

Forgotten Language

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Forgotten Language

by [manyfandomsmember](#)

Summary

Ilya gets his bell rung while playing for Ottawa against Montreal

He forgets how to speak English and can only speak Russian

Luckily, Shane Hollander, the light of his life, has learned Russian

Notes

Okay so this is the third Hollanov fic I've written in like two days, I think I have a problem but they are literally consuming every waking thought (that and the promise of Harry Styles making his return to music).

Anyway! To preface, in this fic there is a lot of Russian being spoken. I put all the translations in brackets at the end of the chunks of dialogue! As a PSA, I use Google Translate for all of the Russian, so if any of it is wrong, please let me know!

Bell Centre nights feel like a verdict before the puck even drops.

Ottawa flies in through the visiting tunnel, past banners that don't belong to them, past photographs of men that have won here, reminders that the building keeps score in decades. The air has the metallic chill unique to big rinks, almost like winter had been domesticated and taught to sit heavy in the rafters.

Ilya feels every eye, present and those embedded in history.

He tapes his stick in the visiting locker room, listening to the dull roar leaking through the concrete of the building. His team is quieter than usual. Jokes land softly and simmer out. Everything smells like Tiger Balm and nerves.

Across the halls, through space he does not occupy, is his Shane.

He knows it in the same way he knows how sharp his skates feel, or where his bruises sit. Not from seeing him – not yet – but he can *feel* him. He's in the atmosphere, laced in the walls, and the history they hold.

Warmup is a ritual. Step on the ice, feel the first shiver of the cold, hear 21,000 people already warmed up and eager for blood. The crowd boos on reflex. It rolls down in waves and breaks harmlessly over them.

He tries to avoid looking for Shane.

He fails almost immediately.

His soul seeks him out across the ice as he crosses his blue line into the neutral zone. Dressed in Montreal red with an easy stride, stick loose in his hands, and a grin that glows like sunlight. Shane doesn't slow his pace, doesn't wave or nod, doesn't do anything reckless. He just lets his gaze brush Ilya's for half a heartbeat, raking his eyes across his body, before skating away.

It's nothing.

It's everything.

"*You okay?*" is what that look says.

"*Yes,*" Ilya lies back with his eyes.

Shane probably knows.

Shane definitely knows.

The anthem rattles bones. They always do at home, especially against another Canadian team. Forechecks are aggressive, defensemen executing perfect pokechecks, board battles

treated like insults that aren't being tolerated. Ottawa bends without breaking, plays honest hockey, and tries to quiet the crowd.

It works in moments, but never for long.

Shane is *everywhere* for Montreal. Calling switches, chasing pucks into corners, winning battles he has *no* business winning, laughing when a play clicks in a way he didn't think it would. The crowd feeds him and he feeds back.

It makes something fierce coil behind Ilya's ribs – pride, love, joy.

He takes his next shift, forcing a reset. His line finds cycles along the wall, short passes that barely have time to exist before they're gone again. Ottawa builds pressure by stacking offensive zone seconds until they begin to mean something.

The crowd hates this. They boo to let them know.

Ilya plants along the right wall, puck tight to the blade of his stick, a shoulder rolled prepared to absorb contact. A Montreal defenseman leans into him, sturdy and heavy. Ilya digs his edge, protects, and waits for a seam. He can feel where his linemates are without seeing them, and whether he wants to or not, he can feel where Shane is as well.

The puck goes up and out of play and Ilya hears the whistle blow. He wins the next faceoff in a clean draw, getting the puck deep into their zone.

He doesn't see the Montreal player until it's too late.

A red jersey slashes into his blind side with perfect, awful timing. It's clean hit, but it *hurts*. Ilya stumbles and that's when a second red jersey comes in to finish the job. Shoulder crashes into jaw, Ilya's head snaps back, crashing into the boards that seem to leap forward like they'd been waiting for this.

