

78 Seconds

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78 Seconds

by [Felifiran](#)

Summary

“What -“ Ilya started, his voice shaky and wet with blood. The movement made Shane’s hand slip, another gush of blood spurting across his fingertips.

“Shut up,” Shane bit in return, fraught. “Shut the fuck up.”

Or: At the Montreal - Boston game in April 2017, it is Ilya who is injured instead of Shane.

Notes

Heated Rivalry has me (and the rest of the world) in a chokehold at the moment.

For anyone waiting on updates on my Aralas WIPs, they are in progress, I promise <3

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

Montreal

April 2017

Ilya's going to be unbearable later, Shane thought to himself, watching from the bench as Ilya cruised past the Montreal defence one more, slotting the puck into the net for his hat-trick goal. Ilya was in top form, and it was both infuriating and mesmerizing to see up close. They were not even out of the second period, and it was already getting embarrassing, an itch on Shane's spine that he'd never be able to scratch.

A tap on his shoulder, and Shane hopped onto the ice too, sailing in for yet another face-off. He steeled himself as he approached; Ilya was beautiful, this close, even with a stupid fucking smirk on his face.

“Hollander, you make me sad. I came for battle, and yet you move slower than Scott Hunter,” Ilya chirped, and then the puck dropped, and Ilya span it to his left wing, leaving Shane stranded in his wake. Shane powered forward, hot on Ilya’s heels, but JJ was there too, bodychecking Ilya to throw him off balance.

Normally, it would have been nothing. Ilya rolled off heavier checks every week. But this time -

His skate caught on something. Unseen.

The check threw him sideways, awkward, falling at a diagonal, rolling as he went until he landed supine, head forced unnaturally back. It threw him straight into the path of Ulander.

Shane had the perfect view as the Montreal rookie jumped to clear Ilya, but his timing was off, he was too late in getting off the ice.

He didn’t make it high enough.

His blades kissed the surface of Ilya’s helmet and neck, and for a moment, Shane thought they had gotten lucky, for Ilya’s face was more outraged than pained, and he didn’t make a noise.

Then came the blood.

A thin line of scarlet, painted like a red ribbon across his neck. Time stopped for a moment; then sped up. The blood gushed, all of a sudden, all at once.

Shane arrived at the scene first, falling to his knees, gloves and helmet thrown aside, the hours of first aid training his mother had put him through kicking in almost without thought - before there was even time to panic. His hand wrapped around Ilya’s neck, pressure on the wound, until he felt a pulsing gush emerging from a tiny point on one side. He focussed his fingers there, cutting off the flow with blood-stained hands, slippery and wet.

“What -“ Ilya started, his voice shaky and wet with blood. The movement made Shane’s hand slip, another gush of blood spurting across his fingertips before he plugged the hole once more.

“Shut up,” Shane bit in return, fraught. “Shut the fuck up.”

“Shane -“

“Just breathe,” he replied, looking Ilya in the eyes. He focused on his own breath, breathing intentionally through pursed lips, which Ilya reluctantly copied. Ilya's irises had been swallowed by the black of his pupils, and Shane couldn't tell if it was panic or confusion that made them so. Either way, it was an alien look for him to wear.

He's going to die, Shane thought desperately, his own breath catching, the air suddenly too hot, in spite of the ice below them. *I'm going to watch him bleed to death*. Shane held his hands as still as possible, desperately hoping that it was only the one artery or vein nicked. *Where the fuck is the medic?* It was an unfavourable thought - only seconds could have passed, though it felt like a lifetime.

Shane wished he had better words of comfort, or was brave enough to say *I love you, don't leave me* out loud. “You’ll be ok. You’ll be fine,” he promised instead. The cacophony of noise around them was all greyed out by the pulse of his own heart, which beat in time with the pulse he felt in Ilya’s neck. He glanced down at the wound, a mess of blood, then away sharply, back to Ilya’s face.

Ilya’s gaze had grown soft, the panic draining out. He was looking at Shane as if there was something he might wish to say, the words caught in a net. “Stay awake, Ilya. Stay awake,” Shane pleaded, and wished he could pet Ilya’s hair, offer him a little comfort, but his hands couldn’t move from their vital place on his neck.

Ilya’s gaze dropped a little, looked at Shane’s lips. *He wants a kiss*, Shane realized, considered closing the gap and kissing Ilya, letting him know he was precious, audience be damned. Ilya looked him in the eye again, and Shane knew Ilya could see the tears gathering there, no matter how Shane tried to keep them at bay. “Please. For me. Stay awake.” His voice was cracking into pieces, no matter how hard he tried to hold it together.

“Hollander?” A voice said, close, loud enough to break through the barrier of noise. Shane looked up to see a paramedic on the other side of Ilya, her hands hovering over his. “I’m going to take over from you, okay? I need you to release your hand on the count of three.” Shane nodded, and she smiled at him, encouraging. He looked down - Rozanov’s eyes were fluttering, and Shane's heart stuttered. “One, two, three.”

Shane watched as he let go, the blood gushing again, Ilya gasping a wet breath, but then the paramedic’s hands replaced his, plugging the blood flow. Almost instantly, more paramedics were there, transferring Ilya to a gurney, practiced hands working in ways Shane could only dream of. One of Ilya’s hands lifted off the bed, and for a moment Shane swore the gloved hand was reaching out for him.

Then, like a marionette, the strings fell, and the hand flopped down.

Shane watched the gurney speed off the ice, out of the doors. There was an ambulance on standby for all matches, and the hospital was minutes away; Ilya could not have better odds.

Still. They were not good enough.

I should have kissed him. I should run after the ambulance and kiss him now, if it is not already too late, Shane thought.

And yet Shane stayed on his knees, the ice around him damp with blood.

Ambulance sirens wailed, and then, as they faded into the distance, the rink fell silent, despite the thousands of people contained within the stadium.

In his periphery, Shane could see other players leaving the ice. He couldn't bring himself to stand, though. His brain was moving to fast and too slow, like he was thrashing against a tide of molasses.

The only word that made sense in his mind was *please. Please please please.*

A pair of hands came under his armpits from behind, scooping him off the ice and onto his feet like he was a toddler. "Come on, man," Hayden muttered behind him, hands still holding tight.

When Shane looked down, it looked like he had stuck a pig on the ice. He was dripping with blood. Ilya's blood.

Too much blood for one person to lose.

Hayden guided him off the ice and to the dressing rooms, which were already emptying out. "Game's abandoned," Hayden said to him. "It was a lot for the fans to watch, and the higher ups wouldn't want to seem uncaring if -"

Hayden didn't finish the thought, and so Shane took over. "If he dies. They wouldn't want to seem uncaring if Rozanov dies."

The words came out numbly, as if they were meaningless, and Hayden nodded, hesitant. Hayden stripped beside him, but Shane couldn't bring himself to undress, though his kit was drenched in blood.

"Okay," Hayden muttered to himself, dressed in only a towel, then stepped forward, pulling Shane's jersey over his head. He took the pads off next, piling them up haphazardly on the bench beside them.

Shane looked at the messy pile, considered complaining, but remained silent.

Hayden kept going, stripping him down and removing his skates until he was left in only his jock shorts. Hayden paused here, only for a moment, but then helped him get those off, too, quickly wrapping a towel around his waist. "Come on, man. Let's get you clean."

