Be There

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Be There

by baletgir

Summary

When Ilya is injured mid-season, Shane is across the continent and barely holding it together.

Shane’s parents step in while he does his best to rush to Ilya’s side. And Shane has to figure out how to protect his relationship amongst all the speculation.

A canon divergence set during The Long Game / Role Model.

Notes

Hey! So 3 fics in a week and a half? Yup, this world is my entire brain. Literally just last week I said how nice it was to write fluff and that all my Hollanov fic ideas were fluffy. Whelp. Here's some angst.

I was rereading The Long Game, and the moment in the epilogue between Ilya and Shane's dad, David was soooo sweet, I knew I wanted more of Shane's parents treating Ilya like their son. So that's how this came to be.

This fic is 90% written, so I hope to upload all chapters before the end of the month!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane is stretched along the edge of the hotel bed, one foot on the floor, the television muted but glowing too bright in the dim room. Ottawa versus New Jersey. Late second period. The score sits ugly in the corner of the screen: 1–3.

Hayden is in the armchair by the window, phone in hand, one leg hooked over the arm like he's settling in for a long night. Outside, the city is brown and palm-lined and in motion. Los Angeles doing what it always does, pretending nothing bad ever happens here.

On-screen, Ottawa sends the puck deep and goes after it. They lose the battle. New Jersey clears the zone without much trouble.

Hayden glances up and snorts. "Jesus. Again?"

Shane doesn't answer. His arms are folded tight across his chest, jaw locked. He hasn't blinked in a while.

"They look tired," Hayden says, not unkind. "Back-to-back games after a week on the road.

"Mmh." Shane keeps his eyes on the screen. Noncommittal is easier than honest.

Ottawa struggles to get set. The puck moves quickly the other way. A whistle cuts through the noise, and Hayes makes a save that keeps things from getting worse. The crowd swells, hopeful and frustrated all at once.

Hayden shakes his head. "How do you watch this every game? It's brutal."

Shane drags a hand down his face. "It's fine."

"That's not an answer."

He shrugs. "You get used to it."

Hayden hesitates, then says, "You know, he'd get it if you didn't watch. Might even prefer it."

That does it.

"No," Shane says. He doesn't look over. "You don't know. And you're welcome to leave."

Hayden exhales through his nose, but he leans back and lets it go.

On the screen, Ilya steps onto the ice. Rested and ready. Shane's chest tightens automatically, the way it always does. Ilya takes the puck along the side boards, shoulder down, protecting

it with that stubborn, reckless confidence Shane knows better than his own reflection. He draws attention, waits a beat too long, tries to force something through traffic.

It doesn't work.

Hayden lets out a low whistle. "That's gonna sting."

The horn sounds, merciful, ending the period. The camera cuts to the Ottawa bench. Helmets come off, sticks dropped, frustration written everywhere. Ilya slams his stick once against the boards before skating off, mouth set hard, expression closed.

Commercials flood the screen.

Hayden reaches for the remote, then pauses. "You want to…?"

Shane shakes his head. "Leave it."

They sit through the break without speaking. The silence stretches, thick and familiar. Shane knows Hayden is watching him anyway, clocking the tension, the stillness, the way Shane hasn't shifted since Ilya came off the ice. Shane doesn't bother hiding it. There's no point.

The third period starts.

The puck drops.

New Jersey controls it right away, keeping the puck down low. Ottawa collapses, trying to contain it. Shane leans forward without realizing it, elbows braced on his knees, breath shallow.

The puck gets knocked loose along the boards. A small scuffle breaks out in the corner as bodies crowd together, sticks tangled, everyone fighting for space.

Ilya doesn't get pulled into it. He reads the moment, drifts a few strides away, eyes tracking the puck as it squirts free. When it comes to him, he settles it quickly, focused and intent. He pulls his stick back, lining up a shot.

Someone barrels across the ice toward the mess along the boards. Ilya hesitates for half a second.

It puts him directly in the path.

Shane's chest tightens instinctively.

The impact is sudden and violent. Ilya is knocked sideways, momentum carrying him straight into the pileup. He hits the ice and the boards almost at the same time. The sound is wrong, sharp even through the television speakers.

For a moment, there's confusion. Players shift and untangle, still half-focused on the fight. Ilya isn't visible.

Shane is on his feet before he realizes he's moved.

"Ilya," he says, barely louder than a breath.

He stands right up against the television, as if getting closer might clear the bodies out of the way.

The whistle shrieks. Play finally stops. Players gather, then pull back.

Ilya is on the ice.

He doesn't get up.

The camera lingers. A trainer kneels beside him. Then another. Someone waves urgently toward the bench.

Shane's hands are clenched at his sides, fingers numb. His heart is pounding so hard it feels bruising, like it's hitting bone.

"Get up," he whispers at the screen. "Come on. Get up."

The broadcast cuts wide, then abruptly to commercial.

Shane spins toward Hayden, eyes wild. "Why did they cut it?"

Hayden is already standing. His expression has shifted, alert and serious in a way that makes Shane's stomach drop.

"Shane," he says carefully.

That tone. That pause.

Shane doesn't wait. He grabs his phone off the nightstand, thumbs clumsy as he unlocks it. No new notifications. Of course there aren't. No one is going to call him about his rival getting hurt.

He refreshes the news. A few short articles pop up. Vague. Speculative. Written from templates designed months ago for moments like this.

None of them say anything useful.

He paces the room, back and forth, refreshing feeds, scanning headlines, looking for a name, a detail, anything that sounds certain. His chest feels tight, breath shallow and uneven.

Then the game comes back.

The announcer's voice is measured, deliberately calm. "An update out of Ottawa: Ilya Rozanov was taken off the ice following a collision early in the third period. We're told he's being evaluated, and no further information is available at this time."

Shane stares at the screen, phone hanging useless in his hand.

Shane's vision narrows at the edges.

The next thing he registers, he's sitting on the carpet with his head tipped forward, elbows on his knees, breathing too fast. He focuses on the floor. The pattern in the carpet. One breath in. One out. Slowly, carefully, he straightens.

Hayden is crouched in front of him, balanced on the balls of his feet, close but not crowding. His hands rest loosely on his own knees.

"You with me, bud?" Hayden asks. His voice is low, steady.

Shane nods once. His throat feels tight. He swallows and exhales through his nose.

"I'm fine," he says, automatically. It sounds unconvincing even to him.

Hayden doesn't argue. He just watches. "Okay."

Shane reaches for his phone. His fingers are shaking as he taps Ilya's name.

It rings. Goes to voicemail.

He ends the call before the message finishes and tries again.

Voicemail.

A third time.

When the screen goes dark, Hayden shifts closer and gently takes the phone from Shane's hand, setting it face down on the carpet between them.

"Hey," he says, calm and firm. "He won't have his phone right now."

Shane nods, jaw clenched. "I know. I just need to know where he is."

"We'll find out," Hayden says. "I'm already working on it."

Shane drags a hand down his face, pressing his palm into his eye socket until the pressure hurts. "I can't leave him alone."

"You won't," Hayden says simply.

That helps. A little.

Hayden stands and turns away, tapping at his phone. He doesn't hover. He gives Shane space without disappearing.

Shane stays on the floor, forcing his breathing to slow. In. Out. Count it. His heart still feels like it's trying to climb out of his chest.

All he can see is Ilya on the ice. Not moving.

His phone buzzes.

He grabs it immediately.

MOM

“Shane?” Yuna says. Her voice is steady, but careful in a way that tells him she’s already braced herself. “Are you okay?”

“Mom.” His voice breaks on the word.

There’s a brief pause, just long enough for her to recalibrate. “Okay,” she says. “We were watching the game. We’re going to help him. Whatever he needs, okay?”

He squeezes his eyes shut. “He doesn’t have anyone there.”

“I know,” she says.

“You and Dad need to go,” Shane says. “Please. Find the hospital and stay with him until I can get there. I can’t— I can’t leave him alone.”

“Okay,” Yuna says. “We can do that.”

Relief hits him hard enough that he has to brace his hand against the carpet. “You have to tell me everything,” he says. “As soon as you know.”

“I will,” she says without hesitation. “We’ll figure out where he is and go straight there.”

“It might be bad,” Shane says quietly.

“It might,” Yuna agrees, steady as ever. “And if it is, we’ll handle it. He won’t be alone.”

Shane takes his first steady breath since the hit.

“Are you alone right now?” she asks.

“No. Hayden’s here.”

“Good,” she says. “Stay where you are. I’ll call as soon as I know more.”

Shane hums in response.

“Shane,” she adds. “He won’t be alone.”

He swallows. “I know.”

He ends the call and stares at his phone. After a moment, he opens Ilya’s contact again, thumb hovering over the call button.

He wants to try one more time. He wants to keep trying until Ilya answers. He needs to hear his voice, needs Ilya to tell him to relax, to make some sharp comment, to roll his eyes at

Shane for spiraling like this.

He doesn't press call.

He sets the phone down and holds himself there, jaw tight, breathing measured.

"Hey," Hayden says, breaking the quiet. "I think I know what hospital."

Shane looks up immediately. "How?"

"JJ played with Troy Barrett in juniors," Hayden says. "Barrett got traded to Ottawa last month. JJ texted him."

"Barrett," Shane says, more to himself than Hayden. "And?"

"Queensway Carleton."

Shane nods once. He's already pulling his phone back into his hand, calling his mom again.

Voicemail. He exhales through his nose. She's probably already on another call.

He dials his dad instead.

"Hey," David answers, breath a little quick. "We haven't figured out—"

"Queensway Carleton," Shane says. He keeps his voice level. "That's where they took him."

A beat. "That was fast."

"Hockey's a small world," Shane says. "Can you get there right now?"

"I'm grabbing the keys," David says.

Something in Shane's chest eases, just a fraction. "Okay."

"We might not be able to see him right away, but we'll be there," David says. Steady. Practical.

"I know," Shane says. He swallows. "That helps."

"Do you want me to stay on the line?"

Shane considers it, then shakes his head. "No. You should go. Focus on Ilya."

"All right," David says. "We'll call as soon as we know anything. We love you. We all love you."

"I know," Shane says.

He ends the call and sets the phone down carefully, like it matters how he does it.

Hayden's still there, watching without crowding him.

"Thanks," Shane says. He means it.

Hayden nods once. "JJ's keeping his phone on too."

Shane leans forward, elbows braced on his knees, hands loosely clasped. His breathing is still uneven, but he pulls it back under control. There's nothing useful he can do in this exact moment but wait for news.

Shane leans forward, elbows braced on his knees, hands loosely clasped. His breathing is still uneven, but he forces it back into rhythm. There's nothing useful he can do in this exact moment except wait for news, and the restraint feels unbearable.

After a few seconds, he straightens.

"I need a flight." He reaches for his phone, fingers moving too fast. The screen blurs suddenly. His eyes turn watery before he can stop them. He swipes at his face with the heel of his hand, irritated more than surprised. "I need a flight. I need to get there."

Hayden stays where he is. "Are you sure?" he says.

"I'm not waiting," Shane says. His voice is tight, controlled to the point of strain. He keeps scrolling. "I'm not sitting here while he's in a hospital by himself."

"We're flying out in a little over twenty-four hours," Hayden says. "One game, then Montreal. I can drive you straight from the airport."

"No," Shane says. It comes out flat. Final.

"If you leave right now," Hayden says carefully, "people are going to notice."

Shane looks up. His jaw tightens. "Let them."

Hayden doesn't flinch. "It won't stay quiet."

"I don't care," Shane says. He doesn't raise his voice, but it comes out hard and direct. "I am done pretending this matters more than he does."

There's a beat. Hayden studies him, then nods once.

Hayden studies him for a moment, then nods once. "Okay. Show me what you're seeing."

Shane hands over the phone. Hayden scrolls, quick and focused.

"There's one in two and a half hours," Hayden says, turning the screen back. "Book first class. More privacy."

Shane takes the phone and starts entering his information without comment.

Behind him, Hayden grabs Shane's bag and begins repacking it, efficient and quiet. He folds, zips, checks chargers. He pauses once, glancing at Shane's shaking hands.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

Shane doesn't hesitate. "No. You need to stay."

Hayden nods and moves into the bathroom to grab the last of Shane's things.

A moment later, Shane's phone buzzes.

From the bathroom, Hayden says, "I just sent you Troy Barrett's number. JJ gave it to me."

Shane frowns at the screen. "Why?"

