

meet me in the afterglow

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by [hollidayparty](#)

Summary

“Ah,” Ilya said, grinning, going for the joke.

Shane looked up, curious.

“So being boring is genetic?”

He expected laughter. Or the way Shane would roll his eyes even as he melted, the way that made the teasing feel welcome.

Instead, Shane’s smile disappeared completely. It wasn’t dramatic. It just... went. Like a light switched off.

“Yeah,” Shane said, clearing his throat, forcing the word out before it could crack. “I guess so.”

He took a step back, creating space that felt suddenly necessary, like he might suffocate if he drifted any closer. Every instinct in him screamed to leave. To put distance between himself and this feeling and the source of it before it swallowed him whole

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

“When did your English get so good?” Shane asked, half-teasing, half-genuine, leaning back from Ilya’s orbit just a fraction.

Ilya smirked, adjusting his cuff. “I, uh, I read *The New Yorker* now.”

Shane’s eyebrows shot up as he grinned. “Really?”

“No,” Ilya said immediately. “*New Yorker* is boring.”

Shane’s smile faltered. Just a flicker at first. Easy to miss if one wasn’t already staring at his mouth.

“Oh,” he said. He dropped his gaze to his shoes. “My dad loves it.”

“Ah,” Ilya said, grinning, going for the joke. Shane looked up, curious. “So being boring is genetic?”

He expected laughter. Or the way Shane would roll his eyes even as he melted, the way that made the teasing feel welcome.

Instead, Shane’s smile disappeared completely. It wasn’t dramatic. It just... went. Like a light switched off.

Shane’s skin prickled as heat rushed unpleasantly up his neck. Shame, old and familiar, curled tight in his chest. He’d been avoiding Ilya’s eyes without really meaning to, eyes drawn instead to his mouth, the sharp line of it, the way it curved when he smiled.

Now even that felt like too much.

Shane dropped his gaze to the knot of Ilya’s tie.

Words echoed in his head, uninvited and cruel, bouncing around the way they had for the last six months.

No. I didn’t answer your boring text. Now will you fucking go?

He swallowed hard.

“Yeah,” Shane said, clearing his throat, forcing the word out before it could crack. “I guess so.”

He took a step back, creating space that felt suddenly necessary, like he might suffocate if he drifted any closer. Every instinct in him screamed to leave. To put distance between himself

and this feeling *and the source of it* before it swallowed him whole.

At the same time, some other part of him wanted desperately for Ilya to notice. To say something. To soothe. To stop him from going.

Shane didn't look up to check if Ilya could see either impulse on his face. He just stood there, shoulders tight, heart pounding, balanced on the edge between fleeing and hoping.

In the end, the urge for flight won.

Shane cleared his throat again. Still didn't look up.

"There's nothing that I want from you," he muttered. "I'm not - " The words crumbled apart in his mouth. He stopped, jaw clenching hard enough to hurt.

It wasn't true. Not even close. Not even five minutes ago he had been putty in Ilya's hands. Pliant and melting, leaning in, basking in that familiar, stupid warmth blooming in his chest just from being close to him. From being *wanted*.

And now he felt ridiculous for it.

"Hollander," Ilya said.

Shane's eyes flicked up despite himself. Just for a second. Long enough to see the confusion crease Ilya's brow, long enough to feel that sharp, idiotic pull in his chest.

Too much.

His gaze darted away immediately, fixing on the far wall instead. Tears pricked the corners of his vision. He shook his head once, small and frustrated.

He would *not* cry in front of this man. Not in front of someone he was pretty sure actually hated him. Or worse, *liked* the way Shane stumbled around him. Or got off on this weird power imbalance. Or enjoyed the way Shane always seemed to want things more than he did.

The awful, gnawing feeling in his chest grew sharper, tighter, like it was trying to consume him from the inside.

Make it stop, he thought. *Just make it stop*.

He straightened and forced his shoulders back. Willed himself to hold it together long enough to get out of this room.

"Enjoy your big night," Shane said, voice flat.

Then he turned and left. The door clicked shut behind him and the echo of it lingered far longer than the sound itself.

Ilya was left standing there alone, his joke hanging uselessly in the air. The certainty that he'd misjudged the situation badly crept up his spine like an icy draft.

Chapter End Notes

whyyyyyyyyyyyyyy do so many taylor swift songs fit them so well? brb blaring
afterglow on repeat while i work on this

also, is the vegas sex scene insanely hot? yes.

has "wow, genetic" + hudson's literal goddamn heart eyes bewitched me body and soul?

also yes

BUT the way his smile drops when he says my dad loves it makes my fucking tummy
hurt :(

so instead, i wrote a version where the jab stings too much and my boy gets
overwhelmed

Chapter 2

Shane didn't go back to the awards show.

He knew it was dumb. Unprofessional. Something he'd probably regret later, when someone made him explain himself. But the big awards were already handed out. He'd done his bit and suffered through the fucking awful presentation with Ilya. There wasn't much left of the night worth sticking around for. Who cared if he missed the rest?

And right now, all he could think about was the way his chest felt too tight, like he couldn't get a full breath in without it catching painfully halfway.

He needed air. Space. Anything that wasn't that bathroom.

He veered away from the elevators and pushed into the stairwell instead, the heavy door thudding shut behind him. It smelled faintly of concrete and cleaning solution and blessedly empty. No cameras. No people. No chance of running into anyone who might look at him and ask if he was okay.

He took the stairs two at a time at first, then slowed, the climb stretching on and on. His legs started to burn. His lungs worked harder. Sweat broke along his hairline.

And somehow, that helped.

