

summer windows

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summer windows

by [cloudies](#)

Summary

Shane blinks his eyes open to find Ilya hovering above him. “Let me make you a burger for dinner.”

“Ilya,” he smiles. *Translation*: Diet.

“I will make you bird burger, the way you like it. Bean patty. Fake bread bun.”

“You think they have my bean burgers and weird bread at this thing?” Shane had been expecting to just survive on veggie platters until they got home.

Ilya scoffs like he said something stupid. “Yes, Hollander, I told Dykstra to order them last week.”

Shane and Ilya attend the 2019 Dykstra-Pike collaborative Canada Day cottage party.

Notes

this started as a silly oneshot about ilya experiencing his first canada day and then it spiralled out of control.

so many thank yous to my lovely friend [@ourladyoftheflowers](#) for beta-ing the disjointed 11k word first draft (you are the best) and continuously giving me the advice + inspiration to turn this into something more cohesive and, i hope, worthy of the word count. ty for being one of my closest friends and lesbian fujo-ing out with me the last like 8 years <3 ilya :)

i played fast and loose with TLG timeline; its 2019, but all the centaurs are all there, troy is a goodboy and knows about hollanov, etc. the premise of this story is also ridiculous, but hey, that's fic baby.

title comes from the song "summer windows" by slaughter beach, dog :)

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

Shane gets a whiff of Ilya's fragrant soap before familiar arms wrap around him.

"From last time you went?" Ilya asks, peering over Shane's shoulder to pictures he's swiping through on his phone. "That is Dykstra and Pike? Having one million kids has aged him."

"Yeah," Shane answers. "2016." It was the only time he'd been there, which was also the first time the now-renowned Dykstra-Pike collaborative Canada Day lakehouse party had happened.

It had been a legendary day. Dykstra and Pike first came up with the idea for it in the summer of 2015, when they realized that they had cottages across the lake from each other. It was pitched as a competition – seeing whose team could party harder – but then word got out, the fire department got involved, and Hayden started to like his neighbour. By the time July 1 came around, they'd joined forces to throw the MLH's most patriotic cottage country rager.

It was a great time, objectively. People talked about it for months afterwards. The games against Ottawa that fall had been more fun because of it, and they didn't seem to mind getting their asses whipped by Montreal as much.

But Shane didn't do well at parties. And this one in particular – with guys from different teams, who didn't know each other, and still felt an innate sense of competition with each other – tended to attract a macho vibe that even a professional NHL player like him could find exhausting.

Which was why he hadn't been back. They always invited him – practically *begged* him to come – and the party had gotten more and more renowned in the three years since. It wasn't just Ottawa and Montreal anymore; some Toronto players came up, and other guys in the league who summered in the area. Dykstra invited some of his cousins, and JJ had said that he was bringing people with him too.

It was exactly the sort of the thing Shane didn't want to do in the off season, but then Ilya – now a fully-fledged, one-season-in Centaur – got added to the group chat.

Going had been Shane's idea after that. He knew Ilya loved their cottage, but there was no way having Yuna and David be their entire social circle for weeks at a time fulfilled Ilya the way it did for him, even if he didn't complain about it. And Ilya had seemed a bit off lately; Shane worried he was lonely.

He swore to Shane that his team and the Hollanders were all he needed, but his world was so much smaller these days. Shane's impression of him, for the first nine years they knew each other, was as the MLH's sexiest Russian playboy; pretty much everything Shane was not. It was hard to shake the feeling that the quiet life wouldn't be enough for him. Especially on the days when Ilya felt so far away and lost in thought. Like only a piece of him was there.

So, he made sure Ilya got the chance to go. And it wouldn't be so bad now that he had someone to go with. Even if the world couldn't know that he did.

“You are nervous to go?” Ilya asks, touching a light kiss to his cheek.

“Obviously.”

“You are their captain. They love you.”

Shane doesn't have an answer to that. It's less about him, and more about how overwhelming he knows this thing will be. Twelve full hours of small talk and wasted hockey players engaging in ritualistic hypermasculine competitions and unsafe water activities. Nonstop blaring music and more weed smoke than he tends to smell in a year.

“I love you,” is all he says.

“I love you too,” Ilya murmurs; it's so natural at this point, he repeats it back like a conditioned response. He's kissing his neck, lightly, because they *just* fucked thirty minutes ago and they know they have to leave soon, and Shane finds himself looking up from his phone at the framed photo of them they have hanging in the foyer. It's from last Christmas; his mom took it. He's wearing a pyjama set Ilya bought him and then almost immediately made him take off.

Shane takes a deep *I'm doing this* breath and turns around to extricate himself from Ilya. He slides on his Birks as he grabs the keys to the Land Rover. Ilya refuses to be seen in a Jeep Cherokee.

He keeps the radio on low as he drives them the two hours to Pike and Dykstra's lake. They don't say much, and it's comfortable. It's a beautiful trip on a perfect day, all smooth winding highways cutting through the orange of the Canadian shield. He loves the stillness of the wetlands, the endless blue of the lakes, the forest so dense it looks like moss. He fucking loves this part of the world, and he loves that Ilya wants to share it with him.

He turns at the sign for the lake, and slows down along the gravel country road. He looks for glimpses of the lakeshore through the thick trees. It's all multi-million dollar complexes and manicured lakefronts. None as perfect as his and Ilya's, though.

He spots Dykstra's cottage down the way. He already sees jet skis and canoes moving in the water, and the outline of figures on the dock. It will only be a couple of minutes until he hears it, too.

The air in the car gets heavier. Shane really wants Ilya to have a good time, and he is happy to go for that reason alone. But he fucking hates hiding. At least during the season, there's a reason for it. During the summers, though, all he can think about is how few days they have to be together, and that he doesn't want to waste a single one.

And there is the way the team treats him, kind of, ever since he came out. But he has already decided that he is not allowed to get upset about that. He'd made his choice, now he lives with it.

No one was homophobic, no one was awful. They just... They saw him differently, now, even if they didn't mean to. Shane knew this would happen before he made his decision.

Maybe he just hadn't thought it through enough.

Shane stops the car across from the cottage before Dykstra's. There's no one around to see them.

He reaches out and squeezes Ilya's hand. Ilya places a hand on Shane's cheek, and pulls him for a kiss. "Are you ready?" Ilya asks when they break apart. There's concern in his eyes. "I am always with you."

Shane snorts at just how ridiculous they are both being. It's enough to make him restart the Land Rover and head up the driveway to Dykstra's lakehouse.

The yard is already full with cars when Shane pulls in. Music is blaring in the distance. Dykstra and Brood come out to greet them, cans and a lit joint in tow. Shane refrains from breathing through his nose. "Rozanov! Hollander! You guys drove up together?"

"Was in Ottawa for camp stuff," Shane answers. "And he needed a DD."

Dykstra and Brood whoop, and Ilya hops out of the car, slapping the front hood a bit as he goes. "Thanks for ride, Hollander! You almost hit speed limit!"

He doesn't so much as look back at Shane before heading off, which he knows is on purpose, but it still sucks. A minute ago, Ilya was looking at him with so much love in his eyes that Shane couldn't take it, and now he wasn't enough for a goodbye. If the roles were reversed, he'd do the same. It came so fucking easily to them, after all these years, turning an entire life together *off* from one moment to the next. It sometimes struck Shane just how insane that was.

Ilya's teammates are jostling him across the shoulders as Shane shifts the gear to reverse and calls out, "I'm gonna go park at Pike's."

"Enjoy braiding each other's hair!"

"Get fucked, Dykstra!"

Shane hears JJ yell out "Bitch!" before he finishes parking. He's in nothing but vivid blue and purple Hawaiian trunks, and he's dripping wet. He fistbumps Shane through the open window and pulls him out of the car with a noogie. "We finally got you back here!"

"I come when it's not Mardi Gras," Shane says back with a smile. He usually does try and visit Hayden at least once over the summer. Last year, he'd brought Ilya for a day, and it was a bit of a disaster, but not as bad as the first time. Him and Ilya had become actual friends in the past year, whether they wanted to admit to it or not.

