kissed by the sun

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by loulovehome

Summary

A 4+1 fic where four times Shane scowls at Ilya for calling him *freckles*, and one time he lets him.

Notes

shane is such a cutie patootie when he scowls or makes an angry face, ugh, i can't get enough of him!!! anyways here is 6k of ilya obsessing over shane's freckles (he is so me).

See the end of the work for more notes

1

Shane had imagined this moment a thousand times. The suit that fit perfectly, the handshake with the commissioner, the jersey with his name on it. What he hadn't imagined was Ilya fucking Rozanov going first overall.

He'd known it was possible. Probable, even. But sitting in that arena, watching Rozanov walk up to the stage with that easy confidence, that smile that seemed to mock everything Shane had worked for.

Second overall to the Montreal Voyageurs. It should have felt like winning, but it felt like losing.

Shane made his way through the crowd of prospects afterward, doing the mandatory photo ops and interviews, his face aching from holding the same practiced smile. He was in the middle of answering some reporter's question about his expectations for rookie year when he felt someone step into his space.

"Shane Hollander, yes?" The accent was unmistakable. Russian, smooth, amused.

Shane turned to find Rozanov standing there, first overall pick, already wearing his Boston cap like he owned it. Up close he was taller than Shane expected, broader in the shoulders, with eyes that seemed to catalogue everything about Shane in one sweep.

"Rozanov," Shane said flatly.

"Please, call me Ilya." That smile again, wide and genuine in a way that made Shane's teeth clench. Ilya held out his hand and Shane shook it because the cameras were watching. Ilya's grip was strong, lasting a beat too long. "We will be rivals now, I think. This is exciting, no?"

"Sure," Shane said. "Exciting."

Ilya's gaze dropped, then returned to Shane's face, something bright and mischievous sparking in his expression. "You have many freckles," he observed, as casually as if he were commenting on the weather. "Like stars. Very cute."

Heat flooded Shane's face, which only made it worse because he could feel his freckles standing out even more against the flush. Several people nearby had turned to look, including a photographer who immediately raised his camera.

"Thanks," Shane said through gritted teeth, trying to extract his hand from Ilya's grip.

"In Russia, we say this means you are kissed by sun," Ilya continued, completely oblivious or deliberately ignoring Shane's discomfort. "Is good luck, I think. But you are only second pick, so maybe not so lucky after all."

The photographer's camera flashed. Shane's jaw clenched so hard he thought his teeth might crack.

"Congrats on first overall," Shane said, his voice tight and professional. He finally managed to pull his hand away. "I'm sure you'll do great in Boston."

"And you in Montreal, Mr. Freckles," Ilya said, the nickname rolling off his tongue like he'd been using it for years rather than seconds. His smile was infuriating, all charm and no shame. "Maybe I will count them next time we meet. See if sun has kissed you more."

Shane felt his scowl deepen, felt it in every muscle of his face. A few people laughed, probably thinking this was just friendly rookie banter. Shane wanted to wipe that smile off Rozanov's face. Wanted to prove, right here and now, that second pick didn't mean second best.

"Looking forward to it," he managed.

Ilya's eyes glittered with something Shane couldn't name. "Yes," he said softly, almost to himself. "I think I am too."

Then he was moving away, pulled into another conversation, leaving Shane standing there with his face burning and his hands curled into fists at his sides. Someone asked him another question and he answered on autopilot, but his attention kept drifting back to Rozanov, who was laughing with a group of Boston staff, easy and relaxed and completely unbothered.

Mr. Freckles.

Shane had been called worse. Had been called plenty worse, actually, growing up wasian in minor hockey. But something about the way Rozanov had said it like it was something worth noticing, worth commenting on, worth remembering made Shane's skin feel too tight.

Later, doing another round of interviews, Shane caught sight of himself in a monitor. His freckles stood out stark against his flushed skin, scattered across his nose and cheeks like someone had flicked a paintbrush at his face. He'd always hated them, the way they made him look younger, softer, less serious than he wanted to be taken.

