do your fingers move? (do your lungs inflate?)

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77752961.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid, Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Troy Barrett, Luca Haas, Wyatt Hayes, Evan Dykstra, Harris Drover, Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander
Additional Tags:	Autistic Shane Hollander, one author knows hockey, Minor Troy Barrett/Harris Drover, Shane Hollander Wears Ilya Rozanov's Hockey Jersey, no beta we die like shane hollanders heterosexuality, Ottawa Centaurs (Game Changers), Montreal Voyageurs (Game Changers), (derogatory), Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Anxious Shane Hollander, I'm Bad at Tagging, Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Mix of Show and Book Canon, Shane Hollander Needs a Hug, troy's character arc deserves a tag, they're in LOVE your honour, Panic Attacks, fuck ai to death - Hudson Williams, one author is in a torrid love affair with commas, the other is in a torrid love affair with semicolons and emdashes, authors just really love punctuation okay?, Luca Haas - Freeform, Because we REFUSE to let him be traded, aro/ace luca haas, authors believe that whole heartedly, why are hockey players like this, (Also Derogatory), one author thinks icing is for cookies and not hockey
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-19 Words: 3,612 Chapters: 1/1

do your fingers move? (do your lungs inflate?)

by fairyaverage, Light_Queen

Summary

This morning is not routine. This morning he didn't wake up before Ilya. This morning, Ilya decided his routine for him. Waking him up with a kiss and his breakfast already prepared. It was sweet, really, it was, (except his skin itched and he could feel his bones—) and normally Ilya doing this for him was fine, but normally it isn't his first week on a new team. He was so close to finishing this week, so close to being able to check this off his evergrowing list of things to make it through this monumental season of firsts.

or, Shane is having a hard time adjusting to the teasing and familiarity and learns that he is safe here with the help of his new team

Notes

Title from Heavy by Birdtalker.

Post Long Game, so spoilers for that book!

See the end of the work for more notes

The day was not going according to plan. Shane had slept through his alarm, or more likely, Ilya had turned it off after he'd finally fallen asleep, deciding for him that rest was more important than getting an extra workout in after his bout with anxiety the night before. Regardless, Shane started off the day feeling lost and off kilter.

Shane *hated* that feeling. It meant his skin itched and felt like it sat on him wrong. It meant he felt the sinewy stretch of it against his bones with every shift. It meant his brain wasn't nice to him on days like this; like nothing he did was good enough, that *he* wasn't good enough. But he was also an NHL All Star, top scorer in the league, and regardless of how he felt, he would go to practice and give it his all, especially as it was still pre-season on a new team where he was only beginning to find his footing. A team that wasn't, had never been, the plan.

Despite all this *wrong-ness*, Ilya always felt *right*. Ilya seamlessly merged into his routine: Wake up. Let Anya out. Feed Anya. Stretch, workout, run. Wake up Ilya, shower, sometimes together. Eat his bland breakfast that he prepares beside Ilya in their kitchen, the same one he has been eating for years, carefully calculated and formulated for his performance while Ilya makes whatever he feels like eating that morning. Get dressed side by side, casually bumping into each other and stealing kisses. Double check the bag that he packed the night before to make sure it's all there. Go through and turn off all the lights, check the locks, double check he has his bag, phone, keys, and wallet. Slip on his shoes and follow Ilya and Anya out to the car, locking the door behind him and giving the knob a twist to make sure it locked properly. Drop Anya off at doggy day care, then head to the arena where he got to go to work alongside his husband. *Routine*.

This morning is not routine. This morning he didn't wake up before Ilya. This morning, Ilya decided his routine *for him*. Waking him up with a kiss and his breakfast already prepared. It was sweet, really, it was, (except his skin itched and he could feel his *bones*—) and normally Ilya doing this for him *was* fine, but normally it wasn't his first week on a new team. He was *so close* to finishing this week, *so close* to being able to check this off his evergrowing list of things to make it through this monumental season of firsts.

