

Not Alone

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Not Alone

by [deadwizardskinnie](#)

Summary

A game-night injury brings the game to a halt, but nothing else slows down. For Ilya Rozanov, what follows is blood, hospitals, and the slow unraveling of feelings that were never meant to survive the spotlight.

Also, Ilya needs a hug

Notes

Just a quick heads-up before you start reading: this fic contains descriptions of injury, blood, hospital scenes, and hockey-related violence. Please take care of yourselves if that's not something you're in the mood for right now.

This is very much my personal take on the situation and on Ilya as a character. The story suggests that Ilya may have traits associated with BPD, explored through his emotions, reactions, and inner world. This isn't meant as a diagnosis, just a way of understanding him in this particular moment. Some of that perspective is informed by my own experiences, which definitely shaped how I approached his character here!!

Timeline-wise, this fic takes place while both Shane and Ilya are still with their original teams? Something like that.

That's it. Thanks for reading, and be gentle with yourselves <3333

also added few smol changes, dont mind me, nothing crucial

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

Chapter 1

Ilya's mother had always told him that he would suffer more than others, and that he had to be ready for it. She also told him that joy, love, and happiness would come to him more intensely than to anyone else.

He experienced every emotion he knew as if it were the last thing he would ever feel.

Ilya understands his emotions. He knows what he feels, when he feels it, and why. That knowledge, however, never taught him how to cope with them.

They're playing in Boston tonight. The Bears are aggressive, always more energized and motivated on home ice. The Voyageurs aren't far behind. They adapt to the constant pressure and refuse to broke.

Ilya waits for the whistle, timing his shift. Hollander stepped onto the ice moments ago. Ilya is waiting for the face-off.

Everything happens suddenly.

One moment Hollander has the puck, the next Marlow crashes into him. It's a clean hit. But Marlow comes in at such speed that they both lose their balance, a tangle of limbs confusing even the referees. A second later Marlow is already back on his feet, and Hollander manages to drop to one knee. They both seem too disoriented to drop the gloves. Marlow lunges back toward the puck, which has been picked up by one of the Bears. The officials don't blow the play dead. The game continues.

Ilya watches as Shane begins to get up, leaning heavily on his stick.

A heated scramble in front of the net pulls his attention away. He tracks the play, knowing that any second Hollander should drive straight into the crease, probably blowing up the scoring chance. But Hollander doesn't appear.

Ilya looks for him.

Hollander is still down on one knee, still gripping his stick, not getting up. He tries, but fails. He can't set his skate properly on the ice. The stick slips, barely giving him support as he tries to brace himself with one hand.

Ilya doesn't even realize when he himself stands fully upright. Everything is happening so fast. Marlow hit Hollander, what, fifteen seconds ago? Why isn't he getting up?

No one else seems to notice. The referees are watching the play in front of the net. It feels as if only Ilya's eyes are fixed on number 24. He sees only Hollander's profile, sees him close his eyes and try to push himself up again. This time the stick slips completely from his hands, skidding a short distance away and leaving behind a red streak.

Ilya follows the crimson trail with his gaze. Hollander has slipped in his own blood.

Ilya vaults the boards at the same moment the first shouts break out. He reaches Hollander first.

Hollander doesn't seem to see him, still trying to get up. Each attempt leaves him worse off, his coordination deteriorating rapidly.

At first glance, there are no visible wounds. Ilya follows the blood again. The stain on the ice is smeared outward from Hollander's knee, which keeps sliding through it. Ilya circles around him, and then he sees what happened.

A gash runs from the eyebrow down to the jaw, maybe further. He can't tell. The amount of blood is overwhelming. Ilya tries not to panic. Cuts to the face and head always bleed heavily, grotesquely, like scenes from a movie.

Then the air leaves his lungs when he realizes the cut runs straight through the eye. He can't see anything else. Everything is covered in blood, which has already soaked the front of Shane's jersey.

"Hollander." Ilya tries to focus his attention on him. It doesn't work. Shane seems dazed, the healthy eye unfocused and darting. "Shane."

Hollander abandons his attempts to get up and looks at Ilya. His face twists in terror. "Ilya?"

Nausea rises sharply. Ilya's vision tunnels, narrowing to Shane's face, the massive wound still pouring as if someone has turned on a tap, the terrified look on his face. Shane opens his mouth as if to say something else, but nothing comes out.

Hands yank Ilya away hard enough that he lands on his ass. A group of bodies blocks Shane from view. Ilya gets back up and tries to push through them. He has to see what's happening. Everyone is shouting, and it isn't the calm, professional tone of medics. There's panic in their voices, only a fraction of what Ilya feels, but still unmistakable.

"Get the fuck out, Rozanov." Someone grabs him by the collar and shoves him toward the Bears' bench, where the rest of his team has gathered.

Hayden Pike fixes him with a furious glare. "Get the fuck out," he repeats, shoving Ilya again.

Ilya wants to scream that he has the right to be there, that out of everyone here he should be the one at Shane's side. Talking to him. Keeping him calm. Watching him closely to make sure he's okay.

Before Ilya can shove him back, Marlow steps in front of him. Pike skates away toward the chaos around Shane without giving Ilya another glance.

"Calm down, Cap." Marlow raises his hands, effectively blocking his path.

Marlow towers over him, heavier, taller. Combined with Ilya's fear and disorientation, it's enough to push him back toward the bench. Several pairs of hands grab him, pinning him against the boards.

