

Hidden

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Summary

Drafted to rival teams and thrown together by circumstance, Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander begin as enemies on the ice: sharp hits, sharper words, and an undeniable tension neither wants to name. What starts as stolen moments and secret encounters slowly deepens into something far more dangerous. As desire bleeds into longing and walls begin to crack. Between the brutal culture of professional hockey, fear of exposure, and the weight of everything they refuse to say out loud, both men must decide how much of themselves they're willing to risk. Hidden is an angsty rivals-to-lovers story about secrecy, obsession, and the terrifying pull of loving someone you were never supposed to want.

OR

Ilya fell first and he fell harder.

Chapter 1: First Overall

The first time Ilya Rozanov saw Shane Hollander, he was laughing.

It was quick, sharp, and careless, like he had forgotten for a moment where he was. Ilya noticed immediately. The sound irritated him in a way that felt... promising. Dangerous. He filed it away in his head.

The draft floor buzzed with heat and nerves, cameras tracking every movement. Red lights blinked like little warnings. Ilya leaned back in his chair, jacket unbuttoned, tie loose despite protests from his agent. One ankle crossed over the other knee, posture so casual it seemed rude. He looked bored. He wasn't.

He'd learned long ago that arrogance works as armor. And when you are the best, and everyone expects you to *be serious*, and you are Ilya Rozanov, you make them wait.

"Sit up," his agent muttered.

Ilya tilted his head. "Why? They will pick me anyway."

The words came in clipped, deliberate rhythm, cadence slightly sharp, carrying the weight of his Russian accent. The agent hissed, but he didn't care. Boredom and provocation often look the same. That was intentional.

Shane Hollander sat several rows ahead. All straight lines, precise edges. Hands folded neatly, eyes sharp. Projected second overall. Cleaner, smarter, more disciplined. He looked... safe. Like someone who played by the rules and would never step out of line.

Rozanov grinned. Loud, wide, unapologetic. Leaned forward slightly. "Hmm... Montreal thinks they are getting angel, yes? Very cute," he murmured to no one in particular, a smirk tugging at his lips. "We will see if this angel can fly."

Someone nearby snorted. Good. Laughter that recognized his arrogance. Attention that confirmed his power. It was a performance, yes. But even as a performance, it drew blood.

The commissioner stepped to the podium. Silence fell immediately.

"With the first overall pick—"

Rozanov straightened just enough to look intentional.

"—the Boston Raiders select Ilya Rozanov."

Applause erupted. Fans cheered. Someone groaned. His brother looked up from his phone for exactly half a second, expression neutral.

Rozanov rose, walking with slow confidence. Every step said, *I own this space*. He accepted the jersey like it was a crown, held it up, and turned toward a camera. "Try not to blink," he

said, voice rolling slightly on vowels, Russian cadence still lingering despite years of practice.

The murmurs followed him: *asshole, jerk, show-off*. He heard them, smirked, and ignored them. Good. Let them hate him. Let them fear his confidence. Let them try to catch him.

When he turned, Shane Hollander's eyes were on him.

Clapping. Careful. Measured. Wary.

Rozanov's grin sharpened. He winked. Shane's eyes went wide. He looked away. Rozanov laughed softly, the sound clipped and musical, more dangerous than pleasant.

Shane had known it would be Rozanov.

Still, seeing him on stage was like standing too close to the fire.

Rozanov was everything the analysts praised: talented, confident, magnetic. But he carried it differently. He provoked, teased, and challenged. His words cut sharper, humor tilted dark, movements daring. Loud without apology. Too aware of the space he owned.

"Unbelievable," Shane's agent muttered. "He's asking to be hated."

Shane swallowed. "He's good enough to get away with it."

The Boston jersey draped naturally over Rozanov's broad shoulders. He tossed a quick smirk at the cameras, gestures playful, precise, flirtatious. Every motion screamed, *look at me, I'm untouchable*.

When Shane's name was called, drafted to the Montreal Voyageurs, he rose with careful precision. The contrast was immediate. Where Rozanov swaggered and teased, Shane moved with measured steps. Where Rozanov provoked, Shane endured.

Backstage, chaos pressed in. Someone bumped into Shane hard enough to jolt him.

"Ah! My apologies," said Rozanov, stepping in, grin bright and teasing. "These halls...they are like maze for big boys. You survive?"

Shane blinked. "I-I'm fine."

Rozanov tilted his head, assessing, unafraid. "Montreal, yes? It is nice, yes?. Very hungry."

Shane bristled. "I'll manage."

Rozanov's grin widened. "Good. Wouldn't want my favourite competitor to burn too soon."

Favourite.

Shane's stomach knotted.

"Ilya!" someone called.

Rozanov backed up, still grinning. "See you on ice, Hollander. Try not to break too fast."

Then he was gone, laughter trailing like smoke.

Shane stood, heart racing, irritated and... something else.

Asshole, he thought.

And worse: *Why do I care what he thinks?*

Later that night, Ilya Rozanov lay across the hotel bed, phone balanced on his chest. Headlines scrolled endlessly:

"ROZANOV FIRST OVERALL: RAIDERS BET BIG"

"CONFIDENT OR COCKY? BOSTON'S NEW PROBLEM CHILD"

He smirked. Locked the phone. No one would call, no one would care. Mother gone years ago, father cold and waiting somewhere in Russia, brother interested only in money. Perfect. No distractions, no soft edges.

