

Mine All Mine

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Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Rose Landry , Hayden Pike , Jean-Jacques Boiziau , Svetlana Vetrova , Andrei Rozanov , Grigori Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander , Original Female Character(s) , Original Male Character(s) , Wyatt Hayes , Cliff Marlow
Additional Tags:	Russian Mafia , Alternate Universe - Mob , Clubbing , Friendship , New Relationship , Falling In Love , Dating , Secrets , Ilya & Svetlana are FWB , Anal Sex , Anal Fingering , Rimming , Blow Jobs , Cunnilingus , Shane has a pet cat , Kidnapping , Minor Violence , Mentions of Suicide , mentions of depression , unhealthy family dynamics , Hockey , Ice Skating , Angst , Happy Ending , Mentions of Anxiety , Nipple Play , Ilya has a nipple piercing , Panic Attacks , POV Alternating , Smoking , age appropriate drinking , Masturbation , Vacation , Bathtub Sex , Mentions of childhood abuse , mentions of domestic violence , Alzheimer's Disease , Grief/Mourning , Wakes & Funerals , Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism , Guns
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Mine All Mine

by [PeaceLilies](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander is a single guy living a fairly boring life until he meets ruggedly handsome and European, Ilya Rozanov. A whirlwind romance begins, but Ilya has a secret that could come between him and Shane.

Notes

I really wanted to write a Mafia AU fic, so I did lol A bit outside my comfort zone but we should try new things, right?

Huge thank you to [KellyLayne](#) for beta reading! And to Ren for their continual encouragement!

I also listened to a bunch of fun music for this fic which I'll include in the chapter notes!

I'll try and update this every Thursday!

Enjoy!! 💖

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Shane is enjoying a quiet evening at home but his friends have another idea

Chapter Notes

Chapter One's Song: Total Eclipse of the Heart - Full Moon Remix by Bonnie Tyler

MAY

Shane Hollander reclined comfortably on his couch, finally getting the chance to finish reading his book on the 1972 Canada-Russia Hockey Series. It was a quiet night in, just him and the cat, enjoying his book, and a nice glass of Cabernet Sauvignon he'd received as a housewarming gift.

A little over a month ago he'd moved into his new house in the suburbs of Ottawa. It wasn't anything extravagant but it was his. He had spent so much time working extra hours at the local rink, teaching private skating lessons, on top of his full time job as a high school French teacher, and hockey coach, to save up the money to buy the place.

He'd sacrificed a lot to get here but he was really proud of himself and he had every intention of enjoying it. So he was all curled up in a comfy throw blanket with his book and his wine, Eloise, the ragdoll cat, curled up in a little ball by his feet.

And then his doorbell rang.

Shane adjusted his glasses and exchanged a look with the cat, who had been woken from her nap by the noise. Shane wasn't expecting guests. Maybe his neighbors? He wasn't used to having people say hi and talk to him now that he was out in the 'burbs. He slid his bookmark into place to save his page and stood up from the couch, Eloise jumping down and stretching.

He went to the door and opened it, finding his three best friends standing on his doorstep.

"What the fuck?" he said at them.

"This is an intervention!" exclaimed Hayden Pike, pushing past Shane into the house. Shane moved aside, still in shock as his friends filed into the house. He closed the door behind

them, turning to face them.

“An intervention for what?” Shane asked, incredulous.

“For you and your sorry excuse for a social life,” Jean-Jacques Boiziau replied in his thick French accent. Shane furrowed his brows.

“ *Excuse me?* ” he sputtered.

Rose Landry held up two bottles of wine. “Why don’t we sit down and talk?”

Shane’s friends could not have been a more different mix of people. Hayden, blond haired and green eyed, was Shane’s oldest friend. They had known one another in Juniors and had played for the same hockey team. Hayden was the physical education teacher at the high school Shane worked at and was Shane’s assistant coach for the hockey team. They played on the same beer league team together, too.

Jean-Jacques, known as J.J. to his friends, was dark skinned and enormous. He had played with Shane in Juniors as well, but had gone on to play professionally in the NHL as a defenseman for the Montreal Voyageurs.

Rose, the lone woman in the room, was Shane’s ex-girlfriend. They had remained friends after breaking up since Rose was the one who had helped Shane realize that he was gay. She was the drama teacher at the high school Shane and Hayden worked at, with movie star good looks.

His friends sat on the couch while Shane sat in an armchair, everyone with a very full glass of wine in hand, while Eloise rubbed herself against everyone’s legs, looking for pets.

J.J. cooed at her in French, stroking her chin, and while normally Shane would be happy to see his friends and his cat getting along, he was mostly pissed and confused.

“Okay. So. What the hell are you three doing in my house and why do I need an intervention for my social life?” he asked, point blank.

“Shane,” Rose said. “When was the last time you went out and had some fun?”

Shane blinked at Rose. He opened his mouth, then closed it. Then opened it again. “I went out with my parents for dinner for my mom’s birthday,” he answered, nodding in satisfaction.

Hayden sighed and J.J. shook his head sadly.

“When was the last time you went out and had fun with people *your age* ?” Hayden asked, mostly meaning the three people currently sitting in his living room.

“When was the last time you had sex?” J.J. added, arms folded.

Shane felt his cheek heat, his brows furrowing in frustration. “If you guys just came here to insult me and make me feel bad, mission accomplished.”

All three of his friends looked at him with a mix of pity and exasperation, which Shane did not appreciate.

“Shane. Buddy. Pal. We love you. Truly. You’re an amazing guy. But you’re about two steps away from becoming the crazy cat lady. Come out with us. Get laid by some super hot dude. Get a little drunk. You’ve had a crazy year this year with buying the house and everything. You deserve to let loose a little,” Hayden said, his voice relaxed.

Shane, as everyone in the house was well aware, had never once let loose in his entire life.

“First of all, fuck you,” Shane replied. “Second of all, it’s only one cat. I was having a perfectly nice time just reading and drinking my wine until *some people* rudely interrupted.”

“That’s how it starts,” J.J. warned.

Shane sighed. “Okay, so, what? We’re just gonna... go out and you’re going to watch me try and fail to pick up a guy?”

Rose shook her head. “No. We want to take you out for your birthday. You’re going to be twenty-nine next week! It’s the last year of your twenties! You deserve to celebrate that and all that you’ve accomplished. We’re proud of you and you deserve to have fun!”

Shane blinked at his friends, moved by the sentiment, even if the approach had been a little harsh.

“You know you could have just told me that from the jump.”

“No,” J.J. chuckled. “We had to do it this way because you would just blow us off otherwise.”

Shane sighed, lifting his glasses to massage the bridge of his nose. J.J. wasn’t wrong, of course. Shane often got... complacent, unwilling to mix things up or take risks or step outside his comfort zone unless something pushed him to do so. His friends confronting him like this would definitely give him that push. It already had.

“We’ll do a nice dinner. Hit a cool club,” Hayden said.

“I’ll be your wingman,” J.J. assured and that made Shane smile. J.J. had tried setting Shane up with some guys in the past, which had been very thoughtful. Shane had gone on a few dates with them and had hooked up with one of them, but that had been almost two years ago now. He could admit that he was sort of overdue.

“We don’t even have to stay out that late if you don’t want to,” Rose soothed. “We just want you to have a fun night and we miss seeing you.”

Shane smiled and nodded. He had been pretty absent from social events the last year and his friends were right. He’d been working really hard without taking any time to enjoy himself. He didn’t need to hook up with anyone, but just being with his friends would be good.

It was probably in his best interest to get out of the house anyway.

“I miss you guys, too. Like, so much.”

Shane put his wine glass down and hugged his friends. He really did appreciate them and their patience. Now that things were settled, it would be good to go out, and have fun. Maybe... put himself out there a little again. Couldn't hurt, right?

He so rarely got to see J.J. during the hockey season, since he was in Montreal, so it would be nice to have more face time with him now that his schedule was more flexible in the summer.

So he sat with his friends and they drank the two bottles of wine that Rose had brought, planning out his birthday.

Later, he stood at his front door, hugging them all goodbye as they got into their Ubers to head home. Shane felt a lot lighter, and was actually looking forward to his birthday.

Shane's birthday fell on a Friday.

He went to work, getting a birthday card and some balloons from his coworkers. He, Hayden, and Rose ate lunch together, sharing the cupcakes that Hayden's wife, Jackie, had made for Shane.

His Seniors sang him Happy Birthday in nearly flawless French which he was so overwhelmed and moved by. His parents called him on his drive home, with Rose following, since she was helping him pick out an outfit for the evening.

So far, it had been a great day.

He parked his car in the driveway and said goodbye to his parents, who told him to have a fun night, and Rose parked behind him.

Rose got out of her car with a gift bag, smiling brightly at Shane.

“Oh god,” he sighed. “What did you buy me?”

“You'll seeee!” she sang and he shook his head, laughing, as Rose took his arm.

They headed into the house, where Eloise greeted them at the door with soft chirps and head butts.

They gave her some love, hung up their coats, and toed off their shoes, before Rose handed Shane the bag. He gave her a look, then sat down on the arm of one of the armchairs, and shifted through the tissue paper to the gift at the bottom.

Shane pulled out a white, button up linen shirt, slate blue pants, a woven belt, and stylish gray sneakers.

“Rose,” he huffed at her.

Rose smiled warmly and leaned in to kiss his cheek. “Put it on! I want to see how good your ass looks in these pants!”

“Oh my god,” he laughed. “Is this a gift for me or for you?”

“It can be both!” Rose giggled.

“You really didn’t have to do this,” he told her, standing up and placing the clothing on the chair. He hugged her close and kissed her hair.

“I wanted to,” she replied. “You deserve nice things. You don’t do enough of it for yourself. Besides, I want to be sure that all the guys at the club can’t take their eyes off of you.”

Shane blushed and laughed, a bit self-conscious, before he pulled away.

“Go change!”

“Okay,” he said and went to change into the new outfit.

Shane had to admit... he looked good. His normal state of dress was athletic wear, athleisure, and khakis with various kinds of sweaters and sometimes button downs. His wardrobe was fairly uninspired but he could probably afford to splurge a bit more now.

The outfit Rose had picked out would not normally be something Shane would wear but he had to hand it to her for her sense of style. The shirt fit him well and made his arms look good when he rolled up the sleeves. The pants fit him perfectly, a slim cut that made his hockey ass look amazing, and they had some stretch, thank goodness. He liked the shoes, too. Casual but trendy and he liked them without socks.

Shane looked at himself in the mirror from all angles, surprised that he found himself thinking that he looked, well, really fucking good.

“Can I see?!” Rose asked from the other side of the door.

Shane laughed and opened the door.

“Holy shit! Shane Hollander! WOWZA!”

Shane cracked up and Rose laughed, taking his hand.

“Let me see you! Ah! Look at that ass! Your body is ridiculous.”

“The pants are definitely good.”

“The whole outfit is good. Trust me,” Rose replied. “Absolutely fab.”

Shane blushed. “Don’t you have to get ready?” he chuckled.

“Yes! I have to get changed, do my hair, and my makeup.”

“Do you want anything?”

“Water and a snack.”

Shane nodded at her and gave her a little salute. “Yes, ma’am,” he replied in French.

Shane brought Rose a water and snack. She had changed into a little black dress that highlighted her curves, paired with a pair of heels. She was curling her hair and Shane watched, sitting on his bed, stroking Eloise who was purring like mad, thrusting her head into his palm.

Rose watched them in the mirror and laughed.

“So,” she said. “Hoping to meet someone?”

Shane shrugged. “I’m open to it,” he replied.

“Hey. I’ll take it,” she hummed. “You know that anyone would be lucky to be with you, Shane. Right?”

Shane looked at the cat, rubbing his thumb along her nose, between her eyes, smiling at the way she seemed to just purr harder under the attention.

“Yeah. I know.” And he did. Kind of. It was more that he was just... uncertain. For most of his life he had thought that he was just waiting for the right woman to come along. He had had a few hookups with men, which he had liked a lot more than the ones he’d had with women, but growing up around hockey, the idea of being gay was... terrifying.

Shane knew that he had a lot of internalized homophobia but he’d been working on it since his failed romance with Rose. He was getting more comfortable with himself and who he was.

He had liked the guys he had seen and been with. But he hadn’t met... *The One*. Shane wasn’t even sure if *The One* existed but he could at least have some fun. There was nothing wrong with hooking up with hot men.

Shane sighed and looked at Rose in the mirror. “I’m open to whatever happens tonight,” Shane said with a smile.

Rose beamed at him. “That’s what I like to hear!”

Shane felt like the most awkward motherfucker on the planet.

He was attempting to dance with Rose, which was really more of him sort of shuffling from foot to foot while Rose danced in proximity to him. Hayden was dancing with his wife, Jackie,, the two of them looking like they were having a good time, comfortable on the dance floor, which was where the two of them had met eight years ago.

Shane was maybe a little jealous of that. It had been so simple and easy for them to meet and fall in love and get married. He was mostly happy for them, though. Jackie was great and

Shane was glad that his best friend had found someone so perfectly suited to him. Maybe he'd have that, too... someday.

J.J. was dancing close by, keeping an eye out for eligible men for Shane, but so far, no luck.

Before they'd hit the club, one of the trendier queer ones in town, they'd gone to dinner at a lovely Italian place and Shane had left the restaurant pleasantly buzzed on wine and delicious food. He felt like his buzz had kind of worn off, replaced by a low level anxiety about how awkward he was.

Shane didn't dance. He had no real sense of rhythm and his taste in music was almost nonexistent, though he had been trying to listen to more music that J.J. sent him. He thought he knew the song playing in the club, the bass reverberating in his chest.

He wished he had a drink in his hand, that would make him feel better than just keeping them limp at his sides, or in his pockets. He leaned in closer to Rose so he could yell into her ear.

"I'm going to get a drink. You want anything?"

Rose smiled at him and shook her head. Shane checked in with Jackie and Hayden, who were also okay, and then J.J. who had a drink but asked if Shane wanted him to come with. Shane politely declined. He wouldn't mind just being alone for a few moments.

He pushed his way through the crowd toward the bar, feeling like a salmon swimming upstream, and finally managed to arrive, pushed out in front of the bar.

A beautiful man dressed in tight black pants, suspenders, and no shirt, with red sparkly eyeshadow smiled at him from behind the bar.

"What can I get you, gorgeous?" he asked.

"Anything with bubbles," Shane replied.

"Cava work for you?"

"That's perfect. Thank you."

The guy took a few more orders and Shane leaned against the bar, taking a few breaths. It was a little quieter here and his ears were ringing. Someone approached the bar next to him and he moved out of the way slightly to give the guy some room.

Shane looked up, staring face first into the man's chest. He blinked and then looked up. A tall man with a head of shaggy golden brown curls looked back at him, and smiled.

It felt a little like time slowed down at that moment. Shane was struck by the fact that the man was *very attractive*, like, *whoa, wow, hello* levels of attractive. He had an angular face with dark, thick eyebrows, and a strong, sharp jaw, a slightly crooked nose, handsome stubble, a cleft in his chin, and plush looking lips.

He had a long neck and broad shoulders with a muscular chest to match that Shane could see all of because the guy's very expensive looking red wine colored shirt was mostly unbuttoned. The open shirt revealed: a gold chain with a crucifix nestled between firm looking pecs dusted in dark chest hair, and what Shane was pretty sure was a gold nipple piercing, and a *snarling bear tattoo* over his left pec. Shane's mouth felt very dry and he was pretty sure he was gaping at the man.

His eyes went back to the man's beautiful face, dumbstruck.

"Hi," the man said, his voice deep and accented.

"Hi," Shane replied.

"Did you order already?" he asked.

Shane nodded dumbly. The guy just kept smiling, crooked and lazy, and leaned casually against the bar, his biceps bulging against the fabric of his shirt. Shane practically gulped. The man looked away for a moment, nodding his head at another bartender and ordered vodka over ice. "The good shit," he said, before turning his attention back to Shane.

"What did you order?"

"Uh... sparkling wine," Shane replied rather lamely.

The man tilted his head. "Are you celebrating something?"

"It's my birthday," Shane replied and was briefly rescued by the bartender who brought his wine.

"Thank you," Shane said to the bartender.

"You have a tab open, honey?"

"Is on me," the man next to Shane said. The bartender grinned and winked at him.

"You got it, stud."

"Oh, you didn't have to do that," Shane practically spluttered, his cheeks pink.

"Why not?" the man asked, genuinely. "Is your birthday. Is a small thing."

Shane smiled, shy. "Thanks. That's very kind."

"You are welcome..." he trailed off, holding his hand out, as if giving Shane space to speak.

"Oh. Shane. I'm Shane."

"Ilya," the man replied and held out his hand for a handshake. Shane shook it. His hand was large and warm against Shane's, his fingers long and strong. Shane could have sworn he felt a

fizzle of electricity travel from his hand all the way down his spine. “Is nice to meet you, Shane.”

“You, too.”

“Are you here alone?”

“No. I’m with friends.”

“Aw, too bad,” Ilya said, smiling again. That smile. Fuck. It was... sexy. Flirtatious. “You are very beautiful.”

He said it so matter-of-factly that it caught Shane off guard and he felt like his whole face was red and his stomach dropped like he was on a rollercoaster.

“Oh. Thank you,” he replied, unable to look at this big, beautiful man with his entire chest out telling him that *he* was beautiful. He took a breath, turning his gaze back to Ilya. “So are you.”

Ilya’s smile deepened, his eyes crinkling as he looked at Shane, his gaze almost heated. The bartender he had spoken to brought his drink and they exchanged a word before Ilya turned back to Shane. He held out his glass.

“S dnyem roshdeniya,” Ilya said. “Happy Birthday.”

Shane tapped his glass against Ilya’s. “Thanks.” He took a sip of the bubbly wine in his glass. “Is that, um, Russian?”

Ilya blinked. “Yes! You have a good ear. I am Russian, if you cannot tell from my accent.”

Shane chuckled. “That’s pretty cool.”

Ilya winked at him and Shane’s heart fluttered weirdly in his chest, and fuck, he was kind of turned on.

“I am a cool guy.”

Shane smiled, laughing again. He felt a little ridiculous but it was nice to have Ilya’s attention. To... maybe flirt a little.

He rolled his eyes playfully and shook his head. “I would say so. So modest, too!”

Ilya gave Shane a tilt of his head with a flourished hand, mimicking a bow, since he definitely didn’t have enough room to do so in the crowded bar. He smiled widely at Shane and Shane’s blood fizzled.

“Will your friends be upset if I ask the birthday boy to dance with me?” Ilya asked, sipping his vodka.

“No,” Shane laughed. “I think they’d be thrilled.”

Ilya's eyebrows lifted a little and he chuckled. "Well, then. Would you like to dance?"

Shane smiled. "Okay."

Ilya crooked his arm and offered it to Shane and Shane accepted, his hand pressed to the hard muscle of Ilya's bicep. God, the guy was fucking fit. He allowed Ilya to lead him to the dance floor and took a long sip of his wine.

Ilya brought them to a spot on the dancefloor that didn't seem too crowded.

"I apologize in advance," Shane yelled over the music as he slipped his hand from Ilya's arm. Ilya bent a little to hear him better. He had to have had at least five or six inches on Shane. "I'm a terrible dancer."

"No!" Ilya replied, waving a hand dismissively in the air. "Do not worry. I am a great dancer."

They mostly kind of swayed together to the music as they drank their respective drinks, talking as best they could over the music; general small talk about the club and what Shane had done for his birthday.

Drinks finished, Ilya took Shane's glass and placed it with his on a railing, along with several other empty glasses and bottles. He came back to Shane, his hands on Shane's hips, turning him around so Shane's back was to his chest.

Ilya bent down, his warm breath tickling Shane's sensitive ear as he spoke into it, making Shane shiver. "Just follow me."

Shane nodded. Ilya had his hands on his hips, more or less guiding Shane in step with him as the music played. It got easier after that, moving to the music, moving in time with Ilya. It was hot in the club and Shane was aware that he was sweating but he didn't think it mattered all that much because Ilya pressed close anyway.

They danced like that for a little while, Ilya dipping his head again so he could talk to Shane.

"See? You are not that bad," he said.

Shane smiled and chuckled. "That's because you're so good." He turned his face up so he could look at Ilya and Ilya looked back, smiling that sexy crooked smile. They looked at each other and it was as if Shane knew exactly what was going to happen next.

Ilya said, "Can I kiss you?"

And Shane responded, "yes."

Ilya lifted his hand, curling his fingers gently against Shane's neck, fingertips sliding against his jaw. He held Shane like that for a moment, before letting his fingers slide down Shane's throat, making Shane's lips part in a soft gasp. Ilya's hand landed on his shoulder, turning Shane toward him, and he leaned down, covering the distance between them and kissed him. The kiss was absolutely electric. Shane had never been kissed like this before. It was so deep

and thorough. Ilya's tongue in his mouth, teasing his own, his teeth nipping at Shane's lip before they parted. Ilya smelled like something musky and expensive and... maybe cigarettes?

Shane felt drunker than he had all night, opening his eyes to stare up at this man, and want... *more*. Ilya kissed him again, softer this time, just his lips pressed to Shane's, before he pulled away.

He wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck, Ilya's hands at his waist.

"You're a really good kisser," Shane said. Ilya smiled warmly at him.

"So are you."

Shane doubted that very much, but he appreciated the compliment. He licked his bottom lip, noticing the way Ilya's eyes locked onto his mouth, before they started kissing again. Shane had no idea how long they were making out for when they finally parted to breathe, swaying just a little to the music.

His phone was vibrating in his back pocket and he reached for it.

"I'm sorry," he said to Ilya, who shook his head, curls bouncing as he did so. Shane looked at his phone and the series of text messages there.

J.J.: YES, BITCH! GET IT! 🍆🍑🍆🍑🔥🔥🔥

Hayden: Proud of you, buddy 👍 **be safe!!**

Jackie: Happy Birthday, Shane! Have a great night! 😊

Rose: I LOVE YOU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! Please have (safe) sex with that sexy curly haired guy! Text me and let me know you're okay!

Rose: AND I WANT ALL THE DEETS LATERRRRRRRRRRR!!!

Shane laughed and shook his head. His friends were so weird but he loved them so much.

"Sorry. My friends," Shane explained. "They're leaving, I think."

"Oh," Ilya replied. "Do you need to go?" He looked disappointed at the idea of Shane leaving, which filled Shane with warmth, and a surprising amount of courage.

Shane tucked his phone into his back pocket and smiled at Ilya. "No. I don't."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ilya takes Shane home

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was: SEDA by Bad Bunny, Bryant Myers

Shane had had some experience with going home with strangers. It wasn't a super common occurrence but he had done it a few times before. There had been the "guys' trip" in Mexico where he'd picked up a guy at a bar, and another, when he'd visited Vancouver. Those experiences had been fine, but mostly anxiety provoking. It had been easier after coming out and sort of dating around a bit locally.

Shane didn't find himself anxious at all now. In fact... he was having *fun*. He was assuming he would probably never see Ilya again anyway, so if things ended up being terrible, he could deal with the embarrassment and shame on his own after the fact.

He didn't know what it was exactly. It could have been the alcohol or the fact that it was his birthday or that Ilya made him laugh and was surprisingly sweet. In truth, Shane would have loved to seek out a partner, someone to date long term, but nights out on the town like this rarely resulted in anything like that. He was okay with this just being a hookup. It just seemed impossible that someone like Ilya would want more from someone like Shane.

They had arrived by black car that Ilya had ordered to a very swanky apartment building. Shane looked out the window, awed and surprised. Ilya had gotten out of the car and opened Shane's door for him, offering him his hand, which Shane accepted, then his arm, which Shane also accepted.

Ilya led him into the very nice foyer of the building. They had taken the elevator, Ilya backing Shane up into the corner and kissing him in that delicious, toe-curling way of his, until they had arrived at the penthouse floor.

The *penthouse* floor.

Ilya smiled and laughed, pulling Shane out of the elevator and to the single door on that floor, opening it, and ushering Shane inside.

The place was absolutely gorgeous. It was very minimalist and sexy. Everything about it was expensive but in an understated kind of way. There was a large leather sectional, a fancy looking cocktail cart, a marble fireplace, a huge flat screen, and there were various pieces of abstract art framed on the walls. Shane was awestruck. The only thing out of place was a large dog bed, piled with toys, but no dog.

“Come,” Ilya said and Shane followed him into a beautifully appointed full kitchen.

“Would you like something?” Ilya asked.

“Water would be great,” Shane replied, looking around, still awestruck.

“Ice?”

“Sure.”

The lighting was better here, so Shane got a whole different view of Ilya without the darkness of the club. The curls in his hair had tightened because of the humidity from the club and he noticed a silver swoop of curls near his temple, noticeable amongst the golden-brown color of his hair. He wore what looked like diamond cufflinks, the stones winking in the light. His skin was golden in a way that did not quite make sense for Canada in May but was lovely all the same. As he turned to Shane, handing him a glass of ice water, smiling at him, making eye contact, Shane noticed that his eyes were hazel, almost gold.

If Shane had thought Ilya was gorgeous in the dark, he was truly beautiful in the light.

“Thanks,” Shane replied, sounding a bit dreamy to his own ears, which was embarrassing. But Ilya only winked at him.

“My pleasure.” Ilya leaned against the far counter, a glass of water in his one hand, the other resting in the crook of his elbow. Shane noticed a signet ring on his pinky finger, but no other jewelry besides that, the crucifix, the nipple piercing, and his cufflinks.

His long legs were stretched out, crossed at the ankles.

“How tall are you?” Shane asked, sipping from his glass.

Ilya’s lips twitched up. “Six foot three,” he replied. “And you?”

“Five ten,” Shane replied, blushing.

Ilya chuckled. “Cute.”

Shane blushed deeper. Ilya was watching him and the attention made Shane fidget.

“So... what do you do for a living?” Shane asked, lifting a hand to gesture to the kitchen.

Ilya tapped a long finger against his water glass. “A bit of this and that,” he replied. “Business ventures, real estate.” He shrugged very casually. “I work for my father.”

“Oh. That’s interesting. It must be nice working with family,” Shane replied.

Ilya chuckled, though it didn’t sound amused. He shrugged again. “Is okay.” He looked at Shane, offering him his crooked, sexy grin. “But we are not here to talk about what I do for work.”

Ilya drank most of the water in his glass before setting it down on the counter, and approached Shane. Shane looked up at him, his stomach dropping pleasantly at the confident way Ilya carried himself.

He looked at Shane in a serious, assessing kind of way. He reached out one long, elegant finger, tucking it under Shane’s chin, his thumb brushing Shane’s jaw, and cheek.

“What would you like me to do to you, Shane?” Ilya murmured, his deep voice rumbled through Shane, sending a shiver down his spine. He closed his eyes, licking his lips, sliding his teeth over his bottom lip.

He had never been good at this, asking for what he wanted when it came to sex. But he was fucking twenty-nine years old and this really hot Russian man had taken him home and wanted to fuck him and Jesus Christ, Shane wanted him to fuck him, too.

“Will you fuck me?” Shane murmured back.

“Is that what you want?” Ilya replied, brushing his lips very gently over Shane’s cheekbone.

“Yes.”

“Then yes, I will fuck you. But I have other plans for you first.”

Shane let out a shaky breath, opening his eyes. Fuck. Other plans? Ilya smiled at him, surprisingly warm, and kissed him. Shane blindly set down his glass, fisting his hands in the material of Ilya’s open shirt, and kissed him harder.

Ilya’s hands slid over his waist, to his ass, squeezing at Shane appreciatively, pulling him closer. Shane went, moaning softly into Ilya’s mouth, his hard cock bumping against Ilya’s thigh. Ilya bumped back and Shane shuddered.

“Come on,” Ilya said. “Let us get more comfortable.”

He shifted his hands under Shane’s ass and Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya’s waist, Ilya supporting him as if Shane didn’t weigh two hundred pounds. Shane slid his hands into Ilya’s curls which were thick and soft between his fingers as Ilya walked them through the penthouse.

He paused against a wall, kissing Shane harder, and Shane made a soft noise of pleasure, one hand cupped around Ilya’s cheek, holding him as his tongue slid over Shane’s, and Shane’s glided over Ilya’s teeth.

They made it into the bedroom and Ilya carefully placed Shane on his bed. Shane wasn’t paying attention to the room or anything else except Ilya, who was unclipping a cuff link.

“Here,” Shane said, standing. Ilya paused in his task, his expression surprised, morphing into a warm smile. He held out his arm and Shane stepped close, undoing the first cufflink, then the other. Ilya placed the links on his dresser.

Shane’s eyes met Ilya’s, tugging Ilya’s shirt out of his pants and undoing the three buttons that he had bothered to button, sliding greedy hands into Ilya’s open shirt.

His chest was warm and firm and Shane ran his hands over Ilya’s pecs, feeling the nipple piercing slide under his palm. He thumbed at it, once, which made Ilya suck in a breath, before he shifted Ilya’s shirt off his muscular shoulders, letting the slick material fall to the floor.

Ilya kissed him again, his hands at Shane’s shirt, undoing his buttons, sliding his shirt off. Ilya had moved closer, bending to press kisses to Shane’s neck and shoulder. They reached for one another’s pants, laughing softly against each other’s mouths.

Ilya carefully herded Shane back toward the bed while they stripped off the rest of their clothes. Shane’s legs hit the bed and Ilya pulled away to let Shane crawl into it. The comforter was soft against his skin and he leaned back against the pillows. Ilya stood at the end of the bed still, naked, head tilted to the side, watching Shane.

Shane took a moment to appreciate the man before him. Yeah, Shane really liked the nipple piercing and the bear tattoo was... *a choice* ... but Ilya had an incredible body. He looked like an athlete, with his muscular shoulders and chest, his perfect abs, and trim waist. He had a pretty large scar on his knee though, hard to miss, but it didn’t detract from his attractiveness, at all. Shane liked how big he was. *Everywhere* . Included his dick. Which was hard and uncut, and Shane was so intrigued by it.

He wanted his hands on it. He wanted it in his mouth. His ass. He wanted *Ilya* .

“You are very beautiful,” Ilya said again and Shane blushed deeply.

“So are you,” he replied, breathless. “Stunning.”

He watched Ilya crawl, impossibly elegant, into bed, his body hovering over Shane’s. He dipped his head to kiss Shane again, one hand pressed into Shane’s solar plexus, his long fingers spanning almost the entirety of Shane’s chest.

Oh yeah. He liked this. *A lot* .

“Is your knee okay?” Shane murmured. Ilya paused in his kissing, looking up at Shane, head tilted to the side, curious.

“Fine,” he replied. “An old injury but is not a problem.” Ilya smiled at him and Shane smiled back, distracted once more as Ilya slid down his body, kissing and sucking and licking until he reached Shane’s cock.

He shifted Shane’s legs over his shoulders, kissing the inside of Shane’s thigh, and licked his dick from base to tip, using the entire surface of his tongue.

“Oh god,” Shane whimpered, heat rushing through him, and Ilya hummed, smiling, and kissed the underside of his cock. His eyes met Shane’s as he licked at the head, sucking on it, tonguing Shane’s slit.

Shane gasped, the sensation overwhelming. “Fuck.”

Ilya made an approving noise and Shane slid his hand into those soft, golden-brown curls with the little gray streak, enjoying the texture under his palm, and the way Ilya looked between his legs. He slid his hand down to stroke over the stubble of Ilya’s cheek and the sharp line of his jaw.

He was good at this. And he looked so fucking good doing it.

“How many times can you come in an hour?” Ilya asked casually.

“I don’t know,” Shane replied. “Twice maybe?”

Ilya chuckled warmly, and hummed, “these are my other plans.” He took Shane into his mouth completely and Shane moaned at the sensation, head tossed back. Ilya’s mouth was warm and wet and Shane had not been expecting this level of skill.

The things Ilya was doing with his tongue and his lips and his *teeth*. Shane was closer than he thought possible; which he chalked up to his two years of abstinence, but holy fuck... Ilya was really fucking good with his mouth. Like, *so good*.

Shane looked down, watching the way Ilya’s plush lips wrapped around his dick, how his curls fell into his face, his big hands and strong arms wrapped around Shane’s thighs, his head bobbing as he sucked Shane. It was too much.

“Ah, fuck. Ilya! I’m gonna—”

Ilya doubled down in response, sucking Shane harder, and Shane came hard in his mouth, babbling apologetic nonsense and praise, one hand in Ilya’s hair, the other curled in the soft comforter.

Ilya pulled off of Shane slowly, letting him slip carefully from his mouth. He leaned back a little, uncurling his arms from Shane’s thighs, swiping his thumb over his lips. He chuckled fondly, his thumb rubbing back and forth over Shane’s thigh.

“You are okay?”

Shane sighed, arms flopped to the side. “I’m fucking great.”

Ilya laughed, moving up the bed, and reclining next to Shane. Shane turned his head to look at Ilya. He was on his side, propped up on his elbow, his head resting in the palm of his hand. He looked so effortlessly beautiful, like he’d just come from a European magazine photoshoot. It was blowing Shane’s mind.

Shane sat up and turned on his side and Ilya observed him, blinking slowly, reminding Shane of Eloise. He let his eyes drift from Ilya’s, to his generous mouth, down his long neck, past

the chain and crucifix, the tattoo and nipple piercing, the flat, firm stomach with its perfect belly button and neat trail of hair underneath it, to the very impressive cock.

“Can I...?” Shane asked, his eyes shifting back up to Ilya’s. Ilya smiled lazily at him, laying on his back against the pillows, hands behind his head, which served to accentuate his muscular arms and chest. Shane licked his lips unconsciously.

“Go for it,” Ilya replied generously.

Shane wasn’t feeling as anxious as he had been anticipating, thanks to the pretty excellent blow job. He straddled Ilya, leaning in to kiss him. He took his time, kissing down the long, firm line of his body, pausing briefly to inspect the gold nipple piercing, and the rather gauche bear tattoo.

Shane glanced up, smiling a little at Ilya watching him through half-lidded eyes. He looked back down, running his tongue tentatively over Ilya’s pierced nipple. He got a hiss in return, Ilya pressing up just slightly into him. Shane hummed, using his thumb and forefinger on Ilya’s other nipple, focusing his mouth on the pierced one.

Ilya apparently liked this because Shane got him to moan, softly, his large hand sliding into Shane’s hair. He said something in Russian that sounded encouraging, so Shane kept going, trailing over Ilya’s abs, his lean hips. He had pretty impressive thighs and Shane wondered if he played hockey, or maybe skied?

Shane could think about that later though. He was definitely a bit nervous about this. Shane loved sucking cock, no question, but he wouldn’t consider himself very good at it. Regardless, he might as well just go for it because he really wanted to suck Ilya’s dick and if it ended up being a horrible blow job, he’d probably never see Ilya again.

He took a breath and copied some of Ilya’s actions, licking him from base to tip, then licked the bead of precum from Ilya’s slit. Ilya made an appreciative noise above Shane and he closed his eyes, letting himself just enjoy blowing a really hot guy in his fancy ass penthouse.

He tongued and licked at the head of Ilya’s cock, enjoying his taste, and the silky feel of his skin. He sucked the head into his mouth, using his tongue to roll around it, then slide along the underside of it, then dipping into the slit.

Ilya made a noise like punched out air, his hand tightening in Shane’s hair. He didn’t pull or tug, just holding.

“Fuck, Shane,” Ilya murmured and Shane opened his eyes, looking up at Ilya. He was watching Shane and Shane felt his cheeks heat, but also encouraged him, if Ilya’s smoldering eyes were anything to go by.

He hummed and Ilya bit his lip, before he took Ilya down as far as he could, using his hand to cover the rest. Shane didn’t have much experience with deep throating and he was too nervous to try.

Ilya said some more things in Russian that sounded very sexy and then, “keep going.”

Shane kept going, using just a bit of teeth, his tongue, bobbing his head. He loved doing this. He liked that Ilya was so warm and silky and heavy on his tongue. Shane reached down to tease Ilya’s balls with his fingers and got a loud moan in response. He hummed around him, pleased.

Ilya warned him that he was close and Shane doubled down. He normally didn’t like taking it in his mouth but Ilya was so fucking hot and obviously enjoying himself and Shane was, too. He wanted it and he opened his eyes to watch as Ilya came.

It was maybe the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. Ilya’s head tossed back against the pillow, mouth open, his muscles pulled taut. Shane swallowed around him, enraptured. How was it possible for someone to look that beautiful? He pulled off of Ilya slowly, letting him slide from between his lips, and wiped his fingers over his mouth.

“You killed me,” Ilya murmured. “I’m dead.”

Shane chuckled, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s hip, simply because he could, and crawled back up the bed to lay beside him. Ilya turned his head on the pillow, looking like something out of a fantasy. He was glistening with sweat, his eyelids heavy over his eyes, his expression still blissed out. Shane ran a proprietary hand over his chest, feeling the pleasant catch of his chest hair, the metal of his piercing.

Ilya smiled and rested his hand over Shane’s. Shane had never been so charmed or thoroughly fascinated by a partner before. Even though this wasn’t... anything... he felt like Ilya was giving him all of his attention and focus. It was... nice.

“I am not done with you yet,” he said and Shane blushed and smiled, chuckling softly.

“Okay,” he replied, settling down on the pillow next to Ilya. Ilya rolled to face him, pulling Shane in for a kiss.

The second half of the evening was much slower than the first. They kissed for long, indulgent spans of time, hands roaming, and exploring. Ilya seemed to like Shane’s hair, running his fingers through it, rubbing the strands between them. It was longer than Shane had ever had it before, brushing his shoulders.

He liked Shane’s freckles, too, pressing tiny kisses over the trail of them, which made Shane blush. He had always hated his freckles, feeling self-conscious about them, but he liked that this attractive man liked them.

It felt nice to have this, to enjoy the attention, though Shane was embarrassingly hard in fairly short order. Ilya didn’t seem bothered though. More warmly amused and intrigued.

“Has it been a long time?” he asked, his fingers stroking teasingly over the underside of Shane’s cock.

“Y-yeah,” Shane replied, cheeks going warm.

Ilya hummed, kissing his cheek, the corner of his mouth, then pressed his scruffy cheek against Shane's and murmured in his ear, "we will go slow, yes?"

"Yeah. Okay," Shane sighed and let out a soft gasp as Ilya gently bit his earlobe.

For someone so confident and sexy, who Shane imagined could just demand what he wanted from people in the bedroom, he was surprisingly soothing and gentle. He opened his bedside drawer, pulling out lube and a condom.

He kissed and touched Shane in all the ways Shane liked, as if he had been paying close attention, and even in ways that Shane hadn't anticipated, but that felt good. He positioned himself between Shane's legs, fingers of one hand stroking over Shane's cock, while the other stroked carefully over his hole.

Whatever remaining anxiety Shane had dissipated under Ilya's mindful attention. The combination of his dick and hole being touched at once was surprisingly enjoyable and relaxing. Shane was floating on good feelings, spread out on the luxurious comforter in this enormous bed, allowing himself to be pleased and pampered by this insanely hot Russian man.

Ilya was smiling knowingly at him, dipping his head to take Shane into his mouth, before pressing his slick finger into Shane. He went slowly, working himself inside. Shane had done this before, with his own fingers, and a dildo, which had been okay. He'd had anal sex before, too, though the experience had been pretty lackluster.

Shane took a few deep breaths against the intrusion of Ilya's finger, then gasped and arched as he nudged up against Shane's prostate.

"Oh fuck," Shane gasped. Ilya pulled off of him, smiling widely.

"Good, yes?"

"So good," Shane huffed, biting his bottom lip. Ilya chuckled lowly, continuing to rub up against just the right spot, waves of pleasure washing over Shane, more intense than he'd anticipated.

Ilya's mouth was back on his cock and Shane wasn't sure he would make it to being fucked if Ilya kept this up. He didn't though, pulling off of Shane, and relieving the stimulation on his prostate.

Shane shivered, exhaling long, and Ilya hummed.

"Okay?" he asked, pressing a kiss to the inside of Shane's thigh.

"Yeah. More than okay. Too okay."

Ilya chuckled, giving Shane a few moments before he added a second slick finger, sucking on the head of Shane's cock, working his fingers in and out of Shane carefully, nudging up against his prostate only a bit. He worked Shane open with surprising care and Shane was loose and relaxed when Ilya finally removed his fingers.

“Stroke yourself,” Ilya said, putting on the condom, and uncapping the lube again. Shane did as he was told, watching Ilya stroke his lubed fist over his dick, his eyes meeting Shane’s. Shane bit his lip, full of a desire so strong it surprised him.

He wanted this so badly and it looked like Ilya could tell.

“Turn over,” Ilya rumbled, his voice low and sexy and commanding.

Shane turned over on his hands and knees, ass in the air. Shane felt Ilya’s hands on his ass, squeezing appreciatively.

“I like your ass,” Ilya murmured. Shane felt his face go red but he was smiling.

“Thanks. You can have it.”

Ilya laughed, his hands curved over Shane’s hips, his thumbs rubbing into the small of his back. “Oh, yes?”

“Mmm.”

“Is this what you want?” Ilya hummed, the blunt head of his cock pressing against Shane’s entrance. Shane pressed his ass back, just a bit, heat pooled in his belly.

“Yes,” Shane breathed, not quite begging, but pretty close.

“Then you can have it,” Ilya soothed, pressing slowly and carefully into Shane. Shane trembled a little, mostly from desire, some from discomfort. There was a bit of pain, but mostly just pressure, and the feeling of being impossibly full. Ilya was pretty substantial but Shane loved it.

“Okay?” Ilya asked, one warm hand running over his back slowly, soothingly.

“Yeah,” Shane replied, only slightly strained. “C’mon.”

Ilya pulled out and then pushed back in, deeper this time, and Shane closed his eyes, gasping.

“Yes,” he gasped. “Like that.”

Ilya repeated the motion twice more, before slightly adjusting his hips, and thrust in again, sliding against Shane’s prostate. Shane moaned as pleasure jolted through him.

“Oh fuck yes. Just like that. Don’t stop.”

“I won’t. Don’t fucking worry,” Ilya chuckled. Shane pushed back against him and Ilya thrust into him harder.

The bed shook, the room filled with moans and grunts and the sound of Ilya’s hips against Shane’s ass. Ilya’s fingers were digging in hard to Shane’s hips, enough to leave bruises, and he hauled Shane back against him as he fucked into him.

God. Shane had never been fucked this good before. Was Ilya like... a sex god or something?

Shane could feel his orgasm building at the base of his spine, in his balls. He reached down to stroke himself, mouth open, all kinds of noises passing his lips without him giving one single shit about how he sounded.

“Yes, Shane,” Ilya growled. “Come on.”

Shane was going to come all over this nice, expensive comforter but at that moment, he didn’t care. He stroked himself, swearing as he came, hard, coating his hand and even getting some on his chest.

Ilya grunted behind him, tense and still as he came. The thought of Ilya coming inside of Shane was pretty fucking hot. This whole experience had been pretty fucking hot quite frankly. Shane had probably just had his most successful, enjoyable sexual experience with a guy who would definitely be considered a ten.

Not too shabby for an uptight wet blanket.

Shane felt Ilya lean over him, pressing surprisingly tender kisses to Shane’s shoulders as his dick slipped out of him. Shane sighed, rolling over onto his back, looking up at Ilya.

“Sorry I got come all over your comforter.”

Ilya chuckled. “Is fine. No big deal.” He kissed Shane, then pulled away, getting off the bed, and walking toward what must have been an en suite bathroom.

Shane watched him go, appreciating the long line of him. His strong, muscular back, and ass, and the elegant swagger he had. No one should look that elegant naked. Shane lay on the bed, wondering if he should ask to shower... if he should go home... or if Ilya would kick him out.

He listened to water running and Ilya returned with a washcloth. Without asking, he cleaned Shane up, then kissed the tip of his nose.

“You can stay. If you like,” Ilya said. “No pressure.”

