

One Silver Ring & A Whole Lot of Nausea

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One Silver Ring & A Whole Lot of Nausea

by [viviennestories](#)

Summary

Ilya sucked in a breath. This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. Of course not. But, how else could he explain beating up his teammate, vacating a game to follow his rival to the hospital, and the tears he now realized were streaming down his face?

“You didn't just hurt Hollander. You hurt my husband.”

Notes

I haven't written in years. College has taken its toll on me. Please, forgive this short and sloppy work. I'm trying to get back into the groove again (and get out of my post-Heated Rivalry slump). God, that show was so good. Can 2027 come any faster?

They were careful. They had to be.

For the time being, they didn't even share a house. It was true that Ilya spent every possible moment in Shane's bed, but those possible moments were few and far between during the season. Their wedding rings were stashed away — Shane's in the top drawer of his nightstand, and Ilya's in a small pouch in his sock drawer. He knew he should keep it somewhere more secure, like a safe, but he liked being able to take it out, feel it, put it on for a few fleeting moments before he went to bed each night.

No pictures, except for ones taken in professional settings. No physical contact, except for on the ice. No interactions, except for in the privacy of closed spaces.

Ilya used to be good at this separation, but since their elopement, it had gotten exponentially more difficult. He couldn't understand why. Nothing had changed, really. The marriage was more for legal procedures than anything else.

But ever since Shane slid that silver band onto his ring finger, Ilya knew he was monumentally screwed. And not in a good way.

Ilya checked his phone one last time before stashing it in his cubby. I love you, be safe, from Shane. The same text before every game. It was different this time, however, knowing that Shane sent that text from the locker room across the hall.

Playing each other's team was not an unusual occurrence. It was quite convenient, actually. Stolen glances on the ice only made Ilya all the more eager to visit Shane's hotel room after the game.

God, sex was a great release after a heated game. And Ilya needed that release. He craved it. He dreamt about it, daydreamed about it, thirsted after it. But sex wasn't the only thing that he craved. It was secondary to simple romance. The secrecy of their relationship continued making that romance difficult to procure, with summer weeks in Shane's cottage being the only solace in a long, dark tunnel of text chains and quiet phone calls after practice.

"Rozanov, you with us or not?" Novak said, his hand waving back and forth in front of Ilya's face. This spacing thing had to stop. But, how could he stop it? He had a husband more perfect than he could've ever imagined. There was nothing more he wanted to think about — though he supposed that hockey should be at the forefront of his mind, at least for now.

Ilya nodded and pushed past his defenseman into the middle of the room, propping one leg up on a bench.

He sucked in a short breath. Focus.

"This moment is all we have," he began, giving his obligatory captain's speech. "On the ice, there is no future, there is no past, there is just this game."

Some of the guys cheered, thrusting their sticks forward in encouragement. None of them knew. None of them would know for a long time. And it killed him.

“How we played in Florida, what happened in Colorado, the victory in Carolina — it’s all shit. This is it. You leave everything out there.”

As his speech came to a close, his mind began to drift, and he did nothing to stop it. He knew that it would all be pointless when he saw Shane on the ice. As Ilya skated out, he didn’t need to look up to know that his face was on the big screen. Nor did he need to look up to know that it took just a few seconds for it to switch to Shane.

The rivals. The most heated game of the season.

If only the crowd knew.

It was a normal game. Nothing too exciting for either side. Ilya felt the pressure from his teammates. They had been down in the past few games and needed a win, or at least a good effort.

His breath was coming in short bursts, his eyes glued to the puck. God, the opposing offense was good tonight. Why didn’t he stretch more? The lights seemed brighter at this rink than at the last. Maybe his brother was watching the game on television. He doubted it.

They were up a few points when it happened. Ilya heard the sickening crunch of bones and scrape of skates gone askew before he saw anything. And when he did turn around, he wished he hadn’t.

“Looks like we have an injury on the ice — Shane Hollander, captain of the Metros. Medical staff are attending to the player. Please stay in your seats,” the announcer offered flatly over the speakers.

Everything shifted sideways. This wasn’t out of the ordinary. Players got hurt all the time. And someone on the opposing team? Ilya should be unaffected, if not gloating a bit.

This player wasn’t just any other player, though. It was his husband. His person. Hollander.

He was skating over to the other side of the rink before he knew what he was doing.

“Rozanov, back off,” one of his teammates shouted from a few meters away. Who was that? It didn’t matter. The announcer was saying something again, but he didn’t hear it. Couldn’t. Nothing was registering except for the puddle of red seeping across the ice. Someone grabbed his shoulder, trying to pull him away from the medical staff. He shoved them away, probably harder than he should have. A few more Metros players came to block his path, their expressions sheepish. Everyone knew about the friendly rivalry between Rozanov and Hollander; they knew he didn’t mean any harm. But this — this was unconventional. Unexpected. A bit strange, if anything.