All the while, Ilya never takes his eyes off the medics and referees crouched over Shane. He can't see Shane himself anymore. They've laid him flat on the ice and are waiting for the stretcher. They're shouting words Ilya should understand, but his brain isn't translating English into Russian right now. He catches fragments: bleeding, unconscious, time.

Ilya has never felt so useless in his life.

Marlow never planned this. Hollander had the puck. Marlow only wanted to bodycheck him, separate him from it, and swing the momentum.

They both lost their balance. Marlow had no idea Hollander was injured. If he had known, he would have gone straight to the referees and the play would have been stopped. But the game continued.

Marlow realized something was wrong the moment Montreal's goalie came out of his crease. Everyone noticed. The goalie turned toward the referees and began waving frantically. Players froze. Goalies don't do that.

Unless they've seen something no one else has.

Shane feels hands on him, many hands. Too many to count.

He's cold and shivering. Only half of his face feels warm. Wet, he realizes. Something slick runs down his temple and cheek, into his mouth. A cough tears through his body as the liquid hits his throat. Shane chokes and it goes into his lungs. The convulsions are violent, and he's exhausted. He wants to close his eyes, but someone taps his cheek.

"Shane, stay with us."

And the thing is, Shane is trying. He really is.

Hayden Pike is frozen in place. He watches helplessly as the medics press one piece of gauze after another to Shane's face. Each one soaks through, bleeding into the next. When the stretcher is brought out, Shane is lifted onto it, leaving behind a horrifying amount of blood on the ice.

Hayden looks down. Beneath his skates are red streaks. At some point he must have skated close enough to drag through the blood.

He looks around. There are more streaks, not just his. The darkest ones lead toward the Bears' bench. The streaks end at Rozanov's skate blades. Rozanov doesn't seem to notice them at all, his gaze fixed on Shane as he's taken into the tunnel.

Ilya's vision blurs. When Shane disappears into the tunnel, something in his head shuts off and instinct takes over. The guys had stopped holding him a moment earlier, unsettled by his sudden stillness. He glides across the empty ice, aware that the stoppage will last at least until the blood is cleaned from the surface, then slips into the tunnel almost alongside the medics. This time, no one notices. Ilya matches the pace of one of them, careful not to stand out, careful not to cross an invisible line.

A blood-soaked dressing covers half of Shane's face. His skin is pale. He's unconscious. His body moves with the rhythm of the medics' steps, limp like a puppet. He looks so lifeless.

This time it's Yuna Hollander who steps into his path. Ilya knows this isn't how he should be meeting Shane's mother face to face, but courtesy isn't the first thing on his mind right now. Yuna is a small woman, so Ilya sidesteps her easily, but in a moment of inattention he stumbles into the path of one of the medics.

"Someone get him out of here," the man snarls.

"Ilya Rozanov!"

Against his will, Ilya stops mid-step. He spins on his heel, anger flaring, a curse already on his tongue.

Yuna Hollander stands in front of him. Her hands are braced on her hips, fingers clenched so tightly her knuckles have gone white. She's breathing fast, her eyes red-rimmed.

"You're in the way," she says. Her voice is controlled, though it trembles slightly.

"I have to..."

"No." Yuna lifts her hand, cutting him off. "What you have to do is go back to your team and stop interfering with the medics."

Rationally, Ilya knows she's right. There's nothing he can do to help. But he can't stay behind.

He can't.

He *can't*-

Ilya makes a decision.

“Where are they taking him?”

Yuna frowns. Ilya steps closer and looks at her. Whatever she sees, it’s enough.

“Boston General.”

In the locker room he strips off his gear, doesn’t bother with a jacket or a tie, buttons his shirt while running across the parking lot. The drive to the hospital passes in a blur, the city lights smearing together as he barely registers the road. By the time Ilya arrives, the automatic doors have never seemed slower. He reaches the reception desk and braces himself on his elbows against the counter, lungs burning, with no idea how he managed to get there at all.

The nurse clearly recognizes him. The pen she was scribbling with slips from her fingers. Her mouth freezes in a silent oh.

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya pants. “Where was he admitted?”

“Are you family?” she asks, though Ilya knows perfectly well she already knows the answer.

“No.”

Ilya lowers his forehead to his clasped hands on the counter. His eyes burn, red and raw, but nothing comes. His chest tightens, breath catching in shallow, uneven pulls. He feels useless, hollowed out. A silent hitch shakes through him. Poor girl. He doesn’t have the strength to think about the position he’s putting her in, or about how, within minutes, Twitter will be full of images of Ilya Rozanov slumped at a hospital reception desk in Boston.

The girl clears her throat. That’s probably his cue to leave. He straightens, pressing his hands to his eyes, trying to erase as much evidence as possible of how messed up he is right now.

“He...” The woman bites her lip, clearly struggling with herself. “Shane Hollander is currently in emergency surgery. His condition was stable when they began.”

Ilya knows this is one of the worst things he could possibly be thinking, especially now, when Shane has already been on the operating table for three hours. But Ilya feels like he’s dying. The heaviness doesn’t fit inside his chest, the thoughts don’t fit inside his head. He doesn’t fit inside his own body.

Ilya is about to lose his mind.

Hayden Pike bursts into the hospital, slamming his shoulder into a man coming out through the doors. Hayden can’t bring himself to care.

The rest of the game was the worst he's ever played. Boston won, barely. No one's heart was in it.

