

## The Only Debt You Owe

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# The Only Debt You Owe

by [FullerMoon016](#)

## Summary

"I told him to pick up milk," Shane sobbed, the sound hysterical and broken. "That's the last thing I said to him. 'Pick up some milk on the way home.' I didn't say I loved him. I didn't say stay. I didn't even look him in the eye because I was frustrated with the loss. I just told him to buy fucking milk."

Ilya Rozanov has always been a master of control. Of the puck, of the media, of his own jagged edges. But lately, the edges have started to blur. The "Czar" is retreating, leaving behind a house that looks like a museum and a husband who is starting to feel like a stranger. When the last of Ilya's mess is cleared away and his ring is left behind like a final period at the end of a sentence, Shane has to face the terrifying truth: Ilya doesn't think he's leaving a hole behind, he thinks he's cleaning one up.

Kinda compliant to The Long Game, but before Ilya talks about his depression with Shane, or goes to seek help.

## Notes

Guys please this was rushed, don't expect it to be great. Please do let me know if there are any mistakes, but enjoy my study procrastination.

The designer living room in their Ottawa home had always felt like a statement of victory. All clean lines, Italian leather, and floor-to-ceiling glass. Now, it just felt like a pressurised chamber.

Ilya sat on the edge of the modular sofa, his posture unnervingly straight. The TV was off. In the glossy black reflection of the 85-inch screen, he could see the ghostly silhouette of himself. He wasn't waiting for a show to start or for the sun to rise. He wasn't doing anything. He was simply occupying time, second by second, as though the clock in the kitchen were a firing squad and each mechanical tick was another bullet he had to absorb.

He didn't look like the "Czar" anymore. The sharp, arrogant angles of his face had sunken, the skin sallow and pulled tight over his cheekbones. His eyes, once so bright, were now rimmed with a raw, bleeding red from a sleep debt that no amount of rest could ever repay.

At 3:00 AM, the floorboards groaned upstairs. Ilya drifted toward the kitchen island without seeming to notice he'd moved, his steps soundless. By the time Shane appeared in the kitchen doorway, hair sleep-mussed and chest bare, Ilya was already there, hands splayed on the marble as though he needed its coldness to stay upright. He stopped short, his breath hitching.

"Ilya?"

Ilya didn't turn. He just stared down at his hands resting on the marble. He turned them over slowly, watching the way the light hit his knuckles, as if he were inspecting a pair of gloves he'd found in the trash. They didn't feel like his. They felt heavy, clumsy, like tools that had forgotten how to hold anything of value.

"Ilya, talk to me, baby. You're spooking me." Shane stepped closer, reaching out to rub a hand over Ilya's shoulder. He tried to inject a bit of their old, jagged warmth into his voice, the competitive friction that usually got Ilya burning. "You're thinking about that turnover in the second period, aren't you? It was a garbage pass, yeah, but even the great Ilya Rozanov is allowed to suck for one night. I've seen defensemen with lead skates move faster than you did on that backcheck."

Usually, this was the cue. Ilya would sneer, call Shane a name in Russian, and pin him against the counter until the argument turned into a bruise-deep kiss.

Instead, Ilya just blinked. His voice was a hollow, dusty thing. "Yes. I was useless today. You are right. I am..." His voice trailed off to be inaudible. Shane's hand dropped from Ilya's shoulder as if he'd been burned. The lack of a retort, the total surrender in Ilya's tone, was more terrifying than anything he'd dealt with before.

As the days bled into a singular, grey smear, the house shifted. The scent of Ilya's expensive cologne faded, replaced by the sterile smell of unscented soap.

The "footprint" of Ilya Rozanov was shrinking. He stopped leaving his damp towels on the bathroom floor. He stopped draping his hoodies over the backs of chairs. He even stopped

wearing Shane's clothes, a habit that had once been a symbol of his want to be close to Shane. A part of him. A part of his life.

Ilya was tidying himself out of existence. He folded his clothes with a terrifying, military precision, tucking them away in drawers so neatly it looked like he was prepping a museum exhibit of a life once lived. He was minimising the mess he would eventually leave behind.