"In case they won't release details to your parents," Hayden says. When he steps back into the room, toiletries in hand, he catches Shane's expression and adds, "I don't think that'll happen. It's just a backup."

Shane exhales through his nose. "Why does it have to be Barrett."

"He got us the hospital," Hayden says. "That's the only connection we've got."

Shane nods once, swallowing hard. He finishes booking the flight, fingers moving on muscle memory alone. Confirmation screen. Seat assignment. Payment processed. Done.

He stares at the screen for a beat longer than necessary, checking the details again. Gate. Time. Seat. He commits them to memory, locks them down, because holding onto facts feels like the only way to keep himself upright.

His phone lights up again. Uber arriving in five minutes.

Hayden steps closer and pulls him into a brief, firm hug. When he lets go, his hands stay on Shane's arms, steady and grounding.

"It's going to be okay," Hayden says. His voice is even, not reassuring so much as factual. "If you miss this flight, there's another. And Ilya is going to be okay." He hesitates, then adds, quieter, "I need you to hear that."

Shane nods. The tears press hard behind his eyes, sharp and insistent, but he pushes them down. He can't cry in an Uber. He can't lose control in public. He takes one deep breath, then another, counting them until the pressure eases just enough.

"Text me when you land," Hayden says.

"I will."

The door clicks shut behind him, and the city rushes back in all at once. Too loud. Too bright. Too much motion. Cars, voices, engines, lights. It all feels wrong against the singular fact in his head: Ottawa. Hospital. Ilya.

The airport blurs into a series of checkpoints.

Shane moves on instinct. Passport out. Bag secure on his shoulder. Shoes half untied because he forgets to tighten them after security. The announcements overhead blur together into meaningless noise, layered over the pounding of his heart.

He jogs when he can. Walks fast when he can't. He checks the gate number three times, even though he knows it by now, burned into his brain.

When he reaches it, boarding is nearly finished.

"Final call for Flight 482 to Ottawa," the gate agent says, already turning back toward the desk.

"I'm here," Shane says, breathless, thrusting his boarding pass forward. "I'm here."

She scans it, nods, and waves him through without comment.

He steps onto the plane last.

The aisle feels too narrow. People are already seated, headphones in, eyes closed, wrapped in their own worlds. The normalcy of it feels obscene. Shane forces himself forward and drops into his seat at the back of first class, grateful he doesn't have to walk past everyone. He sits too hard. His hands shake so badly he has to clasp them together to still them.

Only then does he look at his phone.

A missed call.

DAD

He calls back immediately, heart lodged somewhere in his throat.

"Hey," David answers. The background noise is wrong. Too quiet. Too hollow. "We're at the hospital."

Shane closes his eyes. "Okay. Okay. Have you seen him?"

"No," his dad says. "They've confirmed his name, but they haven't let us back yet."

Shane presses his forehead into his palm. "Why not?"

"Standard stuff," David says gently. "They're running tests. Strict visitation policy."

"But he doesn't have anyone else," Shane says. The words come out sharper than he means.

"I know," David says. "Your mom's talking to them. She's also asking about a transfer."

Shane's eyes snap open. "Transfer?"

“Just asking questions,” his dad says quickly. “Seeing what options we have. You know your mom.”

Shane swallows. “Is he awake?”

“They won’t say yet.”

A flight attendant stops beside him, asking about bags and drinks. She’s holding champagne. Shane shakes his head mutely. She gestures toward his phone, reminding him it needs to be off. He nods.

“I’m on the plane,” Shane says. His voice wobbles, then steadies. “I’ve got to go.”

“That’s good,” David says. “You’ll see him soon. Remember that.”

The plane starts to move, a slow roll away from the gate. Shane watches the terminal slide past the window, every muscle in his body vibrating with the urge to stand up, to move, to do something.

“We’ll call as soon as we know anything,” his dad says. “I promise.”

“Please,” Shane says quietly. “Don’t leave him alone.”

There’s a pause. Not long, but weighted.

“We won’t,” David says. “I promise.”

Shane exhales, shaky and uneven. “Okay.”

“I love you.”

“Love you too,” Shane says, barely audible.

He ends the call and lets the phone rest in his lap as the plane turns onto the runway.

His hands are still shaking.

But he’s moving now.

The engines roar louder. The plane accelerates. Shane presses his heels into the floor, fingers curled tight around the armrests, counting the seconds until the wheels leave the ground. When they do, his stomach drops hard, the familiar wrongness of takeoff stacking on top of everything else.

He closes his eyes until the climb levels out.

The seat feels too small. The air tastes stale. The headrest scratches his ear. Or maybe he’s just too aware of everything.

Once they’re airborne, the pressure settles into his body in a way that never quite fades. Shane keeps shifting, one leg stretched out, then bent, then pulled back under the seat in front

of him. He adjusts the angle of his shoulders. Tries leaning his head against the window. Tries closing his eyes again.

The engine noise vibrates through his bones, constant and inescapable.

Every time his thoughts start to blur, they snap back to the same image: Ilya on the ice, not moving. The way the play stopped. The way no one touched him right away.

Shane opens his eyes.

He orders ginger ale as soon as the flight attendant comes by, then orders another when she circles back. The cold sweetness gives him something to focus on, something immediate. His knee bounces nonstop. He keeps his phone in his hand even though it's still in airplane mode, screen lighting up and going dark again as he checks it out of habit.

Time stretches strangely. Ten minutes feels like an hour. An hour disappears without him noticing.

He doesn't sleep. He doesn't even come close.

When the captain announces their descent, relief and panic crash together in his chest. Ottawa is closer now. So is whatever he's about to find when he lands. Shane grips the armrests again, breathing through the vibration as the plane lowers, watching the lights of the city come into view through the window.

The second the wheels hit the runway, his body surges forward with the urge to stand.

The plane barely finishes rolling before Shane is on his feet.

He pulls his phone out as he moves, thumb already unlocking it as the seatbelt sign flicks off. He's one of the first people off, weaving past slower passengers, bag tight against his shoulder.

By the time he steps into the terminal, he's turned his phone back on.

It buzzes immediately, relentless in his hand.

He checks for his parents first.

2 People: DAD, MOM
December 18, 2020 12:22 PM

DAD
We're with him. He's not awake yet, but he's doing well.
Call us when you land.

Shane exhales slowly. He rereads it once, then again, letting the words settle just enough to register. There's relief in knowing that Ilya isn't alone.

Before he hits call, he checks the other messages. A part of him hopes, irrationally, that one of them is from Ilya.

HAYDEN
December 19, 2020 1:19 AM

HAYDEN
Jackie can pick you up if you want.
She'll have the kids with her, but she can drive you to the hospital.

Shane pictures it instantly. Car seats. The noise. The questions he can't answer. The effort of being polite when every nerve in his body is already stripped raw.

He types *thanks* and deletes it. Leaves the message unanswered for now.

The last message is from a number he doesn't recognize.

For a split second, his chest tightens. He doesn't know what else could go wrong, but his body braces anyway.

Then he opens it.

UNKNOWN
December 19, 2020 2:01 AM

UNKNOWN
Hey it's Troy. I'm at the airport. I can drive you to the hospital when you land.

Troy Barrett.

Shane stops walking.

People stream around him, suitcases clipping his calves, voices and announcements echoing off the high ceiling. He stares at the screen, reading the message again, then once more, like it might change if he looks hard enough.

Troy.

Shane swallows and looks down the terminal, scanning faces without knowing what he's searching for. He doesn't see his parents. Doesn't see anyone familiar.

His phone buzzes again.

UNKNOWN
December 19, 2020 2:43 AM

UNKNOWN
By baggage claim.

SHANE
Ok

Shane closes his eyes for half a second. Long enough to steady himself. Then he opens them.

He sends the message, locks his phone, and starts moving again, heart pounding, pulse loud in his ears. Toward baggage claim. Toward the hospital. Toward Ilya.

Nothing else matters.

Chapter End Notes

Comments, Kudos, Bookmarks, and Subscriptions absolutely light up my life. 🖤

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Shane doesn't wait for anything else. He turns and breaks into a run, shoes slapping against the pavement, phone pressed tight to his ear as he barrels through the automatic doors and into the hospital, heart hammering, pulse roaring, every step pulling him closer to Ilya.

Chapter Notes

> So I am overwhelmed and crying from all of your comments, thnak you so much for giving this fic a chance and wanting more 🖤 For every person who said this made you feel something, I'm sorry, but also, thank you for telling me. Knowing this is touching you, just blows my mind.
>
> I decided to hold off on wrapping xmas presents (it's not like I need them anytime soon) and edit this chapter instead. Also, you can thank the comment that said the last chapter was an "evil cliffhanger" for the quick update.
>
> Please give me some grace with all things medical, injuries, Ottawa, etc. There's a bit of handwaving here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane spots him first by the hat.

A red Centaurs toque pulled low, black sweatshirt, hands shoved into his pockets like he doesn't quite know what to do with them. His shoulders are hunched, posture tight, like he's trying to take up as little space as possible. Shane almost scoffs. Of course. Probably trying not to be seen with him.

They make eye contact.

Troy nods once.

"Uh, hey," Shane says as he gets closer, already feeling the familiar tightness in his chest. "Thanks for—" He gestures vaguely between them. "This."

Troy nods again. "Car's this way."

They move through the terminal side by side, not quite in sync. The silence stretches. Shane registers the scrape of suitcase wheels, the echo of announcements overhead, the too-loud sound of his own breathing.

Outside, the cold hits him all at once. LA feels like a different life. Ottawa winter settles into his bones immediately, sharp and familiar.

Troy unlocks the car and pops the trunk.

Shane hesitates, bag in hand, a strange spike of awareness cutting through the fog. Of all the people who could have been standing here. Of all the options.

He shoves the bag into the trunk and moves around to the passenger side.

The doors shut. The engine turns over.

For a few blocks, neither of them speaks. Shane texts his parents, keeping the phone low, oddly aware of Troy beside him. The update comes quickly: still unconscious, vitals good, doctors optimistic.

Not alone.

That helps. It doesn't calm him.

Shane lets the quiet fill the car anyway. It presses in, claustrophobic. He can't stop thinking about how strange this is—being here, boxed into a car with Troy Barrett of all people.

Ilya's talked about his teammates enough that Shane can picture the alternatives without trying.

Zane Boodram, loud and relentless, filling the car with noise in a well-meaning attempt to distract him. Wyatt Hayes from the summer camp, earnest and oblivious, talking at length about comics, not quite registering how overwhelmed Shane is or how little he's responding. And the social media guy, unfailingly sweet Harris, the one Shane is convinced Ilya has a harmless crush on, who would probably talk too, overshare in that gentle, anxious way people do when they don't know how else to help.

So maybe Troy isn't the worst option.

Shane's fairly certain he couldn't engage in any conversation right now that isn't about Ilya. And even that might crack him open.

"Thanks," Shane says quietly.

Troy nods. He hasn't smiled once. Shane can't blame him.

Shane closes his eyes, just for a moment, bracing himself for what's coming. The hospital. The waiting. The not knowing.

The music fades.

He opens one eye and sees Troy's hand pulling back from the volume knob.

Shane exhales, slow and careful, and opens his eyes fully. Worst-case scenarios are doing him no favors. He fixes his gaze on the road instead. On movement. On getting closer.

That's when he notices.

"This isn't—" He leans forward slightly, scanning the signs ahead. "This isn't Queensway."

"No," Troy says. "He got moved."

Shane's stomach drops anyway. "Moved where?"

"The Ottawa Hospital," Troy says. "Civic Campus."

Bigger. Better equipped.

Still terrifying.

Shane swallows. "How did you know?"

"Coach told me."

"No," Shane says, more carefully. "I mean… picking me up."

Troy keeps his eyes on the road. "Pike sent me your flight info."

"Oh." Shane nods once.

The silence returns.

"But," Shane says, because he still can't wrap his brain around being in this car with Troy Barrett, "how much did Hayden tell you?"

Troy doesn't answer right away. The upcoming light turns red. Then green. He exhales slowly through his nose.

"Hayden didn't tell me anything."

That quiet feels heavier.

Shane glances over. Troy's jaw is tight, hands gripping the wheel a little too hard. He looks like he's mid-argument with himself.

"Did Rozanov tell you," Troy asks, still not looking at him, "about New York?"

Shane's stomach sinks. "Tell me what?"