Hayden guided him to the showers, took his towel off and put him under a warm blast of water. Hayden was the one to wash his hands clean of the blood; Hayden wiped at his neck, too, where Shane must have touched with blood-dipped fingers. Shane stood there, watching as the blood diluted, pink tendrils curling down the drain. The water slowly brought the world back into focus, and he began to move his hands, reaching to take the soap from Hayden.

“You got it from here?” Hayden asked, tentative, and Shane nodded. Hayden stepped across to his own shower, though Shane could feel Hayden watching him, even as Shane’s eyes tipped closed, and he began soaping himself from memory alone.

They didn’t even finish the second period. There was no reason for him to feel this tired.

A strangled sob at the other end of the showers caught his attention, and Shane watched, detached, as one of the other rookies patted Ulander on the back, whispered some empty words of comfort. He imagined, somewhere, that JJ was equally upset, though it had been no rougher than 90% of the checks they all handed out on the ice. *As Captain, I should speak to them both*, he thought - but there was no room for such actions, for all of his energy was fully committed to keeping himself together.

The water mostly drowned out Ulander’s tears, and Shane turned away, let Ulander have a shred of privacy.

Eventually, the other showers all turned off, the players retreating to the locker room. Shane couldn’t bring himself to move.

Shane was going to stay under the spray forever, he decided. His mind was quiet here. There was no 24 hour news cycle to monitor for updates, no WhatsApp chat pinging. As long as he stood in this shower, Ilya could be alive.

Ilya could be dead.

Shane sighed, rinsed the final suds from his legs, reluctantly turned the shower off. When he made it back to his locker, Hayden was sat on the bench, the only other player left. He was dressed, hair damp at the ends, with a frown on his face. He was fiddling on his phone absently, but put it away when Shane approached.

“Any news?” Shane asked, dreading the answer.

Hayden shook his head. “Nothing yet.”

Shane’s own phone was buzzing up a storm in his cubby. He turned off notifications without reading any of them. “Do you think they’d let me see Rozanov?” He asked Hayden, chewing on his nail. “At the hospital.”

Hayden hesitated, but eventually nodded. “If he’s awake, maybe.” Hayden grabbed his bag, and then Shane’s too. “I can drive you down there.”

Shane wanted to say he could drive himself, but the shake of his hands suggested otherwise, and so he nodded.

Only Shane and Hayden's cars were left in the player parking lot, and beyond that, Shane could see the main parking lot was empty too. *How long has passed since we were on the ice?* At least an hour, he suspected. Too long for no news.

As Hayden drove to the hospital, Shane watched the footage on ESPN on his phone. The moment itself was blurred - too graphic for even the most intense of hockey fans - but it showed everything else.

Ilya had skidded on a white glove, likely thrown in by a fan. Invisible against the ice. That, plus a rough but legal check from JJ, was enough to send him careening across the ice at an unusual angle on his back, his head tilted, neck exposed. A lamb to the slaughter.

The footage showed how quickly Shane reached him. It was a surprise to see that it was less than 2 seconds between the injury and Shane reaching him, for in the moment, time seemed to slow.

At the bottom of the screen, there was a counter. 78 seconds. The amount of time that it took for the paramedics to arrive. The amount of time that he held Ilya's life in his hands.

They showed photos, too, of the aftermath. Shane sitting on the ice, covered in blood.

Shane would have done the same for anyone. Literally anyone. His teammates. His worst enemy. Scott Hunter. There was not a single player that Shane wouldn't have done the same for.

No other player would have left him feeling like his heart had been carved out by a blunt blade, though.

That's not entirely true, he realized, glancing across to Hayden. He looked to the vein on Hayden's neck, imagined plugging it with his fingers.

Imagined telling Jackie, if he had not succeeded.

The thought made him shiver. Once he'd started, he could not stop, and at the next red light, Hayden reached to the backseat, pulling out a kids blanket and dropping it on Shane's lap, haphazardly tucking him in. "If you don't stop freaking out, I can't take you to the hospital to see him, Shane."

"M'not freaking out," he replied, leaning forward to rest his head on the dashboard.

The lights changed, but Hayden didn't drive on, ignoring the impatient horns of the drivers behind him. "You did what you could. We all saw it. If the worst happens, no one will say you did not do your best."

Shane frowned. He didn't care if he did his best. It was irrelevant, wholly fucking irrelevant.

Hayden didn't understand, Shane realized. No - Shane had not let him understand. How could Hayden possibly put the jigsaw together when he only had half the pieces?

"Boston Lily," Shane said. He turned his head so he could look at Hayden. Hayden looked back, could probably see the tears gathering on Shane's lashes, but in that moment, Shane couldn't bring himself to care. He swallowed, once, for the words felt stuck in his throat. "It's Ilya."

Hayden's face cycled through every emotion imaginable, as if he was speed-running the entire human experience, before finally settling on horror. "Fuck. *Fuck*."

Another car horn went off, and this time, Hayden drove forwards through the intersection - just in time for the lights to turn red again, stranding the outraged cars behind him. He didn't continue driving to the hospital, though - he pulled over, and Shane frowned.

Hayden unbuckled them both, then pulled Shane forwards, until they were in an awkward embrace over the centre console. "Rozanov is Boston Lily," Hayden muttered to himself, as if he didn't quite believe it.

Hearing Hayden say it made everything worse. Shane felt his resolve crumble, and a single sob broke through. "He can't die. I can't - I won't -" He gasped, clinging to Hayden's shoulders.

"Hey. This is fucking Rozanov. It'd take way more than a blade to the neck to kill him," Hayden said, giving him a little shake within their hug. Hayden pulled away slowly, reluctant. "I have so many questions, and now is *not* the time for them. Let's get you to Lily, hm?"

There was a mountain of press at the front of the hospital. Somehow, it was a shock.

It shouldn't have been - of course the sports press would turn up in droves to report on a terrible ailment to Boston's favourite Russian son. Still, their presence made Shane pause, made him consider asking Hayden to restart the engine and drive off as fast as his old-man driving could manage.

Hayden nudged him, passed him a pair of sunglasses. "We're here to offer our well wishes to an opponent. Don't overthink it."

Shane put on the sunglasses, grateful, for his eyes were red and sore. Hayden nodded at him, and then, in unison, they stepped out of the vehicle.

Mr Hollander, any updates on Ilya Rozanov's condition?

Shane! A statement on what happened!

How does it feel to be the hero of the hour?

The words glided over Shane as he and Hayden pushed their way through to the door. Hospital security recognized him well enough, let him through. Somehow he'd not thought

about this part, either - what right had he to be here? What if the hospital staff sent him away?

The overhead hospital lights lended a green and impersonal tinge to the whole place - clinical. It was no place for someone like Ilya to die. He deserved to die at home, the glowing amber of evening kissing a wrinkled forehead after a long and happy life. Shane indulged himself, for only a moment; imagined he was lying next to Ilya in their shared bed, imagined kissing him, one last time, both of them hunched and old and wondrous.

In the foyer, a voice, vaguely familiar, called his name, broke him from his fantasy. Shane turned to face its owner.

Marlow walked towards him, hand outstretched, and Shane shook it, on autopilot. It was the most serious handshake he had ever been involved in. He couldn't tell if that was good or bad.

"Any news?" Shane heard Hayden ask, and Marlow nodded.

