

home is a person

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home is a person

by [jksaudade](#)

Summary

At his breaking point, Shane expects abandonment. What he gets instead is Ilya in a helmet, choosing communication over silence.

Notes

hi, hey, I think I might be a little obsessed with heated rivalry.
This fic was inspired by a Taylor Swift song. I have a thing for jealous characters, sorry,
please don't take it the wrong way. That's it <3
Hollanov forever.

*"I'm pretty sure we almost broke up last night
I threw my phone across the room, at you
I was expecting some dramatic turn away
But you stayed*

*This morning I said we should talk about it
'Cause I read you should never leave a fight unresolved
That's when you came in wearing a football helmet
And said: Okay, let's talk!" - Taylor Swift (Stay stay stay)*

Shane Hollander was getting sick.

Like, genuinely unhinged. Losing his mind. Completely off his axis. Pick any adjective you wanted for someone who had stopped thinking rationally about twenty minutes ago.

There was no way all of those feelings were his. Seriously, how did people deal with this kind of thing without fully losing it? It was too much, all tangled up inside his chest, so much that it was starting to hurt physically.

With a resigned, frustrated sigh, he collapsed onto the couch. His head throbbed, his muscles ached, but not in the good, familiar way, not the way they did after training or a game. This was different. This was awful. What was this ugly, ridiculous, horrible feeling?

Jealousy.

Ugh. Disgusting word. Shane hated it.

Jealousy.

So that was it? At least that's what Google had said, after he'd desperately searched through a list of symptoms at two in the morning. Okay, sure, he knew what jealousy was. In theory. Just not... like this. Not this intense. Not this invasive. Not this embarrassingly out of control.

And it wasn't like he wanted to be toxic or anything. He'd always wanted a healthy relationship, like his parents'. He wanted to be a decent person. Someone who was good to love.

And now he was stuck dealing with the one feeling he absolutely did not want to be having, which was, honestly, the most irritating thing in the world. Especially for someone like him, who already struggled enough to process emotions under normal circumstances.

Okay.

Shane took a slow, deliberate breath, trying to pinpoint exactly when things had gone off the rails.

Ilya, his boyfriend, had been hired for a sports underwear campaign. Or something like that. Shane only knew it involved athletics and half-naked people, which was already more information than he needed. And, to be clear, he'd never had an issue with Ilya's work. Contracts, jobs, his career. They were adults. Professionals. They knew how to separate things.

But there was something else.

Ilya seemed to have forgotten that they were about to hit their official one-month anniversary. He hadn't mentioned it once. Shane had even gone as far as googling whether this was some kind of cultural thing in Russia, but that wasn't the point.

He just wanted Ilya to care. At least a little.

To be honest, all of those feelings only got worse when Shane found out about that woman last night.

"You know what?" Ilya said casually, pointing straight at his own crotch. "They won't even need padding."

Shane rolled his eyes so hard it almost hurt. "Padding is for how it looks in the photos. To make things look... nicer. It has absolutely nothing to do with the size of your dick."

He said this while pulling on his black T-shirt with a sleepy Snoopy printed on it, his favorite pajama shirt since he was eighteen. Comfort clothing. Emotional support Snoopy.

"Well, either way," Ilya replied, grabbing Shane by the arm and pulling him into a hug that was a little too tight and, annoyingly, didn't bother him at all. He kissed the side of Shane's neck with that soft, sneaky tenderness that always made Shane's heart spin like he was a stupid teenage girl. "It's gonna look pretty full right here."

"You are unbelievably arrogant," Shane muttered, and still didn't pull away right away.

"Is that bitterness because my dick's bigger than yours?" Ilya asked, his voice low and teasing, loaded with that specific brand of humor that only he seemed capable of pulling off.

Shane rolled his eyes again and finally wriggled out of the hug. "Obviously not, you idiot."

"Good. Because you're literally the last person on Earth who should be competing with me about that," Ilya said easily. "I mean, you're the one who benefits the most, sweetheart."

“You talk so much nonsense, oh my God,” Shane complained, giving his chest a light shove. His cheeks felt warm, his whole body buzzing in that very good, very overwhelming way that came from Ilya’s complete lack of filter.

And, unfortunately, also from the thought that the entire world was about to have access to everything Shane mentally labeled as mine.

“And *you love* me for it,” Ilya said, before pressing a kiss right into the middle of Shane’s cheek.

