

one is not like the other

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by [Tizniz](#)

Summary

Shane watches as Ilya laughs brightly, shaking his head despite the person on the other end of the phone being unable to hear him. He responds with the same jovial tone that is being sent in his direction, the words still a chirp as is usual between hockey players, but spoken with a lighthearted teasing laced throughout it.

There's no hunched shoulders, tense jaw, dropped gaze. Ilya is the opposite, sprawled across the couch, phone held in a loose grip, the speaker phone creating a bit of echo but not interacting with the quality of the call.

One would think that Ilya is talking to someone he adores, like Svetlana, or maybe even Shane when they're playing the latest NHL video game, battling against each other.

It definitely doesn't sound like any conversation Shane has ever had with one of his own teammates.

Notes

Hi lovelies!

I had a thought earlier when I decided to post this...I apparently like to share stories when my life is falling apart. Not a healthy pattern. But here we are.

(I'm mostly okay. But having a hard time again.)

Also thank you for the lovely words you've given in the past. I appreciate all of you!

This is another story I've had for a while. Started it back in June. Worked on it off and on for a while and then was hesitant in reading it to edit because it is a heavier story. But I wrote this because I wanted to explore the impact Montreal had on Shane and how his team treated him was very much abusive.

Be mindful when reading!

► Potential Triggers

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

Shane watches as Ilya laughs brightly, shaking his head despite the person on the other end of the phone being unable to hear him. He responds with the same jovial tone that is being sent in his direction, the words still a chirp as is usual between hockey players, but spoken with a lighthearted teasing laced throughout it.

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When Ilya eventually gets off the phone, apologizing because it took up some of their time together, Shane has to ask.

"Were you talking to a teammate?"

Ilya looks at him, a bit confused, like Shane had said an English word he didn't know. "Yes..." He answers slowly, head cocking to the side, "Why?" He smirks coyly, "Thinking I am talking to secret lover?" Shane is tugged closer, Ilya's arms wrapping tightly around him. "Do not worry, Hollander. You are my only secret lover."

Feeling thrown off by the situation, Shane plays into the 'jealous' card and shoves at Ilya even as he presses closer, "Damn right I am."

The moment passes and goes forgotten. At least by Ilya it is.

Shane feels more alert than usual when the rest of his team begin to trickle into the locker room. His ears strain to catch on every bit of conversation, eyes watching the way others shove and jostle each other.

It *seems* like it should be easy. Casual. But for some reason, it isn't. Not with everyone. Comeau and Drapeau have an easiness between them, but when it comes to others? Their words are sharp, to the point, and maybe they use too much strength.

The rookies this season are all wide-eyed and fearful, laughing at everything one of the more seasoned players say, no matter how harmful they are.

Other players, like Wilson and Stedlund, fall into the 'follow the pack' type of role too. Even JJ laughs at the occasional comment. The only person to not participate in any of the

uncomfortable conversations and comments, aside from Shane, is Hayden.

And Shane knows he isn't the greatest at reading the feel of a room, but there's always an underlying sensation of tension. An invisible line from where Shane, and Hayden, sit in their booths, with everyone else on the other side.

Shane's not so oblivious that he doesn't notice the looks sent in his direction, either. Sometimes they're ones checking to see if their captain is gonna say something about what they're discussing, but other times, it's quite clear that they're pointedly looking at him because the remark was meant to be about him in some way.

Shane's skin feels too tight as he finishes lacing up his skates, biting the inside of his cheek as one of the third-line right wings saunters into the room like he isn't ten minutes late, with an almost full cup of iced coffee in hand.

"Sorry, Cap," He shoots Shane a smirk before meeting Comeau's eyes, the latter snickering. "Traffic."

Straightening, Shane pushes his shoulders back, putting on his 'captain mask', as Hayden calls it. "You know the rules. A lap for each minute you're late."

"Oh, come on," Comeau steps up, "Traffic, *Cap*." He practically spits the title. "Not his fault."

The right wing takes an obnoxious sip of his coffee, eyes on Shane, daring him to do something.

The invisible line seems prominent and stark between them. The tension is heavy in the room. Everyone has drifted to that side of the space, only Hayden still sitting by Shane, body poised and ready to jump the moment Shane gives him a sign.

"Ten laps." Shane states, tone curt. "And if you want, you can join him. Now, finish getting ready and get on the ice. We aren't going to win if you keep bagging off." He strides towards the door, not looking elsewhere. Hayden's skates thump against the rubberized floor behind him. The room is quiet until the moment Shane steps out. And then he can hear the growing chatter of his team talking about him.

Does Ilya have to be like this? Or does his team listen and respect him? Shane wonders as he and Hayden make their way down the tunnel towards the ice.

Shane tries to imagine talking to any one of his teammates, Hayden aside, like Ilya had done on the phone a couple days back. Tries to imagine laughing and joking with one of them.

It's like a punch to the gut when he realizes he can't.

Hell, most of the time he can't even get them to listen to him *on* the ice. Most of them look to Comeau first, as if he's the one actually in charge. As if he's the one with a C stitched onto

his chest.

But...isn't this how all locker rooms are?

Shane thought it was.

He thought the captain was meant to be the one that people held at a higher level. Talking to them would feel a bit intimidating. The captain would always be a little bit on the outside. There'd be a distinction between them because of this 'power' that a captain held.

After hearing the way Ilya talked with his teammate, and thinking back about the other stories Ilya has shared with Shane about the rest of them, Shane is starting to think that things aren't supposed to be like this at all.

It gets worse when Ilya moves to Ottawa. Not for Ilya - he's still as charismatic and loved as always - but for Shane.

Because Ilya is talking about the change from Boston to Ottawa, how the team and coach are with each other. Shane is hearing about dynamics in a locker room that he never once considered a possibility. He loves that Ilya has found another great team (maybe not skill wise, but person wise) with a supportive coach. Shane thinks that Ilya deserves that, considering all he's given up and sacrificed to be closer to Shane.

But hearing all these stories, learning about how it was for Ilya in Boston and how it's the *same* in Ottawa, it makes Shane...sick.

Not for Ilya. None of the feelings bubbling up have anything to do with Ilya. Except the ones of joy and excitement because they're physically closer. They're able to see each other more now.

The ugly feelings that burn Shane's insides? Those are the ones coming from him realizing that the locker room culture for the Montreal Voyageurs is not normal in any form or way. It's actually quite toxic. And Shane is learning just how much damage it's done to him.

"Another BBQ?" Shane asks with slight surprise, watching Ilya nod on the screen of his phone.

"*Da*. Bood loves doing them. Big grillmaster, apparently." Ilya's got a smile on his face as he says it. Zane Boodram has become a good friend of Ilya's in the first few months of him

being in Ottawa, and Shane is grateful for that. He knows Ilya misses the camaraderie he had with Marlow.