The physical effort pulled him out of his head just enough. Gave him something solid to focus on besides the ache splitting his chest open. Thighs burning. Breath rasping. The simple, honest hurt of muscles being used too hard.

By the time he finally pushed open the door to the rooftop, his pulse was pounding and his hands were shaking but the panic had eased its grip.

The rooftop was dark and quiet. The bar was closed, chairs stacked neatly, the pool lights off so the water was just a black mirror reflecting the Vegas sky. The city hummed distantly below, muffled and unreal.

Shane wandered a little until he found a handful of lounge chairs pushed off to the side and sank onto one heavily. He leaned forward, elbows braced on his knees, head dropping into his hands.

Okay, he thought. Break everything down. That usually works.

He tried to sort through what he was feeling. Line it all up and make sense of it the way he always did. But it was too much. Hurt layered over humiliation. Desire tangled up with anger. The familiar, stupid hope he kept swearing he didn't have anymore.

He pressed his palms harder against his eyes, breathing slow, trying to get himself back under control.

It wasn't working.

The stairwell door creaked open behind him. Shane jerked upright, heart leaping into his throat as he turned.

Ilya stood there, one hand braced on the doorframe, breathing a little harder than usual, a little too hard to be casual. He straightened quickly, like he could will the evidence away, smoothing a hand through his hair as if he'd simply wandered up here by accident.

Shane had the wild, irrational urge to dive straight off the side of the building just to get away from him.

He had an even worse urge to cross the space between them and throw himself into Ilya's arms.

Both thoughts scared the hell out of him.

He stayed where he was.

Ilya took a few steps onto the rooftop, gaze flicking to Shane and then away again, like he wasn't sure he was allowed to look at him for too long. He hesitated, then dropped into the deck chair beside him.

Close. But not touching. Neither of them spoke.

The Strip stretched out below them, all neon and motion and noise that somehow didn't reach this far up. Cars slid past like glowing ants. The city pulsed and breathed without them.

The silence was tight and stretched thin but it wasn't uncomfortable. It didn't feel like rejection. Not yet, at least. It felt like restraint. Like both of them were holding themselves very still so nothing tipped past a point of no return, one way or the other.

Shane stared out at the lights, jaw clenched. He could feel Ilya there beside him, solid and warm and infuriatingly real. Every nerve in his body was aware of the space between their chairs, of how easily it could be crossed.

He didn't say anything. Couldn't, really. Part of it was stubbornness. Part of it was exhaustion.

He was so fucking tired of being the one who filled the silences. Of bending, adjusting, offering something up just to keep Ilya close. Of making himself smaller and available and willing so this could stay easy for the other man to choose..

Not this time.

If Ilya had something to say, he could say it.

Chapter 3

They sat side by side with the city spread out below them in restless motion. Neon pulsed and dimmed, cars threading along the Strip like veins of light, the noise distant enough to feel unreal. From up here, it all felt distant. The city, the people, the league, the expectation. Like none of it could quite reach them.

The silence between them grew heavy and dense.

After a long time, Ilya spoke.

“I’m sorry.”

Shane bit back a scoff. It lodged in his throat anyway, sharp and bitter. He didn’t look over.

“For what,” he said. Flat. Dead. Like the answer didn’t really matter.

Ilya exhaled slowly. “Many things,” he said. “Too many to fix with one conversation.”

That made Shane turn.

He looked at Ilya fully for the first time since the stairwell door had opened, taking in the way he was hunched slightly forward now, elbows on his knees, hands clasped together like he didn’t quite know what to do with them.

Ilya wasn’t looking at him. He was staring down at his own fingers twisting and untwisting around themselves, brow drawn tight in a frown.

“I’m sorry I called you boring,” Ilya said softly. “Hurt your feelings.” A pause. Then, more awkwardly, “I don’t... I don’t really think you’re boring. I thought you knew it was just...” he searched for the word, gave up and grimaced, “...old joke.”

Shane shook his head, the motion sharp and automatic. The familiar sting bloomed somewhere in his chest. The same old frustration. The embarrassment of always being half a step behind, of missing the moment when something real blurred into something playful. It put him instantly on guard, wanting the hurt to make sense instead of making him look stupid.

“It didn’t sound like a joke in Sochi,” he said defensively.

Ilya closed his eyes for a brief second and sighed. When he opened them again, he nodded once.

“Yes,” he said. “I know.”

And Ilya suddenly understood why the word had landed like a blow tonight. Why Shane’s smile had vanished instead of softening like it usually did. Because last time, in Sochi, he *had* meant it.

He'd been lashing out at the one bright thing he couldn't afford to want, the one person who made him feel safe and special and *wanted* when everything else had been tense and terrifying and hostile.

He'd been miserable. Scared. Trapped back home in a place that coldly demanded silence and obedience and cruelly punished softness and vulnerability.

And Shane had been standing there, open and earnest and offering him a crumb of comfort. It felt like a feast he wasn't allowed to taste.

So, Ilya had struck first.

He rubbed a hand over his face now, shame settling heavy in his chest.

"I was angry," he said. "And I was scared. And I took it out on you." He glanced up then, finally meeting Shane's eyes. "That wasn't fair."

Shane held his gaze for a moment, searching his face for deflection, for sarcasm, for anything that would make this easier to dismiss.

He didn't find any of it. He looked away again, jaw tight, eyes back on the Strip.

"Okay," Shane said. Not forgiving. Not cold. Just... tired. The lights below them kept pulsing. The city kept moving.

And then, because he couldn't help it, Shane asked, "Why scared?"

He was pretty sure already knew the answer. He'd suspected it even then. But his brain needed the confirmation, needed the shape of it spelled out so it would stop spinning.

