

Four Hours, Twenty-Three Minutes

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Four Hours, Twenty-Three Minutes

by Anonymous

Summary

The hotel room key feels like it weighs a thousand pounds in Shane's pocket.

He stands outside the nondescript Marriott three blocks from the arena, watching his breath fog in the October air. Montreal won 3-2; a good game, clean, the kind where both teams left everything on the ice. The kind where Shane played well enough that no one will question why he's not at the team bar right now, celebrating with J.J. and the guys.

His phone buzzes. Just the room number. 1847.

Before the Long Game, Shane and Ilya try to make it work.

Notes

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

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Shane's been counting. Four hours and twenty-three minutes since the final buzzer. Four hours and twenty-three minutes since he skated past Ilya during the handshake line and felt his boyfriend's glove squeeze his own just a fraction longer than necessary. Four hours and twenty-three minutes of pretending the ache in his chest is just leftover adrenaline from the game and not the desperate, clawing need to see Ilya that's been eating him alive for two weeks.

The elevator takes forever. Shane watches the numbers climb—12, 13, 14—and tries not to think about how this has become their normal. Stolen hours in anonymous hotels. Text messages deleted as soon as they're read. A shared life that exists only in the margins of everyone else's reality, squeezed into whatever time they can carve out between games and practices and the endless performance of being rivals instead of whatever the fuck they actually are to each other.

Eighteenth floor. The hallway is empty, carpeted in that generic pattern that could be anywhere, could be nowhere. Shane finds 1847 and knocks twice, soft.

The door opens immediately.

"Took you long enough, Hollander," Ilya says, and god, even the stupid taunt makes Shane's chest ache because he's missed this, missed him, missed the way Ilya's mouth shapes his name even when he's using the wrong one. Then Ilya's pulling him inside, pressing him against the closed door hard enough that Shane feels it in his spine, and Shane doesn't even have time to say *that's not my name anymore* before Ilya's kissing him like he's been starving for it.

Which, Shane supposes, he has been. They both have.

"Had to—" Shane tries to explain about the post-game interviews, the team meeting, the careful choreography of leaving the arena at different times so no one notices they're disappearing to the same place. But Ilya doesn't care. Ilya's tongue is in his mouth and his hands are fisted in Shane's jacket and nothing else matters, not the game, not the careful distance they maintained on the ice, not the future they can't seem to figure out how to build.

"Do not care," Ilya murmurs against his lips, already working Shane's jacket off his shoulders. His hands are impatient, rough. "You are here now. That is all that matters."

Shane sinks into it, into him, letting the tension of the last four hours—the last two weeks—dissolve under Ilya's touch. Ilya tastes like mint toothpaste and something darker, needier, desperate. His boyfriend. His boyfriend who he hasn't touched in two weeks, who just lost to him on home ice and is apparently planning to take it out on Shane's mouth.

When they finally break apart, both breathing hard, Ilya doesn't step back. He keeps Shane pinned to the door, one hand braced beside Shane's head, the other still gripping his hip hard enough to bruise. Shane can feel Ilya's heartbeat where their chests are pressed together, can feel how hard he's breathing.

"Hi," Shane says, breathless and stupid and unable to come up with anything better.

"Hi, Hollander." Ilya's smile is sharp, wicked. Not the soft private one Shane gets sometimes when they're alone and Ilya's guard is down, but the cocky asshole grin he shows the world. The one that makes Shane want to either punch him or kiss him, and sometimes both. "You played dirty tonight."

Shane's pulse kicks up. "You would know all about that."

"That slash in the second period? Very sneaky." Ilya's thumb finds the sliver of skin where Shane's shirt has ridden up, rubbing slow circles that make Shane shiver despite himself. "Think you get away with it because refs love you."

"I didn't—that wasn't a slash, you just have weak ankles."

Ilya laughs, sharp and bright, and kisses him again. Harder this time, teeth catching on Shane's bottom lip hard enough that Shane tastes copper. "Weak ankles. Is that what we are calling it?"

