

what are you willing to do? (kiss it better, baby)

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what are you willing to do? (kiss it better, baby)

by [subbyjeongguk](#)

Summary

shane knew two things: he'd never kissed anyone before, and he really could not stand ilya rozanov.

(college!au with hockey rivals hollanov and virgin shane with forced proximity)

Notes

hi everyone! i am so excited to be adding to the ever growing heated rivalry fandom of fics, as they have taken over my life and consumed me in every conceivable way possible.

this isn't great but i wanted to contribute, and who doesn't love a seven minutes in heaven college fic with forced promixity? i haven't gone through any of their fics yet so i'm not sure if someone has written something similar to this already, but alas here it is!

this title is from 'kiss it better' by rihanna for obvious reasons, of course.

happy reading! xoxo

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Shane had learned, over the years, how to pretend he didn't care at all.

He wouldn't slam his locker when the rankings updates would drop. He wouldn't curse under his breath or argue with the guys who immediately started talking about it. He wouldn't even roll his eyes anymore. He just scrolled with his jaw tight and his face carefully neutral.

He had gotten second place, *again*.

"Holy shit," someone down the bench said. "They finally moved you up."

Shane snorted. "Moved me up would be first."

A few of the guys laughed and someone else groaned. Someone else had said the name Shane had been trying not to think about all day long.

"Rozanov's still sitting on the throne."

Shane locked his phone and set it face-down on the bench. "For now, anyway."

He said it lightly as if it was a joke and as if it didn't matter. Like he totally *hadn't* memorized every single stat comparison between them, or hadn't watched Northshore games he pretended he didn't care about, or hadn't woken up at three in the morning replaying goals that weren't his fault but still felt like they were.

Ilya Rozanov was *inevitable*.

They were in the same position and had a similar build with similar draft projections. The media loved to frame it like they were in a duel, like there could only be one of them worth caring about. Shane hated that part the most.

The rink smelled like ice and sweat and old rubber, familiar enough to settle his nerves as he laced up. Game nights always did this to him, they sharpened him and stripped everything down to purpose. He pulled his jersey over his head and let the weight of it hold him down.

Across the ice during warmups, Northshore spilled out of the tunnel in a blur of navy and white.

Shane spotted Ilya immediately. He hated that too, just how automatic it was for him to notice him.

Rozanov skated a lazy loop near center ice, his shoulders loose and his movements smooth as if he was conserving energy on purpose. He looked calm, like he was totally unbothered by what was going on around him. It was like it was just another game instead of a measuring stick everyone would be talking about all day tomorrow.

"God, I want to wipe that look off his face," Shane muttered.

His linemate snorted. "You and everyone else."

They collided for the first time less than five minutes into the game.

It wasn't dramatic, not at first, anyway. It was just a shoulder check along the boards that was a fraction harder than necessary. Shane shoved back, skates snapping over the ice as he regained his balance.

"Easy," Shane snapped.

Ilya's visor reflected the rink lights when he turned. "You started it."

"Did not."

"You *always* do."

Shane opened his mouth to argue, then stopped. He didn't know why, but maybe it was because Ilya's mouth twitched like he was holding back a smile. Or maybe it was because the referee skated too close and he had snapped back into the game.

They separated without another word, but the tension didn't go with them. By the second period, the game felt like it had teeth and it was gnawing at them.

Shane drove the net and got hooked, but kept going anyway. Ilya shadowed him on the backcheck, close enough that Shane could hear his breath and felt the rush of air as he passed. When Shane stumbled, the ice rushed up to meet him, and it was Ilya's hit that sent him down.

It was clean and unfortunately, legal. But boy, was it *brutal*.

Shane laid there for half a second too long, his lungs burning and his pride stinging worse than anything else. The crowd roared, but the sound felt distant in his ears.

A shadow fell over him.

"You okay?" Ilya asked.

The words were flat and almost sounded bored, but Ilya didn't move away. He just waited for him.

Shane pushed himself up on his elbows, glaring, "What do you think?"

Ilya tilted his head. "You fall. Is what happens."

"Funny."

"True."

Shane got to his feet without help and skated past him with a muttered, "Go to hell."

Ilya's answer followed him. "After you."

Northshore won by one single point.

In the handshake line, Shane kept his eyes forward and his mouth set. He shook hands automatically, with his grip firm as he nodded where it was expected. When he reached Ilya, he almost expected him to say something smart or something smug that would make him roll his eyes.

Instead, Ilya met his eyes and said, “Good game.”

It shouldn’t have bothered Shane. It did.

The locker room buzzed with the end-of-season energy. It was loud and loose, and the relief of it being all over was bleeding into everything. Someone cranked music from a phone speaker while towels snapped. Shane heard all of the laughter as it ricocheted off of the walls, and it made his stomach churn.

“There’s a party tonight,” one of the guys announced. “Off-campus. Apparently everyone’s invited.”

“Everyone?” Shane asked.

“Yeah. Including Northshore.” A few groans rippled through the room.

Shane hesitated. He told himself it was about being tired, about wanting to go home and ice his shoulder and sleep for like twelve hours. He tended to get overstimulated at parties too, all the noise and the overwhelming crowd of drunk, sticky bodies, it just was not for him. He knew that wasn't the real reason for his hesitation, though.

“Come *on*,” his friend said, nudging him with an elbow. “One night. No pads. No refs. Just some liquid courage and loud music.”

Shane exhaled. “Fine.”

The house was already packed when they arrived. Music thumped through the floorboards, the bass heavy enough to rattle Shane’s ribs. The air was warm, humid with bodies and beer and something sweet burning in the kitchen. He squeezed through the crowd, nodding at familiar faces, and accepted a drink he didn't ask for. He was missing his ginger ale already and he hadn’t even taken a sip of his drink yet.

He was suddenly halfway through it when he felt that prickle again. He felt like he was being watched.

Ilya stood near the living room wall, laughing with someone Shane recognized from his own team. His hair was still damp, with the curls darker at the end and his sleeves pushed up to reveal strong forearms dusted with hair. He looked... normal. He seemed a lot more relaxed, like the ice version of him never even existed.

Their eyes met and something tightened in Shane’s chest.

Ilya didn’t look away. Shane did, however, with heat crawling up his neck. “Unbelievable.”

“What?” his friend asked.

“He’s everywhere.”

“Rent-free,” his friend teased.

Shane scowled. “Shut up.”

The living room smelt like sweat and some bittersweet cocktail someone spilled all over the carpet. Shane quickly regretted the decision to come, and it hadn't even been an hour in yet. The music pulsed through his chest, a low thrum that made his nerves twitch.

He leaned against the counter with his drink in hand while his eyes scanned the room without really seeing anyone. And then, inevitably, they met Ilya. Stood near the kitchen, he was holding a red cup with his sleeves still rolled up. Shane wanted to strangle him, and maybe also kiss him. He didn’t like that part, and he would never fully admit that to himself, either.

“You’re everywhere tonight,” Shane muttered under his breath, not bothering to hide the annoyance.

Ilya’s head tilted, a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. “You notice me, yes?”

