

your curious body, sitting on the shore

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/79029001) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/79029001>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , Rose Landry
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Alternate Universe - Daemons
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-06 Words: 5,482 Chapters: 1/1

your curious body, sitting on the shore

by [raven \(singlecrow\)](#)

Summary

It's not just that Ilya's daemon is impressive. Like... a wolf. A fucking wolf. Yeah, Shane is impressed by that. It's that hockey players shouldn't have daemons at all.

Notes

I'm told the daemon AU is going out of fashion! It's a concept drawn from Phillip Pullman's His Dark Materials series, and basically: your daemon is your soul. It can be any kind of animal, until you hit puberty and it settles as one specific animal, usually one with heaps of symbolism about who you are as a person. It's always within a few metres of you but isn't actually attached. It has a name, a gender, and it talks, but it's ultimately part of you. And oh, touching someone else's daemon is offensive and violating, except a lover's, in which case it's desperately hot. There you go.

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

First: those intense eyes and the cigarette smoke. But after that, hard not to look at the wolf.

“I’m Shane Hollander, I wanted to introduce myself,” Shane says, looking down and back up, knowing he sounds painfully young. But one day soon when he’s captaining the Métros or the Centaurs or hell, any team, he’ll have to know everyone. “You’re amazing to watch on the ice. You, and, uh. Her.”

Inside his head his kindergarten teacher is chewing him out. *Smart kids ask, they don’t assume! Maybe it’s not a her!*

But Ilya Rozanov is taking this in with solemnity, his right hand on the wolf’s soft ears. “Yes,” he says. “Yes, we are.”

Another puff of smoke. Shane laughs, suddenly. He and his daemon go back inside the rink.

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It’s not just that Rozanov’s daemon is impressive. That Rozanov is impressive, that they both are. Although of course they are. Like... a wolf. A fucking *wolf*. Yeah, Shane is impressed by that.

But, also: it’s that hockey players shouldn’t have daemons at all. Not really. It just doesn’t mix well, this high-octane sport, guys moving fast, sticks and sharp ice and a puck moving at a hundred miles an hour, with a bunch of fluffy Disney animals, as Shane’s grade school coach used to put it. All daemons do is get in the way. And there’s another thing from grade school that Shane remembers: the boys who wanted to play hockey prayed for birds. Some of those kids ended up with fluffy animals – but some of them didn’t, and those are the ones that eventually made it. All of them with their daemons, their great winged things: eagles, terns, skuas, things that float at a distance, that understand ice. Hayden Pike, Shane’s old friend, has an albatross named Kevina. She likes to hover above his opponents like the wrath of a fishy God.

Shane himself only just squeezed in. His daemon, Oraya, didn’t settle till he was seventeen and well on his way to the draft, and Shane remembers some scout telling his mom that it, she, was a liability; that you wouldn’t know if the kid had a sensible hawk or greylag and not a fucking iguana until it was too late. But in the end Shane was just too good of a hockey player to be condemned to amateur sport, and his parents and coaches made it work. Oraya is an otter, and otters are fluffy and Disney like his grade school coach was afraid of, but they’re smaller than people think they are. She can bundle herself up small in a pouch around his neck and sit where the hood of a hoodie would be. Some high-profile brand of protective gear even makes a custom guard for her. It’s fine. Shane’s parents, particularly his mom, were disappointed at the time. But it’s fine.

(Though Shane doesn’t always wear the special guard. Sometimes, during games, it’s good to hear her voice.)

But here's Rozanov, who *has* a daemon, a big one, a real one, and all the grace and agility required to navigate a full-grown wolf on the ice. And not just navigate it; Rozanov's daemon can actively assist him in play, can get on the way of defencemen and distract a forward with a snarl. In accordance with the rules of the game, a daemon can't touch the puck, but every extant human culture says the players can't touch the daemon.

Maybe it's just something about Russian players, Shane thinks, watching Rozanov in training, swinging his stick through the space where his daemon's head was, only half a second before. She's leapt back as through choreographed. *No*, Oraya murmurs from her little pouch at the back of his neck, her whisper flowing right in his spine. *It's not that. We've known other Russian players.*

Shane nods to himself. Well, then. It's just something about Rozanov.

