

hey, love, we'll get away with it

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by [buckleyspencer](#)

Summary

5 times Shane and Ilya broke the rules they had set in place to get away with it + 1 time they realized they had nothing to get away from.

Notes

This is my first fic ever, and I am so nervous I can't even begin to explain it. English isn't my first language, so forgive me if there are any mistakes (and if there are, please feel free to point them out because I am too nervous to make any of my friends beta-read this).

The title is a lyric from "The Geese of Beverly Road" by the National because that song is so Hollanov coded to me (if any editors are reading this, heyyyyyy)

Also, given recent events, I want to emphasise that I am EXTREMELY against the use of generative AI in all fields, but especially creative fields.

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

They didn't sit down and decide to have whatever it is that they have.

That part always bothered Shane, if he was being honest with himself, how it had just *happened*, how one line had blurred into another, until suddenly there was no clear place to stand anymore. Rivals, enemies, thorns in each other's sides, and then something else layered underneath, something private and volatile and impossible to explain without sounding dumb.

The rules came later. After the first few times, it became clear this wasn't going to stop on its own because neither of them wanted it to stop, despite rationality debating otherwise.

They were in Toronto when they said it out loud for the first time since Toronto was neutral ground. A hotel that was technically nice but felt anonymous in the way all road hotels did. The room smelled of detergent and sex. Shane remembered the window because it didn't open more than a crack, and Ilya had tried anyway, like sheer irritation might convince it to budge.

"You're going to get fined if someone sees you," Shane had said, half-distracted, watching him.

Ilya scoffed. "Fined for air? I make lots of money. I will survive."

"You say that about everything."

Ilya shot him a look, the window-situation agitation bleeding into the conversation. "And I am still alive, yes?"

Shane let out a breath, tension easing just enough to make the silence afterwards noticeable. It lingered, heavy, pulling their attention back to the thing neither of them wanted to name.

Ilya sat on the edge of the bed eventually, elbows on his knees.

Shane couldn't help himself. "This doesn't work," he said.

Ilya stiffened immediately. "But you are still here, yes?"

Shane sighed, long and slow, like he'd expected that reaction. "That's not what I mean. It doesn't work *like this*. We're not..." He gestured vaguely between them. "We are not being careful."

Ilya sat up and crossed his arms, defensive more out of habit than anything else. "Hollander, you're the one who said—"

"I know what I said," Shane said, rubbing at the back of his neck, frustration bleeding into his voice. "And I meant it. But we keep... pushing. This will get messy."

"Already is," Ilya muttered.

Shane looked up at him then, eyes sharp and searching. “Exactly.”

That was when he said it. Quietly, like he was talking himself into it as much as Ilya.

“We need rules.”

Ilya blinked. “Rules.”

“Yes.”

“Like a”, he hesitated before continuing, “contract?” Ilya tried to joke, but it fell flat.

“Like boundaries,” Shane corrected. “Things we don’t cross. So, this doesn’t destroy us.”

Shane didn’t say what he was thinking: *that it already had its hooks in deep, that boundaries felt like closing a door after the fire had started.* Ilya took a moment. Then nodded.

“Leave it to Shane Hollander to make occasional scandalous hookups boring.”

Shane just glared at him. He needed this; he needed rules if this was going to continue.

“Okay,” he said. “Rules.”

They talked them through, one by one, sitting a little too far apart on the bed. Each rule felt reasonable when it was said. Necessary, even.

1. No texting on game days.
2. No staying the night.
3. No PDA.
4. No talking about the future.
5. No choosing this over hockey.

They didn’t shake on it; they didn’t even write it down. They just looked at each other and agreed. Shane told himself that meant something.

Rule One: No Texting on Game Days

Shane had always been good at compartmentalising. It was practically a requirement, growing up the way he had, playing at the level he did. You learned early how to put things in boxes and close the lid tightly. Game days were their own box, as were team practice days.

Routine. Focus. Noise. The familiar ritual of taping his stick, lacing his skates, and tuning out everything that wasn’t the ice. He liked that clarity; he hated to admit it, but he needed it. Which was why the sound of the crowd changing tone mid-shift booming from a speaker nearby set his nerves on edge immediately.

He was walking down the arena corridor when he saw it on the mounted TV, just a replay, slowed down enough to make it worse. Ilya was getting clipped at an ugly angle, leg twisting as he hit the boards. The kind of fall that made your body react before your brain caught up.