The car door slammed shut behind Ilya as he walked Anya into her daycare. Shane turned the music, Ilya's turn to pick, down and took some measured breaths while he waited for Ilya to return. *Ilya always comes back*, his brain reminded, the first helpful thing it had told him all morning. *He promised to always come back*. He focused on the breeze of the AC on his skin, took stock of the pressure of the seat belt across his chest, anything to try and bring himself back to the right mental state. Shane startled slightly when the car door opened and Ilya quirked an eyebrow at him as he got back into the driver's seat, but left the volume quiet, simply shifting into drive instead.

"Today will be simple practice," Ilya spoke softly, reaching over to put his hand on Shane's leg. "Is usual drills. Lots of skating, probably. Board battles. Maybe scrimmage."

Shane nodded. He knew all this from when Coach Wiebe had gone over it last practice, but he also knew what Ilya was trying to do. Knew Ilya was trying to ground him, to remove any

uncertainties he could from the day. He'd seen the look Ilya had given him, when he was slow to rise from bed. When he had scrubbed a little too hard at his skin in the shower—

“You have a captain’s meeting right after, right?” Shane asked, as though he didn’t have their meetings and physio schedules memorized. “I don’t mind waiting so you don’t have to call a car after.” The normalcy of this conversation was soothing. Plans, routines. The same casual hockey conversation that had always been normal between them, even before they *were* a them. His body didn’t feel right, yet, but this helped.

Far too soon, they pulled into the player’s lot. Ilya leaned over and pressed a gentle kiss against his lips before stepping out and grabbing his gear from the back, while Shane took one last deep breath before doing the same. But all his progress in the car to put himself to rights unravelled like a loose thread on a hockey sweater the closer they walked to the arena entrance. His brain shifted him to autopilot, getting him through the halls, greeting those they passed, as he walked side by side with Ilya, keeping distance between them like they still needed to be rivals. To hide. And really, even if the whole world knew about them, this was still their place of work and Shane was a goddamn professional. Just because he and Ilya were on the same team now didn’t mean he *had* to throw away his reputation of being one of the hardest working, easiest to manage hockey players. So despite being desperate to hold Ilya’s hand, to cling to the familiarity, he kept his careful distance as they walked through the hallways, footsteps echoing off the walls around them. It was fairly quiet still, as they tended to arrive early.

Ilya reached over and squeezed Shane’s hand once before dropping it and shouldering open the door to the locker room. They went to their neighboring stalls and silently began their prepractice rituals. Ilya’s gear seemingly exploded from his bag as they began kitting up.

Shane undressed and geared up in the same order he has since he was a kid, losing himself in the rhythm of routine. Trying to remember his breathing techniques, he bent over and slipped his skates on, left then right, tying the laces over and over again until they were perfect. Even. Not too tight his feet went numb, not too loose his ankles felt unstable. He was pulling his shoulder pads over his head and fastening the velcro around his biceps when the majority of the team began filtering in. He forced himself to nod back at them when they greeted him warmly, because *everything was fine, nothing was off*. Still, none of them tried to engage him in conversation, content to talk amongst themselves, and Shane was okay with that. Taking a steadying breath, he finished putting on his well-worn elbow pads and then grabbed his practice sweater. The moment the jersey slipped over his head, hanging loosely, breathing felt easier again. It felt *right*. He stole a glance across the locker room where Ilya was standing half dressed, lost in conversation with Luca Haas about who knows what. It was weird, not being captain for the first time since he was a teen, but the lack of additional stress was nice. He had enough stress this season.

Shane tucked his nose down and took one more deep breath, this time inhaling the familiar scent of hockey and sweat and home, before heading out toward the ice. The jersey moved a little differently around him as he reached for his stick on the way. Shane rolled his shoulders, trying to feel like he still belonged in his skin. It was better, now that he had the jersey on, but then the sleeve cuff rubbed against his wrist strangely and he had to duck

around a corner to take a moment to just *breathe* and adjust to the sensation. Ducking his nose he breathed in that smell again and immediately felt calmer. Settled.

