

I've Been Down Here Before (I Know the Way Out)

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I've Been Down Here Before (I Know the Way Out)

by [HollowIsTheWorld](#)

Summary

Scott's been the subject of a lot of rude comments, on and off the ice. One of the things he'd braced himself for. One thing he hadn't expected was to hear that people who made those comments while playing Ottawa tended to get punched by one Ilya Rozanov.

Notes

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

Scott had been as prepared to come out as he could be. He'd been prepared for the loaded comments he couldn't respond to, the insensitive questions from interviewers, the nasty words in every comment section he should stop looking at.

Still, he's not sure anything could have prepared him for how *exhausting* it was going to be to pretend *not* to notice all of that. He's glad he didn't drag Kip out to Vegas, knows he'd have gotten just as much vitriol thrown his way, if not more - at least most people don't want to piss off a professional athlete to the point he starts throwing punches - but he's missing him like he's a limb right now.

So he wants to see Kip more than just about anything, and seeing Ilya Rozanov walking toward him is pretty much the exact opposite of that.

Scott has been tense all night, but seeing Rozanov makes his muscles clench up even worse. He's not sure if it's better or worse that Rozanov is cornering him on a balcony where he'd escaped to get what passed for fresh air in Las Vegas. On the one hand, there's no audience to back Rozanov up. On the other hand, there's no audience to back *Scott* up if things get ugly.

And he has no idea if things will get ugly. If there's one nasty lesson he's had to learn, it's that you can make educated guesses about people's reactions all day long, but there are still going to be people who react way better than you thought they would - and people who react way worse. Rozanov has always been a little hard to predict anyway - he'll apparently die if he isn't being a little shit at all times, but Scott can never guess what, exactly, is going to come out of his mouth at any given time.

"You do not have to look like I am going to bite you, Hunter," Rozanov says, sliding up to him just a little too close for Scott's comfort. "I save that for people much prettier than you."

Scott rolls his eyes, but his shoulders drop a little. If Rozanov was still doing his 'imply I'd fuck you if you were better/hotter' routine, he *probably* wasn't about to act like Scott had somehow been violating him by breathing the same air all these years. Scott can handle a couple of cocksucker jokes, or whatever Rozanov has decided is so funny that he had to come out here to tell it.

"What do you want, Rozanov?"

Rozanov leans over the railing and pulls a cigarette out of his pocket. He considers it, like he can't decide if he wants to smoke it or not. "You think I come out here to insult you."

He sounds remarkably serious. Obviously, Scott knows the guy can't be in chirp-mode 24/7, but he never would have expected he'd get to hear the non-chirping version.

"That's kind of what you do."

"Well, I can tell you you are a fossil. But you know this." Rozanov doesn't sound like his heart is in it, and he's still looking at his unlit cigarette like it has something to tell him.

"Came to tell you, it was brave, what you did. You must love him very much."

The corner of Scott's mouth pulls up in a smile, even as his brain struggles to register what Rozanov just said. "You could say that."

"He has very bad taste, of course. Could date a much hotter hockey player." Rozanov shrugs one shoulder. "But love does not make sense, yes?" He seems to give up on the idea of smoking the cigarette, shoves it down in his pocket. "People have probably told you you are brave since you did it. Sorry to repeat."

"It's fine," Scott says softly, and he means it. The sentiment *has* been getting exhausting, if he's being honest - like when people tell him how strong he is for getting through life as an orphan. It's hollow, always with the undercurrent that they're glad it happened to someone who isn't them. Strong to go through the world mostly alone. Brave to become the first out gay player in the league.

But something about the way Rozanov said it sounds different. Almost...

"And you are not even retiring now," Rozanov continues. "Going to keep playing, knowing what they'll say. Very brave. Probably also stupid, but." He's silent for a moment. "Maybe you will not be only out player in league forever, huh? Rookies cannot be outdone by old man Scott Hunter." He pushes himself up from the railing. He isn't looking at Scott in a way that's definitely intentional, but it doesn't feel like the other pointed avoidance Scott's been dealing with tonight. Doesn't feel like Rozanov is trying to keep himself from starting a fight or looking at something that will disgust him.