“Wow.” Shane blinks, “That’s...that’s nice.”

Ilya’s eyes narrow, “What are you thinking?”

“What? Nothing!”

“Liar. You are thinking something.”

“I’m not.” Shane reassures quickly; and he’s not. Not about Ilya. Shane just doesn’t know the last time his team hung out outside of practice or games. Ilya’s hung out with his new team in the last few months more than Shane has in all the years he’s been with the Metros. None of them, apart from Hayden and JJ, have seen Shane’s apartment. He doesn’t actually know where half of them live. Isn’t sure who’s dating or married. He doesn’t even really know who has kids.

But Shane knows that some of them *do* hang out. He sees it on social media, when he dares to go on or when Hayden shows him something. He hears the stories in the locker room about the night before at the bar. Some of them are close. Some of them do know stuff about each other.

Shane doesn’t though.

He’s an outcast.

And he can’t tell himself it’s because he’s the captain, anymore. Because Shane’s learned through Ilya’s ramblings that while he was with Boston, he got to know all of his team quite well. Had been in a few weddings, even. He had been friendly with some of the WAGs. Being in Ottawa hasn’t changed much, in that regard. Ilya already knows plenty about his new team. Has done dinners and BBQs with them. He doesn’t go out as much as he did in Boston, mostly because of how things have shifted between him and Shane, but he’s still social.

Shane knows he isn’t the most sociable, but he manages well enough. He’s friendly to his teammates. Even when they give him those looks like they think he doesn’t belong. Even when he hears the remarks that the others think (or pretend) he doesn’t, ignoring how they cut deep, because Shane’s learned to brush off those comments. Even when they don’t listen to him as a captain or a person. Shane doesn’t want to be like them, so he acts as the bigger person. As exhausting as it is.

But he can’t deny it anymore.

The experience he’s had in the locker room, the one he keeps experiencing, is not normal. It isn’t how it *should* be.

And Shane can never, *ever* tell Ilya.

Ilya is doing better, in Ottawa, now. Shane knows this because his boyfriend regales him with stories of the team. Of how friendly and family-like they are. How *nice* everyone is. Even the coaching staff.

Sometimes Shane just stops and stares at Ilya, studying him.

Because Ilya is also the captain of his team. He was in Boston as well.

But his captaincies have been nothing like Shane's.

LeClaire and Wiebe don't have exceptionally high expectations from Ilya.

Don't get Shane wrong, they have high expectations because Ilya is great and the captain, but they aren't *unrealistic* expectations.

Also, if something goes wrong, like they didn't win the game, Ilya isn't pulled aside and torn down into little pieces of himself like the loss is solely his own fault and hockey isn't a team sport.

Practices aren't organized and run by Ilya either. Wiebe uses his assistant coaches; they come up with plays and plans, ask Ilya for input, but never require him to come up with everything only to critique every single aspect of it.

Shane doesn't get it.

He's the captain too.

He is the captain of a very successful team.

Is this really not normal?

Is this why Ottawa hasn't been winning?

But then Shane remembers that things were like this in Boston too.

Ilya won a cup before Shane.

So, clearly not an Ottawa thing.

Besides, the team is doing way better and actually starting to win now that they've found players that meld together.

Shane just can't wrap his head around it all.

For all his life, even before he joined a professional team, this was always how it's been. He's been expected to do *more*, to put in that little extra above everyone else.

It'd gotten worse, when he joined the Voyageurs. The pressure had crushed him into someone who nearly didn't enjoy hockey anymore.

Nearly.

But, Shane did what he's always done: he adapted. He changed. He took that pressure on and became what they wanted.

Isn't that what a captain is supposed to do?

Shane finishes his first week as an official Centaur by having a panic attack alone in his shower.

Ilya had been asked by a couple rookies to stay behind and work through some of their problems, and while Ilya had hesitated, Shane had told him to help them out and that he'd see him at home. Ilya still didn't look convinced but Shane was good at getting his husband to do things. The reality was that Shane needed to go home by himself and fall apart, so he could put himself back together before Ilya arrived.

All week, through each practice and meeting that the Centaurs had had (a couple extra since Shane's arrival, according to Ilya), Shane had been waiting for the other shoe to drop.

He'd been waiting for someone to send him a *look* or make some sort of remark about how he looks, acts, or loves.

Ilya had been good, listening to Shane's request at keeping it professional in the locker room, and he'd only slipped up twice, kissing Shane on the cheek two different times.

There'd been *ooh's* and noise from the team, but it had all been accompanied by cheers and smiles. There hadn't been any judgement or disgust.

Shane has had his shoulders hunched up around his ears all week, tension headaches affecting his day to day, because he's been anticipating the moment the team drops the fake act and treats them like Shane is used to.

Except it doesn't happen.

Ilya was right; the Centaurs are *nice*.

And despite their previous stats, they're also serious about hockey. Not to the same extreme as Shane, but Shane has always known he's a little extra when it comes to hockey. His husband likes to tease him about it too.

There's solid potential in this team, and they work so well together. But they also...have fun.

Something Shane can't quite wrap his head around.

He'd messed up a play — a simple one he could have done perfectly when he was still in elementary school — and Shane's eyes had immediately snapped over to Coach Wiebe, waiting for the lecture and discipline. But Wiebe had only shrugged with a smile and told Shane to try again, that it was probably jitters from being on a new team.

No one else had said a cruel thing either. They'd reassured Shane or given him a smile.

They had *supported* him.

It made Shane's head spin.

Watching Ilya first hand as a captain was amazing and confusing as well.

Because hearing the stories of how the locker room was compared to seeing it was a vastly different thing.

The coaches were the one to go over the plays and practice, for one. It wasn't on Ilya, although he did chime in and give his own comments (usually with a compliment at the end).

There was no singular blame ever placed on anyone. It was all talk about how *they* could do better.

Plus the team actually listened to Ilya?

Both on and off the ice, if Ilya said something, the others listened. Ilya didn't have to demand or threaten. Ilya wasn't ignored or belittled. No one spoke behind his back. No one glared at him. No one called him names that should never be spoken to anyone.

For a full week, Shane experienced all of this, sending him further and further into this deep pit of spiralling darkness.

Because this isn't how it ever was in the ten years he was with Montreal.

Not once did he ever consider that what he experienced wasn't normal.

He never realized how toxic and abusive his situation was.

And that's why a week after being with the Centaurs, Shane has a panic attack alone in his bathroom.

Ilya doesn't find out.

It begins to have an impact on Shane's gameplay.

He isn't *the* Shane Hollander that Ottawa thought they were getting after his hasty exit from Montreal. He's maybe as good as some of the rookies, if that.

