**we'll be afraid of nothing**

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/76057471.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | M/M |
| Fandom: | Heated Rivalry (TV) |
| Relationship: | Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov |
| Characters: | Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Hayden Pike |
| Additional Tags: | Autistic Shane Hollander, Anxious Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Needs a Hug, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Miscommunication, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander-centric, insane that thats not a tag, Self-Esteem Issues, Misunderstandings, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, canon divergence bc they use first names, Soft Ilya Rozanov, shane hollander im sorry u were written by that woman, Character Study, Unreliable Narrator |
| Language: | English |
| Stats: | Published: 2025-12-23 Words: 8,485 Chapters: 1/1 |

# we'll be afraid of nothing

by satorussuguru

Summary

> “Game is over,” he says. “You won. I lost. I was annoying. Normal.”
>
> “That’s not—” Shane starts, then stops, because he actually doesn't know how to finish that thought without sounding like an idiot. His jaw works, teeth grinding together.
>
> *That's not what I meant. That's not the point. You said I was boring and you were right and I need you to say it again so I know where I stand, so I know what you think of me, so I can stop waiting for the other shoe to drop.*
>
> He settles for: “You were kind of an asshole.”

Notes

> set vaguely during ep4 montage

See the end of the work for more notes

It's sort of stupid, how it all starts going downhill. Shane's still reeling from coming three times in forty minutes when it catches up to him, the way Ilya had laughed at him earlier for smoothing out the wrinkles of his folded clothes. He'd muttered *'strange, strange man'* under his breath, lips quirked in that irritating little smirk he does. Stupid, see, because Shane *is* strange. Objectively. So when Ilya rolls off of him with an *oof,* patting Shane's belly before heading to the bathroom, he doesn't say anything, even as that amused half-smirk plays on rewind in his brain. Usually when he can't stop thinking about Ilya's smiles, it's because he's angry or horny or both. Now he just feels—he doesn't know. Not good.

Ilya comes back with a towel, and because Shane is still catching his breath, he wipes him down until the tackiness of his skin is more bearable.

(He'd laughed at Shane for that, too, after they'd fucked for the first time, how uncomfortable Shane had been with the feeling of dried…*substances* on his skin.)

"Good?" Ilya asks, still smiling. Shane doesn't think he ever really stopped. He swallows, leaning up to capture Ilya's lips instead of answering, and it seems to work just fine, because Ilya makes a pleased sound, dropping the towel and sliding his hands beneath Shane's back, thumbs digging divots into his waist. "I take that as yes," he murmurs, grin breaking wide against Shane's lips.

For a moment, the idea of Ilya leaving twists something ugly and panicked in Shane's chest. He tucks his nose into the hollow of Ilya's neck, clutching at his biceps. They both have team meetings early the next morning, so it's not like they have time to linger, but Shane—he wants him here.

Ilya shifts carefully, lowering himself onto the bed and tugging Shane up until he's settled against his chest, one arm firm around his shoulders, the other threading slowly through his sweat-damp hair. "You are okay?" He asks, worry tinging his voice.

"Yeah." Shane clears his throat. "Sorry. You have to go."

Ilya hums, but be doesn't move away just yet, instead angling Shane's head up and bending down to steal one more kiss, unhurried and warm. Shane sighs into it, tracing a fingernail along Ilya's chain.

They can never seem to pull away from each other, Shane has realized, until one of them pulls too far, too hard, and then they don't speak for months. For now, though, he lets Ilya be gentle with him, if only to alleviate the churning in his gut. *Strange, strange man.*

Shane thought he had been called 'weird' often enough for it not to matter anymore. Weird or strange or odd or gay. All of the above, et cetera et cetera. He doesn't care. He doesn't *usually* care, and part of him knows he should probably self-reflect on why Ilya thinking that of him feels so *awful;* but it's hard to remember why he's upset when Ilya's lips are nipping at the sensitive skin beneath his jaw. Shane gasps, arching into the touch, which is of course when Ilya decides he has to go.

“Fucking asshole,” Shane mutters as he pulls away, pinching his thigh in retaliation.

“Yes,” Ilya agrees, eyes crinkled with amusement. “I will see you tomorrow, Shane Hollander. You will be sad with thirty-seven win record?”

“Thirty-eight,” Shane retorts. “Are *you* sad that you're still four goals behind me, Roz?”

“Ah, but I love being behind you.”

Shane snorts at the ridiculous wink Ilya throws his way. He watches him dress, settled back against the pillows, loose-limbed and boneless. Ilya threads his belt through the loops of his jeans, tongue poking out in concentration when it gets stuck on the buckle, and Shane catches himself wearing a stupid smile. He manages to reign it in before Ilya looks up at him, saying goodbye with obnoxious kiss noises that Shane scrunches his nose at. He waves a hand through the air as if to dispel the kisses before they reach him.

The door closes behind him and Shane feels—cold. It’s just the sweat drying on his skin, he knows, the sudden lack of body heat next to him, but it’s fucking with him. Pavlovian, or something. Shane gives his head a little shake. He can't help himself from imagining what Ilya would say if Shane told him. If he asked him to stay, if he said that he misses him when he leaves. Ilya wouldn’t even pretend to care about the science behind it. He’d squint, smirk, and say something dickish like *‘you miss having something warm up your ass instead of stick usually there.’*

Christ. Shane’s insults need to be that good on the ice, too.

The thing is, he really does forget about it, the same way he’s learned to forget every side-eye and suppressed snicker aimed his way since he was eight. It’s whatever. Ilya thinking he's weird and boring obviously hasn't stopped him from wanting Shane as badly as Shane wants him.