He got up again, tossing the washcloth into a hamper, then picking up his discarded pants. He pulled his underwear out of them, sliding into them, then went to his dresser, pulling out a pack of cigarettes and a fancy gold lighter.

Ilya moved to the window and opened it. He leaned against the wall next to it, placing the cigarette in his mouth and lit it. Shane wasn’t into smokers usually but there was something insanely sexy about watching Ilya take a drag of the cigarette, held between his long fingers, in nothing but his jewelry and underwear, his curls mussed. He looked like a romantic heartthrob from some cheesy romance novel.

“That’s bad for you,” Shane couldn’t help but say.

Ilya gave him a sardonic smile as he blew smoke out of the open window. “Yes. I know.”

Shane rolled over onto his front, propping himself up, and watched Ilya. Ilya watched him back.

“You really are beautiful,” Shane murmured.

“So are you,” Ilya replied. He motioned at his own face, cigarette held between his middle and index fingers. “Your freckles. Your eyes. They are stunning.”

Shane blushed and shook his head. “I hate my freckles.”

Ilya put a hand over his heart. “No! They are gorgeous!”

Shane laughed. “I’m glad you like them.”

Ilya hummed, taking another drag of his cigarette, then put it out, and slid the remainder of it back into the pack. He closed the window.

“I think I should go...” Shane said, shifting to sit up.

Ilya was moving back toward the bed. “You are sure?” he asked, tucking a finger under Shane’s chin. Shane sighed, softly, closing his eyes as Ilya ran the back of his fingers over Shane’s cheek.

“I would like to sleep with you,” Ilya murmured. “Fuck you again in the morning...”

God, the sound of that was amazing. Being swallowed up by Ilya, then more mind blowing sex in the morning. But Shane wasn’t sure he wanted to stay the night with a stranger beyond what they’d already done. Ilya was sexy and cool and very obviously wealthy and way out of Shane’s league, outclassing him in pretty much everything. He wouldn’t be interested in a morning with a neurotic guy like Shane.

Not to mention the cat. He’d never really left her alone for longer than a few hours and he hadn’t left her enough food. So Shane opened his eyes and stood up on his knees, cupping Ilya’s face in his hands. He pulled him down for a kiss, enjoying the thoroughness of it, just on the border of filthy.

“I have to go,” he murmured against Ilya’s plush lips. “Thank you for a wonderful night. I had an incredible time. You were the best birthday present.”

Ilya smiled, carefully sliding Shane’s hair behind his ears. He kissed his mouth again, then kissed Shane’s forehead. “Was my pleasure.”

Shane let Ilya go and got out of bed. He picked up his clothes and went to the bathroom, using it, freshening up, and changing back into his clothes. Ilya was in a pair of joggers now, but no shirt.

“I will walk you out,” he said. Shane smiled at him and nodded.

Ilya walked him to the front door and they kissed again.

“I hope I will see you again,” Ilya murmured.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. He didn’t think Ilya meant it, but the sentiment was sweet, and made him all fuzzy inside. “Me, too.”

Mustering up his courage he said, “can I have your number?”

Ilya blinked at him, then gave Shane a sad, heartbreaking smile that made Shane’s heart clench uncomfortably.

“No. Not this time.”

“Oh,” Shane replied, the sting of rejection making his cheeks burn and eyes sting.

Ilya made a soft noise, cupping Shane’s cheeks, kissing him again. Shane closed his eyes, leaning into it.

“If we meet again,” Ilya murmured against Shane’s mouth. Shane had no idea what the hell that meant but Ilya was looking at him with that same sad, sweet expression, and Shane wasn’t sure what to do with any of that.

“Okay,” he whispered.

Ilya kissed him once more and then opened the door for Shane. He stepped out into the hall.

“Happy Birthday,” Ilya said gently.

“Thank you.”

“Goodnight, Shane.”

“Goodnight, Ilya.”

Shane turned away, leaving Ilya at the door, and went to the elevator.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Shane catches his friends up on the hot hookup he went home with

Chapter Notes

The song for chapter three was Sunshine by WIRA
HAPPY NEW YEAR, Y'ALL!!!

I'm gonna post Chapter 4 on Thursday but this chapter is short and sweet and it's the new year, so here is a lil gift 🍷👉

Shane got home, texted Rose so that she knew he was okay, stripped out of his clothes, and flopped into bed. He stayed awake for almost another hour, staring at his ceiling, thinking about the insanely cool but also endearingly sweet Russian man he had just had ridiculously amazing sex with.

He knew that he was going to be chasing that experience for the rest of his life. There was no way he would meet another hot European man who fucked like a sex god again. Lightning never struck twice.

Shane sighed, closing his eyes. It wasn't a terrible way to cap off turning twenty-nine all things considered. He had stepped outside of his comfort zone and had been greatly rewarded for it. He should probably do it more often, if he was honest.

Not getting Ilya's number still stung a bit. He didn't feel very confident that they would meet again... but the experience itself had been incredible and he would cherish it for the rest of his life.

Eloise hopped on the bed and curled up by his feet. Shane carefully rolled over so as not to disturb her. He closed his eyes and drifted to sleep, dreaming about sparkling hazel eyes, golden-brown curls with a silver streak through him, and a crooked, sexy smile.

When he woke up the next morning, he was hard as granite, and what felt like two seconds away from coming all over his own sheets. He groaned, taking himself in hand, and jerked off to the nearly faded memories of the awesome sex dream he'd been having.

It was sort of embarrassing and he felt like a teenager, but all the endorphins flooding his system helped. He felt like he'd been dormant for so long and now one (ONE!) sexual

encounter had him all hot and bothered.

He huffed, using his shirt to clean himself off, tossing the shirt into his hamper, before he rolled over and fell back to sleep. He woke up much later than usual to Eloise meowing in his face and chuckled, reaching out to pet her.

“I know,” he cooed at her. “I’m sorry I’ve been a neglectful dad.”

Shane cuddled her, listening to her purr as she lay on top of his chest. He rubbed under her chin and scratched behind her ears and petted her head. She was such a sweet cat and he liked having her companionship.

He hadn’t really been in the market for a pet. His mom had suggested he adopt one before he’d officially moved into the house, since it was just him. Shane usually did okay in his own company but having another living thing around to focus on was good for his anxiety.

Eloise had been the last of a surrendered litter of ragdoll cats from a disreputable breeder. Shane had taken one look at her sweet face and gorgeous blue eyes and had fallen completely in love. He’d played with her in the kitten room at the adoption center and they had gotten along so well. She would sit in his lap and just purr as he pet her. He’d taken her home that day.

It took him about a week to rename her. She’d come with a name, Muffin, but he felt that it hadn’t suited her. So he’d observed her and they’d gotten to know one another and he’d begun to see her personality.

She was a friendly cat who loved attention from people but was very independent. A distinguished lady. So he named her Eloise. She seemed to like it quite a bit and Shane did, too.

“Alright. Coffee and breakfast time.”

They went downstairs together and Shane started a pot of coffee, then fed Eloise. He checked his phone, laughing at the text messages that awaited him from his friends, wondering about Shane’s curly haired mystery man.

Shane texted them back in-between pouring coffee, slipping into a sweatshirt, and going to sit out on his back porch in the sun. He didn’t give all the details in the group chat, but enough to satisfy everyone’s curiosity.

Shane: Honestly, he was amazing and we had a great night...

J.J.: Did you get his number?!

Shane: I didn’t

J.J.: 😞

Hayden: He’s Russian? Better hope he’s not in the mob! 🤡

Jackie: oh my god, Hayden...

Shane: It's fine lol His accent was...very sexy

Rose: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Rose: I'm so happy for youuuuuuuuu!!!

Shane got a separate text from Rose.

Rose: DEETS DEETS DEETS DEETS!!!!

Rose: did he have a huge dick?! I bet he did!!!!

Shane: um, I mean...it was proportional? So, like, kinda?

Rose: I am LITERALLY SCREAMING! I'M CALLING YOU!

Shane laughed, drinking his coffee, and a moment later, Rose called him. He picked up. He had to hold the phone away from his ear as she screamed and then started laughing.

"Tell me everything, you slutty slut you!"

Shane laughed and rolled his eyes, leaning back in his deck chair.

"What do I even say?" he chuckled. "We danced and made out and he took me home. We had sex."

"What kind of sex?! Was he good?! Did you like it?! Did you have fun?!"

"Rose," Shane huffed.

"C'mon, Shane! You gotta give me something!"

He sighed fondly, smiling. "We got to his place, which, by the way, was a fucking enormous penthouse. He was a very nice host and made sure I wasn't dehydrated. We made out and went to his room and he, um, blew me, and it was... fucking out of this world."

"Holy shit. Out of this *world*?"

"Yeah. Like. I can't really even describe it. It was really fucking good. I wish I'd taken notes!"

Rose laughed. "Oh my god. You giant competitive nerd."

"Shut up!"

"Okay. So, he blew you and it was a life changing blow job. Then what?"

"Uh, I blew him, and it must have been fine because he seemed to have enjoyed it."

“That’s good! I’m sure you were great!”

Shane felt himself blushed. “I don’t know. I guess.”

“Shane…”

Shane shrugged, even though Rose couldn’t see. Their brief stint into dating had culminated in two pretty terrible sexual experiences. Shane still felt bad about that. Rose had been so patient and kind with him and Shane had managed to have sex with her, but the whole thing had been… a bit of a slog and a struggle. Shane had felt terrible about it. He hadn’t understood why sex with his gorgeous girlfriend was so difficult, only for Rose to posit that… maybe he wasn’t actually into women.

Having come out in his mid-twenties and with limited enjoyable sexual experiences, even less of those with men, Shane doubted his skills. It wasn’t like he had anyone to practice with… and maybe Ilya had just been kind…

“Hey. Shane,” Rose said gently, calling Shane out of his thoughts. “I’m sure he had a great time with you.”

“Yeah. I guess. I mean, we did end up having, like, actual intercourse so…”

Rose giggled. “Like, anal?”

“Yeah.”

“Was it good?” Rose sang and Shane knew she was waggling her eyebrows and grinning wickedly on the other end of the line.

“Yes. It was… so good. The guy was like… a sex god.”

“*A sex god* ? Holy jeez! That good, huh?”

“Fucking incredible, Rose,” Shane replied, laughing in disbelief. “Honestly, I can’t even believe it happened. He was so hot and also really nice? He said I could stay, that he wouldn’t have minded having sex with me again in the morning but… I left.”

“Oh Shane! NO! You should have stayed!!!”

Shane laughed. “Maybe. I don’t know. It was nice. I had a lot of fun. It was all very sexy. The whole thing was mind-blowing and amazing but it was just sex, y’know? I felt like, if I stayed, it would have felt like more. I would have been disappointed.”

Rose made a soft noise. “Yeah. I get that. But still. I think it says a lot that he wanted you to stay. From my experience, guys don’t really do that unless they’re really enjoying your company. Even if it ends up only being a hook up.”

“Sure,” Shane replied, spinning his coffee mug idly on the table. “He said that he hoped he saw me again when I left.”

“That’s sweet!”

“It was. I don’t know if we’ll meet again but I appreciate the sentiment.” He sighed, closing his eyes, and leaned back into his chair again. “Overall, a successful welcoming into the last year of my twenties.”

“Good. I’m so glad.”

They talked for a little while longer about Ilya’s penthouse and his dick and how much fun Shane had had last night. Maybe the most fun he had had in a while. They made plans to get brunch, then ended the call. Shane finished his coffee and went back inside. He was grateful for his friends and he was glad he’d gone out last night and he was glad that he had met Ilya.

Shane washed his coffee mug and looked out the window into his modest backyard. Maybe he’d get back on dating apps. Go on a few dates. See who was out there. He wanted to settle down one day with someone he loved. Raise a family. It might happen a bit later in life for him, but that was okay.

And sometimes life was weird.

Maybe he and Ilya *would* see each other again. Maybe it would be the right guy, right time, right place. Shane didn’t want to romanticize anything too much or get his hopes up. Things tended not to go well for him when he was too hopeful.

He placed his mug into the drying rack and dried his hands on a dishtowel. He should schedule a session with his therapist, talk about his experience, and getting back into dating. That would be good. A goal. Something solid he could work on.

He made a mental note to do that, then headed upstairs to shower.

It would be a relaxing day today.

Over the course of the week, Shane couldn’t get his mind off of Ilya and their amazing hook up. Whenever he wasn’t preoccupied with work or coaching, he was thinking about joyful hazel eyes and a sexy crooked smile and hard muscles and of strong hands holding his hips as he was entered and filled...

The marks Ilya had left on his hips had faded and he found that he missed them. He went to bed every night and dreamed about that incredible evening, waking up hard, and wanting. He’d used the dildo he had more times in that week than he had in the three years since he’d bought it.

He felt so silly, all hung up about this guy that he had slept with once. A complete and total stranger! He shouldn’t have been feeling this way but he couldn’t help it. He’d been out of the game for so long and the one time he got back in, he had to be ruined by this one guy.

A perfect guy.

A gorgeous, sexy, confident, European guy who knew how to fuck.

How the hell was Shane ever going to top that? He had literally peaked! It was only downhill from here!

Shane debated the merits of getting on an app and finding someone to hook up with or maybe going out again, taking someone home with him. Or maybe to a hotel? He still wasn't sure if he wanted strangers knowing where he lived.

He texted Rose about it, who was supportive and encouraging. He liked the way she spun it. That Ilya had sort of shaken him up a bit, given him the boost he needed to get back out there. She reminded him that he was an attractive, successful guy and could bag anyone he wanted to. And he never knew! Maybe Ilya would come his way again... but Shane wasn't sure he wanted to hold out hope for that.

He ultimately decided that he would go out again. Maybe to the same club. Or a different spot, mix things up a bit. He would see if he met someone and if he didn't, that was okay, too. It would happen when it happened. He couldn't rush it but he had to at least try.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Ilya can't stop thinking about Shane

Chapter Notes

A note, just in case this isn't for you: Ilya and Svetlana have on page sex in this chapter. It starts at “What are you hiding from me?” and ends at Later, they stood on Ilya’s terrace, smoking, and drinking the good vodka.

The music for this chapter was Feeling This by Blink-182

I wish there were more Russian diminutives in canon, so I used them a bunch here!

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

Ilya stared out the window of his father’s driver’s car. He didn’t like being driven around by Sergei but his father had insisted and it wasn’t up to Ilya to refuse his father’s orders. He watched the city without really seeing it, caught up in his own thoughts.

He should have been thinking about the business meeting he had just attended in his father’s stead, but instead he was thinking about silky black hair under his fingertips, dark, earnest eyes that crinkled with a smile, freckles splashed against pink cheeks, an adorable nose, and pretty pink lips.

Ilya had been thinking about Shane for the last two weeks. He had gone out and taken a few gorgeous women home over that time, which had been fun but Ilya’s thoughts kept coming back to Shane, no matter how he tried to distract himself or turn his attention elsewhere. Ilya had several notebooks that had various sketches and doodles of Shane in them.

He should have been embarrassed, but if anything, he was intrigued. Ilya had started having sex when he was fourteen years old. Sex and hockey had been his coping skills after his mother had died; needing something, anything, to distract him from his anger and grief and loneliness at the loss of the only person he felt had ever loved him.

It had been women at first, then his coach’s son, and a few other men after that. Ilya was very comfortable with his bisexuality, feeling rather evolved for finding both men and women attractive. It usually took a lot for Ilya to be truly interested in *pursuing* someone. He was

mostly just looking for sex and not much else, so he didn't know exactly what it was about Shane that he couldn't quite shake.

Sex was just sex for Ilya... but this had felt like *more*. Earth-shattering in a way he hadn't expected or anticipated.

"Iliushenka."

Ilya came back to himself and turned, looking at the person sitting in the backseat next to him.

"Mm?"

Svetlana Vetrova raised one perfectly sculpted pale eyebrow at him in question, her vivid blue eyes were boring into his, her perfect lips covered with immaculate red lipstick were set in a firm line. They didn't have to speak.

What the fuck is going on with you?

He waved his hand dismissively at her and turned back toward the window. Svetlana was one of his oldest and most trusted friends. She was technically his "assistant" but she was pretty much his right hand in all matters related to the "family business."

They also fucked sometimes.

Svetlana was perhaps the only person Ilya felt that he could trust within the confines of his treacherous family. Ilya was the younger of two sons. His older brother, Andrei, was their father's favorite.

Self-absorbed, petty, lacking any form of self-control, and vapid, Andrei was set to inherit almost everything their father had created as the *Avtorit* under Nikolai Popov, the *Pakhan* of the Russian Mafia.

Ilya did not want any part of his father's "empire." He couldn't lie in that he certainly reaped some benefits as being the son of a *Brigadier*, but this was not the life he was supposed to have. Ilya was supposed to have played in the NHL. He had been scouted. Had excelled through camps and had won Gold for Russia in the World Juniors. Hockey was supposed to have been his salvation; delivering him from Russia, from his family, so he could leave it all behind.

And then there had been the car accident. Ilya's knee had been completely destroyed. He had needed three surgeries and the only reason he could walk without a limp was because he'd been young enough to bounce back.

Any thoughts of going to the NHL were gone. His recovery had taken too long and any sort of trauma to his knee would leave him unable to walk or use his leg properly.

He had had no choice but to join his father and brother, being known as the promiscuous, "useless" second son of Grigori Rozanov. The Charity Case. In eternal mourning for his mother.

Ah, but he had been such a promising hockey player...

The car stopped in front of his building. Ilya thanked Sergei and got out of the car. He came around the other side to open the door for Svetlana, offering her his hand. She took it, then released him, walking ahead of him at a steady clip in her heels. He followed after her.

They went up to Ilya's penthouse, quiet in the elevator. They didn't speak until they had entered the penthouse.

"What the fuck is going on?" she asked him, in her usual blunt manner, one hand on her hip, her white blonde hair tied up in a high ponytail, draped over her shoulder.

Ilya bent down to greet Anya, his two year old dog, as she came to greet him. She was a magnificent, medium-sized mutt of unknown origin, with long hair that was a mix of brown, white, and gray. She always looked like she was smiling and Ilya adored her.

"Ilya," Svetlana said impatiently. He knew he was wearing on her nerves and she was close to snapping. Rightfully so.

Ilya looked at Svetlana, rubbing his hands against Anya's cheeks. He sighed.

"Nothing."

"Don't bullshit me with *nothing*."

Ilya released Anya with a kiss to the top of her soft head and looked at Svetlana. She was one of the smartest people he'd ever met and never tolerated his bullshit. Funny as hell. Dry and sardonic. She was beautiful, too. Very sexy. She had a perfect body with a gorgeous pair of tits, and flawless skin. Ilya liked looking at her. He liked having sex with her.

Their relationship was purely transactional on that level. Stress-relief. A good time on occasion.

He trusted her. Would kill for her. Because she was a friend. Maybe his only friend. But he wasn't sure if he could tell her this. Not yet.

"Sveta," he said, moving closer to her. Her eyes followed him as he approached, but she didn't move away as he toyed with the ends of her soft hair.

"What are you hiding from me?" she whispered, not unkindly, but her eyes flashed a warning.

He shook his head and kissed her. It was a distraction, a deflection. He didn't want to think and he didn't want her to think and it was just easier this way. She kissed him back, angry and forceful. He untucked her blouse from her skirt while she slid off her light coat, dropping it to the floor. He untied the bow at her throat and pulled her blouse up and off.

He used one hand to unclip her bra, unzipping her skirt, only pausing to pull off his now unbuttoned shirt, while she worked on his pants. She slid out of her pantyhose, kicking off

her heels. He lifted her, easily, pressing her against the wall, her long legs around his waist as they kissed.

She was warm and strong.

He kissed her neck, her collarbones, the tops of her breasts, before carrying her into the kitchen, and laying her on the island. They kissed messily, Svetlana's long, red lacquered nails dug into Ilya's back, and he welcomed the bite of pain.

He buried his face in her chest, both hands kneading her tits, thumbs and forefingers playing with her nipples until they were hard points, then he sucked one into his mouth. Svetlana moaned and he busied himself with that until she was panting.

He kissed down her flat stomach, over the rose tattoo on her hip. She was wet through her underwear, which pleased him, and he pressed his tongue flat against her through the fabric, teasing. Her hand fisted in his hair, long legs dangling off the island.

Ilya reached up, fingers sliding into the fabric of her panties, pulling them down and off, tossing them aside. He pressed his mouth against the warm, slick folds of her pussy, enjoying the warmth of her, the taste.

This was familiar. He could do this, turning off his brain, enjoying it simply for what it was.

He licked at her, hands curved around her ribs as he ate her out, focusing on her clit, occasionally pushing his tongue into her. He could hear her moaning, gasping. Her hand gripped in his hair and he knew she was close. He doubled down, reaching one hand up to tease a nipple between his thumb and index finger.

"Ilya," she breathed and he could feel the way she shook and shivered under him, heard her cut off moan as she came under his tongue.

He kissed the inside of her thigh and stood up. She lay on the counter, breathing hard. He smoothed his thumb over her hip in soothing little circles, leaned over her to kiss her shoulder, the underside of her jaw. She sat up eventually, hopping off the counter, and pushed him toward the wall. His back hit it hard.

She slid to her knees and blew him, but Ilya's mind was back in that fucking club.

"Fuck," he murmured under his breath.

Later, they stood on Ilya's terrace, smoking, and drinking the good vodka.

"You're not going to tell me," Svetlana said, tapping her ashes into one of Ilya's crystal ashtrays.

"There's nothing to tell," he replied. Not yet anyway. Or maybe not at all. Ever.

She looked at him. "Well whatever it is. Figure it out. I don't appreciate being used."

Ilya looked back at her. "I'm sorry," he said, honestly. "That wasn't my intention."

Svetlana smiled small. "I know. Do better."

Ilya sighed and took a long drag from his cigarette. "I will." He meant it, too. He needed to get his shit together. Whatever was going on with this Shane guy couldn't be a thing. It was impossible.

The chances of seeing him again were slim to none. He had to give that up and move on. Then he needed to figure out what the fuck he was going to do about the latest issues with Boris and Oleg. He might have to contact Sasha and Mikhail... have them break a few kneecaps.

And then he had to talk to his father.

Much, much later, Ilya stared at the canvas in front of him, covered in dark slashes of black and red and gray paint. He was angry.

Ilya hated his father.

He hated his brother, too.

Hell, his stepmother as well.

Grigori Rozanov had never been a nice man. An old man married to a young woman who was forced to bear his children, a woman who he had hated and abused. Who hated his younger son, for looking like his mother, for not being able to do anything right.

Ilya's meeting with his father had not gone well, but any meetings they had rarely did. It didn't help that his father wasn't well. Andrei refused to acknowledge it but it was becoming more and more obvious.

Lapses in memory. Lapses in judgment. Anger outbursts that were far outside the normal purview of their father's rage. And it was only getting worse.

Alzheimer's, the doctor had said.

Ilya sat back on the lone stool in his studio, running his hands through his mop of curls. He wanted a cigarette. He wanted to fuck someone. He wanted to break something. He dug the heels of his hands into his eye sockets and tried to breathe.

There were some good things in his life, he supposed. His cars, for one. Anya. Art. Hockey. Sex.

Shane.

He sighed, perching his elbows on his knees, palms pressed together, his hands pressed to his lips.

Fucking *Shane* . With his stupid hair and stupid freckles and stupid sweet face. Ilya wished he had stayed that night. He wished he had given Shane his number. He should have. He wanted to see him again. This was so unlike him, feeling so attached to a hook up.

Ilya had had people who he had sex with on the regular in different cities he traveled to and he had never felt this way about any of them. He didn't even know this guy and yet he couldn't stop thinking about him.

It was starting to get annoying. Mostly because Ilya couldn't afford to become attached to anyone. He didn't want to bring people into this life, with its secrets and paranoia and violence.

Ilya couldn't be with anyone until he was rid of his family and he didn't think he ever would be. Inevitably, he would marry a nice Russian girl, maybe Svetlana, maybe someone his father or brother forced on him. Have some kids. Continue to do what he was doing until he died or was murdered or arrested.

He thought about his mother. And himself, a twelve year old boy experiencing death for the first time. An accident his father had said. No. She'd taken her own life. That was always an option, of course but...

Ilya stood up and went to his work bench, covered in paints and brushes and charcoal and sketch pads. He found his cigarettes and lit one. He savored the drag, the nicotine hitting his system. He closed his eyes.

Allowing his mind to wander, thinking about a future with Shane.

Maybe they met again on the street, by accident. Shane passing him by, brushing up against Ilya. Looking at one another, smiling at recognizing the other. Ilya would ask him to lunch and he would accept.

Ilya would wine and dine him. Buy him fancy gifts and clothes, take him on beautiful vacations around the world. Ilya would propose, extravagantly, by a lake, somewhere gorgeous, surrounded by thousands of candles, and Shane would say yes.

They would find a nice house and have some kids and maybe get another dog. It would be a happy, peaceful life, full of love and joy. Impossible... but enjoyable to fantasize about...

Ilya opened his eyes, stamping out his cigarette.

He could never have that life. It was enough to also find men attractive and fuck them. It would be another thing entirely to marry one and start a family.

But didn't he deserve to be happy?

Didn't he deserve to have some kind of life that he wanted for himself, that wasn't dictated by his father or fear or whatever?

Maybe so... but there was no guarantee that he would ever meet Shane again. There were plenty of other people out there that he could set his eyes on and pursue, though.

It had been almost three weeks. He could go out tonight. If someone caught his eye, he could take them home, and if no one did, that was okay, too. He would always have to live his life shackled to his family but when had that ever stopped him?

He loved things when they were dangerous. That was his favorite thing.

Fuck it.

It wasn't like he had any more of a reputation to sully within his family. He was already the black sheep. It couldn't get any worse. He was just "being himself." Might as well ride that for as long as he could.

Ilya sat on a plush velvet couch on one of the raised platforms that looked out over the bar and dancefloor below of *The Velvet Room*, a well-established gay club in the area. He had a martini glass in one hand, his arms spread out over the back of the couch. He was a little drunk, watching as waves of people walked past him. Individual people, couples, groups.

Everyone was gorgeous and interesting but not quite enough to catch his eye. That was okay though. He was having fun observing. A few people had approached him and he had enjoyed having one very pretty man with green eyes lined in black sit in his lap and kiss him, before he'd gone off to go dance with friends.

Now Ilya was alone, sipping his martini and watching the dancefloor. It was probably getting late and it wouldn't be a bad idea to go home, he supposed. He'd been at the club for at least two hours, dancing for half, then lounging and drinking for the other.

Not a bad night overall, even if he wasn't taking anyone home. He sighed, standing up from the couch, and finished off his martini. He glanced around for a place to put his empty glass and stopped in his tracks.

Ilya did a double take and moved closer to the railing that separated the seating from the dancefloor and the bar off to the side. He stared. Standing in the corner, looking awkward and uncomfortable, but undeniably hot, was *Shane*.

He wore a light gray linen shirt that was open at the collar, revealing the hollow of his throat and his collarbones. The shirt stretched across his broad shoulders and the cuffed short sleeves accentuated the bulge of his biceps. He was wearing stylish looking black pants, his long hair tucked adorably behind his ear on one side.

Christ, he looks so fucking good.

Ilya's heart had started thumping against his ribcage, his whole body going warm, adrenaline sweeping through him at the sight of Shane, *here*. Ilya watched as someone started chatting Shane up. He looked like a deer in headlights, which made Ilya's heart clench weirdly at how cute that was. Shane seemed like he needed rescuing and Ilya was already making his way through the crowd to get to him.

Ilya came up behind the man who was attempting to flirt with Shane and Ilya watched as Shane noticed him, doing a double take of his own, his dark eyes going wide, a little smile breaking out on his face.

“I found you,” Ilya said, the man standing between them looking over his shoulder.

“Hey! What the—”

Ilya didn’t let him finish, pushing him aside, his eyes only for Shane. Shane was looking right back. Nothing else existed. It was just them.

“Ilya!” Shane exclaimed, smiling back at him. “You found me.”

Ilya grinned. “You are here.”

Shane laughed, his face all adorably scrunched, and Ilya wanted to devour him. “Yeah,” Shane breathed. “So are you.”

Ilya nodded. It was fate. It was fucking *fate* . Shane was here! When Ilya had thought he would never see him again... when he was about to go home... alone. He reached for him, resting his hands on Shane’s hips.

“You look really fucking good,” Ilya said, his body touching Shane’s body wherever he was able. Shane looked up at him with his wide, dark eyes, and his pretty pink lips parted.

“So do you,” Shane replied. “Like. *So good* .”

Ilya grinned, leaning down, the tip of his nose touching Shane’s, and it was like a tiny electric spark between them. “Can I kiss you?”

“Yes,” Shane breathed, his eyes on Ilya’s mouth. “Please.”

Ilya kissed him and it was like a revelation. He cupped Shane’s face in his hands and Shane’s arms wrapped around him. Ilya kissed him just on the right side of filthy, wanting Shane to feel what he was feeling.

Ilya was elated and fucking turned on, maybe more than he’d ever experienced when it came to hooking up. It was like a little cloud had been following him all day and seeing Shane was like the sun finally breaking through.

They pulled apart, one of Shane’s hands curled into the opaque material of Ilya’s shirt, the other resting on Ilya’s lower back. Ilya stroked his thumbs over Shane’s freckles, watching as Shane opened his eyes.

“Can I take you home?” Ilya asked.

Shane let out a surprised and delighted laugh, grinning. “Yeah. Okay. I just have to close my tab...”

“Okay,” Ilya chuckled, taking Shane’s hand, and Shane squeezed it.

Shane closed out and they left the club, stepping out into the cool night air. Ilya got them a car and they slid into the backseat. Shane settled next to him and Ilya watched him, unable to look away. He liked looking at the sharp line of his jaw, the straight slope of his nose.

Shane turned to look at him, smiling, shy and blushing. Ilya pressed a long kiss to his cheek, nipping lightly at Shane's ear before he pulled away, unable to help himself. Shane's ears were adorable when they were all pink.

Shane took Ilya's hand, threading their fingers, and held Ilya's hand against his warm thigh as the car made its journey toward Ilya's apartment building.

Chapter End Notes

Iliushenka - diminutive form of Ilya

Sveta - diminutive form of Svetlana

Bratva - The Russian Mafia

Pakhan - Mob Boss

Avtoritet/Brigadier - Captain under the Boss (Pakhan)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane head back to Ilya's penthouse

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Antibodies - LP Giobbi Remix by Tensnake, Cara Melin, LP Giobbi

They were kissing in the elevator, Ilya making a meal of Shane's neck, smiling as Shane giggled when Ilya hit a particularly ticklish spot. It was cute. *Shane* was cute. Ilya was all warm and fluttery inside, unable to get enough of Shane's giggles. He pulled away to briefly kiss Shane's mouth, remembering a very particular detail that he hadn't had to worry about the last time Shane had come over.

"Oh," he breathed. "I have a dog. Do you like dogs?"

Shane blinked at him, his eyes a bit glazed. He blinked, refocusing. He looked at Ilya and smiled a little.

"Sure," he chuckled. Ilya grinned and kissed him again before the elevator arrived at his floor. They stepped out and Ilya led him to the door, taking his hand, curling his fingers around Shane's. He opened the door and Anya came running, her tail wagging, looking very excited to see Ilya.

Anya was great with people. Ilya had never had any issues when introducing her to others, though she definitely had a sense for "good" people and "bad" people, as she was not a particular fan of Andrei, though they had only met once.

She was his barometer for individuals in general. If Anya liked you and you were good to her, then you were welcome within Ilya's inner circle.

"Yes, yes. Hello, sweet girl," Ilya cooed at her in English. He would say her first language, much like his, was Russian, but she understood some English. He stroked her soft coat, rubbing her ears between his thumbs and index fingers.

"Shane, this is Anya. Anya, this is Shane."

Shane crouched down, holding out a hand for Anya to sniff. She did, curiously, then smiled her doggy smile at Shane and immediately went to lick his face. Shane laughed and Ilya gently tugged her back, pleased to see that she liked him right away.

“Sorry,” he said. “She likes people.”

“It’s okay,” Shane replied, chuckling. “She’s cute.”

“She is the best.”

“Hi, Anya,” Shane said, stroking a hand over her head. “It’s nice to meet you. Your dad and I are gonna go have sex now.”

Ilya barked out a laugh, resting his hand on his chest. “Wow! So forward!”

Shane’s cheeks and ears were red and Ilya wanted to bite them. Shane stood, lifting self-conscious eyes to Ilya and Ilya moved closer, hooking his fingers into two of the belt loops of Shane’s pants.

“You are hot.”

Shane smiled sweetly and Ilya kissed him hungrily. Anya seemed to get the hint that her dad and his new friend were busy, so she went to her bed, finding a toy to chew on. That probably wouldn’t last long, but Ilya was hopeful that he could fuck Shane before Anya noticed that she was being left out.

Ilya led Shane through the penthouse from the front door, stopping every so often to push him against a wall, his thigh between Shane’s legs. They kissed and Ilya worked at the buttons of Shane’s shirt, and Shane rubbed against his thigh, which Ilya liked. He appreciated how eager Shane seemed.

Ilya managed to get Shane’s shirt unbuttoned, sliding his hands greedily against warm, smooth skin, pushing the shirt off Shane’s broad shoulders, and discarding it on the floor. He used his foot to close the bedroom door, turning so Shane was pressed against it, and went to work on his pants.

Shane was so lovely; with his perfect skin and big, onyx eyes, adorable freckles, and broad shoulders.

Shane’s hands were wandering, tugging at Ilya’s clothes, finding their way underneath to touch skin. Ilya hummed as Shane’s hands slid up from Ilya’s abs to his chest, bunching Ilya’s shirt up to his armpits. He liked Shane’s hands on him, the exploratory touch, hesitant but curious.

They broke their kiss so Ilya could take his shirt off, then they were kissing again, pulled together like magnets. Ilya loved kissing Shane; his lips were so soft and he gave as good as he got. Ilya nipped his bottom lip, pulled away, and sank to his knees. He pulled Shane’s pants down with him, and gave him the chance to step out of them. He pressed kisses to

Shane's pretty impressive abs, taking his time, enjoying the warmth of him, the smoothness of his skin, before he nuzzled his face against Shane's dick through his underwear.

Shane's hand slid into Ilya's curls and Ilya hummed, mouthing at Shane through his briefs, tracing the outline of Shane's dick through the cloth, dipping his head to mouth at his balls.

"Holy shit that's amazing," Shane breathed and Ilya smiled to himself. He was just getting started.

Ilya was under the impression that Shane didn't get out much or have a lot of sex. He felt sort of bad for the guy, that he hadn't had a partner who had paid attention before, but Ilya was more than happy to do that.

He prided himself in being an exceptional lover. Whoever he was with deserved to have their pleasure prioritized and it turned him on to know that his partners were enjoying themselves. He loved giving people what they wanted, especially if he worked them up to begging. He bet he could make Shane beg. He bet Shane would like that.

Ilya pulled away to slip his fingers into the waistband of Shane's underwear and pull them down. Shane stepped out of them and kicked them away, his cock bobbing in front of Ilya's face. Ilya liked Shane's cock. It was neat and tidy and perfectly shaped. He slid his hands up Shane's muscular thighs, over his ass, curling his hands around Shane's hips, and licked him from base to tip.

Shane hissed and Ilya raised his eyes to look at him, smiling a little as he pressed a kiss to the already damp tip of Shane's cock. Shane was looking down at him through lust-drunk eyes, kiss swollen lips slightly parted. Ilya winked at him, before taking Shane into his mouth.

He was really quite beautiful. Ilya particularly liked his freckles. But what he liked more was how eager Shane was, perhaps even a little impatient. He pressed his hips forward and Ilya gripped him a little tighter, stilling him, taking him into his throat. Shane moaned, his head thumping back against the door, and Ilya hummed around him.

"Fuck. God, Ilya. You're so good with your mouth."

Oh. He knew it and he was just warming up.

He wasn't going to make Shane come like this. He would tease him, get him all worked up, then make him beg so nicely for Ilya's cock. Ilya wouldn't deny him, of course, he just wanted to see what would happen. He wanted to *learn* Shane. Ilya suspected he was a bit feisty, maybe sort of kinky, without even knowing it.

The quiet ones often were, in his experience anyway.

He smiled internally. He was having fucking fun and it had been a long time since he had felt that way. He worked Shane carefully, listening to his sweet little noises, stroking his hands over his firm stomach, dragging one down to cup his balls and roll them in his hand.

“Oh shit,” Shane gasped and Ilya kept going, teasing his fingers against them, then back to stroke along his perineum. Shane swore and groaned, his finger tight in Ilya’s hair, but just gripping, not controlling.

Ilya let Shane slowly slip from his mouth, looking up, watching the way Shane’s head was pressed against the door, his chest rising and falling rapidly. He was stunning and Ilya was fucking hot for him. Pleasure seemed to make him and Ilya licked his lips hungrily. He wanted Shane every way he could get him.

He stood up and Shane’s eyes opened, looking at him through his long, dark lashes.

“On the bed,” he instructed, sliding his finger along Shane’s jaw. Shane nodded once and went, laying on his back, arranging himself to look as enticing as possible, which Ilya very much liked. He looked like something out of a porno mag, elegantly spread out, completely on display.

“You are beautiful,” he said again, meaning it, and Shane smiled, turning his head away, laughing softly.

Ilya entertained a brief fantasy of having Shane open himself up, putting on a show for Ilya, before Ilya fucked him. But he could revisit that another time. Shane turned his head back toward him.

“You’re beautiful, too.”

Ilya smiled, bowing his head a little at the compliment as he took off the rest of his clothes, and crawled into bed with Shane, leaning over him.

“How would you like it?” Ilya asked, running the tips of his fingers from Shane’s neck, just under his jaw, all the way down to his solar plexus. Shane shivered under his touch.

“Like this?” he replied. “I want to, um, look at you.”

Ilya’s smile softened at the sweetness of that and he nodded, leaning down to kiss between Shane’s pecs, then gently tugged at a nipple with his teeth, before he leaned away to grab lube and a condom.

He kissed Shane again, because he could, and because he liked kissing him. He liked how responsive Shane was, how perfectly he opened for Ilya. He appreciated it when Shane reached up, stroking his hand over Ilya’s cock. Ilya let him for a few moments, enjoying the touch, the added heat that settled in his stomach, before he leaned back on his heels.

They readjusted a bit so Ilya could open Shane up and kiss the insides of his thighs and suck on his balls and dick a little at the same time. He went slow, since Shane seemed a bit tense, feeling him relax, lost in the moment.

Ilya stroked his prostate, working Shane up, watching the way he pressed down against Ilya’s fingers, his hands curled into the comforter.

“Ah—! Fuck...Ilya. If you don’t fuck me now...”

Ilya smiled and hummed. “Just a little more,” he cooed. “I think you can take it.”

Shane panted and whined and Ilya loved the way he sounded. It made electricity zip down his spine, pleased to know that he was making Shane feel good.

“Please,” Shane huffed. “I want you inside me.”

Ilya growled, nipping at the delicate skin of the inside of Shane’s thigh.

“Yes?”

“Yes. Fuck. *Please*, Ilya.”

God, the begging was so delicious and Shane was feisty, too, just as anticipated. Ilya licked at the head of Shane’s cock once, stopping the teasing torture, and kissed Shane’s thigh. He liked this. And he liked that a little pool of precome had gathered on Shane’s stomach. That was promising.

Ilya grabbed the condom and slid it on, slicking himself up, leaning over Shane once more. Shane, surprising Ilya, put his legs on Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya’s eyebrow twitched up.

“Do you like it deep?” he asked.

Shane nodded. “Hard, too,” he replied, biting his bottom lip, cheeks staining pink, and not from exertion. “I’m very flexible.”

“Oh really?” Ilya murmured, smirking, intrigued. He used one hand to guide himself in, slowly pressing into Shane. He was so warm and tight and welcoming. Ilya loved this feeling, being clutched like this, welcomed in. Shane felt so fucking good around him and Ilya felt... lucky. Like being offered a glimpse into something that not many people got to see.

He started a tentative rhythm, watching Shane’s face, his eyes half-lidded, lips parted. He wanted to be sure Shane was comfortable before he tested out his flexibility. A few more thrusts and Ilya rested his hands on Shane’s thighs, just under his knees, bending him.

Ilya stopped when Shane was basically bent in half, impressed by his flexibility.

“Do you do yoga?” Ilya asked.

Shane nodded, biting his lip hard, his eyes wide and shiny.

“Yeah,” he managed to say. “All the time.”

“Thank your yoga instructor for me,” Ilya replied, pulling out and then pressing back into Shane, making him moan. Ilya thrust harder into Shane, his eyes rolling closed, mouth hanging open.

“Yes, yeah, fuck,” Shane panted. Ilya grinned and kept going, adjusting his hips. He really was fucking deep and it felt incredible. He must have hit the right spot because Shane’s body bowed and he moaned long and loud. Ilya grinned.

“Yes. Perfect,” he murmured.

“Harder,” Shane huffed. “God, that's so good. Just like that.”

Ilya went harder, jackhammering into Shane, listening to the perfect noises he made, looking at his perfect, blissed out face, loving the way his body felt, taking Ilya like he was made for him. It wouldn't take much more for Ilya to come like this. He could normally go for far longer but there was just something about Shane...

“Fuck, shit, I'm so close,” Shane whined, a hand wrapping around his cock, stroking fast and hard.

“Let me see it,” Ilya grunted. “Come for me.”

Shane made a choked off noise, body arching as he came all over his stomach and chest and hand, spasming around Ilya as he did. It didn't take more than a few thrusts for Ilya to come to, forcing his eyes open to watch Shane, little whimpers pulled from him as aftershocks rocked his body.

They stayed frozen in place for a moment, the room filled with the sounds of their panting. Shane had his arms tossed over his head, his hair strewn across the pillow, his face flushed.

“Good?” Ilya asked, though he was pretty sure he knew the answer.

“Fucking great,” Shane replied with a smile.

Ilya smiled back and kissed his ankle. “Good.”

He pulled out of Shane carefully and lay next to him, enjoying the post-coital bliss rolling over him, before he felt the bed move. He opened his eyes and watched Shane get out of bed, walking toward the bathroom. Ilya didn't say anything, just observed.

Shane disappeared into the bathroom and Ilya smiled as he listened to the sound of running water. Ilya rolled off the condom and tossed it in the bin near his dresser before he slid back into bed, leaning against the headboard.

Shane came out of the bathroom, shy and uncertain, and Ilya beckoned him closer. He came, sitting next to Ilya, and Ilya reached out to brush his hair behind his ear, thumbing at his cheekbone gently.

“Will you stay?” he asked, trying not to let his own hopefulness show on his face.

Shane blinked at him. “Okay.”

Ilya smiled crookedly. “Good.” He rolled onto his side, excited by the prospect of an entire night and possibly an entire morning with Shane. There were so many things he wanted to try and explore. He wanted to see what Shane was willing to give him.

Shane settled on the bed next to him, laying on his side, facing Ilya.

“You have never had good sex before,” Ilya observed.

Shane’s brows furrowed, his face scrunched up in confusion. It was ridiculously adorable. Ilya loved it. “Uh, excuse me?”

“You have not had good partners. They were not good at sex,” Ilya continued. Of this, he was certain. It didn’t seem like Shane was used to being treated well or really getting off properly when he was with someone and Ilya imagined he didn’t do much for himself when he was alone.

Shane seemed a bit defensive when he replied, “they were... *fine* .”

Ilya hummed. *Only fine* was not acceptable. He smirked.

“Yes, but now you are having *great* sex.”

Shane narrowed his eyes at Ilya and Ilya found himself greatly enjoying the wide array of facial expressions he was experiencing right now. It was fascinating and entertaining!

“Are you fishing for a compliment?” Shane asked.

Ilya shook his head and waved his hand dismissively. “No. I know I am very good in bed. Best blow job you have ever had, yes? Probably best fucking down also.”

Of this, Ilya was also certain, and if Shane’s blush, and wide eyes were anything to go by, he thought so, too. Ilya laughed, though it wasn’t unkind.

