

when you hold me it holds me together

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when you hold me it holds me together

by [hollidayparty](#)

Summary

They sat in silence for a few seconds and watched the surf rolling in and out, in and out. Shane eased one knee up, resting his arm across it, watching Ilya out of the corner of his eye with infinite patience.

“You wanna talk about it?” he asked, voice soft enough that the wind almost stole it.

He did want to talk. His chest was full of words. Too full. But the idea of opening all that up? Of watching Shane recoil, or worse, watching him care? It was unbearable. The thought of being comforted by Shane, of feeling that warmth and knowing he couldn’t keep it, nearly crushed him.

Ilya kept his eyes on the water, jaw tight.

Shane reached out slowly and carefully and let the tip of one finger trace the outside of Ilya’s forearm. Just a whisper of contact. A question, not a demand.

Ilya looked at him. Shane gave a small tilt of his hand, beckoning him closer.

“Come here.”

A deviation from the All-Star weekend in Tampa:

Instead of finding Shane on the bench, it’s Ilya alone with his ghosts and falling apart in ways he never lets anyone see.

Until Shane sits beside him.

The tide is ceaseless and the night is heavy. Canon diverges; feelings don't.

Notes

i have succumbed to the canadian gay hockey agenda

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The beach looked different at night. Not soft and postcard-perfect the way it had earlier, when the sun was out and people were still milling around in flip-flops, laughing, drinking shitty resort cocktails.

Now it was a restless slab of dark water and deep indigo sky, broken only by the weak glow of street lamps along the walking path about a hundred feet back.

Ilya stood at the very edge of the surf, shoes dangling from one hand, toes sinking into cold, damp sand. The waves moved in and out in a rhythm that felt annoyingly peaceful, considering the mood currently chewing its way through his chest.

He wasn't drunk. But he wished that he were. Being drunk made the world fuzzy and stupid, and he could have used a little fuzziness tonight.

Instead he had... this. Dark thoughts. Awful memories. Painful awareness of every single thing in his life felt like it was not working the way it should.

His father was dying. Slowly and maddeningly, yet still with the same bitterness he'd carried all his life. The fact of it should have devastated Ilya more than it had. Instead, the first feeling had been deep and visceral relief. Followed swiftly by crushing guilt.

Some son he was.

His mother's face drifted through his mind next, unbidden. She would shake her head at him if she saw him now, standing barefoot in the surf like some moody poet who had misplaced his heart. She would tell him to go back inside, get warm, stop being dramatic, stop thinking so much.

He missed her. He missed her every day.

And lately, it felt like the only thing that made any part of his life feel solid was a pair of steady brown eyes and the delicate constellation of freckles beneath them.

Shane fucking Hollander. Of course.

Ilya blew out a harsh breath, as if his own thoughts annoyed him. He crouched down, then let himself sink fully into the sand, legs folding under him until he could sit with his arms resting loosely on his knees.

It was stupid to think about Shane like this. Stupid to let himself feel anything about him beyond the usual cocktail of lust and competitive irritation. Lust he could handle. Irritation he had partially built his career on.

But this... This wanting? This deep, pathetic ache in his chest? Ugh.

Shane had been close all weekend by virtue of the All-Star schedule. Same team, same events, same stupid photo ops where they had to pretend to be friendly but cutthroat rivals. Pretend *not* to be two men who were sometimes entwined together in hotel beds and tried very hard to call it nothing.

And Shane had smiled at him today. Really smiled. Bright and earnest and golden, the way he did when he wasn't thinking about anything except the moment in front of him. It made something in Ilya loosen and tighten at the same time.

He wanted to text him. He wanted to see him. Not just for sex, though God, he *always* wanted that, but because he didn't want to sit here alone with the tide and the dark and his own unravelling thoughts.

But he couldn't do that. Shane was... good. Too good to be dragged into whatever depressive nonsense Ilya was spiraling through. He wouldn't burden him with this. With himself.

He stared at the waves again, watching them break and disappear and come back, over and over, relentless and indifferent. It was easy, in a moment like this, to imagine stepping forward into them. Walking deeper and deeper into the surf. Letting the dark water swallow him. Letting everything, the pressure, the noise, the grief, the hollowness, just turn off.

He wouldn't do it, of course. He didn't *want* to die. He just... wanted the *exhaustion* to stop.

A crunch of sand behind him snapped the thought cleanly in half.

Ilya stiffened. He didn't turn. He assumed it was some drunk hockey player or late-night jogger or -

"Hey," someone said softly.

Shane.

Of course.

Ilya twisted just enough to see him approach. Shoes in one hand, the other shoved into the pocket of his slacks, hair ruffled by the wind. He looked warm and soft. He looked impossibly out of place on this lonely beach, almost glowing from the dull light behind him. As if even the night itself couldn't bear to diminish him completely.

