

The Hard Part(?)

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The Hard Part(?)

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Summary

A 5+1 of Ilya and Shane finding their space together.

Can't get the puck to the net if you're always skating backwards, too afraid of taking a hit.

It took them so long to get here and now that they are, they must take the next step -- learn to face other people, emerge from their safe, secluded bubble and let other people in. Push through the fear.

Notes

Set post-2017 cottage but written pre-airing of episode 6. Only minimal spoilers from the books; we took what we wanted and left the rest. Mostly we kept Svetlana.

Thanks to @alchemistic for discussing hockey lingo and @ziusik for answering our Russian questions. Any mistakes or misunderstandings are all on us. We really appreciate the help.

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

1 – Yuna & David

Admitting they want to be together, it turns out, is the easy part. After nine years of avoiding that conversation, Ilya does not expect this.

Maybe he should have. Making a plan, having a goal — they are both good at putting their head down, striving towards something with a drive and intensity only matched by the other.

Even though he hadn't had anyone else since Florida, the All-Star Game, he didn't think that was the end. That it would just be Shane for him now, but he — doesn't want anyone else, the nameless faces, the ones he'd loved.

Svetlana.

Turning her away had been hard. Awkward. Watching her pull her clothes back on before realizing he shouldn't watch, should turn away, offer her food. Vodka.

She didn't storm out but asked for time. Time, he can offer.

"Tell Jane I said hi," she says archly as she leaves.

He says nothing but he wishes he could. He still loves her. Just loves her differently now.

What changes is that he misses Shane. Doesn't know how it's possible. How they've spent enough time together for him to roll over in bed and expect Shane to be there, for his fridge to seem empty when it doesn't have ginger ale (no reason to buy any, won't see him for another 21 days and then that's in Montreal), for it to be hard to push himself alone, at the gym, on the ice, like he had over the summer at the cottage. Maybe it's just that he's finally named the empty space in his life for what it always has been: Shane.

It annoys him.

The season starts and he has games to win. He can't afford to be distracted by all this *wanting*. They lose four straight games and suddenly the press, the coach, and the front office all have questions. Connors doesn't talk to him in the hotel room on the first road trip, other than, "Get your head in the game, Rozy," as he slams the door behind him.

Later, he thinks, what he needs is to put distance back between him and Shane, whines, "You are so boring. Too boring for me. I have decided."

Says it while he's stroking his cock in a hotel room, tilts his phone to show Shane what boring does for him now.

Shane just laughs at him. It is what he deserves.

But Shane is boring – with his diet, his strict schedule, his incessant need to be at every video review, push through every practice. The way he hasn't ever deviated. Ever.

But that's not true, not fair. He breaks the rules for Ilya. Alters the careful way he lives his life. For Ilya. Gives up control. For Ilya. To Ilya.

And – he appreciates that. Relies on it. Relies on Shane to be boring and safe and a place he can count on. A place he can land.

He is rude, an asshole, and gets back, / *see you in 4 days!* 🙄/

But in the end, whatever he did, whatever he tried, it did not work. Did not make him miss Shane less. Did not make him want him less. Did not win him more hockey games.

Can't get the puck to the net if you're always skating backwards, too afraid of taking a hit.

It took them so long to get here and now that they are, they must take the next step – learn to face other people, emerge from their safe, secluded bubble and let other people in. Push through the fear.

And it is terrifying. For Ilya. And for Shane, who tries so hard to be the perfect Canadian boy, winning Cups for the annoying Canadian team. Everything works for him, doesn't understand why things can't continue like they have, why anything has to change, why anyone has to know. His mother, his agent – everyone expects so much of him. Expect perfection from him. And Shane holds himself to that impossible standard. Hasn't figured out that he can't make everyone happy no matter how hard he tries.

Ilya doesn't care about that, about who anyone else thinks Shane should be.

But at the same time, he doesn't know how to tell him to just be... him. That even if he stopped pushing himself always, he would still be a role model, or whatever.

Ilya – he sees. It's already better, Shane is already better, just the slightest bit less guarded now that his parents know. Ilya would suffer a thousand awkward dinners if it got him the small smiles when Shane talks about his parents knowing.

Until Shane calls to tell him that his mom wants them to come to Thanksgiving dinner. Together.

“Can you even eat Thanksgiving dinner?” Ilya asks, because poking at Shane is better than answering his question.

Shane flushes, which is always a good look on him. “Shut up. Do you want to come or what?”

Ilya eyes him dubiously. “Your mother really wants me at Thanksgiving? Even weird, Canadian Thanksgiving. Wait, what do you eat? Do you eat moose?”

Shane ignores the chirp, answers the real question he's burying under a thousand jokes. “Yes, my mom. And, I'm very sure.” Smirks a little. “You can watch hockey and yell at the TV together.”

So he goes to his boyfriend's (still wild that that's a thing he can say – to himself, even if not out loud to anyone else) house for Thanksgiving. It can't be worse than the dinner they'd had after they'd been caught, dicks out. Okay, not literally, but metaphorically. Mostly not literally.

This will be better. Everyone will have all their clothes on the entire time.

He lets Shane drive them, and looks at the suburban houses with their two-door garages and large front yards, and it is so different from where he grew up. "This is house you grew up in?"

Shane nods absently, turning down smaller streets until he pulls into a driveway and turns off the engine. "This is us." Turns to look at Ilya. "Ready?"

He's not. Has no context for a family like this. His own was nothing like this, even before his mother died. Sveta's was better than his, but still not like this. Shane's parents seem to actually like each other, for one. Not just married for show or politics.

Says, "Yes. I am always ready." Shane's look says he's calling bullshit on that, but he doesn't actually say anything, just holds his hand out when they get out of the car, and it's only when he takes it that he realizes Shane is nervous too.