(Even if Shane is about ninety-eight percent sure that whatever fascination Ilya feels begins and ends with what Shane can do on the ice.)

Besides, he can't let himself be distracted during their game. As annoying as he was about it, Ilya was right; Montreal really can't afford to lose this, not if they want a chance at the playoffs. The next evening, Shane has an earbud in as he puts on his gear, listening to what the commentators have to say. It's nothing new and exciting, mostly just a little mean about how average Montreal has been playing, and a *lot* mean about how average *Shane* has been playing, which—it's unfair. He's still scoring higher than Rozanov, even if only barely. They just—they want him to be exceptional.

Shane knows, rationally, that it wouldn't be solely his fault if they lose, but it’ll feel like it anyway, because he's the captain and captains are supposed to drag their teams across the finish line by the scruff if that’s what it takes.

*You're catastrophizing,* his mom’s voice tells him as he skates onto the ice; half-scolding, half-fond. Right. They're still warming up, Shane can't get all caught up in his head like this.

The arena comes to life when he and Rozanov line up for the puck drop. Shane squares up at center, knees bent, stick light in his hands. Across from him, Rozanov grins. “Have interview answers ready?” he murmurs, eyes flicking to Shane’s lips. “For when you lose?”

Shane rolls his eyes. He taps his stick twice, for luck, and snags the puck when it lands, immediately circling back and shooting off.

Montreal plays aggressive because they have to, the first period a whirlwind of shouts and the sound of blades carving crescents into the ice. Shane feels good. Every pass lands where it’s supposed to, every stop sending a clean spray of ice behind him, and always—*always*—Shane is hyperaware of Rozanov’s position in the rink. The hard line of his shoulders veers to the left in Shane’s peripheral, and he can picture with absolute certainty the one-eighty turn he must make that lands him squarely in Shane’s path, hurtling towards him. Rozanov clips his stick as Shane dances out of the way, muttering something Shane doesn’t catch, but the contact sends a jolt up his arms that has nothing to do with physics.

Midway through the period, a Raiders’ defenseman fumbles the puck along the boards. He's a rookie, scrambling to get a hold on his stick in anxious hands, and Shane lets himself feel a flash of sympathy before he cuts in, stealing the puck and sending it hurtling towards the goal. It smacks against the post, but before Shane can feel even a sliver of panic, it’s bouncing past the Raiders’ goalie and into the net.

Three minutes later, Shane scores his second goal, and only with JJ’s whoops of joy in his ear does he let himself relax. They're two-nil and it hasn't even been ten minutes.

Shane skates past center with his head down, jaw clenched, trying not to smile as his teammates swarm him. Across the ice, he catches Rozanov’s eye, just for a second. The grin is gone now, replaced with narrowed eyes and an almost petulant frown. *Good,* Shane thinks, resisting the urge to stick his tongue out. *Loser.*

Until Boston scores—or at least until Shane’s restlessness becomes too much to handle—he decides to dial it back. Instead of chasing after every live puck, he bleeds seconds off the clock, passing the puck back and forth with his team as Boston gets more and more frustrated, the players and fans alike. Shane hears the tail end of his twelfth slur of the night as he skates past the stands. It might not be flashy, what they're doing, but it’s safe. This close to playoffs, Theriault is always telling him not to risk an injury when he doesn't have to. *Can't have them knockin’ out my star player so easily,* he says, and maybe Shane’s ego is too high, but he likes it when they call him that. Even when it’s from the guys, even when they're sort of mocking him, it feels good. He’s a *star player,* and it doesn't matter that the rest of him is off-kilter; that part feels solid enough to stand on.

Rozanov pushes back, of course he does, but Shane is right up in his face every time. Once, he almost makes it past coverage, only for Shane to crash into him, knocking the puck out from under him with a punishing check. They end up sprawled all over each other, Rozanov’s breath puffing over the exposed skin of Shane’s neck.

The contact rattles them both, Shane's brain bouncing around his skull, and he can only pray that nobody notices the flush staining his cheekbones as Ilya’s thumb swipes over his hip, even as he sneers at Shane once they untangle.

(Even when they're on the ice, Ilya's jeering never feels mean, not the way other players' sometimes do. Shane looks at the ugly twist of his mouth and feels dangerously endeared.)

"Defensive now, Captain?"

"Not yet," Shane responds automatically, the way he always does. "But it's nice that you want me bossing you around that bad." He pushes himself up before he can hear Rozanov's response, strangely pleased with himself.

The next time they line up at center, Shane settles into position easily, rolling his shoulders out. He's expecting a quip from Rozanov, but this time he's the one trying to meet Ilya's eyes. Rozanov doesn't give in, his focus trained resolutely down, and Shane accepts—only a *little* worried—that maybe he's pissed him off for real.

"You play very boring hockey, Hollander," Rozanov says suddenly, his voice light. He's not even looking at him. "Old man style, very dull. Blegh."

And it—well, it works. Shane's reaction time is just a split second slower, still processing the bizarre hurt that's just lodged itself behind his ribs. Rozanov's taunts *never* work, not on him, because they're meaningless. It's all meaningless, but he's—he's called Shane boring a hundred different times before, a hundred different ways, only he's never called his *playing* boring.

It's the only thing about Shane that's worth anything.

Rozanov wins the face-off for the first time all night, and Shane's body is moving before the rest of him catches up. He tears off after him, blood rushing in his ears. Rozanov didn't even *look* at him.

Shane chases after him like he's being yanked along by a chain, his skates digging too hard into the ice, chest tight. The crowd is roaring now, a constant, grinding wall of sound that presses in from all sides. The horns, the chanting, the screech of blades and the crack of bodies meeting along the boards—it's relentless. Shane meets Hayden's gaze across the rink, concern shining in his eyes, and feels horribly exposed. He's playing awfully and everyone can see it. He's playing awfully and everyone knows *why.*

Humiliation coils tight in his gut, sour, and this time when Rozanov leers at him, Shane swears he could punch him.