"Good speech tonight," Rozanov says. "See you next season, fossil."

And then he's gone. Scott isn't sure what to make of what just happened. There's some sort of suspicion scratching at the back of his mind, one he's refusing to look at. That feels too big to tackle, to carry, even only as an idea.

But for the first time *you were so brave* doesn't sound like it's covering a desire to say *wow, that was stupid of you*. For the first time, he feels like he's wedged a door open.

And he thinks, maybe, there's someone behind him, considering following him through.

Scott's been pretty careful not to watch interviews where he might be the subject of discussion since he came out, not unless they've been vetted by someone he trusts. He doesn't need to hear how many ways people can find to say *guys like that shouldn't be on the ice*.

Before his brief talk with Rozanov in Vegas, Scott never would have expected the guy to be the subject of one of those vetted interviews.

The title of the interview says it's *supposed* to be about Rozanov's unexpected trade to Ottawa, but the clipped section is about Scott. Scott doesn't know if there was any sort of natural lead-in to the loaded questions - probably not, if he had to guess.

Rozanov has his shit-eating grin on, kicked back on a couch like he doesn't have a care in the world.

"And what do you have to say about Scott Hunter this year?" the interviewer asks. "Any worries about facing him on the ice?"

Rozanov laughs. "Worries? About Scott Hunter? No. Well, maybe that his age will catch up to him and he will collapse and die on the ice. Then we would have to reschedule the game. Always a pain, yes?"

The interviewer's frozen smile makes it clear that that wasn't what he meant. Rozanov's sharp responding grin makes it equally clear - to Scott, at least, who's been on the receiving end of it enough times - that he's well aware of that.

"What did you think of his win last season?" the interviewer asks, valiantly trying again.

Rozanov scoffs. "Well, everyone must get lucky once, yes? Will not happen again, I am sure. I tell Marlow, is his fault for breaking Hollander. And Lorelle's fault, for breaking me. One of us would have stopped Admirals, otherwise."

"And what about his... demonstration, after the win?" The interviewer said the word 'demonstration' like it was poisonous.

"Demonstration?" Rozanov tilts his head to the side like a puppy. "Sorry, do not know this word."

Scott is positive Rozanov knows that word.

"His..." The interviewer is visibly struggling to find a way to explain what he means without tipping over into saying something that could get him in trouble. Scott wonders if that's exactly the hole Rozanov is hoping to trip him into. He knows Rozanov does that on the ice sometimes, gets people tripping over themselves so Rozanov can skate off, pretending to be innocent.

Scott thinks maybe Rozanov is smarter than people give him credit for.

"When he brought that man down onto the ice," the interviewer finally settles on. Scott wonders if the man would throw up in his mouth if he tried to say the word 'kissed'.

Rozanov shrugs. "Is normal, yes? You have someone to kiss on the ice, you kiss them. We kiss each other. We kiss the cup. Scott Hunter's boyfriend is probably better kisser than anyone on Admirals."

That makes Scott snort. He wonders if Rozanov was picked for this interview because someone saw 'Bad Boy Russian' and thought he was a sure-fire pick for a good rant about how all the real men were vanishing from hockey.

After Vegas, Scott had spent a long time thinking about Rozanov. More time than in the whole rest of his career combined, probably. He's a smartass, but Scott has never heard of him saying anything homophobic, racist, or sexist. He baits people into fights through the simple art of being really fucking annoying. And if Scott's right about him... Well, he may be annoying as shit, but maybe he's earned the right to at least a little bit of that.

"So you don't have a problem with it?"

Rozanov rubs at his chin, looking thoughtful. Scott doesn't even feel nervous waiting for his answer this time. If anything, it's kind of fun, watching Rozanov wind up someone who isn't Scott or his teammates. "Well, one problem. Has someone checked on the boyfriend? We should make sure he knows, does not have to date the oldest man in the world. He is hot, he can do better than a dinosaur."

