

Enough for you

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Enough for you

by [Ishipthisshitokay](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov had been household names for years, yet the media still treated them like gladiators thrown into an arena for public entertainment. Hollywood had never manufactured a rivalry this blatant before—and of course they were the guinea pigs. The blueprint. The cautionary tale in the making.

The money was obscene. The roles were constant.

And the studios? They were practically frothing at the mouth.

If Shane landed a blockbuster, Ilya was mysteriously cast in a competing one within days.

Rival studios loved the drama, the headlines, the built-in war.

And if Ilya was favored to win at the box office against Shane, well then, who was Ilya to complain about it?

Boring Canadian: Got to go

BC: Text you later?

Ilya: Okay

Ilya: Don't get hard thinking of me blowing you

BC: Fuck you!

Ilya: You're hard, aren't you?

BC: ...

Ilya: My good little slut

BC: TURNING OFF MY PHONE NOW!!!!!!!!!!

Or Shane and Ilya have a complicated work-life relationship, and it becomes so much more than either of them could have ever imagined.

Notes

My first fic on here. Kind of nervous. I have no betas and no help, and this was written and edited -by me- in the same 48-hour period. I will post daily because we are experiencing major withdrawals over here since the end of this damn season, and I need a reason to keep pushing until 2027.

Important Note: Things in "[]" are being spoken in Russian. Ex: [I love this story I should leave kudos and comments] would have been said in Russian. This will mostly happen with

Russian speakers' POV, so Ilya, if you notice there's Russian and it's not like this, then that's because the narrator wouldn't have understood it.

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!
Bye :)

Chapter 1: The Academy Awards

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya Rozanov needed to fucking smoke.

But instead, he was posing on the red carpet of the biggest event of the year. The Academy Awards.

As another flash blinded him, another voice shouted at him to turn his head this way, to smile or do something or other. He ignored them. His mind was focused on the woman standing a couple of meters ahead of him, already talking to the next person he had to speak to.

Dread filled him as he noticed the microphone in the man's hand.

Another live interview.

In a language he had only been speaking for six months.

Ilya forced a smile on his lips, but he knew it looked forced, so he raised his hands in thanks and began to walk off the spotlight.

He didn't particularly care for the man he was about to pretend to understand, but he didn't believe in putting things off. Rip the paper off, or something like that.

English was fucking stupid.

Though he did like cursing, it was the only redeeming quality of this fucked language. But he couldn't very well curse on the Oscars' red carpet. At least not without getting a hefty fine, and after only having had a lucky breakthrough that his contract hadn't anticipated, it wasn't like he was pulling in the mountains of money he had heard he could now begin to ask for.

He couldn't wait.

Then he would be free to curse and do whatever else he wanted without remorse.

Without guilt.

"Hi," he said, echoing the man's cheerful greeting.

The lights were bright and hot, instantly making him feel far too warm in his striped suit. He pushed a loose curl gently away from his eyes and put on his now-famous smile. His cheeks were beginning to hurt.

The man asked him the regular questions, bless him.

'Was he surprised at the nomination?' Yes, of course!

‘Who did he hope won tonight?’

He thought to say, “Me, of course,” but Svetlana—his agent—widened her eyes off-screen and shook her head, so he said, “There are a lot of good choices. Any of the others would be good.”

‘But you hope it will be you?’ Of course. Who would answer differently?

When they got to the question about him showing up alone, he just winked at the camera and thanked the man, ignoring the question completely. The interviewer had the exact reaction Ilya had hoped for and began loudly speculating about it, even as Ilya began walking quickly away, allowing the next person to have their turn.

He grumbled.

It wasn’t like he was in a particularly bad mood or that he didn’t want to be there. Ilya was not an idiot; this was the dream. But he couldn’t deny he felt out of place, and being alone meant he had no one to share these nerves with. He felt like he was about to explode. His hands kept trembling, so he put them inside his pocket and accepted the gum Svetlana gave him to keep his mouth busy.

He needed a fucking smoke.

“[No],” she told him for the fifth time, though it felt like the hundredth. “[We are about to go inside. Besides, we cannot have you smelling like cigarettes].”

Because smoking was not allowed anywhere within the premises, he did remember, but wished he hadn’t. He was 99% sure his mood would become way better if he were allowed just to take one drag, just a quick one.

A minute or so later, Ilya was guided to a seat, with Svetlana sitting directly behind him.

He was next to a beautiful woman, whom he remembered was named after a flower. She was nominated, like him, for best actress in a major motion picture, while he was nominated for the same award in the male category. He had watched her movie, and he had to say, he’d be surprised if she did not take the trophy.

She smiled broadly at him as he sat and extended her perfectly manicured hand.

“It’s Ilya, right? I’m Rose. Nice to meet you.”

“Hi, Rose,” he said. Smiling came easily for the first time that night. “I watched your movie. You will win tonight.”

She blushed at this. “God, I hope.”

Ilya’s smile turned into a laugh. “Me too. For me, I mean. And you.”

She laughed at this. “You were phenomenal,” she said, and Ilya used context clues to decipher that the word she used meant he’d done well, too. He thanked her, and then he felt a

tap on his shoulder.

He turned to find Svetlana.

“[Remember, they will have cameras focused on you and her all night. Make sure to play it up. Americans would love it].”

For once, he was glad they were the only Russian speakers. Even then, he felt his eyes shift nervously around searching for unwanted ears.

“[Isn’t she married]?” He asked because he’d heard something about that.

Svetlana surprised him by saying, “[Yes, but still. Wouldn’t hurt to look friendly].”

“[I am friendly. I don’t have to pretend],” he said, with a very unfriendly expression as he scowled at her.

She didn’t answer; instead, she sat back, and Ilya saw someone approaching out of the corner of his eye.

He scowled at her for a moment longer, relishing it, before he put some of his excellent acting skills to use and turned back to face the front of the room, when a male body slid into the empty seat on his left.

Ilya smelled him before he saw him. He wasn’t a perfume expert, but this scent was unforgettable: masculine yet light, neither sweet nor overpowering. Ilya took two deep breaths to savor it.

If only the scent had prepared him for the sight of the man wearing it. He almost felt foolish for not realizing that someone with such a distinctive fragrance must also appear as irresistibly striking as he smelled.

Ilya recognized him instantly. How could he not?

They were both first-time nominees.

Both had started in low-budget international movies- Russian for Ilya, French for Shane Hollander.

Shane wasn’t French. Ilya now knew the man was simply an artist. He had hired the best dialect coaches and mastered the language in one week.

Ilya had nothing against Shane, but the media liked to imagine they would be enemies of sorts.

It was pretty interesting to read the critics' speculation about who deserved this award more. Ilya knew it should be him; he had almost died for this role, having lost 40 pounds, putting him well below what was advisable for someone his height and age. He’d had to, to portray the struggles of the addict he’d been playing as.

What had Shane done, other than learn some French?

Ilya had learned English, and no one was giving an extra Oscar for that.

It didn't help that even though Ilya was ignoring him, he couldn't get the image of Shane out of his head in his all-black suit. He had no shirt under, just bare golden skin, and a choker made of tiny diamonds and a single blue sapphire at the center. His hair was styled to look messy yet classy, and his dark, naturally straight hair fell to his forehead in soft, styled waves.

Ilya heard the announcer say they would be on shortly when he listened to a confident, male voice to his left say, "Nerve-wracking, isn't it?"

"What?" Ilya asked, because he didn't understand the words this man had just uttered at him, but mostly because this man was uttering things at him, and that was just...

"Sorry. I am Shane," he said, offering his hand. As if Ilya didn't know who he was.

As if anyone in this room didn't know who either of them was.

Ilya hesitated, but shook it, and Shane smiled softly, his eyes dropping to their joined hands.

Ilya let go far too quickly.

"Ilya," he said, voice rough as he scratched at a spot next to his eye where his hair kept tickling him. He pushed it aside and saw Shane's eyes follow the movement.

"You are an amazing actor," Shane said, looking at Ilya.

Ilya dropped his hand and felt his jaw tense.

What game was Shane playing at?

"Yes," Ilya said, because it just didn't make sense. They were going against each other. No?

Shane didn't seem offended by Ilya's reaction; instead, he laughed.

Ilya looked around nervously and found Svetlana texting away behind him, not even paying attention to them.

Somehow, this made the tension in Ilya's chest ease. If this were a trap of some kind, she would have been on it right away. Her disinterest must mean there was nothing wrong with this, right?

After many minutes, when the host had been introduced and everyone began to clap, Ilya leaned closer and said over the noise, "You were good too."

Shane didn't turn to him, eyes still fixed ahead as he clapped, but leaned closer so his ear was near Ilya as he asked, "What?"

“You will not be so nice when I beat you,” Ilya said instead, and by then the claps had begun to die down, which meant almost everyone around them heard him.

Svetlana kicked his chair and cursed low in Russian. Ilya felt his cheeks heat immediately.

So much for being the friendly Russian.

Shane seemed taken aback by this, but the shock left far too quickly, replaced by a sudden fire in his eyes, and he smiled in a way that was all challenge. Something inside Ilya lit up at the sight, and he felt his heart race as Shane said, with the confidence of a man who knew precisely the kind of power he held.

“That’s not going to happen.”

It did happen.

And Ilya was finally granted the chance to smoke.

Ilya inhaled deeply and exhaled all the smoke in his throat through his nose, relishing in the burn, when he heard shuffling feet come to a halt to his right.

“I don’t think you’re supposed to smoke here,” Shane said, and Ilya had the strange desire to stub the thing out immediately. Instead, he made a show of putting it back on his lips and taking a long, deep drag, which he let out almost immediately in the direction of the Canadian man.

Shane made a disgusted face and stepped back, his hand coming up and batting the smoke away from his face.

“Smoking is not good for you,” he said, clearly annoyed.

“Is not?”

Shane raised a bemused eyebrow, but the corner of his lips pulled up the tiniest bit, like he was fighting a smile.

“Had a good night?” Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged. “Could have been better.”

Ilya took another drag and let it out. This time, making sure it was in the opposite direction of Shane, which didn’t help much because the air was blowing in his direction. Still, Ilya tried to dispel the smoke even as he said, “Sorry.”

Shane let out a dry laugh at that. “No, you’re not.”

“No,” Ilya agreed. “Not really.”

Shane's smile grew then, and he looked down at the floor, where Ilya had stubbed out his cigarette. Ilya bent down, picked it up, and put it inside his suit jacket.

Shane made a disgusted face but didn't comment, and Ilya took one step closer to him.

Shane didn't move away, his eyes fixed on the floor, watching as Ilya took another closer step, then another, until they were so close that Shane was now staring at Ilya's chest even though his head hadn't moved.

"Going to after-party?" Ilya asked.

Shane took a deep breath and turned his face so he was looking up at Ilya.

Ilya momentarily got lost in the honey brown of those eyes.

"Maybe," Shane said with a one-shoulder shrug. "Will you be there?"

"Maybe."

They remained like that for a long time, and with each second, Ilya felt the air around them turn tense.

"What is your room number?"

"1410," Shane answered so quickly that Ilya knew he had been secretly hoping for the question. The idea made warmth pool low in his stomach. Made worse when he said, "Same hotel as you."

Shane's cheeks reddened when Ilya raised an eyebrow at him in question. "I... saw you there. It was a total coincidence, I swear."

"Sure, it was," Ilya said, and brought his face closer, so their noses were grazing and his lips were almost touching. "What was I doing? When you saw me."

Shane swallowed, his previously wide eyes becoming hooded. "You were working out."

"Ah," Ilya said. "Explains it."

"Explains what?" Shane whispered against Ilya's lips.

Ilya felt himself grow in his trousers, his body thrumming with the need to close the gap between their bodies. He inhaled and- fuck - that smell. He wondered if Shane smelled just as good everywhere else. He wanted to find out.

"I look fucking good in gym."

Shane let out a laugh and stepped back, placing a hand on Ilya's chest. "Yes, sure."

"I do," Ilya said, and placed a hand over Shane's.

Shane's laughter halted at once, the sound caught in his throat as his body responded to the touch.

"Feels good, too," Ilya continued, using the way he was having such an effect on the man to his advantage. "Can show you."

Shane moved closer, and Ilya wasn't sure he even noticed the movement. Shane's eyes were focused on their joint hands. Shane's smaller hand enveloped by Ilya's much bigger one, and he splayed out his hands, feeling the steady flesh over the white T-shirt Ilya was wearing. Shane ran his fingers over it, and Ilya let out a curse in Russian.

This made Shane look up at him, an inquisitive look on his face that made Ilya's heart stutter. Fuck, he wanted-

Ilya hadn't noticed how close they had been until they heard a noise and both jumped back as if electrocuted.

Shane pretended to be fixing his suit while Ilya fumbled for his cigarettes, managing to grab one when the familiar shape of Svetlana appeared in the small, covered patio, her head in her phone screen.

She was saying a few things in Russian, but Ilya's ears were ringing from how loud his blood was pumping, and he didn't catch any of it. She stopped talking when she noticed Ilya's silence, prying her eyes from her phone screen to see the two men.

"Shane," she said, in obvious surprise. "You smoke?"

"No," Shane said. "I was just- I needed some air," he said, his panic quickly morphing into something else, something calmer, and Ilya saw it happen in real time. The way he slipped into a different person was why he had been nominated for an award tonight. The reason he'd become 'French' in three months. He was an actor, and a damn good one.

Ilya wondered if the wrong person had won tonight, because he wasn't sure he could pretend to be anything other than painfully hard and desperate for this man.

He didn't even want to attempt it.

1410, he recalled.

"I'll be going now. After-party," Shane said, and Ilya didn't miss the suggestive way Shane's eyes moved to his.

Ilya nodded imperceptibly, and Shane left. Ilya also didn't miss the smile on Shane's lips as he turned to him one last time before disappearing.

"[What the fuck was that]?" Svetlana asked.

"[What]?"

"[Are you going to fuck Shane Hollander, now]?"

“[Maybe],” Ilya said, lighting the cigarette, but Svetlana took it from him. He began to protest, but instead of putting it out, she pressed it to her lips.

Ilya relaxed.

“[You don’t pay me enough],” she said, exhaling. She handed the cigarette back. “[Don’t make a mess of this. You are both adults, but if this gets out].”

“[I know],” he said.

“[Russia-]”

“[I know],” he said, voice harsh because he didn’t need her to fucking remind him of what he’d be giving up. He had thought of nothing else his whole life.

“[Congratulations, again],” she said, and he noticed she was carrying the fake Oscar in her hands. “[I’ve got to give this back now. Was going to ask if you wanted to do it, but you have an after-party to go to].”

“[Yes],” he said, fighting a grin. Ten minutes ago, he’d been dreading going to this party, and socializing with all these people he did not know who would know him, or who wanted to know him now that he was an Academy Award winner. He knew he had to attend; it made no sense when so many influential people would be there just for him. It was his night after all. But now, he had the added pleasure of the possibility he might end up fucking his ‘rival’, who he’d just defeated, and who had the most fantastic pair of lips and ass he had ever seen.

He handed the cigarette to Svetlana after taking his last drag. She put the cigarette on her lips and began to straighten his jacket, his lapels, and his sleeves.

“[I don’t deserve you],” he said, after he’d let the smoke out.

“[Shut up],” she said with a roll of her eyes. “[Now, go enjoy your big night], Mr. Oscar-Winner.”

“[Want me to wait for you]?”

“[No, go. I have my own plans tonight],” she said, and Ilya nodded, pressing a loud kiss to her cheek, before she swatted him away.

Ilya noticed far too quickly that the after-party was not so much a party but a giant hook-up event.

There were many people, married people, who were not leaving alone tonight, and many more who had come alone but were not leaving that way, including him. Now it made sense why no one skipped these.

Hollywood was full of very attractive and fit men and women. While Ilya would have previously jumped at the chance to take full advantage of his bisexuality, tonight he only had eyes for one man.

The one man whom he'd located from the moment he'd arrived and who had yet to take his eyes off of him.

Shane was laughing with Rose, a champagne flute in his hand, which he had not drunk from once all night. Ilya was being talked to by a short, old, and very well-known man. Not that Ilya knew him, of course, but by everyone else seemed to. So, Ilya played it up, smiling and thanking him when he was told he would be sent a script for an upcoming project. This had been the tenth man to come to him with such a proposition, and Ilya sent a silent thank you to the heavens for the life he was now living.

He pushed away the guilt that always followed the gratitude and let his eyes focus on the much better-looking man on the other side of the room.

Their eyes met, and Shane raised his champagne flute. To everybody else, the sight would have been gratifying, his rival putting down his own ego and congratulating the winner, but to Ilya it was a promise, a silent 'Soon', and suddenly Soon wasn't soon enough.

He excused himself and made his way across the room.

Shane's eyes widened when he saw him approach, and he turned to Rose, who had equally wide eyes, although there was a mix of shock and delight as she regarded her good friend.

"Hello," Ilya said easily to Rose, "and congratulations."

"Congrats, back," she said, and the hand that had been on Shane's forearm squeezed. Shane's smile didn't drop, but Ilya noticed the way his eyes seemed to grow a bit wet, like he was fighting tears.

Something twisted inside Ilya at the sight, but he refused to feel bad about his win. He'd earned this; besides, he had a feeling Shane wouldn't take it well to being pitied.

Good, because he wasn't about to get any pity from Ilya.

"How is party for you?"

"Fun," Rose said, and turned to Shane, "This one is a bit drunk, though. Might need help getting to his room."

Ilya raised an eyebrow at that, shooting a pointed glance at Shane's untouched flute.

"Is he now?"

Shane blushed, and Ilya couldn't get tired of the sight. He wanted to see it more.

"Maybe I can help with that," he said, because it was Rose, and for some reason, she seemed trustworthy, and besides, after all the odd pairs tonight, Shane and Ilya would not be the most scandalous, by far.

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was grinning. He put his flute down on the cocktail table separating him and Rose, and turned to Ilya, the wetness in his gaze still there but filled with

so much desire, Ilya moved closer unconsciously.

“You gonna take me home, Rozanov?” Shane asked, and Ilya had half a mind to notice Rose walking away, leaving them alone. He really, really liked Rose.

“I do,” Ilya said, and swallowed because his throat was suddenly too dry.

“What are you waiting for then?” Shane asked and stepped back, sliding his hands into his pockets. He suddenly looked nervous, and Ilya didn’t know why, but he felt it eat at him as he tried to bring the tension back between them, which had suddenly left them.

He knew why instantly, as a hand slid around Ilya’s shoulders, and a very drunk voice said, “Tormenting little Shane, are we? Wasn’t it bad enough you beat him, you got to rub it in his face as well?”

“Get off,” Ilya said, shrugging the man off.

“He wasn’t rubbing it in my face,” Shane said, and blushed a deep red as he looked down, and Ilya had never been so inappropriately turned on by anyone in his life. He hadn’t even understood half the words Kent had said, or Shane’s reply, but he saw through the blush, saw the way Shane was tense, his jaw clenched and hands crossed over his chest. Saw the way he could barely bear to hold the man’s gaze, like he wanted to disappear.

He turned to Kent and regarded the man.

He was handsome, in that rugged, American bully way. In the same way, his brother was. He reminded Ilya a lot of Alexie, and that was enough to make him hate the man, without knowing anything else about him, but to have Shane’s reaction just solidified that he didn’t want to get to know him.

Not at all.

And Kent should be happy never to meet Ilya outside of this room either.

But now, they were in this room. And there were eyes and cameras everywhere. And so, Ilya just said, “You’re drunk.”

“So what?” Kent asked, breath stinking of alcohol.

Ilya grimaced and stepped closer to Shane, so he was shielded behind him.

“It’s a fucking party, Romanov. You don’t have those in Russia?”

Ilya chose to ignore the clear butchering of his last name to say instead, “We do, and we also have drunk assholes in Russia, too.”

It took a while, but then Kent’s eyes went dark.

“What did you fucking say to me?”

Ilya clenched his fists and tense. So much for staying professional.

If Kent wanted to fight well, so long as Ilya didn't throw the first punch.

"You heard me," Ilya said, and Kent's nostrils flared.

Kent took a step forward on wobbly legs, and Ilya reached behind him for Shane. Shane's hand met his, and Ilya pushed him back, away from Kent. Shane, however, didn't move back; instead, he moved closer to Ilya so Ilya felt his chest against his back, and his nose grazed the back of Ilya's neck.

It made every hair on the back of his neck stand up, and Ilya took a deep inhale, shuddering as he smelled him. He was so close.

Not close enough.

Adrenaline pumping, Kent threw the first punch, and Ilya decided to be the bigger person, for once in his life.

He moved aside, making sure to pull Shane with him, and in the split second before Kent's fist connected with his face, he swiveled them away.

Kent went face-first into the cocktail table.

The commotion drew all the eyes not already on them to the scene, and soon Kent's body was surrounded by his peers, all with their phones out, taking videos and pictures of him.

Ilya didn't stick around to see more.

He turned and whispered into Shane's ear, "Thirty minutes."

Before he strolled out.

Ilya saw the phones filming him as he walked out and shook out his arms, letting out some of the adrenaline and tension he still felt buzz inside him. He didn't remember the last time he'd passed up a fight. 'Never' was probably the answer.

He brought a hand up to fix his hair and caught a familiar heady smell on his suit sleeve. He brought the material to his nose and inhaled, pressed the elevator button with his other hand, and let his eyes slip closed. He allowed the smell to fill his lungs as he waited for the elevator ding to alert him that it had arrived and opened his eyes to find a familiar pair of brown eyes looking up at him.

"[You're still here]?" Svetlana asked. Watching him as he stepped in beside her.

"[Going to bed now]."

"[Whose]?"

Ilya grinned, his eyes still fixedly on the closing doors. "[You know whose]."

Svetlana shook her head. She looked down at her phone when it dinged, and she frowned.

She turned angry eyes to Ilya.

“[Seriously]?”

Ilya twisted his head to look at her screen. It was a video of what had just happened.

He saw himself standing over Kent’s fallen body, bending down to whisper something to Shane before turning to walk away. He looked angry, very much so, and he was shaking out his hands like-

“[I didn’t punch him].”

“[Right. Fuck you]!”

“[I swear, he tripped on his own].” He turned his knuckles towards her. “[Look].”

She assessed his unmarred skin, and then her frown deepened. “[You’re still an idiot].”

“[Kent’s the idiot],” he said, the anger returning. “[And he did something to Shane].”

“[Now]?”

“[Not now. In the past].”

Svetlana was silent for a moment, and the elevator stopped, signaling their arrival at their floor.

Ilya drummed his fingers against his trousers, impatiently waiting for the doors to open. They’d just begun to slide open when Svetlana said, “[Don’t make the same mistake twice, Ilya].”

“[I won’t],” he said and then strolled out to do exactly that.

Chapter End Notes

The first five chapters are up, and the rest will come daily until I post them all, since the story is complete now.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 2: Wagyu Beef

Chapter Summary

Shane's first night with Ilya becomes the secret that haunts them both as their lives drift apart. When they meet again a year later, passion pulls them back together—but fame, lies, and a public relationship threaten to tear apart what they can't stop wanting.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

Thirty-one minutes later, Ilya was knocking on the door to 1410.

He did it as softly as he could, because the place was crawling with half of the attendees from the awards, and more than their lot of reporters who would have had a field day with the knowledge of who he was going to see, who he was hoping to fuck.

Fuck, he really hoped Shane liked to get fucked.

He had thought of nothing else on the whole night, even before their chance meeting in the patio. Had been thinking about it since the moment he'd caught that first sniff.

He hoped Shane hadn't showered, or that if he had, he'd still had on that-

And Ilya didn't get to finish that thought because he was suddenly being pulled inside the room.

Ilya heard the door slam behind him and felt his back get pressed into it as a body was suddenly on him, a mouth crashing onto his.

He opened his lips reflexively, his eyes wide as he tried to calm down his racing heart, and then he inhaled, and there it was.

Ilya's eyes closed, and his arms, which had been frozen by his sides, circled the man in front of him and lifted.

Shane wrapped his legs around his waist instantly, his hands wrapping behind Ilya's neck as this one deepened the kiss. He tried to open one eye to see where he was going and noted it was the same layout as his own room.

He hiked Shane up with renewed confidence and began to walk towards the bed he knew would be waiting for them a couple of feet away.

Ilya was lightheaded, both from the scorching kiss and from the feeling of Shane's body against his. He was breathing too hard, but so was Shane, and every time Ilya licked into his mouth, Shane let out these soft moans, like he was incapable of holding them back.

Ilya groaned into their kiss and gripped the apples of Shane's impressive ass under his hands. When he reached the bed, he threw them both onto it, careful not to relinquish his hold on Shane's mouth as he did.

It was better than he could have imagined, this feeling.

Shane pulled back first, and Ilya enjoyed how gone for it he looked, with his pupils blown and his rosy, freckled cheeks, his lips swollen from the abuse Ilya had put him through. Ilya reached out and grazed his cheek, feeling the heated soft skin.

Shane's eyes widened, then closed as he leaned into it.

Something inside Ilya twisted, and he pulled his hand back, using it instead to tug Shane's cotton white shirt off.

He had taken a shower, it seemed. As had Ilya.

They undressed far quicker than was probably sexy, but it was the hottest thing Ilya could have ever witnessed. To feel this desperation and see it reflected in the other man. Someone else might have acted indifferent, unaffected, but Ilya had never liked those games. He knew what he wanted, and he acted like it. And it seemed Shane felt the same way. Either that, or he was truly incapable of hiding it, which didn't seem likely, a talented actor as he was.

This thought took some of Ilya's eagerness away, as he realized the opposite could also be true.

Could Shane be faking this to get back at him for winning?

One look at Shane's obvious hard-on and the thought was erased from Ilya's mind.

"Come here," he said, once they were both naked and in bed once more.

Shane, who had suddenly gone very still beside him, accepted Ilya's outstretched hand and turned so they were facing each other in the middle of the mattress.

"Hi," Shane said, after a moment of silence.

"What do you need?" Ilya asked, after echoing the greeting.

Shane bit on his bottom lip. He looked almost... nervous.

"Is this first time for you?"

Shane shook his head.

“With a man?”

Shane nodded, and Ilya smiled.

Ilya moved forward slowly, too slowly, and watched the way Shane turned on his back, his eyes following the proximity of Ilya’s lips until they met.

Shane let out a soft moan, almost like a sigh against Ilya’s mouth, and Ilya brought the hand not propping him on his side to caress Shane’s side.

Shane laughed at the first touch. “Sorry, ticklish.”

“Is okay,” Ilya said, against his mouth, and went instead to caress the side of Shane’s hip.

Shane sucked in a breath at that, and Ilya pulled back, placing his forehead against Shane’s as he looked down to where Shane was already leaking for him.

“Fuck,” Ilya said, drawing out the word.

“I want...” Shane started.

When he didn’t elaborate further, Ilya asked, “What do you want, Hollander?”

Shane shuddered, then very quietly said, “I want to suck you. Your dick.”

Ilya groaned. He had not been expecting that.

Before he could do anything about this information, he felt Shane’s hand push at his chest gently, and Ilya allowed him to guide him onto his back.

Shane sat up beside him, eyes on his prize, and Ilya let his legs fall open, one hand going to the base. He gripped it, and he watched Shane’s eyes widen at the sight of it fully erect.

Ilya had seen this reaction before, of course. Nine inches were no joking matter, and he also knew it was usually followed by a lot of hesitation and excuses as to why-

Ilya cursed in Russian and slammed his head back against the pillow when Shane suddenly bent down and attempted to take Ilya down in one go. It, of course, did not work that way, and Shane pulled back after choking, spluttering, eyes wet with tears.

“Hollander,” Ilya began, but a look of pure determination crossed Shane’s face, and then he was back on a mission, and that mission was to make Ilya come too fucking soon.

“Wait, Hollander,” he said, pulling gently at Shane’s hair. “Stop”

This seemed to do it, because Shane came up with a gasp. He used the back of his hand to wipe away the saliva that had gathered on his chin. He looked scared.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No,” Ilya said quickly. “Opposite,” He put a hand on Shane’s chin and sat up to connect their lips in a soft kiss. Shane smelled like spit and cock, and Ilya wanted to lick into his mouth and taste himself.

So, he did.

Shane groaned at this, tensing before he got into it, and Ilya pulled back with one last lick over Shane’s spit-covered lips.

“I want to fuck you,” Ilya said. “Can I?”

A look between fear and desire crossed over Shane’s face. He bit his lip and nodded. “Not here, though”

“Okay,” Ilya said, his chest swelling at the prospect of another moment like this with him.

“Can I?” Shane asked, and Ilya was momentarily worried he was asking if Shane could fuck him instead, but Shane wasn’t looking at Ilya, he was staring down at his dick and oh...

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya groaned, nodding quickly.

Shane wasted no time again.

He was not great at it in the same way that wagyu beef was not great if cooked by an amateur rather than a chef, but it was still top of the line, and somehow even more special because they had attempted it in the first place.

Shane was a sight, the hottest thing Ilya had ever seen, especially with Ilya’s cock in his mouth. There was something almost hypnotic about the way Shane kept trying to look up at Ilya but failed because he was enjoying himself so much he kept moaning around it and giving in to the pleasure. And Ilya was going to fucking cum.

“Off, off, Hollander,” he said, slapping the side of Shane’s thigh, which was the closest part of him he could find, and Shane got off just in time. Ilya helped himself to finish and kept stroking it as he grabbed Shane’s chin with his hand and pulled him into a heated kiss, which Shane once more moaned into.

He was just so responsive.

Ilya was still coming down from it when he felt a brush of a hand against his face and felt something wet land on his stomach. He opened his eyes to find Shane’s release now mingling with his own, Shane’s hand working himself over as the other gripped Ilya’s hair now, pulling him closer so Ilya’s face was on his neck, and Shane was panting into Ilya’s cheek.

Ilya pulled back, eyes raking over the expense of Shane’s post sex face, and found the man kneeling on the bed beside him, his eyes closed, and breathing labored.

Ilya ran a hand down his side, and Shane did not laugh now, just leaned into it, falling to the bed beside Ilya.

They stayed like that for a while, both coming down from their high.

Until Shane whispered, so low it got almost lost in his heavy breathing. “You’re not going to... tell anyone, right?”

Ilya sat up and looked at him. “What?”

Shane hid his face in the crook of his elbow.

“Because no one can know. About this. I- I can’t... I am not ready to.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” Ilya said.

Shane nodded, eyes still hidden, and Ilya felt suddenly cold and empty.

He stood and went to the bathroom. He didn’t bother closing the door; he just grabbed the first towel he found and wrung it out. He ran over his stomach and hissed as the cold water hit his overheated skin.

When he returned, Shane was still how he had left him, his breathing now calmer.

“I’m leaving,” Ilya said.

Shane didn’t answer.

Ilya sighed, picked up his sweatpants and shirt, and threw them on quickly. Once dressed, he stared at Shane, waiting for a reaction or a goodbye.

He got none.

And Ilya left the room. He felt like he was made of lead. His chest was heavy, his balls were empty, and his heart was nowhere in his chest.

Ilya did not see Shane in person for another year.

In person, because of course, he had seen the man everywhere he looked.

Shane was in commercials about underwear, sports drinks, and hotels. He was in more adverts than Ilya himself had booked, and he had been the winner of the damn Oscar.

It didn’t seem to matter, though. Ilya was not as charismatic and earnest. He was not the golden boy of Hollywood, and he was nowhere as popular as the Canadian.

It didn’t help that Shane was now dating a co-star, a very pretty girl named Lily, whom he seemed to adore.

Ugh, Ilya was so bored with seeing his stupid face.

But then, he ran into him- no, that wasn't true. They had both been invited to the Academy Awards for the second year in a row. An achievement on its own, and the two of them were once more going head-to-head as the two favorites.

Ilya would also be presenting an award, something about the best international motion picture, because there was a Russian movie somewhere in there. He had rolled his eyes when he'd first gotten the invitation, but he would do it, as was his job.

His movie had been nominated for three Oscars, and with his nomination, it would be four. However, Shane was nominated for seven. A record-breaking amount. Something that irritated Ilya to no avail.

It really was a great movie, though. Ilya had cried multiple times and felt devastated after the ending. He even swore something inside him had been eternally changed after watching it, but Shane would never, ever know this. This also irritated Ilya for reasons he refused to study too closely.

Ilya looked at himself in the mirror of his penthouse and posed just as he would in the carpet. He had gotten a stylist now, a whole team of people, whose sole job was to make him, as Svetlana liked to say, look pretty.

At first he had protested saying it was an unnecessary expense but now he had to give it to her because he really liked what he saw.

He was in another striped suit, this one brown with golden stripes, and his hair was loose, longer than it had been the previous year because he was filming a movie that required it, so his curls framed his face. He had lost some weight yet kept some of the muscle, and his suit showed this. He had to admit, compared to last year, he did look a million times better.

He thanked his team for a job well done, and they all clapped, happy he was happy. Then he and Svetlana were out the door.

"They will ask why you are coming alone again this year," Svetlana reminded him twenty minutes later as they got out of the car they had ridden to the event.

"I will just tell them to fuck off."

"You do that," she said, scowling at him. "See what happens to you."

"You will fix it," he said, smiling down at her.

She flicked him off and hid it behind an attempt to fix his collar.

He laughed.

He was once more in the front row, only this time he was happy to say he knew half of the room.

He gravitated towards Rose the moment he saw her, hugging her and her husband, Tom, who was a producer and director. He also said hi to his co-stars, onscreen team, and crew.

Ilya took his seat just as someone came to inform him about the timeline for the presentation he would give later.

“It’s going to be in about half an hour. But I’ll come fetch you in about twenty minutes so we can get you mic’d up.”

“Okay,” he said, and thanked the stagehand, who nodded curtly and began to say something into their earpiece. Ilya followed their retreat and noticed they had dropped a pen. He bent down to pick it up, only to freeze when another hand reached for it at the same time.

Ilya smelled him before he saw him, as had become usual.

Ilya’s eyes shot up on their own, and suddenly, Shane Hollander was crouching in front of him, wearing a stunning blue suit and another choker, full of blue sapphires. His hair was different, shorter, almost buzzed, and the look made him look manlier, nearly dangerous.

And he was dangerous, for all the reasons Ilya had still to get up from the floor.

They were smiling at each other, and Ilya felt like his heart could burst.

Shane stood first and extended his hand, but Ilya ignored it as he stood as well.

"Five minutes to curtain," the announcer said over the speakers.

Ilya wanted to flick her off. Who cared about this stupid award show anymore?

“Hi,” Shane said, and he looked different. More confident. He carried himself differently, too, but there was still that reserved energy that had drawn Ilya to him in the first place. It was in the way he kept fidgeting with his jacket sleeve and taking one hand out of his pants pocket and back in again.

“You look pretty,” Ilya said.

Shane blushed, and suddenly, everything was right in the world again.

“You’re wearing makeup too.”

“Yes,” Ilya agreed. “But I don’t look pretty.”

There was a protest in Shane’s eyes, and he opened his mouth, almost as if to voice it, but suddenly, they were pulled down to the seats as the lights dimmed.

The show was starting.

Ilya was seated next to Shane again. Their arms almost graced every time one of them so much as breathed.

And suddenly, Ilya hoped the show would go on for years, not just hours.

Ilya presented his stupid award with another Russian actor, and he had to admit it had been fun. He'd known Viktor for some time, and he had always looked up to the man. He was everything his own brother was not. He was kind and open. He was a great mentor most of the time, and an even better drinking partner.

It was a pity their schedules did not coincide as often as they used to. Ilya missed him.

He was in deep conversation with Viktor, laughing and joking in Russian, so glad he had someone to speak freely with without the language barrier, and Ilya had to admit, he was hilarious in his language.

Too bad none of these Americans would ever know.

A pity for them.

Turns out Shane had a presentation right after his, so Ilya was backstage when he arrived. Once more, that smell of his met Ilya's nose, and Ilya turned like a hound following the scent of prey, to find Shane staring at him and Viktor with something akin to distrust.

No, that wasn't it.

The realization came to Ilya when Viktor leaned in and whispered something in Russian into Ilya's ear. It was quick and stupid, meant to make Ilya laugh, which it did, and then Shane's face fell, before he could turn on his acting, before he could slip on that mask.

Something bloomed inside Ilya then, and he leaned into Viktor, needing to make sure what he saw was really- and oh, God. Shane looked utterly pissed, hurt, and betrayed.

Jealous.

"Hollander," Ilya said, because he was suddenly having too much fun.

"Rozanov," Shane replied. He didn't even acknowledge Viktor, just turned to the stagehand putting the mic on him, and said something low Ilya couldn't hear.

"Having a fun night," Ilya asked, not finished with him yet.

"Yes," Shane said. "Isn't it obvious?"

"It is," Ilya agreed. "Very obvious."

Shane looked at him then, fury in his brown eyes, and rolled them, before stalking away towards the stage.

Ilya turned his eyes to the screen and saw Shane Hollander- the superstar- enter.

He had no traces of annoyance or fury; he was all smiles and easy charisma as he bantered with his co-star, whose name Ilya had not bothered to get to know when they had been introduced earlier, before the show.

The other man was very good looking, but he looked 100,000 years old – not really more like 30- and paled in comparison to Shane. It wasn't a diss at the other man's attractiveness, more than a testament to Shane's beauty that anyone else could be there with him, but he commanded the room.

He was beautiful, a simple yet elegant masculine energy radiated off him that was not easy to replicate. He would know.

Ilya had tried many times to replicate it while in the confidence of his own home. He pretended to be at ease, to smile more, and tried to feel happier, as Shane did. But that mask did not come easily to Ilya.

And that's why Shane Hollander won that night.

“Fuck Rozanov.”

Ilya had Shane pinned chest down on the bed as he rammed into him. The slaps of their bodies were so loud that they almost drowned Shane's cries.

Still, Ilya needed more. He wanted Shane to fall apart completely, to feel him in the deepest parts of him, to walk tomorrow with the shape of Ilya between his legs, the feel of his cock still inside of him.

“You like that?” Ilya groaned and pushed Shane's head down with one hand, bringing his hips higher with the other and snapping his hips to switch the angle-

“Oh, fuck. Right there. Fuck, fuck.” Shane gasped; it came out as a breathless little moan. “Rozanov.”

They'd already had sex four times. Four times in an equal number of hours, and Ilya wanted more. He had a very high refractory period, but so did Shane. And this was their first time together, Shane's first time with a man, as he had found out, and the thought still made his knees weak, and his chest soar.

He gripped Shane's hips with both hands and slammed his hips against Shane's ass, watching the two globes shake with the action. Then he pressed his thumbs into the sides of Shane's hole and pulled his fingers in opposite directions, watching the red, abused nub attempt to stretch further as his cock went in and out of it easily.

So easy now.

The sight was almost too much.

“Fuck, Hollander. Are you-”

“Yes.”

“Together,” Ilya said, and moved his hand to Shane's cock.

Shane whimpered, and his elbows, which had been holding up his chest, gave out, throwing him down against the mattress. Ilya went with him, and the angle must have done it for Shane because Ilya felt him tense and clench around him at the same time Shane let out a scream.

Ilya threw his hand over his mouth quickly, muffling the worst of it, but even then, Shane was too gone to care as he kept pushing back against Ilya, urging him to move and keep fucking him.

“Can I-”

“Fucking, yes, Rozanov.”

He wasted no time; he moved Shane so they were both on their sides and grabbed Shane’s thigh, pulling his leg up as he began to snap his hips, fucking into him from his new angle. Shane was screaming now, but had the foresight to grab a pillow and was shouting into it obscenities which Ilya barely understood but made him feel like he would explode if he didn’t give him what he wanted, what he needed.

“Fuck, like that,” Shane cried, and threw a hand back to grip Ilya’s hips, digging his fingers into the flesh hard enough that Ilya knew he would leave a bruise. “Yes, Rozanov, fuck.”

“You like,” Ilya asked, in between hard thrusts. “How I fuck you?”

“Yes,” Shane said, so gone for it he didn’t care how desperate he sounded.

“Such a slut for it.”

Shane groaned and slammed a fist down on the bed, gripping the bedsheets as Ilya brought Shane’s leg down and pressed it against the mattress so he was pounding on him from another angle.

Shane mumbled something, voice muffled against the pillow, and Ilya grabbed it and threw it halfway across the room because he needed to hear that. Fuck he needed to hear that again right now.

“Say it again.”

Shane looked over his shoulder, and tears were streaming down his face, but he was smiling, and his eyes were so full of lust and want and need.

Ilya gripped Shane’s ass with both hands, rhythm faltering as he tried to take in the sight. But it was... too much.

“Your slut,” Shane said, holding eye contact with Ilya, and then pushed his ass back, fucking himself on Ilya’s cock.

Ilya came with a loud roar, one not muffled by a pillow, not that it would have helped much, and he came so much that he swore he passed out.

When he came to, Shane was smiling over him, one hand propped under his chin to hold himself up, the other running lazily over Ilya's sweaty chest and abs.

"Hey," Shane said, soft, and open, and so, *so* beautiful.

"I died. You killed me, Hollander."

Shane let out a laugh. It was a lovely sound.

"I should be telling you that."

Ilya grew suddenly serious. "I hurt you?"

"No," Shane said. "Or at least, I don't think so. I don't feel any pain. Just sore."

Ilya relaxed. "Good. You liked it?"

"No," Shane said, but he was smiling too widely. "They say the first time is never good. That it's an acquired taste, so maybe we should keep doing it."

"To get taste?" Ilya grinned.

"Exactly."

Then Shane leaned down and placed a soft kiss on Ilya's cheek, then his nose, and his forehead, and Ilya felt his heart burst.

"I should go," Ilya said, and he didn't know why because he wanted nothing more than to stay.

Stay forever, if Shane asked.

Stay forever, even if he didn't.

"Go?"

"Yes," Ilya repeated, already standing. He went to pick up his clothes from the floor and started putting them on.

"I have an early shoot-" He meant to say tomorrow, but it was more morning than night, as they had spent the whole night fucking. "-in a couple of hours."

"Oh," Shane said. "Yes, me too."

"Don't you have a flight?"

"Yes, sorry," Shane amended, cheeks reddening. "That's what I meant."

Ilya hid his frown on the inside of his shirt as he slipped it on. They had not discussed the possibility of Ilya staying, but somehow, leaving felt wrong.

Still, Ilya knew he couldn't stay. It would cross a line they hadn't discussed and one neither of them could afford to cross. Not when their careers were just getting started, and Shane had his girlfriend, a beard, it turned out, he had to continue dating for at least seven months.

While Ilya had no one, and that was okay.

Really.

He was totally happy with that.

He leaned in to give Shane one last kiss, and Shane let him, but his soul wasn't in it.

And Ilya couldn't fault him because neither was his.

Chapter 3: Fucking English

Chapter Summary

An apology at an industry party unravels the distance between Ilya and Shane, pulling them into a raw, private moment neither expected. And even as chaos erupts around them, Ilya and Shane walk away with something fragile and bright enough to hold onto.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

The next year, Shane got cast in another Oscar-winning movie. The man was breaking record after record, as if they had been set just for him to break. But Shane had ultimately lost, not to Ilya, but to the 100,000-year-old.

Ilya had watched it all from the audience, now sitting farther back instead of in the first row. He hadn't booed when Scott Hunter's name was called like he wanted to—he was, after all, an actor who had become adept at putting on what he called the Shane Hollander mask.

Ilya watched Shane for the rest of the show and well into the After-Party, dancing and drinking with his present and past co-stars and even some crew members.

Ilya was drunk.

Maybe.

Just a little.

And Shane was sitting by himself.

The party was almost ending, and most people had left. Ilya would have pegged Shane as one of the first to leave, but he was still there, looking like a kicked puppy.

Ilya couldn't resist.

“You're a sore loser,” Ilya greeted, sitting beside him.

Shane didn't look at him, just let out a shaky laugh.

“That obvious, huh?”

“Yes, you’re a bad actor.”

Shane’s smile slipped off, and he grew very still. The silence thickened, tension prickling the air between them. Ilya knew he had messed up. He’d meant what he said in real life Shane couldn’t pretend to be okay when he wasn’t. Not—

Fuck. Fucking English.

“I didn’t mean—”

“Goodnight, Rozanov.”

“Wait, Hollander.”

But Shane was already walking away.

And Ilya couldn’t remember what breathing was like for a long time after that.

Shane was ignoring him.

They ran into each other at another award party—not the Oscars, but a different one. Ilya cared much less about this one, only attending out of contractual obligation and because he knew Shane would be there. He hoped that maybe Shane would want to see him, too.

It was a dumb idea, mainly because they had not spoken one word to each other since the Oscar after-party months ago. Not from lack of trying on Ilya’s part, but from perfect planning on Shane’s.

Shane made sure he was never alone when Ilya was near, knowing Ilya wouldn’t approach him unless this were the case since they were meant to be rivals after all.

It was dumb, but since becoming household names, the media loved to compare and pit them against each other.

Rival studios loved this sales tactic, so whenever Shane was cast in a project, Ilya was cast in another, and vice versa. So now both Shane and Ilya were playing superheroes in two rival 'universes' for this reason. And yes, these were not award-winning or even nomination-worthy films, but they paid like crazy. And Ilya needed the money. Plus, Ilya was set to outdo Shane at the box office since his character was the more popular one, which was nice.

The frustrating part was that while this was common among rappers and athletes, it hadn’t really happened among TV or big-screen actors before.

They were the first, setting the example for everyone else, which meant all eyes were on them, *all the time*.

Except for when they visited one place.

“Hollander,” Ilya said, closing the bathroom door behind him.

"Holy shit," Shane said, pressing one hand to his chest. "Did you fucking follow me here?"

“Yes,” Ilya said, because he had. No point in denying it. “You’re avoiding me.”

“Obviously.”

“You didn’t let me explain that night.”

“What are you talking about?”

"Don't do that," Ilya said. "That night at after-party, I said you were bad actor, but I didn't mean it the way it came out—"

“Oh, that,” Shane said, and let out a laugh. It looked convincing, too much so. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I do ‘worry about it,’” he said, copying Shane. “Because I feel fucking bad. You’re an *amazing* actor. I only meant in real life—like now—when you pretend you’re not upset, when you clearly still are.”

“Fuck off, Rozanov. Don’t act as if you know me.”

This deeply angered Ilya, because he had been studying Shane’s acting for years. He probably knew Shane better than his acting coach did, and he was obsessed for other reasons as well. Of course, he couldn’t admit that last part.

But Ilya was an actor, too—a better one now. One who could be honest and express his real emotions, unlike Shane.

Ilya moved to the stalls and began to push at them, making sure they were alone.

"What are you doing?" Shane said.

Ilya ignored him. Walking over to the door, which mercifully had a lock on it.

He turned it.

Shane’s face was a poem as he realized he was locked in the bathroom with Ilya.

Shane took a step back, his hands coming to grip the sink his ass had just bumped against. His eyes were steady on Ilya, but Ilya didn’t move closer.

“I am not going to hurt you,” Ilya said. “But you will not lie to me.”

“I can do whatever the fuck I want.”

“Yes, you can,” Ilya admitted. “But you won’t. Not here. Not with me.”

Shane let out a slow exhale. His eyes trailed over Ilya's body as Ilya remained standing between Shane and the door. Noticing this, Ilya moved to the side so Shane could leave if he wanted to.

Ilya told him as much, but Shane still didn't move. He remained positioned where he was, watching Ilya like he was afraid he'd pounce on him if he took his eyes off him. Which Ilya might still do, but only if Shane begged him first.

"What the fuck do you want, Rozanov?"

"I want to talk."

"Well, I don't."

"Then go," Ilya said, reclining against the wall next to the stalls, and crossing his arms. "I am not stopping you."

Shane seemed to breathe in, trying to calm himself, then thought better of it and suddenly turned, slamming his hands onto the sink countertop.

"What the fuck do you *actually* want, Rozanov?"

"I told you."

Shane let out a derisive laugh, eyes finding Ilya's in the mirror. The exhaustion in his face crumpled under the weight of the pain he could no longer hide, and even though he braced himself, nothing could have prepared Ilya for the words that would come out of Shane's mouth.

"You hurt me, okay? I was hurt. I still am. You told me I was a bad actor after the Academy had basically confirmed that. And it... fucking hurt me. A lot. Happy?"

"No," Ilya said, truthfully. "Fuck, Hollander-"

"Don't come any closer," Shane warned, one hand out, and Ilya stopped. He hadn't even noticed he'd been walking. Ilya took a step back, then another, and found his spot against the stalls again.

"I am sorry," Ilya said. "I promise I am. I have been wanting to tell you this since the after-party. But I don't even have a way. I messaged you on Instagram, but you didn't reply."

"I blocked you," Shane said, and he almost looked sorry for it. Almost.

"I figured."

"Okay, so we talked."

Shane turned to walk away, but Ilya moved quickly and grabbed his wrist, halting him.

Shane stopped and turned to face him.

There were tears in his eyes. And Ilya couldn't take it.

"Oh, sweetheart," he said, pulling Shane against his chest.

Shane went willingly and wrapped his own arms tightly around Ilya as he cried, clinging to him. His body shook with ragged, helpless sobs he struggled to stifle against Ilya's chest.

Ilya ran a hand down Shane's hair, then grabbed the sides of Shane's head and pulled him off. He pressed their lips together, softly, putting every ounce of his remorse into it.

And Shane seemed to believe him then, because his sniffing stopped, and he pulled away to wipe his eyes.

"I am so sorry," Ilya said, and Shane nodded.

Then Shane brought their mouths back together.

And this... it wasn't a soft, remorse-filled kiss anymore. It was hot, and desperate, and oh *fuck yes*.

"Hollander-"

"Please."

"Fuck, what do you need?"

"Suck you," Shane answered, quickly. And then just dropped to his knees on the dirty bathroom floor.

Ilya cursed in Russian, his brain short-circuiting. He pulled Shane up again and pressed their mouths together. Shane made a protest as he was lifted up to his feet once more, but didn't get a chance to do much before Ilya dropped to the floor in his stead.

Shane gasped.

"I should be the one on my knees. Asking for forgiveness. You have nothing to apologize for. You're perfect," Ilya said, and began to undo Shane's belt. Shane remained frozen, his eyes so wide as he regarded Ilya.

Shane threw his head back when Ilya pressed a kiss to the head of his cock, Shane's hand going to the back of Ilya's head, not pushing, just touching, his fingers tangling in the curls.

"Fuck, Ilya."

"You like that," Ilya said. It wasn't a question since Shane was already leaking. Ilya loved how responsive he was, how fucking beautiful.

"Fuck," Shane groaned. Ilya looked up at him as he licked at the head, savoring him again.

"Always so sweet."

Shane moaned and closed his eyes, unable to keep them open for long. And Ilya went to work.

He was a giver by nature. Savored giving pleasure to his partners, whether male or female, but there was something extra rewarding in seeing Shane fall apart because of him.

A sudden thought, ugly and unwelcome, consumed him of another person getting to see Shane like this, getting to hear the noises he made, and feel the way he tensed as he got close.

“Rozanov, fuck, I... I am going to-”

Shane began pulling at Ilya’s curls with urgency, but Ilya fought against it, batting his hand away as he went deeper and relaxed his throat, taking more and more of him in, so by the time Shane came, his release went straight into the back of Ilya’s throat. He took it all, every drop, then eased him out.

Ilya wiped at the tears in the corner of his eyes as he stood. He licked his lips, smiling at Shane, who was looking at him like he didn’t recognize him.

“Holy shit, Rozanov. You... You didn’t have to do that.”

Ilya shrugged. “I don’t mind.”

His smile dropped, and he reached for Shane’s face. Shane let him, leaning into the touch, and Ilya rubbed his thumb over Shane’s freckles.

“I really *am* sorry, Hollander.”

“I know,” Shane said. “I forgive you. English can be hard.”

Ilya laughed, tears stinging his eyes. He felt so overwhelmed with relief that he almost fell to his knees again, this time in pure gratitude.

“It fucking is.”

“I don’t know,” Shane said, smiling. “I think Russian may be worse. Fucking genitive case is a nightmare.”

