

The Waiting Game

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76049831) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76049831>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	Gen , M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Hayden Pike & Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Hayden Pike , Ilya Rozanov & Svetlana Vetrova
Additional Tags:	outsider pov , Injured Shane Hollander , Mild Hurt/Comfort , Episode 5 , Svetlana finds out , Hayden Finds Out
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-19 Completed: 2025-12-23 Words: 16,005 Chapters: 4/4

The Waiting Game

by [Rizandace](#)

Summary

“Lily,” Hayden says automatically. “You know about Lily?”

Something flickers across Rozanov’s face. His jaw twitches. “Yes, I know about Lily.” He raises his eyebrows.

Hayden feels like a complete asshole, all of a sudden. There’s just been too much going on to even think about Shane’s mystery girlfriend. “Shit, I should probably, like, call her, or something? I don’t know this girl at all, but Shane’s been obsessed with her for years. If she was watching the game, she would have seen him get hurt.”

“You don’t need to call her,” Rozanov says, and when Hayden glances at him, he still looks fucking miserable but now he’s rolling his eyes, a much more familiar expression of disdain on his face. “She’s sitting right here.”

--

Hayden Pike and Ilya Rozanov are waiting for Shane to wake up after he took a bad hit on the ice. They get to talking.

Chapter 2: Ilya and Shane talk about what it means, now that someone knows their secret.

Chapter 3: Shane and Hayden hash out the big reveal.

Chapter 4: Ilya tells Svetlana the big secret.

Notes

Okay so this one came out of the idea of like, what if Shane was a little bit more severely injured than in canon (he's still gonna be okay, don't worry) and Ilya is trying to get information on his condition but he can't because he's not family, and Shane's unconscious, so he has to find someone who can help him...

Also I have about a thousand different "Hayden finds out" ideas floating around in my head and this is the one I'm starting with lol.

Please let me know your thoughts, this show has EATEN my brain and I need more people to talk to.

- Translation into Русский available: [Игра в ожидание](#) by [Unserious_translator](#)

Chapter 1

When Hayden exits Shane's hospital room, phone in hand to call Yuna and David and Jackie and everyone else who's waiting on an update, he nearly runs into Ilya fucking Rozanov, pacing the hall.

"Oh," he says stupidly, staring at the large, prowling form of Boston's captain. "You're still here."

He hadn't thought much of Rozanov swinging by the hospital a few hours back, right when visiting hours had started that morning. When someone took a bad hit like this, it was routine for the opposing team to do something to reach out, make sure everyone knew that hockey was hockey but nobody had wanted something like this to happen. Rozanov had been stilted and formal and his English had been worse than Hayden had heard it since they'd all been rookies together, offering his apologies on behalf of Marleau, asking after Shane's condition.

Hayden hadn't been at his best after a long night, and he may have been a little snippy with the man when he'd informed him that thanks to his teammate, Shane was unconscious and the doctors didn't know why he wasn't waking up. He'd been too worried out of his mind to really track much of anything else, but he'd seen the expression of legitimate fear on Rozanov's face at the news, something vulnerable and shocked.

"He— is not awake," Rozanov had said blankly. "He is not okay?"

"No, man. No, he's not fucking okay."

And then Hayden had been ducking around the corner to call Shane's parents again; they were waiting at the airport after their first attempt to fly had been thwarted by bad weather in Ottawa. He'd become Shane's temporary medical proxy, of a sort; the doctors had talked to Yuna on the phone and she'd given permission for them to share shit with Hayden about Shane's condition while they got their asses to Boston.

He hasn't taken a second to pause and process in over twenty-four hours. There had been the game, playing shitty and distracted the whole time, and then rushing straight to the hospital after, and getting a lot of scary information about a broken collarbone and a probable concussion and checking for brain bleeds and running tests... he'd gone back to the hotel just long enough to shower and fall into a restless sleep for less than three hours, and then he'd come back to stand fucking vigil outside of Shane's room, wishing Jackie could teleport here to hold his hand, wishing the rest of the team would stop texting him for updates, wishing Shane would wake up and tell him what he's supposed to do.

After he'd talked to Rozanov that morning he hadn't given the man a second thought, dealing with the updates and the phone calls and shoving a bag of chips in his face from a vending machine just to keep the energy up for a little longer. He'd been allowed to go in and sit with Shane for a while, although the experience had been an odd one, like being bored and scared at the same time— Shane was just lying there, bruised face and arm bound up in a sling. He could have been sleeping. He could have been about to open his eyes any moment. But he

couldn't. Wouldn't. And reading between the lines of what the doctors were saying, nobody's entirely sure *why*. It had made him antsy before too long, and he'd decided another round of phone calls might be in order, and now here he is, staring at a very frazzled Ilya Rozanov, dark circles under his eyes and his lips dry and and chapped like he's been chewing on them.

"He is still not—he is not awake?" Rozanov asks, eyes darting around Hayden's face with anxious attention.

"No change," Hayden says, before realizing maybe he shouldn't be offering medical information to a guy he and Shane barely know. "Uh. Not trying to be rude, but what the fuck are you doing here?"

Rozanov opens his mouth and then snaps it shut again, swallowing hard. "I wanted to check on him."

"Yeah, that's what you did like almost three hours ago. You checked. You're good. You can go."

"No," Rozanov says. He looks at Hayden, a fierce sort of defiance in his eyes. He looks—kind of like a wreck, maybe a bit how Hayden probably looks. Sallow, like he hasn't eaten or slept properly. Eyes rimmed in red. "No, I can't leave."

"Are you feeling guilty, or something?" Hayden asks. He can't really understand another explanation for Rozanov's behavior. Not like he actually knows the guy personally, but he's always gotten a general impression of a callous, cocky, annoyingly talented athlete with a stereotypically shallow emotional range. The kind of guy incapable of thinking about other people as anything more than instruments for his own use.

"No," Rozanov says again. "Not guilty, not—I didn't do anything, Marleau didn't do anything wrong. I almost hit him, after the game. But I didn't, because it was accident. We all know this."

"You almost hit—" Hayden shakes his head, trying to make sense of this. "Listen, I'm running on almost no sleep and I'm trying to deal with calling his parents and the fucking PR shit and the rest of the team is bugging me for updates and I don't really have time to decode what the fuck you're saying. Do you need something from me, or are we done here?"

It wasn't a real question, but Rozanov answers it. "I need something. I need something from you. I need you to tell me what is happening with Hollander, please."

And now he's starting to get properly pissed off. "Why the fuck should I?"

"Because—" Rozanov stops and swallows, looks around the empty hallway. "Fuck. *Fuck* this fucking stupid—I need you to tell me if he's okay, or I will lose my mind, nobody can tell me anything here, I can't just ask nurses, I am nobody, I am not allowed to be told. But you know. You know what the doctor is saying, you can tell me that he will be okay. I need to know he will be okay."

“Why do you care?” Hayden asks, and Rozanov makes a frustrated sound, almost a growl, in the back of his throat.

“Please, Hayden, please come sit down. I need, I need— I will explain.”

It’s that, honestly, Rozanov calling him *Hayden*, that cuts through the irritation and the exhaustion and gets him to pause and actually think about the situation. He kind of didn’t think Ilya Fucking Rozanov, player of a generation, would even have bothered to remember his name.

“Okay,” he says slowly, carefully. “There are chairs right around the corner, here. It’s where I was waiting last night when they first transferred him to this room.”

They sit next to each other but with a seat in between, a buffer, and Rozanov looks around the room, scanning it as if for other occupants. It’s really just a little alcove, nothing more. There’s a table with a few old magazines and a fake potted plant. The bigger waiting room is down the hall, but Hayden supposes this is where loved ones gather sometimes right outside the doors of their injured family, waiting for the worst or the best news of their lives.

“Talk,” Hayden says, after thirty seconds of waiting for Rozanov to explain himself. Rozanov flinches, even though Hayden had kept his voice low and steady.

“I will tell you something. And you will maybe not believe me,” he says finally, an odd, undefinable tremor in his voice. “Because it is fucking crazy. It is so fucking crazy but— it’s the truth. And I can’t leave, and I can’t explain it any other way. So.”

“Okay,” Hayden says, trying to stay calm. His brain literally cannot speculate about whatever this thing is, this thing Ilya Rozanov is feeling the need to confess to him, sitting here in the hall outside of Shane’s hospital room. He wants to call Jackie, he wants to hear her voice. He wants Shane to wake the fuck up. And instead he’s sitting here, with this asshole he barely knows. This asshole who looks like he’s two seconds from bursting into tears. “Okay, lay it on me.”

“I don’t want to tell you this,” Rozanov says. “He will be, when he wakes up, he will be so angry, probably. But I need— someone has to know, because I need help, he is unconscious, I don’t know what to do.”

“Look, whatever it is—”

“Just let me— fuck, fuck me, this is so stupid. You know, Shane tells me you know he has a — that he texts someone, a girl, here in Boston.”

“Lily,” Hayden says automatically. “You know about Lily?”

Something flickers across Rozanov’s face. His jaw twitches. “Yes, I know about Lily.” He raises his eyebrows.

Hayden feels like a complete asshole, all of a sudden. There’s just been too much going on to even think about Shane’s mystery girlfriend. “Shit, I should probably, like, call her, or

something? I don't know this girl at all, but Shane's been obsessed with her for years. If she was watching the game, she would have seen him get hurt."

"You don't need to call her," Rozanov says, and when Hayden glances at him, he still looks fucking miserable but now he's rolling his eyes, a much more familiar expression of disdain on his face. "She's sitting right here."

It takes Hayden less than a second to understand. And then it takes him another five seconds to unstick his tongue from the roof of his mouth. And then he decides he can't fucking believe it.

"No. Nope. No fucking way."

"Yes. Sorry, but is true."

"But no it's not. There's just no way. He's been texting her for— I mean, he's been, it's been — years. Years?"

"Mmm. Since rookie year, yes."

"*No* fucking way."

"I am Lily, he is Jane, we have secret sex fling right under everyone's noses. Big scandal. And now he is lying in hospital bed and he won't wake up and nobody in the *fucking world* knows that I even care about him. And I can't leave the hospital until he wakes up because I can't breathe, I am so scared. And now I out him to his best friend without his permission because I am selfish fucking asshole, but I need you to help me, I need someone to tell me what's going on and you're the one who's here. So."