But he can't seem to get rid of this shakiness that has settled into his bones. Each night he's plagued with nightmares that are really just memories of what he went through in Montreal. Now that his mind has realized it was abusive, it's like a tidal wave has washed over him. The flow is never ending.

He's still waiting for it to happen from the Centaurs, but currently all he's getting is concerned looks. Shane knows they're talking to Ilya but Ilya only presses his lips into thin lines and says nothing. He gives Shane these *looks* though. Ones that say *talk to me before I force it out*.

Shane doesn't know what to do or say.

'Hey, turns out I was in a really toxic and abusive locker room and I'm freaking the fuck out?'

No. That'll have him, like, locked up or something.

Shane can deal with this. He'll get through this. He'll get better and then he'll be fine.

The whistle is as sharp as the ice was against Shane's face when he fell to the hard surface.

For a moment, he's back in that game, the one where he tripped and lost for his team. The one where even someone he thought was a friend doubted his word when he said he didn't trip.

Shane can't breathe. But he pushes himself up on shaky arms as his team moves towards him. Ilya is there instantly, helping Shane to his feet.

"M'okay." Shane mumbles, tugging his arm away from Ilya. Shane can't breathe. But he has to pretend he is. He has to remember that it's not angry Voyageurs looking at him, upset that he lost them the game. All there is currently is concerned team mates.

“Bench.” Ilya says, voice firm. “You are off.”

“Ilya—“

“Bench.”

Shane hangs his head and skates towards his bench. There’s a murmur to the crowd, probably talking about how bad Shane’s been playing. There was no reason for him to have tripped. No reason for him to have ended up sprawled across the ice.

God, Wiebe is gonna be pissed. He’s gonna bench Shane permanently. He’s going to point out every single one of Shane’s flaws. He’s going to put them on display for everyone. He’s going to yell until he’s red in the face and Shane has spit on his skin.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“Shane—“

“I’m sorry.” He cuts off his coach, “I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t...I know. I messed up. I made a mistake. I’m sorry. I’ll sit out. And I’ll rewatch the tapes. I’ll stay late at practices. I’ll be better. I’ll do better. I promise.”

Wiebe is looking at him with large startled eyes. Shane can’t look at him. He drops his gaze, tugs at the collar of his jersey. He can’t breathe.

“I’m sorry.” Shane whispers, it’s more like a wheeze.

“Why don’t you sit out for the rest of the period?” Wiebe suggests softly. “Get looked over by Terry.”

Shane nods, turns and goes for the tunnel. His shoulders are tight. He can’t breathe. He can already hear what Wiebe is going to say to him.

Shane fucked up. Again.

As soon as he steps into the locker room, Shane is tugging off his jersey and chest equipment, tossing it into his space. All of it feels like it’s suffocating him and Shane already can’t breathe so this isn’t helping. He gasps as he yanks at straps and fabric, uncaring if it rips. His vision is blurry from tears and his hands shake, fingers not grasping anything. All he can hear in his head is the words that he knows Wiebe is going to snap and snarl at him, a repeat of past experiences with his old coach going around and around.

“Shane?” He turns around quickly, stumbling with one skate off. Terry is standing there, looking concerned. “Woah, hey, you wanna take a seat so I can look you over?”

“N-no.” Shane swallows, bending down to remove his other skate, “No. I’m fine. I need...I have to wait...for Wiebe. So he can...” He swallows, “I messed up.”

“Shane.” Terry says softly, “You’re bleeding. I need to take a look at you.”

“What?” Shane snaps back up, the world tilting for a moment as his lungs compress further. “I am?”

Terry lifts a hand to his own temple, pointing there. Shane lifts a hand and his fingers brush against something slick. When he pulls them away and looks, there’s red staining his fingertips.

“Oh.” He wipes it on his compression pants. “It’s fine. I’m fine. I need to wait for Coach Wiebe.”

“You aren’t fine, Shane.” Terry says, and Shane knows he doesn’t mean it like *that*, but Shane’s mind is too far gone. It twists and turns it into something ugly, something that cuts into his skin and has him bleeding anew.

“I know, okay?!” Shane cries out, fingers moving to his hair, gripping it tightly, “I know I fucked up! I’m trying! I’m *trying*.” He bites down on his tongue, hard enough to taste blood. “Fuck. I’m sorry.” He shrinks in on himself, stepping backwards until he finds the wooden bench, falling down onto it in a crumple, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He bends over himself, fingers still in his hair, “I’ll wait. For Wiebe. And I’ll...I’ll do better.”

There’s a soft murmur from Terry, directed to someone else, so Shane ignores it. He needs to try and get some fucking oxygen into his lungs anyways. Passing out when his coach is in the middle of lecturing him won’t help him. It’ll just earn him more bag skates, probably.

Can’t even take a lecture properly, Hollander? Pathetic.

“I’m sorry.” Shane whispers, eyes squeezed closed tightly, not wanting any tears to slip out. Crying only makes the lecture worse. “I’m sorry.”

“Shane? Shane, can you look at me?” That’s Wiebe’s voice. His coach. Shane forces his stiff fingers away from his hair and head, curls them tightly down at his side as he sits up, biting the inside of his cheek. His eyes land somewhere on Wiebe’s shoulder.

“Sorry. Yes, sir.”

“Are you okay?” Wiebe asks, and his voice is too soft, too gentle. Shane flinches. This isn’t right. “Hey, what’s going on?”

“I messed up.” Shane admits; it’s helped, in the past, if he admits to his mistakes right away. Saves his coach time because he doesn’t have to waste any breath pointing it out. “I’m sorry.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“I know I did!” Shane slams his eyes shut, “I’ve *been* messing up. I’m sorry. I know that bringing me here was a mistake. I will do better. Let me try. Please. Please...don’t...I’ll do better.”

“*Shane.*” Wiebe’s voice sounds strained, which has Shane hunching his shoulders. Fuck. He’s fucked up with this coach too. The team is going to hate him like the Metro’s did. They’re going to start saying cruel things to him. His coach is going to put too much pressure on Shane and that’ll be it. Shane will crack.

“Please.” Shane whimpers, arms wrapping around himself. There’s a faint ache in his shoulder, but he pays it no attention. There’s other things he needs to be more concerned about right now. “Please don’t kick me off the team. I can do better. I *will* do better.”

“Kick you off?” Wiebe echoes, and Shane can hear the echo of his coach back in Montreal in his mind: *I should kick you off this goddamn team!* “Shane, what...”

“Brandon.” Terry’s voice is further away and Shane feels his coach’s presence disappear from in front of himself. A choked sob threatens to choke him as Shane bends over himself, willing the whispering voices to shut up. He doesn’t need to hear the way everyone is talking about him, calling him weak, pathetic, useless. He knows this. He knows all of this. God, he’s tried so hard to prove them wrong, but it’ll never be enough. He’ll never be enough. Why can’t he be good enough?

