

give me back my time and i will give you back your heart

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by [allyasavedtheday](#)

Summary

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“In ten years, fifteen,” he starts, gritting his teeth against his own anxiety. “When hockey is done and no one gives a fuck about us anymore and- and I have American citizenship. If- if we are both still single, then we can try.”

Shane goes still, hand dropping from Ilya’s face and mouth parting. Ilya has a moment or two to panic that he’s somehow completely miscalculated but then Shane’s expression breaks over an awed sort of smile.

“Like those romcom couples, huh?”

Ilya blinks. It’s not what he’d expected Shane to say. “What?”

Shane’s smile widens into a grin. “You know those movies where like, two best friends make a pact that if they’re both still single when they’re forty then they’ll get married-”

“You are proposing, Hollander? Is so sudden-”

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In which Shane and Ilya decide to end things in Tampa, make a deal about *someday*, and end up on the same team together five years later.

Notes

what can i say??? in the words of james acaster: started making it, had a breakdown, bon appetit 🤪

no but for real, i am aware there are a million fics where they end things and find their way back to each other years later so i'm sure i'm not contributing anything new here but this came to me in a vision fully formed as i listened to cigarette smoke by olivia rodrigo on repeat and i couldn't rest until i wrote it so here we are adkjfhaksd

I hope you like it ❤️

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

Tampa, February 2017

Ilya says, “We can’t be something, Hollander,” and he *means* it. Because there’s no other option. How could there be? Being together just means setting them both up for heartbreak when it all inevitably goes up in flames.

So yeah, he’s not lying when he says they can’t be together.

He just doesn’t expect Shane not to fight back.

“Okay,” Shane breathes, a beat too late.

Ilya’s head snaps towards him and he finds Shane nodding, mostly to himself, blinking unseeingly at the wall. He drags his gaze back to Ilya and the smile he manages looks more heartbroken than sincere.

“Okay,” he says again, throat bobbing. “But Ilya, we can’t-” He squeezes his eyes shut, turning his face to the ceiling. It shouldn’t be a surprise that Shane’s glassy-eyed when he looks back at him again but it still lances right through Ilya’s chest. “We can’t keep doing this.”

Ilya frowns, parsing through the words in his head like he’s never heard them before until he realises-

“You want to stop,” he says dumbly. There’s a buzzing in his ears, too loud, and he feels a little like he’s underwater when Shane starts speaking again.

“No.” He laughs once, humourlessly. “I care about you and I *like* you and I get why you don’t want- why we can’t be anything more. But I also don’t think we can stay stuck in this middle ground anymore.” His voice is thick with tears, the closest to crying Ilya thinks he’s ever heard him. “It *hurts*.”

Ilya stares down at his lap, trying to convince himself there’s some other reason for his blurred vision besides the burning behind his eyes. It’s not- it’s not like he expected Shane to try and change his mind but he didn’t think he’d want to cut Ilya out of his life completely. Should Ilya be surprised though? Shane has just as much to lose as he does; he knows this can’t work. And Ilya already knows he gets more out of their deal than Shane does.

He gets Shane’s crinkly-eyed smiles and patience and earnestness and Shane gets...the barb-wire fence Ilya keeps around his heart so no one can get too close.

“We’re already hurting each other,” Shane says lowly, his hand creeping into Ilya’s line of vision as it settles over Ilya’s thigh. “And if we keep doing this it’s just gonna get worse.”

Ilya takes a breath, lifting his head. He allows himself the briefest reprieve of staring at the wall before he manages to turn to Shane. “If it’s what you want...”

The look Shane gives him is beseeching, like he's begging Ilya to understand where he's coming from. Ilya's not sure if he can be that generous right now.

Shane shakes his head. "It's not." The hand he had on Ilya's leg lifts, reaching up to cradle Ilya's cheek instead. "But if we can't be together at least if we stop we might have a chance of being happy with someone else. We should at least give each other that, right?"

And it shouldn't hurt so fucking much when this is all Ilya's fault in the first place. He considers what would happen if he took it back. If he said he changed his mind. Would Shane let him? He'd seemed- determined earlier. Like he'd been ready to fight for Ilya. Would he even still want to now?

He opens his mouth but he cuts himself off before he can ask them both to forget the last fifteen minutes. It's not fair to Shane when he can't change anything else. He can't change the league or their lives or Russia or the rivalry or any of it. So what would be the point?

Still, the thought of never being with Shane again, of never being able to call him his, of spending the rest of their careers only ever circling each other on the ice-

It feels impossible. Death by a thousand tiny cuts.

"Let's make a deal."

The words come out of his mouth without his permission but they make a flicker of a smile appear on Shane's face, private and fond. He nods, silently urging Ilya to keep going.

"In ten years, fifteen," he starts, gritting his teeth against his own anxiety. "When hockey is done and no one gives a fuck about us anymore and- and I have American citizenship. If- if we are both still single, then we can try."

