The Prize We Sought

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/76542091.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, Brandon Wiebe
Additional Tags:	Post-Canon, Established Relationship, Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Injured Ilya Rozanov, Hurt/Comfort, Angst with a Happy Ending, Anxious Shane Hollander, POV Shane Hollander, POV Outsider, only minor. there are some tweets between days to give an outside perspective on what's happening to offset how in his own head Shane is, so can be scrolled past if that's not your vibe, Shane Hollander is the GOAT
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-05 Words: 17,103 Chapters: 1/1

The Prize We Sought

by timesomewhere

Summary

When an injury puts Ilya in a coma during the Ottawa Centaurs third game in the Stanley Cup final, Shane must decide whether he can handle the pressures of leading the team to victory with the worry that at any moment Ilya's condition could go from bad to worse.

*

Shane didn't want to go home. It was one thing to be in another country clinging to the unfamiliarity of the people and the places to try and rationalise that this was a strange nightmare. But when he had to wake up in his bed alone and walk streets with people wearing Ilya's jersey that pathetic hope would be extinguished.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The next game was the 11th, and if they hadn't won by then they would have done by the 13th. Either way, by the time Ilya turned 32 on the 15th he was supposed to be a two-time Stanley Cup winner. They would spend the summer at the cottage, bathing in the joy of success and each other and forgetting that there was a world out there that demanded things of them.

Title from Walt Whitman's 'O Captain! My Captain!' RIP Walt Whitman you would have loved hockey yaoi.

Notes

SPOILER WARNING: This takes place after the canon events of the books, NOT the show hence why it is tagged Game Changers and not Heated Rivalry. However, if you are happy with knowing that by the end of the books they are married, out, and playing on the same hockey team, then there are no further major spoilers and you can continue to read. If you do know about the events in the book, then there will be some extra references you pick up on.

Some hockey stuff explained that you might not have picked up if you've only watched the show/read the books but you might find useful here. During the Stanley Cup in order to make it to the final (and then at the final) you don't just beat the opposing team once, it is a best of seven. The first two games are played at one team's home, the next two at the other team's home, and then it is turnabout until someone wins four games.

Garbage goal - a goal that occurs more by luck than skill
Breakaway goal - a goal where the forward has made their way past the defenders, so it is just forward vs goalie

Hat-trick - scoring three goals in one game
Minor penalty - offending player is off the ice for 2 minutes leaving their team short-handed
Coincidental minor penalties - equal number of players from each team are serving a penalty simultaneously
Major penalty - offending player is off the ice for 5 minutes leaving their team short-handed
Penalty box - where players go to serve their penalties
Penalty shot - unchallenged opportunity to score on the opposing goaltender
Power-play - the time where one team has more players than the other because the other has a player serving a penalty
High-sticking - touching an opponent with the stick above shoulder level
Hooking - using a stick as a hook to slow an opponent

Some Russian you might want to refer back to:

Ya lyublyu tyebya - I love you
Ya tozhe tyebya lyublyu - I love you too
Ya lyublyu tyebya fsyem syertsem - I love you with all my heart

Also if you've ever watched Ted Lasso and notice that a scene in this is ~heavily inspired~ by a scene in that, no you don't, but bonus points if you can guess what it is before reading.

Finally, I would like to say that the medicine in this is solely a plot device. I did some research to make sure I wasn't ridiculously far off what was possible, and I get around a lot of the details by fading to black, but if you want to come at me for inaccuracies know that I am already aware of them and am choosing not to care.

See the end of the work for more notes

June 8th

The last thing Shane remembers before it had all gone wrong was how happy he'd been. Him and his husband on the ice together, about to be another game closer to winning Ottawa's first Stanley Cup. They would be history makers once again.

They had won the Eastern conference comfortably, averaging five games to settle who would move on to the next round, which was in stark contrast to their Cup rivals, the Dallas Comets, who had played all seven games each round and were making clinching last minute victories an agonising habit for their fans.

They were the clear favourites. Everywhere you went people talked about Hollander and Rozanov, Ottawa's great hope. Their dominance was becoming legendary, and Montreal and Boston fans had finally found common ground in loathing that they had each lost their best player to a minor NHL team right before they had begun reaching new peaks.

Shane's presence had freshly motivated Ilya, who for the first time in his life had to fight to be the best player on his team. Given practice time with Ilya, Shane had taken their natural chemistry and sharpened it to the point that they could have played together blindfolded. Twice they had scored a hat-trick in the same game. There were video compilations an hour long of their best moments on the ice together, and they were getting longer all the time. Their names were mentioned so often side by side that the media had coined the term 'Hollanov'.

Ilya had resented that Shane's name came first, and he had said so much in a press conference when they were asked about it, but anyone could tell from the way he had looked at Shane while he was complaining that he was delighted they had become synonymous with each other.

Their first game against Dallas they had won 4-2. The next 3-1. The more sceptical pundits and desperate Dallas fans had said that it was home advantage, that once the Centaurs were on away ice their dominance would fade, but they were a minute away from the final whistle, and it was 2-5 to the Centaurs. Shane had another hat-trick and he could tell from the determination in Ilya's eyes that he was going to use the final seconds of the game to get himself one too.

Ilya had slipped past Dallas' defence with his characteristic ease that had always irritated Shane in their youth, but now only made him grin. He was raising his stick, about to slam the puck into the top right of the goal, but with a little twist in the angle of his grip that was going to convince the goalie to jump left anyway.

There was no way Ilya could have seen it coming. The Dallas defender Shawn Goodwin, (who Ilya had been calling Badlose) was behind him, and he had been being outsmarted by Ilya all game. He was an older guy who had played for the Comets his whole career, and he wasn't as fast as he used to be. Ilya kept nipping past him and chirping about it, and he was getting angrier and angrier, not realising that his reaction was only encouraging Ilya further. He swung his stick above his head and aimed for Ilya's skates as he went to score.

He misjudged the speed at which he was going though, and as he caught Ilya's skates, also caught up with Ilya himself, and sent them both barrelling into the wall at outrageous speed.

Goodwin was far heavier than Ilya and had half a foot on him. He got up instantly from the crash to start arguing with the referee.

Ilya didn't move. He lay slumped against the wall like a doll abandoned at the side of the road. Shane was next to him before the whistle had even blown. He slid him gently down the wall and turned him over onto his back so that he was lying flat on the ice.

Blood was everywhere, streaked down the wall and splashed across the ice, pouring from his head and his nose and his mouth like rivers of wine. Shane couldn't breathe. He had never seen so much blood. He moved Ilya's head onto his lap, and realised he was mumbling something in Russian, but the fear coursing through his veins brooked no understanding.

Eventually Shane was manhandled out of the way by one of the bigger referees. The medics had arrived and one of them had been trying to shove him away, but Shane hadn't noticed.

Ilya had regained a bit of consciousness and was thrashing against the medics to stop them from putting him onto the stretcher. "Ilya, stop! Let them help you!" Shane had cried, trying to wrestle out of the grip of the referee, who had become two linesmen.

Pictures would surface the internet later of Shane on his knees, covered in Ilya's blood and surrounded by the rest of it. Its rich colour against the endless white of the ice would make him look like the penitent victor of a holy war. People would call for Goodwin's suspense, others would criticise Shane for his unprofessional reaction and mistreatment of the referees.

Somehow, Shane had ended up in a hospital in Dallas waiting for news of Ilya's surgery. When Ilya had arrived at the hospital, he was already in a coma, and he had been rushed to neurosurgery for a brain haemorrhage. His recovery was possible, but anything could happen.

Hours had crept by like years. At some point his parents had arrived and sat at either side of him, his mother holding his hand and his father rubbing his shoulder. Shane was distantly aware of Yuna leaving to make various phone calls and talking to hospital staff. His teammates and Coach Wiebe arrived, and she shepherded them as far away from him as possible.

In time a woman in scrubs had approached him.

"Your husband's surgery has gone well. He's going back upstairs now, so I'll get one of the nurses to take you to his room. If you like I can inform you about the rest after you've seen him. All you need to know for now is that he's stable."

"Yes," he had said, hoarsely. His throat was raw and his mouth was a desert. He didn't know if he had spoken to anybody since the game. "Thank you."

Now, he is slipping in and out of dreams in a chair beside Ilya's hospital bed. The surgeon had informed him they expected Ilya to be in a coma for roughly a week, but that they had no way of knowing for certain. She said they could fly him back to Ottawa in a couple of days

so that Shane could be at home while he recovered, and a litany of other things that he was glad Yuna was there to pay attention to.

Shane didn't want to go home. It was one thing to be in another country clinging to the unfamiliarity of the people and the places to try and rationalise that this was a strange nightmare. But when he had to wake up in his bed alone and walk streets with people wearing Ilya's jersey that pathetic hope would be extinguished.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The next game was the 11th, and if they hadn't won by then they would have done by the 13th. That would be nicer in some aspects because they would be playing at home. Either way, by the time Ilya turned 32 on the 15th he was supposed to be a two-time Stanley Cup winner. They would spend the summer at the cottage, bathing in the joy of success and each other and forgetting that there was a world out there that demanded things of them.

Shane has one hand in Ilya's, tracing the back of it with his thumb and kissing his knuckles intermittently. Clutched in the other is Ilya's necklace, which the doctors had asked to be taken off so that he could safely get MRI scans. He had never seen Ilya without it, and it only added to the sense that everything had gone wrong with the world.

It had felt sacrilegious to put it down, so he had been holding it for hours which had made the metal is sweaty from his palm. He unfurls it to hang around one finger and the cross and Ilya's wedding ring clink together like a they're making a toast.

It swings gently back and forth, and Shane notices that the chain is spattered with blood, although the cross and the wedding ring are spotless. If Ilya dies, he'll be the second person to do so wearing it. Tears fill up Shane's eyes again and he curls it up into his fist once more, draping himself across Ilya's chest and trying to comfort himself with the rise and fall of it. He had tried to make peace with Ilya's death once and it was the worst moment of his life. At least that time he had known he would be okay within the day, this time he would have to wait weeks, and those weeks could turn into months.

He wished he knew what Ilya had been trying to say to him before he was taken away. He had replayed the moment over and over again, but the blood and the dread overwhelmed the memory.

Yuna returns from wherever she had been with some drinks and snacks, which she offers him, and he refuses. She had tried to convince him to go back to the hotel, but there was nothing for him there. His season was over now. Ottawa would have to do this without them both.

He hadn't told anyone this, but he was sure Yuna suspected as much. He couldn't handle the questions and the pity and the pressure. Not alone. All his worst moments were headline news, and he was exhausted. Even the calls from their friends and old teammates were too much to handle. What could you say to a man who might become a widower at 32 that changed anything? Grief in its enormity must be his alone. If worst came to worst, no one would hear about Shane Hollander again.

