

intro to russian lit

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intro to russian lit

by [jingooism](#)

Summary

The one where Ilya is Shane's TA for Intro to Russian Literature and Shane is still a hockey boy.

Notes

ahhh this one was banging around my head for weeks before i decided to give them a go. reading and watching heated rivalry has genuinely pulled me out of an insane slump in every way and i absolutely ADORE these characters.

just fyi! i do use the physical descriptions that match connor and hudson because it just makes sense in my head. before the show i saw them differently, but hudcon has embodied them so well on screen that i can't help but picture them whenever i reread hr or read fics.

if you wanna scream with me about these two, feel free to follow my twt @yalooblueetebaa! hope you enjoy! kudos and comments are greatly appreciated! <3

- Translation into Español available: [Introducción a Literatura Rusa](#) by [adigium21](#)

Chapter 1: 2402

Chapter Notes

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

“So you’re telling me I can’t *graduate*?!” Shane can’t help the way his voice raises a few octaves as his advisor delivers the news. “Why wasn’t I told about this sooner?”

It was the beginning of his last semester at McGill University and this was *not* the way he wanted it to start. He doesn’t have time to worry about anything other than hockey, and he knows that his chance of being drafted at the end of his senior season were higher than ever. Unlike some players, his parents and him had thought it better to wait and finish a degree as a fall back option, and while he knew it was sensible, he was absolutely *itching* to get to the NHL.

“Mr. Hollander...” his adviser sighs. John Theriault is an older man who Shane has seen *maybe* four times throughout his college career. They’ve talked over email more than anything. He can’t be much older than Shane’s own father, but the slump in his shoulders and the bags under his eyes ages him. John takes his glasses off of his nose and tiredly rubs his eyes. “How old are you?”

“What does that have to do with anything—”

“How old?”

“Twenty-two, sir.”

“I think a twenty-two year old is well enough equipped to keep up with his own credits, don’t you?”

Shane hates that he’s not wrong. But *god*, this is the first time it’s happened! Cut him some slack.

“Yes, but—”

“You’re a star on the campus, kid, everyone knows it.” He leans back in his chair and places his glasses back on his face. Shane feels the back of his neck heat at the words. He had always struggled with praise. “But this university doesn’t give out degrees for fun. You do know what school you’re going to, right?”

McGill had recruited him on a full-ride for hockey after he’d spent two years at Heritage College half-assing his way through a Socials DEC, on the condition that he maintained at *least* a 3.5 GPA throughout his years there. *Obviously* he knows the school’s reputation in academia; he’s been breaking his neck for years trying not to drop under the weight of it’s standard. No one ever wants to tell you how difficult it is to play D1 hockey while also being a straight-A student.

“I would hope so,” he muttered under his breath, the frustration finally bleeding into his tone. There’s a migraine building at the base of his skull. “Can you at least tell me what I’m missing? I can still enroll in *something*, right?”

“If there’s anything still open, of course,” John tells him, clicking around on his computer. “And looks like what you’re missing is a few credit hours for your cultural outreach requirement.”

“I didn’t even know that existed,” Shane grumbles. His adviser clicks his tongue but doesn’t reply, still looking for something on the computer.

“Looks like there’s exactly one class that has a few seats open,” John says lightly, trying to make the best out of the situation. “Must have gotten lucky, this one is usually packed to the brim as soon as registration opens.”

“Can you enroll me?” He asks quickly, breathing out a sigh of relief. “I don’t even care what it is, as long as it finishes my degree.”

John looks down at his watch, “You’re in. It starts in an hour and is on the other side of the campus, so I’d get going if I were you.”

Shane shoves his schedule in his bag, barely concealing a curse under his breath. He’s almost out of the door before he realizes he has no idea where to go. When he opens his mouth, the question on his lips, his adviser smoothly cuts in.

“Arts Building, room 2402. You’re looking for Intro to Russian Literature and it’s taught by Professor Vetrov.”

Fuck, his mind yells at him as his feet beat against the pavement. *I’ve never even been to the arts building.*

He hopes the door isn’t locked on him once he gets there.

Turns out the Arts Building is a *maze*. Shane looks frantically down at his watch and curses — he’s already ten minutes late.

“2402, 2402...” He mumbles to himself, dragging his finger down the directory.

“Intro to Russian lit?” Someone asks from just over his shoulder. “My class is just next door, I can show you if you want.”

“That would be amazing actually,” he laughs, turning to meet the voice. She’s slightly shorter than him, with a pretty face and shoulder length dark hair. Something about her seems familiar, but he can’t quite put his finger on it. Shane knew that she *should* give him pause, that she *should* give him butterflies in his stomach, that she *should* be someone that made his heart spike. Nothing changed behind his ribs and nothing changed in his stomach. He had come to terms long ago with the fact that he was gay, even if he wasn’t out— not really. Who

he liked was more... private, not secret. "Shane. Shane Hollander." He sticks out his hand in greeting and smiles when she shakes it.

"I know," she teases. "Your face is all over campus! There's probably not a single person who wouldn't recognize you." Her large brown eyes appraise him quickly and Shane doesn't miss the movement. "I'm Rose." She starts walking away and doesn't bother to look back, leaving Shane to scramble to catch up with her. The click clack of her heels echoes through the endless hall. "It's good Professor Vetrov isn't teaching as much this semester, he totally would've kicked you out for being late."

"My lucky day, I guess," he replied, still slightly out of breath from the run around campus. "You know anything about the TA?"

"Ilya?" She says brightly, turning her head to address Shane. "He's great. Real popular and a lit department favorite. Vetrov picked him to TA instead of a grad student since Ilya is best friends with his daughter."

Shane hasn't even heard the name in passing in his four years on this campus, but then again, he doesn't have too many friends who run in those circles. He barely has friends that are outside of his team, now that he really thinks about it. Maybe to others that would be a sad reality, but it's just what he's used to. There's not time in his life for anything else, really. Not when his goals are so close he can almost taste them.

"You're friends with them?" Shane asks her.

She laughs brightly, "Something like that."

Before he can ask what that means, she stops in front of a closed door; Shane winces at the way his shoes squeak against the linoleum when he tries to keep from running into her back.

"Here we are," she tells him warmly. "Maybe I'll see you around and we can hang out sometime," she flirted easily, like it was something she was good at. With that face, Shane wouldn't be surprised if she had plenty of people falling over their feet to be her partner. "Your practices are open to the public, right?"

Shane nods, knowing he doesn't really have time to make new friends, but enjoying her presence regardless. "Yeah, let me know if you need tickets to a game or something. I can get you a few."

"Noted. I'd go in," she whispers conspiratorially. "You're already fifteen minutes late." She's gone with a wink and a wave before Shane could even process a response.

He huffs out a breath before turning the handle as slowly as possible and creeping into the back of the classroom.

Shane Hollander notices a few things pretty quickly. One, this is a much bigger classroom than he thought; it looks more like an auditorium than anything, with nearly all the seats filled. The large projector at the front of the room confirmed that he was, in fact, in the right place. Under the course title sat a single name: Ilya Rozanov. Two, every single head in the

place had turned to look at his attempt to sneak into class, some rolling their eyes and facing back forward and some trying to poorly hide obvious giggling at his expense. He may play hockey in front of thousands of people on a regular basis, but this kind of attention felt downright embarrassing. He's sure his face is slowly turning beet red, the heat under his skin making him want to itch. And three, the *hottest* man he's ever seen is currently moving his lips, yet Shane isn't hearing a single word.

"Huh?" He asks clumsily when who he can only assume is the same Ilya that Rose was talking about raised his eyebrows like he was waiting for Shane to reply. "Sorry, is this Intro to Russian Lit?" He cringed at the question.

Ilya looked behind him at the screen for a second before staring a hole into Shane. "You can read. Good," he said, deadpan tone making the class erupt into giggles again. "Sit."

He spoke in heavily accented english and Shane hated how much he enjoyed the sound. The extended dry spell that Shane was in didn't help either; it has been months since he had last messed around with anyone besides himself. As he rushed to the only empty seat, in the middle of the very front row of course, he prayed his face would cool down. At closer distance, he heard warning bells echo in his head.

Ilya Rozanov looked like he stepped right out of Shane's wet dreams. He was slightly taller than Shane, with a broader, but still slim, build. Shiny brown curls that were obviously cared for nearly fell into his eyes— pretty blue eyes that were hidden behind wire frame glasses. There was a small mole on his cheek that Shane couldn't help but wonder would feel like against his lips. He was wearing a tight v-neck sweater and a glimmering gold crucifix was nestled in the valley of his chest. Something akin to pure *doom* descends over Shane's senses.

"Your name?" Ilya asks him, an attendance sheet in hand.

"Shane Hollander," he tells him quickly. Whispers make their way through the class. There's a small furrow between Ilya's brows when he looks down at the paper.

"You are not in my class, *Shane Hollander*," Ilya states, his accent curling around Shane's name in a way that made him flush for an entirely different reason. His knuckles have gone white with the way he's gripping the book on his desk.

"My advisor just enrolled me, like, an hour ago," he admits shyly, not wanting Ilya Rozanov to know that this class would never have been his first choice.

"See me after," Ilya tells him easily, no room for argument in his tone.

You've been here for barely ten minutes and you're already on his shit list, his mind grumbles. *Nice one.*

He slides down in his seat in an effort to hide and plans the ways he can get through the rest of the semester without failing.

The class passed quicker than he thought it would. If most of that was Shane dissociating while taking in the commanding tone of Ilya's voice while he taught and set the ground rules

for the semester, well, no one had to really know that.

Shane lingered around until most of the students that flocked to the front lectern had left, just leaving him, Ilya and a few stragglers in the big hall. The TA was packing his things up in a well-loved leather satchel.

“Mr. Rozanov,” Shane starts. “You wanted to see me after class?”

“Ilya,” Ilya says firmly. “No Mr. Rozanov. Is my father, not me.” There’s a slight disgust in his voice, and it immediately piques Shane’s interest. Is Ilya’s father in Canada with him? Did Ilya have a good childhood? Did his father support his dreams—

You need to relax, his mind scolds.

“Sorry,” Shane says weakly, shrugging his own backpack onto his shoulders just for something to do.

“Your syllabus.” He hands a thick packet to Shane before donning his own bag. “Make sure to read it. And do not be late again.”

Shane knows that he had never been dumb. Even with all the years that hockey has been his main priority after academics, he’s never once flunked a class or gotten below a B. He had never had to email a professor about an assignment or go to office hours before practice. Knocking on Ilya Rozanov’s door takes him swallowing his pride down like he’s never had to before.

“Come in,” the familiar voice calls.

Ilya is wearing a black sleeveless sweater vest today paired with wide leg slacks. The golden chain sits where it always does. His eyes widen slightly fleetingly before he corrects them.

From where he sits, Ilya knows that Shane Hollander is going to be a problem for him. There’s something shy about his energy as he enters the room, like he’s embarrassed to be asking for help. Black framed glasses sit prettily on his nose, just covering up the spattering of freckles that rest high on the man’s cheeks. He’s wearing a simple white t-shirt and khaki pants, something that would look particularly underwhelming on any young man, and yet on Shane Hollander it looked... perfect.

He had seen Shane’s face around; someone would be hard pressed to walk around the campus and *not* see his stunning dark eyes and freckles that kissed the bridge of his nose. Hockey was something Ilya had given up such a long time ago, but for the first time in forever, he’s curious just how Shane moves on the ice.

“Can I help you?”

“I just had some questions on the homework, if you had a few minutes,” Shane says shyly, one hand making its way to the back of his neck. It’s obvious to Ilya that he’s not used to asking for help. “Something about Tolstoy is doing my head in.”

“Садись,” Ilya tells him, jerking his chin towards the chair in front of him. When Shane just stares blankly, he realizes the words came out in his mother tongue. “Sit. It’s been a long day, I’m sorry.”

“So it’s true then,” Shane states, pulling a well loved copy of Anna Karenina out of his bag and putting it on his lap.

“What is?”

“You’re Russian.”

“My accent didn’t give it away?” Ilya teased, loving the way Shane laughed lightly in response. “If this is your deduction skills,” he tsked. “I can see why Tolstoy would be hard.”

There’s the blush again, rosy on Shane’s cheeks as he ducks his head.

“Hey! There’s plenty of Eastern European countries that have similar accents!” He defends eagerly. “Ukraine, for one.”

“This class is introduction to Russian literature, yes?” Ilya smirked. The man in front of him was digging himself into a hole with every word.

“Well, yeah,” Shane concedes. “I didn’t want to assume what everyone was saying was correct...” The words now are quieter, shyer than before.

“Everyone?”

“I met this girl my first day, Rose,” Shane admits. “She says she knows you?”

Rose had actually been a godsend, if Shane was completely honest. In the few weeks since they’ve met, she’s quickly become one of Shane’s only friends outside of the team. They had run into each other a second time, in which she took his phone from him and added her number into his contacts and had been texting him every day since. It was nice to have a friend who didn’t care about hockey, someone who seemed to like him simply for who he was and not for the amount of goals he could get the Redbirds in a season. If he liked girls, he’s sure he would be in love with Rose Landry; hell, he was halfway there already.

“*Hockey is the least interesting thing about you, Shane Hollander,*” she had told him one day over lunch in the dining hall. When he didn’t know what to say, she just laughed and stole another piece of chicken from his tray.

“She is close with my friend,” Ilya tells him casually, knocking Shane from the fond memory. His light eyes track the small smile gracing Shane’s lips and privately hopes that the man in front of him hasn’t already fallen head over heels for Rose Landry. For one, she’s completely and utterly in love with Svetlana. They had met on Svetlana and Ilya’s first day of university and have been inseparable ever since. Two, the thought of Shane Hollander liking anyone

romantically made him irrationally jealous considering they've only exchanged a few sentences. "What bothers you about Tolstoy?"

"He's so *emotional*," Shane begins explaining. He watches the corner of Ilya's lip quirk up in a smirk. "What?"

"What was the last book you read?" Ilya asked him. He rests his hand under his chin, and Shane's eyes lock onto the small shift of muscle in his forearm.

Shane doesn't like how long it takes him to answer the question under Ilya's expecting gaze. It's not that he doesn't *like* reading, it's just that he doesn't always have the time to do it. And when he does remember the title, it's nothing dense like the brick sitting in his lap.

"It's a book about the rivalry between the Voyageurs and the Bears," he admits meekly, a hand coming up to rub the back of his neck. "Hockey is kind of my thing."

"Boring," Ilya deadpans. "The book. Not the hockey."

He doesn't mention the fact that he's kind of charmed by Shane's answer. He's a *nerd*. Maybe not about Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy like Ilya, but for hockey. It's cute.

"Tolstoy is all emotion," Ilya continues, holding back a giggle at the way Shane looks slightly offended. "Russia is about *passion*. We work hard, we play hard. We live life in the *moment*. How will you understand if you read this boring book?"

He talks with his hands excitedly and hopes that his love of his country's culture is evident. Russia, even with its faults, would always have a piece of Ilya's heart. He hadn't been back in a few years now, not with his father being the one to cast him out. After everything, it just didn't seem worth the risk. Andrei, his brother, wasn't close enough to visit either.

"It's not boring!"

"I am sleeping just thinking about it."

"Maybe *Tolstoy* is the boring one," Shane mutters, a pout gracing his too pink lips. "Have you ever thought about that?"

"Maybe," Ilya tells him, shrugging his shoulders. "But you are in a Russian literature class, no?"

"Obviously," Shane mumbled, hiding a small smile the best he could. There was something here, he felt it in his chest with every bit of banter they volleyed back and forth. It felt dangerous, it felt risky, but more than anything, it felt *freeing*. "Are you going to help me or not, *sir*?"

Ilya's heart speeds up behind his ribs, and he has to tamper down the sharp feeling of *want*. Shane's freckles stand out against the pretty pink blush on his cheeks. There's a tense moment of silence, one that neither of them know what to do with. When Ilya opens his mouth to answer, not totally sure what would leave his lips, a loud knock echos through the small space.

Shane feels himself cough in embarrassment, the moment ripped from under him. The tension was broken now, but he can still see something in Ilya's gaze, something he can't fully grasp.

"You doing a late lunch?" A woman's voice asks from behind Shane's shoulder. When he turns, he's almost taken aback with just how beautiful she is. The mystery woman stands tall, almost as tall as Shane and Ilya themselves, with long legs that most men would trip over themselves for a glimpse of. Her hair was full and curly and somehow glistened even under the harsh fluorescent lights of the office. Her voice curled around the words with an accent similar to Ilya's, but maybe not as harsh. "If you're busy I can pick something up for you, Rose is meeting me at the dining hall."

This must be the friend, Shane's mind tells him. *Introduce yourself!*

Just when he's trying to figure out when it would be least awkward to reach his hand out, she beats him to it.

"Hope I didn't interrupt," she says. "Svetlana Vetrova."

"Shane Hollander," he replies, trying not to grimace at her strong handshake.

"Oh! Rose was telling me about you! Did you want to join us for lunch?"

There was a beat of silence.

"Only if you didn't mind—"

"He's probably busy—"

Ilya and Shane's words clash and it immediately makes both of them cringe. Ilya wouldn't mind, not really, but he was planning on trying to get every ounce of information out of Rose on Shane as he could, which obviously couldn't be done with Shane distracting him with his pink lips and cute freckles.

Svetlana's eyes bounce between the two for a second before taking matters into her own hand and tugging Shane to his feet.

"If it's *really* that important, you can talk about Tolstoy over lunch."

She grabbed his wrist and gently led him from the room, and before he knew it, they were on the way to the dining hall with Ilya in tow.

"So, hockey, huh?" Svetlana asks to break the silence.

Shane had never been that great at socializing with new people. Social cues evaded him, especially in surprise situations like this one. But, if he knew how to talk about *anything*, it was hockey.

"Ilya used to play, you know!"

The words make Shane falter in his step, and he hears a sigh from behind his back. When he turns, Ilya's hands are deep in his pockets, and his shoulders are far too high up to be comfortable. If he's uncomfortable talking about his past or just about hockey, Shane can't yet work out. He has to ask the question anyways.

"You did?"

"It was a long time ago," Ilya dismisses tightly. "I wasn't even any good."

"Total liar," Svetlana guffaws. "He was *incredible*. Definitely would've made it to the NHL eventually if—"

"Svetlana," he says firmly, cutting her off. His eyes are stormy, and now instead of his hands in his pocket, he's white knuckling the strap of his beaten messenger bag. "Пожалуйста."

In the tense silence that follows, Shane chooses to focus on the sound of Svetlana's heels on the pavement. He can't help the way his mind wanders to Ilya, though. What caused him to move across the world? Had he loved hockey once? Why did he stop playing? The questions that linger only serve to make Shane more curious about Ilya Rozanov, and he vows that he'll get the answers at some point soon.

The next time he sees Ilya Rozanov, it's at some frat party that Rose and Svetlana had dragged him to. Shane couldn't name the chapter if he tried, head just slightly cloudy from the few shots that were pushed into his hand. Normally he would stick to ginger ale, but Rose had insisted and Shane finds it quite difficult to deny her of anything.

He's taken residence on one of the walls just off of the cleared out living room, keeping himself off of the dance floor on purpose. Shane Hollander did not dance. Shitty EDM vibrated through his limbs as he watched Rose and Svetlana jump and laugh together to the music. It makes longing shoot through his bones and for a second he considers leaving. It's been feeling like that a lot recently—like he's missing something he didn't pay attention to before.

Ilya is here, a wide smile on his face as a tall blonde girl sways her hips back onto his own. His skin glistens with sweat under the neon LED lights as he settles his large hands on her hips, digging his thumbs into the sliver of skin above her mini skirt. With his head thrown back, curls bouncing, he's got to be the most beautiful man Shane has ever laid eyes on. Something about the thought makes his heart twinge in his chest, with what emotion he's unsure.

Sadness? Definitely. Jealousy? Likely, even if he had almost *less* than no claim on Ilya.

The solo cup crumples easily in his hand when he sees their lips connect in a sloppy kiss; one that looks entirely too messy and uncoordinated.

Maybe it's been hours, maybe it's been minutes, Shane truly can't tell. He's busy stewing in his own head to even notice that Ilya has sidled right up to his side.

“What did the cup do to you?” The question was spoken loudly, and even then, Shane was barely able to hear.

“Soda was flat,” he says plainly.

“This does not seem like your scene,” Ilya teases lightly.

“It *very* much seems like yours,” Shane mutters under his breath.

“What?” He moves his ear close to Shane, bringing with him a cloud of something like clean sweat and lavender with something just under that must just be purely Ilya. It makes Shane’s mouth start to water.

“I’m going to get some air,” he chokes out, willing his entire being to calm down. Shane walks away and doesn’t bother to look back until he’s sitting on the steps to the frat house with a cool breeze on his face. It settles his heated skin, and the cold air in his lungs grounds him when Ilya sits himself down right next to him.

Their knees are close now, close enough that one move could connect the two.

“You are not enjoying yourself,” Ilya tells him.

“I don’t know why I let Rose drag me here,” he admits, picking at his cuticles. When he hears the words fall from his lips, he almost cringes with how pathetic they sound. “She says I don’t get out enough.”

“Probably true, no?”

When Shane huffs out a laugh, Ilya can’t help but push a little bit further. “You always come to office hours looking like you are about to practice. You wear gym clothes to class most days. Is okay to do things *besides* hockey every now and then, Shane Hollander.”

Shane can’t help the way his hackles immediately rise and he’s just about to give Ilya an absolute earful when he turns and really *looks* at him. From this close, Shane can count the moles on his skin and the pale eyelashes that fan out around his light eyes. There’s the slightest bit of stubble dusting his jaw and lip and the thought of beard burn makes Shane feel like he might just start floating away. The loose button up gapes in the front, giving his eyes a shadowed view of a firm chest dusted in hair.

Is this what being drunk is? His mind sighs. *We might be missing out.*

“Yeah, well,” he says lamely, brain struggling to complete the thought. “I like hockey. I’m *good* at hockey. Is it really so bad?”

“Is so bad because you always have a stick up your ass about it,” Ilya says simply, shrugging as he takes a swig of what looks like vodka from his cup. There’s a small smirk that turns up the side of his lips and he tries to hide it best he can.

He hadn’t talked about hockey this often since his last season back in Moscow, and it still smarted. Maybe there was a time he actually loved it, but he can’t remember. All it is for him

now is bad memories of his awful father. It's the reason he missed out on so much *time* with his mother. Regrets sit heavy on his soul when he thinks about everything he had to unwillingly sacrifice for his father's dream. It makes his blood heat up in his veins like it always does, and he has to talk himself through the exercises that Dr. Galina taught him in his head.

He had a decent cup of vodka and the prettiest boy he's ever seen in front of him—Ilya will be *damned* if he lets Grigori or all people ruin it. So he plasters a cocky smile on his face and enjoys the way Shane's eyes track the movement of his lips. Rose had never really mentioned if Shane liked men, but judging by the way his cheeks flushed, he must.

Alarm bells go off in his head.

Another closeted boy obsessed with hockey, it warns him. *And where did that get you last time?*

He had never been one to listen, not even to his own brain. So he continues flirting, because Shane just made it too *easy*.

"The puck too."

And the laugh that Shane lets out is absolutely *stunning*. It lights up his face in a way Ilya had never seen before and is already mourning losing. His dark eyes scrunch closed until they're more akin to moons; the light radiating from his smooth skin is enough to light the entire night. Ilya's stomach swoops at the sight, and he knows that sooner or later he's going to have to make a decision about what to do about this beautiful boy next to him. He just hopes he doesn't get hurt in the process.

"Fuck off," Shane giggles, wiping tears of laughter from his cheeks. Ilya is smiling at him now, something bright and knowing and Shane feels so *doomed*. "Shouldn't you be somewhere grading right now?"

"Nah. I like this more," he admits, letting the vodka's heat guide his words. It's more vulnerable than he wanted to be, but there was no taking back the words. Not when they settled in the small distance between both men. "Vodka could be better."

Shane just hums, leaning back on his hands and puffing out a breath into the night air. "We're at a frat party, that stuff could probably strip paint."

Ilya tilts the cup his way, "Want to try?"

Something short circuits in his brain at the thought of his lips touching something that Ilya's had. Would he be able to taste him? Would there be lingering warmth on the rim from his last sip? His mind wrestles with what to do for mere seconds before giving in. It's dark and cold and Shane Hollander is, at the end of the day, just a man.

He tugs the cup from Ilya's hand and brings it to his mouth, and swallows down a big gulp of what felt like pure flames. Ilya's eyes were lingering on the movement of his throat, tracking

the way Shane's tongue peeked out to lick at the leftover liquor on his lips. He distantly felt himself swallow in tandem.

The burning traveled down Shane's throat and spread through his belly and it took everything in him to not cringe at the taste.

"How do you drink that? It's absolutely vile!" Shane exclaims, handing the cup back and letting his fingers linger for a beat on Ilya's heated skin. There's electricity there, he feels it, and judging by the way Ilya's eyes widen, he does too.

"I am Russian," Ilya laughs, shrugging like it's the easiest thing in the world.

"Living up to the stereotype. Could be good if there was some cranberry juice mixed in, I think."

"I will fail you if you ever say that again," Ilya deadpans.

The banter feels like the first time again and something in Shane's chest unravels just a tiny bit. Maybe it's the vodka burning through him, maybe it's the way that Ilya's eyes carry something behind them that Shane can't fully put a name to. But he finds that in this moment, there's nowhere else he would rather be. And that's got to be one of the scariest things he's ever felt in his life.

"Might end up failing anyways," Shane sighs. "I don't remember the last time I struggled this much in class."

Struggle is a stretch, he knows. His grade is solid enough right now to keep his GPA steady, but this is the first time in a very long time that he has to put genuine effort into a course. All the readings are full of things that Shane isn't sure he's ever experienced. There's love, there's hate, there's deep, *deep*, sadness. It makes him realize how sheltered he's been. Shane has never loved anyone, and honestly, no one has ever come close. Shane had never really *hated* anyone either. Sadness had never weighed down his limbs enough to make it impossible to move forward in his life.

"You were right, though. Everything we read is so... *full*. I don't know how else to say it."

"You might be one of the most famous people on this campus. Romance cannot be that hard to find." It's a thin veiled way of asking if there was anyone in Shane's life. He had to know what he was up against in his head.

Pink blooms high on Shane's cheek as he laughs awkwardly. "You'd be surprised." His eyes flick down to Ilya's lips quickly. "Doesn't seem that hard for you," he mumbles. He wants to take the petty words back as soon as he says them.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Ilya scoffs lightly, trying not to feel defensive at the words. He's heard enough rumors about himself to be used to such comments, but that didn't stop them from stinging. Especially from Shane. It's a weird thing, being perceived. Ilya knows who he is, but seeing himself from someone else's eyes makes him feel insecure. "Spend

your time talking about me? Thinking about me? Surely McGill's golden boy has better things to do."

"I don't *think* about you," Shane blurts out. When Ilya's gaze shutters, he starts to panic. "That's not what I—I don't talk about you behind your back, okay?" He feels like he's losing small ground he's gained with Ilya faster than ever. The heat in his face now feels overwhelming under the beginnings of a withering gaze and the lingering alcohol in his system makes him fumble his words even more. "Fuck, I feel like I'm messing this up." The words are muttered under his breath, mostly to himself.

