

I Got Dreams But I Can't Make Myself Believe Them

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76605671) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76605671>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid , Heated Rivalry_(TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , Wyatt Hayes , David Hollander , Svetlana Vetrova , Anya , Ilya Rozanov's Dog
Additional Tags:	2026 Winter Olympics , Introspection , Homesickness , Minor Injuries , Ilya and Shane become tourists for a day , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Fluff and Angst , Hurt/Comfort , Olympics , Ilya Rozanov-centric , Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Mild Smut , No use of AI here
Language:	English
Collections:	Hollanov 2026 Olympics Collection
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-28 Words: 11,506 Chapters: 1/1

I Got Dreams But I Can't Make Myself Believe Them

by [SuddenlyLaury](#)

Summary

He knows that they voted him into the alternate captain position, but the feelings of inadequacy and being an outsider do more than just linger. He can't stop thinking about it. Can't stop thinking about the fact that he wouldn't feel this way had the country that brought him up not turned its back on him.

"I mean," starts the interviewer curtly, "there are a lot of Canadians who feel uneasy about a foreigner even being on the team, let alone being a captain. I guess what I'm really trying to ask is: why make the switch at all? Just to get around the ban?"

OR: Ilya and Shane go to the Olympics together and feelings are complicated

Notes

Hello and welcome to the 2026 Olympics AU that no one asked for.

I'd first like to say that this fandom has completely rotted my brain and this is the fastest I have ever written anything in my life. So yay for that. Second, I do not play hockey. I'm a figure skater and watcher of other sports, so if it sounds at any point like I'm pulling from those things, then you would be correct. Apologies for any inaccuracies in that department. (Hollanov figure skating au when? Maybe that will be my next endeavor lmao). Lastly, sorry to any ice dancers who read this. I sent a few strays your way in here but it's all in good fun. Hope you can forgive me.

Enjoy!

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

The plane ride to Milan had been smooth enough, but the deboarding process was currently proving more difficult. The bus that was supposed to pick them up on the tarmac has some sort of technical problem that Ilya can see them working on through the window of the plane that they are still on. He watches as some poor workers stand out in the cold trying to pull the doors shut while they, comically, open back up every time. It would be more funny to him if he weren't coming off of a seven hour plane ride.

"Oh my God, can't they just get another bus out here," asks one of the younger players a few rows ahead. He gets a few hums of approval.

Shane leans over from his seat next to Ilya and mutters, "I hope we don't have to share a suite with them. I'm afraid their youthful energy will keep me up all night."

"Oh really? That's who I was planning on rooming with—" Shane cuts him off with a scoff, "is it now?"

"Yes, of course." Ilya can't keep up the act for long, breaking out into a ridiculous smile almost immediately. They both know the only person either of them had ever considered sharing a room with was each other. But they are on the same page about the suite, Ilya doesn't think he can pull all-nighters like he used to.

From behind them, Wyatt stands up and looms over their row. "You two aren't going to, like, have sex in the common areas are you? Because I don't want to hear or see that shit."

Before Ilya can quip back, a new bus pulls up to take them to border patrol and away from this stuffy, disgusting plane. He can hear cheers from his teammates as they start to stand up and unload their luggage from the overhead bins. Shane, Ilya, and Wyatt all follow their lead, packed together like sardines in the aisle while they wait for the people ahead of them to leave.

"Hey, Roz," Wyatt nudges him lightly, "I'm really glad you could be here this time. We all wished you could have been at the last games but..."

Wyatt trails off with a shrug, but Ilya knows what he meant. He hadn't been able to play in the previous Olympics at all, with the Russian team pretending he didn't exist after his relationship with Shane was leaked and his lack of a Canadian passport that would allow him to play for them. So he resigned himself to cheering for Shane from home with his husband's parents.

Almost two years ago, though, Ilya was finally able to acquire his Canadian citizenship. Since he hadn't played for Russia in years by that point, the switch of national teams was pretty seamless. All he'd had to do was sign some papers and it was done, which meant that he was eligible to play for Canada here in Milan. With Shane.

It was a dream come true for Ilya. Even more than playing on the same NHL team had been, in a way. He knew as soon as the news about him and Shane got out that he would never play for Russia again, so the whole thing was very bittersweet. This Canadian team still felt to him

like a foreign entity, somewhere he didn't quite belong yet. But he was sure those feelings would ease as he integrated into the group.

He gives Wyatt a small smile and nods to show that he understands what he was trying to say. Shane must have overheard the interaction, because he looks back to Ilya and leans in for a moment, breathing in against his chest and whispering, "I think I'm happier that you're here than he is."

Chuckling, Ilya puts a hand to Shane's head and ruffles his hair lightly before they turn to make their way down the now-clear aisle. "You better be."

When they finally got to the village, it was far too late to do anything but dump their luggage and sleep. Shane and Ilya hadn't even had the energy to push their beds together like they'd planned before coming to Milan. So when he wakes up alone in a twin bed, the first thing Ilya does is walk across the room to lay himself down on top of his husband.

Shane huffs under him, throwing an arm up wildly behind him to try to push Ilya off. "I can't breathe," he wheezes, "go back to your own bed."

"No," Ilya whines pathetically. Truth be told, he can already feel himself falling back asleep, the comfort of his husband's solid body beneath his own, lulling him back into unconsciousness.

Shane humors him for a few minutes before promptly pushing Ilya to the floor citing that they need to get breakfast. "We didn't get to eat last night so it's extra important that we—"

A pair of lips against his own cuts off Shane's sentence. Ilya has known him long enough to know exactly what was about to come out of his mouth. *Blah blah blah properly fueling our bodies blah blah*. Truthfully, he knows that Shane is right. That if ever there was a time for them to be strict with themselves, it's now. But Ilya likes to tease him, what can he say?

"Can't we just enjoy the fact that we're at the Olympics together?" Ilya asks, a wry smile tugging at the edges of his lips.

Shane rolls his eyes. "We can enjoy it from the cafeteria. Come on."

And suddenly he is up and moving, Ilya watching from his spot on the floor where he is leaning against the bed. Soft morning light floods in through the window, bathing Shane in a light golden hue. He looks beautiful like this and Ilya tells him as such. A shy, bashful smile is sent his way, as is a fresh change of clothes that Shane throws across the room.

When they make it to the cafeteria, most of the team is already there, laughing boisterously over their breakfasts. "Nice of our captains to finally join us," someone shouts to them from the opposite end as they sit down.

Shane being named captain had been expected, practically just a formality at this point. But Ilya would be lying if he said that his appointment of alternate captain hadn't come as a

complete shock. A big ego might be something that he portrays to the world, but Ilya isn't actually enough of a shitbag to come into a completely new team and immediately assume he'd be captain, so it was a welcome surprise.