One evening, after a gruelling practice where Ilya had moved like a ghost through the drills, Shane tried to bridge the widening gorge. He cornered Ilya in the bedroom, the air thick with the scent of rain hitting the windowpane. Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya's waist, pressing his face into the crook of his neck, desperate for the friction that usually saved them.

"Ilya," Shane whispered, his hands sliding under Ilya's shirt, seeking the heat of him. "Come on. Let's just... let's get lost for an hour. I miss you."

Ilya didn't pull away, which was somehow worse. He stayed limp. He didn't get hard. He didn't even breathe faster. He just looked over Shane's shoulder at the wall.

"No, Shane," Ilya said quietly. "I have nothing to give you. It would be like... sleeping with a corpse. You deserve someone who is actually here."

Shane recoiled as if he'd been slapped. "Don't say that. Don't ever say that."

"It is the truth," Ilya murmured, already turning to straighten a pillow that was already perfect.

The final crack happened on a Tuesday night against Boston.

The game was tied in the third. The puck squirted loose, a gift from the gods, leaving Ilya with a wide-open net and the goalie caught out of position. It was the kind of goal Ilya could score in his sleep. It was the kind of goal that defined his career.

He fanned on it.

The puck wobbled harmlessly into the corner. The crowd didn't boo, they groaned. A collective sound of disappointment that vibrated through the glass.

In the locker room after the loss, the atmosphere was funereal. Normally, a loss like that would result in Ilya throwing his helmet, cursing in Russian, and demanding better from everyone around him.

Tonight, he just sat. He didn't even take his skates off. He sat perfectly still in his stall, staring at the floorboards, his chest barely moving. The "Old Ilya", the one who walked through the world like he owned the air everyone else breathed, was gone.

In his place was a man who looked at his teammates not as comrades, but as people he was actively failing. He wasn't a god anymore. He was a burden. And as he looked up and caught Shane's worried eyes from across the room, Ilya didn't offer a grimace or a nod.

He offered a small, tragic smile that looked like a goodbye.

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The house was too quiet.

It wasn't just the absence of sound; it was the absence of life. Usually, even if Ilya was brooding, the air in their home felt charged, like a storm front held at bay. But as Shane pushed open the heavy front door, Hayden trailing behind him after a post-game drinks session that Shane had barely touched, the silence hit him like a physical wall.

"I'm telling you, Shane, he just needs a reset," Hayden was saying, his voice sounding garishly loud in the hollow foyer. "One good game, one lucky bounce, and the Czar will be back to his usual arrogant—"

Hayden stopped. The laughter died in his throat.

"Shane?" Hayden whispered. "Why is it so cold in here?"

Shane didn't answer. He was already moving toward the kitchen. The air felt stagnant, like a tomb that had been sealed for centuries. There were no lights on, save for the digital glow of the oven clock.

Shane's eyes swept the counter. Everything was immaculate. Not a stray crumb, not a misplaced glass. It looked like a house for sale, staged to hide the fact that anyone actually lived there. And then, he saw it.

Resting in the centre of a small ceramic dish where Ilya usually kept his car keys was a circle of gold.

Shane's legs went weak. He reached out, his fingers trembling so violently he nearly knocked the dish over. He picked up the ring. It should have been cold, but it felt like a brand. It wasn't a mistake. Ilya hadn't forgotten it while washing his hands. It was placed there with the same "military precision" he'd used to fold his laundry.

It wasn't just a ring. It was a divorce from the world. It was a note written in gold that said, 'I am no longer yours because I am no longer here.'

"He's gone," Shane choked out. The air left his lungs in a ragged, terrified gasp. "Hayden, he's gone."

In the heartbeat it took for Shane to drop to his knees, Hayden shifted. The distain towards Ilya, the constant not so joking, teasing he gave Shane about finding a new partner, all of it vanished, stripped away by the raw, animal terror in Shane's eyes.

Shane lunged for his own keys on the counter, but his motor skills were gone. His hands were a blur of tremors, the metal clicking uselessly against the marble like a frantic distress signal. He fumbled them, the ring still clutched in his other hand, until the keys slid toward the edge of the island.