"Yes," Ilya huffs out, collecting his cup and going to push himself up off the step. "Yes, you are—"

The rest of his sentence is muffled by Shane pushing forward and bringing their lips together in a heated kiss. Their lips collide messily and Ilya can taste the cheap vodka on Shane's tongue and hear the static of his brain going offline. Shane's hands are fisted in his shirt and his hair, pulling and pushing until Ilya had no choice but to sigh into the kiss. They both distantly hear the cup clattering to the ground beneath them, soaking their shoes in liquor.

Just as Ilya finally starts to let his hands roam on the firm plane of Shane's stomach, he feels him pull away. His dark eyes are frenzied and his lips look extra pink and all Ilya can think about doing is diving right back in.

"Hollander," he breathes, fighting the urge to tug his close again.

"Shit," Shane rushes out, hand running through his hair. "Fuck, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

"Calm down—"

"If you need me to drop the class, I will!" He's already rushing down the steps and into the night when he turns back to Ilya, who's frozen still, one more time. "Again, I'm sorry." The last apology dies on the wind of the cold night, and it's barely left Shane's kiss-slicked lips before he fully turns and almost runs in the opposite direction of the house.

All Ilya can do is stand there with the taste of Shane Hollander still on his lips and wet sneakers and mumble to the dark night, "What the fuck just happened?"

Chapter End Notes

translations:

- Пожалуйста: please
- Садись: sit

Chapter 2: the game

Chapter Notes

after that perfect episode, i could not stop writing.

comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! come yell about hollanov with me on twt, @yalooblueeteebaa <3

“You’ll be there tonight?” Shane asked Rose. She had been asking him all week for two tickets to the game so her and Svetlana could show their support. In the weeks since meeting Svetlana, Shane has built a weird sort of friendship with the young woman. They didn’t really text, not like Shane and Rose did at least, but whenever they were together, it felt easy. He was grateful for both of their friendships, and not for the first time, mourned that it had taken until his senior year to branch out.

If he met Rose earlier, maybe he could have met Ilya before this weird wall stood between them. A wall that had only gotten taller since his disastrous kiss at the party. His neck gets hot with embarrassment just thinking about it.

Ilya Rozanov proved himself to be the problem that Shane feared he would be. They aren’t close, not really, but Shane has caught himself looking forward to class just to hear Ilya’s lips wrap around his name. He looks for him in crowds, wanting to see the shine of his golden curls and the glint of his ever present necklace. It feels like *torture*, but it’s something Shane can’t seem to escape. Even if he could, he’s not entirely sure if he really wants to. Knowing what he tasted like didn’t help.

There’s nothing for Shane to hold onto though, nothing that he can think of, at least. He had gone back to office hours a few times since the party, and Ilya had been kind but there hadn’t been any of the flirting banter from the first time or that night. Ilya had been a consummate professional, and Shane’s GPA thanked him for it. He *was* a good teacher. Shane’s grades had raised significantly since he started reaching out for help and he had even started enjoying the books they were assigned. Before, the melodramatic stories of love and loss hadn’t clicked in his head; he always had trouble understanding why people would bother going through so much only to be devastated when an inevitable end would come. Now, he kind of feels a kinship for the characters in a sense. Which, in his head, is *deeply* embarrassing. He never had Ilya to begin with.

“We’ll be there,” she tells him. “I’m so excited! I don’t think I’ve ever been to a hockey game the entire four years I’ve been here.”

“I’ll have to go to your next play,” Shane smiles. Rose, like Shane, seemed to be extremely popular on campus for her roles on the stage. He hadn’t realized just how known she was

until they started hanging out together on a regular basis. Somehow everyone knew Rose Landry and weirdly enough, she seemed to know them right back.

“And you’ll have a front row seat saved,” she laughs, bumping her shoulder against Shane’s. “Won’t be for a few months yet, though.” She steals a piece of broccoli from his salad and pops it into her mouth, a smirk gracing her lips. “Maybe you’ll sit next to *Ilya*.”

At the mention of his name, Shane feels his cheeks heat. He had called her in a state of panic that same night and spilled everything that had happened on the front step. She hadn’t let him forget it. “Fat chance,” he scoffs. “I don’t think he even likes me.” He pushes the food in his bowl around.

She fixes him with a pitying gaze, “Oh, Shane. You really have no idea.”

Before he can ask her what she means, Svetlana drops into the seat next to Rose and starts going on about some new drama in the art department between two people whose names Shane didn’t recognize. He watches the way both women are sat so close together, watches how Rose’s eyes take in every word that falls from Svetlana’s lips like it’s gospel. When Svetlana reaches out to pick an imaginary fuzz off of Rose’s cheekbone, which were dusted with the lightest of pinks, Shane can’t contain the mixture of sadness and jealousy that swirls in his chest. He had never had *that*, not with anyone. And the one person who lit his insides up was just out of reach.

“Earth to Shane,” Svetlana says loudly, snapping two perfectly manicured fingers in front of his face. When his eyes focus back in on her face, it’s obvious she’s worried. “You okay?”

“Fine,” he says quietly, putting his backpack on. Suddenly, he doesn’t have an appetite. “I’ve got stuff to do at the arena before the game. I’ll look for you both in the stands, yeah?”

His friends share a look that Shane is sure means something before both nodding, “Of course. Break a leg!”

“Not a sports thing,” he huffs affectionately.

It was a tied game and Shane’s muscles were *screaming* under his uniform. His head was soaked with sweat from his helmet and he cringes slightly as he feels a single bead of sweat travel down his spine.

Queen’s University had always put up a good fight. They were McGill’s number one rivals, especially when it came to hockey; home games with them always meant a packed arena, which was by far Shane’s favorite kind. The cheers of the crowd spurred him on in his most exhausted moments and reminded him that his decision to stay instead of trying to get into the draft was the right one. When he looked up into the stands, his number was everywhere.

Hockey always cleared his head, hockey was always *there*. Shane was never in his element like he was when he was staring down another player on center ice. Winning a face off always gave him a shot of adrenaline like he’s never felt anywhere else.

The second period was just ending and the team was skating off the ice to head to the locker rooms and let the zamboni clear it. There's a small section of seats just above their bench where family and friends of players sat, and that was usually where he was able to find Rose and Svetlana when they came to his games; Shane always made sure to send them a wave at some point, it was his small way of telling them that he appreciated them for showing up. But this time, when he scanned the seats for the two women, he only finds Rose. Rose, who as always, was waving a small Redbirds flag and with a painted 24 on her left cheek. Next to her, though, wasn't Svetlana. Sitting with his arms crossed across his broad chest and an unreadable expression on his face was *Ilya Rozanov*.

His golden curls shined under the lights as his light eyes tracked Shane's figure on the ice. The hoodie on his back was too big for him, almost swallowing his normally imposing figure whole. He looked downright *cute* and all Shane's brain could do in the moment was conjure up images of the man wearing his own jersey. His wave stuttered in the air and he felt himself trip over his own skates, much to his embarrassment. When he looked back up, there was something in Ilya's gaze, a light that he had seen on the steps that night. The heat radiating from his body wasn't the uniform's fault anymore.

Once he's into the locker room, he rushes to get his phone out of his duffel bag. It's lit up with one text message from Rose, sent only five minutes ago.

Surprise!

He's busy hitting his head against the wall when Hayden, his best friend, interrupts him.

"You okay?"

"Yes," Shane starts. "No. I don't know."

Seeing Ilya had completely thrown Shane off. Not in a bad way, just in a... complicated way. He was good enough at compartmentalizing this stupid school girl crush when Ilya wasn't near him—kind of like out of sight out of mind. But seeing him *here* of all places? It was majorly doing something to Shane's heart... amongst other parts.

"Was that the guy?" Hayden whispered, a hair too close to Shane's ear for comfort. The question immediately made him groan; he never should have bothered telling Hayden about Ilya. Shane doubted he would ever live it down. "The Russian dude?"

Hayden Pike had been a godsend in Shane's first year of school. They were both going to give the draft a go once their schooling was over. Hayden had made every stressor just slightly better. It helped that he was one of the only people who Shane could really trust with the truth about not only his sexuality, but the struggles of finding someone he actually cared for. Hayden and his longtime girlfriend Jackie never judged him, and he suspected they never would.

Right now, all Shane wants Hayden to do is *shut up*.

"Leave it alone, Hayd," Shane groans, wiping a towel over his sweaty hair before whipping it at Hayden.

“It’s gotta be,” Hayden chuckles, catching the towel with ease. “Look at your face!” He points, full on laughing at his best friend now. “It’s all red!”

Shane doesn’t bother responding, only flipping him off for a second before bending down to tighten his skates. He wills away the dark blush, but knows it probably isn’t doing anything to help.

“He’s hot,” Hayden says simply, like it’s the easiest thing in the world. When Shane narrows his eyes at him, he just shrugs. “What? I’m not gay but I have eyes.”

“Close them,” Shane mutters under his breath.

The twenty minutes of intermission goes by quickly, and before he knows it he’s back on the ice and skating to the center. As subtle as he can, Shane’s eyes find Ilya again in the sea of fans. He’s sitting forward now, like he’s anticipating the puck drop just like Shane will be in mere seconds.

You’re Shane Hollander, his brain reminds him loudly. Show off a little bit!

He makes sure he wins the face-off, and he makes sure he pulls out every trick in the book to score on QU barely five minutes into the period. Just before he gets engulfed in a bear hug by his team, he can’t help but send a small wink Ilya’s way, laughing out loud when he sees the man scoff and look away.

“He’s good,” Ilya leans in to tell Rose.

“The best,” she says proudly.

Being in the seats instead of on the ice still felt weird after all these years. Svetlana had to cancel last minute, and against his better judgement, Ilya caved and let himself be dragged to the Redbirds game. His willpower around Shane Hollander was fading quickly. He had tried his best to keep his distance from Shane in the recent weeks; he had avoided all the invitations to hang out from Rose and Svetlana, had kept their talks purely about the coursework, and quietly avoided looking at him during class.

He couldn’t afford to lose focus, not in his last year. Vetrov had already handed over an incredible amount of responsibility to him when he chose Ilya over a graduate student to be his TA. He’s taught more classes this semester than the Professor had; and it was *hard*. Constant grading, constant lectures, and *constant* emails. Ilya has never been more tired in his entire life, but if he makes it work, it’ll only reap positives for his academic future. Sergei Vetrov was a very well-known man in their field, with connections to almost anyone. Having a glowing recommendation from him could change Ilya’s life completely. There was no room for distractions. And that’s what Shane Hollander was.

“He thinks you don’t like him, you know,” Rose says.

“Is the problem,” Ilya sighs. “I like him too much, I think.” His heart is beating a frantic rhythm after the goal, knowing that Shane must’ve done it for him. The wink confirmed it.

Seeing him in his element was possibly the sexiest thing Ilya had ever seen. In class, although he had definitely gotten more confident as the weeks went on, he was still quite shy. He stayed quiet and kept to himself for the most part, only talking to his classmates when they were paired up together. He was hesitant to ask questions, but even so, his papers and work had taken a turn for the better. On the ice, though? This was a completely different Shane.

He was fierce, uncompromising, passionate. The way he commanded the team around him was downright *hot*. Ilya had seen a lot of hockey players in his time, but Shane Hollander had to be one of the best. His speed is completely unparalleled. His stick handling is better than anything Ilya has ever seen. There's something about seeing him be so assertive that made Ilya's mouth start to water.

"Shane is one of the best people I've ever met," Rose urges. "Anyone would be lucky to have him, and he chose *you*. Tell me how that's a problem."

"It can't work," Ilya says simply, like the sentence doesn't cut through him. "I am busy. He is busy. Is he even out?"

"He's never hid the fact that he was gay. Maybe he doesn't publicize it, but he doesn't need to. With all the girls you sleep with, he probably thinks you're the one who's straight." She rolls her eyes at him before focusing back on the game.

Which, *fair*. Ilya had always loved sex, and it wasn't hard for him to get it. What *was* hard was the fact that with every single beautiful woman he laid down in his bed, he kept seeing Shane. Shane's dark hair on the pillow, his freckles in the dim light, his small frame. Ilya had never been infatuated like this before and he had absolutely no clue what to do about it.

"What's the harm in just being friends with him?" She wonders. "If you want to use being busy as a shit excuse to not date, fine. You don't really have *friends* though, Ilya. Shane could be that."

"I have plenty of friends," Ilya huffs, crossing his arms petulantly.

"You have two things. Acquaintances and people who have been in your bed."

"Is a very nice place to be," he teases. "I can't help that."

"What I'm trying to say is that you and Shane would be *good* for each other. He didn't really have anyone outside of the team, not before meeting me and Svet."

From their seats, he can just see the back of Shane's helmet and the strong line of his shoulders. He's leaning into the space of his teammate next to him, mouth guard sticking out from his mouth in between his teeth. He's radiating a commanding energy, and Ilya is sure that if he could hear, Shane would be talking about some play or strategy to try out on his next shift.

"I will think about it," Ilya concedes. And it was true, he would. There hasn't been a single person that's ever felt inevitable in the way Shane did. "Friends don't kiss friends, though. You North Americans are weird, but not *that* weird."

“I was wondering when you were gonna tell me that,” Rose smirked. “Shane caved almost immediately.”

Ilya had barely enough brain power to unpack it himself, let alone tell his friends about it. He still didn’t know what any of it really means. He knows that he liked it; maybe a bit too much. He knows that when Shane ran away, it hurt something in his chest, reminding him of being kept a secret for so long back home. He knows that he can’t stop thinking of the way Shane’s lips felt against his own.

“What did he say?” Ilya asks against his best interest.

“He said that he thinks he messed everything up. That he mistook you being friendly as flirting and crossed some unspoken boundary or whatever.” She sighs and looks at Ilya. “He’s quite the worrier, if you haven’t noticed.”

Ilya has totally noticed. The way Shane’s knocks on his door for office hours was like clockwork told him all he needed to know.

“Seems confident to me,” Ilya says, jerking his chin toward the ice. While they were talking, Shane had made another goal.

“This is different and you know it. Hockey is the only place he feels like he can really be himself.”

Those are the same words Sasha had told him those years ago when he begged Ilya to continue seeing them under the guise of teaching him new drills on the ice. Ilya remembers sitting in the run down rink in Moscow on center ice and listening to him speak and cry and hope. That’s all it could be, in the end, of course. Hope. They were teenage boys, in *Russia* of all places, but Ilya had dared to hope as well. He remembers looking into the eyes of the boy who he thought would be the one, the boy who he thought he would do anything for, and just *praying* they would work out.

But in the end, Sasha stayed closeted and chose hockey over him. It was *always* about fucking hockey. Last time Ilya had heard, he was engaged with a child on the way. The thought of hockey being chosen over him again made his heart just *sad*.

“That is not my problem,” Ilya tells her, shrugging indifferently.

“But you obviously want it to be.”

“It does not matter what I want.”

“It could.”

“What do you want me to say, Rose?” He sighs, letting his shoulders drop. “That he kissed me and I thought everything would work out? That every single time he sits in my class his stupid freckles distract me? That from the first time I saw him I wanted him?”

“Are those things true?” She asked him quietly, resting a hand on his shoulder.

“Da. It changes nothing, though.” There’s pinpricks behind his eyes that he tries to blink away. He’s afraid to put everything on the line again only to be passed up for a *sport*. It hurt him the first time around, and somehow Ilya knows it would hurt even more if it was Shane.

“*God*, men are so dense! It changes *everything*!” Rose exclaims, throwing her hands in the air. “I just told you that Shane likes you, you just told me you like him. Nothing is stopping either of you from being with each other except the shit excuses you tell yourself so you can sleep at night.”

Before Ilya can open his mouth with a comeback, she cuts him off.

“I’m a TA for two different drama classes *and* I’m the lead in the school musical that rehearses three nights a week. My GPA is *much* better than yours too! And I still found the time to tell Svet that I liked her! What’s your excuse?”

“You *what*?!” Ilya hadn’t heard of this new development from either of them, and he usually was convinced they would end up pining after each other forever.

“Yeah,” Rose admits, cheeks pink and smile shy. “I told her last night, just couldn’t keep it in anymore. And turns out she liked me back! But can you imagine just how scared I was?”

Ilya just hums and nods his head, eyes being pulled back to the ice where Shane is just hopping over the barrier for his shift. He knows scared, he *felt* it every single time he let his eyes linger on Shane’s features. He felt it when Shane’s lips touched his.

“I was *terrified*,” Rose continues. “For the longest time I had no idea if what I was feeling was friendship or love. You and Svet have been the best friends I’ve had in a really long time. I didn’t want to ruin that.”

“Is impossible for her to not love you,” Ilya reassures, slinging his arm around Rose and pulling her close. Rose had been such a breath of fresh air in both his and Svetlana’s life, albeit for very different reasons. “I am happy for you both.”

“I was convinced there was something between the two of you, you know,” she admits, poking him in his side. “Homewrecking isn’t my thing, believe it or not.” She laughs and rests her head on his shoulder, and not for the first time, Ilya is happy that he could have this. Moscow and Russia would’ve never allowed it.

Ilya and Svetlana were as close as friends could be, but he never saw anything romantic in their future. They were bonded by similar experiences and cultural pressures more than anything, and even though they had fooled around when they were younger, there was no way that could devolve into anything serious.

“That is not something you ever need to worry about,” he laughs. “I’ll be the best man at the wedding, not the groom.”

The crowd roars, knocking both of them out of the sweet moment. People are standing up all around them, screaming their protests and worries out toward the ice. When Ilya and Rose stand up, Shane is flat out on the ice with his teammates crowding into his space. Ilya has

seen plenty of hits in his lifetime, dealt out many more, but he knows just how *bad* they could end up being. He doesn't realize he's holding his breath until Shane stumbles to his feet. He waves at the crowd to let them know he's okay before letting himself be led off the ice towards the locker room.

He glances up to big screen and Shane's hit replays, a *nasty* cross check that ended with Shane faceplanting into the ice. His helmet falls in the process, and when he finally is able to stand, Ilya can see streams of claret red gushing from his nose down to his chin. His inky black hair is plastered to his forehead in some spots and sticking up in others. Somehow, beyond everything else, his first thought makes him tumble into what feels like pure doom.

Pretty.

"Fuck," he mutters under his breath, digging his nails into his palm.

"Does it look really bad?" Rose asks him earnestly, the worry in her voice clear.

"Is hockey," Ilya reassures her. "That is normal." There's a fake nonchalance in his voice that he hopes gets past his friend's perception. He's not going to tell her that he's currently falling down an endless pit in his mind that surely will end up with his head between Shane Hollander's legs. Definitely not.

Rose's tone is immediately suspicious, always too knowing for her own good. "If you say so." She's taking out her phone and texting before he can realize. "Let's go," she says a minute later, tugging Ilya by the sleeve.

"Lost interest?" He teases, letting himself be taken away. "Where are we going?"

"Shane said we could go see him in the trainer's room," she tells him. "I want to make sure he's okay, alright?" When Ilya opens his mouth to protest, she immediately cuts him off. "And judging by that look a minute ago, so do you."

It could be worse, his mind reasons. She could know that seeing Shane Hollander roughed up is going to feature in your wet dreams for the rest of time.

If he purposefully makes his steps slower on the way down dark hallways to the belly of the arena, no one needs to know. There's a nervousness about facing Shane again, especially in this context. There's not a desk to separate them, not the invisible wall of professionalism that Ilya puts up when they're in the lecture hall. This is Shane's turf now.

Rose pushes a door open, and there he sits, a trainer finishing up putting small bandages across the bridge of his nose. He's wearing a skin tight dri-fit that stretches across a broad chest. His compression shorts pulled tight across thick thighs. There's still sweat beaded at his hairline. At the sight of Ilya, his eyes go wide and he tries to stand.

"No sudden movements, Shane," the trainer scolds him. "Let me finish here and then you can talk to your friends."

"Sorry," he mumbles, wincing at the touch on his nose. "Not broken right?"

“No. You were lucky to get away with some bruising around it. You’ll probably be black and blue for about a week, but that’s better than I could have hoped for, honestly.”

“There goes your good looks,” Rose teases, going to sit next to Shane once the trainer steps away. “You feeling okay?”

“Been better,” Shane admits, shrugging lightly. “I’m sorry, Rose. I really wanted this to be a good game since you were coming.” His eyes dart over Ilya’s frame quickly before snapping back.

“Too considerate for your own good,” she laughs brightly. “Don’t worry about me. It was a good game before you went down, wasn’t it Ilya?”

Ilya knows what she’s trying to do before the sentence finishes passing her lips. The urge to roll his eyes is strong, but he holds back.

“Da.”

“Ilya,” Shane says evenly, caution in his tone. He’s standing in front of his schoolgirl crush looking worse for wear and not being able to do anything about it. Shane digs his fingers into the examination table. “I didn’t know you would be here.”

“Svet had something come up,” Rose dismisses. “Figured I would come with my only other friend who has any know-how.”

The trainer left them alone, but not before telling Shane in a stern voice to take it easy. Before long, it was just the three of them in the room and a slightly awkward silence descended. Shane couldn’t stop himself from stealing glances at Ilya and Ilya couldn’t stop himself from stealing glances at Shane. Rose puffed out a frustrated breath and took out her phone.

“Speaking of Svetlana, I totally forgot she told me to call her once the game was over.” She hurriedly leaves the room, tossing back a final, “Stay put, Ilya. You’re my ride.”

“Rose—”

The door swung shut.

“Did you wanna sit?” Shane asked quietly, gesturing to the small seat next to the table.

Ilya does so without a word, but he can’t help but notice the proximity to Shane’s still warm body. Like this, he has to tilt his neck back to make eye contact. Distantly, they both hear a loud cheer from the rink.

“Goal,” Ilya mutters.

“Hmm.”

There’s a long beat.

“You look nice,” Shane tells him shyly, eyes averted. There’s the lightest of blushes on his cheeks.

Ilya looks down at his outfit, a large hoodie that he had bought purposefully oversized and a well loved pair of jeans. It was nothing compared to what Shane had seen him in before.

“You are a really bad liar,” Ilya tells him, eyeing the freckles up close. They’re like constellations in the night sky, and all he wants to do is count every single one. He’s endlessly charmed by everything about the man in front of him, and he feels like he’s being really awful at hiding it.

“I’m not!” Shane rushes out. “In class you look amazing—”

“*Amazing?*” Ilya laughs incredulously. Somehow Shane’s cheeks have only gotten darker with a mixture of embarrassment and panic.

“Not amazing—”

“Not amazing,” Ilya frowns. “You change your mind quickly.”

Teasing Shane Hollander is the most fun Ilya’s ever had, he thinks. With everything that’s on his shoulders, *this* somehow makes it lighter. He barely knows anything about Shane, only hearing things through Rose and Svetlana, but he finds he wants to. Maybe Rose was right.

Shane hides his face in his hands and it makes Ilya want to push even more. There’s a smile that’s threatening to break through his defenses.

“You should know this language better than me, yes? Tell me what you mean, Shane Hollander,” he teases, leaning forward into Shane’s space. It’s dizzying, the smell of something so purely Shane mixed with clean sweat. Ilya wants to dig his nose into Shane’s neck and leave it there for the rest of time.

“There’s no way you don’t know how you look,” Shane huffs, finally forcing himself to make eye contact.

“Tell me.”

There’s a fight behind those big brown eyes, one that Ilya can’t help but hope Shane loses. He knew from the first moment Shane walked late into class that he was going to be a problem, and he has been. Ilya looks for him in the crowded lecture hall, he waits behind the door of his office hoping to hear the tell tale knock. He eats up every little detail about Shane that he can get from Rose and Svetlana. The kiss had been...the final nail in the coffin. Ilya liked Shane *too* much. How was he supposed to practice keeping his distance when Shane Hollander looked at him like *that*?

“You’re hot, okay?” Shane grumbles, crossing his arms. “You’re the hottest guy I’ve ever seen. Is that what you wanted to hear?” He locks his gaze onto Ilya defiantly, like he’s asking for him to push back. It takes everything in him to not swallow when Ilya stands up to his full height and cages him in on the exam table with his arms.

This close he can count the moles on his face, can see the dimension in his light eyes, can smell the aftershave from the divot of his neck. Shane is almost ashamed at the quickness in which his length twitches in his shorts.

“Bratty,” Ilya mumbles, eyes flicking down to Shane’s lips and staying there.

“What are you going to do about it, *sir*?”

The challenge in his tone makes Ilya hover ever so closer to Shane’s lips. He wants nothing more than to devour the man in front of him, to finally let all the cooped up feelings of the past month go and to feel that weight lifted from his chest. At least he knows that it would probably be welcome. According to Rose, at least.

“I don’t know,” Ilya replies lightly. “Maybe nothing. You are injured, yes?”

“You’re a dick,” Shane rushes out before closing the distance and bringing their lips together in a heated kiss. His fingers scramble for purchase in curls that are almost as soft as what he had pictured. Ilya’s lips move against his own hungrily, like every single fear and caution he had about this very moment is lost in the sound of their breathing.

There’s the slightest hint of copper on Ilya’s tongue from the left over blood on Shane’s cupid’s bow; the rawness of their situation makes warmth start to build in the base of Ilya’s belly.

“You like it,” he breathes against Shane’s lips. There’s a question hidden in the cocky statement, one that he can’t help but ask.

Do you really like me? Is this part of you a secret? His mind pushes the thoughts against his skull, almost loud enough to grab Ilya’s attention from the delicious moans that Shane is letting out. *Will I be a secret?* A smaller, quieter voice at the back of his mind pleads, *Please don’t make me a secret.*

He wouldn’t be able to go through that, not again. Secrets upon secrets had been his life before he left Russia, before he took a final look at Sasha and never returned. He remembers the pleading tone of a scared boy who didn’t want to be disowned, like if he was found out it would be the end of his life. Ilya remembers the way Sasha started to flinch at the slightest touch in those last weeks, remembers how his eyes would stare just above Ilya’s shoulder into the middle space behind him. It was so different than the boy that had dreams of leaving Russia and taking Ilya with him. There were late night talks of Paris, London, New York; any place that they could be themselves. And, *god*, Ilya had allowed himself to hope. And, of course, since his life was just one big cosmic joke, he had fought for them alone. Sasha bent and broke at the slightest pressure once they were found out. Ilya hadn’t. Which is why he’s here in the first place. He’s not still in love with Sasha, definitely not, but his walls are higher now and no one has come close to scaling them.

Not before Shane fucking Hollander. Before Ilya could realize, he had already broken through and held Ilya’s heart in his hands.

“Fuck,” Shane murmurs against Ilya’s lips. “I do. I do, I do, I do...”

There's a sharp tug on his curls and a warm hand under his hoodie and Ilya's mind and vision is wiped clean of every worry in the world and replaced with *Shane*. Shane, who was pulling him closer until Ilya was stood in the middle of his legs. Shane, whose freckles up close were more stunning than Ilya could have ever anticipated. Shane, who breathes rushed demands into Ilya's mouth like he's been waiting for this very moment forever.

Ilya grabs at Shane's face in the heat of the moment, only for him to jerk back. There are apologies on the tip of Ilya's tongue when he pulls away and shoves his hands into his pockets, but then he sees how Shane is wincing.

"Shit," Shane curses. "I forgot about my nose."

There's a stretch of silence before both of them burst out into shy giggles. Ilya tugs his chair closer to the exam table and rests his forearms there, looking up at Shane with something like wonder in his eyes. Shane's head is ducked and his shoulders are shaking from the force of his laughs; his eyes are shining with *something* when he takes a peak at Ilya from under his lashes.

"Your trainer will kill me," Ilya laughs.

"It's nothing serious," Shane replies, nudging his knee against Ilya's elbow. "Worth it?" There's cautious hope in the question and Ilya can feel the way it squeezes around his heart.