Hayden appears in the double doors of his cottage, wearing a respectable polo shirt and shorts with a can of beer. He's leaning in the doorway like he owns the place, but Shane knows he is probably the most nervous of them all.

Hayden is terrified of Shane and Ilya being found out today. Besides the brief meetings during games, he only experiences them together in the privacy of their homes, and is used to them not being able to keep their hands off each other. Shane had had to reassure him over the phone that they knew how to turn it off in a crowd.

("Silly man," Ilya said when Shane relayed this to him in bed the other night, "he forgets we have been doing this for nine years.")

Shane worries that he is corrupting his best friend into being as easy a liar as he is.

Inside, Hayden's cottage looks more like a practice in doomsday prep than a party. The modern kitchen is covered in boxes of beer, soda, and barbecue ingredients. Shane spots two unopened ounces of weed. In the adjoining living room – like Shane's, it was a big open-concept space – Jackie and a couple of their cousins are playing with the kids and the five hundred toys they have strewn about.

"Seriously?" is Shane's reaction. "You're going to have people over here?"

Hayden laughs. "Nah, my place has kind of become the storage facility. We keep most of the shit here—" Jackie calls out a *hey*, and Hayden waves an apology – "and the kids stay here too."

"So they don't see their dads making total asses of themselves," JJ clarifies.

Shane laughs a *got that right* as Jackie calls them out on language again.

"You don't mind having the party glory stolen away?" Shane asks.

"Not at all. Way less cleanup for us now. Dykstra has to hire a team to come in the next day. Anyway, we were just waiting for you before we boat over, but we can chill here for a bit first."

"I'd like that," Shane says. The less time he can spend on the other side of the lake, the better. He already has images popping into his head of Ilya, like, swinging from a chandelier while Shane tries not to freak out over stepping in a beer puddle.

Hayden leads them out onto the back deck overlooking the water. There's a sunken firepit below and a hot tub. There's also a veritable amusement park for his kids in the yard: a swingset, kid cars, slides, and a custom-built treehouse.

"You guys want anything to drink?" Hayden asks.

"Fucking beer me," JJ replies.

Shane gives a *yes* and Hayden comes back with an ice-cold IPA and a ginger ale.

"How was the drive? You come up from your orgy cottage?" The orgy cottage is JJ's recurring unfunny joke about the extreme seclusion in which Shane spends his summers. If only he knew.

“No, Ottawa,” Shane answers. “I’m DD’ing for Rozanov.”

JJ laughs. “I still can’t believe you two are friends, so fucking weird.”

“He’s not so bad.”

“Yeah, yeah, you should be his PR campaign, Hollander.” He lightly punches Shane’s arm and shakes his head in disbelief. There’s a pause where Shane hopes JJ doesn’t notice how quiet Hayden is being, until JJ asks, “Who do you think is getting the most fucked up tonight?”

They chat until Hayden’s phone buzzes with a text from Dykstra: “They’re requesting a refill on beverages.” He turns his phone towards them, and Shane sees a picture of Ilya and Chouinard shotgunning beers with the message *MORE CANS NOW!!!!*

Here it goes, Shane thinks.

Shane squints through the spray as Hayden blasts them across the lake in his motorboat. They really are close to each other, towards the south side of the lake, so it only takes a couple of minutes when they go fast.

Shane tries not to mind that he gets off the boat slightly soaked, but some of the water got in his drink, and he’s wearing a nice shirt that he’d bought with Rose. Ilya’s voice pops in his mind: *Hollander, calm down, we can afford washing machine.*

He’d made sure the outfit today wasn’t too fancy. Just a plain, cotton, button-up shirt, with a good drape and a little pocket for his sunglasses. Navy swim trunks underneath. He’d gotten self-conscious about his wardrobe again the past few months. When he’d first hired the stylist, the guys calling him fashionable had been expected, funny, whatever. Nothing meant by it. But ever since he came out, it made his skin crawl, and he couldn’t tell if it was justified or not. It felt like it was happening more, but he couldn’t be sure, and he couldn’t read their faces when they said it. So he’d mostly reverted to his old getup around his team.

Dykstra’s party is in full swing, and his property is fucking enormous. The dock turns into a long set of slowly inclining stairs leading to the lakehouse, which has a sprawling deck with a hot tub. By the dock there’s a boathouse, and farther up is a massive yard, peppered with a couple picnic benches, a grill, and lounge and Muskoka chairs. There’s a small manmade beach where some of the guys are playing volleyball.

He follows Hayden up the path, carrying a box of drinks and balancing his ginger ale on top. Metros players, WAGs, and miscellaneous league guys keep stopping to say hi and wave, but thankfully the drinks give him an easy excuse to just nod and keep walking. They get to the deck, where Shane can see the already intense crowd inside the cottage. He puts the box down for Hayden to bring in. The inside of the house is completely lawless and Shane refuses to step foot inside.

He stalls, unsure of what to do next. There’s nothing left to do but leave and join the party below, but he’s not exactly keen on having to turn Captain Shane Hollander on just yet.

Instead, duty finds him.

“Capitaine!”

Shane turns his head and sees one of the newer Metros waving him over on the lawn. “We’re about to play volleyball against the Centaurs and we need one more player.”

Shane follows him to the beach. Focusing on a game is the best possible way to pass the time.

The waterfront is busy, and he spends a few minutes just greeting people and answering questions about his summer while the guys get set up. *Been mostly at my cottage. Yeah, it’s a couple of hours from here. Drove up from Ottawa, though. Camp is gonna be great.*

The game itself is a lot of fun. Shane’s focus zeroes in completely on winning, which is his favourite feeling, and he stays quiet besides calling out *Here!* or *Mine!* during play. Sand is an infuriating medium compared to the freedom of the ice, but he makes it work. He resents that most of the guys playing are taller than him, especially when he’s blocking, but he is a great setter.

They lose the game. To the Centaurs side, JJ says, “Ha! All you had to do to beat us was switch the sport!” They start ribbing each other, and it begins looking too much like a buck fight. Shane steps away.

There’s a refreshments area just off the beach with a couple coolers, some snacks, and bottles of sunscreen. Shane starts reapplying lotion to his face and his arms, and ignores his annoyance that he has to use the cheap, white-casting crap Dykstra buys at Costco. But if he’d brought the one he uses, he’d have needed to bring a bag, and while his team may be neutrally fine with the idea that he is gay, he cannot imagine if he showed up to this party with anything resembling a purse.

He roots through the non-alcoholic cooler until he finds a ginger ale with a sticky note on it that says *RESERVED* in Hayden’s handwriting. He opens it and grabs a straw from the picnic table as he makes his way back to the grass line, where his teammate’s wives are watching a new game get started.

“They don’t stand a chance without you,” says one of them – Jessica, he thinks. He’s only met her a couple of times. So many of the guys are new and their relationships newer.

“I’ll play the next one,” Shane answers.

“So we get to talk to you.” This is... Trinity? He laughs nervously, and tries to focus on the game. If he stays quiet, maybe he’ll be able to break off without it being weird.

“Sorry in advance for anything the girls say,” adds the last one, who Shane knows is their goalie’s wife – Julie. She’s great.

The women start chatting. It’s mostly all innocuous stuff; making fun of their partners’ inebriation, talking about their summer plans and their kids and travel.

Shane tunes them out to watch the game. It's fun watching JJ; he's nothing if not enthusiastic. The smaller teams are good for rapport-building with the younger guys, and it removes the hierarchy a bit to put them in a game where they all kind of suck.

His thought process on how he could integrate something like this into a team-building exercise is interrupted when Trinity says, "Shane – do *you* know what happened?"

"Uh, what? Sorry."

"Beatrice," Jessica says. "Stewart's ex-girlfriend. She left the groupchat last month, do you know why they broke up?"

Shane has a vague recollection of his teammate complaining about his relationship issues in the locker room a couple of times, but he never really pays attention to that stuff. "I don't know, sorry."

"Come on, *gossip* with us."

Something tightens in Shane's chest at the way she says it.

"Trinity," Julie chastises, flicking her hand against Trinity's elbow.

