

I'll Make It Better

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I'll Make It Better

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Summary

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"Hey," Ilya says, magnetized and moving towards him. Shane looks — soft, he looks fine, so fucking breakable but not broken.

"There's my man," Shane says, in a small voice, musical. Ilya closes the distance between them, needing to touch him and needing him to lower his voice in equal measure.

Notes

I see the canonical tag is Cliff Marlow but I saw that man's jersey on the show and the show version has much more personality than Cliff Marlow. I'm going to be stubborn about this one. Thank you SO much for our wonderful friend @sonni89 who doesn't miss and without her we would be lost in the wilderness. Title from the Ingrid Michaelson song, The Way I Am.

Shane is in a *neck brace* on a fucking *spinal board* and Ilya is getting brushed off by a referee. "On your own bench," he barks, and panic has already scooped out Ilya's insides, leaving behind only cold fear in his chest and stomach.

"He's my," he gasps out, drifting backwards onto his own bench on autopilot, docile. He doesn't even know *how* he could finish that sentence, but the first part is true. *He's my he's my he's my* — fuck. Something.

He's Shane Hollander and he's *something* to Ilya, and Ilya can't even finish the game. He plays a shift after that, fucking up left and right. He's disoriented and lost, eyes twitching at inopportune moments, hands in his gloves swimming in sweat and failing to handle his stick like he hasn't since childhood. For all of the minutes he's on the ice after seeing Shane's crumpled body, neither of his hands is his dominant hand. He can't see his way through the usual instinctive ice path. He has to *go*.

Five seconds to the buzzer, and Ilya's down in the locker room. He's drenched in sweat, and leaves behind all gear, stripping down to his skin without even moving towards the showers, trying to step into his clean track pants both legs at a time, catching on the damp of his body.

"Roz," Cliff Marleau says, and Ilya doesn't have the wherewithal to respond, he needs to go, he needs to be gone ten minutes ago. Thirty.

"Marley," Ilya says, clipped. He needs to get out of here, he's ready to fight, pent up, but that's not fair. It wasn't a dirty hit, and he's possibly the only man on the ice feeling even a fraction of the dread thick in his stomach, until he hears news that Shane Hollander is fine, two identical pupils and following the light well and can wiggle all ten fingers and toes. Ilya's whole body is a tightened bow, and Marley claps a hand on his shoulder. His knees almost give out when he says, "I'll drive."

The drive is silent. He likes Marley — he's a good friend, a mentor when the rookies need it, a ballbuster when they don't. When Stacks got divorced, Ilya took him out on a bender; Marley moved him into his guest room and started driving him to practice. "You should stay out here," Ilya says, in the parking lot of the emergency room. His voice sounds shredded in his own ears.

Marley studies him. "Okay. If he's awake, let him know how fucking sorry I am, and that I'll come see him when he's better. Tell him he can have a free one next season in Montreal, off the ice."

Ilya tries to give him a smile, but his face won't cooperate. The best he can do is a nod. Hayden Pike arrives while he's speaking to the front desk staff, because this is what Ilya gets for abandoning the God of his mother when she died.

She's just finished explaining to Ilya that there is no next of kin here to authorize Ilya to see him or to have any of the information that he wants when Hayden lops up to the counter, planting himself next to Ilya and using an expression and tone that say *I am very cute and famous and a hockey player*; which pisses Ilya off, because if that was going to work on this

stoic nurse, doesn't he know Ilya has all of those things and would have been employing them?

Despite his annoyance at Hayden, he did hold out brief hope that it was going to work, because he also got to say: "He's my best friend," which Ilya hadn't tried, and it hurt like hell but Ilya would swallow a hell of a lot more than just his pride to get an update.

It doesn't work, but Hayden has some news anyway: Yuna Hollander is on her way, first available flight and she's *not* available to clear information exchange, but rest assured she would want Hayden to know.

That's not — that's not going to solve anything. Not for Ilya. He needs Shane awake, or just regular visiting hours. Ilya leaves Hayden at the front desk, still trying, and failing.

He goes and sits in a chair, hard under his tailbone, and gets out his phone. He thumbs to his messages, but nothing from Shane. He thinks he'll hear from him when and if he's awake. He wonders if he should try to give a message to the nurse, before stepping out into the loop of the ambulance entrance, fingers twitching for a cigarette. He should walk across the street to the store before he calls a cab.