"It's good," Marlow said, and Shane felt the knot in his chest loosen. Felt himself begin to unravel with it. "It was scary for a minute there, but they stitched Rozy back up and piped a few units of blood into him," Marlow continued, forcibly light. "He only blacked out for ten minutes or so, and has passed their concussion tests, though he's pretty grouchy. They're calling it a miracle. Victor's in with him now."

"Can I..."

Marlow made a sound, somewhere near a laugh, but wet, clogged. "Man, you can do whatever you like. Hero of the hour," Marlow said. He finally released Shane's hand, rubbed his face vigorously. "He said your name, when he woke up. Guess you were the last thing he saw, before..." Marlow trailed off, gesturing with his hand, waving at his neck and head. *Before he almost bled to death*, Shane's mind filled in, and he nodded, shaky.

Marlow pointed him in the right direction, and Shane nodded again. Words weren't easy, and he felt like a nodding dog on a dashboard. He left Hayden with Marlow - god knows what they'd talk about - and headed for the right room.

It was a private room, small and sterile but adequate enough. St-Simon sat in the chair beside the bed, and in the bed was Ilya. Thick bandages coiled around his neck, but his eyes were open.

Ilya was still sweaty from the game, and the blood loss had given him a pale, uneven sheen. His mouth was set in a scowl - the same look Shane had seen on the TV, when Ilya lost a face-off against an opponent he considered inferior.

He looked like a dream. Shane wanted to run to him, fall to his knees, kiss at his fingertips where they rested upon the thin mattress, whisper prayers of thanks into the curve of his shoulder.

But. St-Simon.

Other than the All Stars game in Tampa, they'd never really interacted in front of people with anything other than hostility, and the awkwardness made Shane's skin crawl, especially when his chest was bursting with too many emotions. The weight of St-Simon's gaze was unbearable, and Shane was ready to turn on his heel and leave, now that he'd seen Ilya was alive.

"Hey, man. I came to see if you were alright," Shane said, casual, as if it were any other hockey player in the bed. He lingered by the door frame, ready to leave. He could feel his eyes were glassy, but if St-Simon saw it, he didn't say anything.

Ilya saw.

"Hey, *man*. I am in hospital. Not good. I play so well, only way Montreal can stop me is to kill me," Ilya replied. His accent sounded thicker than usual - *he's tired*. His head angled towards St Simon, even as his eyes remained on Shane. "Victor, go to the gift shop," Ilya commanded, and St-Simon frowned. "I want a *get well* teddy. Biggest, ugliest one they have." St Simon hesitated, and Ilya looked to him, raised a brow. "You can leave me with Hollander. He is too weak-minded to finish the job," he said, and then made a shooing motion. "Chop chop."

St-Simon hesitated a beat longer, then stood. "Yes, Cap," he muttered. He lingered at the door for a moment, close to Shane. "Good save, Hollander," St-Simon said, and then disappeared into the hall, before the strange thanks had fully registered.

Even after St-Simon left, Shane kept hovering awkwardly. "I didn't bring you anything."

Ilya shrugged. "You are here. Is enough," he said, then nodded at the door behind Shane. "Lock the door."

Shane locked it shut, and drew the tiny curtain across its window. The privacy seemed to make Ilya bold, and his hand reached out. The hand wobbled, and Shane stepped in to meet it quickly, holding it to his chest as he leant in, kissed Ilya fervently, kissed him like he should have on the ice. Ilya's lips pressed back, warm and firm and *alive*.

Shane's free hand reached out, ghosting along the edge of the bandages.

"Ilya," he whispered, like a prayer. "Did it hurt?" He asked, leaning back enough to sit in the bedside chair, his face still close. His hand trailed upwards, danced along Ilya's jaw, his cheek, and Ilya's eyelashes fluttered.

"Not at first," Ilya replied. "Hurt very much when you pressed on it."

Shane wanted to bluster, *that pressure saved your life*. It was what Ilya expected, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. "I'm sorry."

Ilya looked at him, waiting, but then shrugged. "Apology accepted," he replied. He looked straight into Shane now, seeing too much. "You were scared. I am sorry."

Shane could feel the tears pricking more insistently at his eyes now, and so he released Ilya's hand and let his head fall to the thin hospital mattress next to Rozanov's stomach. His face was mashed into the white sheet which muffled his reply, "Apology accepted."

"Hollander. Come, sit up." Ilya's hand weaved into Shane's hair, tugged once, then released, switching to running his fingertips across Shane's scalp, a soothing feeling. "You would have missed my dick, mm? If I had died."

"*Ilya*," Shane replied, still muffled.

Ilya pulled at his hair again, and this time Shane followed a little, shifting until his face was buried in Ilya's stomach instead. They were close to the end of the season, so Ilya was thinner than usual, but his stomach still gave way a little under the weight of Shane's head. The warmth of Ilya's skin radiated through the thin sheet and gown between them, and Shane screwed his eyes tightly shut, imagining the skin stiff and cold.

His shoulders were shaking again, like in Hayden's car, and he couldn't stop them.

"Shane..." Ilya muttered above him, and tried to pull him up by the shoulders this time. The effort made him grunt a little in pain, and Shane lifted himself up sharply, looking at the bandages on Ilya's neck.

They stayed lily-white. The effort hadn't pulled his stitches.

"Take it easy, Ilya, please," Shane pleaded, reaching up to brush at Ilya's curls, twining them around his fingers.

Ilya's hand came up, curling around his jaw and leading him in, until their mouths met. Ilya's lips were salty with sweat, fresh from the ice, but there was none of the usual post-game heat to the kiss that followed; it was gentle and thorough, Shane giving in at the first swipe of tongue.

He rolled away from Ilya's lips, letting their foreheads stay connected. "I thought you were going to die in my arms."

"I thought I was going to die in your arms," Ilya echoed, reaching up to smudge his thumb across Shane's freckles. "Would have been terrible for my reputation."

Shane forced a smile, raised his own hand to trace Ilya's sharp cheekbones, his chiseled jaw. The hand trailed lower, finding the edge of the bandages again, and Shane pulled away a little, looking down at the bandages and then back up. Ilya looked back like he was something to be treasured, and Shane could not face losing that again. "Will you wear a neck guard, next time you're on the ice?"

The softness in Ilya's gaze gave way to irritation. "Ugh, *Hollander*, you are so boring!" He declared, hand leaving Shane's face to wave in the air for emphasis. "No, I will not wear ugly neck guard."

Shane sighed, but nodded. His fingertips toyed with the edge of the bandage. “That is fine. It is your choice.”

He gave in easily. Too easily, safe in the knowledge that Ilya would take the bait.

“And...” Ilya replied, brow raised in suspicion. He lifted off the bed a little, following Shane so that the distance between them did not grow.

Shane shrugged. “And nothing. It’s fine, we won’t wear neck guards.”

“We?”

“If you think you don’t need one, then I don’t see why I would need one.”

Ilya scowled. His hand came back up, traced the vein down the side of Shane’s neck with gentle fingers, and then he let out a small sigh. “You are very annoying.” Ilya flopped back on the bed. He tried to hide the wince that the sharp movement created. Shane saw it anyway. “Fine. I will make rest of team wear too. In case they also meet a rookie who cannot jump.”

“Ulander feels fucking guilty.”