Yet even in silence, Shane Hollander's face intruded: jaw tight, hands clenched, controlled to the point of fragility. Rozanov's grin widened, amused, and dangerous.

Yes. That one would be trouble.

Chapter 2: First Clash

The first time Rozanov and Hollander faced each other on ice, it was exactly as intense as the analysts had promised... and worse.

Boston Bears vs Montreal Voyageurs. National broadcast. Fans screaming. Cameras catching every swipe of the puck, every slash, every collision.

Ilya Rozanov skated onto the ice like he owned it. His grin wide and sharp, teasing even as he checked a defender into the boards. Every movement was precise, calculated, and cocky, designed to irritate, dominate, and intimidate.

Shane Hollander watched from the other bench. Jaw tight. Shoulders square. Eyes scanning Rozanov like a hawk, noting the arrogance, the effortless skill, the constant, teasing confidence. He hated him instantly. And he hated that he noticed every little thing.

Rozanov leaned into every opportunity. A jab with the stick here, a trash-talking quip there, a grin flashing whenever Shane got too close.

“Too slow, Montreal!” Rozanov shouted over the ice during a whistle break, accent curling around his words. “You skate like you're afraid of everything!”

Shane bristled, gloves tightening on his stick. He didn't answer. He never answered. Not on ice. Not to players like Rozanov.

The puck dropped, chaos ensued, and they collided shoulder to shoulder, blades scraping. Rozanov's grin brushed dangerously close to a sneer.

“You should learn to fight, da?” Rozanov muttered, low, almost inaudible. “Or are you just beautiful to look at?”

Shane's blood ran cold, and he stepped back. Deliberately. Professionally. He didn't flinch, but something about Rozanov's audacity... that grin... that teasing energy... made him want to push back in ways that weren't allowed.

Rozanov laughed quietly, loud enough that only Shane could hear, and skated off leaving Shane frustrated and oddly... flustered.

After the game came the press conference. The hallways were crowded with players from both teams navigating through staff, media, and security. Rozanov walked with relaxed arrogance, towel slung casually over his shoulder, hair wet and curls clinging to his forehead.

He caught Shane coming down the opposite corridor, a few steps away. Shane's jaw was tight, eyes flicking toward him with a mixture of irritation and caution.

"You looked tense out there, Hollander," Rozanov called across the space, voice loud enough to carry, accent teasing, but just enough to let Shane know it was pointed.

Shane stopped briefly, expression flat. "I wasn't tense," he said curtly.

Rozanov smirked, leaning against the wall, curls falling slightly over his forehead. "Ah, yes. Controlled, always. Like true Canadian soldier."

Shane's jaw tightened. He wanted to hate him. He *did* hate him. And yet, the sparkle in Rozanov's hazel eyes, the teasing tilt of his grin, the careless bounce of his curls- it tugged at something he wasn't prepared to name.

Rozanov stepped closer, still keeping distance, still public, brushing his shoulder lightly against Shane's as they passed. "We will meet again," he said softly, almost a murmur, "and you will see how fun I can be."

Shane's stomach twisted. He swallowed, said nothing, and moved on, mind racing.

Weeks later, the first hotel encounter. Both teams were in the same city for a back-to-back. In a strange twist of fate, a last-minute scheduling overlap meant that the Boston Bears and Montreal Voyageurs were staying under the same roof.

The hallways were quiet, corridors nearly empty. Players from both teams either holed up in their rooms or already out partying for the night.

Ilya Rozanov noticed immediately. He always noticed these things. Timing, opportunity, proximity. His eyes scanned the lobby, smirk fixed in place. He spotted Shane Hollander at the far end of the hall, carrying a small suitcase, jaw tight, shoulders square, expression taut with professionalism.

Rozanov didn't think twice. He moved.

"Fancy seeing you here," he drawled, voice low, accent teasing, just loud enough for Shane to hear.

Shane wanted to glare. He wanted to step back. He wanted to resist. But the pull of Rozanov, the energy, the confidence, the teasing dominance, was too strong.

They walked silently, almost circling each other down the long hotel corridor, eyes locking with unspoken challenge.

When they reached a secluded corner, Rozanov stopped. He leaned casually against the wall, hands loose at his sides.

“You want to fight, Hollander?” he asked, voice a whisper now as he leaned into Shane’s ear. “Or... play?”

Shane’s pulse jumped. “I...don’t know what you mean.”

Rozanov’s grin sharpened. Looking around, as if to check for any eavesdroppers, he stepped forward, closing the distance, dominance radiating in every move. One hand pressed lightly to the wall beside Shane’s head, the other brushing over Shane’s chest as if testing for reactions.

“I think you do,” Rozanov said softly. “I can tell. Every line, every muscle...”

Shane swallowed hard. He had never done this before. Never been with a man. Never wanted anyone like this. But he couldn’t deny the heat rising in his chest, the desperate pull of Rozanov’s arrogance, his experience, his confidence. But this was too much, too public, too dangerous.