Sounds turn to ringing, lights blur into smears.

He loses the puck around the same time he loses his knees. Ilya sinks by degrees, as if in slow motion. The crowd roars – maybe cruelly, maybe with excitement at the physicality of the play.

He ends up half-curved on the ice, cheek against the cold, vision narrowed into a tunnel that is lined with white streaks where the lights should be. A whistle stabs. A trainer vaults the boards. Gloves drop. Someone swears.

It all feels like it's happening to someone else until a voice cuts through the static fizzing in Ilya's head.

“Ilya.”

Not Ottawa. Not bench noise.

Montreal. Shane.

Ilya's brain is looking for English but finds nothing but loose threads and fog, panic pushing language back to where it began.

Sneakers appear in Ilya's line of sight as someone kneels beside him and says his name.

"Ilya, stay with me here. Try to look at me, okay?"

He tries.

His eyelids feel heavy, like they'd been stitched down. The overhead lights seem to double and blur at the same time. A hand finds his shoulder and another braces his neck.

"Don't move your head. Can you hear me? Do you know where you are?"

He opens his mouth and air falls out.

English is in there somewhere, he knows it is. He has used it thousands of times, laughed in it, argued in it. But it won't come when he reaches for it. His mind slides past it like ice too smooth and slippery to grip.

"Moye solnste, gde moye solnste?" His voice breaks. *"Ya khochu, chtoby moy lyubimyy byl ryadom."* [my sunshine. where is my sunshine? i want my beloved please/i want my beloved by my side]

The trainer's brow furrows. "Okay...he's speaking Russian. We need a translator. Ilya, can you squeeze my hand?"

Ilya doesn't know what's being said. He recognizes his name, but when he reaches for English to translate, to understand, he can't. Panic is clawing at his throat.

"Pozhaluysta, umolyayu tebya...dorogoy, ne ukhodi, proshu..gde ty?" [please, i beg you...darling...don't leave, please...where are you?]

His voice is shaking now – small, hoarse, *terrified*. He tries to turn his head but the hands on either side of him stop him immediately.

"Hey, hey don't move. Stay nice and still. Can anyone tell me what he's saying?"

A ref shakes his head. Someone else mutters, "Is he asking for something?" Another voice, further away, "We've radioed for a Russian translator, they're trying to find one."

But they don't have *him*. The one person Ilya needs. He's somewhere he cannot see. He can *feel* him, he can always feel him, but he can't see him.

Tears leak sideways towards his temples before he can notice.

"Dorogoy, ty menya slyshish?" He begs now, his breath hitching, words frantic. *"Zaychik...proshu...ty mne nuzhen...ty mne nuzhen."* [darling can you hear me? little bunny...please...i need you...i need you]

The pet names fall out raw and unfiltered – little, private words never meant for strangers, stripped of context, blanked in a language no one could understand. The trainer can hear desperation, but not meaning.

“It’s okay, Ilya, you’re okay. We’re going to move you once we get a translator. Are you in pain? Nausea? Can you tell me your name?”

Ilya shakes his head, fear and frustration at not being able to understand filling his features. Pain fills behind his eyes, bright and blinding, and nausea rises in his chest at the movement.

He doesn’t know what they’re asking.

He wants Shane, *needs* Shane.

His hands scribble weakly in the air until someone takes them and pins them gently. He gulps in a breath that burns, and tries to force English out of his mouth.

“Lyubimyy...pozhaluysta, pozhaluysta...gde ty? Ya zdes’, ya zdes.” Ilya is calling out to him, desperate and aching. [my love...please...please...where are you? i’m here. i’m here]

He can feel himself slipping as his voice cracks down the middle. The thought of not being able to see Shane, to reach him, is becoming – somehow – worse than the pain.

The trainer leans closer, slowing his speech. “Ilya, listen. You’re okay, your team is here. We’re going to get you moved soon. Are you able to give me a thumbs up? Are you...”