He watches as Troy takes a deep breath. "I'm gay," Troy says.

The words cut clean through the fog.

Shane feels his eyes widen in surprise. “Oh.” The word slips out before he decides on it. Just a sound to fill the space that’s suddenly different than it was a moment ago.

“And,” Troy adds, quieter, “he came out to me.”

Shane doesn’t respond. He can’t quite find a place for that yet.

After a moment, he says, cautiously, “He told you about—about us?”

“No,” Troy says immediately. “No. Nothing like that.” A pause. “I just… put some things together. And JJ texting me, he was confused as hell, but the way he talked about needing info on Rozanov kind of confirmed things.”

Shane looks back out the window. The hospital is closer now, lights bright against the dark.

Another stretch of silence.

“I’m not going to tell,” Troy says softly.

Shane exhales. “Okay.”

They ride the rest of the way in quiet.

The hospital rises into view—huge, bright, sprawling. Too many windows. Too many entrances. Troy pulls up to the front and puts the hazards on.

Before the car has fully stopped, Shane’s phone is in his hand again.

He’s already calling his dad.

“Where are you?” David answers immediately.

“I’m outside,” Shane says as the door opens, cold air rushing in. “Which entrance?”

“Main doors,” David says. “Go straight. Elevators on the left to the fourth floor. Trauma step-down. We’ll meet you by the desk.”

“Okay,” Shane says, already moving. His dad stays on the line. “Okay.”

He shuts the car door, then hesitates, turning back.

“Hey,” he says, breathless. “Thank you. For this.”

Troy nods once. “No problem.”

Shane doesn’t wait for anything else. He turns and breaks into a run, shoes slapping against the pavement, phone pressed tight to his ear as he barrels through the automatic doors and into the hospital, heart hammering, pulse roaring, every step pulling him closer to Ilya.

He barely slows at the desk.

Fourth floor. Trauma step-down. Left turn.

He moves on instinct, shoes skidding slightly on the polished floor as he rounds the corner too fast.

The door is half-open.

For a split second, he expects voices. Movement. Anything that sounds like a room that's awake.

Instead, there's only the quiet, rhythmic beep of a heart monitor.

Ilya lies in the bed, head wrapped in gauze, one arm secured in a temporary splint and sling across his chest. A bruise shadows his jaw; a small cut near his hairline has been cleaned and closed, barely noticeable now. His eyes are shut, lashes dark against pale skin.

Still. Too still.

Shane stops short, breath leaving him all at once. His hand comes up to the doorframe, fingers digging in to keep himself upright.

Oh.

This, this he hadn't prepared for either.

"Shane."

His dad's voice reaches him, calm and steady.

David sits in the chair beside the bed. Yuna stands near the window, arms folded tight, worry etched into every line of her face.

"He's stable," David says quietly. "Concussion. Broken forearm. They're keeping him under until the swelling goes down."

Shane nods without really processing the words. He steps forward more slowly now, like the room might fracture if he moves too fast.

Up close, Ilya looks younger. Smaller. Unfairly breakable in a way Shane has never had to see before.

Shane reaches out, then stops, hand hovering, afraid to touch, afraid not to.

His fingers finally wrap around Ilya's presumably good hand. Warm. Solid.

"I'm here," Shane says, voice barely audible. "I'm here."

The monitor continues its quiet rhythm.

Shane bows his head, resting his forehead against the edge of the mattress, holding on.

He made it.

He didn’t leave him alone.

Shane sinks into the chair beside the bed that his dad has vacated, like his legs have finally given out.

The room hums softly around them. Machines. Lights. The distant sound of carts rolling down the hallway. Ilya doesn’t move.

Shane stares at him, trying to figure out what he’s supposed to do now.

He’s here. That was the goal. That was the whole thing. Get here. Don’t let him be alone.

But now what.

People pray in moments like this. Shane knows that. He’s seen it in movies, in his grandmother’s hospital room growing up: hands clasped, heads bowed. He tries to imagine himself doing that and comes up blank. He doesn’t know the words. Doesn’t know who he’d even be talking to.

His eyes drift back to Ilya’s chest without him quite knowing why. He scans the line of his collarbone, the rise and fall of his breathing, the familiar markers his brain is used to cataloging.

Then the absence registers.

The thin chain isn’t there.

Shane stands, a little unsteady, and crosses the room. The bag is clear plastic, knotted at the top, Ilya’s name printed neatly on a sticker. Inside are only a few things. His phone. His wallet. The chain.

Nothing else.

Shane unties the bag with clumsy fingers and lifts the necklace out carefully. The small cross catches the light. It looks almost too small to matter. Ordinary. Familiar.

He turns it over in his palm, thumb brushing the worn edges.

Shane closes his fingers around it.

He still doesn’t know what to do with it.

He walks back to the bed and sits down again, the cross warm in his hand now, grounding and useless all at once. He thinks about Ilya’s mother, about the weight of family, about how belief sometimes looks less like faith and more like holding on.

He thinks about what it would mean to lose this. Him. The thought opens up a hollow so wide he can’t see the edges of it.

He doesn’t know how to do this without Ilya. It isn’t a surprising thought, or even a new one. But he’s never been forced to look directly at the possibility before. He can’t do any of it alone. Not hockey. Not living.

His grip tightens around the cross until the metal presses into his skin.

He doesn’t cry. He just sits there, breathing shallow and careful, like if he’s gentle enough the world won’t notice what it’s taken.

After a while, he doesn’t know how long, he feels a hand settle on his shoulder.

Yuna’s touch is warm and steady. She doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t need to.

Shane leans into it without looking up, still holding the cross, still watching Ilya breathe, waiting for the moment when he won’t have to guess what to do next.

Time stretches.

Shane sits in the quiet, his thoughts ricocheting endlessly, too loud, too sharp, impossible to settle. He watches Ilya’s chest rise and fall, over and over, like it’s the only thing tethering him to the room.

He doesn’t know how long it’s been when there’s a knock at the door.

Soft. Hesitant.

Shane looks up, startled, instinctively bracing himself.

The door opens just enough for a face to appear. Troy hovers there, one hand still on the handle, posture apologetic before he’s even spoken.

“Sorry,” he says quietly. “I just wanted to check if you needed anything.”

Shane shakes his head. “No. It’s—” He stops, because he doesn’t actually know what it is. “Thanks.”

Troy nods, then lifts the small paper bag he’s holding, like he’s suddenly remembered why he’s there. “Harris asked me to bring this. If that’s okay.”

“Harris?” Shane repeats. He knows who Harris is. He hasn’t met him. He also doesn’t understand how Harris connects to Troy or to this hospital room right now.

“Yeah,” Troy says. He clears his throat. “He spent a lot of time in hospitals growing up. He gets this part of it. He said the waiting was the hardest part for his family.”

He steps just inside the room, careful. His eyes flick once to Ilya, then away again. He sets the bag down on the small table beside the chair.

“He said it’s really easy to forget to eat,” Troy continues, the words coming out unevenly, like he’s reciting instructions. “So there’s food. Stuff you don’t have to think about.”

Shane peers into the bag. Apples with small jars of what he assumes are spreads. A bag of baked turnovers. Granola bars. Gatorade. Water bottles.

“His family owns an apple farm,” Troy adds quickly. “So. Apples.”

Shane nods.

“Thank you, Troy,” Yuna says. “And please thank Harris for us.”

Troy hesitates, then reaches back into the bag. He looks more uncomfortable now, like he isn’t sure this part is his to deliver.

“He also gave me this,” he says.

He pulls out a small notebook and a pen, still wrapped together with a rubber band.

“Harris said,” Troy starts, then stops, shifting his weight. “He said sometimes it helps to have something to do that isn’t just waiting. Like writing. Not journaling or anything.” He winces. “He said maybe letters. To remind yourself the person’s going to wake up and read them. Or lists. Or whatever.”

Shane takes the notebook. The weight of it is grounding, unexpected. Even without a plan for it, having something in his hand feels right.

“Okay,” he says.

“Yeah,” Troy says. “He also said not to feel weird if you don’t use it. Just to have it.”

Shane nods.

There’s a beat where Troy clearly doesn’t know what to do next.

“I’ll head out,” he says. “But I’ll be around. If you need anything.”

He reaches for the handle.

“Troy,” David says.

Troy turns back.

“Ilya’s lucky to have you as a friend,” David says simply.

For a moment, Troy looks like he might argue. His mouth opens, then closes again. He nods once, a little stiff.

Then he slips out, pulling the door shut gently behind him. The room is quieter after. Not empty. Warmer than it was before.

Shane and his parents spend the next stretch of hours moving carefully around one another. There isn’t much left to say as doctors come and go, updates given and questions answered.

Eventually, Shane lets himself rest. Only once he's sure Ilya will still be there when he stops watching him.

He's half-dozing in the chair, head tipped back against the wall, both hands wrapped around Ilya's, when he feels it.

Not a squeeze. Not even movement, exactly. Just weight. A faint pressure, like Ilya's hand remembers how to be there.

Shane straightens so fast the chair legs scrape softly against the floor.

"Ilya," he says, barely more than a breath.

Across the room, his parents jolt at the sound. Yuna turns sharply from the window, where she and David had been whispering, both of them suddenly alert.

Ilya doesn't wake. But Shane knows what he felt, and it's something.

He tightens his grip, thumbs brushing carefully over Ilya's knuckles, like maybe that will help him find his way back. He doesn't let go.

Yuna is already moving. She crosses the room and presses the call button once, efficient and calm, then comes to a stop beside Shane.

They wait.

A nurse arrives a minute later. She doesn't rush. She checks the monitors first, then Ilya, calm and practiced.

"That's a good sign," she says quietly. "He's responding. He's not fully conscious yet, but this is exactly what we want to see."

Shane nods, throat tight.

"This is the right point in recovery for him to start coming around," she continues. "The swelling's going down. Everything looks stable."

She finishes her checks, then hesitates, glancing between Shane and his parents.

"One other thing," she says gently. "We're aware he's a public figure, so we've limited access on this floor. We're keeping things as locked down as possible without interfering with other patients."

Shane exhales slowly.

"Hospital policy is that we don't speak to media, and they aren't allowed in the building without patient consent," she adds. "Right now, only Mrs. Hollander is authorized to approve visitors."

"Thank you," Shane says. His voice is steady, even if he doesn't feel it.

David nods. “We appreciate the discretion.”

“Of course,” the nurse says. She offers a small, understanding smile, then slips out.

The room settles again.

Shane knows it’s all waiting for him. The calls. The questions. The explanations he can’t put off forever. He knows the world is already spinning stories, drawing conclusions, demanding answers.

But not yet.

Yuna exhales and sinks back toward the window, rubbing at her eyes like she’s just realized how tired she is. David lowers himself into the chair again, shoulders slumping now that there’s nothing left to hold himself upright for. They don’t speak. They just sit, the weight of the night finally catching up to them.

Shane watches it happen.

It’s strange, seeing them like this. Not panicked. Not braced for impact. Just worn down, running on empty because there was no other option until now.

Ilya breathes steadily beside him. The monitors hum. Morning noise filters in from the hallway.

That’s when Shane understands that he doesn’t need all three of them here anymore. Not like this.

“You should go home,” Shane says, and his voice is steadier than he expects. “Get some sleep. It’s almost seven. You’ve been up for twenty-four hours.”

Yuna opens her mouth to protest.

“Please,” Shane adds quickly. “And could you grab some things from Ilya’s place? Clothes for both of us. A charger. If that’s okay.”

David nods immediately. “Of course.”

They hug him carefully, like he’s something fragile they don’t want to startle. Then they’re gone, and the room is quieter for it.

Time starts to behave strangely after that. Shane’s body insists it’s still night, exhaustion dragging at him, limbs heavy and uncooperative. But the hospital is waking up around him.

The hallway grows louder. Carts roll past. Voices drift in and out. Shift changes. Morning.

Shane settles back into the chair beside the bed and pulls Ilya’s hand into both of his. He leans forward and presses light kisses to Ilya’s fingers, one after another.

“I’m still here,” he tells him softly. “I’m not going anywhere without you.”

He talks for a while after that. About the flight. About Troy. About how his mom somehow became Ilya's medical proxy, or at least that's what it sounds like. About nothing, really. About everything.

At some point, his voice breaks.

"I don't want to do this without you," he admits, eyes fixed on the blanket instead of Ilya's face. "I don't think I even know how."

The thought settles heavily between them.

What's next.