Rozanov wasn't on the ice even once. Hayden noticed he wasn't on the bench either. The commentators didn't say much about it beyond noting his absence, and the cameras didn't catch much. That much blood doesn't get broadcast live. The Bears didn't release any information either.

Right now, Ilya Rozanov doesn't mean shit to him.

Until Hayden comes face to face with him.

Rozanov looks like he crawled out of the depths of hell. Hayden has never seen him like this, not even after any knockout on the ice.

"Pike."

Ilya doesn't seem surprised to see him. But what the hell is he doing at the hospital? Waiting to be admitted? Did he drive here after Hayden? And why the fuck is he blocking his way now, now when Hayden is dying to find out what's happening to his friend?

"What the fuck do you want?" Poison drips from his tone. All the fear flips instantly into rage.

Fucking Ilya Rozanov. He can already hear how it sounds. The guy who never kept Shane's name out of his mouth, who loved the cameras, who stood next to the man who did this. And now he's here anyway, standing in a hospital hallway like he has any right to be.

Hayden moves before his brain can catch up. He grabs Rozanov by the front of his shirt and shoves him backward until his back hits the wall. Hayden is smaller than Rozanov, but he has the element of surprise, and the fury driving him makes Rozanov's head snap back against the wall with a dull sound.

Rozanov doesn't even flinch. His eyes are wide, fixed on Hayden. He opens his mouth to say something, but Hayden doesn't give him the chance. His fist lands squarely on Rozanov's cheekbone.

The wall behind Rozanov doesn't allow his head to recoil, which only amplifies the impact. For a moment, Hayden thinks he's broken his own knuckles. He draws back for another punch. This time Rozanov barely dodges, Hayden's fist skimming past his temple. Hayden goes for a third swing when he realizes that Ilya Rozanov isn't fighting back.

That moment of hesitation is enough for Rozanov to clamp a hand around his wrist in an iron grip.

"Pike. Where is he?"

Rozanov's voice is quiet, weak. Blood runs down from the split cheekbone. Ilya Rozanov looks, in every sense of the word, pathetic.

Before Hayden can snarl out any kind of answer, hospital security is on him. They twist his arms behind his back and restrain him with practiced ease.

“No.” Rozanov turns to the guard. “No. Please let go. I... I provoked him.”

Damn right he did.

Hayden twists at the waist, trying to talk the guard into letting him go as well. When their eyes meet, Hayden can pinpoint the exact moment the guard recognizes them. The man’s confused gaze flicks between the two of them.

“We won’t cause any trouble,” Hayden says. “Please.”

The guard hesitates, then releases him, shooting them both a wary look.

“Don’t try anything. Next time I’m calling the police.”

Yuna is terrified.

David is convinced he hasn’t breathed since the moment he saw his son hit the ice.

Someone from the hospital staff gave Ilya a piece of gauze. He presses it to his cheek in silence as he follows Pike.

He isn’t even angry. He wishes Pike had hit him harder. Knocked him out. Made him wake up when it was already over. Made the first thing he heard be that Shane was fine.

Shane’s parents stand up when they see them approaching down the corridor. Yuna doesn’t seem surprised to see Ilya, or the bruising on his face.

The same can’t be said for David.

“What is he doing here?” he asks. There’s no accusation in his voice, only confusion.

“I’d like to know that too,” Pike snorts, then steps forward and hugs David. He does the same with Yuna, who holds him a moment longer in a motherly embrace.

Ilya feels a sudden, overwhelming need to be hugged.

A moment later, all three of them turn toward him, watching him expectantly.

“I need to know how he is,” Ilya says. It comes out rough, scraped thin.

“That’s why you left the game?” Pike raises an eyebrow.

“Yes.”

The silence that follows feels like permission. Ilya takes a seat a few chairs away, at the far end of the corridor. He doesn’t test his luck by asking a dozen questions. Yuna and David know little more than what the nurse at reception already told him.

Still, he’s closer now. Close enough to know when the surgery ends. Close enough to try to see him, even if it’s only for a moment.

For now, he waits.

Yuna doesn’t stop stealing glances at Ilya Rozanov. Her already overloaded mind is trying to process a million thoughts a second. She always understands things.

But not now. Now Yuna doesn’t understand why Ilya Rozanov looks like a broken man.

David doesn’t need to look at Ilya Rozanov to know.

An indeterminate amount of time later, the sliding doors open and a doctor steps out, still wearing surgical scrubs, a cap pulled low, a mask hanging loose around his neck. Everyone is on their feet instantly.

“The surgery is over,” he says first with practiced, even voice. “It was successful. We were able to preserve the eye.”

Something in Ilya finally gives. His body goes slack all at once, relief hitting him so hard he has to brace a hand against the wall to keep from dropping to his knees.

Yuna breaks with a sob. Hayden pulls her into his arms, David with her, holding them both as they cling to him.

The doctor keeps talking, outlining the extent of the injury, the repair, the risks ahead. Swelling. Infection. Vision still uncertain. Follow-up surgeries not off the table.

Ilya doesn't process the words. They slide past him, meaningless. All that reaches him is the fact that Shane is alive. That his eye is still there.

For now, that is enough.

Shane is okay.

Shane is okay.

Shane is okay.

But the image still blurs, and Ilya feels unbearably alone.

Yuna and David are given permission to see Shane. They're told he'll be unconscious for some time, but that he should begin to wake eventually.

