

call my heart its home

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call my heart its home

by [maycollins](#)

Summary

Shane wanted to respect Ilya's request for space. Shane wanted to get the fuck out of here. Shane couldn't breathe.

Couldn't move at all. He was frozen - from his lungs to his feet. Everything except his hands which were shaking. He should leave, but he wasn't even sure how much longer his legs would be able to support him, and driving seemed like a bad idea in this state.

What if Shane stayed after the Boxing Day fight. Basically an exploration of the age old question - what if they just, like, talked about their feelings? (And also went to Bood's party after all).

Notes

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

Shane wanted to respect Ilya's request for space. Shane wanted to get the fuck out of here. Shane couldn't breathe.

Couldn't move at all. He was frozen - from his lungs to his feet. Everything except his hands which were shaking. He should leave, but he wasn't even sure how much longer his legs would be able to support him, and driving seemed like a bad idea in this state.

He hadn't meant the question really, he didn't think. Even without all the evidence now forcing itself into a montage at the front of his awareness, he knew that Ilya would choose him. He was feeling it constantly, in the softness of Ilya's gaze tracing his freckles on quiet evenings, in the smiles he shot across the ice, in the comforting pressure of his hands on Shane's waist when he fucked him. It would be impossible to miss the depths of Ilya's adoration.

But Shane had been - he hadn't understood what Ilya was talking about. Things had felt weird between them for a while. Or bad? Off? But one second Ilya was inviting him to a party and the next there were all these years of grievances he'd apparently been collecting, and it was more than just weird or bad or off, and none of it made any sense.

Or, he guessed, it kind of did. Made a lot of sense. Everything that Ilya had given up while Shane had been comfortable in Montreal with his team and his friends and everything kept neatly around him and cleanly contained in separate little boxes. It all made sense because he was selfish, and unaware, and basically just the worst boyfriend possible.

But it hadn't made sense in the moment. There hadn't been *time* for anything to make sense, so he'd pulled words out, whichever he could, threw words back, when he couldn't find his own.

He hadn't meant it, but now, trying to remember how to breathe in Ilya's living room, his brain was trying to fill in enough gaps to make what he'd said make sense. Because obviously Ilya would choose him over hockey, but would Ilya choose *him* over hockey.

Not the Stanley Cup Champion or the secret rebel he roused in him or the *good* Shane that he could almost see reflected back at him in Ilya's eyes. But *him*. Clueless and self absorbed and too intense. Boring.

The version of him that would choose Ilya over hockey, any day, but would never be able to do it enthusiastically.

The version of him that couldn't breathe sometimes, when he thought about the potential of people knowing about him and Ilya. Sometimes, just remembering that people *did* know, even if they were his best friends.

That couldn't bear to keep the lights on after a bad game. Sometimes after a good one, because sometimes, their glare burned behind his eyes like looking directly into the sun.

Who sometimes couldn't look at Ilya straight on for the same reason.

Would Ilya really choose that person? *Why* would Ilya choose that person?

Shane sunk back against the wall Ilya had backed him into just moments ago and tried, unsuccessfully, to drag air into his lungs. He should go. Like Ilya wanted.

Like Ilya deserved.

But instead he drew his legs into his chest and pressed his forehead to his knees and tried to stifle the sob building in his throat.

-

Ilya just wanted this day to be over, wanted to sink into his bed and hit fast forward on all of this, but his body was still electric, anger crackling through his limbs, and he knew it couldn't settle while Hollander was downstairs.

He also knew that it was the only thing holding him up, and if he heard the click of the door closing behind Shane, if he left, there would be nothing left to keep him going.

He gave it a minute, then another, then he stormed back down the stairs.

Halfway to the bottom, he said, "I told you go home." He tried to fill his voice with ice, but it shook too much. Came out fucking tragic instead.

He was getting ready to bark out a "Hollander," when he made it far enough to catch his boyfriend's shape - as small as his 200 lbs could condense into and shaking, with cut-off whimpers and gasps, and what came out instead was a gentle "Shane?"