“Shit,” Shane breathed, stopping short.

The camera cut away too fast. Trainers and Medics and Coaches all swarmed in. The commentators dropped into hushed speculation. Shane stood there longer than he meant to, pulse loud in his ears. Someone brushed past him and muttered an apology he barely registered.

Don't, he told himself, automatically.

Rule one existed for a reason. Game days were volatile, emotional, and dangerous. Texting Ilya would crack the careful distance they maintained when it mattered most. He forced himself to keep walking. The rest of the night passed in a blur. The post-practice brief. The locker room noise. Someone cracked a joke he laughed at half a beat too late. He shoved his phone deep into his bag and didn't look at it again until he was alone in his car. The silence there was worse.

He unlocked his phone. No messages from anyone except his Mom and Rose, both inquiring about some gala next week. He clicked on Ilya's name to open their text chain anyway. His thumb hovered over the keyboard, betraying him.

You okay?

He typed it out without thinking. Then stared at it like it was evidence of a crime and promptly deleted it.

That was a dirty hit.

Deleted.

I saw what happened.

Deleted.

Shane let out a shaky laugh and dropped the phone onto the passenger seat. “Get it together,” he muttered to no one, or maybe he said it to himself. But the image wouldn't leave him. The way Ilya's body had gone loose for just a second. The way Shane's chest had tightened like something vital was slipping out of place. At the next red light, he picked the phone back up. This time, he didn't overthink it.

You okay?

The message sent with a soft, traitorous sound. Shane immediately felt exposed. Like he'd just stepped onto the ice without a helmet. The minutes stretched into hours. He drove home with the radio off, the city lights blurring past. He showered, ate his meal-prepped lasagna without really tasting it, checked his phone again and again.

Nothing.

When it finally buzzed, he startled so hard he nearly dropped it.

Locker room. Knee. I'll be fine.

Relief hit him fast and hard, leaving his hands a little unsteady.

Good, he typed back. **Do what the physio says.**

A pause.

Then:

You texted me on a game day.

Shane stared at the screen, heart thudding. He could have joked it away. Could have pretended it was an exception, a one-time thing. Instead, he typed:

Yeah. I know.

Three dots appeared. Disappeared. Appeared again.

I will be okay, Jane Ilya wrote.

That was it. No lecture. No guilt. Unexpectedly, his phone buzzed again, a few minutes later.

Thankyou

Shane leaned back against the counter and closed his eyes.

Rule Two: No Staying the Night

This one had been easier to follow. Painfully so.

They were almost too good at goodbyes. Slipping out before dawn, pulling on clothes in the dark, leaving behind rumpled sheets and unspoken things. Shane told himself it was efficient; he would go as far as to call it healthy, even. Morning light changed people. Made everything feel closer than it was supposed to be. The night before Ilya flew back to Russia for the summer, Shane told himself this would be no different.

Ilya's apartment was already half-empty. Suitcases lined the wall, zipped and organised quite chaotically, much to Shane's dismay. Shane noticed intimate details: the way Ilya folded his shirts, the care he took with his skates, the gifts he packed for his niece. Even as he told himself not to, he couldn't help noticing the dread in Ilya's step as he packed up the remaining few pieces.

They avoided talking about the flight. About their weeks apart. They always did.

It wasn't until much later, when the city outside had gone quiet, that Ilya checked his phone and frowned.

"Early flight," he said. "I should sleep."

Shane nodded, already reaching for his shirt. "Yeah. I'll head out."

Ilya hesitated.

"You can stay."

The words were soft, careful, like he wasn't sure he was allowed to say them.

Shane froze. "That breaks the rule."

"I know," Ilya said immediately. "Just tonight."

Shane searched his face, saw the tension there, the faint crack in the armour of bravado Ilya Rozanov wore so casually. "You sure?"

Ilya exhaled. "I don't want to wake up alone."

That did it.

"Okay," Shane said quietly, already moving to the bedroom.

It could've always been like this. Shane's brain treacherously supplied.

They lay side by side, not touching at first. The space between them felt deliberate, charged. Shane stared at the ceiling, acutely aware of every sound, every shift of weight.

"Shane?" Ilya said after a while.

"Yeah."

"I don't do this," Ilya said. "Not with anyone else."

Shane turned toward him, throat tight. "I know."

