

Open Flame

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Open Flame

by [baletgir](#)

Summary

“Then I will bring you to that dock out there. I will have hundreds of candles all over it...”

- **Heated Rivalry, Chapter Twenty-Seven by Rachel Reid**

Or;

Ilya proposes to Shane.

Notes

First - Episode 6 was to die for. Amazing, no notes. But I did start this fic on Monday, assuming the proposal conversation would be included in the episode and that this would go well with that. But oh well, best laid plans. I get why they cut it, no hard feelings.

So this fic is what I call a BRIEF divergence from canon, which means it will eventually reconnect with canon. This takes place during The Long Game and references a few different plot points.

I love that Shane's proposal in The Long Game was a way for him to identify that he finally understood how he had been taking Ilya for granted. And I do think it was the right choice for the book, but I wanted to give Ilya his moment back.

Lastly, thank you all so much for all the love you've given to my Hollanov fics thus far. I have been astounded by the kind words and heartfelt comments, and sheer amount of engagement. I've never experienced anything like this, and it means so much to me. Thank you ❤️

OH! I almost forgot. This is my first ever mid-chapter POV change. It starts with Ilya, then when it says "2 Weeks Later" we switch to Shane POV. Hopefully it's not horrendous. 🙄

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

Ilya pulls onto his street just after two in the afternoon, body buzzing with the kind of exhaustion that makes everything feel slightly slow. Florida still clings to him, sun, sand, and the hotel smell he's gotten so used to. All he wants is to sleep for a week with Shane pressed against his side, solid and real.

He pulls into the driveway and reaches to cut the engine.

That's when he sees the shape of the Jeep.

It takes a second longer than it should. It's just a large, dark silhouette against the snow, barely distinguishable without the porch light to illuminate it. His chest tightens before his brain catches up.

Shane.

He sits there for a beat, keys still in his hand. Shane's not supposed to be here for another hour or two and he didn't say anything about being early. The house is dark from the outside. Nothing about it announces another person inside, except for the car sitting there like proof Shane drove down straight from the airport.

The house greets him with silence.

"Shane?" he calls, toeing off his shoes.

No answer.

The living room is dark, curtains drawn. At first he thinks the room is empty. Then his eyes adjust and he sees the shape on the couch.

Shane sits curled into himself, wrapped in blankets, knees pulled tight to his chest, facing into the couch, his head hidden in the back cushions. He's wearing Ilya's hoodie and a pair of Ilya's sweatpants, both too big on him. His shoes and jacket are gone. His bag sits abandoned by the door.

He looks like he hasn't moved in hours.

"Hey," Ilya says quietly.

Shane startles anyway. He lifts his head abruptly, eyes glassy and unfocused, like he was somewhere else entirely. For a second, he just stares at Ilya, like he's checking that Ilya is real.

"You're home," Shane says. His voice cracks on the second word.

Ilya crosses the room in three steps. He drops his bag without looking at it and kneels in front of the couch.

"I am here," he says. "How long have you been here?"

Shane shrugs, helpless. “Got off the plane and drove.” A pause. “Didn’t want to stop.”

Didn’t go home.

Didn’t change.

Didn’t let the world in.

Ilya reaches out slowly, giving Shane time to pull away if he needs it. Shane doesn’t. He leans forward instead, pressing his forehead into Ilya’s shoulder like the weight has finally become too much.

They stay like that for a while. Ilya loses track of time.

Eventually, Ilya shifts onto the couch without letting go, one arm firm around Shane’s waist. The pull is gentle but not a question. Shane moves with him, ending up in his lap, knees straddling Ilya’s hips, face tucked into the curve of his neck.

Ilya’s arms come around him, solid and enclosing, hands gripping wherever they can reach. His back. His sides. His shoulders. Like he’s anchoring them together.

“I need you,” Shane murmurs into Ilya’s neck. “Ilya, I need you. Forever. I can’t—”

“Moya lyubov,” Ilya says softly. “You have me. Forever. I am yours.”