Ilya’s mouth fell open. “Oh, you speak Russian now?”

Shane laughed. “No, well. A little? I’ve been... learning.” He said the last part like he was ashamed of it, his cheeks reddening, and Ilya couldn’t help it when he moved forward and pressed their mouths together.

Shane laughed into the kiss, and Ilya was smiling too.

Ilya pulled back because he just needed to know. “What have you learned?”

“Not much,” Shane admitted.

“Tell me,” Ilya said.

Suddenly there was a loud knock on the door, and Ilya let out a Russian expletive he hoped Shane understood.

Mildly annoyed, he turned towards Shane. Then paused at the panic he saw reflected in Shane's eyes.

Because, shit.

Right.

“Hey, Rozanov, is that you?”

Fuck, it was Dallas Kent.

“Fuck off, Kent.” He said, hoping the man would go somewhere else, and knowing he wouldn't.

He didn't.

“Let me in, fucker. I got to pee.”

‘Go somewhere else.’

“No, fuck you. Open up. What are you even doing in there?”

"Your mom."

"Fuck you, Rozanov!"

Ilya ran through the whole scenario in his head and saw no way out. There was not one single scenario where news of him locked inside a bathroom with his straight rival Shane Hollander did not make it to every tabloid and piece of media imaginable, especially with Kent involved, who would not doubt milk every second of screentime he could to talk about how he was the one who found them.

In front of him, Shane looked very pale. Scarily so, and he was breathing hard. His hands had gone to the sides of his head, and he was looking at Ilya, but he was not seeing him.

Fuck.

“Shane,” Ilya whispered, just as Kent knocked loudly on the metal door again.

“Fuck, give me a moment, Kent!”

“I already have. Get out now, or I am calling security.”

At the sound of this, Shane's hyperventilating became worse, and he dropped to his knees, gasping for air he couldn't seem to get into his lungs.

And Ilya wanted to hold him, but he also knew they were running out of time.

The choice was made for him the moment he heard Kent say, “Fuck this, I am getting security.” And Ilya was sprinting to the door.

He caught Kent halfway down the hall, and then he was on him.

Kent had barely had a moment to turn around when Ilya grabbed him by the collar and slammed him against the wall- the one not facing the bathroom.

Kent’s eyes went wide, as did the eyes of every other celebrity and star around them, but Ilya didn’t care; he just needed to give Shane enough time to leave without being seen.

The moment Ilya caught Shane walking out of the bathroom on his peripheral vision, he stepped back.

Ilya was breathing hard, too hard, but he no longer felt the panic that had driven him to do this, so he just stared at Kent, who was frozen still, his face pale as he looked at Ilya as though he’d grown two heads before his knees seemed to buckle under his own weight, and Kent fell to the floor.

Ilya continued to walk back as more people crowded around Kent and shot daggers at him. Varying versions of “Are you okay?” were directed at the male actor, while Ilya tried to disappear quietly, which he knew would not be possible.

Security was on him almost instantly, and Ilya lifted his hands in surrender, silently following after them.

He caught Shane’s eyes as he went. There were unshed tears in them, and so much gratitude.

There was also something else. Something Ilya tucked away that place in his mind he didn’t dare go to often because he was too much of a coward to, but which he knew would be his happiest place, one he allowed himself to live with it.

And if he was grinning for the whole time it took him to get escorted out of the venue and into his car, then it was no one’s business but his own.

Chapter 4: Boring Canadian

Chapter Summary

Dragged back into controversy by a ruthless reporter, Ilya braces himself against the storm with the help of the people who refuse to let him fall. And in the quiet that follows, Shane's invitation hints at a connection that might survive even the chaos of fame.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

@Rozanovnumberonetrash

Ya'll got to chill. It wasn't even that bad. Kent's just a crybaby *#justiceforIlya*

@TMZNews

Sources say Ilya Rozanov is facing a possible lawsuit from Kent after physical and emotional distress during the SAG Awards. The lawsuit is rumored to be anywhere from \$10- \$20MM due to the actor not being able to meet contractual screening requirements due to hospitalization after the attack.

@ShaneHollanderOfficial

Go watch Mosquito Man. In Theaters now.

@Ilya'srightasscheek *replied to @ShaneHollanderOfficial*

Not Shane using this scandal to promote his movie when his competition's down in the slumps *#Shanenoshame*

@Shaneisthebest *replied to @Ilya'srightasscheek*

Shut up and leave him alone. It wasn't his fault Ilya freaking decided to go start shit with Kent. Why couldn't he be more like Shane? Didn't he also knock Kent out like two years ago during the Oscar After Party? If anything, I hope Kent wins the lawsuit, and his ass gets deported back to Russia *#leaveshanealone*

@IlyaRozanovOfficial

I apologize to all my fans for my actions. I let my emotions get the better of me, and I allowed some past feud to control me. It will not happen again. I just hope you can forgive me. Also, please watch my movie. It's better than Hollander's. I promise.
#IlyaisbetterthanShane

@ShaneHollanderOfficial *replied to @IlyaRozanovOfficial*

Мечтай дальше, Розанов.

@IlyaRozanovOfficial *replied to @ShaneHollanderOfficial*

You spelt that wrong

@ShaneHollanderOfficial *replied to @IlyaRozanovOfficial*

Замолчи

Ilya was smiling as he looked at Shane's latest reply.

Svetlana, however, did not share his sentiment.

"[What's with Hollander]?"

"[What]?"

"[Why is he doing this? Is he trying to win some points with your fans, so they go watch his shit movie instead]?"

"[It's not shit]," Ilya said quickly, even though he hadn't gone to watch it yet and probably wouldn't be able to until it went to streaming. Or he flew somewhere. Planes always had Shane's movies in them. "[And no, I think he just feels bad]."

"[Oh, right, because it's all his fault]."

Ilya put his phone down and looked at her. She had her arms crossed, one phone in each hand, as she regarded him. He knew he had been an idiot, but really, what other choice had he had? Plus, it wasn't Shane's fault at all.

"[I am sorry]," he repeated for the thousandth time.

“[Mhmm. I want a raise],” she said, and he nodded. He owed her way more than that anyway.

Just then, Ilya’s phone lit up. He smiled at the name.

Right after the incident with Kent, while they’d been on the drive to their hotel and he was getting chewed out -with good reason- by Svetlana, he’d gotten a DM notification on Instagram, which was weird because he had all his notifications muted, except for...

ShaneHollanderOfficial: Thank you. And I am sorry you had to do that. Please text me. I don’t want to talk here; it doesn’t feel safe.

Followed by a cellphone number and a stern warning to delete the messages ASAP.

Ilya deleted the messages, then took a screenshot of his empty chat with @ShaneHollanderOfficial and sent it as his first message to Shane.

Now, three weeks later, his phone lit up from a message from **Boring Canadian**, as he’d nicknamed him

BC: Fuck you, I spelled that perfectly. You spelled it wrong.

Ilya: No way. It’s almost like joke... you know?

BC: Oh

BC: That’s pretty funny, actually

BC: Fuck off. It’s been a long day.

Ilya sobered at that. Shane had been doing press for the last couple of days for his new movie, and they were working him to the bone.

Ilya felt sort of guilty that, because of his thing with Kent, he had been ordered to stay home for the press tour. Not that he liked being stuck here with Svetlana much better, but at least here they couldn’t ask him any questions about Kent’s situation. And he was in the comfort of his own home. Resting, sort of.

Ilya: I am sorry

BC: Not your fault

Ilya: I meant, I am sorry I am not there to suck your cock between interviews

Ilya: Would it have been better, yes?

BC: Jesus, Rozanov

BC: But yes

Ilya bit back a laugh and shook his head.

BC: Got to go

BC: Text you later?

Ilya: Okay

Ilya: Don't get hard thinking of me blowing you

BC: Fuck you!

Ilya: You're hard, aren't you?

BC: ...

Ilya: My good little slut

BC: TURNING OFF MY PHONE NOW!!!!!!!!!!

Ilya couldn't help the laugh that bubbled out of him.

And he ignored the pillow Svetlana threw his way.

"[You don't get to be this happy, asshole]."

Ilya blew her a kiss, which got him another pillow to the face.

He gripped it with both hands and fell back on the couch. He felt lighter than he had all week.

But the feeling didn't last, of course.

It turned out the mess with Kent was not an excuse to avoid his press tour obligations. After two days of bliss, he found himself in New York speaking to a magazine about his movie.

The good thing was that he was not alone.

Beside him was Rose, who had been his co-star and love interest, and Troy Barret, who had played his sidekick. Both of whom he loved very much and who made this stress much easier to manage.

Now, they were each given a paddle with 'I have' on one side, in green, and 'I have not' on the other side, in red. The game was simple. There would be questions, and they each had to say whether they had or had not done this.

Easy. Fun.

Question 1: Never have I ever hooked up with a costar?

Ilya burst out laughing, and Rose shot him an incredulous look, but she was laughing too. Barrett was red, very much so, and Ilya couldn't contain it.

"This is, nope," Rose said. She turned her sign red. "Not answering that."

"You just did," the reporter said. She was a young girl, most likely their age, with blonde hair and glasses. She was sweet, soft-spoken. Ilya liked her.

Ilya stopped laughing for just a moment to turn his green, and Rose gasped, hitting him on the shoulder, which just made him laugh harder.

"Shut up, you have not!" She said, and then her eyebrows raised. She covered her mouth, then she put that hand to cover her lips from the cameras and mouthed, "Shane?"

Ilya couldn't contain the bark of laughter, nodding. They had not been costars, not really, but it made for a good interview, to have people guessing who it was.

Rose rolled her eyes and turned his paddle red, shaking her head. "Don't listen to him. He is a liar."

"I am not," Ilya said, and brought the paddle down to his lap, wiping tears from his eyes. When he turned to Barret, he laughed again, because Barret was beet red, but his paddle was bright green.

"Who?" Rose screeched. "Wait, I didn't know this one. Troy!"

"Next question," Troy said, and they all laughed then.

Question 2: Never have I ever had a one-night stand that became more?

Ilya chuckled and brought his green board up quickly, as did Barret. Rose's remained red.

"Same person?" She whispered, low enough to be private but also not covering her mouth.

Ilya nodded, the side of his mouth lifting in a grin. She rolled her eyes.

Question 3: Never have I ever dated a fan?

Rose scrunched her face. "Okay, these questions are something else."

Ilya raised his green again and bit his lip to keep from laughing. Until Rose, feeling the mischief radiating from him, grabbed his paddle and turned it her way. When their eyes met, they both began to laugh. "The same?" She asked when she was finally able to breathe. And Ilya nodded, making them both fall into a fit of silent laughter. He was going to die from lack of oxygen, but he couldn't stop.

Because Shane was his fan, he had never said it, but Ilya just knew he was, and it was ridiculous that Shane was the answer to all his questions and that Ilya was sitting there next to Shane's best friend, who also knew and who apparently had never laughed so hard before.

"The same- what?" They heard Troy ask, dumbfounded, and it only made Ilya and Rose laugh harder, grabbing onto each other as they wheezed.

"Wow, it really got them, huh?" The reporter said, unable to keep from joining in amid their laughter. It was contagious, and soon Troy was laughing too, even though he had no clue why.

After many, many minutes, they got themselves composed.

And Rose lifted a hand in Ilya's direction. "Okay," she breathed, wiping her eyes with her thumbs. "I am done looking at you for the rest of the interview. Troy," she said, making the man jump. "Come sit next to me."

"What?" Ilya whined.

"Shoo," she said, and he smiled, but acquiesced. Once Troy was sitting beside her, she placed a hand on his thigh. "That's better."

Ilya rolled his eyes, but gripped his paddle, ready for the next question.

"Okay, last question," the reporter said.

Question 4: Never have I ever snuck away during an awards ceremony to hook up with someone?

And Ilya didn't even get to the end of the question before he raised his paddle, making Rose let out a snort of laughter that made them dissolve into fits of giggles once again. Troy, in the middle, looked confused, but happy to be included, as Ilya and Rose used his body to keep themselves in place as they rolled around in their chairs.

And Ilya loved this job and these people.

Until the next interviewer took the seat that the sweet girl had previously occupied, and everything inside of Ilya turned cold. The atmosphere changed immediately; the laughter drained from the room, and all three of them sat straighter, the tension suddenly palpable.

Roger Crowell was all smiles as he hit his cue cards on his thigh, making a show of fixing them so they were all squared and ready for him. Ilya had to fight the scowl threatening to

break through his face. He had never liked Crowell; none of them did. He was a notorious asshole in the industry and an even bigger pain in the ass outside of it. He was known for mistreating staff and crew members, and working under him was almost a death sentence to your happiness and joy.

In short, Roger was a bully, and Ilya hated bullies almost as much as he hated racists and homophobes, all monsters in his mind.

“Hello,” Roger Crowell greeted, and they echoed it back. Ilya thought he tasted blood as he said it and ran his tongue along the inside of his cheek, where there was a fresh cut from how hard he had been clenching his jaw.

Ilya swallowed it, tasting metal, as Roger picked up his cards and began to ask them questions. Rose and Troy answered most of them with Ilya pasting on a smile here and there, but mostly he just stared off into space. His mind was everywhere and nowhere, and he sat up straighter when Svetlana motioned for him to do so, snapping back to attention just as Roger turned on him.

The hairs on the back of Ilya’s neck stood. Like he was staring at a ghost, or his worst nightmare.

“So, Ilya, you have been quite popular these past couple of weeks, haven’t you?”

“Of course,” he said. “I am big movie star with a new movie coming out.”

“That is true,” Crowell admitted. His smile was all teeth, like a dog when he was getting ready to pounce.

Ilya crossed his arms over his chest in anticipation.

“But that is not the only reason,” he continued.

And there it was.

“My good looks are also a hot topic,” Ilya said, playing stupid. “I am very hot.”

“And very humble,” Rose added, attempting to diffuse the tension that had settled over the room.

Ilya cracked a smile.

As did Roger, although it didn’t quite meet his eyes.

Ilya took the moment to assess the man. He hated to admit it, but beneath that cruel facade and insufferable personality, Roger was not a bad-looking man. He was in his mid-forties, with the build of someone who had always led an active lifestyle or who shot up a ton of steroids. His hair was dyed black, as was his trimmed beard, and his eyes were a bright blue, almost hypnotic, and that added to the uncanny feel of him. Because his features just clashed with one another. It made him look awkward and wrong.

And it made Ilya's stomach turn.

"No, I did not mean your attractiveness, Ilya. Although I suppose it's hard to deny."

"Are you hitting on me, Crowell?"

Something dangerous flashed across Crowell's face then, and his mouth turned sour, as the idea of a man hitting on another man disgusted him.

Ilya hated him more than he'd hated anyone just then. So, he decided to push it a bit further. "Sorry," Ilya said. "But I am not interested."

"Of course not," Crowell said, and this time the disgust was not disguised, but very apparent.

"I don't know, Crowell," Rose said, running a hand down her skirt as she shrugged. "You two would make one hot *couple*."

The emphasis on the couple was not lost on Ilya, who made a show of winking at Crowell.

Which was the final straw for the man who suddenly gripped his cue cards with so much fury his knuckles turned white. He turned angry eyes towards Ilya, the blue burning with too many slurs he could not say.

Say it. Ilya silently urged. Show the world who you really are. Come on, you coward.

But instead, Crowell just took a deep breath and put on a predatory smile. He glanced down at his last cue card and set it aside on the small stool beside his chair.

"Why did you attack Dallas Kent?"

"Which time?" Ilya asked in a manner that appeared almost uninterested.

He saw Svetlana face-palm behind the camera, shaking her head.

Ilya didn't care. He was done caring. What was the point of hiding away when everyone was going to be talking about it anyway? Might as well address it and get it over with? That would make people turn to something else. Ilya had noticed in his short time in the spotlight that people liked the mystery, anything they couldn't explain, that made their little brains work out in new and exciting ways. Once the magic was exposed, once the trick was explained, they lost interest.

Roger raised an eyebrow, that predatory smile growing as though Ilya had said the exact thing he'd been hoping he would. Like Ilya had taken the bait he'd subtly laid out for him. Ilya almost rolled his eyes. This man was as subtle as a wrecking ball.

"Both times."

Ilya tightened his arms over his chest. It made his pecks and biceps pop, which had been the intention. Reminded the man that he could take him, if it came to it. He saw Roger's eyes follow the movement, before he was back focusing on Ilya's face.

“First time I did not touch him. He was drunk and tripped. Second time I was in bathroom. He kept knocking and annoying me. Saying things to me. What’s the word- ah, provoking me. So, when I was finished, I showed him.”

“Showed him what?”

“That it is not smart to provoke me,” Ilya said, staring at the man and clenching his jaw, flexing his biceps one more time.

Roger lifted an eyebrow, frowned, but nodded.

Message received then. Good. He was smarter than Ilya gave him credit for.

“But I did not punch him, and I also did not mean to hurt him. I am sorry for that.”

“Are you?” Roger asked, almost surprised.

Ilya frowned. “Of course, I am. Kent is an idiot, but he got hurt because of me. Because I lost my temper.”

“And why did you lose your temper? I mean, you mentioned he was saying things. But was this all? Is a couple of words all it takes to get you to attack people?”

Ilya saw it as the trap that it was, and he opened his mouth to respond that no, of course not, but he didn’t get the chance to before Troy was on his feet in front of him.

“What are you even doing here, man? This is a press tour for our movie. Yet you have spent almost all the time we had attacking Ilya. He already apologized and admitted his mistake. What more do you want?”

Ilya placed a hand on Troy’s arm, touched but not wanting him to get involved in his drama. Troy was too nice, always doing the right thing. He reminded Ilya of a lot of Shane sometimes.

“It’s fine,” Ilya whispered. “I can-”

“It’s not,” Troy responded loudly. “This guy’s an asshole.”

“Troy,” Rose said, because you did not call Roger Crowell an asshole. Not even Ilya dared that much. “Sorry,” she said, turning to Roger. “It’s been a long day. He didn’t mean-”

“But I d-” Troy didn’t get to finish before Ilya grabbed him, pulling him by the arm and away from Roger, from the cameras, from the room altogether. He heard Rose begin to apologize and make excuses for them, and heard Svetlana call after him, but Ilya did not stop until they were in front of a small room which seemed deserted.

Ilya pushed the door, and they slipped inside.

“Sorry about that,” Ilya said. “Are you okay?”

“Why did you do that?” Troy asked. He didn’t sound angry at him, just confused. “The guy was totally out of line. Why did you let him-”

“He is not good man,” Ilya said. Hating how his accent got thicker whenever he was emotional. “But you cannot go calling him out on it. He is not the man to do that with. Trust me.”

Troy nodded, then, after a beat of silence, he looked up at Ilya. “Are you okay?”

Ilya stopped moving. He hadn’t noticed he had been tapping his foot on the floor and biting the skin on his finger until Troy’s question. He let out a slow exhale, trying to compose himself.

Finally, Ilya nodded. “Sorry, I don’t usually let them get to me.”

“You don’t have to apologize to me.”

Ilya looked at Troy, so young, so earnest, and felt his heart swell. He pulled Troy in for a hug.

Troy froze, then let out a nervous chuckle, and reciprocated it. Tapping Ilya on the back a few times before they pulled apart.

“Thank you.”

Troy shrugged. “It was the right thing to do.”

“It was, even if you went about it wrong way.”

“Yeah,” Troy said, and he looked almost scared for the first time.

Ilya placed a hand on his shoulder. “You got a PR person?”

“I do. I mean, the one the studio gives us.”

Ilya shook his head, already pulling Troy out of the room. “Those are horrible. I will introduce you to mine. She is-”

Turns out Troy got to meet her immediately, because Svetlana was rounding the hallway just as they came out of the room. She looked fierce as she stalked their way, her red heels hitting the linoleum floor with vengeance. She looked scary, even as she was a full two heads smaller than Ilya and Troy.

“Svetlana,” Ilya greeted cheerfully. “I was just talking about you. Have you met-”

“[What the fuck is wrong with you]?” Svetlana said angrily.

“Sorry,” Ilya said.

“[Are you fucking out of your mind? Get back in there].” She looked at Troy. “Both of you.”

Troy, who hadn't understood the first half, still had the common sense to understand she meant *now* and began to move first.

Ilya frowned.

“[Hey, don’t treat him like that],” he said. “[He’s your new client].”

“[I don’t need a new client. I already got my hands full with you].”

“[You could use the money].”

“[I don’t need another idiot to babysit. I already got the biggest one].”

“Ouch,” Ilya said, as they arrived back in the room. Crowell was gone, thank God.

“Ilya,” Rose was on him instantly. “I am so sorry, I should have stood up for you, too. I was-”

“You were doing your job,” he said, and placed a soft kiss on her forehead. “I know you have my side.”

“You mean, I am on your side?” she asked, scrunching her nose to keep from laughing.

“Right, that.”

“There’s something else,” she said, and she turned her phone screen to him. It was a text thread with BFF <3 that read:

BFF: Tell Ilya he better not attack anyone else

BFF: Unless it’s Crowell

BFF: Also, tell him to check his phone

“You told him?”

“Didn’t have to, it’s everywhere on social media.”

“Shit,” Ilya cursed, and took the phone out of his pocket as they were both ushered back to their seats for the next round of press. Ilya allowed the makeup team to move his head around and touch him up as he unlocked his phone.

Then he stayed very still as he read the newest message from Boring Canadian.

BC: The Ritz Central Park, Penthouse 1

BC: Ask for Jane Hollanov

Ilya smiled at his phone and locked it, slipping it back into his back pocket.

And suddenly, the end of the day didn't seem like a punishment, but a promise.

Chapter 5: Penthouse 1

Chapter Summary

A night of unguarded emotion turns Shane's penthouse into a world of their own—until Svetlana's call cracks it open. And when someone arrives too soon, Ilya and Shane are left hiding in the dark, hearts pounding with everything they stand to lose.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

Ilya arrived at the Ritz at exactly 10:00 pm.

As he strolled through the lobby, he made sure to keep his shades on and his hoodie up. Still, it was not enough, and soon people began approaching him.

The hotel staff was on it right away and guided him away from the crowd and into a private entrance in the back. They asked which room he needed access to, and he said Penthouse 1, as Shane had mentioned.

He watched for a reaction from the woman guiding him down a narrow corridor, but she only smiled politely in that customer-service way they all did, then turned to him as they neared a private elevator entrance.

He didn't even know they had these.

He had always been more of an Intercontinental man, but would not mind switching to the Ritz if this was the kind of privacy they could offer. Ilya thought of Shane in his shoes instead, in another city, another press tour, hiding away, nervous butterflies in his stomach as he sneaked around to go see Ilya.

A grin split his face as the elevator doors opened, and he stepped inside. She did not, which surprised him since they always did at the Intercontinental. Instead, she pressed the PH1 on the control panel and stepped back.

"I hope you have a pleasant stay, Mr. Rozanov."

“Thank you, Jackie,” he said, after stealing a glance down at her name tag. She smiled more genuinely, and Ilya returned it.

It wasn't until the doors closed and blocked her from view that Ilya recognized her.

He told Shane the moment he arrived in the penthouse, the elevator dropped him off in Shane's lavish living room for the night.

“The woman in reception, Jackie. You know her?”

Shane, who had gotten up from the sofa he had been lounging on with a script, stood.

“The receptionist?” Shane asked, frowning as he was nearing Ilya.

“Yes,” Ilya said, walking forward to meet Shane halfway. “*I* know her. She was interviewer before Crowell.”

“Reall-” Shane began, but the rest of his word died on Ilya's lips as this one pulled him in and crashed their mouths together.

It got heated right away, and Shane felt Ilya bend down and scoop him under his ass. He jumped onto him willingly. He sighed into Ilya's mouth, and he felt Ilya smile into their kiss.

He loved it when Ilya just handled him, as if he weighed next to nothing, even though he weighed almost 200 pounds. It was all lean muscle, but still. It sent a wave of heat racing up his spine and made his toes curl.

“Where is your room?” Ilya asked, moving to press kisses into Shane's jaw and chin. “Unless you want to right here on the sofa, or carpet, or-”

Shane laughed. “It's just behind that door,” Shane said and pointed to a closed white door on their left.

Ilya wasted no time. He hoisted Shane up higher, and Shane wrapped his legs right around Ilya's waist as this one began to kiss him again. It felt heavenly. Too much, and not enough.

Ilya let Shane down before they reached the bed -only because Shane had left his laptop on top of the mattress- and used the few seconds it took Shane to get the device out of the way to get his hoodie and shirt off.

Shane froze when he saw Ilya's exposed chest. His face scrunched up, and his mouth fell open as if he was in pain. “Fuck, you're so hot.”

Something inside Ilya felt close to bursting, something which only came close to being full with Shane. And Ilya didn't want to think too deeply about it. He just wanted Shane. So

much, it physically hurt.

“Get naked, Hollander.”

Shane began to undress instantly, without hesitation, and Ilya groaned. He was so good, so fucking obedient and good for him.

Always.

“On the bed,” Ilya ordered next.

Once Shane was fully displayed for him, Ilya began to undress, eyes on Shane’s body and hard, leaking cock as he did so.

Shane followed the undressing with unabashed hunger, licking his lips, his fingers gripping at the sheets, which were hard to do because they were too ironed to form creases, yet somehow he managed it.

Ilya began to get closer, and something broke loose inside Shane.

Shane was on his stomach and crawling towards Ilya before Ilya's knees had hit the side of the bed. As he reached him, Shane pressed his mouth to Ilya’s abdomen, pressing kisses to the space above his belly button, then running his nose through the sparse hair just below.

Ilya just stood there, awed by this man and the things he did that made every cell in Ilya's body burn with need and want, and *more*.

“Fuck, Hollander.”

“Need you,” Shane said, and he looked at Ilya with those big eyes.

“You have me.”

“Can I?” Shane asked, kissing down lower to where they both wanted him to be.

“Anything you want,” he said, before he could stop himself. And he wasn’t sure what he meant because a part of him meant now, but there was that other part, the part that was becoming increasingly more difficult to ignore, that meant anything anywhere, anytime, now and five hours from now, and five years from now, and forever if you like.

He threw his head back and let out a groan as Shane took him into his mouth, but then looked down again, needing to watch Shane because holy shit-

“You’ve gotten better,” Ilya said, and Shane just hummed around him, licking the underside as he took more of him down, and Ilya gripped Shane’s hair and held him steady. Shane made a noise of discontent, pulling against Ilya’s hold as he tried to continue, but Ilya cursed and stepped back.

“Why are you stopping?”

“Where did you learn that?” He asked, then instantly regretted it. “Never mind, I don’t want to know.”

Shane let out a chuckle and licked his lips. Ilya wanted to cry and kiss him and make him come from his cock alone as jealousy threatened to suffocate him.

“Turn around,” he said, voice harsh, and Shane -of course- obeyed.

“In the top drawer,” Shane said, before Ilya could ask.

Ilya slicked his fingers with the lube he found there. As he warmed the cold liquid in between his fingers, he took out a condom with his clean hand, then thought better of it and took out the whole pack, which he threw next to Shane’s head as a preview of the plans he had for him tonight.

Shane moaned into the mattress at the sight. “Fuck, yes.”

“I hope you brought another pack,” Ilya said and then inserted the first finger all the way in onto the second knuckle, the way Shane liked.

The moan Shane let out at the feel would live in Ilya’s head for the rest of his life.

But it did not compare to the noise Shane made as Ilya entered him twenty minutes later.

“Fuck, Hollander.” Ilya said at the same time Shane let out a long, drawn-out, “Yeeeeess.”

Ilya didn’t stop until he was all the way in, watching carefully for any sign of discomfort from Shane. He loved fucking him like this, with Shane on his back and open for him, his legs on Ilya’s shoulders or held wide like they were now, resting over Ilya’s thighs on either side of his waist.

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s already sweaty forehead, savoring the salty liquid as he inhaled his hairline and got lost in that scent.

The scent of him.

All around him.

He wanted to inject it into his veins.

“You can move now,” Shane said, quicker than Ilya liked.

“Is okay?”

Shane nodded, and Ilya bent down to press a soft kiss against his mouth before he did as was asked. He was gentle with it, at first, moving languidly until just the head remained inside and pushing back in all the way, deeper and deeper, relishing the way Shane’s back arched as he took him.

“So good for me, Hollander.”

“Fuck,” Shane gasped. “You’re too fucking big.”

“Da, but look how good you take it.”

Shane preened at this, hooking his hands over Ilya’s neck and pulling him down so they could kiss some more. It made the angle weird, but Ilya made it work, picking up his pace as best as he could without separating their mouths.

Shane felt fantastic, so fucking tight and warm, but Ilya loved kissing him most of all, loved the way Shane gasped into his mouth, the way he bit his lip and pressed open-mouthed kisses when he got lost in the pleasure but just needed to feel Ilya’s lips on his. It was so addicting to be the one to make him lose control like that, and have Shane reach out to him even through the fog, and claim his mouth, even as he was taken apart by Ilya’s cock and hands and fingers.

Ilya's mouth belonged to Shane, and Ilya needed it to survive more than he needed air.

Incredible how Shane felt like both his end and his beginning.

“Fuck, Rozanov, I am close.”

“I know,” Ilya said, because he could feel the way he kept tightening around him. “Me too.”

Shane looked up at him then, eyes full of surprise, and Ilya had to admit he was shocked at himself, too.

“Together?” Shane asked, and Ilya just kissed him.

They came together not long after, Shane hands free, and Ilya inside of him, and Ilya could have sworn his balls contracted in perfect synchronization with Shane’s own release, his hole clenching and unclenching as Shane spurted all over his stomach and Ilya’s chest.

Ilya got out of him gently, so as not to hurt him, and took off the condom. He rolled it and discarded it in the trash can next to the bed. He grabbed a towel Shane had left conveniently close to the bed and wiped the cum from Shane’s stomach and his own skin.

Then he grabbed the strip of condoms and ripped open a new one.

Shane’s eyes closed, and he brought his arm up to cover his eyes, almost as if the sight of Ilya rolling on the new condom over his still hard dick was too much for him.

Ilya grinned and tapped Shane’s thigh. Shane opened easily for him, and Ilya gripped the back of his thighs, pushing them apart as he lined himself up again. Shane was still soft, but Ilya knew that would quickly change.

“Is okay?” Ilya asked, bringing Shane’s leg up to his shoulder and kissing his ankle. He licked it and placed a soft bite against the fleshy part right above it.

Shane nodded.

“Use your words, Hollander.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?” Ilya asked because he loved the flush that crept up Shane’s neck and cheeks when he had to articulate how much he wanted to get fucked.

“Yes, you can fuck me again.”

“Ask nicely.”

Shane took the arm out from in front of his eyes and shot Ilya an annoyed look.

Ilya just grinned down at him, and slapped the head of his cock against his hole once, twice-

“Please,” Shane gritted, that lovely blush all over his face and neck and chest.

“Please, what?”

“Please fuck me again.”

“Better,” Ilya said, and slicked his dick up with more lube before lining himself up and pushing all the way in.

They did it three more times after that, each time driven by desperation and mutual desire.

Once in the shower with Shane bent forward, both hands on the glass door as Ilya took him from behind.

Then another on the lounge by the bed. Ilya had masterfully uncovered it. The lounge was the perfect height to fuck Shane while Ilya remained standing, giving him more leverage to slam into Shane fast and hard, as they both craved. He made Shane come untouched again in that lounge.

Then Ilya moved it to the kitchen because Shane had ordered room service. They had taken all of two bites of their pasta before Ilya bent Shane over the kitchen island and took him there again.

Ilya awoke sometime later to his phone vibrating somewhere to his right.

He only noticed it because, as a perpetual phone-in-vibrate-mode person, his ears were attuned to the minute buzz.

He fished around for it, momentarily lost when he opened his eyes and found a foreign type of darkness. He inhaled, and at once the memories returned as he noticed the unmistakable presence of a body next to him.

Since it was a king bed and Ilya had been told he was hotter than a furnace at night, it made sense that—if Shane was a habitual hot sleeper—he would want to distance himself from Ilya while he slept.

But he was still near, on the same mattress as he was. Ilya had spent the night. More like passed out the night, but still.

He was saved from having to look into it further when his phone buzzed again. He whispered a curse in Russian as he followed the light of his phone screen and found it was on the floor.

He picked it up as the buzzing resumed, showing one name in bold letters.

The time on the top of his screen read four am.

He frowned and turned on the flashlight.

The room was a mess. His and Shane's clothes were everywhere. Throw pillows and towels littered the floor. Now that he was further from Shane, Ilya made out the smell of sweat and sex and them.

Grinning in satisfaction and closing the door to the room, Ilya answered the call.

"Hello?"

"[Where the fuck are you]?" Svetlana yelled.

"[With someone]."

"[No, *where* are you]?"

Ilya went to the kitchen looking for anything to drink. He noticed the total darkness. From up here, the view must have been beautiful. But he knew why Shane had made sure all the curtains had been shut before he arrived.

"[Why? What's the big deal]?"

"[Are you with Shane Hollander]?"

Ilya froze, shock tightening his chest.

"[How do you know that]?"

"[Fuck, Ilya]."

“[How]-”

"[Don't fucking move from there. I am on my way]."

“[What]?” Ilya asked. He was reeling. He had so many questions.

He heard Svetlana say something to someone, but she sounded far away, as if she were holding the phone away from her mouth. Then she was back. “[Room number]?”

“[Penthouse 1].”

She hung up.

He tried to swallow the dread he suddenly felt.

Ilya noticed he'd been standing in front of the open fridge staring at nothing, so he grabbed a ginger ale and sparkling water, as well as a small plate with chocolate-covered strawberries they hadn't finished the night before.

Ilya closed the fridge just as Shane came out of the room.

“[No],” Ilya whined. “Go back to bed.”

Shane reached him then and took the plate and drinks from his hands, placing them on the island behind him before he circled his arms around Ilya's waist. They were both still mostly undressed -only in underwear- and Shane relished the feel of Ilya's skin against his chest and cheek as he embraced him.

“You're cold,” Shane said, but didn't move away.

“I was going to bring breakfast in bed.”

“Strawberry and ginger ale does not a breakfast make.”

“Who says?” Ilya asked into Shane's hair.

“Says who,” Shane corrected.

“Exactly.”

Shane chuckled, enjoying not only the sound of Ilya's laugh in the air, but the deep vibration of it from where his ear pressed to Ilya's chest. Warmth spread through Shane, and he let himself imagine a time when their meetings weren't so rare and fleeting.

“You smell nice,” Shane murmured.

“I smell like you,” Ilya said.

Shane made a small noise. “That must be why.”

Ilya chuckled and bent down to smack Shane's ass. Grabbing a handful before he let go, Shane burrowed his face on the side of his neck to hide the way he knew he was blushing.

Because that had felt...

"Hollander," Ilya said, his voice dropping the way it always did when he was aroused, and Shane let out a gasp when he repeated the slap, this time on the other cheek.

"Fuck, Rozanov."

They jumped apart when the elevator dinged, and had a millisecond to look at each other in panic before they started running towards the bedroom.

Ilya stubbed his toe on the corner of the island and let out a silent curse, slamming a hand on the hard marble countertop as he limped towards the open bedroom Shane was already inside of.

"Hurry up!" Shane urged in a whisper, and Ilya fought through the pain, getting in just as the doors opened, and a loud, angry Russian woman yelled out into the empty living room.

"[Ilya Rozanov, you *idiot*]."

Chapter 6: Moy Paren'

Chapter Summary

When fans spot them together, the fantasy of the night collapses—and Ilya's feelings spill out in a moment of raw honesty. But the reality waiting at his hotel door is brutal: loving Shane is easy, surviving it is not.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

Ilya couldn't see anything in the dark of the room, and he flipped on a lamp he knew was nearby to find Shane's wide eyes, both hands over his mouth like one would not be enough to hold back whatever he was going to say. But he didn't look like someone who had a lot to say. He just looked scared as he stared up at Ilya.

And Ilya realized Shane hadn't understood a word Svetlana had just said.

"She is not mad at you," Ilya said, as Svetlana continued to scream obscenities in Russian outside.

"She is mad at *me*, for some reason."

"Ilya!"

"I am coming, fuck!" he shouted back, in English for Shane's benefit, but Shane just continued to watch him, like he couldn't believe this person was in his hotel room.

To be frank, neither could Ilya. Maybe he would stick to the Intercontinental after all. They would have at least given him a heads-up.

"Stay here," Ilya told him and placed a quick kiss on Shane's forehead as he began to put on his sweats.

He opened the door and strolled out, shirtless because he didn't want to keep her waiting any longer.

"[There he is]."

“What are you doing here?” Ilya replied. Maybe he couldn’t get her to do so, but he didn’t feel it was fair to Shane for him to also respond in Russian. It would be easier if Shane knew what Ilya was talking about and that it wasn’t about him.

“[I should be asking you that question],” she said, and she threw her bag onto the sofa.

Even at four in the morning, she still looked ready for a runway. It was quite a superpower, if Ilya was being honest.

“How did you know who I was with?” He asked, still in English, and went still when he heard a loud gasp coming from the bedroom with the still-open door.

And, *fuck*,

Ilya's return to the room found Shane sitting on the bed with his head between his knees. He was visibly trembling.

“[Shit],” Ilya cursed, then he heard Svetlana start to walk closer.

“[Don't come in here],” he yelled, then cursed as Shane flinched away from him. “Go home, Lana. I will talk to you when I get there.”

“I am not leaving without you, fucker,” she said, finally catching on to why he'd been speaking English this whole time.

Shane raised his head. “That's Svetlana?”

Ilya was surprised Shane knew of her. Of course, Ilya knew of Yuna -Shane’s mom and manager/agent/publicist. But that was Ilya's mom. This was Ilya’s family, yes, but to anyone on the outside, Svetlana would be just another person. Somehow, it warmed Ilya to know Shane knew about her. It felt like the two sides of his world were connecting somehow.

Ilya nodded. “Do you want to meet her?”

Shane looked scared for a moment, even more than he had before. Like the prospect was the worst idea Ilya had ever come up with, but then he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Ilya waited for him, running a hand up and down Shane’s now clothed back in what he hoped were soothing motions.

Finally, Shane opened his eyes and said, with steeled determination, “Yes, I think so.”

Ilya stepped out of the room first and yelled out, “[Shayne is coming to meet you. Be fucking nice, Lana. Or I swear to God].”

Ilya watched Shane’s eyes land on Ilya’s best friend—his sister, really—and braced for him to run and lock himself back inside that bedroom, but instead, Shane smiled timidly and walked over to her.

He stretched out his hand. “Hi, Svetlana. It’s nice to meet you.”

Ilya melted. This polite Canadian boy was going to be the death of him.

Svetlana took his hand and smiled. “It’s a pleasure to meet the famous Shane Hollander. Although we had already—”

Ilya shot her a warning look Shane couldn’t see, but must have sensed, because he turned quickly to Ilya, who pasted on a soft smile to avoid suspicion. The moment Shane’s gaze left, Ilya’s murderous look returned.

“Never mind,” she said. “Sorry to have to cut this short, but we have to fly to England in two hours.”

“England?” Shane and Ilya asked at the same time, and Ilya tried to stop the teenage-like thrill that ran through him because of it.

“Press schedule has changed,” she said, with a shrug, and Ilya took a step forward so he was next to Shane, and Shane took a step to his left, so he was closer to Ilya. It happened reflexively almost, and Ilya caught the way Svetlana’s eyebrows furrowed as she noticed this.

“Can you wait in the lobby?” Ilya asked, but it wasn’t a question.

She fixed him with a bored expression, glanced around, and asked, “Any other exits?”

“[Fuck’s sake],” Ilya said. “[I am not going to run away. Just give me two minutes so I can kiss my boyfriend goodbye, will you]?”

He felt Shane go still beside him, and so Ilya said to him, “Sorry. I am just asking her to leave. I will try to speak English, so you understand.”

Shane nodded quickly, while Svetlana rolled her eyes and picked up her bag from the couch.

“Ten minutes,” she said, and then to Shane, softer, almost gentle. “It was nice to *finally* meet you, Shane.”

Shane echoed the sentiment, his eyebrows furrowing.

Ilya waited for the elevator doors to close before he wrapped Shane in a hug.

“I am sorry,” he said, and kissed the top of Shane’s hair. “I didn’t think she would just show up here.”

“It’s okay,” Shane said, the words flat, robotic—his voice empty, as if he was retreating somewhere unreachable inside himself.

Ilya stepped back to find tears pooling in Shane’s eyes.

“Oh, sweetheart.”

Ilya moved forward, ready to wrap him in another hug, but Shane surprised him by stepping away from his embrace.

“You should go,” Shane said, looking down at the floor.

“Hollander?”

“Please, go. I know you have a flight to catch, and I should try to get some more sleep. We have a long press day today.”

Ilya nodded and stepped away. “Okay.” He said, but he felt cold, detached from himself.

He grabbed his things and refused to look at the room as he dressed. Once a source of pride, it now left him feeling hollow and dirty. Of course, it made sense. Ilya had overstayed his usefulness. He'd fucked Shane like Shane wanted, and now that it was over—what else could Shane want with him?

Ilya stood with his back to Shane as he pressed the elevator button, hoping hands would come up around his waist from behind, and that the voice he heard even in his dreams would ask him to, “Stay a little longer, please. Five more minutes.”

The elevator arrived,

When Ilya stepped inside and turned, he found Shane in the same spot he'd left him. Shane wasn't even looking at him, but at a spot to the right, eyes lost in the distance.

“Goodbye, Hollander,” Ilya said, and didn't know if Shane said it back because the elevator doors closed far too quickly.

“[How did you know I was with him]?” Ilya asked once they were inside the car.

She looked up from her phone and guided the screen towards him.

A fan had posted a picture of Shane at the Ritz, smiling and signing autographs at sunset. He seemed exhausted but happy. Ilya felt that coldness inside him spread as he recalled Shane's faraway look when Ilya had left.

The next slide was a photo of Ilya. He was wearing shades and a hoodie that obscured half his face, but it was undeniable that it was Ilya walking into the same hotel. It had been taken from the lobby; most likely, a worker had snapped it, thinking they would make a quick buck.

“[They know because you always stay at Intercontinental],” Svetlana said, swiping to a photo of Ilya that morning, leaving the hotel for the press tour. He was smiling, waving to his fans, who had slept outside for a chance to speak with him, photograph him, or simply see him.

He loved his fans, truly, but right now, he kind of hated every single one of them. Well, not all of them -these, the ones that did shit like this.

He grabbed Svetlana's phone and went back to the beginning. The original post came from someone named **ShilyaForever**. He groaned.

"[Please tell me we have a better ship name than that]."

"Nope," Svetlana said. Then she took the phone back and locked it. They sat in silence for a beat before she said, "[This is just fan speculation, but-]"

"[I know]," Ilya said. "[I'll be more careful]."

"[Or]," she said, and placed a hand on Ilya's thigh. "[You break things off with him]."

"[I can't]."

"[Because he's your boyfriend]?"

Ilya groaned, wishing he could take those words back. For once, he was grateful Shane didn't know Russian.

"[I don't know why I said that. We just fuck. It's simple]."

"[Is it? Because it sure looked a lot more complicated than that from where I was standing]."

"[Well, it isn't]."

"[Are you sure]?"

"[Yes]," Ilya growled, already over this conversation.

"[Then why are you getting angry]?"

"[I am not]," he said, in a way that sounded very, very angry. He sighed and tried again, "[I am not]."

"Oscar-winning actor, everyone."

He turned vicious eyes towards her.

"[What do you want me to fucking do, Lana? It's bad enough I can't fucking date him for real. I can't even talk to him in public without some tabloid making up rumors of how I must have been saying something nasty to him to get in his head or harassing him. Fuck! Now, apparently, I can't even stay in the same fucking hotel he's in without it being a whole thing. What do they fucking want from me?]"

She didn't say anything. Just watched him. Letting him do the talking.

Which was too bad, because he was done talking.

He was.

“[He’s the best sex I’ve ever had],” he continued, voice heavy with defeat. “[And we get along. With him, I breathe easier—I can just be me. We laugh until it hurts. Makes him the best kind of fuck buddy, I think].”

“[But it’s more than that, isn’t it]?”

“[It *can’t* be more].”

“[But it is. *He* is].”

Ilya sighed, watching streetlamps pass outside the window. He hadn’t noticed he was crying until she collected a teardrop from his cheek, then she gathered him into her arms and let him sob into her expensive coat.

“[I’m sorry],” he said. She shushed him, rocking him gently. He wasn’t a crier but couldn’t hold it back now; the dam had broken. His mind started racing now that he’d gone down this self-pity hole, about all the things he wished were different, all the ways he was fighting to meet expectations when he knew he would never measure up. He hated the part of himself that had to hide, the part that wanted to hold Shane’s hand in public simply because he wanted to. And he knew Hollywood had many openly gay and queer actors who were still somewhat popular.

And Ilya wished a decline in his popularity was the worst of his worries.

“[I know],” she said, as if reading his mind. “[I already sent him the stipend this month. It’s fine. They are all okay. You make sure of it].”

“[I am sorry],” he repeated, because he felt like a coward, and a bad son, and a bad brother and uncle. There he was, a famous actor, a millionaire before twenty-five, with expensive cars and a beautiful home in LA. Crying in the back of a cab, all because he was fucking certain he was half in love, if not fully in love with another man, and he couldn’t ever let himself admit this out loud. So stupid, such a trivial fucking thing in comparison to the struggles his father, brother, and niece were facing in Russia without him.

No.

They were better off without him, he reminded himself. At least this way, he could offer them financial stability. Something he’d never been able to count on growing up.

Which is why he and Shane could never... Because Ilya couldn’t *ever* be openly his. Not without giving up his family, his home.

He felt a primal sort of scream leave him that he muffled against the thick fur of Svetlana’s mink coat. It was so guttural, so raw that it burned his throat as it left him, and he knew he would have a sore throat in a couple of hours, but he didn’t care. He cried harder, letting it all out, and when the car stopped, he sat back, wiped his tears, and put on his dark shades.

He was the first one out of the car.

He didn’t wave to his fans, the ones still awake.

He didn't even acknowledge them. Just slipped into the hotel lobby and went up to his penthouse, Svetlana close by.

She didn't speak a word to him as they took the elevator in silence.

Ilya looked down at a text notification on his phone, but instead of checking it, he just pressed the power button and kept his thumb on it until the screen went black. Then he handed the phone to Svetlana, who took it and slipped it inside her bag without question.

He showered and slipped into his favorite variation of stylish travel clothes: a pair of black sweats and a black hoodie with vans he could toe off during TSA and slip back on without much fuss.

Then he sat on his bed and let the enormity of the last couple of hours crush him.

But he didn't cry. No. Instead, he gave himself two seconds to pull himself together before he walked over to the closet and grabbed his passport and the rolling bag that always stayed packed and ready.

He threw the shades back on and looked at his reflection in the mirror.

“[It's showtime],” he told himself before he turned off the lights and closed the door behind him.

Chapter 7: The Life of a Snowman

Chapter Summary

Crushed by rumors and the weight of fame, Ilya flees home to Russia—only to find old wounds waiting for him there. Then Shane reaches out—and with one impulsive text, Ilya’s holiday takes a turn he can’t take back.

Chapter Notes

Special note: This chapter's Russian will not contain [] markings, as it is inferred that the whole conversation will be only in Russian.

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

Ilya had tried but he’d never been good at acting without a script, and the mask refused to stay on, no matter how hard he attempted to make it stay.

Rose, ever so perceptive, had noticed, of course. Today was just the two of them, since Troy had been sent to do promo with their other co-star, Harris, who played the Villain but was actually a sweetie. And the two of them had gotten the luck of getting shipped off to Paris.

“Hey, is everything okay?” Rose asked him around noon. She had been shooting him looks all morning and had apparently been unable to hold it in any longer.

“Great,” Ilya lied, knowing it was not convincing, and not really caring.

“You know you can talk to me if you need to. About anything.”

Ilya looked at her. They sat side by side in uncomfortable chairs. She had her hair pulled back, makeup soft. She looked beautiful.

“Thank you, Rose,” he said, and tucked a stray hair from her face that had gotten loose. She smiled into this, and Ilya turned when he saw movement from one of the stagehands. They were snapping a picture or maybe taking a video.

“Oh, man,” she grumbled. “There go the cheating rumors again.”

“I am sorry,” Ilya said. He had been saying that a lot lately.

She laughed and shrugged. "It's no big deal. I mean, it is, but Tom works in the industry and knows how it can be. Plus, we trust each other, so."

Ilya nodded and looked down at his hands.

"What's on your mind?" She asked, noticing his shift in mood.

Ilya almost said nothing again, but then he exhaled loudly. "I hate rumors. They can be so damaging. I prefer it if people just mind their own business. If there's something to be said, it will be said; otherwise fuck off."

Rose laughed. "God, can you imagine? Too bad that would run us out of business, though."

"Yeah," Ilya said, dejected. "I know."

Because he did know. They worked in entertainment. Their job was to entertain, sell a story—a fantasy. Be bigger, better, more. But what happened when bigger wasn't big enough? When better was not enough? When enough was never enough?

Ilya was beginning to feel like he would never be enough, a dull ache of emptiness pressing on his chest.

"Hey," Rose said in a whisper, eyes solemn, then something came over her face, and she lit up. "You're not filming anything until February, right?"

Ilya nodded, sitting up because her sudden excitement was very intriguing.

"Come to NY for Christmas."

Ilya stared at her, eyes wide.

"What?"

Her face fell. "Oh, right. You're probably going to spend that with your family in Russia. What about New Year's? Can you make it right? Just two days. The 31st, then the 1st. You could leave on the 2nd. Or come sooner. Come whenever, just." She gripped his hands in hers and smiled softly at him. "Just say you will come. Please. It would mean a lot to have you there."

Ilya knew he shouldn't. He planned to stay in Russia until the New Year, but honestly, neither his father nor brother would be too sad if he left a little early, and his niece was still so young that she wouldn't care if he was there at all.

"Who will be there?"

"Oh, not many people—just you, me, Tom, Barrett, Harris, and Scott Hunter. He's actually very sweet," she added after Ilya made a face.

"If you say so."

“And well, Shane.” She said and held his gaze. There was so much to uncover there. An invitation, but also a silent understanding, and so much concern.

Ilya swallowed and put on his most convincing smile. “Maybe.”

Which really meant no, but she was gracious enough to beam at him and tap his hand once as she turned to greet the man who had just sat in the reporter’s chair facing them.

Russia was, well, Russia.

It was beautiful. And cold. And cruel. But it was home. The only home he’d ever known.

As he tied his skates on the bench by the frozen lake, he tried to clear his mind and feel the cold—the sting in his eyes, lips, and fingertips as he tightened the laces.

He stood, putting his gloves back on quickly, and began to make his way towards the lake. There were people everywhere. Young families and kids. The lake was an attraction of sorts for the locals, one that Ilya had been attending since he could remember.

“You should get us new skates. These are already old. We could fall. Injure ourselves. Don’t you care about your family’s health?”

Ilya looked at Alexei, who stopped abruptly in front of him. Shaking ice shards off his legs from Alexei’s hockey stop, Ilya scowled.

“I bought those for you last year. They are perfect.”

Alexei scowled. “You can’t be serious, Ilya. Come on.”

“No,” Ilya said. “You have good skates. I paid a lot of money for them. Not even hockey players go through them in a year.”

“I skate more than they do.”

“This is the second time you’ve worn them. I saw you take the tag out last year, and you missed one there,” Ilya said, pointing to a small piece of clear plastic still attached to the fastener.

Alexei sneered and skated off, flailing awkwardly. Ilya knew why there was this resentment between them: Ilya had passed up the dream of professional hockey—Alexei’s lifelong ambition—to go into acting, but that knowledge did not make it any less painful to experience.

Ilya knew he could have made as much money in the NHL as he currently did acting. And he liked hockey, mostly because he was good at it, but he was *better* at acting. Truthfully, there

was nothing else he would rather do, even if guilt ate at him every second for having let his brother and father down.

He looked up at the sky, darkening with the last rays of sunset, and pressed a hand over the rosary that had belonged to his mother, Irina.

