

Fool's Gold

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Fool's Gold

by [Taynado](#)

Summary

Rozanov pulls away, tugging at Shane's bottom lip with his teeth as he does so, fingers toying with Shane's hair. "It is because I am too lazy," he says. "Unable to sate you."

The word ricochets between them – there it is again –

Lazy.

Or five times Ilya calls himself lazy, and one time Shane finally calls him out on it.

Notes

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

1. 2009, Los Angeles

Shane watches him walk across the room, their eyes locking as he weaves through the crowd. His hands brush gently against people as he passes, slowly moving them aside, a brief smile – a laugh – Shane tracks his movement with hunger.

With burning.

He observes the way his curls reflect the light, how his smile tugs at the corner of his lips – watches the mole that sits right in his dimple. Watches how it compresses when he talks, when he laughs.

And he's so distracted watching, *looking*, that he doesn't realise that he's walking straight towards *him*.

Until -

"Hi." His accent is thick. "Congratulations on your draft."

And Ilya Rozanov stands before him – talking to him – looking at him.

"Come to gloat?" Shane plasters a fake smile across his face just a second too late.

His body feels stiff with disappointment, disjointed in his efforts to move. He should be ashamed of how this makes him feel, the pettiness he wants to direct at Rozanov. The overwhelming desire to spit at his feet.

Shane has always been the best – has never felt the rush of a challenge. He should be *glad*. Happy that he finally knows what it feels like to play against someone as good as him.

To finally know real competition.

But it doesn't feel good, it squeezes him – catches in his throat and forces the air to wheeze around it. He hates it. Hates feeling like this. Like a failure, an imposter.

Hates that it's Rozanov that has made him feel this way.

"I thought about it," Rozanov muses, a ghost of a smile there – and Shane's anger simmers, "but I do not wish to set out on a bad foot."

"I think it's too late for that," Shane mutters, remembering standing in the cold – the smell of cigarette smoke, the brief touch of their hands and the ocean of space between them.

Rozanov shrugs at Shane's comment. "It is uh," he gestures around the room, "nice party?"

And he thinks about leaving Rozanov unanswered, staring until he wanders off in shame. To throw it all back in his face.

To make him feel how Shane *felt*.

How Shane *feels*.

“Yeah, I guess it’s not bad.” Shane grudgingly admits. “Would be better if I had something to celebrate.”

He leaves the dig hanging between them, wishing it was sharper – more pointed. He isn’t quite sure why he says it at all. He doesn’t know why he can’t let Rozanov have this moment – he *deserves* it after all and he knows that second is still good, amazing even, but he was so sure he was going to get *first*. He had always been *first*.

First the game –

Now the draft -

“I do not know why you act so surprised,” Rozanov smiles, “you were always going to be second yes?”

In this moment, Shane hates him.

Hates him more than anything.

“You wish” he replies, “this won’t happen again.” He means to be intimidating, to show Rozanov that this is just a blip in time. That this will never happen again – that Rozanov will always be beneath him, reaching out but never quite catching him.

But the words fall flat, echo in emptiness and he *knows* that Rozanov knows.

That this has hit more than a nerve. That it feels like his whole world has altered, something in its rotation has broken off and it’s left Shane spinning.

Rozanov’s face softens, just slightly – his lips edging down in the corner, his mole no longer digging into his dimple. His eyelashes catch the glimmering light from the chandelier, highlighting soft shadows across the bridge of his nose and it’s his easy beauty, in his dark suit, crisp white shirt just opened enough to expose a gold chain, that almost knocks the breath from Shane’s chest.

Thud.

Thud.

Thud.

His heart pounds against the aching constraint of his ribcage.

Thud.

Thud.

Thud.

“Ah yes, you may be true.” Rozanov says, and Shane latches on to his voice – anything to bring him back to earth, to plant him firmly back on the ground. “I am a lazy player. Will be hard to keep beating you”

What?

“What?” Shane says, dumbstruck.

Lazy.

The word jolts him back into his body – his chest loosens and his feet finally steady beneath him.

“Oh yes,” Rozanov laughs. “Is well known, I think. But not so known that Boston does not want me first.” It’s half a gloat and half something else –

Something shared, with Shane.