It feels like it should be enough.

But Shane is still shaking, still holding on like the ground hasn’t quite settled beneath him yet. There’s a wetness on Ilya’s shoulder that can only be from Shane.

“That’s not what I mean,” Shane says, pulling back just enough to look at him. His eyes burn, rimmed red, his face pale and drawn. “This isn’t enough anymore. I can’t keep pretending you’re not the most important part of my life. It’s you, over everything else. I can’t keep choosing wrong.”

Ilya’s brow furrows slightly. “Wrong?”

Shane shifts back fully, balanced on Ilya’s knees, his hands resting on Ilya’s chest, Ilya’s hands holding tight to his hips. “When I heard about the crash. When we were texting and I was on the bus.” His breath stutters. “All I wanted to do was call you. You asked me to call. But I didn’t. I chose hiding.” His voice breaks. “Fuck, you could have died. And I couldn’t even make a phone call.”

Shane speaks faster now, the sentences catching on each other. “I wasn’t there. I didn’t hear your voice. I didn’t know how—” He stops himself hard, jaw locking. “I’m a coward.”

Ilya stays still, steady, holding Shane like he isn’t going anywhere.

“You are here now,” Ilya says when Shane finally goes quiet. “You came straight to me.”

Shane's body goes heavy against him, breath slowing. Ilya pulls him closer, one hand sliding into his hair. Not fixing anything. Just staying.

For a while, they just stay there.

Ilya holds Shane close, feels the weight of him settle, feels his breathing slow against his chest. He counts heartbeats without meaning to. Lets the quiet wrap around them like a blanket.

"I thought," Shane says eventually, voice low, like the words slipped out before he meant them to, "if I lost you... I wouldn't even be allowed to grieve."

The words land, sharp and unexpected.

Ilya doesn't answer him right away. He tightens his arms instead, one hand firm at Shane's back, the other anchoring his waist. Shane presses closer, like it's the only comfort he can find.

"I know," Ilya says into his hair. "I only thought of how you are everything."

They stay like that longer than necessary. Ilya doesn't mind, he feels safer with Shane in his arms.

Eventually, Shane shifts. "I'm sorry," he says.

Ilya tilts his head. "For what?"

"I'm making this about me," Shane says, rubbing a hand over his face, tired enough that his movements drag.

Ilya considers that, quiet for a beat. Then he smiles, small and honest. "You were scared." He rubs his hands up and down Shane's back.

"Still am," Shane says softly, like he doesn't want Ilya to hear.

"Is allowed," Ilya says. He squeezes Shane's shoulder. He feels the nod against his neck as Shane pulls in close again.

Silence settles again, but it is different now. Less sharp.

"Is why I have therapist," Ilya says, like it's simply a fact that belongs here. He working on saying it without it landing heavy.

Shane stills. Ilya feels it immediately.

"This," Ilya adds, resting his hand flat against Shane's heart, steady and warm, "is where I live."

Shane breathes out. "Oh."

“You and I are still talking,” Ilya says. “Just not everything at same time.”

Shane nods against him. “Okay.”

Ilya leans down and kisses him, brief and gentle. Shane kisses back just as lightly, there's no pressure in it, no demand for more.

They sit quietly again.

After a moment, Shane says, “It doesn't feel fair.”

Ilya shifts slightly. “What is not fair?”

“This,” Shane says, vague with it, like pointing would make it worse. “I should take care of you.”

Ilya exhales, slow. He nudges Shane's chin up until their eyes meet.

“Love is not fair,” Ilya says. “If it were, it would be easier. And boring.”

A sound leaves Shane, not quite a laugh, but something slightly lighter. His shoulders drop the smallest amount. “Yeah,” he says. “I guess.”

Ilya pulls him in again. Shane comes without hesitation, his weight settling like he plans to live in this spot. Ilya feels it, the shift. Feels Shane fully giving into the comfort.