And then Rozanov’s hand slid under the hem of Shane’s shirt, brushing over skin, teasing, firm but not cruel. Shane gasped, shivering, unsure if he wanted to run or stay. Fire erupted over his skin. Everywhere Rozanov touched was followed by goose bumps, making his hair stand on end.

“Shh,” Rozanov whispered, thumb brushing along Shane’s chest. “Relax. Nobody can see. Just...feel. Let me guide you.”

Shane’s hands shook slightly, then slowly found Rozanov’s hips, gripping him lightly. Rozanov smirked, guiding Shane with confident movements, bending him gently backward against the wall. His curls fell forward, catching the light, haloed around his mischievous, arrogant grin.

“Not here” Shane whispered, too afraid to raise his voice. And with an urgent mutter of “1410”, he left Rozanov in the hallway.

It didn’t take long for Rozanov to find the room, too gently knock on the hard wood door, for Shane to invite him in.

The kiss came next- hungry, teasing, deliberate. Ilya’s hands roamed with certainty, Shane’s tentative and unsure, giving away every new sensation.

When Rozanov pulled back slightly, Shane’s lips tingled, chest heaving. “I...don’t know...”

Rozanov smiled, amused and dominant. “No. Don’t think. Feel. You follow me, yes?”

Shane nodded, breathless.

Ilya’s hands moved lower, guiding Shane gently, confidently. Shane’s nervous gasps encouraged him. Ilya’s grin never faltered- cocky, teasing, but careful- knowing Shane had

never experienced this before.

When Shane tentatively sank to his knees, taking Ilya into his mouth, Ilya's head tilted back, eyes half-lidded, curls falling over his forehead, a soft groan escaping. Shane froze for a moment, unsure, then continued.

Ilya's dominance didn't vanish in that moment. He directed, guided, but never pushed too hard. Every movement, every moan, every gasp of Shane was noted, appreciated, cherished.

Shane discovered quickly that he loved it. Loved giving, loved following. Loved the arrogant, confident way Ilya moved, the teasing dominance, the care underneath the cockiness.

The world outside the hallway disappeared. The league, the teams, the rivalry, all irrelevant. Only the heat, the tension, the stolen intimacy mattered.

When they finally pulled away, faces flushed, breaths ragged, eyes locked, Rozanov's grin was infuriatingly smug.

"See?" he whispered, hand coming up to cradle Shane's cheek. "Fun. Dangerous. Worth it."

Shane could only nod, words lost.

Later that night, once safely back in their respective rooms, the texting began. Rozanov as *Lily*, Shane as *Jane*:

| *Lily*: You cheat too well. I might...like it.

| *Jane*: That was...wrong.

| *Lily*: Maybe. But fun is better when it's dangerous.

And just like that, the game was no longer just on ice.

Chapter 3: A Season of Secrets

The season began with the same roar of rivalry, the same fire of competition. Boston Bears, Montreal Voyageurs. Every clash, every whistle, every collision carried the familiar heat of their first encounter.

Rozanov thrived on it. He played harder, skated faster, chirped louder. Every time Shane was near, he felt the old pull, the thrill of confrontation sharpened by desire. Shane, careful and precise, matched him with equal skill, always maintaining that professional, impenetrable mask. And yet, every touch, every clash, sent sparks beneath the ice.

It didn't take long for them to meet again in stolen moments. Sometimes it was a hotel room, sometimes they stumbled to dark and hidden corners of the arenas. Always away from people, always hidden, never out in the open for prying eyes to see. Every encounter careful, brief, yet charged. Hands brushed, lips met, tension coiling tighter with every stolen glance.

The first few encounters remained discreet. Fade-to-black moments, flashes of heat behind closed doors, where Shane followed Ilya's lead, both careful to avoid exposure.

Lily and *Jane* became a lifeline. Their texting was coded and constant, a world where Shane could confess small truths without fear, and Ilya could tease, challenge, and draw him closer without consequences.

|*Lily*: You're tense today. Harder than usual.

|*Jane*: You think I want attention?

|*Lily*: Maybe. Maybe I like watching you squirm.

Through these texts, they learned each other in ways neither could in public. Shane's defenses cracked slowly; Ilya's arrogance softened, just enough, in private.

Weeks passed. Every game brought opportunity, every Montreal vs Boston match a chance to sneak a stolen hour in a hotel room. They learned rhythms, patterns. Shane's nervous gasps encouraged Ilya, whose cocky grin never faltered, though now there was a faint undercurrent of longing he hadn't allowed himself to recognise.

It was late February when the inevitable finally happened. Boston Bears' away game in Montreal. Ilya invited Shane to his room. No excuses, no corridors, no whispers.

The room door closed behind them, muffling the low hum of the city. Shane froze for a heartbeat, pulse racing, aware of how exposed he felt.

“Finally,” Ilya murmured, pulling Shane close, lips colliding in a kiss that was no longer tentative, no longer brief. Hungry, demanding, but tempered with care. Shane’s hands trembled over Ilya’s chest, exploring, uncertain, but willing.

