craving something sweeter

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craving something sweeter

by fallingflxwer

Summary

Ilya sat on the edge of his bed in the hotel room, phone in hand, scrolling through search results. The game against Boston had ended hours ago, a solid win, but his mind refused to settle. Shane had texted him earlier, something casual about practice schedules, but it stirred up the thoughts that had been building for weeks.

Shane lived for hockey.

Every drill, every shift, he analyzed it like a puzzle to solve. Off the ice, he carried that same intensity, always planning, always pushing. The only times Ilya saw him truly let go were at the cottage, fishing or just staring at the lake, or right after they collapsed together, bodies spent.

Those moments revealed a different Shane, one who didn't need to control every detail.

Ilya wanted more of that for him.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

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Not just fleeting escapes, but something deeper, a way for Shane to release the constant drive. He had his own ideas about what that could look like, drawn from late-night reads and discreet conversations in his past. *Submission,* the kind that came with trust and boundaries, not force, but explaining it outright felt risky. Shane might misunderstand, see it as a game or a kink without grasping the relief it could bring.

He pictured Shane at the cottage again, rod in hand, staring at the water with that rare blank expression that meant his mind had finally gone quiet. Giving him more of those moments felt like the least Ilya could do for the man who carried so much on his shoulders every day.

He paused on a forum link, then another article from a psychology site. Words like "power exchange" and "aftercare" jumped out. Not the dramatic stuff from movies, but practical advice on communication, on how it helped people unwind from high-stress lives. Athletes, executives, anyone wired too tight. Ilya bookmarked a few, then found a podcast transcript that broke it down simply, without jargon.

This could work.

Instead of stumbling through a conversation where words might fail, he could send these. Let Shane read them at his own pace to absorb the concepts. It felt clever, a way to bridge the gap without pressure. He imagined Shane's reaction: curiosity first, maybe skepticism, but eventually understanding. That's what he *hoped* for, anyway.

He opened their message thread and started attaching links. The first one, an intro to BDSM basics from a reputable site. Then a personal essay from someone in a similar dynamic, anonymized but relatable. A third, lighter one, with tips on starting small. No overload, just enough to spark thought.

"Hey," he typed. "Been thinking about you and how you never switch off. These might explain what I mean better than I can. No rush, just read when you want."

He hit send before doubt could creep in. The phone buzzed almost immediately with Shane's reply: "Okay, I'll check them out."

Ilya smiled, leaning back against the pillows.

The next morning, over coffee in the team lounge, his phone lit up again. Shane had sent a thoughtful response, quoting a line from one article. "This part about letting go... Yeah, I get that."

No questions yet, but an opening.

Ilya replied with a simple emoji, keeping it light. He didn't push because he knew Shane would come around in his own time.

The locker room buzzed with the aftermath of victory, but Shane had slipped away early, texting Ilya to meet him at the usual spot. A nondescript hotel two blocks from the arena, the kind where no one asked questions. Montreal had beaten Ottawa in a tight game, three to two, with Shane scoring the game-winner in overtime.

He was the one to arrive first, pacing the room until the door clicked open.

Ilya stepped inside later, shedding his coat and tossing it over a chair. The Centaurs had lost their game earlier that day, but seeing Shane erased any lingering frustration. They had been doing this for months now, stolen moments between schedules, careful to keep it hidden from the world. Dating in secret suited them, or at least it had until lately. Ilya carried the weight of those unread links in his mind, the ones he had sent weeks ago. Shane had mentioned them once or twice, but never delved deep. Tonight, with the quiet of the room enveloping them, Ilya figured it was time to push the conversation.

Shane closed the distance in a few strides, hands finding Ilya's waist. He pulled him in for a kiss, lips urgent and tasting of mint gum from the post-game chew. Victory made Shane bold, his body pressing close, fingers tugging at Ilya's shirt. "Missed you," he said between kisses, backing Ilya toward the bed.

For a moment, Ilya kissed him back just as fiercely, hands sliding up Shane’s spine, but when Shane’s mouth drifted to his neck, teeth grazing skin in hungry nips, he pulled back just enough to breathe.

“Wait. We should talk.”

Shane paused, looking up with a grin that lit his face. "Talk? *Now?"* He kissed him again, deeper this time, hands working the buttons of Ilya's shirt open.

A laugh slipped out of Ilya, helpless, but his thoughts refused to settle. The articles he had sent kept looping in his mind, words about trust and letting go, about wanting something different and naming it out loud. He needed to know if Shane had really thought about it, if any of it had landed.

“Seriously,” he said, trying again. “Those links I sent. You read them, right?”

Shane nodded, but his focus stayed on his chest, lips brushing over exposed skin. "Yeah, I did. Interesting stuff." He dropped to his knees, hands moving to Ilya's belt, unbuckling it. The floor was carpeted, soft under his knees, but Shane didn't seem to notice. He looked up, eyes wide and pleading, like a silent request that needed no words.

He meant to say more, to ask if Shane understood what it meant, but those eyes stopped him. Shane's gaze held a mix of eagerness and vulnerability, begging without a sound. It pulled at Ilya, making resistance feel pointless. He reached down, threading fingers through Shane's hair instead of speaking.

The other man took that as permission, sliding Ilya's pants down just enough. He leaned in, mouth hovering close, then he took Ilya in, lips wrapping around the tip, tongue swirling in a slow circle. The sensation hit Ilya hard, drawing a groan from his throat.

Shane worked with focus, the same intensity he brought to the ice. He bobbed his head, taking more each time, hollowing his cheeks to create suction. His tongue pressed flat against the underside, tracing veins as he moved. One hand stroked the base, syncing with his mouth, while the other dug into Ilya's hip, holding him in place.

Ilya watched, transfixed by the sight. Shane on his knees, eyes flicking up now and then, still carrying that pleading look even as he took control of the moment.

Spit slicked the way, making sounds that filled the room. Shane hummed around him, then he pulled back for a breath, lips shiny, before diving in again, even deeper this time. His free hand wandered, cupping Ilya's balls, rolling them gently, and the combination made Ilya's legs tense.

Shane sensed it, picking up speed. His mouth moved faster, tongue flicking over the head on each upstroke. He looked up again, eyes locking with Ilya's, that doe-like expression intensified by the act. It was as if he *craved* this, needed to please him.

He thrust forward slightly, testing, and Shane took it, relaxing his throat. The heat enveloped him fully, and saliva dripped down, but Shane didn't stop, wiping it away with his thumb before continuing.

Ilya's control slipped. He groaned louder, hips moving on their own, and Shane encouraged it, hands urging him deeper.