It wasn't fair how easily his anger could be disarmed, how quickly he defaulted to caring for Shane over himself, but if Shane's question earlier had been a heartbreak, seeing him like this was a fucking blender, or shredder, or wood chipper crushing his heart to nothing.

"Shane?" he repeated, inching closer. He didn't want to move too fast and risk spooking him, but Shane didn't even seem to acknowledge his approach.

Not until Ilya was dropping to the floor in front of him and pressing a hand to the curve of his shoulder.

"Don't," Shane hissed at the contact, attempting to shake him off. Ilya withdrew his hand, but stayed where he was on the ground.

"Shane," Ilya said again.

"Don't," Shane repeated. He sucked in a breath that sounded painful and added. "I'm fine-" a gasp "I'll leave-" hiccup "I'll calm down, and I'll leave."

Ilya shifted until he was beside Shane, with his own back against the wall.

"It is okay. You don't have to leave. I'm sorry I got angry." Ilya pressed his cheek into his bent knee so he was looking at Shane, whose own face was still fixedly down, eyes squeezed

shut with a force that looked painful.

It took stretching seconds of heavy breathing before Shane got out. “You shouldn’t. I. You’re right. Fuck!”

And more seconds until, “I can’t-” Then he pulled his phone from his pocket and looked up just enough to start typing furiously.

“You can’t....?” Ilya prompted, met only with the muted taps of fingers on a screen.

Who could Shane possibly be texting right now when he couldn’t even get three words out for Ilya? What was so urgent that it couldn’t wait for whatever this was to pass?

But when Shane’s fingers stilled, it was Ilya’s own phone that buzzed in his pocket.

Shane: I can’t fucking talk. I can’t get my mouth to cooperate, or my lungs, but I’m okay. I mean, I’m freaking out, but I’m fine. And you shouldn’t be comforting me when I fucked up, and you were right to be mad. I take you for granted, and I know you love me, and I know how much you sacrificed for me, and I’m just so sorry.

Ilya’s eyes burned reading the message, but it wouldn’t be very productive for them both to be crying, so he willed the tears to stay where they were. “You want me to text too?” Ilya asked, only a little shakily, and Shane shook his head, still not looking up.

“Okay.” Ilya paused for a moment, working himself up to say something that should’ve been easy to say. “I’m sorry too. I shouldn’t have asked about the party. I know it’s too much. Not reasonable.” His voice cracked a little around the words, all the bitterness from earlier gone and replaced with something deep and echoing and hollow.

A hot tear slid down the side of his face to soak into the leg of his pants, and the rest felt inevitable. Felt like they’d been fighting their inevitability for days, and were losing rapidly.

He pressed the edges of his hands to his eyes like that could do anything at all. “Sorry,” he whispered when more fell.

Ilya had started a fight over a futile hope for an impossibility, scared his boyfriend into this not breathing, not talking, not even looking at him state, and now he couldn’t stop crying enough to fix it.

He had one good thing, around which all this other goodness grew, and he was poisoning it because he was too fucking sad to be grateful.

His phone buzzed again.

Shane: It's not unreasonable. It's just big.

Ilya nodded. "I asked like it was small, but I knew it was big. I didn't want to scare you."

Shane: But you want to go? To this party. It's important to you?

Ilya couldn't find the words to explain that it wasn't the party exactly. That he didn't even really go to his teammates' parties. But that the idea of it was important. What it represented.

Not coming out exactly, but maybe hiding just a little less. Enough that he didn't have to be so lonely all the time.

But, then, Shane didn't even know Ilya *was* lonely. It was another thing he made small.

There was a logic, somewhere, or a justification, for all the minimizing Ilya did. Too short nights together that deserved to be enjoyed, too peaceful summers at the cottage that shouldn't be shattered, the cold, consuming fear in Ilya's own chest when he thought of how much like his mother he was, and the certainty that he couldn't pass that fear to Shane.

