

Sweet Nothings

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Sweet Nothings

by Anonymous

Summary

The room went quiet for exactly three seconds before it erupted.

"Holy shit, Rozanov has a date!"

"Who is she?"

"How long has this been going on?"

"Is she hot?"

Ilya let them speculate, keeping his expression carefully neutral as he finished changing. This was the game he'd gotten good at over the past year: deflecting without lying, misdirecting without being obvious about it. His teammates were good guys, but they didn't need to know. Couldn't know.

Nobody could know that Ilya Rozanov's Valentine's Day plans involved Shane Hollander.

Or, Hollanov are still a secret, Shane is making an exception on his diet, and Ilya has something to celebrate.

Notes

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

February 14, 2019

Ilya Rozanov had never been particularly interested in Valentine's Day.

Growing up in Russia, it hadn't been a major holiday, not like New Year's or Victory Day. And when he'd come to North America, he'd found the whole thing garish. The pink and red everywhere, the overpriced roses, the restaurants packed with couples staring at their phones instead of each other. It all felt performative. Manufactured.

But that was before.

Now, sitting in the Ottawa Centaurs' locker room after practice, watching his teammates scroll through their phones with dopey grins, Ilya felt something twist uncomfortably in his chest. Something that might have been longing, if he let himself examine it too closely.

"Lisa's gonna kill me," Hayes groaned, slumping against his locker. "I forgot to make reservations anywhere. Everything good is booked solid."

"Should've thought of that last month, Hazy." Boob was already dressed in street clothes, looking far too pleased with himself. "Cassie and I are going to that new place on Elgin. Made the reservation in January."

"Show off," Wyatt muttered, but he was grinning.

Dykstra looked up from tying his shoes. "What about you, Roz? Got plans tonight?"

Ilya's fingers stilled on the laces of his own skates. He'd been expecting this question all day, had prepared an answer that was both true and completely misleading. "Yes, I have plans."

"Oh yeah?" Chouinard leaned forward, interested. "Finally gonna use some of those moves on someone? There's that club downtown that's supposed to be—"

"No club," Ilya interrupted, perhaps too sharply. He softened his tone, added a smirk he didn't quite feel. "I have... dinner plans."

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"How long has this been going on?"

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"Come on, Cap, give us something," Bood pressed. "Is it serious?"

Ilya pulled his Centaurs hoodie over his head, taking the extra second to school his features. When he emerged, his smile was deliberately mysterious. "Is private."

"Oooh, private," Dykstra teased. "Must be serious then."

"Or she's married," Chouinard suggested with a laugh.

The twist in Ilya's chest tightened. Not married. Not she. Just impossible to explain.

"I am leaving now," Ilya announced, grabbing his bag. "Try not to be too terrible at romance, yes? Your wives and girlfriends deserve better than you idiots."

The chirping followed him out of the locker room, good-natured and warm. These were his guys, his team. In the year since he'd come to Ottawa, willingly, which still seemed to shock everyone, they'd become something like family. He trusted them on the ice, shared meals with them, knew their kids' names and their wives' birthdays.

But they didn't know him. Not really. They didn't know that he'd chosen Ottawa because it was close to Montreal, that every "busy" evening was spent either driving to or from Shane's apartment, that the cottage Haas had asked about once was actually Shane's family property where they'd spent three precious weeks last summer.

They didn't know that Ilya Rozanov was in love with Shane Hollander, and that it was both the best and worst thing that had ever happened to him.

The February air bit at his face as Ilya left the arena, but he barely felt it. His mind was already racing ahead to his apartment, to what, to who, waited for him there. Shane had texted him during practice: *I'm here. Made it early. Door's unlocked.*

Ilya had nearly dropped his phone when he'd seen the message. Shane wasn't supposed to arrive until later. The Voyageurs had practice this morning too, and the drive from Montreal was at least two hours, longer in winter traffic. But somehow Shane had managed it, had rearranged his entire day to give them more time together.

The realization made Ilya's throat tight.

He drove faster than he should have, fingers drumming against the steering wheel at every red light. The Porsche was impractical for Ottawa winters, but Ilya didn't care. It was fast, and right now he needed fast.

His apartment building was quiet when he arrived, most residents still at work. Ilya took the stairs two at a time despite living on the sixth floor, his bag bouncing against his back. His hands were shaking slightly as he unlocked the door. Not from cold, not from exertion.