Shane's mother opens the door before Ilya can say anything. Hugs Shane and then turns to Ilya. He holds his hand out. "Mrs Hollander. Thank you for invitation." Hopes Shane wasn't lying about that.

She looks at least as disconcerted as he feels, but gamely, she says "Call me Yuna," as she shakes his hand. And then, "Your team needs to work on your power play."

"Mom!"

Ilya can feel the grin spread across his face. She's not wrong and also, he wants to defend his guys, but maybe not fight with his boyfriend's mom first thing. There will be plenty of time for that later. Instead he tells her, "I brought ginger ale." Hold up one hand, then the other. "And wine?"

She sniffs, but lets him in. First hurdle crossed.

He glances at Shane as he bends to take off his shoes when Shane does. "This is going well?" It's as much a genuine question as snide commentary.

Shane shrugs. "If she hated you, she wouldn't be giving you notes."

They do end up watching hockey while the turkey (not moose – disappointing) cooks. Because what else would they watch? He and Mrs Hollander both yell about the terrible call the ref makes during the 3rd period, trading slightly startled looks. Shane's pinky brushes his leg where his hand is next to him on the couch and, when he turns to look, Shane murmurs, "Told you so."

And it gets a little easier after that. Still weird. But easier, weird.

He feels Shane's parents watching him. Them. Making sense of it. Sees them notice the way Shane makes fun of him, the way he leans his shoulder up against Ilya's and lets Ilya take his weight. Wonders suddenly what Shane had been like with Rose in front of them. Wonders what they had thought of Rose. By the time Mr. Hollander says dinner is ready – he tries to imagine his father cooking anything ever and then stops trying to imagine impossibilities – it has gotten easier, the shock of the two of them together lessening. Dinner is mostly Mrs Hollander interrogating him (his family, Russia, what his plans are, how their plans are going, what his endorsements are and if he has any upcoming ad campaigns).

Shane periodically interjects, "Mom!" though that has clearly never stopped her. Shane's dad mostly looks amused and pours Ilya more wine. He can see both of them in Shane.

After the food is put away and dishes done, Mrs Hollander – Yuna, she corrects him again, and still he thinks he can not call her that yet – tells Shane she put clean towels in his room. Settles back on the couch next to Mr Hollander, flips the TV back on. Feels like he passed a test. Scored his first hat trick.

They've been put in what is obviously Shane's childhood bedroom to sleep. His fascination with looking at the evidence, and how much Shane very obviously does not want him to be looking, overrides any amount of awkwardness.

After they change clothes, and Shane slaps his hands away, several times (What? His boyfriend is hot), they curl together in a bed that's smaller than any they've shared before. Shane looks at him from the next pillow. "So. You survived."

"Yes," he agrees. "Your parents are nice." He pulls Shane over to lay on top of him, pet his hair.

He thinks about his mother. What she would have thought of Shane. He has no idea. But she'd loved him, and he thinks she'd have liked Shane too. Would have liked the kind of hockey he plays, if nothing else. She and Shane's mother would have had that in common.

"Maybe now I can meet Svetlana," Shane says, hand stilling on Ilya's chest.

Ilya can't stop the laugh. "You want to meet Sveta?" She would eat Shane alive.

There is silence, and when he lifts his head to peer at Shane, to try and guess what he's thinking, he can see Shane biting his lip, hard, really digging his teeth in and Ilya knows that's – he's worried about something. Doesn't want to say it but, Shane's nothing if not brave enough to ask for what he wants. "I want to meet her. She's your family, yes?"

And well, close enough. Even if he could, he wouldn't introduce Shane to his actual family.

Still, it's a bad idea.

He took too long, Shane's already shaking his head. "Never mind. It was just a thought."

"No, no, is—" Ilya stops. "Is. Good."

Shane looks away, "No, I get it, not my place."

He's tempted to keep Sveta and Shane as far apart as possible. Two worlds that should not collide.

But, Shane is his future. He's not sure what it will look like exactly, but he is sure that it will be, one way or another. Unless he's willing to let Sveta be his past, they're going to have to meet sometime.

He's not. Willing to let Sveta be his past. She's too much a part of who he is. He may never go back to Russia, but he's not willing to let go of it entirely. "Would be—" Ilya stops Shane from shifting away, with a hand on his elbow. "would be nice." He stares at the ceiling, the heaviness in the room pushing him down. "Know what also would be nice?" Shane raises up on one elbow, smiling down at him. "What?" Like he knows what Ilya's about to say. He probably does.

"If I fuck Shane Hollander in child bedroom." Shane smirks, then crawls forward to perch on his hips. Must be able to feel Ilya hardening under him. "Am first, yes? To—" he thrusts up, "take you here?" Doesn't think about the possibility of Shane and Rose in this bedroom. "Fuck you." And that is an answer.

"Yes, yes, now you have idea." He can see – feel – Shane wavering, giving in. "You must be quiet." Crunches up to catch Shane's mouth. "Can you do that? Be quiet for me?"

Shane makes a strangled, stifled noise against his mouth, and he grins. This will be fun.

Wants all his firsts. And his lasts. Wants all of it. He may not deserve him, but he's going to hold on for as long as he can.

2 – Svetlana

"I thought you fucking Sasha was stupid," she tells him. "And I knew Jane was..." Makes a rude hand gesture that implies man. She giggles and Ilya snorts. "Beyond my wildest dreams that you are fucking Shane Hollander. You will have best hockey babies," she stops, lips twitching, "But—"

"But what?" he asks flatly, mind a little stuck on babies with Hollander. Can't help but wonder what they would look like, if they'd have his eyes. The freckles. She's right about one thing: they'd absolutely tear up the ice. "What about Hollander?"

"He is so," her hand flails, "nice."

He rolls his eyes at her. "That isn't actually a bad thing."

