What Hurts The Most

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What Hurts The Most

by TeganTales

Summary

What if Shane hadn't gotten hit by Cliff in Heated Rivalry? What if he'd gone over to Ilya's that night, when Ilya planned to break up with him?

Notes

I know this game was in Montreal in the books but I'm bending canon further in this what-if fic to make it in Boston.

The title is from Rascall Flatts song, What Hurts The Most - its an older country song (Ilya would hate it, I'm convinced he is an EDM hockey player), but Shane would listen to it on repeat in his Jeep.

I can take the rain on the roof of this empty house
That don't bother me
I can take a few tears now and then, and just let 'em out

I'm not afraid to cry every once in a while even though
Going on with you gone still upsets me
There are days every now and again
I pretend I'm okay
But that's not what gets me

What hurts the most
Was being so close
And having so much to say
And watching you walk away
And never knowing
What could've been
And not seeing that love in you
Is what I was trying to do

It's hard to deal with the pain of losing you everywhere I go
But I'm doing it
It's hard to force that smile when I see our old friends
And I'm alone

Still harder getting up, getting dressed, living with this regret
But I know if I could do it over
I would trade, give away all the words that I saved in my heart
That I left unspoken

What hurts the most
Is being so close
And having so much to say (much to say)
And watching you walk away
And never knowing
What could've been
And not seeing that love in you
Is what I was trying to do

Chapter 1: Walk Away

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ilya was pacing his penthouse. He'd fucked up, he should have ended things by text. Or maybe Skype? How the fuck was he supposed to look at Shane, see his smile, and tell him they *wouldn't* be hooking up tonight. He could feel the anticipation in his body, the adrenaline remaining from the game, and that hum of arousal just below the surface. *Shane is coming over* , it said. Longing and need was seeping out of every pore. He *craved* Shane's touch. He craved so much more than Shane's touch.

He was so fucking in love with Shane Hollander. His heart felt too big in his chest, like it was straining to burst out of his ribcage. It was screaming at him not to go forward with his plan to send Shane away. But what choice did he have? This whole thing was so fucking impossible. They would fuck, and then Shane would leave. But Ilya wouldn't be left feeling satisfied, like he'd scratched an itch, like he would be good until the next time they were in the same city. Because he *wasn't* satisfied with that, not anymore. It was no longer fun or thrilling. It just left him feeling empty, yearning for something he knew he could never have.

And it was only getting worse.

Every time he received a text from "Jane" or saw Shane featured on TV, he felt the thrill in his chest. He caught himself thinking about Shane throughout the day, missing Shane the longer they went between games. When he jerked off, he *only* ever thought about Shane. Shane was consuming him, and he could never have Shane. Not *really* . Just like he couldn't have taken a stroll on the beach in Tampa, couldn't travel with him in the summer, Ilya could never have Shane the way he wanted him. He wanted everything.

He'd been psyching himself up for a month - since his last night in Moscow. He had rehearsed so many different things to say, and still, he didn't know what he *was* going to say tonight. He just knew he couldn't let Shane touch him. He had to shut it down *immediately.*

When Shane had come up to Ilya on the ice earlier, Ilya's heart had rejoiced at seeing him again. It had been four long weeks since their Skype call from Moscow. Ilya had wavered then, as he wavered now, in his conviction that things had to end. But the way he was feeling - it wasn't sustainable. He hadn't been able to say no when Shane had confirmed they were

still on for tonight. It would be the coward's way out to text Shane, or worse, ghost him. Ilya would tell him in person. Or did Ilya selfishly want to see Shane here one last time? Want to give Shane the opportunity to change Ilya's mind? Ilya growled in frustration. He didn't fucking know. He only knew that he could *not* keep feeling like this.

The elevator dinged, signalling Shane's arrival. Ilya stopped pacing and went to open the door. Shane grinned when he saw him, moving towards Ilya like an eager puppy. Ilya's heart clamoured inside his chest, demanding he react with similar enthusiasm. *He's here, he's here, he's here,* it pounded.

Ilya took a step back from Shane as he closed the door. He pressed his lips together and clenched his fists at his sides so he wouldn't reach for Shane. *Fuck,* why did he smell so good?

Shane's brows knit together, confusion marring his beautiful face as he took in Ilya's strange behaviour. "Is something wrong?"

"Hollander..." Ilya started. He ran a hand through his hair. "Shit. I should have told you not to come." This was already too hard.

"What do you mean?" Shane moved towards him again. Ilya stepped back, again. "Ilya..."

Ilya let out a pained sigh at hearing his name on Shane's lips. "We can't. Hollander. I can't. We can't do this anymore." Ilya sniffed and rolled his shoulders back. "You should go." Ilya felt awful. Shane had just got there. But he couldn't very well do this *after.*

"What?" It came out on a shocked exhale. "I don't understand." Shane reached for Ilya and caught his wrist, even as Ilya tried to move away again. His thumb brushed over Ilya's pulse, and Ilya closed his eyes against the onslaught of sensations that simple touch elicited. "Ilya...look at me. Please."

There was no fucking way Ilya was looking Shane in the eye. Certainly not while Shane was touching him. "Let go." Ilya said, his eyes still closed. Shane dropped his wrist. Ilya could hear Shane's breath coming in short gasps. Christ, he needed Shane out of there *now.* Ilya

walked around to the other side of the kitchen island, putting the large slab on granite between them - he should have done that from the beginning.

Placing both hands flat on the smooth countertop, bracing himself, he looked up to meet Shane's gaze. He was not prepared for what he saw there. Shock - that didn't surprise him. But the pain, the despair. Ilya hadn't thought about the fact that causing Shane *pain* would absolutely wreck him in return. Ilya swallowed the lump in his throat. "Jesus, Hollander. Don't cry. It's only sex"

Anger blazed in Shane's eyes. Anger was an emotion Ilya could deal with from him - though usually it was a twisted form of foreplay for them. "Fuck you!" Shane once again started advancing on Ilya but Ilya moved around the island, keeping it between them. "It's not *only* sex, and you know it."

