they say it's my fault but I want (him) so much

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they say it's my fault but I want (him) so much

by blankjournals

Summary

He needs to move, maybe get Rozanov’s attention before he loses his nerves.

And then the room tilts. His vision narrows, red light smearing into pink and white streaks. Shane staggers. The beer slips from his fingers. It shatters, foam splashing his shoes, glass skittering away. His knees give out like someone kicked him, and his hands shoot forward to hold himself upright.

His left palm lands in broken glass, though he doesn't feel it. What he notices is the certainty that everyone sees, that they can smell him—something sour and wrong. His scent, despite patches and care, has turned exposed.

OR: What if we took the club scene from episode 4 and had Shane collapse from experiencing Omega Rejection Syndrome after seeing Ilya dancing with someone else?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Shane did not want to be here, but he had to come. Rose wanted to, and that's what good boyfriends do, right? They show up for their girlfriends. Go on dates. Hold their hands. Buy them flowers, at least, that's what his dad says.

He does these things, even though the club isn't his scene. The music's too loud. The lights flash in harsh pulses; he feels them even with his eyes closed. It's stifling. His jeans stick to his skin, and he's never resented denim more. He drinks only because everyone else is, even though all he wants is a stupid ginger ale. It's the perfect cocktail for sensory overload. Everything feels too much—like his senses are fighting for dominance.

Can you *hear* that? Can you *feel* that? Can you *see* that?

He has to step away from Rose and Miles before they become victims of his sudden irritation.

God, the club is too damn hot. Red light pulses against walls and swaying bodies. Is it supposed to be sexy? Or a warning? Maybe a preemptive sign. Shane doesn't know. Maybe he should've listened to his gut. No, Shane doesn't do that. Shane should've listened to his brain.

He hears the music, but he doesn't understand the lyrics. It's loud enough that he feels every beat pounding in rhythm with his heart. Against it all, in the middle of it all, just like Shane is, Rozanov is here too. They stand across the room from each other. A girl is in Rozanov's arms, dancing with him, against him. Because she can. Because no one would question it.

Rozanov looks beautiful, even in a ridiculous shirt that resembles a dead cheetah. Shane almost wants to ask where he shops. Rozanov wouldn’t need a stylist; he knows how to dress without help.

Shane doesn’t look away; he can’t. Because something inside him caves in, slow and then all at once. His omega curls in on itself.

Dramatic? *No*. Knows who it's dealing with. It folds quietly instead, like it knows better than to make noise.

He can’t pinpoint where it starts. Or where it ends. How long has it been there? Maybe for weeks. Or months. Possibly years. This need. This want. A want so visceral, Shane deluded himself into thinking it's just dumb secondary gender biology, a way to rationalize feelings that don’t fit the life he’s supposed to want. He’s an omega. Rozanov is an alpha. Of course, he's drawn to him. He can't help it. Or maybe it's easier to believe than face the truth about himself.

It's biology. It's instinct. Over and over, it cycles through his mind.

Shane’s not gay. He can't be. He likes girls. He has a girlfriend. Shane's just mixing it all up; his omega wants an alpha. And that alpha is Rozanov, who happens to be a man.

A man Shane can't have. Not in this lifetime. Not with the career he has. Now, with what he represents for his community beyond the sport. People expect things from him. And Shane needs to live up to all of them. Even if sometimes he feels submerged, fighting to breathe, while expectations wrap around his legs, pulling him under, leaving him gasping for freedom.

But that's what Shane has to do. His reprieve for taking up space in an industry not used to people that look like him.

It doesn't matter; none of it matters. Shane ended it. Not that they were… something to begin with. But he did nonetheless. He left. He panicked when things got real, when Rozanov cooked for him, fed him, said his name like it mattered. And then Shane walked out, thinking he was saving himself, then got a girlfriend, like that would cauterize the wound, like it would make him normal.

And now Rozanov is here. With someone else.

He's a hypocrite. He knows it.

The feeling slams into him, ancient and humiliating. There's no mercy, just a raw ache that echoes in every empty, desperate part of himself. He bristles with self-directed anger, wanting to argue: *he's not being rejected; he was never Rozanov's to lose*. He remembers, in a rush of guilt, that he pushed Rozanov away first.

And Shane's gotten so used to denying himself, hiding this part of himself. The things Shane wants and desires and craves so much that it burns under his skin. Chalking it up to his secondary gender, to dumb omega impulses.

Having someone else do it to him was the final nail in the coffin.

Maybe he should apologize. How many times did Shane meet up with Rozanov in the hopes of "talking" to him first and then getting completely sidetracked? Sidetracked in the best ways. With Rozanov's eyes, there is a twinkle in a mesmerizing way. Hands large and greedy. Mouth, hot and insistent and addicting. His cock—

Maybe if he said he was sorry, it would help him feel better. Rozanov was so sweet that day. He made tuna melts. Kept checking whether his ginger ale was cold. Maybe it'll help to end the restlessness he's been feeling for weeks. The absolute crushing pressure on his chest right now.