If Shane said it was the best sleep he had ever slept, he would be lying. Sleep came in pieces. Shane woke once to find Ilya's hand curled into his shirt, warm and steady. He didn't move it, rather he moved towards it. When morning came, pale and grey, Shane watched Ilya get dressed with a quiet ache he didn't know how to name.

At the door, Ilya paused, then leaned in and pressed a brief kiss to Shane's cheek, soft, almost reverent.

"See you", he said.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. See you."

The door closed.

The rule was broken.

And neither of them pretended it hadn't mattered.

Rule three: No PDA

By the time the third rule started to fray, Shane had learned something uncomfortable about himself.

He was better at pretending than he was at stopping.

The rules still existed. They still said them out loud sometimes, half-joking, half-defensive, like naming them was enough to keep them intact. But Shane had begun to notice the exceptions piling up in quiet ways. Small moments where instinct won out over discipline, where his body moved before his brain caught up. Rule three was supposed to be easy.

No PDA meant no complications. No questions. No photos circulating online with red circles and speculative headlines. It meant keeping whatever this was firmly out of reach of everyone else's opinions. Shane had agreed to that one immediately, relieved by it. Public scrutiny had always made his skin itch. The idea of giving the world something else to dissect—something this personal—made his chest tighten. Ilya had seemed fine with it, too. Until the awards show.

Shane already hated events like this. Too many lights, too many eyes, too much forced proximity under the guise of celebration. He wore the suit he'd been told to wear, smiled when he was supposed to smile, laughed at jokes he barely heard. Ilya was seated right next to him, but they still maintained their distance, close enough to see, far enough to maintain plausible deniability.

They'd exchanged a familiar look when Shane arrived. Nothing anyone else would notice. That was the point.

The interviewer wasn't someone Shane recognised, which should have been his first warning. The questions started normal enough, general roundup regarding his performance, season highlights, team dynamics but there was an edge to them, sharpened slowly.

"So," the interviewer said, tilting his head slightly, "some critics have suggested your recent slump has more to do with distractions off the ice than anything physical. What do you say to that?"

Shane blinked. "I wouldn't call my season a slump," he said carefully. "And I don't think—"

"Right," the interviewer interrupted, smiling thinly. "But you do have a reputation. For being... plain. Since Rose Landry, we haven't seen you with any other women. With your teammates all marrying off or you know... doing the opposite, the concern regarding your

lack of any emotional connections or even exploration seems fair. Do you think your lack of passion off the ice is getting in the way of your play on the ice?"

The room felt suddenly too warm. What an odd question. Shane felt that old, familiar sensation settle in his gut, the one that came with being read too closely, with people deciding they knew him better than he knew himself.

"I think obviously passion is part of the job," he said, voice even. "I simply reserve all my passion for the ice because I care about my season. I am extremely happy for my peers who are settling down, but I know that at the end of the day, they also truly do love hockey. If you don't care about hockey, you shouldn't be playing hockey. I don't think personal relationships are affecting our professional performances. I care about my friends and family just as passionately as I care about hockey."

There was a murmur of approval, but the interviewer wasn't done.

"Some would argue that caring *too much* can be just as damaging."

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it again. He could hear his own heartbeat, loud and unsteady. He was acutely aware of how he must look: carefully neutral on the outside, coiled too tight underneath.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw movement. Ilya leaned forward casually. He didn't stand, didn't interrupt. He simply reached out, fingers brushing against Shane's hand where it rested on the arm of the chair. If the table in front of them had been lifted, everyone would've been able to see what was happening.

Then he covered Shane's hands with this, somewhat entangling their fingers together. The contact was light, almost casual. Easy to miss if you weren't looking for it. Shane felt it like a shock. His first instinct was to pull away. Muscle memory, trained by years of caution and rules and restraint. But then the pad of Ilya's thumb pressed gently into the back of his hand, grounding, deliberate.

I'm here, it seemed to say.

The interviewer kept talking, unaware or uninterested. The camera angle shifted to show the crowds laughing. Ilya didn't let go. When Shane glanced at him, Ilya met his eyes without flinching. His expression was calm, but there was something fierce under it. It was a quiet, unyielding certainty that made Shane's chest ache. Their thighs pressed together, solid and unmistakable. Ilya didn't move when the segment ended. Didn't withdraw when the attention shifted elsewhere.