"Could have been better," Ilya says, shrugging. Obviously, a lie. It was one of the best kisses he's ever had, and even if nothing comes of it, Ilya will be riding this high forever. Shane rolls his eyes, and the pink on his cheeks gets darker.

"Dick."

"You have concussion," Ilya tells him. When he stands, he crowds back into Shane's space and rubs the fabric of his dri-fit in between his fingers. "Ilya is my name. The hit was bad but it wasn't *that* bad, Hollander."

"Shane," he tells Ilya. "Please. Just Shane."

He didn't know why Ilya didn't call him by his first name. It was either his entire name or just his last. Maybe it was an easy way to distance himself, Shane doesn't know. What he does know, is that from the very beginning, Ilya had always been *Ilya*. And that could mean plenty of things that Shane didn't want to unpack in this very moment, but he knew that it definitely meant that he was utterly *fucked*.

"Shane," Ilya whispers, the smallest of smiles trying to escape.

"Ilya," Shane whispers back. He presses a soft kiss to the corner of Ilya's mouth, then to his cheek. "So it's not just me then?"

The words are important, possibly more important than anything else Shane has ever said. That's how it feels, at least.

“No, it is not just you,” Ilya sighs, feeling a weight lift off his shoulders. Shane beams and Ilya can’t stop himself from stealing another kiss. It’s slow this time, indulgent in a way he was unsure he would ever be able to have. New anxieties swirl in his chest, but somehow he knows Shane Hollander will be worth it. His eyes just flutter closed when there’s a sharp gasp from the doorway.

“Thank *fuck!*” Rose squeals, clapping her hands together.

Shane pulls away shyly and hides his head on Ilya’s chest, “Weren’t you on a phone call or something?”

“No,” she scoffs. “I lied and you idiots believed it because I’m such a good *actress*. Took you long enough though, I was starting to get bored in the hallway.”

“Bravo,” Ilya snickers, slow clapping for Rose, who in turn bowed her head in thanks.

“Don’t, it’ll encourage her,” Shane grumbles, grabbing Ilya’s hand and holding it in his own. The contact is warm and sweet and Ilya feels his insides melt— his brain could be pouring out of his ears and he wouldn’t notice. It’s an outward show of affection that he’s never experienced before, and he can’t take his eyes off of their locked fingers.

“Oh my *god*, you’re blushing!” Rose yells, pointing at them. The sound of a camera shutter rips him from his daze. “I’m totally not above saying I told you so, you know.”

“I didn’t *blush*,” he argues, even as he feels his face heat up even more. “Russians do not do that. Obviously.”

“Obviously,” Shane reassures him sweetly.

Chapter 3: after hours

Chapter Notes

holy shit. needed to just say THANK YOU to every single person who has read my little fic so far and left comment and kudos! i truly did not think this would blow up over night, and these numbers are literally insane. i'm so thankful y'all are liking it so far!

i'm thinking this will probably end up being five chapters or so, but don't quote me on that. bigger things are happening after this chapter as well, so stick around!

as always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! come scream with my about hollanov on twt, @yalooblueetebaa <3

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

“Are you religious?”

It’s a question that makes Ilya raise his head from the pile of grading on his already cramped desk. Shane had made it a habit of coming around to office hours more frequently now, most of the time staying until Ilya had to pack up for the night. Their kiss was only a week ago now, but they had seen a lot of each other since. They’d exchanged numbers too, mostly texting about nonsensical things: school, literature, hockey. In the past seven days, Ilya had discovered that Shane was *awful* at sexting. Weirdly, it only made him more endearing.

He was busier than ever, but couldn’t deny that this was the happiest he’s been since coming to McGill. If Ilya made it a point to bring some work home at night just so he could go out with Shane, Rose, and Svetlana—well, he didn’t tell any of them.

Ilya looks across at Shane. As usual, he’s wearing athletic gear from head to toe. Some habits are hard to break, but Ilya has made it his own personal mission to fix Shane’s fashion sense.

“What?”

“Your cross,” Shane says, pointing at the crucifix that always rests on Ilya’s chest. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you without it.”

In fact, it feels like it’s the center piece to everything Ilya wears. Today is no different. Ilya is wearing a simple light blue button up tucked into dark, well-fitting slacks. The color brought out his eyes, but Shane decidedly kept that detail to himself. He didn’t need Ilya to tease him any more than he already did. The top few buttons of the shirt are undone, and the glint of the necklace is bright in the last strong rays of light that bleeds through the blinds.

Ilya’s hand comes to rest over it, like he’s forgotten it was there. “My mother’s,” he says quietly. “She was a believer. I am... not sure.”

There seems to be more there, but Shane isn't going to push. Ilya will tell him whenever he's ready. So he just hums and taps his toe on Ilya's in the small sliver of space under the desk and watches a small smile bloom on his face.

"I like it. It suits you."

"Everything suits me," Ilya postures, quick to move past the moment. He brushes a bit of nonexistent dust off his shoulder playfully, grinning at the way Shane rolls his eyes. "You disagree?"

"You're very self-assured," Shane tells him.

"Ah, I did not hear a no."

Shane thought Ilya would look good if he wore a trash bag, but he didn't say so. It wouldn't do either of them any good. Shane just readjusts his glasses and goes back to reading Anna Karenina, now fully engulfed in the politics and love of the story. Low music plays from Ilya's desktop, nothing with any lyrics, but calming sounds with light beats that made it easier to work to. Before both knew it, the sun had dipped below the horizon, shrouding the small office in twilight. Neither would be surprised if most had left the building for the night. Shane takes off his glasses and rubs at his eyes before yawning. Ilya retires to the tiny beat up loveseat in the corner.

"Come," he tells Shane gently. It was one of the things Shane loved about Ilya. For everyone else, he was always bursting with energy and light, always the center of any room. With Shane, in these quiet moments, he became softer, more flawed. It made Shane's heartbeat a little quicker in his chest as he went without complaint. Their thighs are pressed together, a solid line of heat in the middle of the couch. "You did not have to stay."

"I wanted to," Shane tells him. "And I like watching you grade."

"Does the red pen make you hot?" Ilya asks, smirking.

"And if it does?" Shane quips, throwing his leg over Ilya's thighs to straddle him.

"You will be *so* hard when you see your last paper then." Ilya tugs Shane down to meet his lips in a languid kiss, one full of heat but no urgency. He could sit there forever and do exactly this; kissing Shane was different than anything he's ever done with anyone else.

"Asshole," Shane says without heat. When he goes to pull his glasses off, Ilya's hand immediately stops him.

"Keep them," he rushes out, cheeks the slightest of pinks.

"Oh?"

Had Shane finally found a weakness? And had that weakness been his glasses?

"You are so distracting in them," Ilya tells him between increasingly frantic kisses. "Is unfair when you sit in front row, I cannot focus on the lesson."

The admission makes something light up in Shane's belly and he lets his hand wander from Ilya's soft curls to the sliver of exposed chest. His skin there is tanned and warm, with just the slightest dusting of light hair that makes the tips of his fingers sing. He's painfully hard in his joggers, and it takes every single ounce of willpower in his body to pull away from Ilya. It's even harder when Ilya chases his lips as he goes.

"We shouldn't," Shane breathes, resting his forehead on Ilya's shoulder and taking a big breath. "Not here." The cologne mixed with Ilya's scent makes his head swim and for a second, he debates on if it would really be that bad if someone caught them here like this. "Right?"

Shane would never hide Ilya, he didn't have the heart for it. He was private, yes, a bit scared of PDA too. But who he liked was never a secret. It had taken him too long to figure out, too many years of uncertainty and internalized homophobia to just give in to the culture of his beloved sport and hide. Shane Hollander let people come to their own conclusions about him now, and that seemed to lift a lot of the weight from his shoulders. It helped that he was so good at hockey that it would be ridiculous for anyone to not draft him for being gay. He knew he was going to be first pick when it came time.

But, the fact of the matter is that Ilya is still his TA. McGill had a very strict policy between TAs fraternizing with their students, one that if violated, could spell disaster for both of their college careers. With Shane's scholarship requirements already being so high and Ilya's workload being insane, neither could afford to get into trouble. To any other student, Shane was just a normal classmate who had consistently been having trouble keeping up since day one. It definitely helped that before any of this had really started, there had been plenty of students who had barged in on his office hour appointments with Ilya.

There wasn't that much longer in the semester when they really thought about it, so both had firmly decided to be lowkey about what they had going on. It had yet to be defined. Less than a true relationship but more than a passing situationship? Shane could easily picture Ilya and him walking hand in hand through downtown Montreal, laughing and smiling as snowflakes danced in the air. He could easily see both of them at the end of next semester walking the stage together and taking pictures holding both of their degrees. All of this, and yet all Shane had to show for it was a bunch of gooey feelings and heaps of texts full of innuendos. It was embarrassing how quickly he had become infatuated with Ilya Rozanov.

They had hung out since the kiss, but it was mostly in the confines of these four walls.

"You are right," Ilya breathes back, eyes blown wide in arousal. His length is snug against Shane's, and he forces himself not to buck into the pressure. This was as far as they've gone so far, which for Ilya, was a complete change. He was more used to fucking first and talking later, or more commonly, not talking after at all. There hadn't been someone who caught his attention like Shane Hollander since Russia. Since Sasha. What's even crazier is that he hasn't really felt the need to lay down with anyone else since he first laid eyes on the man in front of him. Ilya had kissed people at parties, but that was really the extent of it. As soon as his lips had tasted Shane, he knew he was done for. "But you are so... how you say? Pretty?"

Ilya's English had always left him when he was tired and his head was floaty, like it was now. The proximity to Shane made him feel drunk, and he very well could have been speaking

gibberish for all he knew. It must've been the right thing to say because Shane's eyes fluttered lightly and his teeth tugged his plump lower lip into his mouth. His cheeks were aflame at the praise, and Ilya filed that away for later.

"Why would you," Shane starts lowly, before being unable to stop himself from capturing Ilya's lips in another heated kiss. "What if someone walks in? What if we get caught?" He tries his best to ignore the distinct throb in his pants at the thought.

Ilya hums, sliding his hand under Shane's shirt to rest against the heated skin of his stomach. "I think you would like this, no?" His thumb swipes over a nipple and relishes in the way Shane's fingers grip harshly at his curls in response. "Always good for everybody, but I think you can be bad."

"Shit," Shane gasps, ducking quickly to shut Ilya up. He's just about to give in and roll his hips when there's a sharp knock on the door. They both look at each other with wide, panicked eyes before looking down at their respective laps. If someone were to walk in on them right now, they'd not only see Ilya and Shane in a compromising position, but they'd see the undeniable tent in both of their pants. The thought makes Shane want to shrivel up and die.

"Custodian," a low voice calls through the door. "Is anyone in there?"

"One second!" Ilya calls back, shoving Shane off his lap and pushing him toward the only place in the cramped office where he'd be able to fit: under the desk. He goes without a word, not wanting to blow his or Ilya's cover. There's barely enough room for his body, Shane is an athlete after all; all dense muscle and height. When Ilya smoothly slides his desk chair as close as he can get, Shane covers his mouth with his hand. "You can come in."

The squeaky door swings open, and Shane can hear a trash bag being opened.

"Just changing the trash," the custodian tells Ilya. "You going to be in here for much longer? I can wait to clean up for tomorrow if so."

"Probably for another half-hour," Ilya says easily, like nothing had been going on. Like Shane wasn't face to face with his clothed dick under this old desk. "Time just flew by me today. So many tests to grade, you know."

"You're Vetrov's TA, right?"

"Yes," Ilya stands to reach out his hand to the custodian, who takes it. "Ilya Rozanov."

"Steve. You'll be seeing me around more, I was just switched to this shift today." There's more rustling, like Steve is taking the old bag out of the bin and replacing it with a new one. "Met Vetrov the other day, kind of a hardass. You must be busy!"

"Too busy," Ilya sighs, flopping back into the chair. He lets the toe of his shoe wander until he's touching Shane's thigh lightly. "I start my day and it is dark outside, I end my day and it is dark outside."

“Preaching to the choir, bud. Preaching to the choir.”

There’s mundane conversation for another minute or two, all while Shane can feel the massive crick forming in his neck from being contorted for this long. Ilya seems comfortable, man spreading in his desk chair, and that makes Shane just a little bit petty. Petty enough to trail his hands lightly on Ilya’s inner thigh, right along the seam that leads to his lap. There’s a slight tone shift that Shane can hear, maybe a little more frantic, a little more breathy. Nothing too crazy as to be noticed by someone who wasn’t looking for it, though. Which *might’ve* done something to embolden him a little more.

“In the future, you can leave your bin outside of the office if you’re busy,” Steve tells Ilya. “I don’t want to bother you in the middle of all that work.”

Shane waits for Ilya to be right in the middle of his thanks before lightly cupping him through his pants and squeezing ever so slightly. Ilya immediately chokes on his own spit, sending him into a coughing fit that has Shane smothering his own laughter under the desk.

“You okay?” Steve asked.

“Is the cold,” Ilya says, tone strained. His toes were curling in his shoes and his knuckles were white where they were clenched onto fists on his thighs. When he dared to flick his eyes down, Shane was already holding his gaze. “I must be getting sick, I think.”

“The shitty ventilation in here doesn’t make it any better.” There’s the sound of something rolling just outside the office, kind of like a cart. “I’ll leave you to it, Ilya. It was nice meeting you. You ever need anything, feel free to ask me, alright?”

The smile in Steve’s voice is evident, and Shane has just witnessed the easy charm of Ilya Rozanov catching yet another person in it’s web. He’d almost be annoyed that Ilya is this good with people, but that charm is what hooked Shane in the first place.

“Thank you, Steve,” Ilya says. “Have a good night.”

Shane gives it a five count from when the latch clicks on the door before he crawls out from under the desk. He sits on the desk, facing Ilya, with what can only be described as a smug smile on his face. He flicks his chin at Ilya’s obvious bulge.

“Guess you *really* liked Steve, huh?”

There’s a beat of silence before they both burst out laughing, albeit quietly. Ilya rolls his chair forward and rests his head in Shane’s lap, smothering the giggles into the soft fabric of his joggers. The moment felt sweet and full of bone deep relief that they hadn’t been caught. Shane feels weirdly proud of himself, if he’s honest.

“You are trouble, Shane Hollander,” Ilya groans. “Pure trouble.”

“You like it,” Shane mumbles happily, grabbing Ilya’s face and tilting it up to his own.

“No comment,” Ilya tells him, standing to full height and capturing his lips once more. It wasn’t a long kiss, but it did have some finality. Whatever *might’ve* happened tonight isn’t

happening anymore, both of them know that. It's fully dark outside now, and Ilya wouldn't be surprised if they both started stifling yawns soon. "Let me take you out this weekend. You have game?"

Shane's heart stuttered in his chest, a goofy smile breaking his lips without him being able to stop it. "Just Friday night, the rest of my weekend is wide open."

"Good," Ilya smiles, pressing a light kiss to Shane's cheek. It's where his favorite patch of freckles were. "Now let's go, I think. We have been in this building for way too long today."

"I'll walk you to your car." Shane lived in an on campus dorm that was conveniently less than a ten minute walk from the arts building, even shorter once they made the trek to the commuter parking lot. It was no problem at all to walk with Ilya, and Shane would cherish the last few minutes of him.

The walk was quiet and full of slight brushes of fingertips and soft conversation. He could listen to Ilya talk all night, could listen to the way his accent formed around words and how he slipped into Russian every now and then when he got extra tired. Shane was almost sad to see Ilya's car come into view.

"What do you North Americans say? 'This is me'?" He teases gently, resting his weight on his driver side door. His face was younger under the yellow light of the parking lot and Shane wanted to do nothing more than lean in for just one more kiss. But, there were still the odd few people walking around. It wouldn't be a good idea.

"When did your english get so good?" Shane teased back. Ilya's english was more than passable, of course. He did entire lectures in the language. "Drive safe. Tell Svetlana I said hi." Their off campus apartment wasn't too far, maybe a ten minute drive at most.

"She will be glad to hear it." Ilay unlocked his car and threw his bag in before turning back to Shane one last time. "I will see you this weekend, yes?" He says it like he's worried Shane either already forgot or already decided it wasn't safe for them to be seen out.

"Yes," Shane says shyly. He was getting asked out on a date by the prettiest boy he's ever seen. There were lingering anxieties of course, he's still himself after all, but he wants to try. Ilya had just as much to lose, which made it slightly easier to trust him with this. They were each other's secret.

"Can't wait." Ilya starts up his car and throws one last wink to Shane before pulling off, leaving Shane standing alone in the parking lot, probably looking more smitten than he ever had in his life.

If he walked back home with a lovesick smile on his face, no one else was there to see it.

OOH A DATE!!!!

Chapter 4: date night

Chapter Notes

just a lil christmas present for us all pre-cottage hehe <3 hope you all enjoy! rating change as well.....i wonder what that could mean wink wink

as always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated. if you wanna scream more about hollanov with me, i'm on twt @yalooblueeteebaa

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

Shane looked in the mirror and sighed yet again. It was his third outfit change of the night and he's starting to feel like nothing in his closet was going to be good enough. He didn't normally care about fashion in the slightest, too busy with classes and hockey to care what he threw on in the morning. It didn't help that now that he had friends from the art department, he constantly looked like a slouch. A clean slouch, but a slouch nonetheless.

It didn't help that Ilya had such personal style. He was able to pull off sweaters with crazy patterns, fancy colorful sneakers, patchwork jeans. Shane had seen it all from the time he's spent with Ilya both in the classroom and out of it. Ilya Rozanov *always* looked good; Shane found it infuriating.

Rose sighed from where she sat on his dresser, politely turned to the side so that the FaceTime call didn't catch him undressing. She was on her second glass of wine.

"Not again," she told him. "You have to have *something*, Shane. Don't you hockey people have to go to banquets and stuff?"

"I'm not wearing a *suit* to our first date. Even I know that would be a bit much." He's starting to get antsy though, refolding the failed outfit with a little more force than necessary. Ilya hadn't given him much to go on besides avidly telling him he couldn't wear anything related to the hockey team. That was a conversation that still made his cheeks burn red with embarrassment. "Should I just not go? I should just tell him I'm sick, right?" He knows he sounds pathetic but can't help it.

"Absolutely fucking *not*," Rose says firmly. "You, Shane Hollander, are going out and you're going to enjoy it. Live a little, celebrate the fact that you won the game yesterday!"

She's right and he knows she's right. Shane had scored the winning goal in a game against University of Toronto, which cinched their top spot in the conference. He felt like he was on top of the world all last night, especially when he came home to a single text from Ilya that had him borderline giggling and kicking his feet. It had read, *that goal was almost prettier than your freckles*.

Shane knew he was probably too busy preparing lectures and grading in his office to actually go to the game, but the fact that he had kept up with the score was sweet. Sweeter than Shane would have expected, but if Ilya Rozanov was anything, it was a surprise. He wants to be the same in Ilya's eyes. Which is why he looks over his closet with even more scrutiny. There *had* to be something.

"Is it cold out?" Shane asked Rose. He had been too holed up in his apartment panicking all day to even step foot outside.

"It's Montreal in November, what do you think?" When he flips off the camera, she sticks her tongue out before taking another swig from her glass. It's moments like these where he's so endlessly thankful for her friendship. "We're locking in. Bring me to your closet." Her determined tone made him want to reach through the phone and hug her.

"Yes ma'am," he says, flipping his camera. He waits a beat before asking, "Am I a lost cause?"

"Shane, you are absolutely awful at being gay, did you know that?" She teases. "There's like nothing to work with! I'm going to have to take you shopping and I don't wanna hear a single complaint about it." He opens his mouth with a comeback and she immediately cuts him off. "Okay, we'll have to do simple, but that's not *bad*. It's not like you're known to be flashy or anything..."

"You know I can hear you right?"

"I would hope so," she says sweetly. "Stop distracting me. I'm a woman at work."

She has him guide her thoroughly through his entire closet to show her every single piece of clothing he owned. "No, no, no," she says, flicking her hand in the camera to signal for him to move on to the next piece. "Wait! *Those*."

It was an older pair of jeans that he was sure wouldn't fit around his hips anymore and he told her just that. They were a dark wash and more tapered than he normally would like, and now that he thinks about it, he's not entirely sure if he's ever actually worn them. The jeans weren't ugly by means, just...out of his comfort zone.

"Put them on the bed, you're going to try them on," Rose commanded, leaving no room for argument. Shane just sighed and did what he was told. "Do you have any sweaters?"

His mom *had* gotten him a nice one for Christmas last year and he took a minute to search in the back of his closet for the box. When he set Rose back up on the dresser to show her, she clapped her hands excitedly. "Yes! This is exactly what we need!"

It was a cream colored chunky turtleneck, one that was good enough quality that there wasn't any scratch against his skin. His mother knew that he couldn't stand that sensation. She had bought it to be a little big baggy, but not too baggy to look unkept. Shane actually doesn't know why he wasn't wearing this more often. It's got to be one of the nicest things he owns by far.

“Okay and maybe those boots I saw last time I was at your apartment, the brown ones.” She nodded when Shane brought them into view of the camera. “Perfect, yeah. And you have a nice coat right? Like, not the puffer.”

“What did my puffer ever do to you?” Shane grumbled, but pulled out his nice peacoat that was almost exclusively used for hockey events.

“It accosts my eyes on the regular,” she groans. “Try it on! I wanna see.”

He does, stepping back far enough so she can see him entire body.

“*Shane*,” she gasped. “You’ve been holding out on us!”

He never knew how to take praise, so he just ducks his head. “It looks alright?”

“Alright? Babes, you’re *so* getting laid tonight.” She screenshots quickly before her face comes closer to the camera, like she’s typing. “Svet is going to *freak*! Don’t worry, I’ll tell her not to show Ilya.”

She might as well have been talking to herself; Shane’s brain had flatlined at the possibility that she was right, he very well could be having sex tonight. He had prepared for every scenario, but his brain hadn’t really processed that.

The sun was just going down, meaning that there was maybe an hour before Ilya would arrive to pick him up. He rested his phone on the shelf in his bathroom mirror. There wasn’t much to be done with his hair, so he rubbed the smallest bit of product between his hands before taming the annoying flyaways. Shaving didn’t matter— he knew he couldn’t grow a beard if he tried.

“Do you know what you guys are doing tonight?” Rose asks.

Shane shakes his head, puffing out a nervous breath. “He didn’t want to tell me.”

He likes to think he’s really getting to know Ilya, but he still doesn’t know him well enough to even start to predict where they could be going tonight. The unknown is a major part of the reason he’s kind of freaking out, Shane had long come to terms with the fact that he was a bit of a control freak. He always felt safer when he could follow the itinerary in his head.

“What if this doesn’t go well?” He blurts out. The question has been clawing up his throat for the entire day. “What if he doesn’t like me enough to do anything but have sex?”

“You’re so stupid,” Rose sighs, shaking her head. “If you took your head out of your downward spiral every now and then you’d see how he looks at you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. I’ve known him since he came to Canada, you know. Him and Svet are a package deal and I met them on the first day of freshmen year.” A small smile starts to spread across her lips at the memory. “Ilya is… different. He’s the most sociable person I’ve ever met,

everyone loves him. But, he's not great at letting people in. I've seen plenty of people in and out of his bed over the years, and he didn't look at a single one the way he looks at you."

It's almost unbelievable to Shane. Ilya is by far the coolest person he's ever met and it's not even close. On the outside, he's stunning. There's a light that follows him everywhere, that seems to cast his light curls in a perpetual golden halo. Somehow he's got the build of an absolute *god*, even though all Shane has ever seen him eat is junk food. It's like someone went into the depths of Shane's psyche and pulled every single one of his weaknesses and mixed them all together with Ilya being the result.

"He's just so..." Shane starts, the words escaping him. "I don't know."

"Ilya is just some guy, Shane. I love him to death but he has his own baggage too. You'd probably feel a little bit better about everything if you stopped treating him like he was untouchable."

It's not a bad point, Shane knows. He just hums and walks back to his room, phone in hand.

"And besides, he's the lucky one," Rose says sweetly. "You're the best guy I've ever met, Shane Hollander. You're hot and talented and so determined, anyone that you set your sights on would be lucky. Don't forget that."

"You're too good to me," he mutters shyly.

"You're not good enough to *yourself*," she chides.

Ilya's name popped up on his phone.

Ilya: I am on my way.

"Fuck, okay, he'll be here soon," Shane panics. "I'll talk to you later, alright?"

"Good luck," she cheers, blowing a kiss to the camera. "You'll be wonderful, I'm sure of it."

"Thank you, Rose," he says before he disconnects. "Really."

He double checked his reflection and then triple checked his reflection. He made sure the zippers on his boots were all the way to the top and that his sweater wasn't bunching weirdly around his hips. He tamed the last few errant hairs who didn't want to do what the pomade wanted them to. By the end of all of his fretting, a sharp knock on the door rang through his dorm.

Shane shook out his limbs in hope that it would help the nerves. The box breathing he always practiced when he got a little bit overwhelmed helped too. When he opens the door, he has to stop his jaw from dropping. If Ilya in *class* was the highlight of his fantasies, well, this was something else entirely.

A navy turtleneck stretched across his wide chest, the color somehow making Ilya's light eyes even brighter in the low light of the hallway. It was tucked into dark grey slacks that sat on Ilya's trim waist. Shane's brain let out an embarrassing noise at just how small that waist

was. There were nice sneakers on his feet, nice enough for a date and casual enough to not be overdressy. That seemed to be a line that Ilya rode very carefully. There was a stylish leather bomber on his shoulders, one with off white fur on the collar.

“Hi,” Ilya said, breaking Shane out of his daze.

“Hi,” Shane breathed. “You look...”

“I know,” Ilya smirks. Somehow it’s conceited and heartwarming at the same time. It’s a kind of confidence Shane isn’t using to having in himself. His light eyes rake up and down Shane’s figure appreciatively, “How do you say in english? You clean up well?”

The way his accent curls around the saying is enough to make Shane want to pull him by his collar and kiss him senseless. He knows what he looks like, it isn’t the first time someone has called him attractive or flirted with him. The one thing that makes *this* different is that Shane is truly and fully enamored by Ilya Rozanov. He absolutely cares what the man thinks of him.

“My mom bought me the sweater,” Shane blurts out, cheeks immediately flaming. It feels like an embarrassing admission, and he’s grateful that his back is turned as he locks the door. There’s a light chuckle behind him, and when Shane finally forces himself to turn back around, Ilya has a tiny smile on his lips. “Sorry, I have no clue why I just said that.”

“Is okay,” he laughs. “Thank her for me.” He takes a step back and tilts his head to the hallway, “Are you ready to go?”

“Depends,” Shane says, falling into step with the man next to him. “You didn’t tell me where you were taking me.”

“Is a surprise.” Ilya nudges him with his elbow. “You do not like surprises?”

Shane debates if he should tell the truth or not. He takes a second too long.

“No surprises after today,” Ilya reassures. “Next time is different, I promise.”

Next time.

Next time.

Next time.

Tension bleeds out of his shoulders without meaning to and the sight makes Ilya laugh again. “I’m kind of boring, I guess. I like to know what’s going on and I like to stick to a schedule.” He lets his hand brush against Ilya’s quickly. “I’m excited for tonight, though.” And then, slightly softer, “And next time too.”

The words make Ilya *beam* and Shane finds that he would probably do just about anything to be the reason to make him smile like that again. He’s led out to a small black SUV and Ilya opens the passenger door for him, which just makes Shane shy again. The inside is definitely older, but clean. He can tell Ilya takes good care of it.

