

So High School...

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So High School...

by [Penelope_x](#)

Summary

Ilya has been at the school for a year, he didn't speak to anyone, but knew being at the Hockey school was better than the alternative - being in Russia, or being dead. Everything is fine until Scott Hunter asks him to show the new student around. Shane Hollander is quiet, but beautiful and Ilya doesn't know how he's going to survive being so close to him. Especially when they're both just as broken as each other.

Was Scott Hunter right all along? Would Ilya and Shane end up fixing each other?

[Descriptions of bullying, homophobic assault, mentions of suicidal thoughts and eating disorder]

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

“Rozanov,” The voice barked from a distance and Ilya gulped, he flicked the cigarette away and blew the smoke behind him as much as he could, waving his hand dramatically in front of his mouth.

“Shit,” he muttered to himself.

“Thank you for saving me the trouble of traipsing up to the second floor to find you,” Scott Hunter had an amused smirk on his face. “Where do you even get the cigarettes?” He asks.

“I do not know what you talk about,” Ilya shrugged. “Why were you looking for me?”

“We have a new student starting today,” Scott started.

“But it’s the middle of the term.” Ilya frowned.

“I am aware.” Scott nodded.

“Students do not start at the middle of the term.” Ilya frowned more.

“We make expectations, you should know that.” Scott said gently. Ilya looked down, he had been the first student to enroll in the middle of the year and he hated to think about where he would be right now if his coach back in Russia hadn’t pushed the school into accepting him.

“Oh.” Ilya nodded slowly, “He... Is he okay?” He asked, he wished he hadn’t thrown the cigarette away now.

“It’s not my place to say right now,” Scott gave a little look that told Ilya all he needed to know. “He is a nice guy, I know his family. Of course because it is the middle of the term we have no rooms ready and you are the only one with the joint room available, so... I hope your room is clean for a roommate?”

Ilya shrugged. “I will clean.”

“I’d also like you to show him around,” Scott added and Ilya pulled a face at that. It was bad enough that he would be having a roommate, but showing someone around?

“I don’t think I am the right person for that.” Ilya said quietly.

“I do. We’ll make a deal, you go and clean your room now, then he should be arriving at midday, you show him around and I won’t write up the fact that you’re smoking again, or search you or your room to find out how many packets you have.”

Ilya sucked his lip, that was a good deal. But he really didn’t know if he could show this Shane around. He did not speak to anyone at the school, only when it mattered. “Fine,” He

whispered.

“Thank you, I’ll write you out of the morning lessons, but I’ll see you at practice this afternoon.” Scott smiled and he turned to walk away and as he did he looked over his shoulder, “But you should really try to stop. They won’t like it in the leagues if you’re smoking,”

“I will try.” Ilya lied and he crossed his arms defensively, he hated the attention on him, and now walking around with the new boy would definitely bring that to him. He turned from the main gates of the school and walked back up the path to the accommodation building.

The school had been his saviour, he was certain if he hadn’t been able to come here he would be dead, something only a few people outside of the school really knew. It was a boarding school, the main sport of the school was hockey, they played in school leagues and Ilya had quickly become the star centre for his age. The school would prepare him for the drafts next year, but also helped with the typical education needed for him to graduate. He wasn’t stupid, not by a long shot, but it was harder for him to learn in English and sometimes he didn’t bother as much as he knew he should.

“Fuck this,” Ilya mumbled as he walked to the top floor where his room was. He unlocked it and sighed, it was a large room, he had his own bathroom and the room was split into two; beds, closets and desks on each side. He had taken over both sides of the room and the side Shane would be sleeping in was cluttered with his junk, not that he had that much. All he had brought with him from Russia was some skates and clothes. His coach had arranged for him to receive money for being at the school, something he didn’t understand, and every two weeks when they were allowed to go to the nearby town or when they travelled for games, he made sure to buy something, he wasn’t materialistic, but he wanted things to call his own, something he had never been able to have in Russia.

It took him an hour to clean the bed, he threw most of the crap away and organised his shelves a little more, even made his own bed and put his dirty clothes in the baskets rather than on the floor. He opened the window and found some air freshener. He didn’t smoke in the room but he felt like he could smell it in the air, something he didn’t know how Shane would respond to. Since he wasn’t going to his morning classes he stripped from the uniform, black trousers, white polo shirt with the school logo on and jumper, others wore ties and blazers but he would not. He grabbed the school sweats and hooded jumper that he would wear for training in the afternoon and put his cigarettes in the pocket.

There was a tap at his door an hour later and Ilya looked up from the text book he had been reading as he waited, “Come in,” He called out and Scott pushed the door open. “He is here?”

“You did a good job on the room,” Scott smiled. Ilya shrugged. Scott had become somewhat of a mentor to him, he knew why, but they never spoke about it. Scott was one of the coaches, he had played professionally for years before he had come out rather publicly. Now he works as one of the coaches and mentors at the school. Ilya liked him, he was a good man and a good player - but he would never open up to him, not like he knew he needed to. “How’s the studying?”

“I do not understand.” Ilya shrugged and he closed the book and put it back on his desk, he pushed his feet into his trainers. His closet was full of them, those were what he liked the

most. In Russia all the students at the school wore the same white or black plimssoles, now he liked the bolder ones. Today he chose the black and blue Nikes.

"You're doing okay in your classes, not failing. If you attended more maybe you would take it in more," Scott said.

"I should attend more but you pull me out to be tour guide." Ilya smirked.

"Well some things are more important than understanding Shakespeare." Scott winked and Ilya rolled his eyes and followed him down to the main area of the school.

Sitting outside the office was who Ilya assumed must be Shane. He wore a similar outfit to Ilya, just no school logos, he had his head in his hands leaning on his lap. Ilya couldn't make out his face, just the soft looking skin and a head of thick jet black hair. His mother and father either side of him and Ilya felt something clench in his heart, he couldn't do this.

"Ilya," Scott whispered as Ilya stopped moving, he hadn't even realised he had stopped moving until Scott was in front of him. "You're okay," Ilya just nodded his head weakly. He took a deep breath and pushed his feet forward in line with Scott's and stopped when they reached the family of three.

"Yuna, David, it's good to see you again. Hi Shane," Scott had such a soft tone to his voice and Ilya remembered how it had irritated him when he first approached him. He tilted his head and looked at Shane, wondering how he felt, but he didn't look up at him. "I have arranged the room for him, Shane for this term at least you'll be sharing with Ilya," Shane turned his head to his mother at that. "I promise as soon as we can you can have your own room."

"It's fine." Shane eventually whispered.

"This is going to be good for you honey, remember, we will come next weekend to see you, okay?" Yuna's voice was sickeningly sweet and Ilya felt like he was intruding on a moment, but it was not like he wanted to be there anyway so he didn't move. He put his hands in his pocket and pretended the photos on the wall were more interesting to him.

"You have work, you've taken a lot of time off already, I'll be fine." Shane managed to say, Ilya turned to look at him, he was an awful liar.

"I'll call you tonight, okay?" His father this time.

"Thanks dad." Shane stood up slowly, Ilya could tell he was injured by the way he held himself and he could tell that this wasn't a hockey related injury. His parents hugged him and then his mother noticed him standing there.

"This is Ilya, he's going to give the grand tour and help Shane get settled." Scott said and Ilya turned to look at him before giving a nervous nod towards the family.

"Hi," He said lamely, he hated how thick his accent was, but Shane finally turned to look at him and Ilya thought he was beautiful. Big brown eyes, so full of hurt and pain and lips so

plump, and fuck, those freckles.

“It’s lovely to meet you Ilya, I’m Yuna, this is David and our son Shane, I think I saw you play when I came for the tour, you’re quite the player.” Yuna smiled.

Ilya just blinked up at her, he had heard the words but they hadn’t gone in fully. He just gave another smile and nod because it felt like the right thing to do.

“Shane, you’re in good hands here,” Scott promised and Ilya gulped.

“I’ll see you both soon,” Shane gave them both a hug and Ilya looked away again.

“Your bags will be sent up to your room, so Ilya will show you around the grounds, your books and time table will be on your desk as well in the next half an hour, it’s Friday so you don’t have to worry about the classes today.” Scott explained once Yuna and David left. Shane just nodded his head slowly. “Ilya, I’ll leave the rest to you and see you this afternoon.”

“Yes,” Ilya just nodded slowly.

Scott gave Shane a squeeze on his shoulder and then left the two of them alone. “So, the tour?” Shane asked once Ilya had made no sign of being able to move.

“Yes. The tour.” Ilya forced his feet to move again, all he could think about was how much he needed a fucking cigarette.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

“This is the canteen,” Ilya had no real idea on what he should show first, he remembered his first tour with Scott - it had taken him a week to actually remember where anything was. “Food is okay.” He added and Shane nodded his head slowly, his eyes taking everything in.

Once they exited the building they were in, Ilya led him around to the sports field. “We have soccer pitch. You play soccer?” He asked, he felt like he needed to break the silence that was falling around them.

“A little.” Shane gave a shrug.

“But of course you play hockey.” Ilya pointed to the large building at the end, “Ice rink.”

“Cool.” Shane nodded.

“Want to see?” Ilya asked and he was surprised when Shane shook his head. “Okay.” He frowned. “We can go later.” Shane nodded at that and followed him around the fields, Ilya fiddled with the cigarette box and pulled it out and lit one quickly, he stepped away from Shane to take his first drag.

“You shouldn’t smoke.” Shane pointed out and Ilya raised an eyebrow. “I mean, I read in the pamphlets I don’t think you’re allowed to smoke here.”

“I am not.” Ilya shrugged. Shane just nodded, his expression unreadable. Ilya finished it quickly and continued to walk around the outside of the buildings, he pointed out a few things, the swimming pool, the track field and the outside common area where students would often hang out. “School building.” He pointed to the next building. “Tour will be easier when we have your map.”

“Oh, okay.” Shane nodded.

“But I can show you.” Ilya said when he heard his tone.

“Thank you.” Shane gave a small smile, Ilya could quickly become addicted to the small little smile he did. “Do you like the school?” Shane asked as they walked through.

“It is okay.” Ilya shrugged. “I like hockey. I am good at hockey.” Shane smiled again and Ilya led him through the building, he pointed out the science and math block, English and History and then at the back of the building was business management and media training. “It is a nice school. The boys here, they care about hockey, it is competitive but it’s not horrible.” “That’s good.” Shane nodded as they walked down the last set of steps he stopped and took a breath.

“Are you okay?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Just winded.” Shane eventually said.

“Well I’ll take you up to our room.” Ilya nodded, “We go slow.”

“Thank you,” Shane whispered and Ilya forced himself to go slower. Once they reached the door, Ilya suddenly felt so nervous, what if Shane did not like the room? What if Shane ended up hating him? He opened the door and showed him inside.

“Your side.” He pointed to the bed, Shane's belongings were already there and his books and planner on the desk. Ilya toed off his trainers and sat on his bed.

“It’s big.” Shane said, looking around.

“It is okay.” Ilya nodded. “Bathroom is through there,” He pointed to the door. Shane nodded and he sat back on his own bed, a whimper leaving his lips as he held his side. “Ribbs?”

Shane bit his lip and nodded slowly, “Ribbs.”

“Painful,” Ilya fiddled with his fingers, Shane just nodded and Ilya watched as he closed his eyes, leaning back against the wall. Ilya couldn’t stop staring, the world was full of beautiful boys, but Ilya was sure he had never seen anyone that looked like Shane. Ilya realised that Shane was done with talking and he was glad of it, small talk was not something that he had any experience in. He picked up his text book again and finished the chapter he was on, his head was aching by the end of it and he put it down.

“Shane,” Ilya whispered and Shane’s eyes opened quickly. “I go to training now.”

“Oh,” Shane sounded disappointed.

“I will be back in few hours.” Ilya grabbed his backpack with his towel and water bottle, he found his box of granola bars and put one in his pocket and then handed one to Shane. “You remember where the canteen is for dinner?”

Shane sucked his lip and shook his head. “Sorry.”

“I will be back at six. I’ll show you again.” Ilya nodded.

“Thank you.” Shane whispered.

Ilya made his way down to the training rink, he had a locker there with his skates and pads in and he tried to shake the thoughts of Shane alone in their room from his mind. “Ilya,” Scott called. Ilya thought they had spoken to each other too much today and wanted to walk away from him. “How are you?”

“Fine.” Ilya nodded.

“If you need to talk...”

“I said I’m fine.” Ilya shrugged. “No need for words.”

“Shane settled?”

“He is sitting.” Ilya shrugged again, his fingers fisting together in his pocket.

“If you need anything, either of you...”

Ilya just nodded, he didn’t care if he was being rude right now. All he wanted to do was get on the ice. Their next game was next weekend and Ilya didn’t want any distractions, they hadn’t lost the last ten games they played and Ilya wouldn’t lose the next one.

Practice was tough, his head wasn’t in it and he had stumbled on the ice more than he had in a long time. When the three hours were finally up, Ilya skated to the side and took a deep breath. He had felt Scott’s eyes on him the whole game but he refused to look at him. He took one last lap on the ice, closed his eyes and just let his body glide forward, only opening them when he knew he was close to the boards. At the other end of the rink was a younger student trying to hit the pucks to the target. Even though the school specialised in hockey it wasn’t the only reason boys came here, it was a good boarding school. From what Ilya had read about it, it was an environment that fostered family, kinship. Not that Ilya had reached out to anyone. But this boy was young, eleven, twelve maybe.