Yes, that's the problem , Ilya thought. But he didn't say it. "We should have ended this years ago," he said instead. "Is too risky. And it's not even fun anymore." Okay, that last part wasn't quite true, but it wasn't a lie either. It wasn't fun when it left Ilya feeling bereft and wanting so much more than sex.

Shane stopped chasing Ilya around the island, his head rearing back as if Ilya had hit him. He took a shaky breath, his eyes searching Ilya's, but Ilya was looking determinedly at a spot on the wall behind Shane's head. "You don't mean that," Shane whispered.

Ilya ignored the way Shane's bottom lip trembled, before he caught it between his teeth. "I do," Ilya huffed out a humourless laugh. "I really do." And he did mean it. They *should have* ended this years ago. It *was* too risky to continue. Not just for their careers. His heart couldn't take another year of this, let alone the decade, or however much longer they played for the NHL. In seven years he'd fallen completely in love with Shane Hollander, despite vehemently trying not to. What would the next seven years bring - other than constant heartache?

Shane let out a whimper and spun around, covering his face with both hands. He leaned back against the counter and Ilya let his own mask slip. He watched Shane's shoulders move up and down as he scrubbed his face. Shane's shoulders tensed when he pushed the heels of his hands into his eyes. "This isn't happening," he muttered. Ilya wasn't sure if he was saying it to him, or if Shane was trying to convince himself.

Ilya didn't respond either way. He didn't trust himself to say anything at that moment. He glanced at his bedroom door, he could escape there, tell Shane to leave. But he'd have to walk *past* Shane to do that. Could Ilya do that without reaching out to comfort him? Ilya was breathing hard now with the effort of keeping still. His knuckles were white from gripping the edge of the counter so hard. His eyes took in the hard lines of Shane's shoulders, his triceps, his back, tapering to his lean waist. Images of Shane's naked body flashed through his mind unbidden, Ilya placing a hand between those shoulder blades. He could have been doing *that* tonight. He could have been doing that right now.

Ilya clenched his jaw and ripped his gaze away from Shane, he looked up at the ceiling instead. "You should go," he said through gritted teeth.

Shane dropped his hands from his face, his shoulders slumping. This time as he moved slowly around the island, Ilya stayed perfectly still, jaw still clenched, eyes now focused on a fleck of granite in front of him. His heart pounded loudly and his chest heaved, but there was nothing he could do to hide that from Shane.

Shane tugged on Ilya's forearm, and Ilya let it drop from where it gripped the counter, allowing Shane to slip in between Ilya and the counter. Shane's hands slid up Ilya's chest to cup his face. *Fuck,* Ilya heart beat even faster - with panic, with desire. He should push Shane away. He should move away. But Ilya was frozen.

"Don't do this, Ilya," Ilya made the mistake of looking at Shane then. His eyes were beseeching and glassy with unshed tears. And his freckles...Ilya closed his eyes and shook his head ever so slightly. The only denial he could muster.

Shane rose up and pressed his lips against Ilya's. Fuck, he was playing dirty. How fucking dare he? Ilya resisted for all of two seconds before opening up to Shane, taking him roughly. He pushed Shane up against the counter, his tongue demanding entrance. He groaned when Shane met his kiss with as much ferocity, as if trying to devour him before Ilya could absolutely destroy him. Shane's fingers tugged at Ilya's curls. Ilya revelled in it for a moment before wrenching himself away.

Ilya stumbled back, putting a good six feet between them. They stared at each other, Ilya drinking Shane in one last time. Squeezing his hands into fists, Ilya steeled himself. "Go."

Shane reached for him again, but let his hands drop when Ilya stepped away.

“Ilya...please. I lo-”

“ *Go!”* Ilya yelled. “Leave. Hollander. Please.”

Tears spilled silently down Shane’s cheeks, across his freckles. Ilya almost lost it at the sight. He backed himself up until he met the fridge behind him, letting it support his weight. Shane gave a single nod, and lurched towards the door, not even closing it behind him as he took off towards the stairwell.

Ilya slid down the fridge to the cold tile. He let out a sob, and then another, before covering his face with his hands, elbows propped on his bent knees. He cried until his throat was hoarse and his head ached.

Fuck. What had he done? This was supposed to be easier. It didn’t feel easier right now. It felt awful. Like he’d ripped out his own heart, then ripped out Shane’s too. Maybe thrown them in a blender for good measure. He thought he felt empty before - he felt like a hollow shell now. His grief tore through him, leaving a husk of what he’d been before.

Ilya thought about getting the vodka he had in the freezer. It was good vodka. From Russia. But he didn't want to waste it. He didn't deserve good vodka right now. A part of him wanted to feel the pain. To remember the anguish he'd seen in Shane's eyes.

Remember the way Shane had almost said... something.

It didn’t matter. It didn’t matter if Shane felt the same way. It meant nothing. They could be *nothing.* He was doing Shane a favour. Shane could move on now. The thought made Ilya feel sick.

When Ilya finally crawled into bed it was well past midnight. In the darkness of his room he curled up on his side and allowed himself to whisper the words so quietly, he couldn't even hear them above the din of the Boston traffic outside. His mouth was really just forming the words, fresh tears falling as he did.

I love you, Shane.

Shane made it to the landing in between the fifth and sixth floors before he collapsed on the concrete. The bright stairwell light flickering in time with his racing heart. A sob wrenched out of him as he clutched at his chest. God, he felt like he was *dying* . Was this a heart attack? Could he be dying of a broken heart? His logical brain told him that was impossible but, it sure as hell felt like his heart was coming apart inside his ribcage. He was dizzy, and trembling. He couldn't pick himself up off his hands and knees if he tried. Shit, he could have fallen down the stairs!

Shane cried out again as he struggled to catch his breath. Stars pricked the edge of his vision. He was going to pass out. He *was* going to die. No. He just had to breathe. He'd been anxious, even panicked before, but he'd never had a full blown panic attack like this. That's what it was. He told himself over and over again. It was just a panic attack. He wasn't dying. Breathe.

