

Sharing a Sunrise

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Sharing a Sunrise

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Summary

“I'm sorry, are we... friends?”

Ilya knows he's in too deep, has for a while. That's why he's decided to end it once and for all, and now is the perfect moment to do just that. Hollander doesn't remember him, and everything they've done. He doesn't know him, doesn't trust him, probably doesn't even like him.

He should shake his head no, right now. No, they weren't friends. Ilya was just the captain of the opposing team, here to offer his condolences. Hollander would accept it at face value. That's it, clean cut.

“No, boyfriends.”

Notes

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

It happens almost like in slow motion. Ilya sees it all right before his eyes but he is helpless, unable to do anything to stop it. He sees a body slam into another—all in a wrong angle—and then, Shane hits the ice with a sickening thud.

Snap—the film runs out and the slo-mo is over. The roar of the audience washes over him as time warp-speeds past and suddenly, Shane has been lying out there on the ice for 10 seconds already. The emergency personnel place the stretchers on the ice next to him—calling his name, trying to get him to react.

Vaguely Ilya realizes a hand on his chest is pushing him backwards, gliding him away from Shane. He is powerless to stop it.

The hospital room is bathing in warm afternoon sun as Ilya enters. Shane is asleep and the room otherwise unoccupied. Slowly, reverently Ilya walks closer to stand by the bedside. Shane looks peaceful in his sleep and Ilya lets out a long breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding in. He already heard on the news that Shane's injuries were considered to be mild but still, it is only now that Ilya can allow himself to truly believe it.

The accident had been a blur, and the game that resumed after Shane was taken off the ice was a blur too. Ilya was present for the full 60 minutes of playtime, he knows he was, but he has no proper recollections of any of it. Just glimpses. On the ice, in the showers, in the car, and then sitting on a hotel room sofa, phone in hand.

Hours of silence.

The bruising on Shane's face is severe but the freckles still stand out, for the most part, against the pale skin. Ilya wants to run his fingers over them.

“Rozanov?” Ilya's eyes flick up to meet Shane's squinting ones. “What are you doing here?”

Shane looks and sounds groggy as hell but to Ilya, it's like the first inhale of oxygen after a long plunge.

“You scared me,” Ilya says.

Shane's eyes dart around the room before meeting his again.

“Oh, I—” Shane stops to consider his words, his eyebrows pinching down. “Were you at the game too?”

It takes a moment for Shane's strange question to register.

“Yes,” Ilya finally replies, his tone careful. “You were playing against Boston.”

Shane takes these words in, nods his head a little.

“Right,” he says, more to himself than to Ilya, “and you play for Boston.”

Ilya looks down at Shane who seems to be avoiding his eyes even more than usual. Something is wrong.

“What is going on?”

Ilya waits a moment but Shane seems disinclined to reply.

“Shane.”

That catches his attention, but not the way Ilya was expecting. Shane looks up at him like he's a stranger.

“I'm sorry,” he finally says, ever the polite Canadian, “the doctor said the concussion caused some memory loss— temporary memory loss in me.”

Shane glances around again and Ilya is starting to get the impression the man might be uncomfortable with having him there.

“I don't... really remember last night, at all,” Shane mutters.

Memory loss. That's not normal. It's worse than just a regular concussion. Suddenly Ilya's throat squeezes half-shut again and all the relief he had gained standing in this room leaves his body at once.

“Just last night?”

Shane doesn't look at him, just shakes his head a little. “There are bits and pieces missing. They just don't really know which.”

“Do you remember me?”

That brings forth a small scoff. “Ilya Rozanov,” is the wry reply.

“No, I mean—” Do you remember *me*, is what he was about to ask. *Do you remember who I am to you, and you to me?*

“What's the last thing you remember about me?” he asks instead.

Shane finally looks up at him, an incredulous look on his face.

“You're such an asshole.”

At least some things survive a concussion.

“Tell me,” he demands.

“I remember the draft, okay?” Shane replies, an angry flush rising to his cheeks. “Happy now?”

Not okay. Not happy. The draft? That was so many years ago.

“Nothing after draft?”

Shane looks unsure, his eyes drop down as he visibly tries to remember.

“The hotel gym,” he finally says, his words unsure. “Did you come to the hotel gym?”

“Yes, gym. Good.” Ilya's English is failing him but at least they're getting somewhere now.