Ilya didn't hedge this time. Didn't soften it.

"Partly because of new laws," he said simply. "Among other reasons."

The words landed exactly where Shane had expected them to. Exactly where he'd been afraid they would.

Shane nodded slightly and turned it over in his mind. He pictured it, or tried to, anyway. Tried to imagine Canada doing the same thing. Tried to imagine Ilya approaching him in Montreal, in public, knowing that a look held too long or a touch caught by the wrong person could ruin everything.

The thought made his stomach twist.

Still - and he knew this was petty, even as the thought rose in his mind - *I don't think I'd've been as much of a dick to him.*

"I figured," Shane said finally. "I mean... yeah." He exhaled, scrubbed a hand over his face. "But I wasn't... I wasn't hitting on you. I was just fucking asking if you were okay. Because you looked fucking miserable."

His voice splintered just enough to make him stop briefly and swallow hard.

“And I -” He tried again and then broke off with a short, disbelieving laugh, shaking his head. “I’m so fucking dumb. I wanted to check on you because I was *worried* about you.”

The admission hung there, exposed and raw.

Ilya’s head bowed a little more. Shame weighed him down, heavy and deserved. Because Shane was *good*. Kind and earnest to the point of near-naivety, the sort of person who reached out instead of retreating inward. Ilya knew that. He had always known.

And for reasons Ilya still didn’t fully understand, he had wanted to be sharp. Wanted to wound him, to prove something ugly and mean about the world before the world did it itself.

He forced himself to speak.

“You are not dumb,” Ilya said quietly. “I’m sorry. I was not okay. Everything I said. It didn’t... have anything to do with you. Not really.” His voice roughened. “It was... everything else.”

Shane absorbed that in silence. It helped. A little.

He could see it now; the fear, the pressure, the way Ilya had been cornered by a country and expectations that left no room to breathe. He understood why Ilya had lashed out, why he’d chosen cruelty over comfort.

But understanding didn’t erase what it had felt like in the moment or in the months after. Didn’t unhear the words. Didn’t undo the way his chest had hollowed out when they’d landed.

“Okay,” Shane said slowly. He glanced sideways at Ilya, then back at the lights below. “It just... fucking hurt,” he added. “A lot.”

The confession was simple. Not accusatory. Just true.

Ilya nodded, accepting the blame this time instead of trying to talk his way around it.

“I know,” he said quietly. “I meant it to. I don’t know why.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

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

Shane stared at a particularly bright neon purple sign for a long moment before he asked another question, his voice still flat, still lifeless.

“Why didn’t you say any of this... after,” he said. “Once the games were over.”

Ilya shrugged.

It was small. Almost unconscious.

For some reason, it made something violent and dangerous roar to life in Shane’s chest. A sharp, sudden urge to throw something burned through him. But the only things within reach were his phone, another deck chair, or Ilya. So, no, *that* reaction was definitely out.

He bit the inside of his cheek instead, hard enough to taste a faint tang of blood, and kept looking at the same blinking violet glow.

Then Ilya spoke again, slower this time. “I didn’t want...” He trailed off, hesitating.

Shane’s shoulders tensed. He could hear the rest of the sentence already, perfectly formed in his head.

I didn’t want you.

He braced himself for the way Ilya would surely spit the last word.

Instead, to his surprise, Ilya finished, “...to bother you with all of my bullshit.”

Shane frowned. He was caught off guard just enough that his anger wobbled for a full minute.

“I wouldn’t have minded,” he murmured.

Ilya shrugged again, helpless now.

“Was less scary to push you away first. Instead of opening up and then...” He gestured vaguely, palms up, like the end of the sentence was too obvious to need words.

Shane’s temper spiked again at once. A short, bitter laugh tore out of him before he could stop it.

“Yeah,” he said, dry and sharp. “I bet that would’ve been fucking *awful*. To just get left hanging.”

Ilya turned his head to *really* look at Shane then, studying his face like he was finally seeing the damage clearly.

Shane couldn't sit with it anymore. His eyes skittered restlessly over the glittering sprawl below them as the words spilled out, fast and uneven.

"Do you have any idea, after *years* of you - " he stopped, jaw flexing, hating the next word even as he settled on it, "- *pursuing* me. Wanting me to let you fuck me. And I kept saying no, because I knew it was a line we couldn't un-cross. But you kept chasing..."

He shook his head as he broke off again. His breath was quicker and sharper now.

"So, yeah, I finally let you," Shane said. "And it's fucking *terrifying* to be that vulnerable. With anyone." His jaw tightened painfully. "But especially with *you*."

The admission landed between them, heavy and unavoidable. It left nowhere to hide.

Ilya floundered for a moment before grasping at levity like a lifeline.

"Next time you want roses and candles?"

"Oh, fuck you. That's not - " Shane squeezed his eyes shut as his anger finally burst its banks. He dropped his head and clenched his fists hard in his lap.

"FUCK!"

The word tore out of him, raw and sharp, echoing in the open air.

He dragged a hand through his hair, breathing hard. "I don't need you to make love to me or some shit," he said. "That's not what I'm saying. I just -"

He swallowed. Closed his eyes. Counted to five, trying to get himself back under control.

"I felt like I was just... some hole you used," Shane went on, voice husky now, shaking. "Something you finally scored after trying so hard, and then it didn't matter anymore. Like, great. Box checked. On to the next thing."

Shame crept up Ilya's spine, hot and immediate. He looked away, eyes stinging. He remembered how careful he'd been in the moment. How he'd tried to make sure Shane wouldn't feel exactly like this.