But the logic didn't work. Played out, it brought them here - Ilya still sad and Shane still afraid and their last day together lost to fighting. And maybe none of it was logic at all. Maybe Ilya was just afraid. So he tried to be brave instead.

"It's not your fault I am lonely," he explained, speeding to the important part of the point he needed to make. "I was alone before - I had strangers sometimes, mostly to fuck, but I was still alone. No family here. No good family anywhere. I had friends in Boston, kind of, but no one like Hayden or JJ. So I don't know why it's worse now." His voice cracked again.

In the too-wide space between them, the brush of Shane's fingers against his sent a frail shot of warmth to Ilya's chest. Just enough strength to continue. "But I'm lonely, and you have people, and sometimes, it makes me angry, even though it's not your fault. I want to have people too."

Ilya hadn't been paying enough attention to when Shane had started breathing again, but his voice was mostly steady when he turned his head to meet Ilya's eyes and said aloud, "And you can't have people because you're always lying to them."

The frank understanding split what was left of Ilya wide open, and he choked on a sob.

With a tug on their joined hands, Shane pulled Ilya to his side, and Ilya buried his face in his neck, grounding himself in the silk of Shane's hair against his cheek and the weirdly healthy smell of his shampoo.

“Okay,” Shane said slowly, while he dragged his blunt nails through Ilya’s curls.

“Okay what?” Ilya asked.

“Let’s go to Zane Boodram’s party.”

Ilya pulled away just far enough for Shane to see his doubtful expression.

“I’m serious,” Shane said, even though his heart was already starting to race again. “It’s important to you. So we should go.”

Ilya pursed his lips in contemplation. “I lied when I said no big deal. They would probably guess we are together. Troy definitely. Maybe Wyatt.”

Shane tried to ignore the alarm bells and push aside the way his hands and chest felt cold. “You trust them,” he said instead.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed, even though it hadn’t been a question.

“Then I can trust them too. I don’t want you to be lonely.”

“It looks like you are panicking already,” Ilya pointed out, but his tone was already lighter than it had been all afternoon, and he punctuated his point by poking Shane’s shoulder.

“A little. But I don’t think I’ve really stopped panicking yet.”

“That’s okay. We have all afternoon.” Even with his eyes rimmed red from the only recently dried tears, Ilya’s cocky grin lit up his whole face. “I know how to make your brain shut up.”

And he did.

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“You are freaking out,” Ilya pointed out, watching Shane’s hand freeze on the car door’s handle.

“Yes, but it’s fine.”

“We don’t have to go in.”

“You already told Zane Boodram-”

“You can just say ‘Bood.’”

“You already told Zane Boodram you were coming. And that you were bringing me. It would be weirder not to go in.”

“But you are freaking out.”

“And it’s fine,” Shane snapped.

Ilya didn't want to fight again today. He was already so exhausted from their fight earlier. But he had to press. "I don't want you to feel scared."

Shane sighed *so* dramatically. "Well I am," he said. "But this is important to you. So I'm doing it. And you can't make me not freak out about it."

Ilya lost the last sentence halfway through. "What?"

Instead of answering, Shane opened the passenger side door and stepped into the street in front of Bood's house and squared his shoulders.

It had been a while since Ilya had gone to one of Bood's parties - too much easy happiness to be on the outside of, too sharp a reminder that all the love and warmth of his team wasn't for him, not while he was lying to them all.

But with Shane trailing behind him through Bood's front door, the laughter already drifting from the back porch didn't sting at all.

"Come," Ilya said, guiding Shane past the living room where a Mario Kart tournament appeared to be getting started, and out to the patio. Rainbow lights outlined the slatted wood ceiling and twined around the columns supporting it, and Christmas music played from a speaker somewhere.

A few people already circled the firepit, but most of the bench seats around the edges of the porch were still empty - Shane had insisted on arriving on time, which at a party of hockey players, was very early.