“And then? CCM commercial, you remember?”

This time Shane doesn't take long to reply, his head shaking an easy no. Ilya feels like his knees are about give out under him so he reaches his hand out, puts some weight on Shane's hospital bed. He already knows the answer before he poses the question, but he still asks.

“But after commercial? In shower?”

Shane shakes his head again. No shower. Nothing of the echoing, steam-filled space. No flow of water over muscles and skin, none of the stolen glances while the other was not looking. Ilya can still remember the surge of excitement that had coursed through his body when he'd caught Shane peeking and saw his body react. Never in his life had he felt a bigger rush of omnipotence than in the moment he had fully turned to face his biggest rival, taken himself in hand, and Shane had been unable to do anything but watch—to flutter his lashes, gulp air and watch. The rush had been even better than getting drafted first.

Shane is starting to look weirded out by his question.

“What happened in—” Shane cuts himself off with a quick shake of his head, and begins again. “I'm sorry, are we... friends?”

Are they friends? They are friendly, nowadays, but they don't spend time together like friends do. Not outside of sex. Not since that one time in Boston when Shane had promised to stay the night, and then didn't.

Ilya looks at Shane's face, his unsure glances up at him as he tries to parse together what he can recall about Ilya at the draft and compare it to the Ilya standing before him now. Is he thinking about the gym? Does he remember the water bottle and the way Ilya's fingers had covered his? Can he remember those specifics, still?

Ilya remembers everything.

He knows he's in too deep, has for a while. Shane really did them both a favor by calling it quits when he did. But then he had to go and break up with his girlfriend, and before Ilya knew it, Shane had him wrapped around his little finger just as tightly as he ever was. Tighter, even, because now he was living with the intimate knowledge of what it felt like to lose it all.

That's why he's decided to end it, once and for all. *He'd told Shane he loved him.* Granted, it was in Russian, but still. This had gone on long enough. It wasn't fun and exciting anymore. It was just agony.

And now is the perfect time to do just that. Shane doesn't remember him, and everything they've done. He doesn't know him, doesn't trust him, probably doesn't even like him. He should shake his head no, right now. No, they aren't friends. Ilya is just the captain of the opposing team, here to offer his condolences. Shane would accept it at face value. That's it, clean cut.

Ilya has been lost in thought too long. Shane is looking up at him, his face open—really studying him now. Shane is forgetting himself, losing himself in the moment. It was a look that usually only really appeared on his face when he found himself flipped on his back, in bed, with Ilya hovering over him, settled between his thighs.

“No, boyfriends.”

The silence stretches out long, and Ilya watches as a myriad of emotions cross over Shane's features.

“What?”

“Is secret,” Ilya stresses. “No one can know, okay?”

“I don't—” Shane is getting overwhelmed, Ilya can tell. “Really?”

Well, not really. ‘Boyfriends’ was not really the right term to describe what they were doing. They were ‘fuck buddies,’ like the ugly, infantile American saying went. Buddies who fuck. Buddies... No, that wasn't a good term either.

“For how long?”

Ilya shrugs his shoulders. “Some years.”

“Wow,” Shane breathes out and Ilya can't help smiling at his awe-struck expression. Shane catches the smile and responds with a small one of his own.

“I guess I'm not completely surprised,” he finally says, seemingly settling back to himself.

“No?”

“I did always have a crush on you.”

A breath leaves Ilya with a whoosh. That's not something Shane has ever told him. It's not something Shane *would* ever willingly tell him, he doesn't think, not if he wasn't... like this.

Shane is smiling up at him with that earnest, open smile of his he usually safeguards so furiously in his public life. Ilya is having trouble responding to it just as earnestly. He is beginning to realize he should probably try to explain their arrangement some more. This is not fair to Shane.

Just then a nurse walks in and Ilya jumps three feet back from Shane's bed, puts his game-face on, and responds cheekily to her quips about him coming here to smother Shane with a pillow. Jesus Christ.

At the door he looks back and catches Shane looking at him, even as the nurse has already launched into her questions about his pain levels. Ilya brings his finger up to his lips, reminding him to keep it a secret. Shane nods and smiles. Despite himself, Ilya smiles back.

Outside the hospital Ilya checks his phone and sees a message from Cliff, asking if he's already gone to see Shane. He hits the call button.

"Hollander's okay," he says once the call connects. "Concussion, I think maybe arm broken. But we talked. He's okay."

