

no god, no family, no country

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76390501) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76390501>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Ilya Rozanov and his very complicated relationship with Russia , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-25 Words: 1,715 Chapters: 1/1

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by [vettelian19](#)

Summary

“And what about the sad Russian gay kids who want to see me succeed?”

“The sad Russian gay kids have already seen you succeed. You are an MLH champion married to a man.”

“Yeah, in another country,” Ilya added. Because that is the full picture. You can succeed, sure, if luck is on your side. But even then, you can’t do it there.

Notes

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

Ilya has known for months that Shane would be attending the Olympics and he would not. Still, watching him pack his bag for camp while he's fiddling around the house doing jackshit nothing is a special kind of torture.

Technically speaking, Canada also called him. The IIHF's requirements for representing another country is not as strict as other federations', and Ilya is almost certain he would have fulfilled almost all conditions. Citizenship? Check. Haven't represented Russia in more than 4 years? Check. Willing to pledge alliance to maple syrup? Well, that's not actually part of the requirements, but Ilya could do it, if he wanted to.

The only thing is that, after a very lengthy conversation with Team Canada and an even longer conversation with his therapist, he said a polite 'no, thank you'. Everyone was really understanding, though Ilya thinks they were at least a little surprised—just naturally curious why he would turn down the opportunity to step back on the ice and show Russia what they've lost. Which he gets. He totally gets that.

But what these people do not understand is that the day Canada called, Ilya woke up in the middle of the night, in cold sweat and shouting in Russian.

"What's wrong?" Shane asked immediately, trying to check Ilya for injuries. When his hands came away clean, no blood coating them, he cradled his face. "What's wrong, love?"

But Ilya just shook his head, unable to speak, unable to even switch to English. It hasn't happened to him in a while. He's been moving effortlessly between the two languages like a ballet dancer on the stage in Moscow, dipping into the language that served more purpose in the given situation. But now, it was just Russian, hard, hurried Russian filling his ears.

He doesn't know whose voice it was—not his father's, not Alexei's, not his old coach's, not even his own. But it just kept fucking shouting.

"Hey, hey, it's okay," Shane said, and moved to wipe away tears Ilya didn't even realize he had on his face. "I got you."

The next day, when it was quiet and peaceful in Ilya's head again, he called his therapist. He shut himself in their bedroom, sat on the floor, and listened to his therapist's voice. He played with the crucifix on his neck, letting it leave indentations in his skin when he pressed too hard against it.

"I don't think I can represent Canada," he said in Russian, diving straight in after the first few minutes of their warm-up small talk is over. Dr. Galina knows he's all about business, so she's prepared for his fast balls.

"What makes you say that?"

He told her about his dream. That he had been in the middle of an empty rink and something was chasing him, shouting in Russian about honor.

"Do you feel that you failed Russia when you left them?"

“Yes,” Ilya said, because that’s something he’d already admitted to himself long ago. He knows it wasn’t his fault, but he can’t help how he feels about it. “But I think it’s more like that—that representing my country meant something to me. And maybe it’s because Russia is this nationalistic hellhole where being Russian means something and representing Russia means something even more, but it’s still true. It still meant something to me even when I already knew that my country would hate me for certain parts of me.”

“And sure, it was also important to my father. My father, who could not even forgive me for simply existing, was proud of me when I had Russia written all over my chest. I think it made him feel less like the failure he was for having a queer son.”

Galina didn’t correct him. She didn’t jump in to re-assure him that he was not a failure, and Ilya appreciated it. He couldn’t deal with empty platitudes. He tolerates it from Shane—though as the years pass he has also stopped offering those up—but it’s only because Shane has always been different. With him, Ilya can focus on the love, the misguided, but genuine love, and not on the naive pity that other people fall helplessly into when they come across his Russian trauma.

“And honestly, even if Russia called, I wouldn’t want to represent them now—not if they came waving rainbow flags and offering apologies for all they’ve done before. So it’s not about that. But—I don’t think I can represent Canada, either.”

“You don’t have to. I’m sure you’d love to win another gold medal and I’m sure the Olympics would be a professional challenge, but you don’t have an obligation to anyone. You do not have to represent anyone, but yourself.”

“And what about the sad Russian gay kids who want to see me succeed?”