Shane is warm against him, slow with exhaustion, but sensitive to every place Ilya touches. Ilya slides his hand under the hem of the sweatshirt, finding skin at Shane's side. His thumb strokes a slow line along bone.

Shane's breath stutters.

Ilya leans in, mouth at Shane's jaw. “I will take my boyfriend apart now, yes?”

Shane nods, eyes closing. “Yeah. Please.”

Ilya shifts his grip and nudges Shane back just enough to make space between them. Shane resists for half a second on instinct, then slides off Ilya's lap, feet finding the floor. He sways, catches himself with one hand on Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya stands, steadying him at the waist until Shane finds his balance. He kisses him once, quick and decisive, then tips his head toward the stairs.

“Bed,” Ilya says.

Shane goes. He keeps hold of Ilya the whole way up, hand fisted in fabric. The bedroom is dark when they enter, the air warmer than the hall. It smells like them, like sweat and detergent and winter trapped in blankets.

Ilya closes the door with his foot. Shane backs toward the bed, breathing uneven.

Ilya comes to him.

He kisses Shane again, slower, teeth catching his lower lip for a second. His hands find Shane's hips and guide him back until the backs of Shane's knees meet the mattress. Shane sits, then leans back, pulling Ilya down with him.

Ilya braces above him, knees sinking into the mattress. The sweatshirt rides up. Skin meets his palms. He lowers his mouth to Shane's throat, not careful, the scrape of teeth a question Shane can answer by pulling away.

Shane stays. His voice breaks on Ilya's name. "Don't stop."

Ilya answers with a sound, low in his chest, like agreement. A promise.

They move close. Clothes shift to the floor; enough to feel skin, heat, the drag of muscle. The kisses turn urgent. The sounds in the room are quiet: breath, fabric, the creak of the bed. Shane arches up against him, fingers grip into Ilya's back. Ilya keeps a hand on Shane's chest, over his heart, feeling it kick hard under his palm. The reminder is sharp.

Shane's hand comes up, pressing over Ilya's heart in return.

"What do you need," Ilya says, mouth against Shane's shoulder.

Shane shakes his head, eyes bright in the dark. "Just you," he says. "Only you."

Ilya doesn't answer out loud. He answers with his body instead, the weight of him, the way he holds Shane like he is something to protect.

The moment crests. Their breathing stutters. Ilya's fingers curl in Shane's hair like he needs something to anchor to. Shane keeps his hand on Ilya's chest and he finds it grounding to be weighed down by Shane.

The air is warm, heavy. Shane's eyes slip half-shut, his body sinking into the mattress like he's letting go. Ilya pulls back enough to move, gets a warm cloth, cleans them both with small, caring motions. Shane watches him, eyes barely open.

They settle under the sheets. Shane drifts first, still close, hand at Ilya's ribs like he needs the contact to stay asleep.

Ilya stays awake a moment longer. He watches Shane's breathing even out. Watches his lashes go still against his cheek.

An hour or so later, they've both gradually awakened. Shane's back to Ilya's chest, Ilya's arms curved around his waist. Shane's fingers move over his knuckles, tracing absent patterns that feel like thought.

Ilya feels an impulse to ask what's happening in Shane's head. He stays quiet. He waits.

“I was thinking,” Shane says, voice quiet.

Ilya lifts his head slightly, just high enough to see the concentrated expression on Shane's face. “Mm?”

“About us,” Shane's shoulders rise with a breath. “I want more time.”

The words settle in Ilya's chest, heavy in the way that matters. He shifts, rolling Shane gently to face him. Shane lets him, eyes tired but clear.

“More time,” Ilya repeats. “I want that, too. Is nothing new, no?”

Shane wets his lips, searching for the shape of it. “We don't have to go to the All-Star Game.”

The suggestion hits Ilya with a quiet shock. People don't skip All-Star games. Not without a good reason. Shane watches him, cautious, like he's ready to take it back.