Shane snapped his eyes away. “Of course not.” His voice was sharper than he wanted. He hated that Ilya could make him flustered off the ice as well.

“Mm,” Ilya hummed, eyes glinting like he knew exactly what Shane was thinking. “You are not enjoying party?”

“I enjoy winning more,” Shane shot back, trying for bravado. “Which, by the way, is still happening despite your perfect little season.”

Ilya laughed softly, a low, teasing sound that crawled under Shane’s skin. “You talk too much for someone who lost last game.”

Shane frowned. “I did not lose that game!” He wanted to argue further, but someone bumped into him, spilling a little beer on his hand. “Great. Fantastic. Un-fucking-belivable”

“Careful,” Ilya’s voice floated near his ear, calm, teasing. “You get too messy, is hard to clean.”

Shane’s ears burned. He scowled and spun toward him, just enough to catch the light in Ilya’s eyes, and that damn smirk. “You’re insufferable.”

“You like it, I think,” Ilya said simply.

Shane wanted to punch something, or maybe just shove him into a wall. The problem was maybe he also wanted to lean closer. He hated that too.

Then someone shouted, “Seven minutes in heaven!”

The room reacted almost immediately with groans, cheers, and a chant starting somewhere near the couch. Someone took out a bottle like it had been waiting all night just for this very moment.

“Spin it!” someone yelled. Shane barely had time to protest before the bottle spun, clattering across the hardwood.

It slowed before it stopped and pointed itself at him. Then the other end swung and landed squarely on—

"Rozanov!" The room exploded.

“No way,” someone laughed. “This is too good.”

Shane opened his mouth. “I’m not—”

Ilya stepped forward, way too easy and unbothered. “Is just game, Hollander.”

Their eyes locked. For a moment, Shane considered backing out, then he thought about headlines, about his pride, and about the way Ilya always seemed just a step ahead.

“Fine,” Shane said. “Let’s get it over with.”

Hands grabbed their wrists and he heard someone whoop in the background and whistle. The hallway narrowed, noise fading as they were pushed toward a door at the end.

The closet opened and then it closed just as quickly.

The closet was smaller than Shane expected it to be. It was much too dark and intimate in a way that made Shane’s skin prickle. The air smelled faintly of coats and something sweet, like perfume, maybe, or just the party lingering in the fabric of the jackets. He could feel Ilya’s presence immediately, his heat, height, and the faint scent of soap and beer on his golden skin.

“This is stupid,” Shane said, too quickly.

Ilya shifted, fabric brushing Shane’s arm. “You are nervous?”

Shane scoffed. “About what?”

“About me.”

Shane laughed, sharp. “Don’t flatter yourself.”

Ilya’s voice dropped, closer now. “Then seven minutes will be easy.”

The muffled sounds of the party continued outside and Shane heard someone start counting down. The door remained completely shut.

Shane had the unsettling and very unwanted realization that he had never been more aware of another person in his life until now.

He immediately regretted standing so close to Ilya, though it wasn't like he had much of a choice.

"Is... very small," Ilya said, his voice calm, almost like he was amused.

Shane gritted his teeth. "You think I didn't notice?"

Ilya tilted his head, one brow raised. "You frown lot. Is cute."

Shane flushed. "Cute? I'm not—" He stopped. He couldn't even argue at that moment, they were just much too close. The warmth, the faint scent of him, the way his shoulder pressed just enough, it was all impossible not to notice.

"You are always angry?" Ilya asked, stepping fractionally closer, but the space was too tight.

"Not always," Shane muttered, voice low. "But with you, yes."

Ilya hummed, his eyes glinting. "I like honesty. Is... refreshing."

Shane swallowed hard and said nothing. He really couldn't say anything. He didn't even want to admit how much his chest was pounding.

A beat of silence was a beat much too long. Shane counted the muffled laughter and music outside. Seven minutes was both too long and somehow not nearly enough.

"You move too much," Shane blurted, partly to distract himself and partly because the air was too thick and he couldn't breathe.

Ilya didn't flinch. "Is close quarters. You move, is normal."

Shane wanted to argue, but the words died in his throat. He couldn't stop noticing Ilya's hand brushing the edge of a coat rack, the way his sleeve slipped slightly above the wrist, and the tilt of his head as he watched Shane squirm.

The closet was tight and just hot, much too hot. Shane could feel Ilya's presence in a way that made his chest throb. Every movement was amplified, like every brush of skin against skin was sparking along his nerves.

Shane wanted to glare, to push Ilya away, or to reclaim some shred of dignity. He didn't.

"...Kind of quiet," Ilya said, teasingly. "Normally fight a lot. Now... nothing."

Shane huffed, crossing his arms. "Maybe I'm enjoying the silence."

"You lie," Ilya said, stepping closer. "You are always nervous."

"I am not," Shane snapped. His voice came out sharper than he intended, a little too loud for the small space. "I'm fine. Totally fine."

Ilya smirked. "*Hm*. You lie. Very obvious."

Shane glared, his heart hammering and pride flaring. He hated how exposed he felt, how much his pulse was screaming in his ears. "You're infuriating," he muttered.

"I know," Ilya said, voice soft, teasing, patient. "And you...?"

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it. He was too aware of Ilya's proximity, of the heat and how much he wanted to fight and run and lean all at once.

"I..." He swallowed, face burning. "...I've never kissed anyone, okay? There you go."

The words hit the air like a bomb. Shane immediately wanted to take them back. He wanted to sink through the floor and punch something and scream and disappear all at once.

Ilya froze. His smirk faltered, just a little. "Never?"

"No!" Shane blurted, completely flustered with his voice raising despite himself. "I—It's... I haven't. Not like, with anyone."

"Ah," Ilya murmured, almost softly, watching him. "You hide well. Very... proud?"

Shane's face was a flush of pure crimson heat. "Of course I'm proud!" he snapped. "Just because I haven't... doesn't mean I'm... I'm—" He stopped. The words failed him and embarrassment clawed at his throat.

Ilya tilted his head, smirking teasingly. "Interesting. You do not want to?"

Shane glared, fists clenching, trying to salvage some pride, or whatever is left of it. "Not... not like this. Not in a *closet*, Rozanov! And don't look at me like that!"

"I am not looking," Ilya said smoothly, stepping closer anyway. "You feel it. I see it."

Shane groaned, heat crawling down his neck and frustration flaring into something else entirely. "You're impossible!"

Ilya shrugged, calm as ever. "Is... good impossible. Makes you real."

Shane's hands trembled, his chest heaving. He wanted to argue and shove Ilya away, to lean in and run all at once. He was trapped in a hurricane of pride, embarrassment, and want all together.

"You're—*ugh*—you're ridiculous," Shane muttered. "Why am I even *trying* to explain it—"

Ilya reached up, gently brushing Shane's cheek with a finger. Shane flinched, then froze.

"Relax," Ilya murmured, voice low. "No rush. Just relax."

