(sub)textual evidence

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by PenAndInkPrincess

Summary

"-can't see each other again," Ilya says, looking only at Shane's hand, holding it so, so gently and stroking over Shane's skin so, so softly. The soothing feeling of it makes it very hard to focus, but Shane tries very hard to do it anyway. "I tried-we tried, but this can't happen again." It takes a moment, but Shane finally manages to make sense of the words, and he lets out a soft noise of understanding.

Ah. He's apologizing that he won't be able to see Shane in the hospital again before he leaves.

"I understand," he says, and he does. It was probably really hard for Ilya to get here even once, and it can't be very long before his plane leaves. He's sad, of course–they didn't even get to spend time together, really–but it's not like this will be the last chance they ever have to see each other. He gives Ilya his best attempt at a smile, and if it comes out a little sad, too, all Ilya does is reach out to stroke the backs of his fingers gently over his cheek.

(ilya goes through with his plan to break up with shane in the hospital) (the problem? shane is too high to understand that he's being broken up with)

Notes

what up, party people, these morons got me again

based on: https://www.tumblr.com/penandinkprincess/813115042821226496/theres-angst-in-it-too-but-im-laughing-about

See the end of the work for more notes

It's the shape of his name on Shane's lips that lets Ilya know this has to be over, even if he doesn't fully realize it when it's happening. In the moment, he's too worried, too wound up about Hollander on the ice, unmoving and then grimacing in pain, to think about anything beyond this exact, horrible moment, too busy trying to get answers from other people to fully think about what answers other people might be getting from *him*.

Or from his supposed rival, laid out on the ice and only half-conscious and clearly in pain and *still* with Ilya's name on his lips.

He doesn't know if he's ever felt more useless in his *life* than when he can't go to him, can't respond to his name the way he wants to, can't risk so much as holding his hand for fear of what it will bring down on them both.

I don't know what we are, Shane had said back in Florida, both of them naked and catching their breath, still pressed close together, *or what you might want to call it, but it's not casual, not for me, and I don't think it's casual for you, either, so maybe we just stop pretending it is.*

He didn't know how to tell him that what's between them has *never* been casual.

His biggest hint about Hollander not sleeping with other people has always been that he's apparently never caught on to that fact, that he thinks the way they touch each other is remotely close to a true no-strings-attached hookup, as if Ilya hasn't found himself tangled in strings almost since their first fucking time together. He's always known he was tying himself tighter with each text and meeting and still did it anyway because it was so easy to ignore the stupidity of it in the face of the fun of it, the relief of it, the satisfaction of Shane Hollander loose and flushed and fuck-drunk in bed with him, a version of a living legend that Ilya doubts few others can ever claim to have seen.

It was easier in the early days to at least *pretend* it was casual, even after his first time in Hollander's bed after two years of working for it, Shane eager but nervous and virginal beneath him, coaxed into relaxing with gentle words and gentler touches. It was more than just fucking for the sake of fucking, but Ilya had at least had the excuse of Shane needing it, needing someone to be sweet and careful with him, needing someone to set the standard for whoever he hooked up with in the future, to teach him that someone should *always* touch him gently, patiently, should make sure that he was relaxed and slick and *ready.* That was what Ilya had told himself in the aftermath, when the memory of receiving gentle touches in return had threatened to crack through the important lie that it was nothing more than a hookup. It wasn't that Hollander was beautiful and trusting and eager in a way that's always been addictive. It wasn't that Ilya even from the start had felt like he swallowed sunshine when he managed to say or do something to make him smile. It was just good manners, showing Hollander the ropes, setting him up for success and teaching him how to avoid assholes who wouldn't treat him right by making sure his standards were high.

(And if a part of Ilya had hoped even then that he'd set standards too high for anyone else to reach, that he'd made it so Hollander would want him and *only* him, well. He'd tried very hard to not listen to it.)

Right now, though, all of his pretend is turning out to be for nothing with the way *nothing* in his chest feels casual.

He can't do this again, he realizes with a distant, horrible kind of certainty. He can't let this go any further. He can't pretend that they can just keep sneaking around and calling it good enough, can't pretend that living a life only in hotel rooms and brief snatches of hours is sufficient. The best hours in his life have been spent with Shane Hollander, yes, but some of the worst moments in his life are happening right now with him, too, as he watches him be strapped to a stretcher and wheeled away, knowing there's nothing he can say or do that will let him go with him, knowing that it doesn't matter that Shane said his name, because this half-life they have to lead means that he can't respond to it. He doesn't even know if Shane was talking to him or calling for him, if Shane is distressed that he isn't responding, if he's in pain and scared and wondering why Ilya isn't there to tell him it's okay and-

He could die, says a voice in his head, *and you would have to find out with the rest of the world. His family will know first, will have time to feel it privately, but the best you'll get is reading a news site before the group chats do.*

The idea of it is nearly enough to make him nauseous.

He can't do this again, he knows with a finality that feels like a blow to the stomach. He can't let Shane Hollander hold any more of his heart than he already does. He can't risk this happening again, can't risk *ever* feeling this fucking useless again.

He can't watch Shane's lips move with a call he can't answer.

It has to end, he knows, and it's just one more blow for the collection at this point, sitting heavier than the rest but mingling among them. They have to call it. They have to call it *now.* It has to be over. Shane has to survive, and Ilya has to break things off with him. It's the easiest decision he's ever arrived at.

He knows already that it'll be the hardest thing he ever has to do.

*

"Ilya," Shane says when he opens his eyes at the sound of the door opening to find *exactly* who he wanted it to be in front of him. Ilya's good at that, at knowing what he wants and giving it to him. The thought combined with the fun drugs he's got happening make him feel floaty and warm and happy, and it takes him a moment to realize that Ilya doesn't look nearly as content as he does. "Hey," he says, part command and part question. When he doesn't get an answer to either, he frowns slightly. "Heeeey," he says, now extending his hand and making grabby motions.

"Shh, shhh, shhh," Ilya says, but it's easy to ignore the annoying shushing after he has Ilya's warm hand in his, solid and steady and familiar.

"Yes," he says, perfectly happy again. "Better," he says, for Ilya's benefit. He sighs once more, happy, and then tilts his head to look at Ilya. "Hi."

“Hi,” Ilya says, and his face is doing something funny, but Shane’s head feels floaty, still, and he thinks Ilya will probably forgive him if he can’t keep up. Ilya’s always so nice. He’s so mean, sometimes, too, but when it’s important, he’s always so, *so* nice. He always has been, even back at the start. He was always so patient, so kind, even back when some touches still sometimes made Shane jump or tense. He’d even stopped trying to fuck him and instead made out for him for almost half an hour one time when Shane had been extra-nervous and tense as a result. Shane had told him to just keep going, but Ilya had gently told him no, kissing his shoulder and his neck and then his collarbone as he turned him over, pressing Shane under the comfortable weight of his body until his muscles stopped being so tight.

He’s so busy reliving the memory and wondering if Ilya might want to roleplay it again that he misses that Ilya has been speaking to him, and he hurries to try and focus. It’s hard when his head is so floaty, but what Ilya is saying seems important.

“-can’t see each other again,” Ilya says, looking only at Shane’s hand, holding it so, so gently and stroking over Shane’s skin so, so softly. The soothing feeling of it makes it very hard to focus, but Shane tries very hard to do it anyway. “I tried-*we* tried, but this can’t happen again.” It takes a moment, but Shane finally manages to make sense of the words, and he lets out a soft noise of understanding.

Ah. He’s apologizing that he won’t be able to see Shane in the hospital again before he leaves.

“I understand,” he says, and he does. It was probably really hard for Ilya to get here even once, and it can’t be very long before his plane leaves. He’s sad, of course–they didn’t even get to spend time together, really–but it’s not like this will be the last chance they ever have to see each other. He gives Ilya his best attempt at a smile, and if it comes out a little sad, too, all Ilya does is reach out to stroke the backs of his fingers gently over his cheek.