*

He parks that observation. What's it to him, that some dude has a daemon and doesn't keep it in his pocket. At the Prospects Cup he barely talks to the guy. Except late one night, when Shane goes down to the gym and finds Rozanov, too, is sleepless, working out his tension on the stationary bike. His daemon isn't independently running on the treadmill or clawing down the drapes or whatever Shane might have imagined; instead, it's curled up on the floor next to the wheel, its soft heavy head buried in grey fur. Shane is used to seeing it with mad eyes and frost-thick pelt. Right now, he kind of wants to bury his own face in that softness.

In his hood, Oraya shifts. *Maybe we go home and take a cold bath.*

Shane ignores her. She's an otter, that's always what she thinks they should do. He gets on the bike next to Rozanov and starts to pedal, feeling alive with it: that brooding soft presence, rich power and passion just a few feet away. When he finally comes to a halt in exhaustion it's Rozanov himself who's all passion, with eyes glitter-sharp like the tundra; and Shane can't look away. He shares his water and puts it away and walks back up to his hotel room with his heart in his mouth and heat in his pants, and a small river otter still in his hood. *Oh, my God, Shane, you can't sway around like this over a boy, Shane, I'm gonna--*

--fall out.

His soul is touched. He picks Oraya up and it feels like something, for a while. But he gets over it. Goes back to his ordinary life, in that anything is ordinary in the run-up to the draft. Gets picked second, after Ilya Rozanov. Goes to the All Stars with nothing on his mind but the game.

But then—

Shane is on the ice, and Shane loves to be on the ice. Clear strategy in mind; this way and then that, feint then go for real, the other line of defence sent scattering. A direct line between himself and the goal—then a decision, keep or pass; keep, twist his body, move—

Rozanov. Out of nowhere, his signature whole-body slam. Shane's in control, bringing it back, bringing himself back, he twists away, his left hand moving, and—

It *is* soft to touch, after all.

Shane freezes. Rozanov is right there and he doesn't take the advantage because someone has just touched his daemon, Shane has just *touched his daemon*, right there on the ice in the middle of a televised hockey game, and for a second they're united across different teams, different countries, different everything, because neither of them has a fucking playbook for this. This is why you shouldn't have a stupid fluffy Disney daemon, Shane is thinking furiously, this is why you need to keep everything at a distance, this is what everyone knows—and then he's fucked up and frozen all over again, because what if everyone does know. What if everyone knows he just touched Rozanov somewhere... like that. If they saw, if anyone saw.

But maybe nobody saw. Rozanov seems to have recovered. It seems this whole thing has taken up less than a second, and the two of them are already on their blades drifting apart. Shane jerks away from Rozanov and finds himself moving again, now into defence as Rozanov gathers himself for his next attack. It's fine. This is fine. The phantom sensation on his fingers—soft, damp, warm—is disappearing into his grip on his stick. He shouldn't have been able to feel it anyway, not through his gloves. It's fine.

It must be fine. A long time from now, Shane will look back and wonder how he even got through the remainder of the game, but he does get through it. Talks to the team, talks to the press, waves at the spectators, skips dinner and finally finds himself flat on his hotel room bed. It's only then that he thinks to listen to his own daemon, who's been inaudible to him since he came off the ice.

Shane, she says, as though she's reminding him of the simplest and most fundamental thing. *Shane, Shane, Shane.*

It seems to be his own mother's voice, as well as his daemon's. Shane. Who he is. *Shane, who are you?*

He's a man who needs to apologise. That's it. He did a bad thing and he's not the kind of guy who can just let that stand. He'll go see Rozanov and say it was an accident. It *was* an accident. Maybe Shane has been thinking about it lately, about Rozanov's daemon, about *her*. That doesn't mean he did it on purpose.

It's a great plan, but he doesn't know which is Ilya's hotel room. Oraya, who's talking a lot today, says maybe he can ask the front desk. But before he can, there's a knock at the door and Rozanov himself is coming in, the wolf close at his heels. Shane can hardly look at it.