Shane didn't hesitate. He just dropped down beside Ilya in the sand, close enough that their shoulders nearly touched.

"You're hard to find," Shane said cheerfully in that gentle, unforced way he had.

Ilya blinked at him, the ache in his chest shifting, sharp and humiliatingly grateful. Shane brushed grains off his palms as he settled more fully beside him.

"I thought you'd be in the bar or something," he said lightly.

Ilya shook his head and turned away, staring at the dark line where water met sky.

“Too loud,” he muttered. “Too much...”

He let the sentence fall apart, waving it off with a small, exhausted motion. He was too emptied out to chase down the English word he needed.

Shane nodded. He didn’t tease. He didn’t push. He looked at Ilya then, *really* looked. And the concern that bloomed in Shane’s eyes wasn’t sharp or pitying, just steady and real.

“Are you okay?” he asked gently.

Ilya inhaled through his nose, puffed his cheeks out, then blew the breath out in a long, uneven stream.

“No,” he said at last. “Not really.”

Shane’s expression softened. “Would you rather be alone -”

“No,” Ilya cut in, fast, almost tripping over the word. “You can stay. Please.”

The last part came out too quickly, too raw. He hated how it sounded, but Shane didn’t seem startled by it *this* time. If anything, he relaxed a little more, as if he was *relieved* to be wanted. By Ilya.

“Okay,” Shane said simply. “I’m here.”

They sat in silence for a few seconds and watched the surf rolling in and out, in and out. Shane eased one knee up, resting his arm across it, watching Ilya out of the corner of his eye with infinite patience.

“You wanna talk about it?” he asked, voice soft enough that the wind almost stole it.

Ilya shrugged, a jerky little lift of his shoulders, and swiped at one eye with the heel of his hand. Quick, irritated, as if batting away a mosquito rather than emotion.

He *did* want to talk. His chest was full of words. Too full. His mother’s voice, her impenetrable sadness, his father’s impending death, his useless leech of a brother. The guilt. The loneliness. The gnawing sorrow.

And the terrifying truth that the only time he didn’t feel so hollow was when Shane was in the room.

But the idea of opening all that up? Of watching Shane recoil, or *worse*, watching him *care*? It was unbearable. The thought of being comforted by Shane, of feeling that warmth and knowing he couldn’t keep it, nearly crushed him.

Ilya kept his eyes on the water, jaw tight.

Shane didn't press. Not this time. Instead, he reached out slowly and carefully and let the tip of one finger trace the outside of Ilya's forearm. Just a whisper of contact. A question, not a demand.

Ilya's breath stuttered. He looked at him. Shane gave a small tilt of his hand, beckoning him closer.

"Come here."

Ilya blinked. "What? Are you su-"

"The beach is empty," Shane murmured. "It's pitch dark. No one's going to see anything. Just... come here."

There was no teasing in his tone. No suggestion of sex. Just kindness, open and unguarded, held out like his offered hand.

Ilya swallowed hard. Then, slowly, awkwardly, he uncurled his arms and leaned sideways until his shoulder brushed Shane's thigh. A heartbeat later, he let his head tip down, resting on that solid, warm leg. Shane's thigh tensed reflexively, then relaxed, adjusting to cradle him.

It was too much. It was not enough. He couldn't move. He couldn't breathe.

Shane's hand came up, hesitant at first, then surer as his fingers threaded gently into Ilya's hair. He stroked once, twice in slow, grounding motions that made the ache inside him loosen its teeth just slightly.

Neither of them spoke. The waves kept moving. And for the first time all night, Ilya didn't feel like the darkness was trying to swallow him whole.

Shane's hand kept moving in Ilya's hair, slow and careful, as if each stroke needed permission. His voice, when it came, was barely louder than the surf.

"I'll listen," he murmured, "if you want to talk." A pause, gentle and testing. "But if not, I'm perfectly happy sitting right here. Doing this."

Ilya's throat tightened. He nodded once, a small, choppy motion. "Thanks," he whispered.

His fingers twitched against the sand before he allowed himself to move them. He curled one hand around Shane's shin, just above the ankle. Not clutching. Just... holding. A little more closeness to keep him steady.

Shane didn't react beyond another gentle sweep of his fingers through Ilya's hair.

They sat like that for a long time. Long enough for the tide to creep higher, for the wind to shift cooler. Long enough for the heavy knot in Ilya's chest to loosen by several degrees. Still there, still sharp, but not strangling him.

He could breathe. Not easily, but he could. And in that small space the breathing created, words slipped out before he could stop them.