Finally, Ilya came with a shudder, spilling into his mouth. Shane swallowed, pulling back only when Ilya softened. He licked his lips, standing up with a satisfied smile. "Better than talking?" He asked, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Ilya pulled him close, kissing him hard, tasting himself on his tongue, but as they collapsed onto the bed, tangled together, he couldn't shake the thought entirely.

Shane traced patterns on his skin, lazy circles that spoke of contentment. "That game was insane," he said after a while. "Overtime goal. It felt like flying."

Ilya nodded, arm around his shoulders. "Saw the highlights. You were good."

"Good? I was unstoppable." He shifted, propping himself up on an elbow to look at Ilya. "You okay? You seemed distracted earlier."

Ilya considered bringing it up again, but the words stuck. Instead, he pulled Shane back down, kissing his forehead. "Just thinking. Nothing important right now."

They spent the next hour like that, talking about the game, the season, little things that filled the gaps. Shane recounted plays in detail, hands gesturing as if recreating them. Ilya listened, adding his own commentary, the rivalry between their teams adding spice to the discussion.

Eventually, Shane's energy waned, replaced by a comfortable drowsiness. He nestled closer, leg thrown over Ilya's. "We should do this more often," he murmured, eyes closing.

Ilya agreed, but his mind wandered back to those links. Maybe tomorrow, or the next time they met. For now, he held Shane, letting the night wind down.

The following weeks blurred into a rhythm of games and travel. Montreal played strong, Shane racking up points, while Boston held steady in the standings. They texted constantly, snippets of life on the road, inside jokes that only they understood.

Their next meeting came after a game in Toronto. Boston versus the Leafs, a loss for Ilya's team, but he didn't care much. Shane had flown in secretly, waiting in another hotel. The door barely closed before Shane was on him again, kisses hungry after days apart.

This time, Ilya didn't try to talk. He let Shane lead, hands exploring, bodies pressing together. They stripped quickly, clothes scattered on the floor. Shane pushed Ilya onto the bed, climbing over him, mouth trailing down his body.

When Shane knelt between Ilya's legs, that look returned. Eyes wide, pleading silently. Ilya nodded, and the other man dove in, lips parting to take him.

The familiarity of it all should have pulled him under, the way it always did. Shane knew every spot that made him curse under his breath, every rhythm that dragged pleasure out. Lips slid down, tongue pressing flat along the underside, hand twisting at the base in that perfect grip. He took his time, humming low when precome hit his tongue.

But tonight the heat refused to spread through Ilya's limbs the way it usually did. His body responded, hips shifting on instinct, yet his thoughts stayed elsewhere, circling those articles again, the idea of giving Shane a different kind of release. The one that came from stillness instead of chase. He stared at the ceiling, fingers loose in Shane's hair instead of guiding.

Shane felt the difference first in the lack of pull on his scalp, then in the way Ilya's thighs stayed relaxed instead of tensing. He drew back, lips shiny, forehead creased with the start of worry. Before the question could form, Ilya cupped his jaw.

"Can we try something?"

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, sitting up on his heels. "Yeah. Anything."

Ilya shifted higher against the headboard, patting the space between his legs. "Come here. Kneel like before, but this time just hold me in your mouth. No moving unless I say. Think you can do that?"

A flicker of understanding crossed Shane's face, curiosity chasing right behind it. He nodded once, and lowered himself back into position without a word, knees settling wider on the carpet for balance. Lips parted, wrapping around Ilya again, sliding down until his nose pressed flush against skin. Then he held perfectly still, hands coming to rest palm-down on Ilya's thighs, eyes lifting in that waiting question that always undid Ilya a little more.

"Good," Ilya said, thumb sweeping across his cheek in a slow arc. "Stay exactly like that. Don't move unless I tell you."

He let his head fall back against the wall, eyes half-closing as sensation settled deep. Fingers threaded through dark hair, combing in idle passes, nails scraping lightly at the scalp just to feel Shane's body react with the tiniest shiver.

Minutes stretched long and quiet. The lack of motion turned every small thing sharp: the faint flutter of Shane's throat when he swallowed around the intrusion, the warmth of exhaled breath ghosting over skin, the subtle flex of fingers on thighs when the urge to grip grew strong.

Shane shifted once, barely a fraction, jaw adjusting to ease the ache. The movement earned a low corrective hum from Ilya, fingers tightening briefly in his hair. Shane froze again instantly, body going pliant once more, submission clear in the way his shoulders dropped another inch.

“Kakoy khoroshiy mal’chik,” Ilya said in Russian, the words slipping out soft. *"Moy khoroshiy."*

Shane's eyes closed at the praise, a shiver running through him that tightened his mouth just enough to draw a hiss from Ilya. He didn't move otherwise, he just held position, letting the fullness sit heavy on his tongue.

Time lost meaning.

Ilya grew harder inside the unmoving heat, the lack of friction turning every small twitch into torture and reward at once. He traced Shane's stretched lips with a fingertip, feeling where they sealed around him.

"Look at you," Ilya continued in Russian, voice rougher now. "Holding me so well. You like this, don't you, solnyshko?"

A muffled sound vibrated around him, then Shane's eyes opened, glassy with the strain, but shining with something calmer than usual frenzy. The constant drive that lived in his shoulders during games had drained away, replaced by this quiet surrender.

Ilya let it build longer than he thought possible, savoring the control, the trust. When the ache finally bordered on too much, he tugged lightly on black hair. "Move now. Slow."

Shane obeyed instantly, pulling back inch by inch before sliding forward again. The pace stayed languid, almost lazy. Saliva gathered, dripping down to coat Ilya's balls, but Shane never hurried. He kept eyes locked upward, watching for each small permission.

The climax crept up gradually, coaxed rather than chased. Ilya spilled with a low groan, pulsing against Shane's tongue, and the other man swallowed around him, careful not to rush, milking every drop before easing off gently.

He crawled up the bed afterward, collapsing half across Ilya's chest, who wrapped arms around him, pressing a kiss to damp hair.

"Better than the usual?" Shane asked eventually, words slightly hoarse.

Ilya huffed a laugh. "Different. Good different. You?"

Shane nuzzled closer, leg hooking over his again. "Yeah. My head's... Quiet. Like after a long swim in the lake."

They stayed tangled like that, hotel sheets twisted around their waists. Conversation drifted to nothing important, schedules and stupid teammate stories, until Shane's breathing evened out into sleep.

