

Sober or Not, It's Always You

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/88341231) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/88341231>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Heated Rivalry - All Media Types
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Wyatt Hayes , Evan Dykstra , Luca Haas , Harris Drover , Troy Barrett , Ottawa Centaurs Team Ensemble (Game Changers) , Random drunk guys for plot advancement purposes
Additional Tags:	Drunkenness , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Autistic Shane Hollander , Protective Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Soft Dom Ilya Rozanov , Soft Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov is Obsessed With Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov Takes Care of Shane Hollander , Anxious Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Non-Sexual Intimacy , Non-Sexual Submission , Emotional Intimacy , Canon Compliant , Sensory Overload , Shane Hollander Has Sensory Issues , Shane Hollander Has Panic Attacks , Worried Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander Calls Ilya Rozanov "Baby" , Ilya Rozanov Calls Shane Hollander Pet Names , Fluff and Hurt/Comfort , No Smut , Angst and Hurt/Comfort , Tooth-Rotting Fluff , Stubborn Shane Hollander , POV Shane Hollander , very mild emetophobia warning , Light Angst , Mild Self-Deprecation , no beta we die like ilya's dad , no AI , Fuck AI , happy anniversary hollanov , Crying
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-07-11 Words: 10,157 Chapters: 1/1

Sober or Not, It's Always You

by [shanebug_2481](#)

Summary

The room tilted slightly, and Shane's throat was raw.

He swayed there a moment, scanning the spinning room for somewhere to steady himself – for Haas or Dykstra. Ilya had been right; he should have slowed down, stayed with his teammates. He hadn't listened, and now he was alone, 2 Moscow Mules and 3 shots deep, stuck at the bar and lost in a sea of people.

Shane just wanted his husband. The alcohol hadn't done anything to soften the effects of the music and lights encircling him. He felt trapped – suffocated – like his skin was fusing itself to his stiff muscles. The room spun faster, and the Canadian wasn't convinced he was standing upright anymore. His heart pounded in his ears as the music rattled his ribcage once more, an insatiable itch beckoning his blunt fingernails.

He wanted to scream. He wanted to rip his hair out. He wanted to tear his clothes off.

He wanted Ilya.

Notes

I won't lie, this one low key got away from me and became much longer than originally anticipated

I'm still pretty new to writing fan fiction and I haven't written something this long yet, so sincere apologies if it isn't very good lmao

I was hoping to post this on July 10th bc its Hollanov's anniversary -- unfortunately, I'm posting it at 5 a.m. on July 11th -- but close enough ig 🙏

Thank you so so so much to everyone who has been so kind and supportive, it really means sm to me and is a huge part of the reason I keep writing 🥰

NO AI WAS USED IN THE CREATION OF THIS WORK, nor do I consent to my work being uploaded or given to any AI platform in any capacity.

As always, translations can be found at the end

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

Shane liked to be alone; it was comfortable and familiar. There was no one there to scrutinize him – no expectations. No interactions to dissect later, leaving him paralyzed, stuck trying to identify exactly where he'd gone wrong.

Being alone was calm.

The world was not.

He could never quite figure out how to explain that to other people, and he'd given up trying a long time ago. Now, when one of the guys tried dragging him along somewhere, he'd just feign exhaustion or say he had other plans. It had worked relatively well in Montreal – especially after he'd been outed and the invitations grew scarce.

In Ottawa, they were harder to dodge.

The Centaurs loved their captain, and when he declined to join them at the bar after a game, they didn't go down without a fight. Shane knew his husband, and while he'd slowed down considerably since they'd been together, he still loved to party. Sometimes, he would successfully convince Ilya to celebrate without him, but on the nights they spent at home while the team went to the bar, Shane couldn't shake the feeling he was holding him back.

The locker room echoed with cheers and hoots as Ilya congratulated the team on their first win of the season. Standing by his locker, Shane beamed with pride. His husband had been so dedicated, putting so much time and energy into captaining the Centaurs – this was *his* win.

“Let's celebrate!” Hayes boomed, slapping Ilya on the back. “We're going to the club!”

The team erupted in cheers and applause. “Hell yeah, we are!” Harris agreed. “Right, Roz?” he said, raising his eyebrows in anticipation.

Ilya grunted a laugh. “Yes, go to the club and celebrate,” he nodded. “I have to get my husband to bed – We have our own celebrating to do,” he smirked, winking at Shane.

The Canadian gawked at him, eyes wide, a blush heating his cheeks. Shane knew he’d been so crass in hopes of distracting from any further persuasion, but that didn’t do much to change how flustered it made him.

The team groaned, and some of the players mimed throwing up, pretending to gag. Ilya’s eyes sparkled at their exaggerated reaction; he laughed, clearly pleased with himself.

Shane’s embarrassment quickly gave way to guilt as he watched the Russian chuckle, a ridiculous smile plastered across his face. Ilya had worked so hard to get the team here. He had played so well tonight, and he hardly ever had the opportunity to let loose.

Tonight, the Centaurs would have the time of their lives clubbing, while their captain went home to his boring house with his boring husband – simply because Shane didn’t like to party.

“Actually,” the Canadian chimed in, holding Ilya’s gaze. “We would love to go out celebrating with you guys,” Shane spoke confidently, hoping his husband wouldn’t see right through him.

“No fucking way, Hollander, really?” Troy asked, shocked. Shane almost never went out drinking with the team, and even when he did, he had to be dragged every step of the way.

“Yeah,” he shrugged with a false certainty. “Why not?” He turned to face his locker and busied himself with shedding his gear – shifting his attention to Troy had allowed him to break eye contact with Ilya, and he wasn’t exactly keen to reestablish it.

The team began whooping triumphantly, crowding around their captain and jostling him in victory. Shane glanced over his shoulder with a small smile. He loved to see his husband adored – he had been robbed of it for far too long.

The Canadian felt a pang of alienation as he watched the joyful moment his team shared.

He found himself doing that often: spectating.

He knew the Centaurs would welcome him into the huddled group without a second thought. The idea, however, of being pressed against the damp, warm bodies of his cheering teammates sounded suffocating.

He wouldn't be able to stand it, so he'd settle for watching them laugh from a distance, doing his best to pretend he didn't feel at least a little alone.

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Shane managed to avoid his husband for as long as possible, but was finally cornered against his locker upon returning from the showers.

“We do not have to go to club,” Ilya insisted.

“I know,” the shorter man huffed, crossing his arms and curling in on himself slightly. “I want to go.”

Scoffing, Ilya caught Shane's chin between his thumb and index finger and tilted his head up, forcing eye contact. “*You* want to go to club?”

“Yes, I do,” the Canadian replied, rolling his eyes in annoyance.

The taller man raised his palms in surrender. “Okay moya lyubov, if is what you really want.” He conceded, voice still carrying a hint of suspicion and disbelief.

“It is.” Shane nodded curtly, bending to reach for his clothes.

The Russian loomed over him a moment longer, then turned to finish getting ready.