"Tell us *something*, at least. We know the boys talk in the locker rooms."

"We won't tell. You can be like one of the WAGs."

"We can add you to the groupchat!"

"*Hey*," Julie barks at them. "Shut up."

Shane's ears are ringing.

He knows they would never talk to another guy on the team like this. Not in a million fucking years. They would never talk to the *Captain* of their husband's team like this. But that's no longer the most important thing about him.

"I'm gonna go," he says, with an awkward nod, and walks off without knowing where he's going.

Ilya has never seen his teammates act so stupid. It is amazing.

After shotgunning a couple beers – Ilya can't remember the last time he'd done that – they held a canoe race to the island in the middle of the lake. Shane's cottage has an island too, nicely forested. They'd fucked there a couple of times. This one is smaller; more of a big rock with a couple of pathetic trees. The stone is wet from the water and covered in lichen and moss, and Ilya loves the texture of it beneath his bare feet.

His teammates are currently making him recite "O Canada" from memory. The bilingual version. And making him chug every time he fucks up, because they are the worst.

“It’s *épopée*, dumbass!” Chouinard yells out in heavily accented English. “What the fuck do they teach you in school?”

“I’m Russian, you fucking idiot!” Ilya sputters as he finishes off another beer.

“You hear it at the start of every fucking game!”

“I’m busy thinking about winning!”

Brood cracks open another can and hands it over to him. “Keep going!”

Ilya wobbles slightly and tries to remember where he left off. “*Des pus grillants* –“

Wyatt boos him. “You’re not even trying!”

Ilya stops and drinks some more as his teammates sing the line for him.

He has the best team. This is *fun*. He’s got everything he could ever want right now, besides Shane by his side – he wishes he could see this. But they will see each other soon, and one day they will be out and married and fucking inseparable everywhere they go. It’ll be perfect.

So why the fuck does he still feel so fucking empty?

He’d been sure that he was just in a rut from living too much in his head. That a day of juvenile idiocy would shock his brain into accepting that his life was amazing and he had no reason to be this constantly kind-of-sad. And sometimes very, very sad.

Drinking usually helped before.

He stuffs it down and continues his recital.

It’s like he’s watching his life through a window. He can deliver his lines and be his usual asshole self without anyone being the wiser that there’s something in the way of feeling fully alive. Not even Shane.

Especially not Shane. Shane is already so fucking terrified of being found out. The last thing he needs is to start worrying that his boyfriend is depressed. He’ll think it’s his fault. He’ll ask Ilya question after question about how to fix it. He won’t stop until he figures out a way to fix *him*.

Ilya doesn’t know if there *is* a way to fix it. Beyond what he’s doing today, which is what he always did before Shane.

He’ll keep drinking until the window between him and the world melts away. He hasn’t thought much past that. He’s just been trying to make it to today and hoping that Shane will stop looking at him like an injured lamb whenever he’s a bit too quiet.

They spend a while fucking around on the island, then head back to Dykstra’s in the canoes. There’s a volleyball game happening on the beach, and Ilya falters for a moment when he

spots an empty ginger ale can on the lawn above. Shane must be nearby, which makes his heart rate speed up, but when Ilya scans the area, he doesn't see him.

His teammates head into the forest between Dykstra's property and the next, and Ilya shakes his head and follows them. He'll see Shane soon. He's probably with Hayden playing bridge or something.

He hopes he's having fun, as much as he can. Shane wants him to be happy so badly. He's giving up one of their precious summer days to go through his personal hell at this party. He needs to make it worth it. He needs to come out of this day fucking beaming.

One of the Centaurs defensemen lights a joint, and Ilya hits it without thinking when it gets to him.

Shane is at the front of the property, where the cars are parked and no one is around. He is Getting Some Air. He is *not* hiding.

His second ginger ale has been empty for a while, but he keeps sipping air through the straw. They're only through a fraction of the day, and he has already bombed one social interaction.

He wonders what Ilya is doing. Probably having the best day of his whole summer.

He tries not to be jealous. He has no right to be. This was *his* idea. He is a good partner who is not clingy. He knows Ilya doesn't actually think he is boring, or pathetic, or any of that. But it's pretty fucking hard to remember when he sees just how much more naturally all of this comes to Ilya.

And he can't complain to Ilya about people being weird to him about his sexuality. For one, people really are trying, those women probably drank too much and didn't mean for it to come off the way it did, and Shane wasn't allowed to get on a high horse about it when no one was being actually shitty. And plus, Ilya will pretty much be forced into the closet for years now because Shane had come out, and what was he going to do, take his chance and then complain about it?

He wants to see Ilya. He wants to FaceTime him right now and drive back to the cottage. But he can't mess up the day that was *for* Ilya. He probably doesn't even have his phone on him right now.

He sips some more at his finished drink. He should have brought more with him. How long until he can ask Hayden to do a supply run? Can he just stay at Hayden's house until this is over?

Except then he'd just end up helping the WAGs babysit, and they'd probably want to paint his nails and talk about boys. And Shane knows that he's not exactly natural with kids. Ilya's got him beat there, too.

He's spiralling. He knows this. He shakes his head and decides to try his hand at social interaction again.

He makes his way towards the front of the lakehouse, skirting the treeline on the edge of the property. He searches the landscape for Ilya – Shane is pretty sure he could spot him in any crowd, but he's not seeing any sign of him, Wyatt, or Troy.

He could be in the house, which Shane eyes nervously. He really doesn't want to go in there. Also, if Ilya is inside, Shane would rather not see it.

He's standing awkwardly against a tree at the edge of the yard, chewing at his straw, when Dykstra comes tumbling out of the house. As the door opens, there's a brief swell of thumping music. He spots Shane immediately.

"Hollanderrrrr, you're here!"

Dykstra walks over and claps his shoulder. Shane holds up the can and swirls it a bit. "Did they have more in there?"

"Nah, don't think so. You could check."

"No offence, but that looks like my personal hell."

Dykstra laughs. Shane wants to ask where Ilya is. He doesn't.

"You guys played a great season this year," he says instead.

"Fuck yeah we did!" Dykstra pumps a fist in the air. "You better watch out, we're fucking coming for you."

Shane nods. "I'm from Ottawa, man, I want to see you kick ass. Just don't get it in your head that you'll have a shot against the Metros."

"Fucking nice guy, eh?" Dykstra laughs. Shane feels a quiet burst of security that he can at least have one normal human interaction. "Glad all the fame didn't go to your head."

"Yeah, well, I know my team."

"Always the captain."

There's a silence and Shane, again, bites back asking where Ilya is, or if Ilya is having fun, or if Ilya seemed happy during the last season.

The silence lasts for a moment too long. "See you around, man." Dykstra nods and walks off.

Shane watches the crowd of people below, drunkenly yelling and moving and laughing. He tries to focus on the sound of the leaves in the breeze, and not the anxiety that's been looming over him since he woke up this morning.

He's survived two Cup celebrations and had fun. He's a normal guy who isn't dependent on his boyfriend. He's the captain of the best hockey team in the world. He can do this.

He goes back to hide in the driveway for another twenty minutes.

Ilya has always assumed that Shane will be the strict parent and he will be the laissez-faire one.

And, well, that's probably true for most things. But he is also realizing that he is going to be an anxious fucking dad. And maybe he's more like Yuna, and Shane like David, than he initially thought.

"Have you ever ridden one of these things before?" It comes out more strung-out than he means it to.

Luca waves him off with a laugh and climbs onto the jet ski. He nearly falls in the water twice trying to get on it. Ilya should not have let him take that second hit of the joint. Or the third. "Rozyyy, I'll be fine!"

Ilya is pretty sure Luca has never called him anything but Captain Rozanov in the entire time he's known him. "You are high, Luca! It is dangerous to go on this thing!"

"Relax, Rozy," slurs some guy behind him, who's not even *on* the Centaurs, Ilya has no idea who he even *is*, and yeah, no, he is not going to let his favourite rookie get taken out via impaired jet skiing.

He marches as best he can to Luca – he only wobbles slightly – and reaches to grab him by the elbow. "You can go," Ilya grunts, "once you have sobered up."