Ilya guided him confidently, hips brushing, lips teasing, hands roaming. Shane followed, still inexperienced, still nervous, but trusting. He gave as he had learned: softly, eagerly, with a careful, cautious curiosity.

When they moved onto the bed, the shift was inevitable. Clothes shed, hands roaming, kisses deepening. Ilya took the lead, gentle yet dominant, guiding Shane with experience, coaxing him into new sensations.

The first time, it was all Ilya: commanding, deliberate, urgent, yet careful.

He kissed Shane deeply, pressing him against the bed, hands roaming over his shoulders, down his back, over his hips. Shane’s breath hitched, fingers trembling, unsure of what to do, unsure if he could handle the intensity of Ilya.

“Look at me,” Ilya whispered, holding Shane’s chin gently, but firmly. “You’re okay. Tell me if you need to stop. Tell me what you want.”

Shane swallowed hard, lips parting, chest heaving. “I... I don’t know...”

Ilya’s grin softened just enough to show the care underneath his cocky exterior. “Then trust me. Follow me. Just feel.”

Shane nodded, hands clutching the sheets, letting himself be guided. Ilya’s movements were deliberate, hands and mouth exploring, coaxing, preparing him, checking Shane’s reactions at every step. Shane shivered under the touch, gasped under the kisses, slowly giving himself over.

“I’m going to... if you’re ready,” Ilya murmured, eyes searching Shane’s for any hesitation. “You still want?”

“I still want,” Shane breathed, voice shaky, body tense with anticipation.

Ilya smiled then positioned Shane, guiding him carefully, patiently, making sure he was comfortable. Every kiss, every caress, every soft moan from Shane drew Ilya deeper, making him ache to take him, to show him how much he had wanted this.

He moved with precision, dominant, taking the lead in every thrust, every touch, every movement. Shane followed instinctively, hands clutching Ilya’s shoulders, pressing into him, lips finding his chest, learning to respond to Ilya’s rhythm, his guidance.

“God, you feel so good,” Ilya murmured, a cocky grin softening into something raw, urgent, yearning. “I’ve wanted this... wanted you...”

Shane moaned, finally surrendering to the sensation, to the heat, to the way Ilya was controlling every movement, yet caring for every reaction, every shiver, every gasp.

Ilya kissed him fiercely, deeply, letting Shane taste the hunger and desire he couldn't yet speak. His hands roamed possessively, his eyes locked on Shane's, showing, in every gesture, how much he craved him.

When they finally collapsed together, Shane trembling and breathless, Ilya curled around him, one hand tangled in his dark hair, the other tracing his back, pulling him close. He kissed Shane repeatedly, murmuring words of praise, soft teasing, and raw longing, letting Shane feel everything he could not yet put into words.

Shane clung to him, still flushed, still catching his breath, finally letting himself relax entirely in Ilya's arms, entirely under his control.

Hours passed in a haze of heat and whispered names. By the time they collapsed, limbs tangled, breaths ragged, sweat cooling on flushed skin, Shane clung instinctively to Ilya, who pressed a possessive, yet gentle hand over his back.

Sleep came slowly, tangled and warm. For once, the rivalry outside didn't exist. There was only them.

Ilya woke softly, sunlight cutting across the hotel room floor. Shane was gone.

Panic rose in his chest. He remembered every movement, every gasp, every whispered plea from the night before. A longing he hadn't admitted to anyone, even himself, flared sharply.

He realized, suddenly and painfully, that he wanted more than just the stolen moments, more than the thrill. He wanted Shane Hollander. The thought hit him with the force of a slap: *I'm falling for him. I'm too invested.*

He paced the room, curls mussed, eyes dark with the awareness that desire alone couldn't bridge the gap between them. Shane's walls were still up, his internalised fear, his standoffish nature, his cautious repression, all barriers Ilya hadn't yet figured out how to dismantle.

And as sunlight spilled into the hotel room, Rozanov felt the first stirrings of real heartbreak — the kind that comes when the heart runs faster than the head, when the game of stolen intimacy no longer feels like enough, and when you know you're in deeper than you ever intended.

Chapter 4: Pulling Away

Shane Hollander hated mornings. Not because of early practices or team meetings, but because the silence of his room forced him to confront thoughts he didn't want. Thoughts of Ilya Rozanov.

Their last encounter haunted him still. Ilya's touch, his voice, the way he had kissed Shane with a mixture of dominance and care. All of it lingered like smoke in Shane's chest. He tried to push it away, tried to shove the memory down into a corner of his mind where it belonged, but it would not stay buried.

Shane hated the way he wanted Ilya. Wanted him so badly it left him trembling and breathless, wanting to confess, wanting to throw caution aside, but terrified of what it might mean. *I can't. I can't let anyone know. Not now. Not ever. Not in this life.*

On the ice, the world was simpler, controlled. Puck, stick, goal. Strategy, skill, timing. The thrill of competition left less room for unwanted thoughts. And yet even there, the tension clung to him like a shadow. Teammates spat insults as easily as they passed the puck. Casual slurs meant to dominate, to intimidate, to reinforce the masculine façade required to survive in professional hockey. Shane had learned to smile, to laugh, to shrug them off, to throw a quip back so nobody would guess how much the words made him flinch inside.

