as far from me as memory

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77907816.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Zane Boodram, Wyatt Hayes, Evan Dykstra, Luca Haas, Brandon Wiebe, Irina Rozanova, Harris Drover
Additional Tags:	discussion of suicide, Mentioned suicide, Mental Health Issues, Depressed Ilya Rozanov, Suicidal Thoughts, Indirectly? - Freeform, ilya isn't actively suicidal he's just talking about his experience, Mental Health Discussions, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, no graphic descriptions of death, i've villainised the press as a plot device, Anxious Shane Hollander, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, irina rozanov sort of haunting the narrative, Ottawa Centaurs (Game Changers), Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Angst
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-18 Words: 4,300 Chapters: 1/1

as far from me as memory

by youreabadliar

Summary

"There’s more to mental health than just suicide, moy lyubimiy," Ilya reminded him gently. "You know this."

A Tampa player's brother commits suicide, and the press are determined to get a statement from Ilya.

Notes

this is an idea i had a while ago but i couldn't ever really put it into words. it's not my best writing by any means, but i needed it to exist.

please please read the tags ! this discusses a lot of heavy stuff surrounding suicidal ideation that is all drawn from my own experiences

if i've missed any tags please let me know

title from ingydar by Adrianne Lenker.

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya didn't spend a lot of time thinking about his mother.

She existed, sort of, in his subconscious. Like that little cricket from *Pinocchio*. A chiding, guiding voice, a gentle touch on his shoulder. But he couldn't let himself sit and think about her.

Her perfume. The curls of her hair. The soft press of her nightgown against his snotty, tear-stained face.

It was too much, too much. If he sat in the memories for too long, he'd sink.

Sometimes, on bad days, he let himself. Thought of the pain she must have carried, the strong shoulders that weighed heavier and heavier until her back had broken.

He couldn't succumb, like she had. Couldn't let it pull him under, drown him.

He had to keep wading. Not for himself, no. On the really bad days, it was easier to lay the guilt on everyone else.

What would Shane do, if he were gone?

Anya wouldn't understand. Neither would David. Or Yuna.

What would the team say?

Would they wish they'd done more? Seen the signs sooner?

Living for others was the only way out, some days. When he resurfaced, hours or even days later, he'd hold his husband close and remember that he had to live for himself, too.

They were in the locker room when the news broke.

"Woah," Hayes whistled, "Johnson down in Tampa just had to pull out mid-game because his brother killed himself."

Ilya felt Shane, getting ready beside him, go very still.

"Damn, that’s awful," said Bood.

"You know him?"

He shrugged. "I met him briefly. Seemed chill. He was just a kid, though."

"I played with him once," Haas piped up. "All he talked about was the fishing trip he was going on that weekend with his brother. I think they were twins. I can’t imagine…" He trailed off.

Hayes shook his head. "Me neither. Hope he's got some good support."

"The league won't be happy he was pulled mid-game," Dykstra grimaced. "Even for a family emergency. I bet they fine him for it."

"Should I ask Harris to post something, maybe? To show our support?" Troy said, looking towards Ilya.

Ilya just nodded, cleared his throat. "Yes. Just something simple, maybe. Tag Irina Foundation. We will make own post, too." He gestured at his husband, who still hadn't said anything. Ilya wondered if he'd even heard the rest of the conversation. "Could it go out before game?"

"I'll go ask." Troy kicked off his unlaced skates and headed to the door in his socks.

"Troy."

"Hm?"

"Shoes."

"Oh, yeah."

"You know, if you just want to go and see your boyfriend, you can," Hayes said, amused. "You don't have to have an excuse."

"Shut up," Troy grumbled, shoving his feet into his sneakers and disappearing out the door.

Ilya sat down carefully next to Shane as the chatter moved on, into stats and the Philadelphia team they were about to play, the players they knew and the rookies they hadn't really seen play yet. "Hey," he murmured, leaning into his shoulder. "You good?"

It clearly took a lot of willpower for Shane to lift his eyes to Ilya's and force a smile. "Yeah, just… Makes you think."

"About what?" He put a hand on Shane's knee, squeezed, grounding him. There were times when Shane still flinched away from PDA in the locker room, thinking he was back with the Voyageurs, his walls up and impenetrable. Other times, especially after a win, he didn't mind so much if Ilya touched him, as long as it was above the belt. He'd drawn a firm line over any *funny business*, as the rest of the team had put it, laughing at Ilya's pout. *I'm not getting kicked out of another team just because you can't keep your hands to yourself*, he'd said, a glint in his eyes.

