blood on the ice

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blood on the ice

by ghosttotheparty

Summary

Lily: i am alive

Lily: hurt

Lily: but they gave me drugs it's nice

Lily: i want you

Lily: my hands miss yours

or; ilya gets injured on the ice. shane can't handle it.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

It happens fast.

One moment, Shane is skating, head in the game, focussed on the rush of it all, and then there's a crash. A crash that's not entirely out of place in a hockey rink, especially during a game like this, one so charged with tension and pressure— it's been like this since the very start of the game, the air thick with it. Palpable. The fans love it.

But the crash is followed by a sound that Shane hasn't heard before, a sudden hush, a collective gasp, and he distinctly hears someone say, "Oh, *shit*," which is distracting enough that he tears his eyes away from where he's following the puck across the ice, glancing back at where a few other players are gathered along the boards.

They scatter, making way. Shane comes to a stop, and everyone else does too. A time-out isn't even called. It doesn't have to be, not when there's blood so visible, vibrant and vivid on the white of the ice. It's not a lot. But it's enough.

Someone yells for a medic. Someone else echos it.

The players move, some of them getting off the ice entirely, some of them taking off their helmets to see better, and Shane stands there, gripping his stick tightly. The puck slides across the ice and hits the board. Nobody stops it, and nobody goes after it.

Shane glances around, tilting his head, looking, watching as the blood seems to freeze right there, stuck on the ice. It's almost mesmerizing in how bright it is, stark in contrast. It looks fake.

The players move. There's one on the ice, his uniform black. He's laying there, and he shifts a little bit, but Shane can't tell if he's rolling over himself or if someone is moving him. He doesn't notice, because his eyes catch on the player's arm.

81.

Shane's stomach drops. The arena falls silent, clouded by some kind of static, and he's ripping his helmet off and throwing it aside with his hockey stick before he can think anything at all, skating to Ilya's side, pushing past the others. He falls to his knees by Ilya's side, tearing his gloves off, and he's lightheaded, breathing hard, touching Ilya as gently as he can with trembling hands, getting his helmet off. There's blood on it, smeared across the broken visor, across his skin. There's a gash on his forehead. His eyes are closed.

"Ilya," Shane says roughly, holding his head. He can feel everyone looking at him, can feel their eyes on him, on his hands touching Ilya's face, cradling his head, pressing hard onto the gash to stem the bleeding. It's a steady flow, heavy and streaming down the side of Ilya's face. It's striking. "Ilya. Ilya."

Ilya shifts, his head turning a little like he's trying to get away from Shane's touch, but he's unconscious. He's breathing, but he's limp, his arms falling when Shane pulls him closer.

"Fuck," Shane chokes. "Ilya."

Someone grabs Shane's shoulder and tries to pull him away, but he pushes the hand off roughly, shoves it away so he can hold Ilya's head.

Ilya's eyes flutter open for a moment, and they search the ceiling for a moment. Blood falls into one of them, staining the white pink, and Shane can already see, even from a distance, that his pupils are dilated.

Ilya mutters something, something Shane can't understand. He can't even tell if it's English or Russian.

"I'm here," he says breathlessly, one hand stemming the flow of the blood, the other moving to cradle Ilya's cheek. "I'm right here, I—"

"Hollander, get out of the way."

"No, I'm— He's bleeding—"

"Hollander, fucking *move.*"

Someone grabs him. Pulls him. Forces him away, makes him pull his hand away from Ilya's blood. He's fighting it, crying something out, and he barely notices that he can't really see clearly, barely notices that he's sobbing, that someone is pulling him away, dragging him across the ice.

He can't breathe. He's watching over someone's shoulder, gripping their jersey tightly enough that his hands hurt, because Ilya is being pulled up, moved onto a stretcher, and his arm falls over the side of it fucking lifelessly.

Shane is swearing breathlessly, panting, lightheaded, his chest tight. He might be having a heart attack.

And somewhere in the back of his mind, there's something whispering that he's being stupid. He's being too obvious, *way* too fucking obvious, because he's crying, and yelling, and trying to push past whoever the fuck is holding him so he can go back to Ilya's side, so he can hold his hand to his face again, so he can stop the bleeding.

"*Shane."*

"I need— I need to go to— Let go of me—"

"*Shane*," the voice says again, sharply, and Shane recognizes the voice, but he doesn't give a shit who it is, because he can't *see Ilya* anymore, he's out of sight, dragged away. "Look at me, man."

"He's— He's bleeding—"

"Fuck— Come here—"

Shane can't see. He doesn't realize his eyes are closed.

He’s breathing too hard, panting quickly enough that his throat is dry and rough, that his head is light and when he does finally open his eyes, his vision is dim and cloudy. He’s in the locker room, and someone is shouting for somebody else to leave. Shane barely hears it.

He’s running his hands across his face, hiding behind them, squeezing his eyes shut and pushing the heels of his hands onto them. He walks into a row of lockers, his forearms slamming into them loudly, rattling locks, and he stays there, panting against the cool metal until it’s wet with condensation.

“Shane.”

He makes a noise, squeezing his eyes shut, pressing his hands down over his ears. It’s not even loud in here, except the repetitive, whiny sound that doesn’t seem to get quieter when he hides his ears. He hates it.

“Shane, you need to calm down.”

He groans, stepping closer to the lockers. They’re cold on his face. His eyes burn, and he tries to stop it even though his face is already wet, even though he’s sobbing.

“Fuck, you’re gonna pass out, man,” the voice says. “Come here, look at me.”

Shane is pulled away from the lockers, pulled to face someone, and it’s fucking Hayden looking him in the eye, gripping him by his shoulders tightly, looking at him intently.

“Shane.”

“I—”

“You need to calm down.”

“I— He’s—”

He’s gesturing vaguely, blindly, his hands still trembling, shaking violently.

“I know,” Hayden says intently, nodding, unblinking. “I know.”

“No, I—”

“Shane,” Hayden says, raising his voice a little. “I know. You need to calm down.”

“I can’t— I can’t breathe—”

“Just slow it down,” Hayden says, nodding, his eyes flickering away when Shane’s hands start flying, shaking like he’s trying to dry them, like he’s trying to get away from something even though he’s letting Hayden hold him like this. “You got it. He’s gonna be fine, man.”

“No, he— he’s bleeding—”

“The medics were quick,” Hayden says slowly, evenly. “It’s probably just a concussion, and he’s gonna be fine.”

“He…”

“He’s going to be fine,” Hayden says firmly. “Breathe.”

It takes a while.

He’s fucking exhausted, even though all he’s done is pant and cry and toss his hands in the air behind himself childishly. But he doesn’t feel like he’s overreacted.

“How bad was it?” he asks Hayden when he’s breathing evenly, sitting on the bench next to him. They ignore the obvious. “I don’t…”

“I didn’t see,” Hayden says. His voice is quiet, gentle like he’s worried about sending Shane into another spiral. “I saw the blood on the ice, but I didn’t get a clear view of his face.”

“What the fuck happened?”

Shane isn’t sure if he’s asking about Ilya’s injury or himself.

It’s never happened like that before. He’s had times, sudden moments of breathless panic, chest tight with anxiety, but it’s never been so intense. So pressing. He’s never felt like he’s dying before.

“Bouchard slammed him into the boards,” Hayden says. “He must have been face-first.”

Shane nods slowly.

He’s looking forward, hands hanging between his legs. They’re stained with Ilya’s blood.

“You okay?” Hayden says softly.

“No.”

They’re quiet again. Shane doesn’t know where the others are, if they’re still playing, if they’ve cleaned Ilya’s blood off the ice.

“Shane—”

“We’re not, like…” He trails off, hesitating, stuck, because he doesn’t even know what the fuck he’s trying to say. What he’s trying to defend himself against, how to defend himself against *caring*.

“Shane, I don’t care.”

"…About— About what?"

"Shane, come on, man."

Shane stares at the ground. He doesn't feel attached to his body, like he's floating above his body, watching himself here, sitting in a void next to Hayden Pike.

