

everything you've wanted

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everything you've wanted

by [livermoriumkid](#)

Summary

“Shane,” Rose says gently. “I don’t think Eva is good for you.”

Shane sighs into his water glass. This again. You get one shoe thrown at you during an argument, and suddenly everyone thinks you’re being abused.

Or: Shane ends up dating Rose’s co-star rather than her, and soon finds himself in an abusive relationship. Ilya and Shane's friends need to put aside their differences in order to keep him safe.

Notes

watched the show in a single day. Godamn I love hockey.

so timeline is.... after vegas? I dunno I can't keep track. Basically at the party Shane meets Rose and her co-star and ends up dating her costar instead of her.

TW: abusive realtionships, eating/food issues etc. You're telling me Shane DOESN'T have an ED? C'mon, man.

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

I'd like to take the time to remind everyone that this is a work of fiction and not true to form. This fic is meant in no way or reason to reflect real life, nor should be used as a resource for life. If you are not comfortable with reading something like this, I would advise you to look somewhere else.

EDIT:

I've been getting some comments that have been clearly been written by AI. Quit feeding my shit into chatbots! read the fic at 3am instead of sleeping like a normal person

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

Shane arrives at the restaurant ten minutes early.

It's a tiny place with barely twenty tables and it's well known for its discretion. Of course, the moment he steps inside, he sees Rose already seated. He waves off the hostess and heads straight for her table.

Rose looks up and smiles. She stands to greet him, pulling him into a brief hug that smells faintly of citrus and perfume.

He likes Rose. He really does. She's friendly and funny, and she doesn't take herself too seriously. When she talks to you, she actually listens, like what you're saying matters. They've been friends for six solid months now, ever since they'd met at the same party where Shane had first met Eva and exchanged numbers.

“Hi, Shane. Good to see you,” Rose says warmly.

“Nice to see you too,” he replies, returning her smile as they sit. “How’s the new movie?”

Rose rolls her eyes, launching into an animated explanation of a shapeshifter role that requires three hours of makeup and prosthetics every day. Shane lets her chatter, nodding along as their server stops by to take drink orders. He asks for water; Rose gets a lemonade.

Once the server leaves, Rose turns her attention back to him. “Enough about me. How are your ribs? I saw you take that hit in the last game.”

Shane lifts an eyebrow. “You watched the game?”

She winces. “Well, watched the highlights? Which included you getting slammed.”

They both laugh, and Shane is struck, again, by how easy it is to be around her. Eva isn’t like this at all. A small, traitorous part of him wonders what would’ve happened if he’d dated Rose instead.

Eva Loren is everything Rose isn’t. She’s famous, and she makes sure everyone knows it. Eva has perfect tan skin and hair that takes stylists hours to perfect. She goes around in iny

dresses and towering heels. Shane always feels like he's scrambling to keep up with her, perpetually a step behind.

"Nice," he says dryly. "Me getting crushed into the boards is a highlight."

Rose giggles into her lemonade just as the server returns to take their food orders. Rose chooses the chicken with a creamy lemon sauce. Shane orders salmon with brown rice. Rose's eyes flick to him for a split second before she looks away again, so quickly he wonders if he imagined it.

When the server leaves, Rose leans back in her chair. "So," she says, clearing her throat. "How's Eva?"

Shane blinks. "Oh. Uh, good. She's doing *The Tonight Show* this week."

Rose nods. "I saw. How long have you two been together now? Five months?"

"About that," Shane says with a shrug.

Rose looks at him for a minute and bites her lower lip. Shane can tell she's debating about saying something. Finally she takes a breath, steeling herself.

“Shane,” Rose says gently, “I don’t think Eva is good for you.”

He sighs into his water glass. This again. One shoe thrown during an argument and suddenly everyone thinks he’s being abused.

“It’s not like that, Rose,” he says tiredly.

Eva is great. She has a temper, sure, but who doesn’t? She works a high-stress job. Hell, Shane does too. He understands frustration.

It had happened a few weeks ago, when they were both in New York. They’d been at her penthouse, arguing about... something. He can’t even remember what now. At some point, she’d kicked off her three-inch heels and hurled one at him. It hit just above his eyebrow, splitting the skin.

She’d been horrified afterward, apologetic. Shane had slapped on a bandage and moved on.

When he video-called Rose the next day and she’d asked about the cut, he’d told her the truth. She’d given him a strange look and asked if Eva had done things like that before. And Shane-stupidly-had said yes.

Eva runs hot and cold. One moment she's curled against him, affectionate and sweet. The next, she's smashing dishes.

Then his *mom* had texted him, asking if he was okay. Rose had reached out to her. Shane had been furious-but Rose apologized, clearly shaken, and said she was just worried. He let it go.

His mom hadn't helped. She never said *abusive relationship* outright, but she danced around it enough that Shane spent half an hour convincing her it wasn't like that. Because it wasn't.

He's a professional hockey player. He's got three inches and a hundred pounds on Eva. It's not like he's some battered spouse. If he really needed to leave, he could. He just... didn't need to.

"*Shane*," Rose says now, exasperated by his silence.

"It's fine," he insists. "Things just get heated sometimes. That's normal."

Rose arches a perfectly sculpted eyebrow. "It really isn't."

"Did you invite me to dinner to hang out," Shane asks suspiciously, "or just to ambush me?"

His phone buzzes. He glances down.

Eva: Hey babe! Call me? I miss you.

“Is that her?” Rose asks, nodding toward the phone.

“No,” Shane lies poorly.

The buzzing doesn’t stop.

Eva: Shane

Eva: c’mon, I just wanna talk

Eva: Shane

Eva: seriously??

Eva: guess I’m not worth your time

Eva: Shane. Pick up.

Then she starts calling. It hasn’t even been five minutes.

“Rose, I -” Shane says apologetically.

“Just take it,” she mutters, clearly annoyed.

He excuses himself and heads for the hallway near the bathrooms, answering the next call.

“*Shane!*” Eva’s voice is slurred. Club music thumps in the background, voices overlapping. She’s at a party. “*Why didn’t you pick up?*”

“I’m at dinner,” he says. “What’s up?”

“*With who?*” she asks immediately.

His heart jumps. He’s a terrible liar, but maybe she’s drunk enough not to notice.

“*It’s a business thing.*”

It works- sort of. She sighs. “*I miss you.*”

“I miss you too. I’ll be in New York next week. You can come to the game.”

“*Ew, no,*” she says, laughing. “*But I’ll see you after?*”

“Yeah. Listen, I’ve gotta go.”

She doesn’t sound happy. “*Fine. Love you.*”

“Love you too.”

She hangs up first.

Shane exhales and leans against the hallway wall. Eva is exhausting. Rose isn’t exhausting. Fan meet-and-greets aren’t exhausting. Even being with Ilya hadn’t been this exhausting-and Ilya was an asshole who’d sent him into a sexuality crisis.

He knows he needs to break up with Eva. He just can’t figure out how to do it without everything blowing up. Maybe he needs to talk to his PR team.

When he returns to the table, their food is waiting, hot and steaming. Rose's lips are pursed.

"She was just checking in," Shane says as he sits.

"Shane," Rose says quietly, disappointment heavy in her voice. "I've worked with her. I know what she's like."

"It's complicated," he replies with a shrug and picks up his fork.

The salmon smells good, but he suddenly isn't hungry at all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for the support on this fic!

TW: emotional abuse/gaslighting and physical abuse between Shane and his GF

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

A few weeks after his dinner with Rose, Shane meets his girlfriend.

They're in Eva's penthouse, high enough above the city that the windows feel unreal, like screens instead of glass. The city glitters below them and Shane still smells like ice and sweat and the antiseptic tang of the locker room. He'd just gotten done with a brutal game against the Admirals. He skipped the pretense of going out with the guys. He'd just showered and headed for his girlfriend's.

Eva has already changed. She's barefoot now, hair loose, one of Shane's hoodies slung over her shoulders like it belongs to her. She's poured them both drinks without asking as he settles in.

"You were amazing tonight," she says, pressing the glass into his hand. Her smile is bright, too bright. "I mean, obviously."

"Thanks," Shane says. Eva's not one for sports, really but she tries. That's nice of her. Not a lot of people would try. He sinks onto the edge of the couch, bones aching in that familiar way that comes after a hard game. He takes a sip. The drink is stronger than he expects.

Eva perches beside him, legs tucked under herself. “I could tell you were distracted, though.”

Shane frowns. “What?”

“You missed that open shot in the second period,” she says lightly. “You *never* miss those.”

He exhales. He’s exhausted. He’s always exhausted these days. “I got checked into the boards right before that.”

She hums, unconvinced. “Still.”

And there it is. That faint shift in the air, the way her tone sharpens just a fraction. Shane straightens without meaning to.

“It was a long game,” he says carefully. “We still won.”

Eva rolls her eyes. “You always get so defensive.”

“I’m not-,”

“You are,” she cuts in. She takes her glass back, downs the rest of it, and sets it on the table harder than necessary. “God, Shane, I flew all the way out here for you. I skipped a dinner with producers for you.”

Right. Because even though this was her penthouse, she’d had a meeting in Boston the same day as the game. She had insisted, even though Shane thought it was silly.

“I didn’t ask you to do that,” he says, immediately regretting it.

Eva turns slowly to look at him. It reminds him of a tiger in a nature documentary. “Excuse me?”

“I just mean- ” He scrubs a hand over his face. “I appreciate it. Really. I’m just tired.”

“So I’m not allowed to have expectations?” she asks. Her voice is calm now, which somehow makes it worse. “I’m not allowed to want my boyfriend to actually be present with me?”

“I *am* present,” Shane says. “I just played 2 and half hours of hockey.”

“And I’ve been on set for fourteen hours a day all week,” she snaps. “But I’m still here, aren’t I?”

He doesn’t answer fast enough, and that’s enough to have her fuming.

Eva stands abruptly, picking up the glass. She pours herself another drink and downs it quickly before setting it down on the counter. “Unbelievable.”

She starts pacing. Shane watches her, heart starting to thud a little faster. Arguments with her never seem to have a clear beginning or end, just a slow spiral.

“Why do you always do this?” she demands. “Why do you make me feel like I’m asking for too much?”

“I’m not trying to,” Shane says. “Eva, can we just- cool down for a second?”

She laughs, sharp and humorless. “Don’t tell me to calm down.”

“I didn’t say-”

“You *always* say it,” she interrupts. “You *always* make it seem like I’m crazy for wanting things.”

“That’s not fair,” he says, heat creeping into his voice now. “I support you. I show up. I-,”

“You show up when it’s convenient,” Eva says. “You disappear when I actually need you.”

“That’s not true!”

She stops pacing and turns on him fully. Her eyes are bright, her cheeks flushed. “You didn’t answer my calls yesterday.”

“I was on a flight,” Shane says. “I told you that.”

“You could’ve texted.”

“I *did* text.”

“Hours later.”

Something in her snaps.

“God,” Eva says, grabbing the glass from the counter. “You are *impossible*.”

“Eva,” Shane warns, standing now. “Hey. Don’t- ”

She throws it.

It happens fast- too fast for him to react. The glass hits him in his face in a sharp, sickening impact that makes stars burst behind his eyes. He stumbles back with a startled shout, hand flying to his face. The glass thumps onto the carpeted floor, somehow having not broken.

There’s blood. He can feel it immediately, warm and wet, sliding down his eye. His nose is stinging. His face is stinging. Eva freezes.

“Oh my god,” she breathes. The anger drains from her face, replaced by horror. “Shane-I-I didn’t mean to- ”

He presses his palm harder against his face, heart pounding. “What the hell, Eva?”

“I didn’t mean to hit you,” she says quickly, rushing toward him. “I swear. I just- I wasn’t aiming at you.”

“You *threw a glass*,” he says, stunned.

Tears spring to her eyes. “I’m so sorry. Oh my god, I’m so sorry.”

She reaches for him, hands shaking. Shane steps back instinctively, then feels bad about it immediately.

“It’s fine,” he says automatically, even as blood seeps between his fingers. “It’s fine. I’m fine.”

Eva grabs a towel, presses it to his face. “I can’t believe I did that. I just get so overwhelmed sometimes. You know that. You know I don’t mean it.”

He nods, because that’s easier than arguing. Because his head hurts and his chest feels tight and he just wants the night to stop.

“I should go.” he says dully.

“No, Shane. Please don’t-,” she begs, but Shane is already slipping his shoes on. Eva places a hand on his shoulder but he pulls away, yanking open the door with a blood-covered hand.

He flees out into the hall with a bloody kitchen towel still pressed to his face.

Chapter End Notes

poor shane :(

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

happy holidays! I am so thrilled from all the love this fic has gotten!! Please enjoy :)

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

Shane isn't sure where he's going, only that he needs to get away.

New York is a blur. He took an Uber from the arena straight to Eva's place; he doesn't even know where the team hotel is in relation to this neighborhood. The streets stretch out unfamiliar and endless.

He fumbles for his phone, trying to get his bearings, but there's too much blood in his eyes for the screen to make any sense. She'd hit him hard. Hard enough that he's suddenly grateful the glass hadn't shattered across his face.

People stream past him without slowing. Maybe the rumors are true. New Yorkers really don't give a shit.

A wave of nausea rolls through him. He shouldn't have left Eva like that. She's probably panicking right now, crying, spiraling.

And still, she'd thrown a glass at his face.

He wanders aimlessly until he nearly collides with someone locking up a storefront, metal gate rattling as it comes down.

“Sorry,” Shane mutters.

The man turns, startled. He was probably expecting trouble. When he sees Shane properly, his expression shifts, eyes widening.

“Oh shit,” he says. “Are you okay?”

“Fine,” Shane lies.

The man exhales, rubbing a hand over his face. He has kind brown eyes. “Why don’t you come inside? Let’s get you cleaned up.”

“You don’t have to-”

“Yes, I do,” the man interrupts, already unlocking the door. “No arguing. Inside.”

Shane is so grateful for the firm command that he doesn't even think to ask the man's name. He stumbles into the smoothie shop as the door opens, the man flicking the lights back on while leaving the *Closed* sign hanging in the window. He guides Shane, still clutching his bleeding nose, behind the counter.

On trembling legs, Shane lets himself be steered onto a small stool. The man tears off a handful of paper towels from the dispenser by the sink and presses them into Shane's hands, the towel from Eva's place a lost cause.

"Thanks," Shane manages, his voice thick and clogged.

"No problem. Here, let me see."

Shane pulls his hand away. The man winces. "Ouch. You've got a cut on your eyebrow, too. I'll grab the first-aid kit. I don't think you need stitches, but I've got butterfly bandages. Just keep pressure on it, okay?"

He disappears around the corner at a quick jog.

God. This is a disaster. How did Shane even end up here?

He wants his mom. He wants Rose. Stupidly, foolishly, he wants Ilya. Blood keeps leaking down his face, and it's not even from hockey.

The man returns with a bright red first-aid kit, setting it on the counter and rummaging through it.

"I'm Kip, by the way," he says.

"Shane," he grunts back. His mouth fills with blood, and he swallows hard, trying not to drip onto the spotless counter. Kip finds a towel, an actual towel this time, and hands it to him. Shane presses it to his nose, uselessly trying to keep from staining his clothes.

"Okay," Kip says gently. "Can you pinch your nose and lean forward a little so I can take a look at your eyebrow? Is it broken?"

Shane squints and wiggles his nose experimentally. "Nope."

"You sure? Because it looks-"

"I'm sure," Shane cuts in. "I know what a broken nose feels like."

Kip's hands pause over the open first-aid kit, just for a second.

"Oh- god, no, nothing- this isn't a regular thing for me. I mean, it is. But—" Shane cuts himself off, grimacing.

Christ, Hollander. Foot. Mouth.

"I play hockey. Professionally. So..." Shane trails off.

Kip straightens up a bit, brightening. "My b-, I mean, my friend plays hockey too. For the Admirals. He's always got a bump or bruise."

"Don't I know it." Shane mutters. The blood has stemmed enough from his nose that he can sorta lean forward and have Kip try and wipe away the blood to see the cut. He must get it eventually, because he hisses through his teeth. "This looks pretty bad," Kip says softly. "You might want to go to the hospital."

"No!" Shane blurts, a little too fast. He reins it in. "I mean- no. It's fine. Just a busted nose and a cut."

Kip bites his lower lip but stays mercifully quiet as he carefully applies a few butterfly bandages to Shane's eyebrow. When he finishes, he leans back to inspect his work.

"I think that'll do."

"Thank you," Shane says sincerely. "Seriously."

He lowers the towel and catches a glimpse of himself in the reflective metal behind the counter. He looks like an extra from a bad horror movie. He's got blood splattered across his shirt and smeared along his face. Kip doesn't comment. He simply takes the towel from Shane and replaces it with a damp paper one.

"Here," he says gently.

Shane accepts it, dabbing carefully, afraid to press too hard.

After a moment, Kip clears his throat. "Listen, Shane... is there anyone I can call for you?"

His first thought is his mom, but she'd instantly panic. Then Rose, but she's in Montreal. And then there's Ilya...

No. They're not like that. Whatever that tuna melt thing was, it wasn't- *they* weren't anything.

That leaves one person Shane absolutely does not want to talk to right now. Eva.

He swallows, tasting blood. "Uh... no."

Kip nods. "Okay. What about... I don't have a car, but I could walk you back to wherever you're staying?"

The dread hits Shane all over again. He's rooming with Hayden. One look at his face and Hayden would drag him straight to the hospital. Or worse, alert the coaches.

Shane hesitates too long, because Kip's expression shifts, concern deepening, as he nods again.

"Okay. Okay," Kip says quickly, as if trying to reassure himself. "What if you just hang out here for a minute? I need to make a phone call. Don't go anywhere, please?"

Too tired to argue, Shane nods.

He watches as Kip digs through his bag and pulls out an older model phone. He dials. Whoever's on the other end answers almost immediately. Shane can't hear the response, but Kip's voice carries clearly through the quiet shop.

"Hey, it's me. Yeah, everything's fine. Listen, I've got a friend here who's kind of in a tight spot..." Kip pauses, listening. "No, not like that. He's just, uh, been roughed up a bit. I don't know... Yeah. I know, but I wanted to ask. Are you sure? You don't have to... Okay. Yeah. Thank you. Mm-hmm. Me too. I'll text you later."

Kip hangs up and turns back to Shane, suddenly bright.

"Game plan," he announces. "If you're okay with it, you can crash at my place. Well, my friend's place. The hockey friend I mentioned? He lets me stay over a lot, and he said it's fine. The couch is comfortable. Just for the night."

Shane swallows, the taste of blood still sharp in his mouth. "I don't..."

"Please?" Kip says, hand pressed to his chest. "For my poor heart. I promise I'm not a serial killer. Or a spree killer. I've recently learned the difference."

Despite himself, Shane nods.

“Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!!! :)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

quick chapter update because i finished episode six and i am UNWELL

please ignore the chapter count going up too lol i have a lot to say

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

Shane follows Kip in silence as he shutters the smoothie shop for the second time that night.

He really isn't sure what to make of Kip. You'd have to be at least a little unhinged to see a bloodied stranger on the street, invite him into a shop full of expensive equipment, patch him up, and then offer him a couch in an apartment he doesn't even own.

Kip doesn't seem bothered by Shane's quiet. During the short walk from the shop to wherever they're going, he chatters easily about his art degree, his voice bright. Shane listens, nodding along.

Shane never went to college.

He went straight from juniors to the big leagues. Hell, he barely went to secondary school at all. By thirteen, he was spending most of his time on the road, bouncing between rinks. Eventually, he'd switched to homeschooling.

Sometimes, he regrets it.

He never went to school dances. Never sat through assemblies or pep rallies or detention. His entire life was narrowed down to ice time and training schedules. It was hockey and nothing else.

He loves hockey. He really does. But there's a sharp, unexpected ache in his chest as he walks beside Kip, listening to him talk about studios and critiques and homework deadlines. A part of Shane wonders what a normal life might have felt like.

If he wasn't who he was, could he have had one? He tries to imagine it. Staying in one place. An office job. Friends who weren't teammates or media obligations. Real friends, like Rose and Hayden. People who wanted to know *him*, not *Shane Hollander, Hockey Player*.

Kip doesn't recognize him. Or if he does, he doesn't say anything. He's too busy rambling about a new installation at the Met.

Shane has never even been to a museum.

They reach an apartment building, and Kip holds the door open for him. There's a doorman, an actual doorman, who recognizes Kip and waves them through without comment. He doesn't even blink at the blood on Shane's clothes.

Apparently, Shane must dissociate somewhere between the elevator and the hallway, because the next thing he knows, Kip is unlocking the door to a very, very expensive-looking apartment.

It's all clean lines and concrete tones. It's very minimal. Like someone copied a spread straight out of a design magazine and hired an interior decorator who hated color.

"Sorry," Kip says as he locks the door behind them. "I know. Trust me, I'm working on it. The man does not understand décor."

"Where are we?" Shane asks, the dizziness finally catching up to him. His knees ache, heavy and unsteady.

"Lower East Side," Kip supplies. "Okay- let me grab you a towel and some clean clothes. I think you'll fit into mine. I keep stuff here. Don't worry, I'll wash everything. In-unit laundry! Isn't that neat?"

He sounds genuinely thrilled.

Shane blinks, overwhelmed.

Apparently, he and Kip have lived very different lives.

Kip leaves Shane standing in the middle of the apartment while he disappears to find clean clothes or a towel or- something. Shane stays where he is, unsure what else to do, and lets his gaze drift over the sparse decor.

There aren't many photos on the walls. A few look like stock images, the kind that come already tucked into frames. But as Shane really looks, some of them start to feel... wrong. Too specific.

One is of a young boy with two missing front teeth, grinning proudly between two adults, a hockey stick clutched in his hands. Another shows the same boy a few years older, wearing a jersey with *St. Thomas* ' stitched across the chest.

And then—

“Holy shit,” Shane breathes.

The next photo stops him cold. A man with unmistakably familiar, tousled hair has his arm slung around Kip's shoulders, both of them smiling straight at the camera. Shane has seen that smile before. In TV interviews, and on posters and in games. And right after the United States won gold in Sochi.

Scott Hunter.

Holy shit.

Shane is standing in Scott Hunter's apartment. As in *captain of the New York Admirals*, Scott Hunter. The same Scott Hunter who had snapped back hard at Shane's light chirping during their last game.

You're starting to sound like him. You know who.

Dread curls low in Shane's stomach. For a second, he considers bolting. Just grabbing his jacket, finding the door, getting out before this gets worse. But he hesitates.

Scott and Kip look close in the photo. They're not teammates. Friends. Maybe more. And Kip had clothes here. The doorman had waved them through like this was normal.

Before Shane can spiral further, Kip comes back into the room. One look at Shane's face and his expression sharpens.

"What's wrong?"

“This is Scott Hunter’s apartment,” Shane says flatly.

Kip goes red instantly. “Oh. Uh, yeah.”

“Does he know I’m here?” Shane asks, carefully neutral. The sting from their last on-ice exchange still hasn’t faded.

“Yes,” Kip says quickly. “I told him I was bringing you over.”

“No,” Shane says, pointing at his own chest. “Does he know *I’m* here? As in- Shane Hollander.”

Kip blinks. “Oh. Um.”

He pulls out his phone and types out a message. It buzzes almost immediately. Kip frowns at the screen and types again. Then there’s a long, awful stretch of silence while he waits.

Finally, the phone buzzes once more.

Kip looks up. “Yeah. He knows. And he says it’s fine.”

Shane isn’t sure he believes that- but he doesn’t have Hunter’s number, and he definitely doesn’t want to ask for it.

Kip gestures down the hallway. “Guest bathroom’s down there. Take your time.” He hands Shane a small bundle. It’s clean clothes and a towel. “Just toss your stuff out the door. I’ll wash it.”

Shane feels oddly detached, like he’s floating somewhere just outside himself. He thinks he says thank you, but he isn’t sure.

Kip waits in the hallway as Shane disappears into the bathroom, the door clicking shut behind him.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter will be Kip's POV :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

the fuck is an uploading schedule amirite????

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

As soon as Shane disappears into the bathroom, and Kip is sure he isn't coming back out anytime soon, Kip drops his gaze to his phone.

Kip: So, my friend he plays hockey too. He wants to know who you are and if you're okay with this?

Kip: He says his name is Shane Hollander.

Kip: Scott???

Scott: It's fine. Call me when you can.

Kip peers down the hallway. The bathroom door is still firmly shut. He moves into the kitchen and dials Scott. Scott answers on the second ring.

"Shane Hollander is in our apartment?" Scott says, without preamble.

"Hello to you too," Kip replies dryly.

“Hi. Yes. Sorry. Hello, Kip. I miss you.”

Kip smiles despite himself. “I miss you too. Okay. Continue.”

“Shane Hollander is in our apartment???”

A small, irrational spark of pride flares in Kip’s chest at the words *our apartment*. He’ll unpack that later. Right now, there’s a bleeding hockey player locked in the bathroom.

“Yes,” Kip says. “I was about to close the shop and he ran into me. I thought he’d been mugged or something, so I brought him inside to clean up. When I suggested the hospital, he completely freaked.”

“Hm,” Scott hums.

Montreal played New York tonight. Even though Scott technically had the apartment and didn’t need to stay in a hotel, game nights meant hours of post-game press, meetings with coaches, and conversations with staff. He wouldn’t be home until very, very late.

“No, Scott. Seriously, he *freaked* out. You should’ve seen his face. It was like he was terrified someone was going to find him.”

Scott exhales into the phone. *“Well. You know there are puck bunnies out there who can get... stalker-ish.”*

Kip files away the *puck bunny* comment for later.

“It didn’t feel like that,” he says. “He’s got a huge gash over his eyebrow, and his nose is all messed up. He didn’t look like that when he left the game tonight, right? Did anyone mention seeing him with someone? Anything happen after?”

Scott is quiet for a long moment. Long enough that Kip almost thinks the call has dropped. Finally, Scott clears his throat.

“I heard some of the guys chirping about him meeting his girlfriend after the game.”

Silence settles between them.

That’s what Kip had been afraid of. He doesn’t know Shane Hollander, not really- but he knows the signs. He’s watched friends twist themselves around unhealthy relationships and stay too long with people who hurt them. Kyle, for one. The bartender at the Kingfisher had been hospitalized twice by his ex-boyfriend before they staged an intervention.

“Did he say what happened?” Scott asks, softly now. He must be thinking about Kyle, too.

“No,” Kip says. “I didn’t ask.”

The bathroom door creaks open. Kip looks up just in time to see a careful bundle of clothes being set just outside the threshold. They’re coated with blood but they’re folded neatly still.

“Hang on,” Kip says, setting the phone down.

He moves down the hall and picks them up. It’s just a collared shirt and a pair of trousers. Both are soaked through with blood. There are faint damp patches on the light blue shirt where Shane must’ve tried to scrub them clean and given up partway through. Kip gathers them to his chest and heads back to the kitchen, fingers slick and cold.

“Christ, Scott,” he breathes into the phone when he picks it up. “I gave him some spare clothes and told him I’d wash his. They’re- Scott, they’re covered in blood. I don’t-” His voice catches. “I don’t know if I can get all of this out.”

“I’m coming over.”

“No,” Kip says quickly, nose burning. The weight of it all presses down at once. Shane had seemed kind enough from the very short time Kip has known the man. Whatever happened to him, he didn’t deserve it. No one does. “Not right now. You’ll scare him. Do you have

anyone's number. Like, someone who knows Shane? Just to tell them he's safe or something?"

Scott goes quiet, then lets out a heavy sigh. *"Yeah. I do. I'll make a few calls. You think he'll stay the night?"*

"He said he would. Why?"

"He's supposed to fly with the team to Chicago tomorrow afternoon. Montreal's got a game the day after."

Kip bites down on his lower lip. "Can he fly separately?" he asks. "Not tomorrow. The day of the game. That's not until the evening, right?"

"Maybe. He'll need to pay for his own ticket."

Kip starts doing the math in his head. A last minute flight to Chicago, probably business class could easily be 500 dollars, easy.

"Shane can afford it, I promise. And if for whatever reason he can't or won't, I'll cover it. I'll see about getting into contact with his coaches. Say he's sick or something. Food poisoning."

They'll think he just has a bad hangover, but it should give him time. He's got a lot of pull given how well he plays."

"Please do. I'll keep him here. I can call out of work."

"*Kip*," Scott says gently, and Kip wants to melt. His boyfriend is just the sweetest.

"It's fine," Kip says casually, even though he can't really afford to take a day off of work. They both know it, hence Scott's gentleness. "I can just switch shifts with Maya or someone. I won't be missing work, just... working a different day."

"Okay. I'll come over tonight around 3am. I have to fly with the team to Raleigh tomorrow morning, though."

"I know. See you soon. I love you." Kip says, because he really, really does.

"I'll see you soon. I love you too. Text me if anything changes." Scott says.

Kip hangs up first.

Then he carries Shane Hollander's blood-soaked clothes to the washer.

Chapter End Notes

Kip's a good friend. He and Scott are post being boyfriends but pre- coming out at finals

also;

Kip: omg a flight could cost like 500 dollars!!

Scott: *looks down at his 1800 dollar hockey stick* crazy

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

FLOORed at all the support. As a thank you, here is a new chapter!!!! :D

Tw: disordered eating, orthorexia etc. basically the inherent eating disorder that comes with being a professional athlete

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

Once Shane is inside the bathroom, it takes a full five minutes before he can make himself look in the mirror.

This has been the strangest, most terrifying night of his life.

He turns on the sink and grips the edges, knuckles whitening, trying to talk himself into it. He needs to see. He *has* to.

Eva did this to him. Eva did this to him. One second they'd been fine, and the next she'd just... exploded.

Rose was right.

Steeling himself, Shane finally forces his eyes up.

God.

He looks awful.

His hair is never perfectly in place after games, but this looks like he's been dragged through a tornado. His face is crusted with coppery, dried blood, thickest beneath his nose and around his right eye. His eyebrow is already swollen, angry and red, scabbed over and barely held together by two butterfly bandages.

There are uneven swipes where the blood has been smeared away, exposing pale skin and freckles. It was probably from when he'd tried to clean himself up with a damp paper towel earlier. Dark rings shadow his eyes, which are bloodshot and glassy.

When did this happen? When had Shane started to look so... not like himself?

And not just because of the blood.

He strips off his shirt, blotched with rusty-colored blood. In the mirror, he can count every rib beneath his skin, each one standing out like keys on a harpsichord. He's always been on the lean side, especially compared to most of the guys he plays with, but under the harsh bathroom light he looks almost skeletal.

He tries to remember the last time he ate something substantial. There'd been his usual smoothie before the game that afternoon. Maybe overnight oats the day before? He hadn't felt hungry at breakfast, but he'd had a few strawberries in the morning.

Shane knows he has to work harder than most. That's why he sticks to the macrobiotic diet: forty percent whole grains, thirty percent fruits and vegetables, the rest beans and sea vegetables.

Usually, he makes it work. Sushi means a brown-rice salmon roll with pickled ginger. Dinner at Hayden's place means splitting a kale salad with pomegranate seeds and soy dressing with Jackie. Even at his parents' house, when they're having chicken or steak, his mom always makes sure there's something set aside for him. It's easy. Predictable.

He and Eva had planned to order in after the game.

They hadn't made it that far.

Not that he's very hungry now. He realizes he hasn't been hungry much at all lately. Part of it is exhaustion; he keeps pushing himself harder and harder, coming home with just enough energy to eat a few barley crackers and a handful of grapes before collapsing into bed. The rest of it is something worse.

Apathy.

He just doesn't care anymore whether he's hungry or not.

Shane has never really looked at himself like this before. It shows. The mass and muscle are still there, but everything is sharper now. There are angles where there used to be softness.

Shane wets his shirt in the sink and tries to scrub away the blood. It's pointless. The stains only smear, blooming darker. With a tired sigh, he gives up and carefully folds the shirt and pants together, deliberate with it. He keeps his underwear.

He unlocks the door just long enough to set the small bundle in the hallway, then clicks it shut again, the lock sounding louder than it should.

Shane turns on the shower. It takes him a moment to figure out the controls, but he twists the handle until the water is as hot as it will go.

He wonders what Eva is doing right now. Is she still upset? Maybe he should call her. She'd seemed remorseful. Like she felt awful about what happened.

I don't think she's good for you.

Rose's voice cuts through the thought. And she was right. Shane knows that, logically. Eva is terrible to him. He hadn't even been that invested in the relationship. She'd been a distraction, nothing more. A last ditch effort to confirm his sexuality. All it would take is a single text, and it could be over.

He steps into the shower.

The heat might as well be ice for all he feels. His skin flushes fast, turning a tender lobster pink, but the warmth never reaches deeper than the surface. The cut over his eye begins to sting. Water runs down his face and shoulders, turning ruddy as it swirls toward the drain.

He watches it disappear.

The sting sharpens as the water keeps hitting the cut. It's a bright, insistent pain that makes his jaw clench. He welcomes it anyway. Pain is easier than thinking. Easier than replaying the way Eva's face had changed. Easier than reflecting on how fast her affection had curdled into something unrecognizable.

Shane braces his hands against the tile and lets his forehead rest there, eyes squeezed shut. The tiles are cool beneath his palms. He breathes in steam and something metallic that still lingers no matter how long the water runs.

He tells himself this is the last time. That he's done. That he won't text her, won't apologize for something he didn't do, won't smooth things over just to keep the peace. He's good at that, right? Keeping the peace.

Too good.

The water keeps pouring over him. Minutes pass. Maybe more. Time feels elastic in here, stretching thin and strange.

Eventually, his skin aches from the heat. His fingers wrinkle. The blood thins, then finally disappears, washed down the drain until the water runs clear. He reaches for the soap and scrubs mechanically, careful around his eye and nose, flinching when his fingers stray too close.

When he finally turns the water off, the sudden quiet feels too loud.

Shane steps out onto the bathmat, legs unsteady. He catches his reflection again. His face is cleaner now, but no less unsettling. The swelling is worse. His eye looks wrong, his face unfamiliar. He wraps a towel around himself and presses another gently to his eyebrow, holding it there until the pulsing dulls. The butterfly bandages have somehow stayed on, but he's definitely going to get something like a black eye. There's bruising echoing around his nose, too. There's a small cut across the bridge.

Shane changes into the clothes that Kip has given him. It's a plain black shirt with the text "This is Not a Shirt" on it in white letters and navy sweatpants. The shirt fits fine, but the sweatpants are a little short at the ankle. Shane needs to pull the pants cord tight to keep them from slipping off his waist. He hangs his towel up politely on a nearby hook.

From somewhere beyond the bathroom door, he can hear movement. Something like cabinets opening and the quiet clinking of glass. It's Kip, giving him space. But he's still there.

The thought tightens something in Shane's chest.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: Scott's POV!

also I've been looking into the macrobiotic diet which Shane is on in canon. You're telling me he DOESN'T have an eating disorder in canon? bitch please

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys so much for all the support! I'm so jazzed I'm doing daily uploads. I've just about finished the fic, so I should be posting about once a day until new year's:)

Also I feel so validated on my views on Shane's diet. He's a professional athlete and the macrobiotic diet would not do him any good!

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

Scott stares down at his phone, his thoughts racing over one another.

Shane Hollander is in his apartment.

Shane Hollander is in his apartment with Kip, and he's bleeding.

The realization won't settle.

Scott stands in one of the arena's back hallways, the kind reserved for staff and players after the game. The noise from the rink has dulled to a distant hum. He's already done several interviews, smiled for cameras, answered the same questions on autopilot but this takes his attention.

Shane Hollander is in his home.

And Scott can't stop thinking about why.

He's always had a healthy level of respect for the other man. Scott knows what it's like to have the pressure to be the best weighing on your shoulders. Hell, Scott was still feeling it. He wasn't old by any standards, but he was old enough according to hockey.

He really shouldn't have responded to Shane's light chirping by throwing Ilya back in his face. Scott had suspected, of course, but he hadn't been 100% sure right until Shane had tried to fight him after Scott accused him of sounding like Ilya. Scott had been an asshole to do that. He knows what it's like to be closeted in the pros.

Scott slips the phone into his pocket and drags a hand down his face. The concrete wall behind him is cool through his suit jacket; he leans into it for a second longer than necessary, eyes closing. Kip is with Shane Hollander in their apartment.

He's played entire games with less pressure in his chest than this.

Scott exhales, straightens, and keeps moving.

The hallway smells like sweat. The sharp sting of the disinfectant the cleaning crew uses barely masks the lingering heat of bodies that have already passed through. A trainer nods at him in passing. Someone laughs farther down the corridor. The world, apparently, has decided to keep going.

Scott pulls his phone back out and scrolls, thumb moving on instinct until he finds the number he's looking for. He hesitates only a moment before hitting call.

"Hey," he says when it's picked up, keeping his voice even. Casual. "Quick question. Have you seen Shane since the game?"

Hayden Pike hums on the other line. Then:

"Huh?"

"It's Scott. Scott Hunter. Have you seen Shane?"

Scott can almost hear the shrugs through the line. *"Uh, no?"* Hayden says, not bothering to hide his confusion. *"He was planning on going straight from the game to his girlfriend's. She's got a penthouse in the city somewhere. Told me not to wait up."*

Hayden cracks a large yawn, and Scott recalls Hayden having a gaggle of very young children. He must be in bed or getting ready to head to bed.

"Is everything okay?" Hayden asks wearily.

“Right,” Scott says. “Thanks. Oh, uh. No. I mean yeah, it’s fine. Thanks, Pike.” and he hangs up before he can say something that’ll have the man sleepless.

He thinks of Kip. His boyfriend who was already rearranging his life around a man he met bleeding on the street. Kip, who Scott could tell was folding himself smaller without even realizing it. Kip who was standing in their kitchen, holding blood-soaked clothes and trying not to panic.

“Fuck.” Scott mummurs.

One of the perks (among many) of being a team captain, of surviving this long in the pros, is the sheer number of names in his contacts. Scott scrolls once, then taps the screen.

Theriault answers on the third ring. “’Allô?”

“Hi, Coach. This is Scott Hunter.”

There’s a pause, just long enough to acknowledge the awkwardness. Scott cringes. Montreal and New York had just faced off, and New York had lost. Bitterly.

“*Scott, yes,*” Theriault says at last. “*What can I help you with?*”

Scott exhales slowly. “This is going to sound... odd. But is it at all possible for Hollander to fly separately from the team to Chicago?”

Another pause. Scott imagines Theriault’s thick brow furrowing, the mental calculus already underway.

“*Separately,*” Theriault repeats, as if feeling the word in his mouth for the first time. “*Why?*”

“Medical,” Scott says without hesitation. “Nothing, um, contagious. He’s not fit to travel tomorrow, but he should be able to play if he flies later. Day of the game.”

Silence hums on the line. Somewhere behind Theriault, Scott can hear muffled voices, the scrape of chairs, the distant echo of a locker room emptying out.

“*Is he injured?*” Theriault asks.

“Not from...,” Scott says carefully. He clears his throat. “He’s... not well.”

Theriahult exhales. *“You understand how this looks.”*

“I do,” Scott says, and he does. It was a really odd request. Scott and Shane were on different teams, first of all. And Scott, not Shane or one of his teammates, was making the ask. “I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important.”

Another beat of quiet. Then a sigh, heavier this time.

“All right,” Theriahult says wearily. “He can arrange his own flight. I’ll mark him as ill and inform the staff. But if this becomes a pattern”

“It won’t,” Scott says, firmly. “Thank you, Coach.”

“See that it doesn’t,” Theriahult replies. “And Hunter?”

“Yes?”

“Make sure the kid’s actually okay.”

Scott swallows. “I will.”

The line goes dead and Scott lowers the phone.

“Fuck,” Scott murmurs again, quieter this time.

He scrolls through his contacts, thumb slowing when he hits Shane Hollander’s name. He doesn’t call. He doesn’t know what he’d say, and the last thing Shane needs is someone asking questions he’s not ready to answer. He’s honestly not even sure if Shane even has his phone. What if he’d left it at his girlfriend’s and she saw the call?

Instead, Scott sends a text to Kip.

Coach’s on board. Shane can fly separately. Marked him as sick.

He watches the three dots appear almost immediately. Then disappear. Then finally:

Thank you.

Just that. No heart emoji. No jokes. Kip is in triage mode and it makes Scott want to start to cry.

Scott slips the phone back into his pocket and pushes off the wall, forcing himself to keep moving. There are still people he needs to talk to. Lots of obligations he can't abandon without raising questions. He passes a cluster of reporters and ducks his head, offering a tired smile that says *not tonight*. One of them calls his name anyway.

"Scott! Quick question about the third period?"

"Tomorrow," Scott says, already walking. "Sorry."

He doesn't slow until he reaches a quieter stretch of corridor, where the lights hum softly and the walls are lined with faded team photos. Faces blur together of men who'd bled for the game, for each other. Men who'd hidden injuries and pain because that's what the culture, the team, demanded.

Scott stops.

That's the part that sits wrong in his chest.

Hockey teaches you how to take a hit. It doesn't teach you what to do when the damage comes, does it?

Scott is so distracted he nearly walks straight into Bennett. The goaltender has already changed into his suit, hair still shaggy and damp from the shower.

“Whoa,” Bennett says, steadying him by the arm. “You okay there, Scotty?”

Scott bites down on his lower lip. He doesn’t want to say anything to anyone. Shane has already had enough people poking into his life without permission. But this is Eric Bennett. Unflappable and calm. The damn near closest thing Scott knows to zen in skates.

More importantly, Bennett is one of his best friends. And someone who knows when not to ask questions.

“Hypothetical,” Scott says, and Bennett quirks a single eyebrow. “If a guy took a hit off the ice and didn’t want it documented yet... what would you tell him?”

Bennett doesn’t hesitate. There’s a flicker of curiosity, but nothing else.

“I’d tell him he doesn’t owe anyone his silence.”

Scott nods. That tracks. “Yeah. Thanks.”

Bennett studies him for a beat longer than necessary. “Everything alright?”

“Fine,” Scott says, and the lie lands badly. “Listen, I’ll see you tomorrow on the plane, yeah? We’ll get them next time.”

“I have a feeling this isn’t about losing to Montreal,” Bennett says mildly. There’s no smile on his face when he says it.

“Later, Bennett,” Scott says, already turning away.

He makes it three steps before he stops.

“Actually-”

Bennett waits, patient as ever. “Yeah?”

Scott hesitates. He may be risking Shane's personal life by asking this, but...

“Do you happen to have Ilya Rozanov’s number?”

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: Shane's POV

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

okay I have no self control. I'm so just so happy people are reading this QAQ. Here's a new chapter!!

Mild-ish spoilers for Kyle if you're gonna read the books. I freaked when I saw him in the show LOL. I demand he gets more screentime in season 2!!!

also ignore the chapter count going up. I tend to do that.

TW for this chapter: mentions of abusive relationships and physical abuse

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

Shane is pruny by the time he finally leaves the relative safety of the bathroom. His skin is tight and tender in places he doesn't want to think about too closely. He pauses in the doorway, barefoot on the cool tile, like he's bracing himself for something. He's not sure what for, though.

“Are you hungry?” Kip asks.

He's changed too. Kip is now in baggy shorts and a soft looking T-shirt worn thin at the collar. He's perched sideways in an armchair, socked feet tucked beneath him, phone loose in his hand. He's wearing glasses that look uncannily like Shane's reading pair, and something about that makes Shane's chest ache.

Shane thinks of keys on a harpsichord under bathroom lights.

“No,” he says quietly. “That’s all right. Thank you.”

Kip nods, accepting it without pushing.

The couch has been made up. Or part of it, at least. It’s a massive sectional in a wide L-shape that dominates the living room. Its cushions look deep and inviting. A careful nest has been arranged at one end: pillows stacked and angled just so and a soft baby-blue blanket (hand-knit, Shane thinks) is folded back and ready. A bottle of water waits on the coffee table like an offering. Somewhere in the apartment, something hums steadily.

“I’ve got your clothes in the laundry,” Kip says, deliberately vague on if it’s in the washing machine or the dryer. “I think I managed to get the stains out. They should be ready tomorrow.”

Tomorrow.

Chicago.

Shane’s stomach tightens. He’d told Hayden not to wait up and hadn’t said why. Hadn’t said anything at all, really.

“Do you have a phone charger?” Shane asks instead. His phone has been dead for hours or maybe longer. Time feels very, very unreliable tonight. “I need to set an alarm for tomorrow.”

“Oh- yeah. Yeah, of course.” Kip hops up and rummages through a kitchen drawer, metal clinking softly. He comes back with a charger and hands it over.

Shane takes it with both hands. “Thank you, Kip. For... all of this.”

Kip’s smile is small and a little shy. “It’s not a problem.”

He hesitates, then adds, “Are you sure you’re not hungry? I know you athletes eat pretty clean. I could make you a salad or something?”

Shane shakes his head, unexpectedly touched by the offer. “It’s okay,” he says softly. “Thank you.”

Kip bites his lower lip and nods, then glances at the time on his phone. “Scott’ll be here really late. Or early,” he adds. “He’s got a flight tomorrow too.”

Shane nods, because that’s the only response he seems capable of right now.

“Oh, here.” Kip crosses to the freezer and pulls out an ice pack. Shane watches as he wraps it carefully in a dish towel before handing it over. “For your eye. Or your nose. Either one. I can grab another if you want.”

“I’m okay. Thanks,” Shane says again.

He lifts the ice pack to his face and hisses quietly when the cold hits swollen skin. He adjusts it, trying to cover both his eye and the bridge of his nose at once, when a thought nudges its way forward.

“Your name is Kip?”

The man flushes instantly, pink blooming across his cheeks. It’s... kind of pretty. Kip is nothing like Ilya. He’s open where Ilya is closed and soft where Ilya is sharp. And there’s also the whole *invited a bleeding stranger into an apartment he doesn’t even own* thing that Ilya would not even consider.

Stop thinking about him, Hollander.

“It’s short for Christopher,” Kip says.

“How do you get-”

“I don’t know, man,” Kip admits with a small, sheepish laugh. “You can call me Chris if you want.”

“Does anyone?”

“Uh. No.”

“Kip it is,” Shane decides.

Kip smiles at him, warm and genuine. But then it fades, just a little.

“Shane,” Kip says carefully. “I don’t mean to pry-,”

“Then don’t,” Shane snaps.

The sharpness surprises them both. Kip visibly shrinks in on himself, shoulders drawing inward, and Shane winces.

“Sorry,” Shane says quickly. “I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just... complicated.”

Kip studies him the way someone might read a difficult essay in *The New Yorker*. Thoughtfully, like the meaning might reveal itself if he looks hard enough. He bites his lower lip again.

The gesture reminds Shane, uncomfortably, of Rose.

“You know,” Kip says lightly, trying for casual, “being strangers and all, I’m actually a pretty good option if you ever want to talk. That’s kind of the New York way.” He shrugs. “One time this little old lady complained to me for thirty straight minutes about her grandkids never visiting her when the L train was down. Never saw her again, but I think it helped.”

Shane licks his lips. He’s never been good at talking to people. They always seemed to vibrate on a different frequency than he did.

“You don’t have to say anything,” Kip adds quickly, voice getting softer. “If you don’t want to.”

He hesitates, then continues anyway.

“My friend Kyle- he’s a bartender at this bar I go to a lot- he was, like, seventeen or eighteen when he fell for his boss. This older guy who was married with kids.” Kip exhales through his nose. “The wife thought he was cheating, just... not with a teenager. She hired a private investigator. When it all blew up, he moved to New York. That’s how Kyle and I met. Not the affair part. The moving here part.”

Shane must look lost, because Kip gives a small, apologetic smile.

“Sorry. Point is, it messed Kyle up. Really bad. He had this warped idea of what love was supposed to look like. He knew when he was being treated like shit, I think. He just... didn’t care.” Kip tilts his head. “Does that make sense?”

It makes *too* much sense. Shane feels faintly nauseous.

Kip keeps going.

“His last boyfriend was the worst one. It got bad. Like- really bad. He broke Kyle’s arm once. We kept telling him to leave, but he didn’t. Or couldn’t.” Kip’s voice drops. “The second time Kyle ended up in the hospital, the guy pushed him onto the subway tracks.”

Shane’s blood turns cold.

Kip swallows, eyes shining a little. “The train was delayed, thank god. People were able to pull him up before it came. But he still split his head open.” He taps his own skull lightly with two knuckles. “Needed a bunch of staples.”

Shane doesn’t breathe.

“We thought, okay- this is it. Your boyfriend pushes you onto train tracks, that’s automatic breakup territory, right?” Kip lets out a humorless laugh. “But when I visited Kyle in the hospital, there was this massive bouquet of roses from the guy.”

Shane’s throat tightens. “Did he take him back?”

“No,” Kip says. “He was going to. I really think he would have. But a bunch of us staged an intervention. He didn’t even want to press charges.” Kip looks down, picking absently at a cuticle. “The whole thing scared him enough to break up in the end. And his ex got arrested anyway.”

Silence stretches in the apartment. Shane feels like he’s got needles under his fingernails.

“I guess what I’m saying,” Kip continues carefully, “is that it’s complicated. Even when you *know* what’s right and wrong. Even when you know what you’re supposed to do.” He hesitates, searching Shane’s face. “You haven’t said anything about what happened. Not really. But you kind of remind me of Kyle.”

Shane feels exposed. Like Kip has flayed him alive and is peering into his organs.

“And whatever it is,” Kip adds, fumbling a little, “your hockey career, or... whatever else-” He grimaces. “You’ve got someone in your corner. Or- your net? Your goal?” He shakes his head, embarrassed. “You’ve got someone on your side.”

Shane can only stare at him.

This stranger- this kind, soft-spoken man who invited him in without asking for a single explanation- has somehow named everything Shane’s been refusing to say out loud.

He *knows* it’s wrong. He’s always known. No healthy relationship involves glass being thrown at your head.

Shane feels his face heat, a flush creeping up his neck.

Kip just smiles at him, like that knowledge alone doesn’t change how he’s willing to sit beside him.

“Well,” the other man says, standing, “help yourself to anything in the fridge or pantry. Scott’s got these chocolate protein bars that taste like dirt, but he swears by them.”

That earns the faintest tug at the corner of Shane's mouth.

"It's really late," Kip continues, softer now, "and you look like you're exhausted."

He stretches, rolling his shoulders until something cracks pleasantly. "Scott'll be back soon, so if you hear the door open, don't freak out. Not a robber," he adds, with a small smile. "I'll have your clothes ready before you head out. Try to get some rest, okay?"

"Okay," Shane echoes, hollow and thin, like the word has already spent all the strength he has left. He kind of has, hasn't he?

Kip pauses, studying him for a second longer, then nods. He doesn't say anything else. He just turns off the overhead light and turns on the lamp nearest the couch, leaving a warm pool of light instead of darkness, and heads down the hall.

Shane sits there for a moment after he's gone, the ice pack melting against his skin.

Then, carefully, like the couch might reject him if he moves too fast, he lies down.

It's a long, long time before he falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

sorry if you guys thought Ilya was gonna show up this chapter. He should be making an appearance in the next one! Kinda. Look, he's in Boston. Shane, Kip and Scott are in NY. Rose is in Montreal.

ALSO I loved Kyle in the books. I think after Shane and Ilya's book, his is my favorite. I definitely changed his backstory to fit this fic, though. Hence the kinda mild-ish spoilers. It's like canon adjacent?

and if someone could explain to me how the hell you get 'kip' from Christopher, please let me know. I can't figure it out. Is it like how 'Dick' is short for Richard? Or Peggy from Margret? Im confused.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

whee new chapter! Loving all the 'team shane' vibes in the comments. Please enjoy this one! I think it's my second favorite I've written for this fic. Don't worry, I'll tell you my favorite one when it happens ;)

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

Scott is careful to be very, very quiet when he unlocks the door.

Kip has been texting him updates since Shane disappeared into the shower. Still-Scott hasn't called Ilya. Not yet. Every time he's thought about it, his chest has tightened, like saying it out loud might make it real in a way he isn't ready for.

It's just past three a.m. when the key turns and the door opens with a soft creak.

The first thing Scott sees is the couch.

An unmoving shape lies curled beneath the baby-blue blanket- the one usually folded away in the linen closet, saved for guests or sick days. The overhead lights are off, but the lamp beside the couch is still on, throwing long, distorted shadows across the walls. Shane doesn't move. His breathing is slow, shallow, almost too careful.

Scott exhales through his nose and forces himself not to stare. The man's face is tucked into the cushion, just the top of his head visible.

He slips his shoes off by the door, sets his bag down without letting it thump, and moves toward the bedroom.

The light is on.

When he pushes the door open, Kip is propped against a small mountain of pillows, glasses perched on his nose, a book open but clearly unread in his lap. That alone tells Scott everything. Kip never wastes sleep when he can get it.

"Hi," Kip says softly, peering over the rims of his glasses.

Something in Scott's chest loosens all at once.

He crosses the room and leans down, bracing one hand on the mattress as he kisses Kip. It's slow and unhurried. It's the kind of kiss that says *I'm here* more than anything else. Kip melts into it immediately, his hand curling into the front of Scott's shirt like an anchor. Scott lingers just long enough to feel Kip sigh against his mouth before pulling back.

When he does, Kip's cheeks are flushed pink.

“I missed you,” Kip says.

“I missed you,” Scott replies, his hand coming up to rest at the nape of Kip’s neck. He can feel the tension in the muscle there. Scott starts to work his thumb into the taught skin and Kip hums appreciatively.

“Did he say anything?” Scott asks, withdrawing his thumb once he feels the knot loosen.

Kip shakes his head, miserable. “No. I mostly... talked at him.” He swallows. “But I think-” He worries his lower lip between his teeth. “I think his partner did this to him.”

Scott’s heart drops, heavy and sick. He’d been circling that thought all night, but hearing Kip say it out loud makes it settle in his bones.

“I was afraid of that,” Scott admits.

“You talked to his coach?” Kip asks.

Scott nods and sits down on the edge of the bed. He shrugs out of his suit jacket and lets it fall to the floor. Normally he'd hang it and smooth it out to keep things neat. Tonight he doesn't have it in him.

"He can fly out the day after tomorrow," Scott says.

"I guess it's just a matter of telling him," Kip murmurs in reply.

Scott winces. He kicks off his shoes and unfastens his belt, dropping both beside the jacket. "I think he's going to have a problem with being delayed," he says carefully. "He's... not the kind of player who likes missing anything."

Kip leans back into the pillows, watching him as Scott loosens his tie with clumsy fingers. "He set an alarm for tomorrow morning."

"He can't go tomorrow," Scott grumbles, thick fingers fumbling with the knot of his tie. "He'll want to, but-,"

Kip slides to the edge of the bed, away from the pile of pillows, and reaches for him. He works the tie loose with careful, practiced hands.

"His face would draw attention," Kip says thoughtfully. "On its own." He pauses. "I could

get foundation that matches his skin tone. If he wants.” The knot finally gives, and Kip slips the tie free, setting it aside. His mouth twists. “It just feels dirty. Like we’re helping him hide a secret.”

“It’s his prerogative,” Scott says quietly.

Kip stands and gathers Scott’s discarded jacket, shoes, belt and everything scattered across the floor.

“Kip,” Scott says, tired.

“I don’t care if you have a cleaning service,” Kip replies, already heading for the closet. “I don’t want them thinking we’re slob.”