Ilya loved kissing. He kissed Shane constantly when they were together, everywhere. Everywhere. Once, he’d kissed the back of his heel, which was objectively strange, considering physical contact had never been Shane’s favorite thing. But with Ilya and his kisses, everything somehow fit. Unexpectedly. Correctly. Way too good to say out loud.

“I am seriously rethinking all of my life choices right now,” Shane muttered, before flopping back onto the bed.

It was late. He was exhausted. Shane had practice in the morning, and Ilya had that photoshoot. That damn photoshoot. It would be the first time Ilya Rozanov would be that exposed to the world, and just thinking about it made Shane’s chest tighten in a way that definitely wasn’t healthy.

And Shane had been planning a dinner to celebrate their first month together. But Ilya hadn’t said anything. Not a word.

Ilya turned toward the huge mirror he’d placed across from the bed, the result of a slightly unhinged, mildly fetishistic idea that Shane would never openly admit he liked as much as he did... but absolutely loved. And, honestly, it was extremely useful in very specific situations.

Ilya flexed his biceps. Those stupid biceps. Admiring himself with zero shame. Shane never got tired of that body. Skin smooth like vanilla ice cream with chocolate chips, covered in freckles he could never keep track of. Last time it had been fifty? Sixty? Something dangerously high.

“You look straight when you do that,” Shane commented. “Like... aggressively straight.”

“That’s the point,” Ilya replied, turning back to him. “The campaign’s with another girl. I forgot her name... something like *Kendy Janne*... I don’t know.”

Shane’s heart twisted violently in his chest, his stomach dropping like gravity had just shut off.

“*Kendall Jenner*?” he asked, making a genuine effort not to sound... weird.

“Something like that,” Ilya shrugged. “She’s hot, though. Nice body.”

“You’re gonna take half-naked photos with... her?” Shane tried. Tried very hard not to sound affected.

Ilya made a little pout at his reflection and adjusted his blond hair with his fingertips.

“Yeah, baby,” he said, just like that.

How could Ilya not see that Shane was boiling alive on the inside?

Well. That was the moment Shane kept replaying in his head to justify the absolute mess of feelings he was dealing with now.

After that, everything blurred into Shane swallowing his jealousy like freshly brewed poison and wasting his precious hours of sleep researching every other campaign that same brand had ever done. It was shameless. Truly. They were a sports brand. Why were the ads so sexual? What kind of sick joke was that?

Now, after barely two miserable hours of sleep, exhaustion hit Shane like a truck. And immediately gave way to anxiety.

Okay. He and Ilya hadn't been officially together for long. They'd had years of history, but there were still things Shane didn't know. The dynamic had shifted once they'd finally put feelings into words and decided to be together for real.

And Shane knew better than anyone that they needed to be honest. Always. Talk about feelings. About things that bothered them. It wasn't easy. Shane struggled to explain what he felt without sounding pathetic for feeling too much. Sometimes he thought he overreacted, that he cared about things that were too small to matter.

But Ilya usually understood. Or... almost always.

That morning, in the middle of his internal chaos, Shane couldn't bring himself to say anything about the photoshoot or the woman involved. His rational side tried to scream louder, demanding calm, maturity, common sense.

And honestly, dealing with her felt like the hardest part of all.

They had breakfast together, and while Shane tried to survive his own spiraling thoughts, Ilya seemed too excited. Too invested. Almost like he'd been chosen for something way bigger than posing in underwear.

Before leaving, Ilya kissed Shane three times. Once on the tip of his nose, once right between his eyebrows, and finally on his lips. Long and lingering. The kind of kiss that usually kept Shane smiling for hours.

On the way to practice, though, Shane was too busy scrolling through that woman's social media.

She was beautiful.

No. By the standards of men who were attracted to women, she was... insanely hot. Gorgeous. The kind of woman who could have pretty much any man she wanted.

Anyone.

Shane ran a hand through his hair, unsure what to do with the little insecurity monster that had woken up with him. It was obvious. Painfully obvious. Nice body. Pretty face. Everything perfect.

Ilya liked women. Shane knew that. Of course he did.

Okay. They were together. Shane trusted Ilya.

He just didn't trust himself enough to believe he'd be interesting enough for Ilya to want for a long time.

He sighed.

Time to train.

"You were absolute trash today, man," JJ said in the locker room.

Shane knew. He knew. It had easily been the worst practice of his life. His brain wouldn't shut up, churning out catastrophic scenarios one after the other, all of them ending the same way: Ilya breaking up with him because he'd found someone better.

