The Tattoo Story

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/68411776.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov, Harris Drover, Wyatt Hayes, Zane Boodram, Troy Barrett
Additional Tags:	Yearning, Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Canon Compliant, References Halloween with Ilya sidestory by the author - link in notes
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-07-30 Words: 1,905 Chapters: 1/1

The Tattoo Story

by MangoTea

Summary

Between when Ilya and Shane were outed and when the season ended, they both still had some games to play. Ilya spends a night on the road with some of his teammates and tells them why he got his loon tattoo

Notes

Thanks to Evie and princebutt for beta-ing, and thanks to this fandom for being lovely and encouraging!

This fic references one of the additional GCU stories up on Rachel Reid's website.

“Of course we’ve got questions, man. Most importantly, what the hell is with that loon tattoo?” Troy asked.

“That is what you say is important?” Ilya said, peering at Troy, who sat across from him in the water. The hotel’s hot tub was not supposed to be open this late at night, but Wyatt had talked the hotel into giving them access somehow. Between his earnestness, star power and the amount of cash he carries on him, it probably hadn’t been hard.

“We’ve all agreed,” Wyatt said, “to not ask you any actually serious questions. Not yet. Trust me, we’ve got a lot of questions about how long this has been going on and how it started.

“And have we just been assuming you’re a giant slut all this time?” Harris added.

“Yes, deep questions like that will have to wait,” Wyatt nodded. “For now, we are only going to ask if dressing up as Shane for Halloween was some weird foreplay thing, for example.”

Ilya laughed. He’d expected his teammates to jump all over him with questions about him and Shane as soon as he was back on the team, but instead they’d been mostly giving him space, letting him focus on hockey. He shouldn’t have been surprised, they all knew what it was like to have the NHL’s scheduling decisions rule their lives. They clearly had burning questions, but were putting supporting him first.

During a break in the game against Denver he’d mentioned to Wyatt that maybe a few questions would be okay, but he hadn’t expected that to lead to being dragged from his room and up to the hotel pool area. The main lights were off, leaving the water glowing from the underwater lights. The sky was dark past the glass ceiling. The whole area felt like a scene from a movie rather than reality. He liked it, it felt dramatic and somehow weirdly cozy, like only they existed in some endless night.

Wyatt was to his left, taking advantage of the hot water to stretch his shoulders. Troy, Bood and Harris were across from him. Harris was traveling with the team until the end of the season to try to flood social media with anything but the drama with him and Shane. Harris didn’t think it was going to work, but the owner insisted and he wasn’t going to complain about more time with Troy.

Ilya enjoyed having an openly gay couple on the plane and staying in the hotels with them. The team seemed fine with it. There’d been a few jokes, but well meaning ones. If everything went as he hoped, and Shane joined the Centaurs, having a couple on the trips would be routine. Harris and Troy didn’t realize they were testing the waters for him. Troy was sharing a room with Harris and no one had objected. Harris had slept curled up next to Troy on the plane and Ilya had to fight not to stare, not to imagine Shane tucked under his arm on flights. He was so painfully close to finally having Shane fully in his life and being fully in Shane’s life.

“No, the costume was me missing him and wanting to annoy him. I spent so much time missing him.” He missed Shane now. Them being benched was terrible, but it had given them

another week of living together, a taste of their future. Soon these separations would be over, maybe, hopefully.

“Not for much longer.” Troy pushed his shoulder, pulling him from his thoughts.

“Not for much longer. Doesn’t feel real. I will fall asleep in his arms so many nights.”

“You are ruining my image of you,” Harris said.

“Do not worry, I slept with many women in many cities. I was also sleeping with men, but not as many as I would have liked, was more difficult.”

“Oh good! So, you’re bi?”

“Yes, and have known since I was twelve. Wyatt, Harris is asking me serious questions.”

“Shit, okay, then answer Troy’s question. Is ‘loon’ your pet nickname for Shane?” Harris asked. “That tattoo has to be about him.”

“You made agreements about asking me questions. I never made an agreement to answer the questions.” Ilya crossed his arms.

“True, but you adore us and haven’t been able to tell us all about your hot boyfriend,” Harris said. “How many times has he scored a goal and you weren’t able to brag about him? That maneuver in Seattle? We watched that live together. Holy shit, were you dying?”

Ilya groaned at the memory. That night they were all at a party at Bood’s and of course someone put on the game, Voyageurs versus Trolls. The score stayed at nothing to nothing until the clock had almost run out. Shane had dove into a group of three Seattle Trolls and had managed to send the puck flying towards the goal. The goalie was still slightly out of position from the last block and had lunged towards the puck, but was a fraction of a second too slow. The puck passed his glove with barely an inch of clearance, with only forty five seconds left in the game.