Scott watches as Kip shoves the bundle into the massive closet the cleaners never touch.

“There,” Kip says, dusting off his hands. “Now it’s classy.”

Scott’s heart stutters. He’s so helplessly in love with this man it almost hurts. He crosses the room and presses a warm kiss to the top of Kip’s head. Kip sighs and leans into him.

“I’m worried about him,” Kip admits softly. “I know I barely know him, but-”

“I understand,” Scott says. “I really do. You said he set an alarm?”

Kip doesn’t move from Scott’s arms, but he nods.

“Maybe we should turn it off.”

Kip pulls back, looking up at him. “Turn it *off*?”

“Well,” Scott says, a hint of shame creeping into his voice, “he needs rest. He doesn’t actually have anywhere to be tomorrow.”

“But that’s... taking away his choice,” Kip says.

“I know,” Scott says. “I know, but we’re already helping him stay quiet. Or at least making it easier for him to.” He exhales. “The least we can do is make him slow down for one day.”

Kip's brows knit together, that familiar crease appearing between them. It's the one Scott usually only sees when Kip is choosing between menu items or debating what to stream for movie night. Not for something so heavy.

"Look," Scott says gently. "If he wakes up and wants to leave anyway, we won't stop him. I'm not trying to lock him in or anything." He exhales. "I just... I've seen guys like him push through things they shouldn't. He's running on fumes."

Kip's shoulders soften a fraction. "You think he'll bolt if he wakes up alone with his thoughts."

"Yes," Scott says without hesitation. "I think he'll convince himself he's fine." His jaw tightens. "And I don't think that's true."

Kip swallows. That crease in his forehead deepens for a second, then eases.

"...Okay," he says finally. "Okay. But *just* for tomorrow. One day."

Scott lets out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. "One day."

They slip quietly into the living room together. The apartment feels different in the low light. It's like it's smaller. Shane is still curled on the couch, face turned toward the back cushions,

the blanket tucked up under his chin like someone did it for him instead of him doing it himself. His hair is still damp from the shower, a dark smudge against the pillow.

Kip hesitates, then reaches for Shane's phone on the coffee table. The screen lights up immediately. The alarm set, loud and early. Of course it is.

He glances back at Scott one last time.

Scott nods, just once.

Kip turns the alarm off.

The light tap feels louder than it should. Both of them freeze for half a second, but Shane doesn't stir. His breathing stays even, if shallow.

Kip sets the phone back exactly where it was.

"I don't like this," Kip whispers as they carefully creep back into the bedroom. After a long second, Kip crosses his arms.

"Isn't there anyone else you can call?" he whispers after a moment, even though they're already back in the safety of their room with the door shut. "Now that the alarm is off?"

Right. Scott still needs to make that call.

"I-yeah," he says quietly. "There is. But I'm not happy about it."

Kip blinks, confused. "What? Are you going to call his parents or something?"

Scott sighs.

"Worse."

Ilya is mid-tongue kiss with a woman when his phone rings.

He's not sure of her name. Katherine something? She's some kind of supermodel, in Boston for a lingerie show. The nightclub's bass thrums through the VIP section, vibrating up through the plush couch beneath them. Ilya is three shots deep and pleasantly hazy, the joint he shared with her earlier leaving him warm and loose around the edges.

This feels right. Like exactly where he's supposed to be.

He actually misses the first call. He's too distracted by his companion, who seems intent on swallowing his tongue.

The phone rings again, unnoticed by Ilya. It's on silent, the vibration swallowed by the music. But the model feels it going off. Katherine whomever pulls back, brow furrowing slightly.

"You gonna get that?" she asks, nodding toward his pocket.

Ilya sighs into her mouth before reaching for the phone. It's an unknown number, but it's got a New York area code. It could be spam or the press, but not many people have this number. Just Svetlana, his coach, a few teammates and hockey contacts, his agent, Shane, and (regrettably) his family.

He answers.

The model doesn't seem bothered at the interruption. She nips at his neck, fingers tracing lazy circles into his thigh as he lifts the phone to his ear.

“Hello?” Ilya says, his accent thicker than usual, softened by alcohol.

“Rozanov. It’s Scott Hunter.”

“Ah,” Ilya drawls. “Hello, Scott Hunter. How is the Ice Age?”

“Fuck off,” Scott snaps. *“This is serious.”*

Scott Hunter, who was ancient and perpetually humorless, always thinks everything is serious. Ilya lets his hand rest on the woman’s neck as she settles more fully into his lap.

“Serious, yes,” Ilya says lazily. “What is it, Hunter? I am busy with....”

She pops up just long enough to murmur, “Katie,” before returning to her work, mouth warm against his skin.

“-Katie,” Ilya finishes, amused.

He hasn't felt this relaxed in weeks. It'll take more than an irritated, geriatric hockey captain to ruin his night.

"Listen, asshole." Scott grumbles on the other line. "Get Katie and whoever else your dick so desires off you-"

"Many, many people." Ilya interrupts.

"For the love of- I can't believe I thought to call you, of all people. I'm hanging up."

"No, no," Ilya assures Scott. "I will listen to what you have to say, Scott Hunter."

"Shane's hurt."

Chapter End Notes

Scott's gonna adopt Shane like a baby duck

should they have turned off the alarm? Uh.... no, probably not. Nor should they have gone over Shane's head to arrange for him to fly separately without telling him. Well, I think so anyway. What about you guys?

Up next: Ilya's POV

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Ilya come get your man

also I'm glad you guys are all of the consensus that Scott and Kip probably shouldn't have turned off the alarm, but did so from a good place. I wonder how shane is gonna react (I say knowing exactly how he is going to feel because I wrote it)

TW: drinking and using recreational drugs (?)

also just ignore the chapter count this was only gonna be eight chapters and it has spiraled out of my control

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

For a moment, Ilya doesn't understand what Scott has said.

The music is still pounding. Katie's mouth is still warm against his neck, her fingers still tracing slow, confident patterns along his thigh. The world hasn't changed. Except it has, hasn't it? Because something cold is sliding straight down Ilya's spine.

"What?" he says. "No, he is not."

Katie pauses, sensing the shift. She pulls back just enough to look at him, concern flickering across her face. "Everything okay?"

Ilya doesn't answer her. He doesn't even look at her.

“Yes, he is. Shane’s hurt,” Scott repeats. His voice is flatter now and stripped of the edge. That somehow makes it worse.

The warmth drains out of Ilya’s body all at once. The buzz from the alcohol collapses in on itself, leaving something sobering in its place. What had happened? A car accident? A trip down the stairs?

Scott takes Ilya’s silence as permission to keep going.

“He was bleeding all over the place and freaked at the idea of going to a hospital.”

“Bleeding how,” Ilya asks, already pushing Katie gently but firmly away from him. He sits up, elbow braced on his knee, the club lights suddenly too bright and too close. “From the game?”

“No,” Scott says. *“Not from the game.”*

That’s all it takes.

Ilya stands, shrugging out of hands that try to pull him back. “Hey-” Katie starts to complain.

“I’m sorry,” he says automatically, grabbing his jacket. He doesn’t wait for her response. He doesn’t explain. He just moves. He pushes out of the VIP section and through the press of bodies. The music fades into a dull roar behind him.

He barely registers the cool night air when he stumbles outside, phone pressed hard to his ear.

“What happened,” Ilya says. It’s not a question.

Scott exhales. *“I don’t know. He won’t say. Kip found him on the street.”*

“Kip,” Ilya repeats, grounding himself on the name. “What is a ‘Kip’?”

“Kip is a nickname.”

“For *what*?”

“Do you want me to talk to you or what?” Scott says, irritation bleeding through.

“Yes. Sorry.” Ilya says, and he’s as surprised as anyone that the apology slipped out of his lips.

“He is safe?”

“He’s safe now,” Scott confirms, voice a little tight. *“He’s staying the night.”*

Ilya closes his eyes.

Shane, who off the ice was careful and soft-spoken, flinching at the idea of a hospital. Shane folding his bloody clothes neatly. Shane apologizing for bleeding on someone else’s floor. The picture assembles itself without permission.

“Where is he,” Ilya asks quietly.

“In my apartment.”

“I am coming,” Ilya says immediately.

"No," Scott replies. *"Not tonight. He's on edge. Seeing you right now might-,"*

"Might what?" Ilya snaps, anger finally sparking through. "Make him tell the truth?"

There is silence on the line. It's a double edged sword. Scott knows. He must know about Shane and Ilya. He has to. There's no reason why Scott would be calling him regardless. The question is more of a challenge than anything. What will Scott be willing to reveal?

Then Scott says, carefully, *"I'm trying to keep him from bolting."*

Ilya swallows hard, jaw tight. He drags a hand through his hair and forces himself to breathe.

"Okay," he says, after a beat. "Okay. Then you keep him there. I will be on the first flight I can get."

"He's flying separately to Chicago for the next game," Scott says. "His coach agreed. We bought time. He doesn't actually know yet, though. We've turned off the phone alarm. I need to be on a plane to Raleigh in the morning, but Kip's staying. He'll keep an eye on him."

Ilya leans his shoulder against the brick wall outside the club. It's rough and cold through his jacket. His hand is shaking. He curls it into a fist and presses his knuckles into his thigh until it hurts.

"You turned off his alarm," Ilya says. It comes out flat.

"We decided he needed sleep," Scott says evenly. *"And time."*

"And a committee vote," Ilya adds. "Did you at least draft meeting minutes?"

Scott ignores that. Of course he does.

Ilya rolls his neck once, jaw tight. "So you decided for him."

"We decided he wasn't thinking clearly."

"Shane never thinks clearly," Ilya snaps. "That is his brand."

Scott doesn't argue. That silence is an answer all on its own.

They're not talking about how this happened, but Ilya has a pretty good idea. Shane wouldn't have done this to himself, and if he had caused himself to get hurt by tripping or something, he'd have admitted it with humor. The only explanation is that someone did this to him.

Ilya knows that Shane has this nasty little habit of getting quiet when he was scared. And Shane not wanting to explain...

"Describe him," Ilya says suddenly.

"What?"

"How bad does he look," Ilya clarifies, already bracing himself. "And do not say 'not great' like that means anything."

Scott hesitates just long enough for Ilya to confirm his theory.

"He's got a cut over his eye that's tender. It may turn into a black eye. Cut on his nose and some bruising. He was bleeding enough to soak his shirt."

Ilya squeezes his eyes shut. The image is instant and vivid. Shane's careful hands dexterous hands, always taped just so and fingers that tremble when he's anxious, now split and raw. Shane apologizing. Shane minimizing. Shane saying he's fine when he's anything but.

"This was not an accident," Ilya says.

Scott exhales slowly. *"That's what Kip thinks too."*

The word *thinks* nearly makes Ilya snap.

"Who else knows," Ilya demands.

"Just us. Kip, me, the coach. Well, coach think he's out sick."

"And the doctors?"

"There are no doctors."

Ilya swears low and brutal under his breath in Russian. He wants a cigarette, but instead he straightens, pushing off the wall. "That is not okay."

"I know," Scott says, voice tight. "But forcing him into a hospital tonight would've been a disaster. Kip said he was barely holding it together."

Ilya presses his phone harder to his ear, like proximity might somehow help. Like he's not states away. Like he's not so utterly useless at this exact moment. "He is not good at being taken care of."

"No," Scott agrees softly. "He really isn't. He was asleep when I got home, but... you can tell."

Somewhere down the block, a taxi honks. Laughter spills out of the club doors behind him, loud and careless and cruel in its normalcy. Ilya wants to throw a brick through the club window. How dare the world keep going when something was wrong with Shane?

"If I get on a plane right now," Ilya says, "will you stop me?"

"Yes."

It's a loose promise. There's realistically nothing Scott can do to stop Ilya from heading to the airport right this instant. Maybe if he called a bomb threat into Logan International. No

matter, Ilya would drive a car. But he could keep Ilya from entering the apartment itself.

Ilya closes his eyes again. He counts his breaths in Russian this time, slower and trying to be steadier.

One. Two. Three.

Один. Два. Три.

Один. два. три.

“Then you keep him there,” he says at last. “You do not let him leave. Not for coffee. Not for ‘just a walk.’ He will say he is fine. He is lying.”

“I figured,” Scott says.

“And you tell Kip—” Ilya swallows. “You tell him thank you. From me.”

“I will.”

Silence stretches between them, heavy but no longer sharp.

“Ilya,” Scott says carefully, “*when he’s ready to talk—*”

“He will,” Ilya cuts in. “He always does. Eventually.” His voice drops. “Just not before he is okay.”

Scott hums in agreement.

“*I’ll call you in the morning,*” Scott says. “*When you’ve cooled off.*”

Ilya huffs. “Bold assumption.”

Scott almost laughs, but he doesn’t. It sounds more like a wounded, tired sigh.. “Get home safe.”

The call ends.

Ilya lowers the phone and stands there for another long moment, letting the cold bite into his skin.

Behind him, the bass thumps on.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter, Shane's POV!

thank you all for the love and support and interest in this fic. I am having a lot of fun reworking what I have to make it a little bit longer. Man I love angst. Isn't it the best?

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I'm so jazzed y'all enjoyed Illya's POV. I promise he and Shane are gonna get together and talk!!! I just love the angst. I know I said this was gonna be done on NYE's... but.... I got to writing and here we are!

This one was fun to write!

also unrelated but I feel like Shane would like goat cheese

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

Shane hovers somewhere between awake and asleep.

It reminds him of being thirteen, sprawled in a dentist's chair with a paper bib clipped to his collar, waiting to have his wisdom teeth taken out. He'd never been afraid of dentists. After all, when you played hockey, dental trauma was just another occupational hazard. Broken teeth were expected. Surgery a little less so.

He'd asked if they could do it without putting him under. The dentist had smiled in that stupidly condescending way and explained it would be easier to take all four at once. It would be safer and faster. General anesthesia was the best option.

Shane had drummed his fingers nervously against the arm of the chair as the needle slid into his arm, as the thin oxygen tube was looped beneath his nostrils. The dentist, who Shane wasn't entirely convinced was qualified to knock people unconscious, had told him to start counting backward from one hundred.

He remembers relaxing. Or thinks he does. His limbs had gone loose and distant, like they belonged to someone else. He could feel pressure, vaguely, and a sense movement in his mouth, but it was all smoothed over by a soft lavender haze. Nothing hurt and nothing mattered.

Later, swollen and numb with ice packs pressed to his cheeks, he'd tried to explain it to his mom.

"They call it twilight anesthesia," she'd said, nodding. "Not quite awake. Not quite asleep."

That's exactly what this feels like now.

Shane drifts in and out of awareness, untethered. He vaguely registers a door opening. Soft footsteps. The low murmur of voices he can't quite make out. He knows, distantly, that this isn't his bed- but he's on the road so often that unfamiliar walls and strange beds blur together. It could be Hayden or another teammate. Anyone.

There are whispers again, closer this time and the faint clink of plates. It's the well practiced hush of someone trying very hard not to make noise. It feels intrusive to listen, like eavesdropping on something he shouldn't be privy to. A door opens. Closes. The apartment settles back into silence.

Time passes strangely. Too fast. Too slow.

When Shane finally surfaces for real, it's because his bladder is screaming and his body is curled in too tight on itself. He's tangled in a thick, knit blanket which is heavy, warm. Too warm.

He kicks it off with a groan.

Cool air rushes over his sweat-damp skin, and he shivers violently as the heat evaporates. For a moment, he debates dragging the blanket back over himself and suffocating through it, just to avoid the chill. Instead, he lies there, waiting for the sweat to dry, his teeth chattering faintly.

He stretches out onto his back. His nose throbs, tender to the slightest movement, and there's a sharp, pulsing ache just above his right eye. The ceiling above him is unfamiliar. It's too high, too smooth and wrong in a way he can't articulate.

Then it hits him all at once, a cold wave washing through his chest.

The game.

Eva.

The sound of glass shattering as it sailed toward him. Blood on his hands. Bleeding in the streets of New York-

“Hi.”

Shane almost launches himself off the couch. He jerks upright, heart slamming, twisting around so fast he nearly tips over the edge.

It's Kip.

The man from last night stands by the kitchen counter, brown hair mussed from sleep, glasses slightly crooked. He looks apologetic before Shane can even form a thought.

"Sorry," Kip says quickly. "I didn't mean to scare you. You missed Scott-he was here for a few hours, but he left around seven for the airport."

Airport.

The word detonates in Shane's chest. He needs to be on a flight to Chicago at one and according to his phone it was nearly noon already. He's got a Canadian passport which makes travel in the USA dicey at best. He'd need to get there three hours early, minimum-

He lunges for his phone. It's still plugged in on the coffee table, screen lighting up as soon as he grabs it. Notifications flood in, but Shane focuses on the one from his travel roommate.

He spots three texts from Hayden, starting at six in the morning.

Hayden: dude, late night??

Hayden: Where are you??

Hayden: Nvmind. Coach said you'd be flying separately. Feel better!

Shane frowns, pulse roaring in his ears. He opens his clock app.

His 8 a.m. alarm is off.

“Oh,” Kip says behind him. The word comes out small and guilty.

Shane turns slowly.

“Why didn’t my alarm go off?” he asks.

Kip winces. “Uh-,”

“And *why*,” Shane continues, voice tightening, “is my teammate texting me saying I’m sick and flying separately?”

“I told him this was a bad idea,” Kip mutters, mostly to himself.

Shane stares at him in disbelief. Kip’s lips go into a thin line and he can’t meet Shane’s eyes.

“You turned off my alarm,” he accuses, suddenly on his feet. The movement makes his head swim, but he ignores it. Kip doesn’t deny it. “Do you have any idea what that means for me? For my career?”

“I...Scott and I talked. You were out cold. You needed rest.”

“That wasn’t your call,” Shane says. His hands are shaking now, and he curls them into fists so Kip won’t see. “I had a flight.”

“You still have one,” Kip says quickly. “Just later. Tomorrow.”

Shane laughs, short and hollow. “You don’t get to decide that for me. And that doesn’t give you the right,” Shane says. His voice cracks with the effort of holding it together. “You don’t get to make decisions for me. You don’t know what happens if I miss a team flight. You don’t know what kind of player I have to be to make up for that!”

“I know I don’t,” Kip says quickly, words tumbling over each other now. “I know we crossed a line. But you were bleeding. You were shaking. I panicked. We both did.”

Shane drags a hand down his face, careful around his eye and nose. Everything aches. His head feels stuffed with cotton and his thoughts are slipping around each other instead of lining up neatly like they usually do.

“You told my coach,” he accuses, thinking Hayden’s texts. “You told my team.”

“Scott did,” Kip corrects softly. “But he talked to the coach. He said you were unwell. That you needed a day.”

“A day can cost me my spot,” Shane snaps. “You know that, right?”

Kip flinches. “Scott said you have pull.”

“I have *some* pull,” Shane says. “Not unlimited! Not for lies!”

“We didn’t lie,” Kip insists. “You *are* unwell. You’re hurt. You’re concussed, probably. You should have been in a hospital.”

“Stop,” Shane bites, sharp as a whistle. “Don’t you dare tell me what I should have done.”

Kip’s mouth opens, then closes again. His eyes are bright and desperate.

“This isn’t... this wasn’t malicious,” he says, softer now, almost pleading. “We- I- are trying to keep you from doing something you’d regret. You were going to get on a plane with a busted face and pretend everything was fine. You were going to smile for cameras and let them call it a bad hit.”

“That’s my job,” Shane says. “That’s what I do.”

“And it’s killing you,” Kip blurts, then immediately looks like he wants to take it back.

Shane freezes.

Kip rushes on, voice shaking. “I’ve seen this before. People who think they can just push through. And it doesn’t end with one missed flight, okay? It ends with ambulances and hospital beds and everyone saying they wish they’d stopped sooner.”

Shane’s chest heaves. “You don’t know anything about me.”

“I know you folded your bloody clothes before I washed them,” Kip says, suddenly fierce. “You apologized for bleeding in the apartment. Do you even remember doing that? And you seemed like you were terrified someone would find you. That’s not normal, Shane.”

The words hang in the air, heavy and accusing.

Shane looks away, jaw tight, blinking hard. His anger is still there, but now it has nowhere clean to go.

Kip swallows. “I’m sorry,” he says weakly. “I wasn’t trying to trap you,” God, Kip looks young. Just how old is he? He must be around Shane’s age. Maybe younger? “Or control you. I swear. I just-” He swallows. “I’ve seen what happens when people don’t stop. When they push through because they think they have to.”

Shane’s jaw tightens. He looks away.

“You don’t know me,” he repeats and he hates how pathetic he sounds.

“No,” Kip agrees. “I don’t. But I know what I saw. And what I saw was someone who got hurt and was terrified of anyone finding out.”

That lands. Shane hates that it does. For a long moment, he doesn't speak. Rose's words ring in his head, rattling around like nickels in a tin can.

Then, very quietly, he says, "You had no right."

"I know," Kip whispers. His voice cracks. "And I'm- God, I'm so sorry. I really am. Look, if you want to leave, I won't stop you. I swear." He gestures vaguely down the hall. "Your clothes are clean. I can call you an Uber to the airport myself. Just - take a little time first, okay? There are clean towels in the bathroom if you want to shower. I've got toiletries you can use. I can make you something to eat, or get you some over-the-counter painkillers. Or both."

Right.

Shane's face.

"Excuse me," he says tightly.

He turns and walks to the bathroom, taking a grim, vindictive sort of pleasure in the sound of the door slamming shut behind him.

This is insane. He's known Kip for less than twenty-four hours. Their only real connection - aside from Kip cleaning blood off his face- was Scott Hunter, and Scott isn't even fucking here.

Shane grips the edge of the sink and looks up at his reflection.

He winces.

His face looks worse than it did yesterday. He'd known it was tender, but not like this. Not this swollen. The ridge of his brow is puffed so badly he can barely open his right eye. The cut on the bridge of his nose has scabbed over thick and dark, the skin around it blooming purple and blue. His nose aches dully. It's not broken, he knows that much, but it's damn near close enough to make every breath feel wrong.

His knees go weak at his reflection. He sits down hard on the toilet lid, elbows braced on his thighs.

Fuck.

Kip is right. And Shane hates that more than anything.

He can't go anywhere looking like this. He's a terrible liar on the best of days. He didn't take a significant hit last night. Certainly nothing that would justify this. If anyone from the team

saw him like this, if the press got one look, they'd ask questions Shane couldn't answer. Hell, if he'd made it back to the hotel last night, Hayden would've dragged him straight to the emergency room without asking permission.

Shane scrubs a hand through his sweaty hair and exhales, shaky and uneven. Maybe staying here is the best option, at least for now. He can ice his face, let the swelling go down, and buy himself a little time.

He doesn't know anyone in this city. He doesn't have anywhere else that's safe. He can't see Eva right now.

If he checked into a hotel and word got out that he wasn't traveling with the team-if even one reporter caught wind of it-

"Damn it," Shane mutters under his breath.

The word echoes too loudly in the small bathroom.

There's a soft tap at the door. It makes Shane jump, his heart skipping a beat.

"Shane?" Kip calls through the door. "I'm going to run down to the bodega really quick. Will you be okay for a few minutes?"

Shane doesn't drag his eyes away from his bruised, swollen face in the mirror.

"Yeah," he says dully. "I'll be okay."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Kip reflects on whatever the fuck is going on, and tries to entertain an anxious hockey player with food issues.

fun fact- I wrote two drafts for this chapter. One in which Shane leaves, and one where he stays. But the one where he leaves felt kinda off. I didn't want to write a thousand words of Kip chasing Scott through new york like Home Alone style haha. Idk what NY is even like. There's a big park and the empire state building where mt. olympus is and that's about all I know

Happy New Year!!! :D

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Here is the new chapter! I love reading all your comments. It literally pushes me to write more. This was going to be about 1/2 of what it turned out being, but as I was editing I was like... needs more. the people need more.

I'm a big fan of Kip, this chapter is a lot of him reflecting on him and Scott. Please enjoy! *kisses your forehead*

TW: references/implied eating disorders via orthorexia

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

Kip throws on his jacket and ducks down to the bodega on the corner, not especially concerned with how he looks. This is New York after all. Someone could walk out in assless chaps at nine in the morning and barely earn a second glance.

The door chimes as he steps inside. Abdul looks up from his morning paper and gives him a small wave. Kip returns it and heads straight for the tiny produce section.

Scott's a health nut, but Kip has no idea what Shane will actually eat. For a professional athlete, he looks... thin. Scott usually goes high-protein for breakfast like eggs, Greek yogurt, that kind of thing. But Scott's also rarely home long enough for fresh food to last more than a day or two.

Maybe a smoothie. Kip is good at smoothies. Scott always keeps blueberries in the freezer- it's an inside joke at this point more than a preference. Kip could grab some greens and throw something together. Shane seems like a smoothie guy.

He sifts through the produce, grabbing spinach and a couple of apples. On his way to the counter, he hesitates, then reaches back for a bag of chips.

Just in case.

Abdul has set his paper aside by the time Kip gets there and is crouched to pet Layla, the bodega cat. She's a massive, talkative calico- ancient, indignant, and almost certainly fueled by spite alone. Kip is fairly sure she's older than at least half the buildings on the block.

Abdul rings him up without a word, giving him a nod as Kip crouches to scratch Layla's belly. She purrs thunderously and rolls onto her side, all entitlement and cuteness.

Kip smiles despite himself. He likes cats.

Maybe he and Scott should get one.

The thought drifts through Kip's head, and he quickly pushes it away.

Yes- he and Scott are dating. And it's good. Really good. Probably the best relationship Kip has ever been in. Scott is, infuriatingly, close to perfect: handsome and tall, sure, but more importantly kind. He has a dry and thoughtful sense of humor. He always reads the plaques

on the park benches in Central Park. When Kip's had a long day, even when Scott's had a longer one, Scott will put on Kip's favorite comfort movie and pull him in close on the couch.

God, it's stupid to be in love. Kip even loves the way Scott always tries to toss his socks into the laundry hamper and always misses.

The one glaring problem is the NHL, the proverbial thorn-in-the-side. And the public. And Scott's deep-seated internalized homophobia which is wrapped up tight with a bone-deep fear of coming out.

It hurts to be a secret.

Kip won't lie to himself about that. He wishes they could walk down the street holding hands. He wishes they could go out to dinner, or to a movie, without pretending to be something they're not.

Part of Kip thinks Scott is paranoid. New York is full of celebrities; most people don't look twice. They could pass as friends easily. Like just two guys hanging out. It wouldn't have to mean anything more. But Scott is scared, and Kip respects that.

Their experiences couldn't be more different. Kip has always known he was gay. Everyone else seemed to know, too. There was no dramatic coming-out moment with his parents or his friends. He just *was*.

Scott is a professional hockey player. Kip knows exactly how locker rooms sound. He's sure Scott has heard slurs tossed around like candy from a piñata. Scott has so much more to lose if coming out went badly: a multi-million-dollar contract, endorsement deals, and a public image built on a very specific, very rigid kind of masculinity. He isn't Johnny Weir or Tom Daley. It would be more like Hugh Hefner coming out as gay.

Kip straightens, pays, and takes the bag of produce from Abdul. He thanks him, then steps back out onto the street

When Kip gets back to the apartment, Shane is still in the bathroom. He can hear the shower running through the closed door.

Kip drops the groceries onto the kitchen counter and heads for the nearest bedroom. Shane's clothes are laid out neatly, now clean and stain-free. That had *not* been an easy feat. Kip had gone through nearly a month's worth of stain remover to make that happen. Still, they're formal clothes: collared shirt and slacks. Shane won't want to wear them now, and he'll need them for the flight back to Chicago. No sense washing them more than necessary.

Shane fit into Kip's clothes yesterday, so Kip pulls out a pair of soft sweatpants and a T-shirt. This one has a Van Gogh painting printed across the front with the words *Let It Gogh*. Kip's dad had given it to him when he finished undergrad. It's one of his favorites. Kip hopes, ridiculously, that good vibes can be transferred through fabric.

He carries the bundle to the bathroom door and knocks gently. The water shuts off.

“I’ve got some clean clothes for you,” Kip calls. “I’ll leave them outside.”

“Thank you,” comes the muffled reply. The shower turns back on.

Kip returns to the kitchen and starts on a smoothie, making it as close as possible to the one from the shop. He’s out of bananas, so he leaves it out. When it’s done, he pours it into two glasses. Then he sets up the coffee maker, putting out sugar and milk even though Shane doesn’t strike him as someone who’d take either.

He rummages through the cabinets and finds a packet of microwave oatmeal. It’s not the most appetizing thing in the world, but it’s something. He’s watching it spin in the microwave when he hears movement behind him.

Kip turns.

Shane stands in the doorway, hair still damp from his second shower in twelve hours. His skin is faintly pink. His face looks better than before, the swelling has gone down, but the bruising is darker now, blooming even as it heals. He tugs at the borrowed T-shirt between two fingers.

“Do you always wear stuff like this?”

Kip notices the sweatpants drawstring is cinched tight. He wonders if the smoothie and oatmeal will be enough.

“At home,” he says, a little sheepish. “My dad likes shirts like that, so they remind me of him.”

The microwave beeps. Kip turns it off, grabs the oatmeal, then looks back at Shane.

“So- smoothies,” he says, gesturing. “Spinach, apple, blueberries, water. I wasn’t sure if you drank milk. I make very good smoothies. And I’ve got oatmeal. I think Scott mentioned you were on a diet.”

That’s a lie, but Shane doesn’t need to know that. One look at him and he seems like a strong breeze could knock him over. Guilt hits Kip immediately.

“Or- never mind,” Kip backtracks. “I don’t know. Is there anything you eat or... don’t?”

He motions Shane toward the kitchen island. Shane sits on a stool, watching as Kip finds a straw and sets the smoothie in front of him.

“I’m on a macrobiotic diet,” Shane says, fiddling with the straw.

“I’ve never heard of that,” Kip admits. “What is it?”

Shane rolls his shoulders, leaning back. He’s clearly practiced at this explanation. “It’s basically a plant-based eating pattern rooted in Zen Buddhism. It started out as a religious thing back in the seventies. Now it’s just another diet these days.

“So... it’s vegan?”

Shane shrugs. “Kind of. You eat a lot of whole grains, vegetables, and beans. You limit animal products. You’re technically only supposed to eat fish a few times a month, but I eat it more than that. Like, tofu’s fine because it’s made out of beans. I can eat vegan miso soup and tempeh. Stuff like that. I’ve got a baked falafel recipe with chickpeas that’s pretty good.”

Kip blinks. It sounds like veganism on steroids. He tries to imagine planning every meal around that- high fiber and low fat. Shane must be thinking about food constantly.

“Wow,” he says. “Sounds like a lot of work.”

“It can be hard when I travel,” Shane admits. “But when I’m home, it’s simple. You buy the safe stuff and build the meals around it.” He finally lifts the straw to his lips and takes a sip.

“Wow, this is a good smoothie.”

“Right? You don’t work at a smoothie place without picking up a few things.”

“Sorry,” Shane says suddenly. “Do you need to go to work?”

“Oh, no,” Kip waves his hand, aiming for casualness. “I’m off today. Here, have some oatmeal. I think that counts a whole grain.”

When they’re both finished eating and Kip has tossed the dishes into the sink to deal with later, he finds himself leaning against the counter on his elbows, staring at nothing in particular.

“So,” Kip says, too casually. “Have you thought about your game plan? For today, I mean. I can still call you an Uber.”

Shane's shoulders sag almost immediately. The change is so sudden that Kip wonders if he's said something wrong. After a beat, Shane taps his fingers against the counter thoughtfully.

"I guess I should stay," Shane says finally. "If that's okay- "

"Of course it is," Kip blurts, then immediately regrets how eager he sounds. He clears his throat. "I mean. If you want. Mi casa es su casa. Or, uh. Scott's casa es su casa."

Shane nods, a small smile tugging at his mouth. It looks a little unsettling on his bruised face. The upturned lips are pulling skin that's tender and swollen.

"Kip," Shane says carefully, "I don't mean to pry, but are you and Scott...?"

He lets the question hang there, unfinished.

Kip's heart drops straight into his stomach.

He hadn't thought this far ahead. Hadn't considered what he'd say if someone noticed, or asked outright. Kip's friends probably knew, or suspected, but Shane is practically a stranger. Kip feels heat rush up his neck, his cheeks burning.

“Oh! I, um-” Kip stammers. “W-we’re, uh-”

Shane swallows, then looks away, his gaze fixing on a spot on the counter. “It’s okay, Kip. I get it.”

That stops Kip cold.

He frowns, really looking at Shane now. The other man has a thoughtful look on his face. His eyes look almost glazed over, like he’s thinking of something.

Or someone.

“You do?”

“I’m dating someone high-profile too,” Shane says, like it’s no big deal. Like he’s talking about the weather. “It’s... stressful.” He exhales through his nose. “I’m guessing it’s more stressful for you.”

There’s no accusation in his voice. It sounds more like just understanding.

Kip lets out a breath he didn't realize he was holding.

"Yeah," he admits quietly. "It is."

That's about as much truth as he can give Shane. Any more and it would turn into something fragile. It's something he doesn't want to hand over to a man he met less than a day ago. Even if he's starting to get the feeling Shane understands dating men and being a hockey player way more than he's letting on. Kip straightens, squaring his shoulders.

"Well," he says, clapping his hands together once, a little too brightly. "I'll get you an ice pack for your face. I don't have any plans today." He pauses, then adds, "Are you good at Mario Kart?"

Shane snorts before he can stop himself, then winces immediately, a hand flying up to his nose. Kip winces in sympathy.

"Define good," Shane says once he's done sitting through the pain. "Because if you ask my teammates, I'm a menace. If you ask my mom, I cheat."

Kip grins disappears into the freezer. He roots around until he finds a half-melted bag of peas, wraps it in a dish towel, and hands it over.

“Hold that,” he orders gently. “And there is no cheating in the apartment.”

Shane takes it, pressing the cold to his cheek with a quiet sigh of relief. He slumps a little on the stool, the tension easing out of him by degrees.

“Fair warning,” Shane says. “I get very competitive.”

“Oh, thank god,” Kip replies, already searching for the controllers. “I was worried this would be relaxing.”

They’re on their third round of Mario Kart when Kip’s phone buzzes.

Scott: Ilya Rozanov just landed in JFK.

Scott: He’s on the way.

Chapter End Notes

QUICK SOMEONE DRAW SHANE HOLLANDER IN ASSLESS CHAPS WALKING
AROUND NYC

up next: Ilya and Shane finally meet. It hits the fan.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Wheeee I'm so excited for this chapter!!!!!!! Sorry I'm alittle late. Originally Shane flew to Chicago and Ilya met him there but this makes more sense to me so i had to rewrite a bunch of stuff

TW: Ilya getting wayyy too much into personal space and he's kinda an asshole. Mentions of abusive relationships, Dating and domestic violence, mentions of disorders eating.

This chapter is brought to you by the Heated Rivalry Hamilton Tiktok because all roads lead back to Hamilton

[Heated Rivalry Hamilton Tiktok](#)

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

They migrate from Mario Kart to Mario Party after Kip loudly, and creatively, accused Shane of cheating, despite the fact that Kip's character has driven off the track approximately a million times on his own. They've just finished a minigame that has Kip swearing with impressive venom as Shane steals every last one of his stars, when Shane finally stands and cracks his back.

He's young, technically, but years of hockey have taken a ruthless toll on his body. Even though they've just been hanging out on the couch, Shane feels drained. Maybe it was the fact that his face was all messed up?

Kip seems to understand the instinct immediately. He stands too, checking his watch. "It's about lunchtime. You hungry?"

No. Absolutely not. But Shane has zero interest in opening that particular can of worms, so he nods.

“I could eat.”

There. That wasn't a lie. He could eat. He just didn't want to.

Kip nods decisively. “I’ll see what we have. Or we can order something. Scott left me his credit card. For emergencies.”

Shane quirks an eyebrow. Not the bad one.

“Well,” Kip says, shrugging, suddenly sheepish. “He basically told me to buy whatever I want, but I never use it. Okay, I did once. My phone was dead, I was in a bad area after a catering gig, and I was pretty sure I was about to get mugged, so I got a taxi. I’m sure he won’t mind if we order food.”

“You don’t need to-,”

“Oh, I’m not,” Kip says brightly. “Scott is.” He winks. “Trust me. Thirty dollars’ worth of food is not going to bankrupt him.”

Right. Yeah. Kip and Scott are *definitely* something.

Why else would Kip have Scott's credit card- apparently with no real limit- and refuse to use it unless absolutely necessary? Kip hasn't outright said they're together, but this feels like the final nail in the coffin.

Shane is surprised, he guesses. But not shocked.

Scott Hunter has always carried this quiet, nervous energy. He never talked about dates the way the other guys did. During the All-Star Game, he'd stayed conspicuously uninterested in locker-room chatter. To be fair, neither had Shane.

Maybe they're more alike than he had realized.

He exhales. "Fine."

Kip grins, visibly delighted, and Shane immediately regrets not being honest about his appetite.

"Okay- whole grains, veggies..." Kip hums. "What about poke bowls? There's a place nearby I can pick up from. Brown rice, salmon, tuna, edamame- that work for you?"

Something tight in Shane's chest loosens. Kip is really trying. He wonders if it would be appropriate to ask for Kips's number. He wants to be friends after this.

"Okay," Shane says. "I'm just gonna hit the bathroom real quick."

"Do you want another ice pack? Or ibuprofen?"

Shane gently prods his nose. It feels tight and warm. "I'll take the meds."

Kip nods and tosses him a small bottle. Shane catches it one-handed and disappears into the bathroom.

When he gets in, he looks at his reflection in the mirror. His face is less swollen now, but the bruising has darkened. There are now deep blue and purple blooming around his nostrils. His brow ridge is still swollen, though the discoloration has stayed above his eye instead of settling underneath. That's how he knows his nose isn't broken.

He's had enough broken bones to recognize the signs.

Shane uses the bathroom, washes his hands, then swallows a few pills dry, chasing them with a handful of tap water. He vaguely wonders if New York City tap water is safe, then decides he doesn't care.

He looks at his reflection.

He looks tired.

That isn't new, but seeing it so clearly on his face feels different somehow.

His phone buzzes in his pocket.

Eva: Shane, I'm so sorry.

He exhales slowly through his nose.

Another buzz.

Eva: I didn't mean to hurt you. It will never happen again, I swear

Eva: Please call me when you get a chance.

Shane grips the sink, fighting the urge to hurl his phone at the wall.

Instead, he shoves it back into his pocket and stares at himself until the shaking passes.

When he feels less likely to have a freak out in Kips' bathroom, he leaves it again. Kip is leaning on the island counter, presumably looking up the poke bowl place. Shane is happy to leave him to until Kip makes a confused noise. Shane frowns.

"Oh, um." Kip says, sounding unsure. That *really* gets Shane's attention.

"What?"

Kip is frowning down at his phone. "I missed Scott's text because *someone* was cheating at Mario Kart."

"I did *not* cheat," Shane says immediately.

“Liar,” Kip replies, without any real heat. He scrolls. “Anyway. It was from a little over an hour ago. Do you know someone named Ilya Rozanov?”

Shane’s stomach drops. “Why?”

“Scott says he landed at JFK,” Kip says. “He’s on his way here.”

What the *fuck*.

Shane shoots to his feet so fast his phone slips out of his pocket clatters against the floor. He picks it up quickly, resisting the urge to see if Lily had texted.

“He’s coming *here*?”

“That’s what Scott said,” Kip answers carefully. “Are you okay? I can ask him to leave if you want-”

“No,” Shane cuts in, already rubbing a hand over his face. “You can’t.”

This is so fucking stupid. Months and months of silence, and one busted-up face later, Ilya comes charging in like some kind of knight in overpriced armor.

As if his life isn't already a terrible sitcom, there's a knock at the door.

It's not even loud or aggressive to make matters worse. It sounds normal.

Kip and Shane freeze, staring at each other.

"Do-," Kip starts. "Do I open it?"

"Fine," Shane grumbles, already scrubbing a hand down his face like he can physically wipe this situation away. There is no way in hell if it is Ilya he's gonna leave. The bastard will set up camp outside until the door opens. "But don't-. Ugh, don't let him think he's... invited."

Kip blinks. "I wasn't planning on it?"

"Good," Shane says. "Because he'll take that and run a marathon with it."

“Aren’t you guys rivals? You sound like you know him-,”

The knock comes again, firmer this time. Like the person on the other side already knows the door is going to open and is just being polite about it.

Kip shoots Shane a questioning look. Shane just jerks his chin toward the door, jaw tight.

“Rip the bandage off,” Shane mutters. “He loves that.”

Kip opens the door.

Ilya Rozanov fills the doorway like he owns the hallway. Tall and broad-shouldered with an expensive jacket shrugged on like an afterthought. His curls are perfect in that irritating way that suggests effortlessness, even though Shane knows for a fucking fact it’s not, and his mouth is already curved into a knowing half-smile.

“Well,” Ilya says, eyes flicking immediately past Kip and locking onto Shane. “This is not the hotel Montreal was staying at.”

Shane closes his eyes for half a second. Of course that’s the first thing out of his mouth.

“Rozanov,” Shane says flatly. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Ilya steps inside without waiting for permission, glancing around the apartment with open curiosity. “JFK traffic was terrible,” he says, like that explains everything. His gaze slides back to Shane’s face.

The smile drops.

“O чепм!”

“There it is,” Shane mutters. He doesn’t know what Ilya has just said, but it sounds like a swear. “That took longer than usual.”

Ilya is on him in two strides, hands already hovering near Shane’s face like he’s deciding whether to touch or throttle him. “Who did this,” he demands, his thick accent cutting sharper than usual. “And don’t say ‘nobody,’ because I will not accept lies before five o’clock.”

“Relax,” Shane snaps, batting his hands away. “I tripped.”

Ilya looks at him like he’s just insulted his entire bloodline. “You tripped into a fist?”

“Wow,” Shane says with an eyeroll. “You should be a detective.” He regrets the dramatic movement because it sends a twinge of pain up through his nose. He tries to hide his wince. Ilya goes still.

Kip clears his throat, suddenly very aware that he is standing in the middle of something old and volatile. “Hi,” he offers weakly. “I’m Kip.”

Ilya finally acknowledges him, turning with a polite-but-dismissive nod. “Ilya. Thank you for... hosting.” His eyes flick back to Shane immediately. “You look like hell.”

“Good,” Shane says dryly. “That was the goal.”

Ilya exhales sharply through his nose, a sound halfway between a laugh and a growl. “You disappear for months,” he says, voice low now, dangerous in its calm, “and I find out you’re ‘sick’ and not flying with the team through your coach?”

“*Me?*” Shane says, agape. He’s about to argue that he’s *not* the goddamn one who disappeared, who does the disappearing, but he can feel Kip’s eyes burning into them.

“I didn’t ask you to come,” Shane shoots back.

“No,” Ilya agrees smoothly. “You did not. I come anyway..”

That lands painfully. Shane’s mouth tightens.

Kip shifts, clearly uncomfortable. He’s hovering by the counter like a referee who regrets volunteering. “You... want coffee?” he asks.

Ilya waves a hand without looking away from Shane. “Later.”

He tilts Shane’s chin up despite the protest, examining the bruising with clinical precision. “You should have gone to the hospital.”

“I didn’t want press.”

“You are press,” Ilya snaps. Then, quieter and biting, “Or did you forget that again?”

Shane jerks away. “Don’t start.”

“Oh, I am starting,” Ilya says, eyes flashing. “You don’t get to vanish, bleed in the street, and then act surprised when I show up.”

Kip watches them, looking like his heart is thudding out of his chest. He’s clearly clocked Ilya as intense immediately, but could tell clear as day that whatever this was is something else. Shane can feel it, too. It’s not concern, exactly. It’s too possessive and sharp to be concern.

“I’m fine,” Shane insists.

“Well-” Kip says suddenly, bouncing once on his heels like a startled rabbit. “I’m gonna go. Uh. Get...us lunch.”

Shane feels a stab of guilt. Kip didn’t sign up for this. He hopes his expression conveys that apology. He’s going to send him a very nice gift basket for dealing with all of this.

“You do that, Kip,” Ilya says lazily, not even looking at him.

Kip nods, more to himself than to either of them, and all but bolts for the door. He’s gone in seconds, the lock clicking behind him.

The apartment goes very quiet.

Shane doesn't turn back until the door is fully shut. When he does, Ilya is already watching him with those stupidly bright hazel eyes.

God. He really did not need this today.

"Fuck you."

Ilya's mouth curls instantly. "Already did, Hollander. Try again."

"Jesus Christ," Shane snaps. "Can you take *anything* seriously?"

Ilya tilts his head, studying him. "What, exactly, would you like me to take seriously?"

That makes Shane pause.

What *did* he want. To mention last night? Their careers which Ilya is putting at risk by being here? The thing between them that never quite had a name?

“Fuck you,” he says again, quieter this time. The words land duller, stripped of their heat.

“Hunter said you were hurt,” Ilya replies. “So I came.”

“I get hurt all the time.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees, maddeningly reasonable. “But usually you do it in front of eighteen thousand people and a television audience.”

“That’s not-,”

“On the ice,” Ilya continues, talking right over him. “Where you wear pads. And a helmet. And where I expect it.”

“Who told you it wasn’t?” Shane demands.

“I watched your game,” Ilya says. “You were fine.”

Shane freezes. *That* gets his attention.. “You watched my game.”

“*Da.*” Ilya shrugs. “I watch all your games.”

That knocks the air out of Shane, whether he wants it to or not.

“What do you *want*, Rozanov?” he asks, suddenly exhausted.

Ilya lifts a brow. The usual smirk should be there but it isn’t. His mouth stays in a flat, thin line. Stupidly, Shane wants to kiss him.

“You are hurt.”

“I’m always hurt and so are you,” Shane says. “It’s hockey.”

“As we just covered,” Ilya replies, dry as dust, and waves his hand in the direction of Shane’s face “this is not hockey.”

Shane exhales sharply through his nose. “So what?”

Ilya steps closer. It's just enough to be irritating and not enough to be kind.

"So," he says, voice low and smug and unmistakably concerned, "now you tell me what you are not telling anyone else."

Shane lets out a humorless laugh. "You flew a few states to interrogate me?"

"I flew because Hunter called," Ilya corrects. "Interrogation is a bonus."

"Go to hell. I told you I didn't ask you to come."

"No," Ilya agrees, and Shane feels like they are running in circles.

He shifts his weight, jaw tightening. "You don't get to show up and start acting like you're entitled to answers."

Ilya hums. "And yet, here I am. Very entitled. Very present."

Shane turns away, scrubbing a hand over the back of his neck. He can feel Ilya behind him, feel the heat of him like a pressure at his spine. It makes his skin crawl. It makes something else in him ache.

“This isn’t your business,” Shane says.

Ilya snorts. “Everything you do becomes my business when you lie about it.”

“I didn’t-,”

“You vanished,” Ilya cuts in smoothly and he doesn’t sound angry, which is somehow worse. “No texts. No calls. Nothing. Then suddenly you are bleeding in the street like a kicked dog and refusing hospital because you are ‘fine.’”

“That’s not what this is. We meet when we’re in the same state. We’re not *together*. And I *was* fine.”

Ilya’s mouth twitches, sharp and mean. “You look like shit.”

Shane whirls on him. “Why do you care?”

For a split second- just one- the smugness cracks. It's gone almost immediately, replaced by something hard and bright and dangerous.

"That," Ilya says quietly, "is the problem."

Silence stretches between them, thick and awful. Shane's heart is hammering now, his pulse echoing painfully behind his swollen eyebrow.

Ilya sighs, like Shane is exhausting him. "Did someone do this to you?"

Shane doesn't answer.

Ilya's jaw tightens. His accent sharpens. "Shane."

"*Don't*," Shane snaps. "Don't say my name like that."

"Like what?"

“Like you get to- ” Shane falters, frustration burning his throat. “Like you get to be worried.”

Ilya steps even closer now. Too close. Shane can smell his cologne, familiar and so fucking unfair.

“I worry because you let me,” Ilya says, smug again, softer now, more dangerous for it. “You could have told me to fuck off years ago.”

“I *have* told you to fuck off.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees. “And then you kiss me.”

Shane’s face burns. “That was a mistake.”

“Mmm,” Ilya murmurs. “You always say that.”

Shane swallows. His voice comes out rough. “Someone threw a glass at me.”

There it is. The truth, ugly between them.

Ilya goes very still.

“Again,” he says.

Shane flinches despite himself.

Ilya’s smile disappears completely this time. His eyes go dark.

“Who,” he asks, deadly calm, “did this.”

Shane shakes his head. “No.”

Ilya’s mouth curves, sharp and humorless. “That was not an answer.”

“I’m not doing this with you,” Shane says. His chest feels tight, like he can’t quite get a full breath. “I’m not explaining my life. Not to you.”

Ilya exhales through his nose, slow and controlled. “You are very bad at lying when you are injured.”

“Good thing I’m not lying.”

“Good thing,” Ilya echoes, and then- too fast- his hand lifts. Shane jerks back instinctively his pulse spiking, but Ilya only stops inches from his face. Not touching. Never touching. Like he’s proving a point.

“That,” Ilya says quietly, eyes flicking to Shane’s reflex, “is not fine.”

Shane’s throat works. “Don’t.”

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t act like you know me.”

Ilya’s gaze softens just enough to be infuriating. “I know you apologize when you bleed on other people’s floors.”

Shane stares at him. "Scott told you that?"

Ilya scoffs. "Please. Hunter is terrible at details. No, that is you."

Shane looks away.

"That is you, so no one asks questions," Ilya continues, relentless now. "That is you deciding pain is easier."

"Shut up."

"No."

The word lands flat.

Shane laughs, brittle. "You don't get to come in here and psychoanalyze me like you're not part of the problem."

Ilya tilts his head. “Am I?”

“Yes,” Shane snaps. “You make everything worse. You show up, and suddenly I can’t think straight. I can’t- ” He cuts himself off, jaw clenched. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“And yet,” Ilya says, smugness creeping back in, “you didn’t tell Kip to slam door in my face.”

“I told him not to ask you to leave.”

“Ah.” Ilya smiles, slow and awful. “Different.”

Shane’s hands curl into fists. “I didn’t want a scene.”

“You always want control,” Ilya says. “You just don’t want responsibility.”

That does it.

Shane steps forward, close enough now that there's no space left between them. "You don't get to talk about responsibility when you disappear whenever things get real."

Ilya's eyes flash. "I disappear because you let me."

"Bullshit."

"You never have asked me to stay."

The words are sudden and raw and unexpected.

For a moment, neither of them moves.

Then Shane says, for some reason, "She lost her temper."

Ilya doesn't interrupt. He doesn't seem to move at all, or even blink.

"She threw a glass," Shane continues. "It wasn't... planned. It wasn't like- " He wants to say it's not like he's getting abused. He's not some trapped housewife. He swallows. "She cried

after.”

Ilya’s jaw tightens. “Of course she did.”

Shane bristles. “Don’t.”

“She hurt you,” Ilya says. His voice is cold now. “And you are defending her.”

“I’m explaining it.”

“You are making less. Ah-” he seems to be searching for the word, “minimizing.”

Shane rubs at his face, careful of the bruises. “It’s complicated.”

Ilya steps back at last, running a hand through his hair. When he looks at Shane again, there’s no humor left at all.

“Complicated is tactics,” he says. “This is simple.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane snaps. “What’s simple about it?”

Ilya meets his gaze, unwavering.

“She will do it again.”

Shane opens his mouth to argue and finds he can’t. Ilya is right, the fucker. Shane is sure of it.

“What do you know?”

“My father was not a kind man. To my mother or to me.” Ilya says quietly. “He was very hard to us.”

Shane's anger falters, just for a second, at the realization.

Ilya rarely talks about his family. When he does it is usually half-truths tossed out like distractions. This is not that.

“What do you mean,” Shane asks, more quietly than he intends.

Ilya’s mouth twitches, almost a smile, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. “I mean I recognize math.”

“Math,” Shane repeats flatly.

“Yes.” Ilya shrugs, like he’s discussing starting lineup changes instead of something that clearly still lives under his skin. “First is accident. Then is stress. Then is your fault for pushing. Then is apology so dramatic you feel cruel for still being hurt.”

Shane doesn’t say anything.

“My mother,” Ilya continues, “was very good at explaining why it was not that bad. Why next time would be different. Why love needs patience.” His eyes flick back to Shane’s face, lingering on the bruises with something sharp and assessing. “She was wrong.”

“That’s not the same thing,” Shane says automatically, even as his chest tightens.

Ilya hums. “Is not identical. Nothing ever is. But the shape of it?” He gestures vaguely between them. “Very familiar.”

“You don’t know her,” Shane snaps, defensive reflex kicking in. “You don’t know us.”

Ilya’s lips curl “Ah. There it is. The *you don’t understand*. I was worried you might surprise me.”

“Fuck you.”

“There it is,” Ilya says lightly. “You always get rude when cornered.”

Shane exhales sharply. “You’re projecting.”

“Of course I am,” Ilya agrees without hesitation. “That does not mean I am wrong.”

He steps closer again, invading Shane’s space with infuriating confidence. “Tell me this, Hollander. Did she apologize immediately, or did she wait until you stopped bleeding?”

Shane’s jaw tightens.

“And did she cry,” Ilya presses, merciless now, “or did she shake?”

“Stop.”

“And did she say she didn't mean to, and she didn't know what she did- ”

“I said stop!”

Ilya falls silent. For a moment, his expression hardens into something unreadable. Then he scoffs softly.

“You see?” he says. “Every time I am correct, you get very loud.”

Shane looks away, throat burning. “You don’t get to do this. You don’t get to show up and act like you’re- like you’re some authority.”

Ilya’s voice softens again, dangerous in its calm. “I am not authority. I am experience.”

“That doesn’t give you the right- ”

“No,” Ilya cuts in. “But it gives me the obligation.”

Shane snaps his head up. “To what?”

“To not pretend I don’t see it,” Ilya says. “To not watch you break into smaller pieces and call it loyalty. Or love.”

Shane laughs, hollow. “Since when do you care about my wellbeing?”

Ilya’s eyes flicker. Just briefly, so quick Shane thinks he must have made it up.

“Since you made it impossible not to,” he says, then immediately adds, smugness snapping back into place, “which is very inconsiderate of you, by the way.”

Despite himself, Shane lets out a short, humorless breath.

“I don’t need saving,” he mutters.

Ilya tilts his head. “Good. Because I am terrible at that.”

He pauses, then adds, quieter, “I am very good at recognizing when someone deserves better.”

Shane swallows.

“You think you’re better?” he asks.

Ilya’s smile is sharp and arrogant, and edged with something that makes Shane want to grind his teeth together. “Oh, no. I am a nightmare.”

He steps back, giving Shane space at last.

“But I do not throw glass.”

Chapter End Notes

“О черт!” - like 'oh damn' or 'holy shit' kinda thing according to the internet.

p.s.- shane totally cheats at mario party.

Ilya is saying some weird words that don't make sense and some poor English grammar because he's freaking the fuck out in his brain in Russian and is trying to translate in his head so he can make sense. Like when he says "Complicated is tactics" he means "complicated is difficult/messy like statistics [the math]" and it came out funky. Like he's making leaps and connections in his mind that is hard to express quickly. It makes sense to him but to no one else lol

next chapter: Ilya and Shane part 2

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! Sorry I'm a day late!!! I had to rewrite a bunch of stuff. This one was rough.

