

Support

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Support

by [Eye_of_the_Dragon](#)

Summary

In which Shane struggles after the events of the Long Game, and life doesn't get as easy as everyone hoped , and years of secrecy and fear do not go away overnight.

Notes

Okay so full transparency, I didnt know what the plot was gonna be untill approx 5,000 words in, so if that explains anything

I also ate edibles before I wrote this

Okay

Thank you

XOXO

Shane's skates felt too tight. His jersey, too loose. The straps of his helmet digging into his chin, and his socks sitting uncomfortable around his ankles. The chattering in the Ottawa Centaurs locker room was loud, boisterous, and friendly.

Ilya was at the center of it, making jokes with Zane Boodram. Shane was trying, he had been trying all morning to focus on the conversations around him, to make a good impression. To prove they hadn't made the wrong choice in bringing him to the team.

But aside from a brief hello upon entering, Shane hadn't been able to say anything at all. His tongue felt like it weighed a hundred tonnes, any words he tried to say would fight their way up his throat, getting stopped behind his teeth.

Ilya kept shooting glances at him when no one was looking, subtle and quick, he wasn't going to draw attention to Shane's discomfort, but he clearly saw it. This did not have the comforting effect that Shane was sure Ilya intended it to have. It made Shane's hair stand on end as he thought of all the ways he was fucking this up.

Shane stood slowly, balanced on covered blades as he gathered the rest of his gear to carry to the rink. Splashes of black cloud the edge of his vision, stomach churning violently with the motion.

A shaky hand reaching out to press against the locker and steady himself Shane tries to take a deep subtle breath, eyes trained on the floor, shoulders hunched.

"You doin okay Hollander?" A hand is gripping his shoulder as a face leans in close, looking over his shoulder Shane identifies the man as Wyatt Hayes.

Shane nodded quickly, raising a hand to wipe his brow and shift so that Wyatt's hand drops off his shoulder. "I'm okay. Thanks."

Shane didn't miss the raised eyebrow Wyatt shot him, or the glance he shot to Ilya after as if trying to figure out the puzzle. It made the knot in Shane's stomach twist. Twisting his body to get out of the way Shane maneuvered himself to the rink.

Practice was long and sloppy by Shane's standards. He had done fine, but he wasn't on his game. The worst was when Dykstra had checked him into the boards, nothing crazy hard, but it had Shane's head spinning, spots flecking his vision, threatening to block out the light completely.

He had been able to shrug off the concern of others by skating away from the boards quickly, ears ringing, he kept his head down while his vision cleared.

When they made it back to the locker room again Shane sat on the bench, head hung low as he waited for his team to shower, listening to the laughter ringing out.

His chest ached with the desire to feel like part of the team. It didn't matter that everyone had been kind this summer at their wedding, or warm when greeting him today. Shane couldn't help the feeling in the back of his mind that kept telling him the other shoe would drop.

The chatter has grown quieter in the other room and Shane is left to listen to the whirring pipes and his own thoughts, interrupted only by his stomach growling every so often.

The pang of hunger was a welcome relief, he knew that was weird and couldn't fully explain it. But when everything was spiraling out of control, sometimes that pit in his stomach was the only thing left he could control.

The boys slowly filter back into the locker room, when Ilya finally emerges Shane grabs his towel and soap and makes his way to the locker room, head down.

Ilya breathed out a heavy sigh watching his husband make his way silently to the now empty shower stalls. His heart was heavy with the weight of his lover's stress that he could do nothing to alleviate.

"He okay?" Zane stood close to him and pitched his voice lower so the other teammates wouldn't overhear.

Ilya peeled his eyes away from the door frame Shane had exited and turned to face Zane. He didn't know how to answer, after all of these years with a private relationship, he had not learnt the skill of what was okay to share, and what was not - so he tended to err on the side of caution. Showing less, rather than more.

"It is new team, he is okay." Ilya forces a smile across his face as he gathered the rest of his things, stuffing them roughly into his bag. The truth is, Ilya doesn't know if he is okay.

He had watched Shane toss and turn the night before, had woken to a cold bed and an empty coffee pot. Shane's dirty work out clothes already at home in the hamper and the shower running all before Ilya had so much as thought about getting out of bed.

He was used to his husband needing to be prepared for change, for new experiences. He was no stranger to Shane's anxiety, but he did not like watching his husband carry it alone.