It's been circling him for months, that question. Quiet. Patient. And now, here, with Ilya unconscious and vulnerable and terrifyingly mortal, it sharpens into something unavoidable.

I'm ready, he thinks. For more. For all of it.

He opens his mouth to say it. To say forever. To say marriage. To say choose me and I'll choose you back every time.

Then he stops.

It isn't fair. Not like this. Not when Ilya can't hear it. Can't answer.

Shane exhales slowly and folds forward, resting his head briefly in his hands. He breathes until the tightness eases.

Then he reaches for the paper bag again.

The notebook Harris sent is still there.

He stares at the notebook for a long moment.

He's never liked writing. Hated school papers. Hated the pressure of finding the right words. But Harris might be right. There's something grounding about putting things on paper. Something solid.

He opens it.

The first page becomes a mess almost immediately. Crossed-out lines. Half sentences. His handwriting tilts the way it always does when he's nervous, slanted and uneven, the pen pressed too hard into the page.

Eventually, he flips to a new page and starts over.

He writes what he would say if Ilya was awake.

It's not polished. Not poetic. Just honest.

He writes about all the ways he loves Ilya. About his laugh, the real one that only comes out when it's just the two of them. About the stubbornness that defines him. About the way he's grown into a man Shane never could have imagined when they first met.

He writes about how deeply Ilya wants to help people, and how that makes Shane want to be better, more selfless. About Ilya's loyalty, fierce and unyielding, and how honored Shane is to be one of the people Ilya has chosen to give that to. He writes about Ilya's kindness, about the boyish joy that still surprises him, about how someone who has endured so much can still create so much light.

He writes about loving Ilya even when it's hard. About choosing him even when it scares him. About wanting to build something that doesn't require hiding forever.

He writes about his parents loving Ilya like he's their own son, and how much that means to him.

Somewhere along the way, it turns into a proposal.

He doesn't label it that. He just lets it be what it is.

He realizes these feelings have been with him for a long time. He's known he wanted forever with Ilya for years, probably even before their first summer at the cottage. But this certainty, this readiness, the knowledge that he doesn't want to keep hiding, that part has been growing quietly for a while now too.

And he knows, immediately, that when Ilya wakes up, if that's what he wants, Shane is ready.

He also knows that if Ilya isn't ready, Shane is willing to wait.

Sitting with that truth makes his chest feel quieter. Not fixed. Just steadier.

Under different circumstances, he might even call it happiness. But it's hard to feel happy in a hospital room with the love of your life unconscious.

He turns to a fresh page and makes a list.

Things I want for you when you wake up:

- McDonald's breakfast sandwiches
- A cigarette, only if the doctor approves, and just one
- Your mom's cross necklace back where it belongs
- Making fun of me for crying
- Telling me you're going to win the Cup now that I'm missing some games
- A dog
- Buying another motorcycle (please be careful)
- Making me come, hands free
- Buying another flashy sports car, even though the garage is full

Another page.

Things I want for us:

- A home with both our names on it, and the cottage too
- A dog (if you're getting a dog, he's ours) (don't make me regret this)
- Holding your hand in public
- Taking you on a date to a place downtown with the best chicken parm that I know you'll love
- Waking up next to you every day
- Cooking dinner together more often
- Playing on the same line at every All-Star Game until we retire
- Retiring together
- A little girl with your curls
- A little boy with your eyes
- Summers at the cottage

By the time he closes the notebook, his chest feels quieter again. Not fixed. Just steadier.

Shane leans forward and rests his elbow on the bed near Ilya's shoulder, his head settling into his hand. His other hand finds Ilya's, their fingers lacing together.

This time, when he lets his eyes close, sleep comes.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos, Comments, Bookmarks & Subscriptions all make my heart happy 🖤

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Three chapters?
> Is lie.
> Liar told you that

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Shane wakes, it's to movement.

A soft shift of weight. Fabric whispering. A breath that isn't his.

"Ilya?" His voice catches. His heart jumps hard enough to hurt.

Ilya's eyes are open, unfocused and glassy. He blinks slowly, like the room is breaking apart and putting itself back together wrong. His mouth opens, then closes. He swallows.

"Hey," Shane says, already leaning in. "Easy. You're okay."

Ilya frowns, the effort visible. "Sh… Shane."

"Yeah." Shane's hand tightens around his. "I'm here."

"Moya…" Ilya mumbles, the word trailing off, Russian slips in, soft and slurred, more sound than meaning.

Shane bends closer, his forehead almost touching Ilya's. "It's okay. You don't have to talk."

Ilya winces. His brow creases. "Cold." His eyes squeeze shut. "Light."

Shane breathes out, relief shaking through him. He keeps his voice low and even. "You got hit during the game. You're in the hospital."

Ilya squints at him, confused, then blinks again like the thought won't stay put. "Shane?"

"I'm here, moya lyubov." Shane says immediately. "You're not alone."

Ilya exhales. His eyes drift shut, then flutter open again. His fingers move, searching, before they curl weakly around Shane's.

Alive. Groggy, but here.

Shane stands just enough to lean over him, pressing a kiss to his forehead. Then another, slow and careful, to his temple. He stays there longer than he means to, breathing him in, one hand

cradling the side of Ilya's head like that might keep him steady.

He wants to get closer. Wants to climb into the bed and fit himself around Ilya, block out the lights and the noise and everything else. He doesn't. He stays where he is, the wanting sharp and contained.

He lowers himself back into the chair, still leaned in, close enough that their shoulders nearly touch. His hand never leaves Ilya's.

The next time Ilya stirs, an hour has passed.

It's small. A shift of his head. A sound in his throat like he's trying to surface.

Shane straightens immediately. "Hey."

Ilya's eyes open partway. Heavy-lidded. Unfocused. He blinks, slow and confused, like the room won't settle.

For a moment, there's nothing there. No recognition. Just searching.

Then his gaze drifts, lands, slides away, then comes back.

"Shane," he says finally. The word is rough, uncertain, like he's testing it.

"I'm here," Shane says. "You're okay."

Ilya watches him, eyes struggling to stay open. His fingers curl weakly around Shane's, then loosen, then tighten again.

"Here," Ilya murmurs. Not quite a question. Not quite a statement. Seemingly just checking.

Shane's throat tightens. "Always."

That seems to be enough. Ilya's eyelids flutter, then close. His breathing evens out again.

Shane shifts closer, pulling the chair in until it bumps the side of the bed. He rests his forearm along the mattress, his head near Ilya's shoulder, close enough to feel his warmth. Close enough that if Ilya reaches, Shane will already be there.

He traces slow, steady circles against Ilya's palm, grounding himself in the repetition.

Shane lets his eyes close, not sleeping, just staying, breathing with him.

The door opens, slow and careful.

Shane looks up, startled at first, then eases when he sees his parents. They move like they're an animal that might bolt if startled, voices low, steps measured.

David has a tote bag slung over his shoulder. Yuna carries a smaller stack of things.

“We brought your things,” Yuna says gently.

They set them down within Shane’s reach. The tote is clothes and toiletries, folded neatly. In Yuna’s stack, a charger sits on top, the cord tightly coiled. Beneath it are magazines, a paperback, a book of crosswords.

“Thank you,” Shane says. It comes out quiet, automatic.

Yuna studies his face. “How’s he been?”

Shane glances back at the bed. Ilya hasn’t moved. Still asleep. Still breathing.

“He woke up,” Shane says after a moment. “Twice. Not for long. He—” He pauses, searching. “He knew I was here.”

Yuna’s mouth curves into a small, relieved smile. David lets out a breath Shane hadn’t realized he was holding.

“That’s good,” David says softly. “That’s really good.”

Shane nods, distracted. His thumb brushes Ilya’s knuckles without him realizing he’s doing it.

After a moment, he lets go.

“I’m going to change,” he says quietly. “I’ll be right back.”

Yuna nods immediately. “We’re here.”

The bathroom is small and too bright.

Shane closes the door most of the way, leaving it cracked, and leans his hands on the sink. He changes quickly, pulling on Ilya’s sweatshirt first, the familiar weight settling against his chest. His own sweatpants after that.

He brushes his teeth, rinses, watches his reflection just long enough to make sure he looks awake enough to stay.

Before he folds up the pants he changed out of, he slips his hand into the pocket, his fingers close around Ilya’s chain.

He’s been keeping it close for hours now, moving it from hand to pocket and back again without really thinking about it. He lifts it, letting the metal catch the light.

He tells himself it’s safer with him. That it won’t get lost this way. That he’ll give it back as soon as Ilya can wear it again.

He slips it over his head. The chain settles against his collarbone, cool at first, then warming. Shane presses his fingers to it once, briefly, like a check.

Then he straightens and opens the door.

His parents are still there when he comes out. David sits in the chair by the window, reading without really reading. Yuna stands near the bed, arms folded loosely, watching Ilya breathe.

Shane moves back to his place and takes Ilya's hand again. His thumb finds the familiar rhythm of knuckle, bone, skin.

Yuna reaches into the tote and pulls out a folded blanket from home. She drapes it carefully over Ilya, tucking it around the sling and up over his chest, practiced and gentle.

Shane watches her hands, the ease of it, the way care looks like something learned over a lifetime.

When she steps back, he leans in again, forearm resting along the edge of the mattress, close to Ilya's shoulder. Close enough to feel the warmth of him through the sheets.

His fingers lace with Ilya's. The blanket smells faintly like home.

There's a quiet beat before Yuna begins speaking. "You should know, there's a few people around. There's no pressure to talk to anyone."

Shane looks up, unfocused. "People?"

"Troy's here," she says. "He's been in the waiting room for a while. I think he doesn't quite know what to do."

"Oh," Shane says. He blinks. "Okay."

"And some of Ilya's other teammates," David adds carefully. "They've asked if they can visit. We haven't told them anything specific."

Shane frowns faintly. "They asked you?"

Yuna nods. "They saw us come in. We let them assume we know Ilya through the foundation. We've just let people think what they want for now. You can figure out later how you want to handle it."

"Right," Shane says, though it's not clear how much of it lands. His gaze drifts back to Ilya. Softens. He's aware, dimly, that he's doing the heart eye thing Hayden always gives him grief for.

"I guess people are going to have questions," he says. A pause. "About us."

David watches him. "You don't have to decide anything tonight."

Shane nods. Then nods again, like he's agreeing with something still taking shape. "I don't really know what I'm supposed to say."

"They just want to know he's okay," David says. "Your relationship isn't the priority for anyone who matters."

“You don’t need to tell anyone anything,” Yuna says immediately.

The quiet that follows is gentle. Measured.

“Ilya’s coach is here too,” Yuna adds. “If you did want to update someone, he might be the right place to start. He’s the reason we were able to get in here with Ilya at all.”

Shane sits with that for a moment.

“Hayden called,” David says. “He wanted to check in. He knows you haven’t been looking at your phone. He said Jackie would come by if you needed anything.”

“We told him we’re okay for now,” Yuna adds. “He said he’ll be here early tomorrow. As soon as his flight lands.”

Shane nods. “He doesn’t need to.”

Yuna’s mouth twitches. “He’s not giving you a choice.”

Shane nods again.

He doesn’t look at them. His eyes stay on Ilya, on the steady rise and fall of his chest.

Yuna steps closer and rests a hand lightly on Shane’s shoulder. Not pressing. Just there.

“You’ve been up for over twenty-four hours,” she says. Not a question.

Shane nods.

“That’s enough,” she says softly. “You don’t have to do anything else right now.”

He exhales, thin and tired, and lets himself sink back into the chair, still holding Ilya’s hand.

For now, the world stays on the other side of the door.

Questions, phones, people already deciding what this means. His parents hold it there without saying so, and Shane lets them.

He shifts in the chair, a restless motion, like a thought has finally pushed its way to the surface.

“I should—” He stops, swallows. “I should talk to his coach.”

Both of his parents still.

Shane stands, stiff from the chair, reluctant fingers lingering on Ilya’s hand before he lets go. “He’s out there? In the waiting room?”

He takes a step toward the door.

“No,” Yuna says.

The word lands hard enough that Shane stops. He turns back.

“No,” she says again, quieter this time, already crossing the room. “Shane. You don’t need to go out there.”

“I can just tell him—”

“There are people,” she says. Not loud. Just firm. “We don’t know who’s around. Or who’s watching.”

David speaks from near the window. “It wouldn’t take much for someone to recognize you.”