“Do you want to listen to music?” Ilya asks.

“I don’t know too much,” Shane admits. “You can play anything you want.”

Ilya hums easily and plugs his phone into the AUX cord; a lively beat and an unfamiliar language flow through the speakers loudly for a second before Ilya turns it down to just be background noise.

“Spanish?”

“Bad Bunny. He is one of my favorites.”

The music is the last thing Shane would’ve pictured Ilya listening to. But looking across the car at the man, his profile bathed in the dying light of evening, Shane thinks it might make sense. The melodies and the harmonies are so layered, so full. There’s layers to Ilya that he hasn’t discovered yet, he’s sure, but he knows he wants to.

“Not what you expected?” Ilya asks, his tone teasing.

“*You’re* not what I expected,” Shane says.

“That is good, yes?” There’s hope there, one so plain and open that Shane can’t help but relax a bit. Ilya sounded just as nervous as Shane felt.

“Yes,” he reassures. They pass the sign that signals that they’re leaving Montreal city limits. “Now, where are you taking me?”

“There is a place on the Saint Lawrence River,” Ilya says. “It was first town I explored when I came from Russia. Is beautiful this time of year.”

Ilya remembers borrowing Sergei’s car that first week and driving north without a thought or care where he ended up. Everything had been so overwhelming those first few months, so overstimulating. He had never been outside of Russia before being completely expelled from the country by his father and he’s not entirely sure when he’ll be able to safely go back. Not when Grigori knows what he knows. The language had been an entirely new hurdle; his accent still being something he felt insecure about. Being in Canada had forced him into a kind of fluency of necessity, but he’s endlessly glad that McGill is majority english speaking. Ilya’s french is horrendous.

Lavaltrie isn’t special, per say. But it’s somewhere that’s important to Ilya. It’s picturesque and warm and so unlike everything Ilya grew up with. He’s had plenty of walks down the main street over the years—ones with snow coming down on his touque, ones where he’s wearing nothing more than a tank top and shorts. The sounds of the river calm him in a way that the hustle and bustle of Montreal itself just can’t.

“I haven’t done as much exploring the province as I should,” Shane admits.

“You are not from Quebec?”

“Ottawa, actually. It’s about two hours west of Montreal.”

“Ah, not too far away from home. Must be nice,” Ilya says genuinely. Shane had something Ilya isn’t sure he would ever have again. “Why Montreal, then?”

“My dad was a Redbird too. And they gave me the best scholarship,” Shane tells him. “It’s hockey program is strong and the fanbase is passionate. Kind of felt like a no brainer to come here, to be honest.”

The highway stretches in front of them and the music has turned to something slower and more heartfelt. Comfortable silence descends for a minute and Shane gets slightly insecure that he hasn’t been asking Ilya questions about himself.

“Do you like Canada? Compared to Russia, I mean.”

There’s a hum like Ilya is thinking of how he should answer, how much he should give up. “Is very different, Canada. Culture is not the same but I like it. There are more opportunities here.” He looks sideways at Shane with a mischievous look in his eye, “And the boys are prettier too.”

“Lucky you, then,” Shane says shyly, hands busy in his lap. He can’t help but fidget when he’s nervous, it’s a habit that he’s tried to unsuccessfully break over the years. His ripped cuticles and frayed edges of hoodies are proof of that.

Ilya’s eyes catch the small movements and he can’t help but feel endeared. He finds Shane to be so effortlessly charming in a way that completely disarms him. Ilya is used to being the charming one, and more so, the charm he puts on being a mask of what his true self is. He enjoys flirting, don’t get him wrong, but Rose wasn’t really wrong about what she said at the game. Ilya has acquaintances and people he’s slept with, not true friends. Letting people in has never ended well.

It feels different with Shane, somehow. There had been plenty of girls that Ilya had been with since he came to Canada, but not a single man. There hadn’t been a man since Sasha. Ilya knew that for the most part he preferred women, but Shane had made his heart beat a little quicker in his chest from the first moment he laid eyes on him in the lecture hall. Getting closer to him over the months hadn’t helped either. Ilya was in a hole that he wouldn’t be able to escape, not that he really even wanted to.

Seeing Shane dressed up all for *him*, seeing his freckles that Ilya had spent hours obsessing over dusted in pink blush, seeing the way he was obviously bubbling over with nervous energy— it was almost too much for Ilya to have to handle and still act normal.

“Ты даже не представляешь, насколько я тобой одержим,” he says under his breath in an effort to shake out his own anxious energy. Speaking his own language always makes Ilya feel a little bit less nervous.

“Two can play at that game,” Shane tells him, turning slightly in his seat so he can get a full view of Ilya’s profile. Not for the first time, he’s stunned at the beauty of the man sitting next to him. “Je voulais t’embrasser depuis que tu m’as récupéré.”

“You want to kiss me?”

“You know french?!”

Ilya’s eyes sparkle when he turns his head to meet Shane’s panicked gaze, “No.”

“Oh, fuck you,” Shane laughs, pushing at Ilya’s shoulder. “You’re such an asshole.”

Shane feels less stressed already, like the ice has been well and thoroughly broken. It’s a relief, he feels like he can finally breathe and just enjoy whatever awaits him. Night is falling quickly as it always does in winter, and Shane can see twinkling lights in the distance. It’s decently busy but not overwhelmingly so, and Shane can see the river in the distance. It’s *perfect*.

When Ilya parks, he comes around to open Shane’s door for him. “Is a Christmas market,” Ilya says gently, closing Shane’s door behind him. His hands twitch at his sides with the need to grab Shane’s own.

“It’s beautiful,” Shane assures him. The words instantly make Ilya tuck away a smile. “Come on, show me around.” As they walk closer to the vendors their fingers brush lightly. There’s enough distance between the school and Lavaltrie that it shouldn’t be a problem, but Shane can’t help but feel his anxiety spike in the back of his mind.

He’s entirely too grateful when Ilya takes the jump and interlocks their fingers just loosely enough to let Shane decide if he wanted to stay or not. The nervous buzz in his head softens to a smitten hum and he tightens his grip.

“You’ve been to this market before?” Shane asks.

“I try to come every year,” Ilya says, nodding. He stops at a vendor and orders them two hot chocolates, handing one to Shane. “This place... is special to me.”

Something clenches in Shane’s chest at the revealing words. Ilya was sharing something important to him, he was trusting Shane with something he held dear. He felt his world tilt just that little bit more. “If the hot chocolate is good, I get why.”

“Try,” Ilya said. “It is.”

And of course, it was the best hot chocolate Shane had ever had. It was smooth and heaped with what tastes like homemade whipped cream. It warms him down to his toes and he can’t help the small sound he makes as he swallows it down.

“Holy shit.”

“I told you,” Ilya says proudly, eyes catching on a little bit of whipped cream that stuck to the corner of Shane’s lip. He doesn’t allow himself to overthink before reaching out and swiping it away with his thumb and bringing it to his own mouth. “Hm. Sweet.”

Something darker flickers in Shane’s eyes, something that sends a thrill down Ilya’s back. Bringing Shane to the market wasn’t with the specific end goal of bringing him to bed at the end of the night. Ilya would wait as long as he needed to for Shane to feel comfortable with

that step. This was Ilya's way of quietly inviting Shane into his life, his favorite places, his favorite things.

If things naturally led to one of their beds at the end of the night, well, Ilya is always prepared.

Shane sputters around a response for a minute before giving up and huffing and dragging Ilya further into the market.

It was the closest thing to a perfect night that Ilya might have ever had. There were no people to say that they shouldn't be together. There were no stacks of endless papers on his desk to grade. There were no cramped offices with dust that swirled through the air. There was just him and Shane, walking through the stalls and laughing and talking more than they've ever been allowed to at once.

He learned that Shane was half Japanese and that his parents worked in government back in Ottawa.

"Ah, so all the Hollanders are boring."

"Hey!"

He learned that Shane had never been asked on a date by a man before Ilya.

"I don't know," Shane admitted shyly. "All the guys I hang out with are teammates. Before Rose, I didn't really get out that much to meet new people."

"You have never liked another player? Not even Hayden?" Ilya remembers Shane telling him about his best friend weeks ago.

"Hayden is the straightest person I've ever met and he's in an incredible relationship with Jackie, who I adore," Shane tells him, waving his hand dismissively.

"That is not a no," Ilya teases.

He learned that Shane dreamed of being drafted into the NHL, that he wanted to win as many cups as the icons of the nineties.

"I have seen you play," Ilya tells him, squeezing his hand quickly. "I think is a very realistic dream, Shane Hollander."

"Maybe," Shane replies, humbly. He was never going to be the one to bug himself up.

"Sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't have even come to college. I'm already older than some of the rookies now."

"And you have had more years to become better than them," Ilya says, shrugging like it's the easiest thing in the world. "You will be worth ten players on whatever team picks you. I am sure of it."

It's so sweet that Shane presses a soft kiss to Ilya's cheek, right on the adorable mole that had caught his eye on the very first day.

"Thank you."

Shane lets himself be led away from the fairy lights of the market and towards the river walk, a warm feeling settling over his body. It's been forever since he's let someone in like this and forgot just how good it feels to let himself be known. As they walk down the empty path, the gentle lapping of the Saint Lawrence River the only company to their quiet company, Shane realizes a few things at once.

One, Ilya Rozanov is not who he portrays to the public. He's deeply compassionate and cares about the people in his life fiercely. He's an incredible listener, always asking Shane more questions like he's endlessly curious about him. He gives little pieces of himself in every interaction. All of the grandmothers throughout the market running their stands were eager to push free baked goods into his hands before their conversations ended.

It's so different to the work hard, play hard persona that he displays on campus and at parties that it might be giving Shane a little bit of whiplash.

Two, Shane hasn't felt the fluttering feeling in his stomach like this *ever*. It's terrifying and exciting at the same time and he knows that he'll need to do whatever he can to keep this, to make this work. His anxieties be damned, Ilya Rozanov *will* be apart of his life somehow.

And three, it's completely dark out now, which means they've been out here for hours and it's felt like minutes. This would usually be the time Shane would turn on whatever game was on that night and get ready for bed, but this is infinitely better.

"Why is this place special to you?" He asks Ilya gently, not wanting to dig too much if Ilya didn't want to answer. "I know you said it was the first place you explored on your own here, but is there anything more than that? There are plenty of towns like this in Canada."

"The people were kind," Ilya says, pulling away to lean his forearms against the railing. He can't look at Shane when he speaks about this, so instead he locks his gaze on the dark waves. "I was not... used to that."

Shane joined him at the railing, standing close enough to let his elbow just touch Ilya's own. "You never did say why you ended up here."

"There was boy back home," Ilya admits. The memories of Sasha don't hurt for the reasons people might think. The rejection, the lack of care, the way he was easily thrown to the curb like trash— that's what made everything painful. "My coach's son and my teammate."

"You loved him," Shane infers.

"No," Ilya laughed, slightly bitter. "I thought maybe I did, but you know, teenager." Looking back, those emotions were so big, so hopeful. Everything pales in comparison to the small spark in his chest when he looks at Shane. This could be *everything* Ilya had wanted and more, and the thought was incredibly sobering.

“His father caught us, in locker room.” He remembers the disorienting doom that settled over his senses when he heard the lock turn that day. Remembers feeling like he was about to experience his life completely falling apart. “My father is cop. My brother is cop. Russia is not safe for people like me.”

“So he sent you here?”

“Da. Vetrov was an old friend, they played hockey together in the Soviet league and Svetlana and I grew up very close.” He blows out a breath, one that helped to make his shoulder feel slightly lighter. “He was very respected professor back in Russia, and McGill offered a lot of money for him to move. It made sense.”

“What did your mom say about all this?”

Shane can’t imagine Yuna not standing up for him in the face of something so scary. His mother had always been his number one supporter. Which is why when Ilya spoke again, voice almost quiet enough to get lost in the winter wind, Shane felt his heart crack in two.

“My mother is dead.”

“Oh,” Shane breathed, shuffling closer to Ilya and grabbing his hand. “I’m sorry.”

“Is okay,” he says, blinking back the stinging that always comes when thinking about his mom. It was less than okay and would never be okay, but it was easier to say that than that her death haunted him most days and felt like his fault others. “She was not well. My father did not help.” His free hand finds the crucifix where it lays in the middle of his chest. Touching the cold metal balances him, reminds him that his mother is with him all the time, even if he couldn’t see her. “Her name was Irina.”

“A beautiful name,” Shane says.

“She was that,” Ilya tells him. “Beautiful. She would have liked things like this, I think.” He tilted his head back towards the night market. “This place makes me happy like I was when I was a child. It is quiet and small and so different from Moscow. I always thought I would never leave Russia but now I cannot go back. It is weird feeling.”

“You miss it?”

“I love my country, yes. It is nice to be able to speak there and not sound like a villain out of a movie.” As hard as he tried, Ilya couldn’t get rid of his thick accent. It was something he had begrudgingly come to terms with. “I think that it would always feel like I was hiding if I stayed. That I was not really *me*.”

“I like listening to you talk,” Shane says matter-of-factly. He almost preens at the hint of pink on the tops of Ilya’s cheeks at the confession. “Maybe too much. You’re so *distracting*.”

“That would explain your exam results,” Ilya teases, glad the mood has lifted slightly.

“Dick.”

Ilya just laughs, something light and airy before grabbing Shane and heading back towards the lights of the market. His hands are dry and warm and the hole that always opens in Ilya's chest when he talks about his mother closes slightly. The sting is still there, it never leaves him, but it's manageable.

"Is that why you don't play hockey anymore?" Shane asks. When Ilya's gaze shutters briefly, he rushes out an apology. The last thing he would want is to ruin the perfect night they've had by being too nosy. "Sorry, I just remember Svetlana talking about it and—"

Ilya cuts him off with a kiss, one more sweet and chaste than anything else. His eyes flutter shut at the way Shane responds immediately, at the way he pushes back into Ilya's space to make it deeper. Ilya pulls away with what he's sure is a lovesick expression.

"You are having panic attack. It is fine, you can ask," he teases, brushing the pad of his thumb over Shane's freckles. "Hockey was fun and I was the best at it." He shrugs easily, this part was undisputed and Ilya had never been accused of being humble. As he swings their hands back and forth, he continues. It's easier to open up when he doesn't have to look at Shane, he realizes. That's something he would have to work on. "It was not my dream, was my father's. He was injured before he was supposed to join KHL so he forced me to play from when I was very young. I like winning more than I actually like playing, I think."

It's a weird concept to Shane, not loving hockey with your entire being. For as long as he can remember, he had been the opposite. His mother had strapped skates onto his little feet when he was three and the rest was history. He always chose to be at the rink when he had downtime, he always chose to put in extra time and effort to achieve his dream of making it to the NHL. Hockey might actually be the one constant he could look to in his life.

"I like hockey," Shane says uselessly. It makes Ilya let out a loud and boisterous laugh, one that sounded like it came from his chest.

"The sky is blue," Ilya tells him, the words full of mirth.

"Shut up," Shane laughs, pushing Ilya. "Hockey is different for me is what I mean. It's my life."

"It is? Is not like I have heard you talk about it for months now." He rolls his eyes but tugs Shane further into the market, the last surprise of the night slowly coming into view. "Shane Hollander is hockey and hockey is Shane Hollander. I cannot be mad when you play so well." The gasp from next to him when the small ice rink finally comes into view is worth the twinge in Ilya's chest at the thought of having to lace up skates for the first time in almost five years. "I thought you would like."

"I do," Shane breathes, looking at Ilya with shiny eyes. "Oh, Ilya, I like so much." The laughter of kids and parents rings through the cold air and it reminds him of a time before everything was so *intense*. A time when hockey was just purely for fun. There's a small stand where a vendor is renting out skates and Shane excitedly tugs them both toward it. When Ilya is handed a pair of his own, Shane's eyes go wide. "You'll skate with me?"

“This is date, no?” He bends to take off his shoes and lace up the skates with an efficiency that only a previous player could have. “You think I would let you skate alone?”

“I don’t know,” Shane says shyly, tugging his own on. “I didn’t think this was going to happen tonight, is all. I don’t want to make you do something you don’t want to do.”

“I want to. How else will you see that I’m the better skater?” There’s a glint in Ilya’s eye, like he knows the words would light something up in Shane’s chest. He’s always been too competitive.

“You’re on.”

And so they skate and Shane falls just that bit more into the orbit of Ilya Rozanov. He’s scared to give true name to the feelings swirling in his heart, like if he says it then somehow it’ll disappear. But in the back of his mind, he knows that there’s no coming back from this. It’s Ilya or nothing.

He’s a *stunning* skater. His muscled legs propel him across the ice like he’s flying, and the children have started to line up to race him from one end of the rink to the other. The tiny cheers when Ilya stopped and kicked up a mountain of snow were adorable, and Shane had to stop himself from cooing at the way Ilya was just *perfect* with kids. Why wouldn’t he be? It’s like the man was built in a lab.

Ilya was having more fun on the ice than he might’ve ever had in his life. There was no coach screaming at him that he was worthless. There was no father telling him that he would amount to nothing if he didn’t fix his crossovers. There was no teammate that would be waiting for him, ashamed, behind closed doors. There was only happy children, the cold air, and Shane Hollander. Shane Hollander, who has resigned to leaning against the boards and watching him entertain the kids with a small smile on his face.

Once the kids started leaving for the night, Ilya skates up to Shane, boxing him in with his arms on the board. “Like what you see?” This close, he can smell the cologne that Shane must’ve dabbed on his pulse points, can smell the gentle scent that wafts from freshly washed hair. He can count the constellations on his cheeks.

“And if I do?” Shane’s eyes bounce over Ilya’s features before settling on his lips. He leans forward and presses a teasing pressure to them, waiting until Ilya lets out a sigh and pushes in before pulling away. “Race you to the end,” Shane whispers quickly, taking off to the other side of the rink. He feels Ilya try to grab onto his coat, and both of their laughs fill the air. “Don’t play dirty!”

When he touches the end board, Shane turns triumphantly. “Who did you say was the best skater?”

Ilya rolls his eyes, “That was unfair, Hollander.”

“Learned from the best,” Shane quipped, skating back to the rental stand. The market seemed to be closing for the night, and they were some of the last people lingering. “There’s a reason Canada always beats Russia in the Olympics. We’re just the better country.” He

shrugs and ducks his head to undo his laces, hiding a smile at the scoff he hears from beside him.

“You have maple syrup and lumberjacks,” Ilya groaned. “This is nothing compared to the history of Russia.”

“Next thing you’ll tell me is that you rode a bear to school and drank vodka at lunchtime.”

“Is true,” Ilya deadpans. “Bear’s name was Boris and he was faster than the bus.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

They walk back to the car hand in hand, the darkness of the parking lot swallowing the quiet conversation between the two. This is the best date Shane has ever been on. It’s never been so *easy* to talk with anyone like it was with Ilya. He usually finds social interactions taxing, which is why he usually stays to the people he already knows. With Ilya though, Shane *wants* to open up about himself and he wants to hear every single thing Ilya wants to reveal about his life too.

This is the best date Ilya has ever been on. He’s too used to just sleeping with people, he realizes. There was a hole in his chest that grew with each person that passed through his bed without so much as a name or smile. Ilya would never regret his conquests, but Shane has taken up every bit of his mind in a way he hasn’t had in years. He can’t remember the last person that he told about Russia, about Sasha, about his dear mother. Weight has lifted from his shoulders and Shane had carried it so beautifully, even asking to know more. He wants to know every single thing about Shane and he wants Shane to know every single thing about him. It’s a terrifying feeling, but one that Ilya revels in.

He pushes Shane gently against the car, grabbing his chin and bringing their lips together. The darkness provides some sort of safety for them, so when Shane pushes back into Ilya, he allows it. There’s quiet moans that are making Ilya’s head swirl so badly he can’t tell if the sounds are from his own lips or not. Shane’s hands find his waist under the jacket, nails softly scratching at the sensitive skin above his waistband. It could’ve been minutes or hours before they pulled away.

Big brown eyes shine up at Ilya’s, spit slick lips shine in the dark. The blush might be from the cold but Ilya hopes it’s from his kiss.

“I like you,” he says simply, praying the gravity of the words come across in his tone.

“I would hope so.” Shane’s lips spread in a smile that’s slightly bashful, but he doesn’t pull his gaze away from Ilya’s eyes. “I like you too.”

It was the right thing to say, Shane finds. Ilya just opens the passenger side door and gently guides Shane in before getting in himself. He reaches across Shane’s torso to buckle his seatbelt in and it shocks an embarrassing giggle from his chest.

“I can do that, you know.”

“You like it.”

“Obviously,” Shane mutters under his breath.

More music is turned on, this time in English, and far more romantic sounding than earlier. It’s slow and the lyrics are soulful and Shane slowly drums out the beat on his thigh with his fingers. Ilya hums along to the melody before letting his hand settle on Shane’s thigh.

“Is okay?” Ilya asks sweetly. He would pull away without question if Shane wasn’t comfortable.

“Yeah,” Shane breathes out, playing idly with Ilya’s fingers. “I had an amazing night, Ilya. Thank you.”

“Is normal to thank me for a date? Canadians are so weird,” Ilya laughs. “I am glad. I... was nervous.”

“Nervous?” Shane questions, eyebrows to his hairline. “Why?”

There wasn’t any point in lying, not now. Ilya had already put so many of his cards out on the table. “You are talented, you are smart. You are so beautiful it takes my breath. That’s how you say phrase, no?”

Shane’s heart stutters in his chest. “I take your breath away?”

“Since the first day,” Ilya tells him. “You were late and I almost turned you away—”

“You just *had* to mention me being late, huh?” Shane mutters, cheeks warm.

“*But*,” Ilya continues, squeezing at Shane’s thigh. “I saw the freckles. These things,” he lifts his hand to brush a thumb over Shane’s cheeks, “these things have made everything so much harder for me.”

“I don’t get why, I hate them.”

“Shh! They can hear you and their feelings will be hurt!”

“You’re an idiot.”

“I can hear you and now *my* feelings are hurt,” Ilya pouts. “Me and your freckles, we are like this.” He crosses his fingers. Shane just rolls his eyes and interlocks their fingers before resting them on his lap.

“There was no reason to be nervous,” Shane reassures him. “You’re so *you* it’s intimidating.”

“What does this mean?”

“It means you don’t care what other people say and just do what you want to do. And it’s incredibly hot.” Shane turns his head to trace Ilya’s perfect profile in the low light of the car. “I care too much. Seeing you be yourself is so refreshing.”

Knowing how long it took for him to be that way, the words hit Ilya a little bit harder than he thought. He brings Shane's hand to his lips and presses a sweet kiss there in response. A comfortable silence falls for a second.

"So you think I am hot?" He asks, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Now you're just fishing," Shane grumbles.

"I am driving."

"That's not what that— whatever."

The drive passed quickly, quicker than the drive up to the market did, at least. Shane wasn't ashamed to admit that he was starting to think of ways to invite Ilya into his dorm without making it seem too obvious. The hand on his thigh felt like it was burning a hole through his pants.

His building came into view and Ilya snagged a parking spot right in front.

"Did you... want to come upstairs?" He normally would've cringed at how awkward he sounded, but Ilya was nodding before he finished the sentence.

"You do not have a roommate?"

"Nope," Shane says, popping the p. "My scholarship paid for a single room so I could focus better on my schoolwork and hockey."

"You want to talk Dostoyevsky in bed, then?" Ilya teases. "You get turned on by *Crime and Punishment*?"

Getting teased is something he's never really been a fan of, to be honest. Shane already struggled with social cues and understanding punchlines and had lived through many a year of being bullied as a kid for it. Ilya's feels so completely different. It makes his heart beat a little bit quicker, it makes his lips turn up in a smile almost instantly. He could get used to it.

Shane just scoffs in response and gets out of the car, not bothering to look back. He feels immeasurably smug when the sound of a door closing follows quickly after.

"Maybe you just like Russians," Ilya ponders. "Is that it?"

"I might *stop* liking Russians if you keep running your mouth," Shane groans, unlocking his door and stepping in with Ilya before closing it. It was late, but he didn't want to risk anyone seeing the two of them together. He's immediately pushed up against the door.

"I don't think that's true," Ilya says against the skin of his neck. His lips find the pulse there and he's rewarded with a small keen from Shane. "You have a bed, yes?"

"Yes." Shane ducks his head to catch Ilya's lips and pushes him back toward his neatly made sheets. He pushes frantically at the clothes covering Ilya's frame on the way. "Been wanting to do this all night."

Ilya quickly pulls his sweater over his head, revealing a broad chest covered in cute moles with a dusting of hair leading down into his pants. It's embarrassing how it makes Shane's mouth flood with saliva. When he sits on the bed, he tugs Shane into his lap.

"So pretty like this," Ilya mutters against Shane's lips. His fingers are carded in Shane's smooth, soft strands that seem to fall through Ilya's fingers like water. The sound of his belt clinking barely processes in his brain before Shane's face is pressed up against his clothed length. "Fuck," he groans. "You're desperate for it, aren't you, любимый?"

The smell of Ilya is making Shane's head foggy— it's something deep and manly and so *Ilya* that he can't seem to get his thoughts straight. The chunky sweater is getting in the way of his ministrations and he gets up for a second to undress and quickly fold the clothes over a chair. Ilya watches on with a charmed smile.

Shane's body is smooth and tanned and everything Ilya's teeth have been craving. There's an obvious tent in his black boxers that makes him smirk. Shane straddles his hips again, this time hissing when their erections brush each other's.

"Shit," he groans. "You feel so good." He peppers kisses all over Ilya's face. "How do you feel so good?"

Ilya wraps his legs around Shane before flipping them over and working his way down to his waistband. "I have been waiting for this. Have you?" He darts his tongue out to taste the soft skin there.

"Yes," Shane keens, fingers clutching at his navy sheets.

Ilya tugs his underwear down and throws them behind him, licking his lips when Shane's length smacks up against his own stomach. He's slightly smaller than Ilya, but cut. Everything is trimmed to perfection, which isn't really surprising. "Oh, you're so beautiful even here, Shane," Ilya tells him, letting himself get face to face with the leaking length. He lightly blows on it and smirks when a single bead of precome travels down the shaft. "I think he likes me."

"Stop teasing," Shane rushes out, burying his fingers into Ilya's curls.

When Ilya takes Shane into his mouth, he does it all in one smooth motion until the head is resting against the back of his throat.

"Fuck!" Shane exclaims, feeling himself arch into the wetness of Ilya's mouth, into the heat of his lips. There's a strong pressure at his hips holding him down and when his vision clears, he sees two strong hands gripping his hips and forcing them back into the bed. It's so hot Shane feels himself clench around nothing. It's embarrassing how close he is. "Your mouth..." He can't help the way he grips Ilya's hair and pulls *hard*, but he does wince when he hears a low hiss below him.

"Sorry," Shane pants, the loss of contact making him sound whiny.

"Nonsense. You aren't pulling hard enough, I can take it."

Another apology slips through Shane's lips before he can stop it and Ilya comes off of his length with a loud *pop*. There's something that can't be named in Ilya's gaze and it makes Shane shy. He's been told plenty of times that he apologizes way too much.

"Do not say sorry," Ilya says firmly, hand coming to grasp at the base of Shane's length. He sets a slow rhythm, one that has Shane digging his heels into the mattress. "*I want to hear you.*" He swiped his thumb over the slit of Shane's dick, smirking when Shane throws an arm over his eyes. "You will look, Shane. Or I will stop." He slows down even more, until Shane's hips are trying to fuck up into his fist. It's the hottest thing Ilya has ever seen and probably that he would ever see. "Do not *make* me stop."