“He is *fucking guilty*,” Ilya parroted back. “But he is rookie, so my payback will not be so bad.”

“I’ll tell him to watch out next season.”

“Maybe this season,” Ilya replied. When Shane frowned, Ilya continued, “St-Simon says this happened to another player many years ago. They were back on the ice within 2 weeks.”

Shane moved his hands, bracketed Ilya’s cheeks with both palms. “If you try to come back that quickly, I will kill you myself,” Shane promised. Ilya rolled his eyes, and Shane shifted forward, kissed him again. Even after the kiss was done, he lingered, close. “Come to my cottage this summer.”

“Hollander -“ Ilya started, guarded, and Shane steamrolled over his response.

“- You can recover in peace. We can hang out, swim in the lake. I have a pool table, and a barbecue. A gym, when you’re feeling better,” he said, tripping over the words in a rush to get them all out. “We can be together. Just us. Just for a while.”

Ilya was looking at him with the same soft eyes he’d worn on the ice, when Shane had held his life in his hands. “Maybe. Maybe,” Ilya compromised.

The door rattled, and they sprang apart. Shane went over to unlocked the door, and a doctor stepped in, brows raised.

“Shane Hollander. A surprise to find you in here.”

“I wanted a moment of privacy, to give my well wishes,” Shane said. It was believable enough, he thought, and the doctor seemed to accept it.

“Quick hands there, son. Saved his life,” the doctor said, offering out his hand. Shane shook it on autopilot, a practiced smile upon his face. “If you’re ever looking for a career change, you’d make a great paramedic.”

“Thank you, sir.” Shane said. From the corner of his eye, Shane could see St-Simon shuffling back into the room, a small gift bag in his hand. “Time for me to head off,” Shane said to himself. He glanced at Rozanov, then looked away. It hurt to pretend he didn’t care. “Feel better soon, Rozanov.”

“Goodbye, Shane Hollander,” Ilya responded, rolling the name around his mouth with fondness. As Shane left, St-Simon stepped close, and Shane heard Ilya hum with disappointment at his meagre offering. “You call this big teddy bear?”

Shane went home with Hayden. Hayden and Jackie had enough spare rooms to accommodate the whole team if needed, and he didn’t much feel like being alone. Hayden didn’t even offer to take him to his own home, just set the satnav to *Home* 🏠 and started driving.

It was a press-free exit - the staff had let Hayden move the car to their underground parking, protected from the gathered media. The duty manager said Shane could park there again if he came back for another visit, though Shane suspected he wouldn’t.

Jackie and the kids were in bed by the time they arrived at the house. Shane sat at the counter as Hayden pottered around the kitchen, and finally turned his phone notifications back on. There were twenty calls from Mom; five worried texts from Rose; a barrage of WhatsApp messages from every teammate he’s ever played with. A message from Theriault, *you're benched until the shrink clears you*. An email from Scott Hunter, which sounded like it was written by a PR firm.

You are a testament to the sport, and to your nation.

On reflection, Shane suspected Hunter wrote it alone, no PR firm required. It was the kind of hollow, media-trained email he could imagine sending himself.

He was torn from his thoughts as Hayden broke the silence. “*Ilya Rozanov*,” Hayden muttered to himself as he prepared cheese sandwiches, then laughed.

“It didn’t affect my game,” Shane countered, and Hayden laughed again. “I never gave him an inch on the ice.”

“Of course you didn’t, you’d check your own mother into the boards if it meant you could score a goal,” Hayden snorted. “If anything, you’ve always played better against Boston,” Hayden continued, which Shane couldn’t deny. “What, winner gets to call the shots for the night?”

“Hayden -“

Hayden shook his head, teasing. “Your boy’s no longer on death’s door. I get to make the jokes now.”

“He’s not my boy,” Shane responded, ignoring Hayden’s raised eyebrows. “It’s just a casual thing.”

“Casual,” Hayden said, brow raised. “Me and Jacks are keeping it casual too. Maybe once we’re on kid number 6 it might start getting serious,” he continued, sliding a cheese sandwich in front of Shane. “I’ve watched you get all starry eyed over *Lily* for what, 3 years?”

Shane didn’t correct Hayden, though it was more like 6 years.

“This is some real star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet shit,” Hayden muttered. He took a bite of his sandwich, but it didn’t stop him from talking, mouth full. “Jackie’s going to eat it up with a spoon.” Hayden paused, mouth full, and swallowed. “Can I tell Jackie?”

“You can tell Jackie. But no one else,” Shane agreed. “I’m serious, Hayds. I shouldn’t have even told you without speaking to Ilya.”

“*Ilya*,” Hayden repeated, then blows air through his lips slowly. “That is going to take some getting used to,” he warned, but then reached over, cupped Shane’s shoulder with his hand. “No one’s hearing anything from me, Shane. Besides, who would believe it?”

“Doctor Hollander,” Jackie teased the next morning as Shane walked into the kitchen and sat himself at the counter, presenting him with a smoothie and kissing his brow. “My phone’s been blowing up all evening - every unattached woman in Boston and Montreal is desperate to be set up with you.”

Shane did not look at Hayden, stood by the coffee maker, who evidently hadn't spoken to Jackie yet. He didn’t need to - he knew what Hayden’s face would look like, that knowing raise of the brows. The same one he’d given Shane when he knew *Lily* was someone special, even if Shane wouldn’t admit it. “Do they need tips on managing neck injuries?”

Jackie smiled, patted his hair gently, and then moved over to Hayden, fussing over him. Her hand kept touching at his neck, and Shane wondered if she, too, had thought about Hayden's veins, sliced in two.

They were sweet together, as always, pulling together like the sand and the sea, and Shane suspected their honeymoon phase might last til their deathbeds. It was suddenly hard to watch - to see how casual their affection was allowed to be, how they could touch each other in the light of day, with Shane sitting only meters away. It caught in his throat, and he forced himself to look away.

There was nothing he wouldn't give up to touch Ilya that way.

Hayden dropped Shane at the player parking lot a few hours later, gave him a long, awkwardly sincere hug for the road. It was a ghost town, Shane's car the only one there. Shane started walking towards it, but then spotted the club shop, took himself towards it instead.

It was an excuse, really, what he bought. An excuse to go back to the hospital; an excuse to see Ilya again. He wrestled the bag into the back seat, and drove to the back entrance of the hospital.

When he reached Ilya's room, he found Marlow already settled in the bedside chair, scrolling on his phone. Ilya was sat up in the bed, and his eyes pinpointed on Shane's large bag. "Is that for me?"

Marlow looked up, nodded at Shane, and then looked at the bag too. Shane suddenly felt foolish. "It's stupid, it's nothing."

"Marly. That bag is for me. I want it," Ilya demanded. "Will you bring it to your Captain?"

Marlow looked at Shane with tired eyes. "Please don't make me come over there," he implored, and Shane sighed, stepping forward.

"It's really stupid," Shane warned, and then handed the bag over.

The teddy bear was 3ft tall, branded to the Montreal Metros, complete with pads and a little helmet. It came with a basic t-shirt, but Shane had ripped it off and bought a child's jersey to replace it. His name was on the back, but he'd asked one of the servers if they could custom embroider the front, too. He was fairly sure they were only meant to put names on the back of the jersey, but being captain had its perks, and she embroidered *get well soon* across the front without a complaint.