At her.

“Rozanov,” Shane says. “Listen. About before. I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to—“

“Touch her?” Rozanov doesn't sound accusing. More... amused, if anything. “Man like Shane Hollander does not think of such... kinky things.”

That's not fair, Shane wants to say, he's had girlfriends and he's done that with them, he knows he's supposed to want to, even. Then he remembers what he's talking about with his

arch rival. “I’m sorry, okay,” he says, flatly. “I hope you’ll accept the apology.”

Rozanov doesn’t seem to be listening. Instead he’s looking at Oraya, his eyes bright with interest. “I’ll show you mine if you show me yours,” he says, flat.

Where did he learn that idiom, Shane thinks wildly. Oraya is snuggled up on his shoulder, visible like she so rarely is. It’s possible that Rozanov has never seen her before, close up in warm electric light.

“No?” Rozanov says, into the silence. “That is fine.”

Shane steps forward, almost against his will, like what’s in his pants is powering him. Little claws dig into his shoulder. Ilya Rozanov reaches out to touch Shane’s daemon and Shane lets him. Light, soft fingers skim over fur and Rozanov looks at him in wonderment. Shane has never seen him like this, eyes soft with evening light rather than the goddamn bleakness of the tundra, and this sweet, open expression on his face.

“Soft,” Rozanov says, in wonderment. “But somehow greasy.”

“Of course,” Shane says, grumpily. That touch went to the core of him, like Ilya was turning him inside out, like this man newly arrived in his life can turn him inside out. It’s not just his daemon that Shane wants to touch. It’s—oh, God— it’s everything.

Out loud, he says, “Of course she’s greasy, she’s waterproof. Doesn’t get wet on the ice or in the bathtub.”

Rozanov smirks. “I would like to see that.”

He leans in and kisses Shane, reaches out to Oraya again. It’s even worse than before, it’s deep and a little violating and so hot, the hair rises on the back of his neck and there’s heat in his belly.

“Goodnight, Hollander,” Rozanov mutters, and with a smile and a faint clattering of claws he’s gone, almost but not quite as if he had never been. Oraya is the evidence of his passage, still vibrating like she was a stone statue, and she’s been brought all at once into life.

“Shit,” says Shane.

*

After that it’s inevitable that they fuck. In hotel rooms, in showers, up on the roof after Shane is MVP of his rookie season and all Ilya ever wanted to do was win. Against walls, on hard floors, with vodka spilled unheeding off the rocks on carpeted floor. Russians don’t drink vodka with ice, Ilya tells Shane; and of course they don’t tell anyone about their male lovers. It doesn’t matter. Shane can’t want that, and he doesn’t want it.

But is that the reason, he wonders, that their daemons don’t come together; don’t ever touch. He lost his virginity to a girl with a pussy cat, a wonderful wreath of fur. Shane remembers the strangeness of the two colliding, Oraya with her slick functional surface and that foreign softness. They didn’t touch much but they did touch, and he does know what that’s like. But

barring that one brief brush at the All Stars game, Shane doesn't know what the wolf's fur is like, whether it's rich and functional or just soft. Against the background of a Russian winter, Shane suspects it's all of those. But he doesn't know, and of course he doesn't know her name.

Just once, he tries asking. They're lying on top of the sheets in some Boston hotel room, and Ilya is wet from the shower. Shane rolls over and says, "What do you call her?"

He still doesn't know that the daemon *is* a her. When she was young, Shane's mom told him once, people used to say a man with a male daemon must be gay. Rough on bi people, Shane observed, and his mom ruffled his hair for no particular reason that he could see.

"You wouldn't understand," Ilya mutters, as though it's not something he's saying for Shane to hear. If that just means, Shane wouldn't understand a Russian name, or if it's something more fundamental than that, Shane doesn't know. But he accepts it, even as he drops a kiss on Ilya's collarbone and starts plotting how next to fuck him. They're not good with names, he and Ilya. He and Rozanov. He and Lily in Boston. It's okay not to know, and it's fine that they can't touch.