And yet here they were. He'd done it anyway, just months later. There was nothing he could say now that wouldn't sound like an excuse.

Then Shane's words came faster, tumbling over each other.

"It was fucking whiplash, man. *Two years* of you pushing and flirting and wanting that from me. And when it happens, it's *good*, like, *really* fucking good. But the next time I see you, you're yelling at me, acting like I'm embarrassing you, like I'm the biggest fucking idiot on the planet or something. And then you -"

He choked off again. But Ilya didn't need him to go on.

He already knew. He had ignored him. For months. Every text. Not accidentally. Not carelessly. Purposefully, even when it had taken effort. Even when he'd missed him. Even when it hurt.

He started a little when Shane laughed again, harsh and humorless.

"Do you know how insane I've felt?"

Shane wiped at his eyes roughly, furious with himself for letting it get this far.

Yes, Ilya wanted to say. Because I felt it too. Even though it's my fault.

But he didn't. Couldn't. The Strip blazed beneath them, indifferent and loud and far away.

Ilya didn't try to joke this time. Didn't deflect. He sat there and took it, shoulders drawn tight, his face set in something that looked a lot like regret. His mind spun uselessly. Because for the first time, there was no easy way out of what Shane had said. No humor, no bravado, no distance far enough to blunt the pain.

"And then everything tonight," Shane went on, before Ilya could speak. "Like I'm just some fucking dog that comes running when you snap your fingers."

Shane swallowed hard, chest heaving once.

"And you said I was *boring* again and I..." he dragged in a breath that came out wrong, half laugh, half gasp, like his body didn't know which reaction to choose. "Jesus."

His hands clenched in his lap. He stared hard at the same neon purple light below, focusing on how it blinked in its steady rhythm.

"I feel so pathetic," Shane mumbled. "And stupid. And I want to crawl out of my own fucking skin right now. Or jump off this fucking building. Anything to stop feeling like this."

The words landed heavy and exposed, stripped of sarcasm, stripped of armor. This wasn't an accusation anymore. It was a confession. Humiliating and honest and aching.

Ilya didn't interrupt. He sensed Shane needed to get it all out of his system before he was ready for any response Ilya might give.

"I hate that I still want you," he muttered. "I hate that it gets to me like this. I hate that you can do that to me without even trying."

He scrubbed a hand over his face, furious tears threatening now, voice dropping.

"I don't even recognize myself when I'm with you."

That was the worst part, Shane realized. Not the anger. Not the hurt. But the way Ilya reduced him to this. Stripped him down to feeling too much, wanting too much, standing there raw

and exposed with nowhere to put it.

Shane was quiet after that. His jaw was tight and his shoulders were hunched, like he'd said too much and couldn't take any of it back.

And for once, Ilya didn't try to joke.

He sat there beside him, finally understanding, not just intellectually, but viscerally, that this wasn't about one night, or one word, or one misunderstanding.

This was about what it felt like to be wanted *and* dismissed by the same person in almost the same breath. And how much damage that could do.

After a long time, Ilya spoke.

"I do not think you are a dog."

Shane glanced over, half a glare, half a challenge. Like he didn't believe him, like he was daring Ilya to make another joke. To make it worse.

Ilya didn't flinch.

"I don't think you are pathetic," he continued, steady now. "Or stupid. Or boring." A pause. "I like messing with you. But that is not... I don't think you are any of those things."

The words landed softer than anything he'd said all night.

After a beat, Shane said quietly, "Thank you."

Ilya nodded once, then dropped his gaze to his hands, twisting his thumbs together like he was bracing himself for the next part.

"I actually think a lot of really nice things about you," he said. He swallowed. "And that is... scary. Sometimes."

Something locked deep in Shane's chest loosened at that.

Because *that*? That he understood.

The fight drained out of him in a slow, weary wave. He leaned back into the lounge chair, eyes closing as his body finally gave in to the exhaustion humming through him. His feet slid to either side of the chaise, legs falling open in a wide, careless straddle. He felt so wrung out from everything. Too much feeling. Too much back and forth.

He kept his eyes closed and focused on breathing, on settling the mess inside his chest into something manageable.

Then he heard the soft rustle of movement.

The chair creaked faintly as weight shifted. A moment later, Ilya sat sideways between Shane's legs on the edge of the lounge chair, close enough that one of his knees bumped Shane's.

Shane didn't open his eyes. But he didn't pull away either.

The space between them felt different now. Not solved, not fixed, but calmer. Less sharp. Like both of them were finally tired enough to stop swinging.

Shane made himself take a deep breath. Let it out. Then another. Then one more. Finally, he opened his eyes.

They looked at each other for a long moment. The Strip's glow gleamed faintly on Ilya's face. The lines of tension were still there but were softened now, stripped down to something honest and unsure.

"I'm sorry," Ilya said again.

Shane nodded. That was all he could manage. The words *it's okay* and *I forgive you* felt too big, too final, and he wasn't ready to hand them over yet.

Ilya seemed to understand. He didn't push.

After a beat, he said, carefully, "I will go now, if you want me to." He paused, hesitating as he searched Shane's eyes.

"But," he added, quieter, "I would much rather stay. If you'd let me."

The difference in the phrasing slid into Shane's mind like a blade.

It wasn't *Do you want me to stay?*

It wasn't a challenge or a test or a demand disguised as a choice.

It was an offer, clean and unguarded. One that didn't force Shane to be the one to confess how badly he wanted something.

It disarmed him completely.

Shane felt the sudden, sharp urge to reach out and touch Ilya's arm, his knee, anything solid. His fingers twitched where they rested against his lap. But the stubborn, still-bruised part of him held still.

Not tonight.