Shane swallowed, caught between wanting to pull back and wanting to lean into the warmth. His pulse was deafening. He hated himself for wanting this and hated how vulnerable he felt. He hated how he wanted it anyway. He almost felt himself getting emotional, as if his eyes could well up with tears at any moment.

Ilya tilted his head closer, like he was teasing him but being patient as well. “Look at me.”

Shane did.

He could feel Ilya’s lips a breath away. His pride screamed to resist, but something inside him gave in, something tiny, tentative, and absolutely chaotic.

But then Ilya leaned in. He was soft, careful, even. Shane froze at the contact, cheeks flaming and nerves screaming. It was messy, awkward, and shaky, but *alive*. His lips brushed Ilya’s, a spark igniting every nerve ending, and suddenly the fight and embarrassment and pride melted into something raw and terrifying to the younger boy.

Shane froze for a beat, then leaned in just a fraction, tasting him. Ilya guided him gently, his hands on his arms, patient but insistent, coaxing Shane through the first shaky, chaotic kiss of his life.

When they pulled back, Shane’s chest was heaving, his lips tingling and face blazing. His pride was most definitely wounded and his embarrassment was sky-high.

And yet, he’d never felt more alive.

“You... okay? Is okay?” Ilya asks, teased, voice low.

Shane swallowed, voice shaky but defiant. “Yeah, b-better than okay. Don’t think I’m weak or anything, Rozanov.”

Ilya smirked. “No... you fight a lot. Good. But, maybe next time, less fight and more kiss, yeah Hollander?”

Shane groaned, burying his face in his hands. He was mortified, flustered, and secretly thrilled all at once. “You’re impossible,” he muttered, and inside, he knew seven minutes would never be enough.

The closet door opened with a sharp click.

Some light spilled in, too bright and much too sudden, and Shane flinched like he’d been caught doing something illegal—which, honestly, felt accurate. The noise of the party crashed back in all at once: laughter, music, someone shouting about beer pong like nothing in Shane’s world hadn’t just detonated.

“Time’s up!” someone yelled. “Seven minutes!”

Shane stepped out first and much too fast. His head was down and his face was burning up.

He could feel it, and everyone could probably see it. The flush, the way his lips still felt strange and hypersensitive and the way his chest was rising too quickly. He refused to look at anyone, especially not Ilya.

Especially Ilya, who stepped out a beat later just calm as ever, like he didn't just rearrange Shane's brain chemistry in a storage closet.

"Wow," someone snorted. "You two look intense?"

Shane snapped his head up and responded much too quickly, "Nothing happened."

Ilya hummed beside him. "Define... 'nothing'."

Shane shot him a glare sharp enough to draw blood. "Fuck off, Rozanov."

Ilya just smiled, but it was a small one. It was a private one, for Shane alone.

The crowd laughed like they were already bored, already moving on, but Shane felt like he was still trapped in that tiny space with heat crawling up his neck. He shoved his hands into his pockets, grounding himself and forcing his shoulders back.

Get it together, Hollander.

This was Ilya, his rival. The guy who stole his stats, his spotlight, his *goddamn ranking*. He was not someone who got to see him flustered like this, and definitely not someone who got to know things about him.

He turned. "I'm going back to the party."

"Good idea," Ilya said easily. "You... look like needing second drink."

"I do *not*—" Shane cut himself off, jaw tight. "I'm fine."

"You are always 'fine'," Ilya replied, voice mild. "But you lie."

Shane scoffed and walked away before he could say something worse. Or before he did something even more humiliating, like look back at him.

They didn't talk for the rest of the night, which was a problem.

It was a problem because Shane couldn't stop *feeling* him.

Every time he laughed too loud with his teammates, he was hyper-aware of where Ilya was across the room. Every time he took a drink, he remembered the way Ilya told him to relax, low and steady. Every time someone brushed past him, his body reacted like it was expecting something.

He left early and claimed he had a headache to his teammates. He pretended the cool night air didn't feel like a relief from the heat that was still simmering beneath his skin.

Shared practice the next morning was hell.

Shane stepped onto the ice sharp and aggressive, fueled by something that felt suspiciously like panic. He skated harder than usual, checked with too much force, and took shots he didn't need to take.

And then there was Ilya.

He was calm and precise. Infuriatingly good, as usual.

“Careful, Hollander,” Ilya called after Shane nearly wiped out going too hard into the boards. “You play... angry.”

“Focused,” Shane snapped back, skating past him. “Try it sometime.”

Ilya's smile was all teeth. “Oh, I focus plenty.”

They clashed during drills. Stick against stick and shoulder to shoulder. Every collision felt charged, like it was a dare, like they were both pretending this was just hockey. It wasn't, though.

At one point, Shane slammed a shot past Ilya's goalie and couldn't stop himself from looking over. Ilya was already watching him.

Their eyes locked and something almost electric snapped between them, like they were unfinished from the night before.

Ilya skated closer, lowering his voice. “You avoid me.”

“Don't flatter yourself,” Shane muttered. “I just don't like you. I never talk to you, anyway. Today's no different, Rozanov.”

“Mmm,” Ilya said. “Funny. You kiss people you do not like, Hollander?”

Shane's stomach dropped. “Keep your voice down,” he hissed.

Ilya leaned in just enough to make it unbearable. “You are embarrassed,” he said softly. Not cruel, but more so observant. “Is okay.”

“No, it's not,” Shane snapped. “You don't get to—” He stopped himself, breath shaking. “That didn't mean anything, alright? Just quit it and let's finish practice so you can leave already.”

Ilya studied him for a long moment. Then, quietly: “You mean that?”

Shane hesitated, just long enough. Ilya nodded once, expression unreadable. “Okay.”

And somehow, that hurt worse.

The whistle blew and practice moved on. But the space between them felt heavier now, like it was loaded with things neither of them was ready to say to one another yet. Shane realized, with a sick twist in his chest, that it wasn't *just* a kiss.

It was the start of a problem.

The game was loud.

Shane positively thrived in a loud rink. The roar of the crowd, the scrape of his blades, the sharp crack of the puck against sticks. It was supposed to drown everything else out, and it usually did.

That night, it didn't, because Ilya was on the ice.

Shane told himself he wasn't watching him. He told himself he was just tracking the puck, just reading the play and doing his job. But every time Ilya glided into view, completely smooth, effortless, and annoyingly controlled, Shane's attention snagged.

Focus.

Ilya stole the puck clean from one of Shane's teammates and drove it down the ice. The crowd reacted instantly. Shane's jaw tightened and he clenched his teeth.

"Hollander, you're up," the coach barked.

Shane hopped the boards with more force than necessary. The ice felt good under his skates. It was solid and familiar, and kept him grounded when it needed it most. He lined up opposite Ilya at the faceoff circle.

They didn't look at each other and the ref dropped the puck.

They clashed immediately. Their sticks collided and their skates scraped. Shane leaned in harder than he needed to, shoulder checking Ilya just a little *too* aggressively as the play broke.

"Easy," Ilya murmured as they passed, voice maddeningly calm.

"Play the game," Shane snapped back.

"I am." That was the problem.