Their son's face is wrapped in bandages. This time they're clean, without a trace of blood. His face has been washed, the blood-soaked jersey replaced with surgical clothing. Yuna hopes she never sees that jersey again.

Shane looks better.
He doesn't look good.
But better.

Hayden has no idea how Ilya Rozanov managed to beg Shane's parents to let him see Shane. If it were up to Hayden, he would have told him to get the fuck out.

No one, however, is stupid enough to let Rozanov go in there alone. All three of them stay in the room as guards.

Rozanov stops in the doorway, his gaze fixed on the linoleum floor. The harsh fluorescent lights make his skin look even more colorless than Shane's. Hayden frowns, watching

Rozanov take several deep breaths before finally lifting his head. Hayden realizes that Rozanov is scared.

Despite how hard it is to tear her eyes away from her son, Yuna finds herself watching Ilya Rozanov's face. She notices the way his brows draw together, the slight parting of his lips, and the sudden glassy brightness in his eyes.

Ilya Rozanov crosses the threshold so suddenly that Yuna instinctively starts to move, ready to intercept him. Hayden acts first. He steps directly in front of Rozanov and stops him, an open palm pressed to his chest.

That saying, if looks could kill? Yuna is seeing it with her own eyes for the first time. Ilya Rozanov shoots Hayden a look so lethal that Hayden, thrown off, lets him pass.

Rozanov reaches her son's bed, and in an instant his face softens. He stops being abrupt, and the last few steps are slow and careful, uncharacteristic of a professional hockey player.

Yuna watches as Rozanov slowly extends a hand toward her son's face. She takes a step toward them, when a hand on her shoulder stops her. David shakes his head. Something in his eyes makes Yuna freeze.

All three of them watch Ilya as if he were a wild animal.

But Ilya doesn't behave like anything wild. With the backs of his fingers, he gently strokes Shane's uninjured cheek.

The room is silent. No one speaks.

Until—

“Ilya?”

Shane feels a warm touch on his cheek, light as a feather. His eyelids flutter open. He can't see anything through the bright light that blinds him completely.

But Shane knows this touch. He knows the hand brushing his cheek. He doesn't need to see to know who it is.

“Ilya?”

Under any other circumstances, Hayden would already be hauling Rozanov away by the collar. Now, however, he stands rooted to the spot, watching as Ilya fucking Rozanov breaks.

A sob tears through him as he sinks heavily into the chair beside the hospital bed. He rests his forehead against Shane’s, one hand still cupping his uninjured cheek, the other closing around Shane’s hand and pressing it to his lips.

He murmurs words, some in English, some in Russian. For some reason, Hayden knows they aren’t meant for anyone but Shane and Rozanov.

The intimacy of the moment hangs in the room, impossible for anyone not to feel.

At the back of his mind, Ilya knows they have an audience. He knows they’re probably all in shock, that Pike is restraining himself from lunging at him. Right now, he can’t even think about it.

Ilya forces himself to pull back just enough to look Shane in the eyes.

Shane’s lids are still heavy. It takes a moment before his gaze finally sharpens on Ilya’s face. His pupils are dilated, probably from the medication, or a concussion. Or both.

“Shhh. Baby. It’s okay.” Ilya doesn’t know whether he’s speaking English or Russian. It doesn’t matter. Shane doesn’t seem aware or lucid enough to parse the words.

“Where?”

Ilya understands the single-word question.

“Hospital.”

“How?”

“Marlow hit you. It looked like a clean hit. But when you went down...”

Ilya cuts himself off when he sees Shane frown, trying to understand what’s being said to him.

“Doesn’t matter. An accident. Everything’s okay now.”

“I’m tired,” Shane murmurs.

“I know.” Ilya strokes his hair. “Sleep.”

“Okay.”

“Yes. Okay.”

“You’ll be here when I wake up?” Shane’s voice is so quiet it’s barely audible. His eyes are already closed, halfway asleep.

Ilya flicks a quick glance toward Yuna, David, and Pike. He can’t read anything in their faces.

“Yes,” Ilya promises.

Yuna watches as the first words her son speaks after a four-hour surgery are directed at Ilya Rozanov. Shane doesn’t seem surprised by his presence at all. He lets himself be stroked across the face, through his hair, lets himself be held by the hand.

Every word is perfectly audible in the small, quiet room.

When Shane falls asleep again, Yuna realizes she hasn’t spoken a single word to him herself. Ilya Rozanov took that moment from her. And yet Yuna feels neither anger nor resentment. Above all, she feels relief that her son is alive, that he woke up, that he can speak.

The next thing she feels is one, overwhelming—

“What the fuck?” Hayden is the first to break the silence.

Rozanov flinches. Startles, like something spooked him.

“What the hell is going on here?” Hayden demands.

He doesn’t understand. Or maybe he doesn’t want to.

Hayden recognizes the look Rozanov fixes on Shane. He recognizes the fear that was written all over his face. Hell, Hayden is pretty sure he actually understands the words Rozanov was murmuring to Shane.

That still doesn’t mean he can wrap his mind around the situation.

Rozanov gets to his feet with his hands raised in a defensive gesture, as if Hayden might come at him again. Which, truth be told, Hayden had considered for a moment.

“It’s difficult,” Rozanov forces out, immediately wincing at the useless explanation.

Hayden scoffs. “No shit.”

“It’s... We. We are—” Rozanov stumbles over the words, like he doesn’t even know what he’s trying to say.

“You’re what?” Hayden presses.