But Marley's still there, his SUV idling in a spot reserved for ICU visitors. Relief wars with shame, that he'll have to climb back into his car and tell him that despite running here like a scared child, saying his prayers in his head — also like a scared child — he didn't see Shane. "Thank you Marley, for waiting. Hollander's idiot friend was there, and," he brandishes a scrap of paper, something that the nurse was willing to part with, "and visiting hours start at ten tomorrow."

Marley reaches over to squeeze his shoulder, and without speaking, hands Ilya a pack of cigarettes. Ilya rolls down the window and smokes six, end to end, face and fingers numb with cold by the time Marley drops him off. "Thank you," he says, smoke and cold and terror and the weight of the day clouding his voice, his thoughts. "Do you want to stay here?"

Marley shakes his head. "No, Roz, I need to go hold my wife. You good?"

Ilya is absolutely not good but he is grateful, and pats the roof of the car.

*

Ilya texts Shane. *Are okay?* and then forces himself to leave it at that. Shane doesn't need a barrage of texts. He wants him to see Ilya's name when he wakes up and to know that Ilya was — well. He wants him to know he was thinking of him, not that he left the rink without showering and almost made a scene with a nurse and would be drinking himself into a stupor if he didn't already have a plan to see Shane at 10 AM.

But he does get a text around 2 AM. *I'm sorry I missed this message. As you can imagine, Shane's phone is blowing up right now, but I wanted you to know that his mom is here and he is stable. I haven't been able to see him but she has and so far — signs are good.*

Who is this? Ilya asks, heart clamboring in his mouth.

I'm his friend. Sorry, my wife just reminded me that there might be people who had heard and were worried about him.

Fuck.

Ilya tries to compose a bland response, but exhaustion and fear have clouded his thoughts. He needs to just say *thank you*, and give Shane's teammate zero reason to scroll up. He doesn't know if Shane is doing what he should do — routinely cleaning out his incriminating texts — but if he's anything like Ilya, he's not.

He absolutely cannot push for details, or say *I'll be there in the morning*. Instead, he grits his teeth and says *thanks*.

*

At 9 AM, he's in the hospital parking lot in his second favorite car, because he left his favorite without a second thought at the rink. He has both sets of keys in his pocket, because at some point today he'll wrangle a teammate to help him get both home, but right now, he just needs to kill an hour. How did he end up here an hour early?

By ten, he's paced miles in the parking lot, and then finally, finally —

"Ilya," Shane says, voice lilting and Ilya might fucking *cry*.

"Hey," Ilya says, magnetized and moving towards him. Shane looks — soft, he looks fine, so fucking breakable but not broken.

"There's my man," Shane says, in a small voice, musical. Ilya closes the distance between them, needing to touch him and needing him to lower his voice in equal measure.

"Oh, someone's on the good shit," Ilya says, amused, like this isn't exactly what he begged for from God or the universe, all night. Shane vaguely floating on — morphine, Ilya imagines. Shane lets his eyelashes flutter closed and brushes his thumb across Shane's face.

"Fractured collarbones, concussion," Shane explains. "Could have been worse."

"Could have been worse," Ilya agrees. The relief he feels —

"Heeeey," Shane says, drawn out and sing-song like a parody of a pickup line. "Your hand is nice."

He's smiling in a loose, unguarded way Ilya has never seen directed at him before. He's so open it's almost painful to look at, like Ilya is seeing something too private even for them.

Ilya's so hungry for it he could die. Shane Hollander should always look at him like this, but only ever in private. This Shane is not for the world's greedy consumption. Only for Ilya's.

"Your face is nice," Shane adds, oblivious to the devastation he's causing.

That, at least, is in character.

"We should play on a line together again." Shane smiles like he's savoring a fine wine. "I liked that."

Then he frowns. It looks oddly childlike.

"Ow."

"You are hurt?" Fuck. Ilya will have to call a nurse and then-

"Sure," Shane said easily. "They gave me morphine. It still hurts but it doesn't matter." He brightens. "Like when I'm with you."

"Shane, I-"

But Ilya never has to find out what he would have said, because at that moment a nurse comes in and Ilya's blood freezes in his veins.

He makes to drop Shane's hand and step away, blandly polite public-facing expression firmly in place, but fuck everything because Shane won't let go.

"Hollander," Ilya tries, and Shane makes a tiny *meep* of distress and just clings harder.

Maybe if Ilya had slept at all since the hit. Maybe if a lower dose of pain meds had left Shane a little less unguarded. Maybe, maybe, maybe Ilya could have made himself pull away.

