

To Be Remembered, Is To Be Loved

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To Be Remembered, Is To Be Loved

by [BrokenColors](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander forgets his marriage.

Ilya Rozanov doesn't forget how to love him.

As Shane recovers from a concussion that fractures his memories, the life they built together resurfaces in quieter ways. Through routine, touch, shared space, and an intimacy that refuses to disappear.

Love, it turns out, doesn't always need memory.

Sometimes, it just needs time.

tl;dr - Hollanov's Amnesia AU in which Shane's last memory is July 2010, a.k.a the first time they hooked up in Toronto after shooting the commercial. Problem is, it is 2022, and they have been married for almost a year, but Shane cannot remember the past 12 years of his life with Ilya.

Notes

Really wanted to post it before the year ended, but hey here's a surprise to welcome the new year :)

Please excuse this unbetad manic madness. I wrote it while fever dreaming for days on end about Heated Rivalry, and to further add to the fuel I have no respect for the English language so excuse me if there are any mistakes (I really tried to avoid them, but it might take me some time to revisit and fix errors if any, please be patient).

It is recommended to have read The Long Game before reading this one shot, as there might be spoilers or references that might not be noticed otherwise (spoilers too). I tried to be careful with the details and mixed both from the books and the TV show to my liking.

I would like to thank everyone involved in creating such a fun and chaotic universe that inspired me to get back into committing and actually publishing my works.

Likewise, I hope everyone who reads this reads it with the same affection, dedication, and care with which I created it. <3

Update 04/01/26: The response you guys have had towards this silly little project has been greater than I could've ever expected. A follow-up is in the works as of today ;)

13/02/26: SEQUEL IS AVAILABLE AND TITLED To Be Loved, Is to Be Seen

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

April 2022

“Welcome back to Ottawa, where the Centaurs and the New York Admirals are deadlocked in what might be the most consequential game of the season. Winner punches their ticket to the playoffs, loser goes home thinking about what could’ve been. And of course, all eyes tonight on the Centaurs’ top line, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, dominant on the ice, married off it, and absolutely unwilling to give an inch to their contenders. Will Hollander be able to lead his new team to the Stanley Cup after just one season with them?”

The building was shaking.

It was that kind of night. Loud, tight, unforgiving. Every hit echoed, every whistle was booed, every shift felt like it could tip the season one way or another. Shane felt it in his chest, in the clean burn of his lungs, in the way his skates bit into the ice like they meant it.

The game was ugly from the first face-off.

Not only ugly, but sloppy for the New York Admirals. The kind where every hit lands a fraction too hard and nobody smiled when they skated away. Ottawa’s barn was loud, already smelling blood. Shane was wired. Locked in. The Centaurs needed this win, and so did he.

The couple had led their team into a fantastic season, proving everyone how good they worked as a team. Across the ice, Ilya Rozanov lined up like he always did. Loose posture, sharp eyes, mouth already curled like he knew something Shane didn’t. *Oh, he is going to tease me when we get home.*

They didn’t look at each other for too long.

They never do. Don’t want to give the press even an infinitesimal reason to gossip about the newlyweds.

The puck dropped, and the noise collapsed into motion. Shane barely registered the crowd after that. Just bodies and speed and angles. He and Ilya moved the way they always do, instinctive and sharp, years of rivalry and experience welded into something lethal and precise.

A look. A pass. A chance that almost went in.

Across the ice, the Admirals pushed back hard. Muller’s line was out more than usual, grinding along the boards, finishing every check. It’s legal. It’s aggressive. It’s personal in

that way games like this always are.

“New York’s clearly trying to disrupt Ottawa’s rhythm,” the commentator noted. “Especially targeting Hollander early, and you can’t blame them. He’s been the engine tonight.”

Shane shrugged off a hit and kept going. He’s taken worse. He always has.

The first period bled into the second. Still tied. Tempers flared. Sticks got tangled a little longer than necessary. Shane caught Ilya’s eye once after a whistle. The familiar flicker of question and answer, “*you good?*” “*yeah, I’m good.*”

He was. Until he wasn’t.

The puck rimmed hard around the glass behind the net. Shane pivoted, tracking it, already planning the breakout. He heard the skates before he saw them. Muller came in fast, wrong angle, too much speed.

There was no time.

The hit landed high and sideways. Shane lost balance. His skates lost the ice. The boards weren’t where they were supposed to be.

He went over the railing.

For a split second there was weightlessness, then impact, brutal and wrong. He crashed into the benches, metal and plastic and bodies exploding around him. His ankle folded under him with a sharp, sickening pain. His head snapped back, lights bursting white across his vision.

“Oh—oh no,” the commentator cuts in, voice dropping. “That’s a terrifying collision. Shane Hollander went head-first into the benches after a hit from Muller, and you can see Ilya Rozanov vaulting the boards immediately. The building has gone dead silent.”

The crowd roared and then hushed, sound surging and pulling away like a tide.

Shane tried to move. Everything felt slow, distant. His ankle was on fire. His head felt stuffed with cotton.

Hands were on him shortly after, trainers, teammates, too many voices at once. Someone was calling for the stretcher.

Through the blur, Shane saw Ilya.

Not skating. Running. No smile, no showmanship, just naked panic carved across his face as he dropped to his knees beside Shane, one hand hovering like he was afraid to touch and afraid not to.

“Hey. Hey,” Ilya says, voice rough, unsteady. “Look at me.”

Shane tried to grin. It came out crooked. “We’re still winning?”

Ilya swallowed hard. Russian curses slipped out under his breath, sharp and furious, before he reined it back in. “Don’t move,” he snapped, then softer, just for Shane. “Please.”

The trainers edged Ilya back as they secured the stretcher. He let them, barely. He never took his eyes off Shane as they lifted him, strapped him down, wheeled him toward the tunnel.

The last thing Shane saw before the lights smeared together was Ilya’s face distancing from him, terrified, furious, helpless in a way Shane had never seen before.

Then the world went dark.



Shane woke up slowly to quiet.

Not the good kind, not sleep-quiet, but the thin, humming stillness that pressed against his ears. There was a steady beeping somewhere close, slow and regular, like a metronome he didn’t ask for. His head felt heavy, with a dull headache starting to form. When he blinked, the ceiling swam, white blurring into white.

Hospital white.

Right. Okay. That should explain the beeping sound.

He swallowed. His throat dry, his mouth tasted faintly metallic.

He tried to move and immediately regretted it. Pain and pressure flared sharply and bright through his ankle, stealing his breath. His hand jerked reflexively, caught on something plastic and unfamiliar.

“Fuck” he muttered.

“Hey —hey, easy, there.”

A nurse appeared in his line of sight, calm and practiced, one hand already hovering like she’d done this a thousand times before. Shane let his head sink back into the pillow.

“What...?” His voice came out hoarse, scraped raw.

“You took a pretty nasty fall,” she said gently. “You’re safe. You’re in the Ottawa General.” She checked the monitors, shined a light briefly into his eyes. “Can you tell me your name?”

Shane blinked again. “Shane. Shane Hollander.”

“Correct. Do you know why you’re here?”

He frowned. That answer would take longer. His thoughts felt sluggish, like they were wading through mud. He exhaled slowly. The memory came back in pieces: ice, speed, impact, weightlessness. "I got hit. Went into the benches."

"That's right," she said. "You took a hard fall. You've got an ankle injury and a concussion, but you're stable. Regardless, we're keeping you for observation." *Fuck, I hope it's nothing too serious, at least I will have all summer to rest and recover.*

She checked his vitals. Shane tolerated it, jaw tight, already itching to get out of bed.

"I'm going to let your family know you're awake," she said. "Try to rest."

When she left, Shane tried to stare at the ceiling again, but his eyes hurt, and he seemed to feel sensitive towards light changes. He might ask his parents to roll the blinds for him. His parents... "Shit, mum is going to kill me" He uttered through his lips.

The door opened again.

"Shane?"

His mum's voice was immediate relief.

He turned his head, and there she was, hair pulled back hastily, worry written all over her face.

"Hey," he said, rough but steady.

She crossed the room in seconds and pressed a kiss to his forehead, her hand warm against his cheek. "Oh, thank God."

"I'm fine," he said automatically, like a reflex.

She snorted. "That's what you said when you broke your wrist at sixteen, and... Last time you got a concussion, too. Seriously, you need to be more careful, this was a scary one"

They talked easily. Comfortably.

She told him he scared everyone. He told her he was dreading the summer that lied ahead. She asked about his ankle, he complained about missing training time. He asked how she got there so fast. She scolded him for always pushing too hard.

Normal. Entirely normal.

If anything felt off, it was only the lingering fog in his head. The sense that he'd woken up in the middle of something unfinished.

The door opened again.

Shane turned his head without thinking, expecting his dad.

Instead, Ilya Rozanov stepped into the room.

For a heartbeat, Shane didn't comprehend what he was seeing.

Ilya looked... Different. Older. Broader through the shoulders. His hair shorter than Shane remembers, he had a stubble adorning his jaw, his face lined in ways that didn't belong to the guy he saw barely two weeks ago in Toronto. He was dressed in street clothes, no team jacket, no gear, just standing there like he belonged. Older. Different. Wrong.

Shane's stomach dropped. He panicked. Toronto? Did he tell his parents? Why was he here? Did him ending up in a hospital bed have anything to do with Rozanov?