“You hold the stick too close.” Ilya found himself saying before he knew what he was doing, he skated over to him. The boy’s eyes went wide. “The stick. Hands too together.” Ilya took the stick from him and showed him the correct position, “Don’t think too much. Bring it back and shoot.”

“Oh.” The boy practically squeaked. “Thank you Rozanov.”

“You try.” Ilya handed him the stick back and watched the boy copy his movements and nodded when the puck went in. “Better.”

“Thank you.” The boy said again. Ilya just nodded and he skated away and back to the locker room.

“That was nice of you.” Ilya jumped at Scott’s voice.

“You are everywhere. Like shadow.” Ilya mumbled.

“You’re going to be an amazing Captain one day, Ilya.” Scott said gently.

“One day Captain” Ilya whispered. “Today tour guide.” He pulled his boots off and threw them in the locker, he changed his jumper, throwing the dirty one in his bag and heading back up to the room.

Shane was sat at the desk, one of the text books open, highlighter in hand and he turned his head and smiled up at Ilya. “Good practice?”

“Okay practice.” Ilya sighed. “I shower now, then food.”

“Okay.” Shane nodded.

Ilya grabbed his towel and walked towards the bathroom, he closed the door and leaned back against it, his eyes were prickling with tears and all turned the shower on, everything was catching up with him and as he stood under the too hot water, he finally let them fall.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

When Ilya finally came out of the bathroom, towel wrapped around his hips, his eyes were red from crying and he just hoped that Shane wouldn't notice. He padded out and Shane's eyes fell on his body. "Sorry." Ilya said as he grabbed his clothes, "Used to my own room. I forgot my clothes."

"It's okay," Shane looked away quickly, but Ilya saw the way his eyes looked at him. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Ilya shrugged, he picked up his sweats, pants and yet another jumper and headed back to the bathroom and dried off quickly, pulling the clothes on before heading back out. "Hungry?"

"I could eat." Shane nodded.

Ilya grabbed his trainers, pushing his toes into them and tying the laces. He was very aware of Shane's eyes on him and he looked up, Shane blushed as their eyes met and Ilya felt the air change around him. They stared at each other for what felt like hours, but Ilya knew it was just a few seconds that had passed. "Come on."

Shane grabbed his jacket and pulled it over his hoody, "What do you normally do on the weekends?" Shane asked as they made their way downstairs.

"Every other weekend you can go to town, every Saturday we have training and every weekend there is normally a game." Ilya shrugged. "Some boys sneak out, there is a girls' school close."

"Oh. You don't..."

"No. I don't." Ilya said quickly and he didn't miss the small smile Shane made.

The canteen was busy and Ilya moved over to the line, he grabbed a tray for himself and then handed him the other. "Rozanov." One of the team gave him a nod. "New guy?"

"New guy." Ilya nodded. "Shane."

"We don't get transfers" Sam, Ilya thought that was what his name said.

"We do." Ilya shrugged. "Sam is goalie."

"Oh. Hi." Shane nodded. "Nice to meet you."

“You too. You play?” Sam asked as he took a tray and stood on the other side of them. Ilya didn’t know why he felt so irritated that he was there talking to them, or talking to Shane.

“I was Captain at my high school,” Shane nodded. “Centre.”

“That’s Rozanov’s position.” Sam said and he slapped Ilya hard on the shoulder. “A little competition for you.”

“Good. I need some.” Ilya mumbled. “Maybe I can rest without carrying the team. My shoulders are tired.” Sam just laughed and turned back to Shane. Ilya didn’t listen as they spoke, or laughed, instead he just picked the food he wanted and walked to a table at the back. Within a second Shane was sitting opposite him.

“It’s okay if I... I can sit somewhere else?” Shane asked.

Ilya just shrugged and picked up his fork, he chose pasta but now he was not hungry. He pushed the food around a little and Shane ate his own pasta slowly. “Are you going to try out?” Ilya asked.

“Maybe. Not... This term is nearly finished, maybe I need to settle and then we can see.” He whispers.

“Oh.” Ilya nodded.

“You have a game tomorrow?” Shane asked.

“No, tomorrow is the younger group. I will watch.” Ilya shrugged. “Next week we have a game.”

“Who is it against?” Shane asked curiously.

“Rival school. Good team.” Ilya pushed his food away and grabbed his water and sipped it.

“Not hungry?” Shane frowned.

“No. Not hungry.” Ilya sighed. Shane nodded and he finished his food. “Each year has a common room, games and television. I can show you?”

“Oh, I mean I’ll probably just head back to the room.” Ilya nodded his head and waited for Shane to finish, he knew he should eat, his stomach was twisting and even sipping the water hurt. Shane finished the majority on his plate and stood up, Ilya followed, emptied his plate and then was heading back to the main building when he heard his name being called. He turned around and frowned at the young boy from earlier.

“Rozanov.” He said, panting a little from catching up to him.

“Are you okay?” Ilya frowned, Shane was standing beside him, a look of concern on his face.

“Sorry, yes, I just wanted to say that I got five out of ten shots in. I know it will be harder when there is a goalie but I think it’s a good start.” He said excitedly.

Ilya smiled at that. “Yes. That’s a good start.” He nodded. “What is your name?”

“Misha,” The boy smiled. “Misha Williams.” He added. “My mum is the science teacher, so I came here because of her. I’ve never been into hockey, but I thought I could try it, you know. I suck but it’s fun.”

“You do not suck.” Ilya said, rubbing the back of his neck. “This is Shane. He’s new.”

“New?” Misha nodded. “Hi Shane. I’m Misha. Do you play hockey too?”

“At my old school, yeah.” Shane smiled easily to the younger boy, he must have been at least five years younger than them. “I like science though.”

“Oh, well my mum will like you then.” Misha grinned. “I better go. I just wanted to tell you thank you.” He said towards Ilya before walking, or more so running away.

“He has a lot of energy.” Shane laughed as they made their way back to the student accommodation building.

“To be young.” Ilya shrugged.

“You’re good with kids, do you have younger siblings?” Shane asks.

“No.” Ilya shakes his head. “Just me.”

“Me too.” Ilya just nods at Shane’s admission, he doesn’t know what to say, he’s not good at making friends, he’s never really had one.

“I am tired, I am going to watch a movie and sleep.” Ilya said as he walked into the room.

“Oh. Sure.” Shane smiled. “Ilya, thank you for today and for... just, thanks.”

Ilya paused, “You’re welcome.” He whispered and he sat down on his bed, he grabbed his school laptop from the desk and propped it up in the corner and put his headphones in. He didn’t care what he watched, sometimes he would put American dramas on to help with his English, but he hated all of the characters. Instead he put Superman on and closed his eyes, doing everything he could to block out Shane.

Ilya didn’t know what had woken him up at first. It was dark outside and he thought maybe he had pressed something on the laptop in his sleep and that was what he had heard, but then he saw the laptop was off and he heard it again. A whimper. He sat up, heard the rustling of sheets and turned to the bed beside him. The bed he was so used to seeing empty. “Fuck.” He mumbled, Shane was tossing and turning, sweat pouring from his forehead, hands clenched. He cried out a little more in sleep, he looked so sad, pained. Ilya really didn’t know what to do. For a moment he thought of calling Scott Hunter, but if it was reversed he wouldn’t have wanted that.

He sat up slowly and walked over, “Shane.” He breathed. “Shane.” He said a little louder, when the sleeping boy didn’t wake he pressed a hand on his shoulder, nudged a little, said his name again a little louder. Then Shane kicked out at him, Ilya felt the blow to his side and cursed, but then Shane’s eyes flew open.

“Fuck I...” That was all the warning given before he rushed out of the bed and barely made it to the bathroom before throwing up. Ilya pulled a face and rubbed his side, his head was pounding and he looked at the bed that was now soaked with sweat from Shane, he grabbed the fresh ones from the closet and changed it quickly.

“You’re changing my sheets?” Shane frowned, his voice was weak.

“They are wet.” Ilya shrugged. “Nightmare?”

Shane just nodded his head weakly. “I get them too.” Ilya said quietly, he knew what it was like waking up drenched in sweat, hell, he had even wet the bed a few times when they were so severe. It was why he had been so blessed to have had his own room.

“I kicked you.” Shane sat down at the edge of the freshly made bed. “I’m sorry.”

“I didn’t feel anything.” Ilya lied and he sat down beside him. “You want to talk?”

“No.” Shane whispered.

“Okay.” Ilya didn’t move from beside him, but he felt Shane lean in a little closer to him.

“Do you?” Shane whispered.

“No.” Ilya said after a few minutes.

“I’m sorry I woke you up,” Shane said, “I’ll try and get my own room sooner...”

“It’s no problem.” Ilya assured him, he stood up and grabbed a bottle of water, “Drink slowly.” He said quietly and he went to the bathroom to wash his face, he looked so pale, bags under his eyes. He was glad there was no game tomorrow, but he didn’t know how he would survive a practice. He changed into one of his cosier jumpers and sweats and tugged the hood up a little. “Do you want to try to sleep?”

“I don’t think I can, not yet.” Shane whispered. “But you... I’m okay, thank you.”

“I can’t sleep to silence. Come, we can lay on my bed and put the film on, when you feel tired, you go to sleep.” Ilya decided and he moved the bedside table a little so he could perch the laptop on, Shane hesitated before moving over to his bed and sitting on the edge, then when the movie was on he found himself laying back down beside him, getting comfortable.

Ilya closed his eyes as the feeling of Shane laying beside him burned through him. They weren’t touching, but there was hardly any space between the two of them. Ilya turned a little to get comfortable, his head brushing against Shane’s shoulder but the boy beside him didn’t move away, if anything he edged a little closer and when Ilya woke up to the sun streaming

through their window, he was asleep on Shane's chest, their legs tucked together and Shane was playing with his hair.

"Oh," Ilya rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Sorry..."

"I didn't want to wake you," Shane stopped playing with his hair straight away, but neither of them moved.

"Did you sleep?" Ilya asked and he moved his head up so he could look at Shane's face. He was looking down at him, his eyes so big and dark that all Ilya wanted to do was swim in them.

"A little." Shane answered. "A few hours, more than I have in one go for a while."

"Good. That's good." Ilya sat up slowly, adjusted his sweats a little and sighed. "Mornings I go for a run."

"Oh." Shane nodded. "Me too, well, not with my ribs..."

"I didn't hurt you?" Ilya cut in.

"No." Shane promised.

Ilya just nodded. "I... I'm going to go for run. Then breakfast?"

"Then breakfast." Shane smiled.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Ilya managed some fruits and oats for breakfast, Shane had the same. They didn't speak about last night, or how they woke up. Shane dressed in a blue nike tracksuit, the strings chewed and Ilya dressed in his training gear. "I am going to watch the game, do you want to come?" Ilya asked.

"I..." Shane hesitated.

"It's okay if no. It's younger division, thirteen to fifteen year olds. No one really goes to watch." Ilya adds.

"But you do?"

"I like hockey. Nothing else to do." Ilya shrugs.

"Okay," Shane nods his head slowly and Ilya can tell that it is a big deal for him. They walk past groups of friends playing soccer, laughing together, and Ilya for a second wishes he knew what that was like, but he turns his head to Shane and thinks maybe he can find out.

They get to the doors of the rink and Ilya feels Shane stop. "I don't think that I can go in there," Shane whispers.

"We do not have to. No big deal." Ilya says. "We can walk?"

"You don't want to watch the game?" Shane frowns.

"Not if you are not okay." Ilya replies quietly.

"Oh." Shane nods. "A walk, and then maybe we can watch in a little while?" Shane asks.

"Okay." Ilya shrugs and he walks by his side. They walk around the tracks and through the gardens and Ilya can feel Shane calm down a little. "Something happened on the ice?"

"Not on the ice." Shane rubs his eyes, he looks tired. There's a big tree beside them and Shane moves so he can sit against it, Ilya watches him, looks at the floor and then sits opposite him, legs crossed. "I... I got hurt, but not on the ice, but in training by a group of hockey players from a rival team."

"What?" Ilya frowned.

"I... A lot happened, I wasn't popular. I was good at hockey, I was Captain, but I was bullied for being..." Shane's eyes were watering now, big tear drops threatening to fall from his eyes. Ilya wanted to reach out to him, to take his hand, to do something but he couldn't. It was like

he was stuck in place. “My team they were okay about it. We didn’t mention it. When everyone found out I was the Captain, they couldn’t... But the other team found out. Fuck, the words they shouted at me on the ice, but we won and I think that pissed them off. I had forgot something in the locker room. I ran back and they were there. I couldn’t move. They were relentless. I woke up two days later in hospital.”

“Shane...” Ilya didn’t know when he had started to cry, his body managed to move and he knelt in front of him, pressed his hands to his face and used his thumb to wipe the tears. “They were punished?”

“I pressed charges.” Shane leans into Ilya’s hands, closes his eyes and breathes him in. “I don’t think they stuck. It’s been a few months. The pain in my ribs is the last reminder. I couldn’t go back to school. My parents didn’t know what to do. Scott suggested this place.”