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A few years on, Scott Hunter—who is an okay guy, mostly, though he's a million years old and the undisputed king of magical thinking—gives Shane a piece of advice: keep your daemon to yourself. Don't let anyone have their name; don't let anyone touch. Not even your friends and lovers, once you have an eye on pro hockey. You keep that shit quiet.

Shane knows all that without being told. Friends or lovers are one thing, but players don't talk about that shit to the press. A professional sports player's body is always up for public consumption; always your wrenched knee or your damaged hip or your Instagram-beloved ass. The bit of your body that's your soul is not needed for hockey. Hockey players shouldn't even have daemons at all, really. It's the same thing as when Shane was a kid, it's best if they're birds, and can keep at a distance. It's all best at a distance.

It would be best if Shane didn't whack Ilya's daemon *again*, in full sight of thousands of spectators and also God. And it's not another glancing touch, all these years after the first, this time it's a full-on hit, so the reverberations of it pass through his arm and into his body. He snowploughs into stillness and thinks a thought that makes him instantly ashamed, which is: *why didn't she get out of my way?*—and then goes like a lamb to the penalty box. Five whole entire minutes; no one's trying to tell the ref that this is minor. That this is anything other than a godawful, revealing thing that he shouldn't have done, that shouldn't have happened, how does Ilya have a daemon like that, anyway, he still doesn't know, that likes to take up space like an idiot on the ice.

Shane thinks about that in the box, all the while trying to hide his face, not daring look up at the crowd. You do need your soul, his coach said, in elementary school. You wouldn't wish your tackle away just so you wouldn't have to wear a cup. But his mom was disappointed, and right now the thousands of spectators are disappointed. And Ilya—but Shane can't go there, not yet. He offers a formal on-ice apology, and later, in the dim light of a Montreal hotel room, "I'm sorry, Rozanov, I really am.

“Is not a big deal,” Ilya says lazily, his wolf daemon winding through his legs. “You thought I would cry? You are concerned about my feelings?”

“It’s sexual assault.” Shane has had a long day and he’s suddenly so tired of trying to be a big cool hockey player who thinks that assault is just fucking fine. “Teenage boys get given pamphlets about it.”

Ilya stills. Shane’s daemon, who has been hiding in her fabric pouch all day, sticks her head up. When he speaks again, Ilya moves his gaze, like he’s making it clear that he’s talking to both of them. “It’s okay,” he says. “Hollander, do not be afraid. We are fine. It is fine.”

Shane nods, his shoulders coming down and his heartbeat slowing for the first time. Ilya’s not hurt; Shane didn’t hurt him. It’s not fine, but it’s okay.

“But I think maybe you like me,” Ilya says blithely, as he takes his clothes off, and Shane throws a pillow at him in fury.

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Rose Landry has a daemon that’s a fucking iguana.

Wow, she says, when Shane tells her about what about what the scout in grade school told him about his daemon, *new homophobic slur just dropped!* Shane doesn’t know if that’s right, if the scout really used exactly the same phrase, but he knows it’s not worth arguing with Rose. He slumps on the table instead and lets her go order him a cherry cocktail. They’re out in some dive bar where they won’t get papped, in theory; in practice and in this moment Shane no longer cares. It’s kind of hard to care about anything.

“You ever gonna let her out to play?” Rose asks, of Oraya. She took ten minutes at the bar but apparently Shane was zoned out for all of that. Rose sets the cocktail glasses down hard on the table and Shane looks at her sidelong. Their two daemons hardly interacted in bed, which was just one of the many, many reasons they were sexually incompatible.

“Oh, not in a sexy way,” Rose says, in answer to what he didn’t say. “Look around you. Daemons everywhere. Not having sex, not playing hockey. You’re not in a game now, are you? You could have her on your shoulder or out on the table.”

