Our Captain, Their Problem

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Our Captain, Their Problem

by Bruja_oscura

Summary

Ilya Rozanov has a "tiny car accident" (his words). Shane Hollander has a full-scale, system-shutdown panic attack about it. Meanwhile, a horrified Hayden is praying for someone to throw him in a lake and tell him that this is all just a big joke, or maybe for a meteor strike; he is really not picky. J.J., on the other hand, is trying to bleach the image of his sweet captain making out with Ilya fucking Rozanov from his brain.

It's a very normal day for the Montreal Canadiens.

Notes

I don't know what to tell you. They have consumed me body and soul.

Russian translation by PrettyLashJr! here

See the end of the work for more notes

The air in Boston always crackled for Shane Hollander. Today, it wasn't just the pre-game electricity of a divisional rivalry. It was a private, illicit current humming under his skin. He pulled off his sweat-damp practice jersey in the visitors' locker room at the Bruins' facility, the familiar chill of the space a stark contrast to the warm, stubborn glow behind his ribs.

They were here. Same city. Same 48-hour window. Tomorrow's game was the public obligation, the necessary cover. But tonight, tonight was the main event.

For weeks, the ache of missing Ilya had been a constant, low-grade thrum, a background process his brain couldn't shut down. Their stolen time was so scarce now—a frantic night here, a tense, hushed phone call there—and it was never enough. It had been easier before the cottage, when they were both experts at denial, expertly filing their feelings into neat, manageable categories. But now? After the confessions, the raw honesty, and those sun-drenched days of simply *existing* together without a schedule or a secret to keep, their love felt too big to contain. It overflowed. And it ached with a new, profound sharpness, making every airport goodbye feel less like a necessary secrecy and more like a stupid, self-inflicted wound. With Ilya still in Boston but already locked in quiet, tense conversations about a potential move to Ottawa, this season was proving to be a special kind of torture, with their time together feeling borrowed and brittle.

But for these two days, the weight lifted. They were in the same zip code. He could have more than a few frantic hours or a pixelated Skype call on terrible hotel Wi-Fi. He could have a *morning*. The thought sent a giddy, humming anticipation straight through his core, a feeling so bright it almost short-circuited his usual pre-game routine. It was perfect as it was reckless. Shane didn't care.

Tonight, after the obligatory team dinner he'd diplomatically duck out of early, he could go to a high-rise condo that smelled like sandalwood and expensive coffee, he'd fall asleep in the arms that knew exactly how to hold him, and he'd wake up to that stupid, perfect smirk. No more walking on eggshells around their own feelings. No more midnight exits that left him feeling hollowed out and freezing from the inside. They'd carved out their truth by a lake, and Shane would never again let himself felt a shred of shame for wanting *Ilya Rozanov* so desperately.

"Looking forward to the game, Cap?" J.J. chirped, slapping his shoulder pads into his stall next to him, breaking Shane's reverie.

"Always," Shane said, and his smile was genuine. He *was* looking forward to it. To the structured chaos, the clear rules, the electric buzz of pure competition. But especially to the secret, scorching looks he'd exchange with Ilya across the sixty feet of ice between face-off circles. Their own private, perfect game within the game.

The post-practice vibe was loose, the usual blend of exhaustion and easy banter. Shane was half-listening to a heated debate about the best post-game burger joint in the North End, mentally already curating the list of terrible reality TV he was going to make his boyfriend suffer through later, when the tone in the room shifted.

“—whoa, guys, check this out.” It was Lafleur, one of their rookies on defense, holding up his phone. “Just popped up on my feed. Looks like Boston’s star boy had a rough morning.”

Shane’s head snapped up, the generic nickname a direct trigger to his nervous system.

“Rozanov?” another voice asked.

“Yeah. Says he wrapped his Porsche around a light pole on Storrow Drive. Black ice, probably.”

The world didn’t tilt so much as it *dropped*. The sensory input of the locker room—the clatter of gear, the easy laughter, the hiss of showers—muffled into a dull, roaring white noise. His brain, usually a whirring machine of analysis and preparation, screeched to a single, staticky halt. He was on his feet without any conscious decision to move.

“What?” The word came out flat, dead. “What did you say?”

Lafleur, startled by his captain’s sudden, intense focus, turned the screen. “Just this. It’s a breaking news alert. Not many details.”

The headline was a physical punch: ***Bruins Star Ilya Rozanov Involved in Single-Vehicle Accident.*** Below it, a devastating photo. Ilya’s beloved silver Porsche 911, its front end concertinaed against a mangled streetlight, glittering with shattered glass on frosty asphalt.

Shane’s vision tunneled. The photo was all he could process. The crumpled geometry of the metal. The deployed airbag, a stark white fungus blooming in the dark interior. Non-life-threatening, it said, but they always say that at first. Standard procedure. *He’s fine. He has to be fine.* His eyes, refusing to blink, scanned the sparse text. *…taken by ambulance to Massachusetts General Hospital for evaluation… condition unknown…*

Condition unknown.

Shane was about to be sick.

A cold nausea, sharp and immediate, swept up from his gut. The carefully constructed, happy future he’d been mentally drafting moments ago shattered. The warm glow behind his ribs was extinguished, replaced by an arctic vacuum of pure, undiluted fear. His hands went numb. His breath hitched in a sharp, painful gasp he couldn’t control. He didn’t hear the questions starting to bubble up around him. He didn’t register the concerned glances. His body was already moving, operating on a primal, singular directive that overrode everything else: ***Find Ilya. Now.***

He shoved his feet into his street shoes, not bothering with the laces—the asymmetry of it would bother him later, but not now—and grabbed his jacket and wallet from his stall.

“Shane?” Hayden’s voice, close and cautious, cut through the fog. “You okay?”