Hayden caught them mid-air, a flash of reflex that Shane didn't even see.

"I can't- I can't breathe," Shane gasped, his lungs seizing as if the atmosphere had turned to lead. He was doubled over, one hand on the counter to keep from collapsing entirely. "I didn't tell him, H. I didn't tell him this morning."

"Tell him what, Shane?" Hayden asked. His voice steady, though his own face had gone the colour of ash. He stepped in close, grabbing Shane's shoulder to steady the vibration racking the smaller man's frame.

"I told him to pick up milk," Shane sobbed, the sound hysterical and broken. "That's the last thing I said to him. 'Pick up some milk on the way home.' I didn't say I loved him. I didn't say stay. I didn't even look him in the eye because I was frustrated with the loss. I just told him to buy fucking milk."

The agony of the mundane was a physical weight. Every 'see you later' they hadn't said, every casual goodbye, now felt like a debt that had just come due with interest Shane couldn't pay.

Hayden didn't offer false hope. He didn't tell Shane it would be okay, because looking at that ring, he wasn't sure it would be. He grabbed Shane by the back of his neck, his grip bruisingly firm, forcing him toward the door. "Get in the car. Now. We aren't staying here."

The interior of the Range Rover felt like a cage, the leather smelling of a life they had built together that was currently being dismantled. Hayden peeled out of the driveway, the tires screaming a desperate protest against the asphalt, leaving black streaks that marked the beginning of the hunt. Shane was curled into a ball in the passenger seat, his forehead pressed against the cold glass of the window, dialling a number with thumbs that wouldn't stop shaking.

Svetlana answered on the first ring.

There was no "hello." There was no confusion. There was only the sound of a winter wind whipping through a car window on her end. A low, mournful whistle that told Shane she was already driving.

"Which bridge, Shane?"

Her voice was a frozen lake. Flat, hard, and cold. She didn't ask what was wrong. She was basically a Rozanov, she'd been listening to the cracks in Ilya's foundation longer than anyone, waiting for the sound of the ice finally giving way.

"I don't- I don't know," Shane screamed into the phone, his face crumpled. "The ring, Svet. He left the ring in the dish. He tidied the whole house. He's-"

"The Alexandra," she interrupted, her own voice finally cracking, a splintering of ice. "He always stared at the water there when we drove over it. I am five minutes away. If you believe in anything, Shane Hollander, start praying that the traffic is light."

The line went dead, leaving only the sound of Shane's ragged breathing and the roar of the engine.

The world outside the Range Rover became a smear of neon and salt-stained asphalt. Hayden drove like a man with nothing to lose, weaving through the late-night traffic until the city lights stretched into long, bleeding needles of white and red. Shane pressed his forehead against the vibrating glass, the hum of the engine rattling through his skull, a physical countdown to a moment he wasn't ready to face.

But Shane wasn't thinking about that. He wasn't thinking about anything. He just was staring at the gold band clutched so tightly in his palm that the metal was starting to leave a permanent indent in his skin.

The high-pitched whine of the Range Rover's engine died abruptly as Hayden slammed the gear into park, the tires still skidding through the grey, salty slush of the breakdown lane. The silence that followed was worse than anything he'd ever felt before. It was the suffocating silence of a clock that had finally stopped ticking.

A hundred yards ahead, the bridge was a skeletal nightmare of steel and shadows. Ilya's Porsche sat idling, its hazard lights cutting through the midnight gloom in rhythmic, amber stabs.

Pulse, pause, pulse, pause.

It looked like a beacon for a ship that had already gone down.

Shane didn't wait for the car to fully settle. He scrambled out of the passenger side, his boots slipping on the black ice that coated the bridge deck. He didn't feel the sub-zero wind that whipped off the Ottawa River, slicing through his thin shirt. He only felt the vacuum in his chest.

"Ilya!" Shane's voice was a raw, jagged streak across the dark.