He had no one to confide in. Not really. Coaches were strict but oblivious. Teammates were competitive, often ruthless. And the locker room, a minefield of casual bravado, felt suffocating. He had to be invisible. Guarded. Perfectly controlled. Every word, every glance, every gesture monitored. There was no room for him to exist as himself.

And yet, the moment he was alone, in his apartment, on a layover, after games, his mind drifted back to Ilya.

Ilya's hand trailing along his hip. Ilya's lips pressing into his neck. Ilya's voice, teasing, cocky, demanding, softening only when Shane reacted with uncertainty. The memory made his chest ache with longing he didn't yet have a name for. Lust had been simple; desire was dangerous but manageable. Love... love was something else entirely.

And Shane was terrified.

He began to notice the difference in how he felt after their encounters. After their last night together, the heat of their bodies intertwined, Shane had felt something beyond physical pleasure. A small, terrifying tug at his chest, a desire not just to be with Ilya but to *keep* him, to be *wanted* in return. But he couldn't allow himself to act on it. Not now. Not while his career, his reputation, and the pressures of hockey demanded his careful, cautious neutrality.

So he pulled away.

At first, subtly. Replies to texts came slower, excuses to leave early after games, subtle distancing during hotel encounters. Every time he felt his feelings tipping beyond lust into

something dangerous, something that resembled love, he recoiled. Convincing himself it was safer to step back.

Shane didn't see that he wasn't just protecting himself. He was isolating himself. The more he pulled away from Ilya, the more he felt lonely, hollow, untethered. The very act of pushing the one person who made him feel alive out of his life created a void that nothing else could fill. Not the team, not the ice, not the city he played in.

And Ilya noticed.

Rozanov, usually so cocky and untouchable, began to show cracks. Shane's delayed texts, canceled encounters, averted gaze in hallways. They cut through Rozanov like a knife. His eyes darkened with frustration, hurt, and something sharper: fear.

Ilya had no one else. His mother was gone. His father, distant and cruel in memory, offered nothing but judgment and disappointment. His brother only tolerated him when there was profit to be had. Ilya's world had been a string of losses, a series of people he could not trust to love him back. Shane was his only escape, the one constant he had allowed himself in years. And now, even Shane was pulling away.

Ilya's chest ached at the thought. He wanted to storm into Shane's apartment, to hold him, to demand he stop pushing away. But he knew better. He had to wait, to watch, to keep the teasing, the cocky dominance, the playful arrogance- all the masks- in place. Otherwise, Shane would retreat further, vanish completely.

Meanwhile, Shane's own isolation was suffocating. The more he pulled back, the more he felt himself unraveling. Away from Ilya, he felt untethered, as if he were drifting through a world designed to expose him. With his parents, he felt the impossible relief of unconditional love and yet even that couldn't fill the hollowness created by fear of exposure. In the Montreal locker room, surrounded by laughter and slurs, he felt the knife of anxiety twist sharper. On the ice, the cheers and shouts blended with mocking jeers, a constant reminder that if anyone knew, if anyone saw, everything he had worked for could vanish.

And still, in moments alone, in hotel rooms, in whispered texts under the guise of Lily and Jane, he felt it. The pull. The warmth. The ache of wanting something forbidden yet undeniably real.

Shane began to see the pattern, the undeniable truth. He was falling for Ilya. The thought terrified him. Love was reckless, dangerous, potentially career-ending. Love was public, visible, permanent. Lust could be hidden, managed, justified. Love could not.

And so he pulled away.

He canceled plans, stayed in his room while Ilya waited, offered terse answers to texts, and avoided lingering touches in hallways. Each retreat tore at him more than any physical pain. Loneliness was slowly consuming him, yet he could not admit it, could not let himself reach for Ilya, even as he ached to.

Ilya felt it all. He always noticed. The hesitation in Shane's hands, the slight chill in his gaze. It was the kind of heartbreak he knew well: being so close to someone, so desperately wanting them, and watching them retreat into walls that weren't made for him. Rozanov's usual arrogance faltered; his cocky grin now carried a hint of raw desperation.

He had no one. And Shane was his only person. And yet, Shane was slipping away.

Ilya curled a hand through his hair, pacing his room alone, heart hammering. He wanted to call Shane, to chase him down, to pull him close and refuse to let go. But he could not. He had to hide his obsession behind arrogance, behind teasing dominance, behind playful jabs and smiles. Otherwise, Shane would vanish entirely.

And Shane, in his quiet isolation, felt the same crushing loneliness, the same desperate yearning, but he was too scared, too cautious, too controlled to reach out. He could feel the distance between them growing, yet he didn't know how to stop it. He only knew that every stolen glance, every touch, every kiss he couldn't have felt like a betrayal of himself, even as it made him ache with longing.

And so the season went on. Games, practices, hotel encounters. All tinged with a dangerous intimacy and a fragile distance. Shane pulled, Ilya chased. Shane wavered between desire and fear. Ilya balanced desire and love, hiding the heartbreak threatening to spill over at every glance.

Loneliness surrounded them both. One self-imposed, one born from loss. And in that lonely space, the tension between lust, love, fear, and desire grew sharper every day.