But sweetheart, Ilya had whined, *how will I show everyone how much I love you?*

Shane had held up his hand, pointed at the ring on his finger. *They were all at the wedding*, he'd said drily. *I think they know*.

Now Ilya linked their hands together, his own ring resting familiar and comforting against his chest. They wore silicone rings during the season; it wasn't superstitious or anything, they

just wanted to keep them safe, and he didn't want to risk dropping his gloves to punch someone and getting their blood on it. Much easier to keep it next to his crucifix, next to his heart.

"I just…" Shane started, exhaling heavily. "I've not really… lost anyone, before. Other than my grandparents, but they were all pretty old. There's no way for me to even comprehend what Johnson's going through right now. And I'm the co-founder of a *mental health charity*. It just feels… I don't know. Cheap?"

"There's more to mental health than just suicide, *moy lyubimiy*," Ilya reminded him gently. "You know this."

"I know, I know, it all just hit me suddenly." He shook his head, before looking at Ilya piercingly. "Are *you* okay?"

"Yes?" Ilya said slowly. "Was not my brother killing himself. Although I would not be complaining if it was."

"Damn, Roz," Bood said. Ilya hadn't noticed him lacing up his skates opposite them. "That's cold."

Ilya shrugged. "He is world's worst person. Would not be missed."

"You're not wrong there," Shane grumbled, and Bood laughed as he grabbed his stick and headed to the door.

"I meant," Shane continued as though they hadn't been interrupted – but then he stopped. "You know what, never mind. This can wait until after the game. I just want to make sure you're good."

"I am good, Shane," Ilya said gently. "I am with you."

Troy, who had just returned, pretended to gag. Ilya flipped him off without looking away from his husband, whose eyes were still full of worry. "Shut your face, Barrett, or I will tell Harris you are being homophobic."

"Hey," Troy said weakly, while Hayes and Dykstra laughed at him.

"Come on," he said, standing up and facing his team. "Let's play some fucking hockey."

The Philadelphia team were probably good, but they weren't anywhere close to the Centaurs. Ilya barely had to concentrate, blindly putting his stick to the ice and the puck in the net over and over again. Shane, on the second line, wasn't playing as ferociously as usual, but a distracted Shane was still miles ahead of anyone else in the arena – apart from Ilya, of course.

The game blurred by, until the buzzer sounded and Ilya realised they'd won 7-3. He barely remembered how many goals he'd scored, let alone who'd scored the others. He shook his

head as he swung himself over the barrier and onto the ice, crashing into his cheering teammates.

"Hey," said a voice, and he turned to find Hayes frowning at him. "You good? You were, like, blurry out there."

"Ah," Ilya crooked his usual grin, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Blurry is fast, yes?"

Hayes snorted. "That too, but I meant like, not quite there." His perceptive eyes narrowed as he stared at his captain for a beat, before he clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Let Hollander look after you this evening, yeah?"

"What am I doing?" Shane said, materialising next to them.

"Looking after this idiot," Hayes gestured at Ilya, who stuck his tongue out at him.

"Fuck you, Hazy."

"Fuck you, too, Cap. Anyway, good game. Do you think anyone has any orange slices?" And off he skated.

Shane stared after him. "Is he always like that?"

Ilya laughed. "Yes. Is just his way." He focused on his husband, still panting after the final third, face flushed and sweaty. "You look good," he said in a low voice.

Shane ignored him. "What did he mean? About me looking after you?"

Ilya shrugged. "I am bit spacey. Nothing bad, just in my head. You know."

Brown eyes narrowed at him. "We're gonna talk about this at home, Rozanov."

Ilya groaned. "But I don't *want* to," he whined. "I'm *fine*."

"Aw, Hollzy giving you a hard time, Cap?" Bood and Dykstra skated up to them, eyes wild with the thrill of an easy win.

"No," Shane said loudly, as Ilya said, "Yes."

Bood laughed as Dykstra shook his head at them. "I swear, you two act like you've been married for forty years, not four months."

"Yeah, it feels like that sometimes, too," Shane grumbled, and Ilya grinned, delighted.

"Aw, Hollander," he crooned, throwing an arm around Shane's shoulders as they skated towards the gate, "if you did not want to be married to me, you should not have proposed, no? Simple solution."

Shane gazed up at him adoringly. "There's no universe where I didn't propose to you that day," he said, and the sincerity hit Ilya somewhere deep in his chest. "I chose you, and I'd do

it again."

Ridiculously – they were *already married* – Ilya felt a little choked up at how much Shane loved him. He opened his mouth to reply, but Wiebe was calling to him.

"Roz! You good to do press?"

