

Not That it Matters

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Not That it Matters

by [porkmincenoodle](#)

Summary

Two negatives make a positive and *six* positives make Shane Hollander throw up in Ilya's specially imported Japanese toilet.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

hiya! just a bit of housekeeping for ease of access when reading:

*setting this in early 2015, which is largely a gap of information for hollanov. pre-tuna melt, post vegas.

*i dont really care for the amount of world building it takes to write a/b/o - so think of this as a universe in which mpreg isn't really an anomaly but it IS rarer due to societal connotations like gender roles, homophobia, transphobia, etc. obviously the only men that have children in this instance have sex with other men so its basically like waving a big flag around that says gay gay homosexual gay aka shane hollanders worst fucking nightmare

*feel free to also HC shane as trans if you'd like! i won't be exploring that in this fic because i think it deserves more care and attention than i can currently give it. there isn't really anything in this story that rejects that idea tho so like. go buck wild guys.

hope you enjoy!

Shane fucking Hollander was standing at his front door in the middle of the night.

Ilya had had dreams that started a lot like this- his mind dangling a carrot in front of him and then yanking up the string before he could sink his teeth in. The nature of his and Hollander's relationship meant that the two of them *always* needed to call ahead, take heed and be informative with their impending hookups. It meant there was, unfortunately, no room for surprise visits like this. Impromptu rendezvous, as *hot* as they were, were too risky for them. Too dangerous for them.

Hollander *knew* this. Hollander was the biggest enforcer of this, actually... In fact, he was so goddamn anal about it that Ilya, on many an occasion, had sent minute by minute updates any time he was heading to meet him just to be annoying... But tonight, Ilya's notifications bank had been as dry as the Sahara.

And yet Shane Hollander was still in front of him all the same.

"Your phone is broken?"

Hollander refused to explain himself, his mouth thinned into a smooth, quiet line. He pushed past him through to the foyer, the orange glow of the lamps hitting his face. Ilya noticed

almost instantly that there was a redness around his eyes and nose.

He'd been crying.

...Why had he been crying?

"What is wrong?"

Hollander still didn't respond. There was a weird sort of defeated look on his face that Ilya didn't like *at all*. Montreal had been experiencing win after win lately- the most recent of which being against his very own team. What was there to be defeated about? What was there to *cry* about?

Concerned now, Ilya moved to put a hand on his shoulder and Hollander just *flinched* away from it like it was something dirty.

Naturally, this shocked him. Hollander had never been one to shy away from his touch. In fact, most of the time it seemed like he fed off of it- curling into his hand like some love-starved dog with dark, sad eyes. Was he here to call things off between them then? The thought was one Ilya had humoured quite often himself, but it never actually eventuated into anything tangible and real. They were magnets drawn to one another, impossible to separate without a force neither of them seemed capable of applying.

"If you are not here for me to touch you, I am not sure what you want from me, Hollander."

"You're such an asshole." Hollander replied finally, his voice was watery. Weak. He pushed past him and into the open-plan kitchen before them both, his footsteps slow, deliberate and angry. Without any sense of ceremony, Hollander emptied out the bag he'd been carrying onto the counter and about half a dozen little boxes fell onto the marble in light thuds one after the other like cardboard raindrops.

"What is this?" Ilya cocked his head, following after Hollander with a cautious sense of curiosity. "You are, what, grocery delivery driver now?"

Hollander just looked at him impassively.

Silent treatment it was then. Unfettered, Ilya clicked his tongue and picked up the first box to see for himself instead.

A pregnancy test.

Oh. Oh fuck.

They were *all* pregnancy tests actually. All different brands. All different colours and qualities and mechanics. Very thorough. Very Hollander.

“I’ve felt like shit since the gala in Vancouver.” Hollander elaborated finally. “It didn’t really occur to me that it might be something *other* than a stomach bug until...” He trailed off, fiddling with his hands. “I don’t know for sure, I just didn’t want to be alone when I found out.”

Ilya nodded. For once, he had been completely stunned into silence. He couldn’t think of a single retort in his mind, really. It was all just... white noise.

“We weren’t exactly careful last time... Or the time before,” Hollander hadn’t met Ilya’s stare once since he’d started speaking. “It’s probably nothing but I just want to be sure before my next game... I want to be responsible about it,” He looked up at the ceiling, trying to well away the tears brimming in his eyes. “...Can you say something please?”

Ilya wasn’t sure if he could. Every time he tried to open his mouth it was as if there was a gravitational pull keeping it shut. Hollander being out of commission for an entire season, maybe even more, at the height of his career would be torture for him. His entire perfect life’s work put on indefinite hold- perhaps never to return. The concept alone was terrifying but the *reality*...

Well, no wonder he was crying.

“You can’t have a kid, Hollander.” Ilya said, his voice quiet.

“Yeah.” Hollander sniffed. “I know.”

Seeing him like this was a strange kind of agony to Ilya. It shone a brutal light on the fact that this had stopped being a casual hookup for the both of them a *very* long time ago. Shane Hollander was now an integral part of his life and he struggled to picture the world without him in it. If this really was still just sex, then Ilya would be able to keep his distance... He would be able to *fucking think*. Instead, it felt like his mind was a sea of white noise, lazer-focused on the series of boxes on his countertops.

Swearing, Ilya ripped the box off the nearest tester and held it out for Hollander to take. “Go piss on this.”

Hollander grabbed the plastic stick, half a wet laugh on his lips. “I thought you’d never ask.”

They both pointedly ignored the fact that both their hands were shaking.

Two negatives make a positive and *six* positives make Shane Hollander throw up in his specially imported Japanese toilet.

In all honesty, Ilya was tempted to join him right now. All those plus signs and double lines were about as damning as anything really could be, but even still he couldn't fully let himself believe the reality of the situation just yet. This was not the kind of fuck-up someone like him ought to make. Ilya was promiscuous, sure, but he certainly wasn't a fucking idiot. He knew better than this, he *was* better than this. At least, with other people he was- and the only difference between other people and Hollander was that he was Shane fucking Hollander and Shane Hollander was...

Shane Hollander was perfect. A perfect player, a perfect person, a perfect example of someone that should not be dealing with this right now.

Ilya winced, leant against his marble sink as Shane wretched into the porcelain bowl in front of him. It truly was an awful sound, no matter how expensive the toilet was. He grabbed a glass from beside the basin and filled it with water. When Hollander had finally finished throwing up his lungs, he held it out toward him.

"Thanks," Hollander said with a pant. There was sweat clinging to his brow, dripping onto his tanned cheeks like teardrops. Even like this, he was elegantly handsome and Ilya hated it.

"You look like shit," he said.

"Fuck you," Hollander let out a sigh, leaning his head against his arms. His eyes wandered over to the half-dozen positive tests still atop Ilya's marble counter and cursed under his breath. "I was *really* hoping it was food poisoning."

"You eat maybe three things," Ilya replied. "There is no food to poison."

"Whatever, asshole," Hollander snapped. "It was better to hope for that than the alternative."

Ilya hummed. That much was true. Hollander wasn't much of an optimist- but anyone would try to be in this situation.

"You are going to get rid of it, yes?"

"...Is that what you want?"

"Does not matter what I want," all Ilya really 'wanted' right now was a cigarette. Or a drink. Something. Anything.

"It's the most sensible option," Hollander was still sitting on Ilya's bathroom floor, knees tucked into his chest like a child.

"It is the *only* sensible option, Hollander."

"The season's basically over though. Maybe..."

"Hollander-"

“I’m, what? One month along? If we start back up in October...”

“*Hollander*,” Ilya snapped. “Are you *seriously* considering this?”

“Of course I am,” Hollander replied, haughty now. “I’m not saying *you’d* have to do anything, Rozanov,” he dusted himself off, rising to his feet. He was still a bit wobbly, still a bit teary-eyed, even as their confrontation escalated- but he never lost his determination.

“This doesn’t have anything to do with you at all, really.”

“Then why did you come here?”

“I don’t know anymore,” Hollander looked away, his words seeping in an unhappy bitterness.

“I just always seem to end up here.”

That much Ilya could relate to. The pull the two of them felt toward one another- It was almost unconscious, unwitting... This was just another etching of proof that the two of them were too far gone. Too entangled and intertwined with one another to ever be free.

It was frightening... And when Ilya was frightened, he got mean.

“Are you sure it is even mine?”

Hollander seemed genuinely hurt by the suggestion, his big dark eyes fixed on the tiled flooring at Ilya’s feet. For a moment, he looked like he was about to cry again. “It doesn’t matter if it’s yours... Which it is, by the way. You fucking asshole,” he twitched. “But it’s not like we’re together. Whatever choice I make, I wouldn’t ask anything of you.”

Ilya pushed down the immediate regret that was already building in his chest as he looked at him. There was nothing familiar about this. Nothing safe. They were crossing lines that hadn’t even been *drawn* yet. Hollander nudged his way out of the bathroom, his shoulders hunched and crumpled. He looked so small like that. Frightened too. Just like Ilya.

“Good,” Ilya said coldly, following him out. He kind of felt like he was going to cry too now. He wasn’t quite sure why. “I’m glad you know this.”

“Fine.”

“*Fine.*”

Chapter 2

When the news of his mysterious sabbatical broke, Shane was gliding along the currently-frozen Rideau Canal in beat up skates leftover from his high school years.

There was a certain idiocy around going skating at a time like this, he was wholly aware, but when it came down to it all he really wanted to do was get himself onto the ice. The hockey world, his parents, *all of fucking Canada probably*, would want answers from him eventually, but they were not answers he was willing to give just yet.

They were not answers he even wanted to *think* about, honestly.

There would come a time when he needed to give context for his leave of absence but today was not that day. No, today Shane Hollander was just going to skate.

The natural rink was busy at this time of the year. It was right before it got too melty to properly skate on and everyone was trying to get one last slice in before they'd have to wait until it got cold enough again. Shane used to come here all the time as a child. The gothic revival architecture of the surrounding buildings made him feel like a snow prince, tearing through the ice to fight some big bad that he hadn't quite thought of just yet. He longed for times like those right now. Simple, tangible problems with easy solutions.

The reality was not so kind.

With how widespread this news was, there wasn't a doubt in his mind that Rozanov had seen the countless articles announcing his 'personal injury.' Shane Hollander was a household name in Canada and now he was a household failure. The mighty had fallen and they had done so by choice and Rozanov's silence on the matter told Shane rather plainly what he already suspected: If he was doing this, and he was, he was doing this alone.

It was fine- no, it wasn't fine. It was *expected*. As Shane had said to his face, they didn't owe each other anything. This situation was a mistake, but what they did with the information was anyone's game to play. He wouldn't force Rozanov to take responsibility, he wouldn't fucking dream of it. There was no point to it, after all. Some things could be done out of obligation, but being a father was not one of them. He couldn't imagine anything worse than Rozanov half-assing something *this* important to him. The craziest part about all of this was that Shane hadn't even *wanted* kids. At least not yet- but he did want *this* kid. Once he got past the existential terror and overwhelming responsibility of it all, that was what came out the other end. A want. A desire. Shane couldn't articulate why just yet- but he'd never exactly been great at that. All he knew for certain was that he was never one to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Sure, this was one absolute *bitch* of a gift-horse but it was also an *opportunity*... An opportunity he was prepared to undergo. If Rozanov didn't think of it that way, he wouldn't hold it against him... But if he decided he wanted to get his head out of his ass and meet him in the middle, that would be alright too. Shane wouldn't be a dick about it. As much as it was *his* decision, it *was* Rozanov's baby too.

Well, Shane *and* Rozanov's baby.

Weird. Very weird.

So fucking weird.

Shane huffed, skating through the legions of tourists and dawdlers on the ice. "You're going to be fucking insane at hockey, kid," he murmured, the sound of his blades on the frozen canal drowning out the sound of his voice. As weird as it still felt, he couldn't lie and say he hadn't thought about it before; the fact that this baby was Rozanov's was just so insane to him that he often found himself speechless at the mere concept. The scandal. The drama. The media would have a field day if it ever got found out... Which was why they could *never* find out. Everyone and their grandmother could speculate on how Shane Hollander accumulated a child... A child with Ilya Rozanov's curly hair and bright eyes. They could speculate all they wanted... They weren't getting anything concrete from him. Ever.

Shane reached something of a natural stopping point on the ice and slowed down, watching the people around him mill about- his legs were *burning* with overexertion. Ice this cut-up was always harder to skate through but he just hadn't noticed with everything else going on in his head.

As he paused to catch his breath, he couldn't help but notice along the wayside that there was a father helping his daughter take off her skates. She couldn't have been older than three or four with a pair of pink pompoms on her beanie. Cute as a button with cheeks flushed red from the cold. Against his better judgement, Shane thought about all the times he'd seen Rozanov interact with children- how effortless it all seemed to him. He was a dick and a cocky bastard but he was something of a savant at it. Funny, engaging-

If, and it was a big *if*... Rozanov came around to the idea, he would be a good father. It was a pathetic thought if Shane had ever had one but he could feel himself linger in it- Bask in the glow of it's potential. They really could do this together if they both wanted to. They could give this kid of theirs the world like it was nothing. They could...

Fuck it.

Shane fished out his phone from his pocket and dialed 'Lily's' number.

The tone dinned ominously. One second. Two seconds. Three seconds...

"Hollander."

It was only when Rozanov answered that Shane realised he had never, actually, called him before. It was such a jarring thought that he almost forgot how to speak. "Hey," his voice was a little uneven. "Haven't heard from you in a while."

"Yes."

Good start. Great start. He was already regretting this.

"So." Shane cleared his throat, awkward. "I made up my mind."

"I know. I saw." Rozanov paused for a moment. "How... Are you feeling?"

"Freaked. I don't know."

"...Why are you calling me?"

Why indeed. Shane felt himself asking a similar question in his head, especially now that he could hear the tone of Rozanov's voice on the other line. He almost sounded... bored? Annoyed? "I guess I just wanted to see where you stood on all this. We didn't really leave things on a good note," he trailed off, a hot flush of embarrassment spreading through his body. "I wanted to give us both some time to think. I've made my choice but I don't know yours. Not that it matters. I just-"

"I think you are making huge mistake, Hollander." Rozanov's voice was cold on the other side of the line. "*Not that it matters.*"

"Yeah, it's a stupid idea alright." Shane looked out into the array of families before him with their rental skates and wind-chafed noses. He wanted that so badly. He didn't realise how badly he wanted it until he could have it. "I'm still gonna do it though."

"Why?"

"Because I want to."

Rozanov huffed out a laugh. "And Shane Hollander always gets what he wants."

"...Not always."

The silence that spread across the line was tense. Familiar. Forever unaddressed... For a moment, it was as if Rozanov would be silent for eternity.

A second later, he spoke.

"What do you want *from me*, then?"

It was not accusatory. It wasn't even exasperated. It was curious. Quiet. Entirely unlike Rozanov. There were many things that Shane wanted from him. His attention. His praise. His love... But that wasn't what he was *really* talking about, was it?

Shane had said it before. He would say it again. "I don't want anything from you."

If Rozanov wanted to step up and take responsibility, that had to be something that *he* wanted to do. There was no point otherwise.

“Okay.”

“Okay?” Shane replied. “Y-”

Click.

-And then the line went dead.

Chapter 3

“Do you think I’d be a good father?”

Upon hearing such a truly *suspicious* question, Svetlana had the good grace to do nothing more than raise a singular, manicured eyebrow; a decided non-reaction to prevent him from being scared off. Ilya appreciated it as much as he possibly could right now, which, admittedly, was not very much.

“What has brought this on, exactly?” She asked carefully, her face a mask of indifference as she swirled her half empty glass of vodka. The montage of hockey highlights from half a decade back were long forgotten on Ilya’s flatscreen, blending into the background like a tank of fish as they stared at one another instead.

“No reason.” Ilya replied from his side of the lounge. His expression was morose- his voice even more so. They both knew he was full of it. *“Alexei is a shit father. Our father is a shit father,”* he trailed off. *“...I just wonder if it is genetic.”*

It had felt like an eternity since he had last seen Shane Hollander in the flesh. That was nothing new in the grand scheme of things, of course. There were times when the pair of them went several eternities without seeing each other... But right now this distance between them felt like a ticking time bomb bound to explode. He couldn't stop himself from wondering how much of him had changed since they'd argued in Boston- would he be showing already? What would that look like? Ilya shook away the thought.

“You are nothing like your brother or your father,” Svetlana told him. *“You are much more handsome than both of them.”*

Ilya’s expression remained decidedly cold, his eyes affixed to a point in the distance that Svetlana could not see. Ilya Rozanov, of all people, was keenly aware of the fact that no father was better than a bad father. He couldn’t remember how many times as a child he had fantasized about a house without an angry man with angry footsteps in it.

As an adult, he still thought about it. More than ever, he worried he was becoming that angry man. He was constantly in a bad mood. Useless. Grouchy- stuck in a stasis of twoing and froing without any end in sight.

It would be easier if Hollander just told him what to do- if he grabbed him by the collar and told him to take responsibility. Ilya had been expecting that type of reaction when they'd found out he was pregnant but Hollander's nonchalant disposition over the phone was the complete opposite. It almost seemed like he didn't care either way what he did. It really was all up to Ilya to decide if it was better he stay away or step up... If he *could* step up- if he could evade the shadow of his father long enough for this to matter.

“...You have always been more like your mother, Ilyusha.” Svetlana added, softer now. *“I think you know that.”*

Irina Rozanova had had him young- had had Alexei even younger. She'd married Ilya's father because she got pregnant and felt cornered and scared. He forced her to leave her university. Abandon her studies. Leave everything behind.

Ilya couldn't help but draw the parallels in his sad little head.

Shane Hollander and his mother had about as much in common as borscht and maple syrup but when he thought about all that Hollander was giving up for this, Ilya thought of his mother... And then he thought of his mother and his father. The resentment. The coldness. The hatred. He didn't want that. He didn't want him and Hollander to be like that- forced together out of obligation. Out of duty.

"*You are scaring me.*" Svetlana eyed him, watching as the cogs turned about in his head.

"*What have you done now?*"

"*Nothing that you can help me out of.*"

Now, Shane Hollander wasn't necessarily *in hiding* right now, but he *had* almost definitely been keeping a low profile. He hadn't held a single press conference regarding his leave of absence and he'd refused every interview thrown at him- no one had even *seen* him for weeks. For all intents and purposes, Shane Hollander was a ghost of the recent past and Ilya would *know*, because Ilya fucking *scoured* social media for traces of him any chance he could get. There was nothing- not even an inkling geared toward the truth of his situation. The most reasonable theories centred around a season-ending injury, and the more ridiculous had him wrapped up in the occult- but no one had come close to suspecting an incoming lovechild, which he supposed was for the best. Hockey fans were not the most accepting kind, even to the greatest, well, *second* greatest player in recent history.

Ilya supposed that was why Shane Hollander was currently donning a near-comical disguise amongst the crowd in Bell Centre.

Ilya had spotted him through sheer will, right up in the nosebleeds near the exit. He was clad in about eight different coats and a surgical face mask but he knew it was him. He'd have known it was him even with his eyes closed. There was something cataclysmic and all-knowing about it- far more than a hunch or a feeling. Shane Hollander was actually in the fucking stands watching his game. Real. Alive. Here, in the flesh.

Here. Hollander was here.

Ilya let the information course through him like a wave of electricity.

The game between Montreal and Boston had arrived with the predicted fanfare. The crowds were bloodthirsty as the Metro's bright blue and red jerseys took the rink but Ilya couldn't tear his eyes away from Hollander who, unlike him, was focused on the ice, his hands fitted

softly against his stomach. The posturing seemed instinctive, almost- as if he was reminding himself why he wasn't the one out there.

It stopped Ilya cold.

For the rest of the game, he just couldn't get his head on straight. Up in the clouds, he let the straggling remnants of the Montreal Metro beat them by a painful two goals. It was a feat that would have been irritating if Shane Hollander was leading them- but was downright *insulting* now.

"I think you left your head back in Boston, Rozanov."

Hollander found him in the visiting team's locker room long after everyone else had left. Ilya had just been sitting in there alone, stark still and far too struck by what he'd seen to properly move just yet.

"...You are dressing for blizzard, Hollander?" Ilya eyed him. Up close, he could see that Hollander looked tired. He was hunched over where he stood, trying to hide the changing shape of his body from the world, from him.

"Better safe than sorry."

"Why come at all then?"

"Couldn't keep away if I tried," Hollander admitted, scratching his neck. "If I can't play, I wanna at least watch."

"You are masochist then."

Hollander huffed out a humourless laugh as he approached Ilya, sitting down beside him in that careful, stilted way that he always did when they hadn't seen each other in a while. Ilya couldn't stop looking his way even if he tried. The subtle curve of his stomach beneath all those layers was all too obvious to him now. It had been burned into his mind since he'd seen him in the stands.

"I get that you don't want anything to do with all this, but I'd appreciate it if you stopped looking at me like I'm a nuclear reactor." Hollander said, shifting uncomfortably.

"...Who said I do not want anything to do with this?"

Hollander almost laughed at that. "I don't know, I guess I sort of *supposed* that was the case when you told me to 'get rid of it' and stopped calling."

"I ask you what you want from me. You say nothing."

"Because you look like a rabbit caught in a fucking bear trap, Rozanov." Hollander bit. "Why would I want to force this on you? We made a mistake. It's as simple as that."

"We made a mistake. We," Ilya repeated. "Why is it only *you* being punished?"

"...Do you really think of it that way? Punishment?"

"Hard not to."

"Seems to me like you're punishing yourself just fine then," Hollander assessed, his expression tight and unpleasant. "No need for me to add to the pile."

It rubbed Ilya in every wrong way imaginable. "...Why are you doing this, Hollander?"

"Doing what?"

"Why do you act like everything is fine?"

"What other choice do I have?"

"You could be honest with yourself maybe."

"Honest?" Hollander gaped, immediately exasperated. "What do you want me to say? I'm tired all the time? My ankles are swollen? I'm getting fat? My team is moving on without me? My parents think I'm on drugs or something? They're going to fucking wish it was drugs, god," he winced, his cadence stunted and quiet. "Not to mention, the only person who actually knows about this baby is just a fucking blank wall of resentment right in front of me. It's pathetic. I'm pathetic. You're pathetic. What the fuck." Hollander rose from his spot on the bench with an almost impressive composure and stomp-kicked the locker in front of him. The impact sent a sharp clanging noise throughout the locker room and echoed in Ilya's head. Loud. Abrasive. Unfortunate. "Shit." Hollander sniffed, drawing back his leg with a limp. "Ugh..."

Ilya fought back a look of obvious astonishment. That was *not* the certain voice he'd heard on the phone or the steely expression that met him when they parted ways last time. This was vulnerable. Intimate. This was cloying and ugly. This was everything he was able to hide beforehand... Before it all got to be too much.

"You think I resent you?"

"You clearly don't want this," Hollander looked up at the burning white light hanging above their heads, his eyes rimmed with brimming tears. "Which is fine, but just tell me outright so I can stop fucking embarrassing myself, okay?"

"I want you. I want this." Ilya said plainly. It was strange saying it out loud but it didn't feel like a lie. It wasn't a lie. It wasn't an answer either though. Not a full one, at least. "But I am afraid. I am afraid I will not be good for you. For... For the baby," he fiddled with his hands. "My father... He is not a good man."

“...Rozanov?”

“Lately, I am worried I am not a good man either.”

Hollander settled a touch now, a sense of intrigue spreading across from him. He sat himself back down on the bench beside Ilya. “...You think you’re like him?”

Ilya shook his head. “I worry I will become him.”

“...So you think it’s better if you stay away?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.” Hollander swallowed. “I thought you were just mad at me.”

“I am.” Ilya replied. “Have no competition now. Is boring.”

“Montreal just beat you 6-4 *without me*, asshole.” Hollander nudged him with the same foot he'd used to kick the locker. “...Ow.”

The silence between them now felt a little more comfortable. A little less suffocating. Progress. Slow. Steady. Possible.

Hollander let out a shaky sigh beside him, eyeing the fresh dent in the door. “...I think I broke like three toes just now.”

“You are a fucking idiot.”

It may as well have been a term of endearment.

Chapter 4

After they ensured that Shane's toes were decidedly *unbroken*, Rozanov graciously drove them back to Shane's place in Shane's own SUV.

He did so, complaining about it the entire time.

"This is car for soccer mom or construction worker," Rozanov's lip curled in disgust, examining the dashboard as he drove them through downtown Montreal, whizzing past all the buildings and cars with a reckless ease that Shane would never be able to replicate.

"Hey. I *like* this car," Shane defended. "It handles the elements well, unlike your ridiculous fucking Ferrari."

"Ferrari is sexy car."

"Yeah, I bet it's *super* sexy when it hydroplanes off the road." Shane argued. "You live in *Boston*, you're from *Russia*... Surely you understand the appeal of a car you can drive without it spinning out off a bridge."

"Would rather spin out off bridge than drive this." Rozanov decreed, nodding to himself like he was being reasonable.

"It's economical."

"Is that another English word for ugly?"

"Fuck you."

Despite their bickering, Shane could admit that it felt good to be talking to Rozanov again. The stretch of radio silence had been... lonely, to say the least and terrifying to say the most. Figuring everything out on his own was a bitch to handle, for sure- but above all else it was the isolation that really got to him. Not having Rozanov here to speak to about this *massive* secret they shared ought to be something Shane was used to, but this new secret of theirs didn't come as easy and it left behind palpable evidence- palpable evidence that only got more fucking palpable as time wore on.

Now, Shane wouldn't say he was fully *showing* yet, but a perceptible little slope *had* begun to emerge on his form. Sure, he might have overdone it today with all the layers of jackets, but soon that would be a *necessity*... And that fucking terrified him.

It wasn't *all* bad though. The nausea and the swelling and the exhaustion... Sure, they were all horrible but being able to see the kid on the big ultrasound screen and hear their heartbeat kinda made it all worth it for him- even if they still sort of just looked like an alien- they were *his* alien. His weird black and white blob... His scary cryptid footage. *His*.

After his phone conversation with Rozanov in Ottawa, he'd assumed it would *just* be his. Now... He was not as certain.