And it wasn't just that he had a big "A" plastered on his jersey that surprised him. It was that the team actually seemed to respect him as a leader. The team of a country that he wasn't born in and who spoke a language his tongue still fumbled over from time to time, actually viewed him as such an integral part of their team that they had written down his name as someone that they wanted in the position. To say that Ilya was humbled would be an understatement.

"Shut up, we were just sleeping in," Shane fires back while a fierce blush creeps up his face, "we all need to make sure we are rested so that—"

A playful groan rips through the team at Shane's response. He'd always had a knack for turning any and every thing back to hockey somehow, which is something that other players often ribbed him for, and this time was no exception. Ilya leans over to whisper in his ear, "it's okay. I will listen to your boring advice."

When his husband scoffs, there is nothing but adoration behind it. His husband, who, when Ilya is just finishing up his food, slides his medication and a glass of water over to him without a word. For the first time that morning, he realizes that he had forgotten to bring it to the cafeteria. Shane must have noticed and done it himself.

Yeah, thinks Ilya, this is going to be a good two weeks.

Their first practice comes a few days before the opening ceremony. It's light, nothing but basic edge drills and stick work. Just enough to shake off any remaining weariness that had settled into their legs on the journey to Europe, but still satisfying nonetheless.

At the end, just before they get off the ice to make room for the next team, they gather around the coach who says a few words then promptly makes way for Shane.

"Good job today guys," he starts, "I'm really excited to be here with this team. I really think we can go all the way this year. Let's keep up the good work tomorrow and every day so we can really fuck the Czechs next week."

The team cheers while someone in the back of the group yells, "no less than five goals, right Cap?"

A lovely laugh bursts out of Shane, so open and unrestricted, and he agrees. Ilya decides that he will score ten goals if it means being able to see his husband laugh like that again.

Everyone is in a good mood when they make it to the locker room, someone playing upbeat music on a speaker that you can hear from the showers. The bass bounces off of the concrete walls to create a cacophony of sound. If he were back in Ottawa, Ilya might have busted a

move or cracked a joke for the whole room to hear, but with this largely unfamiliar team he simply sits down in his stall and smiles at other players' antics.

A rookie named Nate Barbeau, who is off-the-wall excited to be here, gets up and starts lipsynching to whatever pop song is playing. The team cheers loudly, egging him on to start dancing wildly while jumping on and off the benches. After a near-injury on one of these jumps the party atmosphere simmers down to a more calm, but still jovial one.

It is unlike anything Ilya ever experienced with the Russian team. Everyone in that locker room carried with them a stifling nervous energy every time they played, but especially in Sochi. The expectations were always impossibly high and somehow never achieved. Nothing compared to the weight of an entire country resting on your back, telling you in no uncertain terms that if you did not win, the reputation of said country would be tarnished forever.

The day that Ilya signed the release papers from the Russian Hockey Federation, he felt for the first time in years like he could take a full breath again. And it isn't that expectations in Canada are lower, just that they don't mean quite the same thing as they do in Russia.

Ilya had always hated who he became with that team, sectioning off the parts of himself that he actually liked in favor of the ones that would make people believe he was the serious leader worthy of taking the team to victory. It's funny how that was probably their downfall in the end.

He is determined to do better with this group, but it's difficult not to revert into old habits. The stoicism that he wore so resolutely with his national team in the past still lingers, as does the anxiety of underperforming— though for different reasons than it used to. But he is trying not to worry so much. The team is good on the ice and even better off of it, so there is no reason for Ilya to still be feeling like this, even if it is just a bit.

Shane throws himself down next to Ilya when he finally gets into the locker room, having been busy in the Mixed Zone giving interviews. He is still fully dressed, skates and all, but seemingly enjoying the end of the comedy act that he's just walked into. "How long was he doing that for? He's gonna break a bone next time."

"I know," Ilya snorts, "hopefully there is no next time."

Methodically, they strip themselves of their remaining gear before making their way to the showers. It's been years of sharing locker rooms with his husband, but Ilya sometimes still struggles to maintain professionalism. He can't help it, Shane has been working extra hard in the gym this season to get himself ready for the Olympics and it has paid off. He looks like one of those Greek statues of muscular, naked men that Ilya saw in London once. He simply can't look away.

Shane notices, because of course he does. He fixes Ilya with a glare that says *don't you dare try anything here* and of course he obliges. Not without making a plan to get Shane alone at some point that evening, though.

The second that Wyatt and their other suitemates leave for an early dinner, Ilya practically jumps Shane. Clearly, he was expecting it because he doesn't even bat an eye as Ilya drags him to one of their cardboard, sex-proof beds and promptly throws him down. For a moment, they pause as they both look over the edge of the bed to make sure it didn't cave in on itself, but continue when they see it looking the same as it had a few minutes prior.

Ilya hovers over Shane, lips ghosting over the supple skin of his cheek before migrating to his lips, kissing him deeply. They both sigh into the kiss, feeling the relief of being able to touch each other after holding back for the past few days.

For long minutes, they simply make out lazily. But it quickly becomes hard to ignore the desire pooling inside of both of them. Their hips grind together as they moan into each other's mouths, Ilya leaning down to lick a long stripe up Shane's neck and ending just below his ear.

"God, Hollander. I wanted to eat you in showers earlier. Could you tell?"

"Yes, of course I could tell, you fiend." They laugh and not for the first time, Ilya is grateful for this dynamic that they have. Despite the fact that he has slept with many, many people, he has never been able to laugh with anyone like this in bed. Before Shane, sex was always just a means to an end for him. An escape from his deceased mother and distant father. He never could have imagined the show of love and commitment it would become.

Who would have thought the Ilya Rozanov of ten years ago would eventually be madly in love and in a committed relationship? Not him, that's for sure.

In the midst of his husband's pensive moment, Shane has shucked off his shirt and is urging Ilya to do the same. He obliges, sitting up and lifting his arms for it to be pulled off of his body and thrown across the room. Ilya works quickly to pull Shane's Team Canada branded sweatpants down to his thighs before doing the same with his underwear and immediately diving in to put his mouth on Shane's cock.

Immediately, Shane is loud. Probably too loud for the thin walls of the Olympic Village, but everyone knows that this kind of stuff goes down here, sex-proof beds or not.

"Better be careful, or those freaky ice dancers next door will hear you," he teases.

"They'd probably like it." *Yeah*, Ilya thinks, *they probably would*.

Dare he say, he gives Shane a damn good blowjob, taking him apart over long minutes. Ilya brings him to the edge twice until finally, on the third time, he lets Shane come undone. The look on his face as he comes never gets old. Ilya watches, even as Shane's high ebbs away and he's left breathing heavily and looking dazed.