The smell hit him first.

Tomato sauce. Garlic. Basil. Something baking.

Ilya stepped inside and stopped, his bag sliding off his shoulder to land with a soft thud on the floor.

His apartment, his sterile, barely-decorated apartment that he'd never bothered to make feel like home because home wasn't a place anymore, it was a person, had been transformed.

There were candles on the coffee table, not lit yet but arranged carefully. Flowers, actual flowers, not the sad grocery store bouquet Ilya might have expected but a proper arrangement of red roses and white lilies, sat in a vase he didn't own, which meant Shane had brought it. The lights were dimmed, and soft music played from his speakers, something instrumental that Ilya didn't recognize.

And there, in the kitchen, wearing one of Ilya's old Boston jerseys and a pair of sweatpants, was Shane Hollander.

He had his back to the door, focused on whatever was on the stove, and for a moment Ilya just watched him. Watched the way Shane's shoulders moved as he stirred something, the way he'd pushed his sleeves up to his elbows, the way his hair, getting longer, almost to his shoulders now, was pulled back in a small ponytail.

This. *This* was why Ilya had come to Ottawa. This moment right here, getting to see Shane Hollander domestic and unguarded, cooking in Ilya's kitchen like he belonged there.

"You're early," Shane said without turning around. "I heard you trying to be quiet with your bag. You failed."

Ilya felt his face split into a grin, something warm and bright unfurling in his chest, chasing away the earlier tightness. "You are early too."

"Couldn't wait." Shane finally turned, and the smile on his face made Ilya's knees weak. "Happy Valentine's Day."

Ilya crossed the space between them in three long strides, and then Shane was in his arms, solid and real and here. He buried his face in Shane's neck, breathing in the familiar scent of his shampoo mixed with tomato sauce and something uniquely Shane.

"Missed you," Ilya mumbled against his skin.

"I saw you four days ago."

"Four days too long."

Shane's laugh vibrated through both of them. His arms came up to wrap around Ilya's shoulders, holding him close. They stood like that for a long moment, swaying slightly to the music, and Ilya felt something in him settle. This. This was home.

"What are you making?" Ilya finally asked, pulling back just enough to look at Shane's face. His eyes were so brown, overwhelmingly so, and they were soft in a way they only ever were when they were alone together.

"Pasta," Shane said. "That recipe Svetlana sent me. The one with the—"

"The cream and the tomatoes and the—" Ilya stopped, something catching in his throat. "She sent you recipe?"

"Last month. I asked her for it." Shane reached up, brushing his thumb across Ilya's cheekbone. "You got this look on your face when you talked about it once. I wanted to try making it."

Ilya didn't trust himself to speak. He just pulled Shane back in, holding him tighter.

"There's also garlic bread in the oven," Shane continued, his voice muffled against Ilya's shoulder. "And I got wine from that place you like."

"Shane." Ilya's voice cracked on the name.

"And the flowers are probably overkill, I know, but—"

Ilya kissed him. He couldn't help it, couldn't wait another second. Shane made a small surprised sound before melting into it, his hands coming up to cup Ilya's face. The kiss was soft and sweet and tasted like the future, like all the things they couldn't have but desperately wanted anyway.

When they broke apart, Shane's cheeks were flushed pink. "Hi," he said, slightly breathless.

"Hi." Ilya rested his forehead against Shane's. "This is too much. All of this."

"It's not enough," Shane countered. "It's never enough. You deserve—" He stopped, jaw working like he was trying to find the right words. "You deserve to have someone make a fuss over you. You deserve flowers and dinner and all the stupid romantic Valentine's Day bullshit that everyone else gets to have."

The tightness was back in Ilya's chest, but this time it felt different. Like something breaking open instead of closing up.

"We can't go to restaurant," Ilya said quietly. "Can't be seen together."

"So I brought the restaurant here."

"Can't hold your hand in public."

"I'm holding it now." Shane laced their fingers together, squeezing gently.

"Can't tell anyone about us. Can't tell team, can't post pictures, can't—"

"Ilya." Shane's voice was firm. He pulled back enough to look Ilya in the eye. "I know. I know what we can't do. But right now, right here, we can have this. We can have dinner and wine and I can take you apart later because I have until Sunday before I need to drive back."