Luca starts to protest, but Ilya tightens his grip. Luca relents and starts to follow him onto the dock.

"You're not my dad," Luca complains.

"I'm your captain," Ilya replies, and he tries not to dwell on just how upset he is at Luca's poor decision making.

But it's not just that. The past few hours have been a blur – swimming, wrestling, shouting, laughing. He'd gotten so drunk he'd felt, for a moment, free. But it was over almost as soon as it started, and now he's realizing that he drank more in the past couple hours than he has in the last six months. The summer heat is at its peak, drunk people are annoying fucking idiots, and he is starting to feel really awful.

Troy meets Ilya and Luca at the edge of the dock. He'd run down once he'd spotted Luca trying to get on the jet ski. "You should listen to him," he pants. "That was stupid as fuck, Luca."

Luca groans.

"Go to the fucking kiddie pool where you won't drown, Haas," he orders.

"Fuck off." Ilya has the thought to get offended at *his* innocent rookie using language like that at him but, no, a wave of dizziness comes over him and he squeezes his eyes shut as he

focuses on staying upright. Luca stumbles off, and Troy is clearly trying to suss out what's wrong.

He's holding a bottle of water, and spins it in his hands nervously. "Everything okay, Captain?"

Ilya crosses his arms. "No."

"Do you... want to talk about it?"

"No."

"Okay."

Ilya makes his way into the trees between Dykstra's property and the next. He hears Troy following behind him. It's darker here, and relatively quiet. It smells like the cottage. He can close his eyes and pretend he's there.

He plunks down at the base of the tree and brings his legs up, resting his elbows on his knees.

He's angry, he drank too much, he smoked when he shouldn't have, and what the fuck was he thinking? He's not 19 anymore. Some part of him wonders why the fuck 19 year old him found this fun in the first place. Is he really getting too old for this? He's still *young*.

But it's barely the afternoon, and he needs to sit down because he's dizzy and the sun is too hot and his fucking stomach hurts. He misses his dog and his boyfriend and not being surrounded by morons. And he's *sad*. He wants to scream at the weight in his heart to fuck off already.

He feels an icy touch on his shoulder. "Water?"

He takes it, unscrewing the cap and chugging half of it in one go. "Thank you."

Troy sits down next to him. Ilya asks, "Why the fuck did you come to this anyway? Is not really your type of thing."

Troy grunts. "Honestly? I was worried about the shit some of the younger guys would get up to. Especially Luca. He's just a kid." He pauses. "Definitely didn't expect to end up having to take care of you."

Ilya tries and fails to not be embarrassed about how much of a mess he is. He hopes no one besides his friends saw. It'd be terrible for his reputation as Mr. Partyguy to be so soundly destroyed this way, even if that reputation has been retired for a long time.

Ilya hasn't been drunk like this in months – maybe years. The Centaurs went out sometimes, but they were way tamer than the Raiders, because they didn't like making asses of themselves and rarely had much to celebrate. And his summers now consisted of a glass of wine at family dinner, or a beer on the beach watching the sunset with Shane.

He'd been telling himself he missed it. That this emptiness inside him is because he lives like a grandmother at the age of 28.

But he's drunk with his team at the best party in Canada, and the emptiness is still there. If anything, it's worse. And Ilya can't stop thinking about how he wishes he was spending the day going on a hike with Anya and Shane. Fucking him in their California King-sized bed whenever they want and going over to Yuna and David's house to make boring dinner after. Playing late-night video games with Hayden while they talked about his kids over a call, Shane curled into him and reading one of his hockey books.

When did he get this fucking boring?

Ilya breaks the silence between them to say, "Do you think I am boring, Troy?" He means for it to come out like a joke, but he slurs his words a bit, and he knows he sounds sad.

Troy blinks at him. "Not in the fucking slightest, Rozanov."

"I used to be a big playboy. Crazy parties. Crazy sex. Just nonstop pleasure parade."

"I've heard." He waits for Ilya to elaborate, but nothing comes. "And now...?"

Ilya grunts. "Now I am boring."

"There's nothing wrong with that."

"I am too young, no?"

"Aren't you retiring this year?" Troy says back, and Ilya can hear the smile in his voice.

Ilya snorts. It's the most he can manage for now; he really is nauseous. He can't recall *ever* being this nauseous from alcohol before. Usually just from Shane's cooking. Ha. "You would like me to retire then, yes?"

Troy smiles. "Not for at least forty more seasons."

"I will still be a better hockey player than the rest of you then."

"Oh, fuck off," he laughs. Ilya smiles a bit back. They fall into silence for another moment, before Troy says, "If you think you're boring, then what the fuck does that make me?"

"Is only a problem when I am boring. I have no problem with the rest of you."

Troy doesn't seem to know how to answer that. Maybe he knows Ilya will not elaborate. "Whatever you say, Captain."

They sit in silence for a while longer. Ilya drinks the rest of his water. "You should go find Luca," he says. "Make sure he is not doing anything else very stupid."

Troy nods, and gets ready to stand. "How're you feeling?"

“Better.” His stomach is settling. The water helped, but he could use some more.

“Do you need some more water?”

“No.”

Troy sighs, slightly exasperated. “Do you want me to find Shane?”

Yes. “No.”

Troy rolls his eyes – not in a mean way – and ruffles Ilya’s hair as he stands. “You shouldn’t be alone for long. I’ll go look for him.”

Anxiety rises in Ilya’s chest. He doesn’t want Shane to also see him like this. “I’m fine, Barrett. I will be up in a minute.”

Troy looms over him, hands on hips. “He will literally kill me if he finds out I didn’t go get him. Just accept it.”

Ilya groans and rests his head against the tree.

Shane has the misfortune of being the only person in the driveway when the firefighters show up. (The misfortune, he knows, is that he is fucking antisocial and still hiding from everyone.) Nothing’s wrong, but they told Dykstra to expect them popping in at some point, to go over forest fire prevention again. Shane is pretty sure they just wanted an excuse to see their local NHL teams in person.

At least he knows what to do. It’s like talking to his coach, or the sponsors, or any of the other million people that he has to be Capitaine Hollander for. He’s serious, crossing his arms, and nodding to show that he’s listening.

“...so they should already know all this, because we talked to them earlier this week, and we didn’t have issues last year. But the fines can be hefty if there are noise complaints past 11pm...”

“Got it.”

“... and if they use the pyrotechnics, they need to...”

“Right.” Shane is completely tuning the poor volunteer firefighter out until he hears the tone of his voice change.

“And, I know you probably don’t like getting recognized all the time, but can I just say? Big fan, Mr. Hollander. You make this country proud.”

Shane gives him his best, media-ready smile. “Thank you, Mr...”

“Matt. Matt Heron.”

“Thank you, Matt. And thank you for what you do. You keep people safe.”

He extends a hand to Shane, and he shakes it. Finally, the truck he came in drives off, and Shane breathes a sigh of relief, letting the smile drop. He turns back into the property before he can become the ambassador for some other visitor to Dykstra’s fucking party.

He walks along the edge of the yard, avoiding people and searching for Ilya again.

He imagines Ilya asking him about his day when they find each other later. *Oh, you know, I hid for most of it because I didn’t want to talk to anyone and the longest conversation I had was when the fire department came to make sure we were behaving. And then I just wandered around searching for you.*

And Ilya would say, *Oh my God, Hollander, you are so pathetic. I drank my weight in alcohol and got up to shit so crazy, the whole league will be celebrating me for the next six months. You could not begin to understand it. You have more separation anxiety than Anya. Also, I’ve realized that your cottage is boring and I would rather live at Dykstra’s now, sorry.*

He grunts and checks his phone. Nothing new besides marketing emails and Instagram comments. Same as five minutes ago. He opens his messages app. Again.

His last messages with Ilya were from three days ago. There wasn’t much need to text when they spent every moment together over the summer. Ilya had sent, *Want me to bring anything down?* while he was reading on the dock. He’d answered *Grapes in fridge. Already washed.*



God, he wants to text Ilya right now.