"Shane, Ilya, hey!" Wyatt greeted with barely disguised surprise. Ilya hoped Shane missed the assessing and then all too knowing glance he gave them. He hoped Wyatt wouldn't say anything.

Wyatt worked at the camp over the summer, so he'd seen Shane and Ilya together enough that the reality of their friendship shouldn't be all that surprising, but Ilya knew this was different. For one thing, this was the first team party he'd been to since the Halloween party he'd hosted a couple months ago, and the second he'd been to all season, which especially for someone as perceptive as Hazy, had to stand out.

And for a second thing, Shane looked like he was ready to throw up, or pass out, which was admittedly suspicious.

Bood turned from his station at the grill. "I'm glad we could finally get you out here, Roz."

"Yes," he said, badly feigning nonchalance. "You know Hollander."

"Yeah, thanks for coming," Bood reached out his wide hand to shake Shane's.

"Thanks for having us," Shane replied with tight politeness.

Ilya jumped in to explain, probably a little too quickly, "Shane's family is from Ottawa. And he is boring, so he had no plans while he was here for holidays. So..."

Bood accepted his explanation with an easy laugh. “The more the merrier.” Then, “But don’t think I’m not onto you.”

Ilya tried not to let his smile move a millimeter, but it was difficult when he could *feel* Shane go still beside him. “Oh?” he asked.

“Trying to recruit Hollander to the Centaurs with the impressive persuasive power of my barbecue so we can finally start winning some games.”

Ilya’s own laugh came out nervous, and his protestation weak, but Bood didn’t seem to catch it. “We do not need Hollander to win. We have me.” His bravado felt ill fitting.

“Sure, yeah,” Wyatt teased. “That’s why we’re so well known as a successful and popular team.”

“Hey, it could be your year,” Harris stepped through the back door, clearly having overheard, hands full with a case of his sisters’ cider, trailed by Troy Barrett carrying his own case.

Ilya met Troy’s eyes and raised his eyebrows suggestively. Troy rolled his eyes, and raised his eyebrows right back, cocking his head just slightly in Shane’s direction.

Another gesture Ilya hoped Shane missed, though it made something dangerously close to a giggle rise in his own throat.

“Shane, this is Harris. The Centaurs’ social media manager.”

“Yes, I think you’ve mentioned him. It’s nice to meet you.” Shane’s voice came out flatter than usual.

“And you’re Shane Hollander,” Harris responded excitedly. “It’s nice to meet you. Do you want cider? My sisters make it out of apples from our orchard.”

“It’s pretty good,” Lisa, Wyatt’s wife, said.

Wyatt added, “Almost as good as Bood’s barbecue.”

“Oh, no, that’s okay. I’m on a strict performance diet,” Shane said.

“See, boring.” Ilya reached for one of the ciders to make a point. He twisted off the cap and made a dramatic “ah” at his first sip. It actually was very good. Not too sweet.

“There’s sugar free iced tea in the beer fridge,” Bood offered - he really was a perfect host. “And let me know if I can grill anything,” with a nod at Ilya, “boring for you.”

“I’m sure whatever you’re making is fine.”

-

Shane sat stiffly by the firepit with a sugar free iced tea, trying to enjoy himself, but feeling like he was stuck inside his skin. There wasn’t even anything left to be afraid of anymore.

Ilya's team was somehow nicer to him than his own, and if anyone suspected anything, they didn't seem to mind it.

Everyone was laughing and chatting about their Christmases like Shane being here wasn't weird at all. But if it wasn't weird, why did it feel like the first step down a slippery slope into, like, a freezing river or something.

Ilya was so easily relaxed in the chair across from him, tipsy already and gesturing with a piece of jerk chicken as he told some story that Shane was only half listening to. He was the most alive Shane had seen him in - he couldn't remember how long. Maybe years.

Fuck, how had Shane not noticed?

"You sure you don't want anything to eat," Cassie, Bood's very pregnant wife, offered kindly as she joined the group.