Shane goes still, hand dropping from Ilya's face and mouth parting. Ilya has a moment or two to panic that he's somehow completely miscalculated but then Shane's expression breaks over an awed sort of smile.

It reminds Ilya faintly of a similar smile in a bathroom in Vegas. Of a desperately fond, *wow, genetic*.

"Like those romcom couples, huh?"

Ilya blinks. It's not what he'd expected Shane to say. "What?"

Shane's smile widens into a grin. "You know those movies where like, two best friends make a pact that if they're both still single when they're forty then they'll get married-"

"You are proposing, Hollander? Is so sudden-"

"Fuck off," Shane snickers, shoving Ilya's shoulder, but his hands stay on Ilya's arm when he straightens again, settling over his forearm. "That's not what I meant. And it was your idea."

“Mm, I suppose I could marry you for green card...” Ilya muses and Shane’s laughter is a balm to his aching nerves.

“Yeah, whatever.” Shane rolls his eyes but he looks suddenly serious when their eyes meet again. “You mean it though? When we retire, we could try?”

Ilya shrugs and tries not to reveal his own desperate want. “If we are both single. If we both want to.”

Right now, it feels almost impossible to ever imagine wanting anyone more than he wants Shane Hollander. But he reminds himself that just because Shane and Rose Landry weren’t ‘compatible’ it doesn’t mean he won’t be with someone else. Ilya should let him try to find it.

“Okay,” Shane agrees. He’s clearly thinking it over, hands tightening and loosening and then tightening again on Ilya’s arm. “And in the meantime, maybe we could be...friends?”

“Friends?” he repeats, unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

Shane nods. “I like talking to you. And- and we don’t need to stop that just because we stop the other stuff.”

Ilya nods because friends is better than having nothing at all and because he’s not sure the reality of what’s happening right now has fully sunk in for him yet. As if picking up on the same thought, Shane’s hand tightens around his wrist again.

“Can I, um- could I stay here tonight?”

It hits Ilya, suddenly then, what Shane wanting to stay means.

It means they won’t be doing this again. That this is their last night together so Shane wants to be able to linger.

Ilya hardly gets the ‘yes’ out of his mouth before he’s lurching forward to drag Shane into a desperate kiss. Shane releases a shaky breath against him but then he’s just as eager, fingers reaching up to sink into Ilya’s curls like he wants to make sure Ilya can’t pull away. As if Ilya would ever want to.

And sex between them has never really been like this before.

This frantic mix of too urgent and too slow, like they both know as soon as they stop they can’t start again. Still, Ilya lays Shane down on the bed like he’s something precious and kisses every inch of skin he uncovers while removing his clothes and Shane mostly lets him except for when his fingers slide over Ilya’s jaw and he urges him upwards so their mouths can meet again. And, well, Ilya forgets about everything except trying to memorise the inside of Shane’s mouth for at least fifteen minutes.

They’re both distracted, both overwhelmed, too indecisive about what they want or how.

When he finally sinks into Shane it feels like they both go quiet. It’s just foreheads pressed together and mingled breaths and clutching each other hard enough to leave bruises that, for

once, neither of them seems concerned about. He doesn't comment on the tears in Shane's eyes and Shane politely doesn't say anything when Ilya buries his face in his neck to hide his own.

He expects to feel something like devastation when it ends but it's hard when Shane doesn't immediately disappear.

They trail each other to the shower and kiss and touch uninhibited and it's funny how it ending can feel so much like they're moving forward.

When they're back under the covers, curled up on their sides facing each other, Ilya reaches for Shane's hand where it rests on the mattress between them. He slots his fingers into the spaces between Shane's and feels bolstered when Shane squeezes.

"I want to add addendum to our deal."

Shane is silent for a beat. And then, "How the fuck do you know the word addendum?"

"Oh fuck you. My English is better than yours now."

Shane laughs, shifting closer when Ilya tugs on his hand. "What's your addendum?" he asks seriously, even though he's beaming, as his free hand slides over Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya hooks their legs together under the blanket. "As long as we're single, we are allowed one cheat day a year."

Shane's mouth opens around a question, no doubt at what constitutes a 'cheat day' before he seems to realise what Ilya means. He smirks, raising his eyebrows. "You need it that bad, huh?"

"Is mostly for you," Ilya counters, feigning nonchalance. "Since you will probably become monk if I'm not fucking you-"

Shane shoves him again but he's still laughing and Ilya is the biggest fucking idiot in the world to be giving this up. But Shane is right. They'll end up hurting each other. They already have. Ilya doesn't ever want to be the reason Shane hurts again, if he can help it.

"Whatever makes you feel better," Shane scoffs. He's closer to Ilya again now, close enough that they're almost chest to chest.

"But you are saying yes?" Ilya confirms and Shane's smile dissolves into something fond.

"Yeah," he says. "One cheat day a year is okay."

Ilya lifts their still joined hands, making a show of shaking Shane's hand to seal the deal. Shane rolls his eyes but his expression is still soft. He slips his hand free of Ilya's after a few seconds but he only does it to burrow himself in Ilya's arms, curling into his chest and tucking his face into the spot under Ilya's chin. Ilya winds his arms around him instantly, sweeping the palms of his hands over Shane's back.