Also if you see Rozanov spelled with an 'S' instead of a 'Z; no you didn't
TW: panic attack, mentions and references to domestic violence and abuse, some mentions of SH and Ilya still being an asshole about this whole thing.

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

Shane can only stare at Ilya.

This has to be a dream. That's the only explanation that makes sense. Scott Hunter's apartment. Scott Hunter's... *person*... out buying them poke bowls. And Ilya Rozanov standing right in front of him, acting like Shane matters.

It isn't real. Shane knows that. He's convenient. He's safe. He's someone Ilya fucks because it's easy and contained and Shane doesn't ask for anything in return. Whatever Shane feels has never mattered.

Shit.

Maybe that's it. Maybe Shane has always wanted more and pretended he didn't because pretending was the only way to keep Ilya close. Because wanting less made this easier.. Easier to hold. Easier to leave.

Ilya hasn't looked away. Not once, even when he takes off his expensive jacket and lays it on the back of the couch. His hazel eyes pin Shane in place, unblinking, and they look sharp enough to peel him open.

It's unbearable.

"Okay," Shane says finally, exhaustion flattening his voice. He feels so fucking drained. "So what. Forget anything else. I'm nothing to you. But what if you're right? What now?"

"You break up with her."

The panic is instant and violent.

Eva doesn't let go easily. Shane can already see it- tears and apologies whispered into his neck, and shaking hands. The way she'll collapse in on herself and somehow make *him* the villain for wanting out. He'd have to do it in person. He'd have to see her. He-

"Hollander."

Shane's chest locks up. There's no air. The apartment feels suddenly too small, like all the oxygen has been sucked out of it. His hands start to tremble. Is he shaking? He might be

shaking.

“Hollander.”

That’s his name, but it sounds wrong, distorted, like it’s coming from underwater. The edges of the room blur. Someone is talking, but the words won’t land in his brain. He can’t tell if he’s standing or falling or alone.

Hands grab him- they’re warm and callused- and Shane flinches so hard he nearly stumbles over his own feet. He barely registers being guided, steered really, until the back of his knees hit the couch and he folds forward.

Those same hands press at the back of his neck, firmly but not cruelly, guiding his head down until it’s between his knees.

Eva. He has to break up with Eva. He knows that. He *knows* it. But he can’t. She’ll spiral. She’ll hurt herself. She’ll call TMZ before she lets him walk away.

“Fuck,” Shane breathes.

This is bad. Worse than a crowded party. Worse than flashing cameras. It’s like being crushed from the inside out, like something crawling under his skin. Ants- hundreds of them- each tiny leg scraping along his nerves.

He needs them out.

His nails dig into his forearms, scratching hard enough that pale lines bloom pink, then red.

“Hollander.”

The hands return, closing around his wrists, pulling them away before he can gouge himself any deeper. They’re steady.

Shane’s breath stutters as the world tilts, and all he can think- absurdly, helplessly- is that he’d take butterflies over ants any day.

Ilya crouches in front of him.

It’s an undignified position for someone like Rozanov- suit creasing, expensive shoes planted on Scott’s rug- but he does it anyway. He gets low enough that Shane doesn’t have to lift his head to see him.

“Look at me,” Ilya orders.

Shane can't. His vision is still tunneling, his pulse too loud in his ears.

"That is fine," Ilya says, like he's granting permission. "Then listen."

Ilya's hands stay on Shane's wrists, firm but not quite restraining. It's enough pressure that Shane can feel them in his panicked haze.

"Breathe," Ilya says. "In through nose. Out through mouth. Slow. Like you are lining up for faceoff."

Shane huffs out something that might be a laugh if he wasn't on the verge of coming apart.

"Do not be clever," Ilya warns mildly. "Breathe."

Shane drags in a breath. It catches halfway, sharp and ugly, but it's air. He lets it out in a shaky rush. Then again. And again.

Ilya nods, like Shane's passed some invisible test.

“There,” he says. “You are still here.”

The ants recede a little. Not gone.

Ilya loosens his grip, sliding his hands from Shane’s wrists to his forearms, thumbs pressing into muscle. The lines on Shane’s arms are bleeding just a little. They’re already scabbing over.

“You do not get to decide you are nothing,” Ilya says. His voice is low, almost dangerous in a different way now. “Not to me.”

Shane swallows. His throat hurts.

“You don’t- ” he starts, then stops. Tries again. “You don’t get to decide anything about me.”

Ilya’s mouth twitches. Almost a smirk. Almost.

“I do not decide,” he says. “It just is.”

There it is. The thing Shane's been trying not to hear.

"You care," Shane says, flat. Like he's testing a bad bruise.

"Yes," Ilya replies immediately. There's no hesitation with how quickly he says it. "Unfortunately."

Shane lets out a broken sound that might be a laugh or might be a sob. He tips forward again, elbows braced on his knees, face in his hands now that the shaking has slowed.

"She didn't mean to," Shane says, because it's the lie he knows best. "She just- she gets emotional. It won't happen again."

Ilya goes very still.

"No," he scolds. "That is not how that works."

Shane peeks at him through his fingers.

“She threw glass at your face,” Ilya continues, calm. “You are explaining it to me like you broke a lamp.”

Shane flinches.

“My mother said the same things,” Ilya adds, softer. “Every time.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It was a long time ago.”

Shane has an awful thought in his head.

“Did... did your dad kill her?”

Ilya stops rubbing his thumbs, just for a moment. It happens so quick, Shane must have imagine it.

“It was an accident.” he says after a moment. “She 'accidentally' took a bottle of pills.”

God, that’s somehow worse. She was probably miserable. She was probably feeling exactly how Shane was feeling right now. Helpless.

Shane hates that feeling.

For as wealthy as he is, as good as a player as he is, Shane rarely has the chance to make choices. He doesn’t get to decide who his roommate is on away games. He doesn’t get to decide what brands of clothes or shoes he wears, because they need to represent whatever brand his mom made a deal with. He doesn’t get to decide when to play hockey or when to go to practice or what drills the team would do.

He can’t even fucking decide his diet. It *has* to be a certain way. It has to or something terrible will happen.

The thought sits in his chest, heavy and sour.

Maybe that’s why this hurts so much- because it isn’t just Eva, or the glass, or the panic spiraling through his veins. It’s the realization that his whole life has been lived inside lanes someone else painted for him, and he’s been praised for never stepping out of them.

Shane laughs weakly. “I don’t really get to choose much,” he admits. The words feel dangerous, like saying them out loud might make them true in a way he can’t undo. “Everyone thinks I do, because- ” He gestures vaguely at himself. “But I don’t.”

Ilya watches him with that unnerving focus, like Shane is the only thing in the room worth tracking.

“You choose to play hockey,” Ilya points out.

Shane shakes his head. “I play hockey because I always have. Because I’m good at it. Because if I stop, I don’t know who the hell I am.”

Ilya gets a very, very serious look on his face. It’s one that Shane has never seen before, not even when they were playing.

“Shane,” he says. “Tell me the truth. Do you want to stop playing hockey?”

God. *Did* he?

“No.” he mutters quietly after a second. “I don’t. I want to play hockey for as long as I can.”

“Forever?” Ilya asks lightly. Shane’s heart has stopped racing now, and he realizes just how close the two of them are. “Even when you are an old man?”

Shane looks at Ilya. And for a moment he lets himself be selfish. He lets himself see forever with the man in front of him. It's stupid, because Ilya would never want Shane. Not in the soul-crushing, aching way Shane wants him.

"I'll skate with a walker."

"Hmm. With little tennis balls on them?"

Ilya is looking at Shane's mouth. The last time they were this close...

Shane closes the distance between the first. Kissing Ilya is like breathing after holding your breath under water.

The other man doesn't falter. Ilya's hand comes up, decisive and warm, sliding into the back of Shane's hair.

"Hollander," Ilya murmurs into the kiss, smug even now, even here, like he's been waiting for this and is mildly offended it took so long.

The kiss deepens immediately.. Ilya kisses like he does everything else- confident and a little rough, like he expects Shane to keep up. His thumb presses under Shane's jaw, tilting his

head just so, like he's correcting bad form.

Shane makes a quiet, broken sound without meaning to. He can feel Ilya's smirk as it curves against Shane's mouth.

Ilya's mouth softens, just a fraction, like he's letting Shane feel the difference on purpose. Like he wants him to know this isn't just heat or habit or convenience.

Shane's hands fist in Ilya's shirt, knuckles aching. He doesn't care. He kisses back like he's been starved, like he's been waiting years for permission he never realized he didn't need.

His nose twinges painfully, sending a burst of sparks through his face. The pain jolts him into awareness and he yanks himself back from Ilya, breathing hard.

Then his nose twinges painfully, a sharp burst of sparks across his face. The pain snaps him back into himself.

Shane jerks away, breathing hard.

Holy shit.

Holy *shit*.

He has a girlfriend. He has a girlfriend and he was seconds away from swallowing Ilya's tongue.

"Why did you do that?" Shane demands, horrified by how wrecked he sounds.

"Me?" Ilya says, brows lifting, amusement flickering across his face like he's genuinely impressed. "Interesting."

"You- " Shane gestures vaguely between them, his hands shaking now. "You kissed me."

Ilya tilts his head. "You closed the distance, Hollander."

"That doesn't- " Shane scrubs a hand over his face, immediately regretting it when his nose protests again. "You know I have a girlfriend."

Ilya's smile sharpens. "Yes. The one who throws glass."

“That doesn’t make this okay!”

“No,” Ilya snaps, all amusement gone now. Shane can tell irritation is settling in its place. “What makes it not okay is you pretending you are a helpless object I acted upon.”

Shane recoils like he’s been slapped. “I didn’t say that.”

“You implied it.” Ilya steps back, putting space between them now, his posture rigid. “You kissed me like you were drowning and now you want to blame me for pulling you out of the water.”

“That’s not fair,” Shane says, voice cracking despite himself. “I’m...confused.”

“Ah.” Ilya’s laugh is short and humorless. “Yes. You are always confused when you want something you are afraid to take.”

Shane’s chest tightens. “You don’t get to say that.”

“I get to say whatever I want,” Ilya shoots back. “You invited me here with your inability to tell me to leave.”

“That’s not- I didn’t invite you!”

Ilya’s eyes flash. “Then why did you kiss me?”

Shane opens his mouth. Nothing comes out.

That’s answer enough.

Ilya exhales sharply, running a hand through his hair, frustration bleeding through the edges now. “This,” he says, gesturing between them, “is exactly why I should not have come.”

“Then why did you?” Shane asks, almost pleading.

Ilya looks at him for a long moment. Something unreadable crosses his face. It’s something raw and old.

“Because I am stupid,” he says quietly. “And because you were hurt.”

“I have a girlfriend,” Shane blurts.

“You said.” Ilya’s voice goes flat. “Leave her.”

Now it’s Shane’s turn to rake a hand through his hair. “It’s not that simple.”

“Yes, it is.” Ilya’s gaze flicks to the coffee table. “Where is your phone? I will text her for you.”

He spots it, but Shane is faster, snatching it up before Ilya can move.

“I’m not breaking up with her,” Shane insists, panic rising. “She’s my *girlfriend* and I- ”

“What?” Ilya cuts in sharply. “You love her?”

Shane opens his mouth to try and say something in reply, anything, but nothing comes out. He can’t find the words.

Ilya scoffs. “Unbelievable. She hurts you!”

“A lot of people hurt me.” Shane says quietly, glancing up at him.

Ilya waves a hand uselessly, like he’s trying to come up with the right words to say but he can’t find them. He’s just as mute as Shane is when it comes to these things.

Eventually he decides on something, but it’s in Russian and he only manages to mutter it under his breath. Shane imagines that he’s calling him a stupid fool in about fifty different ways. Ilya purses his lips, something like anger flaring through him when he huffs out a breath. He grabs his jacket from the back of the couch. “Figure out what you want, Hollander. And then do something about it.”

“Ilya- ”

“No.” He’s already at the door. He pauses, hand on the knob, without turning around. “I will not be a bystander to you being destroyed.”

The door opens.

“I deserve better than that,” he adds. “And so do you.”

Then he leaves, the door clicking shut behind him.

All Shane can do is stare at the place where Ilya Rozanov had just been.

Chapter End Notes

kip in line at the poke bowl place god I hope they're not fucking on the couch

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

UPDATE!!!! 1/14/26

I fixed it! I have also been told my stupid voice-to-text line was kinda distracting, so i will be removing it. It was hilarious though so here is the line that was accidentally included in my voice--to-text if you are reading this after 1/14/26 lol:

"Google do a flocking line break go-damn it no not a line space a line break what am i even doing"

hi I have no excuse for the delay. Holidays, babe. and I started a new corporate job!!!!

Sorry if this first draft of text sounds weird, I did it via voice recording speech to text in my car on my lunch breaks and editing barely on my phone. I didn't get a chance to drag out my thesaurus and play with it as i usually do. I got a new corporate job!

I will edit and update soon and edit this note when I do so it's not me trying to wrangle voice-to-text. I was re-reading this and was like... god do I sound like that IRL?

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

“Dude,” Bennett says, clapping Scott on the back. He peers at him through the cage of his goalie mask. “You alright?”

Scott exhales as he rips off his helmet. Bennett does the same, tucking his mask under his arm. Scott is exhausted. He's aching in places he didn't know could ache, sweat soaking through his gear. It doesn't matter how cold the rink is; he always runs hot. His pads are never going to smell normal again.

“Yeah,” Scott says, though it comes out more like a sigh. Bennett doesn't question him out in front of everyone, thankfully. He just nods once.

They skate over to the boards. A trainer tosses Scott a water bottle, which he catches one-handed since he's got his helmet in the other. He takes a long drink. All the cold water does is make his stomach hurt a little.

“You’ve got something on your mind,” Bennett says knowingly, now it's just the two of them. The trainer has meandered off to give out more water. Leave it to the guy who had the emotional intelligence of kindergarten teacher than a hockey player to pick up on Scott's mood. But Scott was pretty sure at this point, everyone was picking up on his mood.

Something on his mind feels like the understatement of the year.

Lately, most of Scott's thoughts are Kip-shaped. And now, somehow, they're Shane-shaped too.

Shane Hollander is practically a poster boy for hockey: he’s polite, reserved, and serious to a fault. Scott remembers being genuinely surprised when *TMZ* broke the story that Shane was dating Eva Loren. She had a reputation as loud and flashy and adored being in the spotlight. Shane always looked like he wanted to crawl into a hole whenever they crossed paths at league events.

Scott likes Shane. A lot.

Too many guys in the NHL are grade-A assholes. One Dallas Kent immediately comes to mind or Zullo, but Shane has never been like that. He's thoughtful and professional. Kind, even when he doesn't have to be. Scott always giving sticks away after games and takes time to talk to kids.

And now he's dealing with something he doesn't deserve.

Well, no one deserves it.

It was definitely Eva who busted Shane's face.

Scott hadn't heard Shane say it outright, but the way Kip described him and the way he talked about Shane's behavior... it all added up. The conclusion felt unavoidable. Shane had been abused by his girlfriend and had somehow thought it was a good idea to wander blindly around the city. Thank god it was Kip who found him and not someone who could have mugged or hurt him more. Or worse.

"Get your head out of your ass, Hunter!" The coach bellows from across the ice.

Yeah. Everyone knew about his mood.

Scott tips his head back, taking a long pull from his water bottle. The cold still doesn't help much, but it clears his head a little.

“Scotty,” Bennett calls, but it feels millions of miles away. “You good?”

No. He's not. They've got a game in less than five hours, and all he can think about is Shane Hollander.

Shane, who always looked kind of lost in that quiet, dazed way. Like he was a confused duckling who wandered off from the pond and somehow ended up under Scott fucking Hunter's watch, whether we wants it or not.

“Be right back,” Scott mutters instead of answering. He ignores his coaches protests.

He hops the boards and sets his water down on the bench. He doesn't even bother with skate guards. He just walks with his blades scraping against the concrete, straight toward the visitor locker room.

He makes up his mind to try and call Kip, or even Ilya but when he finally manages to wrestle his phone from his bag he is surprised to see he's got about a a dozen missed calls and text.

They're all from Kip.

Kip: Ilya is here

Kip: okay something is going ON with them

Kip: (MISSED CALL)

Kip: no way that was hetriosexual

Kip: I'm giving them space but they are so fucking

Kip: bokeeeee bowl time

*Kip: ***poke bowl*

Kip: (MISSED CALL)

Kip: wait he's gone

Kip: (MISSED CALL)

Kip: Scort he's ghone

*Kip: scott he's gone****

Kip: (MISSED CALL)

“Oh, shit,” Scott says outloud. His voice rings in the empty locker room.

He calls Ilya for the second time, even though he's afraid of what the other man will have to say. The Russian answers immediately, like he'd been waiting for it.

"Is Shane with you?" Scott asks as soon as he picks up.

“Hello, Scott Hunter,” Ilya says dryly.

“This is serious,” Scott snaps. “Is Shane with you?”

“No,” Ilya replies, his voice flat and somber. “*Hollander did not see reason. I left him at your place.*”

“You left him alone?” Scott demands.

“*My mistake,*” Ilya says coolly. “*I assumed a grown man could make his own choices.*”

“Ilya, you dick,” Scott bites out. “He’s not in a good place right now.”

“*He probably went to his girlfriend,*” Ilya bites.

He says *girlfriend* the way someone might say *serial killer*.

Scott drags a hand down his face. Seriously, fuck this guy. Why couldn't he take anything seriously, even for a moment?

“Where is her apartment?” he asks instead of cussing Ilya out.

“How should I know?” Ilya replies bitterly.

That’s it.

“Got to go,” Scott says, and he hangs up.

He immediately dials his agent.

Todd picks up on the fourth ring. *“Hey, Scott!”*

“Do you have Rose Landry’s contact information?”

There’s a pause. *“Good afternoon to you Todd. How’s the kids, Todd?”*

“Todd,” Scott cuts in. “This is serious.”

His agent sobers instantly. *“May I ask why you need Miss Landry’s number?”*

“No.”

Another pause. A sigh. *“Give me a few minutes.”*

The line goes dead.

True to his word, Todd texts him a number four minutes later. Scott calls it immediately.

It rings twice.

“Hello?” a woman answers.

“Hi...Rose? This is Scott Hunter. The player. The hockey player. From the New York Admirals.”

Scott cringes at himself. Great. He sounds like a stalker.

"Oh. Right?" Rose says slowly. She sounds confused which is fair. Scott would be too.

"Yes. Uh-, I know you and Shane are close. Do you have his girl you have his girlfriend's address?"

That gets her attention.

"Eva's?" she asks sharply. *"Is Shane okay?"*

Scott swallows. "How did you-? Nevermind. I don't know if he is. My friend Kip ran into him last night. His face was... bad. He didn't say what happened, but-,"

"It was Eva," Rose cuts in firmly.

"I...I think so," Scott says. "Shane stayed at my place last night to recover a bit but now he's gone."

"Damn it," Rose mutters. *"I knew it. I knew this was going to happen."*

“You did?” Scott asks, a little surprised.

“I work with Eva,” Rose says bluntly. “She’s not a good person. I thought it was just... Shane told me she threw a heel at him once and split his eyebrow. I told him she wasn’t good for him, but he shut me down.”

“Oh my god,” Scott breathes.

His phone buzzes. He pulls it away from his ear.

Two addresses appear on her screen from Rose’s number.

“I just sent them,” Rose says. “She’s got one place in Tribeca and another overlooking Central Park.”

“Thank you,” Scott says immediately.

“I’m in Montreal,” Rose adds. “But I’m about to board a plane. I’ll be in New York in a few hours for Last Week Tonight. I’ll check on him too.”

“Have you tried calling him recently?” Scott asks.

“...*No*,” Rose admits. “*He's a little frustrating to be around right now. Has he answered you?*”

Scott winces. He hasn't even tried to call, he'd just assumed Shane wouldn't.

“Take care.” Scott says in lieu of reply.

“*I will*,” Rose says. “*You too.*”

“Thank you,” Scott repeats.

“*Keep me updated*,” she demands. Then she hangs up first.

Scott stares down at the addresses glowing on his screen.

"Five hours until puck drop." he says under his breath.

Scott calls Shane first. He wants, needs, to give him the benefit of the doubt. That maybe Shane will answer. Maybe he just left for the airport or something to go to Chicago,

It rings.

And rings.

And rings again, until it drops into voicemail.

“Fuck,” Scott mutters, already dialing the next number.

Kip picks up on the first ring. *“Hi Scott. I’m kind of freaking out right now.”*

“I have her address,” Scott says immediately. “Shane’s girlfriend. I think he’ll be there.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“Okay,” Kip says slowly. “Why does it sound like-,”

“Take a cab and use my card. No,” Scott says, panic sharpening his voice. “Do people even take cabs anymore? Just- take whatever gets you there fastest. Uber? Train?”

“I can’t just show up at a famous actress’s house,” Kip argues, sounding a little outraged. Despite it all, it’s almost cute. Endearing, even. God, Scott loves him. “I’ll get arrested! Or she’ll think I’m stalking her or something.”

Scott grimaces. That part, unfortunately, is fair. Just like Rose's confusion at Scott Hunter calling her out of the blue.

But the sick, twisting feeling in his gut doesn’t ease. If anything, it gets worse. But he can't ask Kip to show up at a famous actress's house asking to see her boyfriend.

He opens his mouth to tell Kip that he's right, that maybe they should just call someone but then-,

“You’re right,” Kip interrupts. “Let me get my shoes on.”

Scott closes his eyes in relief. “Thank you.”

"I love you."

The line goes dead.

Scott stares at his phone, jaw tight.

Please, he thinks, not sure who he's praying to anymore. *Please let it not be too late.*

Chapter End Notes

kip does not own a gun in case anyone is wondering. he may need one when he gets to Eva's tbh.

oop. spoilers.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

thanks for your patience everyone! I'm glad you guys thought it my voice-to-text stress was funny.

here it is!!!

I should be re-editing the previous chapter as well to make it fit my style more too, but if you want to check it out now (1/14/26) and read it cleaned up, feel free. I should have a better 3.0 version today or tomorrow :)

also I know we all love the show and actors but some of y'all are fucking WEIRD and not in a good way. The actors who play the characters are real people and y'all need to respect their privacy, lordy. I'm looking at you, Twitter. >:(

Okat hang onto your jerseys!

TW:

Mentions of abuse, DV, pending sense of doom, rich people

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

Kip has a bad feeling about all of this.

It doesn't matter that he barely knows Shane, or that he doesn't know Eva at all. The whole thing feels wrong, like stepping onto a frozen lake of ice that's already cracking beneath his weight.

He doesn't even have a plan.

Scott had promised to use his connections and that was apparently the extent of the strategy. Kip's role seemed to be: *show up and hope for the best*.

Which would be fine if Kip looked like someone who belonged anywhere near a luxury high-rise in Tribeca

His shoes are seven years old. One toe has a hole so big it's practically a ventilation system, badly stitched together by Kip himself. There is absolutely no universe in which a doorman takes one look at him and thinks, *Yes, this man clearly lives here*.

Especially not in a building overlooking Central Park.

Kip imagines himself walking up to the entrance, trying to bluff his way past security with a smile and a wave, pretending he belongs while everything about him screams *caterer who got lost*. God, what if he ran into someone who he had served at a catering gig? And they totally knew he didn't belong?

He swallows hard.

This was a terrible plan.

But the worst feeling is that if they don't do this, something bad is going to happen.

And that makes the potential embarrassment feel irrelevant.

Kip decides to try the Tribeca address first.

It's closer than the Central Park place, and despite Scott's objections, he walks. It's only a few blocks from Scott's apartment. The movement helps burn off some of the nervous energy buzzing under his skin.

Halfway there, his phone vibrates in his hand. He glances at it.

Unknown number: hi is this kip?

Kip frowns, slowing his pace, but types back anyway.

Kip: yes

A few seconds pass.

Unknown number: this is rose, shane's friend. i got your number from scott

Kip nearly trips over a crack in the sidewalk.

Rose- as in *Rose Landry*? The Rose Landry? He's seen her in tabloids at the grocery store checkout, glossy photos of her and Shane caught mid-laugh or mid-argument, depending on the headline. He hadn't realized they were close enough for *this*.

He swallows and types.

Kip: hi rose

His phone buzzes immediately.

Rose (NEW CONTACT ADDED): are you on the way to eva's?

Kip: yes rn. trying tribeca first

Rose: tell the doorman you're rose landry's PA

Rose: he'll let you in

Kip stops dead on the sidewalk. It wouldn't be that easy. Could it?

Kip: really????

Rose: yeah. unfortunately not the first time i've had to send someone to her place

Kip stares at the screen.

Unfortunately is doing a lot of work in that sentence, and he doesn't like what it implies. But right now he's too focused on the immediate problem to unpack it.

He exhales, nodding to himself as if Rose can see it.

Kip: ok. i'll update you soon

Kip slips his phone back into his pocket. A few minutes later, he's standing in front of the building.

It's a massive high-rise, all floor-to-ceiling windows and polished stone, gleaming so brightly he has to squint against the glare. It looks less like a place people live and more like somewhere important things happen. Like a building on Wall Street.

He hesitates at the bottom of the steps, chewing on his lower lip, then steels himself and jogs up to the entrance.

There's already a doorman posted out front, but he barely glances at Kip before opening the door and letting him through.

The lobby is even more obscene than the exterior. What looks like a crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling, catching the light and throwing it everywhere. The whole place looks designed to say *money* without ever using the word.

Kip approaches the front desk, where a sharply dressed man stands behind a computer.

"Uh, hi. I'm Kip--"

"Ah, Mr. Kip," the man says smoothly, cutting him off. Kip doesn't have the heart to explain that Kip is his *first* name, not his last. "Miss Landry called ahead. You may go straight up. Top floor."

"Oh. Thanks," Kip says, a little dazed.

Is this what being rich and famous does? Or even just working for someone who is? Doors opening and no questions asked?

As Kip turns toward the elevators, the man at the desk leans forward, lowering his voice conspiratorially.

“She’s in a bad mood.”

Kip winces.

“Oh,” he says weakly. “Great.”

Nodding sympathetically, the man waves Kip past the security desk toward the elevators.

Kip steps inside and presses the highest number he sees- 32. The doors slide shut. Mercifully, there’s no elevator music. If there were, he might actually start laughing from the nerves.

The ride up feels too fast and not fast enough all at once.

When the doors open, Kip finds himself staring down a short hallway painted gold, the lighting soft and expensive. There are no other doors. Just one, waiting at the far end. It feels like a horror movie.

Well. That makes it easy, at least.

He walks toward it slowly. A strange uncertainty creeps in. Did he just... knock? Walk in? Call out? Eva was supposed to be home, but would she even answer the door for him?

He's halfway through debating his options when a sharp, sudden sound cuts through the air.

Kip freezes.

It's loud enough to make his blood go cold. A heavy thud, followed by muffled noise. Voices, maybe. Something being knocked over.

His stomach drops.

These apartments are the kind built to shut out the city entirely. If he can hear *this* through them-

Something is very wrong. He rushes up to the door, giving up on walking.

When Kip was fourteen, his dad had signed him up for one of those *Safe in the City* classes, the kind taught by men with military haircuts. He'd learned how to vault a bar without catching his hip and how to tell which footsteps in an alley belonged to you and which didn't. During that class what drilled into him until his legs shook was how to kick in a door.

You didn't hesitate. You didn't think. You aimed for the lock, planted your heel, and trusted your body to remember what your brain didn't have time to.

Kip's heart is hammering now, loud enough that he's sure it could be heard through the walls. The muffled sound comes again and his stomach drops.

He steps back, pivots his weight, and kicks.

The door pops open.

It doesn't explode into splinters like in the movies. It gives way at the weakest point, right by the lock. Kip hadn't expected it to open on the first try. Expensive apartment, shitty door. Never change, New York landlords.

The sudden lack of resistance sends him stumbling forward. He trips over the threshold and barely catches himself before pitching face-first into the apartment. When he gathers himself, his jaw drops.

The place is massive. It's got the same floor-to-ceiling windows like the outside and vaulted ceilings above a sweeping staircase along the far wall. Right by the entrance is an open-plan kitchen. A long island stretches across the space.

Shane is on one side of the island counter.

There's blood on his eyebrow again, dark and sluggish where the scab has split open. He's breathing hard, chest heaving like he's just played a game. His hands are braced on the edge of the counter, his whole body angled like he's ready to bolt at the slightest opening.

On the floor beside him lie the shattered remains of a bar stool. It's a dark oak wood, and it's splintered, probably beyond repair. On the other side of the island is Eva.

And she's holding a knife.

Chapter End Notes

oop run bitch

next chapter is gonna be a long one. I promise.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

yay new chapter! I hope you guys like this one. I, once again, played with another backstory in this fic. Rose's family is a less wholesome.

also thank you to lorarawr who has pointed out that Central Park and Manhattan are like the same thing. I am very sorry. I am from Florida. I would be upset if someone said they had an apartment in Little Havanna and in Miami. lol.

I've changed the location of Eva's apartment to Tribeca. Please for the love of god tell me it makes more sense. I'm crashing out over it.

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

Rose Landry knows exactly three things for certain.

One: she was always going to be an actress.

Two: she's allergic to peanuts.

Three: Eva Loren is a horrible person.

Number one.

Her mother had her acting practically from birth. Literally. Rose was only a few weeks old when she booked her first role as a kidnapped baby on *Law & Order*. Rose loves her mother. She really does. But her mother was a failed actress, and Rose was going to be one. Especially if mother had anything to say about it.

And she did.

Rose was her mother's only daughter after a horde of boys. The do-over. The second chance. The proof that it *could* work this time.

There were benefits, of course. Rose never had to worry about money. She genuinely loves acting, even if some of the roles she's taken have been... questionable. Acting has introduced her to fascinating people and opened doors she never could have imagined. She shook hands with the President last year.

Still, there's a quiet frustration that lingers since she never got a choice. Not since when she booked her first movie role at age eight as, of course, someone who gets kidnapped.

Rose had been a pushover as a kid. As the only girl, desperate to keep her mother happy. She never even went to regular school. Her education was just a revolving door of tutors who worked around her filming schedule. She never went to prom, despite starring in three different prom movies. Never got to be a normal teenager at all.

She was always going to act. That was her life.

Just like her brothers were always going to play hockey.

Number two.

The peanut allergy was discovered the hard way. Rose was three years old, filming a commercial for a peanut butter brand. They made her do take after take, smiling and pretending to eat something she didn't understand. When her throat closed, it terrified everyone on set. Her mother had threatened to sue. Rose doesn't remember ever seeing a doctor before that day, but she remembers seeing several afterward.

She was lucky. Very lucky.

Her mother lived through Rose's acting career, not her medical issues. Otherwise, things could have been worse.

And then there's number three.

Eva.

Rose has met plenty of interesting people in her career, yes, but she's also met horrible ones. Abusive, demanding directors. Creepy producers who pushed her into scenes she didn't want to do. The craft services guy who stared just a little too long, a little too often.

Rose learned early how to recognize that kind of person.

And Eva Loren fits the pattern perfectly.

They met when they were both thirteen, on the set of a tween drama pilot that never should have seen the light of day. Rose had been excited, genuinely excited, to meet a girl her own age who she wasn't related to. Someone who might understand what it was like to grow up under stage lights.

That hope died almost immediately.

Just before the table read, they were introduced. Eva took one look at Rose, wrinkled her nose, and turned away.

That was when Rose knew Eva wasn't a good person.

Unfortunately, knowing that didn't mean she got to avoid her.

Over the next few years, their paths kept crossing. That failed pilot somehow turned into a full teen series. Eva and Rose played cousins adopted by their quirky uncle in a small town where strange and unusual things happened. Then came a couple of blockbuster movies. A few more shows. An audio drama. Again and again, they ended up in the same orbit.

Every time Rose tried to be friendly, when she tried to say hello or to talk about something that wasn't in the script, Eva shut her down with a perfectly calibrated expression that made

Rose feel foolish for even trying.

On set, Eva was professional. She hit her marks. She said her lines. She smiled for the cameras.

Backstage? That was another story.

In dressing rooms, trailers, even the cars that shuttled them between hotels and sets, Eva was unbearable. Her demands grew more ridiculous by the year: a dozen white roses, replaced daily. Sodas chilled to exactly twenty degrees. Coffee flown in from Colombia that cost fifty dollars an ounce and absolutely could *not* be reheated.

And when she didn't get what she wanted, she made sure everyone knew it.

Eva burned through seven executive assistants before they even turned eighteen. Rose had two in that same time span, and only because her first retired to Florida. Rose still got Christmas cards from her.

So yes, Eva Loren was a horrible person.

A horrible person who also happened to be an incredible actress.

Rose had seen the photos on Twitter, the gifs on Tumblr. She's seen the pictures of Eva smiling at fans and visiting children in hospitals. Fan videos of people gushing about how kind and generous and warm she was. Rose knew better. Eva had people buried under NDAs, and the ones who weren't were too scared to say anything at all.

Which was why Rose felt sick the first time she saw Eva talking to Shane Hollander at that party.

Eva was smiling that smile. The one she used when she wanted something.

Rose had tried to intervene by stepping in. It didn't work.

She did manage to get to know Shane afterward, though, and for that she was grateful. He was wonderful. A little dorky, perhaps but impressively polite for a professional athlete. He always seemed slightly lost, like he'd been dropped somewhere without a map.

Rose wasn't formally educated (she had her GED and that was about it) but she was smart. Years of acting had taught her how to read people and Shane Hollander was no different. A crinkled nose and an upturned smile meant Shane was relaxed. The slightest squint in his eyes meant he was thinking hard about something.

And the way his whole face softened? It meant he was in love.

Shane was not in love with Eva.

That much was obvious.

What *was* interesting, though, was the night Rose and Shane ended up watching a hockey game together at a sports bar. His eyes did that little thing- just barely- every time Ilya Rozanov appeared on the screen.

Okay. New information for her but not entirely surprising.

Rose knew sexuality wasn't rigid. In the entertainment industry, queerness wasn't exactly rare. She knew it wasn't a choice first hand. After all, she'd happily stop being attracted to men in a heartbeat if it worked that way.

So Shane might be bi. Or gay. Or some kind of queer. Not a big deal.

But there had been something about the way he looked at the screen when that particular hockey player was on it that stuck with her. It wasn't *just* an attraction. It was something more than a run of the mill '*hey, he's hot*'.

"Thank you, Miss Landry," the production assistant says, guiding her off the stage.

“Thank *you*, Kim. That was fun,” Rose replies easily as she’s ushered toward the green room.

It really had been. She’d filmed a short gimmick segment for *Last Week Tonight*, which was exactly the kind of work she liked. It was pre-recorded and efficient, and most importantly done early. It meant she had the rest of the afternoon free in whatever city she happened to be in.

Kim holds the green room door open. Rose waits until it clicks shut behind her before dropping her bag onto the couch and digging for her phone.

She’s been itching to call Shane all day.

Every call has gone straight to voicemail since she got off the airplane.

She’s tried Kip, too. Nothing.

It gnaws at her. The name is still a little odd to her- Kip- but Scott had vouched for him. Rose didn’t know Scott personally, and she definitely didn’t know Kip, but Scott Hunter had a reputation for being solid and a good guy. And according to him, Kip was the one who’d found Shane hurt and wandering the streets.

God. What a mess.

Rose exhales, shoving her phone back into her bag as she gathers her things, ready to leave-

When her phone rings.

She freezes just for a moment.

Then she grabs it, heart slamming violently against her ribs.

It's Kip.

She answers immediately.

“Kip? Is Shane alright?”

On the other end of the line, Kip sucks in a sharp, wet breath. It sounds like he's struggling not to break down.

“Rose- ” he chokes. His voice is hoarse and wrecked. He’s been crying.

“Kip?” she presses, dread flooding her chest. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

There’s a pause. A shaky inhale.

“Are you in New York?” he asks, voice strained thin. *“Can you- can you come to the hospital? Please?”*

Her heart drops straight into her stomach.

“Why?” she breathes.

Another pause. Longer this time. Like he’s forcing the words out past something stuck in his throat.

“I think...” Kip swallows hard. *“I think she may have killed him.”*

Chapter End Notes

zoo-wee-mama!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

ahaha I'm sorry guys I know it's been one cliff hanger after the other. I promise it's gonna be better from now on! It's gonna get really mushy and emotional. You're gonna love it I promise.

Kept my promise and uploaded at 12am my time! :)

Please enjoy this chapter! I just adore writing Rose. She and Kip are gonna be besties. Rose and Shane go to sports bars and the movies and stuff. Rose and Kip do damage with Scott's credit card on Rodeo Drive.

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

Rose arrives at the hospital entrance and doesn't even wait for the car to come to a full stop before she's flying out of the backseat, ignoring the driver's sharp shout of alarm.

At least she'd had the sense to throw on the classic *celebrity disguise*: an oversized hoodie, baseball cap, and dark sunglasses pulled low over her face.

She barrels toward the ER doors. They slide open automatically, blasting her with cool, antiseptic air. Rose rushes straight to the counter, cutting the line without a second thought.

"I need to see-" She stops herself, suddenly aware of how loud she sounds. She lowers her voice, forces it steadier. "-Shane Hollander."

The woman behind the counter gives her a skeptical look, one eyebrow lifting.

“Are you family?”

Rose opens her mouth to argue. To lie and to say she’s his emergency contact, but before she can get a word out, she hears-

“Rose?”

The voice is unsure. Fragile.

She turns.

A man is standing up from one of the hard plastic chairs lining the wall. His shirt is red- no, white, she realizes a second too late. It's stained dark with dried, tacky blood. There's a bandage across his face, another wrapped tightly around one arm. The hem of his shirt is torn.

He looks wrecked.

He has the saddest eyes Rose has ever seen.

“Kip?” she breathes.

He nods, and tears immediately spill over, tracking down his face. Rose doesn’t hesitate. She abandons the counter entirely and crosses the room in seconds.

They’ve never met. They’ve barely spoken.

It doesn’t matter.

The moment she reaches him, they collide into each other. Rose wraps her arms around him in a fierce, crushing hug, pulling him in tight. Screw the blood smearing across her hoodie. Kip clings to her like a lifeline, shaking against her chest as if they’ve known each other for years.

Right now, it feels like they have.

For a long moment, neither of them says a word. They just stand there, breathing, Kip trembling slightly in her arms.

Rose pulls back first, but she keeps her hands on his shoulders, searching his face, trying to take in the damage.

“What happened?” she asks softly. “Is he alive?” He's alive?”

Her voice wobbles. She's crying now too. Thick, fat tears run down her face.

Kip swallows hard, then reaches for her hand and leads her toward the side of the ER, away from the bulk of the waiting crowd.

“I- he was. God, Rose. It was awful,” Kip says. “I went just like you said- to Tribeca. She had a knife. Shane tried to talk her down, he really did, but she just... went ballistic. Screaming, throwing things-” His voice catches, breaks apart in his throat.

“I don't- I d-don't know.” He drags in a shaking breath. “Then she stabbed him.”

Oh God.

This—*this* is exactly what Rose had been afraid of. Of things going too far. Of Eva deciding that if there was something she couldn't have, she'd destroy it just to make sure no one else could either.

The world goes quiet.

Rose can see Kip's mouth moving, see the tremor in his lips, but no sound reaches her. It's like someone has hit mute on the universe. Her ears ring. Her vision tunnels.

Then all at once the noise slams back into her- voices and movement- like a bomb going off inside her head. A flashbang.

She jerks back instinctively and blinks hard.

“What,” she whispers, then louder, “what did you say?”

Kip licks his lips, eyes glassy.

“She stabbed him. In the stomach.” His voice is flat now, hollow. “His intestines were... out.”

Rose's knees nearly buckle.

“I tackled her,” he continues, like he’s reciting facts instead of reliving a fucking nightmare. “She sliced me.” He lifts his shirt slightly, just enough for Rose to see the edge of fresh bandages wrapped around his side. Then he lets the fabric fall back into place.

“And then she just-” He shakes his head slowly. “She just left. Like it was over. Like nothing happened. She just got up and walked out.”

Rose presses a hand over her mouth.

“I called for help,” Kip says. “They brought us here in an ambulance, but they said they were too full to keep me back there. They needed the bed space.” He swallows. “I just need stitches. They took him straight into surgery. He looked dead. I don't know.”

“Oh my God,” Rose breathes.

Her hands are shaking as she reaches into her pocket and pulls out her phone. She dials Eva’s number without thinking.

It rings. Once. Twice. Three times.

On the fourth ring, Eva answers.

“‘Ello?” Eva slurs.

Kip’s eyes go wide. *Is that her?* he mouths silently.

Rose nods, her jaw clenched so tight it hurts.

“Eva,” Rose snaps, every ounce of fury she’s holding back sharpening her voice. “Where are you?”

“No ‘where,” Eva says vaguely.

God. She’s drunk. Completely plastered. How someone so intoxicated could cause this much damage, this much destruction, Rose will never understand.

“What did you do?” Rose demands.

There’s a click.

The line goes dead.

Rose stares at her phone for half a second, then tries to call back. Straight to voicemail.

“She blocked me,” Rose says hoarsely.

Kip lets out a broken sound somewhere between a sob and a laugh.

How *dare* she? After all of this. After what she did to him!

Her fingers curl tight around her phone.

Rose calls her manager next. Randi picks up on the first ring. With all the money she’s made off Rose’s career, she’d better.

“*Rose! How’s it going?*” Randi chirps.

“Hi, Randi. I need to know where Eva is.”

There’s a pause of audible confusion on the other end of the line.

“Don’t you have her number?”

“I need her location. Something happened, and I need to call the police.”

Silence again. Then Randi sighs.

“Are you sure?”

They’ve been here before. When Eva keyed Rose’s car at age sixteen, right after she’d passed her driver’s test. When she overdosed on coke at Rose’s eighteen birthday party. When she slapped Rose that one time when they were twenty. Every time, Rose had been talked out of filing a report. Of calling the police. Of doing anything permanent.

“Randi,” Rose says, her voice flat, “if you don’t get Eva’s location to me- or give it to the police yourself- I will fire you. And I swear to God, you will never work in Hollywood again.”

Normally, Rose would feel a flicker of guilt about using her fame and connections to intimidate someone.

She doesn't feel it now.

"I'll call Eva's people," Randi confirms.

Rose hangs up.

Only then does she realize she's still holding Kip's hand. She hasn't let go once since he dragged her to the side of the room.

Kip is staring at her with those wide, sad eyes. He looks a little off.

"Wow."

"You okay?" Rose asks, studying his face. Is Kip always this pale?

“I dunno,” Kip mumbles.

He’s shaking now. Really shaking. Trembling.

“I w-was holding his intestines in with my hands,” Kip says, voice breaking, “and he was just apologizing to me over and over. He didn’t even care that he was going to die. He just kept s-s aying sorry. Like he didn’t c-care he was g-gonna die.”

“He’s not dy- *shit!*”

Kip’s knees give out. He pitches forward, and Rose barely catches him as he goes limp, sagging against her chest.

“Little help here!” she yells out loud.

There’s a burst of commotion she can’t see and a nurse in purple scrubs rush up and helps Rose guide Kip down to the ER floor before she can drop him.

The nurse, a stern looking woman with tired eyes, checks Kip’s pulse with her fingers. He’s awake, but shaking hard now. His eyes are darting- confused, glassy.

“What happened?” the nurse asks Rose as they kneel over him.

“He was attacked with a knife,” Rose says, her voice breaking. She’s crying now- sobbing, almost. “They brought him here in an ambulance, but they said they needed the-”

“The bed. You’ve got to be- ” The nurse glances over her shoulder and shouts something in Spanish.

A stretcher comes from nowhere, one of the hospital ones, not an ambulance one.

There is a flurry of people as they transfer Kip onto the stretcher quickly. Someone snaps gloves on. Someone else is already wheeling him backward, shouting something Rose can’t comprehend.

“Hey- hey,” Rose says, walking with them, fingers clutched in the thin fabric of his sleeve. “Kip. Kip, look at me.”

His eyes find her, unfocused and terrified.

“I didn’t let go,” he whispers. “I didn’t. I swear I didn’t.”

“I know,” Rose says immediately. “I know. You did everything right.”

The words barely land. His breathing goes shallow, quick little gasps. His chest is fluttering like it can't decide what rhythm to keep. Is he having a panic attack? Did he get hurt worse and it was just the adrenaline keeping him alive?

“He's in shock,” the nurse who had helped her says. “Sir, can you tell me your name?”

“Kip,” he says, too soft.

“Kip, where are you right now?”

He blinks. “Hospital.”

“Good. Stay with me.”

They disappear through the ER doors. Rose tries to follow and is stopped short by a raised hand of another nurse. A different one.

“Family only.”

“I’m- ” Rose starts, then stops. She doesn’t know what she is at this point. A friend? A stranger? A sister? She swallows. “I’m with him.”

The nurse hesitates, then nods her through. She probably thinks they’re dating or something. The thought is so funny Rose almost laughs. They’re strangers.

Inside, everything is just noise and motion. Curtains yanked aside loudly. Machines chirp all around, beeping and binging. There are orders being barked and medical terms she doesn’t understand. Kip is transferred again, this time onto a bed. They’ve got an IV already going in.

He reaches for her blindly. Rose catches his hand before he can miss.

“I can still feel it,” he says. “In my hands.”

“That makes sense,” she says, even though it makes her stomach twist. “It’ll fade.”

He shakes his head, tears sliding sideways into his hair. “He kept saying sorry.”

Rose leans down, close enough that he can hear her over the chaos.

“You saved him.”

Kip squeezes her hand weakly, like he’s afraid if he lets go she’ll disappear.

Then a nurse gently pulls them apart and Rose is being ushered away from Kip and the bed and she’s desperate- she needs to get back to him. The curtain is pulled closed between them.

And Rose is left standing there alone.

Alone.

Chapter End Notes

SIKE BITCH

see ya in 24 hours

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

okay i'm sorry. Promise.

This is where we're getting into the very emotional hurt/comfort part.

Should Kip and Scott have gotten involved? Maybe. Maybe not. It's hard to deal when you have someone who you know in a place like this. Of course this is a work of fiction. In real life, lots of people have different reactions. Some people may want to try and swoop in and save the day. Others may only want to hang around their loved one, but not with their partner around. Some people may end up distancing themselves because they've tried to bring it up so many times it just seems pointless.

People are involved in abusive relationships for all kinds of reasons. Maybe it's low self esteem, or love (or what they think of love). Maybe it was what they were used to growing up or a trauma response. It's different for everyone. And again, this is a work of fiction written very dramatically and over-the-top for a reason. It shouldn't be used as a reference or handbook, nor should you take it as such.

The only real advice I can truly give is that if you or someone you know is involved in an abusive relationship is to not seek couple's counseling. Abuse is not something that can be fixed. When it comes down to it, abuse is about control and power, and things like couple's therapy is more focused on healing the relationship. That is impossible when there is an imbalance of power.

If the way I am writing this fic isn't your cup of tea, I would advise you to search elsewhere. There are many wonderful fics on this site that are more true to form for abuse, and there are many nonfiction books and resources out there. Help is out there. All you need to do is seek it out.

For resources, call
1.800.799.SAFE (7233)

or you can visit <https://www.thehotline.org/>

Please enjoy!

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

In all his years of playing, Scott will never get used to the crowd.

Once he's on the ice, it's easy and almost automatic at this point, to block everyone out. The rink narrows. The noise dulls. There's just the puck, the boards, the rhythm of skating.

But on the sidelines, or stuck in the penalty box, it hits him all at once. Yes, he's a professional hockey player. Yes, there are thousands of people watching him right now. If he puked, or wiped out spectacularly, or did anything even a little embarrassing, it'd be on ESPN SportsCenter in minutes. He always tries to be careful.

So he doesn't flinch when Jalo checks the guy who's been riding Scott all shift straight into the boards. They're tied 2-2 against Carolina and he needs to focus.

Scott scoops up the puck and fires.

The goalie flashes a glove, but the puck sails past it and snaps cleanly into the corner.

The goal light burns red.

A few cheers break out but they're mostly drowned by boos. They're not on home ice.

Carter skates past and claps Scott on the back, shouting something lost in the noise. There are only a few seconds left in the game, so they circle, burn clock, wait it out.

The buzzer sounds.

Scott exhales for the first time in what feels like ages.

He barely has time to straighten before Carter crashes into him, then Jalo, then what feels like the rest of the line. Sticks knock helmets. Someone yells in his ear. Someone else nearly takes his skate out from under him in the pile.

“Atta boy,” Carter says, breathless, laughing. “Jesus, Scotty.”

Scott grins. something loose cracking open in his chest. His heart is still hammering, adrenaline buzzing in his fingertips. He lets himself get shoved toward the visitor’s locker room with the rest of them.

“Great game out there, boy.” Harv congratulates them once they get in. He looks directly at Scott when he says it and his teammates hoot and holler. He starts to talk about the plays of the game as Scott digs through his gearbag to check his phone.

He’d been thinking about Kip all game. At first he;d been a little off center and distracted, his mind too full of worries to focus. He knew that Kip was a strong, capable man and he could handle anything Shane threw his way. But still. There’s nothing from Kip, but there is a text from Rose.

Rose: call me.

The adrenaline drains out of Scott all at once, leaving something cold and hollow behind it. He's on his feet before he fully registers the decision. He's barely gotten his skates off. He's got no shoes, just his socks, as he strides across the locker-room floor. He doesn't care that his feet soak through with meltwater and tracked-in ice.

He ignores the looks his teammates give him and slips into the hallway.

It smells like sweat and dirty water.

He calls Rose. She picks up after what feels like forever.

"Scott," she says immediately. "I need you not to freak out when I tell you something. Can you do that?"

"Why?" he asks, dread pooling in his stomach.

“Listen,” Rose says. “I know you’re friends with Kip. And you’re the only person I know who really knows him. Do you have his parents’ contact information?”

“Yes,” Scott says slowly. This doesn’t sound good. At all. “What’s going on?”

“Something happened. Kip’s in the hospital.”

It feels like taking a slapshot straight to the chest. All the air leaves him at once.

Rose keeps talking.

“Apparently Kip walked in on Eva threatening Shane with a knife. Things got out of hand. Shane was stabbed in the stomach, and Kip got cut up trying to stop it. Don’t freak out.”

“I’m not,” Scott says, even though he very much is. He can’t seem to pull in a full breath.

“They were both brought in by ambulance. Shane’s in surgery. They sent Kip to the waiting room after patching him up, but it was worse than they thought. He had an adrenaline crash. He needed stitches but he’s almost done now. I don’t know yet if they’re admitting him.”

“Okay,” Scott says numbly.

“Do you have his parents’ numbers?”

“I can text you his dad’s,” Scott says. His brain feels unplugged. His thoughts refuse to line up into anything usable.

“Okay. Hold on- I think they’re finished.”

There’s movement on Rose’s end of the line. Fabric rustling. A curtain swishing. Her voice drifts away, muffled.

“Scott?” she says. *“You still there?”*

“Yes.”

“Kip’s right here. He’s a little loopy from whatever they gave him. Do you want to talk to him?”

“Yes.”

More movement. A faint crackle. Then-

“Scott?”

That’s what almost breaks him. Emotion thickens in his throat, heavy and sudden.

“Hey, baby,” he whispers. “How are you feeling?”

“Sleepy,” Kip says. *“I miss you.”*

“I miss you too.”

“How was your game?” Kip’s words are soft, tilted and a little slurred. It’s almost like he sound after they’ve been having sex and he’s strung out and exhausted.

“We won.”

“Oh. Good,” Kip murmurs. “Sorry I missed it.”

“It’s okay,” Scott says quickly. “It’s okay.”

“I held his intestines together,” Kip adds, faint and earnest.

“Kip, honey-” Rose’s voice cuts in, gentle. There’s movement again, and the phone changes hands.

“Sorry,” Rose says. *“Don’t freak out. Kip’s okay. He’s safe. It was just really scary. I’ll stay with him, alright? He’s going to take a nap.”*

“I’m on my way.”

“But-,”

“I’ll be there,” Scott says. “Thank you, Rose.”

He hangs up.

The world snaps into that strange, distant clarity he remembers too well. It's the same as the numb, functional fog from when his parents died. He moves without thinking, slipping back into the locker room, quiet now.

Something must be written on his face, because Huff stands up from his stall.

"Scott?"

"I need to go," Scott says, already tearing at his gear.

He's usually meticulous after games. He likes to make sure that everything is folded and in its place. Tonight he doesn't care. His pads shoved into the bag and his jersey twisted and jammed down. The team will take care of the gear, so he starts to shove stuff from his stall into the small bag he uses for traveling.

"Uh, Scotty?" Huff tries again.

"I said I need to go," Scott snaps, tight and flat.

“Go where?”

Scott doesn't look up.

“New York.”

“New York?” Huff echoes, half a joke, half not. They'd just come from New York that morning on a red-eye flight to Raleigh. They were due at least another night here before flying to New Jersey for their next game.

Scott yanks his hoodie over his head, hands shaking just enough to make the zipper snag. He forces it up anyway. He grabs his bag and flees out the door to confusion. He turns a corner quickly and almost plows into someone. He manages at the last second to avoid it. When he looks up he sees it's Quinn, the goalie coach.

“Whoah there.” Quinn says, putting an arm out to stop Scott. “What's going on?”

Scott likes Quinn okay, but he doesn't interact with him much. The goalie coach spends most of his time with Bennett. He's got to be around his 50's and walks with a permanent limp due to an ankle injury he'd gotten back in his hockey days.

“I need to leave. Family emergency.” Scott says. His mouth tastes like copper. Then they both stare at each other. Scott doesn’t have any family. Both his parents are dead. No siblings. No cousins or aunts or uncles or grandparents.

“Personal emergency.” he amends. “I need to go back to New York.”

“We need you for media for the post game,” Quinn says automatically. “You can’t just- ”

“You can’t stop me, Quinn. You have a hip replacement. I can run faster than you.”

“Low blow.” Quinn grumbles, but he gets a good look at Scott and studies him for a long second. Whatever he sees there is enough. He nods once.

“Go,” he says. “We’ll handle it.”

Relief hits Scott so hard it almost knocks him over. He jerks his bag shut and slings it over his shoulder.

The hallway feels longer this time from when he’d called Rose. It feels too bright. He walks fast, then faster, before breaking into a jog. His phone is already out, fingers moving on muscle memory.

Taxi. Airport. Now.

Outside, the cold air bites through his hoodie. It helps. He paces as he waits, bag heavy against his hip, leg bouncing uncontrollably.

His phone buzzes.

Rose: he's sleeping. vitals are good.

Scott closes his eyes and lets his forehead rest briefly against the glass of the arena doors. Just a second. Just enough to breathe.

"I'm coming," he says to no one.

The taxi pulls up. Scott throws the door open and climbs in.

"Airport," he says. "Please." The driver looks a little miffed at the short tone, but is appeased when Scott pulls out a wad of cash.

The car lurches forward, city lights streaking past the window, and Scott presses his thumb into the screen of his phone like he can somehow shorten the distance between them by force alone.

New York feels impossibly far away.

When he lands in New York, the wind cuts straight through him.

Scott only has his stupid hoodie and the cold bites hard as he hustles out of the terminal and flags down a cab. The airport taxis are notoriously expensive, all flat rates and tourist markups, but he doesn't hesitate. He throws himself into the back seat and rattles off the hospital's address.