He wouldn't be the one to bridge the gap first this time.

He kept his hands where they were and took a steadying breath.

"You can stay," Shane said.

The words were simple. Barely audible. But weighty.

Ilya's shoulders eased just a fraction. Relief flickered across his face. He didn't touch Shane yet. Didn't crowd him. He just stayed where he was, present and patient, like he understood that *staying* was the important part.

For once, Shane didn't feel like he was bending to keep Ilya close or interested.

This time, Ilya had met him where he was.

Chapter End Notes

i tried to make this more of a conversation, but the shane in my head had to word-vomit first lol

also lol forgot to copy+paste the last bit before i hit post, is fixed now <3

Chapter 5

Shane stayed where he was, sunk back into the lounge chair, legs loose and spread on either side of the chaise, the night air cool against his skin. Ilya sat sideways between his legs on the narrow stretch of the chair, close without really touching, their knees bumping lightly every so often. An accidental contact neither of them moved to correct.

Shane closed his eyes again and tipped his head back, resting it against the chair. He focused on the simple things: the solid support beneath him, the distant hum of the Strip below, the slow rise and fall of his own breath. He willed the tension out of his shoulders. Out of his jaw. Out of his chest.

Just breathe. Just let it settle. But for a few seconds, nothing changed.

Then he felt Ilya's hand come to rest on his knee.

The touch was careful, almost tentative. Not possessive. Not urgent. Just warm contact, placed there and left, like Ilya was still half-asking permission to stay even after Shane had already given it.

Shane's eyes opened, but he didn't look down.

Instead, he kept his head angled back, gaze fixed on the faint scatter of stars barely visible through the Vegas haze, washed out by neon and light pollution and the glow of the city. He let the warmth of Ilya's hand seep fully into his skin before he reacted. Let himself feel Ilya's touch without flinching or pulling away, but without melting and canting toward it either.

The chair creaked softly as Ilya shifted his weight, still careful, still restrained. Shane stayed still.

Ilya brushed his thumb in a small arc over Shane's leg and murmured, "Is okay?"

The words were soft and familiar. And they hit harder than Shane expected.

For a split second, pain flickered across his face, quick and involuntary. The echo of that last night together rose up unbidden. Illicit moments, low light, Ilya's voice husky and low, asking the same question between thrusts and moans and positions.

Is okay?

Can you keep going?

Is still okay?

Care and attentiveness braided with desire. It had mattered in a way he still couldn't quite shake.

Shane swallowed hard, his throat tight. He nodded once.

“Yeah,” he said. His voice was rough and worn thin at the edges. “It’s okay.”

The words meant more than just the hand resting on his knee. They carried everything else with them too; the hurt, the exhaustion, the fragile truce that had sprouted between them out here on the roof.

Ilya didn’t move his hand. Didn’t ask again. He just stayed there, steady and patient. And somehow that helped more than anything else.

Another minute passed. Maybe two.

Then Shane shifted just enough to lay his hand over Ilya’s on his knee. The contact was tentative and testing. Their fingers slid together naturally, his index finger hooking over Ilya’s like it had always known where to go.

Only then did Shane look at him.

Ilya’s gaze moved over Shane’s face slowly and attentively. Like he was committing him to memory, like he was afraid the moment might slip away if he didn’t pay close enough attention. His eyes lingered on Shane’s mouth once. Then again. Then a third time, the thought circling back no matter how hard he tried to rein it in.

“Can I?” Ilya asked quietly.

The question was almost timid. Not performative. Not teasing. Just... careful.

Shane’s mind spun through a dozen calculations at once. Someone could come up here. Someone could see. This was public, technically. Vegas lights, open air, no real privacy.

And underneath all of that, there was something raw and reckless and exhausted that rose up and said: *I don’t care.*

He nodded.

Ilya’s breath stuttered like he’d been holding it without realizing. Then his hands came up, cupping Shane’s face with such careful tenderness it made Shane’s chest ache. His thumb brushed once along Shane’s cheekbone, grounding and steady.

And then he kissed him.

It was impossibly soft. Gentle to the point of devastation. A slow press of lips that felt less like a question or demand and more like an offering. Like Ilya was pouring everything he hadn’t said into the space between them. Every apology. Every fear. Every want he didn’t know how to voice.

Shane made a quiet sound and kissed him back just as carefully. Everything narrowed to the warmth of Ilya’s hands, the brush of breath between them, the way the kiss lingered, unhurried, like neither of them wanted to be the first to pull away.

Ilya's mouth slanted over Shane's as he kissed him again, deeper this time. Still restrained, still tender. Not taking. Just *rediscovering*, focused and unhurried, like he was mapping something delicate by touch alone.

Time slipped sideways, expanding and collapsing all at once as their mouths and lips and tongues moved together in a slow, perfect rhythm.

When they finally paused, foreheads resting together, Shane's heart was hammering. Not with panic or hurt now, but with something ardent and consoling and terrifying all at once.

For the first time that night, in months really, the ache in his chest didn't feel so sharp.

And for once, he didn't feel like he was imagining this part. The way Ilya looked at him like he wanted him more than oxygen, more than fame or glory or any trophy he'd ever chased.

Ilya drew back just enough to speak, breath fanning warm against Shane's lips.

"Do you -" he began then stopped. He swallowed, visibly recalibrating, and tried again. "I want you to come to my room. If that's okay."

The words had a more potent effect than Shane anticipated.

Not because of what they were asking but because of *how*. Because Ilya had put himself on the line first. Because he'd named the want instead of circling it, instead of making Shane do the emotional work of saying it out loud.

Before Shane could answer, Ilya added, softer now, almost unsure, "Will you? Please?"