*

Ilya considers that it might actually have been easier to do this without holding Shane’s hand like this for the first time, but even knowing what has to happen here, he’d been too weak to resist when it was extended to him, in motion to respond to what Shane was asking of him before he’d even consciously decided to do it.

It turns out isn’t just his smoking that’s a hard habit to quit.

“It’s dangerous,” he tells Shane’s knuckles now, knowing it’s cowardly but unable to risk seeing pain in those dark eyes. He rubs his thumb gently along the line of Shane’s and knows it’s probably cruel, a gentle touch in the midst of something ugly. “I know what we said at All Stars, but this is dangerous for both of us.” There are more words, stupid words, crowding their way into his throat and wanting to come out, like they’re desperate to get the chance before it’s too late. He doubts Shane will ever speak to him again after this, and even if he knows it’s for the best, there’s still so much he’s never said.

Especially in English.

“Yeah,” Shane agrees, exhaling heavily, and Ilya glances up only to find him looking at the ceiling, eyes a little shiny. He knows this trick, knows Hollander does that when he’s trying not to cry, and the sight feels like taking a fist to the gut, and coward that he is, he looks down again. “I know. I just wish…” He trails off, and somehow the silence is even worse. There’s so much in those three words. They aren’t even the three most dangerous words of all, but Ilya wishes, too. *God,* he fucking wishes. Shane rolls his head to look at him and Ilya looks up to find him giving him a sad little half-smile, like even in the hurt, he’s remembering the good things, too, like he’s happy to have them even if they hurt now.

Ilya loves him so much, so fiercely, that it feels like a fist closing around his throat.

“Thank you,” Shane says, squeezing his hand. “For still coming to see me.”

“Of course,” Ilya says, feeling a little guilty, honestly, given how much he’d thought about *not* doing that. Still, he’d owed Shane at least this much, telling him in person that it has to be over now. Their years together and his courage in Florida deserve that much, at least.

(And *fuck,* how Ilya wishes he could give him more.)

“Can I have a kiss?” Shane asks, looking shy and hopeful and a little flustered at his own boldness, and Ilya knows the answer should be no. They shouldn’t make this messier. He’s barely gotten himself together enough to come here and do this. A goodbye kiss is flirting with undoing this whole thing.

But he’s also never been able to tell Shane Hollander no.

With a last glance over his shoulder at the door to make sure no one is lurking, he leans in, letting go of Shane’s hand with one of his to instead rest it at his face, soft, freckled cheek in his palm. He tilts Shane’s head up gently, and it hurts, God it fucking *hurts,* to feel how willingly he goes, how easily he follows Ilya’s lead, the trust in the gesture, the full faith that Ilya won’t hurt him, won’t ask anything of him he doesn’t want to give, and it’s true, isn’t it? He would walk into oncoming traffic before he would ever hurt Shane on purpose. He can’t ask Shane to take these risks with him anymore, can’t risk hurting them both when it all turns ugly. That’s why this has to end.

…and yet kissing him still feels like coming home.

He indulges them both for longer than he should, lost in it and willing to lose Shane in it, too, but finally Shane pulls back for breath, and that lets Ilya pull back as well, even if he doesn’t go farther than the space to let them both breathe, foreheads pressed together, his eyes still closed. Something almost frantic leaps to life in his chest at the realization that he’s just kissed Shane Hollander for the last time, and he wants to press forward, wants to ask for another and another and another, wants to make this moment last as long as possible because as long as he does, it doesn’t have to be a goodbye, doesn’t have to be Ilya ripping his own heart out now instead of waiting to do it later.

With one last chaste kiss pressed to the corner of Shane’s mouth–and *fuck,* if his chest doesn’t hurt at the way Shane tries to chase it the way he always does–he makes himself step back, releasing Shane’s hand at the same time.

Shane blinks his eyes open, looking dazed and flushed and *beautiful,* and Ilya has to clench his teeth together to trap the "I love you" that wants to escape.

"I-" Shane starts, but a noise at the door has Ilya pulling back and Shane wrinkling his nose with displeasure in a way that makes Ilya want to kiss it.

Which means that perhaps the interruption from the nurse is a blessing in disguise.

"Oh no," Shane grumbles, as the woman lifts her eyebrows in surprise, glancing between them.

"Uh oh," she says, obviously teasing him. "You're not here to smother him, are you, Mr. Rozanov?"

It's a harsh but necessary reminder of why this had to end here. This is all they will ever be able to be to other people: rivals. Theirs isn't a world that could ever let them be something else, and Ilya isn't stupid enough to think that will ever change, not for them.

Not for *him.*

"No, no," he says, forcing a smile. "But good thinking." Thinking the exact thing that anyone else *would* think, never even imagining that he's running on approximately an hour of sleep caught in brief bursts between constant refreshing of news sites and Twitter threads all night. He's a rival captain here to pay his respects to someone injured by a member of his team. As far as anyone else will ever know, he was just checking an item off of a list, stopping by to be polite.

No one will ever know the way he can already feel the strain in his chest as he leaves his heart behind.

"I was just leaving," he says, even though everything in him beats a rhythm of *stay, stay, stay,* an echo of his plea hidden as teasing months ago in his house in Boston. Maybe Shane had the right idea, running away then, letting things end ugly, not bothering to try and smooth over the jagged edges of a reality in which there would never be another stolen moment together, never be another text after a hard game, never be another stupid couple of hours of pretending to be something that just can't happen.

Trying to end it neatly certainly doesn't feel any better, after all.

"Okay, bye bye," Shane all but coos, and it's only the tightness in his throat that lets him keep from smiling, especially when Hollander then clears his throat when he apparently remembers their audience, adopting a voice Ilya has *never* heard from him before that's clearly meant to sound very manly and heterosexual. "See you next season."

Next season, Ilya thinks, making his way to the door. Next season, on the ice, seeing each other face to face and knowing that there will be nothing after, a gaping space like a missing tooth between them, just the empty echo of could have been and was and never will be.

"Goodbye," he says, and in a final little display of weakness, he glances back.

Shane's smile when he does feels like a knife held to his throat, clearly putting on a brave face here, perhaps aided by painkillers or perhaps indicative of the fact that he's known it couldn't last, either. Always so logical, Shane Hollander, reading the ice like a book and acting accordingly. It's a joke, even, that Shane Hollander is a hockey psychic, always able to see where the puck will be before it is, adjusting himself accordingly before other people move exactly where he knew they would. It makes sense that he would have seen this coming even before Ilya, that he probably saw the ending even at the beginning.

The fact that he still allowed Ilya to be the one to end it this time is a kindness that makes Ilya want to call the whole thing off, to make *him* be the one to do it, to play stupid so he can play pretend, so he can make Shane be the one to call it off again, so he can go back to resenting him, because that's so much easier than missing him.

Instead, he makes himself keep walking, out the door, down the hallway.

Out of Shane Hollander's life.

*

Shane tries very hard not to be too resentful of the nurse who happened to come in at the worst possible moment. She's nice, certainly, and he's appreciative of her checking on his pain level and offering him more of "the good stuff" if he needs it.

She just also interrupted Ilya telling him goodbye when Shane knows it'll probably be a while before they get to see each other again.

When he's alone, he sighs and leans back into the pillows a little more, wishing he'd thought to ask the nurse to return his phone where it had been put out of his reach earlier for concussion protocol. She might have refused, but he could at least have sent Ilya a text to thank him again for coming to see him.

And to make plans for when they can see each other again.

His head is still wildly fuzzy from plenty of "the good stuff" he got earlier, but he knows there was *something* he wanted to tell Ilya earlier. Ilya was right when he said they wouldn't be able to see each other again on this visit–really, it was so nice of him to stop by before what must be a very soon flight at all–but Shane had something he wanted to tell him, he *knows* he did, something he was excited about even if he was also a little nervous about it. Something…

Shane jerks awake without quite knowing he was going to fall asleep, but his memory hasn't gotten any clearer. He frowns at the ceiling and then glances around, eyes falling on his phone plugged in all the way across the room. He could try to get it, maybe, text Ilya-but no, wait, Ilya will be on a plane by now, or close to it anyway.