“Shane!”

The sound of his husband’s voice cuts through everything and Shane lifts his head enough to see Ilya rushing across the room, clad in skates and all of his gear. It’s clear he’s just come straight from the ice as he fumbles with the strap of his helmet, flinging off the protective equipment as soon as he can.

Ilya crashes to his knees in front of Shane, fingers hovering above Shane’s face like he’s not sure he can touch. “Can you hear me?”

Shane’s chin dips in a hint of a nod and that must be enough permission for Ilya because he presses his palms to Shane’s cheeks. They’re sweaty and warm from being inside of his gloves, but Shane doesn’t care. He leans into the touch, a broken whimper sounding from his throat.

“Is okay, *malysh*. I am here. You are okay.”

“No.” Shane trembles, “I’m not.”

Ilya’s mouth parts in surprise, eyes flashing with heartbreak, but Shane doesn’t see it for long because he’s sliding off of the bench and towards Ilya, forcing his husband backwards onto his butt so he can cradle Shane between his bent legs, arms wrapping tightly around him.

“Okay. Okay.” Ilya repeats, fingers pressing into the tense of muscles of Shane’s shoulders. “Okay. You are not okay. But I am here. Yes?”

Shane nods, pressing himself closer to Ilya. He wants to feel his husband’s skin but there’s too much gear in the way. He makes another noise, fingers weakly clawing at the jersey and padding under.

“You want off?” Ilya asks, fingers cradling the back of Shane’s head. “We get it off. Just... I...” Shane can feel Ilya’s head twisting around by the movement in his neck but hiding away in the bit that Shane can reach is helping with the overwhelming panic still inside of his body.

If he comes back out, then Wiebe will tell him he’s off the team. He’ll point out how much of a mistake it was to bring Shane onto the team. He’ll encourage the team to keep saying the comments that Shane can hear swirling around the room, until they’ve cut into Shane’s skin, leaving him a blood mess.

The voices are too much, now. Shane can’t even hear Ilya, not that his husband is talking to him right now. But Shane wants it to stop. He shuffles around against Ilya until he can get his hands over his ears, eyes squeezed closed tightly. The fabric under his cheek moves, sliding away, and then the padding that protects the love of his love is being removed as well. Ilya’s arms are around Shane, not pulling his hands away from his ears, but squeezing tight. Shane can move closer too with Ilya only in his compression shirt. It helps a little.

Ilya’s voice rumbles, meaning he’s still talking, but he hasn’t nudged Shane’s hands away, so he isn’t talking to him. Shane focuses on the vibrations, letting himself slip away as the panic becomes too much.

He needs to disappear. He can’t do this.

“Shane. *Moya lyubov*.” Following the sound of Ilya’s voice, Shane drifts back to awareness, blinking heavily at his husband’s face.

“Ilya?” His tongue doesn’t quite want to cooperate, his body feels heavy, he’s *exhausted*. Keeping his eyes open feels impossible. Shane registers he’s slouched sideways, resting against Ilya. They’re also in a different room. They’re on a couch? “Where are we?”

“Coach’s office.” Ilya murmurs, fingers carding through Shane’s hair. “Are you with me?”

“Uhm,” Shane’s eyes don’t open for a full ten seconds when he blinks next time, “I think?”

“I know you are tired, but you need to stay awake, Shane.” Ilya’s voice has the lightest of trembles. It has Shane growing more alert and he forces himself away from the comfort of Ilya’s body to look him over. “What?”

“Are you hurt?” Shane asks, hands failing to cooperate as he skims over Ilya’s arms and torso, “What happened?”

Ilya looks stunned and very concerned, “Shane, I am fine.”

“You sound like something’s wrong.”

“Because there is!”

“What?!”

“You!”

Shane flinches backwards, curling in on himself. Ilya’s face twists into horror and regret. It’s clear he didn’t mean it in the way that Shane’s disorientated mind is taking it but Shane isn’t quite operating at proper capacity. “Me?”

“No. Shit. Fuck.” Ilya reaches for Shane, stopping when Shane flinches again. His fingers curl into his palms as he rests them on his thighs, “Something is wrong *with* you.” Ilya says softly, “You are not what is wrong.”

“No. I’m fine.” Shane swallows, eyes darting around, “We...we’re in the middle of a game. I need...Coach needs to tell me what I did wrong. So...so I can fix it. And then go back on. I have to...I need to...”

“You need to breathe.” Ilya cuts over him, voice firm. “Shane, you are not playing. You were pulled. Rest of team is back on ice.”

“And you aren’t?!”

“No.” Ilya’s face is stern, “Because my husband was having bad panic attack and disappeared.”

“No. No. Ilya...you...you can’t...I’ll...fuck.” Shane bows forward, fingers finding home in his hair and pulling tightly, “He’s going to be so mad. I fucked up even more. I made you leave. Shit. Shit. Fuck.”

“No one made me do anything.” Fingers gentler than his pry them from his hair. “And no one is mad. We are all worried. A bit scared. But not mad.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“To what?” Ilya squeezes Shane’s wrists, keeping them in place on his lap. “You did not mean to have other player trip you? That was not your fault.”

“It was.” Shane whimpers, bottom lip trembling. “It’s always my fault.”

Ilya’s face goes soft with worry, “Shane, what is going on? You are telling Wiebe that he is going to cut you. You are pushing so hard at practice when you do not need to. You look

scared each time someone on team talks to you.” He looks nervous, “Do you not like it here? In Ottawa?”

Shane’s eyes widen, “No! I mean, *yes*. I mean...” He pauses, takes a breath, “Yes, I do like it here. It’s not...they’re...everyone is...”

Ilya squeezes his wrists again, a silent reminder for Shane to breathe.

The office is quiet, compared to the locker room. There’s no voices creeping towards him, ready to claw at him and dig into his flesh.

His old coach didn’t pull him into the office to berate him. He did that in front of everyone, taking joy in the snickers from the other guys on the team. Shane had to simply stand there and take it, even if the ones truly at fault were the ones laughing and enjoying his pain.

They’d tease him about his mistakes in a way that wasn’t a joke at all, but a reminder of how Shane had messed up. They ignored his directions as captain, choosing instead to look to someone else.

Is that what’ll happen here?

God. Shane’s been here barely a month and look at where he is...hiding in the coach’s office while the rest of the team play without their captain.

“Shane?”

“Everything is different here.” He blurts out, squeezing his eyes tight. He twists his hands in Ilya’s hold until he can curl his fingers around his husband’s wrists in turn. “It’s so different.”

“It is?” Ilya sounds confused, “I mean, maybe a bit quieter than Boston, but Boston is loud. So.”