Shane didn’t answer. He just walked, a stiff, robotic march toward the door, his mind a locked loop of the image of the car and the two words: *condition unknown condition unknown conditionunknown—*

His best friend was beside him in the hallway in a second, a solid, worried presence blocking his path just enough to be an anchor. “Hey. Talk to me. What’s going on?”

Shane stopped. He turned to face Hayden, his left winger, the person who knew his rhythms on and off the ice better than anyone, his tells, his routines, his quiet moods. Except for the one, massive, decade-long secret. The panic was a swirling storm, threatening to fracture his careful control. He pushed it down, deep, locking it behind the most disciplined, flat calm he could muster. He had to make the words come out. He had to make Hayden understand enough to help. The secret could burn.

“I need to go to Mass General,” Shane said, his voice a flat, unnatural monotone. Each word was a deliberate step on very thin ice. “Right now.”

Hayden blinked, his usual easy-going expression fracturing into confusion. “The hospital? Why? Are you hurt? Did you take a puck or something?”

“No. I need to go. It’s important.” Shane’s gaze was fixed, intense, willing Hayden to understand the catastrophic importance without requiring the explanation he couldn’t form. His social scripts had failed. All that was left was raw, unprocessed need. “You have to drive me. I can’t. I can’t operate a vehicle right now.” That, at least, was an objective fact. His hands wouldn’t stop their fine, internal tremor.

The confusion on Hayden’s face deepened into real concern, edged with the beginning of fear. This wasn’t Shane. He was normally their rock, their steady, emotional compass. This was someone hollowed out and running on frayed wires. “Shane, man, you’re scaring me. What is this about? Is it your family? Did something happen?”

J.J. emerged from the locker room then, his usual easy grin dissolving as he absorbed the scene. “Whoa. What’s the five-alarm fire? Cap looks like he just got benched in Game 7.”

“He says he needs to go to Mass General. Won’t say why,” Hayden reported, his eyes never leaving Shane’s face, as if he could diagnose the problem through sheer observation.

The flat control was beginning to splinter. The pressure behind it was too great. A crack appeared, and a desperate, fractured sound escaped him. “*Please*,” Shane said, the word sharp and strained, cutting through the hallway’s quiet. “Hayden. *Please.* I have to get there. I’ll… I’ll explain in the car. I just… I need to *go*.”

He saw the moment their concern for him overrode their confusion. Hayden and J.J. shared a look, a silent conversation born of years of friendship and shared ice passed between them: *He’s our guy. He’s asking. We go*.

Something was very, very wrong with their captain, and he was begging for their help.

“Okay,” his best friend said, his voice shifting into the decisive tone he used to organize their defensive zone. “Okay. My rental’s out front. Let’s move.”

J.J. fell into step without another question, falling into a natural, protective position on Shane’s right side. The three of them moved through the arena’s back corridors in a tense,

hurried silence, Shane leading the way with single-minded purpose. He didn't see the staff they passed. He didn't feel the cold slap of the Boston air as they pushed through the doors to the players' parking lot.

All he saw was the image of that crumpled car. All he knew was that he had to get to Ilya. Nothing else in the universe mattered.

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In the end Shane didn't say a word in the car. His entire being was a raw, vibrating nerve, his consciousness funneled into one single, brutal task: *Do not break down.*

Inhale. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

He stared, unseeing, at the blur of Boston's brick and steel passing the window. In the front seats, Hayden and J.J. exchanged a frantic, whispered conversation, their words just a muffled buzz under the roar of blood in his ears.

"—what the hell, J.J.?"
"—no idea, he just shut down—"
"—think it's a panic attack? He's white as a sheet—"
"—just drive, okay? Just drive."

Their voices were distant radio static. All he could hear was the echo of crumpling metal, a sound his mind had invented and now played on a devastating loop.

Exhale. One. Two. Three. Four.

Shane clutched, desperately, to the simple rhythm like a frayed lifeline, forcing the chaotic, screaming thoughts into the neat, ordered boxes where he usually kept game tape and nutrition schedules. But the boxes kept breaking.

The image of the Porsche—its elegant line utterly destroyed, the driver's side wrapped around cold steel—was burned onto the back of his eyelids. It was all he could see. And with it came the thoughts, the awful, grieving thoughts he couldn't stop.

Inhale. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

What if he was scared? The idea was a physical pain. Ilya, who feared nothing on ice, who met every check with a smirk. Had he been afraid in that single, shattering moment? Had there been time for that brilliant, infuriating mind to register what was happening?

What if the last thing he ever heard was the sound of his own car breaking?

Did he pray? In that final, inevitable second when physics took over, Ilya, who carried his faith like a secret, would surely reach for it. He would inevitably though of his mother. Was

he relief at the thought of seeing her again? Or did he think of Shane? Did he grieve for *them* the same way Shane was grieving right now?

And then, the worst thought, the one that made the breath stutter in his chest despite the counting: *What if the last thing he ever felt was alone?*

They'd spent ten years being so careful, so clever. Ten years of hidden touches and secret codes, building a love in the shadows because the light felt too dangerous. Ten years too proud and too scared to let each other fully in. Ten years where Ilya had carried that kind, lonely heart of his all by himself, and Shane—who knew what it was to feel alone in a crowded room—had sworn that he would spend the rest of his life making sure Ilya never felt that way again. *Did he fail?*

Exhale. One. Two. Three. Four.

He'd have to live in a world where Ilya Rozanov wasn't. A world where that laugh, that specific, rolling chuckle that felt like victory, simply didn't exist anymore. He'd have to play hockey on the same ice Ilya had once owned, in a league that had moved on, while Shane's own life fractured into a permanent Before and After.

Shane was drowning in a grief that didn't even happened yet. Right there in the back seat of Hayden's rental car, he was mourning the man who was his equal, his opposite, his home. But he was also mourning himself, the Shane Hollander who had been whole for one brief, shining moment, who would now shatter beyond any system's ability to reboot.

