put your love down soft and sweet

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by quantumoddity

Summary

Ilya Rozanov would be lying if he said he never thought he'd be facing a Stanley Cup final again. He just never expected to be playing for the Centaurs. He never expected to be this nervous.

And he certainly never expected to be in a Japanese takeout at one in the morning, hours from the puck dropping.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Ilya Rozanov had been wracking his brains trying to remember what he'd been doing the night before he won the Stanley Cup.

If he was honest with himself, it had probably been something very stupid. The Ilya Rozanov that played for the Boston Bears wouldn't have listened to his coach, he wouldn't have eaten a balanced meal approved by the team dietician, done all his stretches and gotten an early night. He'd probably gone out to some bar, found some beautiful girls to dance with, filled his head with pounding music and other people's heartbeats so he didn't have to think about just how nervous he was.

But Ilya was just guessing. He couldn't actually remember what he'd been doing the night before the Bears took the cup. It was lost in the memory of everything that happened after, of that last goal sliding past the net, the horn blasting and the crowd around him going wild with a roar that made the ice underneath him tremble. Everything before that split second when it finally sank in, that realization of *you did it, you actually did it, you did it all without them,* it all stopped mattering.

But Ilya could say with some confidence that whatever he had been doing before the Bears' cup win, it wasn't driving to the only Japanese takeout place in Ottawa that was still open at one in the morning.

He had absolutely no idea why this place was still open so late but he was so fucking glad it was. And he'd been glad nearly every night for the past two months, every time he'd parked in the exact same spot and trudged down the exact same stretch of sidewalk and had the exact same thought that he really should have put some proper shoes on, June in Ottawa was still too cold for flip flops.

But it was blessedly warm inside the little restaurant, close and cozy with its formica tables and completely nonsensical posters on the walls and handwritten fragments of the menu scattered around like a scavenger hunt. Not that Ilya actually needed to know what was on the menu here, his order was already packed up and waiting for him on the counter. Just like it had been every time since the lady who owned the place realised that she'd be seeing a lot of Ilya.

"Fumiko, you are my favourite person on planet Earth, you know this?" he called, leaning over the counter to shout into the kitchen, raising his voice over the loud pop music blasting from the radio, "You keep saving my skin and I'm going to have to marry you."

He got a delighted burst of laughter in return, even with all the times they'd played out this little scene, Fumiko never got tired of Ilya's relentless flirting. She shooed at him from behind an enormous steamer basket, bubbling away with a smell that was making Ilya hungry.

"Ah hush! Run home, *kuma,* before it gets cold."

Ilya blew her a kiss, "*Arigatō!"*

He knew his pronunciation was atrocious, Shane was happy to tell him so, but his attempt made her giggle and blush even harder. Funnily enough, it got the same reaction out of Shane.

He was back at the door, bag slung over his shoulder and about to make the run back to his car, when Fumiko called out to him. He thought she would be telling him off again for leaving a tip that was twice the price of the food but that wasn't what made him pause, half in and half out of the chilly night air.

"Good luck with the game tomorrow!"

Ilya felt his stomach tighten, just a little, and he found himself glad that Fumiko couldn't see his smile dim.

He wasn't sure she even watched the Centaurs games, he'd just come in wearing the jersey enough times to clue her in. But there wouldn't be a single person in Ottawa who didn't know about the final tomorrow, whether they were interested in hockey or not. The whole damn city was papered with their ugly logo and Ilya was sure that the moment that pop song on the radio finally shut up, some news guy would be talking about it. Talking about how this was the Centaurs best chance at the Stanley Cup, how the twenty six players had to bring their all tomorrow night against Florida, how it would come down to the finest of margins.

Everyone knew how close they were, closer than they'd been in years. Close enough to hope, really hope.

Ilya knew better than anyone how dangerous that really was.

"I will score a goal for you, yes?" he filled his voice with a brightness he couldn't actually feel.

That made her cackle again, "Score goals for your mate, *kuma.* Go on now, he's waiting!"

Now Ilya really did smile, pure and uncomplicated joy running through him like dawn breaking. How could he not when he knew Fumiko was right.

Shane Hollander was waiting for him.

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Looking at the cottage up on its little rise, Ilya could imagine how sailors felt when they saw the golden gaze of a lighthouse. Though he imagined they brought home a catch slightly more impressive than an order of curry udon, extra spicy.