"Maybe you're just easy to knock off balance," Shane manages, even though his brain is rapidly losing the ability to form coherent thoughts. Ilya's hand is still on his hip, fingers digging in, possessive. "Maybe I'm just that good."

"Maybe you are just lucky I let you win." Ilya's hand slides under Shane's shirt properly now, calluses rough against Shane's stomach, dragging upward. "Maybe I am feeling generous tonight."

"You let me win," Shane repeats flatly. "Right. That's the story we're going with."

"Is true. I could have scored five goals if I wanted to."

"But you didn't."

"Was not feeling inspired." Ilya's eyes are dark, heated, pupils blown wide. His hand slides higher under Shane's shirt, thumb brushing just below his ribs, and Shane has to bite back a sound he's not ready to make yet. "Maybe you should inspire me better next time."

Shane's breath catches. He knows what game they're playing—the same one they always play, chirping and needling even when Ilya's touch is setting him on fire from the inside out. It's familiar. Safe. A way to ease into this without acknowledging how desperately Shane has

missed him, how the loneliness has been eating him alive in Montreal, how he lies awake at night in his empty apartment thinking about Ilya two hours away in Ottawa and wondering what the fuck they're doing.

"Maybe you're just getting old," Shane says instead of any of that. "Losing your edge."

Ilya's eyes flash. "Old? I am twenty-seven."

"Basically ancient in hockey years."

"You are older than me!"

"By a couple weeks. Barely counts." Shane grins, finally getting his hands on Ilya, fingers tangling in the soft fabric of his t-shirt. He can feel Ilya's abs through the thin material, the heat of his skin. "Face it, Rozanov. You're past your prime."

Ilya growls, and suddenly Shane's being manhandled away from the door, across the room, tumbling onto the bed with Ilya on top of him. The shift in position punches a surprised laugh out of Shane's chest.

"Past my prime," Ilya mutters, straddling Shane's hips, pinning his wrists above his head with one hand. The other braces against Shane's chest, holding him down. "I will show you past my prime."

And god, Shane loves this. Loves the weight of Ilya above him, the strength in his grip, the competitive fire that never quite goes out even here, even now. Loves that they can be this—sharp edges and challenges and *I'm better than you*—while also being everything else. While also being whatever they are when the door is closed and the world can't see.

"You gonna show me or just talk about it?" Shane arches up against him, deliberate, feeling Ilya already hard against his hip. "Because so far I'm not impressed."

Ilya's pupils dilate further, if that's even possible. His grip on Shane's wrists tightens, just this side of painful.

"You are such a little shit, Hollander."

"That's not my name," Shane finally gets to say, and Ilya's expression does something complicated. Softens for just a moment, something raw and vulnerable flickering across his features before the cocky mask slides back into place.

"No?" Ilya leans down, mouth at Shane's ear, breath hot against his skin. "What should I call you then?"

"You know what."

"Maybe I forget." Ilya's free hand finds the button of Shane's jeans, flicks it open with practiced ease. "Maybe you need to remind me." He drags the zipper down slowly, torturously. "Maybe you need to *say* it."

Shane could refuse. Could keep playing the game, keep the banter going until they're both too worked up to think straight. But the want in Ilya's eyes is real, raw, stripping away all the bullshit posturing. And Shane has never been good at denying him anything.

"Shane," he says quietly, voice rough. "My name is Shane."

Ilya's smile is devastating, bright enough to light up the room. "Yes. Is a much better name." He releases Shane's wrists, sits back on his heels. His hands go to the hem of his own shirt. "Now take off your clothes, *Shane*, before I rip them off."

"Pretty sure you can't afford to replace my clothes on your Ottawa salary," Shane says, but he's already pulling his shirt over his head, tossing it somewhere behind Ilya. His jeans and boxers follow, kicked off awkwardly until he's bare beneath Ilya's heated gaze.

"Is a good salary," Ilya protests, but he's distracted, eyes tracking over Shane's body like he's cataloging every detail, every change since he last saw him. Like he's memorizing him. "Could buy you ten new shirts."

"These are designer."