"I saw how you looked at him," Hayden says softly. "I know, Shane."

Shane shakes his head, hiding his face again, because if Hayden saw it, everyone else did too. He's crying, and he fucking hates it.

"I'm not gonna say anything, Shane," Hayden says gently. "You know that, right?"

"I— I don't know fucking anything, Hayden, I don't…"

"Shane, listen to me. You haven't done anything wrong, and you couldn't help how you reacted to that," Hayden says. "Right, I would have lost my shit if I saw Jackie hurt like that, but— but people are gonna talk, right? They're bound to."

Shane looks at him, quiet, and he nods. His chest is tight again, and he exhales slowly.

"But you've known Rozanov for fucking years now, right, even if you're fucking rivals," Hayden says. "And you guys play each other, like, every few months, and you shot that commercial together, and you see each other pretty often, so you're friends."

He says it firmly, like it's a done deal, like it's true.

"Got it?" Hayden says, raising his eyebrows. "You're friends, and you care about him, because you're friends. It's a friendly rivalry, for the fans, and for the game, and you panicked because that's your friend."

Shane's vision blurs. His eyes sting, and his throat is tight, but he nods.

"Okay?" Hayden says, leaning his head in a little.

"Okay," Shane says weakly. He nods.

"You don't have to explain yourself," Hayden says, his voice softening. "But people are going to talk. You just gotta ignore them, alright?"

"Alright."

"So what you're gonna do now, is you're gonna go wash your hands, and your face, and you're gonna drink some water, and you're gonna change."

"I…"

"Shane. Just do it."

He does.

Hayden leaves the locker room for a few minutes while Shane gathers himself. He feels almost guilty washing Ilya's blood from his hands, and his eyes sting again as he watches the pink soapy water wash down the drain. Like he's discarding it. Throwing it away.

He lets the water, steaming hot, run over his hands for a few moments, closing his eyes.

When he looks in the mirror, he stops. Looks at himself. Stares.

There's blood, dried and cracking, smeared across his cheek and chin, staining his skin from his anxious shield.

His stomach aches, flipping over the way it does when Ilya says something about coming on him or leaving bruises on his neck and chest and arms. He can't help it, looking at the blood like it's Ilya's signature, like he's marked his territory.

He washes his face. The soap makes his skin feel dry, but he ignores it.

He looks like a fucking disaster. His eyes are still red, puffy from crying, his cheeks flushed. Even his lips are reddened.

He turns the faucet to cold, hitting it so hard it hurts his hand, so hard he could break it, and he washes his face one more time. The water is cold enough that he holds back gasps every time he submerges his face. He can't tell if it helps or not when he looks at the mirror again.

He lingers a little longer. The guys come into the locker room, their voices softer than usual, hushed. Shane's chest tightens, and he rubs his hand over it

roughly, exhaling shakily.

The guys fall quiet when he emerges from the bathroom. He keeps his head down, eyes downcast, pretending he isn't… whatever he is.

He can feel them looking at him, curious, watching him as he goes to change. As he folds his clothes, as he pushes his hair out of his face. It's damp with sweat, and he hasn't even showered. He doesn't want to, doesn't feel like wasting any fucking time.

Hayden comes up to him. The others turn away, like he's glaring at them, telling them to fuck off, and Shane's chest aches.

He's quiet, shoving things into his bag absently.

"…Is he…"

"Concussion," Hayden says quietly. "And a broken clavicle. He'll probably need stitches for his face."

Shane's hands are shaking. He fumbles with the zipper of his bag, nodding.

Hayden leaves him alone. He stays by Shane, watching silently as he struggles with the zipper again. It catches on some fabric, snagging and getting stuck, and Shane can only pull

at it for a brief moment before he throws the bag to the ground, exhaling sharply.

Hayden picks it up. Shane watches him, his hands pulling the zipper down, getting the fabric in the bag loose from it, pulling the zipper closed.

Shane looks around the room.

He takes the bag from Hayden's outstretched hand, still looking around the room. Bouchard is talking to someone else, but Shane doesn't notice who it is, or what they're doing. He doesn't think he's ever felt like this before, so fucking angry he's trembling. Enraged.

"Shane," Hayden says quietly. Shane blinks. Glances at him.

"Yeah," he mutters. "Fine."

"It was a bad fucking fall, man," someone is saying. Shane looks toward them again, watching as Bouchard fucking *shrugs,* opening a locker, tugging his shirt up and over his head. "You saw how much blood there was?"

"'S not my fucking fault the guy didn't see me coming," Bouchard says. "It was rough, but it's fucking hockey, man."

"Are you fucking serious?" Shane says before he can stop himself. The room falls quiet, save for the rustling of clothes and the echoes of voices. There's a shower running somewhere, the water dripping steadily.

"What?" Bouchard says, turning toward Shane. "You know how this shit works, don't you, Hollander?"

It sounds condescending. Mean. Mocking.

"*This* isn't how it *works*," Shane snaps, gesturing vaguely. Hayden says his name softly, but Shane ignores him. "You could have the fucking decency to feel *bad* for him."

"Feel *bad,"* Bouchard laughs. "Jesus. Hollander, he got knocked out, and we won. It's hockey."

"You are fucking unbelievable," Shane says flatly, stepping a little closer. "If you need someone to get fucking hospitalized to win a game, it wasn't your fucking game—"

"What's your fucking problem?" Bouchard snaps, a hand lifting and pushing Shane's shoulder. Shane doesn't stumble. "Why are you so worked up about fucking *Rozanov?"*

"What the *fuck* do you want me to say?" Shane says, and he's yelling now, his voice carrying, echoing, and everyone is looking. Watching. Seeing.

"Hollander," Hayden tries again, touching Shane's arm, but Shane pushes him away, throws his arm aside.

“You want me to tell you he’s my fucking *friend?”* Shane says, pushing Bouchard back. He falls against the lockers. “That I’m friends with the guy I’ve known since I was fucking seventeen years old? Is that fucking *astounding* to you?”

“Jesus, Hollander—“

“Or do you wanna hear that I like playing against him?” Shane says, looking into Bouchard’s eyes, unblinking. “Because he’s the best fucking hockey player I know, and the rest of you are fucking *boring.”*

“If he’s so much better than us, why is he the one in the hospital right now?”

“Jesus,” Hayden mutters behind Shane, and there are a few other hushed voices, mumbling something about Bouchard taking this too far, about him being a dick.

Shane steps closer.

“Because you’re a fucking neanderthal,” he says lowly, “who doesn’t *think*.”

Boychard’s face shifts. His eyebrows furrow just the slightest bit, and his eyes narrow, and Shane’s stomach twists.

“Je réfléchis beaucoup en ce moment.”

Shane’s jaw clenches.

“About what?” he says quietly, almost whispering. “Hm?”

“Dois-je dire?” Bouchard whispers, lifting his chin so he’s looking down at Shane.“Téteux?”

And Shane can’t really be blamed for it, can he? In an instant, Bouchard has the confirmation he was looking for, and the room is filled with shouts and curses and echoes that make Shane’s head ache. In an instant, his right hand is blooming with pain, and more blood is staining his skin.

They’re torn apart, ripped away from each other, and Shane tries to fight his way back to him, tries to shove away whoever is grabbing him, pulling him, pushing toward the door.

Hayden and JJ are pushing him, holding him back, looking at him wide-eyed. They look scared, and all Shane can think is fucking *good.*

“Nique ta mère!” Shane is shouting, shoving Hayden’s hands off of him, stumbling back. He’s breathing hard again, and he feels lightheaded again, but he doesn’t fucking care. He isn’t scared anymore, not of fucking Aaron Bouchard. “*Putain de merde.”*

He grabs his bag from the bench Hayden had put it on, and he walks out.

Nobody tries to follow him.

He finds himself sitting outside, his face tucked into the collar of his jacket, staring at his phone. His hands are still shaking, and he tucks them against his chest, focussed on where the phone is balanced on his bent knees. He's sitting on the ground like a child, hidden away from where anyone might see him. He heard the guys leave a little while ago, heard them talking and roughhousing on their way out, and he kept his head ducked.