There are about ten thousand different things he wants to say, and the one that manages to get out of his mouth first is— "Shane's *gay*?"

Rozanov snaps his head over to make eye contact with him, a blazing look of fury taking over his face. "If you have problem with that, then you and I have *big big* problem, understand? I will throw your body in a dumpster when I am done with you, I don't care, I am scary Russian, I have ways."

Hayden thinks the last part is probably some sort of weird joke, but the overall threat is certainly sincere. God, the fucking *nerve* of this prick. "I don't care that he's— I mean, Jesus, man, he's my best friend, I wouldn't, I don't have a *problem* with anything like that. No way."

"Good. Shane loves you very much. I can't say I understand why."

"Fuck you."

"Maybe that is why you are friends, this is his favorite thing to say to me too. Such uncreative insults, so boring."

"I just can't believe I didn't *know*. That he didn't *tell* me."

“About being gay? Or about me.”

“Both? Mostly the gay thing. I mean, not trying to be a dick when I say this but I’m judging him a hell of a lot more for his specific choice of man, more than the general category.”

Rozanov tilts his head at him for a second, as if it’s taking him a moment to understand Hayden’s clumsy English. “Ah. Gay is fine, but me, I’m bad choice.”

“He could do better, is all I’m saying.”

He’d meant it mostly as a joke, some way to release the pressure of this fucking insane conversation, some way to keep his wheels spinning while he tries to catch up to all this new information. But Rozanov doesn’t keep the banter going. Rozanov frowns, and says, “yes. Obviously.”

And then his face crumples a bit, and he covers his eyes with his hands, heels pressing into the sockets like he’s trying to push tears back before they can leak out. He looks exhausted, he looks scared. Like a man whose partner is in the fucking hospital. Hayden tries to imagine how he’d be feeling if Jackie had collapsed to the ground in front of him and then hadn’t woken up again. Just to picture it makes his skin go cold. And he doesn’t even *need* to imagine Rozanov’s fear, when it comes down to it. He loves Shane too. He’s already more afraid than he’s ever been.

“Hey,” he says, and he’s slipped into the cajoling, comforting tone he uses on his kids when they’re tired and weepy. “Hey, it’s uh— it’s going to be okay.”

“Will it?” Rozanov says. Fuck, he’s definitely crying. “Will he be okay?”

“They don’t know for sure,” Hayden says honestly, and Rozanov sniffs, hands still over his face. “But they’re hoping he wakes up on his own soon. Head injuries are— tricky, I guess.”

“That’s it? We are just waiting to see?”

“Yeah. Sorry, I know it’s... I know it’s not much.”

“I can’t fucking do this,” Rozanov says, voice croaking out like the words are a painful confession. “It will kill me, I can’t lose him like this.”

“Tell me about him,” Hayden says, unthinkingly. “I mean, tell me— fuck, tell me how this *happened*. Take both our minds off of worrying.”

“Is supposed to be secret,” Rozanov says.

“Well, obviously. But. Cat’s out of the bag.”

Rozanov finally lifts his hands away from his face and looks at him, quizzical. “Is stupid English expression?”

“Oh. Yeah, I guess. It means, like, it’s too late now so might as well keep going. I already know the biggest thing. What’s the harm in telling me the details?”

Rozanov's mouth twitches like he's trying to smile. "You sure you want to know *details*, Pike?"

"Not those kinds of details! You fucking weirdo! I'm just, I'm— I know it's not the main point here but if I'm honest with you my feelings are pretty hurt that Shane didn't trust me enough to tell me this crazy thing was going on."

"We both pretended, a lot, that it's nothing," Rozanov says. "Even to each other, to ourselves, maybe? Is— not easy to explain. I can't speak for him. But we, when we talked to each other or made plans to see each other, we never— there was never a promise it would happen again, next time. Was always something we did because it was fun, and to talk more about it, to say it meant something, was breaking a rule. We have not been, it is not like, secret relationship, really. Maybe recently, a bit more like that, but— but we haven't even said, to each other, what this is supposed to be. He didn't keep it from you because he doesn't trust you."

"If you're trying to sell me on this being some casual thing, you're doing a bad job of it."

"No," Rozanov says. "I tried so hard for it to be casual. But it is not. Casual. Not to me."

"Not to him either," Hayden says with confidence. "Shane doesn't *do* casual. I remember when I was first getting to know him, I actually thought maybe he was gay, because he never paid any attention to the girls throwing themselves at him. But then I caught him smiling at his phone like an idiot, and he's been just, obviously and completely obsessed with the same person for the last five years, at least. I guess longer, if it's really been since rookie year. And I thought it just meant he was private, and romantic, and... and conventional. I sort of thought maybe Lily was like, *married* or something? Couldn't understand why else he'd be this secretive about it with me."

"He is not good at knowing how he feels," Rozanov says. "He is scared, a lot. Doesn't know how to deal."

"And you?"

"He's the scariest thing that's ever happened," Rozanov says flatly. "We are both so, so bad at this."

"Maybe," Hayden says. "But for the record, whether he's told you so or not, it's definitely not casual for him. He was so fucked up, earlier this season. He was *miserable*, and he thought he was hiding it, which was the saddest part of all."

"Miserable," Rozanov repeats, frowning. "When?"

"I mean, I wasn't sure what had happened because he refused to talk to me about it, big surprise, but I sort of figured he and Lily had broken up, and then suddenly he started going out with—" Hayden pauses, suddenly embarrassed.

"Rose Landry. Yes. I have the internet, is not news to me."

“So, what, you guys broke up and he rebounds with the most public person he possibly could have chosen to date?”

“Public *girl*,” Rozanov says darkly. “They were not compatible.”

“Well, yeah, that’s apparently an understatement.”

Rozanov gives him a glare, but it seems a little half-hearted. “He was miserable? Miserable, with Rose Landry?”

“Oh my god,” Hayden says, and he finds himself actually on the verge of laughter. This is so weird. “Look at you, asking me for reassurance.”

“Fuck off.”

“For the record, yeah. I think he was totally heartbroken. Did you break up with him or something?”

“No,” Rozanov says, the glare intensifying. “Other way around, if anything. He was being idiot, I was probably idiot too. We fixed it. And wasn’t a breakup. You have to be in a relationship with someone for there to be a breakup.”

“And you’re not in a relationship?”

“We can’t be.”

Hayden wants to say *why not*, but he’s not that stupid. He knows why not. He can think of about a thousand reasons.

“But nobody knows at all?” Hayden says. “*Nobody*. That seems... I mean that seems like an insane thing to keep between the two of you, for such a long time. Especially if you both feel — the way you obviously feel.”

“We have been careful, we— have been scared, if anybody ever knew. Our careers, our lives, I am immigrant, you know, I am here in America because of hockey but I could not go back to Russia if wrong people knew.”

Hayden can’t believe he’s sitting here being forced to feel sorry for Ilya Rozanov, but every word out of his mouth is making the guy more and more of a human being to him, absolutely against his will. This whole thing is a lot bigger than some frankly mind-boggling gossip he can’t wait to tell his wife. “That’s pretty heavy stuff.”

“Yes,” Rozanov says, and his head is bowed over his hands like he’s feeling it physically. “Yes, heavy.”

“So *nobody* knows. Really”

“No. Nobody. And right now I am so angry at myself for this. And him. I am angry, we didn’t think about, I never— I wasn’t supposed to feel like this, it wasn’t supposed to *be* like this. But I am fucking terrified, here. And now you know, and now I am in position where I need

to beg you to tell me what is happening, because the man I— this person, I care about so much, I have no right to be here, I have no reason, no reason anybody knows about, to be here. I am not boyfriend, *family*, I am some guy he is supposed to hate, some fucking marketing stunt, rivals on the ice. What does any of that fucking matter?”

There’s too much in that whole little speech to unravel properly, but Hayden sticks to what he knows for sure: “You don’t have to beg for anything. I’m not going to pretend I understand what’s going on here, but if this is the situation, then so be it. I can’t— I mean, his parents are the ones who get to make, like, medical decisions about him and all that, but I’ll run interference when they get here. I’ll make sure you know what’s going on, until he wakes up and can tell you himself.”

Rozanov looks at him, heartbreakingly hopeful. “He will wake up, yes? The doctors, they say we wait, but— do they seem like they think he will be fine, or— or— how did they say it?”

“They do this annoying thing where they refuse to say anything definitive. Like, they say we have every reason to hope he’ll wake up soon, but since they can’t explain exactly why he’s still unconscious, they don’t have any firm guesses as to when that will be.”

“So they know nothing and Hollander is just lying there and everybody in this building is useless and we just don’t get to know.”

“Kinda.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, fuck.”

And that’s how Hayden Pike ends up spending most of the day with Ilya Rozanov. They swap out sitting by Shane’s bedside for a while, and Hayden tells him when Yuna and David finally get on the plane after hours of frustrating delays, and whenever the doctor speaks to Hayden, Hayden relays the information back to Rozanov, who looks more and more gaunt and devastated and broken every time Hayden tells him there’s nothing new.

Rozanov vacillates between being taciturn and dour, and then suddenly a burst of energy will overtake him and he’ll want to talk, he’ll want to ask Hayden the same questions over and over, about the doctors and Shane’s condition, but also other stuff— he grills Hayden on what exactly he’d known, or been able to guess, about Shane’s secret Boston girl, over all these years. They talk about the sneaking around, the version of events that Hayden had constructed, contrasted with the truth of the whole thing. He can’t believe he never put it together, that Shane vanished to go be with Lily not only when they were playing in Boston, but when Boston was in Montreal, too.

He gets the sense that Rozanov is unburdening himself of a lot of things he’s been wanting to say for a long time. It makes him feel weirdly soft and tender towards this man for whom he’s never felt anything but professional animosity. Shane’s obviously so important to the guy, and he’s never, not once, been able to share the reality of that with anybody.

“He will be angry, though,” Rozanov says at one point. “I am telling you things I shouldn’t. Have always promised him I would tell no one.”

“I’m never going to say a word,” Hayden promises. “I swear. And I’ll promise Shane the same thing. Hell, I won’t even tell my wife if you guys ask me not to.”

“I think will probably be good for Shane, for you to know. But I am— I feel very guilty that I tell you, it was his choice to make.”

“Hey,” Hayden says. They’re sitting together again in the alcove, this time in chairs right next to each other. He leans over and jostles his shoulder into Rozanov’s. “Extreme circumstances. He’ll understand.”