“We've been to so many,” Shane says, slower now. “And we'll have others. I just thought... what if we skip it. Take the week. Together.”

Ilya studies him. Shane doesn't look uncertain. Just worn down and torn open.

“Take week off like average players,” Ilya says, trying for humor. “Like Hayden.”

Shane huffs against the pillow. “Hayden helped Montreal win multiple Cups.”

Ilya doesn't smile, though the corner of his mouth wants to. “You are offering to skip All-Stars.”

Shane nods. It looks like he's trying to read Ilya's mind. “Only if you want that. You earned it, you should go if you want to. I just...” He meets Ilya's eyes for a moment, breaks away from them just as fast. “I want to be with you.”

Ilya doesn't need to consider. The choice was already made the second Shane suggested it.

“Yes,” Ilya says. “We will go to the cottage.”

Shane goes very still. Then, slowly, he smiles, small and careful. “Yeah?”

“Yes.” Ilya reaches out, thumb brushing Shane's jaw. “We will rest. We will breathe. I will make disgusting smoothies for you.”

Shane laughs under his breath, the sound warm against Ilya's collarbone. He leans in until their foreheads touch. “Only if it sounds good to you,” Shane says. “I just want time. With you.”

Ilya feels something in his ribs loosen, like his body is finally catching up to the fact that he's alive.

“You are sure you will be fine not attending All-Stars,” Ilya says. “You will not miss being reminded you are second best at hockey?”

Shane nudges him with his knee. “I’ll risk it.”

Ilya kisses him, slow and certain. Not asking for anything more. Shane breathes into it like it's something he needed.

“You have tomorrow off, yes?” Ilya asks when he pulls back.

“Mm,” Shane hums.

“I am skipping practice.”

Shane lifts his head. “Is it optional?”

“I don’t care.”

Shane’s smile changes at that. Softens into something real. He tucks himself closer, fitting easily into Ilya’s space. Ilya curves around him and lets his eyes close, lets the decision settle between them like a blanket pulled up to the chin.

It feels steady in a way most things haven't felt recently.

- - -

Morning welcomes them kindly.

Light creeps in through the curtains, pale and cold. Ilya wakes first, Shane warm and solid against his chest, still asleep. He lies there, hand resting at Shane’s waist, breathing him in. There is no urgency to move. The world isn't pressing in yet.

Eventually, Shane stirs.

“So,” Shane says, voice rough with sleep. “What do we tell everyone?”

Ilya blinks awake. “Who?”

“Our teams. The league. Media.” Shane shrugs, an edge of overthinking in his voice. “They’re going to ask why we aren’t at the all-star game.”

Ilya snorts softly. “We say I am in love with boring man. Is very serious problem.”

Shane smiles into Ilya's arm. “I don’t think that’s how I want to come out.”

“An injury,” Ilya says.

Shane shifts up onto his side. “Wouldn’t your team doctor evaluate you? They'll figure out you're lying.”

Ilya grins. “Who said injury would be fake.”

Shane smacks him lightly on the arm. "I'm not breaking your fucking arm."

"I can do myself."

Shane hits him again, harder this time. "Shut up."

"Fine," Ilya says.

Shane exhales. "What about a version of the truth?"

Ilya hums in question.

"What if you said you're taking the extra time to relax after the plane crash," Shane says. "Like you're still a little shaken by it."

Ilya considers this. "Could work. Could also make me sound weak."

Shane lifts his head. "Hey. We run a mental health charity. I think that sounds brave as fuck."

Ilya hums again, thoughtful. His fingers slide idly through Shane's hair. "Yes. Is fine."

Shane leans in and kisses him, quick and satisfied.

"Now you," Ilya says. "What is your excuse?"

Shane grins. "I could say I'm saving myself for the Cup."

"You just won Cup last year," Ilya replies. "And still attended All-Stars."

Shane opens his mouth, then closes it. "Okay, fair."

"You will tell them you are getting old," Ilya says.