Shane messed up everything. Almost everything. The coach yelled at him. He didn't care.

"What do you think about Kendall Jenner?" Shane asked, sitting down on the locker room bench. He needed a straight guy's opinion. Maybe he was overreacting.

"Dude, easily one of the most beautiful women in the world," JJ said.

Shane let out all the air in his lungs and scrubbed a hand through his hair.

"Why?" JJ asked. "Did she DM you or something?"

"No," Shane said quickly. "J-just curious."

“She’s gorgeous. I mean, I’m married, but if she ever hit on me-”

“You’d cheat on your wife?” Shane stared at him, half annoyed, half genuinely horrified.

“Of course not,” JJ laughed. “But my ego would be through the roof.”

Shane rolled his eyes, pulled his phone out of his gym shorts, and texted Ilya.

Shane: Are you guys done yet, baby?

Ilya: Nope 🤔🤔 still missing the part with Keny Jeny 🙄🙄

Under any other circumstances, Shane would’ve laughed. Right now, all he could think about was the fact that, in a matter of minutes, Kendall Jenner would be taking sexy photos with his boyfriend.

A boyfriend who wasn’t out.

A boyfriend who was still a secret.

A boyfriend who, to the public, was nothing more than a rival.

Shane sniffed, refusing to cry. He hated crying over things like this.

Ilya [photo]

Shane glanced around. The team had already cleared out. Safe enough to open it. Still, he never fully trusted Ilya’s messages.

When he tapped the notification, it was a mirror selfie from the set. Ilya was wearing nothing but boxer briefs.

Ilya: you would love this mirror, it’s huge >:)

Shane’s face heated instantly. And just like that, all those tangled feelings came rushing back at once, no instructions included.

He reacted with a heart, locked his phone, grabbed his things, and went home.

Once there, Shane put on an episode of Peanuts. Anything that might keep him from drowning in the mess of emotions threatening to eat him alive. He collapsed onto the couch, pulled a blanket over himself, and tried to focus on animated characters having quiet existential crises.

His phone buzzed in his pocket.

Ilya: oh my god she's here 😱

Shane sighed and locked the screen. Not interested. Not even a little.

The phone buzzed again.

Ilya: she's really beautiful, wow! 😱😱

The message glowed on the screen like a personal attack.

Shane closed his eyes for a second, counting to five in his head. He didn't reply.

Another buzz.

Ilya: we're about to shoot, i caaaaan't believe i'm gonna be in just my underwear with someone else LOL 😎

Shane growled.

He was angry. Really angry. Not exactly at the situation itself, but at Ilya's complete lack of... tact. Did he seriously not realize this was a sensitive subject? That Shane was still trying to process the fact that his boyfriend was doing a sensual, half-naked shoot with another woman?

Was it really that hard to notice?

Shane grabbed a pillow and hugged it way harder than was probably healthy. He was genuinely upset. The kind of upset where you don't know whether you want to scream, cry, or disappear for a few hours.

The phone buzzed again. Ignored.

Then again.

Ilya: baby you vanished

Ilya: whereeeee are you 😞😞😞

Ilya: they keep telling me to smile more 😞😞. idk why!

Ilya: do i look weird when i smile? 😞 i like my bad boy face. makes me more #sexy 😈

Ilya: i think it does

Ilya: i'll send another pic later

Ilya: kisses xx

Shane buried his face into the pillow, letting out a muffled sound that wasn't exactly human.

Still, he forced himself into the kitchen. Because he'd planned a surprise for that day. Because even if Ilya didn't remember, Shane was good with dates. He liked celebrating. He needed to celebrate.

And maybe cooking would help him forget.

Or, at the very least, keep him from completely losing his mind.

Ilya got home a little later that night. It was almost seven when the door finally opened. His blond hair was still damp, he was wearing a comfortable Boston hoodie, and he had this massive smile on his face, the kind that barely fit.

Shane had spent the entire afternoon in the kitchen trying to learn Russian cooking. Hours reading about comfort food, the kind of dishes that tasted like home. He genuinely hoped Ilya would like it, even though a small, bitter part of him felt like maybe Ilya didn't deserve that much effort. Not when he hadn't remembered they were hitting two months together that day.

"Hey, baby," Ilya said, smiling way too brightly for Shane's liking.

He came up behind Shane while he was chopping a stupid salad, wrapped his arms around his waist, and pressed a slow kiss just behind his ear. It was way too affectionate for someone

who had spent the entire day being an emotional liability.