And now Ilya Rozanov, first overall pick, had noticed them. Had given him a nickname based on them. In front of cameras.

Shane's scowl intensified.

This rivalry was going to be hell.

2

The workout had been brutal, the kind of punishing session Shane put himself through when he needed to quiet his mind. It wasn't working. Nothing was working lately.

Three months into his rookie season and Shane couldn't stop thinking about Boston’s next visit to Montreal. Couldn't stop thinking about their last game, the way Rozanov had crashed into him along the boards, the way they'd ended up tangled together, Rozanov's breath hot against his ear as he'd whispered, "Still so many freckles, Hollander. I am keeping count."

Shane had crosschecked him for it. Worth the penalty.

The gym was nearly empty at this hour, which was why Shane liked it. He could push himself without teammates asking questions, without coaches monitoring his ice time, without anyone noticing that he was maybe, possibly, working himself too hard.

He heard the shower running before he reached the locker room. Montreal's practice facility was usually deserted this late, and Shane frowned, annoyed at the prospect of company. He pushed through the door and stopped dead.

Ilya Rozanov was in his shower.

Not in the visitors' facilities where he belonged, but here, in Montreal's locker room, water streaming over his shoulders like he had every right to be there. He looked up as Shane entered, and that familiar smile spread across his face.

"Hollander," he said, pleased. "I was hoping I would find you."

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Shane demanded. His heart was pounding, and he told himself it was adrenaline, anger, anything but the way his eyes wanted to track water droplets down Rozanov's chest.

"Boston's plays tomorrow, yes? I come early to use gym. Very good facilities you have here." Ilya tilted his head back into the spray, shampooing his hair with Shane's soap. "Your soap smells good. Like pine trees."

"Get out of our shower."

"Is big shower," Ilya observed. "Room for two."

Shane should have left but instead he found himself stripping off his workout clothes with sharp, angry movements, hyperaware of Ilya watching him the entire time.

"I want to see your freckles up close." Ilya stated with a playful smile.

Shane's jaw clenched. "Shut up about my freckles."

"Why? I like them." Ilya's eyes tracked across Shane's chest, down his stomach, lower. "Make you look...distinctive."

"They make me look like I'm twelve," Shane bit out, stepping under the spray at the far end. The water was too hot but he didn't adjust it.

"No," Ilya said, and his voice had shifted into something lower, rougher. He moved closer, crowding into Shane's space even though there was plenty of room. "They make you look like Shane Hollander. Like my rival. Like the person I think about when I should be sleeping."

Shane's breath caught. "You don't think about me."

"No?" Ilya's hand came up, fingers hovering just above Shane's shoulder, not quite touching. "Then why am I here, Mr. Freckles, in wrong locker room, waiting for you?"

The nickname made something hot and uncomfortable twist in Shane's chest. He turned his head, meaning to glare at Rozanov, meaning to tell him to fuck off back to Boston, but Ilya was too close. Had somehow gotten even closer while Shane wasn't paying attention.

"I hate you," Shane said.

"Yes," Ilya agreed, and then he was kissing him.

It was nothing like Shane had imagined, not that he'd been imagining it. He told himself, even as he grabbed Ilya's hips and yanked him closer. It was aggressive, competitive, all teeth and anger and the kind of heat that had nothing to do with the shower. Ilya bit Shane's lower lip and Shane retaliated by fisting his hand in Ilya's hair, pulling hard enough to make Ilya gasp.

"So many freckles," Ilya murmured against Shane's mouth, and Shane could feel him smiling. "Even here." His fingers traced the bridge of Shane's nose, the tops of his cheeks. "Is too much cute for such angry man."

Shane scowled, the expression feeling permanent on his face whenever Rozanov was around. "I'm not cute."

"Very cute," Ilya insisted. "Cute freckles, cute scowl, cute the way you try to pretend you don't want this."

"I don't want this," Shane lied, even as he pressed Ilya back against the tile wall.

"Liar." Ilya's hands slid down Shane's back, "Is okay. I want enough for both of us."