He doesn't mention the amnesia. It's not probably info Shane's camp would want circulating right now.

"*Yeah?*" Cliff breathes out and Ilya knows he's genuinely relieved. Competition or not, everyone knows Shane Hollander is a generational talent. No one in hockey would want to see his career cut short over an accident.

"It's not your fault, Marly. I told him you were sorry."

He hadn't, even though he had promised Cliff he would. It had slipped his mind completely.

"*Okay, good,*" is the reply. "*Thanks, Cap.*"

They end the call there. Ilya wishes he had a cigarette to light up. He can't believe he forgot to pass on Cliff's apology. And he hadn't even asked Shane anything about his other injuries. Some boyfriend he turned out to be.

Ilya opens the Uber app on his phone and tries to shrug off the warmth that blossoms under his sternum at the thought.

Two days later Ilya receives a message from Jane.

"*Hi, who is this?*"

Ilya considers how he should reply but in the end he just goes with the truth. It's not like they've ever been that careful with their messages.

"It's Ilya."

"*I figured,*" comes the immediate reply. "*You're saved under Lily.*"

Ilya scoffs at that. Oh, he knows. After all, he was the one who saved it like that on Shane's phone. All-stars game, rookie season. The second time they hooked up.

"Yes. It's secret."

"*I guess.*"

A moment goes by as Ilya tries to think of something to say. Finally he starts typing out a message asking about Shane's injuries but he's interrupted by another message.

"I have a dick pic on my phone from a girl named Lily."

Ilya bursts out laughing.

"I'm not sure what kind of secret is being kept here."

The laughter settles down and Ilya wipes out a tear from the corner of his eye. Nobody ever talks about how funny Shane Hollander actually is. Certainly not Ilya.

He deletes the message he was typing and replies.

"Secret is, it's me."

Thumbs up.

Ilya begins to re-type his question about the injuries but Shane is faster, once again.

"We don't text that much."

Ilya stares at his phone. They don't? Shane is certainly the person Ilya texts the most. And they text a lot more than they used to before.

Once again, he deletes the half-finished text and replies, "We also call."

Three seconds later, his phone rings in his hand. Jane.

"Oh, thank goodness," comes Shane's voice when he answers. *"I'm not really supposed to be looking at screens right now."*

Alarm rises in Ilya immediately.

"Then why you look at screen?!"

Shane just chuckles and ignores Ilya's agitation.

"I wasn't sure which number was yours," he explains. *"I had to make sure before calling."*

"You wanted to call me?"

Ilya doesn't mean to sound so doubtful.

"Course," Shane says and then takes a moment before asking, *"Is that okay?"*

"Of course."

A silence lingers before Ilya clears his throat.

"How are your injuries?"

Apparently it was his collarbone that had been fractured in the fall, not his arm.

“And the memory?” Ilya presses on.

“About the same, I think. But the doctors don't seem worried.”

Ilya hears the way Shane's voice breaks on the last syllable, the short breath he draws in the silence that follows.

“Are you? Worried?”

A pause and then, “Yes.”

Ilya wishes he could see Shane's face.

“I'm scared the next time I get on ice, I won't know how to play hockey anymore.”

“Impossible,” is Ilya's immediate reply. “You can play hockey in your sleep, okay? You never forget. Impossible.”

Ilya feels accomplished when he hears an airy chuckle on the line, but then Shane quickly falls quiet.

“I just think,” he finally says, *“the doctors might not be so optimistic if I told them I've forgotten my boyfriend.”*

Ilya ignores the stupid warmth that blooms in him as Shane refers to him as his boyfriend.

“You haven't forgotten everything,” he replies instead, “just some details.”

“A lot of details.”

A lot of details, and when Shane does remember he'll have a lot of questions about why Ilya has been calling himself his boyfriend in the meanwhile.

Shane calls often. He's recovering at his parents' place now and is banned from both looking at screens and doing any physical exercise. He's very obviously bored, so he calls a lot. Ilya doesn't mind. The Raiders have made it to the playoffs so Ilya is keeping his head down and keeping focus. He sleeps, he eats, he trains and he talks to Shane. That's it. Rinse and repeat.