“And you came?” Ilya moved beside him now, wrapped an arm around Shane’s shoulder and pulled him close to him.

“I couldn’t stand to look at my parents’ faces, I would flinch whenever my mum had hockey on the television, if my dad hugged me I would tense. I just... I thought they deserved to go back to normal, they didn’t ask to have me as their son.”

“They love you.” Ilya whispered.

“They do.” Shane nodded his head slowly. “But maybe they wished they had someone different.”

“Someone not gay?” Ilya frowned.

“Yes.” Shane cried.

“I saw them, when they said goodbye. They got the son they want. They love you.” Ilya promised.

“Thank you.” Shane whispered, his eyes closing against him.

“You cannot sleep here,” Ilya whispered when he felt Shane’s breath even out against his chest.

“Sorry,” Shane sat up slowly.

“We can go back up to the room,” Ilya said and he stood up slowly, holding his hand out to Shane who took it and stood up.

“No... I... Can we go and watch the game?” Shane whispered.

“Okay.” Ilya nodded his head slowly and walked back towards the rink, it was until that moment that he realised Shane was still holding his hand. He gave him a little squeeze before letting go.

“Ilya, Shane, good to see you both.” Scott grinned as they walked in. “Shane, you okay?”

Ilya turned towards Shane, both of their faces were tear streaked and Ilya didn't want to think about what they looked like.

"Getting there." Shane managed to say, but there was a little tremble in his words.

"My office is always open." Scott promised. Shane just nodded his head slowly before following Ilya to one of the benches. There was a small crowd from both schools and Ilya found himself watching Shane more than the actual match. Shane was nervous, nails digging at his fingers and his eyes scanning around frantically. Ilya sucked his lip before moving his hand and covering Shane's with his.

"It is okay." Ilya promised.

Shane turned their fingers and gave him a squeeze, neither letting go. The game was good, their school won and the team were cheering excitedly to the few families and friends that came to watch.

"You have practice now?" Shane asked.

"Yes." Ilya sighed, his head was hurting and he didn't really want to leave Shane. "Three hours."

"I'll see you back in our room?" Shane asked. "Then dinner?"

"Then dinner." Ilya nodded.

Ilya liked the little routines they had built. Shane had been at the school for almost a week now, they shared a few classes and when Ilya would go to practice, Shane would go swimming. Ilya didn't really know Shane that much but he knew that swimming was good for him, he was more relaxed after. He had nightmares every night, but once they would get into Ilya's bed then he would sleep better.

"You look tense," Shane said as Ilya walked into their room, it was Thursday night and Ilya had been at practice, it hadn't gone well, he would pass the puck for his teammate to miss it, he set up plays for them to do something out. The Captain had done nothing. It was frustrating. In Russia this would not have been acceptable.

"We will lose the game." Ilya sat on his bed, threw his backpack to the ground and rubbed his eyes.

"You can't say that, you don't know...." Shane frowned.

"They are idiots." Ilya shrugged. "I should not care. Captain does not."

"I'm sure he does..." Ilya opened his eyes and looked at Shane, "Sorry I don't really know what to say."

"I'm just tired. English is hard. I shower." Ilya sat up, grabbed his towel and clothes and headed into the bathroom. Ilya wasn't too sure if it was just the team's lack of skill that was

displayed tonight, or if it was everything with Shane. Ever since Shane had told him what happened to him, it was like this cloud hanging over his head. He showered quickly and headed back out.

“Let’s go and eat, you’ll feel better and then we can watch a movie.” Shane said softly.

“I have homework.” Ilya mumbled. “But yes.”

“We can do the homework together.” Shane said and Ilya nodded. Together. They did everything together. Ilya didn’t mind though. It was nice.

When they reached the canteen Ilya picked up the tray for them both and looked at the menu for today, his head was spinning and he knew he needed to try and eat something, but lately it just felt hard to finish a complete meal. He snacked between training on granola bars and protein shakes but he knew it wasn’t enough.

“Hey Shane,” Sam, the goalie, greeted them. “Hunter was looking for you, Rozanov.”

“Fuck sake.” Ilya mumbled.

“What did you want to eat? I’ll grab it in the to-go box.” Shane suggested.

“Tuna melt.” Ilya shrugged and he walked out of the canteen, he felt sick knowing he was leaving Shane with Sam. It was an odd feeling, Shane was friendly with everyone, polite, he spoke to people who spoke to him but never sought anyone out. Yet, Ilya felt jealous. Ilya had never been jealous of anyone before.

“Ilya, there you are.” Scott smiled as he walked out of the training rink.

“Useless goalie said you looking for me?” Ilya muttered, his accent thicker with his mood.

“Be nice.” Scott chuckled. “But yes, you know Misha?”

“Small boy. Loud. Yes, I know Misha.” Ilya frowned.

“Well, his mum is one of the teachers here and he isn’t really fitting in, but he’s started to like hockey. He wants to keep practicing, maybe try out next year. His mum was wondering if you could help him, she said she would pay you for your time.”

“A job?” Ilya frowned.

“An hour or two a week.” Scott said softly. “I know you have a lot on…”

“I will do it. Is money good?” Ilya asked.

“I can haggle for a good price for you.” Ilya wasn’t too sure what haggle meant, he would ask Shane later. “Are you okay? You look pale.”

“There is no sun today, I am tired.” Ilya shrugged.

“Ilya, I know I keep saying that you can come and talk to me, but I really think you need to talk to someone.” Scott pressed lightly.

“Words are hard. You know Russian?” Ilya asked and Scott shook his head. “Then no point really. I am fine. Tired.”

“If you are still looking this pale tomorrow, we’ll go see the school doctor. Get you checked out, maybe she can give you something to help you sleep?”

“Maybe.” Ilya shrugged. “Tell Misha mum yes, Sunday’s,” Ilya turned and walked away, he ignored how dizzy he felt as he pushed his legs up to their room.

When he got in, Shane wasn’t there, he kicked off his shoes, changed into his night clothes and curled under the bedsheets. All he wanted to do was just disappear for a while. All he could think about was Shane smiling and laughing with Sam and the rest of the friends he had made so easily, but the deeper he went all he could see was Shane curled up in a ball, bleeding and alone and then his own body hurt, the reminder of the pain he had been in. The scars on his lower back from the belt, the silence of the room he had been locked in. Everything became too much and he found it hard to catch his breath, he knew he was having a panic attack and for a minute he just let it happen. Only when the pain in his chest started to ache did he try and gather some control over it. He fell asleep or passed out before Shane came back.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

“My parents are coming today,” Shane said. It was Saturday - the day of the game. Ilya just nodded his head, he felt like he had hardly spoken to Shane the past few days. Yet, somehow in the middle of the night when Shane had his nightmare they ended up in bed together, a movie on and cuddled together.

That was how they were now, Ilya always ended up with his head on his chest, there was something nice about the way Shane held him, about the way his fingers played with his hair.

“You miss them?” Ilya asked quietly.

“It’s the longest I’ve ever been without them, we talk on the phone but it’s not the same. I want them to come and see that I am okay.”

“Are you?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Okay? I... I’m better than I was. I know I have a long way to go but I think... I think I am doing okay,” Shane whispered.

“Good, the swimming it helps you, keeps your mind busy.” Ilya whispered.

“It’s nothing like I felt when I play hockey, but yes.” Shane hummed. “I want to come and watch your game today.”

“It will be busy.” Ilya said, “Our division is better than the children.” Shane chuckled at that, the way Ilya spoke was like they were already in their thirties and not one or two years older than the ‘children’. “We get big crowd.”

“My parents will want to watch it, I’ll be with them, it will be fine.” Shane whispered.

“Okay,” Ilya nodded.

“What do you do after the game?” Shane asked, he twirled one of the curls in his fingers making Ilya almost pur against him.

“Team will celebrate if we win. Team will celebrate if we lose. Idiots.” Ilya sighed.

“But you, what will you do?” Shane asked.

“Watch movie.” Ilya shrugged.

“We can leave the school this weekend right?” Shane asked.

“Mm,” Ilya closed his eyes again. “You have too many questions.”

“Sorry,” Shane chuckled.

“You are excited to see parents. It’s fine.” Ilya smiled.

“I was just thinking that after the game we could go out? There’s a supermarket near here, we could get my parents to drive us, get some snacks and things and have a movie night.”

“We have movie night every night, snacks not needed?” Ilya frowned.

“A proper movie night, where we pick like two or three movies, we sit on the floor on the cushions and we eat food that’s not good for us...”

“Movie night.” Ilya nodded. “Okay. But you only eat salads, what food will you eat?” Ilya teased. Shane just tugged the strand of hair a little and Ilya sat up slowly. “I should get ready, my parents will be here soon.”

“Okay.” Ilya laid back down on the pillow, he closed his eyes but felt Shane’s gaze on him. “What?”

“We never talk about it.” Shane whispered.

“Talk about?” Ilya opened his eyes.

“This.” Shane gestured between them.

“Some things don’t need words.” Ilya whispered. “Go get ready, I’ll see you later.”

The third period finishes and Ilya feels a sense of relief wash over him. They didn’t lose. They won. The team gather around him, pat him on the back for scoring the three goals and they head back to the changing room. “Good game everyone.” Scott has a big grin on his face, he claps everyone on the back and smiles at Ilya.

“Thanks coach.” Winters, the Captain grins. Ilya thinks he has nothing to grin about, he did not even win the face off for the team and it had been Ilya to do everything. “Great team. I can’t believe we got eleven out of eleven.” Ilya forces his face to say nothing.

“Rozanov, impressive goals.” Scott grins and the team cheer. Ilya lifts his head up and gives a small nod and waves his hand at the cheers. The Captain is stupid but he doesn’t like the attention on him. “Right, shower then go and enjoy the weekend. Monday we are back at practice.” Ilya takes off his gear slowly. Scott walks over and sits down on the opposite bench.

“Shane and his parents were watching,” Scott says softly.

“I know.” Ilya nods.

“We are going to go for dinner tonight.” Scott says and Ilya frowns, “Myself and Kip, Shane and his parents. I think you should come.”

“Tonight?” Ilya frowns, all he wants to do is what Shane said - movie night.

“Myself and Yuna planned it this morning.” Scott shrugged. “Would you like to join us?”

“No. I would not.” Ilya sighed.

“Okay, you don’t have to.” Scott said gently. “You and Shane are getting on well?”

Ilya doesn’t answer, he thinks about how they wake up, how he likes the feeling of Shane playing with his hair, how Shane translates some of the harder English to easy words for him. “Yes.” He eventually says. “We get on well.”

“Good, you played well today, Ilya. You should be proud.” Scott stood up and squeezed his shoulder and Ilya looked away from him.

“I will shower now. Enjoy dinner.” Ilya waved his hand and walked into the showers, he showered quickly avoiding everyone and changed into his sweats and jumper.

When he left the rink he sighed when he saw Shane and his parents waiting for him. “I told you, I told you you would win.” Shane was practically bouncing,

“I told you team are idiots. Neither of us were wrong.” Ilya shrugged.

“It’s good to see you again, really good game. But you are right, your team are idiots.” Yuna smiled. “You’ll be unstoppable when Shane’s on the team next term.”

Ilya nods at that, eleven out of eleven games won makes him think they already are unstoppable but he doesn’t say anything.

“Thank you for taking good care of our boy, he speaks so very highly of you.” David says and Shane blushes at that.

“He’s nice.” Ilya shrugs awkwardly.

“I’m glad you two have become good friends, makes us feel more at ease.” Yuna continued.

“I am standing right here,” Shane muttered and Ilya looked at him and smiled. “Can you drive us to the shop?”

“The shop? What do you need?” Yuna asked and Shane told them about the plans for movie night and Ilya sucked his lip, was it still even a possibility? “Oh, well we were going to go for dinner, Scott and his partner Kip and the three, well four of us, Ilya you are more than welcome to join us.”

“Dinner with the coach and his boyfriend?” Shane asked.

“Well, he is a family friend.” Yuna said softly. “I think it would be good for you.”

“I think I want to do the movie night with Ilya, I’ll be home in two weeks for the break, we can do the dinner then?”

Home. Ilya looked away at that. He hadn’t even thought about the break coming up. Or that Shane wouldn’t be there.

“Of course. We will drive you to the shop,” Yuna nodded, a smile playing on her lips.

Ilya had been quite impressed with how Shane had set the room out, cushions on the floor, snack bowls they had brought, or Shane’s parents had brought for them. They even brought them two large bean bags to sit in. Ilya had tried to give them the money but they had refused. It was weird, being out with them.

“Are you ready?” Shane asked as he lounged in the beanbag, his legs propped up on the bed. Ilya nodded and sat on the one beside him, legs out in front of him but his head seemed to find its way to Shane’s shoulder.

“I will not understand movie.” Ilya mumbled.

“I’ve put the subtitles on.” Shane smiled. “Besides, it’s just Back to the future, it’s more goofy than anything to understand.”

“Goofy.” Ilya rolled his eyes but smiled as Shane pressed play.