Rozanov seemed conflicted, unsure of himself. Shane originally assumed it was out of nonchalance, out of disinterest- but that didn't seem quite right. His absence seemed to be borne more out of fear than apathy- an anomaly in of itself.

After all, when had Ilya Rozanov ever been afraid of anything?

"You seemed kinda distracted during the game." Shane assessed, leant against the back of the elevator now. He watched as the floor numbers climbed higher and higher on the screen above the buttons.

"Because of you."

"Me?"

"Hm. Not even with Metros and still most valuable player."

"What... Did my seven layers of jackets and sweaters get you too hot and bothered?"

"Something like that," Rozanov supposed, drawing closer. With one clever movement he teasingly slinked Shane's puffer jacket down his shoulder... Only to be met with another, thinner puffer jacket. "Fucking hell Hollander. I thought you say seven layers as a joke."

"Nope." Shane replied. "I'm like a *Matryoshka*."

"Say it again."

"What?" Shane laughed. Was his accent that bad? "Matryoshka?" He enunciated better this time.

"I teach you more Russian." Rozanov said, deathly serious. "Will be excellent foreplay."

"You think?"

"I know."

The elevator *dinged*, sending a trill of excitement down Shane's spine. It had been a long time since he'd brought Ilya Rozanov back here- back *anywhere*. Their dry spell was dying of old age at this point and Shane would be damned if that didn't change tonight.

The pair of them only just *barely* got in the front door when Rozanov pressed him and all his jackets up against the foyer wall and kissed him like he'd die if he didn't.

"What else do you want me to say?" Shane asked as they parted, out of breath already. He knew there was no chance of him lasting a respectable amount of time. Everything about him

had been so fucking sensitive lately, he was surprised the sole thought of Rozanov being in his apartment hadn't made him lose control. "How about *borscht*?"

Ilya scoffed out a heated laugh. "Borscht?"

"Yeah, I said it like that. Borscht."

"*Borscht*."

"Borscht."

"Stop talking, Hollander."

Enthusiastic to do just that, Shane shucked off a few more of his layers- folding each of them neatly in half as they made their way slowly into the living room, leaving a trail of clothing and kisses behind them.

By the time Shane finally got down to a t-shirt, Rozanov had led them all the way to Shane's kitchen.

...Shane's kitchen that was currently inexplicably occupied by his parents.

A moment ago, Shane didn't think there would be *anything* that could tear him away from Ilya Rozanov... But he had been wrong. He had been foolish and wrong and stupid.

Yuna and David Hollander.

They were in front of the both of them now. Staring. Eyes wide. Mouths agape.

Bad, bad, bad, this was very bad. This was decidedly very, very bad.

"Mom, Dad. I thought you were back home." Shane choked. He could feel his heart in his throat, alongside the rest of his internal organs- a telltale sign of impending violent nausea. He could feel it crawling up from his stomach like a snake now, slow-moving but no less determined. He swallowed thickly, his body stiff with nerves. "If you'll excuse me for *just* a second-"

Well.

It was hardly the first time Shane found himself throwing up a lung in this toilet. These past few weeks, he'd been in here almost on the daily. Morning sickness was part of the gig, Shane knew this much... But this felt like a whole new beast entirely. It felt like his pulse was in his ears, pounding against his head, his mind racing with possibilities.

Did his parents already know about the baby? Did they know about *Ilya Rozanov*? Were they going into this completely blind?

Shit... Was Rozanov still out there making conversation with them?

Shane shuddered at the thought. *'Hello I am the great Ilya Rozanov from the Boston Raiders. Number one draft pick. I am your son's baby daddy. I bend him over and put him through mattress on the regular. I suck his cock like it is cigarette-'* he felt a hand on his shoulder and jumped.

When he looked to his side, he saw Rozanov kneeling by him, an incomprehensible expression on his face.

Oh. He'd come in here with him. *Thank fuck.*

"Hey." Shane coughed.

"We have to stop meeting like this." Rozanov replied softly, pressing a cool glass of water to his lips. "Drink."

Shane obliged, mostly because the aftertaste in his mouth was so god-awful that it made him want to puke again. "I didn't know they would be here. I promise-"

"Is fine."

"Shit, it's so not fine." Shane put his head in his hands. "Fuck. This is *not* how I wanted them to find out." He could feel his breathing start to shorten a touch, the panic setting in like a familiar unpleasantness.

"Hollander- *Shane*, look at me." Rozanov's eyes were magnetic under the harsh light of the bathroom. "Breathe."

Breathing was important. Shane supposed he probably needed to do it every once in a while, even if it got hard. He took it slow- in and out, back and forth. A tide receding into the ocean, the ebb and flow of the water... Wait had Rozanov just called him *Shane*?

"Will be okay." Rozanov assured. His fingers were stroking Shane's hair now, moving about in a smooth round and round motion.

"I- yeah." Shane sighed, leaning into his touch. He was shockingly good at that. Calming him down. Grounding him. "It's just, *god*, it's gonna be so awkward."

"You want me to leave?"

"No." Shane shook his head. "Please stay."

Rozanov blinked. For a moment he almost looked pleased. "First time you tell me this."

"First time I said it *out loud*." Shane picked. "Should I say it again?"

"...Da."

Shane swallowed. "Please stay, Ilya."

The atmosphere back in the kitchen was, predictably, tense.

After Shane had finished being violently ill in his lovely bathroom, Ilya and him had emerged from the door and seated themselves on the kitchen counter barstools like sheepish school children. They were close enough for their shoulders to touch but far enough for Shane to desperately want to close the remaining distance. His mother and father were postured across the marble kitchen counter from them, looking like the world's most uncomfortable bartenders. It was obvious they were waiting for Shane to speak first. Patient. Understanding. *Terrifying*.

For a moment, there was nothing but silence between them all. An eerie static quiet that did nothing but drill up Shane's heart rate. When he felt himself getting bad again, Ilya grabbed a hold of his hand.

It propelled him forward.

"I... I owe you guys an explanation," Shane began. "I have for a while now. I know, I'm sorry," he looked at the ceiling, at the wall- anywhere but at his parent's faces. "I guess what you saw a couple of minutes ago is the answer for some of it, at least... Uh, obviously I'm gay," he scratched the back of his neck. "And... I don't know if you've formally been introduced to Ilya Rozanov before..."

"Hi."

"The two of us have been *involved* for... a while," Shane elaborated, trying to choose his words carefully. In all honesty, he would sooner die than give away too many details about the nature of their involvement. Yuna and David Hollander did *not* need to be keyed in on what a fuckbuddy was.

"A while?" Yuna asked cautiously. "...How long is 'a while?'"

"...Since 2008."

Both his parent's faces *dropped*.

Shane bit back a wince himself. It wasn't like Ilya was lying, but hearing it out loud was kind of insane. Nearly eight whole years of this... Whatever this was. It was crazy- diabolical, really.

"I... But you hate each other." David kept glancing between the two of them- not so much disbelieving as he was entirely confounded by the concept. "You've been head-to-head your entire career... You said he was an asshole, Shane."

"Wow." Ilya blinked, a slither of amusement crossing his expression. He still hadn't let go of Shane's hand. "This is not nice, Hollander."

Shane cleared his throat, uncomfortable. "Well, you *are* an asshole, I wasn't lying about that," he turned back to his parents with a shake of his head. "We never hated each other though. Not even slightly."

"...And this is why you took a sabbatical?" Yuna asked, confused. "If you've been seeing each other since 2008, then-"

"No..." Shane said slowly. Ilya squeezed his hand. "There was a much more recent development in all this."

"...Another one?" Yuna raised her eyebrows.

"Yeah." Shane nodded. He reached into his pants pockets and pulled out his wallet.

Even now, Shane knew that his dad kept a photo of him as a kid in his own wallet- nestled amongst his membership cards and coupons. A reminder. A reason. Shane couldn't think of a better place to put the sonogram than there. It was like a full circle moment- one that made him all twitchy and melancholic. He slid the photo out of the leather sleeve and shakily handed it to his mother and father to examine.

"...Oh, honey." Yuna put a hand on her mouth, her eyes *immediately* filling with tears. Beside her, David was speechless, his expression one of practiced neutrality.

Shane immediately felt fucking *awful*.

"I'm really sorry," he looked down at the marble counter, unable to handle looking at their faces. "I know I have my career to think about but I just... I didn't want to give this up. I want to have both. I *can* have both. I know it."

"God, I wasn't expecting this." Yuna screwed her eyes shut, angling her face up to the heavens. She was trying not to start crying in earnest. "You've always been so disciplined.... When you started getting all cagey and evasive we thought you'd snapped- gone off the deep end. Alcohol. Hookers. Drugs... Not- not *this*."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? This... This is a bit of a relief actually."

Shane paused. "...A relief?"

"We were worried about you, kid," David sighed, putting a hand on his wife's shoulder. "We thought you were over here snorting marijuana or something."

Ilya squinted. "That is not-

"*Ilya*," Shane eyed him.

Ilya shut his mouth.

"We knew you were keeping *something* from us. We just didn't think it was, well, *this*," Yuna continued. "I thought we'd come here and see your apartment trashed, beer bottles everywhere. A pipe full of cocaine..."

Ilya made another befuddled noise from beside him and Shane kicked his foot under the bench.

"Thanks for checking on me," Shane supposed. "I feel bad for not saying anything sooner. I've just been... Figuring stuff out."

"Of course, honey," Yuna nodded in understanding. Shane could see her settling into the information- her mind slowly piecing it together as less of a concept and more of a reality and *just* as much of a problem. "And was your boyfriend here, 'figuring it out' with you?" She asked, leveling her gaze back at Ilya. "You've been all around the world these past few months. Can't imagine you've had time to figure *anything* out, to be frank."

"Mom-"

"No. She is right." Ilya interjected softly.

"Ilya-"

"I had concerns about Shane taking break from hockey. It is hard to bounce back from even small injury. Having baby now is... Bad timing."

Shane swallowed, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

"I was angry for long time because I do this to him. It is my fault," Ilya provided. "But I want to do the right thing. For Shane and baby. It is my..." He searched for the word. "...Duty? Honour?"

"I like honour," Shane smiled.

"I'd say it's your fucking responsibility, actually," Yuna replied, unimpressed.

"Hey." Shane said, offended on Ilya's behalf. "Look, when we found out I was pregnant I was the one that said he could do whatever he wanted with the information. This wasn't exactly on either of our five-year plans and I didn't want to make any assumptions about what he wanted out of this," he sighed. "So don't be *too* hard on him, Mom."

"Shane," Yuna massaged her temples. "You're giving your mother a stress ulcer. Are you trying to give your mother a stress ulcer?"

"*Mom.*"

“Fine! Fine!” Yuna threw her hands up in defeat. “I’ll leave it.”

“I won’t,” David added, his eyes lifting from the sonogram in his wife’s hands up to Ilya. “What? They don’t have condoms in Russia or something?”

“Dad!”

“I’m just saying, this is a good way to make sure Boston get ahead.”

“You think Ilya Rozanov babytrapped me in order to give the Raiders a better chance,” Shane suggested, deadpan.

“With you benched, the Metro doesn't stand a chance.”

“This is true.” Ilya nodded thoughtfully. “They are awful without you.”

“They literally kicked your ass tonight.”

“Does not count. I say before. I was looking at you whole game.”

Shane flushed.

“...You were at the game tonight?” Yuna’s eyes were wide. “Wait. Do Montreal know-”

“Oh, no. I- the team didn’t know I was there. I just wanted to see the game,” Shane shook his head. “No one knows about... About the baby besides Ilya... And you guys now, I guess,” he let out a breath. “I got a lot of shit for not telling coach why I was taking the season off, but...” He shrugged. “They’d put me on waivers if they found out.”

Yuna frowned. “You *really* think they’d do that?”

“Yeah, I do.” Shane nodded. “If this gets out, they’ll drop me straight away. No one else will want me like this so I’ll probably end up being bumped down to the minor league. It will just be a huge fucking mess-”

“Shane,” Ilya stopped him, his voice low and soft. He could feel his thumb drawing circles on his hand underneath the table. “Is okay.”

“Is it?” Shane asked weakly.

Yuna didn't seem convinced either. “Honey, how are you going to hide this? Don’t you think it’d be better to-”

“-I’m pretty good at hiding things, Mom.” Shane interjected, eyeing the both of them. He felt his eyes sting, the weight of his parent’s stares bringing him back to earth. He fiddled with his hands. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you guys sooner. I didn’t want to disappoint you.”

“We could never be disappointed in you, sweetie.” Yuna assured, reaching out across the counter to grab a hold of Shane’s hand. She gave him a warm, kind smile still edged ever so

slightly by her tears. “You, though...” She narrowed her gaze at Ilya. “You’re still on thin ice for now.”

Shane’s mom and dad didn’t stick around for much longer after that. Once they’d ascertained that their son wasn’t a newfound addict or sex pest they parted ways with him and Ilya with a promise to check up on them both soon.

Shane had very pointedly told them to call ahead next time.

After that, Shane had kind of just... melted into his couch, unsure of what else to do. He was so completely relieved that they had taken it well- but he was also just so *drained* from all the information that he couldn’t even revel in the solace of it all. Before he knew it, he was watching an old Metro’s game from the 90’s, his brain a whirl of fog and fuzz.

Ilya didn’t join him... But he didn’t leave either. It was quite strange. Shane could see him from his spot on the lounge. He’d stayed seated at the kitchen counter, as if he was frozen in place.

Originally, Shane figured he was just looking at his phone or something- decompressing in his own way... But when he focused his gaze properly he saw, rather resolutely, that he was actually looking at the sonogram picture that he’d shown Yuna and David earlier on in the evening.

It had taken a while for Shane to wonder *why* that was. After all, Ilya had known about the kid for as long as he had... What exactly had him so transfixed?

It was only then that he realised that Ilya hadn’t been in that hospital room with him. He hadn’t been there to see them- to hear them in person. This photo was all he had. It was as new to him as it was to Yuna and David Hollander.

Oh.

“...They’re pretty weird looking, huh.” Shane approached, looking over Ilya’s shoulder at the mess of greys and black. “The tech said it was still too early to tell if it was a boy or girl. Not that I really mind. I kinda like the thought of either-” Shane watched as Ilya’s face sort of just crumpled as he spoke. “Hey, woah, is this about what my mom said?” Look, she’s always been a bit of a helicopter parent. She’s just worried about me-”

“You have been doing this all alone.” Ilya’s hands were shaking a little. “I am so sorry.”

“Oh...” Shane blinked. Ilya was... guilty? He supposed that sort of made sense. Doing all this by himself hadn’t been exactly pleasant- but it wasn’t like Shane blamed him for that.

“Well, you’re here now?” He offered- an awkward smile on his face. “Hey, seriously, it’s okay, c’mon.” He gathered Ilya up in his arms. “You’re here now.”

Ilya leant into him- into his hold.

“I cannot bring myself to stay away.” Ilya admitted, his voice slightly muffled against Shane's sweater. "Even if it is for the best."

“Then don’t.” Shane replied, a little too quickly. He cleared his throat. “I want you to stay. Please.”

“My father-”

“You aren’t your father, Ilya.”

“You do not know my father.”

“But I know you.” Shane told him. “And I’m telling you now that being here is the best decision.”

Ilya’s lip wobbled. It was clear he didn’t trust himself to speak. He nodded instead.

The silence that followed was not like the others. It was not tense or cold or sad. This quiet was nothing but warmth.

Chapter 5

Shane taking an elusive 'break' from the hockey world hadn't exempted him from *all* of his obligations. As unfortunate as it was- he was considered a public figure nowadays, which meant he still had a season of commitments outside of hitting a rubber puck into a net... Commitments that he couldn't escape from, even if he wanted to- and sure, Shane *did* kind of want to, but he was also hyperaware of the fact that bailing on some of them would make him a massive fucking asshole.

Tonight's gala was one held for charity. A huge donation event for all the wealthy socialites in Eastern Canada to attend and traverse. Every year, this one night garnered a massive amount of funds for half a dozen children's charities all across the continent. It was a hard invite to snag and an even harder one to keep.

Shane had been on the guest list since he made captain and he'd hated it ever since.

Now, he didn't hate philanthropy, of course. He wasn't a *monster*. He just wasn't huge on parties- especially parties like these. The opulence. The grandeur. The self-aggrandising. In all honesty, he would *much* prefer they skip the fanfare all together and just let him send over a cheque.

Lily: How is your fancy important person party?

The night was already wearing thin on him. Scarcely half over and he was already ready to call it quits.

Jane: It's fine

Jane: If it wasn't a good cause, I wouldn't have come though

After his very public withdrawal from the season, everyone and their mother had questions. Shane had been a good sport about it- not wanting to draw any more attention onto himself than he already had. He'd laughed off their jabs, he'd nodded thoughtfully to their 'ideas' about hockey, he'd made his rounds, he'd shaken his hands- he'd paid his dues. He'd done his fair share and now he was just plain done.

Lily: Poor thing

Lily: Your good heart has betrayed you

More than anything, he just wanted to be at home.

Jane: I kinda figured skipping out on a children's charity benefit because I'm feeling insecure would put a curse on my unborn child or something.

Lily: Do not bother. Baby is already cursed

Lily: Will have to be boring Canadian citizen

Shane looked at the text exchange between him and 'Lily' with dark, longing eyes. His fingers typed out 'I miss you,' in about seven different ways before he hit backspace each time.

Ilya was back in Boston right now. Much like Shane, he had commitments that he couldn't just let go of because his circumstances had changed. He still had a team to captain, games to play, practices to attend and this strange new line that they had crossed over together were making those things a bit more difficult than usual.

Shane could tell Ilya had felt awful about leaving Montreal- which made Shane feel awful about missing him this much, which in turn, made him feel *weird* about missing him at all. The whole situation was just odd, but it wasn't necessarily bad. Just odd.

“-Woah, look who decided to show up.”

Shane jumped, his head snapping up toward the direction of the voice. It belonged to one Saul Porter- a Right Winger for the Maple Leafs. The two of them had trained together for the Winter Olympics but they hadn't had much contact since.

“Surprised you made it, Hollander.”

“Yeah, well...”

“Guess going to a party is more important than training with your team.”

“Guess so.”

Shane hadn't the slightest idea as to why Porter had approached him. From the moment they met it was obvious that the two of them would never be overly fond of one another. Porter clearly found Shane to be high-strung and neurotic, while Shane found Porter to be a massive fucking asshole.

"Can't say I blame ya, hah," Porter took a swig from his flute of champagne. "This place is *nice*."

"Yeah," Shane looked out into the party in search of an escape amongst the well-dressed attendees. Was there a fire alarm he could pull? A sprinkler system he could trigger? He scanned the delicate wall fixtures and accidentally caught the eye of a waitress instead. Her eyes lit up in recognition as she dutifully shifted over to him, a plate of what looked like some kind of fancy pancake on a platter.

"Pea and mint fritter, Mr Hollander?"

Shane couldn't imagine anything worse, actually but he felt too awkward to refuse. He took the smallest one out from it's silver platter with a quiet 'thank you,' and a lukewarm smile. The waitress, in turn, beamed with pride before righting herself- nodding her head at him before drifting away into the crowd once more. Shane wished she would take him with her. Anywhere would be better than here.

Without any fanfare at all, he shoved the stupid fritter thing into his mouth and started chewing. It was as mint-y and pea-y as expected.

Porter eyed him as he ate, watching with a distasteful intrigue.

After a full moment of such staring, Shane had had enough. "What?"

"Nothing. It's just... You really wanna be eating that?"

Not at all, actually. "...I'm sorry?"

"Just saying, you've already got a *gut* now, Hollander. All this finger food isn't gonna help."

"Fuck you," Shane chewed.

"Woah. I'm kidding!" Porter held up his hands in surrender. "Guess that stick up your ass is still there... Like, I get it, man. We all get a little flabby in the off season."

Shane listened to him, his expression neutral as a storm thundered on inside him. He was half-torn between a panic attack and a killing spree. If an idiot like Saul Porter could notice he looked different, did everyone else know too?

"...You've *really* got your work cut out for you when you finally decide to come back though. Sheesh."

Before Shane could bite back, another voice came from behind them both instead. "Funny." Accented and decidedly irritated, Ilya emerged from a sea of black and white suits.

Distantly, Shane couldn't help but wonder if this was some kind of stress-induced mirage... But no. Ilya Rozanov was here. In the flesh- clad in a three piece suit with his immaculate curls pulled back from his face.

"Rozanov?" Porter blinked. He seemed almost as shocked as Shane was. "Why-"

"Hollander's play time this season was same as you and yet you have one forth of his goal count," Ilya drawled. "There is English saying, I think. Do not throw rock from glass house? You have heard, yes?"

"The fuck is your problem, Rozanov?"

"No problem," Ilya smiled, his mouth twitching like he wanted to eat Saul Porter whole. "I am just saying a fact."

Shane's eyes darted between them, the tension palpable. Ilya and Porter looked about two wrong sentences away from coming to blows right now. "*Rozanov*," he warned, trying to find Ilya's eyes, trying to steer him away from dangerous territory. Shane didn't need an attack dog right now. He needed an invisibility cloak... Or a rock to crawl under and die.

"Last time I checked, they don't let dirty-playing russkies into proper events like this," Porter scowled. "What are you even doing here, man?"

"Same as you. I give money. I eat fancy canapé." Ilya replied, popping a delicate wheel of prosciutto into his mouth. "Are we done here? I need to talk to Hollander about good hockey. It is something you do not know anything about."

Porter seemed intent to argue further but couldn't quite find anything else to say- a miracle if Shane had ever seen one. He opened his mouth and closed it before promptly realising that there was no use to it. No one bit as hard as Ilya Rozanov and he was already bleeding.

The two of them just watched him go, tail between his legs, muttering like a madman.

Good fucking riddance.

"Ugh." Ilya let out a low whistle. "Even from the back his face pisses me off."

"...What the fuck was that?!" Shane's eyes were wide. "What the fuck are you doing here?!"

"If you make big donation, they give you invite."

"You..." Shane furrowed his eyebrows, hyper-aware of the fact that they were very much in public right now and they very much needed to not be. "You're supposed to be in Boston!"

"Says who?"

"Your coach?"

"Eh." Ilya shrugged. "You are bigger fish to grill."

“Fry.”

“Hm?”

“It’s ‘bigger fish to *fry*.’ The saying.”

“Whatever.” Ilya waved him off.

"Come with me."

The crisp night air was pleasant against Shane’s skin- an instant improvement from the alcoholic warmth inside. The alleyway was a surprisingly clean one- still dark and dingy but without the cloying smell to go along with it.

“...How are you feeling? How is baby?” Ilya asked softly, the second they were out of the public eye, he’d closed the distance between them.

His proximity was intoxicating but Shane had to remain on task. “We’re fine. You’re deflecting.”

“What is this word?” Ilya played dumb.

“You know *exactly* what I’m talking about. You were looking at Saul Porter like you wanted to kill him.”

“...And?”

“Why?”

“Oh. That is easy one. I wanted to kill him.”

Shane groaned. “Ilya. You can’t just come to my rescue every time some asshole wants to insult me. It’s too risky- besides, I can hold my own just fine.”

“I know this,” Ilya assured. “But you were nervous coming here. I just wanted to make sure...”

“-You came here to check on me?”

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “*Nooo*. I come for big ice sculpture of bear.”

“I think it’s a moose this year...” Shane returned, forlorn.

Ilya rolled his eyes yet his expression was so shockingly fond that it sent a shiver of courage down Shane’s spine.

“I missed you.” Shane admitted then, the words sounded like they were being yanked out of him by force. He was acutely aware that the confession was definitely crossing some kind of line between them- but he was also acutely aware that they were having a fucking baby together so maybe the line didn’t matter at all.

“Ah.” Ilya’s eyes widened a touch. “I miss you too. That is why I come here,” he touched Shane’s collar. “Well this and to see you in your new suit.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane gave him a self deprecating little smile. “I call it ‘nothing else fits me properly’ couture.”

Shane had never had to actually think about his clothes before. He’d never really been interested in fashion. He wore what was comfortable, as simple as that. Now, he didn’t quite have the luxury of nonchalance. He had to get *creative*. Wearing a baggy hoodie and sweats to the biggest charity event of the year would be a massive faux pas and his usual fitted suit would give him away instantly. Instead, he opted for a sensibly oversized black blazer with a pair of sideswept ornate buckles to fasten the top shut. It was avant garde enough to look intentional- but anyone that knew him would instantly see it as an odd choice. Too in vogue. Too experimental... But it wasn’t like he had much of a choice. His stomach was too big to hide otherwise nowadays.

“I love it. You are very handsome.”

“Yeah, right.” Shane scoffed.

“You do not think so?”

“It doesn’t matter what I look like as long as I don’t look pregnant.” Shane replied, cagey.

Ilya’s expression turned sad then. Shockingly so. He watched Shane flatten out his jacket with pedantic hands, his mouth curling downward.

“Can you tell? Be honest.”

“I cannot tell. I promise you.” Ilya assured him. “Saul Porter is just jealous asshole.”

“Okay.” Shane nodded to himself. “Okay...” He leant into Ilya then, his head resting against his chest. He could still feel his heart pounding. He didn’t think it would stop until he was miles away from here. “Ugh. I don’t want to go back in there.”

“...Then don’t.” Ilya reasoned, talking softly into Shane’s ear. “Is over soon anyway, yes?”

“What? Just do an Irish Goodbye?”

“Does not matter what nationality your goodbye is.”

“It just means you leave without telling anyone.”

“Oh. Then yes. We will ‘Irish Goodbye’ every asshole in this gala.” Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s temple. “Except Porter. He will get Russian Goodbye.”

“...And what’s a Russian Goodbye?”

“Hmm. I throw him off tall bridge into cold lake.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

Lily: Big lemon that is pink on inside

Lily: Sour but okay taste.

Lily: You know this?

"Rozy?"

Jane: Grapefruit?

Lily: Da!!!

"Yo, Rozanov?"

Jane: ...What about it?

Lily: Baby is size of grapefruit this week.

Lily: Is big

Lily: I am sorry

"Hellooo?"