They talk hockey a lot. The Metros are out, so the usual competitive edge is absent from their banter. In fact, Ilya has come to appreciate Shane's insights in a way he was not expecting. Svetlana knows *everything* about hockey, but she talks hockey like an analyst, not like a player. His teammates play the game but they're not the captain. He is. And there are things he can and can not say to them.

But Shane is a captain too—one who has lead his team to win the Cup twice already. They don't operate the same way as captains but Shane's point of view, Ilya finds, is becoming invaluable to him.

"I've remembered something."

They had just been talking about last night's game so it takes a moment for Ilya to register Shane's sudden about-face.

"You did?" Ilya asks carefully. "About me?"

"Yeah." Ilya waits out the silence. *"I remember you coming over to my place in Montreal and we had sex."*

That has happened many times over the years but the most pressing question for Ilya is, "Was it nice?"

"Yeah."

Ilya smirks to himself. "We have a lot of very good sex. You will remember."

Shane huffs out an embarrassed "okay" and not for the first time, Ilya wishes he could see his face. But Shane still isn't allowed to look at screens for long periods of time.

"But how does it really work?"

Ilya waits for Shane to go on and elaborate. He doesn't, so dreading the worst he asks, "What, sex?"

"No," Shane scoffs as if Ilya was trying to be cheeky, *"us dating. How can we be in a relationship if we only see each other in person a few times a season?"*

Well, isn't that just the million dollar question. This would actually be the perfect moment for him to explain to Shane the real nature of their relationship. That they aren't really boyfriends. That they just have sex. And actually call only sometimes, almost not all. They text, some, but mostly just dick jokes and hotel room numbers. And that Shane has climbed into his lap and held him while he cried only once.

'Fuck buddies...' Ilya shudders at the thought.

"I'm sorry," he hears Shane's voice from the phone. Once again, Ilya had been taking too long to answer.

"Why sorry?"

"It must be upsetting for you that I don't remember our relationship." Shane's voice is soft and considered. *"I didn't mean to sound dismissive."*

Ilya breathes in and out. Shane is always so fast with his questions. Ilya needs time to think how to answer him and then even more time to think how to say it in English. He has no idea what 'dismissive' means.

"It is hard," he says before Shane can fill the silence with his next question. "In the beginning, we only meet for sex. We play hockey and then we fuck. That's it."

“Oh.”

Memories from the early years flood Ilya's mind. Shane's wide eyes every time Ilya had approached him with a hotel room number, or demanded to know his. His set jaw and tense shoulders the first time he'd let Ilya through the door. The unanswered text message that had haunted Ilya's phone for months: “*Are you okay?*”

Ilya wonders if Shane is disappointed to learn how their relationship began, or if it was finally starting to make sense to him. Ilya as a boyfriend—it's a stupid thought. Ilya as a ‘fuck buddy’—makes sense.

“But it changed,” Ilya goes on, unsure why he suddenly feels the need to defend their non-existent relationship. “Yes, we don't see each other very often but we text, we talk...”

Ilya falls silent. This doesn't sound like a good enough relationship.

“We... um, help each other.” That comes out more as a question than a statement. But it's at least partially true. Talking to Shane helped him a lot when he'd gone to Moscow for his father's funeral. Fleeting, Ilya wonders if he's ever helped Shane with anything.

“And when we're in the same city, we spend as much time together as we can.”

A lie. A complete and utter lie. They spend enough time together to fuck and then the other goes back to their hotel room in the same city and they continue texting like that. Why didn't they just talk to each other in person?

Well, he had tried—once. Shane hadn't wanted to stay.

Makes sense.

“*I'll try to remember faster,*” Shane says, and Ilya lets out a huff. If anyone can overcome amnesia just by their own sheer will and determination, it surely would be Shane Hollander.

“*I don't want you to be the only one who remembers.*”

The playoffs begin and Boston goes head-to-head with the New York Admirals. Shane wishes him luck before the game and after Boston wins, they stay up late to talk shop and go over the best parts of the game over and over again until Ilya falls asleep on the sofa, phone still in hand.

Ilya has never had anyone in his corner the way he has Shane now. He's had people who wanted—no, expected too see him to do well, but their approval was always conditional on him delivering. For family, for country, and for the bragging rights.

Shane, on the other hand, has nothing personal at stake with how Boston does. Ilya has a feeling the only reason Shane has any preference in seeing either of the teams best the other, is simply because he'd like to see Ilya happy. It's a heady feeling and not something Ilya has experienced in his life. Not since his mother.