Shane gasped in a breath, choking on a sob as he did.

Again. Breathe. He ordered his body to do his bidding - it was the one thing he was always good at.

Breathe.

Breathe.

An unknown amount of time later, Shane moved from his hands and knees to sit against the wall, his right hand still fisting his jacket over his heart.

“What the fuck,” Shane whispered. Then more loudly. “ *What the fuck!”*

Shane looked up the stairs, hoping against hope that he might see Ilya coming down them. Should he go back up there? He was *almost* positive Ilya hadn't ended things because he didn't want Shane anymore. No, Ilya had kissed him just as fiercely.

Jesus, had he been about to tell Ilya he loved him? *Did* he love Ilya? Shane had never been in love, and he struggled with the idea that he could be in love with Ilya Rozanov. As he looked around himself now, sitting in a cold stairwell, having just felt like he was fucking dying after Ilya sent him away. What the fuck else could it be?

Ilya was infuriating, and it turned Shane on. He knew how to push Shane’s buttons, but he never pushed too hard. He was so fucking good at hockey, it made Shane want to be even better. Playing with Ilya in Tampa had been a dream. They fit perfectly together. On the ice. And off the ice. It wasn’t just sex either. Ilya had opened up to him. He’d opened up to Ilya. Everything they'd shared over the past three months...it had made Shane feel closer to Ilya than he did with Hayden - his best friend.

But Hayden didn't *know* Shane.

Ilya did.

Of course Shane was in love with him.

What a great fucking time to realize it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry okay, I'm so sorry. I have indicated 3 chapters because I can't just let it end like that. Scott Hunter still comes out at the end of this season - something's gotta give.

But first the boys are going to hurt a bit more, reeling from a break up when no one knew they were in a relationship. Because they weren't...technically. How do they even start to try to get over each other, how do they suffer through that all alone?

Man, Shane's concussion was so much easier to handle than this.

Chapter 2: Pretend I'm Okay

Chapter Summary

> If Shane never got hit by Cliff, Ilya ended things, and they *both* played in the playoffs in 2017 (but both got eliminated before the final), how would things be different?
>
> Alternate chapter 22 - how would Scott Hunter making out with Kip be different?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Boston - May, 2017

"You look like someone ran over your dog."

"What?" Ilya honestly didn't know what Cliff was talking about. He didn't have a dog.

"You look sad? Woman troubles?" Cliff on the other hand looked uncomfortable, accusing his captain of being sad. Probably because Ilya looked angry now.

"No." Ilya responded, a bit too forcefully. He shook his head and forced himself to give Cliff a tight lipped smile. "Just thinking about summer." It was the truth. He wasn't going back to Russia, that's for sure. He'd probably just hang out, alone, in Boston. But he hadn't been thinking about that either. He'd been thinking about Shane, going to his cottage. Like a fucking masochist, he'd found and watched the CBC special of Shane showing off his cottage last night. And now he was so fucking depressed, Cliff was calling him out on it.

"Dude, summer isn't supposed to be a sad time. You going home?"

"No." Ilya sighed. He really didn't feel like talking to Cliff right now.

“Oh shit. Your dad. Sorry, man.” There, Cliff got it. Kind of.

“S’ok. Thanks,” Ilya nodded and Cliff clapped him on the back as he moved past him.

Ilya finished showering and left practice. He got behind the wheel of his Porsche. And he just sat there for a moment. He didn’t want to go back to his apartment. He didn’t want to go to his garage.

He got out his phone to call Svetlana. As he did at least once a day, he opened his messages with Shane. The same last message was there from last month in Boston.

Jane : On my way.

Jane: Here.

Ilya put his phone away. He didn’t want to hook up with Svetlana right now. He thought about asking her to hang out, to talk. But what could he tell her? He was the one who’d ended things. She would wonder why. He couldn’t explain the nuances without giving away *who* he had ended things with.

Besides, it’s not like him and Shane had even been a *thing.* They couldn’t be. That was the whole fucking problem. And now Ilya was left, grieving a breakup, more alone than he’d ever been. He thought about how other people moved on - usually with the help of friends or family, people who knew you’d been involved with someone, who that someone was. Other people had someone they could talk to, rant to, bitch with. Ilya couldn’t do any of that.

His only saving grace was people assuming his funk was due to his dad dying.

“Shane? The press want you...”

Shane was fucking exhausted but, this was his job. He considered asking Riley, who managed the press and social media side of things, if they knew whether Boston had won or not, but he decided against it. Shane was obviously going to be watching the highlights later at home anyway. He could wait.

Shane sighed and laid his helmet down carefully before leaving the locker room.

“Hey guys!” He said as cheerfully as possible. God, he sounded worse than when they lost. And he just scored the game winning goal.

“You don’t sound too excited, Hollander? You’re moving onto game seven!”

“Trust me, I’m thrilled. But we haven’t won the series yet. Just trying not to get too cocky.” Shane also wasn’t sure how he felt about moving onto the next series. If they won, and if the Bears won...they’d be playing each other next week. Shane desperately wanted to see Ilya again. But he also wasn’t sure if he could face him on the ice. Looking into his eyes before a face-off would be torture. In the past when they’d play against each other, they almost always hooked up afterwards, and it had turned into some weird kind of foreplay. Ilya would say some asshole remark, maybe wink at him. Shane would be determined to win the face-off. It was thrilling. Exciting. Now? God, it would still be thrilling. Even thinking about it, Shane knew his heart would race in the presence of Ilya Rozanov. But it wouldn’t be exciting. He’d have to restrain himself from dropping to his knees on the ice and begging Ilya to...to what? Take him back? Like they were a *couple?*

Fuck, maybe Ilya was right. They were nothing. Could *be* nothing. The sooner Shane accepted that, the better. *Yeah, ‘cause its that fucking easy* .