Instead, he texts Hayden. *How is it going?*

Hayden replies, *Im banning Dykstra’s cousins next year*

They chat for a few messages, then Hayden disappears for a minute. He writes, *Troy barret is looking for u*

Oh, shit. Did something happen to Ilya? He writes, *I’m by Dykstra’s house. I’ll be there in a minute. Where are you?*

He’s already scanning the area for them when he sees a text from Hayden that they’re by the barbecue, and he hurries there, hands stuffed in his pockets and clenched into fists.

“Where’ve you been?” is the first thing Hayden says once Shane is in earshot.

“Trying to avoid people,” Shane answers. He turns to Troy. “Is everything okay?”

Troy is texting someone and sitting with the young Centaurs player – Luca Haas. The kid looks awful and is nibbling slowly at a burger. Troy looks up to Shane. “Yeah, some of the guys just drank a bit too much.”

Troy eyes Luca, who is watching Shane with adoration despite the pallor on his face. “I think Rozanov got dehydrated. Could you bring him a water bottle? He’s in the woods by the beach.” He nods his head towards the general direction, and Shane gives an affirmative before heading off.

It’s not hard to find Ilya. He’s at the bottom of a tree, half asleep. He looks towards Shane, then grunts and turns away. He looks clammy and pissed off.

“Hey.” Shane hands Ilya the water bottle and sits a professional distance from him. The trees here aren’t dense, and they’re still easily visible to anyone nearby. It hurts that he can’t touch him right now.

“Hey,” Ilya answers.

“How are you doing?”

“Mm. Fine.”

“Ilya.”

“I drank too much.” He pauses. “Hadn’t smoked in a while, either.”

“Cigarettes?”

Ilya glares at him, and Shane gets the sense that was the wrong question.

He gets the sense that something is wrong in general. He’s been getting that feeling for a while.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just told you. I’m nauseous, and I drank too much.” It’s dismissive, and below him, but he’s not ready to answer what Shane is really asking.

Shane scoots towards him, as much as he can dare, tapping his foot against Ilya’s. “You never drink this heavily, even with your team.”

“Well, my team fucking blows.”

“Hey,” Shane says, and Ilya can hear the shift in his voice. Now they’re going to have a *talk*, because Shane cares, and Ilya should be so thankful that he has a loving partner who wants to talk about his feelings. But what he cares more about in this moment is that he’s angry and sad and everything fucking hurts. “You don’t mean that.”

“Is our reputation not that we’re fucking terrible?”

“You’re being mean, Ilya.”

“Yeah, well, I am drunk.”

Shane sighs. A few years ago, he would have just gotten pissed back and stormed off, and then they would have avoided each other for a few days and fucked until they weren't mad anymore. Ilya misses it.

He hears Shane's voice in his head, through the fog of his impairment. *No, you don't.*

Shane glances behind him, scanning for anyone looking, then drags himself towards Ilya, and squeezes his arm. "I'm worried about you."

"There's nothing to worry about, Hollander."

"You know that's not true. You've been... off, lately. I want to help."

And Ilya knows Shane won't let it go. But he's also really not ready for him to go all-hands-on-deck with curing him.

Shane runs a finger down his arm, and Ilya feels Shane watching him so intensely, his eyebrows knitted the cute way they do when he's worried.

He lets out a breath. "I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm just... sad, I don't know. It's normal. Everyone gets it."

Shane exhales at Ilya's words. "There are ways to get support, and professional help, if you're struggling...."

Ilya clenches a hand around his Shane's. "*No. Shane, ya tebya lyublyu*, you're a few chapters ahead of me. I'm fine. I'm just a bit off. It will pass."

"I hate to see you hurting."

"Well, you're going to have to. Sorry." He takes a drink from his water. He looks at Shane and sighs. He can't help but fucking melt every time he sees those brown eyes. "You help just by being here."

Shane nods, and shifts to be sitting a bit farther from Ilya. They'd been too close before, and Ilya had been about to tell him to make space. "I'm always here for you. Thank you for telling me."

Ilya just nods and says, "Okay."

The heavy silence between them dissipates a bit. Ilya knows they're not done. It will come up again soon, but for now Shane will have to take what he can get. He's drained, and he at least admitted the feeling was *there*. He doesn't want to think about what comes next.

Ilya feels his stomach start to settle, but there is still something else weighing on him. "I am sorry I could not have fun today."

Shane quirks a small smile at him. It's silly thing for him to say, he knows, after what they were just talking about, but it's still bothering him. "Why would you apologize for that?"

“Because you gave up a day to drive us two hours to this stupid party and be around idiots for me.”

Shane sighs. He taps his foot against Ilya’s. “I wanted to do it.” He pauses. “Was it all bad?”

Ilya shrugs. “Not at first, no. We went to the island, that was fun. But I did not pace myself. Didn’t know I had to. Fun surprise. And no one else did, and then it was just, uh...” Ilya has sobered up enough to not slur his words anymore, but English is harder than usual and he says the next words in Russian. Shane doesn’t recognize them, but he imagines it’s adjacent to *fucking chaos*. “What did you do?”

“Hid in the driveway, mostly. Played some volleyball.”

“I wish I could have seen that. You take your shirt off?”

Shane snorts. Ilya readjusts his posture a bit, sitting up straight as he drinks some more water. “No.”

“Good for me, they would have been all over you.”

Shane smiles, then falters. “Well, then some of the WAGs were trying to make me into one of them. Wanting me to gossip, I don’t know. Asking if I would join their groupchat.”

“Ah. I’m sorry.” It’s not the first time something like this has happened. It was one of the tamer instances, if anything.

“It’s okay.”

He shifts his weight between his hands a bit. He’s about to change the subject again, when Ilya says, “They treat you differently, now?”

Shane isn’t entirely sure if he means it as a statement or a question. He’s mentioned weird things people have said before, but he’s never categorized it as a trend. Softly, he whispers, “Yeah.”

“Do you regret it?”

He sighs. He feels his eyes well up a bit. “No. I don’t know. None of it’s *bad*. They’re just not used to it. I made my choice.” *And*, he thinks, *I took yours*.

Ilya eyes him. He always seems to know what Shane is thinking; he doesn’t know how he does it. “You’re allowed to be upset about it.”

Shane wipes the corners of his eyes with his thumb, blinking a bit. He shakes his head. “It’s really not a big deal. Can we talk about it another time?” Ilya looks about ready to argue, but Shane adds, “I’m not avoiding it. But it’s nothing I can solve today. And I think this whole party is just... a lot. I’d rather talk about it at home.”

Ilya nods, and lets it go.

“I really wish I could hold your hand right now.”

Ilya lets out a sad laugh. “Me, too.”

“How is your stomach doing?”

“Better, now that you’re here.” Shane smiles. This was playful-Ilya humour. He was pretty good at telling it from deflecting-Ilya humour. He’d had a lot of experience there.

They sit in silence for a while longer, listening to the noise in the distance as Ilya sips at his water. Shane tells him about the volleyball game, and Ilya relays the more enjoying parts of the morning.

He finishes his water bottle, then hoists himself up, brushing off his swim trunks. “Okay, let’s go.”

“Are you sure you’re feeling alright?”

“I’m fine. I’ll keep drinking water.”

Shane stands. “Where’re you going?”

“*We* are going to take naps on the lounge chairs like two old farts.”

Shane takes a step towards him, smiling. “You don’t want to go find your teammates?”

“No. I want to spend today with you.”

“You spend every day with me.”

Ilya huffs and leaves. Shane jogs to catch up to him.

The beach is perpetually busy, so the only chairs they can find are on either side of one of Ottawa’s defensemen. Ilya considers using his captaincy to order him to switch spots, but ultimately decides against it.

Ilya dozes off for a bit – best he can, given the noise on the beach – and Shane plugs in his earbuds to listen to his hockey podcast. He keeps sneaking glances over to Ilya, making sure he’s breathing, and notices he’s starting to go pink.