When the final buzzer sounds, the relief is brittle. If he'd just *ignored* Rozanov, Shane knows he could've scored again, could've widened the gap. Still, somehow, despite Shane's erratic second half and Rozanov's goal in the third, Montreal had kept it together. Shane coasts through the handshake line on autopilot, eyes fixed on nothing in particular. Rozanov says something as they pass, but Shane doesn't hear it over the pounding in his head. He doesn't look back.

In the locker room, the noise comes back in a different form; there's cheering and laughing and lockers slamming and showers kicking on. Shane drops onto the bench at his locker and fixes his attention on his skates, loosening knots and pulling them free. He has to resist the

urge to slap his hands over his ears like a *child,* instead keeping his eyes trained on the narrow strip of space between his knees and the floor, until the rest of the room exists only at the edge of his awareness. When someone claps him on the shoulder in passing, he flinches before he can stop himself, a traitorous jerk that sends heat flooding up his neck.

*Stop acting like this. Stop making it obvious.*

The awareness doesn't help, it never does. Shane feels eyes on him and he tries to look busy on his phone, his shoulders creeping up towards his ears. They talk about him, he *knows* they do, but if he doesn't give them anything, maybe they won't take it from him.

Shane jumps as his phone buzzes violently in his hands.

**Lily:**

*nice hit in third*

*u trying to kill me or urself ?*

*make up for snoozefest😴😴before*

Jesus. Shane exhales through his nose, head tipping back against the lockers, and stares down the bridge of his nose at the blinking cursor. He wishes, not for the first time, that he could have his glasses with him, but god only knows what fresh category of insults that would open him up to.

**Jane:**

~~*You started it*~~

~~*Shut up, Rozan*~~

Across the room, someone laughs loudly and a locker door slams shut. Shane hunches over his phone, typing again before he can talk himself out of it.

**Jane:**

*Do you really think I'm boring?*

His heart gives a stupid lurch as the typing bubble appears.

**Lily:**

*duh*

*i like duh*

*very efficient*

*duh*😑😑😑😑😑😑😑😑

Ilya doesn't understand. He's saying *Shane* is boring; his habits, his carefulness, the way he exists in the world, and that's—fine, whatever. Shane knows this about himself. It's just that on the ice, there are rules. It's all angles and momentum and the things that Shane is *good* at. When everything else about him is weird, when everything else feels negotiable, this part isn't. The rink is the only place he doesn't feel like he has to apologize for the way he exists.

He's always assumed—a little desperately—that this is the version of him Ilya sees, the part that holds his attention. Shane's speed, his decisiveness, the way everything about him snaps into clarity on the ice. If Rozanov finds that boring, too, then Shane isn't really sure what remains. He can't make sense of being wanted without the anchor of respect, can't imagine that desire holding if there's nothing left to prop it up.

**Jane:**

~~*I meant*~~

~~*I'm talking about*~~

~~*Not me. Hockey*~~

Shane silences his phone, setting it face-down on the bench, his jaw tight with embarrassment. Every draft feels like he's scratching at Rozanov's door, begging for scraps of reassurance that he doesn't need. *Shouldn't* need.

The thought curdles in his gut. It's fucking pathetic.

Shane pulls off his jersey. The fabric is soaked through, clinging to his compression shirt underneath. He folds it once, twice, before setting it aside. Somewhere to his left, three of the guys are reenacting a hit from the first period, their voices overlapping in a way that makes Shane's ears ring. It's white noise pressing against his skull. Still, Shane smiles when it seems

appropriate, and he thought he'd gotten good at that, only he misses the beat by half a second. It lands a little crooked on his face, more of a grimace than anything else. No one calls him out on it, and somehow, that's worse.

His jersey is wrinkly. Shane picks it back up and shakes it out, making sure to smooth out the creases this time as he goes.

"It's not an ikea desk, Hollzy, it's a jersey."

Renaud is two lockers down, grinning at him with that dumb fucking look on his face that people always make when they're pretending to be friendly.

"I just like things neat, I guess," Shane says haltingly.

"Right, yeah. Very professional." Renaud's tone suggests that it's not really a compliment. "You've got a system for everything, don't you?"

Shane doesn't answer. What is he supposed to say? Renaud drops it with a little shake of his head, exchanging a look with Taylor that has Shane's skin crawling, but they drop it, and that's all he cares about. It doesn't matter. Being boring, being weird, being the guy who eats the same pre-game meal and wears his gear in the same order and can't parse sarcasm half the time—it doesn't matter. *Hockey* is what matters, and Shane is good at hockey. Great at it, even. On the ice, his brain works the way it's supposed to.

No one wants to sit next to him at team dinners because he doesn't know what to talk about. No one invites him out after games because he always says no, and it's *fine.* Shane has hockey.

"You alright, Shane?"

And Hayden. Shane has hockey, and he has Hayden Pike.

"Just need to get out of here," he mumbles, already tugging his jacket on, fingers clumsy at the zipper. "I'll shower at the hotel."

"I'll cover you," Hayden says solemnly. He squeezes Shane's shoulder once, jostling him as he gets up, but Shane finds he doesn't mind. "Got a hot date, Hollander?"

What.

"No shot," someone calls out, delighted, and suddenly it's like blood in the water. The room turns on him all at once—voices overlapping, questions piling up faster than he can process them; who she is, and what she looks like, and is she hot, and does she have nice tits, and if Shane's an ass guy, and—

"He's gonna be late!" Hayden shouts, all but shoving Shane out the door. "Call me tonight, Hollander, you hear me?"