Ilya was right, he didn’t understand the movie, but Shane had wrapped an arm around his shoulders and his fingers were touching the skin at the back of his neck so softly that Ilya was sure he could fall asleep. Yuna and David had brought them a pizza to bring back and they had eaten it together, most of it now gone. Ilya had surprised himself by how much he actually ate, his stomach wasn’t in knots and he just felt at peace. By the second movie he was sure he had fallen asleep, a stupid smile playing on his face.

“Thank you so much for doing this,” Miss Williams beamed as Ilya walked into the rink. “He’s a good kid, just a little lonely. I’m not too sure how much he’ll like hockey once he decides to do it as a team, but...”

“We will see.” Ilya shrugged, he really didn’t know what to say. “Ready Misha?”

“Ready.” Misha grinned.

Ilya taught him the basics of skating first. Misha had the skills of a child who went skating regularly but for fun, not to play hockey. It was fun, Misha was funny and determined and the two hours went by quickly. Ilya stayed on the ice, he practiced his penalties and drills and an hour later he headed past Scott’s office.

He tapped on the door and when Scott opened it, his cheeks were a little flushed and Ilya raised an eyebrow and then it made sense when he saw Kip sitting at the desk. Kip was

funny, Ilya had met him a few times, but he had never seen them kiss or look like they had just been kissing.

“Sorry,” Ilya sucked his lip. “Miss Williams left money?”

“Yes,” Scott nodded, “Come in.”

“Okay.” Ilya stepped in and gave Kip a little wave who returned it with a smile.

“How was it?” Scott asked.

“Fun.” Ilya shrugged.

“No Shane?”

“He said he would swim.” Ilya shrugged again. “This is romantic date?”

“Ilya,” Scott warned, but there was no harshness in his tone. “I was working on the rosters for next term, we have some changes.”

“Shane will join the team.” Ilya said matter of factly.

“Yes.” Scott nodded. “But there have been some scouts at the recent games and some of the seniors will be going out on trial.”

“Scouts at the games?” Ilya asked.

“Yes.” Scott nodded. “Winters has been chosen.”

“Winters.” Ilya scoffs.

“Winters is a good player,” Scott says lightly.

“Winters is lazy. Slow. Weak backhand. Sel...”

“Ilya.” Scott cuts him off. “That isn’t a way a Captain should be talking about his teammates.”

Ilya paused and looked up at him. “Me?”

“No one else is more capable.” Scott promises. “Of course this will be starting next term, it hasn’t officially been announced yet.”

“Not me.” Ilya shakes his head. “Team is stupid. I don’t want to be the one to tell them they are stupid.”

“You already do.” Scott said, shaking his head.

“Not me.” Ilya repeated, this time a little louder. His hands were shaking. “Money?”

Scott frowned, he went to say something but Kip shook his head to stop him, instead he handed him the envelope. "I'll see you on Monday."

Ilya took the envelope, put it in his hoody pocket and walked out. His head was spinning, he couldn't be Captain. It was everything that he wanted, but he couldn't have it. He would not be good at it, they would lose. Ilya walked out of the fields and stopped when he saw Shane playing soccer with a group of boys from their year. He was running around and laughing, he looked carefree. Like the boy who woke up screaming every night didn't exist. Ilya wanted to smile, but instead tears slipped from his eyes.

He decided not to go up to the room, instead he signed himself out of the campus and walked twenty minutes to the town, he brought a packet of cigarettes and sat in the park on his own. The only thought going through his head was that he would never be good enough to be Captain, he sat there for hours before eventually walking back, he felt exhausted, all he wanted to do was close his eyes and sleep. All he hoped was that Shane would be back in the room by the time he got back, he didn't want to be alone anymore.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

The week had been slow. Ilya had felt like he was completely shutting down and he couldn't describe why. Shane was giving him space, spending time with Sam, swimming. They would still watch movies at night. Shane would ask if he needed help with homework, Ilya would say no. He hadn't done homework all week. His brain was too foggy to concentrate on anything.

Captain.

Ilya couldn't be Captain.

In practice he pushed himself harder, Scott was giving him space, but his eyes looked at him worried every time he saw him.

"Ilya," Shane whispered, they were on their separate beds, selfishly Ilya couldn't wait for Shane to have the nightmare, for him to crawl into bed with him. That was the only time he felt okay. When his head was nuzzled against his chest, when Shane was playing with his hair.

"Mm?" Ilya turned to him a little.

"Have I done something wrong?" Shane asked quietly.

"No," Ilya whispered in a breath. "You have not."

"Okay, if you... I spoke to you about what happened to me, and it felt better, a weight had been lifted you know?" No, Ilya didn't know what that felt like. "If you want to talk, you know that I am here, right?"

Ilya nodded his head slowly, he kicked his legs out of the bed without thinking and Shane automatically moved over on his bed and held his arms out to him, Ilya didn't say anything as he tucked himself into his arms, his fingers started to play with his hair and Ilya breathed. He let out the breath he had been holding and he just breathed.

"I'm scared." Ilya whispered the two words out so shakily.

"What are you scared of?" Shane whispered, nails gently scraping against Ilya's scalp.

"Everything." Ilya admitted.

Shane moved them so he could hold him more, he rocked him softly and Ilya cried. He couldn't stop, he cried for his mother who he missed every day, he cried for the father he wished so terribly had been better, he cried for his brother who he hated more than anything

in life. He cried for the home he knew he would never go back to. He cried for the dream he was so desperate to reach but terrified of reaching.

He cried for Shane.

“I don’t know what’s going on in here,” Shane tapped gently against his forehead, “But I promise you, it will be okay, it has to be. You’ve helped me so much Ilya, please, let me help you.” Shane pleaded.

“How?” Ilya whispered. “I don’t know how.”

“Just let me in.” Shane whispered and Ilya was sure that he felt something on his forehead, something wet, firm, a kiss. He blinked up at him, his red eyes finding teary brown ones. “Just let me in,” Shane whispered again and Ilya leaned up slowly, pressed the chaste kiss he could against his lips before settling back against his chest.

“I will try.” He whispered back.

Ilya woke up against Shane, his head was pounding from the tears he had cried and he blinked up to see Shane sleeping soundly. There had been no nightmares. He smiled at that and sat up slowly but Shane tugged him back down.

“Morning,” Shane whispered.

“Morning.” Ilya whispered. Shane stroked his cheek, fingers moving to his hair, down the back of his neck, each little touch making him feel like he really was okay. “I like you.” Ilya whispered, barely above a breath, but he saw the spark in Shane’s eyes. He had heard it loud and clear.

“I like you too.” Ilya felt time freeze and he leaned up a little, pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth. He felt Shane smile against him and pulled back slowly.

“I have a meeting with Scott,” Shane sighed, “He asked for me to come down before morning class.”

“Oh.” Ilya nodded. “About you joining team, yes?”

“I think so.” Shane smiled.

“You will be looked after. No... I would not let anyone....” Ilya cursed his brain for not knowing the word, but Shane tilted his chin up and kissed his lips again, just a little press, nothing heated, just there.

“Thank you.” Shane whispered.

“Better get dressed.” Ilya moved away from him and stretched. Once they were both dressed Shane smiled at him nervously. “I’ll see you soon.” Ilya winked.

“Soon.” Shane nodded and he headed out of the room.

“Shane, thank you for coming,” Scott smiled. “Now that you have settled, I just wanted to catch up, see how you are doing?”

“Oh.” Shane knew that this conversation would be coming. “I’m okay. I’m... I like it here more than I thought I would have.” Shane rubbed the back of his neck nervously. “Somedays are hard,”

“Why so?” Scott asked.

“Busier moments, my head scrambles a little. But I have a routine. That helps.” Shane whispered.

“You are an exceptional student, the teachers are raving about you.” Scott praised. “And you have been swimming?”

“Yes, it was Ilya’s idea.” Shane couldn’t help but smile at the thought of him.

“You two are good friends already, it’s good.” Scott nodded.

“Yes,” Shane chewed his lip, could he tell Scott about everything that happened last night? About the way that Ilya had crumbled, about the tears and the kisses? He wouldn’t do that to Ilya.

“Of course I know your experience on the ice, you are talented, next term there will be changes and we could use you on the team. If you are ready?”

“I haven’t been on the ice in months.” Shane whispered. “I’d be rusty.”

“Better to be rusty than to give up,” Scott said softly and Shane nodded. He knew that he was right. “What about you coming down for an hour after practice? Ilya spends time on the ice alone, you can just skate around together, get used to it again?”

“Oh,” Shane nodded his head slowly. “I’ll think about it. When would I need to let you know about actually joining?”

“Whenever you are ready, there will be a space for you.” Scott promised.

“Thank you.”

“Are you going home next week?” Scott asked.

“Yes,” Shane nodded. “What happens to Ilya?”

“He will stay here, he does every holiday. There’s a handful of teachers that stay, I invited him to stay with me for the Summer, but he refused.” Scott sighs.

“He stayed here for the Summer, on his own?” Shane asked sadly, Scott just nodded. “Maybe I can invite him to come home with me, my parents wouldn’t mind. It might be nice for him, a change of scenery.”

“That would be nice, you should ask him.” Scott smiled. “Go on, go and have breakfast I will see you tonight.”

Ilya was exhausted. The day had been hard. He had two tests that he had failed and during media training he was told off for not answering questions properly but he had no idea what they meant. By the time he got to practice his hands were shaking and he could hardly do his skates up.

“Did you hear Rozanov?” Winters walked up to him, a smirk on his lips. “This is my last practice.”

“Yes you have try outs on big team.” Ilya nodded. “Congratulations.” Winters just nodded like he wanted to say something else but he moved away.

Once he was finished with his skates he headed to the ice. He listened to the drills that Scott shouted and he did well, he didn’t miss a target, didn’t miss a beat, but still he thought he could have done better. Scott skated over to him. “You look exhausted,”

“I am fine.” Ilya whispered.

“I have organised for you to speak to someone next term. It will be online, kind of hard to find, but they speak Russian.” Scott said gently. “No connections to the school, they might understand.”

“They might not.” Ilya countered but maybe that would work, maybe. “Thank you.” He whispered quietly.

“Are you staying on the ice? I think Shane was coming down to familiarise himself with the ice again.”

“Oh. I will stay.” Ilya nodded. “It’s big deal for him.”

“It is.” Scott nodded and Ilya turned when he heard Shane’s voice, of course he was talking to the team. It seemed that Shane had already been accepted, something Ilya wasn’t even sure he was there yet. And yet he was to be the Captain.

“Hollander should be Captain.” Ilya whispered. “If he joins.”

“It’s you.” Scott said simply.

Ilya sat back up and skated around, tidying up from the practice and he kept on looking over to Shane, he had his skates on, he was taller, he looked more confident even though he was scared. Ilya could see the fear in his eyes.

“Are you ready?” Ilya skated over to him.

“I am scared. What if I’ve forgotten?” Shane held onto the boards before stepping on slowly.

“Then you fall. Break something. But you tried.” Ilya shrugs and he does a little circle on the skates playfully.

“Show off.”

“Your turn.” Ilya held his hand out to him and Shane took it, he didn’t care if anyone was watching, but he held Shane’s hand as he got used to the feeling of the ice beneath them again. “Good job. You did not fall.” Ilya hummed.

“I didn’t.” Shane grinned and he moved around a little more, finally let go of Ilya’s hand and he skated. A smile on his face that is so electric that Ilya copies, he hates his smile, too teathy, but right now he doesn’t care. Shane skates over to him and wraps his arms around his shoulders. “I did it. I can skate.”

“You can skate.” Ilya smiled. “But can you score?”

“Oh, you bet I can.” Shane winks.

They stay on the ice another hour, every bone in Ilya’s body is aching but he loves the smile Shane beams at him whenever he scores or hits target. Shane truly is a fantastic player.

“Thank you,” Shane grins as they walk up to their room.

“I did nothing.” Ilya shrugs. “That was all you.”

“Have you ever snuck out?” Shane asks as he throws himself on the bed.

“Of school?” Ilya asks, raising an eyebrow. “Yes.”

“Sam, and some of the other guys are going down to the park tonight, they invited us.”

“They did not invite me.” Ilya rolls his eyes.

“They did.” Shane insists. “Do you want to go?”

No. Ilya thought to himself. He did not. “You want to go?”

Shane nodded, he chewed his lip nervously. “At my old school, I didn’t really fit in. I didn’t... I was boring, didn’t go out, didn’t sneak out to do anything or get in trouble. I thought maybe I could try it.”

“Shane Hollander wants to be bad boy?” Ilya laughs.

“I just... I want to just go out.” Shane nods.

“Okay. We go out.” Ilya nods. He would really do anything that Shane wanted, even if it was to go to the stupid park with the stupid team that he knew for sure did not invite him.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Sneaking out wasn't hard, Ilya could see the look of almost disappointment on Shane's face. "You expected crawl under barbed wire?" Ilya asked, eyebrows raised. He had his typical hooded jumper on, hands stuffed in his pocket, beanie on with his curls poking through.

"I expected more." Shane shrugged.

"Parents sign permission for sixteen year olds to leave and go, school says just for every other weekend to manage, but really, you leave it's okay." Ilya explained.