“I should set an alarm,” Shane mumbles against his neck.

Ilya turns his face enough to kiss the top of Shane’s head and tightens his hold. “I’ll wake you.”

“Okay,” Shane whispers and Ilya can almost tell the exact moment he closes his eyes from the way his eyelashes flutter against his neck and then stop.

Ilya doesn’t sleep at all that night.

Ottawa, 2022

Ilya knocks on the open door to Wiebe’s office, offering a polite smile when his coach looks up from the papers on his desk.

“Hey, kid. Thanks for coming in; I know your break just started.”

“Is fine,” he shrugs, moving to take a seat in front of Wiebe’s desk. Not like he had any vacation plans just yet. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Wiebe says, waving away his concerns. “Yeah, no, everything’s good. I just wanted to run something past you.”

Ilya raises his eyebrows expectantly when Wiebe doesn’t continue. It’s rare Wiebe is ever nervous. If anything, Ilya would describe his confidence as something easy, something that he never has to reach very far for. It’s impressive. He takes a breath, tapping his fingers agitatedly on the desk, before he pins Ilya with a look.

“Shane Hollander wants a trade.”

Ilya doesn’t react right away, the words replaying at least three times in his head before they sink in. “To- to Ottawa?” he asks, bewildered.

Wiebe shrugs. “I mean, talks are ongoing but we’re one of the frontrunners.”

Ilya nods faintly, feeling his eyebrows furrow. Shane didn’t say anything the last time they spoke. Then again, they don’t talk as much as they used to. Shane’s ambitious desire to remain friends had been well-meaning but Ilya can’t pretend that it wasn’t its own particular brand of torture talking to him and not allowing himself to have more.

They still text, but it’s more like an every-couple-of-months check-in than a consistent stream of conversation. They’re polite and make small talk at events and there hasn’t been a year yet that they’ve missed their ‘cheat day’ despite the whole point of this separation being a way for them to move on and meet other people.

If anything, Ilya thinks the distance is making him worse.

He usually tries to wait until the MLH awards before he caves and sends Shane his hotel room number.

This year he'd only made it as far as the All Star weekend before he gave in. He tries to remind himself that Shane never turns him down, that he's been the one to text first sometimes.

They keep their conversations light for the most part but he still thought something as big as Shane wanting to leave Montreal would've come up. Especially if he was considering Ottawa.

He looks up and finds Wiebe watching him curiously. Taking a fortifying breath, he nods his head.

"Do you need me to take pay cut?"

Wiebe blinks at him. "What?"

"You cannot afford both of us," he says simply because that has to be why he's here, right? "I will do it. Sign him."

Wiebe's mouth drops open in surprise and it takes a beat before he lets out a startled laugh. "I guess that answers my question of if you're okay to work with him. I know the whole rivalry thing has died down since you moved here but--"

"He is the best player in the league," Ilya says because it's easier than admitting his selfish reasons for wanting Shane to be here. Easier than admitting to the cavernous pit of need that is opening up in his chest again just at the thought of a chance. "He will help us be the best."

It's perhaps too complimentary considering the look Wiebe is giving him but it's the best Ilya can do without spilling his feelings all over the table.

"I suppose you're fine with me offering him the A too then?" Wiebe asks wryly.

"Whatever it takes," Ilya nods.

When he leaves Wiebe's office ten minutes later he opens Shane's contact.

Lily: Ottawa???????

Shane replies almost instantly.

Jane: Only if it's okay with you!

Ilya shakes his head, suppressing a besotted smile as he types out a reply.

Lily: Don't be stupid, Hollander

Jane: Thank you ☺

In his twelve year career, Ilya has never looked forward to a training camp more than he has this summer. He usually relishes in his time off. Takes time to vacation and spend time with

Svetlana and do nothing in between workouts. But this year, he's never wished the summer away so much.

He's got his back to the room at large, rifling through his gearbag in his cubby hole, and it's insane to say he feels it when Shane enters the room but he does. Goosebumps tingle at the back of his neck approximately ten seconds before the rest of the guys go quiet and Ilya hears Wiebe's voice ring out across the locker room.

"Everyone, I'm pretty sure I don't have to introduce our newest addition."

Ilya slowly turns around, eyes zeroing in on Shane immediately. He's standing next to Wiebe in the entryway, surveying the room. Ilya wonders idly if anyone else can see the tension in his shoulders or the anxiety in the set of his mouth or if it's just something he's privy to.

Their eyes meet and he watches the way Shane's stoic expression flickers, his mouth thinning like he's suppressing a smile. It makes Ilya grin in return and Shane looks away for a beat. Like he's trying to school his expression. Like they're little kids making each other laugh across the classroom. Fuck, Ilya *missed* him. Has missed him every single day since Tampa, he thinks.