The rest of the period was a blur of near misses and sharp plays. Shane scored once. It was clean, brutal, and satisfying, and he let himself grin as the crowd erupted. He looked up without meaning to.

Ilya was watching him from the bench. He was not impressed with him by any means, he just looked like he was interested.

Shane's stomach twisted in knots. It got worse in the second period.

Some defenseman from Ilya's team, some tall, broad and annoyingly pretty guy, kept skating a little too close. He was laughing with Ilya between plays. They were leaning in and talking in low voices.

Shane hated him immediately. He checked him harder than necessary along the boards.

"Penalty!" the ref shouted.

Shane threw his hands up. "You've gotta be kidding me."

As he skated to the box, he felt it, Ilya's eyes on him. He refused to look as he sat down hard, jaw clenched and chest heaving.

What the hell was wrong with him? He didn't care. He didn't care who Ilya talked to or *laughed with* or—

Ilya skated by the penalty box during a line change.

"You are jealous," Ilya said casually, not even looking at him.

Shane snapped his head up. "What?"

Ilya finally met his gaze, lips twitching. "You play sloppy when mad."

"I'm not mad," Shane spat.

"*Mmm*," Ilya hummed. "You lie a lot." The clock ticked down. Shane's hands curled into fists.

"Don't flatter yourself," Shane muttered. "I don't care who you flirt with."

Ilya blinked, and then he smiled.

"I was not flirting," he said. "But good to know you notice, Hollander."

The door opened. Shane stormed back onto the ice, his heart pounding and head spinning. He played harder after that, much faster, sharper and reckless in a way that scared him just a little.

Every hit felt personal. After the game, Shane didn't wait around. They won, barely, and he should've felt good. Instead, his nerves were shot, his thoughts a complete mess. He was halfway down the tunnel when a familiar voice stopped him.

"You are running away again?" Shane turned.

Ilya stood a few feet back, his helmet off, hair damp with sweat, and eyes dark. The hallway was quieter here, the noise muffled and much too far away for them to hear much.

"I'm busy," Shane said.

“Liar.”

Shane exhaled sharply. “What do you want?”

Ilya stepped closer. “You say kiss means nothing. But you play like meaning something.”

Shane laughed, sharp and humorless. “You don’t get to analyze me.”

“I already do.”

“That was a mistake,” Shane said quickly, much too quickly. “The closet. All of it.”

Ilya watched him, unreadable. “You are regretting it?”

Shane opened his mouth, but nothing decided to come out. His silence stretched. Ilya nodded once, slow.

“Okay,” Ilya said softly. “Then we pretend.” Pretend. The word landed heavier than Shane expected.

“Good,” Shane said, forcing it. “That’s what I want.”

Ilya held his gaze for a long moment, then stepped back. “See you next game, Hollander.”

He walked away.

Shane stood there long after he was gone, his chest tight and heart racing, knowing two things with absolute certainty. He was lying to Ilya, and he was lying to himself.

—

Shane told himself he was fine.

He told himself this while lying awake at night, staring at the ceiling and replaying moments he pretended didn’t matter. The closet, their kiss, the way Ilya looked at him in the tunnel before walking away like it cost him nothing.

He told himself this while brushing his teeth too hard, jaw aching from how often he clenched it. He told himself this while checking his phone for no reason at all.

Nothing had even changed. Ilya was doing exactly what he said he would do. He was pretending.

At shared practices, he was polite, distant and professional, even. There was no teasing, no low murmurs or looks that lingered too long. He passed when he should, skated where he was supposed to, and kept everything clean and contained.

It was worse than if he’d been cruel, if Shane was honest with himself. Shane hated himself for noticing.

Their next tournament was chaos.

Four teams, one arena, media everywhere. There were scouts in the stands and cameras following every move. Shane thrived on that kind of pressure—normally, anyway. Today it felt like he was being flayed alive. He spotted Ilya across the rink during warmups.

Ilya didn't look at him.

That shouldn't have stung, but it did. Shane's chest tightened as he pulled his helmet on, fingers fumbling with the strap. He missed the first pass sent his way, earning a sharp look from a teammate.

"Lock in, Hollander," someone muttered.

"I am," Shane snapped, skating harder.

Across the ice, Ilya laughed at something a teammate said. It was casual and easy for him. The sound hit Shane like a punch to the ribs.

You wanted to pretend, he reminded himself bitterly. This *was* pretend.

The game was beyond brutal.

It was fast and physical. Every shift felt like a test for him. Shane played like he was chasing something—control of himself, maybe, or relief. He scored once, a clean breakaway that left the crowd roaring.

He didn't look at Ilya but he could feel him anyway.

Late in the third quarter, there was a scramble near the boards. Their bodies collided and their sticks tangled. Shane and Ilya crashed together, momentum slamming them chest to chest.

For a split second, the world felt like it was narrowing.

Ilya's gloved hand gripped Shane's jersey, steadying him. Shane's fingers curled reflexively into Ilya's sleeve. They were too close, with their helmets nearly touching and their breaths fogging their visors.

"You okay?" Ilya asked automatically, with the concern slipping out before he could stop it.

Shane froze and so did Ilya.

The ref shouted for them to move it along. A defenseman shoved between them, breaking the contact. Shane stumbled back, heart pounding like it was trying to escape his chest.

The crowd buzzed and he heard someone suddenly whistle. Shane heard it then, the teammates on the bench, murmuring. They were curious and noticing.

Ilya didn't look at him again for the rest of the game.

After the game, the hallway outside the locker rooms was packed with people, the players, staff, and reporters. Shane kept his head down, answering questions on autopilot.

“Big goal tonight, Shane!”

“Yeah, thanks.”

“How’re you feeling going into tomorrow?”

“Good. Focused, trying to do the best for my team, of course.”

He turned a corner and almost ran straight into Ilya. They stopped short, inches apart.

The noise faded just enough for Shane to be painfully aware of everything, like Ilya’s damp hair and the faint crease between his brows, with the way his mouth tightened like he was holding something back.

For a heartbeat, Shane thought, now they would say something, *anything*.

Ilya stepped aside.

“Good game,” he said neutrally. It shouldn’t have hurt. It really did fucking hurt, though.

“Yeah,” Shane replied, too quickly. “Y-you too.”

They stood there, awkward and blocking traffic. Someone bumped Shane’s shoulder and he barely felt it. Ilya nodded once and moved to leave.

Shane panicked.

“I—” The word slipped out before he could stop it. He swallowed hard. “About... before. The other night.”

Ilya paused, and made no movement to turn around.

“Is fine,” Ilya said after a moment. His voice was calm and much too controlled for Shane. “You said mean nothing. I respect.”

That was it, that was the knife.

Shane’s chest tightened, something hot and miserable blooming behind his ribs. “Right,” he said, forcing a laugh that sounded wrong even to his own ears. “Yeah, good. Thanks.”

Ilya hesitated, just barely, then he walked away.

Shane stood there too long, staring after him, aware that at least three people definitely saw that interaction and definitely noticed the tension. This was exactly what he didn’t need.

That night, Shane spiraled.