Oh well, Shane decides with a contentment absolutely aided by the drugs his IV is so nicely giving him. He can remember and text Ilya later. Maybe he'll have remembered by then.

He falls asleep smiling, already looking forward to it.

*

The first texts come about three days after their breakup, and Ilya, weak as he is, reads them as soon as they come in, curled up in his bed, miserable and hurting, his phone screen the only light in his dark room.

I swear to God my room at my parents' place got smaller over time. There's no way it used to be this small.

Totally no pressure at all, but if you wanted to give Marleau extra practice so he won't run over totally innocent centers just minding their business, I feel like that would be fair lol.

Just kidding.

That's all for the first day, but Ilya spends his time reading back through their other texts, pressing on the bruise for the sake of feeling *something* even if it hurts. The second day, the texts don't come in until late in the evening, and he wonders if it's Hollander's doing or if his parents are trying to keep his phone from him to let his concussion get better. Either way, Ilya both wishes he'd stop and hopes he never does.

I'm seriously just kidding about Marleau. This kind of stuff happens. It probably gives me some street cred, huh?

I can't believe I just said street cred please forget I said that.

I blame the drugs. It was the drugs that made me say street cred, so you can't make fun of me for it. That should be a rule.

Also don't forget you've had to ask me about slang in English before, so I've got material if you try to chirp me about it.

🔪

The knife is a little more aggressive than I meant, but I'm still serious.

Ilya snorts, curled up on his couch now, so endeared and in love and so, *so* fucking pathetic. He doesn't respond because he knows he shouldn't, but Hollander is apparently trying to still be friends despite making the effort alone.

Day three has no texts at all, and day four is when the active attempts at getting a response start.

Hey, it's no pressure, because I know how crazy the season is right now, but are you okay?

You can talk to me, if you want. I'll listen.

You can talk in Russian again. I don't mind. I've started learning a little bit, so maybe I can understand some of it now. :)

Ilya slaps his phone down against his chest at that one, blinking at the ceiling in an effort not to cry.

He doesn't succeed.

He knows what he would say, if he took Shane up on his horrible idea. *I miss you so much it feels like I've chopped my hand off. I dreamed of you last night, and it wasn't even a sex dream. I dreamed you fell asleep on my chest, and I stroked my fingers through your hair, and we sat together in sunshine, and the way it felt even better than a sex dream is pathetic. I'm afraid that what I felt with you is something I will never feel with anyone else. I hope what I felt with you is something I will never feel with anyone else. I hope you think about me every single day. I hope you never think about me again. I hope you find someone who can love you out loud. I hope I never have to hear about it when you find them. The idea of you falling in love with someone makes me want to die. The idea of you never falling in love with someone and being lonely also makes me want to die. I want you to have someone. I want that someone to be me. I know it can't be me, and it fucking kills me, and I still want it so bad that it aches like I took a shoulder to the stomach. You're the only person I have ever loved like this.*

I think I'm going to love you until the day I die.

The texts come in. Ilya reads them. He doesn't respond. He knows they'll end eventually, knows Hollander will get sick of a one-sided conversation, knows that one day he'll check his phone and it'll have been days and weeks and months since he last got a text from Jane.

Even the idea of it makes him curl into a ball under his covers, miserable and hurting and hoping and loving and wanting.

And alone.

*

It's week three of no responses to his texts that Shane knows he needs to make a plan.

He's spun around and around in circles trying to make sense of it, trying to understand what happened, but his last memory of talking to Ilya in person is drug-fuzzy and indistinct, his most prominent memory the comfort of Ilya's hand in his and the warmth that flooded him down to his toes when Ilya kissed him. He apologized for not being able to see him at the hospital again, so Shane knows he wants to talk to him, still, and it's not like Ilya's ever been shy at texting before.

(Which a certain picture hidden in a password-locked folder on his phone can attest.)

"You okay, buddy?"

He blinks in surprise and lifts his head from its place resting against the back of the couch at the sound of his dad's voice, finding him leaning around a doorway.

"I'm fine," he says, more an automatic response than an actual answer.

“You sure?” His dad presses. “You look a little…worried. Your head hurting you again?”

“No,” he says.

“Promise?”

“Promise,” he says with a slight smile, touched by the concern even if it’s been more than slightly annoying to be babied so much when he’s a fully grown adult. “I just…” He sighs. “A friend of mine isn’t answering my texts, that’s all.”

“Hayden?” His dad asks, taking a seat on the armchair across from him.

“No,” Shane says. In thanks for swinging on Marleau after he knocked him down, Hayden has become something of a favorite of his parents, especially his mom. “He’s been checking in every day and giving me updates about the team. It’s…someone else.”

His dad nods, and doesn’t press further, and Shane is grateful for it. He knows his mom would push for more, would want answers, would probably take over trying to get his “friend” to answer the phone as a personal project.

His dad, though, just listens.

“He lost his-one of his parents recently,” he says, catching himself at the last moment. “I’m just worried about him.” It’s been his best guess, after all, for what’s been happening, delayed grief or something. Ilya’s gone silent on him before when he’s had something going on, after all.

It just doesn’t make it easier to have it happen *now.*

“Does he live nearby?” His dad asks. “We could take a little roadtrip, go check up on him.”

“No,” he says. “He’s-” He catches himself before he tries to come up with a too-elaborate lie. “-on a team in the states.” He half-waits for his dad to press, to ask for more details, but he doesn’t, taking what Shane offers and not pushing for more. It makes him bold enough to offer a little more on his own. “He goes quiet sometimes, so maybe it’s just that.”

“Maybe,” his dad agrees. “Does he usually respond quickly?”

Shane makes a non-committal noise even though the answer is yes. When he’s not going radio silent, Ilya’s always been quick to respond, something that he’s found flattering over the years.

“I’m sure he’ll answer soon,” his dad says. “He’s probably just trying to make you stay off your phone for your own good.” He smiles when he says it, but Shane still groans, sinking down into the couch.

“My head’s fine,” he complains, not for the first time.

“Uh huh,” his dad says, rising. “And it’ll be even better if you listen to your doctors *and* your mother.” His dad presses a gentle hand to his head affectionately as he passes. “Who also sent

me to tell you dinner'll be ready soon."

He makes a noise of acknowledgement as his dad leaves, looking back to his phone, which hasn't gained any new texts from Lily in the three seconds he looked away. Shane sighs and locks it, resting it against his stomach. He wants to respect it if Ilya is quiet because he's grieving, because he needs a little space and time to process, but he also can't help but think about how *he* would feel if he lost his own dad.

And about how he knows that what he would want is Ilya.

He doesn't know that he would have words to express why, doesn't know that he would even be able to ask for him, but he knows he would *want* him. If their positions were reversed and Shane had to face burying his father and then leaving his grave behind in another country along with all of the rest of his family, he knows that the *only* person he would want is Ilya, knows that the only person who would even come close to being able to help him carry the weight of that kind of grief is Ilya, knows that all he would want to do is press his face to Ilya's neck and hide in the safe darkness there, the same way Ilya did in that hotel room in Florida. He thinks about Ilya hurting like that again, trying to be brave and failing, his face crumpling, but this time with no one to climb on his lap and hold him through it. It hurts, the idea of Ilya crying with no one to pull him into a hug during it.

Refusing to let himself think about it for too long, he reaches for his tablet and pulls up airplane tickets to Boston.

*

Of the people Ilya was expecting to find at the door when he opens it after ignoring the doorbell was followed by a flurry of knocking, Shane Hollander would be at the bottom of the list.

And yet here he is, in the flesh, with a sling on one shoulder and what looks like an overnight bag on the other.

For a moment, all they do is stare at each other.

"Well," Shane finally says, and he can hear that it's an attempt at making a joke even though there's still worry clear in his expression as his eyes give Ilya a once-over, "you're not dead, at least."