The warmth inside the home he and Shane shared felt different from the warmth anywhere else. It felt like it went right down to his bones, relaxing muscles he hadn't even known he was tensing, ones that had probably been in rictus since he left Russia. It was in the little things, in kicking off his flip flops and sliding them into place next to Shane's sneakers. It was in climbing the stairs and passing photos of the two of them, ones from their wedding, ones of them sitting amongst their friends and family, holding hands and not caring who saw

them, ones of them on the ice together, finally wearing the same colors. Even the ones from the stage at the NHL Awards all those years ago, the ones Ilya had carried around and protected, the only ember he'd had to keep him warm, now hanging next to a photo of them on the day they officially moved in together.

As he moved along the corridor, Ilya paused, letting his hand rest on the door closest to their own, the one that had been a spare room up until a few weeks ago. There was only silence behind the door, at least for now, but he always hesitated for just a moment. It made his heart thud a little harder, his stomach twisting with a giddy excitement that was more than halfway to fear in the best possible way. Like the first time he ever put on a pair of skates and wobbled out onto the ice, so close to falling but knowing that, if he could just keep his feet, it would be something amazing.

Ilya scoffed at himself, tapping his knuckles gently against the door before moving on to his and Shane's room. All well and good getting weepy over the future when he had a job to do in the here and now.

As soon as he shouldered the door open, there was a flurry of fur and a skitter of claws and Ilya had two seconds to brace himself before something small but determined knocked into his shins.

"Anya!" Ilya groaned, wounded, "It's me! Your actual dad!"

His dog didn't seem to remember that Ilya was the one who'd given her a name and a home and a very expensive bed twice her size and extra treats after dinner every afternoon. She only snuffled at him like he was some stranger off the street, suspicion radiating off of her, huffing like she was demanding to know what his business was.

The bitter sting of betrayal was eased by the sleepy laugh that came from the bed as the blankets shifted and Shane sat up. His eyes were soft with sleep, his longer than usual hair sticking up adorably around his head like a bird had been nesting in it. And he was smiling at Ilya like he was the knight in shining armour who'd just slain the dragon.

"She's only being protective," Shane croaked, his voice still a sleepy mumble, already stretching his arms out to his mate.

"So she is taking my job too? The disrespect…"

"Only while you were out," Shane had already caught sight of the takeout bag in Ilya's hand, suddenly looking way more awake, "Out being the best alpha anyone could ever ask for…"

Ilya was instantly mollified, setting the food in Shane's lap with a flourish and slumping into bed next to him so he could tear into it in peace, "Well. Whatever my beloved wants."

"I adore you," Shane groaned, already shovelling noodles into his mouth, his chopsticks a blur.

Ilya smiled, rolling onto his side so he could watch him, "Are you talking to me or the food?"

Shane tilted his head playfully, “I’m talking to you. The baby’s talking to the food.”

Ilya chuckled, moving closer and burrowing in against the reason he was out at one in the morning, the reason he’d proposed marriage to Fumiko ten times now, the reason their spare bedroom wasn’t a spare bedroom anymore. He pressed a soft kiss to the bump straining the old t-shirt Shane was wearing, grinning when he felt a rolling movement under his skin.

“Someone’s awake…”

“They always are when you’re not around,” Shane’s voice softened fondly, “They’ll settle now you’re close.”

Sure enough, the motion gradually settled, the squall passing and becoming something gentle and rhythmic. Ilya purred loudly, for their benefit and Shane’s, resting his forehead against the few inches of skin that separated him and his pup. A promise, as soft and sincere as he could make. *I’m here. I’ll always come back.*

He felt Shane’s fingers push gently into his curls, combing through them, which meant he must have finished inhaling his noodles. If this were like any of the other nights, the many they’d spent following this routine, Ilya knew he would be dozing by now, feeling warm and safe and so deliriously happy. He’d half resurface when Shane inevitably got up to piss in the next half hour, waiting until he could gather him in his arms again, the hard roundness of their pup nestled safely between them for the rest of the night.

But this wasn’t any other night. Ilya couldn’t let go of the anxieties that pinched at him every time someone told him good luck or he passed a Centaurs flag in someone’s window or the ridiculously huge adverts for the game on TV. He wanted to close his eyes, he wanted to focus on nothing but the fact that he’d done right by his mate and their pup had waited for him to come home before they fell asleep. But he couldn’t.

Ilya knew Shane could feel it too, his other hand coming down to trace the lines of Ilya’s shoulders, comforting him before he’d even heard the reason why.

