

heart on your sleeve

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heart on your sleeve

by [Candetrone](#)

Summary

“I’m sorry,” Ilya began drafting.

The text conversation with Jane had sat unanswered since the “Are you okay?” message came in over two weeks ago.

Or, what if Ilya put on his big boy commincaiton pants and didn't ghost Shane for six months?

Notes

I actually haven't ever posted a fic to ao3 despite spending basically all my free time here. for real. My last time actually posting fanfiction was back in the trenches of ff.net, but this fandom has done something to me! I can't help it.

I just had this idea and had to write it and 3 hours later, here we are. let me know what you think!

Winter 2014, Boston

“I’m sorry,” Ilya began drafting.

The text conversation with Jane had sat unanswered since the “Are you okay?” message came in over two weeks ago, and it had been nagging at the back of his mind just as much as all the other shitty things from the last month.

When he remembered the look in Hollander’s eyes when he’d tried to ask that same question to his face in Sochi, it ended up being the main thing causing his heart to clench and the corners of his eyes to sting.

Flopped on his couch, just after his long trip back from Russia and worrying his mama’s necklace between his lips, Ilya debated how he could organize everything in his mind. He needed to ease his guilt and get some clarity on whether he could salvage what he had with Hollander if he had any hope of pulling his focus together to win that damn cup.

And he needed to win that cup.

The stinging in his eyes intensified, and Ilya had to tilt his head back to the arm of his couch and close them. In the 3 years since they began texting - *Christ, how had it been 3 years already* - Ilya could barely count the number of times Hollander reached out first. And Hollander never left one of Lily’s texts without a response for long.

Ilya took a deep breath, hoping to calm himself. He’d been the one to continue wearing down Hollander’s reservations and keeping their spark alive, even though they’d gone over a season without actually hooking up. Their last time had been truly special, and Ilya wasn’t enough of an asshole to try to downplay that. He also felt the foundational responsibility to give his best in terms of aftercare after being someone’s first.

He knew Hollander hadn’t been a virgin. And this wasn’t even the first time they’d done something together. But he also knows that Hollander’s mind runs away from him. And

emotional aftercare isn't limited to the time period just after.

Ilya curses out loud and slaps his own face. He's going to strong-arm his mind back into English and send this stupid text if it's the last thing he does!

It ends up taking him over an hour. And he does, admittedly, have to look up some words because the English had, in fact, fully left his brain since the lead up to the Olympics. He was sure his team was going to be grateful he took the time to bring it back (even if it was like this) before his first practice. And boy was he looking forward to returning to a team that can actually click and connect.

"I'm sorry. Being in Russia is difficult and talking or texting is too much risk there. I will be okay when I win cup. Will not see you or message again until playoffs are over, okay? Is not you, but will need focus. Save time for me on awards night after, yes? Good job on medal."

He added that last part as an afterthought. He'd had the hardest time watching Hollander on the ice when he was fighting for his medal. Ilya thought watching the Voyagers play in a room full of teammates was hard, but those times had nothing on the Olympics.

Ilya was so glad it was over. His chest already felt lighter.

He saw the three dots come up on the text thread. He watched it for a few minutes as they came up and went away. Hollander was surely agonizing over his reply just as much, if not more, than Ilya had agonized over his message.

It hit Ilya now that this was the first indication he had ever given Hollander that he both cared about hockey as more than an ego thing, and that maybe he didn't have the same storybook home life in Russia that Hollander seemed to have in his hometown with his parents.

He figured it would still be several minutes before he got a reply from Jane, so he got up to get himself a coke from his fridge. He had the casual thought that if Hollander bought a whole building for them to hook up in, maybe Ilya could start inviting him to his penthouse, and in which case, he should likely stock some ginger ale for him.

Back on his couch, Hollander was still typing and deleting, so Ilya turned on his TV. He avoided any Olympics postmortems, but left a game between Toronto and the Admirals running with the volume turned off.

Eventually, Jane's reply did come through.

"It's okay, thank you for telling me. The Olympics were a lot. See you in June."

Ever the polite Canadian.

Ilya thought they'd have another match before the regular season ended. And there was a chance that the Bears and Voyagers could be seeded together for the playoffs, too - though Ilya wasn't sure how he'd feel about that.

On one end, having at least 4 back-to-back matches, maybe up to 7, against Hollander woke him up like nothing else (except sex with Hollander, the back of his mind reminded him) could. But he didn't think he had what it took for that to be the case this season.

Either way, Hollander calling out June was a nice reassurance to have that they'd get to connect at the awards regardless of what else happened. Ilya tried not to feel too relieved about that.

