

the greatest game ever played

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/78871106) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/78871106>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Harris Drover , Anya Ilya Rozanov's Dog
Additional Tags:	Dogs , Wholesome , Super Bowl , POV Ilya Rozanov , Established Relationship , Soft Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Fluff , Domestic Fluff , Crack Treated Seriously , Fluff and Crack , Mild Hurt/Comfort , Idiot in Love , Spoilers for Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Short One Shot , One Shot , Sweet , Short & Sweet , Tooth-Rotting Fluff
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-04 Words: 3,115 Chapters: 1/1

the greatest game ever played

by [UglyGreenJacket](#)

Summary

He sends Shane a link for an article about the Puppy Bowl.

Ilya [19:34] Shane Hollander. Did you know this exists?

Shane [19:46] No? Why would I have heard of this?

Ilya [19:46] God, you are such a disappointment

Ilya [19:47] I love you.

Ilya [19:47] Whatever plans you have Sunday, they are cancelled.

Shane [19:53] I'm so confused.

Shane [19:53] I love you, too.

[illegible]

Or, Ilya learns about the Puppy Bowl. Shane never stands a chance. A dog gets adopted, and everything changes.

Notes

I had an anon in my inbox ask for Ilya discovering the Puppy Bowl, and I never thought I'd be rushing to write something on a random Tuesday in February, but these are strange times, so here it is.

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

There's rarely a time in life when a person is happier than Ilya Rozanov is around a dog. Any dog, really. He's not picky, he just really fucking loves dogs.

So, the days Chiron shows up at the arena are truly his favorites. A little reminder that life can be simple and sweet and fun. And if nothing else, the growing puppy's presence keeps that ever-creeping sadness in his mind at bay for a little while.

He and Harris stand near the glass and watch as the team plays with Chiron after practice.

Ilya wants to join in, and he *will*, but he's also trying to be more aware of how much he monopolizes Chiron's time. So, he's giving them a three-minute head start before he jumps in and reminds Chiron why Ilya is his favorite.

"If we ever get to the finals one day, I'm going to do my best to do a hockey version of the Puppy Bowl," Harris says, a dreamy smile on his face as he watches Chiron excitedly chase Troy around the ice. "Can you imagine dozens of puppies out there playing hockey? It would be so great."

"The what?" Ilya asks, his interest immediately piqued. "What is a Puppy Bowl?"

"Oh, it's a thing in the US. On Super Bowl weekend, they always have a puppy version of the game with a bunch of rescue dogs to try and get them adopted," Harris says, still watching Troy and Chiron.

Ilya almost can't even begin to process this information.

"So, you are telling me there is a doggy football game?" he says slowly.

"Mhmm."

"With puppies."

"Yep," Harris says, his head finally turning toward Ilya with the giant grin he's used to.

"How long has this been going on?" Ilya demands.

"Uh, I dunno, years I think?"

"And you are just now telling me this?" Ilya asks, his mouth wide open in only slightly exaggerated shock. "I thought we are friends, Harris."

Harris just laughs, completely unfazed by Ilya's antics. "It's on this weekend, you know. Not sure if it's on in Canada, but I'm sure we can find a way for you to watch it."

Ilya's eyes widen at the possibility. He *needs* this in his life so badly, he'll do just about anything. His tone turns so serious when he says, "Tell me what I need to do."

oOo

“Did you not read the article?”

Shane shrugs. “Not much of it.”

“So I mean nothing to you?” Ilya asks in mock offense, not at all surprised Shane hadn’t spent hours researching Ilya’s new favorite television program. He’d probably been too busy meal-prepping, or reading about hockey, or pretending that Hayden Pike didn’t have the world’s biggest straight boy crush on him.

Shane gives him a *look*. “You’re being very dramatic.”

“Puppies, Shane,” Ilya points to the TV. “*Puppies*.”

“Okay, okay,” Shane holds up his hands in surrender. “I get it, there are puppies, but what are they doing?”

“Playing the greatest game ever played,” Ilya says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“American football?”

“Yes. Is like Super Bowl but for puppies. Keep up, Hollander.”

“Do you even know who’s playing in the Super Bowl?” Shane accuses.

“Do *you*?” Ilya fires back.

Shane glares at him for a moment before his face turns into something questioning. “Is this even on in Canada? How are we watching this? Did you have to do a bunch of things to see it?”

“Not really,” Ilya says. Because a VPN, a new subscription service, and a call to his credit card company to let them know the charge wasn’t fraudulent, really isn’t that much in the grand scheme of things.

When Ilya turns his attention back to perhaps the most important thing he’s ever had the privilege of bearing witness to, *so many puppies* fill the screen. They run this way and that, while they try to wrestle the ball from each other, and it’s full of such boundless joy, Ilya doesn’t think anything could possibly be cuter than this.

But then they start to give bios for each of the dogs.

He swears each one is better than the last, and some of their names are clever puns on celebrity names and the game of football, and Ilya finds himself wishing he could run away and quit hockey forever and open a dog sanctuary for each and every one of the puppies to come live at.