Another reporter stepped in. “Did you hear Nashville won tonight? You won’t have to play Rozanov!”

Nashville won. That meant Boston lost the series two to four. It was confirmed - he wouldn’t be facing Ilya. His heart plummeted. *Well, guess I* did *want to see him.* Shane had to swallow before he could respond. He tried to give them a smile. “It might surprise everyone, but I actually enjoy playing against Rozanov. I’ll look forward to facing Nashville though. They are a good team.”

Shane answered a few more questions before heading back to shower and get dressed. The team might be expecting some sort of pep talk from him, but he couldn't be bothered. He'd get it together for Friday - game seven. He didn't have it in him at that moment to say much of anything to anyone. Hayden tried to engage at some point - congratulating him for his third period goal. Shane knew he was spacing out and Hayden blessedly left without pressing.

When Shane got home, he considered a beer, but decided against it. Instead he went to bed and found the Nashville-Boston highlights on his phone. Ilya looked fucking depressed during his post-game interview. Shane couldn't help but wonder if it's because he was disappointed too? Had he wanted to see Shane? Shane shook his head to himself. Boston had just lost the playoffs, that's why Ilya looked sad and disengaged from the interviews. Ilya was giving one word answers, the whole clip was over in less than two minutes.

"It might surprise everyone, but I actually enjoy playing against Rozanov..."

Ilya watched the clip from the previous night again, rubbing his ribs - which were still sore from the bruising they'd taken. He watched the flicker of emotion cross Shane's gaze when the reporter told him about Boston's loss. Shane was disappointed. And he obviously hadn't known Boston was out of the playoffs until that moment. Well, obviously to Ilya. Maybe not to anyone else.

Did he really know Shane so well he could tell these things?

Fuck. He was supposed to be *getting over* Shane Hollander.

Ilya watched a third time, noticing the way Shane swallowed before responding to the reporter. They way his Adam's apple moved up and down. The hollow in his throat. How many times had he licked that spot?

The ghost of a smile on Shane's lips as he spoke. Ilya always enjoyed playing against Shane too. They were two of the best players in the league. It was nice to feel truly challenged. It *was* foreplay when they played hard.

Ilya caught himself chewing his lip. Fuck, he missed Shane. He muttered a curse in Russian and forced himself to turn off the TV. Of course he wasn't going to get over Shane if he watched a stupid fucking five minute clip of him three times in a row. Ilya paced his penthouse with nervous energy for a moment before grabbing his keys and striding out the door. He'd take one of his cars for a drive.

Ilya drove his McLaren fifty kilometres outside Boston before he pulled over at a coastal lookout. He got out and looked east across the ocean. He wasn't going back this summer. To Russia. The playoffs had ended for him the day before. What the fuck was he doing for the next four months? Why did he keep thinking about Shane fucking Hollander and his massive forest mansion. Cottage? Whatever the fuck it was called.

It wasn't just this summer either. This time next year he'd be a free agent. He could play for almost any team that could afford him. Maybe he'd go west. Then he'd only have to see Shane twice a year.

Or he could stay in Boston. Maybe he could marry Svetlana, get his US citizenship. He liked her, she wouldn't mind if their marriage wasn't exactly *loving* . It would be respectful, they could certainly continue to satisfy each other.

Satisfy ? Would he be satisfied with that life? It beat going back to Russia. Sure. It was a life most men could only dream about. He thought back to his early hockey days - when his skill had become apparent and his dad *did* seem proud of him. He'd been so young, his mom was alive, hockey was fun and exciting and made his family happy. Made him happy. He really had loved it - the way Shane did. It was only as he got older and recognized his father for who he was, after his mother's death - hockey became an escape.

But then hockey brought him Shane. How did he escape from this feeling *now* ?

Montreal, June 2017

They lost the series against Nashville in five games. Shane knew he should be upset. Ashamed. Embarrassed. He had not played his best. He'd still played well - he *always* played *well* . But it would have been nice to win one or two more games. Score a few more goals. Still, he'd scored five goals in five games. Very respectable. No one would suggest he hadn't been top of his game. Except *he* knew he hadn't been .

Shane couldn't help wondering if he would have played differently against Ilya? Did Ilya realize Shane hadn't played his best?

Did Ilya even *watch* Shane's games? Shane had watched every single one of Ilya's. He'd noticed how Ilya had continued to play with an injury - his ribs probably. He'd desperately wanted to text him *something* , but what? What could he possibly say?

The game was starting, and Shane tried to focus on the TV. He was rooting for the Admirals to win - their captain, Scott Hunter, deserved to *finally* hoist the Stanley Cup. The game was intense and managed to hold his focus, a welcome distraction from how lost he'd been feeling for the last two weeks since they'd been eliminated. Or if he was being honest, the last two months since that night at Ilya's apartment.

Shane even stood up and cheered for the Admirals when they won. He was genuinely happy for Hunter and his team. He didn't even register what was happening at first, when a man in street clothes jumped onto the ice and Hunter pulled him into his arms. Shane's jaw dropped, and he sat back down on his couch, hard. Were they - making out? With tongue!

Holy shit. Was that Scott Hunter's boyfriend?

Was Scott Hunter gay?

Ilya. The sound of the TV became background noise as Shane's vision swam with images of Ilya's face. Shane's hands flew to his cheeks, which were flushed and hot, before moving up to press on his temples. This couldn't be real. Shane's breath came in short gasps. His heart was racing.

What did this *mean* ?

Shane's phone buzzed on the coffee table in front of him. He could *just* make out the notification. It was a message. From *Lily.*

Shane dove for his phone.

Ilya: Are you watching the game?

Ilya held his breath as he waited for a response. There was no way Shane *wasn't* watching the game. He was fucking obsessed with hockey, and it was the Stanley Cup final. Ilya had no idea whether Shane would respond at all - maybe he'd moved on? Maybe he was watching with his teammates? Maybe he was with Rose? But Scott Hunter had just kissed another *man* . On television. Nationally broadcasted, live television.