The thought hits Shane a beat late. He blinks. “Oh.”

Yuna reaches him and puts both hands on his arms. The contact steadies him, pulls him back into his body. “You don’t owe anyone anything right now,” she says.

“I just want them to know he’s okay,” Shane says. “That he woke up.”

Yuna looks toward the door. “I’ll bring Coach Wiebe here.”

Shane hesitates, then nods. “Okay.”

“You stay,” she says. The words are simple. Certain. “Right here.”

He nods again and sinks back into the chair as she leaves, the door closing softly behind her.

Shane turns back to Ilya immediately. He reaches for his hand again, grounding himself in the warmth of it.

Coach Wiebe comes in with Yuna a few minutes later.

He moves carefully, like he understands where he is. He nods once to David, then looks at Shane.

Shane stands.

“Coach,” he says. The word steadies him. “I wanted to let you know—Ilya’s doing better, but he’s got a concussion, swelling, a broken arm. They’re keeping him overnight at least. I don’t know timelines yet, but we’ll keep you updated.”

Wiebe listens without interrupting.

Shane keeps going, momentum carrying him now. “I can talk to the trainers, figure out rehab, make sure everything’s lined up so he can get back on the ice as soon as possible—”

“Hollander.”

The single word stops him.

“I don’t care about hockey right now.”

Shane blinks. “I—”

“I’ll handle the team,” Wiebe says. “The schedule. The press. The questions. That’s not your job tonight.”

Shane stands there, hands useless at his sides, the absence of responsibility hitting harder than the weight of it did.

“Oh,” he says quietly.

Wiebe studies him. “I don’t know what your connection with Ilya is,” he says. “And I don’t need to.”

Shane’s chest tightens.

“What I do know is that he’s lucky to have you here,” Wiebe continues. “Someone who crossed a continent to sit in a chair and hold his hand.”

Shane looks down.

“The Centaurs have his back,” Wiebe says. “And yours. Whatever recovery looks like, you won’t be doing it alone.”

Shane nods once. Then again.

“Thank you,” he says.

Wiebe nods in return. “Take care of him.”

When the door closes behind him, Shane sits back down and reaches automatically for Ilya’s hand.

Ilya wakes again slowly.

Not all at once. Not cleanly. Just a shift, like he’s drifting closer to the surface of something heavy. His fingers twitch first, then curl, squeezing Shane’s hand.

Shane is already leaning forward before he’s fully aware he’s moving.

“Hey,” he says quietly. “Hey. It’s okay.”

Ilya’s eyes open partway, unfocused, blinking against the light. His face creases, confused, then faintly irritated, like the world has failed to line itself up properly.

His gaze drifts.

Then settles.

There’s a moment where nothing happens, where Shane can’t tell if the recognition is real or something he wants too badly to trust.

“You’re here,” Ilya says. His voice is rough, barely more than breath.

Shane nods, small and certain. “Yeah.”

Ilya squints at him, studying his face like it takes effort. “You look…” He trails off, swallows. “Bad.”

Shane lets out a quiet, shaky laugh. “Fuck off.”

That earns him the faintest curve of a smile. It fades almost immediately. Ilya shifts, then stills, a low sound catching in his throat as the movement reminds him of everything else.

“Hurts,” he murmurs.

“I know,” Shane says. “I know. You got hit hard. They’re taking care of you.”

It feels useless to say. He wants to do something. Adjust something. Fix something. There’s nothing he can touch that will make this better, and the helplessness sits heavy in his chest.

Ilya hums, noncommittal. His grip on Shane’s hand tightens just slightly, like that’s the only thing he can manage.

“Ya lyublyu tebya,” he says, sudden and unguarded.

Shane doesn’t hesitate.“Ya lyublyu tebya.”

A nurse appears at the doorway and pauses when she sees Ilya awake.

“Well, look at you,” she says softly as she steps in. “Welcome back.”

She checks his vitals, shines a light briefly in his eyes. Ilya squints and groans, turning his head away as much as the pillow allows.

“Sorry,” she says, though she’s smiling. “You’re doing great. I can give you a bit more pain medication now that you’re awake.”

“Mm,” Ilya manages, already fading again.

She glances at Shane. “He’ll probably continue to drift in and out for a while. That’s normal.”

“Okay,” Shane says.

When she leaves, the room settles again.

Ilya’s eyes flutter shortly after, fighting to stay open. His gaze finds Shane once more, softer now, less searching.

“Hi,” he says belatedly, like the thought has just caught up to him.

Shane’s throat tightens. “Hi.”

Ilya exhales, long and uneven, and his eyelids finally give in. His hand stays curled around Shane's.

Shane doesn't move.

He sits there, thumb brushing slow circles against Ilya's knuckles, heart pounding with something that feels dangerously close to relief.

He doesn't say the things he wrote.

He doesn't say the things he wants.

There will be time.

For now, Ilya is awake.

He knows he's not alone.

Shane stays exactly where he promised to be.

An hour or two later, Ilya shifts against the pillows, a faint sound leaving him with the movement. Shane watches him as his eyes open, unfocused at first, then slowly track the strip of light from the setting sun on the wall.

His mouth moves once before sound comes out.

"How long?" he asks. His voice is rough, scraped thin.

Shane is already reaching for the cup, stopping only when he sees Ilya's eyes flick toward it. "Hang on," he says quietly. He adjusts the straw, brings it closer. "Small sips."

Ilya frowns at that, but he takes the water, swallowing carefully. He grimaces, throat working, like it still hurts to use.

"Almost twenty-four hours," Shane says once the cup is back on the table. "You woke up a few times. Not for long."

Ilya blinks. His gaze drifts, then snaps back, sharper. "It's… late?"

"Kind of," Shane says. "Just past four."

That seems to take a second to land. Ilya stares at the wall again, jaw tight, then turns his head slightly.

"When did you get here?"

Shane hesitates before answering honestly. "Early this morning. Like, really early. I came straight from the airport."

Ilya's brows knit together. "You had a game."

“I did,” Shane says. “We were in L.A. at the hotel. Watching your game.” He pauses. “Then you went down, and I just… left.”

“Left,” Ilya repeats, like he’s testing the word.

Shane nods. “Yeah.”

The monitors fill the quiet that follows. Shane is aware of the small sounds in the room, from the shift of fabric to the faint scrape of a chair. His parents are still there, deliberately unobtrusive, giving them space even though there isn’t much of it to give.

“It doesn’t matter,” Shane says, quieter. “I’m here.”

Ilya exhales through his nose. It isn’t quite a sigh. “You shouldn’t have.”

“Yes, I had to.” Shane says.

“So,” Shane says eventually, careful with it, “Troy Barrett picked me up from the airport.”

Ilya’s eyes flick sideways. “Oh.”

“I didn’t realize you two were… close,” Shane says.

Ilya’s mouth quirks, then settles. “Is what he said?”

“And some other things,” Shane replies.

Ilya looks up at the ceiling, eyes unfixed, like he’s sorting through something Shane can’t see. When he speaks again, his voice is steadier than his expression. “We talked a few weeks ago. In New York. Was not my business to share. He is better guy than I thought.”

Shane nods, filing that away without pressing. Not now.

The quiet that settles afterward isn’t awkward. It’s careful. Like both of them are still catching up to the same moment from different directions.

A nurse comes for Ilya not long after.

Two nurses, calm and efficient, explaining scans and follow-ups, all of which is just to be safe. Shane helps where he can, shifting his chair back, gathering the blanket when it slips, and squeezing Ilya’s hand one last time before they wheel him toward the door.

“I’ll be right here,” Shane says.

Ilya nods, exhaustion clear on his face.

When the door swings shut behind the gurney, the room feels abruptly too big.

Shane stands there for a moment, hands useless at his sides, then sinks back into the chair like his body has finally realized it can stop holding itself upright.

Yuna closes the door carefully. David stays near Shane, a gentle look on his face.

Shane looks up. “What?”

Yuna crosses the room and perches on the edge of the chair opposite him. “Okay,” she says softly. “We need to tell you a few things.”

His stomach drops.

“It’s been announced that you’re not playing tonight,” David says. “The game in L.A.”

Shane nods. “Yeah. I figured.”

“They didn’t give a reason,” Yuna adds. “Which means people are filling in the blanks.”

Shane exhales through his nose. “Of course they are.”

David shifts his weight. “Someone recognized you at the Ottawa airport this morning. There are photos.”

Shane closes his eyes briefly.

“And,” Yuna continues, more carefully now, “there’s a rumor that you’re here specifically at this hospital. With Ilya.”

Shane opens his eyes. “Already?”

She nods. “It’s… loud out there.”

He leans back in the chair, staring at the ceiling. For a second, he looks more tired than he has all day.

“They’re starting to ask us questions,” Yuna says. “About why we’re here. About you.”

“And your coach has been calling your agent,” David adds. “Repeatedly.”

“And your agent has been calling me,” Yuna says.

That one lands harder.

“And Hayden,” Yuna continues, her voice gentler again, “has been put in a difficult position. People are asking him things he doesn’t have answers to.”

Shane’s jaw tightens. He rubs a hand over his face. “I didn’t mean to—”

“We know,” Yuna says immediately. “Hayden knows. No one is upset. We’re all here for you.”

David steps closer. “We’re just telling you because it’s escalating. And it won’t stay contained forever.”

Shane nods slowly. His gaze drifts to the door Ilya was taken through, like he can still see him beyond it.

“Okay,” he says. “Okay.”

Yuna watches him closely. “You don’t have to deal with it right this second.”

“I just… I need Ilya here first.” Shane says. His voice is steady, but distant.

David nods.

They let the silence sit for a moment, it’s heavy, but not crushing.

The world is knocking now. Loudly. Insistently.

But Shane stays where he is, eyes fixed on the door, waiting for Ilya to come back, because whatever comes next, he knows exactly where he’s supposed to be.

They bring Ilya back an hour later.

He looks more exhausted than Shane thought possible, after years of long drives after games to see one another and fighting sleep to enjoy every second they have together, Shane thought he knew exhaustion. But Ilya’s eyes are dull, and his shoulders are slack, there’s pain written into the careful way he moves. Shane is on his feet before he realizes he’s moved, hovering uselessly until the nurses wave him back.

“Everything went as expected,” one of them says. “No changes. We’ll continue to monitor him through the night.”

“Okay,” Shane says, relief sharp and fleeting.

Shane’s parents excuse themselves for a walk, a quiet suggestion framed as stretching their legs. Shane nods, grateful and distracted, watching them go before the door clicks shut behind them.

Once they’re alone again, he moves on instinct.

He adjusts the pillows, lifts the head of the bed a fraction, brings the cup back within reach. He helps Ilya drink, steadying the straw, counting swallows without thinking about it. Muscle memory already.

Ilya watches him through it all.

“What is wrong?” he asks finally.

Shane pauses, cup still in his hand. “How are you feeling?”

Ilya shrugs, a careful movement. “Will be fine.” His eyes narrow slightly. “What is wrong? Your face is all… squished.”

Shane huffs out a breath despite himself. Then he sobers.

“There’s a lot of rumors,” he says after a moment. “About us. About me being here.”

Ilya studies him, eyes steady despite the haze. “How bad?”

“They know I’m here,” Shane says.

Ilya absorbs that in silence. Then, faintly, “Are people angry?”

“Probably,” Shane says. “But I haven’t looked at any of it.”

Ilya opens his mouth, clearly ready to push, but Shane cuts in gently.

“It can wait,” he says. “You need sleep.”

“I am awake,” Ilya protests, even as his eyelids betray him.

Shane reaches up without thinking, fingers weaving slowly through Ilya’s hair, careful of the bandage. The movement is familiar, grounding. He feels Ilya give in almost immediately, tension easing out of him in stages.

“Later,” Shane murmurs. “I promise.”

Ilya makes a quiet, disgruntled sound, but his breathing evens out within moments. Shane stays where he is until he’s sure.

When Ilya wakes again, it's only an hour or so later.

His voice is hoarse. “Am starving.”

Shane smiles faintly and reaches for the paper bag. He digs through it, assembling something simple without asking: crackers, apple slices, one of the turnovers broken carefully in half.

As soon as he sees the spread he smiles. “Harris was here?” He says taking a bite. “He is fantastic, yes?”

Shane snorts. “He wasn’t here.”

Ilya frowns. “But these are apples from Harris, yes?”

“Troy brought it.”