Shane couldn't breathe.

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The twenty-minute drive felt like an entire lifetime. An entire alternate lifetime where the worst had already happened, playing on a silent, torturous loop in the prison of Shane's skull. An entire lifetime of not knowing if the last words they'd exchanged would be their last.

The car hadn't fully stopped before Shane was out, the door swinging shut on Hayden's "Shane! Wait!" He moved across the parking lot asphalt with a gait that wasn't quite a run but was miles from a walk.

The automatic doors hissed open, releasing a gust of air that smelled of industrial cleaner and human fear. The lobby was a cathedral of terrible possibilities, too bright and humming with a low-grade dread. His heart was a frantic bird trapped in his throat. Desperation was a cold fire in his veins, sharpening his focus to a single point.

He was vaguely aware of his friends falling into step behind him, a familiar defensive formation, but they were just shadows in his peripheral vision. He beeline for the main reception desk, the nurse behind it looked up, her face a mask of professional neutrality.

Shane didn't bother with preamble as he leaned forward, his knuckles white where they pressed against the cool laminate. "Ilya Rozanov. I'm here for Ilya Rozanov. Where is he?" His voice was too tight, too demanding, stripped of all his usual nervous politeness. He was ready to fight. He'd argue, he'd plead, he'd call in every favor, he'd *scream* if he had to. No one was keeping him from Ilya.

Too deep in his own panicked tunnel vision, he didn't register the sharp, simultaneous inhales from Hayden and J.J. standing just behind his shoulders.

The nurse's fingers tapped across her keyboard. She glanced from him to her screen, and something in her demeanor shifted, softened with a dawning recognition. "Your name, sir?" Was it genuine ignorance, or was she giving the very famous Captain of the Montreal Voyageurs—who was visibly, *publicly* on the verge of tears frantically asking for the welfare of the Boston Bruins' star winger— a discreet way to state his business? Shane couldn't find in himself to really care at the moment.

"Shane Hollander."

She nodded, a small, almost imperceptible gesture of confirmation. "Mr. Hollander. We were about to call the number on file. You're listed as Mr. Rozanov's primary emergency contact."

For a split second, the panic receded, washed over by a wave of staggering shock. *What.* Ilya had put him down at his emergency contact. He'd put *Shane*. Not an agent, not a manager from the Bruins organization. Him. But he surprise was immediately obliterated by the nurse's next words.

"He's been moved from the emergency room to a private one for the night. Room 418, fourth floor. He's stable, and awake. You can go up."

The relief was so violent it was dizzying. The iron band around his chest loosened just enough for him to drag in a full, shuddering breath and dragged himself to the elevators. Shane stepped inside, jamming the button for the fourth floor with more force than necessary. Hayden and J.J. followed, their movements automatic, like teammates following their captain into a box during a line brawl. The doors closed, sealing the three of them into a tense, humming cube.

The mirror wall showed the identical expressions of profound, earth-shattering bewilderment plastered on his friends faces. J.J.'s eyes were wide, darting from Shane to Hayden, who's mouth was slightly open, the shock rapidly being overtaken by a dawning, profound comprehension. But even through their confusion and curiosity, they stood there, two silent, baffled sentinels around their visibly shattered friend.

The elevator chimed. The doors slid open and Shane sprint to the room where the love of his life was hopefully just resting now. When he frantically entered, and after endless minutes where all he knew was panic, when all he tasted was all consuming fear, he finally saw him.

Ilya.

Propped against a mountain of hospital-white pillows, he looked pale and tired, but undeniably, gloriously *alive*. A bright blue cast encased his left arm from knuckles to elbow, resting on his stomach. A spectacular purple-and-yellow bruise bloomed across his right cheekbone and temple, a violent splash of color against his skin.

It was, realistically, nothing a hockey player hadn't faced before. They'd both had worse. Shane had played through a broken rib. Ilya had once taken a puck to the face that required stitches. This? A cast and a bruise? In their world, it was a mild inconvenience, a few games on IR at most. But Shane couldn't shake the suffocating panic from his chest.

His boyfriends eyes—the same sharp, assessing, infuriatingly beautiful eyes that had tracked Shane across a thousand face-off circles—found his immediately and lit with a warmth that felt like a physical touch.

"*Solnyshko*," Ilya breathed out, the nickname a soft, relieved exhale. His smile was tired but real, crinkling the corners of his eyes.

Shane saw the smile. He saw the man, whole and breathing. And the dam holding back the last hour of pure, undiluted terror completely shattered.

"You stupid *asshole*," Shane snarled, the words ripping from a raw place in his throat as he surged fully into the room.

Ilya's smile faltered, replaced by gentle concern. "Hollander—"

"No! I don't want to hear you!" Shane was a live wire, sparking in the sterile space. He paced a tight, frantic pattern at the foot of the bed, his hands clenching and unclenching. His entire world had narrowed to the man in the bed, the source of all this exquisite, unbearable terror. The fact that they had an audience registered only as background static. "You are a reckless idiot! How many times had I told you to sell those damn cars? Why you need to drive so fast, huh? The adrenaline of hockey is not enough for you? You have a death wish? Is that it?"

"Sweetheart," Ilya tried again, his voice a low, soothing rumble. He shifted slightly, wincing, his good hand lifting from the bed in a calming gesture.

"—Because that's what *will* happen to you Rozanov!" Shane's voice climbed, cracking under the strain. He was vibrating with it, a tremor starting deep in his core. "You will *die* if you drive like a maniac! And did you ever stop to think what would happen to *me* if you die?"

"*Zolotse*," Ilya called, the endearment more forceful now, his hand reaching out toward the space between them. But Shane was caught in the riptide of his own panic, too far out to grab the lifeline.