Shane huffs out a laugh, "I think you sucked my soul out of my dick."

"It is talent of mine."

"Stealing souls or sucking dicks?"

"Both."

They lay there together on the twin bed, pressed so close that Ilya can feel puffs of breath against his cheek. Hands intertwine between them, fiddling with the wedding bands that tell the world they belong to each other. Sometimes in the middle of games, Ilya feels the press of cool metal on the inside of his glove and smiles to himself. Or if he's having a particularly rough showing on the ice, he will purposefully seek out the weighted feeling around his finger just to have something to ground him.

It works like magic and secretly, he sees Shane as his good luck charm.

His good luck charm that is currently slipping his free hand down Ilya's chest and into his waistband. "Want me to return the favor?"

"You know I do."

The San Siro is glittering with the lights of a thousand camera flashes. Shane, Ilya, and the rest of team Canada are dressed in identical Lululemon uniforms for the opening ceremonies. They all look a little ridiculous, entirely in red with coats that look far too big for their bodies, but Ilya can't seem to wipe the smile from his face.

He is proud of Shane and proud of himself for making it here. He is proud to represent the country that took him in when the one he was born in left him out to dry. He is proud of this team, because he believes they can make it to the end of this with a medal.

Truly, he is bursting at the seams with happiness, smiling in every photo and video, kissing Shane at every opportunity, and celebrating with the team the whole way around the stadium.

And if he goes back to their room after and stifles the sounds of his cries in the shower as a pit of despair and homesickness he hasn't felt so strong in years grows in his chest, then no one has to know.

They fucking crush the Czech Republic. The locker room is buzzing with celebration that Ilya still feels too out of place to be a part of. So he showers quickly, as does Shane, before they are called out to do post-game media. As the captains, it's their responsibility. Well mostly Shane's, but it's not surprising that they want both of them.

"Congratulations on a great start, guys," the interviewer begins as they each pick up a microphone, "how do you feel the team did today? What do you think of this group so far?"

Luckily, Shane jumps right in. For as awkward as he can be he's always been good at this. "Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, the team is awesome, you know? I think this group has a great vibe and I think we played really well today. I'm super proud of everyone."

"Good to hear. And you, Ilya? How are you feeling about the group and are there any differences compared to other international locker rooms you've been in?"

Ilya knows what she is asking. She wants to know what the Russian team was like, and if he regrets making the switch or not. The look Shane gives him is not one that Ilya can entirely dissect in the moment, too focused on making sure his English makes sense.

“Yes, is good group. Very different to Russian team but I am happy to be here and to win this game with them.”

Shane jumps in, “we’re glad to have him, too. Ilya is the most talented player that I know.” Sharp and clearly pointed at the interviewer.

“I’m sure! Anyone would be glad to have Ilya Rozanov on their side,” she says happily, and it seems to ease a bit of the tension pulling at Shane’s shoulders. Ilya reaches over and puts his hand on Shane’s lower back, rubbing soothing circles there. He doesn’t really understand where the reaction is coming from. Sure, it was a bit of a dumb question, but Ilya is hardly bothered.

But maybe Shane could sense something that Ilya couldn’t, because a few minutes and a few questions later, the interviewer turns back to Ilya and asks, “how is the rest of the Canadian team reacting to having a Russian as a captain?”

“I- I’m sorry. I don’t understand question.” Ilya feigns a lack of English to hopefully move them through the awkward situation they are finding themselves in before he or Shane say something they’d regret.

If he’s being honest, the question cuts deep for Ilya. He knows that they voted him into the alternate captain position, but the feelings of inadequacy and being an outsider do more than just linger. He can’t stop thinking about it. Can’t stop thinking about the fact that he wouldn’t feel this way had the country that brought him up not turned its back on him.

You’d only feel a different kind of shitty if you were still playing for them, his brain supplies.

“I mean,” starts the interviewer curtly, “there are a lot of Canadians who feel uneasy about a foreigner even being on the team, let alone being a captain. I guess what I’m really trying to ask is: why make the switch at all? Just to get around the ban—”

“He’s not a foreigner!” Shane is practically shaking with rage next to him, and Ilya can’t seem to reach out and just pull him away from this disaster. His ears are ringing and he feels like he’s just been submerged under water. He understands how she feels because he’s been feeling it himself. That doesn’t make it any less difficult of a pill to swallow, that his fears are being realized. “God, you are so unprofessional—”

“I’m only stating the truth—”

“The truth, my ass. He lives in Canada, he has a Canadian passport, the team voted him in as captain for Christ’s sake. What more does he have to do?”

“He could play for the Russian team since he is, you know, Russian.”

“You have no clue what you’re talking about. Do you even understand how dangerous that—”

At that moment, Ilya finally comes back into himself enough to grab Shane by the arm and start pulling him away. “Come on, Shane. Let’s just go.”

He doesn’t fight it, just lets Ilya guide him back to the locker room. It isn’t something they talk about right away. Not when they pack their bags to leave the arena, not when they sit next to each other on the ride back to the village, and not when they are in the cafeteria eating dinner while their teammates chatter around them. They both know that it is not a conversation for other ears to hear. Besides, Shane needed to cool off for a bit. If he’s lucky, he might be able to push off the conversation to tomorrow.

When they finally get back to their room, it is late. Both of them are exhausted from the game and they have another one the next day. They really don’t have time for any long, drawn out conversations. But Shane is still too keyed up about the whole thing, pacing the length of their small floor even as Ilya throws himself down on his bed.

“I can’t believe she said that stuff.” Ilya’s eyes are closed as he’s already halfway to sleep, but he hums a response anyway as Shane continues. “I mean, what was she thinking? How stupid can someone be? You’ve done everything necessary to be here and she just shits on it. Unbelievable.”

“Yeah, for sure.”

Shane sighs heavily. “Come on Ilya, don’t be like this.”

He cracks his eyes open and looks at his husband with a glint of mischief. “Be like what? I am tired, I want to sleep.”

“I—” a pause and a breath, “I think you don’t want to talk about it. I think maybe you’re hurt or angry about what she said but you don’t want to admit it to me.”

Ilya sighs. He knows he isn’t getting out of this tonight. “Shane,” he resigns, “I’m honestly not sure how I feel about it.”

It clearly isn’t the answer that Shane wanted, but he seems to accept Ilya’s candor for what it is, sighing again as he sits on the bed next to his husband and saying, “That’s okay. But can I tell you how I feel?”

A hand rubs lovingly at Ilya’s hip. He knows that Shane needs this. That he needs Ilya to know exactly what is going on in his head, so he nods.