Despite everything, Ilya laughed. "Take me apart?"

"I've been thinking about it all week." Shane's smile turned wicked, and he pressed his hips forward just enough for Ilya to feel he wasn't the only one affected. "I have plans."

"Oh, you have *plans*."

"Very detailed plans." Shane's hand slid down Ilya's back, lower, palming his ass through his sweatpants. "Involves getting you out of these clothes. Getting you in bed. Making you forget your own name."

Heat shot through Ilya, settling low in his gut. "Dinner first?"

"Dinner first," Shane agreed, though his hand didn't move. "If you can wait that long."

"Can you?"

Shane smiles, devious and special, in a way Ilya almost has a Pavlovic response to. "Probably not."

The oven timer beeped, shattering the moment. Shane pulled away with a groan. "Garlic bread. Fuck. I'll get it. You should change out of your practice clothes. You smell like a gym."

"You love how I smell."

"I love you *in spite* of how you smell when you've been sweating for two hours."

The words hung in the air between them. I love you. Casual and easy like Shane hadn't just said the thing that made Ilya's entire world stop spinning. They'd said it before, of course. Many times. But it never got old, never stopped feeling like a miracle.

"I love you too," Ilya said softly. "Even when you are being bossy about my shower habits."

"Go." Shane turned back to the stove, but Ilya could see the smile on his face. "Dinner will be ready in ten minutes."

Ilya grabbed his bag and headed to the bedroom, which was really just a room with a bed that he slept in when he wasn't at Shane's cottage. His real bedroom, he was starting to realize, was wherever Shane was.

He showered quickly, letting the hot water wash away the sweat and tension from practice. When he looked at himself in the mirror afterward, his reflection looked lighter somehow. Younger. The ever-present tension in his shoulders had eased.

This was the thing nobody understood about why he'd come to Ottawa. Yes, he got to see Shane more. Yes, they could steal weekends and occasional weekdays. But more than that,

knowing Shane was only two hours away instead of an entire country made everything bearable. Made the hiding and the secrecy and the careful deflections feel less suffocating.

Made him feel less alone.

Ilya pulled on clean sweatpants and a t-shirt, ran a towel through his damp hair. He could hear Shane moving around in the kitchen, the clink of plates and silverware.

When Ilya returned, Shane had lit the candles. The table, Ilya's sad excuse for a dining table that he'd bought from IKEA and assembled drunk, had been set with actual cloth napkins and the nice plates Ilya had received as a gift when he'd moved in but never used.

"Where did you get napkins?" Ilya asked.

"Brought them from the cottage." Shane didn't look up from his careful arrangement of pasta. "Sit. Wine's on the table."

Ilya obeyed, pouring them each a glass of red wine that definitely cost more than anything he would have bought for himself. Shane finally joined him, setting down two plates of perfect pasta in cream sauce with roasted tomatoes and fresh basil.

"This looks incredible," Ilya said honestly.

"I practiced," Shane admitted, a slight flush creeping up his neck. "Twice. The first time I burned the garlic."

"You practiced for me?"

"Well, I wasn't going to serve you burnt garlic on Valentine's Day." Shane picked up his wine glass, but didn't drink yet. "Svetlana sent very detailed instructions. And called me to make sure I understood them correctly."

Ilya's throat went tight again. "You talk to my best friend about cooking."

"She likes talking about it. And I like—" Shane stopped, looking down at his plate. "I like that she trusts me enough to share her recipes. It makes me feel like maybe one day this won't all be so impossible."

The words settled heavily between them. Ilya reached across the table, taking Shane's free hand in his. "Is not impossible. We are here, yes? Together. This is real."

"I know. I just meant—"

"I know what you meant." Ilya squeezed his hand. "One day we tell everyone. One day you can call my friends and she is not pretending to my teammates that she is talking to old friend from Moscow. One day I can go to your parents' house and not park three blocks away."

Shane's smile was sad but genuine. "One day."

They ate, and the pasta was perfect. Rich and creamy with the slight acidity of the tomatoes cutting through it. The garlic bread was crispy and buttery. It was better than any restaurant Ilya had been to, because Shane had made it. Because Shane's hands had prepared this food, thinking of Ilya with every stir of the pot.

"My teammates think I have mysterious date tonight," Ilya said after a while, watching Shane over the rim of his wine glass.