The Ottawa player next to him is awake and sipping on a beer, though, and Shane feels suffocated by everyone around. He texts Ilya, *Hey. You need to reapply your sunscreen.*

The notification wakes Ilya up, and he rolls his eyes at Shane after reading it. As he’s walking towards the picnic table with the sunscreen, Shane texts, *How are you feeling?*

Better after nap, Ilya answers. He finds Pike nearby and wags a bottle of sunscreen in front of his face. “Helloooo. I need your assistance.”

Pike scoffs at him. “No way.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell Jackie.”

“Get somebody else to do it.”

“Hmm, but you are such a good friend, Pike. No one else can help me.”

Pike scrunches his face up. He could just tell Ilya to fuck off and find a teammate, but he has possibly too much empathy for him and Shane and gets sad when he thinks about them for more than, like, thirty seconds, which makes him easy to manipulate. He sees Pike glance over at their favourite hockey player and his expression shifts. Ilya has won.

“Fine,” he huffs, and begins rubbing sunscreen into Ilya’s back. Ilya cranes his neck to find Shane staring from his lounge chair. Very predictable, he is. Ilya gives an obnoxious thumbs up and Shane turns his head back towards the lake.

“Are you having a nice day, Pike?”

“Better than you, from what I’ve heard.”

“Cheap shot! What happened to your nice Canadian manners?”

“I guess I have some poor influences in my life.”

Ilya snorts. Pike takes his hand off his back. Ilya turns to face him and starts applying the lotion to his arms and his chest. Pike is noticeably staring, and it is apparent that he has no idea that he is. Ilya will torture Shane with this information later.

“Me as well. I am officially old and boring like the rest of you.”

“Just because you can’t chug, like, ten beers back to back before noon doesn’t mean you’re *old and boring*.”

“Spoken like someone who is old and boring.”

Pike grunts. “You’re such an asshole, Rozy.”

Ilya shrugs. “Are we playing COD tomorrow night?”

“No,” he says, his face still pissed off. Then, “Fine, sure. Whatever.”

Ilya smiles. Him and Shane really were alike in so many ways.

He places the lotion back on the table and waves Hayden bye-bye.

Shane feels something flutter in his chest as Ilya teaches a sobered-up Luca on how to safely maneuver a jet ski. He had him fitted for a lifejacket and is currently lecturing him on the importance of going slowly and how to brake.

Shane dozes off in his chair after a bit, enjoying the sun on his skin. The sun still has hours left to go, despite it being just after 5pm, and he can air dry from his lake swim without needing a towel. He'd needed to wash off after getting *really* into a few volleyball games earlier; he wouldn't quit until the Metros won. Ilya had definitely been ogling him behind his stupid sexy aviators during it. How did he make them look so good? Shane looked like a dweeb whenever he tried them on.

It had been a pretty nice afternoon. His muscles were sore, his skin was warm from the sun, and Ilya seemed to be feeling better. Not totally normal, but okay. At least he hoped so.

He stirs when he feels the sun disappear. He blinks his eyes open to find Ilya hovering above him. "Let me make you a burger for dinner."

"Ilya," he smiles. *Translation*: Diet.

"I will make you bird burger, the way you like it. Bean patty. Fake bread bun."

"You think they have my bean burgers and weird bread at this thing?" Shane had been expecting to just survive on veggie platters until they got home.

Ilya scoffs like he said something stupid. "Yes, Hollander, I told Dykstra to order them last week."

And, *whoops*, if Shane wasn't sunken into his chair he'd probably swoon.

"I --" *I fucking love you* is what he wants to say, and then he registers the music around them, and the unfamiliar view, and the hordes of people moving around who could theoretically be within earshot. "Thank you."

He follows Ilya at a respectable two-arm's distance to the grill. It's a quiet corner of the party – most people are too drunk to be trusted with high-heat cookware, and opt for the catering instead. There's a picnic table next to it that is currently taken over by a small game of beer pong. Shane spots JJ playing.

"There you fucking are! Hollander, I haven't seen you all day!"

"Well, you're pretty hard to miss."

Ilya heads into the house to grab Shane's food.

"You want to join the game? You do not have to drink."

"No, I'm okay," he says. "Just making some dinner."

They chat for a bit, and then JJ's brain seems to catch up to the fact that Shane is waiting for Ilya to grab him stuff from the house, and he goes, "Wait, Rozanov is making you dinner?"

Shane hugs his arms and shifts in place. "Nice guy, right?"

JJ lets his cousin take over his spot at the table and moves to Shane's side. He leans in to say the next part in Shane's ear, but he has never had good volume control, and it makes Shane wince when he talks. "Too bad he is straight, eh?"

"It's not – it's not like that," Shane says.

"Ben oui," JJ laughs. "Just a joke, Hollander. He'd be terrible for you." He pauses. "Does he know about you, though?"

Shane freezes. "About what?"

"About your... *préférences*."

"Uh," Shane stalls. He hadn't actually thought about this before. He's usually busy running a dozen other simulations in his head on how he's supposed to talk about Ilya in public. "Sure. We're friends. My friends know."

"And he's okay with it?"

The idea that Ilya is homophobic makes Shane want to laugh, but he could see where the assumption could come from, unfortunately. "Of course. He was great about it."

JJ nods, not seeming to notice how fucking uncomfortable Shane is. Ilya comes back outside, nodding to Shane and holding up a plate with burger ingredients on it. He gets straight to grilling.

JJ shifts the conversation, thank God, to telling Shane a story about an intensive water wrestling tournament they'd run that morning and how he had been unjustly eliminated in the quarter-finals. Apparently Rozanov had been sloppy and did even worse.

JJ watches the beer pong and Shane watches Ilya cook his burger. During a lull, JJ leans in to him again a bit, and says, "You know, my cousin over there is bisexual, *c'est un mec bien*. If you..."

"Buddy," Shane says, "I've told you. I'm too busy with hockey for anything right now."

JJ quirks his face at him. "You've got to let yourself be *happy*, mon gars."

"I'm very happy," Shane says, his voice tight.

"Come on, doesn't that cottage get lonely over the summer?" He's getting a bit too loud, and Shane sees Ilya's ears perk up. They make eye contact for a moment, and Ilya goes back to pretending to focus on the patty in front of him. "He is very into hockey, you will have lots to talk about."

"No."

"And if I just give him your number?"

Shane looks at him dead-on. "I will block it."

JJ's smile fades, and Shane regrets it. He sighs and says, "Sorry. It's just. It's one thing to be out to the team. It's another to... be with someone."

He doesn't dare looking at Ilya right now.

"Scott Hunter does fine," JJ suggests, looking more concerned and gentle than Shane has almost ever seen him.

"Yeah," Shane sighs, "He does." And he leaves it at that.

Ilya comes by with the food. He'd made himself a regular burger alongside Shane's, and the two were next to each other on a disposable plate. Shane gives JJ an awkward wave goodbye.

They sit on a rock near the stairs, overlooking the lawn and the water below. Dykstra has synced-up speakers around the property, and they're playing *Take It Easy* by the Eagles for what feels like the sixth time that day. Shane doesn't like much music, besides the stuff he works out to, and Ilya fucking hates Dykstra's. But in this moment, where the day is winding down enough that they can hear the water and people's laughter and there are glints of yellow on the lake, it's nice.

They mostly eat in silence. He says eventually, "Thank you for the food."

Ilya shrugs. "I am glad we came today. Even if it was not what I was thinking."

Shane nods. He skirts a glance around them, making sure no one was within earshot.

"I wish I could kiss you right now," he murmurs.

"Bet you wish you could do more than that," Ilya replies.

Shane smiles and taps Ilya's ankle with his foot. "Fuck off."

"If you want," Ilya says, "We can say camp stuff came up and you need to get back to Ottawa early. Leave now."

Shane shakes his head. "No, I'd like to see the fireworks. It was the best part of last time."

Ilya nods, leaning back on his hands and enjoying the sun.

Shane might even dare to say that he is having fun.

As the sun lazily makes its way to the horizon, Hayden starts corralling a group to go back to the Pike property for fireworks. This was the one part of the day that was still a competition between the two of them, and Hayden went all out, because his kids loved it.

Most of the older Metros want to be at Pike's for it, and Ilya convinces Troy to come so it's less weird if he goes, and with Troy comes Luca and Wyatt.

