

the winner takes it all (the loser has to fall)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77104401) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77104401>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Rose Landry
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Rose Landry
Additional Tags:	Angst , club scene redo of sorts , no beta we die like ilyas dad , Jealousy , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Crying , Love Confessions , References to Depression , Good Friend Rose Landry , Minor Shane Hollander/Rose Landry
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-04 Completed: 2026-01-14 Words: 5,969 Chapters: 2/2

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by [foxesjosten](#)

Summary

“Shane, shit, don’t look now.” Rose says.

“Paparazzi?” Shane guesses.

They’d been on them for weeks. He was no stranger to some pictures here and there, but being with Rose was different. She couldn’t walk down the block without someone shoving a camera in her face. He hoped they hadn’t followed them here. He didn’t want to be at this club and he definitely didn’t want to be photographed.

“No,” Rose says. Something in her tone makes Shane turn. It’s not worry exactly, but something in that family, a pace to the left. Concern? Trouble? He tries to follow her eyes, tries to catch what she sees. It’s no use. He doesn’t see until it’s too late. “It’s Ilya Rozanov.”

Chapter 1: the game is on again

Chapter Notes

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

Shane doesn't want to be here. It's mean and it makes him feel bad to even think it, but he really doesn't want to be here. He'd been up for clubbing when Rose first asked him, or at least he'd been up to try, but then he'd had a terrible game. He played sloppy and off. His coach had chewed him out for it. He could handle that if it had ended there. He'd had bad games before.

But he had made a fool of himself on top of it all. Shane knows Rozanov had seen him staring. He had to have seen it. Shane mooning over him like some stupid lovesick teenager. He hoped the cameras hadn't caught it. He didn't need his desperation catalogued.

None of it mattered, he reminds himself. His phone had been silent for weeks. That was confirmation enough, wasn't it? And anyway, Shane was here with his girlfriend and he was going to enjoy himself. Whether he wanted to or not.

"Shane, shit, don't look now." Rose says.

Not. It was looking like not tonight.

"Paparazzi?" Shane guesses.

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And suddenly there he is, Ilya Rozanov. It's like Shane's thoughts have invoked him. Say his name three times and he'll appear in the same fucking club as you. He's flanked by two of his teammates, their expressions hungry and loose. Rozanov's face gives nothing away. Shane shivers at the blankness.

"We can go," Rose says softly, misinterpreting his discomfort. It's not that Rozanov is here, it's that Rozanov is here with them. Close enough to touch, but untouchable nonetheless. "We can find another club."

Shane doesn't want to go to another club. He doesn't want to drag his body into another loud sticky building. He wants Rozanov gone. He wants to take him home. He wants.

"No," Shane blurts out. "No, it's okay. He's- We're-"

Shane stops himself. What are they exactly? No, scratch that, what were they? He knew it wasn't the same now, knew he'd played some fucked up part in that, but that doesn't explain what they used to be. How can he explain his apprehension to Rose without blowing up everything he's built in these last few months?

"Friends?" Rose supplies.

Friends. He tries to form the word, but it sits clunky in his mouth. It's wrong, he knows this. It's completely fucking wrong, but was there really a word to explain it all? No, Shane thinks, there never will be. There can't be.

Shane grabs the verbal life preserver that Rose has thrown him. "Yeah, friends. Something like that."

Wrong, his brain screams at him again.

"Shane Hollander, you absolute dog. You never told me all this rivalry stuff was fake!" Rose says, lightly smacking him on the shoulder. Her face lights up with relief. "God, it makes so much sense now! No wonder he showed up here. You invited him, right?"

He nods numbly. Shane is jealous of the ease in her voice. She was so unaware, none of it her fault, and Shane wanted that. He wanted to feel at peace in places like this. He wanted Rose's touch to steady him. He wanted to believe that it was possible for him.

Rozanov still hasn't spotted him. He's here, but it makes no difference. Shane feels utterly alone in such a crowded room.

"You know, I was worried for a second there. I thought tonight was gonna end up with you two duking it out on the dance floor!" Rose laughs. She glances over at Rozanov again. He still hasn't seen them. "My brothers fucking love him."

Shane doesn't understand the change in subject. He doesn't have any room in his mind for following this conversation right now. He needs air. He needs to be anywhere but here, with these people.

"Yeah?"