"Then five new shirts." Ilya's hand skates down Shane's chest, over the ridges of his abs, and Shane sucks in a breath. "Maybe three."

"You're terrible at math."

"Am terrible at many things." Ilya's thumb brushes over Shane's hip bone and Shane shivers, goosebumps breaking out across his skin. "But not at this."

He's not. Shane knows from experience that Ilya is very, very good at this—at reducing Shane to desperate want with just his hands, his mouth, the focused intensity he usually saves for the ice. At making Shane forget his own name, forget why they can't have this all the time, forget everything except the way Ilya's touching him.

But tonight Shane has other plans.

"Take your clothes off," Shane says, reaching for the hem of Ilya's shirt, tugging. "Not fair that I'm the only one naked."

Ilya complies, stripping efficiently, and then he's bare too, skin golden in the warm lamplight, all lean muscle and casual grace. He's beautiful. He's always beautiful, but especially like this—unguarded, wanting, open. His.

When Ilya moves to cover Shane again, Shane stops him with a hand on his chest.

"Wait."

Ilya pauses, confused. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong." Shane sits up, uses his leverage to flip their positions. Ilya goes willingly, eyes widening as Shane settles over him, straddling his hips. "Just changing things up."

"Oh?" Ilya's hands find Shane's thighs, gripping, fingers digging into muscle. "You have a plan?"

"Maybe." Shane leans down, kisses him slow and deep, takes his time with it. When he pulls back, Ilya's lips are wet, kiss-swollen. "Maybe I'm tired of you today."

Ilya laughs, bright and disbelieving. "You are never tired of this. You love when I boss you around."

He's not wrong, but Shane's not about to admit it. Instead he reaches for the lube on the nightstand—Ilya's always prepared, always thinking ahead—and makes quick work of getting himself ready. Slicks his fingers, reaches behind himself, and watches Ilya's face as he works himself open.

Ilya watches, transfixed, hands flexing on Shane's thighs like he wants to touch but is forcing himself to hold back. His breathing has gone ragged, chest rising and falling rapidly.

"You are killing me," Ilya mutters when Shane takes his time about it, adding a second finger, then a third, deliberate and slow. "You know this, yes? You are killing me on purpose."

"Good." Shane's voice is rough, wrecked already. "Payback for that assist you got past me in the first period."

"That was a clean play!"

"That was lucky and you know it." Shane pulls his fingers out, reaches for more lube, slicks Ilya up with efficient strokes that have Ilya's hips jerking up into his hand. "Now shut up and let me concentrate."

Ilya makes a noise that might be agreement, might be protest, but then Shane's positioning himself, sinking down slowly, and they're both gasping at the stretch, the fullness, the overwhelming sensation of finally, finally being connected like this.

Shane has to pause for a moment, forehead pressed against Ilya's shoulder, just breathing through it. It's been two weeks and his body needs a moment to adjust, to remember how to take Ilya like this.

"Fuck," Ilya breathes, hands spasming on Shane's hips, fingers digging in hard enough to leave marks. "Shane. *Fuck*."

"Yeah." Shane's voice doesn't sound like his own, rough and broken at the edges. He lifts up slowly, testing, then sinks back down and the angle is perfect, overwhelming. "Yeah, fuck."

He finds a rhythm, slow at first, savoring the slide and friction and the way Ilya's looking at him—like Shane's the only thing in the world worth watching, like he'd be content to stare at Shane for the rest of his life. Ilya's hands guide him, help him, but he's letting Shane set the pace. Letting Shane take what he needs.

And Shane needs this. Needs to feel in control of something when everything else in his life feels like it's spiraling out of his grasp. Needs to take Ilya apart the way Ilya takes him apart.

Needs to see Ilya fall to pieces beneath him.

"You look so good like this," Ilya says, voice wrecked, barely coherent. One hand leaves Shane's hip to skim up his chest, thumb brushing over a nipple, and Shane gasps at the sensation. "So fucking good, taking me so well. Like you were made for this."