"Oh yeah? What did you tell them?"

"Nothing. Let them think what they want." Ilya took another sip of wine. "Dykstra thinks maybe I am seeing married woman. Very scandalous."

Shane laughed. "Well, you are seeing someone who has to hide you. That's sort of the same thing."

"Is not same at all," Ilya said firmly. "We hide because we have to. Because hockey is stupid and people are stupid. Not because we want to."

"I know." Shane set down his fork, his expression growing serious. "I hate it too. Today especially. Listening to the guys talk about their plans, their girlfriends. And I wanted to tell them I already have plans. That I'm coming to see you. That you're—" He stopped, swallowing hard. "That you're everything."

Ilya felt his chest constrict. He stood up, his chair scraping against the floor, and Shane looked up at him with wide eyes.

"Come here," Ilya said, holding out his hand.

Shane took it without hesitation, letting Ilya pull him up and into his arms. They stood there in the flickering candlelight, holding each other, and Ilya pressed his face into Shane's hair.

"You are everything to me too," he whispered. "More than hockey. More than anything."

It was the truth. The kind of truth that would have terrified him a year ago, but now just felt right. Hockey had been his whole life for so long, but Shane had become something more. Something essential.

"I got you something," Shane said after a moment, his voice muffled against Ilya's shoulder. "I know we said no gifts, but—"

"I got you something too," Ilya admitted.

Shane pulled back, a smile tugging at his lips. "Really?"

"Really." Ilya pressed a kiss to his forehead. "You first."

Shane disappeared into the bedroom for a moment, returning with a small wrapped package. It was wrapped badly, the paper creased and the tape showing, and Ilya loved it immediately.

"You wrapped this yourself," Ilya observed.

"Shut up. I'm not good at it." Shane thrust the package at him. "Just open it."

Ilya took his time, carefully peeling back the tape and unfolding the paper. Inside was a slim box, and when he opened it, he found a watch. Not flashy or expensive-looking, but elegant. Simple. The face was clean white with black numbers, the band black leather.

"I noticed yours was broken," Shane said quietly. "The clasp. You keep having to adjust it during games."

Ilya stared at the watch. Shane was right. His current watch, a gift from his agent years ago, had a faulty clasp. He'd been meaning to get it fixed but kept forgetting. He hadn't realized Shane had noticed.

"Try it on," Shane urged.

Ilya slipped it onto his wrist, and it fit perfectly. The leather was soft, already molding to his skin. He turned his wrist, watching the light catch on the simple face.

"Is perfect," he said softly. "Thank you."

"There's more." Shane reached over, turning Ilya's wrist so he could see the underside of the watch face. There, engraved in tiny letters almost hidden by the band, were initials: I.R. & S.H.

Ilya's breath caught.

"I know it's small," Shane said quickly, nervously. "No one will see it unless they're really looking. But I wanted—I needed there to be something. Some proof that this is real. That we're real."

"*Shane.*" Ilya's voice was rough. He set the watch down carefully and pulled Shane into his arms, kissing him hard. Shane kissed back just as fiercely, his hands fisting in Ilya's shirt.

When they broke apart, Shane was breathing hard. "Do you like it?"

"I love it." Ilya kissed him again, softer this time. "But now I am embarrassed about my gift."

"Why?"

Ilya reluctantly extracted himself from Shane's arms and retrieved the small box he'd hidden in his coat pocket. "Is not as thoughtful. Is just—I saw and thought of you."

Shane opened the box, and his face did something complicated. Inside was a simple silver chain with a small pendant, a tiny loon.

"I know is not your favorite bird," Ilya said quickly, feeling suddenly self-conscious. "But I thought—you could wear it. Under your jersey. No one would see but you would know is there and maybe you would think of me."

Shane was very quiet. He pulled the necklace out of the box, holding it up to the light. The loon was delicate and detailed, its wings spread like it was about to take flight.

"Ilya," Shane said softly. "This is perfect."

"Is not too much?"

"No. It's—" Shane looked up at him, and his eyes were bright. "Help me put it on?"

Ilya fastened the chain around Shane's neck with careful fingers. The loon settled against Shane's collarbone, just visible above the neckline of Ilya's old jersey. Ilya traced the chain with one finger, then leaned in to press a kiss to the hollow of Shane's throat, right above where the pendant rested.