"Thank you," Shane murmurs, leaning in just enough to make sure Hayden hears it. Hayden flashes him a two-fingered salute, just before the locker room door shuts with a heavy clang.

Finally alone, Shane thunks his forehead against cool tile. *In for four, hold for four, out for four. In for four, hold for four, out for four. In for four, hold for four, out for four.*

He's fine. Shane pulls out his phone to call an Uber, eyes widening at the flurry of texts from Ilya lighting up his phone screen.

Oops.

**Lily:**

*what is ur room number*

*has been 12 min*

*hollander*

😡

*ok fine u come to me*

*did not hit that hard but fine*

*is chilly🥶call car*

Despite himself, Shane laughs under his breath, scrubbing a hand over his splotchy face. When he looks back down, there are four new messages. “Fuck’s sake,” he mutters, even as his heart skips a beat.

**Lily:**

*u have reading receipts on did u know*

*if u do not answer i will knock on every door in hotel*

*someone will be u eventually*

*this is not threat it is plan*

**Jane:**

*Why are you so clingy today? It’s weird.*

*On my way!*

***OMW.*

**Lily:**

*now who is clingy one nanabooboo*

“Grown man,” Shane says in disbelief. He stands outside the arena for thirty seconds, looking down at his hoodie and jeans. He could call an Uber. He *should* call an Uber. It's cold and he’s not wearing nearly enough layers for this, but he’d have the car drop him off three blocks from Ilya’s place which is only three blocks more than he’d have to walk anyway, so.

Six blocks. He can do six blocks.

The streets are quieter than he expects. There’s the occasional car passing and the distant sound of music spilling out from a bar two buildings over, but that's it. Maybe it's because of the soft, lightly falling snow. Everything feels muted. Shane keeps his head down, counts his steps when the counting helps, stops counting when it doesn't. His phone buzzes twice more —Ilya, probably, asking why his car is limping along at a snail’s pace—but Shane doesn't check. He can't check, not right now, when his hands are shaking and it has nothing to do with the cold.

*You play very boring hockey, Hollander. Very dull.*

He's replayed those words approximately seven hundred times since it happened. The exact tone of Ilya's voice, the way he hadn't bothered to look him in the eyes. Did he *know?* Did he know exactly what to say to ruin Shane’s night? Was it on purpose? The thing is, Ilya criticizes everyone's playing, and Shane—he lives for it, usually. Ilya pushes him to be a better player, and when Ilya Rozanov tells you you're fucking up, it means he's paying attention.

Shane *wants* Ilya to pay attention to him, but not—not all of him.

He stops at a crosswalk, even though the little man is glowing white and he could walk if he wanted to. His heart is doing that thing where it feels too fast and too hard, as if it's trying to beat right out of his body.

*You're fine, he invited you over. Stop being weird about it.*

Except Shane is always weird about things, that's the fucking *problem.*

His phone buzzes again. This time, Shane pulls it out.

**Lily:**

*are you walking*

*in boston*

*dead of night in minus 8*

*hollander i take back invite if u are murdered or frozen before u get here*

Despite everything, Shane's mouth twitches. He types with cold-numbed fingers.

**Jane:**

*Not murdered yet. Frozen, maybe.*

**Lily:**

*how much more*

**Jane:**

*I'm halfway. Three blocks.*

**Lily:**

*ok i time u*

*chop chop hockey boy*

*Hockey boy,* Shane mouths to himself, bewildered. He *does* pick up the pace after that, mostly because he's pretty sure his toes might actually fall off if he's out here much longer. Boston has a personal vendetta against him, probably. By the time he reaches Ilya's building, his breath is coming out in short, foggy bursts and his fingers feel clumsy inside his gloves.

Outside Ilya's apartment, Shane loses his nerve. Right there on the sidewalk, staring up at the grid of lit windows, heart thudding stupidly hard against his ribs. He could still turn around. He could text Ilya that he's exhausted, or that the crash in the third period tweaked his shoulder, or that he just needs ice and sleep tonight. He could—

His phone buzzes.

**Lily:**

*i can see u standing outside like creep*

*4 floor u know this already*

Shane looks up. Sure enough, there's Ilya in the fourth floor window, making absurd faces at him until Shane cracks a smile, and then Ilya is grinning back at him.

Fuck. His stomach is doing butterfly-adjacent things.

Shane heads inside before he can talk himself out of it, taking the stairs two at a time. He's *cold,* alright, and Ilya runs warm. By the time he reaches the door, he barely has time to lift his hand before it swings open.

"I was thinking you freeze into statue outside. Tragic, but I would, er…*preserve.* Like Steve Rogers. I think you make very tasty statue, my tongue would get stuck."

Shane opens his mouth, but Ilya is already ushering him inside, one hand pressing between his shoulder blades, steering him towards the couch. His fingers work at Shane's hoodie zipper before Shane can even process what's happening, pulling it down with quick, efficient movements. "Дерьмо, you are cold," Ilya mutters, his palms skating up Shane's arms, across his shoulders, down his sides, like the medical staff do. Even through the fabric of his shirt, Ilya is fever-hot against Shane's chilled skin. "Why do you Canadians always underestimate winter? It is same every year."

"I know what winter is," Shane protests with a huff, but he lets Ilya manhandle him further into the apartment anyway, his cold feet curling against the blessed warmth of heated hardwood.

Ilya captures Shane's hands in his, turning them over with surprising gentleness, his thumbs pressing into Shane's palms. "Fingers are like icicles," Ilya announces, as if Shane doesn't already know this. His frown grows, that little furrow between his brows deepening. He rubs Shane's hands between his own, breath huffing out in disapproval.