"No problem!" he shouted back. Wiebe gave him a thumbs up and disappeared down the tunnel. Ilya turned back to Shane and planted a smacking kiss on the side of his helmet.

Shane pushed at him, laughing. "Oh my God, get out of here, Rozanov."

Ilya grinned at him wickedly, teeth bared, before turning to follow Wiebe down the tunnel.

It seemed the press were determined to put him in a sour mood. They didn't care about the, frankly, astonishing game of hockey they'd just played, they were more interested in getting quizzing the co-founder of a mental health charity on why Johnson's brother might have killed himself.

"I don't know," Ilya found himself saying over and over again. "I do not know Johnson, and I never met his brother. I can only hope he is at peace now."

"It's just such a tragedy, don't you think? Can you give us an official statement from the Irina Foundation?"

"Not here, no," Ilya managed. "We will of course be reaching out to Johnson and his family to offer support, but I do not want to speak for what he might be feeling. I do not know the situation well enough to say anything. Can we talk about hockey now?" He was virtually begging, but his pleas were clearly falling on deaf ears. Harris, in the corner, was looking more and more furious. Ilya wouldn't have been surprised if steam started coming out of his ears.

"What would you say," yet another reporter asked, "if it was someone on your own team, whose sibling had just taken their own life?"

Ilya sat back, spreading his hands on the table. He took a deep breath, held it, and exhaled heavily. "I would tell them," he began slowly, "what I wish someone had told me, when I was twelve. When I found my mother." He shook his head. "That it feels like the world has ended. That feeling does not go away. It never gets better. It just becomes… easier to carry. You will feel it for the rest of your life. And sometimes, maybe, the grief will be too much, and you will feel like joining them. But you can't. You have to keep going, because they can't." He blinked, willing the tears to stay in his throat. "And you will miss them every day of your life. And you will meet people who make you forget, a little, of how much pain there is in you. But it will never go away."

The same reporter was leaning forward eagerly, oblivious to the ache sitting behind Ilya's ribs, desperate for a headline. "Mr Rozanov, could you just clarify – are you saying you've

experienced suicidal thoughts before?"

Ilya was too exhausted to lie. "Yes."

There was absolute silence. Harris looked on the verge of bursting into tears.

Eventually, a young, mousy-looking reporter in the back row stood, shaking slightly. Ilya didn't recognise them; they must be new. "Could you give us a final statement, please, in commiseration with Mr Johnson and anyone else who might be struggling right now?"

There were barely any words left in Ilya's brain to figure out what they were asking.

"Mental health is not black and white," he began. His tongue felt thick and heavy in his mouth. "It does not matter how many services or phone numbers or leaflets any charity gives out. Even if all the help in the world is available to a person, unless they want to get better, they won't. Is the simple truth." He was so, so tired. "Sometimes people are sad, and it doesn't matter who loves them, or how much. Sometimes the sadness is just…" he shrugged. "Is all you can hear."

He didn't think he'd really answered the question, but he couldn't find it in himself to care.

Harris stepped forwards and clapped his hands loudly. "Okay, that's enough."

Ilya shot him a grateful look as he turned to leave, and Harris nodded at him.

The atmosphere in the locker room wasn't exactly cheerful, even after such a good game. They'd all been watching Ilya's interview on the little TV in the corner, and everyone turned to look at him when he walked in. "Hello?" he said, raising an eyebrow. "Are you clones?"

Haas' brow furrowed. "Um… no?"

"Then why do you all look like that? Like – what is phrase – kicked puppies?"

Hayes shrugged, breaking some of the tension. "Those questions were all bullshit, that's all, Cap."

Ilya nodded sagely, heading to his locker and stripping his pads off. "Big assholes, all of them, yes. I hope Harris yells at them."

"He will," Troy said dangerously.

"Your boyfriend is terrifying, Barrett," Bood said, amused.

"Yeah," Troy replied dreamily, "he really is."

Ilya snorted, heading to the showers. Shane was just coming out. "Two minutes," he promised. Shane just nodded, pushing past him towards his locker.

Had he watched the interview? Did he know what Ilya had said? He'd wanted a peaceful evening at home after the emotional turmoil of the afternoon, but it didn't look like he'd be

getting it.

"Fuck," he sighed quietly, before steeling himself and continuing to the showers. He didn't want to draw any attention to the tension while they were still at the arena, while everyone else was around.

They'd just have to wait.

He was quiet in the car, avoiding Ilya's glances. When they pulled into the driveway, Shane opened his door before the engine was even off, hurrying towards the house and leaving the front door open a crack behind him.