“No,” Shane whispers, “They’re all...everyone is so...” The word sticks in his throat. It’s going to sound ridiculous.

“So...?”

“*Nice.*”

The silence that follows has Shane’s eyes cracking open, forcing himself to look at Ilya. He’s expecting...what? Understanding? No. That wouldn’t be it. Because Ilya had a good experience in Boston too. That’s what started all of this, that day on the couch when Ilya was joking with a teammate.

Shane had never joked with anyone besides Hayden. He also never got the jokes the others would throw around the Montreal locker room. Hayden would quietly explain some, and shake his head at others, lips pressed together. Shane eventually gave up and kept his head

down.

“...Nice.” Ilya echoes.

“Y-yeah.” Shane swallows, “They...they don’t...they can stop acting. I don’t...I don’t want special treatment because of who I am or our relationship.”

Ilya’s head jerks back, “Acting? Shane, no one is acting!”

“They...they aren’t?”

“No!” He leans forward this time, hazel eyes blazing, “Shane, they are being like a normal team.”

And that is exactly what Shane was terrified Ilya was going to say. Because that means that Shane can’t pretend anymore. He can’t deny the truth he’d been avoiding since he realized that Ilya actually *liked* talking to his teammates.

“Oh.”

“Shane...”

“No. No.”

“Shane.” Ilya repeats, “Why are...you are surprised. That they are nice. That they like you. You were...” His eyes widen, “You thought Wiebe was going to punish you because you got tripped. You begged him to not kick you off.” Shane slams his eyes shut again. He can’t watch Ilya piece everything together. It’s hard enough that Shane has to do it. “*Shane.*”

“I’m sorry.”

“No!” Ilya’s voice is firm and fingers on his chin force Shane’s head in a certain direction, even though his eyes remain closed. “You do *not* apologize, you hear me?”

“Ilya...”

“Tell me.”

Shane opens his eyes, peeking at Ilya, “Tell you?”

“What they did. Your old team. Tell me.”

Panic seizes in his chest, “Wh-what? No. No, they...they didn’t...they’re—”

“They made you shut down.” Ilya’s fingers are still gripping his chin, so Shane can’t hide. “They made you think that what they did was normal and fine when it was not. They *hurt* you.”

“They never, like, hit me...”

“It does not need to be physical for it to hurt.” Ilya replies instantly; words Shane had said when Ilya was having a really bad day, afraid to admit that he was hurting.

Something inside of Shane cracks. “I didn’t know any different.”

His husband’s entire demeanour softens and Ilya’s hand glides along Shane’s jaw until it finds a home on the back of his neck, squeezing the tense muscles there. “I know, sweetheart, but that does not make it hurt any less, hm?”

Shane shakes his head slowly.

“Tell me, please, what they did.”

Shane takes a breath and starts to talk.

When they’re done, Shane’s cheeks are wet and Ilya looks ready to murder.

It wasn’t until he properly said it out loud that Shane really, truly realized how bad things were in Montreal. Except a part of him still wonders and believes that he’s making this into something more than it is. Maybe Shane is exaggerating it. He’s never been great at understanding situations anyways.

“Stay here.” Ilya says, kissing Shane quickly and firmly on the mouth before standing. It only takes him a few strides to reach the door and when he opens it, the noise of the locker room only a short distance away crashes into the sanctuary they’d created here. Shane flinches and presses himself into the cushions of the couch, the sounds gone with the door closing behind Ilya.

Unsure of what is going on, briefly wondering if he’s going to need a lawyer for his husband, Shane can’t do anything but sit there and try to breathe. It’s a bit easier, now, than before, but still not great. There’s too much anxious energy thrumming under his skin.

Surely, Wiebe is going to be upset, right? Shane forced the two best players off of the ice for half the game. The others will definitely be upset, having to pick up their slack. In Montreal, Shane’s old team used to let him do most of the work, second and third line grumbling because they had to do more with Shane off the ice. Everyone shuffled around the plays until Shane had most of the grunt work, relying on him to score the goals.

It had exhausted Shane after every practice and game, but he figured that was part of being a captain. Nevermind that it was like that when he was a rookie too...

The door opens and two bodies step inside this time before the noise is cut off and the room settles into a quietness once more. Shane quickly wipes away the dried tears from his face

when Troy shifts uneasily from one foot to the other.

“Ilya, what...” Shane asks, looking to his husband as Ilya crosses the room to sit at his side once more. “Why is Troy in here?”

“Because you need to hear from player that came from different team too. Not just me. You will think I am...softening, for you.”

“Hey, Hollzy.” Troy says with a nod and a small smile; they aren’t the best of friends, but Shane doesn’t mind Troy Barrett. Mostly because he’s been a very good friend to Ilya. Shane can appreciate that. Plus, the man stood up against Dallas Kent. So.

“Hi.” Shane feels a bit awkward, looking at Troy, who also looks a bit awkward and out of place. Apparently that’s the norm for him though, so at least it isn’t because of Shane.

“Roz said you needed to hear about my time with Toronto?”

Shane flinches, pressing into Ilya’s side, “No, I—”

“Yes.” Ilya cuts him off, resting his hand on Shane’s thigh and squeezing. “Barrett, did team ever speak poorly of you?”

Troy looks confused, “What? No. I mean, post-Kent, maybe. But,” He shrugs, “expected.”

“Did they ever have unrealistic expectations of you?”

“Uh...”

“Did they ever call you names?”

“No,” Troy shakes his head, “Kent used some, but even he wasn’t *that* bad. I mean, not to *me*. To others, outside of our team, yeah. He was also obviously a complete asshole, so not a great comparison. The rest of the team never did any of that though.”

Ilya nods, “And they talked to you? Laughed *with* you but not at you?”

“Uhm,” Troy’s eyes dart to Shane, who hunches down a bit more, and then back to Ilya. “No. They...they weren’t bad guys, actually. Kent had some good moments too. If a guy needed some help or a shoulder to lean on, we were there. I really don’t think bad of my time there.” He rubs the back of his neck, “Except the end, with everything. Like, this team is *way* better, because you guys are just...you know?” He offers a small smile, which Ilya nods at. Shane stares at Ilya’s hand on his thigh. “But it sucked, leaving Toronto, because those were my friends. We had good times together.”

“Which is a *normal* experience, yes?”

Troy blinks, “Yeah. Of course. I mean, we all spend so much time together, so, you just... become friends. Family, in a way. We carry the load together.”

“And your coaches?”

“So long as you don’t go to them about supporting accusations against their star player and sexual assault...” Troy drawls, shaking his head, “They were fine. Normal coaches. Made plays, told us plays, then got us to redo them. Decent enough guys.”

“You were never punished?”

Troy’s mouth falls open, “Punished?! For what?” Ilya ignores him and keeps going.