He doesn’t hear the rest.

He drags his mind across the divide where English is supposed to live and shoves with everything he has left. One word. Just one. One name. That’s all he needs.

His jaw works. His tongue feels numb.

“Sha–” It comes out warped the first time, breathy and staticy. He swallows and tries again.

“Shane.”

The trainer freezes.

“Did you hear that?” someone says. “He said Shane. Is there a Shane somewhere here?”

Ilya sags a little with relief. “Shane...Shane...Shane...”

Shane had been frozen in place for what felt like hours. The refs had barked at him to back up and sit down after the collision. Shane hadn’t been doing anything, just had stood there and said Ilya’s name once. He wanted to stay put and argue. But he didn’t. He allowed the ref to put a palm on his chest and shove him away, towards his own bench.

He was standing there, next to his own boards of his own bench, when he heard the murmur of Shane come from the cluster of people in the corner. One of the refs looked at him.

Shane went into motion in a second. He didn't think, he didn't hesitate. He shoved off of the boards, skates scraping against the ice. He was across the rink in six strides.

"I'm Shane, it's me. Hang on, Ilya."

He ignored his coach, the fans, his teammates, the entire Ottawa team.

Ilya's lips were still moving when Shane reached his side, forming syllables to spell out Shane's name.

"I'm here," he said, his voice breaking. "It's me, I'm here, you're safe."

Ilya's eyes fluttered, panic still there, but softening when he saw Shane's face. Shane crouched low, dropping to his knees. His fingers rested gently on the exposed skin of Ilya's wrist.

"Don't move, it's okay."

Ilya muttered in rapid Russian, too fast for Shane to understand.

"Can you ask him if he can understand me?" the trainer asked Shane. "He's only responding in Russian."

Shane's brow furrowed as he softly stroked Ilya's wrist. "*Ty ponimayesh sportivnogo trenera?*" Shane's accent was rough, but his words were strong. He'd been learning Russian for months and had learned it quickly. He was thankful for that now. [do you understand the athletic trainer?]

Ilya let out a shuddering breath at the sound of Russian. He looked at Shane. "*Net,*" he said quietly.

"He can't understand you."

The trainer nods. "I'm going to need you to ask him a few questions before we can move him. Is your Russian strong enough to do that?"

"Yes," Shane replied, slowly.

"Ask him his name, where he is, and if he remembers what happened."

"*Mne nuzhno zadat' tebe neskol'ko voprosov, milyy.*" Shane said, sweetly, thumb still brushing Ilya's wrist. Ilya nods in understanding, his eyes never leaving Shane's. "*Mozhesh skazat mne svoye imya?*" [i need to ask you a few questions, darling. can you tell me your name?]

"*Il'ya.*"

His name sounded different like that, pronounced without trying to speak in perfect English.

“Molodets, dorogoy. Ty pomnish’, gde nakhodish’sya?” [well done sweetheart. do you remember where you are?]

“Em...Monreal’? V Bell-tsentre?”

“Otlichnaya rabota. Ty pomnish’, chto proizoshlo?” [good job, do you remember what happened?]

“Ya igral v khokkey. Pervyy zashchtnik postavil mne podnozhku, vtoroy sbil menya s nog. Vso potemnelo. Kodga ya ochnul’sya, ya iskal tebya.” [i was playing hockey. the first defenseman tripped me, the second knocked me down. when i woke up, i was looking for you]

“Ty tak khorosho spravilsya, dorogoy. Ya tebya lyublyu.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu,” Ilya whispers quietly.

Shane switches back to English so he can address the trainer. “He knows his name, remembers where he is, and was able to tell me what happened.”

The trainer nods softly, “Those are all good signs. Are you able to ask him who his emergency contact is?”

Shane felt his face flush, pink painting his cheeks behind his beloved freckles. “It’s uh– it’s me. I’m– I’m his emergency contact.”