Jane: Apology NOT accepted.

Jane: My centre of gravity is fucked

Jane: You will pay for this!

“-Earth to Rozanov?!” Marlowe waved a hand in front of his face.

“I am listening. Always listening.” Ilya swiped out of the chat with ‘Jane,’ and put his phone into his bag. “In case I do not listen though, what were you saying?”

“We were saying we should get drinks after practice.” Connors piped up from the other side of the locker room.

“Yes.” Ilya nodded. “...Not me though.”

A predictable series of groans followed the rejection but Ilya couldn’t really bring himself to feel all that bad about it.

“There’s no point if the captain doesn’t come,” Marlowe badgered. “C’mon Roz, seriously.”

“I have plans.”

“I’ll bet you do,” Connors smirked from his cubby. “Over there grinning at your phone. What’s got you all chipper?”

“Is nothing,” Ilya lied.

“Bullshit,” Marlowe challenged. “Montreal Jane paying you a visit?”

It was true. ‘Montreal Jane’ *was* paying him a visit.

In fact, ‘Montreal Jane’ had been here for a week now and it had turned the eternally extroverted Ilya Rozanov into the biggest homebody known to man. He was *raring* to get back to his place and see Shane Hollander. If he had more shame he would be embarrassed about that... But he didn’t. He really didn’t.

“There is no Montreal Jane, Marlowe. I am loyal to your mother.”

Marlowe whacked him with his helmet. “Whatever, asshole.”

Ilya didn’t think Shane’s absence would be anything he wasn’t used to, but in truth the two of them had been struggling with the physical distance lately. Ilya couldn’t focus properly during practice and Shane was bored out of his fucking mind. The temporary solution had been the most logical one for their predicament. Ilya still had more training to attend in Boston but Shane was as free as a bird. He had no commitments left in Montreal, he could be anywhere he wanted.

-And he wanted to be here. In Boston, of all places. With Ilya.

“Boo! Captain!” Half the team started jeering. “You’re boring now.”

Hm. It seemed boring was genetic *and* contagious then.

For the first time ever, Ilya had someone to come home to and he didn't quite know how to deal. He wasn't used to announcing his arrival- his departure. He moved in silence. He *lived* in silence. Shane wasn't an overly loud person, but he *was* another person in his space. He created noise simply by existing.

Ilya was kind of obsessed with it- this constant presence in his home... Not ghostly or unwanted but just *here* with him. He wished they could have it forever and more often than not these days, he wondered why they couldn't.

"Hello?" Ilya shifted down the hallway into the main living space, grapefruit in hand. He'd thought it would be funny to pick one up on the way home but now he was oddly attached to it. When he turned the corner, he saw Shane was lying on the couch, glasses on- Ilya's laptop balanced on his growing stomach like a computer stand. He was furiously clicking about with the trackpad, his face a mask of intense concentration. When he saw Ilya standing there watching him though his face broke out into a warm smile. "Welcome back."

It was kind of Ilya's undoing, something so simple. It provoked within him a strange brand of cuteness aggression that made him want to jump out of a window. "I brought grapefruit," his throat felt dry.

Shane huffed out a laugh. "Wow. Grapefruits are bigger than I thought."

"Next week is corn."

"You're really into that chart, huh."

While they were apart, Shane had jokingly showed him a little infographic his mother had emailed him. *'How big is your baby? A week by week comparison with fruits and vegetables!'* It was cheesy and likely inaccurate but Ilya found it kind of fascinating. He'd printed it out to put in his kitchen.

"It is important document," Ilya said seriously.

"Of course." Shane snorted, taking another look at the grapefruit. "You can put it in the kitchen if you want. We can have it after dinner."

"We cannot eat the baby!"

Shane rolled his eyes. "I think I've got every right to eat the baby, actually. Do you know how many times I had to piss today?" He flopped his head against the couch. "Jackie Pike might be stronger than god for doing this, like, once a year."

“Or she just has stupid husband.” Ilya reasoned, shifting over to Shane’s side. He could feel his phone buzzing in his pocket. It was his teammates ragging on him for ditching them, no doubt. Ilya ignored them in favour of peering over at Shane’s laptop screen instead. He was playing some kind of house decorating video game. Of course Mr Real Estate Fetish would like a boring game like this instead of something cool as fuck like Grand Theft Auto.

“Is that... My house?” Ilya blinked. “You make it?”

“Mhm...” Shane nodded. “I found the building plans for this place online and mapped out the whole thing.”

Ilya watched with great amusement as Shane gave him a virtual tour of his own house. Everything, down to the small details, were all accounted for.

“I couldn’t find a good plant to match the one you’ve got in the master bathroom though.”

“Oh, may as well delete whole thing,” Ilya nodded. “Hey wait. There is people in my house.”

“Yeah?” Shane laughed. “That’s the whole game. You make a house. You control the little people inside...Have you not heard of The Sims before?”

“No. Too busy getting laid,” Ilya replied, squinting. His phone was still going off. “Is that me?” He asked. “Is that you? You make... mini us? To live in mini house?”

Shane seemed sheepish. “Maybe?” He scratched the back of his neck. “I have a lot of time on my hands now.”

Ilya felt himself frown at that. He could tell how much it was killing Shane to not have a hockey stick in his grasp. The guy thrived on having a schedule- on structure- on *hockey*. The lack thereof was making him, for lack of a better phrase, batshit insane.

The day before, Ilya had come home to Shane running accuracy trials in his living room- only instead of the usual suspects, he was using a broom as a hockey stick and a throw pillow as a puck. When he saw Ilya was watching him he hadn’t even seemed embarrassed, he’d just bitched about him not having any hockey equipment at his place. (Which, in all fairness, he didn’t.)

Ilya just simply did not live and breathe hockey in the same way that Shane did. His place had its fair share of trophies and momentos, but he didn’t see any need to have sticks and pucks on hand. That was *work*- work that he was exceedingly good at- work that he loved- but work nonetheless.

Shane was the one that *was* hockey and Ilya had taken that away from him.

“I am s-”

“Do *not* apologise again, Ilya,” Shane said firmly. “I made this choice fully knowing it was going to disrupt things. I don’t regret it,” he let out a sigh, booting down the laptop. He closed it and placed it on the coffee table beside the grapefruit. It was a truly strange pair of items if

he'd ever seen them. "You've gotta stop looking at me like I'm a wounded animal, okay? It just makes me feel worse."

Ilya didn't quite trust himself to speak. The truth of the matter was that he wasn't sure if he *could* stop looking at Shane like that- but it wasn't because he thought he was fragile or weak or pitiful... It was just Ilya's own guilt rotting inside of him. He wasn't sure what to do with it- as useless as it was, he couldn't bring himself to throw it away... What if he needed it? What if it was the only thing holding him accountable?

"Ilya?" Shane cocked his head to the side. "Are you okay?"

In Ilya's head, he still wasn't sure if he deserved this. Even if he knew now that he *wanted* it- he wasn't sure if it was his right to have it- if him being here would be even remotely helpful to Shane and their kid. "It is nothing."

"Doesn't *seem* like nothing." Shane insisted.

"It's fine."

"Ilya..."

As the gears in Ilya's head continued to turn about, he could still feel the constant buzzing vibration of his phone in his pocket. It had only amped up in frequency since he'd gotten home. It was doing nothing to settle his emotions. Ding, ding, ding...

"Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong." Ilya snapped. He couldn't bring himself to look Shane in the eye. Finally, he focused his attention onto his phone instead.

That was when he saw the source of the relentless notifications; The Boston Raider's team chat- somewhere that received maybe three messages a day- was being absolutely inundated with texts from everyone in it.

M: Holy shit.

C: Is this for real?

A: Looks pretty legit to me.

C: Hollander never really gave a good reason why he fucked off for the last part of the season... This must be why.

B: Holy shit. No way. He got knocked up?

L: Sure looks like it.

A: I didn't even know Hollander was gay lol. Doesn't seem like the type.

M: Wonder who the dad is?

H: Well. The *other* dad.

S: So weird.

C: I feel bad for the guy. If he wasn't Canada's Golden Boy no one would give a fuck what he was up to in the off-season.

M: Shit. Do you think the Metro will drop him?

P: Totally.

K: Yeah.

S: Good for us then.

F: Injury is one thing and a kid is another. They probably think he's never gonna come back.

M: He's Shane fucking Hollander of course he'll come back.

C: You've seen what the Metros fans are like. They're gonna take this personally.

P: Yeah. They won't want him back.

K: I can't find the article. Where did you say it was?

R: I'll send the link.

Ilya felt his heart drop.

[*'Bump* in the road for Captain of the Metros? Shocking information behind Shane Hollander's controversial choice to take leave from his team.']

Chapter End Notes

shane playing the sims without a mouse he really is gods strongest soldier

Chapter 7

“Shane?”

There was a certain muffled quality to all the sound around him that Shane couldn't really describe. It was like he was underwater or asleep or somewhere in between, floating in a drilling, grating abyss of his own thoughts.

“Shane?”

He was acutely aware of the fact that his worst nightmare had now come to fruition. His mind wouldn't let him forget it, running through all the outcomes this *could* have been instead of the one it turned out to be as if to torture him. An endless array of *could haves* and *should haves* dancing before him. Taunting him.

“Shane, please, you are scaring me.”

Ilya was right in front of him, touching his shoulders with anxious hands. Shane loved Ilya. He'd probably always loved him, or at the very least, he'd loved him for a very long time. He wanted to tell him just that but there was so much white noise all around him right now. It was crawling into his throat, it was clogging his airways and it was choking him. His worst kept secret was a trampled heap on the ground. This was no time for love.

“...Shane!”

Shane finally met Ilya's eyes then. This close up, he could map out every detail of his face. Every mole and notch and eyelash...

“You're so pretty,” Shane breathed, because he was.

Ilya cursed. Well, Shane assumed he cursed- the tumbling Russian that fell out of his mouth just had that kind of watery bite to it that lent itself to cursing.

Shane couldn't exactly blame him. This entire situation lent itself to cursing.

It hadn't been fair- Ilya being the one to have to tell him. Shane was supposed to find out from some guiltless, expressionless omniscient source, some higher power on the internet. It wasn't supposed to be Ilya. Shane didn't *want* it to be Ilya... And Ilya very clearly didn't want it to be Ilya either.

The article had been published by a notorious gossip rag that focused on the scandals of athletes in North America. Ilya Rozanov was a constant in their headlines... But Shane's golden reputation had negated their attention for the most part. They'd been trying to dig up something about him since his rookie season; A pill dependency, serial cheating, a rocky home life... Claims like these were all completely unsubstantiated and entirely disregarded by the general public. They never went anywhere because they had no story and they had no evidence.

This time though, they did. They had a whole lot of it. Shane had seen them; photos of him out in public in baggy clothes, his peculiar fashion at the gala, eyewitness accounts stating he purchased prenatal vitamins from their pharmacy- shoddy yet undeniable scans of his fucking medical records... Soon enough, the story wasn't just shitty celebrity gossip. It was *news*.

"...Fuck."

In his heart, Shane always knew this was a possibility and yet all his catastrophising could not prepare him for the reality of it at all... Of how awful it would feel to have the information torn out of him by force. It was like there was a hole in his throat and he couldn't get enough air into his lungs.

"Is okay," Ilya pulled him in, his own voice just as awful to hear. "It will be fine."

Shane heard himself crying before he actually knew he was. It was almost like an out of body experience- listening to the sniffles and the sobs. He knew they would come eventually, but he'd kind of hoped he would be able to hold off for a bit longer. He hoped these feelings of his would boil into something more productive like anger or determination.

"Fucking liar."

"...Yes. Is bad."

"Ugh."

"I do not like that it is just you," Ilya admitted. "Again. Just you suffering."

Shane rested his forehead on Ilya's shoulder, taking a hand to the other's curls. He felt the texture beneath his fingertips, focused on the silkiness, the myriad of slightly different colours. He'd known Ilya long enough to notice how his hair got lighter in the summer and darker in the winter. It had that golden haze to it these days now that the weather was better- just enough blonde to be undeniably so. It was beautiful. Shane wondered if their child would inherit these soft tangles. Ilya would have to teach him how to brush them properly if they did.

"...Shane?"

Shane shook his head. "It'd just make things worse."

"But-

"Ilya, you wouldn't be able to go home again."

"I know," he took in a breath, defeated. "I hate it."

"It's okay."

"Fucking liar."

It was dark by the time Yuna Hollander arrived in Boston.

She came alone, her husband stuck all the way in Europe in contrast to her business in Montreal. Even still, the drive across the border felt like it had spanned double the five hours it had actually taken. By the time she reached Ilya Rozanov's beautiful split level, she was bursting at the seams to see her son. Shane hadn't picked up his phone *once* since the article had been publicised but she hadn't expected him to. She knew her son. She knew what he was like.

She just hoped she was here in time to pick up all the pieces.

With a steady hand, Yuna punched in the door code she'd graciously been given and stepped inside. The entryway was as grand as the front, and as quiet as the dead. She shuffled in in the darkness, sliding off her shoes as she approached the television light at the end of the hallway.

That was where she finally found her son, sound asleep and tear-stained on Ilya Rozanov's lap. Safe, sound and all in one piece.

"...Thank you for coming." Rozanov spoke. He was so tense and stiff on the sofa, a blanket contrast to how relaxed Shane seemed in his sleep. When the glow of the TV flickered just right, Yuna could see that he had clearly been crying too- his eyes puffy and red and entirely filled with furious indignation. Even his posturing mirrored that protective anger that Yuna felt in her very soul right now- his arm resting across Shane's stomach and his opposite hand carding softly through his hair...It was such a tender scene that Yuna almost hesitated approaching closer. She wondered if she was allowed to without Rozanov baring his teeth at her like a guard dog.

"How long has he been asleep?"

"A while."

"Montreal called while I was driving," she frowned. "They'll be placing him on waivers by the end of the weekend."

"Shane thought they would," Rozanov set his jaw, his tone low and simmering. "I was hoping he was wrong."

Yuna pursed her lips. She had hoped that was the case as well... As a lifetime lover of the Montreal Metro, this betrayal stung like alcohol on a cut. They hadn't said why they were letting him go, simply expressing their need for 'present' players- as if Shane wouldn't be back on the ice winning more cups for them the second he was able to. It was the off-season, for christ's sake, he'd be gone for less playtime than most injuries took to heal and yet they were unconvinced of his dedication. It was absurd, after how hard he had worked for them- but Yuna knew what they were *really* saying; they didn't believe Shane Hollander had what it took to bounce back from this.

Maybe if he was anyone else's son, he wouldn't.

"He'll get them back for it when he's good and ready," Yuna pursed her lips. "I don't see how it's any different from an injury. If they just had some *patience*..." She trailed off, frustrated. "He's earned his spot in the major leagues. I'm sure the other teams are smart enough to see that even if Montreal aren't."

"Is not fair."

"It's not."

Rozanov looked down at Shane's sleeping face, a stony frown on his own.

"...He usually never falls asleep when he's anxious, you know," Yuna noted, drawing closer. She pressed a soft hand against Shane's cheek. "He used to stay up all night before a big game. Nothing I did could get him to close his eyes," she watched the steady rise and fall of her son's shoulders. "Seems like you're not just a savant at hockey."

Rozanov seemed hesitant under her praise, unsure of how to take it. "My mother was... very scared person. She needed help calming down when I was young. I loved her so I helped her."

A mama's boy. Yuna smiled sadly, her mind lingering on the '*was*' of that sentence. "And you love my son, so you help him?"

"Yes," Rozanov admitted. The word sounded like it weighed a tonne to him, pushing off his lips like he couldn't remove it fast enough.

Yuna could see it now. Under the shades of rage and sadness, Ilya Rozanov seemed like a frightened little boy, in over his head and trying his best to remain steady for her son. He was so far removed from the cocky shit-stirrer Yuna had watched for years on the ice and it was throwing her through a loop. She didn't think either of these sides of him were an act, rather, Rozanov just had a lot more depth than Yuna had given him credit for.

"Rozan- Ilya," Yuna decided. "Do... Do your family know about the baby? About Shane?"

"No. Nothing," Ilya shook his head. "They... Russia..." He trailed off like the sentence itself was a lost cause. "Everything is fucked," he paused, thinking better of it. "Sorry for bad language."

"It's okay. Everything *is* fucked." Yuna agreed with a soft smile. She settled into her chair, taking in her surroundings. The great, big windows and the sweeping ceilings... She paused. "...Why is there a grapefruit on your coffee table?"

"Uh," Ilya blinked. "I buy it from supermarket because it is size of baby this week."

"Oh my god, from the chart?" Her eyes went wide with surprise. "Shane showed it to you?"

Ilya nodded. "It is good chart that you send, Mrs Hollander. I take it very seriously."

“Please. Call me Yuna.”

Ilya seemed surprised by that, examining her with a scrunched brow. “I am not on thin ice anymore?”

“Kind of hard when you look so worried about my son.” Yuna’s expression softened. Without even thinking, she leant over and pinched Ilya’s cheek like he was a little kid instead of the (second) best hockey player in the world. “You might play for Boston but we’re all on the same team for this mess.”

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

ok now lets do a silly one

The next few days passed by in a strange blur of nothing and everything. Ilya watched Shane come to terms with the new normal slowly, gradually and numbly- he hadn't even been surprised about Montreal, just weirdly still in a way that made Ilya want to burn the entire team down to the ground. It was clear Shane thought he *deserved* to be shucked away by the Metro, like it was their right to discard him like yesterday's newspaper... Like it was the logical decision instead of their biggest fucking mistake. It was awful, just seeing him accept it instead of getting angry- mostly because Ilya *knew* what Shane Hollander could do when he was pissed off enough not to overthink, when he wanted something so badly that he didn't care what it took.

In fact, Ilya Rozanov was a willing victim of it.

It was exactly three in the morning when Shane shook him awake.

Yuna Hollander had left that afternoon to return to Ottawa and her son had been even quieter than usual. Ilya hadn't considered it particularly off-putting at the time but when he had blinked his eyes open that night and saw Shane knelt and looming over his body like a vulture about to feast, he had assumed this was because Shane Hollander had decided to murder him once and for all.

Predictably, this shocking thought had Ilya springing up from his slumber like a reanimated corpse. "What's wrong?" He slurred, trying to remember how to speak English. "Are you okay? Is baby okay?"

"Huh? Yeah." Shane regarded the question like *Ilya* was being the crazy one right now. "I'm hungry."

"...What?"

"I want food."

Ilya settled a touch, a rush of air entering his lungs. Relief. "You know where my kitchen is, Hollander."

“I want Tarte au Sucre.”

Ilya winced, rubbing at his eyes. “It is three in morning. English is hard enough before you throw in bullshit language like French.”

“It’s like. Uh. Sugar pie,” Shane elaborated quietly. “I’d buy a slice from this bakery every time I was in Quebec as a cheat meal. It was really good.”

“Okay...” Ilya blinked. “Quebec is far from here though, *Moya lyubov*.”

“Yeah.”

"You want to drive to Quebec?"

Shane rolled his eyes. "Of course not."

“Then you think maybe there will be French bakery in Boston?” Ilya suggested gently.

Shane nodded.

"Okay..." Ilya savoured the thought. “We look in morning?”

“No. Now.”

“What?”

“This is an *immediate* situation, Ilya,” Shane said, deathly serious. “If you don’t go out and get me this pie, I’ll go myself.”

Ilya paused. In Shane’s eyes he finally saw that familiar dangerous determination within them. After everything that had happened, it was *pie* that had fucking brought it back. “Are you threatening me?”

“Yes,” Shane nodded, unashamed. He hugged his stomach, no doubt for a more tantalising effect. “And then you will have to live with the fact that you sent your pregnant boyfriend out into the terrifying Boston streets. At night. Alone. When you could have just done it for him.”

“Oh, you are my boyfriend? First time I hear this.”

“Last time I checked, fuckbuddies don’t argue about nursery wall colours.”

“Yellow is stupid colour for stupid people,” Ilya insisted.

“Yellow is gender-neutral and is solely associated with happiness.”

“Piss. It is also associated with piss.”

“If your piss is *that* yellow then you need to drink more water,” Shane snapped. “Now am I getting this pie myself or what?”

Ilya considered the question for a second.

In all honesty, Shane was so weird about food all the goddamn time. The fact that he was actively seeking out something unhealthy and enjoyable to eat... It was certainly strange, but it wasn't *bad*. Especially considering the awful few days he had just had. Shane deserved this terrible french pie more than anyone else in the world right now...

-And so Ilya would get him this terrible french pie no matter what it took!

This was how Ilya found himself standing at a twenty-four hour Walmart's bakery section, looking at the array of sugar with great intrigue.

Predictably, there wasn't much to offer in terms of Quebecois pastries- even the basic little cupcakes here looked pretty sad... But he was certain he could work *something* out. He literally had to. Shane would probably change the locks if he didn't.

"I do not think food should be this colour," Ilya said out loud, his scrunched brow taking in the neon blue icing in the package of cakes he'd picked up. That was the first thing he'd noticed about America; the colour saturation of their food had been turned up to the max. Back then, it had been a point of fascination for Ilya, who had never in his life seen cheese so entirely orange. Even now, he was intrigued. Did electric blue icing have a taste? Or was it just for show?

"...Hey, excuse me, sir."

Ilya broke out of his reverie and turned to find a middle-aged man sporting a vest and nametag looking at him. An employee, Ilya assessed. His badge said '*Jim.*'

"Are you Ilya Rozanov?"

"Yes, that is me."

"No fuckin' way!" 'Jim' clapped his hands together in excitement. "The Raiders are my favourite team and-" he cut himself off. "Wait, what are you doing here?"

Ilya placed the package of nuclear cupcakes back down, defeated. "I wish I knew what I was doing here, Jim. I am following orders from madman."

"Oh."

"Do you know if this place sells... Sugar Pie? Is French-Canadian, so I think not."

"Sorry, man, we just have the classics," he apologetically gestured to the decidedly huge brownies and donuts on Ilya's left.

"Is okay," Ilya assured. "If you see news of my death tomorrow, know it was murder," he turned to leave.

"Uh." Jim held out a hand. "You said 'sugar pie' right?"

“Yes. Tart au...”

“Sucre?”

“Da, yes.”

“You know, I’m a helluva baker,” Jim scratched the back of his neck, sheepish. “If it’s that urgent, I could probably give you some tips on how to make it yourself? Help you get the right ingredients?”

Ilya seemed dubious. “I do not want to be trouble for you.”

“Oh please. This is the opposite of trouble. My wife and I are huge fans. She’ll be so stoked when I tell her I helped you out,” he laughed. “Though I gotta admit she’s a bit more of a Shane Hollander supporter... Sorry. She just really likes his freckles.”

“Me too.”

Jim laughed like he’d told a funny joke instead of the truth. “Poor guy’s had a rough go of it this week, huh? It’s just not fair what Montreal is doing with him,” he shook his head in disappointment. “They’re fucking idiots for putting him on waivers.”

“...Jim?”

“Yes, Mr Rozanov?”

“I love you.”

-And thus, his hunt for pie had turned into a bake-off.

Ilya Rozanov. Star Centre and Captain of the Boston Raiders. He had more accolades as a teenager than most players had in their entire career... How fucking hard could baking be?

Very. As it turned out.

At least for Ilya it was. He knew his way around the kitchen. He’d been cooking for himself since he was a little boy, but when it came to the almost *scientific* skill of baking, he was at a total loss- even with all of Jim’s assistance. Much like Ilya and Shane themselves, cooking and baking were two sides of the same coin; forever joined together but polar opposites on either end. Baking was rigid, formulaic and meticulously planned. Cooking was chaotic and ever-changing. Ilya’s personality just naturally lent itself more to the latter; he eyeballed everything and didn’t even *own* measuring cups... To thrust him into the tight box that was

baking was almost a cruelty, especially at three in the fucking morning. Even still, he did his best. He followed the recipe as reliably as he could, taking into account Jim's tips and tricks. Ilya was determined. More determined than he had ever been. Shane Hollander, his strange hormonal *boyfriend* would get his stupid fucking pie because he *deserved* this stupid fucking pie and anything else he ever wanted.

And so, as Ilya placed the pie into the fiery pits of his oven, he felt a sudden sense of camaraderie with it. He too would be cooked alive soon if he did not do well. He was sure of it.

"Davai," he said solemnly, wishing it well on its journey.

"Wake up, Hollander. I make you pie."

"Huh? Make?" Shane blinked his eyes open slowly, lethargically- the startling smell of *burning* drawing him further into consciousness.

"Yes. Make. They have no sugar pie in all of Boston," Ilya replied, covered from head to toe in flour. In his grasps lay a slice of what was, quite possibly, the ugliest pie in all of existence.

"You made me Tart au Sucre?" -but Shane looked at it like Ilya had just personally delivered him the moon. The murderous aura from before had completely vanished from his stature, replaced instead by soft, sleepy appreciation.

"Mhm," Ilya suddenly felt embarrassed under the speculation of Shane's warm, glittering eyes. He was not too proud to admit that the pie had not turned out well, he had grown impatient with the process and turned the heat up to the max- cleaving the bake time in half.

-This, apparently, had been a bad decision because the tarte au sucre had gone from looking barely-decent to barely-edible in mere minutes. In it's current form it more closely resembled volcanic ash than pie and yet Shane *wanted* pie, so he had no other choice but to hope and pray that judging a book by it's cover lent itself to baked goods as well.

"Thank you, Ilya."

Ilya's chest felt tight, watching with itchy anticipation as Shane took his first taste of the slice.

Chew. Chew. Chew.

Silence.

Tears.

Ilya watched in shocked silence as tears fell out of Shane's eyes like a leaking faucet, silent and plentiful... And for a moment he had hope. "It is that good?"

"No. It's fucking awful." Shane said, half a sob in his throat. "It's just... This is so nice. You *made* this just for me. Because I wanted it."

"If it is bad then why are you happy?" Ilya looked at him like he was insane. "You do not have to eat if it is-"

"No!" Shane angled the plate away, taking another scoop of the dish and shoving it into his mouth. "I love it and I love you-" He paused, swallowing with a grimace. "...Oh. Shit."