In the locker room before their second playoff game, Cliff catches him smiling down at his phone. He'd already talked to Shane that morning, and Shane had wished him a good game then. Still, Ilya had just now received a text message from Jane wishing him good luck with a red heart emoji.

"Let me guess," Cliff grins at him. "Your mysterious Montreal chick."

"Shut your idiot face, Marly," Ilya tells him as he locks the screen and tosses the phone in his locker. He does absolutely nothing to hide his own wide smile.

Cliff laughs out loud as he shrugs his shoulder pads on. "No, no," he says. "Love's a good look on you, man."

Ilya scoffs and turns his back to Cliff's laughter. With a small, private smile of his own he takes out his padding and gets to work.

They win the second game too.

Ilya has been trying to get in touch with Shane the whole morning. With Shane still recovering, it usually isn't hard to get ahold of him—especially not on a game day. He had called him earlier, expecting Shane to get back to him as soon as he realized he'd missed a call. An hour later Ilya had called again and then sent him a text. Now he's standing in the kitchen of his hotel suite, phone in hand. He is expected at the hotel lobby in an hour. If he doesn't get ahold of Shane soon, he won't be able to talk to him until after the game.

Worry is starting to creep in. Could Shane have had some kind of medical emergency? Maybe the concussion was worse than the doctors had thought and he has a ruptured blood vessel in his brain.

"Is everything okay?" he writes in a text message. "I'm starting to get worried."

Ilya stares at the phone, willing the messages to be marked as 'read'. Finally they are and soon after three dots appear indicating a message being typed. He watches and waits as the dots disappear and appear a few times, before disappearing altogether. Five seconds later the phone rings in his hand. Ilya answers right away.

"You should be focusing on the game right now," Shane's voice says in his ear and Ilya sighs out a breath.

"Is everything okay?"

A pause. *"Yes."*

Shane always was a terrible fucking liar.

"What has happened? Are you all right?"

"Nothing has happened. Just focus on the game."

“Well, I can't focus on the game!”

Ilya takes a deep breath to calm himself down. “Just tell me.”

Shane breathes out as well before speaking.

“I've remembered more.”

“About me?”

“Some. And about me.”

Different scenarios race through Ilya's mind. Still, he waits for Shane to go on.

“I remember having a girlfriend,” Shane says. *“And I think... I'm pretty sure it was this year.”*

Ilya can feel his pulse pick up at Shane's words. He tries to think of something to say, something that will make sense of Shane's memory and fit it within the fantasy Ilya has weaved for him, but he can't think of anything. He's taking too long.

“It's not true.”

After a pause, Shane speaks. *“I don't understand.”*

“She's not girlfriend,” Ilya goes on even though he shouldn't. “Just a friend. Keeps your secret.”

“What, like a beard?”

“Yes. Like a beard.” Ridiculous American language.

“Ilya,” Shane says apprehensively. *“I had sex with her.”*

He had wondered about that, but now he knows for sure. “It's not true.”

For a long time neither of them speaks.

“Okay,” Shane finally says, *“but if I'm having false memories I have to tell my doctor about it. I don't think that's normal.”*

“No—” Ilya begins, unsure how to go on. “I have to leave soon, but I will call later and we will talk more then, okay? Don't tell the doctor yet, okay?”

“Of course,” is Shane's immediate answer. *“Just focus on the game. Forget about all this.”*

Ilya closes his eyes. Shane is too sweet.

“Seriously, Ilya. Everything is alright. Just focus on the game.”

Ilya covers his eyes with his free hand. “Yes. I will call you later.”

“Okay,” Shane replied. “I lo—” Pause. “Good luck.”

With that Shane ends the call. Ilya tosses the phone on the kitchen island before leaning both hands on the tabletop and hanging his head low.

The game is a shitshow. Ilya tries to do as Shane had told him and just focus on the game, but it's a struggle. Over and over, his thoughts return to the call. To what Shane had said, what he himself had said back, and what he would have to say later that night.

He shouldn't have lied. Not when Shane first woke up after the accident, not over these past weeks, and especially not over the phone earlier. Ilya doesn't know what took over him. He's made a mistake, a huge mistake, and later that night he will have to own up to it.

The Raiders are losing the game. The team is playing worse than they have in a long time and Ilya knows it's mostly his fault. He's not playing at his usual level of skill or enthusiasm. He'd not firing everyone up and he's not creating scoring opportunities like he usually does, and the rest of the team doesn't know how to compensate for it.