June 10th - Somewhere in American airspace

Shane was flying back to Ottawa with Yuna and Ilya in an air ambulance. She had arranged everything and sent him screeds of information on the entire process. They would be flying on a Bombardier Learjet 60, a business plane which had been fitted with intensive care units and had the facilities to care for 2 patients in critical condition. Supposedly, Ilya would be one of the 'healthier' patients they transported.

He knew Yuna had told him all of this to make him feel better. He was like her in this regard, facts made him feel in control. But unless he managed to get himself a medical degree, no amount of information could attempt to wrestle the fear in his mind. His husband's brain was damaged, maybe beyond repair, maybe not, and his body was trying to turn itself off and on again to heal. The whole thing was already ridiculous and flying him in a metal box for 3 hours 10 kilometres in the air only allowed for more things to go wrong.

David was already in Ottawa, preparing for him and Yuna to stay with Shane and handle 'life stuff' while Ilya recovered. He had also taken their dog (Ilya's dog really) Anya, to stay with Harris, the Centaur's social media manager, for the time being, so that Shane wouldn't have to worry about looking after anyone but himself.

Yuna spoke as if Ilya recovering was inevitable. She had already researched the top rehabilitation clinics around the world and had contacted her top three choices. It was 'when he comes home,' 'when he recovers,' 'when he wakes up.' Shane doesn't know to what extent she believes it and how much she's trying to give him hope. David is more reserved on the issue, his strategy is to remind him about the fact that Ilya was strong, and that the doctors had mostly been positive.

They were an hour into the flight. The doctor and nurse flying with them have both tried to strike up conversation with him and failed, resulting in Yuna graciously picking up the slack. Shane just sits by Ilya's side, moving when they need to take measurements, and fiddling with the necklace.

"Is that *A Wrinkle in Time* in your bag?" the nurse says, writing some numbers on a chart and pointing to Shane's rucksack.

"Yes," he responds, determined not to have a discussion.

"That was my favourite as a kid," the nurse continues, undeterred. "I have a few copies but yours is so beautiful, I've never seen that cover before."

"It's a Russian edition," he deadpans, but weakened by the nurse's expectant stare, he carries on. "I'm learning, so I'm reading children's books for the simpler language."

"That's sweet," he says, fiddling with a contraption Shane hopes won't have to be used at any point. "We don't understand much about what people experience in comas, but some people report remembering what was said to them when they were under. Maybe you could read to him?"

It's the first thing anyone has said to him since the game that has brought him any comfort.

“I’m not very good at reading it out loud yet.”

“I’m sure he won’t mind.”

Shane’s spoken Russian was good enough for conversation, but when he read it aloud Ilya told him he sounded like a robot delivering a message of doom for the planet. Shane had huffed and stopped reading, but Ilya had sidled up to him, and kissed him on the cheek and said, *“A very sexy robot, though.”*

He smiles at the memory, but it falls as he looks at Ilya now. He hoped that if Ilya was aware of anything, he was aware that he was here, that he would wait for as long as it took for him to come back to him.

Shane takes the book out of his bag. He’s only a few chapters in, even though he’s been reading it for a few weeks now. He had studied *A Wrinkle in Time* in school and had hoped that having already read it in English would give him a fighting chance. He had forgotten that the speech quirks some characters had meant that some simple words looked very strange.

He begins to read, terribly aware that everyone is listening to him. He trips over some words, and has to search up a few more, but he eventually strikes a rhythm.

The light spread until the patch of Dark Thing had vanished, and there was only a gentle shining, and through the shining came the stars, clear and pure. Then, slowly, the shining dwindled until it, too, was gone, and there was nothing but stars and starlight. No shadows. No fear. Only the stars and the clear darkness of space, quite different from the fearful darkness of the Thing.

“You see!” the Medium cried, smiling happily. “It can be overcome! It is being overcome all the time!”

Mrs Whatsit sighed, a sigh so sad that Meg wanted to put her arms around her and comfort her. “Tell us exactly what happened, then, please,” Charles Wallace said in a small voice.

“It was a star,” Mrs Whatsit said sadly. “A star giving up its life in battle with the Thing. It won, oh, yes, my children, it won. But it lost its life in the winning.”

Shane shuts the book with a force that causes his mother to move to sit beside him and squeeze his hand.

Tears fall down his face. He’s sick of crying, sick of how useless it is. All it does it wreck his voice and leave salt streaks across his cheeks and exhaust him, and by the time he’s done Ilya is still in a coma.

They land in Ottawa and are escorted to the hospital. There is a team ready to meet them at the doors who transfer him to another bed, and then he is wheeled away for some more tests. Shane is shown to Ilya’s room, where he is left waiting once again.

Ilya returns, and another doctor tells him that his vitals are as ‘good as they could hope for.’

His mother stays with him for what he presumes is hours. Shane holds his hand and reads to him a little more, until his eyelids start fluttering closed.

“Shane, we should go home now.”

“You go, I’ll stay here.”

“I can’t leave you here.”

“Why not? We’re leaving him here.”

It’s petulant logic. He doesn’t care.

“You haven’t left his side for two days, honey. He knows you’ve been there for him; he knows you’ll come back.”

“But-”

“He knows, I promise.”

Yuna has no way of knowing that, but Shane longs to believe her.

“Tell him when you’ll be back, what you’ll be up to when you’re gone,” she suggests.

“I’ll be back for eight tomorrow-”

“Nine,” Yuna corrects.

“For nine tomorrow. I just need to go home to shower and get some new clothes. But I’ll be back soon. I promise. I’ll find some other books to read to you. Maybe that spy novel you keep giving up on.”

He unfurls Ilya’s necklace and unhooks it, sliding Ilya’s wedding ring off and placing the remaining necklace inside the book to mark his page. He kisses him on the forehead.

“Ya lyublyu tyebya.”

June 11th - Shane and Ilya’s home, Ottawa

Shane wakes up in the guest bedroom. He had tried to fall asleep in *their* bed, but the emptiness of it had panicked him so badly he had tried to go back to the hospital. Yuna had predicted this hours ago, and had hidden his car keys. She had talked him down, and he slept in the guest room with her instead, clutching Ilya’s wedding ring to his chest.

She is gone now, and he can hear her and David talking in the kitchen. He had managed to sleep, but he hadn’t rested and body is wound like a rusted coil. There are no updates from the hospital, which he supposes is a good thing, but he plans on spending the rest of the day there anyway.

He showers quickly and prepares to head out, but is stopped by Yuna carrying a bowl of cereal.

“You aren’t leaving without at least trying to eat something.”

His head is clear enough to know better than to argue with her, so he slinks into the kitchen and starts chipping away at his cereal.

“They announced the captain for tonight’s game. Boodram, with Haas and Barrett as alternates.”

Shane doesn’t respond. There’s nothing to say to it as far as he was concerned. Boodram was an alternate alongside Shane with Ilya as captain, so it made sense to bump him up. Haas was a young star, who was destined to be a captain eventually, and Barrett was consistent and experienced. They were the choices he would have made too.

“Boodram is a solid choice,” she continues “Barrett too, I guess. Not too sure about Haas, I don’t think he’s as mature as you were at his age.”

The food is already making him nauseous. He should have delayed breakfast until they got to the hospital. He could eat once he knew Ilya was alright.

“Goodwin is-”

“I’m not talking about Goodwin. I don’t want to think about him.”

“Alright. Apparently New York-”

“I don’t want to talk about hockey, Mom. Can we go?”

Yuna looks dismayed, and a deep worry settles on her brow. There’s not been a day of their lives where they haven’t talked about hockey at length. It bothered Ilya to no end how long they could spend discussing one player’s technique, or 10 seconds of a game.

She goes to say something, but David stops her with a hand on the shoulder. “I’ll take you in 5 minutes. Try and finish eating.”

The car journey with his father is uncomfortably silent. His parents have clearly had a debate about how to handle him, and currently his father is winning. If he knows anything about his mother, that won’t last long.

When he reaches the hospital room, he drags his chair which has been put back into the corner to Ilya’s side. All the machines seemed to be beeping in the same way they had when he had left, so he assumes all is well. The room has been filled with balloons and flowers. They are mostly from the Centaurs but there are a few from Boston players, and even some lilies from Rose.

David is fidgeting with the TV remote that would appear to control the TV that hangs from the ceiling, which was approaching antiquity ten years ago, and has now entrenched itself in it. He manages to switch it on, and a weather report is playing.

“Can you switch that off, please, Dad? I’m going to read to him.”

“I wanted to see if we could get the hockey in here for tonight.”

He doesn’t want to watch the hockey. He doesn’t want to think about the fact that if you search his or Ilya’s names right now a slew of photos and videos of Ilya’s injury and Shane’s breakdown show up, and that alongside each of them there are hundreds of thousands of people giving their opinions on whose fault it was, and what Shane had done, and whether the Centaurs could win without them.

Once David confirms that there is a channel to watch it on, he switches it off and leaves to find some coffee. Shane begins to read.

Nurses come in and out, his father returns, and his mother arrives. They conspicuously swap in and out of waiting with him. Yuna tries to have another discussion about tonight’s game, but Shane keeps reading through it all. He manages a few bites of a sandwich at lunch, which placates her somewhat.

When 18:30 hits they are both with him. David switches the TV on and Shane sees his team warming up. He might not want to watch the hockey, but if Ilya is aware of anything, he would probably prefer it to Shane’s bumpy reading of a children’s novel.

Dallas is 1-0 within the first 5 minutes due to a penalty awarded to them after a hooking incident was judged as preventing an opportunity for them to score. It is a sign of things to come. The next 15 minutes are a myriad of fouls and arguing with the referee. By the end of the period it’s 2-0 to Dallas. The commentators waste no time in blaming it on him and Ilya.

“Without Hollander and Rozanov’s leadership, the Centaurs are all over the place.”

“The injury has had a lasting impact on the team’s mentality, and without Hollander here to score some goals, we could be about to watch the Centaurs rescue defeat from the jaws of victory.”

Yuna is unusually silent. Normally a disaster of a hockey game riles her up into a frenzy that could scare a pack of wolves into submission.

In the second period Boodram manages a tidy backhand goal, which has Yuna sitting forward in her seat a little, but by the end it’s 4-1.

“Defence has never been the Centaurs strong point, but with Hollander and Rozanov keeping the puck out of the Comets hands, it hadn’t been too much of a problem. Now the cracks are beginning to show.”

“We have to remember that the Centaurs are a backmarker team. They’ve never won a Cup, and as of a few years ago, it didn’t look as though that was going to change. They have been extraordinarily lucky that two of hockey’s greatest players have decided that that’s where they want to spend the rest of their years, but without them we remember why this team doesn’t show its face here often.”