He's waiting. The screen is off to save the battery, but his notifications are on for the first time in months, and his eyes are trained on it, watching the vague reflection of the tops of the trees around him, leaves swaying and shimmying in the wind that bites at his skin. He texted Ilya a while ago. He doesn't know if he should expect a response.

Please tell me you're okay.

The sky dims, and the streetlights come on, and part of him wonders if the other guys are wondering where he is. Hayden texts him, just a brief *hey you good?* that he responds to with *fine.* Including the period, which he doesn't usually include, and Hayden leaves him alone after saying *lmk if you need anything.*

Shane bites his nails. He hasn't done that in a while, and they're longer and smoother than they used to be. He usually would force his hands away from his mouth, tuck them into his pockets or under his legs, but he doesn't right now. His leg is bouncing, rocking back and forth, and his hands are still shaking, and he can't calm down.

It's nighttime by the time his phone lights up with a notification, and then another, and another from Lily.

He jumps, grabs his phone and opens it quickly, but the messages are in Cyrillic. Shane shifts, moving onto his knees so he's hunching over his phone, clumsily putting the message into the translator app that he downloaded a while ago.

Lily: i am alive

Lily: hurt

Lily: but they gave me drugs it's nice

Lily: i want you

Lily: my hands miss yours

Shane's eyes burn, and he chokes on his breath, sniffling as he tries to open the keyboard to respond, to ask where he is, but Lily sends one more message.

Lily: 2B15

Shane stumbles to his feet, tripping over his bag and grabbing it as he moves so runs the building, out the shadows he's tucked himself into. He stops when he's standing by a streetlight, looking around— the parking lot is almost empty, and he instinctively open the Uber app on his phone, but he doesn't even know where the fuck he's trying to go.

Jane: what hospital?

But Lily doesn't respond, and part of Shane is glad, because Ilya has a fucking concussion, and he really shouldn't be looking at his phone, texting, reading.

Shane lets out a frustrated noise, shaking his phone, and he looks around again, his breath catching.

Almost everyone is gone. It's late. There's no one here.

He rubs his face, squeezing the strap of his bag tightly, groaning quietly.

He should look it up, the closest hospital, maybe find a phone number to ask if Ilya is there, but he can't really think right now, his vision blurred. And he shouldn't be so open about it, about how he wants, *needs,* to see Ilya in his hospital room. He shouldn't let people know this.

He spins around at the sound of the door opening, and there's someone walking out. A woman, maybe a little older than Shane, wearing a polo that's visible under her puffy jacket. Her phone is lighting up her face, and as she walks, Shane can see light reflecting off a laminated lanyard hanging from her neck.

"Excuse me," Shane calls before he can stop himself. The woman looks up, startled, and Shane waves, stepping closer, softening his expression and voice. "Hi, sorry, I—"

"Hi," she says lightly. She recognises him. He can see it in her eyes.

"Hi, uhm, do you— do you work here?"

"I do," she says, nodding. "I'm in event coordination."

"Uhm, would you— do you know what hospital players are taken to?" he asks. His voice is shaking. "When they're injured?"

She nods, something like understanding settling in her eyes.

"Yeah, the closest is Montreal General," she says. "Really complex cases might be taken to different places that are more suited to treating them, but Rozanov was taken to Montreal."

Shane's stomach twists. He already knew she knows, but *fuck.* He's fucked.

“Okay,” he says shakily, nodding, hesitating. “Thank you.”

He starts to turn away, opening his phone again, but she speaks again.

“I’m headed out right now if you want a ride,” she says kindly. “You can skip chatting with a cab driver.”

He hesitates again.

“I…”

“I won’t say anything,” she says, her voice a little quieter. “I mind my business.”

“I— I don’t wanna impose—“

“It’s on my way,” she says dismissively, tossing a hand. “Come on.”

He follows her. She doesn’t leave much room for argument.

“What’s your name, by the way?” Shane asks as he follows behind her. She glances back at him, looking up— she’s even shorter than Shane’s mom.

“Mia.”

“Mia,” Shane repeats, nodding, holding a trembling hand out for her to shake. She seems to notice the bruising on his knuckles, because she doesn’t squeeze very tightly. “Shane.”

“Very nice to meet you, Shane.”

Her car is small, old, and it takes a second to start up. Shane rubs his face again, looking out the window, hugging his bag to his chest. Mia is quiet.

There’s a rosary hanging from the rearview mirror, and there’s a photo tucked into the sun visor. Shane can’t see what it’s of, but it’s colorful. There are stickers everywhere, rainbows and hearts and stars and bugs, and Shane thinks he kind of loves her.

“So what— what does event coordination entail?” he asks as they’re pulling out of the parking lot.

“I make a lot of phone calls,” she says heavily. He lets out a laugh. “Mostly scheduling and stuff. It’s not the most exciting job in the world.”

“Don’t know what we’d do without you, though,” Shane says. She laughs lightly.

“I like it,” she says. “And I love hockey, so it works for me.”

Shane nods even though she’s looking at the road. She knows. He knows she knows. It makes his stomach hurt, and his hands shake, and this is a huge fucking mistake.

“I’m not gonna say anything,” Mia says like she can hear him thinking. “I’m not gonna run to the press to tell them.”

"…I appreciate it," Shane says.

"For what it's worth, I convinced a friend of mine to get into hockey because of you and Rozanov."

Shane blinks.

"Huh?"

"Yeah, he's really into rivalry shit. Wasn't hard to make him watch some YouTube compilations of you guys competing."

He laughs, and she glances at him, grinning like she's proud.

"And also I don't really know shit about either of you outside of hockey," she says, gesturing vaguely as she slows to a stop at a red light. "I don't really watch, like, ESPN specials or anything like that. I know he's Russian."

"He's *Russian?"*

A laugh bursts out of Mia, and Shane grins. It makes his face sore.

"And *you* are a jackass," Mia says, and it sounds like a good thing coming from her. Shane laughs again.

"Have you been to this hospital?" Mia asks after a moment.

"Uh, no."

"The help desk is right in front of the entrance, you'll need to go up and sign in as a visitor, it shouldn't take that long," Mia says. She leans forward as she's turning around a corner, looking up and down the road. "Do you know his room number?"

"It's—" Shane pauses, checking the message again. Lily hasn't said anything else. "2B15."

"So that's second floor, B-wing, room 15," Mia says. "You go up and left, the room should be on the right."

"How the fuck do you know all of this?" Shane says. He reloads the messages again. Nothing.

"Uh," Mia says. She hesitates for a moment. "My mom spent a lot of time there, I had, like, a visitor fast pass to see her."

Shane looks at her. She has a light expression on her face, so calm it looks forced.

"She's in a home now," she says lightly. "She's alright. Moderately."

Shane snorts. She smiles.

“Alzheimer’s,” she says, glancing at him. “Sucks, but if anything good came of it, she doesn’t remember hating me for most of my life, so…”

“Hating you?” Shane says. Mia exhales, nodding.

“I was outted when I was fourteen,” she says lightly. “She kicked me out for a while, and she tried to send me to conversion therapy, and it was… It was rough.”

“That fucking sucks,” Shane says stupidly.

“Yeah,” Mia says, shrugging. “But when her memory started going she forgot all about it, and she loves me again.”

Shane is quiet for a moment, and he can’t help but think about Ilya’s father. Confused and frustrated and still so critical of Ilya right up to his last day. He doesn’t want to think that Mia’s mother is *better* than him, but he doesn’t know if she’s *worse.*

“Don’t you hate it?” he asks.

“All the time,” she says. “But I’ll take whatever I can get. And I feel bad just leaving her there all alone.”

Shane hums softly, looking at her. The car lights make her look blue.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “That you went through that.”

She shrugs again. She does that a lot.

“It sucked. But it’s done.”

Shane nods even though she isn’t looking at him.