Shane blinks –

“Lazy?” Shane repeats, sceptical. He wonders if there’s been a translation error – if perhaps Rozanov doesn’t quite know what that means, or if he meant to say something else. “Fuck off, don’t fuck with me.”

“Yes lazy,” Rozanov sighs – “I am uh, do you say... lack up and go.” He smiles brightly as he doubles down on his own assessment.

“I don’t understand”

And he doesn’t.

Because he felt the weight of Rozanov as he hurtled Shane into the Boards, felt his speed as he ripped the puck from between his *feet* – felt the rush as he chased him across the ice, never quite managing to keep up - and the ease at which he did it, the beauty in the way he played.

Hockey is a game of love for Rozanov.

Like it is for Shane.

Lazy.

“Ah,” Rosanov waves him off haphazardly, “I do not speak good English, so is fine.”

“I don’t-”

Before he can finish, Rozanov interrupts - “I should go,” and it’s almost a whisper. Shane didn’t realize how close he had gotten, until this moment. He can feel the heat building in his cheeks, unable to tear himself away. “But I will see you soon, I think”

I will see you soon.

Soon.

And he thinks, maybe, it's a promise.

2. 2012, *Montreal*

Something is wrong with Ilya Rozanov.

His shoulders sag slightly between shifts. He skates smoothly but without his usual urgency, without his aggression – his movements are lethargic as he plays in this unfamiliar way – he misses a step here, hesitates there.

Distracted.

Shane knows Rozanov on the ice, knows him perhaps better than he knows himself. He knows where he will be, what direction he will flick the puck, when he will accelerate and when he will come to a grinding halt.

That's what it means to be rivals, to know each other so innately –

So *intimately* -

And yet, here today – Shane feels like he's playing against a completely different person.

Feels like he's playing against a ghost.

And it pisses Shane off.

Shane skates with sharp intensity, muscles burning as he pushes himself to go harder, faster. He wants this game—needs it. The ice feels shaper, every collision echoing in his bones as he stretches himself to his limit.

This is what it's like to play for Montreal. This is what it's like to play against Ilya Rozanov.

Yet he could see Rozanov drifting, eyes wandering during crucial plays. Like he doesn't even *care*.

Doesn't feel the burning desire to win – perhaps doesn't think Shane worthy of his *all*.

Shane is *the best*, only plays against *the best* – and this is *pathetic*.

Shane feels his temper spike – sitting uncomfortably across his face, behind his eyes.

And it's unusual for him – to feel this burning rage. He's not an aggressive player, doesn't feel the same *anger* that others feel.

Late in the second period, he watches Rozanov miss a clean pass, slowing down when he should have driven forward.

And Shane finally snaps.

Without warning, he lowers his shoulder and drives Rozanov hard into the plexiglass. The impact thundering through the arena. He can barely hear the crowd roar around him through the pumping of his own blood through his ears. Can barely hear them over Rozanov's breathless groan.

"Hollander-" he wheezes, struggling to push Shane off as he crushes him into the space between the ice and the dasher boards.

"What the fuck is your problem," Shane spits out. "Why are you playing like this."

There's a call from the Ref, and he knows he's being warned, but he can't bring himself to care.

"Fuck off, Hollander."

Shane shoves him again, kicking his skate out from underneath him, collapsing Rozanov onto his knees.

"Get your head in the game," Shane snaps, breath sharp, anger spilling over. "It's like you're not even here."

Arms wrap around him, dragging him away from where Rozanov wheezes into the ice. "Hollzy," and it's Hayden, arms straining around Shane's weight. "What the fuck is your problem."

Shane shakes Hayden off him and skating back towards his team, J.J watching them both approach, looking stunned.

"Nothing," he says. "It's nothing."

"Nothing?" Hayden chases after him. "You call this nothing? Shane, I've *never* seen you do this."

"So?" Shane retaliates. "You and J.J play like this all the time!"

Hayden shakes his head, "yeah that's our *job*, but you don't do this – so leave it to me."

And Shane can't find the words to explain to him, this rage under his skin – he's never felt like this before – this overwhelming need to hit back, to attack.

Rozanov finally stumbles to his feet, ungraceful and uncoordinated. He looks like a child. Like he's never been on the ice in his *life*.

Fury bubbles in Shane's chest as he watches him skate away. He feels hot.