Ilya’s eyes light up immediately, the haze clearing just enough for mischief. “Oh. Troy brought Harris’ food.”

Shane pauses, wondering where this is going.

“That is progress,” Ilya continues, clearly pleased. “Maybe my injury finally brings them together. Life is short, you know. People should not waste—”

“Ilya,” Shane says, sharper than he means to.

Ilya stops.

The silence that follows is sudden, heavy. Shane’s jaw tightens, guilt flaring immediately.

Ilya watches him for a beat, then his expression shifts into something almost sheepish and regretful. “Too soon,” he says quietly.

Shane exhales. “Yeah.”

“I’m sorry,” Ilya adds. “Was just a bad joke.”

“I know,” Shane says, softer now. He reaches for Ilya’s hand, thumb brushing his knuckles. “Just… not yet. When I was on the flight here, I knew nothing and I thought I really might lose you.”

Ilya nods. “I’m sorry. But I'm fine. Not going anywhere.” Ilya lifts their held hands and presses a kiss to Shane's knuckles, one at a time.

They sit like that for a moment, the joke dissipating, the room settling again around them.

Shane stays close, remembering that life is short.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your thoughtful and kind comments 🖤🤕 Don't mind my weird emoji responses. I have a tradition of black heart + an emoji related to the fic. It's weird but fun.

But your kudos and kindness are making my day!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thanks for not calling me out on my lack of medical accuracy. It's just *hand waves*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Morning comes without ceremony.

Ilya sleeps through most of it. Restless, but sleeping. He shifts and murmurs and drifts back under, caught somewhere between pain medication and exhaustion. Shane barely registers the hours passing. He convinces his parents to go home around midnight, promising to text if anything changes. They hesitate, but eventually leave.

Shane doesn't sleep much at all.

At some point before dawn, his body gives up on pretending. He turns his phone back on, telling himself it's just to check the time. Just to do something other than stare at the walls and listen to the machines hum.

That's a lie.

He scrolls.

At first it's benign. He manages to avoid anything personal or hockey related. Then he stumbles onto the factual posts. Injury updates. Clip replays. The same three headlines rewritten a dozen different ways.

Then there's the speculation dressed up as concern. He keeps going anyway, thumb moving on autopilot, chasing the illusion of control.

Finally, it shifts.

Questions start stacking up. Screenshots of airport photos. A grainy shot of him entering the hospital, taken from too far away to be accidental. Threads full of people piecing things together like it's a puzzle meant for them.

Shane feels the tension settle into his shoulders like a weight. He doesn't stop scrolling. He can't.

When the room finally starts to glow with early light, Ilya stirs.

It's subtle at first. A shift of his head against the pillow. A breath that sounds more awake than the others. Shane looks up immediately, phone still in his hand.

“Hey,” Ilya murmurs, voice rough. “You are… glowing.”

Shane snorts weakly and drops the phone onto the chair beside him. He leans in without thinking, pressing a careful kiss to Ilya’s temple. The relief is immediate and sharp, but it doesn’t loosen anything. His body stays wound tight.

Ilya’s eyes crack open more fully. He’s sitting up on his own now, propped against the pillows, movements slow but determined. He studies Shane’s face with the same blunt focus he always has, even half-drugged.

“You look upset,” Ilya says. Then, squinting. “Very pretty, but upset.”

“I’m fine,” Shane says automatically.

Ilya hums, unconvinced. “Is lie, yes?”

Shane exhales and sits back, rubbing at his eyes with the heel of his hands. The pressure doesn’t help. When he drops his hands, his vision is already blurred.

“Fuck,” he mutters.

Ilya’s expression sharpens. “Shane.”

“It’s nothing,” Shane says, too fast. “Really.”

Ilya reaches out, fingers brushing Shane’s wrist, grounding and insistent. “What are they saying?”

Shane takes a deep breath.

Shane laughs once, hollow. He shakes his head. “It’s stupid. It doesn’t matter.”

“Tell me,” Ilya says.

The words slip out before Shane can stop them. “They’re asking questions.”

“You are here,” Ilya says. “And I’m going to be fine, yes? That is all that matters right now.”

“No,” Shane snaps, the edge surprising even him. He sucks in a breath, tries again. “They’re asking things they don’t get to ask. About us. About me being here. Like this is entertainment. Like they have a right to our lives.”

Ilya frowns faintly. “Are they angry? That we’re together.”

Shane stares at him.

And something in his chest finally gives.

“Angry?” he repeats, disbelief breaking through the exhaustion. “Ilya, you could have died.”

The words land heavy and ugly in the quiet room.

“You didn’t wake up for almost a full day,” Shane continues, voice climbing despite himself. “I sat here and counted your breaths. I watched machines tell me you were alive because I didn’t trust my own eyes. And they’re online asking what this means for trades and rivalries and whether I’m crossing some imaginary line by sitting in a chair next to you.”

He scrubs at his face again, breath shaky now. “How do they think they get to ask anything of us right now? Anything of you?”

Ilya doesn’t interrupt. He just listens.

“They want statements,” Shane goes on, anger finally burning through the fear. “They want explanations. They want us to perform something neat and understandable while you’re lying in a hospital bed with a broken arm and a concussion.”

His voice breaks. “I want to tell them to leave us the fuck alone, but even saying that will be an answer enough.”

The silence that follows is thick but steady.

Ilya looks at him for a long moment, eyes clearer now, the haze pulled back just enough to understand what Shane is really saying. Then he shifts carefully and reaches for Shane’s hand, lacing their fingers together.

“Hey,” he says quietly. “Look at me.”

Shane does.

“I’m here,” Ilya says. “I’m breathing. I am very annoying still.”

A weak smile tugs at Shane’s mouth despite everything.

“They can wait,” Ilya continues. “All of it can wait. This,” he squeezes Shane’s hand, “is only thing that matters.”

Shane nods, throat tight. “I know. I just—”

“I know,” Ilya repeats.

He leans his head back against the pillows, still holding on. “Later, we deal with them. Together.”

Shane exhales slowly, the fight draining out of him in stages. He squeezes Ilya’s hand back and leans in, resting his forehead briefly against Ilya’s shoulder.

“Okay,” he says.

As they sit in the quiet, letting the pressure fade to the boundaries of the room, Shane can feel Ilya’s eyes on him.

Not in the way he usually does, sharp and amused and already two steps ahead. This is slower. He studies Shane like he's taking inventory, like he's counting something Shane hasn't realized he's been giving away.

Then, casually, he asks, "Where's Hayden?"

Shane looks up, thrown. The question feels like it comes from the wrong direction. He laughs, soft and disbelieving. "Why? You hate Hayden."

Ilya frowns faintly. "I don't hate him," he says. "He is annoying and boring. At same time. Should not be possible."

Shane groans.

Ilya watches him for a beat, then says quietly, "You need someone who is awake."

Shane's chest tightens.

"I am not very useful right now," Ilya adds. "You need a friend who can stand up."

The words land heavier than Shane expects. He looks down at their hands, still loosely linked, thumb tracing a slow, unconscious circle against Ilya's knuckles.

"He's not here yet," Shane says. "He stayed for the game. Took a red eye. He should be getting into Montreal in a few hours."

Ilya nods once, absorbing that. He doesn't press. Doesn't ask anything else.

"Good," he says.

The room goes quiet again, but something has shifted.

Shane sits with it, with the realization creeping in after the fact. Ilya isn't asking because he wants Hayden here. He's asking because he knows Shane can't carry all of this alone. Not the fear, not the noise, not the weight of the world pressing in from outside the door.

Ilya's hand tightens briefly around his, then relaxes.

Shane exhales, slow and uneven, and leans forward until his forehead rests against the edge of the mattress. He stays there for a beat, grounding himself in the warmth of Ilya's hand, the steady proof that he's still here.

Time shifts again. It feels like blinking.

A pair of nurses comes in with quiet efficiency, talking about imaging and follow-ups. They ask Shane to step back, and Ilya is wheeled out before Shane can decide whether to stand or sit.

"I'll be here," Shane says. Ilya nods once, eyes heavy.

The room goes abruptly still.

Shane pulls out his phone and calls his parents. They answer on speaker, voices overlapping.

“Don’t rush back,” Shane says before they can ask. “Seriously. You’re fine. He’s not even in the room right now.”

Yuna protests immediately. Shane cuts in, gentler. “I promise. Everything’s stable. They’re running a few more tests, that’s all.”

There’s a pause, then David says, “Okay. We’ll stay put.”

Shane exhales. “Actually—could I ask you to do something?”

“Anything,” Yuna says.

“If—if he gets discharged later today,” Shane says carefully, “could you make sure the house is ready for him?”

“Of course,” David says.

“Like—don’t go into the bedroom,” Shane adds quickly. “The bedroom is fine. Totally fine. Please do not go into the bedroom.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“Okay,” Yuna says slowly.

“But maybe,” Shane continues, words tripping now, “put sheets on the couch? And make sure there’s water and gatorade. Easy food.” He pauses, trying to picture the fridge. “ Fuck. I don’t even remember when I was last there. Three weeks? Could you send me a photo and I’ll order groceries?”

“Shane,” David says gently, “we can handle the groceries.”

Shane breathes, the tightness easing a fraction. “And pain meds, he keeps them in the first-floor bathroom. Can you make sure they’re stocked?”

“Of course,” Yuna says.

Shane closes his eyes. “Thank you. Really.”

When they hang up, he sinks back into the chair and presses his palms into his knees, breathing until the spike of panic fades. The idea of his parents in Ilya’s bedroom, when Shane has no idea what state it was left in, had been concerning.

He doesn’t follow that thought. He refuses to.

Ilya comes back not long after, drowsy and pliant, slipping into sleep almost immediately once he’s settled again. Shane adjusts pillows, straightens the blanket, stays close. The nurse

checks vitals and smiles at the chart.

“Everything’s looking good,” she says. “If this continues, we’re aiming for discharge this evening.”

Home. The idea of it lands warm and gentle.

Ilya wakes later, groggy but more present, and Shane chats with him about anything and nothing, careful not to overload him. They talk quietly, voices low, like the room is something fragile they don’t want to disturb.

There’s a knock at the door.

It’s careful. Almost tentative.

Shane looks up. Troy stands in the doorway, one hand still half-raised like he’s reconsidering the timing. He stops short when he sees Ilya sitting up.

“Hey,” Troy says, relief immediate and unguarded. “You’re awake.”

Ilya smiles. “Don’t look disappointed, you never would have been captain,” he says, voice rough but amused.

Troy lets out a breath that sounds like he’s been holding it for a while. He steps just inside the room, mindful of the space, eyes flicking briefly over the monitors before settling back on Ilya. “I’m sorry to interrupt. I just—” He gestures vaguely. “I wanted to check in.”

“Still me,” Ilya says. “Just more naps.”

“That’s good,” Troy says, and the corner of his mouth lifts despite himself. “There’s someone else here,” Troy says then, shifting his weight. “I think you might want to see him. If you’re up for it.”

He steps back toward the door and waits.

“Okay,” Ilya says easily.

Troy looks at Shane, checking. Not asking outright, just making sure. Shane nods in Ilya’s direction, unwilling to answer for him when he’s clearly capable.

Troy nods and opens the door wider.

A man Shane quickly realizes must be Harris appears in the doorway, already wearing an apologetic smile, like he’s prepared to be turned away. He has a leash in one hand, attached to a very large, very enthusiastic puppy.

Before Shane can fully process what he’s looking at, Ilya straightens more than he has since Shane arrived and makes a sound Shane has *never* heard come out of him.

“Chiron!”

It's high and delighted and completely unguarded, closer to the way he greets Hayden's kids than anything Shane has ever witnessed directed at another adult.

Shane presses his lips together because the laugh is right there, threatening to spill out, and somehow so is the relief.

"This guy was worried about you," Harris says as he approaches the bed carefully. "Thought we might help cheer you up, too."

Troy crosses the room and gestures toward the empty chair on the far side of Ilya's bed, the one Shane isn't currently occupying. Shane's spent the last day rotating between the two. Troy motions Harris into it, positioning him so Chiron can be held steady and Ilya can reach him with his good hand.

Ilya pets Chiron with reverence, like this is a privilege, not a favor. The puppy responds with total devotion, tail wagging hard enough to shake his whole body.

Shane sits back and watches.

The smile on Ilya's face is open and unrestrained, the kind that feels dangerously hopeful. It does something to Shane's chest, loosening it.