“I looked it up,” Ilya murmured, voice so low Shane had to lean in slightly to hear.
“*Compatible.*”

Shane blinked down at him. “Oh?”

“I was pretty sure I knew what it meant,” Ilya said, eyes on the dark water, “but I wanted to be sure.”

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it again. There wasn’t an obvious response to that, not one that wouldn’t tip them off a cliff neither of them had named aloud. So he made a soft, noncommittal hum, a neutral acknowledgment that didn’t push, didn’t presume.

Ilya should have stopped there. He knew he should have. But some part of him that was worn thin, lonely, unbearably grateful for the warmth under his cheek, loosened too much.

“I missed you,” he whispered.

He didn’t see Shane’s face, didn’t see the way that simple sentence split his face with a wide and boyish and stunned smile. But he heard it, that slight, impossible-to-hide grin edging into Shane’s voice.

“I missed you, too,” Shane said softly.

Then the hand in Ilya’s hair stilled for just a moment as Shane bent at the waist, moving slowly, giving him every chance to pull away. But Ilya didn’t move.

The gentlest kiss touched his temple. A brush of lips, feather-light, gone almost before Ilya registered it.

Shane straightened again, hand returning to its soothing, steady motion through his hair, as though nothing monumental had happened.

But for Ilya, the whole world tilted, just a little, toward something that felt unbearably like belonging.

The waves hissed in and out, steady as breathing. Minutes passed. Maybe more. Ilya didn’t track them. Didn’t want to. The dark behind his eyelids was easier than the dark in front of him.

Another confession drifted to the tip of his tongue, heavy, insistent, impossible to ignore.

“Today is my mother’s birthday,” Ilya murmured.

Shane’s fingers froze. “Oh,” he breathed.

Ilya frowned to himself. “Or yesterday. I don’t know. Is after midnight?”

He felt Shane's wrist turn, the whisper of movement as he checked his Rolex.

"Not yet," Shane said. "Only 11:23."

Then his hand returned to its path through Ilya's hair. Ilya nodded, eyes drifting shut.

"Thirty-seven minutes left, then."

A moment passed before Shane asked, gently, "So... you miss her?"

He sounded cautious and gentle. Likely assuming, reasonably of course, that she was alive but just far away in Russia. Ilya felt his throat cinch closed. He squeezed his eyes tighter, pushing against the sharp pain of wishing that were true. Wishing that geographical location was the only distance between him and his mother's arms.

He forced himself to nod against Shane's leg.

Shane was quiet. Thinking. He wasn't hard to read. Not to Ilya, at least. Shane was probably turning over several shamelessly earnest and kind suggestions: You could call her. Or FaceTime. It's morning there now, right? Won't you get to see her in a few weeks when you go back?

But Shane didn't say any of it. Something in the way Ilya held himself must have warned him off.

Another wave rolled in. Ilya breathed out. And said, simply, "She's dead."

Shane went very still.

"Oh," he murmured again, but this time the word was weighted, full of sorrow he hadn't expected to feel. "I'm so sorry."

His hand moved again, deliberate now, cupping the back of Ilya's neck; Shane's thumb swept once along the tense line of muscle there in a gentle, instinctive movement.

"When did she - ?" Shane began, tentative.

"A long time ago." Ilya answered. A breath; inhale, exhale. "Fourteen years."

Ilya braced himself for the questions. How did she die? Were you there? What happened? All the awful details he never wanted to say out loud, not tonight, not ever if he could help it. He felt his shoulders tense.

But Shane didn't ask. He didn't even try.

Instead, he shifted, reaching down to slide an arm behind Ilya's shoulders. He tugged gently but firmly, yet still giving Ilya a chance to resist. Ilya didn't. He let himself be pulled upright, let Shane draw him fully into his arms.

Shane wrapped both arms around him, solid and strong, and Ilya went willingly, practically collapsing into the embrace. He buried his face against Shane's neck, inhaling the scent of sun-washed cotton and sea salt and that faint, clean note that was just... Shane.

Shane held him, *really* held him, one hand splayed between Ilya's shoulder blades, the other cradling the back of his head. No questions. No platitudes. Just closeness. Just comfort.

Ilya's breath shuddered once, barely audible, and Shane tightened his hold the way someone shields a flame from the wind.

For the first time in years, or maybe ever, Ilya let himself be soothed.

They stayed like that for a long, immeasurable stretch of time. The waves rising and falling, the dark settling deeper around them, the world stripped down to breath and warmth and the slow, steady slide of Shane's thumb at the nape of Ilya's neck.

Little by little, the tightness in Ilya's chest eased. Not gone, never gone, but loosened, the pain ebbing the way the tide pulled back from the shore. Shane's arms didn't solve anything, but they made everything hurt less. They made it bearable.