It was something they were both working on, slowly and separately. The desire and inability to fix each other's problems at a constant internal war.

"I'm doing a BBQ this weekend, thinking of making it a team thing." Zane paused, waiting for Ilya to break free of his thoughts and meet his eyes, "You think you can convince him to come? Might be good for him, for the team."

Ilya felt a lump in his throat threatening to choke him. *Yes* bubbling up wanting to burst free. How he had longed to be invited to a team event and be able to bring Shane, not as a friend but as his partner.

But, with how Shane had acted today Ilya wasn't entirely sure the other man would agree, he was never one for team activities, not with the Metros or on his own. Ilya's tongue swiped his bottom lip as his eyes drifted upward in thought, "I will try. But uh, you will need to get certain burgers for him if he comes I-" Ilya cuts his words off as he's being bumped into by an excited Nick.

"Ilya, my bad man." He's laughing and moving away before Ilya can comment, returning to the boyish roughhousing him and Lucca had been partaking in on the other side of the locker room.

"What were you saying?" Zane turns his attention back to Ilya, "Something about-" Ilya holds a hand up firmly, his eyes flicking back to the doorway.

Shane had reentered the room, and Ilya's eyes were tracking him as he crossed the room, he had gotten dressed in the showers. His skin still bright red from the hot water, hair dripping on his shoulders.

But what really caught Ilya's attention was the dull look in his husband's eyes. The spark he so adored felt flattened, blurred and darkened. His heart ached painfully, wanting nothing more than to reach out and wrap his husband in his arms.

"Shane!" He calls, voice deliberately light. The rest of the locker room hushes a little, making his cheeks go pink. It was the first time the two had spoken out loud in the locker room, and the team was not above staring.

Shane turned to face him slowly, Ilya could see the tension in his shoulders, in his eyebrows, and in his fingers where they were gripping his pant pockets. An eyebrow raised in question, his mouth parted slightly like he was going to answer, nothing more than a choking noise falling out.

"Boodram is having BBQ this weekend, you want to go?" Ilya knows that putting Shane on the spot is maybe not the nicest way to have this conversation, but Ilya also knows as the captain of this team, if he doesn't bridge the gap between Shane and the team, they are not going to even make it to the playoffs. He needs to fix this.

“Ah man you gotta come, Bood’s like the best griller on the team.” Wyatt is calling from the door, a bag slung on his shoulder as he heads to leave, paused one foot in the door to watch the interaction.

Shane’s eyes flicked nervously around the room, Ilya could feel his breath caught in his own throat as he watched his husband battle his nerves, knowing he can not battle them for him. A quick nod, blink and you’d miss it, and Shane is whispering “Yeah, okay.”

Ilya’s throat constricts, guilt squeezing the air from his lungs. He hopes Shane will not be too angry later, will let him explain.

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The ride home is painfully silent, Ilya sneaking glances at Shane as the other man’s fingers drum incessantly at the steering wheel. The crease between his brow refusing to smooth, shoulders at his ears and the left leg not being used to drive is bouncing restlessly.

Ilya takes a slow deep breath and places his hand on Shane’s thigh. “I am sorry, I know I put you on the spot. I just, I want you to trust this team.”

Ilya doesn’t know if his words have helped or hurt his case at first, but he watches as Shane’s jaw clenches, hears his teeth scraping and has the faint idea that helping certainly isn’t what he’s done. “Like I trusted Montreal.”

Shane didn’t need to say it loudly, the words stole the air from the vehicle and Ilya’s lungs in one fell swoop. He twisted in his seat to look at his husband head on, eyes wide, jaw dropping just a bit. “They will not do that to you. Montreal was stupid, fools. They did not deserve you. Ottawa is different.” Ilya couldn’t find the words in English to explain why the Centaurs were different, not with the thoughts swirling in his head.

He knew having the Metros betray Shane had caused a lot of grief, but he didn’t think his husband thought the Centaurs would do the same. He felt foolish for not even considering it. “I trust them, I would not bring you here if I feared they would treat you like - like that.” Ilya can hear the disgust ring clear as day in his own voice as he says the words, trying not to be offended by the accusation.

He watches as Shane lets out a long low sigh, watches as he shakes his shoulders slightly, fighting to loosen the tension that had been gripping him all day. All week. All month.

Ilya's fingers on Shane's thigh squeezed reassuring, "I will not let anyone treat you like that again my love, If anyone makes even the slightest comment I will beat them up. Yes? You forget I am strong sexy Russian, I can beat up anyone I like."