“Your captain was not made to run entire practices?”

“No?”

“You were not criticized if another player made a mistake?”

“No?” Troy repeats, looking confused, “That player got told, maybe, but that was it.”

“Not lectured. Or forced to do bag skates until he collapses from exhaustion?”

“What the fu—” Troy cuts himself off, “No. It was a hockey team, not a torture house.”

Shane flinches, sinking further into the couch.

“Jesus, Hollander, what the actual fuck did Montreal do?”

“Noth—”

“Hurt him.” Ilya cuts him off again. “Made him think that is *normal*.”

Troy blanches, “What? No. Holl—*Shane*. None of that is normal. This?” He gestures at the office and towards the door, “The team you’re on now? *This* is normal.” He pauses, clearly hesitating, “Is that why you’ve been...off?”

“Off?” Shane whispers, “What do you mean—”

“Roz talked about you. A lot.” Troy rushes out, “Yes, about how you’re this great hockey player – like we’re all blind and couldn’t see that – but also he talked about how excited he was to have you here, to have you chirping with us, making us ‘look bad’ as players, and getting to know us.” His shoulders drop, “And then you joined us, and we all...I know how you left Montreal was rough. That was...” He flinches, no doubt remembering Shane tripping on the ice. “Rough.”

Shane wonders if he should mention how he was cornered in the parking lot by two of his team members in the parking lot after, how the bruises on his ribs weren’t from the game but from the fists of the people he used to consider friends.

He stays quiet.

“We thought you needed some time to adjust. But you’ve been...quiet. Withdrawn. And I get it. I was quiet and withdrawn at first too. Sort of the same way you are.” Troy explains, “When it didn’t improve, and when we didn’t see you playing to your best on the ice with us...we got a bit worried. We thought we did something wrong.”

Shane’s eyes widen, “No!”

“Well, I know that now.” Troy huffs out a small laugh but it fades quickly, “None of us could have ever imagined it was...fuck, man. Coming from an abusive team? You?” He shakes his head, “I can’t imagine anyone being like that to you. Not with how great you are. Plus you’re just...nice.”

“A-abusive?” Shane stumbles over the word, eyes darting between Troy and Ilya. Yes, he’s admitted it to himself, but he can’t have *others* knowing it. “No. No, they...they weren’t...”

Ilya places a hand on Shane’s cheek, stilling him. “Shane, sweetheart, they were abusive. In many ways.”

Tears well up in Shane’s eyes. “No. They...they were...tough. It was just...they were...”

“Shane.” Troy’s voice is soft and gentle too, “That wasn’t tough. That was abuse.”

The final piece of Shane cracks and he falls forward into his husband, clutching onto his arms as he sobs loudly.

“I think it’s just badly bruised.” Terry says as Shane rubs at the shoulder he’d just been told to move around and been poked at. “Nothing broken, fractured, or dislocated.”

“Good,” Wiebe comments, Ilya nodding in agreement. “Thanks, Terry.”

“No worries.” Terry gives Shane a small smile and then takes his leave from the office.

After Shane had calmed down, Wiebe and Terry had joined the three of them in the office, Shane not quite ready to leave the small bubble of the room just yet. After some gentle nudging from Ilya, Shane had allowed the team physician to do a once over of Shane, needed after his fall on the ice.

A little bit of ice burn on his cheek, a bump to his head with a small cut that had bled because it was a head wound, and a bruised shoulder was all he had. It was clear Terry wanted to check in on Shane a bit more but held himself back, keeping it strictly physical.

A small grace given to Shane.

Troy had been hovering at the edge of the room, only calming when Harris had slipped inside, taking his boyfriend's hand in his, the two remaining quiet until Terry was gone.

"I'm not trying to overstep or intrude," Harris explains, voice soft, "I just wanted to come in and update Shane."

Ilya's arm is wound around Shane, the two sitting on the couch together, and his fingers press gently into Shane's ribs, a silent reassurance.

"No one is saying anything about you leaving," Harris explains, "Only concerned about if you're okay. With your permission, I'd like to post something – just some text – to explain and let the fans know that you're okay. Maybe the fall knocked the breath out of you or agitated an old injury?"

Shane gives his chin a small dip in a nod.

"That will work," Ilya vocalizes, "Thank you, Harris. But there is no..."

Harris shakes his head, "No one knows anything. Even the team doesn't know anything."

The only reason Harris knows anything, from what Ilya and Troy explained carefully after Shane had calmed, is because he'd come in just before the intermission. When he had seen Shane on the floor in Ilya's arms, clearly falling apart, he had made sure that none of the team coming off the ice for the intermission saw him, redirecting them elsewhere until Ilya was able to move Shane to the office.

"They are worried, though," Harris adds, voice sympathetic, "That doesn't mean they need an explanation, Shane. You don't owe anyone anything you aren't ready to share. But I wanted to mention they're worried because they care."

No one would have even batted an eye at Shane missing when he was in Montreal. They didn't care. They were probably relieved if he was gone. He doesn't know how to handle a team actually thinking of him.

"Tell them Shane is...he is okay in body," Ilya answers when Shane stays quiet, "And he will be okay in mind. Please give us space."

"Of course," Harris nods, both hands holding onto Troy's now, "And...Shane?"

"Yeah?" Shane rasps, staring down at Ilya's hand, being cradled by his own.

"I'm glad you're here too. It's nice having someone sane in this nuthouse."

"Wow." Troy drawls as Wiebe snickers from his perch on his desk. "Tell us how you really feel, babe."

"Happily." Harris chirps and Shane's lips twitch into a ghost of a smile. "Come on, Troy. You can help me pick out a hot photo of Shane to post."

“Stop ogling my husband!” Ilya calls after Troy’s back, the latter throwing a middle finger over his shoulder.

The office goes quiet once more, with it only being Shane, Ilya, and Wiebe.

“Shane?”

“Yeah, Coach?”

“Are you okay if we talk?” Wiebe asks, heel tapping lightly against his desk.

Shane nods, “Sure. Let’s get this over with.” Lips brush against his hair line and Shane closes his eyes, leaning into his husband. It isn’t very professional, sitting basically curled up into Ilya’s side on a couch while their coach is waiting to talk to him after Shane had fucked up. But he’s *so* exhausted and Shane is fairly certain he’d collapse onto the floor without the support of Ilya right now.

“Well first...I want to apologize.”

Head snapping up, Shane blinks at Wiebe, “Apologize? Why are...”

“Because I didn’t notice you were struggling.” Wiebe says, arms crossed loosely against his chest, “And I should have.”

Shane can’t do anything but keep blinking.

Wiebe sighs, “God, I could punch him.”

“Get in line.” Ilya mutters.

Shane has no idea what they’re talking about.