"I would die too! That's what would happen to me, Ilya! *I would die!* Do you want that to happen?" Shane was shouting now, his face pale and sheened with a cold sweat, his breath coming in short, ragged gasps he didn't even notice. "Did you stop to think about that before going on the road and driving like a fucking lunatic? No! You didn't! You selfish piece of sh —"

"*Shane!*"

Ilya's voice wasn't loud, but it was sharp, cutting through the hysterical tirade. A command that jolted Shane to a sudden, staggering halt. He choked on the next word, the sound dying in a painful, wet sob.

"*What!*" he spat back, pure, devastated defiance.

Ilya's gaze was locked on him, intense and unwavering, the way it was during a shootout. "I need you to breathe."

The words landed, simple and direct. And only then, with the screaming in his mind momentarily silenced by the order, did Shane become aware of his own body. The world swam at the edges, blurry and tilting. His chest felt like it was in a hydraulic press, each inhale a desperate, insufficient sip of air. He was hyperventilating. A high, thin wheeze accompanied each gasp. He brought a shaking hand to his face and felt the hot, slick tracks of tears on his cheeks. He hadn't even known he was crying.

He stood there, utterly exposed, the epicenter of a silent, trembling storm. He was distantly aware of two figures in the doorway, but their presence was a ghost-image, irrelevant.

Ilya's eyes flickered past him, just for a fraction of a second, taking in the frozen forms of Hayden and JJ. Shane saw the moment of recognition, the slight tightening around Ilya's mouth. But there was no shock, no panic at being discovered. If anything, his expression hardened into something almost defiant, a silent *And?* before his focus snapped back to Shane with a ferocity that felt like a physical pull. The audience meant nothing. The only thing that mattered in the room was the man falling apart at the foot of his bed.

"Come here," Ilya said again, his voice dropping back into that low, gentle register he used only in the dark, or in moments like this. He patted the space on the mattress next to his hip with his good hand. It wasn't a suggestion. It was an instruction. A play called.

Shane was good at following those, especially from Ilya.

His legs, which felt like mismatched stilts, carried him forward. He didn't sit so much as collapse onto the indicated spot, the mattress dipping under his weight. The fight drained out of him all at once, leaving behind a hollow, shaky exhaustion. He leaned into the solid warmth of Ilya's side, careful of the cast, and let his forehead drop against Ilya's good shoulder. The familiar scent of him—hospital soap overlaid on his own skin—was an anchor. Shane screwed his eyes shut, a fresh, silent wave of tears soaking into the thin cotton of the hospital gown.

Ilya's good arm came around him immediately, his hand a heavy, grounding weight between Shane's shoulder blades. "is okay," he murmured, his voice a soft vibration against Shane's temple. His English softened, the edges rounding off, the grammar simplifying into something more essential. "is okay, solnyshko. I am here. I am not going anywhere. Not today."

He began to rub slow, firm circles on Shane's back, the rhythm steady and insistent. "Breathe with me, yes? In… and out. Like this." Ilya took an exaggerated, deep breath, his chest expanding against Shane's side, and let it out in a long, controlled stream. "You match me. There. Good."

Shane tried, his own breaths shuddering and uncoordinated at first, but gradually, painfully, they began to fall into the rhythm Ilya was setting. The crushing pressure in his chest began to ease, millimeter by millimeter.

"You see?" Ilya said, his tone dipping into that familiar, affectionate mockery, but so gently it felt like a caress. "You make such a drama. Big Canadian baby. I have worse from practice."

Shane made a wet, protesting sound into his shoulder.

Ilya huffed a quiet laugh, his fingers carding through the sweaty hair at the nape of Shane's neck. "Is true. This is nothing. Car is… ah, *trash*. Is a shame. She was pretty. But me? I am tough. You know this." He pressed his lips to Shane's hairline, the gesture so natural and unthinking it made Shane's throat tighten all over again. "You are stuck with me, Hollander. A little ice and metal cannot get rid of me. I am like bad rash. Very persistent."

A choked half-laugh, half-sob escaped Shane. It hurt. It felt good.

"There," Ilya murmured, satisfied. "That is better sound than screaming." He kept up the rhythmic motion on Shane's back, his hold possessive and sure. "You waste all your good yelling. Save some for when they try to make me eat hospital food. We will riot together, yes?"

Shane nodded weakly against his shoulder, the last of the adrenaline bleed leaving him boneless. In the quiet, he could feel the steady, strong beat of Ilya's heart against his own. Alive. Here. *His*. The world, which had shrunk to a single point of terror, slowly began to expand again to include the feel of Ilya's hand on his back, the sound of his voice, the reality of his solid, breathing body.

It was only when his own breathing had settled into something close to normal, the tightness in his chest a dull ache instead of a vise, that he became aware of the new quiet in the room. The kind that wasn't just an absence of his own panic. He lifted his head from Ilya's shoulder, his eyes feeling puffy and sore, and blinked around.

The doorway was empty.

Hayden and J.J. were gone. The door was pulled almost completely shut, leaving only a narrow strip of the bright hallway visible.

A fresh, different kind of heat flooded Shane's face. "They… left."

"Mmm," Ilya hummed, his hand still moving in those slow circles. He didn't sound surprised. "Your friends are smart. For Canadians. They see big emotional scene, they know to make exit. Give privacy to a crazy man having meltdown over his boyfriend's little scratch."

“J.J. is French-Canadian,” Shane corrected softly, the habit emerging on autopilot from the haze of his receding panic.

Ilya’s lips quirked. “Which is worse.”

The familiar, ridiculous argument—one they’d had a dozen times about food, about music, about the best city in the league—was a lifeline thrown back to shore. Shane grabbed it. He let out a wet, shaky breath that was almost a laugh. “You’re the worst.”