The laugh that manages to pull from Shane settles something in Ilya that hadn't been settled all day.

"Hey." Ilya's voice is soft as he moves his hand from Shane's thigh to the back of his neck, thumb rubbing gently, "I love you. This will be good for us."

—

Boodram - *Hey man, you mentioned something about specific burgers for the BBQ - which ones should I be getting?*

Rozanov - *Shane is not coming. I will be there.*

Boodram - *Oh no! Hope everything is okay?*

Read 2:37pm...

—

Ilya tried not to feel too disappointed as he drove himself to Boodram's house. Shane had tried to come, and Ilya couldn't fault him. It had been Ilya who had told him to stay home in the end, and Shane who pushed for Ilya to go without him.

Ilya had watched Shane worry himself sick all morning, shaking and pacing. His eyes stayed welled up with tears, his fists clenched in his pockets. He couldn't stand it, couldn't be the reason Shane was so uncomfortable.

Shane had been trying really hard to seem composed in front of Ilya all morning, and hadn't let the tears fall despite their looming threat. But when Ilya had suggested that they stay home, that Shane didn't have to do this, the sobs that tore out of his husband broke his heart.

The pleading and apologies turning his gut with guilt. It was his fault for suggesting it when he knew Shane wasn't ready, and his husband was so wrapped up in not disappointing him he was ignoring his own needs.

So Ilya wasn't disappointed in Shane, he could see how hard Shane fought every single day to be out and proud, to be brave. But he was disappointed in their circumstances. Disappointed that after all of these years he still had to wait. Frustrated that the world had damaged his husband's confidence so severely.

Pulling into the Boodram's driveway, Ilya physically shakes his shoulders as he turns off the car. He lets out one long continuous breath, lips puckered as he looks in his rearview mirror and pats his hair down flat. He tests a couple awkward smiles in the mirror before he settles on one that looks close to real. His eyes look tired, but he can't change that. He had been up all night watching his lover fret.

Ilya climbed out of the car and bypassed the front door, unhooking the gate at the side and making his way to the backyard where he knew the team would be. The smell of burgers and hotdogs wafting through the air making his mouth water.

"Rozanov!! You made it!" Wyatt appears first, smacking Ilya on the shoulder playfully, "Where's Shane?"

Ilya's mouth dries a little, he does not want to lie to his teammates. He has lied to them so many times already. But he cannot betray Shane. He settles on a partial truth, "He was not feeling well this morning. Told me to have fun on his behalf."

“What, aw man I was hoping to finally get to know Hollander a little,” Barrett had walked over and his tone was on the edge of whining.

“I’ll have more Barbeques, he can come to the next one. No biggie,” Ilya is grateful for Boodram’s easy acceptance of Shane’s lack of appearance. He shoots him a small smile. He hopes he can convince Shane to join the next one, maybe with more planning, more time to prepare.

“He wanted to be here.” Ilya offers with an easy charming smile, it was another partial truth. Shane wanted to be there to prove something to himself, to support Ilya. Shane did not want to be here.

That was when Ilya had an idea, one he felt silly not considering sooner. Perhaps he needed to invite the team to their house, where Shane felt comfortable in his own space instead of somewhere new. He would not need to request specific food or worry about who would cook it, and he wouldn’t need to worry about where to be in a new place. The suggestion was on the tip of Ilya’s tongue and he found he had to force it back. He would discuss this with Shane this time, in private. He would not make the same mistake twice.

Ilya tries to enjoy the rest of the barbeque, but his hand keeps finding itself wrapped around his phone, checking for texts or updates from Shane - nothing. He hated this divide, had spent the whole summer hoping to no longer feel the pull between his team and Shane. And while he didn’t blame Shane for pulling him, never had, he couldn’t help but feel a little overwhelmed.

“You okay?” Zane had found him after they all finished eating and Ilya had slipped away to the kitchen inside to check his phone again.

Ilya let out a rough sigh. “I do not -” He paused running a hand through his hair roughly. Teeth working his bottom lip, tearing until a sharp sting and coppery taste reach his senses. “I can’t.” His jaw clenches, teeth grinding.

“You guys fighting or something? You can talk to me, you know that.” Zane’s voice was gentle, but he didn’t move any closer - in fact the other man took a couple steps away and sat on one of the island stools, gesturing for Ilya to join him.