Ilya watched him for a while, the crease between Shane’s brows smoothing as sleep claimed him, the steady weight of his leg anchoring him there. When he finally closed his eyes, his breathing fell into step with Shane’s on its own, the quiet resting over him like a reward.

The phone rang late into the night, vibrating insistently on the nightstand in that quiet Montreal hotel room where Ilya had been half-dozing after his own team's grueling practice session earlier that day.

He picked up on the second ring without even glancing at the screen, already sensing it would be Shane on the other end, the familiar rhythm of their late-night calls pulling him fully awake in an instant. Shane's name lit up the display anyway, and as soon as the call connected, the low rumble of a team bus engine hummed in the background for a brief moment before Shane must have stepped off or found a quieter spot, the noise fading into crisp silence that amplified every word he spoke next.

"We got fucking destroyed out there tonight," Shane blurted immediately, his words edged with the kind of raw frustration that lingered after a bad loss, carrying the weight of defeat in every syllable. "Four to one, can you believe it? And Yvon caught a brutal knee right to the head during that third-period scrum, so now he's sidelined in concussion protocol for who knows how long. On top of that, half the damn locker room is hacking and sneezing from this flu that's tearing through everyone, which means practice is scrapped for tomorrow morning, and honestly, everything just feels like complete shit right now."

Ilya stretched out across the wide hotel bed, his muscles unwinding from the day's exertions as he switched the call to speaker mode, setting the phone down on the pillow beside him so he could listen hands-free while picturing Shane's tense posture on the other end. "Sounds

like your head's spinning too fast, like you need a break from all that thinking and replaying the game over and over until it drives you crazy."

A huff escaped through the line, the sound of Shane exhaling his irritation in one forceful breath. "Yeah, exactly, I even tried jerking off earlier to shake it off, but it didn't do a damn thing except leave me more wound up and pissed off than before."

"Go to your room right now, lock the door behind you, and get undressed completely before you even think about touching that phone again," Ilya said, the command leaving no space for argument.

Footsteps echoed faintly over the speaker, hurried down what must have been an empty hotel corridor, followed by the click of a keycard and the metallic scrape of the deadbolt sliding home.

"In my room now, door locked, everything off," Shane reported.

"Take your clothes off anyway, every last piece, and get yourself settled on the bed right now," Ilya instructed, his mind already shifting into that commanding space where he could guide Shane out of his frustration, imagining the scene unfolding in some dim away-game hotel room hundreds of miles away.

Rustling fabrics crackled over the speaker, the unmistakable whisper of clothing being shed in haste, followed by the soft creak of bedsprings as Shane complied, his zipper dragging down with a metallic rasp that painted a vivid picture for Ilya of pants being kicked aside onto the floor. Shane's breathing grew heavier, more audible through the receiver. "Done, all of it off."

"Good boy, now spread those legs wide for me, I want you completely open and exposed like you're waiting just for my eyes," Ilya said, pausing to let the command sink in until he heard the mattress shift again, the subtle groan of the frame under Shane's weight as he positioned himself, knees parting with a faint rustle against the sheets.

"Now wrap your hand around your cock, but keep the grip loose, just holding it there without any pressure yet," he continued, visualizing Shane's fingers encircling himself, the way his palm would brush against sensitive skin in that initial contact.

Shane let out a shaky exhale, the sound trembling through the phone like a wave, betraying how quickly his body responded. "I'm already hard, rock solid just from hearing you say that."

"Of course you are, because you get so fucking hard every single time I start telling you exactly what to do with that pretty cock of yours," Ilya replied, letting the filthy praise hang in the air for a beat, knowing it would make Shane's cheeks flush even if he couldn't see it, the mental image of that pink tint spreading across pale skin fueling his own arousal.

"Start stroking now, from the base all the way up to the tip, and do it exactly ten times while you count each one out loud for me so I can hear every number," Ilya ordered, settling back against his pillows as the first counts began.

"One," Shane said, his voice coming out rough, like sandpaper over wood. "Two... Three..."

By the seventh stroke, the numbers started to falter, turning breathy as Shane's control slipped, the wet slide of skin on skin faintly audible over the line, letting Ilya picture the gleam of precome starting to slick the way.

Ilya cut in just before the tenth, his interruption firm to halt the momentum. "Stop right there, hands off completely, no cheating with a little squeeze."

A frustrated groan poured through the speaker, filling his ears with Shane's mounting desperation. "Ilya..."

"Hands off now, Shane, or I'll end this call and leave you hanging with that aching cock and no release at all," he warned, imagining Shane's fingers reluctantly peeling away, hovering in the air as he fought the urge to disobey.

Silence stretched for a moment, broken only by the faint click of nails against skin as fingers finally unclenched and withdrew. "Okay, they're off, nothing touching."

"Thumb the head now, press right into it and smear all that precome around until it's glistening and slick everywhere," Ilya directed, the wet, squelching sounds carrying clearly over the phone, allowing him to envision the glossy tip under Shane's thumb, circling and spreading the fluid in lazy patterns that would make the skin hypersensitive.

"Tell me exactly how it feels, every detail," Ilya added, leaning closer to the speaker to catch every nuance.

"Slippery as hell, and so sensitive it's almost too much, like every nerve is firing at once," Shane replied, his words laced with a hiss of discomfort mixed with pleasure.

"Pinch the tip now, hard enough to make it sting," Ilya commanded, hearing the intake of breath followed by Shane's hissed *"Jesus"* that confirmed the pinch had landed just right, the mental picture of pinched flesh reddening under the pressure vivid in his mind.

"Now stroke again, but make it twenty this time, keeping that same torturously slow pace from base to head," Ilya said, listening as the counting resumed, numbers punched out between increasingly ragged gasps that painted a scene of Shane's hips twitching involuntarily.

At fifteen, the rhythm broke, the bed creaking as hips must have bucked upward, chasing more friction. Ilya interrupted once more to reel him back. "Stop immediately, and squeeze hard at the base until that building urge fades completely away."

"Fuck, you're absolutely killing me with this," Shane complained, but the compliance came through in the strained silence that followed, Ilya picturing the tight grip at the root, veins pulsing under knuckles as the edge receded.

"You'll survive it, now spread those knees even wider apart, expose everything, and play with your balls, rolling them in your palm, tugging just enough to feel the pull," Ilya instructed,

the sounds of skin shifting and soft grunts filtering through, letting him imagine Shane's hand cupping and manipulating, thighs quivering from the added tease.

"I need more than this, please, something to push me further."

"You get exactly what I decide to give you, nothing more until I'm ready, so stroke again now, thirty full ones, and if you speed up even a little, we'll reset and start the count from zero," Ilya said, the numbers tumbling out faster this time, laced with urgency that made Ilya envision the frantic up-and-down motion, precome flying in small droplets with each pass.