"Oh." Shane leaned a little closer to him as they walked. It was nice to be walking together outside like this. Ilya wanted to reach over and link their fingers together but he didn't, instead he held his own hands through the jumper. "You cold?"

"A little." Ilya shrugged, he was always cold when he was tired.

"Sam said that two of the Senior players are leaving, they are going pro?" Shane asked. "The Captain..."

"Yes, sad day, Winters played his last match." Ilya shrugged.

"I asked him who was going to be Captain and they said you," Shane pressed.

"They lie. Liar told you that." Ilya looked away.

"You're not going to be Captain?" Shane frowned.

"I don't know." Ilya shrugged. "Hunter says yes. I say no. Hunter says yes. I say you. Hunter says me."

"You said me?" Shane stops walking and moves so he stands in front of Ilya. "Why would you say me?"

"You have Captain experience. Team they like you." Ilya shrugs.

"This is your team, you are the one that deserves this, not me." Shane frowns. "You should tell Hunter yes."

Ilya rolls his eyes. "I tell Hunter maybe." Ilya decides. "Come on, bad boy Hollander," He nudges his arm forward and leads him to the park.

It's set up almost like a party, there's music playing, drinks. Ilya doesn't know how most of the school, and the girls school are there. He hardly recognises any of these people. "Are they drinking alcohol?" Shane asks.

"Yes." Ilya rolls his eyes. "Bad boy Hollander going to drink?"

“I don’t... I’ve never.” Shane frowned.

“It’s okay, you have one.” Ilya walked with him to Sam who was handing out the drinks.

“Wow, Ilya Rozanov actually showed up.” Sam laughed and patted him on the back. Ilya smiled, though it was through gritted teeth. “Let’s get you both drinks.” Sam grabs a red solo cup and hands it to Shane, he hands one to Ilya who shakes his head and grabs an empty cup and a bottle of water. If Shane was going to drink alcohol for the first time then he would make sure he was okay.

“What is it?” Shane asked as he smelt the liquid in the cup.

“Vodka punch.” Sam shrugged.

“Vodka should not be in punch.” Ilya muttered and Shane nudged him again, Ilya just smiled.

“It’s probably cheap Vodka, my brother got it for us.” Sam explains. “In Russia, you drink Vodka a lot?”

“Like water.” Ilya nods. “Not me, but it’s common yes.”

“Huh, I think this is the most I’ve heard you speak, well when you’re not calling us idiots.” Sam grinned.

Ilya just shrugs at that and looks around. “You are not idiot.” He eventually says.

“Well, I think when you’re leading us to our next win you need to work on that motivation.” Sam grins and turns to Shane who sips it. “Good?”

“No.” Shane laughs. “But yes.” Sam just grins and fills his cup again, he offers Ilya one more but he shakes his head.

Within an hour it’s getting busier and all Ilya wants to do is go to bed, everything hurts. He finishes his water and he looks at Shane, Shane who is smiling and laughing with everyone, he’s on his fourth drink and is tipsy but he’s cute and Ilya just can’t stop watching him. He grabs another bottle of water and fills his cup up. The crowd is a little too much now and Ilya turns his head to see older guys he definitely does not recognise and he feels a protective need to step closer to Shane, to protect him.

“Hey, you kids from that posh school?” One of them asks and Ilya realises that they have gotten closer to him, that they were actually talking to him.

“Mixture, some girls school. Some boys school. Some I don’t know.” Ilya shrugs.

“Cool accent.” One of them grins and Ilya just nods. “Where are you from?”

“Russia.” Ilya turns his attention back to Shane, Shane who is now dancing with Sam, it’s goofy and he smiles more. He brings his cup back to his lips and sips his water.

“Enjoy,” The guy winks at him and Ilya doesn’t quite understand what he means, he gives a little wave and keeps looking at Shane. He notices the guys around talking to some of the team, thinks he might see a clear packet of something being handed around and he knows he needs to make sure the team doesn’t do anything stupid. But as he stands up the world spins even more, he finishes the water and makes his way over to Shane.

“Ilya,” Shane exaggerates his name and grins at him, arms reaching for him and Ilya takes one because he thinks if he doesn’t he’s going to fall over.

“Are you having fun?” Ilya manages to ask, but he doesn’t recognise his own voice.

“Mm,” Shane nods his head and steps closer to him. “Ilya,”

“Jesus, did you drink?” Sam asks.

“Water.” Ilya holds his cup up but the effort seems hard for him.

“I think you’ve had a little more than water,” Sam frowns, “Come on buddy, let’s get you sitting back down.”

“Shane,” Ilya calls his name and Shane is right there, hand on his. “Shane...”

“I’m here,” Shane hiccups and Ilya is sure if his vision wasn’t so blurry he would have thought it was cute.

“I’mma walk.” Ilya nods and points, his head is spinning, his body feels lethargic and energised all at once, like he could sleep but also he wants to climb. “I’mma walk.” He says again and he frees himself from Sam’s grip and pushes his feet forward, he’s aware of Sam following him, of Shane, but the lights look so pretty around him and suddenly the cloud that had been hanging over him is gone and the lights are like little fairies and he thinks he can hear his mother singing to him, so he runs towards it.

“Babe, your phone’s ringing.” Kip’s tired voice wakes Scott, Scott who could sleep through anything, but the constant vibrating on his night stand woke Kip up straight away. Kip reached over, grabbed the phone “It’s Shane.” Kip said and he answered it. “Shane?”

“I need Scott. Ilya... Please. Scott?” Shane sounded hysterical. “Scott wake up.” Kip shook Scott who woke up, when he saw Kip holding the phone, eyes panicked he grabbed it quickly, already getting out of bed.

“What’s going on?” Scott forced the sleep out of his voice.

“We snuck out, I... Ilya I think... he just ran... We can’t find him.” Shane was sobbing, he could practically hear the tears on his cheek.

“Calm down. Who are you with?” Scott grabbed his jumper, as did Kip and they got dressed quickly. “Shane, who are you with?”

“Sam and the team and so many people, I don’t... he was drinking water, I swear. I... we are at the park, were... I don’t know where I am now.”

“We are on the edge of Western,” Sam’s voice filled the line. “Ilya, Rozanov was drinking water. These guys came and they were selling shit, but I don’t know if Ilya took it or...”

“No. He wasn’t drinking. He wouldn’t have...” Shane said in a panic.

“We are on our way, stay where you are.” Scott ordered and they raced into the car. Scott cursing the whole way there. Within five minutes they pulled up, Shane was bent over throwing up and he looked a mess.

“What way did he go?” Kip asked as he climbed out, he wrapped an arm around Shane and helped him into the back seat.

“Honestly, he just sprinted that way. I tried to keep up, but I lost him at the cross roads. Winters is getting everyone back to the school, no one touched what the guys were giving out.”

“And Ilya he wasn’t drinking?” Scott asked and he looked at the state that Shane was in, and could smell the vodka.

“No, I think he wanted to look after Shane, he just sat back, watched. The guys were around him though.” Sam sighed.

“Get in, we need to find him. There’s a bag there, if he throws up again. You didn’t drink?” Scott asks as he pulls back onto the road.

“No, I had one cup but Ilya was right, Vodka shouldn’t be in punch.” Sam sighed, “tasted horrible.”

“Ilya.” Shane whispered.

“We’ll find him.” Scott sighed. “Kip, can you call the police, we’ll need help. He could be anywhere.” Scott ran a hand through his hair as Kip made the call. He couldn’t believe any of this was happening.

They drove around the small town for what felt like hours, Kip had filled the police in, sent a photo from the school year book for them to have. Sam had tried to find a photo of Ilya from any of the team hangs, but quickly realised that this was the first time that Ilya had actually joined them.

“Where would he go?” Scott asked himself. “Fuck.” He pulled around again, looking out, he spotted a lake and that’s when he saw him. “Fuck.” He didn’t care about his reckless driving, or the fact that Shane had just thrown up again in the back seat. “Kip. Ambulance.” As soon as the car stopped he was out and running forward.

Ilya felt like he was flying, like the world wasn't holding him down any more. He looked down at the stars shining in the lake, they looked so pretty. "Ilya,"

Ilya looked up as his name was called, he couldn't make out the face, it was just a blur, they called his name again, more voices now. One that made his heart sing.

"Shane?" He called out. "My Shane."

"Ilya, I need you to step down from those rocks." Scott, it was Hunter's voice and he stepped forward. Ilya looked down only realising now that he was so high. His legs trembled. If he fell into the water he wasn't sure what would happen. Ice he was good on, but the water?

"Shane okay?" Ilya asked, his body felt tired again, the adrenaline, everything was slipping from him.

"He's okay, he's here, safe. Why don't you come on down to him?" Scott was closer now, he could almost reach him.

"He is okay." Ilya nodded and he tried to step down, but it was dark and he wasn't too sure where he wanted to go. One way felt like an easy way out of darkness and no more pain. The other had Shane. "I don't..." He wasn't sure what he wanted to say, he felt his body fall, felt the cold water hit his body, his head hitting something hard, he thought he heard Shane scream and then there was nothing else at all.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Ilya tried to open his eyes but they felt like they were glued down, his eyelashes felt heavy. Was that even possible?

“Ilya,” Shane’s voice. “I think he’s waking up.” Ilya didn’t understand the words, he tried to open his mouth, to say something, he wasn’t too sure what came out, if it was Russian or English, everything hurt. “It’s okay, take it easy. Don’t rush Ilya. It’s okay.” Shane said gently, he felt his hand in his fingers linked together. “I’m so sorry.” Shane whispered.

The next time Ilya managed to open his eyes, the room was dimly lit but still felt too bright, there was a pain in his arm and his head. He looked up and saw Scott Hunter sitting on the large green chair opposite the bed. He looked like a giant sitting on a small chair, like from a fairy tale. Scott didn’t see his eyes open and he closed them again.

“It’s been two days,” Shane whispered, his voice tugging him back. “Please open your eyes,”

“Shane,” Ilya breathed.

“I’m here, it’s okay, I’m here.” Shane sounded a little more urgent now. Ilya blinked, tried again and again and eventually his eyes fluttered open. Everything hurt but he turned his head and saw Shane, he looked awful. Bags under his eyes, hair a mess. He had nightmares, Ilya could tell.

“Gde ya?” Ilya mumbled. “Where...”

“Hospital. You’re at the hospital.” Shane breathed.

“Don’t... I remember nothing.” Ilya mumbled.

“You hit your head hard.” Shane whispered, his hands coming up to the thick white bandage. “There was some swelling. But you had another scan yesterday, it’s gone down.”

“Yesterday?” Ilya sat up slowly, Shane was there helping him.

“It’s been two days since we... since the accident.” Shane mumbled. “I am so sorry it’s all my fault,”

“Shh,” Ilya closed his eyes. “You were happy.”

“Was drunk.” Shane mumbled.

“Was cute.” Ilya whispered and he could see the blush on his cheeks.

“I need to press this, tell them you are awake.” Shane pressed the button on the side.

“Scott?” Ilya rubbed his lips, they felt so dry.

“Was talking to the school,” Shane nodded and he grabbed the water and straw and brought it to Ilya’s lips. Ilya drank it like it was his salvation but then he coughed and brought it all back up. The effort of coughing made his head spin.

“Ilya, easy.” Scott was there, at the door, he walked in quickly and Ilya blinked up at him.

“You need to take small sips Mr Rozanov,” The doctor said, tone firm. Ilya shrank back in the bed, why did he feel like a small child right now?

“It’s good to see you finally awake,” Scott smiled, “I said you look exhausted, but a two day nap is quite extreme.” Scott said lightly. “How are you feeling?”

“My head hurts,” Ilya admitted, his hands felt empty without Shane’s in them, as if the boy noticed he moved back around the other side of the doctor, sat on the edge of the bed and took his hand in his. “Better.” He whispered.

“We will need to discuss the results of your tests.” The doctor said softly. “Scott Hunter is here as your legal guardian, but are you happy for me to talk in front of...”

“Shane, yes. Talk.” Ilya frowned. “I am dying?”

Scott frowned and Shane made a noise from beside him. “No, it was very close, I will not sugar coat it for you. The drugs that were in your system affected you so badly because you are seriously malnourished.”

Ilya frowned, he turned his head as much as he could to Shane. “What does word mean?” He asked, he hated feeling so useless.

Shane frowned, biting his lip and turned to Scott. “It means that you haven’t been eating, you have pushed your body to the point of exhaustion.”

“I eat.” Ilya frowned. Did he? Did he not eat on purpose? “I am always tired.”

“You cannot keep going like this, I will speak to a nutritionist, they will help you with a calorie controlled diet, the proteins, carbs, everything you need to keep your strength up on the ice.” The doctor explained. “We will also give you supplements to help the energy levels, your vitamin levels are non-existent.”

Ilya gave a shrug, his head was swimming again. “When was the last time you had a full meal?” Scott asked quietly.

“I...” Ilya looked away from him. “Pizza.”

“Movie night, that was... Ilya that was weeks ago.” Shane frowned.

“I eat small... I eat.” Ilya snapped. “Not dying. I go?”

“No, not yet. You need to stay for another forty-eight hours for us to monitor the swelling, you’ll go for another scan. Then we have someone from the psychiatric team coming to talk

to you.”

“Word?” Ilya asked tiredly.