Shane stepped out onto the ice and began his own warmup laps, waiting for the rest of his team and Coaches to join. When Hayes joined him on the ice, he gave Shane a strange look (*you don't fit in here—)* but moved in front of the bench to start stretching without comment. Eventually, the rest of the team straggled on, making it just in time for their official practice start time.

"Whistle!" Coach Wiebe yelled, and Hazy snorted at the fact Coach continued to forget his whistle. The team slowly meandered their way down the ice, grouping up and talking quietly amongst themselves.

"Nice jersey, Rozy," Bood nudged Shane in the ribs with a smirk.

"What?" Shane looked around for Ilya.

"Finally decided to try to be best like me?" Ilya suddenly appeared behind him, and leaned his chin on Shane's shoulder after admiring his name on his husband's back.

"Fuck you! I'm already better than—what are you talking about?"

"You are wearing my name, Hollander. Looks good." Ilya's lips brushed his ear as he murmured, "Should leave it on tonight when I fuck you."

Shane flinched away and felt his heart plummet through the bottom of his skates to the ice. "I'm what?" He asked weakly, dreading the answer even as he twisted his neck, clutching anxiously at the jersey as he tried and failed to see his own back, wishing, hoping, *needing* to disprove what he already knew:

He was wearing the wrong jersey.

Their assistant coach blew an actual whistle and the team scattered, skating across the ice to meet their coaches by the goal line with Shane following a half step behind, wanting desperately to go change, but there was no way he was going to miss a minute of practice. He had to prove that they didn't make a mistake signing him here, that he could handle this. He couldn't lose everything to a stupid fucking jersey.

Ilya hesitated when he noticed Shane had fallen behind, but he ignored his husband, not wanting special treatment. It was fine. *He* was fine (*you're failing*—). It was just a practice, he had survived millions of these. He refused to make eye contact because one look would be all it took for him to see right through Shane. He was always so damn *perceptive*, but he couldn't bring himself to even look at Ilya. He knew, he just *knew* that if he did, then his shield would fall. He would not risk being vulnerable in front of his team.

It was not fine. The further they got into practice, the more his technique fell apart. Passes weren't connecting, shots were going wide, and each time a teammate jokingly called him Rozy, he felt the sharp stabbing pain of being *other*. Of not being good enough to be *Shane fucking Hollander*. Of not being good enough to be *himself*. Ilya tried multiple times to check

in, and each time Shane mumbled something about ‘needing to finish the drill’ and skated away from him. Every time Ilya frowned after him, another stab of pain pierced through him (*even your* husband *thinks you don’t belong—*).

Shane was so lost in his head that by the time the final whistle blew and the team debriefed and announcements were made, he couldn’t recall what they had done. He shook out his hands as he skated off the ice, propping his stick against the wall. He bumped into Dykstra and immediately recoiled, mumbling apologies as he kept his head down, not noticing the concerned look Dykstra wore, and walked as quick as he could manage into the locker room to rip the stupid fucking jersey off. He just wanted to be *home.* Home with Anya, home with Ilya, where everything made sense and he could put his pieces back together without an audience.

His hands fumbled with his gear, and the shower was too warm (*you fucked up—*) and his skin felt too clammy (*you fucked up—*) and it was all too much (*you fucked up—*) and bile was burning its way up his throat (*you fucked up, you fucked up, you’re a fuck up—*). He was sitting on the bench, dressed. At some point the team had filed out and he was left alone. He felt alone.

“Hey man, you okay?” Troy came and sat down beside him, leaving space between them. Shane didn’t want to think too hard about what that meant, about what Troy had seen of Shane today (*you don't belong—).*

Shane couldn’t bring himself to answer, blinking at his shoes, and Troy seemingly steeled himself, before shooting off a text and standing up.