"What the fuck is *he* doing here?"

The words came out sharp, venomous, the way they always had when referring to the Russian.

The room went dead silent.

His mum turned, startled. "Shane?"

Ilya stopped just inside the doorway. His face drained of color as his eyes locked onto Shane's, something like shock and confusion flickering across his expression.

"Shane," he said quietly.

Shane's pulse was roaring. He propped himself up on his elbows, pain flaring through his ankle, adrenaline burning through the haze in his head.

"No," he said, voice tight. "No. This isn't funny. Why is he—" He swallowed hard, throat tight. "Are you trying to ruin me?"

"Моя любовь... What are you talking about? I- I tried to stop Muller. I-"

"Fuck off, Rozanov. You're such an asshole."

His mum blinked. "Shane. Honey, what's going on?"

"Was getting drafted first not enough for you?" Shane said, not looking away. "You also have to come and ruin my life?"

Silence crashed down between them, heavy and suffocating.

Something broke in Ilya's face. He exhaled shakily.

Ilya felt like he was about to suffocate, he then turned to Yuna, voice low and urgent. "We need a doctor."

Now.

Yuna hovered, wringing her hands. The tension in the room was thick enough to taste. Ilya didn't move, didn't speak again. Shane's chest was hammering in time with the beeping monitors, his mind racing.

The door to his room opened, and a doctor in scrubs stepped in, clipboard in hand. The air shifted. Clinical, calm, authoritative. His family expectant.

"Good afternoon," he said gently. "I'm Dr. García. I'm going to ask our patient here some questions, okay? Sir, could you tell me your name, please?"

"Yes, it's Shane Hollander," the brunet repeated, though the words felt strange on his tongue, like something was off. His head still ached, but the fog had been lifted just enough to make the doctor feel urgent with his questions.

"Good. Do you know where you are?"

"Looks like the hospital. Ottawa General."

"Correct." The doctor exchanged a glance with Shane's parents and Ilya. "You suffered a concussion during your last game. Do you know who you were playing against with?"

Shane shook his head slowly. "I- I'm not sure." He exhaled shakily, "the last game I remember I was... We beat Russia on the World Junior Hockey Championships."

"That's 2010" whispered Ilya to no one, in shock.

"Okay. As I suspected. Looks like the impact of the fall may have caused a type of memory loss we call retrograde amnesia in medicine, which means your brain is essentially remembering the year 2010 as its most recent memories, in your case."

Shane blinked. Something tugged at the edges of his mind. "It's July... 2010, right?" His voice was tentative. "I... that's... the summer..." Shane glanced at Ilya sideways.

The doctor nodded, ignoring the situation. "So, July 2010 is as far as you remember? If so, your memory from after that period hasn't been encoded. Right now, your recall of events post-July 2010 is compromised. I know it might sound shocking but, we are currently in April 2022. You may remember fragments, especially once you get out of the hospital, recover from the concussion and go back to your routine, but don't expect anything concrete yet."

Shane swallowed, "This can't be true." said Hollander staring at the ceiling. "How long... is this... going to last?"

"Good question, but it is hard to determine," the doctor admits, tapping his clipboard. "In cases like this, recovery can range from weeks to months. Some memories return gradually,

some might not. We'll monitor you carefully. Therapy can help, I would suggest we...." Shane tuned out the doctor's voice as he explained to the room the steps they should follow once he was discharged.

Shane's jaw tightened. He exhaled. He had been trying to ignore it. But the fact that his nemesis was sitting in the chair next to his bed didn't sit well with him. He looked at Rozanov, who lowered his gaze the moment brown eyes met his.

Hollander's gaze drifted. Ilya was tense, his bruised hands clenching and unclenching. Shane noticed a glint shining from on one of them, a black band he didn't recognize. His stomach fluttered and his chest tightened, reasons unbeknownst to him. Curiosity got the best of him and he asked the blonde quietly, "What's that?" pointing at his hands.

Ilya gazed up at Shane, as he trailed the direction his eyes followed making his hand twitch, as if he just realized Shane was looking at the piece of jewelry. "It's... uh... nothing," he muttered, voice tight, avoiding eye contact.

Shane froze. The ring was simple, elegant. Weighty. The kind of ring someone would choose if they meant it forever. The Taurus had always liked those discreet designs. "Why... why do you have that?" he insisted, unsure of why he was prying in a way that felt so out of character for him. He felt like a child.

Ilya inhaled sharply. His jaw flexed. Instantly, memories hit the Russian like a punch in his stomach. Shane's laughter during practice, the quiet late-night talks during summers at the cottage, the foundation they built together, the happiness of lazy days off running around their backyard with Anya. Hell... Even going to Hayden's to take care of the kids when the Pikes wanted some alone time out of the house.

The fact that Shane was completely unaware of *all of it* now... It was like seeing someone so important and pivotal in his life slowly fading away, and he knew that feeling very well. He didn't want to go through fighting lost memories, again.

He tried to keep his voice steady. "Don't- don't panic. But, you're... Eventually, we..." Rozanov took a big breath. "You're my husband, Shane. We... we actually got married 9 months ago."

Shane recoiled slightly, confusion darkening his gaze. "You... *Husband*...? But I'm not..."

Ilya's eyes glistened, but he fought the tears back. Seeing Shane this way, lost in a version of himself he had fought to overcome, "Shane... look at me," Rozanov said softly, standing up and stepping closer, carefully, like he didn't want to frighten him. "I'm... I'm here. A lot of things changed. You're safe. You're okay. We'll get through this, together, yes?"

Shane shook his head, the fog thickening with panic. His throat closing, his eyes shedding tears he didn't know he was holding. "I... I didn't... I didn't... we... It was a one time thing, okay? I—I'm not who you think I am. It was a *mistake*. I have other things to worry about I can't do something like this I'm a hockey player for fuck's sake" His words stumbled, fear flooding in. "You say... you're married to me? We... we're married? No, fucking way"

Ilya's throat tightened. Seeing Shane this way. Afraid, defensive, impulsive, lost. He had been expecting some 'minor confusion' as the doctors had explained. But, he was slipping through his fingers way too easily, way too fast for him to catch him. Everything they had built. The time it had taken them to reach this state. He couldn't help himself when his mind filled with dark thoughts as he moved further back from the bed until he hit the wall with his shoulders. Thought of his father flooded his mind, slipping away slowly. The helplessness he felt then when he couldn't take care of him. His own mother, the depression that chased her, the medication he had been taking faithfully for a year to manage what he inherited, the promise he and Shane made with the Irina Foundation to help fight these exact feelings in others. And here, Shane's mind had slipped into a time before all of that. A time before *them*.

"Yes," Ilya whispered, voice barely above a whisper. "We... we are. You... you just don't remember. Yet."

Shane pressed a hand to his face, trying to ground himself, but it only made the spinning worse. "I... I don't... I can't...take everything in..."

Ilya swallowed, fighting back his own panic. At that moment, Dr. García stepped forward, seeming to take in Hollander's distress. Clearing his throat gently, he said. "We'll continue monitoring you and we will start cognitive therapy soon. For now, rest. Hydrate. Avoid stressors. And... I'll be honest, emotional stress could make memory recovery more complicated, but we'll manage it together."

Ilya didn't say anything else.

That was the hardest part.

He didn't reach for Shane again. Wouldn't insist for his freckled husband's sake and peace. Didn't try to anchor him with touch or promises or explanations, that would only make the noises in Shane's head worse. He just stepped back, gave Shane space, even though it looked like it cost him something physical to do it.

Dr. García finished speaking with the Hollanders in low voices. Plans were made without Shane fully understanding them. Follow-ups, therapy referrals, strict rest protocols. He caught fragments: *no skating for at least 8 weeks, gradual return to public life, monitor cognitive overload*. Words piled up until they lost meaning in the jumbled mess that had become of his head.

After the doctor had left. Rozanov and his parents shared some awkward and sad looks between them, Shane could tell. When had they even gotten this close? If all of this wasn't some cruel universe joke against him, which he could tell it wasn't by the increasing gray hairs in his dad's hair and his mother's slightly more prominent wrinkles, how had Ilya even met his parents?

Eventually, his mum turned back to him. "Sweetheart," she said gently, "we think it might be best if you recover somewhere quiet. The season has ended for the Centaurs. They won't need you or Ilya anytime soon. Ilya will call Wiebe explaining the situation..."

Shane frowned only getting half of what was being said to him, "Where?"

“The cottage,” his dad said. “You actually own one now. It is 10 minutes away from ours.” he mentioned, looking back at Yuna. “You can choose”

He did know it. The lake. The creaky dock. The smell of pine and water and summer heat. The familiarity of the scenery settled something tight in his chest.

“That’s fine,” Shane said quickly. “I’ll go there. I like the cottage”

There was a pause.

Ilya shifted, hesitant. “I can—” he started, then stopped himself. “I can stay nearby. If... If that’s okay. Just in case.”

Shane looked at him again. Really looked this time. At the younger’s lines around his eyes and the dark circles under them. At the way he stood, like he was bracing for an impact that never came. At the ring, he still couldn’t grasp a reasonable explanation to. He looked terrible.

“Where do you usually go, during summer? Russia?” asked Shane hesitantly.

Rozanov tried to ignore the ache and emptiness he felt in his chest as he answered. “Usually we go to the cottage, *your* cottage, to spend the summer after we are done with the summer camps. It would be Anya’s first time in it.”