"I'm fine," Shane said. "I'm not hungry."

It was true. His stomach was in too many knots to even think of eating.

"Shane is not allowed anything that tastes good," Ilya teased, and Shane knew it was meant as a joke, but it stung against his too tight skin.

"Maybe if you paid more attention to what you ate, you could actually win sometimes." He knew it came out too sharp, regretted it as soon as he saw Ilya's brow furrow in concern.

What a great first impression he was making, being an asshole already. "Thanks though," he said to Cassie as an afterthought.

She placed a hand on his shoulder, just briefly as she moved to sit, and said, "Well let Zane know if you ever do want anything."

Shane let the conversation move on around him, offering minimal commentary when directly addressed and wondering when it would be an appropriate time to go home.

When Dykstra and Haas started singing Christmas songs off-key, he was startled by familiar hands on his shoulders. He'd thought Ilya was just up getting another drink.

"Shane," he whined, too drunk to be careful enough, too close behind Shane for it to be completely unsuspecting. "Stop being boring. Come play Mario Kart with me and Hazy. We will defeat the kids with our all-star reflexes."

"Okay. Sure. Fine," Shane agreed, clipped, and brushed Ilya's hands from him as he stood.

He was even worse at the game than usual.

"I don't understand, Hollander. You are so good on the ice, but so bad at this," Ilya ribbed, leaning into his side in a way that made Shane feel like he was going to throw up, and also like maybe everyone in the room was staring at them, so they would realize he and Ilya were

together *and* witness his humiliation when he threw up. He leaned away and swerved off the road.

“Fuck!”

“Oops,” Ilya joked.

“It’s not funny.”

“Is a little funny.”

“I’m trying-”

“Is just a game.”

When the race was over, Shane grabbed Ilya’s arm and dragged him to the first private place he could find.

-

Shane pulled Ilya into a bathroom off Bood’s kitchen. “I can’t-” he said, half gasp half command, “-deal with the poking right now.”

“The what?” Ilya thought he knew what “poking” meant, but it didn’t make sense here.

“The comments. The teasing. About my diet. Or me being boring. Or the game. Or whatever. I’m here. I’m trying. And I know all my stuff doesn’t matter to you, but it matters to me. And I already-”

Ilya understood before Shane finished talking, and he pressed into his space, forcing him back against the counter and capturing his face between his hands. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Sometimes Ilya liked to rile Shane up. Because it was funny or because it was hot. And sometimes, he wanted to get him out of his head, because it seemed dangerous in there a little. More than usual tonight - like he was being crushed alive inside himself.

Sometimes, Ilya just didn’t know how else to say he was worried. Shane hadn’t eaten tonight, and Ilya had thought that maybe he would relax when he saw how nice the team was, but he seemed more scared than when they got here.

But now, when Shane was already so drained from their fight earlier, and so fragile, raw at the edges, now when he was already pushing himself so far for Ilya, this “poking” probably wasn’t helping. Maybe never helped. Maybe was just another problem Ilya was causing by making big things small.

Ilya kissed Shane’s forehead, then his little nose, his perfect freckles, then finally his lips before he reached around to lock his arms behind Shane’s back. Like his embrace could thaw Shane from the inside out until he could feel the warmth of Bood’s patio and the Centaurs’ laughter. “I care that you care. I love that you care. I was worried. Because you are scared, and because you’re not eating.”

Shane softened, just a little against Ilya's chest and wrapped his own arms around Ilya. "I'm trying."

"I know, moya lyubov. You are doing something very hard for me. I will stop 'poking.'"

They stood like that for another minute, Ilya waiting for Shane to pull away first, once he had refilled a little. He ran his hand up and down Shane's spine, and kissed the crown of his head.

"Thanks," Shane mumbled as he pulled back.

"Always."

Then Ilya led them out of the bathroom and back out to the porch, scanning until he found,

"Troy." He nudged Shane's shoulder until he was standing in front of Barrett, only a little guilty about interrupting Troy's private conversation with Harris at the corner of the patio.