Shane's laugh is breathless, breaks into a moan when Ilya does it again. "Less talking, more—more—"

"More what?" Ilya's grin is sharp even through the obvious pleasure, even as his breathing stutters. "Use your words, Hollander."

"That's not—" Shane cuts himself off with a moan as Ilya thrusts up to meet him, changing the angle, hitting something perfect inside him that makes his vision white out for a second. "Asshole."

"You love it." Ilya does it again, harder, and Shane's rhythm falters. His thighs are burning but he doesn't care, doesn't want to stop. "You love when I make you lose control."

Shane does. God help him, he does. But he's not giving Ilya the satisfaction of admitting it. Instead he leans down, braces his hands on either side of Ilya's head, and finds an angle that has them both gasping, has Ilya's fingers digging so hard into Shane's hips that it borders on painful.

"Who's—who's losing control?" Shane manages between thrusts, even though he can barely think straight, can barely remember his own name.

Ilya's response is lost in a groan, deep and guttural. His hands slide from Shane's hips to his ass, pulling him down harder, setting a punishing pace. "You are impossible."

"You started it."

"Did not."

"Did too." Shane's laugh breaks into a gasp as Ilya hits that spot inside him again, perfect and devastating. "Fuck—there—right there—"

Ilya is nothing if not a quick study. He shifts his hips, finds that angle again and again, relentless, and Shane's vision starts to blur at the edges. He's close, embarrassingly close, and from the desperate edge to Ilya's breathing, the way his rhythm is starting to falter, Ilya's not far behind.

"Touch yourself," Ilya orders, voice rough and commanding. "Want to watch you. Want to see you fall apart."

Shane obeys without thinking, wrapping a hand around himself, and the dual sensation—Ilya inside him, his own hand stroking—is too much. He's not going to last.

"Ilya," he gasps out, warning, but Ilya just nods, understanding.

"Yes. Come for me. Let me see you."

Shane does, vision whiting out, clenching down around Ilya as pleasure rips through him in waves. He comes across his own chest, across Ilya's stomach, making a mess of both of them. Ilya follows seconds later with a Russian curse that Shane's pretty sure is extremely creative, hips stuttering up as he spills inside Shane.

The aftermath is soft, gentle in a way that makes Shane's chest ache. He collapses onto Ilya's chest and Ilya holds him there, both of them catching their breath, hearts pounding in sync. Neither speaks for a long moment, just lying tangled together in the quiet.

Then Ilya says, quiet enough that Shane almost misses it, "I miss this. I miss you."

And just like that, the real world comes crashing back in.

Shane lifts his head to look at Ilya. His hair is a mess, sticking up in every direction where Shane's been running his hands through it. His lips are kiss-swollen, red and wet. His eyes are soft in a way they only ever are here, like this, unguarded and vulnerable. He's so beautiful it hurts to look at him.

"I miss you too," Shane admits, because there's no point in lying about it. "All the time. It's —" He stops, not sure how to put it into words. How to explain that the loneliness is becoming unbearable, that he lies awake at night staring at his phone wanting to call Ilya but knowing he can't because someone might hear, might ask questions. "I thought it would get easier."

"Is not easier." Ilya's hand finds Shane's hair, fingers carding through it gently, and Shane leans into the touch without meaning to. "Is getting harder. Every day is harder."

Shane knows. God, he knows. The distance is killing him slowly, carving out pieces of him until he's not sure who he is anymore without Ilya beside him.

He carefully extracts himself, wincing at the loss, the sudden emptiness. Collapses onto the bed beside Ilya instead, and Ilya immediately pulls him close, arranging them so Shane's tucked against his side, head on his chest. Shane can hear Ilya's heartbeat, still racing.

"How long do we have?" Ilya asks, already knowing the answer will hurt.

Shane checks the clock on the nightstand. "Four hours. Maybe five if I risk it."

"Always risk it." Ilya kisses the top of his head, and there's something desperate in it, something that makes Shane's throat tight. "Need all the time I can get with you."

They lie there in silence for a while, just breathing together. Shane traces absent patterns on Ilya's chest, over the constellation of moles he's memorized, the scar from a high stick two years ago. Ilya's hand is steady on his back, warm and grounding.