Ilya looked at the bear, face unreadable. Marlow's gaze jumped between the bear and Shane, as if entirely unsure how to react.

Finally, *finally*, Ilya's face cracked into a smile, wide and toothy. "Big and ugly. Is perfect," he declared. "Cliff! Take a photo of me and my bear. Send to Victor, tell him this is what I fucking want when I ask for *big* and *ugly* get well teddy bear."

Ilya's grin was gleeful as he held his bear, raising his other hand to give a thumbs up. Marlow came forward after, showed him the photo, and Ilya nodded. Marlow pinged it off, and then both Ilya and Marlow's phones started pinging in unison. There was a strange intimacy in the synchronization of their phones - Shane and Ilya had never been in a group chat together, and suddenly Shane was jealous, stomach-turningly so.

Ilya picked up his phone, pressed a few buttons, and then summoned Shane closer, oblivious to his upset. "Have you seen this?" He asked Shane.

Shane took the phone tentatively. "You should be avoiding screens."

Ilya shrugged. "No concussion."

Shane looked down, and his stomach turned. TMZ had posted an unblurred photo of Ilya on the ice. He was flat on his back, and Shane was knelt by his side, leaning over him. Their faces were so close - Shane didn't remember leaning down so far, just how little distance

there had been between them. Ilya's eyes were soft - it must have been taken moments before the paramedics arrived - and Shane looked desperate.

And god. The blood. It was everywhere.

Shane looked away, trying to hand the phone back to Ilya. "It's indecent."

"What?" Ilya asked, glancing at the screen and then offering it back to Shane. "No, not the photo. The headline."

Canadian Hero: Shane Hollander saves life of Arch Rival

"My throat gets cut open and I do not even get named," Ilya whined, as if this injustice far outweighed the threat of near-death.

Shane shook his head. "Next time, when my throat gets cut, you can be the big hero."

He meant it as a light joke, but Ilya scowled. Ilya didn't say anything - but then, he didn't need to, as Marlow spoke next, voice tight. "Don't joke about that, man. I never want to see that much blood on the ice again." Marlow scraped his hands up and down his face, like he was trying to stave off tears, but when he looked at Shane again, his eyes were clear. "Rozy mentioned you spoke to him about neck guards. If you want to do a league initiative, I'm in."

"Thanks, Marlow." Ilya's phone was still in Shane's hand, and every few seconds it pinged with a new notification. "You've been getting lots of well wishes, then?"

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Every person I have ever been in same room with tells me they are happy I am not dead. Every woman I have ever slept with tells me I am love of their life, that they cannot believe they almost lost me," Ilya complained, and Shane's chest clenched, for he was just another one of those love-struck hookups. "Scott Hunter sent me world's most boring email. I am surprised it was not letter by carrier pigeon."

Shane nodded. "He sent me one too."

Ilya's eyes narrowed. "What time did he send to you?" Ilya asked. Shane handed over his phone, let Ilya read - after all, the email was about as personal as IKEA instructions. "He emailed you first. First Tee Emm Zee, now Scott fucking Hunter."

Before Ilya's rant about Scott could continue, there was a knock at the door. The doctor on duty had changed, and they wore a serious expression, and for a moment, Shane feared it was bad news.

"Mr Rozanov, the reports are back. The stitches are stable, and everything is looking good. We're happy to discharge you today," the doctor confirmed. *Not bad news, then - just a dour doctor.*

"So soon?" Marlow asked. Ilya glared daggers at him.

"He's in no more danger of bleeding to death than anyone else," she replied, picking up his chart and writing a quick note. "A nurse will be by to talk you through home care, but the

headlines are to keep someone with you for the next 24 hours, no strenuous exercise until cleared by your primary care physician, and no flying for a week.”

Marlow opened his mouth, but before he could speak, Ilya answered, “Hollander will take me to his home.” It was ballsy, and both Marlow and Shane stared at him. “Yesterday, doctor says he has good hands. Will save me again if I try to die,” Ilya explained with a shrug. Ilya looked at Marlow's hands, judgemental. “Your meat paws will be of no use.”

“That is a lot to ask -“ Marlow started, but Shane cut him off.

“It’s fine. He can come back to mine,” Shane said, for he would do anything, anything for a moment longer with Ilya. “I’m signed off from practice until I can talk to the shrink tomorrow. It’s fine.”

“One near-death experience and you guys no longer hate each other’s guts?” Marlow asked, skeptical. “I don't think this is a good idea.”

“We may not be best friends, but I don’t want him dead,” Shane said in return - mostly for the benefit of a nurse who was hovering nearby, curious. “Besides, he’s weak enough now that I can make him watch my highlight reel.”

Ilya groaned. “Marly, I have changed my mind, smuggle me on the plane to Boston so I do not have to suffer such a fate.”

It took a little more convincing, but eventually, reluctantly, Marlow gathered up his things. He reached down, giving Ilya one more gentle hug, like he was hugging a butterfly instead of a 200 pound man. "Glad you're not dead, Cap," he said, gruff. He turned to Shane next - this hug was harder, firm and sure and surprising. "Next time you're in Boston, Hollander, drinks are on me."

"Will be cheap for you, Marly. He only drinks ginger ale," Ilya quipped. When Shane looked over, Ilya's eyes were a little misty, but Shane knew better than to comment on it.

When Shane looked back at Marlow, he was staring at Ilya, brow furrowed. There was no reason for him to linger, he'd said his goodbyes, and yet he did, gaze slowly shifting back to Shane. "Come into the corridor, Hollander. I've got some Rozy-wrangling advice to pass over."

Marlow hustled him into the quiet corridor, suddenly restless. His eyes were intent on Shane's face, brow lowered.

"You're, like, famously a good guy, right?" Marlow asked, close, and Shane frowned. "A kisses babies, gives to charity, doesn't use slurs in the locker room kind of guy?"

Shane tensed. "I am."

Marlow nodded to himself, eyes still intent on Shane. "Fuck," Marlow breathed, then steeled himself. "Look. Rozy's on the good stuff, right?" Marlow asked, and Shane nodded. "Last night, he kept talking."

"About..."

"About your freckles," Marlow said. Shane stayed quiet for a moment, not sure what to say. He could feel his cheeks heat - they always did, when Ilya commented on his freckles, even second-hand, apparently. "Said they were real pretty. Seemed determined to convince me to agree."

If it were anyone else, Shane would be more nervous, but Marlow was Ilya's Hayden, and so Shane exhaled, imagined what he'd say if it were Hayden in front of him. "Wow, Marlow," Shane drawled. "You don't think my freckles are pretty?"

Marlow barked out a laugh, and the frisson of nervous tension in his shoulders dissipated. "Fuck off, Hollander," Marlow replied, almost automatic in his response. "He means nothing by it, but he can be a bit flirty. I know you're no Dallas Kent, but if you're going to take him home..."

"He can compliment my freckles all he likes. I know he means nothing by it," Shane agreed. "Don't worry. He's safe with me."

"Thank you," Marlow replied, genuine, dragging Shane into another rib-crushing hug. He pulled back halfway, looking down at Shane with a teasing smirk. "They are real pretty up close."

"Fuck off, Marlow," Shane replied, no weight to it. He pushed at Marlow's chest, and Marlow stepped back with a final clap on Shane's shoulder. "Safe journey home."