"You-" Ilya blinked, his heart thundering. "...You love me?"

"I-" Shane avoided his eyes, his expression immediately sobering into something much less hysterical. "Yeah. I'm sorry. I tried not to. You-"

Ilya grabbed Shane and kissed him before he could say anything to take the confession back. The tears on his cheeks made his lips taste saltier than usual.

"I love you too," he returned, his eyes were burning. He felt like he was going to die- almost angry at himself for not saying it first, not saying it sooner when he'd known for so long. "Of course I love you. I would not make terrible pie for anyone else in this world."

Shane's laugh was watery- but it lacked the miserable sting that had been so prevalent these past few days. He'd been putting up a strong front for him- for his mother, but Ilya could tell his predicament was weighing on him. He'd been avoiding his phone like the plague- hadn't even *attempted* to watch anything on the sports channel. He'd been on total lockdown since the story had dropped.

The sound of his relieved laughter, free and clear, was like music in Ilya's ears...

...Until it abruptly stopped once more.

Ilya watched Shane's eyes go wide with surprise.

"What is wrong?"

"Holy shit," Shane whispered, moving his plate to the nightstand.

"What?"

Without any further delay, Shane grabbed Ilya's hand and splayed it on his stomach.

"...Holy shit." Ilya had forgotten every other piece of English he knew. The thundering surprise beat it out of his head.

He could feel the kid *moving* underneath his hand like a mouse stuck under a rug- spurred into action by the rumble of their combined happiness. It was such a wholly strange sensation that he couldn't bring himself to move his hand away.

"Does it..." Ilya was transfixed. He couldn't find the right words. "Painful?" He finished inarticulately.

Shane shook his head. "It's just... So weird," he shifted in bed, a furrow to his eyebrows. "There's been, like, fluttering before but this is..." He trailed off, blinking in the darkness. Ilya felt even more movement against his hand. Shane let out a breathy laugh. "What the fuck? Are you feeling that?"

"She likes the sound of your voice," Ilya supposed.

"No, no, she hears me all the time. I think it's you."

"Hm? You think?"

"...Wait, *she*?" Shane cocked his head. "Did you just decide that on your own?"

"Yes. Baby is girl," Ilya nodded.

"What makes you so sure?"

"It is... What is phrase..." Ilya scrunched his eyebrows. "Wishful thinking."

A slow, sweet smile crept across Shane's face. "You want a daughter?"

Ilya hummed, leaning down so he was level with Shane's abdomen. "No pressure though. I love you no matter what."

A harder movement tapped against Ilya's palm. It made him grin like a giddy teenager. From the corner of his eye he could tell Shane's expression was quite similar. Ilya let out what he could only describe as a sigh of *relief*.

"Wow. Big day. I tell three people I love them."

"...Three?" Shane cocked his head.

"The baby, you... and Jim from Walmart Bakery Section," Ilya did not elaborate further, still filled with warmth and excitement- he pressed his ear to the slope of Shane's stomach like it was a telephone. "Okay. You must work with me. One kick for girl and two kick for boy."

He could *feel* Shane laughing at him, furthered only by the complete and utter stillness that followed his request.

Ilya pursed his lips in thought. "Ah, then baby is... Hm. What is word? Unisex?"

"...Non-binary?"

“Da, yes,” Ilya nodded. “This is good. Make excellent coffee-”

He was cut off by two, strong movements right beneath his cheek.

“Oh! Looks like you might be out of luck,” Shane grinned. “It’s a boy.”

“No, I do not believe this.” Ilya rubbed his face. “You will see, Hollander. I am never wrong.”

“Hm. A son...” Shane was purposefully ignoring him now, looking wistfully up at the ceiling. “What do you think about Hayden Hollander-Rozanov for a name?”

Ilya let out a cry of anguish, gently pushing Shane down onto the mattress. “Do not even joke,” he sounded horrified. “You name our baby after Hayden Pike, I kill Hayden Pike.”

“It just has such a ring to it-”

“You are asshole, Shane Hollander.”

Shane looked up at him with those big dark eyes of his, so pleased with himself.

“Yeah, but you love me.”

They still had so much to figure out but right now everything felt just perfect.

“Yes, but I love Jim from Walmart more. It goes Jim. Baby. You-”

Shane kissed him to shut him up.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

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

[10] missed call(s) from [HAYDEN PIKE]

Message(s) From: [HAYDEN PIKE] *three day(s) ago*

Hayden: Shane?

Hayden: Just got the news, bud

Hayden: I'm so fucking sorry

Hayden: You don't have to talk until you're ready. I'll wait you out

Message(s) From: [HAYDEN PIKE] *two day(s) ago*

Hayden: Okay, man, seriously. Please call me

Hayden: You're alive, right?

Hayden: Shane?

Hayden: Dude, if you're mad at Montreal I totally get it but can you PLEASE text me so I know you're okay

Message(s) From: [HAYDEN PIKE] *one day(s) ago*

Hayden: Shane Hollander, don't make me call your mother

Hayden: I'll do it

Message(s) From: [HAYDEN PIKE] *two hour(s) ago*

Hayden: No but seriously don't make me

Hayden: She's so scary

Message(s) From: [HAYDEN PIKE] *one minute(s) ago*

Hayden: You there?

Hayden: I JUST SAW YOU READ THIS HOLLANDER

[HAYDEN PIKE IS CALLING...]

Decline.

Shane: Hi. I'm okay.

Shane: Sorry. Decided to turn off my phone for a few days

Shane: Is it okay if we just text?

Hayden: SHANE THANK GOD

Hayden: OF COURSE

Hayden: You in Ottawa?

Shane: No.

Hayden: Are you... Alone?

Hayden: Wherever you are?

Shane: I'm in Boston

Shane: And also no

Hayden: WAIT

Hayden: WAAAITTTT

Hayden: BOSTON LILY???

Shane: Yeah

Hayden: BOSTON LILY KNOCKED YOU UP????

Shane: Boston Lily isn't actually a Lily

Shane: It's a guy

Hayden: Fucking duh

Hayden: I know that now

Hayden: I admit I did see a text from her saying how hard her cock was one time

Hayden: Just thought you were open-minded tbh

Shane: Jesus Christ

Hayden: Shit dude

Hayden: Boston fucking Lily

Hayden: So who is this guy actually

Hayden: And when can I beat his ass

“Hayden wants to know when he can beat your ass.”

“...What the fuck?”

Shane let out a laugh, flipping over his phone so Ilya could see the onslaught of messages Hayden had left him.

“Ah... You are finally responding to him?” Ilya looked at the screen curiously. “He was one of first people to call, you know.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying to you, Hayden’s a good guy.”

“Good guy that wants to fight me.”

“He’s defending my honour.”

It was a weight off his shoulders- getting to talk with Hayden again. Shane had been putting it off for days out of fear of what the messages said. He should have known that it would be okay... Well, at least until he told the guy who ‘Lily’ really was- but that was a problem for future Shane and right now he was taking things one scandal at a time.

“Has... Any other Metros tried to get in touch?” Ilya asked cautiously, lacing his sneakers.

It seemed he knew the answer before he even asked the question.

“JJ texted me too. I’ll get to his messages next. The rest of them... Well, I’m sure they’re just shocked.”

Ilya hummed, getting to his feet with a barely disguised scowl on his face. “I’m sure they are just assholes.”

Shane didn’t disagree, which told Ilya all he needed to know. He had given his soul to this team, he’d led them to a never-ending stream of accolades and praise... And only two of them cared enough to see how he was doing. It was a tough pill to swallow... How little they all seemed to regard him. Shane hadn’t been the most sociable guy on the team but he’d been their fucking captain, their star centre, their MVP- but all of that clearly meant nothing if the going got tough.

“...I could stay home?”

“Ilya, I’ll be fine.”

“I know,” Ilya affirmed. “You have nothing to worry about. Will get offers from every team in league today.”

“I think if I was in such high demand I would have heard something already,” Shane gave him a sad smile.

As much as he himself was confident in his abilities, he really didn’t have high hopes regarding his current situation. Being placed on waivers had always been something that he

hadn't really concerned himself with. As the best player in the league, he knew that even if he *did* get fucked off by Montreal, he'd get snapped up almost instantly. Now, it was different. Now, he was being treated like he had some kind of long-term injury that no one was sure he'd ever recover from. It was, frankly, pretty insulting if Shane was being entirely honest- but it wasn't like he could change much about it. All he could really do was wait with baited breath and hope they could see his potential beneath the media circus. The once-great Shane Hollander was a pariah and a lot of the teams wouldn't want to touch him with a ten foot pole- but it only took one.

He just needed one.

"If you need me to come back. Just call, okay?"

"Okay," Shane relented. "You really need to go though."

Ilya leant down and kissed Shane like he was going off to war instead of an ice rink. "Seriously. Even if it is little thing. I will come home."

"I thought *I* was supposed to be the clingy one?" Shane challenged. "*Go.*"

"It is like you do not love me."

Shane began outright *shoving* Ilya toward the door, his hands on his shoulders. "I do love you, but if you don't go to practice, Boston is going to put *you* on waivers too and what good would that do?"

Ilya looked wistful. "Hm. I can be stay-at-home dad..."

"*Ilya.*"

"Alright, alright, I go," Ilya relented, reluctantly shuffling out the front door. "Will be back as soon as possible."

"I don't doubt it."

"Give me kiss."

Shane *gave him kiss*, and then Ilya was off in earnest this time.

Shane was never one to wallow. He didn't have it in him to stand still. If he couldn't control the outcome of his position in the league, he just needed to focus on things he *could* control.

Breakfast. He could control breakfast.

Shane pulled a carton of eggs from the fridge, ignoring the familiar itch he had for something sugary. It was obvious this kid of his had a hell of a sweet tooth and didn't give a fuck what he thought of it. Unfortunately for his beloved unborn child, Shane was the one driving this bus and he was intent on eating something without whipped cream on top for once

The smell of the vegetable omelet sizzling about in the pan did next to nothing for Shane's appetite, but it never did, really. The only difference from then and now was that he would presently murder someone for a chocolate chip cookie. It was the only thing in the world he wanted to eat right now and yet Shane deprived himself. Always depriving himself. Always holding back. Always-

The sound of the front door opening drew Shane out of his thinking. "You forget something?" He called, flipping the egg mixture with a twist of his wrist. The kale floating about in the pan made his stomach turn.

"...Илюша?"

Shane froze.

Decidedly *not* Ilya.

"Вы дома?-"

"Uh-"

The woman that turned the corner was gorgeous. Her dark skin practically glittering against the soft sunlight of the windows behind her. Her hair was pulled back into an easy updo with a pretty gold chain around her neck. Svetlana, Shane's mind supplied. He had seen her on Ilya's socials when he'd been stalki- *researching* him a few years back. He'd mentioned her a couple of times in passing since then. Little tidbits here and there, mostly to get a rise out of Shane. Childhood friends that slept with one another... Childhood friends that loved each other... Childhood friends that spoke their mother tongue together.

She was even more beautiful in person. Shane felt itchy all over.

"...Shane Hollander?" Svetlana's eyes went wide when she caught sight of him. Her surprise was evident, but not in the way he'd expected. She seemed shocked in the way one would be if they ran into a friend at the grocery store instead of... Well, whatever the fuck this really was.

"...Hi." Shane said awkwardly, fry pan in hand. He had to assume he looked about as collected as a deer in headlights. "You're... Svetlana right?"

"...I knew it," Svetlana whispered. "I knew it!"

"...Knew what?" Shane coughed. He wasn't sure what good it was playing dumb at this point, but he had to at least *try* for Ilya's sake.

“About you two,” Svetlana elaborated. Her Russian accent wasn’t as strong as Ilya’s. More subtle and soft. It was clear she’d spent more time in the states than he had. “This is... Wow. This feels good, Shane Hollander. What is the word for it? Vindication? I felt like I was going crazy for a while there.”

“I...” Shane opened his mouth to refute something, *anything*, but nothing really came out- just a wet puff of air that tasted like defeat.

Unfettered by his momentary muteness, Svetlana sat herself down on the kitchen stool opposite him. It struck Shane almost immediately how perfectly she fit there- the room decor framed around her like a painting. “Is Ilyusha out? I thought his practice was in the afternoon today?”

“It got moved up to this morning,” Shane replied, trying not to focus on the adorable nickname Svetlana had given *his* boyfriend. “Uh... What were you after?”

“Hm. He wanted me to bring something to his niece when I go to Moscow next week.”

Ouch. Another pang of jealousy. That closeness. That proximity to Ilya’s life outside of North America... It stung like a barb to his heart. “Oh, he hasn’t mentioned anything like that to me. Sorry, I don’t know where he would have put it... Whatever it is.”

“It does not matter. I will text him later. I have more important matters to deal with now,” she leant forward, her eyes sweeping over him. “I can’t believe Shane Hollander is in front of me right now.” Her face was electric before his eyes. “You’re even more handsome in person, you know.”

Shane wasn’t sure if she was making fun of him or not. Either way the weight of her gaze felt like too much to deal with. He averted his stare, looking down at the fry pan in his hands. “...Uh. Do you want half an omelet?”

“No, no.” Svetlana picked up an apple from the bowl on the counter instead and bit into it. “You are eating for two.”

“Right,” Shane emptied the omelet onto a plate, stiff and tense.

“I am sorry the news was stolen from you like that.”

“Guess it had to happen eventually,” he supposed, a little pathetically. “Just wish it was on my own terms.”

“Metro are making a terrible decision trading you,” Svetlana said- her words filtering through the air like they were fact instead of opinion. “It is a personal choice instead of strategic which means they have no plan about who they want to replace you. They’re in for a very bad season.”

“Yeah, well, so am I.”

“No, no. I do not think so, Shane Hollander,” Svetlana assured, taking a bite of her apple. “I am not totally sure but I think Boston will be taking on your contract.”

“...What?”

“Hm. After Lowell was traded last season, they have needed someone with a less aggressive play style. Boston is known for their rowdiness but it is important for *someone* to keep a level head on the ice. I think they suspect that person is you.”

Shane could admit that the thought *had* crossed his mind. The idea that he could be traded to Boston wasn't entirely out of the question. Their salary cap was nowhere near at capacity and they seemed to be after some different types of players to intermingle with all the fire and fight... But that would mean something *actually* went right for him for once. He just couldn't fathom that being the case. “You really think so?”

“It is very Boston of Boston to swoop in and take their division rival's best player, no?”

“I guess so,” Shane supposed. “But out of all the teams in the league I doubt Boston is somewhere that is sympathetic to my ‘predicament.’”

“So did you think Montreal would be sympathetic to your predicament?” Svetlana challenged.

“...Hm. You have a point.”

Shane was impressed by Svetlana's prowess and passion. She seemed to be the whole package. Beautiful, smart and a *woman*. An ugly part of Shane wondered why in the world Ilya had not made it easier on himself and chosen her instead. He did his best to tamp down the thought. It wasn't fair to Ilya- wasn't fair to himself and it certainly wasn't fair to Svetlana, who was currently watching the cogs tick over in his brain with half an apple in her hand.

Svetlana assessed him for a moment and then, without accusation or malice, she provided a simple observation. “You do not like me.”

“No!” Shane replied a little too quickly. “That's not true at all. Why would I? I don't know you- I just...” He trailed off in an attempt to collect himself. He took a breath. “I'm sorry, it's the hormones. I don't dislike you. I'm just jealous and... you're so pretty.”

“I understand,” Svetlana nodded sagely. “I will try to be less pretty next time.”

Shane winced. Beautiful, smart *and* funny. Was Ilya an idiot? “...You really think Boston will take me in?”

“You do not know me very well, Shane Hollander, but if you did you would know I am always right,” Svetlana took another bite of her apple. “If you can get over your jealousy, I would like for us to be friends.”

“I would too,” Shane admitted. “I mean it... I could really use some more of those right now. Especially ones that are clearly as freakish about hockey as me.”

“Hm. Good news. It is a requirement for citizenship in Russia to be ‘freakish’ about hockey.”

“Is it?”

“No, Shane,” Svetlana smiled softly. “Ah, you are adorable. I can see why Ilyusha was losing his mind.”

“He was?”

“Mhm. Jane from Montreal has *always* been a priority for him,” Svetlana shook her head.

“Now that I know for sure that Jane is Shane... I wonder why you were not Holly instead? Holly. Hollander. It is much more clever.”

“He’s Lily on my phone.”

“...Lily? Not Rose? Rosie? You two are terrible,” she shook her head, disappointed. “Your baby is going to be a hockey prodigy with an awful name.”

“Zamboni Hollander-Rozanov will be very loved and very bullied at school.”

Svetlana’s face crinkled as she laughed, looking over at him with an immediate fondness.

Shane couldn’t help but feel a little warm himself. “You-”

The sound of his phone ringing cut him off.

For a moment he was certain it was Ilya checking in on him already- but as he looked down at the screen he saw that it was an unknown number.

“...That’s a fucking Boston area code.” Shane noted, feeling a little like his heart was going to fall out of his ass.

Svetlana’s smile was practically Cheshire. “I told you I’m always right.”

Chapter End Notes

nearly burst a blood vessel trying not to mention how beautiful svetlana is in every paragraph of this chapter bc it started to sound like shane was in love with her or something nope its me svetlana do u like chopped australian bitches hmu

Chapter 10

Being back in Montreal felt like the end of an era in a way. Being an Ottawa native, Montreal was something of a home away from home for him. A vibrant neighbour. A rebellious cousin. Shane had always had a lot of love for the city itself.

For the nigh-seven years he had played for the Metro, he'd never been bored- he'd never been unhappy. He'd given his all. He'd played his best. He'd done everything right... And yet even before the news got out, he'd *known* that they would not lend him the patience he was owed. As he looked out at the cityscape from his apartment, he couldn't help but just see it as any other place now. There was no gradual change of heart- fond one day and weary the next.

This entire city had turned on him and now it was time for him to move on too.

The paperwork had been finalized yesterday. He was *officially* a Boston Raider- set to fulfill his duties as soon as he was able... Which meant that Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov were *officially* teammates. That part hadn't fully set in just yet. It probably wouldn't until the two of them were on the ice together in earnest. Even still, it sent a trill of anticipation down his spine.

"Jackie said she'd come over with Arthur to watch the game with me," Shane cleared his throat, watching as Ilya neatly stacked Shane's books into a nearby cardboard box. "Please don't kill her husband on live television."

The Raiders were playing against Montreal again tonight. Naturally, Ilya was out for blood. He'd been pacing around all day methodically packing Shane's heaviest items with all the terse intensity of a soldier.

"No promises," Ilya paused, turning back to look at him. "I did not know you and Pike's wife were close."

"I've been uh, texting her with some of my questions," Shane scratched his head, his cheeks going a little red. "She reached out after I spoke to Hayden... Told me she knew a thing or two if I needed any help."

"That is nice of her."

"Not entirely," Shane said with a grimace. "I think they both assume I'll be here with 'Lily' packing stuff up."

"Ah. An inside woman... And inside baby," Ilya nodded, impressed. "Very clever."

The pair of them had driven up yesterday to get a head start on packing up his apartment. Now that Shane knew he was bound for Boston in earnest, he was desperate to bring all his things back there; his special chiropractic pillows and perfectly shaped spoons... His mugs and his trophies and his training gear... If Shane hadn't basically been living at Ilya's for the

past few weeks already he would have been scared shitless at the concept of intermingling their things. Now, he was just relieved they wouldn't have to decorate two nurseries.

"I'll have to come out with it eventually but tonight is not the night. I'm tired and this city fucking hates me now," Shane sighed. "Just try not to make them hate *you* more than they already do, okay?"

"Again. No promises," Ilya closed up another cardboard box with a flourish. "Montreal did not show you mercy, so why should I?"

"Ilya, it's just business," even to himself Shane's words sounded like dull platitudes but at this point he was genuinely worried Ilya was going to set fire to the whole of Montreal or something.

"It was *your* business and they used it against you."

"Believe me, I know," Shane assured with a sigh. "Look...I tell you what, you get through this game without killing anyone. I'll let you do *whatever* you want with me."

"Hm..." Ilya seemed to be tempted by the arrangement, approaching Shane with soft, languid steps. "...Whatever I want?"

"Of course."

"I want to fuck you in Metro locker room."

Shane's face dropped. "Absolutely not."

"You said whatever I want!" Ilya whined. "That is what I want."

"Oh I'm sure," Shane rolled his eyes. "I meant I'd suck your dick in the shower or something, Ilya, fuck."

"Why would I waste such a good promise on something you were already going to do?" Ilya cocked his head to the side.

"Fuck you."

"Yes! That is what I want to do! In Metro locker room!"

"You know what?" Shane threw his hands up in exasperation. "I take it back, I'd rather you kill those assholes. You're *not* fucking me in the Metro's locker room."

"Ahhh," Ilya smiled. "My plan all along. You are now accessory to murder. Can be in prison cell together."

"If I was your accomplice they wouldn't send us to the same jail let alone put us in the same cell."

"Please stop talking, Hollander. You are ruining sexy fantasy."

“Sexy fantasy of us being in prison together?”

“Hm. You’d look good in orange.”

“We can’t have a baby in jail, Ilya.”

“You are afraid I would trade her for cigarettes?”

Shane fixed him with a look. “Don’t act like you aren’t trying to quit smoking. I’ve *seen* all those nicotine patches in your drawers.”

Ilya’s expression twitched upward. “Does not matter if I quit. Cigarettes are currency in prison, you know this. I could use them to trade for better, less Canadian baby.”

“If you didn’t want a Canadian baby then maybe you shouldn’t have fucked a Canadian,” Shane challenged, his face close enough to Ilya’s that he could see the light reflecting off his eyelashes.

Ilya grinned. He always liked it when Shane talked back.

They were *both* acutely aware of that fact, actually.

Not much packing got done after that.

“Am I holding him okay?”

“Shane, relax, you’re fine,” Jackie laughed, watching with great amusement as Shane pedantically supported Arthur Pike’s tiny baby head with his left hand. He’d never been *particularly* good at holding babies. In fact, he suspected Jackie was aware of this and had volunteered her fresh son as a training device for him- which was honestly very kind of her. Stupid, but kind. “I’ve held every single one of your kids. I thought I’d be better at it by now.”

The three of them were seated on Shane’s couch with the sports channel playing in the background. The game hadn’t started quite yet, but the commentators had begun their pre-game speculations. He had already heard his name being thrown around quite a bit. It wasn’t overly surprising given the nature of tonight’s game- his old team was facing his new team and it had been all anyone in the sporting world had been talking about recently- the question on everyone’s lips:

Would Shane Hollander be any good after/if he came back?

Everyone had their own opinion to throw into the ring, including his old coach.

In a press conference a few weeks back, he had cited Shane's sabbatical as 'dishonest' and 'manipulative' - insinuating that due to his 'obviously sensitive' disposition he would likely retire and never return to the ice... That in putting him on waivers they were putting the Metro's best interest first. The words hadn't been much of a shock to him. Theriault had been coaching for three decades and was about a million years old. His views were old-fashioned, as were his methods. Shane was used to it.

Ilya, on the other hand, had gotten so angry listening to the guy talk shit that he'd had to go outside and chain smoke for a couple hours to cool off.

Shane tuned out the presenter's voices now, his eyes flicking from the TV screen back to the baby in his arms. Arthur had woken up from his slumber and was watching him with his big brown eyes. He really was a cute baby- all chubby cheeks and gummy smiles. His finger grazed over Arthur's cheek, a smile of his own emerging on his face.

Click.

Shane turned to Jackie. For just a moment he'd completely forgotten she was there- forgot that the baby in his arms wasn't his own.

For just a moment, he felt distraught over the thought.

"Am I holding him that weirdly?"

"No, no," Jackie lowered her phone, sheepish as Shane's own chimed in the background. "It just made such a cute picture. The two of you."

When Shane opened the attachment, he could see what Jackie meant. It *was* a cute picture. Sickeningly sweet actually. The yellow glow from the lighting above washed the entire scene in a warm nostalgic hue. His smile was small but genuine as he held the tiny little human very calmly and carefully in his arms, resting him softly against his own rounded stomach.

"I look like those spouses in action movies that die tragically before the story even starts," Shane noted, his eyes still fixed on the image.

"You should send it to your 'Lily'..." Jackie suggested slyly. "Wherever he is."

"Very subtle," Shane gave her a weak glare. "He's at work."

It wasn't technically a lie.

Jackie slumped, defeated. "Ugh... Me and Hayden are dying to meet him."

“Yeah...” Shane trailed off with a wince. “Today was just bad timing. His schedule is all over the place.”

Jackie nodded, far more understanding than her husband would have been. “Is he a doctor?”

“No.”

“Nurse?”

“No.”

“Uh... Gas station attendant?”

“No?”

“What? You said his schedule was fucky!” Jackie shrugged. “You need to give me something to bring back to my husband, Shay.”

“Fine,” Shane relented. “He... is European.”

Jackie blinked at him, unimpressed. “That’s all you’re giving me?”

“For now,” Shane lifted his gaze back toward the television, the referee’s whistle echoing through the speakers. The players took to the ice in their game jerseys. “We’re starting.”

“You’re not off the hook, Shane Hollander.”

Shane caught sight of Ilya almost immediately, his eyes seeking him out. His posturing was tense as he tore a warpath through the ice. “Believe me, I know.”

The match was an absolute blood bath to watch. All the players on both sides were too busy ramming each other into the boards to bother chasing the puck properly. Even with the typical broadcast muffling, Shane could hear the way the crowd roared in discontent. The Montreal fans had been treating his departure as a betrayal since the second they’d heard of it. In a way, it was. The decision makers had fucked them over just as much as Shane himself... The only difference was that they were directing their anger at the wrong person. To them, it was all Shane’s fault; Shane’s fault for getting put on waivers. Shane’s fault for getting traded. Shane’s fault for getting traded *to Boston*... As if he hadn’t fucking *loved* being a Metro. It didn’t matter. It was all his fault.

In a way, maybe it was. Maybe this decision of his was ill-timed, irresponsible... Stupid. Maybe he was betraying *himself* too.