Then took one step into the ice and let himself get lost in it.

“Faster, faster.”

“Hold tight!”

Ilya was smiling too widely, so wide it hurt, but he didn't mind. Not when he had his niece holding onto his hand, her small fingers wrapped around his gloved pinky as he skated -very slowly- on the ice.

“Circle, uncle,” she said, and giggled when Ilya did just that, twirling her in place. She had a natural knack for skating and outstanding balance for someone so young.

“Figure skating classes are costly,” Alexei had said when Ilya had mentioned it to him.

Ilya had just sighed. “Just send me the invoice.”

Now, his niece was laughing and looking at him with big green eyes full of awe, and he would have emptied his bank account at that moment if it's what it took to make sure that smile never left her face. Anything she wanted would be hers.

He would make sure of it.

The ice had cleared out by then, and only a few stragglers remained.

There were no lights on the lake except by the entry and exit. Ilya knew he had to leave, but wanted to stay forever. Maybe he could have had a future in hockey. Maybe he'd have learned to love it as much as acting.

But no, something inside him told him he would have grown to resent it with time. His father would have made sure of that.

The man wasn't even happy with an Oscar.

Ilya couldn't imagine what he would have done with a Stanley Cup.

With a Gold Olympic Medal.

With anything that held Ilya's name on the front of it.

Because that was the problem, wasn't it? It wasn't that Ilya was less; it was that deep down, no matter how hard he tried, he just wasn't *enough*.

"Ready to go?" Anya, Alexei's young wife, asked. She was pretty, with long blonde hair and green eyes. She was the person his niece took after, and Ilya was glad for it.

"One cigarette and we're gone," he promised, and she nodded, crouching down on the ice to say something to his niece, who began to pout.

"But I don't want to go," she cried.

That makes two of us, sweetheart, he thought as he skated away quickly, a tight ache in his chest, unable to stomach the sound of her little cries.

In the end, he gave the keys to Alexei, who jumped at the chance to drive the convertible Mustang, especially after seeing that Ilya wouldn't join them. Truth was, Ilya's apartment was near the lake. He'd bought it that way on purpose. It was Alexei and his father who were far from him now, also on purpose.

"Are you sure you want to walk?" Anya whispered when Alexei wasn't looking, because he would have reprimanded her for her kindness. Not because Alexei didn't believe in being kind, but because of where that kindness was being directed.

Ilya put on an easy smile. Somehow, acting came easily to him with his family. The mask, he noticed, wasn't a chore to put on if you never took it off.

"Drive safe," he said to Alexei, who flicked him off before speeding out of the now-empty parking lot.

Ilya watched the car disappear down the street until it was so small he could no longer differentiate it from any of the others. Then he lit a cigarette and began to walk home.

No, not home.

He supposed he didn't really know what home was anymore.

He touched the rosary on his chest, shivering as the breeze picked up. Growing up in Russia, the cold rarely fazed him, but after two winters in Los Angeles, the chill seeped through his layers, settling in his chest, making it hard to breathe. It felt like an icicle lodged in his heart, the cold spreading to his bones. He felt like a snowman left unattended in the middle of a blizzard.

An odd thought occurred to him about snowmen, and whether this was how they always felt inside.

It made him take another drag of his cigarette.

He was exhaling, his thoughts working out the logistics of what it would look like inside a snowman's body if it were anatomically correct, when his phone buzzed inside his jacket pocket.

He took it out and cursed when he had to take off his gloves to use his fingerprint recognition.

The frustration at the possibility of frostbite left him the moment he saw who the message was from.

Boring Canadian: Merry Christmas, Ilya [snowman emoji]

For some reason, this struck him. And Ilya stopped in the middle of the sidewalk.

A couple who had been walking behind him sidestepped him and gave him an odd look, but he didn't care.

Already having lost all feelings in his fingertips, he stared at the message as if it held all the answers.

Before he could question it, he dialed Svetlana and put her on speaker, then took off the other glove.

By the time Svetlana answered, Ilya was already typing furiously away.

"Merry Christmas!"

"I need a plane ticket to NY. Now!"

Chapter 8: The Most Beautiful Sight in NYC

Chapter Summary

Fleeing the weight of Russia, Ilya finds unexpected warmth in Rose's New York sanctuary—and the first flicker of hope he's felt in months. But beneath the comfort lies a question he can't ignore: what exactly did Rose bring him here to face?

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty!

“[I need a plane ticket to NY. Now]!”

Svetlana didn't answer him at first.

Ilya gripped the phone tighter, every distant voice and fading footstep tightening the knot in his chest. Each click of her heels echoed like a countdown, sending anxious chills along his spine as he imagined her walking to her room.

“[Where are you]?” He asked, unable to bear the silence.

“[You know where I am].”

He did. He had run down those halls so much growing up that he almost knew them better than the ones in his own childhood home.

Ilya stared at the message-delivered icon. Then, after taking the phone out of speaker mode and putting it to his ear, he slipped the gloves back on.

It felt heavenly after so long without them.

Fuck, Russia was cold.

He winced against a blast of wind as he walked, phone pressed to his ear. "Was Russia always this cold?" he asked Svetlana, who laughed across the line. A door closed on her end—then, a sharp buzz in his ear as she requested a FaceTime call.

“[Where are you]?” She asked the moment his face took up the screen.

He took a drag of the cigarette and let it out. Turning the screen around so she would see.

“Ah,” she said, recognizing the place instantly. She had been to the lake far too many times not to know the neighborhood by heart.

As their video call continued, Svetlana set her phone against her open laptop. He could now see her and hear the clack of keyboard keys as she searched for flights, the hum of her room in the background.

“[What time do you need]?”

“[Put me on the first one out].”

She stopped typing and frowned. “[Is this because of Alexei]?”

“[Give me a moment],” he told her, and slid her into his pocket as he searched for the headphone he usually kept nearby.

A couple of seconds later, he connected the headphone cable to the phone and said, “[Not just him, it’s all of them. Every fucking person here].”

“[Not Anastasia],” she said, reminding him of his niece.

His face broke out into a tender smile. “[Of course not. Never her].”

He took another drag of his new cigarette, noticing the slight tremble of his hand as it held it to his lips

He was a wreck.

“[How’s the Colonel]?” He asked.

“[Now, or just in general]?”

He frowned, and his voice took a sympathetic tone as he said, “Sorry.”

She shrugged. “[Sorry for you, too].”

“[Come to NY with me].”

“[Can’t],” she said.

“[Why not]?”

She exhaled, and when she looked up at him, there were unshed tears in her eyes. “[He wants me to stay here. In Russia].”

“[Like hell you will]!” He said angrily now. “[You’re an adult, Lana. He can’t tell you]-”

“[Of course not, but he’s being difficult].”

"[Who cares about what he fucking says]?" He continued.

"[Ilya, please. Can you just...]"

Ilya took a deep breath in, swallowing the smoke inside his lungs.

"[Do you need me to talk to him]?" he asked as he exhaled. He could think of nothing worse than that scenario. Speaking to a Russian Colonel was never fun. He would know. But he would, for her. He would do anything for her.

She laughed, wetly. "[As much as I would love to see you attempt that. No, I can't ask that of you]."

"[You're not asking. I am offering]."

"[Thank you. But I think I'd rather handle it for now]."

"Okay."

"[I sent the ticket to your email]."

Ilya reached his apartment complex. He stopped just outside the door, glancing at his screen. "[Thank you]," he said, pausing. "[Not just for this, for everything]."

Svetlana smiled softly at him.

"Merry Christmas, Ilya," she said in English.

"Merry Christmas, [Darling]."

"I can't believe you actually made it!" That was how Rose greeted him once he had finally made it inside her huge NY home.

The weather was beautiful in New York. A lovely 16 degrees, not the -15 he'd had in Moscow.

And while Rose wore a light jacket, Ilya wore just a plain black shirt. He'd flown from Russia and gone straight to his freshly purchased NY apartment to shower, pick up some acceptable clothes, and rush over to Rose's before he could change his mind.

And now he was here.

And Ilya wished he had one of those Men in Black things so he could zap Rose's memory of him out of her head and disappear.

But alas, he just hugged her and let Tom take his bags after shaking the man's hand. Turned out he was leaving soon for a work trip, which is why Rose had invited them all over. To keep her company.

"Come on, we were just preparing some cocktails."

"Come here," Tom said, catching up to them and placing a hand around his wife's waist. "I am going to miss you," he said.

She grinned at him and brought him in for a kiss, and Ilya looked away. Taking the moment to take in the house.

It really was quite lovely. He had seen some of it when he'd pulled it up on the maps after getting the address from Rose last night. A whopping 10 million for an East Village Duplex, which was not all that far from Ilya's own apartment, but Ilya had paid nowhere near that much, so naturally, his also looked nothing like this place.

The décor was modern, yet minimalist. White walls and wooden accents. Wooden floors and windows everywhere. There were plants here and there to break up the spaces, art on every exposed wall that wasn't glass, and a beautiful set of stairs leading up to the second floor.

It was peaceful yet lavish, and every bit as Rose Landry as it could get.

"Come on," Rose said, pulling Ilya towards what he imagined was the kitchen. "We've all been waiting for you."

He'd been wrong. She hadn't been taking him to the kitchen at all but guiding up three flights of stairs to the rooftop, which made the price tag make a lot more sense.

"Wow, this view."

"I know," she gushed. She let go of Ilya's hand then, letting him take it all in as she walked towards where Ilya could hear voices and laughter, although he could not see them yet. "We'll be right through here when you're done." She said. Giving him some alone time to take it all in.

Ilya stood quietly on the patio. Towering buildings dotted the horizon, the city sprawling beneath him like a sea of lights, flickering like stars. He could hear the faint hum of the city below, distant and rhythmic, like a heartbeat.

This was more than a home—it was a sanctuary perched above the world.

The breeze picked up, and he closed his eyes, inhaling when he caught another smell, sweet yet masculine, infinitely better and more intoxicating than this city could ever be.

Ilya smiled, savoring it. He wished, not for the first time, that he could live in this smell forever.

"It's a beautiful view, isn't it?"

Ilya felt his heart race and his breath catch at the sound of his voice. And Ilya opened his eyes to find the reason he'd been flown halfway across the world smiling up at him.

Ilya's eyes snapped open to find Shane standing a couple of feet away from him. He was dressed casually, much like Ilya, in white linen pants and a black, loose linen shirt, folded at the elbows, the top three buttons open, revealing his hairless tan stretch of skin. He had his hands inside his pants pockets, with a black, elegant watch on his left arm. And a pair of black vans, much like the pair Ilya wore.

"Aren't you cold?"

A slow smile grew on Shane's lips.

"It's cold for you, no?" Ilya continued.

"No, actually. Canadian, remember?"

Ah, it made sense.

"Are *you* cold?" Shane rebutted. "Is that why you asked?"

"No," Ilya said, quickly. "Russian, remember?"

"Right," Shane said, and looked down, that smile growing even wider.

Ilya wanted to walk over and kiss him until he wasn't smiling anymore, or maybe he wanted to kiss him and smile right back and feel the way Shane's lips stretched thin into the kiss, just like Ilya's would, as they grinned at each other like two idiots.

Ilya cleared his throat.

"Merry Christmas."

Shane raised an eyebrow. "That was yesterday."

"Well, you were a little late with mine, so."

"Was I?"

That wasn't exactly a lie. He had gotten it at 12:00 am, which technically meant he'd gotten it on the 26th.

"Sorry, I didn't realize that with the time change."

"Yes, you sent it very late."

Shane rolled his eyes. “Sorry,” he said, but he didn’t look it, and Ilya was smiling too wide to pretend he actually cared about any of it.

“You look nice,” Shane said, surprising Ilya, who had to look down to remember what he had put on.

It was a pair of black trousers and a black cotton mesh polo shirt that fit tightly against his chest and biceps and loose around his stomach just how he preferred it. He was also wearing a watch, a black and gold Chanel Caliber -his wrapping present for the superhero movie they were supposed to be competing for.

“Thank you,” Ilya said, and made a show of running his eyes all over Shane’s body. Ilya’s smirk grew when Shane shivered at the attention. “You also look...” Ilya stopped, then took the steps to reach him. Shane stepped back when Ilya got close enough to touch. A warning in his eyes.

Almost as if to drive home the point, there was a sudden boisterous laugh, and a chorus of people groaning and complaining about something or other right on the other side of the wall they were hiding behind.

This knowledge made a fresh wave of heat pool low in Ilya’s stomach, and something about it must have shown on his face because Shane’s eyes hooded, like he was right on board and fuck-

“We can’t,” Shane whispered, and it was a testament to how close Ilya was to him that he felt Shane’s breath against his lips as he spoke.

But Ilya didn’t close the gap, though; he just looked into Shane’s caramel eyes, then licked his lips, and his tongue -accidentally- just so happened to grace Shane’s mouth.

Ilya felt himself get pushed backward and hit the wall a second before Shane’s lips were on his.

Ilya moaned into it, recovering from the shock quickly as he circled his arms around Shane’s back, one hand trailing higher until it tangled into Shane’s hair, which was now long again, and brought him closer, impossibly so, so their noses smashed together and Ilya’s lips felt like they would get squished against Shane’s own. He didn’t care, he needed more, all of it, all Shane would give him. Judging by the leg Shane brought up to Ilya’s hip, which he was using to pull Ilya closer, Shane was on the same page.

“Fuck,” Ilya whispered into Shane’s mouth, who moaned at the sound, nodding as he went back in for another suffocating kiss.

Ilya pulled back, just as another laugh ran out into the night. It sounded louder this time, closer, or maybe it just seemed that way because Ilya was suddenly hyper aware of the way they were both out in the open, acting like lust-filled teenagers where anyone could see.

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya said, stepping back. Shane seemed to reach the same conclusion he did at the same time, because Shane stepped back as if struck, eyes wide as he looked around

the patio for any sign of unwelcome eyes.

“I am sorry,” Shane said, and he looked it.

Ilya hated having to apologize for kissing him after not seeing each other for almost six months. Shit, they hadn’t talked in all that time, except for when Shane had sent him that stupid Christmas message yesterday.

“No, I am sorry,” Ilya said in an equal whisper. He fixed himself in his pants and cursed when Shane’s eyes followed the movement, instantly filling with hunger.

“You’re making this very difficult for me, Hollander.”

“Sorry.”

“Stop saying that.”

“Sorry,” Shane said, but he he was fighting a grin.

“Brat.”

Shane’s smile grew tender, and he stepped closer, but not close enough to tempt, more like he couldn’t physically deal with having so much space between them.

And yes. Ilya knew the feeling.

“Who taught you that word?”

“Had to look it up,” Ilya said very seriously. “Was searching for word to describe you.”

Shane’s laughter was what finally alerted the rest of the guests to Ilya’s arrival, and suddenly he found himself facing many familiar, smiling faces.

“Barrett,” Ilya greeted, hugging him first since he was closest. “And Harris, good to see you both.”

“Glad you made it, Roz,” Troy said.

Finally, the next in line was Scott Hunter, who approached Ilya and extended his hand for a handshake.

Ilya shook it, exchanged a quick "Hello," and then Scott moved aside- and Ilya watched, heart skipping painfully in his chest- as he made way for a slightly smaller, very handsome, and visibly younger man. This troubled Ilya, but he let it go.

“Hi, I am Kip.”

“This is Kip,” Scott said, looking fucking nervous.

Ilya's eyebrows furrowed, an alarm going off in his head that he refused to acknowledge.

"I just said that," Kip replied, sounding more charmed than annoyed, so enamored with Scott it was almost overwhelming.

And, *holy shit*.

Was this Scott Hunter's... boyfriend?

Scott Hunter: The wet dream of moms all across America.

No, surely not.

He noticed now that Barret and Harris were standing together. Holding hands.

“You and Harris?” Ilya asked, not trusting his eyes. Or what his brain was doing to him right now.

Troy smiled shily. “Me and Harris.”

"You're gay?" Ilya asked, pointblank.

Harris laughed and shrugged. "I think is safe to say most of us are."

A dark pit formed in his stomach.

Ilya scanned the room, *really* seeing it for the first time.

He suddenly felt like someone had grabbed hold of his jaw and shoved a fist straight down his throat.

What the fuck was happening?

Chapter 9: An Ambush

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane's reunion crackles with everything they've missed, even as they're forced to hide it in plain sight. But when Ilya learns he's not the only one living a secret, the truth sends him spiraling—and ultimately toward a clarity he didn't expect.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy! And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

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

“Ilya?”

It was Rose.

"I am sorry," he said, his own voice sounding distant and hollow, as if torn from him.

Had Rose done this on purpose? Was she trying to push Ilya to come out?

Was this all some sick twisted plan these people had all made against him?

Or was this a joke? Were they laughing at him? Where were they waiting to see him let his guard down and run to Shane, kiss him, just so they could ridicule him for it?

Did they really think he was that gullible?

The thought burned, stinging sharper than the shame.

Finally, Ilya met Shane's eyes.

Shane looked as shocked as Ilya felt—strange, since he'd laughed and drank with the others all day before Ilya arrived. How long had he known about this? Or had it been *his* plan all along?

I can't do this.

“I-” He felt like he couldn't get air into his lungs. "Bathroom?”

"It's over there," Rose said, and she dared to look concerned, maybe even a little scared. It was easy to forget sometimes that they were all really good fucking actors. "I can take you."

"No," he said quickly. He couldn't breathe. It was too hot, but his hands were cold and clammy. He clenched them. "Just tell me."

She pointed to an expanse of palm trees. "Right through there."

He was gone before she had finished her sentence.

"Ilya!" He heard her call after him.

He couldn't walk fast enough.

Couldn't get air into his lungs fast enough.

He pushed through the palm trees -who the fuck had fucking palm trees on a rooftop in New York?- and saw a door.

He pushed it open before he realized it was pull and let out a frustrated growl as he pulled the damn thing and slipped inside.

Seconds later, the door opened, and Ilya jumped. He hadn't expected anyone to follow him, but of course, *he* would.

"I don't want to talk to you."

"Rozanov-"

"Please, Hollander. Please," Ilya said, voice trembling on the last word. He let his head thud back against the wall, jaw clenched, and eyes squeezed shut. "I want to be alone."

"I didn't know," he said.

Ilya scoffed.

"I swear I didn't. I've come to this thing for years and had no idea."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"Believe whatever the fuck you want. I am telling you the truth."

Ilya let his arms drop. "You shouldn't have come here."

"Well, she's my best friend-"

"No, not here with them, Hollander. Here," Ilya said, gesturing to the bathroom around them.

Shane's face fell. He pressed his hand to his forehead. "Fuck, you're right. What am I *doing*?"

“Go. Before they think we are... doing something.”

Shane was out of the bathroom almost as quickly as Ilya imagined he himself had left the enclosed patio moments earlier.

Ilya cursed in Russian and ran a hand down his face.

He stared at himself in the mirror.

He felt so many things in that moment. Anger, mostly. A hint of hurt. Even betrayal.

How could Rose do this to him? To Shane?

He shouldn't have come, but it was too late now for that. The damage was done. Whatever he'd tried to hide, he'd exposed by his reaction, and Shane had sealed it by following him.

Ilya tried to bite back the curling smile, but failed—heat and disbelief rising with it.

“Fucking Hollander.”

His smile stretched, wild and uncontainable, and startled laughter tore from him.

What was he even worrying about? *Really?*

It was over. It was done.

They all knew about him.

And he knew about them.

He turned the faucet and splashed water on his face, then his hair, because he needed to cool the fuck down.

The air felt noticeably crispier against his face as he stepped outside again, only to stop.

Rose was standing there, crying.

“I know what it looked like,” she said, before Ilya could even speak. “I swear it wasn't planned that way. These are my friends. I don't know, I guess I attract you guys?” She let out a groan, tears falling quicker. “Fuck I didn't mean- I just. Who else am i supposed to invite to my holiday party when you are my *only friends?*” She cried hopelessly.

And Ilya understood.

All his anger left him at once, replaced instantly by guilt so heavy it nearly stole his breath.

He pulled Rose into a hug. “It's okay.”

"It's not," she sobbed. "That was fucked up. I can't imagine how scared and hurt you were. I promise that wasn't my intention—to make you—" she hiccupped.

“Shhh.” He kissed her hair, running his hands down over it in what he hoped was soothing. “I am not mad. I *was* initially, but I get it now. I do.”

“How could you ever forgive me? I am so *sorry*, Ilya.” She began crying harder.

Ilya sighed and looked at the sky, asking his mother for guidance. He’d never been good at this.

He pulled back and found her eyes. They were already so red and puffy.

He smiled softly at her. “Hey. Stop that. I promise I am not mad, okay?”

She looked like she wanted to protest, but he pulled her in for another hug, wrapping his arms tight around her and squeezing until she squealed for him to stop before he broke her spine.

When he did, she was smiling too, and he asked, “Are you better?”

“I should be asking you that.”

“Well, I am better. And *out*, apparently.”

That was the wrong thing to say.

Rose dropped to her knees, wailing and curling in on herself. And, oh for fucks sake!

"Hollander!" he yelled. Seconds later, Shane -and the rest of the group- were beside him.

Which. *Great*.

Shane took one look at them and understood immediately, knelt beside Rose, and took over soothing her—a duty Ilya was clearly unfit for.

Shane was a natural. Though Ilya couldn't hear what Shane was whispering to her, Shane calmed Rose almost instantly and helped her to her feet.

She gave a wet laugh, then they hugged, and she smiled into it.

When she turned to Ilya, he already had his arms open, and she fell right into them. She squeezed him this time, and he pretended to groan in pain which got a laugh out of the group.

As she stepped back, Shane came in beside her and placed a hand around her waist, placing a kiss against her temple.

And Ilya clapped his hands together.

As one, they all looked at him, but Ilya only had eyes for one man in that crowd.

To Shane, he said, “I think we deserve a drink.”

There were several voices in agreement, and Rose stepped away, following the crowd out between the palm trees, leaving Shane and Ilya behind.

They watched them leave, and the moment they were out of view, Ilya grabbed Shane by the waist and the back of his neck.

And kissed him.

Shane let out a shocked sound that was muffled by Ilya's mouth, and then, too soon, Ilya pulled away just enough to meet Shane's eyes, searching his face for a reaction.

"Are you okay?"

"I will be," Shane said.

"Me too. This is... good. I think."

"Could be," Shane agreed.

"We should talk, yes?"

"Yeah," Shane said, rising on his toes to kiss Ilya's nose. "But not here."

Ilya smiled and closed his eyes as Shane placed another on his right cheek, then his left, then his nose again, his chin.

Then he stopped, and when Ilya opened his eyes, he found Shane smiling up at him.

"You didn't do the most important one."

Shane smiled, asking, "You mean this one?" Then he lowered himself to his knees and placed a kiss right over Ilya's clothed dick.

Ilya gasped and looked around the trees, as if they had eyes that could watch them.

"There are no cameras here. Trust me, I'd know."

Ilya didn't like the sound of that. "Don't say things like that."

Shane laughed. It was flirty and high, and it did weird things to Ilya's cock.

"Why? Does it make you jealous?"

"Very."

Shane hesitated at Ilya's honest admission, cheeks reddening. Ilya bent down, kissed the flush on Shane's cheek, and gently ran his tongue over his freckles.

"I fucking love these."

"My cheeks."

"Yes. But your freckles more."

“Why?” Shane asked, pushing Ilya back with a chuckle. “I hate them.”

“That’s fine. I love them enough for both of us.”

Shane’s blush came back at that, and Ilya noted the choice of words. He didn’t want Shane to focus on it too much, though, so he placed a quick kiss against his forehead and grabbed Shane's hand, pulling him in the direction of the covered patio and the rest of their party.

“Come on. I need vodka.”

“I don’t know if Rose has any.”

Ilya gasped exaggeratedly. “No vodka? Now, *this* I can’t forgive. Come on, Hollander, we are leaving.”

“We?” Shane laughed, eyes sparkling.

“Yes, we,” Ilya said, halting at the edge of the palm trees. He glanced down at their joined hands, then up at Shane’s face. “Right?”

Shane's smile was radiant. He squeezed Ilya’s hand.

“Da, moy paren'.”

Ilya’s heart stopped.

“[What?]”

Shane grew serious. He swallowed. “I heard you say it to Svetlana. I recognized the word, but I needed to make sure, so I... asked.”

“Shane,” Ilya said, suddenly suffocating him with a happiness Ilya didn’t know if he deserved.

“It wasn’t easy getting her number, but she confirmed it.”

“[Who?]”

“Svetlana.”

“Svetlana,” Ilya echoed, unable to do anything else. Because he was speaking Russian with Shane. Well, he was asking basic questions, but Shane understood. He understood. He had taken the time out of his already impossibly busy schedule to learn the language for Ilya. To better communicate with him.

No one had ever taken the time to do something like that before.

His own brother still hadn’t bothered to remember what day of June his birthday landed on, even though it was the exact middle of the month.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Ilya said in English.

And then Shane finished claiming the last tiny bit of free space in Ilya's heart that hadn't already belonged to him by answering.

"[I don't mind.]"

And it was so simple. Said in such a matter-of-fact way.

Ilya felt the tears. Hot against the crisp air, and for once didn't feel ashamed. He felt happy. He felt proud, and he loved this man. More than he had ever loved anyone in his entire life.

He almost said it, just then, but he didn't need to, because Shane was looking at him, eyes filled with the words they didn't dare to say, and Ilya leaned in and kissed him.

It was the sweetest kiss Ilya had ever had.

After, he pressed his face into Shane's neck, holding this amazing, beautiful man tightly. He breathed in the side of Shane's neck and caught a familiar blend of scents—sweet, masculine, and for the first time, something richer and darker.

His own cologne mingled there.

And Ilya wanted to have his smell imprinted on Shane's skin forever. Wanted to be with him so often that his smell evolved to include Ilya's, so that no matter where he went or who he spoke to, they would smell Shane and know this beautiful, gentle, caring, outstanding actor and lover was Ilya's.

"Follow me," Shane said.

And Ilya didn't answer, but he didn't need to, because Shane began to pull him and turned his head over his shoulder to look at Ilya, and there in those said, he saw the words he didn't know how to say. "Come on," Shane urged, and smiled, a soft, gentle thing too precious to belong to Ilya, but it somehow did.

And he would have followed him off the ledge of the rooftop in that moment, and while that thought scared him, the prospect of him arriving at the other side to find Shane was not there with him, that he had gone to that good place, the one his mother was in, and he had been left all alone again, scared him more.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, this one was an emotional one to write and its probably the one I've re-written and edited the most.

I hope you enjoy and dont forget to let me know your thoughts :) TY ❤️

Chapter 10: Scream My Name

Chapter Summary

This is straight up p 0 r n with fluff thrown into it. Enjoy :)

Chapter Notes

And please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

“In here,” Shane said, pulling Ilya into the room, but Ilya was having a really hard time keeping his mouth away from Shane for long enough to breathe, much less walk. He didn’t even know where Shane had taken them, didn’t care.

He had just followed Shane’s lead when this one had grabbed his hand and pulled him back away from the palm trees towards another door, one Ilya hadn’t even noticed had been there.

And now they were here.

And Ilya needed to be inside Shane fucking yesterday.

Ilya heard a door closing and saw windows, so many of them overlooking the New York City skyline, and then he was on a bed. No, he had been pushed backwards and had landed on a plush mattress, and Ilya groaned into Shane, who instantly jumped on top of him and attached their mouths.

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya said, running his hand up Shane’s back and bunching up his shirt as he went until Shane had to separate to get the thing off. He felt Shane’s hand begin to undo his belt buckle, and he pulled back.

Shane was so gone for it just like he always was, but this time, there was a smile, soft and tender, like he hadn’t been able to stop smiling yet, and Ilya understood, because he hadn’t been able to stop either.

“Windows,” he said, not really giving a fuck, but knowing Shane would.

Shane, however, surprised him by saying. “They are reflective. Can see out, but no one can see in.”

And Ilya decided they had wasted enough time talking.

Shane let out a surprised laugh when Ilya suddenly flipped them, his hands hooking behind Ilya's neck instinctively and pulling him back to his mouth. To the place where Ilya wanted to live for the rest of his life.

The feeling was suddenly overwhelming, and he pulled back to press his lips lower down Shane's neck and his now exposed chest. Ilya's head was already clearing, making breathing a bit more tolerable. But just barely.

He found Shane's nipple and sucked the already hard nub into his mouth, looking up at Shane to watch the way he was looking at Ilya with hooded, wet eyes.

Ilya bit down on it, and Shane's moan was a shot of heat that zoomed right up Ilya's spine and cock.

"Please, Rozanov," Shane begged, and Ilya grinned as he assaulted the other nipple, doing the same thing he'd done to the previous one- kitten licks followed by a soft bite, then a kiss to make it better.

Finally, Ilya said, "Get naked and get on your knees."

Shane's eyes slipped closed for just the tiniest of seconds, and his face scrunched up as the request overcame him, and Ilya was going to wreck this man tonight. He didn't give a fuck if half of New York heard Shane screaming; he wanted them to. Wanted everyone to know Ilya was the one claiming him, making him feel so fucking good.

Ilya used the time while Shane followed his order to get himself naked as well, but then thought better of it and slipped his pants back on, no underwear.

Shane, who had been folding his clothes and putting them neatly on the nearby sofa, gasped when he saw Ilya standing in the middle of the room, shirtless and barefoot, the button of his trousers undone and riding low on his hips, exposing the V of his abs and that light golden canvas of hair he kept neatly trimmed.

"On your knees, Hollander," Ilya said, and then grabbed a pillow he'd taken from the bed and threw it on the floor between them.

Shane didn't need to hear it again. He dropped to the floor obediently, his knees landing softly on the pillow, and Ilya stepped forward, close enough to tease, but not exactly close enough that Shane could reach him.

Shane didn't argue, didn't beg. He stayed there, beautifully exposed and compliant, waiting for Ilya to give him what he craved.

And Ilya had to grip the base of his cock through his pants to keep himself in check. He felt too close to cumming from the sight and obedience already. Would he be able to hold it back once Shane was actually sucking him?

It didn't matter. He wanted this. They both did. And while they had never expressively talked about this, there was something so erotic about this dynamic that they had uncovered

together.

More than that, it was the trust Ilya found reflected in Shane's eyes that made it worthwhile.

Ilya brought down his fly, exposing himself, and caught the way Shane let out a soft, shaky exhale, gripping onto his thighs as if to keep himself from reaching before he was given permission.

"You can touch me, Hollander. Lick me, do whatever you want." Then Ilya put a hand on Shane's cheek, tilting his head up so he could look into Shane's eyes as he ran his thumb softly over his freckles.

They stared at each other like that for a long moment, where Ilya memorized the brown of Shane's eyes, the swell of his lips, the almost perfect shape of his nose, then finally, Ilya whispered, "You don't have to ask permission for anything. I am already yours, Shane."

Ilya had been expecting Shane to jump on him, suck his dick with a feverish, almost desperate need, the way he always did. What Ilya hadn't been expecting was for Shane's eyes to widen with so much shock, as though he couldn't believe what Ilya had just said, or to see the way his face scrunched, and his features crumbled, or for his eyes to well up with tears that Shane let fall.

Ilya was on his knees with his hands on Shane's face instantly.

"What's wrong?" He asked, feeling like his heart was going to come out of his mouth from the panic rising inside of him. "What did I do wrong?"

Shane shook his head as much as he could with Ilya's hold on it. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"Then, why?"

Shane looked up at him then, so much said in those eyes.

It was an apology and a plea.

And Ilya knew, he knew why it had happened. He almost wanted to apologize because it was apparent he'd been moving much too fast for Shane, asking for too much when he'd made that declaration, but he refused to take it back.

Ilya felt how he felt, and while he would be more careful in the future, or try to, he found that he didn't have it in him to feel guilty now. Not about this.

Not about his feelings for this man. This beautiful, still hard as a stone, man.

Ilya slid his hands down and grasped Shane's waist, pulling him in for a hug that Shane just melted into, and Ilya bent his face to kiss the sparse freckles that adorned the top of Shane's shoulders.

"I like these, too," Ilya said, placing another kiss over them.

Shane made a contented noise, and Ilya needed more of this, more of Shane being soft and taken care of. He stood and made sure to pull Shane with him.

“No, I want-”

“We will. Just, not tonight.”

Ilya saw that Shane wanted to protest, so he bent down and caught Shane in a kiss that said all the things he couldn't, not yet. By the time they pulled away, they were both back on the bed, with Shane below Ilya's now fully naked body.

Ilya sat back on his heels, happy to watch him spread out before him, his hair fanning around his head, his eyes crinkled as he smiled shyly up at Ilya, his hands still over his head where Ilya had left them. He looked firm, masculine yet pliant, soft and sensual.

And he was going to be Ilya's husband one day. Ilya just knew this. In his heart. In his soul. Like he knew he could have been a fantastic fucking hockey player in another universe, or even in this one, and he would have still found his way to this man. To this moment. To *them*. Over and over again. For every life he was given.

Forever.

“You're so fucking beautiful, Shane.” He said.

“Come here,” Shane said, and there were tears in his eyes again, like he *knew*. And when he kissed Ilya, it was a silent, “Me too” that made Ilya hide his face into Shane's neck to keep Shane from seeing how affected it'd gotten him.

He opened Shane up slowly, reverently, placing kisses to the inside of Shane's thighs, his balls, his cock, his stomach, and mouth. The freckles over his cheeks and his shoulders. Then he'd done something they hadn't done before.

Once Shane was nice and loose, ready to take him, Ilya got on his chest in between Shane's spread legs and pushed against the backs of Shane's thighs, exposing him just before he ran his tongue over him.

“Fuck-Oh, my God.” Shane cried. It was shaky, and Ilya felt his body shudder beneath his hands and tongue. This only spurred him on, and Ilya speared his tongue, finding that he was granted easy access after the half hour Ilya had spent working him open.

“Oh, my God. That- *Wow*, Rozanov.”

Ilya had never laughed while eating someone out, but he almost did then. It was easy to forget he'd been Shane's first, and it pleased him to no end to find he was Shane's first on this as well. It was intimate, way too intimate to do on a one-night stand, but they'd stop

being a fling a long time ago. Ilya knew the only reason he hadn't done it before was that fate had needed them to find this moment, this one evening, this bubble they had created in Rose Landry's fucking New York mansion, in a room where for the first time they were the ones who got to watch the outside world without fear of the outside world looking back at them.

And so Ilya pushed Shane's thighs higher still and buried his face into Shane's ass. He licked, and probed, and moaned because he knew the vibrations felt wonderful in that sensitive spot. When Shane was so close to cuming Ilya knew he could come just from his tongue alone, Ilya stood and lined himself up and gave Shane what they both needed.

Shane came the moment Ilya entered him. His hole clenched impossibly tight around Ilya as he arched and released all over his stomach and chest. It was almost enough to send Ilya to the edge, but instead, Ilya withdrew from Shane's ass slowly, gently, and placed a kiss on Shane's knee as he got up.

He took the pillow he'd had placed on the ground earlier and took the cover off of it, then walked back towards the bed and used it to wipe Shane clean.

Shane smiled up at him.

"Resourceful."

"What is that?" Ilya asked.

"Smart," Shane said, and Ilya grinned. Placing a kiss on Shane's mouth as he took his place between Shane's legs again.

He was still hard, but he was content to lie here like this, with Shane's blissed-out below him, grateful he got to see him like this. Got to grace the freckles on his heated cheeks and place soft kisses on them.

"I am ready," Shane said, surprising a laugh out of Ilya.

"Fuck, Hollander. I have ruined you."

"Maybe," Shane agreed, and just then, there was the sound of the breeze picking up outside, and Ilya's got the best idea he'd ever had.

"Get up, Hollander."

"What?" Shane asked, his eyes following Ilya as he grabbed a chair and dragged it to face the wall of glass overlooking the New York City skyline.

Shane went, because of course he did, and stood beside Ilya, who stepped back and watched the chair like someone who was admiring a new painting they'd just hung up to make sure it wasn't crooked.

Seemingly satisfied, he reached a hand out which he wrapped around Shane's waist, pulling their naked bodies together.

Ilya didn't kiss him; instead, he lowered his mouth to Shane's ear.

"I want them to watch me fuck you, Hollander."

Ilya felt the way Shane's breath hitched at the same time he heard it, and that was all the answer Ilya needed.

He stepped back.

"Bend over the back of the chair," he said, and decided to demonstrate it by coming up behind Shane and wrapping his hands around his chest as he pushed him against the piece of furniture.

Then, when Shane's thighs were pressed against the plush back of it, Ilya moved one of his hands on his chest and ran it up his back, between his shoulder blades, and up to his hair, where he gripped a handful of it.

Shane gasped and arched, his neck bending and his mouth falling open as he looked at Ilya out the corner of his eye.

"Tell me to stop and I will."

"I don't want to stop."

"But you will tell me," Ilya said, placing a kiss on Shane's shoulder. "If you change your mind."

Shane's eyes slipped closed, and he tried to nod, but due to Ilya's hold on him, he didn't quite manage it, so instead he licked his lips and said, "I will tell you. Now, stop talking and show this city how good you fuck me."

Ilya's grin was almost cruel.

Then, before Shane could react, he pushed him down until Shane was bent over the back of the chair and had to grab the chair handles to keep himself up. Ilya almost wanted to ask if that had been too much, but he trusted that Shane would tell him. Besides, Shane's response had come in the shape of a moan as he spread his legs wider, arching his back in an invitation Ilya would never be able to pass up.

They both groaned when Ilya sank back in with so much vigor that the chair scraped and inched closer to the glass from the force of it.

"Look up," Ilya said, and when Shane did, he landed a sharp slap to Shane's ass.

Shane's moan echoed around them, as did the sharp slap of skin against skin as Ilya picked up a relentless pace.

"Look at them, Hollander. Look at how they watch how fucking good you are for me. How good you -Ah- take my cock."

“Shit, Rozanov.”

“You want to show them?” Ilya said.

This wasn't good enough, not nearly enough. He wanted them to see how beautiful Shane looked, how loud he got as Ilya fucked him, how he pushed his hips back because he needed everything Ilya would give. How his face scrunched and his eyes glazed over, and his cheeks and chest became the most perfect shade of pink.

And then he was pulling Shane up by his chest, and they were moving, still connected, towards the glass wall. Shane reached out and placed his hands against it, bending over to roll his hips against Ilya and fuck- how did he know? How did he manage to always be right there with him, knowing what Ilya needed before he voiced it out loud?

“Such a fucking slut for it.”

“Yours,” Shane whimpered, and Ilya grabbed his chin, pulling him so his chest was to Shane's back as he continued to fuck into him. Ilya kissed him; it was sloppy, too much tongue because of the angle, but somehow this made it hotter. It was real, and raw, and so fucking hot.

“Shit, I am close.”

“Me too,” Shane said, not surprisingly.

“Want to show them how you come from just my cock?”

“I don't know if I can like this.”

“I'll make sure that you can,” Ilya said darkly, and then he fell back on the chair, pulling Shane with him. Shane yelped in shock, his hands pressing onto the armrests as he looked behind him and found Ilya sitting down, smirking up at him.

“I got you, sweetheart,” Ilya said, and then he brought his hands over the space between Shane's waist as he positioned him, and *oh*.

Shane's eyes slipped closed. “Fuck, this is-”

“Open your legs.”

Shane did, and Ilya cursed, somehow always surprised by how easy he obeyed, though he shouldn't have been.

“More, wider. Put them over the armrests. I know you can,” he added, after he noticed Shane's hesitation. “I saw you do a split on that ballet movie.”

Shane chuckled, and it caused him to clench around Ilya. Ilya groaned. “Now, Hollander!”

Shane did, and Ilya reclined a little further back so that his hips were hovering above the cushion, delirious with the idea of how Shane must look spread open like this.

“Lean back,” Ilya said. The moment he felt Shane’s head fit in the space between his head and shoulder, Ilya gripped onto Shane’s hips and thrust up.

Shane fucking screamed, and Ilya had to fight the urge to empty himself inside of him at that moment from the sound alone.

“Yes, Hollander. Let them hear you. Let them know what we are doing. That you are where you belong.” Ilya said, and he had to close his eyes when he noticed the reflective glass was acting as a mirror, and he could just see Shane’s on full display, his cock bouncing, red and almost bursting, and even more, he could see the way Ilya’s cock fucked into him. How Shane just swallowed him up. Like he was made for this. Like he’d been made for Ilya’s dick. “You belong right here,” Ilya gritted. “Bouncing on my cock.”

“Shit, I’m- Fuck, Rozanov, I’m going to-”

“Fucking scream my name, Hollander,” Ilya ordered, and he was shouting too, helpless to fight the onslaught of emotions and pleasures all building inside of him. “Fucking show them who you belong to.”

“Rozanov’s,” Shane shouted. “I am Ilya Rozanov’s.”

And then Ilya came, and so did Shane. And Ilya didn’t think they’d ever be able to come back from this.

He placed a kiss on Shane’s temple, who was breathing heavily on top of Ilya still, and he was getting heavy, and Ilya’s legs were beginning to cramp, but he didn’t dare to move, couldn’t have even if they’d paid him.

“That was so fucking hot,” Shane said, sleepily.

“It was,” Ilya whispered against Shane’s skin. Ilya closed his eyes and inhaled, filling his lungs with Shane’s smell, which now also included his own.

He smiled.

“I don’t want to get up,” Shane said, then winced as Ilya’s now soft dick slipped out of him.

“You don’t have to.”

“I do,” Shane said, and Ilya could hear the smile in his voice as he said, “I can feel you shaking.”

“Is from pleasure,” Ilya lied, and Shane laughed, finally standing.

Ilya all but crumbled into a heap to the floor, which caused Shane to laugh louder, and Ilya was helpless to keep from joining him, even as he looked at Shane and grumbled.

“I was not good enough. You are still walking normal.”

Shane shook his head and rolled his eyes. “Shut up.”

“No, I will do it again. Better. But you must come here, because I don’t think I can move.”

Shane let out a snort. “Then how do you plan to fuck me again?”

“Who said anything about fucking you?” Ilya asked, and then he licked his lips.

Shane’s eyes hooded instantly, his face darkening as he followed the movement of Ilya’s tongue over his plush lips, but then he shook his head, snapping himself out of it, and Ilya wanted to whine at the loss.

“Stop, we’ve been here for three hours. This is not polite.”

“You’re not being serious.”

“I am,” Shane said.

“Hollander, we have been very loud. Patio is just outside, yes? I think it’s too late for polite.”

Shane’s face flushed, and he crossed his arms over his chest.

He looked ridiculous, fully naked, looking like an angry kitten, flushing bright red from the embarrassment of being reminded about what they had just subjected Shane's friends to listen to for the last three hours.

Ilya’s heart swelled at the sight of this impossibly endearing man.

“You win, Hollander. I will be polite. But first you must help me up, please. I was not kidding before.”

Chapter 11: Bonus Chapter: A Fly in the Wall

Chapter Summary

Ilya wanted NY to hear. So they heard.

Alternate POV filler with the NY crew heard while Hollanov went off on the room next to them.

Chapter Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

“Shouldn’t we wait for them?” Troy asked, he was holding his boyfriend’s waist in one hand, the shot glass in the other.

Rose, who was still hiccupping, shook her head, pouring the tequila into his glass. “I think we are better off getting started without them.”

“Shit,” Harris said, wincing after they downed the shot. “Ilya and Shane. Who would have thought?”

All eyes turned to him, and Harris shrugged. “What? The cat’s out of the bag now. I am sorry, I need to gush to somebody about this, and since we are never going to tell anyone outside this group, you guys are it.”

Rose seemed appeased, shrugging one shoulder and nodding.

“How long has this been going on?” Troy asked Rose.

“Can’t say,” Rose said. “But you should ask Roz when you see him.”

“No way,” Troy said. “I don’t need to know that bad.”

“Oh, stop. He doesn’t bite.”

“Maybe he doesn’t bite *you*,” Harris said suggestively as he reached for the bottle of tequila.

“Okay, did that just make anyone else nauseous?” Scott said, and Kip laughed.

“Can’t deny they make a really hot couple, though,” Kip added, and Scott turned to him, mouth wide. “What?” Kip asked, laughing. “It’s true.”

“It *is* true,” Rose agreed.

“Who wants another round?” Harris asked and they all pushed their glasses closer to his.

After they downed that one, Kip asked, “What do you think is taking them so long?”

“Oh, I can think of a few things,” Harris said, and Troy elbowed him.

“Stop that.”

“Sorry,” Harris said. “I forgot straight bros don’t do that.”

“You’re being a dick,” Troy said.

“I know,” Harris said, and pushed the bottle away. “I might be a bit drunk. And a lot in shock.”

“That makes two of us,” Scott said. “But, honestly-”

“What was that?” Rose asked suddenly, and they all fell silent.

There was nothing but the sound of the breeze for a moment until-

“Oh my God!” Rose whispered loudly as they all fell into shocked laughter. There was no denying it now, because as soon as the first one started, it just kept on going.

And they all just stood there, with equal looks of shock and amusement as Shane was apparently fucked to near death.

“What is this man *doing* to him?” Troy asked, wide-eyed.

“Wow,” Rose said. “Let’s take this inside, guys.”

“I am good here,” Kip said far too quickly, and Scott let out a shocked laugh.

“You’re coming with me,” Scott said, and pulled his boyfriend by the hand just as “*Harder, Rozanov!*” Rang in the air behind them.

One hour later, they all watched from behind the closed sliding door of Rose’s upstairs living room, which had a view of the rooftop, as Troy walked slowly closer to the patio like he was scared he’d spook a lion.

He stayed still, listening. His shoulders relaxed, and he turned to them, a relieved smile on their face, when it suddenly crumbled, and he started running like the lion he’d just spooked was chasing after him.

“Still?” Rose asked, in fits of laughter as she opened the door and slid it quickly behind Troy.

“Yes,” Troy said, and he was pale. “I think it might be getting worse.”

“Worse?” Kip asked, almost spitting out the wine he’d been drinking. “*How?*”

“It wasn’t...” Troy said, and then his cheeks turned so red it was like someone had painted them with a Sharpie.

“Use your words, Barrett,” Rose urged.

When Troy spoke, it was through gritted teeth. “I heard *Rozanov*, now.”

There was a bit of stillness, where they all collectively processed this new information, and then it was pandemonium.

“Oh, my God,” Kip screeched.

“Wow,” Harris said dreamily. “To be a fly on that wall.”

“*Hey*,” Troy whined, then grabbed the glass of Rose from Harris’s hand. “Okay, you’re cut off.”

“They switch, what’s the big deal?” Scott asked.

“I don’t think so,” Troy said, before he could help it, and then instantly he went red again.

“No, now you got to spill. And give me my drink back.”

Troy grumbled and passed Harris his drink, maybe hoping this would make his boyfriend show mercy and let it go.

Who was he kidding?

“Barrett!”

“Okay, fuck. Rozanov was... he was calling Shane his-”

His cheeks heated up again, and he looked down at his hands.

“Oh, this is going to wreck me, I fear,” Kip said, and this time it was Scott who grabbed Kip’s wine glass and said, “Now, *you*’re cut off.”

But Troy had gotten some courage, it seemed, because he quickly said, “He called Shane his good little slut.”

Rose let out a shocked chuckle as Harris and Kip freaked out over it while Troy buried his face in his hands and Scott rolled his eyes at his boyfriend.

“I think we all should know less about each other,” Rose said with a grimace, and laughed when Scott agreed with her.

“Okay, so, who volunteers to check next?” Rose asked and almost fell back in laughter when Kip’s hand shot up into the air before she could even finish the sentence.

Chapter 12: The Email That Changes Everything

Chapter Summary

The role of a lifetime sends Ilya into panic just as family news pulls him back to Russia. Shane, left behind and hurting, starts to believe Ilya's distance means goodbye—until he learns the truth might be something far more vulnerable.

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Chapter Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

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

“[Take a look at this].”

Ilya was reclining by his pool in LA, shades on as he enjoyed the oddity of a day off. Svetlana was next to him, scrolling through her email for upcoming projects they wanted him to read for.

Ilya squinted at the phone Svetlana thrust toward his face. He raised one hand to shield his eyes from the sun, struggling to focus on the small text displayed on the screen.

“[What is it]?”

“[It's a movie].”

“[No shit].” Ilya handed back the phone, reclining again.

“[With Shane Hollander as your love interest].”

He looked at her, expecting her to laugh.

When that didn't happen, he sat up and snatched the phone from her hand. His glasses were too dark to let him see clearly, so he took them off with a curse and let them fall somewhere on the floor.

“[What is this]?”

“Tierney,” she said.

“Jacob Tierney?” Ilya asked, now even more alarmed. “*The* Jacob Tierney.”

She nodded, her smile growing.

“[You’re fucking with me].”

“Read it.”

Ilya did.

And then he reread it. And again.

Figure skaters.

An up-and-coming movie about rival Russian figure skaters who fall in love.

Starting Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander.

Tierney wasn’t even going to cast for the parts. He’d written it with them in mind.

This was *their* movie.

Tierney claimed he was unwilling to make it unless it was with them as the leads. There were about ten different agents and producers copied here, including Yuna Hollander.

And suddenly, Ilya couldn’t breathe. Panic clawed at his chest. The world felt compressed, every thought blurring together, making his head ache.

“[When did you get this]?”

“[Like two seconds ago]?”

Okay, so maybe Yuna hadn’t told-

Ilya didn’t even let his phone ring.

“I’m here.”

“Holy shit,” Shane exhaled. His voice trembled, and Ilya could imagine him spiraling, and alone.

“Are you at home?”

“No,” Shane said. “I am in the middle of shooting a fucking Rolex commercial.”

“In LA?”

“Yes.”

“Send me the location.”

“What?” Shane spluttered. There was the sound of a stagehand telling Shane they were about to resume filming. He thanked her. Then he asked, “What?” again, like Ilya hadn’t heard him the first time.

“Your location, Hollander.”

“Ilya,” Svetlana warned, and Shane must have heard her because he said, “Talk to Svetlana. I... I can’t- I have to go. They are waiting for me.”

“Wait, Hollander. Can I come over tonight?”

They fucking needed to talk about this.

There was silence, then Shane said. “I’ll be at your place at 7.”

The call ended.

And Ilya threw his phone. It landed on a soft patch of fake grass beside him, and he stared at it like it had failed to do the one thing he’d needed it to, which was to shatter into a million pieces like he’d meant it to.

“[It’s a great opportunity].”

Ilya scoffed. “[To do what]?”

“[To act your way into never having to act again],” Svetlana said softly. Ilya clenched his fists, fighting tears that stung his eyes. He felt raw, brittle, hollowed out.

“[Was that a joke]?”

“[It could be an answer].”

“[Stop],” he pleaded, and switched to English because his mind was a mess, and even thinking about this thing in Russian felt like a risk.

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“I am not doing anything,” she said. “I am just making an observation. As your publicist.”

“And as my friend?”

She sobered then, and her face became hard. “[As both].”

“No, you’re not.”

“Oh, fuck you, Ilya. [It’s just a movie].”

“You fucking know it isn’t.”

“[It can be, if you guys agree to it. It can be just a movie. A blockbuster, career-altering, Oscar-winning film by the hottest director right now that will win you your second Academy Award.]”

“You don’t know that?”

“[It’s Jacob fucking Tierney, Ilya. And he wrote this for you].”

“For us,” he corrected.

“No, Ilya,” she said, voice hard. “[For you].”

He needed time—just two quiet minutes to breathe and think.

He wished he could go back to the man he’d been minutes ago, before the email.

“[I’m going for a run],” he said, and then he grabbed his phone from the floor and didn’t wait for a reply. He wasn’t asking for permission.

He strolled into his house and slipped on the running shoes he kept by the door before leaving.

As he opened his gate and slipped onto the street, he was met with the usual paparazzi that always awaited him there. He ignored them, like he always did, and started running the second he could, not even taking the time to stretch.

The spring air at least felt nice.

He was on mile eight when his phone started ringing, and he cursed.

He sent it to voicemail, but then it rang again.