Only when the applause swelled did he finally release Shane's hand, as nothing had happened at all.

Shane sat there, stunned, fingers still spread as if the warmth lingered.

Later, in the noise and chaos of the reception hall, Shane found Ilya near the bar.

“That wasn’t subtle,” Shane said, keeping his voice low.

Ilya shrugged, taking a sip of his drink. “You needed it.”

“That’s not the point.”

Ilya turned to face him then, expression sharpening. “The interview man was being rude.”

“I can handle myself.”

“I know.” Ilya paused. “I just didn’t want you to have to.”

Shane swallowed. “People could have seen.”

“They did,” Ilya said simply as if he had nothing to lose. “And?”

Shane had no answer to that.

For the first time, Shane realised how badly he’d wanted to be chosen. For someone to have something to lose and for them to still choose him.

Just a moment after that, he realised that not only did Ilya have something to lose. He had everything to lose. Coming out, for Shane, just meant maybe retiring from hockey (as much as that would ruin him, in the grand scheme of things, it would be nothing compared to what Ilya would have to go through). For Ilya, it meant he would never get to go home, never meet his niece who he loved so fiercely, and he would lose the opportunity to be buried next to his mother.

Shane did not think about why he was imagining a future where they were together, let alone one where they came out together.

The rule didn’t shatter. It slipped, quietly, publicly, irrevocably.

Rule Four: No Talking About the Future

This was the rule Shane thought would save them.

As long as the future stayed unnamed and undefined, they could keep pretending this existed in a vacuum. A series of present moments stitched together by convenience and chemistry and craze. They were good at living in the now. Hockey demanded it.

It was an off-season evening when it finally cracked. One of those strange, suspended nights where time felt slower, less insistent. They were in Shane’s apartment, windows open to let in the late summer air, the city humming softly outside. Ilya was in town for a brand deal and decided he had time to spare.

They weren’t doing anything remarkable. Just sitting on the couch, feet tangled, a rerun of the Toronto versus New York game playing muted on the TV. Shane rested his head back

against the cushion, half-listening, half-dozing.

Ilya stretched, arms lifting over his head. "I'll be back in mid-September," he said casually. "Camp starts early this year."

Shane hummed in acknowledgement. "Yeah."

A beat passed.

"When you're back," Shane said, without thinking, "we could—"

He stopped.

The silence that followed was immediate and heavy.

Ilya turned slowly to look at him. "We could what?"

Shane's pulse spiked. "I didn't mean—"

"You did," Ilya said gently. "You were about to. We could what, Hollander?"

Shane exhaled, rubbing a hand over his face. "It was nothing. Just habit."

Ilya studied him, expression unreadable. "Is it?"

Shane didn't answer right away. He stared at the floor, suddenly aware of how much effort he'd put into not imagining things beyond the next game, the next city, the next stolen night.

"I don't know," he admitted finally. "I try not to think about it."

Ilya nodded slowly. "Why?"

"Because thinking about it makes it real," Shane said. "And real means consequences."

"Everything has consequences," Ilya said, his voice sounding thicker than usual. "Ignoring them doesn't make them go away."

Shane looked up at him, something vulnerable gnawing in his chest. "And what do you think happens if we talk about it?"

Ilya hesitated. That alone felt like an answer.

"I think," he said more carefully than Shane had ever heard him, "that pretending *this* has no future is starting to feel like lies."

Shane laughed softly, without humour. "That's one way to put it."

"So, we could do what?" Ilya said, bringing them back to the reason they're in this mess.

Shane stalled for a second and then answered when he realised Ilya wasn't going to leave this alone.

“I think instead of going to camp directly, you could come here first. Maybe like a week earlier. And then we could go to camp together.” Then he quickly added, “Like not together-together of course, maybe you can get a flight a day earlier to me or something”, his voice sounded dented.

“Okay”, Ilya answered, like it was the simplest thing in the world. As if Shane hadn’t nearly had an aneurysm.

They sat there, the unspoken stretching between them. The rule wasn’t broken by a declaration or a promise. It broke because neither of them could pretend they hadn’t already stepped into tomorrow, even just a little. Ilya reached for Shane’s hand, slow and deliberate.

“We don’t have to figure it out tonight,” he said.

Shane squeezed his fingers. “I know.”

But they both understood that something had shifted. The future had been named not clearly, not safely, but enough to make it impossible to ignore.