The paperwork for discharge took longer than it should, and it was early evening by the time Shane was helping Ilya settle in his passenger seat, Ilya redressed in his loosest, most comfortable clothes. The Montreal teddy was in the back seat - strapped in, at Ilya's insistence.

The staff parking lot was dark, and no one was around, so Shane let himself be brave. He was still stood in the door as he ran his fingers through Ilya's hair. His curls were disheveled and dirty, yet Shane couldn't bring himself to pull away, coiling them around his fingers, whilst Ilya looked back at him with soft eyes.

"If you had been unconscious, no one would have let me see you," Shane whispered, eyes tracing Ilya's profile.

Ilya closed his eyes, leant into Shane's touch. "Sveta would let you in."

"She knows about us?" Shane asked, curious.

"No. And yes," Ilya replied, opening his eyes. "She knows Jane is man. She does not know Jane is you," he said. His hand came over, rested gently on Shane's elbow. "You could tell her. I would not be mad," he said. His thumb ran back and forth along Shane's forearm, soothing. "I would have same problem, if you were in hospital."

A coil of guilt wrapped itself around Shane's heart. "About that. I told Hayden yesterday. That you were Boston Lily. I said he could tell his wife, too."

"Pike?" Ilya wrinkled his nose, as if there was an acrid smell. He huffed once, then released. "I am not happy, but, I understand."

"He won't tell anyone," Shane promised. "I know you don't like him, but he's not a dick."

"He *is* a dick," Ilya corrected. "I believe that he will not tell anyone. Does not mean he is not a dick."

Shane smiled, and didn't push the matter further. His hand dropped from Ilya's face, and he closed the door, going round to the driver's side. As soon as he was in the seat, Ilya's hand found his knee, and once the car was in gear, he let his own hand drop to cover Ilya's, driving them out of the parking lot.

Shane paused at the first junction, considering his options. His Westmount apartment was close, he could take Ilya there. He wanted to - almost desperately. Ilya in his home, curled up in his sheets, safe, whole. The idea of it warmed his soul.

It was selfish.

Ilya was in pain. What good would it do to take Ilya to his home, a place he'd never been before, when Ilya was so much more familiar with the apartment building they always met up at? Where he knew the layout, the bed, the way to get the shower to work best?

Taking Ilya to Shane's home was a selfish whim, and not a smart one. Decision made, Shane turned East, taking the familiar route to his condo.

When they arrived, Ilya looked out the window at the familiar building, and nodded. Shane left him in place while he retrieved the bags, and when he came round to the passenger side to help Ilya up to the building, Ilya was typing away on his phone. "Are you ready to head up?"

"Hm." Ilya said, sliding the phone into his pocket. "Svetlana is coming to Montreal in the morning. She will drive me back to Boston, since they will not let me fly."

Shane realized he should have expected it. Of course Svetlana would look after Ilya. She was his chosen family, his kin. Shane would be fine for one night of care, but long term, Ilya would want Svetlana there. Besides, Shane would have to go back to practice at some point. They had a game in two days, and *I'm playing nurse to Ilya Rozanov* probably wouldn't go down great with the Montreal GM.

It didn't ease the flicker of jealous hurt, though. "Of course. She's welcome to stay here with you, if you'd rather not travel yet."

"No. I would like to go home, I think."

Ilya made it up the steps to the condo under his own power, with Shane only there to hover and worry, carrying Ilya's bag and teddy on his right side. At the top, Ilya seemed to lose steam, and Shane's left arm gently guided him to sit on the bed. Once he was satisfied that Ilya wasn't going to topple over, Shane put the teddy on a chair, retrieved Ilya's wash bag, and found a stool to put it in the shower.

He returned to the bedroom, where Ilya was sat, unmoving. "OK. Strip," Shane said, shrugging out of his own sweater.

Ilya raised a single brow. "Mr Bossy Pants."

"Ilya."

"You will not seduce me a little first?"

Shane sighed. He himself was fully nude now, and the coaxing tease of Ilya's smirk had him half-hard, in spite of the circumstances. He leant over Ilya, kissed him once with closed lips, did not comment when Ilya's hand curled around his bare hip. "Please. Take off your clothes."

"We need to work on your dirty talk," Ilya complained, but stripped anyway, revealing his own half-hard cock, and let himself be led to the bathroom.

"We'll have to work together, or your bandages will get damp," Shane warned as he helped Ilya onto the stool, in the centre of the shower. He'd made a makeshift cover for the bandage with a plastic bag and some KT tape, but it wouldn't stand up to full submersion, and Shane looked at it warily.

"This is strange," Ilya whined. "Can I not have a bath?"

"You'd be steeping in hospital germs," Shane warned, and Ilya sighed.

"Fine. I will have sit-down shower," Ilya grumbled, and soaped himself up while Shane took control of the hand shower, rinsing the suds away. Ilya brought the washcloth as close to the bandages as he could, and frowned when the washcloth came away the colour of rust. "Bath would have been disgusting," Ilya allowed, and Shane smiled, kissing Ilya on the top of his head. Ilya tilted his head back, lips pouted, and Shane kissed him there, too, and then returned to his job as chief sud-rinser. Once Ilya was fully rinsed, Ilya scratched at his head. "My hair..."

Shane nodded, thinking hard. "Ok, we need to lose the stool," he decided, a plan forming in his mind. "If you sit on the shower floor, you should be able to put your arms behind you and lean back towards my lap."

They rearranged themselves quickly and efficiently, and then Shane was kneeling on the shower floor, Ilya reclining in front of him, head tilted back towards Shane's chest. Though Ilya was not flat on the floor, the openness of his neck in this position kicked Shane in the gut, and he put the hand shower down and leant forward and over Ilya, hand curling around Ilya's jaw to bring him in for another gentle kiss.

"Spider-man," Ilya muttered against his lips, and Shane smiled, then, after 78 seconds of kissing, Shane began lathering up the shampoo.

He spent 78 seconds lathering the shampoo.

78 seconds massaging it into Ilya's scalp.

78 seconds rinsing the suds away.

The conditioner was next, and he tried to count the seconds there, too, until Ilya's hands tangled with his own, the quiet "Enough, enough," breaking Shane's count and his resolve, tears springing to his eyes easily. He didn't count as he rinsed the conditioner out, nor as he kissed Ilya again, the hand shower long forgotten.

The towels Shane wrapped Ilya in were big and fluffy, large enough to dwarf even Ilya, where he leant against the bathroom wall. Ilya's wash-bag was on the side, and Shane retrieved his curl cream, ran it through the golden hair under Ilya's instruction, though he was almost certain Ilya could do it himself. He wet the toothbrush next, handing it to Ilya with a generous dollop of paste atop it, and then set about brushing his own teeth also.

He looked at Ilya in the mirror, and found Ilya looking back at him, a pensive smile around the brush. This was new territory, frighteningly domestic, and Shane had to work to keep his shoulders down. It was tempting to make a joke, to disturb the comfortable quiet, but Shane let it sit, and was surprised to find that Ilya did also.

The move to the bedroom was quiet, too, and Shane unwrapped Ilya from his mountain of towels and situated him on the bed easily, plumping at the pillows. Ilya was still half-hard, and when Shane reached to pull the comforter over Ilya to cover him, Ilya's hand came up, holding Shane's wrist. "Shane." He looked at his erection - looked to Shane's crotch, too, which was still covered by a towel.