Heavy.

Which is why not even a minute into the next play, he does it again –

There's a hard crunch as they collide, and although they're both still standing, he can see the tension in Rozanov's jaw, the way his hands claw at the boards to bring himself fully upright.

The whistle shrieks again and this time it's a Ref who grabs onto Shane's arm, yanking him towards the penalty box, shouting dangerous contact.

The Ref underestimates Shane's strength, his *anger* and Shane is easily able to rip his arm free, immediately crowding back into Rozanov's space and shoving him back down towards the ice.

"No seriously," he hisses as he watches Rozanov struggle to catch his breath, hunched over. "What the fuck is wrong with you."

Shane must have knocked into him hard enough that he's bitten into his lip. He sees blood pooling at the corner of his lips. Watches his tongue flick over it. Rozanov spits and it's tinged in red.

He laughs, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "What can I say Hollander, I am just lazy."

And Shane seethes, because he can see that's something wrong, and Rozanov must think him dumb if he thinks Shane can't see it. Hates that stupid word, being thrown at him as if he doesn't know the fucking truth.

There is nothing *lazy* about the way Rozanov plays. They both know it. And Shane refuses to play against someone that won't give it their all-

Refuses to play against *Ilya Rozanov* when he won't give it his all.

The whistle goes again, shrill as it echoes through the screaming stadium and there's more hands on Shane's body, Hayden's again maybe, dragging him away from Rozanov.

"I'm going!" Shane finally shouts, not before giving Rozanov one final shove for good measure. There's a sick sense of pleasure that Shane feels watching him stumble slightly, unprepared for Shane's onslaught.

Rozanov steadies himself and adjusts his gloves. His eyes fixed straight ahead. He doesn't look back to Shane, who is still being dragged away by the refs and Hayden. He doesn't argue. He doesn't explain further. Just leaves the halfhearted admission hanging heavy between them.

What can I say.

I am just lazy.

The crowd boos as Shane skates into the penalty box, doors slamming shut behind him, anger boiling—not at the call, but at Rozanov’s complete indifference.

He seethes silently, watching Boston trying to rally but Montreal’s lead is too great. It’s basically game over. As they continue the play, Shane’s anger finally twists into something else - confusion, maybe perhaps even concern.

Rozanov doesn’t look at him for the rest of the game.

Later, Shane’s text is left on delivered.

3. 2014, Sochi

Shane sees him sitting alone in the ice cream shop – a place he still doesn’t really understand in the Russian winter. Yet it exists here, in the Olympic village, and there is Rozanov, hunched over a single scoop of ice-cream, right next to the window.

On impulse, Shane goes inside. The bell above the door chimes softly.

Rozanov looks up, surprised, then tiredly amused. The harshness from yesterday has dissipated from his face, but there is still an unknown tenseness to him, his knuckles white around his ice-cream cup.

Shane feels uneasy being here, in Russia, with Rozanov so close. If he closes his eyes, he can still feel the ghost of his lips against his own. He can taste the shape of his mouth and hear the hitch of his voice.

And when he opens them, he sees this vast distance – this discomfort that sits between them.

“Didn’t expect to see you here.” Rozanov finally says, acknowledging Shane’s presence.

“Didn’t expect to find you staring at ice cream like it betrayed you,” Shane replies, pulling out the chair across from him.

And whilst Shane isn’t keen to repeat the conversation from yesterday necessarily, he thinks maybe he could try again. Should try again.

“What do you want Hollander” Rozanov sighs. “Was yesterday not enough for you? You want to argue again maybe?”

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

And it’s true, he is – he knows the loss wasn’t easy. And he knows that Rozanov has every right to keep his distance, here of all places. He wonders if people can tell as they walk past, how familiar Shane is with the press of Rozanov’s body against his own.

How intimate he is with the very way he breathes.

Rozanov looks away, poking dejectedly at his ice-cream. "I do not care."

"I just don't understand," Shane continues, "What happened? Russia should have been able to beat Latvia with your eyes closed. What went wrong?"

Rozanov sighs, unwilling to return Shane's gaze. Shane wonders if he's thinking the same thing. Wonders if Rozanov feels prying eyes, watching their every move. Waiting for the moment they accidentally give something away.