The sprawling sectional couch full of hockey players and fans had erupted in shouts and cheers. Everyone around him had been freaking out over Shane’s play and he hadn’t been able to say a word. The giant TV dominated the wall of the living room and showed Shane as he circled the ice in victory, sweaty and disheveled, skin flushed. Ilya’s heart had felt like it wanted to burst from pride, love and longing. That beautiful smile, his nose crinkling as he laughed with his team, the sweat on his neck, all on a screen taller than he was. He hadn’t touched Shane in weeks. He’d wanted to shout louder than all of them, let everyone know that the remarkable man on the TV screen loves him, had chosen him, is devoted to him.

Bood splashed water at him. “We’re going to hear you bragging constantly, aren’t we?”

“Of course you are!” Ilya said, still thinking about that goal. “I’m the love of Shane Fucking Hollander’s life. He is remarkable, genius, beautiful, and he loves me more than hockey. He lets me lay in his arms for hours while I try to find words, figure out how to explain to him he is my heart. Hollander is mine.”

Harris burst out laughing. “God it’s good to see you this happy, see this side of you.”

Wyatt squeezed his shoulder.

Troy leaned forward and said, “You’re going to be so annoying, aren’t you? Can’t wait, man. And if how you got that ink is a bit too intense right now, don’t worry. We’ll just make something up and all swear it’s true.”

Ilya pushed him back to his side and squeezed his arm before he fell back onto the bench, laughing. “Is good to talk. The tattoo, the feeling that lead me to it, is just strange to put into words.” Ilya took a deep breath of the steam rising from the water and tried to figure out where to begin. “Did you know if you are drunk in Las Vegas even the worst tattoo parlor tells you to go sober up? Is probably good, I found a better one the next day.”

“You got it in Vegas?” Wyatt said. “You had a rough night there?”

Ilya nodded. “Between NHL Awards, All Stars some years and other things, it’s a city we’ve spent much time in together. The night I realized I’d never be able to let go of him was there. So many memories there. Then I was back in Vegas without him. Bears were there for a regular game, against the Chevaliers. I was without him and I could not put it from my mind, how much I wanted him there. All the memories, it was too much.”

Ilya closed his eyes, getting lost in the story. “I went to a bar and kept thinking about times with him. The summer before, we had spent weeks together at his cottage on a lake. We saw what it was like to have time, to relax together, to wake up next to each other, to begin to say the things we never had time to say. Then one night he drags me out to his fire pit. I don’t understand woodsy Canadian shit, being out in nature, but he was so happy. And there was this sound it…. Stupid fucking Canadian wolf birds.”

“Oh no,” Harris said. “Did the birds scare you? Are you that much of a city boy?”

Ilya made a grumpy sound and opened his eyes. “Birds should not sound like that.” He paused to see if they were going to make any more comments, but they were all looking at him, waiting to hear the rest. “That night, next to him by the fire, it was like the rest of the world didn’t exist, time didn’t exist. The constant stress eased during those weeks, but that night was even more so. I know what the phrase is in English, the phrase is ‘the moment stretched out’, but I do not like that word, stretched. It doesn’t feel right. It was like the moment relaxed, time melted, and I could stay in his arms forever. That night was so important to me.” More had happened that night, he’d opened up to Shane in painful ways and felt a comfort unlike any he could remember, but he didn’t want to get into that now. The story didn’t need it anyway.

“So, that night in Vegas, missing him, I needed something to hold onto. We had to be careful of what is on our phones and in our houses. We take pictures, send them, get them, then we delete them all. Now I have this.” Ilya lifted his chain with a finger, where his engagement ring hung next to his mother’s cross. “Now I can take pictures and keep them. That night I had nothing to hold onto, to look at. I needed something, something permanent. That night I could not get the tattoo, and that was probably good. The next morning I got up early. Hotel person pointed me towards a good place. City was so quiet, that early. It was a relief, once I

had it. People had questions, but it didn't matter. Since it happened in Vegas they were happy to make assumptions about bets or girls or just having gone on a bender.

"So, that is the story. I missed Shane so much and there were all these bars and tattoo parlors around. Sorry, is not funny or sexy."

Troy moved to sit next to him, shoulders bumping. Ilya leaned into his friend. "I will tell you more stories. Some will be fun, I promise."

"Hey, they don't have to be." Troy said. "It's you we care about, not the drama. At least two of us care more about you than the-" He cut off as Harris splashed him. "I didn't say which two! Ilya, protect me!"

"Noooo," Ilya said and went to go use Wyatt as a shield. He'd have the whole summer with Shane, and maybe so much more. For now he was in this strange space between his old life and what was to come, but he was there with friends who cared about him.

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