The trainer looked at him in surprise, but quickly masked it. “Okay. His emergency contact is here. Let’s go. You’ll just need to change first, no skates in the ambulance,” the trainer joked, trying to lighten the tension that had settled over the group.

The trainers were careful as they transferred Ilya to the stretcher. Shane hovered, just on the edge of panic, letting go for only a second before he was back at his side again, squeezing his hand tightly.

“Ya nikuda ne uydu. Ty menya slyshish? Ya nikuda ne uydu.” [im not going anywhere. do you hear me? i’m not going anywhere]

Ilya nods groggily.

“Hold still, okay?” one of the trainers murmured.

Ilya, processing the sound of English, but not the meaning, looked at Shane with wide, curious eyes.

“Stoy spokojno, khorosho?” Shane translated slowly.

“Khorosho,” Ilya whispered back. [okay]

Shane brushed a soft finger over Ilya’s temple, dusting a rouge curl off his skin. The wheeled Ilya slowly off the ice and down the tunnel, polite clapping rising behind them at the sight of

the fallen player moving slightly on the stretcher. Ilya winced at the noise.

“I have to change, or at least get out of my skates,” Shane said, trying to stop the trainers.

“Okay, we’ll wait here.”

As Shane stepped away, Ilya’s hand reached out, gripping the edge of Shane’s jersey. “*Kuda ty idesh’?*” [where are you going?]

“*Mne prosto nuzhno pereodet’sya, dorogoy. Ya seychas zhe vernus’, obeschchayu.*” [I just need to change clothes, darling. I’ll be right back, I promise]

Ilya looked like he was going to cry at the thought of Shane walking away, but he released his sleeve and nodded very slowly.

Shane changed quickly, unlacing his skates – still in the same order, just much quicker – covering the blades, shucking his dirty jersey into the laundry bag, shoving shoulder pads and shorts and socks into his locker. He *hated* not showering after coming out of his equipment, but Ilya was more important. He tugged on a pair of sweatpants, a t-shirt, and a hoodie he’d stashed in his bag, not wanting to show up to the hospital in his gameday suit. He tied the laces of his sneakers he kept in his locker, grabbed his phone and nearly sprinted back out into the hall where the trainers were standing in an awkward silence next to Ilya, who seemed to be babbling in Russian, but stopped when Shane returned.

“*Solnyshko!*” he exclaimed quietly when he saw his favorite person. [sunshine]

Shane smiled, “*Privet, lyubov’ moya.*” [hello my love]

“Do you have everything?” the trainer asked Shane.

Shane nodded, “Is there anything of Ilya’s I should grab?”

The trainer shook his head, “He’ll have to wear a gown at the hospital.”

“Okay.”

They began to wheel Ilya down the hallway towards the doors where the ambulance was waiting. Shane stepped back only for a second as they loaded the stretcher inside. One of the paramedics began to tell Shane he would have to sit up front, but a brisk head shake from the trainer stopped her before she could finish.

“He stays with Rozanov. He’s translating...and Ilya starts to panic when he’s not around.”

The paramedic gave Shane an odd look before glancing at Ilya, who was looking at Shane with soft, heavy-lidded eyes.

Shane settled in next to Ilya, cramped between the wall and the stretcher. Ilya reached for Shane, and Shane grasped his hand tightly, knuckles turning white.

“Prosto nebol’shaya poyezdka, khorosho?” Shane says, his voice gentle. He eases his other hand over Ilya’s arm. *“My pochti v bol’nitsy. Ya nikuda ne uydu.”* [just a little ride okay? we’re almost at the hospital. i’m not leaving]

Ilya nods in understanding, tightening his fingers, but not responding, too tired to form words.

The wheels of the ambulance thrummed over the pavement. Shane kept one palm lightly on Ilya’s arm, the other grasping his hand. Thankfully, there was no siren, and the two men sat in silence, Ilya fighting to keep his eyes open, Shane just watching him. He translated the paramedics if he needed to, whispering reassurances when Ilya’s panic bubbled into his tone, his words. Finally, Ilya spoke.