“Fair enough, that was a dumb question. Harris is stuck in a meeting and Chiron needs attention. You’re here for a bit, yeah?” After receiving a small nod, Troy continued. “Alright, let’s go, Chiron is going to be stoked to see you.” He stood up and waited.

Shane appreciated that his silence didn’t seem to be bothering Troy. He *wanted* to make an effort with this team, knew they were already like family to his husband despite the short time they’d known each other, but he just had nothing left to give today. This felt okay though, there was no expectation from the other man to be his media self. Still, it took another moment before Shane mustered the energy to unfold himself from the bench.

The whole walk through the arena, Shane following a few steps behind, he had to remind himself to breathe. Inside his pockets, he squeezed his fists for a few seconds before relaxing them, repeating this with the rhythm of his footsteps. Troy still wasn’t saying anything, but Shane didn’t know him well enough to know if that was just what he was like or if this was an awkward silence and he was screwing this whole interaction up by being like this.

After both too long and yet not enough time, Troy opened an office door and gestured for Shane to enter first. Chiron immediately perked up from where he was napping on the couch, stretching his body and leaping down, bounding over to greet them, tail wagging so hard his whole body vibrated energetically.

They walked over to the couch, but Shane slid down onto the floor so he could be closer to the dog. Troy followed suit, fending off kisses from the mountain of snuffling fur. Before

long, Chiron flopped dramatically across both their legs, asking for belly rubs. Who were they to resist?

“It’s weird, isn’t it?” Troy asked quietly as Shane was curling his fingers through Chiron’s fur.

“Hm?”

“This team. I don’t think I fully processed what it was like to be safe in the locker room my whole first year after being traded. The entire time, I was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. I thought that at some point I was going to fuck up or do the wrong thing and the team would notice that I didn’t belong here.” Troy wasn’t looking at Shane, giving Chiron his attention, but Shane felt the burning sense of being *seen*.

“What made you realize? That you were safe.”

“There wasn’t really one thing, I don’t think? And I know it’s different, I was a homophobic piece of shit because that was all I knew how to be, that was what was expected, what has always worked on my teams. I learned real quick that that shit wasn’t going to fly here. I wasn’t used to a team chirping at each other because they *like* each other, not just as a way to pick at vulnerabilities and tear each other down so you look better in comparison, you know?”

Shane couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow. “Very emotionally mature of you.”

“Fuck you, man!” Troy nudged Shane lightly, smiling. “Harris has taught me a thing or two. Unlearning shitty coping mechanisms is hard fucking work, but I’m so much happier here.” His voice had gotten undeniably softer when talking about his partner.

“Do you ever miss them?” Shane wasn’t sure if he was overstepping, but the question had been burning at the back of his mind this week. “Your old team, I mean.”

They sat in silence long enough that Shane opened his mouth to backtrack when Troy finally spoke. “I know I shouldn’t, I hated who I was with them, but they signed me, I gave them six years of my life only for them to turn around and drop me the second I threatened their image. But they also gave me my chance and got me where I am today. I will always be a little grateful for that.”

“I was supposed to retire and hang my jersey there. That was *always* the plan.” Shane’s voice cracked at that admission, tears of frustration burning his eyes. “I gave them fucking *everything* and it didn’t even matter. The second I wasn’t who they thought I was, I was fucking–” he couldn’t bring himself to finish that thought, making an ugly little noise in the back of his throat. Chiron crawled further into Shane’s lap and he let himself focus on the weight, feeling it ground him.

“But you miss them?” There was no judgement in Troy's quiet voice, simply curiosity.

Shane hesitated before he nodded reluctantly, ashamed. He dug his fingers through Chiron's fur, trying to soothe himself. “Yeah. Despite my best efforts, I miss them. Sometimes,

sometimes more than I hate them."

Troy nodded. "I felt that way at first, especially about Dallas. Yes, *I'm* the one who called him out, and I'll be first in line to say he's a fucking scumbag, but…"

"But he was your best friend."