Ilya climbed onto the stool gingerly. “No, no fight. We just, I.” Ilya paused, the words getting jumbled as he tried to explain, cheeks flushing with frustration. “We spend a long time being private, yes? And then we get outed. But Shane, Shane is still so private. I do not know how to talk to you about him, it feels like I am being bad. Or something.” Ilya tapered off a little at the end, saying the last bit staring at the counter. “We did not fight, he is just concerned. And I am concerned, about him. Is all very mushy, you understand.” He was trying to lighten the mood, to bring the conversation back under his control.

Zane hummed and tapped his finger tips on the island. The soft thud on the marble calming Ilya’s racing thoughts. “Is he worried about us?” Zane looks at him when he asks, he doesn’t shy away from the question, he doesn’t sound defensive. He sounds like a man who wants to find a solution.

Ilya feels a familiar sting in his eyes and he pinches the bridge of his nose tightly to force the feeling away. “He is worried you will be like Montreal.”

To Zane’s credit, he doesn’t look offended at the admission, but his expression does turn thoughtful. “How bad was it, with Montreal?”

Ilya swallows thick, “He does not talk about it often. They accused him of throwing the game, said unkind things.”

Zane’s brows draw together in an expression Ilya hasn’t seen on Boodram’s face often, his jaw clenched and eyes ablaze. “Those bastards, after all he did for them?” The words boom out of him as if on instinct, righteous anger that can’t be contained.

“Yes.” Ilya nods, his tone mirroring Zane’s own. He had cursed out Montreal more times than he could count in the last year. “He wants to be here.” Ilya says again, hoping Zane understands. Doesn’t see his husband as weak or less than, doesn’t say something that requires Ilya to punch him in the face to defend Shane.

Zane just nods his head quickly, “Of course. I can’t even - I can’t imagine how that must have felt. I’m sorry everything happened the way it did. I hope we can show him things will be different here.”

“We will.” Ilya’s voice is stern, there is no room for argument.

Shane doesn’t eat dinner that night, he sits on the couch and stares blankly at the TV for three hours after Ilya leaves for the Barbeque. The crying long since stopped, replaced by a quiet and hollow feeling in his chest. Feeling nothing except the light pangs in his stomach as he finally tucks himself tightly into bed.

It’s two weeks later, after their first game together as Ottawa Centaurs, their first *win* together that Ilys finally broaches the topic.

He has Shane’s head on his chest, and his fingers twirling dark hair idly. The warmth of the recent win radiating the air around them, softening Shane around the edges. Their celebration after the win had him practically a puddle of goo on Ilya’s chest. Now was the time.

“I’ve been thinking.”

“Hmm.” Shane’s reply is soft, barely audible. But the way he tilts his chin up slightly lets Ilya know he has his attention.

“We could have a team dinner at our house. Might be less stressful, does not need to be right away. Just, maybe something to consider?” Ilya is careful with his words, pushing the hair off Shane’s forehead and punctuating his point with a kiss to his forehead.

Shane’s body has tensed slightly on top of Ilya, and it feels terrible. He never wants his husband to stop being soft and pliant, he works a hand up Shane’s ribs, rubbing softly trying to ease the tension out of him - to get the calm sleepy post sex Shane back.

It's a long time before Shane answers, long enough that Ilya debates taking his words back. Shane rolls so they're chest to chest, eyes locked on each other. Shane's eyes are a raging storm that Ilya can read like an open book.

His sweet expressive husband. Scared, so scared. But Ilya can also see the longing, the desire. He knows Shane wants them to be comfortable together just as badly as he does, knows Shane doesn't like that he is afraid to be himself around his team either. And worst of all, Ilya can see the toll it's taking on his husband everyday.

Shane's lower lip is wobbling a little, there are tears building and Ilya knows he's trying to hold it in. He can see it in the way Shane's eyes keep looking towards Ilya's chest, the ceiling, or the wall behind him. "I want to say yes, so badly." His voice is tight, clearly the admission had cost Shane a lot.

"We do it when you're ready. You want to say yes, someday you will say yes, we plan for that day. For now, you come back and let me hold you. We are winners tonight." Ilya flattens Shane's head back to his chest, hands back in his silky hair. A small smile tugging at his lips. Shane wants to. Of course he does.