Could they still be friends? Would Rozanov like to be his friend? Would it help?

God, he wishes his brain would let him feel, just once, without draining every drop of his energy. It wrings him out until there's nothing left but exhaustion and emptiness.

He needs to move, maybe get Rozanov's attention before he loses his nerves.

And then the room tilts. His vision narrows, red light smearing into pink and white streaks. Shane staggers. The beer slips from his fingers. It shatters, foam splashing his shoes, glass

skittering away. His knees give out like someone kicked him, and his hands shoot forward to hold himself upright.

His left palm lands in broken glass, though he doesn't feel it. What he notices is the certainty that everyone sees, that they can smell him, something sour and wrong. His scent, despite patches and care, has turned exposed.

One minute earlier, Ilya notices the sway. It’s subtle. Just a fraction off. But Ilya has made a career out of noticing fractions. Hollander looks… wrong. Not drunk. Maybe unfocused? Ilya frowns, still half-caught in the rhythm of the music, the girl’s hands warm against him.

Then Hollander stumbles and drops.

For half a second, Ilya just stares at him, confused, like his brain refuses to assemble the image in front of him. And then the flashes come. They always do when he sees someone get injured, and he loses any and all ability to move. He wonders if his mother had looked the same, if she had stumbled and fallen like this before he had found her.

Gone. Untethered. No longer part of this world.

But this time, Ilya is not stumbling into a room where Hollander is lying out cold. He saw it happen in real time. And he can...

Help him.

Instinct slams into place. His alpha bangs against his chest in panic to *move,* and he pushes the girl away without a word and breaks into a run.

People shout around him. Someone laughs, thinking it's another person who's drunk beyond their limit. Ilya doesn’t slow down. He drops to his knees before Hollander. Glass bites sharply and painfully through his jeans. He pushes the shards aside as he gathers him into his arms. He only winces slightly when it pricks his flesh.

That’s when he smells it, or rather, is hit with a scent so strong, so violent. He’s been slammed with less force on the ice.

Hollander smells *wrong*. He almost recoils, his nose burning. He’s never smelled anything like this. Not from Hollander, not from anyone.

Distressed. Wrong. Bad. Save. Save him. Before it's too late.

“Hollander,” he says, voice urgent, bloody hands moving to cradle his head. “Hey. *Hey*—”

Miles is suddenly there, Rose too, dropping to her knees nearby but stopping short. The club noise dulls around them as the music comes to an abrupt stop. The crowd whispers and gasps

around them.

“Back up,” Miles yells, his arms out. “Give him some space!”

“What’s wrong with him?” Ilya barks, panic scraping his throat raw. “Did someone put something in his drink?”

“I’m going to check his pulse,” Rose says gently, reaching for Hollander’s wrist.

Ilya barely hears the voice from somewhere behind him, his teammate, probably; *Is that Hollander?*

“His pulse is too strong,” Rose says. “We need to take him to the ER.”

“911,” Ilya snaps, tearing his eyes away for a split second. “Call 911.”

Someone nearby fumbles for their phone.

Hollander’s hand twitches, and Ilya catches it immediately, slick fingers wrapping around slick hands. There's blood on Ilya’s hands from where he was shoving aside the glass like it was candy. Shane’s palm is also cut and bleeding bright red. He can't tell anymore where his blood ends and Shane's begins.

“He smells wrong,” Ilya says hoarsely. “He smells—wrong.”

Rose hesitates, just for a second, and she glances at Miles, then back at him.

“What is it?” he demands. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Rozanov,” Shane mumbles suddenly, voice low, eyes barely able to open.

Ilya’s head snaps down.

“Rozanov,” Shane slurs, eyes fluttering shut. “I’m okay.”

“You’re not okay,” Ilya says immediately, voice breaking despite himself. “But you will be. You have to be.”

The paramedics arrive fast, pushing through the parted crowd. Ilya doesn’t move when they kneel beside him, scent spiking sharp and threatening in the air.

“Hey,” Rose says softly. “We need to let them help him.”

"I can't leave him," Ilya says firmly. His eyes never leave Hollander’s face. *Please*, he begs silently. *Open your eyes again.*

“Hey man,” Connor says, crouching beside him, clearly confused why his captain is behaving this way but not questioning it in the moment. “They just want to help. You don’t want to delay this, right?”

That does it. Ilya loosens his grip, just barely. He lets the paramedics work, watching every touch like a supervising MD.

They get Hollander onto the gurney. No one stops Ilya when he follows. Not out the door. Not into the ambulance. He holds Hollander's bloody hand until the paramedic gestures to treat the wound.

Ilya lets go reluctantly, his alpha loudly protesting.

Hollander's parents look surprised when they see him there.

Ilya clocks it immediately, the brief pause, the flicker of confusion before concern takes over. *Why is our son's rival here?*

Rose steps in smoothly, already explaining. The club, Shane's fainting, and how Rozanov had gotten to him. Yuna listens with her whole body, one hand pressed to her chest. David's jaw tightens, nodding once, his arms around his wife.