“But you like it,” Ilya said, his voice dropping into that low, confident register that made Shane’s stomach flip every time. His thumb stroked the nape of Shane’s neck. “Now, talk to me. What happened in your head? From the beginning.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Shane started, the words feeling too big for his mouth. He pressed his face into the space between Ilya’s shoulder and neck, grounding himself in the solid, living warmth of him. “It was like… the floor just vanished. One second I was thinking about what movie to torture you with tonight, and the next…”

He took a shaky breath. “Lafleur had his phone out. He said your name, and then ‘wrapped his Porsche around a light pole.’ And I just… my brain stopped. Everything got really loud and then really quiet at the same time. All I could see was that picture. The car was so… broken. And they said they took you to Mass General. *Condition unknown*.”

He felt Ilya’s hand tighten on his back, a silent anchor.

“I couldn’t make my thoughts line up. They were just these… sharp, terrible pieces. I kept thinking, What if you were in pain and I wasn’t there? What if the last thing you thought was that you were alone again, after everything?” His voice hitched. “And then I started thinking about the cottage. About finally having you, really having you, and how it felt like we’d just… started. And I was so angry. At you, for driving the stupid car. At myself, for all the years we wasted being too scared to just… be this. And then I just… I started mourning you. I was planning what I’d say at your memorial service. I thought about how I’d have to retire your number in my heart and just… keep playing hockey in a world you weren’t in.”

Ilya’s fingers stilled for a moment on his back, then resumed their motion, even softer. “My funeral would be very tasteful. Many flowers. Very sad, handsome hockey players crying.”

“It’s not funny,” Shane whispered, but he felt the corner of his mouth twitch.

“Is a little funny,” Ilya insisted, his own lips curling. “My brave captain. You run entire team, you face down reporters, you fight men bigger than you on ice. But one little news alert and you are…” He gestured vaguely at Shane with his chin. “This. Is cute.”

He knew, with absolute certainty, that his boyfriend would want to talk about the gravity of his reaction at some point. Ilya, who noticed everything, who was so in tune with Shane's body and brain that he knew him better that Shane knew himself, would want to pick apart what it meant that he had completely shut down, and what that said about his mental health.

That conversation would come later though, when they were both more centered and the fear had fully left Shane's body. For now, Ilya was doing what he did best: calming and distracting his boyfriend, steering them back toward familiar ground with teasing and gentle touches. And Shane, helpless against the pull of him, couldn't help but love him even more for it.

A slow, deliberate smirk tugged at his lips. He tilted his head, catching Ilya's eye. "Did you just call me brave?" he asked, his voice regaining a thread of its normal teasing edge.

Ilya's eyes held his, steady and sure, not rising to the bait of the smirk. "Aren't you a brave man, Shane Hollander?"

Yes, Shane thought, the certainty settling deep in his bones. *I must be. To love you this much and survive, it takes a courage I didn't know I had.*

"Yes," he said aloud, the smirk softening into something more genuine, knowing that his boyfriend could read the truth in his eyes. "I guess I am. If I willingly put up with you."

Ilya tried to cross his arms, remembered one was in a cast, and settled for a wounded pout. "You cannot be mean to me. I am injured. Look." He gestured weakly with his casted arm, then let it drop back onto his stomach with a dramatic sigh. "A helpless invalid. You should be nice. Bring me grapes. Tell me I am pretty."

Shane couldn't help the laugh that bubbled out of him. It felt strange and wonderful after the hours of tension. "You are the least helpless person I've ever met. You could probably fight a bear right now and win, one-handed."

"This is true," Ilya conceded, the pout melting into a smug grin. "But still. I deserve sympathy. And grapes. The purple ones, not the green. The green ones are sour, like your personality sometimes."

"My personality is not sour," Shane protested, but he was already shifting, reaching for the plastic cup of water on the bedside table. He held the straw to Ilya's lips. "Here. Grapes are a choking hazard. You'll have to make do with hospital water."

Ilya took a sip, his eyes never leaving Shane's. "See? You are nice. Deep down. Under all the yelling and the panic and the untied shoes."

Shane placed the cup back and looked down. His gaze landed on his shoes. The pristine white laces were still splayed on the sterile floor, a glaring testament to his earlier chaos. The immediate, visceral sense of wrongness they triggered was almost comical in its intensity after everything else. He stared at them as if they were the root cause of all his problems. "Why did you have to say something? Now they're bothering me… a lot."

"So tie them."

"I don't wanna move," Shane mumbled, burrowing his face back into Ilya's good shoulder. The thought of breaking this new, calm contact to deal with the laces felt insurmountable.

“You are a ridiculous man,” Ilya sighed, a fond, exaggerated sound. “Is okay. Come, give foot here.” He gestured with his cast-encased hand. “I will tie for you.”

Shane stared at him. “You have one working hand. And it’s currently holding me up.”

“So?” Ilya shrugged his good shoulder, the movement jostling Shane slightly. “I will manage. I have many skills.” A wicked, familiar glint entered his eye. “You know this. Some of them require only one hand. Others, none at all.”

Shane felt a flush creep up his neck that had nothing to do with panic. He ducked his head to hide it. “That’s not— we’re in a hospital.”

“You are so boring Hollander.”

Shaking his head, Shane looked from the offending laces to Ilya’s earnest, amused face, the bruise and the cast and the sheer, stubborn Ilya-ness of him. The love that swelled in his chest was so huge it felt like it would break his own ribs. With a soft groan, he leaned down, ignoring the protest of his stiff muscles, and quickly, efficiently tied his own laces into perfect, symmetrical double knots. The immediate, soothing sense of order was profound.

He sat back up, immediately leaning his full weight back against the warm, solid body beside him. “There. Crisis averted.”

Ilya hummed proudly, his good arm tightening around him in approval. “See? You do not need me for everything. You are capable man.” He pressed a soft kiss to Shane’s temple. “But is nice you want me anyway.”