Sometimes Ilya found it easy to slip into old insecurities, worrying about the whys of Shane's anxieties, worrying about his role in them. But Shane wanting to say yes? Shane wanted so badly to be on the same page as Ilya, and Ilya would help him get there. As slowly as he needed.

The party remains unmentioned for weeks after that. Ilya works hard to try and bring Shane closer with his teammates in the locker room and on the ice, a mediator and a translator. He had worked with Shane, lived with Shane, and loved Shane for a long time. There were things about Shane that Ilya had grown use to, and even fond of. This the Montreal Metro's had also grown accustomed to over the years.

But the Ottawa Centaurs were still learning these quirks. And sure most of the guys had their own pre-game rituals, but Shane had pre-everything rituals. He was also the most laser

focused on the ice that anyone had ever seen him.

His social interactions in the locker room still leave a lot to be desired. What Ilya found endearing about his husband, others found off putting or rude. It stressed Ilya out and he found himself constantly trying to mediate behind the curtain.

Ilya's heart aches in his chest as he watches his husband remain on the outside of the team and wonders if this was how he was on the Metros. With only Hayden as a friend, an escape. Ilya now fulfilling the same role, he finds himself grateful for Hayden's place in Shane's life all these years.

They're in the parking lot heading to their car after the game when Shane brings it up, "I think we should have that dinner. If you think they would like that."

Ilya's face brightens, his chest lightens as he turns to face his husband. Anxiety is clear as day in the other man's face, but there's something stubborn in his eyes. Shane has made a decision. And when Shane makes a decision he will fight to stick with it.

"I think they would love it. They want to get to know you. They have spent so long admiring Shane Hollander the hockey player, I know they want to know Shane Hollander the man. I know they will love you. Like I do."

Ilya watches the flush raise up Shane's neck onto his freckled cheeks and the strong urge to pull him into a bruising kiss is almost overwhelming. But Shane is still working on hand holding in public, he knows a kiss would be too much for now, so he refrains.

Shane just nods once firmly, like whatever Ilya has said has further solidified his decision and Ilya feels pride bloom in his chest.

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Shane thinks he could puke. He's setting the table while Ilya finishes tidying the living room. There isn't much left to clean, Shane had been at it the whole week leading up to the party, but still Ilya hadn't argued when Shane asked him to vacuum. He had taken one look in Shane's eyes and nodded easily, no mention of the vacuuming Shane had done the day before, no teasing about the cleaning. Just acceptance and help.

It had warmed Shane a little for a moment, had brought a weightlessness to him that was fleeting but hopeful.

But now, alone, Shane's thoughts spiraled. He knew this was important. He couldn't continue to drag Ilya down with him, he had to do this.

His hands were shaking, his palms were sweating. The room felt like it was getting smaller around him. It was too late to back out.

He was so wrapped up in his own head he didn't hear the vacuum turning off, didn't notice Ilya walking into the room.

"Shane?" Ilya calls to him softly, approaching slow.

Shane can't stop the high whine that falls from his lips as he closes the space and allows himself to fall into his husband's chest. Ilya's arms wrapping around him quickly and automatically.

"I don't know why this is so hard. I feel ridiculous." A self deprecating laugh falls from Shane's lips. His fingers are tightening and twisting in Ilya's shirt.

"You are afraid. Your last team was not so good, they did not try to get to know you. I promise it is different here. They want to know you, the real you."

Shane nods his head into Ilya's chest in agreement. "I know, I know." He pauses and lets out a slow breath, "I can do this."

“You can.”

Ilya tips his chin up and captures his lips in a reassuring kiss.

They are interrupted from getting too carried away by the musical tone of the door bell breaking through the moment, and Anya’s excited toes and yaps running towards the door.

Shane let out a low breath, it was now or never.

He slowly unattached himself from Ilya, the air rushing between their bodies sending a chill to his bones as he moved towards the door. He could do this. He would do this. For Ilya, and for himself. They deserved to be comfortable and out just as much as anyone else.

He opens the door, slow, careful, controlled. On the other side is Zane, Wyatt, Luca, Troy and Harris. They’re all sort of smooshed together on Shane’s front porch in a way that brings an involuntary smile to Shane’s lips. He steps to the side and gestures with his arm for them to enter, biting his lip to contain his laughter at the way the five men’s shoulders bump and brush into each other.

The absurdity catches Shane so off guard he can’t help the pull of his lips and the threat of a smile. “Thank you for coming.” There’s a laugh buried deep in his tone. He hopes they don’t hear it, think he’s laughing at them simply for showing up.

