The Things We Can't Say

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The Things We Can't Say

by ConquerSpaceAndTime

Summary

Six months after the Olympic Games, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov haven't spoken a word to each other...and Shane Hollander is doing a terrible job of pretending he's fine. With the NHL Awards looming and everything left unsaid hanging between them, one drunken night in Montreal spirals into an unexpected karaoke performance, and everything he's buried comes spilling out in front of the one person he never stopped thinking about. For Ilya Rozanov, hearing Shane sing might be the moment that finally breaks the stalemate before the NHL Awards bring them back into each other's orbit. Sometimes it only takes a song, a crowd, and one look across a room to realize that silence was never the same thing as moving on.

Notes

Hi!! This is the first fic that I have actually wanted to post, and I'm really excited (and a little nervous) to share it! This story is written to be read alongside "Actor" by Conan Gray, especially during the karaoke scene. If you'd like the full experience, I recommend listening with headphones at a HIGH volume (as long as you're comfortable) so the music's emotional swells really land! I hope you enjoy!

Timeline / Canon Note: This fic takes place several months after the Olympic Games and immediately before the NHL Awards. While this scene isn't canon, it fits directly between two canon events, which I wanted to preserve. As a result, there's no on-page resolution here. Their next meeting at the Awards is left intact and unchanged.

Content Note: Emotional repression, unresolved feelings, and public emotional vulnerability.

POV Note: Alternating Shane and Ilya POVs

Chapter 1: Noise

JUNE 2014

SHANE

Hanging onto the wall at the edge of the bar, Shane Hollander had his eyes squeezed shut, like he was in physical pain. The music was loud — too loud — and he could barely hear himself think. God, his head felt heavy and fuzzy.

He cracked one eye open and scanned the room, trying to catch the eye of any of his teammates. Hopefully so he could beg them to leave.

He didn't know how he ended up here.

Well. No. He did.

After Montreal got eliminated from the playoffs (fucking *again*), J.J. Dagenais, being the guy he was, had announced that everyone was getting dressed and going out. No exceptions. In the end, about ten of the guys showed up, Shane included, even though all he'd wanted was to go home, wallow in his bed, and not think about the fact that Ilya was probably going to win the Cup first.

And the fact that Ilya hadn't texted him in six months.

Shane let out a huff of breath and shook his head.

Ilya. Nope. It's Rozanov.

“Rozanov. Rozanov. Rozanov,” Shane muttered under his breath, chanting beneath the thrum of the music. Calling him Ilya was too… much. Whatever they’d been doing with each other didn’t deserve that name.

He rolled his eyes.

Well, that would require them to be doing anything now, and since he hadn’t heard from Ilya (Rozanov!) since the Olympic Games, it was a moot point.

Not seeing any of his teammates, Shane pushed off the wall into the wall of bodies on the dance floor. Stumbling as his shoes stuck to whatever stickiness was on the ground (Shane shuddered thinking about having to clean these. Who knew what diseases now lined his feet), he fell right into Patrice Drapeau, the Voyager’s Goalie.

“HOLLZY!!” Drapeau screamed right in his ear. “Where the hell have you been man?! You’re missing all of it.”

“What’s “*it*”?”

“Ya know” Drapeau waved a hand vaguely in the air, as if that explained everything. “THE *VIBEEE*.”

Shane laughed and patted him on the arm. “Okay, buddy. Sorry I’m missing *the vibe*.”

“Are you trashed yet?!”

Shane paused, actually checking in with himself. He was definitely drunk. Trashed… not quite.

Did he even want to be?

His mind betrayed him immediately, flashing back to the last time he'd seen Ilya — damn it, Rozanov! — and the ache in his chest intensified. He missed him. That should probably concern him on several levels, but right now he just wanted to forget.

Forget the Cup.

Forget Ilya. Okay, *fine*, whatever, that *is* his name.

Forget the empty text thread on his phone.

Forget the fact that he still hadn't won a Cup, even though the entire Montreal fanbase had decided it was his personal responsibility to deliver one.

Looking back up at Drapeau, Shane squared his shoulders and said, "Not quite. Let's fucking fix that."

Drapeau threw his arms into the air. "YASSS!" He turned and shouted across the bar, "Y'ALL! TIME TO GET HOLLZY TRASHED!"

The boys erupted, making their way toward the bar in a loud, chaotic swarm. JJ ordered a round of shots, and together they threw them back. Shane felt the alcohol scorch down his throat and settle heavily in his stomach.

He just wanted to hold Ilya.

Okay. Definitely not drunk enough.

Catching JJ's eye, Shane lifted his hand and made a twirling motion. JJ grinned instantly. The boys started banging on the bar as another round appeared.

Three, maybe four, rounds later, Shane could confidently say he was effectively trashed.