Which was, of course, its own type of unbearable.

Ilya inhaled against Shane's throat, the skin smooth and soft beneath his lips. He hadn't meant to speak, but it slipped out anyway, almost slurred with exhaustion.

"Thank you," he murmured.

Shane dipped his chin, brushing his lips against Ilya's forehead. Not a fleeting touch, but a long, lingering press.

"Always," he whispered.

The word sank into Ilya's bones, blissful and terrifying.

Before he could think too hard about it, a shiver rippled through him. First small and slight, then harder. The damp sea air had crept under his clothes, clinging to his skin. Shane felt it, too; Ilya sensed the way his muscles tightened with cold.

Shane pulled back just enough to look at him, hands still splayed on Ilya's back.

"Do you want to go inside?" he asked gently.

Ilya nodded, though the motion was hesitant. He was reluctant to let the moment end, reluctant to step away from the one place he'd felt whole all night.

Then Shane asked, "What room are you in?"

"Twelve seventeen," Ilya murmured, rubbing at his eyes with the heel of one hand.

Shane nodded. Then, before Ilya could withdraw or overthink or ruin it with a joke, Shane leaned in and kissed him.

Just once. Soft. Chaste. A promise dressed up as restraint.

Ilya's breath shuddered. Shane's did too. Half from the cold, half from something molten and far more dangerous.

Their noses brushed and Shane nudged his lightly against Ilya's.

"Go," he whispered. "I'll be right there."

The words curled around Ilya's heart just like Shane's embrace.

He stood, unsteady but so much calmer, and Shane rose with him, brushing the sand from his clothes. The wind kicked up again, making both of them shiver.

Ilya hesitated for one second, just one heartbeat, looking at Shane as if he was a miracle made flesh.

Then he turned toward the hotel lights in the distance.

Shane watched him go. And true to his word, he would follow.

Chapter End Notes

i just finished tlg and like, everything w ilya has me like oh my god, my shaylaaaaaa :[

do i have any idea when irina's bday is? absolutely tf not lol, but indulge me

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They were still tangled in the sheets, warmth and sweat cooling slowly between them in the hush of the hotel room. The A/C clicked on again with a soft hum, sending a lazy draft across their bare skin and stirring the hem of the curtains. Outside, tiny pockets of Tampa were still awake, neon bars glowing, traffic lights blinking sleepily.

But in here, everything had shrunk to lamp light and the feel of Shane draped over Ilya's chest, breath fanning softly against his skin, heartbeat thudding against where their bodies touched.

The bed smelled faintly of hotel laundry and sex. One of the pillows had been kicked to the floor. Shane's leg was thrown loosely across Ilya's hip, the weight of it more familiar than possessive. His fingers moved slowly over Ilya's chest, idle, thoughtful. Not tracing anything in particular, just... there.

Ilya didn't seem to mind. He was half-limp against the mattress, breathing slow and relaxed, his palm spread across the center of Shane's back. Not holding him down, not pulling him closer, just *resting* there, like he'd forgotten it was even a choice. The room felt warm, lived-in, like they'd been doing this every night for a dozen nights instead of just one.

Shane was rolling Ilya's crucifix between his thumb and his finger.

"Are you religious?" Shane asked. "Or do you just wear this?"

"I don't go to church anymore."

"But you believe in God?"

"Yes. I think so."

Shane didn't reply. He just considered this information.

"You think that is silly?" Ilya asked.

"No! No, I'm just surprised, I guess."

Ilya laughed softly.

"What?" Shane asked.

"You don't believe in God, but you believe if you put right skate on before left you will play a terrible game."

Shane shook his head and smiled. "That's different. That's science."

Ilya snorted and kissed the top of his head.

“It was my mother’s.”

“Oh.”

Shane stopped twirling the cross and let it fall gently against Ilya’s chest. His fingers lingered for a second longer, then he shifted up just enough to press a careful kiss to the skin beside it, just below the notch of Ilya’s throat, where the chain dipped and caught the faintest sheen of sweat.

Then he nestled back down, cheek settling over Ilya’s heart.

The silence that followed stretched comfortably between them. Their legs were tangled under the sheets. Ilya’s hand had slid down and rested loosely on Shane’s hip, and every so often his thumb moved, tracing small, absent shapes into the dip of bone there.

It was Shane who eventually broke the silence, voice low and tentative.

“You’ll go back to Russia this summer?”

Ilya hesitated.

“Yes,” he said eventually. “Though, I do not want to.”

Shane nodded without lifting his head, thumb brushing lightly over the ridges of Ilya’s ribs. The motion was casual and intimate, like he was giving Ilya space to speak or not, but also reminding him he was still there.