He stopped.

“[What the fuck do you want]?” He said angrily.



TMZ @TMZ · 3h

🙏 Ilya Rozanov flies to Russia after the sudden news of his father's passing.
tmz.me/MNl6vNH



💬 1441

🔄 190.1K

❤️ 298.1K

📺 8.1M



@PrayersforIlya replied to **@TMZNews**

He looks so sad, look at him. I hope he is doing okay. [#prayingforIlya](#)

@ShilyaForever replied to **@TMZNews**

Yo, someone please tell **@ShaneHollanderOfficial** to support his man in this time of need. I have some JetBlue miles if you don't have money for the flight.

@PotatoPotat replied to **@ShilyaForever**

You shippers are so fucking disrespectful. Time and fucking place, jfc [#nocommoncourtesy](#)

Shane shut off his phone and threw it on the cushions beside him on the sofa.

“Shane, honey, everything okay?” His mother asked, stopping her typing to look at him over the rim of her glasses.

“Yeah.”

“Have you taken a look at the Tierney script I sent you?”

He gritted his teeth. “I told you I still haven’t decided.”

“I know, honey,” she said, in that tone that was all manager with zero trace of his mom anywhere to be found.

He stood, picking up his phone as he went.

“Where are you going?”

“Out!”

He drove mindlessly for hours, going around places he knew would not be very heavily trafficked, which was almost impossible in LA, but he managed somehow.

When he stopped, he was by a hiking trail near the Hollywood sign. It was usually packed with tourists at this time of year, but for some reason, it wasn’t.

It seemed the universe was conspiring in his favor today. If only it could grant him the one thing he wanted desperately above all else.

He lowered his windows and turned off the car. He basked in the silence and the breeze. The view of LA from here was one of the best he’d ever seen. It helped that sunset was near, the sky veiled in burnt orange.

He sighed, for the first time in his life, wishing he smoked. Figured the vice had been made for moments like these.

He let his mind imagine Ilya in this moment.

For one, he wouldn’t have stayed in the car. He’d round the front and lean against the hood with one hand. Then, he would pull his cigarette pack and lighter from his back pocket and light up, inhaling with his eyes closed to savor that first drag.

When he exhaled, he’d look back at Shane, still in the car, watching him. Ilya would press the cigarette to his lips and leave it there so he could motion for Shane with his hand.

“What are you still doing in there, Hollander?” He would ask, and he’d be grinning.

The image was so vivid, Ilya almost seemed truly present. And without warning, Shane felt tears sting his eyes, the ache of loss and loneliness cresting into open grief.

He started crying.

Ilya had left for Russia without a word a week ago. And in that time, he had not responded to any of Shane’s attempts to reach him.

It felt like, to Ilya, Shane had ceased to exist the second he'd landed in Moscow.

Shane hated how much it hurt, but he couldn't help it. Being ignored stung, but it felt deeper—like losing something vital, even if he tried to tell himself otherwise.

It felt like he was being left behind. Like Ilya had quietly chosen to end things, without saying a word.

They hadn't talked about being more than lovers since that night at Rose's place in New York that Shane kept replaying over and over in his head, convinced they were more, clinging to every small sign, every casual touch that felt loaded now.

But Ilya was the one who'd called Shane his boyfriend first, he rebutted like he had a thousand times before.

Yes, but only because he'd thought he couldn't understand, came the tired reply.

Shane got out of the car, then rounded the hood and sat on it.

He pulled his phone out, sighing.

Shane didn't have to scroll to find their last conversation, in any app, but this time, he just went through his Instagram DMs.

Messaging and call rates between Russia and the US were expensive, and this was how he had been rationalizing his millionaire "boyfriend" going AWOL.

He dropped his phone on the hood of the car and ran his hands over his face.

"What are you doing, dude?" He asked no one, which is why he was so surprised when someone actually answered.

"Hey, the park's closed today."

Shane jumped off the hood quickly, using his thumbs to push back the tears that were starting to spill. Once he felt composed, he looked up, to find a familiar face.

"Oh, my God."

"Hi."

Shane let out a shaky laugh and reclined against the hood again as he watched her approach. "I actually thought you were a park ranger."

Rose slid beside him on the hood with a laugh. "I am surprised one hasn't come. The whole place is closed for filming. Not even sure how you made it all the way up here."

"Shit, I am sorry. I'll go."

She bumped his shoulder with hers. "What's the rush? You're already here."

He supposed that was true. “What are you guys shooting?”

“Perfume.”

“Oh, nice,” he said, and the grin on her face faded.

She looked out onto the city below.

“It’s so peaceful up here, isn’t it?”

He nodded, basking in the comfort of her presence.

They were quiet for a beat, then Rose said, still looking ahead, “So I take it Roz hasn't answered, yet?”

“Nope,” Shane said, crossing his arms over his chest. There was a rock on the ground not too far ahead that was suddenly the most interesting thing he had ever seen in his life.

“Hey,” she said, and leaned into him. “I’m sure he’s just been busy. With this whole thing. A funeral is a lot of work.”

“You’re telling me,” Shane said, and she sucked in a sharp breath.

“Shit, you’re right. I.. I am sorry.”

Shane shrugged. “It was a long time ago. I barely even remember it.”

Silence overtook them again, before Shane asked, “Do you think it would be too bad if I just... showed up?”

“To Moscow?” she asked. “Probably. Where would you even go? Do you even know where he lives?”

“I could find out.”

Rose watched him, her gaze burning the side of Shane’s face with its intensity. “Don’t you think if he had wanted you there, he would have asked you to come?”

“He can be stubborn. Hide his feelings.”

Rose shook her head. “There’s no way we’re talking about the same person.”

“Why?”

She scoffed. “He’s terrible at hiding, Shane.”

Shane looked confused. She sighed and turned to face him fully. Shane mirrored her.

“Do you want to know how I knew you two had slept together? It was the way he looked at you, literally any time after that night, and the way his eyes lit up whenever I said your name

when you weren't around, or the way he would always ask for details when I mentioned we had plans together."

"That doesn't mean anything," Shane protested. "Maybe he was just being polite."

Rose pinned him with a look. "How about when he started wearing Vans because you liked them. And he used to wear these crazy shirts- you remember- that only he could pull off, but now he only wears monochromatic outfits because you mentioned you liked that look during an interview with Elle Magazine, like a year ago."

Shen scoffed, shaking his head. "Maybe he changed stylists."

"He's not subtle, Shane," Rose said, frustrated. "He shouts what he wants with actions. You just need to pay attention, and you'll see what I mean."

"I don't," he said, but he did. He fucking did now, but he had somehow missed all of it before.

"Now who's being stubborn?"

"Shouldn't you be heading back now?"

"We've wrapped shooting for the day."

Of course, they had.

"Don't worry, message received," she said, and placed a quick kiss on his cheek that got her the first genuine smile since Ilya had left.

"We are still on for brunch tomorrow?"

Shane nodded. She hopped off the hood.

He watched her go, mind racing, connecting all the small things Ilya had done over the years.

It all added up in subtle, consistent ways.

Like how he always wiped Shane off first before he wiped himself during sex. Or how he made sure to bring him food whenever they were finished to replenish his energy because Shane got a headache when he didn't eat for long periods of time.

How he put his hand to the back of Shane's head whenever they fell into bed together, even as his head would only be hitting a soft mattress. His words of encouragement whenever Shane said he couldn't do something, even if that thing was to come untouched.

Shane smiled, shaking his head at how much he'd missed, even as memories pressed in.

Stolen smiles across the award shows because Shane looked nervous.

Asking a stagehand to get Shane some water because he kept clearing his throat.

Grabbing a rose from a vase he'd passed on the way to the bathroom which he then left on the sink for Shane to find once he followed him there.

It was in the way he said Shane's last name like a prayer and his first name like a promise.

And Shane hadn't heard from him in seven endless days. The ache in his chest felt ready to crack him open.

He pulled up their DMs again.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: Ilya, I am so sorry about your father

ShaneHollanderOfficial: I am here if you need to talk.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: Sorry for the call. I was writing a message, and it clicked dial. But if you are okay with it, we could talk instead of texting. I don't mind.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: Hey, I saw Svetlana is there with you. I am glad. You shouldn't be alone right now.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: My mom sends her condolences

@ShaneHollanderOfficial: Hey, will you be back this week? I sent some flowers to your place, just want to make sure they won't wilt before you have a chance to see them.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: I canceled the flowers.

Shane hovered over the messages, the words getting progressively blurrier the longer he stared at them.

They had all been read.

Just then, his screen lit up with an incoming call. Shane's chest seized, hope and anxiety colliding, then sank painfully as he read the name that flashed on his screen.

"Hi, Mom," he said, then had to clear his throat and repeat it when the words got caught there.

"Will you be back soon? I made dinner."

"Yeah," he said. "I'll be there in ten."

"Okay, love you, Hon."

"Me too."

The call dropped and then his screen showed the string of unanswered messages once more.

He held the phone with trembling fingers, thumbs shaking above the DMs. He typed, erased, typed again, erased—three times. On the fourth, he finally hit send. He locked his phone quickly, afraid the words would escape and wound him for daring to hope.

He was slipping the phone into his pants pocket when he suddenly heard the notification bell ping.

Shane almost dropped the phone. Fumbling, he managed to unlock the screen.

Then he froze.

Shane read it, and then the words were very, very blurry through Shane's eyes, but he was grinning so hard his cheeks hurt, and his heart felt like it could explode.

ShaneHollanderOfficial: I miss you

IlyaRozanovOfficial: I arrive in LAX at 9:00 am

And there Ilya went again.

Shane didn't have to check to know this was probably the earliest flight out of Moscow.

I miss you too, so much that I am running back to you as fast as I can.

And Shane felt lighter than he had all week.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all of you who have supported this story. Your kudos and comments mean the world to me. Its crazy to see we hit 2K reads before this story was even 5 days old. I am beyond blessed and grateful. Thank you Thank you Thank you 

Chapter 13: And I'm still so blue

Chapter Summary

Shane steps into Ilya's world hoping for healing, only to find that love and loss are tangled too tightly to separate. Their fight leaves the house echoing with unspoken apologies—and a future neither of them is sure how to reach.

Chapter Notes

HAPPY NEW YEARS EVE EVERYONE!!!!

As always, please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Why were there so many fucking paps outside? He'd figured there'd be *some* -like three- and had the foresight to ask Rose to drop him off while he hid in the back of her SUV, covered by blankets, until they used the code Ilya had given them to get through the gate.

But this was so much more than three; it felt like ten times that.

Shane peeked out at them from beneath the blankets, which had not been very smart, in retrospect. Still, his curiosity had gotten the better of him, especially since they had been knocking on the glass of the car and shouting very aggressively.

Shane waited until he heard the gate creak shut behind them, then took the blankets off with a gasp.

"Holy shit," he said. He was sweating.

"Tell me about it." Rose looked ashen. "What the fuck is wrong with people?"

"Thank you for doing this," Shane said. Rose's face softened as her eyes found his through the rearview mirror. "And sorry about brunch," Shane added, his cheeks pinkening.

Rose turned around in her seat so she could face him. "Don't be. I would have had to cancel anyway; Tom is getting into LAX at 10. It's supposed to be a surprise, so of course Belinda messaged me and gave me the heads-up last night."

Shane laughed. Belinda was Tom's sixty-something-year-old assistant, and quite frankly, Belinda was more on Rose's payroll than on the man she was contractually tied to.

Rose said, "I'm heading home to oil up and lounge by the pool with a script, probably topless."

Shane made a face at that.

Rose laughed.

"Kidding, obviously. Unless I want the first look Tom gets of my tits after three months to be through a TMZ Instagram post."

"Well, good luck," Shane said, because the clock on her dashboard was reading 8:57 am, and he couldn't ignore the desperate hum inside of him any longer.

She chuckled and turned back around, unlocking the car doors a second before Shane went to pull at the handle.

"Good luck to you, too," she shouted after him as he ran up the paved driveway to the front door. It was very pathetic on his part, but it was Rose, and even if it were anyone else, he was too strung up to even try to hide his excitement.

He was minutes away from seeing Ilya. From holding him. Kissing him.

Fuck he didn't even want to have sex- well, he wouldn't be opposed, either. But more importantly, he just needed to be near him.

Shane entered the code and pushed against the front door. The bigger-than-life oak door looked heavy, but it slid open with barely any resistance.

The moment Shane stepped inside, he closed his eyes and inhaled.

As he let the smell of citrus, spice, and oak fill his lungs, he felt something inside of him settle. The nerves and almost frantic anxiety that had been festering inside of him eased out with his next exhalation, and by the time he took his third inhale, breathing was no longer a challenge but a benediction.

He looked down at his wrist watch.

Ilya should be landing any moment now.

With a smile, Shane let himself get comfortable with the idea of being inside Ilya's home, which Shane had visited only twice before.

Three, if he counted this one.

He had seen gorgeous houses. In LA, moving in their circles, it was a given. Still, Ilya's was the most stunning home Shane had seen. He loved it even more than his own, and for exactly the reason most other celebrities probably didn't.

It wasn't the extravagantly lavish and modern fishbowl that no number of reflective coatings could make feel private, with the infinity pool on the ledge of the Hollywood Hills and a

driveway that led directly onto the street.

It was tucked behind gates on nearly an acre of landscaped grounds. Trees of all types towered higher than the highest point of the ‘compound,’ as Ilya called it. The place stretched across four detached structures: the primary residence, guest quarters, and two studio dwellings. These were connected by winding garden paths, sculptural fire features, and a pair of custom Stan Bitters water installations.

Each space was thoughtfully designed to celebrate light, materiality, and a deep connection to nature, featuring reclaimed oak cladding, polished concrete floors, exposed beams, and a dramatic brick fireplace in the main living room.

Expansive outdoor living areas included an open-air bar. Tranquil spaces unfurled beside a pool, almost perpetually shaded by surrounding trees. Fallen leaves often littered the water, but Ilya insisted on cleaning them himself. When Shane asked why, he simply said, “Is relaxing.”

Shane smiled at the memory as he ran his hands over the walls leading to the 24-foot stainless steel and walnut kitchen island -the sculptural focal point of the main premises.

If the complicated layout didn’t scream Ilya, the art on his walls—exclusively by Russian artists—and the Russian books everywhere did. Trinkets were scattered around, which might seem like clutter, but each fit perfectly and made the space complete.

Shane pulled out a barstool and sat down on the island, drumming his fingers on the cool walnut slab that sat atop it.

He pulled out his phone and saw he had a text from Ilya.

Archnemesis: Landed safely. See you soon.

Shane's grin almost split his face when another message quickly followed.

Archnemesis: There’s a gift waiting for you in the fridge.

And even though Shane already suspected what it was, he still walked over to the fridge and opened it.

“I am so fucked,” Shane whispered as he reached forward and grabbed the singular ginger ale can with a red gift bow on top. He snapped a picture of it in his hand and sent it to Ilya.

Shane: I love my gift. Thank you.

Still smiling in what he imagined was a very soppy way, he took the bow off the can and, after slipping it into his pocket for safekeeping, opened the can and took a sip.

It was the best ginger ale he'd ever tasted.

His phone dinged.

Archnemesis: Wait for me to go into the bedroom. I have another surprise for you.

A thrill ran up Shane's spine as he read it, and he ran over to the bedroom. He put his hand on the handle of the closed door and twisted, but didn't actually open it.

He took the picture quickly and went back to the kitchen as he hit send.

Shane: Too late.

Archnemesis: Please tell me you didn't.

Shane: Relax, I didn't.

Shane frowned, confused and hurt a bit by Ilya's worry as if Shane would ever break his trust that way. Ilya was usually the one cracking all the jokes. It was a testament to how important whatever Ilya had planned was for him that his reaction was one of concern rather than mischief.

Something twisted anxiously inside Shane at that.

Was Ilya planning to break up with him?

His eyes went to the bedroom door, all previous joy replaced by apprehension.

A gas bubble popped from where the ginger ale lay on top of the island, and Shane let out a tense laugh.

What the fuck was he even thinking?

Almost as if to solidify Shane's own conclusion that he was being ridiculous, a text came from Ilya.

Archnemesis: Just got in the car.

Archnemesis: Told the driver I'd give him a big tip if he got me there in 10 minutes instead of 20.

Shane smiled at his phone, the tension easing out of him as he typed.

Shane: Tell him I'll double it if he makes it in 5.

Archnemesis: Are Cadillac Escalades known for going 0-100 in 2 seconds? Cause I am pretty sure this one did that

Shane laughed and let the phone drop face down on the island.

He was unsure what to do while he waited for Ilya. It felt odd to be in his home without him. Like Shane was intruding, or trespassing. With this thought in mind, Shane's eyes drifted to the living room, and he walked toward it with all the calmness of a man who had nowhere else to be. Because that was the case, there was nowhere else in the world he'd rather be.

Except maybe in Ilyas' arms, but he would get there. Soon.

As Shane reached the living room, he noticed a half-open script on the center table and bent down to pick it up.

He froze when he saw the title page.

“Enough for You”

Created by Jacob Tierney

Adapted for Dmitri Volkov

Played by Ilya Rozanov*

Shane swallowed the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat as he made his way outside, ginger ale in hand.

He inhaled the woodsy, outdoorsy smell and sat down on a lounge chair with an unobstructed view of the front door. Then he took a sip of his ginger ale and put it down beside him as he

turned to the first page.

Shane hadn't let himself read it. Yet, Ilya had not only done that, but he'd also printed it, and there were markings all over the pages, scratches and character notes—some in Russian when the dialogue called for it, otherwise in English.

It wasn't much, just the first five pages out of the 90-page script.

Shane tried to settle his rising anxiety.

Had Ilya accepted and not told Shane?

Was this the surprise that was awaiting Shane inside the bedroom? Shane's part of the script, printed and with a red bow on top?

Shane tried to shake this idea off as he read the notes Ilya had written. He had beautiful handwriting, cursive yet oddly legible.

He especially focused on a note for when Ilya's character interacted with Roman- Shane's character- for the first time.

It said,

Dimitri already in love. Wanting but Scared.

The word scared was underlined three times in big, angry lines.

Just then, the front door opened.

Shane threw the script down on the chair as he leaped up. Already running to where Ilya was dragging a rolling bag inside and closing the door behind him.

He hadn't spotted Shane initially, but at the sound of his fast-approaching steps, turned and dropped the bag he'd had on his shoulder to the floor, opening his arms just in time for Shane to jump into them.

"Serdtsse moyo!"

Shane buried his face into his neck, squeezing as tightly as he could. Scared that Ilya would dematerialize from beneath him.

Ilya seemed to feel the same, squeezing Shane tighter as he buried his face in Shane's neck and inhaled deeply. He did that a lot, Shane noticed. And just like every other time he'd done it, it sent a sharp, hot flash of desire right up Shane's spine.

"I missed you," Shane mumbled into his skin, because it was true, and somehow, he wasn't afraid to admit that anymore.

Ilya's response was to pull back and connect their mouths into a searing kiss, which Shane immediately moaned into, his hands going to Ilya's hair. Shane loved Ilya's curls. Loved running his fingers through them, loved how soft and silky they were, and how Ilya groaned every time he pulled slightly on them, as he'd just done.

"Did you wait long?" Ilya asked, before connecting their lips again.

Shane pulled away long enough to say, "No," and then he felt his back press against the wall next to the door, and Ilya bent his leg, using it as leverage to get his hands out from beneath Shane's ass and bring them up to cup the sides of Shane's face.

Shane tightened his grip around Ilya's hip, hoping to help keep him up, and relished the feel of gentle thumbs running over his cheeks.

Ilya pulled back, and Shane let his head fall against the wall as he watched him.

Ilya was breathing hard, his eyes full of fire, and desire, and something more, something tightened inside Shane's chest. Me too, he wanted to scream. I love you too.

The hands beside Shane's face stroked a little slower, and Ilya's eyes followed their movement, getting momentarily transfixed by the sight of his freckles, which he claimed he loved too much.

Seeing him now, Shane finally believed that to be true.

"Did you miss me?" Shane asked, this time in Russian.

Ilya's eyes widened before his face scrunched like he was in pain. "So much, so fucking much, Hollander. Ty dazhe ne predstavljajet."

Then Ilya kissed him, somehow, unbelievably, with even more passion than before.

And Shane was burning up.

"I didn't catch the last part," Shane told him, climbing down from his waist so Ilya had to look down to connect their mouths again.

"I said, you have no idea," Ilya said, moving his hands so they were against the wall, on each side of Shane's head, boxing him in.

Shane smiled at him, and Ilya's face morphed into something too soft, too tender.

"Yes, I do," Shane said, and when he moved forward and connected their lips, it wasn't with the same fevered desire as a second ago, but oh so gently.

Somehow, it made Shane's heart race even faster.

Shane opened his eyes to find Ilya's were tightly closed, eyebrows scrunched as if he was fighting against the urge to do more.

He looked tortured. It was lovely.

Shane pulled back. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Very," Ilya said, and pressed his hips down against Shane's suggestively.

Shane laughed and pushed him off. "I meant for food, you pervert!"

"Oh, hm, yes, a little."

"I'll make breakfast, come on."

"You will?" Ilya asked, but he was trailing behind Shane, who was holding Ilya's hand and pulling him along.

"I got bored while I waited, so I raided your pantry, and it seems you have all the ingredients for pancakes and eggs. I also saw some--"

Shane was slightly pulled back as Ilya suddenly stopped.

"Hollander," he said. He looked scared. "You are going to make breakfast for me." It wasn't a question.

Shane felt weirdly self-conscious. Thrown off balance by Ilya's reaction. "It's really no big deal," Shane said with a shrug, but he could feel the heat settling over his cheeks at the bald-faced lie.

Ilya watched him for a short moment that felt endless, in which Shane's cheeks got increasingly hotter, before Ilya pulled him into a hug.

"Thank you," Ilya said against his hair.

"For what?" Shane asked, suddenly breathless.

Ilya pulled back and placed his hand under Shane's chin. He lifted Shane's face, so Shane was looking into his eyes when he said, "For not giving up on me."

Shane was toweling off in front of the mirror, watching Ilya's reflection as Ilya did the same, not too far behind him. He smiled, and Ilya returned it, winking when he caught Shane's eyes drifting down before coming back up again.

"Soon."

"How soon?"

Ilya's laughter echoed around them.

"In a bit."

"I want my surprise."

Ilya's smile became soft. "Soon," he repeated. "Now come. I want to cuddle."

Shane grinned. "Didn't peg you for a cuddler, Rozanov."

"You didn't peg me, period," Ilya smirked. Shane laughed incredulously.

"You're such an asshole."

"Yes, but I like yours better."

"Shut up!" Shane laughed, yelping as Ilya scooped him up.

Shane made a show out of kicking his feet and squirming, but both saw through it.

When they reached the white leather sofa, Ilya set him down gently, as always, with one hand steadying Shane's head before he followed.

"I missed you," Shane said, looking up at Ilya once they were settled with Ilya fitted snugly between Shane's legs.

Ilya's grin was the widest Shane had ever seen coming from him.

"Da, you've said that."

"That's how much I missed you. Can't stop saying it. Fuck, I missed—"

Shane laughed into the kiss Ilya placed on him to get him to shut up. Shane was infinitely grateful for Ilya's steady weight on top of him, grounding him and stopping him from floating away, given how light he felt.

When Ilya broke the kiss, he said, "Stop saying that."

"Why? Afraid it will lose its meaning?"

"No, it's just... hard to understand."

Luckily, Shane had been studying nonstop just for this. "YA skuchal po tebe."

Ilya groaned and pressed his face into Shane's neck. "Not what I meant, Hollander."

Now Shane was really confused. He frowned. Then, realization washed over Shane like a punch to the gut, abruptly shifting his confusion to a sharp ache.

Shane ran a hand down Ilya's back and placed a kiss on his still-wet hair while his heart crumbled into a thousand pieces. He wasn't sure how he could make this man see he was

being honest, and it broke him to think Ilya might assume Shane was lying to him to get into bed with him or something like that.

"I wouldn't lie," Shane said, voice cracking with emotion.

Ilya pulled back instantly, eyes full of confusion as he said, "I know you wouldn't."

Shane fought to keep composed, but ultimately failed. "I'm sorry," he said as a tear slid down his cheek.

He pushed at Ilya's chest.

Ilya got off him quickly, and Shane curled onto his side, hiding his face in the crook of his elbow.

Ilya positioned himself behind him, his hands hesitantly stroking Shane's hair. "Hollander," he whispered, as Shane shook with silent sobs underneath him.

"What's happening? You're scaring me."

"You didn't tell me about your father," Shane said, surprising even himself. It was like his mind had supplied him with the real reason behind these tears now that the initial high of being close to him after so long had worn off, and all the anger and hurt Shane had suffered in his absence came crashing back.

Ilya's hand stilled in Shane's hair. "Hollander," he said his name like a plea, and Shane let it cut through him as he continued.

"Do you know how confused and hurt I was when I found out you had flown to Russia for your father's funeral at the same time the rest of the world did?"

Ilya made a noise, a short, sharp intake of breath, as Shane had sucker-punched him.

"I am sorry," Ilya said. Shane stayed silent, hating how quickly he ached to forgive.

He didn't want to hurt Ilya; that was not his intention.

But what about Shane's pain? Was it not worth an uncomfortable conversation?

He felt torn between the part of him that wanted to talk about this and the other part that knew Ilya had just come back from burying his father and didn't need Shane to add to that.

Shane exhaled shakily and turned to face Ilya, who was not looking at him but out the windows, his gaze far away, his jaw clenched. There was a war raging in those eyes that was out of reach for Shane. Something so foreign he didn't even know how to begin to decipher it, but he wanted to try.

"Hey," Shane said.

Ilya shook his head imperceptibly, jaw clenching and unclenching. It was unfair how, even now, he was the most beautiful man Shane had ever seen.

“Look at me.”

Ilya ignored him.

“Look at me, Rozanov.”

That did it.

When Ilya met his eyes, they held no trace of the warmth Shane had come to associate with him. This was not the Ilya who had asked if he was okay twenty times their first time because he feared hurting him.

This was the other Ilya, the one who slammed Dallas Kent against the wall at the SAG Awards.

And Shane didn't know how to bring his Ilya back. Perhaps he could try showing him he cared, that he worried, and that he ached for him. So, he said, “I am sorry about your father,” because what better way to express his remorse than that?

Ilya jumped off the sofa, fists clenched. “O Gospodi!” He bent down to pick up the towel, which he had previously discarded on the floor, and tucked it around his hips. “I don't want to fucking talk about my father, Hollander.”

“Okay,” Shane said, sitting up. He grabbed a throw pillow and used it to cover himself, suddenly feeling too exposed. “I-”

“And I am sorry I didn't reply to you, okay?” Ilya yelled, “I was clearly fucking busy planning a fucking funeral.”

Shane felt the tears well up again. “I know. I am sorry. I just meant-”

“Do you want me to put a fucking GPS up my ass so you can track me anytime you want to? Fuck!”

Shane got off the couch.

"Fuck you, Rozanov."

He heard Ilya follow him, but refused to acknowledge his presence as he grabbed his folded clothes from the bathroom and began putting them on. It was hard to do because he was so mad that he kept messing up, and it ended up taking way longer than it needed to. But once he managed it, he turned to go and halted.

Ilya was blocking the doorway.

“Step away.”

Ilya stepped back instantly, and Shane was careful to avoid touching him as he passed him.

When Shane had gotten the front door open, Ilya called after him, and he stopped, one hand on the handle.

Shane didn't look back at Ilya, and Ilya didn't move closer.

They stood there, suspended in time—so many unsaid things hanging in the space between them. There was an apology somewhere in there, but this time Shane wasn't going to be the one to utter it.

Finally, Ilya took a step forward, but Shane did as well, crossing the threshold and closing the door before Ilya could stop him.

Chapter 14: Shouting Over the Music

Chapter Summary

Ilya's frayed nerves snap the night he runs into Shane, the man he's been trying—and failing—to forget. Their on-screen chemistry is undeniable, but with an intimate scene looming, the only way forward is through the honesty they've both avoided for months.

Chapter Notes

HAPPY NEW YEAR MY LOVES!!!! My first post of the year. Thank you to all who have read and continue to do so.

I hope this new year is filled with getting the courage to put yourself out there as I did. These last two weeks have been a journey I had been too scared to get on for years. All this to say WRITE THE STORY, publish the book, post the video, start the podcast, start the stream, finally tell that person you love them, propose, get married, get a divorce, make that post on TikTok of your singing, release the songs. Just do it, because the world is shit and we need all the beautiful creations we can get.

Thank you again. I am forever grateful to you. Yes, YOU!

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

Ilya slammed his phone face down on the table.

Three months.

Shane had been ignoring him for three fucking months.

He drummed his fingers rapidly on the table, then lifted his hand, biting the skin around his thumb in agitation.

Ilya had called him more than a hundred times since then and sent about fifty messages and DMs. Meanwhile, Shane was wrapping up their press tour for some space movie and had basically taken over Ilya's entire Instagram and Twitter feed. It didn't help that he'd used his burner profile to follow about thirty different Shane Hollander fan accounts, including his official one.

Which explained the feed, but it didn't explain why Ilya still felt like it wasn't enough.

He kept staring at those paparazzi photos of Shane leaving his place. Shane had looked shocked at first, when they had spotted him, but then his face had morphed to show anger as he'd begun walking, then running away from them altogether. It had been evident from the photographs that he'd been wiping away tears as he'd stepped off his property, and that was the part he just couldn't seem to get over.

“[Surprise],” Svetlana said, startling Ilya, who hadn't heard her come in. She frowned. “[What's up with you]?”

“[Nothing],” he said.

Only that he still hadn't changed the code to his door in hopes that Shane would somehow decide to come by unannounced, and that all Ilya could think about now, looking at her, was that he wished it were Shane instead.

“[I just came to drop off the revised script from Jacob].” She dropped the soft peach bundle of pages in front of him. “[There you go].”

“Okay, bye,” he said, picking up his phone again and checking the notifications. Still nothing. He cursed.

“Dude,” she said, which earned her an eyebrow raise from Ilya. “[When was the last time you left this house for something not work-related]?”

“[Not long],” he lied.

She crossed her arms over her chest and cocked her head. “[Really? When]?”

“[I don't have the time].”

“[You seem pretty good on time right now].”

“Now?” Ilya said and shot a look at the time on his phone. “[It's midnight].”

“Exactly,” she said. “Now, come on.”

He groaned, pushing himself up more out of desperation than agreement. Feeling a slippery relief at the distraction—secretly glad to have something to occupy his mind and drive his thoughts away from Shane for a couple of hours.

An hour later, Ilya handed his keys to the valet and extended his elbow to Svetlana, who took it reflexively, all the while blinded by the flashes of the hungry cameras that were immortalizing every moment of it.

He knew they made quite the sight.

Svetlana wore a skintight black minidress with cutouts below her ribs, a black leather coat, and matching heels with strings climbing her legs. Her loose, natural curls framed her face. Most of all, Ilya loved the Prada shades perched on her nose.

He matched her: tight leather trousers, loose black shirt rolled to the elbow, top four buttons undone. Svetlana had used shimmering lotion on his chest and stomach, which caught the light every time. He looked forward to seeing the effect under the flashes.

The club welcomed them like old friends, and Ilya felt the pent-up stress of the last three months begin to ease out of him with each rhythmic thump from the bass. He recognized the song; it was a remix of the ending track from the superhero movie he'd starred in. The one that had ended up making twice as much money as Shane's.

What a fantastic, beautiful night this was going to be.

"[I'm going to get us some drinks]," Ilya said to Svetlana, shouting over the music. She nodded and began walking towards the roped-off VIP section.

He put in the order quicker than many of the other patrons, who turned out to be a much more famous crowd than usual, because the bartender had been a model he'd posed with for an ad a couple of months back. He would have been shocked at the sight of him behind the bar three years ago when he'd first moved to LA, but now he knew better. The way their industries worked, it was very common to go from walking down the runway on one day to waiting tables the next. One more reason Ilya was so grateful his acting career had taken off as it had.

Ilya made sure to tip him very, very generously, which helped the man out and ensured the next time Ilya came over for their refills, he wouldn't have to wait at all.

A win-win, really.

He moaned into his drink as he took the first sip. This was his favorite club in LA for this reason, and this reason only. They had great fucking vodka here. The real kind, from Russia, and they kept it at the perfect temperature to make Ilya's eyes roll to the back of his head every time.

He swallowed the liquid, the sour bitterness of his last visit to Russia going down with it after another, longer sip, which ended up not being enough, so naturally he drank some more, so by the time he reached the VIP area, he was almost in need to go back to the bar for his next one.

The rope was pulled back before he even had to speak, and he raised his eyebrows in thanks, his glass against his lips, as he took his final sip.

Svetlana was sitting in a booth by the corner, and Ilya quickly noticed that she wasn't alone.

He stopped short. A tight panic pinched his chest as he registered the man she was talking to.

Svetlana leaned close as Shane whispered in her ear, eyes down. His hand rested on her arm; hers lay on his thigh.

And Ilya felt the vodka churn in his stomach so abruptly for a moment, he wondered if he was going to be sick right there, in the middle of the VIP lounge.

"Shane," Ilya said, but they didn't hear him. Couldn't, over the music.

Svetlana must have felt his gaze, because she looked up. Her face shifted from carefree joy to a closed-off expression, her eyes fixed on him as she stood. But Ilya wasn't looking at her.

He stared at Shane, and the way he didn't seem surprised him there. Instead, he looked almost bored, like he didn't understand why Ilya was standing there staring at him.

Like Shane hadn't been ignoring him for three fucking months.

He felt a hand take the empty cup from his grip, so he let go. Then lips brushed his ear. Svetlana's voice said, "[I am tired of your moping. Talk to him. And don't leave until you fix this]."

Then she placed a kiss against his temple, knowing it would leave a lipstick mark, and left.

He hovered between moving and freezing, paralyzed. His thoughts scattered, not sure if his next step would be toward Shane or away.

His heart was beating wildly and painfully. Maybe he was having a heart attack. He heard those were deadly at this age. Fuck he hoped it killed him quick, anything to take him away from this torture.

Shane was lounging back against the booth. He'd taken his phone out and was typing rapidly away on it. The light from the screen illuminated his face, and Ilya had never seen him look more beautiful. His skin was perfect, and his lips were wet from the sip he'd taken moments earlier, so they were shiny, just how they were every time Ilya finished kissing him. Ilya couldn't really make out much of his clothes in the low light, but he was willing to bet they made him look phenomenal.

He took a step forward, unable to resist the pull.

Shane, on his part, didn't look up from his phone as Ilya sat, but he also didn't leave, so Ilya took that as a win.

"I see your phone still works," Ilya said, loudly enough to be heard, because he was an idiot, and because he knew being a dick was the quickest way to get Shane's attention.

It worked.

Shane turned off his phone and placed it on the table, picking up his drink before he put it to his lips. Even in the low light, Ilya watched his throat move as he swallowed—a drop clung to Shane's chin, and Ilya ached to lick it.

He didn't, though, because they were in public. In a very, very public space surrounded by cameras, and people, and people with phones that had cameras.

Ilya took a sip of his drink and waited until Shane finally turned to face him.

"I accepted the role," he said, and Ilya almost asked which, before his mind caught up with him.

“When?”

Shane grabbed his phone, unlocked it, and handed it to Ilya.

There was an open email from Shane, copied to Jacob and Yuna.

I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity. I will work hard to make this vision a reality. I promise Roman is in good hands. And yes, I will speak to Ilya first thing tomorrow.

Ilya read it twice. He was sure he was missing something, but he didn't know what.

“They told me you haven't answered yet,” Shane said, moving closer because the new song was somehow louder than the last one had been.

Ilya shook his head, still staring at the screen.

Shane took back the phone and set it on the table, leaving Ilya with nothing to do but face him.

He hadn't been prepared to find Shane so close; their noses touched, and he moved away from him as though burned. His eyes searched around them, and after finding no one, finally landed on the camera positioned above them, watching everything, and missing nothing.

“Let's get out of here,” he heard Shane say, and then he grabbed his drink and finished it. He picked up his phone from the table and opened it, then pressed it to his ear and said something Ilya couldn't make out over the music. When he slipped the phone into his back pocket, he faced Ilya again.

The sight of Shane standing over him, the lasers from the dance floor painting him in various shades of purple and red, made Ilya's mouth dry completely. Even as he felt himself start to fill up his pants. Because Shane was looking at him with an almost cruel indifference, and Ilya wanted to bend him over this booth and remind him just who Ilya was.

Ilya kept eye contact as he drank the last of his cup, and then he placed it down and stood, relishing the way Shane had to look up at him to keep eye contact.

Ilya smiled smugly, heady with the power he'd just gained by simply standing.

But whereas before Shane would have succumbed to it, now he just pushed past him and expected Ilya to follow.

Which he did, without hesitation.

This was a very, very bad idea.

“Hollander,” he said, reaching out before he realized what he was doing.

Shane stopped and looked down at Ilya’s hand, which was circling his wrist.

Ilya dropped it and stepped back.

They were standing in the hallway, which led to the club’s back exit, where there would be a million paps waiting.

“What?” Shane asked, stupidly.

“We can’t leave together.”

“Why not?”

Now it was Ilya’s time to ask, “What?”

“Why. Not?” Shane asked, pausing each word, as if this would be easier for Ilya to understand.

Through gritted teeth, Ilya said, “You fucking know why?”

“Tell me anyway,” Shane said, and he stepped closer towards Ilya. Ilya moved back instinctively, and his back hit a wall. He looked down at Shane, who was still walking, cornering him against it.

Ilya swallowed.

“Hanging out together in a club makes sense for two very straight actors who need to get over their heterosexuality and learn how to fake enjoying themselves during very non-hetero sex scenes.” Shane put a hand on the wall behind Ilya and the other on the exposed part of his chest. “After all, we are just two rivals who need to play lovers. Isn’t that all?”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Why am I doing what?” Shane asked, and there was that cruel viciousness again.

Ilya didn’t recognize him. He wasn’t sure he even liked him anymore.

Then Shane laughed and ran that hand on Ilya’s chest up to cup his chin, which he tugged on until their lips were almost touching.

“I am workshopping Roman today,” Shane said, letting Ilya’s chin go, but Ilya didn’t dare move. Shane’s smile grew as he noticed. “At first, I was terrified I wouldn’t be able to play a man like him. Someone who doesn’t care about anyone other than themselves. Someone arrogant and outspoken. Simply put, a tremendous asshole.”

Ilya straightened. “So, that’s it then? You’re pretending to be Roman?”

“No.” Shane’s smile turned smug. “I am pretending to be you.”

Then Shane was walking away. He stopped when he reached the door and turned to look at Ilya over his shoulder, who was still plastered against the wall just as he'd left him, unable to do anything more than watch him go.

“[Accept the fucking role, Rozanov],” Shane said, in perfect fucking Russian.

Then he opened the doors and walked out to a sea of flash.

Ilya touched his fingers to the thick, sturdy thermal paper, noting how the ink had begun to fade slightly from how often he rubbed at it, and how it was almost tearing in the center from where he kept folding and unfolding it.

It was summer. The Tierney script lay open beside him, as this was his phone, but he didn't look at either.

He welcomed the pain and remorse that took him hostage every time he did this little ritual of his and let his mind run with the possibilities of what could have happened if Shane hadn't left that day. If Ilya hadn't forced him to.

If Ilya had been able to open the bedroom door, take Shane apart with his mouth, his fingers, fuck him, and then present them with the tickets he'd bought at the ticket counter in Moscow.

Then he would have told Shane, “I can't promise it will be glamorous or even fun, and we will have to stay in different hotel rooms and pretend like we don't like each other, but I want you there, with me. Because it's home, because I want to take you to the lake, and, most of all, because once we film this movie, I'll never be able to return, and I want you to meet my niece and introduce you to my mom. Because she would have loved you, just like I love you.”

He took a sip of his vodka.

When his phone buzzed, he was going to ignore it, but then a call came right after, and he picked it up quickly.

He stood, suddenly anxious.

“Hi, Jacob. How is it going?”

“Ilya, I'm good, thanks. Listen, do you have the script nearby?”

“Hi, Jacob. How is it going?”

“Ilya, I'm good, thanks. Listen, do you have the script nearby?”

“I'm holding it,” Ilya said, because he'd just picked it up.

“Awesome. Can you go to page 54, really quick?”

Ilya pressed the phone between his ear and shoulder as he flipped through the pages. “I’m here.”

“Something’s nagging me about the location for it. It’s supposed to take place in an ice rink. But we weren’t sure if that would be good enough. This is an emotional scene.”

“I agree,” Ilya said. “I had sent an email to the team about this.”

“I know, and I think we’re going to go with your idea. If you can help work out some of the kinks for filming.”

Ilya’s heart stuttered. “Really? In Russia?”

“No,” Jacob said, and he sounded sad about this. “We can’t film this in Russia.”

“Yes, no, that would be,” Ilya let out a rushed exhale, “not good.”

“I was thinking Canada. Shane’s family has a cottage with enough space, so we think it could work.”

“Shane is okay with this?”

“This whole thing was his idea.”

“No, it was my idea.”

“I meant it was his idea to use the cottage,” Jacob laughed on the other side of the line. “Keep this competitive spirit up, and we won’t need to script for the Olympic scenes. Which reminds me, did you get the details about the chemistry read tomorrow?”

“Yes, still same time?”

“Yes, eleven. It should be quick, just some scene work. I’ll have Max send you the scenes we’ll be testing for.”

“Ok, I will see you, Jacob.”

“Bye, buddy.”

Then Ilya ended the call.

He placed the script down and grabbed the worn-out tickets.

“[Guess you will have to wait],” he told Russia, and slipped the tickets into the pocket of his sweatpants.

By the time Ilya arrived at the sound studio the next morning at 10:45, Shane was already there. He was talking to Jacob, Max, and Yuna. Shane was holding his script, as well-loved and marked up as Ilya's own, which he had tucked under his arm.

"Brought coffee," Ilya called out, and at once all eyes fell on him.

"You're a god sent!" Max called, coming over to grab one, but Ilya moved the tray back and gave her the other instead. "Those have whole milk. These are almond."

She smiled at that and grabbed one. "You're so thoughtful."

"No, this is bribe," he told her as Jacob neared them and grabbed himself a cup. "To make you give me the most screen time cause I'm the favorite."

This earned him a laugh from Max and a joking punch to the shoulder by Jacob. "You're both my favorites."

"Right," Ilya said and set the trays of coffee on a nearby table. As the rest of the sparse crewmates, a cameraman, the director's assistant, Jake, someone from photography, and another one from sound, grabbed theirs, Ilya finally let himself walk over to Shane and Yuna.

"Good morning," Ilya said, once he was close enough. "I brought coffee."

"I am glad. We needed something to wash down those bagels Shane brought earlier," Yuna said, speaking for Shane, who was looking down at his shoes, biting his cheek.

Ilya's eyebrows furrowed. And he noted that Yuna was pointing at a box of open bagels on the other side of the studio. "Okay," Ilya said, turning back towards them. "There are two kinds," Ilya continued. "With whole milk and without."

"There are gluten-free bagels and lactose-free cream cheese."

"Mom," Shane reprimanded.

"What?"

He shook his head and finally looked at Ilya. "Thanks for the coffee. I am sure it's great."

Ilya bit the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling. "Oh, it has to be. Since you're so sure."

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. "That doesn't make any sense."

Ilya shrugged. "It does."

Yuna watched the exchange with a frown, but when she opened her mouth to say something that would no doubt break this moment, Jacob's voice rang out through his megaphone.

"Okay, everyone, clear out. Shane, Ilya. Scene 45."

Ilya and Shane threw their scripts down at the same time. Ilya had meant it as a harmless show of his mastery over this script, but the silent challenge in Shane's eyes told him it had come across as much more to the man.

"Wow, okay. So, from the beginning."

Ilya took a deep breath, grounding himself as he channeled this man he'd been sharing space with for the last two months. He rolled his neck and shook out his arms, then opened and closed his mouth and licked his lips. He was so focused on getting his mind and body into it that he had paid no mind to what Shane was doing.

Not until he heard Jacob yell out, "Action."

Ilya felt hands push against his chest with so much force that he almost fell. This had been in the script, of course, but Ilya had been expecting a fake shove, because they were actors and that's what they did.

His shock and surprise were genuine when he looked up to find that the shy, introverted Shane from before was gone, and in front of him stood the asshole from the club. The one Ilya had wanted to punch unconscious and fuck senseless.

The one that reminded him so much of the men he'd grown up surrounded by, that it scared him.

"What the fuck?" Ilya asked in Russian. Letting his native language pull him into the role before he shot forward and grabbed the front of Roman's shirt, pulling him close. Their faces were inches apart.

"What the fuck is your problem?" He continued.

Roman smiled, that cruel smile that made Ilya's insides twist and his hands grow clammy, and suddenly Ilya let go, he allowed some of that genuine fear to show through, and he clenched his jaw.

Roman watched him, cocking his head as he did a once-over of the man he'd just attacked.

"Are you scared?" Roman asked in English.

99% of his lines were in English, since he was Canadian-born and of Russian descent. And it made sense that while he spoke and understood the language, he felt more comfortable in his native tongue. Just like Dimitri, who was born and raised in Russia, spoke Russian most of the time, like during this entire scene, and the other 200 just like it.

"I am not," Ilya replied.

"It's okay to be scared."

Dimitri scoffed and turned around, facing Roman. He placed the back of his hand over his mouth and closed his eyes. He went rigid when Roman came up behind him and jumped away after Roman placed a kiss on the back of his neck.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“You know what I am doing?”

Dimitri was visibly shaking now. “We’re in fucking Sochi.”

“Congratulations, you have eyes.”

“Roman,” Dimitri said, and then he got close enough he could whisper, “Not here.”

“I thought danger did it for you?” Roman said and placed a hand on Dimitri’s chin, which Dimitri smacked away.

“This is not danger, it’s fucking suicide, and you know it.”

“I don’t know anything.”

“Fuck you,” Dimitri said and then pushed him out of his way, but was halted in his retreat when a hand wrapped around his wrist and pulled him back.

Roman connected their mouths, and Dimitri froze, eyes wide and filled with tears, but before he could react, Roman pulled back.

“Okay, now you can go.”

Dimitri stood there for a long moment, as Ilya tried to channel all the frustration, fear, and confusion he himself would have felt in that scenario, and finally moved towards where he tried to depict a bathroom door. He made a show of stopping and then turning.

“It’s locked.”

“Of course, it’s locked. Come on, Dimitri.” Then in Russian, Roman said, “We’re in fucking Sochi.”

“Cut!”

Ilya tried to shake it off as Jacob ran over to them and began to clap them on the back.

“Beautiful, just exactly how I pictured it as I was writing. Just wow, guys.”

Ilya fought to paste on a smile that even resembled something genuine, and he nodded. “I am glad.”

“I don’t think we need anything else,” Jacob said, and then stepped back and let out an incredulous laugh. “Holy shit, this is the easiest chemistry read I’ve ever done.”

Ilya was relieved; he was feeling too frayed. He had no doubts that it had looked like an outstanding performance. It had felt like it. It’d been too much, too real.

It was Max who said, “Sorry, Jacob, but I would really like to see scene 105 and not because I don’t trust your assessment. It’s just such a pivotal moment in the story.” She turned to face

Shane and Ilya. “You guys were a total dream to watch, honest, but I kind of want to see it play out. If you could do me this favor, please.”

Jacob turned from watching Max to them. “What do you say, guys?”

“I’m ready to go,” Shane said, because he hadn’t gotten out of character yet. Not like Ilya, who had allowed himself to shed Dimitri from his skin the moment he’d thought it had been safe to do so.

He almost wanted to cry, but instead, he said, “Yes, of course. Whatever you guys need.”

“You guys are the best,” Jacob said, clapping them both on their shoulders before he grabbed his megaphone from around his neck and said into it, “Okay, guys, we are going to do one more scene, then it’s a wrap. Carlos, please, bring the bed in.”

As if summoned by the word ‘bed,’ their intimacy coordinator came up to them with a warm smile. “Okay, guys, so remember, you don’t have to do anything that makes any of you feel even the slightest bit uncomfortable, okay? We’ve already discussed the importance of safety. Now, I need you guys to come up with non-verbal cues, or, as I like to call them, safe touches. Now, Shane, what would you like your safe touch to be?”

“Can’t be anything we will use right? Like if I say pull my hair, well, of course, that can be a normal thing in the scene. So, it wouldn’t work.”

“Pinch my arm,” Ilya said quickly. “If you don’t feel comfortable, pinch my arm somewhere the camera doesn’t see.”

Shane nodded at him. “Press down on my hipbone with your thumb.”

“That’s great, guys,” Lydia said.

“Now, anything above that is up to you. Sometimes, in scenes, it helps to include other nonverbal cues for actions. Like if there’s supposed to be penetration, there would be a touch that indicates this, so you both know when to act like it.”

“We’ll keep that in mind,” Shane said. “Anything else?”

“Not for this. Once we start filming, yes, tons more, but this is good enough for now.”

“Ilya, Shane, we will let you guys lead this one,” Jacob said after Lydia gave him the thumbs up. “Start whenever you’re ready.”

Ilya nodded, and he saw Shane do the same. Then, Shane closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He ran a hand up his chest and around his neck, like he was working himself up, and Ilya wanted to close his eyes because he felt like he was intruding, and also because the sight was totally doing it for him.

He swallowed and took an inhale, then another quicker one. Shane opened his eyes, and there was already a fire in them that Ilya had only seen reflected at him in the privacy of their

stolen moments together. Ilya's breath-work worked, and he was breathing heavily as he opened the scene.

"On the bed."

Roman was on the mattress at once, and this was... a choice.

Ilya wasted no time pushing Roman back onto the mattress as he climbed on top. He bent down so that their chests touched, then hovered so their lips were just barely touching.

Roman looked past Ilya into Dimitri's eyes, and Ilya saw the silent plea there.

"Let's not pretend," Roman said.

"What do you mean?"

"For tonight, let's try to be honest with each other, okay?"

Dimitri was silent for a long moment. "Okay. I'll try."

Roman lifted his head and caught Dimitri's mouth with his, kissing him firmly.

Ilya heard the collective gasps behind him but held Roman in place, not letting it get him out of the scene.

He felt Roman turn him around, grab Dimitri's wrists, and press his arms up so his hands were above his head. "I got an idea."

"Oh, no, another one?" Dimitri said, alarm flickering across his face. Romanov laughed, then pinched Dimitri's nipples over his shirt. Dimitri yelped and sat up, tension lacing his sudden stillness as they locked eyes, Roman, slightly above. For the first time, Dimitri gazed upward with a stunned vulnerability instead of the other way around.

Roman brought his hands up to caress the sides of Dimitri's face, his touch almost reverent. Watching as Ilya closed his eyes, losing himself in the feel of those gentle fingers. For a second, he let himself do the one thing no actor ever should -Ilya's thoughts drifted to that moment on his couch, before he had ruined everything.

Ilya remained with his eyes closed as he put one hand on Shane's waist and craned his neck, lips slightly parted—an open invitation.

Shane took it, mercifully, and Ilya moaned into it. It was not a hurried or heated kiss. It was soft and way slower than the script called for. And Ilya poured his heart into it, tracing the shape of Shane's bottom lip with his tongue when he pulled away.

"Don't go," he said, off script.

"I'm here," Shane answered. Ilya hoped it was true.

"Are you going to let me fuck you?"

"No," Shane said, now back in script. "I am going to let you make love to me."

Ilya's eyes snapped open, heart hammering, and when he looked up, it was Shane, real and close, staring at him.

"I can't," Ilya said. Shane frowned.

Ilya could sense Shane's hesitation as he continued to veer off script, but Jacob hadn't yelled for them to cut, which seemed to settle Shane somewhat. Still, Ilya knew he was probably seconds away from being pinched, so he said, very quickly, before Shane forced him to swallow these words that had been suffocating him.

"Not without first telling you how crazy I am about you."

"Ilya," Shane whispered, so low Ilya knew no one else had heard them.