“Oh my god, don’t tell me we have kids, too” Hollander replied quickly.

Ilya chuckled. “I guess we can call her that, yes. It’s my dog. She’s been staying with your parents when we’ve had to travel during the season”

“We? Wait, you’ve been drafted by Boston, how is your dog staying in Ottawa?” asked Shane confusedly. He swore there wasn’t a sentence that did not feel like people were speaking a foreign language to him.

“And he played with Boston for nearly a decade, but his loyalty lay elsewhere...” said Yuna with a smirk directed at Rozanov. An inside joke by now.

“Dear,” his father sighed, “we have talked about this, there’s nothing to regret about Ilya leaving his old team. He is happier here in Ottawa with Shane, and they make a great team!” David wouldn’t miss a chance to tease his wife.

Shane caught a glimpse of Ilya’s fond subtle smile directed at his parents’ jest. The situation both weirded him out and made him feel a specific type of warmth that ran through his extremities. He couldn’t quite place it, which almost made him forget to ask “Wait, you play for Ottawa now?”

“We both do, actually”

"WHAT?!" Shane raised his voice. "I PLAY FOR THE OTTAWA CENTAURS?! WHY?! WHAT HAPPENED TO MONTREAL?!"

“Okay, okay, sweetheart, I think that's enough information for today.”



"Wow" Shane was honestly impressed. “And this is mine?”

The cottage. *His* cottage had high cedar wood ceilings and windows that covered the entirety of the outer walls. He had a decent-sized backyard surrounded by trees overlooking the lake, with a barbecue, a modern kitchen with an island with some high stools in the middle and some spacious looking bathrooms which would definitely come in handy when moving around with his walking crutches.

He had stayed with his parents for a total of 2 weeks and, while he appreciated their concern and overprotection, he often felt overwhelmed and overstimulated. Something deep inside him was telling him he needed to stay somewhere where he could be by himself.

“Yes, as you can see it's pretty similar to ours, but still if you ever need anything we are one call away. And please do call or your mum is going to worry herself to the ground.” His father was right for reminding him to do so, and he was thankful that his mother had taken care of rescheduling what seemed to be an endless amount of sponsorships and endorsements related to the what he learned was the Irina Foundation. Apparently, he created the charity with Ilya for what seemed to be a very noble reason.

He had seen the news conference he and Rozanov had held when they made the announcement. His parents had shown him it for him to understand the context and he may or may not have had tears in his eyes by the end of the video. Something he couldn't quite name had sparked inside him. Maybe, the blue-eyed man standing next to him in that room was different from the Ilya he barely knew as far as his memory reached.

He had been spending his time mostly with his father, apparently her mum was in charge of pretty much running the show behind the scenes when it came to the summer camps and Ilya, he knew, was there with her.

His parents had been trying to avoid the subject. Not that they were subtle about it. But, Shane was. grateful for it. It wasn't an idea he thought he was ready to contemplate for the time being.

“You think you can manage? Remember to take your meds as the doctors prescribed. I put some alarms in your phone in case you forget” worried David again.

“Dad, I'm fine, don't worry. I told you, I just need to relax and, you know I love spending time with you but, look, let's call it a silent retreat” Shane argued looking at his dad.

“Oh it’s not you I’m worried about. It’s about your mother when she finds out I allowed this to happen.” Joked his dad.

“Oh, yeah, if she asks it was my idea and I pressured you into ‘allowing’ your very grown and adult son into independence” chuckled the brunet. “Oh, and by the way, don’t forget to grab your charger this time and call before coming.” Shane started laughing at what he thought was a fun and innocent jab at his father’s timing until he saw the older’s eyes go wide looking back at his son.

“What– What did you just say?” mumbled his father.

Shane, not quite understanding his reaction said, “Just, you know. It’s a silent retreat thing, meant for, you know... Mental training and meditation. I wouldn’t want any distractions.”

“Oh, of course, yes. I will be leaving then, I left some tuna salad in the fridge so you have something to eat later.” David kissed his son’s forehead goodbye and walked out of the cottage to grab the car and go to his own.

Did I do it again?

Shane had been doing cognitive therapy online. His body still had to recover and he could afford to do it from the comfort of his sofa.

Judging by his father’s reaction he must have mentioned something ‘Today’s Shane’ would have said. That’s how he had been referring to the new version of himself he was trying to uncover when he talked with his therapist. It seemed that there had been some instances in which he had talked about things that 2010 Shane wasn’t ‘supposed’ to know, or so he had been told by his parents.

Honestly speaking, he didn’t notice when he said anything that was out of this new ordinary, for lack of a better word. He realized that, since his injury, he had been speaking his mind out more often. He wasn’t sure if this was part of 2022’s Shane personality, if having less things to hide about himself made him relax or if the accident had been the cause. But he couldn’t say it bothered him now. It sure was difficult to get used to at first. But he felt good in his own body for the first time in what felt like forever. Still, there were some parts about himself he had been ignoring giving too much thought about.

His sexuality being one of them.

Of course, he was aware of the fact he had never felt like himself in the relationships and experiences he had had with girls in the past, and he may have played around with the thought of only being attracted to the same sex. But it was never something he had wanted to focus too much on. That is until his encounter with Ilya Rozanov in Toronto. He couldn’t say he hadn’t enjoyed that night with him. He had, in fact, jerked off to the thought of it an unspeakable amount of times. Not that he would ever admit it out loud.

Somehow, that night must have triggered something between them if more than a decade later he was married to that very same *asshole*.



“Thank you so much for driving us back, you must be exhausted.”

“Mhm? Oh, no, don’t worry, is okay.” Emphasized Ilya to Yuna. “How is Shane doing?” asked Ilya distractedly.

“Well, unbeknownst to me and thanks to his very responsible father turns out he has been staying at his *own* cottage by himself.” admitted the Japanese-Canadian woman exasperatedly.

“He has?” asked Rozanov confusedly. Yuna answered by nodding her head twice as she closed her eyes to convey her disagreement with the situation as she answered a phone call.

It’s not that Ilya didn’t think Shane capable of being an independent person after the accident. But, he couldn’t help but worry about his husband in such a vulnerable state. He wanted to be close to him, next to him. He wanted to give him a hug and tell him that they will get through this one way or another. That they were a team in sickness and in health. But he was scared about Shane’s reaction.

It was partly the reason he had forced himself to not miss on the summer camps this year. Not only it would make people and media outlets talk but he had a responsibility to accomplish.

ESPN had kept quite about Shane Hollander’s whereabouts or health status. Probably thanks to Wiebe and the directives at the Ottawa Centaurs team. Ilya had asked for discretion until further development of Shane’s health before releasing an official statement regarding next season. For now, his summer was finally starting, but so might be hell.

Ilya still had a hard time accepting the reality he was living in right now. Dr. Galina had called it ‘derealization’, she said it could be caused due to the severe stress Ilya was under. He had been working on trying to come to terms with *his* Shane and the reality they had both built stopping all of a sudden.

The drive down was quiet.

Ilya kept his eyes on the road, hands steady on the wheel, while Yuna sat in the passenger seat with Anya’s head resting heavily on her thigh. The dog was unusually still, ears twitching every so often, as if she sensed the tension clinging to him.

“He doesn’t know you are coming,” Yuna said eventually, not unkindly.

Ilya nodded. "I know."

The Hollanders' cottage appeared through the trees a few minutes later, warm light glowing through the windows. The smell of grilled food lingered faintly in the air when they stepped out of the car.

Anya's tail started wagging before Ilya even unclipped her leash.

Inside, the atmosphere was deceptively normal. Plates on the table. Music playing low from a speaker. Shane sat on the couch with one leg stretched awkwardly in front of him, crutches leaned against the wall, a ginger ale resting untouched on the coffee table.

He looked... relaxed. More than Ilya had seen him since his hospital visit.

"Hey," Shane said when he saw his mum. "You made it."

Then he saw the dog.

Anya broke free the second Ilya let go.

"An—"

The sound left Shane's mouth before he could stop it.

Anya skidded slightly on the wooden floor and launched herself at him on the sofa, tail whipping, paws braced against his chest as she licked his face with unrestrained enthusiasm.

Shane laughed.

It startled everyone.

"Hey— hey, okay— okay," he said breathlessly, instinctively wrapping an arm around her shoulders to steady her weight. His other hand slid into her fur, fingers pressing just behind her ears in a way that made Anya melt instantly, leaning into him with a pleased huff.

There was no hesitation. No confusion. His body moved like it had done this a thousand times before.

"Oh my god," Shane murmured, forehead pressing briefly against hers. "You're so big now."

The room went very still.

David froze halfway through setting plates on the table. Yuna stopped short behind Shane. Ilya didn't move at all.

Shane pulled back slightly, still holding Anya by the collar, his brow furrowing as something clicked too late.

"...Why do I know her?" he asked quietly.

The question wasn't panicked. It was worse than that. Genuinely confused.

Anya whined softly and nudged her nose under Shane's chin, as if answering for him.

"I—" David started, then stopped himself, glancing helplessly at Yuna.

Shane looked up then.

And finally saw Ilya.

The warmth drained from his face in real time.

"What is he doing here?" Shane demanded, arm tightening instinctively around Anya like a shield.

"He came with your mum." David said quickly.

Shane scoffed. "Of course he did."

"Anya, please, be careful with Shane." said Ilya ignoring Shane's comment.

