

im still fighting for you

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im still fighting for you

by [mightydolphin](#)

Summary

“How fast were you driving?” Shane asked.

Ilya groaned, rolling his eyes. “A normal speed.”

“You can’t have been driving a normal speed. I was driving at a normal speed, and you beat me here.”

“Yes, second time tonight I beat you.”

Shane glared at him, but went and opened his front door anyway. As soon as it clicked shut, Ilya was pressing him up against the wall, his mouth on Shane’s neck.

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or: they got through the immediate storm of ilya being outed. now shane must learn to be a little bit braver, and ilya must learn to talk a little more

Notes

lots of ppl were requesting a part 2, so here y'all go :)) thank you for all the love on part 1!

title from try as i may by cameron winter

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

“You’re quiet tonight, Rozanov!” Drapeau taunted. “What’s the problem, sore throat?”

Ilya felt the rage start to simmer inside. But he didn’t let it show, he just grinned. “No,” he replied, “your dad is not big enough. Where you get it from, yes?”

Drapeau’s smirk vanished, replaced with a look of outrage, and he started skating forward, dropping his gloves and swinging his fist.

Good. Ilya dropped his gloves as well, ducking and throwing a punch in return.

By the time the referees had split them up, Ilya’s nose was bleeding, but Drapeau had lost two teeth, so Ilya counted it as a win.

It had been a month since the article came out, and this was how he dealt with the chirps now. The league had gone easy on him for the first couple of weeks, but eventually his coach had had to sit Ilya down and tell him that if he kept starting this many fights on the ice, he’d be given a suspension.

So Ilya had decided to let them start the fights. He didn’t care, as long as he got to finish them.

He was still sent for a ten minute time-out, so he skated to the penalty box, spitting blood on the ice as he went. The only annoying thing was that he would probably miss the chance to face-off with Hollander now, that was always his favourite part of playing against Montreal.

They won the match in the end, although Ilya didn’t feel great about it. Hollander had been off his game, and it didn’t really count as a win if Hollander wasn’t at his best. Still, he congratulated all his players as they left the ice.

“Well done, I love you. I love you, I love you. Well done, I love you.”

Across the ice, Hollander was quiet as his team filed past him and back into their section of the building. Ilya was careful not to look at him for more than a second or two, not to draw attention. When the last member of his team had left the ice, he pushed past the boards as well, heading to the locker room.

He took a quick, perfunctory shower and then was promptly dragged away to do a media hit by the PR people. He’d never liked doing media, and hated it even more recently, but he didn’t exactly have a choice.

“How do you think the game went?”

Ilya stared at the man who had asked the question. “We won. It went good,” he said brusquely.

“What do you think this means for your chances at the Cup this year?” someone else asked.

“It means we are more likely to make playoffs. We need to make playoffs to win Cup.” Ilya didn’t understand why they asked the same fucking stupid questions after every single game. You would think the journalists had only learnt what hockey was that day.

“What did you say to make Drapeau punch you?”

Ilya’s jaw flexed. “Ask him.”

“Did he make a comment about your sexuality?”

“No.”

“You’ve been getting into multiple fights at games ever since you came out. Do you feel the ice hockey community has been suitably welcoming?”

Ilya made a conscious effort not to tense his shoulders, not to show that he was affected. Even though he was very fucking pissed off. He couldn’t get through a single media round anymore without them bringing it up.

Also, he hadn’t come out. He guessed it sounded better, if the press and NHL wanted to phrase it like that, but he hadn’t come out. TMZ had done that for him. And he had never wanted to talk about who he liked to fuck in front of a sea of microphones and cameras. He didn’t think it was any of their business.

“Hockey is fighting sport, I fight,” he said, playing oblivious. “Community is very welcoming.”

Lie. But he wasn’t about to get on TV and complain about homophobia.

He had to suffer through another ten minutes of questions before he was able to escape. He would argue with management more, about being trotted out to the media after every game, but as Captain it was part of his contract.

And his lawyer had told him to follow his contract to the letter until he got his citizenship sorted out. His visa was tied to his employment with the Bears. So Ilya did the media hits without complaint, turned up to every practice on time, and even followed the team nutritionist’s stupid fucking meal plan. He was a model fucking employee now, and would be until he got his hands on that fucking passport.

The locker room was still pretty full when he got back, as the players all talked about their plans for the night. Ilya kept to himself as he gathered up his things. He unlocked his phone, opening his messages with Jane.

Ilya: about to leave. will be about 30 mins

Jane: what??? you need to go see your team medic!!

Ilya fought a smile, biting his thumbnail as he read the message.

Ilya: am fine, just bruised

Jane: i saw those hits

Ilya: i am fine. you will kiss better, yes?

The typing bubbles appeared, then disappeared. Then appeared, and disappeared again. Then appeared. Ilya watched knowingly, his smile growing.

Jane: yes

Ilya: 🤔

Marlow appeared next to him, and Ilya locked his phone quickly.

“So...” Marlow had an evil glint in his eye. “Want to order room service and celebrate?”

Ilya pulled on his hoodie. “Ask someone else,” he said, blunt.

“Why?” Marlow said in a sing-song voice. “Are you not going to the hotel?”

“I hate you.”

Marlow laughed delightedly. “Have fun, Roz. Just make sure you’re back by nine tomorrow, or you’ll miss the flight.”

“Shut up.”

Tyler Duncan, one of the younger players, looked over in interest. “You going out tonight, Cap?”

“None of your business,” Ilya said, slamming his locker shut.

Marlow snorted. More of the team were perking their ears up now.

“Does Captain have a date?”

“Who is it?”

“Oh my God, he’s going red!”

“I am not!” Ilya snapped. He looked at Marlow. “You are awful person.”

Marlow did not look admonished in the slightest. He grabbed Ilya by the shoulders, shaking him around playfully. “Go get laid, you moody bastard. Tell him I say hi.”

Ilya whacked him away. “Whatever,” he said, grabbing his keys, ready to get the hell out.

“Wait, Marlow, do you know who he’s seeing?” Oregon, their goalie, asked.

Ilya turned, staring at Marlow with newfound urgency.

“Sorry, boys, my lips are sealed,” Marlow said, miming locking his lips. “Sworn to secrecy.”

“Not fair!”

“Tell us!”

“Is no one’s business,” Ilya said loudly. “Everyone shut up, no more questions.”

“Whatever, go get your dick sucked, Roz.”

“Have fun.”

“Use protection!”

Ilya stood still, unsure if he should yell more or not. But the other players were already turning back to their previous conversations, like nothing unusual had happened, so Ilya just shook his head and turned around, heading for the car park. Marlow fell into step beside him.

“You are the worst,” Ilya told him.

Marlow barked a laugh. “You love me.”

“I do not. I hate you.” But Ilya couldn’t help but feel strangely... pleased, at the ribbing from the team. It had been so standard, like when anyone else ditched the after-match celebrations for a booty call.