They didn't talk after that. Didn't need to. Shane channeled all his frustration, all his confusion, all his anger at wanting someone he was supposed to hate into the way he touched Ilya, the way he made him gasp and swear in Russian. And when it was over, when they were both breathing hard and Shane's skin was pink from heat and friction and Ilya's mouth, Shane forced himself to step back.

"This doesn't mean anything," he said.

Ilya looked at him for a long moment, water streaming down his face, his expression unreadable. Then he smiled, slow and knowing. "Of course not, Mr. Freckles. Means nothing at all."

Shane scowled harder. Ilya laughed and disappeared back under the spray, leaving Shane standing there, frustrated and confused and already wanting to do it again.

He hated Rozanov.

The feeling in his chest suggested otherwise, but Shane ignored it. He was good at ignoring things he didn't want to examine.

Shane had known he'd won. The league had tipped him off a week ago, given him time to prepare remarks, to bring his family to Vegas for the ceremony. But knowing and standing on stage accepting the Trophy were two different things.

The weight of it in his hands felt surreal. Rookie of the Year. All those early mornings, the extra practices, the nights spent studying match recordings had all been worth it.

The applause washed over him as he made his way through the speech he'd practiced, thanking his parents, his coaches, and his teammates. Professional. Polished. Perfect.

He didn't look for Ilya in the audience. Didn't need to. He could feel that attention like a physical thing, knew exactly where Rozanov was sitting even without looking. It was a skill he'd developed over the season: Rozanov-radar, tracking his rival across ice and apparently now ballrooms too.

The after-party was worse. Shane had to circulate, had to smile and make small talk with executives and sponsors, the trophy getting passed around for photos. He was exhausted from the season, from the playoffs, from maintaining this perfect professional image when all he wanted was to disappear back to his hotel room.

"Mr. Hollander," a familiar voice said behind him, and Shane felt every muscle in his body tense. "Congratulations on your award."

Shane turned. Ilya was wearing a perfectly tailored suit. He looked good. He always looked good, which was profoundly annoying.

"Rozanov," Shane said evenly. They were in public, surrounded by cameras and league officials and probably half the hockey media in North America. "Thanks."

"Is very shiny." Ilya gestured to the trophy sitting on the table next to them. "Almost as shiny as all those freckles."

Shane felt heat creep up his neck. Someone nearby, a reporter maybe turned to look at them with interest. "Not now," he said quietly.

"No?" Ilya's smile was innocent, but his eyes were wicked. "But is perfect time. You are being celebrated, yes? And I am celebrating all parts of you. Including the..." he gestured vaguely at Shane's face, "the decorations."

"They're not decorations," Shane muttered. He could feel people watching them, could imagine the headlines already. Rozanov and Hollander: Rivalry and Banter at Awards Ceremony.

"What do you call them then?" Ilya leaned in slightly, and Shane could smell his cologne, expensive and subtle. "Your pretty spots? Your sun kisses?"

Shane's scowl was automatic, carved deep into his expression. "Ilya-"

"There he is," Ilya said softly, almost fondly. "My Mr. Freckles with his angry face. I was wondering when he would appear."

A camera flash went off nearby. Shane forced his expression to smooth out, forced himself to smile like they were just two friendly rookies chatting at an awards ceremony. Like Ilya hadn't been in Montreal just last week, in Shane's bed this time instead of the shower, making Shane forget his own name while counting the freckles across his face.

"You're an asshole," Shane said through his smile.

"Yes," Ilya agreed pleasantly. "But you like it, I think."

"I really don't."

"Liar." Ilya picked up Shane's trophy without asking, examining it like it was a curiosity rather than the thing Shane had worked his entire life for. "This is very good achievement. You should be proud."

"I am," Shane said stiffly.

"Good." Ilya set the trophy down and met Shane's eyes, and for a moment the amusement faded into something more serious. "You deserve it. You play like fire this year. Is...impressive."

The compliment caught Shane off guard. Ilya rarely said things like that, rarely acknowledged Shane's skill without wrapping it in innuendo or teasing. "Thanks," he said, meaning it.