“Uh... lovers?”

“What?” Hayden takes a step toward Rozanov. He wants to make sure Rozanov understands the meaning of that word, strange as it is for describing someone’s relationship, before he plants a fist in his teeth. “You’re fucking my bestfriend?”

A muffled sound comes from behind him. Hayden knows Shane inherited his virgin-level awkwardness from David.

“That’s not it!” Rozanov raises his voice, visibly frustrated. He gestures with his hands as he searches for the right words.

“Then what is it?”

Last chance.

Rozanov closes his eyes. “I love him.”

Hayden backs off.

David knows he should be shocked.

He isn’t.

Yuna *certainly* is.

“Does he love *you*?” she asks before Hayden can choke out a response.

“You have to ask him. But I think so, yes.”

For the first time, Ilya Rozanov looks her straight in the eye. Not only unflinching, but defiant.

Oh.

Yuna knows that look. It’s the exact same look she gives anyone who dares stand in the way of her family.

“For how long?” Yuna asks.

Ilya Rozanov frowns, as if he’s never considered the question before. And maybe he hasn’t.

“Two years, maybe” Rozanov answers slowly.

“You’ve been together for two years?” Yuna doesn’t hide her surprise. Hayden and David both make startled sounds.

“I’ve loved him for two years,” Ilya corrects.

David beats Yuna to the next question.

“And how long have the two of you...”

“Since our rookie season.”

Yuna gasps. “Since your rookie...”

“No.” Ilya cuts in, thoughtful. “Summer before that.”

The room falls into a dead silence.

The first person to break it is David. Her husband lets out a snort. Yuna looks at him, confused.

“The summer before that!”

Ilya watches as David and Yuna crack into near-hysterical smiles. Pike still looks stunned, his brows drawn together as if he’s piecing something together in his head.

Fucking Lily.

The absurdity of the situation reaches Ilya too, but instead of pulling a crooked smile from him, his eyes fill with tears. The image loses all sharpness. Ilya stands frozen, afraid that if he takes a step in any direction, his legs won’t hold him.

Everything is out in the open.

Shane's parents know.

Fucking Hayden Pike knows.

And Ilya loves Shane so much. *So* much. The fact feels as obvious as breathing, like it's always lived in his head. Why did he only say it out loud today? What if he'd never had the chance? If the accident had gone differently, Ilya would never have been able to tell Shane that he loves him.

He manages a few unsteady steps toward the door. Ilya leans heavily against the frame, trying to steady his breathing, to force his heart to slow down.

A small hand on his shoulder pulls his attention back.

Yuna's heart breaks as she looks at Ilya Rozanov.

Suddenly, it all seems *so* obvious.

So many years of keeping this a secret. So many years of hiding everything from the world. From family. From friends.

Such a vast feeling, and they carried it completely alone.

Two boys left to the mercy of a cruel and unpredictable life in the spotlight.

Yuna makes a sudden decision to protect her son with everything she has, to keep the outside world from devouring him whole. Shane will never have to be alone with this again.

Neither will Ilya Rozanov.

Ilya turns toward her slowly. His eyes are so tired, so sad. Probably a mirror of her own.

"It's okay," Yuna says.

Ilya starts to shake his head, but Yuna doesn't let him speak.

"It's okay. You're not alone in this."

Ilya's face crumples, and the only thing Yuna sees is a defenseless boy in front of her, burdened with emotions too big to carry by himself.

Yuna opens her arms.

And Ilya Rozanov lets himself fall into them, wrapped in all the care a mother can give.

Chapter 2: In love, apparently..

Chapter Summary

I promised

Chapter Notes

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

Shane opens his eyes.

White floods his vision, too bright, too close. It forces a sharp breath out of him before he understands anything else.

He blinks, once, then again.

The room comes into focus slowly.

The first thing he really sees is his mother.

Yuna Hollander is sitting half-upright on a small couch, one elbow propped on the armrest, her head resting in her hand. Her eyes are closed, her breathing steady, but Shane knows she isn't asleep.

He knows because he knows his mother, and she wouldn't fall asleep anywhere other than a place meant for it. He *also* knows because her other hand is moving slowly, fingers threading through the messy curls of Ilya Rozanov.

Whose head, in turn, rests in her lap.

He looks almost ridiculous, his cheek pressed against his mom's thigh, curled into himself on a couch far too small for the massive body of a professional hockey player.

And yet, somehow, Yuna and Rozanov make it work.

Shane tries to clear his throat, but it's painfully dry. Instead, a thin, high-pitched rasp escapes him.

Yuna's eyes open instantly, her gaze snapping to his. Shane can't help but notice how bloodshot and exhausted they are. She doesn't move yet, but Ilya does. As if he sensed it, he straightens immediately, pushing himself upright, his eyes just as red.

Do Shane's eyes look that bad too?

Maybe they do, because neither his mom nor Ilya stop staring at them.

“Uh... water?” Shane manages.

A second later, a glass with a straw is held to his lips. He takes a few careful sips while his mom smooths a hand through his hair.

Shane shifts his gaze to Rozanov. A slow wave of unease creeps over him. His mother. Rozanov. In the same room.

“What are you doing here?” he asks quietly.

“I promised you I’d be here when you woke up,” Rozanov says softly. His voice lacks its usual edge.

Shane looks to his mom, waiting for a comment. About Rozanov’s presence. About how comfortably they’d been curled up on the same couch just moments ago.