Not that Shane was a booty call. But still. Marlow had said *him*. Ilya guessed that part didn’t exactly have to be a secret anymore, but it wasn’t like he had talked to anyone on the team about it except Marlow.

“Sure, Roz,” Marlow grinned. “Seriously though, tell him to try actually playing next time, yeah? Dunno where he was tonight.”

Ilya grimaced. He agreed, he couldn’t even say anything in Shane’s defence. He had missed passes and shots he could have made as a rookie. A sickening voice in Ilya’s brain suggested maybe Shane was pitying him now, was going easy on him. He told that voice to shut up. Hollander would not do that.

“I will work it into my dirty talk,” Ilya said dryly.

“You fucking dog,” Marlow cackled, peeling off and heading to where he had parked.

Ilya got into his own car, throwing his bag onto the backseat and putting Shane’s address into the GPS.

He was still learning the way. Last time he’d come to Montreal, for a flying visit on a Sunday three weeks ago, Shane had finally allowed him into his actual home, not his secret sex apartment.

It had been really good. Ilya had only been able to stay for a few hours, but it had been worth it. They had been texting more, ever since, and calling most nights before bed. Ilya had never been in love before, but he was pretty sure he was in love with Shane Hollander.

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When Shane got to his house, Ilya’s car was already parked in the driveway. Shane frowned - he had left earlier, which meant Ilya had definitely sped.

He parked, getting out of his car as Ilya got out of his, hood pulled up to hide his face.

“How fast were you driving?” Shane asked.

Ilya groaned, rolling his eyes. “A normal speed.”

“You can’t have been driving a normal speed. *I* was driving at a normal speed, and you beat me here.”

“Yes, second time tonight I beat you.”

Shane glared at him, but went and opened his front door anyway. As soon as it clicked shut, Ilya was pressing him up against the wall, his mouth on Shane’s neck.

“Fuck,” Shane gasped, his hands grabbing Ilya’s hips, tugging him closer. “You- you need to be more careful, on the road.”

“Mm, I’m sorry,” Ilya murmured, sultry and teasing in a way that always made Shane feel a little light-headed. “I got too excited... Thinking about getting my hands on you...”

“You should- Shit!” Shane cursed, as Ilya cupped him through his jeans, squeezing.

“Okay?” Ilya asked, smirking.

“Fuck you.”

“I am trying, you keep wanting to discuss my driving.”

“I just- fuck, nevermind.” Shane dragged Ilya to the bedroom. Not that Ilya took much coaxing.

“Solnyshko,” Ilya said as he pushed Shane onto the bed. “You take your clothes off for me, da?”

Shane nodded, stripping as Ilya hurriedly did the same. He still waited patiently as Shane folded each item, setting them down on the floor, before climbing on top of him.

“What do you want, hm?” Ilya whispered. “I could blow you, I could eat you out... I could fuck you? What would you like, sweetheart?”

Shane shivered at the lewd words. “You won,” he said. “You get to pick.”

“No, I have my prize right here.” Ilya groped Shane’s chest. “How do *you* want to get off?”

“I... um...”

“Tell me. Use your words.”

Ilya got like this sometimes. Normally, he took charge, and Shane was more than happy to turn his brain off and do whatever Ilya told him to do. He didn’t have to think, and he always ended up enjoying it anyway. But sometimes, when Ilya really wanted to tease him and work him up, he’d play this game.

“I want, uh, I want you to fuck me,” Shane managed to say.

“Good boy,” Ilya said approvingly, moving down and pressing an open-mouthed kiss on Shane’s stomach. “What position?”

“Ilya, can’t you just-”

Ilya pinched him, looking up at Shane expectantly.

“...Face to face, please,” Shane mumbled, feeling his cheeks burn.

Ilya drew himself back up again, so his face was level with Shane’s. “*Very* good,” he whispered, kissing him. “I was hoping you would pick that one. I love getting to watch you come on my cock.”

“Fuck, Ilya, will you just-”

“Yes, yes. Do not worry, I make you feel good now.”

Shane felt a wet finger circle his hole. He wasn’t even sure when Ilya had got the lube out, but he didn’t care. Ilya pressed it inside him, and Shane groaned.

“You are so tight,” Ilya said. “Have you not been using your toy?”

“Fuck off.”

“So you have? Do you think about me when you do?”

Shane felt the familiar burn of humiliation and, frustratingly, excitement. “I- kind of,” he admitted.

Ilya’s finger stopped moving. “Only kind of? What is this ‘*kind of*’?”

“It’s...” Shane had to turn his head to the side, so he didn’t have to see Ilya’s face. “It’s not as big as you.”

“...Ah.” Ilya sounded far too happy. But at least he pushed another finger into Shane, starting to scissor them slowly. “It cannot fuck you like I can, then?” he asked in mock sympathy. “Poor you, so desperate, and I am all the way in Boston.”

“You-” Shane wished he had a comeback, but he didn’t. Then Ilya pressed both those fingers against his prostate and Shane groaned.

“Do not worry, I am here now,” Ilya continued. “Will give you what you want, da? Make sure you are satisfied.”

“Yeah, Ilya, please. Please.”

Ilya shushed him, taking out his fingers and putting on a condom, slicking his dick up with lube. He slid into Shane slowly, giving him a minute to adjust. Then Shane nodded, and Ilya started rocking into him, just these slow, shallow thrusts.

“God, I have missed you,” Ilya groaned.

“Yeah,” Shane agreed. “Come on, harder, please.”

Ilya started to thrust harder, and Shane’s breath caught in his throat.

“Oh, fuck.”

“Is good?” Ilya asked. He sounded different than normal - almost *needy*. “Is good for you?”

“Yes, yes. More.”

Ilya reached one hand up to grab onto the headboard, shifting them both slightly and getting a better grip, and then he really started pounding into Shane. Shane could have sworn he blacked out for a second or two.

“Make you feel so good,” Ilya was saying, like some stream of consciousness. “Me, my cock, you need it, yes? You need it, I give to you. Always. Urgh, sweetheart.” It descended into grunts and curse words, as Shane was pushed further up the mattress.

“Ilya,” he moaned, “I’m going to-”

“Yes, Shane. Be good boy, come for me.”

As soon as he heard those words, Shane was coming all over his stomach. It only took a few extra thrusts and Ilya was following him, stilling for a second and then collapsing on top of Shane, his face planted into the crook of Shane’s neck.

Shane let them both bask in the afterglow for a bit. But soon he started to feel sticky and gross, and tapped Ilya’s shoulder. “Shower,” he said. “Sheets.”

Ilya, still on top of him, nodded. “You shower first,” he said. “I will change sheets.”

“I don’t mind-”

“I change sheets. I know you want to clean up, go.”

Shane smiled gratefully, letting Ilya roll off him and going to start the shower. He made it as quick as possible, because he really would like to get back to what they were doing before. He brushed his teeth as well, and when he emerged from the bathroom, Ilya was tucking the last corner over the mattress.