He reached the Porsche and yanked the driver's side door the rest of the way open. The interior was a cruel mockery of warmth. The heater was humming, the dashboard glowing with the precision of a cockpit, and the scent of Ilya's sandalwood cologne lingered in the air, thick and mocking. On the passenger seat, Ilya's phone and wallet were stacked with terrifying neatness.

No note. No explanation. Just a space where a man used to be.

Shane spun around, his eyes wild, scanning the railing. "Ilya! Please!"

Then, he saw them.

Svetlana was already there. She stood 20 meters further up, her dark coat flapping violently in the gale like the wings of a crow. She wasn't moving toward the railing, rather she was held in a state of rigid, terrifying stasis.

And there, on the other side of the fence, was Ilya.

He was standing on the narrow concrete ledge, his fingers hooked loosely into the cold chain-link of the outer fence. He looked smaller than Shane had ever seen him. The "Czar" had

vanished, replaced by a silhouette that seemed to be made of nothing but shadow and resignation. Below him, the Ottawa River was a churning black throat, the white foam of the rapids looking like teeth in the dark.

Shane's heart hammered against his ribs until it felt like it would shatter his sternum. He began to move, his steps heavy and clumsy on the metal grates of the walkway.

Svetlana's voice from earlier echoed in his head, but now he heard her real voice, rising above the roar of the wind. She wasn't crying. She wasn't begging. Her voice was steady as Russian words Shane would have only been able to partially understand on a good day rushed out.

"Ilya, look at me," she said, her hands held out, palms up, as if she were trying to settle a high-strung horse. "You think you are balancing a ledger. You think if you remove the weight of yourself, the rest of us will finally be able to breathe. You think you are being a martyr for his happiness."

Ilya didn't turn. He was staring down at the water, watching the way the ice floes collided and shattered.

"Shane Hollander is a creature of habit, Ilya," Svetlana's voice grew sharper, cutting through the spray. "He is a man of routines. If you jump, his new habit will be looking for you in every body of water for the rest of his life. Every time he crosses a bridge, he will die. Every time it rains, he will drown. You are not killing yourself, you are killing him slowly, one minute at a time, for the next fifty years. Is that the mercy you want to give him?"

Ilya's head tilted slightly. The wind caught his hair, pulling it away from his face. When he spoke, the words were thin, carried away by the gale almost before they could be formed.

"I can't feel it, Svet," he whispered. I look at him and I know I'm meant to feel something. Love, heat, that spark that keeps a heart beating. But inside, I'm a dead frequency. A station with no signal. All that comes through is static."

He shifted his weight on the ledge, his boots scraping against the frozen concrete. "I feel like a thief. I am living in a house I didn't build, taking love I cannot return. I am a burden, Svetlana. I am the anchor that will eventually pull him under the water with me."

The wind tore at Shane's throat when he tried to shout.

"Ilya." Not a scream this time. Just his name.

Ilya's shoulders flinched. That was the first sign he was still reachable.

"Don't," Ilya said without turning. It wasn't a command. It was exhausted. "Please don't come closer."

Shane stopped a few feet from the railing. His boots slid slightly on the salted metal grating. He grabbed the fence to steady himself.

"Okay," he said, breath shaking. "I won't. I'm right here. That's it."

Svetlana didn't move. She was close enough to see Ilya's hands trembling where they hooked into the chain-link.

"I can't feel anything," Ilya said again, softer now, like he was apologizing for it. "It's quiet inside my head for the first time in months. I thought that meant something."

Shane swallowed. He forced himself to stay still.

"You're not calm," he said carefully. "You're exhausted."

A pause.

"I am tired of you having to see me fail."

"You haven't failed."

"I missed an open net."

Shane almost laughed. Not because it was funny, but because it was so small compared to this.

"You think this is about a goal?" Shane asked. "You think I drove here because of a puck?"

Ilya's fingers tightened on the fence. "I am not the man you fell in love with."

Shane took one slow step forward. "You're exactly the man I fell in love with," he said. "You're just hurting."

"Stop," Ilya whispered.

His right foot shifted. That was the moment everything changed. Just a slight slip on frozen concrete.

Svetlana inhaled sharply.