The driver takes one look at him in the rearview mirror- rumped and breathing too fast- and then recognizes the destination.

“Yeah,” the cabbie says, already pulling away from the curb.

The car surges forward, weaving into traffic, and Scott braces himself against the seat as the city blurs past. The heater kicks on, blasting stale warmth that makes his skin prickle.

He presses his hands together between his knees, trying to keep them from shaking.

The cab hits a pothole and Scott lurches, knocking his knee into the divider. He barely notices.

The city rushes by in streaks of light and shadow. Bridges and scaffolding and blocks he doesn't recognize. The driver takes turns aggressively, horn blaring, like the street itself is something to fight through.

Scott keeps checking his phone even though there's nothing new. No missed calls. No texts. He opens Rose's last message again, rereads it like the words might change.

Rose: he's sleeping. vitals are good.

He presses his thumb hard into the screen until it hurts. He could text her again, but what if that woke Kip up? What if he texted her again and he got the worst news of his life?

The heater keeps blasting. Sweat breaks out under his hoodie despite the cold still clinging to his bones. He pushes his sleeves up, rubs his hands together, then stills them by gripping the strap of his bag.

Don't spiral, he tells himself. You're here. You're doing something.

The cabbie glances back at him again. "You alright, man?"

"Yeah," Scott says automatically. His voice sounds wrong to his own ears. It's just a little too thin and tight. "Just- hospital."

"Mm." The driver nods and hits the gas when the light turns yellow.

They slow near the ER entrance, the red EMERGENCY sign glowing harsh in the dark. Scott leans forward before the cab has fully stopped, already digging for his wallet.

"How much-"

"Don't worry about it," the cabbie says, waving him off as he pulls to the curb. "Go."

Scott hesitates for half a second, then shoves cash through the partition anyway and scrambles out.

The wind hits him again, sharp and relentless. He slams the door shut and takes off toward the entrance at a near run, heart hammering, breath burning in his chest.

He's about to go in before he stills and takes a second to throw his hood up over his head. He probably wouldn't be recognized if he were still in Raleigh, but he would be here.

It's quieter than he'd expected. It's not calm, exactly, but not the chaos he'd braced for, especially since they were in New York City. There are a few people slumped in plastic chairs. A TV murmurs in the corner. The air smells like disinfectant and burnt coffee.

There's a short line at the counter. Scott forces himself to stand still, to breathe, even though every second feels like a mistake. When it's finally his turn, he leans in close, voice low.

"I'm here to see someone. Kip Grady."

The woman behind the desk glances up from her screen. When she really looks at him, both her eyebrows lift in quick recognition before she schools her expression back into neutral.

"Okay," she says. "May I see your ID?"

Scott hands it over. She scans it, types quickly, then prints a visitor sticker. There's no name on it, just a barcode and his photo.

She slides it across the counter.

"Through the back, Mr. Hunter," she says, and hits a button.

The hallway beyond the desk is narrower. It opens to a wider room. Curtains line the walls in uneven intervals, some pulled tight, others half-open.

Scott slows despite himself, eyes darting from bed to bed. He scans wrists for name bands, faces for familiar lines. Every shape under a blanket makes his chest tighten.

Kip, he thinks. *Please*.

A nurse passes him, clipboard tucked to her chest. "Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Kip Grady," Scott says, the words coming out rough. "He was brought in earlier." "He had-" He stops, swallows. "He was hurt."

The nurse checks her list, then gestures down the hall. "Curtain twelve."

Scott nods, mutters a thank-you, and moves faster now.

Curtain twelve is pulled most of the way closed. A pair of socked feet stick out from under the edge of the bed, toes pointed slightly inward in a way Scott knows instantly. His breath catches.

He hesitates for half a heartbeat, hand hovering.

Then he pulls the curtain aside.

The first person he sees is Rose.

She's sitting in one of the hard plastic chairs- *sitting* being generous. She's slumped forward, half-doing, one hand loose in her lap and the other-

-holding Kip's.

Kip is propped up against pillows, hair a mess, face pale but unmistakably himself. A square bandage sits on his cheek. An IV snakes into the back of his hand. He's in a short-sleeved hospital gown, and Scott can see a tightly wrapped white bandage around Kip's right forearm. There's no blood to be seen.

The light in their little corner is muted, but not dimmed.

Scott's movement stirs Rose. She blinks awake, squinting against the light.

"Scott?" she mumbles.

She rubs her eyes with her free hand, the other never letting go of Kip's. She's in an oversized hoodie and a baseball cap pulled low. It's classic celebrity camouflage.

"Hi," Scott says softly. He lets the curtain fall closed behind him and tugs his hood down.

Rose blinks herself fully awake.

"When did you get here?"

“I just landed.”

Rose exhales, a long, tired sound, and finally lets her head fall back against the wall.

“Good,” she says quietly. “He’s been asking for you.”

Scott’s gaze snaps back to Kip.

As if on cue, Kip stirs. His fingers twitch where they’re tangled with Rose’s, then curl weakly, like he’s searching for something. His brow furrows, a soft, confused sound slipping from his throat.

“Kip,” Scott whispers, already moving closer. He stops just short of the bed, like he’s afraid he’ll jostle him just by existing.

Rose notices and carefully shifts, easing out of the chair. She keeps her voice low. “He got a little freaked out and they had to give him some sedation. It’s alright. He’s just... coming in and out.”

“Thank you,” Scott says. The words feel inadequate, but they’re all he’s got.

She squeezes Kip's hand once before gently placing it back on the bed and standing. "I called his dad. He's on a business trip but should be back in town in two days." she glances from Kip to Scott.

'I'll grab a coffee,' she murmurs. "I'll be right outside."

Scott nods. Rose slips past him and ducks through the curtain, giving them the space.

The room feels different without her. Maybe a little smaller.

Scott steps up to the bed and carefully takes Kip's hand in his. It's warm. Solid. Real.

Kip's eyes flutter open.

For a second, there's nothing there but fog.

Then he focuses.

“Scott?” he whispers, like he’s afraid saying it too loudly might make him disappear.

“I’m here,” Scott says immediately. “I’ve got you.”

Kip’s face crumples, relief washing over him so fast it’s almost painful to watch.

“You came.”

“Of course I did.” Scott presses Kip’s hand gently to his chest. “There was never a question.”

Kip exhales shakily. “Okay,” he murmurs, eyelids already drooping. “Okay.”

Scott stays right there, thumb brushing slow, steady circles over Kip’s knuckles. With his other hand, he runs his fingers through Kip’s hair, careful around the bandage on his cheek. For a moment, he just stands there, holding on. Then his back twinges and he remembers he’s just played professional hockey and then spent two hours crammed into a middle seat. He pulls his hand away reluctantly and eases himself into the chair Rose had been using.

“How are you feeling?” he asks softly.

Kip's eyes stay closed. "Dizzy."

"That tracks," Scott says. "You can go back to sleep if you want."

Kip hums, barely audible, the sound vibrating faintly through their joined hands. His grip tightens for half a second, like he's making sure Scott's still there.

"Is Shane okay?" Kip asks.

Scott stills. He doesn't know, but he's not sure Kip needs to hear that right now.

"He's getting the best care."

Kip nods faintly, eyes still closed. His brow creases anyway, guilt leaking through the fog.

"I should've-" he starts.

"Hey." Scott leans forward, gentle but firm, thumb pressing into Kip's knuckles. "No."

Kip goes quiet.

“You did what you could,” Scott says. He doesn’t know anything other than the fact that Kip got in between Eva and Shane, but he has no doubt. “You did more than anyone should ever have to. You hear me?”

There’s a long pause. The monitors keep up their steady, reassuring rhythm.

“ I didn’t think,” Kip murmurs. “I just- he was bleeding.”

“I know.” Scott’s voice drops. “I’m proud of you.”

Kip swallows. His breathing evens out a little, the frantic edge smoothing away.

“I didn’t want him to die,” he says, small and raw.

Scott reaches out again, fingers back in Kip’s hair, grounding them both. “And because of you, he - he won’t.”

Kip exhales, deeper this time.

“Okay,” he whispers like a mantra. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Scott finds himself saying.

He lifts Kip’s hand and presses a kiss to his knuckles. Kip shifts once, then goes still, sinking fully into sleep.

A soft throat-clearing comes from behind the curtain. Scott lets go of Kip’s hand, even though it hurts to do it.

Rose waits a beat before pulling the curtain aside and stepping in, then closes it quietly behind her. She’s holding two coffees.

“He’s out,” Scott says under his breath.

She hands him one. The heat seeps into his cold fingers as she takes the chair on the other side of Kip’s bed.

“I called Shane’s parents,” Rose says, her eyes still on Kip. “They’re driving down from Ottawa. His mom said she’d handle the hockey part. Whatever that means.”

“Did they tell you anything?” Scott asks.

Rose shakes her head. “No. Just that he’s still in surgery.”

The word *nightmare* settles heavy in Scott’s chest.

“Thank you,” he says quietly. “For staying with Kip.”

“Of course,” Rose says.

Her gaze flicks from Scott to Kip, her fingers drumming lightly against the lid of her coffee cup.

“You know, Scott... I think you two are really good together.”

Cold fear rushes through him, sharp and immediate. Kip could have died and *still* Scott's first instinct is to panic about being seen with his boyfriend.

The fear curdles into shame just as quickly. He shouldn't be this afraid. Not after tonight. Not when Kip-

"Hey," Rose says gently, misreading his expression. Her eyes widen with concern. "It's okay. I won't say anything, alright? Trust me. I'm very good at not saying anything."

She gives a small, self-deprecating huff of a laugh and shakes her head.

"Seriously."

He thinks about Rose and Shane. And then Shane and-

"Shit."

How could he have forgotten?

“What?” she asks.

“Someone’s got to tell Ilya.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: emotions! my favorite.

smooches your forehead k love you bye

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

new chapter!!! thank you for reading guys!!!! I saw a hockey game with a nice gentleman caller today. very nice butts, all around. 10/10. It was a minor league game but still fun. and we won, yay :)

TW for this chapter: mentions/ references to DV, childhood abuse, recalling childhood abuse. unhealthy coping mechanisms (drinking), Ilya being an asshole as usual

i've gotten some comments that I should up the rating of this to M instead of T. Any thoughts, y'all? I didn't think I was writing anything too mature or explicit....

anyway here we go!

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

Whenever Ilya is in New York, he's usually in one of three places:

the rink for a game, the hotel after, or a bar.

He doesn't have a game to play. Not until the day after next, in New Jersey.

The hotel, nice as it is, holds zero appeal right now. He flew alone, separate from the team with promises of making it to New Jersey on time to play. He's too valuable a player to say 'no' to. In fact, he hadn't asked permission. He'd just done the courtesy of telling his team he'd meet them there. That's one of the perks of being a star player for Boston. Just like how he never has a roommate when they are on the road.

He knows Shane shares a room with Hayden Pike, even though he doesn't have to. Shane could ask for the penthouse every time if he wanted. Still, he insisted on sharing. It made their meetups complicated. Ilya doesn't know why.

Maybe Shane didn't like being alone.

"Damn it," Ilya mutters, staring into his half-empty glass of beer.

He's ended up at some random bar in the city, not one of his usual haunts. His usual spots don't even open until ten p.m. and tend to close at six in the morning. It was no good for an all-day, boozy depression spiral.

It's dark outside now. It definitely hadn't been when he first came in.

The small table he's been camped at all afternoon sits in a dim corner. The bar had been nearly empty for hours, but now, as people get off work, they're trickling in one by one. Jackets are slung over chairs and ties are being loosened. There's the low, tired laughter of the corporate peons starting to fill the space.

Fucking Hollander.

That girlfriend of Shane's isn't good for him. Ilya knows it. Shane knows it. Hell, Shane is crashing in Scott Hunter's apartment- *Scott Hunter* knows it. So does Scott's little 'friend'

Kip.

Ilya is positive that Scott and Kip are dating.

He's always been good at sniffing things like that out. There's a word for it in English. For noticing details.

Perspective?

Perceptive.

Whatever. Fucking English.

Ilya already has to translate everything in his head back and forth all day, every day. He doesn't have the energy to stress about new words on top of it.

It's exhausting, feeling stupid.

Or worse, having people *treat* him like he's stupid.

He got that a lot when he first moved to the States from Russia. Just because he took a few extra seconds to read a coffee menu, people assumed he was an idiot. Like his brain worked slower instead of in two languages at once.

There are very few things he hates more than that.

The bartender, who's been checking on Ilya all afternoon periodically, drifts back over to the table.

He's young and pretty with blond hair and warm eyes.

"Doing alright?" he asks.

"Fine," Ilya grunts, staring into his beer.

The bartender hesitates like he's about to leave, then stops himself at the last second.

"I'm Kyle."

“Ilya.”

Kyle gives him a small, careful smile. “Everything alright?”

“Fine.”

“Right,” Kyle says. “It’s just... most people don’t spend several hours in a bar if everything is fine. Girl trouble? Boy trouble?”

My stupid hockey player is dating a woman who beats him and won’t do anything about it and seems intent on suffering, Ilya thinks.

“Something like that,” he allows through gritted teeth.

“Ah. Gotcha.” Kyle nods. “Need another?”

Ilya probably shouldn’t.

He's been drinking all afternoon, but he's not drunk yet. He could stop now. Go back to the hotel. Buy a bottle at a liquor store later and properly drown his sorrows in private. He doesn't have a game. His flight isn't until late afternoon tomorrow. He could preemptively grab painkillers and Gatorade and just... get drunk.

It wouldn't fix anything.

But maybe it would quiet his head long enough to think.

"Yes," he says finally. "Thank you."

Kyle nods and heads back to the bar.

Ilya stares at the condensation ring his glass has left on the table.

He knows complicated relationships.

The one with his piece-of-shit father, for example.

Ilya had known that the way his father treated his mother wasn't right. And when he'd found his mother dead, that knowledge had calcified into something permanent: bad people, no matter how nice they pretend to be, stay bad.

That was part of why Ilya had worked so hard at hockey.

The faster he became a star, the faster he could get the hell away from his father.

And his brother.

People from back home always assumed his brother was just another victim of their father, the same way Ilya had been. Older and angrier. They liked that story better. It made things simpler.

But Ilya knew better.

His brother had learned early how to survive by becoming a smaller, meaner version of their father. He'd learned when to duck, when to flatter, and when to shift the blame onto Ilya so the heat would land somewhere else. He'd learned how to hit without leaving marks. How to smile afterward like nothing had happened.

Ilya had been eight and his brother twelve the first time his brother locked him out on the balcony in the winter. Alexei told him it was a game. Told him to stop being a baby when he cried. Their father had laughed when he finally let him back in, cheeks blue and fingers numb.

“Make a man of him,” his father had said, clapping his brother on the shoulder.

That was the moment something had broken cleanly in Ilya’s chest.

By eleven, he already understood two unshakable truths:

His father was a piece of shit.

And his brother was never going to save him.

When he’d found his mother’s body, those truths fused into something permanent.

She’d been lying too still on the floor of the kitchen, one slipper twisted sideways, a bruise blooming dark along her jaw. The apartment had smelled like vodka and bile and something coppery that took years for Ilya to be able to name. There was an empty bottle of pills by her. Her anti-depressants. Empty, empty, empty.

Ilya had knelt by his mother until Alexei came home from school and saw the two of them. Their mother, dead on the floor and tiny Ilya weeping over her cooling body.

His brother stood in the doorway, arms crossed. Their father wasn't home from work yet.

"She took them by accident," Alexei said flatly. "You know how she was."

Ilya had known that was a lie the same way he knew the sky was blue.

Nothing had happened to their father. Not really. A few questions. A few neighbors pretending not to hear the shouting anymore. Then life had just... kept going.

So Ilya had done the only thing he could do.

He'd run.

Hockey had been the exit plan. Ice rinks instead of shitty soviet era apartments. Drunk coaches instead of drunk fathers. A future where he could leave and never come back. He'd trained until his bones ached and his hands bled, fueled by one singular, feral thought:

Get good. Get famous. Get gone.

And he had.

Which was why Shane made him so goddamn furious.

Because Shane wasn't stupid. Shane wasn't weak. Shane wasn't a kid trapped in a kitchen with no way out. Shane had money. Fame. Teammates who would kill for him. A whole world of exits he could take.

And still he stayed.

Still he made excuses. Still he let a woman put her hands on him and called it complicated and kept going back for more.

Ilya curls his fingers around his beer glass until it creaks softly.

Bad people don't change.

He knows that better than anyone.

And loving them harder has never, in the entire history of the universe, fixed a goddamn thing.

He's startled out of his thoughts when Kyle sets another glass of red ale in front of him.

"Thank you," Ilya mutters.

"No problem. Give a shout if you need anything else." Kyle turns to go, then hesitates. "You sure you're okay?"

"Yes."

Kyle clearly doesn't believe him. He looks like he's about to push again when an obnoxious chirping sound cuts through the low bar noise.

"The hell is that?" Ilya mutters.

Kyle's face goes a little pink. "My ringtone. It's- never mind." He pulls his phone from his pocket and checks the screen. His expression shifts immediately. He picks up.

"Kip?"

Ilya goes still.

Kip isn't a common name. There *can't* be more than one Kip in all of New York. The odds are stupidly low, but-

"Oh my god, is he alright?" Kyle blurts.

Ilya sits up straighter.

"Yeah- no, of course. Don't worry about it. I can grab him some clothes... you need to call *who*?"

Kyle glances at Ilya, startled. "The Russian hockey player?"

That's enough.

Ilya reaches out and takes the phone straight out of Kyle's hand.

"Hey!" Kyle yelps.

"Who is this?" Ilya snaps into the phone.

"*Rozanov?*" comes the familiar, dry timbre of the world's oldest hockey player on the other end.

Ilya's stomach drops through the floor. This was a bad omen.

"Why is Kip in the hospital, Hunter?" Ilya demands.

There's a beat of silence.

Then Scott exhales, long and tired. *“Jesus. Hi to you too.”*

“Don’t,” Ilya growls. “Don’t. Tell me what happened.”

Another pause. A heavier one.

“Eva attacked Shane,” Scott says. *“Kip tried to stop it. He got cut up pretty bad. He’s stable now. Sleeping.”*

The bar noise rushes back into Ilya’s ears like someone turned the volume up too fast.

His hand tightens around the phone. “How bad?”

“Stitches. Shock. He’s okay,” Scott says quickly. *“I’m with him right now.”*

“Not Kip, you idiot.”

Seriously. Even Scott Hunter should know that’s not who Ilya is talking about.

“They won’t tell us anything. Rose called his parents. They’re coming down. He’s in surgery last I heard.”

Ilya drags a hand down his face. “Where?”

Scott gives him the hospital name.

Ilya doesn’t hesitate. “I’m coming.”

“You don’t have to-, ”

“I am coming,” Ilya says flatly. “Tell Kip I am on way when he wakes up, too. Someone needs to answer.”

He hands the phone back to Kyle without ceremony.

Kyle stares at him, wide-eyed. “Is- is Kip okay?”

“He will be,” Ilya says. Then, because Kyle looks like he might throw up, he adds, “He is sleeping. Stable.”

Kyle lets out a shaky breath. “Oh thank god.”

Ilya snatches his coat from the back of his chair.

“Hey- wait,” Kyle says. “Your drink-”

Ilya leaves it untouched on the table, but he does yank out some bills from his wallet and chucks them on the table.

For the second time that day, he storms out into the New York cold, heart pounding, jaw locked, fury and fear burning hot in his chest.

Eva.

Hollander.

Hospital.

The pieces slam together into one ugly, unavoidable picture. Eva had attacked Shane, and it was bad. Bad enough that Scott's Kip got hurt in the process.

For the first time since he'd walked into that bar, Ilya knows exactly where he's going.

And exactly who he's going to tear into when he gets there.

Chapter End Notes

headcanon that kyle's ringtone is crazy frog

next time: Scott, Rose, and Ilya try not to kill each other. it's harder than it seems.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

this was gonna be two chapters but I've put you guys through enough so it's all one. Yay! Also ao3 is going down for about 15 hours on 1/21. Make sure you have your fics downloaded and your bookmarks in order!

and yeah, Ilya ended up at the Kingfisher, and bartender Kyle is the same kyle who Kip was telling Shane about earlier in the fic

tw: lawyers. and violence. and that's all im gonna say.

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

“Uh oh.”

Rose straightens in her chair. “Uh oh?”

“Uh-oh,” Scott confirms, slipping his phone back into his pocket. “Rozanov is on his way.”

Rose winces and cracks her back, wincing again at the protest from her spine. This plastic chair is doing her no favors. It feels like they’ve been here for days, even though it’s only been a few hours. She still can’t believe this has all happened in the same damn day.

“I thought you were just calling Kip’s friend,” she says. “The one with the apartment key?”

“Apparently Rozanov was in the same bar Kyle works at and overheard everything.”

“Wow. Small world.”

It really is. As an actress, Rose runs into the same faces over and over, but that’s because they’re all being paid to be there on different sets. With NHL players, it’s like they just keep popping into existence around each other.

“I should probably meet him outside,” Scott says, rubbing the back of his neck. “He’s kinda…”

“An asshole?”

“Yeah.”

“I figured.” She glances toward the curtain. “Did he say how long he’d be?”

“No, but I think it’ll be soon.”

“Go,” Rose says, nodding toward the bed. “I’ll stay with Kip. He’s not going anywhere.”

They both look down at Kip, dozing in the hospital bed. A nurse had come by earlier and started him on oxygen. “*Just in case, because of the sedatives,*” she’d said warmly, adjusting the nasal cannula under Kip’s nose.

Scott hesitates, torn for a moment. The, apparently, the thought of Ilya Rozanov causing a scene in a public ER waiting room seems to tip the scales. He nods, gathers their empty coffee cups, and heads out- pausing only to give Kip one last look.

Rose is just settling back into her chair when her phone rings.

She snaps to attention and answers without looking.

“Hello?”

“*Rose, It’s Randi.*” her manager says.

“Hi, Randi. Do you have good news for me?” Rose asks.

“I got into contact with Eva’s manager. He found her in her other apartment. She was trashed of course. He called the police.”

The way Randi says it is sort of... odd.

“Why are you-,”

“He said that she was covered in blood. What the hell happened, Rose? Did she kill someone?”

Honestly, Rose isn’t sure. So she stays quiet.

“Seriously?!”

“I don’t know,” Rose hisses into her phone. “He’s in surgery.”

‘Who’s in-? Oh god. The hockey player.’

“Ten points,” Rose grumbles.

There's a stunned silence on the other end of the line.

"In surgery?" Randi finally says. *"Rose, what the hell did you get yourself into?"*

Rose scrubs a hand down her face and lowers her voice, glancing automatically at Kip even though he's still out cold. "It wasn't *me*. It was Eva. She attacked him. My friend Kip tried to stop her and got hurt in the process. I'm with him now in the ER."

"Oh my god." Randi exhales sharply. "Is he going to be okay?"

"Shane? They don't know yet," Rose says. "It seems like he lost a lot of blood. Kip is okay, he needed some stitches. He's sleeping off whatever they gave him."

"Jesus Christ." Randi swears under her breath, then shifts into crisis-manager mode so fast it almost gives Rose whiplash. *"Okay. Okay. Listen to me. Do not talk to any reporters. Do not post anything. Do not answer unknown numbers. If the police contact you, you tell them you want a lawyer present."*

Rose snorts quietly. "You're acting like I stabbed him."

“You’re there,” Randi says flatly. *“That’s close enough for headlines.”*

Rose looks at Kip again. His chest rises and falls slowly and evenly, oxygen hissing softly with each breath.

“I’m not leaving Kip,” Rose says.

“I’m not asking you to,” Randi replies. *“I’m asking you to be smart. This is going to explode. Eva’s team is already in damage-control mode. If she really was-,”*

“She did this,” Rose snaps. *“She’s been doing this to him for months.”*

Randi goes quiet. *“You’re sure?”*

“Yes,” Rose says, heat creeping into her voice. “I saw it. He never said anything, but I knew it. I tried to get him out before it got this bad.”

Another pause. Softer now. *“Okay. Then this isn’t just PR. This is criminal.”*

Rose swallows. “Good.”

“I’m going to send a lawyer to the hospital,” Randi says. “Just in case. You don’t have to talk to them unless you want to, but I’d rather you had someone there.”

“Fine.” she agrees, even though it feels ridiculous. All Rose did was meet Kip at the ER. She hadn’t even been there when they were hurt.

Rose hangs up and lets her head tip back against the hard plastic chair. The fluorescent lights hum overhead. Somewhere down the hall, a monitor beeps in a slow, steady rhythm. It all feels unreal, like she stepped into the wrong genre of movie and now she’s stuck in a hospital drama instead of a rom-com.

She looks over at Kip.

He’s still out cold, mouth slightly open, lashes dark against his pale cheeks. The oxygen cannula curves over his face, fogging faintly with each breath. His hand is curled loosely on the blanket where Scott left it, like he’s still expecting someone to be holding it.

Rose exhales shakily and leans forward, resting her elbows on her knees.

“Jesus,” she mutters under her breath.

A nurse pokes her head through the curtain a moment later. “Everything okay in here?”

“Yeah,” Rose says quickly, softening her voice. “He’s still asleep.”

“Good. Let him rest. Doctor should be by soon with an update.” The nurse smiles gently and disappears again.

Rose nods to no one and checks her phone. A text from Scott lights up the screen. The had exchanged numbers right after Scott had gotten here.

Scott: Outside. He’s here. Pray for me.

Despite everything, a weak huff of a laugh escapes her.

Rose: Don’t let him punch anyone in the ER, please.

She sets the phone face-down and reaches out, carefully brushing her fingers over Kip’s knuckles. His grip twitches, reflexive, but he doesn’t wake.

“You scared the hell out of everyone, you know,” she whispers. “Scott really loves you. I think you scared him the most.”

His breathing stays slow and even. The IV pump gives a quiet click.

Footsteps approach again, and they are heavier this time. They sound a little more purposeful. The curtain rustles.

“Miss Landry?” a man’s voice says. “I’m Dr. Patel. I have an update on Shane.”

Rose’s stomach drops. She stands up so fast her chair scrapes loudly against the floor. Kip doesn’t wake up, too doped up to register the loud sound.

“Is he-?” she starts, then forces herself to stop. “Is he alive? Can you tell me? I know I’m not-well,”

Rose and Scott had both tried to get more information on Shane, but everyone who they talked to had declined, citing HIPPA laws. It was incredibly frustrating.

“Yes,” Dr. Patel says gently, apparently having heard of their previous failed attempts to get information. “He’s still in surgery, but we’re optimistic. That’s all I can say.”

Rose’s knees almost give out in relief. She grips the edge of Kip’s bed to steady herself.

“Okay,” she breathes. “Okay. Thank you.”

“We’ll know more soon. As for Kip, his stitches are done. We’re keeping him overnight for observation because of the adrenaline crash and the sedatives. We’ll get him moved up to one of the wards as soon as we have the manpower to transfer him. He should be good to be released in the morning or early afternoon.”

“Can Scott stay with him?” Rose asks immediately, despite desperately wanting to stay with Kip as well.

Dr. Patel smiles. “One visitor overnight is fine.”

“Good,” she says fiercely. “Because if you kick him out, I think Scott might fight someone.”

The doctor chuckles and steps out.

Rose sinks into the chair again, heart still pounding. She grabs her phone with shaky hands.

Rose: Kip's staying overnight. You're allowed to stay with him.

Rose: Also try not to punch anyone.

There's a long beat.

Scott: No promises.

Rose snorts, wipes at her eyes, and looks back at Kip.

“See?” she murmurs. “Everything's still a mess, but it's... less of a mess than it was five minutes ago.”

Kip shifts, brow creasing faintly, like he's frowning in his sleep. Rose gently smooths away the crease with the pad of her thumb. Then there is a loud banging sound and some swearing. There's a voice in harsh Russian followed by-

“You fucking piece of shit!”

Uh-oh, indeed.

Scott waits outside the ER, hunched into his thin hoodie, when a cab pulls up to the curb.

Ilya Rozanov steps out.

He looks a little worse for wear despite the unmistakably expensive jacket. He pays the cabbie what seems like way too much money- Scott had done the same thing earlier- and then turns, sunglasses still on, baseball cap pulled low. It’s almost the exact same thing that Rose had been wearing earlier. Celebrity disguise.

“Hunter,” Ilya says.

“Rozanov. You didn’t have to come,” Scott replies, even though he knows the other man won’t listen to him. “Shane’s still in surgery, and they won’t tell anyone anything who isn’t a listed contact.”

“They will tell me,” Ilya says with absolute confidence. “Where is your Kip?”

Despite the cold, Scott feels his cheeks heat.

“He’s not *my* Kip.”

“Ah. So you are, How do you say? Fuckbuddies?”

“Shut up,” Scott mutters. “C’mon. Rose is with him.”

“I’m surprised you left him.”

“Only to make sure you wouldn’t cause a scene.”

“You wound me,” Ilya says, “I can be calm,” and Scott knows it’s a lie. There’s no way Ilya would have come in calmly without someone to intercept him first.

Scott motions for him to follow, and together they head into the ER. The same nurse from earlier is at the desk. She doesn’t even blink at the sight of two NHL All-Stars. She just takes Ilya’s ID, scans it, and hands over a visitor sticker with quiet professionalism.

Ilya flashes her a dazzling, flirtatious smile.

She blushes and buzzes them through.

“Oh god,” Scott mutters, rolling his eyes. “*Really?* Shane’s in the hospital.”

“And so I am here,” Ilya says, walking beside him easily. He must be nervous, more so than he’s letting on. Scott certainly would be.

Scott hates to admit it, but Ilya has grown on him over the years. They run in the same circles, and yeah, he’s always been a bit of a dick- but never truly mean. Not like a lot of the guys Scott’s played with.

Lately, though, Scott’s thoughts have been elsewhere. With Kip in the hospital... god. When he got the call, a thousand scenarios ran through his head. What if Kip didn’t make it? What if he never got the chance to tell him how much he loved him? Would he be forced to hide his feelings for the rest of his career?

Scott knew, the instant he picked up the phone, that he’d regret it for the rest of his life if something happened and he hadn’t shared how he felt about Kip to anyone. He didn’t want to admit it, but deep down, he knew he was going to come out soon. Not until after he’s retired. Soon. At least to his teammates. Kip didn’t deserve to be a secret, and it shouldn’t have taken him getting hurt for Scott to realize that.

They reach the hallway where Kip's curtained-off corner waits. Scott knows Ilya probably couldn't care less about Kip- he just needed a place to wait for Shane- but in a weird, twisted way, it's nice to have him there. Even if the man is here for selfish reasons.

They're about to step in when a commotion erupts down the hall. Both of them turn.

A woman, handcuffed to a wheelchair, is being pushed down the corridor. Her dress is streaked with red. She's screaming, cursing, thrashing against the restraints.

"Calm down!" one of the cops yells.

"Fuck you, pig!" she screeches back.

Scott's stomach drops. He recognizes her instantly.

So does Ilya.

In the next second, he's moving faster than Scott's brain can keep up with. Before Scott can react, Ilya lunges across the hall.

The wheelchair crashes to the floor with a metallic bang as both Eva and Ilya go crashing to the ground.

“Shit!” Scott swears, already running. He grabs Ilya around the waist, hauling him up just as Ilya starts shouting something in Russian.

“Fuck you, you piece of shit!” Ilya roars.

Eva spits on the floor in front of him.

That nearly sends Ilya feral. He thrashes in Scott’s grip, straining forward again.

“Break it up!” one of the cops shouts, stepping between them.

“Shut up!” Ilya and Eva snap in unison.

“How dare you?” Ilya snarls, then launches into more Russian. Eva shrieks back at him.

“I love him!” she slurs.

“No you don’t!” Ilya seethes. “You don’t! You only love yourself, you-”

Scott clamps a hand over Ilya’s mouth. “Knock it off,” he whisper-shouts into his ear. “If you get arrested, you won’t be here when Shane wakes up.”

Ilya jerks away, but this time it’s controlled. He exhales hard, straightens his jacket, and forces himself still. Scott can see him twitching,. Eva is being hauled back upright by the cops. The Russian must have gotten a punch in, because her nose is bleeding.

“What the fuck is going-Eva?!”

Scott and Ilya both turn.

It’s Rose.

“Heyyyyy, bitch,” Eva slurs as she’s shoved upright into the wheelchair. “You fucking these two?”

“Shut up, you crazy-” Rose cuts herself off mid-breath. She’s the only one who would be able to manage to stop herself from swearing publicly. Ilya certainly didn't put a lid on his rage. “You almost killed him!”

“I hope he’s dead!” Eva snaps, and she smiles wide. Her pupils are huge. Her teeth are red with her own blood.

That’s it.

Scott has to grab both Rose and Ilya as they surge forward. He barely holds them back for a few moments. Ilya slips away collides with Eva and the wheelchair again and they both go down. Scott loses his grip on Rose as he tries one-handed to yank Ilya back. She’s about to pounce and get into the fray when a hospital security guard hurries in and intercepts her. She actually jumps, honest to god jumps, trying to get around him, but ends up in the world’s lamest over-the-shoulder carry instead.

The guard deposits her back in front of Scott and rushes off to help contain Ilya again, who is barely being held back by one of the two cops.

Scott scoops Rose up around the waist. She’s not short, but she’s thin- and he’s a professional athlete. He tucks her under one arm and uses his other to try and keep Ilya from hitting Eva too hard.

The hallway is chaos.

And Scott is running out of hands.

Thankfully, the cop who'd been pushing the wheelchair rushes to help Scott and the second cop with Ilya. Together they manage to hold him back as he strains forward, still swearing under his breath in Russian.

Rose squirms in Scott's grip, trying to wriggle free. "Let me go!" she snaps, twisting her shoulders and planting her feet.

"Not a chance," Scott grunts. He lets go of Ilya, who is being reigned in by the cops, and hoists her clean off the floor, dragging her backward away from the overturned wheelchair and the mess of people surrounding Eva.

"This is ridiculous!" Rose protests, kicking uselessly at the air.

"Yeah, welcome to my night," Scott mutters, hauling her a few more feet down the hall.

Behind them, Ilya is still being restrained, breathing hard with his eyes locked on Eva like he might actually set something on fire with pure spite.

Security converges from both directions now. The cops get Eva upright again, shoving the wheelchair back into position. One cop quickly steers her away down the hall as she continues to scream incoherent threats.

It isn't until she disappears through a set of double doors that Scott finally sets Rose back on her feet.

She whirls on him, glaring. "Don't do that!"

"You were about to get arrested!" Scott snaps. "What the hell happened to *try not to punch anybody*?"

"She wanted him dead!" she protests.

Nearby, Ilya is arguing with the cops.

"I just need five minutes-"

"You're lucky you're not in cuffs," the cop cuts in, pointing at Ilya, then at Rose. "Both of you. You're not allowed to-"

“Don’t tell me what I’m allowed to do-” Rose says at the exact same time Ilya says, “I don’t care.”

Scott pinches the bridge of his nose. “Can you two get it together?” he hisses. “You’re making a scene *in a hospital!*”

All three of them go quiet as the reality of what they’ve just done sinks in.

Rose’s face is red and flushed. Ilya has blood on his knuckles. Scott is breathing hard from manhandling them both.

And then there’s the cop, the one who didn’t wheel Eva away. More importantly, his uniform, which has a tiny blinking red light on his chest.

The body cam.

It’s recording.

“Ah,” Ilya says gruffly. “Shit.”

Chapter End Notes

Ilya: *sees Eva* *violence*

Rose: who are we fighting? *see Eva* oh ok *violence*

Scott: ?????

up next: the trio end up in the principal's office.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

rose and ilya together are crazier then a bag of cats. Poor Scott. He's gonna be a great dad someday. He's trying his best. Also, IRL both Ilya and Rose would have been arrested. We're ignoring that. It's fan fiction. Suspend your disbelief!

Once again, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for reading! I know it's not super Shane/Ilya right now, but it's about to be in the next few chapters. It's gonna be so fluffy, you'll want to vom.

okay love you enjoy

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

Scott, Ilya, and Rose sit in the hospital director's office.

It's a nice office. Tasteful, with a mahogany desk and soft lighting. There are various diplomas on the wall.

Scott would very much like to be anywhere else.

Ilya has an ice pack pressed to his knuckles. The hospital director- a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair and deep under-eye bags- sits across from them, arms crossed, and expression unimpressed.

Scott kind of wants to laugh.

This is exactly like getting hauled into the headmaster's office at his boarding school.

And oh boy, are they in trouble.

"I recognize this situation is sensitive," the director- Dr. Mason- says sternly. "But you cannot go around punching people or attacking them. Not in this hospital."

"Sorry," Rose says after a beat. "It was inappropriate." Either she genuinely means it or she's an incredible actress, because she manages to look properly ashamed.

"I am not," Ilya says flatly.

Scott kicks him in the shin.

Ilya winces and clears his throat. "I am... sorry for having disturbance. Is not fair to you."

"Or my staff. Or the other patients," Dr. Mason says. He sighs deeply and leans back in his chair. It squeaks loudly.

“I will make a donation to your hospital,” Ilya adds. “To say sorry.”

“Me too,” Rose says quickly.

“Me three,” Scott offers, because honestly? He does feel bad about all of this.

Dr. Mason closes his eyes for a long moment.

“...Of course you will,” he says.

The poor director looks torn, like he genuinely has no idea what to do with them. He obviously knows exactly who they are, which only makes this whole thing feel like a bad joke.

Two hockey players and a movie star walk into an ER and try to fistfight a woman handcuffed to a wheelchair...

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” Dr. Mason says finally. “We’ve moved Ms. Loren to a separate wing of the hospital. You three are not to go anywhere near it.” He gives a pointed look at Ilya, who does his best to look innocent. “I’ve warned security. If you try to see her, I will have you trespass.”

Then he clears his throat.

“Your friend is out of surgery.”

That gets everyone’s attention.

“Is he okay?” Rose asks immediately. “You can tell us.”

Dr. Mason slides on a pair of reading glasses and looks down at a small stack of papers on his desk.

“Are either of you Yuna or David Hollander?”

“Would you believe me if I said yes?” Ilya asks.

“No.”

“Then no.”

Dr. Mason peers at them over the rim of his glasses.

“There’s a secondary emergency contact I can speak to. Ilya Rozanov.”

Well.

That’s... surprising.

Scott and Rose make eye contact, and they both have the exact same thought at the exact same time.

They’re fucking, right?

Oh yeah. They totally are.

That probably explains why Ilya had been so confident the hospital staff would update him about Shane.

“That one is me,” Ilya says. “Do you need to see ID, or do you want to Google me?”

Dr. Mason just looks tired. “It’s fine. I know who you are. Now- Mr. Hollander had what we call a protrusion of internal organs.”

Ilya blinks, clearly lost.

“His intestines were out,” Rose supplies gently, clocking that Ilya doesn’t know what *protrusion* means.

“His guts were out,” Ilya says, oddly calm.

Scott is honestly impressed. This is the most controlled he’s ever seen him when it actually matters.

“His small bowel was exposed,” Dr. Mason corrects. “We performed an exploratory laparotomy. It came back negative, which is a good thing.”

“His guts were out. How is that a good thing?” Ilya demands.

“It means there were no penetrating wounds to his internal organs,” Dr. Mason explains. “The primary damage was to the skin, muscle, and fat of his abdomen. The protrusion happened because there was no abdominal wall to keep everything in, so to speak. There was no need to repair the intestines themselves. All things considered, Mr. Hollander is very lucky.”

“I hate that word,” Ilya mutters.

Scott does too.

He’d been *lucky* when his parents died and he didn’t.

Lucky he was good at hockey.

Lucky he got a scholarship.

Lucky, lucky, lucky.

“Fortunate, then,” Dr. Mason amends.

“Can we see him?” Rose asks.

“Not yet. He’ll be in recovery for a while, and then the ICU.”

“ICU?” Scott echoes, immediately tense.

“I-C-U?” Ilya repeats. “What is this?”

“Intensive care unit,” Rose supplies helpfully.

“And he needs this... intensive care?” Ilya repeats, the words sounding rough in his accent.

“It’s a precaution,” Dr. Mason says. “Just until we’re confident in his recovery.”

“He is out for season, yes?”

Wow. Scott didn’t think they’d make it this far into the conversation before Ilya asked about hockey. Still.

“Don’t be stupid, Rozanov,” Scott snaps. “Shane was stabbed. Of course he can’t play hockey.”

“It was more of a slashing wound,” Dr. Mason corrects. “About seven inches long. Roughly the length of a banana.”

“That’s a little over seventeen centimeters,” Rose adds automatically. Because of course she would know the conversion between metric and imperial.

“He is fixed, yes?” Ilya asks.

Scott feels his chest tighten. He wants that answer too. Badly.

“The wound has been closed,” Dr. Mason says. “The abdominal wall has been repaired. There were no internal organ injuries, which is the best possible outcome in a situation like this. He’ll be sore. He’ll need time. But yes, he’s stable. We are optimistic.”

Ilya exhales hard, like he’s been holding his breath for hours.

Scott feels like a rubber band wrapped tight around his ribs has finally snapped. Rose looks just as relieved, shoulders sagging, tension draining out of her face.

Scott hadn't known what to think when he'd heard Shane had been stabbed. His mind had gone straight to blood and gore and intestines spilling everywhere. Knowing Shane had been stitched back together-knowing there'd been no terrible internal damage- makes it something he can actually *hold* in his head without panicking.

"...but he's only allowed one overnight visitor," Dr. Mason is saying.

Scott blinks. He definitely missed a chunk of that conversation.

"You should let his mom be the overnight visitor," Rose says to Ilya. "She'll want to."

"Yuna is not here," Ilya says flatly. "I am."

"Rose and I are here too," Scott points out. "Why should it be you?"

"I'm his emergency contact."

"Secondary emergency contact," Rose adds sweetly.

Ilya frowns at her. Rose looks delighted to have gotten under his skin.

“It won’t be for a while anyway,” Dr. Mason interjects. “We’re moving Mr. Grady to the third floor for the night. Mr. Hollander is currently on the fifth and will be transferred to the ICU on the seventh floor, east wing.”

Scott had only commented on the visitor thing to piss Ilya off.

He likes Shane. He does. But he is *in love* with Kip.

He is absolutely staying with Kip.

“After he stabilizes, we’ll move him to a VIP room,” Dr. Mason continues. “I can only imagine the media circus this will cause. We’ll also be providing additional security.”

“Thank God,” Rose mutters. “You won’t talk to the press, will you?”

“We may make a statement confirming Mr. Hollander is here,” Dr. Mason says evenly, “but that is it. It depends on his next of kin. That is not you, Mr. Rozanov. You are an emergency contact and nothing else.”

“The backup emergency contact,” Scott mutters under his breath.

Ilya cuts him an annoyed look. “I punched a woman in a wheelchair. Do not think I will not punch you.”

“Save it for the ice, gentlemen,” Dr. Mason says warily. “It’s against my better judgment that I’m even permitting you three to stay.”

“I didn’t do anything!” Scott protests weakly.

“The three of you were involved in a fistfight with a patient who was handcuffed to a wheelchair,” Dr. Mason says flatly. “The three of you have some level of notoriety. All three of you are a pain in my ass. And my legal team’s ass. Behave.”

His tone leaves absolutely no room for argument.

“Yes, sir,” Rose says, meek as a church mouse.

Scott nods. “Yes, sir.”

Ilya crosses his arms, jaw tight. "...Yes."

Dr. Mason exhales like he's aged ten years in the last fifteen minutes. "Security will escort you back to your respective friends. You are not to leave your assigned wings. You are not to approach Ms. Loren. You are not to speak to the press. You are not to cause any further disturbances. If any of those rules are broken, you will be removed from this hospital."

He stands. That's clearly the end of the meeting.

"Understood?" he repeats.

"Understood," Scott says.

"Understood," Rose echoes.

Ilya gives a stiff nod. "Understood."

Dr. Mason opens the office door and gestures sharply. "Go. Before I change my mind."

They file out into the hallway.

Rose lets out a shaky breath. “Wow. Okay. I officially never want to be in a hospital director’s office again.”

“You were the one who tried to tackle her,” Scott says.

“She wanted Shane dead.”

“Still.”

Scott rubs his face. The adrenaline is finally wearing off, leaving him exhausted and wrung out. “I just want to see Kip.”

A pair of security guards peel off to escort them in opposite directions.

One gestures to Ilya. “Seventh floor. East wing.”

Another nods at Scott and Rose. “Third floor.”

Ilya hesitates, glancing toward the elevators. He’s an asshole, but he’s utterly alone right now. Scott forgets how young Ilya is, sometimes. He really is just a kid.

“You go,” Scott says quietly. “We’ll be here. Text me if you need anything. I’ll send you Rose’s number,” he glances at Rose to confirm that it’s okay to do so, and she nods. “If you need anything.”

Ilya studies his face for a second, then nods once. “I come back.”

Then he turns and heads down the hall.

Scott and Rose start toward Kip’s wing, escorted by security.

Halfway there, Rose’s phone buzzes in her pocket. She pulls it out and reads it.

“What is it?” he asks as she frowns.

“It’s a text from my manager, Randi.”

Scott swallows and peers over her shoulder, trying to see “Bad?”

“Define bad,” Rose mutters, passing Scott the phone.

Randi: Press is already circling. Call me when you can.

He hands the phone back to Rose and she shoves it back into her pocket and they wordlessly as they keep walking.

Toward Kip.

Chapter End Notes

Ilya “catch these hands” Rozanov

the only ice i like is the one where hockey players skate. fuck ICE! If you disagree, stop reading. I want nothing to do with you.

Shoutout to my buddy Laura who is an ER nurse and answered my questions. She said her hospital has about 100 disembowelments a year. Interesting.

up next: it's midnight. Ilya can't sleep and sleep is all Shane can do.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

okay this is my second or third favorite chapter. Here's the thing; I have re-written this series like six times. It was only gonna be eight chapters!! I always change my mind. This one is up there, though. Like top five?

also did you guys see the leaked texts about the guy from empty netters? :(Such a bummer if true. Here I was, thinking things were changing.

once again, I have been disappointed by a straight man. smh

please enjoy!

TW this chapter: mentions of domestic violence, references to underage drinking, mentions of injuries

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

Ilya isn't sure what to think when he arrives in Shane's hospital room, escorted by a security guard. The guard gives him a stern look.

"Stay on this floor."

"Of course." Ilya says innocently. This was the guard who had to separate Ilya's fist from Eva's face. He's got a little bruising on his cheek. He must have gotten punched in the chaos of it all.

"I am sorry about that," Ilya says, nodding toward the guard's face. "Is accident."

“Right. Go on.” The guard says, unamused. Ilya lets himself into the room and is stunned by the scene.

He’s never *truly* visited someone in the hospital before.

By the time his father got seriously sick, Ilya was already playing professional hockey and he was countries away. His mother had been dead long before Ilya had found her on the floor of their apartment. There’d been no hospital for her. Just the funeral home.

There had been teammates, sure, who’d been injured badly enough to end up hospitalized. Most of the time Ilya sent a card. Sometimes flowers. He never stayed long, if at all.

The closest he’d come to a real hospital visit was his rookie year in Boston, during a two-week break. He’d been eighteen and drinking with Victor Popov and Henry Novikov, two other Russian players. Ilya was used to drinking - he’d grown up in Russia with its very relaxed drinking laws and culture. But his American teammates went a little feral.

All three of them ended up in the ER after trying to steal the bell off a Taco Bell downtown. Victor had climbed up on the roof to yank it free, only to discover it was welded to the building. He’d slipped, fallen, and split his forehead open instead.

They’d all been laughing then, sprawled across plastic ER chairs, drunk and obnoxious and *young*. Ilya remembers thinking it was boring after they’d sobered up. Hospitals were boring. They smelled like bleach and nothing ever happened except waiting.

This is not boring.

In fact, it was kind of terrifying.

Shane's room is dim, lit mostly by the glow of monitors. There's a rhythmic *beep-beep-beep* that makes Ilya's chest tighten every time it stutters. Tubes snake out from under the blankets. There's an IV taped to Shane's arm. A clear oxygen cannula rests under his nose. That kind of relieves Ilya. He'd thought he'd be on a machine helping him to breathe with a tube down his throat.

But still he looks... small.

Ilya hates that thought immediately. Shane Hollander is not small. Shane Hollander is five foot ten and built like an athlete. He is the guy who once played an entire third period with a cracked rib because "it only hurts when I breathe, Rozanov, relax."

But right now with his hair flattened and his face pale in the dim hospital lights, he looks breakable. There is now a single stitch in his eyebrow which is uncovered. Whatever patch job Kip had done hadn't worked, apparently. Shane's nose is still bruised looking and slightly swollen. He's got what looks like a black eye, too.

Ilya stands just inside the doorway, hands shoved into his pockets like he's afraid to touch anything. Like if he moves wrong, an alarm will go off and someone will come running in and yell at him.

“Hey,” he says quietly, to a man who very much cannot hear him.

He takes a few steps closer. The door shuts behind him.

The monitors keep beeping. Shane’s chest rises and falls, slow and steady. Ilya watches it like it’s the only thing keeping the world from tipping over.

It is.

He drags a chair closer to the bed and sits, elbows braced on his knees. For a second, he just stares at Shane’s face, memorizing it. He needs to store it away for proof later that this moment really happened.

“You look like shit,” Ilya murmurs. “Is very rude to get stabbed and then look worse than me in morning.”

Nothing.

Ilya swallows hard.

He hadn't let himself think about the what-ifs yet. Not really. He'd stayed angry instead. Anger was easy. Anger had somewhere to go. Just like when he saw Eva covered in Shane's blood. Just like how in that medical director's office and the talked about abdominal damage and guys hanging out.

But now there is only this room and this bed and this man who is not dead but came far too close.

"I am emergency contact," Ilya says quietly. Like a confession. "Did you know? You must have. You put me as backup emergency contact. Very sneaky, Shane."

His voice cracks on the name. He presses his lips together, jaw tightening.

"I told doctor I do not like word lucky," he goes on. "He said fortunate instead. I also do not like that word."

He reaches out, hesitates, then finally rests two fingers lightly against Shane's knuckles.

"You scared me," Ilya says, low and rough. "Do not do that again. I will kill you myself if you do."

He lets out a humorless breath.

“I was going to wait,” he admits. “Tell you things later. When season was over. When timing was better. But timing is bullshit. It may never be good enough timing.”

He shifts closer, forearms on the edge of the bed now.

“I care about you,” Ilya says simply. “You idiot.”

The machines keep beeping. Shane’s breathing stays steady. Nothing explodes. The world does not end. No one with a camera pops out of nowhere and records them.

Ilya bows his head, forehead hovering just above Shane’s hand.

“You better wake up,” he whispers. “Because I am not explaining this twice.”

This was stupid. The doctors had said Shane would be fine.

Ilya sits up and finds himself staring at the blanket draped over Shane's torso. There are wires everywhere and strange machines humming softly. He doesn't want to disturb him. Still... maybe....

He's seen Shane shirtless before. Plenty of times. While they were having sex. On TV in post game-interviews from the locker room. In that stupid Rolex ad that's in all black and white. But never like this.

Slowly, carefully, Ilya leans in and lifts the edge of the blanket.

He isn't sure what he's expecting. A jagged red line of stitches, maybe. Something raw and weeping? Barely held together layers of muscles and skin or the smell of infection.

But there's just a wide swath of white bandages, wrapped neatly and tightly around Shane's stomach. It's clean and orderly. It seems almost too calm for what happened. A few sticky pads dot his chest, each one trailing a wire to one of the machines beside the bed.

Ilya doesn't know the English words for any of it.

The realization hits him with that familiar, ugly helplessness. It's the same stupid, sinking feeling he gets whenever the language barrier traps him inside his own head. He wishes someone would sit him down and explain what each wire does and what each machine is for and what every soft beep means.

For a horrible moment, Ilya imagines Shane dying.

The thought comes out of nowhere and hits like a slapshot to the throat. What would he even do? What would he say? Would he tell *anyone* about them? Would he tell Shane's parents the truth, or would he lock it all away and stay in the closet forever?

He could marry Svetlana. She would do it for him. She'd understand. He could hide with her for the rest of his life. But he can't see a world where, if he'd lost Shane, he'd want a life at all. Everything would stop.

But he knows with sudden brutal clarity what would actually happen.

What they had, messy as it was, was more than sex. It hadn't been, not at first. But it was now. And Ilya would peel the flesh from his own face if it meant Shane would be okay.

The thought is wild and grotesque and completely sincere.

When he was a kid, he used to go to his mother's graveside in Moscow. His father never went. His brother never went. But Ilya did. He'd sit there in the dirt and the cold and imagine digging her up, imagine sleeping with her bones. He might have, if anyone would have let him. If only he'd had a shovel. He would have done anything at all to have her back.

That same feral devotion curls in his chest now.

For Shane, he'd do anything. He'd give up anything. He'd give up hockey.

If Shane woke up right this second and asked him to quit, Ilya would have his manager on the phone in seconds. He wouldn't hesitate. Not even a little.

If only to see Shane open his eyes.

Ilya gently sets the blanket back down and smooths it over. He sinks down into the chair beside the bed, careful not to jostle anything. It's a stupid little plastic hospital chair, the kind that creaks if you shift your weight wrong, but he doesn't care. It could be a bed of nails. He folds forward and clasps his hands together so tightly his knuckles ache. His right fist is red and bruising quickly. It feels like he's broken a finger.

"Don't do this to me," he murmurs, barely louder than the machines. The words slip out before he can stop them. "Not like this. Not when I am... finally brave enough to want you."

He shakes his head. That was silly. He'd always wanted Shane. This was just the first time he was brave enough to say it.

Shane looks too still. The awkward, polite, *impossible* man who fills locker rooms and bars and Ilya's entire damn head has been reduced to a quiet body under too many wires. Flesh and bones that somehow make up a man.

Ilya reaches out, hesitates, then carefully takes Shane's hand. There's no one here. This was safe.

It's warm. Thank god, it's warm.

He presses his thumb into Shane's palm.

"You are very stupid man," he whispers, voice shaking. "You stay with Eva. You always do. You did not think about consequences. You think you are invincible."

His throat tightens.

"I think you are invincible too," he admits, softer. "That is the problem. I... should not have walked away."

He leans closer, forehead hovering just above Shane's knuckles.

"You know what is funny?" Ilya says. "I never believe in love. I think it is... American movie bullshit. Something people say because they are afraid to be alone." A weak, broken

laugh slips out of him. “And now here I am, bargaining with God like a fool.”

He squeezes Shane’s hand.

“I will be good,” he whispers. “I will stop picking fights. I will stop mocking so much. I will call my father more, even.” His mouth twists. “Please do not make me live without you.”

There’s a humiliating ache behind his eyes. He lets it come. He doesn’t care if someone walks in and sees him crying over another man. It all seems so silly, now.

“Everyone thinks I am this big, scary asshole Russian,” he murmurs. “They think I am made of steel. But you-,” He swallows hard. “You make me soft. You ruin me.”

He brushes his thumb over Shane’s knuckles, reverent. A postulant, worshiping a deity.

“You once told me I am not good at saying nice things,” Ilya whispers. “So listen very carefully, okay?”

He leans in, close enough that his breath stirs the fine hairs on Shane’s wrist.

“You are my favorite person in the world,” he says simply. “You are my home. And I am not finished with you yet.”