“I feel angry *for* you. And I feel sad that someone would say that stuff about you, especially when they don’t know you or what you’ve been through.” He looks deeply into Ilya’s eyes and speaks the next part very quietly. “And I know that there’s at least a small part of you that— whether you want to say it out loud or not— wanted to play for Russia for the rest of your career. That them not calling you up to play after we came out hurt more than you let on.

“I also know that I’m rambling now, but I guess I just want to tell you that you’re allowed to have mixed feelings about being here. With us. But that it doesn’t make you any less worthy of being a part of this team.”

Ilya isn’t quite sure how to reply to that. Once again, Shane has read him like a book, and quicker than even Ilya himself could. There is no stopping the way his throat closes up, choked with the overwhelming feeling of being seen. It almost brings tears to his eyes. But Ilya doesn’t want to cry. Not here, not again, where his dreams are supposed to be becoming a reality and he’s supposed to be happier than ever.

“Thank you,” is all he can muster up. Shane accepts it. “Of course. And when you figure out how you feel, or if you just want to talk, you know I’m here.”

Nodding, Ilya burrows into the apex of Shane’s shoulder and drifts into sleep.

The game against Switzerland proves a bit more difficult. Ilya feels outside of himself, making it harder to focus on the game. He bags one assist— to Shane, of course— but other than that he is largely invisible on the ice. Opponents ram him into the boards, he loses the puck more times than he cares to admit, and his slap shot is all wrong.

It’s hardly a surprise when the coach pulls him out for most of the third period, but it stings either way.

The locker room is still joyous, albeit slightly more subdued than yesterday. Ilya thinks that it’s because this game was not quite the beating on the opponent that the previous one was, but it becomes apparent that there’s something else going on when Nate Barbeau— the rookie that almost split his head open dancing after the first practice— walks up to him shyly.

“Hey, man.” He doesn’t quite make direct eye contact. “We saw that interview from yesterday and, like, it was totally fucked, man. We totally see you as Canadian and we’re really glad you’re here. So, fuck her.”

A chorus of muttered agreement breaks out through the room. The rookie’s speech was stilted and a bit awkward, but the sentiment was there. Wyatt even claps him on the shoulder and gives him a tight-lipped smile. The feeling of not belonging doesn’t quite go away— maybe it never will— but it eases at the show of support, making Ilya feel just that much lighter.

They have a day off between the second and third games. Without practice, Ilya isn’t sure what to do with himself. Blissfully, he wakes up without an alarm, but notices pretty quickly that Svetlana has texted him for the first time since arriving in Italy.

Sveta 3:12

I saw the video

The one with the stupid reporter

Fuck her. She was wrong

Sveta 3:16

But for the record I still think you are way too sexy to be playing for Canada of all places. Everyone knows they don't make them like you over there

Ilya chuckles lightly at the last message. Count on Svetlana to make any situation into something that can be laughed about. Shane stirs in his bed at the noise, brow furrowing against the morning light piercing through the large window. Ilya stifles his laugh so as to not disturb him again and quietly types his response.

Ilya 9:26

Quit making me laugh before I wake up my husband on accident

Quickly, he shuts off his phone and places it face-down on his nightstand. In all honesty, he'd rather just forget about the whole interview incident and move on than keep dwelling on it. People keep bringing it up, almost like they think he'll be offended if they don't show him their support. He wouldn't, but that doesn't seem to stop anyone from telling him how stupid or ignorant she was.

He knows that they're right, but still, it would be easier if everyone just forgot about it. And anyway, he thinks about it enough already as is. He doesn't need the reminder that there are people who think he doesn't belong here.

Shane shifts again, this time clearly coming closer to wakefulness. Ilya can hear him hum softly from across the room. Deciding that he doesn't want to wait, Ilya stands up and saunters across the room, kneeling by the side of Shane's bed.

His lips, pouty with the discomfort of being halfway between sleep and consciousness, look so kissable that Ilya can't help but lean in and lay one on him. Featherlight and not enough to rouse him. So, Ilya leans in again, kissing him harder this time with the full intention of waking him up. As a little treat, he even licks between the seam of Shane's lips.

It works. Shane sucks in a deep breath as his eyes flutter open, the first thing he sees being his husband's smiling face.

"Goodmorning," he slurs, sleep still heavy on his tongue.

"Good morning, moya liubov." It's impossible to keep the lovesick tone from peeking through.

Shane clearly heard it, because he smiles back with that dopey look that he only gives when he's especially charmed by Ilya. "Whole day off. What are we gonna do?" Shane can't help but need a plan.

"I do not know. Maybe stay and let me ravage you all day." Ravage is a new word for Ilya. He'd heard some character in a sitcom say it a few weeks back and for some reason, it stuck.

He learned long ago not to question the random English words that his brain picks up on in lieu of more important ones.

Shane seems to enjoy his new vocabulary, giggling and pushing at Ilya's shoulder playfully. "Not all day. Maybe for a bit, though."

"What else should we do then, Mr. Cockblock?"

He doesn't even dignify the name with a response. "We could sightsee. I've never been to Milan."

Of course, Ilya bends to Shane's whims and they end up halfway across the city for some tourist attraction that he'd never heard of before. The city is beautiful with a distinct, old style that reminds him a bit of Moscow. A pang of homesickness strikes him suddenly, burning his insides and squeezing his heart painfully. He takes a deep breath and tries to ground himself in this moment. Being in Milan, sightseeing with Shane

Around midday, he surprises Ilya by pulling them towards a gelato shop. "Who are you and what have you done with my husband?"

Shane scoffs. "We're in Italy, I think we can cheat our diets a little bit to try gelato."

"Okay. But I still think you have been possessed."

They end up sharing a small one that tastes like strawberries and laugh at the tiny spoons that barely fit in their hands. After, as they walk along the canals holding hands, they make light conversation. "Have you been anywhere in Europe outside of Russia?"

Ilya lets go of Shane's hand to instead rest his arm over his shoulder and pull him in close. "Yes, we went some places for tournaments when I was young. Finland, Latvia, I think Estonia, too. Places like that."

"Did you like to travel? I always hated being away from home." Ilya squeezes his shoulder and jokes, "of course you did."

They laugh before he continues. "I liked to travel. But to come home was always better. At least until Mama died."

The light atmosphere becomes a bit more heavy, Shane humming in acknowledgment of Ilya's vulnerability. He knows how difficult it can be for him to open up at times, so he doesn't push. Instead he waits for an in, when Ilya cracks the door open just enough for Shane to slip in. Ilya knows he can sense the opportunity coming and he allows it to happen. Allows Shane to ask what he wants to know.