She says nothing, just watches him with unwavering intensity.

Why don’t they look relieved? Why aren’t they happier? He wouldn’t expect miracles from Rozanov, but his mom, always direct and bossy, should already be lecturing him. Telling him how badly he scared her. Threatening, as she has for the last twenty years, to forbid him from playing hockey.

“What is it?” Shane forces out.

“Sweetheart,” his mom smiles tightly. “Do you remember what happened?”

Shane frowns, then quickly tries to relax his face. Even the smallest movement makes his skin burn.

“I’m guessing I got knocked out on the ice.”

He doesn’t remember much. He knows he’s in a hospital, and that it probably has something to do with today’s game. Yesterday’s game? Thin beams of sunlight slip through the blinds.

“Cliff Marlow hit you. Clean hit. But you both went down,” Yuna says, brushing her fingers along his eyebrow, first one side and then-

Her hand stops over the right side of his face.

All at once, Shane becomes painfully aware of how tight and sore half of his face is. He instinctively raises his hand to his cheek.

Bandages.

They cover his jaw, his cheek, his eye, his brow.

Oh.

Shane hadn’t even realized he was only using one eye.

“Did I—”

“No. No,” his mom cuts in quickly. “Sweetheart, the doctors managed to save your eye. But you’re looking at a long recovery. If there are no complications, everything should be fine.”

Shane nods slowly.

He almost lost an eye.

His thoughts blur, slipping out of focus. His entire career. Everything he’s worked for his whole life. Everything he’s sacrificed. Everything he’s hidden about who he really is.

All of it, threatened by one bad fall.

Rationally, Shane knows a hockey career can end in a matter of seconds. He’s seen it happen.

But somehow, he’s never truly believed it could happen to him.

He’s always walked away. From concussions. From broken bones. He’s never really been afraid for his career.

Until now.

“What if something goes wrong?” he whispers, his hand still hovering near the bandages.

“It won’t.”

The heavy accent snaps his attention sideways.

Ilya Rozanov is standing on the other side of the bed. Shane hadn’t even noticed him move.

Rozanov reaches for his hand, gently pulling it away from his face. Shane doesn’t think about it. He doesn’t do it on purpose and his hand jerks back instinctively.

Something ugly twists across Rozanov’s face. Hurt? Frustration?

“I’ll give you two a moment,” Yuna says. “I’ll see if David managed to find something for breakfast.”

She shoots Rozanov a sharp look, kisses Shane’s forehead, and leaves the room.

A heavy silence settles between them.

“Hollander.”

“Rozanov.”

Eventually, Rozanov smiles. That cocky, familiar smile. It doesn’t reach his eyes, but it’s something Shane recognizes.

“How are you feeling?” Rozanov asks.

“Tired. Sore.” Shane meets his gaze. “Confused.” He adds pointedly.

“Ah. Yes. That’s common with concussions,” Ilya says solemnly.

If his face weren’t on fire, Shane would grimace.

“What are you doing here?” His voice comes out weaker than he’d like.

“I came to see you,” Ilya answers.

“When?”

Rozanov hesitates.

“Yesterday.”

“And you came back this morning?”

“No. I stayed.”

“Why?”

“Because I promised you.”

Shane does not remember it, but he has no reason to doubt Rozanov. Every time Shane ended up in a hospital, or too medicated to think straight, their conversations had a way of turning... softer. Closer.

And Shane is painfully glad that he is here. So glad it almost scares him. He is afraid that if he lets it show, if he leans into it even a little, Ilya will pull back, wish him a quick recovery and leave.

“Who won?” Shane asks, just to drag his thoughts away from the chaos in his head.

Rozanov doesn’t answer right away. When Shane opens his eyes, Ilya isn’t looking at him.

“I don’t know.”

Shane raises an eyebrow, earning himself a fresh spike of pain.

“How do you not know?”

“I came here right behind the ambulance.”

Shane exhales.

“Ilya.”

“Shane.”

Hayden is losing his shit.

Shane's parents told him to go back to the hotel, at least for a few hours. Hayden does not know whether it was because they genuinely wanted him to get some rest or because he could not stop shooting murderous looks at Rozanov.

Hayden does not understand how he did not see it.

Shane had never been in a relationship, and when he finally got together with Rose Landry, Hayden was over the moon, genuinely happy that his best friend had finally found someone.

But the relationship did not last long. And honestly, Shane did not seem that bothered by it, insisting that he and Rose stayed good friends.

Then he went back to texting Lily, who had always been in Boston. It seemed like the only time they were not talking was during Shane's relationship with Rose. Hayden remembers feeling relieved that he did not have to lecture Shane about fidelity.

Hayden is almost certain that the person who invented monogamy must have been one of his ancestors.

Not that polyamory is wrong. No, **no**.

Hayden would just rather die the worst, most painful death imaginable than share Jackie with anyone else.

Love you, babe.

But Shane and Rozanov?

Lily, who was always in Boston. Shane, who always went out for at least a few hours. Christ.

He went out to fuck Ilya fucking Rozanov.

Hayden does not give a shit that Shane is gay.

No, no, no.

Jesus, he is so bad at this.

It is *not* that he *does not* care. He knows it has a massive impact on Shane's life, on his entire career. Whenever Hayden managed to tear his thoughts away from Rozanov and Shane *together* for even a moment, a powerful urge to protect Shane would rise up in him.

And trying to protect Shane feels almost impossible when Rozanov is involved.