Rule Five: No choosing this over hockey

Rule five was never explicitly discussed in the way the others were, simply because of how absurd the idea was. It didn’t come up in casual conversation or half-joking reminders. No one teased it into the open with a smirk or a raised eyebrow. It sat beneath everything else, unspoken but understood, heavy as gravity.

You don’t choose *eachother* over hockey.

Hockey was the point. The reason everything else worked. The justification they leaned on when things got complicated. If hockey always came first, then whatever existed between them could be contained, controlled, excused. Shane had told himself that for years. It was easier to believe the hierarchy was clear.

It started with a call Shane almost didn’t answer.

He was in the middle of a late workout, the rink mostly empty, the air cold and sharp in his lungs. His phone buzzed against the bench where he’d left it, vibrating insistently. He ignored it at first, finished the drill, took another lap, then finally skated over, annoyed.

Ilya’s name on the screen wiped the irritation clean.

He hesitated since it was quite late. Late enough that this wasn’t casual.

“Hey,” Shane said, breathless as he answered.

There was a pause on the other end. Not silence exactly, just Ilya breathing, grounding himself.

“Where are you?” Ilya asked.

“At the rink. Why?”

Another pause. Longer this time.

“I might need you,” Ilya said.

The words landed harder than Shane expected.

“Ilya,” Shane said carefully, “what’s going on?”

“I got the scans today,” Ilya said. “The knee is fine. Mostly. But doctor thinks I should delay training camp.”

Shane frowned. “Delay how?”

“Two weeks. Maybe more.”

“That’s not—” Shane stopped himself. “That’s not terrible.”

“It is for me,” Ilya said quietly. “They’re already talking about roster adjustments. If I miss camp...”

“I know,” Shane said immediately. “I know how that looks.”

Another beat.

“I don’t usually call you for this,” Ilya said.

Shane swallowed. “You don’t have to explain.”

“I’m explaining anyway,” Ilya exhaled. “I don’t want to make this decision alone.”

Shane closed his eyes.

This was the rule. Right here. The invisible line they weren’t supposed to cross.

“I have practice early tomorrow,” Shane said, hating himself for how reflexive it sounded.

“And meetings. I can’t—”

“I know,” Ilya said quickly. “I wasn’t asking you to fix it. I just” He faltered and then took a breath. “I just wanted to hear your voice.”

Shane’s chest tightened painfully.

“Okay,” he said, softer now. “Talk to me. What did the doctor actually say?”

They talked for almost an hour. About rehab timelines, about risk tolerance, about how fragile a career could be when your body decided not to cooperate. Shane paced the empty rink as he listened, stick abandoned on the bench, sweat cooling on his skin. At some point, he realised he was offering advice he wouldn’t give anyone else. Not teammates. Not friends. Advice that prioritised Ilya’s long-term health over optics and immediate performance.

Over hockey.

“I think you should wait,” Shane said finally. “Even if it pisses them off.”

There was a long silence.

“You’re sure?” Ilya asked.

Shane didn’t hesitate. “Yeah.”

“I could lose my spot.”

“You could lose your knee,” Shane shot back. Then, gentler, “And you’re too good to burn out like that.”

Ilya laughed softly. “Best player in the league.”

“Glad to hear your sense of humour is still intact.”

Another pause. Then, quieter: “This will ruin our September plans.”

Without thinking, without hesitation, Shane replied, “You could still come, you know”

And then to cut the awkward tension, added “I will nurse you back to health, maybe I will go to camp a day or two late, cant leave without ensuring my patient is taken care of”. Even though he meant it to sound lighthearted, it came out far more sincere than either of the men could’ve expected. The conversation went still for a beat.

“Thankyou” Ilya said so earnestly, Shane almost sat down on the ice.

When the call ended, Shane stood alone in the rink, phone still warm in his hand. The realization crept in slowly, unwelcome and undeniable. He hadn’t even questioned it, not the advice, not the invitation and not the offer. No questions asked.

It wasn’t the last time.

A week later, Shane skipped an extra team practice followed by a team dinner to sit in on a video call with Ilya’s physical therapist. He told himself it was a coincidence, that he’d already eaten, that he practised almost double the hours the team did, that no one would notice.

But of course his teammates noticed.

Hunter asked carefully, “You’re skipping practice, Shane? All okay?”