“I hope so.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’ll defend you,” Hayden says. “If he’s mad, I mean. Which I don’t think he will be. But if he is, I’ll tell him you deserve the benefit of the doubt.”

There’s a long pause, before Rozanov speaks again, a sort of forced lightness to his words. “Is annoying, how nice of a guy you are. You and Shane, perfect polite boys.”

“If it weren’t for the fact that I’m straight, I could have swept him off his feet, is that what you’re saying?”

“Not funny.”

“A little funny.”

“I don’t share.”

“You’re going to have to,” Hayden says, switching to serious on a dime. “Not like that, obviously, but— he’s my best friend. I fucking care about him. I’d do anything for him. And I think that actually puts us on the same team, for once. Yeah?”

Rozanov snorts, tilts his head back so it thunks against the wall. “For him, yes, I will endure such indignities.”

“Big words, Rozanov. Impressive”

“Get new material, seriously, all you English speaking meatheads with the same damn thing again and again. Yes, I have smaller vocabulary in second language, congratulations on your big discovery.”

Hayden laughs, he can’t help it. Rozanov’s funny. Almost, like, *charming*, actually. “Noted. I’ll spin up some more creative shit for next time we’re on the ice.”

“Best if you keep your mouth shut and focus really hard on not embarrassing yourself during games, I think. You will have to play rest of season without Hollander, so you’re basically fucked.”

This, Hayden reflects morosely, is probably true. But he'll save those feelings of disappointment for once he knows Shane is okay.

Yuna calls once she and David land and are on their way to the hospital, and shortly after Hayden hangs up with her, he gets ushered into Shane's room by the doctor. He throws a look over his shoulder at Rozanov— "I'll be right back, I'll tell you what's going on, I promise", and then slips through the door to see Shane sitting up in the bed, eyes open and blinking slowly in the dimmed light.

"Holy shit," Hayden says, swallowing around a lump in his throat. "Shane, you're awake, oh my god. Oh my god."

"He's doing well," the doctor says. "Concussion and broken collarbone as we discussed, but he's fairly lucid and we figured he'd want to see a friendly face. He's on pain medication and he needs to be resting, so keep it short."

The doctor hesitates in the doorway before exiting. "When he woke up, he was asking for an Ilya. Is that the other man who..."

Hayden snaps a look at the doctor, suddenly wondering if there's any chance this Bostonian doctor doesn't know who Ilya goddamn Rozanov is. "I'll tell Ilya," he says, the name weird on his tongue. "I'll let him know Shane wants to speak to him."

She gives him a nod, which Hayden can only hope means *I know how to be discreet*, and then slips out of the room.

"Hey, bud," Hayden says. He sounds like he's talking to one of his children, but he kind of can't help it.

"Ilya," Shane says, eyes darting over Hayden's shoulder. "Did she just say Ilya's outside?"

"Yeah," Hayden says, "he's here, he's been waiting for you to wake up."

He watches Shane's face soften, relief and eagerness in equal measure. His mouth drifts up into a dopey smile. It is not fucking subtle. "Good. He's worried about me, I bet."

"Uh, yeah. I'd say so. Listen," Hayden says, taking a step closer. He lays a hand carefully on Shane's uninjured arm, giving it a tiny squeeze. "You scared the shit out of me, Shane. I'm so glad you're okay."

"Sorry," Shane says, because of course he'd apologize. "M okay. Really. Really."

"Yeah. We're going to make sure you are, all of us. Your parents are on their way, they should be here really soon, but, uh— you want me to send Rozanov in here?"

The smile gets bigger, and more lovestruck, and *wow*, Hayden can't believe he'd had no idea, all this time. "Yes. I wanna see him. Have to ask him something."

“Okay,” Hayden says, and he swallows back on the bajillion other things he wants to say, things like *what the actual fucking fuck, Shane Hollander? You’re having a gay love affair and you had to pick THAT guy? What gives??* “Okay. I’ll send him in, and I’ll call your parents. And Jackie. She’s been texting me nonstop asking after you.”

“That’s nice,” Shane says. “Jackie’s so nice.”

“Uh huh,” Hayden says. He can’t stop his own dopey smile from taking over his face. He’s never seen Shane high before, and odds are he never will again. “She sure is. Hold on a sec, I’ll send your— I’ll send Rozanov right in.”

Maybe there’s something to it, spending one of the worst days of your life with someone. Something bonding. As much as the thought of *Ilya Fucking Rozanov* still fills Hayden with a certain amount of incredulity and disgust, he’d have to be a blind fool not to see how much these two men care about each other. So maybe he doesn’t even care that it’s this jackass from Boston who not infrequently kicks his ass out on the ice; he’s so fucking happy to have good news to share and someone to share it with. Someone, he suspects, who’s going to be as relieved as he is.

“Rozanov!” He rounds the corner to the chair where Rozanov’s been waiting. “He’s okay, he’s okay, he’s awake!”

Rozanov’s on his feet instantly, eyes wide and mouth open, rushing towards him. “Awake?”

“Yeah, awake! Groggy and drugged up and asking for you.”

A spasm of unconcealed emotion overtakes Rozanov’s face for a second, some combination of terror and elation and a frankly blinding amount of affection, and in that moment Hayden thinks, *holy fuck, it’s all entirely, actually true. He’s completely in love with Shane.*

“This is the real deal, isn’t it?” he says, almost more to himself than to the man in front of him.

But Rozanov gives him an appraising look. “Yes. Real deal. You are not such a bad guy, Hayden Pike.”

“Thanks a lot.”

Rozanov pushes past him, but Hayden catches his arm. “He’s pretty out of it, on the pain meds. I said you were here, but I didn’t, uh, mention that I knew why. I figured you should talk to him first.”

“Thank you,” Rozanov says. And he sounds so fucking sincere, and grateful, that Hayden almost wants to hug him.

“All that stuff you said to me, before,” Hayden says. “I’m going to take a wild guess and say you haven’t really said it to Shane.”

Rozanov stares at him and doesn’t answer, which is probably answer enough. “I’m just saying, you probably should. Tell him. Your name was the first word out of his mouth, man.”

Rozanov blinks, dislodging a tear. “Yes. Okay. Okay. Thank you.”

And then he’s turning away, towards the door. Towards Shane.

It takes a heroic effort to turn away and walk down the hall to call Yuna and David and tell them the news. He wonders what Rozanov is saying to Shane in there, if he’d rushed over to take Shane’s hand, if he’d leaned down to kiss him, if he’s crying and blubbing out love confessions. He wonders what kind of fucking conversation he himself and Shane are going to be having the next time they’re in a room together alone. He has soooo many goddamn questions he should start writing them down so he doesn’t forget. He wonders if he and Ilya Rozanov are going to have to be *friends* now.

Hayden puts the phone to his ear and glances over his shoulder at the closed door one more time as he waits for Yuna to answer.

Seriously. He should win some sort of a prize for not eavesdropping.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“You really don’t hate me?”

“*What?* What are you even talking about?”

“For telling Pike about us.”

There’s a beat of heavy silence on the other end of the line. Ilya curls himself up smaller on the couch. It’s such a big couch for one person, he feels like an idiot alone in this giant place sometimes.

“Ilya,” Shane says carefully, like he’s talking to a spooked animal. “We talked about this in the hospital. I told you I wasn’t mad about that.”

“I wasn’t sure how much of that conversation you remembered.”

“I remember it, I— look, yeah, obviously I wish the circumstances of Hayden finding out were different, but he’s been great about it, and we’re working through it, and you were just trying to find out if I was *okay*. Do you seriously think I could hate you for that?”

Chapter Notes

Okay, yes, here's a part 2! Thank you all so much for the overwhelming support on the first chapter. There may be more to come in this universe, so stand by!

It’s almost seven whole days after Shane’s out of the hospital, before they can properly discuss the Hayden situation.

Ilya had wanted to beg forgiveness that first day, but Hollander had been way too out of it on the drugs for anything more than a basic exchange, and Ilya had been— too raw, too exhausted, to push for a longer discussion. He’d spilled his guts to Hayden Pike already, spoken more English in one go than he maybe ever had before, and Hayden had been, loath as he is to admit it, a really decent guy about it. But that didn’t change the fact that Ilya had told him a secret that didn’t belong just to him. When Ilya had apologized to Shane for spilling his stupid feelings all over the place, Shane had looked up at him with glassy eyes

and a small little smile, and said *'s okay. If I'd seen you go down like that, I woulda lost my shit too.*

And fuck him if he hadn't nearly burst into tears at that. Shane had looked alarmed at whatever look flashed across his face, his doped up little smile turning down into a frown—*whoa, hey, are you okay?* and Ilya had squeezed his hand, hard, fighting the urge to lift it up to his lips, and he'd said, *yes, yes I am okay. As long as you are.*

He'd gotten out of there before Hollander's parents had shown up; it had just seemed like too much to try and tackle in a day, and he'd known the longer he stuck around, the greater the chances of someone seeing him and wondering why Ilya Rozanov looked like he was having a mental breakdown outside of Shane Hollander's hospital room.

In the days since, Ilya has gotten back to his life. He's played hockey, he's texted Shane, he's played hockey, he's holed up at home and in hotel rooms on the road, he's texted Shane, he's won games, he's practiced with his team in preparation to crush the Admirals in the next round of the playoffs, he's texted Shane some more.

All the years they've known each other, Ilya has always missed him when they're not together, but— he used to be better at lying to himself about that. He hadn't always spent his free moments sitting around just to hear from him, aching and lonely and missing the smell of him, the warm weight of his body pressed close. *Fuck*, Ilya wants to be with him now. Just to sit near him in silence while Shane dozes on the couch and rests his aching head. He wants to brush his fingers through his hair, fetch him water and snacks and prop him up in a million pillows so he can sleep comfortably on his back.

It's late, and Ilya has nothing to do but go to bed. He wishes he weren't alone.

L: How was your day?

J: Boring. Still supposed to limit screens so I can't even just stare at the tv.

L: You shouldn't be texting me then. If you can't look at screens.

J: Fuck that, I'm dying, I need someone to talk to.

L: Your parents?

J: It's late, they went to bed.

J: And anyway they hover. I love them, but I think we've all gotten used to me having my own space.

J: My own life. You know?