Anya chose that moment to abandon all loyalty and trot straight toward Ilya, tail wagging furiously, circling his legs before sitting at his feet and looking up expectantly.

Shane stared.

"She—" His voice faltered. "She listens to you."

Yuna exhaled slowly. "Shane... Sweetheart... She's his dog."

Shane looked back at Anya. Then at Ilya. Then back again.

"That doesn't make sense," he said flatly. "Why would I—" He stopped, jaw tightening as the thought refused to finish forming.

Ilya spoke carefully, like approaching a wild animal. "Her name is Anya," he said. "She's... she's very important to you."

Shane's chest tightened at the certainty in his tone. He hated that his body reacted before his brain did. The pull, the echo of familiarity.

Anya padded back to Shane and sat neatly by his injured ankle, leaning her weight against his leg like she'd done it a hundred times before.

Shane sucked in a sharp breath. "She's warm," he muttered, more to himself than anyone else. "She does this when things get loud."

Yuna's eyes filled immediately.

Ilya's hands curled slowly into fists at his sides.

Shane looked up, suddenly overwhelmed. “I don’t— I don’t remember any of this,” he said, voice pitching dangerously close to panic. “But she does. And that’s not— that’s not nothing.”

“No,” Yuna agreed softly. “It’s not.”

Dinner was quieter after that.

Shane kept Anya close, one hand resting absently in her fur the entire time, grounding himself without realizing it. He barely looked at Ilya, but he didn’t tell him to leave any more either.

Later, when the plates had been cleared and his parents were inside arguing quietly about whether dessert was necessary, Shane maneuvered himself outside. The backyard smelled like pine and smoke, the lake a dark, glassy stretch beyond the trees. A small fire crackled in the pit near the deck, flames snapping softly in the cool evening air.

Anya followed him without question.

He settled carefully into one of the chairs, stretching his injured ankle out, exhaling slowly as the pressure eased. The fire helped. The sound, the warmth, the predictability of it. He focused on that.

Footsteps crunched behind him.

“I won’t stay long,” Ilya said.

Shane stiffened anyway.

“Didn’t invite you,” he replied, eyes fixed on the fire.

“I know.”

Silence stretched. Shane hated how aware he was of Ilya’s presence. The shift in air, the way his shoulders relaxed a fraction despite himself. It pissed him off.

Ilya took the chair opposite him, far enough to give space, close enough that the firelight caught on his face. He didn’t look at Shane right away. That helped.

Anya got up, circled once, then lay down squarely between them.

“Traitor,” Shane muttered.

Ilya huffed quietly. “She is very diplomatic.”

Shane shot him a glare that lacked its usual bite. “She’s supposed to be on my side.”

“She is,” Ilya said. “That’s why she’s here.”

That shut Shane up for a moment.

The fire popped. Sparks drifted upward and disappeared into the dark.

“I don’t want you here,” Shane said finally, blunt as a slap. “I don’t trust you. I don’t like how you look at me like you know things I don’t.”

Ilya nodded once. “That’s fair.”

Shane frowned. “You’re not even going to argue?”

“I’m not here to convince you of anything,” Ilya said quietly. “I just want you safe and, if that means keeping my distance, I will.”

Something in Shane’s chest twisted unpleasantly. He shifted in his chair, fingers digging into Anya’s fur. She leaned harder belly up into his leg in response.

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Shane snapped.

“I know,” Ilya said again. Same tone. Same steadiness.

It made Shane’s teeth itch.

“Then why are you pushing this?” Shane demanded. “Why can’t you just—” He gestured vaguely. “Leave me alone?”

Ilya looked at him then. Not intense. Not pleading. Just honest.

“Because when you get overwhelmed,” he said softly, “you stop breathing properly. You lock your jaw. You forget to eat. And you don’t notice until it hurts.”

Shane froze.

“That’s not—” He stopped. Tried to remember the last time he’d eaten something that wasn’t handed to him. His stomach gave an unhelpful twist.

He hated this. Hated that Ilya wasn’t wrong. Hated that his body reacted. Breath slowing, shoulders lowering just from hearing that familiar cadence in his voice.

“I don’t like this,” Shane admitted, quieter now.

“I know.”

“Every time you talk,” Shane continued, frustrated, “it’s like... My head’s on fire, but my body feels fine. And that doesn’t make sense.”

Ilya’s expression softened in a way that made Shane look away.

“Look, you don’t have to like it,” Ilya said. “And you don’t have to trust me.”

“Good,” Shane muttered.

“But,” Ilya went on, careful, “let me stay. Not as your husband. Not as anything you’re not ready for. Just—” He gestured to Anya. To the fire. To the quiet. “As someone who knows how to keep things from getting too loud.”

Shane swallowed.

He stared at the flames, at the way they moved in patterns that felt familiar, comforting. Anya’s breathing was steady against his leg. Somewhere beside him, he was acutely aware of Ilya’s presence. Not looming, not demanding. Just there.

“What are the conditions?” Shane asked.

Ilya didn’t hesitate. “Separate rooms. I don’t touch you unless you ask. I don’t correct you unless it’s about safety. I— I don’t tell you things you don’t want to know.”

“And you don’t call me *that*,” Shane added sharply.

“I don’t call you *what*?” Ilya questioned puzzled.

“You don’t call me hus—”

Ilya interrupted and nodded. “I won’t.”

Another pause.

“You leave if I tell you to,” Shane said.

“Yes.”

Shane’s jaw clenched. He hated that this felt... Reasonable. That the knot in his chest was loosening instead of tightening.

“Fine,” he said at last, voice stiff. “You can stay. Because of Anya. And because—” He exhaled sharply. “Because I don’t want my parents hovering any more than they already do. They worry too much.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched, just barely. “Understood.”

Shane finally looked at him. “This doesn’t mean anything.”

“I know,” Ilya said softly.

Anya thumped her tail once, satisfied.

Shane leaned back in his chair, eyes closing for just a second longer than necessary. The fire crackled. The lake breathed. And despite himself, despite everything, his body settled.

He hated that most of all.

May 2022

The weeks settled into something resembling structure, even if Shane refused to call it routine out loud it helped ease some of his initial anxieties about this new arrangement.

May 2022 moved slowly at the cottage. Mornings started early, usually with Anya's nose pressed insistently against Shane's hand or calf, her tail thumping once she was sure he was awake. Three days a week, Ilya drove him into town for physical therapy, the same route every time, the radio kept low because sudden noises and volume changes still scraped at Shane's skull, but music had been recommended by his doctors. On the other days, Shane logged into cognitive therapy sessions from the dining table while Ilya disappeared into the kitchen, deliberately out of earshot but never far.

When there was nothing scheduled, Shane watched TV. More specifically, hockey.

Not highlights. Not interviews. Full games. Chronological. Painstaking.

He sat on the couch with his ankle elevated, remote balanced in one hand, Anya curled against his thigh. He watched himself move. Younger, sharper, reckless but calculated in ways that made his chest ache. Sometimes Ilya lingered in the doorway, arms crossed, offering quiet commentary Shane didn't ask for.

"You always did that with your left shoulder," Ilya said once, nodding at the screen.

Shane frowned, concentrated on the game, Montreal Voyageurs versus Boston Bears. His second season playing for the Canadian team. "Did what?"

"Dropped it when you were tired."

Shane rewound the clip. Watched again. Swallowed. "Huh."

"This is why we got to the playoffs that year. Montreal was too easy."

"Fuck off, Rozanov." complained Hollander. Ilya smirked subtly at the reaction.

His therapist's name was Dr. Matthews, and she spoke gently in the careful, measured way people used when they didn't want to spook him, which happened to be more often than he thought.

Anya lay at Shane's feet throughout the session, as always, chin on her paws, eyes half-lidded.

“You’ve been making good progress,” Dr. Matthews said, tapping her notes. “Your emotional regulation has improved since last week, according to what you’ve explained.”

Shane shifted in his chair. “That’s because I’ve been sleeping better.”

“And why do you think that is?”

He hesitated. Glanced down at the dog. Her tail thumped once when his foot moved.

Dr. Matthews smiled, knowing where must have been looking. “Exactly.”

Shane groaned quietly. “You’re not about to tell me the dog is medical equipment, are you?”

“No,” she said, amused. “But animals, especially familiar ones, can act as grounding anchors. Your nervous system responds to her presence. Your heart rate stabilizes faster when she’s near.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Shane muttered, heat creeping up his neck. This was starting to feel old.

“I wouldn’t say she is babysitting you,” Dr. Matthews said calmly. “She is helping with *regulating*. Animals can help regulate stress responses, reduce sensory overload, and in some cases trigger procedural memory.”

That word again.

“She helps interrupt spirals before they escalate,” the therapist continued. “Given your concussion, memory disruption, and sensory sensitivity, I’d strongly advise keeping her with you during recovery.”

Shane crossed his arms. “So what, I bring her everywhere?”

“For now,” Dr. Matthews said gently, “yes. As much as possible.”

He looked down at Anya again. She blinked up at him, slow and trusting.

The frustration drained out of him, replaced with something quieter. Resigned. Uncomfortable.

“...Fine,” he said at last. “But I’m not calling her a coping mechanism.”

Dr. Matthews smiled wider. “You don’t have to.”

The domesticity still threw him off.

The cocky and arrogant Ilya he remembered did not match the Ilya with who he had been living with for the past couple of weeks.