Ilya blinks.

"Can I…come in?" Shane ventures, and Ilya is already moving to obey before his brain catches up, Shane slipping past him before he can get hold of himself enough to shut the door and send Hollander on his way, back out of Ilya's life where he belongs.

The way Shane immediately starts toeing out of his shoes doesn't make him feel very confident in his ability to do it now that he's already made it inside.

Nor does the way he drops his bag to the floor like he doesn't expect to be picking it up again any time soon.

"Hollander-" Ilya starts, already exhausted and heartsick all over again, but Shane has apparently rehearsed something in his head, and he straightens his shoulders, ready to deliver it.

"Look, I know we don't do this, okay? Just show up at each other's houses, I mean, but I know your schedule from when you sent it to me earlier this season, and you weren't answering any of my texts or calls-"

"Because it just makes things harder for-"

"Let me finish, please," Shane says, and there's an edge to it that's more Captain Hollander than Shane, something Ilya wishes they were in a place for him to tease about. As it is, he just gestures, hoping to at least get whatever this is over quickly. "I know what we've agreed about before," yeah, Ilya thinks wryly, they've agreed that they would no longer be having this exact kind of conversation, and yet here they are, "but maybe we were wrong. Maybe we need to just be…" He trails off with a gesture. "Braver? I guess?"

"This is a bad idea," Ilya says, feeling exhausted and reluctantly a little impressed at Shane being bold enough to do this at all. It is a bad idea, after all. This thing between them is over. They've agreed on that.

(...and yet he can't help the little thrill that runs through him at Shane still turning up to his house weeks later anyway, the dangerous way it makes him feel wanted, the tempting thought it sparks about being important enough to miss.)

"I know things are complicated," Shane ventures, stepping closer, and it's perhaps a sign that Ilya is already doomed when he doesn't back up, even when Shane reaches for his hand. He closes his eyes, accepting the touch even though he knows he shouldn't, because he's truly the most pathetic man who has ever lived and he can't make himself reject any scrap of affection Shane Hollander offers him.

"Yes," Ilya agrees, eyes still closed. "Which we've both said before. And why you shouldn't be here right now."

"I was worried at you going silent on me," Shane says softly, and Ilya shuts his eyes tighter. "And I-" His voice goes softer, a little shy. "I missed you," he says, a confession.

You'll get over it, is what Ilya *should* say. *One day you'll wake up and you'll forget you ever knew me. I'll still be pining over you until I'm dead, I think, but the pain of that will be easier if we don't pretend we could have had anything else.* He made the right call in that hospital room. He knows it. The way that Shane didn't argue then says he knows it, too. This is just a momentary lapse in judgement, a brief weakness, a growing pain into the empty space where whatever they were used to be was. Shane probably just woke up horny enough that he couldn't quite recall why doing this would be such a bad idea…and yet it's a bad idea that lasted long enough to have him here in Boston, right in front of Ilya, beautiful and worried and hopeful and-and-

He's pulling him into a kiss before he can even finish the thought, Shane going easily, his one good arm sliding around Ilya's back, holding him close, tight.

"Fuck," Shane breathes when Ilya releases him only enough to press kisses to his face, his neck, the line of his clothed shoulder. "I missed you."

"This," Ilya says between kisses, tugging Shane's shirt to the side enough to reach bare skin over his collarbone, "is *very* bad idea."

"Yeah, well," Shane says, sounding like he's smiling, "what else is new between us? Might as well just make another one at this point."

Well, when he puts it that way…

When he tugs Shane back towards his bedroom, not bothering to release him, he goes, easily.

*

"Wait," Ilya breathes against his lips, but the way the other man's hands have a firm hold on his ass is making it very hard for Shane to listen. He makes an inquiring noise, eyes still shut, and tries to pursue Ilya's mouth for a kiss, whining through his nose when he's evaded and blinking his eyes open to ask what the fuck. Ilya smiles, faintly, and grants him one chaste little peck but then pulls back. "You're hurt." The quality of his voice says Shane is supposed to be picking up on subtext, but he's not good at that on his best day.

And certainly not when Ilya is sliding his thigh out from between his, depriving him of perfectly good muscle to grind against.

"I'm good," he says, fully prepared to tackle Ilya to the floor in frustration when he pulls away again.

"You are not thinking clearly," Ilya says, but the way he rocks forward in a half-aborted motion to capture another kiss says he isn't, either.

It does let Shane know what the fucking hold up is, though.

"Just some Tylenol," he says, using his one free hand to start tugging Ilya's sweatpants down, grateful he doesn't have to try and deal with a buckle and fly. "I still have some heavy stuff for sleeping, but right now I am sober and horny and *really* need you to fuck me already."

The way the demand makes Ilya inhale sharply makes Shane grin in a way that feels a little feral, and feeling a little drunk on his own daring, he leans forward, nipping at the skin of Ilya's neck, making him flinch slightly. Shane follows it up with a kiss that is also the threat of a hickey before he pulls back.

"Now," he says, and the way Ilya's eyes go a little dark says he's picked up on the game Shane wants to play.

He always does, after all.

“That,” Ilya says, capturing Shane’s free wrist in his hand and backing him up until the backs of his legs hit the bed and make him sit, “is not very nice.”

Shane makes a considering humming noise as he lays back–Ilya slowing the descent in a gesture of care that they both don’t comment on–and tilts his head slightly, offering up a perfectly good stretch of throat.

“Maybe I’m not feeling nice,” he says, voice low.

“Mmm,” Ilya says, and the look on his face gives Shane little flurries of butterflies in his stomach, hips rocking up automatically for want of something to press against. “But you are always so *good* for me.” The sentence ends with the words said right against the sensitive skin of Shane’s throat, and he lets out a breathy little sigh when the hand not holding his own captive helpfully glides down his stomach to press against his erection. “Even when you are being very bad.”

Shane opens his mouth to say something to keep the game going, but Ilya’s fingertips slipping below the waistband of his boxers sends the words right out of his head.

And what comes after *certainly* doesn’t help him find them again.

*

Ilya watches Shane sleep and knows exactly what he should do as soon as he’s awake.

It’s just not something he thinks he has the strength for a second time.

Shane makes a soft noise in his sleep, and isn’t *that* something dangerous to know, to have the ability to learn these little things about Shane Hollander that he’s never had the time for before. They’ve dozed off together a few times in their years together, but those have always been small stretches of time, ten or twenty minutes stolen before a phone alarm went off, a precaution Shane always insisted on and one that Ilya can reluctantly admit has saved him from missing a flight a couple of times.

There’s no need for a phone alarm now, though, not on a Friday evening with nothing on his schedule except a clear weekend he had intended to use to continue feeling sorry for himself, an event that he thinks might be canceled now, with the person at the heart of him feeling sad and lonely now safely tucked up in his arms, sleep-lax and curled close, breath moving in steady flows of air across his bare chest. He’s getting hungry, but for the comfortable peace of Shane Hollander asleep on his shoulder, he can withstand it.

For Shane Hollander in his arms once more, he thinks he could probably withstand just about anything.

You shouldn’t be here, he thinks at Shane’s sleeping face, feeling every bit of love he’s tried to deny ever having swelling back to life in a rush beyond his control. A rich, professional athlete, at the top of the goddamn world, able to pick up just about anyone he wants for the night, and yet it’s only this, the most boring hockey player in the world trusting and warm in his arms, that feels *right.* He told Shane in Russian that all he ever wants is him, and that

hasn't changed even with his best efforts at trying. Nothing feels as good as this. Nothing feels as addicting as this.

Nothing feels as natural as this.

He can't do it again, he knows suddenly, with a wave of both shame and relief. He can't look into those beautiful, dark eyes a second time and rip his own heart out of his chest. He can't walk away from Shane Hollander thinking it will be the last time again. He can't give up the most beautiful thing that's ever been his, no matter how impossible the idea is that he'll get to keep it.