"Yeah. My only friend, really. I'm not…I'm not the best at social interactions, I tend to be a bit of an asshole, but we started on the team at the same time and bonded over being rookies, over playing for *the NHL*." Troy waved his hands around as if to gesture to the *awe* rookies tended to exude. "He was all I had, for a long time. Even though I couldn't actually be *myself* with him, it was the closest I had gotten. Until now." Troy turned to look at Shane. "This team, this *family*, they all mean well. If you tell them to back off with the jokes they will, but Shane, you should have seen the look on Ilya's face when he saw you in that jersey."

Shane rolled his eyes, but he felt his cheeks heating up. "He looked like he wanted to eat me, right?"

"No, I mean, yes, that too, but he looked like he wanted to marry you all over again, right then and there. As much as the team ribbed on you, they were chirping at Ilya just as much. They really don't mean any harm, or that you're not an absolutely phenomenal player yourself, because you *are*, they just…they just love giving people they *love* shit, because that's what we do to family." Troy shrugged, glancing at Shane who was staring at him a little wide-eyed. "What?"

"I just. I think that's the most I've heard you say, *ever*."

"Shut up." Troy shoved Shane's shoulder, but neither of them bothered to hide their grins.

Shane's smile faded slightly. "Thank you. I know Harris doesn't actually have a meeting—no, don't try to deny it." He held up his hand and talked over Troy's weak denials. "Ilya would have mentioned it as a way to get time with Chiron. But seriously, thank you. It's…nice, knowing someone else on the team understands."

"Yeah, man. I'm always here to talk if you need."

Shane eyed Troy. "It's weird, you being nice. But it also gives me hope that this team can be as good for me as it obviously has been for you."

There was a gentle knock on the door and then Ilya opened it, visibly relaxing as he laid eyes on Shane. "*Moya lyubov*, Harris said I would find you here. Stealing all of Chiron's love? I should be jealous, yes? You give him belly rubs and not me."

Upon hearing Ilya's voice, Chiron immediately got up to greet Ilya, much to his delight. He bent to scratch Chiron behind the ears, cooing quietly in Russian. Shane was pretty sure he heard him thank the dog.

"Shut up," Shane huffed, but held his hands out towards his husband, who closed the distance and helped him up, pulling him in for a hug. Shane relaxed into him, taking a deep breath of

that scent of *home*.

“We are good, yes?” Ilya whispered into his ear, holding him tighter and Shane nodded against his chest.

“Yeah. We're good now. Home?”

“*Da*, home.”

Shane wasn't quite sure how to let Troy know how much this conversation had meant to him, and he didn't want to just say ‘thank you’ again, so he simply nodded at the other man, trying to put all that meaning into the gesture. Troy nodded back, smiling softly and Shane knew he understood.

As they walked out of the rink hand in hand, Shane knew that it wasn’t over, he would have more hard days, it would take time to find his footing with the team. But for once, that thought didn’t scare him, rather it filled him with a glimmer of excitement for what this season would bring. Maybe his jersey wasn’t going to hang from Montreal’s roof, but maybe his old city didn’t deserve that. Eventually it would be hung at *home*, alongside his husband’s. But for now, Ilya’s jersey would come home with them, and if it ended up in Shane’s gear again, everything would still be okay.

End Notes

So Light_Queen and I have decided to resurrect our joint fic writing endeavours from our early 2017 Wattpad era, where we met online and have since been friends (well, platonic wives, really) for 9 years!! Including getting to meet in person twice! Neither of us have written for fun thanks to school sucking all of our writing joy, but here we are, fully developed frontal lobes (allegedly), master's degree (her), spontaneous motorbike purchases (me), and full careers later. Back in the throes of writing fic thanks to Heated Rivalry. I know nothing about hockey (despite being Canadian. I know, I'm sorry) so I brought my hockey expert (Queenie) with me so any inaccuracies are entirely my fault. She has tried her best over the years but I still call the breaks in-between periods first half time and second half time, and the only icing I understand is the kind I decorate cookies with haha.

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