His voice breaks on the last word.

“Wake up, Shane,” he pleads, barely holding it together now. “Please. I will say it. I will say everything you want to hear. I will take you on stupid dates. I will hold your hand in public. I will stop pretending we are...”

He finds he can’t finish the sentence. That they were what? More than sex? More than hockey?

A tear slips down his cheek and drops onto the blanket.

“I love you,” Ilya says, finally. “There. I said it. So you have to wake up now. It is very unfair if I confess and you are not even here to be smug about it.”

He presses his lips gently to Shane’s knuckles.

“You owe me a life,” he whispers. “So don’t you dare leave me alone in it.”

He hears the door open behind him. Shamefully, he wants to drop Shane's hand. He resists the urge, but he does lower it from his lips.

"Ilya Rozanov," comes the taut and unamused voice of Yuna Hollander. She looks exhausted, red-eyed from travel and in rumpled clothes. But she crosses her arms, narrowing her eyes at the sight of him holding Shane's hand..

"I heard you punched a woman handcuffed to a wheelchair for my son. Care to explain?"

Chapter End Notes

fun fact that taco bell is based on a true story. They're fucking welded to the buildings now cause people (like my dumbass) kept trying to steal them. College was fun lol. Actually i don't think they have bells anymore!

Up next: Yuna and Ilya have pancakes

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

new chapter! I rewrote this one a few times. My first few drafts ended up being way too much like the book. When I cross-referenced them I was like "ah shit" so I hope I did Yuna justice! I have my own images of the characters in my mine expect for Yuna. It just makes sense to me that she looks like Christina Chang.

TW this chapter: beginnings of a panic attack

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

Ilya goes very still.

For half a second, he considers pretending he didn't hear her. For another half second, he considers doing the stupid, cowardly thing and letting go of Shane's hand and abandoning it.

He does neither. Instead lowers Shane's hand carefully back onto the blanket, then straightens and turns around.

Yuna Hollander stands in the doorway. She looks smaller than he expected, worn down by travel and a sleepless night, but there's nothing fragile about her. Her eyes are sharp and her jaw is set. She's wearing, of all things, a flannel shirt and a vest over it.

"Yes," Ilya says quietly. "That was me."

She stares at him like she's deciding whether to kill him.

"You assaulted a suspect in police custody," she says flatly. "In a hospital. While my son was in surgery."

"Yes," he repeats. He winces at her tone. "When you say it like that, it sounds very bad."

Her mouth twitches. Then it hardens again.

"Why?"

Ilya swallows. He knows why, but he's not sure he wants Yuna to. But he says it anyways.

"Because she said she hoped he was dead."

Yuna studies him for a long, heavy moment. Her gaze flicks past him to Shane. He's unmoving in the bed. Her breath stutters once before she masters it. Ilya has no idea what she must be thinking. Her son's rival, a notorious asshole, jumped someone because they said something horrible.

Then she looks back at Ilya.

“You’re an idiot,” she says.

He nods in agreement. “Yes.”

She steps into the room, the door swinging shut softly behind her. Yuna walks forward and stops at the foot of the bed, looking down at Shane. Her stern expression cracks just enough for Ilya to see the worry underneath it. He wonders how she reacted when she got the call that her son was hurt.

“I’ve called your agent.” Yuna says primly, not looking away from her son.

“I- you *what?*”

“Your agent. I called him and suggested he get you an attorney.”

‘How did you even get his number?’

Yuna quirks an eyebrow. “I’m Shane’s manager. I have a lot of contacts. You should be hearing from a lawyer soon. Did they say anything about charges?”

“No. We mostly got yelled at.”

“Good. Saves me the time.” She nods and motions at him. Ilya gets up so she can pass to her son’s bedside. He’s reluctant to let Shane go, but he’s a little scared of Yuna. They trade places. Yuna sits in the chair; Ilya stands at the foot of the bed.

“They said only one visitor.”

“Unofficially. Don’t cause a scene and you can stay.”

A thought occurs to him.

“Where is Mr. Hollander?” he asks. “Shane’s father.”

Yuna frowns and gazes at her son. She places her hand right where Ilya’s had just been and begins to softly stroke his hair. Her face is unreadable. Is it grief? Anger?

“I was in New Jersey for meetings. David was back in Ottawa. There’s a snowstorm there that’s grounding flights. I rented a car.” She pauses. “Have you heard anything about Eva?”

This is weird. This is so, so very weird.

Shane has probably talked about Ilya as his rival to his parents dozens of times over the years. They’ve met a few times too. Just briefly, at fundraising events and games. Mostly it had just been Ilya acting like an asshole. He can’t imagine Yuna is thrilled to see him here now.

“No,” Ilya admits, feeling off-balance. It’s rare for him to not have the upper hand in anything. “The police separated us and took her away. I promise them to stay away.”

She lets out a weak, broken laugh. “Probably for the best. I heard some gossip on the way in here. Eva had drugs in her system.”

Yeah, no shit, she did, Ilya thinks, but he bites his lower lip.

Now is not the time.

Whatever Eva had been using, it wasn’t anything he’d tried before. Ilya’s used a few things in his life, sure. But mostly just party drugs. Weed he enjoyed semi-frequently. Coke a handful

of times, though he hated how it made his heart race and how paranoid it made him. Poppers once at a nightclub; that had actually been nice.

Those were fun drugs. Casual drugs.

Not whatever Eva had been on. He can't imagine there's a rule like that in Hollywood, or on movie sets.

He isn't proud of it, but when he'd seen Shane with Eva in the tabloids, he'd gone on a deep internet dive. He'd studied her IMDb like it was scripture. He'd scrolled through photos of her at clubs and parties. On the surface, she looked fine. A little wild, maybe. Just a party girl with good press.

But Ilya knew better.

They'd gone to a lot of the same clubs. He knew what actually happened in those places and just what people took in bathroom stalls and back rooms.

He's so lost in his thoughts that he startles when Yuna clears her throat.

"So," she says, still staring at Shane. "How long have you been sleeping with my son?"

Ilya's soul leaves his body.

He is dead. He has died. This is a hallucination, or hell, or some elaborate punishment for punching a woman in a hospital hallway.

He opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again.

"...Is there a wrong answer?" he manages weakly.

"There are only wrong answers," she says, her face unreadable. "Try anyway."

He drags a hand down his face.

"On and off. A while. We are... very bad at defining things."

"Yes, well," Yuna says dryly. "That sounds like Shane."

She reaches out and gently smooths Shane's hair back from his forehead. Her fingers linger there, trembling a little. Ilya pretends to not notice.

"He doesn't let people in," she says quietly. "Not really. He never had many friends. A couple, maybe. Never any real girlfriends. His circle of people who matter to him is very small."

Her eyes lift to Ilya.

"You matter," she says. It isn't a question. It's an assessment. In fact, it sounds almost like a verdict. Lika Ilya is kneeling at the feet of a ruler and judgement has been passed.

Something in his chest tightens painfully. Had she suspected? Had Shane ever smiled when he said his name? Had Yuna seen it and simply...waited?

"Yes," he says hoarsely. "Too much."

She studies him for a long moment. Then her gaze drops to where his hand still hovers near Shane's.

"I heard what you said," she adds softly.

Heat crawls up Ilya's neck.

"...All of it?"

"All of it."

He closes his eyes for a moment, mortified.

Yeah. He's dead. This is some kind of cosmic punishment. There is no other explanation.

"I am very sorry," he mutters. "I did not mean to-"

She cuts him off gently.

"Don't," she says. "Don't apologize for loving my son while he's unconscious in a hospital bed. That's not something I'm going to punish you for."

His throat tightens.

“I am not good man,” Ilya says quietly. “I am selfish. I am angry. I hurt people. I am bad at feelings. I am bad at being brave.”

Yuna snorts, soft but not unkind.

“You just punched a criminal in a wheelchair and confessed your love to an unconscious man,” she says. “You seem plenty brave to me.”

She motions him closer, her hand hovering near Shane’s like she can’t quite bring herself to let go.

“If you hurt him,” she says calmly, “I will ruin your life.”

Ilya nods at once. He believes her.

“That is fair.”

She looks down at Shane again, then back at Ilya.

“And if you leave him,” she adds, her gaze sharp, “after all this? After he wakes up and realizes someone finally chose him back?”

Ilya’s voice comes out rough.

“I would rather die.”

Yuna studies his face for a long moment.

Then, unexpectedly, she reaches out and grips his arm once. She’s got thin, strong fingers. They remind him of his mother’s graceful ones. What he can remember of her hands, anyway. As he gets older, it feels like she gets farther and farther away.

“Good,” she says. Then she licks her lips. “Now, when you say a while-,”

The door opens behind them. They both turn.

A nurse in light blue scrubs steps in, a smiley-face sticker on his ID badge. He's tall, taller than Ilya even and he's got ear piercings.

“Hi, I’m Jesse,” he says. “I’m in charge of the ICU tonight. We’ll be checking in periodically. Do you need anything?”

“Is there a coffee machine nearby?” Yuna asks. Her exhaustion finally shows. “I’ve had a long night.”

“I can show you,” Jesse offers.

Yuna nods and stands. Ilya lingers stupidly for a second until she gestures for him to trade places with her. He slides into the plastic chair. It had felt cold before. Now it’s warm to the touch.

Jesse and Yuna leave.

Oddly, there’s no sign of the security guard who’d threatened to stand watch outside the door. Had Jesse dismissed him? Had Yuna? Or had he heard Ilya’s confession and decided this room didn’t need any more witnesses?

Ilya had only heard the door open toward the end. Had Yuna left it ajar? Had she walked in quietly, listened, then made noise on purpose so he’d hear her?

The thought makes his skin prickle.

It feels like he's been dunked into a bucket of ice water. He's alive. Shane is alive. Yuna is... not furious. Upset, yes. Confused, more like. But she didn't scream at him. She didn't throw him out of her son's life.

What if she's calling the press right now?

No. She wouldn't do that.

Would she?

No. She loves Shane. And if Shane tolerates Ilya, she'll tolerate him too. That's how mothers like her work. Loyal to the bone.

"Shit," he mutters.

He looks down at his hands. They're shaking.

This is not how he thought today would go. It had already been a nightmare, but he hadn't expected to come out. Not to Yuna. Not to anyone. Maybe never. Not while he still had a hockey career to protect.

And now people know.

Rose and Scott. Maybe Kip. Definitely Yuna.

He hadn't been prepared at all. Not for the way the words tore out of him. Not for the way the world didn't immediately end afterward.

Now he feels flayed. Like all his soft, secret parts are exposed and now he's at the fragile mercy of people that don't fully trust him yet.

He drags a hand over his face and lets out a shaky breath. It doesn't help. His throat feels too tight. His palms are slick with sweat.

He presses his feet flat to the floor and curls his toes inside his shoes, grounding himself. He still can't quite catch his breath. It feels like a tight rubber band is wrapped around his lungs, stopping them from fully expanding. He tries to force the air in. The ICU is cold, but sweat trickles down his spine, and he has the irrational urge to strip off his jacket.

Ilya is right on the edge of passing out when the door opens again.

He almost doesn't turn his head, but he manages it. It's Yuna. She's balancing two coffee cups and a black takeout box. Her expression shifts the second she sees his face.

"What's wrong?" she asks.

"Nothing," he bites out.

She clearly doesn't believe him. There's a small side table by the wall, and she sets everything down carefully.

"Ilya?" she says, more cautiously now.

"Fine," he grunts.

For reasons he can't explain, having another person in the room who is awake is quickly bringing him back down to earth.

She only hums. A horrible thought occurs to him.

“What if he wakes up and hates me?” he asks, small. “What if he thinks I said it only because he was dying?”

Yuna picks up both of the coffee cups. “Then he’s an idiot,” she says flatly. “Which he is not.” Her mouth twitches. She nudges one of the cups into his hand.

“Drink,” she orders. “You look like you’re about to vibrate through the floor.”

He wraps his trembling fingers around the cup.

“Thank you,” he says quietly. Not just for the coffee.

She nods once, like she understands exactly what he means. Then she goes back and opens the takeout box.

“I don’t know if you feel as strongly about carbs as my son,” she says dryly, “but Jesse had some leftovers from the meal service. I know you probably aren’t hungry right now, but if we’re both going to stay here all night and wait, we should eat something.”

He frowns as she drags the other plastic chair into the room, nudging it closer to the bed and the small side table. Then she flips open the black container.

Pancakes.

They look... sad. Slightly rubbery and definitely microwaved. There are three of them, stacked crookedly paired with a tiny plastic octagon of syrup sweating onto the lid.

Ilya stares at them like they might bite him.

“I do not deserve pancakes,” he says faintly.

Yuna snorts. “Nobody deserves hospital pancakes. That’s not how this works.”

She splits the stack in half with the flimsy plastic knife, hands him the bigger portion without comment, and peels open the syrup. It makes a pathetic little *plink* noise as it lands on the plate.

“Eat,” she says. “Doctor’s orders. Or mother’s. Take your pick.”

He takes it automatically. His hands are steadier now, but he still feels hollowed out, like all his insides have been scooped clean and left echoing.

He cuts off a piece and chews. It tastes like cardboard and sugar.

“Shane would complain about this,” he murmurs.

Yuna huffs. “Shane complains about anything that’s not clean carbs.”

They eat in silence for a few minutes, the machines filling the gaps with soft beeps and mechanical breaths.

Yuna watches Shane between bites, like she’s memorizing him.

“He was six,” she says abruptly, “the first time he broke his arm. He fell out of a tree trying to rescue a cat that did not belong to us.”

Ilya smiles weakly. “Of course he did.”

“He cried for about thirty seconds. Then he asked if the cat was okay. Then he asked if he could keep it.”

“Did you let him?”

“No. The cat belonged to a woman who lived two houses down and hated us.”

“Also of course.”

Her mouth curves, just barely.

“He’s always been like this,” she continues. “Charging straight at things and then acting surprised when he gets hurt. I wonder if he does it on purpose, sometimes.”

Ilya’s gaze drifts to Shane’s face.

“He did that with me,” he says softly.

Yuna doesn't disagree.

"Men are exhausting," she says instead.

"Yes."

They lapse into silence again.

He forces down another bite. His stomach twists, but it's a grounding kind of discomfort. Like weird, sugary proof that he's still here and still in his body.

"Yuna?" he asks.

"Yes?"

"If he wakes up and tells you he is in love with me... will you be angry?"

Ilya really hopes he will be brave enough to tell Shane when he's coherent. He might not be able to. But he doesn't want to think about that right now.

She considers that.

“I will be furious,” she says calmly. “Not at you. At him. For not telling me sooner so I could start emotionally preparing myself.”

His throat tightens.

“You really are terrifying,” he says.

“Thank you.”

They share a small smile. It’s almost friendly. Almost.

Ilya looks down at his plate. He’s eaten most of it without realizing.

“Do you think he heard me?” he asks quietly. “When I was talking to him.”

Yuna's eyes flick to Shane. Ilya wonders how old she was when she had him. Shane is an only child. Had they wanted him to have siblings? Had Yuna always wanted to be a mother, or did it just happen? He thinks about his own mother. He's always wondered by Irina had agreed to marry an old, angry man and have his kids when she was so young and beautiful.

"I don't know," she says honestly. "But I think... even if he didn't consciously hear you, some part of him did. People always say that."

He swallows hard.

They sit there, shoulder to shoulder now, eating bad pancakes and watching the man they both love breathe.

Waiting.

Chapter End Notes

awh bonding! also fiance pro fit for Yuna. She is THE Momager.

Next chapter: fallout.

ding dings if you know where Jesse is from

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Holy COW you guys! I cannot believe this fic has gotten 100k hits. It seriously means so much. i'M SO HAPPY i FOUND MY PEOPLE!!!

also yes it was Jesse from da pitt. I love da pitt. Watch me write a pitt fic next.

.....

Pittsburgh has a hockey team. It's in the east coast. Boston would play them. Oh my god. Is that the best idea ever???? Or maybe it's too niche.

also why didn't anyone TELL ME about the typo in the summary for this fic??? Smh making me look bad. i'VE FIXED IT, DON'T WORRY <3

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

Rose wakes to the sharp buzz of her phone rattling against the hard plastic chairs she's been sleeping on.

Last night, after she and Scott were escorted to Kip's room, they'd both basically collapsed. Kip wasn't going anywhere, and neither were they. Rose had texted Randi to cancel her appearances for the next couple of days. She'd expected a fight. Instead, Randi had sent back a single thumbs-up emoji. Rose had mentioned it to Scott, who'd looked faintly sick to his stomach.

"I can't miss the next game," he'd said and he looked so miserable that Rose hadn't pushed.

She liked Scott well enough. They hadn't done much besides talk about Kip, and then he'd hauled her away from Eva like she weighed nothing. It had pissed her off in the moment, but

it was probably for the best. The last thing Rose needed was to end up on the cover of a tabloid punching Eva in a hospital hallway.

In some ways, she and Eva were always paired together. Like Shane and Ilya- only without the rivalry. They were 'longtime collaborators' and 'friends'. People assumed they were a package deal. Maybe that was why they kept ending up on the same projects. It was just assumed they'd love to work together.

She's dizzy now, eyes blurry as she fumbles in her bag for her phone. It keeps buzzing. She's curled up across two plastic chairs she'd shoved together in a pathetic attempt at a bed. A nurse had given her a spare blanket, and she'd used her hoodie as a pillow.

Scott stirs, woken by the noise. He's way too big to fit comfortably on hospital chairs. They'd apparently run out of loungers overnight. He's got his jacket draped over him like a blanket, using the spare blanket he'd been given to pad the chair instead.

"Okay?" he mumbles, still half asleep.

"Yeah," Rose says. Kip still looks asleep. She finally grabs her phone. It's Randi. She's let it buzz too long- there's already a voicemail. Rose decides to wait a minute before calling back.

She's so exhausted she feels herself nodding off again when another buzz jolts her awake.

It's not her phone.

It's Scott's.

She rubs the heels of her palms into her eyes as she watches him pull his phone from the charger in the wall and answer it.

"Hello?" Scott says into his phone.

Someone answers, and his posture changes immediately. He sits up so fast his hoodie slides off his shoulders and puddles on the floor. He's wearing a red Admirals T-shirt underneath.

"What? What are you talking about?" He pauses, listening. "The *what?*"

At the exact same time, Rose's phone pings.

Randi's finished leaving her voicemail.

Rose unlocks her phone, about to listen to it, when the screen lights up again. And again. And again.

Mom: Rose, what did you do????

Peter: dude that was awesome

John: sis??? You good???

Mom: Rose Abigail Landry! Answer me!

Greg: mom's freaking out

Peter: you should have gotten another punch in. think you would have if Scott hadn't pulled you away

Mom: Do you have any idea what kind of disaster you've created???

Dad: hi honey, can you call when you get a chance

Dad: Love you

Greg: i am so happy this is gonna be the story at thanksgiving this year and not me being single

Oh. Shit.

She looks up from her phone and meets Scott's wide eyes.

"Gotta go," he tells whoever he's talking to. He pulls the phone away from his ear.

"That was my teammate from New York," he says. "Someone leaked the bodycam video online."

That is very much not good.

Rose mutes her phone and opens a browser, her fingers already shaking as she types her own name into the search bar.

The headlines are already there.

**ACTRESS EVA LOREN ARRESTED AFTER HOSPITAL ATTACK?
ROSE LANDRY, SCOTT HUNTER, ILYA ROZANOV IN ER FISTFIGHT! WATCH
THE SHOCKING VIDEO HERE
LEAKED BODYCAM FOOTAGE SHOWS CELEBS GOING PHYSICAL IN
HOSPITAL HALLWAY!**

Her stomach drops. Especially when she reads the last one.

**HOCKEY PLAYER SHANE HOLLANDER IN CRITICAL CONDITION AT NYC
HOSPITAL FOLLOWING ALTERCATION**

“Well,” she says faintly, angling her phone so Scott can see. “That’s not good.”

She sinks back into her chair. “I have no idea how someone could have gotten the bodycam so fast.”

“Maybe an insider?” Scott asks, sounding as helpless as she feels. Rose sighs and opens her phone to dial. She needs to call her mom or she’ll be here faster than Rose can blink.

It rings once.

“ROSE,” her mother barks immediately. “*WHY AM I FINDING OUT ABOUT A FISTFIGHT FROM TWITTER.*”

Rose squeezes her eyes shut, feeling a headache coming on.

“Good morning to you, too.”

“*Do not ‘good morning’ me. Are you okay? Are you hurt? Why is your name trending with Shane Hollander and a Russian hockey player who looks like he eats people?*”

Wow. That was different. Usually her mother would be more focused on-

“*You’ve created such a mess for me to handle!*”

Yep. There it was.

“Mom,” she complains, “You’re not my agent.”

“I wish I was. Then your father and I wouldn’t have been blindsided with this! You could have been arrested! And now I hear you’ve canceled your appearance on the Jennifer Hudson Show?”

“Mom,” Rose says tiredly. “I talked to Randi. We’re getting a lawyer and PR team. It’ll be fine.” She glances at Scott questioningly, who nods grimly in agreement. “Scott’s getting his team involved too.”

“Scott Hunter? The football player?”

She rolls her eyes.

“The hockey player, Mom.”

“I’m coming to New York.”

“No!” she barks too fast, then clears her throat. “No. You don’t need to come. Randi is handling it. I’m leaving it to the professionals, okay? I’ll have Randi call you.”

“But-”

“Okaygottagoloveyoubye,” Rose says quickly and hangs up. Then she mutes her mother.

“This isn’t good,” Scott says, looking a little green.

Of course, this is the exact moment Kip chooses to blink awake, groggy from whatever they gave him.

“What’s not good?” he asks blearily.

Rose drops her phone and is at his side immediately. Scott follows. Rose takes Kip’s hand. Scott takes the other.

“Nothing,” Scott says quietly. He looks like he may cry. “How are you feeling?”

“Okay,” Kip murmurs, then clears his throat.

Rose pulls away long enough to grab a cup of water and a straw. She and Scott ease Kip up and help him take a slow sip. They prop him against the pillows and raise the bed so he’s sitting upright. Kip hisses softly and folds a little around his stomach.

“Are you in pain?” Rose asks urgently. “Do you need us to call someone?”

“No. I’m fine. Just uncomfortable.” Kip blinks a few times. “Where are we?”

“The hospital,” Scott says.

Kip turns his head toward him. His eyes widen.

“Scott!” he breathes. “What are you doing here?”

“You don’t remember?” Rose asks.

Kip glances between them.

“I remember going to Eva’s apartment. And then... oh my god. Shane. Is he okay? He was-”

“He’s okay,” Scott says quickly. “He had surgery. He’s recovering. He’s just a few floors away. Rose called me, and I took the first flight after the game.”

Kip exhales shakily, like he’s been holding his breath too long.

“Is that... okay? I mean-” He glances at Rose. “Is it *okay* for you to be here?”

“She knows,” Scott says, a little sheepish. “Especially after how I acted.”

“You came out to someone?” Kip asks, his jaw dropping.

“Not in so many words,” Rose admits. “Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone. I can count on, like, six hands how many times I’ve found out about this kind of stuff.”

“Oh,” Kip says softly.

Scott lifts Kip's hand and presses a kiss to his knuckles. Even pale and groggy in a hospital bed, Kip blushes. It's painfully cute. Scott clears his throat, clearly forcing himself to focus.

"You were hurt, but not too badly. Right?" he asks, looking to Rose for backup.

"Right," she confirms. "You just needed some stitches. It was scary for everyone, though. They gave you medication to calm you down and decided to keep you overnight. You should be released today."

Kip groans and drops his head back onto the pillow.

"Oh no. I have a shift at Straw+Berry. What time is it?"

Scott checks his watch.

"A little past seven. Wait-you're not going in, are you?"

Kip suddenly looks guilty.

“Well...”

“No,” Scott and Rose say at the same time.

“But-”

“Your dad will be here tomorrow,” Rose cuts in, trying to redirect him. “He’s on a business trip and booked the first flight he could get.”

“You talked to my dad?”

“I talked to everyone,” she says. “They should let you out today, but you really do need rest. And if you’re worried about making rent, I can pay it.”

“What? I’m not-” Kip sputters. “I live with my parents, first of all. I don’t pay rent. And even if I did, I couldn’t let you-”

“I’m a millionaire, Kip,” Rose says flatly. “My last movie made five hundred and eighty million dollars, and my deal was two percent of the profit. It’s a drop in the bucket.”

“Don’t even try to argue,” Scott adds seriously. “She won’t listen.”

“Great,” Kip grumbles. “Now I have two rich people trying to pay for me.”

Rose and Scott share a ‘*can you believe this guy*’ look and Scott opens his mouth to say something, maybe to argue, when there’s a knock on the door frame. All three of them look and see a woman in a white coat with a severe bun and circular glasses standing there.

“Oh, good, you’re awake,” she says brightly. “I’m Dr. Charles. How are you feeling, Kip?”

“Fine. Mostly sore.”

“Sore how?”

“Like in between getting hit by a truck and checked during a hockey game?”

Rose snorts. Scott bites his lip to keep from laughing.

The doctor smiles.

“What's your pain level? One to ten. Ten being the worst pain in your life and one being a paper cut.”

Kip thinks about it. “A three? Uncomfortable, but not awful. Just a little tight.”

“Good. That’s what we like to hear.” She checks his IV, his monitors, and scribbles something down. “We’ll keep you for observation until later this morning. If everything looks good, you can go home this afternoon.”

Kip nods, relieved.

“Thank you.”

After she leaves, Kip looks between them again.

“...So,” he says hesitantly. “Did anything else happen while I was out?”

Rose opens her mouth and hesitates. How is she going to explain the whole Eva thing? Scott squeezes Kip's hand.

"Do you want the short version or the version that ends with my face on Twitter?" Scott asks.

Kip blinks.

"...Why would your face be on Twitter?"

Rose grimaces.

"Okay, so. Funny story."

It's only now, standing there with the paperwork in hand and Kip on his feet, that it really sinks in just how close it was.

Both Rose and Scott have been fielding calls from their reps for the past hour. It's been decided that Rose and Scott's teams will meet with Ilya's people in one of the hospital's conference rooms, along with a few attorneys. Rose has tried to ignore the news, but with new notifications popping up every second and the constant stream of texts from her family and Randi, it's impossible.

She can tell Scott is having a hard time with all of it. He's deeply in the closet, and the publicity is clearly rattling him. She's watched him answer call after call from guys on his team. He even got one from his coach and stepped out of the room to take it.

It doesn't help that none of this makes much sense on the surface. It's not unusual for hockey players to be friends, but Scott and Shane-or Scott and Ilya- aren't known to be close. There's no obvious reason he would've rushed out after a game, skipped post-game media, and ended up in the middle of a fistfight in an ER with Rozanov.

They're in the elevator, headed to the meeting-Kip had insisted on coming along-when Rose slides her hand into Scott's.

"It's okay," she says gently. "We've been friends for a long time. I needed your support after what happened with my friend."

Scott frowns. So does Kip.

"But-,"

"We met at a fundraiser in New York three years ago," she says smoothly. Lying is a lot like acting; it comes easily to her. "The one for kids with CP."

They had both been at that fundraiser, though they'd never actually interacted.

"Okay?" Scott says, confused.

"We've been texting back and forth and meeting up whenever we're both in town," Rose continues. "When I found out Shane was hurt, I needed the support of someone local. You're nice. You came to support me."

Kip frowns. "It'll seem like you guys are dating."

She quirks an eyebrow at both of them. "Oh, does it? Weird. Our mutual friend was in the hospital too. I met him," she points to Kip, "through you," she points to Scott.

"You want us to fake-date?" Scott asks, his voice a little pitchy.

Rose shrugs. "I'm sure Randi can arrange it. It'll explain why you came here and it'd be a bigger story than the ER thing. Does that work for you two?"

Kip and Scott exchange a look. They have a whole private conversation with just their eyes, one Rose can't follow. She feels a familiar pang of envy. Shane has Ilya. Scott has Kip. Her mom, as annoying as she is, has her dad. Rose is just... unlucky in love. Still, it feels nice to be around people who are.

“Okay?” Scott says finally, uncertain.

“Just in case,” Rose assures him.

The elevator dings, and the doors slide open onto the conference room floor. They step out together. A hospital security guard is stationed nearby, though it’s not the same one who dragged Rose away from the fight.

The guard opens the door for them. Rose murmurs a thank-you as they step inside.

The room is chaos.

Rose immediately spots Randi. She has no idea how her agent managed to get from L.A. to New York this fast, but the sight of her is grounding. Randi’s dark hair is pulled into a messy bun, and she looks wired and exhausted in equal measure. A man in a crisp suit sits beside her, posture straight and expression severe. Definitely her lawyer.

Across the room is another pair: a man in a plain button-down and jeans, and a woman in a tailored pantsuit. Scott’s people, she guesses. Or Ilya’s. Or both? Next to them is Dr. Mason, the hospital director from before, and a woman in a neon blue blouse.

And then, in the far corner, Ilya Rozanov and Yuna Hollander stand close together, speaking in low tones. Ilya's shoulders are tight. Yuna's arms are crossed, her face drawn and tired. They're very quickly talking back and forth.

"Hello," Rose says, attempting a general greeting.

No one hears her. Or, if they do, they're too deep in their own conversations to register it. She clears her throat.

"Rose." Randi looks up and immediately stands, relief washing over her face. She's barely five feet tall, but she barrels across the room and wraps Rose in a fierce hug. "Christ. Have you made my job harder for me."

"Sorry," Rose mutters into her shoulder.

Randi pulls back, still gripping her arms. "We're going to survive this. But I swear to God-"

"I know. I know."

The man in the suit rises and offers his hand. "Jacob Garrity," he says briskly. "Your attorney."

Rose shakes it. “Nice to meet you. I think.”

Scott nudges her lightly with his elbow. “That’s my agent Todd,” he murmurs, nodding toward the guy in jeans. “And I think that’s Rosanna Martinez, my lawyer. I’ve never actually met her in person. Only over the phone.”

Rose gives Scott a look that says *we are absolutely in over our heads*, then straightens her shoulders and follows Randi back toward the table. They all sit down, having been the last to arrive. Kip looks really out of place there, but Rose sits in between Scott and him. She feels bad for it, they clearly want to sit together, but it’s not the time or place.

“Okay,” Randi claps her hands once, sharp and managerial. “Now that the rest of our main characters have arrived, can we please get on the same page before Twitter invents a new felony?”

Jacob Garrity clears his throat. “First order of business: no one says anything to the press. Anyone. Not even ‘no comment.’ Especially not ‘no comment.’”

Rosanna nods in agreement. “We already have three different versions of events circulating. A drunk brawl. A lovers’ spat. A Russian mob hit.” She flicks her tablet awake. “Someone on TikTok thinks it was performance art.”

Scott winces. “I didn’t even punch anyone.”

“That is not helping,” the woman with the blue blouse mutters. She must be the hospital attorney. They haven’t done introductions, but she’s sitting next to Dr. Mason.

Rose slinks into her chair, suddenly exhausted all over again. “So what’s the worst-case scenario here?”

Jacob doesn’t hesitate. “Charges. Civil suits. Morality clauses. Sponsors getting skittish. Studios delaying projects. The bodycam footage makes it look... messy.”

“Because it was messy,” Rose says flatly. “She wanted Shane dead.”

Yuna Hollander makes an unhappy noise. Rose has never met her, but she’s seen pictures. She’s beautiful.

Randi points at her. “And that’s the story we are sticking to. You acted in defense of another person. Multiple witnesses. Hospital security footage. We have facts on our side. Eva was making a threat.”

From the corner, Ilya finally looks up. His eyes flick to Rose, then Scott, then Kip sitting awkwardly between them.

“It was not self defense,” he says quietly. “It was an emotional action.”

Yuna touches his arm. “Ilya.”

“No,” he insists, voice tight. “We all lost our heads. We made it worse.”

Scott shifts in his seat. “With all due respect, man, if we hadn’t tackled her, she would’ve figured out a way to hurt Kip or Shane again.”

Kip stiffens. “Again?”

Everyone looks at him.

Rose turns fully toward him. “You weren’t supposed to hear that part.”

Ilya swears under his breath in Russian.

Jacob exhales slowly. “All right. New rule: injured parties don’t listen to legal strategy.”

Kip folds his arms. “I’m fine. And it’s my fault you’re all in this mess.”

“Absolutely not,” Rose says immediately.

Scott nods. “Not even a little.”

Yuna shakes her head. “I read the police report. My son is alive because you. You don’t get to take blame for this.”

Kip swallows hard and looks at the floor.

Randi clears her throat again. “Okay. Moving on before we all start crying, okay? Eva Loren has been arrested. Assault with a deadly weapon. The DA hasn’t filed formal charges yet, but they will. That shifts public sentiment in your favor.”

Rosanna taps her screen. “The leaked footage is the bigger problem. It shows all of you throwing punches. Including you, Ms. Landry.”

Rose sighs. "I knew I shouldn't have hit her."

Ilya mutters, "She had it coming."

Randi shoots him a warning glare. "We are not saying that out loud. Ever."

Todd leans forward. "The league is already calling. Scott, they're concerned about optics. You skipped post-game media, and showed up in a viral ER brawl. Same with you, Ilya. Chances are good you will both be penalized by the league."

Scott scrubs a hand over his face. "I don't care about optics. Kip could have died."

"And Shane." Ilya adds morosely.

"That," Todd says gently, "is not how contract clauses work. It doesn't matter the motivation. You two could be looking at serious fines. Or even game suspensions."

The room goes quiet for a beat.

Rose reaches out and squeezes Scott's hand under the table.

"Here's what we're doing," Randi says. "Joint statement, carefully worded. Emphasizing concern for Shane Hollander, gratitude to hospital staff, and relief that everyone is recovering. No details about relationships. No details about motives. No comments about Eva beyond 'the matter is in the hands of law enforcement.'"

Jacob nods. "And no more surprise meetings in emergency rooms."

"Well-," Ilya starts and Rose can see Yuna kick him in the shin. "Nevermind," he says quickly, leaning over a bit to rub his shin.

"The question is," Randi says, scanning the room, "how do we explain why all three of you were in the ER in the first place?"

Rose's eyes flick to Scott. He could tell the truth-it wouldn't leave this room- but he looks so pale she is worried he might faint. She glances at Kip, who is staring at her helplessly.

"Scott and I are friends," she says quickly. All eyes in the room shift to her. Even Ilya looks surprised. "We met a few years ago at a fundraiser. Shane and I are friends as well, and when I heard he was hurt, I needed support."

"Are you two... together?" someone asks. She's not sure who.

Rose looks at Scott. He looks like he might be sick. She swallows. “Can we say it’s private?” she asks weakly.

“They used to date,” Kip blurts suddenly. Everyone turns to him. “A while back? But they left on good terms.”

“Sorry,” Jacob asks, brow furrowed. “How are you involved?”

Time to act. Rose straightens. “Kip is Scott’s friend,” she says easily. “He works at the smoothie shop Scott frequents. That’s how they know each other. Scott was concerned about Shane, and because he was busy, asked Kip to check in on him. And... here we are.”

“But-”

“It’s complicated,” Rose and Kip say together.

“Look,” Rose continues, leaning forward slightly, “does it even matter how? The story is that my friend Shane, and my co-star Eva, were dating. Eva was abusive, and Shane got hurt. When we”—she gestures from herself to Scott and Ilya—“saw her saying vile things, our emotions took over. If anyone *should* get arrested, it’s her. Or at the very least me. Scott never touched Eva.”

“No one’s getting arrested,” Randi cuts in. “But it still doesn’t explain why Ilya was here. They hate each other, right?”

Now all eyes turned to Yuna. She sighs, rubbing her forehead.

“Ilya and Shane are rivals, yes. But they’ve known each other since they were seventeen. The rivalry was...” She glances at Ilya, who looks as ashen as Scott. “Overplayed. After a few years, it became less hateful, more respectful. I’d even say they’re friendly. Ilya was already in New York for...”

“Business,” Ilya supplies flatly.

“Right. Business,” Yuna agrees “When Scott, another NHL captain who knows they get along, let him know my son was hurt... that’s why all three were in the ER. For Shane- and Kip.”

Rose isn't sure how Yuna knows Kip's name. Ilya must have told her. They make an odd pair. It makes sense that she'd be here as Shane's mother, but she's going an awful lot of talking on Ilya's behalf. Had Ilya asked her to represent him?

A hush falls over the room as they all consider the angle. Rose spies Randi scribbling notes furiously in a little notebook.

“The hospital won’t press charges,” the woman in the blue blouse adds. “We’ve accepted the generous donations as an act of good faith.”

“And the donations are?” Rosanna asks, her eyes narrowing.

“A million each,” Rose blurts out before she can stop herself. She has the money, certainly. Even if Scott or Ilya don’t, she could cover all three of them.

“Yes,” Ilya adds, nodding in agreement.

“That could be seen as paying your way out of trouble,” Jacob interjects cautiously.

“People get emotional in our ER,” Dr. Mason says from the corner, his tone calm. “It’s understandable. As for the criminal charges, that decision rests with Miss Loren. She’s still in our care but she will be released into police custody. She may want to press charges.”

Rose exhales, letting her shoulders drop slightly. “That’s fair,” she says, even though she really doesn’t mean it. “But the donations aren’t meant as a cover-up. They’re because we care. Plain and simple.”

Ilya shifts slightly, glancing at Yuna, who gives a small, approving nod. Scott fidgets with the edge of his hoodie, clearly unused to being part of a serious conversation like this. Kip is sitting awkwardly, clearly out of his element. The bandage on his face is stark white in the conference room lighting.

Randi scribbles rapidly on her notepad, muttering to herself. “Okay, we frame this as a goodwill gesture. Not hush money. Got it.”

Rosanna leans back, arms crossed. “And the media? How do we handle that? This is already trending nationally. It hasn't even been a day.”

Rose glances at Scott, then at Kip, who’s quietly watching the proceedings with wide eyes. “We stick to the truth. Minimal details. Emotions run high, people make mistakes. No one’s hiding anything, but no one needs a full play-by-play either.”

“Shane is stable. That’s the priority. Everything else comes second. Make that clear.” Yuna’s voice cuts in firmly. “And we keep it short. We can all issue statements that support another and go from there. Simple, right?”

Ilya exhales, a brief smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “Simple works.”

Dr. Mason clears his throat. “We will release a statement that Mr. Hollander is here and he is stable as well as ask for privacy. In return I expect you all to behave if you must visit again. No more theatrics in my hospital.”

“Understood,” Rose says. "Randi?"

Randi flashes her a thumbs up. "I'll get a draft started with the PR team and have it sent around. Once everyone gives it the green light, we post it. Stay off social media. All of you." she orders.

"No problem." Rose lies. Because she's had her phone open to about a hundred different gossip sites this whole time. It would definitely be a problem to try and keep herself offline. "We can get through this." she adds, looking at Scott and Kip.

For once, it feels like everyone is listening.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading! *kisses your forehead *

up next: shane.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

okay. THIS one is my favorite chapter.

TW: graphic depictions of abuse. mentions and references to suicide. DV. Homophobia and bullying. self-blaming. Hints of eating disorders. Please take care of yourselves with this one, loves!

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

When Shane is sixteen, he realizes he might be different from the rest of his teammates.

He loves hockey. Of course everyone on his hockey team loves hockey, right? But Shane loves it with the kind of devotion that borders on obsession. He gets to practice an hour early just to steal extra ice time. He stays late. On his sixteenth birthday, his coach tosses him a set of keys to the rink and tells him to lock up when he's done. Shane is more excited about that than he was when his parents bought him a used car.

One of his teammates is named John.

John hates hockey. His dad had been an all-star back in the day. John's older brother had played hockey. His sister had played hockey. So John has to play, too. It has never occurred to Shane that someone could hate playing hockey. Sure, their schedules are brutal. Sure, their gear always smells like sweat and mildew. But that all feels like a small price to pay to be on the ice.

“My dad makes me,” John tells Shane one night after practice.

Shane is driving them home, and they’ve stopped for milkshakes. They sit in Shane’s car in the parking lot, passing a small bag of fries back and forth and dipping them into their shakes.

“I hate it,” John says. “I wanted to play music. But then I wouldn’t have time for hockey.”

“How could you not like hockey?” Shane asks. “You’re good at it.”

John shrugs. “I’m good at math. That doesn’t mean I like it.”

Shane is a little jealous. He’s bad at math. He’s bad at everything that isn’t hockey. He’d just transferred to online school so he can keep playing hockey. School had been hard enough in person. It’s even worse over the internet.

“Sounds insane,” Shane says.

“It would to you, Mr. Hockey,” John says. “You’ll be playing professional hockey in a few years.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yeah, I do. You’ll be playing professional hockey for some team and making millions of dollars. My dad’ll see you on TV and look at you like the son he’s always wanted. He’ll tell his bar buddies he used to drive a carpool for the great Shane Hollander.”

Shane doesn’t know what to say to that. “What about you?” he asks instead. “Where will you be in a few years?”

John gives him a small, sideways smile. He has the prettiest brown eyes Shane has ever seen. “I don’t know. Not here.”

Three weeks later, John is dead.

He jumps off the Place Bell building.

His family moves to Vancouver soon after. For a while, Shane still stops by John’s empty house to pick him up for practice. It isn’t until he’s standing on the porch, knocking on a door no one answers, that he remembers his friend is dead.

John had been right.

He wouldn't be in Ottawa in a few years.

Secondly, Shane never notices his own feelings.

His mom says he gets that from his dad. His dad says that too. Yuna Hollander is as bright as the sun. David Hollander is just lucky to be a flower growing under it. Shane feels like a little weed pushing up through a crack in the sidewalk.

Maybe it would have been better if he'd had a sibling or two. He knows his parents struggled to have him. They'd talked about adoption when he was little, but in the end they decided to pour everything they had into just him.

A few months after John dies, Shane is skating laps alone in the empty rink.

He takes four pucks and tries to hit one into each corner. Then he skates a lap or two. Hockey is the only thing that makes his brain shut up. He's worried about making the cut. He's worried about meetings with scouts. He's worried about his stupid English paper on *The Great Gatsby*, due in three days, when he hasn't even cracked the book open yet. But when his stick connects with the puck, it's like someone turns the volume down inside his head.

He's so focused he doesn't hear someone come in.

He nearly jumps out of his skin when clapping echoes through the rink.

He spins around and sees a guy about his age in a tight black shirt and gloves, applauding loudly.

“Wow,” the guy says. “They weren’t kidding. You are good.”

“Who are you?” Shane asks. Sweat drips into his eyes; he wipes it away with the back of his hand.

The guy flashes a keyring that looks a lot like Shane’s. “We had the same idea. My name’s Joe.”

“Shane.”

“I know,” Joe says with a wry smile. He has dirty blond hair and bright, amused eyes. “My coach thought I could use the practice.”

“You play hockey?”

“No. I’m a figure skater.” Joe skates a little closer. “Do you mind if we share the ice? I won’t bother you.”

“That’s fine. I can leave,” Shane says awkwardly.

“You can stay. Just don’t hit me with a puck,” Joe says, pushing off onto the ice.

He’s taller than Shane, all wiry muscle instead of bulk. He moves like he belongs there, graceful even in a simple glide. Shane always thinks he looks like a dumb oaf when he skates. He hates watching himself play.

“I won’t,” Shane says.

“Good,” Joe says.

“Good,” Shane repeats, stupidly. “Sorry. I’ll leave you to it.”

They start sharing the ice a lot more after that.

Shane learns Joe is a year older than him. He likes to read, especially the *Harry Potter* books. He has an older sister who died of cancer before he was born. He rides his bicycle to the rink. His mom is a nurse; his dad works at a bank. He started skating when he was little and can't imagine doing anything else.

He does school online too. He tells Shane it's so he can skate more.

But he looks a little sad when he says it.

One night, after another shared ice session, they go to leave and find Joe's bike with two flat tires.

There are two neat slices in each tire. Someone has slashed them.

Joe stands there for a long time, staring down at his bike. He doesn't say anything.

"We can patch it," Shane offers.

"I need to replace them," Joe says, not looking away.

“Sorry,” Shane says.

“It’s fine. You didn’t do it,” Joe replies. The familiar amusement is gone from his voice.

They stand there in their coats, staring at the ruined bike.

“C’mon,” Shane finally says. “It can fit in my trunk. I can drive you home.”

“Okay,” Joe says.

They shove the bike into Shane’s car. Shane drives him home and helps carry it into the garage. Joe thanks him. Shane goes home.

And then things like that keep happening.

One time Joe comes to the rink and finds the blades snapped clean off his skates. Another time they skate during open hours and come back to find someone has dumped an entire soda into Joe’s bag. Shane helps him try to save his gear, but it’s a lost cause.

Every time something happens, Joe gets that blank look on his face- the one that reminds Shane of John a little too much.

The worst thing happens right before a competition at the rink.

Joe invites Shane. Shane has never been to a figure skating competition before. When he tells his mom, she smiles and gives him ten dollars for the entry fee and tells him to have fun.

At the rink, Shane meets Joe's dad. His mom has to work. Joe's dad is just as tall as Joe, with the same eyes.

They call Joe's name.

He doesn't come out.

Joe's dad looks confused. So do the judges.

"I'll find him," Shane offers, and slides out of the bleachers.

He finds Joe on the locker room floor, crying.

His costume-a sequined, billowy blue shirt that matches his eyes, with matching pants-has been cut straight down the center. There's marker scrawled across it too.

FAGGOT.

All in capital letters.

Shane can't understand why anyone would want to hurt Joe like this. Joe is nice. Joe is funny. He always reads the plaques on park benches. He can hold a handstand longer than anyone Shane has ever met.

"Go away, Shane," Joe snuffles. He sounds exhausted.

"Why would someone do this?" Shane asks, anger flaring in his chest. Joe had been excited to skate.

"Look at it," Joe says, gesturing at the word. "It's right there."

It takes Shane a second to connect the dots.

“Oh,” he says dumbly. “Because they think you’re-”

“I am,” Joe cuts in tightly. “I *am* a faggot. I am a queer.”

“Oh,” Shane says again.

“I thought it would get better after I dropped out of school. But the kids from school skate here.” Joe rubs his eyes. “You didn’t drop out of school on purpose?”

“I didn’t want to. I liked it. But the bullying was too bad. It was supposed to get better.”

Joe suddenly stands and yanks off one of his shoes. He hurls it at the ruined costume.

“Fucking- ugh!”

“We can fix it,” Shane says. “Do you have a backup?”

“Do I look like I have a backup?” Joe snaps.

“Sorry.” Shane glances down at his jacket- a jet-black peacoat. He shrugs it off and holds it out. “You can wear this, right? All black is better than nothing.”

Joe stares at the jacket like it’s made of gold. He looks from the jacket to Shane and back again.

“Thank you,” he says hoarsely.

“No problem. Wash your face. I’ll tell them to expect you soon,” Shane says, nodding. He gives Joe a small smile and leaves the locker room.

Joe skates in Shane’s jacket fifteen minutes later.

He’s incredible.

He gets third place.

He later tells Shane he would've gotten first if he hadn't been penalized for being late and for his outfit. Shane believes him.

After that, Shane starts driving Joe to and from the rink.

Later they end up in the same parking lot after skating, sharing a milkshake. Just one. Joe needs to watch his weight, and Shane does too.

"I used to hang out with John here," Shane says, passing the milkshake to Joe.

"John?" Joe asks, taking a thoughtful sip. "Oh-the guy who-"

"Yeah. He was kind of my only friend," Shane says, and immediately feels stupid for saying it. Why did he even bring Joe here? To the place he used to come with his best friend, before his best friend jumped off a building?

"Do you know why he did it?" Joe asks.

There's a little milkshake on his upper lip. Shane stares at it for a second before blinking.

"No. Maybe. I don't know," he says. "He didn't like hockey. His dad made him play. I just... I wish he'd left a note or something. I think the worst part is not knowing. I don't know if he was scared or not."

Joe's whole face softens as he looks at Shane.

"C'mere," Joe says.

Shane's confused, but he leans in.

Joe kisses him on the cheek.

It sends a rush of warmth through Shane's chest, like someone lit a small fire under his ribs. He wants Joe to stay there longer, wants him closer, but Joe is already pulling away.

"What was that for?" Shane asks.

“I’m your friend, Shane,” Joe says. “We’re friends, aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” Shane says stupidly.

He wants Joe to kiss his cheek again, but he doesn’t say that. He doesn’t even really understand why he wants it.

They finish their milkshake. Shane drives Joe home.

The next week, Joe gets recruited for Team Canada for the Olympics and has to move to the training facility. His family throws him a going-away party. Shane is happy for him. Joe is going to live his dream.

But watching that car drive away toward the airport leaves Shane feeling hollow.

Now, of course, it’s obvious to him that he liked Joe.

But at the time, he hadn’t known. Literally anyone else would’ve figured it out. But Shane hadn’t.

His teammates talk all the time in the locker room about crushes and dating and girls. Shane never does. He never gets why everyone talks about sex all the time, or how much ass they're getting. Shane just wants to play hockey and be left alone.

So yeah- Shane isn't the smartest about this stuff. But he eventually starts to understand just how different he is from his teammates.

He tries, once, to explain it to his mom. He fumbles over the words and they come out wrong. A lot of Shane's words come out wrong. It's like he knows exactly what he wants to say, but when he tries to say it, there's superglue on his lips.

It doesn't occur to Shane, for years, that this is a pattern.

Joe leaves. John dies. People matter to him, and then they disappear. And Shane just... files it away. He buries himself deeper into hockey, because hockey doesn't leave. Hockey doesn't get sick. Hockey doesn't jump off buildings or move to Olympic training facilities. Hockey stays exactly where you put it.

When Ilya Rozanov shows up in his life, Shane is already seventeen and half-feral with ambition.

Ilya is loud. Ilya is brilliant. Ilya is infuriating.

Ilya beats him to the puck by half a second and smirks like he's won the war. Ilya trash-talks him in two different languages. Ilya elbows him in the ribs and then pretends it was an accident. Ilya steals his goals and his headlines and his spot on the highlight reels.

Shane hates him.

At least, that's what he tells himself.

What he actually does is memorize the exact way Ilya's mouth twists when he's about to chirp something nasty. He notices how Ilya always ties his skates in the same double-knot pattern. He learns the cadence of his laugh without meaning to. He feels something warm and electric in his chest every time Ilya looks at him like Shane is the only person in an arena of thousands worth paying attention to.

When Ilya slams him into the boards and growls something in Russian into his ear, Shane's heart goes haywire and his hands shake for an hour afterward. He assumes that's adrenaline.

When Ilya grins at him from across the ice, Shane feels off-balance, like he's standing too close to the edge of something tall. He assumes that's anger.

When Ilya gets drafted to Boston and they don't see each other for months, Shane feels hollow in a way that reminds him too much of airport parking lots and empty rinks and slashed bike tires.

He assumes that's competitiveness.

He never once assumes it might be grief.

Or longing.

Or the same stupid, aching thing he felt when Joe kissed him on the cheek and then left.

Shane dates women because that's what you do. He goes through the motions. He likes them well enough. He tries to feel what his teammates seem to feel. It never sticks. It always feels like he's reading lines from a script everyone else got in advance.

Every time he runs into Ilya again- at tournaments, at league events, on opposite sides of the ice- something in him locks into place. Something familiar. Something stupidly hopeful.

He tells himself it's because he wants to beat him and because the sex is good. Great.

They get under each other's skin. They needle. They provoke. They orbit. They can't leave each other alone. Shane starts sleeping with Ilya because it happens the way everything in his

life happens: intensely, and without him quite understanding how he got there.

He tells himself it's just sex and that it doesn't mean anything. When they finally end up in Vegas together it feels like the universe is playing a joke on him.

He tells himself he's not like Joe. He tells himself he's not like that. He tells himself he just likes Ilya because Ilya is there and hot and familiar and dangerous in the way hockey is dangerous.

But it's not the truth, is it?

The truth is that he recognizes Ilya the same way he recognized Joe. The same way he recognized John. The way he typed out the words 'we never even kissed' and deleted it before he could send it.

The truth is that his brain goes quiet when Ilya is near. The truth is that he sleeps better when Ilya is in his bed. The truth is that he feels like he's standing under the sun again.

But Shane Hollander has spent his entire life mislabeling his own feelings.

He calls loneliness discipline. He calls grief motivation. He calls love rivalry.

And by the time he realizes what he's actually done- by the time he understands that he's fallen in love with his worst enemy and the one person he never learned how to leave alone -

It's already too important to survive being named out loud.

Maybe that's why, when he sees Eva at that party, he's drawn to her.

She's beautiful the way Ilya is beautiful- bright and magnetic and impossible to ignore. Her eyes are alive with humor. She laughs easily and loudly, like the world hasn't taught her to flinch yet. She leans into him when she talks, touches his arm like it's the most natural thing in the world.

She seems warm.

And Shane is so tired of being cold.

Being with her feels simple at first. Easy. She wants him. She admires him. She doesn't challenge him the way Ilya does, doesn't see through him, doesn't ask questions he doesn't know how to answer. She fits into his life the way a puzzle piece fits when you're too exhausted to notice it's from the wrong box.

He tells himself that must be what normal feels like.

The first time she hits him, they're arguing about their schedules.

He has to be in New Jersey for a game. Eva is filming in the city and wants him to come meet her between takes. It would mean cutting it too close, risking traffic, risking being late to warm-ups. Shane says no carefully in the same the way he's learned to say no to coaches and managers and sponsors.

"I can't," he says. "It's a game day."

She rolls her eyes. "You're *always* at a game."

"It's my job," he says. "This one matters."

"They all matter," she snaps. "I matter too."

He exhales, rubs his face. "Eva, I just- if I miss warm-ups, I get fined. If I'm late, Coach is going to lose his mind. I'll see you after."

“You always say that,” she says. Her voice has gone sharp around the edges. “After, after, after. I’m not an afterthought, Shane.”

“You’re not,” he says automatically. He means it. He thinks he means it.

“So come *now*,” she says. “Prove it.”

“I can’t,” he says again.

Something in her face changes.

It happens so fast he almost misses it- the way her mouth tightens, the way her eyes go flat. She steps closer, jabs a finger into his chest.

“You’re choosing hockey over me. Again.”

“I’m not choosing hockey over you,” he says, confused. “I’m choosing my job.”

“Same thing.”

“No, it’s not.”

“God, you’re so fucking selfish,” she says.

That hurts more than he expects it to. He feels himself fold inward the way he always does when someone gets mad at him. “I’m trying to do the right thing.”

“For who?” she says. “Your precious team? Your stupid coach? Or yourself?”

He opens his mouth to answer.

She slaps him.

It’s not hard enough to knock him down. It’s not dramatic or anything like that. It’s just sharp and sudden and *loud* in the kitchen. The sound cracks through the room like a dropped plate.

They both freeze.

Shane's cheek burns. His ears ring. He tastes metal in his mouth even though she didn't hit him that hard.

"I-" Eva says. "I didn't mean to-"

He blinks at her. His brain feels like it's buffering.

"It's fine," he says, automatically.

He doesn't know why he says that.

He doesn't know why his first instinct is to smooth it over, to make it smaller, to make it okay. Maybe it's because he grew up with coaches who screamed in his face and threw clipboards. Maybe it's because anger has always felt like something he deserves. Maybe it's because his whole life has trained him to absorb impact and keep standing.

Eva starts crying. "You make me so mad," she says. "You just don't care enough."