"You and Hollander should be friends. You have a lot in common. Both very good at hockey."

"Everyone here is good at hockey," Harris pointed out.

"Not Dillon."

Troy choked on a laugh before his face returned to its usual slightly grumpy frown. He and Shane really would get along.

"Okay," Ilya clapped a little awkwardly. "Well, I will be back."

Shane shot him a panicked glare as he retreated across the porch, but Ilya watched as Harris welcomed him easily into the conversation, and he knew he would be safe with them for a couple of minutes.

Bood was cleaning the grill when Ilya reached him. "Is it too late to ask for plain chicken or something for Shane?"

Bood handed him a paper plate from the little shelf part of the grill. "I made these just in case."

Ilya grinned at the unexpected kindness. "You are very good at throwing parties."

"Spread the word. And maybe come to some more of them."

"Yes, I will." Ilya agreed. "To both."

There was, he realized, with a probably goofy smile on his face, real possibility finally. Real hope. He could come to Bood's parties. He could go out with the team, when Shane wasn't in town. Or when he was. He could bring him.

He could be part of this team, finally. Could sink in and enjoy it.

“You know,” Bood patted his shoulder. “I could never really picture you and Hollander being friends, but seeing it, it kind of makes sense.”

“Yes,” Ilya joked, “Makes sense. Because we are both so much better at hockey than you. And prettier.”

Bood’s laugh boomed across the patio.

Ilya searched the table for the healthiest looking sides and settled on the peas and rice. He also grabbed a sugar cookie, just in case. He would eat it if Shane didn’t.

When he returned to his boyfriend, Shane looked for the first time that night, not happy necessarily, or comfortable, but not nauseous, which was an improvement.

Ilya handed him the plate of food without fanfare and resisted his urge to pull up a chair next to him and press their legs together. Shane was finally starting to relax. Ilya wasn’t going to ruin it.

He sat next to Troy instead, who was watching Harris a little too intently.

“Did you know Shane’s family used to come apple picking at my family’s orchard when he was a kid?” Harris asked excitedly. “We could’ve been friends.”

“It’s a good orchard,” Shane offered. “They do a corn maze in the fall. Do you still do that?” It was the most Shane had said to anyone all night.

Harris nodded. “My sisters do cider tastings now too, if you want to come after your performance diet ends. And there’s a hay ride.”

Ilya watched the corner of Troy’s lip twitch at the invitation.

“You are jealous,” he whispered.

“Why did I tell you anything?” Troy whispered back. “And no I’m not.”

“You are. You are in love.”

“So are you.”

It was meant to be a retort, but Ilya couldn’t help but sigh. “Yes,” he agreed, glancing at Shane, who was absentmindedly eating his chicken while he and Harris talked. “I am.”

He expected a jolt of panic to follow the undeniable confession, but instead it settled over him like a warm blanket. Someone knew now, and Ilya had never felt less alone.

Eventually, the conversation found it’s way to hockey, and Harris somehow became more animated, and Troy joined in, and Ilya watched as Shane really, fully relaxed. Like maybe he felt some of the warmth too, like maybe it was melting through all the cold fear to make him better too.

It was just after midnight when Shane and Ilya left the party, tired, but maybe content.

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“That was fun,” Shane said, climbing into the drivers seat of Ilya’s car. They’d been hanging out and talking with Harris and Troy, and eventually Wyatt when he won the Mario Kart tournament, for long enough that Ilya was probably sober, but Shane was definitely sober, so he would rather drive.

“Really?” Ilya asked, doubt and hope warring in the curve of his lips.

“Really,” Shane confirmed. Somehow, despite everything, Shane had enjoyed himself. He *liked* Harris and Troy. He liked Ilya’s whole team really - Bood who had gone out of his way to make Shane something he could eat (honestly, the best plain chicken he’d ever had - he would need to ask Bood how he did it) and Wyatt who had rambled about comic books for, like, a full half hour, and Haas who definitely had a crush on Ilya.