Shane was angry.

Not explosive angry, but the quiet kind. The kind that made his chest burn. Angry at the situation. Angry at Ilya. Angry at himself for not knowing how to deal with his feelings the way a normal person supposedly would.

He crossed his arms, trying to ignore the tightness in his chest and the extremely inconvenient fact that Ilya still looked unbearably adorable. Like a puppy fresh out of a bath.

Which was deeply unhelpful.

“I have to say,” Ilya went on casually, “I’m really glad I chose hockey. A lot of models would be out of a job because of me.”

Shane swallowed what little pride he had left, turned around, and gently pushed Ilya away. Way too gently for someone clearly on the edge of... something he couldn’t even name.

“Cool,” he said flatly.

He felt petty immediately. Part of him was happy for Ilya, for the job, for the opportunity. He just wasn’t going to admit how upset he was. No way.

“And it was amazing,” Ilya continued, completely oblivious. “I thought I’d be nervous around such a beautiful woman, but honestly it was so... you know...”

Oh my God.

Shane just wanted him to shut up. To notice. To understand that Shane’s heart and brain did not work properly when faced with the mental image of his boyfriend half-naked, in nothing but underwear, standing that close to another woman.

Sometimes Shane wondered if he was sick. Like, actually unwell. Not sick-sick. Just... completely unhinged. Maybe he was. He didn’t know.

“I don’t want to hear it!” Shane snapped. Boom. Like a cartoon bomb going off.

The words slipped out before he could stop them.

Ilya froze instantly, one eyebrow lifting in clear confusion. Shane never raised his voice. Ever.

“What?” Ilya asked. “What happened?” He sounded confused and, if Shane hadn’t been spiraling, maybe even a little amused.

“Go to hell. Seriously. Jesus Christ, just fuck off,” Shane said, running his hands over his face, trying to fight the dryness in his mouth.

“Wow. That’s a lot,” Ilya let out a small laugh. “What’s with the meltdown?”

Shane's eyelid twitched. How could Ilya still ask that? On top of forgetting their anniversary, he wanted Shane to sit there and listen to him rave about his perfect sexy campaign with a ridiculously beautiful model?

Oh, for fuck's sake.

"You-" Shane tried. "I- you don't-"

He couldn't. He couldn't get the words out in a way that sounded coherent, reasonable, not like a jealous, toxic psycho. God, Shane had never even dated anyone before. Relationships were already hard enough without this. He didn't know what to do. He was absolutely sure he was about to explode.

He didn't know if people actually exploded, but the pressure in his head, the tightness in his chest, the shapeless storm of feelings crashing all at once made it feel very possible.

It felt like his entire body was begging for some kind of release.

So he grabbed his phone. The closest thing. The dumbest thing. The most harmless thing. And threw it.

The regret hit instantly.

It was excessive. Childish. A pathetic burst of frustration, the kind he used to have as a spoiled kid who couldn't handle emotions bigger than himself. He hadn't even thrown it hard. It was more like a desperate plea to break something. Anything. Without hurting anyone.

But the universe had a cruel sense of humor.

The phone hit Ilya's leg with a dull, unmistakable sound.

Panic flooded Shane immediately. Sharp. Violent. Suffocating. He thought he might pass out.

His eyes widened, his heart practically jumping into his throat as he tried to read Ilya's expression. Shocked. Confused. Maybe hurt. Maybe angry. Shane couldn't tell. He couldn't breathe enough to figure it out.

"Ilya... baby, I- I'm sorry- I didn't-" The words stumbled and died before they made any sense.

Ilya didn't respond. He simply turned around and walked out of the kitchen without saying a word.

Oh God.

The floor seemed to vanish beneath Shane's feet. He'd ruined everything. Over something stupid. Over a feeling he didn't even want to have. Did he not trust his own boyfriend? Was that it?

Of course it was.

Shane was awful. Dramatic. Maybe broken. *Crazy*. And he probably didn't deserve someone like Ilya anyway.

He'd understand if Ilya left. If he married Kendall Jenner, had beautiful kids, and completely forgot Shane Hollander had ever existed.

Shane tangled his fingers in his hair and pulled, eyes burning.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

When he managed to steady himself a little, he thought about going after Ilya. Apologizing. Explaining he hadn't meant to hit him, that it was just a stupid gesture, that he was scared and jealous and had no idea how to handle any of it.