He paced his hotel room. He laid on the bed, then sat up again. He opened his phone, closed it, and opened it again. He told himself he didn’t care and that this was all happening because he wanted it this way.

But then why did it feel like this?

He pressed the heel of his hand into his chest, trying to steady his breathing. Pride curled tight and sharp in his stomach.

He thought of the way Ilya pulled back and how easy he made it look. It felt almost impossible for Shane to do the same.

There was another game soon, which was just another chance for them to collide and another chance to play pretend with each other.

Shane stared at the ceiling and thought, with a kind of quiet dread, that pretending was starting to cost him more than telling the truth ever would.

—

Their next game started badly. Not on the scoreboard, but on the ice.

Shane could feel it in his body the second his skates touched down. He was wound too tight, muscles buzzing with restless energy, thoughts spiraling faster than the puck. He told himself to breathe, to focus, and to just play.

He told himself a lot of things that didn't help.

Across the ice, Ilya looked... wrong.

He wasn't bad, not even sloppy. He was just restrained in a way that made Shane's chest ache. His movements were precise but muted, like he was holding himself back and he was choosing control over actually putting his all into it.

You wanted to pretend, Shane reminded himself, but it didn't make it any easier to watch.

The first period was brutal as the hits landed harder and the sticks clashed sharper. Shane took a check that rattled his teeth and he barely reacted, the adrenaline burning through him like fuel.

Ilya scored first. It was clean, fast, and effortless, just like him. The crowd erupted and Shane's stomach dropped.

He skated back to center ice, his jaw clenched while refusing to look at him. When he did anyway—because *of course* he did—Ilya wasn't celebrating. He was just skating back to position, calm as ever.

He acted like it meant nothing to him, like scoring in a game against him was *that* insignificant to him. Something inside Shane snapped.

Midway through the second quarter, they collided again, but it wasn't accidental.

Shane drove into the boards after a loose puck and Ilya met him there, shoulder to shoulder with their bodies slamming together with enough force to draw a sharp collective inhale from

the crowd.

They stayed there a beat too long.

“You got a problem?” Shane muttered, breath hot, voice low.

Ilya exhaled through his nose. “You play reckless.”

“Maybe I’m just not scared of you.”

Ilya’s jaw tightened. “That is obvious.”

Shane shoved him and the whistle blew instantly.

“Hollander! Rozanov! Enough!” the ref barked. They separated, but Shane’s heart was pounding, fury and something else tangled together so tight he couldn’t tell them apart. He skated to the box, his chest heaving and helmet coming off with a sharp tug.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Ilya glance over, just once. Concern flashed there before it was gone, and that was what did it for Shane.

After the game, Shane didn’t cool off.

They lost by one point. The locker room was tense, quiet except for the hiss of showers and the clatter of gear. Shane ripped his gloves off, his hands shaking while trying to control his uneven breaths.

“Dude,” one of his teammates said carefully, “you good?”

“Fine,” Shane snapped. He didn’t wait as he grabbed his bag and left before anyone could stop him. The hallway outside was dimmer and much more quiet. He was almost at the exit when a voice cut through the air.

“Stop.” Shane froze. He turned.

Ilya stood a few feet away, still in half his gear, hair damp, eyes dark and sharp and very much not pretending anymore.

“You following me now?” Shane scoffed.

“You run,” Ilya said. “I chase.”

“That’s not my problem.”

Ilya stepped closer. “No. Is mine.”

Shane laughed, harsh and brittle. “You don’t get to decide that.”

“You make it my problem,” Ilya said, voice tight now. “You say kiss means nothing. Then you look at me like I steal something from you.”

Shane's chest tightened painfully. "You're not stealing anything."

"Then why are you angry?"

"I'm *not*—" Shane cut himself off, breath hitching. His hands curled into fists at his sides. "You don't get to play calm and distant like you didn't—like that *didn't happen*."

Ilya went still.

"Then what is it you want, Hollander?" he asked, voice raising an octave. "I should care? I should not? I should pretend? I should not? What do you want?"

Shane opened his mouth but nothing came out. The silence stretched, it was heavy and awful.

"I pull back," Ilya continued, voice lower, rougher. "Because you ask. Because you are proud. Because I *respect*."

"Then stop looking at me like that," Shane blurted.

Ilya's eyes flashed. "Like what?"

"Like you know me," Shane snapped. "Like you—like you *see me*. You don't get to do that and then act like I don't exist."

The words echoed between them. Ilya exhaled slowly. "You confuse me."

"Yeah?" Shane laughed shakily. "Join the club, Rozanov."

For a moment, it felt like everything could spill out. Like Shane would finally say it, whatever it was. The truth, the fear, and the thing that was clawing at his ribs every time Ilya walked away.

Instead, he stepped back. The pride, both stubborn and familiar, reasserted itself in him.

"This is stupid," Shane muttered. "We shouldn't be doing this."

Ilya watched him, something wounded flickering across his face before it smoothed away. "Maybe."

Shane nodded, jaw tight. "Yeah. Maybe."

He turned and walked away before he could ruin himself completely. Behind him, Ilya didn't follow.

—

The storm hit halfway through the drive.

Not dramatically or with thunder and lightning, but with relentless, miserable persistence. Rain slicked the highway as traffic grinded to a crawl, and by the time the tournament buses pulled into the hotel parking lot, everyone was exhausted and irritable and already over it.

Shane stepped off the bus with his bag slung over one shoulder, the strap digging into his collarbone. The lobby was already packed with players from every team in damp jackets, coaches arguing quietly into phones, and parents hovering near the front desk with thinly stretched patience. His phone was pressed to his ear.

“No, Mom, I don’t know what time I’ll be home,” he said, weaving past a group of players arguing about food. “Flights are delayed. Yeah. I’m fine. Tired. I’ll text you.”

He hung up and exhaled, scrubbing a hand through his hair. All he wanted was a room, a shower, and complete and utter silence.

A tournament staffer shouted something about weather delays and grounded flights. Shane exhaled slowly. He was halfway across the lobby when he felt it, that prickle at the back of his neck. He looked up without meaning to.

Ilya.

He was leaning near the windows with his posture loose, like this whole situation was more amusing than inconvenient. Hoodie, hands in his pockets, and hair still slightly damp. He was smiling at something one of his teammates said, his eyes brightening up.

Shane looked away immediately, but he didn't get far.

“Hollander. Rozanov.”

Shane stopped and turned. His coach looked exhausted, dark circles under his eyes.

“The hotel's overbooked,” the coach said. “Tournament messed up the block. Flights are grounded until morning. We’ve got one room left.”

Shane blinked. “One.”

“Yes.” He opened his mouth to argue, then closed it again. Every protest sounded wrong, like it would come out too sharp and too personal.

Ilya tilted his head, clearly entertained. “Is fate,” he said flatly.

Shane glared. “Fuck off, Rozanov.”

“One night,” the coach added. “You’re adults. You’ll manage.”

The coach walked off before Shane could say anything else. Shane dragged a hand down his face. “This is unbelievable.”

Ilya smiled. “You look thrilled.”