J: Right now I'm really missing my own life.

L: What would you be doing right now if not for injury?

J: You mean besides playing for the cup?

L: You wish.

J: Asshole.

J: I'd be on a break either way after the season, I'd just be at my own cottage instead of staying with my parents.

J: I'd be relaxing.

L: So boredom is the plan either way then.

J: Well.

J: Actually.

Ilya stares at the screen, waiting, watching the dots appear and disappear as Shane types. He's mesmerized by the sight of it, the thought of Shane on the other end, his face scrunched up as he thinks of what to say. Ilya wants to see his face so fucking bad it's making him feel crazy.

J: Are you alone? Can you call?

Ilya, it transpires, is alone. He's in Boston, they've got a big game tomorrow, and most of the guys are doing whatever they do the night before a big game— in years past, Ilya would have been out at a club somewhere, partying hard enough to cut through the tedium but not so hard he wouldn't be in fighting shape to play. If their game had been against Montreal, he and Shane would be somewhere together, if even remotely feasible with flight schedules and practices.

Ilya calls him, and Shane picks up immediately.

"Hey."

Oh god, his *voice*, Ilya is so in love with his stupid Canadian voice, especially when it's all timid and soft like this.

"Hi. Are you okay, you sound nervous."

"Yeah, I— I was just, you asked me what I'd be doing if I hadn't gotten injured. After the season. And it reminded me, there was something I was gonna ask you. Before, I mean. I was going to tell you to come stay with me this summer. Instead of going to Russia."

He can't. He can't he can't he can't, he wants to, oh *god* he wants to, but—

"You know we can't do that, Hollander."

"Why? We could have a couple of weeks entirely to ourselves. Just— think about it, okay? I know it's like, uh, I don't know, maybe it's a big step? But—"

"Is not very discreet," Ilya says. It sounds stupid to hear it out loud. He hates that he's scared when Shane is being so brave.

“It’s a pretty remote location. And I’m not asking you to move in or anything. I’m saying come visit. For a little while. When playoffs are over, and my arm is out of this sling, and my head isn’t killing me...”

“You would want that?”

It’s not what he meant to ask; he should be letting Shane down easy, he should be reminding him to be practical. This isn’t what they are, they don’t get to have these things, they aren’t a *couple*. Never mind the way they’ve been since All Stars, never mind all the phone calls and simple, sweet texts about nothing, texts that mean *I’m thinking of you* even if neither of them ever says it outright. Never mind that when he was falling apart back home after his dad’s death, he’d known calling Hollander would be the only thing to keep him sane. He needs to fortify himself against this, and spending uninterrupted time with Shane, falling asleep beside him and waking up next to him in the mornings, god, it’s only going to make all the rest of his life that much more impossibly painful in the aftermath.

“Yeah, I want it,” Shane says on the other end of the line, incredulous. “I’m the one asking for it. Do you not— want—”

“You really don’t hate me?”

“*What?* What are you even talking about?”

“For telling Pike about us.”

There’s a beat of heavy silence on the other end of the line. Ilya curls himself up smaller on the couch. It’s such a big couch for one person, he feels like an idiot alone in this giant place sometimes.

“Ilya,” Shane says carefully, like he’s talking to a spooked animal. “We talked about this in the hospital. I told you I wasn’t mad about that.”

“I wasn’t sure how much of that conversation you remembered.”

“I remember it, I— look, yeah, obviously I wish the circumstances of Hayden finding out were different, but he’s been great about it, and we’re working through it, and you were just trying to find out if I was *okay*. Do you seriously think I could hate you for that?”

“It’s a big deal,” Ilya says. “You told me you were gay, in confidence, yes? And I told someone else. I wouldn’t blame you if you were angry about that.”

“Honestly? I— I don’t know when I would have been brave enough to break this news to him. To anyone. So in a weird way I’m kind of glad it happened when it did. It’s a *relief*, having someone else know.”

“Was your first ever chance to come out to someone and I— there is saying for this. I stole your lightning?”

“Thunder,” Shane says, voice trembling slightly with laughter. “Stole my thunder.”

“Yes.”

“I mean, not really. I came out to you, didn’t I? And Rose.”

Ilya sits up straight on the couch. “You came out to your girlfriend?”

“Ex-girlfriend, idiot.” He sounds so fond and gentle that Ilya wants to hide from it, wants Shane to be here just so he can duck his face and bury it in Shane’s shoulder. “And with Rose... she sort of came out *for* me, if anything, which is embarrassing. And now I guess you’ve come out for me too. Shit, I’ve gotta get up the nerve to tell someone to their face one of these days.”

“Like you said, you told me,” Ilya says. “And— fuck, I laughed at you for it.”

“Wow, you’re really determined to hate yourself today, aren’t you?”

I hate myself most days.

That’s the kind of thing Ilya can’t say out loud to anybody. Especially not Shane, who deserves better than to have to manage his stupid feelings about any of this.

“I’m sorry,” he says instead. “I was an asshole.”

“Yeah, but I’m used to it. Anyway, it is kind of stupid, if you think about it. Obviously you knew already, what was there to tell?”

“No, don’t go easy on me, I knew you were— I knew why you were telling me. I was just mad at you at the time. Frustrated, a little. Not much, really. I am so bad at being angry with you, Hollander, it’s not fair.”

“Mad at me for freaking out on you, that day at your house.”

“Yes, and for getting girlfriend and rubbing it in my face. Not nice.”

“Oh, come on, of the two of us who has more cause to be jealous of the other person’s dating history?”

“It’s different.”

“How?”

“You don’t fuck around with people. If you are on the news holding hands with someone I assume you mean it. I was—”

Shit. Should he be saying this? Any of it? It’s more vulnerable than he’d meant to be, it’s moving them in the direction he’s supposed to be guarding against.

“You were— what?”

He can’t say *heartbroken*. He does still have some shred of pride left to his name.

“I was hurt, maybe. Just a little.”

“I think...” Shane says, and Ilya can picture the way he looks, lying on the couch or in bed, maybe, in the dark with the phone resting against the side of his face, contemplating the ceiling. “I think I wasn’t sure if you gave a shit or not.”

“You aren’t that stupid.”

“Okay. Yeah. So I knew you gave a shit. But you give mixed signals, you know you do.”

Well, *yeah*, mixed signals are what happens when you’re stupidly in love with someone you can’t really have, and aren’t strong enough to stay away from. It’s the entire history of the two of them, Ilya losing the will to stay away, again and again and again.

“And anyway,” Shane continues. “I didn’t mean just about being gay. I meant, it’s a relief, Hayden knowing about *you*.”

“He hasn’t given you shit about it?”

“Well, he’s being pretty nice to me because I’m all injured or whatever, but yeah, of course he’s given me shit about it. He’s in shock, he thought I hated you.”

“You *do* hate me maybe a little. It’s what makes the sex so hot.”

“You’re impossible.”

“Mmm. I do try.”

“You know,” Shane says, the smile audible in his voice. “Uh. It really has been pretty nice, having a friend to talk to about my— uh, my relationship?”

He says the last word with so much trepidation, like he’s waiting for Ilya to laugh at him. Like maybe Ilya will scoff and say that Shane is a warm mouth, a decent fuck, and that’s the end of it. But Ilya won’t say it, he won’t deflect. Even when they were so new to this, even when it was supposed to be just sex when convenient, Ilya has never been good at dismissing Shane’s earnestness. He wants it to be true just as badly. He wants this to be a relationship, even knowing all the reasons it won’t work.

“You talk about me with Hayden Pike. What do you tell him? You tell him how fast you come when I have my mouth on you? Or how big of a—”

“Okay, knock it off, mister, I am at my parents’ place, remember?”

“Oh, are they in the room with you, am I on speaker this whole time and you forget to say?”

“Nooo, I just— don’t want to talk about *sex* on the *phone* with you with my parents sleeping down the hall.”

“Hmm. Suddenly conversation much less interesting.”

“Knock it off.”

“Okay, sorry, sorry. You tell Hayden things about me? What things?”

“I just— I told him about how we’ve been, how we’ve been sneaking around, how much I wish things could be different sometimes. How much I fucking— miss you all the time.”

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. Ilya squeezes his eyes shut and takes a breath to make sure he won’t sound like a weepy idiot when he answers. “I miss you too.”

“Really?”

“Don’t,” Ilya says. “God, you sound so cute right now, I want to be there to wrap you in ten blankets.”

“I wish you were.”

“When you say to Hayden Pike that this has been going on for almost ten years, what does he say?”

“He pretended to throw up,” Shane says sardonically. “He told me if he hadn’t seen you completely falling apart with his own eyes, he never would have believed it.”

Ilya has no idea how to reply to that one.

“Sorry,” Shane says. “I wasn’t trying to make a joke of—”

“No, is not wrong. I was completely falling apart. I was rambling. To *Hayden Pike*. Embarrassing, very.”

“I’m glad it was him that was there, honestly,” Shane says. “Imagine if my parents—”

“I didn’t really care who it was,” Ilya confesses. “I just needed someone to fucking tell me if you were going to wake up or not. I’ve never been scared like that.”

“It’s fucked up, I guess,” Shane says. “If we— if we keep doing this? If we keep seeing each other, it’s fucked up if nobody knows. For situations like this one. You couldn’t... you were stuck. We should have thought about that.”

“We haven’t been... we are not a couple, Hollander. It wasn’t supposed to happen like this.”

“But it did. I don’t know how to go back to pretending I don’t want this to be something real. I don’t think I can put it back.”

No, me neither.

“It’s a bad idea, you know.”

“Everything we do is a bad idea. It’s too late, Ilya. For me, anyway.”

It’s been too late for Ilya for years, now. Maybe the whole goddamn time.

“I will think about it, coming to the cottage. Like you say, maybe if— if we do this, we should think it through more.”

“We have an ally now. Hayden’s not exactly your biggest fan but he has my back, and I think — that might make it easier.”

Ilya really does not want to pay Hayden Pike a fucking compliment, but some things are bigger than his petty bullshit. “He was good with me. He helped me keep my shit together. You’re right, was nice to talk to someone about it.”

“Do you have... uh...” Shane trails off. “Is there anybody in your life who knows you’re not...”

“Knows I am not straight. Knows I fuck men.”

“Yeah.”

“Yes,” Ilya says. “Yes, one close friend.”

“Svetlana.”

“You remembered.”