Shane went still against him. The words were teasing, familiar, but he’d heard the faint, almost imperceptible shadow beneath them. The self-deprecation Ilya wielded like a shield, disguising a real insecurity as a joke. *You do not need me for everything*. It was a statement of fact, but the way Ilya said it, it sounded like a quiet fear.

Shane lifted his head, pulling back just enough to look Ilya directly in the eyes. He needed him to see this, to understand it wasn’t part of the banter. He cupped Ilya’s unbruised cheek, his thumb stroking the stubble there.

"But I do need you,” Shane said, his voice low and utterly serious, every ounce of the day’s terror and love distilled into the words. “The mere thought of losing you… I shut down. The world stopped. And you were the only thing that could start it again. You *are* the only thing. I cannot function in a world you’re not in. I don’t want to. I love you.”

Ilya’s playful expression dissolved. The defenseless, tender look he saved only for Shane broke through, raw and unguarded. His smile wasn’t smug or teasing now; it was wide, real, and breathtakingly open, transforming his bruised face. He turned his head to press a firm, lingering kiss into Shane’s palm, his eyes never leaving Shane’s. “I know, *solnyshko*,” he whispered, the Russian endearment thick with emotion. “I love you, too."

It was a quiet vow, spoken in the sterile light of a hospital room. Their eyes held, and Shane felt the shift in the air, a sudden, palpable charge. The teasing tension vanished, replaced by

something far more profound. Ilya's gaze was a deep, consuming well, stripping away every last defense, and it filled Shane with a heat that had nothing to do with panic and everything to do with weeks of pent-up need. In that moment, without a care for who could see them, for who could enter the room, the last thread of caution snapped.

Shane leaned in, and Ilya met him halfway, not with gentle acquiescence, but with a sudden, hungry pull.

The kiss wasn't soft.

It was a desperate, brusque press of mouths that spoke of hours of choked-back fear. It was all the terror Shane had swallowed in the car, the dizzying images of a funeral he'd already started planning, poured directly into Ilya. And it was Ilya's answer—the stark relief of seeing Shane here, whole and his, after the sterile, lonely wait. There was nothing gentle about it. It was teeth and shared, ragged breaths, a fierce claiming that had nothing to do with possession and everything to do with verification. *You're here. I'm here. We're alive.*

Shane's hand slid from Ilya's cheek to tangle in the hair at the nape of his neck, holding him fast, as if he could fuse them together through sheer force of will. Ilya's good arm banded around Shane's back, his grip iron-strong, pulling him closer until Shane was half-sprawled across his chest, heedless of the cast and the wires. It was messy, off-center, fueled by adrenaline and a love so vast it had nowhere to go but here, into this frantic, consuming contact.

It was every bit as intense and raw as they were. It tasted like salt and desperation and a ferocious, undying hope. It was less a kiss and more a vow sealed in flesh*: Never again. Don't you ever leave me*.

When they finally broke apart, gasping for air, their foreheads pressed together, the tenderness returner, not as a replacement for the intensity, but as its foundation.

Shane's breath shuddered out against Ilya's lips. "If you ever scare me like that again, Ilya Rozanov," he whispered, the words a vow scraped raw from his soul, "I will kill you myself."

"Okay," Ilya panted, his own voice rough with the same spent emotion. A faint, bruised smile touched his mouth. "Is deal. You can have the honors." He brushed his nose against Shane's. "But maybe you will fight my insurance company for it. They are also very angry with me."

"I can't imagine why," Shane grumbled, but the tension was bleeding from his shoulders. "They should total it. No more Porsches."

"Mm, maybe I get a minivan," Ilya said, his tone contemplative. "Very safe. Very roomy"

Shane snorted. "You in a minivan. I'd pay to see that."

Ilya's good hand slid from Shane's back to his hip, his thumb tracing a slow, deliberate circle just above the waistband of his jeans. His voice dropped to a low, suggestive purr. "Lots of room in a minivan. For… activities. Very comfortable seats."

Shane froze, then let out a choked sound, half-laugh, half-disbelief. He pulled back just enough to stare at Ilya. "Are you ever not horny?"

Ilya's grin was pure, unrepentant wickedness. "Impossible," he stated simply. "When you are right here? Looking at me like this? With your face all…" He gestured vaguely at Shane's no-doubt blotchy, tear-stained features. "It is very sexy. My near-death experience makes you emotional. I like it.You are very pretty covered in tears. And all red and big."

Swollen. Shane mentally corrected as he felt a blush heat his neck and cheeks. He ducked his head, his protest muffled against Ilya's collarbone. "Stop it, we can't–... you have a broken arm. And a concussion, probably. Nothing's happening for a while. Not until you recovered."

He felt the rumble of Ilya's chuckle against his cheek. "You will be my little nurse then, Hollander, yes?" Ilya's voice was a teasing, hopeful whisper against his ear. "Bring me my pills? Fluff my pillows? Give me sponge baths?"

Shane groaned, long and loud, and buried his burning face deeper into the hollow of Ilya's neck. "You're insufferable," he muttered, the words lacking any real heat.

Ilya just laughed, the sound rich and warm, and tightened his arm around him. "You love me."

"I do." Shane answered too fast, no wanting to risk any room for doubt. A familiar warmth spread through him, not just at the words, but at the utter, unshakeable confidence in Ilya's tone. He wasn't asking. He was stating a fact. There was no insecurity, no hidden plea for reassurance. Ilya knew, with the same certainty he knew his own shot, that Shane loved him.

The realization of how far they'd come hit Shane with a quiet force. From the eighteen-year-olds who could barely look at each other without sparking a fight, who had to hide every glance, every touch, behind a wall of bitter rivalry... to this. To Ilya being able to declare Shane's love as a simple truth, in a hospital room, with a bruised face and a broken arm. Yeah. They'd come a long way.