Except he doesn't ask. "You miss Russia, still," he states like a fact because it is. While there are things that he doesn't miss— the pressure, the homophobia that weighed heavy on him constantly, the soul-sucking energy of his father and brother— there are things that he will never stop longing for. Like the ability to speak and understand without thinking, or the food that will never taste quite right when he tries to make it at home, no matter how exactly he

follows the recipe. Or his mother's grave that he will never again visit, and that surely sits barren and dirty without flowers or visitors to keep it clean.

"Yes," he chokes out, because it's all he can manage. He thinks back to Shane's words to him a few days ago: *you're allowed to have mixed feelings about being here. With us.* And the tears he shed in the shower that he never talked about with Shane.

For the first time, Ilya realises that he never truly grieved the loss of his home country. He's spent so long trying to wrap his mind around his mother's death and how it impacted him, that this has seemingly been left behind to rot and fester. Of course, he knew that he carried a sense of homesickness from time to time, but he usually attributed it to missing his mother rather than the actual physical location.

"I feel." He racks his brain for the right words. The one he wants to use only comes to him in Russian. "Predanny. I do not remember in English."

Shane pulls out his phone, tapping a few times before holding it up to Ilya to translate. "Say it one more time."

Ilya complies, repeating the word again but quieter this time. It feels more real the second time he says it. "Betrayed. You feel betrayed?"

He nods, but can't find it in himself to look towards Shane. The English word doesn't feel like it would sit right on his tongue quite yet, but he knows it's the right one. The burn of betrayal sears him constantly. Because how dare the country that raised him— loved him, even— turn its back on him? At the drop of a hat, people who once revered him as a crowning achievement of the nation's sporting programs decided that he was the scum of the Earth. How could he not feel betrayed?

When Ilya finally works up the nerve to shift his gaze towards Shane, it's clear that he doesn't understand why Ilya chose that word. He doesn't have the energy to explain it properly, though. Not in his second language.

So all he says is, "they loved me until they did not."

Secretly, Ilya worries that the same thing will happen with Canada.

The game against France goes better for Ilya. It ended in a draw, but he didn't feel completely invisible out on the ice, which is an improvement from the previous game. They ended up coasting through the prelim round, first in their group and earning an automatic spot in the quarterfinals.

With a few game-free days ahead of them, the team decides to celebrate by crowding into one of the suites to drink together. Going to clubs wouldn't be a good idea while the city is bustling with millions of extra people and really, the hassle of trying to get twenty five grown men out on the town across the city isn't worth it. So they settle for some— in Ilya's opinion— shitty vodka while they sit shoulder to shoulder in an increasingly stuffy room.

At some point, when he is pleasantly buzzed but overheating a bit, Ilya gets up and pops open a window. Cool air brushes his face, instantly making him feel better. He amusingly hears some of the ice dance girls from down the hall– who came in when they heard the celebration– flirting with the younger players behind him. With the space he now has standing up, he pulls out his phone and reads the texts that he hasn't had enough time to answer since after the game.

Sveta 20:51

Good game Ilyusha !

Yuna 21:12

So proud of both of you! Congratulations and kick some ass in the quarters.

Shane 20:59

Where are you?? Bus is leaving soon

He smiles at that last one. Leave it to Shane to be on top of everything, so much like his mother in that way. Ilya answers Sveta and Yuna with words of thanks and promises to see them soon before shoving his phone back in his pocket and turning to look at his team who are laughing and enjoying themselves.

Mixed feelings and homesickness aside, there is nowhere Ilya would rather be but here.

The quarters end up being a blowout. A five-nil win to Canada over Latvia that Ilya secretly feels is payback for the humiliating defeat he suffered in Sochi. Two days later, after a rest day spent doing nothing but lazing in bed and having sex, they are warming up to play against the defending champions, Finland.

Everyone is all straight faces and tense shoulders. Ilya is under no false pretense that this game will be easy, but lord have mercy on his soul because he really feels like they need to lighten up a bit. He knows from experience that nerves like that can be detrimental to any team, especially one that has a lot of young players. So he stands from his stall, pads half on, and says, “Okay, okay I make a deal with you. I will give one thousand dollars to every player who scores goal tonight. So make sure you crush them or that money will go to Hollander.” He points behind his back to his husband. “And we all know that he will use to buy ugly clothes and more books about hockey. No one wants this. Please do not let this happen.”

The room is very serious for a second before breaking out into a tentative bout of laughter. It lightens the mood. At least, Ilya hopes that it does.

Coach comes in to give some last minute tactical advice, then opens the floor for Shane to do his captain's speech. He never has a lot to say, but the players hang off of every word like drops of water in a desert. This speech is no different, things like, “remember your

positioning. Don't lose focus. Fight for every puck," with the obligatory, "we are going to fucking ruin them. Let's make sure to send them home crying."

Something akin to a battle cry echoes in the locker room, the whole team hollering that Finland's days are numbered and that they will be humiliated tonight. Ilya can feel the words becoming true, confidence growing bigger in his chest.

Half way through the second period, the game is way too fucking close for Ilya's liking. He can already feel the fatigue chewing at his muscles, making it harder to focus. The score is tied up at one a piece, with Barbeau netting his first goal for Canada.

Him and Shane are on a line together making great passes that should be ending in goals, but are being stopped by Finland's beast of a goaltender. It's all so frustrating that Shane ends up making another speech at the first intermission. It's quick but effective, because when they get back out there, Nate snags his second goal of the night and they lead for the rest of the period.

The second intermission is less do-or-die, but still serious. And when they go back out for the third and final period, Ilya feels good. Like he can feel the final within his reach. Just twenty more minutes and they'll have the chance to fight for the title that will prove they are the best in the world.

Ilya thinks they are going to seal the deal with a third goal when he makes a beautiful pass to Shane. He can imagine the way Shane slides it into the back of the net with ease before it happens. The end of his husband's stick moves to do just that, winding up for the perfect angle. But just when he's about to release the energy building in his body into the puck, one of Finland's massive defenders barrels in, twisting Shane's upper body and knocking him to the ice with an unfathomable force.

For a moment, Ilya flashes back to that horrible night in Boston so many years ago, where Shane was hit in almost the same way and didn't get back up. A pit grows in his stomach now just as it did back then. But Shane is moving, trying to push himself up off of the ice. Ilya tries to breathe, tries to tell himself that this isn't like that hit. Because Shane is okay, he is moving and he is okay.

Except he notices almost immediately that Shane is holding his shoulder and grimacing. Without being able to help himself, Ilya skates over to check on him. "You are okay?"

"Well, I didn't hit my head or anything." That's good. More than good, actually. "But my shoulder really hurts."