“There is more where that came from, sweetheart. I promise.”

Shane’s eyes had narrowed again, watching Ilya. “You sure are talking a big game. You’re going to have to put your money where your mouth is.”

Ilya’s smile turned sly. Challenging. “Oh, do not worry. I will.”

Shane tilted his chin up. “Don’t hold back.”

Ilya leaned in, his mouth hovering near Shane’s, a hair’s breadth apart. “I won’t.”

Shane made a soft noise and Ilya tilted his head to kiss him when Anya started barking on the other side of the closed bedroom door. Ilya blinked, turning toward the door, caught between the urge to comfort his dog, but also... Shane was in his bed.

Shane laughed. “You can go get her,” he said. Ilya turned to look at him. “I don’t mind. It’s okay.”

Ilya smiled, relieved, and kissed Shane quickly, before he got out of bed. He grabbed his underwear and tugged it on before opening the door.

“Any! Sweet girl! What is wrong? Are you lonely?”

Anya whined and barked, hopping up, pressing her paws against Ilya's thigh. He knew he should be more disciplined with her but she was like his child and he couldn't help spoiling her. He lifted her up into his arms, her head cradled on his bicep, and he kissed her cute little puppy face.

Shane had put his underwear back on and was sitting on the bed, watching Ilya and Anya with an expression that could only be described as fond.

"Are you hungry?" Ilya asked Shane.

Shane considered the question for a moment before he said, "yeah. A little."

"Do you like tuna melts?"

Shane smiled. "You want to make me a tuna melt?"

Ilya shrugged as best he could with a dog in his arms. "I'm making one for me. I can make two."

Ilya put Anya down and the three of them went into the kitchen. Shane sat at Ilya's kitchen island and Ilya opened his fridge and cabinets, pulling out ingredients.

"Anything to drink?" he asked.

"Um, just water is fine."

Ilya gave Shane a glass of water, then went about making the tuna melts. Shane was watching him, which Ilya enjoyed. He liked the attention, especially from Shane. He didn't think making tuna melts would be very sexy, but he could try.

He mixed the tuna in a bowl with some mayonnaise and lemon. He covered four baguette slices with the tuna, then topped them with cheddar cheese. Ilya looked up at Shane and winked at him, which made Shane laugh.

He put the sandwiches into the oven when they were done and then his phone started ringing. Ilya's brows pinched together.

"One second," he said to Shane, retrieving his phone, looking at the caller ID. "I have to take this."

Shane nodded and watched as Ilya left the kitchen. Ilya scowled at his phone, annoyed at getting a call from Mikhail at this hour, when he was clearly busy. But duty called, no matter what the hour.

"What?" he barked in Russian into the phone.

"It's done, sir," Mikhail replied.

"Good. Thank you. You know what to do."

“Yes, sir.”

“Don’t call me again until tomorrow.”

“Understood.”

Ilya ended the call.

He went back into the kitchen, schooling the annoyance from his face.

“Sorry,” he said to Shane.

“It’s okay. You alright?” Shane asked, sweetly concerned.

“Yes. Work,” Ilya replied, dismissively. Shane looked at him curiously but didn’t comment further.

“So,” Ilya said casually, crossing his arms over his chest, catching Shane’s attention. “Why were you at the club?”

Shane was looking at his water glass, tapping the sides. He didn’t say anything for a while, the only noise being the sound of Anya chewing on a toy.

“To be honest,” Shane finally said. “I was hoping I’d see you again.”

Ilya looked at him, blinking, his heart thumping in his chest. Shane looked up, too, meeting his eyes. Ilya stared at him, awed.

“What were you doing there?” Shane asked softly. Ilya smiled.

“Hoping I would see you again.”

He chuckled and Shane did, too, blushing, and to his own embarrassment, Ilya felt his own cheeks heat as well. This was so unlike him but he also didn’t care? He hadn’t felt this way in a long time, like everything was in color after years of black and white. He didn’t want to let go of that feeling. Of knowing that Shane had been thinking about him, too. Hoping to see him again.

He ran a hand through his hair self-consciously and Shane breathed out a nervous laugh. Ilya came around the island to Shane, pressing a lingering kiss to his bare shoulder.

“I’m glad,” Ilya whispered.

“Me, too,” Shane sighed.

Ilya smiled at him, turning the seat Shane was sitting in so that Shane was facing him. Shane looked up at Ilya, reaching out to rest his hands on Ilya’s ribs. Shane had nice hands. They were calloused, smaller than Ilya’s, but strong and warm. Ilya cupped Shane’s face in his hands and pressed kisses over his freckles and down his nose and at the corners of his mouth.

Ilya didn't really know what he was doing. Sex, he was good at. Anything else... not really. This wasn't anything... yet. But Ilya thought maybe he wanted it to be. Maybe he could pursue this. Maybe he could keep this feeling. Protect it for himself.

The timer went off for the sandwiches and he took them out of the oven.

"Gotta say... a hot, half-naked Russian man making me a tuna melt at midnight wasn't on my bingo card but... I'll take it," Shane said with a bit of flirtatiousness in his voice.

Ilya shimmied his shoulders a little, looking over one to wink at Shane.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself."

"Oh. I am."

Ilya grinned, plating the sandwiches with some chips, and two dill pickles each. He brought the plate to Shane and placed it in front of him. Anya placed her front paws on Shane's thigh, obviously looking for some of his food, and Ilya scolded her.

"Anya! No! Get down," he said firmly in Russian.

"Sorry, ma'am. Not for you," Shane said as Anya hopped down and came around to Ilya's side. Ilya shook his head at her.

"Be nice to our guest," he told her in English. "Be a good girl."

Shane chuckled, taking a bite of his sandwich.

"Is good?" Ilya asked. "Warm enough?"

Shane nodded, covering his mouth with his hand. "It's delicious."

Ilya smiled, pleased. Before he'd lost hockey, Ilya hadn't had many other talents or interests. But he had needed some kind of outlet, so he'd picked up art and collecting fast, European sports cars, and cooking. He'd gotten quite good and it always felt nice to have someone compliment him on how delicious his food tasted.

Not that tuna melts were anything special but hey, he'd done his best on short notice.

They finished their food and Ilya dropped the plates in the dishwasher. He went into the fridge and grabbed a peanut butter filled kong for Anya. He waved it in her face and she got all excited, wiggling, trying to get at it. Ilya tossed it toward the living room and Anya bounded after it.

"That should keep her attention for a while," he said, arms crossed over his chest, watching Anya fondly as she grabbed her prize, and took it to her enormous, plush doggy bed.

"Is that our cue to escape to the bedroom?" Shane asked, slipping out of his seat.

"Yes," Ilya replied, laughing.

Ilya woke up the next morning to a warm, firm body next to his. He and Shane had separated at some point during the night after falling asleep spooned together. Now Ilya was on his back, one arm tossed over his head.

Shane was on his stomach next to him, one arm curled up so his hand rested near his face. He was still sleeping, breathing deep and even. Ilya turned carefully onto his side so as not to wake Shane, and just... looked.

Maybe it was kind of weird but it had been a long time since Ilya had had anyone stay over like this. And Shane was truly beautiful.

Ilya loved his silky, glossy black hair and his long, dark lashes, and his pretty freckles, and his adorable little nose, and his perfect pink lips. His skin was tan and absolutely flawless and Ilya wanted to kiss and touch him everywhere. He was so intrigued. Fascinated. He wanted to know who Shane was. Maybe starting with his last name. And his phone number.

Shane woke up not too long after Ilya and Ilya marveled at him waking, appreciating his sweet, shy smile, and his indisputable loveliness. He wanted to capture all of Shane on paper, sketch out every perfect detail.

After a hilarious conversation where Ilya learned that Shane didn't like kissing before he had brushed his teeth, Ilya was able to get him back into bed. They spent a lot of time kissing, and touching, before Shane sucked Ilya's cock for a bit, and then Ilya fucked Shane from behind.

They cuddled together after, which Ilya enjoyed immensely, playing with Shane's hair, before they got up. Ilya made Shane coffee and breakfast (scrambled eggs with cheese and toast), they played a little with Anya, and Ilya offered Shane his shower, if he wanted it. Shane accepted and rather boldly asked Ilya to join him. Ilya couldn't pass that up.

After, he sat on his bed, half dressed, watching Shane toweling off his hair, standing in Ilya's bedroom in nothing but his underwear. He was absolutely stunning and Ilya knew that he wanted more of this.

"Give me your phone," Ilya said. Shane looked at him.

"Um, okay," he said. He picked up his pants from the night before and fished his phone out of his pocket. He unlocked it and handed it to Ilya.

Ilya took the phone and opened up Shane's contacts. He created a new contact, entering his own name, and phone number, then handed the phone back to Shane.

"Ilya... Rozanov," Shane said. He smiled and texted Ilya. Ilya looked at his own phone.

"Shane Hollander," Ilya read, saving the name and number to his phone. "Nice to meet you."

Shane chuckled. "It's nice to meet you, too."

Shane finished getting dressed and Ilya walked him to the front door. He watched Shane say goodbye to Anya, which made his heart all warm and gooey. Shane stood, smiling at Ilya and Ilya smiled back.

“I want to see you again,” Ilya said as he gathered Shane into his arms, kissing him.

“You have my number,” Shane replied, his hands resting on Ilya’s chest. “Text me anytime.”

“I will,” Ilya nodded.

They kissed again, one of Shane’s arms wrapping around Ilya’s neck, and Ilya pressed Shane against the door, the kiss turning heated. They pulled apart, Shane’s head on Ilya’s shoulder, and they both laughed.

“I should go,” Shane murmured.

“Yes,” Ilya replied, though he really didn’t want Shane to leave. “Text me when you are home.”

Shane smiled and gave Ilya one last, brief kiss. “I will.”

Ilya watched him go. Closing the door behind him. God. He was so fucked. This was... dangerous. But that had never really stopped Ilya before and he was tired of putting his own happiness aside for the sake of his family. He’d protect whatever it was that was happening between himself and Shane, no matter what.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane text and call and Shane's friends and family are a little nosy

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Felt This Way by Carly Rae Jepsen
Here's an extra chapter because I'm on a train and was doing a bunch of editing lol
Enjoy! 🥰

“Who ya textin’?” Hayden asked, looking over Shane’s shoulder as he attempted to type out a reply to Ilya’s most recent text.

“No one! Stop!” Shane huffed, pushing Hayden’s cackling face away.

They were the last two in the locker room of the high school’s hockey training facility, all the kids having gone home for the night. Shane hadn’t had the chance to really talk to Ilya since he had been coaching and he’d been eager to text him back, not wanting Ilya to think he was ignoring him.

“Is that your lover boy? Your beau? Your gentleman caller?”

“Shut up, Hayden! Jesus Christ!” Shane hissed, shoving his phone into his pocket, his red cheeks giving him away. He hated how easily he blushed. Hayden just laughed.

“Oh man. I’m sorry, dude. You’re just so easy to tease!”

“Yes. I’m aware. Thank you. Can we go now?”

“Yeah, yeah. C’mom.”

They left the facility, locking up behind them. Shane took out his phone as soon as he felt it vibrate. It was a selfie that Ilya had taken. He was semi-cropped out of the shot, as the picture mostly focused on Anya, who was curled up in a ball in his lap. Ilya looked good. Cozy. Wearing a comfortable looking t-shirt and joggers. Shane could feel himself smiling, sliding his teeth over his bottom lip.

Shane: Very cute. Both of you.

Ilya: ❤️

Shane: I'm heading home from practice. I'll call you when I'm back?

Ilya: Can't wait

Ilya had been busy at work most of the day today, going radio silent until about an hour ago and they had been texting back and forth whenever Shane had a free moment.

"Man, Shane. You got it *bad*."

Shane looked guiltily away from his phone. "What do you mean?"

"Like... you really like this guy!"

"Sure. Yeah. I mean, the sex is fantastic."

Hayden gave Shane a *look* and they stopped when they arrived at their respective cars.

"Listen. You guys have been hooking up for like, a month, right?"

Shane nodded.

"You think it's possible that this is more than just a situationship? Or, like, do you want it to be more?"

Shane looked at his feet, shuffling them anxiously. He had thought about this before, many times. He saw Ilya fairly frequently. They texted and FaceTimed and called each other all the time, sending pictures back and forth. They hadn't really gotten to know one another on a deeper level but it felt like they were getting there, and talking was just as enjoyable as the sex.

Ilya would sometimes go long periods of time without texting Shane back, apologizing for his absence because of work, though he was pretty vague about those details. Shane wondered if maybe his family was contracted with the government or something and Ilya couldn't give him more information.

But Ilya was funny and charming and engaging and it had been a long time since Shane had laughed so much.

Shane didn't know what Ilya wanted out of whatever it was that they were doing and Shane couldn't lie that he wouldn't mind if things were... *more* ... between them. He just had no idea how to ask for that.

Shane looked back up at his best friend. "I mean... yeah. I'd like it to be more."

"Talk to him about it," Hayden replied. Which was maybe one of the most sensible things that Hayden Pike had ever said to Shane in all their years of friendship.

Shane smiled. "Yeah. I know. I should. I will."

Hayden smiled back. “Good. You deserve to be happy and if this guy makes you happy, then go for it. And if he sucks and breaks your heart, then I’ve got a shovel and some lime in my garage!”

“Oh my god, Hayd,” Shane laughed, shaking his head. “Thanks. I think.”

“No problem, pal!”

They hugged and said goodnight, getting into their cars, and heading home.

Shane was greeted at the door by Eloise and he paused to pet her before he dropped his keys in the bowl he kept on the table near the door. He slid off his shoes and tucked them away, hanging up his jacket, and brought his bag into the kitchen, turning on more lights as he went.

He was tired but also starving. He pulled out the meal prep dinner he’d made on Sunday (a steak grain bowl) and popped it in the oven. He texted Ilya while he waited, sitting at his kitchen table.

Shane: is it okay if I call?

Ilya: Yes!

Shane FaceTimed him.

Ilya answered and for a moment all Shane saw were his golden-brown curls and heard a dog panting. Ilya said a bunch of things in Russian that Shane couldn’t understand but that he loved hearing. Ilya speaking Russian was unbelievably sexy and... kind of romantic. Ilya laughed and then his face appeared on the screen. He looked happy and Shane’s heart flip flopped in his chest.

“Sorry,” he chuckled. “Anya is very hyper today.”

Shane smiled, shaking his head. “It’s fine. Why is she so crazy?”

“I don’t know. She went on a very long walk and played with some dog friends. She should be very tired.” Ilya looked away from the video. “Do you want to say hi to Shane?”

“Hi, Anya!”

Anya sniffed at Ilya’s phone, blocking out the camera with her nose, then turned away and went to her bed. Ilya’s face came back on screen.

“Children,” he huffed, rolling his eyes, and Shane laughed. “How was your day?”

They talked about their respective days, though Ilya was fairly nonspecific about his, asking more questions about what Shane had been up to. They talked about what Shane was heating up for dinner, what Ilya had made for himself, Shane’s practice, and the hockey game from last night. Shane had loved learning that Ilya liked hockey as much as he did. Though apparently he was a Boston Bears fan, while Shane cheered for his hometown Ottawa

Centaurs. It was nice, having this, a domestic scene at the end of a long day, though Shane wished that it was in person. His house felt very empty.

He rested his phone against a can of coffee as he loaded the dishwasher as he and Ilya kept talking, then he took Ilya upstairs to his room.

They didn't always have video sex but the majority of the time they did. Shane liked it, especially if Ilya's work or Shane's coaching gig prevented them from being together on the weekends. Shane still wasn't sure what Ilya did exactly, but he was too preoccupied to care at the moment, thinking about getting off with him.

It had kind of been a stressful day for Shane. He loved teaching and he loved coaching but summer was approaching. Final exams were coming up, faculty meetings, graduation for the seniors. It was a lot. He wouldn't mind Ilya taking him out of his head for a bit.

"When will I get to see your room in person?" Ilya asked as Shane clipped his phone into the tripod he'd ordered after the first handful of times he and Ilya had had video sex. It had been kind of hilarious to try to be sexy only to have his phone continually fall over but this was ten times better.

"Um," Shane replied, blushing. "Whenever you want, I guess."

Ilya smiled at him. He was reclined in his own bed. Shirtless, hand behind his head, looking effortlessly sexy, and he knew it, too. Shane just looked at him, amazed and dazzled.

"I wish you were here now."

"Me, too."

Ilya didn't live very far but Shane had work tomorrow morning and he couldn't afford to be kept up all night, as much as he would have liked that.

"You are very beautiful," Ilya said and Shane closed his eyes, knowing his entire face was turning red. But he smiled and shrugged.

"I'm okay."

"Okay? No. More than *okay*," Ilya replied, looking annoyed at the suggestion that Shane was anything other than beautiful.

Shane shook his head a little.

"Has no one ever told you this before? I'm not the first."

Shane opened his eyes. "No," he replied. "But definitely the most consistent."

Ilya smiled softly. "I will tell you all the time."

Shane huffed, the sweetness of that sentiment made him all warm inside. "I wouldn't mind that..."

Ilya's smile turned a bit flirty. "You love praise."

Shane bit his lip and nodded. This was a relatively new thing that he and Ilya were exploring. Shane loved a challenge. He liked when Ilya challenged him, made something into a game. Shane liked the discipline of it, the praise he received for a job well done, and Ilya liked his obedience. It was maybe one of the hottest things that Shane had ever done with a partner.

"Are you going to be good for me?" Ilya asked, his voice low and gentle, his accent wrapping beautifully around the words as he spoke.

"Yes," Shane murmured, feeling eager, and a little slutty.

Ilya grinned. "Show me."

Shane was at lunch with Hayden and Rose when his phone buzzed. He had been talking with Ilya on and off all day, which was their usual routine, and he smiled at the notification of a text from him on his screen.

He noticed Rose and Hayden exchange looks, grinning.

"Shut up," he murmured at both of them and opened Ilya's text.

Ilya: What is your address?

Shane blinked at the text. A mix of dread and excitement washed through him at the implication of that question. Why would Ilya need his address? Was he going to come over? Was he sending Shane a sex toy like he said he would?

"What's wrong?" Rose asked.

Shane looked up. "Nothing..."

"Doesn't sound like nothing..." Hayden replied.

"Is Ilya being weird?" Rose added.

Shane shook his head. "No. Not really. He asked for my address."

"Could he be sending you something? Like... flowers?" Rose suggested.

Shane shrugged. "Maybe? I don't know. Is this weird?"

"I don't think so," Hayden said. "I bet he wants to be like, romantic and shit."

Shane laughed, feeling himself blush.

"You could always ask him."

"Yeah. That's true."

Shane texted back.

Shane: Are you sending me a sex toy? 🤪

Ilya: 😂😂😂

Ilya: No. Not this time.

Shane smiled, biting his bottom lip, and texted Ilya his address.

Shane: should I be nervous?

Ilya: No! I am just thinking of you...

Shane: 🙄

Shane: I'm thinking of you, too. I miss you.

Ilya: I miss you, too

“What’s he saying?!” Rose asked.

Shane shook his head. “He said he’s thinking of me and misses me.”

“Awww, Shane!!!”

“Romantic as fuck,” Hayden said, shaking his head.

“I bet he’s sending you flowers or chocolates or something,” Rose asserted, nodding firmly.
“He seems like the type.”

“Do you think we’re going too fast?” Shane asked suddenly. “Am I being dumb about this?”

Hayden and Rose looked at him as if he’d sprouted wings and a tail.

“If we were worried, we would have said something,” Rose replied.

“Yeah, man. You seem, like, really happy. And this Ilya guy seems, y’know, *decent* .”

“*Are* you happy? Do you like how things are progressing?” Rose asked, reaching out to rest a hand on Shane’s arm.

Shane nodded. “Yeah. I mean... I think I actually wanna date the guy. I’m just trying to figure out how to ask.”

Rose smiled at him reassuringly. “Then you’re good. I think that’s a great conversation to have and not an unreasonable one. I think he’d be open to it.”

Hayden nodded in agreement.

“We have to meet him though,” he huffed. “He’s gotta be friend approved.”

Shane laughed, feeling better. “I promise you will. Don’t worry.”

After work, Shane went home to drop off a few things and freshen up before he went to his parents’ house for dinner.

He parked his car and walked up to the front door, pausing in the walkway. On his stoop, was the largest bouquet of flowers he had ever seen in his life. Shane was by no means a flower guy but the bouquet was gorgeous. Bright, vibrant orange and yellow roses mixed with what was maybe thistle and weird yellow ball-like flowers.

Shane was smiling, feeling all warm and fuzzy and delighted. He walked up the steps, picking up the bouquet, and let himself into the house. He set the flowers down on the kitchen table, Eloise meowing curiously at his feet.

Shane found a card attached to the bouquet.

One Date? Say Yes.

Shane smiled, feeling a little swoony. Simple but effective, he had never felt more like the main character in a romance novel then he did right at that moment. He supposed he and Ilya were on the same page after all.

He took out his phone, snapped a picture of the bouquet, and sent it to Ilya. Then he typed out a single text.

Shane: Yes

Ilya: Tomorrow night, 7pm. I will pick you up. Wear something nice.

Shane: Okay ❤️

Ilya: Do you like the flowers?

Shane: I love them. They’re beautiful. Thank you. I’m with my parents tonight but I can call you when I get home?

Ilya: Good

Ilya: Have fun with your parents. I will be here but if you are tired, don’t worry. I will see you tomorrow ❤️

Shane was surprised at the urge he had to text back *I love you* . It was definitely, definitely too soon for that, but he was just full of so much... excitement. Happiness. He’d never actually had a steady boyfriend before or really dated someone seriously. It was thrilling and terrifying at once. It felt really nice knowing someone was thinking about him and was interested in him and wanted to take him out. Someone had bought him flowers.

He felt so... giddy and excited.

He'd text the group chat about it and he definitely wanted to talk to Ilya more but he had his parents to see. He tucked his phone away in his back pocket, made sure that Eloise got some attention and had enough food and water before he left again.

"Who are you talking to?" his mother asked as they stood in the kitchen together after dinner. She was standing at the sink, washing dishes. Shane looked up from his phone, his cheeks heating.

"No one," he murmured back, hiding his phone behind his back.

Yuna Hollander raised one perfect brow at her son, silently calling him out on his bullshit. Shane blinked at her, chewing on the inside of his cheek.

"A guy I met..." he confessed. "Someone I'm seeing."

Mom dropped the spoon she was holding into the sink, whirling around to face her only child.

"You're seeing someone?!" she exclaimed. "For how long?!"

Shane grimaced. "Uh, a little over a month-ish."

"Shane Alexander! I cannot *believe* you would keep this from me!"

Shane's father, David, appeared in the doorway to the kitchen, a few more dirty plates in hand, then promptly tiptoed back out.

Thanks, Dad.

"I wasn't keeping it from you. I just... I don't know what to say about it. We're not, we're just..." he had no idea how to tell his mom that they had just been having sex and that they hadn't labeled whatever it was that they were.

Shane sighed. "We're going on like, a real, actual date tomorrow evening."

Mom looked at Shane with big dark eyes, the same color as his own. Her initial frustration with Shane keeping this secret from her dissipated and she smiled at him, her eyes a little teary.

"Mom..."

"I'm just happy for you," she said, grabbing a dish towel to dry her hands, moving closer to Shane. "You've seemed so much... *happier*, lighter, these past few weeks and I thought maybe something good was going on..."

Shane smiled at her and nodded. "Yeah. It's been good. Fun. I like him."

"Oh honey," Mom said, wrapping her arms around him. "That's great. I'm so glad."

Shane closed his eyes, hugging his mom back. He remembered being a kid and feeling like she'd swallow him up when they hugged. Now it was the opposite.

"What's his name?" Dad asked, having come back into the kitchen now that it was apparently safe.

"Ilya," Shane replied.

"That's a unique name," Mom said.

"He's Russian," Shane chuckled.

"You got a picture?" Dad asked. Shane most certainly did have pictures, most of which were very not safe for work and definitely not appropriate to share with one's parents.

He looked through his photos and picked one that he actually really liked and was parent appropriate. Ilya sitting in the front seat of some luxury sports car, looking like a model for the company. He was in a black sweater and dark jeans, smiling for the camera.

He showed the picture to his parents.

"Wow," Mom said. "Shane... he is *very* good-looking."

Dad nodded his approval.

He felt himself blush. "Yeah. He is." It was undeniable that Shane had snagged himself a ten out of ten. For sure.

"Well, he is certainly very lucky," Mom hummed. "My son is very handsome and very successful and anyone would be privileged to be dating him."

Shane laughed and shook his head. "Thanks, Mom."

"So, are we going to get to meet him?" Dad asked.

Shane shrugged. "At some point. If things keep going well, I guess. We haven't known each other long so... I'll keep you posted."

Mom reached out to gently touch his cheek. "You know you can tell us anything, right? I don't want you to feel like you can't tell us things..."

Shane nodded, smiling reassuringly at her. "I know. It's not that. It's just new, that's all. A little hard to talk about while we figure things out, you know?"

Mom nodded in understanding. "Of course."

Shane's parents had been nothing but supportive when he'd come out. He had been riddled with anxiety about it but it had been good and had felt good when he'd finally told them he was gay. Shane understood his mom's concern though, her worry that he felt he couldn't be open with them out of fear, but he knew he could trust them. He'd gotten past that hurdle.

He helped Mom finish up washing dishes and Dad pulled out dessert. They sat in the living room, watching the Ottawa game, for Dad, and after the game, Shane wished his parents good night, and headed home.

Shane spent the majority of his Saturday stress cleaning his house. He'd pulled out his nicest outfit (after a video call with Rose for advice and approval), leaving it laid out on his bed. He needed something to do before Ilya was supposed to pick him up that evening, knowing that being idle would only make him more anxious.

So he went for a run, then did some bodyweight training back at the house, then showered, and then started cleaning. He did both bathrooms, his bedroom, the living room, and kitchen. He started and finished two loads of laundry and was now listening to an audiobook as he folded said laundry.

He'd been texting with Ilya a bit, trying not to give away how nervous he was. He was excited, too, of course. Going out to a nice restaurant with an incredibly attractive man. It was all very new to him. Thrilling but also... kind of terrifying.

Laundry finished and put away, he got ready for Ilya to pick him up. He was coming by at six thirty, giving them enough time to get into the city, and then to their reservation. Ilya had also told Shane to pack an overnight bag, so he had that, too.

He looked at himself in the mirror from all angles. He liked his outfit, something lighter for the late spring evening; an ivory colored, slightly transparent silk t-shirt (the most expensive piece of clothing he owned), and a pair of nice dark jeans. He hadn't been sure about his hair. Leave it down? Put it up? But he'd decided to leave it down, tucked behind one ear.

"Alright," he said to the cat while he waited anxiously in the living room, his bag by the door. "Wish me luck."

Eloise meowed at him in response and Shane chuckled, scratching under her chin.

Shane was expecting Ilya to text him when he arrived but instead, he'd decided to come to the front door and ring the doorbell, scaring the shit out of Shane.

"Keep it together for fuck's sake," he murmured to himself, going to answer the door. Ilya stood on the other side, dressed in a burgundy shirt and dark pants. Shane could see the glint of his gold chain against his mostly exposed chest. His golden-brown curls spilled into his eyes a little and Shane was speechless.

How the hell was this heart-stoppingly gorgeous guy into *him* ?

"Hi," Ilya said.

"Hi," Shane replied, feeling a tiny bit winded. Ilya smiled softly at him, leaning in to kiss Shane's cheek. He smelled amazing and Shane liked the soft scrape of his stubble against his skin.

“You look incredible,” Shane sighed.

Ilya beamed at him, chuckling. “So do you.”

They just stood there, looking at each other, before Shane came back down to earth and grabbed his bag. He closed the door to his house, making sure it was locked, and stood face to face with Ilya.

“You are ready to go?” he asked and Shane nodded. They went down the steps together, Ilya trying to take Shane’s bag, but Shane didn’t let him. He could carry his own bag.

“Is that your car?” Shane asked incredulously, staring at the bright orange sports car parked at the curb in front of his house.

“Yes,” Ilya replied, a smile in his voice. Shane looked at him, gaping.

Ilya opened up the passenger side door for Shane.

“After you.”

Shane slid into the car, squeezing his bag between his feet on the floor.

Holy Moly. What the fuck does this guy do for a living to afford a car like this?

Ilya got into the driver’s seat. He looked casual and relaxed behind the wheel and fuck if Shane wasn’t turned on by his whole deal. His outfit and his hair and the way he smelled and his fucking car.

Shane wanted to have sex with him *right now* .

“Is this a Porsche?” he asked.

Ilya grinned at him. “Yes.”

“Wow. Okay.”

“Do you like it?”

Shane blinked. “I mean... It's a very cool car. Also very fast, I’ve heard.”

“It is,” Ilya replied, chuckling.

Shane buckled himself in. He had no idea how this night was going to go but if he knew at least one thing, it was going to be an adventure.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane go on a date

Chapter Notes

Okay, one more! I enjoyed writing this chapter, I hope you enjoy reading it! 🥰

The song for this chapter was Chapter 7 - Take Me Home (ft. Bebe Rexha) - Fareoh
Remix Radio Edit by Cash Cash

By the time they arrived back at Ilya's penthouse, Shane had a slightly different feeling about Ilya and sports cars. Sexy as they were in theory, it had been kind of harrowing in practice. But they had survived, so that was great. He just wasn't sure if he was willing to put his life in Ilya's hands like that again.

Shane dropped his bag off at the penthouse, said hello to Anya, and then they made their way to the restaurant, which was only just down the block from Ilya. It was a lovely evening, just on the right side of warm for June.

They talked about the restaurant. It was a chic Italian joint that had come highly recommended with several write ups in the local papers and food blogs. The menu was apparently top notch and the cocktail and wine list was exceptional. Ilya raved about the chicken parmesan, which Shane thought was adorable.

Ilya's hand brushed against Shane's as they walked and Shane glanced at him, smiling small, before he tangled his fingers with Ilya's before he could overthink it. Ilya squeezed his hand gently. Shane tried to lean into the moment a little, to let Ilya ground him as they walked to the restaurant.

He had never been openly out with anyone before, not like this, where it was obvious that there was something more going on between him and whoever he was with. He'd never held hands with a man in public. It was... *nice* .

They smiled at each other and Ilya stopped them when they'd arrived at the restaurant, holding the door open for Shane. They stepped inside and Shane looked around, taking in the sights. The restaurant was lovely. Everything was bright and open, tastefully decorated, lots

of wood and brick. It also smelled amazing and he realized how hungry he was. He'd barely eaten today thanks to his nerves.

They were brought to their table, Ilya's hand settling lightly at Shane's lower back. They were seated and given menus and thanked the hostess.

They decided to split a bottle of wine and while Ilya told Shane to choose, Shane admitted he knew very little about wine. He was a bit anxious about this date, mostly because the restaurant was so fancy, and certainly out of his price range. He couldn't afford to bring Ilya to a place like this, unless it was for a very special occasion. He hoped Ilya didn't think he was in this for his money or that Shane would assume Ilya would just pay for everything.

Ilya may have noticed Shane's anxiety because he reached out a hand and rested it gently over Shane's. He leaned in close over the table and told Shane that he didn't know much about wine either. They laughed softly and agreed to ask their server for a suggestion.

"Maybe I'll get the chicken parm," Shane said as he scanned the menu, looking up at Ilya over the top of it.

Ilya looked back. "Yes. I would recommend it," he chuckled.

"What are you going to get?" Shane asked. Ilya's expression was thoughtful as he looked at the menu and Shane watched him, unable to help the adoring look that was probably plastered to his face. Ilya was so *handsome*, Shane couldn't believe that he got to kiss him!

"Maybe the pan-seared scallops with pasta," he replied.

"Scallops are good."

Ilya smiled. "You can try some."

Their server arrived and Ilya asked him for a wine recommendation. They were given three options and Ilya let Shane pick whichever one he thought sounded best. Shane made his choice, a Malbec, and the server gave them time to consider food.

They discussed appetizers, deciding on the arancini and focaccia bread to share. Their server arrived with their wine, showing them the bottle, and opening it for them at the table. Shane and Ilya exchanged glances and Shane was given the first taste.

"It's perfect," he said, though he honestly had no idea if that was true. The wine... tasted like wine. It was *good* but he was far too plebeian for all this. Ilya ordered their apps and entrées and dinner was in full swing.

They both laughed softly after their server had left and Ilya lifted his wine glass. Shane lifted his, feeling a surprisingly pleasant, slightly anxious flutter in his chest.

"To more of this," Ilya said and Shane smiled, blushing.

"To more dates," he replied and gently tapped his glass against Ilya's.

The entire dinner was maybe one of the most pleasant experiences Shane had ever had. He and Ilya discussed (argued animatedly) about hockey, shared the appetizers, and their entrées. They ended up drinking an entire bottle of wine. Shane laughed. A lot.

They got dessert to split; three different kinds of house made gelato, which ended up being so delicious that Shane had been tempted to lick the bowls. Ilya asked for the check, his expression warm as he looked at Shane. Shane felt himself blush and smile shyly.

Shane was a tiny bit tipsy, feeling warm and comfortable and greatly enjoying Ilya's company. Ilya was cocky and kind of a dick, but in a charming way that Shane found really appealing. He was also very funny, and kind, in ways that were subtle and easy to miss.

He was very nice to the staff at the restaurant, which Shane thought was a good metric for who someone was, intrinsically. He also really loved his dog, which was another good way to measure someone's character.

The check was brought over and Shane reached for it, only for Ilya to snatch it away.

"Hey!"

Ilya shook his head. "No. I am paying."

"Ilya."

One of Ilya's thick brows raised in question. "Shane."

Shane narrowed his eyes at him and Ilya just tilted his head to the side, staring him down.

"Fine," Shane huffed, rolling his eyes. Ilya snorted softly, taking out a matte black credit card and sliding it into the check holder. Shane watched Ilya add a tip to the receipt and sign it when it was returned to him. He slid his card back into his wallet.

"Ready?" he asked. Shane nodded.

They left the restaurant, Ilya's hand at the small of Shane's back once more. The touch was light but proprietary in a way, and Shane liked it.

"We can go somewhere else," Ilya said when they were on the street. "Or just walk. Or go back to my place."

"I like being out with you," Shane replied. "We can go to another spot. Maybe grab one more drink?"

Ilya grinned at him. "Okay." He reached out and took Shane's hand. "I know a place."

They walked several more blocks before Ilya turned onto one side street and brought them to a brick building with one storefront for what looked like a very trendy bar. Ilya opened the door to the bar, holding it for Shane. The name of the bar was written across the door in elegant script. *Irina*. It was small, with two tables by the front window, and three off to the

side. The rest of the space was a bar, with about eight seats, and what was probably a small kitchen.

Ilya's hand was back at Shane's back and he leaned close to speak directly into Shane's ear. Shane shivered at the way his breath ghosted over his skin. "This is *my* bar."

"Your bar?" Shane said, looking at Ilya in confusion. Ilya beamed at him, his eyes crinkling.

"Come."

He tugged Shane into the place, which wasn't quite filled up yet, but definitely would be soon, and sat Shane in the second to last seat at the bar. Shane laughed, still confused, and watched as Ilya went behind the bar, tapping the bartender on the elbow.

They greeted each other with warm smiles and hugged briefly, talking for a few moments, where Ilya indicated Shane, before Ilya left the bar to go into the kitchen. Shane shook his head. When Ilya said *his* bar, did he mean that he owned it, or that this was his local? It was a toss up on which one, especially with Ilya. Shane wouldn't put it past him to go around like he owned a place, even if he didn't, simply because he was comfortable there.

"Shane, right?"

Shane turned from where he had watched Ilya disappear into the kitchen to look at the bartender. He was a tall man with curly blond hair and a wide, smiling mouth.

"Um, yes," he said.

"I'm Hazy, the bartender. Nice to meet you." He offered his hand and Shane shook it.

"Nice to meet you, too," Shane replied.

"Can I get you anything? Roz told me to take care of you until he got back."

Shane furrowed his brows, smiling a little. "Did he go somewhere? Should I be worried?" He chuckled.

"Nah. He's just gonna get caught up with talking to Cliff, the chef. The guy never shuts up."

Shane laughed. "Okay. Um, do you have a menu?"

Hazy provided him with one and Shane asked for a glass of the Malbec they had. He'd already been drinking wine so might as well just stick to it. Shane thanked him for the glass and sipped from it.

He felt a little weird, sitting by himself, waiting, still sort of confused about what the hell was actually going on. He wondered if Ilya brought other dates to his bar. It was impressive, owning a business like this, if Ilya even owned the place, but Shane bet he was just a dime a dozen. He was sure Ilya brought other people he was seeing here. It was disappointing to think about... but... he tried not to let the thought ruin the lovely evening he'd been having so far.

About seven minutes passed before Ilya finally emerged from the kitchen with a plate of something in one hand and an apologetic smile on his face. He set the plate down in front of Shane. Arranged neatly on it were what looked like four tiny, delicate crepes dusted in powdered sugar and topped with strawberries with a small side of some kind of cream.

“Sorry,” Ilya said, pressing a lingering kiss to Shane’s cheek, making Shane blush, and forgive him immediately. “The chef likes to talk a lot. These are *blini* . Russian crepe.”

Ilya sat on the stool next to Shane at the end of the bar and Hazy brought him a drink, some sort of thick white something or other with ice. Ilya laughed.

“What?” Shane chuckled.

Ilya was rolling his eyes and shaking his head. “Is a White Russian. Hazy thinks he is funny.”

“A White Russian?”

“Yes. The cocktail. Vodka, Kahlua, and cream.”

“Ohhh.”

“I hope he did not use the good vodka,” Ilya sighed. “Try it.”

Ilya offered the glass to Shane. Shane took a sip. It was very good. Dangerously so.

“It’s good. Boozy.”

Ilya chuckled. “Yes. Is the point.” He took a sip of the drink, placing his mouth over the lip of the glass where Shane had taken his sip, making eye contact with Shane. Shane bit his lip and blushed deeper.

“So,” he said, tapping his fingers along the base of his wine glass. “When you say this is *your* bar, you mean that you own it or...?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. I own it.”

Shane turned toward him, their legs bumping, and Shane leaned his elbow on the bar. “That is very impressive. You must do very well for yourself.” He certainly did. If his Porsche and penthouse were anything to go by.

Ilya’s eyes slid away as he sipped his drink, smiling. “Yes. I do.” His eyes slid back to Shane and he rested a hand on Shane’s thigh.

“Tell me what you do.”

Shane smiled. “I’m a high school French teacher and a hockey coach.”

Ilya looked intrigued by this. “Really? French?”

“ *Yes, sir. I love my job* ,” Shane replied in flawless French.

Ilya whistled, impressed. “That is very sexy.”

Shane laughed and blushed furiously. “I don’t know. I think you have me beat. You have the whole accent and European-vibe and everything going on.”

Ilya’s smile went a little goofy and he seemed surprised to hear Shane say that. “Oh yes? You like my accent?”

“Yeah,” Shane replied genuinely. “I do.”

Ilya’s thumb smoothed over the material of Shane’s pants, just above his knee. “I do not like it.”

Shane’s brows furrowed. “Why not?”

Ilya shook his head, his curls bouncing a little, and Shane loved watching them. He especially loved that little streak of silver, right in front. “I sound like... old cartoon villain. Is not very good. My English, too. Is just okay.”

Shane rested his hand over Ilya’s. “Hey. I don’t think that’s true at all.” He hadn’t been expecting this bit of vulnerability. Of intimacy. But it felt good. Nice to be trusted. And he wanted to reassure Ilya. He could only imagine what it must have been like for him, to feel insecure in that way.

“It couldn’t have been easy to learn. I’m sure it was frustrating. But look where you are now. You own this really cool bar and you’re doing so well for yourself. You should be proud!” Shane squeezed his hand and smiled at him. “I think you’re pretty amazing.”

Ilya blinked, looking sort of uncomfortable as his cheeks went all rosy. It was actually quite fetching, seeing him all pink cheeked, but it didn’t seem like something he was used to.

“Thank you,” he said. “You are very sweet, Shane.”

Shane just shrugged and Ilya turned his hand over to squeeze Shane’s fingers. He brought Shane’s hand to his mouth and kissed his knuckles. Shane’s heart and stomach fluttered at the touch.

They talked a bit more, drinking their drinks slowly, splitting the blini between the two of them. They were delicious. Their conversation turned more flirtatious and Shane liked Ilya’s hand on his thigh, the way he would lean in close, as if they were sharing secrets, laughing. Shane delighted in the fact that he and Ilya were more or less the same height sitting down and filed away the implication that Ilya’s height was mostly leg.

When they’d finished their drinks and blini, Ilya said goodbye to Hazy, popped his head briefly into the kitchen to say goodbye to Cliff, and then guided Shane very gently out of the bar. They walked back, hand in hand, to Ilya’s building, and headed up to his penthouse.

By the time they were inside the penthouse they were kissing and half-naked. Anya tried to get into the middle of it and Ilya gently steered her away. He said a bunch of stuff in Russian

to her that Shane didn't understand except ' *Papa* ', which was fine, because he was much more interested in getting Ilya naked. Listening to him speak in Russian was pretty sexy, too.

Ilya hefted Shane over his shoulder like Shane was a sack of potatoes and smacked his ass which Shane was not at all expecting but found extremely hot and also hilarious. Ilya closed the door to his bedroom with his foot and then placed Shane onto his feet.

"That was hot," he said, laughing, and Ilya grinned widely, before cupping Shane's face in his hands, and kissed him some more. Shane shoved his hands down the back of Ilya's underwear, squeezing his perfect ass, before working his boxer briefs down and off.

He ran his hands up Ilya's back, appreciating how firm he was. Ilya pulled him close, reaching between them, his hand wrapping around their cocks, stroking them together.

"Fuck," Shane breathed and Ilya ducked his head to kiss Shane's neck, pausing to suck marks into his skin, working his way down to Shane's shoulder. Shane shivered and sighed, running a hand up into Ilya's curls.

Shane maneuvered them to the bed, pushing Ilya down onto it until he was sitting. He smiled at Ilya, then got to his knees between his legs, and took Ilya's dick into his mouth. Shane moaned around him, enjoying this. He would have loved to feel Ilya get hard against his tongue but that was something for another day. This was just as enjoyable for him.

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya said, resting a gentle hand against Shane's face. Shane hummed in response and Ilya made a soft noise of pleasure. He'd been wanting to do this all night. All week. And after the fun night out they'd had? This was icing on the cake.

Ilya traced a gentle thumb along Shane's freckles, just under his eye, and then said, "Stop. Enough. Stop."

Shane stopped, pulling off of Ilya slowly, and kissed the tip of his cock, raising his eyes to look at Ilya. Ilya looked back, his eyes smoldering, though his expression was surprisingly tender.

"I'd like to look at you tonight. All of you. You on top?"

Shane smiled and nodded. "Okay."

Shane stood up and slid out of his underwear. Ilya pulled him closer, his long fingers curled around his hips. He pressed soft kisses to Shane's stomach and chest, and Shane slid his hands through Ilya's soft curls, down over his muscular shoulders, to his arms, squeezing the muscle there.

Ilya bent to lick at Shane's dick, just once, making Shane flood with pleasure. Then he pulled away, moving back onto the bed, and Shane followed, almost like he was in a trance. He crawled up the bed to Ilya, who curled his fingers gently around Shane's face, and kissed him deeply, roughly. Heat pooled in Shane's belly, feeling the effects of the alcohol and Ilya's sex appeal. It was heady stuff.

Ilya grabbed the lube and a condom from his bedside table, setting them aside, and slapped his thighs in invitation, which made Shane snort with laughter. Ilya laughed, too, and Shane realized that he liked Ilya *a lot* .

“I like this,” Ilya murmured as Shane leaned over him, one of Ilya’s slick fingers pushing into him, opening him up. “I like looking at you like this.”