He let Shane reach twenty-eight before halting it. "Stop, and put your hands behind your head, interlaced so you can't sneak any touches."

A desperate whine broke free, carrying the raw edge of need. "Ilya, come on, this is torture."

"Count to fifty out loud, no shortcuts, and absolutely no touching yourself while you do it," Ilya ordered, hearing the count begin, Shane's voice cracking around thirty as frustration built, curses slipping in under his breath by forty, and by fifty he sounded utterly wrecked, like he'd been pushed to his limit.

"Please," Shane gasped out at the end, the single word hanging heavy.

"Please *what?* Use your words and tell me exactly what you want," Ilya prompted, savoring the vulnerability in the plea.

"Please let me touch my cock again, I can't stand it anymore."

Ilya smiled into the darkness of his room, the power thrumming through him. "Fine, grip it tight this time and pump fifty strokes, make them fast and relentless."

The line erupted with slick noises, the rapid wet slap of hand on flesh as Shane chased the relief at last, moans spilling free in unfiltered bursts that let Ilya picture the blur of motion, cock throbbing and leaking profusely.

He waited until the rhythm stuttered, until Shane's breaths came in those hitched pants that signaled the brink. "Stop right this second, pull your hand away completely."

The stroking cut off with a strangled, anguished sound that echoed through the speaker. "No, fuck, I'm right there on the edge."

"Hands off entirely, I said *stop* and I mean it," Ilya reinforced, the long pause filled with labored breathing that painted Shane's struggle, body trembling with denied release.

"You're pure evil for this," the other man finally managed.

"Thumb your slit now, press right inside it a little, pretend it's my tongue probing and tasting you," he directed, hearing the whimper as Shane complied, the exploration carrying over the line, allowing Ilya to imagine the finger dipping in, circling the opening with pressure.

"I want you here so bad, want your mouth wrapped around me instead," Shane said, his voice thick with longing.

"Keep it going, circle just the head, no touching your cock at all, draw it out," Ilya commanded, the minutes dragging as precome flowed freely, making everything increasingly messy, Shane's words slurring together in a haze of overstimulation.

"I can't take much more of this teasing," Shane admitted, sounding on the verge of breaking.

"Stroke again then, forty full times, and edge yourself twice during it, backing off right before you tip over each time," Ilya said, the pumping sounds starting up wet and urgent, Shane hitting the edge fast and pulling away with a curse that vibrated the speaker, then diving back in for the second build, even closer, his thighs shaking so violently that Ilya could hear the tremor in the bed's faint rattles.

"I can't hold it anymore, Ilya, please," Shane begged, the words tumbling out.

"Beg me properly, make it convincing."

"Please let me come, I need it so fucking bad, I'll do anything you want, just please let me finish this."

Ilya let the plea linger in the air, but then he said, "Start stroking again, and don't you dare stop until I give the word."

Shane dove right back in, his hand flying with renewed frenzy, grunts pouring through the phone in filthy waves that let Ilya envision the frantic pace, cock swollen and slick, balls drawing up tight.

"Close, so damn close."

"Hold it right there on the edge, balance without tipping over, don't you dare come yet."

"I'm trying, fuck, please let me," Shane whimpered.

"Count down from ten now, and when you finally hit one, that's when you come, not a second before," Ilya said.

"Ten," Shane gasped, each number dragged out. "Nine... Eight..."

At three, his voice cracked apart completely, dissolving into pleas. "Please, *please,* Ilya, let me go over."

"Keep counting, no shortcuts," Ilya insisted.

"Two... One..."

"Come now, do it, shoot all over yourself like the desperate little slut you are, cover your chest in it," Ilya commanded, the cry that followed was loud, punching through the speaker as

release hit, the wet splatters of ropes hitting skin audible even over the line, Shane milking himself through every pulse.

He listened intently until the last shuddering wave faded away, until Shane collapsed back into spent breathing that signaled the tension finally breaking.

"Feel better after all that?"

A weak, satisfied laugh filtered through. "Yeah, a hell of a lot better now."

“Use your fingers. All of it. Then clean them for me,” Ilya said, and the other man obeyed without hesitation.

“God,” Shane murmured around his fingers.

“Now sleep. No practice tomorrow, remember.” Ilya replied calmly.

“Stay with me?”

“I’m not hanging up,” Ilya said.

The breaths on the other end slowed until they settled into sleep. Ilya stayed there, phone warm in his hand, thumb moving in absent circles as he pictured Shane sprawled loose and boneless, tension finally burned down to nothing.

The end-of-year break arrived like a long exhale after months of nonstop games and travel. Schedules cleared, flights booked separately to avoid questions, and they met at the cottage in Quebec, the place that had become their real home away from everything.

Snow covered the lake in a thick blanket, turning the world outside the windows into something distant. They unpacked groceries together, arguing playfully over where the good coffee beans belonged, then spent the first afternoon chopping wood just to have an excuse to move after too many hours sitting on planes. Shane stacked the logs, lining them up like equipment in the locker room, while Ilya hauled armfuls inside and dumped them by the fireplace.

Evenings settled into a rhythm they never needed to discuss. One cooked while the other built the fire, trading places each night. They ate on the couch more often than at the table, plates balanced on knees, trading bites of whatever was on the stove. Shane discovered he liked Ilya's borscht more than he expected, and Ilya admitted Shane's grilled cheese with tomato soup hit the spot on cold days. Conversation drifted from hockey gossip to stupid childhood stories, the kind they rarely shared with anyone else.

One morning they woke to fresh powder and decided to skate on the lake. Ilya dug out old sticks and a puck from the shed, lacing up skates that had seen better decades. Shane glided out first, testing the ice with careful crossovers, then called back that it held solid. They played a lazy game of one-on-one, no score kept, just chasing the puck and each other until lungs burned and cheeks stung from the wind. When Shane hip-checked Ilya into a snowbank

on purpose, laughter echoed across the frozen water, loud enough to scatter a flock of crows from the distant trees.

They built snowmen after, ridiculous ones with branch arms and stolen scarves. Shane insisted on giving his a Montreal cap, while Ilya topped the other with a Boston toque just to start another mock argument. Photos stayed off phones; these moments belonged only to them.

A few days before Christmas, Shane suggested a detour south to his parents' place in Ottawa. They were moving to Florida full-time, the house sold, and needed help with final packing before their flight. Ilya agreed without hesitation, loading the truck with empty boxes and tape.

