

Why him?

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/75091916) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75091916>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	POV Shane Hollander , Romantic Fluff , Relationship Study , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Established Relationship
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Hollander-Rozanov (they hyphenated)
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-01 Words: 1,704 Chapters: 1/1

Why him?

by [mareastralis](#)

Summary

“I don’t want to sound like an asshole man, really, but... why him?”

Shane had heard this question a hundred times by now, from all sorts of people, in various tones. Some people were more serious than others, most genuinely didn’t get it.

“Of all the available guys in North America, why Ilya Rozanov?”

Or: Shane has heard the question again and again, but for once he really thinks about it

Notes

Trying to post this for the second time and you know what if it doesn't work I will simply give up

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

“I don’t want to sound like an asshole man, really, but... why him?”

Shane had heard this question a hundred times by now, from all sorts of people, in various tones. Some people were more serious than others, most genuinely didn’t get it.

“Of all the available guys in North America, why Ilya Rozanov?”

He usually brushed it off, laughed it off, shrugged and moved on. *It is what it is*. There had been some joy in their coming-out, most of it coming from the fact that they could finally love each other loudly, but he didn’t want to share every single part of them with the media, with prying eyes all over the world. He felt like they all took a lot from them already. For a little over a year now, Shane and Ilya’s relationship had been looked at and studied from every angle. People wanted to know everything, like they had any claim to it, to their story, to their feelings. Like they could even understand any of it. Shane felt like they were ripping away pieces of him every time they uncovered a new picture or some information that one of them had let slip. It was a million times better than being in the closet, but it was still a bumpy road. And people often asked, why him?

Shane looked at the grinning guy standing in front of him. He was a Boston player, one of Ilya’s ex-teammates. One he was still on good terms with, one he had shared funny story of, one of the good guys, who had texted Ilya to express sympathy after the fanmail shitshow. It was just a joke, some light teasing from someone who actually knew that Ilya was a decent guy. But for some reason, maybe because he was lightly buzzed, as he usually was during galas, the question resonated. Shane wondered. Why him?

Ilya wasn’t the asshole most people thought he was, sure, that was easy. His public personality was mostly a mask, mostly a joke. Shane had known better for years now, and many players knew it too, despite Ilya’s behavior during games. He was kind, affectionate, soft, fiercely protective. He was always looking after Shane, anticipating his every need, providing him with what he wanted even before Shane had realized he wanted it. But Shane Holander was an attractive star athlete. Nice guys would be lining up at his door if he said that he was looking for one.

But Ilya was also funny. No one made Shane laugh like him, usually when he shouldn’t be laughing, usually when he needed it the most. Ilya knew how to read his face and see the signs that Shane needed to relax, and he always knew what to say to make that happen. Ilya could read him like nobody else, but maybe that came with the fact that they had known each other for all of their adult life, that they had grown up and become actual people together. Maybe someone else, in some other reality, could make him laugh as much, and wanted to make him happy enough to try.

But as protective as Ilya was, he was also the first one to make Shane uncomfortable. He pushed him out of his comfort zone. He had done so forever. First, on the ice. The mere existence of Ilya Rozanov meant that Shane had to become better, work harder, study more. Ilya had made Shane a better player, he had made the sport stay fun for over a decade, just because beating each other was a rush like no other. Then, in private, Ilya made Shane feel safe enough that he could push his limits, expand his comfort zone in every aspect of their

lives. He could try, because failing was allowed, because Ilya would be there to catch him. Because Ilya wouldn't mock him, not really.

The whole thing had started because Ilya dragged Shane out of the heteronormative box he had locked himself in even though he had been feeling just fine there. Well... it had started because Shane was very gay and Ilya looked like sin personified, if you wanted to get specific. But he never would have crossed the line with anyone else. Even back then, when they were basically still kids, when there hadn't been all those complicated feelings in the mix, Ilya had known how to tease him just enough to make the situation feel less dramatic, less like the world was about to end if Shane reached for something he wanted, but never too much, never too far. He had never made Shane feel ridiculous. He had made him feel seen, and safe. Lost in his memories, Shane could almost hear him asking if everything was okay, over and over, that first time. It was what he remembered the most vividly, everything else was blurred in pleasure like he had never known at that age.