“Chto yesli ya zabudu, kak govorit’ po-angliyski?” [What if i forget how to speak english?]

The paramedics look at Shane.

“He wants to know if he’s going to forget how to speak English.”

Ilya is looking at him with wide, expectant eyes.

“We’ll know more once we get a CT scan.”

Shane nods and repeats the message to Ilya, whose eyes fill just a little bit more with fear. Shane squeezes his hand as the ambulance slows outside the hospital.

The hospital swallows them in fluorescent lights and a steady rhythm of footsteps. Automatic doors open, cold air rushing in. Nurses were already waiting, hands practiced and efficient, voices overlapping in clipped English that never made it past Ilya’s ears.

Shane didn’t let the stretcher out of his sight.

They rolled Ilya through triage and into a curtained room, monitors waking with bright beeps. A nurse starts asking questions, and Ilya can only stare at her lips as if he could catch the meaning. His gaze found Shane’s instantly, seeking help.

“Sorry, not to cut you off,” Shane starts. “He speaks English he just...can’t right now. I’ll translate for him, he can only comprehend and respond in Russian.”

“Oh, we have a translator that we can bring in. You’re more than welcome to wait in the waiting room.”

“With all due respect, ma’am, he won’t let me leave, nor do I want to. He more than likely won’t talk to another translator, and he’s been panicking any time I’ve left his sight.”

The nurse eyes him quizzically. “Well, it really is standard protocol, Mr. Hollander.”

“I understand that—”

“Then you’ll let me get the translator?”

“You’re more than welcome to try, but he’s not going to like it.”

“I think I know what’s best for my patient,” there’s a finality in her words as she yanks the curtain open and disappears down the hall.

“I think I know what’s best for my partner,” Shane thinks to himself. He has to bite his tongue to keep from uttering these words aloud. He didn’t want to accidentally out them, though he probably already did when he left the ice, hand gripping Ilya’s, without so much as an explanation.

The nurse returns with a larger man in tow.

“Mr. Hollander, if you could just step out please.”

Shane moves to stand, and Ilya’s grip tightens on his fingers.

“Kuda ty idesh?” he questions sharply, his eyes filled with fear. [where are you going?]

“Oni khotyat, chtoby ty pogovorili s drugim perevodchikom. Mne nuzhno podozhdat' v priyemnoy.” Shane replies, not bothering to hide the bitter tone. He knows the other translator can hear him, but he doesn’t care. [they want you to speak with another translator. I need to wait in the waiting/reception area]

Ilya panics.

“Net, ya ne khochu, chtoby ty ukhodil. Pozhaluysta, ne ukhodi. Ty dolzhen ostat'sya so mnoy, pozhaluysta,” he's not bothering to hide the panic in his voice. His heart rate rises, the beep accentuating the panic in his words. [no, I don't want you to leave. please don't go. you have to stay with me, please]

Shane can’t leave him. Not with this nurse and this large man he’s never met. Behind him, Shane hears the translator repeat to the nurse what was said.

“Will you please let me stay with him? I’m clearly just as capable,” Shane asks, not kindly. “He is scared. He is going to ask for me until you bring me back into the room. I think you should do what’s best for your *patient*—” he says the word the same way she had earlier “and let me stay.”

“Fine,” the nurse says. “Fine.”

“What questions do you need me to ask him?”

At the sight of the large translator leaving, and Shane’s hand back in his own, Ilya’s heart rate begins to slow.

“Ask him if and where he’s having pain. Whether or not he’s sensitive to the light or sounds. If he feels like he is going to get sick.”

Shane nods, sitting back down and leaning close to Ilya.

“Khorosho, dorogoy. U menya yest’ yeshche neskol’ko voprosov. Ty chuvstvuesh kakuyu-libo bol?” [okay darling, I have a few more questions. do you feel any pain?]