“Bed is done,” he said. “I will be ten minutes, okay?”

Shane nodded, taking his phone and lying on the bed as Ilya went to go and wash. He checked social media briefly - they were all ripping him apart for how he had played earlier, not that that was a surprise. Still a lot of fucking chatter about Ilya too, even though he’d only got in two fights this time. In one game last week it had been four, that had been bad. Ilya had been so quiet when Shane called him afterwards.

Shane worried about him a lot, maybe more than was healthy. But he couldn’t watch those clips and not worry, even when Ilya took it all without complaint.

When Ilya came back, Shane switched his phone off quickly, setting it on the nightstand. He got to watch Ilya towel himself dry, wet hair and soft cock and skin pink from the hot water. He looked like something out of one of those old paintings, it made something tug at Shane’s stomach. Then Ilya climbed into the bed, still naked, and wrapped an arm around Shane’s shoulders.

“Is still early,” he said. “Do you want to watch something? Or food?”

“I’m okay for now,” Shane said. He leant back against Ilya’s bicep comfortably. “I’m kinda tired.”

Ilya’s grin was criminal. “Have I tired you out, Hollander?”

Shane poked him. “The game did, asshole.”

“Ah, of course.”

Shane stared at him. He looked so content now, so different to when he had been playing. “So how have you been?” Shane asked.

“Am okay.”

Shane rolled his eyes.

“What?”

“You always say that,” Shane complained. He put on a shitty Russian accent. “Am okay. Is fine.”

“Nothing else to say.”

“You fought Drapeau and Comeau today,” Shane reminded him.

“Yes. I said I was going to, didn’t I?”

“What did they say to you?”

Ilya sighed, waving a hand. “They say stupid things. It does not matter.”

“Ilya-”

“Shane. It does not matter.”

Shane bit his tongue. “Well, at least you won.”

Ilya’s eyes narrowed. “You are happy we beat you?”

“Not happy Montreal lost, obviously,” Shane said with a glower. “But glad you got to shove it in their faces at least.”

Ilya carried on looking at him with suspicion. “...This is why you play like shit? To let me win?”

“I- *What?*” Shane was angry immediately, sitting up. “I’d never let you win, what the fuck?! Why would you even say that?”

Ilya’s body was stiff, and he wasn’t looking at Shane. “I do not want your pity, Hollander. You should not play bad just because of me.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Shane snapped. “Fuck all the way off! That’s not what happened!”

“No? Pike played better than you tonight, how do you explain that?”

“I was just-... off my game,” Shane said weakly.

Ilya made a disbelieving noise. “Ah. Sure.”

“I was. We all have bad games.”

“Not you. Not like that.”

Shane was thrumming with rage. “You know what, if you’re going to insult me like this, you should just go,” he said. “I don’t want to look at you right now.”

“And I do not want your pity.”

“That’s not what it fucking was!” Shane exclaimed.

“So what was it then?”

“I was-” Shane took a deep breath. “I was pissed at my fucking team, okay?” he said. “It wasn’t... I was pissed at them, and myself, and I kept missing passes. I was *not* trying to hand you a win, I’d never do that. And fuck you for thinking I would.”

Ilya was quiet for a while. “You were pissed at your team,” he said. “Because of me?”

“Not because of- well, yeah, kinda. But that’s not your fault.”

Ilya hummed. “I thought we agreed you did not need to worry about what they said. I would handle it.”

“I know. That doesn’t mean they aren’t still- fucking... aggravating me.”

“I am sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“Is because of me.”

Shane began to feel like shit. He knew Ilya had to have been struggling, even if he pretended he was fine. And now Shane was just adding to that, instead of helping. “It’s not,” he said firmly, “it’s because of them.”

“What can I do? To help?”

“You don’t need to do anything.”

“Yes, but I want to help you,” Ilya said, gazing at Shane with these big, open eyes that honestly made Shane feel a bit uncomfortable.

Ilya had started acting like this recently. Ever since Shane had driven from New York to Boston, Ilya had been... affectionate? Sincere? And in bed - look, it wasn’t like Ilya had ever been a selfish lover. He had always liked making Shane come hard, and Shane had assumed it was a bit of an ego thing for him, being a good partner in bed. But now it was different. Almost... romantic.

It wasn’t that Shane didn’t like it. But he didn’t know what they were anymore, if they weren’t rivals who had sex. Before, there had been rules, and Rozanov had been put firmly away into a little compartment in Shane’s mind that didn’t have to be disturbed. And now Shane didn’t know what was going on.

Was it romantic? Was Ilya just hurting, and stressed, and looking for support? Had they upgraded to fuckbuddies now?

But Ilya didn't seem confused, he seemed perfectly at ease with the new dynamic, so Shane didn't say anything.

"It's fine," Shane said. "It was a bad game, and my fault. I just need to shake it off."

"...Mm, okay." Ilya pulled Shane back into his arms. "If you say so. We relax now, yes? I have to leave early tomorrow, I do not want to waste our time on these conversations."

"Okay," Shane agreed, letting Ilya spoon around him.

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Ilya flew back with his team the next morning. He felt like an empty cup that had been refilled, after getting to see Shane. Or like a phone that had run out of battery, but was finally plugged back into a charger. There was an English word for it, he was sure. He would have to google it.

Marlow sat next to him on the plane, waggling his eyebrows annoyingly.

Ilya wasn't really sure how he felt about it, about Marlow knowing. It was okay, he supposed. He wasn't like Shane, he wasn't terrified about the idea someone knew he was queer. He hadn't wanted the whole world to find out, obviously, but he was okay with who he was.

Still, there was being okay with something hypothetically, and then there was living it. It felt weird, Marlow making these faces at him, when they both knew Jane wasn't a girl, just a fake name in Ilya's phone. He wasn't quite sure how to handle it all.

Most of the team used the flight to catch up on their sleep, after having spent the previous evening celebrating their win. Marlow offered Ilya a headphone instead, and pressed play on the next episode of Breaking Bad on his iPad.

They were almost onto the final season now. Ilya liked that this is what they did together - he did like Marlow, but Ilya had never been much of a talker. It was probably why he didn't have many friends. Now he was in America, he had the second language excuse for not wanting to have so many conversations, but honestly, he hadn't talked much in Russia either.

He didn't mind banter. He could talk about meaningless things. He'd just never much liked talking about himself. He liked that Marlow didn't seem to expect that, and was happy to just whack on the TV and watch in silence. It was easy.

They landed in Boston, and Ilya allowed Marlow to follow him home to watch the season finale. They watched it on Ilya's TV, and Ilya laughed at Marlow's reactions. He was the type of guy who yelled at the TV, and sometimes it meant Ilya missed what the characters were saying, but he didn't mind that much. They always had the subtitles on anyway, it helped Ilya when he was translating it all.

Marlow switched the telly off when the episode ended. "Next episode after practice tomorrow?" he asked.