"Of course, I would have won if I had not been injured for a few games," Ilya added, the smile creeping back. "But you, you and your army of freckles, you were very good runner-up for best rookie."

And just like that, the moment shattered. Shane's scowl returned full force. "I wasn't runner-up. I won."

"Only because I was hurt," Ilya insisted, clearly enjoying himself now. "Is okay, Mr. Freckles. I will let you have this one."

"Let me tell-" Shane cut himself off, aware that his voice was rising, that more people were looking now. He took a breath, forced calm. "You're impossible."

"Impossible handsome? Yes, thank you, I know."

"That's not," Shane stopped, seeing the trap. Ilya was grinning now, clearly delighted with himself. "You know what? Congratulations on your very impressive third place in this voting."

Ilya laughed, bright and genuine. "There is my competitive Hollander. I was worried all this winning had made you soft."

"I'm not soft."

"No," Ilya agreed, his eyes dropping briefly to Shane's mouth before returning to his eyes. "Definitely not soft. Very, very hard actually. Rigid even. So tense all the time, like string ready to snap."

The words shouldn't have sounded like innuendo but with Ilya everything sounded like innuendo. Shane felt his face heating again, knew his freckles were standing out like neon signs against the flush.

"Stop," he said quietly.

"Stop what?" Ilya's expression was all innocence and his voice drops into whispers. "Stop complimenting your trophy? Stop admiring your freckles? Stop thinking about how you look when you are in my bed, all those spots going pink-"

"Ilya." It came out sharper than intended. They were definitely being watched now, definitely going to end up in tomorrow's gossip columns as the rivalry that kept getting more heated.

Ilya held up his hands in surrender, but he was still smiling. "Okay, okay. I will behave. For now." He leaned in one more time, close enough that Shane could feel the warmth of him. "But later, when you are in your hotel room with your shiny trophy, you will think of me, yes? And maybe you will call me. And maybe I will come count all those freckles again, make sure you didn't win any new ones with your trophy."

Shane's scowl could have melted steel. "Get away from me."

"As you wish, Mr. Rookie of the Year." Ilya stepped back with a slight bow, theatrical and ridiculous. "Enjoy your party. Try not to miss me too much."

He disappeared into the crowd before Shane could respond, leaving Shane standing there with his trophy and his burning face and the absolute certainty that yes, he was definitely going to call Ilya later.

He hated himself a little for it.

But not enough to stop.

4

The condo had been Shane's idea, back when this thing between them had shifted from hate-fucking to something that required more planning, more discretion. Somewhere neutral where neither of them had home ice advantage, where they could meet without anyone noticing patterns.

Ilya mentioned that people on twitter call it his "secret sex condo." Shane had been mortified. Ilya had thought it was hilarious.

"They don't actually know about it," Shane had insisted.

"They suspect," Ilya had countered, scrolling through speculation threads with undisguised glee. "Is very funny what they imagine you do here."

"I’m not doing this for anyone's entertainment."

"No?" Ilya looked amused and fond in equal measure. "Then why are we doing this, Shane?"

Shane hadn't had an answer then. Wasn't sure he had one now, three years into whatever this was, standing in the kitchen of their secret place while Ilya made coffee like he lived here.

Maybe he did, in a way. His suits hung in the closet next to Shane's. His toiletries cluttered the bathroom counter. There were Russian tea cookies in the cupboard and that terrible energy drink Ilya loved in the fridge.

"You are thinking very loud," Ilya observed, not turning around. "Is bad for freckles, all this thinking. They might multiply."

Shane's automatic scowl felt different now. Softer, maybe. More habit than genuine irritation. "That's not how freckles work."

"No? You are expert on freckles now?" Ilya turned, two mugs in hand, and his smile was gentle, teasing without the edge it used to have. "I am the one who studies them. I should know."

He set Shane's coffee down. Black with no sugar, exactly how Shane liked it and settled onto the stool next to him at the kitchen island. Close enough that their knees touched. They'd gotten comfortable with casual contact, with existing in the same space without the constant electricity of early days.