Ilya opened his mouth, a confession on the tip of his tongue, but then Jacob was clapping, and just like that, their bubble was burst, and both men got off the bed and put some distance between them as Jacob made a show of bowing in front of them. Jacob took a step forward, arms outstretched, but Max circumvented him.

"Oh my God, thank you!" Max cried before wrapping them both into an awkward three-person hug. "I can't even put it into words how great that was."

"I kind of wish we'd been rolling," Jacob said.

Shane scratched the back of his neck, that maddening flush creeping up his cheeks. "Thank you."

"It was fun," Ilya said to Jacob. "So, we are done, yes?"

"Yes," Jacob said, stepping back. "We saw everything we needed to. You boys are free to go."

Ilya thanked him, then moved forward and extended his hand towards Shane.

"Great work today, Hollander."

Shane's eyes widened, then he shook Ilya's hand. "You too, Rozanov."

"So, the next we see each other will be-"

"At my family's cottage," supplied Shane.

Ilya nodded. And if Ilya couldn't keep himself from running his thumb gently over Shane's hand just once, it was a secret that would stay between them. Another one, to add to the pile of things the world would never, ever know about them.

"See you at the cottage, Hollander."

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 15: Immersive Acting 101

Chapter Summary

A playful call turns into a fracture neither of them can ignore. When Ilya summons Shane to Moscow, what follows is a reunion thick with longing, secrets, and something dangerously close to hope.

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Chapter Notes

Scroll to the bottom for a little surprise ;)

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

Jacob Tierney was collecting the closeted Hollywood gays like infinity stones, and Ilya couldn't stop laughing.

"Oh, this is not good, buddy," Troy was saying, concern etched across his face, but Ilya, lost in his own amusement, barely heard him.

"It could be worse," Harris said.

"How?" Troy asked.

"Yeah, I don't have a good feeling about this," Scott said.

"I really don't see what the big deal is," Shane said. "Besides, it's too late to backpedal now. We start filming at my family's cottage in two months."

They were all Facetiming now, the direct aftermath of a call with Jacob and some of the producers who had by now left, leaving only the main cast on the virtual screen together.

"They would have saved so much money if they sent us the script last New Year's," Ilya said, finally calming down.

“Not funny,” Scott said. He was doing something, but he was also shirtless, so naturally, Ilya was... distracted.

“I heard Tom has been trying to get himself into this movie for a while. As Assistant Director, but it went to some other guy.” Shane sat by his pool, applying sunscreen to his arms, keeping the camera angle deliberately higher than his chest and showing only parts of his shoulders, neck, and face.

Boring.

Changing scenes from their FaceTime call, Ilya, still chuckling, stood and walked over to the coffee maker. While it was noon in LA, it was 11 pm in Moscow, and he was in that precarious in between where he’d started getting accustomed to the time difference. However, his mind still woke him up way too early anyway.

“You think Tom said anything to Jacob?” Troy asked.

“What, like, sold us out?” Harris asked.

“He wouldn’t.” Shane finally put the sunscreen down and reclined, angling his phone a little down so it caught the start of his abs.

There was the sound of broken glass.

“*[Fuck]!*”

Troy gasped. “Whoa, Roz, you okay?”

Ilya cursed some more and looked at his phone like it had personally affronted him. He shook out his hand where he could feel the burning sensation spreading, then threw the phone onto the counter and turned on the faucet before sticking his hand under the stream. He heard the voices of his future cast mates asking what had happened, but Ilya was listening out for one.

The only one who wasn’t asking.

He cursed louder.

“Okay, I am really starting to worry,” Harris said, his voice tight with anxiety, as Ilya grabbed his phone with his good hand, pulse throbbing in his palm.

“I’m okay. Spilled hot coffee on my hand. Burns.”

“Do you think you have to go to the hospital?” Troy asked.

“I think I will be fine, but I am going to go. It’s very late here.”

A lull came as they wrapped up the virtual chat and waved goodbye. Most said they would disconnect as well, and Ilya focused on the small square that showed Shane to find out Shane wasn’t looking at them. He was apparently muted, his headphones out of his ears as he spoke to someone off camera. He was smiling, and his eyes were crinkling.

Just as Ilya hovered over the ‘End-call’ button, a hand landed on Shane’s shoulder. A very masculine, undeniably male hand.

The call disconnected.

“*[No]!*” Ilya screamed at the screen, which now showed the recent incoming and outgoing calls.

He took his hand out of the water and turned off the faucet, slamming his phone down harshly. There was a definite crack, and he closed his eyes, breathing deeply.

His left hand shook—he blamed the burn. But why was his right trembling too?

He pressed the dial button before he could take it back.

Shane answered after the first ring.

“Rozanov?”

“Jacob thinks it would be good if you come to Russia.”

“What?”

“He told me, before you guys joined the call,” Ilya lied. “He said that you should come. While I’m here, I will show you around. You will hear how Russians speak. Learn about the culture. Will be good for your acting.”

“I am playing a Canadian,” Shane said.

“Russian-Canadian,” Ilya said, but he was already losing steam.

Shane was quiet for so long that Ilya had to look at his phone screen to make sure the call hadn’t dropped.

“How much longer will you be there for?”

His hands turned clammy. Was Shane actually considering this?

“I don’t have a return ticket,” he lied. “Usually stay until it feels like too much.”

The first honest thing he’d said since Shane had picked up, only too much was always too soon, but he stuck it out anyway.

“How long is the flight?”

“Mm, not long.”

“That’s a lie,” Shane said, but then he sighed. “I’ll talk to my mom and let you know.”

“Got to ask mommy for permission?”

“Got to ask my agent if I have the time to spare.”

“You tell yourself that, Hollander.”

Shane hung up, but not before Ilya heard the echo of his laughter—warm, unexpected, leaving Ilya’s chest aching with something unnamable.

Shane was drumming his fingers on his Canadian passport. He hadn’t even noticed he’d been doing it until his mom put a hand over his and forced him to stop.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay, honey,” she said as she placed her hand back on the wheel. As they neared LAX, a wave of nausea washed over Shane, making it impossible for him to look at the approaching structure without his stomach twisting.

“Shane, honey, are you okay?”

Shane nodded tightly.

“Are you sure you want to go on this trip? I mean, I can talk to Jacob and-”

“No,” Shane said, way too quickly. “He’s busy with the movie and stuff. I don’t want him to think I am not taking this seriously.”

It was a convincing lie. Good enough to satisfy her, and Yuna beamed at him, as if proud Shane had forced himself to do something he dreaded just to do a good job. That tightened the knot in his chest. If only she knew his anxiety sprang from desire, not reluctance. He nearly laughed. The urge to teleport to Ilya’s side was raw, almost unbearable.

Fuck, he was going to Russia. To be in Ilya’s home, maybe meet his family and friends. He pictured walking the same streets Ilya walked when he wasn’t in LA, when he felt so far away it hurt.

This was the olive branch—Ilya’s apology, offered without words. Shane was so in love that every second in traffic was torture.

Being dropped off outside the terminal felt like torture.

Eighteen hours—plus a one-hour and forty-five-minute layover in Istanbul— felt like torture.

And then, after hours of tense anticipation, he was rolling his bag through customs at the Sheremetyevo International Airport.

As he exited customs, following the English signs, he recognized spots from TMZ photos of Ilya and Svetlana last year, when Ilya walked here on his way to his father's funeral.

He checked Ilya's DM again and, after looking at the signs, took a right.

Forty minutes later, Shane was closing the door of Ilya's car as he got inside.

"What took so long?" Ilya asked, already backing.

"The layout's confusing," Shane said, shivering. "I got lost."

"What are you talking about?" Ilya turned up the heat.

"I don't know. It was confusing."

"You manage LAX fine," Ilya said, merging into traffic.

"I can ask for help at LAX," Shane said, rubbing his hands. "What am I supposed to do here? Tell someone, [I want to suck your dick]?"

Ilya laughed. "Love to see you are learning useful Russian."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Yeah. Real useful."

"I think it is useful. Here, learn this one, [Fuck me harder]."

Shane pinned him down with an unamused look, and Ilya laughed harder. "What? Don't tell me you already knew that one."

Shane's silence was all the answer Ilya needed. "[Oh, my God, Hollander]."

Shane's cheeks turned bright red. "It's for the movie."

"No, it's not. I have the same script. Unless your copy's dirtier than mine."

"Whatever," Shane said. "Watch the road, it's snowing."

"Da, I can see that. I have eyes."

Shane moved the vent closer, angling it so the hot air blew directly onto his hands.

"Are you cold?"

"Are you kidding?" Shane laughed. "This place's got nothing on Ottawa."

"Remind me never to visit Ottawa," Ilya said.

“You will in two months.”

“Not if I quit,” Ilya said, trying to hold back a grin and failing.

“You would give up the role of a lifetime just so you don’t have to come to my hometown?”

“Yes.”

“Then I don’t want to see your hometown anymore. Please take me back to the airport. I’m leaving.”

“No, Hollander, stay,” Ilya whined, and his hand landed on Shane’s thigh.

All laughter stopped. Shane stared at Ilya’s hand, shock sparking in his eyes, longing knotting his muscles. The world outside blurred; time stretched, suspended in the heavy silence between them.

Ilya took his hand back.

“I am sorry.”

Shane turned sideways in his seat to face Ilya. He knew that outside, the landscape was passing by—a view he’d probably never see again—but he chose instead to study the man beside him, whose features he’d already memorized.

“I didn’t ask you to stop.”

Ilya looked at him with the corner of his eye, then smiled. “I didn’t want to. Trust me.”

“Are you sure?”

Ilya’s playful mask dropped. His jaw tightened, eyes shadowed by something close to fear.

“Remember that movie we are about to film? The one where the main protagonist has a panic attack in Sochi. Do you remember why?”

Shane sighed and ran a hand over his face. “Right, sorry.”

“We are in Russia now, Hollander. We can’t be-”

“No, I get it. I... I promise I won’t. I mean, I will behave. I swear.”

“Good,” Ilya said. “Thank you.”

Shane nodded and turned his head to watch the passing city outside.

“I wish it were not like this,” Ilya said, startling Shane. “I wish...”

Shane turned to face him.

Ilya gripped the wheel, knuckles white. His strained silence told Shane more than words ever could.

“Hey,” Shane whispered. His hand reached for Ilya instinctively, hesitated mid-air, then withdrew, his own breath catching.

Ilya let out a wounded sound that made Shane’s stomach twist. “I am sorry.”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. This is the culture I’m supposed to be learning about, right? I need to know it all. The good and the... not so good.”

“The horrible,” Ilya corrected.

Shane gave him a sad, lingering smile—one that held more ache than comfort.

Their conversation ended when Ilya turned left and stopped in front of a gate. It reminded Shane of Ilya’s LA home. Shane watched as Ilya clicked the button of a small three-button controller on the center console, and the gate began to slide open.

“Put your cap back on,” Ilya said. Shane complied, fitting the cap on and adding his shades, which felt appropriate. As Ilya drove them up a ramp to an elevated parking lot, Shane saw how tense Ilya looked—his jaw clenched, his eyes locked on the snowy outdoors.

The air had gone cold around them, and Shane shuddered as Ilya stopped and changed gears.

There was a rear camera on Ilya’s car, but Ilya still put his hand on the back of Shane’s seat and twisted around to look behind. Shane had to resist staring at Ilya, yet found himself watching him for longer than his ‘straight rival’ should. He knew he should do better, but the scent of Ilya’s cologne, the careful way he checked mirrors, and the smoothness with which he parked all made it hard to look away.

“What?” Ilya asked, after he’d taken off his seatbelt because Shane was still staring at him.

“Would it be super bad if I kissed you right now?”

Ilya’s whole demeanor shifted. His eyelids dropped, and his face took on that sly smugness it always had when he was turned on. “Very bad. There are cameras.”

“Okay,” Shane said, and got down quickly because he knew he was being unfair to Ilya and because he still didn’t trust his self-control around him.

Ilya helped him take his bag out of the backseat, and when he handed it to Shane, he leaned just a bit closer, not close enough that it would look suspicious, but sufficient that Shane could hear him when he whispered, “There are no cameras in my apartment.”

This was going to be the longest five days of Shane’s life.



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Details: tmz.me/3y1GenT



371

18.5K

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❤️ Shane Hollander lands in Russia ahead of rumored Tierney film.

tmz.me/MNL6vNH



1410

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7.5M



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🌴 Rose Landry and Husband Tom spend the final days of the year in St. Barts, where she's filming romantic comedy "Yours" with close friend Scott Hunter. tmz.me/hnNDQJQ



Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 16: Welcome Home!

Chapter Summary

What begins as playful intimacy deepens into something far more revealing. By the end of the night, both men are forced to face what's been simmering between them—and what it might mean.

Chapter Notes

Buckle in kids!

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

“This is really nice, Ilya,” Shane said as they entered Ilya’s apartment. “Did you buy it like this, or did you-”

Shane didn’t get the chance to finish that sentence before Ilya was on him.

He gasped into it and let Ilya turn his head up to deepen the kiss. Shane was suddenly too hot, and there were far too many layers between them. Ilya was on the same wavelength, it seemed, because he began to tug at Shane’s coat, then the jacket underneath.

Shane refused to let go of his mouth, grabbing and pulling off anything he could while they stayed connected, stopping only when one of them couldn’t help but cup the other’s face in their hands, only to go back to undressing seconds later.

Soon, they were shirtless, and they began to undo each other’s belt buckles. Ilya was faster, and he got down on his knees the moment he’d manage it, unbuttoning Shane’s pants and fly and getting him free. And maybe it was a little painful, the desperate kind of way Ilya handled him, it was all forgiven the second he wrapped his lips around Shane’s cock and took him all the way down in one expert motion.

“Holy shit, Rozanov,” Shane gasped, and Ilya stopped immediately. He stood and put a hand over Shane’s mouth.

Shane stared up at him wide-eyed.

“No noises. And don’t say my name.”

Shane nodded quickly, and Ilya took his hand away.

“I’m sorry,” Ilya said dejectedly.

“It’s okay. I can be quiet. I think.”

“Not helpful,” Ilya said, but stopped to watch Shane’s hands as they returned to his belt buckle and finally got it open. Shane slid his own pants down his legs and began to kick them off while he undid Ilya’s buttons and fly, but met resistance when it reached his boots, causing him to trip.

Ilya caught him by the waist quickly, impeding Shane’s face from meeting the hardwood floor. “Holy shit, Hollander,” Ilya gasped. He helped Shane to his feet and steadied him.

Shane couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled out of him. “Sorry,” he said, and Ilya’s face lit up as he too started laughing. They stood like that, in various states of underdress, laughing in the middle of Ilya’s living room, holding onto each other as their laughing grew more and more boisterous.

At some point, it died down, and Ilya crouched down to help Shane out of his boots, and then finished sliding Shane’s pants all the way down and off him.

Then he took Shane’s hand and guided him down a hallway and opened one of the doors to reveal his bedroom. Shane gasped.

Shane had no other thoughts in his head, other than this felt like a room made for a king.

The entire room was centered around a large bed with a black-and-white striped headboard and crisp white bedding layered with patterned pillows. Matching black nightstands framed the bed, each topped with lamps and small decorative pieces. A geometric accent wall rose behind the headboard, giving the space a structured, contemporary look. Yet there was unmistakable gentleness to it in the dim glow of the chandelier, the textured throw at the foot of the bed, and the subtle contrast between black lacquer and white trim lining the walls.

Near the window, a sleek black desk and chair created a small workspace, softened by sheer curtains and heavier patterned drapes that cast shifting patterns across the herringbone wood floors and muted textiles. A light rug with black accents served as the bed’s resting place, leaving enough space on all sides to ensure no feet would land on the cold floors, but on the soft wool instead. Overall, the air held a sense of stillness, as if time moved differently here.

Shane wished it wouldn’t move at all so he could stay inside these walls with Ilya forever.

Strong arms circled Shane’s waist from behind, and Ilya’s face came to rest on Shane’s shoulder. Shane sighed, closing his eyes as he let his temple rest against his.

“Should I leave you and the room alone?”

Shane scoffed. “Shut up.”

“No, seriously. You never look at me like that.” Shane laughed, and Ilya’s hold tightened. “I am jealous.”

“Let me go, asshole.”

“Nyet,” Ilya said, then proceeded to throw them both onto the bed.

Shane chuckled as he landed on his side on the plush mattress. Ilya’s laughter was darker against Shane’s ear as he kept them tightly close together. Shane noticed Ilya was naked behind him and was already hardening against his back.

He turned in Ilya’s arms and, for a moment, they just lay there, looking into each other’s eyes. The enormity of this moment, of Shane being there in his bed, in Russia, sobering them.

Shane brought a hand up to Ilya’s face and tucked a wisp of a curl that was resting on his forehead.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” Ilya whispered, like he was afraid anything louder would break this moment.

Shane leaned forward and placed a kiss on his nose, and felt it scrunch up as Ilya smiled.

When he lay back down, Ilya let out a quick breath, almost like he was psyching himself up to something.

Shane waited.

“I have been wishing, hoping,” he corrected, “that this would happen.”

He brought a hand up to Shane’s cheeks, eyes trailing the gentle movement of his thumb as he caressed the skin there. He looked transfixed.

“I bought you a ticket. That was the surprise I was going to give you.”

It took Shane a moment to understand what he was referring to. “You mean the surprise you had in your bedroom?”

“I lied,” he admitted. “There was nothing in my bedroom. The tickets were in my suitcase with me.”

Shane let out a quick laugh. “So, you were just fucking with me?”

Ilya shrugged. “I like it when you are good for me.”

“Oh yeah,” Shane swallowed. “What else do you like?”

Ilya rolled them over, so he was leaning on Shane’s chest. “I like everything, Hollander. Every. Single. Thing,” he accentuated each word with a kiss, and by the last word, Shane had his arms tightly around his neck and was pulling him on top of him, legs sliding open to grant him access between them, which Ilya wasted no time in claiming.

They both gasped when their dicks slid together, and Ilya bent down so he could place a kiss on Shane’s neck before he moved to the dip between his collarbones, where his neck ended,

and placed a fluttering kiss there.

“I wish I could leave a mark here,” he said, and ran his tongue over the spot. Shane whimpered, hips canting, which had the effect of sliding them together again. “So, everyone would just look at you and know.”

“Know what?”

“That I am yours,” he said and placed a kiss on his sternum. “That you are mine,” he kissed his right nipple. “That we each other’s,” he kissed the left one.

Shane gasped, back arching as the idea sent a shot of heat down to his dick. “I want that.”

Ilya captured his mouth and bit on his lower lip. “What else do you want?”

“You,” Shane said, and made sure to pull back so he could stare into Ilya’s eyes as he said, “I want you, Ilya.”

Ilya winced as if struck, but he was nodding and already moving off the bed.

“Come, I want to blow you in the shower.”

Shane laughed. “Do I smell that bad?”

“You smell too fucking good. It drives me crazy.”

“Yeah?” Shane asked, following him down the hallway. “You do too.”

“No, not like you.”

“Better.”

Ilya pulled him into the bathroom and closed the door with Shane’s back as he kissed him against it. Then Ilya pulled away and said, “I’ll get the bath started.”

“I thought we were showering.”

“Yes, bath is for after. Now come.”

“I want to,” Shane joked. He worried Ilya wouldn’t get the play on words, but Ilya laughed.

“You’re going to regret you said that, Hollander.”

“Fuck, I am going to-”

“Not yet.”

Ilya gripped the back of Shane's leg and hiked it higher on the sink counter, placing a kiss on his shoulder blade as he thrust into Shane from behind.

"Look at yourself," Ilya said, and saw through the mirror's reflection how Shane attempted to do just that until too soon his face crumbled and his eyes shut closed as his face returned into the crook of his elbow. "It's too much, I am going to-"

"I said, not yet," Ilya said, and hooked a hand on Shane's shoulder, the other pushing down on Shane's lower back as he switched the angle again, and Shane let out a very loud, very high moan.

Like a woman.

Ilya's smile grew -he saw it in the mirror- and he picked up his relentless pace.

They were both sweating, even as they had just taken a shower. The steady outflow of water from the faucet into the now half-full bath drowned out most of the sounds coming from Shane's mouth.

He was trying, Ilya knew. He could see it even now when Shane bit down on his forearm to muffle his rhythmic little Mh, Mh, Mh, with each of Ilya's thrusts. It was the hottest and most terrifying thing Ilya had ever seen.

He felt equally on the brink of cumming and losing his hard-on altogether as his fight or flight kept getting triggered from the reminder of what he was doing and where, and with whom.

Shane's noises got higher suddenly, and Ilya captured the moment when Shane attempted to look at themselves in the mirror again. He knew what was happening before Shane even had the chance to voice it, and he threw his hand over Shane's mouth just as he began to scream, his release coating the sink and the counter, a trickle of it even landing on the mirror.

The sight and feel were too much for Ilya, who bit down on Shane's shoulder as he joined him, trembling through his release, which he emptied inside Shane.

"Sorry," Shane said in between breaths. "I really tried."

Ilya found Shane's eyes in the mirror, brimming with unshed tears, and placed a kiss on top of the bite mark already blooming there. "I know you did."

He slipped out of Shane then, wincing at his already soft dick.

Shane noticed it and frowned, but Ilya turned away from him, taking care of the condom before he returned to Shane and took his hand.

"Come on, the bath is ready."

“Why did you tell me you wouldn’t lie?” Ilya asked moments later as they lay in the bath—Shane’s back against Ilya’s front.

“When?”

“Before. Back in my house. After my father’s funeral, you said, ‘I wouldn’t lie’ and then started crying. Why did you say that?”

Shane sighed. "I think it was because you said you didn't understand why I missed you. I thought you didn't trust me. That you thought I was lying."

"Hollander," Ilya said, grabbing Shane’s chin. "That’s the stupidest thing I’ve heard. I didn’t understand how you could miss me when I was such an asshole. I was upset at myself, not you."

“Oh,” Shane said, and smiled sadly. “I am not sure that’s better.”

“What do you mean?”

Shane huffed. "So I haven’t been communicating as well as I thought. That’s a bummer. I’ve been trying."

Ilya was quiet for a long time, his expression tense. Then he looked into Shane’s eyes and said, “Communicate then.”

Shane began to turn away, shaking his head as if in disbelief.

"No, stop. No running," Ilya said, kneeling in front of Shane. Water sloshed onto the floor. Shane winced.

“Look at me, Hollander.”

Shane didn’t, keeping his eyes down on the water where the bottom part of their bodies was hidden beneath a layer of lavender-scented foam.

Ilya brought his hands to Shane’s face, gently framing his cheeks, and began to turn Shane’s head up, up, up.

Somehow, very reluctantly, Shane let Ilya turn his head to meet his gaze. When their eyes met, fresh tears welled up, revealing the vulnerability he'd been holding back.

"It's okay," Ilya whispered. "You can cry. I maybe cry too. That’s why we’re in bath—no mess."

Shane let out a wet laugh that made the tears spill.

"I want to talk about this," he said, wiping his tears. "It’s been coming, yes, and we keep running."

Ilya caught more tears and rested their foreheads together. "Let's talk about this. Right now. Here. In my bathtub that I bought, hoping to share it with you one day."

Shane scoffed at that. "You're lying."

Ilya kissed him. When he pulled back, he stroked Shane's cheek one more time, not because there were new tears, just because he felt like it.

"If you are not ready, tell me, and then I won't. We won't. But if you agree -and fuck, Hollander, I really hope you do- then I think it will be okay."

"What if you don't like what I say? What if it's not what you expect?" he said, hiccuping.

"Then I will deal with it, and we will deal with it. Like adults."

"I don't know about that. We don't exactly have a good track record."

"Then let's start over," Ilya pleaded.

Shane still looked unsure, and Ilya ran a hand through his hair, enjoying the way it made Shane lean back into it, and his eyes slid closed, like the sensation was too much. Like he couldn't help it.

"Okay," he said. "But not in here."

"Okay," Ilya agreed and stood, offering his hand to Shane, who took it.

Shane stood in the tub, the water hitting just above his knees, and threw his head back, eyes on the ceiling. "Fuck, this is not going to be good."

"Hey," Ilya said, reaching over and wrapping a hand around Shane's waist. "We'll get through it."

Shane let out a shaky laugh. "Oh, that's exactly what I am afraid of."

Ilya watched Shane pace in front of the sofa, each hurried step and clenched fist ratcheting up the unease in the room. Since they'd gotten dressed and moved their conversation to the living room, Ilya had hoped Shane would calm, but with every restless lap, the tension crackled, and Shane only seemed to grow more agitated.

They hadn't even said a word to each other yet.

Ilya had had enough.

"Hollander, sit down."

Shane stopped his pacing and turned to look at him. He swallowed. Then, he took a tentative step towards the sofa, then another.

He sat.

“What did you mean back there?” Ilya asked.

“Back where?”

"Two minutes ago. When you said you feared we'd get through this conversation."

Shane winced. “I- it came out a lot worse than I meant it to.”

“How did you mean it to?”

Shane shot up from the couch.

“Sit, Hollander.”

"I'm not a dog," Shane grumbled, then sat.

Ilya folded his arms tightly over his chest and studied Shane's every move.

“I don’t even know how to start,” admitted Shane.

“Then let me, and you jump in when you feel like it.”

"Okay," Shane agreed.

And then, just like that, Ilya said, “I like you.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 17: Ya tebya lyublyu

Chapter Summary

After years of fear and missteps, Ilya and Shane finally speak the truth that's been burning between them. The next day brings warmth, laughter, and the first fragile steps toward a future neither of them thought possible.

Chapter Notes

I cried writing this chapter so...

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

Shane's head shot up, eyes wide. "You... like me."

Ilya nodded. "Very much. Too much."

"So much it scares you?"

Ilya's face softened. "Is how you feel?"

"I... Yes."

Ilya fought against his smile. He nodded. "We never discussed that night. When you called me your boyfriend."

"So, you mean—" Shane swallowed. "What, do you have a list or something? How do you remember all this?"

"I've been thinking about this for long time."

"I can tell."

"You called me your boyfriend."

"*You called me your boyfriend first.*"

Ilya nodded. "Da, I did, but I didn't think you would understand."

Shane's face fell. "So, you didn't mean it?"

"I like to think I did, but I don't know. I think at that time, maybe, not really."

Shane nodded, wringing his hands, then suddenly looked up. "Wait, at that time? You mean ___"

Ilya was incapable of fighting his grin any longer. He shrugged one shoulder.

Shane scoffed, starting to smile also. "You're such an asshole."

Ilya jumped on top of him then, tackling Shane onto the sofa. He proceeded to pepper Shane's face with kisses until Shane was laughing and fighting to get him off. Ilya stopped when Shane asked him to, but by then, they were both smiling, and Shane was curled facing Ilya, who had made sure he was the one stuck between Shane and the back of the couch, and not the other way around.

"Shane Hollander," Ilya said, bringing a hand to cup the back of Shane's neck. "Will you be my boyfriend?"

Shane smiled, but as Ilya leaned in, Shane pulled away.

Ilya frowned and took his hand away.

"Hollander?"

"This is what I was talking about. In the bathroom."

"This? That I'd ask you to be my boyfriend?"

"Yes—no. Kind of." Shane sighed, sitting up.

Ilya followed.

"Which one is it?"

"What's the point, Ilya?" Shane asked, turning his head to face him.

"What do you mean, 'what's the point'?" Ilya felt anger rise.

"Let's say we become boyfriends. What then?"

"Then we are boyfriends," Ilya was yelling, exasperated. "And is nice. Maybe, one day, we become more. Who knows. I am not thinking that far ahead, Hollander."

"Yeah, well, I am."

All anger left Ilya at once. He whispered, "You are?"

Shane nodded.

For some reason, it made Ilya want to cry. “How far ahead?”

Shane looked down at his hands again.

Ilya placed his hand over both of Shane’s. “There is literally no wrong answer to this question.”

“Yes, there is,” Shane said, and this time, when he stood up from the couch, Ilya didn’t stop him.

“Hollander, I just told you I have no plans. None. You can say one day, and you’ve already won.”

“Is that what you think I want? To win?”

“I don’t know what you want.”

“I want forever,” Shane shouted. “I want forever with you. I don’t want stolen nights and sneaking into each other’s hotel rooms for two hours before one of us needs to leave. I want to wake up together every morning and go to sleep beside you every night. Not for one day. But for all of them. And I don’t want to have to worry about people finding out, I want them to know, I want everyone to know that I-”

He stopped suddenly.

Ilya whispered, the words trembling as emotion flooded his chest. "Hollander."

Shane turned away, his back hunched, as silent sobs made his shoulders quake.

Ilya was in front of him in an instant, grabbing his head and forcing his face up.

“I love you.”

Shane’s eyes were wide, the sudden confession lingering between them. The mix of fear and awe in his expression made Ilya hesitate for an instant before he hugged him as tightly as he could without hurting him, his heart thundering so loudly that Shane had to hear. He kissed Shane’s head and repeated the three words in Russian.

Now Ilya was crying too, though Shane hadn't said it back. He didn't need to—Ilya’s heart had never felt fuller.

Shane shifted below him, and Ilya pulled back just enough to find Shane’s eyes, deep brown and shiny with tears, looking up.

“I love you too,” Shane said with an intensity that almost made Ilya’s knees buckle.

He kissed Shane again, harder, putting all his emotions into it, and Shane went pliant under his touch. He laid Shane out on his couch and helped him take his shirt off, then slid down the shorts he’d borrowed from Ilya. His cock sprang up, already hard and leaking, and Ilya went down to give it attention when he felt Shane’s hands on his chest stop him.

Then Ilya was pushed onto his back. He watched as Shane placed a kiss on his chest, which he'd left naked after their bath, and gasped when he noticed where exactly on his chest Shane kept pressing tiny kisses to.

"Shane," Ilya whispered, and grabbed the sides of Shane's face, pulling him so he could kiss him, but stopping just before their lips touched.

Their eyes met, Shane's tear-stained and still leaking, and Ilya felt Shane bring up a finger, which he used to wipe a tear from Ilya's own cheek.

"You are a mess," Shane said.

"Oh, just me?" Ilya asked, and smiled into the kiss Shane gave him.

"Will you let me make love to you?"

Shane's cheeks flushed. "Here?"

"Is what you want?"

Shane thought about this for a moment, then began to stand.

Ilya didn't say a word as he trailed behind him, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist as they waddled over to his bedroom. He pressed kisses over the splattering of freckles on Shane's shoulders, savoring the way it made Shane gasp and moan from the simple act alone. Shane pushed on the door as Ilya wrapped his hand around his cock, and began to stroke him.

Shane stopped.

"Fuck, Ilya," he moaned, letting his head fall against Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya kissed his temple, the freckles on his cheeks. "Do you like that?"

Shane nodded, biting his lip hard.

Ilya's chest constricted at the sight. "I wish you did not have to hold it in," he said, against Shane's ear. "I wish it could be like New York. I would make sure to open all the windows this time, so they really hear you. Or maybe, I would bend you over the window and fuck you. Give them show."

Shane whimpered and put a hand over Ilya's. "You have to stop, or this is going to end embarrassingly quickly."

Ilya laughed against Shane's shoulder and, after placing one last kiss there, took his hand off Shane, who sighed like he was relieved.

"On the bed, Hollander. On your stomach."

Shane got on the bed, grabbed one of the throw pillows, but before he could throw it on the floor, Ilya said, "Put that one under your hips."

And Shane closed his eyes, bringing the pillow against his chest and hugging it, like the simple idea of it was too much for him.

Ilya walked up behind him, running a hand down his back, moving lower until he found that part of Shane that only he got to touch. Shane whined and arched his back, causing Ilya's finger to push in dry, but Ilya didn't let it get far.

"Do they have lube in Russia?" Shane asked as he put the pillow down on the bed and proceeded to get on top of it, so his hips were supported and his ass was displayed to Ilya like a prize.

And fuck, was it ever.

Ilya moved to the closet and rummaged around, then came back holding a bottle and a pack of condoms, both of which he threw on the bed beside Shane.

"Good job, Russia," Shane said, or began to until Ilya grabbed the globes of his cheeks and spread them before dipping down and running his tongue over his hole. The words became nonsensical mumbling after that.

Ilya took his time using his fingers and his mouth, making sure Shane was open for him, which didn't take long since they had already had sex once before.

When Shane told him he was ready, Ilya flipped him and placed the pillow just below Shane's lower back, folding him as he lined himself up. He bent down to kiss him and pressed their foreheads together. "Ready?" He asked, just like he always did.

Shane's response was to reach between them and grab Ilya's cock, which he positioned at his entrance. It was so hot to sink into Shane and feel his welcoming heat, but also feel Shane's fingers, and know he was holding him there, wanting him there.

Ilya dropped his head against Shane's chest when he bottomed out, and Shane ran a hand over Ilya's back soothingly. He pressed a kiss on Ilya's temple and grabbed his face to bring him in for a gentle kiss.

"You feel perfect," Ilya said against Shane's lips.

Then he began to slide out again, and Shane let out a gasp which turned into a groan as Ilya pushed back in. They moaned together at the next one, and then Ilya began to really move.

"*Fuck, fuck, fuck,*" Shane said through gritted teeth to the beat of Ilya's thrusts. He arched, and Ilya leaned over him. His mother's rosary swung between them as he connected their mouths, drinking in all of Shane's sounds. They tasted sweet, like him, like a million things Ilya wished he could say, that he now knew he could.

"I love you," Ilya said, and Shane made a pained sound, pulling Ilya and crushing him against his mouth as he let out the sound of his release against Ilya's lips. Ilya felt him clench as he came, and Ilya helped him through it, stopping just as he knew it would be too much. He left Shane slowly and removed the pillow from under Shane's hips.

Then he met Shane's eyes, as he lowered himself and stuck out his tongue, which he proceeded to run over the pool of cum on Shane's stomach. Shane's eyes widened, and he went up on his elbow to get a better view. Ilya made a show of slurping and licking, moving up to catch the one that had landed a bit higher on Shane's abs, then went down to Shane's dick, and collected the small drop gathering in his slit. He kneeled over him once he was finished, and licked his lips, using his thumb to catch what had rubbed off on his chin and sucked the thumb into his mouth, closing his eyes as he savored it.

When he opened his eyes, Shane was staring at him like he was the hottest thing he'd ever seen, but also as if he loved him, and it was so obvious now, looking at him. Ilya remembered the way he had caught bits and glimpses of this look over the last months, and had pretended like he knew what it meant, but now, he *knew*, and he couldn't believe it.

He slid beside Shane and placed a hand over Shane's chest, tracing small circles over his heart, before bringing it up and cupping his chin. He was still achingly hard, and Shane was beginning to harden again.

Ilya placed a kiss on Shane's bicep as he lowered himself and pushed on Shane's hips to guide him onto his side. Shane went willingly, catching on quickly, and pushed his ass back, giving Ilya access. Ilya bit on the side of his chest where he could see the outline of his ribs when he put an arm behind Ilya's neck.

After slicking himself up with more lube, Ilya grabbed Shane's leg and pushed it a bit higher, making it easier to enter him.

He did so slowly, watching Shane as his face began to scrunch up, getting lost in the sensation, the pleasure of being entered.

Ilya wanted to see this face for the rest of his life. Knew he would never get used to this. Never get over the honor of being the one who got to make him like this.

"I love you," Ilya said in Russian against Shayne's ribs.

Shane's eyes opened, and they found Ilya.

"How did we let this happen?" He asked, suddenly, too serious.

"I don't know," Ilya answered equally seriously.

Shane looked down at him for a moment longer and reached a hand to stroke Ilya's cheek gently. Ilya's eyes began to sting.

"Make love to me, Rozanov."

And Ilya had to hide his face against Shane's armpit to keep him from seeing his tears as he began to move. He felt raw inside, his heart sore, as if it had been through too much, and Ilya knew it was because it was used to feeling only pain, used to the constant heaviness, so now feeling this light was a shock.

He felt Shayne's fingers run through his hair, and Ilya lifted his eyes, resting his cheek on Shane's ribs as he picked up the pace. Shane's mouth was open as he let out small, *ah-ah-ah's*, but he was staring at Ilya, and then he was smiling even as he moaned.

And Ilya had to bury his face against his armpit again when it all became suddenly too much. Shane's name was on his lips as he came, and Shane rolled his hips while he did, helping to heighten the sensations.

When he finally came down from it, Ilya untangled himself from Shane, noting he had fresh cum on his stomach, and laughed.

"What?" Shane asked, which got another laugh from Ilya.

He accepted the shorts Ilya was handing him, his brow furrowed in confusion. When he realized Ilya meant for him to clean himself with them, he recoiled, making a face of mild disgust.

Ilya rolled his eyes. "The bathroom's so far," he whined.

"I'll go," Shane said, voice gentle but determined. Ilya groaned in exasperation and pushed Shane down when he tried to leave the bed, his eyes narrowing with playful annoyance.

"Oh my God, Hollander. You are so boring."

Then Ilya walked out of the room, only to return moments later wearing the shorts he'd given Shane and carrying a wet towel.

"Thank you," Shane said.

He winced, lips pressed tight, when Ilya passed the towel gently over his hole, and Ilya pressed a soft, apologetic kiss against his inner thigh.

"I am sorry."

"For what?" Shane asked. "It's just a bit sensitive."

"I didn't hurt you?"

Shane shook his head.

"Promise?"

Shane smiled and opened his arms. "Get up here and cuddle your boyfriend, Rozanov."

Ilya's heart felt like it would burst with happiness as he put his head on Shane's chest, exhaling a shaky, relieved breath.

Shane circled his arms around him.

Ilya felt safe for the first time since he'd arrived back in Russia, perhaps for the first time since his mother's death. A deep calm settled over him, like nothing—and no one—else mattered. Nothing mattered—just them.

Shane's fingers drifted over Ilya's hair and back, and Ilya felt a kiss pressed gently into his hair.

"Your phone was buzzing."

"Just now?"

"Yeah, when you went to the bathroom."

Ilya closed his eyes. "It's probably just Svetlana."

"She's still here?"

"She usually leaves when I do."

"Does she have a place here as well?"

"No, no, she stays with her family."

"And you stay here?" Shane asked, but Ilya knew what he was really asking.

He let the question sit in his mind as he found the best way to say it, but realized quickly there was no best way to tell him, so he just said, "I stay here."

"Was your dad your only family?"

Ilya sighed, then shook his head. "I have a brother. And a niece, Anastasia."

Shane noticed the smile on Ilya's face and asked, "Tell me about her."

"So, what am I looking at?" Shane asked later that night. Jetlag meant he'd crashed by 4 pm, and he'd just awoken to the smell of food. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until catching the first whiff. Now, sitting at Ilya's kitchen table, his mouth watered as he eyed the dishes before him.

"This is Pelmeni. Has beef." Ilya said, pointing to a dumpling-like dish. "Over here, we have Borscht, it is soup made from beets. We also have Olivier Salad if you prefer it over the soup. Or you don't have to eat either, it's up to you."

Shane made an ah sound, trying to remember the names.

Ilya smiled, then pointed to the dish that had caught Shane's eye. "There's the Beef Stroganoff. They make it best here. Anastasia loves it."

Shane smiled and reached for the soup.

“Here, let me,” Ilya said, taking it from him.

“I can serve my own soup.”

“I can’t let you serve Russian food yourself when your Russian boyfriend is right here. Feels wrong. Bad vibes.”

Shane laughed. “Who taught you that word?”

“Your mother.”

“Fuck you, Rozanov,” Shane said, but he was grinning.

“Maybe. If you behave.”

Shane’s laughter died. He raised an eyebrow at Ilya. “Oh, yeah?”

Ilya laughed, blush blooming. “Yes, well. Sometimes.”

Shane hesitated, nerves suddenly rising where there had been laughter before. He cleared his throat, running his hands over his pants to dry the sweat he suddenly felt there. “Do you think you’d want to. Now?”

“Now?” Ilya laughed, setting Shane’s soup in front of him. “We just sat down to eat, Hollander.”

“Right. No, I mean,” he exhaled. “Like sometime in the very near future. Maybe.”

Ilya sat, tapping his spoon against Shane’s bowl. The metal on porcelain made Shane wince.

“Eat, Hollander.”

Shane smiled at his soup. Ilya watched him scoop some up and take a sip. Shane’s eyes widened.

“Mhmm,” he said, swallowing. “This is delicious.”

Ilya leaned back, tasting his own soup. “Told you. Russian food is the best.”

“Well, I don’t know about that. All I’ve had is the soup.”

“Trust me. Everything in Russia is better. Better food. Better alcohol. Better athletes.”

“Hottest men,” Shane said, playfully.

Ilya laughed, “Yes, but I think Canada comes in as a very close second.”

Shane laughed and kicked his shin under the table lightly. “Fuck you, Rozanov.”

“Yes, if you behave.”

Shane groaned, shifting in his seat.

“Something the matter?”

“Ilya,” Shane warned.

“Is something wrong with your soup?”

“I’m going to stab you with my spoon if you don’t stop.”

“I do not think spoons do that,” Ilya said, grinning, but he stopped.

“It hurts,” Shane whined. He was reclining on the sofa, one hand on his stomach, the other behind his head, and his feet up on Ilya’s lap as Ilya rubbed them. The television was on behind him, but Shane didn’t care to watch; he didn’t understand a single word of what was being said anyway. He’d just been curious about whether Russian news looked like American/Canadian news.

The answer was yes.

“Is massage. Is supposed to hurt. That is how you know is working.”

“None of the massages I’ve gotten before have hurt.”

“That’s because you had bad massage person.”

“*Ouch*, ” Shane said, and sat up, taking his foot away from Ilya’s grasp.

“Okay, I am sorry. That was my bad,” Ilya said, and moved closer to Shane so he could grab his foot again. He brought it to his face and kissed the bottom of his feet. “I am very sorry for hurting you, Mr. Shane’s foot.”

Shane chuckled. “You’re so gross.”

“Yes, but you love me.”

They both froze at that, until, at the same time, the realization settled over them that there was no need to be scared anymore. This was not a slip-of-the-tongue moment. This was real, and Shane said, “I do,” just because he wanted to, but more importantly, because he could.

Ilya smiled, that soft smile that Shane had now begun to call his “I-love-you” smile.

It was the most beautiful smile Shane had ever seen.

“Okay, now it's my turn. Give me those feet, Rozanov.”

Ilya's smile turned mischievous. “Come get them, Hollander.”

Shane jumped on him, launching into the air. Ilya screamed as Shane landed, and they both fell into a fit of laughter that lasted too long and was only interrupted by sporadic kisses.

“So, is this all we are going to be doing for the next five days?” Shane asked. Once they were cuddling, facing each other and their legs intertwined, he added, “Not that I am complaining, but I thought Jacob said I needed to see Russia.”

Ilya cleared his throat. “Yes, we will. Tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Shane said. “What are we doing?”

“Is surprise.”

Anxiety twisted inside Shane's stomach, uncertain if it was worry or indigestion. "Please tell me," he pleaded. "If you don't, I'll spiral and won't be able to enjoy this time together."

“Spiral? Like... worry, yes?” Ilya asked, guessing from context.

Shane nodded.

“I did not know you did not like surprises,” Ilya said, frowning.

“It's not that I don't like it. I would just rather not have any here. I am—” Shane exhaled. “—not looking forward to leaving this apartment, if I am being honest.”

Ilya pulled Shane's hand, which he had been holding between them, and pressed it to his lips. “What is it that scares you?”

“I am not scared—well, no, I am scared, but not of Russia,” Shane whispered. "More of... I don't even want to say it out loud. It won't happen. I won't let it happen. So, forget I said anything, okay?”

Recognition settled over Ilya's features. He grew quiet and dropped Shane's hand from his mouth, eyes turning sad as he processed the realization.

"I am so happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me to your home and letting me get to know this side of your life. It sucks that I can't touch you; then again, I couldn't do that in America either. Don't worry—I promise I can live without touching you for a couple of hours."

“You can?” Ilya said, overdramatically. “Could have fooled me, Hollander. You really are good actor.”

Shane bumped him into the shoulder. “The best.”

“Second best.”

Shane laughed and pulled Ilya into a kiss that became heated instantly. But as the intensity grew, he pulled back, needing Ilya to really hear him. “I want you to stop apologizing for the things you cannot control. I will not blame you for them, so please don’t apologize, okay? At least not to me.”

“What are you saying? I don’t understand,” Ilya said, still dazed from their kissing.

“I mean, stop apologizing on behalf of Russia. You don’t have to minimize it for my sake. It makes me feel bad, because I know how much you love it. And I already love it, too. So much.”

“You don’t have to love it just because I do.”

“I don’t. I love it because it’s the place where you were born and raised, and where you found your love of acting. That’s what made this possible,” Shane said, motioning between them. “More than that, because it’s the home of the man I love. That is more than enough reason for me.”

Ilya was quiet for a long time. He looked down, jaw tight. So much lingered unspoken behind his eyes.

“Talk to me,” Shane urged, unable to take the silence.

“I won’t quit the movie. I will come to Ottawa.”

Shane let out a happy squeal as he wrapped his arms around Ilya. “You will love Ottawa!”

Ilya sighed happily into Shane’s mouth. “I already do.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 18: Irina Rozanova

Chapter Summary

One quiet moment changes the shape of their relationship forever. By the time they reach their final stop, the path ahead looks brighter—and far more mysterious—than either imagined.

Chapter Notes

Yeah... just... yeah. I don't know what to tell you man. This part fucked me up.

Also this is my BDAY POSTTTT happy bday to me <3 im beyond grateful to you all.
Your bookmarks comments and kudos are the best birthday gift I could ever hope for :)

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

Shane instantly understood why Ilya was so adamant about keeping their destination a secret. Why he'd been a shadow of the man Shane knew all morning -distant as he sipped his coffee, letting opportunities slip by for anything sexual, as though he was too distracted.

Now, it all made sense.

The Moscow cemetery was hushed under thick snow, softening all edges and muting all sound. Frost-laced birches lined the narrow path where Shane walked behind Ilya, the branches bowing under winter's weight, while the sharp, metallic cold of January filled the air.

Much too soon, Shane stood quietly before the grave of Ilya's mother.

It looked lovingly tended. Beneath the fresh layer of snow, Shane could see the neat arrangement of stones. Her name—Irina Rozanova—was visible. There were wilted, but thoughtfully chosen flowers, and the small memorial lantern had been recently cleaned. It was clear someone, likely Ilya, had taken great care to preserve her memory. Shane felt that quiet devotion settle in his chest as he lingered there.

He watched in quiet reverence as Ilya bent down, his knees pressing into the snow, and placed an arrangement of red carnations on top of the grave. Shane now felt embarrassed at having assumed Ilya had gotten the flowers for him.

Ilya counted the carnations, smiled at the bouquet, then pulled one free and offered it to Shane, whose confusion shifted to shock.

He took it with trembling fingers.

“Now is good number,” Ilya said, as though it was supposed to mean something to Shane. Shane nodded anyway and placed the flower against his nose. It smelled of cinnamon and fresh cloves. Shane slipped the flower into his overcoat pocket, careful not to hurt its petals as he did so.

Ilya turned back to his mother’s grave, his smile slipping.

And Shane crouched down beside him, though he made sure to keep his distance.

Ilya stroked the side of the headstone reverently with his hand as he spoke to her. Shane, hearing his own name, gave a little wave at the headstone. Ilya chuckled wetly, shook his head, and murmured something too quiet for Shane to hear. Then Shane caught a single word—Lyubov', the most wonderful word Shane had ever heard come from Ilya’s mouth—and realized Ilya was introducing him to her, explaining who Shane was and why he was here—and at once, it was just too much.

One thing to know about crying in subzero weather is that the tears don’t fall the same way. They thicken, sting, and cool instantly on your cheeks, sometimes catching on your lashes before they can drop. Shane knew this. He hoped he could stop them, but he was helpless when he saw Ilya put both hands on the headstone and press his forehead against it as he would his mother’s own, eyes slipping shut.

Shane had done the same to his father’s headstone too many times before, and Shane knew, just from that, that Ilya had lost her as a child, just as Shane had his father.

Only now, as an adult, Ilya had lost his other parent, too.

He wondered if Ilya would take him to meet his father as well. Shane wished he would. He had a question he needed to ask the man.

Finally, while Shane had been wiping furiously at his tears, Ilya turned. There were small drops of frozen water on his lashes.

“My mother’s name is Irina. She died when I was twelve. I... wanted you to meet her.”

Shane smiled warmly at him and asked in a whisper, “Does she know?” Because he thought the answer would be yes, but he needed to be sure before he said something Ilya didn’t want him to.

Ilya nodded.

Shane smiled, appeased, and then he turned towards her gravesite. “I am Shane. It’s very nice to meet you.”

Ilya made a pained noise beside him, and Shane reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder. He tried to make it look manly, like a brotherly touch, and it must have looked that way, or maybe Ilya was too starved for the touch he didn't care, because he let it stay there as Shane continued.

"I don't know how much he told you, but you have a wonderful son. He's the kindest person I have ever met. And he is so smart, smarter than he even gives himself credit for. He is a great actor and selfless to a fault. As for me," he said, with a shrug. "I am nowhere near his level, in most things. Except for acting," he said, and Ilya let out a chuckle. "I hate to say he's second to me on that."

Ilya scoffed. "You wish, Hollander."

"It's true!"

"Don't lie to mother."

"I am not," he said, and turned to the gravesite. "Ask my father, he'll tell you. His name is David Hollander. He's in Canada, but you guys can meet, I am sure, since you'd both be in heaven together. There are no geographical boundaries there, right?"

He turned to Ilya, seeking reassurance, and saw Ilya's eyes had gone wide and his face had taken on a slightly ashen color. Shane froze. "I'm sorry, I didn't... I was only joking," he said quickly, turning back to Irina's grave. "I am sorry if I said something insensitive just now. I am new to Russian culture. I will get better. I promise."

"Your father is dead?"

Shane turned to Ilya. "What?"

"I didn't know he was dead," Ilya said. His eyebrows were furrowed, but his eyes were still wide; he looked... horrified.

"Oh," Shane said. "Yeah, but this is not about my father. I... don't want to make this about him," he said, and squeezed once on Ilya's shoulder before he returned his attention to the gravesite.

What he had told Ilya wasn't entirely untrue, but it wasn't the whole truth either.

The whole truth was, he didn't like to talk about his father with anyone outside of his mom because he felt ashamed, mostly of himself.

He'd begun to forget his father—not the fact that he'd had one, not the warmth or the certainty that he'd been a wonderful, steady, endlessly doting presence. But the details were slipping. The sound of his voice when he called Shane in for dinner, the way he laughed at his own bad jokes—those had blurred at the edges, worn thin by how many times Shane had tried to summon them back. All that remained were the video recordings, and even those felt wrong now, warped by time. He no longer knew which memories were real and which were inventions his mind had stitched together to fill the gaps. And the knowledge that he would

never make new memories with him... that was a thought he tried not to touch for too long, because it hurt in a way that felt bottomless.

"I just want you to know, Irina, I'm not the reason he isn't here with you in Russia," Shane said. "It was not me, blame the Yankees."

This should have made Ilya laugh. Instead, Ilya placed a hand on Shane's neck and slid cold fingers beneath his scarf. He began twisting the overgrown wisps of Shane's hair around his finger. Even as Shane's tension drained with the soothing caress, the touch made him shiver.

Ilya wasn't looking at his mother's gravesite anymore, and his gaze burned the side of Shane's face.

Shane exhaled, the humor gone. "I love your son—more than I've ever loved anyone—and if he'll have me, I want my whole life beside him. I will cherish him, fight for him, remind him of his worth every time he forgets, because he is the best thing that's ever happened to me, and he's made me better just by existing. I want every morning, every night, every victory and failure with him, and whether it's now or ten years from now, I'll still be here wanting the same thing—him, for as long as he'll have me."

Shane turned then and saw how Ilya's bottom lip trembled as Ilya struggled to hold himself together.

"And I'll remind him it's safe to fall apart and ask for help when it gets too hard, because he's not alone—not anymore. And if he accepts me, I'll make sure he never feels alone for the rest of his life."