Shane nodded, biting his lip. He felt more vulnerable in this position, on display, and somewhat at Ilya’s mercy. He sort of liked that... being *appreciated* . And Ilya was being gentle and sweet with Shane, so he had no reason to think he couldn’t continue to trust him.

Shane liked that Ilya liked looking at him, that he thought Shane was worth looking at, and it made him preen a little.

He liked looking at Ilya, too; the way his curls spilled out over the pillow under his head, his half-lidded eyes dark and full of desire, his plush lips quirked into that sexy crooked smile. Shane had never really ridden anyone before, so he wasn’t sure how he’d feel about it, but so far... this was *good* .

Ilya kissed Shane’s chin, the side of his jaw, working him open with careful precision, making sure that it felt good for Shane. His fingers sank into him, curling and stroking and gently stretching. He was so good at it and Shane thought he could probably come from Ilya’s fingers alone.

“Do you like doing this?” Shane asked softly. “Just doing the work?”

“Yes,” Ilya replied easily. “I like watching you let go.”

“Oh,” Shane gasped, both from the way Ilya’s fingers moved inside him, stroking along his prostate, and from the admission. He bit his lip and looked at Ilya, who smiled at him.

“You are beautiful, Shane.”

Shane let out a helpless little moan at the words and Ilya's slow, thorough penetration, making him swear, his eyes sliding closed. Ilya worked him open until Shane was rocking back against him eagerly.

He removed his fingers, slicked himself, and Shane reached back to guide him in. He went slowly, feeling things out. He loved the way it felt to have Ilya inside him, filling him up. Ilya didn’t move, simply resting his hands on Shane’s hips, until he was fully seated.

Shane took a deep breath, adjusting. It felt so fucking good to have Ilya like this. Deep but Shane had more control from this position.

“Okay?” Ilya asked and Shane nodded, opening his eyes. He braced a hand on Ilya’s chest, slowly rising up on his knees, and then back down.

“Oh fuck,” he whispered, lips parting, his eyes locked on Ilya’s face as he rose up and sank back down on his dick.

Ilya was watching him, too, his breathing a little strained, his hands tight on Shane's hips. Shane bit his lip, seeking out a rhythm, riding Ilya's cock more confidently.

Ilya never took his eyes off of Shane's face and Shane looked right back, his eyes shifting only once when Ilya rested his hand over the one Shane had on his chest. Ilya seemed to really be into this if his sex-glazed eyes and slack mouth were anything to go by.

Shane used his free hand to stroke himself and Ilya's eyes shifted, watching him.

"Yes. Keep going," he panted.

Shane did and started riding Ilya harder. He squeezed Ilya's hips with his thighs and pounded his ass down on Ilya's lap over and over. He had no idea what words were coming out of his mouth, if any at all, moaning and sighing as he hit just the right spot again and again.

Shane tossed his head back. "So good, Ilya. So fucking good. I'm so close. Shit."

"Fuck," Ilya grunted and then flipped them over so Shane was on his back. Ilya hadn't even slipped out. He had Shane's legs in his hands and he drove into him hard and fast. The crucifix he wore slid against Shane's chest as Ilya fucked into him. Shane pressed one hand against the headboard behind him, making a weird, whimpering noise as he came, hard and sudden. His orgasm rolled over him, seemingly endless, his eyes rolling closed.

"Yes, sweetheart," Ilya practically purred and then he was coming, too, going still and pulsing inside Shane. He dropped to his elbows over Shane when it was over, kissing him messily, and Shane kissed him back. He ran his hand into Ilya's curls, fisting his fingers at the back of his head.

They pulled apart and Ilya nuzzled his nose sweetly against Shane's, pressing it against Shane's cheek as they caught their breath. Shane closed his eyes, smoothing his hand up and down Ilya's back, one hand still resting in his curls.

"Wow," he sighed dreamily, and Ilya chuckled.

"Was perfect," Ilya hummed.

"Yeah. It was."

Ilya's softened cock slid out of him after a little while and Shane mourned the loss. Ilya kissed him again, warm and slow, before he moved away from Shane.

He cocked his head in the direction of the bathroom and they went together, cleaning up, before Ilya led Shane back to bed. They cuddled up close, Ilya watching Shane tenderly, sliding his fingers through Shane's hair, and then tracing the trail of freckles that spanned from cheek to cheek over his nose.

Shane liked that Ilya seemed to like his freckles and he watched him with soft, sleepy eyes. He felt... happy. Relaxed. Safe.

Ilya leaned down, pressing kisses into Shane's hair, against his face, down his neck. Light, adoring presses of his lips that weren't escalating anything. Shane let his eyes slide closed at the tender attention, his heart fluttering in his chest. Ilya murmured something softly in Russian, the words tickling Shane's skin.

"Hm?" Shane murmured.

"I'm glad you are staying."

Shane opened his eyes and smiled. "Me, too."

They made out for a long, indulgent while, all tangled up in each other, but not going any further than kissing. Shane liked that. He liked kissing Ilya and just enjoying that simple act. Ilya seemed to enjoy it, too.

When they pulled apart to catch their breaths, Shane slid a hand down Ilya's chest, his fingers smoothing over the tiny, smooth links of his gold chain, and resting over the crucifix.

"Are you religious?" he asked softly. Ilya regarded him and smiled a little.

"No. Not really. I don't go to church anymore. But I believe in God."

Shane considered this, slowly piecing together the things he was learning about Ilya Rozanov, finding himself wanting to know more.

"It was my mother's," Ilya continued and Shane pressed his palm flat against Ilya's chest.

"Has she passed?" Shane asked gently.

Ilya nodded. "A long time ago. She, ah, ended her own life, after many years of struggle..."

Shane's heart fell into his feet. "Oh, Ilya. I'm so sorry."

Ilya smiled a little. "Thank you. She was... wonderful. But very sad."

Shane nodded in understanding and reached up to squeeze Ilya's shoulder.

"Do you have other family?"

"My father, Grigori. A stepmother, Polina. And an older brother, Andrei. My family is... difficult. Complicated."

Shane's brows furrowed, saddened to hear this, considering his own family was pretty great. "I'm sorry."

Ilya hummed, closing his eyes, his smile a little pained. Shane's gut twisted. Maybe he shouldn't have said anything at all. He hadn't meant to upset Ilya but Ilya opened his eyes, calm and relaxed.

"The bar is named after my mother."

“Really?” Shane asked, finding that fact surprisingly sweet and touching.

“Yes. She had always wanted me to be happy. Follow my dreams. So I opened the bar and named it after her.”

“Ilya. That’s beautiful. I’m sure she would be so proud of you.”

Ilya’s mouth quirked up in the corner and he nodded his head slightly. “Yes. I think so. Tell me about your parents.”

Shane huffed a soft laugh, understanding the need for a change of subject. “Hmm, well. I’m an only child. My mom, Yuna, is first generation Japanese-Canadian, my dad, David, and his side of the family, have been in Canada for a long time and he’s like, Dutch, English, and Irish.”

Ilya nodded, his expression one of interest and curiosity.

“You were born here? In Canada?”

“Yeah. In Ottawa. Where were you born?”

“Moscow. I came to Canada when I was eighteen.”

“That must have been a huge adjustment for you.”

Ilya nodded. “It was. A bit of, um, what is called? Different cultures?”

“Oh, like, culture shock?”

“Yes. Like that.”

“I can imagine.”

Ilya shrugged. “I made it work.”

Shane smiled brightly. “Yeah. You did.”

Ilya’s expression shifted slightly, his smile small, and soft. “How old are you? I met you on your birthday.”

“I’m twenty-nine.”

“Me, too.”

Shane smiled. “I would have guessed you were older.”

Ilya’s expression was one of exaggerated shock and horror. “What? You think I am *old*?”

Shane laughed. “Not that old. You’re just very distinguished, that’s all. I like this,” Shane said, scratching his fingers in Ilya’s handsome, lazy stubble. “And this.” He gently traced the streak of silver in Ilya’s hair with a finger.

Ilya huffed. “You do not like your freckles and I do not like my gray.”

Shane shook his head. “I don’t know, man. I like it. It’s very sexy.”

Ilya laughed and kissed Shane and Shane smiled and hummed into it.

They talked into the early morning hours, getting to know one another. Shane learned that Ilya was bisexual, that he had a collection of European sports cars, and that he had an art studio and would draw and paint as an occasional side hustle. He showed Shane the scar on his knee that Shane had noticed the first night they’d hooked up. It was the culmination of all the repairs required for the injury that had ended his prospects at a professional hockey career.

Shane had found this fact absolutely fascinating and he *had* to know more. Ilya was supposed to be a professional hockey player! He felt terrible hearing how Ilya’s career had been cut short before it had even started but it was incredible to think that he had been *that good* .

Apparently Ilya still skated but he couldn’t play, as any kind of hit to his knee would permanently damage his knee beyond repair. He worked with a personal trainer to stay in shape, but any kind of team sport was out of the question.

Shane’s heart broke for Ilya. He could only imagine the difficulties of losing a parent and then losing the sport you loved and hoped to make your career, on top of having a strained relationship with your remaining family, and then moving to Canada from Russia, basically as an adult, without knowing the language or culture.

Ilya had had a rough go of it and Shane felt honored to be so trusted by him. Just sharing everything that they had shared, it was so much deeper than the intimacy of sex. Perhaps even more intimate. Being open and showing pieces of themselves that not many people got to see or know.

Shane was under the impression that Ilya didn’t have many people in his life to confide in and he wanted to be one of those people for Ilya. If Ilya let him.

As they settled down for sleep, spooned together, Ilya’s larger form cradling Shane’s almost protectively, Shane hoped that they could protect and grow this thing between them. For it to become something good and positive in both their lives.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Ilya and his family have a complicated relationship

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Is There Somebody Who Can Watch You by The 1975

When Ilya had turned twenty-five, he had decided to open up his own bar. He had felt lost and directionless since he had come to Canada, simply doing what he was told, and fighting against the continuous weight of what he would later find out was depression.

In the beginning, he had more or less been an errand boy for his father, meeting associates of his father at the docks or abandoned factory buildings to collect money, sometimes even having to shake people down, break bones, make threats. He had hated it.

His position was slightly different now. Still a glorified errand boy, but doing less of the “hands on” work. At least now he had people he could tell to get their hands literally dirty as opposed to needing to do it himself. It had been a long time since he had broken any bones, his or anyone else’s.

But those early years had been the worst.

Svetlana was the one who had gotten him into therapy and from there he’d started taking medication and it was like life felt more manageable again. Ilya would never tell his father or his brother about it but that didn’t matter.

It had been the first place he’d felt he could actually express what he was feeling. And get answers for why he felt the way that he felt.

He’d sort of righted his ship and started looking into starting his own business that was free and clear of his father’s connections. He had his own money in investments and a stipend from his father, so he had squirreled some of it away in various accounts, one of which was for starting the business.

Ilya had enlisted a commercial realtor and they’d found him the small little spot in Hintonburg that Ilya had absolutely fallen in love with. They’d gutted the place and rebuilt it from the studs, everything very romantic and classy. A marble bar, sexy, pink velvet high

chairs for the bar, elegant wooden tables and matching chairs. Lots of mood lighting. Someplace that couples and small groups of friends would want to come for drinks and snacks before or after dinner.

He'd named the place *Irina*, after his mother, because she would have been proud of him, and she would have loved it. The recipe for the *blini* on the menu was hers and the signature cocktail on the menu: rum, coconut, pineapple, and champagne, was named for her, too.

Wyatt "Hazy" Hayes and Cliff Marlow had been the first two people he had hired. They had done odd jobs here and there for Ilya's family and Ilya had offered them an option to escape. The bar was completely separate from anything related to the mob. They had agreed and had kept Ilya's "other business dealings" to themselves.

Ilya considered them good friends, but at this very moment, they were trying his nerves.

Hazy was standing behind the bar, leaning on it, looking at Ilya with a playful smirk on his face. Ilya's lips were pursed unhappily. Ilya hadn't been sitting at the bar for more than five minutes before Hazy had sidled up to him, looking at him like he was asking for trouble.

"You brought a *boy* in here the other night," Hazy said to him, as if they were teenage girls in a high school lunchroom.

"No," Ilya said, resting his hands on his not yet opened laptop. "I am not doing this."

Hazy just grinned wider and Cliff came out of the kitchen and down the bar to stand next to Hazy. Ilya glared at him.

"Was he cute, Hazy?" Cliff asked.

"Real cute!"

Cliff looked at Ilya. "Aww, Roz! You're in love! You never bring anyone here! You even had me make blini for both of you!"

Ilya's lip curled up in a snarl. "Shut. Up."

Both Cliff and Hazy looked absolutely gleeful and Ilya was not about it. Whatever it was he was feeling for Shane Hollander was... big. He didn't think it was love quite yet, but it was definitely *something*, and he didn't appreciate being teased about it.

"If you keep doing this, I will *never* bring anyone here. *Ever*."

Hazy shook his head. "Calm down, Roz. We're just busting your balls."

Ilya eyed him unenthusiastically.

"But seriously, bro," Cliff interjected. "Like... what's the deal?"

Ilya held his resolve for a grand total of ten seconds before he sighed and let his head fall forward, curls covering his face.

“We are dating... I think.”

“You think?” Hazy asked.

“Last night was the first date. We have been hooking up before now, for maybe a month? A little more? And now we are maybe dating...”

“Are you going on another date?”

“Yes. This weekend.”

“Oh, yeah. You’re totally dating,” Hazy affirmed.

Ilya shrugged, rubbing his hands over his face and then through his hair.

“So what’s his deal? Tell us about him,” Cliff said.

Ilya talked for almost an hour about Shane. How they had met, their hookups, how beautiful and interesting and successful Shane was, how much they had in common. Ilya had never really been this excited about anyone before. And only after a month!

He was a bit concerned about it if he was honest, excitement aside. It was possible this feeling was only temporary and he was feeling this way because Shane was someone new and exciting. Ilya’s interest or desires could wane and things could fizzle out between them. Or Ilya’s family could ruin things, though Ilya would do everything in his power to prevent his family from touching Shane at all. But Shane might find someone better. Someone with less baggage.

Ilya had never really been “special” to anyone and he wasn’t sure if he ever would be.

He appreciated his friends being interested in his love life though, and being excited for him. It was nice to have that, to tell people about Shane. He supposed all he could do was see where things went.

SEPTEMBER

Ilya stood outside his father’s house, dressed in his wool coat, and one of his best suits. Everything about his outfit and appearance were perfectly polished and elegant, but anxiety still lay like a stone, heavy and uncomfortable, in his stomach.

When Ilya had lived in his father’s house, they had always had dinner together, as a family. It was a semi-regular occurrence, something separate from family “business meetings”. It was all very “proper.” A cocktail hour, a several course meal. Ilya had always hated them, having to present himself before his father, and being lectured. It was always something with Ilya. His hair, his tie, his shirt, his shoes.

Ilya closed his eyes. In moments like this, he missed his mother, always willing to make a joke, or offer him a smile, even when she was sad.

He opened his eyes and took a deep breath. He rang the doorbell.

Andrei answered a few moments later, looking like a younger, spryer version of their father, with straight, dark hair that was graying just a little. His beard was neat and tidy, his hair coiffed just so.

“Iliushenka!” he exclaimed in faux enthusiasm.

“Andryusha,” Ilya replied.

He hated using the diminutive form of his brother’s name and he hated hearing his own out of his brother’s mouth. The implication was a closeness and warmth that neither brother had for the other, though Andrei was far more likely to play along than Ilya.

“You look well,” his brother said in Russian as they bussed cheeks and he took Ilya’s coat, tossing it aside for one of his father’s staff to retrieve.

“As do you,” Ilya replied, also in Russian. They never spoke in English when they were at their father’s house or working. “Where’s Tatiana?”

“Home,” Andrei replied, leading Ilya into a side room, where there was a cocktail cart waiting.

“Home? Is everything alright?”

Tatiana was Andrei’s wife, someone their father had chosen for his favorite son. She was lovely and sweet and Ilya liked her, though she was far too good for her husband, and Andrei didn’t treat her the way she deserved. She often went along with whatever Andrei asked of her, a “good, obedient wife.” Ilya knew Andrei had, and was still having, multiple affairs, and Tatiana turned a blind eye. He felt bad for her but could not intervene.

Andrei poured vodka into two crystal rocks glasses and handed one to Ilya.

“She’s pregnant,” Andrei said, forcing a smile. Ilya’s eyebrows raised and his stomach dropped.

“Congratulations,” he replied, the pit in his stomach only growing. He clicked his glass against his brother’s. They both downed the vodka in one go. “Are you... excited?”

“Yes. Terribly excited,” Andrei sighed, though it was obvious he was not. “Father is thrilled.”

“Of course he is,” Ilya replied flatly.

Ilya had never known his brother to want children or have any interest in raising them, but their father, about fifty years older than Ilya and forty-six years older than Andrei, had been putting pressure on Andrei to have children for years. It looked like he was going to get what he wanted after all, though Ilya doubted their father would be of sound mind by the time any children were born. He felt for Tatiana, though he was sure that she was excited about having children. She had expressed wanting to be a mother.

She reminded Ilya a lot of his own mother... and Ilya feared for her. For his future nieces and nephews.

Andrei shrugged and poured more vodka into his glass.

“What about you, Iliushenka? Any news? How’s your love life?”

Ilya watched his brother and held his body still. Giving nothing away.

“No news,” Ilya replied casually. “Just the usual.”

Andrei frowned a little, shrugging. “Is that so? Because I’ve heard, through the grapevine, that you were seeing someone...”

Ilya blinked at his brother and tilted his head, acting much more nonchalant than he felt. “I see a lot of people. That’s my game.”

“Yes. Usually. But apparently you have a favorite. Someone you’ve been seeing many times over the past few months. Lovely dark hair and freckles, I think. A gentleman.”

Ilya’s fingers gripped hard around the crystal glass in his hand. Andrei’s eyes met Ilya’s and he dropped the act.

“Other people will use that against you, little brother. I would be very careful and tread very lightly, if I were you.”

Ilya stepped closer to Andrei before even thinking about it.

“Leave him out of this,” he hissed.

Andrei’s lips twitched up slightly, knowing that he had hit a nerve, and enjoying seeing Ilya get defensive.

“I have no use or interest in whoever you’re fucking,” Andrei replied casually. “I’m only doing my due diligence as your brother and letting you know what I’ve heard.”

Ilya receded back into his blank, neutral façade, but he was reeling within himself. “Duly noted. Thank you.”

Ilya went to the cart and poured himself more vodka. He didn’t think anyone would actually touch Shane. Ilya wasn’t a particularly large or important target within the organization. That was by design. Even so... Andrei knew this information would stir Ilya up, and it made him angry.

He hated being toyed with and his brother was toying.

A bell was rung and the two Rozanov brothers turned toward the sound. They both collected themselves, exchanging a brief glance. If there was at least one thing they could agree on it was that their father was particular.

Right on time meant you were five minutes late.

Ilya followed Andrei out into the dining room where they would be eating dinner. They walked through, past the long, neatly set table, into the living room, where their father and stepmother waited with cocktails.

Grigori Rozanov used to be a tall, imposing man, with steel gray hair and beard and sharp, unsmiling eyes. Ilya didn't have many good memories with his father. He had always been an asshole and Ilya had been afraid of him for a very long time as a child. He was less afraid of him now and more just angry. And resentful.

And sad.

Grigori was a shell of his former self. Rapidly deteriorating in the face of this awful disease, he was sitting in a leather armchair, staring into nothing. He looked so much more frail than Ilya remembered from the last time he had seen him.

He had always been a stranger to Ilya but now he felt even more remote.

Andrei greeted him first, talking to him as if nothing was wrong at all, kissing his cheek. Ilya stepped up next, crouching down close so his father could see his face.

"Ilya," his father said and Ilya smiled, despite himself. He felt a small pang in his heart at the simple fact that his father remembered his name.

"Hello, Papa," he replied softly.

Grigori reached out, gently smoothing his hand over Ilya's curls. Grigori had always had something to say about Ilya's often wild, shaggy hair, the same texture and color as his mother's. He hadn't slicked it hair back tonight but he had been sure that his curls were as neat as they were capable of being. He'd used product and the fancy hair attachment for his hairdryer and everything. His father didn't comment on it at all.

"Where is your mother?" Grigori asked.

Ilya swallowed. "She's not here, Papa," he said gently. *She's dead, remember?*

Grigori's brows furrowed with confusion and Ilya patted his hand. "It's alright. Polina is here."

Ilya kissed his father's cheek and stood, turning to look at his stepmother. She was not much older than Ilya and Andrei. She was elegantly dressed and lovely but very obviously drunk. She ignored Ilya's eyes and Andrei wasn't helping.

There was one aide that was hovering and she came forward at Ilya's pleading look. Ilya stepped away to give her space and his whole body felt awkward and rigid. He hated this. All of it. He hated pretending that everything was fine when it was very much not.

His father was progressing deeper into Alzheimer's, his brother was a lying, cheating asshole, and his stepmother was completely useless. Ilya wanted to scream. He wanted to throw the

crystal in his hand against the wall and flip the table full of alcohol and burn the entire house to the ground.

What were they even *doing* ?

Instead, he sipped his vodka, and ate a canapé that tasted like ash in his mouth, and waited to be called to dinner.

At the dinner table, Ilya ate sparingly. He wasn't very hungry. His father needed to be assisted by the aide in order to eat. Polina's wine glass was never empty. And Andrei prattled on as if nothing was the matter.

Their father was lucid through some of the courses, asking after Tatiana, his excitement about a potential grandson, and then he asked Ilya when he would be marrying Svetlana. Which would be never but Ilya brushed it off, telling his father that Svetlana was too good for a lazy lout like himself.

Ilya got halfway through his entrée when he finally broke, the silence of the room was suffocating. He set down his knife and fork very calmly. He patted his lips with his napkin and set it on the table. He excused himself and walked to the bathroom. He stepped inside and locked the door.

He took out his phone, which had been on silent all through dinner. There were texts from Shane but Ilya couldn't respond to those now, not in the mindset he was currently in.

He opened his texts with Svetlana and texted her.

Ilya: I don't care how you do it. Get me the fuck out of here

She texted back immediately.

Svetlana: On it. Five minutes.

Svetlana was as good as her word. If not better. She fabricated an entire emergency that Ilya needed to handle which facilitated both his brother's opinion that he was "completely useless" and also got him out of his father's house.

He gave his profuse apologies and more or less fled, with Svetlana picking him up around the corner. Normally dressed in attractive professional outfits with her hair and makeup flawlessly done, Svetlana was in a pair of black sweatpants, an Ottawa Centaurs t-shirt, her hair up in a messy bun, and no makeup.

"I don't deserve you," he told her, kissing her cheek.

"You don't," she replied. "My laundry is in the trunk."

Ilya laughed. "Okay."

Back when Svetlana had first been hired by Ilya, when they were both in their early twenties, though Svetlana was far more mature and put together than Ilya would ever be, they had

started having a “laundry day.” It was very casual. Just them, in their pajamas, eating pizza, and washing and then folding laundry.

It had been a normal, silly thing, and they’d kept doing it, because it was normal and silly, when so many other aspects of their lives weren’t. It had also been a way for Ilya to actually keep some kind of routine, as opposed to roaming listlessly through his life, smoking and drinking and fucking.

Svetlana had saved his life, in a way, and he owed her an enormous debt of gratitude. But for now, he could at least carry her laundry.

They went up to his penthouse and he brought her laundry to the closet that held the piggyback washer and dryer, leaving it for her to sort. He spent some time with Anya in the living room, before he changed into his own pajamas, and brought his laundry out, setting it outside the hall where the washer and dryer closet was.

“Do you want pizza?” she asked.

“I’m not hungry,” he replied, laying on the floor with Anya. “But order what you want.”

Ilya looked at the texts from Shane, trying not to dwell on the awful dinner with his family.

Shane: having a good evening?

Ilya thought about texting Shane and telling him that he had had a horrible evening, that his family was finally falling apart, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. That he felt worthless and unwanted. That he was angry. And sad.

But that seemed like a lot to dump on Shane and he didn’t want to fake it, so he didn’t reply.

Anya whined at him, concerned, and Ilya stroked her soft head, playing with her ears, as she rested her head on his chest.

“It’s okay,” he murmured to her.

Svetlana brought the pizza into the living room, resting that, and a pack of cigarettes, on the coffee table for later.

“Tell me what happened,” she said.

Ilya told her.

“Iliushenka,” she murmured, squeezing his ankle, shaking her head.

Ilya sighed. “It is what it is, Sveta. What can I even do?”

“Nothing,” she replied, taking a bite of pizza. “You let the fuckers end themselves.”

Ilya closed his eyes. “Yeah.”

He sighed. "I'm worried about my brother's future kids."

"Maybe Tatiana will get out."

Ilya snorted. "Fat chance. Andrei would never let her."

"They could stay married and he could pay for her and the kids, then fuck around with anyone else he wants."

"He's not smart enough to think of that and she would never ask for it."

"Could you suggest it to her?"

"I don't think she would hear it."

"You could try."

Ilya nodded. "Yeah." He could. Maybe he would. It was worth a shot. She deserved better.

Ilya had a slice of pizza and they talked about more mundane things. Svetlana flipped her laundry and Ilya loaded his into the washer. They went out onto the terrace to smoke, watching the city below, enjoying the last vestiges of summer before fall set in, then went back inside.

Ilya checked his phone.

Shane: I hope everything's okay

He stared at the text, full of longing. He wished Shane was here. He would have loved the distraction of him, of being in his company. Shane was a bit of a nervous type, but he was also incredibly sweet and kind and Ilya wouldn't have minded his comfort.

He craved it, actually.

"Do you want to call him?" Svetlana asked, looking at Ilya as if she already knew the answer.

Ilya looked up from his phone. She was watching him knowingly. She knew all about Shane, having been the first person that Ilya had told about him after the second time he and Shane had slept together. She hadn't been surprised, only encouraging, and told him to not keep such things from her.

"Yeah," Ilya replied, hiding most of his face behind his phone.

Svetlana laughed. "Call him then." She was finished folding her laundry, everything neatly piled in her basket.

"I'm sorry," he said to her.

“Why?” she replied with a laugh. “It’s okay. I know he’ll take good care of you. And I’m happy he makes you happy.”

Ilya felt his cheeks warm and he resisted the urge to squirm.

“He does...”

Svetlana’s expression softened and she patted Ilya’s shin.

“Then call him and let him comfort you. I’m sure he’ll be happy to do so.”

Ilya nodded, looking down at his phone. “Okay.”

Ilya texted Shane.

Ilya: Come over?

Shane: Yeah! Sure! I can be there in like, 20 min?

Ilya: ❤️

Ilya: It will be worth it. I promise

Ilya walked Svetlana to the door and she hugged him.

“Everything will be okay,” she murmured and Ilya felt the ridiculous urge to cry. They said goodbye and she left, leaving Ilya alone to wait for Shane.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Shane is there for Ilya

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was King of My Heart - Taylor Swift

Shane hadn't heard from Ilya very much at all throughout the day, which was unusual for him. Ilya was always sending Shane something. A meme or a song that he liked or had reminded him of Shane (which Shane collected into a Spotify playlist) or random texts about his day or that he was thinking of Shane.

His absence was acutely felt and Shane had wondered if he had done something wrong. He wasn't on social media the way that Ilya was and he certainly wasn't as attached to his phone, though texting with Ilya had changed that to some degree.

So Shane had been a bit on edge today, waiting to hear from Ilya, and spiraling a little. He tried to keep himself occupied and not look at his phone but scrambled for it when it had vibrated, disturbing his attempts at working through a yoga flow.

Ilya: Come over?

Shane replied back right away, already getting to his feet, leaving his yoga mat where it was. Something didn't seem right and he was worried.

Ilya: 

Ilya: It will be worth it. I promise

Ilya didn't need to justify the time that he and Shane would be spending together. It always felt worth it to Shane but he was concerned. He packed an overnight bag and made sure that Eloise had enough food and water.

He drove into the city and parked his car in the parking garage that Ilya had given him a pass for. He had a key fob to Ilya's penthouse, which felt like a pretty big step, but in the three months they'd been seeing each other, they'd spent all of their time at Ilya's place.

He went up into the lobby, to the elevators, and up to the top floor. He got to Ilya's door, pressing the fob to the keypad, and stepped inside. Anya came running from the bedroom and Shane crouched to greet her.

"Hi, Anya," he hummed, petting her gently before he stood.

"Ilya?" he called into the penthouse.

"Shane."

Ilya appeared around the corner with a basket of laundry. He was dressed in a worn t-shirt and sweatpants, his curls looking surprisingly tidy, though this was the most casual that Shane had ever seen him. Ilya smiled at him, genuine and warm, and Shane's heart lurched. He placed his bag on the floor, as Ilya put down his laundry.

They wrapped themselves around each other, one of Ilya's strong arms pulled tight around Shane's back, one hand sliding into his hair at the back of his head. They kissed, tugging at clothing, stumbling their way to Ilya's bedroom without breaking contact.

Shane lay down on the bed and Ilya went immediately to work on him with his mouth. Shane watched him, amazed and awestruck as always to have someone like Ilya sucking his dick, and being *so fucking good at it*.

Something was up though and Shane wanted to know what it was, but he would ask after. It seemed like maybe Ilya needed this, so Shane reached down to gently caress Ilya's face, along the stubble on his jaw and cheeks. He slid his hand into Ilya's soft, soft curls, playing with them gently.

Ilya's eyes lifted to look at Shane. They were dark, his pupils blown wide, but there was something else in them beyond just lust. Shane sighed softly and bit his lip.

"It's okay," he murmured and Ilya turned his gaze down, focused on getting Shane off.

Shane stared up at the ceiling for a moment and closed his eyes, lost in the sensation of Ilya's warm, knowledgeable mouth on him, bringing him staggeringly fast to the brink. He was surprised how close he was so quickly but then again, that was just what it felt like when they were together.

Shane came with a soft little moan and Ilya swallowed, humming encouragingly around him. He let Shane slide slowly from between his lips, then kissed his way up Shane's body, to his mouth. Shane kissed him in return, holding him, before pressing Ilya onto his back, and returning the favor.

Shane sucked Ilya carefully into his mouth, focusing on just making Ilya feel good. He pressed his fingers to Ilya's firm thighs, holding them, working his mouth over him the way he knew Ilya liked.

"Shane," Ilya breathed, sounding reverent. Shane lifted his eyes and Ilya was looking back at him as if Shane was the most precious, beautiful thing he'd ever seen in his entire life.

Shane's heart fluttered in his chest, wanting to say more, to blurt out the words that felt too big and too soon for this thing between them. He didn't doubt that Ilya might say them back. He just wasn't sure if he was ready to hear them or if he believed them true. Especially if they were said after a blow job.

So he doubled down on sucking Ilya off, taking him deeper, keeping his mouth busy. Ilya panted and warned Shane but Shane didn't pull off. He didn't like taking it in his mouth usually but he didn't mind at all when it was Ilya.

Ilya swore above him in English and Russian and Shane swallowed around him, pulling off of him carefully, then flopping back onto the bed next to him. He turned his head, looking at Ilya, who was running his hands through his hair, and laughing.

"Fuck," Ilya said and Shane sat up, turning to look at him. He reached for Ilya's hand, holding it in his, stroking his thumb over Ilya's knuckles. Ilya looked at him.

"Are you alright?" Shane asked. "I've been worried..."

Ilya was silent for a moment, just looking at Shane. His brows furrowed a little and he looked away, carefully removing his hand from Shane's.

"I need a cigarette," he said, sliding out of bed and Shane stared down at the comforter, listening to Ilya move through the bedroom, and out into the hall. He waited a few moments, considering how to approach this, before he got up. He slid into his underwear and shirt and followed after Ilya. Anya came up to him and Shane smoothed his hand over her head, making his way to the terrace. He stood just outside the sliding doors, watching Ilya smoking on the balcony in nothing but his briefs.

Shane didn't like that he smoked but he couldn't deny that he looked incredibly sexy doing so. He looked a lot like a brooding heartthrob, leaning against the railing, masculine and handsome and sad, with a cigarette between his fingers.

Shane leaned against the door, just watching. Ilya glanced to look at him, then put out his cigarette. He came to Shane and Shane reached an arm out for him. Ilya moved closer and rested his head on Shane's shoulder. Shane wrapped his arms around him and held him, kissing into the soft curls of his hair. His heart ached.

"What's going on?" he asked after a few quiet moments of just holding Ilya. "Talk to me..."

"I don't know if you are ready to hear it," Ilya murmured back.

Shane closed his eyes and squeezed Ilya tight. His heart stuttered at the words, his stomach clenching with anxiety.

"Let me be the judge of that, okay?" he replied gently, trying to be brave.

He felt some of the tension leak out of Ilya and then he stood up, looking at Shane. "Okay."

Shane smiled at him and leaned up on his toes to kiss Ilya very softly on the mouth.
"C'mon."

Shane took Ilya's hand and they went back into the apartment, Ilya closing the terrace door behind him. Shane took him to the couch and sat him down, finding a throw blanket, and tossing it over Ilya.

This made him smile a little and Shane smiled back, joining him on the couch. Shane's knees were pressed to Ilya's thighs and he took Ilya's hands in his, rubbing his thumbs over his knuckles again.

"I was with my family today," Ilya said slowly. He was staring off into the middle distance, his face in profile, and Shane watched him, listening.

"My father is not doing well. He has Alzheimer's. It has gotten worse. My brother pretends that nothing is wrong. My stepmother is always drunk."

Shane didn't say anything, his heart breaking as Ilya just started spilling what he was feeling, as if once he'd started he couldn't stop. Watching the father he hated deteriorate, grieving for the man who had never loved him and who he would never have a real relationship with. The fear for his brother's children and what they were being born into, afraid that they would end up just like him, unloved by their father, and worried for a depressed, trapped mother.

Shane had no idea what kind of family business Ilya was a part of but he thought he understood a small amount of why Ilya felt trapped. By the time he had finished, he looked exhausted. He slumped back against the couch, his head resting against the back of it. Anya had joined them on the couch, her head resting on Ilya's thigh, and he'd placed one of his hands on her head.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "That was... too much."

Shane shook his head. "No. It wasn't."

Ilya rolled his head to the side to look at Shane. His normally joyful, sparkling hazel eyes just looked so sad and lost. There was more going on here than Shane realized and he wanted to know the whole story. He wasn't going to push for that now but he wanted Ilya to know that he had someone he could confide in.

Shane reached out and brushed the backs of his fingers lightly over Ilya's cheek. "I'm sorry that you've been dealing with so much and I'm sorry your family is so difficult. What would be helpful right now?"

Ilya blinked at Shane slowly. "Probably sleep," he replied. Shane smiled softly.

"We can make that happen."

Ilya sat up, looking down at Anya, and petting her head, before he turned his eyes back up to look at Shane. Shane looked back and cupped Ilya's face in both hands.

"You're the strongest person I know," Shane murmured. "You're incredible."

Ilya closed his eyes and huffed out a soft laugh. "Did you not hear the part where I called Svetlana to rescue me?"

“You asked for help,” Shane replied. “I don’t know a lot of people who would do that.”

Ilya opened his eyes, leaning his cheek into Shane’s palm. “You are sweet.”

Shane shrugged. “I’m just telling the truth.”

Ilya hummed, turning his head to kiss Shane’s skin.

“Anya needs one more walk before bed,” he said, changing the subject completely. Shane let him. It had certainly been a lot to unload in one night and it was obvious Ilya was tired. They would walk Anya and Shane had every intention of cuddling and soothing Ilya until he fell asleep.

So they got dressed and went out to walk the dog, hand in hand.

Back in the penthouse, Anya settled down for sleep, Shane herded Ilya into his bedroom to get ready for bed, and then got Ilya into it.

Ilya lay mostly on top of Shane, his head on Shane’s chest, one arm wrapped around him. Shane played with some of his curls, twirling them around his fingers, then released them, and rubbed his back. Ilya chuckled softly.

“What?” Shane asked quietly into the dark of the room.

“I like you, Shane,” Ilya murmured back.

Shane felt his face flush and he was sure that Ilya could feel his heart rate increase. The words were more than he had been expecting tonight and he was warm all over. He tilted his head down and kissed into Ilya’s hair.

“I like you, too, Ilya.”

Shane woke up the next morning to soft kisses being pressed to his shoulders. He hummed and smiled, rolling over, his body pressed against Ilya’s.

“Hi,” he sighed, stretching out. Ilya chuckled, leaning down to kiss just below Shane’s elbow.

“Good morning.”

They cuddled up together, enjoying a quiet waking up, Ilya’s fingers sliding into Shane’s hair, his lips pressing kisses to whatever parts of Shane he could reach. He seemed better this morning. Happier. Which eased Shane a bit.

They brushed their teeth and Ilya lured Shane back to bed to make out, which turned into slow, easy sex that had Shane’s toes curling. He was floating on nothing but good feelings as he and Ilya left Ilya’s bedroom, arms around each other.

They said good morning to Anya and Ilya started making coffee and breakfast and feeding the dog.

“How long can you stay?” Ilya asked as he passed Shane a mug of coffee.

“All day,” Shane replied. “Though, I should go home to check on the cat.”

Ilya spluttered, nearly choking on his sip of coffee. “You have a cat?! Three months I have been seeing you and I didn’t know you had a cat!”

Shane burst out laughing and Ilya looked affronted.

“Shane Hollander, what the fuck? Pictures! I want to see!”

“Okay, hang on, let me get my phone.”

Shane retrieved his phone from where it was charging on the nightstand, bringing it back to the kitchen. He handed his phone to Ilya, opened up the album where he kept all of his pictures of Eloise.

“Her name is Eloise,” Shane explained.

Ilya gasped. “She is beautiful! Magnificent. Very fluffy.”

Shane laughed. “Yeah. She is. She sheds like a motherfucker but she’s really cute.”

“When can I meet her?” Ilya asked, looking at Shane with intense, excited eyes.

“Whenever you want.”

“We can go to your house?” Ilya was getting increasingly excited and Shane was greatly amused by it.

“Yeah. We can.”

“I can see your bedroom?”

“Mmhmm,” Shane nodded.

Ilya backed Shane up against the kitchen island, his hands on either side of Shane on the counter, trapping him. His nose brushed Shane’s.

“Will I get to fuck you there?” Ilya asked in a low, husky voice.

Shane bit his lip and nodded slowly. “Yeah.”

Ilya growled and kissed him hungrily. Shane heard his phone slapping onto the counter top before Ilya hauled him onto it, kissing him. Shane wrapped his arms and legs around Ilya, kissing him back just as greedily.

Shane's phone and their coffees were forgotten as Ilya lifted Shane off the island and carried him back to his bedroom.

After another round of more intense, athletic sex, they showered together, took Anya out for a nice long walk, played fetch with her in the dog park, watched her play with some doggy friends, and picked up coffee and brunch on the way back to the penthouse.

"I want to take you to my studio," Ilya said as they cleaned up their food.

"You mean, your art studio?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes."

Shane smiled. As difficult as last night had been, he really liked that Ilya was sharing so much of himself with Shane. It didn't seem like an easy thing to do for him and Shane was once again glad to be trusted with these pieces of Ilya that he was willing to share.

"I'd like to see it," Shane replied. "I'd like to see your art."

Ilya smiled at him and kissed his cheek.

They took Shane's car to the studio, Ilya directing Shane until they arrived at what appeared to be a warehouse that had been converted into artist studios and lofts.

Ilya led Shane to a large studio on the second floor, sliding the door open. The studio was more sparse than he was expecting. There was a single chair with wheels, a stool, and a bench that was covered with all kinds of art supplies.

Ilya had turned on the lights and he went to one corner pulling a piece of cloth away, revealing several canvases covered in geometric designs of varying dark colors. Blacks and grays and blues and reds. A black and gold piece caught Shane's eye and he moved closer.

"May I?" he asked and Ilya nodded, holding out a hand in invitation. Shane picked up the canvas, looking at the chaotic black background and the perfect ring of gold.

"These are beautiful," he said and they were. Shane wasn't very artistic and he didn't think he had much of an eye for art but this was... intimate. Shane didn't know if Ilya was trying to evoke any particular feelings from the viewer but Shane was under the impression that this art came from a place of hurt.

He looked at Ilya's canvases and moved to the work table, leafing through Ilya's sketchpads. He saw some really amazing sketches of Anya, of a gorgeous woman in profile, of a car, of the river.

"Ah," Ilya said and Shane stopped leafing through the sketchbook, turning his gaze to Ilya.

"Sorry. Should I not...?"

Ilya shook his head. "No. It is..." he paused. "These are more... personal."

“I don’t have to look if you don’t want me to,” Shane replied, removing his hand.

Ilya shook his head again and picked up one of the sketchpads. His cheeks were pink and he looked uncomfortable as he flipped through the pad, then held it out to Shane.

Shane took the pad from Ilya curiously and looked down at the page. He was looking at his own face. The sketch of him was smiling, his face scrunched up in the way it did when he was comfortable... and happy.

He stared at the sketch, amazed at the detail. The way his hair fell, the line of his freckles, even his teeth.

“Did you draw this from memory?” Shane asked, looking up at Ilya. Shane had sent Ilya plenty of pictures, but none of them like this.

Ilya nodded, looking more self-conscious than Shane had ever seen him.

Shane wasn’t even sure what to say. He was completely dumbstruck. This was maybe one of the most romantic things that he had ever experienced. Ilya had memorized his face and captured it in such loving detail... was this how Ilya thought of him? Saw him? Shane's heart felt like it might explode.

Shane set down the sketchpad and reached for Ilya. He grabbed his coat in his hands and pulled him in, kissing him. Ilya made a surprised noise, then sighed dreamily, and kissed him back.

“You’re amazing,” Shane breathed and Ilya smiled, looking away, almost sheepish.

They stayed at the studio a little longer, Ilya showing Shane what he was working on, and some other sketches.

“This is my mother,” Ilya said, showing Shane a sketch, and then a picture of her. Shane could see where Ilya had gotten his looks from. His mother was beautiful. The same curly hair and hazel eyes and plush lips.

“She’s beautiful,” Shane said reverently. Ilya nodded.

“Yes. She was.”

Shane squeezed Ilya’s arm gently and then put his own around him. Ilya leaned into him.

“She was not a weak person. She was amazing. Great. My favorite person. But my father was so hard on her and she was so sad...”

They had talked a little more last night, about Irina Rozanova. The person she had been and how important she was to Ilya.

Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya and squeezed. There were so many things he wanted to say, wishing he could take away all of Ilya’s hurt, and make everything all better. He leaned away, just to look at him, catching Ilya flicking away tears.

“What would happen if you just... stepped away?” he asked. “Just... stop engaging with your family. Don’t go to dinner. Say you can’t, it’s too hard.”

Ilya didn’t say anything for a long time. Processing. What Shane was asking wasn’t unreasonable... but it felt nigh impossible.

“I don’t know,” he finally replied. “I’ve never tried.”

Shane pressed a kiss over Ilya’s heart, through his shirt. “Think about it. Maybe it’s worth a shot.”

Shane drove them to his house, feeling a little anxious and uncertain. He hadn’t had anyone besides his parents and his closest friends to his house before and he was nervous about what Ilya would think.

But Ilya had seemed excited to see Shane’s house and Shane thought it probably was only fair. Ilya had shared so much of himself and been so vulnerable this weekend, surely Shane could do the same.

He parked in his driveway and chuckled softly as Ilya looked out the window, one hand on the glass. Shane normally would have been annoyed by the idea of fingerprints on the window, but he would worry about that later. Ilya was like a little kid on Christmas.

“C’mon,” Shane said warmly. “I’ll give you a tour.”

They held hands as Shane led Ilya into his house where Eloise made a very noisy, annoyed entrance.

“Hi,” Shane cooed at her. “I know you’re pissed at me. I’m sorry.”

Ilya crouched down to greet Eloise, too, holding out a hand for her to sniff.