Ilya can see the medical team getting ready to step on the ice if Shane decides he needs treatment. He knows that his husband is stubborn and will likely wave them off to continue playing, so Ilya makes the decision for them, gesturing for them to come take a look.

"Ilya—" Shane is a man of instinct. The instinct to push through, to be the leader everyone expects him to be even if he's hurt. It makes him an amazing player, but can ruin him in times

like these.

“They will take a look and if you are okay then you will keep playing. Better safe than sorry.”

He does one big swizzle back to give them some room. When they get there, they sit Shane down on the ice and begin asking questions. Ilya can't hear over the roar of the crowd but he can see the words forming on his tongue. When they start to touch Shane's shoulder he winces in pain.

Ilya can just barely hear, “okay, now try to move it,” over the noise. Shane's upper body jerks strangely before he shakes his head. He can't do it.

They say a few more words to him before they help him up off the ice and start towards the bench. Shane calls his name and Ilya is there before he can finish. “What did they say?”

“Dislocated shoulder.” That's... not great. He's out of the rest of this game, surely. Possibly out of the final, too. But Ilya can breathe knowing that Shane is conscious and that this will heal. He will be upset, but it will heal. “Okay. Go get checked out more. I will make sure we win.”

“You better.” His smile is a bit strained, clearly frustrated at not being able to finish, but he makes his way off the ice without much fanfare. As the door to the ice closes behind him, Ilya puts his focus back onto the game, ready to ensure their spot in the final.

Yuna 22:10

Call me when you get some time

The message blinks on Ilya's phone, blue light only increasing his pounding headache. He's on his way to the medical room in the bowels of the arena, after the game ended in a win for Canada and Ilya finished interview duties, which landed on him in Shane's absence.

He was nervous given the incident last week, but it seems that the Canadian federation has vetted all questions beforehand to avoid more trouble, because all questions were focused and professional. They asked about Shane, of course. The truth was that he hadn't seen him yet, and wasn't sure exactly what had happened, but the last thing he'd heard was a potential shoulder injury.

His answer was accepted and he was let go. Which leads him to now, speed-walking down the dimly lit hall, the door to Shane visible on his right near the end. Throwing it open with little grace, Ilya storms into the room and right to his husband. “Tell me how bad it is.”

Shane looks worn down. “They were right, it's dislocated. I'm out for the final.” Ilya's head drops, disappointed for him. He knows how much Shane wanted to play. How much he wanted to captain the team to the gold. Grabbing Shane's hand is the only comforting thing he can think to do in the moment.

“I'm so sorry, sweetheart.”

“It sucks, but at least I’ll have a front row seat to Canada winning.”

Of course Shane would deflect by trying to make Ilya feel better. He knows he is devastated despite it by the furrow of his brow and the slight quiver of his lip as he speaks. “We will win you a gold medal, Shane Hollander. I promise.”

“You better.” They smile sweetly at each other. A rare intimate moment in public.

“Good. Now that this is settled I have to call your mother. She is very worried.”

Ilya takes a freshly slinged Shane back to the village. The piece of medical equipment holding his arm in place reminds him of going to see Shane in the hospital under the guise of being a respectful rival captain. The relief he feels at never having to pretend like that again is palpable. This time he can put his arm protectively around his husband without worrying how it will be perceived.

Similar to that time all those years ago, Shane has been given enough pain medication to make him unsteady on his feet and his words slur on his tongue. Ilya can find the humor in it now that his loose lips won’t spill any life-altering secrets. “Careful through the door. There you go, lay down.”

“Ilya.” Shane drags his name out with a whine. “Come here. I wanna suck your dick.”

Ilya can’t help but laugh. “I can’t, liubov. You are hurt and I still have to call your mom.” Shane is out cold before the sentence is even finished, drugs clearly taking their course. Once he’s tucked into bed, Ilya steps out into the common space of their suite.

Two rings is all it takes for Yuna to pick up, and she’s hounding him with questions before Ilya can even say hello. “Is he okay? What’s the injury? Will he be ready in time for the gold medal game?”

“Hello to you too,” Ilya jokes. “He is okay. Sleeping now but will be fine. It is his shoulder, he dislocated it. He is out of the game.”

He hears a sigh from the other end of the line. There’s both relief and sadness in it. Relief that Shane is okay. Sadness that he will miss a game he has dreamed about for almost his entire life. Ilya understands, feels all the same emotions. “Is he upset?”

“He is probably too high right now to be very upset. So we will see.” Yuna huffs a laugh. They talk for a bit longer, and not just about Shane. About the games and their sightseeing and Yuna and David’s plans to bake cookies. Not for the first time, Ilya thinks how lucky he is to have found Shane and been invited into his family like this. His own family, with the exception of his mother, was all hard lines and sharp edges. Shane’s couldn’t be more different.

Thank God for this life he’s built.

The coach pulls Ilya aside before their next practice. He thinks that he'll just answer some questions about how Shane is doing and be on his way, but that's not what happens. "Listen Ilya, with Shane out that means we don't have a captain." A hand pats Ilya's shoulder. "As you know, the guys chose you to be the first alternate captain, meaning that you're going to have to take over from here."

He must look like a fish, the way his mouth opens and closes while no words come out. Truly, he hadn't even thought about the fact that being alternate captain made him the obvious choice to step in for Shane. Ilya had been so caught up in making sure he was okay to pay any mind to anything else, really.

"You are serious?" Part of him can't believe it. He knows that the team voted him into the position, but he never thought it would really mean anything. At most he thought he'd talk to the refs a few times while Shane was briefly subbed out. Never did it cross his mind that he would have to assume all responsibility.

It's not that Ilya doesn't want it. He's been the Centaur's captain for his entire duration in Ottawa, and he was Boston's before that. He knows that he's capable, and he isn't going to turn his nose at this opportunity that's being given to him. He just doesn't know how people will react to a Russian-born player leading the Canadian team into an Olympic final.

"Yes, Ilya. I am completely serious. But of course if you don't think you want that, I'm more than happy to ask Wyatt—"

"No! I want it. I just—" he chews his bottom lip nervously. "You don't think people will not like that *I* do it?"

Coach gives Ilya a strange look, and Ilya almost thinks it's sad. "I don't care what other people think, son. I know that this team looks up to you. I know that you're one hell of a captain for the Centaurs. And I know that you can do what needs to be done tomorrow."

How does one even respond to that? Ilya sure as hell doesn't know, because all he manages is, "oh."

No one has ever stated their confidence in him quite that overtly. Anyone but Shane, that is. But it's different coming from Coach. He's under no obligation to put this sort of belief in Ilya, but here he is. For some reason that goes completely over Ilya's head, he wholly and truly trusts that he can get the job done.