Ilya shrugged. "If you want."

"*If I want*," Marlow mimicked, rolling his eyes. "Like you don't wanna know what happens."

Ilya smiled despite himself. "Whatever. Get out of my house."

"Jesus, you're such a prick."

"I'm a delight."

"I bet you don't talk to Shane this way."

Ilya stiffened. Marlow didn't ever say Shane's name. "Careful," he warned.

"What, did he not put out last night? Is that why you're grumpy?"

"...Was fine. Is nothing to do with you."

"Roz," Marlow said. "Come on, chill out. You know I'm only teasing."

"I know."

"So relax."

Ilya exhaled purposefully. "Shane was good," he said.

"Can I, like... ask about it?"

Ilya frowned. "Why would you do that?"

"I dunno, because you're my friend and you have, like, a whole relationship I knew nothing about until a month ago."

Ilya would never understand Americans and their need to talk about things. But he supposed he owed Marlow something, after everything he'd done. Even if they'd had a very successful years-long friendship so far built around *not* talking about things. "You can ask," Ilya said. "I might not answer."

"Okay... how long?"

"Depends... we have been, uh, hooking up since we were rookies."

“Holy shit.”

“Was not always... with feelings.”

“But it is now.”

It wasn't a question, but Ilya nodded anyway.

“He is... best person I know,” Ilya said slowly.

“Yeah. He seemed, uh, cool.”

“Are we done now?”

“Jesus Christ.” Marlow shook his head. “You're impossible.”

Ilya felt like he'd just offered two pretty massive pieces of information. Surely that was enough?

“Whatever man, I'll stop torturing you with my company.” Marlow slapped his back. “See ya tomorrow.”

“Yes, tomorrow. Goodbye.” Ilya left Marlow to let himself out.

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Shane's alarm went off at five am, and he groaned. It was one of those mornings he actually considered skipping his morning yoga before practice. But that wasn't his timetable, so he pulled himself away from the warmth of his sheets and willed himself into a cold shower.

He was only allowed to check his phone after yoga and breakfast, those were his rules. Still, he knew there would be a notification waiting for him. And he still smiled when he saw it.

Lily: good morning ❤️

Sent at 23:41. Ilya had started sending Shane good morning texts now, and he had been sending them in the morning, until Shane fessed up that he had always been up for hours before Ilya texted him. So now Ilya sent them right before he went to sleep.

They were nice to wake up to. They were still new enough that Shane got a little thrill each time he read them, a little reminder that Ilya really was thinking about Shane as much as Shane thought about him.

Shane: good morning

Shane: don't forget you have that meeting with the pr people today

Shane: and you need to send your lawyer a copy of your birth certificate

Shane: bring it into practice if you don't have a printer at home, they'll have one in the office you can use

Shane: or you can use a public library if you don't want to do it at work

He sent the messages, and then stared at them depressingly. He was so bad at this. Ilya managed to just send a nice, simple message to make Shane smile. And Shane was nagging him before he even woke up. He thought about sending another message to apologise, but then thought the constant buzzing might wake Ilya up, and he didn't really want to do that either.

Fuck. Okay, well he'd sent them now, there wasn't much he could do about it. Hopefully Ilya didn't think he was annoying, or overstepping, or something. Shane switched his phone off, ready to go to practice.

They spent the first half of the day doing cardio, so that sucked. Then Coach had them running drills, pushing Shane even harder than normal after his disastrous performance against Boston. Shane still wasn't gelling with the team like he should be, although it was better than when Ilya was actually there.

After practice, he took one of the team iPads, and found an empty meeting room. He had planned to go over the game footage again, by himself this time, and try and figure out what he could have done better. He didn't have long, though, before Hayden was poking his head through the door.

"Hey, can I talk to you?"

Shane glanced up from where he was sat. "Yeah? Sure, what's up?"

Hayden came in and took a seat next to him. "I think you need to talk to some of the guys," he said seriously. "The fucking Rozanov shit... it's getting a bit much, don't you think?"

Shane's heart skipped a beat. "Me? Why should I talk to them?"

"You're Captain, they'll listen to you."

“Oh.” Shane remembered to breathe again. “...Maybe, I don’t know. I think it’s just... locker room stuff, y’know?”

“No.” Hayden’s mouth was turned down. “I don’t think it’s appropriate, actually. And I’m getting pretty fucking sick of it.”

“Why do you care about Rozanov?”

“I don’t.”

“What’s the big deal then?”

“My cousin’s gay,” Hayden said shortly. “The shit they’re saying about Rozanov right now, they may as well be saying about him. I don’t want to have to put up with it.”

“I didn’t know that.”

Hayden shrugged, shoulders stiff. “Guess it never came up.”

“Right...” Shane swallowed, unsure of what to say. “I think... if you just ignore it, they’ll start to lose interest.”

“Yeah, that’s actually not good enough, actually,” Hayden said. “You need to tell them to cut it out. Unless you think it’s funny too?”

“No!” Shane said quickly. “I, um, I don’t like it either.”

“Tell them to cut it out then,” Hayden said. “Rozanov’s a dick, but it’s not like it should matter if he’s gay.”

“I think he said he’s bi, actually,” muttered Shane.

Hayden stared, raising his eyebrows. “I don’t care. I need the fucking comments to stop.”

“What if... can’t you go to Coach or something?”

“What’s your problem, man? You hate Rozanov so much you’re willing to let this shit slide? Because I think that’s pretty fucking crap of you, if so.”

Shane felt the panic in him start to build. This is not what he wanted - it was the opposite of what he wanted. The only reason he let the team run their mouths was to keep any attention off himself, but now Hayden was staring at him with betrayal in his eyes, thinking Shane was a piece of shit.

“I don’t- don’t care about Rozanov,” Shane said, feeling his cheeks burn.

“Right,” Hayden said, sounding disbelieving. “I gotta say, I thought better of you, man.” He stood up and strode away, leaving Shane feeling utterly crap.

~

After practice, Ilya dragged his feet to the meeting room. The email had arrived in his inbox over the weekend, he probably would have forgotten all about it if not for Shane's reminder. *Attendance mandatory*. He already knew it was going to be something that would piss him off. Anything at work that wasn't about how he played tended to piss him off, and that feeling had tripled in the last month.

The two PR people were already in there waiting for him, so was Coach LeClaire. Ilya nodded once in greeting, and took a seat, slouching in it.

"Ilya!" PR Lady said. She was too happy and bubbly, it was already grating on him. "How are you?"

"Am fine."

"...Okay!" She smiled forcefully. "Well, we've been making some plans, we have some great ideas for you and the Bears to expand the brand. Firstly, we thought you could start using pride tape during matches-"

"No."

She faltered, frowning. "We think it would be a really great-"

"No," Ilya said again. "Is not part of contract, you cannot make me."

"Well, no, but-"

Ilya's fists began to clench.

"Okay," Coach interrupted, glancing between them. "That's a no, Milly. Let's move on."