The third period is some of the worst hockey Shane's ever seen. It's not only the Centaurs, the Comets have decided to join in on the fun of the low road. At one point there are 5 players in the penalty box. If he wasn't so miserable and his team wasn't losing, this would be added to his list of chaotic games he rewatched like sit-coms.

The game finishes 6-1. If the Comets had scored every penalty they were awarded it would be 9-1. Wyatt Hayes had managed to single handedly reduce the game from a complete and utter humiliation for the Centaurs, to just a total humiliation.

"They could do this without Rozanov if they had Hollander. But without him, I would say for the first time in this final that the Comets are now the favourites."

"Of course, we all feel for Shane Hollander's situation, but he has to be asking himself if this is where he needs to be."

His father finally has the sense to switch it off.

Disappointment should be flooding him right now. He has tortured himself over far better games, but for the first time in his life Shane doesn't care about a hockey result.

The commentary had stung, but until their spouse was closer to death's door every day that they didn't wake up, he rejects their criticism. If he lost Ilya while he was in Dallas playing a hockey game he would never forgive himself.

He doesn't know what Ilya would be doing if the roles were reversed. Ilya's anger might play a bigger factor, he might not be able to resist flinging himself back out onto the ice and trying to fix things the only way he could. Shane supposed that if he woke up and found out that Ilya had lost them a Stanley Cup because he had spent all of his time in a hospital room getting in the way of people trying to do their jobs and reading to him, he might be a little annoyed.

"I don't know how they're going to come back from that one, that was horrendous," his mother finally says.

"Yeah."

"That's all you have to say?"

"Yuna," his father tries to interject.

"They played badly so they lost, it happens."

"They didn't just lose Shane, they were annihilated. You should-" She stops herself from saying something, but Shane knows what it is anyway.

"Yuna, we promised that we weren't going to push this."

"Shane, you can't spend all your time sitting in a hospital room. It's not going to help. You will drive yourself mad."

“I’m fine.”

“I know hockey seems trivial right now. But there’s a team out there who needs you. Ottawa shouldn’t be in the final. They shouldn’t have even qualified for the playoffs. You and Ilya put them in that position, and now they can’t get themselves out of it. You have a responsibility-”

“I have a contract. There’s only one person in the world I made a vow to, and he’s right here,” Shane seethes.

Yuna doesn’t flinch. “You have a responsibility to yourself, to your team, to finish what you started. It’s what he’d want.”

“You seriously want me to play fucking hockey? While he’s trapped in here?”

“He’s healing. You’re trapped in here.”

“I can’t leave him! I just can’t.” Shane strokes a hand through his hair, careful to avoid the bandages.

“How long have you been dreaming of winning a Cup together?” Yuna asks, her voice softer.

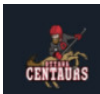
“It won’t be together like this.”

“It will be. It absolutely will be. You won the conference together, you won the majority of the final together, you just need to get everyone over the finish line.”

“You understand that you’re not a normal player, don’t you?” David adds cautiously. “These guys could train for the rest of their lives and they wouldn’t have what you have. They can’t do this without you. If you’re okay with that, I respect your decision. But if you want it at all, you have to know that Ilya wants that for you too.”

“You still need to be a person when he wakes up Shane. You can’t stop the world for him.”

He’s crying again, and his parents bundle him into a hug as he sobs. “I wish I could.”

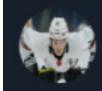


Liam Jenkins
@l1amj3nkins

Damn, Rozanov and Hollander really are a two man team, huh?

7:56 PM · Jun 11, 2023

1 Retweet **22** Quote Tweets **18** Likes



SAM | #getwellsoon81
@d3stielimpala

sick and tired of tweets about how this shows hollanov are the only reason the centaurs are in the final. r's injury was traumatic for the whole team, they've lost their captain.
i guarantee you that if they were even just present and not playing tonight we would have won

10:14 PM · Jun 11, 2023

9 Retweets **4** Quote Tweets **26** Likes

rhaenicent's divorce lawyer
@sup3rwh0lock15

absolutely miserable being a Dallas fan atm. if we win it's because one of our players managed to kill two of the greatest hockey playing birds with one foul and if we lose we lose to a backmarker team who shouldn't even be here. worst cup ever I hate it here

10:32 PM · Jun 11, 2023

4 Retweets **81** Quote Tweets **165** Likes

#1 HOLLANDER DEFENDER
@bellaluvshcky24

Call me a forgetful farmer the way I need my GOAT back

9:01 PM · Jun 11, 2023

64 Retweets **9** Quote Tweets **422** Likes

June 13th - Civic Hospital, Ottawa

His phone buzzes in the middle of his reading, he checks it, awaiting a message from David about what he wants from the deli across the road. Instead, it is a message from Harris, the Centaurs' social media manager.

Hey, I hope you're doing okay. The whole team is thinking of you. I found this video on my camera last night, I thought it might help.

The thumbnail of the video is Ilya in the stands of the Centaurs rink. Shane recognises it as the videos Harris had filmed with everyone before the playoffs, asking some questions about how they were feeling about them (it was the first time many of these guys had reached the playoffs) and predicting how they would go.

He presses play.

"Tell us how you think the playoffs will go, whether you're feeling nervous, who you're most excited to take on, anything you like," Harris says behind the camera.

"We will win. I don't get nervous. I am excited to beat Montreal."

Shane didn't realise how much he missed the sound of his voice. His bluntness, his confidence. His blatant lying about not getting nervous and his vehement hatred for Montreal. He loved it all, he wanted it back.

"Okay, we'll need a little more than that," Harris laughs. "What do you think the biggest factor in reaching the playoffs has been this year?"

"Hollander. Without him Montreal are very easy to beat."

"Do you enjoy playing with him?"

"Of course. He is the best there is. Many people love sport, it usually does not love them back. For me, I like hockey, and it loves me. For Shane, he loves hockey, and it loves him too. It is a rare combination. It's why he is so special."

"Will winning together be particularly special for you?"

"The first win is always the sweetest, I think, but unlike him I have nothing to compare to. But with him it will be very special, he makes everything more special."

"Do you think you'll win?"

"Yes. We're the best team, that's how it works."

"Who will score more goals in the playoffs, you or Hollander?"

Ilya fiddles with his necklace in the video, Shane copies the movement with it now, pulling the cross back and forth.

“Him. Only because he cheats and says he can’t play winger. I’ll have more points, which is what is important.”

The video ends and Shane wipe the teardrops from his screen to type a reply. In the end, the best he can do is *Thank you.*

“I tried Ilya, I really did,” he says to him now. “I just- How am I supposed to go out there without you? What if you need me and I’m not here?”

Shane fights with the silence. There was another game tonight, this time in Ottawa, barely 20 minutes from where he was now. Maybe his mother was right, and he should be out on the ice. If anyone had earned his loyalty it was them, and while he pretended to believe that they could pull this off without him, he knew that the chances were too slim to bother with if things continued as they were. Ilya had wanted to win. He had moved to Ottawa for Shane, and while Shane had played a part in their success, it was Ilya who had been dedicated to them for so long. Perhaps he owed it to Ilya to finish what he had started.

The pressure mounts in his mind until all he can do is grab the book again in a desperate ploy to distract himself.

“I can’t go!” Meg cried. “I can’t! You know I can’t!”

“Ddidd annybbodyy asskk yyou ttoo?” The grim voice made Meg’s skin prickle into gooseflesh.

She burst into tears. She started beating at Aunt Beast like a small child having a tantrum. Her tears rained down her face and spattered Aunt Beast’s fur. Aunt Beast stood quietly against the assault.

“All right, I’ll go!” Meg sobbed. “I know you want me to go!”

“We want nothing from you that you do without grace,” Mrs Whatsit said, “or that you do without understanding.”

Meg’s tears stopped as abruptly as they had started. “But I do understand.” She felt tired and unexpectedly peaceful. Now the coldness that, under Aunt Beast’s ministrations, had left her body had also left her mind. She looked toward her father and her confused anger was gone and she felt only love and pride. She smiled at him, asking forgiveness, and then pressed up against Aunt Beast. This time Aunt Beast’s arm went around her.

Mrs Which’s voice was grave. “Wwhatt ddoo yyou unndderrsstanndd?”

“That it has to be me. It can’t be anyone else.”

Shane shuts the book and calls his mother before he can change his mind.

“Tell them I’ll play tonight.”

“What?”

“Tell them I’ll do it. I’ll be there in half an hour. I don’t know who you have to call to change the starting lineup this late, but tell them I’m coming.”

“Shane, are you sure? I don’t want you to think you need to do this to make me happy, or because you owe it to anyone.”

“I owe it to him. He’s not here, Mom. He’s- This is what he wants. This is what I can do for him now.”

“Okay, alright. I’ll deal with it. I’ll get your Dad meet you with the car and-”

“Will you stay with him?” Shane interrupts.

“Sorry?”

“Will you be here with him? While I’m gone.”

“Of course, honey. Of course I will.”

“And could you bring a necklace with you?”

June 13th - Canadian Tire Centre, Ottawa

Stepping out onto the ice is the best he’s felt in days. The atmosphere is electric, and he receives the biggest cheer he has since he joined the Centaurs when he emerges from the tunnel. This is where he is supposed to be.

Yuna had brought him one of her necklaces, which he had removed the pendant from and threaded his and Ilya’s wedding rings through. He touches it now, barely feeling it through all his layers, but comforting him anyway.

He hadn’t expected to also receive the captaincy upon his return, but it was more symbolic than anything else. A sign of respect from the team, both for him and Ilya, and a demonstration that they trusted him to bring it home. He wished he had come up with something more provoking than what he had said in the locker-room before the game. Ilya was fantastic at speeches, he would raise the roof and work up what was a very nice group of guys into a raving mob. The past few hours had been such a whirlwind all Shane had managed was to stammer something about doing this for Ilya and believing in them all, which was only met with stiff nods.

The game begins, Shane wins the puck and has it past the Comets’ defence in seconds, he shoots to score and is barely stopped by their goalie throwing himself to the ground with the haste of a man who thought he had a few more minutes before he would have to do anything today.

Shane’s line switches and he’s back on the bench. The team is already playing better, their defence is more organised and their forwards are in attack mode instead of drawing back in

an awkward attempt at joining defence. Coach Wiebe would have had a tough conversation with them after the previous game, and whatever he had said worked.

Shane is being targeted like had hasn't been since his youth. When confronted by young stars, older players often try to scare them off physically and he had dealt with that a lot. Nowadays, between it no longer being embarrassing to lose to Shane Hollander and it being harder to target the star performer when you had to choose between him and Ilya, he tended to deal with the normal level of battering, but tonight he seems to be absorbing attacks on Ilya's behalf as well as his usual hits. He should be able to cope as he had when he was younger, moving too fast to touch, inciting power plays, being marked by three guys and simply scoring anyway, but with the little sleep and food he's had over the past week, the beating draws no extra fight from him.