Shane wrapped his hands around the mug, absorbing the warmth. It was late April, their seasons both over Montreal eliminated in the second round, Boston in the first. They had the whole summer stretching ahead, and Shane had been working up the courage to ask Ilya about it. About what came next.

"I counted six new ones," Ilya announced.

"What?"

"Freckles. Since last time I saw you. Six new ones." Ilya reached out and traced a path across Shane's cheekbone, casual as anything. "Sun has been kissing you very enthusiastically."

Shane should scowl. Should push Ilya's hand away and complain about the nickname like always. Instead he found himself leaning slightly into the touch, his scowl half-hearted at best.

"You can't possibly have counted six new freckles," he said.

"No?" Ilya's thumb brushed the corner of Shane's mouth. "Test me. Point to any freckle and I tell you when it appeared."

"That's ridiculous."

"Try me, Mr. Freckles."

There it was, the nickname that had annoyed Shane for three years, that he'd scowled at and argued against and secretly, privately, started to anticipate. It sounded different now in the quiet of the condo, stripped of audience and rivalry and pretense.

It sounded almost affectionate.

Shane caught Ilya's wrist, not pushing him away but holding him there. "Why do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"The freckles thing. The nickname. You've been doing it since the draft."

Ilya's expression shifted into something more serious, though his hand stayed where it was, cupping Shane's face. "You want real answer?"

"Yeah," Shane said quietly. "I think I do."

Ilya was quiet for a moment, his thumb resuming its gentle path across Shane's skin. "When I first saw you at draft, I thought 'this is my rival, this serious boy with angry face.' And then I see your freckles and I think 'he is not so serious, not so scary. He is person, real person, not just player to beat.'" He paused, considering his words. "The freckles, they make you look...soft. Vulnerable. Like underneath the scowl is someone I want to know."

Shane's breath caught. "That's..."

"Stupid?" Ilya offered.

"No," Shane said. "Just...I always hated them. The freckles. Thought they made me look weak."

"Weak?" Ilya looked genuinely offended. "Shane Hollander, you are many things, but weak is not one of them. The freckles, they are just...you. The part of you that is beautiful even when you are trying to be tough."

Shane's scowl softened into something dangerously close to a smile. "You think I'm beautiful?"

"I think you have too many freckles to count and I want to spend my summer doing it anyway," Ilya said. "I think when you scowl at me for calling you Mr. Freckles, my heart does stupid things. I think-"

He stopped, looking suddenly uncertain in a way Ilya rarely looked.

"What?" Shane prompted.

"I think I would like to stop pretending this is just sex and rivalry," Ilya said quietly. "I think I would like to spend summer with you at your cottage. Meet your family properly. I think I am in love with you, Mr. Freckles. Have been for a while now."

Shane's heart hammered against his ribs. This was it, the thing they'd been dancing around for months, maybe longer. The thing Shane had been too afraid to name, too worried it would ruin what they had.

"Yeah?" he managed.

"Yeah," Ilya confirmed. "Is okay if you don't want to or if you are not ready for-"

"I want you to come to the cottage," Shane interrupted. "Wanted to ask you tonight, actually. Was just working up the courage."

Ilya's smile started slow and spread like sunrise. "Yes?"

"Yes." Shane set down his coffee and turned fully toward Ilya, their knees bumping. "And I think- I mean, I'm pretty sure I-"

"You love me too?" Ilya supplied, hopeful.

Shane's scowl was automatic, defensive, accompanied by a surge of feeling he wasn't quite ready to name. "Don't put words in my mouth."

"But is true, yes?"

"Maybe," Shane admitted, and then, at Ilya's expectant look: "Probably. Yeah. I probably, definitely, love you too."

"Definitely or probably?"

"Definitely," Shane said firmly. "Definitely love you. Even when you're annoying about my freckles."

"Especially when I am annoying about your freckles," Ilya corrected. "That is when you scowl the most, and I love your scowl."

"You're ridiculous."

"Yes, but you love me anyway, Mr. Freckles."