Shane’s parents weren’t at this game. On some tropical vacation, Ilya vaguely remembered. No one would be with him on the way to the hospital. Or walking next to the side of his gurney. Maybe they would even be delayed in finding a plane back. If Shane needed surgery, his room might be empty when he woke up.

He started skating towards the exit from the ice. Novak grabbed his jersey.

“Dude, what the hell are you doing? I pushed him down pretty hard, but he’ll be fine,” Novak said as he tugged Ilya backwards.

Ilya thought back. Yes, that was Novak’s jersey he remembered seeing when Shane went down. That same aggression he usually appreciated in his defenseman now stirred up an irrevocable rage in his heart.

“You did this.”

Novak’s eyes widened slightly as Ilya reached out to throw the first punch. Or, well, more like a shove. Then a punch. Then some more punching. A bit of kicking, too. Ilya was on top (in his element), holding his teammate down (also totally familiar) while he attempted to cause him the same amount of pain he assumed Shane was experiencing at the moment, if he was even conscious.

As some other players pulled Ilya away, his fists still throwing punches, Novak looked up at him, confusion flowing in the rapid streams of blood extending down his face and neck. He took out his mouth guard and spit out, “What the fuck, Rozanov?! It’s just Hollander. He’ll be fine.”

Just Hollander. Just Hollander. God, Ilya wished Shane could be just Hollander. He would give anything to not love that man so much that he would lose control and beat up his own teammates. To not be so consumed by his obsession with that man, to not accept that his father would have disowned him, had he known.

But, would he? Would he really give it all up to have an easier life? It was true, Ilya liked women, too. He knew that Svetlana would have married him in a heartbeat. Or any number of beautiful women across America. He could’ve had a few children by now, presented his WAG to the hockey world, grabbed a few more brand deals, and lived out a cushy life in retirement.

It wouldn’t mean anything. Not without Hollander. Their elopement was a bit rushed, of course, but there was no other way. Their lives couldn’t have played out in any other series of events. There was only ever going to be Shane for Ilya, and Ilya for Shane.

Ilya felt like time stopped for a moment, only to immediately continue in slow-motion. He didn’t usually wear it, but when their teams played each other, it felt right.

With a careful hand, Ilya tugged a small chain out from under his equipment. He felt the cool metal beads shifting along the skin of his neck and chest. At the end, he fingered a smooth silver ring. Simple. Clean. No stones, no lines. Just a simple engraving on the inside.

Ilya watched as Novak eyed the ring, even more confusion creeping into his features.

Ilya sucked in a breath. This wasn’t how it was supposed to happen. Of course not. But, how else could he explain beating up his teammate, vacating a game to follow his rival to the hospital, and the tears he now realized were streaming down his face?

“You didn’t just hurt Hollander. You hurt my husband.”

The big screen had been zoomed in on the entire encounter. Silence followed for what felt like an eternity, no one quite understanding what Ilya was saying. Yes, his words were clear, and no, his thick Russian accent hadn’t caused anything to get lost in translation. The ring, his expression, it all technically made sense.

But Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were nothing more than friendly rivals. Married? What kind of sick joke was this?

As Ilya skated off the ice, it still didn’t click for most. The referees wrote Rozanov off as having some sort of psychotic episode, and the game went on. Novak sat out, garnering convoluted sympathy from the crowd.

It took a few hours for the news to actually break. And even then, it had to be confirmed, tastefully and cautiously, by Shane’s parents. No one could accept this reality, until it was undeniable.

Ilya waited. Waited for the world to understand, for Svetlana to call, for Shane to wake up, for anything. He took the big step, and that was all he had the strength to do for now. He was now a nomad. Yes, his apartment in Boston was more than comfortable, but it wasn’t home. Home was Russia, a place to which he could never return. His father would be rolling in his grave if he knew. His brother, if he had been watching, would be doing the equivalent of rolling in one’s grave in the world of the living. His teammates had barely texted him, mostly short apologies and unassuming offers for comfort.

And Shane. His world. He was in surgery. Nothing too serious, but serious enough to make Ilya violently nauseous for the entirety of the procedure. That nausea didn’t stop, either, even when Ilya was permitted to sit by his bedside. Or when Shane woke up.

It continued for days, coming in particularly painful waves when he had to explain the series of events to Shane after the worst of the drugs wore off. The monitors attached to Shane’s arms started beeping in erratic fashion upon his understanding of the news, his blood pressure spiking to seriously concerning levels.

But it was over. Done. The silver ring on Ilya’s hand was the first step towards acceptance. And when Shane saw it, all he could do was smile.

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