But before he could move, footsteps echoed back.

Ilya was back in the kitchen.

This time, he was wearing his hockey gear.

The helmet was on, which somehow made the moment feel both incredibly serious and completely ridiculous. Shane stared, confused. Then Ilya tapped the red helmet, took a deep breath like he was about to step onto the ice for a decisive game.

And then he said, his voice soft and steady:

"Okay, baby. Let's talk."

It felt like someone had ripped an entire elephant out of Shane's chest. Air finally rushed back into his lungs. He looked at Ilya and found so much understanding there, so much calm, so much steady presence, that for one ridiculous second he was sure he could confess absolutely anything.

Even that he might need help hiding a body.

And Ilya, without blinking, would probably just ask where.

[...]

"Do you really think I'd trade you for any other woman?" Ilya asked, genuinely offended, after Shane had basically word-vomited everything he'd been feeling for the past twenty-four hours.

The accent made it funnier, which was wildly unfair given how serious the moment was. They were sitting on the living room couch, Ilya still in his hockey gear. Probably a safety precaution. Just in case Shane decided to throw another object.

“I don’t know,” Shane admitted, fingers digging into his own thighs because he needed something to keep himself anchored. “I mean... she’s really, really beautiful. And you-”

“So what?” Ilya cut in, blunt.

Shane swallowed hard. “She’s beautiful.”

Ilya looked at him for a second longer this time, serious now.

“And you’re more,” he said, just like that. No effort. No hesitation.

The honesty hit hard. Shane’s body reacted before his brain could catch up, like the air had been physically pulled out of him.

“I am?” His voice came out smaller than he meant it to.

“Dă?” Ilya said, letting out a short breath through his nose, almost impatient, like this shouldn’t even be up for debate. “You are literally the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen.”

Now Shane was officially embarrassed. His cheeks burned, his gaze darted away, his heart racing too fast over a compliment that felt way too big to fit inside him.

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you two together,” he confessed, covering his face with his hands. “Just... the underwear. God. I felt like throwing up all my organs. It was like— I don’t know— like my brain decided to torture me for fun.”

“Shane,” Ilya said, gently cutting him off before the rambling could spiral again.

Shane peeked at him from the corner of his eye, one hand still covering half his face.

“Okay, you’re a little bit of an idiot,” Ilya said, with absolutely no cruelty. None at all. “But I don’t blame you. Honestly, if I were you, I’d probably feel the same. But—” He paused, choosing his words carefully, the way he always did. “Keeping this stuff to yourself hurts. When you don’t talk about what you’re feeling, you end up suffering alone. And I don’t want that for you.”

“Wow,” Shane said, a small, shaky smile breaking through. “Look at you, giving deep emotional advice.”

“Shut up,” Ilya shot back, smiling too. “I just don’t want you suffering in silence when something’s bothering you. I can try to help. I mean... I will help.”

He leaned in and kissed Shane, first on the mouth, then softly on his eyelid, slow and careful, like he was stitching something back together.

“That’s how a couple works,” Ilya added. He paused, thought about it, then concluded, “Communication. That’s the word.”

“Oh my God,” Shane laughed, resting his forehead against Ilya’s. “Have you been reading the New York Times relationship advice column?”

Ilya shrugged.

“Sometimes it’s useful.”

He pulled off one of his gloves and stood up. Shane bit his lip, considering mentioning that there was still one more tiny thing bothering him. But before he could say anything, Ilya’s phone buzzed.

“They sent some photos from today,” Ilya said, glancing at the screen. “Wanna see?”

“One thing at a time,” Shane said, way too quickly.

Ilya laughed. “Okay. I’ll go change and then we’ll eat.”

He leaned down, kissed the top of Shane’s head, and left the room.

Shane stayed there, breathing slowly, his heart lighter than it had been all day. Maybe he’d mention over dinner that it had bothered him a little that Ilya hadn’t remembered the date... but what if that was silly? It had only been one month.

He shook his head, pushing the thought away.

He would say it. Because he cared about dates. About the little things. About all of them.

[...]

Shane was sitting at the kitchen table when Ilya came back. The table was already set, arranged with almost obsessive care, and Shane felt a low buzz of anxiety humming under his skin. Part of it was not knowing whether he’d actually managed to recreate the foods Ilya truly loved. Another part was knowing he needed to bring up that topic... the one-month anniversary he had genuinely thought Ilya had forgotten.