PR Man leaned forward instead. "Okay, second idea. Boston Pride is coming up, we thought the Bears could buy a float, and you could-"

"Fuck off."

"Rozanov," Coach warned.

"Is every idea about who I sleep with?" Ilya asked tersely. He didn't get a response. "Is already all anyone wants to talk about," he said. "I do not want to do any of this."

"We think it could really make an impact," PR Lady said. "And it would be a great way to try and get more gay fans invol-"

“Why is that my job? My job is hockey, I play hockey.”

“But if you just-”

“No.”

Coach sighed. “Alright,” he said, “I know you don’t like this, Roz.”

“Is not in contract,” Ilya said again. “You cannot make me, no?” He hoped they couldn’t. He wasn’t quite sure.

“No,” Coach said, looking him in the eye. “No one’s going to make you do anything.”

Ilya nodded. “I am not doing any of... this.” He gestured vaguely. “I don’t want attention for this.” He never had.

“Alright.”

“Is that everything? Can I go now?”

The PR people looked annoyed. But Coach nodded, and Ilya took the dismissal eagerly, scraping his chair on the floor as he got up and left the room. He headed to his car, digging out his pack of smokes as he walked.

He’d been doing pretty well at quitting, before. Now he was back to smoking daily. But fucking sue him, shit had been crazy recently. He was allowed this one thing.

He had just managed to light it when he got to his car. Marlow was waiting for him, leaning against the hood.

“What did they want?”

“Bullshit.” Ilya exhaled a cloud of smoke.

“Sounds ‘bout right. You ready to leave now?”

“Da.” Ilya unlocked the car, getting in and opening the windows while Marlow got into the passenger seat. He tried to keep to the speed limits as he drove them home, Shane’s voice in his head. *Ilya, you’ll end up in a crash. Ilya, you need to be safer.* Shane would be mad about the cigarette if he knew, so Ilya didn’t want to speed as well.

It was annoying, but kind of good as well, the way Shane worried about him. No one else cared how fast Ilya drove. Okay, the trainers didn’t like that he smoked, but that wasn’t because they cared about anything beyond Ilya’s lung capacity. Shane just cared. Cared enough to bother Ilya about driving, and smoking, and he remembered Ilya’s appointments for him. Shane was far too good to him, really, but Ilya was trying. He had gone to that stupid PR meeting, had brought his birth certificate in and scanned it that morning, like Shane had reminded him.

Marlow took the aux and played his shitty fucking music. Ilya scowled but let him get away with it. They got back to his place and Ilya let them in, going and turning on the TV. They only got halfway through the first episode when Ilya's phone started buzzing.

Jane: hey can you call?

Jane: not urgent

Jane: but when you get a chance pls

Jane: im freaking out a little

Jane: but dont worry if its a bad time

Jane: we can talk later

Jane: just whenever you get a chance

Ilya turned off the TV. "You must go now."

Marlow stared at him in disbelief. "Seriously? What the fuck?"

"Something has come up. We will watch another time."

"What's so important?"

"None of your business."

"...Well, are you going to give me a ride home at least? I don't have my car!"

"I will call you Uber."

"Don't fucking bother," Marlow glared. "I can call my own fucking Uber."

Ilya shrugged, eyeing him pointedly. Marlow dug out his phone.

"...Six minutes away," he muttered. He was definitely mad at Ilya. Ilya would have to fix that later. For now, he texted Shane back.

Ilya: will call you in six minutes.

Jane: okay? thats weirdly specific

Ilya: how long it will take for marlows uber to come and get rid of him

Jane: omg pls tell me you aren't kicking him out to call me

Jane: i said it wasn't urgent

Ilya: you want to call. we will call. marlow is big boy, he will be fine

Jane: ilya apologise to him right now

Ilya sighed, looking at his friend. "Sorry," he said. "I'm being rude, I know. Shane is, um, freaking out about something."

Some of the animosity left Marlow's face. "He okay?"

"I don't know. I am going to talk to him, will sort it out."

Marlow nodded. "Yeah, alright. Whatever."

"Sorry."

"S'okay. I know it's, like... hard for you guys, or whatever."

"It's fine," Ilya said automatically.

Marlow gave him a knowing look. "Yeah, sure."

"We can watch tomorrow, if you want."

"Yeah, that works."

Ilya stood up, letting Marlow out of his house, watching him walk down the driveway and get into the Uber. Once the car had pulled away, he took his phone out again and called Shane.

"Hello, solnyshko," he said. "What is problem?"

"Ilya, you can't be kicking people out for me." Shane sounded upset. "Especially Marlow, he's been so good with you. I told you it could wait!"

"We were watching TV, nothing important," Ilya argued. "You are important."

Shane was quiet for a bit. "...I hope you apologised, at least."

"I did."

"Okay."

"So what is problem?"

"I... Hayden spoke to me today."

Ilya hummed. “Now I see. Stuck in a conversation with Pike, that is horrific. I send money for therapy, yes?”

“*Ilya*,” Shane admonished, but Ilya knew he was amused. “Don’t be- whatever. He was annoyed with me.”

“Why?”

“He wants me to talk to the team. About- about what they’ve been saying. About you.”

“Ah.” That was not good. Ilya knew Shane didn’t want to talk about it, he wasn’t ready. “You don’t have to do what Pike says, you know this,” he said.

“I know,” Shane sighed. “But he’s, like, *actually* upset with me. He thinks I agree with them.”

“So you tell him you don’t.”

“I did, but that’s not enough!... Hayden’s right, I shouldn’t keep letting it slide. I’m being a terrible person.”

Ilya frowned. “Shane, you are not terrible person. You are good person. I should know better than anyone. You are such a good person.”

“Then why am I letting my team mates spout all this shit without doing anything about it?” He wasn’t at full panic attack, but Ilya estimated they were at a level six on the Hollander Distress Scale. “I’m being a shit Captain, and a shit friend, and a shit- y’know, whatever.”

“You are a very good *whatever* to me,” Ilya said gently.

Shane huffed a pathetic little laugh. “Shut up.”

“Is your choice, sweetheart. If you want to say something to them, you can. You do not have to. And just telling them to stop... does not say anything about you, remember? Does not mean they will know.”

“...Yeah,” Shane murmured, “it feels like they will, though.”

“Is just your brain trying to scare you.”

“Maybe.”

“Only do what you are comfortable with. Do not worry, I can fight even more next game.”

“Oh God,” Shane laughed. “Please, no. I’ll- I’ll talk to them, I think.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I’ll, um, I’ll make a plan. Figure out what to say. Try and make it, like, not a big deal. Tell them to go back to making fun of everything else about you, they’ll still have plenty of

material.”

Ilya smiled. “I take it back, you’re so mean.”

“And you’re an asshole.”

“...You are very brave, Hollander.”

“Fuck off.”

“No.”