“The sad Russian gay kids have already seen you succeed. You are an MLH champion married to a man.”

“Yeah, in another country,” Ilya added. Because that is the full picture. You can succeed, sure, if luck is on your side. But even then, you can’t do it there.

“I like Canada, you know? I am—I am grateful for this country every day, even when I don’t say it.”

“It certainly offered you opportunities,” Dr. Galina agreed. “And you have a lot of happy memories connected to the country, I assume.”

The Cups, the cottage, his marriage. Shane.

“But I don’t love it. I don’t even think it’s home really. When I think of home, it’s the house we live in. It’s my bed with Shane in it. And a little bit of the apartment my grandfather left me in Moscow. Even if I won’t see that place ever again.”

“But I don’t think home will ever be a country again,” he added. “So maybe I have to learn to live with that?”

“You can create your own definition of home, Ilya. That is absolutely up to you.”

For a little while, they were both quiet. Dr. Galina didn’t rush him, just let him ruminate his thoughts.

Ilya didn’t think he had anything else left to say. They both knew that he’d already made his decision. He can’t play for Canada, because he doesn’t want to. He can’t play for Russia, because he can’t. So the decision had been made.

“I’ll call them tomorrow.”

Dr. Galina nodded, not needing any further clarification. “How does Shane feel about this? Does he want you to come play with him?”

“He was excited when Canada called. He actually researched if I could even play for them—spent hours digging through the bylaws to make sure there was no secret caveat for switching nationalities. He didn’t tell me this before the call—I think he didn’t want me to get excited in case it fell through.”

“Do you think he will understand why you don’t want to play for Canada?”

Ilya thought about that for a long time. “Yes and no? I think he understands that my relationship with Russia is complicated. He gets that part, even if he doesn’t necessarily understand the nuances of it. I’m not sure he’ll understand why I don’t want to play for Canada. I think he’ll think the same thing you asked about—that it’s about failure or betrayal to my home country. But I really don’t think that’s the main thing. I think it’s more—it’s more that it would just simply hurt to play for them. It would hurt that, for once again in my life, it’s not about who I choose to play for, but who allows me to play for them. Even if it’s coming from a good place, even if someone allowing me to play for them means that they want me on their team. It’s still—it makes me feel like they have this power over me. That they can decide to take me if they like certain parts of me—my new passport, my hockey skills, the PR clout Shane and I on the same team would bring—but if they don’t, they can just not call.”

“It’s hard to find the unconditional love you’re looking for, though. Especially in professional sports.”

“Believe me when I say that I know unconditional love doesn’t exist.”

Because it doesn’t—it can’t when your mom didn’t love you enough to stick around, when your dad never even loved you in the first place, and your country thought that you only belonged as long as you acted like they wanted you to act like. It can’t exist in a world like this.

“And are you sure you’re not going to regret not going when you see Shane on the ice? Or the others on Team Canada?”

Ilya shrugged. “I’ll be angry for sure. Jealous. But I don’t think the alternative would be better. I’m choosing what’s best for me, even if it’s not particularly good.”

Because that's the reality Ilya has slowly been learning to accept.

Shane scores a goal with two minutes left, and Ilya can't help but grin. His husband. His husband is winning Team Canada the game.

He sends a string of hearts to Shane even though he knows he won't see the message for a long time—the game is still underway, then when they win (because they will win), there will be media and celebrations and spraying champagne on each other. But the text will wait for Shane and Ilya knows he'll be happy to see it.

The kitchen is dark and empty when he goes to grab some water. The fridge is full of magnets, souvenirs from trips, drawings from Hayden's kids, kitschy snowglobes Ilya and Shane have been buying each other as a running gag. There is one old magnet from Sochi, back from the 2014 Olympics that Ilya stares at for a long time. The plastic of the magnet is worn out—has been moved around from one apartment to another, slapped onto the hard surface of fridge after fridge. It shows a snowy ski slope, and some of the Olympic buildings, and one corner of it is slightly chipped—it must have fallen down at one point.

Ilya runs his finger through the slope, absentmindedly.

Maybe one day, he thinks. Maybe one day.

End Notes

i don't think you guys understand how much I project onto one ilya rozanov, but here we go again

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