"Blasphemous, I know. When we started dating they couldn't believe I'd ended up with his rival. God, they'd be so mad if they knew about this." Rose says.

There's a connection that Shane is missing, something nagging at the back of his mind. If it wasn't so loud in here he'd be able to focus. A loud arena is no problem, but a loud club is enough to undo him on a night like tonight. "Mad?"

"Yeah, if they knew I was in the same club with Ilya Rozanov and didn't socialize with him? Major fomo." Rose explains and something clicks this time.

Shane nods again because he understands now. Seconds from panic, he finally sees where this conversation is going. He knows he can't stop it now.

“Well I mean, if you invited him out, don’t you think you should introduce us? I’d love to meet him.” Rose asks.

Shane wants to scream. Everything was happening too fast, everything was so loud. The music and the beers and the glare of the lights. It’s too much. He can’t say no now, not after he said they were friends. It would be too suspicious. He’s backed them all into a corner and only Shane knows just how small it really is.

He meets Rose’s eye and sees the concern again. She senses her misstep. It isn’t her fault. None of this was. “Unless you’d rather not?”

“No, it’s okay.” Shane says finally. It’s too late. “I’ll, uh, I’ll go grab him.”

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He’d seen Hollander as soon as he had walked in. Well no, not Hollander, not at first.

Rose Landry.

She’d looked right at him, almost right through him. Lately, it felt like everyone could see right through him. Marleau and Svetlana and Hollander. They saw right through him. They saw too much.

Hollander walking towards him, this was too much too.

Ilya looks around for someone to save him, but his teammates have scattered. They’d already found what they’d come here looking for. If he hadn’t been distracted by Rose Landry so soon, Ilya would’ve found someone too. But he had no one tonight, no pretty girl he could hide behind. No one to distract him from the person coming his way. The one person he’d rather die than talk to right now.

Ilya puts on a brave face for the second time today, but the heat, the anger he’s been searching for all day never finds its way to the surface. Shane is in front of him now. His mouth goes dry at the proximity. He lets Hollander take the lead. He’s tired of being in charge.

“Rozanov.” Shane says in lieu of a greeting.

“Hollander.”

The conversation, predictably, stops there. What’s there to say? Nothing that Ilya wants to hear.

“Look,” Shane starts. He doesn’t look at Ilya, not really. Anxious, he looks over him and past him. Ilya feels exhausted all of sudden. He can read Hollander like a book. He knows something is coming. Something that there’s no time to brace for it. “Rose, uh... Rose Landry. She wants to meet you. She really wants to meet you.”

It’s not at all what he expects. He thought Hollander was here to kick him out. The King of Montreal here to banish him once and for all. He would’ve listened. He would leave if

Hollander asked him to. Shane's true request knocks the breath out of him. An open ice hit, he's seeing stars.

He almost says no. Almost.

But Hollander is shaking. He tries to hide it, but Ilya sees it in his hands. He sees it in the tight way he's holding himself. Seeing Shane this tense knocks something loose in him.

He wants to make it worse. He wants to kiss it better.

"Okay." Ilya agrees quickly, before he can really think about it. His mind is screaming at him to run for the nearest exit, to get as far away from Hollander and Landry as possible, but his feet don't comply. He doesn't run. He watches the shock he felt make its way onto Shane's face. His discomfort is no win to celebrate.

Hadn't Ilya lost this battle weeks ago?

Hollander's gracious enough to leave it at that. He doesn't ask Ilya if he's sure or anything else for that matter. He only nods, making sure Ilya is following as he sets off. He turns back every so often, making sure he hasn't lost Ilya in the crowd. Laughter, bordering on something hysterical, bubbles up in him. Shane leading him like that old Greek myth, turning back when he isn't supposed to.

But he was sure Orpheus led Eurydice out of hell, not into it.

They reach the end of their road, and all roads seem to lead to Rose Landry. Shane stops turning back when Rose is in his sight. Ilya Rozanov was not Eurydice tonight.

"Ilya Rozanov," Shane says, shaking him from thoughts. His name in Shane's mouth is enough to ground him and knock him off balance all at once. He doesn't need this introduction. A face he's been keeping tabs for weeks turns towards him. "Rose Landry. Rose Landry, Ilya Rozanov."