Then Shane reached out and took Ilya's hand in his.

It took a moment for Ilya to make sense of all the English words, and even longer to realize Shane had placed a small round object in his palm. He opened it to find three interlocking rings of yellow, white, and rose gold.

A wedding band.

Shane swallowed hard, the silence pressing on his ribs. "I was going to wait," he blurted, voice unsteady. "But being here with your mother right here with us—it felt like this was it." His hands shook as he folded Ilya's fingers back over the ring, closing them gently, desperately. "I don't need an answer," he whispered, breath catching. "I don't even want one. Not now. I just..."

He glanced back at the grave, his throat tightening as he spoke to her instead. "I love your son so much I bought the ring a month after our first night together," he admitted, voice trembling with the confession. "And I almost threw it away more times than I want to admit." The words hung in the cold air—raw, unguarded—and he startled when Ilya let out a small, shaky laugh behind him.

Encouraged, he turned back to find Ilya's eyes. In a whisper, he told him, "I know where we are. I know you can't come out to the world—not here, maybe not ever—and I'm not asking

you to. I'm okay with that."

Ilya's mouth parted, the start of a protest on his tongue, but Shane shook his head fast—almost frantic. "Please... just let me," he said, the words tumbling out on a shaky breath. "I've been planning this for two years, and if I stop now, I swear I'm going to explode."

Ilya's mouth shut, and he shook his head slowly, but there was a small smile on his lips.

"I have been hiding this part of me from the public for so long, it feels like it will kill me sometimes. But then we went six months barely talking to one another, and then that night at the club... I thought I had lost you for good. I was such a dick."

Ilya's eyes widened, and Shane blushed, "Sorry," he told Irina quickly, covering his mouth. "I don't usually curse."

"Stop lying to my mother," Ilya joked, and something softened inside Shane at the sound. Ilya looked better, not as pale, more relaxed, like he was slowly coming to terms with this thing Shane had just thrown at him.

And it wasn't a yes, but it was progress.

Shane's voice cracked as he repeated, "I'm sorry," but this time his eyes were locked on Ilya's, unblinking, nowhere else to run. "The pain of hiding was nothing—nothing—compared to the pain of thinking I'd lost you, and I can't survive that again." His breath shook, white in the cold. "We can hide forever if we have to. I don't care. As long as I get you in the quiet of our home, and it's your lips I get to kiss every night before I fall asleep and every morning when I wake up."

"Shane," Ilya said, his voice sounding rough from the strain of having to hold all his emotions, and Shane wanted to lean over and kiss him, but instead he let go of Ilya's hand, which stayed as a fist over his lap.

"I don't need an answer today. Just promise you will think about it."

Ilya looked at him for a long time, the breeze choosing that moment to pick up and ruffle the small bits of hair visible under Ilya's beanie, showing them with fresh snowflakes, which a large tree branch had been protecting them from. And Shane was struck again by this man, by how beautiful and striking he looked, and how lucky he was to even be in a position where this wonderful human could be his husband one day.

Ilya's eyes were soft and unreadable, and he wasn't moving, hadn't said another word.

Shane hesitated for a single second—one that felt like it stretched into forever—before gently uncurling Ilya's fist. He slipped the ring from his palm and tucked it into the front pocket of Ilya's jacket, tapping the fabric once as if sealing the promise there. "I'll wait for your answer," he said quietly, steady despite the tremor in his chest. "I just needed you to know where I stand. I don't want you to think there's even a shadow of doubt on my end. I'm in this with you. You're it for me, Rozanov. No one else will ever come close. "

He stepped back, the cold air rushing into the space between them. "I'll leave you and your mom to talk. I am sure you two have a lot to discuss. Thank you for letting me be a part of this moment."

Then, he turned to the headstone once more, before he vowed, as low as he could, as was custom in the Japanese culture he had half a claim to. "It was lovely meeting you, Irina."

Then he left.

Shane walked toward the car as fast as his shaking legs would carry him, the cold clawing at his lungs. From inside his coat, he pulled the carnation he'd hidden there, freeing it with trembling fingers before lifting it to his nose. The air was sharp with winter—cold, damp, edged with a kind of pain that felt too familiar—but the flower's cinnamon-and-clove warmth bled through it, softening the hurt just enough to allow him to breathe. It wasn't a scent anyone would ever bottle, nothing polished or marketable, but Shane wished he could trap it forever. He'd name it Ilya Rozanov and lock it away in his safe beside his most precious things, knowing it would be the rarest, most priceless piece he would ever claim as his own.

Ilya was tearing through the apartment, frantic and flustered, his wild energy making Shane's heart race with both anxious worry and a trace of helpless amusement.

Shane stayed by the door, keeping out of the way after one accidental collision nearly caused World War III.

The first war, when Ilya called him a bad actor. The second was that day at Ilya's, when Shane stormed out, and they hadn't spoken for almost four months.

Shane wasn't ready to see a repeat performance on any of those.

They hadn't discussed that moment yesterday at the cemetery. Ilya had gotten into the car a long time after Shane and asked, "Are you hungry?" and that had been that, which Shane was honestly happy with.

Ilya still had the ring. The question remained, open-ended and suspended in time. A 'maybe' that filled Shane's chest with hope.

"Hollander." Ilya's voice came as he rounded the hallway, and Shane stood straighter at the sound.

"What did I do?"

Ilya's eyebrows furrowed. "What you didn't—what are you doing standing there?" As he finished, he pulled Shane into a hug, tucking his head into Shane's neck. "I am sorry," he said against the skin. "It's- I am very stressed."

"I can see that," Shane said, melting into the hug. "How can I help?"

"You can't, or maybe you can." Ilya exhaled, stepping back. "I can't find this bag. I left it in the living room last night—now it's, like, invincible."

"Invisible. And it's under the kitchen table."

Ilya's eyes widened. "Is where?"

"I saw you bring it into the kitchen when you made breakfast this morning. Then, I almost tripped over it when I went to get the eggs from the fridge. So, I pushed it under the kitchen table to keep it out of the way."

Ilya let out a relieved laugh. "Слава Бору! [Thank God.]"

He returned moments later with the black duffel bag. "Okay, we're ready now. You have your phone?"

"Yes."

"And your passport?"

"Are we flying somewhere?"

"No, but it's good to carry ID."

"I brought my driver's license from LA. It's in my wallet."

"And where is your wallet?"

Shane's cheeks flushed. He held up a hand and ran to the bedroom.

"Okay, let's go," he said, returning, wallet now in his pocket.

Shane's fingers hovered over the handle, startled when Ilya stopped him. The warmth of Ilya's hand over his sent a jolt of anticipation up Shane's spine.

Shane turned to face him.

The kiss hit Shane like an electric surge, stealing the air from his lungs and making his body tremble with longing.

"This will be the last kiss," Ilya said, against his lips. "For many hours."

Shane let go of the handle and threw his arms around Ilya's neck, bringing their mouths together properly. Ilya groaned into it. Shane heard the loud thud of the duffel bag as it landed on the floor, moments before he felt Ilya's hands cup his ass and pull him up.

Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist as he felt his back slam against the door. Shane moaned, a sound Ilya swallowed as he sucked Shane's tongue into his mouth.

Ilya's lips left him two seconds later, but only to move down to his neck, licking and sucking lightly on the sensitive skin. Shane stretched it to give him more access and sank his fingers

into Ilya's hair, pushing his face closer.

"Holy shit," Shane gasped. "We're never going to leave if we keep this up."

"I know," Ilya said against Shane's skin, before crashing their mouths together again.

He began to slide Shane down until Shane's feet were on the floor. Then, he planted one last kiss on Shane's already swollen lips before pressing their foreheads together.

They stayed locked in a breathless standoff, foreheads touching, eyes squeezed shut, until Shane finally pushed at Ilya, hearts still thudding in unison. Ilya yielded, a rueful smile bending his mouth.

He cleared his throat. "Alright, Hollander. Time to put those Oscar-winning skills to use."

Ilya bent down and picked up the bag, and Shane took a deep, shuddering inhale and rolled his neck in much the same way he did when he was trying to get into character. He shook out his arms and closed his eyes for one, two, three breaths. Then he moved forward and planted one last lingering kiss on Ilya's mouth before turning to twist the doorknob.

"How far away is it?"

"Not far," Ilya said, hauling the bag higher on his shoulder.

Shane shoved his gloved hands deeper into his coat pockets and tucked his face so only his eyes peeked out over his thick scarf. He'd told Ilya Russia had nothing on Ottawa. But fuck, he'd been wrong. Maybe it was just that Canadians didn't walk this much. Here, the streets teemed with bodies, and he had to dodge aside so people could squeeze past.

Ilya's neighborhood in winter looked like a dormant ice giant, in a way that made zero sense and total sense at once. He commented as much, and Ilya chuckled.

"This neighborhood is what we call a микрорайон."

"Microrayon," Shane repeated, causing Ilya to smile softly at him.

"Da. They were built not so long ago, during the Soviet Era. There was a problem. Too many people, not enough houses."

"Oh," Shane said, catching on. "That's why they all look the same." He looked up at the building they were passing—a white concrete apartment, maybe six to nine stories high. It looked the same as the one in front of it and the one next to it. All except for Ilya's building. Apart from being gated and more private, it looked more modern, though not architecturally different. It just had some paint and new windows—cosmetically enhanced to justify the higher selling point.

“Da,” Ilya said. “It’s meant to function as its own community. There are schools, grocery stores, gas stations—everything we need. See?” Ilya pointed out a small shop Shane wouldn’t have guessed was a pharmacy if Ilya hadn’t told him.

A gust of wind then flew past them, causing both men to shudder.

“Are there many microrayons in Russia?”

“Da,” Ilya said, smiling at Shane, an evident delight in his face at hearing it called by its name. “They are all over.”

Shane nodded. “So, did you grow up around here?”

Ilya pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He hadn’t smoked since Shane arrived—Shane would have smelled it even if Ilya tried to hide it.

“Please, don’t.”

“Just one,” Ilya said, already taking it out and placing it on his lips.

Shane exhaled, staring straight ahead as Ilya lit the cigarette, shaking his head as the first whiff of smoke drifted over.

“You are going to feel really bad when I get cancer and die because of you.”

Ilya chuckled around his cigarette as he put the lighter and pack back in his pocket.

Shane walked beside him in tense silence for another block, then he turned, suddenly remembering. “You never answered my question.”

“Which one?” Ilya said, exhaling a puff of smoke with his lips pursed away from Shane. “You ask too many. Hard to keep track.”

“Ha, ha.” Shane rolled his eyes. “The one about your childhood home. Was it around here? In one of these buildings?” Shane suddenly stopped in his tracks, eyes wide. “Please tell me I am not on my way to meet your family right now.”

“What? No, of course not.”

Shane exhaled in relief, falling into steps beside Ilya once more.

“So, where are you taking me then?”

“See? So many questions.”

Shane’s cheeks flushed, grinning into his scarf as Ilya did the same.

He took a drag of the cigarette and let it out.

“My childhood home is not around here. I bought this place after I won the Oscar. It felt appropriate. Plus, with my brother moving back in, it felt,” he clicked his fingers together.

“What’s the word?”

“Crowded?”

“Yes. Very much so.”

“So, where are we-”

“We’re here,” Ilya said, cutting him off. Shane looked around at a parking lot crowded with cars and a small hill that sloped to a clearing among pine trees, blocking his view beyond. People walked through the lot, some just out of their cars. Dogs ran around. Shane felt an intruder watching the happy locals' faces, not so different from Ilya’s own, lit with easy smiles.

“What is this place?”

Ilya’s smile only grew. “You will see.”

Shane’s first hint at what might be waiting came in the form of two men with fishing rods and a bucket of live bait. Worms writhed inside them. Shane tried not to make a face at the disgusting sight. There were a lot of people, but only a few more rods here and there. The rest seemed like them—one person carrying a large duffel, maybe a backpack. All were lost in the excitement of whatever they were about to do.

Rods meant fishing, and fishing meant water. So, were they going to a pond? Maybe a lake? Did Moscow have lakes?

Just then, someone bumped Ilya, and they exchanged polite words before the man and his family moved on as if nothing at all strange had happened.

Shane frowned, then his eyes roamed around to the rest of the people around them.

“They don’t recognize you,” Shane noted.

Ilya flicked his cigarette butt into the old snow crunching beneath their feet.

“They do,” he said, slipping his hand back into his jacket pocket. “That man just said, “Sorry, Rozanov.”

“He did?” Shane asked, frowning. How had he missed that?

“That girl over there,” Ilya said. “By the tree to your left.”

Shane looked and saw a young girl, maybe 13 but not older than 15, who quickly looked away. She turned to her friend, a young boy, and began to run away, both giggling. “She has been looking at you since we arrived.”

Shane watched them go, noting how the older boy glanced back, his cheeks reddening to see Shane still watching.

“Is he-”

“It seems like that,” Ilya said, and he sounded angry.

“Ilya,” Shane started, ready to laugh at him for being jealous of a kid.

“He’s being too obvious.”

“He’s a kid,” Shane said, laughing slightly.

“He’s an idiot.”

“Ilya,” Shane said. “He is just a kid. He doesn’t know better.”

“He should. Someone should have told him. Protect him.”

“Maybe his parents don’t care about it. Maybe they accept him as he is.”

Another man, carrying a fishing rod, passed behind them. Ilya’s mouth tightened. He waited for the man to leave, then said, “I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

Shane nodded, now walking over the spot the boy had been on when he’d looked back, right at the point where the hill they had been walking on reached its peak.

Shane stopped abruptly.

“Holy shit, Rozanov.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 19: Anastasia

Chapter Summary

A frozen lake, a pair of skates, and a moment of joy give way to the sharp edge of family tension. And as the crowd prepares for a hockey match, the night teeters between healing and hurt.

Chapter Notes

Sweet filler goodness to lighten the heart before we go back down the angst hole. So, hope you enjoy :)

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

A woman bumped into Shane when he abruptly stopped.

Ilya apologized to the woman on behalf of Shane and tugged on Shane's sleeve, prompting him to start walking again. "Sorry," Shane told the woman, knowing she probably didn't understand.

Ilya shook his head. "These fucking Americans. Can't take them anywhere."

"Hey," Shane whined, bumping his shoulder, and slipped into his now-barely their Canadian accent, "Who are you calling an American, eh?"

Ilya laughed.

"No, but, seriously," Shane continued, eyes going back to the scene before him, awestruck. "Ilya, this place is—"

"I know," Ilya said, with a private smile.

This was obviously the community's winter gathering place.

A wide pond, frozen solid by the cold, stretched out beneath them. Its surface was busy with movement. People of all ages did different things on it. Some had come out to skate—some glided smoothly, others stumbled and laughed, arms flailing for balance. Children zipped past in bursts of energy while adults moved more cautiously, bundled in coats and scarves.

Some stood chatting or watching around the edges of the lake, their breath visible in the crisp air. A few sat on benches, resting or lacing up skates. Others, like the men Shane had seen,

were farther left, where the lake was still covered by a thin layer of snow. There, people sat on upside-down buckets, ice fishing.

A group of men and women gathered at the back, in the middle of the lake. They set up what looked like two goal posts as another began handing out hockey sticks.

Bare trees framed the scene, buildings peeking through, hinting at the city beyond. The whole moment felt communal—joyful, chilly, and alive with winter's charm.

And somehow Shane was here, sharing this perfect slice of their lives with them.

He felt suddenly overcome with gratitude. He ached to reach over and hug Ilya, kiss him silly to show how thankful he was, how honored. But instead, he just said, "Thank you for bringing me here."

And when Ilya looked at him, stopping beside an unoccupied bench, there was a softness there that made Shane's heart pulse, aching to answer it, but instead, Shane looked quickly away, stepping back like distance could protect him from feeling too much, even though they had been a perfectly normal distance before.

Ilya dropped the bag onto the bench. The loud thud snapped the air, drawing every surrounding gaze, and Shane flinched, staring at his shoes, shoulders rounding as he wished to shrink from the sudden attention.

Ilya sat down on the bench and patted the spot beside him several times, indicating for Shane to sit. Shane took the seat next to him.

Ilya turned to the duffel and began to rummage around in it. There was something going on with Ilya's face; he was biting on his lip, eyebrows furrowed, like he was trying very hard not to grin and failing miserably. He kind of looked constipated, a thought which made Shane chuckle.

"What are you up to, Rozanov?"

Then Shane gasped because Ilya had pulled out a pair of white, unmistakable, and very well-loved figure skates.

"No. fucking. way." Shane's words were accentuated by incredulous laughter as he took the skates from Ilya.

Ilya was helpless against his fight anymore, and his face broke out in a radiant, proud smile. "I thought you didn't like surprises."

"How the fuck do you have these, Rozanov?" Shane asked, giddy with excitement. He was shocked because Ilya was holding his skates. These were the ones that had gotten him a full scholarship to Toronto Metropolitan University, where he studied acting and won many trophies. His mother liked to display all the trophies on the same wall as his Oscar, as if his FISU World University Games gold medals could ever compare.

"I have ways."

Shane laughed and accepted the figure skating socks Ilya handed him, shaking his head at this ridiculous, beautiful man. And to think Shane had gone the last year asking himself if his feelings were one-sided. He wanted to kick himself in the head for his stupidity.

He saw Ilya pull out skates of his own—hockey skates, Shane noted—and began to take off his boots. Shane made sure to put his socks and skates on quickly as the cold, negative-degree air hit his exposed feet.

Shane loved how it all came back instantly, like muscle memory. He secured his heel back, centered the tongue, and laced with 'hourglass' tension—loose at the toes, tightest at the ankle for heel lock, and slightly softer at the top for movement. He crisscrossed over hooks for support, finished with a double knot, and tucked the ends away.

He sat up once finished, and found Ilya was staring openly at him.

“What?”

“You did that so... pretty.”

Shane’s cheek reddened, and he scoffed. “Shut up and lace up, you’re going to get frostbite.”

Ilya did, using almost the same method as him, but in a much more brusque and ‘manlier’ way, and suddenly Shane understood what Ilya had meant.

Once finished, Shane went to stand, but Ilya said, “Wait, not yet.”

Shane frowned when he noticed Ilya was pulling out his phone. “Are we waiting for someone?”

Ilya raised one hand as he put his phone to his ear, signaling Shane to be quiet. But it wasn’t just the gesture. Ilya’s face went ashen as he stood, stepped over the stool, and walked on his skates away from Shane. He pressed the phone closer and spoke in rapid, hushed Russian, mouth close to the mouthpiece. That alone made Shane keep his lips tightly shut.

Ilya sounded angry, even though he looked terrified. He kept shooting Shane looks that made the hair on the back of Shane’s neck stand on end. Something ugly twisted inside his stomach, making his hands sweat inside his gloves.

He caught “Lana” somewhere in the conversation and figured he was talking to her, which only worsened his anxiety. It was never good to get a call from your publicist, especially when it made you react like that.

Shane stole a look around, expecting to find all eyes and a multitude of cameras pointed at them, but once more, the world moved around them as if they weren’t there. Not even a phone in sight.

Ilya cursed, and he ended the call.

“Is everything okay?”

Shane asked, and Ilya landed on the bench beside him, Ilya's back to the lake. He put his hands over his face and leaned forward, elbows on his knees. Shane almost reached out to run a soothing hand over his back, but stopped himself. His fingers curled into a fist at his side.

"I wanted you to meet my niece," Ilya said, through gritted teeth. "So, I asked Svetlana to get her from my brother's house and bring her here."

"And she can't make it?"

"No, she is coming."

Shane frowned. "Okay?"

Ilya let out a harsh exhale and turned his face up to the sky.

"My brother Alexei decided to tag along. Svetlana couldn't get rid of him, not without making it worse. And now-" He cursed in Russian, his eyes sliding closed as he mouthed Russian words up to the sky.

"I take it you two don't get along?"

Ilya nodded. "You could say that, yes."

"Is he like... Will my being here make it worse?"

Ilya opened his eyes, and he focused them on Shane. There was a bitterness there Shane had never seen before, and it scared him.

Ilya's voice was as rough as he said, "I won't let it. I promise you, Shane."

And suddenly, Shane's insides were as cold as the water below that frozen lake.

Anastasia was probably the most beautiful little girl Shane had ever seen.

A petite blonde with curly hair, rosy cheeks, bright blue eyes, and a wide smile that reminded Shane so much of Ilya it hurt.

The moment Svetlana parked, the back door opened. A bundled-up little girl jumped out and ran to her uncle, who was waiting outside with his arms open. Shane watched, heart aching, as Ilya bent down just as she reached him and picked her up for a tight hug. He murmured sweet words in Russian into her hair as he kissed it, and then she pushed him back.

She spoke quickly and energetically, her eyes widening and scowling as she shared an animated story Shane did not understand.

Ilya's response was equally animated, in which Shane recognized all of two words, Wow, and his own name.

Shane looked at Ilya, eyebrows furrowed, a clear question on his face. Ilya just laughed, joined by Anastasia's equally delighted, although higher, laughter.

"What are you saying about me, Rozanov?"

Ilya laughed and put his fingers over his mouth as he looked into Anastasia's eyes. She did the same, and they giggled.

And now Shane understood the phrase Rose liked to throw around whenever she was around Tom and babies, because if Shane had had any ovaries, they too would be hurting right now.

The car's front doors opened, and at once, Ilya's smile dropped. Like someone had turned off a switch. Shane noticed how he held his niece closer to his chest, as if afraid she would be taken from him. Shane felt a fierce protectiveness for them that made him angry.

Ilya held Anastasia closer, watching his brother exit the car with eyes fixed on Shane. Alexei's lip curled as he stepped forward and asked, "Who the fuck is this?"

"You did not have to come," Ilya replied, gripping Anastasia tighter to hide his shaking hands. She was turned toward her father, her little fingers twirling the hair at the base of Ilya's neck, a calming habit she always showed with him. Alexei disliked it, but Ilya cherished every moment.

"She stays with me. I won't let you fill her head with American bullshit."

"Language," Ilya said evenly.

He could see the muscles bunch in Shane's jaw, his shoulders pulled tight in defensive anticipation. The air between them grew heavier, and despite the language barrier, the hostility radiated clear as day.

"I'll talk however the fuck I want," Alexei snapped, turning to his daughter. Ilya's grip tightened.

"Come, my dear. Let's get your skates on."

Anastasia squirmed in Ilya's arms, signaling she wanted to get down. He hesitated, holding her close for a moment before finally loosening his grip, bending at the waist, and gently setting her on her feet.

As Anastasia slipped from his arms, Ilya felt an ache settle deep inside. He clenched his fists, desperately masking the hollow pain and searching the face of the only person who could

ease that ache.

Shane was watching him, concern plain on his face.

"My brother is very welcoming," Ilya said dryly as Svetlana approached. "As you see."

Shane frowned. "Does he speak English?"

Ilya shook his head.

"Good," Shane said. "I didn't want to talk to him anyway."

Ilya cracked a small smile at that, then turned to Svetlana, who had placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry for him. I tried."

"I know you did," Ilya said, wrapping her into a hug.

She moved to Shane next, and Shane hugged her tightly.

"Are you liking Russia?"

Shane's cheek flushed. "Oh, I am really liking Russia."

Ilya let out a snort and shoved him.

Svetlana's soft smile flickered between them, but the warmth made Ilya's gut tighten with dread, a harsh reminder of boundaries that could not be crossed. He cleared his throat, stepping away from Shane—Shane's practiced mask not quite hiding the sting of rejection that hit just beneath his skin.

"Did you bring them?" Ilya asked.

Svetlana nodded and switched to Russian. "You don't have to, Ilya. I can stay with Shane. I'll make sure Alexei doesn't—"

"No," Ilya said, voice rough. "I will handle this."

Just then, Alexei slammed the trunk of the car closed. Anastasia, now wearing her skate guards, followed behind him toward Ilya. As soon as she was close, Ilya quickly picked her up.

"You'll hurt yourself."

She made a face at him. "You're walking on your skates."

"Yes, but I'm old. It doesn't matter if I hurt myself."

"Yes, it does," she insisted. He kissed her cheek, which she giggled and wiped away. Her eyes landed on Shane's skates.

“What about Shane? What if he hurts himself?”

Ilya thought about this for a moment because if they had been in America, he would have asked Shane to get on his back and somehow mustered the strength to get them both safely to the lake.

Having them both together was almost unbearable for him.

“Hollander,” Ilya said, catching Shane’s eyes, who had been looking at the two of them with doe eyes. “Anastasia wants to know why I picked her up to keep her from hurting herself, but I am not picking you up.”

Shane looked shocked at first, but then his face softened, and he smiled at her.

“I am okay. Thank you.”

Ilya gasped as Anastasia glared. "You said he didn't speak Russian."

He didn’t. But somehow, he just had.

Ilya watched Shane with so much awe and love that Shane had to look away to resist leaning in for a kiss.

"Wow, Shane," Svetlana said, slinging an arm around him. "You really do like Russia." Her eyes flicked to Ilya, making her meaning clear.

“Uncle?”

Ilya finally tore his eyes away to face her. Behind her, Alexei stood, glaring at Shane with a scowl.

A wave of cold panic swept through Ilya, leaving his insides numb as he stared at Alexei.

"Heard there's a hockey game," Ilya said, setting the trap.

Alexei's scowl became a smug grin. "Finally going to face me like a man?"

Alexie’s smile turned vicious, and Ilya had a flashback of Shane’s face, also twisted in much the same way when he played Roman.

He shuddered.

“Bring it on, asshole.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 20: Light the Lamp

Chapter Summary

A fierce lake-hockey showdown cracks open years of rivalry and leaves Ilya with an unexpected sense of belonging. But as the night unfolds on the ice, warmth, wonder, and old wounds collide in ways he never saw coming.

Chapter Notes

Semi-canon event because I miss hockey Ilya too much!

Also, we are almost at the end of this story. Just a few more chapters to go. Feeling Kind of emo rn tbh.

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

Ilya gained control of the puck and immediately pushed it into open ice. He kept his strides short and fast, pulling the puck across his body to keep it out of reach. The defenseman in front of him, a stocky man twice his age, hesitated just long enough for Ilya to slip past on the inside.

Ilya angled toward the slot, reading the goalie's positioning. The glove side was slightly exposed, and Ilya adjusted his grip, preparing for a quick release. He shifted the puck from backhand to forehand, setting up the shot he'd practiced a thousand times.

Behind him, he registered the sound of skates cutting hard into the ice — Alexei closing the gap. Ilya tried to accelerate, but he was already mid-stride, committed to the shooting lane. He pulled the puck in tight, ready to fire-

The hit came a split second before he could release. His brother drove a shoulder into Ilya's side, a clean but heavy body check that knocked him off balance instantly. His skates slid out from under him, and he went down hard, the puck bouncing loose and rolling toward the corner.

Ilya lay on the ice, catching his breath as the voice of the young boy they had designated as the ref called it out. Pain shot through Ilya's ribs, but he forced himself up, meeting his brother's smug face. An opposing player approached and offered a hand. Ilya glanced up and spat on the ice, ignoring the blood as he pulled himself up.

There were cheers and jeers, applause rippling from the many onlookers they had pulled to the lake. Some people even dragged benches just to get a better view, turning the sidelines into a noisy gallery. While it didn't bother Ilya, he noticed how Shane kept stealing nervous glances down at the ice, as if worried the crowd's weight might crack it.

Ilya's eyes found Shane's as he skated back to the face-off point, and Shane yelled, cupping his hand over his mouth so his voice carried, "Come on, Rozanov. When have you ever been put off by a bit of roughhousing?"

Ilya smiled down at the ice as he took his spot on the ice.

Ilya crouched over the faceoff dot, stick blade flat, breath steady despite the roar around him. Across from him, Alexei mirrored his stance with that familiar, infuriating arrogance.

Brother.

Rival.

Shadow Ilya had spent 25 years trying to outrun.

The referee dropped the puck, and Ilya snapped into motion, winning the draw cleanly with a sharp pull that surprised even him.

Ilya pushed forward immediately, but Alexei was on him in an instant, lifting his stick and forcing a turnover. The puck skittered loose, and Alexei scooped it up, driving hard toward the slot. Ilya chased, matching stride for stride, refusing to let the play die. Alexei cut inside, readying a quick wrist shot — the kind he'd scored a thousand times growing up.

Ilya lunged, stick extended, and knocked the puck off Alexei's blade at the last possible second. The two collided shoulder-to-shoulder, fighting for balance as the puck slid away. Alexei recovered first, reaching for it, but Ilya read the angle faster. He intercepted, pivoted sharply, and accelerated out of the corner with the puck under full control.

Ilya tore down the ice, every stride burning, every breath tight. The crowd's buzz rose, their anticipation palpable as Alexei chased him, close enough that Ilya could hear the scrape of his skates. The goalie squared up, ready for the shot, but Ilya didn't hesitate. He shifted the puck to his forehand, pulled it just wide of the defender's stick, and released a clean, rising snap shot that sailed past the goalie's glove and into the net.

The crowd erupted when the puck hit the net, shouts and whistles peaking in celebration. But Ilya barely heard it. What struck him more than the noise was the sudden, quiet certainty settled in his chest — that this moment wasn't about beating Alexei or proving anything to anyone else. For the first time, he felt like who he was — not who he was supposed to be.

Ilya's eyes found Shane's over the sudden crowding of his "teammates".

Shane was smiling so wide it looked painful, clapping above the din. He even cupped two fingers in his mouth and whistled so loudly that Ilya almost winced, his excitement easily heard over the continued cheering.

Then Ilya was hoisted up by too many arms, laughter and whoops cresting as if they had just won the Stanley Cup instead of an everyday game of lake hockey. The crowd closed in, some patting his back, others chanting his name.

Alexie watched, his face brimming with fury, and he threw down his stick hard enough to force it to break into two, and Ilya laughed, cheering along with these people who, for the first time, were not pretending they didn't know who he was but were praising him. Even singing,

Rozanov, Rozanov,

King of the ice,

King of the screen.

Don't leave for America.

We have better women,

We have better drinks.

They sang repeatedly, their voices carrying over the chattering crowd. The infectious chorus spread until even Ilya joined, belting it out at the top of his lungs, feeling the group's energy as the crowd clapped and laughed along.

The celebration stretched on, everyone still buzzing as the group reached the edge of the lake together. Ilya accepted the glass of vodka he was handed as his prize, while bystanders continued to cheer and slap him on the back.

“[To us]!” They cheered before they took the first drink, and Ilya savored the liquid as it warmed his insides before pooling pleasantly in his stomach. He looked at Shane, who had been forced to come with them, and was also served a shot of vodka in a plastic cup, like the rest.

Shane was not a good drinker, which Ilya had prefaced to his teammates, blaming it on Shane's weak Canadian stomach, which the others found hilarious. But Shane surprised them all when he took the drink with the ease of a man who had been drinking vodka his entire life.

“What?” Shane asked, cheeks heating when he noticed the eyes of the men and Ilya's on him.

“[Okay, which one of you assholes switched the Canadian's vodka with water]?” He asked, and got a laugh from the others.

“What?” Shane repeated, looking around at the laughing men self-consciously. “Did I do something wrong?”

Ilya shook his head. “No, opposite. We’re all very impressed.”

“Oh,” a shy smile bloomed on Shane’s face at that, and he stuck out his plastic cup towards Ilya. “Pour me another then.”

And Ilya grabbed the bottle, filling Shane’s plastic cup halfway like theirs, and watched as Shane raised it, “Za Nas!” then took another swig. The men all clapped, and one even went as far as clapping Shane in the back, perhaps a bit too hard, causing Shane to let out a groan that the man laughed at.

The sight of Shane here, blending in, matching the energy of his fellow countryman—just another one of the boys—made Ilya’s chest constrict with happiness, crowding out the rivalry and tension from before. He tried to steady himself, overwhelmed by the sudden change from the shared intensity on the ice to this simple camaraderie.

And Ilya had to push his hands into his jacket pockets to cover the way his pants began to tent.

Shane noticed the movement – because, of course, he did - and moved closer to him so they were standing side by side, shoulders almost brushing as they watched the rowdy group of men talk animatedly amongst themselves, already losing interest in the expatriate and the foreigner.

“That was some impressive hockey back there, Rozanov.” Shane pronounced his last name with the stress on the second syllable like he’d heard everyone else do.

Ilya smiled shyly in an almost boyish manner. “Yes, I suppose it was.”

“It looked professional.”

Ilya turned to look at Shane, who was looking at him knowingly.

“Svetlana told me.”

Ilya nodded, eyes growing unfocused, then Shane asked, “Do you regret it?”

“No,” Ilya answered quickly.

And when he met Shane’s eyes, he found understanding in those deep brown eyes.

“Me neither,” Shane said.

Ilya smiled, remembering. “You know, for someone who was set to be Canada’s next Olympic Figure Skating Champion, I have yet to see you on the ice.”

Shane scoffed. “Okay, first, I don’t know who told you all of that. But okay,” Shane’s eyes became alit with a sudden spark. “Let me show you how it’s done, Rozanov.”

Shane began to move towards the edge of the lake, and Ilya followed him, unable to resist the pull Shane had over him. Shane skated over to where Svetlana was with Anastasia, and waved at her as he went, “Privet,” he said as he passed. Anastasia smiled broadly, returning the wave and the greeting before she turned to Ilya, who had bent down and picked her up.

“[What is he doing, uncle]?”

“[You’ll see],” he told her.

Shane reached where center ice would have been in an actual hockey rink, the goals far apart, putting him dead center between them. A lone, unmoving figure as Shane closed his eyes. His arms elegantly placed by his sides, his back and neck stretched with one skate slightly in front of the other, and Ilya almost expected music to start playing out of thin air.

Ilya had figured Shane would do a few lazy laps, a flashy turn, or some fancy footwork, nothing remarkable, but then Shane’s eyes snapped open with an intensity in them Ilya had never been lucky enough to see in this context.

Shane’s first push sent a clean, ringing note through the ice. Suddenly, he was motion itself, unfolding across the frozen surface with confidence that made Ilya’s breath falter. Every line of Shane’s body sharpened against the pale winter light. Every turn carved something deliberate and impossibly graceful into the ice. People slowed, then stopped. Ilya had frozen long before they did, rooted by the quiet shock of watching Shane move like that.

When Shane gathered speed for a jump, anticipation coiled in Ilya’s own muscles. There was a strange echo of the motion he wasn’t the one making. Shane rose cleanly, effortlessly—the kind of lift that made time stop. It restarted the moment Shane’s foot landed on the ice once more. A few skaters gasped. Others drifted to the edges, drawn in as if by gravity. The lake seemed to hush around him. The scrape of blades faded into a reverent silence. Ilya felt the hair on his arms lift, despite the layers he wore. Awe settled warm and heavy in his chest—warm enough to be dangerous. Shane transitioned into a series of tight, controlled spins. Frost lifted in a halo around his skates. Ilya felt something inside him tighten, a pull he didn’t know how to name. It was longing, yes, but threaded with something sharper: the ache of witnessing beauty he couldn’t touch.

Shane finished with a long, sweeping edge that sent a spray of frost curling behind him, the final flourish of someone who didn’t even realize he’d just turned a frozen lake into a stage. When he straightened, cheeks flushed from the cold, breath visible in the air, the crowd erupted into applause. Ilya didn’t clap. He just watched, pulse steady and aching, as if the moment had struck him clean through. The applause washed over them, but all he could hear was the thrum in his own chest—an insistent, quiet truth he wasn’t ready to face, but couldn’t look away from either.

“Holy shit,” Svetlana said beside him. “[I don’t know if Shane loves Russia, but Russia definitely loves Shane.]”

“[Yes, it does],” Ilya said, suddenly overcome with emotion.

He let Anastasia down when she began to fuzz, and somehow, his heart, which was already almost too frayed to handle any more, didn't completely stop as she skated eagerly towards Shane, her hands wide as she met him halfway. Shane didn't hesitate to pick her up, his footing not even faltering as he continued his confident strides over to them, now with Anastasia tucked tightly to his side.

"I'm going to need translating," he said, because Anastasia was speaking quickly at him.

"She says you were incredible," Ilya said. "And the most beautiful thing she's ever seen." Shane, in the middle of thanking her in Russian, paused, meeting Ilya's eyes. "And," Ilya went on, voice tight, "that you keep amazing her, just when she thinks she's got you figured out."

Shane let out a shaky exhale. "What else?"

Ilya lowered his voice. "That she loves you so much it should be impossible for her blood to pump when her heart's sole purpose is to burn for you."

Svetlana suddenly came between them, gently lifting Anastasia from Shane's arm. Both men skated back in unison, a jolt of reality pushing space between them. Ilya blinked rapidly, face turned away to hide the sudden gloss in his eyes. Shane cleared his throat, forcing a smile down at Anastasia, who looked between her uncle and Shane, confusion flickering in her gaze.

Svetlana grinned. "Now, for what she actually said—she wants to know if you'll teach her how to do that."

"Oh," Shane said, and laughed. "Da. Of course."

Shane extended his hand out to Anastasia. She eagerly took it, already beginning to skate toward the space that Shane had just left open.

Ilya turned back to watch Shane and Anastasia skate away, and as he did, he sensed someone come to stand beside him.

"[Alexie left in my car.]"

"[Perfect.]"

"[What do you think he will do]?"

"[I don't give a fuck.]"

"[I normally wouldn't. But...]" Svetlana's voice trailed off just as Shane twirled Anastasia slowly in the ice, both laughing.

And yeah. *Fuck.*

"[I'll go check on him]," Ilya said.

Svetlana nodded. “[I’ll take Shane and Nastya to the apartment when they are ready.]”

“[When Shane asks]-”

“I’ll tell him your brother got too drunk and you took him home.”

Ilya nodded and placed a kiss on the top of her head. “[Thank you.]”

“Go, [while they are distracted.]”

Ilya watched as Shane held onto his niece’s waist, guiding her as she jumped and landed safely on the ice. She nailed the move, and Shane dropped to one knee beside her so they were the same height. He smiled broadly as she hugged him.

He wished he didn’t have to go. Wished he could freeze this moment, this day, forever and keep it in his pocket for safekeeping.

“[Go, Ilya,]” Svetlana urged, and Ilya’s senses came back to him at once.

Ilya skated quickly toward the duffel bag to change back into his boots. As he did, he stole one last glance at Shane and Anastasia—now small figures on the ice—before turning and leaving.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 21: Running Home to You

Chapter Summary

When a drunken insult turns into a dangerous fight, Ilya flees into a storm with no guarantee of safety, with more on his shoulders than he can bear. As hours pass without word, Shane and Svetlana cling to hope, united by the fear of losing him.

Chapter Notes

Sorry in advance. I swear, it's nothing personal, I live for the pain.

And yes, my therapist is aware. And yes, we are working on it...

No, really, we are.

We really are.

Really...

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

Ilya walked inside his father's house -his childhood home- with confident strides.

Svetlana's car outside meant his brother was home, so Ilya entered without knocking.

He found him sitting on the couch, head thrown back as he chugged a half-empty bottle of vodka.

Ilya stood, arms crossed, in the doorway. He leaned back and noticed Anya on the nearby love seat, looking frightened. With a silent nod, he motioned her to leave. She did, after shooting her husband a look Ilya was glad Alexei missed.

It was one of pure disgust and hatred.

Ilya could relate.

Alexei finished drinking, bottle resting on his thigh, eyes closed. And suddenly, Ilya grew tired of waiting.

"I'm surprised you didn't crash the car."

Alexie jumped, startled, bits of the vodka landing on his chest and legs.

“What the fuck, Ilya?” He slurred, making it worse when he missed the center table, so the bottle hit the floor and shattered, the strong scent of alcohol permeating the room with the stench of all his brother’s bad decisions.

“I came to take the car back. Don’t take it without her permission again.”

“Or what?” Alexei spat. His eyes were red, his lip curled. He looked sweaty and disgusting. Ilya hated the side of himself that still felt hurt seeing his brother like this. “Going to hit me? Or are you going to let that American do it? Shane, right?”

Ilya’s blood boiled at Shane’s name in his brother’s mouth. But he knew Alexei was searching for what would hurt most. This was a trap he would not fall for.

“Where are the keys?”

Alexei’s smile turned predatory. He sneered, “I know where the keys are—up your little boyfriend’s—”

Ilya did not wait for him to finish that sentence before he was on top of him. He punched Alexei’s jaw so hard the sound echoed. Alexei screamed, put his hands up, but Ilya punched them too.

“Don’t you ever dare talk about him!” Ilya shouted, landing another punch on Alexei’s left cheek.

A pair of frail hands seized Ilya’s arm and pulled him away. Ilya wanted to resist, but unlike his brother, he was not drunk, and he knew that struggling would only hurt her more. He’d already done more than enough damage for today.

Ilya let her pull him off her bastard husband.

Ilya shook as he saw his brother’s bloodied face and heard him whimper. He hated how Anya rushed to his brother, her hands trembling as she checked the damage. Ilya had to admit, it looked bad.

“You should take him to the hospital,” Ilya said, and threw the keys on the sofa cushion.

“I can’t drive,” Anya reminded him. Fury surged in Ilya, and he stepped back to stop himself from pushing her aside and finishing what he started. She was so young, just like his mother had been.

Alexei never taught Anya to drive or helped her open a bank account; she existed to serve him, and sometimes, if spared, Anastasia too.

All she had ever known was this monster. This awful man, who had impregnated her and skipped his daughter’s birth. But Ilya had been there. Holding his niece, he felt the love he hadn’t known since age twelve pour out in unstoppable waves.

“I will help you,” he said through gritted teeth. She looked up, eyes brimming with tears. “I promise I will get you both out of here.”

Her trembling worsened, spurred by Alexei’s cries of pain.

Finally, she nodded.

Ilya dialed emergency services, then grabbed the keys from the couch.

“Will you be okay?”

She nodded again, her eyes steeling. She asked, "Can you keep Nastya with you?"

“Of course,” Ilya said. She nodded and turned to Alexei, who stained the couch with blood from his nose.

“You should go. You should not be here when they arrive. It won’t look good.”

Ilya nodded and bent down, placing a soft kiss on the top of her head, something he’d never done before, then he turned away and walked out.

He watched the house grow smaller in the rearview mirror and gripped the steering wheel tightly with both hands as he drove, grateful for the sudden snowstorm that was burying the tire marks beneath a clean, untouched sheet of fresh snow.

“Have you tried calling Alexei?”

“Yes.”

Shane paced anxiously in the living room, gripping his phone and redialing Ilya. Each call went straight to voicemail. Frustrated, he clenched the device tightly, reminding himself to keep quiet so Anastasia, asleep in the guest room, wouldn’t wake.

The news played on the television, and Shane’s eyes darted between the screen and the window. The constant noise made him increasingly agitated, yet he didn’t dare turn it off in case there was an update.

“Where does Alexei live?” Shane asked. “Let’s call a cab, we can-”

“We can’t go anywhere with this snowstorm, Shane.”

"Why not? There are cars out there. I can see them."

“They are running home, you idiot, not running away from it.”

He pressed his fists to his eyes, trying not to cry. The thought haunted him: So am I, he thought, tears burning with the need to be let free.

It had been five hours since Shane and Svetlana had called Ilya to let him know they were back in the apartment early due to a heavy snowstorm alert.

Five hours since their call went to voicemail.

Five hours since Shane felt something was wrong with Ilya.

He just knew.

“Stop moving around, you’re making me lose it.”

“Well, good for you. I have already fucking lost it.”

“He’s fine, Shane. Ilya grew up here. He won’t drive in this storm. He’s probably waiting it out, but can’t call us because his phone’s battery is dead. It happens.”

“What place that lets you ride out a snowstorm doesn’t have a charger?”

“Not many options in a storm, Shane. Can’t look for a Ritz, just stop where you can.”

Shane walked to the window and stared at the busy highway visible from the apartment.

He stared at the distant headlights streaming along the busy highway, his insides twisting. He couldn’t voice the terror eating at him: those people out there weren’t waiting out the storm—no, they were all fighting it, desperate to get home, because someone precious was waiting for them... as he was for Ilya.

He glanced back at the closed door of the guest bedroom, checked on Anastasia sleeping soundly, then redialed Ilya’s number.

This time, when the call went to voicemail, he let the tears fall.

They got the call at six in the morning, two hours before the snowstorm would finally end.

Yet agitation built in Shane until he couldn’t wait any longer, the weight of fear breaking through his restraint.

“I’m going,” he told Svetlana. “You stay with Anastasia.” He ran to the door. Pulled on his coat, gloves, scarf, and boots. “I know there are no cars, but I’ll flag a taxi. I’ll pay them a hundred thousand dollars. A million, if I must. But I am not—” Shane’s voice cracked, and then his hands enveloped him in a crushing hug.

He was sobbing, and so was she. They clung to each other like lifelines. Too soon, Shane stepped away, gasping for air that wouldn't reach his lungs.

"I am coming with you," Svetlana said, surprising Shane.

"But—"

"We'll bring her."

Shane started shaking his head immediately. "The snowstorm is—"

"It's dying down, and the hospital is close. It won't take us long in a car. Come on. I'll get her; you get yourself together a bit. I don't want to scare her."

Shane nodded and went into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. He turned on the faucet, then ran to the bath and the shower and turned them on too. When he felt safe, he let himself cry, really cry, letting out all the pain and fear inside him.

He had been right: Ilya had been driving in the storm, during the worst of it. Because of that, they hadn't been able to get to him until twenty minutes later.

Twenty whole minutes—out in that cold, hurt, and probably thinking he would die.

Alone.

Shane gripped his hair and pulled, using the pain to ground himself. He could hear Svetlana and Anastasia talking next door. They had to hear him, and he couldn't live with himself if Anastasia was frightened because of him.

He forced himself to push away despair. Ilya needed them now—even if Shane doubted his own role, he knew Svetlana and Anastasia remained Ilya's only real family.

And holy shit, he could have died last night. Shane had been locked up in this house with them. 950 square feet—containing Ilya's whole support system, his whole world—trapped inside, while he had slowly—

"Shane."

"I'm okay. I will be right out."

He stood on shaky legs and splashed water on his face as he stole a glance at himself in the mirror.

He looked like hell—deep bags under his eyes from nearly 24 hours without sleep. He hadn't eaten in sixteen hours, worsening his migraine. His eyes were bloodshot from crying, and his nose and cheeks were raw from constant rubbing.

He shut off the faucet, shower, and bath, muttering an insincere apology for wasted water. Then he inhaled deeply three times and stepped outside.

“Shane?”

Anastasia was pouting, and her hands were reaching out for him.

He couldn't help the tears as he bent down and picked her up.

“I got her food and things here,” Svetlana said, and opened the door, the keys to Ilya's mustang in her hands. “Let's go.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 22: A Brightness Edged with Loss

Chapter Summary

One terrifying night threatens to unravel everything Shane has fought to protect. Haunted by the past and hounded by the press, Shane fights to keep himself together as he races to Ilya's side.

Chapter Notes

I would pay for your therapist's bill but I'm broke rn.

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

He had not spoken to his mom more than three words since he'd left LA, but on the drive to the hospital, she called him, and Shane answered, even though that was the last thing he wanted to do.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Oh, my God, Shane.” His mom was crying. No crying was an understatement. His mom was sobbing so hard he could barely make out the words.

Unbidden, he saw a memory of another time she had sounded just like this. That night his own father hadn't made it home. He saw her kneeling on the floor, her face twisted as she tried to explain what the cops were doing at their door that late at night. She had failed, and it was the female cop who had described, in a very professional way, that his father had died in the accident. He'd hit black ice and veered off the street as he had tried to avoid colliding with an incoming vehicle that had also lost control.

They'd both died on impact.

One night. Two families who would never recover.

His insides twisted; he'd been trying to repress that memory all night, but it was like something had broken, and now, he couldn't focus, couldn't see or hear anything besides his mother's terrified voice on the other line.

He was inside the car, but he was nine years old again, standing in his living room with his Spiderman pajamas, watching his mother fall apart in front of him and not understanding why.

He understood now. He understood her perfectly.

“Oh, honey, I... I saw the news and I-”

“I am okay, Mom,” he said. “I was home.”

“The car. Is Ilya...? I saw the car and- how could anyone ever survive that?”

“Mom,” Shane said, slightly hysterical.

He hadn't wanted to see any footage; in fact, the moment Svetlana had gotten the call, he had turned off the television and had put his phone on Do Not Disturb, which meant there were only three people who could reach him: one of them had, one of them couldn't, the other was in St. Barts with her husband, probably sleeping cuddled beside him, the steady heavy presence of the man she loved and the knowledge of him being safe and sound, making her sleep soundly.

Shane hadn't slept soundly for many years after his father's death.

Now, he doubted he'd ever sleep soundly again.

“I am sorry, God. I am so sorry. I booked a flight. I will be there soon.”

“Okay,” he said, because he couldn't stop her. Nothing could stop Yuna Hollander when she set her mind to something, not unless you were ready to go to war for it. And he didn't have the energy for war. He barely had the energy to hold the phone to his ear.

Shane couldn't find it in himself to have the energy for anything anymore. He felt... numb.

“We're here,” Svetlana said, redundantly, because he could see they had parked.

“Mom, I have to go. I will call you after, okay?”

“Okay, honey. I love you so much.”

“Me too.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Svetlana groaned the moment they neared the main entrance.

About fifty news outlets and reporters were waiting outside.

They turned as one back towards the parking lot. But it was too late. The moment one of the reporters spotted Shane, the reporter began shouting at him and running toward him, alerting the rest to Shane's presence.

“Go,” Shane yelled to her. “Take her away. I don’t want her in this.”

Svetlana grabbed the side of Anastasia’s head, whispering broken, trembling reassurances in her ear. She tucked Anastasia’s little face tightly into her neck, shielding her from the chaos of cameras and shouted questions. Some reporters filmed Svetlana’s shaking retreat, following her until she disappeared through the entrance doors. Shane’s jaw clenched as he watched, only moving forward once he was sure they were finally safe.

“Shane,” one asked, in heavily accented English. “Are you here because you feel guilty?”

“Excuse me,” Shane said, pushing past him.

“Shane, is it true you and Ilya are dating?”

That made him stop, and he looked up at the man with confusion. “What?”

In response to the reaction, the other reporters began shouting similar questions. “Is it true you are an item?”

“Is that why you came to visit him in the hospital?”

“Is it true Ilya kissed you today at the lake?”

“Will you be changing your name from Hollander to Rozanov if you guys ever get married?”

“What the fuck are you people even talking about?” Shane burst out. “A man is fighting for his life in there, and none of you care. What the actual fuck is wrong with you? Don’t you feel ashamed? People are dying in here. Their families are waiting, desperate, and you turn it into a fucking clown show. Show some fucking respect.”

Shane turned and pushed past the last of the reporters before entering the hospital.

He stood in the hallway outside the recovery room. Each word from the doctor echoed as he tried to repeat them to his mom. His hands shook so hard he dropped the phone twice before the first word made it out.

“He’s stable, but it was close.”

That was how the surgeon had opened—no softening, no preamble. The explanation followed: the impact had triggered a cascade of trauma responses—acute stress reaction, significant soft-tissue contusions, and a borderline case of thoracic strain. It could have easily tipped into something far worse. The snowstorm had turned the road into a gauntlet; Ilya’s body took the brunt of it, showing resilience that surprised even the medical team.

The doctor had said the surgery was mostly precautionary. They repaired a deep laceration, monitored internal bleeding, and stabilized his vitals after the shock. No organ damage. No fractures. Just a body pushed to its limit that had somehow refused to give up.

“He’ll be sore, disoriented, and exhausted,” the doctor had warned, and now so did Shane, “but he’s going to recover.”

As he spoke the words aloud, his voice trembled under the weight of what wasn’t said. The terror of how close they’d come to disaster clawed at his chest, matched only by the fierce, overwhelming relief flooding him—he was still here, still with him.

Unlike his father.

He felt guilty for his happiness, a brightness edged with loss, each thank-you to heaven shadowed by the absence of someone who should have been there instead.

His mother, his beautiful, sweet mother, had been so relieved and so grateful, too. Only her thanks, Shane knew, were directed elsewhere, towards the man who had not shared Ilya’s luck.