Shane moved without thinking. He closed the distance fast, grabbed the back of Ilya's jacket with one hand, and caught the waistband of his trousers with the other. Ilya jerked in surprise, instinctively grabbing the fence harder.

"Don't fight me," Shane gasped. "Don't fight me, just- just lean back."

For half a second, Ilya resisted, then his grip faltered. The sole of his boot skidded on the icy ledge. Shane felt the full shift of Ilya's weight and dropped to his knees, anchoring his shins against the base of the railing with a force that rattled his teeth.

"Let go," Shane choked out, his voice fracturing against the wind. "I've got you. Ilya, I've got you."

One by one, Ilya's fingers peeled away. For a terrifying heartbeat, there was no momentum, only the raw, downward pull of gravity. Ilya didn't spring back toward safety, rather he

simply surrendered his hold on the world, leaving Shane to catch the sudden, staggering drop of two hundred pounds of dead-weight muscle.

The weight nearly wrenched Shane's shoulders from their sockets. His boots skidded on the black ice, his legs screaming as he jammed his body against the metal skirting to keep them both from pitching over the edge. It was an ugly, desperate struggle. With his knuckles white and locking into cramps, Shane buried his fingers into the heavy wool of Ilya's coat and threw his entire centre of gravity backward. They collapsed together onto the pedestrian side of the railing in a tangle of limbs and winter coats.

The sound of Ilya's shoulder slamming into the metal grate was sickening, but Shane didn't let go. He pinned Ilya down, his knees digging into the slush, his entire weight crushing the Russian into the ground as if he could force the life back into him through sheer pressure. Shane was heaving, his chest labouring for air, his face pressed so hard into the crook of Ilya's neck that he was breathing in the cold, damp scent of his skin.

"I've got you," Shane roared, his voice a raw, jagged mess of a sound. "I've got you, you arrogant asshole! You don't get to leave! You don't get to decide when it's over!"

Ilya didn't fight. He didn't even try to push him off. He went limp, his body shivering violently against the cold ground. He began to cry. Silent, hot tears ran down his face disappearing into the expensive wool of Shane's coat.

"I wanted to be the version you traded your life for," Ilya whispered, the words trembling against Shane's shoulder. He meant the MVP. He meant the superstar. He meant the man who walked into a room and owned the oxygen.

Shane pulled back just enough to look him in the eye, his own face a wreck of tears and snot.

"I didn't trade my life for a highlight reel, you idiot!" Shane screamed, his grip tightening until it had to be bruising. "I traded it for the guy who snores! I traded it for the guy who hates the rain and argues about the coffee! I want the broken version! I want the version that can't get out of bed! If you're a burden, then I'm a pack animal! Just stay. God, Ilya, just stay."

Behind them, Hayden stood by the open car door, his hands over his mouth, watching the two most powerful men he knew huddled together in the dirt and the dark, clinging to each other as if the rest of the world had already fallen away.

The drive back from the bridge was a funeral procession for a death that hadn't quite happened.

Svetlana didn't hesitate. While Hayden maneuvered a devastated Shane into the backseat of the Range Rover, she stepped toward the idling Porsche. The hazard lights were still blinking, casting an orange strobe over her. She didn't look at the water. She didn't look at the railing. She simply climbed into the driver's seat, her hands gripping the leather steering wheel where Ilya's had been only minutes before.

She had already texted her friends. They would pick up her car from where she'd abandoned it on the shoulder of the highway. For now, she was the one who had to bring Ilya's car home.

She followed the red glow of Hayden's taillights, her face a mask of marble, driving the car back to a house that suddenly felt like a crime scene.

Inside the SUV, the heater was cranked to its maximum, but the air felt thin. Shane hadn't moved. He was still half-draped over Ilya in the backseat, his arms locked around the Russian's torso as if the moment he let go, he'd be back on the ledge all over again. Ilya was shaking, but he remained limp, his eyes staring vacantly at the leather seat in front of him.

When they pulled into the driveway, the designer house was waiting for them, its floor-to-ceiling windows glowing with a sterile, expensive light. It looked perfect. It looked untouched. It looked like the pressurised chamber Shane had escaped an hour ago.