Ilya was still wrapping up his post-game interview when Shane had finished dressing and packing their things. After he’d waved goodbye to Troy and Harris, promising to see them at the bar later, the shorter man found himself alone in the empty locker room.

Sitting on the bench, he bounced his leg rapidly, somehow trying to shake himself loose from the dread that consumed him. Staring at the scuffed tile, he wrung his hands and hoped the reporters had congratulated Ilya – given him the credit he deserved.

He sat there, thoughts racing, until he heard the door creak open. Shane scrambled to grab his phone, pretending to be preoccupied with scrolling. He waited until Ilya came into view, then looked up at him, smiling. “How did it go?”

“Was fine,” the Russian sniffed, shrugging. “Mostly boring questions about stupid things, but we win, so I talk about that.”

Shane laughed softly. He always found Ilya’s persona endearing – knowing that beneath it was someone just for him. “Are you ready?”

The taller man hesitated, putting his hands in his pockets. “You are sure about this?” Unease flickered across his face.

“I’m sure.” Shane did his best to sound convincing. He stood, slinging their bags over his shoulder and interlacing his fingers with Ilya’s.

Ilya had sacrificed so much for him – given up almost everything. He shouldn’t have to give up making memories with his team, too.

Shane would not keep being what hindered him.

For once in his life, he would be fun, easygoing, and normal – for Ilya.

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Shane could hear the bass from the parking lot, and the closer they got, the stronger the vibrations in his chest became.

The door swung open, revealing the colored strobe lights and artificial fog that awaited. Ilya caught it, holding it open for the other man.

Shane was nauseated. He stood for a second in sickening fear before shoving it down, schooling his expression, and nodding to his husband.

Following closely behind him, Ilya's hand found the small of his back as they stepped into the club.

Shane looked back at Ilya with pleading eyes, instantly assaulted by the thrum of music and a powerful aroma of liquor that burned his nostrils.

The Russian dropped his hand from Shane's waist, moving to stand in front of him. Eyes impossibly soft, he took the shorter man's hand and guided him through the packed dance floor. The soles of Shane's shoes stuck to the filthy wood as he was led through the crowd, doing his best to weave around the sweaty bodies inches away from his own.

No matter how small he tried to make himself, the Canadian couldn't avoid colliding with the drunken dancers. The air hung hot and thick, and the itch he knew too well was beginning to blossom under his skin.

Fixing his eyes on the back of his husband's head, he willed his taut lungs to inflate just enough to return the color that had drained from his face.

He gripped Ilya's hand tighter.

Shane let himself be led the rest of the way, unfocusing his eyes and manually breathing – concentrating on ensuring the panic that simmered inside him didn't boil over.

When they finally emerged from the dance floor, the taller man ushered Shane to the corner booth where the Centaurs sat, cheering loudly at the couple's arrival. "What the fuck is up, Roz!" someone shouted, handing Ilya a beer.

"You order drink for me already?" the Russian grinned.

"Fuck yeah we did!" Haas shouted.

"Hollander, don't think we forgot about you motherfucker," Hayes called. "What's your drink?"

"Gingerale," Ilya answered for him, smiling affectionately.

"You sure?" Dykstra questioned, taking a sip of his own beer.

Shane glanced around the table; everyone was drinking. His stomach twisted. They were there to celebrate their win – he was there to celebrate his husband. The bass was surging through his veins, and the harsh lights flashed in his eyes – the simmering panic was bubbling now.

"Not tonight," he calmed.

“What?” Ilya said, whipping his head around. “You are drinking?” his husband asked, shocked.

“We’re celebrating, aren’t we?” he answered, voice just barely shaking.

“Damn right we are!” Dykstra applauded, sliding further down the booth to make room for Shane and Ilya.

The vinyl fabric was coated in spilled drinks, and it stuck to Shane’s hands as he moved to sit down. Quickly, he peeled them off the seat in disgust, vigorously trying to wipe them clean on his pants.

The Canadian felt his husband’s eyes on him, but he couldn’t let it go. No matter how hard he rubbed, he couldn’t rid himself of the putrid sensation. Ilya’s large hand rested on his knee and squeezed – comforting. When Shane’s hands slowed, the Russian took them in his and brushed his thumb across his knuckles.

He knew the Russian was still staring – he could feel his gaze burning into the side of his head. Laughter echoed around them, but neither man was smiling.

Shane couldn’t look at Ilya. He couldn’t let him see just how close he was to reaching his limit, despite having just arrived.

Not tonight.

Tonight, he was going to be normal. Tonight, he wouldn’t burden his husband with his oversensitivity.

Much to Shane’s relief, before the Russian had the chance to express his concern, the waitress had appeared, asking their orders.

Ilya declined, gesturing to the beer in front of him.

“I’d like a Moscow Mule, please,” Shane said, barely audible over the blaring music. He’d had the drink before. Ilya had made it for him once at the cottage, promising he’d like it (he did).

He was supposed to be fun tonight – fun people didn’t stay sober while everyone else was drinking. He refused to keep being the one who limited Ilya and stopped him from enjoying his life.

Fortunately, the Centaurs had taken the time Shane had spent ordering to finally get Ilya’s attention. Thanking the waitress, the Canadian turned to look at the taller man – he was nursing his beer and nodding along to something Bood was saying.

Shane exhaled and leaned further back, moving methodically so as not to capture Ilya’s attention; he was finally talking and laughing with the team – finally letting loose. The shorter man wrapped his arms around his torso, flattening his palms against his cotton shirt.

His hands were still sticky, plagued with the tacky residue of stale alcohol. The music reverberated through every atom of the room, exacerbating the ache that lodged itself in his eardrums. Even when he closed his eyes, the flashing lights somehow reached behind his eyelids.

Fuck – his skin was crawling.

He needed to pull himself together. He was here for his husband. He would not freak out. He would not make this about himself.

Digging his nails into the heels of his disgustingly sticky palms, he did his best to swallow his discomfort and tune into the conversation.

“I wish we knew more famous people; I mean, we *are* professional athletes,” Troy complained.

“Shane knows a famous person,” Haas pointed out.

Shit. He was already struggling to breathe, never mind wasting what little social capacity he had left on this trivial small talk.

“Oh shit, yeah, he does!” Troy cried. “What is Rose Landry like?”

Shane glanced at his husband, who rolled his eyes at the mention of Rose.

“She's nice,” the Canadian shrugged. He was there for Ilya, and as much as he loved her, the last thing he wanted to do was spend time talking about his ex-girlfriend.

Silence lingered a moment, like it waited for Shane to say something more.

“Wow, I had no idea,” Hayes smirked, blinking back at him.

“You didn't?” Shane asked, face twisted in bewilderment. “Almost every article about her says she is.”

Ilya's hand found Shane's thigh. “He is joking, lyubov.”

“Oh,” Shane whispered, looking away in embarrassment. The bass rattled his ribcage, and fresh tears gathered in his eyes, making the strobe lights bleed together.