It was too much for Shane to handle. After he bid her goodnight, he hung up the phone, set it on the table, and then turned it off completely.

Anastasia was sitting cross-legged on the sofa, eating a chocolate bar, when he returned to the sitting room. She looked up and extended it towards him with a chocolate-covered smile, offering to share.

“I am okay, but [thank you].”

Anastasia shrugged and took another bite.

“I am going to go make some calls. Will you be okay to watch her while I am gone?”

Shane nodded.

Svetlana didn’t look much better than he felt. Gone was her usual runway-ready attire; in its place, she wore Ilya’s gym sweats and a T-shirt. She had changed into them after her shower earlier in the night.

Shane wished he had showered, too. The smell was so bad he could sniff it on himself, which meant showering wasn’t just a want—it was a necessity.

He watched her go, then turned to Anastasia, who was licking her fingers after finishing her chocolate. He reached out, gently grabbed her wrist, and pushed her hand away from her mouth. “[No],” he told her. “You’ll catch something.”

She frowned and yanked her hand away, but didn't put it back in her mouth. Shane smiled softly at her, running his fingers over her hair. It was so soft, just like Ilya's. Both shared the same coloring—blonde with a slight brown tint at the roots.

“Shane?”

He looked down and saw that she was looking up at him. Then, she stretched out her chocolate- and spit-covered hand and gently pressed it to his cheek, right where he realized she'd caught a tear. He smiled at her, even as he felt the chocolate smear across his skin. “[Thank you.]”

He heard a doctor come into the room. Instantly alert, Shane pushed himself up from his chair when he recognized the man.

“Is he okay?” Shane asked, instantly.

The tall, dark-haired man with kind brown eyes nodded. He looked Asian. He sounded competent. And he spoke English, which was more than Shane could ever have asked for.

“He's still fighting off the anesthesia, but he is awake. Want me to take you to him?”

Just then, Shane heard running steps and turned to find Svetlana.

She began to ask something in Russian, and the man responded with all the ease of a true bilingual.

Then Svetlana reached over and gripped Shane's hand hard enough to hurt. She glanced at his face, nodded, and he realized she'd been offered the same choice he had.

“Follow me.”

Chapter End Notes

With morning comes a heartbeat, a voice, and the promise that not all stories end in loss.

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 23: One Heartbeat and an Eternity

Chapter Summary

Shane's tears fall freely when he finally sees Ilya awake, alive, and reaching for him. By the next day, the outside world has caught up—forcing them to face a scandal, a leak, and the sudden presence of Russian authorities.

Chapter Notes

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

He let Svetlana and Anastasia go in first, frozen by the fear pressing against his chest as the door loomed in front of him. He told Svetlana it was so Anastasia wouldn't see, but shame prickled through him when she saw right through the excuse. It was hard to believe he'd won awards for acting when now he felt stripped bare, unconvincing even to himself.

Once they came out, Svetlana stopped and placed a hand on his arm.

"He's waiting for you," she said, as though she was afraid he'd run away, then she placed a soft kiss against his cheek and squeezed the hold she'd had on his forearm.

Shane stared at the door, his pulse thundering, as he heard her footsteps fade. For a moment, time splintered, caught between one heartbeat and an eternity, before he forced himself to move.

Shane stepped into the hospital room as quietly as if the air itself might shatter.

The overhead lights were dimmed to a sterile, clinical glow. It barely illuminated the pale figure in the bed. Shane's breath hitched at the sight of Ilya—alive, breathing, but frighteningly still. Pain tightened Shane's chest, sharp as a fist closing around his heart. The monitors beside the bed hummed their steady, indifferent chorus: the cardiac monitor traced gentle green waves, the pulse oximeter blinked calm, and the IV pump clicked with each drop like a countdown. Everything in the room worked to keep Ilya anchored to life. Yet, the harsh precision of the machines made Shane's stomach twist with dread.

They were merciless reminders of how close he had come to losing him.

He moved closer. Each step was heavy with the memory of the phone call, the drive, the reporters, the frantic sprint through the emergency unit. He found Ilya asleep beneath the hospital blanket. And at once, every fear Shane had forced down churned up, clawing at his chest.

There was a stark white bandage pressed to Ilya's temple, a bruise flowering along Ilya's jaw, and the rise and fall of Ilya's chest beneath the sheets—a fragile, defiant proof of life. The

relentless beeping of the heart monitor felt almost cruel in its steadiness, mocking the chaos that had torn through Shane only hours before.

He reached the bedside and finally let himself breathe, though it trembled on the way out. The worst had almost happened. He had almost lost the person he loved most. Standing there—watching him sleep in the quiet glow of machines and antiseptic air—Shane felt something inside him break and mend all at once.

Shane reached for Ilya's hand and felt Ilya stir beneath his touch.

Then, Shane was struck by Ilya's eyes—deep, beautiful, and almost lost to him forever.

“Oh, sweetheart,” Ilya rasped, but Shane was already sobbing uncontrollably, heart pounding so fast his vision swam. He clung to Ilya's hand, pressing desperate kisses to it, shattered and alive, overflowing with desperate love.

“Shane,” Ilya said, so low, his voice unable to rise to more than a whisper. “I'm okay, sweetheart. I am alive.”

This only made Shane cry harder, his throat tight, tears burning as Ilya's hand left his grasp. Ilya threaded trembling fingers through Shane's hair, the IV cool against Shane's temple and cheek, pausing with quiet care. He let Shane sob, offering only silence, understanding Shane needed this—or maybe just understanding he could not be soothed, not now.

Finally, Shane's sobs shuddered to a halt. Ilya brought his hand up again, running soothing fingers over Shane's scalp. The gentle touch anchored Shane, drawing him back from the edge of panic.

Shane stood, careful to do it slowly so as not to hurt Ilya.

As he looked down at him, Shane saw that Ilya had a soft smile, but his eyes were closed, while tear tracks ran down his cheeks.

Shane reached up and wiped them away with a bent index finger, driven by a fierce, aching hunger to taste Ilya on his tongue. Shane brought the finger up to his mouth. The tears were sharp, clean—alive. They belonged to Ilya, who could still weep because he was alive and beautiful, unbearably so.

“I wish I could-”

“I know, sweetheart,” Ilya said, eyes still closed. “Me too.”

Shane's chest softened a bit more at the pet name.

“Sweetheart?” Shane said. “Just how hard did you hit your head, Rozanov?”

Ilya cracked a smile and attempted a chuckle before he winced with a groan.

“Sorry,” Shane said, running a hand down Ilya's arm.

“And they say you’re not funny.”

“Who says that?”

“I do,” Ilya said, with a crooked smile. “It must be drugs, I think. Playing trick on me.”

Shane laughed and pulled the chair from the corner to the bedside. He sat. Ilya’s hand was turned up, a silent invitation. Shane took it immediately, lacing their fingers together. Gently, with his other hand, he covered them with the sheet, hiding them from view.

He caught Ilya’s grateful smile at the gesture.

“How are you feeling?” Shane asked.

“Like I should not be here right now,” Ilya said, serious for once.

A pit tightened at the base of Shane’s throat. He swallowed, but the ache remained, sharp and unmoving.

“Don’t cry, Hollander,” Ilya said, knowing him well enough that even with his eyes closed, he just knew. “It hurts me to see.”

“Then keep your eyes closed,” Shane said, fighting against the familiar sting.

Ilya squeezed his hand once, softly, too much so. “How long did they say you stay?”

“Trying to get rid of me, Rozanov?”

Ilya smiled softly, then shook his head. “No. Opposite.”

Shane tightened the grip on his hand and brought his face down so he could place a kiss over the sheet covering it.

“I am not going anywhere.”

Ilya smiled at that, then stopped fighting the exhaustion. His face softened to a serene, almost concerning stillness as he succumbed to sleep.

Yuna Hollander landed in Moscow by midafternoon the next day. She had been picked up at the airport by Svetlana and had been taken straight to the hospital, where Shane just refused to leave.

He didn’t care that he stank to high heaven; Ilya didn’t seem to mind it, so why should he?

The moment his mom walked into the room, she crushed him with a hug so tight it stole his breath. A lump rose in Shane's throat, and if there were even a single tear left inside him, it would have fallen right then.

"How is he?" She asked him, even though Ilya was right there.

"Hello, Yuna," Ilya said, with a timid smile.

"Hello," she said, approaching and eyeing the monitors with concern.

"I'm doing better," Ilya replied. "You didn't have to come."

"Of course I did," she replied, serious.

Ilya's eyes widened, his lips pressed hard together, trembling at the verge of tears. Sensing this, Shane jumped in, trying to shield Ilya from his mother's gaze, knowing she wouldn't grasp the depth of what Ilya was feeling.

This wasn't just Yuna, Shane's agent, talking to him. To Ilya, this was his boyfriend's mother, maybe someday, his mother as well if he ever accepted Shane's proposal.

And so, Shane pulled his mom into a hug and watched Ilya dab at the corners of his eyes, blinking the tears away quickly, before he closed them to hide the sudden wetness and brought his hands back down to his sides.

He let her go.

"Honey," she said, putting a hand on his cheek. "It's okay. We'll fix this."

Shane froze and saw in his peripheral vision as Ilya's eyes snapped open and shot to her.

A cold, weighty dread flooded Shane's chest, rooting him in place.

"What are you talking about? Fix what?"

She frowned, but it was her condescending little agent smile when she thought he was being silly.

He stepped back. "What are you talking about?" he asked, louder now.

Ilya winced, one hand going to his head, and Shane cursed.

He reached out to Ilya's temple. "Sorry," he told him.

Then he turned back to his mother.

"Step outside with me for a minute?"

"Hollander," Ilya began, and Shane looked at him. He tried to communicate with his eyes the desperation he felt, the anger, the need to have this conversation, and Ilya sighed, understanding him at once, because of course he did. That was just the way they worked.

Why they worked.

“Come on,” Shane said, this time without intervention from Ilya.

His mother followed him down the hallway into the waiting area, then farther into the chapel, which was private and, for the first time, empty.

“Why are you really here?”

“Shane,” she said, pretending to be hurt.

“I am here for you, honey. I came for you. So you would have support.”

“I’m not in that bed. I can take care of myself.”

“Of course you are, but these things should be handled with... delicacy.”

He closed his eyes, trying to keep his cool as his hands shook.

When he opened them again, he said, “How bad is it?”

“It’s not good.”

“Be honest. Stop talking like I’m a child. How bad is it really?”

He cut himself off before he could say "Go home". But it was fruitless; he was better off trying to fool a cow into thinking it was a fish than presenting those words in a way that would drive her to actually do it.

Suddenly, Yuna’s face dropped, becoming stern as her professional instincts took over. Her priority shifted to crisis management, replacing her earlier warmth with a focus on containing the situation.

It made Shane feel so small; it was terrifying.

“The internet’s speculating about you two. After the accident, it got worse.”

“How is that my fault? I can’t control what people say?”

“You can control your temper, can’t you? Blowing up at reporters didn’t help.”

“I-” Shane looked for excuses, but he found none. He’d always been so good at getting himself out of trouble, of lying his way through a tough conversation by cleverly shifting blame to something or someone else, but now... he found he didn’t really want to.

“I am proud of that, actually.”

Yuna scoffed. “Oh, really?”

“Yes. And I stand by what I said. Every single uncontrolled word of it.”

She regarded him with a blank expression. “I spoke to Svetlana on the way here. She walked me through the plan she has been running on her end to protect Ilya, but I can tell she’s scared. Of course, she is. Because her client is in a hospital in a country that doesn’t like their men dating other men, even if it’s just speculation.”

Shane’s blood ran cold instantly.

“I can issue an apology video. You drafted one, right? I... I’ll go home. Shower. I’ll film and post it myself. By when do you need it?”

She continued to regard him, then she crossed her arms. “You can’t film in his apartment; the address of it got leaked, and they have pictures of the inside from the listing, so they will know. I got you a room at the Ritz next to mine. We’ll do it there.”

Shane knew the one he meant; he’d looked at all the hotel accommodation close to Ilya’s house when Ilya had said he would be staying with him, just in case he couldn’t go through with it and needed a place to sleep for the night.

He was so happy he hadn’t done that. Forever grateful for the beautiful day and night they had shared in his apartment, before they had stepped outside, and somehow, fucked it all up.

“Why the change of heart?”

“I was being stupid,” he said, slipping into his usual façade. “It was my ego talking. You know how I can get.”

She nodded. “Yes, and I also know you don’t give up without a fight. It’s the only thing you inherited from me. Besides my good looks, of course.”

Shane managed a weak smile, but sweat pricked at his hairline. He squeezed his eyes shut. His mother’s steady fingers gripped his chin, breaking his spiral, and for a moment, grounding him.

“You’re in shock,” she said.

And Shane let out an exhale at the way she had given him the perfect escape.

“No, I’m not,” he replied, as expected.

She rolled her eyes. “So stubborn. Come on. We must nip this in the bud right now before it continues to get traction.”

“Okay, let me just say bye to Ilya first.”

“Okay,” she said, but she looked like she wanted nothing less.

It hurt Shane to see it, but he reminded himself that his mother only saw Ilya through media portrayals—as the rival, the bad boy, and not the real man he knew. Shane wished his mother understood Ilya as he did, knowing that her wariness came from the public image, not the truth.

Because the irresistible, beautiful, emotional man he knew, no one had yet seen, and while he loved that only he got to know this side of Ilya, moments like these reminded Shane there was another scenario where everyone would also come to love Ilya, would come to understand, as Shane had, that there was so much more than the met the eyes.

Shane couldn't wait until that moment came, whenever Ilya chose to do it. He'd support him, if only to see the shock in the world's face when they realized this man already belonged to him.

Shane didn't know how he'd managed that, honestly.

He was rounding the hallway on his way to Ilya's room when Yuna grabbed his arm and pulled him back. A second later, Shane spotted the uniformed men outside of Ilya's room.

And he had never seen them before, had never thought he would, but it didn't take a native Russian to know what these men were. It was in their posture, their overly serious attitude, their macho bravado, their muscles, their height.

The guns at their waists.

These were policemen.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 24: A Visit from the Colonel

Chapter Summary

One threat in Russia detonates everything, tearing Shane and Ilya apart before either can fight back. Now exile, guilt, and a single shattering confession force them to confront the truth neither can outrun.

Chapter Notes

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

Shock, fear, and something too horrific to name, caused Shane to stumble back, pressing himself against the wall and moving out of their sight. He stared up at his mother, searching her face for answers.

“We have to go,” Yuna said, and Shane shook his head. “Shane.”

“I can’t leave him. God knows what they will do to him.”

“Nothing will happen to him.”

He whispered urgently, "You don't know that," just as a familiar, terrified-looking figure ran toward them from the entrance.

She looked herself again, but before Shane could register it, Svetlana gripped his shoulders tightly.

“You need to go.”

“What?”

“I am serious, Shane. Please. Listen to me. This is not a game. It’s not a prank. Ilya’s safety depends on it. Do everything you can to dispel these rumors. Listen to Yuna, and get on the next flight out of Russia.”

There were tears forming in Shane’s eyes, and what do you know, he still had water left for them after all.

“I can’t leave him.”

“You have to if you want to save him. Now, go. I have wasted too much time already.”

With that, she let him go and walked now at a normal pace, towards the two men. Shane knew he shouldn’t, but he couldn’t help but glance and saw as the two men stepped in her

way. They were almost twice her size, so much so that they would have had to duck to enter the room they were kept in. But then Svetlana said something, sharp and short, and after looking at one another, they reluctantly stepped away. She thanked them, then went inside, and their bodies returned to their previous stance.

“Come on,” Yuna said, already tugging him away. “He’s in the best hands he can be.”

Ilya felt the air shift before the knock even came, a tightening in his chest, like the hush before something breaks.

Colonel Vetrov filled the doorway, certain as a man who had commanded rooms all his life. Even in his late sixties, he stood straight and imposing, olive uniform pressed sharply, brass buttons gleaming, medals lined with punishing precision. Red piping at collar and cuffs marked his rank with dangerous pride. His boots—shined, heavy—hit the floor with the rhythm of someone used to the world making way.

He stepped inside without waiting to be invited, his pale eyes sweeping the room with a calm that felt more threatening than any raised voice. The space seemed to shrink around him, as if his presence displaced the air itself. Ilya straightened instinctively, dread settling low in his stomach. This was a man who could dismantle a future with a single sentence, who enjoyed letting others wonder whether today would be the day he chose to do it.

And Ilya had a sense that perhaps his day had finally come.

'Colonel Vetrov,' Ilya said, forcing bravado. He drew on his acting skills, hiding clenched, shaking hands beneath the sheets. “What an honor to have you visit me.”

"Yes. It is," he said, his voice edged with the same sneer as his late father.

"Thank you," Ilya said, hoping flattery might work. He still didn't know what he'd done to deserve this visit, but the answer felt close.

He wished Svetlana were here; she knew how to navigate the man after 25 years of practice.

"You're alone," he observed, scanning the room as if confirming a fact he already knew.

“Yes,” Ilya said, and suddenly his heart felt like it would beat a hole through his chest.

Please, Ilya thought, sending his prayer out to whoever would take mercy on him. I know you already saved my life, and that was gift enough -one I will never be able to repay. But please, please do not let Shane come back here. Not now.

Just then, there was a commotion outside his door, and Ilya almost yelled at Shane to leave, to turn around and save himself, when he heard the pissed off voice of Svetlana, and like he'd

turned a flip, his heart settled, and he pasted on an easy smile. His calm returned as did his breathing.

"I spoke too soon," Ilya said. "My apologies."

The door opened, and Svetlana walked in with all the air of a woman who owned the world, her father, and everyone else in it.

'Colonel,' she said, kissing his cheek. The Colonel waited until she finished, then fixed cold, calculating eyes on her, following her every move.

"What did I miss?" She asked, coming to stand beside Ilya.

"I was just thanking the Colonel for his gracious visit," Ilya said.

"Oh, yes. To what do we owe this honor, father?"

The Colonel's silence made Ilya tense, until Svetlana's warm hand calmed him with a touch to his neck. The Colonel's eyes snapped to it, scowl deepening. Svetlana quickly withdrew her hand, almost ashamed.

"You. What is your relationship with my daughter?"

Ilya's eyes widened before he schooled his features quickly. "I..."

Svetlana jumped to his rescue again. "What kind of question is that?"

"Do not question me!" The Colonel yelled, with the loud booming authority of a man who screamed at grown men for a living.

Svetlana met his shouting with calm, crossing her arms and jutting her chin. 'I've told you: we are what we are. Ilya is concussed, drugged, and not your daughter, so his opinion shouldn't matter to you.'

"It matters," her father said, and his lip curled as if disgusted when he looked at Ilya.

"Because I know you would do and say anything to protect him. Even if the rumors are true."

Ilya wanted to ask, "What rumors?" but read the room and kept his mouth quiet.

"They're just rumors. We love each other—that's the truth."

Wait, what?

Her hand gripped his shoulder—tight, commanding. Play along, it said, and he clenched his jaw to keep from wincing or making any noise of discomfort.

"You expect me to believe he loves you? Even with the videos and photos of him and that boy."

Oh, Fuuuck.

“Is this about the engagement?”

He asked, and then wrapped his hand around her waist, hiding his wince at the pain that shot up his shoulder by tensing his fingers around her.

His gesture was meant to show unity, but he could tell the Colonel was not convinced as he followed the movement, then frowned, “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing,” Svetlana said. She smacked his arm with deliberate flair. This time, Ilya winced openly, and Svetlana quickly apologized, realizing his pain was genuine.

“There’s no point in hiding. I have to ask him for his blessing anyway.”

“I know, but not here. In the hospital after you almost...” Ilya was shocked and yet not at all surprised to see real tears begin to fall from her eyes. He’d always told her it was a pity she hated the public scrutiny because she would have made an outstanding actress.

"Hey, hey—stop. I’m fine. I’m alive."

“I almost lost you,” she said, through her tears, and Ilya pulled her in for a hug, which was real because with those words, he noticed he’d been so, so terribly mistaken. She was a great actress, yes, but she wasn’t acting now. And suddenly, neither was he.

He gently moved Svetlana, so she sat beside the gurney instead of leaning against him, then leaned over to kiss her temple.

'I'm sorry,' he said against her skin. 'I should have pulled over. I was mad at Alexie and desperate to get back to you and Anastasia. I was an idiot. I'm sorry.'

“You were,” she sobbed. “Such an idiot.”

“I know,” he soothed. “It won’t happen again.”

“It better not,” she agreed and pulled herself back enough to meet his eyes. “Or you'd better hope you die that time, otherwise I will kill you myself.”

He laughed then immediately groaned, his hand going to his chest as the pain shot up to his sternum.

The Colonel made a noise to interrupt whatever scene they were playing, and Ilya looked up at him, eyes cold. “Pardon me, Colonel. I... forgot my manners.”

He watched them for a long time. His calculating eyes took in every detail of their current postures, their hands and proximity, the way Ilya was unmoving and Svetlana was still sobbing quietly beside him.

Then he said, “The boy has twenty-four hours to leave Russia. After that, he is forbidden to set foot on our soil, and his name will be marked for arrest on sight. Make sure he understands. If you fail to deliver the message... I will make sure he gets when he’s behind bars in the Siberian Tundra.”

He said the last part with a sinister sort of smile that chilled Ilya more than his words had.

After Svetlana pinched his arm, Ilya nodded. The Colonel left without a word, door swinging open behind him.

Svetlana scanned the hall, confirmed the others were gone, then closed the door with a definitive thud. She turned, her resolve shattering in front of Ilya's eyes as she let her body crumble against it. "Holy fuck."

"Shane," Ilya said, his mind still racing.

"I got here just in time, thank God. He's gone. Yuna took him with her."

Now, Ilya allowed his own resolve to leave him. The aches in his body came back tenfold, the direct result of acting like nothing hurt for too long. He let himself recline against his pillows, wincing openly.

"I'll get the nurse," Svetlana said and left. Leaving Ilya alone with his thoughts and the aftermath of the adrenaline crash. He looked at the monitors; there were more squiggles than usual there, and he supposed that was to be expected.

He closed his eyes, inhaled, exhaled. Let himself get lulled by the steady beeping around him, which had been his companion for the past eighteen hours.

He should call Shane. Should be the one to tell him he was no longer... allowed in his home country. All because of Ilya.

Flashes of Shane on that lake, smiling openly as he skated, playing with his niece, his open curiosity at everything and everyone he saw. His eagerness to learn the language. The language of a place he would never be able to set foot in again.

"Fuck," Ilya cursed.

He'd been too stupid. Too careless and naïve. He thought of the young man in the lake, the one who had flaunted his crush so openly that it had shattered something inside of Ilya. He wished he'd gotten his name, wished he could call him now and tell him, "See? See what being careless gets you?"

He was being an asshole again. He crackled a smile at that. Shane would have called him out on it right away.

Shane's words came back to him: Maybe his family doesn't mind. Maybe they accept him as he is.

Ilya tried to think of himself as a young boy discovering he liked girls, but perhaps he also liked boys a little too much. He remembered how scared he'd been, how confused.

So, he'd told his mother, because he knew she loved him unconditionally, there was no doubt in his mind about that fact. She listened to him, then hugged him and kissed the top of his head. And Ilya felt so light, so wonderfully accepted.

Until she opened her mouth.

“No one can ever know this, Ilya. Your father must never find out. You must hide this. Promise me you will hide this.”

It wasn't her words, but rather the terrified wail of her voice, that made him nod, and then he was enveloped in a hug again.

Three days later, she swallowed a whole bottle of sleeping pills and never woke up again.

“Hello, Ilya. How are we feeling?”

Ilya's eyes snapped open to find a young nurse.

He swallowed. “Hurts.”

“Where?”

“Everywhere.”

She adjusted one of his drips, saying, “This should help, although it will put you to sleep.”

He nodded and glanced at Svetlana in the doorway.

His voice grew heavier as he told her, “Please take care of him.”

Svetlana nodded. “I will. I promise.”

Ilya nodded, eyes closing, and let himself succumb to nothingness.

Shane heard his mother close the door. Another penthouse—beautiful, but like all the rest. It lacked all of the charm of Ilya's apartment. The room was temperature-regulated, but he'd never felt colder.

“Shane,” his mother said beside him. He turned, not bothering to hide his tears. He'd waited this long, expecting she'd show him his room and leave. She didn't. This was her fault.

Her face crumbled at the sight, and she pulled him into a hug. “Oh, honey. It's okay. He will be okay.”

“You don't know that,” he said, and then his phone dinged.

He jumped out of her hold and fumbled to get his phone out of his back pocket.

Svetlana: It's been handled. He is fine. I will call you in a couple of minutes to explain.

Then his phone dinged with another notification. An email, this time.

They were plane tickets.

He dropped the phone, hands shaking with a rush of overwhelming relief and confusion, unsure how to process the quick shift from hope to dread.

“Shane, Shane,” his mother cried, and he felt himself falling, but didn’t have the strength to stop.

His knees landed on the carpet, and he let his hands fall to his side. Trembling, he tried to speak. “Ilya... he’s okay. But... he wants me... he wants us to leave.”

Yuna’s face was kind as she said. “Yes, well. That was to be expected.”

Shane scoffed. “Was it? Because that possibility hadn’t even crossed my fucking mind.”

“Shane,” she started, but he shot up and walked further into the penthouse. Frustration mixed with anxiety as he walked. He just needed to let off steam. His head felt like it would explode. His hands hadn’t stopped trembling for days.

And he was suddenly just so fucking angry. He couldn’t see straight.

“All I wanted was to spend time with him. Just a few fucking days together like a regular couple, without the whole fucking world making it a—”

He stopped when he saw his mother’s eyes widen. And he stood very still, his mind catching up on his words.

“Mom,” he started, but she immediately looked down at the ground, one hand going over her chest as she turned away from him. “Mom,” he called softly.

She stilled, her back still to him. Her voice was low and full of uncertainty, almost too quiet for Shane to hear. “So, it’s true? The rumors are real?”

Shane walked back to her and placed a hand on her shoulder, guiding her to face him. Her eyes were distant, no doubt in shock. He hadn’t told her he was gay, and now he’d dropped this news out of nowhere.

“I am so sorry. I wanted to tell you. I was planning on it when we got back before shooting started in February.”

“So, is Rozanov... you partner, boyfriend, lover?”

Shane blushed at the question. He let her shoulder go and crossed his arms. “Boyfriend,” he said. “Now.”

She let out a sharp exhale. “Wow, Shane, I... I don’t even know what to say.”

“Is it really that terrible?” He asked, voice shaking. “That I love him?”

Her eyes widened, and then her face turned soft. “You-you love him?”

Shane bit his lip and nodded. “So much. So much it hurts.”

He saw her cogs turning. The last twenty-four hours took on a new meaning, and then she let out a dry sob, her arms circling tightly around him. “Oh, honey. I am so sorry. You- I didn’t know. I was such an idiot. You must have been so scared.”

He returned the hug, crushingly, and buried his face in her neck. Her familiar scent grounded him. It eased the pain, hurt, anger, and frustration warring inside.

“I was,” he admitted, voice cracking. “I kept thinking of you and that night.”

Her grip tightened, and she was crying now, harder than he’d probably seen her do since. “I am sorry, honey. About everything. I am sorry about the way I handled that moment.”

“No, Mom,” Shane insisted, pulling back so he could find her eyes.

She refused to meet them.

“Mom, look at me.”

She did.

“You were so strong that night.”

Her tears fell harder, and he pulled her back in, one hand on the back of her head. “I don’t think I would have been able to live on without Ilya,” he admitted.

“I almost didn’t,” she whispered, and the words pierced something deep inside of him. “But I didn’t have a choice. I had you. I couldn’t leave you without a parent.”

“Thank you,” he murmured against her hair. “For everything. For being the best mother I could have asked for. And for always looking out for me. And loving me.”

“Thank you for telling me about yourself. And your relationship with Ilya.”

Shane felt his cheeks heat in shame. “I really was going to tell you.”

She pulled back, and there was a soft, tender smile on her face as she said, “I know you were, honey.”

Then she wiped her tears and said, with a faint smile, “I am going to make us some tea. And then you’re going to tell me all about this thing with Rozanov.”

Shane grimaced. “Do I have to?”

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 25: The Plan

Chapter Summary

As viral speculation explodes and a single ring sends the internet spiraling, Shane hides the truth behind a polished PR cover while Ilya heals an ocean away under Svetlana's fierce protection. But even as the world moves on, their whispered Russian calls and stolen affection only pull them closer, turning distance into the proof that what they have is real.

Chapter Notes

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

There were videos.

That was the catalyst for the madness and what had fucked everything up.

With eighteen hours, a first-class ticket in hand, and wifi at his disposal, Shane was ready to lose himself in it all.

He hadn't heard from Ilya since his flight departed, but stayed in touch with Svetlana, who said Ilya had been sedated and mostly asleep since Shane last saw him.

She had been the one to send him the first video, after explaining who the man was and what had prompted the visit.

He felt bad for Svetlana to have a father like that, but worse for Ilya to have had to go through that because of him.

Tears prickled Shane's eyes as he watched Ilya on the ice: focused, lethal, hot as hell. The doctors said filming was possible with Ilya's current bill of health, but Jacob contacted them and pushed filming back an extra month to be safe.

Shane knew it was smart—not to mention very considerate of him. Still, his chest tightened at the thought of how long he would have to wait to see Ilya again.

Nothing physically stopped them from meeting in LA, but the current buzz made it impossible without raising suspicion.

Video-Ilya had just scored. The screen began to shake as the young man filming started shouting and jumping in celebration. Shane caught a glimpse of himself there. He'd been on the other side of the ice, giving him a perfect view of his gleeful celebration: his whistling, the wink—fuck, he'd fucking winked at him.

What he hadn't noticed, though—and what the internet had pointed out for them—was the ring that had been hanging beside Ilya's mother's rosary on his chain. It was the unmistakable three-tone wedding band Shane had given him just the day before. On one occasion, as he was thrown into the air by teammates, the ring slipped out. They paused, zoomed in, cropped it—and then the speculation began.

And his mother had been right. She had to fly to Moscow because this was too real, too close to the reality of what he'd been doing with Ilya, and it was too much. It felt suffocating.

There was footage of his entire stunt on the ice as well, but Shane hadn't been paying attention to himself; instead, he'd been looking at Ilya's face, the way he'd been unable to hide his awe, his tenderness, his absolute fucking love for him.

Shane groaned, dropped his phone, and buried his face in his flimsy airplane pillow. He wanted to scream, open the exit door, and swim back to Russia.

He heard a tap and looked up to find his mother on the other side of the divider.

Her eyes showed concern. Shane almost guessed her next words: 'Hey, honey, let's stay off the internet and get some sleep?'

Instead, she surprised him: "Want to go over the plan of action? It'll take a couple of hours to dissect, but I can't sleep either, so what the hell?"

Even in the chaos, Shane felt the fragile ache of gratitude. He really was so, *so* lucky.

Ilya awoke to the feeling of hands brushing his hair off his forehead.

He opened his eyes slowly, relieved to find it was nighttime and there were no glaring lights tormenting his retinas.

"Hi," Svetlana said, eyes warm. "How are you feeling?"

At once, it all rushed back. Shane in Russia. The proposal. The lake. Alexie. The accident. The hospital. The Colonel. And threaded through it all, agony, both physical and emotional. He felt battered, inside and out.

So obviously, he said, "Awesome."

Svetlana laughed, but it didn't reach her eyes.

"Shane?"

"Halfway to LAX by now."

Ilya shut his eyes, relief and sorrow mixing in his veins like the IV he was hooked to.

“We need to talk.”

Ilya grimaced, but he nodded.

Without a word, Svetlana grabbed her phone and cued up a video. She dimmed the brightness and held it up for him. Even softened, the artificial glow knifed into his skull, but the discomfort faded as he watched.

It was a compilation of multiple videos and pictures of their day at the lake.

Ilya watched himself laugh, a soft smile appearing as Shane spoke to him and Svetlana, Anastasia on his hip. Seeing himself watch Shane skate—so much yearning and love on his face—made it hard to watch. Then, Ilya was lifted into the air, a chain slipping from beneath his shirt and catching the sunlight—a ring, unmistakable in its traditional design.

The video ended, and Svetlana slid the phone back into her pocket. A quiet moment stretched between them, the hush settling as memories faded into the present.

Ilya recalled his earlier words to the Colonel. The way Ilya had brought up an engagement. He'd thought it had been a stroke of genius, to use his ring as a way to push this narrative of Svetlana and him and their supposed relationship. To use Shane's own love for him as the way to protect him. Meanwhile the whole world had known the truth. Had put the pieces together. Had outed them both, their promise, out on the open.

Ilya hadn't even accepted yet and the world already knew. The Colonel already knew.

For a moment, neither one spoke. Then she said, “I have a plan.”

Ilya nodded. He was hearing her, but he wasn't listening. His mind just kept replaying the video on a loop.

“I spoke to a lawyer. He's an old friend, discreet, very well connected. He's going to help us get Anastasia and Anya out.”

Ilya's eyes snapped to her. “What?”

“Well, since you're not coming back to Russia.”

Ilya's eyes filled with tears. “Why do you say that?”

“Ilya,” she said softly, and she sat on the bed. He took her hand in his. “Did you really think I wasn't going to figure it out?” Then, as if to make her point, she pressed her hand over the ring, bulging the fabric of the hospital gown.

“I was going to tell you,” Ilya said in a rush. “I wasn't going to leave without telling you. I just thought we had more time. That-”

“Shh.” She smiled ruefully, her acceptance softening the tension in the room. “I’m not upset. I’m happy for you both. You deserve to leave this bullshit behind. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

“I want that too,” he said, voice raw. “For you, for me.”

"I know," she said, wiping a tear from his cheek. "And I'll get there. But now, it's your turn. You can count on me. Always. Shane and you both."

Ilya's bottom lip quivered, and he bit it, but then Svetlana was bending down to hold him, and all at once, the fight drained away, and it was impossible to hold back the sobs as her arms surrounded him.

“I am sorry,” he said, in between gasping breaths.

She just shushed him softly and began rocking them both side to side. Ilya was unsure how long he cried like that, held in her embrace, but eventually his tears faded. Svetlana pulled back, and he saw her own eyes were wet.

“I love you,” he told her. “You’re my family. My real one. I don’t care if we don’t share blood. You’re my sister.”

She let out a wet laugh. "Do I get a say? Not sure I want a hotheaded brother."

Ilya laughed and watched as her smile morphed into something intense and serious. “You’re the only family I’ve ever known, Ilya. That will never change.”

He touched her face. She leaned in, closed her eyes, then caught his hand, lowering it to her lap. "No more crying. This is embarrassing."

Ilya laughed. “Speak for yourself, I look hot when I cry.”

It was true, he’d been voted Teen Vogue’s hottest crier just last year. She seemed to remember. “Ugh, that wasn’t even a real award.”

“Um, my very real trophy would disagree with you.”

She chuckled. “You’re so stupid.”

“Yes, but you love me.”

She nodded, smiling gently. “Yes, I do.”

Ilya let the moment between them simmer for just a breath before he exhaled sharply. “So, what’s the plan?”

The plan was a fucking masterclass in perception manipulation.

Shane had to hand it to his mother—no one could spin a scandal into a cinematic masterpiece quite like she could. The moment photos leaked of him in Russia—staying in Ilya’s apartment—she crafted a narrative so elaborate it could’ve been its own franchise. According to her, every affectionate moment was “immersive emotional research” for their upcoming film, a phrase she delivered with such icy conviction that even Shane almost believed it. The public didn’t need to know he’d been clinging to Ilya like a man starved—they only needed to hear that he was “studying the romantic cadence of the characters’ arc,” a phrase so pretentious it practically required its own press release.

According to her, Shane’s sudden appearance in Moscow, the cozy domesticity of staying in Ilya’s apartment, and the frankly incriminating level of affection he’d shown in public were all part of a method-adjacent, cross-cultural bonding exercise for their upcoming film. And apparently, the more ridiculous the phrasing, the more believable it became.

The family day, she insisted, was even easier to explain. Yuna spun it into a “cultural immersion exercise,” claiming Shane had been shadowing Ilya’s personal life to “understand the emotional stakes of the script better”.

Meeting Anastasia? “Understanding intergenerational dynamics.”

Laughing with neighbors? “Observing community bonding rituals.”

Speaking Russian? “Linguistic preparation for authenticity.”

Meanwhile, the photos of him gazing at Ilya like he’d forgotten how to breathe were rebranded as “capturing the subtle romantic tension required for the film’s central relationship.” The thought made Shane’s mouth go dry—if anyone believed that, they deserved an award more than he ever would.

And the ring—God help him, the ring. Yuna didn’t even blink. She declared it a “symbolic prop exploration,” claiming Ilya wore it on a chain because the film’s plot involved a wedding band and they were “workshopping emotional beats through physical objects.” Shane nearly passed out when she said it with a straight face.

As Shane listened to his mother outline the plan with terrifying precision, he realized the truth didn’t matter. He felt both exposed and oddly safe, shielded by the story she wove. Her narrative had become a veil, and real events were like hidden actors on her stage. The world would believe whatever Yuna Hollander told them to believe, and for now, the official story was that everything between them was fake. “After all,” Yuna had once quipped with a knowing look, “the best stories come from pretending they’re not stories at all.”

Only he and Ilya knew how catastrophically untrue that was.

Somehow, impossibly, it worked. The ring became a prop, the affection rehearsal, and the entire trip a “deep-dive creative retreat.”

Within two weeks, the world had moved on, and Shane was back to his pre-movie routine. He balanced two personal trainers with a packed schedule of Russian lessons, diving deep into commercials spotlighting the upcoming movie. His schedule was so packed that he sometimes only got three hours of sleep.

Yet he spoke to Ilya every day and texted him whenever he could. Ilya was back in his house in LA. He'd flown back only three days after Shane had, Svetlana by his side.

Shane had just finished modeling for Calvin Klein and got inside the company-sponsored ride when he hit the call button and pressed the phone to his ear.

"[Hello, sweetheart]," Ilya greeted on the second ring.

Shane felt his soppy smile as his insides turned to mush. "[Hi, how are you feeling]?" he asked.

They had taken to speaking Russian anytime they could. Shane needed the extra practice, and Ilya was all too happy to take a break from English while in the States. It was a win-win.

"[Terrible]."

"Is it because I didn't call you something sweet?" Shane asked, lowering his voice so the driver wouldn't hear. He was sure the man had signed an NDA, but still. It didn't take a genius to put two and two together when he'd gone from speaking Russian to talking about calling each other sweet nothings.

There was a noise on the other side, like the sound of very heavy weights landing on metal. Then Ilya said, "[Exactly. Where's my sweet greeting? I gave you one]."

"[I am sorry]," Shane said, then blushed as he whispered, "[my love]."

He could hear Ilya's smile as he said, "[Better]."

"[Are you working-out?] Are you sure it's okay?"

"Da. Want me to give you Dr. Petrova's phone number so you can make sure?"

Shane grumbled out. "Nyet." Then sighed. "I'll let you go then."

Ilya replied, "[No, it's fine. I like hearing your voice while I work out. It gets me hard, and that makes me stronger]."

"Okay, I didn't get most of that," Shane admitted. Ilya laughed on the other end.

"[I said], I want to hear you talk to me because it makes me hard and I feel strong when I am hard," Ilya translated patiently. Shane could almost hear the smirk in Ilya's voice, teasing but pointed, the words holding more weight than just banter. There was an unspoken truth between them, an underlying need—a craving for an anchor, a reminder of control and focus amidst the chaos of their public lives. And Shane wanted to give it to him more than he'd wanted anything in his life.

"Oh," Shane said, his blush deepening. He glanced at the chauffeur and swallowed. "That's nice to know."

"[You're not alone, are you?]"

"Nyet."

"[Do you wish you were]?"

"Da."

"[Are you hard, right now]?"

Shane closed his eyes and shifted in his seat. "Yes."

Ilya prompted, "[In Russian.]"

"Da," Shane repeated obediently.

"[Good boy. Always such a good boy for me, Hollander]."

"Fuck," Shane cursed, crossing his legs as best he could. "Can you not?"

"[Why not]?" Ilya asked through gritted teeth. He was lifting again, his breath coming out as a hiss as he worked through his set, and Shane groaned. He could picture him so clearly.

His mind went back to that first sighting, all those years back in the hotel gym.

Shane remembered the moment with startling clarity. He had entered the hotel gym that day just looking to clear his mind and shake off the jet lag with a quick run, envisioning a straightforward workout that would leave him refreshingly tired. The gym had been quiet, almost echoing, when he walked in and saw Ilya for the first time.

At first, he thought he was looking at an athlete. Ilya was shirtless, in small black shorts that clung to his hips, body angled forward as he pulled through a set of rows with slow, devastating control. Sweat traced a sheen across his chest, catching the overhead lights and carving every muscle into sharp relief—defined pecs tightening, biceps flexing with each pull, abs contracting in a rhythm that felt hypnotic.

But it was Ilya's back that undid him. Broad, powerful, every muscle shifted under his skin like it was made to ruin Shane's life. The movement was fluid, focused, confident—almost graceful—not a trace of strain on his face. Shane had never seen anyone look so at home in their own body.

He'd frozen in the doorway, pretending to check his phone while his pulse hammered in his throat. He hadn't expected to feel anything—he'd come down for a quick run, that's all, but the attraction hit him fast and hard. Ilya didn't notice him, too absorbed in the rhythm of his workout, jaw set, breath steady, sweat sliding down the curve of his spine in a way Shane absolutely should not have been staring at.

When Ilya finally glanced up, his eyes didn't catch Shane because he'd had eyes for no one else but himself. Ilya bit his lip as he'd checked himself out in the mirror with a hunger that made Shane harden instantly, and that was when he felt it. The spark. The pull. The sudden, disorienting awareness that this man, this stranger, had just shifted something inside him.

Later, he would tell himself it was just physical attraction, just a moment of being caught off guard. But even then—standing in the doorway, heart racing, trying not to stare—he knew better. Something had started that day. Something he hadn't been ready for but couldn't have stopped even if he tried.

The sound of metal on metal took him out of his reverie.

Ilya was breathing heavily into the phone. And shit. Shane hadn't seen him in weeks, hadn't touched him, kissed him, made love with him. The sharp ache of missing Ilya hit so suddenly that Shane pressed a hand to his chest, overwhelmed by how much he longed for him—and how badly he wanted him right now. He felt lightheaded with need, a rush of heat and loneliness catching him off guard.

"[Did you have fun with Kip and Hunter yesterday]?" Ilya asked.

"Yes. Im glad I agreed to stay with them this week. I'd really missed them."

"Ah," Ilya said, and there was a sound like Ilya was drinking water. He gasped when he finished, and continued breathing heavily into the phone, making Shane want to whimper.

"Why?" Shane smiled. "[Jealous, Rozanov]?"

He froze at the slip of his tongue, eyes darting to the rearview mirror, but the driver kept his eyes straight ahead, face indifferent. Shane relaxed.

Had an NDA then. Good.

"[Of Scott Hunter]?" Ilya scoffed. "I would be surprised if he can still get it up."

"He's thirty-eight, Ilya, not eighty."

"Same thing," Ilya said, returning to his lifting.

Shane waited for him to finish before he yawned, using his acting skill to good use. It had the desired effect.

"[You did not sleep well last night]?"

Shane hid his smirk from his voice as he explained, "Nyet. The guest bedroom is being remodeled, so I had to share the bed with Scott and Kip. It's a California King, so we were fine, but still. Awkward, you know?"

With a hint of mischief, Shane wondered how long it would take for Ilya to realize he was just messing with him.

The call went deadly silent.

Shane laughed. "Ilya?"

Nothing.

Shane looked at the phone in confusion and saw the seconds still ticking by, but it was obvious Ilya had muted him. Shane laughed again and said, "[Come on, Ilya]. I was joking."

Just then, his phone dinged with a new message, and Ilya's heavy breathing came back to the line.

"Why is Svetlana texting me?"

"Open it," he said through gritted teeth as he went back to his workout.

Shane did, and then he laughed in earnest. "Ilya, there's no way!"

"Yes."

"I can't do that, it's rude!"

[Fuck that. My boyfriend is not sleeping in the same bed as Scott fucking Hunter.]

And Shane had gotten enough of that to get the gist. His heart swelled, caught between laughter and tears, as he continued to argue playfully with Ilya about it. Ilya had booked him a penthouse at the Ritz Central Park, where they'd first forged the bond of calling Shane 'his boyfriend,' a slip that had since become a proud declaration. The memory made Shane's pulse hammer with tangled pride and love. In this echo of their shared beginnings, Shane realized that the thin line between the facade and reality had all but vanished. The love he felt wasn't just part of a performance, but the truest story he'd ever tell.

And Shane loved him so much it would be concerning if he wasn't already getting used to the heavy ache of this overflowing emotion. He hoped it never got easier; he hoped loving him would always feel this way, overwhelming and agonizing in the most wonderful way.

"What about Kip?" Shane asked and heard the metal-on-metal bang as the plates on the cable machine hit each other.

"[Kip, I'll forgive, but only if I get to join]."

Now it was Shane's turn to protest; Ilya's ensuing laugh was the sweetest sound he'd heard all day.

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 26: A Ghost from the Past

Chapter Summary

As filming ends and real life looms, Shane's world cracks when a new Russian AD arrives—one whose hidden past with Ilya was never meant to surface. Betrayal, jealousy, and old wounds surge back to life, throwing their once-steady love into sudden, dangerous uncertainty.

Chapter Notes

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

Shane hated wrapping up a film. People assumed he would be happy. Filming was grueling work that kept him away from home for months. But Shane loved his job. He loved waking up and getting paid millions to act, which had been his dream ever since he could remember.

There was always sadness in leaving the small family he'd created inside the bubble of a film set. Not to mention, he always got too caught up in his roles, taking bits and pieces home with him after he finished. Which didn't usually bother him, but now there was nothing at all he wanted to keep from Roman, between his temper and his arrogance; there wasn't a lot to choose from.

To make matters worse, there was Ilya.

While filming, they had been blissfully unbothered by the public. It had been an authentic slice of paradise: five months of waking up together, spending time that wasn't just rushed sex squeezed into a stolen hour or two in a dark hotel room.

Instead, they got to hang out, laugh, and enjoy each other's company like a real couple. Made Shane find out things he hadn't known before, a new quirk, a new habit, a new spot to drive Ilya crazy with pleasure. It had been a chance for them to continue to add to what they had started in Russia.

And Shane had to admit he'd gotten a bit spoiled.

"Did you guys hear?" Troy asked as he came to a stop beside Scott and Shane on the ice.

"What?" Shane asked, and Scott said, "You mean about the Assistant Director?"

"The what?" Shane said, bending down to tighten the lace of his skates.

"Yeah, so apparently, there was an issue with one of Jacob's other works," supplied Troy. "Deleted footage—something like that. I don't know. They had already been in post-production so you can imagine the state of Jacob right now."

“Sounds like a nightmare,” Scott said. “Poor Jacob.”

"Anyway," continued Troy. "The assistant director is going to be the one directing us today. He's going to be the one to wrap up the film."

“Who are they?” Shane asked. “Do you know?”

Shane shrugged. “I asked Tatiana from wardrobe, and she said he was some Russian big shot. Apparently, he’s good, and Jacob liked his vision. He’d been helping film some of the not-so-important scenes.”

“Yeah, I filmed with him,” supplied Scott.

“How was he?” asked Shane.

Scott shrugged, leaning back against the boards. “He was cool. Quiet. Not as energetic as Jacob. Laid back. I liked him a lot.”

Shane nodded. He could work with that. Not that he had much of a choice. He wasn’t going to be prissy about this. Still, he hated when things didn’t go as planned. And getting a new director for these pivotal scenes? That wasn’t helping his anxiety.

“Good thing Rozy already wrapped,” Troy said, looking at Shane. *"Lucky."* I'm so done with this film.”

Troy had been speaking to Shane, but it was Scott who said, “Oh, no. He's here. He is getting fitted for a new costume since he ripped it during his final scene yesterday.”

“Oh, wow,” Troy said, chuckling. "Bet you he was so pissed."

"Oh, he was. Still is I bet you."

"No kidding," Troy said. "I would be pissed too if I thought I was done and I had to come back to reshoot."

Shane nodded slowly and looked down, a furrow formed between his eyebrows as he chewed on his lip.

Scott's eyebrow raised. “He didn’t tell you?”

Shane shrugged, “Must have slipped his mind.”

It wasn’t a huge deal; it was so trivial, it wouldn’t have bothered Shane if he’d never known. But it did bother him. Because he didn't know, and yet somehow Scott did.

He and Ilya had driven separately to the studio like they did every morning since they had to sleep in different beds again now that they were in LA. Still, Ilya could have told him last night when they spent hours on FaceTime. Or this morning, since they made it a habit to talk for the whole drive to work. Only Shane hadn't called him this morning like he always did,

because he'd thought Ilya had wrapped yesterday. And it was not his fault he didn't know. *Ilya hadn't fucking told him.*

The thought settled in his mind unpleasantly. An alarm was going off in his head that he hadn't noticed was blaring until he acknowledged it, and now, it was all he could focus on - like the sound of the kitchen vent, an incessant background noise that little by little riles you up until it becomes too impossible to ignore. Only now it was on, and Shane didn't know if he could even reach the off button anymore.

“When did he tell-” Shane’s question was cut short by the sound of angry Russian.

“[But I don’t want to try another one. This one is fine. It looks good, and it fits].”

Svetlana rolled her eyes, shaking her head. “[Stop being a diva, Ilya. Just go back and let them try-”

Ilya ended the conversation by sliding into the ice, leaving her seething and spluttering curses behind him.

As Shane saw him approach, he felt his mouth go a little dry.

Ilya, in skin-tight figure skating tights-

“Hey Shane, don't take this the wrong way,” Troy said. "But wow."

Shane only nodded.

Shane had seen Ilya in a hundred different outfits — street clothes, stage costumes, *nothing at all*, but nothing hit him quite like the sight of Ilya skating toward him in that outfit did.

Ilya’s build had always been athletic, toned, and fluid, but the costume made that impossible to ignore. The black base clung to him like a second skin, sleek and unforgiving, tracing every line of muscle with precision. His thighs flexed with each glide, powerful and controlled, the cut of the uniform framed his backside with such unapologetic sharpness that Shane felt heat crawl up his neck. Red and silver embellishments flared across his chest and shoulders like sparks mid-spin, catching the rink lights with every movement.

And then Ilya looked up — eyes locked on Shane, a hint of a smirk tugging at his mouth as he skated closer, effortless and precise. Shane’s breath caught. Not because of the costume. Not even because of the way Ilya moved. But because he remembered, with stark clarity, who he was staring at.

He’s mine, Shane thought, chest tight with a fierce, yearning pride that nearly hurt. Fuck, he couldn’t wait till Ilya was finally okay to go public. He really, really wanted to scream it from the top of every building in the city.

“Hi,” Shane said, the moment Ilya was within earshot.

“Hey,” Ilya replied, the smirk softening. “How is your ankle this morning? Ready to go?”

Shane had twisted it a couple of weeks back during a shot and had now been given a clean bill of health, which he needed since he had insisted on doing his own routines instead of using a body double as the other men did.

“Good. Was practicing earlier, landed everything fine, so.”

“I can’t wait to see you,” Ilya said, smiling widely. “You should stop acting. Skating is so much hotter.”

"Oh, yeah? And let you run rampant during award seasons without a real rival to put you in your place?"

"Hey," Scott said, but he was laughing. "Just cause it's true doesn't mean it doesn't hurt."

"Sorry," Shane said, but he didn't really mean it. Beside him, Ilya laughed and slid his hand on Shane's waist, his fingers gracing ever so lightly at the dip of Shane's back where the curve of his ass began. He tapped it once, then the hand was gone.

“Roz, did you hear about the new director?” Troy asked.

“Yeah,” Ilya said, surprising Shane.

Just how many things was Ilya keeping from him?

“Is whatever,” he said, shrugging. “No big deal.”