—

Ilya steps out of the kitchen and watches Shane greet the team with a small smile on his own face.

“You all fit in one car? Did you sit on Harris’ lap Troy?” Ilya calls out teasing as he enters the room fully, drawing the attention in easily.

He sees Shane shoot a small smile over his shoulder at him.

“Nah, I was on Hayes’.” Zane’s voice is light as he teases. Everyone toeing their shoes off and lining them up at the door without being told. Beside Ilya and Shane’s.

Ilya watches Shane’s face as he takes in the small act of respect. Watches a softness take over his features. Pride washing over Ilya, he knew he could trust Ottawa. Knew they would be different, better than Montreal.

“Come, come. Make yourselves comfortable, dinner will not be too much longer.” He gestures to the couches and moves towards the kitchen, “Does anyone want a drink?”

“You got beer?” Wyatt calls back as he sits down casually on the couch, leaning back like he had visited hundreds of times before.

“Da, of course.”

“I can get it!” Shane offers, a little too eager. But Ilya allows him the small break and nods his head in agreement.

Before anyone can say anything further Shane is moving towards the kitchen with hurried feet. Ilya forces an easy smile on his face as he turns back to the team.

He’s about to speak when the doorbell chimes again. He crosses the distance quickly, opening the door to let in the rest of his teammates who had been able to make it, Dykstra, Haas, Chouinard, Holmber, and Dillon.

Ilya opened the door wide and invited them in with an easy smile.

“Thank you all for coming.”

“Of course man, we couldn’t miss the opportunity to see the infamous Hollander Rosanov house.” Dykstra teases as he toes off his shoes, bumping his elbow into Luca like it’s an inside joke. Maybe it is.

Ilya smiles, he knows they’re joking but the small hit of guilt in his chest at being so secretive doesn’t go ignored.

“Yes, well, we are happy to have you here.”

Ilya ushers everyone in and directs them to the couches to join the others before he heads to the kitchen to help his husband get beer for their guests.

He passes Shane in the hall, five beers precariously balanced in his crossed arms as he makes his way back to the group. “The others are here, I am getting their drinks. I will be right back. Okay?” Ilya reaches a gentle hand out and traces a finger along Shane’s jaw as he waits for Shane to nod once in acknowledgment.

“Okay.”

Ilya nods and moves towards the kitchen. Hand falling from Shane’s face as he steps away. He feels a pang in his chest and hopes Shane does not feel overwhelmed alone.

Ilya moves as quickly as he can, loading his arms with his own beers - bringing two boxes of six instead of the individual cans. Knowing his team likes to drink to bond, they would certainly want more than one, and this would save the need for multiple trips before dinner was ready.

When he makes it back to the living room he sees Shane has passed out the beers and seems to have been drawn into a conversation with Zane and Luca. He lets himself smile and feel hopeful at the sight, passing out beer to the remaining guests waiting.

Ilya lets himself be drawn into a conversation with Evan and Nick, discussing some play that the Admirals had made last night. He shoots a few glances towards Shane from the corner of his eyes, but Shane doesn't appear to be drowning so he lets him be.

A warmth blooms in Ilya's chest as the night progresses, everyone except Shane on a second beer by the time they sit at the table. A large roast placed in the center of the table and several vegetable sides.

Shane and Ilya had spent all morning preparing, and Ilya was proud to say it looked like it had paid off. Everyone was thoroughly enjoying their food, Ilya went to bump Shane's elbow with an easy grin to make a comment when his eyes locked on Shane's plate.

He hadn't eaten anything. He had moved the food on his plate, mushed it under his fork even. But Ilya was certain that the volume of food had not decreased. He was certain because he had watched Shane take the food and worried about the small portion size.

To see it now, uneaten, Shane's fork pressing a piece of broccoli flat as he talks with Zane on the other side of him.

Ilya feels an uncertainty fill his chest, on one hand Ilya had not seen Shane say so many words to any of their teammates since the wedding. On the other hand, Shane wasn't eating.

He had never not eaten. Been cautious or restrictive sure. But they had made this meal together, with all of his anxieties and concerns in mind. The food was safe for him. But here he sat, a small smile on his face and what was probably an empty stomach.

Ilya forces himself to think back over the day critically, realizing with abject horror that he hadn't seen Shane eat all day and hadn't noticed.