Ilya made a witty comment that Shane couldn't quite make out over the music, and the team broke into laughter again.

The Canadian blinked rapidly, desperately trying to banish the tears. He always felt 2 seconds behind in places like this; always the first to be bothered by the stimuli and the last to arrive at the joke – if he got there at all.

For the second time that night, he watched the joy through a window locked from the other side.

He wanted so badly to hold his husband's hand, to lean against his shoulder, to feel his warmth, but he simply wouldn't allow himself. That wasn't something a normal, carefree husband would do at a club.

It wasn't unusual for Shane to gravitate towards the other man in public (or in private), and he knew the contact would be welcomed, but Ilya was finally enjoying himself; Shane couldn't risk taking that away from him.

He dug his nails deeper into his palms, reoriented himself, and tried his best to follow where the conversation had gone.

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When the waitress returned with his drink, Shane thanked her and immediately took a sip. He needed to show Ilya he wasn't always uptight and boring – that he was trying.

He relinquished himself to observing the team, laughing when they did, nodding along, and interjecting well-timed remarks to fill the dead air. Shane followed the discussion for the most part, drinking more each time the bass roared, but Ilya still occasionally leaned close to his ear, whispering hushed explanations of the jokes Shane didn't register.

Eventually, most of the guys got tired of the chatter and went to dance, leaving Ilya to focus his attention back on Shane, who was reaching for his freshly refilled glass.

The Russian caught his wrist and spoke softly into the shell of his ear. “Maybe is time to slow down, malysh, hm?”

Shane was undeniably tipsy. “Maybe you should hurry up,” he objected, jutting his finger out to point at Ilya’s half-drunk beer. “You’re still on your first.”

“Yes,” the taller man nodded. “Ever since I marry polite Canadian boy, I do not drink so much. He is always reminding me to be careful,” Ilya raised his eyebrows. “Maybe he should take his own boring advice, yes?”

“Shut up, Rosanov,” Shane whined, wrestling his wrist away. “I’m trying to celebrate.”

The Russian narrowed his eyes and studied Shane as he brought the glass back to his lips.

“Is not like you to-” he was cut off mid-sentence when a drunk couple stumbled past, spilling a drink onto the floor – and Ilya’s lap.

“What the hell?” Shane shouted, mouth still full of liquor.

“Is okay, lyubimyy, just a spill.”

“They didn’t even apologize to you!” he cried, blotting the wet fabric with a napkin as best he could.

“They probably did not even notice,” the taller man figured. “I will go clean this in bathroom,” he said, gently taking the napkins from Shane’s clammy fist.

Ilya shouted over the noise to Haas and Dykstra – the only 2 players left at the table – motioning to Shane, then to his drink. “He does not need more after this. I will be back – going to bathroom.”

He crouched, leveling himself with the other man's eyeline. "I mean it, Shane. No more after this. You have low tolerance." He spoke sweetly, kissing the Canadian's forehead. "I will be back soon. Call if you need me; I will come."

"I am an adult, you know," he retorted. "You can have fun without worrying about me."

"I know, Shanya." he smiled softly. "But you are my husband, so I worry anyway." He kissed his forehead again and tussled his hair before turning and disappearing into the dense crowd.

In his absence, everything was amplified. The music, the lights, the spilled alcohol that coated his hands, adhering his fingers together. Without his husband's presence to soothe him, Shane was acutely aware of everything that overloaded his nervous system.

He began to knead his lip between his teeth, only pausing to chug the rest of the Moscow mule. The air around him was thick, and he could feel his throat tightening. Maybe if he got drunk enough, when Ilya came back, he could find it in himself to dance.

Across the table, Haas was laughing at something on Dykstra's phone. Having faded into the background, Shane seized his opportunity and slid out of the sticky booth, shrinking away from the table and heading to the bar.

The Canadian rarely drank, and the 2 mules were starting to get to him. The music ringing in his ears had quieted slightly, muffled by the buzz settling comfortably over him. He moved with purpose, determined to be the kind of husband that Ilya could party with.

Walking past the dance floor, he noticed a group of Centaurs, drinks in hand, moving with the music. Ilya liked to dance. If Shane hadn't been there – hadn't been such a hindrance – he was sure his husband would be there too, teasing their teammates for their terrible dance moves.

Tonight, Shane decided, Ilya *would* be there, and so would he – he just needed to get drunk enough to ignore the itch burning beneath his skin.

Once he reached the bar, the Canadian steadied himself against the counter and waited to order another drink.

A rowdy group of guys stumbled past him, shoving one another – and, as a result, Shane.

“Oh shit, bro,” one of the guys said, apologizing as he turned around. “My bad.”

“All good,” Shane replied with a tight-lipped smile, despite being very far from it. He was already fraying at the seams from the sheer overwhelm of the thumping club, and being pushed only ripped him apart more.

“No fucking way!” the apologetic man yelped, elbowing his friend in the ribs, half-lidded eyes suddenly sparkling. “Are you Shane Hollander?”

His entire body stiffened with fear. *Great*. He was barely holding it together and certainly not in a state to be recognized. Now that his secret was public, he never knew what to expect from hockey fans.

Even completely sober, he wasn't confident he could defend himself properly – and he was definitely not sober.

“Yeah,” he nodded, mouth dry.

The intoxicated men stared back at him in amazement. “Dude, I just bumped into *Shane Hollander*; this is fucking insane!”

Shane huffed a small laugh through his nose, relieved.

“Let me buy you a drink to make it up to you,” the man insisted.

“No thanks – that's okay,” Shane declined. He never felt right about accepting things from people just because he was an MLH player.

“Come on, man, do a shot with us! You’re a hockey legend!” One of the other men chimed in.

The rest of the group murmured their agreement, nodding fervently.

Shane felt the pressure in his head building again, and his skin burned hotter. He needed to stop being dramatic if he wanted to dance with Ilya later – and to do that, he needed to get very drunk. “Alright, thanks.” He nodded slowly.

The drunk man slapped him on the shoulder, raising his hand to call the bartender over.

The group lined up next to Shane at the bar – a shot of vodka sat in front of each of them. “To the greatest of all time!” the guy at the end boomed, and with that, they raised their glasses and threw back the shot in unison.

Shane felt his esophagus burn as the alcohol traveled through him, setting his insides ablaze. A drop of vodka dribbled down his chin, and he swiped it away with the back of his hand.

Sticky.

“Another!” one of the men declared, clapping loudly. The bartender returned, filling each glass to the brim.

After they took another shot, the inebriated group finally decided they’d had enough.

“Sorry again for bumping you, brother,” the first man shouted, drumming his hands against the bar.

The room tilted slightly, and Shane’s throat was raw. He squeezed his eyes shut, suddenly met with a flash of blinding light – they were taking a selfie with him, he realized.

“Pics or it didn’t happen, am I right, Hollander?” he heard one of the men chuckle.

Eyes still readjusting, he nodded weakly and half-heartedly waved to the men as they disappeared into the crowded dance floor.