"Ilya," Shane said back. "You're on bed rest."

Ilya shrugged. "Am in bed," he replied, stretching out. He was golden in the lamplight, sharp and beautiful, and God, how Shane wanted him. Ilya's hand trailed down his own stomach, fingers curling round the base of his cock and pumping, once. "You do not want?"

"Of course I want," Shane muttered, captivated as always. He wanted so much, He wanted to kiss Ilya like a lover, to coil around him like a vine, to whisper *I love yous* into his damp curls. But he would have to make do with watching Ilya come apart. The nurse had said *no strenuous exercise*, and Shane thought on it a moment longer. "Ok. I have a plan," he said, and then stood up, heading for the door.

"Shane!" Ilya called after him, but Shane paid him no mind, running to his home gym and scrambling through the drawers until he found what he was after.

Back in the bed, Shane slid the heart rate monitor around Ilya's chest gently, ignoring Ilya's exasperated complaints, and then connected it to his phone. He placed the phone next to Ilya's hip, and nodded.

"Is this sex or doctor appointment?" Ilya asked tartly.

"If you go above Zone 2, I'm stopping," Shane warned, tracing patterns up and down Ilya's inner thigh. "You just lie there, ok? I'll do the work, you just need to rest."

"Be pillow princess, I understand," Ilya quipped back. Shane leant down, but before his lips could touch the head of Ilya's cock, Ilya spoke again. "Wait."

Shane pulled back slowly, frowning.

Ilya was looking past him, to the corner of the room. "I cannot, with him watching."

Shane looked over, where the Montreal bear was sat, stitched smile facing towards them. Shane sighed, but got off the bed, turning the bear to face the corner of the room. "Okay?"

"Perfect," Ilya replied. Shane returned to the bed and lowered his mouth down, all the way to the base, and smiled at the deep groan that reverberated through the room as Ilya's cock hit the back of his throat.

The pace remained slow and languid, Shane's eyes darting over to his phone every so often to check that Ilya's heart-rate never climbed too high. Ilya was frustrated, Shane could tell - he liked it faster than this, more aggressive, more *everything* - but so long as Shane was in charge, tonight would be languid and slow.

Ilya's hips slowly began to roll, and Shane pulled off, held Ilya's hips down. "Stay. Still."

"Hollander you are killing me," Ilya muttered, but keeps his body still, just as Shane had asked, and Shane lowered back down.

His bedside table was just within reach, and Shane slid open the draw, retrieving his lube. It required a bit of readjusting, but soon enough, he was between Ilya's legs, one leg over his shoulder, leaving Ilya open and exposed.

Shane slicked up a finger and slid it in all the way, gently curling to stroke Ilya's prostate, not bothering to tease, and the reaction was immediate, Ilya letting out a deep and hearty moan. Shane preened at the noise - he didn't often play with Ilya's ass, even though it was a great ass, deserving of all the attention in the world. It just never seemed a priority when they were pressed for time, but he promised himself he'd do this again, if he ever got the chance.

Shane let Ilya's cock fall from his lips for a moment. "Play with your nipples," Shane instructed, whispering the words against the crown of Ilya's cock.

"You are putting me to work?" Ilya asked, breathless and teasing and tart, but he obeyed, rolling his nipples roughly in his fingers. "I thought I was pillow princess?"

Shane didn't bother to respond, instead taking Ilya back down to the base. His pace was still slow, but the triple-attack of stimulation to cock, ass and nipples seemed to be doing the job.

"Fuck, Shane, I'm close," Ilya muttered, tipping his head back a little, and Shane eyed the bandages - still white. Ilya looked beautiful, eyes lowered and watching him, and Shane felt

his eyes grow wet.

Shane didn't pull off, instead swirling his tongue around the head of Ilya's cock, dipping into the slit, before burying his head down once more. He let himself choke on it a little, so that he could excuse the tears gathering in the corners of his eyes. His finger in Ilya's ass kept pressing, and then, with another whisper of "Shane," Ilya was coming, orgasm slow and long, rolling through him in waves.

Shane swallowed everything Ilya had to give, until finally Ilya's breath evened out, and Shane pulled off slowly, wiping his own spit from the ridge of Ilya's cock. It elicited a final twitch from Ilya, who huffed at the stimulation.

Shane smiled to himself, and moved up the bed, kissing Ilya thoroughly, letting him taste himself on Shane's lips. Shane moved even further up, kissing Ilya's curls, once, and then climbing out of the bed. He didn't make it far before Ilya's hand snapped out, coiling around his wrist. "Where are you going?" Ilya asked, and his voice sounded strangely panicked.

"You need a good night of rest," Shane said, reaching over with his free hand to smooth the frown from Ilya's face. "I don't mind sleeping in the guest room."

"But you are hard," Ilya said, nodding at the mound in Shane's towel, as if Shane was stupid.

Shane rolled his eyes. "You are injured. I'll take care of myself later."

Ilya tried to pull him forward, but Shane stayed in place. "Or, you could take care of it now, and I could watch," Ilya said, coaxing. "Please, Shane."

Shane sighed, but Ilya's big, hopeful eyes had him moving back to his side, kneeling with knees wide, his kneecaps pressed against Ilya's thigh and armpit. "You'll just watch?" Shane asked, letting his hand come up and trace the bandages, reminding himself they were still dry and white.

"I will just watch," Ilya promised, and Shane nodded, unwrapped the towel from his waist. Ilya whistled appreciatively.

Shane huffed, even as he wrapped a hand around his cock and ran his fist up and down. "Fuck off."

Touching himself like this for Ilya was like Vegas, but at the same time, it was not even close. Sure, Shane was performing a little, but Ilya was lax and close and soft, and was watching his face as much as his hand, where it danced between his legs, playing up and down his cock.

Ilya reached over with the hand furthest from Shane, threaded their fingers together. It forced Shane to lean forward a little, almost looming over Ilya, their entwined hands resting on a Russian hip. Ilya hummed, pleased. "Can I talk?"

Shane let himself smile. "Better men than me have tried to shut you up."

"You are pretty like this," Ilya praised, and Shane flushed. "Prettier even than with all of the makeup at your photoshoots," he said, eyes tracing every inch of Shane's face. "The makeup

artists should see the shade of pink your cheeks turn. Is the same shade as your chest. Same shade as your cock.” Ilya's gaze dropped, looking intently at Shane's cock, the head emerging obscenely from Shane's fist with every pass. “If they make a blush powder of this, it sells like shaved ice in August.”

“Ilya,” Shane whispered, hoping it might discourage him, but Ilya continued.

"I saw photoshoot you did for Men's Health. Is criminal, what they did to you," Ilya said, gaze returning to Shane's face, and Shane frowned, confused. "Airbrushed away all your pretty freckles. They do not understand, this is the prettiest part. Like constellation."

Shane laughed, which turned breathless in pleasure as his fingers caught on his head, just right. "Marlow mentioned how much you like my freckles."

Ilya looked proud of himself. "Marly says he has never looked at your freckles before, so I described each one in turn." He reached up with his free hand, fingertips tracing along Shane's freckles.

Shane turned into his hand, kissed the fingertips. "You converted him. He said they were pretty, earlier."