“Yeah, just some unexpected work.” His words sounded like lies to his own ears.

“You bailing on us now?” Hayden joked. “What, got a secret life we don’t know about?”

Shane forced a smile. “Something like that.”

The call ran long; it was full of technical intricacies and details. Shane asked more questions than he initially planned to until Ilya shot him a look through the screen, fond, a little startled.

Afterwards, when they were alone again in the digital quiet, Ilya tilted his head.

“You didn’t have to do that.”

“I know,” Shane said.

“You’re not my agent or medic or whatever.”

“Never said I was.”

Ilya watched him for a moment, expression thoughtful. “You’re choosing me.”

The words weren’t accusatory or triumphant.

But they were deliberate.

Shane felt something twist in his chest. “I’m choosing sense because I know you won’t.”

“Not the same thing,” Ilya said gently.

Shane didn’t argue.

The breaking point didn’t come all at once.

It came in fragments. In moments, Shane could almost justify it if he didn’t look at them too closely.

Like the night before a big game, when Shane stayed up too late because Ilya couldn’t sleep. Like the morning, Shane rearranged his workout schedule without thinking, so he could catch Ilya between rehab sessions.

Like the way he checked his phone first thing after every game, not for stats or headlines, but for a message that said *I watched*.

The realisation crept in sideways.

Hockey was still central. Still vital. Still, the axis around which everything else spun.

But it wasn’t alone anymore.

It came to a head in a way Shane didn’t expect.

He found out about the trade rumours from someone else.

They were stretching after practice when one of the guys nudged him with a grin. “You hear? Sounds like your boyfriend might be headed east.”

Shane stiffened. “What?”

The guy laughed. “Relax. Just rumours. Rozanov’s name is floating around. Big shakeup.”

Shane forced a laugh, but his pulse was already climbing. He finished practice in a haze, hands moving on muscle memory alone.

He texted Ilya as soon as he was off the ice.

Are you getting traded?

The reply took longer than usual.

Maybe.

Shane stared at the word, anger flaring sharp and unexpected.

You didn’t think to tell me?

Three dots appeared. Disappeared. Then:

I didn’t know how.

That did something to him. Not relief. Something heavier.

They talked that night, voices low and tense. Ilya explained what he knew, what he didn’t. What little control players actually had, no matter how good they were.

“I didn’t want to stress you out before a game,” Ilya said. “I know how focused you get.”

Shane laughed humourlessly. “You think this isn’t stressing me out?”

“I think hockey matters to you,” Ilya said. “I didn’t want to be the reason it slipped.”

The words hit like a gut punch.

“You’re not a distraction,” Shane said immediately. “You never were.”

There was silence on the other end. Then, very softly: “You are sure, Shane?”

Shane leaned back against his kitchen counter, exhaustion washing over him. “Yeah,” he said. “I’m sure.”

“Because,” Ilya continued, careful and quiet, “if it came down to it—”

Shane cut him off. “Don’t.”

“I need to ask.”

“No,” Shane said, sharper than he meant to. He took a breath. “I don’t want it to come down to that.”

“Not an answer, Hollander.”

Shane closed his eyes.

This was it. The rule, finally dragged into the light.

“I don’t know what happens next,” Shane said. “I don’t know where you’ll be, or where I’ll be. But I know this” He swallowed. “I don’t want to pretend you don’t matter just because it’s convenient to not care.”

The line was quiet. When Ilya spoke again, his voice was steady, but there was something fragile underneath. “That sounds like choosing.” Shane didn’t deny it.

“I guess it does,” he said.

They didn’t resolve it that night. They didn’t make promises or plans. But something had shifted irrevocably.

Maybe they hadn’t broken the rule. Top of Form

Maybe they’d just bent it slightly.

+1

The strange thing was that once the last rule broke, everything else went quiet.

There were no more frantic justifications, no scrambling to repair the cracks with logic and discipline. Shane noticed the absence first, the way his mind stopped automatically reaching for the rules when something came up. The space they’d occupied was still there, but hollow now, like a habit his body hadn’t quite unlearned yet but would soon.

They didn’t talk about it right away.

Life went on. Games were played (and won), rehab continued, the trade rumours swelled and faded without resolution. Shane kept skating, kept scoring, kept doing the thing he’d built his entire sense of self around.

But something fundamental had shifted. It showed up in the smallest ways.