Trembling, the Canadian reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet, setting a \$100 bill under his empty glass for the bartender.

He swayed there a moment, scanning the spinning room for somewhere to steady himself – for Haas or Dykstra. Ilya had been right; he should have slowed down, stayed with his teammates. He hadn’t listened, and now he was alone, 2 Moscow Mules and 3 shots deep, stuck at the bar and lost in a sea of people.

Shane just wanted his husband. The alcohol hadn’t yet done anything to alleviate the effects of the music and lights that encircled him. He felt trapped – suffocated – like his skin was fusing itself to his stiff muscles. The room spun faster, and the Canadian wasn’t convinced he was standing upright anymore. His heart pounded in his ears as the music rattled his ribcage once more, an insatiable itch beckoning his blunt fingernails.

He wanted to scream. He wanted to rip his hair out. He wanted to tear his clothes off.

He wanted Ilya.

“Selfish,” he muttered under his breath, tongue heavy as it touched his teeth.

He was supposed to be normal tonight. Ilya had come to have fun with his team – not to babysit his anxious lightweight of a husband.

The room spun too fast, and the lights were far too bright for him to find his way to the corner booth where his team sat. Stumbling a few steps to the right, he sank into the empty barstool beside him.

He pillowed his pounding head on his folded arms, resting them on the bar's damp countertop. He shut his eyes tight, trying to focus more on his breathing and less on the spilled liquor seeping through the fabric of his sleeves and the sweat and alcohol that had begun to dry onto his skin.

The ache in his eardrums was now accompanied by a shrill tone that rang in sickening harmony with the music. He could feel his pulse thrumming between his brows, and his raw throat still tasted faintly of vodka. He sank his teeth into his bottom lip until he tasted copper and rust, trying his hardest not to come completely undone.

He would be normal. He would do it for Ilya. He would not burden him with such pathetic things.

He was fine – he just needed the room to stop spinning.

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Shane yelped at the feeling of a large hand on the small of his back. “Mmph... ‘m m-arried,” he slurred, swatting his hand blindly behind him in hopes of dissuading the person.

“I do not think he will mind...Russians do not get jealous,” Ilya's accented voice answered, moving his hand to trace Shane's spine.

“I-Ilyaaa?” he questioned, face still pressed into his folded arms. “You're hereee?”

“Da, malysh, I am here.”

“Where did ‘everyone go?’” he said, mouth dry.

“They are at table, where you should be.” Ilya chastised.

“Not themmm,” Shane replied, rolling his eyes. “The guys who took the picture.”

The Russian's voice rose with concern: “What picture?”

“Flash was really bright,” the shorter man recalled. “They were nice, though, bought me shotsss.”

Ilya squeezed his shoulder firmly, clearly more possessive having heard of his drunk husband's interaction. “Is time to leave. Can you stand up for me?”

“Noooo,” the shorter man whined. “We’re s’posed to celebrate.”

“We did celebrate. Was enough. Now is time to go.” The Russian’s voice was cool and dominant – something steady and sure for Shane to hold onto.

After a brief moment of consideration, he relented. “Ookayy,” he sang, lifting his head off the counter.

“Can you stand up for me, Solnysko?” the taller man coaxed.

“Mmm,” Shane hummed. “Can’t – room’s ‘pinng.”

“Yes, I know. Is okay, just hold onto me.”

That sounded nice, Shane thought. He liked holding onto Ilya. He was big and strong and safe – and the way he was speaking to Shane made him feel fuzzy inside.

Ilya steadied his hands under the shorter man’s armpits, bracing him as he stood from the barstool. When his feet hit the floor, Shane wobbled, reaching out for his husband. Ilya held him close, wrapping his arm around his waist and resting it on his hip protectively.

Shane leaned all his weight against the taller man, one arm thrown over Ilya’s shoulder and the other resting against his chest, fingers fisting the fabric of his shirt. The shorter man focused his attention on where his feet met the sticky tile, doing his best not to trip over himself as his husband led him through the club.

A few yards from the door, Shane gasped and stopped walking, tugging on his husband’s shirt. “We didn’t say goodbye,” he slurred, heavy eyes wide with shock.

Ilya shook his head fondly, reaching out to brush his thumb across Shane’s freckles. “Is fine, Shane. I talk to Haas and Dykstra when I come back from the bathroom. I say goodbye and tell them I need to find my stubborn husband.”

“Oh...” Shane’s face crumbled. “I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. You were right... You’re always right.” He felt his lip quiver and caught it between his teeth.

“Is okay, lyubmiyy. I am not mad. Just glad you are safe and back with me.” He gently nudged Shane forward, and they began to walk again.

“We go home now, da?” Ilya said, pushing open the door and maneuvering them through the frame.

Whimpering, Shane nodded, rubbing his cheek against the Russian's shirt, feeling the fabric against his skin.

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The stillness of the night air settled something in Shane as they walked through the parking lot, gravel crunching under the weight of their feet.

When they reached Ilya's sports car, the Russian leaned him against the vehicle and opened the passenger door, helping an unsteady Shane into his seat.

Once inside, the shorter man reached out to tug on the hem of his husband's shirt.

"Babyyyyy?" he called.

The taller man crouched next to the car, reaching into Shane's lap and taking hold of his hand. "Yes, moya lyubov?"

"Hi."

"Hi, Shanya"

"I missed you."

Ilya stifled a laugh, a small smile teasing his lips. "I missed you, too." Kissing the back of Shane's hand, he moved to stand

Canadian immediately whined when he pulled away. "Don't gooooo."

“I am just going to get in car, rakushka.”

“Stay,” Shane pouted, looking up at him with big brown eyes.

Ilya leaned into the car, pressing a tender kiss to his lips as he reached into the backseat. “Here, Solnyshko,” he said, covering Shane’s chest with his Centaurs hoodie, complete with a large “C” in the corner.

The Canadian could smell traces of his husband's cologne on the warm fleece. Humming contentedly, he allowed Ilya to untangle their hands, shut the passenger door, and climb into the driver's seat.

“Did you put your seatbelt on?” the Russian asked, turning the key in the ignition and clicking on the heat.

Shane sat up slightly, shaking his head. He pulled his arm from the warmth of Ilya’s hoodie and reached for the seatbelt, hands shaking slightly as he tried fastening the buckle. The sound of the metal clacking against the plastic broke the patient silence each time he missed the slot.

Ears still ringing, Shane felt suspended in static. He groaned in frustration, fingers curled around the buckle still coated in tacky residue.

“Is okay, moya lyubov,” Ilya cooed, gently taking the seatbelt and fastening it across a quivering Shane. “See?”

Grateful, the Canadian nodded, blinking his eyes shut and leaning back against the headrest. Heat still simmered atop his prickling, but duller now, the alcohol coursing through his veins sedating him slightly.

As the heat blasted through the vent, an already gooey Shane melted a little more.

Ilya's hand found its usual spot on the Canadian's thigh as he shifted into reverse and pulled out of the parking lot.