Jane: Yes

Ilya exhaled in a huff. It wasn't much - yet. But it was a response. Those three little bubbles started bouncing, and Ilya's heart rate sped up with every second Shane took to respond further.

The bubbles suddenly disappeared and Ilya's jaw clenched. Christ, this was torture. Should *he* say something?

Jane: Please tell me this changes things...

Oh, Shane . Ilya looked up at the ceiling as he rolled his lips together. Ilya had no fucking clue *how* exactly it would change things. All he knew was that his first thought - the moment he witnessed Scott Hunter sucking face with some cute guy on the ice, was of Shane. He saw Shane the way he'd looked at Ilya in his apartment back in April, *begging* Ilya not to send him away. And he was filled with so much regret and remorse. And longing. It was agony.

Ilya: I think so. Yes.

Jane: Thank God.

Jane: I miss you

Ilya's hand covered his mouth as he stifled a sob at Shane's words. He'd give just about anything to be with Shane right now. Blinking rapidly, Ilya's thumbs flew across his phone's keyboard.

Ilya: Are you going to be in Vegas?

Ilya was flying out in two days for the NHL Awards in Las Vegas. They would be held in three days' time. Ilya chewed his lower lip before typing out another message.

Ilya: I've missed you too.

So much. Ilya didn't add that, but *fuck.*

Jane: Yeah. In two days.

Jane: God, I don't want to wait that long.

Ilya was grinning now. He'd forgotten how fucking *eager* Shane could be. He was probably checking if he could switch his flights right now. Ilya chuckled to himself. It had taken all of five texts from Shane and Ilya felt happier than he had been in *months.* Clearly *ending things*

had not worked to tamp down his emotions. He was still completely in love with the boring Canadian.

Jane: I could be in Boston tomorrow morning!

Jane: Fuck no, my parents are coming tomorrow. We are going out for dinner.

Ilya: It's okay. It would be weird if we both arrived in Vegas from Boston anyway.

Jane: Oh shit. You're right! Sorry.

Ilya: I wish you were here too.

They continued to text well into the night. They both rewatched Scott Hunter's post-game interview, discussed what it might mean - generally speaking. Neither one touched on what it would mean for *them.*

Jane: Do you want to Skype?

Ilya *did* want to see Shane. But he felt too raw. He wasn't sure he could look at Shane right now and *not* pour his heart out. He'd probably tell Shane how much he loved him, how wrong he'd been, how sorry he was for hurting him, and how awful the last two months had been.

Ilya: Tomorrow. Get some sleep.

Jane: Okay, yeah. Tomorrow. Goodnight Ilya.

Chapter End Notes

Next up is our heavy-angst to HEA at the NHL Awards!! Remember Ilya went to the club with Scott...so what if Shane weren't injured and he was also in Vegas!!!!

Look, I apologized for chapter 1 and I think I'm making up for it here? If you know me, you know I love our boys too much to break them up forever!

Chapter 3: So Much To Say

Chapter Summary

The reunion we've all been waiting for.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry it took so long to get this final chapter posted but I promise (I hope) it was worth the wait...even if it took months. In the grand scheme of things it took our boys YEARS to get here, what's another couple months right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Vegas, June 2017 - the day before the NHL Awards

Ilya: Just checked in. Room 1842

Shane's flight didn't even land for an hour, but Ilya knew Shane would appreciate the text waiting for him when he arrived in Vegas.

Because Ilya *knew* Shane like that.

Ilya sat down on the edge of the king bed and scrubbed his hands over his face. They had avoided any talk over the last two days of *how* Scott Hunter's very public coming out would actually change things for them. Ilya told himself it was because it wasn't the type of conversation you have over text, or even Skype - though they hadn't actually gotten a chance to video chat the night before, what with Shane's parents visiting him.

Now it was only hours before he'd see Shane again, and as excited as Ilya was, he was also...terrified. What was he supposed to do? Tell Shane he's so fucking in love with him he hasn't been able to think about anything else for *months?* That he'd tossed and turned every night. He'd forced himself to eat, but didn't enjoy the food. He'd wanted to smoke so fucking bad, but he couldn't even be bothered to go buy a pack of cigarettes. Hockey, his cars, women - none of it had appealed to him.

How did he tell Shane he'd been an *idiot* ? Sure, he'd been trying to *protect* himself. But all he'd managed to do was break his own fucking heart when he told Shane to leave that night.

“I love you, and I’m an idiot, and I’m *so* sorry.” Ilya tried out the words - in Russian. It was somehow less embarrassing to be talking to himself in the empty hotel room in Russian.

He was fairly confident Shane felt the same way. But that didn’t mean Shane would forgive him. Or that it was even enough for...what? Ilya felt like his heart was being squeezed in a vice as his thoughts spiraled further.

With a sigh Ilya got up and changed so he could hit the hotel gym for an hour. He needed to burn off some of his nervous energy. It was all useless conjecture. Shane would be here in two hours and Ilya would find out how Shane felt then - would he forgive him? Ilya would also find out if he was brave enough to tell Shane how *he* felt when he saw him.

No matter what, he was going to *see* Shane soon. Ilya focused on that while he pushed himself on the treadmill. He’d see Shane, his perfect face. His freckles. Would he be wearing his glasses?

Ilya had only just put his jeans back on after his shower when he heard a knock at his door ninety minutes later. He didn’t let himself think too hard about it before rushing to open it.

Shane. There he was. With his suitcase, and suit bag, eyes widening as he took in freshly showered, shirtless Ilya.

“Did you not book a room, Hollander?” Ilya smirked as he stepped back to let Shane in.

Shane blinked, finally tearing his gaze from Ilya’s bare chest and meeting his gaze. Ilya gestured to his bags. “What? No. I mean - yes. I have a room. It's just chaos in the lobby, and I didn’t feel like waiting to check in right now.”