In the third period, despite trailing the Admirals by three goals already, Ilya tries to rally the troops and lead by example by charging after the puck like a bat out of hell when the Admirals' defenseman shoves him into the boards. Ilya isn't paying attention properly so he isn't prepared for it. Immediately, he can feel how his ribs absorb most of the hit instead of the padding, and a sharp pain shoots through his entire body.

Ilya bites down on his molars and refuses to even wince. Any indication that he's hurt and the Admirals will hone in on his weak spot, for this game and all the games after. He shoves the defenseman off himself and skates stiffly back to the bench.

The Raiders lose. Ilya sits quietly through the debrief and is among the first ready to head back to the hotel.

In his room, he sits gingerly down on the sofa, takes out his phone and calls Shane on FaceTime. He needs to see his face for this, and he doesn't expect the call to last long anyway. The call connects and the video reveals Shane already in bed, leaning against a headboard, wearing his reading glasses.

“Hey,” Shane says and makes no move to take off his glasses, which Ilya appreciates, “*sorry about the game.*”

“Thank you.”

“*Are you... bummed out?*”

Ilya's first reaction would be to scoff and ask ‘What do you think?’ but he doesn't. Right now, he is so thankful that Shane is even asking, and wanting to talk to him about it. It's a luxury Ilya had never known before. Besides, with the way the his ribs are currently throbbing, Ilya doesn't think he could even scoff right now without wincing.

“Yes, I think so,” he says instead. “Very bummed out.”

“I’m sorry.”

Ilya takes a moment to just look at Shane's freckled face. It's the first time he has seen him since the day at the hospital. The day when all this started. Somehow, he looks different in Ilya's eyes. Softer and prettier. Ilya would love nothing more than to climb through the screen and into Shane's bed, the one he can see in the video, lay his body over his without feeling any pain, close his eyes and let Shane's fingers combing through his hair lull him into a 24-hour sleep.

“I said wrong earlier,” Ilya says. “It isn't a false memory.”

Shane doesn't say anything but he doesn't look exactly surprised either.

“She was your girlfriend,” Ilya continues. “It's true.”

“Had we like... broken up?”

Ilya shakes his head no. Shane waits for him to go on but he doesn't.

“It's 'cause we were never actually boyfriends.”

It's not really a question, but Ilya still answers. “No, more like fuck buddies.”

Shane nods his head at that, like it all makes sense now. His gaze is not meeting Ilya's.

“Well,” Shane tells his bed sheet after a moment. *“I think that means I've recovered most if not all of my memories now.”*

“Good. That's good.” Ilya's voice sounds weird to his ears.

Shane waits for a moment longer—for what, Ilya isn't sure.

“Okay. Well, good luck with the rest of the playoffs,” he finally says. *“See you next season.”*

Shane ends the call just as Ilya is mumbling his “bye”. He sits on the sofa for a long time, breathing shallowly and wishing he had the energy to get up and go find some pain medication.

The next morning his coach reams him out in front of the team when he realizes Ilya had hidden an injury and failed to have it checked out by the team doctor after yesterday's game. Ilya takes it without complaint. It *had* been stupid of him, and now he has to miss the day's practice. He can see the worried glances his teammates keep shooting him as he watches them do drills on the ice. The coach's foul mood does nothing to boost morale.

They lose their second New York game as well and then the Admirals humiliate them back in Boston in front of the home crowd. With their backs against the wall, Boston rallies and

manages to steal a narrow win in the sixth game but in the end it's not enough and the Raiders are eliminated while the Admirals move on to the second round.

After the final game Ilya finally lets some of his ache show. He had wanted to keep a tight upper lip in front of the team as not to demoralize them further but now that the season is over and most of the players have already left, Ilya allows himself to take it a little bit slower in the locker room and the shower.

Towel tied around his waist, he limps his way back to his stall. He thought he'd be alone in the room and is surprised to see Cliff still sitting there all clothed up. He looks like he's waiting for him.

"Marlow." Ilya nods at him on his way back to the bench.

"How are you doing, Roz?"

Ilya leans back with a sigh. "Pissed off, sore. I'll live."

He glances at the man. "You?"

Cliff shrugs. "Well. You know."

Ilya hums. He does know.