He scores at the 17th minute. A nice wraparound that went right between the goalie's legs after he had wrestled his way out from the defenders. The crowd erupts so much he thinks a seismometer might be going off somewhere, and he allows himself to believe that he could finish this tonight.

He remains the object of the Comets' violent affections in the second period, and they only increase when he gets a high-sticking penalty for Barrett overturned, which deprives the Comets of a power-play. The target on his back soon pays off when he is charged by a defenseman, and the resulting power-play allows him to assist Haas to a goal when he only has to dodge one defender to pass to him. The crowd love Shane more than ever. He may be their top scorer this season, but the hearts of Centaur fans had always belonged to Ilya, no matter how often he reminded them that he only moved there because of Shane.

The Comets score moments before close of second period. It's not a problem, if no one scores for the next 20 minutes, the Cup is theirs.

Five minutes into the final period, while Shane is off the ice, their defender Dykstra is sent to the penalty box for high-sticking. Helpfully for Dallas the referee only notices this and not Young being hooked by one of them seconds prior. Haas is the captain on the ice, but he is ignored when he tries to bring it up to the ref. He gives Shane an abashed glance and Shane signals for him to brush it off. He can tell Haas is thinking that he or Boodram would have been listened to, but that's the way it goes sometimes. Besides, the Comets had a reputation for squandering power-plays, so statistically they should be okay.

The Comets score within thirty seconds. It would be a beautiful goal if Shane was impartial, Hayes didn't stand a chance.

"I'm sorry," Haas says when he returns to the bench. "He wasn't listening, I tried-"

"Don't worry," Shane grins, but inside himself anxiety is roiling around like a marble in a velodrome. "There's 15 minutes left. Anything can happen, yeah?"

'Anything' unfortunately includes the Comets scoring again, which they do. The Centaurs are now losing. Two goals need to be scored in 8 minutes, or one goal and then they need to score in overtime. It's already influencing the team. Defence is getting choppy again, not

helped by the forwards trying to do their jobs, now more afraid of having to close a two goal gap than determined to close a one goal gap.

When Shane gets on the ice his line mates are nowhere he needs them to be. On a good day he might not really need them to be on top form, but this is far from a good day, and the idea that he might have to go to Dallas next week and *really* leave Ilya behind won't let him focus.

He needed Ilya, he needed him to be here to get past the bigger defenders and pass the puck to somewhere Shane wasn't, but Ilya knew he was going to be. But Ilya asleep was in a hospital bed, and he might not ever wake up.

They lose 2-3. It is a better loss than last time, if you were the kind of person that could rank losses instead of dismissing them all as failures, which Shane wasn't. He tries to be encouraging in the locker-room, but he has always been a terrible liar. A call from his mother gives him an excuse to step out into the corridor.

"I thought you might want a 'get-out-of-locker-room-free' card, so I called."

"Thank you."

"You played well tonight."

"No, I didn't."

"The Comets' defence is good, that's why they're here. It's hard to get past them alone, but you managed it. Besides, they were letting the Comets away with murder when you weren't on the ice. Talk to Haas, or get Bood to talk to Haas. He's young and they're messing around with him, make sure he knows he can stand up for himself."

"Yeah but, the third period, I couldn't- I was trying but I couldn't-"

"You got in your head," Yuna offers. "That's okay. I expected that. You've got two more games to get out of it. The Comets have to win both the next games, you only have to win one."

"You expected it? You didn't think we'd win tonight?"

"You've hardly eaten or slept over the past week. If you were anyone else you would have collapsed a minute into the game tonight, especially given the way they were targeting you, but you got a goal and an assist. You'll get back on track, I believe in you."

Shane hates it when she answers questions without answering them. Perhaps once he's retired she should explore a career in medicine.

"Are you with him? Is he okay?"

"He's doing well. We watched the game together. His heart rate picked up when the crowd was chanting your name."

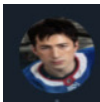
An ache pulls at his chest.

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I’ll be back in 20, I’m wrapping up here. Probably longer with the post-game traffic.”

“We’ll be waiting.”



#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Shane Hollander nicknames w/ explanations for the uninitiated because I've seen a lot of old one surfacing on the timeline, a thread
🧵:

2 112 849

#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Ottawawa – since he's from Ottawa NOT because he plays for them and he has/had a rep for 'crying' to refs when he was younger. everyone now agrees that he had to protest so often because he was getting beaten up every week for being good and no one was doing anything about it

1 98 701

#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Complain Hollander – less creative version of the nickname above

Shane the Bane – for terrorising everyone he plays

Inspector Shane – coined after he got two sticks removed from a Buffalos game because he realised they were illegal

1 77 645

#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Hollaback Girl – because Hollander = Hollaback ig? was used more back in the day but got a resurgence when people found out about his relationship with Rozanov because he already had the nickname 'Gwen' or 'Gwen Stefanov' for being pretty and blond and a bit of a diva

1 203 1K

#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Jane Doe – this is either being used to call him attractive, to call him a victim, or both. Shane rhymes with Jane, he has 'doe' eyes, and he's often the target in fights

1 65 589

#1 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 13, 2023

Princess Jane - offshoot from Jane Doe used by fans to call him the people's princess/attractive and by non-fans to call him soft

Princess Daisy – used similarly as above stemming from Rozanov being called Princess Peach because he's blond and has a fat ass

4 188 954

June 15th - Civic Hospital, Ottawa

It's Ilya's birthday today. Shane had had a whole plan. If the Cup was finished, they would be in the cottage together. They would have a slow start to the morning, and make a late breakfast in whatever state of blissful disarray they had eventually left their bed in. They would take Anya for a long walk in the forest and finish up with a swim in the lake. Ilya would challenge him to a race that Shane would be about to win before a hand would wrap around his ankle and pull him under. Shane would pretend to be angry as they emerged from the water kissing, and he'd keep up the act until they got back to shore. They'd order fast-food for dinner because it was the off-season and they could, and he'd let Ilya pick whatever terrible action film he wanted while they ate. They'd finish everything but the film and then go out and watch the last drops of sun fade from the horizon around a fire and Anya would curl up in Ilya's lap. Shane would give him his gift, and everything would be perfect.

If they hadn't won the Cup yet, Shane would give him his gift, spend a bit more time kissing him in the morning, and the rest of the celebrations would wait until it was secured.

He picked Anya up from Harris' this morning. He had already taken her on a walk so she wouldn't be overexcited in the hospital, but the moment she senses Ilya she drags Shane to his room. Ilya has always been her favourite, Shane supposed they had that in common.

She stops near his head and sits down and barks, confused as to why her favourite person is ignoring her.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, he's not waking up," Shane says gently. She whines and he picks her up and puts her in the small space at the foot of his bed, where she promptly curls up and falls asleep. He chides himself for wishing he could trade places with her.

"It's me," he whispers to Ilya, kissing him on the forehead. "Happy birthday."

He had cried properly this morning, allowed himself full blown breakdown with shaking and screaming and his head buried into his knees thinking it would mean he could get through the rest of the day without losing it, but a tear is already running down his cheek.

"I got you a gift. Made it actually. I've been working on it since November."

He takes the present from his bag and unwraps it neatly. It had been wrapped before playoffs started, so that he wouldn't have to worry about it when they were happening.

Inside is a leather-bound photo album. The nature of their relationship meant they hadn't taken photos together for a long time, but all their public appearances throughout the years had been professionally photographed, so he had had them printed out. There was probably some copyright infringement law he was breaking, but he figured they were photos of him, and nobody should ever see this given any luck, not that he seemed to have much, particularly in the privacy department.

Every game they had played against each other or together was logged in the album, and in the margins of the photos he had written, in Russian, how he had felt about Ilya in those moments. He had even put aside his embarrassment and called Svetlana to help with the writing and the translation.

Shane flicks through the pages, reading out the notes to him. The first time they had played each other, merely 17, and Shane had already known that Ilya was special somehow. That his impact on him would be as more than just a rival.

At the draft, when he had been heartbroken at being picked second, and had spent the whole day watching Ilya's every move, as curious as he was envious.

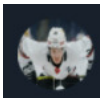
Their first game as teammates, when Shane had scored a hat-trick and they had defeated Montreal. Ilya taking off Shane's helmet and kissing him in front of the crowd as they cheered, and all Shane could think about, despite the crowd and the success and the fact that the team that had abandoned him was across the ice, was how much he loved Ilya, and how grateful he was that he loved him back.

When he finishes reading he is fully in tears again. Anya hops down from the bed and climbs into Shane's lap. She's a bit too big really, but the weight of her is comforting. At the end of the album he had left some blank pages for the playoff games that were yet to happen. It could have been so perfect.

He would be flying to Dallas tonight. He didn't want to go to Dallas ever again. The thought of playing on that ice again made him queasy, but he had made a decision to see the Centaurs through to the end, and he would follow through no matter what he felt.

Maybe he should ask to take Anya with him. She had helped Ilya through his struggles after all. Having someone around who didn't ask any questions and just wanted to be near you as you are was soothing.

Apparently gauging that he has been adequately consoled, Anya hops off Shane's lap and back onto Ilya's bed. He couldn't take her to Dallas, he's not sure he could get her to leave this room. Shane knew the feeling.



SAM | #getwellsoon81
@d3stielimpala

did y'all see the video they put out for Ilya's birthday of him talking about how playoffs are going to go? and he just spends the entire time talking about shane? ilya loverboy you are so precious to me

9:30 AM · Jun 15, 2023

9 Retweets **4** Quote Tweets **26** Likes

#1 HOLLANDER DEFENDER
@bellaluvshcky24

Ooooo look at me I'm Shane Hollander I'm the sexiest hockey player alive and also the best and I'm married to Ilya Rozanov and he turns every question into an opportunity to wax poetic about me. Whatever man.

11:08 AM · Jun 15, 2023

4 Retweets **1** Quote Tweet **233** Likes

Liam Jenkins
@l1amj3nkins

The birthday video the Centaur's posted for R's birthday just adds to how funny his asshole reputation is. 90% of his media presence is him talking about how much he loves his husband and simultaneously everyone he plays against talks about him like he's the devil incarnate

12:00 PM · Jun 15, 2023

76 Retweets **14** Quote Tweets **619** Likes

Maki :D
@springsteen2run

'Rozanov is so romantic he thinks Hollander is the GOAT' BECAUSE HE IS? IDGAF WHO YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH SHANE HOLLANDER SHOULD ALWAYS BE SPOKEN ABOUT AS THE GOAT. ROZANOV JUST SO HAPPENS TO BE THE GUY THAT BAGGED HIM

3:51 PM · Jun 15, 2023

13 Retweets **3** Quote Tweets **124** Likes

June 16th – American Airlines Center, Dallas

The Dallas crowd does not offer the same succour that Ottawa had. They want him to fail, and for all he could promise, tonight could be their lucky night. He had returned to his rigorous playoff routine since the last game, only seeing Ilya for a few hours and prioritising sleeping, eating, and training. While he felt stronger for it, his focus remained loyal to a hospital room 2000 kilometres away.