Ilya’s smirk widened into a grin. “Always so eager.” He couldn’t help the way his voice deepened as he said it. Shane was *here.*

Shane raised an eyebrow at Ilya, not backing down. “ *You* gave me your room number before I even landed.” It was a challenge, just like before, like it always was with them. *This* hadn’t changed.

“Yes.” Ilya couldn't take it anymore. Shane was right here, in his room. He closed the distance between them, and brought his mouth down on Shane's, one big hand wrapping around the back of his neck, fingers tangling with silky strands of his hair.

Shane moaned as his hands came up to Ilya’s chest, the feel of his fingers as they grazed Ilya’s nipples causing Ilya to growl low in his throat. Then Shane *pushed* , and backed Ilya up against the wall, before pressing himself flush against Ilya, his hands coming up to cup Ilya’s face as he deepened the kiss. His tongue sliding against Ilya’s, a soft whimper coming from Shane, as if he’d been starving, hungry for Ilya, and finally, *finally* he could feast.

Their kiss was frantic, bruising, both men wanting more, needing to be closer. Ilya’s arms wrapped tightly around Shane, hands moving down his waist to cup his perfect ass in the thin athletic shorts he’d worn on the plane. The embrace had them grinding against each other in moments.

“ *Ilya,”* Shane breathed against Ilya’s lips. The sound of Shane saying his name made his breath catch and a sudden prickling sensation arose behind his eyes. Ilya let his head fall back against the wall while Shane’s mouth trailed hot, wet kisses down his jaw, to his neck. Finally he gave Ilya’s bear tattoo a chaste kiss.

“Missed this guy,” Shane brushed his fingers lightly over the tattoo. Ilya huffed a laugh at that and finally looked down at Shane, feeling at least somewhat more composed.

The sight of Shane though, lips swollen from their kiss, face flushed, highlighting his freckles - Ilya’s chest felt too tight. He brought a hand up and brushed his knuckles across Shane’s cheek. “Shane...”

But Shane’s hands were at Ilya’s fly, pushing his jeans and briefs down together and Shane dropped to his knees in front of Ilya. “Oh fuck, *Shane* .” Ilya didn’t take his eyes off the beautiful, brave man who’d stolen his heart - probably years ago if he was being honest - as he took Ilya into his mouth, eyes closing blissfully as he moaned around Ilya’s cock. Ilya’s knees almost buckled and he raked his fingers through Shane’s hair, leaning harder against the wall for purchase.

“You’re so fucking perfect,” Ilya mumbled in Russian, forcing himself to keep his eyes open as he watched Shane work his mouth up and down his cock. “So fucking beautiful.” How had he *ever* thought he would be able to get over Shane? The sight of him, his mouth on Ilya’s cock, the feel of his tongue as he ran it over Ilya’s slit, it completely undid Ilya. He marveled - not for the first time, at the way Shane’s enthusiasm for Ilya’s cock seemed to fucking *do* something for Ilya. Even years ago, when Shane was completely inexperienced, when he’d never even sucked a dick before Ilya’s, Ilya’s self-control would dissolve under Shane’s eager ministrations.

Today was no different - other than the fact that it was *completely* different and had Ilya biting back all the things he wanted to say. *I love you.* “Love your mouth,” Ilya said instead.

Before long, Ilya’s breath was coming in short gasps, his toes starting to curl on the rough hotel carpet. “Shane...” he warned. But Shane didn’t pull off him as he often did, instead taking Ilya’s release, swallowing like he didn’t want to miss a drop. Ilya swore and fisted both hands into Shane’s hair as he thrust one last time into Shane’s mouth.

Shane sat back on his heels, coughing once as he wiped a hand over his mouth. Ilya’s legs finally gave out on him and he lowered himself to the floor, his back still against the wall. “Jesus, Hollander,” Ilya kicked his pants off the rest of the way before pulling one knee up to rest a forearm on it.

Shane crawled forward and smiled softly, before leaning in to give Ilya a tender kiss that had Ilya’s eyes stinging again. What the fuck was wrong with him today?

“Yeah, that was...” Shane pulled back to search Ilya’s eyes.

“Intense,” Ilya finished for him. Shane simply nodded, his eyes glazing over with desire as his gaze raked down Ilya’s naked form. He was probably rock hard and leaking, and Ilya loved that he knew that about Shane.

Ilya pushed himself up, taking Shane's hand in his and tugging Shane up with him. Ilya started pulling Shane's T-shirt up and Shane quickly finished taking it off as Ilya pushed his shorts down, Shane stumbling backwards as he worked to kick his sneakers off. Ilya held him firmly by the waist, guiding him towards the bed as he nipped Shane's neck, his earlobe. "Ah fuck. Ilya." Ilya grunted and - checking to make sure Shane's shorts and shoes had successfully been removed, threw himself onto the bed with Shane.

Shane moaned when Ilya took his cock into his mouth. "Ilya. Shit. Oh my God. Mmm. How.." Reducing Shane to gibberish and curse words made Ilya's heart soar. He reveled in it as his hands moved to run up Shane's quads, the dip of his hips, his abs, his pecs. God he was the most perfectly sculpted human Ilya had ever seen, touched, tasted. He wanted to tell him again how beautiful he was, in English, but he'd have to take his mouth off Shane's cock, which he definitely didn't want to do. It was really quite the problem.

Fortunately, Shane was never going to last long, and was coming into Ilya's throat moments later. Ilya crawled up next to him afterwards, propping himself up on an elbow to look down on Shane's blissed out face.

Ilya realized he was smiling at the smile on Shane's lips. God, he would do anything to make Shane smile. His own smile faltered at the thought of having hurt Shane. He'd been an idiot. A stupid, fucking idiot. But Shane was here now, and things would be different. Somehow.

Ilya brushed the hair back from Shane's forehead, causing Shane to open his eyes. They gazed at each other for what felt like a long time.

"Hello." Ilya finally said with a lopsided smile.

Shane grinned. "Hi."