She cocks her eyebrow at him. "In general, no. For you?" She rocks her hand.

"What does that mean?" he asks, more irritated than he thought he'd be.

She shrugs. "You need someone who pushes you. Vanilla boy is going to push?"

Shane does, is the thing. Not the way Sveta does. But he pushes.

He was the one who'd named this thing between them. The one who'd pushed Ilya to talk. To admit what he felt. He's braver than Ilya is, in a lot of ways.

He gives Ilya a future. A dream of a home, together. Something to look forward to. Can't say that to Sveta though. She will mock him until the end of time if he admits that.

And he doesn't want her to feel bad, that it's not her. For a long time, so much of him wished that it could be her.

She cocks her head when he doesn't say anything, looks at him thoughtfully. "You are really in love with him? Not just fucking?"

He fights the temptation to play it off. Make it less. "Yes. Not just fucking." That makes three people other than them who know now. No, probably four. He's sure Shane has told Rose. He can still count the number of people on one hand. It's still contained. Isn't sure if that's good or bad anymore.

Her, "huh," is ... he doesn't know what it is. For the first time in a long time he can't read Sveta at all.

"And how will that work?" She waves a hand at his apartment. "You, here. Him," she points towards the window in what might be the direction of Montreal, "there."

"I'm moving to Ottawa."

It's the first time he's said it out loud to anyone who isn't Shane.

Her, "huh," this time is more judgemental, but after a long pause where she studies him like a bug, all she says is, "I want to meet him. Set it up."

He tells Shane Sveta wants to meet him too. He says Ilya should meet Rose.

Counts himself lucky that Rose is on a movie shoot. That would be the not-double date from hell.

He sighs. Bites the bullet. Invites her to brunch next time Shane's in town, somewhere Ilya's been before and they know him. Gets the secluded corner, arranges for them to come in through the back. Figures brunch is ... neutral? Can always say it's a business meeting, introducing Sveta to Hollander for work reasons. Besides, how much damage can be done over omelets and french toast?

He forgets about bottomless mimosas.

Everyone's cheeks are pink. But his (never his). He stares when Shane says yes when Svetlana orders them all mimosas, but does not say anything. Shane is a big boy. Stares even more when Shane drinks a second, and then a third.

They talk hockey because, what else do they have to talk about? Montreal's at the top of the standings and Boston's finally started winning games, but not by big margins – Sveta gives him *feedback* that makes Shane's eyes widen. When she turns on Shane, he has to laugh. "I will use this next time we play," Shane tells her, earnestly.

Ilya's glad he didn't set up the meeting before last night's game.

He's never seen Shane do more than nurse a single beer all evening at a club. He holds it better than Ilya would have thought. His rosy cheeks are the only real sign that he's tipsy. That and the way he keeps stealing bites of Ilya's pancakes. Normally he'd tell Shane to order his own if he wants them so much, but he's too amused to protest.

Sveta keeps giving him looks at the way Shane is eating off of Ilya's plate. The way Ilya's letting him.

She leans over and steals a pancake too.

"Is my food," he tells them. "Should have ordered good things, not—" gestures at their bird food.

Shane defiantly steals another bite of pancake. Looks smugly at Sveta when Ilya doesn't protest.

He glances up and catches Sveta grinning. He raises his eyebrows at her, and she tells him, in Russian, "He is peeing on you. Like dog." Shane looks over, and Ilya shakes his head. Won't translate that.

He would very much like for her to be wrong. Does not think she actually is.

The mimosas are catching up to him. "Play nice," he orders, wagging a finger as he pushes out his chair to find the bathroom. Comes back to find Sveta and Shane staring at each other across the table, Sveta's arms crossed, Shane looking defensive.

"So, you will let him," she snaps her fingers looking for a word, "rusticate for you?" Ilya mouths at her, '*Rusticate?*'

"Rusticate?" Shane says, at the same time. "You think I can tell Rozanov what to do? Ever?"

She looks impatient. "He is leaving Boston. For you." Says it like an accusation.

Shane turns to look at him, whole body softening. Ilya wonders if he looks at Shane this way too, if everyone can see. "Not for me, for us."

Sveta raises her eyebrows at him, suggesting she thinks that is bullshit. He shrugs. "Is good idea. Ottawa needs help, has cap space." If they want this to work they can't live in separate countries. He doesn't want to live five hours away. Ottawa is not Montreal, but it's closer, and he's making it a condition of his contract that they'll sponsor him for citizenship.

Shane looks back at Sveta, squaring up like he's on the ice. "It was a decision we made together. I don't tell him what to do."

She flicks a hand, dismissing the notion. “Your idea. Who wants to leave Boston?”

“Lots of people,” he says, just to remind them both that he’s there, and can hear them. They ignore him. He steals the bacon off of Shane’s plate that he has ignored. Proper American bacon, none of the strange, round Canadian bacon.

“And you are letting him throw away his career. For you.”

“A little louder?” he snaps at her in Russian. She ignores him. What else is new?

“For us,” Shane snaps back.

She stabs a finger at him. “What are you giving up for him? Hmm?”

He takes his life into his hands and snags her hand. “We have a plan.”

Sveta shakes her curls, takes an angry sip of her drink and hisses in Russian — “So he is good on the ice, fast, soft hands, maybe even good in bed,” her eyes say she finds that unlikely, “that doesn’t make him good enough for you, make him good enough to give up the best years of your life, your chance at the Cup, to play in Ottawa.” She manages to make Ottawa sound like a bad word. “You could go anywhere, play for anyone, and you choose a third rate team in a third rate city in Canada?”

And Shane is looking between them, and he doesn’t want Shane to worry and Sveta sees through him. So does Shane, but that’s a problem for later.

“Is my decision,” he tells Sveta, in English, nudging his knee into Shane’s.