"Is that a yes?"

Ilya thinks for a moment. If the coach thinks he can do this, then that must mean something. "Yes. I will do it."

The energy in the arena is electric. During warmups, Ilya looks up to the box he knows Shane will be in. He can't see him from down here. It's too high up. But just knowing that he's there eases his nerves.

The final is set, almost ready to go. It's Canada vs. Germany. The German team skates just a few meters to his left, across the center line, and Ilya tries not to focus on them, but it's hard when they are so close. He knows that Shane is cataloguing every little thing and minor discrepancy he can see, creating some kind of plan in his head that would get them the victory. Maybe he'll even text his findings to Ilya for him to read in the short time between warmups and the first faceoff.

Once he feels his body is warm and loose, Ilya drops to the ice to start stretching. He opens his hips first, then frees up his quads and hamstrings, before pulling at his arms a bit. By the time he's finished, there's only a minute or so left of the warmup, and some of his teammates are already making their way towards the boards to get off the ice.

He doesn't think his pregame speech is anything special. It's his usual, "destroy them," mentality with yet another promise of monetary compensation for goals scored. But the team seems fired up anyway, cheering and clapping with an energy that you can only feel at big games like this.

For so many years, hockey felt like a chore. A job that he did because that's just what he was employed to do. But moving to Ottawa helped him find some joy in it again, and having Shane by his side on the ice with his enthusiasm and unbridled love for the game ignited something in Ilya. For the first time in his entire life, Ilya could say, with his full chest, that he loved to play Hockey.

Stepping on to the ice and up to the ref as captain easily becomes one of the proudest moments of his life. Knowing that all the people who he loves are watching him represent the Canadian flag is enough to put a goofy smile on his face. All of those feelings about not belonging here don't just vanish, but they do quiet at the sight of a crowd cheering his name, holding the Canadian flag.

Ilya loses himself in the game. It's the most fun he has ever had on the ice, the only thing missing is Shane by his side, but having him watching from the stands isn't so bad. He passes with pinpoint accuracy, barrels down the ice with a speed he hasn't had in years, and rounds defensive players like they're air. The only thing stopping him from scoring is that the German team is playing at their best too.

But Ilya knows that his team is playing better. They just need the right shot.

That shot comes after a grueling two periods and deep into the third, when Ilya is starting to think that the standoff won't end and they will go into overtime. The first forward pass of the breakaway comes from Wyatt, who has been a brick wall tonight. He lays it on to Nate who makes a huge run down the length of the ice, then shuffles it ever so slightly to Ilya who skates up behind him and calls for it.

It doesn't take much after that, really. With all of the German defense looking around for the puck like chickens with their heads cut off, Ilya easily gets up near their goaltender and slides it through his legs.

There's a few moments where Ilya is all alone, his teammates yet to make their way across the ice to celebrate with him. In those seconds, the world goes quiet even as he knows the

crowd is electric. It's all he can do to drop to his knees, hands raised to the air in reverence and say quietly, "for you, mama. Always for you."

At the first touch of his teammates, he comes back to the world with all of its noise and celebration and beauty. Bodies pile on top of him, restricting his breathing and yet, Ilya can't find it in himself to care. He's too elated, too proud.

He's had his Canadian passport for a while now, but this is the first time he feels truly Canadian. Finally, like a weight he didn't realise he was holding on to, Ilya decides that he doesn't care what anyone has to say about how Canadian he is, and forgives that journalist for her insensitive comments. He lets himself feel angry for the version of himself from a few weeks ago that was secretly hurt by it, but he doesn't let the Ilya of right now feel it bog him down.

Looking around the stadium as he heads back to his spot to finish up the period, he spots Shane on one of the big screens, smiling wide and clapping despite his injured shoulder. Ilya didn't think Shane could have more belief and pride in him as he already did, but somehow this is the most proud he's ever looked.

Ilya can't get enough.

The medal ceremony isn't until that evening, when all top three teams are dressed in their official, patriotic uniforms to line up on a stage in the middle of Milan and receive their awards. Shane is with them for this part, of course. His arm is still in a sling, but he's not high on pain meds anymore, completely lucid for this moment.

They stand in line, Shane at the front with Ilya just behind and Wyatt third. The three senior-most players, more than likely participating in their last Olympics. Ilya hopes they can go four more years, but he isn't sure his body is on board.

"I can't fucking believe this," says an awestruck Shane as the Olympic anthem blasts and the IOC president gets up on stage to say a few words. Ilya shakes his head in disbelief and Wyatt murmurs an agreement.

They did it. They won. Canada are Olympic champions. And Ilya was the hero, though he keeps insisting on giving the credit to Nate for the assist.

When it's time for their ceremony to start, they go in ascending order of placement, meaning the bronze medalists first. Then the heartbroken German team, and finally Canada. The corny music they play is almost too loud in Ilya's ears, vibration rattling the stage slightly.

It all goes by in a flash. Before Ilya knows it, he's shaking hands with some official as they wind a ribbon tied off with gold around his neck. All he can do is hold it in his hands and stare, like it will vanish if he so much as takes his eyes off of it. He inspects it, flipping it over to read the inscription on the back: *XXV Winter Olympic Games Milano Cortina 2026, Men's Hockey*

When Ilya finally looks up, Shane looks so radiant, lit up by the stage lights and draped in gold. He looks like a statue, like he belongs in a museum for everyone to look at and discuss how gorgeous of a piece of art he is. Ilya thinks that right now, he is the most beautiful thing he's ever seen before.

The closing ceremonies, held just after they get their medals, are a chaotic affair. The whole team rushed to get there on time, medals still on, and they just barely made it. To be honest, Ilya doesn't remember much of the whole event. Just that all he wanted to do was go back to the room with Shane so they could spend some time together before getting on the plane home tomorrow.

It's late by the time they finally make it back. Ilya is bone tired and ready to go to sleep immediately, but Shane insists on them taking a shower. "We'll feel disgusting tomorrow if we don't," he reasons.

They work carefully together to get Shane out of his sling and step in. The water is comfortably warm, instantly soothing the ache in Ilya's tired muscles. He feels Shane's good arm track up his spine, landing at the base of his neck and putting pressure. "You played so well. I bet you're sore."

Ilya only hums, eyes closed in relaxation. Shane's fingers start to dig pleasantly into the muscles, working out the tight spots and turning Ilya into jello. He lets his husband take care of him, washing his hair and body with such care. When they get out, Ilya can hardly stand anymore, making his way immediately to the bed the second he is dry enough. He doesn't even bother putting on clothes.