"You are very beautiful," Ilya's expression turned more serious as he trailed his fingers down Shane's cheek, over his collarbone, before resting in the middle of his chest. He could feel Shane's heart beat like this, pounding away in time with his own.

"Ilya," Shane pushed himself up on his elbows, causing Ilya's hand to fall away. Suddenly, Ilya couldn't meet Shane's gaze as shame washed over him. He rolled off the bed and pulled his jeans back on. Shane hesitated a moment, watching him, before reaching down to grab his own shorts and T-shirt.

Ilya cleared his throat as he looked down at Shane sitting on the edge of the bed. "I think, we should talk."

"Are you going to put on a shirt?" Shane asked. Ilya gave a lopsided grin at the pleading look in Shane's eyes and pulled a - very tight, T-shirt out of his suitcase.

"Better?" Ilya tried not to flex as Shane raked his gaze over him, sighing and rolling his eyes, before moving back to sit cross legged on the bed.

Ilya took a deep breath. He knew what he wanted to say. This couldn't be harder than the last two months had been.

“I’m sorry,” he said softly, sitting on the bed next to Shane.

“It’s okay,” Shane was quick to lean in, a hand on Ilya’s knee.

“No. Shane. I was an idiot. I thought, there is no hope.” Ilya gestured vaguely with his hands. “And so we cannot continue, it was becoming too...” Ilya struggled with how to describe the torment of wanting all of Shane, but knowing he could never fully have him. They could never have everything. Maybe that was still an unrealistic dream, but at least now, he felt like it might be a dream worth fighting for.

“Too hard.” Ilya sighed. It was a weak description.

Shane nodded once, slowly. “I...can understand that.”

Ilya shook his head at Shane. “No. It did not work. I was wrong. Because then it was even *harder.* ”

Shane was nodding more sincerely now. “I know.” Shane was rising to his knees now, both hands on Ilya’s knees. “But Ilya, Scott Hunter is *gay* .”

“Yes,” Ilya agreed tentatively. “But his boyfriend is...not another hockey player. Not a *rival* hockey player.”

“Right.” Shane deflated slightly, sinking back to his heels, and Ilya cursed himself for taking some of the wind out of his sails. Ilya placed his hands over Shane’s on his knees in encouragement.

“So. You are thinking, if Scott Hunter...then we...” Ilya swallowed past the lump in his throat. Why the fuck was this so hard?

“Then we...I don’t know Ilya. *Something* though. Right?” Shane looked pleadingly at Ilya, and Ilya could only nod, not trusting himself to say anything else just then.

Something.

But I want everything, Ilya thought as Shane’s lips brushed his. And suddenly it didn’t matter that they hadn’t figured it out.

He would take whatever Shane would give him.

The next day, after the NHL awards, Las Vegas

Shane: Are you coming to my room?

It was after midnight already and Shane was a bit annoyed. He thought they’d been on the same page. After the awards show, they would both mingle a bit and then head back upstairs - to Shane’s hotel room. Shane had been back in his room for almost two hours.

Lily: Come to the club. It's Scott Hunter night.

Lily: <link>

Shane frowned at his phone as he opened the link Ilya had sent.

Shane: Are you serious? That's a GAY club. Why are you there?

Lily: Like you aren't totally fucking gay Hollander.

Lily: I'm here to support Hunter. A bunch of his teammates are here too. It is not weird.

Shane: Oh my God. You fucking would.

Lily: You should too. Show of support. From another captain.

Lily: <photo>

Lily: I think I will dance, lots of sexy men on this dancefloor, all very gay.

Shane: OMG. Asshole.

Shane stared at the picture Ilya had sent him for a full 30 seconds before he deleted it. It was fairly tame, but that combined with the idea of other men watching him dance...

"Shit." Shane jumped off his bed and pulled on one of the outfits his stylist had picked out for exactly this kind of event - thank fucking God - and ran out of his hotel room.

Twenty minutes later Shane was walking nervously around the perimeter of the dancefloor - which took up most of the space in the club, looking for Scott Hunter's VIP booth, when he felt strong arms wrap around him from behind.

"Ilya!" he squealed. "What are you doing?" Ilya pulled him further away from the dancefloor as he nipped at Shane's neck.

"You came!" Ilya sounded almost in awe. And maybe a little drunk.

Shane pushed Ilya off of him, glancing around, but no one seemed to think anything of their behaviour. "Yeah. Well." Shane gestured vaguely at Ilya like that explained his lapse in judgement.

Ilya was grinning like he'd just won the Stanley Cup. He looked ridiculous. He looked incredible. Shane had to look away before he did something stupid like touch him. Or kiss him. Instead he looked back towards the dance floor and the tables. "Where's Hunter?"

"He just left, I was finishing my beer and was about to head out when I saw *you* ."

"Oh," Shane wasn't sure if he was feeling anxious or exhilarated at the prospect that there were no other hockey players to recognize them here. "So it's just us?"

Ilya inched closer to Shane. “Mmhmm,” he murmured as he leaned down to brush his lips against Shane’s ear, sending shivers straight down his spine to his cock. He scanned the room, but they were tucked away, next to an empty booth, anyone looking would just think Ilya was whispering something to him over the music. Or think they were just another couple in a dark, secluded corner of the club.

“ *Oh God,”* Shane breathed as Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane and moved his hips against him in time to the music. Why was this fucking hot? Shane should be freaking out. Someone could see them. Someone could recognize them. Someone could take a picture.

“Dance with me,” Ilya’s breath was hot on Shane’s neck and Shane felt his body move with Ilya’s of its own volition. “Just one song, then we can leave.” Shane clung to Ilya’s biceps, burying his face in Ilya’s neck - why did he have to smell so fucking good?

“Okay,” Shane said, his lips against Ilya’s collarbone. Not kissing him, but tasting him, his tongue darting out as he ground against Ilya, his cock already rock hard, sliding against Ilya’s through their pants. Ilya groaned, and Shane felt it more than heard it. Shane had never in his life understood why people liked to go to the club and just *dance* . Until now.

Holy fuck.