Though…perhaps not so impossible, if Shane is this determined to *be* kept, if their separation was so miserable for him, too, that he did what actually might be the first self-directed impulsive thing he's ever done, showing up on Ilya's doorstep with his heart in his hand, ready to offer it up because it didn't sit right anywhere else.

The thought makes him smile, and he reaches out, brushing light fingers over Shane's cheek. He doesn't know if it will wake him–doesn't know, yet, how deeply Shane Hollander sleeps–but he can't resist, fingertips tingling with the need to touch warm, soft, freckled skin. Shane turns into the touch, nuzzling like a cat, and Ilya knows in this instant that he's doomed.

It rests on his shoulders lighter than he expected.

*

Shane wakes feeling warm in a way that's half-familiar, and it takes him a moment to make sense of it, solid warmth at his back and in a line over his waist. Even before coming to a conclusion about what's going on, he feels calm, at peace, in a way he rarely does, and he drifts for just a bit longer, holding onto the gentle comfort of it.

It's the nose nudging at his jaw that gives him the final clue, and he smiles faintly as he tilts his head up enough to offer up a stretch of skin for a kiss he receives.

"If I make you food, are you going to give me handjob and then run?" Ilya asks, mouth still close to his skin, rubbing a proprietary hand over Shane's hip. "Or is only after tuna melt that this happens?"

Shane snorts, stretching and then regretting it immediately, freezing and then breathing through the sharp pain in his shoulder, eyes shut tight. Ilya's hand remains on him, but he feels it slip further up his side, gentle as snowfall but present in a way that makes the pain feel a little quicker to fade.

Still, when he opens his eyes and tilts his head back to meet Ilya's, he gives him a look.

"That's your fault," he says, a little strained, still. "For being an asshole to me."

Ilya rolls his eyes, but his touch remains gentle.

"I am just asking to clarify if I should bring lube with me this time or not."

“Shut up and go make food,” Shane says, smiling faintly. “I'm hungry.”

“Hm,” Ilya says, dubious tone in contrast to the warmth Shane can see in his eyes, “now I am not so sure I *want* to feed you. Maybe you should ask nicely.”

“Please shut up and go make food,” Shane says, grin widening.

“So much for polite Canadian manners,” Ilya says with a shake of his head.

Still, he leaves him with a soft kiss to his injured shoulder.

*

Dinner isn’t anything fancy, just pasta with jarred pesto and chicken breast, but Ilya feels strangely flustered as he makes it, as if he’s in tryouts for something. He’s using the brand of protein pasta he first saw in Shane’s kitchen years ago and bought out of curiosity afterwards, and he feels oddly embarrassed about it, this little thing that’s a tangible way Hollander’s life has colored his. It feels like an admission, somehow, caring enough to notice what pasta brands Shane Hollander likes enough to have three boxes of in his pantry at one time, and then being curious enough to purchase a box of his own, knowing he would think about Shane when he ate it.

“Oh,” Shane says, eyes lighting up with recognition when he sits down on the same bar stool as before, freshly showered and dressed, and sees the box on the counter, reaching for it and spinning it on one corner to look at the front. “You like this brand, too?”

I only know I like it because you liked it first, Ilya thinks but doesn’t say, flipping the chicken over in the pan before he glances back with measured casualness.

“Is pretty popular pasta, I think,” he says, trying to strike a balance between dismissive but not overtly rude. “I am surprised you don’t just eat sad plain chicken and kale smoothies all day.”

“Asshole,” Shane says, but it’s warm, and he’s smiling, and he looks comfortable in a way that says he *feels* comfortable here in Ilya’s home, and the sight of it is too much, forcing Ilya to look back to the stove before he says or does something embarrassing. “My dad sent me some when it first came out years ago. I used to eat this chickpea pasta stuff that was honestly pretty fucking gross. My dad had some when I was staying with them a couple of years ago, and he said it tasted like sadness.” Shane laughs at the memory, and even without looking back, Ilya smiles at the sound and the offered memory both. “It smells good, whatever you’re making,” he offers.

“Is just chicken,” Ilya says. “Nothing fancy.”

“Need help with anything?” Shane asks, and Ilya catches his impulse to say no, to keep Shane where he is, a stupid urge overcoming him, the tempting idea of Shane Hollander moving around his kitchen like he has a right to.

“Mm,” he says with faux-consideration. “You are okay with no vegetables with dinner, or will this keep you up all night with guilt?”

He laughs when a dishcloth hits the back of his head in answer, sending it back with only a half-glance over his shoulder.

“Fine,” he says with faux-resignation, tilting his head to the fridge. “See what you can find so you can be good boy who always eats his vegetables.”

“You’re such a dick,” Shane says, veering close enough to bump shoulders with him and grinning with delight when he immediately turns to make returning the blow impossible without hitting his injured arm, newly returned to its sling.

“You play dirty,” he tells Shane, kicking his ankle gently before he steps away.

The grin he gets in response before Shane focuses on digging around in his produce drawer is so beautiful that he has no choice but to kiss him about it before he returns to making dinner.

*

Dinner is good, pasta with pesto and some only-mildly-sad-looking zucchini dug up from Ilya’s fridge and sauteed in an amount of oil that involved a wrestling match over control of the bottle, Ilya winning only because Shane was limited to one arm.

Even better is eating it on the couch together, sitting close enough that his knee touches Ilya’s thigh when he sits criss-cross to have a more stable surface to rest his plate on.

“Give,” Ilya directs after watching Shane struggle to cut his chicken with one hand, setting his plate aside to take Shane’s.

“I can do it,” Shane protests, but not enough to try and keep custody of his dinner.

“Badly,” Ilya says dryly, and Shane nudges him with his knee, feeling strangely shy at Ilya doing something like cutting his food up for him. It’s…intimate, in a way that Shane thinks probably shouldn't be so flustering when Ilya has literally been inside him before.

And yet watching Ilya slice up his chicken into bite-size pieces still has him nearly squirming with pleased embarrassment.

“I should feed you, too?” Ilya asks when he’s done, and the smirk on his face as he tries airplaning a fork to Shane’s face thankfully takes some of the edge off of the embarrassment.

“You’re an asshole,” he says, pulling his head back and laughing when Ilya still tries to pursue him, grinning. “Stop, you’re going to poke my fucking eye out.” Ilya persists until Shane takes a bite with a roll of his eyes, reaching his hand up to grab the fork and keep it.

“‘Thank you, Ilya,’” Ilya teases, returning Shane’s plate to his lap and reclaiming his own.

“For what?” Shane asks when he’s swallowed. “Being annoying? I’m pretty sure that’s your natural state.”

Ilya tsks, taking a bite of his own food.

“I fuck you *and* feed you,” Ilya says, mouth half-full, “and you treat me like this? I am going to tell your mother on you for having no manners.”

“She’d understand,” Shane says, settling a little deeper in the couch and feeling something warm and content settle in his chest when Ilya doesn’t move away at him pressing a little closer with the motion.

“Like she understood you flying to Boston?” Ilya asks, and there’s another question under that one, obvious enough for Shane to pick up.

“She thinks I’m in Pittsburgh, actually,” he says, pausing to take another bite and swallow. “One of our rookies from a couple of years ago lives there now, and I said he asked me to help him with finding a house to buy since I’m out for the season anyway.”

“And she believed you?” Ilya sounds insultingly surprised. “When you are world’s worst liar?”

“Fuck off,” Shane says, though he knows it’s not entirely an exaggeration. “She knows how much I like touring houses, and I think she thinks I was just looking for an excuse to get a break from being fussed over.”

“You should be nicer to her,” Ilya says, and there’s a strange note to the teasing edge of his voice that Shane doesn’t know how to read. “Let her fuss. You probably scared her.”

“Hm,” Shane says, trying and failing to work out what meaning Ilya is hiding under the words and wondering if he should just ask. Before he can decide, Ilya speaks again, changing the subject slightly.