Chapter 5: Edges and Exposures

The season pressed on, Boston Bears, Montreal Voyageurs. The same rivalry, the same fire, but now every match carried something heavier for Shane. Every collision on the ice with Ilya Rozanov, every moment when their skates brushed, every trash-talking quip or teasing glare, stirred something in him he couldn't name and didn't want to. His walls, so carefully built over years of hockey, were starting to crack.

In the quiet moments, alone in his head, he thought about Ilya constantly. Not just the teasing grin or the sharp curls over hazel eyes, but the way Rozanov could dominate a room, dominate a game, dominate him. And in those thoughts, Shane felt both exhilaration and terror. He hated how much he wanted Ilya, and hated even more that he might already be falling.

The back-to-back away games brought them together more often than Shane liked. The proximity was dangerous. Shane would try to stay away, keep his distance, but they always found each other. In a silent hallway, Ilya would lean close, teasing and confident. "Fancy seeing you here," he'd murmur, voice low, eyes scanning Shane for hesitation. "Or are you going to hide again?"

Shane's heart would hammer, chest tightening, palms slick. "I... can't," he'd mutter, trying to sound firm, though his body betrayed him. Ilya smirked, cocky as ever, but careful. "Then we don't have to. Only if you want. You tell me stop, I stop. Always, da?"

It was the rhythm of their stolen encounters. Teasing, urgent, playful, but also painfully careful. Each brush of hands, each fleeting kiss, each whispered word made Shane's longing more unbearable. And Ilya, ever perceptive, noticed every hesitation, every subtle retreat.

Their texting became their lifeline.

|Lily: You're tense today. Harder than usual.

|Jane: Maybe I don't want attention.

|Lily: Maybe. Maybe I like watching you squirm.

Through these messages, Shane explored feelings he couldn't name, and Ilya teased, challenged, and drew him closer, feeding both lust and something unspoken, fragile, and terrifying.

Late March. Boston Bears in Montreal. The hotel room was quiet, lights dimmed, city humming below. Shane leaned against the bed, chest tight, hands pressed to the sheets. Ilya stood over him, grin in place, curls falling into his eyes, but the teasing arrogance was tempered now by careful attentiveness.

"You sure you want?" Ilya asked, voice low, gentle beneath the playful accent. Hands hovered, brushing Shane's shoulders.

Shane's throat tightened. "I... yes... I want..."

“Good,” Ilya whispered. “Then trust me.”

Every movement was deliberate. Shane followed, hands trembling, lips seeking, chest pounding, mind screaming both yes and no. Ilya constantly checked in, lips brushing Shane’s neck, hands roaming but holding back just enough: “Do you like?”, “Is this okay?”, “Tell me what you want.”

Shane shivered, heat rolling over him despite his fear. He wanted to surrender, wanted to follow, wanted to feel, but panic pulsed beneath the surface. *I can’t want this. I can’t...*

Ilya noticed the hesitations, the small retreats, the tight grip of Shane’s hands on the sheets. His grin softened, cocky and dominant, yes, but now threaded with something vulnerable. He leaned closer, murmuring into Shane’s ear: “I got you. Always. Only if you want.”

Shane’s walls trembled further as Ilya guided him onto the bed. Every kiss, every brush of fingers, every whispered instruction was carefully measured, consent always checked, always confirmed. Shane gasped, shivering, finally letting himself follow.

And then, caught up in the heat, in the urgency, in the intimacy, Ilya’s last wall cracked.

“Ya tebya lyublyu, I love you,” he whispered, rough, strained, desperate.

Shane froze mid-gasp. Heart hammering, chest tight. *He... said it... he loves me... oh God... I... can’t...*

But outwardly, Shane continued, pretending nothing had happened, moving instinctively with Ilya, gasping and clutching him. Internally, panic twisted every thought. *No. Don’t think about that. Pretend it didn’t happen.*

Ilya felt every microshift. Every hesitation, every subtle pullback in Shane’s hands and shoulders cut him deeper than any collision on ice. He had just confessed the last of his secrets, let the bravado drop entirely, and Shane... Shane acted like it didn’t happen.

By the time they collapsed, sweat cooling, breaths ragged, Shane feigned sleep, curling against Ilya while his mind spun. Ilya pressed close, one hand tangled in his hair, the other tracing his back. And inside, Rozanov felt hollow. Shane was the only person he had ever allowed himself to love, and even he was retreating.

Shane woke with his head on Ilya’s shoulder, chest tight, mind whirling. The desire he felt for Ilya had grown into something more than lust, something terrifying and wonderful. But admitting it, even to himself, was impossible. His walls, cracked but still standing, pulled him back from the brink, forcing him to isolate. He silently stood up, dressed and left Ilya to wake alone hours later.

Ilya Rozanov felt the emptiness left in the aftermath. Shane had left the hotel room that morning, leaving only the lingering warmth of their bodies, and the echo of words he could never take back. The loneliness pressed in, heavy and sharp. He had exposed everything. His desire, his care, his love, and Shane had pretended it didn't happen. He was left with only the memory, and the ache of being utterly seen and almost immediately abandoned. Ilya's mind twisted and turned over the confession he hadn't meant to make, the one that laid him bare.

