Ice Breaker

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Ice Breaker

by AutumnFoxed

Summary

> The puppy sniffed the hard plastic toe of Shane's skate, and then sat down squarely on his foot, as if claiming territory.
>
> “If we leave the dog,” Ilya said, “you will think about it all night. You will play like shit tomorrow. And then I will have to listen to you be sad about that for a week.”
>
> A defeated sound escaped Shane. “…Damn it.”

After a secluded practice session, Shane and Ilya find a cold golden retriever in the middle of a snowstorm - and a sudden power outage. Shane does not spiral (he does). Ilya absolutely does not get jealous of a puppy (he does).

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Sitting near the rink, Shane yanked a lace tighter. Ilya was standing so close that Shane could feel the heat coming off him and smell the fake-cherry sweetness of his drink.

Shane glanced sideways. *Neon pink sports drink.* It was probably a liquid insult to anyone with functioning taste buds.

“I missed that pass twice,” Shane said. He’d felt the mistake happen in real time - that tiny disconnect between his brain shouting *‘pass!’* and his hands decided to have a debate about it.

Ilya leaned closer. “You have re-laced your skates three times.”

“It doesn’t mean anything.”

“It means you are thinking instead of feeling,” Ilya said, which was annoyingly perceptive for a man whose primary language was chirps and smirks. “Also, you scored two goals.”

“That doesn’t cancel it out,” Shane grumbled.

Ilya tipped his head. “In math of hockey, it does. Two goals minus one bad pass equals to… awesome.”

Shane finished the knot and dropped his hands.

“You don’t get it,” Shane said. “If I miss that pass in an actual game - ”

“I will score anyway,” Ilya interrupted. “Is what I do.”

Shane sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. “You *enjoy* this.”

“I enjoy *you*,” Ilya corrected, and there was the unbothered honesty that always made Shane’s chest feel a little too tight. “Also, you look very hot when you are mad.”

Shane was not amused.

That was when he heard a faint sound near the far boards.

The bright lights over the ice didn’t reach the shadowy corners, making every shape look suspicious. "Did you hear that?"

Ilya, who had been in the middle of upending his bottle to get the last sugary drop, paused. "Hear what? The sound of your overthinking? Always."

From behind the equipment bench, something small and golden-colored wobbled into view.

It was a puppy.

An impossibly small creature, all oversized paws and round little belly, with fur so fluffy it stuck out in every direction. A golden retriever, but in its beta-test version. It took three

uncertain steps onto the concrete, let out a miniature sneeze that shook its whole body, and then shivered so hard its floppy ears did a little dance.

Before Shane could even begin to organize his mental panic spiral, Ilya stepped past him to crouch down in front of the tiny intruder. "What are you doing out here all alone, hm? No game plan. You would be benched for this behavior."

The puppy just blinked, its little pink tongue darting out to lick its nose.

"This is bad," Shane announced. "It's freezing in here for a human, let alone a... a mammal of that size. And the weather report said the storm is intensifying, and the roads will become impassable, and - "

The puppy let out a hiccuping sigh.

Shane swallowed hard. The responsible part of his brain was screaming a checklist: *Call authorities. Contain the animal. Maintain hygiene. Assess for injury.* Instead, he crouched down too.

"It's... really little," he said.

"Yes," Ilya agreed. "This is what we call a baby."

Shane shot him a withering look. "I'm making an observation, asshole."

The puppy's eyes flicked over to Shane. With a few clumsy steps, it shuffled over, sniffed the hard plastic toe of Shane's skate with great seriousness, and then sat down squarely on his foot, as if claiming territory.

Shane's voice automatically shifted into captain-mode. "The storm parameters are worsening. If we don't initiate a locate-and-return for the owner in the next fifteen to twenty minutes, road conditions will become a significant factor. Secondary complications include... okay, so first, league-approved hotels have strict no-pet policies, especially for non-documented animals, and what about potential allergen scenarios for other team members, and what if he has pre-existing separation anxiety, or undisclosed trauma, and the dietary considerations alone - "

The puppy chose that exact moment to yawn, as if to say, *Your move, buddy. I'm staying right here.*

Ilya stood up decisively, and scooped the puppy up with an ease that suggested either prior experience. The puppy vanished into the front of his partially zipped jacket, only a curious nose poking out just under his collarbone.

Shane stared. "You can't just - what about pathogens? What if it's someone's and we're technically committing a - "

"If we leave the dog," Ilya interrupted, "you will think about it all night. You will play like shit tomorrow. And then I will have to listen to you be sad about that for a week."

A defeated sound escaped Shane. "…Damn it."

He reached out, his hand hovering for a moment before he gently adjusted the rumpled edge of Ilya's jacket. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "We're figuring it out. I promise. Just… don't get any ideas about this being a long-term arrangement."

~

Sneaking the puppy into the hotel was, predictably, Shane's version of a heist movie. Ilya walked through the gleaming lobby like he was its celebrity ambassador. The puppy's head was a barely noticeable lump.