Eventually they drag themselves to the shower, both protesting the loss of contact. The hot water seems to melt some of the tension from Shane's shoulders, the knots that have taken up permanent residence there since the season started.

Ilya washes his hair with careful fingers, working the shampoo through gently, and Shane closes his eyes and lets himself have this. Lets himself pretend, just for a moment, that this is their normal. That they share a bathroom, share a life, share more than just stolen hours in hotel rooms.

When they're back in bed, Shane tucked against Ilya's side again, Ilya says quietly, "We should tell them."

Shane's stomach clenches. "Ilya—"

"I know. I *know* all the reasons why we waiting." Ilya's voice is careful, measured, like he's been thinking about this for a while. Practicing what to say. "But Shane—I want to go to dinner with you. Want to hold your hand. Want to tell teammates about my boyfriend when they ask what I do on days off." His voice cracks just slightly on the word boyfriend, and Shane feels it like a knife between his ribs. "Want to stop lying."

Shane closes his eyes. "Me too. Shit, every time someone asks about my weekend I want to just—" He stops, throat tight. "I want to tell them I was with you. That we—that this is real."

"So why don't we?"

"Because—" Shane struggles to articulate the fear coiled in his chest, cold and heavy.

"Because what if it ruins everything? What if our teams hate us, or the league comes down hard, or management decides we're more trouble than we're worth, or—"

"Or what if it is fine?" Ilya counters. "What if they do not care? What if we are worrying for nothing?"

"You don't know that. You can't know that."

"You do not know that it will be bad." Ilya shifts so he can look Shane in the eye, and there's something fierce in his expression, determined. "I am not saying we do it tomorrow. I am not saying we do not think about it carefully. But Shane—we cannot keep living like this. *I* cannot keep living like this."

The words hit Shane like a physical blow. "What are you saying?"

"I am saying—" Ilya takes a breath, seems to be choosing his words carefully. "I am saying that I love you. That I want future with you. But I do not know how to build future when we are in different cities, lying to everyone, pretending we are nothing."

Shane's chest feels too tight, like he can't get enough air. "I want that too. You know I do."

"Then why are we not doing it?"

"Because I'm scared," Shane admits, and it costs him something to say it out loud. "I'm scared of losing you. I'm scared of losing hockey. I'm scared of—of everything changing."

Ilya's expression softens. He reaches up, cups Shane's face in his hand, thumb brushing over his cheekbone. "I am scared too. But I am more scared of losing this—of losing us—because

we are too afraid to be honest."

The words settle heavy in Shane's chest. He knows Ilya's right. He knows the secrecy is rotting something between them, that every lie takes a toll, that they can't keep going like this indefinitely. But knowing and doing are two different things, and Shane doesn't know how to bridge that gap.

"Can we—" Shane takes a breath, hates himself a little for asking. "Can we talk about it next time? I just—I need to think."

Disappointment flashes across Ilya's face before he schools it away, and Shane feels it like a punch to the gut. "Da. Yes. We will talk about it next time."

Next time. Two weeks away. Two weeks of separate cities and lonely beds and pretending they're nothing more than rivals.

Shane hates it. But he doesn't know how to fix it without risking everything.

"I'm sorry," he says quietly.

"Do not be sorry." Ilya pulls him closer, buries his face in Shane's hair. "I understand. Is scary."

"You're not scared?"

Ilya laughs, but it's hollow, empty. "I am terrified. But I am more scared of waking up five years from now and realizing we wasted all this time because we were too afraid."

Five years. The words make something twist painfully in Shane's chest. Five more years of this. Five more years of hotel rooms and deleted text messages and lying to everyone they know.

He can't. He can't do five more years of this.

But he also can't take the leap Ilya's asking him to take. Not yet. Not without thinking it through, weighing all the risks, making sure they're not about to destroy everything they've worked for.

"Next time," Shane promises, and hates how weak it sounds. "We'll figure it out next time."