Ilya doesn't move. He's sitting on one of the hard plastic benches lining the ICU waiting area, elbows on his knees, hands hanging uselessly between them. His eyes never leave the double doors.

"Rozanov?"

Yuna's voice is soft when she sits beside him. David hovers next to her.

Ilya's head snaps toward them before he can stop it.

She looks him over, his face, his posture, then down at his hands. Her brow furrows gently. "Did you get hurt?" she asks.

Ilya blinks, following her gaze. His hands are still smeared red, dried tacky in places. There's blood on his knees too, darkened against the fabric. "It's nothing," he says automatically. "Just some glass."

"Are you sure?" Yuna asks slowly, mouth pulled into a frown. "Your hands—"

"It's Hollander's," Ilya says, too fast. The words crack on the way out. He swallows hard, staring at his palms like he can still see the moment it happened. "Mrs. Hollander," he says, voice rough, "it's Hollan—Shane's blood. He—he touched glass when he fell."

Something in Yuna's expression softens even further.

"Oh, sweetie," she says quietly. "I'm sorry. That must've been scary."

Ilya shakes his head; it was not scary, it was terrifying. “I wasn’t fast enough,” he says instead. His eyes sting, but he doesn’t look up, refuses to let them fall; he doesn't deserve to cry, not when Hollander is the one inside who is hurt. “I didn’t catch him.”

Rose’s voice drifts over from where she’s standing with Miles. “I told her you were across the room,” she says gently. “You still got to him the fastest.”

“No,” Ilya says, shaking his head again. “Should’ve been faster. Should’ve been quicker.” His breath stutters. “I’m fast. I skate. I can run fast.” He finally looks at Yuna, eyes bright and unsteady. “I should’ve caught him faster.”

Yuna doesn’t argue. She just rests her hand on his forearm, and Ilya wonders whether all moms around the world share a secret ability to make any child feel comforted by their presence alone.

“He didn't smell right,” Ilya says suddenly. The words tumble out like he’s been holding a secret, desperate for someone to know, to understand, to believe him. “Something’s wrong with him. What’s wrong with him?”

Yuna exhales softly. “I don’t know, sweetie,” she admits. “He hasn’t really been all there for a couple of weeks. Not himself.” She squeezes his arm gently. “We’ll know soon enough, okay?”

The ICU doors open. Everyone stands at once. The doctor calls for Hollander’s parents, and they move forward immediately. Yuna pauses just long enough to turn back, giving Ilya’s arm one last reassuring pat.

“We’ll let you know,” she says softly.

Then they’re gone through the doors, swallowed by the bright white light.

Ilya stays where he is, eyes fixed on the space they disappeared into, hands still stained red.

Hayden Pike gets there not long after. Ilya doesn’t turn at first, but he feels it anyway. The question sits heavy behind Hayden’s tongue. *Why the fuck are you here? What happened? How bad was it?*

Rose and Miles flank him, murmuring something low. Hayden nods, hesitates, his brows pulling together, staring intently at Ilya, before he crosses the room and sits down beside him.

“We should get you cleaned up,” Hayden says, voice carefully neutral.

Ilya blinks, eyes still locked on the ICU doors. “No,” he says. “Need to wait for Hollander’s parents. Need to wait for Hollander.”

“You might scare him off with your hands all bloody,” Hayden says quietly. “Look—Rose and Miles are here. As soon as Yuna and David come out, we’ll come back, okay? Besides, this is a hospital in Canada; this will take time.”

Ilya hesitates, just a second. Then he lets himself be pulled to his feet. His hands are shaking by the time they reach the washroom.

“Hold on, Rozanov,” Hayden says carefully, sighing, already rolling up his sleeves. He turns the tap on and adjusts the water.

Ilya stares at his hands as Hayden holds his wrists, guiding them under the stream, careful not to wet his sleeves. Blood swirls away, pinking the sink before disappearing down the drain.

“Nice shirt,” Hayden mutters, eyeing the cheetah-print monstrosity stretched across Ilya’s chest.

“Shut up,” Ilya mumbles.

There’s a pause. And Hayden leans in just a fraction before he moves back, his face twisting into an odd expression. Then Hayden asks, carefully, “Is that Shane’s smell on you?”

Ilya’s eyes snap up. “You smell it too?” he asks, clutching the front of his shirt, fabric twisting in his wet fingers.

Hayden frowns slightly. “It smells like him, but…” He trails off.

“But wrong,” Ilya finishes.

“Yeah,” Hayden admits, after a beat, his face making a pained expression.

“Everyone keeps making that look,” Ilya says, voice tightening. “What—what is it? Is Hollander sick? Does he have cancer?” The words tumble out fast with fear. “What is it?”

“No—” Hayden sighs, scrubbing a hand over his face. “I’m not an expert. I don’t know. I don’t even know where to begin with what could cause something like this.” He glances at Ilya. “I’m not his bonded pair or whatever, so I don’t know what he… *smells* like. Like his true scent. But I can—I mean—we can all smell his emotions, right? It’s just—he’s in distress. Badly. So bad you can smell it.” He swallows. “It hurts to think what Shane could be going through to feel like this.”