Ilya expects anger. He expects snark to pour off him in waves. He's a cornered dog and he is so often known to bite. He doesn't know why he always has to bite.

But Rose smiles at him, disarms him almost instantly. She's beautiful, Ilya thinks, she's so fucking beautiful. "You're even more handsome in person, Mr. Rozanov. It is so nice to meet you."

She says it like it's that simple. Isn't it? This beautiful young star isn't his enemy. She never has been. All these weeks he's seen her as some kind of monster. Someone standing in the way of him and Hollander, in the way of whatever they'd been hurtling towards. Ilya knows better now. Seeing her here, so lovely and bright, Ilya knows that none of this is her fault. She is not his enemy.

"Ilya," He says finally, "please call me Ilya."

Her smile widens. It almost eclipses Shane. Ilya doesn't spare even a glance in Hollander's direction. He's gotten good at looking away from Shane lately.

If she senses something is wrong, Rose doesn't show it. She leads them to the bar, offers him a drink that he politely declines. She promises not to take up too much of his time. All she wants to talk about is hockey. Hockey and her brothers and their admiration for him. He can't help but smile along as she talks. She doesn't even want anything from him. No pictures or autographs. She's sweet and kind and easy to talk to. He humors her. He can't find a reason not to.

Hollander doesn't say a word. It's like he's not even there.

Five minutes turn into ten, which turn into fifteen, and Ilya finds that that is all he can take. He won't be rude. He'll finish this the way he started it.

"If you will excuse me, I have to return to my teammates. Someone must keep an eye on those animals." Ilya squares his shoulders and chooses his next words carefully. "It was very nice to meet you, Ms. Landry."

He doesn't wait to hear either of their responses. His legs finally get the message. Ilya gets out of there as fast as he can.

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Hollander follows him out of the club. Of course he does. Ilya can't catch a break. Something explodes in his chest, a precious burst of the anger he's been reaching for all day.

He whirls on Shane.

"Private guy you said, yes? This," Ilya says, gesturing towards the club they left Rose in, "this is not private."

"You weren't supposed to be here tonight. You weren't supposed to see." Shane says frantically. He reaches a hand towards Ilya and Ilya backs away.

"You made sure I did though, yes? You made me see." Ilya says.

"Ilya-

Ilya. The anger is gone as fast as it appeared. It's the second time tonight that Shane has said his name tonight. He wants to feel victorious. He wants to believe it means something. It can't. Not when Rose Landry is the last person Shane will see when he closes his eyes tonight. Ilya needs to walk away. Fuck this.

He turns to go. Shane grabs him by the wrist. "Rozanov, wait."

Ilya looks down at his trapped wrist. He could easily pull away. They both know this. But he needs Shane to know that it's over. He needs Shane to see him bow out gracefully. Ilya Rozanov won't be a sore loser tonight.

"You win, Hollander." Ilya says. He feels sick and exposed, drowning in this feeling that's been threatening to pull him under since he'd landed in Montreal. He can try to ignore it. He doesn't have to put a name to it, no matter how many times it begs for one. Even if the word

flashes through his mind at every touch, every glance. It can't be love. He won't let it be. "You win. Your prize is Rose Landry. I hope you will be very happy together."

Ilya snatches his wrist back and walks back to the hotel alone. He doesn't look back at Shane. He doesn't want to see him running back to Rose.

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Ilya doesn't tell any of his teammates that he's gone, he doesn't need to. He knows what they'll think. He should be glad, having a guaranteed cover like that. Roz, the lady killer. Roz the playboy. He should be fucking ecstatic, but all he feels is a bone deep exhaustion spreading through his body.

Hollander had won. He had escaped whatever it was that they had been doing unscathed. Ilya hadn't pulled him down, like he did everyone else. He wonders what it feels like to win like that, to take it all. He wonders if he'll ever be able to feel that glory off the ice. The trophies, the prestige. All of it feels like nothing in the wake of a loss this big.

He can't even blame Hollander though, can he? He can't and that's the worst part. He'd went along with it, hadn't he? He let Shane lead him over to Rose fucking Landry. He had been polite for once in his life. How could he not be? There was no fight left in him. Not when Ilya had finally met his competition, not when he realized that he didn't stack up at all.

It's not that Rose is a girl, or maybe it is, he doesn't really know. Surely that plays a part in all of this, but it's not what bothers him. It's knowing that she could have Hollander in a way Ilya never could.