He knows it’s not realistic, but *fuck*, he wants to have a dog so badly. Very rarely is he envious of normal people, but he’s so jealous that there are people in the world who work from eight to five and get to come home to a *dog*.

And then a face comes on the screen that changes his whole entire world.

Anya. She's brown with long, silky hair and floppy ears and brown eyes that remind Ilya of Shane. She's *adorable*, and Ilya wants to reach through the screen and across hundreds of kilometers and pull that dog into his arms.

The announcers start to talk about Anya's history, about how she was found next to her dead mother, who had been hit by a car. Cold and alone in the snow.

"*Fuck*," Shane says quietly, and Ilya can tell his usually stoic boyfriend is genuinely affected. "That's awful. I can't even imagine."

Ilya's chest feels tight. His mind shouldn't be drawing parallels between a puppy and his own life, but he can't help but feel a rush of the same dread he'd felt all those years ago as he tried to shake his mother back to life.

The fact that anyone, any creature of any kind, has to suffer like he did makes his heart break. He hates that someone as pure as Anya has known anything other than the warmest sunshine.

There's something desperate inside him that he knows he can't answer, because he wants to get on a plane and go wherever the hell the Puppy Bowl is being played and bring Anya back to his house so she'll never be alone again.

He takes in a deep breath through his nose, trying his best to keep the sharp sting behind his eyes at bay.

Shane looks back at him, his eyes studying Ilya, seeing him in a way no one else ever has. Like he *knows* what Ilya is thinking.

"I think we could have a dog, someday," Shane says as he threads his fingers with Ilya's.

He wants to tell Shane that he doesn't want *a* dog someday. He wants a very particular dog *now*. But instead, he just says, "Yeah?"

"It could be fun, I think," Shane replies with a small smile that makes Ilya's stomach flutter dangerously, giving hope to an impossible idea, while Ilya pulls him closer and lets his presence give him the comfort only Shane can give.

The game eventually ends, and Anya's team loses, and when he holds Shane in bed that night, listening to the steady sounds of his boyfriend's breathing, Ilya lets himself dream of the patter of paws on his floors and sleek fur under his fingers.

oOo

Ilya [22:30] I cannot stop thinking about Anya.

Ilya [22:30] She deserves a home.

A home with me.

He expects a laundry list of reasons why this isn't a good idea. And Ilya gets it. He's been going over the same list in his head for days, but there's something about those soft brown eyes and floppy ears that just won't leave him. And he can't help but wonder if Anya might need him as much as he's convinced he needs Anya.

When Shane's reply comes a minute later, he's more than a little surprised.

Shane [22:31] Then bring her home.

Ilya [22:31] ...really?

Shane [22:32] If it makes you happy, of course. We'll figure it out.

And that's all the permission he needs.

oOo

Ilya spends an inordinate amount of money to charter a private flight for Anya to Ottawa. He can't manage to go himself because of his insane schedule, but he recruits Harris to go in his stead, and Ilya honestly can't think of anyone more suited to go in his place.

He bounces on the balls of his feet while he waits impatiently for them to disembark, and when he sees Harris start down the stairs with a small ball of fluff in his arms, it takes everything in Ilya not to break into a full-on run.

When she's finally placed in his arms, fur soft and silky against his skin as she sniffs him all over and eventually begins to lick at his face, something clicks into place in Ilya's restless soul.

She won't fix him, he knows, but there's something that makes him feel lighter as she wriggles in his arms, unabashed excitement for him written so plainly on her exaggerated features.

He realizes then that even on his worst days, the days when he's feeling low and questioning his worth, the days when Shane can't be there, and Ilya needs him so badly, it makes him physically ache, on those days when the loneliness feels like it's too much, he won't ever truly have to be alone again.

"Welcome home, sweet girl," he whispers in Russian into her fur, and even if just for a few, sweet moments, everything feels right with the world.

oOo

Shane shows up at his door that night with a box full of supplies.

"I raided a boutique near my house," he says as Ilya takes the overflowing box from him and places it on the kitchen counter. "I didn't know what kind of brush she'd want, so I bought three different kinds, and I guess we can just see. The bed I got is super soft. Like, I'm a little jealous of it, honestly. Oh, and I also wasn't sure what kind of collar to get her, so we'll have

to look at options together because I figured you'd have opinions and she's your dog, so I'm sure she'll be a bit of a diva."

Ilya should be insulted by that, but instead, he just falls more and more in love with Shane as he prattles on about all the things he'd purchased.

"Do you want to meet her?" he asks, and Shane nods. "She is just out back."

They walk outside together, and Ilya smiles fondly as Shane crouches down when Anya approaches. She sniffs him for a few moments, eyeing his hand warily like she's not sure if she can trust him or not.

But as soon as she licks once at his fingers, she begins to jump and gently paw at Shane's legs, whatever trepidation she felt before, melting away and into pure excitement, and Ilya's so relieved he feels tension he hadn't even realized he'd been holding leave his body.