Shane shivered, his hands coming up to grip Ilya's shoulders. "Ilya."

"Mm?" Ilya kissed his way up Shane's neck, feeling his pulse jump beneath his lips.

"I think dinner's over."

Ilya pulled back, looking at the half-eaten plates of pasta, the candles burning low. "You want to skip dessert?"

"We can have dessert later." Shane's hands were already sliding under Ilya's shirt, warm against his skin. His fingers traced the lines of Ilya's abs, skating lower. "Right now I want you."

The words sent heat pooling low in Ilya's stomach. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Shane was pulling him backward toward the bedroom, stumbling slightly. "Been thinking about this all week. All the things I want to do to you."

"Tell me," Ilya demanded, following willingly, his hands finding Shane's hips. "What things?"

Shane's laugh was low and promising. "I want to ride you until you forget every word of English you've ever learned."

Ilya groaned, his cock hardening instantly at the image. Shane on top of him, taking what he wanted, beautiful and demanding and his. "Fuck, Shane."

"I want to watch you fall apart underneath me," Shane continued, his voice dropping lower as they stumbled through the bedroom door. "Want to feel you inside me with nothing between us."

They'd talked about it before, going bare. They were both clean, both tested. But it felt like such a big step, something intimate in a way that went beyond the physical. Now, with Shane looking at him with dark, hungry eyes, Ilya wanted it more than his next breath.

"Yes," Ilya managed. "Fuck, yes. Whatever you want."

Shane pushed him down onto the bed and crawled over him, settling his weight on top of him in a way that made Ilya's breath catch. For a moment Shane just looked at him, one hand coming up to cup Ilya's face.

"Hi," Shane said, grinning down at him.

"Hi," Ilya managed. He reached up, pushing Shane's hair back from his face. It had come loose from its ponytail at some point, falling around his shoulders. "You are so beautiful."

Shane ducked his head, blushing. "Shut up."

"Is true." Ilya pulled him down for a kiss, slow and deep. He could taste the wine on Shane's tongue, the garlic from dinner. Could feel Shane hard against his hip, matching his own arousal.

"Want you," Shane breathed against his mouth. "Want you so much."

"Have me," Ilya said. "I am yours."

Shane made a broken sound and kissed him again, harder this time. His hands were everywhere, pushing up Ilya's shirt, mapping the planes of his chest and stomach. Ilya arched into the touch, his own hands sliding down Shane's back to grip his ass through the sweatpants.

"Clothes off," Shane murmured against his lips. "Everything. Now."

They separated long enough to strip, tossing clothes carelessly aside until they were both naked. For a moment they just looked at each other, and Ilya felt the weight of Shane's gaze like a physical touch. Shane's eyes traveled down his body, hungry and possessive, and Ilya's cock jerked under the attention.

"Fuck, look at you," Shane breathed. "You're so—" He didn't finish the sentence, just reached out to wrap his hand around Ilya's cock, stroking slowly.

Ilya's hips bucked up into the touch, a gasp escaping him. "Shane, please."

"Please what?" Shane's grip tightened, his thumb swiping over the head of Ilya's cock, spreading the wetness already gathering there.

"Please—fuck—please get on me," Ilya managed. "Want to be inside you."

Shane's eyes darkened. He released Ilya's cock and reached for the nightstand, fumbling for the lube. "Lie back. Get comfortable."

Ilya obeyed, settling back against the pillows, his heart racing. He watched as Shane slicked his own fingers, watched as Shane got up on his knees and reached behind himself.

"Wait," Ilya said suddenly. "Let me see. *Please.*"

Shane's cheeks flushed pink, but he shifted, turning so Ilya could watch as he pressed one finger inside himself. The sight was obscene and perfect, and Ilya's mouth went dry.

"Fuck, Shane. You look so good like this."

Shane's breath hitched as he worked another finger inside, his free hand braced on Ilya's thigh for balance. "Been thinking about this all day. Touched myself in the shower earlier, thinking about you."

Ilya groaned, his hands clenching in the sheets. "You are trying to kill me."

"Not yet." Shane's smile was wicked. He added a third finger, his eyes fluttering closed as he worked himself open. The muscles in his arm flexed with each movement, and Ilya could see the way his cock was hard and flushed against his stomach.