“A coach should care about his players, Shane.” Wiebe explains, “Especially when they’re struggling. I don’t give a shit if you’re the next Gretzky or if you’re a rookie fresh off the farm - if you aren’t doing well, I’m going to care the same amount.”

“I’m fine.” Shane says, an automatic response. He doesn’t need to look at Ilya to know his husband is giving him a look. Wiebe is also providing one of his own. “I...sorry. But...” He closes his eyes, taking a breath, then reopens them. “I didn’t know. That what...that what happened...it just...” He hates that he can’t get his words to work, that he can’t organize his thoughts. Shane sort of wants to go home, hide away for three to five business days, and then revisit this.

He doesn’t think that’ll be allowed.

“I didn’t know that was abnormal.” Shane finally gets out. “I thought everything I experienced was just how it is. How every team is.”

“And that alone is so very wrong.” Wiebe comments, jaw tight. “No one should be made to feel like being treated that way is normal, Shane. It was abuse, plain and simple.”

“I’m realizing that now.” Shane whispers, blinking away fresh tears. “I won’t let it affect me, sir. I’ll...I’ll get past this.”

Ilya makes a choked sound next to him as Wiebe’s eyes widen.

“Shane.” Ilya’s hand lands gently on his cheek and turns his head, “Stop. You are allowed to be affected. You do not need to ‘get past this’...you need...you need...”

“Therapy, probably.” Wiebe supplies when Ilya’s eyes dart over to him, “A good support system, definitely. But Roz is right, Shane.” Ilya’s hand falls from his cheek so Shane can look at their coach again, “Firstly, none of this has affected how you play. You’re an amazing player, regardless, but that’s what concerns me. Because you’re shoving it all down, thinking that you have to be this, like, robot hockey player.” Wiebe shakes his head, “I don’t want that. I want Shane Hollander, the guy who loves hockey.”

Shane can’t bring himself to say he wants that too.

Leaning forward, Wiebe meets Shane’s eyes straight on, “I want you to hear me when I say that this next thing I’m about to tell you is *not* a punishment, okay?” Swallowing, Shane nods. “You’re benched for the next few games.”

If he wasn’t sitting down, Shane would probably have collapsed. Benched? He’s being *benched*?

“Breathe, sweetheart.” Ilya murmurs into his ear.

“But—what—why?” Shane splutters, “I’m fine! Terry said it was just a bruised shoulder!”

Wiebe shakes his head, “I’m not benching you because you’re physically incapable; I know you would get back on that ice even with a broken bone. I’m benching you because you need to sit down and work on your mental state, Shane. You just had a really heavy break through, and I’m worried if you don’t actually process this, it’ll do even more damage.”

“But—”

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice cuts through the buzz, “Is not a punishment. He is helping.”

“Playing hockey helps!” Shane cries out, “I can’t lose hockey!”

“And you aren’t,” Wiebe says casually, “Your spot is safe here. I am not getting rid of you. I’m doing this so you can keep playing.”

“You need time, Shane.” Ilya rubs his back, “You keep thinking you will be kicked off or that team is going to turn on you. None of that is going to happen. We are not Montreal.”

“And we never will be.” Wiebe adds, “This team? This place? We’re safe, Shane. That means you *can* take time to recover. Sometimes, our injuries aren’t visible.” He tilts his head, “You

didn't really take time when you were outed, did you?"

"He was told to take time off like me," Ilya replies, "But his was...not so good."

Shane certainly didn't have a visit from his coach like Ilya did. And none of his teammates had reached out, apart from Hayden, for obvious reasons.

"So you were on your own." Wiebe nods, "Right." His jaw twitches, "Fucking Montreal. Sorry, I know you spent many years there but—"

"Fuck Montreal." Ilya echoes. Shane doesn't have it in him to chastise his husband.

"So you didn't get to process then, and you came right here, and now..." Wiebe sighs, "No, Shane. You need time. You're only human, not a machine. And I want you to play hockey because you love it, not because you think you have to be this certain thing. So, yes, you are benched for a little bit, and no, this is not a punishment. I will be checking in on you every other day, the team too, if you're okay with that. And I would like you to see someone; a professional, I mean. I'm not enforcing this, it should be your choice, but I would highly recommend it for your own sanity."

"I agree." Ilya adds at the end.

The logical part of Shane's mind knows that Wiebe is right. He can't play like this, when he's prepared for his team to abandon him on the ice again. He can't exist in a locker room where he's bracing himself for cruel comments about him. He can't enjoy this sport that has his heart when his heart is shattered into many pieces.

But it's hard, accepting that, because of all the stuff he's gone through. All of the hurt, abuse, mistreatment, and cold shoulders...it's warped his thinking and view on everything.

And he fucking hates that.

"Okay." Shane sighs, body leaning heavier against Ilya, "I'll take some time. And...and I'll find someone."

Ilya kisses the side of his head while Wiebe smiles at him.

"I'm proud of you, Shane. I can't imagine this is easy. But I know it'll help. We all want you here for a long time."

"I'd like that."

"Good." Wiebe nods and stands, "Take as much time as you need in here. I'll make sure the boys clear out and so you don't have to face them. If you want to tell them, then do so whenever you're ready. No one is going to push. I'll put you on IR but we'll stay firm on no other information. It'll be alright, Shane, I promise." He waits until Shane offers a smile and then he leaves the office, shutting it quietly behind him.

Much later, when Shane should be asleep like Ilya is beside him in their bed, Shane sits awake, sitting upright.

He wants to sleep. So badly. He knows he's exhausted, has been for far too long, and his body yearns for him to close his eyes and rest. But his mind protests.

Ilya hadn't pressured Shane to leave the office earlier, he'd simply waited until Shane was ready. Then he was the constant, steady, strong presence beside him as they went back into the locker room and stripped the rest of their gear, replacing it with comfy clothes instead of game day suits.

During the drive home, Ilya had held Shane's hand, the other on the steering wheel and navigating the streets of Ottawa. They didn't speak.

Even when they got home, neither spoke, except for Ilya to utter the word *shower* softly. Shane had let his husband lead him upstairs, strip him of his clothes, and then wash him in the shower.

Shane had learned some time ago how intimate helping someone shower can be, especially when they're as lost and broken like he is now. Shane's done it plenty of times for days where Ilya can't quite fight off the darkness that waits in the shadows for him. And Ilya had done this for Shane on the rare occasion where he allows his struggles to be seen. Usually they do this because they just want to touch each other, explore the bodies they've known since they were still boys on the cusp of men.

Shane was dressed in a pair of Ilya's shorts and a shirt, tucked into bed, and given a glass of water to drink. Ilya didn't mention food, and Shane could have wept with relief at that. The thought of having to eat something felt more difficult than climbing a mountain. But his husband knew which battles to fight, and this was not one.