"It's too much." The sound of wrecked breathing and skin makes it hard to focus on anything *but* trying not to finish early. Ilya's hands are calloused, evidence that he spends a lot of his free time at the gym. The slight roughness against Shane's skin is making his nerve endings sing, like every single synapse in his brain is firing off at once. All his brain can see is Ilya. "I can't, I've never—"

Ilya.

Ilya.

Ilya.

Ilya with a slightly condescending tone that's making his brain flatline. Ilya with the body like statues of old. Ilya with the beautiful accent that wrapped around Shane's name in a way that sounded biblical. Ilya with his shiny curls and gleaming crucifix that pull attention in whatever room he walks into. Ilya with such sad stories, ones that Shane hopes to hear more of, yet such open smiles for everyone he meets. It's all too much, and he's almost sure if he opens his eyes that this moment will be over. But then Ilya clicks his tongue and really *does* stop. The noise that rips from Shane's chest is absolutely pathetic and he lets Ilya swat away the forearm draped over his eyes.

"Let me see you," Ilya scolds, letting his free hand trace light circles over Shane's heated skin. His other is wrapped just loosely enough around Shane's length to cause his senses to swim. Prying his eyes open is a Herculean effort, but Ilya asked him to and so he did it anyway. There's something about his voice that makes Shane want to obey, like he wants to give in and bare his neck to a predator. He knows in that scenario it makes him the prey and he's almost ashamed at the thrill that shoots down his spine. "Do not hide, Shane. Not from me."

The words are too much and they pull a whimper from Shane's throat, one that he'll surely be embarrassed about later. "I'm sorry," he pants again, forcing his eyes to stay locked with Ilya's in the dim light of the room. He realizes a beat too late that he's just done what Ilya told him not to and a prick of panic stabs at his heart, like maybe he's just ended whatever is going to happen. "Shit, I'm— I know you said—"

"Is okay," Ilya cuts him off, ducking back down to press soft kisses to the soft skin of Shane's inner thigh. His voice is soft and reassuring. "No more apologies, yes?" He nips at the skin playfully before smoothing his tongue over the spot. "You Canadians do it too much."

“You just love to talk, huh?” The question comes out bratty and breathless and Shane feels the rumbles of Ilya’s answering laugh on his heated skin.

“What else should I be doing, котенок?”

He presses open mouthed, sloppy kisses to Shane’s length, tongue catching the wetness that falls. “Tell me, what do you need?”

“Your mouth,” Shane begs, fingers burying themselves in Ilya’s curls.

“Here?” Ilya presses a featherlight kiss on Shane’s hip.

“You know where.”

“Of course, of course.” He presses another teasing kiss to the middle of Shane’s chest.
“Here?”

“*Ilya*,” Shane warns.

“I cannot read minds,” Ilya scoffs lightly. Teasing Shane until he’s squirming might just be his new favorite thing on this planet. “You will have to tell me *exactly* where you want my mouth. Is the only way I will understand.” He flutters his eyelashes, “I am not fluent in English, you know.”

“I need your mouth on my dick,” Shane mutters, blush high on his cheeks.

“And what do we say?”

The silence stretches between them for a second. Ilya gently pushes himself up and brushes a stray hair from Shane’s face. There’s no expectation in his gaze, like he’s trying to make it known that Shane doesn’t *have* to say the words, not if he doesn’t want to. The thing is... he absolutely wants to.

“Please, I need your mouth on my dick,” he says, forcing more confidence in his tone. “*Sir*.”

The words land instantly, Ilya’s eyes darkening as he lowers his head back down to Shane’s aching length. “Good boy.” He places Shane’s hand back in his hair and swallows him down to the base.

The rhythm is hot and slick and Shane feels dizzy with want. There’s no way he’s going to be able to last that much longer, as embarrassing as it is. The sight of Ilya’s pink lips wrapped around his dick with spit pooling at the corners of his mouth is enough to make Shane want to explode. His tongue presses just on the sensitive underside of Shane’s head.

“Don’t stop,” he cries, breath stuttering in his chest. The white hot pleasure is building in his belly fast and he can’t help but arch into it and chase the feeling, hips rocking. “I’m so close —”

A large hand comes up to grab at his pec, massaging there for a second before Ilya comes off of him. He smirks at the whimper, “Breathe, котенок. It will feel better, I promise.”

If there's one thing Shane Hollander can do, it's follow directions. He's done it since he was a toddler, wobbling in skates on the frozen lake behind the house. So when Ilya tells him to breathe, he forces his diaphragm to expand and the rush of oxygen to his brain makes his vision blur at the edges. He hadn't even realized he was holding his breath. There's a light pressure on his rim and Shane feels himself bear down on nothing.

"Is okay?"

Shane thinks the world of Ilya for asking him, even in such a moment like this one.

"It's perfect, *fuck*. I won't be able to stop, Ilya, *please*—"

It's when the finger dips shallowly inside him that Shane falls apart with a string of swears that he wouldn't be able to recount if he tried. His brain feels floaty and not fully there, a peaceful hum settling over his senses. Ilya drags a finger through the mess on his stomach and lifts a finger to his mouth. It's *obscene* and Shane feels a small aftershock go through him at the sight.

"You did so well," Ilya tells him, brushing an errant hair from Shane's face. The praise makes Shane preen like a flower in sunlight. He goes to stand, smiling softly when Shane stops him with a small whine. "I will be back, don't worry."

He finds a washcloth and runs it under warm water before running it over Shane's stomach, cleaning the stickiness of release from his sensitive skin. The way Shane's eyes flutter closed for a second at the gentle touch is enough to make Ilya forget about his own hardness; he's content to tuck himself back into his underwear and just cuddle him until they fall asleep. Ilya knows there will be more times for this, he's not anywhere near done with Shane Hollander.

"The bed is messy," Shane sighs, eyes still half shut. He lets himself be pulled back towards Ilya's chest anyways.

"I just sucked your soul out through your body and *this* is what you are worried about?" Ilya questions, a low laugh smothered by the back of Shane's neck. "Should I be offended?" Shane was just so *Shane*, and it never failed to charm Ilya even more.

"Two things can be true at once," Shane murmurs, pushing himself back into Ilya. There's a hardness there that Shane definitely hasn't forgotten about, even if he's completely wrung out. "You didn't...?"

Ilya just tsks in response. "Do not worry about me, there is no rush."

Shane knows that Ilya really means the words but can't help but push himself back even more, this time purposefully grinding on him. There's a small hiss at the shell of his ear.

"Shane—"

"My thighs," Shane suggest airily. Their fingers are intertwined and resting on the middle of his chest and he feels so *warm*. He's had sex before, but this just felt different. Shane was

warm and content from head to toe and feels himself slipping in and out of space. Ilya at his back is his anchor; without him Shane is sure he would start to float away. “I want you too, Ilya. I’ve been good, right?”

A breath puffs out against his neck. “Yes. More than good.” He tightens his grip of Shane’s hand knowing that he’ll break if asked again. “Ты невероятный.” The words come out quieter, more vulnerable. Speaking his native tongue gives him room to say things he’s not yet ready to say for fear of what they would set into motion in his chest. Ilya is already too close to that feeling, the one that had been niggling at the back of his mind since the very first day.

“Then give this to me.” Again, even stronger this time. “I want it. I want *you*.”

And who is Ilya to refuse such a beautiful man?

He lets go of Shane’s hand, this time cupping it under his mouth. “Spit.” He’s half expecting a complaint about how dirty it is, but Shane follows his directions almost before they fell from his lips. This night has been a study in Shane Hollander: what he likes, what he dislikes, what he sounds like when he comes. The way his freckles bunch up in the exact moment the pleasure overtakes him. It’s all too much and too little and Ilya can’t wait to discover everything about the man in front of him.

The slick slide of his length trapped between Shane’s strong thighs is overwhelming. Ilya can’t bring himself to look away, even if the sight has him closer, quicker than he’s ever been. Stamina was always a point of pride with other partners, but that doesn’t seem to be the case here. Not right now, anyways.

“Shane,” he gasps. “You were made for me, yes? Made to be used by me.” His voice is tight, his breath starting to quicken already. He sucks a love bite at the base of Shane’s neck and revels in the noise that fills the small room.

“Only you,” Shane breathes. His dick twitches between his legs, trying valiantly to get hard again even though he’s completely spent. Sex was usually pretty stressful for Shane. His mind viewed it as more of a necessary chore, more often than not just choosing to get himself off rather than involving another person. It had never felt like *this*. Burning, urgent, touches that flatlined every comprehensible thought in his brain. He’s never felt pure want like this before. It’s like a drug. “Take everything from me, Ilya.”

“Next time, I will keep you in bed all day,” Ilya tells him, words rushing out as he rapidly feels his crest approaching. “I will take you apart with my teeth, котенок. Until there’s no one else in your head, until I have ruined you for everyone else.”

Shane almost lets slip that he’s already done that. It feels too big for this moment, too revealing. Inside he doubts that anyone will make him feel the way Ilya does. They’re different in every way, yet a perfect match.

Instead he whispers, “I’ll let you.” Shane squeezes at Ilya’s hand, hoping all of the words he really wants to say are clear.

It's the quiet earnestness in Shane's voice that sends him over the edge, painting beautiful thighs and navy sheets in his release. His nails rake down Shane's pec, and his teeth sink into the soft skin at the back of his neck. All he can see is Shane, all he can taste is Shane. Every single one of his senses is completely overwhelmed.

Shane.

Shane.

Shane.

His limbs feel like jelly and his eyes feel droopy when he tries to extract himself to get another washcloth.

"Stay," Shane mutters sleepily. He can't bring himself to worry about the mess, not when the solid line of Ilya's body is secure to his back. It's having the same effect that his weighted blanket always did. He's slipping into darkness when he hears a gentle reply.

"Where else would I go?"

Chapter End Notes

translations:

-Ты даже не представляешь, насколько я тобой одержим: you have no idea how obsessed i am with you

-Je voulais t'embrasser depuis que tu m'as récupéré: i've wanted to kiss you ever since you picked me up

-любимый: sweetheart

-котенок: kitten

-Ты невероятный: you were perfect in every way

Chapter 5: kitten

Chapter Notes

smaller chapter in preparation for the meeting between all of them! hope y'all enjoy <3

comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! come yell with me about these two on twt, @yalooblueteebaa

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

The classroom is quiet and tense, only the sounds of pencils scratching against paper and the clock ticking away the time filled the space. The occasional frustrated sigh or nervous clicking of pen and pencil tops made it hard for Shane to focus, and he quietly thanked god that he was on his last question.

How does the novel expose the double standards between men (Stiva) and women (Anna) regarding adultery?

Would Shane consider himself an expert on Russian literature? Absolutely not. But, he does know a metric fuck tonne about Anna Karenina. The book had quickly become a favorite of his, Tolstoy as well. Maybe it had to do with it being the first book he really spoke to Ilya about, maybe it didn't. Shane definitely knew that the fervor with which he devoured it once he opened his mind was all him. There was something to be said about how cute he found it when Ilya's eyes would light up at the mention of the book, always so eager to talk about the trials and tribulations of one of history's most famous stories.

Ilya sits at the front of the lecture hall, laptop open and fingers flying across the keyboard, eyes occasionally flicking up to observe for any cheating students. He would have absolutely no issue failing them if he caught them, Shane knew. Ilya was deathly serious about teaching this course and had made it very clear, to Shane's complete offense, that he would not go easy on grading just because they were fucking each other.

"You think I can't pass on my own?"

"I never said that," Ilya teased, pinching Shane's bare hip where his hand lay. "You are very smart boy, Shane."

There's a goading tone in his voice and Shane knows it and yet still can't help but rise to the bait. He flips around to meet Ilya's gaze and tampers down the smile on his face.

"That line sounds rehearsed," he huffs. "You fuck all your students?"

"Define all."

"You're an asshole," Shane laughed, playfully pushing Ilya away.

"Yes. You like."

"Unfortunately."

The early morning sun strengthens to something warmer, more full, as it falls through the slats of the blinds. Shane finds that if it hits Ilya's hair just right, it looks like spun gold. His fingers scratch lightly at the man's scalp, smiling when Ilya lets his eyes drift shut with a satisfied hum. The only sound they can hear is their synced breathing. Shane is almost drifting away when he hears him.

"No," Ilya says lowly, lips resting against Shane's neck.

"Hm?"

"I never fuck students." The words are stronger, like he really wants Shane to know that this is the truth. For some reason, Ilya was always guarded with his sexual history when Shane asked, but not with this. Shane would know he wasn't just a notch in the bedpost, and he wouldn't even have time to stress and think he was. "Is my rule."

"I hate to break it to you..."

"Only slow hockey player who shows up late to class," he puffs a raspberry against Shane's skin, holding him tight when he squirms. "And who likes to only have blue pens on tests—"

"They contrast better with white!"

"And who pretends to not cry when Anna Karenina kills herself—"

"Fuck off, I saw you crying too!"

"And who has these pretty freckles that like to distract me when I am trying to teach—"

"Well," Shane says, shyly. "That one can't be helped."

"Ah? You know this person?" Ilya teases, thumb brushing the very same freckles he spoke so much about. "Let them know that I fuck them. They are my... how do you say in english? Hall pass?"

"Who taught you that?" Shane asks instead of being embarrassing and nuzzling into Ilya's chest. "I know him a little. Any other message to pass along?"

"There are big words in my head when I think of this person," Ilya says gently. "In here too." He takes Shane's hand and puts it right on his heart— a heart that was beating a frantic rhythm too fast for what was supposed to be a slow morning. "He feels it, yes? I am not always good at saying these things."

Shane's heart stutters in his chest with the sweetness of it all, with how overwhelming this feeling truly is. There's nothing that could've prepared him for Ilya Rozanov— Shane knows

that now. In the short time they've known each other, his entire life has been changed for the better. Ilya showed him daily what it was like to be accepted, to be included, to be loved. Being with Ilya was like cleaning your glasses after stepping out of a rainstorm. Everything felt clearer. The very same words sat in his chest too, never been said to anyone else. To be fair, no one else was him.

Ilya's skin is warm under his hand as he lets it travel up to hold his cheek, running a thumb over the mole he loves so much. He traces strong eyebrows, the sharp line of his cupid's bow that Shane probably thinks of way too often. An errant curl falls onto Ilya's forehead, and Shane gently pushes it back, tucking it away with the rest of his golden brown hair.

"He feels it," Shane says quietly, strongly.

A giddy smile stretches Ilya's lips, revealing his perfect teeth. It's something Shane doesn't see everyday, his Ilya preferring smirks and hidden smiles more than full-on beams. Something about the look steals the air from Shane's lungs for a second. Their hearts must be beating the same panicked tattoo now.

"I don't think..." Shane starts. "I don't think he's good at saying those things either." And he wasn't. So much of Shane was quiet, focused, shy. He barely knew how to navigate anything that wasn't hockey, let alone the l word. "But, from what I've heard," he clears his throat, playing back into the joke. "His friends say that he's just a little bit obsessed with you."

Ilya wiggles his eyebrows, "I get it. Who would not be? I am me."

"You're a dick."

The memory makes Shane tuck a small smile away as he scribbles his answer down on the page, sparing a quick glance up to Ilya at the front of the class, who was already seemed to be looking at him. He playfully taps his watch on his wrist and cringes, openly teasing Shane even here. It's all he can do to not let out a giggle. Instead he pulls out his phone slowly under his desk and types out a quick message.

Shane: Fuck you.

Ilya picks up his phone at the front and smirks down at the screen and typing a response.

Ilya: Later ;)

Shane's done with the question but stays seated, fake slipping through the pages like he's looking over his responses. Really, he's willing his half-hard boner away. It's pathetic.

Ilya watches Shane collect his things much too slowly and check his test three times before he almost has to cover his mouth to stop the laugh threatening to come up. He slaps the finished exam on Ilya's desk with a little more force than necessary and Ilya looks up at him from under his eyelashes in the way he knows makes Shane *very* forgiving.

"It was a pleasure to have you in my class this semester, Mr. Hollander," he says quietly, rolling the last name over his tongue. "Did you enjoy yourself?"

“You’re *so* lucky TAs don’t have *Rate My Professor*,” Shane replies, huffy. “I’d review-bomb you if I could.”

“I do not know what these words mean.” Ilya can feel his smile start to spread even wider. “Enjoy your winter break. Maybe we will see each other around, yes?”

They had plans for that night. Ilya was just being a little shit, as always.

“If you’re lucky,” Shane grumbles.

Ilya sticks out a hand and lowers his tone, “I will miss you in class. You were my favorite student.”

Shane tries not to laugh, shaking Ilya’s hand and letting their fingers linger together for a beat too long. “I better *stay* your favorite student, Ilya.”

“Mr. Rozanov,” Ilya corrects, just to be a dick. He actually hated when students addressed him as anything other than his first name. It felt too professional.

Shane just rolled his eyes. “Mr. Rozanov.”

He leaves the classroom and immediately pulls out his phone.

Shane: We’re still on for later, right?

Ilya: Yes. You have checked with me three times today.

Shane’s cheek flame. He’s nervous, sue him! It was an important night.

Shane: My mom kind of hates people being late.

Ilya: So I am assuming you never tell her about this class then?

Shane: Dick.

Ilya: You want mine, yes, I am aware. **Ilya:** While I am working is too much, Shane. What will I do with you?

Shane: I can think of plenty of things.

Ilya: Someone is getting better at flirting!

Ilya: I will pack exams and then head to your apartment to pick you up. Do not worry.

Ilya is worried. Ilya is scared shitless, actually. He’s slept with plenty of people, almost enough for them to start blurring together, but he’s never been introduced to a single partner’s parent. A large reason for that is he didn’t really *want* to be. He’s been in and out of strangers’ beds ever since he got to Canada; his foreign accent and extroverted mask did a lot of the heavy lifting once he got to McGill. Ilya wasn’t a dick, contrary to popular belief; he would make sure his partners were satisfied at the end of the night and that they got the

aftercare they needed before politely dipping out while playfully dismissing requests for his number. He's built up quite the reputation as a ladies man.

Sex was fun, sex felt good. He was good at sex. Emotions, not so much. So when Shane had come into his life and completely bulldozed through every single wall Ilya had painstakingly built for years, he found himself willing to do things that once wouldn't have even crossed his mind. Like being exclusive with one person. Like meeting said person's *parents*. Shane loved his parents *so* much—Ilya could tell in the way he smiled when he talked about them and how his tone always bled into something purer, younger. It made him boyish, which in turn made Ilya fall just that little bit more. It's something he can't fully wrap his mind around, if he's honest. Grigori had never spared a single good word about Ilya, instead choosing to demean and belittle his youngest son until Ilya absolutely hated him. It was a complicated thing, their relationship, and the distance between Montreal and Moscow hadn't helped. Irina had been the best mother she could have been with the smothering darkness that always clawed at her mind. She had protected and loved Ilya as much as her broken heart allowed, always making sure that he knew that he had plenty of things to offer the world and the people around him. That his worth wasn't tied to such a silly thing as hockey, but to how he treated the people around him. He loved his mother and always would, but she was out of reach. He hated his father but was afraid that one day he would begin to look like him, leaving only the two of them to understand each other.

His mind spiraled as he packed away the finished exams in his bag and hurried to his car, planning to pick up flowers on the way to Shane's place for his mother. It had been years since Ilya had been able to talk to his own mother, but he knew better than to show up empty handed, no matter how many times Shane had insisted that she didn't need anything. He had refused to tell Ilya her favorite flower.

"You just need to bring yourself," Shane had said, planting a sweet kiss on Ilya's cheek. "They're excited to meet you, you know."

"She does not like flowers?"

"She does, but—"

"Then I bring flowers."

His tone had left no room for argument and Shane had just rolled his eyes and snuggled closer on the couch. Win.

The florist was packed to the brim, probably a consequence of buying so close to the holidays. The smell flooded Ilya's senses, and it immediately brought him to one of his most cherished memories of his mother—one he looked back on often when the ache in his chest was simply too much to bear.

He must've been six or seven, hair much more golden than it was now and heart not nearly as heavy. Irina's hand is soft and warm in his small one, so different from when he last saw it. Her face is softened at the edges from time now; Ilya is dreading the day when her features aren't distinguishable anymore. The warm air of Russian summer fills his lungs as his mother tugs him through the fields on the outskirts of the city. Wildflowers grew there, her favorite.

“Ilyusha,” she says, bending to pick a purple flower from the ground. “Do you like them?”

“Yes, mama,” he replies, always eager to please. It wasn’t a lie, though. Wildflowers reminded him of his mother at her best: bright, beautiful, and everlasting. She just smiles, brushing the soft petals under his nose so he can breathe the sweet smell. “Do you?”

She tucks the purple flower behind Ilya’s ear, something small and broken flickering in her gaze before she schools her expression back to one of happiness. The action makes something in Ilya’s chest clench. “They are free, my love.”

The words break something in him even then, although he’s too young to understand what. He’s taken over by a fierce need to hug his mother, and before either of them know it, they’re laying in the soft grass and letting their loud laughs leave them on the breeze. Ilya plucks a flower from the ground and tucks it in Irina’s soft honeyed locks.

“We match now,” he giggles, for a second before tucking his face into her neck. “You look so pretty, mama.”

“Of course,” Irina says quietly, rubbing gentle circles on his back. “I look like you.”

The bell *tinkling* softly above the door in the shop pulls him from the bittersweet memory and Ilya brushes away the tears at his waterline. Turns out time doesn’t heal all wounds— this is one that he’s sure will never really close, one that would be tender for the rest of his days.

There’s a small bucket full of wildflowers of all colors in the corner of the store, still relatively full compared to all the other kinds. Maybe they don’t match winter, but Ilya knows that they’re the only option. He gathers the delicate stems in his hand before lowering his head to take a deep breath.

“You’d like him, mama,” he mutters into the blooms.

And when he takes the bundle to the front counter, the only ribbon left is the one that was the exact shade of Irina’s eyes, and all Ilya can do is smile. It’s moments like these where he’s entirely sure his mother is with him. He pats the cross through his shirt.

The drive to Shane’s apartment is short and Ilya gently places the bouquet in the backseat near his own duffle before unlocking the door. Shane is already opening the door to his building with a large backpack on his strong shoulders. Not for the first time and definitely not for the last, Ilya finds himself admiring the line of his strong thighs encased in well loved sweatpants, the swell of his chest under his favorite dri-fit shirt. Shane looks cozy and it makes Ilya want to kiss him senseless.

“Sorry, elevator was slow,” Shane starts, opening the back door to shove his backpack in next to Ilya’s. His eyes immediately lock onto the flowers and he stops the swell of affection behind his ribs. Ilya is always Ilya. He slides into the front seat and buckles before turning to look at Ilya. “What kind of flowers are—”

Ilya brought their lips together before he could finish the sentence, fingers sliding through the short hairs at the base of Shane’s neck. His eyes widen for a split second before fluttering

shut and pushing back against Ilya over the middle console. There's a smile against lips, neither able to tell from who. When they split, Shane puffs out a breath, cheeks warm from the attention.

"Hi."

"Hi," Ilya replies, light eyes sparkling with mirth.

"What was that for?"

I want to kiss my boyfriend, his mind supplies. Maybe we aren't official, but to me, that's what you are. You agree, don't you?

"Every time you apologize, I will kiss you," Ilya says, fighting the smile on his lips. "It will make you stop, yes?"

"Might make the problem worse," Shane giggles. "Reverse psychology or something like that."

"Well, we will have to test the theory. It is the only way to truly know."

He pulls out from the curb, already following the directions on his phone to Shane's parents cottage. Now that Shane is next to him, he feels more settled.

"Scientific." The words are light, the smile evident in the sound. He grabs at Ilya's hand where it rests on the gearshift and brings it to his lap. "You feeling alright? It's been a busy day."

"I am okay," Ilya reassures, giving Shane's hand a quick squeeze. "Long day, but good day." He brings their hands up to his lips. "Now, an even better day."

The car is filled with the gentle smell of his favorite flowers mixed with something else clean and so deeply Shane. It unravels a small knot in his shoulders.

As Montreal gets smaller and smaller in his rearview mirror and the time to the cottage lessens, he starts to get stressed. What if they didn't like him? What if this was the day that made Shane finally realize that Ilya didn't deserve him? His fingers tighten on the wheel. What if he's driving himself to his own end?

"Hey," Shane says lowly, brushing a thumb over the pulse point on Ilya's neck. It beats hard against the pad of his thumb. "Where'd you go?"

Ilya doesn't see the point in lying. "I think I am a little nervous."

Shane's heart squeezes at the sheepish expression gracing Ilya's features. He's always so self-assured, so confident in himself and what he brings to the table. He spent an entire semester listening to Ilya give hour and a half long lectures in his second language, for gods sake. The idea that meeting Shane's parents is what's making him falter is so *sweet* that Shane doesn't quite know what to do.

“You’re smart, you’re handsome,” Shane lists, matter-of-factly. The way Ilya’s lip ticks up in the corner shyly is worth every bit of embarrassment Shane feels at voicing his ever present thoughts. “You have goals. Everyone you meet falls in love with you, Ilya. This won’t be any different, okay? I’m sure of it.”

His breath hitches at what Shane implied.

Everyone who meets you falls in love with you.

It was the closest they’ve come to saying the words and Shane hadn’t even realized. While his ears ring, Shane is rubbing small circles into the back of his hand. It works wonders to ground Ilya back in the moment.

“Be careful, I might think you like me.”

“God forbid.” Shane smirks, leaning his head against the cool window, praying it’ll help tamper down his blush.

To be honest, Shane is starting to feel jittery as well. He’s never introduced anyone to either of his parents, and he barely ever *really* came out. Shane loved his parents deeply, and even more, he truly *liked* them. Most guys his age wouldn’t choose to spend spare time with their parents or to take vacations with them anymore— not Shane. They were his two favorite people in the world, and quite possibly the two people who understood him best. There’s no doubt in his mind that they would be supportive of Shane dating, and he’s not nervous at all of Ilya making a good first impression. But, it does feel like a major step in their relatively new relationship, and this was going to be something new for everyone involved.

“I didn’t even think you could *get* nervous,” Shane laughs. Somehow it humanizes Ilya even more in his mind.

“Do not tell Russia. They will not let me back in.”

Shane’s ears perk up in the way they always do when Ilya mentions Russia. The man was so proud of being from his country, but kept most of his history from there close to his chest. All that did was make Shane endlessly curious. But maybe that’s because learning about Ilya has quickly become his favorite thing in the world.

“What was it like? Russia, I mean.”

Shane won’t push if Ilya decides to not talk about it— he never does. He prepares for a gentle rebuff when the silence stretches a beat too long, an apology and reassurance heavy on his tongue when Ilya finally speaks.

“Cold,” Ilya tells him evenly.

“Worse than Canada?”

Yes, he thinks. The difference is that Moscow doesn’t have you. It doesn’t have the warmth of your lips against mine. It can’t.

“Mm. Not worse, just different. Moscow is busy and loud, but is beautiful in its own way.”

Ilya felt a weird sort of sadness on reminiscing on his home, but it felt nice to not have it bottled up. His relationship with his country would always be a complicated one.

“I’d like to see it,” Shane tells him, smiling at the way Ilya’s eyes soften at the words. “It would be nice to see where you grew up.”

Ilya doesn’t have the words to express the blooming in his chest, so he just brings Shane’s hand to his lips and presses a chaste kiss there.

“We can go to yours first. I remember you said is not far from Montreal.”

“About two hours or so, yeah.”