Ilya nods against his hair, but he doesn't look convinced. He just holds Shane tighter, like he's afraid Shane might disappear if he lets go.

They don't talk much after that. Shane doesn't know what to say, and Ilya seems lost in his own thoughts. They just lie together, skin to skin, making the most of the hours they have left.

Shane tries to memorize the feeling of Ilya's heartbeat against his palm, the warmth of his skin, the way he sighs contentedly when Shane presses a kiss to his shoulder. Tries to commit it all to memory because it has to last him two more weeks.

"I love you," Ilya murmurs somewhere around 3 AM, voice rough with sleep. "Even when you are being stubborn asshole."

Shane huffs a quiet laugh against Ilya's skin. "I love you too. Even when you're being impossible."

"I am never impossible. I am always perfect and right about everything."

"See, that right there. That's what I'm talking about."

Ilya pinches him lightly, and Shane retaliates by biting his shoulder—not hard, just enough to make Ilya yelp. They tussle for a moment before Ilya pins Shane to the mattress, grinning down at him with that cocky, competitive smile that Shane fell for years ago.

"You are lucky I love you," Ilya says.

"Yeah?" Shane reaches up, cups Ilya's face in his hand. His thumb brushes over Ilya's bottom lip. "Why's that?"

"Because otherwise I would have to kill you for being so annoying."

"Pretty sure the league would notice if you murdered the Montreal captain."

"I would make it look like accident." Ilya's grin is sharp, playful. "Trip on ice. Very tragic. Everyone would cry at your funeral."

Shane snorts. "You're ridiculous."

"You love it." Ilya leans down, kisses him soft and sweet, nothing like the desperate hunger from earlier. When he pulls back, his expression has gone serious. "You love me."

"I do," Shane agrees, and means it with everything he has. "I really do."

They make love again as the sun starts to rise, slow and tender this time. Ilya maps every inch of Shane's body with his hands, his mouth, like he's trying to memorize it all over again. Shane does the same, committing to memory the constellation of moles on Ilya's chest, the scar on his knee from juniors, the way his breath hitches when Shane kisses the soft skin of his inner thigh.

When they're done, both wrecked and sated, they lie tangled together in silence. Shane can hear the city waking up outside—cars starting, people talking on the street below. The real world, creeping back in to reclaim them.

His alarm goes off at 6 AM. Neither of them move for a long moment.

"I hate this part," Shane whispers.

"Me too."

But they get up anyway. Shane showers again, alone this time, washing away the evidence of their night together. When he emerges, Ilya's already dressed, standing by the window looking out at the city below. His shoulders are tense, his jaw tight.

"Two weeks," Ilya says without turning around. "Until we play in Montrwal."

"Two weeks." Shane comes to stand beside him, close enough to touch but not touching. Not yet. "And we can talk about everything then. Figure out what we want to do."

Ilya finally looks at him, and there's something fragile in his expression, something that makes Shane's chest ache. "You promise? We will really talk about it?"

"I promise." Shane takes his hand, squeezes. "I'm not trying to avoid it, I just—I need time to think it through. To make sure we're doing this right."

"I know." Ilya brings Shane's hand to his lips, kisses his knuckles with a tenderness that breaks Shane's heart. "I am just tired of this. Of being apart. Of lying. Of pretending you are nothing to me when you are everything."

"I know." Shane pulls him close, presses his forehead against Ilya's, breathing him in one more time. "I am too. I swear I am."

They stand like that for a long moment, just existing in each other's space. Then Ilya steps back, and Shane knows it's time. Knows he has to let go.

At the door, Ilya pulls him in for one last kiss. It's desperate, clinging, like Ilya's trying to pour everything he feels into it—all the love and frustration and loneliness and hope. Shane kisses back just as hard, tries to tell Ilya without words that he feels it too, all of it.

"I love you," Ilya says when they break apart. His eyes are shining, suspiciously wet. "Even when you make me wait."

"I love you too." Shane cups his face, thumbs brushing over his cheekbones, memorizing the angles. "So much it scares me sometimes."

"Good. Should be scary. Means it is real." Ilya catches Shane's hand, presses a kiss to his palm. "Two weeks, Shane."