Shane groans and shoves him. "Fuck you."

"Is believable?"

"No, it isn't."

"Then you should wait," Ilya says. "Bail last minute."

"I can't do that," Shane says. "That would be so shitty."

"If we both back out at same time," Ilya says, "it becomes strange."

Shane sighs, staring up at the ceiling. "Suspicious."

"Yes, that," Ilya says. "So last minute for you. Mental health for me."

Shane turns his head, squinting at him. "Maybe I'll get a stomach bug."

“I will start rumor you are old.”

Shane laughs despite himself and rolls on top of Ilya. “You’re the worst.”

Ilya smiles, slow and private, and pulls him back in.

“You love me.”

“I do.”

- - -

Late that night, the goodbye catches on something sharp.

They stand in Ilya’s entryway, neither of them reaching for the handle. Goodbyes are never simple, but this one feels heavier. There's a fragility to it that makes Ilya hold still, like a wrong move could tip the moment into something they cannot fix.

Shane steps closer and rests his forehead on Ilya's.

“This feels harder,” Shane whispers.

Ilya nods. “Yes.”

He pulls Shane in and kisses him. The kiss starts soft, then builds, Shane opening for him with a sound that vibrates against Ilya’s mouth. Ilya steps forward, guiding him back until Shane’s shoulders meet the door. The urgency in the kiss sharpens. Shane’s hands fist in the front of Ilya’s shirt and Ilya feels it like a question he already knows the answer to.

He lifts Shane without thinking about it, hands firm under his thighs, and Shane’s legs wrap around him automatically. Their bodies align, heat sparking, pushing them into motion. The world narrows.

Ilya keeps him close, keeps the rhythm between them until he feels Shane’s body go tight, sees his eyes fall shut, hears his breath catch. The moment hits Ilya just after, a shock of heat that takes his balance for a second. He holds Shane up through it, forehead pressed to Shane’s neck, breath unsteady.

They stay tangled there, catching what air they can.

Shane finally laughs, soft and wrecked. “Fuck,” he says, voice rough. “Now I need to shower again.”

“If you say so,” Ilya says, with a knowing smirk.

Shane presses a hand to his chest to stop him. “No. You’re not starting something in there. I have to be up for practice in eight hours. In Montreal.”

Ilya kisses the corner of his mouth, then lets Shane go. “I will wait.”

Shane disappears down the hall. Ilya stays where he is, hands braced on the door, breath slowly evening out. The house feels too still without Shane in the room. He listens for the shower to start; the rush of water sounds like distance.

When Shane returns, hair damp, cheeks flushed, Ilya steps forward again. The goodbye resumes, quieter now. The kisses taste like steam and toothpaste. There's less urgency and more subtle promises.

"I'll see you soon," Shane says. He grips Ilya's neck like he's trying to hold on.

"Ya lyublyu tebya," Ilya says. The words sit solid in his chest.

Shane smiles. "Ya lyublyu tebya."

There is no map for what comes next, Ilya knows that. No promise that fixes anything. But there is something ahead of them now. Not just vague hope anymore. Direction.

They kiss once more, slow and deliberate. Then Shane turns for the door. Ilya lets him go.

He listens to each step. The click of the latch. The engine outside. He waits until the Jeep pulls away before he exhales.

- - -

Two Weeks Later

Shane pulls into the garage of the cottage just as the sun starts to drop. He kills the engine and sits there for a second, hands still on the wheel, letting the quiet land.

He pops the trunk, grabs the grocery bags, and goes inside.

The cottage is dark, but not cold. That registers after he hangs up his jacket and sets the bags on the counter. The air feels lived-in. Warm in a way an empty place should not be in the dead of winter.

He starts unloading groceries, lining up Ginger Ale and Coke, sliding milk into the fridge. He's halfway through when the back door opens.

Shane turns, startled.

Ilya stands there, snow clinging to the shoulders of his jacket, hair damp from the cold. He's wearing dark jeans and a fitted sweater. It's nice, not something Shane gets to see often in person.