“Ottawa, yes?” It’s a simple callback to one of their earlier conversations, but Ilya sees the dopey smile that spread over Shane’s lips at him remembering. “Tell me about it.”

“It’s beautiful,” Shane starts. “My parents live there most of the year so I try to get back as much as hockey and school lets me. It’s big but... not really like Montreal. The vibe is completely different.”

“They have hockey team?”

“The Centaurs.” Shane nods. His childhood team would always have a place in his heart and it was sad to see them losing so consistently. “They’re kind of on a losing streak though. But I grew up going to all the games with my parents.”

“It was always hockey for you?”

“Always. My mom put skates on me when I was three,” Shane laughs. “I felt like Bambi, but then when I got the hang of it it felt like I was flying. Caught the bug then and there.”

“There is bugs in winter here?”

“No— it’s just a saying.” Shane tells him, the words coming out much too fond. “Means I was obsessed from the first day.”

“Ah, so I catch Shane Hollander bug then?”

Shane’s heart explodes in his chest and he has to cover his face for fear of what it would reveal. Ilya has this way of completely disarming him with the simplest of words, and now isn’t an exception. Maybe it’s because Shane has never really been flirted with, but he suspects it’s because it’s just Ilya. The man next to him makes him absolutely giddy.

“Come back, котенок.” He tugs Shane’s hand away from his face and is glad when they go without struggle.

“You can’t just say things like that,” Shane mumbles shyly, his face heated from the attention. His ears tune in to the familiar nickname that falls from Ilya’s lips. There’s plenty and since

they're in Russian, Shane doesn't have a single clue what any of them mean. He knows how they make him feel, though. And that's... well, that's much too gooey to ever mention aloud. "What do you keep calling me?"

Something akin to the feeling of winning a hard fought game in overtime lights up Shane's insides. He almost has to pinch himself to confirm what he's seeing is real. Because Ilya, his over confident and loud Ilya, is *blushing*. And not just a dusting on the tops of his sharp cheekbones either— Shane had seen that a few times and it made him kiss Ilya senseless without fail. No, this, this was full on beet-red. It starts at the base of his throat and spreads up his face, leaving the tips of his ears a deep scarlett. His mouth is opening and closing like a fish gasping for air.

"Are you *embarrassed*?" Shane asks him, voice too high to to hide the pleased laugh that's working it's way up. "Now I *really* need to know."

"Russian is too hard, you do not need to worry about it," Ilya rushes out. "Is nothing." His fingers drum a random beat against the steering wheel. "What are your parent's names?" The forced casualness in the question makes Shane bark out a laugh.

"It's actually really cute how you think you're getting out of this, Ilya."

Shane never felt like he had the upper hand in situations like these, but this feels like crack. He gets why Ilya gets off on teasing him.

"Getting out of what? I am not *in* anything."

"You know that's not— stop stalling!"

There's a mumble that disappears into the low music from the radio.

"Louder, please," Shane teases.

"...Small cat."

"Small cat? What does that have to do with," Shane starts, before it all connects in his head. There's something akin to the sound of a car crash ringing in his ears and the flush on his cheeks is definitely back if the suffocating heat of the space is anything to go by. "You've been calling me kitten?" He croaks out, throat all of a sudden too dry. There's a distant pulsing heat in his belly.

"Do you hate it?" Ilya asks genuinely, resigning himself to his fate. There's plenty of other things he can call Shane, so there would be no problem if the man wasn't a fan of the petname.

Shane feels like he might like it a little too *much* actually, even if it makes him feel slightly insane. He almost wants Ilya to pull over at the next rest stop just so he can kiss him until neither of them can breathe. But, that would be embarrassing. So, like any other completely normal person, Shane waits till they hit a little bit of traffic before throwing all caution to the wind.

The few minutes of stilted silence are unsettling for Ilya. It feels like he's been found out, like the depth of his infatuation was completely laid bare. The traffic in front of him has slowed, and he takes the opportunity to turn to Shane.

"Is okay if you don't like—"

In a flash, Shane's hand is on Ilya's jaw, fingers just dipping into his curls. He crushes their lips together in something altogether too urgent.

"Shut up," he gasps against Ilya's lips. The car jerks to a stop like Ilya had just put his foot through the floor. There's a pleased hum that sings through him and he's not sure which one of them it's coming from. There's only Ilya and his soft pink lips and hot tongue licking into Shane's mouth. And, well, the countless cars surrounding them and waiting for Ilya to pull forward in traffic.

A sharp horn makes Shane jump, hitting his head on the roof of the car.

"Shit!" He curses, rubbing the spot. "Oh my god, Ilya, please move the car."

There's a silly grin on Ilya's kiss slick lips as he sticks his middle finger out of the window to the cars laying on their horns behind him.

Chapter End Notes

translations:

-КОТЕНОК: kitten

Chapter 6: first impressions

Chapter Notes

little longer of a wait between chapters, my bad! work has been super crazy and sometimes the words simply don't come to my brain. we're winding down on this story now, the next chapter will most likely be the last. i'm so appreciative of everyone who has taken the time out to read this story, really. it's quickly become my most read and most kudos fic, which is absolutely INSANE.

hope y'all enjoy the chapter! slight TW for talking about Shane's diet.

as always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! if you wanna scream with me about these two, my twt is @yalooblueeteebaa <3

translations will be at the end

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

Warm yellow light from the cottage flooded out into twilight of late afternoon. It was woodsy, the path to get to the house mostly packed gravel and dirt that seemed to crunch ever so loudly in Ilya's panicked ears. The traffic hadn't made it better, either. He had been reminded of the text that Shane had sent him earlier about his mother not liking lateness. It made the back of his neck sweat. Was he already making a bad impression?

Inside, he can see Yuna setting a small table with utensils and placemats, an idle smile on her face as she talked to David, who seemed to be setting up music to listen to. Two half empty wine glasses rested on the table. The headlights must've given them away because as soon as she saw the car, she waved eagerly through the large front window.

"Forewarning," Shane starts. "She's a lot but she means well."

"Mm," Ilya hums distractedly, unable to release his fingers from the wheel.

"Ilya." He gently takes Ilya's face in his hands and turns his head before pressing a sweet kiss to the corner of his mouth. His words come out small, quiet. "Would it make you feel any better if I told you I was nervous too?"

Ilya chases Shane's lips for another kiss, letting his shoulders sag for a second before breaking away. "Why would that make me feel better? I feel *worse* now."

"I'm not nervous because of *you*," he clarifies, thankful when he sees Ilya relax slightly. Shane is slowly prying Ilya's fingers from the steering wheel one by one, massaging them into submission until he can interlock their fingers. "I've just... never brought anyone home before."

A beat of silence, and then:

“I have never been *brought* home,” Ilya confesses lowly, eyes downcast at their joined hands.

It’s an admission that Shane has to force himself not to react to. He knew a little but about Ilya’s history around campus now, and was well aware that there was no shortage of people in and out of his bed in the years he had been at McGill. Shane was... well. Shane was as okay with that as the ugly green monster in his chest would allow him to be. But the idea that not a single person had thought Ilya good enough to bring home almost makes him angry. Or maybe Ilya didn’t think himself good enough. Either way, Shane feels the need to fiercely defend him for it.

“Their loss,” he says firmly. “We’ll do this together, okay? Just be yourself and they’ll love you. It’s hard not to.”

It’s also hard to not fully say those words aloud to Ilya himself, but Shane has been more than scared about the depths of his feelings since the very beginning. There is no doubt in his mind that it’ll happen sooner rather than later, but for now he’ll hide behind these less than subtle words and hope that Ilya understands.

“You say I am asshole all the time.”

“And yet here we are,” Shane laughs, gesturing out the windshield to the cottage he grew up coming to. “It got you somewhere, didn’t it?”

Ilya’s eyes dance over Shane’s features for a second before he lets out a slightly more reassured, “It did.”

Yuna and David are already standing on the front steps, quietly observing as Ilya and Shane get out of the car and grab their bags. She rushes forward to pull her son into a bear hug.

“Oh, I’ve missed you so much!” She tells him, pressing a kiss to his cheek and laughing when he tries to push her away. “We haven’t seen you in so long!”

“You came to the away-game we had against Ottawa a few weeks ago,” he grumbles, trying to tamp down the smile on his face. Growing up an only child meant that his parents were the only people in his world for a very long time. They were who he trusted most in the world, and under all the fake sighs of annoyance as his dad joins the hug, he really did miss them too.

“And who’s this?” Yuna asks lightly as she lets go, brushing a stray hair behind her ear. Ilya is standing too straight, like he’s scared to move and mess up. Something in her chest immediately softens.

“Mom, Dad, this is Ilya,” Shane tells them.

“Nice to meet you, Ilya,” David tells him warmly, putting a hand out to shake that Ilya quickly takes.

“Thank you for inviting me to your home,” Ilya tells them. His parents eyes widen at the thick accent for a second, probably curious about how Shane and him had met each other. “I brought you flowers, Mrs. Hollander.” He holds out the bouquet and is pleased when Yuna’s face breaks into a smile.

“Honey, how sweet!” She takes them and smells the petals. “I love wildflowers. How’d you find them? It’s usually harder now since the weather is getting colder.”

“I cannot give up my secrets.” He shrugs, putting a finger to his lips. “Shane said you like flowers.”

“I do,” she nods, pulling Ilya into a quick hug. It doesn’t escape her notice that he’s tense for a second before his body seems to relax into it. “And *he* hasn’t bought me any in forever, would you believe?”

“Shame on you,” Ilya tuts at Shane, who just rolls his eyes. David tugs the bag from his son’s shoulder and laughs. “A mother *this* beautiful deserves flowers every day of the week, Shane.”

“Oh, I like him,” she stage whispers, loud enough for everyone to hear. It makes Ilya *beam*.

“Watch out, kid,” David grins. “I’ll think you’re trying to steal my wife with that talk.”

The warmth that spreads through Shane’s chest as he watches his two most treasured people in the world accept Ilya is something he’s never felt before. It confirms everything he’s too scared to say out loud and makes him fall deeper and deeper into Ilya’s orbit. Any lingering jitters he had earlier are gone. He had been right; they already love him, because it’s impossible not to.

“Come in, it’s starting to get cold and I want to put these in water,” Yuna says, patting Ilya’s back before tugging her cardigan closer. “Shane can give you the tour while dinner finishes up. We’ve got around thirty minutes or so.”

Ilya’s stomach decides *that’s* the moment to let out an embarrassingly loud growl. He had been too nervous to eat anything substantial all day and it was finally catching up to him.

“There’s pasta on the stove,” David laughs, eyes crinkling at the corners with mirth. “Nothing fancy, I’m afraid.”

“It sounds perfect.”

Ilya forces his mind to not linger on the fact that this would be the first home cooked meal he’s had in a long while. Even longer when he thinks of the last time he tasted his *own* mother’s cooking— ten years at least. Longing pangs in his heart, a dull ache that is only marginally better than the shooting pain when he thinks of his mother in the past tense. It helps that he’s surrounded by such obvious, loud signs of affection from Shane and his parents, though. Ilya had only ever gotten that from one parent, and even his mother, with her ever-engulfing love, couldn’t balance out the utter contempt that radiated off of his father when he looked at Ilya.

He shakes the thought away as they cross the threshold of the house. Grigory won't ruin this for him.

"Excuse the mess," Yuna tells him over his shoulder. "We only got here yesterday ourselves and haven't had the time to fully settle in yet."

The house was perfectly clean. Ilya almost had to laugh.

"I see where you get it from," he says out of the side of his mouth to Shane, who just rolls his eyes.

"Shut up," he laughs, tugging Ilya towards the stairs. "I don't hear you complaining when you come over to my dorm."

"I am always distracted," Ilya mumbles against his ear, chasing him up the stairs.
"Obviously."

There's pictures of Shane from when he was a kid lining the wall. One where he must've been a toddler— with too-big skates on his feet and a wide smile on his face as he stood on a frozen lake. One where he sat on David's shoulders outside of what Ilya can only assume is the arena where the Centaurs play. One where a graduation cap sat slightly off kilter on his head as he shot the camera a thumbs up, his diploma held in his free hand. The last was what made Ilya's step falter. It was what looked like a professional shot of Shane, a Team Canada national hockey team jersey on his back, standing on the top of the podium with a gold medal hanging around his neck. He didn't look much younger than he was now.

There were unshed tears on his waterline, making his already beautiful brown eyes sparkle against the flash of the camera. His black hair was shorter than it was now, and drenched in sweat, plastered to his forehead. There was a bouquet of flowers in his arms and the Canadian flag loomed big in the background. Shane wasn't the most expressive person Ilya has ever met, not by far; most of his emotions were found in the little things his face did without him really ever knowing. A small twitch of his eyebrows, the way his mouth pinched slightly when he was stressed, the way his eyes lit up when someone made him happy.

But *this* photo?

It laid every single emotion bare on Shane's features. The relief, the elation, the *pride*. It was brimming out of him and it made him *glow*. Ilya always knew Shane would make something of hockey— there was never a doubt in his mind about it. This only confirmed his thoughts. Shane Hollander was put on this earth to play hockey, and ice hockey would never be the same for it.

"That was World Juniors," Shane says, resting his head on Ilya's shoulder. "Three years ago now."

"You are beautiful," Ilya breathes, eyes never straying from the photo. He can't even bring himself to joke, not with the way his breath was knocked out of his chest. If he looked to the side he would see how Shane's own eyes trace Ilya's profile indulgently before ducking his head at the praise.

“It was one of the best nights of my life,” he admits. “Russia gave us a run for our money, you know. They always do.” He tugs at Ilya’s hand to continue up the stairs and is happy when he goes without issue.

Ilya smirked. “Of course, we are country of superior skaters.”

“You’re outnumbered is what you are,” Shane laughs, rolling his eyes. “Three Hollanders to one Rozanov, I’d quit while you’re ahead.”

When he opens the door to his room, it’s so *Shane* that Ilya has to hold back a smart comment. There are endless trophies and medals on the shelves, far too many for what the small room should realistically fit. The bed set was a simple navy with matching pillows that wafted off a gentle lavender scent, like they’ve just been washed. There’s a small stack of books on the nightstand, which at closer inspection, all have to do with hockey.

“It’s kind of small,” Shane tells him, suddenly fidgety. “The guest room could probably be set up if you don’t want to squeeze in—”

Ilya drops his bag and tugs Shane onto the full size bed, “I am okay. Are you?” When he nuzzles his face into the side of Shane’s neck, he feels him relax under his hands.

Ilya feels like a weighted blanket on him. “I’m okay.” The words are quiet; the stress of the day finally melting from his muscles and making his eyelids heavy. The familiarity of the room and Ilya’s body heat is doing wonders for his normally anxious brain. He’s far too busy being pleased about seeing Ilya in his childhood bedroom to care about anything else. “You’re like a space heater.” He snuggles closer into the embrace, a slow smile spreading when Ilya starts to pepper soft kisses on the side of his face.

“I am built for cold. Quebec winters are nothing compared to Moscow.”

“Does everything have to be a competition?”

“Yes.”

Ilya’s hand rests on Shane’s heart, the rhythm lulling him into some place between sleep and reality. He’s never been allowed this, never allowed *himself* this. And now that he has it, he has no clue how he went so long. Comfortable silence drapes over them, low music and talking floating in from downstairs through the small crack in the doorway.

“I’m glad you’re here, Ilya,” Shane says gently, heart on his sleeve. The words are so open, so vulnerable, that the less brave part of him wants to take them back. He forces them to settle between the two of them instead.

“Thank you for inviting me,” Ilya replies, warm breath puffing against the side of Shane’s neck. “I am... little bit terrified, but happy. Very happy.” Happier than he’s been in a very long time.

“I think my mom already likes you more than she likes me, actually. She really loved the flowers.”

“I told you,” Ilya teased.

“Why wildflowers?”

“They were my mother’s favorite,” Ilya admitted, a nostalgic feeling pinging at his heart. “We used to walk through fields of them outside the city on her good days.” He tightened his hold on Shane, using him as something to ground him. “There were... not many of those. They are my most cherished memories.”

“Thank you for telling me,” Shane says, pressing a gentle kiss to the back of Ilya’s hand. “I think our moms would have liked each other.”

“Me too.”

When Yuna goes upstairs to find them for dinner a little bit later, she has to stop herself from cooing at the sight from the door. Shane and Ilya are cuddled close together, eyes closed, and breath exactly in sync. Shane’s face is smoothed out in slumber, the normal stoicness dropping away to make him seem much younger than he is. Ilya’s mouth is ajar, every breath rustling Shane’s hair ever so slightly. She wonders if she could get away with running downstairs to grab her phone for a photo.

Instead, she just gently closes the door and tiptoes back to the kitchen, wanting to give them a few minutes to relax after what must’ve been a very long day. If it wasn’t for the fact that she was completely anal about making sure Shane ate every meal when they were under the same roof, she probably would’ve let them be for the night. But, Yuna knows her son, and she knows that he has a bad habit of skipping meals when he’s busy, which is all the time now.

David is pouring another glass of wine as she brings the pot to the middle of the table and starts scooping pasta on plates.

“Asleep?”

“Out like a light,” she confirms. “You should’ve seen them, David. They were all cuddled up and it was *adorable*.”

“Ilya seems like a nice boy,” he says back. “Poor guy was shaking like a leaf.”

“Must be more than nice if Shane brought him *here*, don’t you think?”

They ruminate on the words for a second as they work perfectly around each other in the dining room. Shane had never talked about relationships, let alone brought anyone to meet them *ever*. Both Yuna and David had really just assumed he was gay, but even that wasn’t really talked about either. Shane was private to a fault with some things, to both of his parents chagrin. If he’s bringing Ilya to their home, then it must be serious.

“Whatever it is, I’m happy for the two of them.”

Her eyes soften in the way they always do when it comes to Shane, “Me too.”

The sound of a door closing downstairs knocks them both out of their light sleep. Ilya is warm against his back with an arm slung over Shane's chest right over his heart. His arms tighten reflexively when Shane tries to escape.

"Hey," Shane says quietly, turning his head to meet Ilya's tired gaze.

"I'm hungry," Ilya grumbles.

"For what?"

"Pasta, you pervert." He squeezes at Shane's chest playfully before untangling their limbs and sitting up on the bed. The movement makes the bed creak, an obnoxiously loud noise that gave away just how old the bed frame must've been. Ilya looks down at Shane, a smirk on his pink lips. "That will be a problem, eh?"

"Ilya!" He rushes out, cheeks flaming pink.

Truthfully, there's something in his chest that twists happily at the thought of Ilya laying him down in his childhood room. Maybe it's because this is one of the places he knows best, maybe it's because it feels like Ilya is being folded into Shane's life in a way he wasn't ever sure he would be able to. Shane isn't sure, but he is sure that he wouldn't be able to resist Ilya if he tried anything.

"What?" Ilya crawled over him, arms bracketing him in before leaning down and pressing a warm kiss to his lips. "You don't want?"

Shane never claimed to be a strong man. Which is why he chases Ilya's lips as soon as they leave his own. "I never said that..."

"Dinner!" Yuna called from down the stairs.

Ilya leans back just enough to where their lips are just out of reach, an infuriating grin on his face. "Maybe later, котенок." He pushes himself off the bed, making the headboard lightly tap against the wall. "You are bad at being quiet though, so maybe not."

"Asshole."

When they're sat at the table, Ilya can't help but start to scarf down a big bite of the hot food. It was simple like David had said, nothing more than spaghetti and meat sauce with what looked like parmesan set aside in a separate bowl. A big bowl of salad sat in the middle, and of course, that's what Shane immediately reaches for.

"Shane," his mother tsks. "Eat the pasta, please."

"It's not a part of my performance diet," he grumbles. "You served me way too much."

Ilya tapped his foot under the table, a quiet *I know you haven't eaten all day. For me, please.*

He had noticed Shane's strictness with food from the very beginning on their first date. He had nursed the rich hot chocolate for longer than Ilya would have expected and then took the

smallest bites of vendor food at Ilya's insistence. There are signs that Ilya recognized in the people from back home, the friends who relentlessly trained without time for anything else. The figure skaters who trained at the same rink who starved themselves to be able to fit into their intricate costumes. It wasn't uncommon, but it didn't mean that it should be ignored. Ilya had quietly kept his eyes on Shane just for his own peace of mind.

It feels like a win when Shane's toe pushes back and his gaze locks onto Ilya's for just a second before picking up his fork and twirling some pasta onto it.

"This is very good, Mrs. Hollander," Ilya says after he swallows a big bite.

"Call me Yuna, please," she laughs sweetly. It reminds him so much of his own mother that his heart twinges. "It's David's mother's recipe. Shane used to love it as a kid."

"Couldn't get enough," David chimed in.

"Although you'd never know it now," Yuna muttered, eyes raised at the small bites her son was taking. It's obviously from a place of concern, but Ilya feels the way Shane stiffens for a second at his side.

"Mom," There was resignation there, like this wasn't the first time Shane had heard about it and he knew it wouldn't be the last either. "Can we not do this now? Please?"

"I just worry about you, is all," she tells him. "But okay, I'm sorry. Let's just enjoy dinner and then we'll let you both unwind for the night." She holds up two fingers, "Girl Guide's honor."

"You were never a Girl Guide," Shane chuckles, rolling his eyes. His posture is more relaxed now, thankfully. Ilya hooks his ankle around Shane's under the table anyways.

"Semantics."

"So, Ilya," David starts. "How did you and Shane meet each other?"

Shane isn't really sure how they should approach this, to be honest. Ilya wasn't *really* a teacher, but the dynamic could be potentially sketchy from the outside. Ilya looks at him, almost like to ask *what should I say?*

"We share a class," Shane cuts in, purposefully vague. Ilya hums from where he sits. Just as his parents start to nod approvingly, his brain spits out, "Ilya is actually my TA."

"Oh?" Yuna's voice goes high at the end.

An awkward silence falls over the table while his parents obviously mull that over.

"And that's not..." His father says slowly, before taking an almost too big gulp of his wine. "A problem?"

"*Technically*, I am not TA anymore," Ilya cuts in, trying to diffuse the weird tension. "Today was last day of the semester."

“Shane, honey,” Yuna starts, eyes flitting around the room nervously. “You didn’t— you know,” she makes a gesture that makes Shane cringe, “just to pass did you?”

“Mom!”

“It’s just a question!”

Ilya’s eyes are bouncing back and forth between the two, wholly unsure of if he should cut in or not.

“No,” Shane grinded out. “I’ve never struggled in school, you know that.”

“Just making sure,” she says quickly. “You caught me off guard, I’m sorry.”

“I have given Shane only the grades that he deserves,” Ilya tells her seriously. “He needed no help from me.” And because he wants desperately for the tension to break, he adds in, “Except for that one test he failed and had to retake...”

“Shane,” she gasped, scandalized. “You’re keeping up with your scholarship aren’t you?”

“Why would you—”

He chooses not to tell his mom that the entire reason he ended up in Ilya’s class was that he was *not* keeping up with his credits in the way he should’ve been. Probably would not go down well. Shane tries to rub out the small headache forming at his temples. It doesn’t work. The small smirk on Ilya’s lips isn’t helping. But the gentle pressure from Ilya’s sneaker on his own does.

“I don’t know much about you, Ilya,” David says warmly. “But, I haven’t seen my son this... light in a very long time. Whatever you both have together is just fine in my book.”

The words dissolve any lingering tension, and Yuna nods at the words with a soft smile on her face.

“I would like you to know me,” Ilya tells them seriously. “You are the most important people to Shane, which makes you very important to me.”

There’s an old Fleetwood Mac song drifting through the dining room, something about believing in miracles and the ways of magic. It feels incredibly on the nose for the swell of emotions going on behind Shane’s ribs.

Ilya was, contrary to how much he joked around, completely and utterly invested in what he had with Shane. He had lived long enough with not voicing his feelings to people he cared deeply for. The lingering consequences of growing up in Russia still echoed through him; it was a coldness and stoicism that he had to constantly navigate through. But, here? Here he was in the warmth of one of the first *real* loving homes he can recall stepping foot into, and if he lets the ice around him melt just slightly, the way Shane looks at him is worth it.

“Oh, honey.” Yuna leans forward and pats his hand, something so mother-like that Ilya can’t help but relax a bit. “We’d *love* to know you.”

It's one of the sweetest things anyone has ever said to him, actually. There's a burning at the backs of his eyes that he tries to laugh off. "What do you North Americans say? "Who is cutting onions?" He brushes at the corner of his eyes.

It makes Shane's parents bark out surprised laughs, their eyes crinkling. It was proof that they had lived long lives full of laughter and smiles and Ilya can't think of a better family to be folded into. He distantly wishes he could've seen his own mother with the same lines on her face.

"Keep him," Yuna giggles into her wine glass.

"I'm trying," Shane replies, not even bothering to hide the wide smile splitting his face.

Comfortable silence fell for a few minutes as Ilya and Shane continued to eat. Yuna watches Ilya scarf down more pasta than she's ever seen in one serving, an amused expression on her face.

"Someone was hungry," she chirps playfully. "Take better care of him." She tsks disapprovingly across the table.

"What she said," Ilya says around a mouthful of garlic bread. David grins, standing up to get something from the kitchen.

"He's a grown man, he can take care of himself," Shane mutters under his breath.

"It has been long time since I have had a home cooked meal," Ilya admits. There's no pity in Yuna's eyes, which he appreciates, only an understanding nod as she serves up another scoop to his plate. David pats his shoulder as he sits back down, putting an expensive bottle of vodka and two glasses in front of him. Just by the way the glass is frosted, Ilya knows it'll be good.

"I don't want to be presumptuous, but there's no way you can afford good vodka with your pay, right?" David asks, unscrewing the top of the bottle and letting a heavy pour fill the glasses. "I try to buy the Russian stuff whenever I can."

Ilya brightens. "Shane, you didn't tell me your father was cool. Why you leave this important detail out?"

He lifts his glass and clinks his with David's, both hiding smiles behind the rim at the way Shane starts sputtering at Ilya's side. The vodka is smooth and freezing as it travels down his throat, leaving only the most subtle burn in its wake. It's cold like the chilled air outside, like the snowflakes they had started to see float down in Montreal in the recent weeks. It's crisp like the smell of the pine trees surrounding the small cottage, like the tight turns of Shane's worn skates on the ice as he chases down the puck.

"This is very good vodka," Ilya tells David, who looks oddly proud at the words. The bottle is covered in cyrillic writing, and Ilya realizes that he's been around english for so long now that his brain is a second slower on the uptake than usual. He speaks his mother tongue constantly, but writing it was a different thing.

“I’m glad I can share it with someone who appreciates it. Yuna and Shane have never been drinkers— not that I really am either but a glass every now and then to celebrate is perfectly fine.”

“I’ll stick to wine,” Yuna teases, wrinkling her nose. “Vodka always gave me the worst hangovers when I was in college.”

“Means it is bad quality,” Ilya tells her, shooting back another small shot before setting his glass back in front of him. “Vodka is meant to be enjoyed, most people do not know how to drink it correctly.”

“This is the most Russian you’ve ever been,” Shane laugh, tapping his toe against Ilya’s. He looks to his father, “What are we celebrating?”

“New friends, I think.”

“New friends,” Ilya repeats, feeling warmer in his chest than the vodka ever could’ve made him.

Before long, they had all moved to the couch; it was a comfortable one with large, soft cushions that almost swallowed Ilya whole when he sat down. It had seen better days, that much was obvious, but it felt homey in a way that made it endearing. Shane sat next to him, their thighs barely touching. A game played quietly on the TV, and one of the teams was *desperately* losing.