Leaning heavily against his best friend, Hayden Pike, he slurred, “Hayyydeeeennnn, I am so pissed about the Cup.”

“I know, buddy,” Hayden said. “Total fucking bullshit. And now Ilya Rozanov is gonna win it, which just makes me want to punch a wall.”

Shane giggled. “Well… he is a good player. He deserves it, I guess.”

Hayden stared at him like he’d lost his mind.

“Did you, Shane Hollander, just compliment Ilya Rozanov?” Hayden reached out, dramatically checking Shane’s pulse and pressing a hand to his forehead. “Are you okay? Feverish? Hallucinating?”

“No, dickhead,” Shane said, batting his hands away. “I’m just saying it’s not surprising he made it this far. Whatever. I’m not talking anymore.”

“Exactly right, Hollzy! You’re *not* talking!” someone proclaimed loudly in his ear.

“God, JJ, you smell like shit! Get off me!” Shane wriggled out from under the heavy arm slung across his shoulders. “What do you mean I’m not talking?”

JJ pulled back, brandishing a microphone and wearing a shit-eating grin. “You’re *singing*.”

Shane stared at him, utterly baffled, before realizing the entire team had gathered in the second room of the bar…the one fully equipped for karaoke.

Shane’s worst nightmare.

“Oh, hell no. I am not singing.”

“You can’t argue! Team vote. Captain goes first.”

“Absolutely not. I would need to be, like… thoroughly blacked out for that.”

Hayden appeared out of nowhere, holding two tequila shots. “No problem!”

“But I don’t know many songs,” Shane protested. “I’m not a big music guy.”

“You said you don’t know *many*, which means you know *some*,” JJ said, nearly whining. “It can be literally anything. We just want you to do it!”

Shane looked around the room. His teammates were already flipping through the catalogue, hyped. A few spotted him and gave enthusiastic thumbs-ups.

He sighed.

“Fine. I’ll do it.”

JJ whooped. “YES!”

“But,” Shane added quickly, “I am *not* going first. Put me somewhere in the middle.”

“Deal!” JJ shouted as he ran back to the group. “GUYS, HOLLZY’S DOING IT!”

Shane shook his head in defeat as Hayden slapped him on the back. “Don’t worry, mate. It’s gonna be a blast.”

Ten minutes later, Shane sat nursing another drink (liquid courage was absolutely required) while two rookies absolutely *killed* “Bad Romance.” To his surprise, Shane was actually having fun. He was still nervous about his own song, but everyone seemed to be enjoying the moment, not taking it too seriously.

That was… until people from the dance floor started filtering into the room.

The crowd grew. Faces he didn’t recognize filled the space.

A couple more songs passed. The room got fuller. Shane started to panic.

He wished he knew more music. His song suddenly felt stupid compared to everyone else’s. And God, if they knew. If they knew *why* he was singing this song. If they knew that when he’d heard it playing at the rink a few days ago, while figure skaters practiced, he’d downloaded it immediately and listened to it nonstop.

If they knew it was about Ilya.

About how much it hurt that he hadn’t texted him back.

About how pathetic it felt to ache like this over a guy he’d only ever occasionally slept with.

“And next up,” JJ announced, snapping Shane out of his spiral, “is our very own captain of the Montreal Voyagers. The one, the only, SHANE HOLLANDER!”

The crowd erupted.

Shane stood, muscle memory kicking in. Years of playing under pressure settled into his bones. He took a breath and silently prayed that whatever training had carried him through packed arenas would get him through this too.

Even if he was extremely drunk.

ILYA

Ilya was getting a drink when he heard Shane's name bellowed from the other room.

He already knew Shane was here. He always does.

It's like his body is tuned to Shane's frequency, picking up the signal even when he can't see him.

Ilya doesn't go out often during the season, especially not during the playoffs, but Jesus, he needed a break. The drafts in his phone, all addressed to Shane and never sent, had started to haunt him. He wanted to text him so badly. He knew he should.

But every time he typed something out, it felt either like too much or not nearly enough to span the time that had passed.

And what if Shane didn't *want* to hear from him?

Maybe he was still pissed about Sochi. Not that he needed to be (Shane had at least won a medal and hadn't been a fucking embarrassment to his country), but Ilya knew how badly he'd handled things there. Or maybe Shane was pissed that he hadn't heard from him since.

Or worse.

What if Shane *did* want to hear from him? What if he was hurting just as badly? What the fuck were they supposed to do with that?

So, Ilya was here. At a club in Montreal, after a game. At a place Shane Hollander would never willingly set foot in. He drank just enough to take the edge off the ache in his chest, to try and forget how, over the last six months, through the rest of the season and this entire playoff run, all he'd wanted was to curl up with Shane at the end of the day.

And now Shane's name was being chanted from the karaoke room.