“Mmm. Speaking of making each other jealous.”

Ilya clutches the phone a little tighter to his face. “No, I told you is not like that, me and Sveta.”

Shane laughs, a weak little sound. “Yeah, yeah, I know. Still, mixed signals. But. She knows. About you. But not about me?”

“Of course she doesn’t know about you,” Ilya says, rolling his eyes. “I think I would have mentioned that. She knows... she knows there’s a Jane.”

Just a week ago, that would have felt like too big of a confession to make. *I spend so much time staring at your messages that other people have noticed.* But after Shane’s injury, after all the things Ilya had blurted out to Pike in the hospital, after this late night conversation, it’s getting easier to say it all.

“Same way Hayden knew there was a Lily,” Shane says.

“And my best friend is smarter than yours,” Ilya says. “She guessed Jane is a man.”

“But you don’t think she suspects...”

“I don’t see how she could ever figure it out, no.”

“Do you... *want* to tell her? About me?”

Honestly, Ilya has never given the idea much thought. He's spent so long lying to himself about Shane, about what he feels, about what it means. To speak to it out loud to any living soul would be to acknowledge the power it has. The power *Shane* has. Does he want to tell the person in this world he's known and cared about the longest, his best friend, the woman he used to wish he could fall in love with and marry because it would have been the simplest thing, does he want to tell Svetlana about Shane Hollander?

"I... maybe."

"Because you could," Shane says. "I mean. If you trust her. You could tell her."

"We've kept successful secret for this whole time and now you want to volunteer information to more people."

"Not more people. Person. Your person. I get Hayden, maybe it's only fair you have someone too."

"I have someone," Ilya says, before he can stop himself. "I have you."

"God, that was smooth."

"Yes, very. I am better sweet talker than you even though I speak in second language."

"I *know*, it's unfair. I wish I could kiss you right now."

"I am definitely coming to the cottage, you know."

"Fuck. Really? Yeah?"

"Yes." He hadn't noticed himself deciding, but he's decided. "The second the season is over. I need to see you. I need— I wish we were having this conversation in person."

"Me too."

"You would really be okay, if I tell Svetlana."

"I would really be okay. Yeah."

"Okay. Maybe. Yes, maybe I tell her. She will be mad with jealousy, she thinks you are very sexy."

Shane laughs, a loud, bright sound, one that punctures the growing dimness of Ilya's big empty living room. Just the sound of him and this place is a little less depressing.

"I really don't want to get off the phone," Shane says. "But my head is actually starting to murder me a little bit."

"Okay," Ilya says, dropping his voice down quiet. "Okay, yes. You should sleep. And I will text you tomorrow."

“Play good hockey.”

“I always play good hockey.”

There’s a pause, and Ilya wonders if Shane is thinking the same thing he is; feeling the absence of words they’ve never spoken to each other before. It’s felt so natural, so fucking right, to be on the phone with him this way, to talk until it’s time to say goodnight. He can almost hear Shane’s voice, like some echo from the future, saying *love you, goodnight*, and then Ilya would say it back, *I love you too*, and they’d hang up the phone.

“Good night, Ilya.”

“Good night, Shane.”

When the line goes dead, Ilya pulls the screen up in front of his eyes, staring at the text thread from earlier.

He gets up, his legs stiff from sitting still in the same position for too long, and he trudges towards his bedroom, his big bed, empty and cold.

Before he turns the lights out, he pulls up a different text thread, stares at Svetlana’s profile picture. He flips the keyboard back to Cyrillic and types— *tomorrow after game, can you talk? I have news about summer plans.*

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“Shane. Buddy. Twenty-four hours ago I didn’t think Ilya Rozanov had an actual beating heart in his chest capable of normal human emotions, but now? That guy is crazy, deeply, heartbreakingly in love with you. Like. Trust me.”

Shane keeps staring down, but now Hayden thinks it’s because he’s afraid to show his face. “How... I mean, how do you know that?”

“I was the one sitting with him while he cried over you, okay? He was really, really worried. He said he wasn’t good enough for you, he said... you were the scariest thing that’s ever happened to him. Oh, and he also super threatened to kill me and throw me in a dumpster if I had a problem with you being gay.”

And now Shane does look up, and Hayden can see the tears in his eyes, his bruised face flushing underneath all the discoloration. “He did?”

Hayden nods, keeping his expression solemn. “I don’t know what you see in him, I really don’t, but— I think he would have traded places with you in a heartbeat, to spare you this. I think he’d do anything for you. I must, grudgingly, give him points on this one.”

Chapter Notes

Oh wow, the reception to this fic has been so lovely!

I have some ideas of how to round out this story with maybe one or two more chapters; I do think I want to see Ilya and Sveta's conversation. But this here is Hayden and Shane having their chance to hash it out!

Timing-wise, this chapter would actually take place chronologically *before* chapter 2, back when Shane is still in the hospital.

Thank you so much for the support, everyone.

Hayden can tell Shane’s in a bit of pain the second he walks through the door, even before he asks. It’s obvious, the way he’s holding his body still, the squint of his eyes.

“Not on the good stuff anymore, huh?” he says, sympathetic.

Shane sighs, eyes widening to meet his as Hayden plops himself down in the chair by the hospital bed.

“No. I mean I’m on painkillers but I can’t tell the difference. Stupid concussion.” Then he squints again, brows furrowing. “Why are you still here, anyway?”

“Ouch.”

“No, no, I just— don’t we have a home game tomorrow?”

It’s a testament to just how serious the concussion had been that Shane asks it as a question. Most of the time, it’s like he’s got their schedule tattooed onto his eyelids. “Flying home in the morning,” he says. “Don’t worry, I’ll be there on the ice for our humiliating defeat.”

“Don’t,” Shane frowns. “‘S bad luck. You can’t give up before the game’s even started.”

“Yeah, yeah, sorry. Keeping my chin up. I just hate playing without you.”

“Awww. Sap.”

“I think people are allowed to be sentimental about you after a scare like that.”

“My parents are freaked. They’re trying to play it cool but I can tell.”

“Yeah, your parents are really worried,” Hayden says.

He probably shouldn’t do this now; Shane’s a lot more lucid than he was yesterday, and the doctors are saying he’ll be able to fly home as early as tomorrow evening, but still. He’s weak and helpless on a hospital bed. Not the best conditions for a grilling.

On the other hand, Shane can’t currently escape, and maybe Hayden’s not good enough of a person to let that opportunity pass him by. “And so is your *boyfriend*.”

Shane’s jaw snaps shut and his eyes dart to the door. It’s closed, and nobody else is around— Hayden’s in here to keep Shane company while Yuna and David go back to their hotel for a bit of a break from the hospital chaos. “He’s not,” Shane says.

“Oh, sure.”

“He’s not. We’re— I don’t know. Maybe he is. I don’t fucking know. Will you stop looking at me like that?”

“I’m not looking at you like anything, man.”

“You’re looking at me like *what the hell is wrong with you*.”

Hayden wants to say, *yeah, okay, fine, then: what the hell is wrong with you????* But instead he takes a deep breath, looks his best friend in the eye, and says, “Shane. C’mon. Talk to

me.”

“I... I don’t...” Shane sighs, tilting his head back to rest on the pillows. The bruising on his face makes Hayden want to cry a little. “I didn’t mean for you to find out like this.”

“Or you didn’t mean for me to find out at all,” Hayden says before he can stop himself. “That’s the part of this that’s fucking me up.”

Shane blinks at him, a fleeting expression of shock on his face that then turns to weary resignation. “I’m sorry. It’s not anything to do with you, okay, I just... it’s recent for me, and I still haven’t fully wrapped my head around...”

“Recent,” Hayden says, tilting forward to rest his elbows on his knees, leaning in towards Shane. “Rozanov says you guys started up our *rookie year*.”

“Oh. Well, yeah.”

“So, the entire time we’ve known each other,” Hayden says. He tries to keep his voice down. “Doesn’t sound fucking *recent* to me, Shane.”

“I meant, I wasn’t... ready to admit it? I’m sorry, I know that probably sounds so stupid to you. I don’t have any practice coming out to people. For a long time I thought I’d take it to my grave, to be honest.”

“But what...” Hayden kind of wants to shake him, jostle him into saying the things he actually needs to hear, “what did I ever do, to make you think you couldn’t tell me? How did I fuck up so bad that you— I mean, Shane, dude, you were best man at my wedding, you’re the first person outside of immediately family to hold all of my babies, you’re, like, you’re *family* to me, and you didn’t tell me this big thing about your life.”

Shane’s lip wobbles a bit, one of the strongest signs of emotion Hayden’s ever seen from him. This guy does not get worked up, he does not get angry after a bad loss, he doesn’t cry at weddings, he smiles at jokes instead of laughing. Right now, for the first time in a decade of knowing him, it occurs to Hayden that maybe it takes Shane a lot of effort, to be like that. Maybe it’s not how he’d choose to be, in a different world.

“If I’d told you, it would have been real,” Shane says finally, the words scraping out of him. “I kept thinking that... well, that if I was, if I liked... if I was— fuck. *Fuck*, I’m pathetic, I can still barely say—”

“You’re not pathetic!”

“I am, though. I’ve spent my whole life thinking that it didn’t really matter that I was attracted to men, because, like, I was focusing on my career anyway, so that stuff just— I didn’t have to worry about it, I could put it in a box. And then one day when I was ready I’d meet a woman and I’d get married and have kids and nobody would ever have to know.”

Hayden sits there and tries to think of something to say, something that’s not *it’s okay to be gay*. He’s pretty sure Shane knows that, intellectually. Or maybe he knows that it’s okay for

people, in general, to be gay, but not okay for him, specifically. That would track with Shane's whole— deal. He's always so forgiving to everyone else on the team for dumb mistakes, he's always so warm and patient and encouraging during practice. But if *he* flubs a play or has an off day...

"I wish you'd felt like it was safe to tell me," Hayden says. "I'm sorry if I ever—"

"It's really, totally, not about you, Hayd. I'm not just saying that. My mom— shit, when I was like thirteen years old my mom sat me down and told me that if there was anything I ever wanted to share with her, if I ever felt like maybe I was different from the other kids, I could tell her and that she'd love me no matter what and it would all be okay. And I just nodded and said, *yeah, Mom, I know*, and we never brought it up ever again, and she tries to set me up with women almost as often as you do. Nobody fucking knows this about me, okay? Nobody."