“Da. U menya bolit golova, i, kazhetsya, plecho tozhe.” [yes. i have a headache, and my shoulder seems to hurt too]

Shane looks at the nurse. “He said his head hurts and so does his shoulder.”

“Svet slishkom yarkiy ili zvuki slishkom gromkiye?” [is the light too bright or the sounds too loud?]

“Da.”

“He also says the lights are too bright, and the noises are too loud for him.”

The nurse is making notes in a chart.

“Tebya toshnit? Tebe kazhetsya, chto tebya seychas vyrvet?” [do you feel nauseous? do you feel like you’re going to throw up?]

“Menya toshnit tol’ko togda, kogda ya dvigayus’ slishkom bystro. Dumayu, menya ne vyrvet.”

“He said he only feels nauseous when he moves too quickly. He doesn’t think he’s going to throw up.”

“Okay, thank you Mr. Hollander.”

A second nurse came into the room to adjust the collar around Ilya’s neck and to check his pupils. Every time someone addressed him, his eyes darted to Shane waiting for a translation. Waiting to hear his voice.

The forms appeared next.

“I can do it,” Shane said. “While he gets his CT.”

“Are you family?” a nurse asks.

Shane hesitates. He leans to Ilya, *“Mogu li ya skazat’ im, chto my partnery? Chto ya yavlyayus’ chelenom sem’i?”* [can i tell them i am your partner? that i am family?]

“Da. Pozhaluysta.” [yes please]

“I am his partner,” Shane said, half-confident, half-scared.

The nurse just nods and hands him the forms and a pen. Before he starts, they ask him to ease Ilya into a hospital gown. Shane complies, gently shedding Ilya’s jersey and gear and sliding him precarious and slow into the gown before fastening it in the back and pressing a kiss to his shoulderblade.

He fusses with Ilya's blankets, smoothing it flat as if a creaseless blanket was all he needed to stay safe. He explained to him that the nurses were going to take him to get a CT scan, and that Shane had to stay here and do his paperwork. He promised he'd be there when Ilya got back. Before they wheel Ilya away, Shane presses a soft kiss to his curls and another along his temple.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," he whispers against his hair. Ilya whispers it back.

After Ilya leaves, Shane settles into the uncomfortable plastic chair, meticulously reading the questions before checking boxes and leaving uniform print letters on lines. By the time he had finished the packet of forms, Ilya had been wheeled into the room. He wasn't awake, they said he had fallen asleep on the way back.

"How did he do?" Shane asked the nurse hooking Ilya's heart rate monitor to his finger.

"He did good, the doctor will be in to discuss the scans shortly."

"Was he able to understand?" worry crept into Shane's words.

The nurse nodded once. "You did a very good job at explaining it to him. He kept asking for you," she smiled. "It was very sweet."

Shane smiled.

The doctor came in and spoke briefly to Shane. The scans had been clear and he promised to relay the information to Ilya when he woke up. He shifted his chair as close to the bed as he could and rested his head next to Ilya's hip, their fingers threaded tightly together. The monitor beeped steadily, and Ilya's chest rose and fell silently with every breath.

After a while, Ilya's fingers shifted, his other hand clumsily finding Shane's hair, twisting through the strands. He rubbed at it like he often did after games, contentedly and calm.

"Shane," he breathed out, his eyes still closed. He said nothing else and he did not wake.

He opens his eyes much later.

It's slow and dazed as the fog lifts. He blinks awake to the soft beep of a monitor and the type of sterile chill that only accompanies hospital rooms. His head aches, dull and insistent, but the world stays still when he moves his eyes, which he counts as a victory. The room is no longer spinning.

And there, half-curved around Ilya's thigh, is Shane.