Oraya is cuddled up in Shane’s hood as usual. She’s so small, so easy to hide. Shane looks: Rose isn’t wrong about the daemons all around them. The girl at the next table has a mouse. It’s stealing nuts from a bowl, playing at blowing out a candle. Someone at the same table has a chipmunk. A guy and his dog daemon are playing fetch with bar snacks. The bartender has a fox, though something about it makes Shane want to count its tails. Kitsune, his mom would say. You never know what you see and don’t see.

But some people do have to hide their daemons. Not because of their participation in elite sport, necessarily; there was a guy Shane trained with, who figure skated at Sochi. Had a big beautiful boa as a daemon, made it part of his free skate programme. Wrapped it around arms and waist and neck till it made you dizzy to watch. That guy’s gay, out, happy. Good for him and his giant snake.

Then there's Rose. Her gorgeous paintbox of a daemon features on her movie posters. She gets sponsorship deals from MAC and Maybelline. She doesn't have this problem either.

But still. Some people *do* have to hide. Shane shrugs at Rose, chugs down his cocktail so he has an excuse to fetch them both another one. It's the off-season; who gives a shit. Who gives a shit about anything. When he gets back to the table Rose is looking at him in a way he doesn't like. With soft eyes and smudged make-up, like she honest-to-God cares about him, and wouldn't be telling him any of this shit if she didn't.

She wouldn't be here at all if she didn't care, murmurs Oraya into his neck. She startles him, like he's surprised his soul can speak.

"Your friend manages it somehow," Rose says. "Sorry, your arch rival. Your occasional co-worker. Rozanov. He has his daemon out on the ice with him. I've seen it."

"Rozanov is different," Shane says, and then, though he doesn't care about anything: "Rozanov is brave."

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Rose keeps at him, usually by texting him cute magazine spreads he could copy if he lets out his cute otter, and he tries it. Once or twice. He lets Oraya perch on his shoulder, like he's seen other guys with small fluffy daemons do. Puts her in the hood but has her look out. It just feels weird. Like he's pretending to be something he's not. Pike notices. Most of his other teammates are stupid kids who don't notice anything but pucks and chicks, but not all. His dad doesn't say anything about it, but Shane can tell he's noticed too. No one comments, but Shane can tell what they're all thinking.

It's fine. It's not worth dying in a ditch over. The next time he hangs out with Rose his daemon is hidden in his hood, and she buys him more cocktails and doesn't mention it.

So that's that. After the season ends, Shane waits for a mild sunny day and goes for a hike. Into the woods around his parents' place, nothing fancy, just a big bottle of water and some trail mix in his pockets. This isn't actually his idea of fun, not really, but his mom has been talking about it, said she never gets properly outside in the summers now and wants some company. And in the end it's nice. The air is soft, warm, speaks of rain to come but not today. They set off along the trail, Yuna trying hard to catch up with Shane's stride and him slowing down whenever he remembers, and it's all perfectly nice.

He's not sure, later, what makes him come out and say it. Maybe it's Rose who's gotten into his head, or maybe it's those two or three attempts to carry Oraya in public. But after twenty minutes' of content silence they come out on the summit of a low hill, and into the breeze and open air, Shane says, "You were disappointed, weren't you? When I was a kid."

Yuna looks at him sharply, the sunlight showing the lines in her face. "What do you mean, disappointed?"

"All the hockey kids were praying for birds," Shane says, getting the words out fast.

"Anything that would stay out the way. And we had to work so hard to handle my stupid

fluffy daemon.”

Oraya cringes in her little pouch. Maybe she’d like to have been by his side, running along through the woods, but Shane didn’t think of it.

“She’s not stupid,” Yuna says. Her own daemon is a ferocious little tiger, quarter-size but no tabby cat. For only the third or fourth time in his life, Shane hears the resonant growl of that wild creature. “No, I wasn’t disappointed, you—”

She breaks off. When she speaks again the sun is behind a cloud. “I forget you’ve never been to school,” she says, restrained. “Never had a normal college experience, or even high school, I guess.”

That’s why you’re ignorant is silent. Shane is wishing from the bottom of his heart that he never brought this up.