Waiting for the moment they slip up.

"I do not know," Rozanov admits. "We did not click, Russia has many strong personalities, our goalie is injured." He waves his hand, gesturing towards the direction of the rink, "I am lazy Captain."

Lazy.

This is not the first time he has heard that word.

It's also not the first time he has heard Rozanov use that word to describe himself.

Lazy.

And it kind of just makes him... *sad*.

Sad that Rozanov blames himself for a whole team's short comings. As if he wasn't the best player on that team, as if he isn't the only reason the game wasn't a massive blowout.

Sad that Rozanov can't see what he looks like on the ice, the way he moves – his control, his speed.

"I don't think-"

"It doesn't matter," Rozanov continues, ignoring whatever Shane was going to say. "We lost, I have shamed my country."

He shoves his ice-cream cup away, the spoon falling onto the table with a light clatter as slowly melting ice-cream begins to pool beneath it.

Cookies and cream, Shane thinks. *He's eating cookies and cream.*

Shane leans forwards, picking the spoon up and placing it back in the cup. He's so close, he can feel the ghost of Rozanov's exhale on his hands.

"Teams lose for a hundred reasons." Shane says, and he hopes his words convey everything his hands can't, everything his body keeps secret. "Like you said, your goalie was injured, your team didn't click."

Ilya shakes his head. “These are not... real reasons,” he says. “I keep finding the same one.”

“That you’re lazy?” Shane’s voice is low, half joking, half just trying to understand – unsure how to proceed.

And he wonders, would it be different if they were in Boston, or Montreal. Would it be different if they had the four walls and the comfort of a motel bed. Would Shane challenge him, openly? Kiss his hands – starting at the palm and slowly moving up each individual finger. Counting every single goal Rozanov scored during the Winter Olympics until Rozanov finally agrees that it wasn’t his fault.

That it isn’t his fault.

Until he believes that he’s not *lazy*. That he plays with a ferocity that snatches the air from Shane’s lungs. With a grace that makes Shane feel almost clunky in comparison.

That after all these years, the thrill of chasing after Rozanov never changes.

“Yes,” Rozanov agrees. “I am lazy.” His laugh is breathy, but the hitch at the end gives him away. Because after all this time, Shane knows Rozanov’s laugh.

Shane frowns, “Rozanov, you can’t really think that-“

“I do not want to fight with you again today, Hollander.” Rozanov interjects. “Please.”

“Will you stay?” Shane asks, surprised at his own question. “For the closing ceremony.”

Rozanov finally looks at him from beneath his eyelashes, they’re golden in the soft light of the ice-cream shop.

“No,” he finally says. “I don’t think I will. I leave tonight.”

And Shane doesn’t really know how to respond – or how to engage – doesn’t know how to provide *comfort*.

But that’s not what they do, right? Comfort each other?

The silence stretches between them, Shane unsure how to bridge the gap and the ice is cracking beneath his feet, until –

“Will you please go?” Rozanov says. “I would like to eat my ice-cream and be sad now.”

“Okay,” Shane relents. “Okay I guess I’ll see you in Boston, we play there next, right?” He’s grasping at straws, desperately trying to hold on to the tendrils of conversation. Unwilling to be cast aside, to admit defeat.

“Hollander, please” Rozanov almost whispers. “It’s time for you to go.”

Shane nods, because that’s what he does – that’s what they *do*.

And he hasn't quite figured out how to say he wants to *stay*.

4. 2015, Boston

Shane's chest heaves as Rozanov collapses above him, landing on Shane with a soft thud. He splutters in indignation, "Hey!"

Rozanov laughs, nuzzling into his neck. His breath tickles against the cooling sweat pooling in his collarbones.

The city light that peaks in from behind his blinds blur into soft streaks, and the room is filled with the quiet sound of their breathing.

"I think that was good," Rozanov finally says, and Shane can feel his grin against his chest, his teeth gently pressing into his skin. "Da?"

Yes. Shane wants to say, the word a ghost on the end of his lips. *You are always perfect.*

You have ruined me.

Nothing compares to the taste of your lips, the grips of your hands.

I can't stop thinking about you.

Instead, he curls his lip suggestively – "it was average I guess."