He reaches out, stupidly, to comfort her. "I do care."

She presses her face into his chest. “I just get so scared you’re going to leave me.”

He thinks about Joe. About John. About airports and locker rooms and empty beds.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he says.

It becomes the story they tell themselves.

It was a mistake. It was stress. It was fear. It won’t happen again.

And it doesn’t.

Not for a while.

But something in Shane shifts anyway. He starts choosing his words more carefully. He starts checking her mood before he checks his own. He starts rearranging his life to keep her happy, the way he’s rearranged his whole life around hockey.

He tells himself this is what relationships are. He tells himself that love means compromise.
He tells himself that warmth comes with a cost.

And he does not, not once, tell anyone about the slap.

Because it didn't leave a mark.

Because she cried.

Because he's a six-foot-two professional athlete and she's a woman half his size.

Because no one would believe him.

Because, deep down, some part of him thinks he earned it.

It doesn't happen again right away.

That becomes important to Shane. Proof, he thinks, that it really was just a fluke. Eva is sweet afterward. Overly sweet. She texts him constantly, sends him pictures from set, shows up at his games with homemade signs and a smile so bright it makes his chest ache.

See? he tells himself. Normal couples fight. Normal couples mess up. Normal couples forgive.

The next time it happens, it's six weeks later.

He forgets to tell her about a team dinner. It runs late. His phone dies. When he finally gets to her home, she's sitting on the couch in the dark, arms folded.

"Where were you?" she asks.

"I texted you," he says, fumbling for his charger. "We had a team thing. My phone--"

"You didn't text me," she says. "I waited two hours."

"I did. I swear." His phone turns back on. The message is there, timestamped and unread. He shows it to her.

She doesn't look.

"So now you're calling me a liar?" she says.

"No," he says quickly. "I'm just saying-"

She stands up so fast the coffee table rattles. "You're always making me feel crazy."

"I'm not trying to-"

She shoves him. Harder than the slap, this time. He stumbles back into the wall, shoulder hitting drywall.

"Don't," she says. "Don't do that to me."

"I didn't do anything," he says, quietly.

Her hand comes up again. This time she hits his chest, not his face. Once. Twice. Three times. Each impact is more startling than painful.

“Stop,” he says, but his voice is barely there.

She breaks down crying immediately after, like a switch flips. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. You just scare me when you pull away like that.”

“I wasn’t pulling away,” he says.

“You were,” she insists. “You always do.”

He wraps his arms around her because she’s shaking and because that’s what you do when someone is crying and because he doesn’t know what else to do.

It becomes a pattern.

Something goes wrong. He says the wrong thing. Or the right thing in the wrong tone. Or nothing at all. She explodes, she collapses and then he comforts her.

He starts to feel like he's constantly defusing a bomb that only he can see.

The third time, she throws his phone across the room. It shatters against the wall.

"You care more about this stupid thing than me," she screams.

"I need it for work," he says. "My sponsors-"

"Your sponsors, your team, your fans- what about me?"

She slaps him again. Hard enough this time that his head snaps to the side. His ear rings for hours afterward.

He doesn't tell anyone but he does buy a new phone.

The fourth time, she locks him out of his own building at two in the morning because he doesn't answer her texts during a home game.

He sleeps in his car.

The fifth time, she throws a mug at his head. It misses and shatters against the fridge.

He cleans up the glass and tells himself it's still not that bad.

He tells himself it's not like she's really hurting him. He tells himself that every relationship has rough patches.

But something in him starts to go numb.

He stops bringing things up. Stops disagreeing. Stops saying no. He lets her schedule his off-days. Lets her read his messages. Lets her decide who he can and can't hang out with.

He starts lying to his teammates about why he can't come out with them.

"Eva needs me," he says, even when they're in Florida and she's in New York City.

He starts lying to his mom about the bruises on his arms.

“Hockey injury” he says. “You know how it is.”

He starts lying to himself about how afraid he is.

Sometimes, late at night, he lies awake next to her and thinks about Joe. About John. About Ilya, who would never look at him the way Shane wanted him to. About how all three of them left him and how maybe this is just the price of not being alone.

It’s the knife that finally changes things.

Not right away. Not the first time.

They’re in her kitchen, arguing about nothing. About a comment he didn’t like on one of her posts. About a scene she filmed with a co-star and didn’t tell him about. About how he didn’t answer her call fast enough because he was in the shower.

He’s tired. He’s always tired.

“I’m not cheating on you,” he says. “You know that.”

“You say that like it means something,” she snaps.

“It does mean something,” he says. “I don’t lie to you.”

She laughs, sharp and humorless. “You lie all the time.”

“I don’t.”

She turns away from him and yanks open a drawer. His stomach drops when he hears the metal clatter.

She pulls out a knife.

He freezes.

She doesn’t point it at him. Not at first. She just grips it too tightly, knuckles white, blade shaking.

“You make me feel insane,” she says. “Do you know that?”

“Eva,” he says, alarmed. “Put that down.”

“I wouldn’t feel this way if you didn’t push me.”

“I’m not pushing you,” he says. His heart is beating so hard it hurts. “Please. Just put it down.”

She slams the knife into the cutting board. The sound makes him flinch.

“You don’t care about me,” she says. “You never have.”

“That’s not true.”

“You’d rather be anywhere else than here with me.”

He takes a step back.

“I need you to put the knife away,” he says.

She looks at him like she hates him. Like she loves him. Like she doesn’t know the difference.

“You’re scared of me now?” she says, almost mocking.

“Yes,” he says, because it’s easier than lying.

Something in her face twists.

She lunges.

He reacts without thinking. He grabs her wrist. The knife jerks sideways. Pain blooms across his forearm, hot and blinding.

She drops the knife.

Blood pours down his arm, dripping onto the tile.

“Oh my God,” she says. “Oh my God, I didn’t mean to-”

He sinks down against the cabinet, dizzy. The world feels too loud and too bright.

She’s crying. She’s apologizing. She’s pressing a towel against his arm with shaking hands.

“I’m so sorry,” she says. “You scared me. I didn’t mean to. I didn’t mean it.”

“I know,” he says automatically, even as his vision goes gray at the edges.

She drives him to the ER.

He tells the nurse he cut himself cooking. Eva nods along.

He gets stitches. Twelve of them. The doctor gives him a pamphlet about kitchen safety.

Eva holds his hand the whole time.

“I’m such a mess,” she whispers. “You should leave me.”

He squeezes her hand. “I’m not leaving.”

He means it. In fact, he doesn’t even realize how insane that is.

After that, the violence escalates.

She doesn’t use a knife again for a while. But she throws heavier things. Plates. Books. A dumbbell once. It had nearly hit him in the jaw.

She starts hitting his face more. His ribs. His stomach.

She starts apologizing less.

He starts making plans in his head for how to avoid her moods.

He keeps his keys in his pocket at all times. He keeps his phone charged. He memorizes which floorboards creak.

He stops sleeping through the night.

He starts flinching when she moves too fast.

The second time she cuts him, it's worse.

They're in a hotel room in Chicago. He has a game the next day. She's mad because he didn't invite her out with the guys.

"You're embarrassed of me," she says.

"I'm not."

“You are.”

“I just wanted one night to myself.”

She grabs a knife from room service.

“Don’t,” he says.

She slices his stomach.

It’s shallow. Long. Bleeds a lot.

He collapses onto the bed.

They don’t go to the hospital that time. He cleans it himself.

It scars.

He starts wearing longer shirts and starts lying better.

The third time it happens, Shane wonders why he can't just leave her.

They're in his apartment. He's on the couch, icing his knee because he took a bad hit in practice. She's pacing, phone in hand, wineglass sloshing.

"You didn't like my post," she says.

"I did," he says. "I just didn't comment."

"So you didn't like it."

"I did like it."

"You're lying."

He closes his eyes.

“I’m not doing this tonight, Eva.”

“That’s what you always say,” she snaps. “You never want to talk about anything.”

“I talk about things all the time.”

“You shut me out.”

“I’m exhausted,” he says. “I played a double session today.”

“You always choose hockey over me.”

“It’s my job.”

“So am I,” she says. “I’m your girlfriend.”

He stands up too fast. His knee screams.

“I need space,” he says, preparing to leave his own home if it means getting away from her.
“Just for tonight.”

She laughs. “You’re not leaving.”

He grabs his jacket.

She blocks the door.

“Move,” he says.

“No.”

“Eva. Move.”

“You don’t get to walk away from me.”

He tries to step around her. She shoves him. He stumbles into the wall.

Something in him snaps.

“I’m done,” he says. “This is over.”

Her face goes slack.

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do.”

“You can’t leave me.”

“I am leaving you.”

She slaps him.

Hard.

His head whips sideways. His ear rings.

He doesn't raise his hands.

"I'm leaving," he says again.

She hits him again. Then again.

He doesn't block it. He doesn't fight back. He just keeps repeating it.

"I'm leaving. I'm leaving. I'm leaving."

She starts crying.

“You’re abandoning me,” she sobs. “You’re just like everyone else.”

He takes a step back.

“I’m done,” he says.

She lunges for him.

This time he grabs her wrists.

“Let go of me,” she screams.

He lets go.

She falls backward into the kitchen counter. A knife clatters to the floor.

They both freeze.

“No,” he says. “No, no, no.”

She grabs it.

He backs away, hands up.

“Eva. Please. Don’t.”

“You don’t get to leave me,” she says, eyes wild.

He turns and makes it to the door.

She slashes his back.

White-hot pain explodes across his skin.

He stumbles into the hallway.

She chases him.

The elevator doors are closing.

He throws himself inside.

The doors slide shut just as she slams into them.

He collapses to the floor.

Blood soaks his shirt.

He presses both hands to his back.

He doesn't even feel scared.

He feels relieved.

The ER is a blur.

There questions and lights. Pain. Hands on him.

“Who did this to you?”

“I fell,” he says.

He always says that.

They stitch his back. Twenty stitches. Maybe more.

They tell him he’s lucky it didn’t hit his spine.

Eva doesn’t come and he doesn’t tell anyone what really happened.

Not his mom. Not Yuna. Not his team. Not Ilya, for sure. He thinks it could be over. But then Eva shows up again with that smile and her tears and Shane wonders why he even bothers. They start to see each other again. Rose calls him and worries. His mom looks sad when they face time. Even his coach pulls him aside after practice and tells him to talk to him if he needs anything. It's like the whole world knows Eva is terrible to him and he does too. He just doesn't want to do anything about it.

Then she hits him in the face with the glass.

He wanders aimlessly until Kip invites him inside. Then Ilya fucking Rozanov is there with his crooked smile and his smirk and his *care* and Shane is too weak. He leaves Scott's apartment without so much as a note. He finds her in her apartment.

She lets him in and the first thing he says is-

"I'm done. This is over."

"You don't mean that."

"I do. I'm done, Eva. I'm tired."

What happens after that is a blur. There is shouting. A door opening. A scuffle that doesn't involve him. Then his stomach is on fire and there's something warm and heavy and wet in his hands as he collapses to the floor. There are hands, pushing down on his stomach. A single palm on his cheek. It feels nice. Then there's nothing.

No memory of doctors or nurses. No flickering LED lights. Not even the smell of his own blood. He's just on the floor bleeding and the next-

Shane opens his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: reunion

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

i am so happy you guys loved the last chapter. I threw that thing at like fifteen different IRL people to edit. Labor of love for sure. I am ALMOST done editing the last few chapters of this fic. I think I finally have an ending I'm happy with lol. Once my edits are made, it should be (maybe) 4 more chapters after this, but I'm gonna keep the chapter count 30 for now.

I've also started the first draft of my heated rivalry/ the pitt AU. It should only be a one or two-shot. Maybe. I'm still thinking about it. Obvious plot would be that one of them (shane, ilya, etc.) gets hurt during a game and they end up in the pitt. I'm trying to think outside the box here.

So far all I have written down is 'frank and robby... fistfight?' and a little doodle of a fucked up hockey stick that looks like a check mark.

so. ya know.

TW this chapter: mention of puking/feeling sick. Panicking. references to abuse/domestic violence. Not wanting to deal with said abuse/domestic violence.

the horrifying ideal of being known (and loved) by your mother.

Please enjoy!!!!

also shoutout to my IRL roomie :) You know who you are babes. write that AFTG fan fic!!! thank you for not thinking i'm a whackadoodle when i very clearly am.

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

Awareness comes to him in fractured spirals.

It's nothing dramatic. It feels, oddly, like waking in the middle of the night after a brutal practice. They're all just brief moments of clarity before sleep drags him under again. Up and down. Sleep and awake, over and over.

The first time he truly wakes, it only lasts a second.

Everything is blurry. His body is too hot, slick with sweat beneath too many blankets. He tries to shove them away, but his arms feel heavy, like he's pushing through mud. The effort costs more than it's worth. Sleep claims him again almost immediately.

The second time he wakes-*really* wakes-he's aware enough to notice someone holding his hand. A thumb moves in slow, comforting circles over the back of it. The touch is the only solid thing in the world. He can't feel anything else besides that touch and heat.

He's too hot again. His skin feels wrong and overheated. He wants to open his eyes, to move, to say *something*, but exhaustion pins him in place. It feels like heavy coins are stacked on his eyelids.

He learned in school once that the ancient Greeks buried their dead with coins- on their eyes or in their mouths- to pay the ferryman. Without them, the soul had to wait on the shores of the underworld for a hundred years. Shane really hopes that isn't what's happening to him.

He always thought the shore of a black-sand river would be unbearably lonely.

The third time he surfaces, the dizziness is so sharp he thinks he might puke.

He hates puking. Always has. Worse he *always* does it after a brutal practice or drill. He'll spend twenty minutes dry-heaving into a bucket while a trainer claps him on the back and tells him it's fine. That it means the drill is working. He hates that part most of all.

When he was eight, he got the stomach flu.

He couldn't keep down water. He cried until his throat hurt, helpless and miserable. His mom had held him while he was sick, and when he got too weak to stand, she'd laid down beside him on the cool tile of the bathroom floor, right next to the toilet.

He kept begging her to make it better, because that was what she did. She kissed bruises. She put dinosaur bandages on scraped knees. She pressed ice packs to fevered foreheads.

But she couldn't fix it.

Something cold and wet brushes his lips now. Small pieces of ice, maybe? It felt blissful against his dry mouth. He parts his lips without realizing it, chasing the relief.

Voices drift in and out above him. He can't make out the words, only the tones. One voice is lighter than the other. They sound familiar.

The next time he wakes, he does it fully.

He's staring at speckled white ceiling tiles. The pattern tugs at something old. It looks like his preschool classroom ceiling. He was never a good sleeper as a kid. During nap time, he'd lie awake, staring up at the tiles while everyone else slept.

There's movement beside him.

It takes everything he has, but he manages to turn his head.

It's his mom.

She's wearing a flannel shirt and jeans. Her black hair is tied in a messy bun. He almost doesn't recognize her like this. These days, she's usually in designer clothes- things *he* bought her. After his first big paycheck, he'd taken her to the mall and tried to clear out every high-end store in her size. She'd refused, mortified, but it had made him so happy just to try. His parents had spent so much on him over the years. It felt like the least he could do.

She used to wear outfits like this when he was a kid.

He remembers the day after his rookie year, handing his parents a small envelope. Inside was proof he'd paid off their mortgage. His mom had cried. His dad had tried to refuse it. Shane hadn't known what else to do with his first bonus- only that this mattered.

She'd been so happy.

Now she looks exhausted and worn down. Her eyes are rimmed with red. But the moment she realizes he's awake, she's on her feet.

"Honey," she says softly. "Shane. Sweetheart. How are you feeling?"

He wants to answer. He wants to tell her he's fine. But when he tries, his voice scrapes uselessly in his throat.

She doesn't panic to her credit. She just reaches for a pink plastic cup and a straw. Carefully, she props him up a little and guides the straw to his lips.

It's ice water, and it's honestly the best thing he's ever tasted.

She helps him ease back down against the pillows.

"Are you in any pain?" she asks, her brows knitting in a failed attempt not to look worried.

He takes stock of himself. There's no sharp pain and there's nothing screaming for attention. He just feels... strange. Like every muscle in his body has been pulled too tight. It's like he ran a marathon he doesn't remember.

"No," he croaks. The sound of his own voice surprises him. God, he sounds rough.

"You're in the hospital, Shane."

"Picked up on that."

Normally she'd give him a playful swat or at least roll her eyes, but instead she just looks relieved- like the fact that he's being her annoying kid again is proof he's really okay.

"Do you remember what happened?"

He frowns. Then it rushes back all at once.

Eva. Kip. The knife.

“Oh,” he says quietly, trying to not think about it. “Is Kip okay?”

His mom brushes some hair off his forehead. “He’s fine. Just a few stitches. You needed surgery, honey. It was a long one.”

That explains the heaviness and the way his body feels borrowed.

“Am I out for the season?”

She stares at him for a beat, then drags a hand through her hair. “Damn. I owe him twenty bucks. Five minutes awake, Shane. You couldn’t have waited ten before asking about hockey?”

“Dad?” Shane asks, confused.

“He tried to fly in from Ottawa, but the snowstorms grounded all the flights. He’ll be here as soon as he can,” she says, misunderstanding him completely.

Shane blinks. Had she and his dad really been betting on this? Or did she mean someone else?

“Everyone else is around here somewhere,” she continues. “We’ve been taking shifts, but the police are trying to round everyone up.”

“Police?” Shane asks, suddenly more awake than he’s been since opening his eyes.

His mom blinks. “Yes. I’m sure they’ll want to talk to you soon-,”

“Mom.” Shane interrupts, his voice thin. “I’m not talking to the police.”

She stares at him. Really stares, like she’s waiting for him to smile and say he’s joking.

“I-what do you mean?”

“I’m not going to talk to the police,” he repeats. Just saying it drains him. His chest feels tight again, his limbs heavy against the bed. God he’s tired.

“Shane-”

“No.” He swallows, throat aching. “I don’t want to. I want to be left alone.”

“But-,”

“I’m sorry,” he adds helplessly, like an apology might soften her disappointment. He can’t talk to the police about this. He barely wants to talk to *her* about this.

Her expression shifts, something cautious and searching flickering across her face. “Is this because of Ilya?”

The room tilts.

“Ilya?” he manages, breath catching. “Why would-” He breaks off, dragging in air that doesn’t feel like it’s going anywhere. The monitor beside him starts to beep faster. His mom’s eyes widen.

“No, Shane,” she says quickly, reaching for him. “It’s okay. It’s okay, I promise. He was here earlier. He really cares about you.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Shane gasps, the words tumbling out too fast. He feels almost hysterical. His mom knows. She knows about Ilya. About *him*.

About *them*.

“Mom, I-”

The door opens.

They both freeze as a nurse steps in, slightly out of breath. Her eyes immediately flick to the monitor, then to Shane’s face.

“It’s alright,” his mom says quickly. “We were just talking.”

The nurse’s gaze lingers on her. “Maybe this conversation can wait. Mr. Hollander needs rest.”

“Yes. Of course,” his mom says at once.

The nurse adjusts something on the monitor, gives Shane a careful look and his mom a suspicious one, and leaves.

The door clicks shut.

Shane stares at the ceiling, heart still racing.

Holy shit.

His mom knows about him and Ilya.

“Mom,” Shane croaks, desperate. He needs to explain. He needs to apologize and to make it make sense somehow. He *needs* to tell her.

She doesn’t let him. Instead she climbs into the hospital bed with him and gathers him into her arms as carefully as she can, and suddenly he’s eight years old again, curled on the bathroom floor with the stomach flu, her body beside him.

“It’s okay, Shane,” she murmurs into his hair. “I promise you, it’s okay. Just rest. We’ll talk later. Just know that it’s okay.”

“I’m sorry,” he whispers.

“Don’t,” she says fiercely, pulling back just enough to look at him. “Do not apologize to me. You have nothing to be sorry for. Do you understand me? Nothing.” Her voice breaks anyway. “I love you. You are my child. My son. There is nothing on this planet that will ever change that. I swear to you.”

His vision blurs. Warm tears spill down his temples and into his hair.

“Mom,” he says, his chest aching. “I tried. I’m sorry. I really tried.”

“I know,” she says softly. “I know.” She strokes his sweaty, tangled hair. She’s crying too now. “It’s okay. We’re okay. I’m so sorry you were ever scared. I’m sorry you didn’t feel like you could tell us.” Her forehead presses to his. “Your father and I love you so much. You are my entire world, Shane.”

“But-,”

“Shane,” she says again, firmer now. She cups his face so he has no choice but to look at her. “You could be a garbage man and I would still be just as proud of you. Do you hear me? Hockey doesn’t make you my son. Who you love doesn’t make you my son.”

He hiccups on a breath.

“‘You and Ilya’ doesn’t matter. ‘You and Eva’ doesn’t matter,” she continues, tripping over her words. “What matters is that you’re alive. That you’re here. That you’re *you*.”

His eyes burn. “I didn’t want to tell anyone,” he whispers, and he’s talking about not telling anyone about Eva. He thinks his Mom knows that’s what he means. “I didn’t want to mess everything up.”

“I know,” she says immediately. “You always carry things that aren’t yours to carry.” Her thumb brushes under his eye, catching a tear. “You don’t have to be brave with me. You don’t have to earn my love. You were born with it.”

Something inside his chest finally gives. A sound tears out of him, broken and raw, and even though he’s feeling weird and hazy and his stomach kinda hurts, he presses his face into her shoulder. She holds him like she used to. Like she could physically keep the world from touching him if she tried hard enough.

“I was so scared,” he admits, voice muffled. “I thought I’d lose everything.”

She tightens her arms around him. “You won’t lose us. Ever. Not for this. Not for anything.” She kisses the top of his head, lingering. “We’ll figure the rest out together. One step at a time.”

His breathing starts to slow, exhaustion pulling at him again now that the fear has loosened its grip. She feels it, of course, she always does, and eases him back against the pillows.

“Rest,” she whispers, brushing his hair back one more time. “I’m right here.”

Shane believes her.

Chapter End Notes

shane and his mom have my heart. sorry david. I am not as obsessed with you as I am Yuna Hollander.

This is my take on the scene where he and his mom talk at the cottage. It's half her being okay with him being gay and being with Ilya and half her confirming that he's safe with her. That she understands why he never said anything, and why he may not want to say anything. She will always have his back, because when she looks at him like this all she sees that sick kid on the bathroom tile, crying for her to make his pain stop. and she stands there, being helpless to.

next time: new friends.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

okay. I have the final draft written. This fic shall officially be 34 chapters! everyone cheer!!! Well 34 and an epilogue. So 35 chapter count. Right. That makes sense. Moving on!

Little bit of spoilers for Kyle's backstory. I've changed it from Common Goal a bit, but I wanted to warn y'all all the same. He's ashamed of his past but trust me when I say literally nothing he did was wrong. Seriously. He needs therapy. I may just write a fic where he addresses his shit instead of just having sex with a hot guy and calling it a day. YOU NEED THERAPY, KYLE.

I really hope he gets a lot of screen time in season 2. I also really liked Matthew Finlan as Kyle. I wonder how they're gonna do it, since season 2 is gonna follow the long game, and Kyle's story is like way before TLG. Makes me nervous....

TW: Domestic violence and abuse. The conversation is very honest and open. Also puking. I, too, share Shane's hatred of it. But it must be done. For the plot.

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

The next time Shane opens his eyes, his mom is gone. He reaches for her blindly, but finds the space next to him empty.

“Hey,” comes another voice. “Take it easy. You’re in the hospital.”

“Mom?” Shane asks, rough and sleepy. That is definitely not her voice. Everything swims in his vision.

“She went to pick up your dad from the airport and grab a shower at the hotel,” the voice explains. “Don’t worry. She wouldn’t have left if someone else wasn’t here.”

Shane squints, trying to make sense of the blur. He wishes he had his glasses. Or maybe the blur is because he's been asleep for what feels like a hundred years. He doesn't even know how long it's been since he's been at Eva's.

He coughs, dry and painful, and immediately someone is there, helping him drink ice water like he's a kid again. A hand steadies the cup, another adjusts his pillows so he's sitting more upright. The person leans into view: tall and skinny with pale blond hair falling into his face. He's wearing black pants and a white shirt. He's not a doctor or nurse.

"I'm Kyle," he says, offering a slightly nervous smile.

That does not make Shane feel better about the stranger in the room. Kyle lets out a small huff of laughter.

"I'm Kip's friend," Kyle adds. "And yeah, your mom didn't want to leave you alone. Everyone else is kind of... occupied. Also, your mom is terrifying. I think I'd rob a bank if she asked me to."

That only makes Shane more confused.

"Well," Kyle continues, rubbing the back of his neck, "they're talking to the cops. There was... an incident. Don't worry, they should be done soon. In the meantime, you're stuck with me. Are you in any pain? Do I need to call someone?"

“No,” Shane croaks, not trusting himself to shake his head. His stomach churns. “I’m feeling a little sick.”

“Oh. Yeah,” Kyle says immediately. “The nurses warned me about that. Don’t puke yet. Hang on.”

There’s something by the bed that Kyle finds and that he clicks a few times, and then he stands up.

“Okay. Okay,” he says, already moving for something else. “That’s normal. Totally normal. You’re doing great.”

Shane doesn’t feel like he’s doing great. His stomach rolls, sharp and sudden, and his vision swims. He squeezes his eyes shut, breaths coming shallow whether he wants them to or not.

“I hate this,” he mutters, words slurring together. “I hate throwing up.”

“I know,” Kyle says quickly, like this is useful information he’s been waiting to deploy. “Your mom said. Kip hates it too. He warned me the first time we met. Extensively.”

There's fumbling and plastic rustling. Kyle's hands are gentle but a little frantic as he pulls a basin up and settles it against Shane's chest, bracing it like he's afraid Shane might float away.

"Lean forward just a little," Kyle murmurs. "Yeah. Like that. I've got you."

The nausea crests, ugly and painfully familiar. Shane gags, dry-heaving hard enough that it makes his stitches pull. Does he have stitches? He doesn't know. His eyes water instantly. He feels humiliated in a distant, abstract way. He's too tired to be embarrassed properly.

"Easy," Kyle says, one hand firm between Shane's shoulder blades. "You're okay. Nothing's wrong. Your body's just... rebooting."

That word *rebooting* makes something fragile inside Shane almost laugh. Like he's a computer or a busted cell phone.

When it passes, Shane slumps back against the pillows, shaking. His throat burns. His head pounds. The room spins just slightly, and he wishes he could vanish into the blankets.

The same nurse from before who came in when his mom was here slips in quietly, sees the scene, and tuts softly.

"Kyle, you were supposed to call if he woke up," she says.

“I did call!” Kyle protests, a little defensively. “I pressed the button thing a dozen times!”

The nurse gives Shane an injection of something into his IV for the nausea and then wipes his mouth with a damp cloth without asking, efficient and surprisingly tender. She pats him on the shoulder with a smile and flees the room, taking the basin of sickness with her.

“Sorry,” Shane whispers automatically once she’s gone. Nurses seem like they’d be used to bodily fluids. Kyle didn’t sign up for that.

Kyle snorts. “Nope. Not allowed. Your mom banned apologies, I think. Besides...” He tilts his head slightly. “I’m a bartender. Puke is kinda normal for me.”

Shane lets out a weak huff of air, staring up at the ceiling tiles, trying to let his breath even out. The beeping nearby slows, like it’s satisfied he hasn’t died after all.

“I’m really out of it,” Shane admits quietly after a second.

“Yeah,” Kyle agrees. “You’ve been stabbed and sliced open and put back together. You’re allowed.”

Huh. No one had really explained to Shane what his injuries exactly were. He just knew he'd been cut by Eva. The drugs they must have him on are incredible because he doesn't feel totally freaked out by that.

There's a pause. Kyle shifts his weight, clearly unsure whether to fill the silence.

"Shane... I know we just met- like, officially- five minutes ago," he says gently, "but I heard about the talking-to-the-cops thing from your mom."

Shane tightens his jaw. Damn. When is that anti-nausea medicine supposed to kick in? He braces for a lecture.

Instead, Kyle says softly, "I just want you to know... I understand where you're coming from."

Shane blinks at him.

"My friend Kyle- he's a bartender at this bar I go to a lot... It got bad. Like really bad. He broke Kyle's arm once. We kept telling him to leave, but he didn't. Or couldn't."

Shane connects the dots, remembering Kip's story. "You're Kip's friend. He told me about you."

“That’s me,” Kyle says quietly. “He said he’d talked to you about my situation.”

Kyle rubs his left arm absentmindedly, tracing the long, white scar along his forearm. Shane realizes this must be the same arm his boyfriend had broken.

“I know it can be scary,” Kyle continues, “but... I think you should talk to the cops.”

Shane struggles to recall the details but slowly, it comes back. Kip telling him about Kyle, about how he hadn’t gone to the police even after his boyfriend hurt him. How it ended only when Kyle was pushed onto the subway tracks.

“You didn’t.” Shane accuses with no heat.

“No,” Kyle admits, voice low. “I didn’t. Because I was scared. But I should have.”

He frowns, gaze dropping to the floor. “My ex hospitalized me twice,” he continues. “But honestly, that wasn’t even the worst of it. He hurt me in other ways. Like telling me I was stupid and that I was worthless and making me feel like I was losing my mind.” Kyle exhales slowly. “I felt completely alone.”

He hesitates, then adds, "I've done things in my past I'm not proud of. That's why I moved to New York. And then when things got bad between by ex and I, I sort of... leaned into that. Like maybe I deserved it." He winces. "I know that's the most cliché excuse in the world, but... it felt true at the time. Does that make sense?"

Shane thinks about Eva. Yeah. It makes sense. He swallows, throat aching. Kyle notices and helps him take another careful sip of water.

"I was angry for a long time after," Kyle says softly after he sets the cup back down. "After he pushed me onto the subway tracks, Kip and our friends kept telling me to talk to the police. I refused. They arrested him anyway- something about mandatory arrest law in domestic violence cases."

The words *domestic violence* make Shane flinch. Kyle doesn't seem to notice, or maybe he's just used to saying them now.

"Once that happened," Kyle goes on, "I lost my choice in it. He plead guilty, and I never really got the chance to... I don't know. Tell my story? Explain how it all affected me. I just had to sit with all that anger."

Shane watches him carefully. He can't help wondering what Kyle did, or thought he did, to make himself feel so undeserving. And then it hits him: Kyle is probably wondering the same thing about him.

"I was angry at him," Kyle says, thoughtful now. "It felt like he saw exactly how good a target I'd make and took advantage of that. But mostly, I was angry at myself. I felt *so* stupid. What kind of person stays with someone who hits them, right?" He gives a humorless

chuckle. “You’d think after he broke my arm, that would’ve been it. Hell, the first ER visit should’ve been the end. The first time he hit me, I should’ve walked out the door.”

Kyle shakes his head, like he needs to physically dislodge the thought. “I really believed I loved him. And that loving him would fix me.”

There’s a beat of stillness as Kyle’s eyes sort of glaze over. He stops stroking the scar on his arm and blinks a few times.

“Well, anyway. It took a lot of therapy to untangle that.”

He looks back at Shane. “I know it hurts right now. I know you don’t want to do this. And yeah, if you talk to the police it’s going to hurt so bad you’ll want to crawl out of your own skin. You’ll feel angry and stupid and embarrassed.” He sighs. “But I regret not talking to the police and not telling anyone. I waited until it was almost too late. In the end, I had my voice taken away from me.”

Kyle’s voice steadies as he gives a gentle glance at Shane. “I don’t want that for you.”

Shane stares at him.

For a long moment, he can’t find anything inside himself that isn’t heavy. Kyle’s words settle like bruises on his skin. His throat tightens. He looks away, back at the ceiling tiles, because

if he looks at Kyle any longer he might start crying again, and he doesn't know if he has that in him.

"I don't want to ruin everything," Shane says finally. His voice is rough and scraped thin. "I don't want to... make it real."

Kyle nods slowly, like he's been expecting that exact sentence. "Yeah," he says. "That makes sense too."

Shane's fingers twist in the blanket. His hands feel clumsy and foreign. Are these really the hands of a professional hockey player?

"If I talk to them, then it's not just-" He falters, searching for the right words to say. "It's not just something that happened. It's... a thing. With paperwork. And questions. And people *knowing*."

"And consequences," Kyle adds.

Shane exhales, shaky. "Yeah."

"Some of it will suck," Kyle says after a moment. "Actually, a lot of it will. You'll replay things you don't want to replay. You'll second-guess yourself. You'll wonder if you're being dramatic. Or think that maybe you're making too big a deal out of it."

Shane lets out a small, humorless breath. “Already doing that.”

“I know,” Kyle says, soft. “But here’s the thing I didn’t understand back then.” He hesitates, then taps his own chest once. “Talking won’t make it worse. It just stops you from carrying it alone.”

Shane swallows. His eyes burn. He thinks of Eva’s voice, sharp and sweet at the same time. Of the knife. Of Kip’s blood. Of his own blood, Of his mom’s arms around him.

“I’m scared,” he admits, barely audible. He wishes his mom was here. But he's glad that he's not alone right now.

Kyle’s mouth curves into something sad and kind. “Yeah. Me too, when I was in that bed. That doesn’t mean you’re wrong.”

Then his phone buzzes loudly, making both Shane and Kyle jump.

“Sorry,” Kyle mutters, glancing at the screen. “Oh... your friend’s here. There’s been some bad weather up north. I didn’t think he was going to make it today.”

Shane frowns, confusion knotting in his chest. Friend? He doesn't have many. Just Hayden... and-

The door opens, letting in a gust of chilled air. Someone steps inside, slightly breathless.

“He’s awake?” The voice is familiar and warm. It’s carrying that lightness Shane remembers.

He tries to lift his head, to see, but his limbs feel like lead. The person moves to the other side of the bed. He’s tall, taller than Shane with bright eyes. His hair is shaggy and untamed, and he's got a thick beard just like the last time Shane had seen him at the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

“Joe?”

Chapter End Notes

Shane's figure skating friend tag on here is HORRIBLY underused. I am basing his description off the skater who plays him, Dylan Moscovitch. He is a retired figure and he took a silver medal in the real life Sochi Olympics! Good on him for making a cameo. And he's real life Canadian. Bonus!

next chapter: old friends

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

yay new chapter! I adore Joe. I love the idea of Shane and his figure skating friends being friends. real friends.

Also, I think I have come up with an idea for my pitt/HR cross over. I think you'll like it! If you subscribe to me, you should see a notification soon!

Here is the new chapter. :)

TW: mentions of bullying. Homophobia. Thoughts of suicide. Referenced domestic violence.

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

“What are you doing here?” Shane asks, stunned.

Joe is supposed to be in Canada. Or wherever Team Canada trains now. Not in a hospital room in New York City. The next Winter Olympics are still a long way off, but even so. Joe should be skating, training, living that life.

They haven't seen each other since Sochi.

Even then, they hadn't really *seen* each other. They never talked. Never crossed paths in the Olympic Village or at any of the ceremonies. Shane remembers checking the Team Canada website, seeing Joe's name on the roster. He watched his routine in the back with some hockey friends. They'd watched him glide and spin, brilliant and precise. And then he had to rush off to get ready for his own game. He didn't even realize Joe had won silver until after Canada hockey lost its final match. It was like they were strangers orbiting the same massive event, close enough to touch and somehow impossibly far apart.

“Your mom called,” Joe says now, offering the same small, familiar smile he used to give Shane when they were sixteen.

Kyle stands, stretching his arms over his head. “I’ll give you two some privacy,” he says easily. “Nice to meet you, Joe.”

They shake hands.

The absurdity of it hits Shane all at once. Kyle, who is a bartender from a sports bar in New York, is standing in a hospital room, casually greeting an Olympic medalist figure skater like this is normal. Like this makes sense.

Kyle slips out, and Joe drags the chair closer to the bed, careful and deliberate. He sits.

“How are you feeling?” Joe asks.

For a moment, Shane can’t find the words. His mind stalls out, empty and buzzing. Then he realizes Joe isn’t rushing him. He’s just waiting for Shane to reply.

The same way he used to. Back when Shane was a teenager and overwhelmed and needed time to figure out how to say what he meant.

“Fine.”

Joe gives him a look. It’s skeptical, but fond. Almost like he’s humoring a kid caught in a lie.

“I am,” Shane insists hoarsely. “I’m on a lot of drugs.”

“Sure,” Joe says easily.

Then, softer, he says “You know, I saw you in the audience at Sochi.”

Shane blinks. “You did?”

“Yeah. Sitting with your hockey buddies.” Joe’s mouth quirks. “I watched your game too. It was a close one.”

“Yeah,” Shane says again. He clears his throat, suddenly aware of how dry it feels. “You were good too.”

Joe smiles at that, eyes bright in a way that still feels unfairly familiar. “Do you need some water?”

“I’m okay,” Shane says. Then, because the question has been pressing at him since Joe walked in the door, “Seriously. What are you doing here?”

Joe doesn’t answer right away. Instead, he reaches out and takes Shane’s hand in both of his.

Shane startles. His own hands are rough, calloused from years of sticks and gloves and ice. He’s not sure what he expects Joe’s hands to feel like. Soft, maybe. Careful. Something delicate, like the rest of him always looked on the ice.

But Joe’s hands are rough too.

The pads of his fingers are calloused and his nails bitten down short. These are hands that grip blades and railings. Hands that work.

Shane is so focused on them that he almost misses it- the clean gleam of gold on Joe’s left hand.

His chest tightens.

“You’re married?” he asks quietly, eyes on Joe’s ring finger.

Joe smiles, his bright eyes crinkling. “Engaged.”

He doesn’t let go, though. He leave one hand on Shane’s. With his other, he digs into his pocket and pulls out his phone, turning the screen toward him.

The wallpaper is a photo of Joe with a shorter, tanned man. They’re holding hands, caught mid-laugh beneath a bright green willow tree. There’s a leaf tangled in Joe’s hair. It’s probably what they’re laughing about. Joe looks loose and unguarded and incandescently happy.

So very, very happy.

“He’s a physio for Canada figure skating,” Joe tells him. “That’s how we met.”

“That’s great, man. Really,” Shane finds himself saying. And he means it.

He missed Joe- more than he ever let himself think about- but he'd never reached out over the years. Maybe because he was afraid. Afraid of dredging things up. Afraid of realizing how much he'd mattered, or how much he hadn't.

Now, looking at Joe- smiling, settled, whole- Shane doesn't see that sad, scared kid staring blankly at slashed bike tires or ruined skates or a costume cut to shreds. He sees a man. A happy one. Successful. In love.

"Thank you," Joe says. "We'd love to have you at the wedding."

"Name the time and place," Shane says immediately. "I'm there."

Joe's smile softens fondly. "I thought you'd say that."

They're quiet for a moment, both of them drifting back to sixteen. Back to shared ice and milkshakes and the strange intensity of friendship when you're young and desperate for connection.

"I know after I moved, we lost touch," Joe says. "I'm sorry. I;m sorry I left you."

“We were both busy,” Shane offers gently.

Joe shakes his head. “I was scared. I loved being your friend, Shane. I loved you.” He exhales. “But things were too hard for me there. I think making Team Canada saved my life.” He pats Shane’s hand, grounding him. “Well- actually, I think you saved my life first.”

“No, I-,”

“Yeah,” Joe says firmly. “You did. I skated in your coat, Shane. No one else’s. Yours.” His mouth quirks. “I know there’s that *it gets better* saying it feels like bullshit, but... it really did. Even when I couldn’t see it.”

“Joe,” Shane says, his eyes burning now.

“It’s okay,” Joe says softly, sniffing. “We’re okay.” He shakes his head with a small, incredulous laugh. “I can’t believe how old we are. I can’t believe how different our lives are from when we were sixteen.”

“Me too.”

Joe leans back in the chair, the plastic squeaking beneath him. “I hated Ottawa back then. What you saw at the rink was only a fraction of it.”

“It was horrible,” Shane says quietly.

“It was,” Joe agrees. “I hated myself. I was so alone. I really didn’t think anything would ever change. Until I met you. Then I wasn’t alone anymore.”

Shane’s throat tightens.

“And then you told me about your friend,” Joe continues. “That night in your car.” His voice roughens. “How he died. How the worst part was not knowing? Because he didn’t leave a note. You hated not knowing if he was scared.”

John.

“I saw that look on your face,” Joe says. “Like you were shattered. And I never wanted to be the reason you looked like that again.” He swallows. “I was going to kill myself that night. I wanted to spend my last night with you. One good thing before it was over.”

Shane’s breath stutters.

“But when I got home,” Joe says quietly, “I thought about you. About how sad you were. And I threw the pills away.” He lets out a shaky breath. “A week later, Canada Figure Skating called. I wouldn’t have been there to answer if I’d gone through with it.”

Joe squeezes Shane’s hand once.

“I owe a lot to you, man,” he says. “I’m sorry it took me this long to realize it. I missed you.”

“I missed you too.”

Joe nods, just once. Then, more carefully, “That’s why I want you to take care of yourself.”

Shane feels himself fold inward at that. “You heard about her?”

Joe winces. “Yeah. Actually... I saw it before your mom called me. Well, she called my agent. I’m not sure how she got his number.”

Shane is about to joke that his mom could track down the Pope if she needed to, but the words stall in his throat. *Saw it.*

Had what Eva did been recorded? Had everyone seen-

“Whoa, no,” Joe says quickly. Even after all these years, he can still read the signs when Shane starts to spiral. “Not that. The other thing. The Rozanov wheelchair thing.”

“The *what*?” Shane asks.

Joe’s eyes widen just a fraction. “Oh. You haven’t seen it.”

“Seen *what*?”

“Um,” Joe says, suddenly hesitant.

“Just show me,” Shane says.

Joe sighs, then reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone. He taps through a few screens and turns it toward Shane as a video loads.

“It’s pretty chaotic,” he says, glancing at the closed door. “And if you tell your mom I showed you this, we’re gonna have a problem. I don’t care if you’re in the hospital. I *will* give you a wet willie.”

“Promise,” Shane swears. He very much does not want a wet willie.

The video finally loads. Joe turns the volume up and passes the phone into Shane’s hands, leaning in to watch from the edge of the bed.

The camera shakes violently. For a second it’s just ceiling lights and motion blur, someone breathing hard behind the camera. It’s clearly a body worn camera of some kind.

Then the frame steadies to reveal a hospital corridor.

Shane feels his chest tighten before he even understands why.

The view from above shows a pair of hands pushing a dark haired woman handcuffed to a wheelchair. What little of her dress Shane can see from the angle is bloody. She’s screaming hoarsely, swearing and trying to wrestle herself free.

Joe goes very still beside him. He’s seen this video before. He must be doing it for Shane’s benefit.

“Calm down!” a cop yells from the tinny speaker.

“Fuck you, pig!” the woman shrieks.

Shane’s fingers curl around the phone. His pulse starts to thud in his ears.

“I know her,” he explains faintly, though he doesn’t need to. They both know it’s Eva.

The camera jolts sideways a little as they struggle to contain her. There’s a bit of fuzz and then- Ilya.

It’s unmistakable. The way he moves, the way his whole body snaps forward like a wire pulled too tight.

“Oh no,” Shane breathes.

The wheelchair goes down hard and metal clatters. Someone swears loudly. It’s Scott, Shane realizes distantly, because of course Scott is there.

The sound spikes as Ilya shouts in Russian, furious and feral, words tumbling over each other too fast for the mic to catch cleanly. They jumble together in a thread of snowy-sounding tones.

Shane's stomach drops through the bed.

"I didn't-," he starts, then stops. He can't finish the thought.

Onscreen, Eva spits.

Joe lets out a sharp, disbelieving laugh that has no humor in it at all. "Jesus Christ. I forgot about that part."

Shane watches Ilya strain against Scott's grip. Shane watches the exact second restraint gives way to rage. He knows that look. He's seen it on the ice before. When everything narrows for Ilya and when there's only one thing left to protect. Usually it's the puck. Not a person.

"Break it up!" someone shouts.

"Shut up!" two voices snap in perfect, awful unison.

Shane swallows. His throat feels thick, like he's coming down with something.

When Eva slurs, *I love him*, Shane flinches like he's been struck.

"*No you don't*," Ilya snarls from the phone speaker, and the words hit Shane harder than he expects. He'd expected Ilya to say that sort of thing to him. That he didn't love Shane. Not whatever fucked up version this was. "*You only love yourself-*"

The video lurches as Scott clamps a hand over Ilya's mouth.

Joe exhales slowly through his nose. "Scott deserves a medal."

The camera swings again. Rose appears in frame, her voice shaking. Shane feels something splinter in his chest when she shouts, *You almost killed him!*

"*I hope he's dead!*" Eva screams.

Joe sucks in a breath through his teeth. He sounds... unhappy.

Shane can't look away. His hands are steady, but only because he's gripping the phone too hard to let them shake.

He watches Rose lunge. Watches Scott grab her. Watches security pile in and try to separate everyone. The hallway dissolves into chaos. There's shouting and bodies colliding and suddenly the wheelchair is overturned again. Ilya's face flashes across the screen, wild-eyed and furious.

Joe reaches out without thinking and rests his hand lightly on Shane's wrist.

"Hey," he murmurs, low and grounding. "You okay?"

Shane nods, even though he's not sure if he is or not.

The video keeps rolling. Eva is finally wheeled away, still screaming, her voice echoing even as the doors swing shut.

The video cuts off abruptly.

The room feels too quiet afterward.

Shane lowers the phone onto his chest and stares up at the ceiling, blinking hard. “I didn’t know,” he says finally. “I didn’t know any of that happened.”

Joe nods, slow and careful. “Yeah. I figured that out.”

Shane forces his fingers to loosen and hands the phone back. His thoughts are already spiraling. What the hell was Ilya still doing in New York? They’d kissed, and Shane had practically chased him away afterward. And yet Ilya had come to the hospital. He’d come back for him.

So had Rose.

His one hundred and nothing pound, all-fire friend had tried to launch herself at Eva without hesitation. Even Scott had gotten involved, even though every second of the video made it clear how badly he’d wanted to stay out of it. Still, he’d stepped in. He’d grabbed Ilya, held him back, stopped him from saying something stupid or doing something even worse.

“I know,” Joe says, commiserating with Shane’s silence. “I have no idea how the body cam footage came out so fast. Someone in the police department must’ve leaked it.”

That must be what Kyle had meant when he said there’d been an incident, that the police were trying to talk to everyone. Rose, Ilya, Scott- the three of them must be dealing with this on top of everything else. The fallout alone makes Shane’s stomach twist.

He tries to picture them getting arrested. He can almost see it happening to Ilya. Almost. But Rose? Never. And Scott hadn't hurt anyone in the video. He'd just been trying to keep Rose and Ilya from clawing Eva's eyes out.

"There are a bunch of rumors," Joe continues easily, like he hasn't just dropped a bomb on Shane's chest. "Some of them are pretty funny. People think Ilya's in the Russian mob and that it was an ordered hit." He snorts. "My grandma posted on Facebook that she thinks it was just a PR move for Rose's next movie."

Shane wishes it was as simple as a movie promo.

Joe scratches at his beard, still half-amused. "You have a weird group of friends now, Shane." His friend watches him for a moment as his smile fades into something gentler. "They showed up, though."

Joe is right. They did show up. Scott has probably just been there for Kip, but Rose and Ilya both did. And all three risked their reputations for Shane.

"They didn't have to," Joe continues. "Especially not like that." He shrugs. "Most people don't run *toward* a mess like that."

Shane's chest feels too full, like something is pressing behind his ribs. "They're probably dealing with hell right now," Shane says. "All because of me."

Joe shakes his head. “Because of *Eva*,” he corrects. “Because she made choices. Don’t rewrite the story just to make yourself the villain. Trust me when I say I’ve done that enough to understand.”

Shane closes his eyes, breathing carefully around the ache in his throat. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Well,” Joe says gently. “You could talk to the cops. Tell them what happened with Eva. That would probably earn everyone a lot of goodwill. Jumping someone is generally frowned upon in polite society.”

The nausea rolls back in. Shane really doesn't want to throw up again. He fights it back. He must look a little green because Joe pats him on the shoulder.

“You good?”

Shane thinks about what Kyle said about not having a choice and staying angry. He thinks about Ilya’s bloody knuckles and how devastated he’d looked when Shane told him he wasn’t going to leave Eva, even after everything she’d done. He thinks about the way Ilya had smiled into the kiss they’d shared, soft and certain, like he already knew something Shane didn’t.

I deserve better than that. And so do you.

He thinks about being sixteen, his mother sitting him down on the couch and telling him that John had killed himself. He thinks about Joe crying in the locker room, staring at the shredded remains of his skating costume with a slur stained into it. He thinks about the first bruise Eva ever gave him, the way he'd stared at it in the mirror afterward and carefully covered it up.

Shane swallows and nods.

"You're right," he whispers. "I'm going to talk to the police."

"Atta boy," Joe says, and he smiles like the sun.

God. How Shane has missed the sun.

Chapter End Notes

joe <3

Shane and joe stopped talking after Joe left. Maybe because they were both scared. They still have the same numbers they did when they were sixteen. Neither one was brave enough to text the other. Funny how things change.

Trevor Project Number: 1-866-488-7386

up next: what the fuck is this, Brooklyn nine-nine?

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone!!! Here is the new chapter. The next one may take me a few days to upload. I keep re-reading it and adding stuff and removing stuff. I'm trying to feel it out.

tw: cops/interrogations. retelling of traumatic events by Kip.

also not related to my fic but if you need a good HR fic, I read 'apply pads (shock now!)' by blongblong and it knocked my socks off. I fucking loved it. If you're looking for a great read, check it out! I've read it about a dozen times now. Hollanov EMT AU and scott hunter is STILL catching strays. Ilya hates that guy in every universe lol. not sponsored or anything, I just loved and i need other people to read it. You understand? I NEED it.

[apply pads \(shock now!\)' by blongblong](#)

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

“I don’t know,” Ilya says, drumming his fingers against the metal table.

The detective across from him looks unimpressed. He’s got a paunchy stomach, thinning hair, and the kind of expression that suggests he’s heard every version of *I don’t know* a thousand times today. They’re in a small interrogation room at the NYPD, which is deeply not where Ilya wants to be. He’d much rather be back at the hospital, sitting beside Shane and waiting for him to wake up for real.

It’s been barely a day since Eva attacked Shane. Shane had drifted in and out of consciousness since then. There were just a few brief moments where he’d squeezed Ilya’s hand or mumbled something incoherent before slipping away again. Yuna had let Ilya sit with him for a while, the two of them holding Shane’s hand together. That had been... nice.

He liked Yuna. A lot.

She was tough as hell, honestly scarier than some of the enforcers he'd played against, and she had a sharp, dry sense of humor. At one point she'd told him a story about trying to steal the bell off a Taco Bell during her college days.

"We couldn't get it off," she'd said solemnly. "They weld those things on. So we took a traffic cone instead."

"I tried to take the bell too!" Ilya had laughed. "They're impossible!"

She'd laughed with him, then gone right back to fussing over Shane by pressing ice chips to his cracked lips and running her fingers gently through his hair. She was warm and fierce and completely devoted to her son. Ilya wonders where she is now. She'd said Shane woke up, they talked, and then he fell asleep again. David's flight should be landing soon. Maybe she went to pick him up.

"What my client is saying," says the man seated beside Ilya, smoothly interrupting his thoughts, "is that he was unaware of any abusive relationship between Ms. Loren and Mr. Hollander until Mr. Hunter contacted him."

Right. That.

Yuna had also acquired him a lawyer. A very good one, apparently. He had on an expensive suit and a Rolex so large it could probably be seen from space. Truly, she was a goddess among mortals.

Ilya briefly considers asking if she'd like to manage his career too.

"Let me get this straight," the detective says. "Scott Hunter, the hockey player-"

"*Barely*," Ilya cuts in cheerfully. "He is one hundred years old."

"Scott Hunter," the detective repeats, pointedly ignoring him, "called you in Boston."

"Yes."

"And you answered."

"Yes. Did we not establish this already?"

The detective's eye twitches. "He told you that Shane Hollander had been injured."

“Yes.”

“And you then took a flight to New York City.”

“Yes.”

“To see Shane Hollander,” the detective continues, voice flattening, “who is publicly known as your rival.”

Ilya hums, considering. “I would say ‘competitor.’ ‘Rival’ feels a bit dramatic.”

The detective stares at him.

“Fine,” Ilya concedes. “Very dramatic competitor.”

“So,” the detective says, folding his hands on the table, “you flew across state lines for a man you supposedly don’t like.”

“I never said I don’t like him,” Ilya replies mildly.

The detective pauses. “You didn’t?”

“No,” Ilya says. “The internet did.”

The lawyer sighs into his hand.

“And when you arrived,” the detective continues, “you went to the hospital.”

“Ah, no. I went to Scott Hunter’s apartment where Shane was. We talked, and I see his face all,” he gestures with a hand.

“Injured,” he lawyer supplies helpfully.

“Yes. Injured,” Ilya agrees readily. “We have a talk, I tell him to leave her, he does not want to. I leave and find a bar.”

“A bar.”

“Yes. A bar. And wow, small world! Bartender is friends with Kip. He gets call about what happened at Eva’s apartment, so I go to hospital to see.”

“So,” the detective says, slowly, “you’re telling me you just *happened* to be at the hospital when a handcuffed woman in a wheelchair rolled by, and you reacted by... tackling her.”

“I did not tackle her,” Ilya says automatically. “I tipped her over.”

The lawyer closes his eyes for half a second.

The detective stares. “You tipped over a restrained suspect in police custody.”

“She was screaming,” Ilya offers. “Very aggressively.”

“That tends to happen during arrests.”

“She said she hoped he was dead,” Ilya says, leaning forward now. He’s surprised to find his voice is sharp. “That is not normal screaming thing.”

The detective glances down at his notes. “You’re referring to Mr. Hollander.”

“Yes.”

“And you responded by yelling profanities in Russian and attempting to-” he checks the page “- ‘go feral.’”

Ilya blinks. “I did *not* say feral. Who said that?”

“That’s the word Officer Ramirez used.”

“Well,” Ilya says, considering, “he is not wrong.”

The lawyer clears his throat loudly. “My client was under extreme emotional distress.”

“I was,” Ilya agrees immediately. “I am still under emotional distress. I would prefer to be at the hospital.”

“We’ve established that,” the detective says dryly. “What we’re trying to establish is why you ignored multiple commands from law enforcement.”

Ilya shrugs. “I do not speak English when I am angry.”

His lawyer clears his throat audibly. Ilya never did catch his name. He should ask for a business card when he is released from here.

“I speak *less* English,” Ilya corrects.

The detective flips to another page. “There’s also the matter of you shouting something that translates to-” he squints “-‘You don’t love him, you love damage.’”

Ilya’s jaw tightens.

“That was not for the police,” he says quietly. He wonders if everything he had yelled in Russian was translated. He may have some explaining to do about how he shouted at Eva that he was going to burn down her house.

The detective exhales, then gestures vaguely with his pen. “Look. Between the overturned wheelchair, the shouting, the hospital security report, and the body cam footage-”

“Leaked,” the lawyer cuts in smoothly.

“-allegedly leaked,” the detective amends, “this has turned into a circus.”

“I did not bring popcorn,” Ilya says. “So I agree.”

The detective almost smiles. Almost.

Rose has her hands folded primly in her lap. She is doing everything in her power not to jiggle her knee like a malfunctioning jackhammer.