No one scores in the first period. Dallas' defence has reached new heights with the verve of their home crowd, and none of the Centaurs can find a way past. Fortunately, all the Comets' shots on target are easily prevented by Hayes, who is putting in a performance for the ages.

Boodram scores in the second period, a literal long-shot which had sailed past Dallas' defence and buried itself into the top of the net. The Comets respond with a deke that barely makes its way past Hayes. Then Shane is on the ice again. He has been subject less checking than last game, but whether that is because he's playing stronger or because the Comets' coach had told them to wind it in, he couldn't tell.

Barrett is alongside him making entertaining work of getting through a defender and passing the puck to Shane through his legs. If Barrett was Ilya, Shane would keep the puck for long enough to divert the defender's attention and then pass it back to him, at which point Ilya would sweep it into the right of the net, but just a little closer to the left than the goalie would expect it to go.

But Shane has tried that move with Barrett a few times now, and the goalie keeps stopping him. The pass back meant that Ilya would be further along the ice than a lot of people would attempt to score from, and when they tried goalies knew the range of the net they had to aim towards was reduced by the angle being shot from. Ilya had a way of putting a twist into the puck's trajectory that negated this issue, and while Barrett was good, he was no Ilya, so this was up to Shane.

He passes it through a defender's legs and catches it on the other side. He's now facing the left-hand corner of the rink, and the obvious move is to try and batter the puck into the right of the net from there. The accuracy required to shoot left and score was outrageous and the goalie knew it too, already preparing to jump right and stop him.

The shot skims past the left-hand pole of the net on the right-hand side. It's a stunning goal, and the section of Ottawa fans they have here cheer so loudly that the jeers from the rest of the crowd fade to nothing.

The period ends with them 1-2 up. During the break he reminds the team not to try and protect the score. They need to stay on the attack, if the game becomes defence vs defence they will always lose.

Back on the ice again, Shane tries his best not to remember what had happened the last time he had played a third period here. It didn't help that they were scoring the same direction.

Whenever Shane got near the goal the scent of blood assaulted him and his stick developed a mind of its own, which rendered him useless against this defence that could only be weakened by the ludicrous precision he was famous for.

Dallas scores again, he doesn't see how. The world is fading in and out and his mouth tastes like sweet metal. In a bid to stop a goal from Haas, a Comets defender ends up moving the net which results in Shane taking a face-off. As they are approaching the end of the game this will be the last major chance to score, so if he can turn this into a goal it's all over.

He's against Mityaev, the Comets' first line centre who was drafted a year after himself and Ilya. Shane had never interacted with him outside of games, but Ilya knew him from junior matches in Russia and had never spoken highly of him.

"Mityaev isn't a problem. A strong back hand, maybe. But he is not fast enough to do anything interesting with it. You'll have no problem getting past him."

Shane positions himself on the face-off spot, metres from where Ilya had been injured. Mityaev joins him. Shane had thought him a brunet from the videos he had watched of him playing, but he is more of a dirty blond up close.

He murmurs something to him in Russian.

"What?"

"Do you miss him?" Mityaev repeats with a vicious smile. *"Ilya was always the better of the two of you at face-offs."*

The puck has dropped before Shane can recognise that he is trying to get into his head. He loses and Mityaev scores. By the time the horn sounds Shane has barely moved from the spot. His team are uniformed with a look of concern that unleashes a rush of distress through him as he returns to the bench.

The puck had dropped, and he had done nothing. He had made a vague attempt to take it off Mityaev, but one it was gone he had just stood there. Coach Wiebe approaches him, and he tries to talk but he can't breathe. He is distantly aware of being lead away from the rink into an unfamiliar room, but all he knows is blood, pouring endlessly and filling up his vision and his lungs.

"I need to get back," he sobs, trying to fight off who he can only assume is still Coach Wiebe. "Something's gone wrong, I can feel it. I shouldn't have come here, I've let you all down, I've let him down, I can't- I can't-"

The figures swap, and a familiar scent overpowers the blood. Woodland and printer paper and cologne that went out of fashion decades ago.

"Dad?"

"It's me," David replies, gently pushing Shane to sit down onto a chair and crouching in front of him. "You're alright. I need you to breathe with me, okay? I'm gonna count to three."

Minutes pass and all Shane does is try to breathe. A professional athlete, a should be guaranteed hall-of-famer reduced to breathing exercises because he couldn't even try to win a face-off. He thinks of all the fans in Ottawa, of Yuna who would certainly be watching. He had let them all down. How could he return to Ottawa now? How could he face his teammates?

"Ilya's alright. I called the hospital and he's been fine all day. You have nothing to worry about."

"I have nothing to worry about?" Shane exclaims, the power of his outburst dampened by the fact that he's sniffling through tears. "I've failed my entire team because I couldn't get my fucking head in the game because my fucking husband might be about to die! I have everything to worry about!"

There's nothing to say back to any of that, because while he be in the middle of a breakdown, he's not wrong.

"Let's get you home, okay? All your stuff is here, so you can get changed without speaking to anyone. I've got tickets for a flight back to Ottawa in three hours."

"I need to speak to the team."

"Wiebe will deal with it, you're in no place to speak to anyone right now."

David leaves, and Shane surveys the room. Based on the rows of treadmills and spin bikes and weight racks, he reckons he's in the Comets' gym. His belongings have been piled neatly beside a wall of every size, shape, and colour of resistance band you could imagine.

He changes out of his hockey gear, taking advantage of the gym showers that no one else is using. If he never sets foot in Dallas again it will be too soon.

His Dad escorts him out of the building, claiming to have found a back exit that would allow him to avoid running into fans, or worse, reporters.

However, the Dallas stadium is a rabbit's warren of tunnels and dead ends, and the map that David has pulled up on his phone doesn't seem to accommodate for the extension they added a few years ago.

"It's here, I think," David says, pointing to the right, and Shane turns and walks through the door.

He should have known it wasn't the way out. As he had approached it the sound coming from the other side was too loud to think it led to a back exit. But if quick-thinking had been on his side today, he wouldn't have to have worried about a back exit in the first place, so he ends up face to face with a hundred reporters.

If they were loud before, they are roaring now.

"Shane, what happened during the face-off today?"

“Mr Hollander, do you think you can still win the Cup?”

“Shane, what can you tell us about Ilya Rozanov’s condition?”

“Hollander, do you think you made the right choice in coming back to play after your husband’s accident?”

The urge to flee is overwhelming, and his father is trying to drag him away. He is almost able to ignore them all, but then he hears it.

“Do you believe the way Rozanov’s injury has impacted your playing calls for a ban on relationships between teammates?”

The rest of the press falls silent. Somehow Shane has reacted in a way that signals to them he is going to respond. Even David stops tugging at him.

It’s the kind of question that Ilya would usually answer for him. He’d say something funny, or clever, or plain rude, and that would become the story.

But Ilya is in a hospital bed being kept alive by machines. Shane is alone in front of a crowd, and there’s no humour, or intelligence, or insult that he can come up with.

“It wouldn’t make a difference,” he says. “I would love him anyway.”

Cameras begin snapping pictures faster, and David pulls him away. That quote is going to be everywhere within the hour. He can’t predict its fallout the way Yuna could, but what was he to do? It was the honest answer.

“I’m sorry,” he says to his Dad, as they finally find the exit and get into his car.

“No,” David says. “Don’t be, it was a good answer.”

SAM | #getwellsoon81
@d3stielimpala
hollander having a panic attack during the face-off where rozanov was injured... someone needs to get this guy to a sports psychologist we might be about to lose a GOAT because somebody's grandpa didn't know how to take it on the chin
10:14 PM · Jun 16, 2023
1 Retweet 2 Quote Tweets 70 Likes
#2 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 16, 2023
Somebody translated what Mityaev said to Hollander before the face-off and I think we probably have to kill him
1
5
ria @forceagaykens · Jun 16, 2023
link?
1
3
#2 HOLLANDER DEFEN... @bellaluvshck... · Jun 16, 2023
https://youtu.be/dQw4w9WgXcQ?si=wTf467zqYK-p_ZOY
1
6
ria @forceagaykens · Jun 16, 2023
holy shit
2

June 17th – Civic Hospital, Ottawa

Shane had finished reading *A Wrinkle in Time.* It had been a happy ending, but he had cried anyway.

"I hope you liked it," he says to Ilya, kissing him on the forehead.

"I thought you'd be awake by now," he adds quietly. "The doctors expected a week, it's been nine days."

He paces around the room, fixing an untucked corner of Ilya's bedsheets. "It's the last game tomorrow. I had hoped you would be well enough to talk so that I could speak to you before it. I think that's all that will help me now. They're all looking to me for something, and I don't have it."

Shane catches himself in the mirror, the sun captures their wedding rings on his necklace and beams a ray of light around the room before disappearing behind a cloud.

“I could have lived quietly, you know. I could’ve spent my days at Montreal. Won a few more Cups, maybe another Olympic medal. Could’ve retired when my body gave up and by the time anyone figured out what was wrong with me, I wouldn’t be worth the ink they’d hate me with. I could have made everyone happy.

“But you show up and you make me do the impossible, and now I have to do it again. But this time I’m alone. I always thought I was good at that, but I’ve never been without you since we met. Not really.

“You just can’t help yourself. I know you knew how mad he was getting, but you didn’t care. You keep pushing until the other guy breaks, you never know when to stop!”

Shane didn’t know he was angry at Ilya. He had been so consumed by dread he hadn’t noticed it, but now it’s pouring from him, and the worst part is that it feels fantastic.

“You’ve left me! You’ve left me to do this without you because you always, *always*, have to get the last word in! It’s never enough to win, you have to *beat* them and I’m the one paying for it! And you go on camera, and you tell everyone I’m the best, and I have nothing to show for it because all I’m thinking about is how I might never talk to you again! You might die Ilya!

“God, if you had kept your fucking mouth shut, we wouldn’t have any of this!”

A machine starts beeping.

Doctors and nurses descend upon the room like vultures.

“What’s happening? What’s going on?”

“Mr Hollander, will you please step out of the way.”

“Somebody tell me what’s happening!”

“We’re taking him to surgery, he’s having another haemorrhage.”

Ilya is wheeled out of the room, and while his heart longs to follow, all his body can do is slide down the wall and put his head in his hands.

We wouldn’t have any of this.

If Ilya knew how to keep his mouth shut, they wouldn’t have anything. He had made the first move, he had exchanged their numbers, he had called him ‘Shane’, he had said ‘I love you’, he had moved to Ottawa. There was not a day that went by that Shane wasn’t grateful that Ilya couldn’t help himself, particularly that he couldn’t help himself when it came to him. Ilya was Shane’s every extreme, all the pillars of his life were built by him in some way, and the last words Shane said to him might be accusing him of things he didn’t really believe because anger was a cheap cure for loneliness.