He's asleep in the world's worst chair, plastic and tall-backed. His shoulders are slumped, mouth half-open, one hand still firmly wrapped around Ilya's. There's creases lining his cheek from the bedsheets, rumpling his freckles. His hair is messy, like someone was running panicked fingers through it. Ilya knew exactly who.

Warmth floods Ilya as he squeezes Shane's hand.

“Shane,” he whispers.

Shane wakes fast. His eyes are sharp before his body has time to catch up. The alertness melts into worry.

“Privet, dorogoy. Dobroye utro. Kak ty sebya chuvstvuyesh?” Shane murmurs in rapid Russian. [hi darling. good morning. how are you feeling?]

“Why are you speaking Russian?” Ilya questions, his voice rough. Followed by, “When did your Russian get that good?”

Shane furrows his brow. Ilya tries to smooth the creases with his thumb, curiosity ignited in his eyes. “I– you–”

“Spit it out,” Ilya teases, his voice still soft.

“When you hit your head, you couldn’t speak any English. I’ve been translating since the game last night.”

“Oh...thank you,” he smiles softly at Shane.

Shane’s eyes go soft and he presses a kiss to the crown of Ilya’s head.

“Hi, baby,” Shane murmurs.

Ilya’s face goes bright, “baby,” he mumbles to himself, smiling.

“You’re with me now?” Shane questions.

“Yes. With you.”

Shane lets out a breathy laugh. “Jesus, you scared me. Do you really not remember me translating at all?”

“I do little bit. I just remember not letting you go.”

“Yeah, you were very insistent about that part.”

Ilya laughs lightly.

“I sorry I scare you,” he admits, and then frowns at the heart rate monitor and IV line and his ridiculous hospital gown. He scans the room before zeroing back in on Shane, the same way he did when he couldn’t find English at all. “Come here.”

“I’m here,” Shane says, automatically leaning closer.

“No,” Ilya says, stubborn and earnest. He shifts grimacing at the tightness in his muscles, the soreness in his shoulder. He pats the narrow hospital bed with insistence. “Here.”

Shane blinks. “You’re *concussed*.”

“No. I am lonely,” he counters, deadpan. “And you are far.”

Shane glances at the curtain barring them from the rest of the building. “We’re in a hospital.”

“Yes,” Ilya says, patient as a saint. “And they fix head, yes? Not heart. Heart hurts.”

That does it.

Shane exhales, defeated and fond and so in love it’s embarrassing. “You’re impossible.”

“*Da*,” Ilya says, reaching for him with gentle hands.

Shane checks the wires, IV line, and the monitor clips, moving carefully like Ilya was a porcelain doll he didn’t want to break. Then he slides himself very gently onto the edge of the mattress, sliding off his sneakers and setting them neatly at the edge of the bed. He turns and fits himself into the narrow space that was too small for two. Ilya follows, pressing into his side, making a home for himself on Shane’s chest.

The monitor jumps a little and then settles.

“Better,” Ilya mumbles, his words muffled by Shane’s chest.

“Rest,” Shane reprimands into Ilya’s hair, but he’s shifting closer as he says it, one hand finding the small of Ilya’s back out of muscle memory. “Go back to sleep.”

“I will,” Ilya promises. “Only if you are here.”

“I’m not going anywhere. They’ll have to pry me off of you.”

“Pry,” Ilya mutters, testing the new word on his tongue.

“Yes,” Shane encourages. “Pry, like pull us apart.”

Ilya smiles, “Let them try. I fight.”

“Take a rest, Rocky.”

“Rocky?” Ilya questions. “Who Rocky?”

“He’s a boxer, baby. Don’t worry about it.”

“*Da*, okay,” Ilya sighs happily. His eyes drift shut and his breathing slows as his heart rate evens out.

He slips under again, this time with his English intact and Shane’s chest under his head.

Before sleep fully pulls him down, he mumbles, slurred and unmistakable, “My Shane.”

Shane closes his eyes.

“Yes, always, my Ilya.”

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