“It’s difficult for you to be there?”

Ilya didn’t answer right away. Several moments passed and Shane started to wonder if the question had been too much, too invasive. But then Ilya spoke, voice barely above a whisper, muffled where his mouth was smushed against the top of Shane’s hair.

“I hate it there,” he said. “My brother is a shit head. My father is getting worse, but Alexei pretends he is not dying when he *is*. ”

“I’m sorry,” Shane said softly.

Ilya gave a small, bitter shrug. “I’m... relieved, if I’m honest. I fucking hate him. I hate how he treated me. Still treats me. But then I feel bad for hating him. So it’s just...” He trailed off, voice going thin and tired. “Mess.”

The room went still and quiet again.

Shane didn’t try to fill the silence or untangle the knot. He didn’t ask for more, didn’t prod at wounds still healing. He just tightened his arm around Ilya’s torso, squeezing him gently, and letting his hand drift in slow, soothing strokes along the curve of his side.

Ilya closed his eyes and exhaled shakily. His body stayed tense for a few more seconds, shoulders drawn, jaw locked, but then, gradually, he softened. Let himself relax further into the embrace, into the safety of it, the weight of his guilt and grief finally easing just enough to rest.

They stayed like that for a long time. Quiet. Close. Breathing in sync.

And for once, Ilya didn't pull away. Didn't try to armor himself with sarcasm or distance. He just stayed. Letting himself be held. Letting Shane just *be there*.

After a long while, Shane's voice stirred the stillness again. Soft. Careful.

"Is your mother buried there?"

Ilya nodded where his face was tucked against Shane's temple.

"The cemetery is in Moscow. Not far from the apartment I have there."

Shane didn't respond right away. Just let the information settle, one hand moving slowly over Ilya's ribs.

"Do you go?"

"Every Sunday, when I'm home," Ilya murmured. His voice was softer now, close to Shane's ear. "I pay someone to take care of the grave year-round. Fresh flowers, candles, clearing snow in winter, you know. But I like doing it myself when I can."

Shane hummed, a low sound of acknowledgment. Thoughtful.

"What kind of flowers do you get for her?"

Ilya blinked, caught off guard by the question. He shifted slightly, enough to glance down and see Shane watching him with open curiosity, no trace of judgment or pity. Just... wanting to know.

"Uh... peonies," he said. "White ones, mostly. Crocuses if I can find them, but is harder in summer. So, sometimes irises. She loved those. Lilacs, too. That was her favorite."

Shane's hand moved up, brushing lightly over his collarbones in a slow, soothing arc.

"What color irises?" he asked after a pause, like it genuinely mattered. Like every detail was worth tucking away and remembering.

Ilya swallowed hard, throat tight. "Dark purple. Almost navy, really."

"Mm," Shane said, exhaling against his skin. "Those sound pretty."

The words weren't dramatic. There was no awe, no overt sympathy. Just genuine sincerity.

It was so fucking *nice*.

So simple and curious and earnest. Not performative, not polite for politeness's sake. Just genuine interest. Like Shane wanted to understand him better. Like Ilya's memories and the people he loved were worth knowing about.

It made Ilya want to cry. Or kiss him until neither of them could breathe. Or roll him over and fuck him into the mattress until the only thing either of them could feel was how deep he was.

Maybe all three.

He didn't do any of them. Yet.

He just squeezed Shane a little tighter to his chest.

Shane made a soft contented noise at the pressure and was quiet again for a moment. Just trailing lazy fingers along Ilya's pecs. Then, gently:

"She was different from your dad?"

Ilya exhaled slowly. "Yes," he said. "She was... everything he wasn't. Isn't."

His eyes fixed on the ceiling like he was watching memories flicker across it.

"She was nice. Not soft, exactly, but... warm. Kind. She was so sad most of the time. Like she was always bowed by something heavy." He paused. "But she never took it out on us. Not once. Even when Father was awful. Even when she probably wanted to give up."

Shane turned toward him, one hand resting over Ilya's heart. Listening without interrupting.

"I used to wonder what she was thinking, by staying," Ilya murmured. "But now... I don't know. Maybe she stayed for us. Or maybe she didn't think she had a choice. But she still made us feel safe. Loved. She tried."

He swallowed again, eyes stinging.

"She liked to watch me skate."

There was a long pause. Shane leaned in and pressed a kiss just below Ilya's jaw. A silent thank-you for the trust, for telling him all of this.

Ilya closed his eyes. Allowed himself feel the safety of it. Allowed himself miss her. Allowed himself let Shane in.

Ilya squeezed his eyes shut, but it was too late, a single tear slipped free, carving a hot path down his cheek.