...But it just wasn’t fair. Everyone else got to start a family. Everyone else got to be proud of it. Everyone else got to keep their careers. Their teams. It was different for him. He knew that... But it shouldn’t be *this different*.

Shane kept pensively silent beside Jackie, watching the two teams rip into each other like wild wolves- more frosty fist fight than hockey game. He didn't regret his decision, but he wished he was out there in the fray, proving himself. Then *everyone* would be able to see he wasn't making a mistake. Not just him.

By the time the first intermission was called, both teams were still sporting donuts. Zero on zero. Neither side was playing well, but there was a more intense bloodlust coming from the Raiders that led Shane to believe that they would hopefully pull ahead once they actually remembered they had a game to play.

"I think Boston is defending your honour tonight," Jackie noted, wincing as she watched her husband get checked against the boards for the fifth time this game.

"I don't know why. It's not like I know any of them," Shane replied, tense.

"You haven't gone to watch a practice or anything?"

"Well, I'm kinda... Like this right now," Shane gestured to his stomach with a frown.

"And?" Jackie blinked. "It's not like they don't know you're pregnant."

"I guess so," Shane supposed. "It's just... It's harder. For me."

"I'm sorry that you can't just have this in the same way everyone else does."

"It's fine." Shane said, but his eyes were burning a little.

It wasn't fine.

By full time, Boston had beaten Montreal by the skin of their teeth. They'd been tied until the final five minutes of play wherein Ilya scored the winning goal. Shane was more relieved than victorious as he watched Ilya send off his team into the locker rooms, his hands clasping each and every one of theirs with gratitude and appreciation. He really was a great captain.

Shane swallowed, a thought bubbling up into his brain. He'd be *his* captain too now.

He was sure the two of them would be very normal and not horny about that fact.

Ilya lingered on the ice a while longer, skating slowly over to the side of the rink where a reporter was waiting. Shane watched in silence as she asked him a series of run of the mill

post-game questions about the outcome tonight. Ilya answered as he always did; confidently and succinctly, even when the inquiries got a little less typical.

“I’m sure we’re all wondering what your feelings are about your rival, Shane Hollander, joining your team soon. Could you give us a little insight? Any tension there?”

Shane froze.

Ilya didn’t even flinch.

“Hm. No tension. It is big shame that Metro think taking break to have baby is worse than losing to us forever now. Is a great deal for Boston though. Two-for-one Hollanders, yes?”

“And you have no concerns? Over whether he’ll return to the ice at all?”

Ilya glanced at the camera then, almost like he was speaking to Shane himself. “None.”

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

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

Four in the morning was a decidedly ungodly hour to be conscious. Too late for a bender but still too dark out for the early birds. It was an in-between sort of stasis that only existed in the waking minds of very few people.

Thanks to Shane Hollander and his nigh-violent cravings, Ilya had become one of those very few people.

Boston was quiet at this time of the night. All the party-goers had passed out and all the morning joggers were still lacing up their sneakers in their dreams. It felt like the only other person in the world that was awake right now was Mr. Nguyen, the owner of the earliest opening bakery in all of downtown Boston.

Ilya had come across his shop one night after Shane had sent him out into the cold once more- this time, in search of an eclair- a fucking *eclair*, of all things! The glow from the bakery's kitchen had been like a lighthouse in the cloudy distance, beckoning Ilya forward. It was there that he'd first caught sight of the little old man working away, icing cakes and folding pastry on his lonesome.

He'd seemed surprised to see Ilya there, but not in the way most people were surprised to see him.

"I have no cash" he'd said, his eyes wide.

He hadn't recognised Ilya Rozanov at all- he'd thought he was robbing him.

To be fair, Ilya did have what Shane called RRF or, 'Resting Russian Face,' which basically meant he didn't smile unless he was actually happy- unlike stupid Americans and weak-willed Canadians. He had to assume the black hoodie and beanie hadn't helped his case much either... Nor the fact that it was four in the fucking morning. Either way, he wasn't backing down now.

Ilya held his hands up in a soft surrender. "You have... Eclairs?"

"...Oh." Mr Nguyen's shoulders eased a touch, his expression turning apologetic. "Yes, yes. Freshly iced," he gestured to the array of desserts that were resting at the back of the store. They looked fucking delicious, as did everything else here- droves above the saturated sweetness of the twenty-four-hour chain stores Ilya thought he would once again have to resort to.

"I'll take two," Ilya blinked, pausing to examine the other items that were slowly being stocked into the pastry case.

"Of course."

"...And twenty croissants." He had practice today. Maybe he ought to be a good boyfriend *and* a good captain.

"...Twenty?"

"If you do not have that many, is okay."

"No, no," Mr. Nguyen seemed pleased with his patronage now that he knew he wasn't going to rob him blind. "Just was not expecting business so early."

"You are not open?"

"If I am in here, I am open," Mr. Nguyen said reasonably.

It was hard to argue with that logic.

After that, it became something of a routine. One or two nights a week, Shane would wake him up with a craving for some kind of pastry or sweet and Ilya would see what he could do about it. Mr. Nguyen didn't *always* have what Shane was after, but he often made helpful suggestions and substitutions that ensured his boyfriend's satisfaction. Ilya couldn't be more thankful for his help... Even if it did sort of feel like he was cheating on Jim from Walmart.

"Heo! Early today!"

Heo. When Ilya had first heard Mr. Nynguyen call him that, he'd assumed he was calling him a *hoe*. This of course, would have been correct- if not a little insulting. Luckily, Ilya eventually deduced that the kindly old man was not slutshaming him and was instead using a Vietnamese nickname for him that was usually reserved for children... Which he supposed was *probably* better.

At the very least it sounded more endearing.

"Mr. Nguyen," Ilya eyed the half-full pastry case, the enchanting smell of the baking bread easing into his sinuses. After a bit of searching, his gaze at last landed on the chocolate chip cookies. "You are life saver."

"Ah, it is a cookie day today?"

Ilya nodded. "That is what the boss told me. I will take half a dozen and... two loaves of whatever you have finished baking."

Mr. Nguyen nodded, already taking the cookies out for him. "Baby must be due soon, yes?"

“Ten more weeks,” Ilya smiled. He’d blurted to him a couple visits back that he was going to be a father. He wasn’t allowed to tell many other people so it felt good to finally say the words out loud. It wasn’t like Mr. Nguyen knew who he was- or cared for that matter. To him, he was just some pushover husband.

It wasn’t that far from the truth, in all honesty.

Starting tomorrow his whole team would be away from home for two entire weeks before ending their trip in Chicago. Usually, Ilya didn’t mind the travel, he liked seeing new places and playing in new rinks... Right now, though, he was fucking dreading it. Shane had *just* finished moving all of his stuff here from Montreal and now Ilya had to leave him all alone with no one. It was awful... And terrifying... And maybe the worst thing ever, no hyperbole. The two of them had avoided talking about it as much as possible, but the inevitability of it all was hard to deny.

Luckily, they were pretty good at leaving things unsaid.

By the time Ilya had returned home, Shane was already awake, showered and in the kitchen restlessly making power play diagrams out of cheerios.

Things like this were par for the course these days. After Shane’s future in major league hockey had been assured, Ilya had sort of hoped, (and prayed,) that that meant he would mellow out a little but it sort of just... Never happened. The third trimester was supposed to be the calm before the storm but no one in the world could tell Shane Hollander that. He’d been on a journey of self improvement since he was a teenager and nothing would ever stand in his way. It was obvious Shane missed hockey. For months he’d been crawling out of his skin like an addict jonesing for a hit but he had always had an impossible determination about him- dedicated to his craft to a tee. The tiny fact that his craft was essentially an injury factory meant he was being increasingly *weird* about the way he did things these days. Once the usual training maneuvers got too difficult or dangerous for him to, well, maneuver in his current state he’d gotten... creative.

“...What?”

“You have lost the plot, Hollander,” Ilya placed the baked goods onto the counter, jostling the aforementioned cheerios out of place.

“Hey!” Shane squawked, adjusting them back to where they were. “I have not. It’s important to keep my mind in the game. I’ll get sloppy otherwise.”

“I know you have whiteboard for power plays in box somewhere here.”

“I do. It’s in the study,” Shane confirmed, “But I like making them move. It’s better for visualisation,” he shifted a single cheerio forward with a quiet contemplation as if to prove his point, nodding along like he didn’t look batshit crazy right now.

“...You are supposed to be relaxing.”

“I’m sitting down!”

‘Sitting’ was not the word Ilya would use. Shane was actually just standing in front of a kitchen barstool, hovering his ass over it while he loomed over the counter. This action as a whole, rather succinctly summed up Shane Hollander's idea of 'relaxing,' to a tee and it did nothing to ease Ilya's decidedly uneasy mind. He had no doubt his hair would be grey by the time Shane had this baby.

“I think your mother should come stay. While I am gone," Ilya frowned.

“...I’ll be fine on my own, Ilya. You’re being paranoid.”

As if to sweeten the proposition, Ilya fished a cookie out of the paper bag and held it out toward Shane like he was feeding a horse. “Mhm. When was last time you went outside?”

“Yesterday,” Shane told him, taking the cookie out of Ilya's hand with a glare. “...I brought the mail in.”

“*Shane.*”

“I know,” Shane rolled his eyes. “It’s just...” He trailed off. “It’s hard.”

"It is hard, but you are brave... Look, I make deal with you, if you come say hi to team today, I will not ask your mother to stay with you while I am gone.”

“Huh? As in introduce myself to the Raiders?” Shane seemed dubious. “Like this?”

“Well maybe you put pants on.” Ilya smacked Shane’s ass for good measure. “But yes. Like this.”

“But-”

“It would be good for team to meet you officially,” Ilya knew full well how much Shane was struggling with going out in public these days- the leak from the press had really shaken him, but getting him to meet the Raiders was something best done sooner rather than later. They already thought he was some tight-ass priss that was ‘too good’ to see them. If they waited until Shane was up and ready to play, their team dynamic would be *fucked*. At least this way, Shane would get some outside time and the Raiders would be able to see how delightful he was. Two birds, one stone. "They've been asking when you're coming down."

“Yeah, I’m sure they’re *dying* to meet the salary cap hog that can’t even get on the ice yet.”

“You are second best player in league,” Ilya insisted, watching with familiar amusement as Shane rolled his eyes. “Some of the rookies still have your poster on their walls.”

“Did you hear me and Jackie talking or something? These guys are gonna be my teammates. *Our* teammates, Ilya,” Shane emphasised. “If they see me as I am now, they’re going to think I’m weak or something.”

“If they think that after everything that you have done then they are stupid.”

"Are they stupid or are they just making a logical assumption?" Shane challenged. "This isn't the appearance of someone trying to get their jersey number in the hall of fame. This is the appearance of a liability."

Ilya frowned, drawing closer to him. Their bodies used to be able to stand fully flush against one another but now there was a literal bump in the way. Ilya couldn't bring himself to be disappointed by this. In fact, it made his heart soar with anticipation. He rested his hand atop Shane's. "Yes, you look different. Having baby will do that."

Shane huffed out a self deprecating little laugh as he leant into Ilya. So soft and gentle. "And I wouldn't take it back for the world, but it *is* a lot sometimes."

"It is... No pressure if you do not want to go." Ilya relented because he was a giant pushover. "But hiding in house is not helping."

"I'm not *hiding*..." Judging by the tense line that Shane made with his mouth though, he knew Ilya was right. He eyed his cheerio diagram with a thoughtful expression. "...Fine. *Fine*," he caved, popping another piece of cookie in his mouth. "I'll introduce myself to the team today, but you've got to promise not to be weird."

Ilya shook his head, incredulous. He leant forward and took a bite of the cookie still in Shane's hand. "Why would I be weird?"

Ilya was being weird.

He felt so stiff walking into the locker room with Shane trailing behind him. He wasn't exactly *nervous* perse, more so just tense.

The Raiders had *mostly* been pleased to hear that Shane had been brought to them but there was still plenty of animosity there too. Shane Hollander had been the face of Montreal for years and that would be a hard visual to shake for some of the more seasoned players. Ilya had no doubt that the transition would be fine eventually... But, if one of the guys gave Shane shit today, Ilya wasn't sure if he'd be able to keep his cool. He was like a live wire just daring someone to touch him. Or Shane, for that matter.

"Alright assholes," Ilya's voice echoed through the space. "We have very special visitor today, yes. Grand Captain of all Boy Scouts and Princess of Wales, Shane Hollander."

"Thank you for the introduction, Rozanov," Shane glared at him before returning his stare to the full room of his snickering future comrades. "Hi." He was in an oversized hoodie, another one of Ilya's that didn't disguise much these days. He'd been fretting about it all morning but Ilya thought he looked fan-fucking-tastic. "I, uh, I know I've seen a lot of you from the other side of the line... But I wanted to formally introduce myself as your new teammate."

All of the attention was entirely on Shane now, on his appearance- The Raiders were sizing him up like they weren't quite sure what to make of him. Ilya had anticipated Shane would be all twitchy and scared in front of them now, but he was oddly determined looking out into the sea of heads and padding. It was impressive- this mask he seemed able to don when he addressed a team.

"...Bout time you showed your face, Hollander." Marlowe was the first to speak out of everyone, shucking on his practice jersey. "Welcome to the team."

"Yeah, we were wondering if you'd ever make an appearance."

"Good to see you still have some balls."

"You're in for a surprise, Montreal. We do things differently here in Boston."

"I'm looking forward to it," Shane replied, entirely truthful. His gaze steadily shifted over the entire team as his voice carried throughout the room. "I won't let you guys down. I promise."

There was just something so earnest about Shane Hollander. It was what made him *Canada's* sweetheart, not just Ilya's.

Unfortunately, it couldn't sway *everyone*.

Gagnon, a large defenseman from Quebec, eyed Shane with a layer of distaste. "That is if you make it back on the ice at all."

A few huffs of agreement followed the rebuke.

"...Right," Shane seemed to expect this kind of response. After his condition got blasted out into the ether, it had been all anyone had been speculating on. "The leaks are true. I am having a kid. I'm sure you could tell just by looking at me," he kept his voice shockingly steady. "I'm not much use to you guys right now and I do apologise for that."

Gagnon scoffed.

Ilya resisted the urge to sock him in the jaw.

Shane was so nice! So fucking nice! Why would anyone be mean to someone this nice? Ilya gritted his teeth, unable to fully hold his tongue. "Is fine, Hollander. Gagnon is not much use to us either. He does not have good excuse though."

Gagnon's indignant rage coloured his features pink as the rest of the team sniggered at him. It was easy to turn the tide in a room like this. To many of the men on this team, it wasn't so much about who a person was and more about whether they could 'take it as well as they could give it,' a sentiment that honestly sounded far gayer than anything Ilya and Shane had ever done to, and with each other.

"It's cold what Montreal did to you, dude," Marlowe piped up. "You made them, like, not suck."

“Montreal have never sucked. They’re one of the most consistent teams in sports history,” Shane said matter-of-factly, which earned him a series of well-deserved boos.

“C’mon, Hollander we’re giving you the benefit of the doubt, can you not jerk off your old team in front of us?”

“I said they were consistent and that they didn’t suck,” Shane repeated. “I didn’t say they were *good*.”

“But if they didn’t dump your ass you’d still be with them, right?”

“Probably,” Shane supposed. “But they did and Boston swooped in to save the day.”

A few whoops sounded out amongst the men.

“Yes, yes... So whether you like it or not,” Ilya shot daggers at Gagnon. “Shane Hollander is a Boston Raider now and if you can get past his boring personality and his annoying voice maybe you will learn something from him.”

“...Learn what?” Stephens, a left-winger called from the back. “How to get knocked up and put on waivers?”

Ilya froze. Shane didn't even flinch.

Again. He was used to it by now.

“I mean, sure, Stephens, if you want to I can teach you how to do that,” Shane replied, his voice entirely neutral. “...But more importantly I could teach you how to score a fucking goal for once too.”

The *entire* locker room burst into surprised laughter at that.

Golden Boy Shane Hollander knowing how to hit back... It was like Christmas had come early.

Ilya often forgot that Shane had been in these locker rooms just as long as he had. Locker rooms that were different from his but the same in so many ways. He hated that his team wasn’t perfect- hated that he couldn’t ensure Shane’s transition to the Raiders was smooth- hated that the few bad apples amongst them were all so fucking loud... But he loved how unwaveringly brave Shane was anyway, he *loved* Shane.

In fact, it was getting increasingly more difficult not to grab him by the collar and kiss him right now so he just cleared his throat instead. “Alright, no more talking. We go practice kicking ass now,” he turned to Shane as nonchalantly as he could managed=. “You stay? Or go home? Your choice.”

There was a renewed sense of anticipation thrumming through Shane now. Ilya could see it. It was different from the restless anxiety he’d been displaying for months on end. Fresh. Clean. Hopeful. “I’ll stay.”

Chapter End Notes

i wish regina george wasnt such an iconic movie character bc regina would be SUCH a great name for hollanov kid since they met in regina saskatchewan ough alas

also yuri would be great for a son too bc its a japanese AND russian name (thanks yuri on ice) + also incorporates both their mothers names (YUna and iRIIna)
but head yaoi 1 and 2 of 2025 naming their son yuri is just too funny

i also dont think i will use irina, apparently in russia (and a bunch of other countries) its more disrespectful/ bad luck than commemorative

Basically I'm trying to go for something thats;

- simple, but nice

- sentimental or thematic

- steering clear of anything OVERLY russian/japanese inspired (i just dont think a guy named shane that only eats turkey breast and kale would get fun with it) but subtle nods are great

Happy to hear suggestions for Zamboni Hollander-Rozanov from you guys!

Chapter 12

The Raiders had beaten New York on their home turf tonight, a wonderful start to their lengthy round of away matches and a *massive* morale booster for the Boston team as a whole.

Ilya wished he could relish in the victory with them- wished he could feel some other way about it other than just... homesick- but it felt almost impossible.

"I think all of New York wants you dead," Shane told him over the phone, his voice crackling a touch as the reception dipped and ducked.

Ilya was back in his hotel room near the Admiral's home rink, his feet splayed out on the bed like nobody's business. He hadn't taken his sneakers off yet and could practically hear a little mini Shane Hollander on his shoulder bitching at him about it.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd *longed* home like he did now. It had to have been before his mother passed away because it certainly wasn't after.

"New York will have to catch me to kill me which they cannot do because they are all so fucking slow," Ilya drawled. "I think Scott Hunter broke a hip tonight trying to keep up."

Shane snorted. "You're too harsh on the guy. He played well."

"Yeah, for *Scott Hunter*," Ilya let out a breath. He had left for New York this morning and wouldn't be back for half a month. Shane had been calm and collected about it. He hadn't cried- just kissed him long and slow in their bedroom doorway and told him he'd be waiting here for him when he got back. Ilya hated it. Even now he just couldn't shake the uneasiness swirling about in his stomach.

His brain wouldn't relent on the fact that the last time he'd seen his mother alive, she'd told him that exact same thing.

"I'll be waiting here for you, Ilyusha."

That time, he'd been off to Sochi for some gruelling hockey program his father had forced him to go to. Ilya hadn't wanted to leave her, but he had. He shouldn't have, but he had.

By the time he'd come home, MVP trophy in hand, she was cold- waiting for someone to find her, waiting here for him just like she'd said.

"...How are you feeling?"

In his mind, he knew he was being ridiculous. He knew that these broad strokes he was painting weren't helpful to anyone, especially himself, and yet he could not rid them from his brain any easier than he could stop breathing.

"I feel the same as the last time you asked me... Which was ten minutes ago. I'm fine."

"Hm. Put baby on phone. Will be much better conservationist."

"You mean conversationalist."

"What the fuck did I say?"

"Conservationist. It's like... Someone that cares about the environment."

"English is such bullshit language," Ilya rubbed his temples. "...You are sure you are fine?"

"Ilya," Shane reprimanded. "You're not missing anything here, I promise."

"I am missing *you*."

Distance had been a large aspect of their old relationship but proximity was what defined it now. A return to form like this was not comforting or nostalgic to either of them- it was just a reminder of how much time they'd already wasted- how much time they were *wasting*.

"Shut up," Shane made an amused noise over the phone line. "I think the kid misses you too- been keeping me awake kicking me at all hours of the night."

Ilya should be there. Ilya *wanted* to be there... And the fact that he wasn't was making him fucking miserable.

"No good," Ilya tutted. "Only I'm allowed to keep you awake all night."

"Yeah, yeah."

"Two whole weeks where I cannot touch you, Hollander, what are you going to do?"

"Dunno," Shane's reply sounded a bit breathier than before. "What are *you* going to do?"

Cry, probably. Ilya thought to himself. In the silence that followed Shane seemed like he was thinking something similar. "...I wish you were here or I wish I was there."

"You would have wanted to come?"

"No," Shane admitted. "Well, not yet. You were right. Meeting the guys did help but I still don't really know them very well..."

"The rookies will not stop talking about you," Ilya admitted. "They asked me if you would be at all our home rink practices from now on."

"...And what did you tell them?"

"I tell them it is up to you."

"Very diplomatic," Shane supposed. "Well I can't disappoint them now, can I?"

"Of course not."

Practice yesterday had gone as smoothly as it possibly could have. Shane had stuck by the boards and spoken to some of the younger more receptive players for a while. He wasn't overly good at articulating but he had a sharp eye and a persnickety need to correct fucking everything and everyone he saw. The newer players had taken to him immediately... He *was* the Golden Boy of hockey, after all. It was hard not to gravitate toward such a blinding light-hard not to want to get as close as possible and bask in his greatness. Ilya would know.

By the end of the day, Shane had a whole legion of fanboys following him around like cute little ducklings, asking him for tips and pointers on how to improve their speed and accuracy-sheepishly requesting autographs and trying to show off for him. Shane had put on an air of exasperation over all of it but Ilya could tell he'd fucking *loved* it. It wasn't just hockey that he missed, after all. Shane Hollander also just very much enjoyed being fawned over like some sort of deity... He very much missed being *Shane Hollander*.

"Did Pfiefer end up unfucking his backhand?"

"Yes. Thanks to you," Ilya replied. "He made very good assist tonight."

"I'm glad he took my feedback to heart."

"When Shane Hollander tells you to do something, you do it."

"In that case, I'm *telling* you to stop worrying about me."

"I am not *worried* about you," Ilya lied. "I just miss you."

"I miss you too, but it's not like we can do much about it. This is just part of the game."

Ilya could hear Shane stifle a yawn. They'd been talking for hours at this point but it had felt like mere minutes to him. "Are you tired?"

"No," Shane said, a little too quickly for it to be the truth.

Ilya could feel a lump in his throat begin to form. He didn't want to leave him yet. He didn't want to stop listening to the sound of his voice. A dark, pathetic part of him was desperate to ask Shane to leave his phone on as he slept just so Ilya could hear him breathe. "I will call you again tomorrow then, yes?"

"M'okay. Love you."

"I love you too. Very much." *Too much.*

Click.

The dial tone rang out against the empty hotel room, it felt like the only sound in the world right now.

Ilya felt red hot tears prick his eyes.

He wasn't fully sure why.

Pittsburgh had been a rough game. The Raiders still came out victorious, of course, but it didn't feel like much of a win. A one point lead always felt more like a fluke than a sure thing to Ilya. It was less about skill and more about chance. Even still they'd needed all the luck they could get tonight. Ilya hadn't been much help on the ice this time around. He went through the motions, he paid his dues but his heart just hadn't been in it. Even his team had noticed there was something up with him. They kept shooting him weary glances like they couldn't quite determine whether they should say anything or not. Since they'd won, they'd likely leave him be for now. Ilya appreciated that.

It wasn't like he could tell them what was bothering him anyway.

"Good game tonight, Rozy," Marlowe called from behind, slapping him on the shoulder. There was a tentative air to his posturing that hadn't been there before.

"Was it?"

"We won, didn't we?"

Ilya made a noise of noncommittal agreement, fishing his phone out of his bag. He felt restless. Agitated. Strange... And the feeling only escalated when he realised it was ringing. For a moment, his heart dropped. If Shane was calling instead of texting then it was probably something super serious. Was he sick? Was it the baby? Was he hurt? He-

Oh.

It wasn't Shane calling him at all, actually. It was Alexei.

Ilya didn't think he'd ever been relieved to see that his brother was attempting to contact him. If his math was correct, it had only just turned morning in Moscow- a complete opposite to the darkening skies and city lights outside the stadium that Ilya and his team had just played at. He stared down coldly at the blocky cyrillic flashing on his phone.

"Montreal Jane?" Marlowe cocked his head.

"No. My brother."

These days Ilya had been getting less and less inclined to answer his calls. In fact, he couldn't remember the last time he'd actually picked one up. Even as children they hadn't gotten along. Alexei was seven years older than Ilya, just enough for a clear divide to form between them. It had only grown further after their mother had died. Ilya had been in pieces and Alexei had been too coked out to properly care. He hadn't remembered much about her funeral but he remembered not seeing him there.

The topic of family had been on Ilya's mind a lot lately. It was hard not to think about it when his once empty house was slowly filling up with cute little baby clothes and all the furniture that came along with it. Soon enough, he would be a father, just like his father before him... Just like his brother.

Earlier on, Ilya had wondered if the concept would bring him closer to them- make him understand why they were the way that they were.

If anything, it made him understand them less- made him hate them more.

In a way, that was freeing too.

He'd spent so much of this time fearing that he would become like them... That the situation before him would cause a transformation into something cruel and callous- that Shane would become his tortured mother; dreams crushed and wings clipped, her husband holding the shears. He worried that maybe, before him, before Alexei, that his parents really did care for each other and it just hadn't been enough.

Ilya watched the call breathe and die in his hands, fading to black before his eyes. He had been nothing but a distant ATM to his family for the past seven years and he was fine with that. It was better than being there. Especially when everything he'd ever wanted was in Boston now anyway.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

dw we're going back to long chapters after this i just wanted to do a little offcut to bridge the gaps ;) enjoy!

“Are you fucking Ilya Rozanov?”