“Thrilled isn’t the word I’d use here.”

“Good,” Ilya said. “I hate boring nights.”

The elevator ride up was a special kind of torture. It was too small and too quiet except when their bags knocked together as the elevator jerked upward. Shane kept his eyes fixed on the glowing numbers, painfully aware of how close Ilya was, close enough that if either of them shifted an inch, they'd touch.

"So," Ilya said casually. "You sleep like normal person, or you steal blankets?"

"I don't steal blankets."

"Everyone steals blankets."

Shane snorted, despite himself. "I absolutely do not."

"We will see, Hollander."

The doors opened before Shane could respond. The room was worse than he expected.

It was small and warm, with definitely only *one* bed. There was a couch that looked like it belonged in a waiting room. The lamp casted everything in soft light that made the space feel intimate in a way that made Shane's chest tighten.

He dropped his bag immediately. "I'll take the couch."

Ilya stepped inside, surveying it like a critic. "That couch is insult to human body."

"I don't care."

"You will care tomorrow."

Shane turned. "Why are you like this?"

Ilya grinned. "Charming, yes?"

They fell into a strange, but awkward rhythm, just unpacking, brushing their teeth, and moving around each other without touching. Every near-miss sent awareness buzzing through Shane's nerves.

Ilya sat on the edge of the bed to untie his shoes. "You are quiet," he says.

"Long day."

"Long week."

"Long life."

Ilya chuckles. "Very dramatic, Hollander."

Shane sat on the couch, his elbows on his knees as he stared at the carpet. "You didn't have to pull away so much, you know."

The humor faded from Ilya's face. "You told me to," he said quietly.

“I asked you to pretend,” Shane muttered. “Not act like I don’t *exist*.”

Ilya exhaled slowly. “You are proud. I respect.”

“That’s *not*—” Shane shook his head. “That’s not fair.”

“Nothing about us is fair,” Ilya said gently, and the word *us* landed harder than it should have.

Shane looked up and their eyes met. Ilya stood, closing the distance like he was offering Shane a choice.

“You still want to pretend?” Ilya asked softly.

Shane’s heart pounded and his pride positively screamed. His body, however, didn’t listen to him.

“No.”

The kiss didn’t happen immediately.

There was a pause as his breath held, and the tension stretched thin before Ilya leaned in. He was slow and deliberate, like he was still giving Shane time to pull back.

Shane didn’t.

Their mouths met, tentative at first. A soft press like they were testing one another. Shane’s breath stuttered when Ilya tilted his head, lips moving against his with more intention.

“Okay?” Ilya murmured, barely pulling back. Shane nodded, fingers curling into the fabric of Ilya’s hoodie.

The second kiss was deeper.

Ilya kissed like he meant it, like he was unhurried but sure at the same time, coaxing Shane to follow his lead. Shane’s thoughts scattered, heat pooling low in his stomach as he kissed back harder, less careful, like all that bottled-up tension was suddenly bleeding through.

Ilya made a soft sound against his mouth that sent a shiver down Shane’s spine.

Hands came into play with Shane gripping and Ilya steadying him at the waist, his thumbs warm. The kiss grew messier, breathless, lips parting, foreheads brushing when they broke apart just long enough to breathe.

“You learn fast,” Ilya murmured, amused.

Shane huffed a shaky laugh. “Shut up.”

They kissed again, but slower this time, heavier. Desire hummed between them, but there was restraint there too. Ilya kept it controlled, like he was aware of every line he wouldn’t cross.

When they finally pulled apart, Shane’s pulse was racing, his lips tingling and chest tight.

“This is bad idea,” Ilya said fondly.

“Yeah,” Shane agreed, breathless.

Ilya’s hands framed Shane’s face, thumbs stroking over the sharp line of his jaw. The touch was gentle, a stark contrast to the force of their kisses. “Look at me,” Ilya murmured again, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through Shane’s bones.

Shane did. He forced his eyes open, his breath catching at the intensity he found there. It was a raw, focused hunger that mirrored the chaotic storm in his own chest. “This is a bad idea,” Shane repeated, his voice barely a whisper.

“I know,” Ilya agreed, and then he kissed him again, erasing the space for any more arguments.

This time, the kiss was different. Ilya’s mouth moved over his with a confident, practiced pressure that made Shane’s head spin. There was no hesitation now, only a deep, thorough exploration that stole the air from Shane’s lungs. He felt a hand slide from his jaw, down the column of his throat, fingers resting lightly over his hammering pulse. The touch was like a silent statement of *you are mine, at least for tonight*.

A tremor ran through Shane, a mix of fear and a desperate, gnawing want. He’d never been touched like this, had never been the focus of such singular, consuming attention. His own hands, which had been fisted in Ilya’s hoodie, unfurled. He didn’t know what to do with them, so he let them drift up, his fingers tangling in the damp hair at the nape of Ilya’s neck. The soft strands against his skin sent a fresh wave of heat through him.

Ilya hummed against his mouth, a low sound of approval. He broke the kiss, resting his forehead against Shane’s. “Breathe, Shane.” The use of his first name, spoken so softly, was more intimate than any touch would ever be, really.

“I am,” Shane choked out, his chest tight. He was feeling too much. Every nerve ending was on fire with every touch, like a hand on his hip, the press of Ilya’s thigh against his own, the warm air ghosting over his lips. It was like they were being magnified a million times over.

“Good.” Ilya’s hands moved to the hem of Shane’s t-shirt. His knuckles brushed against the sliver of skin between his shirt and his jeans, and Shane’s entire body jerked. “Easy,” Ilya soothed, though his voice was rougher now. “I will not do anything you do not want.”

The problem was, Shane wanted it *all*. He wanted everything Ilya was offering, even if he didn’t have the first clue what to do in return. He was new to all of this, and the knowledge made a hot flush of shame crawl up his neck.

Ilya seemed to sense it. He stilled, his hands resting on Shane’s waist. “What is it?”

Shane shook his head, unable to form the words. *I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m going to disappoint you.*

Ilya tilted his head, his gaze sharpening with understanding. He leaned in, his lips brushing the shell of Shane's ear. "Let me lead," he whispered, the command like a warm caress. "You just... hold on, yes?"

It was the permission Shane didn't know he needed. He let out a shuddering breath and nodded, a short, jerky motion.

That was all the encouragement Ilya needed. In one smooth and fluid motion, he hooked a leg behind Shane's knees and swept them off the couch. Shane yelped, his arms flying around Ilya's neck to steady himself as Ilya stood, lifting him effortlessly. The world tilted, and suddenly the cheap carpet was gone, replaced by the soft surface of the bed.

Ilya followed him down, covering his body with his own, bracing his weight on his elbows. He was *everywhere*—his scent, his heat, and the solid weight of him pinning Shane in place. It should have been terrifying. Instead, it was a profound relief, like coming home to a place he'd never been before, but he was glad that he found it.

Ilya's mouth found his again, hungry and deep. One hand snaked under Shane's back, arching him into the kiss as the other pushed his t-shirt up, exposing his stomach to the cool air of the room. Shane gasped into Ilya's mouth as calloused fingers traced the lines of his abs, a slow, deliberate exploration that mapped his trembling body.