"Hi," Ilya says, smiling like he's been holding it in.

Shane drops the carton of eggs on the counter and crosses the room in two strides. They collide more than hug, arms tight, the kind of contact that resets something internal. Shane

kisses him without thinking. Ilya kisses him back just as easily, warm and solid and unmistakably here.

“I thought you were coming tomorrow,” Shane says when they finally pull apart, forehead resting against Ilya’s.

“I could not wait,” Ilya admits. “Left after the game last night.”

Shane pulls back, brow creasing. “You did?” Then, immediately, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Ilya shrugs. “You had practice today. I did not want you to have to decide between practice and me.”

Shane leans in and kisses him again, softer this time. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too, moya lyubov.”

They kiss again, longer and slower. Shane’s hands settle at Ilya’s waist like they belong there. He leans in for more when Ilya pulls back, breathless but smiling.

“One more,” Shane murmurs.

Ilya obliges with a quick, decisive kiss, then steps out of reach. “Come,” he says, already taking Shane’s hand.

“Where are we—” Shane starts as Ilya tugs him toward the front door.

Ilya grabs Shane’s jacket from the hook and shoves it at him. “Put it on.”

“Why?”

“Trust me.”

Ilya helps him into it, quick and efficient, and Shane doesn’t argue. Whatever this is, it’s not bad. Not with Ilya’s hand warm in his, not with the cottage humming quietly around them like it’s been waiting for them.

Ilya doesn’t slow as they step outside. He leads Shane across the packed snow of the backyard, boots crunching softly. The cold bites sharp and clean, but Shane stays warm anyway, following without question, trusting the pull of Ilya’s hand and the certainty in the way he moves.

It is only when they near the dock that Shane stops short.

“Oh,” he breathes.

Candles cover the weathered planks, dozens of them, scattered across the entire surface, their flames steady despite the cold. They reflect off the surface of the lake, black and icy beneath a clear sky. The moon hangs low and nearly full, bright enough to turn the snow and the frozen water almost silver.

Shane turns slowly, taking it in.

“Ilya,” he whispers.

All the breath leaves Shane at once. This is familiar. He knows what this is, and still it feels impossible, like the ground has shifted without warning.

Ilya steps in front of him, hands warm and sure as he takes Shane’s, squeezes once, then lets go. He guides Shane forward, between the candles, through an opening clearly meant for this moment. At the center, the space widens into a clean, open circle.

Then Ilya drops onto one knee, just as he promised he would, boots scraping softly against the wood.

Shane freezes.

“Ilya”

“I told you,” Ilya says, looking up at him, eyes bright and steady and entirely unafraid. “Clear night. Almost full moon. Candles.”

Shane’s chest feels too tight to breathe.

Ilya takes a breath, like he is grounding himself, then half-smiles, fond and familiar.

“Shane Hollander,” he says, “will you please marry me so I can become Canadian citizen faster?”

Shane barks out a laugh, sharp and wet. “You are such an asshole.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees easily. Then his expression softens, the humor giving way to something quieter, deeper. “But also because I love you. And because I want this to be forever. All of it.”

The lake laps gently against the dock. The candles flicker. The world narrows to this single point.

“English is not enough right now,” Ilya continues, steady even now. “I do not always have the right words to tell you just how much I love you. But I will try.”

He looks up at Shane like there is no doubt anywhere in him.

“I love how seriously you take your hockey. How you commit to it fully, even when it hurts. I love how loyal you are to your family. I love how you welcomed me, how you always made me feel like I was good enough.”

Shane’s throat tightens. He does not move.

“I love how you help me remember my mother. How you say her name. How you let me miss her without trying to fix it.” Ilya smiles faintly. “I love that you learned Russian for me, even

though your accent is terrible.”

Shane lets out a broken sound that might be a laugh.