Rose Landry could have him publicly. She could put her hands on Shane Hollander in front of all the god damn paparazzi she wanted. She could kiss him with the doors open and the lights on. They'd applaud her for it. They'd stone him for it.

Ilya could have that too, couldn't he? He could find some cute willing girl who would love him loudly. She could come to his games and wear his jersey. He could find someone to come home to every night. But when Ilya thought about coming home to someone, it wasn't some mystery girl. It wasn't a girl at all anymore.

All he wanted was Hollander. What a fucking joke. Hollander pretending to like girls and being somewhat successful. Ilya, who actually liked girls, but none the way he liked Hollander. His life was a joke. God had been laughing at him for years. Since Russia at twelve years old. Since Canada at seventeen. Ilya had never been one to get what he truly wanted, and man had he wanted this.

"Rozanov!"

He knows that voice. He keeps walking.

hollanov is still taking over my brain sooo hope you guys enjoy this!

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Chapter 2: a lover or a friend

Chapter Notes

honey, you've got a big storm coming.

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

Rose is there when Shane turns around. He'd been so caught up in Rozanov leaving that he hadn't even noticed her approach. What had she heard? Would she realize what was happening? Did she know already? Panic roots him to his spot.

"Is he always like that?" Rose asks, saving Shane from starting this conversation. Whatever this conversation was supposed to be. Shane wasn't sure of anything anymore. Coming here tonight, letting Rozanov walk away. All of it felt wrong.

"Like what?"

Rose shrugs. "I don't know, I guess I just expected something a little bigger? Grander maybe?"

Shane doesn't understand. Sure, Rozanov hadn't been his usual brand of obnoxious, but he was still Ilya Rozanov. He was larger than life. How could she not see that?

Rose, bless her, follows whatever disaster plays out on Shane's face.

"Hey, no. I didn't mean-" She pauses. The look she fixes on Shane feels pitying and comforting all at once. He isn't sure if he should feel offended. "On the ice and in interviews, Ilya Rozanov is like a god. Something bigger."

Shane nods, trying his best to follow along.

"But tonight... He seems sad, Shane." Rose says finally. "Is he okay?"

"Of course he's okay." Shane blurts. It's a kneejerk reaction, something drilled into him nice and young. In hockey, unless you were dying, you were okay. Sad doesn't land you on IR. Concussions and broken bones were when you finally called it quits, and even those only granted you short breaks.

Ilya wasn't injured or sick. Ilya was okay.

But Shane can't help thinking about Boston and the phone call from Rozanov's dad. Russia and the way Ilya had lashed out on him. All the failed attempts at talking about his family. Ilya retreating into himself every time, but not without a biting remark and painful dismissal to move Shane along.

The rejection had made his skin crawl and Shane had made sure to shove the memories to the back of his mind. He'd never thought about them with anything other than shame. Should he have? He assumed Rozanov didn't deem him important enough to talk about the serious shit with. He never thought that Ilya might not be able to talk about those things at all.

Was he okay? Was he ever okay? Shane thinks about all the different sides of Ilya and how they never quite add up. He thinks about Las Vegas and Russia again, and his stomach drops. A different Ilya every night. That's what it felt like sometimes, right? He never understood how Rozanov went from one extreme to the next, but Rose makes him see.

Ilya's whole life is a performance. It always has been. Even for Shane, Ilya puts on a show. He plays the lover, the burden, the provider. And fuck, he plays them well. He brings the house down every night. Standing ovations and the crowd screaming for more. More, Ilya, more.

Shane wants to know what's left of Ilya under all of that.

Their whole situation feels like agony half the time. It's been torturous since the beginning. He just never realized that Ilya might ache too.

"He looks like he could use a friend." Rose says. Shane doesn't budge. "You, Shane. He looks like he needs you."

"We're not- We were never-" Shane can't get the words out. He doesn't want to lie to Rose, but how could he tell her? He's barely let himself think about it, nevermind saying any of it out loud. He can't start now.

They fall silent after Shane's failed attempts at an explanation. He wants to tell her how confused he is and how sorry he is for doing this tonight. She had just wanted a fun night off and Shane had fucked it all up. Rose smiles at him, sad and sweet.

"I know, Shane." Rose says finally.