"Average!" Rozanov exclaims, rolling off Shane and into the space next to him. One arm draped loosely across Shane's pillow, his fingers splayed into the ends of his hair. "You tell that to your dick, I think he is quite sated, no?"

Shane laughs. Rozanov's brashness no longer scares him, not like it used to. He doesn't blush when Rozanov whispers something suggestive in his ear, no longer jumps like he's been burned when he feels the ghost of a brush against him in public. The anxiety of their encounters causes nothing but a low twinge rather than an all-encompassing wave. It's *fun* stirring Rozanov up. Bantering with him, after.

"Average!" Shane repeats, glee plastered across his face.

Because knows that when Rozanov looks, because he's always looking at Shane, that he will see Shane's jest, will see the warmth across his cheeks and the sweat rolling down his brow –

And Rozanov will smile, will lean in and softly brush his lips with his own. That his hands will fist in his hair, pulling gently as he brings Shane in close, until they're breathing the same air – Rozanov's exhale becoming Shane's inhale.

And Rozanov does, it's everything. It's not enough. Shane sighs into him. He wants this so bad it *hurts*. Wants this *forever*.

Rozanov pulls away too quickly, tugging at Shane's bottom lip with his teeth as he does so, fingers toying with Shane's hair. "It is because I am too lazy," he says. "Unable to sate you."

The word ricochets between them – there it is again –

Lazy.

Before Shane can even think to argue, can mount a defence against the callousness towards himself, he captures his lips once again and Shane leans into it with a sigh.

He leans into the taste of his mouth, into his hands still gripping his hair, pulling gently as Shane rocks into him.

Like this he wants to say, *I need you like this*.

He wonders when this happened, when Rozanov knew what Shane needed before Shane could voice it – before he could ask.

Before he even knew himself.

Shane chases after him as he releases his mouth, desperate to feel him again, to taste him.

"Not so fast" Rozanov laughs, toying with Shane. But his hands stay put, wrapped tightly in his hair, thumbs soothing the stress out of the edges of his hairline and it's –

Heavenly.

And any thought of protest, any argument Shane might have prepared slips through his fingers like sand.

His eyelids flutter under his gentle caressing. "Hmmmmmm" he says, "that feels good."

And he's no longer ashamed, to voice his pleasure – to cry out when Rozanov touches him right. Not like he used to be. There is comfort here now, between them.

"I know," Rozanov says, using his elbows on either side of Shane's head to prop himself up more firmly, chest pressed firmly against Shane's. "You like it when I do this."

He says it like a fact – an undeniable truth of this world.

Shane opens his eyes, reaching up to brush a stray strand of hair from Rozanov's face.

From *Ilya's* face.

"I like it when you do a lot of things," he whispers.

Rozanov's eyes widen, just slightly. Almost unnoticeable except that Shane notices *everything* – notices the way his pupils dilate until there is nothing but a small ring of hazel.

Ilya's eyes.

Ilya.

"Do you?" and Ilya's grin is wicked, his mouth filthy as he ducks down to lick up his neck.

"Fuck off," Shane gasps.

"Hmmm," Ilya hums. "I will show you, I am not so lazy as to leave with an average rating."

Shane's heart pounds with the promise, it thuds against his chest so hard that he worries that Ilya can feel it – that he knows the effect his words have on him.

That he has always known.

And oh.

Oh.

Shane thinks that he might actually be completely fucked.

5. 2017, Ottawa

The phone call comes late, long after the final buzzer has sounded on Shane's television.

Long after it echoes through his parents' dark house as they wish him goodnight, gently petting his head as they pass him to walk down the dark hallway towards their room.

Long after he curls into himself on their couch, holding his phone close waiting for it to ring. He knows he will, he always does. Now.

He knows that something has changed between them, but he doesn't know how to voice it. How to bring clarity to what they are now. What they mean to each other.

So, he waits, for the call. In the dark, alone.

He'd watched the entire game, noticed the way Ilya favoured one side, the grimace he tried to hide but was so clearly caught by the cameras as they locked in on him with each stolen goal.

Caught by the cameras but not, so it seems, by anyone on his fucking team.

His phone vibrates against the couch -

"You lost," Shane says, answering the phone on the third ring. His voice is soft, trying not to draw attention from his parents, praying that they're asleep, that their room is too far away, that they can't hear the ache in his voice.