"Too much?" Ilya asked, pulling back just enough to speak.

Shane shook his head, his hands clutching at Ilya's shoulders. "No," he breathed. "Don't stop."

A slow, predatory smile spread across Ilya's face. He sat back, his eyes roaming over Shane's prone form with an appreciative heat that made Shane's skin prickle. With a deliberate tug, he pulled Shane's t-shirt over his head and tossed it aside. The air in the room felt cool against his overheated skin, and he fought the instinct to cover himself.

Ilya's gaze was heavy and possessive. He reached out, tracing a finger from the hollow of Shane's throat, down his sternum, circling one flat nipple. Shane's back arched off the bed, a choked sound escaping his lips. It was a simple touch but it sent a jolt straight to his groin, making his jeans feel impossibly tight.

"Sensitive," Ilya noted, his voice thick with satisfaction. He leaned down, his tongue replacing his finger, and Shane's world dissolved into a haze of pleasure. He'd never felt anything like it, the wet heat of Ilya's mouth, the gentle scrape of teeth, or the way his entire body seemed to sing under the attention.

His hands tangled in the sheets, his hips lifting instinctively, seeking a friction he didn't know how to ask for. Ilya's other hand held him down, a firm, steady pressure on his hip that was both grounding and maddening. "Patience," Ilya murmured against his skin.

"Don't have," Shane gritted out, his voice ragged.

Ilya laughed, a low sounding grumble in his chest. He moved to the other nipple, giving it the same thorough, devastating attention, while his free hand worked at the button of Shane's jeans. The sound of the zipper lowering was loud in the quiet room, the metallic hiss that signaled they were actually doing this.

Shane's heart hammered against his ribs frantically. He was exposed, vulnerable, and at Ilya's mercy.

And God help him, he'd never wanted anything more.

Ilya's knuckles brushed against the sensitive skin just above the waistband of Shane's boxers as he slowly, deliberately, worked the denim down his hips. Shane's breath hitched, his entire body going rigid with a combination of anticipation and terror. He'd never been this naked in front of anyone, not even in the locker rooms with his teammates, and certainly not like this—spread out on a bed, under the gaze of his rival.

Ilya sensed the tension instantly. He stilled, his hands resting on the waistband of Shane's jeans, his thumbs stroking small, soothing circles on his hipbones. "Still with me, Hollander?" he asked, his voice a low, intimate rumble.

Shane swallowed, his throat tight. He nodded, unable to find his voice.

"Words," Ilya commanded gently. "I need to hear you."

"Yeah," Shane managed, the word coming out as a hoarse croak. "I'm... yeah."

A small, knowing smile touched Ilya's lips. "Good." He finished tugging the jeans down, pulling them off and letting them drop to the floor with a soft thud. He didn't immediately move to remove Shane's boxers. Instead, he settled back on his heels, his gaze sweeping over Shane's nearly naked form with an appreciation that was almost worshipful. He was hungry, and it made Shane feel powerful in a way he'd never experienced before.

"You look beautiful like this," Ilya said, his voice and accent thick with sincerity.

Shane's face burned. He wanted to make a sarcastic retort, to deflect the compliment with a joke or an insult, but the words didn't come out. All he could do was lie there, his chest heaving as Ilya's hands returned to his body. They started at his ankles, strong palms sliding up his calves, his knees, his thighs. The touch was firm and possessive, as if he was memorizing the terrain of his body. Shane's muscles trembled under the slow, methodical caresses.

When Ilya's hands reached the sensitive skin of his inner thighs, Shane let out a strangled gasp, his legs falling open instinctively. It was an involuntary reaction, like a silent plea for more. Ilya's thumbs stroked the crease where his thigh met his hip, dangerously close to the straining fabric of his boxers.

"Please," Shane whispered, the word torn from him. He didn't even know what he was begging for.

“I know, baby” Ilya murmured, the pet name falling from his lips too easily. He hooked his fingers into the elastic of Shane’s boxers and paused, his eyes meeting Shane’s. “Last chance to say no.”

Shane shook his head, his eyes locked on Ilya’s. “Don’t you *dare* stop.”

With a final, decisive pull, Ilya stripped away the last barrier between them. Shane was completely bare, every inch of him exposed to the cool air and Ilya’s searing gaze. For a moment, self-consciousness threatened to swallow him whole, but then Ilya was leaning over him, his body blanketing Shane’s, and then the fear melted away, replaced with a desperate, aching need for more, more, *more*.

“Relax for me,” Ilya whispered against his mouth. “Let me take care of you.”

He kissed him then, a deep, almost drugging kiss that demanded a response Shane was more than willing to give. As his tongue explored Shane’s mouth, his hand slid down his chest, over his stomach, and finally, finally, wrapped around his cock.

Shane cried out, his back arching off the bed as a bolt of pure pleasure shot through him. The sensation was overwhelming, a thousand times more intense than anything he’d ever managed on his own. Ilya’s grip was firm, sure, his movements slow and torturous as he stroked him from base to tip.

“*God*,” Shane gasped, his hips bucking into Ilya’s hand. “Ilya...” His first name felt foreign on his tongue, but he liked it.

“Feeling good?” Ilya asked, his voice a rough caress.

“So good,” Shane babbled, his hands clutching at Ilya’s shoulders, his head thrown back against the pillows. “So... *so good*...”

Ilya’s thumb swirled over the head, spreading the bead of moisture there, and Shane’s vision went white. He was lost, adrift in a sea of sensation, like his body was no longer his own but an instrument Ilya was playing with. He could feel the pressure building low in his spine, a tight coil of pleasure that wound tighter and tighter with every stroke.

“Not yet,” Ilya murmured, sensing how close he was. He released him, and Shane whimpered at the loss. “I want you to come with me inside, yes?”

The words, blunt and crude and so incredibly *hot*, sent a fresh jolt of desire through Shane. He watched, wide-eyed, as Ilya reached for his own jeans, fumbling with the button and zipper before shoving them down his hips. Ilya was hard, thick and heavy, and the sight of him, so obviously aroused, sent a shiver through Shane.

Ilya grabbed his wallet from the discarded pile of his jeans and extracted a small foil packet and a bottle of lube. He ripped the packet open with his teeth and rolled the condom on, his movements almost habitual. Then he squeezed a generous amount of lube onto his fingers, warming it between his palms.

“Legs up,” Ilya instructed, his voice soft but firm.

Shane complied, his movements clumsy, his heart pounding against his ribs. Ilya knelt between his spread thighs, his eyes dark with hunger. He coated his fingers with lube and then, without warning, one slick digit pressed against Shane’s entrance.

Shane tensed, a flash of panic cutting through the haze of pleasure. Ilya’s other hand came to rest on his stomach, rubbing soothing circles. “Easy, Hollander” he murmured. “Breathe for me, just breathe.”

Shane forced himself to take a deep breath, and as he exhaled, Ilya’s finger breached him. There was a strange, burning stretch, a sensation of being filled that was uncomfortable but not painful. Ilya paused, letting him adjust, his thumb stroking Shane’s hip.