“I am sorry, too,” he said. “It is my fault. I am Ilya, it is nice to meet you, Eloise.”

Eloise took a long time to sniff at Ilya before she started rubbing against his hand, looking for pets, and purring.

“Hussy,” Shane murmured at her affectionately, shaking his head.

“You are so beautiful,” Ilya cooed at her. “Yes you are.”

He said a bunch of things in Russian that Shane didn’t understand but just hearing Ilya speak in his native tongue made Shane warm all over.

“It’s sexy when you speak Russian, you know that?”

Ilya looked up and smiled his sexy, crooked smile at Shane.

“Oh yes? You like it?”

Shane nodded. “I really, really do.”

Ilya hummed, standing up, and sliding his hands into Shane’s jacket pockets. He pulled him closer and grinned. Shane’s heart sped up and heat pooled in his belly.

“Would you like me to speak in Russian while I fuck you?” Ilya purred.

Shane’s hands pressed to Ilya’s chest and he couldn’t help the tiny whimper that escaped him at the idea because, well, yeah. He wanted that. It would be fucking hot.

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Ilya hummed, brushing Shane’s hair behind his ear, then leaning down to gently bite the sensitive skin. Shane choked back another whimper.

“Yes,” Shane breathed. Ilya pulled him in for a kiss.

They pulled off jackets, dropping them to the floor, toeing off shoes without breaking the kiss.

“Upstairs,” Shane sighed, taking Ilya’s hand and leading him to his bedroom. Ilya stopped him on the landing, pressing him against the wall to kiss him some more, before they continued to Shane’s room.

Looks like Shane would worry about giving Ilya the full tour later. They had better things to do.

Ilya paused when they got to Shane’s bedroom, looking around, curious and awed. It was a simple set up. Lots of blue and white. He was a pretty simple guy. Some pictures of his friends and parents were scattered around on his dresser. His favorite scented candle. Books. A nice watch.

“This is very…” Ilya murmured as he looked around, turning to Shane and smiling. “*You* .”

Shane laughed and blushed. “It’s nothing special. But the bed’s a king so…”

Ilya laughed, too, swooping in to pull Shane onto the bed with him. They bounced on the mattress and laughed. They tugged off clothes and tossed the offending garments to the floor until they were both naked and pressed together.

“I have wanted this,” Ilya murmured, pinning Shane’s wrists to the mattress. Shane sighed, tilting his head to give Ilya access to his neck.

“What? To see my house?” he murmured back as Ilya kissed his neck, making Shane squirm in pleasure.

“Yes. And to fuck you in your bed.”

Shane huffed a soft laugh that turned into a moan as Ilya sucked on his skin. He bit his lip, loving the idea of Ilya leaving marks on him.

“Please,” he breathed and Ilya hummed in reply. He released Shane, licking and kissing the mark he'd left.

“Mine,” he growled.

“Yours,” Shane sighed dreamily.

Ilya kissed him, sliding his hands down Shane's arms as he worked his way down his body. He took his time, kissing down Shane's neck, over his pecs, his stubble rubbing pleasantly against his skin. He licked over Shane's nipples, sucking them into his mouth, making Shane moan and arch into him.

Ilya cooed, smiling as he continued down Shane's abs, to his pelvis, kissing over his hips, and ignoring Shane's cock. Shane whined, feeling needy, and wanting Ilya to touch him. But Ilya had other plans. He got to Shane's thighs, leaving a mark on the inside of Shane's right thigh, before gently having Shane turn over.

Shane relaxed into the mattress, closing his eyes as Ilya leaned over him, nuzzling against the back of his head.

“Lube?” he asked.

“Everything's in there,” Shane muttered, pointing in the direction of his nightstand. Ilya shifted away, opening the drawer, pulling out the lube and a condom.

He settled over Shane again, pressing slow, lingering kisses to his shoulder blades, the back of his neck, down each notch of his spine. It was worshipful and soft and Ilya whispered Russian words sweetly into Shane's skin. Shane shivered under the careful touches, only more turned on by Ilya speaking in his first language.

“Gorgeous,” Ilya said in English. “So perfect.”

Shane blushed and preened, *feeling* gorgeous and perfect.

Ilya reached Shane's lower back, kissing along it, before his hands curved around Shane's ass, squeezing. He pressed a kiss to Shane's left glute, pulling his cheeks apart, and brushed his tongue lightly over Shane's hole.

“Oh fuck,” Shane gasped, the sensation riding up his spine.

“Okay?” Ilya asked.

“Definitely okay.”

Shane had never had anyone do this to him before and holy fuck... he already knew his mind was going to be blown.

Ilya chuckled and kept going. He lapped at Shane's entrance; small kitten licks, then firmer strokes, then circling his tongue. Shane had no idea how something could be so hot yet so relaxing at the same time. His cock was rigid and leaking against the mattress and he was

vaguely aware that he could probably come just from this. Ilya was impossibly skilled with his tongue and he took his time.

Shane moaned and whined and panted as Ilya worked him, pushing his tongue inside of Shane, which made Shane gasp and shudder. No one had ever done *that* to him before and it was incredible.

“Holy god, Ilya. Fuck. Wow. That’s so fucking good.”

Shane melted into the mattress, feeling almost drunk, his mouth hanging open, eyes unfocused, his cock aching.

“Can you come like this?” Ilya asked.

“Uh huh,” was all that Shane managed.

“Do you want to?”

Without the onslaught of sensation, Shane came back to himself, shifting his hips further up, so his cock couldn’t use the mattress for friction.

“No,” he finally said, peeking over his shoulder at Ilya. “I want you inside me.”

Ilya smiled his sexy smile at him and leaned away. Shane rolled onto his back and Ilya bent down, their noses brushing.

“Did you like doing that?” Shane asked.

Ilya nodded. “Yes. I like all of the things I do to you.”

Shane smiled at him and Ilya smiled back, kissing him. Shane wrapped his arms around him, sliding one between them to stroke Ilya’s cock. He loved the feeling of it in his hand, silky and warm. They pulled apart and Ilya leaned back to put on the condom and slick himself.

Shane bit his lip as he watched Ilya press up against him and push inside. Shane loved the look on Ilya’s face, soft and awed, as if he couldn’t believe Shane was allowing him this. Shane would give him so much more.

“C’mon,” he sighed, wrapping his arms and legs around Ilya. “Fuck me.”

Ilya complied, pulling out and driving back into Shane. Shane cried out, letting himself be loud and uninhibited. Ilya made a pleased sound, looming over him.

“Yes, Shane. Let me hear you.”

Ilya fucked Shane hard and fast, shaking the bed, Shane’s headboard slamming against the wall rhythmically. Ilya grabbed Shane’s hands, tangling their fingers and Shane squeezed. He lifted his ankles onto Ilya’s shoulders and Ilya pushed into him deeper, folding Shane in half, and fuck it was so good. Just the right angle, hard and fast, and so, so, so good.

They looked at each other, panting and sweating.

Ilya said something in Russian and all Shane understood was his own name but it was sexy and encouraging all the same, even if he didn't know what Ilya said.

He whined and panted in response. He was so close. He was going to come untouched any second.

More Russian and then Ilya translated, "are you going to come for me?"

Shane nodded his head frantically and Ilya sped up.

"Yes. Fuck. Come on."

Shane's mouth fell open and his eyes rolled back, a long, loud moan escaping him as he came hard all over his chest and stomach.

"Shane. Fuck," Ilya gasped, stilling and coming inside him. Shane squeezed Ilya's hands tight, watching him as aftershocks rippled through him.

They both stared at one another, catching their breaths, and Shane could feel the words he so desperately wanted to speak hover against his lips. Ilya carefully untangled one hand from Shane's, reaching up to caress Shane's cheek with the backs of his fingers, then cupped Shane's cheek in his hand.

His expression was so soft and tender, his touch sweet and adoring, that Shane's heart constricted. He closed his eyes, turning his head to kiss Ilya's palm. The air between them was heavy with unspoken words. Ilya gently pulled out of Shane and lay next to him.

Shane ignored the mess on his torso and rolled over to face him. They looked at each other and Ilya gently tucked Shane's hair behind his ear, and stroked his thumb over Shane's cheekbone.

"I want to fuck you in every room of your house," he stated and Shane laughed, cheeks going warm.

"Well, I guess we can make that happen," Shane replied, sighing as Ilya nuzzled under his chin, pressing kisses to Shane's skin, making him shiver. He smoothed his hand through Ilya's hair, down his neck, resting just at the top of his spine, eyes closed as he enjoyed Ilya's gentle ministrations.

Shane liked this. He liked all of it. He liked being with Ilya and dating and getting to know him. He liked being close to someone and the idea of maybe... building a future together. He didn't know if that was what Ilya wanted, if Ilya was as serious about this as Shane was.

He opened his eyes and swallowed, gathering his courage.

"Ilya?"

Ilya kissed the corner of his mouth before he leaned away to meet Shane's eyes.

“Yes?”

“What are we?”

Ilya didn't say anything for a long moment and Shane was afraid that he had overstepped. He opened his mouth to try and take the words back but Ilya replied, “do you want to be boyfriends?”

“I—yes,” Shane said immediately. “Do... you?”

“Yes,” Ilya replied, his expression surprisingly open. “I do.”

Shane was practically glowing at hearing that confirmation, at knowing that Ilya wanted the same thing, felt the same way. Shane reached for him and Ilya came, neither of them caring that Shane was still all gross.

They kissed, warm and affectionate, both of them smiling into it. Ilya rolled over, pulling Shane on top of him and Shane went easily. They both laughed and Shane smoothed his hands through Ilya's curls.

“Boyfriend,” he murmured and leaned down to kiss him some more.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Ilya meets Shane's parents

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Paradise by Carmody

OCTOBER

Ilya stepped through the rotating doors that led into the rink. The place was empty inside except for a single, lone figure on the other side, sitting on one of the benches that led out onto the ice.

Shane looked up, standing up, and beaming happily as soon as he spotted Ilya. Ilya's heart tumbled helplessly in his chest at the sight of Shane's adorable, crinkled, happy face, his whole body flooded with warmth and delight at seeing him.

"You made it!" Shane called.

Shane had invited Ilya to the rink after Shane had finished coaching for the day so he and Ilya could skate together. They both shared a love for hockey and Ilya had liked the idea of some one-on-one time with Shane before they went over to Shane's parents' house for dinner.

Ilya had never met anyone's parents before and he was a little nervous. He had never cared much about people's impressions or opinions of him but he cared very deeply about how *Shane's parents* would perceive him.

Would they not like his accent? Would they think that he was unintelligent? Not good enough for their son?

From what Shane had described, his parents seemed like wonderful people, and Ilya had nothing to be worried about, but he was anxious anyway.

"Hi," he said, joining Shane on the bench, and kissed him in greeting. Shane was smiling and beautiful. He was wearing a toque, a jacket with his school's logo on it and *Coach Hollander* sewn onto the front, dark jeans, and his skates. The added five inches from the skates made him about as tall as Ilya without skates, which made Ilya smile.

“Hi,” Shane replied. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

Ilya placed his bag down and sat. “Me, too.”

He skated often enough, though it was no longer part of his usual fitness routine. There was a guy he paid at the local university who let him use the rink when the college team wasn’t practicing and Ilya would spend hours just skating around and playing with a puck.

“I’m excited to skate with you,” Shane said, sitting down next to Ilya and bumping his shoulder. “Mr. NHL.”

Ilya huffed. “Mr. *Almost* -NHL.”

Shane hummed and kissed Ilya’s shoulder, watching as Ilya took his skates out of his bag.

“How was practice?” Ilya asked, taking off his socks and shoes. Shane talked about his day as Ilya slid into his skate, lacing up.

He liked listening to Shane talk. He had a nice voice. Just a touch higher than Ilya’s, with a slight Canadian accent that Ilya liked. Ilya nodded and hummed and asked questions and finished with his skates.

“Ready?” Shane asked.

“Let’s go.”

Ilya let Shane lead him out onto the ice. It looked like the Zamboni had come through because the ice was pristine. Ilya let Shane skate away from him, watching him move, before he turned, graceful and practiced.

“Come on,” he laughed.

“I am watching you,” Ilya replied, pleased to see Shane blush. “Show me your moves, Hollander.”

Shane grinned and for the next six or so minutes, he skated circles around Ilya. He moved with calculated, easy grace and had Shane ever considered a career in professional hockey, Ilya had no doubt that he would have been phenomenal.

Shane came to a stop by Ilya, spraying him with ice, and Ilya laughed, brushing the ice off his pants and jacket.

“Hey!”

“Your turn!” Shane said. His face was flushed and he was breathing a little hard and smiling. He looked so fucking good like that. Ilya wanted to squish his perfect face between his hands and kiss him breathless. He wanted to bottle up this feeling, to immortalize this moment in his memory.

He wanted to tell Shane he loved him.

And he was pretty sure that Shane would say it back.

Ilya didn't say anything though. He just winked at Shane and pushed off. He definitely wasn't in the same kind of shape he had been in at eighteen but he could still move well. He'd been a fast skater, one of the fastest.

He missed competing but at least he could still skate. There had been a time when he hadn't been sure he'd ever walk again, so he would take what he could, and be grateful.

He skated past and around Shane. Forwards, backwards, changing direction quickly, using his edges, doing some crossovers. He came to a stop next to Shane, spraying him with ice, and snickering.

"What the fuck?" Shane laughed, his entire front covered in ice. "You're really good!"

"So are you," Ilya replied. "You are a beautiful skater."

Shane was blushing, brushing ice off himself, and beaming at Ilya. "Thanks. You, too. I can see why you were scouted."

Ilya shrugged and Shane moved closer to him. He took Ilya's hands in his, leaning up to kiss him. "Skate with me..."

They skated around together for a little, holding hands. There was no music. Just them, talking, and the sound of their skates on the ice.

"I've always wanted to do this with someone," Shane said, skating backwards, Ilya's hands held in both of his.

"Oh?" Ilya replied softly.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. I don't know. Maybe it's kind of stupid. But it was something I thought about a lot. Being able to take the person I love to a rink or to fly out to Banff, and skate together."

Shane's expression dropped and he stopped skating when he realized what he'd said. His whole face was red and his lips parted. Ilya just blinked at him.

"I—" Shane stammered. Ilya held Shane's hands tighter in his own.

Oh.

Oh shit.

"Shane..."

"I'm sorry. I'm so—shit, I didn't..."

"No, no," Ilya said, moving closer to Shane, holding Shane's hands in his, pressed to his chest. "Shane."

Ilya's throat felt dry but it was out there. The word was out there and Ilya wouldn't leave Shane hanging. Not when he felt the same.

"I love you."

Shane blinked up at him with big, dark eyes. He looked scared and uncertain but he relaxed, his expression turning hopeful.

"You do?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes."

"I love you, too."

Ilya let out a helpless laugh. "Thank Christ."

Shane laughed, too, reaching up to rest his hand at the back of Ilya's head, pulling him down to press their foreheads together.

Ilya's expression softened as he looked at this sweet, sometimes shy man who had completely and totally enraptured him. He had no idea how he had let any of this happen, how he had fallen so helplessly and completely for him. And in such a short amount of time.

Maybe it was a mistake. Certainly it was dangerous. But that had never stopped Ilya before.

How could any of this be a bad thing? Shane made him so happy and he made Shane happy, somehow. He always wanted to make Shane happy.

He loved him. It was that simple.

Ilya pulled Shane into his arms and Shane cupped his face, kissing him.

"Thank god," Shane huffed against his mouth and Ilya laughed as they kissed some more, right at center ice.

"Fuck," Shane laughed. "We're supposed to go to my parents' after that bomb got dropped? Shit."

Ilya laughed, too. "It will be okay, yes?"

Shane nodded, smiling up at Ilya, his thumb stroking over Ilya's cheek. "Yeah. It'll be fine. I just don't know how I'll get through dinner. I'll just be thinking about going home and making love to you."

Ilya chuckled deeply, kissing Shane's palm, and then his mouth. "I will be thinking the same."

Shane groaned. "Not helping."

Ilya laughed more, gently turning Shane in a circle on the ice, kissing him.

“I love you,” he said, because he could, and because it felt so good.

Shane laughed, holding him. “I love you, too.”

They arrived at Shane’s parents’ house and despite the fact that he and Shane had exchanged ‘I love yous’, the good feelings from that were now being replaced by anxiety. Ilya had a bottle of wine in one hand and some traditional Russian cookies in the other, following Shane up to his parents’ front door.

It was the moment of truth. No turning back now.

“It’s going to be fine,” Shane assured him, though he seemed just as nervous as Ilya. Ilya offered him a smile, hoping he looked cool, calm, and collected.

Shane opened the door and stepped inside.

“Mom! Dad!” he called into the house and Ilya stepped in after him, closing the door behind him.

“Shane!” came a woman’s voice from somewhere in the house, and a moment later, Yuna Hollander appeared in the entryway, followed by a tall-ish man with salt and pepper hair, who must have been David Hollander. Ilya could immediately see Shane in his mother’s features. The same hair, the same colored eyes, the same nose.

“Honey! Hi!” Yuna cooed, embracing her son, kissing his cheek, and giving him a once over, before she turned her eyes on Ilya.

“Hey Dad,” Shane said, embracing his father.

“And you must be Ilya!” Yuna said warmly, reaching out for him. Ilya smiled at her, switching the bottle of wine to the crook of his other arm, and nodded, bending down to allow her to hug him. He wrapped an arm around her frame to hug her back.

“Yes. And you are Yuna. It is very nice to meet you.”

Yuna pulled back, smiling at him. “Yes! It’s lovely meeting you! Here let me take those. Thank you so much. These look delicious!” She took the wine and the cookies and then reached up to cup a warm hand against Ilya’s face.

“You are so handsome,” she said with the same earnestness as her son and Ilya couldn’t help but smile.

“Mom!” Shane squawked but Ilya was not at all bothered. He was flattered and pleased that his boyfriend’s mother at least approved of his looks.

“Yes. Thank you.”

“Oh my god,” Shane mumbled and Yuna laughed, turning to her son.

“I like him,” she said to Shane with a wink and a little nudge, making her way back into the house.

Ilya beamed at Shane who rolled his eyes but was smiling. Everything was coming up aces for Ilya, at least where Yuna was concerned. There was still one more person he had to win over though.

“You are David,” Ilya said to Shane’s father, who held out a hand. Ilya shook it and David brought him in for a hug.

“It’s nice to meet you, Ilya. Welcome!”

“Thank you.”

“You boys get settled and then come on in. Dinner’s almost ready.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

They hung up their coats and took off their shoes in the entry. Shane pointed out slippers laid out at the front door and they both slid into those, before going into the house. Shane’s family home was cozy and inviting and a little cluttered in the way that Ilya imagined most “normal” people’s homes were.

Ilya took everything in, amazed. The home looked so lived in and well loved, nothing compared to the cold, sparse houses he had been used to growing up. Elegant but remote.

They went into the kitchen where Yuna handed them glasses of wine and talked about what they would be eating for dinner. The entire house smelled delicious. Shane tilted his head toward another part of the house as he looked at Ilya and Ilya followed after.

“I’ll give you a tour,” he said, taking Ilya’s hand.

“Do I get to see your childhood room?” Ilya asked.

Shane huffed, but his blush and smile gave him away. “Yes. But it’s just storage at this point.”

Ilya grinned.

Shane showed him the living room, dining room, and bathroom. They went upstairs to his old bedroom (which was now mostly storage), his parents’ room, a guest room, and another bathroom.

Ilya saw pictures on the walls of family vacations, Yuna and David’s wedding pictures, and photos of Shane growing up.

“Aww, look at you,” Ilya said, pointing at a baby picture of Shane. “How cute.” Shane had been a really cute kid though, no lie.

“Stop it,” Shane laughed and Ilya chuckled, kissing Shane’s temple.

“No. I love this.”

Shane hummed, wrapping his arms around Ilya, his face buried in Ilya’s chest. “I can’t believe you’re here... meeting my parents.”

Ilya smiled as he pressed kisses into Shane’s scalp and held him and felt himself fill up with happiness at being in this warm, loving home with the man he loved, meeting his parents.

Shane sighed, lifting his head, smiling up at Ilya happily. “Okay. Let’s go back downstairs.”

They went back down and sat at the dining room table.

“Oh, Mom broke out the fancy china for you,” Shane said, waggling his eyebrows at Ilya.

“I’m honored,” Ilya replied honestly, a hand on his chest.

Dinner was a casual, comfortable affair. Ilya was a little overwhelmed by how welcoming and interested David and Yuna were in him as a person but he fell easily into step, joking with and charming them.

He caught Shane looking at him every once in a while, a sappy look on his face, like he was so proud of Ilya, and so pleased that he was here with him. Ilya knew that Shane really did feel that way and it warmed him to his core.

And Ilya loved watching Shane interact with his parents, to see the dynamic between the three of them. Yuna and Shane playfully bickered and David acted as the sensible middle man. Ilya noticed that Shane and David had the same smile and that Shane must have inherited his freckles from his father’s side of the family.

Ilya found himself really liking Shane’s family.

Dinner was cleared away and dishes put in the sink. Dessert and coffee was brought out and Ilya explained what the cookies were and was delighted to find that Shane’s parents liked them.

After dessert, Shane helped his mom clean away the dishes. He checked in to be sure that Ilya was okay being left along with Shane’s dad while Shane and Yuna washed dishes, and Ilya reassured him.

“I’m not going to threaten him or anything,” David assured. “Don’t worry.”

Ilya chuckled and Shane gave them a fond, slightly exasperated look before he went into the kitchen.

“So Shane was telling me that you’re an artist, too? What’s your medium?” David asked.

They talked for a while about art and Ilya’s cocktail bar and what David did for a living and what Shane was like growing up. Ilya wanted to hear every adorable, embarrassing story about Shane as a kid.

David was in the middle of such a Shane story when Shane and Yuna came back into the dining room. Shane tried getting his dad to stop telling the story, looking mortified, but Ilya protested.

“No! I want to hear,” he laughed, taking Shane’s hand, kissing his palm. He did it unconsciously and he wondered if it was okay to kiss Shane in front of his parents but Shane only blushed deeper and smiled, then sat down next to Ilya.

It was a lovely evening overall. Maybe one of the best that Ilya had ever had. Yuna hugged and kissed him goodbye and David gave him a hug and they both said how nice it was to have met him.

They got into Shane’s car and Shane drove them back to his house. Ilya felt like everything was so... surreal. What a lovely, incredible evening.

“Did you have fun?” Shane asked, reaching for Ilya’s hand. Ilya took Shane’s, tangling their fingers, and resting their joined hands on his thigh.

“Yes. I did. I really like your parents. They’re very nice.”

Shane smiled. “Yeah. They’re the best,” he replied, sounding very soft. “They liked you, too. A lot. My mom wouldn’t shut up about it.”

Ilya laughed. “What did she say?”

Shane chuckled. “That you’re very handsome and polite and funny.” Shane softened again, squeezing Ilya’s hand.

“She said that I seemed really happy. And I am. Maybe the happiest I’ve been in a long time... because of you.”

“Shane...” Ilya murmured, turning to look at Shane’s face in profile, the strong line of his jaw, the straight slope of his nose. He was so beautiful and Ilya loved him so much.

Shane glanced at him, smiling and blushing in that shy, sweet way he did that made Ilya’s heart go crazy.

“I was lonely. I think I’ve been lonely for years. And I’m really, really glad I met you.”

Ilya squeezed his hand and brought it to his mouth, kissing the back of it.

“I’m also glad I met you,” Ilya replied. “I love you.”

Shane let out a little wet laugh. “I love you, too.”

Ilya smiled at him, smoothing his thumb over the side of Shane’s finger, then kissed the back of his hand once more.

Shane pulled into his driveway and they walked into the house together. They hung up their coats, slipped off their shoes. Leftovers were placed in the fridge and Eloise was given much

love and attention before Shane fed her.

Ilya took Shane's hand and led him upstairs. He turned on Shane's bedside lamps, pulled out the lube and a condom, and went to where Shane stood by the foot of his bed. He tossed down the supplies in easy reach before he cupped Shane's face gently in his hands, just looking at him. Shane looked back, his hands coming to rest on Ilya's hips. Ilya brushed his thumb against Shane's cheekbone and kissed him.

He took his time, pouring his heart into the kiss, kissing Shane deep and gentle, and ended it with little nips to Shane's bottom lip. Shane let out a dreamy sigh, leaning against Ilya's chest. He opened his eyes, looking up at Ilya.

"You met my parents."

Ilya smiled. "I did."

"They loved you."

"Of course. What is not to love?"

Shane laughed, wrapping his strong arms around Ilya's waist, eyelids dipping low over his eyes as he blinked.

"You were amazing tonight. So charming and funny. And fuck, your skating."

Ilya hummed. "Was a good night, yes."

Shane smiled, brushing his lips against Ilya's in an almost kiss. "And I love you."

Ilya melted. "I love you, too."

They kissed again, hungrier, deeper, pulling off shirts, unbuckling belts, unzipping flies. They kicked off their underwear and pulled off socks and Ilya went to his knees on Shane's carpet and kissed the tip of his hard cock. He loved that Shane got hard so easily, that he always seemed so eager. He licked at him, teasing his tongue under the head of his dick, lifting his eyes to watch Shane's face. He was looking down at Ilya, his expression almost reverent. Ilya kept eye contact as he tongued at Shane's slit, watching him bite his lip, and let out a little whimper. Ilya closed his eyes and sucked on the head of his cock for a bit and then took him into his mouth.

One of Shane's hands threaded into his hair, the other curled around his shoulder. Ilya stroked his hands over Shane's strong thighs, to his ass, pulling him closer, making Shane gasp.

"God, Ilya. Fuck. You're so good at that."

Ilya hummed around Shane, using his tongue and teeth, swallowing around him. He bobbed his head a little, enjoying the weight and warmth and taste of Shane on his tongue. He listened to Shane's quiet noises, to his intermittent praise. He pulled off of Shane, pressing kisses to his stomach, and got to his feet.

“Come here,” Shane murmured, pulling him in for more kisses. They kissed for a long time, bodies pressed flush, hands roaming eagerly over skin.

Ilya turned Shane, bending him over his bed carefully, his arms on the mattress.

“Okay?” Ilya murmured, kissing the top of Shane's spine.

“Yeah,” Shane replied, lifting his ass a little, looking over his shoulder. Ilya grinned.

“Is this for me?” he asked, squeezing Shane's ass and Shane hummed.

“All yours”.

Ilya growled and leaned over him, reaching for the lube. He slicked his fingers and pressed one to Shane's hole, teasing gently.

“Is this what you want?” he asked, warm and tender.

“Yes,” Shane replied. “Want your dick.”

Ilya kissed his shoulder, carefully sliding a finger inside, Shane's responding moan going right to Ilya's dick.

Ilya worked him open with knowledgeable fingers, kissing Shane's back, feeling him shiver at the attention, and pressing back against Ilya's fingers.

Ilya loved pulling moans and whines and begging from Shane, he loved knowing how good he could make Shane feel.

“I'm ready,” Shane panted. “C'mon.”

Ilya smiled. “So impatient for me.”

Shane whined, which only made Ilya chuckle. He kissed Shane's shoulder, pressing up against him.

“This is what you want?” he asked, rubbing his dick between Shane's ass cheeks.

“Yes. Fuck. Give it to me, baby. Fill me up.”

Ilya growled possessively at those words, pushing into Shane in one thrust, making Shane yell. He loved when Shane spoke like that, uninhibited and slutty, it was incredibly sexy to Ilya. And he'd called Ilya *baby*.

Fuck.

He *liked* that.

He fucked Shane just the way he liked it, hard and fast, watching the way his head tilted back, and he moaned loudly, the sound filling the room. Ilya loved Shane like this, completely free and lost to pleasure. One day, Ilya was going to fuck him in front of a mirror,

so he could watch all of Shane's expressions from behind, and make Shane watch himself. He needed to know how perfect and gorgeous he was.

"Oh yes. Fuck yes. I'm gonna come. Holy Shit. Ilya. Fuck. I'm coming, I'm—"

Shane let out an almost pained noise as he came, clenching around Ilya exquisitely. It only took two more thrusts for Ilya to come right on Shane's heels, pulsing inside him. He leaned over Shane's back, panting, pressing breathless kisses to Shane's sweaty, flushed skin.

"Moy lyubimyy," he murmured. "Moy vozlyublenniy."

"Mmm?" Shane said, his hand searching blindly for Ilya's. Ilya took his hand, squeezing gently.

"My beloved," he translated. "My love."

Shane shivered under him, peeking over his shoulder. His cheeks were pink from more than just the exertion of their love making, his eyes a little wide. Ilya smiled back at him.

He pressed tender, soft kisses to Shane's back and shoulders and into his hair before he slid out of Shane and moved around the bed to kiss him gently on the mouth.

"I will be right back."

He went to Shane's bathroom, grabbing a face towel, and brought it back to clean Shane, and the footboard, off.

They settled into bed together, cuddled close, Ilya running his fingers through Shane's silky hair.

"I'm very happy," he said softly. "It was very nice meeting your parents today.."

Shane snuggled against Ilya, pressing a kiss to his left pec, right over the bear tattoo.

"I'm happy, too. Today was... a really amazing day. I love you."

"I love you, too."

Ilya smiled, tilting Shane's head up with a gentle finger, and kissed him. He really was so happy. And so was Shane. And Ilya realized that he would do anything to protect this. He'd do anything to make Shane happy.

The next morning, Ilya woke up to a pair of blue eyes set in a very cute, furry face, staring down at him.

"Mreow?" said Eloise and Ilya chuckled.

“Good morning,” he said in Russian to her, reaching up to gently massage his fingers between her ears. She was sitting on his chest and while she seemed like she was a fairly large cat, he was pretty sure she was mostly just fluff.

Petting the cat, Ilya turned his head to find Shane asleep beside him. He looked impossibly lovely, completely relaxed, and peaceful. Ilya wanted to curl around him and kiss him awake but he also had a cat on top of him that he wasn’t entirely sure what to do with.

“Can I help you, ma’am?” he asked her, still in Russian. And she meowed back at him. Maybe she was a trilingual cat, since Shane talked to her in both English and French.

“Are you Russian, too?” He chuckled, scratching under her chin. Eloise purred aggressively and Ilya gave her the attention she so desperately seemed to want, before she eventually jumped off the bed.

Ilya rolled over, taking the opportunity to snuggle up against Shane, and press kisses to his shoulders and hair until he woke up. He smelled good, like his detergent and his own musky scent, and Ilya breathed him in. It didn’t take long for him to wake and Ilya watched in awe at the absolute vision that Shane Hollander was.

He let his lips linger on Shane’s skin and Shane smiled at him, sleep rumbled and warm and cute as hell. He stretched out and made a little squeaking noise that made Ilya laugh and his heart feel like it could burst.

“Good morning,” Shane sighed, settling on his back, opening his arms, and Ilya went to him, leaning to to press kisses to Shane’s smooth chest.

“Good morning,” he murmured back, kissing the hollow of Shane’s throat, up his neck, to the underside of his chin.

They cuddled and nuzzled each other, legs tangled. Ilya wouldn’t have minded staying in bed with Shane all day, enjoying his body, his company, reveling in the fact that Shane loved him and he loved Shane and they were *together* .

They did eventually get out of bed so they could brush their teeth and Ilya spent a very dedicated amount of time just kissing Shane once he was able, leaving Shane dreamy and maybe a little winded.

They went to his kitchen and Shane made Ilya sit while he bustled about, starting coffee, and feeding the cat.

“I can help,” Ilya chuckled and Shane shook his head.

“No. You’re my guest.”

Ilya leaned his elbows on the table, his face resting in his palms, watching Shane. He looked good in his sweatshirt and shorts. Ilya liked his broad shoulders and trim waist and amazing ass. “Okay.”

It was a nice, domestic morning. Eloise made herself at home in Ilya's lap and he indulged in petting her. She was very soft. Shane made eggs and toast and they sat outside on his back deck, drinking coffee, and eating breakfast.

"Thank you for breakfast, moya lyubov," Ilya murmured, kissing Shane's neck.

"You're welcome," Shane replied. "What does that one mean?"

Ilya smiled. "My love."

Shane was all pink and smiling shyly and Ilya wrapped an arm around him and kissed his cheek. "You are so cute, sweetheart."

Shane whined and Ilya laughed.

"If you keep calling me those things, I'll combust."

"Com-what?" Ilya chuckled.

"Explode," Shane replied.

"Mmm, is it too much?"

Shane turned in Ilya's arms, wrapping his arms around him, hiding his face in Ilya's neck.

"I'm just not used to it," he replied. "I've never really had a boyfriend before or been called any of those things..."

Ilya hummed, gently rocking them back and forth. "I will keep doing it if you like it."

"I do," Shane whispered. Ilya turned his head and kissed into his hair.

"Okay." He smiled. "You know, I liked when you called me baby."

Shane groaned and Ilya laughed. "I did! Was nice!"

Shane chuckled, his breath puffing against Ilya's skin. "Duly noted."

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya go on a trip

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Love You For A Long Time by Maggie Rogers

DECEMBER/JANUARY

Shane chuckled fondly as Ilya got into the car, muttering to himself in Russian. He looked very handsome in his winter jacket and toque, pulling off his gloves as he started the car. Shane put their to go mugs of coffee in the cup holders near the car's front console.

It was still dark outside, the sky only just beginning to lighten. It was early, for both of them, and he knew Ilya wasn't completely thrilled about it, simply humoring Shane because he was a good boyfriend. Shane brought up directions to Lake Louise and Ilya pulled them out of their parking spot. They were only fifteen minutes away, an easy drive, even if it was so early in the morning.

Shane was excited. He had been looking forward to this trip since he and Ilya had talked about it in October. Shane had learned that Ilya hadn't really seen much of Canada outside of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, and Shane had only been to Banff National Park once as a little kid. He'd always wanted to skate on Lake Louise in the winter and doing it with the man he loved seemed like a pretty good deal.

Shane had off for the holidays; twelve days free to use as he chose and they had decided to use nine of them for their trip. They'd spent Christmas with Shane's parents, which Shane had loved. He had been so happy to have Ilya there with them and he'd completely melted at seeing his dad and Ilya leaning over the coffee table and doing a puzzle together.

The day after, they'd flown out to Banff, staying at a quaint boutique resort that wasn't far from Lake Louise, offering them privacy in a beautiful, semi-secluded spot in the woods, overlooking a creek.

Shane loved everything about it so far. The snow, the quiet, the tranquil beauty of the place, the fact that he was there with Ilya. He rested his head on the headrest of his seat, turning his head to watch Ilya as he drove, a soft little smile on his face.

“What?” Ilya asked, eyes darting quickly to Shane, his lips shifting upwards slightly.

“You’re unfairly handsome in the mornings,” Shane replied and Ilya chuckled, reaching for his coffee.

“Yes. I know.”

Shane laughed softly, closing his eyes, feeling so, so happy. Ilya drove them to the lake, finding a parking spot, both of them unsurprised to see that they weren’t the only ones here so early. There were maybe five or six other cars, probably all with the same idea. Skating at sunrise on the crystal clear frozen lake.

“Wow,” Ilya said, peeking out the windshield, his arms resting on top of the steering wheel. “It is beautiful. I have only seen pictures...”

“Right? It’s fucking gorgeous.”

Ilya turned to Shane, his expression tender, and he reached out to touch Shane’s cheek. “Not as much as you.”

Shane’s face burned at the words and he stared at Ilya, dumbfounded.

“You can’t just say that, Ilya!” he finally managed to splutter, punching Ilya lightly in the arm.

Ilya laughed, the sound was absolute music to Shane’s ears. “What? Why not? Is the truth!”

Shane shook his head and rolled his eyes, picking up his own coffee, but his heart was glowing in his chest. He didn’t think he’d ever get over Ilya saying such sweet things to him... and *meaning* them.

“Do you want to go?” Ilya asked when Shane had placed his empty coffee cup in the cupholder.

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

They got their gear out of the back of the car and made their way down to the lake. There were some benches set up and they put on their skates, walking out onto the ice as the sun began to rise. The ice was completely transparent, revealing the lake bottom underneath.

It was absolutely breathtaking.

Ilya came closer to Shane and took his hand, tugging him out to skate with him. They skated in nonsensical patterns, hand in hand, while the sun rose up over the mountains. It was one of the coolest, most beautiful things Shane had ever experienced.

Ilya looked so perfect, the sun picking out all the bronze strands in the curls that poked out from under his toque. His eyes sparkled with delight, all crinkled as he smiled at Shane. And Shane was helplessly in love.

He wrapped his arms around Ilya and held him, wanting to burn this moment into his memory. Something he would remember and treasure for the rest of his life.

“Moya lyubov,” Ilya murmured, squeezing Shane. Shane smiled and closed his eyes, leaning into him, before lifting his head to kiss him warmly a few times.

“I love you.”

Ilya smiled, kissing the tip of Shane’s cold nose. “I love you, too.”

There were only a handful of other people on the ice with them and it was nice to enjoy the relative quiet of it all. They decided to leave when things started to get more crowded and Shane drove them back, stopping at a diner for breakfast.

Shane and Ilya sat in a booth, deciding to split eggs, sausage, and a waffle. It was nice and cozy in the diner and Shane watched Ilya across the booth from him, marveling at his tousled curls, the strong, masculine lines of his face, and his perfect mouth.

They played footsie under the table, laughing at each other for no reason. Shane felt so giddy and warm, enjoying Ilya’s company, and being on this adventure together. He’d always wondered what it would be like to be out with a partner. On a date, on vacation, what people might think when they looked at him with the person he was with.

Shane had been out for dinner with Jackie and Hayden before and he could see how much they loved each other. Shane hoped that that was what people saw when he looked at him and Ilya. Two people who were in love and happy.

They shared their breakfast, “fighting” over the last piece of waffle, which Shane let Ilya have because Ilya liked sweet things more than Shane did. Ilya paid for breakfast and then they went back to the resort.

The cabin was nice and cozy upon their return. They tugged off their coats and hats and gloves, hanging everything up, sliding out of their boots and leaving them by the door, along with their bags. Shane went up to the loft, stripping down, and getting back into bed for a nap. Ilya joined him, snuggled up close, his body tucked around Shane’s, spooning him.

Shane had no idea what time it was when he woke up again, Ilya still warm and comforting against his back, one strong arm draped over Shane’s waist. Shane snuggled back against him, sighing happily, and closing his eyes.

He was hard and he could feel that Ilya was, too, but it was nice to just exist together in this quiet space. They could cuddle and kiss and caress and just be. Shane gently dragged his fingers up and down Ilya’s arm and he felt Ilya stir behind him.

He made a soft noise and Shane could feel him stretching out and he chuckled softly as Ilya curled his body tighter against Shane’s kissing the back of his shoulder.

“You are awake?” Ilya murmured.

“Mm,” Shane replied, rolling over to face Ilya. He was all rumbled and sleepy and gorgeous and Shane just looked at him, taking him all in. “What do you want to do with the rest of our day?”

Ilya took Shane’s hand, pressing kisses to his palm, and the tips of his fingers, little jolts of pleasure tingled down Shane’s arm.

“I want to touch you,” he hummed, looking at Shane through his eyelashes. “And kiss you. And make you a very nice dinner later.”

Shane smiled, blushing, and rested his palm against Ilya’s scruffy cheek. “I’d like that.”

Ilya leaned down to kiss him gently. Focusing on Shane’s bottom lip, then his top lip, then both of his lips together.

“I want to try out that jacuzzi tub, too,” he chuckled against Ilya’s lips.

“Oh yes?” Ilya replied, kissing Shane again. “Maybe we both can.”

“Do you think we’d both fit?” Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged. “Is worth a shot.”

“True,” Shane agreed, wrapping his arms around Ilya, pulling him close. Ilya made a contented noise, pressing his body against Shane’s. Shane loved the catch of Ilya’s body hair against his skin, the warmth and weight and strength of him.

They made out in bed for a long time. It felt so indulgent and lovely that by the time they stopped because lips were sore and oxygen had become necessary, Shane felt almost drunk. He lay back on the pillows in a happy little heap, smiling to himself, and Ilya chuckled, nuzzling his neck.

“You are very cute,” he said to Shane, kissing just under his jaw, sliding a hand over Shane’s chest to curve around his ribs. Shane blushed and toyed with Ilya’s hair, tugging playfully at his curls.

“Thanks,” he murmured, turning his head to kiss Ilya’s forehead. “You’re very handsome.”

“Mm, I like when you tell me,” Ilya chuckled, kissing Shane’s shoulder.

“I’ll tell you all the time then...”

They got up and dressed, making a light lunch, and then deciding to go for a walk in the snow. Shane loved the way Ilya looked in the snow. All bundled up, his cheeks and nose getting pink from the cold.

But he was a terror. Throwing snowballs at Shane, lifting him up and dumping him into snowbanks. Shane wasn’t going to let him get away with it though, throwing snowballs right back, and dragging Ilya into the snow with him. And then kissing him.

“You’re such a dick,” Shane laughed, shaking snow out of the hood of his jacket while Ilya cackled.

“Ah, you love me,” Ilya hummed, wrapping his arms around Shane, pulling him close.

Shane hummed, resting his hands on Ilya’s chest, and looking up at him. “I do.”

Ilya smiled adoringly at him, rubbing his nose gently back and forth against Shane’s, then pressed their foreheads together. They stood like that for a moment, just breathing together in the cold.

“Are you cold?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah. I’m getting there.”

“Should we head back?”

“Probably a good idea.”

They got back to the cabin, cold and wet, and Shane went to play around with the jacuzzi tub. It wasn’t particularly large and he was pretty sure he and Ilya would have to sit with their legs curled up in order to fit.

“Are we going to try it?” Ilya asked, one arm wrapping around Shane from behind, his chin resting on Shane’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “Why not?”

They stripped off their clothing and tied up their hair; Ilya’s in a messy little ponytail, a few wavy strands hanging around his ears, and Shane’s into a bun. Ilya got in first, legs stretched out as far as they could, which wasn’t very far, and Shane laughed, following after, his back pressed to Ilya’s chest. It was kind of nice, pressed close like this, the water just on the right side of hot.

“I’m afraid to turn on the jets,” he chuckled.

“Yes. Maybe not a good idea with two of us.”

Shane rested his head back against Ilya’s shoulder, closing his eyes, letting himself relax. Ilya pressed little kisses to his temple, his chest rising and falling against Shane’s back as he breathed and it was more comforting than Shane would have thought.

“We should do this all the time,” Shane murmured.

“What? Take a bath together?”

Shane chuckled. “I mean, yes, we should, but more like *this* .” He raised his hands in a gesture to encompass everything around them. “Traveling. Doing adventurous stuff together. I’ve had a lot of fun so far.”

“Me, too,” Ilya replied. “I like that idea. Maybe we can go someplace warm next time. Have you ever been to Spain?”

They talked some about other places they’d like to travel to, before settling back into comfortable silence. Ilya had his arms around Shane and his hands had started to wander, fingers brushing teasing little touches against Shane’s skin that made him hum softly.

Ilya nipped at Shane’s ear, his hands stroking over Shane’s chest, gently, as if soothing him. Shane’s mouth fell open a little as warmth slid down his spine, pooling in his belly, his nerves waking up at the touch. Ilya dipped his head, kissing Shane’s neck, his shoulder, his fingers coming up to tease Shane’s nipples.

“Is this what you had in mind?” Shane huffed, biting his lip as Ilya’s fingers worked his sensitive skin until Shane’s nipples were hard under his fingers.

“Always,” Ilya hummed back, a smile in his voice. “You are hard to resist.”

“Me?” Shane let out a soft laugh, already half-hard from the attention to his chest. “You’re one to talk.”

“Do you find me irresistible, Shane Hollander?” Ilya asked, a smile in his voice.

“Completely,” Shane breathed in reply. Ilya hummed low, almost a growl, and bit Shane’s ear.