It's more than can possibly fit in Hayden's motorboat, and most of the excess guys decide to make a final canoe race out of it. Shane, though, has another idea.

"How long would the walk be?"

"I don't know, twenty minutes?" Hayden answers.

"Great," Ilya answers, stuffing down his desire to take Shane's hand as he walks away. "We will see you in forty minutes."

"That was so unnecessary," Shane says as they walk down the driveway, but he's smiling.

Once they're off the property and on the lake road, Ilya scans the area and curls his pinkie finger around Shane's. They don't dare much more when a car could come around the bend at any time.

The silence is lovely after the day they've had, and the old, tall trees and sound of gravel crunching as they walk is almost enough to make them feel like they're home.

They eventually see the sign for Hayden's cottage – it says *Pike* in faded yellow and green paint, with six different multicoloured hand prints on it.

The private road to the cottage is about another five minute walk. Ilya leans into Shane, his breath tickling his ear. "Here, or the shed?"

The shed was more private, but with the crowd at Hayden's there'd be a bigger risk of being spotted compared to last time. "Here."

Ilya pulls Shane by the hand into the woods along the road. They can't even see the cottage yet, and the trees here are thick. It feels like there's no one else in the world.

Shane brings Ilya against a tree and kisses him. He can hear Ilya's voice in his head, *Shane, are you trying to suck my face off?* But he can't help it. Need washes over him like a fire.

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*," he murmurs into the skin of Ilya's cheek, and it almost hurts to say it after having to keep it locked up all day.

Ilya groans and pulls off Shane's shirt. He throws it over the nearest tree branch so it doesn't get too dirty. Ilya runs his hands down Shane's chest, quickly working his way towards his crotch.

"Ilya," he breathes, "We have a giant bed we can fuck in at home tonight," and he doesn't mean a fucking word of it.

"Hmm, no." Shane can hear the smile in his voice as he kisses his neck. Ilya finds his way past the elastic of Shane's swim trunks and frees his dick. "I want you now."

Shane gasps at the touch. "Someone could hear us."

Ilya turns them around so Shane's back is against the tree, and starts working his cock, gently at first, then increasing the pressure. "I bet you'd like that, wouldn't you."

Shane moans. He would never get tired of this.

Ilya brings his free hand up to Shane's mouth, and he sucks on the thumb. They stay here, Ilya stroking Shane's cock and rutting his own, still-clothed bulge against it, until Shane seems to get comfortable with the rhythm.

Ilya pulls his thumb from Shane's mouth and runs his hand along his neck down to his chest as he sinks to his knees.

Shane will never get over how amazing Ilya is at blowjobs. Not as good as him, of course, he's worked at it over the years, but he learned from the best. And it's still mindblowing every fucking time, just how enthusiastic he is to take him.

"Fuck, Ilya," he moans, running his fingers through his curls. "I love you, fuck."

Ilya pauses momentarily to stare up at him through those gorgeous lashes. Then he takes Shane as deep as he can go, with a suck, and starts going at a pace that should be humanly fucking impossible unless you're Ilya Rozanov. Before he knows it, Shane is seeing stars and coming in his mouth with a gasped moan.

Ilya's mouth pops off Shane's cock and he leans back on one hand, wiping his mouth with the other. Shane is panting.

"My turn," he says, and Shane is so happy, he has to look away.

"Give me a second," he says. "Catching my breath, Jesus Christ."

Ilya readjusts to be leaning on his elbows, his legs spread open. He quirks an eyebrow at him, and brings their gazes down to the tent he has on display for Shane.

Shane rolls his eyes, nestles himself between Ilya's legs, and starts on his neck again.

He doesn't linger on Ilya's chest or stomach the way he usually does, when they're at home. As private as this corner of the forest is, they know they shouldn't take too long, and Shane can't help but feel exposed. But there is a danger, a franticness, to this, that makes up for it.

He starts by putting his hand up the leg of Ilya's trunks and stroking him a few times through there. Ilya lolls his head back in relief. Then he takes his hand out, and Ilya instinctively raises his hips so Shane can pull his shorts down.

He starts sucking Ilya's cock in earnest. Ilya groans his name, his hand finding Shane's head, and Shane hums back, happily.

He loves the feeling of Ilya's grip in his hair, guiding him, even though he doesn't need it to know exactly how to drive Ilya crazy. It's an art and a science; there are certain routines he keeps up every time, but he also has moments he improvises, keeping him guessing. "Fuck, Shane, you're perfect."

Yes, Shane thinks, licking the slit of Ilya's cock with pressure before taking him down to the back of his throat. He's perfect, and his boyfriend loves him, and he is extremely good at blowjobs. It's a good day.

He feels Ilya's breathing speeding up and he increases the rate he's bobbing at to match, clenching his hand against Ilya's chest.

He sucks in a breath right before Ilya comes, and takes it all down in a swallow. He rises, catching Ilya's gaze, and wipes the corner of his mouth with his hand.

"You taste like lake water."

Ilya squeezes his eyes shut in bliss and lets out the cutest fucking laugh Shane has ever heard. "Sorry."

Ilya lifts his hips to bring his shorts back up. Shane moves to curl up next to him, resting his head on his shoulder and lying on the forest floor. It's extremely fucking uncomfortable and they won't stay here for long, but for now, it's nice. Ilya twirls his fingers in Shane's hair. "That was not boring."

"No, it fucking wasn't."

They stay there for a few moments longer, until their breathing is back to normal. As Shane feels his arm start to fall asleep, Ilya slaps him. "Mosquito," he says.

Shane sits up slowly. "We should probably go."

Ilya stands, reaching out a hand to help Shane up. He kisses him a few more times, and gets Shane's shirt from the tree, pulling it over his head. He combs a few twigs and leaves out of Shane's hair. Shane gets so flustered when Ilya dotes on him like this.

"We will tell them you fell down a hill and I saved you."

Shane snorts and laces their fingers together as they start walking. They keep holding hands until the roof of the cottage appears over the hill. Shane breaks off so there's more space between them as they walk up the driveway, even though no one's there.

They find everyone on the other side of the cottage. Troy and Luca are in a sandpit with the toddlers, helping them build a lopsided castle. Wyatt is pushing a kid on the swings, and JJ and Hayden are playing hide-and-go-seek with a group of them, including the twins.

The twins, who were hiding behind a tree, spot them first. They yell, "Uncle Ilya!" and run up to him, grabbing him by the wrists and jumping.

Shane finds it so endearing how much they love Ilya that it mostly negates the sting that they like him so much less.

"Okay, okay, okay," Ilya says, trying to calm them down. Hayden had said he'd talked to them about what they couldn't say today, but they were still kids. "Calm down."

JJ walks up to them, looking confused. “Uncle Ilya?”

It’s good that he went to Ilya directly, because if he’d asked Hayden, he’d have probably shit his pants. “I babysit, sometimes,” Ilya says with a shrug. “Centaur’s do not pay very well, you know.”

Ilya’s strategy was sometimes to just tell a blatant lie, because the actual truth was just as unbelievable. It helped if it was funny.

He walks away, and JJ turns to him. “Did you fall down or something?”

Shane shrugs, “Tripped.”

He makes a beeline for the deck, trying to put distance between him and Ilya and JJ, and finds a ginger ale in the cooler. He spots Jackie in the kitchen, scrolling on her phone.

He goes inside to say hi. She startles when the door opens, then relaxes when she sees it’s him. “No kids, thank God.”

Shane laughs, sliding the door behind him and grabbing a straw from the cupboard. “They drive you crazy today?”

“Some of these players’ kids – oh my God.” She shakes her head. “But I’m doing a spa trip after this, and then two weeks in Paris, so I guess it’s worth it.”

Hayden always made sure Jackie had a couple kid-free weeks in the summer. More guys in the league could stand to do the same.

“It’s nice of you guys to do this,” Shane says.

Jackie shrugs. “This year was better than most, since the shenanigans were all at Dykstra’s. And we had a lot of people come over and hang out throughout the day, which helped. One of Ilya’s teammates, he’s great with kids...”