Ilya closes his eyes and breathes out hard. Neither of them says anything after that.

The water keeps running. And somewhere down the hall, behind closed doors, Shane is still not okay.

By the time they come back, David and Yuna are waiting for him, Rose and Miles just a few feet away from there, looking worried.

Ilya doesn't walk so much as jog the rest of the way, chest tight, Hayden trailing close behind him. The looks on their faces don't do anything to ease the dread curling in his gut.

"Son," David says quietly. "We need you inside, okay? We'll explain everything once it's confirmed."

Confirmed.

That word alone makes Ilya's stomach drop.

They lead him into a small office just off the ICU. He's guided into a chair, and Yuna and David flank him on either side.

"Rozanov," Yuna says gently. "I'm getting the suspicion that you and my son are closer than either of you has let us all believe."

Ilya hesitates, then nods. His hands fold together tightly in his lap.

"We just need you to be honest," the doctor says calmly. "The more honest you are, the better the chances for Mr. Hollander."

Ilya's head snaps up. "Hollander's dying?" he asks sharply, terror hollowing his chest.

No one answers fast enough.

"Mr. Rozanov," the doctor says instead of answering, "Do you know what Omega Rejection Syndrome is?"

Ilya shakes his head. "Maybe—in Russian—but I don't… I don't know."

"It's exactly what it sounds like," the doctor explains. "When an omega builds a close bond with someone, their secondary gender can form a bond with them. It doesn't have to be with an alpha. It can be with anyone." He pauses, letting the words settle. "When that bond is broken—through death, or perceived rejection—the loss is comparable to losing a vital organ."

Ilya's blood freezes. He stares at the doctor, struggling to understand, to inhale the last bit of air.

"Sweetie," Yuna says softly, "you said Shane smelled wrong. I don't think anyone else can smell it as strongly as you can."

"Are you able to describe to us what he smelled like to you before he came into the hospital?" the doctor asks, clicking away on his keyboard.

"Wrong," Ilya says, looking between at the doctor, then back at Hollander's parents. *How could they not smell it?* Ilya still feels like he's drowning in it. It's all over his shirt. "He

usually smells... boring. Like, clean. Sometimes like… not sour um—different—”

“Citrus?” David offers.

“Yes!” Ilya exclaims, nodding at him, then back to the doctor, “He smells like citrus. Sometimes fresh. Like mint. But at the club, he smelled the opposite—not dirty, ah—”

Dying. Ilya’s breath hitches as the words flash in his head.

“Perhaps like, food gone bad?”, the doctor quietly asks.

Ilya can only nod, and he can feel Hollander’s parents tense on either of their sides.

“Bonded pairs are attuned to each other’s scent,” the doctor adds. “We’d like to know—if you are his bonded partner, or if you believe you might be.”

“I don’t know,” Ilya whispers, throat dry. Tries to ignore his alpha shouting internally, *he is he is he is, ours, mine, Shane is ours—*

“We never—we weren’t like that. Not fully.” His voice falters. “And then he got a girlfriend. And then—”

He stops short, eyes widening. “He saw me,” Ilya says hoarsely. “At the club. With someone else.” His voice drops. “He fell after that.”

The room goes very still. “It’s my fault,” Ilya says, the words tearing out of him. “I did this.”

“It can be self-inflicted,” the doctor says gently. “He may have believed you rejected him, even if neither of you said it aloud. For an omega, perception can be enough.”

“What matters,” David says, voice breaking, “is if you didn’t mean to reject him. If you can be there for him now. The doctor believes that seeing you might help stabilize his vitals a bit.”

“Anything,” Ilya says immediately, turning to them. “Anything. I’ll—I’ll do anything.”

Both of Hollander’s parents sag with relief, as if they'd somehow considered that Ilya would ever say no.

“Okay,” the doctor says. “He’s still in the ICU. We’ll need to get you gowned before you can see him.”

“What do I need to do?” Ilya asks, already standing. “What do I say?”

“Mr. Rozanov,” the doctor replies, “just being next to him may help stabilize him.”

I can do that, Ilya thinks fiercely. He can do that. He can be there for Hollander.

They dress him like he's going for surgery. They put him in a gown, an N95 mask, gloves, and a fucking hairnet.

Surgical cap, he can almost hear Hollander correcting him with a *tsk*.

When they finally lead him to the room, a nurse stops him just before the threshold, one hand gentle but firm on his arm. “He’s hooked up to a lot of machines,” she says softly. “I know it’s asking a lot, but try to be brave for him, okay? Let’s not get scared.”

Ilya nods once and braces himself.

It still doesn’t help. The sight of Hollander steals the air from his lungs—but not in the way people mean when they say that. Not take his breath away the way Hollander usually does, cause he’s stunning. No. This is something else.

It's like a tragic movie scene. Hollander is swallowed by the bed. IV in his arms. A nasal cannula was strapped to his face. Tucked underneath the hospital covers. And Ilya wonders if the sheets are bothering him.

