

Fair Game

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Summary

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Ilya would manage a quip if he could muster the energy to - something about how the old man should really have taken a sick day - but keeps his mouth shut, totally because he doesn't want to kick someone when they're obviously already down, not in any way because his own throat hurts too much to talk of course.

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Maybe this game will be easier than he thought; the Centaurs seem to be faring at least a little better than their big apple competitors, who seem to be in worse form, if that's even possible considering how terrible Ilya feels, several of the opposing team coughing into fists or sniffing so loudly it hurts his already pounding head. Barrett has been borderline obsessive since the very start of whatever it is that has been making the rounds of the league, not wanting to risk getting Harris sick and although the team haven't completely averted it, they are mostly at full capacity; Hayes on top form after being out for the last game, Luca at the tail end of the worst of it, and Boodram somehow managing to skate free from the cold that has been working its way through the rest of the team.

In all honesty, they probably should have cancelled. The idea was toyed with this morning, or at the very least presented as a possibility to Ilya when he reluctantly fessed up at morning practice to the fact that he'd been running a fever since last night. It had been the fault of the New York Admirals that they didn't withdraw, thanks to a stalemate sparked by the word on the street being that their opponents - and particularly their star captain - were struck down with this same flu and might pull out before they could. Neither team withdrew, as had become all too clear with just an hour before the game. *I can play*, Ilya insisted.

And so here they are.

Ilya's stick catches the puck first, Hunter just a moment too slow after him. God, Ilya thinks. The poor guy should just give it up; he is sure good old Kip Grady will be somewhere in the crowds waiting for the end of the last period so he can wrangle his fiance into bed with a blanket and a mug of honey-lemon tea and enough nyquil to dose a horse or just a hockey player with a bad case of man-flu after the game.

Although perhaps he is projecting. Someone from the other team - he doesn't care to register who - checks him, and somewhere in the chaos Ilya ends up being the one to almost take a nosedive onto the ice, his balance off but whether from the loss of his ego or the blade flying from his skate without his knowledge he isn't entirely sure. For a brief second - less than a second really - he stays like that, staring down at the ice on his hands and knees and contemplating walking out of the rink without so much as a glance back. He's still considering it as he maneuvers himself off the ice to fix the aforementioned blade issue, but he shakes his head when someone - the coach or a trainer or perhaps someone on the bench - asks him if he wants to tap out.

Besides, he doesn't have his own bed and significant other waiting for him on the other side of this game like Scott Hunter does. Shane is god knows where, on the other side of the fucking country or something at some fucking gala event for one of his fucking sponsors or whatever and so Ilya will be returning to convalesce in his fucking New York hotel room alone after this fucking game, with only a fucking facetime call to tide him over if he's lucky.

This fucking game. This fucking city. This fucking cold. He chokes against the metallic taste coating the back of his mouth, somehow managing to suppress the coughing fit which has been threatening since the end of the first period. If he had to bet, he figures he has the best gag reflex in the entire league, but so much as thinking about the presence of his mouth guard at this moment clattering against his teeth has him fearing he might blow chunks on the ice if he isn't careful. He can only imagine what the commentators might say, the headlines the next morning.

He hates this, he hisses as the Admirals level the score. His body not feeling right, not feeling like his own. He's used to the satisfying hum of muscle memory, being where he needs to be a moment before he even thinks about it. He's still moving fast, still playing like he always does for the most part, but typically by this point in the game adrenaline is making itself at home; right now, the only thing making itself at home is the fucking crud in his chest.

Scott is the one who scored, and Ilya watches him celebrate in envious disbelief, the older hockey player seemingly having taken on a second wind during the intermission. Ilya should ask him for advice on whatever home remedy has seemingly worked its magic, but he has a strong suspicion it has something to do with the man's fiance in the crowd; a likely promise of the healing properties of true love's kiss... or true love's sucking of a dick, he smirks.

"Having trouble keeping up, Rozanov?" Scott remarks, although it doesn't have the intended bite coming from a man who at present sounds like a dying cat.

"Oh are you, Hunter?" he furrows his brow, hoping his own hoarse voice sounds at least a little more rugged and less ridiculous.

They share a knowing glance. It's anyone's game really, with the playing field levelled like this but it is the Centaurs who just barely manage to take the win by the end, a just-missed save allowing them to take back the lead when it really mattered. Ilya doesn't gloat, and the celebrations are quite frankly a subdued affair, most of the players on the ice already burying their red noses into tissues and in a rush to get off the rink.

"Good game," Scott reaches a hand out to shake Ilya's, before he hesitates, figuring it's maybe not the best course of action when he is blatantly contagious.