He feels like he did in Dallas again. He can't breathe and the rest of his senses are numb, his brain unable to cope with his panic and the outside world at the same time.

Yuna appears, sitting by him and wrapping him in her arms unquestioningly, rocking him back and forth as he bawls.

"I did this to him! He was fine but I got so angry and then something went wrong. I did this to him!"

She says nothing, just keeps rocking him until his body runs out of the energy to panic.

"You didn't do this to him, honey. You can't make someone have a brain haemorrhage by talking to them. I promise."

"Mr Hollander?"

"I'm his Mom," Yuna says, standing up and saving him from having to interact with someone in his state. "What's the news?"

"He'll be okay, it was-"

Shane stops paying attention.

He'll be okay.

He gathers the strength to stand and wipes away his tears. "When will he be back?" he asks the nurse, trying to keep the shake out of his voice.

"Roughly two hours. Let me know if you need anything."

The nurse leaves and Yuna engulfs Shane, he feels better though so he moves to stop the hug until he notices that she's crying.

"Mom? What's wrong?"

She steps back and wipes her own tears.

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm sorry. I shouldn't be crying in front of you."

It hits Shane, perhaps stupidly, that he isn't the only one hurting. Ilya was a second son to Yuna, between the stress of that and trying to support him, he feels ashamed for not realising how hard this was on her too.

"No, you should. I want you too I- I'm glad I'm not the only one losing it."

"Of course not. You know Ilya is family to your father and I. And you're not losing it, there's no appropriate reaction to a partner being this ill, especially when you're this young. This is one of the hardest things you'll ever do, and your life has already been so difficult."

Her sobs intensify suddenly, and not knowing any other way to help Shane wraps her back into a hug again.

“I hate watching you go through this,” she says through tears. “I hate seeing you in so much pain and knowing there is nothing I can do to stop it. These past few years have been so terrible to you, and it makes me feel so helpless.”

“I couldn’t do this without you. Not just this,” he says, gesturing around the hospital room “but my whole career. My whole life. You’ve always been my biggest fan, and I know I can rely on you for anything. I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”

She cries silently into his shoulder, and he relaxes as the lulls between her sniffs get longer.

“Hey, do you remember that time when I was like, 8, and I scored 12 times against that junior team in one period, and it was upsetting the other kids so coach didn’t play me for the rest of the game, and you told him that if it was bothering them so much they should spend less time crying and more time practicing?”

Yuna gasps and puts her hand over her mouth. “Oh my God, I forgot about that. Wow, that’s so terrible. I can’t believe how much of a tiger mom I used to be.”

“Used to be?”

“Come on I’m not that bad anymore. Besides, you’ve got Ilya now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I never punched anyone for you. Not saying I wouldn’t, but I’ve restrained myself thus far.”

“That’s during games though, it’s basically in the rules that he has to.”

“Hmm. And where in the rules is it that in the interview afterwards he has to say that he ‘would have punched him harder but I wanted him to remember why it was happening,’” Yuna quotes, doing a surprisingly accurate (but not accurate enough that it’s wasn't slightly embarrassing) impression of Ilya.

“You have an Ilya impression?”

“Your father’s is worse.”

Shane tries not to think about the implications of that answer. He moves them to sit on the chairs and she rests his head on his shoulder as they talk about their favourite memories from Shane’s childhood, and some recent ones with Ilya. The time Ilya had stayed with Shane at his parents’ house and he and David got into an unspoken drinking contest that had them belting showtunes by the end of the night. (Ilya swears to this day that he doesn’t know any of the lyrics to *Les Misérables* - a video of his rendition of *I Dreamed A Dream* on Shane’s phone would say otherwise). The time when Shane was 14 and a girl came up to him at the ice rink to tell him how talented she thought he was, and instead of recognising the obvious

flirtation, he corrected her form and skated away. The time Ilya had been asked in an interview what his favourite meal was, and he had answered “Mrs Hollander’s chicken parmesan” so politely there were rumours of various sincerity for months that he had hired a body double to do publicity for him.

In the end they are both crying from laughter which could have continued forever if they weren’t interrupted by a familiar voice calling Shane’s name.

Coach Wiebe is standing in the doorway.

“Can I come in?”

Shane nods, even though there’s very little he would like less than to have a conversation with Wiebe right now, but he knew it would have to happen eventually. Yuna squeezes his shoulder and leaves and Wiebe takes her seat.

“I’m sorry about yesterday,” Shane starts.

“You’re doing the impossible, Shane. No one with half a heart blames you.”

“It was unprofessional, and I’m sorry. I don’t- you see I’m-” He sighs. “I’m not going to play tomorrow.”

“Why’s that?”

Shane scoffs, but Wiebe is serious.

“Because I can’t. I thought that maybe I could put it all behind me when I played and help us win before it was down to the wire, but I couldn’t, and I didn’t. And now we only have one game left, and all I’m going to do is disappoint everyone.”

“You’ve never stopped thinking, have you?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’ve coached a lot of athletes. By the time they’re at this level they don’t have to think anymore. They get on the ice and their body takes over. That works for a bit, but then they’ll hit a rough patch, and they’ll have to remember how to think and play at the same time. They’ll get through it, and they’ll play the best hockey of their lives for a while. But then they’ll start playing on autopilot again, and the cycle repeats. Occasionally, you get a Rozanov. Somebody who has basically surpassed the need to think about what he is doing when he is playing. Someone so in tune with the game that thinking would only slow them down.

“You’ve never stopped thinking. You step on the ice and your brain is going a thousand kilometres an hour. It knows where you are, it knows where the puck is, it knows where the other 11 guys are and what they’re doing, and how to beat every one of them, and the whole time your body is operating at the intensity of a fighter pilot. That kind of process would have burned out anyone else years ago, but you’re not anyone else. You’re special. I know it,

Rozanov knows it, the fans know it. People who aren't the fans know it, and it makes them very angry.

"To you, thinking is playing. You think it and that's what makes it happen. But you can't think right now. If you turn your brain on all you'll think about is him. So don't turn your brain on. You've studied these guys ad nauseam, you've played and won a thousand times. Your body knows what to do. So leave your thoughts here with him and play like you're a kid again and you don't know the rules. It's a game. Games are supposed to be fun."

"But what if we lose?"

"The Centaurs know how to lose better than anyone, I'm more scared of what happens if we win."

"But my reaction during the face-off was-"

"Human. It was human. Everyone knows what Mityaev said, there's a viral video with a translation. Not one of your teammates or your fans are thinking that you are weak instead of that he is an asshole."

"What do I do though? If it happens again?"

"You're going to take a deep breath and stop thinking."

"And if that doesn't work?"

"Then you aren't not thinking hard enough."

It all seems a bit ridiculous, but he looks at Ilya and thinks about what he would say if he woke up tomorrow while the game was on and Shane was with him instead of out there. He thinks about how he would feel if he was Ilya, and woke up to find out they had lost and Ilya had been too scared of failing to try, or worse, they had won and he had been too scared of leaving him to be there.

"Fine. But I shouldn't be Captain."

"No can do."

"Why not? I've only let them down."

"You're not a young man anymore. Half of these guys spent their childhood's saying, 'I want to be like Shane Hollander when I grow up.' Their game goes off when yours goes off, but if you play well, they'll play well. You're a leader in this team whether you're wearing the 'C' or not, so you might as well wear it. Besides, if anyone deserves to lift the trophy first when we win this thing it's you."

"It's Ilya."

"He'd want it to be you."

Silence falls again, but its comfortable this time.

“Thank you.”

“The whole world is rooting for you, son. You and him. What you said about him at your impromptu press conference is all anyone can talk about. You’ll never be alone. Never.”

He pats Shane on the shoulder and walks out the door. Shane stares at Ilya, paralysed by love and doubt. He decides to go after Wiebe, he needs to make sure he's sure. Needs to tell him that while he promises to play with all he has left, he's not sure it's enough.

But he seems to have disappeared into the labyrinth of the hospital. Shane is too familiar with these walls by now, but he can’t find him anywhere that would make sense. He gives up and walks back return to Ilya, despite judging by hospital traffic that it’s 7 or 8pm now, and he should be leaving soon.

He walks past a waiting room where he hears the familiar sound of a hockey horn blowing.

“Another incredible game from Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. A hat-trick each and another goal from Zane Boodram just to top it off. How lucky we are to be hockey fans at the same time that these incredible players are giving world class performances.”

He peers around the corner to see a boy, maybe 7 years old, alone and watching hockey on what he presumes must be a parent’s phone.

The boy looks up at him and his jaw drops. Shane turns around to see what’s going on.

Oh, right.

“Shane Hollander?”

“Umm, yeah. Hi.”

He hasn’t interacted with a fan in a long time, not that it comes particularly naturally to him when he is doing it regularly.

“I’m watching videos of you play!”

“I heard,” Shane laughs, unsure if he’s supposed to approach or not.

“You’re so cool. My big sister has your jersey. You’re her favourite player.”

“Well, tell her I said, ‘thank you for the support’”.

“Can I take a picture with you? It will make her so jealous.”

“Sure,” Shane replies, taking a seat next to the boy. He takes a selfie expertly even though the photo is nearly triple the size of his hands.

“You’re not my favourite though,” the boy adds once he’s finished, and Shane grins at the childish bluntness of it all.

“Oh yeah? Who’s your favourite?”

“Ilya Rozanov.”

“Wanna know a secret?” Shane whispers.

The boy stares at him wide-eyed, Shane thinks he would believe him if he told him he hung the moon.

“Ilya’s my favourite player too.”

“I’m sad that he’s injured,” he responds, suddenly glum. “My sister says he might not play again. Is that true?”

Shane winces, this is the first person he’s talked to who had been so honest about the future.

“He was injured pretty badly, yeah. But you’ve seen Ilya play, he’s very strong.”

“He is. So that means he’ll get better?”

“Yeah, he’s going to get better.” Shane realises that he truly believes it now. He understands that his definition of ‘better’ is likely a lower bar than whatever the boy is imagining. He wants him to be Ilya Rozanov, cutthroat centre or indomitable winger and star captain of the Centaurs, Shane just wants to hear his voice. Maybe they can both get want they want. He understands now that he has to believe it for as long as he can if he wants to get through this.

“Are you here to visit Rozanov? I’m here because my mum has cancer.”

Shane’s heart sinks, and he gets a gloomy understanding of how difficult it must be to interact with him these days. What can you say to that that means anything?

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay. The doctor thinks she might get better. She would like to meet you one day; she thinks you’re very handsome.”