"Of course he did. My Marly is man of great taste," Ilya replied, unabashed. His hand was tracing down Shane's neck now, following down the vein. For a moment, Shane's breath caught, but Ilya's fingers kept going, dancing along his collarbone. "I like how you cannot resist," Ilya said, tone teasing, and his fingers caught on Shane's nipple, sending sparks straight to Shane's cock. "Your face looks all constipated, sometimes, like you wish you did not want. But you want. You want so much."

Shane fisted himself harder, nodding. "I do, Ilya. I want."

Ilya brought his hand to his own mouth, wetting his fingers, before returning them to Shane, tracing down his abs. "I love how your tongue feels against my skin. I love how *my* tongue feels against *your* skin, too," he said, leaving a wet trail down Shane's body. "I love the noises you make, when I lick you here," Ilya's wet fingers touched at the tip of his cock, where it emerged from his fist, and Shane gasped, before the fingers went back up to his chest, "and here," Ilya said, tracing the underside of Shane's pec before cupping it gently. "Best tits in the league."

"Fuck off, Rozanov," Shane muttered.

Ilya shrugged. "Is compliment," he muttered, looking up at Shane. "Are you close?"

"Yes," Shane replied through gritted teeth, and Ilya tweaked his nipple roughly.

It shouldn't have been enough, but it was, and Shane spilt across Ilya's ribs, gasping as Ilya's fingers kept rolling around his nipple. Shane felt alight, aftershocks spreading more come over Ilya's chest.

Shane let himself have a moment, breath slowing as he came back to himself. It was only then, as the last sparks of pleasure worked their way from his system, that a rush of ice ran through his veins.

He was knelt by Ilya's side, Ilya supine. When he closed his eyes, the blood was back, and Shane stiffened, all pleasure gone, tears sparking at his eyes.

"Shane," Ilya said, frowning, and Shane tried to turn away, tried to hide the wetness of his eyes. "Shane," Ilya repeated, and then strong arms were pulling Shane down to the bed, heedless of the come spreading between them. Ilya rearranged Shane like a rag doll, until Shane was buried in his chest, tears dampening the skin.

"You almost -" Shane stuttered, words mashed into the skin.

"- but I didn't." Ilya replied, burying a gentle kiss into his hair.

Ilya's arms were tight around his waist, and Shane was torn between wanting to bury himself there forever and to hide away, for this was sharp and real.

It took a long time for Shane's breath to even out, but once it did, Ilya kissed his hair again. "I understand why you are upset," Ilya started, and Shane's heart clenched, for this felt serious and heavy. He shuffled closer to Ilya, resting his forehead on Ilya's shoulder, and prepared himself for a serious heart-to-heart. "If I had died, you would have missed my dick," Ilya finished, light, and Shane laughed. Ilya didn't comment on how wet the laugh sounded, though Shane could hear it in his own voice.

"Not just your dick," Shane replied, trying to stay as light as Ilya, even as his heart beat its way out of his chest.

"My hands, too. My mouth," Ilya continued, waving a hand at his face. "My tits," he said, hand trailing down to cup the pec that Shane was not using as a pillow. He flicked a thumb over his own nipple, and Shane's stomach clenched. "They compete with yours, for best in the league."

Shane lifted his head to look at Ilya's chest, how it rose and fell with each breath. The perfect roundness of the muscles; the pink nipples, crowning each slope. "It could be a tie?"

"A tie?" Ilya asked, incredulous. "Who are you and where is Hollander?" He leant over, kissed Shane quick and wet. "You are losing your edge, growing soft," he whispered, lowering Shane back to his chest. "Stay here tonight?" Ilya asked, quiet, and Shane nodded. Guest room be damned - there was nowhere he would rather be.

The first thing Shane registered upon waking was the sound of Ilya's heartbeat.

The second thing Shane registered was the pure relief. Ilya's heart was still beating. Nothing else mattered.

When he looked up, he found Ilya looking down at him, face soft and open. "Good morning," Ilya said, quiet in the soft dawn light.

Shane leant up, heedless of their morning breath, and let their lips meet.

Ilya was pliable in the kisses, lips soft and giving way. Shane pulled away first, let his kisses drop down, kissing the top of Ilya's pec.

Right where his head had been resting. Right over his heart.

"Svetlana will be here soon," Ilya whispered, still quiet in deference to the dawn. "If she sees us together, she will know. She is smart like that."

"You could tell her, if you wanted," Shane offered, and Ilya smiled, but did not comment. "I'll head home, then," Shane said. "I'm glad you didn't die."

"I am glad too." He lifted Shane's hands to his face, kissed at the knuckles.

When Ilya released his hands, Shane traced the bandages with his fingers, one last time. "You'll think about the cottage?"

The answer, *no*, was in Ilya's eyes. Shane could see it clear as day. "I will think about it," Ilya said instead. *In spite of his reputation, he's trying to be kind*, Shane thought.

Shane climbed from the bed, bones heavy as he washed and dressed for the day. From the doorframe of the bathroom, he looked at Ilya, lax in the bedsheets, and thought about saying it. Just once. The words he'd thought on the ice, when his hands were wet with Russian blood.

I love you, don't leave me.

His mouth couldn't form the words, and so instead, he stepped forward, perched on the edge of the bed, and leant in. Ilya met him halfway, and Shane imbued as much love as he could into the kiss that followed. Ilya kissed him back, open and sure, and for a moment, Shane could believe they had a future.

Ilya pulled away first, a soft smile on his lips. "Goodbye, Shane."

"Goodbye, Ilya," Shane replied. He did not linger.

They'd timed it poorly. Svetlana was on the step, plugging in the entry code as he opened the door. She looked at Shane once, discerning. Shane suspected she saw the tired circles around his eyes, the sorry slump of his shoulders. "Jane," she said, testing.

Shane thought to deny it, but Ilya had been right. She knew immediately. He nodded.

"Hm," Svetlana said. She looked him up and down, as if measuring his worth. "I should have known sooner. Ilya loves to be challenged," she continued.

Shane's heart thumped hard, and he nodded. For a moment, he felt choked, as if it were he who had his throat sliced. He coughed, and then spoke quietly. "Take care of him?"

Svetlana stepped in, kissed him on the cheek. "Always." She stepped away, through the open door. "Chin up, Hollander. No doubt we will be seeing more of one another in the future."

The door closed behind her, and Shane looked up, to where the bedroom light glowed. The Montreal air was cold for April, and it was tempting to go back inside, to burrow under the covers with Ilya and pretend the world beyond the condo didn't exist. He could put off his shrink appointment until the afternoon; maybe even longer, put it off until he was so fused to Ilya that a chainsaw couldn't separate them. He could coil himself round Ilya and never let go.

The clock struck 7am. Do Not Disturb slid off on his phone, and the first messages of the morning vibrated in his pocket. He stood a moment longer, admiring the bedroom glow, and then turned away.

His heart stayed at the condo, even as he walked away.

End Notes

Thank you so much if you made it this far <3 Kudos and comments are loved and appreciated! The urge to write Ilya's POV is strong....

I swear to god I have some much more lighthearted stories for this fandom drafted, but it turns out the heavier stories are where I'm starting.

Ilya's injury isn't based on a specific story from real life, but there are several occasions where hockey players have sustained severe neck injuries from a blade to the neck. Some of these players were (perhaps inadvisably) back on the ice within weeks.

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by [Shalls](#)

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