That was the first question that came out of Hayden’s lips after Shane answered his call. No *hi*, no *hello*, no *how are you?* Straight out of the gate it was just, ‘*are you fucking Ilya Rozanov?*’

In all honesty, it was a question Shane had at least sort of been expecting, considering the fact that he *very much was*. Even still it took him by surprise that it was *Hayden* of all people asking him. Pike was one of his best friends but he was not the smartest cookie in the jar. If anyone was going to cotton on about him and Ilya it’d be his lovely, far more observant wife... Or maybe even one of his older children... Not *Hayden himself*.

“Yeah.” Shane cleared his throat. There was no reason for him to lie. Even if he still sort of wanted to. “Yes. I am.”

“Are you fucking *serious?*”

“No, we just went over this. I’m *fucking* Ilya Rozanov.”

Hayden sputtered on the other side of the line like he had just been gutted like a fish. “So your baby daddy- your *Boston Lily* is Ilya fucking Rozanov?”

“Yeah.”

There was a weighty silence on the other side of the line that lasted an eternity. For a moment, Shane worried that his good friend had dropped dead. “...Hayden?”

“I need a moment with all this.”

“You’re the one that asked?!”

“I didn’t think I was *right!*” Hayden squeaked. “I was mostly joking. I thought it was funny that all the little clues you’d given us about Boston Lily *also* described Ilya Rozanov. I didn’t think that meant it *was* Ilya Rozanov. Shit, man... God. What the fuck? You *hate* him.”

“I obviously don’t, Hayden. We’re having a baby together.”

“Don’t fucking remind me!”

Shane looked at the clock on the wall. It was nearing eight at night here. He’d been dead tired and intensely irritable for hours at this point. Before Hayden called, he’d been about to call it a night and go to bed early.

Right now he was wondering why he hadn’t.

“Well... It’s the truth. I don’t know what to tell you.”

“What makes you think *Ilya Rozanov* of all people would be a suitable father to your child?”

Shane sucked in a breath. Ilya hadn’t been home for close to two weeks at this point and it was making him fucking miserable. Maybe if he’d been here pissing Shane off like he usually did he would have had more lenience with Hayden right now- but his old teammate was shit out of luck and pushing it all the same. “Hayden, you need to stop talking.”

“What? You can’t possibly think he’s got a single nurturing bone in his body? The guys a major dick-”

“You’re the one being a major dick right now,” Shane seethed.

“Shane-”

“Hayden,” Shane snapped. “I mean it. He’s really important to me. You need to lay off.”

“Alright, alright. Fine,” Hayden relented. He took a breath. On the other side of the line, Shane took a few deep breaths of his own. “How... How long have you been,” he winced. He fucking *winc*ed. “Together?”

“Save it,” Shane scowled. All along he’d known this would go poorly. He was just thankful he was too pissed off and tired to be sad about it.

“No, no. I...” Hayden sighed. “I’m sorry. I’m not *trying* to be a dick.”

“Well you are.”

“It’s just... It’s *Rozanov*.”

“Fucking get over it, Hayden. Or don’t. It doesn’t matter,” Shane was so fucking tired. Any patience he had for this subject had left the second he’d stop being able to see his toes when he looked down. He felt like a big, lumbering, pissed off, depressive bear holding back from ripping his best friend’s head off. These past couple weeks he’d missed Ilya so much that it physically pained him and he hated Hayden for constantly reminding him of it. Ultimately, he knew he was just concerned about him, but right now it just felt like an attack hammering at his heart. “I seriously need to go-”

“I want a redo.”

“What?”

“Redo,” Hayden cleared his throat. “Let me redo.”

“What the fuck-”

“Hello my good friend, Shane Hollander! I have a question to ask you... Are you romantically involved with Ilya Rozanov?”

“Huh?” Shane paused. “...Yes?”

Hayden made a fake noise of surprise over the other side of the line. “Wow. This is surprising news, but if you are happy then I am happy,” he cleared his throat. “How... How was that?”

“Depends how much of it you actually mean.”

“Well I *definitely* mean the part about it being a surprise,” Hayden said. “The part about me being happy...” He trailed off. “I mean, who cares, it’s not like I’m the one that has to wake up next to him.”

Shane would give anything to wake up next to Ilya right now.

“But *you* ’re happy, right?”

Not right now, Shane thought to himself but that had nothing to do with Ilya being in his life. In fact, it had everything to do with the fact that he was currently out of it. “Yes,” Shane told him, because it was easier than saying any of that.

The call ended about as unceremoniously as it started. The two of them bid each other an awkward goodnight with the promise to reconnect the next time the Metros played Boston. Hayden had told him he’d bring Jackie over for a double date- a concept so entirely foreign to Shane that it was *almost* funny... Almost.

A comedy of errors was still a comedy, after all- but it wasn’t one Shane wanted to live in.

It was all fine and good for Hayden to give his reluctant blessing over the phone but it was another thing entirely to do it in front of a smirking Ilya Rozanov. Perhaps with Jackie and him there as a buffer it might be fine. Ilya and him could cook dinner together and the four of them could sit down and talk about whatever adults talk about that isn’t hockey... It had the potential to be a perfectly normal, boring evening if his best friend and his boyfriend behaved themselves.

Yeah.

Not happening.

Ilya Rozanov was an acquired taste and Hayden was the pickiest eater Shane knew.

Chapter 14

Even after months of settling in, Ilya still wasn't *quite* used to having someone to come home to. After so many years of empty rooms and static scenery, it was quite the adjustment to make- but it was very much a welcome one. His house had always seemed cold before, fully detached from his sense of being. It was a place where he slept, a place where he slept *with people*, a place he could call his own but couldn't quite call home.

O'Hare International had been nothing but delays and bad coffee. It had been dark for hours by the time Ilya finally walked through his front door. He'd found Shane sound asleep on their couch not long after. It was clear he had attempted to wait up for him and failed miserably. The sight was so endearing to Ilya that he almost felt like crying just looking at him- living, breathing in front of him. All the tension and unease he'd been feeling these past few weeks melted off him in a wave of near-painful relief, fleeting but warm nevertheless.

Being on the road had been exceedingly hard on the both of them this time around. With the season well and truly kicked into gear, there'd be dozens more weeks like this- whole months spent apart in blank, overly air conditioned hotel rooms and unfamiliar hockey rinks. The thought of it alone made Ilya feel sick with dread.

Shane would join him and the Raiders in earnest *eventually*- but what about before then? They'd discussed it at length multiple times but they still hadn't come to a satisfying conclusion. There was no real established parental leave in the league- and it wasn't like Ilya could take it even if there was. To the team, Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were nothing more than begrudging allies. Shane was vehement about it staying that way as well, at least for now. So much of his private life had been snatched away from him at this point that it felt cruel for Ilya not to indulge him in this.

It felt cruel not to give him everything he ever wanted in this life, in all honesty.

Ilya looked down at Shane, still sound asleep, still snoring on the sofa like it was his full time job. His hands were wrapped around his stomach like he was worried it would scurry away if he didn't hold it there. Ilya wasn't sure he could bear to leave him alone while he was like this again. It honestly might kill him.

His heart thundering, Ilya leant down and kissed Shane on the cheek, trying to rouse him softly. "Shane?" He said gently. "I'm going to carry you to bed, okay?"

"Huh?" Shane said, still groggy. "...Ilya?"

With a careful ease Ilya gingerly slid his arms underneath Shane's body, scooping him up and into his steady hold. It had been a while since Shane had let him pick him up. Ilya knew it was because he was worried he wouldn't be able to carry him now that he was a little heavier. Shane's perception of himself lately bordered on slander. It broke Ilya's heart. He was kind of obsessed with all his new soft edges, as temporary as they were. He just wished Shane felt the same.

“Woah, hey,” Shane mumbled, still coming to. “What the-” he shifted his head a touch, trying to take everything in. “Put me down, I’m too heavy.”

“If you are too heavy then how am I carrying you?” Ilya raised a calculated eyebrow at him. “You are going to be all sore sleeping on the couch like that.”

“I was waiting up for you. I must have fallen asleep.” Shane yawned, his mouth twitching upward into a smile. “Welcome home, Ilya.”

Home.

Ilya didn’t care what Shane told him, Hayden Pike really did just have a naturally punchable face. The second he opened his door to see him and his too-gorgeous-for-him wife standing there, he’d felt his fists itch with anticipation. It had to be something about the way he moved his eyebrows or maybe even the slope of his mouth... Whatever it was, it had Ilya *desperate* to start poking at him.

“Hello.”

Ilya had promised Shane he would be on his best behaviour tonight as long as Pike was too. He would not have to be good for long.

“Holy shit, it really is true.” Hayden blinked at him. “Part of me still sort of thought Shane was fucking with me.”

“Don’t be like that.” Pike’s wife admonished, raising her head to meet Ilya’s gaze. “I’m Jackie, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Ilya.” He nodded, taking her outstretched hand gently. “You did not bring your little Pikes with you?”

“Nah, they’re with my mom for the weekend.” Jackie told him with a smile. “I couldn’t have them tearing up your lovely house.”

“Ah, I would not mind.” Ilya told her. “Please bring them with you next time.”

“Next time?” Hayden scowled.

“Do not worry. You are not invited.” Ilya’s lips curled up into something of a smirk as he stepped away from the entryway to let them through properly. “Please come through.”

Hayden stepped in before he’d even finished speaking, hands in his pockets- inspecting the area with a pinched nose. “Doesn’t look like you’ve done much baby-proofing to this joint.” He frowned. “All these open wall sockets...”

Jackie shot Ilya an apologetic look.

Ilya just grinned back at her. Right now, Hayden Pike was basically giving him the green light to be an asshole and Ilya *loved* being an asshole.

“Still looks like a bachelor pad to me, Rozanov.”

“Of course it does. All my mistresses that come over cannot know I have family.”

Hayden glared at him. "You-"

“Hi guys. Sorry, I was just getting the bread out of the oven.” Shane stepped into view out of the kitchen then, a nervous smile on his face. He’d gone shopping for a new sweater that weekend to wear for tonight- a nice navy blue one that complimented his skin tone very nicely. Ilya liked it on him so much that he’d feel bad about tearing it off later.

“Woah! You’re getting so huge!” Hayden’s attention shifted from Ilya to Shane then, his face lighting up. He clearly hadn’t meant the comment to be an insult but watching the way that Shane’s face dropped after he said it made Ilya contemplate homicide.

Hayden Pike had a *very* punchable face.

“Gee, thanks, Hay,” Shane brushed the comment off as much as he could as Hayden came in for one of those unnecessarily awkward 'bro' side-hugs.

Jackie, on the other hand, decided just to cut her losses and kiss him on the cheek. “How are you settling into Boston?”

“It’s... Different, but okay. The whole visa thing is annoying to deal with though, especially because of...” He gestured to his stomach with an anxious sort of stiffness. “If the kid is born here they’ll be an American citizen, you know.”

“A Russian, a Canadian and an American baby walk into bar...” Ilya grinned, shifting over to Shane’s side like they were a pair of puzzle pieces.

“Babies aren’t allowed in bars, Ilya.” Shane replied flatly.

God, Ilya was so fucking fond of him. His smile only widened. “I know, Shane.”

“You guys are cute.” Jackie cooed, her eyes darting between them. “I should have known you were together after that post-game interview Ilya gave back in Montreal. It was so... *Romantic.*”

Hayden made a gagging noise from beside her.

Shane pointedly ignored him. “I, uh, I hope you guys are hungry. We made *solyanka* for dinner. It’s like a Russian soup. Ilya makes it for me all the time. It’s really great.”

Hayden seemed dubious. “...What's in it?”

Ilya's smile turned a little meaner then. "Poison."

Dinner was about as tense as one would expect it to be. In between pushing around the vegetables in his soup with a spoon, Hayden glared daggers at him from across the table.

Ilya didn't mind all that much. He was pretty well-accustomed to being hated. He just didn't really understand what Hayden's angle was. It wasn't like Shane had begged him to come over. Hayden had basically invited himself. Jackie, on the other hand, had been a delight all night- clearly compensating for her manchild husband's antics. She'd kept the conversation flowing nice and easily, talking about her kids and her life and steering everything away from hockey and their rivalry.

It was nice to see someone so careful and intentional with her words. Ilya could not for a second understand what such a nice woman could see in someone like Pike.

"This soup is delicious, guys." Jackie said, dipping a piece of bread into the broth and taking a bite. "What did you say it was called again?"

"*Solyanka*." Ilya replied, softening the 'L' sound with his accent.

"*Solyanka*." Jackie repeated, savouring the word. Her pronunciation was good. "Are you going to teach the baby Russian, Ilya?"

"I think yes. Shane has evil plan."

"It's not an evil plan." Shane argued. "I just thought it would be good if you talked to the kid in Russian, and I talked to them in French. Then, by the time they're in kindergarten they'll be, like, trilingual."

"Hm. Very important to be trilingual by age five. Is good for little baby diplomatic relations."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Jackie, your family is from Quebec, right? Do you speak French with the kids?"

"Oh Hay and I had the best of intentions when we first had Ruby and Jade but..."

"Since there were two of them we were just trying to keep them alive, mostly." Hayden added. "Having them speak toddler gibberish in English *and* French just seemed like a recipe for disaster. Especially since I don't know a lick of French."

"Twins are a handful." Jackie hummed in agreement, a fond smile on her face. "I can't say I recommend."

"You've just got one in there, right?" Hayden looked to Shane, speculative.

"Yeah, just one." Shane nodded. "Twins don't run in my family either, which is good."

“Ah, see I’m a twin that’s why I kinda figured I was fucked from the start.” Jackie grinned. “What about you though, Ilya?”

“Hm. I think my grandmother was a triplet.” Ilya joked, his lips twitching upward.

“Fuck.” Shane huffed. “*Don’t* say that.”

Ilya laughed. “Is fine, we saw it ourselves. We have just one baby.”

“Yeah, *this time*.”

The silence that blanketed the room would have been funnier if Ilya wasn’t in the middle of a fucking revelation. “This time? As in... There will be other time?”

Hayden choked on his soup.

Shane blinked, taking in his own words with a growing flush rising to his face. “I don’t know. Maybe. Like, later on.” He fiddled with his spoon, his eyes trained on the table. “It was lonely. Being an only child. Not that my parents could help it, but... Yeah. I think that would be nice? Right?”

“Yes.” Ilya blinked. Very much yes. More than anything, *yes*.

“Wow, you guys are like, really serious huh?” Hayden cut through the warmth, his cutlery clanging against his bowl.

“Happy to hear you have figured this out, Pike.” Ilya tore his gaze away from Shane and raised an eyebrow at him. “Trophy for you will come in the mail next week.”

“Ilya, please.” Shane said tiredly.

“No, I think Pike should speak his mind.” Ilya needed.

“Alright.” Hayden straightened his posture. “I don’t like you, Rozanov and hearing about you and Shane has sort of just made me hate you more, actually- not because you guys, are like, gay-”

“Wow, another trophy for you-”

“But because you’re *you*.” Hayden finished. “And you’re an asshole and Shane and his baby deserve better.”

“*Hayden*.” Jackie warned.

“Do you not get how *crazy* it is that the two of them are together?” Hayden gestured to Shane and Ilya, his eyes wide. “Even if you don’t think about the rivalry, they’re like chalk and, fucking, massive shithead cheese.”

Ilya’s mouth tilted upward, intent on returning fire- when he was suddenly interrupted.

“Ilya and I *are* different.” Shane admitted, his mouth set into a frown. “But it’s not like you and Jackie are completely similar.”

“Yes. Shane is right. She is lovely person and you are massive garbage person.” Ilya retorted, clearly trying to get a rise out of him.

It obviously worked. Hayden clenched his jaw, his hands in fists at the dining table. “You-”

“That’s enough!” Shane stopped him. “Out of *both* of you. If you can’t behave then Jackie and I will be the only ones getting dessert.”

Ilya and Hayden shut their mouths immediately.

“...Aw, Shane, you’re going to make such a good dad.” Jackie said with a smile. It was such a nice sentiment that it helped sooth Ilya’s heart.

“I don’t know about that.” Shane seemed disarmed over the praise as well, scratching the back of his neck with an awkward sheepishness. “I wasn’t very good at holding Arthur when you came over.”

“Nonsense! You were a natural.” Jackie insisted. “Did you end up sending Ilya the picture I took?”

“What picture?”

Jackie opened her phone and leant over the table, showing him her camera roll. “I snapped a candid while Shane was holding our Artie.”

The second he saw it, Ilya felt his mouth go dry and his eyes go wet. Before him was a snapshot of Shane sitting on his old sofa in Montreal, holding the youngest Pike in his arms. The softness in his expression when he looked down at him was almost too much to handle.

“Ilya?” Shane tilted his head. “Are you good?”

Ilya swallowed, trying to keep his voice even. He hadn’t torn his eyes away from the screen just yet. “Yes.” He choked, clearing his throat in an attempt to compose himself quicker. “Is nice picture. Please send it to me, Jackie. Please.”

“Are you crying?” Hayden asked, incredulous.

Ilya didn’t answer. He didn’t quite trust himself to. His whole body felt too watery and soft, especially in the presence of Hayden fucking Pike.

Shane grabbed his hand and squeezed it.

After that, the dinner conversation was a bit quieter, a bit less tense. Hayden seemed to have cooled down and Ilya’s mind was still stuck on that picture.

Soon that would be their baby in Shane's arms. Soon that picture would just be their lives, everyday. The idea just *clung* to his mind, it burrowed and sunk its teeth in. To think he could have rejected all of this just because he was scared. He didn't even want to think about it... He didn't want to think about the cold way he told Shane how bad of an idea this was. He didn't want to think about what could have happened if Shane really *had* taken his advice. He didn't want to think about anything but that image right now, in all honesty. Warm. Impending. Lovely.

Home.

Chapter 15

“Well, look what the cat dragged in.” Marlowe was the first on the rink in the morning. He’d come up behind the boards as Shane was rustling around in the equipment bin. “I thought we might come back to Boston and see you with a fresh baby.”

“Not yet.” Shane assured, straightening up a touch. “Still a month or so to go.”

“Shiiiiit. That’s so long.” Markowe seemed disappointed. Shane wasn’t sure why. “What are you gonna name it?”

“It?” Shane laughed. Was Cliff Marlowe really trying to shoot the shit with him right now? He had absolutely no reason to extend kindness unto Shane. Before Boston had saved his ass, their limited interactions on the ice hadn’t been *overly* friendly. “Uh, not sure.”

“Cliff is a great name for a boy *or* a girl.” Marlowe slapped him on the shoulder. “Just saying.”

“Are you a Clifton or a Clifford?”

“I’m just a Cliff.” Marlowe responded. “My parents got straight to the point. That’s why it’d work for you. You’re a no nonsense type of guy.”

“Absolutely not.” Ilya came over then, his hockey stick slung over his shoulder. “Hollander cannot name his daughter Cliff Hollander. She will sound like old man mountaineer from 1920’s.”

Marlowe nudged Ilya’s shoulder as a form of greeting. “Daughter? Are you even *having* a girl, Hollander?”

“No. I’m not sure what I’m having. I wanted to keep it a surprise.”

“I woulda thought the having a kid part would be surprise enough.”

“Touche.” Shane shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess it just isn’t that important to me.”

Ilya faltered a touch. “...The baby?”

Shane rolled his eyes. “The *gender*, dumbass.”

“Ah...”

“So long as they grow up liking hockey, am I right?” Marlowe laughed.

“No kid of Shane Hollander would dislike hockey.” Ilya retorted. “Is in their blood to be crazy freak about it, maybe.”

“Fuck off.”

“Am I wrong?”

“Yes. You are. I’m not a ‘crazy freak’ about hockey.”

“You are, what? Fifty months pregnant organising equipment? Move.” Ilya stepped in and took the far heftier boxes of skating gear out from on top of the practice bibs. “No heavy lifting for you.”

“...Thanks.” Shane said curtly, their shoulders lightly brushing against one another as Ilya moved onto the ice.

The contact alone was enough to send goosebumps up and down his arms.

“Seems like you guys are getting on a bit better now that you’re on the same team.” Marlowe noted, watching them. In all honesty Shane had sort of forgotten he was there. Just a little.

“Of course not.” Ilya grinned. “We like each other the same amount as we always have, right Hollander?”

“Sure.”

Marlowe laughed, slinging an arm around Ilya’s shoulder- with a nod of his head toward Shane, he drew them both further into the rink.

Shane was sad to see them go- sad he could not follow. The forlorn look on his face was probably clear to anyone that saw him. That kind of longing just wasn’t something he could hide.

He *could*, however, divert his attention elsewhere... Namely to the trio of eighteen year olds in the middle distance that seemed to be dying to get his attention. They looked so cute in their too-big gear and their baby faces. Shane swore he never used to feel this way about rookies. They were loud and cocky and smelly and annoying and he wasn’t even *that* much older than them- but the chemicals in his brain had completely fucked him over and now all he wanted to do was ruffle their hair and fix up their helmets.

Shane waved them over and they wasted no time rumbling their way to him.

Toussaint, Pfeifer and Blanchard were Boston’s picks from the most recent draft and they seemed to be trying their darndest to prove themselves to the team as best they could. Ilya had affectionately called the three of them Shane’s ‘ducklings,’ because they wanted nothing more than to follow him around whenever he was here.

“You came back.” Pfeifer smiled. He could see he was missing another tooth since Shane had last seen him. “Did you miss us that much?”

“No, I just love freezing my ass off at nine in the morning.” In all honesty, Shane really *did* enjoy being back at the rink. Ever since he’d introduced himself to the Raiders, he’d taken up something of an unofficial mantle as assistant coach. Shane was just *dying* to be useful, *dying* to be busy, *dying* to prove himself and this was the best he could do for now, even if all it really was was babysitting the rooks. It was better than nothing and it kept him sharp. It kept

him hopeful... And it kept him watching Ilya Rozanov from the stands for hours at a time like he was a sexy fish in a tank.

“Did you watch all our away games, Mr Hollander?” Blanchard probed.

He’d been the only kid that wouldn’t shake the, ‘Mr Hollander,’ shtick- little shit was too polite for his own good. “Of course.” Shane fished out a few more training vests from the bin and piled them in his arms. “I think you all did well with the little play time you got...”

“But...?”

Shane blinked. “...But?”

“You’ve got something else to say.” Toussaint insisted, his arms crossed.

“It’s cool. We can take it.” Pfeifer puffed out his chest. “Lay it on us.”

Blanchard cleared his throat, nodding along with his peers. “If you’re okay with telling us, then we’re okay with hearing it.”

“Alright.” Shane doled the first vest out to Pfeifer. “Your assist in New York was pretty good but your stick handling isn’t very consistent. I’d focus on accuracy today.” He turned to Blanchard. “I can’t believe I’m saying this to a Boston player but you need to be meaner. A lot of the shit those Pittsburgh guys were pulling would not fly with anyone else. Start hitting back.” He ended with Toussaint. “And you’re just too slow, dude.”

Touissant went a little red as the other two laughed at him.

Shane felt a little bad- but it wasn’t like he was lying to him. He was trying to help- he just didn’t really have a lot of tact most of the time. He’d always figured he’d make a bad coach, but what he lacked in verbiage he made up for with a good eye. “It’s easy to improve on speed though. I’m sure Rozanov can help you out.”

“Rozanov can help you what?” Ilya approached the boards once more. He was seemingly incapable of leaving Shane alone these days. As his due date drew closer, Shane felt a certain necessity to it- but he could probably *try* being a little more subtle when they were in public. Probably.

“You can help Toussaint get faster.”

“I was born fast. Might be hard for me to teach.”

“I skated circles around you during our rookie season.”

Ilya squinted, hands on his hips. “...Who are you again?”

“Asshole.” Shane scowled. “Toussaint, I can give you some tips if this guy doesn’t want to.”

Toussaint went red for a whole other reason then, “Thank you, uh, Shane.”

“Hm. ‘Shane,’ I do not see big ‘C’ on your shirt and yet you are acting very much like a Captain right now. Are you trying to steal my job?”

“Nope,” Shane shoved a stack of plastic cones over the board at him. “Just doing it for you.”

“How kind.” Ilya’s voice was way too warm to seem snappy, but it didn’t seem like anyone else had really noticed.

“We’re teammates now, Rozanov. We should probably learn to get along.”

“Oh, well, I am not sure about *that*.” Ilya turned his attention onto Shane’s ducklings. “Get your asses on the ice.”

“Wha-”

“Toussaint, *I* will help you be not slow as fuck after your drills. Not Captain Canada over here.”

“But Cap-”

Ilya raised an eyebrow and they all shut up straight away. Their gazes lowered as they sheepishly got their asses on the ice.

“Quite the authority figure...” Shane noted, watching as the trio dutifully joined the rest of the slowly gathering Raiders.

“Yes, I would make good father.”

Shane’s smile was probably too genuine for public viewing, but it wasn’t like he could stop it even if he tried. “Well, I’m sure you’ll find a nice girl to settle down with eventually, Rozanov.”

“Hm. You think so?” Ilya leant back against the boards- *too close*, Shane’s mind supplied. He didn’t move away even if they were. “I am not sure I can be tamed, Shane Hollander.”

“It’s a shame.” Shane batted his eyelashes at him. “You’d make a good househusband.”

“How dare you?” I would make *amazing* househusband.”

“So rare for the league to hire a referee with a disability.”

“...Huh?”

“Well, clearly he is blind.” Svetlana threw a piece of popcorn at the television.

“Hey! I’m eating that.”

The pair of them were watching the Raiders game together in the living room, the broadcast blasting loud and energetic through the speakers in the walls. They were barely into the second period and Shane couldn't count on one hand how many of his future teammates had been sent to the penalty box already. Even one of his ducklings, Blanchard, had seemingly taken his advice and decided now was the time to start sticking up for himself.

Shane probably should have been a bit more specific and told him not to pick fights with the away team's gigantic defensemen but there were certain things that kids had to figure out on their own.

"God, who the fuck pissed in Washington's cheerios this morning?" Shane grumbled, watching and wincing as Ilya got checked into the boards for the *unth* time this afternoon. He had to assume they'd have matching back pain tomorrow, albeit for *completely* different reasons.

"If they lose this game they're going to be dead last in the standings." Svetlana observed. The teams were tied right now, but Boston had good endurance. They'd pull through before overtime.