“Yes,” Ilya replies, voice tired. “Because I’m lazy.” And he says it like an old, familiar joke.

How many times has Shane heard this?

I’m just lazy

It’s because I am lazy.

It is not their fault that I am so lazy.

And it hurts, to hear that word – again and again and again – but Shane knows to not push it, that Ilya will not let him push. Not in the ways it matters.

Shane scoffs softly. “Don’t start,” he says. “You were playing with bruised ribs. I saw it—you could barely twist.”

There’s a pause on the line, the distant hum of traffic filling the silence. Then Ilya chuckles, low and resigned. “Don’t ruin my excuse.”

“Ilya,” he sighs, “Why did you play?”

He can almost see Ilya’s shrug, if he closes his eyes. Can see the nonchalance in which he brushes away Shane’s concern. “No other option,” he says, “the other Boston centers suck. They can’t even outplay me with a bruised rib.”

And Shane knows he’s right – that Boston has become reliant in Ilya. On his love for the game, the spark he brings – the way he can rally a broken team and inspires them straight into playoffs and eventually, the Stanley cup.

“Still,” Shane whispers. “You were hurt.”

“Ah” Ilya replies. “We all hurt sometimes, no?” and his voice is a gentle caress. Musky and warm. “But sometimes the pain is worth it, and you push through anyway. I think you know.”

And Shane does know – knows what it means to be aching so deeply, but unable to stop. The thrill of pushing himself past his limits until he collapses. The sweet release of giving into agony and dragging himself back up to start again.

He knows what it’s like to *want* something so intensely, how it washes away everything around him – nothing but the sharp twinge of pain centering him in real life.

He knows, because he feels that ache here, on his couch. Feels the weight behind his eyes, the barb lodged in the bridge of his nose, sharpening with every inhale.

“I know,” Shane says.

“Ah well,” Ilya says, and Shane can hear him shift through the speaker. “Didn’t matter in the end. We still lost.”

And Shane almost smiles, at the ease in which he acknowledges that his season is over. The grace in which he admits his defeat. Bittersweet in the knowledge that he gave it his all, gave it his everything.

“HMMMMM,” Shane hums. “Do you know what you’re doing now that the season is done? If you’re not going back to Russia.”

Ilya pauses on the other end of the phone. “No,” he says gently. “I haven’t decided.”

And Shane hates the way his heart clenches, hates the slight prickle of tears behind his eyes. Caused by the ache of watching Ilya play, the sound of his voice through the phone when Shane desperately wants it *here* with *him*. The ache of his hesitancy – the agonizing desire of wanting more and knowing that one day he will need to make peace with having nothing.

But still –

“The offer is still there,” he says. “It’s always there.”

And he pretends he can’t hear the choked noise on the end of the phone. Pretends that he doesn’t match it with his own.

Pretends that he is just rubbing his eyes from exhaustion, and his hands don’t come away wet.

+1 2017, the Cottage

Ilya isn’t in the kitchen. He isn’t out on the deck with his morning coffee. He isn’t sprawled across Shane’s lounge, remote in hand and old hockey games playing on the television.

Ilya hasn’t moved. Hasn’t gotten out of bed.

Shane, unlacing his joggers against the bedroom door, frowns. The sheets in the bedroom are rumpled around Ilya’s oddly still body, blankets strewn haphazardly across his curled figure.

“Ilya?” Shane calls gently, leaning against the doorframe. “You up?”

There’s no sound except the faint creak of the bed as Ilya shifts slightly. Awake.

“Ilya,” Shane steps into the room. “Are you sick?”

“I’m just... being lazy,” Ilya mumbles, voice muffled from beneath the blankets.

Shane kneels beside the bed, concern creasing his forehead. “Lazy? Ilya you’re not lazy, you know you’re not lazy.”

“It is true, I am just lazy.” Ilya’s eyes are downcast as Shane brushes back his matted curls.

“It’s not true” Shane runs a slow hand through Ilya’s hair again, tangling a single lock around his finger.

Ilya doesn’t respond, doesn’t look at him –

“God Ilya, I have never met someone so determined as you, so hard working.” He sighs, bending down to rest his chin against the soft mattress to look Ilya in the eye. “Ilya.”