Shane's world stops. She knows. Of course she knows. For weeks, Shane has tried to be the perfect boyfriend. He had tried so hard to keep it all up, but it never felt right. It felt like a production, something he prayed would be graded on a curve. He was good at hockey, great even, but he wasn't good at this. He'd known it from the beginning. He just didn't think that Rose could see it too.

Shane was screwing up left and right tonight. Trying to make everyone happy only left them all miserable. Ilya was gone, Rose was hurt, and Shane was utterly wrecked.

Tears fill his eyes. This can't be where it all happens. He can't have this conversation for the first time outside of some shitty club. He owes Rose, he knows he does, but this can't happen here.

"I-Rose, I can't... I'm-" Shane tries. He can barely speak around the lump in his throat. The tears are so close to falling, but he refuses to let them go. It's not crying if they don't spill over. It's not crying unless he's doubled over gasping for air.

He's fine. He's fine. He's-

"Shane," Rose says, placing a hand on his arm. It pulls him from his inner spiral. He expects Rose to be mad. He deserves it, he must, so Shane expects it. He doesn't expect to see concern and kindness. "It's okay. I'm here for you and I promise that it's okay."

Rose smiles at him and his shaking hands still. She knows. Rose Landry knows and she's telling him it's okay. She's not disgusted or angry. She's supportive, wearing a knowing smile that should scare Shane, but it doesn't. How could a smile so tender do anything but comfort him?

Rose knows and Shane feels something akin to peace. It spreads through his chest, filling in the cracks that years of fear have left. He almost feels whole. Someone finally knows and the world doesn't end.

Shane has spent most of his life trying to be brave. Hockey scrums and locker rooms, ad campaigns and hotel rooms. He's tried his best to be brave through it all, but he always felt like missed the mark. He wants this braveness to mean something, he needs this moment to matter.

"I think I'm gay." He says, at last.

"Is this the first time you've said that to someone?" Rose asks slowly.

Shane nods, fear mingling with peace, his body at odds. Is this what being brave is supposed to feel like? A freefall with no end in sight? A landing point hurtling towards him faster than expected? He's taken a leap. He prays he sticks the landing.

"Thank you for telling me, Shane. I'm proud of you, okay?" Rose says, and Shane's heart breaks. It's everything he's imagined hearing on a night like tonight, and it guts him anyway. He does love Rose, he knows that now. Shane loves Rose, fiercely, but not in the way he expects. It would be easier, loving her in the way he thought he was supposed to. He can't love her like that. How could he?

There was no room in his heart for anyone but Ilya.

Shit.

He loves Ilya.

He expects it to hit him hard and fast, to tear him apart, but the panic never comes. This isn't new, he realizes. This feeling has always been with him. Behind every corner and in every flash of light, his love for Ilya has always been with him. In every kiss and text and touch, this love has been a part of him. Ilya has been a part of him. Part of his game, his triumphs, his entire life. Ilya Rozanov is lodged in his bones and under his skin, and it's far too late to rip him out. Shane would never recover.

He could never be with Rose like that, he's sure now, but he doesn't want to give her up. They may not fit the way he hoped, but they clicked nonetheless. He's been hiding for years and he's finally come clean. He's dropped all of this on her, and Rose carries this burden like

it's weightless. The thought of losing this, this closeness, hurts more than he thought it would.

"It's okay," Rose says again. "Really, it's okay. We can have a real conversation about this sometime soon, alright? Go after him, Shane. I'm good here."

Shane surges forward, pulling Rose into a hug. She grabs onto him tightly, holding him up even after everything he's put her through tonight. How can he properly thank her for what she's just given him? How does he let her know that she has set him free?

"And hey, maybe Rozanov's friends are still inside. The night doesn't have to be a total loss." Rose jokes. She pulls back, looking him in the eyes one last time, and lightly pushes him in Ilya's direction. She doesn't know what it means to him, she never could.

"And maybe find yourself an umbrella! It looks like it's about to pour." Rose shouts.

-

Shane is a spectacle, running through Montreal in the drizzle. He doesn't care how ridiculous he looks. He has to get to Rozanov. It was all fucking wrong. Shane couldn't let this be the end of everything.