Shane's scowl deepened, but his heart wasn't in it. It was too full of other things, better things, to maintain genuine irritation. "I'm going to make you stop calling me that."

"Never," Ilya said cheerfully, leaning in to press a kiss to Shane's forehead, then his nose, then each cheek where the freckles clustered thickest. "Is my favorite name for you. My Mr. Freckles who scowls so beautifully and loves me so definitely."

"Probably," Shane said, but he was smiling now, couldn't help it.

"Definitely," Ilya insisted, and kissed him properly.

Shane kissed him back, there in the kitchen of their secret condo, and for once didn't scowl when Ilya pulled back and started counting freckles again, whispering numbers against Shane's skin like a prayer.

+1

The cottage was beautiful and Ilya said so the moment Shane pulled up the long driveway. "Shane," he breathed. "Is like something from magazine."

Shane felt a flush of pride as he grabbed Ilya's bags from the trunk. "Had it built a few years back."

"Is perfect," Ilya declared, already heading up the porch steps. "Show me inside."

The interior was even better as it had all warm wood and a stone fireplace, with glass walls overlooking the private lake. Ilya moved through the space like he was memorizing it, running his fingers over the kitchen counter, the back of the leather couch, the bookshelf full of Shane's childhood favorites.

"This is where you spend your summers," Ilya said softly. "This is where you come to be yourself."

"Yeah," Shane said, setting down the luggage. His heart was pounding. "And I wanted you here with me."

Ilya turned to face him, and the look in his eyes made Shane's breath catch. "Show me the bedroom?"
They barely made it there.

Ilya kissed him on the stairs leading to the room and later pressed him against the wall in the bedroom doorway, and by the time they fell into Shane's bed, the same bed Shane had slept in alone last summer, Shane was shaking with want and something bigger, something that felt like belonging.

Afterwards, tangled together in the sheets with the windows open and the sound of the lake drifting in, Ilya traced lazy patterns on Shane's chest. "We should get up," he murmured. "Make dinner. Be responsible adults."

"In a minute," Shane said, and pulled him closer.

They stayed there until the light changed, until Shane's phone buzzed with a text from his mom asking what time they should come by tomorrow.

"Tomorrow," Shane said aloud, something anxious flickering in his chest.

"Your parents?" Ilya propped himself up on one elbow. "You are nervous."

"A little." Shane stared at the ceiling. "I've never- they don't know about me or about us."

"Do you want them to know?"

Shane thought about it. Thought about years of hiding, of secret meets-ups and careful distance in public. Thought about how tired he was of pretending Ilya was just his rival, just someone he competed against on the ice.

"Yeah," he said finally. "I think I do."

Ilya kissed his shoulder. "Then we tell them. Together."

The next day, Shane's parents arrived mid-morning, his dad and mom bearing containers of food. Shane met them on the porch, Ilya beside him, and tried not to look as nervous as he felt.

"Mom, Dad," he said. "There's something I need to tell you."

His mother took one look at his face, at the way Ilya stood close enough that their shoulders almost touched, and her expression softened. "Alright, sweetheart."

"Ilya and I, we're uhm" Shane fumbled for the words. "We're together. Have been for a while now. And I wanted you to meet him. Properly. Not as my rival but as-"

"His lover," Ilya supplied helpfully.

Shane's face went hot. "Boyfriend," he corrected quickly. "He's my boyfriend."

His dad blinked. His mom's eyes were suspiciously shiny. And then she was pulling Shane into a hug, fierce and tight.

"Oh honey," she said. "Thank you for telling us."

"You're not mad are you? You're okay with it?"

She pulled back, cupping his face in her hands. "We just want you to be happy. And if Ilya makes you happy…"

"He does," Shane said quickly. "He really does."

His dad cleared his throat and extended his hand to Ilya. "Welcome to the family, son."

Ilya shook it, looking genuinely emotional. "Thank you, sir. I will take very good care of him."

"See that you do," Shane's dad said gruffly, but he was smiling.