They've both gotten injured enough times over the years. He distinctly remembers Hollander once complaining about the detergent the hospital uses for its sheets, swears it makes his skin itch. Ilya has a sudden urge to wash his sheets with the baby detergent he knows Hollander likes, keeps a stack of in his apartment, cause its gentle on his skin.

His skin looks washed out, almost translucent. Too still. Too small. He doesn’t look like the six-foot, two-hundred-pound man Ilya knows. Doesn’t look like someone who works hard, skates like the pro he is, the one who can bodycheck him into the boards just as good as Ilya can.

Ilya staggers the last step forward and sits heavily on the stool beside him.

No amount of filtered hospital air can stop it. The scent hits him immediately.

Wrong.

Distress, yes—but more than that. Pain. Loss. Something quietly imploding on itself. Something *withdrawing*. It makes Ilya’s chest ache. And he distinctly wonders if the ache in his chest is the result of seeing Hollander like this or if it’s residual pain from the bond they both may share. The bond that his alpha has with Hollander’s omega.

Is he feeling Hollander’s pain? Is this what he feels? Do his insides also feel like they’re—

Dying, the word flashes through his mind again. *Rotting*.

“Can I touch him?” Ilya asks, barely louder than a breath. His eyes never leave Hollander’s face.

“Sure,” the nurse says. “Just be mindful of the IV.”

Ilya nods. His gloved hand trembles as he reaches out carefully, and he has a moment of hesitation before wrapping his fingers around Hollander's bandaged hand. He holds his breath, fearing the worst. Like his touch alone could destroy the man in front of him, make him crumble and disappear right before his eyes. Like everything and everyone who has the misfortune of being loved by Ilya.

But Hollander doesn't vanish. He doesn't get worse. His monitor continues to beep; vitals still a little too abnormal for someone at rest. But Ilya continues to hold his hand. His hand, which he can't even feel properly under the wrinkly white gauze wrapped around it.

He doesn't know what to do. Doesn't know what to say. So he does the only thing he can. He leans in just slightly, letting his scent spill out despite the layers, despite the sterile barrier between them. Let it exist in the space Hollander still occupies.

Please, he thinks helplessly. *Please smell me.*

It's quiet in the room, save for the beeping of the machines and the subtle exhales of breath coming from the man lying in front of him. The air filter hums somewhere behind him.

"Hollander," Ilya says finally. "I need you to wake up."

His voice sounds wrong in the room, muffled by the mask, swallowed by machines.

"I had to tell your parents everything," he adds after a beat. "Spilled the beans, as Americans say." A weak attempt at levity. "You can't make me do this alone."

He waits. Hollander keeps breathing. The monitor ticks on.

"This is going to be really awkward," Ilya continues, quieter now, "if I'm not the person who rejected you. If some other alpha you're hurting over." His mouth curves just slightly beneath the mask. "Would be embarrassing. Maybe Rose Landry should be in here."

Nothing.

"She was no one," Ilya says after a moment. "Hollander, there was no rejection. Never. Woman at the club was... no one."

He squeezes Hollander's hand carefully, mindful of the IV. "You could've just talked to me," he murmurs. "Instead of passing out in middle of the club. Who does that?" A huff of breath escapes him. "Crazy short Canadian man."

Hollander barely twitches.

"*Shane*," Ilya says, voice cracking as he finally allows himself to say his first name. The edge creeps in now, the humour burning away. "*Moy lyubimiy*, please wake up."

He switches to Russian because English is failing him, and he can't even begin to translate the words burning behind his lips. He leans closer, forehead hovering near Shane's hand.

"*Please wake up so I can tell you about this annoying problem I have*," he whispers. "*Hear me out, okay? I am with a beautiful woman everywhere I go. And these women are fun and sexy, and it would be so easy to be with them, cause I can't be gay. Not fully*." Ilya's voice breaks on the last syllable.

"*But no matter what, I cannot stop thinking about this short fucking hockey player with these stupid freckles and a weak backhand*." Ilya smiles faintly, like he can imagine the exact reaction Shane would make on that last comment. "*But this problem. This problem is just so boring, and he drives a terrible car, and...that is my problem. All of these beautiful women, and I am always wishing they were him*."

The machines continue to beep. Shane doesn't as much as flinch.

"*Hollander, do you know, you are the only person who's ever wanted something from me, and I wanted you to ask for more? Everywhere around me, my family, they ask and want and demand until I have nothing left to give but Hollander. When you look at me, I—*" Ilya feels breathless, but he continues, "*You look like you want to give back to me, too. Like, I am allowed to ask*."

Ilya feels the agony in him turn tenfold as he gets closer and closer to laying out his heart open and bare.

"Ok, fine, Hollander. *Shane*. Now you are just being dramatic. I will talk in English again. I have to say it clearly, right? Or you don't understand. Fine. *Fine*." Ilya says, breath trembling.

"I love you," he confesses. "I accepted you before the rest of me knew." His voice breaks, just slightly. "There was no rejection, I mean it. So open your eyes. You can't hide your eyes from me. They're mine to look at, and I want to see them."