This is officially the most trouble she has ever been in. Ever. In her whole life. Including the time she borrowed her dad’s car at seventeen and accidentally drove it into a lake. A *lake*. At least no one had mentioned jail that time.

She could actually go to jail for this.

She hadn't landed any good hits. That had all been Ilya. Maybe she'd feel less bad about the whole thing if she'd gotten to smack Eva.

The detective across from her is an older woman with badly dyed roots and a face that suggests she has Seen Some Things and is not impressed by any of them. She'd said her partner was interviewing everyone else. Rose tries not to think too hard about who "everyone else" includes. Herself, Ilya, Scott, and Kip had carpooled to the station. They'd been separated immediately, like kids on a school field trip who absolutely could not be trusted.

Abby, her lawyer, sits beside her looking infuriatingly calm. Rose technically had a lawyer on retainer, but he was an entertainment lawyer. He handled things like contracts and NDA's. Abby was a criminal defense attorney. Which felt... ominous.

The interrogation room smells like mothballs and cheap coffee, and it keeps reminding Rose of the time she'd played an arsonist on *Law & Order: SVU*. Only then she'd gotten to meet Ice-T and Mariska Hargitay and had them sign her script. This time, no one was offering autographs.

The detective flips open a thin folder. "Rose Landry."

"Yes," Rose says immediately. Then, because apparently she has no self-preservation instinct, she adds, "That's me."

Abby gently clears her throat and gives her a look that says ‘*shut up.*’.

The detective looks up. “Do you understand why you’re here?”

Rose opens her mouth.

“-My client is aware this is regarding an incident at New York-Presbyterian Hospital,” Abby says smoothly. “She’s happy to cooperate.”

Rose nods enthusiastically. Too enthusiastically. “Thrilled. Love cooperation.”

The detective’s eyebrow arches. “You attempted to assault a restrained suspect.”

Rose winces. “Attempted is doing a lot of work in that sentence.”

Abby kicks her leg a little under the table.

The detective sighs, rubbing her temples. “Ms. Landry”

“Right. Sorry,” Rose says, clamping her mouth shut with both hands for a second. She lowers them. “She said she hoped he was dead.”

The detective stills. “Who?”

“Shane,” Rose says, voice sharp now despite herself. “She, Eva, said she hoped Shane was dead.”

There’s a pause as the detective writes something down. How Rose wishes she could peer into the little notebook.

“That doesn’t give you the right to attack her,” the detective says carefully.

“I know,” Rose blurts. “I know that. Logically. But emotionally? I was gonna bite her.”

Abby makes a strangled noise.

The detective regards Rose for a long moment, then looks down at her notes. “Your friend restrained you.”

“Yes,” Rose says. “Well, I guess I’d say Scott isn’t-, ah hell. Yeah, Scott’s my friend.”

“And you continued to resist.”

Rose lifts one shoulder. “I commit?”

The detective exhales through her nose. “Ms. Landry, do you often resolve conflict with physical violence?”

Rose thinks about it. “Only when someone tries to murder people I love?”

Abby leans forward. “My client was under distress.”

Rose points at her gratefully. “That. I was distressed.”

The detective closes the folder slowly. “You’re lucky hospital security intervened when they did.”

Rose swallows. “Yeah.”

The bravado drains a little.

“Because if they hadn’t,” the detective continues, “this would be a very different conversation.”

Rose nods, quiet now. “I know.”

The detective watches her for a beat, then says, “Tell me how you ended up at the hospital in the first place.”

Rose blinks. That... is not the question she was expecting.

“Oh. Um.” She takes a breath. “Scott called me and asked for Eva’s address. Shane was crashing at his place, and Scott was worried. His friend Kip said he’d go check on him.”

She swallows, fingers twisting together in her lap.

“So I got Kip’s number from Scott and texted him the address. Kip went over, and... both of them got hurt. Kip called me after and said he thought Shane was dead.”

The detective looks up sharply. “Dead?”

“Yeah,” Rose says quietly. “Like, actually thought Eva had killed him.”

The room feels smaller now.

“So I met Kip at the ER,” Rose continues. “And then *he* collapsed. That’s why Scott and Ilya and I were all there. We weren’t there for Shane at first. We were checking on Kip.”

She exhales, shaky. “And then everything kind of... exploded.”

“Let me make sure I have the timeline straight,” the detective says. “You were closing up the smoothie shop where you work-”

“Straw + Berry,” Kip says, nodding. He feels like he’s been sitting in this chair for hours, but it’s probably only been about twenty minutes. He wants to see Scott. He wants to hug his dad. He wants to crawl under the sheets of Scott’s massive bed and sleep for a week.

“Right. And Shane wandered in front of you, already injured. You brought him back into the shop to try to patch him up, and then you invited him to stay with you. Not at your own apartment. At someone else’s.”

“I have a key,” Kip says quickly. “And I asked permission.”

“Mm-hmm. So Shane spends the night. The next day, hockey superstar Ilya Rozanov shows up at the apartment. You leave so they can talk.”

“Right,” Kip confirms. The stitches on his cheek itch like hell, but he keeps his hands folded in his lap.

“You come back later and they’re both gone. You call Scott Hunter, who tells you he’ll handle it. Then movie star Rose Landry contacts you with some addresses, and you go to check whether Shane is at one of them.”

“Yes.”

“They let you in, and you hear... what?”

“A commotion.”

“A commotion,” the detective repeats evenly. “You kick open the door and see what, exactly?”

Kip swallows. He really hopes the others are okay. He’s the only one here without a lawyer—he’d been blissfully unconscious on pain meds when Eva was wheeled into the ER. Kip was a witness, not a suspect.

Scott had held his hand in the car on the way here, trying very hard to look calm. Kip had known better. He always did when it came to Scott.

“Eva and Shane,” Kip says slowly. “There was a bar stool on the floor, shattered. I think she threw it at him and missed. She was holding a knife. Like... a real kitchen knife. The kind you see on cooking shows.”

He takes a breath.

“Shane’s eyebrow was split open again. And then-” His voice falters. He swallows and forces himself to keep going. “Then she started swinging it. She was trying to hurt him. I didn’t even think. I just moved. I got between them.”

He gestures to his face, then his arm. “That’s how I got cut. Here. And here. And my stomach. But Shane pulled me back in time so she didn’t... really get me.”

His throat tightens.

“When he yanked me away, she just-” Kip closes his eyes for a second. “She stabbed him. Just took the point of the knife and... gutted him.”

The room is very quiet. He can hear the lightbulb buzzing above him.

“What happened next?” the detective asks gently.

“Everything stopped,” Kip says. “She looked shocked. Like she couldn’t believe what she’d done. She was sweating and her eyes were all over the place. She looked high.”

He opens his eyes again. “Then she dropped the knife and left.”

“And you?”

“I went to Shane. His intestines were... out. Like something from a horror movie.” Kip’s voice shakes, but he keeps going. “I tried to keep them in. I called 911. They took us both to the ER. They bandaged up, but said they needed the beds, so they sent me to the waiting room.”

He rubs his palms on his jeans.

“I called Rose. She got there. And then I guess I didn’t feel so good anymore.” He gives a small, embarrassed shrug. “I fainted.”

The detective leans back in his chair, chair legs squeaking faintly. He studies Kip like he’s trying to decide whether this is the most elaborate lie he’s heard all week or just deeply annoying.

“Hm,” he says. “You sure do know a lot of famous people.”

“Um. I guess?” Kip says. “Scott and I are friends.”

“And by friends,” the detective says, deadpan, “you mean you house injured Olympians, get surprise visits from international hockey stars, receive emergency texts from movie celebrities, and end up bleeding in other people’s apartments.”

Kip blinks. “When you say it like that, it does sound... bad.”

The detective snorts despite himself. He flips a page in the folder. “How did you meet Scott Hunter?”

“Work,” Kip says. “He came in to get a smoothie and I recommended him one. And he won his game that night, so he kept coming back. Hockey players are superstitious.”

“Oh. He liked the smoothie, then? The one you recommended?”

“Yes,” Kip says firmly. “Which is how I knew he was trustworthy.”

The detective stares at him for a beat, then writes something down. Kip can’t help leaning forward.

“Is that... is that relevant?”

“No,” the detective says.

He looks back up. “Let me ask you this. At any point, did you plan to be involved in a violent altercation with your friend’s ex-girlfriend?”

“Oh my god, no,” Kip says immediately. “I don’t even like confrontation. I cried once because someone took my laundry out of the dryer in college.”

A corner of the detective’s mouth twitches. He clears his throat. “Alright. One last thing. You’re telling me all of this voluntarily. No lawyer. No prompting.”

“Yes,” Kip says. “Should I have brought a lawyer?”

The detective considers him, then closes the folder with a soft thud. “Honestly? I don’t think it would’ve helped.”

Scott briefly wonders if it would be rude to ask the detective across from him how long she’s been out of school. She looks young- early twenties, maybe. Fresh enough that she still

believes paperwork solves things.

“So,” she says, consulting her notes. “You let ‘*Kip*’ ”-she pronounces the name like it’s experimental- “bring Shane to your apartment.”

“Right.”

“Why does Kip have a key to your apartment?”

Scott licks his lips. He would very much prefer not to come out for the first time in a police interrogation room. Rose knew, but she’d just figured it out. Ilya definitely knew, though he’s not sure how. He’s not sure he can handle this Doogie Howser cop knowing.

“He works near me,” Scott says carefully. “It’s an easier commute if he crashes at my place. We’re friends. It’s not a big deal.”

“Right,” she says again, in the tone of someone who does not believe him.

Damn. He’d thought she might be nicer, what with the youth.

“And when Kip told you Shane was gone, you contacted Rose Landry to get Eva’s addresses.”

“Yes. And I asked Kip to check on Shane.” Scott pauses. “Which, clearly, did not go great.”

His lawyer, Wong-Yoo, nods once. She’s represented him since his rookie year and has the demeanor of someone who eats prosecutors for breakfast. Maybe she’ll throw him a rope.

“And then you heard about the incident at Eva’s apartment and went to the ER to be with Kip.”

“And Shane,” Scott adds. “But he was in surgery. Rozanov was on his way too, so I went to meet him in the waiting room. I don’t know if you’ve met him, but he’s... kind of an asshole. I wanted to make sure he didn’t make a scene.”

The detective’s pen pauses.

“As I was walking him to Kip’s bed,” Scott continues, “we heard screaming. Turns out it was Eva. I tried to stop him, but-” he lifts a hand helplessly, “-hockey players. Then Rose showed up. I tried to stop her too.”

“But you didn’t *want* to?” the detective asks.

“Well-,”

“How is that relevant?” Wong-Yoo cuts in sharply.

The detective’s mouth twitches. She’s clearly delighted to have found a loose thread.

“I’m just trying to understand your *state of mind*, Mr. Hunter,” she says pleasantly. “You didn’t want to stop her?”

Scott winces. “That’s... not what I meant.”

“Then clarify.”

He looks to Wong-Yoo. She gives him nothing. Absolute stone. Betrayal, honestly.

“What I meant,” Scott says slowly, “is that I understood the impulse. Not that I endorsed it. Or assisted it. Or-” he gestures vaguely, “- emotionally supported it.”

The detective tilts her head. “So you sympathized with the urge to assault someone in a hospital hallway.”

“No,” Scott says quickly. “I sympathized with the urge to yell and be upset.”

“That’s still disorderly conduct.”

Wong-Yoo clears her throat. “Detective, unless you’re suggesting my client incited violence via *vibes*, I fail to see the relevance.”

The detective sighs and scribbles something in her notebook. “You athletes are all the same. Big feelings. No filter.”

“Hey,” Scott says. “I have a filter. It’s just... broken. Sometimes.”

She looks up. “Mr. Hunter, do you consider yourself responsible for what happened in that hallway?”

Scott doesn’t hesitate. “No. I consider myself the reason it didn’t get worse.”

That gives her pause.

“I restrained one internationally famous hockey player who was actively fighting,” Scott continues, warming up now. “I physically removed one movie star from the blast radius. I did not punch anyone. I did not kick anyone. I did not flip a wheelchair.”

“That’s a low bar,” she says.

“And yet,” Scott replies, “I cleared it.”

Wong-Yoo nods once. “For the record, my client’s actions prevented further injuries and potential civil liability.”

The detective closes her notebook with a soft snap. “Do you believe Eva Loren intended to kill Shane Hollander?”

“Without a doubt.”

She studies him for a beat. “Last question. Would you do it again?”

“Of course,” Ilya says.

“Yes,” Rose says.

“Yeah,” Kip says. “I would.”

Scott shrugs easily. “I think so.”

“Here’s the good news,” the detectives say. “No charges are being filed.”

When Ilya is finally released from interrogation, he shakes his lawyer’s hand and heads into the NYPD lobby.

The others are sprawled across mismatched chairs like a support group that’s given up. Rose is swallowed by an oversized hoodie and dark sunglasses, clearly hoping anonymity will magically occur. Scott is wearing the ugliest hoodie known to man, plus a ball cap pulled low. Kip is the only one who looks remotely normal, which feels suspicious.

They all straighten when they spot Ilya.

“Well?” Rose demands.

“No charges,” Ilya says lightly.

Kip breaks into a huge grin. Rose lets out a dramatic whoosh of air. Even geriatric Scott Hunter looks pleased.

“Alright!” Rose says, louder than strictly necessary. It’s fine- the lobby is packed. She could probably start screaming and no one would blink. This is New York City. Famous people are just mildly interesting furniture.

“Back to the hospital?” Ilya asks.

Rose nods, but Scott suddenly looks guilty.

“There’s an Admirals game tonight,” Scott admits. “I already missed mandatory practice. Coach will actually murder me if I don’t show up. Visiting hours will be over by the time the game ends, but I’ll be back in the morning.”

Kip shifts, also guilty. “I need a shower and my own bed,” he says, glancing at Scott- clearly meaning *Scott’s* bed. “And I have a shift tomorrow morning.”

“No,” Rose and Scott say in unison.

“I need to work!”

“You were stabbed,” Ilya says flatly. “Take another day off. Is it money? I will pay your rent.”

“What is it with you people and trying to pay my rent?” Kip sighs. “I don’t pay rent. I live at home. And I’ll visit tomorrow. After my shift.”

“No, Kip,” Rose scolds.

He ignores her. She flicks him in the forehead anyway.

“Don’t you need to get back to Boston?” Scott asks Ilya. “It’s been two days.”

“We have a home game tomorrow night,” Ilya concedes. “I can fly in the afternoon, play, then come back.”

“Aren’t you two in trouble with the league or something?” Rose asks.

“Scott is not,” Ilya says cheerfully. “Because he is too old. They give him pass.”

“Shut up, Rozanov,” Scott mutters. Then, to Rose: “I didn’t actually hit anyone. Unlike you ding-dongs. I’m fine. Rozanov, on the other hand- ”

“I pay fine,” Ilya says. “Very small.”

“It’s five thousand dollars.”

“Small. I once paid eight thousand for flipping off a camera during a live game.”

“Oh my god,” Rose says, delighted. “If you want to carpool, Ilya, I’ve got a car service.”

“I would like that,” Ilya says sincerely. “Thank you.”

He hadn’t liked Rose at first. He’d been-perhaps- jealous. But she’d proven herself. She was loyal, ferocious, and fully willing to claw Eva Loren’s eyes out. As far as Ilya was concerned, Rose could ask him for a private jet and he’d start calling airports to ask about prices

His phone buzzes.

He pulls it out.

Yuna <3: Shane's awake.

Yuna <3: He's asking for you.

Chapter End Notes

Ilya and Yuna have both tried to steal the bell from a taco bell. It is canon now. So is the traffic cone thing.

me: *nervously looks at the traffic cone in my room which I don't remember acquiring after a I blacked at a sorority party in 2019* don't steal, kids

Yeah, Yuna's name has a heart emoji next to it in Ilya's phone. That's his mom now. No take backs.

up next: reunion part 2

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Heyo new chapter alert!!! I am in FL right now and it snowed. I melted before it hit the ground but it snowed. I am suffering. I am warm-blooded. 30 F is not for me. Plus my windshield froze over and I was late to work because I didn't know how to melt it off (don't worry I found the heater thing eventually). I can't believe people do this for months at a time. I miss the beach. i am now one with my electric blanket.

TW: domestic violence, depression, abusive relationships etc.

Idk if I am fully happy with this, so I may touch it up over the next few days as a heads up.

did you guys know that many people concern food gendered in the west? I did my undergrad thesis on it. Like if you were to hold a mug with two hands vs one hand, they have male or female connotations. Or imagine a big burly biker type heading into a bar and ordering a whiskey on the rocks. And then the same guy ordering an appletini. A good example of this is JD from Scrubs, who often orders 'girly' drinks and gets made fun of for it. Hence why I talk about ice cream in this chapter. Take that mom and dad, guess who's using their degree now!

Also ignore all the tense changes. I don't know what the fuck I was thinking when I wrote them all different. Consider it artistic

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

Ilya misses his mother more than ever during the drive to the hospital.

It's a good thing Rose has a car service, because he isn't sure he could get there on his own. He feels flayed open, like a bundle of exposed nerves.

He thinks Rose might have tried to talk to him. He isn't sure. The world feels muffled and far away. Instead he keeps drifting back to another time, years ago- waiting to hear if he'd made

the draft, his father beside him, breathing down his neck and reeking of cheap vodka. His brother hadn't bothered to show up. Couldn't have cared less.

"The KHL is better," his father had said while they waited for the phone call. "The Americans don't know real hockey."

Ilya had ignored him. He'd tried to imagine what his mother would say instead. She would be proud, wouldn't she? She had always loved to watch him skate. She used to tie his laces and hold his hand when they crossed the street, even when he was old enough to do it himself.

His earliest memory of her is from his first hockey game: her golden curls tucked beneath a crocheted hat, her nose pink from the cold, clapping and cheering like he was the only kid on the ice. The game hadn't been much to watch. It was just a pack of four-year-olds wobbling around in oversized gear, trying to find the puck. Half the time the hardest part was just staying upright. Most of the other parents looked bored.

Not Irina.

She'd been on her feet the entire time, applauding when little Ilya managed to nudge the puck a few centimeters across the ice. She'd had a black eye that day. When he asked about it, she told him she'd fallen.

No one scored. Of course they didn't. But afterward she helped him pack up his gear and took him out for ice cream anyway. She loved sweet things, and she could eat ice cream in any weather.

He remembers another game, years later, when he was eight. They'd lost badly. He'd been knocked around the ice like a rag doll. The other kids were stronger and faster and better than he was. Ilya hadn't scored once. The only good thing was that his father had left halfway through with his brother as soon as it became obvious they were going to lose.

He'd cried in the locker room afterward, hot and furious and ashamed.

His mother found him there.

He told her he was a failure. Horrible. Ugly and terrible and useless.

She only kissed his forehead and helped him peel the pads off his bruised shins and aching shoulders. She brushed the sweat- damp curls back from his face and kissed him again.

"It's okay, *zaychik*."

"I'm not a bunny," he'd muttered, sniffing.

"You're fast like one."

“Not this time,” he said miserably.

“That’s okay, bunny.”

He’d given her a sour look. Bunnies were small and fluffy and weak. He told her so while she helped him pack his things.

“Okay,” she’d said, smiling. “My bear, then. Yes?”

That he liked. Bears were big and strong.

She placed her hand over his heart.

“My little bear, you do not always have to win. There will always be someone who seems better than you. Are they? Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on what you think.”

“But my team must hate me,” he’d said. “I lost.”

She'd tilted her head. "Do you love them?"

"No. I guess not."

"Then they don't matter. What matters is the opinion of people who love you. Like me. And I think you were great."

He smiles and wipes away the last of his tears, and she takes him for ice cream again. He gets whipped cream on his nose and she laughs, handing him a napkin. His father, who would never do something as unmanly as eat sweets, would have just yelled at him for making a mess.

As Ilya gets older, his mother grows quieter.

She still smiles at his games. She still plays the piano when he asks. But she seems to fade somehow, like a photograph left too long in the sun. At home she had never spoken much when everyone was there, but little by little she becomes almost silent. Even at meals.

One day, when Ilya is ten, he comes home from hockey practice and walks straight into the sight of his teenage brother striking their mother.

He is so shocked he freezes in the doorway.

Irina doesn't. She simply straightens, touches her reddening cheek, and looks at Andrei blankly.

"Why would you do that?"

Andrei doesn't seem to know. He just stands there, silent. After a moment she tells him to go to his room, and he does. Ilya slips back outside and then reenters loudly, letting the door bang so she knows it's him.

"Hello, bear," she says, her cheek still flushed. "How was practice?"

"Fine," he answers. "Are you okay? Your face is red."

She gives him a small, sad smile. "I just fell. I'm okay, bear."

That night at dinner, Andrei has a split lip.

Their mother tells his father what happened. After he comes home, she sends Ilya outside for a little while. It feels hypocritical, the way she always protects him from the worst of it. From

down the street he can still hear his father shouting.

“You think it’s okay to hit your mother?”

“You do!” Andrei yells back.

Ilya keeps walking until he can’t hear them anymore. He doesn’t want to listen. He loves his mother more than anything.

He just can’t understand why his father and brother don’t.

A week before she died, she watched the last game of the season.

Ilya was twelve and growing like a weed. He scored a hat trick. His teammates invited him out to celebrate, but he only shrugged and told them his mother was waiting for him.

They got ice cream instead. He ended up with whipped cream on his nose, and she smiled and handed him a napkin. Afterward they went for a walk. It was chilly, but it was always chilly these days. They wandered past the center of town and eventually came to the dance school. Through the big front windows they could see a ballet class in progress. It looked warm inside, bright and golden.

His mother stood very still, watching.

“You know, bear,” she said softly, “I used to dance.”

Ilya blinked at her. He’d never heard that before. He knew she loved music, but dance? Still, he could picture it. She was small and graceful, light on her feet. Not for the first time, he wondered how on earth she had ended up married to his father. He knows she could have been a *prima donna* if she’d wanted.

“You did?”

She nodded, her eyes going a little wet. “It wasn’t meant to be. When you were younger, the neighbor girl started ballet lessons. I gave her my shoes.” She looked back at the window one last time. “I used to dance,” she repeated, almost to herself.

Ilya took her hand, and they crossed the street without saying anything more.

Now, years later in the car on the way to the hospital, he wonders what she would do if she were here. Would she hug him? Comfort him the way she always had? Would she still love him if she knew he liked men?

He hopes so.

He needs to believe so.

He and Rose arrive at the hospital and take the elevator up to Shane's floor. When the doors open, they almost run straight into Kyle, the bartender. He looks exhausted.

"So nobody got arrested?" Kyle asks, looking them up and down.

"No charges," Ilya confirms. "How is Shane?"

"He's been awake for a while," Kyle says. "Joe just left to check in at his hotel. His mom's in there. I think they're waiting for you." He glances at Ilya a little warily- clearly he hasn't forgotten Ilya snatching the phone out of his hands at the bar. Ilya isn't even sure who Joe is. A lawyer, maybe.

"I will go," Ilya says, hoping he doesn't sound as nervous as he feels.

"Have you eaten?" Rose asks Kyle. "I've heard the hospital cafeteria makes a mean cinnamon bun. And by that I mean it microwaves one pretty well."

“I could go for some coffee,” Kyle admits. He either doesn’t recognize Rose or doesn’t care, because he looks completely unimpressed by the idea of a celebrity inviting him for bad coffee and a stale microwaved pastry.

“Me too. Come on,” she says, waving him along. Then she leans up and kisses Ilya on the cheek. “It’ll be okay, Ilya.”

“Sure,” he says.

The walk from the hallway to Shane’s door feels endless. Like the green mile.

What if Shane hates him?

What if Ilya finally tells him the truth and Shane rejects him?

What if he walks out of here with nothing but humiliation to show for it?

He isn’t sure he can survive that.

He stops in front of the door and presses a hand over his heart, over the bear tattoo inked there. He thinks of his mother.

Then Ilya knocks.

Ilya opens the door.

Kyle is right. Yuna is there, dressed in a black silk shirt and trousers. She looks more like herself than she had in flannel, composed and elegant. Beside her stands another man who looks so much like Shane it startles him: David Hollander. He appears exhausted, which makes sense. Ilya remembers hearing he'd spent almost two days trying to get a flight in from Ottawa.

He has every right to be worn out.

David studies Ilya with open curiosity, but not anger. Ilya wonders what Yuna and Shane have told him.

Propped up in the hospital bed on a mountain of pillows is Shane.

He's paler than usual, his freckles standing out starkly against his skin. There's still a stitch in his eyebrow and bruising around his eye and nose, but the swelling has gone down. He isn't in a hospital gown anymore-thank God- but a loose button-down pajama shirt. The rest of him is hidden beneath the blankets. Someone must have brought him clothes so he wouldn't be miserable. Hospital gowns are itchy and awful, and Shane would have hated every second of it.

Ilya isn't sure what he expected. Tears, maybe. Anger or something like it.

Instead Shane just stares at him, wide-eyed, like he can't quite believe Ilya is really there.

"Hello, Ilya," Yuna says, rising to her feet. She crosses the room and hugs him without hesitation, right in front of her husband and son. It feels surprisingly good. Over her shoulder he hears Shane make a small, strangled sound.

"Hello," Ilya manages.

"No charges?" Yuna asks.

"None," Ilya confirms with a nervous smile. "Your lawyer was good."

"Of course he was. I picked him."

That pulls a genuine smile out of Ilya.

Yuna slips her arm through David's. "Come on, honey. Let's get some coffee."

"Uh," David says, clearly confused. "Sure."

"Good to see you again," Ilya tells him.

"You too," David replies, still bewildered, and allows himself to be guided out of the room. Ilya watches them go until the door clicks shut.

Then he turns back to Shane.

It's the first time he's seen him awake and coherent in the hospital.

"How are you?" Ilya asks after a moment, shoving his hands into his coat pockets.

“Fine,” Shane says. “Well. Better.”

Ilya steps closer to the bed. They both open their mouths at the same time.

“You were right-”

“I’m sorry,” Ilya blurts.

Shane stops. “You- what?”

Ilya swallows. “I’m sorry, Shane. I shouldn’t have left you alone.”

“No, Ilya-” Shane says, and Ilya realizes they’re using each other’s first names now without even thinking about it. “Why would you-”

“We kissed, and I ran,” Ilya says, the words tumbling out. “Because I was upset. I should never have done that. You were hurt, and I needed to be there. And I wasn’t. And then you went to Eva’s.”

Shane shakes his head. "I went there to break up with her. You were right. I realized I couldn't-" He hesitates, swallowing hard. "This wasn't the first time she hurt me."

Ilya goes very still.

"Not the first time?" he repeats carefully. He had suspected, but hearing it was another story.

Shane lets out a slow breath and looks down at his hands, picking at a loose thread on the blanket. "No."

A long, heavy silence settles in the room. The monitor next to Shane is beeping softly. Ilya can't find the right words to say. Maybe that Eva was lucky she had been arrested, or Ilya definitely would be going back for round two.

"I kept telling myself it wasn't a big deal," Shane says finally. "That it was just... misunderstandings. Bad days. Stress." He gives a humorless little laugh. "Turns out you can excuse a lot of things when you really don't want to admit the truth."

Ilya pulls a chair closer to the bed and sits, because his legs suddenly don't feel reliable.

"I'm sorry," he says again, softer this time.

“You didn’t know,” Shane answers. “And even if you had... it wasn’t your job to save me.”

Ilya thinks about the blood on Shane’s face, about how close it all came to being so much worse. “Maybe not,” he says quietly. “But I should have stayed anyway.”

Shane studies him for a moment. “You look terrible, by the way.”

Ilya blinks. “Thank you.”

“I mean it,” Shane says, almost smiling. “You look like you haven’t slept in a week.”

“It feels like I have not slept in a week,” Ilya admits. “Not since Hunter called me and told me you were hurt.”

Shane shifts a little on the pillows, wincing. “Come closer.”

Ilya hesitates, then moves his chair nearer. Close enough that he can see the faint gold in Shane’s eyes and the pale dusting of freckles across his nose. How he loves those eyes.

“I was scared,” Shane says. “After you left. Not just of Eva. Of everything. Of what we did. Of what it meant.” He pauses. “But when I woke up here and they told me you were with the police... I don’t know. That didn’t feel like someone who didn’t care.”

“I care,” Ilya says immediately. Too fast. And it is too honest to take back.

Shane searches his face. “Yeah. I think you do.”

Another quiet moment passes.

“I thought you would hate me,” Ilya admits. “For running. For everything.”

Shane shakes his head. “I don’t hate you. I was hurt. And confused. And kind of mad.” He gives a small smile. “But mostly I was just worried you weren’t going to come back.”

Ilya swallows hard. “I came back.”

“I know.”

Ilya glances down at his hands, then back up. “There is something I need to say. Properly this time.”

Shane’s expression softens. He looks almost scared. “Okay.”

Ilya takes a breath. Thinks of his mother, of her hand over his heart, of the bear tattoo beneath his shirt.

“I like you,” Ilya says. “More than I planned to. More than I know what to do with.” His voice wobbles only a little. “And I’m tired of pretending that I don’t.” He swallows hard. “I- I love you.”

Shane draws in a sharp breath.

“Holy shit.”

“I saw you covered in those wires,” Ilya continues, the words rushing out of him now. “And I thought you were going to die. I made a promise- to tell you if... *when* you wake up. That I would not waste another second.” He sniffles, fighting to keep himself steady. “I love you, Shane Hollander. I think I have loved you since the first time I saw you. You have my heart. All of it. I cannot live this life without you.”

He takes Shane's hand in his, and the simple touch hits him like a jolt of electricity. It steadies him and unravels him all at once. He would stay here forever if Shane let him- just holding on, never letting go.

"I'm sorry," Shane says, his voice thick. He's crying.

"No, Shane," Ilya murmurs. He can't find a tissue, so he wipes at Shane's tears with the sleeve of his shirt.

"I am," Shane insists. "I knew Eva wasn't good. I knew I loved you, but I was scared. I couldn't say anything. I thought you'd see me as weak."

Ilya lifts Shane's hand and presses it over his own heart- over the bear tattoo, over everything he has left of his mother.

"This only beats for you," he says quietly. "*Because* of you. You complete me. I loved you before I even knew what love was. I know you don't-"

He doesn't get to finish.

Shane grabs him by the collar and pulls him in.

They're kissing.

It isn't like their other kisses. Those are heated and almost competitive. This kiss is just as intense, but softer. Gentler. Kinder to both of them. It leaves Ilya breathless, like he's stepped off the edge of something vast and impossible. Like he's been thrown out of plane without a parachute.

It's like falling without fear.

Shane finally pulls back, and suddenly they're nose to nose.

"I love you," Shane says.

Ilya just stares at him, trying to process the words. Shane is looking at him intensely, like he does when they're fighting for the puck during a face off.

I love you.

"You-" he starts, then stops. "You mean that?"

Shane lets out a shaky laugh. “Yeah. I mean it.” He squeezes Ilya’s hand like he’s afraid he might disappear. “I really, really mean it.”

“Oh,” he says faintly.

Shane smiles at him through damp eyes. “That’s it? That’s all I get after a declaration like that? ‘Oh’?”

“I am... having too many feelings,” Ilya admits.

“Overwhelmed?”

“Yes. I am overwhelmed. Give me a moment.”

“You can have several,” Shane says softly.

Ilya leans his forehead against the side of Shane's bed, still gripping his hand, and lets out a breath he feels like he's been holding for years.

He thinks of the last few days. The fear and the endless waiting outside this very room. He thinks of how close he came to losing all of this, all of Shane, without ever saying what mattered.

"I was so scared," he says quietly. "When they would not let me see you at first. When you would not wake up. I kept thinking... if I lose you without telling you the truth, I will never forgive myself."

Shane brushes his thumb over Ilya's knuckles. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Good," Ilya says fiercely. "Because I would follow you."

Shane huffs a soft laugh. "You already did."

That makes Ilya smile despite everything.

They sit there for a while, not talking, just holding hands. The machines hum quietly around them. It feels strangely peaceful, like the storm has finally passed.

After a minute Shane clears his throat.

“So,” he says. “We should probably talk about... everything.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees. “We should.”

“But not right this second.”

Ilya glances up at him. “No?”

“No,” Shane says, tugging gently on his hand. “Right this second I’d just like to enjoy the fact that you’re here and you love me and I love you.”

Ilya’s chest warms at hearing it again.

“I can do that,” he says.

Shane smiles, tired but happy, and shifts a little on the pillows. "Come closer."

Ilya does, careful of the wires and everything fragile between them. Shane rests his head against Ilya's shoulder, and Ilya presses a careful kiss to his hair.

It feels like somewhere safe.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone assumes the bear tattoo is because of his new team. His first shot at it. But Ilya at age 18 goes to a tattoo shop wearing his mother's cross and asks for a piece of her to be by his heart. It ends up being a bear. It's the first time he's cried since she died when it he looks at it in the mirror.

I know the bear tat is not in the show, but this is my canon so it shall be.

next chapter: interrogation. Or: baby, it's an arms race

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

HUGE ding-dings to the people who caught that 'just for once' reference in the last chapter. Literally had that on repeat writing ch 31. I fucking love NPMD!

Sorry for the delay on this one. I don't have crazy excuse. It's just busy at work cause it's tax season. Anyway, if you need to file you should do it now and not wait until the last minute.

I was so jazzed to see a bunch of comments about you y'all also taking street signs and traffic cones. I feel so seen <3

also they never call each other dude in the books but they're hockey players. c'mon, now.

TW: Police, misplaced guilt for traumatic event. References and descriptions of domestic violence.

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

The Admirals game goes surprisingly well.

Even though Scott doesn't really have his head in it, his teammates pick up the slack.

He can practically hear the commentators on ESPN already.

Captain Scott Hunter wasn't giving it his all tonight. Is retirement in his future?

Jesus. He isn't that old. He probably still has an easy ten years of hockey left in him. He's not even thirty yet. Of course, thirty is considered ancient in hockey years- but he's not there. Not for a little while, at least.

Still, he knows the guys can feel it.

Jalo has to work overtime even though he's already one of the best defensemen in the league. During a reset he just claps Scott on the back, in a quiet encouragement. In the end they pull off a 2-1 win against Washington.

In the locker room afterward, Harv takes one look at him and quietly lets him skip media.

Scott knows he must look like hell. He feels like a raw bundle of nerves. Logically, he knows Shane is okay. He knows Kip is okay. He knows he isn't in any kind of trouble.

None of that stops his thoughts from circling anyway.

Mercifully, he'd gotten a pass on missing the mandatory practice for this game, and so far no one has mentioned the body-camera video. He has no idea how he's supposed to explain why he, Ilya Rozanov, and Rose Landry were all in the same emergency room. Or why he apparently had to play referee between them and Eva.

There'd been a very brief conversation in Harv's office before the game. Mostly just Coach asking if any of this was going to become a problem, and Scott saying no. Harv had nodded, waved him out, and that was that.

Unbelievably chill, considering everything.

Scott changes out of his gear and lingers at his stall, checking his phone.

Kip: With my dad

Kip: He freaked a little but it's all good

Scott smiles and types back.

Scott: Did you ask him how his work trip was?

Kip: Funny. I don't think he cared about anything when the hospital called.

Yeah. Scott can understand that. He's never been as scared as he was when Rose contacted him.

"Scotty!" Carter calls, clapping him on the back so hard he nearly drops his phone.

“Dude. What the hell happen-”

“Carter,” Eric says sharply.

“Jeez, Dad,” Carter mutters. “I was gonna ask who’s got him smiling at his phone. Not about the hospital.”

“Dude!”

Carter winces. “Sorry. I didn’t ask, did I?”

Scott sighs. “It’s fine. Just a really weird couple of days.”

Carter nods. “I hear that.”

Scott finishes packing up and checks the time. Visiting hours at the hospital are definitely over by now. He’d wanted Kip to spend the night, but Kip said he needed to be with his dad.

Scott gets it. If he'd been on the road and gotten a call that his kid was hurt...

Well.

It doesn't matter. Eva's been arrested. Kip is safe. Shane is safe.

Everything is totally fine.

He doesn't sleep well that night.

The next morning he wakes to knocking at the door.

Scott squints at the clock. Just past eight. He'd set an alarm for seven. He isn't usually the type to sleep through an alarm, but he remembers finally drifting off sometime around six. He must have hit snooze half-asleep, because he has no memory of it.

He drags himself out of bed, pulls on a pair of sweatpants, and shrugs into a hoodie without bothering to zip it. Then he shuffles to the door and peers through the peephole.

Kip stands on the other side, hands full with a box and a drink carrier.

Scott opens the door.

“Good morning,” Kip says and then very obviously takes a moment to appreciate Scott’s bare chest.

“Hi,” Scott mumbles, stepping aside to let him in. “You have a key.”

“My hands are full,” Kip replies, heading straight for the kitchen.

“How did you knock?”

“I didn’t.” Kip sets the drinks and the box on the counter. “I kicked.” He wiggles his foot for emphasis and toes off his shoes.

The stitches on his face look stark against his skin. He's wearing a long-sleeved shirt, but Scott's eyes still drift to his arm, to the place where he knows there's a bandage underneath.

"Scott," Kip says, half fond, half chiding when he catches his boyfriend's gaze. He crosses the room, takes Scott's hands in his. "I'm okay. I promise."

"You're handling this a lot better than I would have."

Kip smiles. "Totally. I see a therapist regularly. I had a call with her last night- got some good coping techniques."

Then he kisses him.

Scott sighs into it. Even after all these months, it still doesn't feel entirely real that he gets to have someone like Kip.

Kip pulls away first and goes back to the counter. He hands Scott a coffee-just milk, the way he likes it- and keeps the cream-and-sugar one for himself. Then he opens the box.

Doughnuts.

Scott raises an eyebrow. He's a professional athlete; he doesn't exactly make a habit of eating like this. Kip hits the gym religiously too. Sugary carbs are not exactly a staple in either of their diets.

Kip catches the look immediately. "Oh, shove off. I think we both deserve doughnuts. But I can make you a smoothie if you want."

"No, thank you," Scott says, smiling despite himself. "This is really sweet of you. Get it? Sweet? Because... doughnuts are sweet."

Kip's eyes twinkle. "I do get it. You're hilarious. My sexy, hot, hilarious hockey player boyfriend."

"Two of those were about my looks."

"Am I lying?"

Scott considers. "No."

They sit at the kitchen island with their knees touching. Kip only brought three doughnuts-no need for a whole dozen for two people- and they split them. They're warm and taste

homemade. The coffee is just okay, but the fact that Kip went out of his way to get it makes it feel a lot better.

When the doughnuts are gone and the coffee cups are empty, Kip studies Scott carefully.

“Saw your game last night.”

Scott winces internally. He’d been hoping Kip was too busy with his dad to watch.

“That bad?” he asks.

Kip doesn’t answer right away. “Are you doing okay?”

“Yeah. Yes.” Scott scrambles for the right words. “I mean-I wasn’t the one who got hurt.” He hesitates. “And I wasn’t even there, because I was in-”

“Scott,” Kip says gently. “I know I’m acting okay, but it really scared me too.”

Scott lets out a shaky breath. “When Rose told me you were in the hospital, it was the scariest moment of my life.”

Kip blinks, looking almost surprised.

“I didn’t know what happened,” Scott goes on, the words tumbling out now. “I didn’t know if something terrible-if you were-” He stops, swallows hard. “I’m sorry, Kip. I never should have asked you to go over there to get Shane. It’s my fault. You didn’t even want to go, and I pushed-”

“Oh my God,” Kip says, voice catching. “You think this is your fault?”

“I mean-”

“Scott.” Kip stands up so fast the stool scrapes against the floor. He wraps his arms around Scott and presses his face to his chest. “It is not your fault. It’s Eva’s fault. Only Eva’s. I could have said no. I went because I wanted to help Shane.”

“You didn’t even know him,” Scott murmurs.

“I do now.” Kip lifts his chin to look at him. “And I like him a lot. I think we’re going to be good friends. I’m glad I was there.”

His fingers brush lightly over the stitches on his own cheek.

“I can’t even imagine what would have happened if she’d gone after him and I wasn’t there.”

Scott tightens his arms around Kip, holding him close. His living, breathing, relatively unharmed boyfriend.

“That thought has been keeping me up all night,” he admits.

Kip squeezes him. “Well, stop it. I’m okay. Shane’s okay. We got lucky.”

“Too lucky,” Scott says quietly.

“Maybe,” Kip agrees. “But we’re still here.”

For a moment they just stand like that, holding each other in the quiet kitchen.

Finally Kip pulls back a little. “So yeah-you didn’t have your best game. But you had a pretty good reason.”

Scott huffs a weak laugh. “Coach was surprisingly understanding.”

“He should be. Your boyfriend got cut up with a knife. You’re allowed to be distracted.”

“My boyfriend,” Scott repeats, smiling faintly.

“Yeah.” Kip grins up at him. “Your very alive, very okay boyfriend.”

Scott leans down and kisses him, slow and grateful.

“Good,” he murmurs. “I plan on keeping you that way.”

They stay like that for another minute, just breathing each other in, until Kip finally pulls away.

“So,” Kip says, leaning back against the counter, “what’s the plan for today?”

Scott shrugs. “I was going to head to the hospital later. Visiting hours don’t start until ten.”

Kip brightens immediately. “Good. I want to go too.”

Scott pauses. “Are you sure? You don’t have to-”

“I know I don’t have to,” Kip cuts in. “I want to. I texted Shane a little last night. He said he’s feeling better. Bored out of his mind, apparently.”

That makes Scott smile. “Yeah, that sounds like him.”

“And I promised I’d come by,” Kip continues. “Plus, I kind of want to check on Yuna. She looked exhausted yesterday.”

Scott studies him for a moment. He still can’t believe how calm Kip has been through all of this.

“You’re amazing, you know that?” he says.

Kip snorts. “I brought you doughnuts. Let’s not get carried away.”

“No, I mean it.” Scott reaches out and laces their fingers together. “After everything, you’re still thinking about everyone else.”

Kip shrugs, a little embarrassed. “Shane went through something awful. So did you. We should all stick together.”

Scott squeezes his hand. “Okay. We’ll go together.”

“Good,” Kip says decisively.

Scott glances at the clock on the stove. “We’ve got about an hour before we can head over.”

“Perfect,” Kip replies. “That gives you time to shower and not look like you just rolled out of bed.”

Scott glances down at his sweatpants and open hoodie.. “I’ll have you know this is my natural charm.”

“Uh-huh.” Kip grins. “Go shower, hockey boy. I’ll clean up.”

Scott leans in for one more quick kiss. “Bossy.”

“You love it.”

“Yeah,” Scott admits, heading toward the bedroom. “I kind of do.”

As the bathroom door closes behind him, he feels lighter than he has in days. Shane is safe. Kip is safe. And Scott still has his job even after skipping practice.

Screw ESPN. He’s got a lot of hockey in him yet.

They arrive at the hospital just past ten-thirty.

Kip had wanted to be there right at ten, but they hit traffic. When they get inside, they check in at the visitor's desk—Kip far more confidently than Scott. Kip wasn't involved in the body-cam video or the whole mess at the bar. He also isn't famous.

Scott, unfortunately, is both.

Not movie-star famous like Rose, but well known enough in New York City. More than enough.

He hasn't touched social media since the video leaked. He handed his Instagram login over to his PR team and washed his hands of it. For his own sanity, he knows he'll need to avoid Googling his name for a while. Even though, as he'd pointed out to the police more than once, he hadn't actually hit anyone—he'd just tried to break things up.

Still, he knows there have to be dozens of articles out there by now. He's fielded calls from every reporter looking for a comment, and Harv has managed to get him out of media obligations for the last two games. But as captain, that grace period probably won't last. The next game against Pittsburgh is in two days, and there's a good chance he won't be able to dodge questions anymore.

He'll also have to travel for it.

He hates the idea of leaving Kip behind, even for a couple of days. It's always hard, but now it feels worse than usual.

They head down the hall and up the elevator to Shane's floor. Even with visitor badges, they still have to show ID before they're allowed into the wing. Kip had mentioned it was some kind of VIP unit.

He wasn't kidding.

It's small- maybe five rooms total. Each one is single-occupancy, spacious, almost luxurious by hospital standards. Private bathrooms, extra seating. There's even a sink. Scott wonders who else ends up here. Probably wealthy donors and celebrities.

Shane likely would have been fine in a normal room, but after what happened with Eva, the hospital must have decided extra security was a good idea.

At least they don't have to worry about her showing up again.

They reach Shane's door. Scott knocks. He can hear voices inside, but they're muffled. He glances at Kip, who shrugs.

Then Yuna Hollander calls, "Come in!"

Scott opens the door.

It's a full house.

Yuna is there, along with a man Scott assumes is Shane's father. Ilya and Rose are present too. Ilya looks like he slept in the chair. He's in the same clothes as yesterday, hair a mess. Rose looks better, at least. She's not her usual polished self, but her clothes are clean.

There's also a tall guy with shaggy hair and a full beard, and a short woman with dark skin and box braids pulled into a neat ponytail.

Half a dozen bouquets of flowers are scattered around the room, along with balloons and at least two dozen cards displayed by the window and small table next to Shane's bed.

And in the middle of it all is Shane. He's propped up in bed in a pajama shirt instead of a gown.

The second he sees Scott, he snaps his fingers and points.

"Scott. Can I pick Scott?"

Scott blinks. “Uh. Okay. For what?”

“Hi, Shane,” Kip says warmly.

“Hi, Kip,” Shane replies, ignoring Scott’s question.

The woman Scott doesn’t recognize steps forward and offers her hand. “My name is Femi Damijo. I’m a detective with the NYPD. I’m here to interview Shane.”

Well, that explains the serious atmosphere.

“What do you need me for?” Scott asks.

“Shane is allowed to have someone with him during the interview,” she explains. “We were just discussing who he’d like.”

Scott glances around the room, confused. Surely Shane doesn’t mean him. Rose would make sense. Or his parents. Or even the scruffy guy Scott vaguely recognizes from somewhere-

Then it clicks. Sochi Olympics. Figure skating. Shane's friend.

Right.

"Shane-," Ilya starts, clearly about to protest.

And suddenly Scott understands.

Ilya would get too emotional. Rose probably would too. Shane might not want his parents sitting there while he recounts something awful. He's choosing Scott because they're friendly enough, but not *close* enough to make it harder.

"Okay," Scott says, cutting Ilya off. "Yeah. I can do that."

Ilya shoots him a dirty look but, miraculously, keeps his mouth shut.

"When?" Scott asks.

"Now, preferably," Detective Damijo says. "If we could have the room."

Shane's parents kiss him goodbye. "We'll see you later," Yuna says, adoration written all over her face. Scott misses his own mom, suddenly.

Rose elbows Ilya. "Come on. Let's get you some clean clothes. And you can explain the neutral zone to me again. Joe?"

"Sounds good," Joe agrees.

Scott looks at Kip. Kip gives him an encouraging smile. "I'll see you in a bit, okay?"

"Okay," Scott echoes.

He really wants to kiss him, but not here, not now. Instead he settles for a quick squeeze to Kip's shoulder.

Once the room empties and the door shuts, Detective Damijo turns to Scott.

"If you'd like to take a seat, Mr. Hunter."

“Call me Scott,” he says automatically, dragging a chair closer to Shane’s bed.

“Only if you call me Femi,” she replies.

“Deal.”

She rummages through her briefcase while Shane glances at Scott, relieved.

“Thank you,” Shane murmurs. “They were arguing.”

“I figured,” Scott says. “You sure you want me here?”

Shane nods, tight-lipped and obviously nervous.

Femi finally pulls out a notebook, a pen, and a slim recording device.

“Are you comfortable with me recording this, Shane?”

“Sure.”

“Great. Before we start, I want to introduce myself properly.” She sits a little straighter. “As I said, I’m Detective Femi Damijo with the NYPD. I’m with the Domestic Violence Unit. It’s relatively new, but I’m not. I have a criminal justice degree from NYU. I spent four years as a street cop and five as a detective in Special Victims. When this unit was formed, I requested a transfer. I want to be here, and I want to help. Okay?”

Shane nods, clearly uncomfortable with the words *domestic violence*.

“I’m going to hit record now. We can take as much time as you need. If you want to stop or need a break, just say so.” She glances at Scott. “That goes for you too.”

Scott nods.

She presses a button and sets the device on the bedside table among the get-well cards. Scott notices one signed by the Montreal team.

“Okay,” Femi says, settling in. “This is Detective Femi Damijo, badge number 186, conducting an interview with Shane Hollander.”

She rattles off the date, time, and hospital address.

“Interview begins.”

The room feels smaller, even though there are fewer people in it.

Femi glances from Shane to Scott, then offers a small, reassuring smile. “Shane, we’re going to go at your pace. I’m not here to trap you or trick you. I just need to understand what happened, in your own words.”

Shane swallows. “Okay.”

“Why don’t you start by telling me about the day before the incident,” she says. “From the beginning.”

Shane stares down at his hands where they’re folded on top of the blanket. Scott notices his nails are bitten down to the nubs, the skin around them raw and scabbed over.

“Okay. Um. I played a hockey game against the Admirals, and I went to Eva’s apartment after. We started fighting.”

“About what?”

Shane shrugs. “I don’t really know. Just that I spent too much time playing hockey. She had missed an important dinner so we could meet. And she started to say that I wasn’t present.”

Femi nods. “Alright. You were arguing.”

Shane winces. “It was more like she was yelling at me. Then she drank some alcohol.”

“Did you?”

“No,” Shane says. “I’m on a special diet. I don’t drink during the season. Um. She was upset and she threw the glass she’d been drinking from at me and I wasn’t fast enough this time. It hit me in the face.” He motions to his bruised cheek and eyebrow. “I was bleeding pretty bad. She felt bad after, but I’d had enough so I just left.”

Scott feels his stomach tighten. He’d known Shane was hurt that night. He hadn’t realized it had started like this. Which was stupid. But Scott also hadn’t seen Shane’s face until the next day, after he’d had surgery and time to heal it up a little. He’s starting to understand why Kip had been so freaked out before.

“Do you know what kind of glass?” Femi asks.

“Um. Something heavy. Like the kind you’d drink whiskey out of. It was crystal.”

Shit. Scott knows exactly what those glasses are like. They’re hick and practically weapons on their own. He imagines it hitting Shane’s face and has to force himself not to react.

Shane swallows audibly. “I’m not from around here, so I got turned around. And I ran into Kip. Kip Grady. He was closing up his smoothie shop and he invited me in to try and get me cleaned up. He told me I should go to the hospital, but I didn’t want to. So he invited me to spend the night at his place. I had a hotel, but I couldn’t go back without my teammates looking at me. And I was just tired. So I did.”

Scott keeps his face neutral, but his chest aches at the image of Shane wandering around the city hurt and embarrassed and trying to hide it.

Femi scribbles something down at great speed. “Okay. Then what happened? You spent the night?”

“Yes. I was going to leave for the airport with the team but-” Shane glances at Scott.

Right. Scott and Kip had turned off his alarm. Would he tell Femi that?

“I decided to stay. And Scott called my, uh, friend. Ilya. He showed up and tried to talk to me about it. But I was upset, so when he left, so did I. And then I went to Eva’s apartment to break up with her.”

Femi nods.

“And when I got there, she’d already been drinking. And her pupils were huge. It looked like she was high or something. I dunno.” He licks his lower lip.

“Did she seem upset?”

“At first? No. She seemed... fine. Happy, even.” Shane pauses. “Too happy. That’s why I thought she was on drugs.”

Femi nods but doesn’t interrupt.

“She kept trying to get me to talk to her,” Shane continues. “I told her I didn’t want to. I told her that we were done.”

“And how did she respond to that?”

Shane’s jaw tightens. “Not great.”

Scott can practically feel the moment Shane hits the wall. The words are right there, but they’re stuck behind something. Sadness? Embarrassment, maybe? Grief?

“You’re doing fine,” Femi says softly.

Shane takes a breath. “She started getting angry. Saying I was embarrassing her. That I was acting like a child. She grabbed my arm at one point.”

Scott’s eyes flick automatically to Shane’s forearm, even though if there had been a mark then, it’d be long gone. He feels a simmering anger begin to build in his chest.

“Did it hurt?”

“A little,” Shane admits. “Mostly it just surprised me.”

“Okay,” Femi says. “What happened next?”

“We argued. I didn’t want to make it a big deal. I tried to leave but she blocked me from the door.” His voice goes thin. “Then she chucked a barstool at me. One of hers from the kitchen island. I managed to duck in time for that one.”

Scott winces before he can stop himself. A barstool. Jesus Christ. Shane doesn’t react, though. Femi just nods, her face neutral.

“And that’s when things escalated?”

“Yeah.” Shane swallows again. “I told her I needed to leave. That we were done.”

Shane’s fingers twist together in the blanket.

“She started yelling,” he says quietly. “Calling me names. Saying if I left her she’d ruin me.”

“Has she ever said things like that before?” Femi asks.

Shane hesitates.

“...Yeah.”

Something cold settles in Scott’s stomach. These were threats. Real threats. Not just arguments. Shane was seriously downplaying this.

Femi doesn’t react. “Okay. And after that?”

“She picked up a kitchen knife. Bigger than a steak knife. Like the size of a bread knife, but it wasn’t serrated. And she started swinging it.”

Scott feels the blood drain out of his face. A knife. She’d come at Shane with a knife. He knew that, of course, but it was different hearing Shane say it. It was different to *know* about it and *hearing* about it first-hand.

Shane nods, more to himself. His breathing speeds up a little. “And then Kip showed up. He’d kicked the door down and...” he clears his throat.

“I’m sorry. I don’t remember everything,” he admits. “Just her screaming and Kip getting between us. And then- pain.”

Scott’s hands curl into fists on his knees. He thinks of Kip walking into that apartment, unarmed, trying to protect someone he barely knew.

She makes another note before looking up.

“Shane,” Femi says, her voice steady, “has Eva ever been physically violent with you before this?”

Shane stares at the blanket, eyes suddenly hard.

“Yes,” he whispers.

Scott’s head snaps toward him so fast his neck aches. This hadn’t been a one-off?

Femi doesn’t look surprised. “Can you tell me about that?”

Shane starts to pick at the skin of his cuticles. Scott feels useless sitting there, a big hockey player with nothing to offer.

“She, um... she’d hit me before.”

“How many times before? Do you know?”

“No. I stopped counting after five.”

The words hit Scott like a slapshot to the face. Just how long has this been going on for? Since day one?

“Did she slap you or punch you? Open or closed handed?”

“She liked to slap me,” Shane says quietly, so quietly Scott almost can’t hear it.

Scott has to look away for a second. He feels sick. He wants to put a hand on Shane’s shoulder, to say something, anything, but he doesn’t know if Shane wants to be touched.

“Open handed,” Shane continues. “Um, she liked to throw things at me. Like mugs, plates. That sort of thing. A dumbbell one time, but she missed.”

Scott stares at the floor. A dumbbell. Christ.

“Were you ever hospitalized before?”

“I had to go to the ER a few times.” Shane’s voice wobbles. “She, um...”

He looks like he’s swallowed glass.

“She’s used a knife before.”

Scott’s breath leaves him in a silent rush.

“Once in New York, before now. She cut my arm and we went to the hospital. Different one. I said I’d cut myself cooking. I had to get twelve stitches.”

Scott feels a buzzing in his ears.