Shane didn't bother with words. He nodded and nudged his forehead gently against Ilya's. A yes pressed into skin instead of sound.

Ilya exhaled in a rush of relief he didn't bother hiding this time.

"We don't have to..." he started, then stopped again, clearly struggling to find the right balance. "I can just... Would you be disappointed if I said I just want to..."

Shane huffed a breath of laughter, tired and fond and a little incredulous.

"*Cuddle?*"

He half-expected Ilya to scoff. To tease. To deflect with something clever.

Instead, Ilya nodded. Earnestly. Almost solemnly.

"Yes," he said. "That."

The simplicity of it did something strange and chaotic to Shane's heart.

"Only a *little* disappointed," Shane joked, smiling just the tiniest bit. Ilya smiled back, small, exhausted, and crooked.

“Well,” Ilya said after a beat, “there’s plenty of night left for... more. Later.”

Shane nodded, exhaling another quiet laugh through his nose. He squeezed their still-linked fingers once, then stood, pulling Ilya up with him.

The Strip glittered below them, loud and unreal, all neon and motion and noise.

Up here, they headed back inside. Unhurried. Together. And that felt like enough for now.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

The door shut behind them with a soft click.

They hadn't run into anyone in the stairwell or the hallway. Most people were still filtering out of the awards show or already spilling into after parties. But Shane couldn't find it in himself to care even if they had. The world outside this door felt distant already, like it belonged to a different universe entirely.

Ilya's suite was impossibly luxurious, of course. Floor-to-ceiling windows framed the city in its wild glittering sprawl. Expensive furniture filled the space, all clean lines, muted colors, indulgent without tipping into tacky. A sitting area, a sleek kitchenette, the kind of understated opulence Vegas did best.

Shane stepped inside and didn't go any farther.

He slumped back against the door, shoulders sagging as the last of the adrenaline drained out of him, leaving him wrung out and raw and aching in a way that had nothing to do with exhaustion. He tipped his head back against the wood and closed his eyes for a moment, breathing through it.

Desire washed over him anyway. Potent and unavoidable.

When he opened his eyes, Ilya was still standing a few steps away, studying him.

Shane could see a thousand things moving across his face at once: relief, worry, want, restraint, something like awe. Like he couldn't quite believe Shane was here. Like he was afraid that one wrong move might break whatever fragile truce they'd carried in here from the roof.

Slowly, Ilya crossed back to him.

He lifted a hand and touched Shane's face with impossible gentleness, thumb brushing along his jaw. Shane leaned into the touch automatically, the contact loosening the rest of whatever was tight in his chest.

Ilya's eyebrows lifted in a silent question. Shane didn't answer out loud. He just leaned in. Ilya met him halfway.

The kiss was tender and drawn out, even more so than on the roof. Ilya's mouth moved against Shane's like he was trying to say everything he hadn't managed to put into words. Every apology, every confession, every fear he'd buried and left unexamined.

Shane made a low sound in the back of his throat as his hands came up to grip the front of Ilya's jacket. He kissed him back just as softly, breath quickening, overwhelmed by how

careful Ilya was being now, even with the intensity of everything he'd held back simmering under the surface.

They stayed like that, pressed together against the door, kissing slow and languid and deep and aching. Not taking. Not rushing. Just letting this stolen moment linger as long as they wanted.

It felt like nothing could intrude.

No expectations.

No misunderstandings.

No wounds poised to open again.

There was just the whisper of their lips moving together, the tiny, needy sounds slipping out of both of them, the warmth of Ilya's body pressed to his, and the delicious, terrifying relief of being wanted without being pushed away or made to feel foolish or small for giving in so easily.

After several moments, or possibly lifetimes, Shane wasn't sure, Ilya broke away first, just barely. His eyes darted over Shane's face like he was trying to commit it to memory, to file it away for later so he could be sure he hadn't imagined any of this.

"I missed you," he murmured, voice jagged and thick. "So much."

Something suspiciously like Shane's heart fractured and reformed in the same breath. He didn't trust himself to answer. He just stayed there, hands still fisted in the front of Ilya's jacket, heart thundering, his gaze flicking between Ilya's eyes like he was searching for something he didn't quite know how to name.

Ilya's fingers slid into his hair, tightening slightly, tender and desperate all at once. "I'm so sorry," he murmured. "I -

The words failed him. Instead, he pulled Shane back in, the kiss deeper this time, less careful. Not rough, but urgent. Like he couldn't hold the apologies back any longer and didn't know how else to give them.

Shane gasped softly against his mouth and kissed him back, dizzy with it, overwhelmed by the sudden intensity. Ilya kissed him like he was trying to make up for months of silence, for everything he hadn't said when it had mattered.

They pressed together again, breathless and tangled, the room spinning faintly around them.

For the first time in months, Shane didn't feel like he was bracing for the other shoe to drop.

Ilya pulled back once more, breathing hard, his forehead resting against Shane's. His voice dropped to a whisper.

"Come to bed?"

Shane didn't hesitate. He nodded once, decisive, and his hands slid to Ilya's waist, guiding him backward across the room. He kissed him again, harder and hungrier this time, like he'd been starving and had only just remembered what it felt like to be fed.

Ilya made a soft sound against his mouth and went willingly, steps faltering as Shane walked him back toward the bed, kissing him like he was afraid of losing him again. Every touch felt charged now. Months of restraint gave way to something urgent and aching and alive.

They reached the edge of the bed together, still tangled, still kissing, still panting against each other's mouths.

Ilya tugged his jacket off and tossed it aside. His hands went to Shane's lapels next, fingers deft and quick as he started unbuttoning Shane's jacket and then the dress shirt beneath.