"We're extremely lucky to have him," Wiebe is saying, even though Ilya is only half-listening now, too focused on Shane. "So make him feel welcome and show him what you've got at practice today. Don't make him regret signing with us."

Some of the guys laugh and Shane's mouth quirks but Ilya can tell he's distracted too. He wonders if anyone else has noticed them staring yet.

"Rozanov!"

Ilya jumps, snapping his attention to Wiebe.

Wiebe, who is glancing between them with something calculating in his expression. Well, that answers Ilya's earlier question.

"You can show Hollander around, right?"

"Of course," Ilya exclaims – too enthusiastic, probably, if the look Wiebe gives him is anything to go by.

Coach leaves them then with a reminder that practice starts in fifteen minutes.

The rest of the team descend on Shane almost immediately and Ilya has to shove down the urge to push through the crowd and stand at Shane's shoulder like a bodyguard. He makes himself wait instead, focusing on changing out, and he's proud of the way he manages to sound flippant when he says, "I know you all think Hollander is shiny new toy but maybe let him change before you play with him, yes?"

He ignores the good-natured, "Fuck off, Roz"s that get thrown his way but it works. Everyone slowly returns to their cubbies and Shane appears a moment later at the empty space on Ilya's right.

“Rozanov,” he greets. It’s supposed to sound polite, probably. To Ilya’s ears, he sounds fond.

Ilya looks up and catches his eye, smirking. “Hollander.”

“This one mine?” Shane asks, nodding to the cubby, even though it’s redundant when his name is already up there.

Ilya nods and tries to ignore the anticipation building under his skin. Shane smiles at him and it’s just as fucking earth-shattering as it was five years ago. Ilya turns away while he changes because he can’t actually trust his body not to react to a shirtless Shane Hollander.

Wyatt is watching him when he looks around the locker room and Ilya makes a face at him. “You ready for practice, Hayes?”

Wyatt looks like he wants to smirk but he doesn’t. “Yeah, Cap.”

“Then maybe get on the fucking ice, yes?”

Given that Wyatt lets out a cough that was definitely a laugh, Ilya thinks his order comes out more hysterical than threatening. Still, he nods and dutifully heads for the door.

“See you out there, Cap!”

Ilya watches him go and hopes the chill of the ice will be enough to conceal the way he feels his face heating up.

They’re in the locker room after a practice that Ilya can only describe as exhilarating. He’s always loved sharing the ice with Shane, in any capacity. Playing on the same team as him, working on drills with him, getting to see him play up close and just *admire* him- it’s the happiest Ilya thinks he’s been on the ice since he was a kid.

Shane is next to him now, rummaging through his bag for a change of clothes. His hair is sweaty and sticking to his forehead and he’s in just his compression shirt up top and Ilya can’t help himself anymore.

“So, uh, what kind of house did Mr Real Estate by in Ottawa?”

Shane abandons his bag, throwing him a sidelong glance before he huffs a laugh. “You wanna see?”

He doesn’t expect the question – though he should, the plain way Shane was always able to cut through Ilya’s bullshit, roundabout questions has disarmed him more than once. “You’re inviting me over?”

Shane shrugs, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Sure. It’d be good to catch up.”

Ilya has a brief moment to consider how insane it is that they’re having this conversation in the locker room where anyone could hear but no one else seems to be paying attention to them. Even so, it feels significant how...calm Shane seems about it all.

He supposes it would be easy to tell everyone they're friends. The rivalry died down a lot after Ilya moved to Ottawa and it's not like people never see them talking or anything.

It still feels like a big deal.

"Okay," he says, mouth oddly dry. "Tonight?"

"Yeah," Shane says. "I'll text you the address. We can get takeout or something."

Ilya nods and fucks around at his locker until Shane disappears into the showers and tries not to feel like he just agreed to a date.

Shane opens the front door for him and it could be 2013 or 2016 or last year when Ilya had gotten a text forty minutes after a Montreal-Ottawa game asking if he had any plans for the night.

"Hey," Shane says as he steps aside to let Ilya through.

"Hi." Ilya slips off his shoes, glancing around in curiosity. It's different to his place in Montreal, not least of all because it's a house instead of an apartment.

There are still a few boxes lining the walls, suggesting it hasn't been long since Shane moved.

"Still settling in?" he asks, nodding to the boxes as he looks around the entryway.

Shane blows out a breath, something bashful in his expression when he nods. "Yeah, I should've started earlier but I was at my cottage for most of the summer so I really only got the move organised in the last week. But most of the big stuff is already unpacked. The essentials, y'know."

Ilya briefly considers making a joke about whether Shane's sex toys are considered the essentials but he bites it back. He turns back to Shane and fuck- if it doesn't feel like every other time. Like he's here for one reason.

He knows Shane can feel it too, the crackle of tension between them.

They're both silent for a beat as they stare at each other and Ilya wonders if he should try to break it. But then Shane says, "Fuck it," and surges forward and Ilya promptly forgets he'd even planned to speak. Shane's hands catch on his jaw and they meet in the middle with a kiss so desperate their teeth clack together.