"Mmm," Shane sighed. The weight of his husband's palm found its way through the buzz beneath his skin.

Almost magnetically, both of Shane's hands wrapped around Ilya's forearm, holding on. "You looked hot tonight," he said, giggling. "I wanted to kiss youuu."

"Oh?" the Russian smirked.

"Yeah." Shane's face fell. "But my hands were too sticky 'n it was really loud."

"Yes, was very loud," Ilya nodded earnestly. Noticing the crease between his husband's brows and how intently he chewed his lip, the Russian began to stroke his thumb back and forth over Shane's inner thigh.

They rode in silence the rest of the way, the only noise the whirring of the engine and the blowing heat. The Canadian kept his eyes closed, face scrunched in discomfort. Ilya continued caressing the other man's thigh, hoping the quiet warmth would help to bring him down.

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Shane must have fallen asleep somewhere along the way because the next time he opened his eyes, the passenger door was open, and Ilya was crouched in their driveway beside him. "Shanya," he whispered, brushing the shorter man's hair off his forehead. "We are home now, is time to go inside."

As soon as he shifted to climb out of the car, a surge of nausea forced him back down, saliva pooling in his mouth. “Don’ feel good,” he whined, vision swimming. “Can't move,” he contended, hoping to spare himself any more pain.

“Okay,” Ilya said, pushing off his knees and planting his feet. He reached into the car, sliding one arm around Shane’s back, the other under his knees, and hoisted the intoxicated Canadian into the air. Shane wrapped his arms around his husband's neck instinctively, resting his head against his strong chest.

“Wait!” the shorter man gasped, unhooking one arm from Ilya’s neck to point down at the car. “The hoodie!”

“Is okay, I will get it tomorrow,” the Russian assured him.

“No! I need it!” the shorter man cried.

Ilya craned his neck to look down at his husband in confusion.

“It smells like you,” he whispered after a moment, a blush spreading across his freckled cheeks.

Ilya sighed, squeezing him tighter against his chest, and bent down, allowing Shane to retrieve the hoodie. “Okay, you have hoodie. We go inside now, da?”

“Da,” the Canadian parroted, giggling.

Having unlocked the door one-handed and successfully hauled his inebriated husband inside, the Russian set Shane down gently on the couch and knelt in front of him. Delighted by the safety of his own home, the Canadian began babbling, combing his fingers through Ilya’s curls, as the taller man untied his shoes and worked them off his feet. “You played so well tonight, babyyy. I’m *soooo* proud,” he swooned, a wide smile plastered across his face.

“Thank you,” Ilya said quietly, pressing a kiss to Shane’s knee as he pulled the shoe off his other foot.

He stood with a yawn, forcing the Canadian’s hands to fall from his hair.

Robbed of his husband’s curls, Shane clutched the hoodie in his lap. “Hey!” he accused, “Where are you going with my shoes?”

The Russian said nothing, only lined them up neatly on the rack next to his own.

“Oh,” Shane said, “okay.”

“You know,” he continued, “I bet people are really jealous I have such a strong, sexy husband who carries me around,” Shane said, smiling smugly to himself at the idea.

“Oh, you think so?” Ilya laughed, sitting down next to him.

“Yeah,” he replied, resting his head on the taller man’s shoulder. “I would be reallyyyy jealous too if you weren't mine forever.”

Looking down at Shane’s flushed face and droopy eyes, Ilya felt his heart swell. Overcome with the weight of it, he rested his palm on the Canadian's cheek and patted it twice, relishing the way his husband leaned into the contact.

“Ilyaaa,” Shane groaned suddenly, sitting up, glassy eyes frantic. “I really don't feel good.” His hand flew to his mouth as he hiccuped, trying to fend off the vomit that threatened to stain the carpet.

Quickly, Ilya gathered Shane in his arms and rushed to the bathroom, placing him in front of the toilet just before he lost control.

Just as Shane had feared, the vodka burned just as much coming back up, scraping sharply against his already raw throat. He hated throwing up regardless, but throwing up a copious amount of alcohol was another feat entirely. He gripped the toilet seat as tight as he could, using every ounce of strength he possessed not to empty his stomach.

His husband sat behind him, rubbing his back.

“I know it hurts, moya lyubov, but it's better to let it out,” he soothed. “Will feel worse if you fight,” Ilya was speaking in the register that always managed to cut through his thoughts, no matter how aggressive the spiral. He let the sound of his husband's voice and the way his accent curled around the words settle over him, and felt the fear ebb ever so slightly. Letting out a strained noise, Shane gave in to the nausea.

“That's it, let it out,” the Russian purred. “So good for me.”

When the last of the retching had ceased, the shorter man's energy had been completely depleted. Breathing raggedly, he leaned back against the Russian, who closed the lid and flushed the toilet.

He lay there until his racing pulse slowed, and he felt himself being lifted off the tile. The Canadian reached for the hoodie that sat next to the toilet, hugging it to his chest as he was carried out of the bathroom.

Shane whimpered as they walked up the stairs, clearly displeased.

“Ah, no,” his husband tutted. “Is bedtime, Shane.”

Grunting, the Canadian closed his heavy eyes, pouting.

Mere moments later, his eyes fluttered open once more, and Shane was surprised to find himself sitting on a closed toilet – this time in their en suite. In the warm light, the room tilted in front of him. Shane didn't feel far away from his body anymore; he was no longer in an echo of experience. Everything came crashing back to him in full force – the ringing in his ears, the itch crawling beneath his skin, the burning of his throat, the sticky residue that covered his palms.

The Canadian's breathing grew labored, and panic ripped through him. Limp-wristed, he shook his hands at his sides like a dog shakes water from its coat.

He was so sticky, so hot, so grimy – the room was still spinning, but he knew it was too small. He couldn't breathe.

Ilya's outline appeared in the swimming space in front of him. Reaching out, he tugged at the fabric of Shane's shirt, lifting it over his head. The Russian moved to undo his belt and unzip his jeans, knocking the comforting weight of the Centaurs hoodie from his lap. Shane began to scratch his blunt fingernails across his forearms at the loss, trying desperately to regulate himself. He was on the verge of hyperventilating – he was drowning.

“Shane, baby, I need you to stand up for me.”

Shane shook his head, horrified.

“I need to take off your pants, then we shower, da?” Ilya didn't wait for an answer this time, just hooked his hands under Shane's armpits and hauled him to his feet. Holding him against his chest with one arm, the taller man used the other to push the Canadian's pants down his thighs, tapping his bare ass lightly – an unspoken direction to step out of the denim around his ankles.

Ilya set his gasping husband back down on the toilet, the now naked Canadian shivering slightly at the contact with the cool porcelain. After stripping off his own clothes, Ilya knelt again to remove Shane's socks, then stood, his back to Shane, as he turned on the shower.

Shane felt as though all his blood had been replaced with static electricity, lungs working overtime to expand and contract in such rapid succession. Even seeing double, the shorter man could make out the clothes that sat piled in front of him. "All over the floor," he murmured between gasps, shaking his head feverishly.