"I guess the silver-lining for you is that you're now free to fuck off to Montreal and get some of that tender loving care from your girl."

Ilya doesn't say anything, doesn't even look at him. This was not the kind of conversation he usually has with Cliff, not with anyone on the team.

After a moment's silence, Cliff goes on.

"There's really nothing like getting nursed back to health by a... um, loved-one—"

Ilya decides to put them both out of their misery.

"No," he interrupts, shaking his head. "No. I um... I fucked up. There's no girl in Montreal." Ilya bites his lip, and then finally adds, "Not anymore."

"Oh, man." To his credit, Cliff sounds genuinely bummed out for him. "What did you *do*?"

Lots. He did lots, for years and years. But Ilya is not about to get into the details so he just shrugs.

"Well, did you at least try some groveling?" Ilya isn't sure what that word means and it must show on his face. "You know, like apologize. Beg for forgiveness."

No, he didn't. He hadn't even said sorry to Shane.

Ilya leans forward with a deep sigh and rests his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. This is the kind of vulnerability Ilya does not want to display in front of his teammates but he's just so tired. Tired to his bones. Truthfully, he doesn't want to be having this conversation with Cliff but somehow Ilya feels like he owes the man at least something, some payoff for making the effort.

"I was selfish," he finally mutters to the floor.

"Somehow I find that hard to believe."

Cliff's reply is so quick and matter-of-fact that Ilya has to sit back up straight just to look at his face. The man looks completely serious.

"You're like the least selfish man I know."

Ilya is starting to feel like Cliff is maybe pulling some kind of prank on him. Post-loss hazing of the captain? Is that something that happens?

"Why are you looking at me like that, man?" Cliff says with a wary chuckle. "It's true. The team, the fans, your... you know, family. You're always putting everybody else first and yourself last."

How on earth could Cliff know about his family? He's barely mentioned them a few times in passing over the years.

"And you're always so generous. With your time, with your money. Even on ice, you're generous with the puck."

Cliff chuckles again like all of this should be obvious to Ilya too.

"That's why everyone loves you, Captain."

Ilya has to look away, a pressure behind his eyes intensifying.

"Look, I don't know what happened with your girl but for God's sake, at least try groveling first, okay?"

Ilya still can't look at him so he just nods his head to show Cliff that he's listening.

"You had a good thing going," the man continues. "You're gonna have to at least try to hold on to it."

Ilya nods some more and clears his throat before speaking.

"Yes, you are right." He glances at Cliff and nods some more. "Thank you."

With that, Cliff slaps his knees and gets up with a groan. "I better get going."

He heaves his bag on his shoulder. At the door he turns back to give Ilya a small salute. Ilya nods back with a smile.

Back in his own home, Ilya sits on the sofa with his phone in his hand. He has to try. Despite knowing for a fact that Shane is better off without him, he has to try. Cliff was wrong. When it comes to Shane, Ilya is always going to be selfish.

He presses call on the FaceTime app and waits. Waits and waits. Just as he's starting to lose hope, the call connects and Shane's face appears on his screen. Ilya had already decided that the first thing he would do, if Shane even answered, would be to apologize—at last. But coming face to face with the man after what feels like the longest weeks of Ilya's life, he finds himself at a loss.

Shane allows the silence to go on for a moment before removing his glasses and clearing his throat.

“Sorry about the playoffs,” he says, always the polite Canadian boy. *“Are your ribs okay?”*

“I’m sorry, Shane.”

Shane looks confused. *“Okay,”* he says after a moment. *“For the playoffs, or...”*

“No,” Ilya breathes out. “For lying. After your concussion.”

“Oh.”

A silence stretches out. Ilya doesn't know why this is so hard for him to do.

“I guess I just don't really understand why you did it.”

That's a fair question, one that Ilya had asked himself over and over. He watches Shane continue avoiding his gaze as the silence lingers. Ilya can see from the way Shane has his lips pressed into a small, determined pout that he's not going to break the silence for him this time. Good for him, he thinks. Ilya is just so fond.

“I didn't want to lose you.”

Shane glances over, mulling over his explanation. It's not really much to go on, Ilya can agree. Shane deserves the rest of it too.

“I was worried if I said we were just— That we just have sex sometimes, you wouldn't want to know me.”