“And I like my life,” she continues, stopping at a red light. “I mean, it's tough, right, but I have really good friends, and I like my jobs, and I’m managing just fine.”

“Managing what?”

She pauses, glancing at him. Smiling.

“Life,” she says. Her hands slide over the steering wheel to rest at the bottom, and she watches cars pass by them. The turn signal clicks rhythmically. “Paying for mom’s home, paying bills, et cetera. I work two jobs, I’m actually on my way to work after this. And I have rat that’s diabetic but I’d rather kill myself than give him up.”

Shane blinks, a laugh bursts out of him.

“I didn’t know rats could be diabetic.”

“Most don’t think about it much.”

They fall quiet again, and when the light changes, she turns. The clicking stops.

“People are, uhm.” She stops, tilting her head. “I was on Twitter when I was coming out of the arena.”

“Right.”

“People are talking about you,” she says. “And Rozanov.”

Shane nods. His stomach twists.

“I— I’m not trying to freak you out,” Mia says, looking at him briefly. “I just— I mean— Our situations are totally different, obviously, but I kind of get it, kind of like— just. As a queer person.”

Shane stared at her. He thinks she would be talking with her hands if she wasn’t driving. One of her hands tosses occasionally, gesturing vaguely.

“Right,” he says slowly.

“But I just— I get it. Kind of,” she says. “And it’s gonna suck, and it might be terrible, but you— you’re gonna be fine.”

Shake blinks.

Mia glances at him, biting her lip like she’s nervous.

“Not to overstep,” she adds. “You just— You’ll have people in your corner, whenever you need them.”

“Thank you,” Shane says quietly. “That— It means a lot.”

Mia glances at him again. She seems to settle.

“And, for the record, you’re already, like, a player that people look up to.”

“Am I?”

“Uh, yeah,” Mia says dryly, almost sarcastic. “A Japanese-Canadian dude setting international records in a white man’s sport? Come on, man.”

Shane laughs, rubbing his cheek bashfully.

“Thank you.”

They’re quiet again. Shane takes a slow breath, ignoring the tightness in his throat.

“So, I— I have to ask about the stickers,” he says after a while.

“What stickers?”

It’s not a long drive to the hospital, but there are plenty of red lights along the way. Mia seems like a good driver, much more cautious than Ilya, but maybe she’s just extra careful

with someone else in the car. Ilya isn't.

Mia drives around to another side of the hospital, muttering something about fewer people coming to this entrance.

"Sign in at reception, and then the stairs are to the right," she says, coming to a stop.

"Oh, uh—" Shane pauses after unbuckling his seatbelt. torn between lingering and rushing. "Let me…"

He rummages in his pocket, withdraws his wallet, and Mia lets out an *Oh, no* as he starts thumbing through cash.

"You don't need to—"

"Just—" he says clumsily. "Just let me get you back for the gas."

"No, this was on my way anyway," she says, reaching out to push his wrist down. "No gas used."

"Okay, just let me give you money, then."

"Shane."

"Mia," he says firmly. "I'm stubborn."

They stare at each other. Shane wins out.

"Fine," she huffs. He passes her a few twenties. "Jesus, this is way too much—"

"Already in your hand," he dismisses, closing his wallet and tucking it back in his pocket. "You have your phone?"

"What, are you mugging me?" she says, almost muttering to herself, but she pulls her phone out and passes it to him. He pauses, holding up the locked screen. "1234."

"Terrible passcode."

"Haven't been hacked yet."

He shoots her a look, an *I'm going to hack you now* look, and she sticks her tongue out at him.

"Here," he says lightly when he passes the phone back.

She looks, looking at his phone number, raising an eyebrow.

"What do I do with this?"

"You're gonna text me when you get to work," he says, finally opening the car door, letting the cold outside air in. "Because you're cool and I wanna be friends with you."

“Sweet.”

“And you’re gonna text me if you need help,” he adds. He feels her looking at him as he gets out and lingers with the door open, tossing his bag on and leaning down. “If your mom or your diabetic rat needs anything."

“I didn’t drive you here for charity,” she says, leaning over the center console to see him clearly. “I’m not blackmailing you.”

“‘S not charity,” Shane says. “‘S helping a friend out.”

Mia looks at him, her expression shifting into hesitance and then acceptance.

“Okay,” she says. “Okay.”

“Thank you,” he says earnestly, looking into her eyes. “Seriously.”

“Go see your guy,” she says, gesturing with a jerk of her chin, and Shane is kind of relieved that she dismisses sentimentality the same way he tends to. “Let me know if either of you needs a beard. I’ll text you.”

He nods, laughing a little , and he finally steps away and shuts the door. She waves.

It’s quieter in the waiting room than Shane expects it too, and he checks his phone quickly as he approaches the reception desk. Nothing.

“Hi, I— I’m here to see a patient,” he says awkwardly, looking over the desk at the woman sitting there. She’s got a sudoku book open in front of her, but she tucks it under some paperwork when he leans over the desk.

“Patient name?”

“Ilya Rozanov,” he says quickly, and then he spells it when he looks at him over her glasses. He searches her face for recognition, for realisation, but there’s nothing. He hopes she’s not a hockey fan.

“Visiting hours are closing soon,” she says, and his heart rate picks up again.

“No, he— he texted me,” he says quickly, pulling his phone out of his pocket. “He wants me to see him, he even gave me his room number—“

“That’s fine,” she says calmly, nodding at him. “Just letting you know you might be asked to leave pretty soon.”

He’ll deal with that when it happens.

“What’s your name, honey?” she asks.

“Shane Hollander.”

“S-H-A… Y?”

“No, just…”

“Okay.”

He has to sign a paper, and she passes a visitor pass over the desk to him.

“Clip it somewhere visible,” she says. “Shirt or pocket. He’s in room—“

“I got it, thank you,” Shane says, already walking away, waving at her.

He runs up the stairs, can’t be bothered to wait for the elevator, and he ignores the sign with the arrows and room numbers, remembering what Mia had said. On the left, down the right.

“What in the fuck *are you doing here?”*

Shane jumps, almost drops his visitor pass, because he’s still holding it, and he turns to find Cliff fucking Marleau, a visitor pass clipped to his shirt, a paper cup in his hand.

“I…”

“No,” Marleau says firmly, gesturing to him. “Absolutely fucking not, get the fuck out of here—“

“I just wanna see him,” Shane says, and it sounds too desperate, too needy, but Marleau doesn’t even seem to notice.

“He doesn’t wanna see *you*,” Marleau snaps, and Shane’s chest aches. His face feels hot, and part of him is ready to rip his phone out of his pocket and shove it in Marleau’s face, to show him the Cyrillic, to show him the translated *i want you.* “You need to fucking leave.”

“Marleau—“

“I’m not fucking playing, Hollander,” Marleau says, his voice rising a little. “I’ll beat your ass right here.”

“Jesus fucking—“

Marleau steps up closer, and he’s bigger than Shane, taller, built, but Shane is ready to lose his fucking *mind,* to break another nose. Marleau pushes Shane’s shoulder lightly.

“Go.”

Marleau passes by him, and Shane watches him go down the hall, watches him turn and open a door and disappear into a room, and Ilya is *right fucking there,* and Shane is just fucking standing here. He rubs his hand across his face roughly, squeezing his eyes shut, turning around. There’s a sitting room between the two wings, empty. A water cooler.

Shane's eyes sting. He pulls the phone out, looks at the screen, void of notifications except two from his mother that he doesn't read.

Jane: Marleau is a bitch

There's no response. He supposes he could wait for Marleau to leave, but visiting hours are ending soon, and Marleau would see him. And he isn't scared, but he doesn't want to fucking waste time, not when Ilya is *down the hall.*

"Hollander."

He startles again, turning abruptly to find Marleau looking at him, seething, *pissed.*

"He wants to see you," he says dryly, begrudgingly. Shane exhales sharply and starts down the hall, but Marleau grabs his arm, yanking him closer. "Hollander, you fucking try anything —"

"What the fuck am I gonna try?" Shane snaps, jerking his arm out of Marleau's grip.