“Aren’t Canadians supposed to be good at hockey?”

The chirp caused loud protests and light shoves that Ilya took in stride.

“The Centaurs are doing their best,” Shane tells him. “It just so happens that their best is pretty fucking bad.”

“I’m not sure they ever won a single game we took you to as a kid,” Yuna says. “Maybe one or two? I can’t remember.” She waves her hand dismissively, before turning to Ilya. “Shane would make us wait for hours outside after just to see if he could get a glimpse of one of the players. It was so sweet.”

“Mr. fanboy,” Ilya gushes, a dopey smile on his face. It makes him happy to know that small Shane was so loved, that he has these memories to look back on fondly so many years later. “You have always been hockey nerd, then.”

“*Always*,” his parents say in sync.

Shane figures it’s time to take Ilya upstairs when he head falls forward for the third time that night. An embarrassing photobook full of childhood moments lay in his lap, Shane’s toothless smile looking back up at them.

“I think I’m gonna put him to bed,” Shane tells his parents softly, dragging the album from Ilya’s lap. “He’s had a long day.”

“I’m sure,” Yuna tells him, hiding a yawn. David plucks the empty wine glass from her hand before pressing a kiss to the crown of her head. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

It warms Shane’s heart like it always does. His parents had always been the blueprint for what he wanted for himself: something seamless, something perfectly balanced, something willing to stand the test of time. Their relationship wasn’t perfect; no one’s was, but they moved around each other like they knew what was going on in the other’s brain. Yuna could finish David’s sentences, David could pull her back from the ledge when she got a little too keyed up about something. They aged together, lives and selves intertwined to the point where it was unclear where one ended and the other began. Shane longed for that— for someone to watch his hair go gray, for someone to show him reason when his brain wanted to jump ship. Looking at the man next to him, Shane allows himself to hope.

“He sees you,” Yuna tells him, voice barely above a whisper as to not wake Ilya. His fingers scratch against the back of his neck and Shane finds himself leaning into the familiar touch. “Keep him. He’s a good one, I can tell.”

“You’ve never met any other ones,” he says, just to be contrary. Her words settle in his chest like a weighted blanket, warm and secure. Shane would’ve stayed with Ilya regardless of what his parents thought of him, but it did make him feel better that they were able to see Ilya for who he really was.

“I don’t have to. Mother’s intuition,” she taps her temple, “I just know these things.”

“How are you so sure?”

“The way he looks at you when you’re not looking back,” she tells him, patting his cheek once more before standing. “Reminds me of me with your father back in the day.”

There’s no time for Shane to process those earth-shattering words before she’s disappeared behind their bedroom door with a quiet, “Goodnight.”

There’s a light snore from his side.

“Let’s go upstairs,” he mutters, gently shaking Ilya awake. His eyes are so sleepy that Shane almost feels guilty for it.

“Pretty boy,” Ilya slurs, accent heavier than normal, hands reaching out to Shane’s face like a young child. “You want to sleep with me? In parent’s house?” He tsks, but let’s Shane drag him to his feet. “I will do it but you suck at being quiet, котенок.”

“Shut up,” Shane hisses, his cheeks flaming. “My parents room is right down the hall!”

“I like them. They are cute. Maybe why you are cute too, I think. Do you think I am cute?”

“You were cuter when you were asleep.”

Ilya pouts, “I was dreaming about you and this is how you repay me?” He pretended to pout. “Ah, just like a man.”

“Ilya, *you* are a man.” He forces himself to gloss over the admission that fell from a sleep-drunk Ilya’s lips, tucking a smile away from view as he tugs Ilya toward the bed.

“How dare you.”

Ilya is wearing slippers that are slightly too big for his feet, which Shane immediately tugs off. Next are the too-tight pants, and Ilya *cannot* shut up about it.

“You are bad at this.”

“Maybe if you wore pants that were your fucking size.”

There’s a deep laugh coming from Ilya’s chest, one just slightly too loud for the time of night, but it’s too endearing to stop. His blue eyes turn to moons as he scrunches his face in joy, a light flush at the tops of his cheeks.

“These are your favorite though,” Ilya tells him through a giggle, pointing at Shane. “I notice you looking at my ass more when I wear them.”

Well. He wasn’t *wrong*. But that doesn’t mean Shane is going to admit anything. He’d rather die.

“I think that vodka is going to your head.”

“Nonsense.”

The pants finally come off and the socks with them, and Shane neatly folds them on top of the dresser. Ilya sits up messily and tugs the shirt he has on over his shoulders before dropping it to the floor, leaving him in only his tight black briefs on top of the bedspread.

Ilya had always been hot— Shane knows it, Ilya himself knows it, everyone on campus knows it. He’s also infuriatingly... beautiful. It’s a word that Shane never really understood with men until he saw Ilya that first day. There’s a smattering of moles all over his skin, skin almost too golden for winter. His curls were shiny and soft; they would spring back to their form immediately when Shane tugged on one. His strong, built chest that leads down to a trim waist, and most mouth-watering of all, a thick happy trail that disappears under his waistband. All of it embarrassingly makes Shane’s mouth flood with saliva.

“Like what you see?”

Shane feels his head nod without hesitation, eyes catching on the way the crucifix seems to shine bright in the low light of the room.

“Let me see you,” Ilya purrs, reaching out and thumbing the hem of Shane’s sweater. “Is unfair that you have so many clothes on.”

The clunky English is too sweet to deny, so Shane sheds his own clothes before folding them neatly. Fresh goosebumps rise on his skin at the way Ilya’s sleepy eyes darken. The bed squeaks when he reaches to turn the light off, the room being bathed in crystal moonlight.

“Come here,” Ilya says quietly, voice tinged with something other than exhaustion. Something that makes Shane’s skin spark against Ilya’s when he lays next to him. “Today was perfect day, yes?”

Shane cups his jaw and brings their lips together, more chaste than anything before rest his forehead against Ilya’s. “It was.”

You were beautiful in every sense of the word. If I wasn’t already sure I was falling in love with you, this confirmed it.

“They love you,” he says instead. He watches as each land across Ilya’s features for a second before stealing another kiss.

“I am like a Hollander magnet,” Ilya says smugly, tugging Shane until they’re skin to skin. “See? You’re stuck to me, котенок.” He tangles their legs together and tries his hardest to not rut into Shane lazily. The pleasure is there for the taking, but Ilya is content with waiting, content with laying here in Shane’s warmth until the cold sunlight of morning bleeds through the blinds.

He doesn’t have to when Shane rolls his hips forward, his head coming to rest in the hollow of Ilya’s shoulder. The breath there is warm, bordering on hot, and Ilya’s fingers tighten around Shane’s back.

“I’m sorry,” Shane breathes, words stuttering out quickly. “You’ve had a long day and must be exhausted and—”

“And what?” Ilya asks firmly, running long fingers through Shane’s inky strands, pulling just enough to where Shane is forced to meet his eyes in the moonlight. “Tell me, красивый мальчик.”

“I *want* you,” Shane admits shyly. His pupils are blown wide, black almost taking up all of the deep brown of his iris. “I’ve wanted you in my mouth all day.” His gaze catches on Ilya’s plush lips, “Fuck, I feel like I’m going crazy.”

Two fingers slip past Shane’s pink lips and he sucks them in greedily, swirling his tongue around them as his eyelids flutter shut. Flames lick at the base of his spine, the heat coursing upwards until he feels his face burn. There’s a low moan forcing its way up his throat, and Ilya just smirks sleepily before clicking his tongue.

“So pretty for me, Shane. Do you want more? Should I *let* you suck my dick?”

Shane’s head is nodding eagerly before Ilya even finishes the sentence. He’d be embarrassed if he wasn’t so turned on that it hurt. The fingers slid out of his mouth and Shane felt his lip pout.

Ilya roughly grabs Shane’s chin, spreading spit across his mouth before capturing his lips in a heated kiss. He swallows a whine from Shane’s throat, “Quiet, Shane.” He taps the side of Shane’s cheek and watches as his eyes glaze over.

Noted.

There's a loud *creak* that rings through the night when Ilya readjusts them on the bed, him now on his back and Shane between his spread legs. The noise makes both of them start for a second and then dissolve into giggles.

"I've been telling my parents to get a new bedframe for years now," Shane whispers, smiling as he kisses his way down Ilya's torso. "This might be the last straw."

When he nips at the soft skin just above Ilya's waistband and hears a sharp hiss, his smile becomes smug. "Didn't you say *I* sucked at being quiet earlier? Funny." He takes the band in between his teeth before letting it snap back onto Ilya's heated skin.

"You will kill me," Ilya gasps, pulling him up for another kiss on the lips. The stifled sounds in the dark are hotter than either thought they would be.

Shane mouths at his clothed dick, lapping at the small wet spot that his eyes could barely see. His tongue can taste it though, something so purely *Ilya* that it makes his head spin.

"Fuck, Ilya," he breathes.

"That is what we're doing, no?"

Shane pulls down his boxers in one motion, not giving Ilya a moment to say a word before taking him to the back of his throat.

"Playing dirty is not nice," Ilya grits out, fingers gripping hard at Shane's hair.

When they had first gone down on each other, Shane had made himself a student of everything to do with Ilya Rozanov and making him come. He knows the rhythm to hold to get him there quickest, he knows the hitch in his breath when Ilya is actively reminding himself to breathe through it. He's used to the way Ilya can't help but thrust shallowly into his mouth, he's used to the way that Russian starts to fall from his lips when he's about to tip over the edge.

"You look so beautiful like this, котенок," he gasps, biting down on his fist to stay quiet.

"Your mouth was made to suck my cock. Если ты сейчас не остановишься, я кончу."

When Shane gags around him, the words only seeming to spur him on, Ilya realizes. "Stop, stop, stop." The words are rushed, and Shane immediately pulls off, and the wave of heat recedes for just a moment.

"You okay?" Shane asks, wiping the corners of his mouth. His eyes are wide with worry, bouncing around Ilya's like he's trying to figure out if did something wrong. "Too much?"

"Too good," Ilya breathes out. The relieved smile on Shane's face is so sweet it makes him want to eat him. He flips them so Shane is on his back. "I forget that you cannot speak Russian sometimes."

"You'll have to teach me."

“Probably you would learn it in a week,” Ilya huffs, rolling his eyes lovingly. He peppers kisses all over his favorite freckles before finally bringing their lips together quickly. “No accent. People will think you are from Moscow.”

“I should commit more to the duolingo streak then.” His cheeks immediately flame when Ilya levels him with a deadpan look. “What?”

“I am about to fuck your brains out and you talk about green owl?”

It’s easier to tease him than to admit that the thought of Shane practicing Russian just to be able to relate to Ilya more makes him almost *cool*. Shane has the funniest way of always knocking Ilya on his ass when he’s least expecting it.

“So you know it then?”

“You are not the only one with tricks up your sleeve, cher.” The French endearment feels clumsy off his tongue at best, but the embarrassment is worth the way Shane’s eyes light up. Ilya quickly hides his face in Shane’s neck, pressing open mouthed kisses to the pulse point that’s racing under his lips. He will *not* let Shane see him blush. Russians don’t do that.

“You have no idea,” Shane breathes, arching into Ilya’s mouth. “God, you’re so…”

There’s no words to describe Ilya. Not really. Everything Shane can think of is entirely too revealing, even if it was true. So he says what is undeniably easier, stowing the confession in the back of his mind for now.

“Please, fuck me.” He reaches into his nightstand and fishes out the small bottle of lube that was always hidden under endless layers of useless papers. He tosses it on the bed next to them before quickly crossing the room and digging to the bottom of his duffle bag, pulling out a small box of condoms. Ilya’s eyebrows are almost to his hairline.

“Someone was prepared.” He drips lube onto two fingers and rubs them together to warm them up. “Were you planning this all along? Is this all I am to you?” A pout graces his lips. “I thought you liked me for more than my beautiful dick, Shane Hollander. I am disappointed.”

“I do,” Shane huffs, laying back down. “Your ass is nice too.”

“Brat.” Ilya gently circles Shane’s rim with one finger, eyes locked on the already blissed out expression on his face. “Is okay?”

“Mhm.” The sound was reedy, too high pitched. Shane’s bottom lip was in between his teeth when he gritted out a slow, “More.” He’d be shy if he wasn’t so singularly focused on getting as much of Ilya in him as possible, as quick as possible. “*Shit*.”

“Needy,” Ilya mumbles, ducking to suck a nipple into his mouth. Shane’s chest was a weakness of his—the way it was round and built, a solid wall of muscle that showed the dedication Shane held when it came to his sport. There was a softness there too, one that Shane’s love for dri-fit shirts always showed of, one that Ilya’s teeth had ached to sink into. Fantasy, turns out, is nowhere near close to how good reality is. “These tits, I think of them

too much,” he says into the smooth skin, pleased to hear a hitch of breath above him. “You like that?” He leans in to whisper the words against the shell of Shane’s ears. “When I call them tits?”

There’s a moment of stillness that almost stretches too long for Ilya’s comfort and an apology ready on his tongue when Shane slowly nods.

“You will tell me if you didn’t, yes?”

The words left no room for Shane to not answer. Blue eyes searched his face for any trace of uncertainty or lie.

“I promise,” he tells him.

“Good.”

Another finger pushes into Shane’s heat, scissoring until he’s able to relax around them. The breath is caught in his chest and his knuckles are white in Ilya’s locks and he’s *struggling* to keep his eyes open. The feeling is too good, too much, but the thought of missing Ilya when he looks like this— skin glowing and eyes hooded in lust— was unthinkable. Shane burns the sight into his memory.

Searching presses find the spot inside Shane that makes his vision blur out at the edges.

“There it is,” Ilya sings, proud of himself. He tries not to be smug at the way Shane writhes under his touch. Pearls of precome bead at the head from the attention and Shane can’t help but take himself in his hand, desperate for friction. Ilya quickly bats it away. “You will wait.”

“Hurry up then,” Shane shoots back, whispered voice on the edge of irritation as his hips arch into nothing. He’s desperately grinding himself down on Ilya’s fingers, which have stopped moving inside of him.

Ilya pulls his fingers out quickly before finding the condom and ripping the packet open with his teeth, rolling it on. “What if I can make you come untouched?”

“I’ll kill you.” There’s a dark flush on Shane’s skin that makes Ilya feel insane.

Ilya lines himself up with Shane’s entrance, “Would be worth it.” He waits for a small nod from under him before slowly pushing in. The pressure is a vice around him and he lets out a low hiss. “*Fuck*, you’re so tight, Shane.” His fingers dig into the meat of Shane’s hips, “Let me in, котенок.”

It had been a while since Shane had had sex with anyone besides his own dildo; long enough to forget just how fucking good it felt to be filled by someone else. They hadn’t taken this step before tonight, too busy and tired during the semester and hockey season to do anything but mutual blowjobs and some heavy petting. That didn’t stop the desire that raged in Shane’s mind whenever he laid eyes on Ilya though, and right now it felt like every single moment of longing led to *this*. And it was absolutely perfect.

Shane breathes through the pressure, the smooth slide of Ilya pushing all the way in until he bottomed out. There's a minute when neither move and their shallow breaths seem to echo through the small room. His lip was bitten between his teeth in a weak attempt to keep sounds from coming out. "You can move. Fuck, I need you to move, Ilya."

And so Ilya does. The first thrust into Shane knocks the headboard loudly into the wall and they both look at each other with wide eyes, muscles frozen in place. Ilya has the sense to shove his head in the crook of Shane's neck before dissolving into giggles.

"Shut up!" Shane whispers, shoving at Ilya's shoulder. There's a laugh in his tone that only spurs Ilya on. "You're laughing. You're *inside* of me and you're laughing. What about this is funny?"

"Not funny," Ilya says softly, nipping at Shane's neck. The smile on his lips is evident. "I am happy. This is moment that I will look back on with a smile on my face."

Those three little words bubble at the back of Shane's throat, desperate to escape just to see what Ilya's reaction would be. Would he smile? Would he go quiet and kiss Shane? Would he say it back?

"You are thinking too much," Ilya tuts. He takes one of the pillows piling Shane's bed and sticks it between the wall and the headboard. "I will stop that, don't worry."

Before Shane can open his mouth, Ilya pulls out of him and thrusts all the way back in, smirking at the way Shane's eyes glaze over. There's a small furrow in his brow from trying to stay quiet.

"The pillow worked."

"Thank fuck for that," Shane breathes out shakily.

The sex is slow, languid, like Ilya is trying to avoid any jerky movements for the sake of the whining hinges on the old bed frame. Shane's eyes flutter shut, chest puffing out a harsh breath when Ilya hits the sensitive spot inside him again. His fingers thread into Ilya's curls and he can't bring himself to be gentle when he tugs from the root. Whispered words fall from Ilya's lips against the shell of his ear and spark down his spine.

"So greedy for my dick," Ilya croons, sucking an earlobe into his mouth and rolling it between his teeth. "Look at the way you take me in, мальчик. Like you've been waiting so long for it, eh?" He grabs at Shane's jaw, forcing him to open his eyes. The gaze is hazy at best, already verging on blissed out—it makes something hot pulse in Ilya's belly. "Look at it."

Shane's eyes stray downward, over the chiseled planes of Ilya's chest, over the endless moles that look more like constellations than his own freckles did, over the happy trail that made Shane's mouth fill with saliva at a quick glance. He feels his lips part as his gaze meets Ilya's length just before it disappears inside him. It's the hottest thing Shane has ever seen.

“Jesus *Christ*,” Shane grits. His hands are everywhere—in his own hair, fisting the sheets under him, gripping the back of Ilya’s neck to bring him down into a bruising kiss. All the noise he wants to make escapes between the meeting of their lips.

“Sucking me in like a *slut*,” Ilya purrs against his lips. He takes Shane’s bottom lip between his teeth and pulls back until it snaps back into place. The word is a risk, one that Ilya is glad pays off when he feels Shane tighten around him quickly. “Oh, you like that, don’t you?” When Shane nods frantically, Ilya tuts petulantly, “Say it.”

The words fall instantly from his lips, all reservations completely wiped from Shane’s mind. All he can think of is this moment—the sweet drag of Ilya inside him and the white hot pleasure that keep building in his stomach. “I like it so much. Again,” he pants, eyes scrunching closed when Ilya hits the spot inside him again. “*Please*, Ilya, again.”

When he looked this beautiful begging, who was Ilya to resist?

“My slut,” he mumbles against Shane’s ear. His hips snap against Shane’s own now—a slick, loud slide that makes Ilya grateful they’re the only room on the entire floor. He couldn’t stop if he tried, especially not when Shane arches into each thrust, desperate to chase his release. His chest was flushed pink, a pink that spread all the way up to his freckles. “My pretty little slut. Only for me, yes? No one else?”

“Only you,” Shane tells him frantically. They’re words that he already knew were true from the very first day. “Yours. Only yours, only yours, only yours...”

The rhythm inside him was bordering on too much. White spots explode behind Shane’s eyes, and when he opens them, he’s almost embarrassed to see that his vision is blurred by tears. One leaks out of the corner of his eye and trails down until it makes a tiny wet spot on the navy sheets. Ilya’s hips stutter, a thumb brushing the wetness from his cheek.

“Любовь моя...”

“Don’t stop,” he keens, rolling his hips to meet Ilya’s own. Electricity sluices down his spine and blood rushes in his ears at a deafening volume. He must be getting louder because Ilya’s hand is pressed over his mouth seconds later.

“You have to be quiet,” Ilya tells him, in a hushed tone. “You have to be good, Shane. You don’t want to be caught, do you?”

Shane shakes his head quickly and Ilya drops his hand from his mouth. There’s something feral snapping its teeth in his chest at the thought of being thoroughly fucked on his childhood sheets. “I need you to touch me,” he whimpers softly.

The coil tightens when Ilya’s hand wraps around his length. Barely two strokes in, it snaps. Pleasure engulfs every muscle, and release shoots up to coat Ilya’s fist and his stomach. Shane pulls Ilya in and sinks his teeth into his shoulder in a weak effort to muffle the sounds leaking from his lips. On and on it goes until his bones were somehow jelly and heavy as lead at the same time. His brain is somewhere out of his body, floating high above either of them.

Distantly, Shane feels Ilya bury his face in the crook of his neck before spilling warmth inside of him. Ragged breaths fill the room and their chests move in sync. Maybe their hearts beat the same tattoo, maybe they don't. Both feel like they've melded into one either way, unsure where Shane starts and Ilya begins. There's a small whine of protest from Shane when Ilya eases himself out, but it's quickly covered by the pleased hum of being gently cleaned off. The stickiness would've ruined the moment for him soon enough.

"Мне кажется, я тебя люблю," Ilya tells him sleepily before pulling Shane's back to his chest.

"I like it when you speak Russian," Shane mumbles, hand resting on Ilya's own. "Makes me feel closer to you."

The words are deeply honest and they go straight to Ilya's heart. There's no room to be anything but deeply honest.

"I will teach you, I think. I want you to know every part of me."

"Yeah?"

"Yes."

He thinks of what they can have, the happy memories, the shared life. He thinks of the family he could have with Shane, the people who welcomed him so warmly into their home and treated him kinder than his own father ever had. Hope expands behind his ribs, almost to the point of suffocation; Ilya is content to go if that's the cause. He had never been so content in his life.

"No red pen, though, right? You aren't my TA anymore."

"No red pen," Ilya agrees easily, pressing a kiss to Shane's neck. "Even if I know it turns you on."

"Does *not*."

"Lying is very bad in relationships."

"Relationships?" Shane turns in Ilya's arms to meet his gaze.

"Am I saying word incorrectly? My english is bad when I'm tired."

"No, no," Shane reassures him shyly. "I just— we haven't really talked about it. You want to be in a relationship with me?"

Ilya's brows furrow in confusion, "We spend all of our time together. We kiss. You introduce me to parents," he lists. "Now we fuck. Isn't this dating? Are we not boyfriends?"

"When you put it like that..." He hides his giddy expression in Ilya's chest. "I think I would like to be your boyfriend, Ilya Rozanov."

“Good, because I already thought you were mine, Shane Hollander.”

Just before the darkness drags Ilya under, he swears he hears a quiet, “Je crois que je t'aime.”

Chapter End Notes

translations:

-cher: dear

-котенок: kitten

-Любовь моя: my love

-красивый мальчик: pretty boy

-Если ты сейчас не остановишься, я кончу: if you don't stop now, i'm going to cum

-Мне кажется, я тебя люблю: i think i love you

-Je crois que je t'aime: i think i love you

Chapter 7: epilogue

Chapter Notes

and....we're done. i'm so incredibly thankful for the response to my little story, never in a million years could i have anticipated it. i'm glad you all love this version of them just as much as i do. thanks as always, to my incredible beta reader, lipstickdaddy <3

as always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated <3 if you wanna scream about hollanov with me on twt, my account is @yalooblueteebaa

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

A few months later

It's hot. Even more so than usual for the oppressively humid mid-June heat of Montreal, and the long black gown that Shane is wearing isn't making it any better. It feels like he's sucking up every single ray of sun on this cloudless day and they're taking residence right under his collar. The feeling of hot sweat beading at the back of his neck makes him want to crawl out of his skin. Maybe telling Ilya that he'd meet him outside the auditorium wasn't the best idea. Yuna and David are already inside, eager to get the best seats in the house. Rose and Svetlana laughed in Shane's face when he suggested going outside, saying something about their makeup melting off in this heat.

He's just looking down at his phone when he hears him, slightly out of breath.

"I could not find my graduation cap," Ilya pants, pressing a quick kiss to Shane's lips. "You look very pretty today."

At least he could explain away the flush on his face with the heat. "I don't know how you find anything in your apartment." He straightens hood on Ilya's shoulders, lined with pale blue to represent his arts degree. His curls are pushed back from his face today and they shine in the strong afternoon sunshine. "You look nice too."

"Everything has a place and everything is in its place." He goes to straighten Shane's own hood, even though there's no need to; he just wants to touch him. It's pinned down to stay straight, thanks to Yuna. "We still have time before ceremony, yes?"

"Yeah. Rose and Svetlana said they would save seats for us." It was a few minutes' walk from where they were to the hall itself, and so he takes Ilya's hand in his own and tugs them to start walking. Butterflies flap in his stomach when Ilya goes with him without a second thought. "You hear from your dad?"

"Nope." Ilya pops his lips on the syllable. "He has not contacted me in a very long time, I did not think he would show up."

“Still, even if him and your brother suck, you must miss them, right? I mean, they’re family.”

It was all such a foreign concept to Shane. He’s in contact with his parents most days, even if its just a text message in their group chat to remind them that he’s alive. The radio silence from Russia just seems cruel, but to be fair, all of Ilya’s stories from there do— especially the ones about his old-fashioned father and his coke snorting brother.

“By blood, yes.” He squeezes Shane’s hand before bringing it up to his lips. “But that is not the only way that matters, I think.”

Does it kill Ilya that his family doesn’t think to show up for such a big achievement? Without a doubt. Does it hurt him that they threw him away without a care in the world, that their love was so obviously conditional? Yes. His father had always hated him, even when Ilya was on track to be a hockey star. He had always thought him too soft, too girlish; somehow it was always related back to Irina. It was Irina’s fault that Ilya liked books so much. It was Irina’s fault that Ilya cried when he was hit. It was Irina’s fault that Ilya would always choose the fields on the outskirts of the city to the cold, dark, rink.

Andrei was the same. Although, Ilya can’t fully blame him for how he turned out. They were both abused by the same man, but his brother had the added pressure of being the first born son. He was never good enough at anything to please their father either, making the police academy the last ditch effort to get any acknowledgement from Grigory. Maybe it worked, maybe it didn’t. Ilya hasn’t reached out and neither has his brother, so there’s no way to know. Last he heard, he was married and had a baby on the way.

Ilya’s relationship with his blood was complicated, just like his relationship to Russia. It doesn’t mean that he doesn’t wish it was different. But after so many years, he’s learned to know when he’s not wanted. His empty voicemail box tells him all he needs to know.

“I’m glad you have Svetlana and her dad,” Shane tells him, oblivious to Ilya’s words. “He knows about you? I would guess he doesn’t care since Rose and Svet are attached at the hip. He’s got to be pretty liberal for an older Russian guy right—”

“You are idiot,” Ilya huffs, stopping them in their tracks. Shane shuts his mouth and the cute furrow between his brow is back. “When I talk about family, that means you too.” He brushes an errant lock of hair from Shane’s forehead, just to avoid eye contact. “You understand this, yes? It is important to me that you understand this.”

“Oh.” His brain doesn’t offer up anything else, completely unmoored by the words.

“Yes, *oh*,” Ilya mocks, a smitten look on his face. “Is good thing you are pretty.”

“Dick.”

“You love it. Now, let’s go before we miss the ceremony. Svetlana and Rose would kill us.”

Shane pulls him in for a kiss, one that was more chaste and sweet than anything else. It would never cease to amaze him how perfect Ilya’s lips fit with him own, almost like they were

made for each other since the very beginning. His shoulders drop in relief and the nerves for the day ahead fade away. His brain felt quiet. Ilya had that effect.

Their dress shoes echoed on the linoleum as they rushed to their seats. Somehow Rose and Svetlana had swung four only a few rows back from the stage, which worked perfectly since there was plenty of things any of them would rather be doing then waiting for the thousands of names to be called. The girls were only a little annoyed that they snuck in as the valedictorian speech was starting.

“Thank *god*,” Rose hissed, leaning over Svetlana’s lap. “If you almost fucked up our plan to walk together because you couldn’t keep your hands off each other, I was going to kill you, Shane.”