“I love how your mind works,” Ilya says gently. “How you worry, how you plan, how you think ten steps ahead so the people you love do not have to. I love all of you, even the parts that are sometimes difficult, especially those parts.”

His voice does not waver.

“And I love that you know exactly who you are, and you are not afraid to be it. Even when that means forcing terrible nutrition plans on your very sexy boyfriend.”

Shane swallows hard. He leans down, hands shaking now, and cups Ilya’s face with one hand. His thumbs gently caresses Ilya’s cheek.

“Shane,” Ilya says again, quieter. “Will you marry me?”

“Yes,” Shane says softly. “Yes, I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Ilya’s smile breaks wide and unguarded. He stands fast and a little clumsy, and Shane is laughing and crying at the same time as they crash into each other, kissing under the moonlight, candles burning steady around them.

Shane’s hands slide over Ilya’s waist, then lower, fingers curling instinctively. He feels something hard and square beneath the fabric.

He pauses. Before he can ask, Ilya blurts, “Oh. Fuck.”

Shane pulls back enough to see his face. Ilya reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a small velvet box.

“I will start again,” Ilya says. “I forgot the ring.”

“No,” Shane says, breath catching. “Just show me the ring.”

Ilya opens the box. Inside is a simple black band with a gold interior, subtle, yet elegant.

Shane touches it, thumb skimming the inside. His fingers shake. He takes the ring and slides it onto his left hand, testing the weight.

“How does this work?” he asks. “Is this an engagement ring and then I get another at our wedding?”

Ilya blinks. “Wedding? I did not agree to a wedding.”

Shane stares at him, exasperated. “Seriously.”

“I am not sure,” Ilya says. “But I have a second one, so you can write something very pretty about me this week and then you can give me the other ring.” He tries to make it sound like a

joke, but it lands too sincere.

“You bought yourself a ring,” Shane says, eyes widening. “Pretty cocky of you to assume I’d say yes.”

Ilya’s expression shifts, humor thinning into something honest. “I had to believe it,” he says quietly. “Or I would not have been able to ask it.”

The lake stays calm. The candles keep burning. And for the first time, Shane feels like he’s touching something ahead of him instead of chasing it. Like maybe the future has finally stopped running.

They don’t go inside right away.

They stay on the dock, shoulders brushing, the candles burning lower around them. The cold creeps in eventually, but it feels distant, manageable. When Ilya stands, Shane watches him go, watches him return with a blanket, champagne, and two pairs of skates hanging from one hand.

Ilya sits, tugging Shane close until they share the same pocket of warmth. He pours champagne and hands a glass over. The blanket unfurls, and Shane flinches when the edge flies too close to the candles.

“Is fine,” Ilya whispers, lips close to his ear. “We are on water.”

Shane looks out over the lake, breath fogging in the air. “You really did all this,” he says, wonder threading through the words.

“I told you I would,” Ilya replies. There is no smugness, none of the usual self-satisfaction. Just truth.

Shane leans into him, head on Ilya’s shoulder. “I think... I was never sure if we’d ever get this.”

They breathe together. Ilya’s arm wraps around his waist. Shane’s hand rests on Ilya’s thigh, their fingers laced where they meet.

Eventually, Shane nods at the skates. “What are those for?”

Ilya hesitates. “Well. I know some couples like to dance.”

Shane frowns, not following.

“But I thought maybe we skate,” Ilya says.

“You want to run drills. Right now. On our engagement night,” Shane asks.

“No,” Ilya answers, gentle. “I want to skate with you. Out there.” He gestures to the frozen lake beneath them.

Shane laces their fingers together and feels the ring warm against his skin. The dock stays steady beneath them, and for once, so does everything else.

End Notes

This reconvenes with canon after All-Star weekend. Which means that their relationship/engagement continues in secret until Hayden accidentally outs them in a FanMail video.

Thank you for reading! Kudos, Comments, and Bookmarks make me dance (or tear up based on the way some of you have been commenting on my other fics! Thank you dearly).

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