Ilya feels a little dizzy. He doesn't think he's ever talked this much in life. He just told Shane fucking Hollander he loved him, and the asshole is not even awake.

"I'm sorry," he pleads. "*I'm sorry*. Please wake up for me." His voice drops to something bare and terrified. "Shane, please. Please don't be gone. I'm not worth feeling this hurt over."

The machines continue to hum, and Shane doesn't answer.

Ilya's shoulders sag. He bows his head, resting it gently beside Shane's hand, mask brushing the blanket. His grip tightens just enough to remind himself that Shane is still alive. Still here.

"Hollander," he whispers. "Shane, *please*."

Shane's fingers twitch. It's small, barely a movement, but Ilya feels it immediately, like a current snapping through his body. He jerks upright so fast the stool squeals loudly against the floor, heart slamming into his ribs.

"Shane," he breathes.

A low groan pulls from Shane's chest, and the monitor reacts instantly, the rhythm climbing into something faster. Shane's brow furrows, and his head shifts slightly against the pillow.

“Shane,” Ilya says again, leaning forward, every instinct screaming. “Hey. I’m here.”

Shane’s eyelids flutter, struggle, and finally parting. His gaze doesn’t land properly, drifting past Ilya and then back again, unfocused. His breathing is shallow and uneven.

“What’s… what’s happening?” he slurs.

“You’re in the hospital,” Ilya says gently, forcing his voice to remain steady even as panic coils tighter in his chest. “You collapsed. You need to rest. You need to get better.”

Shane squints, the bright fluorescent lights of the room assaulting his senses. His hand lifts weakly, then drops back to the bed.

“I can’t—” he swallows hard, grimacing. “My head...” His voice wobbles. “My head feels...”

“I know,” Ilya says, softly now. “You don’t have to think. Just breathe. I’ve got you.”

Shane’s chest rises sharply. He coughs, the sound tearing out of him, and instinctively curls inward, one hand pressing against his sternum like he’s trying to hold himself together.

“Can you—” he starts, then breaks off, coughing again. “Can you help me?”

“Yes,” Ilya says immediately, without hesitation. “Yes. Anything. Just tell me what you need.”

“I need—” Shane tries again, his eyes more open now, darting wildly now, trying to push his body up. “I need to find—”

“Shane,” Ilya interrupts gently but firmly. “Don’t move. You don’t have the energy.”

“I need help,” Shane insists, his voice pitching higher.

“I’m here,” Ilya says. “I can help. What do you need?”

“He’s mad at me,” Shane whispers.

Ilya goes still. His hand tightens unconsciously around Shane’s arm.

“Who’s mad at you?” he asks, carefully, afraid of spooking him.

Shane’s eyes fill instantly, tears spilling over as the monitor beeps faster beside them. His chest rises and falls too quickly now, like his body knows something terrible his mind can’t quite articulate.

“You have to tell him I’m sorry,” Shane says, voice breaking. “Please. I didn’t mean to—I’m so sorry.”

“Shane,” Ilya says, heart pounding painfully now. “Who are you talking about?”

“*Mine*,” Shane chokes out, the word ripped straight from his chest. “He was mine. Maybe. I don't know. Not anymore.”

Ilya feels something inside him split open.

“Ilya,” Shane whispers desperately. “His name is Ilya.”

The room tilts, and Ilya feels his entire being tipping off balance. His chest feels like it's on fire.

“Shane,” Ilya says, his voice cracking. “It’s me. I’m Ilya. I’m right here.”

Shane looks at him then, really looks this time, and for a fraction of a second, hope flares in Ilya’s chest. Then Shane shakes his head. “No,” he gasps, terror flooding his face. “No—you don’t smell like him.” His breathing turns ragged. “I need—please—go get him. I need him.”

He’s sobbing openly now, and he claws weakly at his chest, like he's trying to create a path for the pain to escape, gasping like he’s run out of air.

“Shane!” Ilya shouts, springing to his feet so fast the stool crashes over behind him.

The door flies open. Nurses rush in, their voices overlapping, and someone grabs Ilya’s arm, pulling him back.

“Don’t hurt him!” Ilya yells, struggling violently. “Don’t touch him!”

“Sir, you need to step back—” a nurse starts.

“No,” Ilya snarls, ripping the mask from his face, tearing off the cap. His scent spills into the room unchecked and unmistakable, flooding the space. “Shane!”

Shane’s head snaps toward him, recognition finally colours his face as Ilya's scent finally registers.

“Ilya!” he cries, twisting desperately against the bed. “Ilya, where are you?” His hands shove weakly at the nurses. “Get away from me! I need him—I need to see him!”

“I’m here!” Ilya shouts, fighting the grip on him. “I’m not leaving! Shane, I’m right here!”

But someone is already pressing a needle into Shane’s arm. “No—” he sobs, voice slurring as the sedative hits. “Ilya, don’t go—I’m sorry—”

“I’m not going!” Ilya screams. “Shane, I’m right here!”