“Jacob what are you do- Holy shit you’re Shane Hollander. I mean, uh, gosh darnit you’re Shane Hollander.”

A burly man with a beard stands where Shane was moments ago, looking more starstruck than his son.

“I know you swear, Dad. It’s not a secret,” Jacob pipes up.

Shane stands and offers out a hand to shake. He realises it’s probably not the best look to be seen hanging out alone with stranger’s children in hospitals.

“Sorry, I’m here visiting someone, and your son called me over-”

“I’ll bet he did,” he replies, shaking his hand. “I’m Joe, nice to meet you.”

“Shane.”

“We know who you are,” he chuckles. “If my wife had it her way you two would be married.”

Shane isn’t quite sure how he’s supposed to respond to that.

“I hope he wasn’t bothering you,” Joe says, gesturing to Jacob.

“Definitely not, we were just talking about hockey. We have the same favourite player, don’t we?”

Joe’s face falls and his eyes fix on Shane’s necklace. “I’m so sorry about what happened. The way you’ve been playing despite it all, man I don’t know. My wife’s in hospital and I can barely move some days, I don’t know how you’re doing it.”

Shane swallows down the tears. “Thank you, that means a lot.”

Joe pats him on the arm. “Alright kid, we’ve gotta get going,” he says to Jacob, helping him put his jacket on. “Say goodbye to Mr Hollander.”

“Goodbye Mr Hollander!” Jacob shouts.

“You play like God’s watching out there tomorrow, alright son?" he says to Shane. "Show those Yankee bastards what us Canadians are made of.”

“Yes, sir,” Shane agrees as an unfamiliar daring washes over him. “What’s your wife’s name?”

“Diane.”

“Tell her the first goal I score tomorrow is for her.”

Joe beams. “I will.”

When Shane returns to the hospital room Ilya has arrived back and someone has dragged his chair into place already. He pushes it out the way and stands as he kisses him on the forehead. "I have to go home," he explains to him quietly. "I've got a big game tomorrow and people are counting on me, so I'm going to rest. While I'm gone you're going to do the same, because people are counting on you too. Me, my mom, our team, little boys called Jacob. Then you're going to wake up, because tomorrow we are going to win the Stanley Cup, and I don't think you'll want to miss it."

June 18th – Canadian Tire Centre, Ottawa

The locker-room is beyond tense. A few of the more laid-back guys are trying to joke around, but even they are half-hearted in it. The next 2 hours is going to be a fight like none other. Shane squeezes his necklace three times, puts on his jersey, and stands in the middle of the room as it quietens.

“This final hasn’t gone how any of us have wanted it to go. I’ve been playing for over a decade, and this has been the hardest part of my career so far, and I’m sure many of you would say the same. But we’re all still here for a reason. We’re here because when you were a kid you decided that this was what your life was going to be about. You practiced hard, you played harder, and every night you dreamt of the day you’d get to lift that trophy into the air. You hoped by that point you’d be wiser, or better in some way that would make it easy. But you know now that it’s never easy. Even when Ilya was here, we were fighting tooth and nail for months. This is what that was for, to be able to go out and fight for the chance to lift that trophy. We’ve come so far, and there’s nothing left to lose. So put it all out there tonight and let’s fucking destroy them.”

“Let’s fucking kill them!” Boodram yells.

“I wanna drink Comet tears out of that fucking Cup!” Haas adds, astonishingly Ilya-like.

The whole team is on their feet, shouting Shane’s name and making threats of various degrees of severity toward the people of Texas. An old resolve settles in Shane, and he hears Ilya’s voice in his head. *“For Shane, he loves hockey and it loves him too. That’s what makes him so special.”* Tonight hockey needed to absolutely adore him.

By the seventh minute of the second period Shane has scored a hat-trick.

His first had been a minute into the first period. He had broken away from the middle with such speed that the defenders weren’t hounding him yet, and he had tried his luck with a shot from far out. It had bounced off the goalie’s kneepads and spun away, at which point he hit it midair and slammed it into the back of the net. He had found the nearest camera and shouted, “That was for you Diane!” while making a heart with his hands.

The second had been at the 17th minute. He had been pushed from the centre line by the left defenseman and was being hunted down by the righthand one. If he was allowing himself to think, he might have attempted a deke and an early shot, but he kept the puck and waited for it to feel right.

He finds himself trapped between both defensemen and the goalie. The goalie falls to his knees trying to block him, meaning Shane has to jump over his kneepads and he loses the puck briefly. He lands and reaches for control of it again, swinging it 270 degrees around him and tidying it back into the net.

The third was his favourite. The crowd was already rabid off of the first two goals, and it was making the Comets reckless and the Centaurs hungry for blood. Shane had ended up in the kind of situation he tried to avoid, in possession of the puck surrounded by a pentagon of the Dallas goalie, both their defensemen, and their wingers (their centre was busy checking Haas into the wall). He judges the winger to his left to be the easiest to get past to find some space but is tripped up by a defenseman. He has his eye on the puck though, and as he slides across

the ground on his stomach, he hooks it around to his left with has much strength as he has at that angle, and it loops around his body and into the net.

Shane stays lying on the ground while his team celebrates around him. It's 3-1 to the Centaurs and he is king of the world. Not thinking was the best advice he had ever been given. He had never felt so free, he would take possession of the puck and as if by magic it would end up in the net because he was just that good. He spots Yuna in the stands as he gets up off the ice and she's hugging everyone around her like they've already won the Cup.

The Comets score again by the end of the second period, but the Centaurs are undeterred.

They race out onto the ice again with the vigour of a thousand suns. There's a skirmish that Shane manages to talk up from a penalty for Ottawa alone to a coincidental minor penalty. He has a few more shots on target that are saved, but even just the knowledge that he's close to another goal has everyone playing for their lives.

Shane is off the ice as the game comes to a close, there's nothing he can do now,

Dallas scores with 10 seconds to go. It's a garbage goal. There was a struggle that had Hayes, both Centaur defenders and all three forwards for the Comets trying to push the puck in the direction they deemed fit, and the Comets' centre tripped over the puck and slipped it into the net as much to his surprise as anyone else's. The quality of the goal changes nothing, they now have a tie.

This means another 20-minute period after a break with sudden death rules. Whoever scores first wins.

Coach Wiebe's face is taut when they enter the locker-room, they gather around him like sentinels.

"I'm not going to make this long, boys. Spend this break hydrating, listening to music, calling your mother, whatever you need. When you go out there your only job is to get everyone out of Hollander's way and let him do what he does best."

A presence hangs in the room, Shane realises he's not the only one staring at Ilya's locker space. If he was a vibrant speaker when it came to pre-match speeches, he was evangelical when it came to sudden-death periods. The team disperses to do what they need to do, Shane stays looking at Ilya's locker. He doesn't know the code, but he has a suspicion.

1005

The locker clicks open and Shane smiles sadly. Ilya Rozanov, renowned playboy and ladies' man, making his locker code his husband's birthday like the romantic he truly was.

It's full of the usual stuff, spare clothes, sticks, tape, and exactly what Shane was looking for, a helmet.

Shane takes it out and taps his head against it like he would if Ilya was wearing it. If he closes his eyes, he can imagine he is. He stands by the door and Haas, having watched his

whole routine, comes over and head taps Shane and then Ilya's helmet, before heading back to the ice. Then they're all doing it. Some tap Shane first then Ilya, others vice versa. Some kiss Ilya's helmet or whisper a prayer to it. They all look Shane straight in the eye and tell him they'll give him everything they have, or that he's got this.

Ultimately Shane is left alone with it. He kisses the visor and touches their wedding rings. He skates out to take his position.

He is against Mityaev again, but the fire roaring in his skull prevents him from hearing anything he might try to say. There were two things in life Shane was made for, one of them was Ilya, and the other was this.

He spares a look to the bench to remind him who he is fighting for and he sees Ilya in the tunnel. Too far back to be recognisable to anyone but him, but Shane swears he's looking right at him and smiling. It's probably not a good sign that he's hallucinating him, but he's not using his brain tonight, so his body's only knowledge of how to react to Ilya is to put on a show.

The puck drops, Shane wins. He pushes past the forwards and is descended upon by the defensemen, with the rest of his team working to drive the forwards out of his way. It means they are too distracted for him to pass to, so he shoves the puck out of reach himself and both defensemen, and while they are busy turning around, he pushes forward. He regains full control, dribbling the puck back and forth, wondering what he's going to do next.

He flicks the puck over the goalie's head and lands it into the top of the net, dead centre. A textbook breakaway goal.

He's done it.

He's won the Stanley Cup.

The crowd thunders with delight. Horse plushies and tulips are being thrown onto the ice. He rushes across to the bench where his teammates are pouring onto the ice to engulf him and he cries from joy.

When they let him go to hug each other and their families and boast to the camera, he pulls his necklace out from underneath his layers and kisses it, holding it to the light. *This was all for you.*

The cheering continues, but near him the crowd grows strangely quiet, and a whisper spreads through it. He searches for the source of the disturbance of celebration, and his heart leaps to his throat.

Ilya is standing by the bench, now emptied of the rest of the team.

He's wearing Shane's joggers and hoodie that he had been keeping as spare clothes at the hospital, and his hospital wristbands peek past the sleeves. If it wasn't for the reaction of the crowd Shane would swear that it was still a hallucination, but Ilya is awake. He's awake, and he's *here.*

Shane sprints across, stopping at the wall to prevent himself from throwing himself at him. Every urge in his body says to fling his arms around him and hold him so tight they could never be separated again, but he doesn't know what state his body is in right now and whether it can handle a hockey player in full kit launching at it, although it has somehow managed the 20-kilometre journey from the hospital.

A few security guards have grasped the situation and are now pushing back a crowd that is trying to get closer to Ilya.

Shanes takes Ilya's hands in his, turning them palm up and down again.

"It's really you?"

Ilya only nods and raises Shane's hands to cradle his face. Shane strokes his cheek, finally hopping over the wall and stroking the other through his hair, careful to avoid his stitches.

Ilya closes his eyes and smiles into the touch, Shane can't resist anymore and wraps him into his arms.

"It's really you," he breathes into his neck. "Oh my God, it's really you."

"Were you expecting someone else?" Ilya replies nervously, and Shane starts crying all over again at the sound of his voice.

Shane pulls back his head, so they are face to face, but allows no daylight between their bodies.

"How did you get here?"

"Taxi. A nice man called one for me, said he knew you?"

"The hospital let you go?"

"Maybe not."

"Ilya!"

"I tried to ask. But everyone was bothering me and David was watching the hockey so I knew you were here but somebody told him to turn it off so I couldn't see you anymore. I thought you might need me, so I waited for them to leave and I came."

"I did," Shane sobs, "I did need you."

"We won?" Ilya queries.

"We did."

"The whole thing?"

"The whole thing."