“And then again in Chicago. She sliced my stomach, but it was shallow. I didn’t go to the hospital that time.”

Scott stares at Shane in disbelief. He can’t even picture it- can’t wrap his head around the calm way Shane is listing these things, like bad weather reports.

“And then once in Montreal.” Shane’s voice drops to almost nothing. “She stabbed me in the back with a butter knife. The doctors said it was lucky it wasn’t my spine.”

For a second Scott forgets how to breathe.

He sits there, frozen, staring at the kid in the hospital bed, at the bruises and the stitches and the nervous hands, and realizes with horrifying clarity that what happened yesterday wasn’t an escalation at all. It wasn’t a one off. It had been normal to Shane. Expected, even.

It was just the first time anyone else had seen it.

“Last question for now,” she says. “Do you feel afraid of her?”

This time Shane doesn't hesitate.

“Yes.”

Femi nods, clicks off the recorder, and closes her notebook.

“Okay,” she says gently. “That’s enough for today.”

Shane visibly sags against the pillows.

“Thank you,” he murmurs.

Femi gives him a warm, professional smile. “You did really well.”

Then she turns to Scott.

““And thank you for being here,” Femi adds.

Scott nods. “Of course.”

She gives them each one of her business cards. Shane quickly tucks his away under one of the flower vases beside the bed. He probably doesn’t want anyone to see it. Scott shoves his into his pocket. He feels the same.

“Call me any time if you have questions, okay? I’ll be in contact later.”

Scott shakes her hand again. She doesn’t offer it to Shane, which is probably for the best- Shane looks like he wouldn’t want to take it anyway.

Then she leaves. For a long moment, neither of them say anything.

Finally Scott clears his throat.

“Shit,” he says quietly. “All this time?”

“Six months. About.” Shane stares at the blanket. “God, I’m so stupid.”

“Hey- no.” Scott turns toward him fully. “Don’t say that. Don’t say that, Shane. It was a difficult situation. I’m not sure I would have said anything either.”

Shane lets out a huff of air through his nose. “Sure.”

“No, I mean it. Seriously.” Scott leans forward a little. “I’ve never been-” He stops, frowns and tries again. “I don’t think I would have said anything. I can’t imagine how scared you must have been. Especially with, you know...” He trails off, waving a hand vaguely.

“Ilya?” Shane supplies.

“Right.” Scott nods.

He thinks Rozanov is an asshole most of the time, but the guy had clearly gone to bat for Shane. That counts for something.

They fall quiet again.

Then, out of nowhere, Shane asks, “How did you know?”

Scott blinks. “What?”

“How did you know,” Shane clarifies. “To call Ilya. I know you were the one who told him I was hurt. How did you know to call him? The rest of the world thinks we hate each other.”

Oh.

Oh god.

Scott had really hoped this question wasn’t coming.

He coughs awkwardly. “Oh. Um.”

Shane narrows his eyes.

“Remember the, uh... All-Star Game?” Scott says. “The one where we were on the same team?”

“Yeah,” Shane says slowly.

“And we were on the bench, and Rozanov skated up to you. And said something. And I asked what it was and you said he was chirping?”

“Yeah? So?”

Scott grimaces. “I...heard him tell you his room number.”

Shane freezes.

Then he goes bright pink. There are actual real, visible blotches appearing under his freckles. He turns his head toward Scott in absolute horror.

“Holy shit.”

“Well, I-” Scott scrambles. “I thought you guys were just, I don’t know, hooking up?”

“Why didn’t you say anything?!”

“*Why* didn’t I-what was I *supposed* to say?” Scott shoots back. ““Hey, I know you’re secretly sleeping with another professional hockey player?’ I tried to warn you!”

“Literally how?!”

“At the awards show!” Scott exclaims. “Remember? I said I had the room next to him?” He waves his hand. “And then I asked you where your ‘boy’ was?”

“Oh my god,” Shane groans, burying his face in his hands. Even the tips of his ears are red now.

“For the record,” Scott adds, unable to stop himself, “you guys were still loud. Hotel walls are pretty thin.”

“Stop talking,” Shane squeaks. “Please stop talking.”

“I’m just saying, I thought it was, like, a hookup. But then I started paying attention, and it’s like- you guys have this really weird chemistry anytime you’re on the ice, so I figured... you know.”

“Scott. Please. I can’t take this.”

“Sorry!” Scott says, though he’s smiling a little now.

It’s ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous. Ten minutes ago Shane had been recounting the worst six months of his life, and now they’re both blushing like teenagers because Scott accidentally figured out about the secret relationship with Ilya Rozanov.

Hospitals are weird fucking places.

Chapter End Notes

I've seen so many vids online saying like "scott clocking shane for 3 minutes". that shit is so funny, yo.

online ppl are like 'why is kip so buff?' my guy, he's a gay man active in the gay man gym NYC scene. He's buff. trust me on this one.

up next: ah shit. here we go again.

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

has anyone read Check Please? I fucking love that web comic. It's HR meets heartstopper. I've been reading it since 2016. If you're curious, check it out! Bitty is da best. Also you can pry Dex/Nursej from my cold, dead hands. Actually, maybe not even then

Speaking of da best, I have published Ch 1 of The Pitt/Heated Rivalry crossover on my page, called 'orange chicken, hockey, and other stupid fucking surprises'. It's much more humorous than this one, but it'll still have whump and angst *wink*.

TW: eating disorders

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

“Mr. Hollander,” Dr. Adams says, stepping into the room. She’s an older woman, probably close to his mom’s age. She’s got streaks of gray in her hair and kind but tired eyes. She’s also unexpectedly buff. Shane can see the outline of serious biceps through the sleeves of her white coat. “We need to talk about your blood work results.”

His mom straightens immediately.

It’s only been two days since Shane was hurt, and she’s already taken over everything—lawyers, statements, medical leave with the team, even pushing back sponsor obligations. She’s been relentless.

There is no way he’s letting her handle this part too.

His discomfort must show on his face, because his dad, thank God, stands up.

“C’mon, honey,” he says to Yuna. “Don’t you need to call Reebok?”

His mom narrows her eyes at him. “Well-,”

“Mom,” Shane interrupts, trying not to sound as drained as he feels.

Being hospitalized is draining enough on its own. This morning he’d given a full statement to a detective from the domestic violence unit. Then he’d been horrified to learn Scott had apparently known about him and Ilya this entire time. The steady stream of visitors had been nice, but overwhelming. Even Joe, who flew all this way just to sit by his bed, has caught Shane dozing off half the time.

Joe says he doesn’t mind. Shane still feels guilty.

From his chair beside the bed, Ilya glances over, clearly picking up on his sour mood.

“Can I just do this alone?” Shane asks. “Please? Both of you.” He looks from his mom to Ilya. *“Please.”*

His mom worries her bottom lip between her teeth. “Are you sure, honey?”

Yes. He is.

Just like he’d been sure he didn’t want either of them in the room when he talked to the police. That had almost turned into an argument too- until Scott had walked in at the perfect moment and unknowingly saved him.

He knows the protectiveness comes from love. He really does.

But it still drives him a little crazy.

“Yes,” Shane says, forcing firmness into his hoarse voice. “I’m sure.”

To his surprise, Ilya doesn’t argue. He simply stands, stretching his back.

“I need to talk to you anyway, Yuna,” Ilya says casually. “Do you want any more clients to manage?”

Shane's jaw drops.

"You want my mom to be your manager?"

"Yes. Why not? She is very good. She got you Reebok, no?"

That certainly gets Yuna's attention.

She looks from Shane, to Dr. Adams, then back to Ilya, calculating.

"...Okay. Fine." She leans down and presses a kiss to Shane's forehead. "Be good, okay?"

"Always," Shane says.

His dad gives him a quick hug too.

Even though it's just Shane, his parents, and a doctor in the room, Ilya squeezes his hand instead of kissing him. Shane feels a small, wistful tug in his chest.

Later, he reminds himself. They can kiss later.

The door closes behind them.

Dr. Adams turns back to Shane and opens her clipboard.

“Okay,” she says, “First of all, you seem to be healing well. We’ll need to keep you here a little longer just to make sure there are no complications. Your white cell count is slightly elevated, which may signal the start of an infection. Basically, your body is working overtime to heal and it’s struggling.”

Shane frowns.

That doesn’t make sense. He’s in great shape. He’s a professional athlete. He eats better than almost anyone he knows. Why would his body be struggling?

“Shane,” Dr. Adams says, studying him over the rim of her glasses. “What do you usually eat?”

He blinks. “My... diet?”

“Yes.”

Shane shrugs. This is what she’s worried about?

“I’m on a macrobiotic performance diet,” he explains. “Lots of grains, fruits, and vegetables.”

“Carbs?”

“There are naturally occurring carbs in fruit,” Shane says, a little defensively. “But no junk food. Nothing with saturated fat. No refined carbs. No added sugar. No dairy.”

“Are you vegan?”

“No,” Shane says. “I eat eggs.”

Dr. Adams nods. "All right. Walk me through a typical day of your diet."

Okay. Weird. But she looks serious.

"Um... I don't really allow more than fourteen hours between dinner and breakfast," he begins.

"Okay," she says calmly. "What else do you allow or not allow?"

"Well... breakfast is usually around 450 to 600 calories. Less than ten percent fat. No more than 400 milligrams of sodium. Zero grams of trans fat." He thinks for a second. "I'll have about an ounce of nuts or seeds- like a thumb-sized portion. Fruit, usually apples or oranges. I switch it up."

Dr. Adams scribbles something down on his chart in a way that remind him of the detective. He starts to feel nervous.

"Lunch and dinner are around 750 to 800 calories each," Shane continues. "At least one cup of vegetables per meal. I only substitute color for color- like green beans for kale, that kind of thing."

"Starches?"

“I can substitute starches for legumes,” he says. “But I eat a lot of volume. Like one cup of lettuce would only count as half a portion of vegetables.”

“What types of foods do you eat?”

“A lot,” Shane says. “Kale, spinach, nori. Carrots, squash. Edamame, lentils, chickpeas. That sort of thing. I’ve been really into mung beans lately.”

“Grains?”

“Normal ones, I guess. Brown rice, oats, millet.”

“Fats?”

“Avocado, olive oil, sesame oil.” He hesitates. “And I drink a lot of water.”

Dr. Adams nods again. “You said you avoid dairy?”

“Yeah. No dairy. But like I said, I eat eggs. No added sugar, no red meat. I rarely eat poultry, but chicken’s okay if there’s no fish available. Mostly I eat fish, tofu, soybeans, and mushrooms for protein. It’s a healthy diet.”

Dr. Adams doesn’t react at all. Her face gives nothing away.

Shane suddenly feels the urge to sink into the mattress.

“Okay,” she says evenly. “It certainly sounds like you make an effort to eat healthy.”

“I do,” Shane says quickly.

“All right.” She sets the chart down on her lap. “Then let’s talk about your bloodwork.”

Shane straightens a little. Surely, it’s a fluke.

“You’re anemic,” she says. “And you have very low levels of Vitamin A and D and Vitamin B-12.”

For a second, he just stares at her.

“That... can’t be right.”

Dr. Adams turns the chart around so he can see it. Shane has to squint (he doesn’t have his glasses) but the numbers are clear enough.

They’re low. *Really* low.

“But-,” he flounders. “I’m careful. I’m really careful with what I eat.”

“I’m sure you are,” she says kindly. “But careful doesn’t always mean balanced.”

Shane sinks back against the pillows, suddenly feeling foolish.

“We’re going to give you some vitamins through your IV while you’re here,” Dr. Adams continues. “And I’ll prescribe supplements for when you go home. A nurse will be in shortly with what’s called a banana bag. It looks like saline, but it’s yellow.”

Shane frowns. He's heard of them, but mostly from other athletes who swear by them after a late night out.

"I think I've heard of those."

"Most people have."

"I thought they didn't really help."

"It's not really recommended in the ER for alcohol patients anymore," Dr. Adams concedes. "But in a therapeutic setting, it's very useful for correcting deficiencies. I imagine it'll help you feel better."

"I feel fine," Shane says automatically. Then he glances down at his bandaged stomach and winces. "Well... I usually feel fine."

"Hm." Dr. Adams hums again, studying him. "Do you ever feel unusually tired? Even after doing things that shouldn't be tiring- like walking up a flight of stairs?"

Shane opens his mouth.

“Or trouble concentrating?” she continues. “Dizziness? Feeling off-balance? Maybe noticing soft brown bruises on your legs or arms?”

Ah.
Shit.

His silence must be answer enough, because she nods.

“Okay. We’ll get you set up with the IV. And I’ll write prescriptions for supplements you’ll need to take after you’re discharged.” She makes another note on the clipboard. “I’d also like you to see a psychiatrist.”

Shane stiffens. “I’m not crazy.”

“No one is saying you are,” she replies calmly. “But you’re a professional athlete under a tremendous amount of public pressure. Anyone in your position could use help managing that kind of stress.”

He shifts uncomfortably in the bed.

“I don’t need a shrink,” he mutters.

Dr. Adams gives him a patient look. “Shane, you’ve just been hospitalized after a violent assault. You’ve described months of physical abuse. You’re dealing with a serious injury, a demanding career, and now medical issues on top of it. Talking to someone isn’t a punishment.”

He looks away.

“I just don’t want people thinking there’s something wrong with me.”

“There isn’t,” she says gently. “But you’ve been through something traumatic. Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your body.”

Shane lets out a slow breath.

“Okay,” he says finally. “I’ll... think about it.”

“That’s all I’m asking.” She smiles at him, softer now. “One step at a time.”

A few minutes after Dr. Adams leaves, there's a light knock on the door.

"Mr. Hollander?" a cheerful voice calls.

Shane looks up to see a nurse stepping inside, pushing a small metal cart. She's younger than Dr. Adams, with bright pink scrubs and a messy ponytail that bounces when she walks.

"Hi," she says with an easy smile. "I'm Marisol. I've got your banana bag."

Shane manages a weak smile back. "I feel like I should be offended by the name."

She laughs. "Everyone says that. I promise it's nicer than it sounds."

She parks the cart beside the bed and sanitizes her hands. The IV pole beside him already has a bag of clear saline hanging from it. Marisol swaps it out for a new bag filled with unmistakably yellow liquid.

"Looks very... tropical," Shane mutters.

“Right?” she says. “Like a sad little hospital smoothie.”

That gets a real laugh out of him, short and surprised.

She checks his chart on the screen beside the bed. “Dr. Adams said you’re a tough guy who doesn’t think he needs any of this.”

Shane raises an eyebrow. “She said that?”

“Not in those exact words,” Marisol admits, grinning. “But I can read between the lines.”

“I’m not tough,” Shane says. “I just... didn’t think I was unhealthy.”

“Most people don’t,” she says gently. “Especially athletes. You all assume if you can run fast and lift heavy things, your insides must be perfect.”

She takes his wrist, checking the IV site. Her touch is quick and professional.

“Any pain here?”

“No.”

“Good. This’ll run for a couple hours. You might taste something kind of metallic while it goes in, but that’s normal. And you might feel a little warmer than usual.”

“Fun,” Shane says.

Marisol studies him for a second, head tilted. “You look exhausted.”

“I am,” he admits before he can stop himself.

“Hospital tired is a special kind of tired,” she says knowingly. “Your body’s doing a lot of work right now. Don’t be hard on yourself.”

Shane nods, staring at the yellow drip as it begins to flow through the line.

She finishes adjusting the tubing and gives him another smile. “Hit the call button if you need anything. Water, blanket, someone to complain to. Whatever. I’m here until 8 tonight.”

“Thanks,” he says.

She starts for the door, then pauses. “Oh- and don’t worry. This stuff really does help. You’ll probably feel less like a zombie in a day or two.”

“I don’t feel like a zombie,” Shane protests.

Marisol just gives him a knowing look. “Sure you don’t.”

The door clicks shut behind her.

Shane sinks a little deeper into the pillows, listening to the quiet hum of the IV pump.

Maybe, he thinks reluctantly, he doesn’t feel as fine as he’s been pretending. Everything Dr. Adams said makes uncomfortable sense. Especially the dizziness. He’d always told himself it was because he didn’t drink enough water, or because he’d pushed too hard in practice, or because he’d stood up too fast. Normal athlete stuff.

Except apparently it isn't normal to get light-headed just walking up a flight of stairs.

It isn't normal to be bone-deep exhausted after a game you barely played in.

It isn't normal to bruise like a peach.

Shane stares at the yellow drip making its slow, steady way into his arm. Vitamins. Electrolytes. All the things he's apparently been starving himself of while congratulating himself on how disciplined he is.

Healthy, he'd told Dr. Adams. He eats healthy.

The word feels a little ridiculous now.

He thinks about all the times his teammates ordered pizza after late games and he sat there with a container of plain rice and steamed vegetables, feeling quietly superior. All the nutrition plans and calorie limits and little rules he'd built his life around.

No wonder he's been so tired.

No wonder everything has felt harder lately.

The door opens again and he glances up, half expecting Marisol. Instead it's Ilya, slipping back into the room with a cautious expression on his face, like he's expecting to get in trouble or something. He freezes when he sees the IV bag.

“Why is it yellow?” Ilya asks immediately.

“It's a vitamin thing,” Shane says. “Apparently I'm deficient in... like, everything.”

Ilya frowns and sets the coffees down. “You are not deficient. You are professional athlete.”

“Yeah,” Shane mutters. “Turns out that doesn't automatically make you healthy.”

Ilya studies him for a long moment, eyes flicking from Shane's face to the bag and back again.

“You feel okay?”

Shane considers lying.

He's gotten really good at it.

But the concern on Ilya's face is soft and real, and for once Shane doesn't feel like pretending.

"Not really," he admits. "I'm tired."

"Is okay." Ilya says, sitting down next to Shane's bed. "Sleep, yes? I will be here."

"I'm tired but not sleepy. Does that make sense?"

Ilya is dead silent for a long moment. "Yes," he says finally. "I understand."

Shane wants to say something, anything, but he nearly jumps out of his skin when Ilya's phone starts buzzing. Ilya checks it and immediately makes a face.

"Ah," he mutters, and instead of explaining, he answers the FaceTime request.

“Hello, Hayden Pike. How is Montreal’s fifteenth best player?”

“*Screw you, Rozanov,*” comes the tinny voice of Shane’s best friend. Ilya rolls his eyes and passes the phone to Shane.

“He insisted, and your phone is not here,” Ilya says casually, as if giving a guy he supposedly hates his personal number just so he can talk to Shane isn’t a big deal at all.

Hayden’s face fills the screen. He’s in a soft T-shirt, clearly not at practice.

“*Hi, Shane!*” Hayden says, brightening the second he sees him. “*How are you feeling?*”

“*HI, UNCLE SHANE!*” one of the girls shrieks in the background.

“*Jesus, Ruby! Inside voice!*”

“You said he’s far away! He needs to hear me!”

“That’s not how- ugh. Just say hi to Uncle Shane properly.”

The screen is suddenly taken over by two small, grinning faces, all messy hair and missing teeth. Shane feels his heart melt a little. He’ll never get over them calling him Uncle Shane.

“Hi, munchkins,” he says, smiling despite everything.

“Daddy said you got hurt,” Ruby announces solemnly.

“Yeah,” Shane admits. “But I’m okay.”

“Did you get stitches?” Jade asks, eyes huge.

“Yep. A bunch.”

“Cool,” Ruby breathes.

“*Not cool,*” Hayden corrects from somewhere off-screen. “*Very not cool. Scram, you two.*”

“*So what did the doctor say?*” Hayden asks once the girls have been successfully shooed out of frame.

“Uh.” Shane shifts a little against the pillows. “That I’m apparently terrible at feeding myself.”

Hayden blinks. “*What?*”

“I’m anemic. And low on, like... a bunch of vitamins.” He glances toward the IV bag hanging next to him. “Turns out eating like a very disciplined rabbit is not actually ideal.”

From the chair beside the bed, Ilya snorts.

“I told you,” he says without looking up from examining his nails.. “Too many leaves. Not enough real food.”

Shane shoots him a look. “No one asked you.”

“I was asked. Many times. You never listened.”

Hayden frowns at the screen. *“Wait, are you telling me you ended up in the hospital and now they’re also yelling at you for malnutrition?”*

“Basically.”

“Dude,” Hayden says flatly. *“You’re a professional athlete.”*

“I am aware,” Shane mutters.

“Apparently not,” Ilya says.

“Stop agreeing with him!” Shane hisses unhappily.

Hayden laughs. *“Man, I can’t believe I’m on Team Rozanov right now.”*

“Traitor,” Shane says, but there’s no real heat in it.

Hayden's expression softens. *"Seriously though. How are you doing? Like... actually. You're out for the rest of the season, right? How are you?"*

Shane hesitates. He can feel Ilya go quiet beside him, suddenly very still.

"I'm okay," Shane says automatically.

Hayden raises an eyebrow.

Shane sighs. "Okay, I'm... not great. But I'm getting there."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

There's a pause.

“And Eva?” Hayden asks carefully.

Shane’s stomach tightens at the name. “Detectives are handling it,” he says after a moment. “I had to talk to them earlier.”

“Good,” Hayden says firmly. *“I’m glad.”*

“Me too,” Shane admits.

Another beat passes.

“Hey,” Hayden says, lowering his voice a little, *“you don’t have to be brave with me, you know.”*

Shane swallows. “I know.”

In the background, one of the girls yells something that sounds suspiciously like *Daddy, Ruby stole my unicorn!*

Hayden grimaces and half turns away from the camera. *"I did not sign up to be a hostage negotiator today. Ruby, give it back! Sorry. Chaos household."*

Shane smiles. "I miss your chaos household."

"Anytime you want to visit, you've got a bed," Hayden says immediately. *"Well. Couch. The bed is full of children and stuffed animals."*

"I'll take it."

"Good. Once you're healed up, we're feeding you actual food. None of this twig-and-air diet crap. Jackie will be thrilled."

"I eat more than twigs," Shane protests weakly.

"Debatable," Ilya mutters.

Hayden points at the screen. *"See? Even your enemy agrees with me."*

“Not enemy,” Ilya corrects calmly.

Hayden pauses. *“Right. Sorry. Your... aggressively Russian emotional-support rival.”*

Shane lets out a startled laugh.

“That is more accurate,” Ilya says, nodding.

“Great,” Shane says. “Glad we’ve settled on that.”

Hayden grins. *“Seriously though, man. I’m really glad you’re okay.”*

“Me too,” Shane says quietly.

“I’ll let you rest. Call me later?”

“Yeah,” Shane says. “I will.”

“Love you, dude.”

“Love you too.”

The call ends, leaving the room oddly quiet again. Shane lowers the phone and stares at it for a second. Then he looks over at Ilya.

“You gave Hayden your number.”

Ilya shrugs. “He was very persistent. Like small angry dog.”

“You hate him.”

“I will tolerate him for you.”

Shane feels something warm settle in his chest.

“Thanks,” he says softly.

Ilya nods once, and he looks at Shane with such a gentle expression. It makes Shane a little wet-eyed. What a wonderful expression.

“Of course, Hollander.”

Chapter End Notes

Shane's ED is more OCD/ perfectionism than body dysphoria. It's a reflection of his perfectionism. So while it may not be a 'typical eating disorder' it is most def 'disordered eating'. I will touch on it more next chapter.

if you took a shot every time I used the words 'pause' or 'beat;' in this fic, you would have a BAC of like eight times the legal US limit lol. I gotta get more creative. Fun fact- the highest BAC that has ever been recorded in someone who lived was like a 1.33. Insane numbers. 24 year old woman outta LA back in the 80's! Wild times huh?

up next: nine days to home

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

huzzah!

Getting this done was like pulling fucking teeth. I re-wrote this like five times. Hopefully this lives up to your expectations Sorry if the pacing feels weird- this was gonna be two chapters but then I promised there was only gonna be 35 chapters and i've extended this fic a bunch of times... ugh. Idk if I'm happy with it. i AM happy with the epilogue, though. That's chapter 35. so maybe it's so weird cause I'm thinking this is the end of the fic when it's NOT. I mean, I guess it is. It's the 'end' but the penultimate chapter. I'd be kinda upset if this was how it ended, but it's not over. promise! I may end up adding in a paragraph or two at the end. idk. I'm gonna sleep on it.

TW: mentions eating disorders etc. mentions of domestic violence and abuse... um mentions on how being in the hospital sucks balls?

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

Nine days.

That's how long Shane is stuck in the hospital.

And it's nine of the worst days of his entire life.

Number one. The most obvious problem: his injuries.

He'd been so numbed and drugged for the first two days that he hadn't felt much. But as the doctors start to reduce the pain meds, he really starts to feel it.

It's like a deep, throbbing heat in his stomach.

It hurts to breathe.

It hurts to laugh.

It hurts to cough.

It hurts to just exist, even when he isn't doing anything at all.

The doctors also inform him that he's showing signs of an infection, which explains why he'd been running so hot.

Fair enough. Shane has no idea what Eva might have used that knife on before she used it on him. It could have come straight out of the dishwasher or it could have been used to cut raw chicken an hour earlier.

So, not only is he experiencing some of the worst pain of his life, he also feels like he has the flu, even with the IV antibiotics. His joints ache. His skin feels too tight. It's like he's bruised all over.

And on top of all that, all he does is lie in bed all day.

The stillness is starting to get to him.

At first it was just mildly uncomfortable, like when he falls asleep on a long plane trip and needs to get up and stretch his legs in the aisle. But after days of it, the discomfort turns into pain. Real pain. It takes a lot of resolve to not ask for more painkillers.

Number Two: *because* he's in so much damn pain, he can barely sleep.

Shane has always been a good sleeper. Years of training schedules and travel taught him how to fall asleep anywhere. He can knock out easily on planes and strange hotel rooms. Even noisy locker rooms.

Not here.

In the hospital, sleep comes in thin, jagged pieces.

The machines never shut up. Something is always beeping or clicking or humming. Every few hours a nurse comes in to check his vitals or change an IV bag, or ask him to rate his pain on a scale from one to ten.

He *hates* that question.

Because the answer is never simple.

Sometimes it's a six.

Sometimes it spikes to an eight.

Sometimes it dips low enough that he almost feels normal again.

And then he moves the wrong way and remembers exactly why he's here. The worst is when he sneezes one time. God, he'd nearly given his mom a heart attack with how high his pulse had spiked.

The bed doesn't help. It's too firm and too narrow, and the sheets feel like sandpaper after a few days. No matter how he shifts, he can't find a position that doesn't tug at the stitches in his stomach.

He lies awake staring at the ceiling tiles, counting them, tracing the little cracks and patterns like constellations.

And he thinks too much.

He'll jerk awake out of dreams he can't quite remember with the phantom sensation of pain crawling over his skin. Once, he wakes up with tears on his face and doesn't even know why.

Those are the worst nights.

He has a lot of visitors, but visiting hours end eventually, and then Shane is alone with the dark and the soft mechanical breathing of the hospital.

He starts to dread the moment the lights dim and the hallway outside goes still.

During the day he can distract himself. At night, there's nothing to distract him from his own head.

And his own head, lately, is not a very kind place to be.

Number three: the food thing.

Even though Shane is still pretty convinced there isn't really *a food thing*, Dr. Adams gets him set up with a therapist anyway.

They end up talking for hours.

Her name is Ms. Kaan. She's nice enough, calm in a way that makes him feel like maybe she's seen a thousand people worse off than him. Best of all, she apparently knows absolutely nothing about hockey.

That part is almost a relief. It's rare these days for Shane to talk to someone who doesn't already have an opinion about him.

"I'm more of a soccer fan," she admits, a little apologetically, before letting him ramble about hockey for far longer than he probably needs to.

Eventually they move on to his diet and then routine. Finally, what a normal day looks like. He tells her about his 10km runs. He tells her about his travel schedule. He tells her about his smoothies.

When Shane finally runs out of things to say, she studies him for a long moment and then looks him straight in the eye.

“Shane,” she says gently, “I think you have an eating disorder.”

His jaw drops. He barely manages to close it before he catches flies.

He’s a professional athlete. He trains harder than almost anyone he knows. He doesn’t starve himself. He doesn’t throw up his food unless it’s after a brutal workout. He doesn’t spend hours staring at himself in the mirror.

“What?” he blurts. “No. I’m not- I’m not anorexic or anything. I don’t care about being skinny.”

She nods like she expected that answer.

“I know,” she says. “And that’s not what I’m saying. To me, it sounds like you have a preoccupation with healthy eating to the point that it’s become unhealthy.”

“It’s *not*-”

She gestures to the yellow IV bag hanging beside his bed.

The banana bag.

That shuts him up.

“It’s an eating disorder because it’s disordered eating, Shane,” she continues calmly. “You compulsively check labels. You’ve eliminated entire food groups. No sugar, no refined carbs, no dairy? That, paired with what seems to be strong perfectionist tendencies...”

She tilts her head slightly.

“Body image concerns don’t need to be present. For you, this doesn’t seem to be about how you look. It seems to be about control.”

He frowns. “Control?”

“Yes. Control. It means safety.” She pauses. “In some ways, it resembles OCD. You are in a high pressure environment. You’ve described to me a lack of control in your own schedule, for example. Like when you travel for games, right? You don’t choose where to stay. You can’t choose your roommate.”

“I like Hayden.”

“Yes, you’ve said. You can’t pick what time to wake up or when to arrive to practice. It seems like food is a way that you are trying to gain some of that autonomy back.”

Shane stares at her.

He doesn’t like that comparison at all. But it sort of makes sense. Well, what makes the most sense is when he thinks about him and Ilya. He’s under more pressure keeping that secret than dealing with his schedule. He loves hockey. All the travel and practice and brutally long days are a means to an end. Without it, he wouldn’t have hockey. Sneaking around means he gets to do the thing he loves with the person he does.

Jesus.

“Okay,” he says finally. “So... how do you fix me?”

She smiles faintly, like she saw that question coming from a mile away.

“It’s not a simple fix, like flipping a light switch,” she explains. “There aren’t standardized clinical treatments specifically for orthorexia yet. But many experts- including myself- treat it similarly to anorexia and OCD.”

She folds her hands on her lap.

“A treatment plan would look like a team approach. A physician, a therapist, and a dietitian working together.”

Then she adds, very deliberately, “And I think it would be best if those people weren’t connected to hockey.”

Yeah.

No shit.

Number four: physical therapy.

Physical therapy sucks ass. Shane will let ESPN quote him on that.

His knees are shaky and his calves ache and complain like he's pulled something. It doesn't make any sense to him. He didn't injure his legs at all, but apparently nine days of barely moving is enough to turn a professional athlete into a newborn giraffe.

The two *worst* parts are a tie.

The first is the humiliation factor.

Because he's hurt and can barely stand upright without wanting to scream, he's being treated like a baby deer. He'd had a catheter inserted after surgery, which was mortifying enough on its own. He really, really didn't want to think about a nurse sticking a tube up his dick.

Worse, he can't use the bathroom normally yet. The doctors have made it very clear they won't release him until he can do that without help.

Which means his literal freedom from this place depends on his ability to take a shit.

He can barely shuffle down the hallway without leaning on his IV pole. Everyone keeps telling him it's normal after surgery and trauma, but that doesn't make it feel any less awful.

The second thing- and, on reflection, possibly even worse than the lack of independence- is how fragile everyone suddenly thinks he is.

He's six-foot-two and two hundred pounds. He's a professional hockey player. He is not made of glass.

But you wouldn't know that from the way people hover.

His mom fusses constantly. His dad hovers and pretends he isn't hovering. Even Ilya, who Shane actually appreciates treating him with a little more gentleness than usual, acts like Shane might break in half if he breathes too hard.

And then Ilya has to leave on day four for a road trip, gone for three days while Boston travels to Rhode Island, and Shane feels like he's right back at square one.

There are only two people who treat him normally.

The first is Joe, but Shane had expected that. Joe's personality has always been laid-back. It was just the constant harassment that had made him tense all the time. Shane's enjoyed getting to know his friend again. They spend hours just talking. Joe tells him about his fiancé and their wedding plans. They talk about skating. It's easy and familiar and really, really nice.

But Joe can only stay for a few days.

Shane does get to meet Andrew, Joe's fiancé, over FaceTime. He's just as friendly as he looked in the photos Joe showed him, and he genuinely wishes Shane well. Shane wonders what Andrew knows, if anything, about what Joe went through as a teenager.

When Joe finally leaves for the airport, they hug.

"Take care, Shane," Joe says, and then he kisses Shane on both cheeks.

It feels different from the way it did when they were kids. Back then it had felt sad, almost.

This time, it doesn't. Because Joe isn't sad anymore.

The second person who treats him normally is, surprisingly, Kip.

Shane and Kip end up spending a lot of time together, and Shane finds he genuinely enjoys his company. Maybe it's because they've both been almost gutted like fish, but Kip is remarkably cool about the whole thing.

He does ask Shane to hold his hand while he gets his stitches taken out, but other than that he seems to be handling everything pretty well, all things considered.

Over those nine days, Shane learns a lot about Kip.

He still lives at home. He has an older sister who lives with her boyfriend in her own apartment.

“She’s a show-off,” Kip grumbles one afternoon as he steals Shane’s applesauce off his lunch tray. Shane doesn’t mind and hands him a spoon. He doesn’t like applesauce anyway. “Not that she’s bragging or anything, but it makes me look bad, right?”

Shane learns that Kip has a degree in art history and is thinking about getting his master’s. He’s worked at the smoothie place since graduating undergrad- that’s where he met Scott- and he takes catering jobs on the side to supplement his income. Lately, he’s been thinking about quitting both and getting a full-time job at the same bar Kyle works at, just to change things up.

“It’s not like I have anything against smoothies,” Kip says, shuffling the deck of cards he’d brought to entertain Shane. “But if I smell wheatgrass one more time, I might actually hurl. I was always going to quit. I think this just gave me a good excuse.”

Ah yes. Entertainment.

That's another thing that sucks.

Shane is bored out of his mind.

Being hospitalized is mind-numbingly boring. When Kip visits, he brings a deck of cards. But Shane only knows how to play Go Fish and War. Kip tries to teach him poker, but it just gives Shane a headache.

Everyone has it in their heads that Shane should be resting, but he can only sleep so much. He's getting stir-crazy, but he's usually in too much pain to do much moving around.

His phone is still bagged as evidence in a police station somewhere, so he doesn't even have that.

Rose brings him books, which he tears through. She's nice to have around, but she eventually has to leave for Moldova to film some action movie. She'd wanted to break the contract for Shane, but when she casually mentioned the massive penalty fee for doing so, he insisted she go.

The very nice VIP room he's been moved to after the ICU has a TV, but- honestly, Shane cannot fucking believe he's thinking this- there's only so much hockey he can watch.

It's not that he's bored of hockey.

It's more like... it makes him ache.

He watches and feels wistful, desperate to be out there on the ice. He finds himself wishing he could heal instantly and jump through the TV screen and just *play*. Especially whenever he sees an Admirals or Boston game. Whenever Scott or Ilya appear on the screen, his chest hurts a little.

He wishes he could handle watching Montreal games.

Normally he'd be fine. But now, every single time Montreal plays, someone brings up the absent Shane Hollander.

They've managed to keep things mostly under control, but not completely under wraps. Someone made the connection between Eva and the wheelchair incident and Shane's sudden hospitalization. The public knows Shane is out for the season and that Eva had something to do with it.

The one time he tries to watch a Montreal game, it goes horribly.

"Once again," one of the ESPN anchors says, "Montreal captain Shane Hollander is still absent from the rink following the arrest of Eva Loren. As a reminder, Montreal released a

statement in tandem with Shane Hollander-”

“You know, Bob, I think it’s shameful.”

“What is? That Hollander is a victim of-”

Shane turns the TV off.

Kip is the only one, besides his parents, who can visit consistently.

Ilya and Scott have to play. Rose is on the road. Joe is back in Canada. So most days it’s just Kip, showing up with cards or coffee or some ridiculous story about a customer at the smoothie shop.

Shane thinks they’ve finally run out of things to talk about when they somehow end up arguing about Mario Party strategy while playing Go Fish.

“I’m telling you,” Kip insists, “stealing stars is morally bankrupt.”

“It’s literally part of the game,” Shane says. “That’s the entire point.”

“Exactly. Capitalism simulator for kids.”

They’re halfway through another round when Kip pauses, cards in hand.

“Hey,” he says casually, “how’d they not know?”

“What?” Shane asks. “Nintendo? Well, I think-”

“No.” Kip rolls his eyes. “Montreal.”

Shane goes still.

“What was happening with Eva had obviously been going on for ages,” Kip continues. “You were hurt a lot, right? Got any fives?”

“I- yeah,” Shane says automatically. “And yes.”

He passes over the five of hearts. Kip sets the pair down on the little side table they're using as a game board.

"And," Kip goes on, "you shower in the locker rooms and change together and stuff. I know you're not really supposed to look at your teammates like that, but still. Have any eights?"

Shane swallows hard.

He'd really hoped no one was going to ask him this.

"No eights," he says. "And... um..."

Kip waits.

"Well," Shane says slowly, "I tried to be the first to change and the last to shower. It helped that I did media so much."

He licks his lips.

“And, um... tattoo stickers.”

Kip frowns. “Tattoo stickers? Like temporary tattoos?”

“No,” Shane says, suddenly feeling weirdly embarrassed. “In Japan, people think if you have tattoos you’re in the yakuza. Like, the Japanese mob. So you can’t go to onsens or hot springs if you have them. They make these flesh-colored stickers that look like skin to cover up tattoos.”

Kip blinks. “Okay...”

“That’s how I covered up the stitches and stuff.”

“Just the cuts?”

Shane shrugs. “Well... hockey’s a violent sport. A bruise or two isn’t out of the ordinary.”

Kip freezes mid-shuffle.

“Shane,” he says carefully, “are you telling me that you purposely took hits while playing hockey so you could try to cover up what Eva was doing to you?”

Shane keeps his eyes glued to his cards.

He expects Kip to get angry. Or horrified. Or to lecture him.

Instead, he hears a soft, shaky breath. Then a sniffle.

Shane looks up.

Kip is crying.

He’s crying for Shane.

Shane stares at him.

“Kip-”

“I’m sorry,” Kip says quickly, swiping at his eyes with the back of his hand. “I’m not trying to make this about me. I just-”

He breaks off, shaking his head.

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Shane says, and his voice sounds strange to his own ears. It's thin and wobbly.

Kip lets out a humorless little laugh. “Yeah, I kind of do. You’re the one in the hospital bed and I’m the one crying all over your Go Fish game.”

“It’s okay,” Shane repeats.

And it is. Weirdly.

He’s had a lot of reactions over the last week. Shock. Pity. Fury on his behalf. People getting quiet and careful around him, like he’s a bomb they might accidentally set off.

But no one has cried for him.

Not like this.

Not openly, not without trying to hide it. His mom had cried, certainly. But she'd tried to dry her eyes before he could see.

Kip presses his fingers to his eyes and takes a shaky breath. "I just keep thinking about you walking around with all that and acting like it was normal."

Shane shrugs, uncomfortable. "It was normal."

"That's the problem," Kip says.

Shane fiddles with the edge of one of his cards. "I didn't want anyone to know."

"I get that," Kip says softly. "I do. But you shouldn't have had to do all that just to survive your own relationship."

Shane swallows.

He hadn't thought of it that way before. Survival.

He'd said he was handling it. He was keeping things under control.

Survival sounds a hell of a lot more desperate.

"I wasn't trying to be dramatic," he mutters. "I just... didn't want to make it a thing."

Kip gives him a watery smile. "You getting stabbed is kind of automatically a thing, Shane."

"Fair," Shane admits.

They sit in silence for a minute. The TV hums quietly in the background. Somewhere down the hall, someone laughs. Shane knows by now it's the nurse Marisol.

Finally Kip clears his throat.

“For the record,” he says, voice steadier now, “I’m really glad you’re here.”

Shane looks up at him.

“Like,” Kip continues, “not just here in the hospital. I mean... here. Alive. Sitting with me. Arguing about video games and cheating at cards.”

“I’m not cheating.”

“You absolutely are.”

Shane manages a small smile.

“Yeah,” he says after a moment. “Me too.”

Day nine can't come soon enough.

Shane wants out of the hospital so badly he can taste it. He wants real air and real clothes and a bed that doesn't adjust with buttons. He wants quiet. Real quiet, not quiet that is filled with beeping machines and nurses' footsteps in the hallway at three in the morning.

Mostly, he just wants to go home.

The problem is that "home" isn't New York City.

His parents have a hotel room nearby, and they've offered to let him stay there while he recovers, but that isn't what he means. He doesn't want a temporary place with stiff sheets and a view of midtown traffic. He wants his apartment in Montreal. His couch. His shower. His own damn bed.

He wants his life back.

Getting there, though, is another issue entirely.

Shane has traveled hundreds of times in his life. Airports and planes are practically a second home. But it's always been with the team- chartered flights and private terminals. Or, at the least, the protection of traveling in a pack. Even when they flew commercial, there was safety in numbers.

This time he'd be flying like a normal person.

Well. Like a normal person who'd just been stabbed and had his personal life splashed all over the internet.

Flying out of JFK might be manageable. New York was big enough that people minded their own business.

But the second they landed in Canada...

He doesn't even want to think about it. It makes him feel sort of ill. He doesn't even know if he's *allowed* to fly.

"You can fly," Dr. Adams says when Shane finally brings it up. "Carefully. I can write you a note if you need one. It depends on the airline. You could drive instead, but you'd need to stop every few hours. It's a long ride from here to Montreal, and we need to make sure you're moving enough so you don't throw a clot."

"Okay," Shane says lamely.

Because what else is he supposed to say? Argue? Refuse medical advice? He'd really prefer not to die of a blood clot after surviving everything else.

His mom pats his hand. "It'll be okay, Shane. We can get in and out without any fuss, right, David?"

His dad nods confidently. "I'm sure I can make a few calls. Maybe we can have you board early, keep you out of the way of prying eyes."

Shane sighs.

His mother already released a statement on his Instagram- it was short and painfully vague. It said he was recovering, that he appreciated the support, and that he would be out for the rest of the season.

The public, of course, filled in the blanks themselves.

Turns out it was big fucking news when a famous actress stabbed her professional-athlete boyfriend. Even bigger news when people realized it hadn't been a one-time thing.

Shane hates every second of it.

He hates that strangers are arguing about him online. Hates that commentators who've never met him are suddenly experts on his private life. Hates that he can't even check the internet with his new, non-police evidence phone without seeing headlines with his name next to words like abuse and victim.

He just wants to disappear for a while.

The door opens, and he looks up automatically, heart jumping before he can stop it.

Ilya steps inside, duffel bag over one shoulder, looking tired from travel and somehow still more damn familiar than anyone else in the world.

"Hello Hollander," Ilya says softly, looking at Shane with fond eyes. "Hello Yuna and David."

Shane feels some of the tension drain out of him. God, he'd missed his boyfriend. He wants Ilya to kiss him silly. But that may be a bad idea in front of his parents. Shane knows they accept their relationship, but it opinions may change if Shane asks Ilya to suck his face off in a public hospital.

"Hi, Ilya," his mom says warmly. "We have a trip to plan."

Planning the trip turns out to be almost as exhausting as physical therapy. They only have a few hours to plan everything, and it's a mess. Well, Shane feels like a mess. He's one bundle of nerves and anxiety. His boyfriend puts his hand on his thigh and leaves it there. That's the only thing that keeps Shane from spiraling off the handle. How was this going to happen?

Shane sits at the little hospital table, his parents on one side of him and Ilya on the other. It feels a little like a war council. Especially because his dad has a little notebook, but the way Shane is feeling it may as well be war plans. He's finally changed into comfortable street clothes, thank God, while the hospital finishes up the discharge paperwork and everyone figures out what the *actual* plan is.

He technically could have stayed another day while they sorted out travel plans, but he's never wanted to leave anywhere so badly in his life. He'd buy last-minute tickets for ten thousand dollars if it meant walking out those doors today.

"Okay," his dad says, glasses perched on his nose. "Option one: we drive. Your mom can get a rental car in less than thirty minutes."

"That's, what, six hours?" Shane asks.

"Closer to seven with stops," his mom corrects. "And Dr. Adams said you'd need to get out and walk every two."

Shane groans. “So it’d be like... ten hours.”

“Roughly.”

“Hard pass,” Shane mutters. "No thank you." he adds for Ilya's benefit. His boyfriend may understand what both 'hard' and 'pass' mean in English, but Shane is trying very hard to keep this P-G.

Ilya nods in agreement. “Too long. You would be miserable.”

“Option two,” his dad continues, “is flying commercial but with assistance.”

“Wheelchair service,” Shane says flatly. Great.

“It’s standard,” his mom says gently.

“I know,” he says. He just hates the idea of it.

Ilya taps the table thoughtfully. He looks exhausted, and he should be. He's just played a hockey game and flown hours to be here with Shane. It makes his heart squeeze a little. He doesn't want to think about doing this without him.

“What about early boarding? Private lounge?” his boyfriend muses.

“I can arrange that,” his dad says, chewing on the cap of the pen. It's the same pen he uses to do the crossword in the *New Yorker*. “And we could request a more secluded seat.”

“First class?” Ilya suggests.

Shane shoots him a look. “I’m not made of money.”

“You are literally made of hockey money,” Ilya says dryly. “You just say you would do whatever to leave.”

“Not helpful.”

“I will pay,” Ilya says. “Or I can call Rose. She is very scary, much like your mother, when she wants to be.”

“No you won’t!”

“Yes I will.”

“No-”

“Boys,” Shane’s mom interrupts, amused. “Let’s stay focused. And thank you for the compliment.” she smiles at Ilya.

Shane rubs his face, feeling tired all over again. “Fine. Flying is probably easier. Faster.”

“And safer,” his dad adds. “Less time sitting.”

Shane exhales. “Okay. Flight it is.”

Ilya nods like the decision was never in doubt.

“I will go with you,” he says.

Shane looks at him. There's no way he can ask Ilya to do that. Not only if they get caught would it be a media shitshow, but he's been traveling non-stop for days. "You don't have to. You'd have to go straight from the Montreal airport to a connecting flight to Boston. You've got a home game."

"I know," Ilya cuts in. "I want to."

Shane swallows. He wants to argue, but... "You'd do that?"

"Of course," Ilya says, like it's the simplest thing in the world. Maybe for him it is. Maybe flying all over the country for Shane is the simplest thing in the world for Ilya Rozanov to do.

Yuna smiles. "Then it's settled."

And it is, Shane realizes. With Ilya and his parents going home with him, it doesn't feel.... exhausting anymore. It feels manageable, even if Shane is exhausted. Like no matter what the court of public opinion might throw at him, he could handle it.

Sitting there between his parents and Ilya, arguing over flight times and packing lists and whether Shane needs compression socks, he thinks;

Maybe it even feels a little bit like hope.

The door opens again. Marisol steps in with a wheelchair and a plastic bag of Shane's belongings. He has to keep himself from launching out of the bed in his excitement. Home is so close, it's tantalizing.

"Hey, champ," she says with a small smile. "Paperwork is all done. Ready to get out of here?"

"Hell yes," Shane says. He feels his boyfriend squeeze his hand. "I'm going home."

Chapter End Notes

up next: epilogue.

Or: the way home.

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

i tried SO hard to get this in that HTML newspaper format but I'm terrible at coding. My bad.

Y'all! This is it!!! This is the end! When I started this fic a few months ago, I had no idea how incredibly popular it was going to be. You are so, so wonderful. I'm too overwhelmed to respond to every comment, but know that I do read every single one of them. Your love and support motivated me for my near daily uploads and to extend this fic nearly five times the planned amount of the original 8 chapters.

If you are interested, I have another Heated Rivalry fic on my page currently that is an HR/the pitt crossover. I also have a few ideas floating around my noggin for a few one-shots or spin offs. I think i'd like to write about Kyle in canon, maybe.

Thank you to the lovely Rachel Reid for gifting us such wonderful characters!

This fic has been a labor of love for sure, and I really enjoyed it. I hope you all enjoyed it at well.

See you next time!

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

Shane Hollander on Coming Back, Letting Go, and Learning How to Survive

By Larissa Zimmerman

Shane Hollander answers the door himself.

There is no entourage, no publicist hovering in the background. No dramatics.. Just Montreal's captain, barefoot on hardwood floors, holding a cold bottle of ginger ale and offering a small, easy smile.

"Come on in."

It's late summer in Ottawa, nearly autumn. The cottage sits tucked away from the road, all glass walls and discreet technology. It's less rustic getaway, more high-end retreat. When I point this out, Shane laughs.

"Yeah, I get that a lot," he says. "I don't really care. It's my favorite place in the world."

At the start of the upcoming NHL season, Hollander is back- back on the ice, back in a Montreal jersey, and back in a league that hasn't seen him play since last year's devastating injury. For most players, that alone would be enough of a comeback story.

But Shane Hollander isn't most players.

We sit on opposite ends of a wide gray couch. He hands me the ginger ale, waits until I've taken a sip, then folds his hands loosely in his lap.

"Yeah," he says when I ask about the season. "I've got high hopes. I'm excited."

It's a simple sentence, but we both can tell it carries a lot of weight.

Hollander is many things. Montreal's captain. A franchise cornerstone. A locker-room leader. A face on billboards and jerseys and highlight reels.

He is also a survivor of domestic violence.

"It wasn't easy to admit," Shane says quietly, eyes dropping to his hands. "Being a hockey player and all."

Indeed. Even while in injury recovery, Shane Hollander looks like the last person anyone would expect to associate with victimhood. Six-foot-two. Broad shoulders. Thick forearms. The kind of body built for collisions.

"I don't think people picture someone who looks like me when they think about this stuff," he says.

I hesitate, then ask the question anyway.

"Can I see it?"

I immediately regret how clinical it sounds. But Shane doesn't flinch.

He nods and lifts his shirt.

The scar stretches horizontally across his stomach, thick and uneven, about the length of a ruler. The kind of scar that never really fades.

"That's from the last time," he tells me.

Not the first time.

The injury was inflicted by his ex-partner, actress Eva Loren- whose arrest and subsequent domestic violence trial dominated headlines seven months ago. At the time, much of the coverage focused on the spectacle: a famous actress, a famous athlete and one shocking accusation.

Very little of it focused on the man sitting in front of me.

"I had been preparing," Shane says. "I didn't want to testify at all. But it was important."

He shrugs.

“Thankfully, I had friends and family who were there.”

Those friends include fellow NHL stars Ilya Rozanov, formerly of Boston, and Scott Hunter of New York.

“They’re both great guys,” Shane says, a small smile tugging at his mouth. “I don’t know what I would’ve done without them. And Rose, too.”

Rose Landry- actress, Eva Loren’s frequent co-star, and, unexpectedly, one of Shane’s strongest allies.

Landry appeared in a viral video that surfaced shortly after Loren’s arrest: Eva, later found to be under the influence of PCP, handcuffed to a wheelchair in a hospital corridor, screaming as Rozanov, Hunter, and Landry jumped her.

“‘Jumped’ is a strong word,” Shane says when I bring it up.

He scratches the back of his neck.

“I was in surgery at the time, so I didn’t even know what was happening. Scott didn’t hit anybody, by the way. I was upset at first.”

He pauses.

“But later... it meant a lot. That they were willing to go that far for me.”

Shane doesn’t speak like someone trying to shape a narrative. There’s no sense of spin. No rehearsed answers. He talks like someone who has spent months sitting with uncomfortable truths and has finally decided honesty hurts less than silence.

The high-profile trial was well attended by supporters. In addition to Landry, Hunter, and Rozanov, several Montreal players were present, including Hayden Pike and J.J. Boiziau. Somewhat unexpectedly, Olympic and reigning world champion figure skater Joe Davis, who is currently slated to lead Team Canada at the 2018 Winter Olympics, also attended.

"Oh, Joe. He's a great guy," Shane says. "We went to the same skate club as kids. We reconnected after everything. He and his husband are great guys. It's been really nice."

When I ask about support from the league, Shane grows quiet.

"The league has been great," he says, simply, then asks to move on.

Notable moments from the trial included someone hurling a shoe at Loren- George Bush style- and a widely publicized shouting match between Ilya Rozanov and Loren's defense team that resulted in Rozanov being removed from the courtroom.

"Yeah," Shane says with a sigh as we watch the video on my phone. "That was a little embarrassing for me. I know we have a healthy, competitive relationship, but Ilya's a good person. He just lets his hockey attitude get the better of him sometimes."

The trial, originally expected to last at least two weeks, ended on day three after Loren changed her plea to guilty and accepted a deal. She was sentenced to five years in prison, followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered to cover Shane's hospital bills. Shane was also granted an order of protection. She asked for his forgiveness.

Shane considers my question on forgiveness for several long moments. So long, in fact, I wonder if I need to repeat it before he finally answers.

"I don't know if I forgive her for everything. I... maybe for myself? But I've learned that, in general, you don't owe peace to someone who abused you."

There are protests from some of Loren's supporters, who maintain that Shane is lying. Loren herself, released a statement through her attorneys attesting that she wanted to end the trial as quickly as possible for the betterment of them both.

When I ask how he handles that, Shane takes a slow sip of his ginger ale.

"I doubted myself a lot too," he says. "Sometimes I'd wake up and think maybe I should just give this all up. It's not like this whole thing was doing my reputation or relationships any favors."

He exhales.

"I think the hardest part was realizing I wasn't weak. I just loved the wrong person. Or thought that I was in love with the wrong person."

That distinction matters.

Rehabilitation has been slow for the hockey star. Shane describes it as painful and boring, but needed.

"There were days I didn't feel like a hockey player anymore," Shane admits. "Just a guy with a broken body and too much time to think."

So, what kept him going?

"Routine. Therapy. My friends. And honestly? The idea of getting back out there. Feeling normal again."

Normal, for Shane Hollander, means a rink. The scrape of blades. The roar of a crowd that doesn't know everything about him- and doesn't need to.

"I don't want to be known as 'the guy this happened to,'" he says. "I'm a hockey player. That's who I am."

When I ask about the Irina Foundation, Shane visibly brightens.

The foundation- named for Ilya Rozanov's deceased mother- is a joint project between former rivals Rozanov and Hollander. Its mission is to support mental health initiatives and provide resources for victims of domestic violence, regardless of gender.

"I was too scared," Shane admits. "I realized that too late. It could've been too late for me."

Shane's relationship with Rozanov, which for years has been described an intense rivalry seems to have cooled off a little. Rozanov was spotted many times during the trial supporting Shane. In turn, Shane supported his now friend's move from top-tanked Boston to, arguably worst team in the league, Ottawa.

"I can't say if I know 100 percent why he moved," Shane says, rubbing a hand on his knee. "But I'm glad he's a few hours away from Montreal. It makes everything easier. For the foundation, I mean."

When I ask what he hopes fans take away from his story, Shane doesn't hesitate.

"If someone sees this and realizes they're not alone, then it's worth it," he says. "That goes for men especially. We don't talk about this enough."

Outside, the sun begins to dip behind the trees and the cottage fills with soft orange light.

Shane walks me to the door.

“I’m excited,” he says again, about the season ahead.

I believe him.

Watch Shane Hollander’s return to the ice in the first matchup of the new season in a Montreal vs Ottawa game next Friday the 12th at 7pm est.

Chapter End Notes

the end!

End Notes

For resources if you or someone you know who is in an abusive relationship:
call 1.800.799.SAFE (7233) or you can visit <https://www.thehotline.org/>

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