He'd never seen Rozanov quite like he had tonight, so subdued and behaved. Even when Shane walked out on him, Ilya had fought, but tonight he held back. It reminded Shane of their rookie year. Reporters constantly slinging quick English at Ilya when they knew he couldn't quite keep up. He'd done his best, but his responses always lacked what really made Rozanov himself. Fire and wit and charm. Shane didn't want this sanitized version of him. He never wanted to see him like that again.

He wants Ilya to yell at him. To tell him to fuck off, hit him, anything but Rozanov looking at him with that resigned look on his face. Sadness. Shane knows now. It's there, he's seen it before, he's just never had a name for it. For fuck's sake, he'd been looking at it all night. Ilya there, but not fully, on the bench. The anger on his face, so manufactured, as he slammed Shane into the boards. God, how had he never noticed before.

The farther he runs, the harder the rain gets. It didn't matter. Shane would run through a fucking hurricane right now if it meant getting to Rozanov.

Rozanov.

Shane's thoughts have conjured him for a second time tonight. He had run towards Boston's usual hotel, hoping he'd be lucky enough to find Rozanov. He'd found him. Ilya was only a block ahead of him now. It wasn't too late.

"Rozanov!" Shane yells. Ilya doesn't budge. He doesn't turn or show any signs of slowing. The rain was only getting heavier and louder. Shane runs harder.

"Ilya!"

He turns finally. Shock rippling across his face, like he didn't really believe it was Shane that was calling him. Like he didn't believe that Shane would come after him at all.

"Hollander?" Ilya calls. Shane is close, but he jogs the rest of the way nonetheless.

"I'm sorry." Shane says, breathless. He's in arms reach now. "I'm sorry I didn't see it."

"What? You are making no sense, Hollander. What are you doing here?" Ilya asks.

Ilya's face almost breaks him. He doesn't look any different than he did before, but Shane knows now. He knows what to look for and where to find it. He doesn't know how to turn it off. Shane doesn't know how to look at Ilya and see anything other than suffering. "You're not okay, are you?"

"What are you-"

"It's been like this since I've known you, hasn't it? You're sad. I didn't- I never noticed." Shane says as his vision blurs with raindrops and tears. He's crying now, fast breaths and trembling hands. Ilya shakes his head, denial fast on his tongue, but Shane beats him there. "No, whatever you're about to say, just don't. I can't handle you lying to me right now. I swear I'll lose it."

Ilya, to his credit, doesn't say anything. It's as good a confirmation as any. Shane's stomach lurches. All these years and he hadn't known. How many times had Ilya been falling apart when they were together? What else had Shane missed?

"God, it's all over you, Ilya." Shane whispers.

"Well, don't get too close then," Ilya says, looking away. "It's genetic, could be contagious too."

"Genetic," Shane says back. Suddenly he's in a bathroom in Las Vegas wondering where Ilya had learned the word. Shane's stomach makes another sickening tumble. He brings a hand to his mouth to keep it all down.

The rain is soaking them both now. Hair askew and shirts clinging to their bodies. Shane feels it all. Shane feels too much, but he still wants to pull Ilya close. He wants to tell him that it's okay now, if he wants it to be. Ilya's been so strong for so long, and now it's Shane's turn. "I wouldn't care even if it was. I wouldn't care if you were contagious."

He doesn't anticipate Ilya's reaction. Devastation. It's different this time. It's not just sadness now. Shane sees something shatter. He wants to reach out, to wrap his arms around Ilya on this street corner. He wants and wants, but he doesn't know if Ilya does anymore. His hands twitch with the effort of holding back. "You should care, Hollander."

Shane shakes his head, water splashing from his drenched hair. "I'd take it from you, if I could."

"Don't do this Hollander." Ilya says. He's trying to come off angry, to push him away, but all Shane sees is hurt. Tears are building in his eyes and Shane feels like he's breaking apart. He

did this, at least some of it. They've spent years loving and hurting each other all the same. Shane is so tired of hurt. "Don't say things like this when Rose Landry is waiting up for you."

"I tried. I tried to love Rose like I'm supposed to, Ilya. I really tried, but I can't. I don't know, maybe something's fucking wrong with me, but I couldn't do it." Shane takes a shaky breath. He knows what bravery feels like now. He's ready to take the leap this time. Brave. Be brave. "And even if I could, I wouldn't want to. It would hurt you, wouldn't it? Fuck, I never want to hurt you like that. Ilya, I'm sorry. I never should've walked out on you. You didn't deserve that."