She scoffs and Shane’s mouth twists. He looks around quickly, then says, barely above a whisper. “I love him?” He says like a question, like he’s unsure but then repeats, just a little louder. “I love him.”

Ilya’s whole body warms and Sveta’s face softens. He thinks that’s the first time Shane’s said that out loud to someone else.

“Okay.” She tucks her hair behind her ear, “okay.” He can’t tell if she’s won over, or just giving up.

They order more drinks. The waiter suggests Bloody Marys. Shane laughs and tells them they both just made exactly the same face. “Waste of good vodka,” he says and Sveta nods her emphatic agreement. They get more mimosas. And coffee.

“Don’t understand you either,” she points at Shane. “Choose him when you could have Rose Landry,” a name spoken with the utmost reverence.

“Hey!” Ilya interjects but they both ignore him. Again. He knew introducing them was a bad idea.

"I like him. We are," Shane ducks his head and looks over at Ilya, says, "compatible," like it's their inside joke now.

She shrugs, spears a piece of banana and waves it around, "He's okay. Good tongue, good—"

Shane chokes, turns red but when Ilya's about to interrupt, he tells her earnestly, "He does. Especially when he does that thing?" Makes a small, obscene gesture under the table.

And she cackles, "Okay, Shane Hollander. You can stay."

In the car on the way home Shane says, "So Svetlana seems nice."

He takes his eyes off of the road to look at Shane incredulously. Shane makes an alarmed noise. "Road. Road." He swerves around the car in front of him doing – he checks and rolls his eyes, the speed limit on Storrow – and then cuts back in front of them as soon as there's clear space – fucking out of town drivers. "You think Svetlana is nice?" There are a lot of words to describe Sveta. Nice is not one of them.

"I'm trying," Shane says with an edge in his voice.

Ilya honks his horn, twice. Loudly. "Fucking–asshole!" He waves his middle finger as he swings around the guy in front of him. Pats Shane's leg. "Give her time." He stares hard at the road. "She has been there, through—" He swallows, hard. "She is Russian. Does not trust easy."

"Okay."

They're all trying.

3 – Rose

"Rozy," Ilya looks up from taping his stick, to find Marleau gesturing at him to come over. "Did you see? Hollander and Rose Landry got back together!"

It is not true. And he does not care, he reminds himself, what anyone else thinks. They are friends. This is fine. Of course. He even knew about this lunch. Shane had told him the other day.

"I care who Hollander dates because?" Still, eyes the screen when Marly holds it up. They do look – cozy. Intimate. Shane is leaning in towards her, laughing at something she's said.

"She's hot, man. If Hollander isn't going to show her a good time, I will." Thrusts his hips to really get his point across.

Ilya rolls his eyes. "You think she is puck bunny? One hockey player is good as other?"

Looks at the picture again. Shane looks good. Happy.

Shane is different since he dated Rose Landry. Clothes aside, she helped him be – looser. More settled in his skin. Ilya's not sure what he's given Shane except another secret to keep, nothing but a wrinkle that mars his veneer of perfection.

Doesn't stop him from sending a text to Jane. / *heard rumor you are getting married. Did not invite me* 🙄 /

/ *you could just say you want to meet her* / Shane sends back. Which is not what he'd meant? Probably.

He's still not used to people other than Svetlana being able to read him. It's ... disconcerting. Wonders how exactly Shane had learned to do that.

Worries about what else he sees.

They both have games, not the time to get into it. Turns his phone face down in his locker and yells at the boys. It makes him feel a little better.

After the game, he scrolls through his phone instead of calling Shane, reading all about their date together. They look good together. She makes him smile. He doesn't want to like her, this woman who's had Shane.

He's never asked, but he's pretty sure that he's the only man Shane's ever slept with. He was first, he knows that. Tries not to think about all the years between then and when they made commitments. He's not sure how that makes him feel. On the one hand it feels like a responsibility he never asked for. And, on the other hand, he's self-aware enough to know he'd absolutely murder anyone else Shane slept with, wants to be the only one who's touched him, like that, *seen* him, like that.

Tries to tell himself that Rose doesn't count.

Now.

He can just imagine the sex they had – very polite, very *Canadian*, sex. They probably said thank you at the end. There is nothing polite about the sex he and Shane have.

He's never been jealous of anyone before. Never had anyone he cared enough about losing to be jealous. Him and Sveta – that's different. That was friends. That was the one person he could trust for so long. It was love, but not in love. Took him a while to understand there was a difference.

He knows it's not rational to resent Rose for having dated Shane. Slept with Shane. He's slept with lots of women in the nine years since he first kissed Shane. He's slept with Sveta in those nine years.

Nobody ever said jealousy was rational.

He almost cancels. Thinks about it right up until he is walking into the private club Shane texted the address of.

/ Member of club? Like sex club? /

/ No, it's for business meetings / A pause. / I don't like them at my house / Yes, strangers in Shane's house, touching his things, making a mess – that seems not ideal.

/ would have been better if sex club / Bits his lip and then pushes, */ Could have threesome. Have you had threesome? /*

/...No /

/ of course not. You are boring /

/ Fuck you. And you're late /

He is; standing in front of the doors with a doorman staring at him, waiting to see what he'll do. The only reason he doesn't bail is because Shane would be grumpy at him. And yes, fine, he tells the Sveta who lives in his head, he is whipped. He knows this already.

It isn't even that he minds meeting Rose. Not really. It's just. It's a lot. All these pantomimes of being a normal couple – meeting the family, meeting the friends. But all of it in secret. In hiding.

Realizes he is jealous of Rose, but mostly because she got to do all of this out in the open with Shane – and be adored by the public for it. She got to wear his jersey, his name stretched across her back (he'd never wear Shane's jersey – but Shane could wear his, that would be hot), hold his hand, go to bars and clubs and dance with him, go home with him.