Thinking back to Hollander's face when Ilya had shooed him off in Sochi still didn't make him feel the greatest. But now that they'd talked, that Ilya had re-established contact as he had the entire time they'd known each other (after Hollander set the stage by introducing himself and his stupid, adorable freckles), he felt settled.

He locked everything from the Olympics, from his father and his brother in the stupid Russia box in the back of his mind and began mentally preparing himself to play the best hockey of his existence for the next several months.

And he did.

The other games against the Voyagers went surprisingly without issue. Hollander made eye contact with him for sure, but didn't say anything and didn't look angry. Their face-offs and squabbles over the puck were the most fun he'd had playing in memory, even without the sizzling of a potential hook-up looming in the aftermath. Ilya could genuinely just let go and play his favourite game ~~with his favourite person.~~

The Voyagers got knocked out in the first series with several injured players, so they didn't have to face the Bears in the playoffs. But the Bears kept winning. And they kept winning all the way to the cup, where Ilya got to hoist it over his head, scream to the entire planet that he'd done it all for his mama, and bask in the brotherhood, victory and affection with his team.

A message from Jane on his phone left a warm weight in his pocket.

“Congratulations. See you soon.”

Ilya had responded with several dozen emojis, trying to capture just a little bit of the jubilation he was feeling but genuinely having no words.

Not even the lacklustre call with his father or his brother's continued demands for more money could knock him down.

Ilya kept riding high as he booked his trip to the NHL awards in Vegas to see how he measured up to that MVP nomination. He couldn't help the giddiness he felt when his agent called him to tell him he'd be presenting the sportsmanship award together with his most hated and least sportsmanlike rival, Shane Hollander. Those event planners sure thought they were funny.

June 2014, Las Vegas

He hadn't managed to snag a second with Hollander at the awards before they had to present their bit, but in the wings behind the stage, he saw a small bathroom. He loitered near enough to it, and when he saw Hollander join them backstage, with somewhere between 5 and 10 minutes before they were meant to be on, he let his impulsiveness take the wheel.

No one was really looking at them after the event organizers confirmed they were in the area before their cue, so Ilya was able to steal Hollander away. At first, he'd resisted, but when he saw that it was Ilya, he turned to putty and went along.

In the bathroom, Ilya locked the door behind them while Hollander checked under the stalls to see if anyone else was there. The telepathic synergy did something to Ilya, but he didn't let that take too much of his attention away.

Their eyes met, and Ilya's face split open into a grin. Hollander's gaze shifted from his eyes to his lips in the slightest of motions, and Ilya couldn't help himself. He stepped into Hollander's space, cradled his jaw into his hands and gave him a soft, drawn-out kiss before pulling away and just hugging the man.

He felt Hollander inhale a bit, tense for a second, before he relaxed and wrapped his arms around Ilya, equally as tightly. Even from just that, Ilya could feel the spark of arousal in both of them. He didn't care. He was a champion, and all he wanted right now was this, for just a little longer.

Eventually, though, Hollander's Hollanderness forced him to gently push at Ilya's sides to separate their hug. He could already tell that the man had a mental timer for when they were supposed to make their way onto the stage, and it was turning from white to orange.

Ilya decided not to let Hollander's brain run away from them.

"I'll make you a deal." He started, the first words spoken out loud between them since Sochi.

That caused Hollander's brain to pause. "Yeah?"

“Yes. If you win MVP tonight, I will blow you, fuck you, whatever you want.” He offered, knowing those things were also something he very much offered willingly.

“And if you win?” Hollander asked, his eyes boring into him.

Ilya grinned and darted down to press another kiss on him. This one was more heated, rougher. Shane’s interest was beyond evident. They maintained eye contact for a beat, smiling like idiots, when they parted before Ilya tapped Hollander’s cheek and then left the bathroom all at once.

Hollander followed him a minute after, and then they were ushered towards the stage to present their award.

The crowd laughed a little too much at how ironic they perceived the whole bit of the fiercest rivals in the league, forced together and to take a selfie (and Ilya had every intention of saving those selfies for the rest of his miserable life) and present their sportsmanship award.

Afterwards, Ilya did in fact win MVP. He caught Hollander’s gaze, and he walked back up to the stage to accept it. The hunger was mutual.

The rest of the boring show and boring party dragged on, but the simmering heat under his skin was one of the best highs he ever experienced.

When Ilya felt like he’d tortured them both enough, he texted Jane “Penthouse 1,” along with the code he’d set to unlock the door. He sits in anticipation for those last few moments before extracting himself from the socializing and making his way back to the room.

In the penthouse, Ilya waited for Hollander in just his dress pants and an unbuttoned shirt. He’d poured himself a small measure of the surprisingly great vodka the hotel stocked in his room to pass the time.