"Yeah, but it's still early enough in the season that that shouldn't really matter."

"Do you think Washington *really* needs an excuse to play angry?"

"True." Shane relented, shifting uncomfortably on the couch.

"What is the matter?"

"It's nothing. I just... cannot for the life of me get comfortable." Shane winced, trying to readjust himself to a position where it *didn't* feel like his insides were being compressed into a cube of spam. This late in the game, he felt about as big as a planet. According to the helpful chart, his kid was the size of a honeydew melon, which was decidedly not planet-sized but it was still pretty fucking huge. Frankly, it was a miracle he put pants on every day. He didn't think he got enough credit for it.

"I've seen a diagram of what a pregnant body's organs look like when there is a baby in there." Svetlana told him, a touch paler now. "It is horrifying. If I were you, I would cut Ilyusha's dick off in his sleep for payback."

"It's fine," Shane sighed, finally relenting and deciding just to lie down on his side instead of sitting. Svetlana dutifully grabbed a hold of his legs and placed them onto her lap so he would have more space to stretch out. "He blames himself enough as it is."

"Yes, but you do tell him when you are in pain, yes?"

"..."

"..Shane?"

"I would. If it got really bad." Shane nodded. "But he already worries so much and it's *really* not that bad."

“I can *see* that alien of yours squirming about in you from here.” Svetlana shook her head, her lips twitching in horror. “You are telling me that it doesn't hurt?”

“I’m used to it.” Shane shrugged. “It’s kinda cool, actually. Last night, Ilya put smarties on my stomach and we watched the baby kick them all off.”

“I cannot believe the same man that did that is on screen right now.”

Shane couldn’t help but agree. On the ice, Ilya had always been a beastly player. He scarcely pulled his punches and showed his opponents next to no mercy. Off the ice, he got teary eyed when he saw how small the newborn onesies Shane bought were. No side of Ilya Rozanov was his *true* side- but the contrast felt pretty glaring sometimes. Shane and Svetlana watched as he swiped a puck into the net with three minutes to go. His expression alight with satisfaction as the home crowd hollered and hooted.

“Fuck yes.” Shane hissed, watching Ilya skate circles around the Washington team in a victory lap, goading and poking them with his sharp tongue.

“Washington won’t be able to score with the time they’ve got left. Look at them, they’re completely burnt out.” Svetlana replied, leaning forward in anticipation.

“Another win for the Raiders then.” Shane grinned.

“Your new team is on a streak.”

“Hell yeah they are.”

As the final few minutes of the game ticked down, it became obvious that Washington well and truly had given up on evening out the scoreboard. Their anger still burnt bright but it was directionless. It needed a vessel.

It needed Ilya Rozanov.

As the Raiders ran down the clock, the game continued as it ought to with both teams zipping up and down the rink like pinballs in a machine- but something was different now. The checks felt a little less like an effect and more like the main intent... A team of aggravated players banding together to give Ilya Rozanov a taste of his own medicine. Every time they got close Ilya dodged their blows with rapid precision. He ducked and dipped and did everything in his power to evade their capture...

Until he didn’t.

Shane wasn’t quite sure what happened- wasn’t quite sure if Ilya hadn’t seen him coming or if he just hadn’t had enough time to avoid it. Either way, Washington’s gigantic alternate centre, Fitzpatrick slammed into Ilya with the full force of his body, the two of them going down onto the ice like a pile of bricks.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

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

Shane had always been a pacer- a fidgeter, a leg juggler. Any time he was even slightly nervous he'd be moving *something* of his. He'd inherited it from his ever-energetic, slightly frantic mother. When the going got especially tough neither one of them could sit properly still. They always had to be doing something, *anything* to relieve some of that anxious energy orbiting around their frame.

Shane was a lot less mobile nowadays, but it didn't stop him from burning a circle into the carpet of his living room. Walking around and around in a big loop, his fingers and stomach in knots, his mind racing a mile a minute. Full time had been called shortly after Ilya had been escorted off the rink by a pair of medics, walking on his own but slumped in on himself. The hit had been considered clean, he just hadn't seen it coming.

It happened. It happened all the time- and yet Shane still wanted to rip Fitzpatrick's head off for hurting him.

If he was less wired, he'd probably chalk it up to hormones but baby or not, he would be losing his shit right now. Being kept out of the loop on something this important was enough to make any version of him go totally crazy.

"Shane, maybe you should sit down, yes?" Svetlana offered softly.

"I don't really feel like sitting down."

"I know, but maybe you should anyway," she rose from her own position, slowly guiding him back to a spot on the sofa beside her. Shane let her move him because he didn't have any reason not to. He knew it was best to stay calm right now... To stay still. Any added stress on his body would not be good for him or the baby right now- but he'd just seen the love of his life crumple into a pile on national television so maybe it was inevitable to feel a little scared shitless.

The broadcast had ended close to an hour ago. The television was playing some old drama now, the noise ringing out through the living room like muffled nonsense. Since the hit, Shane had tried calling Ilya ten separate times but had received nothing but his sassy voicemail in return. He'd even tried their coach- discreetness be damned- but still hadn't gotten very far. Right now it felt like he was pounding at a brick wall, his fists bloodied and broken with no give in sight.

The most frustrating part of all of this was the fact that if the two of them were a 'normal' couple, Shane would be the first person they'd fucking contact. They would think of him. They would think of *them*- but they just *didn't know*.

It wasn't their fault- for not knowing, but right now Shane hated them for it anyway.

“He’ll be okay, Shane.” Svetlana assured. She held up a much stronger front than he could. Her worry for Ilya was beautiful- dignified. Elegant. Shane’s felt so ugly in comparison. It felt like he was choking on it.

“I-”

The sound of Shane’s phone finally chiming out- loud and blaring amongst the white noise made him jump. It echoed through his ears like a siren call.

The caller I.D read, ‘*Lily.*’

Shane picked up before the second ring.

“H-”

“Hey, Jane?”

-But it wasn’t his Lily at all.

It was Cliff fucking Marlowe.

Shane could feel that wretched panic wrap its body around his heart once more, squeezing it until it was pale and strained and awful.

“Hey so uh, you don’t know me but I’m one of Rozy’s teammates. I’m sure you saw he took a pretty bad hit on the ice during the game...” He let out a nervous laugh. “Oh, he’s fine, don’t worry. It’s just... Me and Connors are driving him back to his place right now. We were wondering if you were still in Boston staying with him? If not, we’re cool to hang around for a while and make sure he doesn’t get all concussion-y, you know? Just thought he might prefer a pretty face instead of our ugly mugs.”

Shane’s mind raced- still reeling with relief that Ilya was allegedly okay- that he was not prone and in an ambulance, clinging to life somewhere.

He was so relieved that, for a moment, he totally forgot he was supposed to answer... Supposed to answer as ‘Jane.’

Somehow.

Fuck.

For a moment, Shane heavily considered just pitching up his voice and answering in his best ‘girl’ voice like a fucking idiot.

-But then, in the background of the call, he could hear someone fighting to get the phone out of Marlowe’s hands. His voice was loud and *alive* and pissed off.

Shane had never been more glad to hear it.

"I was fine to drive home myself you fucker!" Ilya hollered. "Do not bother my Sh- my Jane! She is... She has, um, cold..."

Shane could practically hear him trying to piece the words together in his addled mind.

"He- She is like, fuck... Ariel in Little Mermaid?"

"...Jane's a Mermaid?" Marlowe seemed confused.

"No, asshole. She cannot talk for now, yes?"

"Ohhh... She lost her voice?"

"Da! Yes. Just... Just text her instead, okay? She can respond there. Wait. Actually, no. Do not read our texts. It is uh-"

Svetlana, sensing the situation was southward bound, slipped Shane's phone out of his hands and into her own. "Hi Marlowe. It's Svetlana." She spoke, her voice coming out as smooth as butter. "Me and 'Jane' were just watching the game together at Ilya's place. If you can drive him home I'm sure we can take over from there."

"Oh hey, Svetlana... Wait, you're there with Jane too?"

"Yes?"

"Rozy, you greedy son of a bitch." Marlowe sounded like he was giving him some kind of congratulatory slap on the shoulder. Shane heard Ilya yelp over the line. "That's good. Yeah. We're on our way back to his now. Should be like, five minutes."

"Great, thank you."

"Okay, thanks. Bye."

Click.

It was *that* easy.

If Shane was a girl or just *some guy*, it would have been *that* easy for him too... But he wasn't. It wasn't and that *sucked*.

Svetlana politely handed Shane's phone back to him, almost immediately noticing his continued discontent. "What is the matter? You heard him in the background. He is as lively as ever." She huffed out a relieved little laugh.

"What if he really gets hurt next time?" Shane asked quietly. "What if something terrible happens and I have to find out from the fucking *news*?" His eyes were trained on the floor.

“I’d be the last to know.”

“They thought to call Jane?” The smile Svetlana gave was not cruel or mocking. It was small and sad and *knowing*. “Until you’re ready that might just have to be enough.”

Svetlana was right. Shane was not ready.

When Marlowe and Connors brought Ilya through the door and settled him in on their couch in front of Svetlana, Shane had hid in their baby’s nursery with the door closed tight.

It was some kind of symbolic torture he’d created for himself, sitting here in the silence as they all shot the shit outside. A self-imposed banishment.

It would be funny if it wasn’t so fucking sad.

He knew well and good that he could not have his cake and eat it too. Revealing his and Ilya’s relationship to the world and maintaining this quiet, tentative peace they’d fostered here were not things that could exist in the same universe. At least not right now. Until everything got less precarious, it just didn’t make sense for him to walk out there. They *both* knew that, even if Ilya was far more willing to throw caution to the wind.

Marlowe and Connors left after a couple more minutes, their rowdy farewells echoing down the hall. Shane knew he could move now. He knew he *should* move now... But he just felt so still. He was frozen in place like a great big lumbering mannequin, far too ashamed to go out there just yet. He didn’t think he could face Ilya right now, not when he couldn’t even find the guts to greet him at the door- couldn’t even *talk* when Marlowe had called.

Shane could keep telling himself that it was ‘for the best,’ and it could keep being true but it didn’t stop him from being ill with guilt over his own inaction.

After a few more minutes, the front door opened and closed again and Svetlana was gone now too. It was just the two of them in this big house. All alone once more.

Shane still didn’t leave the room. He focused on his breathing instead. He closed his eyes and let his emotions wash over him, one after the other. He felt sick. He felt evil. He felt so fucking pathetic...

When the door creaked open, it was not from Shane opening it.

Ilya stepped into the space like a phantom intent on tormenting him. He didn’t seem real and yet the sling on his arm felt *all too real*, as did the bruising on his face and body. He looked like hell and yet he’d gotten himself up off the couch to go look for him because Shame was too much of a coward to do it himself.

“Hi.” Ilya said.

Shane didn’t respond, his eyes still fixed on his injuries.

“You should see the other guy.”

“I did and he walked off the rink just fine.” Shane whispered. “...You scared me.”

“I am sorry.”

“Fuck.” Shane shambled over as quickly as he could to Ilya, grabbing his face in his hands and checking him over up close. Every detail was still there. Every mole. Every eyelash. He was here and he was okay.

“For better look, you might need to put on your glasses.” Ilya suggested slyly.

Shane was not having any of it. “How are you feeling?”

“Good.” Ilya replied. “Great, actually.” Shane couldn’t tell if he was being sarcastic or not. He glanced about the room as if it was his first time seeing it. “You moved all the fluffy bear toys from the. Uh. Baby holder.” He frowned.

“The crib?” Shane blinked.

“Yes. Sorry. I am still a bit... Fuzzy.” Ilya winced. “Why you move them?”

“You’re not supposed to put toys in the crib with the baby. It’s dangerous.” Shane replied matter-of-factly. “Besides, with the bars all around them it made it look like the teddy bears were in jail and it was upsetting me.”

Ilya huffed out a fond laugh, bringing Shane closer to him and encircling him in his arms as best as he could with one of them being in a sling.

“I’m glad you’re okay.” Shane said, his face smushed against Ilya’s chest. “I’m... I’m sorry for hiding. I really didn’t want to.”

“I know, I know.” Ilya nodded against his head, the soft tickle of his curls scratching at Shane’s cheek as he moved up and down. “Is okay, I knew it would have to be like this. That is why I tell Marlowe I am okay to drive home by myself.”

“And were you? Okay to drive home yourself?” Shane raised an eyebrow at him. “What did the team doctor say?”

“He say cla- ca- fucking...” Ilya nodded to his clavicle.

“Your clavicle?”

“Da, he says I have clavicle fracture. Very nasty. Slight concussion too but it is mostly the breakage they are concerned with.”

“A breakage? Shit, Ilya, you’re not going to be able-”

“-To play until it is healed?” Ilya nodded sagely. He seemed oddly calm about the whole situation. Almost smug. “Three months on the bench, at least.”

Shane blinked. He was due in one.

A suspicious realisation knocked about in his head- one that felt almost too cruel to say out loud unless he was *totally* sure.

Ilya had been dodging hits *all night*, why had he suddenly missed the one right in front of him?

Unless...

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice was low, cautious- dubious. He pulled away, his touch suddenly feeling almost cloying and sickly. Wrong.

“Yes?”

“Did you get injured *on purpose?*”

Ilya paused for just a moment. “...Will you be mad if I say yes?”

He didn’t even *try* to deny it. The deed was done. Ask for forgiveness, not permission and all that. Shane felt ill for a completely different reason now. “Ilya, what the fuck?”

Ilya just shrugged, nonchalant, uncaring. “There is no paternity leave in league. I make my own.”

Chapter End Notes

omg ilya u gotta run girl ur in danger

Chapter 17

Ilya was not suicidal but he *was* an opportunist. The day he looked a gift horse in the mouth was the day he died and he was *not* planning on dying today.

The idea hadn't exactly been one he'd spent a long time mulling over. David Fitzpatrick had just been his gift horse. Plain and simple. Ilya had seen him coming for him just fine, elbows out like the big and slow and stupid oaf that he was and Ilya just *hadn't really cared*.

He'd kind of been hoping that Shane wouldn't care either- had been hedging his bets on him being so *glad* to have him here for him and the baby that nothing else would really matter- that he wouldn't even *notice* Ilya had taken a hit he very well could have dodged.

Leave it to overthinker extraordinaire, Shane Hollander to find him out almost immediately.

"This isn't a fucking joke, Ilya. Shit." Shane was staring at him like he couldn't quite believe his eyes. "Did you... Is this *my* fault? Did I say something-"

"Oh, fuck- Shane. No, of course not." Ilya frowned. "I just... I want to be here. With you. With the baby."

-And he did. More than anything he did. Leaving Shane here on his own had made him feel worse than he'd ever felt. The entire time he was gone he'd just felt perpetually on edge, always on the verge of breaking down, unable to properly focus on the world ahead of him.

Shane would hate to hear Ilya say it but he *was* vulnerable right now. If anything happened and Ilya was states or even *countries* away, he wouldn't be able to forgive himself.

"I'm fine by myself, Ilya." Shane didn't quite seem to understand this reasoning though. All he could see right now was Ilya risking his career while he sat on the sidelines. "Yeah, it sucks but *this* wasn't the answer."

"So you would be okay? If you had to have the baby on your own? If I had to leave you both in a hospital to go play fucking hockey hundreds of miles away?"

No. Ilya could see the answer clear on his face but he knew Shane would never say it. Of course he wouldn't, because then Ilya would be *right* about something. "My parents could help out..."

Ilya fixed him with a look. "*I* should help out. I should be here."

"And what help are you going to be with your arm in a sling?" Shane snapped.

"It is a broken collar bone. Sling will be off in three weeks, and I will be fully healed and back on the ice in a couple months. It is nothing serious."

“Well, it could have been. Did you think about that?” Shane raised his eyebrows. “Did you think about the fact that if you fell differently, it could have been both your arms in those slings? Your legs? If you were slightly less lucky I’d have to look after *you* and a baby at the same fucking time.”

“Shane-”

“You wouldn’t have even been able to *hold* our kid for the first few months of their life, Ilya.” Shane’s voice broke and Ilya nearly crumbled completely. His knees twitched as if they were begging him to throw himself in front of him and plead for forgiveness.

Instead, Ilya stood his ground. “It was worth it.”

“Sure.” Shane said, bitter. “But would it have been ‘worth it’ if you’d fallen on your neck? Or your head? If you died?”

“I did not do any of those things, so I do not know why it matters.”

“I’m saying those things *could* have happened, Ilya! And you took this massive risk on purpose without talking it through with me which makes this all so much worse!” Shane threw his hands up in exasperation. “Intentionally injuring yourself should never be a *choice* you think you should make.”

“It was the only choice I had.” Ilya returned with a bite. “We cannot tell the league about us yet so what else can I do?”

“Fucking *play*, Ilya.” Shane seethed. “We always knew it was going to be hard. We were prepared for it to be hard.”

“I did not think it would be this hard.” Ilya replied a little pathetically. “You feel it too, yes?”

“Of course. It’s... It’s really awful being away from you right now but...” Shane sighed, the noise sounding so entirely exhausted already. “But Ilya, is there something else to this? Is there something I’m missing? This was so fucking stupid and I know you’re not fucking stupid.”

Ilya looked at him. He could tell him that the last time he’d seen his mother alive he’d been leaving her too- that when he’d come back to Boston after half a month of being away, he’d almost been afraid to come through the door and see what he’d find.

Ilya just didn’t know what the point of saying all that would be though. He knew even now that that was an absurd line of thought to have and yet he couldn’t deny the fact that it had propelled him forward into making the decision before them now. If he never left Shane, he could never be in danger. It was as simple as that.

“This was not stupid idea.” Ilya said plainly. “It got me what I wanted.”

“*What you wanted.*” Shane seethed as he raked a hand through his hair. “I hope you’ll be just as happy with any consequences that come your way then.”

“And what will those be, exactly, Hollander?”

“They have me, freshly signed and unable to do *anything* and now they have their star centre and captain doing fuck-all too. Did you even consider the fact that they might go back on either one of our contracts now?”

“You would not say that if I had been injured by accident.” Ilya pointed out, his own temper flaring.

“Of course not, that wouldn’t be fair. You wouldn’t have had control over that. This situation we’re in now though is because of a *choice* you made that you didn’t have to make at all-”

“*You* got to choose this over hockey.” Ilya interrupted, voice raising. “That was a *choice* you made. You cannot get mad when I am just doing the same thing.”

Shane went quiet, his mouth slamming shut. Ilya could feel the room drop about ten degrees in temperature.

Wrong thing to say.

Very much the wrong thing to say.

“You’re right. This was a choice I made.” Shane was suddenly very calm, all the anger and tension in his body easing out of him like he’d been injected with a sedative. “But out of everyone that could throw that fact back in my face, I never thought it would be you.”

“Shane-”

-But he already knew Shane was done with him. He shouldered past him toward the door in all his stone-faced composure and left Ilya in the nursery with nothing but his thoughts; bad company to keep, if he’d ever known it.

Ilya let out a breath that felt more like dust than air. His entire body alight with unease in the silence that followed. That hadn’t been how he’d wanted this to go at all. Arguing with Shane never felt *good*, but this felt like an extra step above the usual kind of awful Ilya was used to. It seemed as if he’d intentionally thrown himself into a hole and instead of clambering out, he’d just started digging.

Why the fuck had he started digging?

Ilya could hear Shane’s footsteps sift through their home. His gait had changed with his centre of gravity. More of a waddle-y shuffle than a stride shifting against the timber floorboards.

Ilya should go out there and apologise- rip off the bandaid and just get it over with. He hadn’t meant to be cruel. He knew more than anyone how badly Shane wanted to be back on the ice... And yet, in the heat of the moment, it had all come tumbling out.

The frustration he felt right now wasn’t really toward Shane. It was toward everyone *but* Shane. The world they were in as a whole just did not make anything easy for them. Ilya’s

choice to injure himself was just one of the more dramatic examples of their desperation to make this work without losing something in the process.

Ilya took a breath and stepped out of the room, his eyes scanning the area for any evidence of Shane. He hadn't noticed that the sun was already beginning to set, the pink and orange hues dyeing the living room in a soft watercolour tinge.

The space was empty, ghostly- *still*, just like it always had been before.

Shane was already gone.

Chapter 18

Shane never used to let himself have cannolis, even in the off-season they were off-limits. They were so entirely sugary and fatty and fucking *delicious* that he knew they'd become a bad habit if he cut himself even an ounce of slack. Biting into one now, he did his best to remember that there was no point in counting calories when there were no games for him to win and no cups to chase after. His rigid, almost *religious* restraint wasn't worth a dime in this changing body of his, but perhaps it never really had been worth much anyway.

It had been a *long* time since he and Ilya had had an argument this nasty. The whole thing had just plummeted from bad to worse, spiraling downward into a pit of anger and disappointment that they could both feel in their souls. Ilya's nigh callous disregard for his career felt like a slap directed straight to Shane's face- harsh and cruel and entirely *confounding* because he *knew* Ilya. He knew how much of an outlet hockey was for him. He knew what it represented- what it meant. There was something so horrifying about him intentionally putting himself in harm's way to escape it, and it certainly wasn't a decision that anyone of sound mind would make, reasonable reasoning regardless. No. There was something more to this. There had to be.

Shane furrowed his eyebrows, savouring his final bite of intermingled chocolate and vanilla custard in his mouth. It was delicious, but he'd known it would be. That was never the issue.

He'd known for a while that there may be something amiss with Ilya. Until now he'd just chalked it up to anxiety over the baby, but this... This was something else entirely. This was a poisonous cocktail of reckless, dangerous and fucking terrifying all at the same time.

Sure, it was natural for Ilya to want to be close by at a time as tumultuous as this, but the desperate dread that he seemed to be navigating his feelings through was slowly becoming a pit he might not be able to jump out of without some help.

-But how could Shane help him out if he didn't let him in?

"Fuck."

Shane willed away the frustrated tears brimming in his eyes, eternally grateful that there were no other customers in this kitschy little bakery he was in. Boston wasn't much of a hockey town, but all it took was one person recognising him to be thrown back into the spotlight once again. He could see the headline now, *'Hockey Legend Shane Hollander cries over cannoli in the Seaport District.'* It was the absolute last thing he needed right now.

Shane looked around, taking stock of his surroundings in an attempt to calm himself. In a sea of brutalist buildingscapes, this bakery's old-style federalist facade wedged in the middle of the fray felt almost refreshing. The interior was just as rundown as the outside was, but there was something comforting about it that Shane could not deny. It was nostalgic and entirely different to the modern spaces he tended to prefer. That lack of familiarity was a comfort right now. In fact, he wanted nothing more than to stay in this bubble of his, picking at dessert after dessert until everything just magically fixed itself without him needing to be

there. The thought was unrealistic and, frankly, childish but he'd always found running away was much easier than staying. Distance brought clarity and clarity brought the right thing to do and say and *be*.

Shane didn't notice the chocolate chip cookie sliding into his periphery until it was right in front of him. The tanned, calloused hand that placed it there was the same one he'd handed cash to half an hour earlier.

"Oh. Sorry. I didn't order this." Shane winced, even to him his voice sounded all clammy and gross.

"That's okay." The baker seemed unfettered by his watery refusal, however. "You seem like you need it."

"Oh." Shane blinked, confused by the kindness. He *did* need it, actually. "...Thank you."

"It's no problem."

As Shane looked down, he almost immediately noticed how... *familiar* the cookie looked to the ones Ilya brought him. It was hard to deny. In a world of perfectly circular baked goods, these ones were rustic and misshapen- focused only on tasting good and fuck *did they*.

Biting into it only confirmed his suspicions. The second the flavour hit his mouth, he was hit with another cloying wave of emotion. They'd both been drawn to the same place without knowing- without *needing* to know. Shane thought back to all those late night expeditions Ilya made without a single complaint. The unwavering support, the undying fondness.

It was all so bittersweet right now.

Ilya was in the kitchen when Shane walked through the door. He looked just as battered and bruised as he had before but now there was something battered and bruised about his expression as well. Guarded. Uneasy. Anxious... A wounded dog snapping at any hand that drew close enough to touch, to comfort. Shane had seen that look on him before. Back in Sochi, it had been permanently affixed to his face. Shane had not been certain enough of himself to reach for him then. He had been afraid of getting bitten.

"Where were you?"

"Out."

"You should not just leave without telling me where you are going."

"...Seriously?" Shane blinked, his voice quiet and low in its disbelief. "You're going to give *me* shit for doing something without telling you?"

“Yes.” Ilya’s mouth was a thin, firm line on his face.

“Unbelievable.” Shane muttered.

As much as he truly wanted to understand Ilya, he was also still very much angry with him. It was a terrible dichotomy of feelings to have and it left Shane almost at a loss on how to navigate the treacherous seas ahead. It seemed Ilya felt something similar. The two of them were locked in a stasis, wondering if it was best to let sleeping dogs lie for now.

Except Shane had never liked to leave things well enough alone. He was the kind to pick at a mole until it bled and he *hated* going to sleep angry. He wanted this sorted and he wanted it sorted two hours ago.

People often thought his efficiency was a sign of apathy but Shane had never understood why. If he didn’t care about something why would he try so hard to fix it?

“I want to understand your side of things but you need to *talk to me* for that to happen. I’m not just going to take all of this at face value and be *fine* with it, you know? What you did was fucking terrifying...” Shane fiddled with his hands, waiting expectantly for a reply that never came. Ilya remained as silent as ever. Stock still and leant against the kitchen counter like a big, gloomy, injured mannequin- unwilling or unable to speak to him.

Unlike him, Ilya was the kind to let a wound fester. Rot.

“Ilya.” Shane, however, remained unbothered by this, an unstoppable force to Ilya’s immovable object. He pressed onward. “Talk to me.”

“What do you want me to say?” Ilya snapped.

“Fucking *anything*.” Shane returned. “*Please*.”

“I...” Ilya opened his mouth and then shut it again. His expression was tense, cagey- almost, but his defenses had softened under that word. *Please*. It was the great equaliser and Shane knew it. “I was the one that found my mother,” he admitted, his voice quiet enough for Shane to almost miss it.

“Oh.”