“Should I be flattered?” He asks, and his teasing is easier now. “Honest Shane Hollander lying to his parents just to come see me?”

“Maybe I just wanted to fuck you,” Shane teases, but there’s a quick flicker on Ilya’s face that says he might actually have thought that, too, and trying to tap into his own courage from the hotel room back in Florida, he reaches out, resting his hand on Ilya’s knee and squeezing gently. “I was worried about you,” he admits.

Immediately, Ilya seems enraptured with his pasta. Shane decides to throw him a bone and take a step back to slightly less emotionally-charged territory than grief.

“And I missed you,” he admits, offering up something vulnerable of his own. “With how stuff ended at the hospital…” He trails off with a shrug. “We didn’t really get to talk, not really.”

“Hm,” Ilya says. “And you think there is more to say?”

His tone is off, and Shane frowns slightly, tilting his head in confusion, but Ilya still isn’t looking at him and thus can’t read the silent question.

“A lot more, yeah,” Shane says slowly, trying to figure out what Ilya wants him to say. “I know what we said in the past–both of us–but this is important to me.” He hesitates, just slightly, and then decides to be brave. If he can look into his mom’s eyes and lie about being here in the first place, he can suck it up and be honest with Ilya Rozanov. *“You’re* important to me, Ilya. I don’t want to pretend that isn’t true anymore.”

Ilya swallows, hard, resting his fork on his plate with a painful amount of care.

“That doesn’t make this any less of a terrible idea,” he tells the flooring ahead of him.

Shane rolls his eyes. As if he isn’t fully aware that lying to his mom and risking being seen flying into Boston when he has no reason to be here isn’t a risk. Feeling bold off of his own annoyance, he reaches out, turning Ilya’s head to make him look at him.

“I don’t care,” he says. Beneath his fingertips, Ilya’s jaw tightens slightly, eyes moving like he’s studying every millimeter of Shane’s face. Shane smiles, slightly, trying to be as easy to read as possible. He’s tired of playing games, tired of pretending that his favorite place in the world isn’t at Ilya’s side, tired of playing emotional chicken with the one person on earth that he thinks he might be able to trust in a way he’s never trusted anyone else before. “It’s worth it.” And it is. Even if he’s probably only got about 72 hours here before his mom will start playing with the idea of reporting him missing, it’s worth it.

Any time he can get with Ilya is always worth it.

“You had to lie to your own mother to even be here,” Ilya says, voice rough. “This is how you want to live? Lying all the time? To everyone?”

“I don’t want to lie, no,” Shane says honestly. “But maybe…maybe one day we won’t have to.”

“‘One day,’” Ilya repeats with a huff that is probably supposed to be a laugh. “Very specific.”

“Fuck off,” Shane says fondly, squeezing Ilya’s face gently just to be annoying before he releases him. “I don’t have all the answers, okay? But I want this. I want you.” His breath catches for a second at his own honesty, and he swallows against the pressure in his throat that is trying to get him to shut up, to shield himself, to-

He makes a soft, surprised noise when Ilya pulls him into a kiss so good he feels his toes curl, glad when Ilya pulls back just enough to save them both from ending up with laps full of food by all but tossing their plates onto the coffee table.

It *also* ever so helpfully frees up Ilya’s lap for Shane to climb right on, Ilya steadying him with a hand at his hip on the side hindered by a sling.

“We’ll figure it out,” Shane says, voice a little shaky for want of air when he’s finally released from another kiss, sitting back on the firm cushion of Ilya’s thighs, forehead still pressed to his. “Okay? We’ll…figure something out.”

“Okay,” Ilya agrees, and pressed together like they are, Shane feels it when a tear escapes, dripping onto his nose after sliding onto Ilya’s cheek. He moves enough to kiss Ilya’s closed eyes, his nose, the space between his eyebrows. There are three little gigantic words trapped behind his teeth, and it’s an effort to keep them contained, but this moment feels heavy enough without dropping another bomb into it.

“We’re a team,” he says. “I’ve got your back, and you’ve got mine. We’ll figure the rest out as we go.”

“Okay,” Ilya repeats again, voice rougher this time, and when he tucks his face to the curve of his throat, Shane lets him, bringing his hand up to palm the back of Ilya’s head, fingers sinking into soft curls and rubbing there gently.

By the time Ilya releases him, their food is cold, and Shane lets him have the excuse of throwing their plates into the microwave to go wipe his face off, accepting his with a smile when Ilya returns, though he gives him a look when he realizes he’s also been given another dusting of parmesan that he absolutely didn’t ask for.

“Your plate looked sad,” Ilya says, catching the look and sitting back down next to him, closer this time. “It was depressing me.”

“Asshole,” Shane grumbles, leaning more fully against him and taking a bite.

It’s delicious in a way Shane will *never* admit to.

*

Like all of their stolen moments, Ilya knows that this time together has an end date. Shane has taken a few calls to throw his mother off of the trail, and Ilya has even helpfully scrolled through Zillow listings from Pittsburgh, PA on his laptop for details to feed Yuna Hollander since Shane doesn’t currently have a free hand to do so while on the phone. It feels stupid and ridiculous.

It feels like more fun than he’s had a long, long time.

He gets teasing comments on Monday when he barely lingers in the locker room after practice, but the pointed questions and raised eyebrows and suggestive smiles roll off of him easily. Let them tease him about what woman he’s taking out tonight. Let them all tease him about being too good to go a bar with them. The closest they even get to the truth with their teasing is when Cliff brings up Montreal Jane, slapping Ilya hard on the shoulder when he’s smiling at his phone over being told to buy more dishwasher pods on his way home, which is frankly more embarrassing than if he’d been perusing nudes around an audience.

“So Jane forgave you?” Cliff asks, shaking him and grinning when Ilya punches him on the arm, tucking his phone away in his pocket.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Ilya says dismissively, zipping his bag shut and lifting it to his shoulder.

“Yeah, okay,” Cliff scoffs. “You stop talking to Jane and start acting like a fucking demon, and now you’re suddenly all goofy smiles at your phone again?”

“Only thing that is ‘goofy’ is your face, Marleau,” he shoots back, not his best work, but he’s too happy to come up with anything better. He rolls his eyes and starts heading for the exit. “Go fuck yourself.”

“I’d say the same back, pal,” Cliff calls after him. “But I’ll leave that to Jane.”

“Tell her we send her our love!” St-Simon adds, prompting all of the stupid idiots he works with to pile on, yelling all of their gratitude for Jane at him to pass on.

“You are all doing bag skates until you die,” he yells over his shoulder.

“Tell Jane to make you change your mind!” Connors yells, not sounding remotely afraid.

Ilya shakes his head and makes for the parking lot.

He has an errand to run before he goes home, after all.

*

Shane knows he’s reaching the end of his excuse’s limits. His mom was already doubtful about the story, and that certainly isn’t going to improve with time.

Still, it feels a particular kind of shitty to be perusing plane tickets while resting on the couch with his back against Ilya’s chest, Ilya’s chin hooked over his uninjured shoulder and his hand holding up the tablet so Shane can scroll, the teamwork just making it feel worse that this beautiful little stretch of time together–the longest they’ve ever had–has to end soon. He knows Ilya feels it too from the hand at his hip, flexing and releasing slowly, rhythmically.

“Is this one too early?” Shane asks, picking a flight and pulling up details to check.

“Mm,” Ilya says, pressing his lips to Shane’s shoulder before he actually looks at the screen. “Is your flight.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to wake you up too early if I don’t have to,” he says, and there’s a certain amount of pleasure to it, having to arrange his schedule around someone else, having to account for a “we” instead of just a “me.”

“You could always just stay,” Ilya says, tone clearly teasing. “You can borrow one of my jerseys, play for Boston. They will notice when you are so much slower than me, but-” He laughs when Shane elbows him, but he also lays his head against Shane’s shoulder. “I will miss you,” he confesses.

“I’ll miss you, too,” Shane says, tilting his head back enough to rest it against Ilya’s.