“I can’t believe you still went out and got my food the night before the final. I’m honoured…”

Ilya smiled at the mushy, adoring tone Shane slipped into so often these days, even if he was absolutely prodding him to talk about it, “You and the pup want curry udon five minutes before the puck drops, all you have to do is ask.”

Shane’s long fingers traced the curve of Ilya’s ear, “I love you…and I know you well enough not to test that theory or my new team is really going to hate me.”

“They’ll love you,” Ilya corrected firmly, hesitating only a moment before he murmured, “It should be you out there tomorrow with the C on your chest. Not me.”

Shane’s hands stalled for a second, like he was wincing at those words, though his voice stayed light and fond, “Well, it might be if you’d worn a condom nine months ago. But here

we are…and the Centaurs are lucky to have you, Ilya. No one else should be out there but you. No one else earned it."

Ilya bit his lip, turning his face to Shane's belly like it might make him braver, "It's never been like this before."

"What do you mean?"

He would always marvel how questions like that from anyone else on the planet would make Ilya shut down, the undeniable reflex of flinching away from a source of pain. But when Shane asked him for more, when Shane asked to see the darker parts of him, all Ilya wanted to do was tell him everything. Even when it scared him, he wanted Shane to have all of it, just because he'd asked.

"I've never been scared before," he sighed, "Not about hockey, that was the one thing I always knew I was fucking incredible at. And I am *still* fucking incredible!"

"You are," Shane chuckled fondly, now stroking along the line of his jaw.

"So why am I terrified about tomorrow?" Ilya groaned, "Why do I feel sick thinking about it?"

Shane paused before he answered, brow furrowing in the same adorable way it always did when he was trying to figure something out, whether it was a play on the ice or putting together the crib for the nursery.

"Maybe because it is different this time? I don't think you're worried about the game, Ilya, you're worried about the team."

Ilya wrinkled his nose, "Is not the same?"

Shane shook his head, "Think about it. When the Bears won the cup, who were you doing it for? The team or yourself?"

"Myself," the answer came easily, even if it made him sound like a bit of a dick.

But he had been a dick then, if they were all being honest. It had been part of the persona, part of what worked so well. The Ilya Rozanov who had played for the Bears had been playing to prove something about himself, to prove to his father that he didn't need his money or his blessing to exist, to prove to his mother that he didn't need her love to be worth something. And yes, to prove to a certain dark eyed, freckled Canadian center that he deserved his attention.

He'd done it all for himself. The men around him had been immaterial, he hadn't bothered to care about how good they'd feel if they won, how devastated they'd be if they lost.

But things were very different with the Centaurs.

"I don't want to let them down," Ilya admitted, his heart thumping like it had been waiting ages for him to realise this, "I feel like they look up to me, they all act like they wouldn't be

here if I hadn't joined. And if we do not win tomorrow, then…then it's like I lied to them. They will be so hurt, they will go back to thinking this team is useless and that matters to me. I want them to see how good they are."

Shane purred softly, leaning down and kissing Ilya's forehead, "Look at you, learning about teamwork a decade into a hockey career. I'm so proud of you."

"Shut up," Ilya gave a growl with nothing but fondness in it, catching his mate's hand and slotting their fingers together, "No one told me that your team being your family meant you had to give a shit. This sucks."

Shane brought their joined hands to his lips, kissing Ilya's knuckles lightly, "Your days as a cocky lone wolf are over, baby. You're a tender hearted veteran now."

"We are," Ilya corrected him gently, unwilling to let Shane forget that he was part of this team too, whether he was playing tomorrow or not.

That made his mate smile, gentler this time, all the teasing set aside, "And you won't let them down, Ilya. You can't, it's impossible. Because it's not about whether you win or not, you've given them your absolute best and that is enough. You are enough. I promise."

Ilya had to swallow hard past the lump that had suddenly appeared in his throat, trying to blink back the tears because he didn't want to stop looking at Shane. He felt like he might fall apart if he didn't have those soft, dark eyes holding his own, giving him something to hold on to.

He'd never felt like he was enough. He'd never felt like he'd actually proven the thing he'd been trying to prove when he'd lifted the Stanley Cup. But now he was here, on a team he was proud to play for, feeling his future fluttering just under his mate's skin, hearing the man he loved tell him that he'd done it. So maybe he should start believing it.

"I can give them my best," he murmured, knowing he wasn't just talking about the team anymore, "I can do that."