"Except for Ilya Rozanov," Hayden says.

Shane's despairing look is replaced with a tired glare. "You don't have to sound so horrified."

"Uh. Sorry."

"And it's not like I told him, either, it's not some... big intimate moment where I looked him in the eyes and confessed to being a certified homosexual. We just— we hooked up. We were *kids*, basically, when it started. I had no idea what the hell I was doing."

"I'm not that surprised you're gay, Shane," Hayden says. "I'm hurt you didn't tell me, but I think maybe that's a me problem? I'm not an expert, but isn't it, like, it's not something you owe to anybody, right? Your business."

"Not surprised?" Shane says. He sounds worried, damn it, and Hayden's heart is breaking, just a touch. "Like, you thought maybe I was?"

"No," Hayden says, and he remembers Rozanov yesterday, the way it had somehow become Hayden's responsibility to manage some extremely volatile feelings, hunting for the right words to say while pushing down his own shock and discomfort. This is a little like that, only — it's Shane, and he loves Shane. So it's even more important he not fuck this up. "It's not that I thought you were gay. Like, maybe a bit when we first knew each other, just because you were... quiet, and polite? Is that a stereotype? That gay guys are polite?"

"It's maybe an Asian stereotype," Shane says with an eye-roll. "But okay. So you thought at first, but then..."

"But then I thought you were just stupid crazy in love with Boston Lily. The story I had in my head was that it was just a casual fling for her but you were holding a major torch."

Shane laughs, and then winces, bringing a hand up to his head. "Ow."

"Sorry," Hayden says. "Should we not be talking about this right now? Because, if you need to rest—"

“No, no, I’ve been spiraling about it all day. Since Rozanov left yesterday, really. I feel so guilty.”

“It’s okay,” Hayden says. He’s not sure that it totally is; he’s still reeling, he’s still shaken, he hasn’t gotten enough sleep these past few days, but— in the bigger sense, it’s okay. Of course it’s okay. He’ll get over it, and he and Shane are going to be fine. “I don’t think you have anything to be guilty about, really, if I’m being fair.”

“He was completely fucking alone,” Shane says. “He— I was unconscious in the hospital and he couldn’t— he had *nobody*.”

Oh.

Huh.

“You feel guilty because— but I mean—”

“He doesn’t know my parents, he doesn’t know any of my friends, I don’t even know how he figured out which hospital I’d been taken to, he probably had to track it down in the fucking news. That’s messed up. It’s been this big secret all these years, but we should have thought. We should have realized. I don’t know shit about his life, either, not really. Not to where I could get in contact with someone if he... if I needed to.”

His lip is doing that little wobbly thing again, and Hayden is remembering, against his will, the look on Ilya Rozanov’s face when Hayden had rushed out into the hall to tell him Shane had woken up. Like his whole world had just been saved from the brink of destruction.

Somehow, it’s easier to imagine the bizarre reality of Rozanov loving Shane, than it is to accept the reverse, that Shane, *Shane*, could feel that deeply for Rozanov in return.

“I feel like that’s something the two of you should probably get on the same page about,” Hayden says.

“Yeah, probably,” Shane says, sniffing. “I don’t know. We aren’t good at that.”

“Talking?”

“Basically. I don’t know. It’s been a little better, recently. He let me be there for him, a little, when his dad died, so that was progress. But for a long time it wasn’t— we didn’t talk at all, really.”

“You two texted a *lot* for you to claim you never talked. What exactly were all those messages if—”

Shane cuts him off with a snort, gives him a look, and Hayden grimaces. Oh. Gross. *Gross*.

Not because of the two dudes thing.

Because of the Ilya *Rozanov* thing. Jesus Christ.

“Dude. I’m sorry, but *how* did this *happen*?”

Shane smiles, and it’s not a smile at Hayden for asking the question, it’s something else, private and fond. It’s him, thinking about the person he loves, reminiscing.

Ah, fuck. If Hayden wants to be best friends with this great and awesome guy, this hockey legend who babysits his kids all the time and makes the time to get to know his wife, who has been a genuine and stalwart system of support for him throughout their entire friendship... he’s going to have to step it up.

“Tell me,” Hayden says, voice gentler this time. “I’m just going to do a thing where I—” he mimes shoving something aside. “—ignore that it’s fucking *Rozanov*. Tell me, dude, about this guy you’re seeing. I wanna know.”

Shane lifts a skeptical eyebrow at him. “Really? You want to hear this stuff?”

“Look, I’ve already sworn my secrecy, but yeah, man. Everything else aside, I’m so fucking curious. I wanna know the *drama*.”

Shane laughs, gentler this time, a little bleaker. “I’m not sure how entertaining you’re gonna find it, it’s just— we met up whenever we were in the same city. For a long time, it— it wasn’t more than that. Or, I think, it *was* more than that, I just didn’t want it to be. I’ve never felt the way I feel about him for anybody else. Not even close, not for one second. It’s always been really intense. But plausible deniability, you know? Neither of us ever admitted to... to *feelings* or anything. And then I was over at his place, and he was being... we were being all... domestic with each other? He made me food. And suddenly I wanted it so bad— wanted him, wanted to be a fucking *couple*, wanted to stop missing him all the time, wanted to just be with him, for *real*, like normal people, and— I wanted it so bad I basically worked myself up into a panic attack about it? Ran out of there, met Rose Landry shortly after...”

“I can’t believe you dated a movie star as a fucking rebound, that’s insane.”

“I was running scared. I was hiding. And... and that didn’t work out, obviously, because I’m — *gay*, so... and I missed him so much, it was like something was crawling under my skin, this itch I couldn’t scratch. It hurt, and I couldn’t— I don’t know. I couldn’t keep it up. So we... All-Star weekend, we talked. And we’ve been talking more, ever since. It’s felt more like... I don’t know. It’s been good.”

“And now?”

“And now... I don’t know. I want him. I want it to work. I have no idea *how*, but... it hurts too much to keep him at a distance. I think I just have to work up the courage to ask him if he wants the same thing.”

Hayden lets out a little laugh of his own, completely involuntary, and Shane’s eyes narrow, pinning him with a sharp stare. “What?”

“Nothing.”

“No, you laughed. What?”

“It’s just the thought of you needing to ask if he feels the same way.”

“Well,” Shane says, looking down and shrugging with his one good arm. “It’s like I said, we’ve never been great at communicating.”

“Shane. Buddy. Twenty-four hours ago I didn’t think Ilya Rozanov had an actual beating heart in his chest capable of normal human emotions, but now? That guy is crazy, deeply, heartbreakingly in love with you. Like. Trust me.”

Shane keeps staring down, but now Hayden thinks it’s because he’s afraid to show his face. “How... I mean, how do you know that?”

“I was the one sitting with him while he cried over you, okay? He was really, really worried. He said he wasn’t good enough for you, he said... you were the scariest thing that’s ever happened to him. Oh, and he also super threatened to kill me and throw me in a dumpster if I had a problem with you being gay.”

And now Shane does look up, and Hayden can see the tears in his eyes, his bruised face flushing underneath all the discoloration. “He did?”

Hayden nods, keeping his expression solemn. “I don’t know what you see in him, I really don’t, but— I think he would have traded places with you in a heartbeat, to spare you this. I think he’d do anything for you. I must, grudgingly, give him points on this one.”

Shane’s eyes slip closed, his head falling back against the pillow again. “Fuck. I love him too, you know. I need to tell him. This is a disaster. It’s the worst possible idea in the world.”

“Imagine the scandal.”

“I really try not to think about it. I can’t— nobody can know.”

“Can I tell Jackie?” Hayden asks. He’s been sitting on that one. They’ve been texting all day, coordinating travel shit for when he’s flying back home, getting updates on the kids, and Jackie keeps asking how Shane is doing. Hayden’s proud of himself, of his restraint, that he hasn’t already called her up and spilled the beans.

“Yeah,” Shane says, with only the tiniest, blink-and-you-miss-it hesitation. “It wouldn’t be fair on you, to have to keep something like that from her. Just— make sure she knows, make sure she *really* knows, not to say anything to anyone. Ever.”

“She loves you, okay? And so do I. We won’t do anything to fuck with your life.”

“Thanks.”

“And you can tell Rozanov too, that he doesn’t have anything to worry about. Even if it wasn’t you, even if it was just his secret, I’m not— no matter what I think of the guy, I’d never do something like that.”

“I know you wouldn’t.”

There’s a pause, the longest one since this conversation has started. Hayden still has a million questions. He’s morbidly curious about the specifics— not that he *wants* to know about Shane’s sex life, not that he wants to think about Rozanov in that context whatsoever, but it’s still so insane to him, that something like this ever could have happened in the first place. What a crazy risk they took all those years ago. What a crazy thing, that they’d carved out something real from the mess.

“He’s not who you think he is, you know,” Shane says at last. “He’s a good guy.”

“Okay.”

“You sound convinced.”

“I don’t really know him. He seems like a dick, but if you say it’s an act...”

“He’s so smart,” Shane says. When Hayden glances at his face he sees that his eyes have slipped closed, just a hint of a smile playing at the corner of his lip. “He’s so smart, but people here don’t know that because he’s having to speak in English all the time. He’s gotten really good, these days it doesn’t matter as much. When he first came here he wasn’t as fluent, and people would ask him questions during interviews and he’d... he couldn’t understand them, they’d talk too fast and the league doesn’t hire enough interpreters, and he just... if he played it off like he was a cocky asshole who didn’t have time to answer all their stupid little questions, he could get away with it. Then people wouldn’t realize he was having trouble with the questions, then people would stop writing think pieces about... about him being some dumb jock who has good physical ability but will never make it as a strategist.”

“People said that?”

“All that shit, our rookie year, the comparisons. It was always, *oh, Rozanov’s bigger and tougher, but Hollander’s got the brilliant mind, he’s a planner*. Fucking insulting, honestly. To both of us. Ilya’s way smarter than me, he’s a quick thinker, he’s so funny. He’s funnier in his second language than I am in my first. Nobody gets that. Nobody bothers, they just... they believe him, when he acts like some heartless brainless dickhead. They believe him because he’s a damn good actor, that’s the problem. Sometimes I think he believes it himself.”