He knew now that, at some point, Ilya had wanted to break things off. That would have been a shot at an entirely different life, one where he didn't get that question all the time. Shane could have found a nice guy, come out on his terms once Scott Hunter had opened the doors for all NHL players. He could have lived an easy quiet life where people didn't care about the person he was dating.

Except that would never have happened. Shane's heart would have died in his chest when Ilya would have rejected him. He wouldn't have found a way to make it start again. There was no one else he could trust like that. No one to make him laugh at his own failures in a way that made them feel unimportant. No one to light his body on fire with a simple look. No one to challenge him to become a better version of himself every day. No one to kiss his worries away and never make him feel like a burden. No one to accept all his quirks and fears and accept to live with them, accept that they couldn't be changed. No one to make him feel safe enough to want, to explore, to ask, to beg. No one to make him feel loved to his core, loved for who he was, for who he had been and who he could become.

He felt his throat closing up.

If Ilya had ended things back then, Shane would have lived half a life. He would have gone on feeling like half a soul. He would have been starving for the rest of his life. Starved for warmth, for love, for safety. He would have married a woman he could get along with, because that's what he was supposed to do, what people expected, and Ilya wouldn't have been here to yell at people to go fuck themselves. Shane would have been unfulfilled forever. He would never have had the courage to break down the closet door, not on his own. He had needed Ilya's love for that. Shane had lived most of his life with Ilya by his side. Even in this reality, even now that people knew, no one could understand what they had gone through.

So... why Ilya?

"Because there's no one else for me."

He was pretty sure that he had sent the guy an apologetic smile and had excused himself. He didn't really care. Right now the only thing that mattered was this other version of him who had to live without Ilya and walked through fire every day for it. This Shane needed a hug.

Shane navigated the crowd easily. He always had a vague idea of where his husband was. He dropped his half empty glass onto a table he walked by and made his way towards Ilya.

His husband looked like sunshine personified, laughing and smiling amongst the crowd. Maybe Shane was a little more drunk than he had anticipated, but he didn't care. He couldn't care, because every second spent away from Ilya made him want to cry. As he reached him, he just touched his wrist and nodded towards the closest exit before making his way there. Sure enough, Ilya followed him, until they were in a mostly empty hallway. Not caring about any passersby, Shane turned around and didn't give Ilya a warning before he wrapped his arms around his shoulders and hid his face in his neck. But Ilya was there to catch him. He always was. His arms came around Shane's waist like it was second nature. It probably was at this point.

"Everything okay moya lyubov?" Ilya asked, the rumble of his deep voice helping something settle deep in Shane's chest.

"I love you," Shane sighed, pushing a hand in Ilya's hair, just to feel more of him. He didn't know if he could ever let go.

"You're scaring me," Ilya confessed softly. "What is it?"

"Nothing. I just needed a second."

Ilya kissed Shane's temple softly. "Is okay." His arms were around Shane's middle, swaying them both from side to side.

"I'm so happy to have you," Shane exhaled.

"What?" Ilya laughed, a little puzzled, trying to pull away to get a better look at his husband's face, but Shane didn't want to be any further than he needed to.

"I'm just... very glad I didn't have to do it on my own."

"Do what?"

"Life, I guess."

Ilya was silent for a second. "Sweetheart I think you are very drunk."

Shane laughed and stepped away from his refuge in the crook of Ilya's neck to look at him. His beautiful husband. The other half of his soul. It could never be anyone else but him. Resisting the urge to snort at Ilya's confusion, he leaned in to kiss him softly. He didn't care who saw them. He almost hoped someone would see how tenderly Ilya was holding him, so maybe someone would finally understand.

Ilya broke the kiss and looked for something on Shane's face. "You need more time? Want us to go back to the hotel? We've been here long enough already."

Shane smiled, and nodded enthusiastically. Yes. Everyone else could go to hell. He only needed Ilya.

End Notes

Guy who just made a joke to Shane Hollander and watched his eyes glaze over with tears before he ran away to his husband: 🧑

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