Shane smiled proudly, "And for what it's worth? I think you're going to smash them tomorrow. That cup's yours."

Ilya laughed, scrubbing at his eyes with his free hand, "Then next year, we will win it together. Deal?"

"Deal," Shane slid down to kiss Ilya properly, winding his arms around him, "I love you."

"I love you too," Ilya didn't know how to fit everything he felt about Shane into those four words but he would never stop trying, "I am still not going to be able to sleep though…"

Shane's smile turned into something playful, mischievous in a way Ilya very much liked, "Fine by me. I was hoping I'd get to take your mind off your nerves for a little while."

Ilya could have cried with relief, that kind of closeness was exactly what he needed right now, but he still hesitated, hands coming up to cradle Shane's face, "Are you sure, *moy*

milyi?"

Shane shrugged helplessly, his cheeks flushing pink, "Hormones. Guess you being vulnerable and emotionally available turns me on or something."

"You freak…" Ilya purred in delight, that smile and those eyes and the gorgeous scent gathering around them more than enough to convince him.

"Your freak," Shane rolled onto his back, pulling Ilya over him, settling back against the pillows.

As their little one grew inside of Shane, sex had become something heartbreakingly delicate and gentle. Ilya remembered being terrified the first time after he'd learned they were going to be fathers, unsure where to put his hands, studying Shane's face for any sign he was hurting him or putting pressure in the wrong places, like if he did something wrong Shane would crack like bone china.

But he'd learned that his mate was far, far from weak. If anything, he was getting stronger by the day, his body wasn't giving him any other choice. Every morning spent on the bathroom floor, Ilya smoothing his hair back from his face as he hurled into the toilet. Every time he burst into tears at a nature documentary and then got angry at himself for crying and then got even angrier at Ilya for laughing and calling him cute. Every evening after he showered when Ilya would catch him looking in the mirror, smoothing his hand over his growing belly like he couldn't quite believe it was real. Every article that came out saying the great Shane Hollander had thrown his career away and the Voyageurs had been right to drop him and this was why omegas had no place in the NHL. Shane took all of it and just kept going, that jaw set so stubbornly.

Ilya could only marvel at him, knowing he'd never ever be able to thank his mate for all of this, there weren't words in any language he knew. But he could damn well start by getting on his knees and worshipping him in any way Shane would allow, with his tongue or his hands or his cock, whatever he asked. If he couldn't find the words, he would show Shane Hollander that he was everything to him.

So there was no hesitation as he kissed his mate down into the nest of blankets, even if worries flickered in the back of his mind about the soreness in his lower back and the cramps he'd been getting lately as Shane's body geared up for its own big final game. He shoved them away, pushing them out of his mind along with all the thoughts of what was coming tomorrow, refusing entry to anything that wasn't Shane.

He gave himself permission to care about nothing but the softness of his mouth as his lips parted into Ilya's kiss, the trembling moan that escaped him before Ilya's tongue muffled all his other sounds, selfishly swallowing them. He only cared about the way Shane's legs parted for him, ankles crossing at the small of his back like his mate was making sure he wasn't going anywhere. As if Ilya would, when everything he wanted in the world was right here under him.

"Please…" Shane whimpered, voice sweet and desperate, not begging because he needed to, just because it felt good.

Ilya purred, only moving back enough to yank down his own shorts and free his aching cock, “It’s all yours, *moy lyubimyy,* all of it…”

He was much more careful as he pushed up Shane’s baggy shirt, reverent as he caressed the gorgeous swell of his stomach and the new fullness in his chest. He kissed every new inch of skin he uncovered, dragging his tongue across the most sensitive parts until Shane was close to coming then and there, sensitive enough that this might be enough.

Every single cell in Ilya’s body was humming with the same hungry note. *Bite.* He wanted to put his mark on Shane, right where everyone would see it and know how proud he was to claim this omega as his own. He wanted all his promises tattooed onto Shane’s perfect skin, to give him something to touch and know that, no matter what happened, Ilya would be right by his side.

But it wasn’t the time for it right now. So much had been out of their control but this one thing, Ilya would do right. He’d do something really romantic, set up a picnic under the stars out by the lake or take him out to a ridiculously fancy restaurant or get down on one knee at center ice, fairy lights or fireworks or roses, whatever he wanted. He’d ask Shane Hollander to wear his bond mark in exactly the right way. And that way was not when they were both in their pajamas and Shane’s kisses tasted faintly of curry and Ilya’s hair was a mess. Some other time.