That Ilya was sharp smiles, hotel rooms and rumors that followed him like smoke. A guy who looked like he never stayed anywhere long enough to leave an imprint. A playboy. A party animal. A provocateur.

This one cooked.

Shane watched him chop vegetables from a distance with methodical precision, sleeves pushed up, music low as to not disturb Shane's match on TV. He saw him disappear into the gym room every afternoon, disciplined and quiet about it. Watched him clip Anya's leash on and take her for long walks and runs through the forest, returning with dirt on his shoes and a calm settled into his posture.

It didn't compute.

Sometimes Shane caught himself staring, chest tight, brain short-circuiting. His body reacted before his thoughts did when he noticed Rozanov had left the house and returned. Shoulders easing, breathing slowing and it pissed him off every time.

One afternoon, while Ilya stirred a pot at the stove, Shane opened his laptop.

He didn't know what he was looking for. Proof, maybe. Control.

His name filled the screen quickly. Stats. Contracts. Headlines he didn't remember earning. Photos of himself older, heavier, holding trophies that made his stomach flip.

Stanley Cup Champion.

Team Captain.

League Veteran.

He scrolled until his hands shook, then closed the laptop abruptly.

From the kitchen, Ilya glanced over but didn't comment.

The screen went dark, but the images didn't.

Shane's breath hitched as if his lungs had forgotten the order of things. His heart slammed hard against his ribs, too fast, too loud. The room felt wrong all of a sudden, too big, too sharp, the crackle of the fire stove suddenly unbearable. His fingers curled into the fabric of the couch, nails biting in without him meaning to.

No. No, no—

The pressure built fast, overwhelming. His vision tunneled, edges blurring as heat crawled up his spine. The ceiling seemed to tilt. His chest burned, each breath shallow and useless.

"Shane?"

Ilya's voice cut through the fog, distant at first, then closer. Too close.

Shane sucked in air like he was drowning. "I— I can't—" His words fractured, slipped apart. He bent forward, elbows on his knees, head dropping as his body folded in on itself. The world narrowed down to noise and panic and the sick certainty that he was losing control.

The dam broke.

Ilya was beside him instantly, movements sharp with fear he didn't bother hiding. He dropped to his knees in front of Shane, hands hovering, unsure where to go, where he was allowed.

"Hey," Ilya said softly, grounding his voice on purpose. "Shane. Look at me, okay? Just look."

Shane couldn't. His hands flew up to his head instead, fingers tangling in his hair as if he could physically hold himself together. His breathing stuttered, chest jerking.

"I need to— I don't— it's too much," he gasped, shame flooding in on top of the panic. "I can't—"

Ilya's heart pounded painfully in his own chest. This helplessness, it dragged him somewhere dark and familiar. Too familiar. He forced himself to breathe slowly, deeply, the way Dr. Galina had drilled into him over and over. You can't calm someone if you're unraveling too.

"Shane," he said again, quieter. "Can I touch you?"

The question came delicately, earnestly, like stepping onto thin ice.

Shane hesitated, body rigid, then nodded once, jerky. "Yeah. Okay."

Ilya didn't hesitate this time. He placed one hand on Shane's forearm, firm but gentle, anchoring. The other settled between Shane's shoulder blades, warm, steady pressure. Shane flinched, then melted into it, breath hitching as his body responded before his mind could argue.

"There you go," Ilya murmured. "I've got you. You're here. You're good. Just breathe with me, yeah?"

He demonstrated, exaggerating his inhale and exhale, counting softly under his breath. Shane's breathing fought it at first, erratic and panicked, but slowly, painfully slowly, it began to match Ilya's rhythm.

Ilya felt it the moment Shane leaned into his touch.

The way his shoulders dropped a fraction. The way his grip loosened.

God.

It broke something in him.

I've been here before, Ilya thought bitterly. Watching someone he loved disappear into fear and confusion. He remembered his father's eyes, clouded and lost, the panic when the world stopped making sense. He remembered being twelve and realizing too early that love didn't always mean you could save someone.

His chest tightened, but he stayed.

Because this time, he could hold on. He had a chance to fight it.

Shane let out a broken sound, halfway between a sob and a breath, forehead pressing into Ilya's shoulder without asking. His hands fisted in the fabric of Ilya's shirt like it was the only solid thing left.

"I didn't mean to," Shane whispered, voice wrecked. "I just... I saw myself and I don't feel like that person and it feels wrong and I don't know how to fix it."

Ilya swallowed hard, eyes burning. He slid his hand up Shane's back, slow, grounding strokes. "You don't have to fix anything right now," he said caressing his husband's neck. "You're not broken. You never were."

Shane shook his head weakly. "I hate that my body trusts you," he admitted, voice small and raw. "I don't understand it."

A sad smile pulled at Ilya's mouth. "Yeah," he whispered. "I know."

As Shane's breathing evened out, his mind still foggy but no longer spiraling, he became dimly aware of other things. The sharp line of Ilya's collarbone beneath his cheek. The way his shirt hung looser than it should have.

He pulled back just enough to look at him.

"You're... thinner," Shane said quietly, frowning. "Have you been eating?"

Ilya stilled.

For a moment, he considered lying. It would be easier.

Instead, he exhaled slowly. "I forget sometimes," he admitted. "And I train more when my head gets loud. Dr. Galina says it's better than other of my coping mechanisms." he chuckled.

Shane didn't like that answer. Something twisted in his chest, unfamiliar and uncomfortable. He nodded anyway, exhausted, fingers still curled into Ilya's shirt like he hadn't realized he was holding on.

They stayed like that for a long moment. Anya shifted closer, pressing her warm weight against Shane's leg.

Ilya rested his forehead briefly against Shane's temple, eyes closed, grounding himself just as much as Shane was grounding to him.

I can do this, he told himself. *I've survived worse.*

And even if Shane didn't remember loving him. Ilya would keep choosing him anyway.



Something shifted after that.

It wasn't dramatic. There was no big conversation, no sudden trust or sweeping forgiveness. Just... Small things. Incremental things. Shane started answering Ilya instead of deflecting. Started sitting closer on the couch without tensing. Started letting silences stretch without feeling like he had to fill them with suspicion.

One morning, a few days later, Shane watched Ilya make coffee for their breakfast. Sharing meal time had now become part of their routine. He made sure of that. He also didn't feel as useless around the house. Now, he could walk longer distances without the help of crutches and he wanted to start going on walks instead of simply sticking to the treadmill. He thought about asking to join Ilya on his walks with Anya that morning.

He didn't mean to. He was half-awake, Anya playing with one of her many toys in the sofa. He stared vaguely at the kitchen as Ilya moved through it with practiced ease. The Russian reached automatically for a mug Shane didn't recognize, filled the coffee pot, waited. When the coffee brewed, he added cream without measuring on his and gave Shane a simple black coffee.

Then—

two teaspoons of sugar.

Shane frowned.

"Why'd you do that?" he asked.

Ilya glanced over his shoulder. "Do what?"

"The sugar," Shane said slowly. "You always—" He stopped short.

Always.

The word landed between them like a dropped plate.

Ilya turned fully this time, brows knitting together. "I... what?"

Shane's pulse picked up. Not panic, something else. A hum under his skin. "You don't like spoons in the morning," he said, uncertain but compelled. "You say they clink too loud and they are annoying. So you usually use cubes. Two. And cream because black coffee 'tastes like punishment.'"

Silence.

Ilya stared at him.

Then, very carefully, he set the mug down on the counter.

“Yes,” he said hoarsely. “That’s... yes. That’s exactly right.”

Shane swallowed. His chest felt tight, but not in a bad way. “Huh.”

It wasn’t a memory the way he expected memories to be. No images, no timeline, no context. Just a fact. A certainty. His body knowing something his mind hadn’t caught up to yet.

Ilya didn’t push. He just watched Shane like he was something fragile and miraculous all at once.

Later that afternoon, it happened again.

They were sitting outside on the backyard chill-out, the last rays of spring sun filtering through the trees. Shane was scrolling idly through his phone. Scores, articles, old forums, when he snorted suddenly.

“Jesus,” he said, startling himself.

Ilya looked up from his own phone. “What?”

Shane’s forehead creased. “Hayden Pike.”

Ilya froze.

Slowly, he straightened. “Sorry?”

“My best friend?” Shane said automatically. “Voyageurs. Left wing. Countless children. Huge pain in the ass.” He paused, “Your words, not mine.” then added, confused, “Why do I remember that?”

Ilya blinked once.

Then twice.

“You remember him?” he asked flatly.

Shane glanced up, startled by the tone. “Yeah? I mean—why are you looking at me like that?”

Ilya let out a sharp laugh, scrubbing a hand down his face. “You forget our wedding. You forget living together. You forget me cooking you dinner every night for a year.” He gestured vaguely in the air. “But Hayden Pike survives the apocalypse.”

Shane bristled instinctively. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” Ilya said dryly, “that man is a cockroach.”

Despite himself, Shane smiled. It felt familiar. Right.

“Oh,” Shane said suddenly. “Wait. Didn’t he—” He stopped, eyes widening. “Oh my God.”

Ilya closed his eyes. “No.”

“He sent something,” Shane said, half laughing now, half horrified. “A video. To— to a fan email thing. And we were in the background.”

Ilya opened one eye. “Kissing,” he supplied.

“Very much kissing,” Shane confirmed.