"Sorry," he muttered, immediately turning his face away, voice cracking with shame.

But Shane didn't let him go. Didn't give him the space to spiral or disappear. Instead, he used all his considerable strength to shift upward on the bed a little and tug Ilya back against *his*

chest, arms wrapping around him with unshakable resolve.

He held him, full-body, bone-deep, like he wasn't going to let go, no matter how hard Ilya tried to turn away or make himself small.

And Ilya... broke. Silently, fiercely, shaking with everything he hadn't really let himself feel until now.

Shane just held on tighter.

It took a long time for Ilya to cry himself out. Longer still before the tremors faded, before the weight of it all eased just enough for words to return.

Shane stayed quiet through it all, still wrapped around him, his cheek resting against the crown of Ilya's head, one hand carding through his hair like a metronome. Their bodies were warm and tangled, limbs heavy with exhaustion and everything else beneath it.

After a while, Ilya's voice slipped out, rough and small. "Stay? Please."

Shane's lips curved against his curls.

"Mm. You'd have to physically throw me out if you wanted me gone."

The laugh that bubbled out of Ilya was watery and hoarse, but real. He scrubbed at his face with the heel of his hand, chasing away the salt still clinging to his cheeks, then sniffed and exhaled like he was trying to reset himself from the inside out.

"Shower?" he murmured, voice steadier now.

"Sure."

They moved unhurriedly, bodies loose and heavy, the warm weight of closeness and comfort still hanging over them. In the bathroom, the light was low, the tiles cool under their feet. They stepped beneath the spray together, letting the steam wrap around them in a thick, comforting cloud. The hot water hit Shane's front and he exhaled so deeply it was nearly a groan, his shoulders sagging under the sudden rush of relief.

Ilya laughed.

"You were dying that whole time, weren't you? Covered in sand and sweat and dry cum?"

Shane gave a little sheepish tilt of his head, caught. "Maybe."

Ilya stepped closer, water running in rivulets down his chest. "You could've said something."

Shane shook his head. "Didn't matter," he murmured. "Didn't want to move."

That admission made Ilya soften. He reached out and cupped Shane's face, fingers wet and gentle, and kissed him. Slow, sweet, grateful. Just a press of lips under the rush of water. A silent thank you for staying, for wanting, for not pulling away.

Shane let his eyes flutter shut as Ilya's hands moved over him. Practical at first, scrubbing and rinsing them clean of everything they'd shed between the sheets, but then it was slower, more deliberate. Sensual and *intent*.

When Ilya dropped to his knees, there was no teasing in it. No performance. Just devotion. Gratitude wrapped in desire. He looked up once through damp lashes, like asking permission, and Shane could only nod, breath caught somewhere behind his teeth.

It wasn't about power. It wasn't about taking. It was Ilya saying thank you in the language they both understood best. And Shane, with one hand in his hair and his other braced against the wall, received it the only way he knew how.

Chapter End Notes

i didn't intend for this to be more than a one-shot, but then i had ~ideas~ lol

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ilya's bedroom smelled like sweat and skin and something wilder and greedy. Afternoon light spilled across the rumpled bed, the sheets kicked halfway to the floor. It was a few weeks out from Tampa, just hours before they faced each other on the ice in Boston, they'd broken one of the unspoken rules neither of them had ever dared put into words.

Just this once.

They lay loose-limbed in the aftermath, heat still simmering under their skin, breath slowly evening out in the quiet. Ilya had pulled Shane in without thinking, one arm wrapped tight around his back, like holding on would somehow slow time. Their legs were tangled.

Neither one moved for a while.

Eventually, they spoke again, soft and lazy. A few minutes of hockey talk, just barely pretending the clock wasn't ticking down. They mentioned the game. Rumors of a couple possible trades that had surprised them. Dragging out their post-sex cooldown in the thin space between denial and honesty.

Then Shane shifted and propped himself up on one elbow.

"Oh," he said suddenly, voice still a little rough. "I, uh. I brought you something."

Ilya tilted his head, curious. "Yeah?"

Shane rubbed the back of his neck, suddenly sheepish.

"It's, um, for when you go home. For your mom."

Ilya blinked. His heart rate picked up instantly. "What do you mean?"

"I just..." Shane exhaled, fumbling. "I can't imagine what it's like. My mom's always been there; games, interviews, everything. She's been so... involved. And I thought, fuck, I don't know. If it were my mom, if she... well, I think I'd want to bring her something like this."

His voice was soft and awkward. Earnest in that way that always made Ilya want to cover his face or kiss him breathless.

Shane reached into the small backpack he'd brought with him and handed over a flat box, neatly wrapped.