There was rustling on the other end, like Shane was moving about. “...Thanks,” he said, when he came back. “And sorry, for, um, bothering you. You didn’t need to kick Marlow out over all that. I was just stressed, I wanted to talk to you.”

“Is okay,” Ilya said at once. “You know I will always listen.”

“...Yeah.”

“Feel better?”

“Mhm... what about you, how was your day?”

“Was fine.”

“*Ilya.*”

Ilya inhaled deeply. He didn’t want to talk about it, but Shane wanted to know, so. Ilya would tell him. “I mean... I had shitty meeting with PR team. But it doesn’t matter, I told them to fuck off. Is done now.”

“What did they want?”

“Just... trying to get me to do a lot of, like... gay stuff. For marketing, or, I don’t know.”

“Oh.”

“I didn’t want to. I said no.”

“...Okay,” Shane said quietly. “Is that... allowed? Will it make the Bears pissed at you, because-”

“Is not part of contract,” Ilya assured him. “No risk.”

“Alright, good.”

“And I sent lawyer birth certificate, so she has sent off application to get new visa, so I can get green card, so I can get citizenship.”

“Well done, baby,” Shane breathed.

Ilya's breath caught at the name. He called Ilya that, on occasion. Ilya wasn't even sure Shane was aware he did it, but it made Ilya feel so soft inside. "Thank you," he said. "Will tell you what lawyer says next."

Shane huffed. "Why's it so complicated?"

"I know. If I get off P1 visa though, and onto EB visa, green card should come quickly. Then I at least have permanent residency, so no deportation." Ilya had become depressingly familiar with US immigration law over the past month.

"It takes so long, though," Shane whispered. "It- you're still at risk, until then."

Ilya didn't like how he sounded. "Relax, Hollander," he said teasingly. "Lawyer says I definitely have 'extraordinary abilities'. EB visa will be no problem for me. You would stand no chance."

"Like I said, you're an asshole," Shane said, but he was laughing.

~~

Shane spent that evening painstakingly writing out the speech he wanted to give his team. He wanted to be prepared, he knew if he did it off the cuff he would devolve into a stuttering, red-faced mess, and that would provoke questions that he had no answers for. So he took his time, scribbling out certain lines and rephrasing them, making sure that there was enough emotional distance, that he didn't come across too invested, didn't come across as *hurt*.

When he thought he had it down, he practiced in front of the mirror. He wanted to be word-perfect, so he could just get it out, all at once, and hopefully never have to talk about it again.

Fuck, he was scared. He shouldn't be so scared. If he wasn't... what he was, he probably would have put a stop to this ages ago. He hoped he would have. But here and now, staring at his pale face in the harsh lights of the bathroom, he looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

He thought of what Ilya had said. *You are brave, Hollander*. He hadn't even sounded like it was a joke when he said it.

Shane had never felt brave in his life. He had a lot of good qualities - he knew he was a hard worker, he went out of his way to be polite, he was relatively humble, especially compared to other qualities. But courage was never something he had had a lot of. For some reason, Ilya thought he was brave anyway. It made Shane feel like maybe he could actually do this.

That made him scared as well. Ilya had so much power over him. When they were- what, exactly? ‘Whatever’? Shane had almost let the word boyfriend slip past his tongue earlier, had only just caught himself. Because they hadn’t had that conversation yet, and he still wasn’t quite sure what Ilya wanted.

Ilya was happy with ‘whatever’ apparently, he thought with just a twinge of resentment. Shane didn’t like ‘whatever’, he needed to know. He didn’t know what he was allowed to do anymore, or how much he was allowed to feel. He felt so much.

When he felt like he had everything he wanted to say memorised, he forced himself to go to bed and get some sleep. His alarm went off punishingly early, as it did every morning, and Shane got up, doing his pre-practice yoga and making himself a vitamin-heavy smoothie before having a shower.

He read over what he had written one more time. The words seemed practically etched into his skull at this point. Okay. He could do this. He’d wait, until Rozanov came up naturally, make it seem like these thoughts were just occurring to him. No one would suspect anything.

He was the first person to get to practice, but he normally was. He got changed and started doing his own warm-ups, as everyone else started to trickle in over the next thirty minutes.

There wasn’t much time for banter once practice officially started - neither Shane nor the Voyageurs’ coaches would allow that. So Shane waited, focused on learning new plays.

But it wasn’t like Rozanov wasn’t going to come up at all. It was afterwards, in the locker room, when they were all tired and moving sluggishly. Some were talking, others just scrolling on their phones. Shane was pretending to text; really, he was keeping his ears perked.

“Jesus Christ,” Olsson commented. “Can the Bears stop posting Rozanov every fucking day? I don’t need to see his face every time I open my phone.”

Shane kept quiet. Not out of line yet.

“Why the fuck are you following the Bears anyway?” Stedlund laughed.

“I follow every team!”

“That’s stupid.”

“Fuck you.”

Drapeau snorted. “Bet Rozanov’s just enjoying being the centre of attention right now.”

Getting there. Shane rehearsed what he would say one more time in his head.

“Probably what made him a fag,” someone said, Shane wasn’t even sure who. “Closest he could get to fucking himself.”

There was a smattering of laughs. Hayden shot Shane a look.

“Alright, guys,” Shane said, and thanked God that his voice came out steady, “I think we can give it a rest with the gay jokes now.”

Renaud gave him a strange look. “Cap, it’s fucking *Rozanov*.”

“I know,” Shane said carefully. “So there’s plenty else to go at him for.”

Comeau narrowed his eyes. “Who gives a shit? It’s all true.”

“I don’t care,” Shane said, gritting his teeth. “I don’t think laughing about- about *that stuff* is appropriate. We are- I mean, this is technically a workplace. And we are professionals, who play sport for a living, and I think it’s good to maintain a healthy level of sportsmanship with regard to our oppone-”

“Christ, Hollander,” Drapeau snapped, interrupting Shane’s carefully planned speech. “You don’t need to be so fucking perfect all the time, it’s just us here. And Rozanov taking it up the ass is pretty fucking funny.”

“Um, no,” Shane said. “I don’t think so.”

“Me either,” Hayden said, and God, Shane was grateful he didn’t have to be the only one making this argument.

“I mean...” JJ shrugged. “I don’t think it’s, like, *bad* or anything.”

“Okay,” Shane said quickly. He really didn’t want to hear if anyone disagreed with that statement. “Whatever people’s, um, personal feelings are, it doesn’t really matter. We just need to remember that, y’know, however competitive we all feel, what are the... appropriate ways to express that. As professionals who are in the workplace.”

The team stared back at him blankly.

“Just a... reminder,” Shane finished weakly. “Thanks, guys.”

“...Whatever, I guess,” Renaud sighed. “Just another way for you to stop us having fun, huh, Cap?”

“Keeping us professional,” corrected Shane.

“Yeah, yeah.”

Shane turned back to his locker, taking a few seconds to keep his composure. He grabbed his bag. “Nice work today, everyone,” he said. “See you all tomorrow.”