But in this life, he could sooner cut off his own hand than let go of Shane's.

Ilya stares at the nurse.

The nurse stares at Ilya.

Shane giggles.

Fuck. This is it. He's never going back to Russia again. Shane will never forgive him. He'll lose everything because he's too weak, too slow to protect what he loves.

He opens his mouth to cajole, maybe, or threaten or bribe, but before he can speak the nurse abruptly shakes herself like a dog getting out of a bath.

"We take patient privacy extremely seriously at this institution," she says in a clipped, flat tone at odds with her wide eyes. "I'll tell everyone Mr. Hollander is sleeping and not to be disturbed."

Then she turns and leaves before Ilya can manage more than a faint but heartfelt, "Thank you."

Ilya's heart is in his throat as he watches the door close behind her. It is dangerous to place your trust in the kindness of strangers, but. But. Maybe he hasn't fucked everything.

Shane is watching him with an expression that should be illegal.

"Marleau feels terrible," Ilya says. He owes it Marley to say as much. And if it saves him from whatever the next devastating thing Shane is about to say, all the better. "He did not mean to hurt you."

"It's not his fault," Shane says. "It was a clean hit." Then he laughs. "I'm just mad I didn't get to see you last night."

He's speaking clearly enough, but there's a slight slur to his words now along with the sing song quality.

"I was going to ask you-" he starts. "I was going to- I-"

And then he's asleep.

Huh. Well, whatever it was, it's avoided for now. Maybe Shane will have forgotten by the time he wakes up again.

On balance, that's probably a good thing.

Why the fuck are Shane Hollander's cheekbones so chiselled? No one needs that. He's a hockey player, not a movie star. They don't even make him more aerodynamic - the helmet would get in the way. It's wasteful for him to be so beautiful. Inefficient.

And his fucking eyes. At least they're closed now, the bruises surrounding them making his face look sunken and hollow (and breathtaking). It should be a crime to have eyes like that and be good - exceptional - at hockey. It speaks of cosmic injustice.

Ilya loses track of time angrily contemplating Shane's mouth.

At some point his phone buzzes.

Hey Lily it's Hayden, reads the message from an unknown number. Visiting hours started at 10 but they're not letting anyone in. Apparently he's sleeping and not to be disturbed, so you might want to come later.

This is followed by another message sent seven minutes later. *Not to assume anything. But just in case.*

What do Shane's teammates think Lily is to him? Probably not far off the truth, apart from the obvious, if Ilya's teammates own impressions of Jane are anything to go by.

Something in Ilya feels almost proud at the thought. They may not know who Lily is, but they recognise "her" claim on Shane. They know he has someone who matters to him, who has mattered to him for *years*, even if the details are a little off.

Shane's hand twitches in Ilya's. He's still asleep, but maybe not for long.

Thanks, Ilya texts back after saving the number as Bad Pike. He knows the score - in the unlikely event that he ever gets the wife's number, that's who's going in his contacts as Good Pike. She's the one who keeps the fridge stocked with ginger ale and cooks Shane's gross

microbiotic shit. What has Bad Pike ever done for Shane? Assisted some goals Shane could have scored off anyone's passes, mostly.

If you see him first, he adds, tell him Lily says hi.

He rubs his thumb over Shane's knuckles. No one in hockey has *nice* hands, whatever Shane and the morphine have to say about it, but Shane's have won two Cups and made Ilya come so hard he saw the face of god, so that's kind of the same thing.

"I take it you're the reason no one is allowed in to see my son?"

Shit fuck holy shit fuck fucking damn.

"Mrs. Hollander," Ilya's mouth says while his brain whites out.

He makes to stand, move away from where he is tenderly holding her son's hand, but she waves him to stay.

"Are you the reason he's glued to his phone every summer?" she asks mildly.

This is where Shane gets his beauty from - and his nerves of steel. Ilya would not like to stand across from Mrs. Hollander in a face off.

"I hope so," Ilya says and does not throw up even a little. "He is the reason I am."

When her face softens she looks even more like Shane. Still guarded, still beautiful, but with a look in her eyes that says she's willing to be convinced. It's a look Ilya has seen on her son's face in hotel rooms, in their apartments, and even a couple of times on the ice.

"I can't-" Ilya says. He knows it's the wrong thing from the way her gaze shutters, but he has to tell her, she has to understand. "He can't, either. He doesn't want anyone to know."

She lets out a breath like she's wounded.