“I did not know how long she was just left there, waiting for me to come back. I do not want *you* to have to wait for me to come back.”

Shane could feel the realisation settle into his bones. The clarity that he had needed so badly had hit him like a freight train, but Ilya was not done.

“I know she is not you in the same way that I am not my father, but I cannot stop my brain from forcing you together because I love my mother, I love you, I hate my father and I...” *Hate myself*. The words were there but he didn’t say it. Not out loud. He knew better. “I did not tell you all this because I know it is... I know it does not make sense.”

It didn't make sense, but things like this often didn't. That wasn't the point. Ilya's fears about them *were* real and they broke Shane's heart. "Ilya... Have you been feeling like this the whole time?"

Ilya did not answer for a moment. "At the start it was not so bad, I was used to not having you here with me. Now... It is different," he nodded. "It is better but it is also harder."

"Yeah." Shane acknowledged. He could understand that. The distance had been easy when it was all they had. Now that they knew what it was like to exist in the same space as one another there was no going back. They were doomed to always be a little bit miserable when they were apart from now on. "I..." He sighed, a little unsure how to proceed. "Thank you for telling me. I wish I knew how to make it better."

"You do not have a twelve step plan ready for me?" Ilya's mouth curled upward.

"Not yet." Shane corrected, drawing closer. "But we can figure it out together... If that's okay?"

"Yes. I think that would be good."

"Okay. Alright." Shane nodded, a bit more reassured now as he placed his hands on Ilya's shoulders. He took a deep, resounding breath. "Do not *ever* fucking do that shit again."

"You are still mad at me." Ilya noted.

"Yeah." Shane affirmed. "I can empathise about why you did it and still be angry at you, idiot," his breath stuttered a touch. "Do you have any idea how scared I was when I saw you hit the ice? You can't be pulling that when I'm *this* pregnant," he shook his head. "I was pacing around like a madman, Svetlana probably thought she was going to become an auntie this afternoon."

Ilya just watched him, his eyes weary and remorseful. "I am sorry. For worrying you."

"...Not sorry for anything else?"

"I am sorry for not telling you my plan beforehand."

Shane rolled his eyes.

"And I am sorry for what I said when you found out about it anyway. I know being on the bench has been very hard for you. It is not a choice you made lightly and I am very grateful for that choice," Ilya's frown was deep and unrelenting, his face only inches away from Shane's. "I do not want you to ever think I do not appreciate what you have given up."

"You were frustrated, I get it." Shane shrugged, but his burning eyes gave him away, especially when they were this close together.

Ilya sighed, he pulled his face in gently with both his hands, his eyes soft.

Shane let himself still under the hold. "...We have some work to do when it comes to being honest with each other, huh."

"I think maybe yes." Ilya admitted, shifting his weight toward the sling around his neck. "I do not have enough limbs to keep doing this instead."

"Not funny."

"Eh. Is a little funny."

Chapter 19

It happened at the ice rink because *of course it did*. Where else could it possibly happen? This was Shane Hollander, after all, and Shane Hollander was nothing if not achingly, night-tragically consistent. He had vehemently *insisted* on being at practice today despite the fact that he was due in less than a week and no amount of pleading from Ilya had dissuaded him from doing what he wanted. More than anything it just seemed to piss him off, actually- which Ilya supposed was fine, it wasn't like he was here hovering around him for pleasure, after all. The only reason he'd tagged along was 'just in case.' If he had his way neither of them would have even left his bed yet...

...But he didn't have his way and now the two of them were leant up against the boards watching the remaining uninjured Raiders train from a respectable, unsuspecting distance between one another.

"He's still taking corners too fast," Ilya noted, watching as one of Shane's ducklings, Blanchard, jolted across the ice with a touch of unsteadiness to his rhythm. His stick handling had gotten much better over the past few weeks but he still had a lot to learn when it came to momentum. "That level of speed is only good if you can hold yourself up properly."

Shane hummed in agreement but did not verbalise any further, his eyes fixed on the drills before him. There was something pensive about his stare that was putting Ilya on an even more precarious edge than before.

"You should sit down," he prompted.

"...Why?"

"Because you are maybe one hundred months pregnant and should not even be here right now," he needled, doing his darndest to keep the nagging tone out of his voice. How the mighty had fallen. Since when had Ilya Rozanov ever been one to nag? "Come on, we go and get breakfast, yes? Do you want croissant?"

"I'm not hungry." Shane, stubborn as ever, just shook his head.

Ilya resisted the urge to hit his own against the boards. "You will turn all my hair grey, Shane Hollander."

Shane finally tore his eyes away from the ice. "Do you think I'm made of glass or something?"

"A little bit, yes."

Shane seemed like he wanted to argue over that for a moment before ultimately deciding against it. His gaze eased a touch, before returning back to the drills in front of him. "...I just like listening to the sound of the skates on the ice. It's soothing."

Ilya hummed in acknowledgement, watching Shane from the corner of his eye now. His nose and ears were all red from the cold but his posture was steady, strong. It made sense for him to like it here. An audienceless practice rink was practically Cancun for Shane Hollander. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine.”

“You look cold.”

“I’m not.”

“You had a scarf in the car, where did it go?”

“I think it *stayed* in the car. I forgot to bring it with me.” Shane admitted. “My brain fog has been insane lately. I’m surprised I even remembered to put shoes on this morning, to be honest.”

The corners of Ilya’s mouth quirked upward. “You mean you remembered to tell *me* to put your shoes on this morning.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Please, you *leapt* at the opportunity.”

“Hmm... Am I just being gentleman or do I have foot fetish? You will never know.”

“You don’t have a foot fetish, Ilya.”

“How do you know?”

“Because my feet are *fucked* from being in skates twenty hours a week for more than half my life. That’s how.” Shane’s nose wrinkled in disgust as he lightly kicked his sneakers against the wall. “Even if you *did* have one, these things would kill your boner faster than any naked grandma ever could.”

“-*What’s this about naked grandmas?*” Marlowe pulled in from the ice just then, his skates scraping against the ground.

“Why? Looking for your next date, Marley?” Ilya blinked, watching as he leant against the boards, inspecting the two of them with an inquisitive eye. He’d been doing that a lot lately. Studying them. If Ilya couldn’t read Marley like a book already he would have assumed he’d figured them out. Instead, Ilya’s current running theory over Marlowe’s newfound ‘attentiveness’ was due to him making sure they weren’t about to murder each other and leave him as the next captain of the Boston Raiders.

“Fuck off, Rozy.” Marlowe clapped him on the back, towering over him in his ice skates. He shifted over to the side, sliding off the ice and back onto solid, less slippery ground. “What are my two favourite invalids up to?”

“How dare you? I am *completely* back to normal.” Ilya lifted up his, (admittedly still quite tender,) arm and flexed it. “See? No cast. The doctor took it off yesterday.”

“Maybe you should do that without wincing next time.” Shane retorted. “Seems more believable.”

Marlowe laughed. “When did the doc say you can come back?”

“Two more months.”

Marlowe whistled. “Shit, brother. At this rate Hollander will be out on the ice before you.”

“I don’t think-” Shane cut himself off then, his voice going sharp at the jagged end of his sentence. For a moment he went completely pale before he took a wincing breath. “...*Oh.*”

Ilya’s joking facade fell away within the next second. “What is wrong? Shane?”

At that, Marlowe whipped his head around like a dog hearing a whistle.

“It’s *nothing.*” Shane waved Ilya off, his expression saying what his mouth couldn’t. *Be cool. Stay calm.*

“Is-” Ilya’s eyes went wide and his throat went dry. As if he could *be cool* and *stay calm* right now. “Is it the baby?”

“Uh...” Shane answered. “Probably. I just-” his breath cut itself short again, leading into a sharp wince of pain. He folded inward on himself as another pang raced through him.

Fuck it. Fuck everything. Appearances be damned, Ilya immediately started toward him. “*Shane.*”

“...Damn, yeah. So that’s *definitely* a contraction, huh.” Shane hissed. “Fucking hurts.”

“More than the fake ones?” Ilya asked, pulling him closer and checking him over as best as he could. “Or about the same?”

Shane shook his head. “No... These feel different. I think they’re the real deal.”

The real deal.

The real deal.

...*Oh fuck.*

Ilya felt like a jolt of lightning had just hit his body, shocking him into action. “Okay. We go to hospital now,” he paused. “Wait... You say ‘these?’ You have been having more than this one?”

“Oh, yeah. All morning.” Shane shrugged, too distracted to be sheepish. “But they haven’t been, like, *super painful* until now. I didn’t want to make something out of nothing. I’m basically always kind of uncomfortable these days, you know?”

“Shane.”

“Ilya.”

“You say we need to be honest with each other. You remember this?”

“Right, yeah, shit.” Shane winced.

“Can you walk?” Ilya jittered on his feet, one second away from just grabbing Shane and princess-carrying him all the way out of the arena.

“Of course I can *walk*.” Shane frowned. “Just give me a minute to catch my breath.”

Distantly, Ilya caught sight of Marlowe glancing between them like he was trying to put together a puzzle in his mind and he’d finally found the last piece hidden underneath the sofa. “Holy shit.” He looked almost catatonic for a moment before seemingly snapping out of it. “Sorry, I’ll be helpful in a second. Just give me a bit.”

Shane looked over at him like he’d forgotten he was there, his pained expression turning into one of indignant resignation. “Fuck, Ilya. You were supposed to be nonchalant about it.”

“I do not what the fuck ‘nonchalant’ means but I will not be it.” Ilya hissed. “You are about to have baby in ice rink.”

“I am *not* about to have a baby in an ice rink.” Shane gritted. “My water hasn’t even broken ye-” he promptly shut his mouth.

Ilya’s stomach dropped as his eyes wandered toward the ground. The black, textured rubber of the floor was always covered in icy puddles due to its proximity to the rink. It was hard to tell what was what right now, but judging by Shane’s slowly paling expression he could hazard a guess that he may have contributed to it just now. “Did it-”

“Okay. Yeah. We should go.”

“-I’ll drive!” Marlowe interjected, already shucking off his skates with a frantic pair of hands. He still seemed pretty shellshocked by the revelation, but the emerging situation before him had put everything into perspective. At least for now.

Ilya suspected there would be questions later. Many, many questions.

“That way you can both sit in the back seat and, uh, hold hands?” Marlowe cleared his throat and looked to Shane. “I think he needs some calming down.”

Shane huffed. “I’m completely cal-”

“I wasn’t talking about you, Hollzy.”

“Oh.” Shane looked to Ilya now, who had almost gone purple from the tension of the situation alone. “Yeah, um, that would be good. Thanks, Marlowe.”

“Yeah, uh, no problem at all.”

“*Wait.*” Shane paused for just a second more, his gaze fluttering out back toward the wholly unaware gathering of players on the far end of the rink.

“What is it? Are you okay?”

“If Pfeifer stopped favouring his right side he could really improve his puck work. I should tell him before we go...”

“*Shane!*”

Shane was still *absurdly* calm about all this and it was actually making Ilya freak out even more. In the backseat of his terrible, terrible SUV, his expression was entirely neutral, his head angled toward the window as he watched the scenery go by.

By some miracle, the two of them had actually taken the same car to practice for once—heading inside at ten minute intervals of one another to maintain some level of anonymity. They could definitely be more careful if they wanted to be, but Shane was too exhausted to be pedantic over something no one suspected them of and Ilya was more than happy to drive them both around... Even if it was in Shane’s far more economical, (ugly,) SUV he’d brought over from Montreal.

‘*You can’t put a baby seat in a fucking Ferrari, Ilya,*’ he’d said. He was right, of course, but Ilya’s equally helpful suggestion of just taping their child to the roof of said Duccatti hadn’t earned him any favours, sexual or otherwise.

“I’m sorry, I still can’t believe this.” Marlowe’s posture from the front seat was ramrod straight, his eyes firmly fixed on the road. “Rozy, dude, when this gets out...”

“I know.” Ilya gritted. “It will be bad.”

“What is Jane gonna think?”

“*Marley.*”

“What? She’s gonna be so- *oh.* Oh.” Marlowe flicked himself on the head. “Fuck. My bad, brother. Jane. Shane. I’m stupid.”

“It’s a lot to take in.” Shane noted reasonably, looking over to Ilya. “Sorry you had to find out like this. It’s my fault. I didn’t want anyone to know...”

“No, no. I get it.” Marlowe insisted. “Seriously, dude, I’m- I’m happy for you both. This is really exciting and everything but it’s like... Holy fuck. Like, *holy* fuck.”

Ilya huffed out a short laugh. Even if things were crazy now, he could already feel how much of a massive relief it was to have someone else in his life that *knew*. Ilya would scream it from the rooftops if he could. “Is fucked, yes?”

“A little.” Marlowe admitted. “Not because you’re both, like, gay, or whatever. Just, you know... All the other stuff.”

“Yeah, It’s kind of-” Shane paused, going quiet again. It seemed he’d grown accustomed to the ebbing and flowing of the pain by now. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth, letting out a low exhale of hissed breath.

“Another one?” Ilya asked quietly, pursing his lips as Shane nodded. “They are getting closer together, yes?”

“That’s kinda what they’re supposed to do.” Shane replied, matter-of-factly, his eyes still shut tight.

Ilya stared at him, perplexed. “I do not understand. You freak out about everything else... But this is okay?”

“Do you *want* me to start freaking out?”

“No! Of course not. Unless you want to. Are you not freaking out because it is bad if we freak out at the same time? I can be calm. It is-”

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice was stern, cutting through the haze of his mind. “I’m good. I’m just... I’m good.”

“You are good.” Ilya repeated, the realisation settling into his bones once and for all. “That is good.”

“...I’m good too,” Marlowe chirped up from the front. “If anyone cares.”

“Of course we care.” Shane insisted. “We really owe you one, Marlowe. Maybe this baby really will have to be Cliff Hollander.”

“No. I am drawing with lines.”

“You’re drawing *the* line.” Shane corrected.

“Yes. That.” Ilya replied. “I am sorry. You can be ‘Uncle Marley,’ though, yes?”

“Shit, Rozy. I’d be honoured.” Marlowe grinned, his eyes still set on the road. He was a good driver- a much better one than Ilya. As a Boston native, he’d been navigating through terrible conditions since he was old enough to get a learner’s permit. Thankfully, right now, the streets were decently empty. Rush hour had passed and traffic had a natural flow about it that lent itself to his ducking and weaving.

“You called my parents, right?” Shane squinted, righting himself into a less shrimp-like position now that the contraction had passed.

“Yes.”

The Hollanders had planned on flying to Boston later this week for their impending grandchild. Suffice to say, they were currently at Ottawa International on standby instead. When Ilya had called, it seemed like Yuna Hollander was about to get in the cockpit and fly a damn plane here herself if they didn't get something soon.

"Good." Shane nodded. "That's good... Wow, this is so weird."

"What is weird?"

"We're about to be parents." Shane furrowed his eyebrows. "And I'm not terrified, like, at all. My whole life I've been on edge about *something*, but this? I'm fine with this. I mean, yeah, I'm sure I'll eventually be nervous about what the future holds for me, for *us*, but right now I'm just excited." A small smile crept onto his face as he grabbed ahold of Ilya's hand. "We're gonna do great because we always do."

Ilya looked down at their hands intertwined together and brought them up to his lips, his stern expression softening under Shane's stare. "Who are you and where have you put my Shane Hollander?"

Ilya could not describe Shane's grin as anything less than *giddy*. "Oh he's still in here. He's screaming to come back out but I'm not letting him."

Chapter 20

Lucy was so small and so red when they thrust her into his arms for the first time. She'd still been squawking with discomfort from being introduced into a world as complicated as this one, and Shane couldn't even blame her, he would cry too- he *did* cry, actually- but it was mostly out of relief, out of happiness, out of everything from this past year that had made him feel anything at all. All the good and the bad that had built up to this and now there was actually something to show for it and she was so little and loud and *here* and... A carbon fucking copy of Ilya Rozanov.

"Wow, this is going to be way harder than we thought."

"Hm?" Ilya was almost just as red and teary as their new daughter, squeezed onto Shane's hospital bed with him, watching the little creature in his arms with such pure, rapt attention that it made Shane's heart squeeze deep inside his chest. Her cries had quietened down to whimpers now, comforted by the familiar warmth that now enveloped her once more.

"There's no way we're going to be able to keep this a secret," Shane inspected the little girl's generous crop of light, curly hair. "She looks *just* like you."

"Hm. That must be why I think she is so beautiful," Ilya whispered, reaching out to graze his pointer finger on her cheek. "Hello, *malyshka*. I told your father that you would be a girl but he did not believe it. Very nice of you to prove him wrong for me," he was grinning so wide that Shane was sure his face would begin to ache soon but even still he showed no signs of stopping. It was a nice return to form, such a contrast from the fretting mess he had been all morning- all *month*, really. It had gotten to a point where *Shane* had been the one to tell him he was overthinking things- an absurdity in of itself. He supposed he could certainly understand it though. He'd spent his entire life second guessing certainties, after all.

Right now, though, they were both just... happy. Well and truly.

Ilya leant over and kissed Shane's head about a dozen times, all in quick succession of one another. "Thank you, thank you, thank you. *Spasibo, spasibo*."

"For what?"

"For her."

"Oh." Shane warmed under the praise. "It's... You're welcome," he nodded. Neither one of them had taken their eyes off of her just yet. She couldn't be more perfect if she tried.

This couldn't be more perfect if they tried.

"We should get married." The wave of realisation that washed over him was like nothing he could have imagined or expected... It was just *so much* that Shane couldn't help the words from flowing out of his mouth like a deluge.

“What?”

“I’m serious,” Shane’s expression didn’t shift. “It makes sense, doesn’t it? Look at her, Ilya. When- not if, *when* all this gets out, it will be easier for you to stay here with us if we were married. Huh, I can’t believe I didn’t think of this sooner.”

Ilya studied him for a moment, his mouth a simple, straight line on his face. “Hmmm.”

That gave Shane pause. For a moment he wondered if he had just said something so disastrously stupid that he was about to get dumped in his hospital bed. Ilya Rozanov *did not hesitate*. “What? No good?”

“You are not very much of a romantic are you, Hollander?”

“Well, sorry I didn’t get down on one knee. The single stitch that’s holding literally all of my organs inside my body is still kind of tender.”

“-And you’re holding a baby.”

“-And I’m holding a baby. *Our* baby.” Shane raised an eyebrow at him. “So keep that in mind when you think of your answer.”

Ilya grinned at him in that same, teasing way that he always did, his expression softening just a touch further as he shifted his gaze back toward the swaddled bundle of blankets in his arms. “Lyusyenka, what should I do? Your father is trying to talk me into a very, very, very late bazooka wedding.”

“It’s a *shotgun* wedding, and that isn’t what this is at all.” Shane leant back, shifting closer toward Ilya. “If anything, it’s a green card marriage, but not really even, because I *do* love you. In fact, I love you so much that I don’t want anything to ever pull us apart- and I would do this all over again just to get this same outcome if I had to.” The words tumbled out of his mouth in a flurry, each one coming out faster than the other. “Because we’ve got something right now that I never thought I would have and it makes me feel like I got away with murder.”

“...Ah,” Ilya’s smile was a little more watery this time as he took all of Shane in, watching him like he wasn’t quite sure if this was real or not. Shane had never been good at reading people but the look on Ilya’s face seemed to come along with a resounding, ‘*ditto*,’ to his sentiments. “Maybe you are a romantic, after all.”

“...So is that a yes?”

“Of course it is a yes, Hollander.” Ilya laughed. “I would love to be your husband.”

“Oh good.” Shane shifted a touch, the sense of relief clear on his face. “That’s good.”

“You could have just waited for me to ask, you know.” Ilya replied. “You do not have to do everything yourself.”

“...You were gonna ask?”

“Yes. I was going to drop a ring in those terrible, terrible smoothies you make. The ones with the kale? Bleh,” he made a face. “And you would find it in there and you would go, ‘Ilya what is this?’ and then you would turn around and I would be on one knee behind you and I would say, ‘Shane Hollander, will you marry me?’ And then you would say yes, of course, and we would probably end up having sex right there in the kitchen because we are just so excited and in love and then I would accidentally get you pregnant again and you would very rightfully murder me with an axe the night before our wedding and raise Lyusyenka to be triracial trilingual hockey president of Canada.”

Shane blinked at him, taking in the information entirely seriously as he tended to do. After a moment, he spoke once more. “We have a prime minister, not a president.”

Shane wasn’t used to seeing himself in black. The familiar blues and reds and whites of the Montreal Metro had been so integral to his professional appearance in the locker room that it almost just felt like his eyesight had gone bad- that some of the wires in his brain hadn’t quite crossed over just yet.

He’d always known this would be the reality of his first time in his new team’s colours, but it didn’t stop it from being strange all the same. The Boston Raiders jersey slung over his body was heavy, but not uncomfortable. It felt like a weighted blanket enveloping his torso and holding his nerves together in a neat little bunch in the pit of his stomach.

“First game back, Hollzy!” Marlowe’s cubby was next to his, but it still felt like he appeared out of nowhere when he slapped him encouragingly on the back. “You good?”

“Yeah.”

He was, he really was.

These past few months, Ilya and Shane had settled into parenthood in the same way that they settled into everything; with a certain reckless abandon that just seemed to work. It wasn’t perfect but it was a welcome change to what their dynamic had once been. Their days of late night rendezvous and surreptitious texting were long gone- and as much as sneaking around had been tantalizing, Shane found he didn’t miss it as much as he thought he would. They were still doing plenty of secret keeping, after all- biding their time before officially coming out with quiet moments and tentative touches.

It wasn’t safe for Ilya to sing their love from the rooftops. Not just yet, at least. They still had a lot more paperwork to go over and a lot more wedding preparations to finalise- boxes to tick and dotted lines to sign- but the end was in sight. After this season, Ilya would return to Russia for a final time to settle his affairs and then...

Then everything would hopefully find a less chaotic rhythm, then their worst kept secret would finally be their loudest and proudest.

“Black suits you better.” Marlowe grinned, “makes you look badass.”

“You think so?” Shane raised his eyebrows. “Um, thanks. I like it too.”

As much of a change as this all was, the most frightening things were behind him. What lay ahead was uncertain- different, but it was the aftershocks, not the quake... And more than anything Shane Hollander was excited to see what the future had in store for him.

“Is baby Lucy watching from the stands?”

“No. She’s at home with my parents.”

Shane thought of his phone in his bag. Right before he’d turned it off his mother had sent him her traditional ‘good luck’ text- only this time, for the first time, there had been a photo attached to it. It was one she had taken of Lucy on her play mat, angling her gummy smile up toward the camera with an eerie perfection that felt far beyond her years, (or, more specifically, months.) Clad on her body was the tiniest Boston Raiders onesie Shane had ever seen. The jersey had been a gift from the rookies Shane had been giving pointers to. They’d pooled their meagre starter salaries together to have it specially made for her in time for his return to the ice. When Shane had unwrapped it in front of them all he’d nearly burst into tears. The sentiment had been so kind and thoughtful that he could not fathom that it had come from a trio of jocks fresh out of high school.

“Aw man, you gotta bring her to the game next time.”

“No chance.”

“Come on,” Marlowe insisted with a whine. “We need a new defenseman, she’d work great on my line.”

“Maybe when she can actually sit up on her own,” Shane placated, giving Marlowe a well-meaning pat on the shoulder. “Until then maybe you can come over for dinner or something?”

“You’re on. Hey, good luck out there. You got this.”

“Thanks, man.” Shane smiled, shifting over toward the doorway with a shaky sigh. Mere minutes out from the start of the game, he couldn’t help but think about how much had changed since the last time he was here- or, well, somewhere like it. Almost every aspect of his life had changed and yet... It felt right. It felt just. It felt perfect.

“Looks like it is finally time to put all those cheerio diagrams to good use.” It didn’t take long for Ilya to follow him out. “Is exciting.”

“Yeah.” Shane’s mouth twitched upward as the other sidled up toward him with a practiced ease, the ‘C’ on his jersey shining like a beacon even in the LED lights of the locker room.

Shane hadn’t shown Ilya the photo of Lucy in her jersey. He’d leave it until after the game. Boston needed a fired up captain, not a weepy one.

“...You think she’s going okay with my parents?”

“She is much better off with them than Svetlana.”

Shane snorted. ‘Auntie Svetlana’ had been a sight to behold. Gorgeous and poised and entirely terrible at holding babies. What she lacked in skill, though, she made up for with every piece of tiny baby clothing she came across. Shane was secretly thankful for her padding his daughter’s wardrobe with nicer pieces. He didn’t know anything when it came to clothes and Ilya’s mindset had always been ‘the more zeroes on the price tag, the more fashionable.’ Lucy was lucky to have someone that had a clue. She was already very loved.

“...We make her proud and then we come home to her as soon as possible, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“Hey.” Ilya bumped him on the shoulder, he could tell he was still up in his head. “You will do great.”

Shane knew that. “Is that an order, captain?”

Ilya’s smile was soft and decidedly un-captainly. “It is.”

“Oh. Well, I can’t refuse then, can I?”

The two of them stood side by side. Jersey to jersey. Hollander and Rozanov in matching colours for the first time, ever.

Shane was always hungry for victory but right now it felt like he was starving for it.

“We need to win Stanley Cup together this season.”

“Yeah.”

“We can melt it down into wedding rings and tell everyone it was destroyed in a house fire.”

“Wha- a house fire?”

“Yes. Very sad. No one at all hurt- except Hayden Pike whose hair and eyebrows all burnt off.”

“Ilya please.”

Ilya huffed out a laugh that didn’t seem entirely kind, even still Shane couldn’t bring himself to scold him. He was too busy taking it all in. He had dreamt of impossible scenarios like this one; situations where Ilya would be traded to Montreal and they’d become an absolute force to reckon with, a day in the near future where they could trade glances without wondering if their expressions were too much for the facade they maintained. It was all so close now he could touch it.

“Are you ready?”

Shane was more than ready, if he was being entirely honest. He had a lot of people to make proud and a whole lot more people to prove wrong. "Of course."

He always played better when the odds were against him, after all. It just made him want it more.

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