"I don't know," Marleau says, pushing him again. "Your fuckin' teammate put him here—"

"And I broke his fucking nose," Shane says firmly, lifting his hand so Marleau can see his knuckles. "I'd do it again."

He shoulders past him.

Contrary to popular belief, Cliff Marleau isn't stupid.

He saw Hollander's panic, but he didn't think much of it in his *own* panic, seeing his teammate, his *friend* on the ice like that, bleeding and unconscious. It took everything in him to not knock Bouchard on his ass then and there.

He *didn't* notice that Hollander was gone for the rest of the game.

Rozanov is high, maybe out of his mind, but even high he's nonchalant and bitchy. Cliff can't stand him. And he maybe loves him.

"Fucking audacity," Cliff mumbles, shutting the door behind himself, already reaching out to give Rozanov the water he'd gotten for him from the sitting room.

"What is your problem?" Rozanov says, mumbling into the cup. His accent is thicker when he's inebriated.

“Fucking Hollander is outside,” Cliff snaps, gesturing vaguely toward the door. “Like he can just waltz in here—“

“Hollander?” Rozanov says brightly, fumbling with his cup, splashing water on himself. “Here?”

“Yeah, he’s got a damn visitor pass—“

“Why he isn’t here?” Rozanov says, gesturing. “Where is he?”

Cliff blinks.

“I told him to fuck off,” he says. “Obviously.”

“*No,”* Rozanov says sharply, his expression shifting to rage. “You go get him,” he demands. “Bring him here.”

“What the— *Why?”*

“Because I want him,” Rozanov says like it’s obvious, like *fucking duh.* “Go.”

“I’m not letting him in here,” Cliff says.

“Marleau,” Rozanov says in the way he always pronounces it. “I will get him, I will get out of this bed right now—“

“You’re not fucking moving, don’t even think about it—“

“I’ll do it,” Rozanov says, already turning to put the cup on the side table, moving to swing his legs over the side of the bed. “I go.”

“*No,”* Cliff says, moving to push him back but stopping when remembers his *broken fucking collarbone.* “Jesus, fucking— *fine*, you— *Fine.”*

He goes outside.

Hollander is still in the hall, and he looks like a wreck. He’d noticed it earlier, but he hadn’t *noticed* it.

He’s been crying, and he looks fucking exhausted even though he didn’t even play the whole game.

He looks worse up close, when Cliff is grabbing his arm and pulling him to meet his eyes. He’s shaking. Cliff sees it when Hollander lifts his hand up, shows him knuckles that are bruising, already purple, and tainted with dry blood.

And Cliff thinks maybe he *is* fucking stupid, because he’s never been more confused in his life.

He follows behind Hollander closely, ready to snag him by the back of his jacket, by his duffel bag, but he doesn't, because Rozanov is gasping excitedly when Hollander steps inside, and Hollander is dropping his bag and visitor pass, and he's pulling Rozanov into his arm in a hug.

Cliff stares.

Rozanov is touching the back of Hollander's head with his free hand, petting his hair, saying something in Russian, something smooth and soft, something Hollander seems to understand, because he's nodding. Like he *cares*.

"Come here," Rozanov says when they part, pulling at Hollander's jacket. "Sit."

Hollander sits on the edge of the bed. He hasn't taken his eyes off Rozanov, and Cliff can hear him sniffling.

"It doesn't hurt," Rozanov says lightly.

"You're high."

"Only a little."

Rozanov reaches for Hollander's hands, pulling at them, *holding* them, and Hollander hisses in pain, his right hand retracting. Rozanov looks at it. His expression shifts, and he isn't smiling anymore.

"What happened?" he says roughly, lifting Hollander's hand up to look.

"I'm fine," Hollander says. His voice is shaking.

"You hurt."

"I'm *fine,"* Hollander says again. He leans in with emphasis. "Jesus, you're the one with—with stitches in your face, you…"

He trails off, taking a shaky breath. Cliff can't see his face, but he knows he's crying.

"Marleau," Rozanov says. Cliff blinks, looking at him. He's looking at Cliff over Hollander's shoulder, and Hollander doesn't turn around.

"Uh."

"Go get me drink."

"I just brought you water," Cliff says stupidly.

"Then coffee."

"You can't have stimulants," Cliff says just as Hollander lets out a sound that sounds argumentative. "You're concussed."

“Stimu…”

“Caffeine,” Hollander says. His voice is thick.

“Okay, then a virgin coffee.”

“Virgi— What?”

“Decaf,” Hollander says, glancing back at Cliff. Rozanov looks at Hollander, his eyes bright. “Or,like, herbal tea or something.”

Cliff blinks blankly.

“*Go,”* Rozanov says, throwing a hand toward the door. “Get me drink.”

Marleau hesitates, and then he exhales sharply, almost scoffing, before he leaves, shutting the door behind himself.

And he knows he shouldn’t, but he lingers by the door. It’s quiet in the room, silent until Hollander’s voice breaks it, hushed and soft.

“Ilya…”

“Please,” Rozanov says. He sounds pitiful.

“You’re high.”

“I am not that high.”

Quiet.

“…We’re in public.”

“Door is closed,” Rozanov says dismissively.

Quiet.

“Ilya…”

It sounds weird, Rozanov’s first name in Hollander’s mouth. It’s bizarre.

“I am not asking to suck your dick,” Rozanov says, and Cliff’s eyes widen. He almost chokes. “I am asking for a kiss.”

Cliff stares at the floor.

It’s silent, and he can hear himself breathing, can hear his own heartbeat, until there’s the very distinct sound of kissing, quiet and soft and wet, and then the sound of crying. His throat tightens inexplicably, and he thinks of how Hollander threw his helmet aside when he saw Rozanov on the ice, how he held Rozanov’s head.

Rozanov says something in Russian, and Cliff has never heard his voice like this before, soft and sweet. Tender.

Hollander says something back. His voice is muffled.

Cliff blinks again, and his stomach twists.

Not because they're *gay,* Cliff doesn't give a shit about that, who *cares.* Because he tried to make Hollander *leave,* because he thought Hollander would ever hurt Rozanov, thought he would make this worse.

Cliff blinks tears back, glancing up and down the empty hallway, and he kind of wants to stand here like a fucking guard, but he should go. This isn't his to listen to.

He goes to find a *virgin coffee*.

He walks slowly.

"Мой сладкий мальчик," Ilya murmurs. Shane nods, lifting his head from where it's resting on Ilya's shoulder. He's hiccuping, his breaths sharp and rapid, and Ilya touches his face with his free hand— the other is tucked away in a sling. "Shane."

"I know," Shane says nonsensically, nodding.

"Look at me."

Shane looks at him. His eyes are glassy too.

"I am okay."

"It scared me," Shane says, almost whining, holding Ilya's face. He's bruised down the side of his face, swollen around the stitches. Shane wants to count them, but they blur. "I was so scared, Ily—"

"I am okay."

"Ilya—"

"Shane."

It makes him stop, makes him look into Ilya's eyes and listen.

"I am okay," he says slowly. "I will be fine. And I will have badass scar when I heal."

Shane laughs a little, wetly, and he wants to press his forehead to Ilya's but the stitches extend past his eyebrow.

"God, you…"

Ilya kisses him again. It's clumsy, kind of messy with Shane's tears running down his face, and they shouldn't be doing this. Not here, not at *all.*

Not when Marleau could be back at any second, when someone else could walk right in, someone from Ilya's team or a nurse or doctor or somebody who might *recognise them.*

But Shane can't help it. He gasps into it, pushing a hand into Ilya's curls as carefully as he can, leaning forward so Ilya doesn't have to. He lets Ilya tongue at his lip, lets him suck on it the way he likes to, lets him hold his face possessively, fingers gripping him like he's proving a point. Shane moans weakly, letting his mouth fall open, letting Ilya in.

When they part, Shane is gasping for air, and Ilya's cheeks are glistening with Shane's tears. He's looking at Shane like he's analysing him, still holding his face, squishing his cheeks a little from his grip.