He can forgive her for the shitty sex; not sure he can forgive her for having all the rest of it.

She eyes him all night, protective of Shane, in a way that, despite himself, makes Ilya like her. Happy Shane has her and annoyed that she doesn't seem to think he's good enough for Shane.

He's not, but he doesn't want the person closest to Shane who isn't him knowing that. He tries not to respond like an asshole but he can't help himself. Shane kicks him more than once.

She waits until Shane gets up to settle the check before she says, "You're good for him."

It's like getting blindsided into the boards. Takes him out at the knees.

Isn't sure he believes her, but he'd like to.

She's the first person who is on their side without caveats. Even Shane's parents, who like him – he thinks, mostly – can't quite hide the fact that they worry about what the reality of him and Shane will mean for Shane. His career. What impact it will have if it lasts. If it doesn't. Whether he will break Shane's heart. Whether the world will break it for him first.

He worries about that too.

"You'll make it work," she says and seems unconcerned about the obstacles or the logistics.

Russian pessimism bred deep in his bones says no, says she's been living in the world of movie magic and happy endings too long. But she puts her hand over his and says, "You will be happy." Like it's an order. "They don't get to win this one."

He wishes he lived in her world. Maybe he will one day, at least a little bit.

"I'll be your beard," she tells them, when they get up to leave, like Ilya has any idea what she's talking about. Why would she be facial hair? "For Shane," she clarifies, which clarifies nothing. "Not all the time but..." she fades off, "Awards shows? Bars when we're all in town? Until I find..."

She stops. Shane hugs her.

"You would do that? For us?" He asks and now Ilya gets it; she would be go-between, giving them chances to be together, in public, but not.

"Shane's playoff beard sucks," he says solemnly. "You can't be worse."

4 – The Photographer

Rolex sets them up with a photoshoot. He didn't even have to suggest it this time. His publicist tells him they want something organic. Wild. Whatever that means. Apparently it means they want it outside. Them skating on a frozen lake, mountains in the background. It means an overnight in a ski resort. It's been six weeks since he's been within 500 miles of Shane. He says yes before his publicist has finished telling him how much they're paying him.

They meet in the parking lot. One rented car each.

"You are not driving that," Shane tells him, when the sports car pulls up behind a bulky SUV.

Ilya does not pout. It's unbecoming. "But you rent terrible car."

"I'm not getting in that with you," Shane tells him, "I've heard about how you drive." That was his mistake, telling Shane about the small accident he had in December.

Small accident. Barely worth mentioning. His Porsche slid backwards down a hill. It was not his fault; they should have cleared the road better. There are children who could get hurt.

"I am Russian," he reminds Shane. "Snow is in my blood. Instinct." He is one with the snow. The snow is one with him.

(And fuck Connors for making him watch that movie and try not to cry at the end in front of him.)

Shane just opens the passenger door to the SUV, gesturing for Ilya to get in. "And yet."

He sniffs, tossing his bag into the back. Waves at the employee driving the little red sports car he'd told his manager to get him. "Is fine. Big, important men do not drive in Russia."

Shane eyes him skeptically. "Uh huh. Or you could just admit you don't know how to drive in snow and ask me to teach you. Or is that not a thing big, important men do in Russia either?"

"And you do?"

Shane eyes him over the hood of the car. "I grew up here. I drove myself to hockey practice at 4am in the winter. Yes, I know how to drive in the snow."

Nobody taught him how to drink vodka, why would he need someone to teach him how to drive in the snow? Shane looks unimpressed by this logic when he explains it.

"Someone taught you how to skate, right? Like that's not some mystical Russian blood thing?"

His mother had taught him how to skate. He thinks it's the only time he remembers seeing her happy. Wonders if she'd have taught him how to drive too, if she'd stuck around long enough. And that's not fair. He knows it's not. He still misses her. Still gets angry that she left him alone with his father, his brother,

She couldn't stay with his father. He understands. He can't blame her. But that doesn't stop him from missing her. Wishes she could have met Hollander. Shane.

Shane drives them up to the glacier. The Corvette, a red beacon in the rearview mirror, stays in the rental car lot in Calgary.

The photoshoot is fun. More fun than photoshoots usually are. Less makeup, more skating. Skating for the fun of it. "Like when you were kids," the photographer says. They trade looks and do not tell him that neither of them can remember a time when skating was just for fun, not for hockey.

He always loves watching Shane skate. All that control, power, focus. He's the best player who isn't Ilya. Maybe (maybe) some days he's even as good.

They do stupid stunts. Practice face-offs. Don't get a lot of opportunities to skate with each other instead of against each other. Watching Shane let go, laugh while he skates – playing keep away, racing each other – it is fun. And hot.

How the photographer doesn't realize, is a mystery. They are not subtle. Too isolated up here without the noise of the team, the fans, the media around them – just them and the ice and the photographer.

They can barely keep their hands off each other.

He always heard from his father (bitching about Polina), from Alexei, from every married bastard in the locker room whining about legs being closed and not getting any — he thought, maybe this was his, their future too.

It's not. When they're together, it is better. When they are apart, it is better — freer. Shane asks for what he wants. Explicitly. It is fantastic, it is — worth all the heckling from the boys, in the locker room, in the bars, when he leaves alone, goes home early.

After the shoot, they crash into each other as soon as the door is closed behind them. Shane's hand pushing impatiently at his sweater, his shirt. They leave a trail of clothes behind them, like breadcrumbs. Shane pushes him down onto the bed, already moving between his legs, hot breath and cold hands on his cock, and he yelps and then buries his hands in Shane's hair when he sinks all the way down. Too fast. Gags himself, looks up at Ilya from under his lashes, coughing slightly but winks, and oh that was on purpose, the little shit. Just for that Ilya pushes his head back down, and Shane hums in pleasure, gives up control and lets Ilya use him as he wants. Pulls him up after to kiss him, hard, then wipe away the smudge of tears under his eyes.