Shane, meanwhile, was about one polite cough away from an unprompted confession to the concierge.

As they passed the front desk, Ilya leaned closer. "Relax. You look like you have stolen the crown jewels and hidden them in your pants."

"Because this is against the rules," Shane hissed back. "There are very clear clauses about non-service animals in the team contract - "

"Rules are just suggestions that come with consequences."

Shane could, in fact, not handle these kinds of consequences. The consequences he liked were on the ice, involved penalty minutes, and followed a known rulebook.

The elevator ride was a special kind of torture. Shane spent it silently Googling on his phone: *golden retriever puppy hypothermia symptoms, emergency puppy supplies list, can puppies drink water too fast, are puppy eyes a form of hypnosis.*

By the time the doors slid open on their floor, Shane had mentally compiled a spreadsheet of necessary supplies they didn't have, potential veterinary emergencies they were unprepared for, and ways this innocent rescue could end with them both being evicted or featured on a local news segment about irresponsible athletes.

The *click* of their hotel room door shutting behind them felt like the end of a tense mission.

Shane looked around - and his gaze landed on the bed. *Their* bed, which still faintly smelled like Ilya's shampoo and, if one knew where to look (and Shane always knew), carried subtle evidence of the previous night's… activities.

"Okay," he rubbed the back of his neck. "We can't - he can't - go on the bed. It's unsanitary. And it sets a precedent."

Ilya, who had begun to carefully unzip his jacket, raised one eyebrow. "Why? Is soft."

The puppy tumbled gently onto the plush carpet and then toddled on unsteady legs directly toward Shane's feet before veering sharply toward the forbidden furniture. It placed two front paws on the duvet and hauled the rest of itself up.

That was when the lights went out.

One second the room was warmly lit; the next, it was plunged into a blackness so complete it felt solid.

“Oh my god,” Shane blurted into the void.

Phone battery at 37%. Flashlight? No flashlight. Candles? No candles.

What if we're trapped. What if -

"It's fine," Ilya's voice cut through the mental noise. "The storm probably took the grid out. It will come back."

Shane turned his head sharply toward the sound, seeing nothing. "You don't know that. It could be a localized systems failure. Or a downed transformer. Or - "

"I *do* know," Ilya interrupted. "Your panic has volume settings. This is only medium volume."

Shane opened his mouth to deliver a scathing rebuttal to this analysis, but the words died in his throat as he felt Ilya's hand settle firmly on his hip.

One moment Shane was standing rigidly in the dark; the next he was on the bed, Ilya's arm was sliding around his waist, drawing him in until his back met the solid wall of Ilya's chest.

"For warm," Ilya stated, his breath a warm puff against Shane's neck.

Before Shane could muster the willpower to actually disentangle himself - the puppy settled right over his sternum.

Ilya let out a husky laugh. "See? Even dog knows. You are best pillow."

"This isn't - " Shane began, then stalled. He wasn't sure how to finish. *This isn't professional?* They were in their shared bed. *This isn't helping?* It bizarrely was. *This isn't what we do?* Except, lately, it kind of was. "We're not - this is just for the dog. And the power outage."

He could feel Ilya's smile against his shoulder.

"This is a temporary situation," Shane announced softly to the ceiling.

Ilya hummed a note of deep skepticism behind him. "You say this about many things that become permanent. The extra foam in your skates. That protein bar. Me."

Shane chose to ignore that last part. "We can't keep him. We don't even know his name."

"That is easiest part," Ilya said. "Looks like a Mikhail."

Shane frowned. "He is *not* a Mikhail."

"Why not?"

"Because he's..." Shane glanced down carefully. "He's small. And... objectively sweet. And he has that kind of trusting face. Mikhails are... gruff. They have beards."

Ilya's quiet laugh was a warm puff of air. "You are describing my uncle Mikhail. He is also small, sweet, and stupid-looking."

Shane huffed. "No. He needs a practical name. Something that won't embarrass him."

"Ah," Ilya said, understanding dawning. "You wish to name him like you name your files. Puppy_Protocol_v2_FINAL.doc."

"Don't be ridiculous," Shane muttered, his cheeks warming. "I was thinking something sensible. Like... Charlie."

Ilya made a sound of distaste. "Charlie is name of a dog who file your tax. *This* dog has more spirit."

"That's not true. Charlies can be adventurous."

The puppy twitched in its dream.

"Sorry," Shane whispered down at the dark lump on his chest. "Did I wake you up?"

Ilya took the opportunity to shift even closer. His arm tightened just enough to be possessive.

"You see?" Ilya murmured. "You are already apologizing to him."

Shane felt the flush spread from his face down his neck. "I just don't want him to be stressed. His cortisol levels are probably already elevated from the unfamiliar environment."

"He is asleep," Ilya stated. "On chest of athlete, in king-size bed, during snowstorm. He is hero of good kid's book."

Shane considered the storm-muffled darkness. “Okay, but what about something like… Snowy? For the obvious reason.”

Ilya let out a puff of air. “Lazy. Is like naming fish ‘Wet.’”