The drive took most of a day, highways clear with holiday traffic heading the other way. They stopped once for coffee and bad gas-station sandwiches, sharing fries from the same bag while music played low. Shane drummed fingers on the wheel in time with whatever old rock station came in clear.

His parents welcomed them at the door, and hugs happened all around, his mom pressing kisses to both their cheeks.

They worked side by side for hours, wrapping dishes in newspaper, labeling boxes for the movers. Shane's mom directed traffic efficiently, saving special ornaments for last so the guys could handle the heavy lifting. Ilya carried dressers down narrow stairs while Shane steadied from below, the two of them moving like they had done this together for years.

Lunch broke the pace, simple soup and sandwiches at the kitchen table that would soon belong to someone else. Stories flowed easily, his dad asking Ilya about growing up in Russia, his mom teasing Shane about the time he tried to dye his hair blond and ended up orange. Ilya watched Shane relax in a way he rarely did around others, shoulders loose, smiles coming quick.

Later, while sealing the final boxes in the garage, Shane's dad pulled Ilya aside for a quiet word. Thanks came for helping, but more for making his son look happier than he had in years. Ilya nodded, and promised to take care of him. The older man clapped him on the back, eyes a little shiny, then went back to taping like nothing had happened.

At the airport the next morning, goodbyes dragged out in the departures lane. His mom hugged Ilya twice, telling him he better visit them in Florida soon. His dad shook Shane's hand first, then pulled him into a proper embrace that lasted longer than usual. They stood waving until the automatic doors closed, then climbed back into the truck for the return trip north.

The cottage felt even more like theirs when they arrived, snow starting to fall in fat flakes outside the windows. They unpacked the few things brought back, mostly leftovers his mom had pressed on them, then collapsed onto the couch with cups of tea. Shane leaned against Ilya's side, head on his shoulder.

"Thanks for coming with me," he said after a while, fingers laced through Ilya's.

"Wouldn't miss it. Your parents are good people."

"Yeah. They like you."

Ilya pressed a kiss to his hair. "Feeling's mutual."

The rest of the break unfolded gently. They read books in front of the fire, trading when one finished something the other wanted. Shane had moved past the picture books and simple stories now, tackling young adult novels in Russian because the vocabulary stretched him just enough without drowning him. The latest choice sat in his lap, a dog-eared copy of the first Twilight book translated into Cyrillic, the one he had grabbed from a Moscow airport shop on a whim during a road trip last season.

Ilya glanced over from his own thriller, eyebrow raised at the familiar sparkly cover hidden under plain text. "You picked that one on purpose."

Shane shrugged, cheeks pink already. "It's popular. Figured the drama would keep me turning pages even if I miss half the words."

"Read out loud. I want to hear you butcher Bella's inner monologue."

Shane groaned, burying his face in the open page for a second. "You'll laugh the whole time."

"Probably. Do it anyway."

He sighed, but flipped back to the start of the chapter and began, voice careful with each syllable. The Russian rolled off his tongue accented, tripping over longer words, pausing to sound out unfamiliar phrases. He mangled the pronunciation of Edward's name every time, turning the brooding vampire into something closer to a cartoon villain, and stumbled hard through the meadow scene where everything got flowery and overwrought.

Ilya watched more than listened at first, the book forgotten in his own hands. Shane sat cross-legged on the rug, blanket draped over his shoulders, brow furrowed in concentration as he worked through the sentences. The fire cast shifting shadows across his face, picking out the way his lips shaped each foreign sound. Hearing his mother tongue wrapped around that ridiculous story, delivered in Shane's careful cadence, hit Ilya square in the chest.

He set his thriller aside, leaned forward, and plucked the Twilight book gently from Shane's fingers.

“Translate these for me,” Ilya said, voice lower than intended. He traced a thumb over Shane's knuckles before speaking again. *“Moy milyy.”*

Shane's mouth curved. “My sweet one.”

“Solnyshko moyo.”

“My sunshine.”

“Rodnoy.”

Shane paused, working it out. “My dear. Or the one who feels like home.”

Ilya nodded, shifting closer until their knees touched. *“Kotyonok.”*

“Kitten.”

“Lyubimyy.”

That one came easier now, practice from late-night calls. “Beloved.”

Ilya cupped his jaw, thumb brushing the corner of his mouth. The next words spilled out without planning. *“Ya ne mogu dozhdat'sya togo dnya, kogda smogu zhenit'sya na tebe.”*

Shane caught most of it, eyes widening as the key pieces clicked. *Marry. Someday.* He stared, book sliding forgotten to the rug, face open in a way that made Ilya's ribs ache.

"You... What?"

Ilya repeated it slower, letting each syllable land. Shane still missed a few connectors, but the meaning sank in clear enough. His hand came up to cover Ilya's on his cheek, fingers pressing there.

"You mean that?"

"Every word."

Shane leaned in until their foreheads touched, breath mingling in the small space between them. He didn't say anything for a long moment, just held the gaze, thumb stroking Ilya's wrist in small circles.

When he finally spoke, he whispered, "I'm gonna hold you to it, Rozanov."

Ilya kissed him then thoroughly, the forgotten vampire drama lying abandoned on the floor. The fire crackled on, pages fluttering in a stray draft, but neither moved to pick the book up again that night.

Water dripped from their hair in trails down bare backs as they stepped out of the shower stall. Towels hung low on hips, knotted loosely, and the bathroom mirror stayed fogged over, hiding any clear view of flushed faces or water-slicked skin.

Ilya led the way toward the bedroom door, feet padding quiet on the cool floor, but Shane reached out before they crossed into the hall, fingers wrapping around Ilya's hand with a firm hold that stopped him mid-step. "Do you wanna try?"

“Try what?"

Color bloomed high on Shane's cheeks, spreading like spilled ink down his throat, but he didn't drop the gaze, standing there with water still beading on his shoulders. "Dominate me."

He tugged Shane closer, free hand settling on the curve of his waist, thumb tracing the edge of the towel. "You mean it? Right now?"

Shane nodded, swallowing hard enough for his Adam's apple to bob. "Yeah. Feels right."

Ilya pressed a kiss to his temple, lingering there to breathe him in, then guided him through the door into the bedroom where the bed waited with rumpled sheets from their nap earlier. The lamp on the nightstand glowed just enough to chase shadows from corners. He sat on the mattress edge, pulling Shane to stand between his spread knees, hands sliding up thighs to untie the towel and let it pool at their feet. His own followed, leaving them both exposed, cocks half-hard already from the proximity.