One of Ilya’s hands slid purposefully down Shane’s torso, from his chest, down his abs, fingertips dragging in a teasing touch over his cock until he was fully hard in Ilya’s hand. Shane gasped softly as Ilya began stroking him. His touch was firm, his pace slow, his thumb teased over the head of Shane’s cock, just like he knew Shane liked.

“I wish there was a mirror,” Ilya murmured, his cheek pressed to Shane’s. “I want you to watch yourself. To see how beautiful you are when you give yourself to me.”

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane sighed, the words going straight to his dick, his mind conjuring up images of what that might be like. Ilya behind him, pleasuring him, forcing Shane to watch. It was overwhelming to think about, perceiving himself in that way, but undeniably sexy.

“I love seeing you like this. I love when you let go.”

Ilya’s hand had sped up and Shane looped an arm back around Ilya’s neck, turning his head for a messy, urgent kiss. Ilya kissed him back, his free hand pinching one of Shane’s nipples, making him gasp and moan. He could feel how hard Ilya was and tried to press back against his erection, which seemed to amuse Ilya because he chuckled.

“Wanna make you feel good, too,” Shane almost whined.

“You are,” Ilya soothed. “I love this.”

Ilya nuzzled against his neck, murmuring in his ear, how perfect Shane was, how stunning, praising him, which fucking did it for Shane. He loved being told he was good. Ilya spoke in

Russian, too, which made Shane melt every time.

“Fuck. So fucking good,” Shane panted. “*Ilya*.”

“You are so perfect for me, Shane,” Ilya practically cooed. “Are you going to come for me?”

“Yes. Fuck. Oh god. Ilya. I’m coming. I’m—” Shane cut himself off with a long, loud moan, his body trembling as he came all over Ilya’s hand and the lukewarm water. Ilya had an arm wrapped around his chest, holding him, and Shane felt like he’d shot off into space, floating all the way back down to earth.

He felt Ilya laugh warmly, the rumble vibrating through Shane.

“Holy shit,” Shane chuckled. “That was good.”

Ilya hummed in agreement. “Yes. Very.”

“Do you want me to...?” Shane asked, wiggling back against Ilya.

“Not now,” Ilya replied softly, pressing kisses all along Shane’s shoulder and neck.

They drained the water in the tub and Shane pulled Ilya into the shower so they could rinse off. He went to his knees, blowing Ilya, because he loved doing it and wanted to return the favor.

Ilya came quickly, hands threaded in Shane’s hair, and Shane swallowed around him, humming happily.

Ilya pulled Shane to his feet to kiss him and they held each other under the warm shower spray for longer than was maybe necessary. They finally got out, drying each other off, then changed into pajamas, and started working on dinner.

Ilya had kept his hair up and Shane kind of liked it. He liked seeing Ilya dressed so casual, in his comfy pajamas. He liked the way he danced to whatever music came on as they played their playlist, the way he would serenade Shane.

He had a nice voice, too.

They finished cooking dinner and cuddled on the couch together, under a blanket. It was a cozy, quiet night in, and Shane wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya spend NYE together

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter and the title for this fic was - My Love Mine All Mine by Mitski

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

Shane had very particular plans when New Year's Eve came around. There were no TVs in the cabins and even though there was WiFi, Ilya and Shane had decided to just spend the day a bit separated from the outside world.

And so far, the day was going exactly as Shane had hoped.

He and Ilya had woken up that morning and had slow, sleepy sex. They'd fallen back to sleep and then got up, showered together, and then made brunch. After washing dishes, they'd gone out to skate on the tiny rink at the resort, then went for a walk along the creek.

The snow made everything soft and quiet around them. It felt nice to just be together without having to worry about schedules or work or other distractions.

They'd come back and started getting ready for their evening. They'd bought ingredients for a charcuterie board, some other finger foods they could easily heat up, and two expensive bottles of champagne that Ilya had stashed outside in the snow to keep cold.

Ilya had gotten only one phone call that day, the first of their trip. Shane didn't know what it was about but Ilya seemed pretty agitated and frustrated, talking in rapid fire Russian, snapping at whoever was on the other line. It was weird seeing him that way. Ilya had a pretty even-keeled personality, at least around Shane. He was funny and sweet, sarcastic sometimes, but never mean. Whatever was going on, Shane wanted to do his best to comfort Ilya, though Ilya seemed determined to not let work impact their trip. Shane didn't care about that. He just wanted Ilya to feel loved and supported.

"Everything okay?" Shane asked gently.

“Fine,” Ilya replied. It was obvious that things were not fine. Shane rested a hand on Ilya’s arm.

“Hey,” he murmured gently. “Talk to me.”

“There is nothing to talk about, Shane,” Ilya replied firmly. Shane had to admit that that stung a little. He wanted Ilya to trust him and he didn’t like that Ilya felt that he needed to hide whatever was going on from him. He wasn’t sure how to bring that up though... without ruining their evening.

“You can talk to me, you know. About whatever is going on...”

Ilya’s shoulders sagged a little, his head bowed for a moment, before he turned to look at Shane. His expression was pained and Shane felt that in his chest. He reached up, cupping Ilya’s cheek in his palm. “Hey...”

Ilya gathered Shane into his arms and held him close. Shane held him back, gently petting Ilya’s curls. Maybe it hadn’t been work, maybe it was Ilya’s father. Shane knew he wasn’t doing well and he was sure that was difficult. Regardless, he would leave the door open. If Ilya wanted to talk to him, Shane was more than willing to listen.

“Thank you,” Ilya murmured softly. Shane kissed into his hair gently.

“Of course,” Shane replied.

They pulled apart and Ilya kissed Shane very softly, before going back to his task of preparing their little New Year’s meal. Shane smoothed a hand over his back and kissed his shoulder. He could be patient. Whenever Ilya was ready, he would talk to Shane.

Shane was still trying to figure out how to execute his plan for the night, which was a good distraction. The cabin was small and it wasn’t like he could send Ilya out for an ingredient they might have forgotten since they were in the middle of the woods and about a half hour from the nearest grocery store.

He’d figure it out and it would be fine. For now, he could just enjoy organizing the charcuterie, while Ilya put on the Spotify playlist that he collaborated with Shane on. Most of the music on there was just what Ilya had been sending Shane over the last few months.

“Look how fancy,” Ilya said, peering over Shane’s shoulder at Shane’s masterpiece. He’d labeled the cheeses with little toothpick labels, laid out the prosciutto and salami neatly, along with some mixed nuts, honey, jam, and tiny pickles.

“So professional. Do you need a job, Hollander? I will hire you for the bar!”

Shane giggled as Ilya pressed teasing, ticklish kisses to his cheek and neck. “Stop it,” he said, though it was only half-hearted.

“I am afraid to eat anything. Is too pretty.”

Shane shook his head. “It’s fine. It’s supposed to be eaten, not looked at.”

“Okay,” Ilya replied, chuckling, stepping away from Shane, and pulling his phone out of his pocket. He was wearing a very soft cream colored sweater and a pair of black jeans that accentuated the length of his legs and fitted perfectly around his thighs and ass. Shane loved the entire outfit and also wanted to tear it off him.

Ilya’s curls, too, were perfect. Shane had been intrigued at watching Ilya put product in his hair and using a fancy hair dryer attachment to blow dry them. It had taken a long time but they were so springy and shiny, the one silver streak sat neatly at Ilya’s temple, an elegant little swoop. Shane had no idea how this man was even real. He looked like a *GQ* model for fuck’s sake!

Ilya took a picture of the charcuterie board, then looked up at Shane.

“Hey. We should take some pictures, too.”

They had taken a few at Lake Louise and during their walks, but not too many, since they were mostly staying off their phones.

“Okay,” Shane replied. He moved closer, feeling self-conscious in his simple navy blue button down, unbuttoned at the collar, and dark, fitted pants. Ilya smiled at him, tucking Shane’s hair behind his ear, and brushing his thumb over his cheek.

“You look beautiful,” he said and Shane blushed deeper, shy, but reassured.

Ilya brushed a kiss over his cheekbone, pulling him close. “Okay?”

“Yeah.”

Shane wrapped an arm around Ilya as Ilya wrapped an arm around him, his other arm stretched out to take the picture. Shane rested a hand on his chest and smiled as Ilya snapped a few shots.

Ilya showed Shane his phone, flipping through the shots.

“Oh,” Shane said. “We look... really good.”

“You are surprised?” Ilya chuckled, kissing the side of Shane’s head.

Shane huffed softly, turning into Ilya to hug him, and tuck his face in his neck, hiding his blush. They both looked good, and they looked happy, too. In love. Ilya hummed warmly, gently rocking Shane back and forth, and kissed the top of his head.

“I am keeping these.”

Shane laughed. “Yeah. You should.”

Shane went back to the charcuterie, fussing with it, just to keep his hands busy, while Ilya kept looking at the photos.

They made the rest of their food, setting everything up on the long counter in the kitchenette, and Ilya opened one of the bottles of champagne. Shane watched him pop the cork of the bottle, unreasonably impressed. Was there anything this man didn't make look sexy?

They sipped the bubbles from the champagne flutes in one of the cabinets, talking over their heavy hors'devours, listening to their playlist.

Ilya swept Shane up into a dance around the tiny living room and Shane was completely lost in the romance of it all. Just the two of them in a snowy little cottage, all cozy, enjoying each other's company, lost in their own little world.

"You are getting better," Ilya murmured as he turned the two of them in a slow circle.

"At what? Dancing?"

"Yes."

"I'm not doing anything. You're leading," Shane laughed.

Ilya shrugged. "Yes but you are not stepping on my toes."

Shane shook his head and rested his head on Ilya's shoulder. "I wasn't that bad."

Ilya laughed and kissed Shane's hair. They stayed like that for a long time, even as the music changed, until Ilya spun Shane, and started dancing with him more energetically as a pop song came on.

They danced for a while and picked at food. They played some card games and watched the time.

About a minute to midnight, Ilya refilled their glasses with champagne and they stood by the sliding door to the porch that looked out over the creek and the full moon that occasionally disappeared behind drifting clouds.

They both looked at Ilya's phone.

Midnight.

"Happy New Year, Ilya Rozanov," Shane said, smiling up at Ilya.

"Happy New Year, Shane Hollander."

They kissed, soft and sweet and warm. Ilya sighed happily against Shane's lips, deepening the kiss, dipping Shane backwards a bit.

"Wow," Shane hummed, breathless, when they finally pulled apart.

Ilya touched their foreheads and kissed the tip of his nose.

"I am so happy I met you, Shane," Ilya murmured.

Shane looked at Ilya, cupping his face with his free hand. "I'm so glad I met you, too."

They kissed again and held each other close and tight, before Shane's phone started ringing.

They talked to his parents and then J.J., Rose, Hayden and Jackie.

Ilya got one phone call from Svetlana. They talked in Russian for some of it, before Ilya put her on speakerphone so Shane could join them. He had met Svetlana once, when he had come by Ilya's penthouse. Apparently they worked together and she had been helping Ilya with something.

He had seen her before, in Ilya's sketchpad at his studio. She was an absolutely beautiful woman with white blond hair and shockingly blue eyes. Shane had felt a little weird about her at first, after learning that she was a former 'friends with benefits' of Ilya's. Their whole relationship seemed sort of strange but Shane wasn't one to judge, and their hookups had ended when Ilya decided to pursue a relationship with Shane.

Shane trusted him and he didn't think there was anything else going on between them. As far as Shane could tell, she was maybe one of Ilya's closest friends.

After the phone calls they were alone once more. Shane licked his lips, biting his bottom lip, and set his champagne on the counter.

"Wait here," he said.

Ilya arched a curious brow at him.

"Okay," he said, smiling, with a hint of uncertainty in his voice. Shane kissed him before he moved past him, going up the stairs to their lofted bedroom.

He felt kind of ridiculous, but he had been thinking about this for a while, and it was too late to turn back now. So he was going to do it. One of his favorite songs on the playlist started playing downstairs and he laughed, bolstered. Yeah. He was definitely doing this.

He stripped out of all his clothes, tossing them into a corner to deal with later, then pulled a red satin ribbon out of his bag. He was shaking as he tried to tie the ribbon into a nice little bow around his neck. He took a few deep breaths and finally tied the bow just to his liking.

Task complete, Shane got into bed, arranging himself as enticingly as possible. He'd been thinking about this since they'd started planning their trip. There was no real rhyme or reason for it, other than Shane wanting to surprise Ilya. And be sexy. He just hoped he didn't come off as ridiculous.

"Shane?" Ilya called, sounding confused, and maybe a bit concerned.

"You can come up," Shane called back. "Bring the champagne."

Shane heard Ilya moving around downstairs; the shuffle of his feet, the clink of glasses, and then Ilya was coming up the stairs.

“What is—” Ilya stopped at the top of the stairs. He was staring at Shane, the champagne bottle in one hand, the glasses in the other. His head tilted to the side, reminding Shane of a large cat that had just had some kind of new stimulus added to his environment.

Shane knew his entire face was red and he was having a hard time meeting Ilya’s eyes. He was so self-conscious, very aware of being perceived like this, but he glanced back up, to see Ilya grinning.

“What is this?” he asked, placing down the champagne and the glasses. “For me?”

Shane bit his bottom lip and nodded and Ilya moved closer to the bed, sitting at the end of it.

“Are you my present? Do I have to unwrap you? What do I get to do with you?” Ilya practically purred, leaning in close, his lips just barely touching Shane’s.

“Yes,” Shane replied breathlessly. “Whatever you want.”

“Whatever I want?” Ilya replied, gently thumbing Shane’s cheek. “You are too good to me, moy lyubimyy.”

My Beloved .

Shane closed his eyes and sighed, leaning into Ilya’s touch. Slowly, he had been learning Russian and every soft, sweet, tender thing Ilya called him made him warm all over.

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s bare shoulder and Shane opened his eyes. He reached for the ribbon, carefully pulling the bow free, letting the material fall from Shane’s throat as he pulled it off.

“I want to look at you,” Ilya whispered to him, his eyes smoldering, trying to take all of Shane in at once. “I want to touch you and kiss you everywhere. I want to open you up until you are begging for it. And when you are ready, I will fuck you.”

Any of Shane’s bashfulness had dissipated in the face of Ilya’s blatant desire, his nerves gone, and his dick very interested in the goings on. His tongue felt thick in his mouth, just thinking about what Ilya was telling him.

“Do you want that, too?” Ilya asked, brushing his index finger over Shane’s freckles.

“Yes,” Shane breathed.

Ilya held Shane’s chin in his long, strong fingers, kissing him deeply, and Shane moaned shamelessly into it. When they parted, Shane chased Ilya’s lips, nearly falling over, and Ilya hummed warmly. Shane watched Ilya stand at the edge of the bed, pulling off his sweater.

God he was beautiful. The crucifix on the chain around his neck lay between his muscular pecs, the bear tattoo visible and ridiculous but also kind of endearing. He loved how big Ilya was over everywhere. His arms, his chest, his fucking thighs.

Shane crawled to Ilya, feeling slutty and wild. He reached for Ilya's pants, working them open, tugging them down to press his face against Ilya's crotch, nuzzling and mouthing at his dick through the cotton of his underwear. Ilya's hands slid into his hair and Shane moaned softly, reaching his hands up to push Ilya's jeans and underwear down enough to get his mouth around Ilya's cock.

He moaned around him, unable to help himself. Fuck, he loved this so much. Ilya's dick in his mouth and his hands in Shane's hair and knowing that Ilya was going to take him apart piece by piece.

"Look at you," Ilya murmured, caressing Shane's face. "So perfect, so beautiful."

Ilya didn't let Shane suck him for long, gently pushing Shane back onto the bed, and kicking off his jeans and briefs. Shane moved back toward the pillows and Ilya followed, grabbing the lube and a condom.

Shane bit his lip, laying out on the bed like an offering. Ilya looked at him, his face blatantly admiring, his eyes dark, but full of that familiar joy that Shane loved seeing so much. Sparkling and delighted. He settled himself between Shane's legs, leaning over him to kiss him, hovering, so Shane couldn't press up against him.

"Will you be good for me?" Ilya murmured, running his thumb back and forth against Shane's bottom lip.

"Yes," Shane breathed back. And he would. He would be good and patient for Ilya, knowing he'd be rewarded for it later.

Ilya smiled at him, warm and tender, and pushed his thumb into Shane's mouth. Shane closed his eyes and sucked on the digit, teasing the pad of it with his tongue. Ilya said something in Russian that Shane didn't understand but it sounded reverent, and withdrew his thumb, kissing Shane instead.

It was a dirty kiss, all tongue and teeth, and Shane was so fucking hot for Ilya it was almost unbearable. They hadn't even done anything yet and he ached for it all. He wanted Ilya inside him in every way he could get him all at once.

Ilya worked his way from Shane's face, all the way down to his ankles. He kissed over Shane's forehead, down his nose, over the line of his freckles, the corners of his mouth, the tip of his chin. He left a mark on Shane where his shoulder met his neck, then kissed down his sternum, over his chest, pausing to tease his nipples until Shane was moaning, before working his way down Shane's abs, to his hips. Ilya bypassed Shane's dick which made Shane huff softly, and Ilya chuckled. He kissed down Shane's groin, to the inside of his thighs, where he left more marks, taking his time with these, sucking and licking and kissing over them. He kissed the inside of Shane's knee and then the inside of his ankle.

"Turn over," he said and Shane obeyed, lying flat, trying not to hump the mattress.

Ilya's hands curved over his ass, squeezing, before he slid his palms down the back of Shane's thighs. Shane tried to lean into it. He had literally asked for this and Ilya was being

very sweet with him, which, when Shane thought about it, was really adorable. As much as he enjoyed their athletic sex, it felt nice to know that Ilya's first inclination was to treat Shane tenderly.

Ilya worked his way up from Shane's legs, kissing over his ass, his lower back, up each notch of his spine. Shane shivered, his back sensitive, particularly when Ilya's stubble brushed against him. Ilya kissed over his shoulder blades, nuzzled the back of his head, and gently moved his hair to kiss the back of Shane's neck.

"I love the freckles here," he murmured. "Adorable."

Shane's hands curled into the comforter and he exhaled, closing his eyes. Ilya chuckled and kissed his cheek. He moved away and Shane mourned the loss of his warmth. Shane opened his eyes and watched Ilya as he grabbed the lube and condom. He tapped Shane's hip and Shane got his knees under him, raising his ass, and sagging into the mattress.

"Fuck," he whispered.

"So patient," Ilya cooed at him. "You are being so good for me."

"Better make it worth it," Shane replied.

Ilya quirked a brow, meeting Shane's eye. "Brat," he hummed affectionately and leaned in to bite Shane's ass cheek. *Hard*. Shane yelped. Ilya licked and kissed over the bite soothingly and Shane whimpered.

He didn't keep Shane waiting much longer, pulling his cheeks apart to lap at his entrance with firm, confident strokes of his tongue, working Shane open. He fluttered his tongue, kitten-licked, then pressed his tongue against him, licking at Shane's entrance as if it was an ice cream cone. He did this over and over and until Shane was loose and relaxed and dripping onto the comforter.

Finally, Ilya pushed his tongue inside of him. Shane would never get used to that. Fuck, it felt so good and Ilya was so good with his mouth. Shane moaned, wanton and eager, pushing his ass back against Ilya's face, making Ilya hum.

Shane didn't think he would ever get used to how good Ilya was in bed. It was dizzying.

Ilya gave Shane one more parting lick before he grabbed the lube, popping the cap. "On your back," Ilya commanded and Shane moved onto his back, spreading his legs, arms above his head.

He stretched himself out, watching Ilya through his lashes. His dick was so hard it almost ached and he was leaking all over his stomach.

Ilya made a soft sound of appreciation, one hand sliding up the inside of Shane's thigh, over the hickies there, his other hand reaching between Shane's legs, fingers circling his hole before pushing inside. Shane's eyes slid closed and he gasped at the intrusion.

"So beautiful," Ilya murmured. "I like this. Watching you."

Shane bit his lip. He wanted to stroke himself or have Ilya do it. He wanted some kind of relief and it was killing him a little to not have it. Ilya used his fingers, working Shane open further with gentle persistence. He teased Shane's prostate, making Shane moan and shudder and press back against Ilya's fingers. He was taking his time, Ilya's fingers not enough stimulation, and Shane wrapped a hand around his cock, giving in.

Ilya watched him and smiled, stroking Shane's prostate in time with Shane's own strokes over his cock. Shane wouldn't last like this. It was too perfect.

"Enough," Ilya murmured and Shane stopped, gasping softly, moving his hand way, back above his head. Ilya looked at him with that same heated yet adoring expression, removing his fingers.

"Good boy," he said. Shane didn't usually like that kind of praise but it made him flush with desire and pleasure at being obedient and praised for it.

"So sweet for me, krasivyy mal'chik," he purred.

Ilya grabbed the condom, readying himself, and Shane was practically vibrating with need. Ilya moved down the bed, to stand, and dragged Shane with him, which never ceased to impress. Shane was not a small man but Ilya was fucking strong and it turned Shane on.

Ilya took Shane's legs, placing them over his shoulders.

"Do you want it?" Ilya asked, the blunt head of his cock pressing against Shane's entrance.

"Yes. Yeah. Give it to me."

Ilya pressed into him in one long stroke that had Shane's mouth falling open, a punched out noise pushing past his lips. He loved having Ilya inside him. Loved how he felt inside him, a perfect fit, filling Shane up so completely, just in the way he loved, leaving no empty spaces.

Ilya found a hard rhythm, just the way Shane liked. Shane curled his hands into the comforter, watching Ilya fuck into him, his hazel eyes dark with desire, thick brows furrowed in concentration, his perfect lips slightly parted.

"Fuck. Holy shit. Yes. Ilya. God."

He fucking loved how athletic Ilya was, manhandling Shane as if he weighed nothing, fucking him hard and deep. Shane let himself be loud, panting and whining into the cabin.

"Yes," Ilya growled. "Let me hear it, sweetheart."

"So good, baby. So fucking good," Shane moaned. "Love how you fuck me. Don't stop."

Ilya didn't stop. He adjusted his angle, making Shane absolutely melt. It was a struggle to keep his eyes open as his orgasm began to build. He wrapped a hand around his cock when Ilya lost his rhythm, fucking into Shane, chasing his own pleasure.

"I'm gonna come. Ilya. Fuck. So close."

“Yes, Shane. With me. Come on.”

Shane’s orgasm hit him hard, come streaking over his stomach, his chest, his hand, and it was made even better by watching Ilya come at the same time. God, his face when he orgasmed. It was one of the most beautiful things Shane had ever seen.

Ilya leaned over him, Shane’s legs still on his shoulders. They were both breathing hard, catching their breaths. Shane sighed, smiling, feeling like a million bucks.

“Okay?” Ilya murmured, carefully lowering Shane’s legs.

“More than okay,” Shane hummed in reply, reaching for Ilya, pulling him close. Ilya went easily, his weight settling on top of Shane, and Shane kissed him, sliding his clean hand into Ilya’s hair.

They kissed for a while, Ilya peppering sweet kisses all over Shane’s face, making Shane sigh happily, his heart fluttering. Ilya’s softened dick slid out of him and he moved away, making Shane whine in protest.

“I’ll be right back,” he promised with a fond chuckle.

Shane sighed, legs hanging off the bed, staring at the ceiling as he listened to Ilya in the bathroom. He felt pleasantly sated and sleepy and happy.

Ilya wasn’t gone long, coming back with a washcloth, and cleaned Shane up in a very tender, loving way. He took his time, dropping kisses to Shane’s cleaned skin. He tossed the face cloth aside for them to deal with later and they cuddled under the covers together.

Shane rested his head on Ilya’s chest, listening to his heart beat under his ear, his fingers playing lightly over Ilya’s skin. Ilya played with the ends of Shane’s hair, and kissed his forehead. They didn’t talk, just enjoying the companionable silence, and Shane had the sudden realization that... he wanted to marry Ilya. He wanted this all the time. For the rest of his life.

He wanted to laugh with Ilya and cook with him and have sex with him and cuddle up with him just like this. He wanted to skate with him and go on adventures together and... maybe even have kids.

Shane wanted a *life* with him.

He turned his head, looking at Ilya, who tilted his head down to look back. Shane just stared at him, the realization filling him with such deep love for this man. For this wonderful, funny, brave person who had fallen right into Shane’s lap when he had needed him most.

“What?” Ilya asked softly, resting careful fingers on Shane’s cheek

“I love you,” Shane said. “So much.”

Ilya smiled, brushing Shane’s hair behind his ear, stroking his thumb over his cheek.

“I love you so much, Shane,” he replied.

Shane kissed him, his heart so full he didn't know what to do with himself. Everything felt so perfect. So ideal. What an incredible way to start the new year.

Chapter End Notes

krasivyy mal'chik - beautiful boy

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Ilya starts thinking about a future with Shane

Chapter Notes

Ilya's father dies in this chapter

The song for this chapter was Sweet Nothing by Taylor Swift

MARCH

Ilya felt that he had been suddenly blessed with good fortune and good feelings. The New Year had started out so perfectly with Shane and Ilya was riding that high all through January and February.

People noticed. Svetlana kept giving him meaningful glances whenever he'd look up from his phone if he was texting with Shane. Cliff and Hazy pointed it out more often than not and consistently asked when Ilya was bringing Shane back to the bar.

He saw Shane whenever they were able. School was in session, so Shane was busy with classes and grading and coaching, but Ilya was more than happy to just be in Shane's vicinity if he had work to do at home. He could make Shane dinner and make sure he stayed hydrated while he diligently graded tests. Ilya spent that time slowly but surely building a relationship with Eloise.

They had fallen into a good routine, spending most evenings, and majority of their weekends, together. Ilya had even met Shane's friends, which had been a pretty significant step in their relationship. Ilya had the realization that he wanted this. Forever. He wanted Shane in his life. Permanently. He wanted to wake up with him every morning and go to bed with him every night.

He wanted to go to all of his hockey games and skate with him at family skates and go on more vacations and celebrate the holidays together and spend time with Shane's family.

Ilya wanted to anchor himself to Shane and just... *stay* .

Ilya had spent so much of his life adrift. He had left Russia and didn't fully belong in Canada. He did not belong in his family. Then he had met this shy, sweet, beautiful Canadian boy who had completely reeled him in.

Shane loved Ilya. Accepted Ilya. And so did Shane's family. It was more than he could have asked or hoped for.

With each passing day, Ilya thought more and more about what it might be like if he stepped away from his family, if he left them for good. He wasn't sure how he would do it. How he could disentangle himself from his father's tangled web. But he was thinking about it more and more...

And then his father died.

Shane was staying the night. They were watching a hockey game. Anya was on her doggy bed, chewing on a new toy in the corner. Shane leaned against Ilya's chest as Ilya played with Shane's silky hair, pressing light kisses into it. It was the perfect evening out of a string of perfect evenings. Ilya had every intention of slowly turning Shane on, fingering and rimming him until he was begging for it, then fucking him over the arm of the couch, when his phone rang.

Normally, any correspondence Ilya had with his family, for anything related to the "business", was made through secure channels. Unlisted or Restricted numbers were commonplace. But this was Andrei's personal number.

"I'm sorry," he said to Shane. "I have to take this."

"Of course," Shane said, sitting up so Ilya could get off the couch. He answered his phone, making his way into his bedroom.

"Andrei?"

"Ilya," his brother said, sounding tired. Ilya waited for his brother to speak again. The only time Andrei would be calling was because he needed Ilya to move money into his personal accounts for gambling or something with their father.

Ilya felt dread settle in his stomach like a stone.

"Is it Dad...?" he finally asked, unable to take the continued silence.

"Yes," Andrei replied. "He's gone."

Ilya closed his eyes and took a deep breath. The news washed over him slowly. He felt it at the top of his head and the sensation traveled slowly down to the tips of his toes. A mixture of relief and grief and anger.

"The services will be this weekend. I will have Anastasia send you the details. There is nothing you need to do until then."

"Okay," Ilya replied.

The brothers remained on the line for a very long, uncomfortable silence. What was one supposed to say to your only remaining family member that you didn't even like, let alone love?

"See you this weekend, Andrei."

"Yes. See you."

The call ended.

Ilya stood in his room for a moment, phone gripped in his hand. When no tears came, he went back out to the living room. Shane was petting Anya, who had come to visit him by the couch, and they both turned to look at Ilya. Anya ran to him immediately.

"What's wrong? What happened?" Shane asked, standing up. He covered his mouth with one hand. "Oh shit. Your father."

"Yes. Dead."

Shane's face looked stricken. "Oh, Ilya. I'm so sorry."

Ilya shook his head, unsure how to react really. Shane came to him, wrapping his arms around him tight, holding him, and Ilya held him back. He leaned into Shane, closing his eyes, allowing himself to feel comforted by the presence of the man he loved.

Shane gave him a squeeze and leaned back to look at him, one hand cupping Ilya's cheek. His face was one of soft concern. "What do you need?" he asked softly.

Ilya leaned into Shane's hand and closed his eyes.

"I don't know," he replied. "You being here is... good."

"I'll stay as long as you like," Shane replied. "I'd like to help... if I can."

Ilya opened his eyes and smiled at Shane, warm and tender. "Thank you, sweetheart. You already are."

Shane smiled back and kissed Ilya softly.

"Do you want me to come with you? To the services?"

Ilya kissed Shane's palm, then took his hand, holding it in his. "No. My family is not... they are... very conservative. They do not know that I am bisexual and they do not like... strangers."

"Oh," Shane replied. "Is it really that bad?"

Ilya nodded. "My family is very particular. Everyone they know is also Russian. Very, um, what is word? Not very open-minded and... detached."

“Insular?”

“Maybe, yes. They do not like that I am not married to a nice Russian girl and have five children. They do not like that my friends are not Russian.”

“I’m sorry, Ilya.”

Ilya shook his head again and shrugged, bringing Shane’s hand to his mouth, kissing his knuckles. He wasn’t completely lying to Shane, though he hated that he was at all. His family *was* insular and they were upset about how Ilya chose to live his life. Andrei certainly didn’t approve of Ilya’s bisexuality and if Shane came to the services, he would be an enormous target. Even if the “business” aspect of things didn’t get in the way, the coldness of Ilya’s family alone would do it. And Ilya didn’t want to subject Shane to any of that.

“Do not worry,” Ilya murmured back. “Being here, with you, is enough. You do not need to do any more. Is good to not be alone.”

Shane smiled small, stepping closer to nuzzle at Ilya. “Good. I’m glad.”

Ilya pulled Shane close again, holding him. Shane rested a hand at the back of Ilya’s head, stroking his curls, their cheeks pressed together. Ilya closed his eyes. Maybe this was it. Maybe this was the opening he needed to leave his family. He had really only been holding on because of their father, because some unfounded naïveté that things would... get better... somehow. But that had never been the reality. And now his father was gone. He had been gone for a long time, if Ilya was honest.

Maybe he would tell Shane. Not now, but after the services. He would tell Shane everything and that he was planning to leave and they could be together without Ilya having to constantly look over his shoulder, or keep Shane out of certain aspects of his life.

He wanted Shane completely. He wanted a life with him. He wanted something that he could share with the world.

Ilya held Shane tighter, turning his head to press his lips to Shane’s freckled cheek. “I love you,” he said in Russian against his skin.

“I love you,” Shane repeated back. Ilya smiled, his heart fluttering every time Shane attempted to speak Ilya’s native tongue.

The rest of their evening was spent in quiet comfort. They finished watching the hockey game with Ilya lying against Shane. Shane held him, playing with his curls, kissing the top of his head every so often.

After the game, they watched some of an action movie, before going to bed. They kissed and cuddled but that was the extent of their intimacy, and Ilya was okay with that. Shane was here, being his usual sweet self, and that was all Ilya really needed. He was exhausted and it would be a long week.

“I can commute from here,” Shane murmured. “If you’d like the company...”

“You would?” Ilya murmured back.

“Of course. If you needed me.”

Ilya smiled, feeling his eyes prickle. His father had just died and he was getting more emotional about the fact that his boyfriend would stay with him because he was going through a tough time.

“I always need you,” he admitted quietly and Shane shifted against him, wrapping his arms tightly around Ilya.

“I’ll always be here.”

Ilya sighed, closing his eyes. He wished that that was true. He was sure that Shane meant it but he didn’t know the whole truth and Ilya owed him that.

Soon .

Soon he would tell Shane everything about himself and Ilya would tell him his plan. For now, he would appreciate Shane’s love and support, and he could pretend it was just the two of them in the world, safe and sound in each other’s arms.

Ilya’s family had never been particularly religious. His mother had been, out of all of them, the most observant, and Ilya wore her crucifix in her memory, but it had been years since he had been to Church.

He thought he believed in God, or some kind of higher power. He believed the spirits of passed loved ones stayed with you, something he had taken great comfort from over the years. He did not know what would happen to his father’s soul, but like the dutiful son he was, he was present for the services his father had requested in his Last Will and Testament.

In accordance with Russian Orthodox tradition, his father’s body was left in an open casket over the course of three days for people to pay their condolences and respect. Ilya stood with Polina, Andrei, and Tatiana, shaking hands and thanking people for their sympathies and for coming.

Most of the people in attendance were those who had worked closely with his father. Ilya didn’t think that they were genuine in their grief but it was what tradition required. Nikolai Popov, the head of the *Bratva* , had sent along an enormous funeral floral arrangement and his condolences to Andrei and Ilya.

Ilya felt nothing.

He felt like a ghost himself. Only visible when people chose to see him. Haunting the funeral home, waiting for his father to be buried.

On the second day of services, Ilya approached Tatiana. They hadn’t really had a chance to talk and he hoped he might be able to steal her away for a bit and have the conversation with

her that he had discussed with Svetlana.

He tapped her elbow gently and she turned to look at him, smiling, stirring a spoonful of sugar into her tea.

“Hello there,” she said. She looked tired and sad.

“How are you?” Ilya asked, leaning down to carefully buss her cheeks.

“Fine,” she replied, still smiling, resting a hand on her visibly pregnant belly. “Tired. Which I think is to be expected.”

Ilya offered her a small smile in return and nodded. “I can only imagine.”

“It’s exciting though. Are you happy to be an uncle?”

Ilya knew his expression was pained as he looked at her. “Of course.”

Tatiana hummed, reaching out to gently squeeze Ilya’s arm. “How are *you* ?”

Ilya sighed. “Fine. Also tired. For very different reasons.”

Tatiana giggled softly and Ilya smiled a bit more genuinely. He looked around, then back at his sister-in-law.

“Can I steal you away for a moment?”

“Sure,” she replied, curious.

Ilya led her into a side room, closing the door behind them. He was anxious but he knew that he needed to say this.

“I need you to listen to me very carefully,” he said, soft and urgent. “You should leave my brother. Go to him, tell him that you can remain married. He can pay you an allowance, child support. He can see all of the women that he wants and you can have your freedom. Take the baby and go wherever you want.”

Tatiana looked at him, her blue eyes wide and surprised.

“Ilya,” she murmured. “Why are you saying this?”

“Because you deserve better than this life, Tatiana. You deserve better than my mother. Then Polina. You shouldn’t suffer.”

She blinked at him slowly, her eyes glistening. He hadn’t meant to upset her but he also thought that she needed to hear this. It was what he wished someone had offered his mother.

“My brother is not a good man, I know this. And you don’t need to suffer the consequences of his actions.”

“Ilya...”

“Please. Consider it. If you need help, I will help you. Whatever it is.”

Tatiana moved closer, resting her hand on his arm again, and squeezed. “And what about you?”

“I’m trying,” Ilya replied.

She offered him a small smile. “For your beau?”

Ilya’s brows furrowed slightly but he nodded. He shouldn’t have been surprised that Tatiana knew about Shane. She was a keen, observant woman.

“His name is Shane,” he said softly. “And I love him.”

Tatiana nodded, smiling warmly. “I’m glad. I’m so happy you found someone. I wish I could meet him.”

“You can,” Ilya replied. “If you wanted...”

Tatiana’s smile turned more sad. “Perhaps. One day.” She released Ilya’s arm, resting her hands protectively on her belly.

“I’ve made my choices and I also have to deal with those consequences. But please don’t think your words have landed on deaf ears. They haven’t. I can’t make any promises but... thank you for caring about me. And your niece.”

Ilya blinked, feeling himself start to get misty eyed. “I didn’t know you knew...”

“I wanted to keep it a secret.”

“Does Andrei know?”

“No,” she replied, shaking her head and smiling small. “This is for me. He’ll find out when she’s born.”

Ilya nodded in understanding. “Did you choose a name?”

“Karina,” she replied, her expression warm and happy as she said the name, as if she couldn’t wait to bestow it, and meet her daughter. Ilya didn’t doubt that that was true. “I hope you’ll be able to meet her.”

“Me, too,” he sighed. “One day.”

Tatiana hugged him and Ilya hugged her back.

“Thank you,” she said softly. “I mean that.”

“Of course,” he replied. “Always.”

They left the room and Tatiana retrieved her tea.

Ilya went home that evening to Shane. It felt so good to know that Shane was waiting for him at home, simply because he was the one bright spot in Ilya's life. Being with Shane felt good, reassuring, comforting.

He walked through the door of the penthouse. Anya came to greet him, followed by Eloise. The cat had adjusted pretty quickly to a new environment and, much to everyone's surprise, got along with the dog like a house on fire. Ilya had received several adorable pictures from Shane of Eloise and Anya cuddling together.

Ilya gave both of the girls some attention and looked up to see Shane leaning against one wall, watching him fondly, his arms crossed over his chest. He was dressed in a pair of trousers and a comfortable sweater and his glasses. Ilya's heart fluttered in his chest at the sight of him.

"Moy lyubimyy," Ilya said, the word falling from his lips before he could stop himself.

"Hi," Shane replied, moving away from the wall, and coming to Ilya. Ilya stood and practically fell into Shane's arms. They held each other close and tight and Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya's cheek.

"How was today?" he asked gently, rubbing his hand over Ilya's back. "Are you hungry?"

"Fine," Ilya sighed, his face pressed to Shane's neck, and kissed him there. "Yes. I am."

They went to the kitchen and Shane made a plate of leftovers for Ilya while he took off his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeves. He sat at his kitchen counter and watched this sweet, beautiful man heat food up for him and it was all so domestic and lovely that Ilya could have cried.

Why was this so difficult? It could just be simple. It could be him and Shane, doing this, every day, for the rest of their lives.

"Thank you, sweetheart," he sighed, his words belied all that he was feeling, as Shane set the plate in front of him.

"You're welcome," Shane replied, kissing Ilya's cheek once more, before leaning against the counter. Eloise jumped in Ilya's lap, meowing, her fluffy tail brushing Ilya's face.

"Eloise!" Shane admonished and Anya barked at Shane's feet.

"Is fine," Ilya chuckled.

Shane rolled his eyes but smiled fondly, leaning down to pet Anya. Ilya gave Eloise some more pets before he placed her down on the floor.

He ate a few bites before he told Shane about the day. He ate another bite, twirling his fork nervously in his hand, as he considered what he was about to say next. He didn't like being so careful and cautious with his words but there was only so much he could share with Shane right now.

“I spoke to my sister in law,” he said softly.

“Oh yeah? Was it a good conversation?”

Ilya tilted his head to and fro. “Yes and no,” he replied and let out a long sigh. “My brother is not a good husband. He is not a good person, really. I spoke to her about leaving him.”

Shane’s eyes widened at that, listening as Ilya spoke. He reached out, resting his hand on Ilya’s forearm but he didn’t say anything, allowing Ilya to continue.

“It is not easy... for the women in my family. My mother, my stepmother, Tatiana. Things are not fair. I don’t know if Andrei would even listen to her if she asked to leave him quietly. Without a divorce. She listened to me and that is all I could ask for. I told her I would help her, if I could. But she is having a baby, a girl, in June. I think that will make it harder for her...”

“Jesus, Ilya,” Shane murmured.

Ilya ran a hand through his hair and chewed on his thumbnail. Shane’s thumb rubbed soothingly against his skin. He shook his head.

“I don’t know. I think I have done all I can do.”

“Could you... talk to your brother yourself?”

“I could, yes. But he will not listen. I’m foolish to him. He does not value my opinion.”

“Fuck. That’s awful.”

Ilya smiled wryly. “It has been for my whole life. I am used to it.”

“It’s not fair though. You don’t deserve to be treated that way. No one does.”

Ilya nodded, resting his hand over Shane’s, rubbing his thumb over Shane’s knuckles. “You are right. I’m learning.”

Shane smiled at him softly, carefully, pulling his hand from Ilya’s, and moving closer. He took Ilya’s face in his hands, tilting his head up slightly to kiss him, soft and adoring. Ilya sighed into it, letting his eyes slide closed, and for the warmth of the kiss to wash over him. He rested his hands on Shane’s sides, holding him.

“I love you,” Shane murmured, resting his forehead against Ilya’s. “I think you’re so brave and smart and wonderful. You deserve the best. I’m sorry your family isn’t good to you.”

Ilya sighed. “I love you, too. And thank you. For saying that. It means a lot.”

Shane stroked his thumbs against Ilya’s cheeks and they stayed like that, breathing together, for a while, before finally parting.

“Finish your food,” Shane said. “Then I want to take care of you.”

Ilya chuckled softly. "Anything for you, moya lyubov."

Apparently taking care of Ilya meant completely pampering him.

Shane had taken him to bed, slowly undressing him, and kissing him with slow, sweet thoroughness. Shane was often more impatient, wanting things to be heated and fast and hard. Ilya never minded obliging, though forcing Shane to slow down often yielded its own rewards.

But Ilya had to admit that it was kind of nice to be on the receiving end of such attention. Shane ran appreciative hands over him, pressing gentle kisses to Ilya's exposed skin, and letting Ilya make himself comfortable on the bed.

He lay himself out, legs open, arms above his head, watching Shane pull off his own clothes. He was such a dream, Ilya could hardly believe it, with his glossy hair and his broad shoulders and athletic physique. Ilya loved his smooth, perfect skin. Shane wasn't a particularly small person, but Ilya liked that Shane was smaller than him. He liked that Shane liked their size difference, too.

Shane joined Ilya in bed, laying down beside him, his head propped up on his hand. Ilya rolled to his side to face him, mirroring his position. Shane smiled at him, reaching out to trail a finger over Ilya's chest.

"Question for you."

"I may have an answer."

Shane huffed a laugh and blushed before he spoke. "How do you feel about me fingering you?"

Ilya considered this. He didn't like bottoming any more than Shane liked topping. He was fairly particular about anything that involved his ass but he wasn't against fingering or even rimming in general. It might actually be kind of nice, to be taken out of his head, out of his body, for a little while. Especially after today.

"Fingers are fine. Tongue, too, if you are feeling generous," Ilya replied with a little smile. "Nothing else."

Shane nodded, filing the information away. He reached out, brushing his thumb over Ilya's lips. Ilya kissed his finger, then sucked it into his mouth, and Shane watched, eyelids dipping over his eyes, lips parting.

"Would that be okay, then?" he asked softly. Ilya released him.

"Yes."

"You'll tell me if you don't like it?"

“Of course.”

Shane nodded again, leaning in close, his nose brushing Ilya's. “I want you to feel good.”

Ilya smiled. “I trust you.” And he meant it completely.

Ilya rolled onto his stomach with a pillow under his hips and Shane settled behind him. He was surprised when Shane straddled him, leaning over him, kissing him from the back of his neck, all the way down to his waist, and over his ass.

Shane went slow, moving sweetly, his kisses adoring and tender. Ilya closed his eyes and surrendered to the attention, something he wasn't used to, but could enjoy, especially with a partner he loved.

Shane's hands gently smoothed over his back and over his hips and ass, squeezing appreciatively. With careful hands he pulled Ilya's cheeks apart, and started soft and light, gently fluttering his tongue against Ilya's entrance. Ilya groaned, sinking deeper into the mattress. It had been a long time since someone had done this for him and he had forgotten how good it could feel, how sensitive he was there.