Hayden pushes down the squirm of guilt in his stomach. Shane’s not wrong. Dumb hulking jock who doesn’t take anything seriously and takes cheap digs at people on the ice because he gets off on being a villain. That’s basically exactly who he thought Rozanov was.

“But he’s not like that with you?”

“He’s *sweet*,” Shane says, like he knows it’s going to be tough to believe. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, he really is a total asshole, but it’s— he’s perceptive, I guess is the word? He teases me all the time but it’s because he sees me. He knows, he gets it. He likes getting under my skin. It hasn’t always— I mean, there have been times when I’ve wished he could just come out and say how he actually feels about shit, but then I’m a hypocrite for that one

because the first time he tried to do that with me, at least a little bit, I ran for the fucking hills.”

“Sweet?” Hayden says, echoing the word. “If you say so.”

“I wasn’t— uh— I mean, when, when we met, I didn’t have a lot of experience, and he’s always been— so fucking nice to me. He takes care of me. Sorry. Jesus. You don’t want to hear that.”

“I mean, no, I don’t, but also, yes I do? I guess? I want to know the person you’re with is treating you the way you deserve to be treated.”

“You are being so brave for this conversation, seriously, I can hear you biting your tongue over there.”

Hayden laughs, slumps back in his chair and looks up at the ceiling. “I’m not gonna pretend this whole thing isn’t super fucking weird to me. But who cares if I think it’s weird. If it’s what you want, if he makes you happy, then I say lock it down. Work it out.”

“It could tank our careers. It could tank Rozanov’s residency status in the US if he loses his job. It’s such a stupid idea.”

“Can you give it up? Can you walk away from him, close the door on this whole thing and move on with your life?”

“Nope.”

“Okay. Then I think you have to deal with the rest of it when it comes, don’t you?”

Hayden’s phone buzzes in his pocket. He fishes it out.

“Jackie again?” Shane says.

“Yep. She’s going to *freak* out when I tell her about all of this. Unless— oh, shit, do you wanna be the one to tell her? Like, uh, come out to her?”

“I think you should call your wife and get all the gossip out of your system,” Shane says. He reaches for his own phone on the little table by his bed. He’s not supposed to be looking at screens, Hayden’s pretty sure, but he’s not Shane’s doctor, or mother. “But here, I’ll do this first.”

He scrunches his eyes together in concentration and taps something out on the screen. He takes his time over it, backspacing and then typing again, before finally Hayden hears the little *whoosh* of a message sending. He turns the screen to face Hayden. A text thread with Jackie, one mostly used to coordinate plans when Hayden forgets to answer texts, or for Jackie to send .gifs after games, celebratory or commiserating depending. Today, Shane’s written a small paragraph:

Hey, Hayden says you’ve been asking after me, just wanted to check in and say I’m doing okay. H has some news to tell you about me, with my full blessing. Everything’s fine, it just

might be kind of a shock. I'm saying thank you in advance for being such an amazing friend. Details next time I see you in person, I promise.

Hayden grins, looks at Shane, and thinks about how much it means to him that his wife and his best friend have a friendship of their own, how much it warms his heart that these people he loves also love each other.

And then he thinks— ah, shit. He really *is* going to have to be friends with Rozanov.

“Your parents should be back soon,” Hayden says, standing from the chair. “How’s the collarbone, can I hug you?”

“Be gentle, I’m fragile,” Shane says, but his arm is strong around Hayden’s back as he accepts the embrace.

“I love you,” Hayden says after he’s pulled back, looking down at his best friend in the world, a face as familiar to him as almost any other.

Shane grins at him, shakes his head against the pillow. “Careful, now. I’m taken.”

Hayden flips him off and slips out the door, to the sound of Shane still laughing behind him.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“I want to hear you say it, because if I’m wrong you will laugh very loudly in my face.”

Ilya takes a deep breath, feels an invisible hand squeeze around his heart. He’s kept these things separate for so long. It had been his only way of protecting himself, protecting Shane. The only thing he could give to him, really, this promise of utter privacy. Sacred, precious, even during times when the two of them were barely speaking to one another.

But Shane had given him this. Given him permission, as a gift. So he says it.

“You’re not wrong. It’s Hollander.”

Svetlana lets out a shriek, bouncing up and down on the bed like a little kid, and Ilya wishes they were together so he could slap a hand over her mouth and tickle her and pin her down to the bed in submission. So they could giggle and roughhouse and hold each other close. Like when they were little, like when he’d told her, that very first time, about wanting to kiss a boy, and she’d smiled like she was hearing good news instead of bad.

“I can’t believe it! I had this theory, but it seemed too crazy to really be true, I kept thinking maybe I was reading into it too much. You and Shane Hollander! God, I bet that’s hot.”

Chapter Notes

Okay. This is the last update for at least a couple of days, lol, I have GOT to slow down with this, I'm legitimately falling behind on work stuff obsessing over these boys.

The much-requested Ilya and Svetlana conversation is here! I hope you like it. They are speaking in Russian unless otherwise specified.

I have a few ideas of how to round this out with a final chapter, but it will be a bit longer before that hits. Thank you so much for all your wonderful support of this story!

“Ilyusha, you played brilliantly! Fuck the Admirals.”

Svetlana's voice on the other end of the call is exuberant, and even in the small video screen Ilya can see the brightness in her eyes, the looseness of her posture. "You're drunk," he accuses fondly.

"Just got home from the club early because you said you had news. You owe me an orgasm, I was dancing with a very promising prospect earlier."

Ilya grins, shaking his head. It's almost three in the morning for him, which means it's not quite midnight in LA, where Svetlana is. That *is* early, especially for her. "You can't put that on me, unless you know the guy was going to deliver. Not everyone's a guarantee."

Svetlana sighs, and for a moment the camera view tilts wildly as she brings the phone down away from her face. Ilya can hear keys clattering onto a hook, and a thunk that he imagines is her shoes coming off, kicked into the corner. Sveta's never been the tidiest; she has a giant shoe rack in her closet and every time Ilya's been to her place he's found at minimum half a dozen pairs of shoes strewn about in the living room and hallways instead.

"You're only a guarantee because *I'm* such a good teacher," Svetlana says, her face coming back into view as she wiggles her eyebrows. And then she tilts her head at him, some of the flirtatious joviality falling away. "Are you okay? Really, you played well today. Your team played well. Just not your season."

Ilya shrugs. "I could feel it, I think we all could. Maybe if my ribs..."

"Hunter is on the warpath," Sveta says. While keeping the phone balanced in front of her, she twists her other arm up behind her and unhooks her bra, pulling it out from underneath her shirt and tossing it somewhere out of frame. She flops down on her bed, drops her phone, then fishes it out of the comforter and holds it up again so Ilya can see her. "I think they've got it this year."

"That's what people are saying," Ilya says with an eye-roll. That's what Shane's mom is saying, anyway, and from what he knows of the woman, she's got nearly as keen an eye for these things as Sveta does.

"It's late, I'm surprised you still wanted to talk."

"Can't sleep anyway," Ilya says. "It's like this, sometimes. The energy, even after losing, like my body doesn't know how to... how to accept that I don't have another game coming."

Svetlana nods, crunching her curls back into the pillow behind her, squirming to get comfortable. "That makes sense. And plus you *miss* me so terribly you'll stay up 'til any hour just to get a glimpse of my pretty face."

"Obviously."

"Okay. Tell me, I'm dying of curiosity, what's your news?"

"I'm... not going home this summer during break. I am not going back to Russia."

The words have an instantly sobering effect on Svetlana. Her smile drops and she blinks a couple of times, looking at him. “Oh, really?”

“Really. I know I will have to go back some day, but not this summer. Not now. There is nothing there for me anymore.”

Sveta lets the words linger between them for a while before speaking again. “Maybe someday you’ll build happier memories there. But I think... it’s probably for the best, taking some time away. What are you going to do instead? Stay in Boston?”

“Uh— no. That’s. That’s actually the news part.”

It’s ridiculous how nervous he feels, all of a sudden. There has never been anything he couldn’t say to Svetlana, except this one thing, this one huge thing, and he’s about to say it. He closes his eyes and thinks of Shane’s face, thinks of what it will be like to see him soon, to hold him through the night without pretense.

“You look weird,” Svetlana cuts in. “What. What is it?”

“I’m going to stay with my— with Jane.”

Svetlana sits up suddenly, curling over her knees and bringing her face close to the camera. “*Really*. The elusive Jane? All summer? This is big news.”

“For a couple of weeks, anyway,” Ilya says, trying to control his face so he’s not just grinning like an idiot. He hunts for words, more words, better words— he’s allowed this now, he’s allowed to tell her everything. When he speaks again, he finds he’s switched to English without really meaning to. Maybe it’s just easier to think of Shane, to speak of him, in the language they share. “He has a place, a cottage. We are going to stay there. We have never— all this time, there has never been a chance for this.”

A smile stretches over Svetlana’s face. “A cottage,” she echoes, also in English. “*Interesting*.”

“He isn’t... he isn’t out, nobody knows he likes men. For same reason as me, you know. Bad for career.”

“Bad because the league is bigoted,” Svetlana says, switching back to Russian. “Because he is a player too.”

“You *knew*?”

“I want to hear you say it, because if I’m wrong you will laugh very loudly in my face.”

Ilya takes a deep breath, feels an invisible hand squeeze around his heart. He’s kept these things separate for so long. It had been his only way of protecting himself, protecting Shane. The only thing he could give to him, really, this promise of utter privacy. Sacred, precious, even during times when the two of them were barely speaking to one another.

But Shane had given him this. Given him permission, as a gift. So he says it.

“You’re not wrong. It’s Hollander.”

Svetlana lets out a shriek, bouncing up and down on the bed like a little kid, and Ilya wishes they were together so he could slap a hand over her mouth and tickle her and pin her down to the bed in submission. So they could giggle and roughhouse and hold each other close. Like when they were little, like when he’d told her, that very first time, about wanting to kiss a boy, and she’d smiled like she was hearing good news instead of bad.

“I can’t believe it! I had this theory, but it seemed too crazy to really be true, I kept thinking maybe I was reading into it too much. You and Shane Hollander! God, I bet that’s hot.”

Ilya laughs, feels his face grow warm. “Sveta!”

“What? What? Do you think he’d let me join sometime? Those *hands* of his—”

“No,” Ilya says, trying to stay stern. He’s slipped back into English again. “He is shy and sweet and practically innocent. Not for your eyes, only mine.”