After his tasks were completed, Ilya flicked off the lights, shuffled down in bed, and held open an arm. Shane immediately curled up into Ilya, inhaling the scent of his shower warm skin. There was no shirt covering Ilya's torso, allowing Shane to press himself up against the bare skin.

"I'm proud of you, Shane."

Those were the only other words Ilya had spoken. The two simply laid there, Ilya holding tightly onto Shane.

Eventually, Ilya had succumbed to sleep, his hold loosening and his breath evening out. Shane stayed there a bit longer until the thoughts had him slipping out from his husband's

arms and sitting up, staring across the dark room at nothing.

Shane comes back to his senses when he tastes blood and it's then he realizes he's chewed his bottom lip raw. Hissing softly at the small sting when drags his tongue across it, he swallows the bloody saliva and forces himself to leave his lip alone.

God, he wishes he could sleep.

He wishes he wasn't so broken.

He wishes he hadn't fucked up.

It isn't until Ilya is sniffling awake that Shane realizes he's reached out and shaken his husband's shoulder.

"Hm? Wha—Shane?"

"What if I never get better?" Shane blurts out, still staring across the room into the dark space. "What if I stay like this? I'll never be allowed back on the team."

"What are you..." Ilya's accent is thicker, his voice laden with sleep. Shane should really stop waking him up and immediately talking about stuff.

"I'm *broken*, Ilya. I'm just this broken mess and I can't even play good hockey anymore and what good am I if I can't play good hockey? All because, what, I couldn't handle a little teasing in the locker room?" Shane's hands flail wildly in front of him, nearly hitting Ilya in the face as he sits up.

"That was not little teasing, Shane."

"Yes it was!" Shane snaps at Ilya, fingers curling tightly into his palms as he drops his hands into his lap. There's a sharp sting as his nails bite into his skin. Shane presses harder, chasing that sensation. "It's just locker room talk! I should have—I can—god, I'm such a fucking pathetic *mess*. I can handle it!" He presses harder yet, chest tight as sharp jolts of pain run up his arms from his hands.

"Stop it!" Ilya snaps this time, rearranging himself until he's sitting on Shane's thighs, knees straddling the outside. His hands grasp Shane's face, forcing him to look at Ilya. "You are not pathetic. You were *hurt*, Shane. You were *abused*. It was not right."

Shane gasps out a breath, tears rushing to his eyes with a suddenness that burns. "Ilya." He whimpers, not quite sure what it is he's asking for.

"None of it was your fault, sweetheart." Ilya's voice is softer and his touch is gentle as his thumbs brush away the tears in the corner of Shane's eyes that threaten to spill over. "You did nothing wrong."

"Then why did they do it? Why me?"

“I do not know.” Ilya sighs, “I am sorry. I wish I did.”

Shane chokes on a broken sob, closing his eyes. He clenches his fingers further, wincing and releasing a small whimper. He hears Ilya gasp seconds before his husband’s hands disappear from his face.

“Shane. Shane. Sweetheart, please.” There’s fingers on his, fluttering a bit as they try to pry Shane’s away from his palm. Ilya’s voice takes on a slightly desperate tinge. “*Shane*. Let go. Please. *Please*.”

Gasping a heaving breath, Shane’s eyes fly open as he unlocks his fingers, allowing Ilya to slip his own between Shane’s and his palm, pressing the fingers open.

“Oh, *moy lyubov*.” Ilya whispers as they look at the bloody crescents on Shane’s palms. “I am so sorry.”

“Me too.” Shane whispers back but Ilya shakes his head, lifting Shane’s left hand and pressing a kiss first to his palm and then to the finger that carries his wedding ring.

“No. You do not apologize. Not for any of this. You do not need to. You have done nothing wrong.”

“Then why does it feel like I have?”

Ilya’s face falls, hazel eyes shining with heartbreak, and all Shane can feel is guilt. He’s the one making Ilya feel like this. He doesn’t want that. He wants his husband to be happy and free and loved.

Can Shane not even manage *that*?

“Hey, hey, no.” The hand Ilya isn’t using to hold onto Shane’s comes up to cradle Shane’s cheek. “Is okay. Well, no, it is not, but...but you did not do anything bad, okay? You have done nothing wrong. I know it feels like it but you *haven’t*.” Ilya relinquishes his hold on Shane’s hand to squish both cheeks, “You are not at fault. All of them are. *They* did this. You did nothing to bring it on yourself.”

“But I—” Shane is cut off by Ilya’s mouth against his. It’s short, abrupt, but it does get Shane to stop talking.

“No. No but. You did *nothing*, okay?”

“I...”

“Nothing.” Ilya is staring intently at him. “You. Did. Nothing. Wrong.” He insists, “Repeat it.”

“Ilya.”

“Say it.”

Shane sighs, “I...I did...” His nose scrunches up, cheeks still pressed between his husband’s hands.

“Say it, Shane.”

“I did noth—Ilya, I can’t.”

“Yes. You can. Because it is true. You did nothing wrong. You did not ask to be attacked. You did not ask to be tormented. You did not ask to be treated that way. Did you?”

“No.”

“You did *nothing* to deserve that. You are wonderful, and kind, and smart, and talented. You are *good*. You are my sunshine. My *solnyshko*.”

“Ilya.” Shane hiccups softly, more tears falling, trickling over Ilya’s hands.

“Please,” His husband begs softly, hands sliding from Shane’s face to rest against his chest, “Say it.”

“I did nothing wrong.” Shane gasps out, dropping his head until his forehead rests on Ilya’s shoulder. “I did nothing wrong. I didn’t deserve it. I didn’t—I didn’t—” The words disappear as he cries once more, wondering how there’s anything left in him. He feels so hollow, scooped clean of anything and everything that makes him Shane.

Ilya wraps his arms around Shane and starts rocking them slowly from side to side, one hand cradling the back of Shane’s head as his other hand splays wide across Shane’s back. He’s encompassed Shane in a comforting, warm embrace. Keeping him safe from the world that had tried to cut him down.

“You did nothing wrong.” Ilya murmurs, kissing whatever part of Shane he can reach. “And I will tell you as many times as it takes until you accept. Okay? Okay. I love you. I have you. I love you.”

Shane thinks he mumbles it back as he cries but he isn’t sure. That’s alright though, he knows Ilya knows. That’s proven by how he’s holding Shane now.

Not for the first time, Shane is so grateful that he had the small burst of courage to walk up to Ilya Rozanov on that one frigid winter day in Regina. He couldn’t imagine doing this life thing without him.

“You did nothing wrong. You did not deserve this. I love you.”

“I love you too.” Shane replies, slumping down into Ilya. “Thank you.”

“Always.”

End Notes

love you.

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