They spent the day together. His dad fixing a loose board on the dock while Ilya peppered him with questions about the property, Shane snuck glances at Ilya through the glass wall. It felt surreal and wonderful and terrifying all at once.

"He's lovely," Shane's mom whispered to him, squeezing his arm. "And he looks at you like you hung the moon."

Shane hadn't known what to say to that. Had just nodded and tried not to let the sudden surge of emotion overwhelm him.

After his parents left, promising to come back for dinner later that week, Shane and Ilya collapsed onto the couch, exhausted and relieved.

"That went well," Ilya said.

"Yeah," Shane agreed. "It really did."

Over the next few days, they fell into an easy rhythm. Mornings near the dock with coffee, afternoons swimming in the lake, evenings cooking together or reading on the couch with their toes touching. It was domestic in a way Shane had never experienced before, comfortable in a way that made him understand why people wrote love songs about coming home.

One afternoon, Shane was lying on the dock in just his swim trunks, eyes closed against the sun, when he heard the click of a camera. He opened one eye to find Ilya crouched nearby with his phone.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking picture," Ilya said, snapping another. "The light is perfect. You are perfect."

Shane scowled on instinct. "Delete those."

"Never." Ilya came closer, kneeling beside him. "Look at this one. See how the sun makes your freckles look like gold? Is beautiful."

Shane looked at the photo. His freckles did stand out against his sun-warmed skin, scattered across his nose and cheeks in a pattern he'd spent years hating. But in Ilya's photo, backlit by golden light with the lake behind him, he looked...happy. Peaceful. Like someone who'd finally stopped fighting himself.

"You can keep it," Shane said quietly.

"I am keeping all of them," Ilya informed him. "For when we are apart and I miss your freckled face."

"We just got here. We're not going to be apart."

"Not for long time, no. But eventually, season starts again. And I will miss you." Ilya set down his phone and stretched out beside Shane on the dock. "So I take pictures. To remember."

Shane turned his head to look at him, at this man who had somehow become his entire world. "I'll miss you too."

"Good," Ilya said. "Is nice to be missed by someone you love."

They lay there in comfortable silence for a while, soaking up the sun. Then Ilya sat up suddenly. "Come. We swim."

"I'm comfortable here."

"You are lazy here. Come, Hollander. I want to see you in the water."

He let Ilya pull him up, let himself be dragged to the edge of the dock. The water looked perfect, clear and inviting, reflecting the cloudless sky. It wasn't too cold. It was perfect, actually, cold enough to be refreshing, warm enough in the shallows that they could float for hours without going numb.

Shane floated on his back now, eyes closed against the late afternoon sun, listening to Ilya splash around nearby. The water lapped at his shoulders, and he felt more relaxed than he had in months. Maybe years.

"Shane," Ilya called. "Come look at this."

Shane opened one eye. "I'm busy."

"Busy doing nothing. Come."

With a put-upon sigh, Shane swam over to where Ilya was treading water near the dock. "What?"

Ilya grabbed his hand and pulled him closer, until they were bobbing together in the chest-deep water, the afternoon sun turning everything golden. Water droplets clung to Ilya's eyelashes, and his hair was slicked back from his face, and Shane had the sudden, overwhelming thought that he wanted to look at this face forever.

"Look," Ilya said, softly caressing Shane’s cheek. "So many new freckles. The sun here is very generous."

"Mmm," he said noncommittally.

"I counted three new ones just on your nose," Ilya continued, tracing a path across Shane's face. "Is impressive work, sun."

Shane waited for the familiar irritation, the reflexive scowl. It didn't come. Instead he felt something warm and fond and almost amused. "You're obsessed."

"Yes," Ilya agreed easily. "Is it a problem?"

"Kind of weird, maybe."

"You love me anyway." It wasn't a question. Ilya said it like a fact, certain and simple, and Shane couldn't argue because it was true.

"Yeah," Shane said, letting himself float closer. "I do."

Ilya's smile was sunlight, was everything good about summer condensed into one expression. "Say it again."

"I love you."

"Again."

"I love you, Ilya."