As openings go for what he remembered never asking Ilya at the hospital, well…

“I have a cottage,” he starts slowly, trying to remember how this went in his head when he rehearsed it before the accident.

Ilya makes a noise that sounds like a question, and Shane leans back against him a little more firmly, pressing his wrist down to make him set the tablet down so Shane can hold his hand instead, feeling a little braver with it in his.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but it’s super private. You could come up and stay with me for a week or even two, if you want.”

“You want me to come stay with you?” Ilya asks, and Shane feels a little frustrated by how neutral his voice has gone, especially when he can’t easily try to read his facial expression when he still has his head tucked against his shoulder. Fuck it. Honestly has gotten them this far.

“Yeah,” he says. “I really do. I know that Russia is…complicated, for you, and I know you said your family was…” He doesn’t know how to finish that sentence in a way that might not be either insulting or risk poking at painful things. He abandons it and moves on. He turns back slightly, trying to ask for a kiss to steady his nerves, but Ilya holds him resolutely still, also hiding his face in the process.

Asshole.

Shane stretches enough to press a kiss to Ilya’s hairline, ignoring the twinge it sends through his shoulder. When he speaks, his voice is softer.

“No one to bother us. No one to hide from. It could just be the two of us. Together.”

“You want that?” Ilya asks. “Me at your super secret cottage?”

Shane huffs a laugh, squeezing Ilya’s hand under his gently.

“I mean I did a whole TV thing about it, so I don’t know how secret it is,” Ilya snorts, and he smiles, pressing their heads together a little firmer, “but it’s my favorite place. You’d also get to be my first guest who isn’t my parents, so you’d get to win at that,” he teases.

“Hm,” Ilya says, sounding fond. “You are not having big parties every weekend?”

The very idea of a party happening in his cottage is enough to make him feel a little sick with stress, but he doesn’t mention it, knowing it would give Ilya far too much teasing material.

“No,” he says. “It’s just for me up there, and it…it could be for you, too. If you want. It could be our place.” He’s edging close to words too big for what they are, he knows, but he wants Ilya to know that there’s a place for him each summer if he wants it, a place where he doesn’t have to deal with family that makes him sound stressed and angry and sad. He wants Ilya to have a place that’s comfortable, a place where he knows he’ll always be welcome, a place where he doesn’t have to be anything but himself.

Even in his head, though, that all sounds a little intense.

“You are just trying to have dick on call, maybe. Inviting me up so you don’t have to go all summer without sex,” Ilya teases, and for a second, Shane considers playing along. They haven’t had many big conversations between them, and he’s been told before that he’s too intense sometimes, too focused, too single-minded.

Ilya, though, has never complained about that.

“I mean, I won’t say no to sex with you ever,” he says honestly, and he feels Ilya’s grin when it’s pressed to his neck. He smiles back, leaning into the touch when it turns into a kiss. “But it’s not just that. It’s my favorite place, and you’re-” His voice catches slightly, the words he’s about to say making him feel shy, but he makes himself continue. He already booked a flight and came to his house when he didn’t respond to texts. He’s not sure he can get much clingier than that. “You’re my favorite person. I want-”

But what he wants gets cut off when Ilya twists himself around him enough to kiss him, cutting the words off.

Shane doesn’t complain.

*

Ilya can't deny that it's scratching at painful memories, Shane Hollander on his lap, on his couch, and his hand around both of their cocks, mouth pressed close, too wound up to kiss and thus mostly just trading air with each other. It ended badly, the last time they were in this position.

Somehow, though, Ilya has higher hopes for this round.

“Fuck,” he groans, rocking his hips up into the pleasure. It's not even that good, really, too dry and not nearly the dirtiest thing they've gotten up to together, but it still feels electric, Shane seemingly all around him, blocking out everything that isn't dark eyes and freckles and warm skin and a firm, familiar hand. He cups Shane's face in his hand, pressing him close enough to kiss, and he swallows the beautiful little noise Shane makes when he pushes his hand aside to replace it with his own.

“B-bossy,” Shane pants, now-free hand moving to Ilya’s hair, sinking in and then holding on for the ride.

The little pinpricks of pain just make the pleasure keener.

“You like it,” he teases, just as breathless, and the airy little whimper he gets when he gets a palmful of ass and pulls enough to start slipping his fingers towards sensitive territory is more of a confirmation than a yes would have been.

“Ilya,” Shane breathes, and he thinks he might actually black out for a moment, coming to with Shane clinging to him with one arm, pressed tight, clearly close.

“A-again,” Ilya pants, and Shane, always so eager to please, obeys him immediately.

“Ilya,” he says, turning his head enough to breathe it right into his ear.

“Again,” he grits out, barely holding on and not sure he'll survive it but wanting it anyway.

“Ilya,” Shane says again, a plea in his voice. “Ilya, Ilya-” His obedience breaks when he comes, hips stuttering as he spills over Ilya’s hand, shuddering through the pleasure and clinging tight the way he always does, holding tight enough that Ilya thinks he's going to have bruises in the shape of fingertips the way he has before.

As ever, he'll wear them with pleasure.

“Shane,” he breathes into the hinge of his jaw, pressing kisses to every bit of skin he can reach. Shane whines through his nose, edging into over-sensitive when Ilya doesn't release him, and the sound pushes him over the final inch, groaning as he finds his own release, nosing at Shane blindly until his lips are in front of his own. He feels Shane smile into the kiss, holding tight, pressed close and clearly not planning on letting go any time soon.

He smiles back.

*

“So,” Shane says into the heavy, humid silence afterwards, both of them collapsed together and ignoring the mess between them, “is that a yes?”

Ilya laughs and then gets his fingertips under Shane's chin to tilt him into another kiss, this one sweet, gentle.

“Yes,” he says against Shane's lips.

“Yes?” Shane repeats, and he can feel it when Ilya smiles before kissing his nose, his cheek, his jaw, trailing his way up to his ear and pressing a kiss to it, too, before he speaks, voice warm.

“Yes.”

*

Even three years into it, there are moments Ilya re-remembers that he’s a husband now and is immediately hit by the need to pinch himself just to confirm that he’s indeed not dreaming.

Right now, the sleepy, content weight of Shane against him and the warm metal of the ring on Ilya’s hand is proof enough. He smiles faintly, bowing his head enough to kiss the top of Shane’s, resting his hand there afterwards and his chin on top, eyes closing to enjoy the moment. There are a thousand different ways they might have never ended up here, he knows, a thousand different choices that could have led them down different paths. If there are indeed infinite universes like David was telling him about at dinner the other day after reading an article about the idea, then there are ones where other Ilyas are still alone, searching forever for the other half of their hearts without even knowing what they’re looking for. There are infinite other Ilyas who will never know the comfort of Shane Hollander against them, warm and reassuring and *his*. He was almost one of them, he knows. He *would*

have been, if Shane hadn't been determined enough to get them back together all those years ago.

"I'm glad you didn't listen to me," he says, not meaning to say it out loud but not taking it back when he does. Shane makes a sleepy noise and lifts his head, yawning through his nose and then frowning in confusion, head tilting slightly in question.

"What did I not listen to you about?" He asks. "You're the one who wanted me to sit on your-"

"No," Ilya says with a laugh, pulling him up into a kiss and then settling him a little more securely over his chest, enjoying the weight. He might not get *quite* as much pleasure out of being squished against the mattress as Shane does, but there is still a certain amount of reassurance to his husband's body over his. "Not that. You always listen *very* well in bed, kotenok." He winks flirtatiously and then smiles at the eyeroll it gets him, so, *so* fucking happy, and pulls him into another sweet kiss, almost distracting himself into forgetting his own point until Shane pulls back a bit.

"What didn't I listen to?" Shane prompts, yawning again, clearly ready to fall asleep. Ilya traces gentle, affectionate fingers over the familiar curve of his cheek before brushing his hair back behind his ear.