Shane's fingers twitch in Ilya's grip. His skin prickles, almost painful as sensation returns.

"You sit. I will get dry clothes." Ilya releases Shane's hands with obvious reluctance, already turning toward the hallway.

"You don't have to—"

"You sit," Ilya repeats, more firmly this time. Shane stands there for a moment, uncertain, before his body makes the decision for him and he sinks onto Ilya's couch. They've fucked so many times on this couch that it sort of blurs together, but this—*this,* they've never done. Shane's hands rest on his thighs, fingers still aching with cold. He flexes them once, watching

the joints move sluggishly, then presses his palms flat against his jeans, trying to absorb some warmth from the friction.

Ilya comes back with what looks like Shane's entire closet worth of fabric. He tugs Shane's hoodie off of him, then his shirt, his socks, his pants, redressing him in warm, dry clothes that sit loose on his frame. Shane is hardly an active participant. He can barely muster the energy to blink as Ilya moves his arms into the softest crewneck he's ever felt before, and then a hoodie on top of that.

"But what about—" Shane cuts himself off, his face heating.

Ilya pauses, one hand still smoothing down the hoodie fabric at Shane's shoulders. His lip twitches. "Yes? What about?"

"Fuck you."

"Mmm." His fingers find the hood of the sweatshirt, tugging it up over Shane's head for no apparent reason other than to watch Shane's face disappear into fabric. "You are allowed to say it out loud, you know."

*"Fuck* you."

Shane glares at him, but it's probably undermined by the fact that he looks like a drowned rat at the moment. "You know what I'm asking."

"Do I?" Ilya straightens up and taps his chin, shrugging emphatically with a shit-eating grin. He stares at Shane imploringly for a beat before Shane rolls his eyes. Ilya nods sagely. "Ah. You are asking why I am not trying to sex you up right now, yes?"

*"Don't* phrase it like that. Jesus," Shane groans, trying to pull the hood back over his face.

Ilya catches his hands, clearly delighted by Shane's mortification. "But it is what you mean! You show up at my door looking like sad frozen street urchin, and you think I take one look and think 'yes, I must immediately seduce this Popsicle man'?"

"I'm hardly a—"

"You are *exactly* popsicle. It is not physically possible. Hollander. Very uncomfortable, possibly dangerous. My dick would get frostbite and fall off, and then where would we be?"

"Oh my god," Shane says, and he's definitely laughing now despite himself. "Stop *talking."*

"I am only explaining the facts of life!" Ilya drops into a squat and jostles their joined hands, looking up at Shane with big, beseeching eyes. "You ask me question with your sad eyebrows, I give you answer. Very reasonable answer. Thermodynamics, no?"

"That's just not what thermodynamics is."

"It is *Ilya* dynamics, then. Sit still and no complaints, then we will discuss other activities. Goodbye."

Shane blinks and he's gone again, only to come right back with a frankly excessive number of blankets tucked under his chin. He drops them on Shane’s head, vanishing before he can protest.

“Roza—” Shane’s grumble is obscured by fleece.

“I am making cocoa,” Ilya calls from the kitchen.

"Wait, wait—" Shane lurches to his feet, one of the blankets wrapped around his shoulders, and takes two steps toward the kitchen before stopping abruptly, his hand coming up to scratch awkwardly at his neck. "I can't. My diet is—my nutritionist has me on this specific plan and hot chocolate isn't really—it's got too much sugar, and the dairy can be—I mean, unless you're using almond milk? But even then the cocoa powder usually has added—I can just have water," he finishes lamely. "Or nothing. I'm fine with nothing. You don't have to—"

Ilya, from where he'd materialized in the doorway, stares. "You are joking with me," he says finally, his voice flat with incredulity. He takes a step into the living room, jabbing a spoon at Shane. "This is joke. Canadian humor, very stupid, I don't understand but it is funny, yes? Or maybe you like to hear me say everything twice like cartoon character. I am *making,"* he repeats, glowering. "Cocoa."

"But—"

"For *me,"* Ilya clarifies, louder now, throwing his hands up. "I am making cocoa for *me.* And also for you, but you are acting like I am force-feeding you poison, so maybe just for me now. Maybe you can have your—what, your sad protein shake? Your plain water? Is this what you think I invite you here for? To give you water like stray dog?"

"That's not—"

"It is *one* cup of cocoa, Hollander. It is not—is not going to destroy your entire career. Your muscles will not fall off. Your skating will not become bad. You will not turn into pumpkin at midnight."

Shane, frankly, has completely lost the thread of this argument, if you could even call it one. He opens his mouth to say—something. *Anything,* though he's not quite sure what, but it doesn't end up mattering because what comes out is: "Okay." Ilya nods, muttering in agitated Russian under his breath, and turns on his heel.

He can hear Ilya moving around in the kitchen, the clink of mugs, the sound of the stove lighting. Shane sits. His throat feels tight and he swallows hard, rubbing a thumb over the thin skin of his palm right where Ilya had held him. Tucking one of the blankets beneath his curled up legs, he wraps the others around his body—except the one that's too scratchy, which he pushes to the side hoping Ilya won't take offense—and tucks his face down, eyes fluttering closed.

Maybe Ilya will skip the hockey talk entirely and finally start warming Shane up in other ways. Sex is easier than talking, and sex with Ilya is easier than most things Shane’s ever

done. When Ilya's hands are on him like that, Shane doesn't have to worry about what comes out of his mouth or whether he's making the right facial expressions or if he's being weird.

Shane doesn't really care what they do tonight. He doesn't want to leave, is the thing, and that scares him. Just a little.