Rozanov has always been... a community resource.

For one awful moment, a disgusting thought crosses Hayden's mind that maybe Rozanov is trying to use Shane somehow...

No.

Hayden almost slaps himself.

He knows that cannot be true. He saw Rozanov's eyes and how brutally broken he was through every second in that goddamn hospital until Shane woke up. He saw him collapse into himself when Yuna hugged him.

Hayden really needs to talk to someone about this. Normally it would be Shane, but right now that is very much not an option.

He calls Jackie, already bracing himself, hoping she will not mind that he is about to dump the whole mess in her lap. He is just so disoriented, worried, exhausted. Maybe even a little betrayed. He does not know what to do with himself.

Jackie listens patiently and attentively until Hayden finally shuts up. At some point he must have broken down because both his cheeks are wet.

So yes, Hayden is losing his shit. Which in no way stops his wife from *giving* him shit anyway.

Jackie Pike is in shock.

She is not easily surprised, she is married to Hayden Pike after all. She is raising their four children. Nothing is supposed to faze Jackie Pike.

Apparently nothing except the news she has just heard.

The first thing she does after hanging up with her husband is turn on the replay of last night's game. Fine, sue her. Jackie Pike, one of the Montreal hockey team's WAGs, does not watch every single game. She has four kids to handle, and Hayden should be grateful she even answers the phone when she is alone with them.

She knew Shane ended up in the hospital. She knew Hayden was terrified, but later he texted her that Shane would be okay.

Watching the game now, Jackie is glad she did not follow it live. The hit or the fall do not look that bad. The camera does not stay on Shane once intense action breaks out under the net. It is only when Ilya Rozanov gets to Shane that people begin to realize something is wrong.

Everyone looks shocked and concerned. Blood on the ice is always awful. Against the white surface it looks almost black. The camera cuts away once the medics take over, switching to shots of the crowd. Most fans sit on the edge of their seats, some pull out their phones to record what the broadcast no longer shows.

For a single, brutal moment, the camera lingers on Ilya Rozanov. What stares back is not concern, but raw and absolute fear. The commentators talk about concern for an injured

opponent. No one thinks anything more of it.

But just like Hayden said.

Jackie sees it now.

It is the same look she gets whenever something happens to Hayden on the ice.

Ilya's heart is breaking.

Now that Shane is awake, conscious and aware, Ilya does not quite know what to do with himself.

Everyone knows that he loves Hollander except Hollander himself. And it seems like, for Hollander, not much has changed.

What would have?

Shane only remembers the accident on the ice, maybe fragments of the hospital. He was unconscious while everyone around him lived through hell.

Now Ilya feels a different kind of fear.

Shane watches him with sharp eyes, and while Ilya always felt that look could see straight through him, now he is certain that Hollander has no idea what is happening in his heart.

"You scared me," Ilya says. He sits on the edge of the bed and takes Shane's hand again, lifting it to his lips and pressing a gentle kiss to his knuckles. Without an audience, Shane does not pull away.

"I'm sorry I scared you," Shane sighs. "I'm scared now," he admits.

"No, no." Ilya stays close. "Everything will be fine. You will see."

"How do you know?" Shane's voice is small. Ilya hates that.

"You will play until they call checking you into boards violence against old."

"Elderly"

"Yes."

Shane snorts. Ilya's heart swells at the sound.

Ilya is looking at him strangely. Shane does not understand that look, he does not recognize it. It is full of emotion and makes something complicated stir in Shane too.

Only now does Shane notice the cut on Ilya's cheek. He does not remember Ilya getting hurt during the game.

"What happened?" Shane disentangles his fingers from Ilya's and stops them millimeters from the wound.

Ilya makes an annoyed sound.

"Pike happened," he scoffs.

Shane raises an eyebrow, the healthy one, though it still hurts. Small smile tugging at his lips.

"What did you do to deserve it?" he asks.

"Nothing."

"Oh, really?"

Ilya has given Hayden plenty of reasons to get punched over the years. During Boston versus Montreal games, gloves have been dropped more than once.

"Really," Ilya crosses his arms. "He saw me inhospital and attacked me like... like how you say it, some aggressive animal."

There's not such saying.

"Did you hit him back?"

"No." Ilya does not sound happy about it.

"Why not?"

Ilya avoids his gaze again.

"No one would give me any information about you. I'm not... family. I thought Pike would know where to go."

"How did they even let you stay in my room?" Shane struggles to imagine it.

"They stayed with me, like watching dogs."

"Watchdogs," Shane corrects automatically.

Ilya rolls his eyes.

"Yes. Watchdogs," he repeats through clenched teeth.

"That still doesn't explain why they let you stay. Did you tell them you needed to assess the condition of your rival to calculate your Cup chances?" Shane teases.

"No. I told them I love you."

Shane opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again.

His heart starts pounding, and the pathetic remnants of blood left in his body rush to his cheeks.

Ilya's look makes a little more sense now, but Shane needs to be sure.

"Why would you say that?" Shane asks quietly.

"Because I love you." Ilya's words sound almost like a challenge. Like he is daring Shane to say it back.

But Shane does not need any encouragement.

"I love you so much." Shane knows he sounds desperate, and that is fine. He wants to sound that way. He wants Ilya to feel it.

With the words, a weight lifts from him, one he did not even realize was pressing down on his entire body.

The same thing seems to happen to Ilya. He straightens, his eyes light up, and a huge, slightly cocky smile spreads across his face.