"Two weeks," Shane agrees. "And then we figure this out. Together."

"Together," Ilya echoes, but there's doubt in his voice. Like he's not sure Shane means it.

Shane kisses him once more, softer this time. Tries to make it a promise. "I mean it. I swear."

Then he slips out into the hallway, back into his other life. Takes the stairs instead of the elevator because he needs the time to pull himself together. Goes out the back entrance, walks the three blocks to his own hotel through the early morning cold.

The sun is just starting to rise, painting the sky in shades of pink and gold. It should be beautiful. It just makes Shane feel hollow.

In his hotel room, Shane collapses onto the bed without bothering to undress. His body aches in all the best ways—his thighs, his back, the marks Ilya's fingers left on his hips. Physical proof that it was real, that it happened, that for a few hours they got to have each other.

His phone buzzes.

Lily: Missing you already

Shane's throat tightens. He types back with shaking fingers.

Shane: Miss you too

Lily: Two weeks is too long

Shane: I know

Lily: Next time we really talk about it yes?

Shane: Yes. I promise.

Lily: Okay. I trust you.

The words hit Shane like a punch to the gut. *I trust you.* Even when Shane is the one asking for more time, more patience, more of everything. Even when Shane is too afraid to take the leap that Ilya's ready to take.

Shane: I love you

Lily: Love you more

Shane: Impossible

Lily: Is true though

Shane doesn't argue. Just holds the phone close and lets himself feel it—the love, the loneliness, the fear, the hope. All of it tangled together until he can't tell where one ends and another begins.

Two weeks. Then they'll figure it out.

Or maybe they won't. Maybe Shane will ask for more time, and more time after that, until the waiting becomes their new normal and Ilya stops asking. Stops hoping. Stops trusting that Shane will ever be ready.

The thought makes him feel sick.

Shane stares at the ceiling and tries not to cry. Tries to convince himself that he's making the right choice, that patience is smart, that rushing into things would be worse. But all he can think about is the look on Ilya's face when he said *I want to stop lying*. The desperate hope in his eyes when he asked Shane to really talk about it next time.

The way Shane keeps letting him down.

His phone buzzes one more time.

Lily: Hey. I know you are probably overthinking right now. Stop. We will figure it out. Together. I promise.

Shane's breath catches. Because of course Ilya knows. Of course he can read Shane even through text messages, even from three blocks away. Even when Shane's trying his best to hide it.

Shane: How do you always know?

Lily: Because I know you. And I love you. Now go to sleep before you make yourself sick with worry.

Shane: Can't tell me what to do

Lily: I just did. Sleep, Hollander.

Shane: That's not my name

Lily: It is for now. Until you let me call you boyfriend in front of other people 😊

The emoji is so unexpected, so Ilya, that Shane actually laughs out loud despite everything. Leave it to his boyfriend to make him smile even when his heart feels like it's being torn in two.

Shane: Fine. Sleeping. Love you.

Lily: Love you. See you in two weeks. We will fix this.

Shane wants to believe him. God, he wants to believe him.

He closes his eyes and tries to sleep, but all he can think about is Ilya, alone in that hotel room three blocks away. Probably lying in the same bed they'd just shared, sheets still smelling like both of them. Probably staring at the ceiling just like Shane is, wondering when they'll get to stop doing this.

Both of them alone when they could be together.

Shane has never hated himself more.

He pulls up his phone one more time, types out a message before he can second-guess himself.

Shane: I'm going to fix this. I promise. Just give me two weeks.

The response comes immediately.

Lily: I will give you forever. But I do not want to wait forever.

Shane: I know. You won't have to. Two weeks.

Lily: Two weeks.

Shane sets his phone down and closes his eyes. Two weeks to figure out how to be brave enough to deserve Ilya. Two weeks to find a way forward that doesn't feel like jumping off a cliff.

Two weeks.

He can do two weeks.

Maybe.

End Notes

This felt corny but I hope y'all liked it! Please leave kudos and/or comments if you want to see more!

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