He jerks Shane off, quick and dirty, doesn't even bother to get him all the way undressed. There will be time later for slow. They have all night. Nowhere to be until breakfast tomorrow.

Round two starts in the shower. Ends in bed. Opens Shane up with his mouth and then his fingers until he is begging, clutching at his shoulders, leaving marks. They'll be faded by the time he goes to practice, but he'll know they were there, will remember tonight. Begging, "Please, Ilya. I need—"

He pushes into Shane's body, swallows his gasp. Promises, "I have what you need."

He'd loved Shane today on the lake — skating without the weight of expectations. He loves Shane here too. Stripped down and vulnerable, the way that only Ilya gets to see him. Wants this forever.

Puts Shane's yoga routine to good use and folds him in half, fucking into him deep and hard. Shane puts a hand back to brace on the headboard and pushes back. Yanks Ilya down to kiss him when he comes — untouched. It's still a good trick.

Round three is slower. Early morning when they are both only half awake, but unwilling to give up time together for sleep. He fucks Shane on his side, leg pulled up, memorizes the sounds he makes when Ilya fucks him just right. The way he always does. Shane twines their hands together on his chest, and leans back to kiss him.

A few weeks later, he meets with his publicist to review the pictures and see which ones should be used for the ad. He rubs his finger across the contact sheet, asks if he can keep them. His publicist looks surprised, he's never asked for that before. He stares at her blandly until she nods and gets him the paperwork that says he will not sell them.

He has no interest in selling them. He wants them for himself. There are no pictures of the two of them — him and Shane — except the few that live on his phone in a secret folder. He looks through the pictures again. They are good. He should tell his publicist to use this photographer again. They tell a story he doesn't think the photographer realized he was capturing. Knows the photographer didn't realize or he'd be selling these to TMZ and ESPN instead of handing them over.

Looks at a picture of Shane, flushed from skating and the outdoors, the way he's looking at Ilya. That's not a public look. That's a private look. One he sees behind closed doors, behind curtains, nowhere out in the open. But it's here now. On display for anyone to see, even if they don't know what they're witnessing.

5 – Svetlana + Rose + Miles

The NHL bans its players from the Olympics. He bitches about it for a week straight, until Shane says, “I will fly to Boston to blow you if it will make you shut up about this.”

“You will do that anyway,” he points out.

“Game on Friday,” Shane reminds him. He makes a face at the empty room.

Two weeks later and they’re both in New York, games overlapping. He lounges on his bed in his hotel room five floors away from Shane’s hotel room, wheedles, “Come out tonight. After game.”

Shane makes a non-committal noise.

“Hunter has new bar. Everyone will be there. We should go.”

“You don’t even like Hunter,” Shane points out, which is just another way of saying no.

“Not a good reason not to go,” he says shortly. “We should be, what is word? Allies.” He slips more in English when he’s upset. He knows this. Hates that he has a tell like that.

Shane stays at the hotel. To watch tape, he says. It’s a bullshit excuse. Ilya goes anyway. Waste of what little time they have together. Wonders if he wanted Ilya to come down to meet him, but this – going out, *being* out, but not, doesn’t happen safely, often.

Drinks more than he should. Texts Shane to say he should be there. Tells him he’s a coward. Sends lots of pictures. Kisses the cheek of a boy who is friends with Kip. Sends that too.

Texts, / *could be you* /

Shane doesn’t respond.

He doesn’t talk to Shane for two days. Thought they were getting on the same page. Tries to readjust.

The only good thing that comes out of the NHL putting its foot down on the Olympics– and there are a lot of bad things, for one he cannot get revenge on the ice – is that the way the game schedules line up, they have three days with no practices, no games, nothing to do but each other.

“We could go somewhere,” Shane says a little hesitantly. They haven’t been in the same place since New York. Haven’t had a chance to fuck out the tension between them. He hates this distance. It will be easier in Ottawa. It has to be. He’s counting on it.

He stares out at the Boston harbor skyline. “Why? You think view will be better than looking at me? It will not. I am god.”

He can hear Shane rolling his eyes over the phone and grins to himself. So predictable.

“Rose has a break too.” Can hear Shane biting his lip. “She rented a house on Cape Cod.” He waits. “She suggested a house party.”

He frowns. He knows the words, but not in combination. “House party?”

“You, me, Rose, Svetlana.” Pauses. “Miles.” Ah, so here is the apology. Not going out in public but with people who know, who matter. He recognizes a peace offering when he is handed one. Makes a humming noise anyway; Shane needs to work a little harder. It’s good for him.

“We’ve never gone anywhere together.”

He waits, wants to see how far Shane will push this. Can’t help push back a little. “Not *my* fault.” Hears the edge in his voice, but doesn’t soften it; it would have been nice, to have Shane, to have *Hollander* there, across a table from Hunter and his boyfriend.

“Ilya...” He’s going to say yes. Wants to hear Shane squirm a little more first.

There’s enough plausible deniability if they get caught that it doesn’t spell disaster. Anyway, next year they’re going to start being friends. In public. If they’re caught now at a house party with other people it won’t look too weird. Well, it will, but it’ll be easier to explain than just the two of them alone.

“I thought it might be fun,” is Shane’s next play.

“Fun is that sound you make when I –”

“I can make that sound anytime you want on Cape Cod.”

His eyebrows go up a little. “Promise?”

Shane huffs a laugh. “Depends on you I guess. Kind of have to be there to make me make that sound.”

And well, that’s just a straight up lie. Tells Shane so, and then proves it.

He gets what Shane is offering though. As close to being public as they can. A few days where they get to playact at being normal. Going on vacation like a normal couple with friends.