He got some mumbled goodbyes in reply and nodded, starting to leave. Hayden joined him.

“Thanks,” Hayden said, once the locker room door had shut behind them.

“Dunno if they’ll listen.”

“They listen to you,” Hayden said confidently.

Shane shrugged. “You were right. I should have said something earlier, I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking.”

“Yeah. Well, it’s okay.”

“Thanks.” Shane headed for his car. He wanted nothing more than to get home and call Ilya, even though that urge scared him, maybe as much as the conversation he had just had did.

~~

Ilya leaned over to the backseat, grabbing the gift bag he had left there and dumping it in Marlow’s lap.

Marlow stared at it. “What’s this?”

“Good vodka,” Ilya told him. “Better than that crap Smirnoff shit you buy.”

“...Okay. Why?”

Ilya rubbed his nose, turning the engine on and keeping his eyes determinedly on the road as he pulled out of the parking lot. “For the other day, or whatever. You have good Russian vodka now, so shut up.”

Marlow grinned. “Roz, are you trying to buy my friendship with booze?”

“Fuck off. I get it because you buy shit vodka, okay? Hurts me even thinking about it.”

“Yeah, okay. You’re lucky I’m cheap.”

“Is good stuff! Better than Smirnoff!”

“Sure, sure.” Marlow was laughing. “Thanks, I guess.”

“You’re welcome. Do not mix it with anything, don’t insult me like that.”

“You gave it to me, it’s mine! I’m gonna mix it with orange juice now, just to piss you off.”

Ilya growled. “You wouldn’t.”

“I would.”

“You do that and I will smash bottle over your head.”

Marlow hit his shoulder. “Yeah, whatever. Seriously though, you don’t gotta be buying me shit, I’m not your sugar baby.”

“...Shane said I was rude,” Ilya admitted. “He was probably right. I...” He grit his teeth and took a deep breath, forcing himself to say the words. “I know you have been very... y’know recently. With me. And him. And everything... I am still an asshole, most of the time. Probably always. But you have been good, so thank you.”

The car was silent for a while. Ilya watched the road more intently than he ever had in his life.

“...Wow,” Marlow murmured, “So Hollander’s even got you apologising, huh? You really are whipped.”

“I take it all back, I hate you.”

Marlow cackled. “Yeah yeah, I hate you too.”

Ilya drove back to his house, thinking about what Marlow had said. Whipped. He guessed it was probably true. The sentiment didn’t even annoy him, like he assumed it would have. Yeah, he would do whatever Shane wanted, whatever made Shane happy. He couldn’t even imagine something more enjoyable than doing things that made Shane happy.

They had finally finished Breaking Bad. Not that he would ever say it, but Ilya had been a little scared that it would be the end of the excuse, and Marlow would stop hanging out with him every day. But Marlow had suggested watching The Sopranos next, and Ilya had pretended to begrudgingly agree. So they went and watched that, and Marlow still insisted on providing live commentary, and Ilya continued to watch quietly, and the routine stuck. Ilya was glad.

Halfway through the second episode, Marlow paused it. “Do you think she’s hot?” he asked.

“Sure, I guess.”

“I dunno, I never got the milf thing.”

Ilya smirked. “What, did you have a healthy relationship with your mother or something? Loser.”

“Fuck off,” Marlow snorted.

“You like brunnettes, anyway.”

“Oh, you noticed?”

“Hard not to.”

“Well now I feel like shit, I knew you for years and never knew you were into dudes. And you still managed to notice I like brunnettes.”

“I’m more mysterious, Cliff. Is burden you have to learn to bear.”

Marlow half-attempted to kick him. “Fuck off... Hey, did Hollander get that thing sorted out or whatever?”

“...Yes,” Ilya said slowly. “Is fine now.”

“Yeah?”

“Was nothing. He worries a lot.”

“Sure... Just, like... you can, uh, talk to me or whatever. I mean, I already know, so. If you wanted to.”

Ilya looked at him, raising his eyebrows. “You think I want to talk?”

“No, I guess not,” Marlow said. “Just, like, giving you the option. Instead of smoking and glowering every day.”

Ilya pulled a face. “I do not glower. I brood, maybe, sometimes. I never glower.”

“Sure, man.”

In his head, Ilya cursed North Americans and their obsession with talking for the millionth time. “...I have made problems for Hollander,” he confessed. “With my... new publicity. He has had to tell his team to be- you know. To stop. About me.”

“Ah,” Marlow sighed. “They were being dicks?”

Ilya shrugged. “I guess so. But Hollander is... not very accepting of himself. Does not like to talk about that stuff, it’s not easy for him.”

“Right. That doesn’t make it your fault, though.”

“I am idiot who slept with fame-hungry bitch.”

“When you were a kid.”

“I was old enough. To know better.”

Marlow stared at him, eyes sympathetic. Ilya hated it. “Did he talk to them, then? Hollander, I mean.”

Ilya nodded. “Did very well,” he said. “Of course he did. Was just nervous, beforehand.”

“Do I need to hit any of them at the next game?”

Ilya grinned. “Drapeau must be in dentures by end of season.”

“You got it, Roz. I’ll let the boys know.”

~~

It was another three weeks before Shane got to see Ilya in person again. They were playing in Boston this time, but the paparazzi had finally left Ilya's street, so it was okay. Shane would be there, after the game. The match was brutal; Shane played better than last time, now his team had finally shut the fuck up, but it didn't matter. It was like every member of the Boston Bears was on the warpath, slamming Voyageurs into the boards, dropping their gloves at a moment's notice. Marlow started two separate fights with Drapeau.

Shane wondered what Ilya had said to them, then realised he didn't really care. He was just glad Ilya had such a good team.

And Ilya was on fire. Stealing the puck at every opportunity, skating around the ice like he owned it. It would have been hot, if it wasn't so fucking frustrating.

Shane chased after him ferociously, desperate to redeem himself after last time, but even he wasn't a match for every single Boston player combined. The game ended 6-2, and honestly, it could have been way worse.

The Voyageurs were all in a pissy mood as they filed back into the locker room. Shane rushed through his shower and interviews - now the game was over, he just wanted to get out of there, call his Uber and get himself under Ilya as quickly as humanly possible.

Ilya was cocky as soon as he opened the door, of course he was. He slammed Shane into the wall like he had slammed into him just a couple of hours earlier - this time, though, he offered his mouth like an apology, kissing the column of Shane's neck.

"You- you played well today," Shane managed to get out.

Ilya smirked at him. "I know."

"Oh my God, you're such an asshole."

"Mm," Ilya said distractedly, scraping his teeth against Shane's skin. "I'm going to fuck you now, yes? Hard, like you want it."

"Fuck, yeah," Shane groaned.

Ilya did just that, dragging Shane to the bedroom and peeling off his clothes before fucking him into the mattress like a man possessed. Shane's thigh were shaking from just the effort it took to hold himself up.