“Those little kids who prayed for bids,” Yuna says. “Cute. I guess more of them studied ornithology than grew up to play hockey. I was sad about your daemon, Shane. But not the way you’re thinking. Shut up and listen.”

Shane keeps still and listens.

“An otter, a river otter,” Yuna says. “They used to play in your grandparents’ backyard, up in Hokkaido. But your little Oraya is extinct, did you know that?”

Shane shakes his head mutely, wondering how in a quarter century of life he never came to know that.

“There are no more otters in Japan,” Yuna says sadly. “But there is one with you. Your soul is still your people’s soul.”

Shane can’t speak for a moment. He’s thinking about his soul, that he hides away. That he’s ashamed of.

“Sometimes things are gone forever,” Yuna says. “Sometimes you can’t take your child home with you. Instead he has to stay here and play hockey and not quite be who he is. So I was sad, for a while. But you did good and you don’t need to worry about any of that now.”

“Okay,” Shane says, though he’s worried, quite a lot. “Okay.”

He gets Oraya out. He watches her skitter and play, jump into the streams and splash water, as they head on through the woods.

*

Oraya stays out, now she’s out. In Miami at the All-Stars game, she splashes around in the swimming pool and shouts out *this is awesome!* Ilya, right beside Shane, freezes; Shane knows it’s because he’s never heard her voice before.

But Ilya rallies, shouts back, “Yeah, this is awesome!” and cannonballs into the water. He doesn’t touch Oraya’s lovely fur as he comes to the water’s surface, because even Ilya Rozanov was not born in a barn, but it’s a close-run thing. Shane stands back and watches how they don’t touch, but they’re so happy to play. His mom told him more about the river otters, back home, back on Hokkaido. They still speak some Russian there even now.

Don’t fuss, Shane, Oraya tells him, when they come back together to go hit the showers. *That was fun. We’re having fun.*

They are having fun, Shane realises, despite everything. The stylist he hired thinks he can carry his otter daemon in a stylish backpack to hide her. It’s not the poor woman’s fault for suggesting it. Shane is only just learning how not to hide.

He’s working on it, anyway. He doesn’t have the strength to hide her when he’s recuperating in the hospital, after that horrible bang on the ice; she’s in his lap when he asks Ilya to come to the cottage. She’s by his side when he’s spending the night at home with his parents. There’s garlic bread and pizza, and Oraya is batting popcorn around. Yuna is laughing at her, throwing more popcorn back. Shane, on the couch, is texting friends, texting Lily. The game is hotting up on TV and the Admirals finally look like they’re going places.

Told you not to underestimate them, says Oraya, who is the half of this body-soul combination who understands the long game in hockey. She’s starting to talk out loud in front of people. *You never know how in a minute everything can change.*

That’s what’s great about sport, Shane thinks, as the Eagles song plays idly in his head. Oraya is on his lap, in front of everyone, when Scott Hunter kisses his boyfriend in front of eight hundred thousand people. Their daemons tumble in mid-air, birds brought down to the kiss of earth.

You see, Oraya says, *you see!* Shane picks her up and holds her to his heart. Ilya calls to say yes.

*

So here they are, at the cottage. Just downstream of it, sitting on two sunwarmed rocks. The wolf is splashing through the water like it’s an overgrown puppy; Oraya has her paws in the air like she’s a meme. It seems Ilya, too, has seen pictures online of otters holding hands, because he’s got his cute-thing-on-the-internet face on, slightly slack-jawed and delighted. Shane loves that face. He loves everything right now. He wants to kiss Ilya, wants to drag him back up the hill to the house to fuck him, wants to sit here quietly with him forever, wants all of it in equal proportions. He’s so happy to be here.

So he pushes Ilya off the rock.

“Hollander!” Ilya howls through pondwater, then drags Shane down to his level. And it doesn’t matter if they splash around in the water, in complete privacy, and laugh and kiss, but the mud gets in the crevices. Eventually they go back up to the house, dripping assiduously. Oraya is happily in her element; the European grey wolf native to the tundra keeps sneezing. Shane turns to look at her with love overflowing and says, “What’s her name?”