Shane lifted one eyebrow, breathless but amused.

"I thought you said cuddle."

Ilya paused and looked at him, incredulous.

"You want to cuddle in tuxedos?" He tilted his head. "Is one of those polite Canadian things? Sorry. I am not familiar."

He made a show of reaching for his own discarded jacket again.

Shane laughed, a real one, and rolled his eyes, smiling despite himself. Fond. Helpless.

There it is, Ilya thought. The reaction he'd tried to provoke earlier in the bathroom with his sharp, careless teasing. The look on Shane's face settled warm and satisfying in his chest.

"Come here," he murmured, sobering just slightly.

He slipped one hand under Shane's shirt, palm warm against bare skin, sliding up his abdomen. The touch wasn't rushed or overtly sexual, just appreciative and affectionate. Feeling the heat of him. The way Shane's muscles tensed slightly under his hand, instinctive and sensitive.

"I just want to feel," Ilya said softly.

And Shane let him.

They stripped slowly. Ilya held out his hands for each piece of clothing, wordlessly accepting jackets and shirts and slacks as Shane folded them with habitual care. Ilya set everything neatly on the nightstand beside the bed, one at a time, fighting the indulgent, delighted smile tugging at his mouth at Shane's endearing precision.

Soon they were left in just their briefs.

Ilya stepped back until the backs of his thighs brushed the edge of the bed, then tugged Shane toward him by the wrists, guiding him closer. Shane's gaze flicked down, then back up, one

eyebrow lifting as he took in the conspicuously untouched last layer between them.

Ilya huffed a quiet laugh.

“I *said* cuddle, pervert.”

Shane laughed again, open and unguarded. Something in Ilya gave way entirely. He leaned in and kissed him again, warm and fond and a little helpless, tugging him down with him as they sank into the plush bed together.

Ilya made good on his word. Mostly.

They'd lain in bed for what felt like hours, just holding each other. Shane's head rested on Ilya's chest, and he seemed too comfortable, too content after months of painful distance to be embarrassed by the intimacy of it. They kissed lazily, open-mouthed and unhurried, trading heat and comfort in equal measure. Their hands drifted, slow and absentminded, tracing aimless shapes into each other's skin beneath the sheets.

Now and then, they talked. Easy, meandering conversation. Gossip about players they both knew, speculation about team shifts and trades next season. Nothing important, but it felt easy. Familiar. Like they'd done this a hundred times before.

But in the end, Ilya couldn't help himself.

Not when Shane was warm and loose beside him, half-draped across his chest. Not when almost every inch of his skin was pressed to Ilya's under the covers. Not when he felt the faint line of Shane half-hard against his thigh. Not when he could tell how pliant Shane was, how happy.

And so, eventually, he slid down Shane's body, trailing open-mouth kisses over his skin before he wrapped his lips around Shane's cock. He took his time, working over him with aching slowness and smoldering intensity, savoring every reaction; the little sounds Shane couldn't seem to stop making, the way his body arched under Ilya's touch.

He was pretty sure his brain stopped working entirely when Shane had looked down at him, his pretty doe eyes wide and unguarded, gasping, utterly undone, and begged for Ilya to fuck him. The ragged, broken way he'd said he'd *needed* it, needed *him* had been irreversibly seared into Ilya's memory.

Ilya had taken his time, every movement patient and thorough, draped over Shane's back like he couldn't bear to let go of a single inch of him. His mouth had found the curve of Shane's shoulder, the nape of his neck, the sensitive skin just beneath his ear. He'd murmured to him in Russian, voice low and husky, half-coaxing, half-dominant. He'd bitten gently at Shane's earlobe, laughed softly when Shane shivered, then pressed a kiss there like an apology.

When it was over, they collapsed together in a tangle of limbs, breathless and wrecked in the best possible way. Shane didn't pull away. Ilya didn't let go. They just stayed like that, sated and still, as they came back down to earth together.

Chapter End Notes

basically, what if instead Ilya let himself have these things from the LV remix blog post

"But if he kissed him the way he wanted to—a slow exploration of Hollander's mouth that would provide Ilya with enough memories to get him through the long summer ahead—they would never leave this bathroom."

&

"Shane Hollander sprawled out on Ilya's bed, offering himself as a fucking prize, did not make sense. The way Ilya was more tempted to gather Hollander in his arms and hold him all night than fuck him didn't make sense. The way Ilya knew that if he kissed him he'd never stop didn't make sense."

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

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

Shane lay sprawled across Ilya's chest, the sheets tangled around their legs, his cheek resting just below Ilya's collarbone. Their skin was tacky with sweat but the air in the suite frigid, delightfully chilled by the low hum of the vent overhead. Shane didn't mind. It was the perfect antidote to the flushed heat still radiating off their bodies.

Ilya's fingers moved slowly through his hair, stroking in a steady rhythm that made Shane's eyelids flutter. It was so relaxing. Intimate. A little dangerous, too, in a way Shane couldn't afford to think too hard about.

Because *this* wasn't something they did.

And yet here they were.

His body was content, spent in the best way, but his brain wouldn't settle. The hush of the room gave his thoughts too much space to unspool. He tried to shut them up, tried to just *be* here, but the spiral crept in anyway.

He knew this was temporary. Knew how much they'd broken the rules just by letting it go this far tonight. Knew how they'd argued earlier, *really* argued, and how he'd fled. How Ilya had come after him and apologized. Made up with him, even. But all of this still felt like a surprise. Like a fluke.

So he closed his eyes and pretended.

Pretended Ilya liked him. Not romantically, exactly. Just... liked him.