Shane loves that smile too.

Ilya does not bother hiding the tears of relief.

Yuna walks into the room just as her boy is kissing another boy. Kissing, like *really* kissing. At a slightly awkward angle because half of Shane's face is covered, but they make it work. They always seem to make things work despite obstacles.

This particular sight, though... well. Yuna will have to get used to it.

David, entering behind her, makes an awkward noise. Bless his heart.

Shane and Ilya pull apart immediately. Ilya looks unfazed. Shane, David's son, turns red from his neck all the way to his ears.

"I'm assuming you've cleared things up between yourselves," Yuna says, settling back onto the couch, David beside her. A bag of food lands in her lap.

Shane starts mumbling explanations, but Ilya's attention has already shifted. He cranes his neck with interest toward the sandwiches David is unpacking.

"Did you get..."

"Yes, Ilya. One chicken sandwich for you," David smiles and hands it to him.

Shane snorts quietly. “Good luck. He’s like a toddler. Won’t eat it if there’s tomato.”

“Oh, I know. I asked for no tomato,” David replies matter of factly.

Ilya has already demolished half the sandwich by the time Shane reacts.

What Shane mutters definitely isn’t mother approved.

Yuna, for once, lets it slide.

Hayden walks like a man on a mission. He is determined.

The last time Jackie gave him this much hell was when he almost dropped Jade... or Ruby. They were tiny and practically indistinguishable back then.

Anyway, getting back to Rozanov.

Does Hayden feel guilty? Not exactly. He stands by it. He spent years watching Rozanov and Shane go head to head on the ice, compete in everything imaginable. Hayden knows the media fueled it, but Shane insisted he hated him. He bitched about Rozanov more than once.

As a good friend, Hayden hated him too. That is what besties do, right?

And now it turns out Ilya Rozanov loves his best friend. And Shane probably loves him too.

And Hayden feels too... small. He tries to be better than that, but he feels betrayed, genuinely hurt. He watched his best friend bleed out on the ice, then had to finish the game just to be allowed to visit him, and Ilya Rozanov was already there, waiting as if he had any right to

Rozanov left the game to follow him.

And Hayden thinks he should have done the same.

Because Ilya Rozanov was there.

And Hayden was not.

Of course. *Of course* Hayden walks in just as Rozanov’s tongue is down Shane’s throat.

Not to be a creep about it, but there is something visible there. Hayden has to admit, reluctantly, passion. He is willing to believe it is love. Hands tangled in hair and soft smiles, all that.

Oh.

Hayden decides to announce his presence right as Rozanov’s hand slides from Shane’s hair, down his neck, across his chest, his stomach and...

“Hi!”

Hi? God.

“Have you had enough of the show?” Rozanov asks, turning toward Hayden, one eyebrow raised in mockery.

“You knew I was standing here? What the fuck?” Hayden’s voice goes weirdly high. His cheeks heat up.

Rozanov just shrugs in response. Shane’s face is red when he hits Rozanov’s leg.

“Hi, Hayden,” Shane smiles.

And Hayden feels like crying. Shane is embarrassed and giddy and looks like someone who is going to be okay.

Hayden closes the distance in two steps and bends down to plant a solid kiss on the top of Shane’s head.

Rozanov graciously moves aside to give him room.

“Sure. Don’t let me interrupt,” he mutters.

“You didn’t interrupt yourself a minute ago,” Hayden shoots back.

“I’m his boyfriend. Are you his boyfriend too?”

“I might as well be.” Hayden has no idea why he says that.

“Oh, I’m sure,” Rozanov purrs.

Before Hayden can snap back, Shane speaks first.

“Boyfriend?” His voice is full of bright, hopeful excitement.

“I mean. Probably, yes. Right?”

Hayden resists the urge to roll his eyes. What a romantic.

Shane clearly does not mind. He bites his lip, holding back a smile that is clearly trying to break free.

“Yes.”

Rozanov gives Shane a gentle smile. Hayden speaks before his best friend starts giggling.

“Rozanov.”

Rozanov is clearly unhappy about the interruption but turns his gaze to Hayden.

“Yes?”

Hayden clenches his jaw, then releases it. Takes a deep breath.

“I wanted to apologise,” he forces out on an exhale.

“Oh, really?”

Hayden knew Ilya would not try to save him from his misery. He thought he was more prepared for this, but no, he doesn’t back out.

“Yes.”

“Then apologise.”

Hayden is about to crack his teeth.

“I apologise.”

Rozanov is silent for several long seconds, then nods slowly.

“It is okay,” he says simply.

Hayden knows this is not the response anyone would expect from Rozanov in a situation like this, because even Shane looks surprised.

“Really?” Hayden and Shane ask at the same time.

“Yes. In your place, I would do same. Or worse,” Rozanov shrugs one shoulder. “You are a good friend. You should not like me. Not right away.”

Shane snorts, clearly thinking the same thing Hayden is, about how likely it is that Hayden and Ilya will *ever* like each other.

Rozanov seems to know exactly what they are both thinking. He leans forward and wraps his arms around Hayden. For a split second, Hayden is sure Rozanov is choking him. And maybe, for a moment, he actually is.

But looking over Rozanov’s shoulder at Shane’s face, where a resigned smile lingers, Hayden realizes he has just received the most spiteful, provocative hug to ever exist.

And this is Rozanov being exactly who he is.

Chapter End Notes

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End Notes

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