“Therapist, someone to talk to you about your mental health,” Scott explained a little more gently than the doctor.

Ilya wanted to argue, he wasn’t crazy. He fiddled with Shane’s fingers and just nodded, was there a point in arguing? Was there a point in any of this?

“I did not take drugs.” Ilya whispered once the doctor had left.

“We know, luckily there was camera footage, they spiked your drink with the ecstasy they were trying to sell.” Scott sighed, running a hand through his hair. “The team is in a lot of trouble.”

Ilya felt guilt swell up in his chest, he knew none of this was really his fault. He shouldn’t have let Shane sneak out, or he shouldn’t have shown Shane how to do it. But he wasn’t the Captain. He wasn’t in control of the team, fuck he wasn’t in control of everything. He felt his eyes well with tears and he pulled his knees up to his chest. But Shane was there, Shane curled around him, holding him close and let him cry.

“I think he’s asleep.” Shane whispered as he settled Ilya back onto the bed, he wiped his own eyes quickly and when he looked at Scott he was surprised to see him crying too. “It was my fault.”

“It wasn’t anyone’s fault. It was unfortunate, the ones who did something wrong were the ones pushing that stuff on you, the one who spiked his drink.” Scott said gently. “Has he ever said anything to you about how he’s feeling?” Scott asked.

“One night, he... he just wouldn’t stop crying, he had stopped talking to me, he was still there. Every night when I wake up screaming he’s right there, but I couldn’t see... he said he was scared.” Shane whispered. “Scared of everything.”

“Talking to the therapists here will help him, then we can help him more at school. I should... Your parents will be picking you up tomorrow.”

“No, I can’t leave him,” Shane breathed.

“He will be discharged hopefully in forty eight hours, I live close by to your parents. I’ve already told the school that I will take him home with me. It’s a two week break, that should be a good start for his recovery.”

“I will wait until he is discharged. I can’t Scott, please.”

“I will speak to Yuna,” Scott sighed.

“Thank you.”

His scans were fine, the swelling had gone down and the painkillers were good. He still had a swimming feeling, like he wasn't too sure where he was, but Shane didn't leave his side. "You'll be coming home with me tomorrow," Scott said softly. "This afternoon you have your first session with the therapist team here,"

"Home with you?" Ilya frowned. "School?"

"It's the break, two weeks there alone is not what you need. You'll stay with me, Kip has already set out the spare room. I live ten minutes from Shane." Scott explained.

"I do not want to be burden." Ilya sighed. "More."

"You're not a burden." Scott assured him. "I am sorry I didn't see how much pain you were in," Ilya shrugged and looked away from him. Shane squeezed his hand softly, head resting on his shoulder.

"You have not been to school." Ilya mumbled. "Parents mad?"

"No, they are worried about you. My mum was here for the first day, she ensured you had the best doctors looking after you, dad too. Said when you are better you're coming to ours." Shane said softly. "Then weekly visits from them when we are back at school to make sure we are okay."

"You are... Are you okay?" Ilya asked quietly. "Nighthmares?"

Shane sighed. "I haven't been able to sleep more than a few hours, so no, no nightmares." Ilya wrapped an arm around him a little tighter and Shane cuddled into him, neither of them caring that Scott was watching them.

The therapist was awful. Ilya disliked her straight away. Her questions were long, he hardly understood what she was saying, Ilya had tried to talk to her, but the words wouldn't come and he ended up crying again, only this time Shane wasn't there and neither was Scott. He felt so alone.

"I think the best course of action is some medication," The therapist spoke like he wasn't there, instead talking to Scott now that their session had ended. "He is suffering, has been for sometime from how bottled up he seems to be. I think there is a language barrier..."

"I have someone next week, who was supposed to start when we were back at school. Russian, the earliest appointment I could get with them is next week." Scott said softly. "Remember, Ilya I mentioned?"

"I remember. No pills." Ilya turned on the bed, his head aching.

"I think they can help the mood swings, balance your emotions..."

"No. Fucking Pills." Ilya screamed.

"Easy," Scott rushed to his side, his hands shaking and Scott took them. "No pills, it's okay, no pills." He said gently. "Want to tell me why?"

“My mother.” Ilya whispered. “She accidentally took too many. Died.”

“Jesus.” Scott breathed and he rubbed Ilya’s arm softly. “No pills.”

“Spasibo,” Ilya whispered, closing his eyes hoping to close everyone out. “Shane?”

“He’ll be in soon, he is talking to his mum.” Scott said gently.

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered.

“I haven’t really done anything,” Scott admitted.

“For bringing him to my life.” Ilya said quietly.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

"I will skate tomorrow?" Ilya asked as he put his seat belt on. Today he was finally going home, well back to Scott's house. Shane had packed his bag for him. He wouldn't be going back to school for two weeks.

"Probably not tomorrow, but maybe in a few days." Scott said gently. "Tomorrow you will see Shane." Ilya relaxed at that. His head was hurting, but he was trying not to ask for the painkillers, they made him feel funny, he couldn't describe it. "Here." Shane pulled out a pair of raybans, "I've had many concussions, any light can hurt your eyes."

"Thanks," Ilya put them on and settled back into the chair. "Long drive?"

"Forty minutes." Scott smiled. "Try and sleep."

"All I do." Ilya mumbled but he closed his eyes and soon enough he had fallen asleep.

"You have nice house." Ilya whispered as he looked around. "I thought that you lived in a pent house."

"Before, when it was just me, yes. Now it's me and Kip. We wanted something where maybe one day we could start a family, you know?" Scott smiled, he grabbed Ilya's duffle bag from the boot.

"You will be good father," Ilya whispered. Kip opened the door for them and Ilya gave a small wave.

"It's good to see you, how are you feeling?" Kip asked.

"Better." Ilya lied.

Scott showed him up to his room, it was big, he sat down on his bed and rubbed his eyes.

"We are going to make lunch now, we have the diet sheet from the doctors, Kip is actually a good cook."

"I am not too hungry, but I will try to eat." Ilya whispered.

"You can explore the house, we have a games room, cinema, outside we have a pool." Scott sounded nervous and Ilya just nodded his head slowly. He didn't want Scott to be nervous.

"Thank you." Ilya whispered. "I have... I will come down for lunch."
Scott just nodded and gave him a smile before leaving him alone.

Ilya opened the duffle bag and sighed, he didn't even have a phone to call Shane on, maybe he could ask Scott if he could get one, he had never wanted one before, never needed one. He didn't need an expensive one, but he just was desperate to hear Shane's voice.

He put the clothes in the closet and smiled at the packet of cigarettes, a little sticky note on the box 'I probably should have thrown these away, x' He put them in the bedside unit and curled up on the bed. It had been an exhausting few days, but maybe it had all happened for the best, maybe he could actually get help. Maybe he could finally be okay.

"This is nice salad." Ilya said, he was sitting at the barstool, legs kicking a little. He still kept the sunglasses on.

"Thank you," Kip smiled. "I'll go shopping later, we need some other groceries, if you want to come?"

"I... Yes, okay." Ilya nodded, "I have some money for the food."

"Ilya, we are not taking any money from you." Scott said, shaking his head. Ilya just looked down and nodded, he mumbled a thank you and ate the chicken. He had eaten a few bites and already his stomach was turning, the doctor had said it was normal, when he had tried to eat at the hospital he had been sick straight away. "Stomach hurting?"

"Da," Ilya sighed, he moved so he could rest his hand on the table. "I will try more." Ilya went to take another bite but Scott put a hand on his arm.

"Don't force it, we can eat more later," Scott assured him.

"Thank you," Ilya smiled and he stood up and started to clean up, Kip and Scott exchanged looks but didn't stop him.

"Thank you for washing up," Scott smiled. "Would you like to go to the shop now, or do you want to rest?"

"Shop, please. I... I would like to buy something," Ilya looked down, "I..."

"What do you need?" Kip asked.

"A phone." Ilya whispered. "I don't have one."

"We can get you one," Kip stood up and squeezed Ilya's shoulder softly. "I have some old ones, but we can pick one that you want."

"I want to pay, I don't have..." Ilya looked up at Scott.

"We'll figure it out." Scott promised. "Come on then, we will go now,"

By the time they got back from the shops, Ilya was exhausted, but he was also excited. Scott had got him a new iPhone, he was so eager to set it up but he was also just tired. Scott had said that tomorrow Shane would come over, so he would get him to set it up then. He fell back to sleep and woke up for dinner. Kip had made a nice soup and Ilya had managed to eat all of it.

“Did you manage to set your phone up?” Scott asked.

“No, I will ask Shane tomorrow.” Ilya nodded.

“You can use mine to call him, if you’d like.” Scott offered and Ilya nodded. “Are you two...?”

“Scott.” Kip reached out and hit his arm.

Ilya looked between them, they were very cute together. “It’s fine.” Ilya smiled at Kip. “I like him.” He shrugs. “I...I am gay.” Ilya looked down, he had never said those words out loud. “I kissed him.”

Kip made a noise and Ilya looked up to see his eyes shining, Scott smiled and moved over to the side of Ilya and wrapped an arm around him. “I promise you it is okay,”

“It is not.” Ilya said, shaking his head. “For you, you had a moment, was nice, people loved you, you got a trophy. You got a husband. I got beaten.”

“Ilya,” Kip said gently.

“I got locked in a cupboard. Belt on my back. I cannot go home. I like Shane. But we could never be anything. We get drafted. We would not see each other. The world says it’s okay, but you know that on the ice it still is not. Thank you for soup.” Ilya pushed his chair away and he walked upstairs so quickly.

“Scott,” Kip whispered.

“He’s right,” Scott sighed, “No matter what they decide, it isn’t going to be easy for them. For Ilya, he wouldn’t ever be able to go back to Russia.”

“He wouldn’t go back, not after what he just said, I won’t let him.” Kip said fiercely and Scott pressed a kiss to his lips.

“I should go and talk to him,” Scott whispered.

“It is not you he would want to speak to,” Kip said, rolling his eyes, he grabbed Scott’s phone, unlocked it and found Shane’s contact, he tapped on Ilya’s door “I have the phone here, unlocked, you can call Shane.”

Ilya opened the door slowly, his eyes were red, Kip handed him the phone and he held his arms open and Ilya hesitated before he allowed himself to fall into them. “We will figure this out,” Kip promised.

Ilya nodded his head slowly and he pressed the call button as Kip stepped away, "If you don't want to come back down just leave it on the landing." Kip said softly before heading back downstairs.

"Scott?" Shane's voice filled his ears and Ilya breathed it in. He had seen him yesterday, his parents had picked him up before he had been discharged. "Ilya is he okay?"

"I am fine." Ilya whispered. "Not fine. Better. You okay?" Ilya slid down the back of the door and pulled his knees up to his chest.

"Tired," Shane said honestly. "I was about to take something to help me sleep,"

"Oh, you... just one?" Ilya whispered.

"Yes," Shane was frowning, "I wanted to come over, my parents said you were out?"

"Shopping. For food and phone." Ilya whispered.

"You got a phone?" Shane asked.

"Tomorrow you can set it up. Too many words." Ilya yawned.

"You sound tired too," Shane whispered.

"I feel tired, I haven't done anything. Eat and sleep." Ilya sighed.

"What did you eat?" Shane asks and Ilya wonders if this is how it will be now.

"Chicken salad was bad, stomach hurt, but soup was nice." Ilya said honestly. "You?"

"I had chicken pasta," Shane yawned.

"Go to sleep," Ilya stood up slowly, "I will see you tomorrow, Shane."

"Goodnight Ilya," Shane whispered before ending the call. Ilya sighed, he held the phone to his chest and whispered his own goodnight before he left it outside his door. All he wanted to do was go to sleep so he could see Shane tomorrow.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Ilya woke up to be sick, his knees hit the toilet floor and he threw everything up. The doctors said this was normal, despite him not stopping eating completely, the lack of food in his system and the strong painkillers would make him feel like crap. Ilya stood up shakily, washed his face and brushed his teeth and stared at his reflection.

He hardly recognised himself.

Thin skin, dark bags under his eyes. He had a bandage on the side of his head, when he had fallen from the rocks he had hit it before going in the water. Before Scott had jumped in to save him. He had needed stitches, he would have to go back in soon to get them removed.

He showered quickly, careful not to get his hair wet and he changed into fresh sweats and a jumper and pulled on his socks before going downstairs. "Good morning," Kip smiled.

"Good morning," Ilya said quietly.

"Scott is out running," Kip hummed. "I am on breakfast duty."

"Can... Can I help?" Ilya asked.

"Oh... Sure, you can cut the fruit? I'm making protein pancakes, sounds kind of gross but we'll see." Kip shrugged. Ilya nodded and he went to the fridge and found the strawberries and Kip had handed him the knife and chopping board. "Did you manage to sleep?"

"I think yes." Ilya nodded. "When I woke up I was sick." Ilya said honestly.

"You should have called me," Kip frowned.

"I was okay." Ilya shrugs. "Doctor says normal."

"Okay but Ilya, I know it's hard, we don't really know each other but you can call okay? When you need help, I'm here. Scott is here."

"Scott jumped in the water. Saved me." Ilya whispered. He had been thinking about it since his shower.