It says a lot, he thinks, that neither of them even react, too concerned with pulling each other closer. He licks into Shane's mouth, fingers finding the hot skin of Shane's sides beneath his t-shirt and squeezing. "Yes?" he breathes, needing some kind of permission even as his hands drift lower over Shane's sides.

"Yeah," Shane mumbles, nodding against him, and it's all the confirmation Ilya needs before his hands are circling the backs of Shane's thighs and he's hoisting him into his arms. Shane's

legs lock around him instantly even as his breath hitches and he laughs against Ilya's mouth. Ilya stumbles over his own feet, trying to lead them in the direction of somewhere, before he stops short.

He pulls his head to the side, mouth dragging over Shane's cheek. "Shane."

Shane leans back, frowning at him.

"I don't know where the bedroom is."

Shane is silent for a beat and then a laugh exhales out of him. He uses the hand he still has on Ilya's jaw to guide him into a kiss that's sweet enough to make Ilya's knees buckle and murmurs, "Put me down," right into his mouth.

Ilya does, reluctantly, but Shane doesn't look like he's about to put a stop to this any time soon. He takes Ilya's hands, turning them around so he's walking backwards as he leads them down the hall. "Come on."

He kisses Ilya again, squeezing his hands, as he urges them on. And, well, Ilya discovered a long time ago that he'd happily let Shane Hollander lead him anywhere.

Shane insists they put on clothes after they've cleaned up, laughing and darting away from Ilya's wandering hands when he says they already broke their cheat day rule. He's not too strict about it at least: he doesn't bother putting on anything more than his boxers and a t-shirt and he even lets Ilya get away wearing a pair of his sweatpants and nothing else.

The tension between them has eased now, simmering into something soft, almost tender.

Ilya thinks it's the first night neither of them has ever actually had an urgent reason to leave.

He's lying on his stomach, pushed up on his elbows, while Shane is stretched out beside him, propped up against the many pillows that made their way from Montreal. It feels stupidly juvenile, like they're having a sleepover.

"Why didn't you tell me about Ottawa?"

He's been picking it apart all summer. And he knows he could've asked Shane before but he wants to see his face when he answers, wants to hear it in his voice.

Shane shrugs but it's not self-conscious. "I was afraid you wouldn't want me here."

Ilya gives him a look. "You know Wiebe would've done anything to get you to accept that deal. He would've told me to go fuck myself if I tried to say no."

"I still wouldn't have wanted to move if you didn't want me to," Shane says honestly and that's-

It could be Shane respecting Ilya's non-existent need for space. Or him admitting he *wanted* Ilya to want him here. Either way, it makes Ilya feel lightheaded.

He nods, picking at the comforter as he works up the courage for his next question. “What happened in Montreal?”

Shane is quiet for a beat. “Why do you think something happened?”

“Because you wanted to retire there.” He stares Shane down, daring him to argue, but Shane just sighs, glancing at the ceiling for a moment before he meets Ilya’s eyes again. His smile is sad.

“I uh, I came out to the team last year,” he says, eyes going unfocused like he’s remembering it. “I thought, you know, dating and everything might be easier if they knew. And- and I’d already told Hayden and JJ and they’d been so good about it.”

He pauses, mouth pursing and eyebrows furrowing. Ilya resists the urge to reach out and smooth them out.

“It was fine,” he says after a moment, breathing out a laugh at Ilya’s sceptical look. “It really was. Some of the guys were great and there was really only one or two that were assholes about it. Most of them were just...neutral.” He crosses his arms over his chest, picking at the skin of his elbow in a nervous habit. “And it was fine but- I don’t know. Things were just so...stilted. Like the chemistry in the room was gone and it- I didn’t know how to fix it. It was almost worse than having some big blow-up argument about it.”

He’s pinching the skin of his elbow now; Ilya reaches out to make him stop.

“I- I couldn’t do anything to fix it because, on the outside, it didn’t look like there was anything *to* fix. But it still felt like my fault every time we lost or played a bad game.” He ducks his head, staring at his crossed arms. “So when my contract renegotiations came up again this year I asked about a trade.”

Ilya frowns, finally giving in and shuffling closer so he can press their sides together – his hip against Shane’s leg. “I’m sorry, Shane.”

“It’s okay,” Shane says and his face makes it look like it is. Or like he’s spent months trying to convince himself it is. “I mean, it’s not. But-” He shrugs, giving Ilya a helpless smile. “I’m trying to get past it.”

Ilya nods. “What made you pick Ottawa then?”

Shane exhales, shrugging again. “Well, it’s my hometown-”

“And I am here,” Ilya interjects, waggling his eyebrows when Shane’s eyes dart to him.

It works to make Shane laugh, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he shakes his head. “Sure.”

Ilya offers him a shit-eating grin and, inexplicably, it makes Shane’s expression soften.

“I mean, you and Barrett both being out at least made me think the team would be accepting.”