Ilya watched him go as the engine cooled, sighing. He knew exactly what was going through Shane's head. It wasn't difficult to put the pieces together. In some ways, he was grateful they'd been playing in Ottawa today, so they could talk in the sanctuary of their own home. Another part of him, though, wished they'd been anywhere else in the country, with the sterility and anonymity of a hotel room working to distract them, pull up old memories.

They had to be quiet on the road – with both their sex life and their arguments, although those were typically mild, who'd-forgotten-to-pack-extra-socks type things, nothing massive. Nothing too personal.

Bickering was basically their love language, but it was rare that they had a proper argument. They'd fought enough over the years, had sacrificed enough, that these days they were content to just… live. Sure, Ilya had his days – they both did – where every little thing would set him off, get under his skin and make him want to hurl harsh, cruel words. But those days were few and far between. And he knew it wasn't fair to either of them, to bring up old wounds just to make his husband flinch. It was the lingering remnants of his father's anger, which he'd long been working on to soothe. Shane knew this. Knew *him*.

But this…

It wouldn't be an argument, he knew that. And it wouldn't be anything new, everything bundled up in things they'd said before. But it would be fresh, and it would hurt, and they'd probably both cry, and Ilya wouldn't be able to sleep with the guilt sitting so heavily on his chest.

Tomorrow would dawn either way. Better to sit down now, than to risk taking their frustration out on the team.

He grabbed their bags from the backseat, locked the front door behind him. Anya was with Yuna and David tonight, and he missed her comforting presence, her sunshine bark. He'd see her tomorrow, when they went over for dinner.

He stepped quietly through the dark house. Shane hadn't turned on any lights, but that wasn't unusual. It was easier, sometimes, to be in the dark.

"Shane?"

"In here," came a voice from the kitchen. He sounded tired.

Ilya found him standing at the sink, staring out of the dark window at the night sky. His arms were stiff on the counter tops like he was bracing for impact. His hair was a mess, like he'd towelled it off roughly and left the rest to dry.

"Shane."

His husband turned, tear tracks on his cheeks catching the faint light of the moon and turning his face silver. "Ilya," he whispered, voice thick, "I don't – I can't –"

"Sweetheart," Ilya murmured, crossing the room and gathering his husband in his arms. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm here, yes? With you. We're okay."

Shane was trembling, clutching at Ilya's shirt like he was afraid he'd disappear. His own eyes were itching, and he blinked quickly. This wasn't about him, not really.

"I know – I know you're okay, and you're here, but I-I hate hearing about it," Shane whispered after a minute. "I hate those fucking reporters who were asking such *bullshit* questions, trying to get a headline about whether you'd ever…" He shook his head, stepping back out of Ilya's embrace, leaning up against the counter. "We played a great game of hockey, we're the best team in the league right now, and all they wanted to talk about was Johnson's brother. You never even met him!"

"Is okay, really, sweetheart," Ilya said gently, reaching for his husband and pulling him back in. "They just want statement from Irina Foundation. I get it."

"Well, I don't," Shane grumbled. "They were vultures."

"Yes, yes, big scary birds. Not as scary as loons, though."

Shane choked on a laugh, and Ilya beamed. "There you are," he said softly. "You are good, yes? I am here, we are safe, everything is okay."

"I know," Shane said again. "I just don't like thinking about it."

"No, paperwork would be terrible," Ilya said. "Would not be good if I established mental health charity and then killed myself, no?"

Shane's head snapped up. He stared at him, eyes wide. "Please," he said after a long moment, "please, please don't joke about that. You don't – I can't imagine what I'd – who I'd even *be* if I didn't have you. If you weren't here, I'd – I'd – I'd die, do you understand that?" His voice was fierce, his eyes blazing and bright with tears. "If you ever kill yourself, you're killing me, too. I don't care if that's – I don't know, manipulative, or whatever. I know your depression isn't something you can control. But if you die before we've had the chance to live our whole lives together, I will never, *ever* forgive you for leaving me behind. Do you understand that?" And then his voice cracked, and Ilya thought his heart would break. "I can't live without you, I can't – I can't even *think* about it, because you are *everything* to me, Ilya,

and if you died I would be alone forever, and it would be *your fault*, so you have to live, you have to fight every day, because if I ever have to pick up the phone and hear that you've – that you've –" His face crumpled, and he buried himself in Ilya's neck, shaking.

It was all Ilya could do to keep standing, just holding him, shell-shocked. He knew, of course he did, that Shane loved him. They were *married*, for fuck's sake. They'd been together for years, choosing each other for longer. And yet this – hearing this, today, even though he'd heard snippets of it before in whispered conversations and late-night promises – this took his breath away, lodging itself somewhere under his ribs, tucking into his diaphragm and moulding itself to the shape of his organs.