In the way Shane stopped checking the calendar before texting, or in the way Ilya didn’t joke about “breaking protocol” anymore or in the way silence between them stopped feeling like something that needed to be filled. While they were still dramatic and reckless, they were a lot more settled.

They saw each other in person again weeks later, in a city neither of them played for. Neutral ground, again, but it didn't feel like it used to. Shane picked Ilya up from the airport, heart kicking harder than he wanted to admit when he spotted him near baggage claim, hoodie pulled up, posture unmistakably his. They hugged without thinking about it. Shane wasn't quick about it, nor was he careful. He didn't think about the fact that if the media got a picture of them, they would only see it as two co-workers greeting each other, maybe even two friends. And thanks to the genes Yuna Hollander had passed down to him, he took another few seconds to think that maybe the picture getting captured would get some more attention towards the Irinia Foundation, which was, all in all, great.

"You look better," Shane said, pulling back enough to look at him properly.

Ilya huffed. "I am better. Doctor says I'm annoying him by healing correctly."

"Shocking," Shane said, smiling.

The drive back was easy. Music low, conversation drifting from nothing to something and back again. When they got to Shane's apartment, they cooked badly together, burned approximately seventy per cent of their food and then attempted to eat it and ended up ordering in from an Indian place nearby. Later, they ended up on the couch, legs tangled, the TV forgotten. Shane rested his head against Ilya's shoulder without thinking about how natural it felt. How long had it been since he'd let himself do that?

"This is new," Ilya said eventually.

Shane snorted softly. "It really isn't."

Ilya tilted his head, considering. "It feels different."

Shane didn't argue. "Yeah."

They stayed like that for a long time, listening to the city settle outside. Shane felt the familiar urge rise, the instinct to define, to categorise, to protect himself by naming what this was, but he managed to ignore it.

It was later, much later, when the conversation finally happened.

They were in bed, sheets tangled, the room lit only by the glow of the streetlight filtering through the curtains. Ilya lay on his side, propped on one elbow, watching Shane with an expression that made his chest tighten in an almost unbearable way.

"You know," Ilya said quietly, "we haven't talked about the rules in a while."

Shane exhaled a soft laugh. "I was hoping you wouldn't notice."

"I notice everything," Ilya said, fond and dry.

Shane shifted onto his side, facing him. The space between them was minimal, intentional. "I don't think they're helping anymore."

Ilya's gaze softened. "I don't think they ever were."

That landed deeper than Shane expected. He swallowed, fingers worrying at the edge of the sheet.

"They made sense at the time," Shane said. "We needed something to hold onto."

"I know," Ilya said gently. "They helped us pretend we were in control."

Shane let out a shaky breath. "I'm tired of pretending."

Ilya didn't respond immediately. He reached out instead, brushing his thumb along Shane's jaw, grounding him in the moment.

"Me too," he said finally.

Shane searched his face. "So, what now?"

Ilya smiled, small and real. "Now we stop making rules about how much we can care."

The words hit hard, sudden and relieving all at once.

Shane nodded. "Okay."

It wasn't a grand declaration. No promises about forever. No more timelines or ultimatums; just a simple decision.

Shane leaned in, resting his forehead against Ilya's. "I choose you, you know," he said quietly. "Not instead of hockey. Just alongside it."

Ilya closed his eyes, emotion swelling sharply behind them. "Yeah," he whispered. "Me too."

The rules didn't disappear overnight. They simply faded due to lost urgency. They became footnotes to a story that had outgrown them. They still played hard and competed harder; they still loved the game with everything they had. But now, when Shane checked his phone after a game, he didn't feel guilty for hoping. Now, when Ilya stayed the night, it didn't feel like a transgression. Now, when their hands brushed in public, neither of them flinched.

They weren't careful nineteen-year-olds anymore; they were just honest men now.

And that was more than enough.

Fin.

End Notes

Thankyou so much for reading! I hope you liked it. Please leave comments if you want to, its my first time publishing fanfiction so I am not sure as to what the proper etiquette of finishing a fic is.

If you want to be oomfs on twitter/X let me know (I am too afraid to publicly tag my twitter account because what if you all hate the fic and throw tomatoes at my page hehehe). Also, if you want to post any part of this fic on any social media just do it, i dont mind.

Love you all! Hope you have a good day or a good sleep. MWAH!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!