Ilya opened it slowly and carefully.

Inside was a framed photo of himself.

Him hoisting the Cup almost three years ago, mouth open in triumph, tears streaming down his face. Sweat-soaked, grinning, eyes bright and wild with disbelief. Arms lifted, gear half-off. The translated closed captioning recreated in clean, simple lettering over his chest:

I did it, Mama!

Exactly what he'd shouted into the air that night, adrenaline and a thousand emotions surging through him.

But it wasn't just the photo that made his chest constrict sharply. It was the frame, too.

Ilya's fingers trembled as he trailed them over the edges. It was impossibly ornate and textured, but not gaudy. There were dozens and dozens of tiny flowers carved into the surface, delicate and exquisitely detailed: lilacs, crocuses, peonies, irises. Bundles of them, curling around the border like they'd grown there naturally.

His throat worked uselessly.

When he looked up, his eyes were glassy. Shane was watching him carefully, still awkward.

"I, uh, had the frame made by an artist in Ottawa. It's um, special material that's sealed with something. Weatherproof, so it won't get damaged, even if it's outside all year. Even in the snow."

Ilya didn't speak. Just set the frame down with shaking hands and reached for Shane, dragging him into a kiss that said everything words couldn't touch.

Ilya pulled back just enough to breathe, their foreheads still resting together. Tears were slipping silently down his cheeks, but he didn't try to hide them. Didn't turn away.

"Thank you," he whispered, voice raw and shaking.

Shane nodded, gently brushing his thumbs under Ilya's eyes.

"Of course."

Ilya huffed a breath that might've been a laugh.

"You should've given it to me as soon as you got here."

Shane arched an eyebrow, confused. "Why?"

Ilya's lips curved, teasing now. "So I'd have had time to thank you properly."

Shane laughed, embarrassed and delighted.

"Right," he said. "Next time I'll remember. Just... you're very distracting."

Ilya leaned in again, mouth brushing his with a smile.

They kissed again for an indeterminate amount of time, slow and breathless. Shane finally eased back just enough to look at Ilya, to catch the tremble in his lower lip as he looked down at the frame again for a long moment.

With a careful, cautious touch, he traced a tangle of lilac blooms etched into the metal like it was an offering for something sacred and holy.

“You like it?” Shane asked softly.

Ilya nodded, and then he cupped Shane’s face between both hands, thumbs brushing his cheeks. Stared at him like he was something miraculous. He knew he wouldn’t be able to hold the words back, so he let them fall.

Not in English.

In Russian. Soft and fast and ragged.

You’re the kindest, most wonderful person I’ve ever known.

*I love you. I **love** you.*

I love you so much it hurts. So much it feels like I can’t breathe.

Shane just watched him, entranced. Lips parted, chest rising and falling rapidly. He didn’t understand a word, but Ilya could see the way it landed anyway. He stroked Shane’s face gently, eyes scanning every inch like he needed to memorize it.

Ilya kept going, voice thick with emotion.

I wish you could come with me. Take this to the cemetery with me. Help me find flowers to match this frame exactly. Be there while I talk to her. Tell her everything you mean to me.

Fresh tears slipped down his cheeks before he could stop them. He collapsed into Shane’s neck, a jagged, stuttering sob tearing through his chest.

Shane caught him instantly. One arm around his back, the other cradling the back of his head, holding him as close as humanly possible. He didn’t say a word. Just stroked his hair, rocked him gently, and let him cry.

Several moments later, Ilya pulled back a little, wiping his eyes with the heel of his hand, still trembling, still half-folded into Shane’s chest. He felt raw and flayed open, but also steadier now, with Shane holding him like this, like he was keeping all the broken parts of him glued together.

And then, so softly he almost missed it, Shane murmured something in French.

Ilya blinked. Lifted his head.

Shane gave him the smallest, sheepish smile. Adorable, crooked, like he knew exactly what he was doing and was already bracing for retaliation.

“I said a bunch of stuff you didn’t understand,” Ilya teased, voice still a little hoarse and watery, “so now it’s your turn, yes?”

Shane nodded, grinning slightly wider. He leaned and kissed him once, then the tip of his nose. Then his forehead, like a benediction.

I adore you, he murmured again, in French. *I have for a long time.*

His hand cupped Ilya’s jaw, thumb stroking gently as he went on, whispering only a fraction of the words that had been locked deep inside his chest for so, so many years.

I want... so many things. And it’s terrifying. You’re perfect. You’re such a dick, but you’re also really funny. And sweet. And so good to me. When you want to be.

He pressed another kiss to Ilya’s mouth, firmer now.

I want this.

Another kiss.

You. Us.

Another, lingering even longer now with more heat behind it, more ache.