“Here.”

Shane jolts. He hadn’t heard Ilya come back, but there he is, standing right in front of him with two steaming mugs, one already being nudged insistently into Shane’s hands. It’s ceramic, decorated with little cartoon puppies.

"Cute mug," Shane tells him, and Ilya beams. Marshmallows bob on top of the hot chocolate, but half of them are white and half of them are the pink and green mix. Shane ducks his head and takes a careful sip instead of smiling outright, shuddering as he's warmed from the inside out. “That's amazing, Roz, thank you.”

“Psh. And you wanted dog water." He's terrible at hiding the pleased look on his face. He takes the unused blanket from where Shane had left it, gives it a distracted shake, and lays it over his own lap before shuffling close enough that their thighs brush. “You did not like this one?”

Shane swallows, his throat suddenly dry. “No,” he admits, sheepish. “Too scratchy. It’s dumb, but—”

“It js not dumb,” Ilya interjects—he’s put some baking show on the TV, which is just so out of the realm of Ilya Rozanov that Shane is at a loss—with a shrug. “I hate scratchy cloth. Why you think my shirt always inbuttoned?”

“Unbuttoned,” Shane corrects. “But—yeah. Same thing, I guess.”

He knocks his knee against Ilya’s, grateful, and Ilya leans back, stretching his legs out. The movement makes his thigh press more firmly against Shane's, a solid line of warmth. His arm comes to rest along the back of the couch, not quite around Shane's shoulders but close enough that Shane can feel the heat radiating from it. Ilya's hand dangles near Shane's shoulder, all casual and suave like they do in the movies. It's a little funny, honestly—Ilya's not subtle about anything he does—but mostly Shane is just confused. Ilya never holds back from taunting him, and today, of all days, Shane deserves it. He played like total shit the second half of the game, which Ilya *must* know is his doing. Shane sneaks a look sideways, thrown off-balance by the content look on his face. He doesn't *understand.*

Shane’s free hand curls into a fist on his thigh, pressing hard enough that his short nails dig into his palm. The anxiety that had settled slightly comes creeping back, a cold trickle down his spine.

“I am too beautiful?” Ilya asks after a beat, wry. He glances at Shane. “You have staring problem.”

Shane's face heats. He jerks his gaze back to his cocoa. "No—I mean *yes,* but no. I just—" He trails off, huffing softly through his nose, frustrated with himself. The words are tangled up somewhere between his brain and his mouth, but he tries again. "I don't know. Thought you'd say something. About the game."

Ilya considers that, lips pursed for a moment, then shrugs. “Game is over,” he says. “You won. I lost. I was annoying. Normal.”

“That’s not—” Shane starts, then stops, because he actually doesn't know how to finish that thought without sounding like an idiot. His jaw works, teeth grinding together.

*That's not what I meant. That's not the point. You said I was boring and you were right and I need you to say it again so I know where I stand, so I know what you think of me, so I can stop waiting for the other shoe to drop.*

He settles for: “You were kind of an asshole.”

Ilya grins, utterly unabashed. “Yes.”

*You play very boring hockey, Hollander.*

Shane's stomach twists. His leg bounces for a couple seconds before he catches himself and forces it to stop, pressing his foot flat against the floor. "You said I play boring hockey. You said I was *dull.”*

It comes out accusatory, and Ilya’s smile falters on his face. "Yes?" He draws the word out. *Yeeeaas?* "I say this before. Many times. You know this."

"It's not the same," Shane says tightly, and his heel starts tapping against the floor again, rapid and uncontrolled. His whole leg vibrates with nervous energy.

"How is it not same?" Ilya sounds genuinely baffled now, his confusion bleeding into frustration. "I call you boring in October. In November. Last week I say you act like accountant who is afraid of auditor. You laugh, you tell me ‘fuck off, Rozanov,’ I blow you after. What is different?"

Everything is different. Everything is different because Shane has spent the last twenty years of his life feeling like an alien, watching everyone around him communicate in a language he doesn't understand, and the one thing—the *one thing*—he thought he had was that he was good at hockey. That even if he was the weird guy who none of them really liked, at least he could play. At least on the ice he made sense.

And if Ilya thinks even *that's* boring—

“Hollander,” Ilya tries, almost pleading. He’s sat upright now, resting a tentative hand on Shane’s shoulder.

“It’s different when it’s hockey and when it's *you,”* Shane says, and immediately wishes he could take it back because now Ilya is looking at him with this expression that he can't parse at all.

"When it is me," Ilya repeats slowly, as if testing how the words sound in his mouth. His hand has gone still on Shane's shoulder, the pads of his fingers pressing into taut muscle. "What does this mean?"

Shane's throat is closing up. His fingers curl into fists on his thighs, digging crescents into his palms. "Nothing. Forget it."

“I won't. You birthed earworm in me, Hollander. Is tactic to ruin my brain.”

“That one's a lost cause,” Shane mutters.

“Yes, it deteriorates from hearing the same thing twenty-four seven. ‘Harder, Rozanov!’ and ‘oh god, Rozanov!’ and—”

“You're such a fucking dick,” Shane snaps.

Ilya leans forward, meeting Shane’s eyes even when he tries to look away. “Tell me what you mean. I don't understand, Hollander.”

*Because I don't care what anyone else thinks. Because the guys on the team already think I'm weird and I've accepted that. Because I know they're never going to get me, never going to understand why I need to eat the same salmon-rice meal or why I can't handle it when everyone's talking at once or why I go quiet sometimes and can't force words out even when I'm trying.*

They're nice to Shane because they have to be. They’re professionals and good teammates who just—don't really know what to do with Shane. *Oh, there goes Hollander, you know how he is.*

"Hockey is the only thing I'm not bad at," Shane finally says, and the words feel like they're being pulled out of him with pliers. His heel is still tapping, his whole body wound tight as a spring. "Okay? Hockey is the one thing I have. I know I'm—" He makes a frustrated gesture with one hand. "I know I'm weird. I know the guys think I'm strange. I know *you* think I'm strange, and that's—it’s fine, it’s true. I don't care.”