“Fine. Puck, then.”

“Half dogs in the league are named Puck,” Ilya countered. “He deserves better.”

“Buddy?”

“That is not name,” Ilya said, with the finality of a judge passing sentence. “That is placeholder.”

“What about…” Shane ventured. “Buttercup?”

Ilya went quiet.

"…Hm,"

Shane waited, not breathing.

"It is dramatic," Ilya admitted. "Strong for something so small. Memorable."

A victorious smile touched Shane's lips, unseen in the dark. "See? I can be fun. I have naming ideas."

"Let us not get carried away," Ilya murmured. "One idea does not make you 'fun.' It make you… less boring."

Ilya's breathing deepened.

"You know," Ilya added after a while. "He will remember this."

Shane blinked. "Remember what?"

"First night," Ilya said. "Warm. Safe. Not alone. He will carry it in his dog bones forever. This is night he learns what home feels like."

Just then, the lights snapped back on.

Shane's first instinct was to protect the small thing.

Buttercup was still there, unbothered by the return of electricity.

For a moment, none of them moved.

Driven by an impulse he couldn't name and didn't examine, Shane reached for his phone on the nightstand. He angled it carefully and captured the scene before his common sense could shout a veto. The screen showed a crooked, intimate slice of their reality: Buttercup on Shane's sternum; Shane himself, and behind him, Ilya, his face half-buried in Shane's shoulder.

The shutter sound was obscenely loud in the quiet room.

Ilya peered at the glowing screen in Shane's hand.

"Delete that," he ordered, already making a half-hearted grab for the phone. "I look… soft."

Shane turned the screen away. "You *are* soft. At least… parts of you are.

He locked the phone and set it firmly face-down on the nightstand, a silent declaration. "I'm not deleting it."

Buttercup chose that moment to snort loudly in his sleep.

~

For the first time in what felt like years, Shane woke to warmth, not an alarm. The first thing he registered was a solid heat pressed to his chest. He blinked, his eyelids heavy, his body deliciously reluctant to move.

Buttercup was splayed across him like a furry conqueror who had claimed his kingdom by right of extreme cuteness.

“Hey,” he whispered. “Good morning, you.”

Behind Shane, the peace was shattered by an irritable rustle of sheets and a low grumble.

Shane’s brow furrowed. He realized that Ilya was awake.

And he was in a mood.

Ilya sat up abruptly. He glared down at the scene beside him and his expression darkened into a scowl.

Shane braced for the teasing remark about his newfound role as a dog bed.

With another wordless huff, Ilya swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood up, his back a rigid line of displeasure.

Shane blinked, pushing himself up on one elbow, his movements careful so as not to disturb his overlord. “Uh. Good morning to you, too?”

Ilya grunted a sound that could have meant anything from ‘the world is unjust’ to ‘my coffee is cold,’ and snatched his jeans off the floor.

Shane’s frown deepened. “What’s wrong? Is it the storm? Are the roads still bad?”

“Nothing is wrong,” Ilya said, the words clipped.

“You seem… angry.”

Ilya paused, one leg in his jeans, and shot a glare over his shoulder. “I am not angry. You are cuddling the dog.”

Shane glanced down at Buttercup. “Well, yeah. He’s… he was cold.”

“I was also cold,” Ilya said flatly, finally getting the second leg into his jeans.

Shane just stared, his sleep-addled brain trying to process the statement. “…You took him in. You literally zipped him into your jacket.”

“Yes,” Ilya snapped, pulling a hoodie over his head with more force than necessary. “Now he has replaced me.”

The absurdity of it finally broke through Shane’s confusion. He choked, trying to smother the laugh that bubbled up in his chest.

“You’re jealous,” Shane said, the realization dawning with delighted clarity.

“I am not jealous of a puppy,” Ilya declared. He scooped his keys off the dresser with a clatter.

“You are.”

Ilya scoffed and headed for the door. “Going for a walk. To clear my head.”

Shane pushed himself up further. “Ilya, it’s a blizzard out there. The news said not to travel.”

“I will travel,” Ilya said stubbornly, shoving his feet into his boots without untying them.

“You hate morning walks.”

Ilya paused at the door, his hand on the knob. He didn’t turn around. “Air in here is… thick with a dog.”

The door shut behind him.

“He didn’t even put on a coat,” Shane told Buttercup. “He’s gone to buy dog food.”

Buttercup wagged his tail against Shane’s ribs, as if in full agreement with this assessment.

Shaking his head, Shane relaxed back into the pillows, one hand coming up to absently scratch the velvety spot behind Buttercup’s upturned ear.

He wasn’t trying to look. Snooping was against his personal code.

But Ilya’s phone, left behind in his dramatic exit, buzzed softly with a forgotten alarm. The screen flared to life, illuminating the dim room.

And there they were: Shane, looking softer than he ever allowed; Ilya behind him, and Buttercup, a golden comma between them, completing the sentence.

End Notes

Hope you liked it! Buttercup would really appreciate a kudos/comment 🐾

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