Ilya nods. Coming out to the team on his first day was probably reckless in hindsight but he was tired of hiding it. He figured if they were going to hate him for it he wanted to know from the start. When he'd gotten his citizenship a while back he came out to the public. Troy Barrett wasn't far behind him.

"And...?" he prompts and Shane huffs, rolling his eyes even as his mouth curves up in an involuntary smile.

"And it was nice. To think I might at least have one friend here."

Ilya smiles back, nudging Shane's side with his shoulder. He hasn't really been a great friend these past few years. It was too fucking hard. Any time they did see each other or text they never really talked about anything real. He likes to think it was easier, even though none of it made him want Shane any less.

"What about you?" Shane asks then. "You never told me why you moved here."

Ilya stares at the pillow in front of him, trying to organise his thoughts. He doesn't know to explain it without giving himself away. "Canadian citizenship felt...safer than American," he starts. "And I was- Ottawa needed rebuilding; I needed a challenge. Or- ...a distraction, maybe."

"A distraction?" Shane sounds confused and Ilya gives him a look.

He flushes when he seems to realise what Ilya is implying, looking down and away. When he raises his head again there's something almost teasing in his eyes. "So you moved to my hometown-?"

"Yes, okay, well I obviously was not going to move to Montreal," Ilya cuts in and Shane chuckles.

His expression melts a little then, a private smile tucked into his cheeks as he finally lets his arms drop and his fingers move to run over the comforter between them. He watches them instead of meeting Ilya's eyes. "You know I used to have this like- fantasy, I guess," he starts, eyes flicking to Ilya and away again. "That I'd be visiting my parents for the weekend or home for the holidays or something, and I'd bump into you in, like, the supermarket."

It takes Ilya a second to remember how to speak, the heavy thump of his heart too distracting in his ears. "You know you have my phone number," he says, trying for teasing and sure he misses it by a mile.

It makes Shane huff anyway, throwing him an exasperated look and a bitten back grin. "I know. But it had to be an accident. If I called you I'd be breaking the rules-"

"Ah yes, and god forbid we break the rules you made up in your head."

Shane shoots him a warning look but continues, "Anyway. If I just bumped into you then I could- it would be allowed. If we spent time together. Because we didn't plan it."

Ilya doesn't say anything to that but he finally gives into the desire to tangle his fingers with Shane's where his hand is splayed on the mattress. They're not quite holding hands but Shane doesn't pull away either. They're both watching their hands when Ilya remembers his voice.

"Have you been seeing anyone?"

He doesn't want to know the answer but he thinks he might explode if he doesn't ask.

Shane exhales. "Uh, no. Not really." His fingers curls and release around Ilya's and then twist tighter. "I tried a few times but it just- my heart wasn't in it, I guess."

And Ilya has been speaking English long enough to understand that phrase but he still feels the same way he did in a bar in Tampa in 2017 when Shane was telling him he and Rose Landry weren't compatible. Sure he understood, but terrified he'd somehow picked it up wrong.

"Did you ever, um- think about coming out publicly?" He chances a glance up and watches the way Shane's eyes drag away from their hands to meet his.

"I've thought about it," he says quietly. "It still scares me a little. And-"

He cuts himself off with a shake of his head and a humourless laugh. Ilya squeezes his fingers to silently encourage him to keep going.

"I always kind of thought if people knew about both of us they would..."

"Assume we were fucking?" Ilya guesses and Shane scoffs.

"Well, yeah."

Ilya pretends to think about – because actually thinking about it is a terrifying monster of a thing. "We cannot blame them for having eyes."

Shane rolls his eyes, slouching a little further down the pillows. Ilya wants to gather him up in his arms and never let him go.

"What, um- what about you?" Shane asks for the second time. "Are you dating anyone?"

Ilya thinks the fact that he's in Shane's bed should be answer enough but he shakes his head anyway. "No."

Shane gives him a speculative onceover. "Have you tried?"

Ilya jerks his head back in indignation. "Ah, excuse-"

"Hookups don't count," Shane interrupts and Ilya deflates, letting out a long-suffering groan.

"Maybe I do not want to date anyone."

Shane shakes his head ruefully. “We’re so fucking bad at this. The whole point of not seeing each other was so we could actually try and find relationships that would stick.”

After twelve years Ilya thinks the evidence of which relationship will stick is pretty damning.

He hesitates for a moment before steeling himself. “Shane. I do not think I can see you every day and not kiss you.”

Shane stares at him, a tangled mess of emotions all over his face. Hope and heartache and desire and familiarity and a million other things Ilya doesn’t know how to name.

“It hasn’t been fifteen years yet,” he whispers and Ilya laughs.

“Yes, well, we were not sharing a locker room before.”

Shane chews on the corner of his mouth, indecision making him waver. “I- you want to go back to the way it was before?”

Ilya shrugs. He wants whatever he can get. Whatever Shane will give him.