Shane kept his mouth busy, working his tongue over Ilya, taking his time to be thorough. Ilya found himself floating on pleasure, so they didn't really talk. Shane increased the pressure of his tongue and Ilya was surprised at the gasps and moans that Shane managed to pull from him. It felt so fucking good; relaxing and sexy at once.

Shane was diligent and patient. Ilya knew he was tight, from stress and from lack of penetration, but Shane managed, after concerted, surprisingly tender effort, to poke his tongue inside Ilya.

Ilya gasped and shuddered. Shane leaned back, hands smoothing over Ilya's back and hips soothingly.

“You okay?” he asked.

Ilya made a vague noise of acknowledgment. Shane chuckled and kissed the top of Ilya's right ass cheek. “Do you want fingers?”

“Mm. Da. Yes.”

Shane hummed softly and Ilya heard the lube cap snap open. He felt the first press of Shane's slick finger against him, gently rubbing circles against his hole. It was an easy touch and Ilya relaxed. Shane teased him a bit before pressing inside. It wasn't painful exactly. More of just pressure and a feeling of fullness that wasn't quite pleasant.

“I got you,” Shane murmured, pressing a kiss to Ilya's lower back. “Breathe.”

Ilya breathed and Shane sank his finger in a little deeper. He was careful, staying still until Ilya adjusted, then carefully twisted and curled his finger. An intense wave of pleasure rolled over him, startling, as Shane crooked his finger in just the right spot.

“Okay?” Shane asked, though Ilya could hear the smile in his voice.

“Yes,” Ilya replied, a bit shakily. “Fuck... I always forget...”

He was pretty familiar with other people’s prostates but not really his own. Not that he hadn’t ever gone there before by himself, it just wasn’t his first inclination. But fuck, it felt good. Intense. But good.

Shane nudged his prostate again and Ilya gasped and swore.

“I can keep going,” Shane said gently. “If you want.”

Ilya considered it. Honestly, he could probably come just from that, and maybe some assistance from the pillow under his hips. Ilya looked over his shoulder at Shane. He looked so pretty, lounging casually behind Ilya with a finger up his ass like it was something he did all the time. It was pretty sexy actually. He smiled warmly at Ilya and leaned in to kiss his hip.

“Yes. Okay,” Ilya breathed. He settled back down and Shane started a rhythm that had Ilya trembling in minutes. It was intense, pleasurable waves that washed over him relentlessly, not quite enough. He whimpered, hands curled into the comforter, involuntarily humping the pillow under him, hands flexing against the mattress.

“Good, right?” Shane hummed. “Just ride the feeling...”

“It is... a lot,” Ilya breathed.

“Yeah. It is. Feels fucking good though. Wanna keep going?”

“Yes. Fuck.”

Shane hummed warmly and kept going and Ilya didn’t think it was going to take long at all for him to come. He could feel his orgasm building, in his stomach, his spine, his balls. It was so fucking good and he was so close already.

“Oh fuck,” he panted, fingers curling tightly into the comforter. “Don’t stop. *Shane* .”

He clenched hard around Shane’s finger, his body rocking. He moaned, long and loud, swearing as he rode out his orgasm. Ilya didn’t think he’d ever come so hard before or for so long. It was kind of crazy.

Ilya felt Shane remove his finger and lean over him, pressing tender kisses to Ilya’s spine. Ilya felt like he was outside of his body, floating up to the ceiling. Shane was sweet and soft with him, waiting for him to come down.

“Holy shit,” Ilya finally managed to say.

Shane laughed softly, smoothing a hand over Ilya’s back. “Good or bad?”

“Good,” Ilya replied, turning his head to look at Shane. “Intense.”

Shane nodded. "Yeah, it is. But I'm glad it was good for you."

Ilya smiled at him, leaning up on his arms to kiss Shane. "Let me get you off."

Shane smiled. "I can do it. You relax."

Ilya chuckled. He wasn't going to fight Shane too hard about it. He liked watching Shane get himself off. He loved watching the way his hand moved over his cock and how perfect he looked when he came.

Ilya moved the unfortunate pillow out of the way to deal with later and rolled onto his back so Shane could straddle him. Ilya slid his hands behind his head, watching Shane jerk off, appreciating the way his muscles moved, the way his face melted into ecstasy.

It didn't take him long to come all over Ilya's chest, slumping over, chest heaving. He kissed Ilya, a little sloppy, and Ilya smiled into it. "Love you so much."

Ilya smiled, warm and soft, and wrapped his arms around him, kissing him again.

They got cleaned up and back into bed. Ilya rolled on top of Shane and they kissed, sleepy and soft, for a while, before Ilya settled his head on Shane's shoulder, face pressed into his neck. Shane wrapped an arm around him, his free hand playing with Ilya's curls.

"Thank you," Ilya murmured. "For being here."

Shane kissed into his curls. "Always."

Ilya smiled, his heart full, and let his eyes fall closed. He fell asleep within moments, feeling safe and loved.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Shane has the worst day of his life.

Chapter Notes

Shane gets kidnapped in this chapter

I'm feeling angsty, so here is angst. I promise it'll be okay.

The song for this chapter was Daylight - David Kushner

MAY

Shane was in an excellent mood.

It was Friday. His birthday was next week and Ilya apparently had “big plans” for the day, which Shane was excited but also a little nervous about. He was going to meet up with Rose for drinks tomorrow night and he’d have today and all through Sunday with Ilya.

He liked that they could share time together while also doing different things. Ilya had met Shane’s friends and liked them all and Shane appreciated that he could have one-on-one time with them and not have to also sacrifice his time with Ilya.

He loved balance.

He wished Hayden a good weekend, telling him to have fun shuttling the kids around to various play dates and extracurriculars, before heading out into the sunny spring day with a bit more pep in his step.

Shane was looking at his phone as he got closer to his car, texting Ilya back, and looked up when someone stepped into his path.

The man was tall, towering over Shane. He wore a black overcoat and had hair that was slicked back, and a scar over his mouth. Shane blinked.

“Excuse—” he said but couldn’t finish his sentence as someone clamped a hand over his mouth. Shane’s eyes went wide and panic flooded his whole body. He automatically brought

his arm back to elbow the person behind him but stopped in his tracks as something hard pressed into his back.

“Don’t move,” the man behind him said. His voice was thickly accented. Shane froze. He could feel himself sweating. His heart was pounding.

What the fuck? What the FUCK? WHAT THE FUCK?

“Come with us,” the man said again. “Move.”

He pushed Shane forward and Shane had no choice but to move. The two individuals brought him out of the parking lot to a car that was waiting by the curb. The man who had stepped in front of Shane opened the back door.

The man behind him shoved him into the car, on his stomach, and planted a knee into his back. With his mouth free, he started screaming.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” the man said and Shane heard the unmistakable click of the safety of a gun. A gag was placed into his mouth, his hands grabbed forcefully and tied with a zip tie very tightly behind his back. Then they put a bag over his head.

The back door was closed and he heard the front two doors open. Then, the car lurched, and they were driving away. Shane’s mind was reeling. He had gotten a good look at at least one of his assailants. He’d seen the car they had shoved him into, a nondescript black four door sedan.

He’d dropped his phone. It was in the parking lot. Someone would have to find it... but that meant that there was no way to track him. He was wearing his Apple watch though, so maybe that would do it?

He couldn’t move or see, so there was no way for him to get out of the car. What the fuck would these people even want from him? He was a fucking French teacher for fuck’s sake! He didn’t make that much money. Could it be one of the kids from the hockey team? Someone unhappy that their child was third line instead of first? Another team’s parent disgruntled that their child’s team had lost to Shane’s?

No. Absolutely ridiculous.

Why would this be happening? Shane was the most boring person on the planet. He was just a regular guy. He didn’t have any enemies. He wasn’t rich. J.J. was... and Ilya... but why would anyone be after either of them through him?

Shane supposed he had to wait and see what they wanted then? Holding him for ransom?

Or maybe he wouldn’t.

Maybe they would just kill him.

Oh god. Was he going to *die* ?

He was supposed to see Ilya. Rose.

He and Ilya had barely had any time together. Just under a year. He wanted to marry him. He was pretty sure of that. Have kids with him. He wanted a soft, peaceful life with the man he loved and he would never be able to have it now.

What was Ilya going to do? What about his parents?

God, his *parents* .

Shane's mind shifted through terrible images of his grieving parents. His grieving boyfriend. His grieving friends. What if they never found his body and he was just... missing. What would happen if they declared him dead, when there had been no hope of finding him at all?

Jesus. It was awful.

Shane's heart hurt. Tears streamed down his face as he thought of everyone he loved and of his life and all of the things he had never gotten to do but had wanted to. He thought about how he should have told his parents he loved them more, how grateful he was to them for being so incredible and for loving him the way they did.

He thought about all of the things he wanted to share with Ilya that they would never get to have together. He thought of golden-brown curls and a crooked smile and joyful hazel eyes. Ilya would have been an amazing dad. He was so good with kids. So gentle and sweet. Maybe he still would be, even if it wasn't with Shane. He could see the life and the joy being sucked out of those eyes, of Ilya mourning him, but he hoped that there would be someone else. That Ilya would be happy again, that he would feel loved and cherished by someone else, even after Shane was gone.

I'm so sorry, Ilya. I wanted more time. I wanted to love you properly. Thoroughly. For the rest of our lives. But thank you for this. For making my life colorful, in the end. Thank you for loving me. I'm so glad that I got to love you.

The car stopped and Shane was dragged out of the car and forced to walk. He couldn't see anything but he could hear the distant sound of traffic and the creaking of old wood. He nearly tripped up a set of steps but was caught by rough hands.

He was led inside, through what felt like a labyrinth of hallways, and then stopped.

"Sit," he was commanded and then forced down into a wooden chair. Someone bound his legs so he couldn't walk and made sitting uncomfortable. The bag was removed from his head. He was in a vacant room in what looked like an abandoned house. In front of him were the goons who had kidnapped him.

The guy who had stood in front of him in the parking lot, with the scar, and another man, bald, shorter, also in a dark coat. The bald guy took out a smartphone and took a picture of Shane. Shane glared at them both, tugging at the ties on his wrists, but that only served to make the plastic bite into his skin.

The scarred man tisked at Shane, wagging his finger at him like he was being a naughty child.

“I don’t think so, Mr. Hollander.”

Fresh fear hit Shane like cold water. *They knew who he was.*

The bald man spoke to the scarred man in what sounded like Italian. They glanced at Shane, then each other, then left the room.

No one came back. Shane was alone, in this empty, dilapidated room, in God knows where, with no phone, and no way to escape.

Shane had no idea how long he was left there. Alone. His whole body hurt from tension and anxiety. His body was shaking from adrenaline and fear, his mind whirring. Were they going to kill him? He tried to see if there was something sharp he could use to cut his bonds but the room was empty. He tried to take in as many details as he could. If he got out of here alive he wanted to give as much detail as he could to the authorities...

Shane’s mind ran in anxious circles. Trying to find a way out, wondering what would happen to him, falling down the rabbit hole of awful scenarios of what they would do to his body. Would they kill him quickly? Or slowly?

His thoughts circled back to his family, his friends. He didn’t want to think about his devastated parents or his grieving boyfriend or his shattered friends, but his brain wouldn’t stop. He cried out of fear and hurt. Afraid for them. Afraid for himself. Who the fuck were these people? What the hell could they possibly want? He had absolutely nothing to give them.

The men came back after maybe an hour or two with additional chairs and a small table. Shane was filled with more anticipatory anxiety, watching the two men like a hawk. He didn’t want to take his eyes off of them, afraid of what they would do if he wasn’t paying attention.

But they started playing fucking cards while Shane sat there, tied up, helpless. He started making a fuss, doing his best to scream at them through his gag. The scarred man stood up calmly from his seat after laying down his cards and came over to Shane. He stood before him, his face impassive, and reached out, grabbing Shane by the shirt. He lifted him up as if Shane weighed nothing and slapped him hard across the face.

Shane was dropped back onto the chair, stunned, his face burning.

“You will get only one warning,” the bald man said. “We will not kill you if we don’t have to. So sit there and shut up.”

Shane glared at the men but stayed silent.

Time seemed to pass both slowly and quickly at once. Shane didn’t want to take his eyes off the men, but in the moments where his mind exhausted himself, he felt drained and sluggish.

He couldn't afford that though, he needed to stay alert.

The unmistakable sound of a car pulling up outside caught everyone's attention maybe forty minutes later. The men looked at one another. There were footsteps on gravel and then the sound of the front door being slammed open. Splintering wood and a loud bang.

The men stood. There were more footsteps, strong, determined strides on the old wooden floor. And maybe... the click of high heels?

Reinforcements?

The room was tense and Shane watched the door, waiting. One figure appeared in the doorway and Shane was out of his seat and then falling to the floor before he could even really register what was happening. He gasped around his gag, eyes turned up.

"Don't move, Shane," said Ilya, already crouched down close to him. He heard the snick of a knife and his gag was cut. He looked up at his boyfriend, shocked and relieved to see him.

"Ilya!" he exclaimed.

Ilya was looking at him in a way that Shane had never seen before. It made him look like a completely different person. His face was dark and hard. He turned away from Shane and said something in Russian to the person behind him.

Shane followed his gaze to see Svetlana coming around him to cut his legs free. Ilya stood up and Shane looked up at him. He was dressed in an elegant, dark suit, a coat draped over his shoulders. He was wearing leather gloves and Shane was pretty sure he was holding a crowbar.

"What is going on?" he asked and Svetlana rested a hand on his arm.

"With me," she said. "Come."

She helped Shane to his feet, hustling him out of the room.

"Wait! Ilya! We can't just leave him! Ilya!"

"Shane," Svetlana said firmly, her hand gripping painfully around his bicep, keeping him moving forward, out the door. "Enough."

Shane looked at her, her face was set into a hard mask, her perfect red lips pressed in a firm line. What the fuck was going on?

She frog marched him to a sleek black car that was parked in front of what Shane could see was an abandoned house.

"Inside," she said, opening up the back door of the car. Shane slid into the backseat. She sat in the driver's seat.

"What is going on, Svetlana?" he asked her. He felt parched and winded and nauseous.

Svetlana met his eyes in the rearview mirror. She had pretty eyes. A deep shade of blue. She looked lovely, like she always did, but something about her facial expression and demeanor made anxiety spike anew in Shane.

“Ilya will explain,” she replied.

Something prickled in the back of Shane’s mind. He didn’t acknowledge it but it was there, making ice drip uncomfortably down his spine, and pool in his stomach.

“Oh god,” he wheezed, putting his head between his legs. His chest constricted and it was hard for him to breathe. He heard Svetlana moving in the front seat.

“Shane?”

“Panic attack,” he managed to get out and flopped to his side on the backseat.

Oh fuck. Oh no. Oh god. Oh no.

“Breathe, Shane.”

He was trying. He was fucking trying. But he was hyperventilating, his vision tunneling as everything crashed over him all at once. He needed... he had no idea what he needed. His entire world had just been flipped upside down.

He was going to pass out...

Shane had no idea how long he was out for. He woke up with a start, looking around, finding himself in Ilya’s bed, in Ilya’s room. He was safe. His clothes had been changed. He wore a baggy t-shirt and a pair of joggers. Anya was at the edge of the bed and perked up at seeing him awake.

She came over to inspect him and lick his face and Shane petted her, but it felt robotic.

What the fuck had even happened...?

Anya jumped off the bed and left the bedroom. Shane could hear murmuring out there but he wasn’t ready to confront Ilya and Svetlana. He curled his legs to his chest, wrapped his arms around them, and buried his face in his knees.

This was what he knew: he had been kidnapped. He had no idea why or how Ilya was involved. It was possible it had something to do with Ilya’s bar business or his family business but Shane had no idea how any of that would even tie together.

What the hell was his boyfriend involved in? Was this criminal? Governmental? Was Ilya a spy? An informant?

Shane was missing something. He knew he was. He probably needed to confront Ilya about it. He wanted the fucking truth. Whatever Ilya had tried to protect him from was out in the

open now and Shane deserved to know what was going on.

And Ilya had *lied* .

There was surely more that he was hiding and Shane wanted to know what that was.

Shane closed his eyes as angry, hurt tears slid down his cheeks. He didn't know if he could do this. He loved Ilya. He wanted to be with him, have a life with him, but he didn't know if he could keep going if he was going to continually be lied to like this. You couldn't build a relationship on lies.

There was a gentle knock at the door and Shane looked up. Ilya stood in the doorway, backlit by the light from the hall, looking so beautiful and so sad, and Shane sobbed. God. *God* . He thought he was going to die and never see Ilya or his parents or his friends ever again. He had been so fucking *scared* .

"Shane," Ilya said, coming to him. He felt Ilya's weight dip the mattress, his strong arms coming around Shane, holding him tight. And Shane curled into him because all he wanted was for Ilya to hold him and comfort him and tell him that everything was going to be okay. He smelled like his expensive cologne and cigarettes and himself.

"Sweetheart. I am so sorry."

"You should be," Shane managed, pulling away to wipe at his eyes. Ilya's hands lingered on him, stroking his hair, and Shane's heart hurt so much. He needed to know what was happening. He needed to know everything.

"Ilya..." he murmured, looking at the man he loved through blurry vision. "Fuck. I was so fucking terrified. I didn't know what was happening. Who were those people? What the hell is going on?"

"Shane," Ilya said gently and Shane's eyes burned with new tears.

"Tell me the truth."

Ilya was silent for a long moment. He lifted Shane's hand into his, covering it between his own. Shane blinked, more tears sliding down his face. Ilya looked ashen.

"Who are you?" Shane asked, his voice breaking. "Are you like some kind of spy or something?"

Ilya swallowed, looking at their hands, then up at Shane.

"My name is Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov. I am the second son of Grigori Rozanov, former *Brigadier* of the *Bratva* under Nikolai Popov. My brother, Andrei, is the new *Brigadier* . The men who took you are from *Cosa Nostra* , the Italian mafia. They were attempting to bribe their way into my brother's good graces through me. They were using you as leverage."

Shane blinked. " *What?* "

Ilya closed his eyes. “My family, and myself, by extension, are part of the Russian mafia.”

Shane’s entire body flooded with ice. The room spun a little bit as the words crashed into him.

Russian *mafia* ? What the *fuck* ?

Shane looked at Ilya, at a complete loss for words. His entire understanding of Ilya reworked itself in his brain. His long periods of radio silence, the weird hours he worked, the job he wouldn’t ever talk about, the money he had that he had never explicitly stated where he got it all from.

Ilya was watching him with a neutral expression but Shane could see the pain in his hazel eyes. It didn’t make Shane feel any better but at least he knew that they both felt like absolute shit about this entire situation.

“What the fuck do you mean the Russian mafia? What the fuck do you do?” Shane managed.

“My job is... like a messenger. Errand boy. I show up on behalf of my father, now my brother, and collect money, or negotiate terms of different agreements. Sometimes I am required to... use force...”

“Jesus Christ,” Shane murmured, pulling his hand from between Ilya’s, and put his head in his hands.

How the hell were they having this conversation? How was this actually happening? *Ilya* . The fucking *man of his dreams* , the guy who spoiled his dog, and was obsessed with Shane’s cat, and was so good with children... working for the goddamn mafia?

“Have you ever...? Did you ever...?”

Ilya seemed to know what Shane was asking and shook his head. “No. I have never killed anyone...”

Shane wasn’t sure if that actually made him feel better about this conversation.

“I see. But you’ve... hurt people?”

Ilya nodded his head once.

Shane felt sick.

The moral and ethical implications of all this were... insane. It was so hard to comprehend. Ilya didn’t really... seem like the type. He was confident, borderline cocky, but he was so kind... and loving...

Ilya licked his lips. “I’m sorry, Shane. I was going to tell you—”

“But you didn’t,” Shane replied quietly, matter of fact, looking up at Ilya. “You didn’t say anything... and *this* happened...”

Ilya looked back at Shane and Shane could see the pain clearly on his face now. He wasn't even trying to hide. He knew he had failed. He was well aware of the danger Shane had been in because of whatever he had overlooked or not considered.

Shane's chest felt tight.

"What happens now?" Shane asked. "I guess I can't go to the police..."

"I don't know," Ilya replied. "And no. You cannot. But it has been taken care of."

"Taken care of? What the hell does that mean."

Ilya looked away and Shane's vision blurred.

"It is better that you do not know. I am having your house surveilled, to be sure it is safe. I will have someone posted outside your house to be sure—"

"No!" Shane said, suddenly furious. "No. Absolutely not. You are not posting one of your—your— *goons* —outside my house!"

Ilya turned back to him, looking startled by Shane's outburst. "Is for your protection..." Ilya replied.

Shane's face crumbled. "I don't want your protection, Ilya! I don't want any of this at all. I want... I want a quiet, peaceful life with the man I love... and I don't even know who you are any more..."

"Shane..."

Ilya's heart was so clearly displayed on his face. Fear and sadness. He was at a loss, Shane knew it. But there was no way to fix this, not that he could see at the moment. He shook his head.

"I can't—" Shane started to say, his breath hitching. He covered his mouth and shook his head and Ilya held him and Shane felt like his heart was shattering into a million pieces under the weight of this revelation.

It took him a while before he could speak again, Ilya carefully wiping tears from his face.

"I want to go home," Shane whispered. Ilya nodded in understanding, his eyes glistening, his expression one of complete heartbreak.

"I will take you home when I know it is safe."

"Okay."

Ilya nodded and stood up. He reached into his pocket and pulled out Shane's phone, handing it to him. The case was beat up a bit, but it was otherwise completely fine.

"Thank you," Shane murmured, taking the phone. Ilya nodded once more and left the room.

Ilya dropped Shane off at his house the next day. They didn't say anything to one another. They had barely spoken at all. Shane wasn't sure that there was anything to say. They didn't kiss or hug. Shane went to his front door, got inside his house, and burst into tears as soon as he'd closed the door.

He sat down on the floor, leaning against the door, and cried into his knees.

Shane knew, deep down within himself, that Ilya was *The One* .

But this wasn't the movies or a romance novel. Love wasn't enough to save them. Shane loved Ilya with his whole heart, his whole self, but not even love would be able to keep him safe or prevent him from ultimately resenting Ilya if they proceeded.

If Ilya felt that he couldn't leave his family or the mob, then Shane couldn't stay. Their relationship would be full of nothing but tension and fear. It wouldn't be fair. To either of them. Shane couldn't allow what they had had between them to sour. So he would give it up, if it meant preserving that love.

He knew he'd never recreate it. He would never meet another man who would hold a candle to Ilya Rozanov. Maybe, one day, Shane would be ready to settle. He would find a nice, normal guy who he could have affection for and care about and they could have a nice, normal life and Ilya would always be the one that got away.

He'd stolen Shane's heart and Shane knew he wasn't ever going to get it back.

Maybe one day, Shane would be able to make peace with that.

But not today.

Certainly not tomorrow.

Maybe in five years. Or ten.

Shane didn't talk to Ilya for almost a week. Ilya texted him. Called him. And Shane knew he was being cowardly. He should break it off. End things. But he didn't know if he could. Finally, he mustered up all the courage he had and called Ilya.

"Shane," Ilya said as soon as he answered the phone and Shane's heart broke even more.

"Ilya," he said softly. "We need to talk."

"Yes," Ilya replied. "Okay."

They were quiet on the line for a moment before Shane took a breath and let it out shakily.

"I've thought about everything that you told me. And... I want you to know that I care about you very much, that I love you... but... I can't live this life... I don't want to. The implications around everything you're involved in, everything associated with your family..."

It's too much. Too scary. Too hard. I'm not..." Shane bit his lip, tears streaming down his cheeks. It was hard to breathe.

He didn't want this. He wanted his love for Ilya to be enough to get him through, to be enough to overlook the life Ilya had found himself in. He wanted what he held in his heart to be enough to protect them both from any danger or harm... but it would never be enough. Shane didn't want that to be true. He wanted to persevere but he knew, down the road, that whatever love they held for one another would be destroyed by more lies and resentment and fear.

"I can't be what you need me to be... if you're going to stay and keep doing this job for your family."

Ilya was very quiet on the phone. Shane could hear his breathing, which sounded just as choked up and shuttered as his own. He felt terrible. It was like trying to cut off his own arm.

"Yes. I understand," Ilya finally managed to say. "Thank you then. For everything."

Shane couldn't even reply. He just cried into his hand instead.

"Goodbye, Shane." And Ilya ended the call.

Shane sat down on his bedroom floor, knees tucked to his chest. He put down his phone and sobbed into his hands.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Ilya considers the predicament he's found himself in and weighing the risks and benefits of leaving his family

Chapter Notes

They're gonna be okay, y'all! 🥰🥰

Song for this chapter was What Was I Made for? By Billie Eilish

Ilya sat in his office, smoking a cigarette amidst the shattered remains of a crystal rocks glass that he'd thrown at the wall. His desk lamp was on, nothing else. He felt a lot like that rocks glass. Shattered into a million pieces after being hurled at a wall.

He wasn't angry at Shane. He understood why Shane had said what he'd said and done what he'd done. Ilya couldn't blame him. It was smart. Better for Shane to separate himself from Ilya now, for him to no longer be seen as important. It was much safer that way.

Ilya recognized his failure so completely. He could hear his father's voice in his head, telling him how he should have made better plans, should have been less impulsive.

Useless boy. Good for nothing.

Ilya took another drag of his cigarette.

Nothing good could ever stay. Anything good in his life. Anything worthwhile, anything he treasured, was always ripped away from him. Whatever it was about him, the fact that he wasn't enough, meant that he didn't get to have good things.

His mother.

Hockey.

Shane.

All he would ever have was a brother who didn't know him or care for him and a job working for the scum of the earth. But Ilya was scum, so what did it matter?

For this past year, Ilya had been so happy. The happiest he had been in a long, long time. Maybe ever. He closed his eyes, picturing Shane's beautiful face, the way it would crinkle in happiness. Nose, eyes, freckles.

His heart ached. He felt sick to his stomach with grief and longing. He had fucked everything up. He'd been so stupid. He should have known better. He *did* know better.

He sighed, opening his eyes, took one last drag of his cigarette and put it out in his ashtray. He leaned back in his chair, feet on the desk, and flicked away a tear before he slid his hands behind his head.

What was he even doing? What was the point of all this? He had been thinking about telling Shane about his family and history. He had been thinking about getting out. What was even stopping him now?

Maybe this was the wake up call that he needed. It shouldn't have happened in the first place. Shane wasn't involved in any of this besides knowing Ilya. It wasn't fair. But it didn't have to stay that way.

He was happiest when he was with Shane. It was a long shot to even consider that Shane would take him back, even if Ilya proposed what he was thinking. He could try though. It would be hard but... Shane was more than worth it. He ran his tongue over his teeth, then leaned forward.

Ilya opened his desk drawer and pulled out a pad of paper and a pen. He started making a list. There was a lot he would have to do. Empty out all of his bank accounts, account for whatever he was to receive from his father, sell his guns, his cars, the penthouse, burn all his Russian documentation, destroy his contacts.

He could do it. Not in short order but... he could do it over time. He put down the pen, steepling his hands, and pressed them to his mouth. Shane's words echoed in his brain, repeating themselves over and over.

I want a quiet, peaceful life with the man I love...

That was what Ilya wanted, too. And he wanted to give that to Shane. And he could. Probably. There was nothing stopping him. Nothing physical anyway. Even if his brother threatened him, there was very little recourse.

It was possible Andrei could have him killed but Ilya wasn't valuable enough to kill. He didn't know enough. He could be dangerous but not in any way that would be on Andrei's radar.

Ilya didn't think Andrei would care though. He would get all the money, all the power, what difference would it make if Ilya stayed or not. In all honesty, Andrei would probably be happy to get rid of him, he was sure. He probably considered Ilya more of a liability with the *Bratva* than if he were out of it.

Ilya looked down at his list again, thinking, rubbing his fingers over the crucifix around his neck, grounded by the familiar bumps and grooves of the pendant.

He could do this. He *would* do it.

For himself.

For Shane.

It had only been seventy-two hours since the last time Ilya had talked to Shane but it felt like much longer. He was anxious as he pulled up to Shane's house. He was coming unannounced and he wouldn't be surprised if Shane told him he didn't want to talk to him.

The radio silence had been awful but Ilya had to at least try and see what happened. He had to try... for Shane. And if Shane told him that he wasn't interested, even with Ilya's plan, then Ilya would leave him alone. Forever. It would kill him. Slowly. But he'd do it because he loved Shane and would never make him suffer. Not if he could help it.

Ilya took a few steadying breaths and got out of the car. He walked up Shane's walkway, to his front door, and knocked.

A few moments later, the door opened, and Shane peeked his face out. He was wrapped in a blanket, his face looking drawn, and exhausted. His eyes widened behind his glasses as he looked at Ilya on his front steps. Ilya hated seeing him so upset... but he loved seeing him.

"Hi," Ilya said, hands in his pockets, head bowed.

"What are you doing here?" Shane asked. It wasn't accusatory, mostly just disbelieving.

"I wanted to talk," Ilya replied. "If that is okay..."

Shane blinked at him for a moment, then stepped back and opened the door wide. Ilya came inside. The house was dark and quiet, so unusual from the usual warm, hominess that Ilya had come to associate with Shane's house.

Eloise meowed at his feet, rubbing against his legs, and Ilya reached down to pet her gently.

"Hello, sweet girl," he murmured to her.

Shane had moved away, going to the couch, and sat on it heavily. His hair was pulled up in a messy bun and he was wearing pajamas. Ilya noticed the pile of tissues on the coffee table. Even though he seemed sad, he looked good. Ilya wanted to wrap him in his arms and tell him that he would make everything better. But he needed to take this slow and he would have to respect Shane's wishes, no matter what they were.

He slipped off his shoes and hung up his jacket, coming around to sit in one of Shane's armchairs, as opposed to on the couch. He didn't want to infringe on Shane's personal space. Not unless he was welcome and he wasn't sure he was.

“What’s going on?” Shane asked softly.

Ilya swallowed, rubbing the knuckle of his forefinger with his thumb, looking down at Shane’s carpet for a long time. His heart was racing and he could feel himself sweating. He wasn’t sure if he could handle another rejection from Shane...

“Ilya...?”

He looked up. “If I do what I need to do to leave this life behind, will you wait for me?”

Shane blinked at him. “What do you mean?”

“If I... remove myself... from my family, from the *Bratva* ... will you... would you want...”
He swallowed again. “Would you want to still be with me?”

Ilya felt like his heart was in his throat, his fingers threaded, hands clenched together as he watched Shane’s face. Shane’s eyes darted around as he looked at the floor as if he was processing what Ilya was saying.

It felt like forever as Ilya waited for an answer. He felt queasy.

Shane looked back up at him, his eyes glassy behind his glasses. “Yes,” he said, so softly Ilya almost missed it.

He stood and Shane did, too, and Ilya came around his coffee table to wrap him in his arms and hold him close. He felt Shane’s breath hitch, his face turned into Ilya’s shoulder, and he started to cry.

Carefully, Ilya sat them both on the couch, and held Shane. He petted his hair and murmured how much he loved him against his temple, his own eyes filled with tears. He had been so scared of losing this for good. Afraid of what his life would look like with all of the light snuffed out of it.

Shane pulled away, taking his glasses off to wipe at his face. Ilya carefully took the glasses, folded them up, and placed them on the coffee table. He reached for Shane, brushing tears away gently with his thumb.

“I’m sorry, Shane,” Ilya said. “For causing you so much pain.”

Shane sighed, his lip trembling a little. “I won’t say it’s okay because it’s not. I was really scared and you really hurt me... but I also understand why you didn’t tell me. I just... I wish you had. I wish we’d found a way to work things out sooner...”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. I know. And I understand, too. I only wanted to protect you. And... I wanted to tell you, I just didn’t know how.”

Shane nodded, too, and reached for Ilya’s hand. Ilya held it tightly in his, kissing Shane’s knuckles.

“You are the best thing in my life. I love you, always. And I was scared. Afraid of losing you because of who I am connected to. I have a plan. It will take time. I don’t know how long. But you are worth it...”

He offered Shane a soft smile and Shane reached out, cupping Ilya’s face in his palm. His hand was warm and familiar.

“I hope you’re doing this for you, too. Not just for me. I want you to be happy.”

“Yes,” he murmured, leaning into Shane’s hand, closing his eyes, pressing Shane’s hand tightly to his skin. “Is for me, too. You make me so happy, Shane. I want good things in my life and I think, being apart from my family, means getting to keep those things.”

He opened his eyes and Shane was smiling back at him, soft and sweet. “Okay.” He brushed his thumb gently over Ilya’s cheekbone and Ilya’s heart felt too big for his chest. He loved this man more than he could ever express and he knew he was doing the right thing.

They looked at each other for a long time before Ilya whispered, “can I kiss you?”

Shane nodded. They shifted closer and Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, kissing him as gently as possible. The kiss was tender and apologetic. It felt so good to kiss Shane again, to hold him like this. Shane kissed him back, his hands holding Ilya’s face.

“Ilya,” Shane murmured, his eyes dark and anguished, and Ilya couldn’t have that. He pulled Shane into his lap and kissed him again. He wanted every one of his senses to be filled with Shane. He wanted Shane to know how much he loved him, how dedicated he was to doing the most difficult, most terrifying thing he’d ever done in his life, because he was in love with Shane.

Ilya would do *anything* for him. From the moment Shane had walked into his life, it was like his world had switched to technicolor. He didn’t want to give that up. He couldn’t.

They spent a long time kissing on the couch and Ilya could feel Shane’s hard cock press against him. That was a good sign, he hoped. He slid his hands under Shane’s ass, lifting him up as he stood, and Shane’s arms and legs went around him. He carried Shane upstairs to his bedroom and laid him very gently down on the bed. They looked at each other and Ilya carefully pushed Shane’s hair back from his face, stroking his hand from his temple, to cup his cheek.

“Is this... okay?”

“Yeah.”

Shane pulled him into bed with him and Ilya carefully started peeling off Shane’s clothes, pressing tender, adoring kisses to his newly exposed skin. He kissed his chin, his neck, the hollow of his throat, his collarbones, down between his pecs. He was so beautiful and just looking at him made Ilya want to weep.

He leaned away to pull off his own clothes, distracting himself, and Shane reached for him when he was naked.

“Come here,” Shane whispered. “Kiss me.”

Ilya went, nipping at Shane’s bottom lip, then kissing it. He kissed both corners of Shane’s mouth, then kissed him thoroughly, with control and patience. He wanted to love on Shane. He wanted to worship him, to make sure that Shane remembered how much Ilya loved and cared for him, no matter how long they were apart.

Ilya worked his way back down Shane’s body, taking his time to kiss every inch of him, pausing over the places he knew that lit Shane up; his nipples, his hips, the insides of his thighs, his balls, his cock.

“Ilya,” Shane sighed, his hand sliding into Ilya’s curls as Ilya sucked on the head of Shane’s cock, then slid his lips all the way down, taking him into his throat. Shane moaned above him and Ilya closed his eyes, sinking into the moment, enjoying this.

He pulled off of Shane after a short time of sucking him, gently patting his hip.

“Turn over,” he murmured.

Shane did and Ilya kissed one perfect ass cheek, squeezing Shane’s muscular glutes in his hands, spreading him open, and gently sliding his tongue over his entrance.

“Oh fuck,” Shane panted. “Yes.”

Ilya smiled, fluttering his tongue, then switching to long, confident strokes. He loved how Shane relaxed, panting softly, mouth slack, eyes unfocused. Ilya could feel Shane loosen up under his tongue and he pulled away, reaching into the bedroom drawer that housed the lube and condoms.

“You are so beautiful,” Ilya murmured, kissing along Shane’s spine. “I love you. I want you to remember that... while we are apart...”

Shane made a soft noise, looking over his shoulder at Ilya. His face was flushed, his expression slightly pained.

“I love you, too. So much, Ilya.”

Ilya hummed, kissing Shane’s hip, before pressing a slick finger against him, opening him up, slow and careful. Shane made soft noises of pleasure, opening up so beautifully for Ilya as he curled his fingers inside him, gently stretched him apart, his fingers sunk deep.

“Enough,” Shane breathed. “I’m ready.”

Ilya stopped, withdrawing his fingers, and Shane rolled over. Ilya picked up the condom and Shane stilled his hand.

“I haven’t been with anyone else,” he said.

“Neither have I,” Ilya replied.

Shane swallowed, meeting Ilya’s eyes. “I trust you.”

Ilya’s heart clenched in his chest. “Are you sure?”

Shane nodded and Ilya kissed him. God, he couldn’t waste this. He couldn’t fuck up. He wanted to hold the heart of his gorgeous, sweet, perfect man forever. He had to be worthy of him. He had to be at his best because that was what Shane deserved. He was giving Ilya a second chance. He had to be true to his word.

Ilya picked up the lube and slicked himself, making sure to be thorough, before he very carefully entered Shane. It was like a revelation every time. Like a gift. And this felt like so much *more* . He watched Shane’s face, the parted lips, the slightly furrowed brows.

Ilya pressed fully inside and he and Shane both sighed, simultaneously. Ilya kissed that little furrow between Shane’s brows and Shane relaxed, his hands curving around Ilya’s biceps.

“Come on,” Shane murmured, lifting his face so his lips brushed against Ilya’s. Ilya kissed him back, his thumb brushing back and forth against the edge of Shane’s cheekbone as he found a slow, steady rhythm. Not quite enough, but also just a bit too much.

He tried to memorize as much of Shane as possible. How he looked under Ilya, the noises he made, the scent of him, how he felt around him. Shane squeezed Ilya closer, arms sliding around his shoulders.

“I want to feel this for days,” Shane panted and his breath hitched and Ilya kissed his cheek, lips pressed against his skin, a tear sliding over his nose as it dripped down Shane’s skin.

Ilya murmured sweet nothings to him, how perfect and beautiful he was, how much Ilya loved him. He pressed their foreheads together as he sped up, chasing his own pleasure, fucking into Shane hard. Shane reached between them to jerk himself off. He came first with a helpless noise that broke off into a quiet sob and Ilya tumbled right after him.

Ilya tucked his arms around Shane and held him as best he could, both of them crying quietly. It wasn’t goodbye, there was hope yet, but the idea of being apart for an unknown, extended period of time hurt.

Ilya didn’t want to be apart from Shane at all. He had never been good at slow things and this would be slow... and painful. But he would do it. Because he wanted this. Wanted Shane. He wanted a quiet, peaceful life with the man he loved.

He tenderly brushed tears from Shane’s face, kissing his forehead, his right eyebrow, the tip of his cute little nose, and the smattering of freckles on his cheek. He slid out of him and pulled away to grab a cloth to clean him up, taking his time with it, brushing the cloth soothingly over Shane’s slightly swollen entrance.

They lay together after, holding each other.

“When do you have to go...?” Shane murmured, his fingers brushing lightly back and forth over Ilya’s chest.

“Tomorrow morning,” Ilya replied, kissing into Shane’s hair.

“Don’t leave without saying goodbye.”

Ilya squeezed him. “Never.”

It took both of them a long time to fall asleep, faces pressed together, kissing, breathing in sync, noses brushing, foreheads pressed together. Ilya gently toyed with Shane’s hair and Shane twisted some of Ilya’s curls around his fingers, smoothing his fingers over the silver streak in Ilya’s hair.

“I love you,” Shane murmured.

“I love you,” Ilya murmured back.

At some point they managed to fall asleep, curled tightly around one another. When Ilya woke up the next morning, he was spooned against Shane’s back, and Shane was curled up against him.

He lay still for a long time, his face pressed into the back of Shane’s head, breathing him in. He kissed the adorable grouping of freckles at the back of Shane’s neck and burned the memory of Shane’s weight and warmth against him and in his arms into his mind.

Shane woke a short time later, rolling over to look at Ilya. He was so breathtaking, soft and warm and sleepy. Ilya gently pushed his hair back, cupped his cheek, let his thumb slide over his cheekbone, cradling Shane in one arm.

They made love, slow and sweet, then went to the shower to clean up, lingering under the warm spray longer than was necessary because they kept kissing. Shane hadn’t even brushed his teeth or made Ilya brush his.

After their shower, Shane slid into a new pair of clothes, and Ilya put on his clothes from the day before. Shane watched him sadly and Ilya pulled him close.

“My beloved,” he murmured in Russian. “I will love you always.”

Shane squeezed him tight.

As they parted, Ilya took Shane’s hand, turning it so his palm was facing up. He lifted his own hand and pulled off his signet ring, placing the piece of jewelry into Shane’s palm. Carefully, he folded Shane’s fingers around it.

“My heart,” he said. “For safekeeping.”

Shane blinked wide eyes at him, which rapidly began filling with tears. His body crashed hard into Ilya’s and Ilya held him again, as if he could protect him from this hurt.

“Be safe,” Shane whispered wetly. “And come back to me...”

“I will,” Ilya replied. “I promise.”

He buried his face in Shane’s hair, breathing him in, kissing him. They held each other for a long time before reluctantly letting go. Ilya did have to leave. He had a lot of work to do. Shane slid Ilya’s ring onto left hand’s ring finger and Ilya tried not to think too much about that.

Shane walked him downstairs and they lingered at the door. Ilya didn’t want to leave and he could tell Shane didn’t want him to either. Maybe feeling the same, like he could protect Ilya from whatever he was about to walk into.

Ilya said goodbye to Eloise, who was lounging across the back of an armchair, before he turned back to Shane.

“I love you,” Ilya said, holding Shane’s face in his hands, wanting to memorize the feeling, the way Shane looked in that moment. His beautiful, sweet Shane.

“I love you, too,” Shane murmured.

They kissed, even as Ilya opened the front door, and moved to step out onto the steps. They looked at each other, as Ilya backed away, hands sliding apart, fingers gripping, until Ilya was too far, and their hold broke.

Shane was crying again and Ilya blew him one last kiss, before he got to his car, and slid inside. He watched Shane as he drove away, standing in the doorway of his house.

Ilya would come back to him.

He would make sure of it.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya navigate time apart while Ilya gets his life sorted out

Chapter Notes

The Bomb by Florence + The Machine

Shane felt a bit untethered. After Ilya had left, he was sort of in a bit of a haze. They had left things on hopeful terms but Shane didn't know if he would hear from Ilya at all while they were apart.

He didn't know what Ilya had to do to remove himself from his family or the mafia. Would he have to fake his own death? Change his identity? Shane wasn't sure what any of it entailed and his mind spun out of control, thinking about all the possible things that could go wrong.

What if Ilya's brother killed him? What if he was killed by one of the other members? What if he had to go underground and Shane didn't see him for another five years?

He was afraid to text or call. He didn't want to put Ilya more at risk or draw attention to himself.

Rose and Hayden knew there was something up and Shane tried to play it off as he and Ilya "taking a break" because Ilya needed to "sort some things out." It wasn't really a lie but he couldn't go into all of the details.

His friends sort of bought it, making themselves available to him, but Shane wasn't sure what he needed right now.

All he had was Ilya's ring on his finger and that wasn't more than a promise. Promises could be broken...

Shane woke up on his birthday feeling absolutely terrible.

Ilya had had plans today for them but Shane would never know what those plans were. He had been excited about today, looking forward to spending a luxurious morning in bed, having sex with his boyfriend. Then maybe getting brunch, then a walk down by the river,

maybe more sex, then a lovely dinner out, maybe a stop at a rooftop bar, or to *Irina* for a nightcap, then back to Ilya's penthouse for yet more sex.

Shane was sure that Ilya would have gotten him ridiculous, frivolous gifts, which Shane would have appreciated, but weren't what he would have been looking forward to. He had been looking forward to entering this new decade of his life with the man he loved. Being happy. But he was just miserable instead.

He wanted to be with Ilya. It was a petulant thought but it was true.

Shane wondered what Ilya was doing now. If he was safe. He wanted to text him but he refrained. Instead, he took off the signet ring and looked at it. He hadn't really given it much consideration, just letting the weight of it on his finger keep him grounded. Shane examined it. It was a medium sized gold ring, with an oval shape to it. Simple and relatively plain. He ran his thumb over the engraving on the face.