They chat for a while, until Hayden comes in to ask Jackie where the extra bug spray is. Outside, the sun is setting, and the yard is mostly in shadow. He sees Ilya and JJ getting the firepit started, and a few of the older kids are carrying logs of wood over. It’s cute.

“I hope you guys can bring your own here one day,” Jackie says, and her smile is a bit sad.

Shane nods, casting his eyes down. “One day.”

“So, you and Hollander are close, eh?”

Ilya looks up briefly from the s’more-making station he’s assembling by the glowing fire pit. He hopes that his accent is not as ridiculous sounding as JJ’s. He has to be playing it up, doesn’t he?

“He is a friend, sure. A colleague.”

“You drive up together, you make him dinner, you walk over together...”

Ilya thanks a higher power that all the other guys are busy watching the kids or helping Pike get the fireworks ready. He shrugs as nonchalantly as he can. “Lots to work on for the foundation and camp.”

JJ finishes moving a Muskoka chair into the sand by the pit. He leans on it, biting his lip for speaking. “And you are okay with him being...”

Ilya stops. “Gay? Am I okay with him being gay?”

JJ shrugs slightly, to indicate *yes*. “I know, where you’re from, it’s not exactly, uh...”

“I haven’t been to Russia in two years,” Ilya says back, trying not to sound huffy. Why was JJ prying anyway? JJ hates his guts. “We do not all think like our government.”

Ilya is afraid JJ is going to keep asking invasive questions, but another Metros player arrives and starts talking to him. Ilya sticks marshmallows on the pokers, and calls out to the kids that it’s time to start making s’mores.

They come running, and Ilya spends the next half-hour being on marshmallow-roasting supervision duty. He’s had some experience making them at Shane’s cottage, though he doesn’t make them often. It’s a bit depressing when he can only make them for himself. Maybe they should have kids just so he has more friends to each junk food with.

He sees Shane at the dock below, sipping on his soda and dangling his feet in the water. He’s chatting with Pike, who’s setting up the fireworks. The sun is almost entirely gone. The last of it is reflecting orange in the water, leaving him a shadow illuminated by only a soft glowing outline.

One of the kids calls him back to reality by asking for a ghost story, and Ilya obliges.

It’s a lovely wind-down to the day. Eventually, once the kids have ingested a volume of s’mores that will get Ilya in trouble with their parents and the stars are twinkling in the sky, Pike’s voice calls out to the whole cottage, “All right! It’s time!”

People gather all over the lawn, with most crowding closer to the docks where the fireworks will be launching from.

Shane and Ilya find each other at the top of the lawn, near the house. Shane nudges Ilya’s elbow with his own. If no one turns around, which he hopes they won’t, it should be private.

“Why are they not sitting down?” Ilya asks.

Before Shane can answer, he hears why. From across the lake, a chorus of drunk hockey players begins to sing O Canada. The Pike side follows immediately.

Ilya and Shane both snort. They sound terrible. It’s very funny. But by the second stanza, they glance at each other, and join in.

He's pretty sure the entire lake can hear them. They can probably hear them all the way in Montreal. It's sweet, though.

"You did well," Shane whispers into his ear when it's over, and they sit down next to each other. "Did you practice?"

Ilya tells him about the drinking game that morning. Shane laughs softly. He laughs some more when he sees Hayden light the first firework below and go running for safety.

The fireworks are amazing – better than the ones Dykstra lights between each of Hayden's, despite what anyone else might argue – and everyone is accounted for. It's dark, the world around them is watching the show, and Shane dares to curl his hand around the muscle of Ilya's arm and kiss his shoulder.

Ilya adjusts, wrapping his arm around Shane and pulling him in. It's so risky, too risky, but Shane lets himself close his eyes for a moment and just enjoy it. Lets himself pretend that they're allowed to have this.

Ilya takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry again for making you come to this."

"Stop apologizing," Shane says. "Seriously. It's probably good for both of us that we got out of the house for a day."

"Mm, have I been working you too hard?"

Shane snorts. He stays curled into Ilya for another minute. Then he feels the familiar anxiety settling in that someone will turn around or appear behind them. He squeezes Ilya's arm and moves to the side, but keeps the edge of his foot touching Ilya's.

He looks away from the fireworks to watch Ilya's profile. It's lit up by rotating flashes of colour: gold, green, red, white. It's beautiful in every hue.

He's grown so much in the past couple years. He's opened up, weaved himself into Shane's family, moved countries, found a new team he cares about. Shane can't imagine going through everything Ilya has. Some part of Shane had hoped, however unconsciously, that fixing the shitty things in his life would mean he didn't get sad anymore.

It terrifies him that it only seems to be getting worse.

"I know you don't want to talk about it," he says, "But if you have another day where you feel like, I don't know, you're sad, or you need to drown it out... tell me, please. I want to help."

Ilya thinks, *I'm scared those days are becoming more common than not.*

But he doesn't say it. He nods his head slightly, and gives Shane's hand a single squeeze. He's going to keep hiding the day-to-day ennui, he thinks. It would only bring Shane down, and there's nothing he can do about it. But he'll talk to Shane on the really tough days.

At least, he'll try. There's no reliable way for him to hide them, anyway. Shane's onto him. And, he has to admit, he does help.

Mostly, he doesn't want to be thinking about his annoying fucking feelings anymore.

Below, there's an especially loud *crack* and a burst of pyrotechnic light, and one of the younger kids starts crying. Her dad – one of the older Metros players – picks her up, and starts to carry her up to the lakehouse, shushing her gently.

Shane shifts to be a good three feet from Ilya as soon as he starts to see movement. Even so, the sight of them this far from everyone, sitting together, gets them a weird look from his teammate. Shane feels his insides twist, from his gut up to his throat.

He says to Shane, "Talking business even now, eh?" before going inside.

Shane thinks he hears suspicion in his voice, but it's hard to tell. Ilya always tells him he's paranoid.

He hardly acknowledges the comment – just raises his hand a bit to wave to him, no smile.

Ilya glares. Playing up the asshole helps make it less plausible that someone like Shane would be hopelessly in love with him.

And he loves Ilya more than anything. It's so fucking hard to remember how he is allowed to talk about him around other people all the time. Constantly asking himself what people know. What they would find weird. What they expect him to feel about Ilya.

Ilya, who he shares three homes and parents and a dog with. Who he shares a *life* with.

For the first couple years, pretending they were nothing more than business partners and reluctant friends was fine — it was exciting, even, because it was progress. But it's not enough anymore. They're too intertwined, and he's sick of being acutely aware all the time that one mistake could bring both their combined lives tumbling down.

Today had really rubbed it in. There were so many different perspectives and lies to keep track of. It was a mess. Shane's brain had worked overtime trying to keep up with it, and it left him with this overwhelming, residual anxiety that he had been too comfortable around Ilya, too happy, too close to him too often. People probably noticed, and will talk about it, and the rumours will start, and they'll have to backtrack how they act in public for a while.

He's trying not to show it, but Ilya knows him too well, even in the dark. He can see the quiver in Shane's lip. The way his breathing is too controlled. Shane peeks a glance over and, yeah, he's watching.

Ilya catches his eyes. The world feels still. He says, softly, "If we ever come to this thing again, we will not be hiding."

Shane's stomach twists some more, but it feels different, this time.

If all goes to plan, it could be the summer after next. It's too close and too far all at once.

But the fireworks are lighting Ilya's beautiful face the prettiest shade of gold, and it reminds Shane that he's not in this alone.

He wants every summer with Ilya. He's *going* to get every summer with Ilya. All the external shit will melt away, the same way he can't even hear the crowd when he's speeding down the ice with the puck. He will keep telling himself this until it becomes true. Over and over and over. He has to.

There's hope for them. There has to be.

He wishes he could wrap himself around Ilya. They could hold each other until they felt better, Ilya's hand running softly up and down his arm. Feeling the warmth of his neck against his face. The surety of his breathing.

Instead, he taps his foot against Ilya's, lets it linger a moment too long, and watches another firework go off.

End Notes

merry yaoimas and a happy new yuri <3 thank you for reading :)

im not ready for s1 to be over :(

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