Evidently, Shane doesn't either, because he slips in right after Ilya. The small bed doesn't allow them much room to spread out, but it hardly matters when they naturally press so close together, arms intertwined.

They are silent for long minutes, just breathing each other in. Shane speaks up as Ilya is halfway to sleep. "Tell me what you said. Right after your goal, I saw you mouthing something."

He opens his eyes. "To say is for my mother. That I do it for her."

"That's nice." They share a sweet kiss. He wants to tell Shane how he missed him on the ice. And not just in the way that a center misses his winger, more like the feeling of a phantom limb. Like Ilya could still feel Shane, even when he wasn't there. Could feel the way he was supposed to pass to him, or the position he should have been in but wasn't. But he doesn't quite have the words in English. Knows it would sound clunky on his tongue.

Like he can read Ilya's mind, understand how there are things he wants to say, Shane asks, "What were you thinking when you scored?"

Ilya takes a second to think back to the goal. What was he thinking? He remembers flashes of his mother, of course. Then he remembers the crowd, which triggers the most monumental memory. How he could have let it slip from his mind, he has no idea.

"I was thinking how for first time, I felt like real Canadian."

Shane's face betrays him, Ilya thinks, and he doesn't even realize it. He looks confused at why this would ever be a thought that crossed Ilya's mind, which would be endearing if it weren't for the fact that Ilya knows Shane will want to talk about it. "What do you mean? Like, you didn't feel Canadian... at all before?"

"No, not really. I felt more like—" what *did* he feel like? It's so hard to put into words that he has to really think carefully about which one to use here. "Imposter, maybe. But, when I score tonight, I felt like I earned the right to be Canadian."

"Oh, Ilya—" that is not the reaction that Ilya expected. The hurt in Shane's voice as he says his name almost makes him feel nauseous. "That's not something you need to earn. Jesus, I thought you were just feeling homesick not— I didn't realize you were feeling this way."

He wants to soothe the worry, but he finds he wants to be honest, too. "You were not wrong, I was feeling homesick." Shane sighs a little in relief at the notion that he wasn't entirely off-base. "But I was also feeling like maybe I did not belong here. Was nothing anyone did—well, except maybe that stupid interviewer— was just how I was feeling."

"I thought that what she said may have cut deeper than you let on."

Almost sadly, Ilya smiles at his husband. "Yes. It did."

If possible, they move closer to each other, chests touching as they breathe in sync. Ilya has never felt as connected to another person as he does with Shane. The closest thing to it would be his relationship with his mother, which is tinted with the colorful filter of childhood. Ilya loved his mother and knows that she understood him, but he never got the chance to know her as an adult. Not in the way he knows Shane.

It took some getting used to, getting read like a book. Ilya remembers times, early in their relationship when Shane seemed to know what he needed without words, and how surprised he'd been that that was something he could have. For a long time, a relationship like that felt off limits to him.

But here he is, spilling his heart out on the floor for his loving husband who knows exactly what to do with it. "Look at me," he says, and Ilya does even though he knows Shane won't meet his eyes for whatever he is about to say next.

"Canada is just as much yours as it is mine. You don't have to earn your place on this team—other than with your hockey, of course— and you definitely don't need to earn the right to call yourself Canadian. The goal was amazing and I am so proud of you, but it doesn't change anything about whether or not you belong on this team."

Tears threaten to spill over the barrier of Ilya's eyes. He rubs his finger along the line of Shane's jaw, loving in the same way Shane is to him in these kinds of moments between them. "Thank you."

"You don't need to thank me," Shane says as he nuzzles into the palm of Ilya's hand. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

The first thing Ilya does upon getting home is pull out both of their medals and snap a picture of them hanging around Anya's neck. It instantly becomes one of his favorites of her, so naturally he posts it on instagram within minutes.

When Shane's phone goes off with the post notification, he huffs out a laugh and asks, "really?"

"Yes, of course. She is gold medalist too."

"Oh yeah? Gold medalist of what?" Ilya plays along, acting like he has no idea what Shane could possibly be confused about.

"Of being best dog in the world."

"Oh yes, how could I ever forget."

They have dinner with Shane's parents that night. The greeting consists of lots of hugs, requests to see the medals, and even some tears from Yuna that she tries to swipe away undetected. "I cannot believe my boys are Olympic gold medalists," an awestruck Yuna says as she holds one medal in each hand, observing them both as if they are any different to each other.

Ilya doesn't think he'll ever get over how easily Shane's family integrated him into the fold. Love hadn't been so easily given to him since he was twelve years old. The way that David clasps his shoulder, so obviously brimming with pride for a man that he has no blood relation to. The way Yuna looks at him, calling Ilya her favorite son. It's all so unbelievable for him sometimes.

But he's trying not to think like that anymore. From the few times he's voiced these thoughts to Shane, and the conversation they had during their last night in Milan, he knows that Shane doesn't like when Ilya goes down these tracks. He's talked about it with Galina too, his propensity to catastrophize situations and assume how other people feel about him.

It's something he's working on and probably will be for a long time. He hadn't even realized he was doing it in Milan until after the fact. Reminding himself that he has a family, that there are people who love him, and that not everyone is out to get him all helps. For a while he forgot to do that.

The meal is perfect and wonderful in every way. They catch up, Yuna fretting over Shane's still-injured shoulder while Ilya slips Anya table scraps and everyone pretends not to notice. "You know," David starts, "I obviously wish Shane would have got to play in the final, but I have to say, Ilya, I was so excited about that goal you scored."

He tries to hide his blush to no avail. "Ahh. Thank you."

"What were you thinking, after you scored? I thought you looked like you couldn't believe it." Yuna says. They all laugh at the idea of Ilya Rozanov of all people being brought to a state of disbelief.

"I was thinking," he starts, carefully, "how proud I am to be Canadian."

There's another hand reaching out, gripping Ilya's tightly. When he looks at Shane, he can tell he's said something right. But Ilya finds that he doesn't just say it because it's the right thing, he says it because he believes it.

And it doesn't erase the fact that he is Russian-born, or the fact that he's an immigrant, or that he speaks with an accent. But he holds his pride of being Canadian in the same place as he holds these things. Together, simultaneously. Because they cannot exist separately.

Ilya is Russian but he is also Canadian. He speaks with an accent but he also says things in English that feel dangerous in his native tongue. He was born across an ocean but has all of his roots planted firmly in this ground.

Canada is his home. Nobody else has any right to tell him whether or not he belongs. That feeling comes from within. He just regrets that it took this long for him to finally understand that.

End Notes

comments and kudos feed me so please don't be shy. Also, let me know if there would be any interest in a figure skating au. Highkey considering it rn.

Title from homesick by Noah Kahan

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