"What?" Shane breathes.

"You are pretty when you cry," Ilya murmurs, his voice smooth, washing over Shane like rain.

"Just when I cry?"

Ilya smiles, shaking Shane's head like a scolding. Shane closes his eyes. It sends more tears down his cheeks.

"Pretty boy."

"I fucked it up," Shane says, crying. Ilya lets go of his face to wipe his tears away, and Shane longs for him to cradle his face the way he does sometimes. His palms fit so perfectly on his cheeks, perfect for Shane to tuck into and hide away.

"Fucked what up?"

"This," Shane says, his chest heaving with a weak sob. "Us. I fucked us up."

Ilya murmurs something in Russian, and Shane can't understand it, but he nods instinctively.

"You cannot fuck us up," Ilya says softly, caressing the side of Shane's face. "Shane."

Shane is crying. Sobbing.

"Shane," Ilya says. "Sweetheart."

"I was too obvious," Shane cries. "I panicked, and I fought Bouchard in the locker room, and I—"

Ilya pulls him into another kiss, shifting up so he's almost kneeling. Shane lets him, because he would never stop him from this.

"Is okay," Ilya murmurs into his mouth.

"It's not," Shane insists, shaking his head. "It's okay, Ilya, people are already speculating about us—"

"I do not know this word."

"They're *talking* about us," Shane says firmly, looking into Ilya's eyes. "They're saying we might be gay."

Ilya tilts his head.

"Well."

"Ilya."

"Sweetheart."

It makes him melt. It always makes him melt, every fucking time without fail.

"Why are you so calm about this?" Shane chokes, resting a hand on Ilya's forearm.

"I am little high."

"Jesus."

"Is fine," Ilya says, leaning with emphasis, looking into Shane's eyes. There's bruising under the stitches, almost a black eye, and his pupils are a little dilated. "I promise."

"Ilya, what if you can't go home?"

Ilya stops. Looks at him. Tilts his head like what Shane's just said is curious.

"You mean Russia?"

"Yes, Ilya," Shane says, exasperated, squeezing his arm. "If the whole world thinks you're fucking gay, what if you can't go back to Russia?"

"Why would I want to?"

Shane blinks.

"…What?"

Ilya exhales, glancing at the door briefly. Shane follows the look. The door is still shut. Where the fuck is Marleau?

"Shane," Ilya says. Shane looks at him again. "I have no family in Russia."

Shane looks at him. He's a little blurry, and he kind of looks like he's glowing.

"But it's your home," Shane says weakly, looking at him pitifully.

"Shane," Ilya says again. His expression shifts into something pained, and they shouldn't be having this conversation right now, not when he's concussed and drugged, not when Marleau should be on his way back with a drink for Ilya. "Sweetheart."

"Ilya."

"If I cannot love you in public, it is not my home."

Shane blinks.

"Is not home for me," Ilya says again, like he didn't just say *that.* "I have nothing in Moscow to go back to except my asshole brother— Why would I want to go back?"

"You…"

"I will find way to stay here," Ilya says lightly. "I will try to not be deport."

"You're not really in total control of that," Shane says absently.

"I will marry Svet if I have to," Ilya says. "She will understand."

"You love me?" Shane says weakly.

Ilya blinks. His eyes are glassy, and Shane remembers that he's fucking high.

"Jesus," he says, letting go of Ilya's arm, looking away. "I'm— We shouldn't be talking about this right now—"

"Why?" Ilya says. Shane looks at him.

"Because you're fucking medicated," he says. "And Marleau could show up any fucking second."

"I do not care," Ilya says.

"You're *high*, Ilya."

"I am not *that* high," Ilya insists in the same tone he uses when he says he had *one cigarette.* "I can think."

"You just told me you *love* me—"

"*I do—"*

"*Ilya*," Shane snaps. His eyes sting again, and his throat feels tight, and he doesn't want to feel like this, so fucking *hopeful.* "Just leave it."

But Ilya doesn't leave it— that's not really his thing, and instead he reaches for Shane's neck again, pulling him in by his throat until they're face-to-face, so close Ilya can feel his breath.

"I love you," Ilya says firmly. "I have for long time."

Shane looks between his eyes.

"I love you. I will yell from rooftop, I— I will skate in cursive *I love Shane Hollander* on rink—"

Shane interrupts with a wet laugh, because it's ridiculous.

"I will quit hockey," Ilya says. "I will do it for you."

"You're not fucking quitting hockey," Shane says. "I would never ask you to do that."

"I know," Ilya murmurs, smiling a little. "You are good to me."

Shane exhales slowly, closing his eyes and leaning closer so Ilya's hand presses more firmly to his throat. He presses his face to Ilya's, rubbing his nose against his cheek.

"I love you too," he says weakly, whispering. "I love you so much, Ilya."

Ilya's hand slides around his head and pushes into his hair, tugging it lightly, tenderly. Shane kisses Ilya's cheek.

"I love you," Shane murmurs. "But we can't come out."

He lifts his head. Ilya looks at him, and his gaze is gentle, tender, like Shane is some bring worth gazing at.

"Not right now," he whispers. "I'm just— It would fuck both of our careers, and I— I'm not even out to my *parents*, and I don't know how to— to—"

"Is okay," Ilya says softly. "You are not ready. Is okay."

"I'm sorry," Shane chokes. Ilya makes a soft noise, a tiny grunt in the back of his throat, and he shakes his head, shaking Shane by his throat.

"No sorry," he says firmly. "Do not say sorry. Is nothing wrong."

Shane closes his eyes. Ilya kisses him sweetly. He stays close when they part, their lips brushing when he speaks again.

"You are my best friend," he says quietly. Shane exhales shakily. "We tell world we are friends."

"Okay," Shane breathes. "Okay."

Ilya kisses him again, tilting his head, and Shane savours it, holding Ilya's forearm. He likes it when Ilya holds him like this, fingers tight around his throat like he doesn't want Shane to

get away. Not that Shane would try.

When they part again, Shane looks at him. He holds Ilya's arm with both hands, brushing over his smooth skin, gazing at the stitches on his eyebrow and forehead. It will be a pretty sick scar.

"I'm so glad you're okay," he says quietly. "I was so scared, Ilya."

Ilya hums softly.

"They can't get rid of me that easy."

Shane scoffs. He touches Ilya's face, traces lines over his cheeks, trails a finger down the bridge of his nose. Ilya smiles.

Ilya falls against him after a minute, tucking his face tentatively into the side of Shane's neck, resting so the injured side is up. Shane closes his eyes, running a hand through Ilya's curls.

"I made a friend today," he says after a moment.

"Mm?"

"She works at the arena," Shane says softly. "She gave me a ride over here."

"She is nice?"

"Yeah, really nice. She offered to be a beard for one of us."

Ilya is quiet for a moment.

"What the fuck does that mean?"

Shane laughs lightly.

"She'd pretend to be dating one of us if we want," Shane explains quietly. Ilya's ear is so close to his mouth. "To help us out. Keep people from thinking too much."

Ilya hums softly.

"Is nice."

"Are you allowed to fall asleep?" Shane asks, toying with Ilya's hair. "Did the doctors say anything?"

"Mm. They say I can sleep. Should sleep."

"Why were you awake when I got here?"Shane says, dragging his fingers through Ilya's hair slowly. "If you're supposed to rest?"

"Waited for you," Ilya mumbles. "I knew you would come."

Shane buries his face in Ilya's hair.

"Go to sleep," he says softly.

"Stay." Ilya's voice breaks. "Do not go."

"I'm right here," Shane whispers.

Ilya presses a slow kiss to Shane's neck, lingering to suck the skin between his lips, and Shane tilts his head to let him, exhaling. He can feel Ilya fall asleep, notices the moment his breathing evens and slows, the moment he becomes dead weight against Shane's chest. Shane lowers him slowly, carefully, guides him to lay down, his head in Shane's lap, and he plays with his hair.