For now, he could give him this, he could give him the sweet moment as he slid home, his cock pressing into Shane’s slick, eager hole and surging forward until their hips met, the two of them as close as they could possibly be.

Shane cried out, his voice half a sob, his fingers digging into his alpha’s shoulders like he never planned to let go, “Oh fuck, Ilya…”

Ilya panted heavily, resting his forehead against Shane’s, needing a long moment before he could even think about moving, before he could ask his muscles to do anything but shake with the wonder that all this was his. That after waiting and hurting for so long, this was actually real. He had Shane and Shane had him.

“I love you,” Ilya breathed, voice breaking under the weight of those words.

“I love you too,” Shane gasped, “I love you so much, oh fuck, please…”

Ilya knew exactly what he was asking for and he gave it willingly, rocking his hips, bracing himself on the headboard so he could move deeper in him. He made it so Shane wanted for nothing, able to just lie back and feel everything, rewarding his alpha with gorgeous moans and breathless pleas for more, harder, faster.

“Can’t…can’t hold it, baby, please,” Shane’s voice was thin to the point of breaking, his chest heaving, eyes glassy as the last of his control slipped through his fingers, “Gonna come…”

Ilya nodded, the rumble building in his chest, unstoppable as snow thundering down the mountain, “With me. I am there, *moy lyubimyy,* together…”

If the Centaurs did win tomorrow, Ilya would bet that the roar of the crowd wouldn't sound as sweet as Shane did right then, arching up and coming with a desperate cry of his alpha's name. Ilya could only answer, following him straight down into oblivion, emptying into Shane with a groan of pure relief.

Ilya used to hate that sticky, blurring, ringing in the ears moment after they came together. Not all that long ago, that moment was when he'd realise it was over, that he and Shane had to untangle themselves and go back to living like they weren't made for each other, feeling every centimeter of space between them.

But now it was his favourite part. He would never, ever get sick of wrapping his arms around Shane, feeling him come back to himself and knowing that the first thing he'd really be aware of was Ilya's scent, the sound of his raspy purr, his heartbeat pounding hard for him. And they never, ever had to let go. This was their forever.

"You really are the best alpha anyone could ask for…" Shane mumbled against Ilya's chest, kissing that ridiculous bear tattoo he couldn't believe was about to adorn someone's father.

"I am half of what you deserve, *moy lyubimyy,"* Ilya kissed the side of his head.

"And it's more than enough," those dark eyes crinkled adorably in the corners as he smiled up at him.

Ilya shifted, separating them gently and getting Shane settled as comfortably as possible in the nest he'd made of his bed. He still wasn't sure if he'd be able to sleep but his mate was halfway there already, eyelids heavy and head lolling contentedly. Ilya didn't mind. If he spent the rest of the hours until his alarm went off watching Shane sleep, he'd count himself lucky. He was as ready for the game as he'd ever be.

He reached down and stroked Shane's belly, chuckling roughly, "You stay put tomorrow, little one. Last thing we need is you complicating things."

Shane snorted, grinning sleepily, "Don't worry, if my water breaks tomorrow there's no way in hell I'm telling you until after the game."

Ilya blinked, "You wouldn't!"

Shane shrugged, completely unrepentant, "I'm serious. If I can't be on the ice scoring most of the goals, least I can do is keep the guy who'll score at least two in the game."

"Two? Fuck off…" Ilya grumbled, scandalised, dipping his head and kissing the bump, "Now you really have to stay in there, your daddy's insane."

"It'll be fine, Ilya," Shane flicked the top of his head lightly, "You've got one job tomorrow, be the captain. Afterwards you'll have a whole summer to focus on being papa."

Ilya exhaled softly, feeling the warmth of that spread through his chest. He could see it now, that long, golden summer stretching out before him and every day after, Shane and his pup

and their team. Whatever happened on the ice tomorrow, his family wasn't going anywhere. With that promise keeping him warm, he felt like he could actually sleep.

"I'll do my best," he murmured, staying down there, knowing he'd rest easier the closer he was to his pup, with Shane's fingers stroking through his curls, feeling the pride radiating off his mate.

As he finally drifted to sleep, Ilya realised he still couldn't remember what he'd been doing the night before his last Stanley Cup final. But he knew for sure he hadn't been this happy.

End Notes

People have been enjoying this AU so much, please let me know if you have any requests or suggestions, I'm over @mollymauk-teafleak on tumblr! All comments are hugely appreciated <333

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