As the moment stretches, Shane notices Troy standing just off to the side, arms crossed. He's watching too, but not Ilya. His attention is fixed on Harris, expression unreadable.

"I'm Harris, by the way," Harris says from the other side of the bed.

"Hey," Shane replies. "I'm Shane."

Harris grins. "I'd say nice to finally meet you, but this one hasn't mentioned you much."

For some reason, it doesn't sting. It doesn't feel invasive. It feels like hockey banter, the kind of jab that lands soft, makes you feel included instead of exposed.

"Well," Shane says, glancing at Ilya, "he's told me a lot about you. Though even more about Chiron."

Harris's grin widens. "Oh, come on. Come meet him. You can hold him for a bit."

Ilya looks between them, pleased. "Didn't Troy tell you all about Harris too?"

"What?" Troy splutters.

"Well, not really," Shane says.

"Yes, he did," Ilya insists. "Troy talked his ear off in the car ride here."

Shane stares at him. "How would you know?"

Ilya's mouth quirks, unapologetic.

Shane settles into the chair as Harris carefully passes Chiron into his lap. Shane angles himself so Ilya can still reach, but finds his own hand moving too—scratching behind Chiron's ears, steadying the warm weight of him.

The puppy leans into it like he belongs there.

Ilya's voice drops without warning.

"Oh," he says softly, leaning in closer. "You are doing very important work, yes?"

Chiron's tail thumps harder, like he understands.

"You will be such good therapy dog," Ilya continues, words careful, rounded. "Look at you. Already practicing." He smiles at the puppy, something open and undone in his expression. "You make people feel better. You make *me* feel better."

Shane's chest tightens.

Ilya scratches gently under Chiron's chin, reverent. "You will make everyone happy," he says, voice slipping into something gentler, warmer. "Very professional. Very serious job."

The puppy leans into the attention like it's his calling.

He watches Ilya soften around the dog, the sharpness sanded down into something tender and absurd and unbearably sincere. He's seen this before, it isn't entirely new, but still, Shane feels himself go a little helpless at the edges, entirely captivated.

Shane looks down at Chiron, then back at Ilya, and realizes he's smiling like an idiot.

He doesn't try to stop it.

Ilya finally looks up from Chiron, eyes bright and a little dazed with happiness.

"Harris," he says, suddenly earnest. "Thank you for the food. Drover apples are still the best." A pause. "Did you bring more?"

Shane taps his knee lightly without thinking.

Ilya looks offended for half a second, then amused. "I said thank you."

Harris laughs. "I don't have anything else on me right now. But—" He hesitates, then brightens. "There are a lot of gift baskets in the waiting room. Like, an unreasonable amount. I can grab a couple if you want."

Ilya's eyes widen. "Yes," he says immediately. "Please."

Harris starts to stand from the windowsill, shifting his weight—

And Troy's hand comes out of nowhere, landing gently but firmly on Harris's shoulder, nudging him back down into his seat.

Before Harris can react, Troy is already moving toward the door.

“I got it,” he says, without turning around.

The door closes softly behind him.

Harris watches it for a beat, a small smile on his face.

Shane clears his throat. “Hey. Thank you. It was really thoughtful. All of it.”

Harris looks pleased. “Yeah. Of course.” He nods toward the notebook and pen on the table. “I hope those helped too.”

“They did,” Shane says honestly.

Harris leans back against the sill, expression softer now. “I spent a lot of time in hospitals as a kid,” he says. “My sisters used to draw me pictures while they waited. Stick figures, monsters, whatever phase they were in. Margot even went through a poetry phase.” He smiles faintly. “And my parents wrote me letters. Especially when they were there all day. It helped. Gave me something special to wake up to, and gave them some hope, knowing I’d get to read it soon.”

Ilya frowns, processing. “Letters?”

Shane feels heat crawl up the back of his neck. “Later,” he says, too quickly.

There’s a pause.

Shane risks a glance at Harris. He’s watching them in that mild, unfazed way some people have, like he’s seen enough hospital rooms to know when not to fill the silence. His smile doesn’t change, but something about it feels knowing.

Shane looks away first.

Ilya studies him for another second, clearly filing it away, then lets it go. For now.

The door opens again not long after.

Troy reappears, arms full. Three baskets. One of them is already open, contents clearly disturbed.

“Sorry,” Troy says. “The guys got a little curious. We decided to… test some things.”

Ilya laughs, delighted. “I guess I can share.”

They don’t stay much longer after that.

Harris promises to bring Chiron back the next day if Ilya is still in the hospital. Troy claps Ilya on the shoulder, quick and solid, then nods at Shane.

“Feel better,” he says to Ilya.

“Thanks,” Shane says. “For everything.”

When the door closes behind them, the room settles again, full of the faint sense that something good has passed through and lingered.

Shane drags one of the baskets closer and starts unpacking it, setting things out on the bed. Wrapped cookies. Crackers. Granola bars. Trail mix. A suspicious amount of chocolate.

Ilya’s attention sharpens immediately.

He reaches out and grabs a cookie without ceremony.

Then another.

Shane watches, says nothing.

Ilya chews, satisfied, then glances up at him. “So,” he says lightly. “Letters?”

Shane pauses mid-unwrapping. “You really don’t let things go.”

“I do,” Ilya says. “When they’re not interesting.”

Shane sets the current snack basket down on the floor and sits back. “It’s nothing.”

Ilya lifts an eyebrow. “You are blushing.” His face softens, “You wrote me letters.”

Shane can’t quite meet his gaze, knowing what that letter contains. The air feels fragile in his throat.

Shane shrugs, uncomfortable. “One letter.”

Ilya reaches for another cookie.

Shane intercepts it.

Ilya looks at him, affronted. “What?”

“Eat something that isn’t entirely sugar,” Shane says. “Please.”

“This is energy,” Ilya argues.

“It’s dessert.”

Shane picks up a packet of nuts and a bag of dried mango and nudges them toward him.

Ilya sighs dramatically, rolls his eyes, but tears the mango open anyway. He eats a few pieces with exaggerated care. “There,” he says. “Healthy. Now I get letter.”

Shane hesitates, then reaches for his bag and pulls out the notebook. He tears the first page free, and hands it over.

Ilya takes it, studying the paper with his brow furrowed. “This is not letter. This is…” He pauses, clearly searching for the word. “Draft.”

“No,” Shane says. “It’s a list. Just read it before I regret this.”

Ilya does.

He reads slowly, lips moving just enough for Shane to track where he is. His expression shifts with each line—soft, amused, confused, something like awe threading through it all.

“You can cry over me anytime. I am worth tears.” Ilya nods, satisfied. “But no crying otherwise. Then I make fun of you.”

Shane huffs a breath. “Noted.”

Ilya keeps going. “You missed one game, yes? You will not miss more. It is not winning if you are not playing.”

“We’re not talking about this now,” Shane says. “I’ll go back when you’re better.”

Ilya opens his mouth as if to argue, but Shane gives him a stern look and nods back at the list.

“Dog,” he says, suddenly animated. “I am getting a dog? Yes? Where is he? Is he goodest boy?”

Shane laughs, startled by the force of it. “I’ve been in a hospital for twenty-four hours. I haven’t had time to adopt a dog.”

Ilya looks genuinely offended. “You had time to write this.”

“Not the same thing.”

“Hm.”

He reads on. “Motorcycle can wait,” he says, decisive.

Shane exhales, the relief unspooling like a muscle he hadn’t unclenched since LA.

Ilya reaches the end. His eyes soft. He folds the page once, then again, careful with the crease, like it’s delicate.

“Thank you,” he says, voice low.

Before Shane can respond, Ilya tugs him down by the front of his sweatshirt and kisses him. It’s unsteady, but warm and grateful and so much more than Shane was ready for.

Shane’s breath stutters when Ilya’s fingers graze his hip, lower, clearly aiming for something they are not doing in a hospital bed.

“Hands free will be good,” Ilya mutters. “Easy for recovery.”

Shane's face goes hot. He pulls back, gently pushing Ilya's wrist away. "We are *not* talking about that while you're on pain meds."

Ilya smirks, victorious. "You are the one that put it in the draft letter thing!"

"I was in distress," Shane says. "Eat your mango."

Ilya pops another piece in his mouth like he's won.

The day stretches.

It doesn't blur exactly, but it loosens, edges softening as the urgency drains out of it in increments. Ilya sleeps again, deep and heavy, the kind of sleep that feels earned. Shane doesn't move while it happens. He shifts only enough to stay close, to keep a hand somewhere reassuring, on Ilya's forearm, his knee, the edge of his blanket. When the nurse comes in, Shane steps back and then immediately steps forward again, like a tide that can't help itself.

When Ilya wakes, Shane is right there.

He offers water. Snacks. Adjusts pillows. Smooths the blanket even when it doesn't need smoothing. Ilya eats in small bursts, accepts help without comment, eyes flicking to Shane often enough that Shane knows it's noticed.

They talk, but carefully.

Not about what comes next. Not about statements or press or the noise building outside the room. They agree, quietly and without ceremony, to wait until they're home. Until Ilya is horizontal on a couch that isn't a hospital bed. Until they can shut a door and decide together how much of themselves the world gets.

So they talk about other things.

Shane helps Ilya type out a response to Svetlana, reading the text aloud before sending it. Reassuring. Brief. Ilya dictates, Shane types, doing his best to mimic Ilya's texting style.

He touches Ilya constantly, but gently, like he's reminding himself that this is real. Fingers brushing Ilya's knuckles when he passes the phone back. A hand resting warm and steady at the back of his neck. Thumbs tracing absent shapes on Ilya's wrist while he pretends not to watch the monitors.

Shane pulls up the scores from last night's game and tilts the phone so Ilya can see. The recap is already live. Highlights clipped into something sharper and smaller than the game itself.

Montreal lost.

Ilya stares at the screen, jaw tight. "Only Pike is trying," he says finally.

Shane nods. "He keeps setting it up and no one's there."

“He is doing his job,” Ilya says. “Passing. Waiting. But they are not ready.” He exhales, annoyed.

Shane watches him process it, the familiar irritation settling in alongside the disappointment. “Am I allowed to tell Hayden you complimented him?”

“No,” Ilya mutters, then sighs. “But you can tell him I’m sorry. It is my fault you weren’t there.”

Before he looks up, Shane thinks Ilya is joking, but when he meets his eyes, he sees the sincerity there and a tinge of guilt.

“Hey, this is where I need to be,” Shane says, reaching out to softly hold Ilya’s cheek. His runs his thumb down his jaw. “This is where I want to be.”

Ilya closes his eyes in response and leans into Shane’s touch.

Unexpectedly, there’s a knock.

Hayden doesn’t wait for permission. He opens the door and pauses for half a second to seemingly take everything in.

Then he crosses the room in three strides and pulls Shane into a hug so tight it knocks the breath out of him.

Shane doesn’t protest. He folds into it, relief breaking loose in a way he hadn’t realized he was holding back.

“Hey,” Hayden says quietly, into his shoulder.

“Hey,” Shane manages.

When they separate, Ilya watches them with interest.

“I am right here,” he says mildly. “You know. Injured.”

Hayden turns on him instantly, glare sharp and unimpressed. “Don’t start.”

Ilya smiles, pleased with himself.

Hayden moves to the side of the bed and looks him over, expression serious now. “You scare the shit out of us and you’re cracking jokes?”

“Us?” Ilya says. “Do you care about me now, Pike?”

Hayden snorts despite himself. He reaches out and gives Ilya’s uninjured shoulder a careful squeeze. “You’re an idiot.”

Shane watches them, one hand back to resting on Ilya’s leg, grounding himself in the weight of it.

Hayden lingers at the side of the bed, hands on his hips now, eyes moving between them like he is taking inventory.

“Okay,” he says. “What do you need?”

Shane blinks. “Hm?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Hayden says. “Food. Clothes. Rides. Someone to yell at. Pick one.”

Ilya considers this seriously. “Dog.”

Hayden squints. “What?”

Shane laughs, startled and a little hysterical. “No.”

Ilya looks betrayed. “Shane promised me a dog.”

“If you keep this up,” Shane says, still smiling despite himself, “you are not getting the other list. Or the letter.”

Ilya gives him a playful glare. “Cruel.”

“You can get a dog this summer,” Shane adds. “When we can actually train it.”

“I can train dog now,” Ilya argues. “I will be home all day.”

“With one arm,” Shane says.