Thank god he thinks, unsure what he would have done if Anya had rejected Shane. Well, he *does* know, but he doesn't want to think about it.

"I think she likes me," Shane says with a grin as she finally jumps into his arms and licks all over his face and neck.

"Of course she does," Ilya says, his earlier fear suddenly feeling a little silly. How any being could not love Shane Hollander is beyond him.

oOo

Shane [12:45] How's it going? Is she still settling in okay?

Ilya [13:12] She is so perfect Shane you have no idea. I am so in love. This is the best decision I have ever made.

Shane [13:15] Gee, thanks.

Ilya [13:21] Do you know if I can fix my will to leave everything to her?

Ilya [15:20] I am going to assume yes if you do not respond

Shane [15:23] No, Ilya. You cannot leave everything to our dog.

Ilya not so secretly loves that Shane has started to refer to Anya as *their* dog. Not just his, but theirs.

Ilya [15:24] Ok no problem. I leave to you and you can give to her.

oOo

They're outed a month later, and while it's a relief they don't have to hide anymore, Shane's lack of support from his team and the league hit him much harder than Ilya.

It leads to them spending several days of their suspension together, cooped up in Ilya's house, just trying to escape the noise.

On a particularly hard day, he finds Shane sitting on the back patio with Anya curled up in his lap while he gently pets her head.

He's told Ilya several times before that he isn't good with animals. Something about how he thinks they can sense his awkwardness and just avoid him.

But Anya clearly doesn't get that memo, as she's grown nearly as attached to Shane in her time with them as she is to Ilya.

He slips out the door and watches them for a bit, trying his best not to alert Shane to his presence. He's so in love, and while he knows there's a fucking hurricane going on outside their tiny bubble, he feels more calm and content than he has in ages.

"I'm glad you were on that stupid puppy bowl," he hears Shane say as Anya sighs her own content into the early spring night. "Never thought I'd be excited to have a dog, but your dad and I are both really happy you're here. You help him a lot, but you help me, too."

She stretches and licks his hand, and Shane laughs at the contact. It's a happy and carefree sound that makes Ilya think maybe this will all be alright in the end. And until then, at least they have each other and the sweetest little brown dog that ever existed in the history of ever.

oOo

The next year, they actually *do* make it to the cup finals, and Harris manages to make their very own version of the Puppy Bowl happen.

Ilya's honestly not sure which one he's more excited about. It's been a while since he'd won a Stanley Cup, but he's currently surrounded by more puppies than he can count, and it's honestly just the most perfect fucking day.

They're playing San Francisco for the final, and members of both teams are on the ice, trying and desperately failing to keep dozens of mini hockey jersey-wearing rescue puppies on task.

And to make things even sweeter, the two star puppies on Ottawa's side are named Shane Howllander and Ilya Noseanov.

"I'm surprised you haven't started begging me to take Howllander and Noseanov home," Shane says from next to him, a smile on his face almost as big as the one on Ilya's. Anya pants happily in his arms.

"Do not think I was not tempted. Anya needs a sibling," Ilya replies, and Shane shakes his head. "But I found the next best thing, I think."

"Oh, really?" Shane questions. "What's that?"

“Kate is taking them,” Ilya beams. “Willa and Andrew have been begging for dogs, and when she saw those two, I didn’t even have to do much convincing.”

“I bet you’re thrilled.”

“I am,” reaching over to scratch between Anya’s ears. “Ilya and Shane will have so many playdates with Anya.”

“Oh, god,” Shane suddenly looks horrified. “Please tell me she’s going to be changing their names.”

Ilya’s smile turns sly. “Sure isn’t,” he says. “She insisted on keeping them the same, actually.”

Shane groans. “I’m already so fucking tired of all the jokes that are going to come from this, and I haven’t even heard a single one yet.”

Ilya nudges him playfully in the ribs. “Is going to be so great.”

Shane isn’t able to continue with his complaints because Anya begins to bark and wiggles so much that Shane can’t keep hold of her any longer.

He sets her down, and they watch as she runs to the throng of puppies tussling over the puck at center ice. She manages to steal it from them and runs all the way down to the Centaurs goal, crashing into the net and looking very proud of herself.

The puppies all chase after her, and everyone around them laughs at her antics while the announcers debate if her goal should count since she’s not technically participating.

“What even is this life we’re living?” Shane asks with what sounds like equal parts humor and actual awe.

Anya runs back to them, her tail wagging and eyes bright. Ilya bends down to pick her up, and she licks a stripe across his cheek. His eyes meet Shane’s, and the love he sees reflected there will stay with him long after the day is over.

He takes a breath and smiles. “The best life, I think.”

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading, your comments help heal my imposter syndrome, and kudos are love. Feel free to come find me over on [tumblr](#) or [twitter](#) though I mostly just lurk there, I'd love if you come give me a follow and say hi. Until next time!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!