The words just slip out. It's not like when he was a rookie, when he psyched himself up to ask a dangerous question. It feels like the most natural thing in the world.

Ilya mutters something under his breath. Shane thinks it might be something complicated and Russian before he realises it's *tell you later*.

"Okay," Shane says. They get in the shower together, share the water and Shane gets on his knees for a blowjob. Ilya comes in Shane's hands and the two of them end up no cleaner than when they started. Water is getting everywhere and Oraya does love a deep hot bath, so Shane runs one. It's early evening now and while waiting for the tub to fill Shane gets down on the floor. He buries his face in the fur of Ilya's daemon, and it's as wonderful as he always dreamed it would be: warm and powerful and so soft, and with the distinct scent of snow. "She's perfect," he says, drawing back.

"You can," Ilya says, making a gesture because he can't say it. Shane hugs the wolf, kisses her head and her ears like she's a German shepherd. Loves her, because Shane loves Ilya utterly.

"Ah," Ilya says. It's all he says, though this touch must be turning him inside out and back again. He's content, like this is how they were meant to be, all along. "Yes."

When they get out of the bath they cook dinner. Home-made pizzas in Shane's almost-brand-new pizza oven, while the daemons play kiss-chase on the kitchen floor. Back on the couch, Shane says, "Do you have to hide your daemon, in Russia?"

Ilya doesn't fuck around, or pretend he doesn't know what Shane is talking about. "You mean... hockey players? Or boys? Or... boys who are for other boys?"

"Yes," Shane says.

Ilya considers. "Yes, then," he says. "Oh, sometimes. There are boys for whom it is different. A boy who has a crocodile, what else will he do but have it in public? Or a boy with an elephant, or a big horse. Maybe a boy with a rabbit, not so much."

Shane nods, understanding. "And hockey players have birds?"

"Some," Ilya says, nodding. "Also mice, for hiding in pockets. Insects. One boy I knew, he had a... what is the word? A small animal, with needles."

"Hedgehog," Shane says. "Prickly, like you."

"Like me," Ilya says. "But I could not hide, and I could not *not* play hockey. So I had to play hockey, just as I was."

Shane has been resigned about it, but for Ilya, he gets angry. "I hate to think of you hiding," he says. "You have such passion, such emotion, such—"

"Soul?" Ilya says wryly. "We have many long books about the soul, in Russia. But they are not very happy books."

“I guess not,” Shane says. He disentangles himself from Ilya for a minute to go fetch the pizzas. There’s a salad, and extra grated cheese. He sets the table. When Ilya comes to sit with him he picks up as though they’d never left off.

“It’s your soul,” he says. “And that you love who you love. If you have to hide your daemon, you end up having to hide those things. Like, you have a fucking emotion, that means you can’t play hockey?”

“No,” Ilya says definitively. “That is not true. You asked what my daemon’s name was.”

Shane was slipping down in his chair. He sits up. “Yeah, I did, Like... once today, and once years ago.”

“I remember,” Ilya says. From the look in his eyes he really does. “My daemon’s name is Liliya.”

Shane just looks at him. “You—your daemon’s name is *Lily*.”

Ilya smiles. “I told you, you do not always have to hide.”

Shane gets up, comes round the table, kisses him through it gets him covered with cheese. He remembers his teammates, all the questions. *Lily from Boston*. “Fuck, Ilya.”

“Yes,” Ilya says, as though that had been a question. “I want to eat pizza now.”

“I’ll make you another one,” Shane says. “I’ll make you whatever you want.”

*

After this—after this week; after Shane’s parents find out; after Shane has finally walked the rivers of Hokkaido, and kissed Ilya there on the ice; after *hockey*—Shane will say: “You gave me your soul, all along.”

“Yes,” Ilya says, before *fuck you, Hollander*, and Shane stroking his fur the wrong way.

End Notes

If you like a daemon AU, I have written them for [Star Trek](#), [MASH](#), [Vorkosigans](#), [Shetland](#).

I have also written [one other HR fic](#), which is a futurefic but not an AU.

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