“Okay?” Ilya asked.

Shane nodded, his breath coming in shallow pants. “Yeah.”

Slowly, carefully, Ilya began to move his finger, a gentle in-and-out motion that gradually eased the tension. He curled his finger, searching, and then he brushed against a spot inside Shane that made him see stars. A jolt of pure electricity shot through him, and he cried out, his hands fisting in the sheets.

“Found it,” Ilya said with a low, triumphant chuckle. He did it again, and again, each time sending a fresh wave of pleasure crashing through Shane’s system. Soon, one finger wasn’t enough. He was pushing back, silently begging for more, and Ilya obliged, adding a second finger, then a third, stretching him, preparing him, and driving him to the brink of madness with every deliberate stroke.

“Please,” Shane begged, his voice wrecked. “Ilya, *please*, n-now.”

Ilya withdrew his fingers, and Shane felt the loss immediately. He positioned himself between Shane’s legs, the head of his cock pressing against his slick, prepared entrance. He looked down at Shane, his eyes searching, his expression serious.

“Look at me,” he said, his voice low and intense. “I want to see you when I take you.”

Shane’s breath hitched, but he forced his eyes open, his gaze locking with Ilya’s. He watched as Ilya pushed forward, slowly, inexorably, breaching him for the first time. The burn was more intense this time, a deep, aching stretch that bordered on pain, but beneath it was a burgeoning pleasure that was even more powerful.

Ilya paused, giving him time to adjust, his body trembling with the effort of holding back. “Is okay?” he asked, his voice strained.

“Yeah,” Shane breathed, his hands coming up to cup Ilya’s face. “I’m okay.”

Ilya began to move, a slow, shallow rhythm that gradually deepened as Shane’s body relaxed and welcomed him. With each thrust, he hit that spot inside him, sending shockwaves of

pleasure through his entire body. It was overwhelming, the painful pleasure more than he could have ever imagined.

He wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist, pulling him deeper, silently demanding more. Ilya's rhythm increased, his movements becoming harder, faster, more demanding. The headboard slammed against the wall, the sound of their flesh meeting, the sound of their ragged breaths, filling the room.

"Touch yourself," Ilya commanded, his voice a harsh, guttural growl. "I want to see you come."

Shane didn't hesitate. He wrapped a hand around his own cock, stroking himself in time with Ilya's powerful thrusts. The dual sensations were too much, and the coil of pleasure in his spine snapped. He came with a hoarse cry, his release spilling all over his hand and stomach.

Ilya followed him over the edge a moment later, his own orgasm tearing through him with a force that left him shaking. He collapsed on top of Shane, his weight a grounding pressure with his face buried in the crook of his neck.

For a long time, the only sound in the room was their ragged breathing, slowly returning to normal. Ilya rolled off him, disposing of the condom before pulling Shane into his arms, tucking him against his chest.

Shane laid there, his body feeling heavy, boneless, and utterly reconfigured. His mind was a quiet, static-filled hum. Ilya's arm was a warm, heavy weight across his waist, with his breath a steady rhythm against Shane's hair. The room smelled of sex and sweat and Ilya's soap, a scent that was already becoming all too familiar to him.

He could feel the sticky mess cooling on his stomach, a physical reminder of what they'd just done, of how completely he'd fallen apart. A flicker of his old panic tried to stir, the *what now*, the *what does this mean*, but it was too weak. He was too exhausted and too sated.

Ilya shifted beside him, propping himself up on an elbow to look down at him. In the dim light from the lamp, his features were softened. He reached out with his free hand, his fingers tracing the line of Shane's jaw.

"You okay?" Ilya asked, his voice low and rough.

Shane swallowed, his throat still dry. He nodded, not trusting his voice.

"Talk to me, Shane." The use of his name again, a deliberate choice.

"I'm..." He started, then had to clear his throat. "I'm good. I think. I don't... I don't really know what I am."

A small, understanding smile touched Ilya's lips. He leaned down and pressed a soft, lingering kiss to Shane's forehead. It was an almost paternal gesture that was more intimate than anything they'd just done. "You are alive," Ilya murmured against his skin. "That is a start."

He sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. Shane felt a sudden, sharp chill at the loss of contact, the space between them feeling vast and cold. He watched Ilya's back and the smooth, shifting muscles of his shoulders and spine as he stood. He was beautiful, effortlessly and infuriatingly so.

Ilya disappeared into the small bathroom for a moment, returning with a damp washcloth. He sat on the edge of the bed and gently, carefully, began to clean Shane's stomach. The touch was incredibly intimate, and Shane felt a fresh wave of heat crawl up his neck. He'd never been taken care of like this, never had someone tend to him with such tenderness.

"You don't have to—" Shane started, his voice small.

"I want to," Ilya cut him off softly, his eyes focused on his task. He finished and tossed the cloth into the laundry basket before pulling the covers up over them both. He settled back beside Shane, gathering him into his arms again.

Shane went willingly, tucking his head under Ilya's chin. The steady beat of his heart against his ear was a comforting, grounding rhythm. The silence stretched, but it was peaceful, almost.

"This doesn't fix anything, you know," Shane murmured into the warm skin of Ilya's chest.

"I know," Ilya replied, his hand stroking up and down Shane's back. "We still rivals. Still want to beat you, don't worry."

"Good," Shane said, and he meant it. The thought of losing that fire and that competition, was more unsettling than the thought of losing this. "Because I'm still going to take that number one spot from you."

Ilya chuckled, the sound vibrating through his chest. "I would be disappointed if you said otherwise."

Shane was quiet for a long moment, listening to the sound of the rain still lashing against the window. The storm outside mirrored the one that had just been inside him, and now both were quieting down. "Ilya?"

"Hmm?"

"Was it... was it *okay*? For you?" The vulnerability of the question made his chest ache. "I mean, I know I don't know what I'm doing. Not that I did much, really, anyway—"

Ilya's hand stilled on his back and stopped his rambling. He tilted Shane's chin up, forcing him to meet his gaze. His eyes were utterly sincere. "It was perfect," he said, his voice firm. "Don't ever think it wasn't. This... you... trusting me like that. Is best I ever had."

Shane's breath hitched. He searched Ilya's face, looking for any hint of a lie, of placating ego, but he found none. He only found a raw, honest truth that made his heart ache in a completely different way.

Before Shane could respond, Ilya's mouth was on his. This kiss was slow, deep, and full of a tenderness that stole the air from Shane's lungs. It was a kiss that said everything words his words didn't.

When they finally pulled apart, Ilya rested his forehead against Shane's. "Sleep now," he whispered. "We deal with everything else tomorrow."

Shane closed his eyes, a sense of calm settling over him for the first time in what felt like years. He was still Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov was still his rival, and tomorrow they would go back to trying to destroy each other on the ice. But that night, in that small hotel room, with the storm raging outside and the quiet thud of a rival's heart in his ear, he was exactly where he was supposed to be. And for now, that was more than enough.

End Notes

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