It was Ilya's initials, *IGR* , in a very fancy kind of calligraphy.

Shane didn't know if Ilya had bought the ring for himself or if it had been a gift from his family. Shane knew he wore it all the time, along with his mother's crucifix, so it had to have some meaning.

My heart... for safekeeping , Ilya had said. Shane sighed, feeling his eyes burn. He held the ring in his fist and pressed his hands to his heart.

I will. I promise.

God, how was he going to endure this?

He didn't come up with an answer to that question as he lay in bed for another fifteen minutes before Eloise jumped up, headbutting him.

"Hi," he cooed at her, sliding the ring back on his finger, and gave her some pets. She was such a sweet thing and he appreciated her company. She lay on his chest, purring up a storm, as Shane rubbed her cheeks, and scratched under her chin.

She meowed at him and Shane let out a long sigh. "Yeah. Should probably get up now, right?"

He sat up and Eloise hopped down off of him. Shane stretched and got out of bed, making it, before he checked his phone. He had a bunch of texts from his friends and his parents, which was nice.

He gave the okay for his friends to come by for brunch but warned them that he wouldn't be good company. His parents were going to come by for dinner. Shane didn't know how he would spend the time in-between. Probably just meandering around the house feeling sorry for himself.

He took a shower and brushed his teeth and changed into clothes that were actually nice. He looked at his phone again.

Ilya: happy birthday, sweetheart

Ilya: I am thinking of you today ❤️

Shane's heart stopped as he looked at the texts. It was the first contact that he and Ilya had had in about a week. He typed out several responses, deleting each one, before settling on something simple.

Shane: Thank you. I'm thinking of you, too. Hope you're well ❤️

He didn't know what the parameters were for this. He didn't know if Ilya even wanted to really speak with him while he did whatever it was that he had to do. Shane didn't want to make it harder for him but he also missed him something fierce.

He just stared at the messages for longer than was probably reasonable before he tucked his phone away and tried to prepare to be more cheerful for his friends when they arrived.

Brunch was nice. No one brought up Ilya or looked at Shane with pity. They drank mimosas and ate breakfast sandwiches and talked about summer plans. Shane felt a little better, being in the company of the people he loved and cared about.

Everyone stayed later than Shane was anticipating, which was fine. It gave him less time alone to just be with himself and his thoughts. He had enough time to clean up, then freshen up, before his parents came over.

His parents knew more than his friends did. He'd told them that Ilya had had some "mafia connections" and was trying to get out. Shane was actually surprised at how supportive his parents were. He would have expected everyone to tell him to tell Ilya to fuck off, but both his parents had been much more empathetic about the situation.

If he's getting out and doing what he has to do to better his life, then good for him. As long as he keeps treating you well...

Shane let his parents into the house and Shane let his dad engulf him in a tight hug. A man of few words, Dad had always given the best hugs.

"Happy birthday, kiddo."

Shane held Dad tight. "Thanks."

"Let me get in on this," Mom said, making the Hollander men chuckle. Mom wrapped her arms around Shane and Dad from behind, so Shane was sandwiched between his parents.

"Happy birthday, Shane," she said. "We love you so much."

His eyes stung and he closed them. "I love you guys, too."

His stomach roiled and his heart clenched as he remembered his fear of never seeing them again and the comfort of their presence now made him feel more emotional than he would have liked.

They all stayed huddled together until Eloise demanded attention and they broke apart. Mom greeted the cat as Dad hung up their coats and handed Shane a present.

“Just a little something,” he said with a wink, then chuckled. “I can’t believe you’re thirty.”

Shane smiled. “Neither can I.”

“Oh, I made your favorite,” Mom said, holding up the cake carrier that she had been using since the ‘90s. “Triple chocolate cake!”

“Thanks, Mom.”

They ordered take out from Shane’s favorite Greek restaurant and sat around his kitchen table with a bottle of wine. Shane talked to and saw his parents pretty regularly so there wasn’t much new he had to update them on.

They didn’t poke or prod him for information but he gave it up anyway because he could never really hide anything from his parents.

“Ilya texted me today,” he said into his mostly empty wine glass.

“Oh?” Mom replied gently. “What did he say?” She placed a plate of chocolate cake in front of him. They’d already sung happy birthday and he’d already blown out the candles (all thirty).

“He just wished me a happy birthday and told me he was thinking of me. Sent a heart emoji. That was it. I haven’t heard much from him since.”

Dad squeezed his shoulder sympathetically and Shane offered him a small smile. It was strange, being in this liminal space with Ilya. Not really together at the moment but not broken up. He didn’t know what to say about the whole thing. If there even was anything to say about it at all. He missed Ilya. He was lonely and sad and facing down a huge unknown. He supposed all he could really do was stay the course.

Shane fiddled with the signet ring on his finger.

“It’s nice that he did reach out,” Mom said, sitting down next to him and rubbing his back. “Slow and steady. These things are complicated. They take time.”

Shane nodded. “Yeah. Slow and steady.”

Leaving Shane was one of the hardest things that Ilya had ever had to do but he knew that it would propel him forward. He’d push through that pain to get to the other side, because he had to. He would. For himself. For Shane. For the ability to be happy and to build the kind of life he actually wanted.

He had a lot of work ahead of him and he needed to do it very carefully and very concisely. He wasn’t sure how long it would take. Conservative estimates indicated about a year. If he

played his cards right, maybe eight or nine months. He had no idea how it would all play out but he couldn't dally.

He sat with Svetlana in his office, both of them going through every bank account that he had access to, sorting them into personal, professional, and "family." The most important thing was making sure that all of his personal assets were safe and secure and unable to be found by Andrei or anyone associated with the *Bratva*.

Over the next several weeks, Ilya spent more time in banks than he ever had before, transferring money here and there, emptying bank accounts, creating new ones. He didn't have to worry much about anything with *Irina* because that was its own separate business and not tied to anything or anyone except Ilya. The same with his art studio. No one even knew that he had it, except Svetlana and Shane.

He sold the majority of his car collection, keeping only four cars out of the near twenty he had. This took many more weeks. Finding buyers, negotiating prices. He took the money from the cars and stashed that away, too.

He had to sell his weapons, which took much longer to do, which was unsurprising, given that it was the black market. He'd decided to kill two birds with one stone and end any connection he had with dealers there. He didn't have many but there was no use in keeping them any longer.

It meant giving up his favorite vodka but that was a small price to pay.

He went back years into all of the accounts, double, triple, quadruple checking that he didn't have anything in his possession that his brother or the *Bratva* could come after.

It was a daunting, grueling process, but Ilya had to be perfect about this, because there were no other chances after this.

"What do you think?" he asked Svetlana as they sat in his office, smoking next to the window, almost five months into the process of disentangling himself from the *Bratva*.

"I think we're close," she replied, smoke pouring out of the corner of her mouth. "You just need to bring your proposal to your brother and hope he says yes."

Ilya nodded as he took a drag from his cigarette and held it. He released it and sighed, tapping his ashes into his ashtray.

"I think I'm going to quit smoking," he said.

Svetlana chuckled. "For him?"

"For us both."

Svetlana hummed. Her expression softened as she watched Ilya. "I'm happy you found him."

Ilya nodded, looking out at the city, knowing that he would lose this view soon. The city was like a sparkling jewel but Shane was far more beautiful than this.

“Me, too,” Ilya replied. He turned back to look at her, nudging his foot against her ankle.
“What about you?”

Svetlana laughed. “What? With men? You’re all so boring. There’s no one I’m interested in right now and even if I was, he wouldn’t be good enough for me.”

Ilya made a face, holding out his hand as if conceding her point.

“But I have a few opportunities lined up. Better pay and better hours, too.”

Ilya laughed. “Good. Perfect.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, before they both extinguished their cigarettes.

“You’ll keep in touch, won’t you?” she asked, her face surprisingly vulnerable.

“Of course,” Ilya replied.

She smiled. “Good.”

Ilya smiled back and reached for her hand, squeezing.

“Thank you. For everything. For all of this and all of the years of my bullshit.”

Svetlana huffed a laugh but her eyes looked glassy. “Well, the sex was really good so...”

“Made it worth it?”

“Almost.”

Ilya barked a laugh. “Fair enough.”

Ilya arrived at his father’s house, which now belonged to his brother. He waited at the front door and it was answered by Anastasia, Andrei’s assistant, and occasional mistress. Ilya bowed his head slightly at her as he entered the house.

“He’s upstairs in his office,” she told him as she took Ilya’s coat to hang up. Ilya smiled and nodded and then motioned to the large pink gift bag he held in his hand.

“And my sister-in-law?” he inquired.

“The nursery.”

“Of course. Thank you.”

Ilya walked through the house, to the stairs, and made his way up. It had been a long time since he had actively been in this house. He had lived here for a few years, in the beginning, and had hated every moment of it. It was nice, in a way, that the house bore little resemblance to the place he had known when he had first arrived in Canada.

It was still cold and remote, but Tatiana had added her own touch to the place, and his room was now part of his niece's nursery, which Ilya liked the idea of. In theory at least.

He found Tatiana in a rocking chair in the baby's room, singing softly. Ilya knocked gently on the door and she looked up.

"Oh! Iliushenka," she said, smiling widely.

"Hi," he replied. "I didn't mean to disturb you."

"No. Not at all. Come in."

Ilya entered the room, looking around at all the gentle pastel pinks of the room, how comfortably everything was set up. He had met his niece only once before, after she had been born. She had been so small as he held her in his hands. He hoped he would be able to know her as she got older... but that was yet to be seen.

"I brought a gift," he said. "And... I wanted to say goodbye."

Tatiana blinked at him and gave him a sad, knowing smile.

"I see."

Ilya nodded. "I can't make any promises. I don't know what Andrei will say or if he will tell me that I must break all ties. But... I wanted you to know that I wouldn't be doing so by choice."

"I understand," she said. "I'm proud of you. This must have been a very difficult decision for you."

Ilya nodded and set down the gift. "Yes... and no. He's worth it. And so am I."

Tatiana nodded. "Yes. You are."

She stood up and walked toward him.

"Here," she said gently. "Hold her. She's sleeping."

Ilya nodded, opening his arms to hold his sleeping niece. She was bigger now, but still small, as most three month olds were, he imagined. He looked at her, completely enamored by her sweet little sleeping face. He rocked her gently back and forth, just looking, trying to make sure he didn't forget this moment.

"You're so good with her," Tatiana murmured.

Ilya smiled. "I like kids."

"Would you like your own?" she asked.

"Someday. Yes."

“I hope we’re there to see it.”

“I’d like that,” Ilya replied, nodding. He sighed softly, lifting Karina closer so he could press a kiss to her forehead. She still smelled like new baby and he kind of loved it.

“I love you, little sun. I hope I’ll see you again soon. Don’t grow up too fast.”

He handed the sleeping baby back to her mother, then steeled himself for the conversation he needed to have with his brother.

Tatiana touched his arm and kissed his cheek.

“Good luck,” she said. “I’m rooting for you.”

“Thank you,” Ilya replied, offering her a smile, and left the room.

Ilya went down the hall to his brother's office and knocked on the door.

“Enter,” his brother called. He opened the door and stepped in.

Andrei was at his desk, looking at something on two giant monitors in front of him.

“Ah. Ilya,” he said.

“Andrei.”

“Sit,” his brother said, indicating one of the chairs in front of his desk. Ilya sat.

Andrei made him wait while he finished whatever it was that he was finishing, then he moved the monitors so that he could see Ilya better. He smiled tightly at Ilya, hands resting on his desk.

“So. You wanted to talk. What’s going on?”

“I have a proposal for you,” Ilya replied, leaning forward in his seat.

Andrei looked at him with interest. “What kind of proposal?”

Ilya looked at his brother. “I would like to tender my resignation from this family and the *Bratva*. In exchange for my leaving, you get all of the assets our father left to me. The money, the houses, the cars, everything.”

Andrei blinked at Ilya, then leaned back in his chair, resting his hands on his stomach, assessing Ilya. He tilted his head to the side, considering.

“Is this because of your boy toy? He must really be good in bed for you to be coming to me with all this.”

Ilya’s hands flexed against his knees but he didn’t allow himself to rise to the bait. “I have considered removing myself from our family and my position within it for years. Dad’s gone.

My place within the organization is replaceable and laughable. My leaving wouldn't harm anyone."

Andrei narrowed his eyes. "Besides what you know."

"What do I know, Andrei? I don't know where the bodies are buried. That information died when our father got sick, you know he didn't trust me with anything. And whatever money or assets I have would be yours. I don't want it."

"How will you survive, Ilya? You have no skills. You are too old to go back to the NHL and risk reinjury. Are you going to work at your bar?"

"Yes. Perhaps open up a restaurant."

Andrei scoffed.

"There is nothing keeping me here. I am offering you this as a kindness. You very well know I can simply leave." It wasn't quite that simple, but legally, Ilya was correct.

Andrei sucked on his top teeth, considering this. Ilya simply stared him down.

"So... what? Would you like papers drawn up then?"

"I already have," Ilya replied. He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out a neatly folded bit of paper. He handed it to his brother, who took it. Andrei unfolded the paper and read through the agreement.

Essentially it said that Ilya was renouncing everything he may have inherited from their father, giving it to Andrei, in exchange for his complete and total removal from the Rozanov family and the *Bratva*.

"It'll be like I died," Ilya said simply. "You can wash your hands of me."

Andrei finished reading.

"Fine."

He picked up the phone on his desk, pressing a number on the keypad, and held the phone to his ear.

"Come upstairs. Bring Tatiana with you."

A few moments later, Anastasia and Tatiana entered the room.

"Witnesses," Andrei said and held out the paper to his wife. "Read this. Both of you."

Tatiana and Anastasia read the paperwork, then handed it back to Andrei. Ilya exchanged a brief look with Tatiana. Andrei signed both copies, then Ilya, then Tatiana and Anastasia.

"There," Andrei said. "Now you are free."

Ilya nodded. "Thank you."

There wasn't more that he wanted to say to his brother. No goodbye. There was no love lost between them. Ilya took his paperwork, folded it, and placed it in the inside pocket of his jacket, then left the office.

"Ilya!" called Tatiana as closed the closet door, his coat in hand. She hurried into the entryway and hugged him tight. He hugged her back.

"I'm sorry to be leaving you and Karina," he said.

"No. Don't be. Please. I'm so proud of you. So happy for you. Please don't disappear completely. We'll find a way to stay in touch."

Ilya closed his eyes and nodded, holding her tightly. "We will."

"Please be well. Take good care of yourself. And your Shane."

Ilya smiled and huffed a soft, wet laugh. "I will."

Tatiana pulled away, cupping his cheeks, then kissed his forehead. "Go."

He offered her a smile and nodded. He slipped into his coat and left the house, never to return.

Back in his penthouse, Ilya lay on his bed with Anya, stroking her head, and playing with her soft ears, her little head resting on his chest. He'd been crying on and off for the last few hours, lost in a mix of emotions.

He felt ten times lighter but also scared as hell.

He had been in his family for so long. It was really the only system he knew how to operate in. Now, he was unmoored, lost in free fall. Had he actually made the right decision? Could he really do this? On his own?

He had been tempted to call Shane, to seek out his comfort, but Ilya didn't think he could. Not yet. Not until he was well and completely separated. And there was no guarantee that Shane would even want him back. It had been almost five months... anything could have happened in that time.

They talked a little. Just enough to keep that door open. The texts were minimal but affectionate, at least, Ilya thought so... but they hadn't had an actual conversation in so long.

Ilya didn't think Shane would give up on him but it was still a possibility. Anything could happen. He wanted to believe that Shane was a sure thing... but it wasn't fair to put that pressure on him... he could do whatever he wanted and if that meant not being with Ilya, in the end, then... Ilya would have to accept that.

Regardless of how all of that would play out, the deed had been done. He'd spoken to Svetlana to let her know and the paperwork had been filed away with his lawyer. Now he needed to sell the penthouse, find a smaller, dog friendly apartment, and burn all of his Russian documents.

"Eugh," Ilya murmured, gently lifting Anya into his arms and sitting up. "What do you think, sweet girl? How would you like to downsize, hm?"

Anya licked his face and Ilya smiled. He reached for his laptop, opening it, and started looking at nice, two bedroom condos. He still had a ways to go but at least things were starting to look up.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Eight months later...

Chapter Notes

Song for this chapter was Francesca by Hozier

JANUARY

It had been eight months since Shane had last seen Ilya. He had settled into a routine of sorts, adapting to the absence like one might adapt to an injury or an amputated limb. Sometimes he forgot that Ilya wasn't there and once he realized he wasn't... had to manage the grief of his absence all over again.

They didn't really talk. They texted, sometimes, but not enough for Shane to feel comfortable.

Ilya's texts were always sweet and affectionate, though sometimes Shane felt a little like maybe he was being led on. But he didn't think that Ilya would go through so much trouble just to fuck Shane over. He wasn't that kind of person.

So Shane waited and tried to be patient, though he was completely in the dark. He tried to focus on the ring that Ilya had left him and the last evening they'd had together. He was lonely. He missed Ilya tremendously but he was hopeful that they would be together again.

Someday.

Maybe.

He was grateful for his friends and his family. For Eloise. They had all kept him afloat, though there were good days and bad days. Shane just tried to focus on putting one foot in front of the other.

Shane laughed softly as Eloise batted at a Christmas decoration he was taking down. He smiled at her, gently bobbing the decoration up and down as she swatted at it, trying to catch it.

They played for a little while before Shane packed the decorations away. He closed and sealed the box, then took it downstairs to his basement. It had been a quiet December. He'd had some time with friends and family, accepting invites to holiday parties but spent the new year with his parents, missing Ilya terribly. Ilya had really enjoyed Christmas with Shane's family and they had had such a wonderful new year together last year...

But Shane had gotten through it and the week was progressing as usual. Nothing out of the ordinary. No unwanted or scary surprises. No surprise boyfriends appearing at his workplace or on his doorstep. Just work and hockey.

Shane closed the basement door and startled at the sound of his doorbell ringing. It was a relatively rare occurrence and he wasn't expecting any guests. He really hoped it wasn't anyone trying to solicit anything... he didn't have the capacity to deal with people at the moment.

Eloise meowed at the door and Shane gently nudged her away, opening the door, preparing to tell whoever was on his doorstep to (politely) fuck off.

"How can I—"

It took him a moment to register what he was looking at. On his front step, dressed in a winter coat, snowflakes in his hair, with a backpack over one shoulder, was Ilya. His hair was longer, shaggier, and he had more facial hair than Shane had ever seen him with. Not quite a full beard, but definitely on the way to one.

He looked... *perfect*. Exhausted and sad and maybe even a bit scared. But *good*.

Shane had no idea how long he just looked at him, stunned.

"Ilya..." he finally managed to say.

"Hi," Ilya replied, with a small smile. His eyes darted away from Shane, then back again. "I'm sorry to just appear here... without warning... but I wanted to tell you that I left. It's done. No one should bother either of us any more."

Shane blinked.

Oh.

Oh.

Ilya had done it. He had *actually* done it. Ilya had left his family and the mob. He'd done all of that, eight months worth of work, completely upending his entire life... for *Shane*.

It was suddenly very hard to breathe.

Ilya looked down at his boots, shuffling his feet.

"I'm not expecting you to just take me back," he continued. "But I cannot move into my new place until this weekend... and I need a place to stay. Is okay if you don't want—"

Shane didn't let him finish. He grabbed the front of his jacket and hauled him into the house. He cupped Ilya's bearded face in his hands and kissed him for all he was worth. Ilya didn't respond for a moment, body rigid, before he relaxed, arms going around Shane to hold him, kissing him back with just as much fervor.

Shane's heart was pounding wildly in his chest. His mind was reeling but in the best way possible. Ilya was *here*. In Shane's arms. In one piece. He had *come back*.

When they pulled apart, they both had tears streaming down their faces. Shane sighed, his breath shuddering, his thumbs stroking over Ilya's cheeks. He looked at him in wonder and awe.

"I missed you so much," he said, his voice all throaty with emotion. "I was so worried I would never see you again."

Ilya pressed their faces together. "I missed you, too. I am sorry it took so long... I wanted to be sure. I couldn't make any mistakes."

Shane nodded in understanding, closing his eyes as he rubbed his nose back and forth against Ilya's.

"I'm so proud of you..."

Ilya made a tight, throaty sound and Shane wrapped his arms around his neck, pulling him close. He rested a hand at the back of Ilya's head and just held him tight. They stood like that for a long time in his entryway, crying quietly against each other.

Shane had absolutely no idea what Ilya had been through, how difficult things must have been, and now that he was here, Shane didn't want to let him go ever again.

Finally, they pulled apart and Shane gently brushed tears from Ilya's face.

"You can stay as long as you need to," Shane said. "And... if you want to talk about everything, I'm here to listen."

Ilya looked at him, grateful and relieved, and Shane could already tell how much he had been holding. He looked *so* tired and Shane just wanted to take care of him.

"Come on," he said, touching Ilya's cheek. "I'm going to make dinner and then you can take a nice, long shower, and we can go to bed."

Ilya smiled small, leaning into Shane's palm, and closed his eyes. "Yes. Okay."

Ilya slipped off his boots and hung up his jacket. He left his bag at the bottom of the stairs and then scooped Eloise into his arms. He was talking to her in soft, sweet Russian, which made Shane's heart skip. He'd missed listening to Ilya talk in his native language. Ilya kissed Eloise, and Shane watched fondly as Eloise headbutted Ilya's face.

"She missed you, too," Shane said.

“I did, too,” he replied, cuddling Eloise, before gently setting her back on her feet, and followed Shane into the kitchen.

“Where’s Anya?”

“At the dog hotel,” Ilya replied. “It was a lot for her, with moving, so she is there until this weekend.”

“You could bring her here, if you want.”

Ilya was quiet for a moment and Shane looked over his shoulder at him. Ilya blinked. “You are sure?”

Shane nodded. “Yeah. Of course.”

Ilya moved closer and wrapped his arms around Shane again. Shane smiled and chuckled softly, holding him tight

“Thank you.”

“It’s no trouble at all,” Shane replied, smoothing his hand up and down Ilya’s back. He guessed that the thank you was more than just about Anya. They looked at each other and kissed gently.

“Sit,” Shane instructed softly. “Do you want anything to drink?”

With Ilya settled at the kitchen table, a large glass of water and a beer in front of him, Shane started on making chicken parmesan with a side of penne. Chicken parm was Ilya’s favorite meal and Shane was glad he had the ingredients for it.

They talked as Shane cooked, Ilya telling Shane about everything he had done in order to free himself from his family and the *Bratva*. It sounded grueling and Shane understood why it had taken as long as it had. No wonder Ilya was so exhausted.

Shane’s heart broke for him. He had lost so much in such a short amount of time and while Shane hoped that he felt that he was gaining more, he imagined the loss wouldn’t be an easy one. He wanted to be here for Ilya’s grief, no matter what that looked like.

Ilya had put his head down on the table, resting on one arm. Eloise was in his lap and he was petting her with his free hand. Shane was afraid he’d fall asleep at the table, which wouldn’t be comfortable, but he didn’t. He looked so tired but so handsome and Shane loved him so much he was fit to burst.

His heart felt so full but so fragile. Ilya had been through so much, given up so much, because he loved Shane so deeply that it was worth it for him to have gone through such suffering. He’d *chosen* Shane, over a life that, despite its toxicity, certainly had a lot of monetary perks.

Shane almost couldn’t fathom it. How had he been deemed worthy of such love?

He came around the table while the chicken parm baked, carding his fingers gently through Ilya's golden-brown curls, sliding that one silver streak through his thumb and index finger. Ilya sat up and wrapped his arms around Shane's waist, resting his head on Shane's chest. Shane wrapped his arms around him and kissed into his soft hair.

"I love you so much," he murmured, tears burning his eyes. "I'm so glad you're here... that you came back to me..."

Ilya sighed, just as wetly. "Always."

They held each other and cried until Shane's timer went off. They both laughed and wiped their faces and Shane kissed Ilya several times, because he could, and because Ilya deserved all of the kisses, and then went to check on their food.

He made plates for them and brought them to the table. They ate, stealing glances at one another, fingers brushing together whenever the opportunity presented itself.

After eating, Shane cleaned up, and loaded the dishwasher. He made sure Eloise was fed, then took Ilya upstairs. He left his bag in the bedroom and they went into the bathroom together where Shane started the shower.

He pulled Ilya's clothes off carefully. He looked thinner to Shane. Still fit but like the stress had started to get to him. Shane's heart clenched uncomfortably. He wanted to make Ilya feel comfortable and loved and safe. He wanted Ilya to know that he didn't have to worry any more.

Once they were both naked, Shane slid his hand over the chain around Ilya's neck, and the crucifix pendant that sat at the top of his pecs. He slid his hand to rest over Ilya's bear tattoo, over his heart. Ilya lifted his hand to rest it on Shane's and Shane swallowed past the lump in his throat.

After a fragile moment, they stepped into the shower together.

Ilya stood under the spray, head bowed forward a bit, shoulders slumped. Shane brushed his wet curls back from his face and kissed him very softly. He washed Ilya's hair first, taking his time, massaging his fingers into Ilya's scalp, watching the way his eyes dipped, and closed, his plush lips parting slightly.

Eight months was a long time to go without any TLC and while it had been difficult for Shane, he knew he had many more supports than Ilya did. He'd done so much alone. Shane didn't want him to have to do that any more. They were in this together.

"Do you want me to wash the beard, too?" Shane chuckled as he smoothed his sudsy hands through Ilya's hair.

Ilya chuckled. "No. I need to shave it..."

Shane smiled. "Maybe leave it for a bit. It's sexy."

Ilya's eyebrow twitched upwards and Shane chuckled. "Rinse."

Ilya tilted his head back and rinsed and Shane shamelessly watched as the soapy water ran over Ilya's muscular shoulders, down and between his firm pecs, the lines of his abs. Shane had never met anyone who looked so gorgeously sexy when they were wet like Ilya did.

Once Ilya's hair was rinsed, Shane picked up his body wash and washed Ilya from head to toe. Ilya tried to protest but Shane waved him off. He wanted to do this. He could tell that Ilya was too tired for sex, his dick mostly soft, and Shane wasn't going to force it. They'd only just gotten here... they could take their time.

And Shane wanted to. He wanted them to reconnect and readjust. This was a brand new start and there was no need to rush it. Especially if Ilya was still raw. Shane was just so happy he was here.

Once Ilya was clear of any soap, Shane wrapped his arms around him, and held him under the warm spray. He turned the water off not too long after, grabbing a towel, and drying Ilya off.

"Shane," Ilya murmured but Shane just kissed him, and finished his task.

"Bed," he said, pushing Ilya gently out of the bathroom before he dried himself off, and joined him.

Ilya was already under the covers, looking snug, and soft, and so sleepy. Shane smiled, closing the blinds, turning off the lights, and joining Ilya in bed. They immediately curled around each other, tucked close and tight.

"I'm so happy you're here," Shane murmured again, unable to help it, and kissed Ilya's forehead, his cheeks, the corner of his mouth. "I love you."

"Yes. Me, too. I love you."

They settled down, close and warm, and Shane gently petted Ilya's damp hair.

"Sleep. You're safe. I got you."

Ilya pressed closer and Shane closed his eyes, holding him tight.

Shane woke up the next morning to kisses being trailed over his shoulder, his skin tickled by the scratch of facial hair. He smiled, pulling his shoulder closer to his chin, humming happily at the tender attention. Ilya chuckled and Shane rolled over to look at Ilya. He was sleep rumpled and gorgeous and Shane reached for him, pulling him close.

Ilya hummed, curling his arms around Shane, his face tucked against Shane's neck. "Good morning," Shane mumbled, yawning.

Ilya chuckled and kissed Shane's neck. "It is."

He pulled back to look at Shane, his hand smoothing over Shane's hair, his hazel eyes soft as he looked down at him. Ilya's thumb brushed at Shane's hairline, right at the crown of his head, and he felt himself go all soft, too.

"You are so beautiful," he murmured and Shane smiled, feeling himself blush. He reached up, stroking a finger over Ilya's bearded cheek.

"Not so bad yourself," Shane replied and Ilya smiled back at him, pressing a long, lingering kiss to his cheek.

"Do we need to brush our teeth?"

Shane laughed. "Nah. Fuck it."

"Thank Christ," Ilya muttered and kissed Shane as he laughed. It felt so good to kiss him like this, to be laughing with him like this. Ilya lay himself on Shane, not quite using all of his weight, but enough, and Shane hiked a leg up over Ilya's hip.

They made out for what felt like hours. It was luxurious and reaffirming and Shane realized how starved he had been for this. For the heat and firmness of Ilya's body, for his thorough, borderline filthy kisses that somehow also made Shane feel adored and cherished, simply for his presence, being here, next to Shane.

Shane dragged his hands through Ilya's rumbled curls, holding him as they kissed with increased ferocity, almost desperation. He wrapped both legs around Ilya, pulling him close, fingers digging into the muscles of his back, rocking their bodies together, making them both moan.

"How do you want it?" Ilya asked, kissing his top lip.

"In your lap," Shane replied almost right away. "As close as possible to you. I want to hold you and kiss you and... fuck, Ilya. I missed you so much."

"I know," Ilya sighed. "Me, too..."

They kissed more and Shane relaxed his legs so Ilya could move next to him, sitting back against the headboard. Shane crawled into his lap, straddling him, cupping his face to kiss him again. Shane felt needy and eager and he wasn't even embarrassed about it. Eight months was too long without *this*. Without *Ilya*.

Ilya wrapped his hand around both their cocks, stroking, and Shane moaned shamelessly against his lips.

"Shh," Ilya soothed. His free hand stroked down Shane's spine, palming Shane's ass, before he reached into Shane's bedside table to retrieve the lube that was still there. Shane heard the pop of the lube cap and after a moment, Ilya's slick finger rubbed up against his hole.

"Yes," Shane panted. "Please."

Ilya made a soothing noise, his hand on their dicks barely touching now. He kissed Shane's jaw, carefully pushing one finger into Shane.

"Was there... anyone?" Ilya asked quietly. Shane opened his eyes to look at his face, to see how neutral he was trying to be, but the fear and anguish was obvious in his eyes.

Shane shook his head. "No. No one..."

Ilya's expression seemed even more pained, but also awed, as if he hadn't believed that Shane really would have waited for him.

"Ilya... it's only you. It's only been you. From the start."

Ilya's eyes tracked Shane's face. "Oh Shane..."

Shane kissed him deeply, trying to convey all he felt into that kiss, his fingers threaded into Ilya's hair at the back of his head, his hand pressed to his chest.

"I need you," Shane breathed, their foreheads pressed together. "I want you..."

"You have me, sweetheart," Ilya sighed, the words full of warmth, and Shane believed him completely.

It didn't take long for Ilya to open Shane up, though his careful, attentive ministrations left Shane practically begging for his cock. Ilya didn't tease him much more and Shane sank back onto him, shaking with need, it was fucking glorious.

Ilya rocked up into him and Shane cupped his face in his hands once more, kissing him. This was exactly what he wanted; to feel Ilya everywhere, to have Ilya fill him up like this, leaving no empty spaces.

Shane rested a hand on Ilya's shoulder and the other on his headboard, using the leverage to pound his ass down on Ilya's dick. It felt so fucking good, deep and at just the right angle. He tossed his head back.

"So good. So fucking good. Holy shit, Ilya. Love your dick. I'm right there." And he was. It hadn't taken much at all and Shane could feel his orgasm creeping up and he chased it.

"Give it to me, sweetheart. I'm so close."

"Fuck. Oh god. I love you. Ilya. I love you. I'm—" Shane cut himself off with an almost startled gasp, spurting all over Ilya's stomach and chest, his whole body trembling with pleasure so intense that the entire world had faded to nothing but *this feeling*.

Shane let his forehead fall to Ilya's shoulder and Ilya wrapped his arms around him, holding him close and tight.

"Jesus," Shane panted. "Wow."

Ilya huffed a laugh and kissed into Shane's hair. "Was perfect."

“Yeah. It was.”

Shane reached up to run his hand up and down Ilya’s arm, his thumb brushing over the curve of his muscular bicep. He kissed Ilya’s shoulder, then lifted his head to kiss his mouth.

They stayed like that for as long as was comfortable before Shane eased off of Ilya and they went to the bathroom to clean up.

They changed into pajamas and went downstairs together to make coffee and breakfast.

“Oh, hello,” Ilya laughed from behind Shane as Shane poured coffee. He turned, finding Eloise wrapped around the back of Ilya’s shoulders.

“Hey! Excuse me, ma’am!” Shane scolded.

“Is okay,” Ilya chuckled. “I don’t mind.”

Shane shook his head, smiling. “Don’t be fresh,” he said to Eloise, scratching under her chin. “Just scoop her up and put her down if she starts bothering you.”

Ilya smiled. “Okay.”

Shane made Ilya’s coffee the way he liked it, three sugars and cream, then handed Ilya the mug with a kiss.

Shane leaned against the kitchen counter with his own coffee (splash of cream) and watched Ilya and Eloise. It was so good to see Ilya here, in Shane’s kitchen, laughing and smiling and looking... lighter.

“Can I take a picture?” Shane asked impulsively. Ilya sipped from his mug.

“Okay. Sure.”

Shane unplugged his phone from where he had left it on the kitchen counter, charging, last night. He’d forgotten it in light of Ilya’s arrival.

He opened up his camera app and lined up a shot, taking a picture of Ilya and Eloise looking at the camera, and then another as Ilya kissed at her head, giving her scratches. He looked like a fucking model and Shane could hardly stand it.

How was it possible for him to look so stunning first thing in the morning? It was so unfair.

Shane put his phone down and moved closer, wrapping his arm around Ilya.

“Mm, I am feeling very loved,” Ilya said and Shane smiled, kissing his cheek.

“Good. You should.”

They stayed like that until they’d finished their coffee and then Eloise jumped off Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya turned to Shane, bending down to hoist Shane into his arms. Shane laughed,

surprised, and Ilya set him on the counter, standing between his legs.

“Hi,” Shane hummed, arms resting casually over Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya’s hands curved around his hips.

“Hi,” he said, nudging his nose against Shane’s, then kissed him. Shane hummed into it, wrapping his legs around Ilya’s thighs, his arms around his neck.

“Shane,” Ilya sighed when they had finally stopped kissing, though Ilya was now peppering tender kisses all over Shane’s face.

“Mm?” Shane replied, chuckling, playing with Ilya’s shaggy curls.

“Now that I am free of my family... will you be with me? Properly?”

Shane’s heart flipped in his chest. He scratched his fingers into Ilya’s facial hair and cupped his face again.

“Yes,” he replied, smiling wide.

“Boyfriends?” Ilya asked.

Shane nodded. “Boyfriends.”

Ilya kissed him, smiling into it, and Shane smiled, too, unable to help himself, his heart fit to bursting. They were both laughing when they stopped kissing and Shane hummed, rubbing his nose against Ilya’s.

“Do you, um, want this back?” Shane asked, indicating the signet ring he still wore on his finger.

“No,” Ilya replied softly, kissing Shane’s forehead. “Is yours now.”

Shane nodded a little. “I’ll keep it safe.”

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

And they lived happily ever after...

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter was Up Beat (Married Life) by Kenyi
Thanks so much for sticking with this fic! I hope you enjoyed it! Please know that I am so grateful for every kudo and comment!! It's helped sustain me and keep me going!!! I appreciate everyone who read this! Thank you!!! 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰

DECEMBER - 3 Years Later

“And you grabbed the diapers I left on the changing table?” Shane asked.

“Fuck, Shane. Yes,” Ilya replied, looking at him with a combination of fondness and extreme exasperation. He was holding their daughter, Leo, in his arms. She was all bundled up in her little winter coat with her little mittens and her little hat that had bear ears on them.

She blinked her big eyes at Shane and whatever it was that Shane had been worrying about completely left his mind. He smiled, soft and gooey, at their baby, then looked at Ilya and sighed.

“Sorry,” he said to his husband and Ilya chuckled, kissing Leo’s head, and then moved to strap her into her carrier.

“We have everything in the bag and if we missed something, your parents will have it,” Ilya said. Shane was only half paying attention because he was watching the careful way his husband strapped Leo into her carrier, the way he brushed one long finger against her round cheek, then kissed the tip of her nose.

She giggled and Ilya cooed at her, nuzzling his face so gently against hers. Shane’s heart felt too big for his chest and his eyes stung. He loved watching Ilya and Leo together. Ilya was so good with her. Tender and soft and sweet, just the way you would want any father to be with his children.

While Shane’s journey into parenthood had been fraught, Ilya had taken to it like a duck to water. He was a natural and his calmness through the chaos had kept Shane afloat,

particularly when they were only getting eight hours of sleep between the two of them.

But all things considered, Leo was an easy baby. She had sort of fallen into their laps rather quickly. They had talked about kids fairly extensively and had started the process for adoption, which had taken time. Once everything had been settled and they'd been approved, they'd gotten a call two months later about a newborn.

She'd been in the NICU since birth and was being monitored for serious health complications. At that point, the main concern was her heart. Ilya and Shane had gone to visit her in the hospital and they'd fallen in love immediately.

Leonora Irina Hollander came home with them a month and a half later with a fairly clean bill of health. They would have to monitor her heart as she grew older but otherwise she seemed to be a happy, healthy baby.

Everyone who had met her was obsessed with her but none more than her parents.

Now, at six months old, she was a curious, vivacious infant who was interested in the world around her. She could sit up on her own and was starting to put weight on her legs whenever Ilya or Shane held her up. Shane suspected she would start walking soon. She was a quick crawler though and would get into anything if you weren't watching her carefully.

This was her first Christmas and everyone in Shane and Ilya's life had maybe gone a little overboard. Shane's parents in particular. But it was just because they were excited.

"Okay. Ready?" Shane asked, brushing his hand over Anya's head as she sniffed around their bags.

"Yes," Ilya replied, picking up the carrier. Shane shouldered Leo's diaper bag and the cookies Ilya had made. They said goodbye to the pets, before heading out to the car. Shane was grateful his parents didn't live very far, especially because it had started to snow.

He parked the car on the street in front of the childhood home he had grown up in and smiled. The three of them walked up the snowy walkway to the front door, where Mom was already waiting for them excitedly.

"Where's my baby?" she cooed. Shane rolled his eyes, smiling, and gave her a hug.

"Right here."

"No. My other baby. The new one."

Shane laughed and stepped around his mom to hug his dad and let Ilya and Leo into the house.

"Hello, my sweet little angel! Look how cute you are all bundled up!" Mom said. "Hi, Ilya. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," Ilya chuckled.

There was a lot of shuffling as packages and bags were placed down or handed off. Jackets and scarfs, hats and boots were removed, and the baby was taken out of the carrier and divested of all her winter clothing.

Mom took her immediately and Dad handed Ilya and Shane glasses of wine with a wink. Shane watched his mom show his daughter the Christmas tree and he watched Leo reach out to touch some of the ornaments.

She had a head of dark, springy curls, and the cutest little button nose, and blue eyes, which were wide as she and Baba walked around the tree together. Shane put an arm around Ilya's waist and tucked himself against his side. Ilya kissed the top of his head.

Christmas with the Hollanders was pretty relaxing overall. They ate dinner and hung out in the living room, playing card and board games. Ilya and Dad worked on a puzzle together, as had become their tradition.

Everyone got one present to open, though the baby got about five. Shane and Ilya sat on the floor, Leo in Shane's lap, letting her rip at the wrapping paper of her gifts, her parents helping unwrap them completely. Everyone cooed over her as Ilya showed her her gifts. She really liked a pink stuffed elephant in particular.

She fell asleep on Shane's shoulder not long after and Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, chin on Shane's other shoulder.

"Moi zvezdy," he murmured, making Shane smile. *My stars* .

Shane nuzzled Ilya gently and Ilya kissed his cheek.

"I love you," he hummed.

"I love you, too," Shane replied.

Shane eventually lay Leo down in the pack n play his mom had gotten for when they brought the baby over.

"She can sleep through a bomb," Shane chuckled, the pack n play set up in the living room, Christmas music playing, and the adults chatting. Leo had been like most newborns, struggling with her sleep schedule, but since she'd started sleeping all through the night, she was a heavy sleeper.

Shane and Ilya curled up on the couch together and Shane smiled fondly every time Ilya glanced over at Leo, checking in on her.

Shane smoothed a hand over his chest, snuggling against him. He loved this. Everyone he loved most in the world all in one place.

They did eventually have to leave, Ilya and Dad going out to clean off the car because it was really snowing now.

“Get home safe,” Dad said as he hugged Shane and Ilya goodbye, and gave a still sleeping Leo a tiny kiss.

“We love you. Merry Christmas,” Mom said, hugging and kissing all of them.

They drove back home with their gifts and Shane parked the car in the garage. They got into the house using the garage entrance and Shane brought Leo to the living room.

Anya and Eloise were curled up together on Anya’s dog bed, both of them getting up to greet Ilya and Shane.

“Hello, sweet girls,” Ilya cooed at them, giving them pets as Shane carefully undressed Leo and lifted her out of her carrier.

She woke up and fussed a little. He held her close, hushing her gently.

“Here,” Ilya chuckled and Shane handed her to him because Ilya was *The Baby Whisperer* .

“Aww, my little star. It's okay. Shhh,” Ilya murmured to her in Russian. He held her against his shoulder, humming softly, and rocking back and forth on his feet. Shane watched them together, his heart melting.

She fell back asleep and they both went up to put her to bed.

They spent a little while just looking at her in her crib before they went back downstairs to take care of the cat and dog and exchange *their* Christmas gifts.

“Open yours first,” Shane said, handing Ilya his gift.

“Okay,” Ilya chuckled, smiling at Shane. He sat on the couch, legs folded like a pretzel, and opened his gift.

“Shane,” he breathed. “These are very nice.”

Shane beamed, pleased with himself. He'd bought Ilya a new sketchpad and the best compressed charcoal he could reasonably afford. Ilya had kept his studio and had continued making art. He had had some success with it locally, which Shane was immensely impressed by. He was proud of Ilya. *Irina* was doing very well, too. The little bar had gotten a write up as one of the best cocktail bars in the area, and Ilya had been considering opening a restaurant, too.

Ilya had persevered and flourished away from his family and Shane was so in awe of him. Accomplishing all that he had accomplished despite personal adversity and struggle. Shane bragged about him whenever he could.

“Thank you,” Ilya said, his smile sweet and affectionate, and Shane leaned in to kiss him.

“Of course,” Shane replied warmly.

“Here. Is not much. You are hard to buy for,” Ilya chuckled, offering Shane a small wrapped present.

Shane knew he was hard to buy for, tending to just buy what he wanted for himself, which annoyed Ilya to no end, since he enjoyed spoiling Shane. He tended to buy sex toys for Shane instead, as Shane wouldn't buy them for himself, and they now had a fairly substantial collection.

Shane looked at his husband skeptically and began unwrapping the gift. The present was... a desk calendar.

It was a very nice desk calendar in fact, good quality, and apparently Ilya had customized it because each picture for every month was of their family. Some were pictures they'd taken and some were pieces that Ilya had drawn.

For May, it was a photo of Shane, Leo, Anya, and Eloise that Ilya had taken for Shane's most recent birthday. June was one of Shane's favorite photos of Ilya from when they'd gone to Italy last summer. August was the most adorable photo of Leo, laughing and smiling for the camera, her parents kissing her cheeks.

“Ilya... this is great,” he said, looking up at his husband and opening his arms for him. Ilya came, hugging him close.

“Glad you like it.”

“I do. It's perfect.”

Shane pulled back, kissing Ilya warmly, his heart full. He felt so lucky. They'd come so far since first meeting in that club on Shane's birthday.

“Merry Christmas, moy lyubimyy,” he said.

“Merry Christmas, baby,” Shane whispered back.

FIN

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

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Every kudo and comment is so greatly appreciated and treasured! Thank you for your support! <3

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