"It wasn't," Ilya takes Scott's hand, shakes it firmly, running the back of his other hand against his dripping nose with a smirk. "But get well soon, yes? Beating you will feel better if actually fair next time."

"Yeah this cold's a killer. Sorry, I wasn't thinking; I wouldn't want to get you sick."

"Too late."

Ilya pauses, and sniffs dramatically for good measure.

“You too?” he blinks, bleary eyed and probably figuring that he could have worked it out from how bad Rozanov sounds; or perhaps he’s just being sarcastic. “Damn. Anyway, I have a hot date with a bottle of Nyquil and my bed, so I’ve got to go. Congrats on the win, man. And uh, get well soon too, I guess?”

“I will not tell your fiance about your cheating. Enjoy. Thank you.”

Both captains forego the post-game interviews; Scott by choice, and Ilya forced by the hand of Coach Wiebe who sternly tells him to hit the showers and head back to the hotel immediately to rest ahead of their flight out to their next game in a couple of days, clearly concerned that they might be down their star centre if he gets any worse. Ilya insists he’s fine, and when the coach refuses to accept this answer, insists that he *will be* fine, which seems to placate him at least somewhat, probably mostly because the stubborn hockey player has finally been wrangled into the back of a car for the short drive to the hotel.

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Kip knows why Scott had to play, understands it, but it doesn’t make him hate it any less. The hockey player has been sick since a few days ago, since flying back to New York for this game and he had hoped he’d be able to shake it off in time, but wishful thinking and an overdue dose of vitamin C are not in fact the miracle cure he had claimed it would be. He shouldn’t have played, Kip is realizing as he waits for him after the game; it was something akin to torture watching him on the rink, all too aware of the heat radiating off the man even from this far away, wincing every time he subtly tried to suppress a cough into his elbow or keep his balance.

Stupid Ottawa Centaurs. Stupid Ilya Rozanov. Scott would have withdrawn - leading to the cancellation of the game thanks to so many others having been forced to do so - if not for the other team, if not for his opposing captain. All the buzz - or at least the level of buzz that could be mustered by a team trying and failing to ward off the plague - at practice that morning had been around the news that several of their opponents, including their captain Ilya Rozanov, had been struck down by illness, and that it was touch-and-go as to whether the game would go ahead. Let them cancel first, the coach had said; let them take the fall. Unfortunately, with similar news circulating about the Admirals, it seems the Centaurs had the same idea.

“Hey,” Scott appears, pulling Kip from his ruminations.

Fuck, he looks worse than before the game; Kip isn’t even sure how that is possible. Scott runs a shaky hand through his sweaty hair, shivering as he protests Kip taking his bag from him. He eventually relents, the deep body ache evident in the way he heaves out a sigh once relieved of the weight.

“Hey,” Kip says, managing to hold back from the lecture he wants to give.

He doesn’t need to say a word. Scott throws his arms around him, nuzzling into the dip of Kip’s shoulder as if to say *I know*. As if to say *I’m sorry*.

“How are you feeling?” Kip asks as they start making their way to the car.

“Like I…” Scott pauses to cough harshly into his shoulder. “Like I got hit by a zamboni.”

A pause. Kip suspects Scott is about to have another coughing fit, but it is silence that hangs in the air.

“I’m sorry,” he croaks.

“It’s okay,” Kip whispers, palm pressed against Scott’s back as they walk. “I understand; the joys of professional sport.”

“The joys of professional sport, yeah.”

“Lets get you home and into bed, yeah?”

“That sounds… Awesome.”

There are many things that Scott knows will make him feel better - cold medicine, a hot shower, tea with honey and lemon - but as soon as they get home he makes a bee-line for the one thing he has been dreaming about since the moment he left it this morning; his bed. He unceremoniously faceplants into the mattress, still fully clothed; Kip only allows it because the other man is in a hoodie and a pair of sweats, and had at least paused to kick off his sneakers when they got home.

“Hey, don’t sleep just yet,” Kip teases softly. “You should eat something, take some meds.”

Scott responds without saying a word, reluctantly lifting his head and sending a death glare in his fiancé’s direction. Meds would probably help, he figures, and although his appetite isn’t as ravenous as usual following a game, he doesn’t want to add a hunger-induced stomachache to the list of symptoms already playing havoc with his body. He forces himself to prop himself up with a pillow, and it takes everything Kip has not to climb into the bed beside him, endeared very deeply by the pitiful expression on Scott’s face as he waits for Kip’s return a few moments later, his arms laden with supplies, evidently having raided the drug store round the corner when Scott was at morning practice.