"Shane, please. I need—you're ready, you're so ready, please—"

Shane opened his eyes, pulling his fingers free. "Yeah. Yeah, okay." He reached for the lube again, pouring a generous amount into his palm and wrapping his hand around Ilya's cock.

The slick slide of Shane's hand was almost too much. Ilya's hips jerked up involuntarily, and Shane made a satisfied sound.

"Hold still," Shane commanded, his voice rough. "Let me do this."

Ilya forced himself to stillness, his hands gripping Shane's thighs now as Shane positioned himself over Ilya's cock. He felt the head of his cock press against Shane's entrance, felt Shane begin to sink down slowly, so slowly.

The heat was incredible. The tight grip of Shane's body around him made stars burst behind Ilya's eyelids. And without a condom between them, he could feel everything. Every clench, every flutter, every inch of Shane's perfect body taking him in.

"Oh fuck," Shane gasped as he sank down further. "Oh god, Ilya, you feel—"

"So good," Ilya finished for him, his voice strained. "You feel so good, sweetheart. So perfect."

Shane bottomed out, fully seated on Ilya's cock, and they both froze, breathing hard. Shane's hands were braced on Ilya's chest, his head dropped forward, hair falling like a curtain around his face.

"Okay?" Ilya managed, though holding still was taking every ounce of willpower he possessed.

Shane lifted his head, and the look on his face was one Ilya would remember for the rest of his life. Pleasure and love and something almost like awe. "So okay. So fucking okay."

Then Shane started to move.

He rose up slowly at first, almost letting Ilya slip free before sinking back down. The drag and pull was exquisite, overwhelming. Ilya's hands tightened on Shane's thighs, his fingers digging into the muscle there.

"That's it," Ilya encouraged, his voice rough. "Take what you need. Use me."

Shane made a desperate sound and picked up the pace, riding Ilya with increasing confidence. His thighs flexed with each movement, his abs tight as he rolled his hips. The loon pendant swung with each thrust, catching the light, and Ilya was mesmerized by the sight of it. By the sight of Shane wearing his gift while taking Ilya's cock so beautifully.

"Touch yourself," Ilya commanded, one hand leaving Shane's thigh to stroke up his side. "Want to see you."

Shane wrapped a hand around his own cock, stroking in time with his movements. His head fell back, exposing the long line of his throat, and Ilya couldn't resist sitting up enough to press kisses there, to feel Shane's pulse racing under his lips.

"Ilya," Shane gasped, his rhythm faltering slightly. "Fuck, I'm already—you feel so good, I can't—"

"Don't hold back," Ilya told him, his hands finding Shane's hips now, helping guide his movements. "Want to feel you come on my cock. Want to feel you fall apart."

Shane's hand sped up on his cock, his movements becoming erratic, desperate. Ilya thrust up to meet him, finding a rhythm that had Shane crying out with each stroke.

"There," Shane gasped. "Right there, don't stop, please don't stop—"

Ilya angled his hips, hitting that spot inside Shane that made him see stars, and Shane came with a broken shout of Ilya's name. Ilya felt him clench impossibly tight around his cock, felt the wet heat of Shane's release painting his chest and stomach, and it was too much.

"Shane, I'm—fuck, I'm going to—"

"Do it," Shane commanded, still shaking through the aftershocks of his orgasm. "Come inside me. Want to feel it. Want to feel you."

Ilya's orgasm hit him like a freight train. His hips jerked up hard as he came, spilling inside Shane, and the feeling was so intense he thought he might black out. Shane rode him through it, taking everything Ilya had to give, and when it finally subsided, Ilya collapsed back against the pillows, boneless and wrecked.

Shane slumped forward onto Ilya's chest, both of them breathing hard. Ilya wrapped his arms around him automatically, one hand coming up to stroke through Shane's sweat-damp hair.

"Holy shit," Shane breathed against Ilya's neck.

"Yeah," Ilya agreed, his voice hoarse. His entire body felt like liquid, warm and satisfied in a way he couldn't remember ever feeling before.

They stayed like that for a long moment, Ilya softening inside Shane but neither of them moving to separate. Finally, Shane carefully lifted himself off, and Ilya felt the warm trickle of his release following. The sight was obscene and possessive and perfect.

"We should clean up," Shane murmured, but he didn't move, just collapsed beside Ilya and immediately curled into his side.