On a normal day, Ilya loved karaoke. He was usually the first one to grab a mic, always game to get the party going. But this didn't feel like Shane's vibe at all. Still, he couldn't stop his feet from moving.

He followed the sound, already bracing himself for what was sure to be a beautiful, awkward trainwreck.

Chapter 2: Voice

Chapter Summary

It's time for Shane to sing...

SHANE

He didn’t want to do this.

He didn’t want to do this.

He didn’t want to do this.

He didn’t want to do this.

Shane was shaking by the time he reached the stage.

Damn it. Fucking chill out, he chided himself.

Stepping up to the microphone, he put on his best press-conference voice. “Hey, Montreal!”

The crowd went wild.

“Okay, so full transparency, I don’t listen to a lot of music. I know, I know! I hear it all the time from my teammates. You don’t need to tell me I’m crazy.” The crowd laughed. Good. Shane took another breath.

“So, when I was strong-armed into singing by my buffoon of a goalie,” he said, pointing toward JJ — who raised his hand and waved like he was greeting fans — “I had to pick from a very limited knowledge base.”

More laughter.

“I heard this song, like… four months ago during a figure skating practice at the rink, and I haven’t been able to get it out of my head. So, in lieu of embarrassing myself with a song I don’t know the words to, I’m going to embarrass myself with my song choice.”

He winked at the crowd, which felt wildly unlike him.

And that’s when it hit him: he’d just gone through that entire spiel joking, laughing, smiling…and feeling good.

Really good.

The cheers, the warmth of the crowd, the alcohol buzzing through his veins, it all settled into something solid in his chest.

Okay.

Let’s do this.

THE PERFORMANCE

Actor by Conan Gray

The song begins to play, and Shane exhales a deep breath in those first five seconds before he starts to sing.

Ah-ah, ah-ah

The crowd collectively gasps as they realize — holy fuck — Shane Hollander can sing.

Mm-mm-mm

Ah

Shane grabs the microphone with both hands, closes his eyes, and leans in close enough that his lips brush the mic.

Nobody saw us in the hotel lobby

And nobody saw us with your sweatshirt on me

A small smile tugs at his mouth before he continues...

And nobody saw us leaving bruises on our necks

In a summer spent in a coat check

Ilya's entire body goes taut, like a wire pulled too tight. Standing in the back of the crowd, peering over heads and shoulders, he knows without a doubt that Shane is singing about them.

Nobody wondered where you went all April

Like kicking feet under the whole damn world's table

Unbeknownst to each other, both of them think of the same moment…years ago, at a press conference, when Shane had stepped in for Ilya after a difficult question in English. Their feet had tapped together beneath the table, quick and grounding. Ilya smiles at himself.

When my friends discovered when you left me in July

Shane braces for the next lyric, feeling it resound in his chest.

No, I didn't cry, kept the lie alive

Ilya bunches his fists in the pockets of his coat. Did Shane want to cry?

Shane leans forward, feeling like he is eye level with the crowd and sings softly because this first chorus… this one is the hurt before the anger.

But the church bells won't stop ringing

For an undead wedding day

Ilya's heart shatters at the thought of a wedding he'd never be able to consider with Shane.

And you've spent the summer drinking

While I spent it being erased

They remember last summer differently.

Ilya remembers Moscow: clubs, bodies, alcohol, anything sharp enough to keep him from thinking about his fucking brother, or the slow, terrifying fade of his father's memory.

Shane remembers the cottage. The quiet. The peace that tipped too easily into loneliness. He remembers waiting for texts at odd hours, counting down the days until the season started so he could see Ilya again

And I tried to hide the feeling

But it just won't go away

Shane grips at his chest, right over his heart. He wishes it would go away. He knows it never will, because he knows Ilya will never feel the same.

Let's pretend nothing happened, I agree

But you're a much better actor than me

Ilya sees it written all over Shane's face, baffled that no one else seems to notice. Shane is never expressive, but drunk, singing this song, stripped raw, everything is there. Plain as day. And Ilya wonders if he played his role too well.

Shane yanks the mic from the stand and starts pacing the stage. He feels off-balance, exposed, singing this in front of everyone. He doesn't want to sing to Ilya, exactly … he just wants Ilya to know. That he thinks about him. That this is about him. Even if it's humiliating.

A friend of mine asked you, "Ever talked to Conan?"

You didn't react, you said, "I barely even fucking know him"

Shane nearly scoffs mid-line, throwing up his free hand in frustration. The endless placating of the media, teammates, everyone in their lives.

You're saving your face, but you take it out on your nose

Ilya watches as Shane stumbles a step backward, barely catching himself. The music swells. For someone who claims not to know much about music, Shane is fully in its thrall, carried by every word.