"When I said we should break up," he says with a smile equal parts chagrin and fondness. "And-"

His breath leaves him in a rush when Shane uses him as leverage to sit up sharply, knee finding his stomach in his haste to get upright.

"Blyat," Ilya curses, rubbing at his stomach and searching Shane's face for what has him so suddenly alarmed.

"When the *fuck* did you say we should break up?" Shane demands, incredulous.

Ilya stares back.

"Ilya," Shane presses. "When the *fuck* did you say we should-"

"After the accident with Marleau," Ilya says, slowly and clearly, stunned that Shane could have possibly forgotten it. He knows that the accident itself is fuzzy in Shane's memory because of the concussion, but-

"When?" Shane demands. "I was at your house three fucking weeks after that happened, and you fucking *certainly* didn't say it then."

"When we-" Ilya cuts himself off, pushing himself more upright as well, shoving pillows behind his back with an elbow, annoyed when they get in his way. He stares at Shane, trying to understand if this is some strange prank, but Shane looks both upset and pissed in a way that says this is *very* genuine. "Shane, we broke up in the hospital," he says. "You-I said we should break up, and you agreed."

"No the fuck I did not," Shane says, arms crossing in a way that makes him look *terrifyingly* like his mother.

"Yes, you did," Ilya insists, wondering if he's having an extremely strange dream right now. "I said we should break up. Is why I stopped responding to-"

"That's why you tried ghosting me again?" Shane demands. "You mother*fucker."*

Ilya lifts his hands in confused supplication.

"You stopped texting me then because you thought you broke up with me?"

"I did not *think* I broke up with you," Ilya says, annoyed now. "I *did* break up with-no, no, *we* broke up. I said it, but you agreed."

"With *what,* Ilya?" Shane asks, incredulous.

"With breaking up!" Ilya cries, arms going wide, confused and frustrated. "I said we should break up, and then you agreed, and then I thought we were over until you showed up on my doorstep because you changed your mind."

"I didn't change my fucking mind, Ilya! We didn't break u-well, *I* didn't break up." Now Shane looks insulted. "Apparently *you* wanted to break up and then did it all on your own."

"No," Ilya says, wrapping his legs around Shane when he tries to hop off of the mattress and storm off. "No, *stay.* No walking away. You agreed with me. It was mutual break up."

"Ilya, you came-okay," Shane drops his head into his hands and groans, scrubbing his palms over his face quickly before looking up. "Ilya, I was on a *lot* of drugs, but I think I would remember you breaking up with me. I'm pretty sure that's a big enough thing for me to *remember it happening."*

"Apparently not," Ilya says dryly, having to hold tight when his tone makes Shane try to pull away again. "What the fuck did you think I was doing, then?"

"Telling me you couldn't come see me again before you left," Shane says, like he's stating something very obvious. "The details are a little fuzzy, but you said something about it being dangerous and you couldn't come see me again, and, yeah, that made sense. You-*wait,"* he appears to remember something that makes him even more pissed. "You broke up with me and then kissed me anyway? You fucking *asshole."*

"You asked me to!" Ilya defends. "It was last kiss before we wouldn't see each other again."

"And you think I would *want* to make out with you if I knew you were breaking up with me?" Shane asks with disbelief. "Did you not even think for a second, 'Wow, he seems to be taking this well'?"

…well…now that Shane mentions it…

Replaying the interaction now with a new perspective, Ilya is starting to regret ever bringing this whole thing up.

“You thought I was just ghosting you?” He asks after a moment, realizing something important now. “You really think I would do that to you again when you already said before that it bothered you?” He’s insulted on Shane’s behalf, honestly. If Shane had thought he was being a dick about something Shane had already said hurt his feelings, he should have been angry, not ready to jump into bed with him as soon as he got in the door. “Shane, if you thought I was doing that, you should have told me to go fuck myself, not-”

He startles slightly when Shane starts laughing, bowing forward and resting his head on Ilya’s shoulder.

“Are you actually about to have a grudge with past you?” Shane manages between laughs.

“Yes, on behalf of past *you,”* Ilya says, bringing a hand up to rest it on the back of Shane’s neck, squeezing affectionately. “Past you should have had higher standards for how I was allowed to treat you.”

Shane snorts, and Ilya uses his other hand to pinch his hip in reprimand.

“I’m serious,” he insists. “You had already asked me not to do that to you again. If you thought I was-”

“Ilya,” Shane says, sounding fond. “I thought you were still just grieving too much to text me back. I didn’t know you were doing it because you didn’t want to talk to me. That’s why I went to Boston. I didn’t want you to have to mourn all by yourself. I thought you might, I don’t know, need someone with you.” He pulls back, cupping Ilya’s face in his hands. Ilya rests his own hands on Shane’s wrists, squeezing lightly. When he speaks again, his voice is warm, and he squishes Ilya’s face between his palms affectionately. “You’re so fucking stupid.”

“Hey,” Ilya protests, but his heart isn’t in it. “Was two person mistake, Hollander. You are at fault, too.”

“Oh, I don’t fucking think so,” Shane says, still smiling. “I was on drugs, dude. What the fuck was *your* excuse?”

The question sobers him a bit.

“Seeing the love of my life hurt right in front of me,” he says softly, and Shane’s face goes a little more serious. He uses his hold on Shane’s arms to pull him into a kiss, Shane going easily. “You called for me, and I couldn’t get to you. They wouldn’t have let me, and the cameras…” He trails off, the memory of that feeling still enough to make his chest feel tight, even years later.

“Hm,” Shane says, releasing his face only to pull him into a hug, sighing into the contact and softening a bit. Ilya leans back, taking Shane with him, tucking his face against his shoulder.

“Well,” Shane says, reaching out and touching Ilya’s wedding band thoughtfully, “we at least won’t have that problem again.”

“Oh?” Ilya asks dryly. “I will be *allowed* to leave the ice next time when my husband is hurt? You will let me do that? This is news to me.”

“It was just a dislocated shoulder, Ilya,” Shane says in a tone that means he’s rolling his eyes. “And Montreal was up by a point with-”

“Yes, and you still yelled at me to ‘get your fucking ass back on the ice, Rozanov, or we aren’t fucking for a *month’* when I tried to go to hospital with you instead of finishing the game,” Ilya says, digging his fingers into Shane’s ribs just to make him flinch.

“Yeah, and then we *won,”* Shane says, sounding smug. “So I was right to make you stay.”

“No, that does not mean that you-” Ilya catches himself before they have to have that argument again, shaking his head. He kisses Shane’s temple, annoyed and fond in equal measure. “Not important. I just didn’t think it was possible, you and me.”

“Hm,” Shane says, “and look at us now.”

Ilya smiles, holding him a little tighter.

“Yes,” he agrees, “look at us now.”

They’re quiet for a moment, and then he hears Shane huff a laugh.

“I can’t believe you tried to break up with me when I was in a fucking hospital bed. You’re such an asshole.”

“I can’t believe you just let me ignore you for three weeks,” Ilya shoots back. “You have terrible standards.”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees amiably enough that Ilya is immediately suspicious, “just look at who I marr-”

He cuts off with a laugh when Ilya flips him onto his back, and their conversation devolves into a wrestling match. They’re evenly matched when Shane isn’t choosing to lose, and by the time he manages to pin Ilya to the mattress, flushed and smiling and looking a little feral in a way that makes Ilya nearly *desperate* to kiss him, they’re both breathing hard.

Ilya is grinning so wide his face hurts.

“Breaking up with me,” Shane grumbles, shaking his head but still smiling while he does. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees, “ridiculously in love.”

Shane groans and reaches for a pillow to press over his face in disgust. Still, when Ilya pulls him into a kiss, he goes easily.

“I’m glad you un-broke us up,” Ilya says when they pull apart for breath, now resting on their sides.

Shane reaches out, brushing Ilya’s hair back and then resting his hand against his neck, thumb rubbing at his jaw affectionately.

“Me, too,” he says, voice soft.

They fall asleep between one kiss and the next, curled up together.

Right where they belong.

End Notes

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