I shouldn't need this... shouldn't want this... he told himself. He doesn't have to feel the same. Why would he? Look at me... who would love me? My father... gone. Mother... gone. My brother... cares only for what I can give him. And Shane... even he... he's pulling away.

He paced, fists curling in his curls, heart aching. He had given everything in that one moment — desire, care, honesty — and Shane had acted like it didn't happen. Ilya had no one else. No one who wanted him. And now, even Shane, the one person he had let close, was retreating behind invisible walls.

And yet, he continued the stolen moments. Every back-to-back game, every hotel stay, every brief encounter in a quiet hallway, he found Shane. He teased, pressed, kissed, and touched, always checking, always asking, always seeking consent. He didn't push too hard, not physically, not emotionally — but the need, the obsession, the ache in his chest, was impossible to hide.

He told himself it was enough: the stolen moments, the fleeting intimacy, the teasing and texted banter. But every time Shane's hesitation became visible, every small retreat, it cut him. Was this all he deserved? Just these fragments of love, this patchwork of desire, never full, never complete? Could he accept that? Should he?

Stolen moments, whispered texts, fleeting hotel encounters, all of it rested on fragile threads now. Desire had turned into something far more dangerous: love, unacknowledged, unreciprocated, and agonizing. Both men, separate, felt the weight: Shane's retreat, Ilya's obsession, and the question neither could yet answer: how long could they keep walking this line before it broke completely?

The season pressed on, games coming faster, travel schedules piling up, but Shane could barely focus on anything except the weight of Ilya's words, whispered in the heat of a hotel room: *Ya tebya lyublyu, I love you.*

He had frozen at the confession, chest tightening, mind spinning, body betraying him even as his mind screamed to retreat. And then, as if nothing had happened, he had moved with him, feigning normality. Pretending it didn't exist. Pretending that the confession hadn't split open the careful walls he had built around his own heart.

Now, hours later, alone in his apartment, Shane sat on the edge of the bed, hands pressed to his face, heart hammering. He replayed the moment again and again. The way Ilya's eyes

searched his, the rasp in his voice, the raw vulnerability he never let anyone see. Every detail haunted him, and yet Shane refused to name it aloud. He couldn't.

I can't let myself... I can't... he told himself, mind spinning in circles. *Ilya... he doesn't need me to be... to feel the same. It was just the heat of the moment. I can pretend. I have to.*

But pretending was getting harder. Every stolen glance in a hallway, every touch in a darkened corridor, every whispered laugh in a hotel lobby reminded him of what had been said, and what he hadn't allowed himself to admit. Every text from Lily made him shiver, every playful tease tugging at a longing he didn't fully understand yet.

Shane realized, slowly, painfully, that he didn't want to just follow Ilya. He didn't want fleeting moments, hidden kisses, or secret nights that ended in solitude. He wanted more, though the words still lodged in his throat. He wanted the person behind the cocky grin, the teasing arrogance, the obsessive devotion. He wanted Ilya, all of him, and that terrified him.

Shane continued to oscillate between fear and craving. Every encounter with Ilya was both a thrill and a torment. The unspoken confession hovered between them like a shadow, never mentioned, never acknowledged. Shane reacted with instinct: following, responding, clutching at the heat, yet keeping himself at arm's length emotionally.

In private, though, alone in his thoughts, the truth began creeping in. He couldn't bear the idea of Ilya not being in his life. The thought of someone else touching him, seeing him, teasing him. It tightened something in his chest. The jealousy, the desire, the longing, all tangled with the memory of Ilya's words.

I can't be without him. I don't care what it means. I can't... I won't...

It was gradual, almost imperceptible at first. He found himself lingering a little longer in hallways before walking away, catching Ilya's gaze and not flinching. He noticed the warmth in Ilya's hand when they brushed, and didn't pull away immediately. His responses to the teasing texts became more honest, more playful, less guarded. Small cracks appeared in Shane's own walls, letting light, and fear, in.

Ilya noticed, too. Every moment Shane stayed a little longer, every small smile, every breathless glance, fed his hope and deepened his anxiety. Could he ask for more? Could he push for more? Or was he only ever allowed these stolen moments? Every night, every encounter, brought him to the same question: is this enough? Will he ever get the person he's already fallen for completely, or will he have to settle for scraps?

Even in the heat of their secret intimacy, the unspoken words hung over them like a fragile thread. Shane's retreating heart, Shane's panic, Shane's desire to hide, it pressed against Ilya's obsession, feeding it and breaking it at once. And Ilya, ever careful, ever dominant,

ever devoted, felt the pressure of needing Shane, of wanting Shane, of fearing that the man who had become his only person might slip through his fingers entirely.

And yet, they continued. Hallways, hotel rooms, stolen kisses, whispered laughs, teasing touches. Each moment, a battle between desire and fear, love and secrecy. Each moment, the confession lingered like an elephant in the room, unsaid but impossible to ignore. Shane's walls began to crack, slowly but irreversibly. Ilya's obsession and care deepened, threaded with pain, yearning, and the fear of never being fully seen or loved in return.