Hayden killed the engine, but nobody moved. The silence that rushed back into the car was suffocating.

"I've got him, Shane," Hayden whispered, his voice cracking as he reached back to help unbuckle Ilya's seatbelt.

"No," Shane snapped. It was the first coherent word he'd spoken since the bridge, and it was sharp, feral. He didn't want Hayden's pity. "I've got him. Don't touch him."

Shane hauled Ilya out of the car, practically carrying him. Ilya was a dead weight, his feet dragging slightly over the interlocking stone of the driveway. Svetlana followed behind them, the keys to the Porsche clutched so tightly in her hand the metal bit into her palm. She didn't head for the kitchen to make tea they wouldn't drink, she didn't even take off her coat. She simply stood in the centre of the living room, her presence the only thing keeping the walls from closing in on them.

Hayden lingered in the foyer, looking at the trophies on the mantle and the framed jerseys on the walls.

"Should I stay?" He asked quietly, looking at Svetlana.

"No," she said, her voice a low, Russian rasp. She finally looked at him, her eyes hard. "Go home, Hayden. I am here. He is here. That is enough for tonight." He left without another word.

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In the master ensuite, the air was quickly becoming thick with white, rolling steam. Shane hadn't even bothered to turn on the overhead lights. The only illumination came from the cold, blue moonlight spilling through the skylight, casting long, distorted shadows across the tile.

Shane didn't strip Ilya. He couldn't. He didn't have the heart to see the sharp, skeletal hollows of Ilya's ribs or the sallow, bruised skin in the light. He couldn't bear to see how much of his lover had already withered away while he was busy complaining about 'bad passes.'

Instead, he sat Ilya down on the edge of the deep, stone soaking tub and began to run the water. He made it warm, a soothing medium meant to warm Ilya up quickly without hurting.

Shane kicked off his boots, but left his soaked jeans and shirt on. He climbed into the tub first, the hot water soaking through his denim with a sharp, stinging heat, and then he reached for Ilya.

"Come here," Shane murmured, his voice trembling. "Ilya, look at me. Just... come here."

Ilya moved like a marionette with cut strings. He tumbled into the water, his heavy wool sweater and dark trousers billowing around him like dark ink in the tub. The heat should have made him flinch, should have turned his skin red, but he just sank into it, his head falling back against Shane's chest with a sickening, heavy thud.

Shane sat behind him, his legs wrapped around Ilya's waist, his arms locked across Ilya's chest in a bruising, desperate embrace. It was a cage and a hug all at once. He tucked his chin over Ilya's shoulder, pressing his nose into the damp, cold hair at Ilya's temple, breathing in the scent of river water and sandalwood.

"I'm here," Shane whispered into the rising steam. "I've got you. And I love you."

Ilya finally started to stop shivering, the violent tremors replaced by a heavy, profound exhaustion that seemed to sink into his very bones. He leaned his head back, finally breathing in the scent of Shane's skin.

"I'm sorry," Ilya rasped, his voice barely a ghost of a sound. "I'm so sorry, moya lyubov'. I can not- There is something wrong, and I do not know what it is. I think I am maybe like my mother, and I don't know if I can fix it."

"It's fine," Shane said, his voice cracking but firm. He tightened his grip, pulling Ilya so close their heartbeats felt like a single, frantic rhythm. "I don't care if it takes a year. I don't care if it takes the rest of my life. You stay in the water until you're warm. You stay in this house until you feel like you own the air again. I'm not letting go."

Ilya closed his eyes, a single, hot tear tracing a path through the steam on his cheek. For the first time in months, he didn't feel the urge to vanish into the black throat of the river. He felt the crushing, physical reality of Shane's arms, and wanted nothing more than to sink inside of him.

Shane reached into his pocket, his fingers finding the gold band he'd clutched all the way to the bridge. He didn't put it back on Ilya's finger, not yet, but he pressed it into Ilya's palm, closing his own hand over it, sealing the metal between them.

"I love you," Shane whispered.

"I love you too."



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