Shane’s eyes flutter, the fight draining out of him. “Come back,” he whispers brokenly. “Please come back.”

Hands drag Ilya backward, out of the room, the nurses flinching just a bit as Ilya’s alpha scent flares in the air, panicked and threatening. Still, his protests are useless as he’s fully kicked out, the doors sliding shut in front of him.

He’s left standing there, chest heaving, palms pressed uselessly against the glass, watching Shane lie motionless on the bed once more, this time not from fear, but from chemicals.

The doctors come out again later, and Ilya has to physically stop himself from moving. Every muscle in his body tightens at once, instincts and alpha screaming at him to run, to push past them, to get back into the room where Shane is lying alone. David's hand comes down on his shoulder, like he's been bracing for exactly this moment.

"I'm sorry we had to abruptly cut your visit short," the doctor says carefully. "It would've been dangerous for Mr. Hollander to panic in that state. We had to intervene." His gaze sharpens, not unkind but serious. "You also broke ICU protocols."

"He couldn't recognize me," Ilya says hoarsely. "He couldn't smell me."

His eyes feel hollow when he says it, like something vital has been scooped out and left behind. Like the idea of being known—*really known*—has been taken from him along with the sound of Shane's voice.

"I understand," the doctor says gently. "Now that his secondary gender knows you are nearby, we're going to run bloodwork and continue monitoring him closely to see if his markers improve, and if his vitals remain stable, we'll transfer him out of ICU."

Ilya continues to stare down at his hands as the doctor continues to talk to Shane's parents. He can barely hear what they're saying. Even if he wanted to, even if he tried to pay attention, he couldn't.

Not when he can feel the bond between him and Shane burning. Not when all he can smell is Shane's scent, sour and decaying. Not when all he can hear is Shane's voice ringing in his consciousness, panicked and desperate, begging him not to leave.

Ilya has never been a religious person. His mother was. And maybe his faith died the same day she died, too. Took any and all of it, with her. But that day, in the hospital, Ilya prays. To whoever is up there. To whoever will listen. He lets himself believe. Maybe his mother can grant wishes from up there.

He doesn't sit in the spiritual room. Nothing like that. Just sits on the benches again, head bowed, one hand pressed firmly against his chest till he can feel the cold press of his crucifix necklace against his skin.

And by some fucking miracle, Shane's bloodwork does improve. Enough that the numbers shift in the right direction. Enough that the vitals settle instead of spiralling.

They move him out of the ICU andinto a regular room. Somewhere quieter, with windows where the sun can filter through.

Ilya barely waits for permission. He gets the nod from Shane's parents, Yuna's tired smile, and David's tear-bright eyes. They whisper a quiet *thank you* to him for getting their son back, and Ilya can't swallow the lump in his throat enough to answer verbally, so he can only nod at them and hopes that his eyes convey to them that they never have to thank him for something as little as this.

And then he's moving, nearly tripping over himself as he pushes into the room. This time, there's no mask. No gown. No gloves. Nothing between him and Shane.

He drags a chair over to Shane's bedside and drops down onto it as he reaches for Shane's hands carefully. Shane looks smaller still under the softer lighting, lashes dark against pale skin, mouth slack with sedation. His freckles—his stupid fucking adorable freckles—rest easy across his cheeks.

"Shane," Ilya breathes, voice breaking as his scent finally floods the space unchecked. "I'm here."

He curls his fingers around his hand, tracing the exposed part of Shane's fingers not covered by bandages, mesmerized by how the skin turns rough to soft in different places.

"Please," he whispers. "Please open your eyes."

He stays like that, trying to breathe steadily, waiting for him. And this time, he refuses to leave.

He falls asleep without meaning to.

At some point, the waiting becomes unbearable, and the exhaustion snuck up on him like a mercy he didn't ask for. Yuna had forced fed him two Timbits out in the waiting room, but that was not nearly enough sugar to keep him awake for an extended period of time. Ilya was slumped forward in the chair beside the bed, one hand still holding Shane's bandaged one, unwilling to let go even as his body gave in. His head was tipped down, curls against their joined hands, posture folded inward. From a distance, it might look like he was praying.

Maybe he was.

He wakes to the softest sensation, bandaged fingers combing gently through his hair. For half a second, he almost leans into it, a quiet hum of comfort rising in his chest. Then memory slams back into place all at once, the ICU, the panic, Shane screaming for someone he couldn't smell, and Ilya gasps, body jerking upright.

“No—” he breathes, turning fast, catching Shane’s hand before it can fall away. His heart is already racing, his eyes stinging unfairly because Shane is awake. Awake and looking at him.

“Shane,” Ilya says, voice breaking on the name.

Shane’s eyes are open, wide and wet, but *there*, focused and unmistakably alive. The sight punches the air from Ilya’s lungs.

“Fuck,” he laughs weakly, almost in disbelief. “You’re awake. You’re—”

“You’re here,” Shane says, his voice thin. “You came to see me.”

“Not just to see you,” Ilya says, swallowing hard. “I was here the whole time.”