Ilya's expression shifts, something painful flickering across his face, but Shane barrels on before he can interrupt.

“But hockey—" His voice cracks. He swallows hard, forces himself to continue. "Hockey is supposed to be the thing I'm good at. The one part of me that isn't just—" Shane gestures vaguely at himself. "So yeah, Roz, it's different when you say it." He's breathing hard now, can feel his pulse hammering in his throat. "Because I don't care if Martinez thinks I'm annoying or if Renaud makes comments about how I fold my jersey. They already think I'm a freak anyway. But you—"

He cuts himself off, jaw clenching so hard it aches. His eyes are burning and he absolutely cannot cry right now, *cannot* fall apart on Ilya's couch over something this stupid.

"I what?" Ilya asks quietly, and both his hands are on Shane's face now, cradling it gently, thumbs stroking along his cheekbones. "I what, Shane?"

They don't *do* this. When they fuck, Ilya's hands are everywhere—demanding, possessive, sure. That makes sense. Shane understands that. Sex has rules, has a clear beginning and end, has a purpose. Ilya can grip his hips hard enough to bruise, can palm the back of his neck and pull him into rough kisses, can touch him with an intensity that makes Shane's brain go all staticy. That's sex. That's allowed.

Shane's hands hover uselessly in the air between them, not sure where to go, what to do. If this were sex, he'd know. He'd reach for Ilya's waist, or his shoulders, or pull him closer. But it isn't, and Shane doesn't have a script for this.

"I what?" Ilya asks again, softer now, and his thumbs are still moving, tracing gentle arcs that are unraveling something fundamental inside Shane's chest.

Shane closes his eyes because he can't watch whatever expression crosses Ilya's face when he admits this. "You're supposed to like at least this part," he whispers. "You're supposed to think at least the hockey is worth something."

In seventh grade, Shane had been invited to his first real party. Not a birthday party with the balloons and the hovering parents, but an actual teenage party at Marcus Vetter's house while his parents were out of town. Shane hadn't understood why he'd been invited. He didn't talk to Marcus, didn't talk to anyone really, but the invitation had been extended in front of other people so Marcus couldn't take it back without looking like an asshole. Shane *wished* he had taken it back when he admitted during truth or dare that he'd never had a sleepover before.

It had gotten horribly quiet, fifteen different people staring at him with bemusement, and Shane *still* remembers the way Marcus had gone: "well, I guess that tracks," making the room erupt into giggles.

Ilya is quiet. Shane half expects him to start laughing, too.

"Hollander," he starts, and his voice sounds strained.

"Forget it, Rozanov, *please."* Faintly, Shane wonders how much dignity he can still afford to lose. This is awful. This might be the most awful thing to happen to him *ever.* His hands come up to wrap around Ilya's wrists, pulling them away half-heartedly. Shane refuses to feel disappointed when Ilya lets him go, his fingers twitching towards Shane like he doesn't really want to. "I'm being stupid. The game is over, you're right, it doesn't matter. Can we just watch the show? Please? What is this, Bake Off?"

"Holiday Edition," Ilya agrees, though he sounds frazzled. "Hollander, look at me."

"I really am not going to do that," Shane manages.

"Holl—"

"If I look at you I will literally throw up, Rozanov. Leave it alone."

Ilya's voice pitches up with alarm, and Shane almost cracks a smile. “Do not do that, please. Okay. Okay, you will sit over there and I will sit over here and we will not look at each other. This is fine?”

*No.* “I guess.”

Shane stares straight ahead at the screen, watching a woman in a festive sweater carefully pipe bright red icing onto what might be a gingerbread cottage, though Shane's brain isn't actually processing any of it. His whole body feels like a live wire, every nerve ending exposed and raw.

Beside him, Ilya shifts, and Shane can feel the movement through the couch cushions, can sense him turning slightly as if he's trying to sneak a look. Shane keeps his eyes locked on the TV, his shoulders so tense they're practically up by his ears.

"I don't think you are boring person," Ilya says finally, his voice even. "I need you to know this.”

Shane closes his eyes briefly, then forces them back open. On screen, someone's gingerbread is collapsing. It feels apt. "Okay.”

"No, is not okay." Ilya leans forward to meet Shane's eyes before abruptly remembering he's not allowed to, and sitting back again with a huff. "You say I am supposed to like at least the hockey part, like the rest of you is—what? Is problem? It is something bad I am tolerating?”

"Can we please not do this," Shane says. It comes out flat. He's so tired suddenly, exhausted from the game and from the cold and from this conversation.

"But we *are* doing this," Ilya insists, and now he's definitely turning toward Shane, his knee bumping against Shane's thigh and keeping it there. "Because you are sitting here thinking I don't like you, thinking your hockey is only good thing about you, and this is—" He makes a frustrated sound. "This is ерунда. Bullshit. It is completely wrong.”

“You *literally* called me—”

"Yes," Ilya says immediately. "I call your hockey boring. And dull. And too safe. Because I am asshole who is trying to get in your head, trying to make you mad so maybe you will play different. It is tactic. Is—" He pauses, and Shane can practically hear him searching for words. “Hollander. I am a mean person, okay? Especially in game. That's all it was. Can you trust this of me?”