“Passionately,” Ilya added.

Shane groaned, dropping his head into his hands. “That’s why people found out?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “Two months earlier than what we had planned. The internet had screenshots within six minutes.”

“That’s horrifying.”

“That’s Hayden.”

Shane laughed then. Really laughed. It startled both of them.

Ilya watched it like it was sunlight after a long winter.

Those moments didn’t fix everything. Shane still flinched sometimes. Still shut down when things came too fast, too emotional, too abstract. Still didn’t trust easily.

But he was softer now.

He helped Ilya with the dishes without comment. Let him sit closer. Let his hand brush his wrist without pulling away when they handed each other things. It felt natural.

And Ilya, *God*.

Ilya took every inch of it like a gift.

Carefully.

Reverently.

June 2022

Ilya learned, sometime in early June. Being remembered could be dangerous.

Not all at once. Not in a rush. It crept in slowly, disguised as small mercies.

It was the way Shane said his name now. Not “Rozanov,” sharp and defensive like a shield.

Not hesitant, like he was testing unfamiliar ground.

Just—

“Ilya.”

Casual. Soft. Said like it belonged in his mouth.

That alone was enough to undo him.

Physically, Shane was better. Fully cleared. The limp gone, the crutches abandoned by the door like an artifact from another life. He moved easily again, confidently, his body remembering what his mind still couldn't. Watching him skate for the first time after PT had ended nearly broke Ilya in half. Shane had stepped onto the fake ice of the indoor hockey training facility by the cottage like he'd never left it, like gravity had been waiting patiently for him to come back.

Memory, though. That was another beast entirely.

It came in flashes now. Disjointed things. Preferences. Habits. People they had met throughout the years. Team members. Matches.

And Ilya felt every single one land like a weight landing on his chest.

Shane remembered how he took his coffee.

That he secretly enjoyed telenovelas “Listen, Hollander.” he explained when he got called out. “You need to open up your mind, you would *hate* these characters. So, sit, watch and shut up. The protagonist just realized she is pregnant. This is crucial.”

That he would train harder when his thoughts got too loud.

“You doing okay with the new dosage?” Shane asked one morning, not looking up from giving Anya her bowl of breakfast.

Ilya had stopped dead in the kitchen.

“With... what?”

“Your antidepressants,” Shane said easily, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. “Mum mentioned Dr. Galina adjusted them after the accident. I was just—” He shrugged. “Curious.”

Curious.

Not cautious. Not afraid. Not treating it like fragile glass.

Ilya swallowed, heart stuttering. “Yeah,” he said finally. “It’s... better. Quieter.”

Shane nodded, satisfied. “Good. You need to take them once a day, right?”

That was it. No pity. No awkwardness. Just a check-in.

Later that week, Shane had cornered him on the deck with his tablet in hand, sunlight catching in his hair in a way that made Ilya ache, rivulets of water still running down his back from coming out fresh out of the lake.

“I was reading about the foundation,” Shane said. “The Irina Foundation.”

Ilya felt his stomach twist instinctively. That territory was sacred. Raw. Tender.

“And?” he asked carefully.

“And I was thinking,” Shane continued, laying down, mind clearly already running ahead of his words, “what if the camps weren’t just seasonal? I know we’d be too busy to actually be there all year, but—like a hockey extracurricular school. All benefits for the mental health organizations. Not just summer.”

Ilya stared at him.

“You have been thinking about that?” he asked quietly.

Shane shrugged again, but there was something earnest beneath it. Something intentional. “It feels like something we would’ve talked about.”

We.

The word hit Ilya harder than any check ever had.

“Yes,” he said, voice thick. “We did. Talk about it, I mean.”

Shane smiled faintly, pleased in a way that felt dangerously intimate. “Then maybe we should talk about it again. I feel kind of bad that I wasn’t able to join everybody this summer.”

Ilya turned away under the excuse of admiring the sunset because if he didn’t, Shane might see the way his eyes burned.

This—this version of Shane—was cruel in ways the old one never had been.

Because he wasn't rejecting Ilya anymore. He wasn't pushing him away. He was approaching him.

Asking questions. Showing interest. Choosing closeness.

And every time Shane leaned in, every time he remembered something small and inconsequential and theirs, Ilya felt the hope swell larger in his chest, terrifying in its scale.

Hope was dangerous.

Hope said: Maybe he could fall in love with you again.

Hope said: Maybe this time, you won't lose him.

But hope didn't protect you if the memories never came back at all. Ilya knew that better than anyone.

So he took what he was given.

He memorized the way Shane now watched him when he thought Ilya wasn't looking.

The way his body still softened instinctively at Ilya's presence.

The way his questions were starting to drift, not just toward facts and work-related stuff, but feelings.

"Were we happy?" Shane asked later that night, as they hung out in the sofa watching reruns of old sitcoms on TV. So quietly Ilya almost missed it.

Ilya closed his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "We were."

At some point during the night, Shane had slipped further next to Ilya in the chaise longue, head almost resting on Rozanov's shoulder.

Ilya noticed it immediately.

He froze. Not because he didn't want it, but because he was afraid he craved it too much.

The sitcom laughter played softly in the background, canned and distant, the glow of the TV washing over them in muted blues. Shane's presence was warm and solid against his side, the subtle weight of him grounding in a way that made Ilya's chest ache.

Shane shifted, restless.

"Can I ask you something else?" he murmured.

Ilya nodded, careful not to move. "You can ask me anything."

Shane hesitated, fingers worrying at the seam of the cushion that lay on his lap. “What were we like... together?”

Ilya exhaled slowly. “What do you mean?”

“Like—” Shane searched for the words. “Were we intense? Quiet? Did we fight all the time? Were you... patient with me?”

Ilya let out a soft, breathless laugh. “God, no.”

Shane frowned, lifting his head slightly to look at him. “No?”

“You were patient with me,” Ilya said, voice low. “You taught me how to slow down. How to stay. You were stubborn and competitive and a pain in my ass, but you were kind. Especially when it mattered. When I needed you most.”

Shane swallowed. His gaze lingered on Ilya’s mouth longer than necessary.

“Did you ever... date anyone else?” he asked, trying to sound casual and failing.

Ilya’s heart stuttered.

“Not dated,” he said honestly. “I slept around. We both did before we started dating. Ten years is a really long time and we were casual for most of it. Finding random one-night stands when you weren’t around became boring. So, I mostly stuck around with the usual.”

Shane stiffened almost imperceptibly. “Who?”

Ilya hesitated, then decided he owed him the truth. “Svetlana.”

Shane’s jaw tightened instantly. “The Russian girl from Boston?”

“Yes.”

Silence stretched.

“Oh,” Shane said flatly. “Of course.”

Ilya turned toward him, concerned. “Shane—”

“So you could commit,” Shane muttered, heat creeping into his tone. “Just not to me back then.”

“That’s not—” Ilya stopped himself, choosing his words carefully. “She was safe. Easy. People wouldn’t have asked questions if they saw us hanging out. She didn’t scare me.”

Shane scoffed quietly. “And I did.”

“Yes,” Ilya said without hesitation. “Terrified me. Every time we met I struggled to leave. I would have left everything behind if you had asked me to. Eventually, I did and it got us where we are now, I guess.”

That stopped Shane cold.

He looked up then, really looked at Ilya, searching his face for deflection or arrogance or humor, and finding none. Just sincerity. Vulnerability.

“Oh,” Shane said again, this time softer as he turned his head back to the images on the screen.

After some minutes, Hollander’s hand lifted without permission, fingers brushing Ilya’s chest near where his mother’s cross lay. The contact sent a sharp, unmistakable jolt through both of them.

“Is this okay?” Shane asked, barely audible.

Ilya nodded. “Always.”

Shane then looked up. His eyes meeting Ilya’s. They both started to lean into each other’s space slowly, giving the other time to pull away.

Neither did.

Their lips met gently at first, hesitant and unsure, like the kiss itself was asking a question. Shane’s breath caught as soon as it happened, a soft whimper escaping him before he could stop it.

Something old and familiar surged through Ilya’s chest.

Shane deepened the kiss instinctively, mouth warm and searching, his body pressing closer as if it remembered exactly how to fit. Ilya’s hand came up to cup Shane’s jaw, thumb brushing his cheekbone, grounding them both.

Shane kissed him like he was learning and remembering all at once.

When they finally pulled apart, foreheads touching, both of them breathing harder than before, Shane laughed softly under his breath.

“Okay,” he said, dazed. “Yeah. That makes sense.”

Ilya smiled despite himself. “What does?”

“Why this feels...” Shane gestured vaguely between them. “I don’t know. Right.”

The space between them collapsed again.

Shane stood up and straddled Ilya’s hips with urgency and practiced desire evident. He was pure instinct. Ilya, although hesitant at first, gave in and started running his hands all over Shane’s body. Taking what had always been his. They kissed intensely. Their tongues dancing to a familiar rhythm against each other.

“Do you...?” slurred Ilya in a haze.

“Let’s go to bed. Ilya, please.” Shane interrupted breathlessly.

Ilya grabbed his husband’s face with both hands. Pecked his lips one more time before asking. “Are you sure?”

Shane nodded haphazardly. “I need you. Now.”

Hollander stood up, grabbing Rozanov by his wrist and dragging him to the en-suite bedroom. They kissed along the hallway on their way. No one was holding back this time. Clothes scattered around the floor without a care in the world.