"In a minute," Ilya said, tightening his arm around Shane's shoulders. "Just want to hold you for a minute."

Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya's shoulder, his hand coming to rest over Ilya's heart. The new watch caught Ilya's eye, the simple face showing it was barely past eight. They had all night. All weekend.

"That was—" Shane started, then stopped, seeming unable to find the words.

"Yeah," Ilya agreed, because he understood. Something that made the ache in his chest feel both worse and better at the same time.

"I love you," Shane said quietly, his fingers tracing idle patterns on Ilya's chest. "I know I said it earlier, but I need you to know. I really, really love you."

"I love you too," Ilya replied, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane's head. "So much it scares me sometimes."

Shane lifted his head to look at him, his blue eyes serious. "Me too. I never thought—I never thought I could feel this way about anyone. And definitely not about you."

Ilya huffed a laugh. "Thanks."

"You know what I mean." Shane's smile was soft. "You were supposed to be my rival. My enemy. And instead you're—*everything*."

The words settled in Ilya's chest, warm and right. "You are my everything too."

They lapsed into comfortable silence, their breathing evening out. Eventually they did clean up, stumbling to the shower together and getting only mildly distracted this time. By the time they made it back to bed with clean sheets, it was late, but neither of them was particularly tired.

They ended up tangled together, trading lazy kisses and softer touches. At some point Shane retrieved the chocolate cake from the kitchen, and they ate it in bed, feeding each other bites and laughing when Ilya got frosting on Shane's nose.

"This is nice," Shane said, settling back against Ilya's chest, Ilya's arms wrapped around him from behind. "Just this. Being able to be together like this."

"Is best Valentine's Day I've ever had," Ilya admitted. "Best day maybe ever."

Shane turned his head to look back at him. "Really?"

"Really." Ilya pressed a kiss to his temple. "Even better than winning Cup."

"Okay, now you're just saying things."

"No, is true." Ilya tightened his arms around Shane. "Cup was amazing, yes. But this, you, us—is better. Makes everything else worth it."

Shane was quiet for a long moment. When he spoke again, his voice was thick with emotion. "One day we won't have to hide anymore."

"You think?"

"I have to believe it. Otherwise—" Shane didn't finish the sentence.

Ilya understood. Otherwise it was too hard. Otherwise the loneliness would win. Otherwise the weight of all those team dinners and family gatherings and public events they couldn't attend together would crush them.

"One day," Ilya agreed, pressing another kiss to Shane's hair. "When we are both old and retired and no one cares anymore."

"I'll still care," Shane said softly. "When we're old and retired, I'm still going to want to make you dinner every Valentine's Day. Going to want to wear your gifts and give you mine. Going to want all of this, just—without having to hide it."

"Then we will have it," Ilya promised. "All of it. Everything we want."

Shane shifted, turning in Ilya's arms until they were face to face. He reached up, cupping Ilya's jaw. "You really believe that?"

Ilya looked at him, at this beautiful, complicated man who had somehow become his entire world. At the loon pendant still resting against his collarbone. At the love and trust and vulnerability in those impossibly blue eyes.

"I have to," he said honestly. "Because I cannot imagine my life without you anymore. So yes, I believe that one day we will have everything. Because the alternative is unacceptable."

Shane's smile was small but genuine. He leaned in, pressing a soft kiss to Ilya's lips. "Okay. Then I believe it too."

They settled back down, Shane's head on Ilya's chest, Ilya's fingers carding through his hair. Outside, February darkness had fallen over Ottawa, and somewhere out there, Ilya's teammates were probably home from their fancy dinners, posting photos on social media, living their lives openly.

But here, in this small apartment that had finally started to feel like home, Ilya had everything he needed. He had Shane in his arms, Shane in his bed, the taste of Shane's cooking still on his tongue and Shane's watch on his wrist and Shane's necklace around Shane's neck and his release still inside Shane's body.

He had this moment, this weekend, this secret life that was somehow more real than anything else.

It wasn't perfect. It wasn't everything they deserved. But it was theirs, and for now, that was enough.

"Ilya?" Shane's voice was sleepy.

"Mm?"

"Happy Valentine's Day."

Ilya smiled into the darkness, holding Shane closer. "Happy Valentine's Day, sweetheart."

And for now, for this moment, it was everything.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments and kudos always appreciated :D

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