"First things first," Ilya said, voice low as he ran palms over Shane's hips, feeling muscle shift under skin. "You remember the traffic lights? Green means keep going, yellow to ease up or check in, red stops everything no questions."

Shane's hands rested on his shoulders, fingers flexing lightly. "Yes. Got it."

Satisfaction settled in Ilya's chest; safety came before anything. He stood, crowding Shane back a step, mouths meeting in a kiss that started gentle but deepened fast, tongues sliding together with familiar heat. Hands roamed, his fingers digging into Shane's ass to pull him flush, cocks pressing side by side. Shane moaned into the contact, hips rocking forward on instinct, seeking friction.

Ilya broke the kiss to trail lips down Shane's neck, sucking at the pulse point until a mark bloomed red. "You're so gorgeous like this. All mine to command."

The praise drew a shiver, Shane's cock twitching against Ilya's thigh. He nipped at an earlobe next, then whispered commands. "Hands at your sides. Don't move them until I say."

Obedience came immediately, arms dropping, fists clenching at thighs as Ilya circled him, admiring every inch. Ilya pressed close from behind, cock nestling between cheeks, hands wrapping around to stroke Shane's length. "Feel that? How hard you make me."

Shane pushed back, a whimper escaping when he squeezed the base. "Please."

"Not yet." Ilya released him, stepping around to face front again, capturing his mouth in another kiss. Tongues battled, teeth clashed, hands everywhere. He pinched a nipple, rolling it between fingers until Shane arched, then switched to the other, building sensation layer by layer. Their cocks rubbed together, precome slicking the way, the slide turning urgent.

Shane's breathing grew erratic, body tensing as pleasure coiled tight. Without warning, he shattered, cum shooting in thick ropes across Ilya's stomach, the release hitting him hard and fast. He sagged forward, mouth open in a silent cry, hands clutching Ilya's arms for support.

Ilya held him upright, surprise flickering but quickly replaced by a dark thrill. "Came already? Without even asking? That's against the rules, baby."

"Didn't mean to. It built so quickly."

A chuckle rumbled in Ilya's throat as he maneuvered Shane toward the bed. "That's fine. But bad boys get punished. Bend over, hands on the mattress, ass up high."

Shane complied, positioning himself with legs spread wide, back arched to present perfectly. Skin still carried the shower's warmth, but now goosebumps rose under Ilya's gaze. He ran a hand over the curve of one cheek, kneading firmly. "Thighs and ass only. Nothing that bruises where it matters for games. Color?"

"Green."

The first spank connected with the back of Shane's right thigh, a sharp crack that left a pink handprint blooming instant. Shane jolted forward, a gasp tearing free, but he settled back into position, ass wiggling slightly in invitation. Ilya rubbed the spot to soothe, then delivered the next to the left thigh, matching the intensity. "You're doing so well. Taking your punishment like a champ."

Alternating sides, he built a pattern, slaps landing with controlled force, skin reddening under each impact. Shane moaned with the third, pushing back into the strikes, cock dangling heavy between legs and starting to harden again. Ilya targeted the fleshy part of thighs first, avoiding joints or areas that could ache during skates, then moved higher to ass cheeks, spanking the undersides where sting would linger without visible marks.

"Look at this pretty skin turning pink for me. You're loving every smack, aren't you?" He paused after ten to massage the warmed flesh, fingers dipping between cheeks to tease the hole without entering. Shane whined, hips bucking.

"More. *Please."*

Ilya obliged, resuming with firmer slaps, the sound echoing louder now as skin sensitized. Left cheek, right thigh, center of ass, varying to keep it unpredictable. Shane's moans turned constant, body rocking with each hit, precome dripping from his cock to the floor. "Such a perfect boy. Taking it all. Makes me so proud."

By twenty, thighs and ass glowed red, heat radiating like a furnace. Ilya stopped, pulling Shane upright to kiss him deep, tongues tangling as hands soothed the tender areas. "You handled that beautifully. Now let's see how much more you can take."

He pushed Shane onto the bed, flat on his back, legs spread wide. From the drawer came soft cuffs, velvet-lined to avoid chafing. "Wrists above your head. I'm tying you down."

Shane lifted arms willingly, eyes following Ilya as he picked up the shirt from the floor and folded it into a long strip. He tied Shane’s wrists together and secured them to the headboard, testing the give with a tug before asking quietly, “Color?”

"Green."

Ilya grabbed the lube next, coating fingers generously before settling between Shane's legs. He teased his asshole first, circling the rim until muscles relaxed, then pushed one finger

inside, crooking to rub the prostate. Shane arched off the bed, wrists straining against bonds. "Fuck. Yes."

"Like that? My finger fucking you open?" Ilya added a second, scissoring to stretch, thrusting in and out. He leaned down to suck Shane's cock at the same time, mouth enveloping the head, tongue flicking the slit.

Shane thrashed, moans filling the room, body caught between sensations. Ilya bobbed his head, taking more each time, fingers pumping faster. "Close. Gonna come."

Ilya pulled off both mouth and fingers, leaving Shane hanging on the edge. "Not without permission. Beg for it."

"Please. Let me come. Need it."

"Not yet." Ilya withdrew completely, fingers and mouth gone, leaving Shane's body clenching around nothing, cock throbbing untouched in the air. He shifted up the bed to straddle Shane's chest, knees pinning arms lightly against the mattress, cock hovering close to his face. "Open your mouth. You're going to warm me while I decide if you've earned more."

Shane parted lips eagerly, tongue extending in invitation. Ilya fed his cock inside until the head bumped the back of his throat. "Hold it there. No sucking. Just keep me nice and wet."

The heat enveloped him, Shane's tongue pressing flat beneath, throat fluttering around the intrusion. Ilya rocked shallow, barely moving, letting saliva build and drip down Shane's chin. Hands braced on the headboard, he looked down at the sight: Shane bound and stretched, mouth stuffed full, eyes glassy with need. "Look at you. My perfect cockwarmer. So obedient."

Minutes stretched, Ilya's hips rolling in tiny circles to tease without relief. Shane's breathing turned shallow through his nose, body squirming beneath the weight. Precome leaked from his own cock, pooling on his stomach. Ilya reached back to swipe through it, bringing fingers to Shane's lips around his dick. "Taste yourself. Lick them clean."

Shane lapped at the digits, tongue swirling even with his mouth full. The dual sensation pushed him deeper into surrender, mind quieting under the constant fullness and denial. Thoughts blurred, the world narrowing to Ilya's cock on his tongue, the stretch in his jaw, the ache in his bound wrists.