"He was terrified." Kip nodded.

"I am sorry." Ilya whispered.

"It was not your fault," Kip leaned over and squeezed his arm. "Do you remember being up on the rocks?"

“I remember being up there. I don’t remember why, or how.” Ilya sighed, “Like bad dream.” Ilya started to chop the strawberries, slow precise movements and Kip turned back to the batter.

“Scott found the Russian therapist, when you speak to them maybe you can explain how the dream feels?” Kip suggested.

“I will.” Ilya nodded, he had already decided that he would be honest with them. Maybe it would be easier to get it off his chest in his native tongue. English was just too hard sometimes.

Scott came in, sweat pouring from his head and he grinned at Kip. Ilya could tell this was where they would normally have a moment, neither seemed to know what to do with Ilya standing there but he just laughed a little, the noise taking them both by surprise. “You kiss him now? All sweaty? Gross?” Ilya asked.

“Normally, yes.” Kip laughed.

“Gross. He is old man.” Ilya winked at Kip who laughed louder.

Scott rolled his eyes and he walked over to Kip and pressed a kiss to his cheek, he then walked over and took one of the strawberries from Ilya’s pile. Scott gave him a grin before heading up to the bathroom, Ilya sighed, he liked Scott and he liked Kip, but he felt a pain in his chest knowing that he would never get this.

“Shane will come this morning, I’ve made enough batter for him and his parents too. He has an appointment and then he will be here.”

“Appointment, he is okay?” Ilya asked.

“I think it is just a catch up,” Kip says softly. Ilya nods and he finishes the fruit, cleans the knife and the board and sits on the stool. Scott comes back down and smiles, he opens the fridge and grabs some oranges and starts to make fresh orange juice, Ilya is struck with how domestic it is.

“Easier to buy bottle?” Ilya asks.

“Kip likes the fresh ones,” Scott shrugs and Kip just grins at him. Ilya just nods and watches as the little orange juice comes out. It does look good though and when it’s poured into the jug and Scott grabs glasses, Ilya picks them up and carries it to the table, putting the glasses out and grabs the plate that they have already left out.

“Ilya, you know you don’t have to do...”

“Useful.” Ilya shrugs and he looks down, “Russia we help. Children clean after themselves. It’s good. Character building.” He says and he finishes setting the table.

When the doorbell rings Ilya wants to rush forward, but he stops himself, Kip stands beside him, hand on his shoulder. Scott greets the three Hollanders and they walk in slowly, as soon

as Ilya sees Shane he walks forward, doesn't care that the four adults are watching and he wraps his arms around him tight.

"Ilya," Shane whispers and he holds onto him tighter. "I'm here,"

"Missed you." Ilya hated how weak he sounded, it had been barely twenty four hours. "You sleep?"

"I sleep." Shane nods.

Ilya pulls back a little, his cheeks burning red but he would never admit that. Russians didn't blush. "Ilya, it's good to see you on your feet." Yuna said as she walked over and wrapped him in a light hug, he could break away if he wanted, but instead he just moved a little closer.

"I am sorry for..."

"Nonsense." Yuna shook her head and David walked over and shook his hand, giving him a little squeeze.

"Breakfast." Kip decides once he sees the deer in headlights look at Ilya's face.

Ilya pulls back from them and walks into the kitchen and helps Kip with the rest of the food and brings it to the table, he sits down beside Shane.

"Pancakes?" Shane asks.

"Protein pancakes," Kip clarifies, "All good for you." Shane just smiles and nods and when the serving bowl full of beautiful pancakes lands to him he puts two on his plate.

Ilya watches the scene in front of them, the way that they take turns, and hand out the bowls and pots easily. "Ilya," Shane whispers and Ilya realises that Shane had been holding out the bowl for him.

"Oh, sorry." Ilya nods and he takes one of the pancakes and then the fruit and puts some on his plate, he doesn't need to look up to know that there are eyes on him. He cuts the pancakes and chews, the silence around them is getting too much. It's Kip that notices and he starts to talk about art. Ilya isn't sure anyone is interested, but that leads to Scott noticing too and the chatter gets louder, more normal. Ilya has never been more grateful for Kip. He takes a bite, it tastes good, he adds a strawberry and eats it too.

"These are really good," Yuna declares.

"Ilya helped," Kip says proudly.

"I chopped fruit." Ilya shrugs, still not looking up at anyone.

Ilya chewed the pancake slowly, he felt his hands were trembling a little and he looked up, he hated the eyes. He felt like a bird in a cage. He picked his plate and orange juice and walked out of the room quickly, he opened the garden door and sat on one of the deck chairs.

A few minutes later the door opened and he felt something soft around him, a blanket. He looked up expecting it to be Shane, but it was Kip. "Take your time, sorry we didn't think about..."

"Thank you, Kip." Ilya whispered. "It is really nice."

"Bit powdery, you are all just too nice," Kip smiled. "Want me to send Shane out? He was ready to run after you but his dad told him to stop."

"I just... this is what it will be like? Everyone watching," Ilya sighs.

"You have a room full of people there who care about you, I get it." Kip sat down beside him. "Before I met Scott, I wasn't in a good place. I worked at a job I hated, I didn't have much money, still lived at home. I couldn't control much in my life, on bad days I wouldn't eat. I didn't realise I was doing it as a punishment, pushing myself to do better. It wasn't something I considered a problem."

"How did... You got better?"

"I did. Pieces just started to fall into place, I took control of my life, applied for grad school, tried to find jobs that I actually had an interest in, met Scott..."

"I am glad you are okay," Ilya whispered as he took a bite of his pancake. He swallowed it easily and Kip went to get up but Ilya looked at him and he sat back down. They didn't speak, Ilya didn't need words but he felt better having him there. He finished the pancake and the fruit and smiled at Kip.

"Proud of you," Kip whispered and Ilya felt it in his chest.

Scott came out a little while later and sat on the deckchair beside him but moved it closer, he held out his hand and Ilya took it straight away. "You had appointment?" Ilya asked.

"A final physical to clear me to play hockey next term," Shane smiled, "And well, I asked my parents if they could find someone for me to talk to."

"Like therapist?" Ilya played with his fingers.

"Mm," Shane nodded. "We had spoken about it when it first happened, but I wanted to make sure that my body was okay, and maybe I shouldn't have waited this long, but I think I am ready now."

"Good." Ilya smiled and he brought his hand up to his mouth and kissed his fingers.

"Scott has a nice house." Shane mused.

"He has. He is nice, I... I am grateful." Ilya nodded.

"Last Summer you were at the school all alone?" Shane whispered.

“Da.” Ilya shrugged. “Was okay.”

“Lonely?” Shane asked and Ilya hesitated before nodding slowly. “We have two weeks off, and then when we get back we have a few months before Summer. You won’t stay there on your own.” Shane said strongly.

“Where will I go?” Ilya asked.

“With me.” Shane said simply.

“With you.” Ilya smiled. “Then it will be last year. We will have scouts and try outs. We will be performing monkeys.”

“We’ll put on a good show,” Shane grinned.

“I am scared.” Ilya whispers.

“Me too.” Shane says and Ilya feels comforted in that, comforted that he isn’t doing this on his own. “We can do this together,”

“Will not be easy.” Ilya whispers.

“No. But we can do this.” Shane promised. “What do you want to do today?”

“This,” Ilya shrugs and he tugs Shane a little closer so Shane comes over onto his chair, he settles beside him and they wrap their arms around him. “Your parents are okay with this?” Ilya whispers.

“Yes,” Shane nods. “I told them.”

“Told them what?” Ilya asks.

“Told them how much you mean to me.” Shane whispered. “They are good people,”

“I know, they raised a good son.” Ilya presses a kiss to his forehead.

Shane blushes and blinks up at him, “Rest, later maybe we can swim.” Ilya just nodded and closed his eyes against him, for the first time in a very long time he let the warmth of peace wash over him.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

The day was nice, Ilya and Shane stayed outside for a few hours before going to explore the games room. Ilya had never smiled or laughed so much, the air hockey table had been their favourite. "I can't wait to play with you on actual ice." Shane grinned.

"I miss the ice." Ilya pouted as he sat down on the leather sofa, Shane nodded and he curled up next to him.

"Did they say when you can skate?" Shane asked.

"No. I will ask tomorrow." Ilya decided.

"Okay," Shane smiled. "Your phone, shall I set it up?"

"Please" Ilya smiled. Shane went and grabbed the box, when he came back Ilya had fallen asleep on the sofa, legs stretched out and Shane just smiled at him. He sat on the floor and leant back, setting Ilya's phone up for him and already saving his phone number for him. He added Scott, Kip's and his parents too, just in case.

"Shane?" Ilya's sleepy voice filled the room and Shane blinked up at him. "I slept."

"An hour." Shane turned so he could see him more and Ilya moved over so Shane could lay back beside him. "Your head is hurting,"

"Da." Ilya nodded.

"You have a crease here," Shane ran a finger over his eyebrows, "When you are hurting, you scrunch." He whispers and he leans in and presses a kiss to his forehead.

"Feels nice," Ilya whispered and Shane smiled and pressed a few more kisses so gently across his forehead, around the bandage and to his lips. "Shane," Ilya whispered. "Have you ever been..."

"No." Shane shook his head. "I mean... Kissed, yes but... Nothing else. What about you?"

Ilya nodded slowly, "Once." He whispered. "One of my coaches' sons. He was older. I... I was drunk."

Shane frowned, fingers linking together. "He took advantage?"

"I don't understand word." Ilya frowned.

"Did you... Did you want it?" Shane asked quietly.

"I... At the time... I..." Ilya looked down and then he shook his head. "I think no."

Shane stroked his cheek so softly, leaning down and pressing a kiss to his lips. “We can... We can take everything nice and slow, we don’t have to rush...”

“We will need to keep it a secret,” Ilya frowns.

“Why?” Shane whispered. “I mean I know why, but we could choose not to. To just be us,”

“They will not sign gay players.” Ilya breathes.

“They will, we are amazing players, they will.” Shane whispers.

“You are very confident.” Ilya smiles.

“Yes, about this, yes.” Shane nods and he seals that promise with a kiss.

Every day Shane comes to Scott's house, sometimes on his own, sometimes with his parents. Ilya thinks it's unfair, this is the only real alone time that Kip and Scott get and it has been disturbed so much. “Tomorrow, maybe me and Shane go out?” Ilya asked.

“Where would you like to go?” Kip asked.

“Skating.” Ilya decided.

“Do you feel...”

“Fine. Yes.” Ilya nodded.

“That sounds like a good idea, we can...” Scott started.

“No we. Me and Shane.” Ilya said strongly.

“A date?” Kip asked excitedly.

“A date.” Ilya frowned. “For you two yes. Date. No teenagers bothering you. Me and Shane skate.”

“Ilya,” Scott said gently.

“I will text Shane now.” Ilya decided and he walked up to his room, he didn’t text him, instead he pressed for a video call, popping his phone on the night stand.

Shane had left a few hours ago and Ilya wasn’t used to the feeling of just missing someone as much as he missed him. “Ilya,” Shane’s face popped up, he was in the garden, sunglasses on and no shirt. Ilya couldn’t hide his expression. Shane looked gorgeous. “Ilyaa...”

“Sorry, you have no top on. Distracted.” Ilya shrugs. “Tomorrow, instead of coming here, we go out. Skating. Do not ask if I am up to it. I am fine.”

“Skating sounds good, I’ll book us tickets now.” Shane grins. “Just the two of us?”

“Yes. Kip and Scott deserve time alone.” Ilya smiled. “Why do you have no top?”

“I was working out,” Shane smiles.

“You work out no top?” Ilya chuckles.

“Sometimes.” Shane winks and Ilya just grins lazily and curls onto his side. “Headache?”

“No, it is okay.” Ilya smiled.

“I am looking forward to tomorrow,” Shane smiled. “We can go early, it’s quieter, then I can show you around a little?”

“I’d like that.” Ilya hummed.

“Is it a date?” Shane blurts.

“A...” Ilya sucked his lip, he remembered Kip's excited voice when he mentioned it. “I think, yes.”

“A date.” Shane smiles, “I’ve never been on a date before.”

“No, I have not.” Ilya smiled.

“I’m excited.” Shane grinned, “I need to go and help my mum, she’s calling me.” Shane sighed, “I’ll message you before I go to sleep.”

Ilya nodded, blew a little kiss and then ended the call. A date. His stomach twisted at the thought, but in a good way. There was a little tap at the door and Ilya blinked up as Scott walked in.

“Can we talk for a second?” Scott asked. Ilya nodded and Scott walked over and sat down on the chair opposite the bed, Ilya crossed his legs and looked at him.

“This is serious?” Ilya frowned.

“Well, maybe.” Scott nodded. “Tomorrow you’ll be out with Shane, I just want to check in on how you feel about that?”

“Excited. Fine. Good.” Ilya nodded. “Why?”

“I just don’t want you to be in a situation you are not ready for,” Scott said gently.

“I like Shane. Shane likes me. We will not hide.” Ilya nodded. “Shane is brave.”

“It is very brave, but how do you feel?” Scott asked.

“One day we go with no one asking how I feel.” Ilya groaned and he threw himself back on the bed. “I am scared. Shane has ideas. No hiding. Everything will be fine. We will get drafted. We are good players.”