He settled more comfortably at Ilya’s side, the need for physical contact overriding everything else. He was exhausted, wrung out, but the world was right-side up again. He had a bruised, ridiculous, insatiable, alive boyfriend to look after, and two friends waiting somewhere to interrogate him.

But for now, in this quiet room, with Ilya’s good arm pulling him close and his quiet laughter a steady rhythm against him, it was enough. It was everything.

***

“I’m gonna be sick. I’m actually gonna be sick. I looked. *Why* did I look?”

J.J. leaned heavily against the stark white wall of the hospital corridor, a hand pressed dramatically over his eyes as if trying to scrub an image from his brain. “They were *kissing*. With, like… *tongue*, Hays. *Tongue*. Ilya Rozanov. And our captain. My brain is breaking.”

Hayden, standing stiffly beside him, didn’t turn. He stared straight ahead at the fire safety poster on the opposite wall, his gaze a thousand miles away. He felt distinctly… untethered. “I told you not to look,” he said, his voice flat. “You peeked through the crack in the door. You brought this on yourself.”

“Curiosity killed the cat, man! And it’s killing me right now!” J.J. hissed, dropping his hand to glare at Hayden. “You’re telling me you’re not even a little bit traumatized? After all that? The screaming? The crying? The… the *emergency contact*? And then the… the *mouth-mashing*?”

“I’m processing,” Hayden said, which was a lie. He wasn’t processing shit. Processing implied a brain was engaged, his had blue-screened somewhere between Shane listing Rozanov’s driving habits as a personal betrayal and the moment Ilya Rozanov had said ‘*solnishco*’ (or whatever the fuck he said) in a voice so soft it made Hayden’s teeth hurt.

It wasn’t that Shane was with a guy. *Please*. That was about as surprising as a slapshot from the point. Hockey locker rooms were not the place for that kind of hang-up. Not on his watch at least.

It was that he was with Ilya Rozanov.

Ilya fucking Rozanov.

The smirking, trash-talking, ego-the-size-of-Russia pain in their collective asses for the better part of a decade. The man who took particular delight in screening Hayden, who chirped Shane with a vicious, personal creativity that had sparked more than one on-ice fight. The guy with the stupid hair and the infuriatingly good hands and the perpetual look of someone who’d just won a bet you didn’t know you were in.

That Ilya Rozanov made Shane his… secret emergency contact. Was maybe his… boyfriend? Lover? The person who reduced Shane Hollander—Captain Steady, Mr. Compartmentalize—into a sobbing, shoelace-obsessed puddle of pure panic.

None of it computed. The math was all wrong. Hayden was half-convinced a camera crew was about to jump out from behind a supply cart. *Smile, you’re on Punk’d!* He’d laugh. He’d laugh so hard. *God, please let it be a joke.*

“It just doesn’t make any sense,” Hayden muttered aloud, finally tearing his eyes from the fire poster.

“What part?” J.J. asked, counting on his fingers. “The secret relationship part? The decade-long rivalry being a lie part? The ‘Shane has a pet name in Russian’ part? Or the part where Rozanov looked at him like… like Shane hung the goddamn moon while simultaneously looking like he wanted to eat him? Pick one, Hays, they’re all gold.”

“All of it,” Hayden said, running a hand over his face. “He *hates* him. Shane *hates* him. We’ve listened to him bitch about Rozanov for years. The arrogance, the showboating, the…” He trailed off, the memories taking on a horrifying new filter. Shane’s intense, laser-focused analysis of Rozanov’s game. The way he’d get weirdly quiet and intense before Boston games. The ‘private meetings’ after their on-ice scraps.

Oh, god. The scraps. The fights. Hayden felt a fresh wave of nausea. Had those been… foreplay?

“Oh, no,” he groaned, leaning his head back against the wall with a dull thud.

“What? What now?” J.J. asked, instantly alert.

“The fight in '15. In the playoffs. When Shane broke his nose and Rozanov got the game misconduct.”

J.J.’s eyes went wide with dawning, horrified understanding. “You don’t think…”

“I don’t know what to think anymore,” Hayden said, his voice hollow. “All I know is we have to go back in there eventually. And we have to look our captain in the eye. And we have to look *Rozanov* in the eye. And we have to pretend any of this is normal.”

They stood in silence for a moment, two pillars of shocked masculinity in a pastel hospital corridor.

“Do you think,” J.J. whispered, “they have, like… a system? For when they play each other? Is winning a… kink thing?”

“J.J., I swear to god, if you don’t shut up right now, I will admit myself to this hospital,” Hayden said, closing his eyes. The image was now, unfortunately, seared into his own mind as well. Shane, straddling Rozanov on the ice, not throwing a punch, but just… sitting there. Staring.

He shuddered. A deep, full-body tremor of pure existential confusion.

Yeah. They were never going to unsee this. Hayden wanted someone to throw him into the nearest ice-cold lake and then tell him, with a straight face, that this was all just one big, elaborate joke or let him freeze to death.

Beside him, J.J. had gone quiet, his own face pale. He was still trying to process the single, world-altering fact: he just saw his beloved, kindhearted captain—the guy who remembered everyone’s kids’ names and made sure the rookies felt welcome—kiss Ilya fucking Rozanov in a hospital room. Willingly. Passionately.

It was, Hayden decided, the weirdest goddamn day of his professional career. And he’d once had to play a period with a dead bird in his mask.

J.J. straightened up from the wall, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Okay,” he said, his voice still a little shaky but firmer. “Okay. So. That’s a thing. That’s… a big, weird, confusing thing that is happening.”

Hayden just grunted, not trusting himself to form a coherent sentence that wasn't *what the actual fuck.*

"What do we do now?" J.J. asked, glancing nervously at the almost closed door.