Scott makes a note to tell Kip. He'll get a kick out of that.

The interviewer gives up, goes into the wrap-up spiel thanking Rozanov for his time, and the clip ends.

Scott realizes he's smiling.

"There's rumors going around about you, Rozanov," Scott says in a low voice.

Eyes sparking with his usual mischief, Rozanov says, "Oh? Are they sexy ones? Should I be flattered?"

"Apparently you're my knight in shining armor." Scott's been the subject of a lot of rude comments, on and off the ice. One of the things he'd braced himself for. One thing he hadn't expected was to hear that people who made those comments while playing Ottawa tended to get punched by one Ilya Rozanov.

Rozanov flashes a smile. "Well, you need help, yes? Too old to do it yourself."

"Asshole."

Rozanov winks. The puck drops.

Off the ice, in interviews, Rozanov isn't Scott's only defender. A decent number of players, more than Scott would have expected, have made statements that who Scott sleeps with doesn't affect his game and shouldn't affect anyone else's. Shane Hollander gave a really nice speech about how Scott wasn't hurting anyone, was inspiring other people, and had done something incredibly brave for himself.

But Rozanov *is* the only one making people say *don't call Scott Hunter a faggot where Rozanov can hear you unless you want to be smashed through the boards.*

Rozanov gets asked about it after games, of course, in no small part because there isn't much else to ask about after an Ottawa game. The reporters want to keep going with Rozanov's fame, but Ottawa isn't Boston and if Rozanov isn't getting in fights or pulling off the occasional miracle win there just isn't a story. *"Is lazy insults,"* Rozanov tells them. *"Rude and lazy. Sucking dick is not related to hockey scores. Now, Hunter's age, that is something we should be worried about. How is his heart, we think?"*

Scott's noticed the not-answers about Rozanov's move to Ottawa. It has him wondering things he isn't putting words to yet.

"Thanks, for what it's worth," he says the next time they're in each other's orbits. "I wouldn't have expected you to be in my corner like this."

Rozanov gives his lazy shrug, the one that says he doesn't give a fuck what people are saying around him. For the first time, Scott is close enough, knows enough, to be sure the shrug is a lie, and he wonders how often that's been the case before. Scott's been wearing a mask for a long time, damn near his whole life, and somehow it's never really occurred to him that he might not be the only one. That maybe Rozanov is wearing one too.

"Is boring, playing on nicer team than Boston," Rozanov says. "I should be thanking them, giving me something to fight about."

Rozanov isn't going to accept the thanks, that much is obvious. He isn't going to admit he's doing anything brave or dangerous. Isn't going to acknowledge that just about every other player with a similar asshole reputation is getting his kicks by talking shit about Scott, not defending him. He'd probably roll his eyes and say that would be the *boring* option, if Scott pointed it out.

So they play hockey. Scott pretends he doesn't think anything of it, and gives a neutral statement about being glad to have support from many places when reporters ask him about it.

Scott starts keeping a closer eye on Rozanov in the news.

Being the first out gay man in the league has had some consequences Scott wouldn't have thought of, one of which is that everyone rushes to call him the moment something gay happens in the hockey world.

So he's pretty quick to find out when a video goes viral with a blurry image of Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander kissing in the background.

He's glad he's at home when he sees it, where he can collapse onto the couch, press himself close to Kip, and feel his heart break in peace.

He got to come out on his own terms, at the best possible time. Some assholes had done their best, but it was hard to say Scott being gay was ruining the sport right after he'd won the cup. Rozanov and Hollander were in the middle of a season, Rozanov on a pretty crappy team, and though they'd been seen working together on a charity a lot in the last few years, people still loved pushing their rivalry.

And Rozanov, as far as Scott knew, wasn't a citizen of anywhere but Russia. Scott's no expert on Russian laws, but he's pretty sure Rozanov can never go back there now.