Ilya had gone into that hospital room with every intention of breaking up with Shane once and for all. But he knows now that even then he had believed that no matter how he said it, they would not be able to keep apart for long. That no matter what, they would still find a way back to each other eventually.

Then, coming face to face with a Shane without his memories, and with the possibility of a break-up becoming final, Ilya had panicked. He was selfish when it came to Shane.

“I don't know why you would think that when you know how much I like you.”

“What?” Ilya breathes out.

“I told you in Tampa,” Shane says frowning. *“Did you... forget?”*

No, Ilya remembers everything. He remembers Tampa and he remembers Shane's words. He also remembers not believing him.

“No, I didn't forget,” he says. “But it was a long time ago.”

“Not that long,” Shane replies reasonably. *“Anyway, it's still the same for me.”*

Ilya is struggling to keep his breathing steady and eyes dry, so he can't answer Shane right away. He doesn't even know what to say.

“Thing is that even though I now have all my memories back, it's not like my memories from the weeks after the accident have suddenly disappeared. So I also have all these memories from when I still thought you were my boyfriend. I know now it wasn't real but it feels— it felt real to me.”

“It felt real to me too,” Ilya manages to croak despite the lump in his throat. He knows he needs to say more but he can't. He just can't. So, after a moment's silence Shane moves on.

“You know, I had this whole thing planned for the night I had my concussion,” Shane says conversationally, and Ilya knows he's missed his opportunity to explain himself. To tell Shane how much he likes him back.

“That's the thing that pisses me off the most about it, to tell you the truth.”

“Marlow was really sorry about it,” Ilya quickly says. “He did not mean to hurt you.”

Shane waves his words away with a small smile.

“I had the whole thing planned,” he goes on. *“I was going to ask you if you'd like to come to my cottage this summer.”*

Ilya is stunned silent. Is Shane asking him now or just telling what he was going to do, before all this happened?

“It's super private. No one would know, I promise.”

He wants to go. More than anything.

“Come to my cottage, Ilya.”

“Okay.”

Ilya watches as the day breaks slowly all around them. Through the glass walls Ilya watches how the sun slowly climbs over the horizon and the first signs of life in the forest make themselves known.

Ilya has been lying awake already a good while now, unable to fall back asleep even though he's still tired. He's stressed out, he knows he is. He's not sorry for coming to Shane's cottage but he knows there will be hell to pay. First losing in the playoffs and then not coming back home for the summer, he knows the Russian press will not forgive and forget this any time soon.

He also knows he's not not on the best footing with Boston right now. His dumbassery in the playoffs probably cost the team their chance of advancing to the second round, and everyone in the Raiders' organization knows it.

His contract with the Raiders is up for renewal and Ilya can't help worry they won't offer him a new one. Rationally speaking, he knows it's unlikely but he worries Boston will drop him, and then none of the other teams will want him either, and he'll have to go back to Russia. He can't go back. He just can't.

Incoherent mumbling coming from under his arm alerts Ilya to how worked up he's allowed himself to become just by mulling his situation over. Slowly, consciously he lets out long, steady breath and forces his muscles to relax again, his heart rate to slow.

Shane settles down again without waking up, his head resting on Ilya's chest, their legs tangled together. Ilya watches his relaxed features and mushed up face, and smiles contently.

And there lies another complication. Their time together at the cottage has been a marvel, and the happiest time of Ilya's life. On the first day Shane had demanded that while there they'd be honest with each other, no matter what, and for the most part Ilya had acquiesced. But, he still hadn't told Shane he loved him, and he wasn't sure if he even should.

As wonderful as their time at the cottage has been, it isn't a solution for anything. Soon they'd have to separate again for the coming season, and Ilya is sure that after this summer, that separation will be even more painful for them both. No need to complicate things more than necessary.

Ilya runs the tips of his fingers lightly over Shane's freckles, careful not to wake him up. With a sigh he lowers his hand and turns to look at the sunrise again. It really does look remarkable over the water. Maybe they should set an alarm for one of these mornings and go watch it down by the shore together. He would like to share a sunrise with Shane.

But not tomorrow. Tonight they will watch the Cup final on TV, and it might go on until late. According to Shane his mother is certain the Admirals will take it this year and privately Ilya thinks the same. He scoffs into the silence. Before the night is over, goddamn Scott Hunter will probably be hefting the trophy up in the air, even if he is 100.000 years old.

End Notes

Thank you for reading ^^

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