“He’s the one that kissed me,” he scoffs indignantly. “*And* the one that got here late!”

“Ilyusha,” Svetlana tuts.

“Was I supposed to graduate with no cap? You will deprive me of this Canadian tradition? Harsh Russian woman.”

“Maybe if you *cleaned*—”

“Shh!”

All four of their heads snapped backwards at the sound, coming from a student two rows back. To no one’s surprise, it was Kayla, a teacher’s pet and complete snitch that shared the Russian lit course with Ilya and Shane. She had made some very obvious passes at Ilya over the semester and had walked in on them when Shane had visited for office hours more times than they could count. She shrunk back slightly when Ilya fixed her with a withering gaze.

“After your final exam grade, I did not think I would see you here, *Kylie*.”

Her face flamed, and for a moment, Shane almost felt bad for her. Almost.

“It’s Kayla,” she hissed.

“I did not ask.” He turns back around to face the stage. Svetlana and Rose are going red with trying to hide a giggle fit. Ilya turns to Shane, smirking at the embarrassed flush on his face. “Help me with my cap, любимый.”

“You know her name,” Shane mumbles to him, low enough for only them to hear. The hat sits on Ilya’s curls better than expected and most don’t even have to be tucked away. There’s a single one that curls just under the cap on Ilya’s forehead and Shane has to stop himself from leaning in the small distance to kiss him senseless. The tassel swishes in his vision and he flicks it away only for Shane to gently switch it to the correct side. “Don’t be mean.”

“You do not defend your *boyfriend*’s honor,” Ilya tells him, pouting. The words are quiet enough to not escape the bubble around them. “Someone likes me, you should be angry. You should kill them.”

“*Kill* them?” Shane asks incredulously. He could never guess what was going to come out of Ilya’s mouth— it was a big reason why Shane was so in love with him, honestly.

“Da.”

Then it clicks. Shane can’t help the giggle that bubbles up at the words, “You want me to be *jealous*?”

“Da.”

It was adorable how Ilya’s lips pulled down into a small frown, how his leg started bouncing slightly under Shane’s watchful gaze. It was almost *childish*.

“You’re such a baby,” Shane mutters, pushing his knee out to meet Ilya’s. He took every opportunity he could to wind Ilya up— it was only fair that he gets a taste of his own medicine every now and then. His favorite activity in the world was easily rage-baiting Shane. Which is why when his shoulders slump a little in disappointment, Shane can barely hold in a laugh.

“And now you call me names,” Ilya sighs dramatically. “Life is so hard. Maybe I go back to Russia, eh?”

And just to see him falter, Shane decides to turn the tables. He leans in, just close enough to where Ilya and only Ilya will be able to hear his words and whispers out a quiet, “You’re *my* baby.” The flirtation feels clunky falling from his lips— Shane had never been one to vocalize what he’s feeling. That was always Ilya. But the color that immediately dusted the tops of Ilya’s cheeks made it worth it. Something akin to victory spreads through his chest, blinding and joyful. He reaches for Ilya’s hand and interlocks their fingers before resting them in his lap.

“Oh.”

It always came as a surprise when Shane so outwardly flirted with him. Ilya was much more used to his boyfriend’s subtle signs of affection. Lingering touches, the way Shane would clean so Ilya would have somewhere nice to sleep at the end of a long day, the quiet talks in the darkness of the night. It was never pet names in front of people. Ever. Which is why his stomach is doing something funny and his face feels like it’s hotter than the early summer sun outside.

Shane throws Ilya’s words back at him, “Yeah. *Oh*.” His thumb traces mindless circles on Ilya’s hand and tries to tune into the extremely boring speech going on in front of them. “Thought Russians didn’t blush.”

“We do not. It is hot in here, many big lights.” He’s blushing and he’s thankful that his shirt is buttoned very smartly all the way up; the heat feels like it’s spreading down his neck. If the tips of his ears weren’t already hidden by his graduation cap, they’d be giving him away. “You must be seeing things.”

Shane just hums in response, nice enough to let Ilya try to deflect what's so obvious. He sees Rose turn to Svetlana, mumbling something under her breath.

"Please tell me we don't look like that."

Svetlana gently pats the back of her girlfriend's hand, a mischievous glint in her large eyes, "I won't tell you then." It's Shane's turn to hide a snort in a cough; it earns him a swift kick to his leg.

After what seemed like an endless amount of speeches, it was finally time for the graduates to walk across the stage. They lined up, grad cards in hand, fixing the last little details on their gowns and hoods before they would have to take a photo with the dean of students. The room was buzzing with chatter and the occasional yelling when someone's family cheered as their loved one received their degree. Camera flashes were everywhere, colognes and perfumes mixed to a nauseating degree, and the hard floor of the hall was causing a dull pain to pulse in his lower back. It was overstimulating to say the least, and Shane was ready for this part of his day to be over.

Ilya privately thought it was all very sweet. Maybe it's because no one ever showed up for him, but the thought of the amount of love that was so obvious in this room made him feel lighter. And, sad. Very sad. The two emotions battled in his mind and neither wanted to be the one to lose.

His mother had been his *person*, the one to show him love, to show up to all his games, to read old fairytales with under the covers on the days his father worked late. She had taught him how to ride a bike, how to pick flowers correctly so that they didn't die as quickly, how to fold the crease on a pelmeni so that the filling didn't spill out of the edges. All the little things that Ilya carried with him every day were a result of Irina's gentle, yet somehow fierce, love. What he wouldn't give for his own mother to stand in the crowd and cheer for him, the golden crucifix around her neck glinting under the auditorium lights like a beacon in the crowd. He adjusts it under his shirt and the press of the cross against his skin soothes him for a fleeting second.

"You feeling okay?" Shane asks as they shuffle ever closer to the stage. Ilya had gotten quiet, pensive. It was Shane's least favorite version of him, but the one where he knew he had to show his love the loudest to. "Penny for your thoughts?"

"They are worth more than penny," Ilya sighs, still trying to make levity of his true feelings.

"Ilya," Shane pushes gently.

"Later." If Shane notices the way his voice cracks on the end of the word, he's nice enough not to mention it. "Please, солнышко."

"Okay." Eyes softened in his direction, and Shane's heart cracked. Something was wrong. He'd file the conversation for later. His ears caught the endearment, and latched onto it.

"That's a new one. What is it?"

“Sunshine,” Ilya says simply. His smile is soft, a private one that Shane is sure only he’s ever really seen. He shakes out his arms, flicking them down like he’s trying to expel the sad energy that’s started to creep into the forefront of his mind. “Today is good day.” And it was, even if it was slightly brushed with melancholy. Most things in Ilya’s life were, when he really thought about it. “Your father is making chicken parmesan for us later, yes?” The thought immediately brightens his mood.

“He is,” Shane laughs. After the ceremony, they were heading to the cottage for a long weekend with the Hollanders. Ilya had been looking forward to it for weeks. Shane had barely gotten the question out to his parents before they agreed. They were easy like that. “I told them it was your favorite.”

Ilya rubs his hands together, “Even better day now.”

Before long, Shane had climbed the stairs and handed his grad card to the speaker at the podium. Ilya, Rose and Svetlana were lined up behind him. This moment felt... odd. His entire college career had led up to this moment and it felt more bittersweet than he would’ve thought— not even because he necessarily loved school, he had been pretty indifferent to academics his whole life. It was something he was good at, but not invested in. His brain hadn’t allowed him to picture a future that didn’t include hockey.

So when he walks the stage and distantly hears, “Shane Hollander, receiving a Bachelor’s of Science in Nutritional Sciences,” he plasters on a smile and shakes all of the hands and can’t help a little laugh at the way his parents are hollering his name in the crowd. When he turns back to look at Ilya, his boyfriend just winks at him before cupping his hands around his mouth and cheering. It’s what makes Shane most bashful.

Ilya steps into the light of the stage and quietly hopes that they won’t butcher his name.

“Ilya Rozanov, receiving a Bachelor’s of Arts in Russian History and Literature,” the announcer says, only pausing for a second on his surname. The dean’s hand is warm and slightly sweaty in his own and the flash of the camera leaves spots in his eyes. If anyone asks, that’s why his eyes become glassy; it has *nothing* to do with the cheers coming from the crowd. Front and center in the first row stands Yuna and David, smiles blinding in the dim room and both have their phones up like the proud parents they are.

“Ilya!” Yuna yells, waving to get his attention. David whistles quickly. “Smile, honey! We’re so proud of you!”

It shocks a laugh out of him and his cheeks hurt when he waves back. Yuna and David were... unexpected. He had hoped that they would be able to forge a relationship, if only for Shane’s sake, but he could have never anticipated what place they would hold in his heart. He has active text threads with both and most days don’t pass without words being exchanged. David had gotten him into puzzles, and there’s a four thousand piece one rolled up for them to continue at the cottage. Yuna loves to baby him— the first time he woke up to her tucking a blanket around him on the couch, Ilya had almost burst into tears. It felt peaceful to feel this kind of love again. It had been too long.

“Я тебя люблю, брат!” Svetlana yelled, light voice cutting through the noise of the room.

“What she said!” Rose cheered.

A wet laugh escapes him as he walks off the stage where Shane is waiting for him, gaze full of what can only be described as *love*. He tugged Ilya into a darker corner, out of the path of graduates that were crossing the stage. They cheered for Rose and Svetlana as loud as they could, and enveloped them in the tightest hugs possible as they walked down the steps.

“We’ll catch up to you guys,” Shane tells them, pushing them gently back towards the entrance where their families were meeting back up. They went with bright smiles on their lips, heels clacking against the floor of the auditorium. When Shane looks back at Ilya, his boyfriend’s eyes are big and wet, tears sticking to his lashline, refusing to fall. It makes Shane’s heart flop in his chest. “Happy tears?”

“Very happy, Любимый.” English felt like it was escaping him like it always did when he was feeling overwhelmed. “This moment will stay with me forever.” He brushes a thumb over Shane’s freckles, softening when he feels dampness there.

“Ditto,” Shane tells him, laughing when Ilya’s brow furrows. “It means me too.”

“Your language is ridiculous.”

“Like yours is any better,” Shane leans in, pressing a kiss high on Ilya’s cheek before whispering a quiet, “Я тебя люблю.” The way Ilya’s lips part in shock brings heat to his cheeks. “Is my pronunciation alright?”

“Perfect,” Ilya breathes. He’s sure his face is giving away every single emotion in his heart. All the joy, the longing, the contentment at finally being *seen*. Ilya feels like he’s missing Shane even with him being right in front of him; he’s grieving for all the future moments that they won’t be this, just happy and teary eyed and together without the hurdles of daily lives getting in the way. “Mine will not be. Je t’aime.”

“Je t’aime.” Shane pulls him into a fierce hug, one that feels like a beginning and an end of this era. It hurts *beautifully*. When he pulls away, there’s stars in his eyes. He takes the tassel of Ilya’s cap and gently moves it from right to left. “Tradition. We’ll make you Canadian yet, I think.”

Ilya grabs his hand and tugs him along, a lovesick expression on his face, “Nah, too boring.”

“Boring isn’t always bad, you know.”

And looking around at his life, his perfectly ordinary existence that is so different from the life back in Moscow, he agrees. There’s warmth, there’s smiles, there’s reasons to laugh around a dinner table of people he loved and even more reason to want to immortalize those moments in pictures. Ilya finds that boring might just be the best thing that’s ever happened to him.

“Maybe,” he teases Shane. “Now hurry up, David wants to finish the puzzle we are working on and I want to eat my weight in chicken parmesan.”

And Shane lets himself be led towards his parents with a grin on his face, unbelieving that he actually got to be *this* lucky in love.

“With the first overall selection in this year’s NHL draft, the Montreal Voyageurs are very proud to select...”

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya whispers under his breath, eyes closed. It’s repeated what seems like a million times; this is the closest thing to a prayer that Ilya has ever sent up since he was a boy with his mother’s watchful eyes on him to make sure he got the scripture correct. He’s so nervous you’d think he was getting drafted. Time became slow, the mere seconds stretching to hours as Shane squeezed his hand so hard it almost hurt.

“McGill University’s Shane Hollander!”

“Holy shit,” Shane breathes, looking to Ilya as the table around them erupts. He always had faith in his abilities, but being called first was a completely different experience. Especially when he’s one of the older guys in the crowd of potential draftees. “Montreal— Ilya, it’s Montreal!”

Distantly he can hear his parents cheering from where he is across the table, face buried in Ilya’s neck as they hug each other tight.

“I am so proud,” Ilya tells him quietly, quickly before pulling away to readjust Shane’s lapel. The words are broken at best, the emotion choking them in Ilya’s throat. He wants to kiss him so bad. “Go, Mr. Voyageur. I will be here.”

Shane’s eyes flicked down to his lips and everything went slow.

They had talked at length about being open as a couple when Shane made the transition into the NHL. Being gay wasn’t something he was ever ashamed of, not really. He had figured it out later than most but that was okay— Shane had always been a late bloomer. But by the time he *did* discover that part of himself, he had absolutely no desire to shove it down and hide it like it was some dirty secret. Being at such a progressive school like McGill, in such a progressive city as Montreal, definitely helped. Meeting Ilya helped even more. Shane Hollander had no illusions about just how good he was at hockey. And if the league never had an abundance of out players? Well, that was their problem. He would be damned if he couldn’t have hockey *and* Ilya.

Which is why the way Ilya obviously hesitates because he’s worried about others’ perception of them only propels Shane forward into his lips. There’s shock at first before Ilya melts into it like he always does, the wide smile on his lips making their teeth clack together more than anything. It was objectively a shitty kiss, nothing like the ones behind closed doors where they can take their time, but it also might just be the best one they’ve ever shared.

When he pulls away, Ilya’s smile is like the sun and his cheeks are dusty pink. He pushes Shane towards his parents with a giggle. “Does this mean I am also Mr. Voyageur? Will I be your kept husband?”

“If you could start picking up your socks from the floor, maybe,” he throws over his shoulder, before letting himself be bear hugged by his parents. The words he really wants to say are for later, for their shared bed in the apartment still stacked high with boxes. Shane hears a loud, bright laugh behind him and can’t help but grin into their embraces.

The lights of the stage are warm on the way up the stairs and he’s mostly focused on not tripping in front of all these people. A blue jersey is held out to him, one with his name and number proudly stitched on is stark white. The moment it touches his hands he can’t pull it over his head quick enough. Every single bruise, every single check into the boards, every single insensitive chirp from his white counterparts has led up to this moment. Shane was never a fighter on the ice, he’d rather let his skill speak for itself. That’s exactly what donning the jersey felt like— every single fight up till now was won. And he’s the clear winner.

When he holds up one finger, the cameras flash so rapidly he can barely see in front of him. But what he does find in the crowd is his Ilya, who’s proudly standing with his phone out and a beaming smile on his face. It’s almost too good to be true.

The rest of the night was a flurry of activity that he couldn’t remember if he tried. Shane has never shaken so many hands in his life and through the waves of excitement his palms start to itch. His skin is hot, hot enough to have him tugging at his collar and loosening his tie after he gulps down another complimentary champagne. His laugh sounds tinny even to his own ears, and his eyes feel tight like they’re begging for a reprieve from the fluorescents of the reception hall. Through it all, Ilya’s constant touch on his lower back grounded him. The small teasing whispers about the whole event cut through the buzz of the room, and all of a sudden, Shane’s laugh sounded real again.

“I can skate circles around anyone here,” Ilya said quietly, almost into his champagne. “Do you think is too late for them to take me? Maybe we will be first teammates who are dating. Me as captain, of course.”

“*Anyone* here?” Shane asked, thankful that his mother was currently talking the ear off of the Voyageurs general manager. “I remember me beating you around that rink in Lavaltrie. Captains should be humble, and you are *not* that. Like, at all, actually.”

“I was distracted, obviously. Why have you not worn those jeans since?” He waits until Shane’s right in the middle of a gulp of bubbly before, “They make your ass look incredible—”

Bubbles shoot back into the glass and Shane rushes to put it down before hacking into the bend of his arm. “Ilya!” He’s beet red, from the lack of oxygen or from the embarrassment, Ilya has no clue. He does know that this is the most present Shane has been in the last few hours, though. His observant eyes had watched Shane’s social battery slowly drain, watched the way his shoulders started to slump in on themselves, watched the way he started to shift his weight more often. Ilya isn’t entirely sure on when it’s acceptable to leave, but for his boyfriend’s sake, he hopes it’s soon.

“You need mouth to mouth?” He asks, wiggling his eyebrows. Shane just rolls his eyes and waves off the worried gazes of Yuna, David, and whoever else they were entertaining at the moment. “Because I am willing to. Just so you know.”

“We’ll be back,” Shane tells their company, pulling Ilya to the blessedly empty bathroom. There’s an annoyed furrow in his brow as he checks to make sure they’re alone. “You’re going to kill me.”

“Till death do us part, though, right? That is what you say in your language?” Ilya bats his eyelashes.

“When you’re getting married! Which we are not!”

“So you don’t want to marry me.” Ilya says flatly, a hand to his heart. He remembers Shane telling him that he didn’t mind the teasing, and so in this moment, he couldn’t help but push a little bit more. There’s a tiny curl at the end of Shane’s lip that he’s chasing. “This is what bullet through the heart feels like. Almost like Anna when she jumped on the tracks.”

“Of course I want to—,” he groans, eyes going wide and all of a sudden ducking eye contact. “You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?”

“I would *never*,” Ilya gasps, scandalized. “Me?”

Shane lets out a short laugh, “Yes, *you*.” He rubs at his eyes, eyes that were getting more bloodshot by the minute. “Thanks for getting me out of there. I feel like my head is about to explode.”

“You look like it too,” Ilya says gently. His eyes bounce around the room and he almost lets out a cheer when he sees a dimmer instead of a normal light switch. When he turns it lower, tension visibly bleeds out of Shane’s shoulders. “Better, Любимый?”

“Much.” Shane isn’t shy when he reaches his arms out to Ilya, but he is happy when Ilya comes without issue. The scent of his cologne envelops them both, something woodsy and fresh and so Ilya that the knot of anxiety between his shoulder blades starts to unravel just enough for a full breath to enter his lungs. Small scratches on his scalp make his limbs feel like goo and Shane can’t help the way his eyes drift shut, just for a second.

“This is why I call you котенок,” Ilya mutters, pressing a kiss to Shane’s inky locks. “You are almost purring under my hands.”

“Really?” The question is quiet, more spoken into Ilya’s lapel than anything.

“Well, and because you look too cute when you are angry. Like tiger cub trying to roar but who cannot yet.” He grins when he feels Shane huff. The random patterns he rubs into Shane’s back seem to be helping. “What is movie? Svetlana made me watch when we were children.”

“The Lion King?”

“Da. The Lion King. You are Simba.”

“That was a lion, not a tiger. But thank you, I guess?”

“Is a compliment! One day you will be the king of this world, Shane, of hockey” he starts softly, more serious. “You’ve worked so hard and it is paying off. There is no doubt in my mind that you will win all of the Stanley Cups you want, and you will go down in history as one of the greats. I know it.”

“And you’ll be by my side, right?”

“Of course. I guess that makes me Nala.” He tuts, pretending to give it some thought. “Worse characters to be, we have same eyes. I could’ve been Zazu.”

Shane pulls, back, a tired grin on his lips, “Never pegged you for someone who likes Disney.”

“I have taste.” Ilya insists, brushing down errant strands of Shane’s hair back into place. “How do you think I got you?”

“Charmer.” He presses a kiss to the mole on Ilya’s cheek, his favorite one of all, before moving to his lips. It’s short and sweet, a thank you for pulling Shane out of the fire that was his own mind.

“You love it.”

Shane’s eyes take him in, really for the first time in hours. He sees the well fitted black blazer that hugs broad shoulders, the silky navy shirt that was unbuttoned just enough for the ever present gold crucifix to shine against Ilya’s tanned skin. The color brings out his blue eyes, somehow bringing forward new shades of the color that Shane has yet to discover. He sees the tailored suit pants that hug the very thighs that Shane would rather in between right now. His shoes are polished to shine even in the dim light. Altogether he looks absolutely *perfect*.

All he can do is hum in response, too overwhelmed by everything else to form words. “I think I’m ready to call it a night,” Shane says instead. Fatigue is starting to pull at his posture, his lower back has maybe another few minutes standing on this hard floor before it collapses. “Is it bad if I leave? Does it make me look ungrateful?” A warm shower to slough off all the lingering smells and germs sounds like absolute heaven. Falling into his own bed next to Ilya sounds even better.

“Nope,” Ilya says easily, popping the p at the end. He looks down at his watch. “Is good thing I asked Yuna to let me take you home early.” He says it like it’s nothing. They’re a short drive away from their building, luckily the draft had taken place in Montreal this year. “And she said yes, of course, because I am her favorite.”

Shane’s lips part in shock, “You what?”

“You are an open book, Shane,” he smiles, something smitten. “How about I take you home, we shower, and I make you one of your boring meals?”

This is what it’s like to be seen. What it’s like to be known, his mind whispers.

“They’re not boring,” he defends weakly, more as a knee jerk reaction than actual offense.

“Salmon and brown rice with *kale*,” Ilya shivers. “Meal fit for a king, yes.” He presses a kiss to Shane’s forehead quickly before taking his hand in his own. “Come. Let’s go home.”

Home.

Home.

Home.

The word had never sounded so sweet.

Parting pleasantries were quick and their steps out to the car even quicker, and before Shane knows it, he’s in the passenger seat of Ilya’s car, idly humming to some soft ballad on the radio. The lights of downtown Montreal streak by them and Shane can see the flashes behind his closed eyelids. The window feels cool despite the early summer heat, and the pulse in his forehead softens at the sensation.

Their apartment was on the outskirts of Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, a neighborhood known for its younger population and trendy cafes and galleries. Rent was affordable enough for Ilya to comfortably split on his TA salary, only slightly higher now that he was going to be a graduate student opposed to an undergrad. It was ten minutes to campus and less than thirty to the arena that Shane would be spending a lot of his time in, Centre Bell. Ilya had put down the security deposit and first months rent on his own against Shane’s insistence that they split it.

“You are about to be a millionaire,” Ilya had laughed, like it was the easiest thing in the world. “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine, no?”

Shane had floated the idea of a highrise in the middle of the city, one that his new contract would have easily paid for, but Ilya had refused. There had to be some kind of level playing field for them for him to feel comfortable, Shane knows now. So, they had compromised. The apartment on the top floor of a brightly painted brownstone was perfect for the two of them, really. It had a view of the Saint Lawrence and roof access to see the sky painted in pinks and purples when it set in the summer. Their landlord occupied the ground floor apartment, an older Puerto Rican woman with gray streaks in her hair and deep smile lines around her mouth. She had already fallen in love with Ilya, as most do, when she heard him blasting Bad Bunny on move in day and was constantly sending him up the flight of stairs with a new tupperware full of dishes neither had ever tried. The containers had started to accumulate their own tower amongst the maze of unpacked boxes, both too busy in the recent weeks to really put any effort into unpacking. Ilya with prep for the course he’d be teaching during the summer semester

The hinges were slightly squeaky, the old hardwood floors creaky in certain spots, and the old electric stove took a second too long to heat up, but it was their home, and both loved it already. It felt significant in a way that they couldn’t really put into words.

When the lock finally clicks behind them, Shane feels his shoulders drop from around his ears. “Finally,” he breathes, making a beeline for their room. The suit was starting to feel like a second skin and not in a good way, too close and too tight and too scratchy. His sensory

issues always were at their worst when he was exhausted. The tie was loosened first before being folded over a hanger, same with his blazer, pants, and dress shirt. Ilya had followed behind, giving him enough space to decompress but always close enough for Shane to know he's there. "Let's save water." The words are quiet, shy in the way they always are when Shane tries to be sexy.

"I like the way you think," Ilya grins, pecking Shane's cheek before letting his suit drop to the floor in a pile. He lit a candle in the bathroom, basking it in the flickering light of a small flame—it gave them just enough vision to see each other under the spray. For all the small things about this apartment that could be flaws, the water pressure wasn't one of them. The pleasantly warm spray sluiced down their bodies, and with it the whole day.

"Turn around, let me wash your hair," Shane tells Ilya. They share a shampoo and conditioner now, and while neither would admit it, they revel in the fact that they smell like each other. It was the little things. The easy intimacy of washing each other down with a soft cloth, the touches that were full of a softer love that spoke of a future together. "Thanks for being there today, I know you're in the middle of a lot of prep for the summer semester."

"I would not have missed it for the world, you know that."

And weirdly, Shane did. He had no doubts that Ilya would show up for him because he always had.

"I know." He massages at Ilya's scalp and smiles at the way he pushes into the pressure.

"Your turn." Ilya's fingers carded through Shane's hair, rubbing gentle circles around his temples to stave off the last bits of his tension headache. With only the sound of the water hitting tile and their breathing filling the room, Ilya decides to let loose all the words he's wanted to say all day.

"You were beautiful today, Shane..."

"Ilya—"

"Let me finish, Любимый." He rinses Shane's hair before wrapping his arms around his front and resting his chin on his shoulder. "All I could think about while you were on that stage was these freckles," he brushes his thumb on them, "and this heart," he rests a hand on Shane's chest, the rhythm soothing him, "and how fast it must have been beating. Your dreams had become reality in front of me and I am so... grateful. That I get to see you like this is one of the best things you've ever given me."

Shane feels pricks at the back of his eyes. He can't tell if tears are escaping his eyes with the water running down his cheeks, so he lets the dam break anyways. Being loved like this was hard, even with all the peace it provided. Shane had never been one to open up, to let every single part of himself be truly seen, for fear of what would happen if he did. He always felt not enough. Not white enough for hockey, not asian enough to really identify with any of his culture, not normal enough to be able to catch all the innuendos and banter in the locker room with his teammates. Loneliness clung to him like a bad smell, it always had. Meeting Ilya, Rose, and Svetlana had changed that.

Rose with her insistent pushes to be his friend. Svetlana with her ability to see through any of his bullshit and cut straight to what was bothering him. Both with a perspective that he now knew he was lacking for so long.

And then there's his Ilya. With his secret smiles and accent that curled around Shane's name like something of a benediction. Ilya that had broadened his horizons with things that weren't hockey, that weren't hard and bruising and cold like that ice his skates tore through day after day. He had filled Shane with something softer— stories of love and loss and coming of age in a time where the stakes seemed to be so much higher than they were now. Memories of warm laughter on the beat up couch in that small office rose to the surface of his mind. The dust mites dancing in the air, the smell of ink and paper from Ilya's red pen and the ever growing stack of assignments on his desk. At the time, Shane had been sad that they couldn't really be seen beyond those walls, but now? Now those memories are some of his favorites, and the thought that now their lives are inextricably changed and he wouldn't be able to just knock on that door and sit with his love for hours was bittersweet. He had achieved his dream, Ilya was closer every single day to achieving his own as well. Things were always going to change, and Shane had never been good with that. But at least Ilya was with him—the immovable object to Shane's unstoppable force.

“I cannot wait to build a life with you, Shane Hollander. I think it could be great, yes? We could be great?”

Shane can do nothing but press their foreheads together, breathing in Ilya's breath like it's his own, feeling their heartbeats sync under a shaking hand.

“Yeah, Ilya. I think we can be.”

fin

Chapter End Notes

translations

-Любимый: beloved

-Солнышко: sunshine

-Я тебя люблю, брат: i love you, brother

-Я тебя люблю: i love you

-Je t'aime: i love you

-Котенок: kitten

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