He doesn’t complain, frankly kind of enjoying it; or at the very least enjoying being doted on in the comfort of their own home instead of having to push through how awful he felt out on the rink. Snack consumed and a dose of cold medicine delivered, Kip’s concern is assuaged.

“You want anything else?” Kip asks as Scott finds his way underneath the comforter. “More water? Another protein bar? I think there’s some of that menthol stuff in the bedside drawer-”

Kip is already set to retrieve Scott’s next request but is caught off guard by the hand catching his wrist, pulling him closer towards the warmth of the bed.

“I just want you,” Scott mumbles.

Kip doesn’t need to be told twice. He peels off his shirt, slotting into the space beside his fiancé. Scott immediately maneuvers himself to lay down on his chest, fever-warmth cooled by Kip’s skin as he settles, soothed by his presence, his scent. Sleep is already sneaking around his bones.

“Feeling better?” Kip strokes his hand lazily through his hair.

“Mmm,” Scott murmurs. “Much.”

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Shane calls not long after Ilya gets back to the hotel. He considers, only for the briefest of moments, not answering; he doesn’t want to see Shane’s face, not right now. Not when one look at it will have him grief-stricken that he’s not here in the flesh with him, on the other side of the fucking country.

He answers. Of course he does. He props his phone against the mirror and Shane’s face appears, the other man’s own hotel room behind him, the same chain as evident from the identical wallpaper and the crisp blue piping on the bedsheets. His heart pangs as he leans against the chair, focusing on Shane’s face first, and then his own in the hotel mirror. Fuck, he looks like shit.

“You look like shit,” Shane doesn’t waste a second to tell him as such, although there’s no bite behind it; in fact, it makes Ilya feel loved.

“And you look pretty,” Ilya manages a smirk. “How was the gala thing?”

“Boring.”

“Well yes. You were there.”

“Shut up,” Ilya kind of wishes the ground would swallow him whole as Shane’s smile lights up the screen. “How was the game? I didn’t get to watch, but my mom was texting me the whole time.”

“I played well, yes? Very impressive game.”

Ilya’s sarcastic scoff turns into a coughing fit, and he has to brace himself against the back of the chair until it stops.

“You sound awful,” Shane inches closer to the screen.

“Would you believe it if I said I feel worse?” Ilya admits.

“From my mom’s play-by-play of the game, yes I would.”

“Was a bad game. I played bad.”

“You were... fine. My mom was just worried about you. She said that you seemed really sick.”

Shane pauses, feeling awkward; he’s not good at this, not a natural caretaker. At least, that’s what he says; Ilya would beg to differ. Hollander has his own special way of taking care of him, his own way of making Ilya give himself up to him, worming out confessions from him that nobody else could. Fuck, he wishes he were here even if he would be awkward, even if he wouldn’t shut up about how he’s not good at this, even if he would be at least a little weird about the possible spreading of Ilya’s gross germs.

And they are very gross, he thinks as the coughing fit finally relents.

“You should lay down,” Shane suggests; the look on his face makes Ilya feel like he’s about to melt, but that’s probably just the fever talking.

“I should,” except Ilya doesn’t move, stubborn like a dog disobeying orders just because it can.

“You’ll feel better after some sleep.”

“Promise?”

“You might feel worse,” Shane admits, expression twisting into something that makes Ilya smile, endeared by him. “That happens sometimes, I guess. Last time I was sick I woke up in the middle of the night and felt... I’m not helping, am I?”

“No,” Ilya grins as he decides to obey, grabbing his phone and a soda from the mini-bar and climbing into the hotel bed. “You are not.”

He sits in silence for a moment, holding the ice cold can to his cheek and catching his breath before cracking it open, taking a sip and pulling a face, entirely for Shane’s benefit.

“You’re drinking ginger ale?” Shane raises an eyebrow.

“Yes,” Ilya lazes back against the pillows propping him up, lifting the can up to show him. “Good for when sick, yes?”

“I just like the taste of it, but yeah. It helps with nausea. Are you nauseous?”

“A little. Had to look at Scott Hunter’s ugly face for long time. Bleh.”

“Bleh,” Shane repeats.

Silence again. Ilya sets his ginger ale aside and buries his face into the duvet, breathing slowly, carefully.

“I wish you were here,” he whispers.

“I wish I was there too,” Shane responds.

“Going to lie down, sleep.”

“That sounds like a good idea.”

“Can you uh... Can you stay on call?”

“Yes, Ilya. I can stay.”

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