Ilya grins and reaches for Shane's helmet, trying to pull it off but not quite having the strength to, so Shane does it instead. "We're champions."

"We are."

Ilya kisses him. The crowd, which had been reduced to a strange murmuring as everyone tried to figure out what was going on, explodes again.

Shane searches for a security guard he trusts and spots Gus, a gruff older gentleman who had been working security for the Centaurs since long before Shane was born. A lot of the team were slightly afraid of him, including Coach Wiebe, but Shane enjoyed his frankness. "Can you please call Civic hospital and tell them they have a runaway patient at the Canadian Tire Centre about to receive the Stanley Cup?"

Gus nods, and Shane notices with a start that he's grinning. "I've never won before!" he bursts.

Shanes laughs, holding on to Ilya with one hand around his waist with his head resting on Shane's shoulder.

"Same time next year?" he replies.

"I'd rather a little earlier if I'm honest, not sure my heart could take this again" Gus croaks, shuffling off into the stands to make the call.

Most of the team have now come off the ice to see what is happening and have replaced the security guards in forming a tight barrier around him and Ilya.

Questions flood in both for Ilya and himself. Ilya is too disoriented to answer, and Shane is too overwhelmed. He uses his best 'this is your captain speaking' voice to cut through the noise.

"He escaped the hospital to come watch. I'm taking him to the rehab room to get checked."

"I didn't escape, I left when no one was looking. And you told Gus you'd give me the Cup," Ilya complains.

"After I know you're not about to die on me," Shane says sternly. While he is elated at Ilya being awake, for all Shane knows this he could collapse again any minute. He wants this moment with him, he wants him to accept the Cup and kiss him holding it with everyone watching and cheering, but not until he knows that he's okay. "Keep celebrating," he tells the team, "we'll be back for the Cup."

Shane scoops Ilya up off the floor and carries him through to the rehab room, where he lays him down on a physiotherapy table. He drags a weights bench across the room to sit on and kisses Ilya's knuckles. There was so much Shane had planned to say when he woke up, but it has all been shocked out of him.

"I'm sorry," Ilya says, breaking the silence.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I left you alone. And even though I didn’t mean to, I can be sorry.”

“Thank you.”

“Ya lyublyu tyebya.”

“I love you too.”

Paramedics rush in alongside Coach Wiebe and Yuna. They check his vitals amid heated debate as to whether or not it’s appropriate for Ilya to stay out of the hospital for a little longer to accept the trophy. Of everyone Ilya is the most pro not-going-back, citing the fact that the hospital is boring and miserable which Shane finds entertaining given that he was unconscious for most of his time in it. Eventually, Ilya signs a temporary outpatient form and is allowed to stay here and accept the Cup under the strict conditions of returning immediately after the ceremony is over.

The paramedics leave and Coach Wiebe follows soon after to find a rug and chair to put on the ice for Ilya, who may have won the staying out of hospital battle, but had lost the ‘putting his skates on’ war. He is sitting up on the bed now, swinging his legs back and forth like a kid.

“I thought you should have this,” Yuna says, handing Ilya his hockey jersey and kissing him on the temple.

“Thank you,” Ilya smiles, and Yuna leaves with the fond look she seems to reserve for Ilya.

“I should go get my old one, then,” Shane states, making no move to leave.

“Why?”

“We can’t both be captain,” Shane says, gesturing to the ‘C’ embroidered on both of their shirts.

“Who cares,” Ilya replies. “We are the best in the world, we can do what we want.”

Shane helps Ilya swaps his hoodie for the jersey, and just the sight of it makes him even happier.

“Ready to go, Captain?”

“Not yet,” Ilya says, pulling Shane closer to him. Shane leans in for a kiss but Ilya stops him, instead looping a finger around his necklace. “Can I have this back?”

“Right, of course.”

Shane fiddles with the necklace clasp and slides off the rings. He offers Ilya’s out to him, expecting him to thread it back onto his mother’s necklace but instead Ilya has his hand outstretched and is waggling his ring finger at him.

Shane laughs, sliding it on and kissing him. He goes to put his own ring on, but Ilya nicks it from him and takes Shane's hand and slides it on.

"I love you," Ilya says with a determined stare as tears roll down his face. "I love you more than anything."

"Ya tozhe tyebya lyublyu," Shane replies. *"Ya lyublyu tyebya fsyem syertsem."*

Ilya stands up to kiss him, knocking Shane back with the force of it. He has his hands on his neck then in his hair then on his back then round his waist then sliding up his chest and on his face. There was so much they needed to say to each other, but this was enough for now.

Shane has to break the kiss, because he can tell that despite how hard he fought to be here, Ilya might choose to forgo the presentation entirely given the option to stay here and make-out.

"We have to go."

"They'll wait for us."

"They will, but I would like our Cup now."

"Our Cup?"

"Who else's?"

Shane picks him up again, which Ilya only mildly protests. They walk out into the stadium to a round of applause and somehow even more flowers are thrown onto the ice. Ilya catches one and offers it to Shane who takes it between his teeth. They look like something out of a rom-com, and Shane couldn't be more thrilled about it.

Their team gathers around them and Shane spots the chair that has been placed for Ilya. He chooses to keep carrying him, he never wants to let go.

The Conn Smythe trophy will be presented first, the MVP award for the playoffs which Shane has won once already. It is voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, and Shane reckons it will go to Hayes, or maybe one of the defenders from Dallas. If it was up to Shane it would go to Ilya, but many would say he was biased on that front.

"There are many players that have earned this award during these playoffs," the Commissioner says, "and our votes reflected that. It was an incredibly close call, but it has gone to a deserving champion. To face what he has faced and play as he has despite it some would say is a miracle, but us fans know it is no act of God and instead the status quo for this great man, a living legend and an inspiration to us all. Therefore it is with great honour I announce that the winner of the Conn Smythe trophy is, for the second time, Shane Hollander."

Ilya grabs the back of his head to pull Shane down to kiss him. "You should probably put me down now," he whispers, taking the tulip from his mouth. With the help of Boodram he places Ilya in his chair and gives him another kiss on the forehead.

Shane skates over and shakes hands with the Commissioner, picking the trophy up and posing for a photo with him. He is then supposed to do a lap of honour with it around the rink, but he goes back to Ilya with it, kissing him again and placing it in his lap, because he's Shane Hollander and he can do whatever he likes.

Ilya kisses back but puts the trophy back in his hands.

"Go for a lap with it."

"But-"

"I will be here when you get back. You will be gone 20 seconds. Take it."

Shane raises it above his head and spins around. There are cameras in his face, but he finds them easier to handle when it's his joy they're zooming in on. The competitive part of him that never rests decides to see how fast they all are on skates. He shoots off taking a convoluted route around the rink where he stops quickly to hold up the trophy up to the crowd so that by the time the cameras are focussed on him he is gone again.

He returns to Ilya and drops another kiss to his head as they wait for the Stanley Cup presentation.

It takes two people to bring it out and place it on the pedestal. Shane has held it three times already, but it still takes his breath away.

"The Stanley Cup is the most iconic trophy in sport, and the hardest to win," the Commissioner says. "This is demonstrated by the fact that one of these teams hasn't won it in 20 years, and the other has never won it since its founding in 1992. However, hockey loves an underdog, especially when they are joined by two of the sport's greatest players. So, without further ado, could Shane Hollander please come up again, and receive this wonderful trophy for the fourth time."

Shane Hollander will, but not alone. While he was Captain tonight it was Ilya that got them here. He hoists Ilya out of his chair again, causing another uproar in the crowd, and signals to the men who brought out the Cup to pick it back up again. They do so, albeit with some confusion, and Shane sits Ilya on the pedestal in its stead.

The Commissioner smiles, and hands the Cup to them both, and Shane takes as much of the weight of it as he can. They raise it to the sky and bring it down for Ilya to kiss it. Shane kisses it again on the same spot and Ilya laughs. They repeat that a few times just because they can until Shane decides he's tired of the middleman and lowers the Cup so that he can kiss Ilya's lips, one arm wrapped around the Cup and the other clutching onto him.

The photo at the top of every article would show them smiling into the kiss, both their hands on the Cup framing them into a heart shape, wedding rings shining.

Liam Jenkins
@l1amj3nkins
Why did bro look shocked about the Conn Smythe trophy? Do you know what you just did?
10:35 PM · Jun 18, 2023
35 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 127 Likes
WE ARE THE CHAMPIONSSSS
@centaurbynature
Shane picking Ilya up like he weighs nothing. Yeah... okay...
10:48 PM · Jun 18, 2023
51 Retweets 20 Quote Tweets 284 Likes
#2 HOLLANDER DEFENDER
@bellaluvshcky24
2 time Conn Smythe winner and 4 time Stanley Cup winner, absolutely incredible stuff. Never have I been so happy for someone I don't know.
10:57 PM · Jun 18, 2023
18 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 1.2K Likes

July 18th, The Cottage

Ilya had been officially discharged for two weeks. The first had been spent at home because Shane was afraid of taking him too far from the hospital, but Ilya had worn him down and they had been at the cottage since. It wasn't the complete seclusion from the world Shane had dreamed of, they still had to go to rehab three times a week, but when they had mornings like this, where they woke up in each other's arms as sunlight glanced through the window, Shane found that he couldn't complain.

Ilya is lying on Shane's chest, playing with his fingers and twisting his wedding ring around and around. On his index finger is his most recent Stanley Cup ring, which Ilya is also fidgeting with.

Shane didn't usually wear his Cup rings, but Ilya had requested they both wore them last night when they were fucking, and it had somehow stayed on until morning, unlike everything else.

He threads their hands and their rings clink together as they lock into place. The champions of the world, having a lazy morning in bed together like they could be anyone. Shane had dreamed of this moment a million times, but nothing compared to the real thing.

"What do you want to do today?" Shane asks.

Ilya rotates so that they are face to face, leaving a light kiss on Shane's cheek. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Wow, I was going to say the exact same thing."

"We have so much in common."

Shane kisses him again, long and slow, savouring Ilya's every sound and movement.

Ilya breaks away, sliding back down Shane's body and resting his head in the space between his shoulder and neck. Ilya takes Shane's left hand in his again, and resumes playing with the rings.

"Which do you prefer?" he says eventually. "This one or that one?"

"This one," Shane says, poking Ilya in the chest with his ring finger and kissing him on the head. "Always."

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you are all having a lovely start to the new year!

Also if you're sitting there thinking 'Wow timesomewhere, Shane's backstory about being called a cry-baby in his youth for sticking up for himself when he was being targeted week in week out for being talented sounds remarkably like what Sid Crosby dealt with!' then that would be intentional.

Also also if the terms 'Inspector Shane' and 'Gwen Stefanov' reminded you of a certain 'Inspector Seb' and 'Britney', then you are absolutely correct they were the inspiration and also you are invited to my birthday party.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!