"Once more, but this time with the scowl."

Shane laughed before he could stop himself, the sound startling in the quiet of the lake. "I can't scowl while saying I love you. That doesn't make sense."

"You can try," Ilya insisted. "Is very you. I love you but also I am irritated about it."

"I'm not irritated about it."

"No?" Ilya pulled him even closer, until they were pressed together in the water, arms around each other to stay afloat. "Not even when I call you freckles?"

There it was, the familiar nickname, but without the "Mr." this time. Just freckles, soft and affectionate, said the way someone might say "sweetheart" or "darling" or any of those words that meant "you're mine and I'm yours."

Shane looked at Ilya's face, at the water droplets on his cheekbones and the way his eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled. He thought about the past three years, about all the times he'd scowled at that nickname, all the times he'd pretended it annoyed him more than it did. He thought about the draft and the shower and the awards and the condo, all those moments where Ilya had seen him, really seen him, freckles and all.

"Freckles," Shane repeated quietly. "That's what you're calling me now?"

"Is what I have always called you," Ilya said. "Just shorter now. More convenient for when I am saying '*ya tebya lyublyu*, freckles' or 'good morning, freckles' or 'come back to bed, freckles.'"

Shane's lips twitched. "That's a lot of freckles."

"You have a lot of freckles. Is only fair."

And Shane realized, there in the golden light of his cottage with Ilya's arms around him and the lake stretching out around them like a promise, that he didn't hate the nickname at all. Maybe he never really had. Maybe he'd just needed time to understand what it meant, that

Ilya saw all of him, even the parts Shane had always tried to hide or diminish, and loved him anyway.

Loved him because of those parts, not despite them.

"Okay," Shane said.

"Okay what?"

"You can call me freckles."

Ilya's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Really." Shane reached up with one hand to cup Ilya's face, his thumb tracing the sharp line of his cheekbone. "But only you. Anyone else tries it and I'm throwing hands."

"Of course," Ilya said solemnly. "Is special name, just for us."

"Just for us," Shane agreed, and then he kissed him.

It was different from all the other times. Softer, slower, full of the kind of tenderness that Shane had never let himself show before. There was no anger here, no competition, no need to prove anything. Just Ilya and Shane and the quiet recognition that this was real, this was happening, this was everything Shane had been too scared to want.

When they broke apart, Ilya was staring at him with wonder. "No scowl," he said softly.

"No scowl," Shane confirmed.

"You are accepting the nickname. You are kissing me. You are maybe, possibly, definitely letting yourself be happy."

"All of the above," Shane said. His face ached from smiling, an unfamiliar sensation after years of scowling. "Is that okay?"

"Is perfect." Ilya kissed him again, quick and sweet. "My freckles, so serious for so long."

"Don't let it go to your head."

"Too late," Ilya said cheerfully. "Is already there, taking up much room. I will be impossible to live with now."

"You're already impossible to live with."

"Yes, but you love me anyway."

"I do," Shane said, and meant it with everything he had. "I really, really do."

They floated there together as the sun moved lower in the sky, painting the lake in shades of gold and amber. Ilya did eventually insist on kissing every single freckle on Shane's face, lost count somewhere around his cheekbones when Shane laughed and kissed him properly.

Later, dried off and making dinner together in the open kitchen, Ilya would catch Shane's hand and press a kiss to his knuckles. Shane would just squeeze Ilya's hand back and keep chopping vegetables, feeling settled and happy and home in a way that had nothing to do with the cottage and everything to do with the man beside him.

"Freckles," Ilya would say, testing the name again, savoring it.

And Shane would smile, would pull Ilya in for a kiss that tasted like summer and possibility and the kind of future Shane had never let himself imagine before.

"Yeah," he'd say. "That's me."

And he'd mean it.

End Notes

i hope i didn't confused everyone with the sudden transition at the 4th part. it all sounded perfect in my head but while penning it down in my doc :P anyhow, i hope you guys enjoyed reading it! check out my previous hollanov fic if you haven't!

i am @okg0atsu on twt!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!