When Hollander finally arrived, they took a moment to stare at each other from across the room. At this point, it felt like the 7 or 8 months since they'd last been together like this was just foreplay.

Ilya tilted his head, and Hollander fought a smile from taking over his face. He failed. "Congratulations, Rozanov."

"Thank you," Ilya responded, and cheersed his drink towards him. "How about you take off your clothes for me?"

Hollander took a bit more convincing to give Ilya the show he'd wanted. But a bet's a bet, and Hollander's resistance was more of a token effort to begin with. This really felt like the true reward for everything life had thrown at Ilya over the last six months. Maybe his whole life.

Despite Hollander's relative inexperience, Ilya felt that saying that this was the hottest sex of his life was still an understatement. He'd wager that Hollander was inclined to agree.

Showered and sated, back on the massive hotel bed, Ilya offered Hollander some of the fancy vodka, just to see if he could extend their time together. Hollander declined the vodka but grabbed himself a beer from the minibar instead, coming back to lie next to him.

Pressed against each other, with Hollander's hand buried in Ilya's curls, the last of the weight that had been pressing on his shoulders lifted.

"Sorry for pushing, during the Olympics." Hollander broke the silence.

Ilya had wondered if they'd talk about it more. His own style was to always ignore all bad things and hope they went away (they never did), but he knew that Hollander's brain didn't let him do that. It's the main reason why he knew he wouldn't be able to focus on winning the cup without sending that text.

Ilya hummed an acknowledgment, trying to think of what he could say that wouldn't completely ruin his night. ~~He really didn't want to ruin the best night of his life by getting into this.~~

"Are you going back this summer?"

Okay, seems like the night was heading in the direction of ruin, but Hollander's nails scratching on his scalp and the warmth between them helped. He tucked his head into the crook of Hollander's neck and gave the easy, factual answer. "Yes, flight is in 3 days."

Hollander shifted closer to him, leaving his beer off to the side. Ilya wondered if Hollander was able to see any similarities in Ilya's demeanour with the last time they were in Vegas after their rookie season, and the topic of Russia came up.

He could feel Hollander's brain running. He knew if he said more, said he didn't like seeing his family but felt he had to. Said that he thinks his father is sick, but won't admit it, that even Alexei and Polina deny it with force, that Hollander would understand. Would sympathize.

He can't get the words out, though. And Hollander is struggling with his own words, too, even though English should come easier to him.

Ilya had the idle question of whether Hollander sometimes had an easier time with French. If he also got stuck with English. But then he remembered he was Hollander, and he was perfect. Perfect English. Perfect French.

"What if you came back sooner?" Hollander broke the silence.

That was a weighted question, but Ilya firmly made the executive decision in his own mind that he would circle this back to more familiar territory.

"Ah, because you will miss me? Want me to fuck you again, October too far?" He tilted his head up to watch Hollander's face as he said this.

Hollander's face said yes while his voice said, "Fuck you," with a smile.

They came together for another kiss. Heated, but not leading anywhere, yet. They still had some time, and Ilya for sure wouldn't be opposed to another round, but he wasn't rushed to get there.

Something else settled in Ilya's heart with that kiss. With having Hollander so close and pulling him closer.

"My family is difficult, but I need to be there." He started. He didn't even know where those words came from, or even if they rang true. Memories of Alexei always telling him that they didn't want or need him replayed on a loop, but were counteracted by memories of his father asking if mama had been the one to help him with his bowtie.

Ilya closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Hollander tugged him even closer and waited.

"Maybe coming back earlier is not bad idea." He admitted. Training camps usually start in September, but perhaps coming back to North America in August could be something. Could help.

Hollander pressed a kiss to the top of his head. Ilya's heart throbbed.

"I have a few sponsorship commitments towards the end of the summer." He said, "But for the most part, I try to keep myself open to relax at my cottage and rest."

The contrast between their summers was painful to Ilya, but some part of him was happy for Hollander. Happy he was able to enjoy his time. Ilya reached to rub the skin on Hollander's abdomen idly, breathing in the scent of him without saying anything.

Hollander shifted away again to look Ilya in the eyes. Ilya hated and loved that in the same breath, he felt seen and too vulnerable.

“Text me if you do make it back before training camps.” Hollander’s determination was something. “We can compare schedules.”

“Okay.” Ilya was helpless and unable to deny that this was what he wanted more than anything.

They came together in another kiss, and Ilya tried to not let him get ahead of himself with hope. They couldn’t be more than this. They really couldn’t. But whatever this was, it was slowly becoming everything.

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