Shane closes his eyes, taking a steadying breath. When he meets Ilya’s gaze again there’s something pleading in his face. “I’m not saying no, but- Ilya, I just moved. And- and I need to figure out how to gel with the team and you and I need to *work* together now, like, we can’t fuck this up-”

“We won’t.”

Shane tilts his head, fond and worried all in one. “Maybe. I just- I need this to work, okay? I need Ottawa to work out for me because Montreal-” He chokes back whatever he was going to say but Ilya can see his anxiety rising. “I need this work because if it doesn’t I don’t know what- I don’t know-”

“Okay,” Ilya says, pushing up on his hands and shuffling until he’s hovering above Shane, one hand on either side of his torso. “Okay, is okay. We don’t have to decide anything right now.”

Shane looks up at him with those glassy eyes that have always been Ilya’s undoing. “Just give me a couple of weeks.”

Ilya nods. A couple of weeks. He can do that. He can see Shane every day and not go out of his mind with want.

“You can stay tonight though,” Shane offers, hopeful.

Ilya pretends to think about it. “But no fucking?” he checks.

Shane can hardly contain his grin, a laugh bubbling out of him. “Nope.”

“No touching?” he asks, raising his eyebrows.

“PG only.”

Ilya makes a show of frowning. “No kissing?”

Shane is beaming as he reaches up to curl a hand around the nape of Ilya’s neck and pull him down. The kiss is painfully sweet. It makes Ilya’s veins fizz and his mouth tingle and he never wants it to fucking end. Even so, he pulls away before he does something stupid, pressing his forehead and nose against Shane’s while he catches a breath that he had no reason to lose in the first place.

Shane kisses the corner of his mouth and Ilya can tell he’s smiling again.

Swallowing down the emotion threatening to choke him, he shifts, moving until his head is propped on Shane’s chest and he’s wrapped entirely around him. Shane’s arms circle his shoulders, one of his hands immediately burying into Ilya’s curls and scratching at his scalp. He closes his eyes.

Shane presses his lips to the crown of his head, his free hand smoothing over Ilya’s back before he stills.

They never do get around to ordering takeout.

For the next two weeks, Ilya is on his best behaviour. He’s patient and doesn’t push and lets Shane settle into the Centaurs.

And every time they’re on the same wavelength over a play or they sit together during lunch or Shane catches his eye in the middle of a group conversation and shoots him a private smile, he has no choice but to face up to the fact he’s been running from for nearly five years.

He is hopelessly, desperately, stupidly in love with Shane Hollander.

He thinks about his own idea to wait – to try when they’ve retired – and it feels ridiculous now. A cowardly solution from his younger self who was drowning too much in the present to see a future.

Now...now, he thinks they’re old enough, brave enough, that maybe they could take the risk.

Inexplicably, the thing that makes his decision for him is recognising Shane’s car in the parking lot when he pulls into the grocery store on Saturday morning.

He suppresses a grin as he parks his car, fetching a cart he doesn’t need and making his way inside. To anyone watching, he must look insane hurrying up and down the aisles without picking out any food but he finally finds what he’s looking for in the fresh produce section.

Shane is comparing two cartons of blueberries with fierce concentration and Ilya has never loved him more. He selects one after a moment, setting it in his cart and getting ready to move on. Ilya rallies into action, rounding the corner just in time that his cart crashes – gently – into Shane’s.

Shane looks up, an apology already on his lips, but whatever he'd planned to say leaves him when his eyes find Ilya's.

"Ilya," he says blankly.

Ilya tries and fails not to grin at him. "Shane," he greets. "What a surprise to bump into you here!"

Shane lets out a laugh, something giddy, either at his terrible acting or the callback to their conversation from a few weeks ago. "What a coincidence, right?"

"It really was," Ilya tells him – too serious, maybe. He glances down at his empty cart and back up, feeling his cheeks heat. "You, um- do you have any plans for the weekend off?"

"No, no plans," Shane says. He isn't giving an inch and he looks like he's enjoying this and Ilya wishes he cared more about the embarrassing lengths he'd go to to keep Shane Hollander's attention on him.

"You know" he says, clearing his throat, "we never actually got dinner a couple of weeks ago..."

Shane's face lights up and he ducks his head, eyes moving to his groceries. "How about I cook for us this time?"

Ilya bites the inside of his lip as if it does anything to hide his eagerness. "Yes. I would like that."

"You wanna come over around seven?"

Ilya nods and says, "See you then," and doesn't try to make Shane stay when he starts to wheel his cart away after he says goodbye.

Seven. That gives him approximately eight hours to figure out how to tell Shane he's in love with him.

He knocks on Shane's door at 6:59 and tries to remember if he's ever felt as nervous as he has right now. The last time he tried to change things between him and Shane probably. Boston, six years ago.

The door swings open and Shane is already smiling, a greeting on his lips. It never comes out, his mouth dropping into a tiny 'o' at the bouquet in Ilya's hand.

"These are for you," he says before he can lose his nerve, thrusting the flowers in Shane's direction.