The difference from his own team was stark.

He hadn’t really registered just how uncomfortable the locker room had become since he’d told his teammates he was gay. Meanwhile, Wyatt Hayes was talking about his lesbian sister and Harris was wearing pride pins on his jacket, and no one was looking twice.

“I think I might be jealous,” Shane commented as he drove.

“Jealous? Of what?”

“You?” Shane answered, still uncertain. “I can’t believe the Centaurs are.... like that.”

“Like what?”

“You know. Nice? Like, cool with stuff.”

“Oh, cool with stuff. Yes, makes sense,” for the first time tonight, Ilya’s teasing didn’t poke at frayed nerves, and Shane shoved his shoulder lightly.

“Fuck off. You know what I mean.”

“Yes, the Centaurs are good.”

“Even though you always lose.”

Shane didn’t have to look to know Ilya was rolling his eyes. “We are done losing,” he said. “Is our year, I think.”

“Really?” The Centaurs’ lineup *was* better than their record, so Shane figured they had some kind of chance, but only some kind.

“Well,” Ilya allowed, “Maybe just playoffs. But *next year*, the cup.”

“You know, my contract with Montreal is ending at the end of this season.” Shane wasn’t sure what possessed him to say that. He’d never leave the Metros.

Probably.

“Is it?” Ilya asked, and even Shane could tell that the casual tone of his voice was forced.

Shane might leave the Metros. If it meant being close to Ilya all the time, and if it meant more nights like this with more people who didn’t make him feel like he was walking a tightrope across broken glass, and if it meant he and Ilya could maybe come out sooner than ten years down the line.

Could maybe come out soon.

“Hmmm,” Shane hummed his confirmation.

“Wait,” Ilya reached for Shane’s hand on the console, and Shane tangled their fingers. “I am making big small again.”

“I could actually tell that time.”

“I want you to come to Ottawa. I want you to be on my nice team. I want to win the Stanley Cup together.”

Shane didn’t know what to say to that. Something like “yes,” was waiting on the tip of his tongue, but it was easy to say yes after a night like tonight.

“I don’t want to make a promise just because I feel fearless,” he said slowly. “I’ll be too scared again tomorrow.”

“Then make the promise tomorrow when you are afraid,” Ilya said. “You promised to come tonight - afraid. You talked to all my friends - afraid. And it all turned out so good that now you’re fearless.” Shane could hear the grin in his words. “Things you do afraid turn out very good.”

There was one thing that Shane was still afraid of, even now, so he took a deep breath and said, “You should tell your team about you. And about us. If you want to.”

He expected some kind of panic to follow, but it didn’t. If anything, the last of Shane’s fear seemed to dissipate, leaving just a centered calm, like when he was doing yoga, or when he was chasing a puck across the ice. Like when Ilya was fucking him so hard all other thoughts left his brain.

“Stop the car.”

That wasn’t the response he’d been expecting. “What?”

“Stop the car,” Ilya repeated. “I need to kiss you.”

Shane, ever the follower of instructions, pulled the car to the side of the dark highway, and Ilya's face was wet when he kissed him. Shane's might've been too.

“And maybe suck your cock,” Ilya added when he pulled away.

Shane laughed, but he didn't protest.

End Notes

A gay autistic man and an emotionally stunted sweetheart. Obviously I had to write a story to make them sad, then happy again.

When I was trying to find a fitting title, I figured, hey, it's probably projection of some kind, so I scrolled through my "Relatable" playlist on Spotify, and I found "Autoclave" by the Mountain Goats. So, yeah, probably projection.

When Shane retroactively fills in the details to try to defend in his own mind something that he said but logically knows he didn't mean, is that relatable to anyone else, or is that just a me thing?

Please comment and kudos - it's been a real drought for this Leo while I've been trying to focus on writing my own novel. A lot less praise.

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