Hayden followed his gaze. He thought of Shane's face, white with a terror Hayden had never seen before. He thought of the raw, shattered sound of his voice. He thought of the way Rozanov—*Ilya*, he guessed he had to think of him as Ilya now (Hayden was going to puke)—had looked at Shane, like he was the only solid thing in a spinning room.

And when Shane had completely panicked, Ilya—*who would've fucking thought*—was the one who'd helped. He'd actually helped. So, in Hayden's book, the guy passed. Barely. For now. He still needed a mountain of convincing, and the jury was definitely still out, but he'd passed this one.

Hayden chose to trust Shane and his judgement. He also chose to trust the sliver of… whatever that was he'd glimpsed in Rozanov in that room. The focus that wasn't predatory, the gentleness that wasn't an act. It was still so fucking weird to even think about, but maybe the guy wasn't only what met the eye. At the very least, he'd earned Hayden's benefit of the doubt.

Not that Hayden thought for a second that Rozanov would give a single fuck about his approval. But Shane would. And for Shane, Hayden was prepared to be the best, most supportive, most chill-about-this-mind-fuck friend in the history of the goddamn league.

(He was absolutely, one hundred percent not freaking the fuck out about this. *He wasn't*. But god, where was his wife when *he* needed someone to calm him down? At home, probably. With their kids. Blissfully, ignorantly unaware of the world-altering, earth-shattering, league-breaking news Hayden had just been forced to absorb. What wouldn't he give right now to be covered in baby vomit and mystery sticky fluids, happily knowing nothing about his best friend's who-knows-how-fucking-long secret love affair with Ilya Rozanov)

And despite the cosmic weirdness of it all, despite the dramatics and the sheer mental whiplash, the answer was simple. It was the same answer it had been back at the arena, when a broken Shane had begged for their help.

"We stay right here," he said, his voice low and definitive. He shifted his stance, settling more squarely in front of the door, a 6'3 wall of athletic muscle. "We gave them time. We don't let anyone in who doesn't absolutely need to be in there. Nurses, fine. Doctors, obviously. Anyone else?" He shook his head. "They get past us first."

J.J. nodded, a grim determination settling over his features. He moved to flank the other side of the door, mirroring Hayden's posture. The confusion and shock were still there, buzzing underneath, but they were overridden by a deeper, more fundamental instinct: Protect your captain. Protect your teammate. Even if your teammate was currently making out with Public Enemy Number One.

They weren't leaving. Their complaints and dramatics were just noise. This, standing guard, giving the two people inside the quiet, private space they so clearly needed—this was loyalty.

So they stood. Two confused, slightly traumatized hockey players, guarding a door, protecting a massive secret, and the fragile, precious peace unfolding on the other side of it.

J.J.'s sharp elbow dug into Hayden's ribs. "Hays. *Hays*."

"What," Hayden grunted, not opening his eyes. He was trying very hard to meditate on the fire safety poster. *Stop, Drop, and Roll* felt like solid life advice right now.

"I looked again."

Hayden's eyes flew open. "Why? *Why would you do that?"*

"I don't know! It's like a car crash!" JJ whispered, his voice a mix of horror and fascination. He had one eye pressed to the slim crack where the door hadn't fully latched. "Oh my god, Hayden. They are *kissing* again. Like… a different kind of kissing. Less 'we almost died' and more… I don't know, 'hello' kissing? It's still a lot."

Hayden squeezed his eyes shut again, pressing the back of his head hard against the cool, unforgiving hospital wall. He willed the universe to make sense. He willed for Ashton Kutcher to come bounding around the corner, a film crew in tow, laughing about the epic ten-year prank.

Please, he thought, the prayer almost physical. *This is a perfect moment to bring the cameras. Right now. Any second. Or, you know, for a meteor to fall on my head. Either works. I'm not picky.*

"They stopped," J.J. reported, his voice hushed. "Now they're just… looking at each other. It's worse, somehow."

Hayden didn't ask how looking could be worse than the kissing. He just believed it. He believed anything was possible in this new, horrifying, bizarro world where Ilya Rozanov was Shane Hollander's emotional support Russian.

He sank a little lower against the wall, the starch of his polo shirt scraping the cheap paint. A singular, terrible thought cut through the fog of his shock.

Jackie is going to fucking love this.

His wife, with her terrifyingly accurate intuition and her deep appreciation for what she called 'high-quality drama', was going to cackle with glee. She'd probably whip out her phone and start drafting a screenplay. She'd ask a million questions he didn't have answers to. *How long? Are they serious? Did you see any rings?* He could already see her knowing smirk.

God, he hoped there wasn't any rings.

He, on the other hand, was pretty sure he was dying. This was it. This was the event that would finally do him in. Not a 100 mph slapshot to the throat. Not a career-ending knee blowout. No. It would be the sheer, unparalleled psychic damage of witnessing Ilya "The Tsar" Rozanov being all… *soft* and *tender* with his best friend. That was what would orphan

his children. The image of Rozanov gently stroking Shane's hair while Shane cried on his hospital gown would be etched on his tombstone.

What a world, he thought bleakly. *What a godforsaken, inexplicable world.*

Beside him, J.J. let out a long, shaky sigh. "So," he whispered. "We're just… never talking about any of Shane's pre-game rituals ever again, right? Because I'm starting to think his 'special visualization' before Boston games wasn't about beating their defensive scheme."

Hayden just groaned, a low, pained sound from the depths of his soul. He wished J.J. would just shut up already and stop putting pictures on his head.

They were so screwed.

End Notes

The boys are just a little shock, they will grow to like Ilya.... eventually.

edit: Omg I knew we were all a little crazy about them but damn I didn't expect all the love this fic would get, specially since this is the first time I wrote something out of my usual fandom.
I can't believe the numbers of people that are reading something I wrote, I'm beyond happy 😭😭.
thx all of you for all the kind messages.
Also, it is so freaking fun to write Hayden panicking you all have no idea.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!