Ilya pulled out halfway, thrusting back in gentle but firm. "Good boy. Taking me so deep." He repeated the motion, fucking Shane's mouth in lazy strokes, saliva coating everything. One hand dropped to pinch a nipple hard, twisting until Shane moaned around the length.

Shane's eyes unfocused, body going pliant, resistance melting away. He floated in the sensation, mind drifting toward that hazy space where nothing existed but Ilya's control. The edge approached, subdrop teasing at the borders, vulnerability rising fast.

Then panic flickered in suddenly. His breaths started coming shorter around the cock in his mouth, and his eyes darted up to Ilya's, wide with a flash of fear.

Ilya noticed instantly, pulling out fully and shifting down to cup his face. "Hey. Color? Do you want to stop?"

Shane blinked, swallowing hard, cheeks flushed deep. He shook his head, voice rough from use. "No. Don't stop. Just... Got a little intense."

Ilya kissed his forehead, then his lips, tasting himself there. "We can slow it or keep going. Your call."

"Keep going." He arched up, seeking contact. "I want it. Want you to push me."

The blond kissed Shane again, deeper this time, before sliding back down the bed. Lube coated three fingers now, and Shane opened easily, body welcoming the stretch. Ilya crooked them to rub the prostate relentlessly, milking more precome onto the sheets.

"You're doing amazing. Letting me open you up like this." He added a fourth finger, twisting and spreading, preparing thoroughly.

When fingers withdrew, Ilya slicked his cock and lined up, pushing in with one smooth thrust. The fullness drew a cry from him, back bowing off the bed. Ilya set a pace, hips snapping hard, hand wrapping around Shane's throat lightly, thumb pressing just enough to remind without restricting air.

"Mine. This hole belongs to me. Look how you clench around me. Desperate to keep me inside."

Shane pulled at the shirt, body meeting each thrust, mind slipping again toward that floaty space. The earlier panic faded under the overwhelming sensation, replaced by deep trust. Tears pricked at his eyes from intensity, spilling down temples into his hair.

Ilya wiped them away with a thumb, leaning down to kiss the wet tracks. "Beautiful. Crying on my cock. Let go for me."

Thrusts slowed to deep grinds, hitting the prostate on every pass. Ilya's free hand stroked Shane's length in time, twisting at the head. "Come whenever you need. You've earned it."

Permission unlocked everything. Shane's body seized around Ilya, muscles clamping down in waves as orgasm tore through him, cum streaking high across his chest and neck in thick pulses. The clench pulled a loud sound from Ilya's throat, hips stuttering once before driving deeper, chasing the same release.

Ilya kept moving through the aftershocks, with his hand still stroking Shane's oversensitive cock to milk every last drop. Shane whimpered, legs wrapping around Ilya's waist to hold him close, heels digging into his back. Tears continued to slip from the corners of his eyes, not from pain but from the raw overload, the complete surrender to sensation and trust.

The edge approached for Ilya, so he shifted weight to one arm, starting to pull out on instinct, the habit drilled in from countless times without protection. His cock slid halfway free when

Shane's hand shot down, fingers wrapping around Ilya's wrist with surprising strength for someone so spent.

"Inside," Shane whispered hoarsely, eyes locked on the other man's.

The single word undid him. Ilya moaned brokenly, slamming back in to the hilt, hips flush against Shane's ass. Release hit like a freight train, cum flooding deep in long, pulsing jets, marking him in a way they had never allowed before.

Love crashed over him in that moment.

This man under him, flushed and tear-streaked and begging to be filled, owned every piece of him. Ilya stayed seated deep, grinding slowly to prolong the connection, arms wrapping tight around Shane's shoulders like he could fuse them together permanently.

When the pulses finally ebbed, he eased out carefully, watching his cum leak from Shane's stretched hole with possessive satisfaction. Shane lay boneless with his wrists still loosely tied but forgotten in the haze. Ilya reached up to release the restraints immediately, rubbing red marks with gentle thumbs, kissing each wrist before gathering Shane against his chest.

Water appeared from the nightstand, bottle pressed to Shane's lips first. He drank greedily, throat working, then passed it back so Ilya could do the same. A warm cloth followed, fetched from the bathroom, wiping cum and sweat from his skin. Ilya cleaned between his legs last, folding the cloth to a fresh side, pressing lightly to soothe the tenderness.

"You okay?"

Shane nodded against his shoulder, fingers tracing idle patterns on Ilya's back. "More than okay."

Ilya huffed a laugh, pulling the covers over them both. "You scared me for a second earlier. Proud of you for saying what you needed."

"Trusted you to hear it." Shane pressed a kiss to his collarbone. "And I meant the inside thing. I wanted to feel you."

He rolled them so Shane lay half on top, leg thrown over his hip, hand stroking down his spine in long passes. "Love you ridiculously. You know that?"

Shane hummed, nuzzling closer. "Yeah. Same." He lifted his head just enough to meet Ilya's eyes, a lazy grin tugging at his mouth. "Ridiculously is a hard word."

"You complaining about my vocabulary now?"

"Never." Shane pressed a kiss to the center of his collarbone, then settled back down, cheek against skin. "Just pointing out facts. You're ridiculous in the best way."

When he tried to sit up, Ilya pushed him back down with a playful growl, tucking him in again.

"Rest. I take care of you now."

Shane rolled his eyes but complied, a smile tugging at his mouth. "Bossy even in aftercare."

"Get used to it." Ilya tugged the blanket higher, tucking it around Shane's shoulders like he might catch a chill in the middle of summer. "You earned the full treatment tonight."

Shane shifted, rolling to face him fully, one arm sliding under Ilya's neck, the other draping across his chest. Fingers traced lazy over golden skin, following the line of an old scar from a high stick years ago. "Hey. Serious question."

Ilya raised an eyebrow, hand stilling on his back. "Shoot."

"Why'd you want to try this stuff in the first place? The dominating thing. The links you sent way back. All of it."

The blond considered for a moment, thumb resuming its path along Shane's spine. "Because I hate watching you spin out."

Shane lifted his head again, propping on an elbow. "Spin out?"

"Yeah. The way your brain never shuts off. Games, plays, stats, what the coach said, what the media wrote, what you could've done differently. I've seen you pace hotel rooms at three in the morning because you can't stop replaying a shift. Or sit on the bus staring out the window like you're solving world hunger when really you're just beating yourself up."

Shane opened his mouth like he might protest, then closed it, cheeks coloring faintly. He knew it was true.

Ilya cupped the side of his face, thumb brushing over the faint stubble. "I can't fix hockey. Can't make the schedule easier or the pressure less, but I can give you a place where none of that exists. Where you don't have to think or plan or be perfect, just let me take it all for a while."