Shane blinks, accepting them after a beat. He stares down at them for too long, like he's inspecting each individual petal. It makes Ilya antsy but the look on Shane's face is enough to keep him quiet for now. When he finally lifts his head again he's confused but...awed. A little. Maybe.

“Thank you,” he murmurs. “They’re um, they’re really beautiful.”

Ilya offers him a weak smile and tries to steel himself. Swallowing around the lump in his throat, he curls his hands into fists at his sides. It’s now or never.

“I know it has not been fifteen years yet,” he starts, buoyed by the way Shane’s mouth quirks. “But I don’t think I can wait ten more years to try.”

There’s the briefest intake of breath from Shane and Ilya is desperate to close the distance, to cradle his beautiful face in his hands and kiss the words right into his mouth. But he needs to get this out, needs to say everything he means so that, one way or another, he knows where they stand at the end of this.

“I love you,” he says, throat squeezing around the words. “I loved you in Tampa and I love you now and I have tried every single day for the past five years not to but it won’t go away. And I don’t *want* it to go away.”

He takes a hesitant step forward, absently pushing the front door closed behind him. Shane is rooted to the spot and Ilya can’t figure out if he should be relieved that he hasn’t taken a step back or concerned that he’s stunned him silent.

“It always felt so impossible before but- ...I know now what it is like to not have you or to only have you a little bit and I don’t think there is any universe where either of those options is better than having you completely.” He takes a tremulous breath, trying to smile even with his eyes stinging. “So we can tell everyone or we can tell no one. I don’t really care. But I cannot wait until we retire. I do not think I can even wait until tomorrow, honestly-”

Shane makes a noise, stilling him into silence, but he can’t tell if it’s a sob or a laugh or both. And for once, Ilya doesn’t know how to guess what the tears in his eyes are supposed to say. Shane looks down at the flowers again before carefully setting them down on the side table.

Ilya watches with a faint furrow between his brows. “Shane?”

Shane straightens, meeting Ilya’s gaze with his mouth set into something like determination. Then, he takes three purposeful strides forward, and tugs Ilya into an all-consuming kiss. His hands come up around Ilya’s neck, fingers twining in his hair to hold his head in place, and Ilya feels five years of missing each other in the shape of his mouth. He lets his hands catch on Shane’s sides, clutching the fabric of his hoodie between his fingers, as Shane rolls their foreheads together and lets their mouths separate on a harsh breath.

Ilya is about to draw him back in when Shane pulls back. He fits a hand to Ilya’s jaw, thumb sweeping over his cheekbone.

“I love you,” he says seriously and Ilya has imagined this moment so many times but it still doesn’t prepare him for the way it feels to hear those words on Shane’s lips.

His breath hitches and he loses his battle against the tears that have been threatening to fall since he arrived. He tries in vain to turn his head away but Shane doesn’t let him, the hand he still has on Ilya’s jaw turning him back to centre as he brushes a stray tear away.

“Hey,” he says, so soft and- and *loving* and too much for Ilya to deal with right now.

“Hey,” he says again, kissing the corner of Ilya’s mouth and pressing his forehead to Ilya’s temple. “I love you – so much. I think I probably loved you the whole time-”

“Hollander, shut the fuck up, *fuck-*” Ilya chokes, hiding his face in Shane’s neck as an embarrassing sob hiccups out of him. Shane only laughs, cradling the back of his head and hugging him tight. Ilya clings and, for once, feels like he’s allowed.

“Sorry,” Shane mumbles, even though he’s definitely smiling when he kisses Ilya’s temple. “What did you expect when you showed up at my house with flowers and a fucking love declaration?”

He snuffles, making himself straighten, and it’s ridiculous that just looking at Shane’s big, brown eyes makes his knees weak but it does. “I expected to sweep you off your feet and fuck you until you could not remember your own name and then maybe we would have dinner.”

Shane snorts, brushing Ilya’s curls back off his forehead. “You can still do that if you want.”

Ilya feels his mouth curve up in a smirk and doesn’t try to stop it, sliding his hands over Shane’s shoulders. “When we tell people this story I did not cry.”

“Of course,” Shane agrees easily and Ilya *loves him*.

“You really want to try?” Because he has to ask one more time, just to be sure.

Shane nods, pulling him closer if it’s even possible. “I don’t want to wait until we retire. I think I’ve just been waiting for you this whole time anyway.”

Ilya reaches up to touch his cheek, to thumb his bottom lip, and asks, “Was it, ah, worth the wait?”

Shane’s face dissolves into something familiar and precious and Ilya knows he remembers.

He kisses Ilya in answer.

*

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!!! 🥰 yes, i was too much of a baby to keep them completely separate for the five years and i couldn't even make them wait until retirement like the plan was supposed to be but to be fair!!!!!!!!!!!!!! as if they could've resisted each other anyway lmao

i was 10k into writing my new long fic when this idea grabbed me by the throat so i will be returning to that now and hopefully have it for you guys soon!!! in the meantime, i'm on [tumblr](#) if you're looking and the rebloggable post for this fic is [here](#) 💖

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