Shane’s breath hitches sharply; he looks like he doesn't fully believe him. “I—I need to talk to you,” he says quietly.

“Water first,” Ilya insists, already reaching for the cup. He helps Shane drink carefully, supporting him as he coughs and winces. When Shane finishes, he doesn’t let go.

“Rozanov,” he says again, gripping his hand tighter. “I need to talk to you. *Please*.”

He tries to shift, to sit up more, and immediately hisses in pain.

“Careful,” Ilya says, alarmed, moving closer. His eyes flicker over to the monitor. Shane’s vitals were fine while he was asleep, but they’re slowly rising again. “You need to rest. Your body’s been through too much.”

“I need you to listen,” Shane insists, panic flickering behind his eyes. “Please don’t go away before you listen to me.”

The words freeze Ilya in place. Images flash unbidden; Shane sobbing, calling for him, begging him not to leave.

“Shane,” Ilya says softly. “I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying, okay?” He cups Shane’s face gently, thumb brushing beneath his eye. “*Moy lyubimiy.* What’s wrong?”

Shane leans into the touch immediately, like he’s been holding himself together by sheer force of will. His face softens just a fraction at hearing Ilya speak in his native tongue. Tears spill freely, and Ilya catches them, wiping them away as they fall, fingers smoothing over freckled skin.

“I’m sorry,” Shane whispers, breath hitching. “I’m sorry for leaving that day. I got scared.”

“It’s okay,” Ilya says without hesitation. “I scared you. Too many changes, too fast. My fault.”

Shane shakes his head, eyes squeezed shut. “I didn’t want to leave,” he says. “I promise. I just—I panicked.”

“I know,” Ilya murmurs. “It’s okay. It’s all okay. There’s nothing to apologize for. Nothing to forgive. We’re okay.”

Shane hesitates. Then he reaches out, his hand trembling as it comes to rest against Ilya’s chest, right over his heart. “Tell him I’m sorry too,” Shane says quietly.

Ilya stills. “Him?” he asks carefully.

“*Your alpha*,” Shane says, eyes fluttering close, like he’s afraid to see his reaction.

The breath leaves Ilya all at once. His legs give out, and he sits carefully on the edge of the bed, close enough now that there’s no space between them. He covers Shane’s hand with his own.

“I could never be mad at *my* omega,” Ilya whispers.

Shane’s eyes fly open. Ilya watches the emotions change in his eyes, and he almost smiles, cause Shane’s face can be hard to read sometimes; he's not expressive in that sense, but it doesn't matter. Not when Shane speaks so much with his eyes alone. Ilya would know; he’s looked into those eyes for the past eight years, even if it was for only moments at a time.

“Yours?” Shane asks, disbelief threading through the hope.

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya says softly, fiercely, “you are mine. And you never stopped being mine.”

The sound Shane makes then is broken and raw. He folds forward, and Ilya catches him instantly, guiding his head to his chest, arms wrapping around him as Shane sobs into the fabric of his shirt.

“*Shh*,” Ilya whispers, pressing his cheek to Shane’s hair, wanting his scent to transfer till Shane smelled like nothing but him. His own tears fall freely now. “Shh.”

He can smell it, Shane’s scent shifting, slowly returning to itself. No longer sharp with rejection. No longer in despair. No longer retreating.

Sharp, but in the way Shane’s scent usually is. Citrusy, minty, and clean. So utterly Shane. Of course, the pro Canadian hockey athlete smells like winter and ice. Ilya can’t get enough of it. How much he *craves* the simplicity of it, when everything around him is anything but.

“Don’t cry,” Shane manages between sobs.

“You stop crying first,” Ilya argues weakly, his voice thick.

Neither of them does. They stay like that, clinging to each other, breathing each other in, like proximity alone could fix the ache between them.

The bond that both of them refused to acknowledge, to name, in all the years they've been doing this, hums between them. Their secondary genders almost sigh in relief, curling around each other like they're trying to share warmth.

Ilya spends every ounce of his energy making his scent bleed out, letting it wrap around them protectively, all warm and woodsy. Hopes Shane can understand with scent alone as much as he can understand Ilya's words, his confessions, that he—

That he loves him. That he wants him. Wants to shield him and protect him. That this entire situation terrifies him beyond belief, but that he's never understood the word *mate* as much as he understands it now. Words like *bonded* and *soulmate,* and *mine,* never meant anything until he met Shane.

And he can't continue to live in a world where those words exist, and he can't share them with Shane. A world where those words exist, and they aren't about Shane.

Shane melts into his chest, sobs tapering into quiet sniffles, his citrusy scent turning mellow and soft. He presses closer, cheeks rubbing against his shirt like he's trying to get himself to smell like Ilya. Or get Ilya to smell like him. Maybe both.

He wraps his arms tighter around Shane, both of their instincts finally at a moment of peace after so many years.

End Notes

call me ilya rozanov the way i wish i could write in my native language cause ENGLISH JUST AINT CUTTING IT ANYMORE. this all seemed so better fleshed out in my head but well. something was attempted, and i hope it was ok.

thats all folks.

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