"Shhh," Ilya soothed, turning to gather the clothes and drop them in the hamper. "See? All clean."

He walked back to Shane, stopping to stand in front of him, and placed a hand on his shoulder. The Canadian leaned forward and rested his forehead against his husband's torso, closing his eyes to quiet the dizziness. The taller man stood quietly, breathing exaggeratedly, patiently waiting for Shane to follow him.

After a minute of intense focus and manual breathing, Shane was finally able to take longer breaths. Ilya stood, scratching his fingers through Shane's sweaty hair. "Is time to shower, Solnyshko," he said, helping the shorter man to his feet and supporting his weight as they stepped under the water.

He situated Shane so his back was directly under the stream and lifted the shorter man's sullen face to meet his own. "You drink too much tonight," he scolded softly. "I tell you to stop after two."

Shane shifted his eyes to the side, doing his best to look away from his husband, who held his chin in place. "I know," he whispered.

"You wait until I leave to get another drink," he continued.

"Shane," he warned, waiting to speak until the Canadian met his eyes again. "Is *never* okay to walk around club alone without telling anyone where you are going and then drink with strangers."

He paused when the shorter man looked away once more. “Hey – look at me,” he beckoned, tone firm and uncompromising.

Shane wavered for a moment, guilt and embarrassment twisting inside him. For a brief moment, he considered retorting indignantly, but he knew what his husband said was true, and he was too far gone to even try. Relenting, he forced himself to look into Ilya’s disappointed eyes that always saw straight through him.

“Is *absolutely* never okay to do this when I am not close enough to help – when I am too far away to protect you.”

The shorter man’s lip quivered as he fought back the tears flooding his drunken eyes. “You shouldn’t have to protect me,” he muttered.

Ilya’s eyes softened, but his voice remained clear and stern. “We are married. We do this for each other. You are my husband. Is my job to protect you.” The Russian let the silence marinate, allowing Shane’s delayed processing to fully grasp what he had said. “You will not do this again, da?” he said, raising his eyebrows.

Shane couldn’t fight the tears anymore; they fell big and full, staining his freckled face as he sniffed. “-’m s-sorry,” he hiccuped. “-’m not g-gonna do it again – promise.”

Nodding, the taller man let go of his grip on Shane’s chin, bringing both his hands to his face to brush away his falling tears. “Thank you,” he sighed, tenderly capturing his husband’s trembling lips in a kiss.

Upon pulling away, he frowned, resting his thumb gently over the small scab that had formed in the center of Shane’s puffy bottom lip. “What happened tonight, malysh?”

“Too bright ‘nd too loud ‘nd,” he sniffled. “Just wanted it to stop.”

That was all it took for him to unravel completely.

“I hate the club so m-much.. The music is *so* loud ‘nd it makes my chest vibrate – it feels like my bones are rattling inside me. I don’t like the colored lights; they shine in my eyes, ‘nd it hurts. It’s so *hot* in there too, ‘nd everything is dirty. Oh god, Ilya ‘m s-so gross. Everything there was so *sticky* ‘nd now my hands are sticky – it’s so sticky and gross; my ears are still ringing, and everything is s-so loud,” he sobbed. “My head is so *loud*, ‘lya.” He was crying uncontrollably now, snot and tears running down his face.

Ilya wrapped his arms around his sobbing husband, pulling him into his chest and squeezing hard – pressure always anchored Shane. “Okay – okay, shhh,” he whispered; Shane’s fingernails clawed at his back, trying to pull him impossibly closer.

“You are safe now, yes? I am here. You will get clean.”

The Canadian nodded against his skin, and Ilya reached for the soap.

Shane still hid his face in Ilya’s chest as his husband ran a lathered washcloth over his back. He only stepped away to allow the Russian to drag the cloth across the front of his body. His motions were light and his touch gentle, careful not to frighten an already skittish Shane.

Lifting his hand, the taller man unballled his fist. Ilya tenderly washed each palm, making sure to reach every crease and crevice, tracing the lines etched into his palms – he took extra care running the cloth over the indentations Shane’s fingernails had left on the heels of his hands. He repeated the process on the back of each hand and kissed the Canadian’s knuckles.

After bending down to quickly wipe down the shorter man’s legs, Ilya gently lathered shampoo in his hair. Shane’s purred, closing his eyes and melting into the touch. He felt fuzzy again, thoughts not exactly fully materializing.

Opening his half-lidded eyes, he lifted his finger to trace the outline of his husband’s clavicle, dragging his finger over each crest and over the golden chain that rested there. “Mmm, pretty,” he breathed, moving to trace the Russian’s bicep and pecs. “Mine,” he sighed, the ending of the word sounding more like a question.

“Yes, Shanya,” Ilya hummed as he tipped the Canadian's head back under the water, shielding his eyes. “Yours,” he echoed, washing the remaining shampoo from the shorter man’s inky hair.

Shane scissored his fingers together hesitantly, expecting them to stick and contaminate his tranquility.

“Still sticky?” the taller man asked.

“Mm-mm,” Shane shook his head, relieved and existing somewhere between worlds.

“All clean then, rybka?” the Russian asked, hushed.

“Mmmmm,” the Canadian hummed, slurring slightly – he was definitely still drunk, but it wasn't the alcohol that was melting away his inhibitions.

Shane pressed his wet body back against Ilya’s. “I wanted to,” he started, then trailed off, unable to hold onto the thought long enough. “I just hope,” he tried again, losing his grip on the sentence again. Grumbling in defeat, he opened his mouth and bit down slightly on the Russian’s shoulder.

Ilya hummed and huffed a laugh from his nose, resting his calloused hand on the back of Shane’s neck. “Is getting harder to think?” he smirked into the Canadian's hair.

The shorter man melted further under his embrace, letting a small whine escape his lips.

“Ah – good. Is better when head is quiet, da?” he mused.

Shane didn't even bother responding; he just wrapped his arms around the talker man's neck, anchoring himself. Ilya patted the curve of Shane's ass twice, and the Canadian allowed himself to be lifted, wrapping his legs around the taller man's waist – doing so without a second thought, trusting he would be held steady.

Ilya cut the water and carried his dripping husband out of the shower.

Holding Shane with one hand, he spread a towel over the vanity countertop and seated the shivering man on top of it. He wrapped another around his shoulders and began to dry him off. Shane was limp in his husband's hands as Ilya moved wordlessly, dragging the towel over his wet skin.

The Canadian only watched his movements, breathing softly from his swollen lips. Once finished with his body, Ilya shifted to dry the wet hair that sat heavy, spread against his forehead. Shane sat patiently, blinking blearily up at his husband through wet brown eyes.

After setting the towel down and kissing his head, Ilya squirted toothpaste onto Shane's toothbrush and brought it to his mouth. "Otkryt" he instructed, dragging his thumb over the Canadian's pink lips.

Obediently, Shane opened his mouth, letting his husband brush his teeth and scrub away the last traces of vomit. At his husband's direction, the shorter man sipped water from a paper cup, swished it around his mouth, and spit it back out into the sink.