Ilya pushed Shane on top of the bed covers once their legs touched its edge.

“The clothes are going to get wrinkled.” Said Shane in a daze as Ilya started to kiss and suck on his neck. “Fuck, Ilya-”

“I will wash and iron even the clothes from the closet tomorrow if it is going to help you worry less.” Ilya started to press kisses down Shane’s chest and sensitive nipples. He palmed and stroked Hollander’s already hard cock as a moan came out of the older. “Fuck, Hollander. As ready as always.” Shane groaned as Ilya moved to caress his balls in his big hand.

He continued to kiss downwards until Shane stopped him. “You’re okay?” The blonde said breathless. “I can stop if it’s too much.”

“Fuck. No. Don’t you dare.” Shane flipped them over hovering over Rozanov. He lowered himself without breaking eye contact as Ilya propped himself up on his elbows. “I need you in my mouth, is all.”

Shane wasted no time in filling his mouth with his husband’s cock. Sucking and licking the head the way he *knew* made Ilya shiver with pleasure. As expected, the curly haired one threw his head back as he groaned. Shane felt himself get harder and heavier if that was even possible.

Up and down he made sure to drag his tongue along every, single, inch. He changed his speed. Slowed down almost teasingly which he knew would drive Ilya mad. And would most likely earn him a tease later. He craved all. He was hungry for more, something inside him felt starved and neglected.

“Shane, wait— Fuck, мой любимый.” Ilya moaned the words out of his mouth, lost in passion. “If you want me to fuck you, Hollander. I’m going to need for you to stop doing *that*.”

Shane gazed up. Eyes clouded and glistening with desire. He smirked sideways crawling back up to Ilya’s mouth. The Russian could feel his own saltiness in the Canadian’s lips. “How do you want me?”

“I want to see you.”

The couple lay side by side facing each other, their legs tangled and lips kissing hungrily as hands roamed each other's bodies and thrusts found their cocks together.

“Is there lube on the nightstand?”

“Yeah, I- I used it this morning. There's still some left.” breathed Shane against Ilya's lips.

Ilya moved slightly away to look at Shane with a straight face. “You used it. This morning.”

Shane blushed. “My memory might resemble Dory's but a man has needs.”

“Who the fuck is Dory?”

Shane chuckled softly and moved to get the lube from the nightstand, ignoring him.

It didn't take long for Ilya to get inside Shane's slicked warmth. Both men moaning, groaning and whimpering in each other's mouth with every thrust of their hips.

“You're so tight, Hollander.”

“Shit. I— I missed this.” Ilya ignored the pressure in his heart and throat as Shane said these words. He wasn't completely sure the brunet was aware of what he was saying. “Me too.” Ilya kissed Shane's temple as he increased the intensity of his thrusts.

“I'm— I'm close, Ilya.”

“Are you going to cum for me?”

Shane's seed landed on their stomachs as he gave his neglected cock some quick strokes. Accompanied not long after by Ilya's cum inside of the older. Both men trying to regain their breaths between pecks and kisses.

After cleaning up. The house was quiet again. The TV had long since gone dark in the living room.

They lay tangled together in bed, sheets hastily pulled on top of them, Shane's head resting against Ilya's chest. His breathing was slow now, even.

Ilya ran his fingers gently through Shane's hair, afraid that if he stopped, the moment might disappear.

Shane shifted slightly, then looked up at him, eyes heavy-lidded but clear.

“You don't have to,” he said quietly.

Ilya frowned. “Don’t have to what?”

“Stay,” Shane clarified. “I know you said you’d give me space. I know this is complicated.”

Ilya waited, heart in his throat.

“But,” Shane continued, voice steady, “I don’t want to do this alone. I don’t want you sleeping in the guest room. I can’t keep pretending this,” he gestured between them. “doesn’t exist.”

He hesitated, then added, softer, “Can you stay?”

Ilya didn’t even think about it.

“Yes,” he said immediately. “I’ll stay. For you.”

Shane smiled, relief washing over his face as he tucked himself closer.

“Good,” he murmured sleepily. “I think I’m starting to remember why I married you.”

Ilya closed his eyes, holding him like something precious and fragile and very much alive.

And for the first time in months, hope didn’t feel like a threat.

It felt like a promise.

July 2022

By July, whatever they were doing had stopped having a name.

They went to sleep together, kissed every morning without thinking about it, touched constantly in ways that felt instinctive rather than deliberate. Sex came easily, often. Woven into the rhythm of their days like muscle memory refusing to be ignored. They shared meals, workouts, silences. They filled the cottage with motion and noise as if afraid that if they stopped, something fragile might slip through the cracks.

Ilya still rose early, still needed the quiet hours before the world woke up to process his thoughts quietly, but Shane always followed eventually, hair sticking up, bare feet padding across the floor until he found him. Sometimes in the kitchen. Sometimes on the deck. Sometimes already back in bed, waiting.

To Shane, it felt like catching up.

To Ilya, it felt like standing on a shoreline, watching the tide come in and wondering how long before it went back out.

Because even now —especially now— there was no guarantee of permanence, it felt like borrowed time. Shane was present, affectionate, choosing him every day, but his condition loomed like a shadow neither of them named out loud. Ilya loved him carefully, with a restraint that didn't quite reach his hands but stayed lodged somewhere behind his ribs. He took the joy as it came. He didn't plan too far ahead.

Because even now, even with Shane laughing more easily, teasing him again, stealing his hoodies and wearing them like they belonged there, Ilya lived with the quiet terror that it could all be temporary.

Shane's condition haunted everything they did like an unanswered question.

Some mornings, Ilya woke up convinced this was the day Shane would look at him and not know why they were here. Some nights, he lay awake listening to Shane's breathing and wondered whether loving him like this. Fully, openly, again, was selfish.

Today, the Pike's family caravan arrived late into the morning, rattling down the gravel driveway like a small parade.

Anya lost her mind first.

By the time Ilya stepped out onto the front door, she was already circling the vehicle, barking and skidding, tail a blur. The door slid open and four kids spilled out immediately one after the other, shrieking with laughter as Shane appeared in front of them, arms already open.

“There he is!” Shane laughed, crouching just in time to catch the second smallest one as he launched himself at him. “Hey, hey—easy, I missed you too.”

“Uncle Shane!” the twins yelled, wrapping themselves around him too.

Ilya froze for half a second.

Uncle Shane, right. He assumed Hayden had updated him enough before their visit.

Then, speaking of the devil. He emerged, grinning like an idiot, followed by Jackie, who waved cheerfully as she started unloading bags.

“Well,” Hayden called, eyes flicking pointedly to Shane’s stance. Solid, relaxed, unguarded. “You look annoyingly alive.”

Shane smirked. “Disappointed?”

“Oh, no, not you. I meant Rozanov!” Hayden said with a shit eating grin from ear to ear.

“I wouldn’t talk about being alive when your hairline has started to give up on you like that. You look old.” retorted Ilya.

The best friends clapped each other on the shoulders, an old familiarity settling instantly into place. Hayden’s gaze slid, inevitably back to Ilya. The latter chose to ignore it, for now.

“There he is,” Jackie said, softer as she approached Rozanov. “Uncle Ilya.”

Something in the way she said it made Ilya’s chest tighten.

“Hey,” Ilya replied, stepping forward. “Good to see you.”

Jackie hugged him without hesitation, the kind of hug that said *you’re family whether you like it or not*, and the kids followed suit in a chaotic pile.

The day unfolded gently.

Grill fired up. Music low. Kids running wild between the trees while Anya supervised with grave importance. The backyard filled with overlapping conversations and clinking bottles.

Shane stayed at the center of it all.

He laughed loudly. He listened closely. He crouched to the kids’ level when they talked and remembered their names, their stories, their favorite snacks. He moved easily, confidently, no hesitation in his step, no flicker of pain when he shifted his weight.

Ilya watched him from across the yard, a cold drink sweating in his hand.

Hayden joined him eventually, bumping his shoulder lightly.

“He looks good,” Hayden said, casual but careful.

Ilya nodded. “Yeah. He does.”

They stood there in silence for a moment, watching Shane chase one of the kids around the picnic table, laughter ringing through the trees.

“You’re doing good by him,” Hayden added, eyes still forward.

Ilya swallowed. “I’m trying.”

Hayden glanced at him then, something unreadable in his expression, before grinning crookedly. “Yeah. I know.”

Later, as the sun dipped lower and the smell of charcoal clung to everything, Shane leaned into Ilya’s side without thinking, fingers hooking briefly into his belt loop as he laughed at something Jackie said.

It was unconscious. Familiar.

Ilya’s hand settled at Shane’s lower back automatically, steadying him, grounding himself.

From the outside, it looked simple.

From the inside, it felt like walking a tightrope with no visible end.

And still. Ilya stayed.

Because Shane kept choosing him.

The caravan was packed slowly, like no one was in a hurry to leave.

Jackie wrangled the kids with practiced efficiency, handing out juice boxes and instructions while Hayden secured straps and double-checked doors. The sun sat low enough now to soften everything, turning the clearing gold, the kind of light that made goodbyes feel heavier than they needed to be.

Shane hovered near the trunk, hands shoved into his pockets, watching the controlled chaos with a fond smile. Ilya stood a few steps away, talking quietly with Jackie, Anya glued to his side like a sentry.