The music. The atmosphere. “ *Ilya* ...” Shane was pretty sure the song was ending, but it didn’t matter, they *needed* to leave. Now.

Ilya murmured something to him, but Shane didn’t catch it. He blinked to regain his focus through the haze of lust, as Ilya started walking away from him - towards the exit. Shane hurried to keep up, but didn’t engage with Ilya until they were in the Uber five minutes later. Even then, he didn’t dare do more than tap the side of his shoe against Ilya’s, his hands resting in his lap. Neither of them spoke during the short ride back to the hotel, the tension in the air palpable.

Despite being well after midnight, there were a number of people still awake and milling about the lobby, riding the elevator to their rooms - it was Vegas after all. Shane and Ilya remained silent, Shane stealing glances at Ilya in the elevator, focusing on keeping his breathing under control. They both exited on Shane’s floor, and Shane had to force himself to walk calmly, casually, to his room.

Ilya crowded him from behind as he tapped his card to unlock the door, and he noticed his hand visibly trembling. God, he was so fucking turned on, and Ilya hadn’t even touched him for the last fifteen minutes.

In the room, they wasted no time, Ilya’s shirt was off before his mouth was on Shane’s. Both of them kicked their shoes off as they stumbled towards the bed. Shane pushed his own pants down, before briefly breaking their kiss to remove his own shirt.

They tumbled onto the bed, Shane thrusting up against Ilya as Ilya kissed his jaw, his neck. “God, why was that so hot?”

“Because.” Ilya licked the sensitive skin behind Shane’s ear, causing him to gasp, his fingers digging into Ilya’s ass. “You like to be watched, Hollander.” Shane rolled his neck, giving Ilya more access as Ilya’s words washed over him. Was that it? His cock seemed to think so, he could already feel the precome dripping down the shaft.

“Fuck,” Shane breathed, thrusting back against Ilya, who was grinding his cock against Shane’s hip. Fuck that, Ilya was just as turned on as Shane. “What’s your excuse?” Shane challenged, running his hands up the hard planes of Ilya’s back.

Ilya pulled back to look down at Shane. There was something so raw in his gaze. “Shane...” he whispered. Holy shit. Shane’s heart - already pounding against his ribs, stuttered in his chest. But Ilya hesitated. Or maybe he was gathering courage?

Either way, Shane chickened out before Ilya could, and surged up to kiss him. He deepened the kiss almost immediately, sliding his tongue along Ilya’s, Ilya’s groan reverberating through his chest.

“God, Ilya,” Shane gasped. “Need you to fuck me.” Ilya grunted in response, and reached for the lube - which Shane had already laid out with a condom on the bedside table, as Shane flipped over.

Shane took two steadying breaths before he felt Ilya push against his rim with one finger, groaning as it slowly slid inside. Shane lifted his ass back towards Ilya, hands fisting in the sheets. Within seconds Ilya added another finger and Shane’s eyes rolled to the back of his head. He was as relaxed as he’d ever been, plus this would be the second night in a row they’d fucked. Shane knew he would feel it tomorrow. He wanted to feel it for *days*.

Ilya added a third finger and Shane’s hips jerked as Ilya grazed his prostate. “C’mon. Fuck. I’m ready.”

“Yes,” was all Ilya said as he removed his fingers from Shane’s ass. Shane whimpered at the emptiness. Then Ilya was entering him, slowly, and Shane moaned at how good it felt. How full.

“Want it hard,” he demanded. Ilya slowly pulled almost all the way out again, and then slammed home with such force that Shane cried out. “Fuck. Yes. Like that.”

Ilya set a punishing rhythm, jack-hammering his hips, until Shane was panting, he was so close he thought he might come without even touching his dick. As it was, he knew it would only take one pump and he’d make a mess of the sheets. Ilya growled behind him, and Shane knew he was close too.

Ilya pressed one hand up Shane’s spine, to rest between Shane’s shoulder blades, the other holding Shane by the hip as he pounded into him, the rhythm becoming more erratic with each thrust. Finally, Shane took one hand and gripped his own cock as Ilya found his release, Shane coming all over the sheets beneath him moments laters.

Ilya carefully pulled out, as Shane moved over to collapse on the bed. He shivered when Ilya returned, and Shane felt the warm cloth against him, Ilya tenderly taking care of him before

getting them both to slide under the covers.

They laid there for a while, *cuddling* - there was no other word for it, when Shane finally gathered up the courage to ask what he'd been thinking about since Scott Hunter kissed Kip Grady days ago.

"Come to my cottage this summer?" He whispered the words against Ilya's bear tattoo. He heard Ilya's breath hitch and pressed on, determined. "It's very secluded. No one will see us there. You could stay for weeks and no one would even know..." He could feel Ilya's heart beat and was pretty sure it had started racing along with his own.

"Weeks?" Ilya said quietly.

Shane shifted so he could look Ilya in the eye. "Haven't you ever wondered what it would be like? To have more time?" He knew he was right, Shane could see it, in the way Ilya stared at him with that raw, unchecked need. Yes, Ilya wanted this. He hadn't read it wrong.

Ilya swallowed. "Yes." Ilya kissed Shane's forehead, his cheek, his eyelids, and Shane couldn't help but smile at Ilya's simple acceptance of Shane's invitation. "I will come to the cottage."

Shane felt giddy. So much so that he *giggled* . That should be embarrassing, but he didn't care.

Ilya was coming to the cottage. For *weeks.*

They'd figure something out.

They'd figure everything out.

Chapter End Notes

Well there you have it! The cottage 2017 is still happening. I struggled with this last chapter a bit because parts of it didn't feel Ilya enough to me, but then I realized, Ilya would never have broke things off with Shane in the first place, this IS a different Ilya. But don't worry, he came around. Hard.

Phew...the HEA/HFN was screaming at me to get out, glad we're finally here. And this fic is officially complete :) thank you everyone who stuck around, and read, (and reread). As always your comments mean everything to me, thanks again <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!