"All clean now, lyubimmy," the Russian assured him.

Shane sat patiently as Ilya placed the toothbrush and paste back into the holder and moved back to stand between his legs. The shorter man sat, still wrapped in a towel, watching the water track down his husband's frame.

The Russian rested his hands on the other man's hips, looking down at him. "So beautiful like this, moy milyy mal'chik," he purred. "See what happens when you do not fight so hard and let me take care of you?"

Shane just blinked back at him, pupils blown wide, mouth slightly agape.

Ilya bent, picking up the Centaurs hoodie that the Canadian insisted he bring inside with him. Gently, the Russian removed the towel from Shane's shoulders, motioning for him to lift his arms. He pulled the hoodie over his head, tugging the heavy fabric until it sat properly, making sure it hadn't bunched anywhere and sat smoothly against Shane's skin. Nodding in approval, Ilya brought his hands to cradle the shorter man's cheeks, dragging his thumbs softly over his freckles. "Tebe nravitsya byt' moim khoroshim mal'chikom, hm? Is okay to need your husband, malysh."

He pulled Shane into a hug, carding his hand through his hair and dragging it down his back – guiding him back to himself just enough to stand on his own. When he broke away, he pulled the Canadian off the counter and to his feet, tenderly directing him to step into the clean pair of underwear he'd pressed into his hands.

Shane swayed where he stood while Ilya dried himself quickly, pulling on only a new pair of boxer-briefs, and hung the towels on the rack.

The Canadian's eyes followed his husband, mind full of cotton. He was blissfully quiet, the only sound the sigh that escaped him once he was back in Ilya's arms. The Russian lifted him again, holding firm under his shoulders and thighs. Shane pressed his freshly cleaned cheek to Ilya's bare chest as they moved, whimpering when he was placed on the bed, sitting with his back against the headboard.

Ilya disappeared back into the bathroom momentarily, flicking off the light as he reappeared with a plastic trash can. After setting it on the floor next to Shane, he twisted the cap off a bottle of water and brought it to his lips. "Vypey eto," he said, gently commanding. "Will help with hangover tomorrow." He stood, holding the bottle to the Canadian's mouth, until he was satisfied with how much he'd drunk. "Good," he said finally, screwing the cap back onto the bottle and placing it on the nightstand. He gestured for Shane to lie down before clicking off the lamp, a darkness blanketing the room.

Shane whimpered again, louder this time, reaching his arms out in search of his husband – his cloudy mind not quite processing where he'd gone.

“Shhh, is okay, moya lyubov,” the taller man cooed, sliding under the covers and pulling the shorter man onto his chest. Shane rubbed his face against Ilya’s skin, soaking in the touch. The Russian’s skin was soft and always smelled faintly of his musky soap. The aroma of his husband’s freshly washed body blended with the cologne that lingered on his Captain’s hoodie. Ilya always smelled so good – he was always so soft and so warm.

This was his – being held like this belonged to Shane and no one else.

“My husband was very stupid today, da?” the Russian asked, combing his fingers through Shane’s wet hair.

The other man’s voice pulled the shorter man away from the warmth of his fuzzy thoughts. His face twisted in defiance as he opened his mouth to protest. Sensing his petulance, Ilya lifted his free hand and placed two fingers on his tongue. Shane stilled for a moment, trying to wrap his syrupy mind around what had just happened.

“Yes, very stupid,” the taller man continued, cooling his voice to a patronizing tone. “He did not listen to what his very smart and handsome husband told him,” he tutted. Pushing down a little on Shane’s wet tongue. He softened his cadence to a warm coo: “Is okay, though, ah? Next time, he will know better.”

Shane nodded once, moving slowly as he processed the accented words – he *would* know better next time. He closed his lips around Ilya’s fingers then, nuzzling into his bare chest. “There you are,” he purred. “Always so sweet for me, lyubmiyy,” the Russian whispered, scratching his fingers against the nape of the shorter man’s neck.

Shane’s eyes fluttered as the words washed over him, finally letting them close. He was floating weightlessly now, tethered only by the weight of the fingers resting in his mouth and the knowledge that Ilya would guide him back to himself tomorrow.

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Shane woke with a dull ache reverberating in his head, still tucked comfortably into his husband's chest. He had fallen asleep boneless and content – in his sickly sobriety, he was

anything but. He groaned, bringing his hand to his face and covering his eyes. “*Fuck.*”

Beneath him, Ilya stirred, tightening his arm around Shane’s waist reflexively. “Ah, head is angry from last night,” he observed, voice raspy and deep.

“Jesus Christ, why do people like this?” the Canadian scoffed. “Being drunk isn’t even worth all the shit that comes after.”

“Most people do not drink whole bar after not drinking for months, moya lyubov.” The Russian poked the other man playfully between his ribs.

“Fuck off,” Shane said. “I was trying to celebrate.”

“You drink like we win the cup,” his husband teased. “Was only first game of the season.”

Shane rolled his eyes, still covering them with his hand, “I know that, Ilya. I was trying to celebrate *you*,” he huffed.

He heard the pillowcase rustle as the taller man cocked his head and looked down at him in confusion. “Celebrate me? Why?”

“Because.” Shane lingered a moment, then spoke again. “You worked so hard to get the team to the point that we could win *any* game. You put so much time and effort into the preseason, and it showed. *You* are why we won last night.”

Ilya rubbed soothing circles at the base of Shane’s neck with his thumb. “Is very sweet of you to say, Solnyshko, but was team effort. Is team sport.”

Normally, Shane found his husband’s humility endearing, but his patience was wearing thinner with every pulsating throb of his head. “*You’re* the captain, Ilya. You pour everything into the team. And you never get to celebrate because you always get stuck going home with

me instead.” The Canadian’s voice broke midway through the sentence, tears building behind his lash line.

“Hey, look at me,” Ilya said, softly lifting Shane’s hand off his face and holding it in his. Brow furrowed, the shorter man looked up, big brown eyes wet with tears. “I am not *stuck* going home with you. Is what I want.”

“You’re seriously going to try to tell me that you don’t want to go to the bar with the team when they invite you out?” Shane was having none of this. He knew his husband, and he knew how much he liked to party.

“Is not like that,” the Russian explained. “You do not like club, and *I* do not want to be anywhere my husband does not want to be.”

The shame came rushing back through Shane, hot and dark. “My fucking *god*, ” he spat. “You don’t have to let me hold you back all the time – you don’t need to let me stop you from having fun.” Anger was far easier to contend with than the guilt that coursed through his veins – the heat of it more tolerable than the humiliation that burned inside of him.

Ilya frowned, speaking softly. “I have fun with *you*.”

“Bullshit,” he shot back, crying now.

“Is not bullshit, Shane,” the Russian responded, a little exasperated. He pushed off his elbows, seating himself against the headboard. Hooking his fingers under Shane’s armpits, he hauled him upright, positioning him so he was sitting on his lap, face to face with Ilya. Shane’s eyes burned as he stared back at his husband, who was studying him intently, rubbing his hands up and down the Canadian’s biceps.