"He wouldn't want me to see this, would he?" She keeps her voice steady. It is admirable.

Ilya considers lying. Shane might want him to, he thinks. Now that she knows, what is the point of hurting her further?

"He loves you very much," Ilya says instead. "He hates lying to you."

That may be too much, but he has to give her something. This is Shane's mother, the woman who made the man who Ilya loves.

Her eyes go to where Ilya is still holding Shane's hand.

"He always did play through the pain," she says. "You take care of my boy, Ilya Rozanov. I'll be back this afternoon."

She leaves and Ilya slumps back in his chair, a puppet with his strings cut, tethered only by Shane's hand in his.

"I would not do that for just anyone," he says to Shane's sleeping form. "Your mother is scary woman."

Shane doesn't reply, but the fact that Ilya's still here — Ilya who probably should have bolted at that first creak of the door, and he didn't — one thumb against Shane's best callus thinking of how glad he is to feel the warmth of him? That's probably all the answer he needed.

And, after so many years, isn't a relief to have had the worst happen? Ilya had worried so many times about being caught with Shane Hollander, and mild surprise and immediate privacy is certainly not what he expected.

When Shane wakes up, unintentionally extricating his hand from Ilya's to perform an aborted attempt at a stretch, Ilya's heart lurches. "Arm," Shane says, inarticulate. He is frowning deeply without opening his eyes.

"You are in pain?" Ilya asks, voice soft, and the difference is immediate.

"Ilya," he says, face lighting up and voice as whimsical and delighted as he'd been when he first walked into his room. A moment ago he'd tried to put his arms over his broked fucking collarbone. "You came."

"Oh god, Hollander. You have amnesia. This is no good. I will call the nurse for her to put the flashlight in your eyes some more."

"No," Shane says. "I remember. You were here and you're still here. Come here, you're too far away."

Ilya is still against the bed. Until a moment ago, Shane's hand was in both of his. "You want me to climb into the bed?" He asked, raising an eyebrow. "This is the only way for closer."

Shane's eyes light up and Ilya groans. "No, this is not happening. Your collarbone is in too many pieces," but he does press himself closer to Shane's side, darting his eyes to the entrance of Shane's room, before leaning down to place a lingering kiss on his forehead. Shane's eyes flutter closed. "I will need to leave. But I am glad I have seen with my eyes that you are —"

"Still pretty?" Shane asks. Ilya thinks he is trying to waggle his eyebrows but they are not cooperating. Ilya has *one* picture of Shane. Why is that? The reasons seem less important. He reaches for his phone and snaps one. Shane even smiles for it.

"Perfect."

Ilya should probably tell Shane a few things before he leaves. About Yuna and Hayden, but he worries with Shane in so much pain — clavicle is the absolute worst, they're so fucking lucky it's just a fracture, but he's still in for a hell of a painful recovery — and on medication, he worries if Shane is on guard. He can't even prep Shane to be defensive with Hayden.

Hopefully, if and when he says "Lily says hi," Shane will just glow a little bit. Preen with his good arm. He doesn't need him to blurt *she definitely isn't a man* which would be a suspiciously specific denial.

"You should come home with me this summer," Shane says. "We could have so much fun. That's what you should tell Marley he's in trouble for."

"Maybe," Ilya demurres. He can picture it. Shane told him his front door code. "But being in Montreal on the off season — is..."

"Not in my apartment, my *cottage*." Shane draws a helpful little square in front of him.

Ilya squints at the space in front of him, like he recognizes it. "Ah, yes. The place where the yoga magic happens."

"Ha! You *have* seen it. Anyways we could have fun."

Ilya knows he should say no. Or *maybe*, a soft no for an injured Shane.

Shane's cottage is too well-known. Ilya is too recognizable, with no excuse to stick around after the playoffs are over. They have been lucky at the hospital, but luck runs out. It is one thing to have a single, foolish moment of weakness when you haven't slept and your- the person you care about has just had a head injury. It is quite another to plan a week, a month of weakness in advance.

"I have game. Several, I hope." He pauses. Thinks about letting go of Shane's hand. "And then I will see you."

"At my cottage," Shane crows quietly.

"At your cottage," Ilya agrees. Fuck.

*

Ilya is sitting on Shane's good side so he doesn't jostle his sling with exuberance, because every time Ilya leaps to his feet, Shane plants himself under Ilya's arm. It's thrilling, Ilya is thrilled, baseline heart rate fast and strong. "My mom was right," Shane mutters, one minute to the buzzer. He sounds annoyed.