He’s also fucking *wild* in bed once Ilya has gotten him to relax; the best sex Ilya’s ever had by a wide margin, a constant and ever-brilliant surprise. But he’s not telling Sveta that.

“*Wow*. Okay, tell me everything. Right now, from the start. I have been dying for years.”

“How did you know?” Ilya says. His prevailing emotional reaction to telling Svetlana is relief, of course it is, but there’s this tiny niggling sensation of fear as well. What had he done, that somebody had been able to guess? Nobody in *Shane’s* life had had any clue, and they never would have, if not for Ilya barfing out the truth to Pike in the hospital out of sheer desperation.

“I didn’t know for sure,” Sveta says. She seems to have picked up on the complexity of his mood, because she stops bouncing and settles back on the bed, giving him a serious look. “I could tell you had a crush. I thought maybe... professional rivalry, and he’s hot, and you had fun riling him up. That was it. But then you had this person you texted, you were always looking at your phone... I didn’t think at first that it could be the same thing. But then...”

“What? What did I do, what did I say?”

“I can’t even remember what game it was. Years ago. Not an important one, but Hollander was on fire. Hat trick. We were together, I think just the two of us. You pulled out your phone to text him the second the game was over. I don’t know what made me think it, I just realized... you’d been so focused on the game. So much more focused than you ever are for almost anything. And you wanted to talk to someone right after it was over. And I thought... he’s texting his lover. He’s texting his lover who he just watched play a brilliant game of hockey. The thought just popped into my head, and once I thought it... well, it seemed to fit.”

Ilya thinks he remembers the occasion— it’s been one of the consistent points of contact for them through all the years they’ve been doing this. They watch each other’s games. Ilya offers sexual rewards in a cheeky not-at-all-kidding sort of way after impressive showings, and he roasts Shane mercilessly after losses. Early on, Shane would only play along in the

most basic sense of the word, texting “good game” after Boston wins, and “better luck next time, loser” after losses.

Eventually, though, Shane had loosened up a bit; Ilya still remembers with a great deal of fondness the time during playoffs a few years back when Shane, sitting at home mourning the end of his own season, had texted Ilya. *Offer: one orgasm for every goal you put on the board today.* Ilya had scored twice, and he and Shane had texted deep into the night, working each other up, sending pictures, pictures Ilya still has saved in a password protected folder on his phone. None of them show Shane’s face, because Shane’s always been paranoid about that. Ilya has touched himself to those pictures more times than he cares to admit.

“Wow,” Svetlana says. “I should take a picture of your face right now. Love-struck.”

“Shut up.”

“No, no, it’s nice. You *love* him, huh?”

“So fucking much,” Ilya admits, a weight flying off his shoulders with the words. “It’s been terrible.”

“Tell me,” Sveta says. “Please, tell me everything.”

And Ilya does.

He tells her about being young and reckless and extremely attracted to this innocent little Canadian kid. His fucking freckles, and his thighs, and the way he moves on the ice. The best hockey player of his generation, people call him now, and Ilya doesn’t even mind that that means he comes in second place. He’s known it since basically the start, even if their stats put them neck and neck. He’d wanted Shane Hollander because he was the best, and because he loved hockey with such a clean, pure passion that Ilya had never known for anything before. He’d wanted him because he was awkward and unsure and so deliciously corruptible, and because it was dangerous and stupid, and Ilya had wanted to feel something.

And he tells Sveta about the pain of it, surprisingly sharp, every time he got up to leave after sex. Every time Shane rolled out of bed and reached for his neatly folded clothes before Ilya had even finished catching his breath. How he’d tasted the words on his tongue, the forbidden question— *can’t you stay?* and how he’d never let himself ask it. How he’d been afraid to think too hard about how good it was to be with him, how bad it was to be apart, because what did it mean that this once-in-a-while hookup had turned into the only thing he wanted in the world? What did it mean that he went months without seeing Shane in person and yet he thought about him every day when he woke up and every night before he went to sleep?

The times when he’d tried to pull back, protect himself from the way Shane Hollander made him feel. The explosive relief of touching him again after months apart. The way Shane’s hands always find their way into Ilya’s hair when they’re kissing, the perfect sharp pressure of his fingers scratching against his scalp. How when Shane had started dating someone in the public eye, Ilya had taken it so badly that his entire team had tip-toed around him at practice and in the locker room, how everyone had been able to tell he’d been dumped. Even

though he hadn't been, even though he had no right to feel like he'd lost something precious, because the depressing truth was, he'd never really had it in the first place, had he?

He tells Svetlana, sparing her the intimate details even though he knows she's desperately curious, about the night they spent together during All Stars, Shane's gentleness with him, the way he'd known he shouldn't let himself indulge and how much he can't regret indulging anyway. And then he tells her, his breath catching a little in his throat, about what it felt like to watch Shane go down on the ice.

"I should have called you after that game," Svetlana says, shaking her head. Her makeup is smudged, her hair frizzy and unkempt. She looks young, she looks like Ilya's childhood, his home, all the best parts of it. "I saw him take that hit, I saw your face on the cameras."

"I wasn't looking at my phone," Ilya says. "I was camped out in the hospital waiting for news, harassing Hayden Pike."

"He's doing okay, though, right? He'll be back next season?"

"Sling comes off in a couple days," Ilya confirms. "His head isn't hurting him anymore, he's mostly just bored. Eager to get back to the gym."

"Good. I'm so glad."

"I thought maybe he'd never wake up, and then I'd... I would die too, die alive inside my body, keep living out this life without the reason my heart beats, pointless and empty. I didn't know that kind of hurt was possible, not again, not after— after my mother. It's the worst thing, he is the worst and best thing that could have happened to me. I'm still so scared, all the time."

Svetlana has her eyes closed when he looks at the screen, and they flutter open to look at him, bright and warm. "He feels the same way. I know he does."

"You don't."

"Anybody would be an idiot not to. Is Shane Hollander an idiot?"

"He does a good imitation of one sometimes," Ilya says, letting himself smile. "But no. No, he's a stupid fucking genius, on top of everything else. It's unbearable."

"You've got it so bad," Svetlana says. "Adorable."

"I am not adorable, you take that back."

"The cutest little thing," Svetlana says in English. "Precious boys. They will write movies about you one day. Forbidden love. Sex sells, so I've heard."

"He said I could tell you, if I trusted you. I'm trusting you. With me, but more importantly with him. I know you'd never tell anyone but this is... it's a big deal. That he was okay with someone else knowing. He's even more scared of people finding out than I am, I think."

Svetlana curls her lower lip into her mouth for a moment, then sighs, nodding. “I solemnly swear. Not a word to anybody. Of course.”

“Thank you.”

“Do I get to meet him, though? Next season, when he comes to play in Boston. I’ll fly over.”

“If you promise to be *nice*.”

“I’m always nice!”

“Hmmm. We’ll see. This is all assuming things go well this summer.” He switches to English again, realizing even as he speaks the words that he’s been nervous about something. “Maybe first time we get real chance to be alone together, long stretch of time, he realizes it’s not what he wants.”

“Or maybe you will get sick of him?”

“No, don’t be crazy.”

Sveta laughs at him, and Ilya snorts, shaking away the maudlin thoughts. “Okay. Yes. You’re right. It will be fine.”

“It will be better than fine. It will be a sex vacation with your one true love. Just remember to stay hydrated.”

It’s pushing five in the morning before they finally get off the phone. Sveta says she loves him, and Ilya says it back, and he thinks about how the last time they were together, he hadn’t known it might be the last ever time he got to touch her like that. He thinks of one of his favorite words in English, *bittersweet*, and hopes that her imagined vision of the future comes true—that he gets to introduce Shane and Sveta next season, that he gets to watch Sveta tease him, watch Shane’s face flush under those freckles. They could hide away together after a game, sit on Ilya’s couch, he could hold them, one under each arm, and when he kisses Shane in front of Svetlana, she’ll whistle just to make them all laugh.

He manages to doze a bit, eyes drifting closed and then flickering open as he plays over the conversation with Sveta in his head. His sleep schedule is always fucked at the end of a season anyway; he has nowhere he has to be today. He’ll lay around at home daydreaming of Shane’s cottage and catch up on sleep in his own time.

He gives into the temptation and grabs his phone again at around six in the morning.

L: I told her. She wants to meet you.

J: It went well? Are you okay?

L: I’m good. It feels good to tell someone.

J: That’s amazing. I want to meet her too. I mean I’m kind of scared of her but still.

L: She is very scary, you are right to be afraid. I will protect you.

J: My hero.

J: Also, it's so early, why are you up?

L: Haven't really been to sleep. Why are YOU awake?

J: Habit. Would be going on morning run right now.

L: I'm going to force you to sleep in, you know. When I see you next week.

J: You can try.

L: I think I have good ideas to keep you in bed. I have been brainstorming.

J: Brainstorming, wow.

L: I will get to take my time with you.

J: I want that so bad.

L: Good. Me too.

J: I'm glad it went well with Svetlana.

L: Thank you for letting me tell her.

J: I want this to work. I really want this to work.

L: Me too. So much.

So, so much. Shane has no idea. It's overwhelming, it's terrifying, he's never wanted anything more.

J: You should try to sleep

L: I will.

J: Call me later? This afternoon? I have dr's appointment and then a big fun day planned of absolutely nothing.

L: Yes, I will call you.

He's loopy enough from the lack of sleep, from the high of his successful chat with Sveta, from the lingering disappointment of losing yesterday, that he adds:

L: Miss your voice.

J: Miss yours too.

L: Miss your hands. Sveta says you have good hands.

J: What did you tell her about my hands?

L: Nothing, she noticed them all on her own. I told you, she thinks you are sexy. I could have told her all sorts of things about your hands. I'm very obsessed with them, you know.

J: Really?

L: When I see you, I will tell you all the things I like best about them. About all of you. I will show you. I will go slow. I will go so slow you will beg me.

J: Game on.

L: Can't fucking wait.

J: Get some SLEEP

L: Yes okay.

L: I will try to dream of you.

L: And your hands.

Shane sends back a heart emoji, and then a picture of his hand giving the middle finger, and Ilya clutches the phone to his chest like a love-struck idiot.

He thinks, for the first time, he really believes it— he might get to have this forever. He might never have to say goodbye. He might never have to be alone again.

Works inspired by this one

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