They stood there, two bodies intertwined, for a long time. Enough for the moonbeams on the floor to shift, turning loose strands of Shane's hair all to silver. Eventually he stirred, pulling back slightly, but stayed in the circle of his husband's arms. Safe. Ilya would give up anything to keep him there forever, protected from the calamity of the world, right where he could shelter him from the storms, protect him from the battering wind.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I did not mean to upset you. Was supposed to be a joke."

"You can't joke about shit like that, Ilya, please," Shane begged, voice muffled. "I can't handle it. I just can't."

"Okay, okay," Ilya said soothingly, rubbing his hands across Shane's back. "I'm sorry. I won't, ever again, okay? I promise."

He sniffed. "Thank you."

Ilya sighed. "While we are still talking about it, do you have any… questions? You can ask anything, is okay."

Shane hooked his chin over Ilya's shoulder, hot breath tickling the soft curls at the base of his neck.

"Is also okay if you have no questions to ask," Ilya reassured him. "I just want to make sure you know I am good."

Shane didn't reply. His breathing was evening out, heart rate slowly coming down. Ilya kept rubbing between his shoulder blades, trying to encourage the tension from his back.

"You said, to the press. That you've had. Thoughts, before. Can… Could you tell me about that, a bit?" He was biting his lip.

"You know I have struggled with it, sweetheart," Ilya said gently, trying not to scare him too much.

"I mean, like… Are you… Do you always think about it? Is it something you actively think about? Or is it just sort of…" He trailed off. "I don't know what I'm trying to say."

"No. I get it," Ilya said slowly. "Is like… Thought is there, but is always there. At the back of my brain. And sometimes it is very loud, sometimes it is very quiet. Sometimes I can't hear it

at all, and sometimes it is all I can hear."

Shane closed his eyes, another tear slipping free. He swallowed. "Can I – Can I ask… when was the last time that happened? When it was all you could hear?"

"Not for a long time, *moy lyubimiy*," Ilya murmured, tucking dark hair behind Shane's ear. "Not since marrying you, definitely. Not since we didn't have to hide anymore."

Shane blinked slowly at him. "So – before then, when we were together but no one knew – you were thinking about …? Because of –"

"No, *no*, Shane, not because of," Ilya said firmly. "This thing in my brain has always been there. But I do not think of it as me, *da*? It is like… parasite. Sometimes more noticeable, never going away, but I was not…" He sighed. "Fuck, English. Okay. Sometimes, when I was sad, the thought was louder, yes? But was never *me* thinking it. The thought exists *outside* of me. I could not control when it got louder."

The line between Shane's brows was deeper than usual. Ilya's thumb itched to smooth it away. "That makes sense, I think. Like a headache, maybe? If there's loud music playing, and your head already hurts, then it'll get worse, but it's not you *wanting* it to get worse. It just happens separate from you."

Ilya nodded. "*Da*. Yes. Like this. Is not like this for everyone, I think, but that makes sense for me."

Shane was quiet for a moment. Ilya rocked them back and forth, gentle in the dim light, the moon their only witness, before he found his voice again. "Would you have told me that? If Johnson's brother hadn't… Would you have ever said that hiding our relationship made the bad thoughts that much louder?" He pulled back to look at him. "I just want to understand you better," he said quietly. "I know we're out and we're married and we're happy now, but you still have your bad days. Fuck knows I do, too. But do you think there's any other timeline where we have this conversation, and Johnson's brother is still alive?"

Ilya shook his head slowly. "I don't think so," he admitted. "Not because I'm trying to hide anything from you, but because it's… irrelevant, now. We're happy, and I tell you when my brain is bad, and you give me space, and I come back to you. What would be the point in bringing up old hurt, when you couldn't do anything about it? Is in the past."

"But will you tell me? In the future? If… if it's ever the only thing you can hear?"

"I promise I will try," Ilya murmured, bringing their foreheads together and closing his eyes. "I cannot speak for who I might be when my brain gets bad, but here and now I promise you I will try."

"Thank you," Shane whispered. "I love you. So fucking much."

"I love you too. Very much." He swallowed. "Can we go to bed now? I want to hold you."

"In a minute," Shane breathed, and pressed their lips together. *I'm here, I see you. I love you, I love you, I love you*.

End Notes

the reporters/press in this are complete arseholes because i need a plot device, i don't think they'd actually be allowed to ask questions like this but then again what do i know. they might

not written using any AI. fuck AI

twitter is beanisabadliar
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come and yell with/at me

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