"You already do that just by being here."

"Not enough." Ilya pressed their foreheads together. "I want to be the thing that quiets it. The person you can hand everything to when it's too much. Reliable. *Safe.* Yours."

Shane exhaled, like tension he hadn't noticed was leaving his body. He tucked his face into Ilya's neck, arm tightening around him. "You are. Always have been."

"Good." Ilya kissed his hair, then his temple, then the corner of his mouth. "Because I'm not going anywhere. And next time your head gets loud, you tell me. We figure it out together. Deal?"

"Deal." Shane pulled back just enough to meet his eyes, smile small but real. "But I'm still allowed to complain about your vocabulary."

Ilya snorted, rolling them again so Shane lay pinned beneath him, wrists caught loosely in one hand above his head. "Try it and see what happens."

Shane laughed, filling the room. "Promise?"

"Always."

"You're gonna regret that promise when I start complaining about your grammar in Russian too."

"Bring it on." Ilya shifted them sideways, pulling him fully into his arms, one leg hooked over his to keep him close. "I'll just punish you for it."

"Threats already." Shane poked him in the ribs, earning a grunt. "Some aftercare."

"Best kind." Fingers resumed their path along Shane's back, tracing idle patterns. "You feeling okay? Nothing sore?"

Shane considered, flexing experimentally. "Good sore. The kind that reminds me tomorrow."

"Proud of you." Ilya pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Took everything I gave and asked for more."

"Only because it was you." Shane's hand found his, lacing their fingers together over his chest. "Anyone else and I'd have safeworded out the window."

"Same goes. You're the only one I want like this."

Shane hummed again, contentment clear in the sound. "Weird how it works. You boss me around and somehow I end up calmer."

"That's the point." Ilya nipped at his earlobe. "Your brain finally shuts up when someone else is in charge."

"Mean."

"True." Another kiss followed, this one to the shell of his ear. Shane's breathing slowed, words coming softer. "You ever gonna let me switch it up? Boss you around for once?"

Ilya considered, hand stilling on his back. "Maybe. If you earn it."

"Asshole."

Ilya grinned against his hair. "Sleep now. Arguing takes energy."

Shane made a token protest noise, but his body went heavy, limbs relaxing completely. The last thing he managed came muffled against Ilya's neck. "Love you. *Ridiculously."*

"Love you more. Always."

The locker rooms hummed with the familiar pre-game energy, players moving through routines honed over years. Sticks leaned against stalls waiting for final tape jobs while teammates traded jokes or stared at the floor to find focus.

Boston hosted Montreal in a game that mattered more than most, both teams locked in a tight race for the top seed in their division. Playoff implications hung heavy, and the media had spent the week hyping it as another chapter in the longstanding rivalry, replaying old hits, goals, and post-game barbs on every highlight show.

Shane occupied his spot on the visitors' bench, legs stretched out as he worked through his skate laces. His mind ran the usual loops: matchups against Boston's top line, potential forecheck adjustments, where the defensemen liked to pinch. The routine grounded him, pushing everything else to the background. His phone buzzed once against his thigh, tucked in the pocket of his base layer. He fished it out, half-expecting a text from the coaching staff about a late scratch or video clip.

“Lily’s” name lit the screen instead.

Can't wait to get you alone after this. Strip you slow. Tie those wrists again. Make you beg twice before I even touch your cock.

Heat surged up Shane's neck, as some memories slammed into him. He glanced left and right, making sure no one stood close enough to see the screen or the flush creeping across his face.

Another message arrived before he could pocket the phone.

Gonna fuck you face down until you can't remember what team you play for. Fill you up again. Leave you leaking me for days.

Shane's fingers hovered over the keyboard, pulse kicking up a notch. He typed quickly, thumbs flying.

No phone sex before games.

The reply popped up almost instantly.

Too late. Already hard thinking about it. Your fault.

Shane exhaled a short laugh, shaking his head as he shoved the phone deep into his equipment bag, burying it under gloves and tape rolls. He finished tying his skates, double-knotting with extra force, then stood to stretch hamstrings and roll shoulders. The images Ilya planted lingered, stubborn and vivid, but he shoved them down. Game first. Always game first. Everything else came after the buzzer.

Across the arena, in the home locker room, Ilya leaned against his stall, phone cupped in his palm while teammates bustled around him pulling on jerseys and snapping chin straps. He read Shane's response and grinned, wide and unrepentant, thumb already moving.

Be good out there. Or don't.

He sent it, pocketed the device, and grabbed his own jersey from the hanger, sliding it over pads with practiced ease. The messages had done their job, planting anticipation that would simmer through sixty minutes of hockey. He joined the flow toward the tunnel, helmet tucked under his arm, mind split neatly between the ice ahead and the promise waiting after.

The arena filled steadily, sections divided into waves of black and gold versus red, white, and blue. Chants started early, signs bobbed above heads, and the energy built like a storm. Warm-ups spilled onto the ice in organized chaos: laps skated at increasing speed, pucks fired at empty nets, goalies stretching in dramatic splits. Shane took his turns in the shooting line, wrist shots snapping tape-to-tape with the goalie's glove, then flipped to backhands for variety. He felt Ilya's gaze more than once, that heavy stare tracking him across the neutral zone, and each time it pulled an involuntary smirk to his mouth.

Ilya mirrored the routine on the opposite end, sniping corners with one-timers, then circling back for stretch passes. He caught Shane's eye during a crossover, tilting his head in mock innocence, earning a subtle eye roll in return. The exchange lasted seconds, invisible to everyone else, but it carried the weight of their earlier texts.

Lineups crackled over the PA system, drawing the loudest reactions for the starters. Both coaches opted for their top centers to open, a deliberate chess move that acknowledged the rivalry and set the tone. Shane heard his name and skated out first for Montreal, taking a slow loop around his end, stick tapping the boards in steady rhythm to settle nerves. Ilya followed moments later for Boston, gliding straight to center ice with that loose-shouldered confidence he carried everywhere.

They lined up opposite each other for the opening draw, skates digging in, bodies crouched low. The referee hovered with the puck raised, waiting for the signal. For a brief moment, the roaring crowd dulled to background noise.

Ilya tilted his helmet slightly, mouth curving into a knowing smile meant only for the man across the dot.

Shane met it with one of his own.

Sticks lowered to ice, gloves tightened on shafts, eyes locked through cage bars.

The whistle blew.

Game on.

End Notes

you can find me on x: @fallingflxwer

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