Ilya searched his face like it held the answer to any question he could ever think to ask. Shane leaned in again, mouth moving hungrily over his, and when he pulled back just slightly, his voice was breathless against Ilya’s lips.

I want to fall asleep with you in my bed every night. Wake up with you. Retire and be boring with you.

Ilya let out a shaky breath, one hand fisting in Shane’s shirt. Then he dragged him in, scooting backwards across the bed, twisting until Shane was straddling his lap, knees bracketing his hips.

Shane gasped, arms locking around his neck. And then there was no space left between them at all.

It took everything in Ilya to say it aloud, in English. His breath stuttered out of him, jaw clenched, voice hoarse and guttural.

“I need to be inside you,” he said. “Please.”

Shane’s pupils blew wide, jaw slackening, but he nodded fast, already climbing closer, already reaching.

Ilya’s thumb dragged across Shane’s lower lip.

“Please don’t stop,” he rasped.

“You too,” Shane whispered, already breathless. “More Russian. Please. It’s so fucking hot.”

He was already pushing down onto him, bare, slick, no hesitation. They both gasped like they’d been punched. The stretch, the pressure, the heat. Shane braced a hand against Ilya’s chest and rocked down harder.

Rough. Desperate. Unrelenting.

Ilya’s head hit the headboard with a thud. His hands grabbed at Shane’s hips, then his ass, then his ribs, like he couldn’t decide what to hold onto, just that he *needed to*.

The Russian poured out of him raw, wrecked, unfiltered.

I love you. I love you. I love you so much I want to tear my own heart out. You make me fucking insane. I would kill for you. I would kneel for you. I would ruin myself for one more second like this.

Shane moaned, shivering, fucking himself harder onto him.

He bent low, mouth dragging along Ilya’s jaw, then his ear. Whispered in French, voice wrecked and gasping.

You make me forget my own name. My own body. It’s always you. It’s really only ever been you.

Ilya swore under his breath, one hand sliding down Shane’s back, the other fisting in his hair. He bucked up hard, brutal. Shane took it with a gasp and came back down for more.

You ruin me, Shane hissed. Every other man disappears when you look at me like this. No one’s ever touched me like you do. No one’s ever made me feel like I’d fall apart if you stopped.

You won’t stop, right? Tell me you won’t stop. Tell me you want this. Want me.

More Russian. Filthy and ardent and helpless.

You feel like fucking heaven. You take me apart like it’s nothing. Like I belong to you. You could do whatever you want to me. I’ll beg for it. I’ll let you use me. I’ll worship you on my knees, just don’t leave. Don’t ever fucking leave me.

They were kissing like they were trying to break each other’s jaws. Shane was shaking from the force of it, thighs burning, whole body slick with sweat. Ilya’s fingers dug into his waist. Shane was clawing at his shoulders. They were both on the verge, speaking in tongues they didn’t share, but lost in the language their bodies understood completely.

Nothing coherent. Just:

More.

Mine.

Please.

Don't stop.

Stay.

And then they were both shattering together, still moving, still grinding into each other like they needed to fuse into one being. Like it wasn't enough to be skin to skin, like they needed more. Always more.

The words didn't stop. Neither did the kisses. Or the shaking.

Only when the aftershocks began to ebb did Shane collapse forward, breath shuddering as he buried his face in the crook of Ilya's neck. Their chests rose and fell in sync, damp skin pressed together.

Ilya's hand moved in slow, steady passes along the ridges of Shane's spine. He glanced at the clock on the bedside table, then tipped his chin to kiss Shane's temple.

"You need to go soon," he murmured, voice low and reluctant. "Or you'll miss your bus to the arena."

Shane nodded against him, the motion sluggish, still boneless and warm. He didn't speak right away, just let himself linger in the afterglow, breathing in the scent of Ilya's skin.

Ilya closed his eyes, pulling him a little closer. He let himself savor it for a few more minutes. The weight of this beautiful, stubborn, ridiculous, kind man sprawled over him, tucked into him like he belonged there.

After a long beat, Shane rasped, "I apologize in advance for tonight."

Ilya huffed, already smiling.

"We're gonna destroy you guys," Shane added, hoarse and smug.

Ilya snorted and pressed a kiss to the crown of his head. "Dream on, Hollander."

Chapter End Notes

happy honda days <3

I jumped the gun a little on the love confession, but UGH ep 5 wrecked me. and then i remembered shane *also* speaks another language ilya doesn't understand. so here we are.

also, shane doesn't outright say i love you back, even in french, because my little paranoid neurotic flower would be absolutely sure je t'aime would be too recognizable for even ilya to miss lmao

i might add more to this later, but i am not 1000% sure yet lol

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