And somewhere between the tension, the stolen heat, and the unspoken words, they both began to realize: this wasn't enough. Stolen moments, whispers in hallways, fleeting intimacy- it could never be enough. Not when hearts were involved. Not when one of them had already fallen, and the other was only just beginning to understand the truth.

Chapter 6: Finally, us

The hotel room was dim, the city lights flickering through the curtains, but nothing in the world existed except Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. Shane's mind had been spinning all day: skating patterns, interviews, the rivalry, but always, always Ilya.

He had replayed their stolen moments countless times, each one a mix of desire, fear, and longing. And now, here, alone together, the tension that had been coiling for months was about to snap.

Ilya hovered over him, curls mussed, grin teasing but eyes soft, searching. "You ready?" he asked, voice low, a rumble of both anticipation and care. "Tell me if you don't... yes?"

Shane swallowed, chest tight, lips trembling. "I... yes. I'm ready."

And then they were moving together, hands, mouths, and bodies entwined. Shane followed, trusting Ilya, feeling the familiar thrill of desire that had always been laced with fear. But tonight was different, Shane wanted more. Not just the heat, not just the secret stolen intimacy: he wanted to give himself, completely.

"I... Ilya," he gasped as their rhythm picked up, "I... I can't... I can't hide it anymore. I... I love you."

The words hung in the air, heavier than any puck collision, sharper than any chirp or shove on ice. Ilya froze mid-motion, lips parting, eyes wide, a crack in the cocky mask he always wore.

Shane repeated it, voice shaking, desperate to be heard. "I love you, Ilya. I can't... I can't keep pretending I don't."

The world seemed to tilt. Ilya's hands stilled on Shane's body, chest heaving. And then it hit him: the truth he had been trying to bury under arrogance, under lust, under bravado, he loved Shane and Shane loved him. He could have this. Not just in stolen moments, not just as an obsession, they loved fully, painfully, beautifully.

Tears pricked at Ilya's eyes, blurring the hazel that Shane adored. He pressed his forehead to Shane's, voice breaking, raw. "Ya tebya lyublyu... I love you... I love you..."

Shane's chest tightened as Ilya repeated it, hands roaming, pressing kisses to his neck, shoulders, chest, leaving a trail of whispered devotion across his skin. Each repetition was a promise, each Russian syllable a piece of his heart laid bare.

"I love you, Shane. I love you, I love you, I love you..." Ilya's voice cracked, tears slipping freely now, but every motion was tender, reverent, worshipful. Shane cupped his face, brushing curls back from wet eyes, pressing his lips to Ilya's forehead, soaking in the words, the warmth, the devotion.

“I love you, Ilya,” Shane whispered back, finally letting himself give in fully, all fear melting away in the wake of confession. “I’ve loved you for... forever, I think.”

And just like that, all pretense, all teasing, all stolen moments culminated into something real, solid, theirs. They clung to each other, kissing, crying, whispering promises, their bodies and hearts intertwined in ways that no rivalry, no distance, no fear could touch.

The next weeks and months were a battle of logistics and secrecy. Boston, Montreal, constant travel, away games, media scrutiny, teammates who assumed nothing, fans who had no idea. Their love was whispered in texts, stolen in quiet hotel rooms, hidden behind doors and closed blinds.

“I hate hiding from the world,” Shane admitted one night, phone between them as they video-called across the miles. His knuckles were white from gripping the edge of the hotel desk. “I hate... not being able to... just be with you.”

Ilya’s grin softened, though it didn’t mask the frustration in his eyes. “Da. I hate it too. But...” He traced the screen with a finger, as if he could touch Shane through the glass, “we need each other too much to stop. We survive, yes? Even hidden, even... far apart.”

Shane nodded, chest tight. “I know. I just... I want more. I want you, all the time.”

“And you will have me,” Ilya promised, voice fierce, curling into the same intensity that had drawn Shane months ago. “But patience, my love. We make do until... until we can’t hide anymore.”

Their relationship continued to evolve, becoming more urgent, more intimate, more emotionally charged. Every kiss, every touch, every whisper became a way to remind each other that distance didn’t make the longing weaker, it made it sharper, more desperate. Shane still wrestled with his fears, his internalized pressures, and the legacy of a hockey world that assumed heteronormativity. But Ilya, cocky, domineering, and infinitely caring, was always there, always checking, always guiding, always loving.

Even amid the secrecy, they found solace in knowing that they were the only ones who could truly satisfy the hunger of the other’s heart. And with every stolen hour, every whispered confession, every tear, they cemented the truth: this was theirs, and theirs alone.

By the end of the season, Boston and Montreal had become more than rivals, they had become the backdrop to a love that refused to be silenced. Stolen moments, hotel rooms, text

messages under aliases, all had led to a single, undeniable conclusion: Shane and Ilya could no longer exist separately.

And though the world around them was hostile, demanding, and often isolating, in private, in quiet hallways, in hotel rooms, or on video calls that stretched across time zones, they found freedom.

Ilya would whisper, half-cocked grin, half-tears, “You are mine. Always. My Shane. Moy lyubimyy.”

Shane would smile through frustration and longing, replying, “Always. I can’t live without you.”

And for the first time, it was true.

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