He had been so focused on the upcoming party, and trying to soothe Shane's nerves, he had entirely missed the way Shane tried to soothe himself.

Ilya's chest ached, the smile being stolen from his face.

Ilya doesn't say anything for the rest of the meal, he stuffs his face so nobody questions it and then moves quickly to clear plates. Shane doesn't like mess, that is the excuse he tells himself as he disappears from the dining room to the kitchen to clean up after dinner.

He's so focused on the warm soapy water and the crusty pan in his hands he doesn't hear Zane approach from behind.

"Ilya." Zane's voice is soft as he leans on the counter beside the sink, his eyes are looking Ilya up and down slowly, concern clear as day on his features.

Ilya swallows and meets Zane's eyes. He raises one eyebrow in question, he can't bring himself to ask outloud. He's sure this conversation won't be pleasant, and he doesn't feel like making it easy on Zane. Maybe it is petty, after all Zane has been a great friend. But he feels weird and hollow inside and he wants to be difficult.

"Does he do that a lot?"

Ilya feels sick at the implication.

"What do you mean?" He prays he's wrong about what Zane is asking.

"He didn't eat a single thing tonight." He was not wrong.

Ilya flicks his tongue over his bottom lip and evaluates his words. "I think, sometimes, when he feels things are too- " Ilya pauses, frustration on his lips, English always eluding him when emotions are high. "Too big. Or too much. Yes, too much. He controls what he can, where he can." He is very careful with his words, trying not to definitively confirm anything, but also feeling like he needs to say something. Desperate for an outside voice or opinion.

“It does not affect his game!” Ilya adds, quickly his face scrunched nervously as he begs Zane to understand him, to not judge Shane for this harshly or incorrectly.

Zane gave an easy nod, “I wasn’t accusing him. I can’t even imagine the stress and toll the last few years have had on him. On both of you.” Zane pauses as he thinks over his next words carefully, “Have you guys ever talked to the team counselor? I’m not going to pretend I can even imagine what it’s been like, but maybe it could help?”

Ilya let out a slow breath and let himself be honest. “I do. Not the team counselor, I see a woman, she speaks Russian. She has helped me.” Ilya took a slow breath, “I had wondered if I should bring it up with Shane. I guess I hoped things may improve after he got on the team and got to know you all.” His voice cracks at the admission, guilt flooding him.

“Hey, hey. Okay, so you trusted him at his word and supported him while he tried on his own. You did not do anything wrong Ilya. Do you hear me?” Zane placed both hands on Ilya’s shoulders and bent his head so their eyes met. “I was not making an accusation, of either of you. Maybe I went about this all wrong, but I see you. Both of you. And you have come so far, and you guys have had a shit couple of years and I want to support you in any way I can.”

Ilya nods his head and blinks his eyes rapidly to force back tears. “You are a good man Bood.” He aims for light, but even he can hear the emotion in his tone. He moves in quick and wraps his arms around Zane squeezing tight and brief, and then he’s gone to finish cleaning the kitchen.

—

Shane feels beat by the end of the night. His body feels heavy, and his brain feels floaty. He’s finally back in bed, his head resting on Ilya’s chest after being loved and taken care of to ground him after the party.

Ilya was running his hand through Shane’s hair, scratching his scalp softly. “My love?” Ilya whispers into the top of Shane’s head. He sounds hesitant, his fingers stalling for a moment and the muscles in his stomach tense.

Shane hums against Ilya's chest encouraging him to speak without moving from the comfortable warmth he's finally found.

"I do not want you to be upset with me for this suggestion. You know how I see therapist, da?" Ilya's voice is careful, it hasn't raised above a whisper and his lips haven't left Shane's hair.

And Shane knows where this is going. He isn't even surprised Ilya is bringing it up. Truth be told he had been thinking it himself lately, Shane clears his throat and nuzzles into Ilya's chest a little. "I think so too."

Ilya's whole body freezes, for just a moment. "You do?"

Shane could feel tears gathering in his eyes, he brings a hand up to grip Ilya's bicep firmly. "I want to get better. I want things to be easier."

Shane could feel the smile on Ilya's lips pressed to the top of his head and couldn't fight the flush rising up his cheeks like it always did when Ilya was happy with him.

"We will figure this out together, just like we do for me. Everything, together. I love you." Ilya kisses the top of his head so many times and so enthusiastically Shane can't help but to giggle.

"I love you too. So much."

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