He gazes at him. Watching his chest rise and fall slowly, watches his curls fall into place when he lets go. He always looks so peaceful when he's asleep, his face relaxed and almost smiling. Shane hasn't told him, but he wants to watch him sleep, wants to spend the night with him, to make him stay at Shane's apartment overnight, so Shane can just look at him. So he can admire him in the dim light of the city outside, so he can trace the lines of his face and commit them to memory.

Shane drags his fingertips lightly over Ilya's eyebrows and under his eyes, letting his eyelashes catch on the whorls of his fingerprints. It makes Ilya's face twitch, his nose moving like a rabbit's, and Shane smiles at him.

The stitches look gruesome. Shane counts them— twenty-four, extending from his eyebrow to his forehead, bending in a slight curve. Shane can't wait for it to heal so he can kiss it without hurting it.

Ilya turns his face into Shane's lap, taking a breath like a sigh, and Shane pushes his fingers into his hair, scratching at his scalp the way Ilya likes. He listens to him breathe, slow and steady and calm and beautiful.

Shane looks up when the door opens, startled, and it's Marleau— Shane had forgotten about him completely, forgotten that he'd just gone to get Ilya a drink. He's holding a floral styrofoam cup that's got a lid on it, and he stops in the doorway when he sees them. Shane's hand freezes in Ilya's hair, and Ilya is blissfully unaware, nuzzling into Shane's lap.

Shane and Marleau stare at each other. Shane's face is hot, and his stomach hurts, but Marleau's expression doesn't change, doesn't shift into something angry or confused.

"Do you… Do you need another minute?" Marleau asks.

Shane blinks.

"…What?"

Marleau stares at him again, his expression blank, eyes wide, and Shane wants to throttle him, to grab him by the shoulders and shake him, but he doesn't move. Marleau comes into

the room, shutting the door quietly, holding the cup awkwardly. He looks at Ilya laying on Shane's lap.

"I've been trying to get him to sleep for hours."

Shane just nods hesitantly, his fingers stroking through Ilya's hair absently. He doesn't say anything. He watches Marleau move, sit down in the chair by the side table, stiff and awkward. His mouth opens and then closes, and then opens and closes again, hesitating.

"It's, uhm… It's cool with me," he says stiffly, gesturing at them vaguely. "I'm not… I don't have a problem with it."

"…With what?"

Marleau looks at him. Bites his lip. Hesitates.

"I— I heard you guys," he says finally. "When you kissed. I— I left right after, I tried to give you guys some time."

Shane stares at him.

"I'm just— I'm cool with it, you know, I'm not gonna tell anyone or anything."

"Okay," Shane says quietly.

Marleau looks at Ilya, and Shane sees him soften a little.

"He was waiting for you," he says quietly, looking at Shane again. "I caught him on his phone and I confiscated it because the doctors said… It was— It was you, wasn't it? That he was texting?"

Shane hesitates, and then he nods.

"Yeah."

Marleau nods. He smiles.

"What?" Shane says.

"Just…" Marleau gestures vaguely with his free hand before he lifts the cup up to take a long sip. It must not be very hot. "Things… falling into place."

"What things?" Shane says, making a face. Marleau looks at him.

"…You're his Montreal girl," he says plainly. "Aren't you?"

Shane tears his eyes away from him when his face flushes with heat at the thought of being *Ilya's girl*, and Marleau just laughs a little. It's a nice laugh, something familiar like banter, like they're friends.

"Fuck off."

He listens to Marleau laughing, and he caresses Ilya's face again even though Marleau is watching.

"You really don't care?" he asks quietly, shyly, glancing up at him again. Marleau shakes his head, making a face.

"Nah, man, I'm cool," he says before he speaks again. "I mean, I could say something about him going out with someone from fucking *Montreal*, but…" He hesitates, looking at Ilya again before he gestures at him. "This feels bigger than hockey."

Shane looks at Ilya again, and he nods. His throat tightens.

Marleau leaves eventually. He shakes Shane's hand, and it's weird, and awkward, and Shane kind of loves it. His hand goes back to Ilya's face.

He cradles him. He checks his phone, glances through the messages from his mom reading variations of *Hello, where are you?* and *Did something happen?* There's one from an unknown number that reads *hello i have arrived safely at work* followed by *how's your guy doing?*

He responds to his mom first.

Shane: I'm fine, sorry

Shane: Long day

Shane: I'll talk to you guys tomorrow

And then Mia.

Shane: he's doing okay

Shane: a little high from painkillers but he'll be fine

Shane: he's asleep in my lap right now

He sets the phone aside, and he gazes at Ilya some more. He's sleeping soundly, unbothered by Shane touching his face, and Shane wants this forever. He savors it.

Ilya stays in the hospital for monitoring. He's fine, less loopy, but lonely now that Shane's gone. He texts him a few times until he's scolded into putting his phone away.

Shane goes to Ottawa. He's texted his parents a few times, brief *I'm okay*s and the mention that he's on his way to visit them. He wasn't supposed to visit them for the next few weeks, and they ask questions, but he doesn't say anything. He knows he's worrying them, and he feels a little bad about it, but he can't say anything like this, not over text, or over the phone.

His chest aches, and he can't really catch his breath. He keeps taking deep breaths, lifting his head so he can fill his lungs all the way, letting his chest rise, and exhaling slowly, heavily. He rubs his hand over his chest, and rereads the messages that Ilya sent that morning, and closes his eyes, and breathes.

It's afternoon when he gets there. Home. Kind of home. He hasn't really lived here for a while now, hasn't slept in his own bed, and he isn't sure he would even consider it home now. It feels kind of foreign to him now, especially as he approaches the door, his throat tightening. His hand clenches in his pocket, his nails digging into the palm of his hand as he opens the door. His parents are in the living room, sitting. Waiting.

His mom gets up, comes to him and hugs him tightly, and she's already asking him what's going on, what's happened, but he can't say anything, burying his face in her neck and wrapping his arms around her. His hands are shaking.

"Shane," David says, coming to them, putting his hand on his back gently. "What's going on?"

"You're scaring us," Yuma says, pulling away, pushing Shane to look at his face. "We've been worried sick, Shane."

"I'm sorry," Shane chokes, nodding, letting go of her to wipe his face quickly. "I'm sorry, I'm fine, it's—"

"Are you?" David says, and it makes Shane laugh, because no, no he fucking isn't.

"Yeah," he lies. "I just… I need to talk to you guys."

They let him step away. Drop his bag. Gesture vaguely to the sofa.

They sit on the very edge of the sofa, hands clasped, looking at him intently, and he hesitates, standing in front of them like he's doing a presentation, a performance, before he sits in the armchair across from them.

It's quiet. It's always been quieter around here. He had to get used to noise when he started leaving for games, when he started living by himself— the passing traffic, the people outside laughing or yelling, the sirens. He's grown to like it, the world existing in the background as white noise.

The silence is deafening. They're staring at him, and he's staring at the ground like he's expected cue cards to sprout from it, because he doesn't know what the fuck to say, doesn't know where to even start. He never thought he'd do this; when he was younger, he thought he'd leave it all bundled in his chest, silenced and locked up until he died.

“Shane,” Yuna says quietly. “Talk to us.”

He looks up at them and rubs his face anxiously, looking back and forth between them. They’re staring at him, eyes shining with concern, and he feels kind of sick. He wants to call it off, to go home, wherever the fuck that is.

He looks back at the floor.

“So, uhm.” He’s quiet again, hesitating, taking a slow breath because his lungs want to start hyperventilating. “I— I’m gay.”

Silence.

He doesn’t look up. His hands are trembling, his fingers locked and twisting where they hang between his knees.

“And I… I’ve been seeing someone,” he adds, his voice breaking a little. “And it’s— it’s been fine, it’s been *great*, but…”

He chokes, taking a shaky breath, rubbing his face, ignoring his stinging eyes.

“Yesterday,” he says weakly, “he was hospitalized with a— a broken collarbone and a concussion, and I— he’s *fine,* he’s going to be fine, but it— it *scared me—“*

He chokes on a breath, squeezing his eyes shut, and suddenly he’s sobbing, covering his face, shaking, and his mom is touching him, kneeling on the ground to cradle his head.