"Hollander." Ilya whispers, voice cracking. His tears fall freely now. He's soaked all the way through, shaking.

"Come here." Shane says, reaching out this time. He needs Ilya to know that he's ready to want him back now. He needs to know that Shane is ready to do whatever it takes to make this right, for both of them.

Ilya hesitates. He looks down at Shane's outstretched hand and back up at his face. A shake of the head and Shane thinks he's lost him. He's finally lost him this time.

But Ilya doesn't walk away.

He mutters a watery curse and throws himself at Shane hard. It knocks the breath out of both of them. Being this close out in public where anyone could stumble upon them should make Shane pull away. He's sensible, he's responsible. He should be terrified, but the only thing that terrifies him tonight is the thought of letting Ilya go. They pull him closer, melting into the touch.

Shane holds Ilya on a Montreal street corner while they both shake, drenched in freezing rain, whispering desperate apologies to each other.

Ilya really doesn't know why he bites. Even when he's leashed, he always has to fucking gnash his teeth and bark. And he's sorry, he really is. He doesn't know how to do this, to keep Shane close without falling to pieces, without lashing out and pushing him away. He's secretly scared of everything. The world has torn him apart.

Shane is sorry for leaving and for never telling him why. He's sorry for the way Ilya found out about Rose and for how things went down tonight. He's sorry it took them this fucking long to get to this point. He's sorry for being just as scared as Ilya.

Ilya whispers things in a language Shane regrets not picking up sooner. He'll do better now. They both will. Russian mixes with English and French.

Shane knows what he wants to say, what he's always wanted to say, and Ilya isn't far behind.

Ya tebya lyublyu. Je t'aime. I love... I love.. I love you.

A confession strong enough to keep them dry on this stormy night. A life raft in a sea of regrets. An anchor to keep them afloat forever.

"It can't be all you see now." Ilya says, pulling back from Shane. All red eyes and shaky breaths. "I need to know you are still seeing me under all of this, Hollander."

"I know," Shane says. He knows it isn't fair to only see sadness and pain. It's not fair to either of them. "But, I don't know. I've spent so long missing things, not seeing what was really going on with you and with us, I don't know how to stop seeing it."

Ilya smiles for the first time that night and warmth floods Shane's chest. "We are being honest tonight, yes? Maybe the only time we have been really honest together."

Shane nods.

"Maybe this is what we do now. We try to be honest, so you do not worry yourself to death." Ilya suggests. "So that I do not make you worry. It is hard, but also easier, I think."

"Yeah, yeah I think I'd really like that, Ilya."

"Me too, Shane."

His name in Ilya's mouth is intoxicating. How could he ever have been scared of this? Saying each other's names, calling this what it always has been is freeing. They're more than Hollander and Rozanov when they're together. They're something that feels right.

Shane feels truly right for the first time in months.

"And I am sorry too," Ilya says. "Lying was easy for me, at least a little bit. I did not realize how hard I made it for you."

"I forgive you, Ilya. Do you forgive me?" Shane asks.

"Yes. Of course I do, moya lyubov." Ilya replies, and Shane blushes fiercely. Pet names and movie scene confessions. He never thought he would be able to have this. Shane never thought he would be able to have Ilya.

"Come on," Shane offers, "let's go dry off at my place before one of us gets sick."

"Russians do not get sick. We do not do this!" Ilya shouts.

Shane laughs with delight, loud and genuine. It gets swallowed up by the storm, but Ilya hears it. That's all that matters.

-

Shane

Why aren't you playing against New York tonight?

Did you somehow goad Scott Hunter into punching you before the game started or

something?
Seriously though are you alright?
WAIT.
Ilya, are you sick?!

Ilya

No comment.

Shane

I told you!!!! I told you one of us was gonna get sick!!

Ilya

I am first Russian to do this. You are talking to a trendsetter Hollander. I will send you my autograph.

Shane

You're such an asshole... Who even taught you that word?
I'll call you tonight.
Feel better, okay?

Ilya

I already do :)

Chapter End Notes

this took me entirely too long to finish, and while i might not be fully satisfied, i hope you guys are! thank you for the nice comments on chapter one and i really hope you enjoy the conclusion! thanks so much for reading!!

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