"F-fuck, Ilya," he gasped, practically weeping.

“Shane,” Ilya panted. “Feel so good around me.” His hand moved to the back of Shane’s neck, holding Shane down possessively. “Like that. Take it, you can take it.”

“Yeah. Wanna- wanna take it.”

“Fuck. Good boy, *fuck*. So good for me, mine.”

“Shit, Ilya, I’m going to-”

“Yes. Come, now.”

Shane came immediately at the command, untouched. Ilya continued pounding into him, even as Shane started to whine.

“You can take it,” Ilya hissed, “be good for me, da?”

Shane nodded - he wanted to take it, wanted to be good for Ilya.

“Fuck.” The hand around Shane’s neck gripped harder. “Fuck. Mine. You are- all mine.” Ilya’s hips stilled, as he emptied into the condom, buried deep in Shane’s ass. “God,” Ilya whispered, his touches turning gentle as he mouthed along Shane’s spine, “thank you, so good. You are so good.” He pulled out, getting up to throw away the condom.

Shane rolled over, staring at the ceiling. He suddenly felt cold.

Mine.

They didn’t say that - Ilya had never said shit like that before, even in the bedroom. They didn’t do that. And Shane had liked it. No, he had *loved* it. It wasn’t - it meant something, right? How different Ilya was with him recently, and now this. Unless this was just some sex thing. Ilya did always get more dominant after he won, maybe it was just...

Ilya frowned as he came back over. “You are thinking too hard,” he said. “I can see it on your face. Stop it.”

Shane looked at him. “I think we need to talk.”

“Ughh.” Ilya flopped down onto the bed, not even pulling the covers over himself. “Why does everyone on this continent constantly need to talk about everything? Is not necessary.”

Shane bit his lip. “Ilya, you know I don’t do well with... undefined things,” he said seriously. “I need, like, structure, and rules, and clarity.”

The corners of Ilya’s lips quirked up. “Yes, you do, don’t you?”

“I do. So can we talk about it, please? About our... whatever.”

Ilya sighed heavily, but reached out and patted Shane on the stomach. “Yes, if we must. I do not enjoy talking about my feelings, Hollander, I hope you know I would not do this for just anyone.”

“I know. Thank you.”

“Is okay.” Ilya squeezed his thigh, and then rolled away, getting out of the bed again. “I will need some time, but I will be back soon.”

“You- what?” Shane said, scrambling to sit up.

“Some time,” Ilya repeated. He pulled on his boxers. “This is serious conversation, yes? I do not want to get it wrong, I want to translate what I am thinking, check that I can say it right.”

“...Um, okay,” Shane said slowly. “If you think that’s for the best.”

Ilya nodded. “Will not be long,” he said, swiping his phone off the nightstand and leaving the room.

Shane swallowed, suddenly terrified. If Ilya needed to go and translate - he probably was figuring out how to let Shane down gently. Shit. Shane got up as well, cringing at how sticky he felt, and had a quick, nauseating shower. He got completely dressed afterwards, so he would be ready to leave quickly, after Ilya had said whatever it was he needed to say. Then he just sat on the bed, scrolling instagram and taking in absolutely none of it.

“Okay, I am ready.”

Shane startled, looking up. Ilya was standing at the foot of the bed, still just in his underwear. “You know what you want to say?” Shane asked.

“Da.”

“Alright. So, um, what is it?”

“I am... google says phrase is head over heels. I am head over heels for you.”

Shane stared at him. Ilya stared back earnestly.

“Fuck off,” Shane snapped, folding his arms. “Don’t make fun of me right now.”

Ilya’s brows furrowed. “I am not. What, is that wrong? It is head over heels in love, yes?”

“Stop it, you’re being mean.”

“I am not,” Ilya said quietly, eyes now shining with hurt. “Why do you think is joke?”

“Because- because we’ve hated each other for years!”

“I never hated you.”

“Well, we didn’t exactly like each other,” Shane huffed.

“Yes, that was before. This is now.”

“So what, you just fell in love with me?”

“Yes.”

Shane’s jaw began to tremble. “You- you’re being serious,” he realised.

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

“I have more,” Ilya said.

“Um, okay.” Shane didn’t have any words. “Go on.”

“I find word. Rejuvenate? Like charging battery, but for people? This is what you do to me. When I am with you, even talk to you on the phone... I am rejuvenated.”

“Really?”

“Da. And I like that you nag me.” Ilya flushed. “I feel, um... cared for. Is silly, I know, but I like it, so I wish you would stop apologising for it. I like that you think about my problems, even when I don’t. No one else worries about me like you do. And I want to, uh, care for you too. Help you with your problems and... anything else. Maybe I can rejuvenate you too?”

“Wow,” Shane breathed.

“Is that enough clarity for you?” Ilya didn’t sound sarcastic. He sounded like he genuinely wanted to know the answer.

“I- I guess so,” Shane said.

Ilya smiled. “So you understand now? I’m not going to stress you out?”

“Uh, yeah. I mean.” Shane blinked. “I understand, I think.”

“Good.” Ilya crawled onto the bed and lay against Shane’s side. His smile was wide and unrestrained. “Is the feelings talk over now? Am I free?”

“Uh... does this mean we’re, like... dating?”

“It is up to you. I would like.”

“Me too,” Shane said, far too quickly.

“Good.” Ilya grinned at him, wolfish. “Done now, yes?”

“Yeah, thank you.”

“Anything,” Ilya said, sneaking his hand underneath Shane’s t-shirt, fingertips skating across his abs.

Shane’s hand suddenly shot down to grab Ilya’s wrist. “Wait!”

“Ughh.” Ilya groaned, his head flopping onto the pillow. “There is more? I’m dying here, Hollander.”

“Yeah.”

“What is it?”

“You never asked me how I felt.”

Ilya’s face turned serious. “No. You, um, do not have to-”

“I love you too.”

Ilya laughed, and then leaned up to kiss him, long and deep. Shane ran his hands over Ilya’s biceps, relaxing into it.

“I feel bad,” he murmured.

“Why?”

“You had a whole, like... romantic speech. I could’ve had one too, if I’d prepared.”

Ilya snorted. “You don’t need speech, sweetheart. I know you love me.”

“Yeah?” Shane looked down at him. He almost couldn’t believe it - he knew he was closed off, awkward. The worst at showing his feelings. “You do?”

“Of course. You are so lovely to me, always, how could I not feel that? I feel so loved by you.”

Shane took a deep breath, holding Ilya tighter. “I’m glad you do,” he said. “And I’m sorry I’m not the same. I know I’m, like, neurotic or whatever. I always need everything spelled out for me, sorry.”

“...We do not talk about feelings in Russia,” Ilya said softly. “I do not like doing it very much, and I am not good at it, especially in English. But for you, I will spend rest of my life googling different ways to tell you I love you. Okay?”

“Okay.”

End Notes

hope everyone enjoyed :)))

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