Texts Sveta after he’s done making Shane fall apart.

Plans are set.

There's snow on the ground and in the forecast as the week approaches. It is February in Boston. Snow is not a guarantee the way it is in Moscow, but also not a surprise.

Ilya can't say anything because he's Russian but—

“You're still not driving the Porsche,” Shane tells him on the phone the day before.

There are reasons he doesn't live in Russia anymore. Okay, the weather is not actually one of them, but it could be. He can make it one. Move it to the top of the list. His father doesn't deserve to be there anyway.

"Why not?" he asks, because the Porsche is pretty.

"You know why not. Unless you've suddenly learned how to drive in the snow.”

He should have taken the phone off speaker, because Sveta is laughing at him now. “You drive safe, family car,” he snarls. “Like minivan.”

"My car makes it up the hill," Shane points out. He never should have told him that story. Also, Shane was not this bitchy when Ilya first met him. He's taking credit for that. He is proud.

Sveta and Rose get along like gangbusters. They shared phone numbers after 10 minutes. He — this terrifies him.

The only thing that makes it better is that Shane also looks terrified.

At some point, he and Shane haven't said a word in at least 15 minutes. He has no idea what Sveta and Rose are talking about. He'd say it was a language barrier but he thinks that he and Shane have matching faces.

Miles arrives on his own, later, dragging in more bags even than Sveta. He eyes Ilya up and down when they meet; it's almost worse than girls at the clubs. He feels naked in his track pants and slides, without the armor of the clubbing clothes (however see-through those may be). Now Miles is looking at him, not the Ilya he performs for the public.

“I would have bought you a drink," Miles tells him.

"I would not have accepted," he answers, raising his chin to where Shane and Rose are standing, heads together.

"Good for you," Miles says, a small smile on his face.

"It is," he agrees and abandons Miles to cross the room, loop an arm around Shane's stomach, pull him back against him. Feels the way he tenses for a second in surprise, and then relaxes all at once when he remembers — there's nobody here who doesn't know, nobody here who will care.

Svetlana dares them to go into the ocean. He does it because he's never met a dare he didn't take, and immediately regrets it (would never admit it). Spends twenty minutes worried that his balls will never come back out of hiding and won't strip off in front of Shane until he warms back up. Appearances must be maintained.

He gets three days with Shane. Of waking up in the same bed with him. Eating breakfast and dinner with him. Of watching movies curled on the couch with him. He teases Shane that he is boring, but this is not. None of it is. It's too unlikely to be boring. Too unique. Too much like what he wants all the time.

They all promise Miles that they will not watch the Olympics. Miles doesn't believe them (smart boy) and hides the remote. They survive a few days, but the day of the gold medal match, Sveta finally wheedles it out of him before he and Rose go out for a call with the director of their upcoming movie. They come back to chaos — the three of them yelling at the TV, dramatically pointing, talking over each other.

"You should be there," Sveta tells them, later. "Both of you."

"I would win this time," Ilya says with authority.

"Fuck you, you would not."

Sveta pats both of them on the head. "There there, you are both very good hockey players. Do not need to," she snaps her fingers and looks at Rose, "what is phrase I am looking for?"

"Measure their dicks?" Rose suggests dryly.

Sveta snorts. "No, that they have done already. I do not want to know results."

Miles laughs. They both scowl at them all.

In the empty, gray expanse of the Cape outside of tourist season, Miles takes pictures. Curates the ones he posts for the public – shows them to Rose and Shane and Ilya for approval. Ilya's not sure he trusts him, but Rose does, and Shane does through Rose, so he nods and agrees. Pictures of glasses of wine on a table, a grill with lobster and asparagus, sunset and snow on the beach.

He takes more that he doesn't post. Pictures of Shane throwing Rose into the freezing Atlantic. Of Rose egging Ilya on to do the same to Shane in return. Shane chasing Ilya down the beach. Sveta looking down at all of them from the porch, serene and dry – and warm. Pictures of Sveta asleep halfway through a movie, head on Ilya's shoulder. Pictures of Shane making faces at the Russian candies of his childhood that Sveta had brought with her, and salt licorice from a trip she'd been on to Stockholm.

He wishes he could show the world those pictures. Show them Shane instead of Hollander. But, for now, this is just for him, for them, and he doesn't regret it.

Shane is private. Hollander belongs to the world. To the coaches and the team and the fans. Shane is his. Grumpy in the mornings when he wakes up. Bitchy when nobody is watching,

expecting him to be perfect. Funny in ways that being a role model doesn't let him be (because god forbid role models have a sense of humor).

Still. He wishes this didn't have to be a secret. He's been living with it since he was 14, and this is the first time it's felt unfair.

They have just three days, four mornings, before they have to drive back to Boston. Ilya convinces Shane to let him drive back; it's some of his best work all weekend.

He laughs when Shane starts swearing at him. "Rozanov, you are not supposed to pass cars on the right in the US."

"Not supposed to do it in Russia either," Sveta says unhelpfully.

He calls her a rude word in Russian and she laughs at him. Translates for Shane and Rose. He knew introducing them was a bad idea.

He gestures at the road, which makes Shane swear again. "Everyone does it. Have to keep up or be left behind." A car passes them on the right as he says it, and he revs the engine to make a point.

They get back to town much faster than they would have if Shane drove. They say goodbye to everyone and he pulls Shane inside for a long kiss goodbye, one that has to tide them over for a month.

+1 – Shane & Ilya

Despite the slow start, Boston rides a post-All-Star Game wave of victories to the playoffs, so he has one more shot to bring the city another Cup. They fail. He fails.

Stays on the ice longer than he should after his final game, soaking in the scrape of his skates on the ice, saying goodbye. It may not be his team, his rink, any more, but he will always appreciate what this ice has given him. Hasn't been in a church since they buried his mother; this arena has been his temple instead. His salvation. Gave him a home.