“Shane,” she says softly, almost cooing, like he’s a baby. He ducks his head down, hiding, but she’s unmoved, running a hand over his head, moving so his head is resting on her shoulder. “My baby.”

He sobs, his shoulders shaking, and he finally moves, hugging her again, letting her arms wrap around him and hold him. She pulls him, gets him off the armchair onto the floor, and he crumbles, falling against her.

And then his father is there too, kneeling on the floor in spite of his dodgy knees and perpetually sore back, and Shane is enveloped, tucked into the shadow between his parents’ bodies, and he cries, and cries, and cries.

They hold him, rock him back and forth, and he can hear them breathing— Yuna is crying too.

When he stops crying, he sniffles, resting his face against his mother’s shoulder, his eyes still closed. The fabric of her shirt is damp against his cheek, and he feels bad, but he doesn’t move.

“I didn’t…” His voice breaks, weak in his throat. “I didn’t realize how much I love him.”

David exhales slowly, running his hand over Shane’s back.

“That’s okay,” he says quietly.

Shane sniffles, taking a hiccuping breath, and Yuna lifts his head, holding his cheeks and pulling him in to kiss his forehead.

“That’s okay,” she whispers.

He shakes his head absently, letting his eyes close.

”Shane,” Yuna says, wiping his cheeks. “My son.”

He gasps, hiccuping, his chest spasming.

“Hey,” she whispers, caressing him. “Breathe, you’re okay.”

He shakes his head again, letting go of her to rub his chest like he’s trying to lessen the weight on it. He’s a little lightheaded, too far away from his own body. Yuna talks to him, rubs his arms and shoulders in a way that grounds him just the slightest bit, and David gets up to get him water.

Shane sits against the armchair, looking at the glass in his hands. It’s rippling.

“Shane,” David says, looking at him. He’s sitting on the sofa now, looking down at him in a way that makes him feel small, *tiny,* but it’s a kind look, his eyes gentle. “You know we love you, right?”

Shane looks at him. He’s tired. He wants to go to sleep.

“Yeah,” he says quietly, almost whispering.

“And nothing will ever change that.”

“…I know.”

“Even if you fall in love with someone from Boston.”

A wet laugh bursts out of Shane, and he closes his eyes, shaking his head as he covers his face like he’s trying to hide. Of course they know who he’s talking about. They watched the game yesterday. They saw Ilya go down, probably heard the specifics of his injuries. Probably saw Shane holding him before Hayden and the medics tore him away.

“We don’t care,” Yuna says gently, tenderly, from where she’s sitting on the floor across from Shane, leaning against David’s leg. “You have questionable taste, but we do not care.”

Shane scoffs, looking at his tangled fingers.

“You guys don’t really know him.”

“Do you wanna tell us about him?”

Shane hesitates, biting his lip, picking absently at one of his nails, torn between yes and no. Because this is his, and maybe he shares it a little with Hayden and Mia and Marleau, but he wants to keep it, wants to tuck it into his chest where it belongs.

“He’s really sweet,” he says finally. David lets out a laugh, and in spite of himself, Shane grins, shaking his head. “He’s an asshole, but he’s…”

He trails off, thinking about how to say it.

“…He’s nice to me,” he says finally.

”You know that’s all we care about, right?” David says intently. Shane looks up at him. He’s a little blurry. “That he’s good to you?”

“He is,” Shane says, nodding, feeling the need to protect Ilya, to defend him. “He… He stayed up yesterday, waiting for me at the hospital, even though he was supposed to go to sleep. And he— he comforted me even though he was the one in the hospital with a— a broken clavicle and a concussion, and he…”

He trails off again, pausing, rubbing his face roughly with both hands, because he hates that they know this, that they know *him*.

“He— He doesn’t make me do anything I don’t want to,” he says softly, looking at them. They both nod the same way, slow and careful. “He— He respects me, and he always checks on me.”

It’s a vile thought, the fact that they know he has sex, that he has *gay* sex, but neither of them seems bothered by it.

“That’s all we care about,” Yuna says seriously. “That you’re okay, and you’re responsible, and you’re happy,”

“I am,” he says, nodding. “We are.”

“That’s all,” Yuna says. “And whenever you guys are ready to come out, we’ll be right here, no matter how the world responds.”

Shane nods, his eyes squeezing shut.

“I don’t— I don’t know when we’re going to,” he says quietly. “If we’re going to.”

“You and Rozanov do whatever you need to do,” David says earnestly. “We’ll be here, And you can bring him by any time, if he needs somewhere to go.”

“You’d let a Bear into your home?” Shane says, laughing a little when Yuna sighs heavily.

“I’ll look past it,” she says. “For you.”

“…That’s nice.”

“You love him?” Yuna says, raising her eyebrows. Shane looks at her, and he nods. “I’ll look past it.”

He nods, his eyes flooding once more.

“Thank you.”

He stares at the ceiling.

His parents are in bed, and Shane kind of feels like a teenager again, laying in bed and waiting for the time to pass, waiting for the world to move on. He remembers it well, the feeling of solitude in the dark of night, the loneliness pressing him down into his mattress. He wanted to disappear back then.

He pulls his phone out.

Jane: i told my parents about us

Jane: they said they’ll look past you being a bear

Jane: and you can come by any time

It takes a minute for Lily to respond, and Shane is excited and also annoyed, because he shouldn’t be on his phone.

Lily:)))))

Lily: like i look past you being voyeager

Jane: you absolutely do not look past that

Lily: true

Shane calls him, and he answers before the first ring is over.

“Hollander.”

“Where are you?” Shane asks. He rolls onto his front, folding his arm under his head and closing his eyes.

“Hotel,” Ilya says. “They let me go today.”

“They say you can use your phone?”

“They say I *shouldn’t*,” Ilya says snarkily. “I have not been on my phone much today.”

”’S good.”

“So your parents?” Ilya asks.

“They’re cool,” Shane says softly. “I told them I love you.”

“Wo-o-ow…”

”Shut up.”

Ilya is quiet for a few moments.

“You there?”

“I am here,” Ilya says softly.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I…” He pauses, and Shane hears him sniff, and he wants to be there, wants to hold him. “My mother would have liked you.”

Oh.

Shane’s eyes burn, and he buries his face in the bend of his elbow.

“I would have liked her too,” he says, his voice muffled.

“You would have,” Ilya says, and it sounds like he laughs a little. “She was… She was ridiculous.”

“Must run in the family.”

“Asshole,” Ilya says, but he’s laughing.

“You’re the asshole.”

“Creative.”

“Fuck off.”

“You love me.”

Shane exhales, nodding like Ilya is right there, like he can see him.

“Yeah.”

“…Have you thought about what we will do?” Ilya asks after a moment. “I have not seen what people are saying, but Marly says they are talking.”

“Yeah, I know,” he says quietly. “I haven’t. I’ve been trying not to. My parents said they’d support whatever we wanna do.”

Ilya hums. His voice is soft.

“What options do we have?” he asks slowly.

“We, uhm…” Shane swallows, pausing, thinking. “We could come out. See what happens. Maybe get kicked from our teams. We could… say we’re just friends. Keep this secret.”

“Mhmm.”

“Mia could pretend to be my girlfriend. You could ask Svetlana to take some pictures with you.”

“Could be too obvious,” Ilya says. “Doing all that so soon.”

“‘S true,” Shane sighs. “Uhm. I don’t know.”

“You are tired.”

“I am,” Shane says, nodding again. “You are too.”

“I am. Do you want to go to sleep? We can talk about it later.”

“Yeah,” Shane admits. “I don’t wanna let you go.”

“I can stay.”

“I wanna be with you.”

“Soon.”

Shane exhales, squeezing his eyes shut, nuzzling his face into his own arm the way he wants to do to Ilya’s chest.

“Okay.”

They fall quiet, and Shane listens to Ilya breathing. His favourite sound.

End Notes

come hang out with me!

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