Because he knew, objectively, that Ilya was attracted to him. That he respected him as an athlete, as a rival. But *liked* him? Liked him enough to want him around when there wasn't sex or hockey to justify it?

Probably not.

No.

Absolutely not.

He was too boring. Ilya told him so constantly, usually with a smirk and an exaggerated sigh. It has been Ilya's favorite running joke, constant and recurring since... forever.

Except. Up on the roof...

When Shane had expected him to crack another joke or roll his eyes or just be a dick, Ilya hadn't. He'd said he *didn't* really think Shane was boring. That he actually thought... *nice*

things about him.

Shane's heart kicked in his chest.

He had a sudden, ridiculous urge to ask. *What things?* What *nice* things?

But he didn't.

Because Ilya might laugh. Might make fun of him again. Might sit up and shake this off like a mistake, remind them both they weren't supposed to be like this, tangled and close in the aftermath.

And then he'd tell Shane to leave.

So instead, Shane kept his eyes shut. Forced the thoughts back down. Focused on the steady beat of Ilya's heart under his cheek. The slow drag of fingers through his hair. The weight of Ilya's arm around him, still there.

He let himself believe, just for a little while longer, that this was allowed. That he was wanted, at least a little. At least on some level that went beyond the way Ilya had kissed him or touched him or fucked him. Something... more. Not quite romantic, maybe, but tiptoeing dangerously close.

Shane also remembered what else Ilya had said earlier, that he'd just wanted to cuddle.

Which they had done.

And how he'd teased that, there'd been plenty of night left for more, later.

Which they'd definitely also done. So, both parts were accounted for. Boxes checked.

But now?

Surely he didn't mean for Shane to actually stay all night like this. Still tangled up together, like some kind of... something?

Shane's eyes stayed shut, lashes brushing warm skin, and he kept his breathing slow and steady like maybe if he didn't move, didn't speak, didn't do anything to disrupt the fragile stillness of it all, Ilya wouldn't send him away.

Maybe this didn't have to end just yet.

Ilya didn't want this to end. Not now. Not ever.

Shane was still sprawled over him, warm and quiet, his breath ticklish where it fanned Ilya's chest. But Ilya lay perfectly still, as side from one hand stroking slowly through Shane's hair, the other resting lightly against his back, afraid that if he shifted too much, or said the wrong thing, Shane would pull away.

It felt like trying to coax a wild creature into his palm. Like Shane might spook if Ilya reached too fast or held on too tight.

And maybe he would. Ilya couldn't blame him. Not after the way he'd acted these last few months. Going silent, keeping his distance, pretending like they're last hook up in Montreal had never happened. He'd never truly *wanted* to hurt Shane, but he had. Over and over again.

So, he didn't have any right to this. To the weight of Shane's body on his. To the trust of it. The comfort.

And yet, here he was.

Ilya let his hand drift again through Shane's hair, slower this time. Like a promise. Like a plea.

He could only hope that tonight had changed something. That maybe, *maybe*, Shane was starting to believe that Ilya could be different. That he *wanted* to be different. For him.

Even though he didn't quite see how that was possible for him to follow through on.

Because he *did* know that in a few weeks, he'd be back in Russia.

Miserable. Alone. Haunted by the silence of his apartment and the looming presence of a father he could barely stand to look at. There'd be no Shane. No laughter, no teasing, no warm body pressed up against his. Just memories. Just the echoes of this night, looping in his head until it frayed at the edges.

Selfishly, he hoped this night together would be enough. That if he soaked up enough of Shane now, let it burn into his skin and his bones, it might carry him through those fucking awful months ahead.

But even as he thought it, he knew better.

Because every single cell in his body wanted more. Was starving for it. For *him*.

He wanted to draw this night out as long as possible. To linger in it. To memorize every breath, every shift of weight, every kiss, every slow stroke of his fingers against Shane's back.

Deep down, Ilya knew the dangerous truth. The one he couldn't let himself say out loud.

No matter how much of Shane he stole for himself, how many breaths, how many kisses, how many hours tangled up in hotel sheets, it would never be enough.

He could hoard these moments like treasure, tuck them away for the lonely nights ahead, but he would always want more.

And he couldn't afford to want this. Not like that. Because this was impossible.

It had always been.

There was no version of the future where they could have this... *thing*. No reality where he could keep Shane and everything else intact.

Not without unraveling their careers. Not without inviting the scrutiny and cruelty of their teammates, the league, the press. Not without giving up his country entirely; losing his visa, his passport, his place in the national system. Losing the one true version of "home" he had left, flawed as it was.

And for what?

For a maybe. For a hope so fragile it couldn't even survive the light of day. He couldn't ask Shane to risk it either. Couldn't drag him into a future built on lies and sacrifice and hiding. Shane was too good. Too bright. Deserved someone who could love him openly, without fear.

So instead, Ilya let his chin tip forward and pressed his lips to the crown of Shane's head. Just one more whisper of contact.

Ilya closed his eyes. Inhaled slowly, deeply, letting the scent of Shane's skin settle in his lungs, trying to burn it into his memory. He pulled him closer, one arm curling around his back, the other smoothing through his hair again.

He didn't let himself think about tomorrow. About plane tickets and locker rooms and all the ways this would have to be folded up and hidden away again.

He just held Shane a little tighter.

And tried, desperately and hopelessly, to let this be enough. Tried to pretend that he didn't already know it never would be.

Chapter End Notes

listen, i tried to make this into an HEA ending but in the end, this vegas scene is still in 2014 and we got a LOOOOOOOOOONG fucking way to go to summer 2017 lol
so unfortunately, angst

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!