The white wind blows, and now I'm lives ago

Shane bends low and lets the note tear out of him on '*ago'*. When he straightens, he kicks a foot out, unleashing whatever he's been holding back. The crowd, especially those singing along (thank God), goes wild.

Ilya thinks it might be the most beautiful thing he's ever seen, if the words weren't tearing him apart.

But the church bells won't stop ringing

For an undead wedding day

And you've spent the summer drinking

While I spent it being erased

Shane is belting now, one hand gripping his chest before flying outward, fingers tangling in his hair. His body refuses to stay still. Every word is branded into him.

Eyes closed, both hands wrapped around the mic:

And I tried to hide the feeling

But it just won't go away

Ilya doesn't realize he's moved until he's a few rows closer, pulled forward by something he can't fight. He isn't close enough for anyone else to notice, but close enough that if Shane opened his eyes, he'd see him.

Softer now, Shane sings:

Let's pretend nothing happened, I agree

Shane knows Ilya is there. He knows that if he opens his eyes, he'll see those curls, those eyes.

He opens them.

But you're a much better actor than me

Their gazes lock. A sharp, unexpected flash of anger cuts across Shane's face as he keeps singing — be damned if anyone clocks it.

If you ever cared, well, I wouldn't know

Blame it on a bad manic episode

Ilya feels every word. The tears rimming Shane's eyes. The redness in his face — exertion or emotion, impossible to tell — making his freckles stand out stark and beautiful. He can't look away. He sees Shane's eye twitch, like he's wincing through pain, as he sings:

When you meet a girl on some TV show

There's a side of you that she'll never know

Ilya sucked in a breath. Damn.

Tell all your friends that she's the one

And you can say it's love

Shane straightens, nearly toppling backward as he bellows, never once breaking eye contact with Ilya, and whatever restraint he had left gives out. Something in Shane snaps

But the church bells won't stop ringing

For an undead wedding day

And you've spent your whole life drinking

Oh, drinking me away

And I tried to hide the feeling

But I just can't lie that way

You pretend nothing happened, I believe

'Cause you're a much better actor

.....

Chapter 3: Silence

Chapter Summary

After

SHANE

Shane is breathing hard, barely able to hear the whoops and hollers over the ringing in his ears.

Ilya is here.

He can't fucking believe it. Can't believe Ilya is here, can't believe he just watched that, and can't believe Shane let himself watch him back.

Ilya knew. Shane is sure of it now. He saw the pain, the sorrow … regret plastered all over his beautiful face. In those final verses, they were having their own conversation, wordless and raw, surrounded by dozens of strangers who had no idea what they were witnessing.

Shane tears his gaze away from those piercing eyes that threaten to swallow him whole and forces himself to refocus on the room.

People are losing their minds.

"DUDE! I didn't know you could sing like that?!" Hayden yells, yanking Shane down from the stage. "That was crazy intense!"

“Yeah, man, you’ve been holding out on us!” JJ jumps in. Then he raises an eyebrow, eyeing Shane more closely. “You looked like you were feeling every word.”

Shane flinches at the implication.

“Haha.” He lets out an awkward chuckle. “Nah, man. Just a catchy song and a drunk singer, that’s all.”

JJ doesn’t look convinced, but he shrugs and turns back to the crowd that’s still cheering Shane on. “SHOTS FOR THE CAPTAIN!” The response was immediate with cheers erupting and bodies surging toward the bar.

In the chaos, Shane slips away. He finds his things tossed into a messy pile in the corner, slings them together, and sneaks out of the club before anyone can stop him.

He needs to go home.

He needs to go to bed.

And somewhere in the middle of all that, he needs to stop thinking about the look on Ilya’s face in the crowd.

And drink some water.

ILYA

Ilya saw Shane sneak out of the club while everyone else was busy cheering for more shots. If they’d taken one real look at him, they would have known that was never going to happen.

Ilya, trying not to be noticed but also not lose Shane, slipped out after him as quickly as he could. By the time he hit the cool summer night air, Shane was already halfway down the block, shoulders tense, probably calling a car.

“Hollander!” He shouted.

Shane paused with his back turned to him.

“Hollander,” Ilya said again, quieter this time, still certain Shane could hear him. He didn’t dare move closer. They stood less than half a block apart, the distance between them suddenly feeling enormous.

Slowly, Shane turned around.

Their eyes met.

“Rozanov.” Shane’s voice was clipped. Not angry… just tired.

They stared at each other, neither of them speaking, suspended in the aftermath of the emotional storm they’d left behind in the club. Ilya watched the corner of Shane’s mouth lift in a slight, almost could-be smile.

Shane sighed, blinked slowly, and began to turn away.

“I’ll see you in a couple days at the NHL Awards, Rozanov,” he said. “Don’t be late.” And then he was around the corner, gone.

“I won’t,” Ilya whispered, to no one but the strangers passing by on the street.

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