Shane rolled his eyes. Of course, he would think so. Outside of his situation with his family, nothing ever faced Ilya. Shane wished, not for the first time, that he could steal even just a little bit of that self-assurance for himself. Ilya could spare it; he had more than enough for both of them.

“Do you know him?” Scott asked. “Heard he’s Russian.”

Ilya shrugged. “Worked with him once. Long ago. Barely remember.”

Something clicked just then. Shane couldn’t explain what had triggered it, but he just knew Ilya. And Ilya had given something away. Perhaps it had been the tone of his voice, the way in which he dismissed the news, downplaying it, or his body language, but Shane frowned at the realization that Ilya was hiding more than just wardrobe malfunctions.

This wasn’t just a director. And Ilya was not being honest. Not about any of it.

The alarm bell went off at a deafening level, and Shane's heart picked up as though unwilling to be left behind in the chaos.

“Ilya,” Shane said. “Can you help me with something really quick?”

He began to skate away from the group, signaling Ilya with a quick nod to follow. Ilya joined him, and once they reached the middle of the ice rink, Shane turned to face him.

“Grab my waist.”

Ilya’s wide eyes were almost comical. “What?”

“Just do it.”

Ilya put his hands on Shane's waist with a hesitant grip. Shane slowly glided forward on the ice, acting as if testing his balance. As they moved, he asked quietly, “What’s the deal with the director?”

Shane didn’t miss the way Ilya instantly tensed, his fingers digging into Shane’s skin before he remembered to relax them. But it had been too late, and Ilya knew. Still, he said, “I told you. Worked together in film. Long time ago.”

“You’re hiding something,” Shane said, twisting so he was facing Ilya, who still held his waist. The touch felt cold against Shane’s skin, as cold as Ilya’s eyes as he met Shane’s gaze. “Why are you hiding this from me?”

“Not everything is about you, Hollander.”

“Then what is it?”

“*Nothing*,” Ilya said. “You’re being... stupid about this.”

Shane let out a dry laugh. “Oh, am I?”

“Da, you are. It’s not my fault you don’t believe it. That’s your fault. Believe what you want.”

Shane stared into those green eyes and hit the familiar, implacable wall. The sight of it was like a slap to the face after so many months without it.

“You still don’t trust me.”

Ilya let out an exasperated sigh, removing his hands from Shane’s waist and folding them over his chest. “You are overreacting over nothing, Hollander.”

“Oh, *fuck you*, Rozanov,” Shane said, and began to skate away to where Troy and Scott still were, now also joined by Max.

She raised an eyebrow at him when he approached. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Shane said, and he shouldn’t have been breathless from the exertion of skating two meters, but he somehow was. “Just needed to check out the ankle was cooperating.”

“Right, smart,” she said, giving him two thumbs up. “Okay, so let me introduce you guys to the Assistant Director, Ivan.” She motioned to someone behind Shane. “Scott, you have worked with Ivan, right?”

Scott nodded, and Max grinned as though that was the best news she'd gotten all day.

"Ivan is super nice. I'm sure you guys will connect right away," she told Shane and Troy.

Shane felt a nervous thrum of energy at her words, pulse racing, and hands clammy. He followed her eyes to a tall man, maybe even taller than Ilya. The man, much younger than Shane expected for an assistant director of such a big film, was stoic as he approached, lacking Jacob's easy smile. Shane found himself standing straighter, chest tight with anticipation, posture perfectly erect as he neared.

"Good morning," Ivan greeted, and fuck, even his voice was hot. Low in both timber and volume, words coming out even more accented than Ilya's.

"Good morning," they all echoed, and Ivan smiled. His whole face changed when he did that. It was quite... arresting.

Shane heard the sound of skates and felt Ilya's presence behind him without turning. His hand went to the small of Shane's back once he was fully stopped. Shane caught the way Ivan took a deep inhale, almost like stilling himself at the sight of him. The way his eyes went from Ilya to Shane fleetingly. The way his jaw ticked.

"[Good morning]," Ivan said, eyes on Ilya.

"[Good morning]."

Shane's pulse jackhammered in his veins. His heart plummeted, heavy and cold, into his gut.

Shane didn't need Ilya to confirm it. Shane only had to see the way Ivan looked at his boyfriend to know for sure.

They had been lovers.

Unlike in the past, when Shane had chosen to be a willing participant in Ilya's involvement with others, this left him reeling and angry. The jealousy was so raw, it felt all-consuming. This information had blindsided him. And it wasn't the jealousy of a past lover that got him, no, it was the way Ilya had lied about it. Had told Shane Ivan had been someone he had barely remembered when Ivan was looking at him the way Shane had seen himself look at Ilya in those videos from Russia.

With a love he couldn't hide, and it... It was draining, this torturous dance Ilya and Shane kept repeating—one step forward, ten steps back.

No matter how hard Shane tried to be available, Ilya kept pushing him out.

What had Shane done to deserve this? What had he done so wrong to make Ilya not trust him, even now? Even with Shane's engagement ring hanging from his neck.

They chose to start with Scott and Troy, since their scenes were the quickest to shoot. They were mostly just doing fancy footwork and some embellished hand motions. Their body doubles would do the real work.

Shane tried to lose himself in watching them, struggling to keep his mind from racing as waves of dread pooled in his chest, his thoughts spiraling so dark he barely recognized himself.

Because what if...

No, he wouldn't let himself go down that path. Nothing good waited down that road. And while Ilya did not trust Shane, Shane trusted Ilya, still, even after this.

It was hard, but Shane tried to keep his morale up. Smiling, laughing at some joke Max made during scenes -managing to deliver his best acting since they'd set foot in the ice rink.

Then it was Ilya's turn, and Shane couldn't hear Max over the pounding in his ears from his own erratic heart.

From where Shane stood, up in the rafters, he saw Ivan step onto the ice. Ivan shook hands with Troy, then Scott, before stepping over to Ilya, who was watching him with a withdrawn expression.

And Shane had been right. Ivan was taller than Ilya—not by a lot, but enough that Ilya had to look up a bit as they spoke. Just as Shane had to with Ilya.

Shane couldn't make out their voices from this far away, so he strained his eyes to read their lips. He saw Ilya say yes, shake his head, and then say no. All in Russian.

Because, of course, it was easier to slip into their first language with one another. No need to pretend, no need for four-hour classes every afternoon to make an accent believable. They were born, raised, and shaped by the same nation.

It must've felt so lovely for Ilya to have Ivan there. To finally be able to speak confidently and fluidly, without holding back his opinions and ideas just because he didn't know how to voice them in a foreign language.

Shane had been so happy when Ilya started talking more openly in Russian with him, both in set and in private. It made Shane glad that Ilya felt comfortable enough to do that. That he felt confidence that Shane would get it. Get him.

And yes, Shane loved acting. And he loved being praised for doing a good job. But he loved Ilya more. He loved him so much he was willing to leave it all behind if Ilya asked him to. So he'd learned his language, practice six hours instead of the four he was mandated to, only no one knew about those extra two hours when Shane did his own research, using bits and pieces of Ilya's childhood, his favorite artists, memorizing lines from his favorite shows and movies, because it made him happy to be that piece of home away from home for Ilya.

But now, Ilya didn't need Shane for that anymore. Now, Ilya had Ivan.

Ilya's scene was short, just a couple of twirls, the same as the other two men before him.

And then... it was Shane's turn on the ice.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 27: A Gold Medal Worthy Performance

Chapter Summary

Shane finally lands the impossible jump, but one whispered “I love you” on a live mic turns victory into danger. Forced back on script under Ivan’s glare, he leaves the ice drained and shaken, the crack between him and Ilya widening just when they needed each other most.

Chapter Notes

Shoutout to borntodyke. Thank you for the support. I hope you enjoy :)

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

“Let’s start you over there. We will shoot the triple axel first.”

Shane nodded, but his mind was cataloguing him now as he spoke. Like the way Ivan’s eyes were a grey color, and his hair was dark black, trimmed short at the sides and longer on top. He had three piercings, one on the right earlobe and two on the left. And he smelled like the ice rink they were in, like he’d been here for far longer than any of them had.

Shane skated away, then stood on his cue. “I got to build up to it. So I’m going to start two moves before, okay?”

Ivan spoke to Max, then nodded. Shane waited until he left the ice, hoping Ivan would fall—but he didn’t.

Pity.

As Ivan left, Shane noticed Ilya hadn’t gone to the rafters like Scott and Troy; instead, he stood behind the director’s chair, hidden among the crew, watching Shane intensely.

Shane closed his eyes.

From behind closed lids, Shane saw the lights dim, so he was in the artificial spotlight, and at once all the sound was sucked from the room.

Shane took a deep breath, letting his body slip into performance mode, slipping on the old skin of the competitor he used to be. Anxiety prickled beneath his skin. He tried to remind himself it was just a movie and nothing was at stake, but his muscles stayed tense, his heart pounding fiercely, refusing to listen.

He shook out his hands, letting some of that tension out, just as he heard Ivan call out, “We’re all set.”

Shane nodded and exhaled one last, shuddering breath, forcing his fingers to loosen before he opened his eyes.

He made sure they were on Ilya as the music started.

Shane pushed off, letting the cold air sting his cheeks as he gathered speed. The cameras were rolling, but the only thing he truly cared about was the music swelling through the rink’s speakers — low strings at first, pulsing like a heartbeat beneath the ice. The melody had been chosen for this moment, for *Shane’s* moment, and it wrapped around him like a current pulling him forward.

He could feel every hour of training in his body. The early mornings when the rink lights flickered on before sunrise. The conditioning sessions left his legs trembling. The drills — endless, punishing drills — until his muscles burned and his coaches told him to stop before he broke something. The choreography sessions where he repeated the same entry steps until he could feel them in his sleep. The nights he lay awake replaying every failed attempt.

And always, always, the jump.

The combination that had haunted him for years.

Back-to-back quad loop into quad salchow. Two quadruple jumps, four rotations each, thrown one after the other with no breath in between. A combination so rare that most skaters didn’t even dare to attempt it.

He’d tried it when he was competing. Tried it until his body gave out. Tried it until the fear of failing became heavier than the desire to land it. The loop alone was brutal — blind landing, unforgiving edge. The salchow demanded explosive power. Doing them consecutively? It bordered on impossible. A handful of skaters in the world had even attempted it. None had made it look clean.

The script only called for a triple axle; no one in their right mind could demand more, but this wasn’t about the movie anymore. This was about proving a point to everyone. To himself. He’d wanted it more than anything.

Back then, it had felt like the line between greatness and failure.

And he had failed. Every time.

He wouldn’t let himself fail. Not anymore.

The music rose, the strings tightening, and percussion began to rumble around them like distant thunder. Shane felt the vibration of it in his ribs. The choreography had been timed so the climax would hit right as he launched — a cinematic flourish, the director had said. But for Shane, it felt like something else. Like the music was daring him, mocking him. Just as it had every time before.

He circled the rink again, nerves jangling as the melody climbed higher, sharper, more urgent. His heart hammered in his chest, keeping pace with the frantic rhythm. His breath came quick and jagged. Every muscle in his body tightened, anticipation coiling inside him.

He thought of the weeks leading up to filming — the bruises, the falls, the frustration. The coaches who had told him he was close. The trainers who pushed him harder.

The music surged. Violins soared. Drums pounded. The entire rink seemed to vibrate with the sound.

This is it.

He accelerated, blades carving deep into the ice. The world narrowed to the sound of the music and the rhythm of his own breath. His arms drew in. His core tightened. His legs burned with the familiar ache of power gathering.

The music hit its peak in a sharp, explosive crescendo.

He launched it before he could overthink it.

The air spun around him — one, two, three, four — and he felt the landing under him, clean and shockingly soft. No time to celebrate. No time to breathe.

The orchestra crashed around him — drums, brass, strings — a tidal wave of sound as he left the ice again. The world blurred as he rotated, suspended in a moment that felt impossibly long and impossibly short. Then-

His blade touched down.

Holy shit.

The music cut to a ringing silence, the final note hanging in the air.

Shane stood there, stunned, the echo of the music and the jump still vibrating through his bones.

The rink froze—crew, extras, coaches—staring as if unsure what they'd seen.

Then the applause erupted. A wave of sound crashed over him. Cheers, shouts, disbelief, joy. The director yelled something unintelligible. Someone clapped so hard, their hands echoed off the boards. Someone else swore in awe.

Shane exhaled, chest heaving, adrenaline buzzing through every nerve.

He'd done it. Finally, he'd fucking done it.

Not for a medal. Not for a score.

For himself.

And it felt better than gold, better than any trophy on his wall. It felt like reclaiming a piece of himself he thought he'd lost forever.

A body crashed into his on the ice. Strong arms circling him with so much force that the air was pushed out of his lungs.

“[Holy fuck, Shane. That was incredible. You're so incredible. The best. So perfect. Fuck].”

Shane melted into Ilya's touch, letting his praise warm him. He felt tears pool in his eyes.

He'd done it. Holy shit. Holy fucking shit.

Ilya pulled Shane back with his shoulders, eyes wild, a huge grin splitting his face. “[How the fuck did you do that]?”

Shane only laughed and shrugged. “I don't fucking know.”

Ilya crushed him to his chest again, and Shane buried his face into his chest. He was so happy, so happy, and full of love for this man who was so proud of him.

“I love you,” he murmured against Ilya's chest.

Ilya froze. And that's when Shane remembered, when it all came crashing back.

They were filming a movie.

With microphones. Live microphones. That connected to the crew's earpieces.

Ilya stepped back, his eyes wide, not with joy but with gut-wrenching fear and shock, regret twisting his expression.

“That was a good jump,” Ilya said, voice cracking.

“Thank you,” Shane said, quickly. And skated away, so fast he was in front of Ivan and Max in the next breath.

Max hugged him when he reached her, squeezing hard. “Shane! That was incredible!”

“Do you do this a lot?” Ivan asked.

Both Max and Shane turned to him.

“I used to,” Shane said, smiling. “Back in college.”

“Not the skating. I meant this, going off script.”

The floor might as well have dropped from beneath Shane's feet. “Excuse me?”

“The script asked for a triple axel.”

Shane couldn't believe it. He glanced at Max, who looked equally stunned.

“I know,” Shane said slowly. “I just thought this would be-”

“Do they pay you to think, or do they pay you to act what is written on the script?”

“Ivan,” Max admonished. “Shane, thank you. Can you give us a moment, please?”

Shane nodded, skating away. He passed Ilya’s body on the ice, who was still standing where Shane had left him, his face unreadable as he looked towards where Max and Ivan were now in deep, hushed discussion. Ilya didn’t follow him to the other side of the ice, and Shane didn’t know if to feel disappointed or relieved.

He’d just made it when he heard two sets of skates coming up behind him. He turned to find Scott and Troy, smiling widely and dashing madly for him.

“Shane, you absolute beast!” Troy shouted, just as Scott did a perfect hockey stop, flying ice landing over Shane’s skates as he groaned, and shielded his face.

They were hugging them next, their laughter contagious, and Shane found himself smiling against his own will.

“I can’t wait to see that shit on the big screen,” continued Troy. “Jacob is going to flip.”

Shane’s smile dropped. “Yeah, well. I don’t think they’re going to keep it.”

“What are you talking about?”

Scott scoffed. “Of course, they are going to keep it. Come on.”

Just then, Ivan’s voice rang out, so loud he didn’t need a megaphone as he said, “Restarting the scene in five minutes. Everyone who is not Shane is off the ice. Now.”

Scott and Troy looked at each other, then at Shane, and Shane felt his lip quiver, even as his insides started to become numb.

“Shane,” Troy called, but he was already skating back to the center. Towards where Ilya was still standing.

“You don’t have to do this.”

Shane shot him a tired smile. “Off the ice, Rozanov. I have a triple axel to land.”

Ilya watched him for a moment longer, his head shaking imperceptibly as he did, like he couldn’t believe it, like he was upset. But what help would that be? Shane was upset, too, but as Ivan had said, they didn’t pay him to be upset unless the script called for it, and right now, the script needed a triple axel and a happy skater.

“[Ilyushka],” Ivan’s voice called out. “[Off the ice.]”

“[Go],” Shane told him, even as the nickname bounced around his brain like a bullet ricocheting.

Shane put a hand on Ilya's chest, pushing him back. Ilya let his body slide backwards, the slight push not carrying him very far.

Shane closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Fighting to draw back the energy to do a triple axle after he'd left it all on the ice moments before. He knew before he even started that he wasn't going to be able to. His legs were shaking, and his core felt weak, as if it took his muscles three times the effort to steady him. His arms were heavy as he raised them, and when the lights dimmed again, and the music started, the percussion felt like mourning drums.

He landed the triple axel.

Finished the scene.

And then he walked out of the ice and into the locker room without being dismissed.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 28: The Night Everything Fell Apart

Chapter Summary

When Shane learns the truth about Ilya's past with Ivan, their confrontation detonates into something that leaves them both shattered—Shane collapsing in his mother's arms while Ilya falls apart under Svetlana's steady care. But in the wreckage, Ilya chooses to change, reaching out with a raw, hopeful promise that their story isn't over yet.

Chapter Notes

I am sorry.

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

They wrapped early that evening, and Shane was grateful because he didn't know how much more of this he could take.

Doing his job now took every ounce of his considerable self-control. He'd always felt undeserving when awarded titles like "Best actor." But now? After today's performance, if he didn't win one, he would have actually felt robbed.

Shane had also been ignoring Ilya.

Not that Ilya had made any real attempts to talk to him, except during their scenes.

However, just because Ilya hadn't interacted with him didn't mean he wasn't watching him. It was rather annoying to have Ilya follow his every move, as if Shane were a ticking time bomb that could go off at any moment.

Shane figured it was a fair assessment. That was undoubtedly how he felt. And maybe it was the competitive stubbornness his mother claimed she'd given him, but Shane refused to let Ilya see him fall apart or do a bad job because of their personal issues.

Shane was a professional, and as such, he grabbed his keys and coat and ran out of the set at lightning speed the moment he was given the okay.

Ignoring their agreement to meet at Ilya's after shooting, Shane went straight home instead.

Shane's fingers shook as he tried to put the code on the door. It took him three tries. And when he got inside, he leaned against it, suddenly drained.

“Mom,” he called out, even though he knew she wasn’t home. Her car had been missing from the driveway.

The utter stillness of his home chilled him, as he took off his shoes at the door before going towards the fridge.

A notification from his front camera warned him someone was at the front door, followed almost instantly by familiar beeps as they entered the front door code. Shane grabbed the water bottle and closed the fridge as he waited for his mom to get it.

The door closed with a soft tap, then a familiar voice grunted, low and annoyed.

Shane turned the corner to find Ilya toeing off his Vans, one hand against the wall for balance. Ilya looked up when he heard Shane approach and stilled.

“Hi.”

“I knew I should have changed the code.”

Ilya’s face dropped. “Sorry. I thought about calling, but knew you would not pick up.”

Shane crossed his arms over his chest. Ilya just watched him, and Shane felt his resolve begin to crumble just from looking at the contrition on his face.

It was unfair.

“Stop looking at me like that. I am mad at you.”

Ilya’s lip quirked up on one side before he forced it down again. He nodded. “I know. I am sorry. I want to explain.”

“Okay,” Shane said. “I’m listening.”

“[My love],” Ilya said, softly. “Let’s sit down somewhere, yes?”

Shane let the warmth bloom inside him at the pet name, tension warring with fondness.

Minutes later Shane sat purposefully on the love seat, forcing Ilya to take the sofa across from him.

“[I am sorry.]”

“For?”

“For all of it. I should have told you.”

“Yes, you should have,” Shane shot back, crossing his arms over his chest again.

“I get why you’re mad,” Ilya said. “But I didn’t think...” He sighed. “That’s not... [Fuck, this is not at all what I wanted to say, it’s just... I am so scared. Even now].”

“Scared?” Shane asked, brows furrowing. “Of what?”

Ilya stood.

Shane watched him approach, then let his arms drop as Ilya straddled his hips so they faced each other, Ilya’s hands cupping Shane’s face.

Shane sat frozen, his eyes staring up at Ilya’s.

“[This is better],” Ilya said, fingers running over Shane’s cheeks, over his freckles. “I am sorry I didn’t tell you about Ivan. He was lover, back in Russia. My first with a man.”

Shane tried not to react at the admission. Even as the knowledge added to the dislike Shane already felt toward the man.

“He was the assistant director for my movie. We weren’t good for each other. Not healthy. Not like how we are,” he said, looking into Shane’s eyes. “And I never loved him. Never. I have only ever loved one person. He meant nothing to me.”

Shane tried to fight against the pain and betrayal that still had him feeling too raw, too exposed.

“How long have you known he would be directing us?”

Ilya looked guilty as he said, “A week.”

“*A whole week?* And you didn’t tell me?” Shane spluttered, pushing against Ilya’s chest until he got off, then he stormed off, unable to be near him any longer.

“I am sorry,” Ilya said.

“Stop saying that!” Shane yelled, shaking. “I am so fucking mad I can’t even look at you.”

“Shane,” Ilya said, trying to place a hand on Shane’s shoulder. Shane smacked it away.

“Don’t,” Shane warned, raising one hand to stop him when Ilya tried to come closer. “What else have you been hiding from me?”

“*Nothing*,” Ilya said.

Shane turned to him, eyes hard. “I don’t know if I can believe you.”

“Hollander.”

“I think you should go,” Shane said, his voice as cold as ice.

“Please, let me explain.”

“Explain? You mean make me feel like I am crazy to be upset that you still don’t fucking trust me, even after all this time. Does that ring, that promise I made to you with your mother as witness, mean nothing to you?”

Ilya recoiled as if struck, eyes wide.

Shane wanted to stop. The words poured out anyway.

"I guess that's why you haven't accepted it. Because then you would have to actually let me in, and that's something you don't feel I'm worthy of."

"*Hollander*," Ilya said, and he looked pained, as if Ilya was breaking his heart. And good, because Ilya had already broken his. He had broken it a million times, and Shane was tired of putting it back together.

"I don't think I can do this," Shane whispered, eyes downcast.

"[What are you talking about]?" Ilya said, then he was in front of Shane, his fingers digging into Shane's chin as he searched for the eyes Shane kept resolutely away. "Shane, what are you talking about?"

Shane stepped out of his hold. "I am tired of this back and forth. Me putting myself out there and you playing with me," he said bitterly.

"I am not *playing* with you."

"Yes, you are," Shane said, voice cracking with emotion. "You know how I feel. How in love with you I am. But it means nothing when you can't be honest with me. If I haven't made it so you feel comfortable enough to open up then what the fuck are we even doing here, Ilya?"

"Shane," Ilya said, letting out a sharp exhale. "You are not making sense. Or maybe is English. I dont-"

"[The movie is wrapped. It's finished. We are done]."

"Are you talking about the movie..." Ilya said, now his voice was trembling, as were his hands as they tried to reach for Shane again. Shane stepped out of his reach. Then Ilya's voice turned cold. "You talking about us? [Are we finished?]"

Shane didn't answer. Couldn't bring himself to speak, couldn't bring himself to even look at him.

Ilya let out a sound like someone had dug a rusted rebar into his chest and twisted.

Shane felt the tears fall as Ilya began walking away.

Shane heard Ilya reach the door and slip into his shoes. Then the door opened. It stayed open for a long time. Shane almost wondered if Ilya had left it wide open, but then it slammed shut.

And Shane knew Ilya had waited. Had waited for Shane to run after him, to say he'd been wrong. That he'd just been emotional. That he hadn't meant it.

Shane crumbled to the floor, his knees just giving out from under him. He was screaming then, shouting at the top of his lungs as he let out all the rage and anger and agony. The sounds were being ripped from him, scratching his throat until he knew he'd go hoarse, but just kept screaming more and more.

Until his mother arrived. He hadn't even heard her over his own wails. The moment she got in and heard him she ran to his side, kneeling in front of him, her face full of worry. "Shane? Shane, honey, what's wrong? What happened? Are you hurt?"

Shane nodded, shaking and sobbing in her hold.

"Where does it hurt?"

Shane slammed his fist hard against his chest -once, twice, three times- and then Yuna was pulling his wrist to keep him from doing it again. She shushed him as she cradled his head against her chest.

"We are done," Shane said, gasping for air he couldn't get in his lungs. "Ilya, he... we are over."

Yuna froze, but she didn't ask him any questions. Just continued to hold him and place kisses against his head, whispering soothing words that were meaningless.

And he already missed Ilya so much it felt suffocating.

And Shane was dying.

And the worst part was that it had been a suicide.

Ilya wasn't sure how he managed to make it home.

He sat inside his car, now parked in his driveway. His hands shook so hard that his vision blurred with tears he hadn't allowed to shed. He felt raw, numb. His mind struggled to catch up to what his heart already knew.

He checked his phone.

No messages or calls.

Then, his front door opened. Ilya watched, detached, as Svetlana's smile faded into concern. She ran and pulled on his door, which stayed closed since he hadn't unlocked it. He hadn't even turned the car off.

He did, and then she was on him at once.

"What's wrong? Is it your head again? Is it Shane? Is something wrong with Shane?" Her face grew even more alarmed at this possibility, and Ilya just... couldn't.

He got out of the car, feeling as if he was watching himself through someone else's eyes. Svetlana stayed beside him, arms out as though ready to catch him if he dropped. He was glad. He really did fear he might.

Ilya made it all the way to the kitchen. He grabbed the half-finished vodka from the cabinet—the good kind, the one he didn't like to display. He didn't bother with a glass. He opened the bottle and took two long swigs.

Svetlana cursed. She went to take it away from him, but he used his height to his advantage—craning his neck higher as he continued to drink from it. One. Two. Three.

She jumped and tried to grab it, and at the same time, Ilya moved.

The sound of glass shattering against the hard tile floor made them both jump.

"Fuck, Lana!"

"Step back, asshole," Svetlana ordered, pushing him away from the broken shards.

She returned moments later with a mop, a small pan, and a duster. Dropping down, she began to clean. Ilya gripped the kitchen counter to ground himself. His stomach was warm from the vodka, even as his hands felt clammy and he trembled. He watched her toss the shards in the trash.

Then, she turned.

Ilya expected to see anger, and he did. But it quickly turned back into the concern he hated so much.

"Look what you fucking did!" Ilya shouted. "That was my favorite, from Russia. Now, how am I going to get another?"

"I'll bring another one when I visit."

"I don't want you to bring me another one. I wanted that one."

She leveled him with a bored look. "Stop being a fucking child. And tell me what's really going on."

"Nothing," Ilya said automatically. "Well, now there's something wrong. You broke my favorite bottle of Vodka."

"Ilya." She said his name the same way his mother had.

"Shane broke up with me."

The moment he said the words, the dam broke open.

He crouched down, his back against the hard metal of the dishwasher. He covered his face and began to cry in earnest, letting go of the tears he'd been fighting. Keeping them back had

been torture, but this felt worse.

"What happened?" Svetlana asked, crouching in front of him.

Ilya whimpered, a pathetic sound he'd never made before. Another followed, prompted by Svetlana pulling him into a hug.

"Are you sure you understood him? Are you sure he didn't say he needed to take a break? Because he was tired from shooting?"

Ilya shook his head, still buried in her neck. "He said—" He sobbed. "That we were—" Another sob. "Finished. Done. Like our movie."

"Oh, Ilya." She ran soothing motions up his back, shaking her head. "I am sure there was more to it. Shane loves you so much. Sometimes I think even more than you love him."

This only made Ilya sob harder, because that wasn't fucking true. That wasn't true at all, but somehow Shane thought so, and so did Svetlana, and Yuna, of course, probably. How had he fucked up so monumentally?

"I wish I knew how to show it better," Ilya admitted. "I just don't... I don't know what I am doing wrong. I thought—"

"You did nothing wrong."

Ilya shook his head adamantly, pushing back from Svetlana. "Yes, I did," he told her. "I didn't tell him about Vanya. And he figured it out all by himself, which I knew he would, but I was such a coward."

He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes. "And I keep hiding things. I still haven't told him I want to marry him. I still haven't mentioned that I was planning to come out during the press release."

"Why not? Why are you—"

"I'm so scared," Ilya whispered, lowering his hands and tilting his face to the ceiling. He hadn't wanted to admit it, even to himself.

But he was scared Shane wouldn't want to—and then Ilya would be left wanting. Or worse, Ilya feared he couldn't go through with it, and Shane would be left disappointed. Again.

"I don't know what to do."

Svetlana ran a hand through his hair, coming to sit beside him against the dishwasher. The room smelled strongly of alcohol, which didn't help. The smell took Ilya back to his childhood—his father, yelling at his mother, being cruel after too many drinks. Ilya didn't want that for them, but he didn't know what else to do.

He wanted to be better, but navigating unknown waters in darkness felt suffocating. Shane had been that destination, the place he always wanted to reach. But there was no lighthouse—

only waves and jagged rocks, shaped by his childhood and life before Shane. Before he knew there was more than darkness and pain.

Ilya gripped the ring still on his chain and whispered, "I don't want to lose him."

"Then don't. Talk to someone, Ilya. Not me, but... someone. Professionals. You've been avoiding this for so long, but we both know nothing will ever change until you do."

"It's not that simple."

"Who said anything about simple?" Svetlana asked, her voice softening. "I love you, my brother. Even more now that you seem happier, more open, and freer. Shane has given you the first tools to break this curse; now you must do the rest."

Ilya thought about this for a moment, then scoffed. "Since when have you become so wise?" he asked.

"Since life made it so, I had to be the voice of reason for both of us."

"Sorry," Ilya said, placing a hand on her knee. "You're honestly the best thing to ever happen to me."

"No, that's Shane."

Ilya smiled sadly. "It used to be."

"It still is," Svetlana said, rolling her eyes. "Fuck, you can be so stubborn." She pulled out her phone, and Ilya watched her go through her contacts. She found Dr. Molchalina and forwarded the contact to Ilya. Then she said, "There, now it's up to you."

"I don't think I can do it," Ilya said.

"Yes, you can. You are one of the strongest and bravest men I have ever met. And you have a beautiful, kind heart. Let the world see what I see. Learn how to let them see it. Do it for Shane, but most importantly, do it because you owe it to yourself."

Svetlana became blurry through Ilya's tears. "Okay," he said, voice shaky. "I will call her tomorrow."

Svetlana kissed his cheek, then she stood and extended her hand. "Come now. Let's get some food and watch shitty American television."

Ilya smiled and let her pull him, already feeling a bit better now that he had a plan.

They ordered from Shane's favorite restaurant. Ilya cried into his soup. Still, he managed to smile and laugh with Svetlana as they watched reality TV curled up on his sofa. Dr. Molchalina's phone number weighed heavily in his pocket.

That night, he texted Shane once before putting his phone on do not disturb.

I love you. Please do not give up on me. I will do better. I promise.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 29: Your Secret Is Safe With Me

Chapter Summary

Crushed by the breakup, Ilya unravels in therapy, finally confronting the lifelong wounds and buried fears that made him believe he'd never be enough for the man he loves. And when he walks out with trembling hope, his message to Shane is the first step toward a truth he's terrified may already be too late.

Chapter Notes

We made it, ya'll. Welcome to the penultimate chapter.

How are we feeling? I am wrecked, thanks for asking.

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

Dr. Molchalina's office was next to an industrial warehouse. So far removed from central LA that he had to check the address three times to make sure he had it right.

As Ilya drove, his phone rang—his tenth call from Rose.

He gripped the steering wheel, sighed, and finally answered, "Hey. Before you start, I know I was—"

"Oh, my God. Roz. Are you okay?"

His grip tightened on the steering wheel.

"No," he admitted, letting his voice tremble.

"Yeah, that was a dumb question. Do you want to pass by? We could talk."

"Thank you, but I can't. I am... busy today."

She was silent for a moment, then she said, "Okay. But just remember I am here, okay?"

Ilya nodded, his jaw tightening. Then, before he could take it back, he asked, "How is he? Is he... okay?"

"Ilya," she sounded sad. "I can't... You should be asking him that yourself."

“I know,” he said, turning into the parking lot. “Listen, Rose, I have to go.”

“Okay,” she said again. “I love you, Roz. You guys... it’ll be okay. You just need to talk it out.”

“I know,” he repeated, his eyes on the nondescript door in front of him. “I’ll do it soon. I promise. I just need to work some things out first.”

“Yes,” she said. “Okay. Let me know if you need anything. I am here. And I love you both.”

“I know. Me, too.”

Ilya sat in the chair, his heart pounding so fast it seemed loud in the silent waiting room.

He’d walked in using the code he’d been given and found himself in a small waiting area. There was one plant, one sofa, and the sharp scent of essential oil and incense. The smell reminded him of a yoga studio Shane liked to frequent.

He stood quickly as the only other door opened, and then he was faced with a tall woman, his height, blonde, with kind blue eyes and glasses. When she spoke, she spoke in Russian, and Ilya felt tears instantly. He didn’t even know why. What had prompted it, but one moment he was fine, then he just wasn’t.

Dr. Molchalina did not seem phased. She guided him into the dimly lit room, with a sofa, a love seat, a bookshelf, some degrees on the wall, a plant in the corner, and a center table with tissues. He sat on the sofa and accepted the box of tissues.

“I am sorry,” he said, even as the tears kept coming.

Grief ripped through him, every sob clawing its way out after years of being locked inside.

He cried for almost the entire session. By the end, his body felt wrung out, empty—yet somehow startlingly light. The tears, heavy as anchors, had been with him for so long he’d forgotten their burden, only now realizing how deeply they’d weighed him down.

“Sorry,” he said, dabbing at his eyes to collect what appeared to be the last of his tears.

“Don’t be,” she told him. “You will be surprised how often I get this reaction during the first session.”

That made him feel a lot better. “Really?”

She nodded.

He blew his nose and tossed the tissue in the almost overflowing trash can.

“Thank you for agreeing to see me on such short notice.”

She smiled softly. “I like to be available when needed, so I don’t take many clients.”

Ilya smiled gratefully. “Thank you. I hope I won’t need to bother you often.”

“You will never be a bother to me.” She placed her hands on her lap, where she had a closed notebook. “Would it be okay if I asked what finally made you seek help?”

He’d thought hard about this, -had been expecting it- and had distilled his answer to one simple sentence that was anything but.

“I want to be enough for him.”

“For who?”

“For my...” He swallowed. “My future husband.”

“Okay,” she didn’t even look surprised by the news. “Was he the one who recommended you do this?”

Ilya shook his head. “My friend Svetlana did. We grew up together. She’s technically the only family I have left.”

“I am sorry to hear that, but I am glad you have someone who loves you and wants what’s best for you.”

He nodded, smile growing soft. “She’s the best. I am fortunate.”

“Do you always feel fortunate?”

Ilay shrugged. “I try to. I know I have been lucky. I had a lucky break that got me this life and helped me accomplish my dreams. Got me more money than I could spend in one lifetime, which allowed me to help my niece, brother, and father -may he rest.”

“May he rest,” she echoed.

Ilya swallowed. “But I also feel like an impostor. Had the role gone to anyone else, they would be the ones living my life now. I am not special. Just... lucky.”

“So, you think it was luck that made this possible, not skill?”

Ilya nodded, mouth dry. He drank the water she'd offered.

She waited until he finished before she said, “Even though you won an Oscar for that performance?”

He paused. She noticed.

“Do you think the Academy made a mistake?” She probed.

Ilya shook his head quickly. “No.”

She waited.

And suddenly, he frowned.

She smiled a barely-there smile, jotting something down in her notebook as she allowed him to stay in this moment.

“Holy fuck,” Ilya said with a dry laugh. He’d always joked with Shane about winning the Oscar first—teasing him to see that angry kitten face Ilya loved—but had never let himself truly believe the words.

In his mind, Shane was the better actor: more serious, more thorough. Shane perfected lines and workshopped characters until he embodied them. Ilya didn’t. He just showed up, read the script, and acted his ass off until they yelled cut.

He’d always felt less than because of it. But they both held the same awards on their walls. Both had the same amount of screen time in movies. Both were starring in a major motion picture together as dual protagonists.

“When did this mindset begin?”

Ilya looked up at her, trying to come up with an answer. Finally, he said, “Ever since I can remember.”

She nodded, jotting something else down. “I read online that you were quite good at hockey when you were younger. Did the sport have anything to do with it?”

He shook his head reflexively, then stopped, frown deepening.

Had it?

He recalled the hockey camps, the coaches telling him he needed to be faster, more accurate with his shots, more aggressive on the ice, a better team player, a better captain. Through it all, he heard his father telling his coaches he was lazy, he was incapable of doing better because his mother’s genetics had ruined him. Ilya heard his father compliment Alexei, who wasn’t as fast, or as strong a skater, or as good at scoring goals. Saw his pride as he showed off his other son, the future “King of the KHL”.

Only Alexei hadn’t even made the Junior Hockey League. Ilya had. And then Ilya had brought Gold to Russia three times and was rumored to be the top pick, not in the KHL but in the NHL. And he still wasn’t as good, never as perfect as Alexei, who was probably the worst hockey player Ilya had ever seen, and the worst person Ilya had ever met -besides his father.

So, he’d become like him -like them, especially after his mother’s death had left him with no other role models to follow. Nothing soft, nothing but the brutality of being a Rozanov in that house that smelled of vodka and sex and was never peaceful to him.

“It wasn’t hockey,” he said. “It was my father and brother.”

“Do you want to talk about them?”

Ilya shook his head. “Not today.”

She nodded.

“I want to talk about... Shane.”

She nodded again, once more not showing any surprise at the sound of Shane’s name. Even though she knew who he was referring to.

“Your future husband,” she confirmed.

He nodded. “Well, I hope so.”

“Are you planning on asking him?”

“He already asked me,” he said, and took out his chain, showing her the ring.

She smiled at it. “That’s very beautiful. Very traditional.”

“Yes,” Ilya smiled down at it. “I can’t wait to wear it on my finger.”

“From your words, I gather he asked, but you haven’t answered yet.”

“I wanted to say yes from the moment he asked. But we were in Russia at the time, and I was so scared to. I was terrified he would get into trouble because of me, because of us. So, I put it here, next to my mother’s rosary. The last piece of her I have. He asked me in front of her, you know?” He let out a gentle smile at the memory. “I took him to meet her, her grave, of course, and he asked, right then and there. Asked for her blessing and presented me with his ring.”

He let his fingers run through the warm metal. “I love him so much it hurts. And he does things like that. Like knowing exactly what to say and when, and how to be so perfect. He doesn’t have to earn his place. Everywhere he goes, people know he’s there because he belongs. No one questions his worthiness. He sets the standard. I want to be better. I want to be a husband worthy of him.”

“Have you told him this?”

Ilya shook his head.

“Why not?”

Ilya inhaled sharply. “I... I guess I don’t want him to think less of me.”

She jotted that down. “Do you think he will?”

Ilya shrugged.

“Has he ever made any indication or said something to this effect?”

Ilya thought about it.

He recalled Shane's words that day. How Shane had made sure his mother knew how amazing Ilya was. What a great person Ilya had become. How much Shane loved him. Gone as far as to say he wasn't even half the man Ilya was, that he couldn't measure up. That his life was better because Ilya was in it.

"No," Ilya said. "Opposite. He always makes me feel like I can do it all. He pushed me into this role I was scared to take on, even though I knew deep down I really wanted to do it. He made me brave when I wasn't. In Russia. He made me forget my fears, made me want to be better."

"Then why not tell him about this? How you feel?"

"I am scared I will not know how."

She waited for him to elaborate.

"I have never been good at saying how I feel. That's why I love acting. Because I can say other people's words. I can be the voice I cannot... give myself."

She nodded, jotting it down.

"Also," he continued, swallowing. "I never had someone show me it was okay. Growing up, talking about your emotions meant you were weak, and weakness was something that just could not be allowed to exist. So I didn't show it. I didn't talk about it. I just let it consume me. And I knew it was bad, I felt it eating me alive. But my brother and father seemed not to feel so why should I?"

"There is nothing wrong with feeling," she said. "Human beings are made to feel. It's a biological necessity. We feel pain, so we know when something is not beneficial for us and can stop it. We feel hunger so we can feed ourselves, we feel sleepy when our mind requires rest."

"Is love a biological reaction?" He asked.

"It most definitely is."

"I think so, too," he admitted. "Sometimes I feel it so much, it consumes me. And I can go hours without eating, or drinking water, or even forgo sleep, to not miss a moment with him."

"And he knows this?"

Ilya smiled. "Yes, this he knows."

"Then, what is the worst-case scenario?"

Ilya bit on his lip as he pondered her question.

"I don't know. The worst has already happened."

“How so?”

“He... we are not together anymore. He broke up with me. Yesterday.”

She noted that down, nodding. “Did he tell you why?”

Ilya closed his eyes against the pain of remembering that moment.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “I kept something from him. Something big. And I have done it before. As I mentioned before, talking about things, especially things from my past, is hard for me.

“Can be triggering?”

“Triggering?”

“Painful because it brings up buried memories, so it triggers negative reactions and emotions from when you went through that period of your life.”

“Ah, yes. Very triggering.”

“So okay, the worst has happened. What is the second worst?”

Ilya sighed. “That I go and speak to him and tell him. Finally, open up and go against every instinct. Spill it all out there, but it’s too late. He doesn’t believe me because I have broken his trust too many times. And that he doesn’t forgive me. Doesn’t love me anymore.”

She regarded him for a moment. “What would you do if that happened?”

“I would die,” he said.

She noted that down.

“Do you think about death often?”

“Not always, but lately, yes. My father... he passed recently. And my mother died when I was very young. I was the one who found her, and it stuck with me. And then, I had the accident. I am sure you know.”

She didn’t react.

“I remember I was there, and everything felt so... peaceful. It wasn’t scary. It was... like a relief almost when I thought my time had finally come and that I wouldn’t have to feel this way anymore. This pain. This... pressure to be someone I hate. All I could think about, besides the relief, was Shane. How sad he would be. How he would hurt so much with me gone. And I fought. I fought like hell not to go, to make sure I made it back to him.”

“And you did.”

Ilya smiled sadly. “I did. And now I might have lost him forever anyway.”

“Does this make you wish you hadn’t fought as hard that night?”

The question scared him. He looked down, interlacing his fingers over his lap. Finally, he said, "No. I don’t want to cause him pain. If he leaves me, that’s his choice. But I will never leave him. Never."

“So, then, returning to that second worst-case scenario, you have this happen, and then you... Would still die? Wouldn’t that go against what you just said?”

“I would still die but stay living. For him. Hoping one day I can make him love me again.”

She nodded, smiling softly like she was happy with what she’d heard.

Something inside Ilya softened at the sight, giving him hope that all wasn’t lost.

There was a soft buzzing sound.

“Our session is up,” she told him. “Would you like to return tomorrow?”

He nodded quickly. When she stood, he stood too.

He shook her hand. “Thank you,” he said.

“Thank you,” she replied. “For taking this first step. I hope you will think about what we talked about today. There are answers there, Ilya. You already know what to do. You need to let yourself do it.”

He smiled widely and nodded. “See you tomorrow, Dr. Molchalina.”

“Galina,” she corrected gently.

“Galina,” he echoed, smiling wider.

She waved as Ilya left.

Once in his car, Ilya hesitated, feeling vulnerable as he picked up his phone. Even though Shane had not answered his last text yet, he sent another.

I am yours. Even now. Always.

Chapter End Notes

All ya'll who made it this far say "Ayyyyy" and I will comp your therapy bill (no, I won't. Still kidding. Still just as broke as before. Even more so, actually.)

Also, are we ready for the last chapter tomorrow????

Please let me know if you like it by leaving Kudos and comments. Ty! Bye :)

Chapter 30: The End

Chapter Summary

It's crazy to think it's all come to an end.

Thank you to Rachel Reid for creating these characters that we are all obsessed with.
You have changed my life.
And thank you, to Husdon and Connor, for making them come to life.

Now, without further ado, I give you: The End.

Chapter Notes

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

“Five minutes out.”

Shane thanked the driver and let his mother fix his shirt. It was the premiere of their movie at Cannes.

Of course, Ilya would attend; they all would.

He had not spoken to or seen Ilya since that day six months ago.

Shane had lost ten pounds and about ten huge deals since, unable to stomach being outside his room for more than a couple of hours a day, but Shane didn't care. He had all the money he and his mother could ever need.

He had only one Ilya.

Only, he didn't. Not anymore—now there was a cold emptiness where Ilya had once been.

The car stopped. Shane closed his eyes and braced himself. His mother noticed and asked, “Ready?”

Shane's response was to knock twice against the glass window. The door opened from the outside. Instantly, flashes began—blinding, relentless. He kept his eyes down, only glancing up to spot where he should go next. Then he reached for his mother's hand and helped her out.

She looked beautiful in her custom Alexander McQueen gown.

Together, they made their way down the red carpet until it was time for pictures.

Shane had worn a custom Calvin Klein: a clean, minimal, all-black look built around sharp lines and a sleeveless silhouette. The top was fitted through the chest and cut high at the shoulders, leaving his arms fully visible. The fabric sat close enough to show the shape of his biceps and the definition along his upper arms without looking tight or stretched.

His trousers were high-waisted, straight-leg, and tailored with a crisp drape that kept the outfit structured. The hem fell neatly over black shoes detailed with metallic spikes, adding a textured contrast to the otherwise smooth, matte fabrics.

He felt ridiculous in the outfit; it seemed too casual, but his stylist insisted it was what the premiere needed and that he'd make a splash.

He was posing, which came easily to him after so many years of modeling, when he heard it.

"Ilya, look over here. Ilya, smile."

He tried not to look. Really, he did.

Ilya wore a custom three-piece suit in soft, light pink—a tailored ensemble that stood out against the marina backdrop. The jacket was structured with a classic notch lapel and a single-breasted cut, fitted through the shoulders and waist. Underneath, the matching vest added polish without bulk, layered over a crisp white dress shirt with a standard collar. His trousers were slim through the leg with a clean break at the ankle, just brushing the tops of his black dress shoes. The shoes were sleek and formal, balancing the pastel tones with a sharp finish.

But that wasn't what caught Shane's attention. It was the chain displayed over Ilya's shirt, the rosary and ring glinting, stealing focus. Out in the open.

Proudly.

As if drawn to Shane by his eyes alone, Ilya turned mid pose and looked his way.

The feeling hit like a shock. Shane didn't care if his face twisted with desperation or agony. The emotion crashed over him—raw, consuming. He felt every edge of it.

He wanted to run to him, to kiss him, to hold him.

An "I'm sorry" on the tip of his tongue.

Ilya was looking at him like he wasn't faring much better.

There, in his eyes, he saw the apology, the ache, the need, and all the love, still there.

He remembered his message: I am yours. Even now. Always.

Shane turned to face him.

Ilya echoed the movement.

And then, as one, they were moving.

Shane didn't know what he was doing. But Ilya seemed to hold no doubts, no fears.

Shane was aware of shouts, of flashes, of movement around them as people turned to watch what was happening. Reporters stopped their questions, and other celebrities halted their posing.

Finally, Shane was close enough to touch, and he felt so dizzy with the need.

"Ilya—"

Ilya's lips crashed into Shane's with a heat that melted Shane in his arms. Ilya crushed him close, circling him so tightly Shane could barely breathe—or maybe it was because Ilya swallowed the exhale that escaped Shane when their mouths finally connected.

Shane gripped Ilya's face, fighting to contain his emotions. Ilya shook beneath him, and Shane tasted his tears as he deepened the kiss. Then Shane's arms wrapped around Ilya's neck, pulling him closer.

And in that kiss, he said everything he hadn't had the chance to yet.

Ilya broke away first, and Shane heard the cheers, the applause, but all he could see was the green of Ilya's eyes, the relief in them—the love.

"I am sorry. I am so sorry."

"[No, I'm sorry]," Shane said, and he didn't care they were in the middle of the red carpet for the world's biggest film festival, and there was a line of people waiting for them to be finished so they could take their spot. He didn't care that it was not polite. He was being selfish for the first time in his life. More than that, he was being an asshole. And fuck did it feel good.

"[I am sorry]," Shane repeated. "[I didn't understand how hard it must have been for you]."

"Do you still—"

Shane began nodding instantly. "[Yes, I still love—]"

But Ilya was dropping to one knee, his hands trembling as he held out a matching ring to the one he had on his chain.

Shane gasped as everything stilled. No one spoke; it was as if the world had ceased to exist.

"Shane Hollander. My love," Ilya's voice was steady. Confident. Loud enough to carry. The English words rolling off his tongue as though he'd rehearsed them a million times before.

"I have been in love with you from the moment I first saw you. You have been, and continue to be, my source of happiness. If you accept this, I can't say it will be easy, but it will be worth it. Marry me, Shane, and let me prove it to you. Let me show you, today and for the

rest of our days together, that I am yours until the end. Allow me to be yours, even though I don't feel like I deserve it yet, allow me to be, help me to be. Help me believe I can be enough for you, as you are for me."

Shane was crying by the end of it. He dropped to his knees in front of Ilya. "[Are you being serious]?"

"So serious is kind of boring. Which is weird, because that's usually your specialty."

Shane laughed, so did the onlookers, and just like that, Shane remembered where they were.

"What about going back home?"

Ilya's hand was no longer shaking as he reached for Shane's left hand. He brought it to his lips and kissed it, then, staring right into Shane's eyes, he said. "Home is right here."

"Say yes," someone shouted. Ilya smiled, motioning for others to join, until Shane laughed at the chorus of voices.

And then, Shane was nodding so fast it made him dizzy.

The crowd erupted into deafening cheers and applause, and Ilya's arms circled him again, standing suddenly and taking Shane with him as he twirled them, their lips joining somewhere in the midst of it all.

Shane stuck out his left hand, breath held, as Ilya slid on the ring. Then he was twirled again to cheers and applause.

"[I love you, Ilya Rozanov]," Shane said, loudly and without shame.

"And I you," Ilya whispered against his ear as he finally put him back on the floor.

Finally, they moved away, waving, shaking hands as they passed, and accepting hugs.

When they were out of the red carpet and inside the venue, Ilya squeezed his hand and pulled him to where Shane's mother waited, tears in her eyes.

"Mom," he cried, hugging her tightly.

"Congratulations, honey. I am so happy for you. I know your father is, too."

Shane let the words envelop him, and he closed his eyes as he recalled a memory. A new one, after all these years.

They were sitting on the dock of the cottage. Shane's legs were too short to reach the water, but his father's ankles were submerged. He was smiling, pointing at a loon in the far distance. Shane had made a face.

"I don't like loons."

“Oh, yeah? Why is that?”

“They make scary noises. And they are loud, and they look weird.”

His father laughed, his feet kicking up water and making the loon swim away.

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure to keep scary loons away from you.”

“You can’t keep them all away.”

“Yes, I can. The bad ones,” he’d said. “Watch me.”

Another loon came close, and he splashed it again. Shane laughed, laughing harder when it came back to get splashed again.

“I don’t think it’s working,” his father told him, frowning. “I think this loon likes getting splashed.”

“It’s okay. I like that one. It’s weird. It’s not as scary as the other ones.”

“So, are you saying you’ve found your special loon?”

The memory faded, and Shane found Ilya. He was talking to Svetlana, still smiling, still so achingly beautiful. He turned and met Shane’s gaze, his smile growing.

“Yeah, Dad,” Shane said, reaching for the hand Ilya had extended his way, their matching rings glinting against the light. “I have.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi again. These words are very blurry through my eyes right now.

These couple of weeks have been some of the best in my life.

Thank you for making my first fic so unforgettable.

I hope you keep coming back to it as the years pass and keep loving it just as much as I love every single one of you.

While posting this work, I've been working on a new (now completed) fic called "The Breakaway", featuring pro NHL player bottom-Ilya and a very complicated non-famous top-Shane. I am happy to announce it is already up.

So if you enjoyed this one and dont mind showing some love over there it would be greatly appreciated 💖 [warning for "The Breakway" fic: Dead Dove: Do Not Eat - meaning please pay attention to all tags and read responsibly.]

Until then !!

Works inspired by this one

[His, His, and Mine](#) by [Ishipthisshitokay](#).

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