Next season, he'll move on to a new rink, new ice; get to know it — the grooves, idiosyncrasies, what helps him fly. And he'll build a new home. With the Centaurs (such a silly name). With Shane. New country. New beginnings. Next chapter.

Gives his exit interview with Coach, says nice things, and sneaks out before anyone stops him. He will miss them less than he thought he would.

Watches Hollander will his team to the semis, but their defense can't stop San Francisco's first line. He and Pike try their hardest; Hollander gets a hat trick in Game 4 to push them to a fifth game but it's too little, too late.

He waits a respectable amount of time before calling; Shane answers in the tunnel, SF crowd still roaring above him.

“What the fuck, Rozanov, I haven’t even gotten my skates off yet.”

“Meet you at cottage tomorrow?”

Shane sighs, “No, I can’t.” Ilya can hear him breathing over the line. “Friday?”

Ilya can make Friday work.

The news of his signing with Ottawa drops on Thursday.

His phone blows up. He answers Sveta, studiously ignores the others. Doesn’t want to know what his old teammates think of him. Knows he is an asshole. “Your plan worked,” she says. Then, “I’m coming over.”

“Never gave me notice before?” He pours drinks while he waits, but she must have already been on her way.

“You will also become a nice Canadian boy,” Sveta tells him, laughing, raising her glass in a toast. “He has already rubbed off on you.”

“He has,” Ilya tells her honestly, then adds, “Felt nice.”

She hits him on the chest, hard. He winces. She’s stronger than she looks. Takes after her papa. It is good that they still have this, each other.

He drives his Porsche to Ottawa because he wants to, he can and fuck Shane. Also it is June and, even in Canada, there is no snow. He gets the key from the planter and unlocks the door. Mr. Hollander brought over the groceries he asked him for, left a post-it note with a smiley face and a “we’ll see you in a week for dinner.”

It is not a request. He does not mind. Is looking forward to it, even.

Ilya unpacks his bag, tucking his clothes into drawers like they belong. Makes the bed, puts out candles and he’s tucking lube into the couch cushions when he sees the photos on the side table.

One of Shane with his parents after the draft. One of Pike, buried in a pile of children Ilya assumes belongs to him. He’s heard that he is working on fielding an entire hockey team of his own. One of Shane holding the newest of Pike’s many children, big hands cradling a tiny body and he lingers on that one for longer than he would admit to anyone. It is a thought for the future.

And then, there, at the front, pride of place, is one of all of them at the house on Cape Cod from earlier that year. He remembers Miles taking it, wishing he could show the picture to the world. They are all so pretty. It is a shame to keep that much beauty hidden.

Then Sveta made a joke, saying “too bad the hockey players are ruining it.” He’d bared his teeth at her to prove he still had all of them. Miles had snapped another picture just then, him grinning at Sveta, Rose watching them all, amused, Shane laughing.

He hadn’t realized Shane had kept it. Asked for it. Put it in a frame in his living room.

This isn’t a place where everyone comes – this is Shane’s safe place, not a team hangout. But, it’s not a place where nobody comes. Pike has been here, he knows. Pike’s wife. JJ too, he thinks.

Shane has put him – them – out for people to see.

He can reward that. Strips naked when he hears Shane’s car pull up, drapes himself over the couch. Enjoys the stutter in Shane’s step when he opens the door, slamming it closed, looking around furtively.

“Who do you think will see?” Ilya asks, laughing. “Come here, must give reward for shot in last game. Goal like that deserves prize.”

Shane drops his bags at the door in a jumble, stumbling down the steps, leaving clothes as he goes. Crawls on top of Ilya and they take a second to just breathe, his nose tucked into Shane’s neck.

They have a week at the cottage before Ilya has to fly back to Boston to pack up his life and move to Ottawa. They take full advantage.

They are outside, on the dock, their dock. Shane has been quiet, tucked into the groove of Ilya’s arm, then feels him take a breath and push himself up and over, straddling Ilya’s lap. It’s a good view.

Tells him so.

Shane smiles, slightly, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. Ilya would be worried, but nothing has happened. They are alone. They have been alone.

Shane buries his fingers in Ilya’s hair, scratching his scalp slightly. Says, hesitantly, “I love you, Ilyushen’ka.”

The air is forced out of him, like a punch, the name, a name he hasn’t heard since he was twelve years old, echoes in his mind. He stares at Shane, unable to speak. He looks so proud, so happy – but the longer Ilya says nothing, stares at him with wide eyes, like baby deer, the more his smile drops. And he starts to shift away. Ilya holds him tighter.

“Did I, uh, did I say it wrong?” He’s so worried and Ilya can’t find the air to breathe, let alone answer. “I asked Svetlana? I practiced. She said–” He swallows. “She said it was okay?”

Holds Shane tighter. Finds words for him. “My mother. My mother called me that. Nobody since then.”

Sveta never had. Because she knew it hurt. Found other names for him instead. She's always been a good friend. The best.

Shane doesn't try to move away this time. "Oh. Uh. Should I not? Do you not like it? I thought."

He buries his face in Shane's neck. Easier to say it if he doesn't have to look at him. Easier to let himself feel it. "No. Is perfect." Then a little steadier. "I like it."

Later he watches Shane put their dinner dishes in the dishwasher. It is so domestic it feels unreal. Except. This is what he's moving to Ottawa for.

They are building a life, a home together. They have friends, family. It is more than he dreamed possible.

He fiddles with the cross, brings it to his mouth and kisses it. *Wish you were here to see*, he tells the sky.

Thinks she would be proud.

End Notes

The joke about the car rolling downhill? That is Lim calling Cecily out for her inability to drive in snow and almost crashing on the way to Lim's house 25 years ago. Some people never forget, yo.

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