“It will be a service dog,” Ilya replies. “Like Chiron.”

Hayden holds up a hand. “I am not weighing in on the dog thing.” He turns back to Shane. “What about food? I can stock your fridge. Or just bring stuff over.”

“We’re covered,” Shane says. “My parents handled it.”

Hayden studies him for a second, then nods again, accepting it. “Alright.”

There’s a pause. The room hums softly around them.

“Has anyone filled you in?” Hayden asks carefully, “About what’s going on out there?”

Shane exhales. “A bit.”

“If you want me to make any sort of statement,” Hayden says, “I can.”

“We just want a little more time,” Shane says. “Before we say anything.”

Hayden nods. “Okay.”

He means it. Shane can tell.

“Just, they won’t stay patient forever,” Hayden murmurs, a failed attempt at gentleness. “When he’s home, you’ll need a plan.”

Shane nods, eyes on the floor.

They sit with that for a moment, feeling the weight of it all settling in again.

“Just a heads up,” Hayden says finally. “JJ is… confused. And upset.”

Shane groans, scrubbing a hand over his face.

“Fuck JJ,” Ilya says, without hesitation.

Hayden snorts. “JJ thinks Shane has a crush on you. And that you’re straight.”

Shane’s head whips around so fast it makes his neck twinge. “What?”

Ilya looks delighted.

“This is very funny,” he says.

“It is not funny,” Shane says.

Hayden shrugs. “Apparently, he also noticed all those heart eyes I told you about during camp this summer. So he thinks you have an unrequited crush.”

“Oh,” Shane says.

The humor drains out of him completely. He stares at the floor, jaw tight, guilt threading through the relief and exhaustion all at once. JJ’s voice flashes through his head. The check-ins. All the men he’s attempted to set Shane up with recently.

“I’ve just been avoiding him to be honest,” Hayden says. ”I wasn’t sure what you’d want him to know.”

“I should tell him,” Shane says. It comes out rough. “I hate that I’ve been lying to him.”

Hayden watches him for a moment, weighing something.

“Do you want me tell him?” he suggests finally.

Shane looks up. “You’d do that?”

Hayden grimaces. “I don’t love it. But yeah. I can.”

Shane nods slowly. “Okay. Yeah. Please.”

Hayden looks at him, firm. “I’m not telling him how long this has been going on.”

Shane nods. “Thank you.” He glances at Ilya, who’s been quiet through all of it, watching Shane with an expression that’s gentler than the moment deserves.

A nurse knocks and steps in with a clipboard tucked against her chest, smile professional and kind.

“Alright,” she says, glancing between them. “Let’s talk discharge.”

Shane straightens without thinking.

Hayden shifts back a step, reading the room.

The nurse goes through it slowly. Meds. Follow-ups. Restrictions. She looks to Shane when she gets to the paperwork.

“You’ll be the one signing him out?”

“Yeah,” Shane says. “That’s me.”

She nods, finalizes the forms, and hands over the instructions and prescriptions. When she leaves, the room exhales with her.

Hayden steps forward again. “I’ll let you guys get settled,” he says. “I’ll check in tomorrow. At the house.”

Ilya looks at him, unimpressed. “You are not invited to my house.”

Hayden snorts. “Good to know.”

“So much for it being our house,” Shane says, glancing at Ilya. “I invite Hayden.”

Ilya sighs, long-suffering. “Fine. Pike. We’ll see you tomorrow.” Then, quieter, eyes on Shane. “Text him today. Make sure he eats when I nap.”

Hayden’s expression softens. “I can do that.”

“Thank you,” Ilya says.

After Hayden leaves, they wait.

The room goes quiet again, the kind of quiet that means something is ending. Shane’s parents are on their way. Everything shifts into minutes and logistics instead of hours and fear.

Shane reaches into his bag.

“One more,” he says.

Ilya looks at him. “Another list?”

Shane nods and hands it over. “Things I want for us.”

Ilya takes the page. He doesn’t joke this time. He doesn’t comment. He just reads.

His eyes go wet, but the tears never fall. When he finishes, he folds the paper carefully and pulls Shane in, arms awkward but determined.

Shane goes easily, pressing his face into Ilya's shoulder, breathing him in like he might need to remember how this feels.

"Me too," Ilya murmurs.

They stay like that longer than they should.

When Ilya finally pulls back, he keeps his forehead resting briefly against Shane's shoulder. His voice is quiet now.

"Thank you," he says. "For being here."

Shane swallows. "I wouldn't be anywhere else."

A pause.

"You missed a game," Ilya says.

"I know," Shane says. "It was worth it."

The words don't need anything added to them.

After a moment, Shane says, "You should thank my parents too. When you see them."

Ilya nods. "Of course."

"They were here before I was," Shane adds. "My mom really took care of everything."

Ilya frowns slightly. "How?"

"Coach Wiebe pulled your emergency contact form," Shane says. "It was blank. My parents showed him our family photos. That was enough for him to let my mom stay until you woke up."

Ilya absorbs that quietly.

Then he reaches for Shane's hand and squeezes once, firm and deliberate.

The door opens without ceremony half an hour later.

Shane looks up instinctively, already bracing for another nurse, another update, another interruption. Instead, he sees his parents framed in the doorway, expressions careful.

Ilya is on his feet for the first time since Shane arrived, standing beside the bed and stretching slowly, experimentally, like he's reacquainting himself with gravity. One hand braces against the mattress, the other holds tight to Shane. He looks tired, but upright. Real.

For a split second, no one moves.

Then Shane sees it, the way both his parents' shoulders drop at the same time, tension draining out of them so visibly it almost startles him. Like they'd been holding themselves rigid until this exact image existed.

Oh.

It hits him all at once. He'd been so consumed by his own fear that it never occurred to him they might have been carrying the same weight. Loving Ilya fully and just as afraid of losing him while trying to be strong for Shane.

Yuna crosses the room first. She wraps Ilya in a careful hug, mindful of the sling, her arms warm and certain around his shoulders. She holds him for awhile, the two just comfortably standing there.

"Never again," she says into his shoulder, half-laugh, half-warning. It's just loud enough for Shane to hear. "Not allowed."

Ilya huffs a soft breath, the sound almost a laugh. He leans into her without thinking. "I will try," he says. "But hockey is hockey."

She pulls back just enough to look at his face, eyes shining. "I'm serious," she says. "You scared us."

Ilya nods.

David steps in next. He claps Ilya gently on the shoulder instead, firm and grounding, the way he always does when he's trying to say something important without making it heavier than it already is.

"Good to see you standing, son," he says.

The word lands softly. Intentionally. Like it's always been there.

Ilya blinks.

"Thank you," he says, voice rougher now. "For being here. For… everything." He glances between them, then at Shane. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare anyone."

For a moment, the room holds very still.

Yuna presses her lips together. Shane feels his chest tighten. David clears his throat once, sharp and quiet.

"Well," Yuna says finally, voice wavering just enough to give her away, "you're okay now. That's what matters. And you'll be back to terrorizing the NHL in no time."

A wet laugh slips out of her before she can stop it. Shane smiles despite the burn behind his eyes.

“We also need to fix your emergency contact situation,” she adds briskly, wiping at her cheek.

Ilya smiles, small and genuine. “Ah, yes.”

Yuna steps back, squaring her shoulders like she’s reclaiming solid ground. “The freezer’s stocked,” she says, turning practical on instinct. “Cookies and cream. The good kind.”

Ilya brightens. “Excellent.”

“And David’s making chicken parm tomorrow,” she continues.

“I’m spoiled.” Ilya lets out a soft, surprised laugh. “Shane will you eat ice cream with me? Please?”

Shane laughs, shaking his head.

They stand there together for another moment just letting the fact of it settle. That Ilya is upright. That he’s okay. That they’re all here together.

Shane watches them, his family, and realizes that whatever happens next, they’re all going to be okay.

A nurse appears in the doorway with a wheelchair, hands folded easily around the handles.

“Ready?” she asks, like it’s the simplest question in the world.

Yuna exhales like she’s been waiting for permission to do that all day. She turns to Ilya, already smiling. “Let’s get you out of here.”

Ilya nods, then reaches for Shane without looking.

“I can walk,” Ilya mutters, already irritated. “I am literally standing.”

Shane ignores him, taking his hand automatically and helps Ilya ease down into the chair, careful of the sling.

“And now you’re sitting,” Yuna says briskly, patting his shoulder.

“This is humiliating.”

“You were unconscious yesterday,” she replies.

Shane bites back a smile as he rests his hands on the handles, solid and grounding and begins pushing Ilya in the wheelchair toward the door.

“Okay,” David says quietly, already reaching for his keys. “I’ll grab the car.”

The nurse leads them down a few different hallways to eventually end up at a side corridor Shane hadn’t noticed before that is deliberately empty. The hospital has cleared it for them, the hum and traffic of the main floors fading behind a closed door.

The exit opens onto cold air and a stretch of quiet pavement.

David's already waiting with the car.

- - -

Home feels unreal at first.

The door clicks shut behind them and the sound alone nearly takes Shane out at the knees. No beeping. No footsteps in the hall. Just space and quiet and Ilya breathing beside him.

Shane helps him onto the couch slowly, carefully, hands steady where his heart is not. He adjusts pillows and blankets. Makes sure Ilya is settled. Makes sure he's really there.

"I'm going to make food," Shane says, already turning toward the kitchen. "Just something quick."

Ilya catches him with his good arm.

Not rough. Not urgent. Just firm enough.

"No," he says.

Shane looks back at him. "You need to eat."

"I will," Ilya says. "Later."

He tugs again, pulling Shane down until Shane is half-collapsed against him, carefully maneuvering around Ilya's injuries. Ilya shifts, awkward but determined, and wraps his arm around Shane's waist, drawing him fully in.

"Food can wait," Ilya says quietly.

Something in Shane finally gives.

He lets himself go, lets his weight settle, lets his head drop against Ilya's chest. Ilya's heartbeat is steady beneath his ear. Solid. Real. His arm tightens just a fraction, protective even now.

Shane exhales.

He doesn't mean to sleep. He doesn't decide to. It just happens, his first real rest since everything broke open. His body finally believes they're safe because they're home and because Ilya is holding him.

When Shane wakes, he has no idea how much time has passed.

The light has shifted. His neck aches faintly where he slept wrong. He blinks, disoriented, and then he registers the quiet sound of breath above him.

"Yes," Ilya says.

His voice is unsteady.

Shane lifts his head. Ilya's eyes are wet. Not spilling, but close. Focused on something in his lap.

"Yes," Ilya says again.

Shane's stomach drops. "What," he says, already sitting up.

Ilya shakes his head, a breathless laugh breaking through the tears. He lifts one hand.

The notebook.

Open.

"I read it," Ilya says. His voice catches. "I know you said later, but you fell asleep and I was not tired and it was right there."

Shane's heart is pounding so hard it's almost painful. "Ilya."

"Yes," Ilya says again, finally looking at him. "Yes. Of course yes."

It takes a second for the words to land.

Then Shane understands.

His hands start to shake.

Ilya reaches out, careful, cupping Shane's face with his good hand. "I am not going anywhere," he says. "I am saying yes to you. To this. To us."

Shane laughs and sobs at the same time, pressing his forehead to Ilya's, hands coming up like he needs to anchor himself somewhere real.

"I didn't mean for you to read it like that," Shane says, breathless. "I wanted it to be more romantic."

"I am glad I did," Ilya says. "The answer is the same either way."

Shane closes his eyes and kisses him, soft and reverent and full of everything he was holding back when Ilya was unconscious.

When they pull back, Ilya draws him in again, tucking Shane against his chest like before.

"We'll figure it out," Ilya murmurs.

Shane nods, because for the first time, the idea of everyone knowing doesn't feel overwhelming.

He lets himself rest there.

Home.

Chapter End Notes

So this fic kind of reconvenes with canon around the time of Shane's trip during the playoff game in TLG

The plane crash does not happen in this universe, these boys have been through enough and clearly this incident is serving a similar purpose for both Troy & Harris as well as Shane & Ilya.

I have a small idea for a follow-up one-shot or maybe epilogue that better clarifies the timeline merging with canon. But it's like 500 words in my head so for all intents and purposes, this is complete!

Thank you to everyone that has read along with this fic! The kudos 🖤 comments 💬 subscriptions 👀 and bookmarks📚 have meant so much to me!

Thank you!!!!!! 🖤🥹

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