He thinks of Rozanov, standing on that Vegas balcony, holding a cigarette he wouldn't smoke. *Maybe you will not be only out player in league forever.* Scott wonders if it was Hollander he was thinking of, even back then. The trade to Ottawa had followed not too long after, and Ottawa is only two hours from Montreal.

An old memory surfaces, Hollander's eyes widening, saying *He's not my boy*.

It's absurd to think the relationship could be that old.

If it is, Scott thinks his heart's going to break all over again. That's a long, long time to hide. And to be dragged out of the closet like this...

"People are already talking about benching them. That they can't be expected to play fair against each other." Kip usually doesn't go into the comments sections on all things gay hockey players either, but he looks to be hip deep in a Twitter thread now. He knows enough about hockey culture to know how bad this is going to be.

Scott hesitates a moment before sitting up, holding his phone like it's a weapon. "I'm going to make some calls."

He can't change the league by himself. He can't do anything about guys like Commissioner Crowell, or Rozanov and Hollander's coaches. But he has the Admirals, at least. He's got his own platforms.

He remembers Las Vegas, remembers that feeling, like he's gotten a door open, a door that someone else - that Ilya Rozanov - might be able to get through someday.

Scott can't protect Hollander and Rozanov from the storm that's coming. But maybe, just maybe, he can help them weather it.

Scott's finally retiring. It's been coming for a while, he knows. He's been playing with fire, seeing just how far his body will take him. It's a small miracle that he's doing it on his own terms and not being taken out by a hip or a knee giving up on him.

So, win or lose, this is the last time he'll ever play for the cup.

It's the Centaurs who the Admirals are going up against in the final this time, and damn if that isn't something no one could have predicted the last time Scott hoisted the cup over his head. A lot's changed since then. The league is up to seven out active players. Two of those players are married to each other, and terrorizing everyone who goes up against them. Scott's got a real idea of his post-retirement life, centered around his push to get some amount of toxic masculinity out of the sport. He has Kip's ring on his finger. He has friends, family. He's at a place where retirement isn't scary anymore, isn't this looming void where it seems certain he'll lose everything he cared about.

He wants to win, he always wants to win, but he thinks if he doesn't take the cup home this time... He'll live. He'll even mean it when he congratulates the Centaurs.

But he's still going to make Rozanov pay for every inch of ice tonight.

"Ready to lose, Hunter?" Rozanov taunts the moment Scott's in earshot. Competitive little shit. Scott grins despite himself.

"I think we're both winners tonight, Rozanov."

Rozanov frowns - almost pouts, really. He hates when people don't take his bait. "This is not how hockey works, Hunter. Are you so old you forget rules of game now?"

Scott has been bravely refraining from pointing out that Rozanov is now older than Scott was when Rozanov first started making jabs at Scott's age. He continues this tradition. He may also be planning on bullying Rozanov on social media after retirement. Just a little.

"No matter how this game goes, the cup is going home with a team whose captain is married to another man," Scott says. "I think that matters."

He can see in the way Rozanov's eyebrows jump that he hadn't thought of that. His eyes track up to the stands, where there are almost as many pride shirts and banners as you'd find during a pride night game. "A good point. We are proving sucking dick makes you good at hockey, yes?"

Scott snorts, rolls his eyes. "Admitting I'm good at hockey, finally?"

Rozanov shrugs a shoulder. "Is your last game. Is like letting a dog have table scraps before you put him down."

Scott doesn't dignify that with a response.

The puck drops. The game plays out.

A queer man captains his team to victory, holds the cup over his head, and kisses his husband on the ice.

The door behind them opens a little wider.

End Notes

I've never seen The West Wing, but there's a speech from it that I've seen on tumblr about a man being trapped in a hole and another man jumps in to help him out and I think about that speech 24/7. That's where the title comes from; you can find it if you search "i've been down here before i know the way out speech". The connections that exist between minorities even when they aren't speaking to each other about it make me insane.

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