And he knows that Ilya’s name on his lips, whispered gently between them, communicates everything left unsaid.

Tell me.

Trust me.

Ilya shifts slightly, pulling the blanket tighter around him. “I... I don’t know if I can get up,” he admits. “Some mornings it’s like... like everything is too heavy. Like I am too heavy”

Shane’s expression softens, but his concern doesn’t fade. He stands slowly, knees creaking as he makes his way around the bed, crawling into the empty space behind him. He wraps his arm across Ilya’s stomach, resting a hand against his chest so he can feel the steady beat of his heart and pulls him in close, close enough that his lips press against the back of his neck.

Ilya doesn’t speak. Just lets out a rattled breath, the kind that catches in your throat.

Shane knows that it’s shame that Ilya is feeling. Ashamed to be found like this, ashamed to have to turn and face Shane. Ashamed of the need he feels as Shane settles around him.

Shane *knows*.

So, he doesn’t push it. Doesn’t let his concern or his frustration take control. Doesn’t fight against Ilya’s disparaging words.

He presses another gentle kiss against Ilya’s neck.

“You don’t have to get up.” Shane whispers into his ear. “You don’t have to do anything right now except... be here. With me. That’s enough.”

“I don’t... I don’t know how to stop feeling this.” Ilya’s voice catches and his body shakes.

Shane *aches* for him – because he thinks he finally understands.

And, in some small way, he’s almost grateful. That Ilya is finally letting him in. Leaving himself vulnerable and exposed, trusting that Shane will piece him back together.

And Shane will. Over and over and over again forever. He would do it gladly.

Because hasn't Ilya done that for him? So many times, over the years. Done exactly what he needed, what he wanted.

Shane stays close, the warmth of the mid-morning sun falling across the bed, Ilya's head resting against his bicep, breathing in tandem. He's still silent, eyes half-closed, still curled under the blanket. Shane's hand lightly traces circles on Ilya's side, steadying him, anchoring him.

"You know," Shane begins softly, "I've watched you for years. I've seen how you play. How you dominate on the ice." He pauses, letting the words sink in. "You're not lazy, Ilya. You're determined. Hard-working. You push yourself in ways most people couldn't even imagine."

Ilya's fingers twitch in the sheets but don't move away. "I... don't always feel like it," he murmurs. "Not everyone agrees with you."

"Fuck them" Shane says, voice firm. "You're an incredible hockey player. You lead your team like a real captain—not just by calling plays, but by knowing when to push, when to hold back, when to listen. People follow you because you care, not just because they have to."

Ilya is quiet, he doesn't respond. But he doesn't protest either.

"You inspire people Ilya. Kids love you. You have this way of connecting with them, making them feel like they're important, like they belong. You make friends wherever you go because you actually see people—not just the surface, but who they are. That's... rare, Ilya. That's not lazy. That's remarkable."

Remarkable.

Remarkable how much I love you.

Remarkable just how much you mean to me.

"You inspire me," Shane continues. "Every single day. You make me a better hockey player. You challenge me. I've never had to fight to be the best before you, but you make me want to fight for every win. You make me feel like I *have* to fight for every win."

Ilya exhales slowly, letting himself sink further back into Shane's chest. Until Shane has completely enveloped him with his body. With his arms.

"I... I don't know," Ilya whispers. "I don't know how to believe *you*."

"Then let me believe it for you," Shane says, pressing more kisses into the back of Ilya's neck, behind his ear, along the side of his jaw. "Because I do. I believe it so much it hurts sometimes. How much better you make me, how much better you make the world around you. And it's because you try Ilya. God, you try so hard, and that's not lazy. I refuse to call you lazy."

Shane nips gently, teeth pulling against his day-old stubble. Ilya slowly rolling towards him, grasping onto Shane's shirt, a hand coming up to sink into the back of his hair.

“You’re not lazy. You’re strong. You’re brilliant. And I’m here—right here—with you. You don’t have to be anything else right now.” He rests his forehead against Ilya’s, their noses brushing.

And he watches as Ilya closes his eyes, watches him lean into his touch.

“I’ll believe it for you. Always.”

And finally –

“Okay.”

End Notes

I really came out of retirement for this ffs

Fic soundtrack: Fool's Gold - Buffalo Traffic Jam

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