“Hey,” Shane said suddenly, glancing toward the treeline. “Hayds. Walk with me a sec?”

Hayden looked up, instantly suspicious. “That tone usually precedes bad decisions.”

“Just humor me. C’mom”

They drifted a few meters away, far enough that the kids’ voices blurred into background noise, close enough that no one would worry.

For a moment, Shane said nothing.

Hayden waited.

Then— “I remember.”

Hayden blinked. “You... Remember what?”

“All of it,” Shane said quietly. “Everything.”

The words landed softly. No fireworks. No dramatic pause. Just truth, laid down carefully between them.

Hayden’s face shifted. Not shock exactly, but something like relief breaking through restraint. “Since when?”

“A little before the end of June,” Shane replied. “It wasn’t all at once. It just... locked back into place. Like my head finally caught up with the rest of me.”

“And Ilya?”

Shane shook his head. “Doesn’t know.”

Hayden stared at him. “Jesus, Shane—”

“I know,” Shane cut in gently. “I know. But listen.” He ran a hand through his hair, grounding himself. “My therapist warned me it might come back gradually. That once it did, I might need time to process it without pressure.”

“And you decided,” Hayden said slowly, “to turn that into a surprise.”

Shane smiled faintly. “I decided I didn’t want the moment I told him to feel clinical. Or fragile. Or like something that could be taken away again.”

Hayden exhaled through his nose. “You’re insane, Hollander.”

“Probably.”

“But you’re sure?”

Shane met his eyes without hesitation. “I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.”

Silence stretched between them, filled only by the rustle of leaves and distant laughter.

“You’re telling me,” Hayden said finally, “because you want me to—”

“Keep it,” Shane finished. “Just a little longer. One last secret.” He hesitated, then added, quieter, “I want to give him something back. Something solid. On our anniversary.”

Hayden looked back toward the cottage. Toward Ilya, who was now crouched down as one of the kids clung to his shoulders, laughing.

“You know,” Hayden said slowly, “if this goes sideways, he’ll murder me first.”

Shane snorted. “Fair.”

Another beat.

Then Hayden pulled him into a quick, fierce hug, thumping his back once. “Okay,” he said gruffly. “I’m in. But you don’t get to keep me in suspense after that. I want details.”

Shane smiled, genuine and unguarded. “Deal.”

They walked back together.

Goodbyes resumed. Hugs. Promises to visit. The kids piled into the caravan, waving wildly from the windows.

Shane wrapped an arm around Ilya’s waist without thinking, pressing a kiss into his hair as the engine started.

Ilya leaned into him easily, unaware of the truth sitting warm and steady in Shane’s chest.

And for now... That was exactly how Shane wanted it.

By the time their anniversary arrived, Ilya had already convinced himself it would pass unmarked.

He didn’t mention the date. Didn’t circle it on the calendar or bring it up over breakfast. He told himself it didn’t mean anything, not really. That labels were complicated now. That they hadn’t talked about what they were, what they were allowed to be. That pretending nothing had changed was safer than risking wanting an answer. that Shane couldn’t give him.

Still, the knowledge sat heavy in his chest all day.

July had settled into the cottage in full, the air warm and lazy, sunlight spilling through the windows in long, golden bands. It was the kind of day that begged to be remembered. The kind of day their wedding day had been just one year ago. *Time flies*

Ilya moved through it quietly.

He trained longer than usual, pushed his body harder than he needed to, chasing exhaustion because it was easier than sitting with the ache. He showered. He cooked lunch. He took Anya out for a walk even though Shane offered to do it but he insisted on taking her on his own. If Shane noticed something different in his demeanor today he didn’t mention it. He smiled when Shane talked, laughed at the right moments, kissed him when Shane leaned in like he always did now. Soft, warm and familiar.

But underneath it all, something hollow throbbed.

This was supposed to be ours, he thought.

This day.

His wedding day had been the happiest day of his life. Not because of the venue or the guests or the noise and celebration, but because Shane had looked at him like there was nowhere else on earth he'd rather be. Because they had chosen each other openly, proudly, without fear, without hiding anymore.

And now—

Now he had Shane. In his bed. In his arms. In his life.

But not in name.

Not in certainty.

By late afternoon, the weight of it had begun to press harder against his ribs. It took greater effort to try and ignore it. He told himself he was being ridiculous. Shane didn't remember. Shane hadn't agreed to anything. This was no one's fault but his maybe for not bringing the subject up sooner.

That didn't make it hurt less.

Shane noticed, of course. He always did.

"You okay?" he asked gently when Ilya lingered too long at the kitchen counter, staring at nothing.

"Yeah," Ilya lied easily. "Just tired."

Shane studied him for a moment longer, brow creasing slightly, but let it go.

Dinner was quiet at first. Comfortable. Domestic. Delicious. Shane had decided to prepare dinner on his own while he and Anya were out and had forbidden Ilya from getting close to the kitchen insisting he needed to rest if he felt tired.

Then Shane set a bowl down in front of him.

Steam rose from it, fragrant and unmistakable.

Ilya froze.

For a second, his brain refused to place it. His chest tightened, breath catching sharp and sudden, like he'd been punched somewhere tender and old.

"Shane," he said hoarsely. "What—what is this?"

Shane hesitated, suddenly uncertain. "пельмени," he said. "I hope I didn't butcher the name," he joked. Looking at Ilya's face, he panicked. "I mean—if I did it wrong, I can—"

Ilya's vision blurred instantly.

It wasn't just Pelmeni. It was *that* Pelmeni. Thin dough and rich white looking dumplings, the smell of ground meat and seasoning and sour cream curling through the kitchen like a ghost. Like childhood. Like winters in Moscow. Like his mother standing at the stove, humming under her breath while he sat at the table pretending not to be hungry, while he waited.

His throat closed.

"My mum used to make this," he whispered, barely aware he'd spoken aloud.

Shane's face softened. "I know."

That was it.

The faucet opened, and the tears started running wild.

Ilya's shoulders shook as the tears came fast and unguarded, months of restraint collapsing under the smallest, kindest weight. He bent forward instinctively, hands coming up to his face like he could hold himself together that way, but Shane was there immediately.

Always there.

"Hey," Shane murmured, chair scraping back as he closed the distance. He knelt beside Ilya, hands warm and sure as they settled on his arms, then around him, pulling him in without hesitation as he sat on Ilya's lap. "Hey, hey. It's okay."

Ilya clutched at him, fingers digging into fabric, breath shuddering. "I didn't—" He laughed weakly through the tears. "I didn't think today would hurt like this."

Shane stilled.

"Today?" he repeated softly.

Ilya shook his head, already regretting it. "It's stupid. Forget it."

"No," Shane said firmly, pulling back just enough to look at him. His eyes were gentle, steady. "Talk to me."

Ilya swallowed hard. The truth pressed against his tongue, heavy and fragile. "It's our one year anniversary," he admitted quietly. "Or—it was. Our wedding anniversary. I didn't think you'd—I didn't want to assume anything. I know things are complicated and—"

His voice broke again, traitorous.

"It was the happiest day of my life," he whispered. "And I just—I miss it. I miss us."

Shane didn't say anything for a long moment.

He just held him. Let him cry. Let the grief bleed out slowly, safely.

When Ilya finally calmed down, breathing evening out against Shane's shoulder, Shane shifted slightly. Carefully. Like he was bracing himself.

"Ilya," he said softly.

"Mm?"

"There's something I need to tell you."

Something in his tone made Ilya pull back.

Shane's hands were steady as he reached into his pocket. He hesitated only a second before pulling something free and placing it in Ilya's palm.

Metal. Cool. Familiar.

Ilya's breath hitched violently.

His ring. The very same one he had stopped wearing when he came to stay in the cottage to avoid making Shane feel uncomfortable.

Shane took a breath, then another. "I remember," he said quietly. "I have for a while now."

The world tilted.

"What?" Ilya whispered.

"I didn't lose it forever," Shane continued, voice steady even as his eyes shone. "It came back in pieces. Slowly. Like my therapist said it might. And when the puzzle completed, like, two weeks ago, I—I didn't tell you."

Ilya stared at him, heart slamming painfully against his ribs. "Why?"

Shane swallowed. "Because you were holding me together when I didn't know who I was. Because you loved me without knowing if I'd ever come back. And I needed to be sure that when I told you... It wasn't just memory talking."

He turned his hand over, revealing his own ring, warm from his skin.

"I wanted to give you something back," Shane said, voice thick. "Something solid. Something real. On our anniversary."

He took Ilya's shaking hand and pressed the ring into it.

"Put it back," Shane said softly. "Where it belongs. Please."

Ilya let out a broken sound, half-sob, half-laugh, tears spilling freely now as he slid the ring onto Shane's finger with hands that trembled too much to be graceful.

It fit perfectly.

Shane smiled through his own tears, leaning in to press his forehead against Ilya's. "Happy anniversary, моя любовь" he whispered.

Ilya laughed, breathless and undone, pulling him close like he was afraid he might disappear.

"Happy anniversary, моя любовь" he echoed. "Don't you ever fucking scare me like that again, Hollander."

This time, hope didn't feel fragile.

It felt earned. He felt remembered.

End Notes

Well, thank you for reaching the end. I hope you found it to your liking :)
Comments and kudos alike are appreciated.

You can find me on Twitter/X by the current username @lilsc00ps you are invited to ramble and get spicy with me in the replies xoxo

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