“What is going on, moya lyubov?” he asked.

Shane only shook his head, anger fizzling out almost as quickly as it had ignited, leaving him to deal with the embers of shame and embarrassment that burned hot under his skin in its wake.

“Shane, talk to me. Use your words, yes? Tell me what is wrong, dorogoy.”

The tears were traveling down his neck now. He was exhausted, his head was pounding, and – quite frankly – he didn't have the energy to argue. He inhaled sharply, and after a beat of agitated silence, the Canadian completely unwound.

“Y-you always have to say no to things you wanna do be-because of me. You never get t-to have f-fun or be celebrated, all because ‘m a fucking baby who can't handle anything,” he rambled.

Ilya's voice was pained: “You are not baby Shane; club is not fun for lot of people.”

“It's fun for *you* though, ‘nd even when I go ‘nd I try my hardest to be fun – to be *normal*, ‘m still not.” He sighed in defeat before continuing: “I'm a grown fucking man who s-should be able to deal with the music and the lights, and not freak out when my hands get sticky-”

The Russian gathered the other man's hands, squeezing them in his. “Shane-”

“No,” the Canadian sobbed, cutting him off. “You sacrificed so much,” he hiccuped. “Just to be stuck explaining the jokes you should be laughing at to your boring fucking husband who is s-somehow always on the outside of everything n-no matter how hard you try to include him.”

Shane was shaking now.

Ilya shook his head as he listened – waiting for the shorter man to take a breath, for an opportunity to finally interrupt. The spiral was too aggressive, though, and Shane kept rambling.

“I just wanted you to feel celebrated and loved like you deserve, and instead I got too drunk, and you got stuck picking up the pieces all night like you always do, and now you have to do it again this morning. You didn't even get to drink more than one beer or spend any real time with anyone. Even when I t-try really fucking hard not to hold you back from enjoying your life, I fail, and you just end up taking care of me. It's not fair to you-”

“Shane!” Ilya exclaimed, hoping his voice registered louder than his husband’s racing thoughts. He held Shane’s head in his hands and caught the tears with his large thumbs before they could even touch his flushed face. “You do not hold me back from enjoying my life. You *are* my life. Nothing makes me happier than you, moya solnyshko.” He kissed Shane’s trembling lips, long and deep.

Pulling away, he spoke again, filling the air with his smooth accent, sure and affectionately dominant. “I love *you*, Shanya. I chose *you*. I marry *you*. I make you my husband because you live in my heart and in my head all of the time. When I fall asleep, is you I am thinking of. While I sleep, is you that I see in my dreams. When I wake up, is you I reach for.” Ilya kissed the shorter man’s nose to puncture his words.

Shane whimpered, preparing to protest, but the Russian continued to speak. “All of these things you say you must fix – they are big part of why I fall in love with you.”

Sensing the confusion on his husband's distraught face, he elaborated. “When I first meet you, you shake my hand twice in two minutes. Was first time someone looked at me like that. Like I was worth getting to know.” He smiled to himself at the memory. “You have always been bad liar, too. I see the truth on your face. Is why I knock on your door that night, yes?”

Shane nodded.

“The first time we fuck, you make me wait to touch you until you fold your clothes. Every time after that, when you sneak into my hotel room, you take your shoes off before you let me kiss you. I love that you make me wait – I get to watch you, look at all of you, before I fuck you.” Ilya nipped at the shorter man’s bottom lip.

“I always know what food to make when you are sad, because you eat same thing every day. When you do not understand joke, I get to laugh twice, and is even better the second time, because I get to see your face light up when I explain. You are the best thing in my life, Shanya.”

Now it was Ilya's turn to get teary-eyed. “I do not have to pick up the pieces. You are already whole. Do not say these things about my Shane. Is not problem. Problem means there is something to fix. Ty uzhe sovershenen. Moy ideal'nyy mal'chik, da? Do not ever forget this.” The Russian held his husband's gaze, looking deep into his soul.

“Is only you that I want. Is my job to protect my husband. Is my most precious thing to have you like this. Eto tol'ko moyo. Vso eto — dlya menya. I want only real you, no one else. Ty mozhesh' doverit'sya mne. Ty moyo.”

Ilya waited for Shane's defiance to dissolve. Then, in the sternly sweet voice he knew pacified his husband, he concluded. “Do you understand?”

Shane was crying again, softer now, as he melted into Ilya. “Yes,” he whispered. He sat a moment quietly, finding his words, then managed an “I love you.”

The Russian guided the shorter man's head to rest on his shoulder, stroking his hair. “Sleep now, malysh; only rest will help hangover.”

Humming, Shane shut his eyes obediently.

“We will not decide to go back to club like that again; we talk about it first next time, da?” Despite its presentation, it wasn't really a question.

“Da,” Shane echoed.

Ilya held him there, safe in his lap, as he drifted off once more. When he woke again, his husband would give him medication and feed him something to soothe his stomach – until

then, Ilya wouldn't let go.

Every time Shane worked himself up – remanded himself to the point of sickness – his husband was there to nurse him back to health and remind him that he was *already* enough.

He'd felt, for most of his life, left out of the joke – like he was watching his life play out in front of him.

With Ilya, though, he wasn't alone; he wasn't merely a spectator. His husband looked for him in every room and saw right through him effortlessly – through everything he so expertly presented himself to be – and loved him anyway. He was loved not despite his insecurities, but – in many ways – because of them.

Shane let his husband see all of him, every awkward and unseemly part, and Ilya loved it all fiercely. He didn't need to put on a facade to impress him, or twist himself into another shape to fit his expectations.

Love, Ilya reminded him, did not have to be earned – love was something that did not demand record-breaking statistics and a polished presentation. Love was something soft and delicate, something vulnerable and patient.

Slowly, with his husband's help, Shane was learning how to be loved in return, without apology or conditions.

Ilya's love belonged only to him – their souls inextricably connected.

End Notes

I have been considering possibly writing a longer, ongoing fic alongside posting one-shots, so if that would be something of interest to anyone, please lmk!!

I would love to know your thoughts on this fic if you would be comfortable sharing, esp bc this is my longest one yet lol

Translations:

Moya lyubov/lyubov-- my love/love

Malysh-- baby

Lyubimyy-- beloved/favorite (endearment)

Rakushka-- barnacle

Solnyshko-- Sunshine (endearment)

Rybka-- little fish

Otkryt' -- open

Moy milyy mal'chik-- my sweet boy

Tebe нравиться быт' моим хорошим mal'chikom-- you like being my good boy

Vypey eto-- drink this

Dorogoy-- sweetheart

Ty uzhe sovershenen. Moy ideal'nyy mal'chik, da?-- You are already perfect. My perfect boy, yes?

Apologies if the Russian is inaccurate, I am not a Russian speaker 💔

Thank you so much for reading!! 💖

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!