Shane risks a glance at him—just a quick sideways look—and immediately regrets it because Ilya is staring at him with this intense, almost desperate expression. It's unnerving. *Can you trust this of me?*

Of course he can. If he really thought Shane's performance was bad, Ilya wouldn't lie to him to spare his feelings. “Yes,” Shane says honestly. “Fine, yes. Good?”

“Good.” Ilya nods once, decisive, before narrowing his eyes. “Because I am not done.”

“What—”

“You," Ilya continues, one hand reaching out like he's going to touch Shane's face again before he seems to remember the no-looking-at-each-other rule and lets it fall to the couch between them instead, fingers splaying against the leather cushion inches from Shane's thigh. "You as person? Shane Hollander who talks about elastic energy and reads hockey literature and knows every single stat for every single player? Who explains things in this very serious way like you are giving lecture? This is my favorite thing. This is what I like most. That you are so—" He makes another frustrated sound, switching to rapid Russian for a moment before catching himself. "You are so straightforward. So honest. Everything you think is right there on your face, even when you are trying to hide it. You don't play games with people, you don't say things you don't mean. And I—”

He cuts himself off abruptly, and Shane can see from his peripheral vision that Ilya is running a hand through his hair, tugging at the ends in agitation. “And I think this is most interesting thing about anyone I have ever met.”

Shane looks down at his lap, his fingers finding the edge of his thumbnail and picking at the skin. "That's not what boring means.”

"In Russian, maybe is better word," Ilya says helplessly. "But I don't know it. It is compliment. You are smart and polite and say your 'please' and 'thank you' with no fail. You are refreshing, boring like perfect Canadian stereotype, Shane Hollander. Keep my interest for years, no?”

"Without fail," Shane corrects hald-heartedly. His chest feels tight.

*My favorite thing.*

This time, when Ilya shifts closer, Shane turns to meet him—and the smile Ilya gives him when he looks up almost makes it all worth it. “I love your hockey. It is beautiful, is smart, is reason you win games. But your hockey is just—is just what you *do,* Shane, is not who you *are.*”

Shane's heart is doing something arrhythmic and painful in his chest, slamming against his ribs almost violently. His mouth is dry, throat clicking when he tries to swallow. He should say something.

"You called me Shane."

Maybe not that.

Ilya blinks, caught off guard, his mouth still open on whatever he'd been about to say. Promptly, his face pinks right in front of Shane's gobsmacked eyes, starting at his cheeks and spreading down his neck, unmistakable even in the dim lamplight of the apartment. His shoulders hunch just the slightest bit, as if he's trying to make himself smaller, which is absurd because Ilya Rozanov has never made himself smaller a day in his life. “Are you *blushing?”* Shane demands incredulously.

“Russians do not—*no,”* Ilya scoffs. “You have bad eyes, remember? Psh. Do not be ridiculous.”

“Oh my god,” Shane laughs, almost doubling over at the stink-eye Ilya gives him. “Are you embarrassed, Rozanov?”

"I am not embarrassed," Ilya insists hotly, but his flush is deepening, spreading down past the collar of his t-shirt. He's not meeting Shane's eyes now, staring determinedly at a spot somewhere over Shane's shoulder. "I am allowed to call you Shane. Is your name, yes? We are friends. Even when we are not—" He gestures vaguely between them. “Even when I am not all the way up your butt, we are friends–”

*“All the way up my—”* Shane chokes.

“It is expression. English expression.”

“I really don't think it is.”

“Well, is expression *now.* Point is, I can use first name. Is normal for friends.”

He's scrambling. Ilya Rozanov, who trash-talks NHL enforcers to their faces and gives post-game interviews in his second language without breaking a sweat, is scrambling to justify himself. It's possibly the cutest thing Shane has ever seen, which is an insane thought to have at this moment but, well. Here he is.

“Friends,” Shane repeats. He's smiling, he realizes, all big and crooked like a loser, but he doesn't really mind.

"Yes, friends," Ilya says, gaining confidence now, his chin lifting slightly even as his face remains stubbornly pink. "Good friends. Who watch baking show together and drink cocoa and talk about hockey. And sometimes I make you come one million times until you are crying. But definitely friends. This is—" He waves his hand again. "This is what we are. Obviously.”

“Obviously,” Shane echoes.

If it were anyone else, he might think Ilya is *nervous,* with how he's fidgeting with his chain, eyes darting around the room. "This is okay? That I call you Shane? That I say we are friends?”

“Yeah,” Shane says quietly, and his own hand comes up to cover Ilya's where it rests on the couch. His fingers slot between Ilya's, squeezing once. "That's okay. Shane is—you can call me Shane.”

The smile that breaks across Ilya's face is devastating. “Okay, *Shane,”* he says, and the way he emphasizes the name, deliberate and maybe a little bit pleased with himself, makes Shane's stomach flip. "Now we watch Holiday Bake Off like friends, yes? And you tell me if their gingerbread is, er… sound?” He pauses for Shane to nod his confirmation before continuing. “Because this one—" He points at the screen where someone's elaborate

gingerbread mansion is listing dangerously to one side. “I think I bake better. It is pathetic, no?”

“Yeah, Ilya,” Shane snorts. He's still tired, and maybe that's why he's a little greedy with it, because he shuffles until their thighs are pressed together again and Ilya lifts his arm up, allowing Shane to curl into his side. He's oddly quiet. Shane tilts his head up just enough to catch the stupidly fond grin playing on Ilya’s face, warmth blooming in his chest as he fights the urge to smile right back.

End Notes

this isnt really accurate to how they text in the books but its accurate in my heart

edit 2/4 i need u guys to know im reading every single new comment and bookmark i dont know why or how this fic is blowing up but jesus christ!!! love u all mwah

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