"They should give her a headset and a job."

"God," Shane groans. "She would be unbearable and I'd have to drop my gloves so often on the ice."

"The things said would all be very nice," Ilya says, being a shit. He knows exactly what Shane would hear on the ice.

Shane elbows him, and he concedes, "Yes, yes, but I would be very into it. It was hot when you punched Hunter. Your aim was not good but he had not talked about mama."

Ilya looked down at his phone. "Svetochka also anticipated this, before the playoffs. I will not hear the end of it. When our witches agree in the future, we will put money on the game," he adds, thumbing a reply. He's so irritated.

"Ilya," Shane says.

Ilya makes a questioning noise.

"*Ilya*," Shane repeats.

Ilya looks up from his phone. "What is ... what is he doing?"

"I don't know," Shane says, his fingers gripping Ilya's sleeve.

There is a man making his way down through the stands, and Hunter is gesturing for him to hop the boards. Ilya can hear the announcers describing it, but only until his pulse rate spikes and he can't hear anything over the rush of blood.

"Is he fucking...?"

It can't be that. Boring Scott Hunter, the oldest man in hockey, must just be doing some kind of stupid fan service. It's good PR. Ilya and Shane are both too caught up in their own secrets - they are seeing things that are not there.

And then Boring Scott Hunter takes the fan by the hand and pulls him onto the ice.

"What's he doing?" Shane whispers. It's not a real question. They can both see what he's doing. He has the fan's - it's not a fan, Ilya knows it's not a fan - he has the guy's hands in his now, and they're looking at each other like they're the only two people in the whole fucking world.

Ilya has only ever seen one person look at him like that, and it's the man sitting next to him on the couch right now, holding his breath and keeping a white-knuckle grip on Ilya's sleeve.

They're talking, Boring Scott Hunter and his not-fan. What the fuck are they talking about? Why are they doing this? Why now? They can't, they can't do this.

But they can. They can and they are and it's like every bone in Ilya's body suddenly goes liquid, watching two men kiss on center ice in front of the fans and the cameras and the Cup itself.

He draws a deep, gulping breath, then another, and next to him Shane is doing the same, coming up for air after all those years of drowning.

"He's really doing it," Shane says, voice cracking. "Fuck."

"He's really doing it," Ilya agrees. He can't find the words in Russian or English for what he's feeling right now, lost and found at the very same moment.

And then he's kissing Shane and Shane's kissing him and they're both crying, hot tears mingling as they anchor themselves in each other. Shane's body is a warm, solid, real thing in his arms, the only real thing he could ever need.

"I've got you," Shane says eventually, pressing soft kisses to the top of Ilya's head. "I've got you."

Part of Ilya, the part that broke when his mother died and never healed right, wants to shy away. But the rest of him, all the choices that make him the man he is today and not the boy he was when Shane first trusted him with his secrets, knows to lean in, to let Shane do this for him.

"I don't- I don't know what this means," Ilya admits. If Scott Hunter gets to have this in daylight, what does it mean for them?

"Me neither," Shane says.

Ilya takes his hand. The world Boring Old Fuck Scott Hunter has just opened up in front of them is big and scary and unknown.

"But if Scott Hunter can do it — not kiss on center ice, tacky, but have —" Ilya says, voice abandoning him, but luckily, he has Shane with him, who is steady when Ilya is faltering.

"Have a boyfriend?" Shane supplies. He's so gorgeous and brave and Ilya feels — helpless. "Sure. We're better at him at most everything."

"Yes. Now that he has definitely peaked, he is ready for his true calling which is making annoying sounds on the ice and incorrect calls." Ilya says, smirking despite the fact that he's actually thrilled for the man, Cup and handsome out-of-his-league partner and thick playoff beard which has been hiding his hideous face. He can be happy for a little bit. Next season, though, Ilya's coming for his crown. He agrees, mouth softening into a genuine smile. "If Scott Hunter can have boyfriend, I know I will be much better at it."

"Oh my god," Shane says, laughing wetly and crashing back into Ilya. Ilya shifts to accommodate Shane's bad arm without thinking about it, protective and in love and laughing, because Shane's whole and happy and his — God. Shane puts his forehead against Ilya's chest and Ilya cards his hands through Shane's hair, and he says, "He does skate a little like a ref, but that is *so mean*. You're fucking — ugh, Ilya you are my favorite person."

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