Ilya sat down across from him. Before Shane could say anything, he beat him to it.

“Happy one-month anniversary, baby,” Ilya said, casually, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Shane’s eyes widened, completely caught off guard. He stared at Ilya a second longer than socially normal and only then noticed the velvet box being held out toward him.

Oh.

“You-”

“You really thought I’d forget?” Ilya asked, smug, that infuriatingly beautiful half-smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“I don’t know,” Shane admitted, too honest to pretend otherwise. “I mean... yeah. I kind of did.”

He took the velvet box and opened it with slightly shaky fingers. Inside was a delicate gold necklace, a small pendant engraved with the initials H.R. Shane let out a soft, almost disbelieving laugh and looked up at Ilya, whose cheeks were faintly flushed. Something Ilya always claimed was impossible, because, according to him, Russians didn’t blush.

A sudden wave of euphoria and genuine affection crashed through Shane’s chest. He stood up, crossed the small distance between them, and sat down in Ilya’s lap without asking permission. He cupped Ilya’s face and kissed him.

He kissed his warm cheeks, his nice nose, the tip of his chin, his sharp jaw.

“*Ya tebya lyublyu*,” Shane tried in Russian, his voice low and a little shy.

Ilya stiffened for a second, then pulled back just enough to look at him. The smile that spread across his face was way too big for the moment. His eyes shone dangerously bright.

“Oh my God,” Ilya breathed.

“It’s not just you who’s been reading and learning things,” Shane murmured, still holding his face.

“I can tell, my love,” Ilya said, kissing along Shane’s jaw before pulling him into a tight hug. “*Ty moy dom*.”

“What does that mean?” Shane asked, curious, still glued to him, with zero intention of moving.

“You’ll have to find out,” Ilya said, smiling against his temple. “But not now. Now we eat.”

It was only then that Shane realized Ilya hadn’t actually noticed the food yet.

“I don’t know if you’ll like it, but...” he started, insecure. “I made borscht.”

Ilya’s eyes widened.

“And pelmeni,” Shane added quickly. “And kasha.”

Ilya’s cheeks flushed almost instantly.

“I don’t know if it tastes like what you’re used to, but I tried,” Shane said, his voice wobbling just a little.

“Shane...” Ilya murmured, wearing an expression Shane had never seen before. There was so much tenderness and gratitude in it that, for a second, Shane thought he might cry.

Ilya didn’t finish the sentence. He just kissed him, deeper this time, slower, like he was answering everything without words.

“I don’t have words anymore,” Ilya admitted against his lips, smiling. “But you just gave me home, food, and love all in the same day. That’s dangerous.”

Shane laughed, resting his forehead against Ilya’s.

They ate together after that. Shared the soup, the pelmeni, the small table, and that soft, comfortable silence that only exists when everything is okay. When the world finally slows down.

Later, when the weight of the entire day finally settled on Shane’s shoulders, they were sitting on the couch, shoulder to shoulder, the TV on something neither of them was really watching. Ilya wrapped an arm around him automatically, like muscle memory.

Shane lifted a hand and touched the pendant at his neck. The metal was warm against his skin.

“You realize you put your initials on me, right?” he said quietly, almost casual.

Ilya smiled faintly. “I do.”

“That’s kind of... serious,” Shane said. No accusation. Just observation.

“I know,” Ilya replied. “That was the point.”

Shane swallowed. His heart sped up, but not from fear this time. It was that strange, good feeling of something finally clicking into place. Like, after so much noise, the world had found the right key.

Ilya rested his chin on top of Shane’s head and murmured again, like he was reaffirming a simple truth:

“Ty moy dom.”

Shane closed his eyes.

He thought about all the dates he carried like his own private constellations. The first time they saw each other in that alley, Ilya smoking somewhere he absolutely wasn’t allowed to. The first game they played against each other, rivals on opposite sides of the ice. The first kiss in that hotel room. The first time. The first moment he realized he was in love. The first time Shane went up to his cottage. The first *I love you*. So many firsts. Too many to count.

He thought about the chaos, the ugly jealousy, the insecurity that now felt distant, muted, because somehow Ilya had a way of pulling the best out of him. But he also thought about how Ilya always came back. Always sat down. Always stayed.

Shane turned his face, resting his forehead against Ilya's neck.

"I know," he said, finally.

And for the first time since everything had started spiraling out of control, he actually believed it.

Home wasn't the absence of fear.

It was the place where fear could exist, and you were still chosen anyway.

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