“You’re phenomenal players.” Scott corrects.

“You think plan is stupid?” Ilya asks quietly.

“I think your plan is amazing, if it is what you both want, of course it will be hard, but I think for you...”

“It will be harder. Shane... he doesn’t understand that. I think it has not clicked for him.” Ilya sighs.

“Have you tried to explain it to him?” Scott asks.

“I will. But I like plan. No hiding.” Ilya decides.

“And when you have to go back home?” Ilya looked away at that. “I don’t want to push you Ilya, or make you feel upset, but there might be a day when you have to go back there.”

“I will find a way to not.” Ilya whispered. “When I get drafted, they give me the working permit, I can stay.”

“I will do everything I can for you not to go back there,” Scott promised.

“Thank you,” Ilya breathed.

“Tomorrow, you are going on your first date?” Scott smiled, changing the subject.

“Yes, I don’t... What do dates look like in Canada?” He whispers.

“Well, until I met Kip, I could not tell you, but just getting to know each other, having fun.” Scott smiled. He grabbed his wallet, “Your bank card.”

“Oh.” Ilya smiled. “Thank you.”

“The day after tomorrow we have to go and get your stitches out, you have a check up with the nutritionist and then we can do whatever you want.” Scott smiled.

“Thank you, for... For everything.” Ilya moved over off the bed and Scott stood up and Ilya wrapped his arms around him. “For the water, for the phone, for everything.” Ilya whispered.

“It’s okay,” Scott whispered, for the first time thinking that maybe he would make a good father.

Ilya stood in front of the mirror and sucked his lip, he didn’t really have any nice date clothes here, but he picked out the nicest sweats that Shane had packed and jumper. They were going skating, so it wasn’t like he needed to pick something too fancy, his curls were a mess from not being able to wash his hair fully but Kip had given him something to put in it and he thought he looked okay. The bruise around the bandage was starting to turn a horrible purple, but he knew it would fade soon.

“Well don’t you look sharp.” Scott smiled as he walked downstairs.

“Sharp.” Ilya rolled his eyes and turned to Kip. “I look okay?”

“My opinion does not count?” Scott pouted.

“You look good,” Kip smiled. “Shane is picking you up?”

“Yes.” Ilya smiled and he opened the fridge and pulled out a smoothie he had made last night, he had put some of the protein powders and fruits in. “We will eat after the skating.” Ilya sips the smoothie and licks his lips. “What will you two do?”

“We are going to go out for lunch and then a gallery,” Kip smiled. “Maybe dinner too.”

“Sounds nice.” Ilya nods and he rocks on his feet a little, nerves suddenly pooling in his stomach, but he finishes the smoothie just as Shane knocks on the door. “See you,” Ilya gave a little wave before heading out.

Shane was standing at the door, a big smile on his face, he looked good. It was the first time that Ilya had seen him not in athletic clothing, instead he was in black jeans, he had a hoody on with a denim jacket on top and his hair looked nice, bouncier. “You look good.” Ilya hummed.

“So do you,” Shane smiled and he stepped to the side so Ilya could walk with him. “It’s not a long walk,”

Ilya just nodded, they were walking so close together and Ilya took a breath before moving his hand and linking his fingers with Shane. No hiding. Shane smiled and gave his hand a tight squeeze.

Skating had been fun, they both rented a pair of skates, both complaining about the fit but they held hands and just skated around. Ilya didn’t think he had ever laughed or smiled so much, at one point he took his phone out and took photos of the two of them, selfies and videos of Shane doing some tricks. It felt so normal. So right. After the skating, Ilya rubbed his hands together, he felt cold and Shane wrapped his arms around him. “Hot chocolate?”

“Shane Hollander wants to eat chocolate?” Ilya grins.

“Drink it.” Shane smiles and he kisses Ilya’s hair before leading him to the small cafe, he orders two deluxe hot chocolates and Ilya rolls his eyes at it, “This kind of looks disgusting.” Shane chuckles as they find a little booth at the back. Shane slides in beside Ilya and Ilya grins, dips his fingers into the cream and licks it. Shane just gulps.

“It is tasty.” Ilya decides but he uses the little spoon to finish the cream and marshmallows on top before taking a sip of it, the hot liquid warming him up. Shane smiles and eats his, scooping some of the cream off before using the straw to sip it. Ilya grabs his phone again, takes a photo of their cream covered lips and he hardly recognises himself.

“You like to take photos,” Shane smiles.

“Never had a phone to do it before.” Ilya shrugs. “I like memories.”

“Me too.” Shane hums. “Do you want to eat here or somewhere else?” Shane asks. Ilya looks at the menu, but nothing really catches his eye.

“Somewhere else,” He decides and Shane nods his head in agreement.

Once they’ve finished the hot chocolates they walk around a little more, they end up in a small little market square and Ilya grins at the colourful stalls set up. “Wow.” He whispers. Shane smiles, watching him. “This is beautiful.” Ilya grins and he squeezes his hand tightly. They walk around the food stalls and Ilya’s eyes go wide when he recognises the familiar Russian writing and he tugs Shane's hand closer. He stares at the food he recognises so familiarly and his eyes water.

“Privet,” Ilya looked up quickly, the lady behind the stall smiling at him.

“Privet,” Ilya repeated and looked at the food. “Shane, it is Blini,” Ilya grinned.

“What is it?” Shane asked, looking at the pastries and pies in front of him. Ilya bit his lip trying to decide on how to describe it in English, but the lady took over.

“It is a thin pancake, we can make them sweet or savoury, a little like a crepe.” She explained, then turned back to Ilya and said softly in Russian, “You are far from home.”

“Da.” Ilya nodded, but he squeezed Shane’s hand. “I am home now.” He said back quietly. The woman cut up some of the sweet Blini putting them on the tasting plates and handed them to them both as she continued to speak to Ilya in Russian.

Shane watched the conversation with a smile, Ilya was so confident in speaking in Russian, he laughed, made the lady laugh, charmed her into more free samples and Shane watched him, he was glowing. “Shane,” He looked up as his name was said.

“Hmm?” Shane smiled.

“I asked him who his friend was, he introduced you as his boyfriend.” The lady grinned, “I said lovely to meet you.”

“Oh, boy... It’s nice to meet you too.” Shane grinned.

Ilya smiled, when he saw Shane not eating his food he picked it up and ate it too. “I will take some for Scott and Kip.” Ilya decided.

“That’s a nice idea.” Shane grinned. “And pick something for me to eat, maybe not so much sugar...”

“Pelmeni.” Ilya decided for him and ordered two savoury ones and then a handful of the sweet treats for Kip and Scott. He felt good, paying with his card, though he was sure Scott had probably put money on it, he wished he understood how it worked. The lady bagged everything up for them and Ilya was just grinning.

“You look happy,” Shane whispered.

“I feel happy.” Ilya hummed. “Best first date.” He pressed a kiss to his cheek and Shane just grinned.

“Best first date.” He decided and kissed his cheek.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Ilya cannot stop bouncing his knee, Kip and Scott are either side of him. Shane is sending little texts every now and again. Ilya desperately wishes Shane was there too, but also, he knows that he hates hospitals. He will see him tomorrow. They had one more week left before they would go back to school.

“Rozanov.” The doctor called and Ilya gulped as he walked into the room.

He had already had his scan, already had his blood taken, now he just needed the results and the stitches to be removed. Ilya sat down on the examination bed, Scott and Kip stood awkwardly at his sides. “I am dying?”

“No, Ilya, you are not dying,” The doctor said softly. “But I am not satisfied by your bloods,”

“What... What do you mean by not satisfied?” Kip asked.

“You are anemic, this is what is causing the tiredness. Your body is not able to absorb nutrients on its own. The nutritionist will amend your diet plan, but I would like for you to have an IV drip with a push on iron and other vitamins that you are lacking.”

“Oh.” Ilya just nodded, he really didn’t understand anything.

“I would like to add that this is not a result of bad eating habits, it can be genetic, or just happen. Of course there are things we can do to improve this, but this is not because of anything that you have done, Ilya.” The doctor says gently and Ilya just nods slowly. “You have your appointment with the nutritionist in an hour, we can do the IV whilst you wait.”

“Okay,” Ilya nodded.

“Your scans have all come back clear, the swelling is completely gone. How are the headaches?”

“Fine.” Ilya looked down.

“Ilya,” Kip pressed.

“Not so fine.” Ilya sighs. “Behind my eye, hurts.” Ilya pointed to where he had been getting the most pain. “I don’t like the painkillers. I think funny.”

“Let’s have a little look.” She grabs a pen light and shines it in his front of his eyes. He blinks and groans quietly. “Light sensitivity, it looks like you have some photophobia, this means lights can cause issues for you. It could just be a result of the injury, it is still healing and the headaches will be common. I can have a look at some lighter painkillers for you.”

Ilya just nodded, he trusted that Kip and Scott would be able to tell him everything again.

“Will the lights affect his ability to play hockey?” Scott asked.

“No.” Ilya said quickly. “It will not.”

“Easy,” Kip said gently.

“It is not something that can be cured, there are ways to avoid problems, not looking directly at big lights, if you use screens dim them, many sports people have this and work through it, it can cause migraines so having medication for migraines ready and just knowing your own limits.”

Kip and Scott exchanged looks, both knowing that Ilya would push any limits given to him.

“Okay.” Ilya nodded.

The doctor wrote up the prescription and handed it to Kip and they were taken to yet another waiting room. A nurse greeted them and Ilya winced as they did the IV, his arms were still bruised from the blood tests at the hospital.

“You need anything?” Kip asked him.

Ilya shook his head, he picked his phone from his pocket, crossed his leg on the chair and opened up the chat with Shane.

Shane: Guess what!

Ilya: ?

Shane: Dad says we are all going to the Montreal game together. The six of us. Scott got us a box.

Ilya frowned and looked up at Scott. “We are going to watch hockey?”

Scott chuckled and another text came in.

Shane: Was meant to be a surprise...

“We are going to a game?”

“Yes, tomorrow night.” Scott smiled.

“I have only been to games in Russia.” Ilya said excitedly. “Real... Real hockey?”

“Yes.” Scott grinned.

“You are coming?” Ilya asked Kip.

“Yes,” Kip smiled.

“Fun date night.” Ilya teased and he went back to his phone.

Shane: Are you still at the hospital?

Ilya: Yes,. I am not dying.

Ilya sends a selfie of himself, the IV in the background, but he's grinning. He really can't believe that they will be going to a game together.

Shane: I am glad you are not dying, x what is that for?

Ilya handed the phone over to Kip, "I do not know." He shrugs and Kip sends a text to Shane for him.

Ilya: Low iron and lack of vitamins, this is to top it all up and then take some prescribed strength vitamins. Scans were all clear, weight is good, waiting for the Nutritionist and the stitches to be removed. - Kip

"Thank you," Ilya smiled and he settled back against the chair and closed his eyes. "Did you eat all of the pastries?"

"No, there are still some left." Scott chuckled. "They were delicious though."

"I will take two for Yuna and David." Ilya decided. "Or I can go back tomorrow to buy some."

"That would be really nice of you," Kip smiled. "It was a lovely gesture. I had a look online, her bakery isn't too far from the school. You could go on the weekends if you don't have games."

"I would like that." Ilya nodded.

The hour passed slowly, the nurse came and removed the stitches and it hurt a lot but Ilya just closed his eyes and focused on tomorrow. The meeting with the nutritionist was okay, they were not as pleased with him as the doctor. Even though he was trying, they wanted him to try more. Ilya felt a little defeated on the way home.

"Would you like to go somewhere?" Scott asked as they got in the car. They had gone to the pharmacy and Ilya had at least five boxes of tablets he didn't know what they were for.

"I am feeling tired. I go to bed? You two go out," Ilya sighed.

"We'll see." Kip shrugged. "Was thinking about a little movie night, we could ask Shane if he wants to come over. Tomorrow we have a little drive before we get to the arena, we'll be staying at a hotel."

"A hotel?" Ilya asked quietly. "I... But money?"

"It's all compensated for by me being there." Scott shrugged.

"You old player." Ilya frowned.

"MVP." Scott winked and Ilya rolled his eyes. He wasn't too sure if he believed what Scott said, surely it would have cost something.

“When I am MVP I pay you back.” Ilya decided and Scott just grinned at that.

“So, movie night, Shane...” Kip chuckled.

“Okay, you can text him.” Ilya nodded. “I am tired.”

Kip smiled, he already had his phone out.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Ilya is smiling, it feels strange, but good. He is happy. Kip had gone through all of the tablets with him, even brought him a little box with the days of the week so he would have just what he needed, something that made Ilya feel more at ease. It wasn't that he thought he would take all of the tablets at once, but he didn't trust his brain. Scott would keep the painkillers in his office, and the migraine tablets if the pain behind his eyes continued. All Ilya would be in charge of was the iron and supplements. Kip had even set Ilya's phone with daily reminders to take them.

Shane had come over the night before, they had sat in the cinema room, Scott and Kip cuddled on the back seats and Ilya and Shane sat on the floor on cushions. It was just like the movie night back in their room, only the laptop screen was now a screen that fitted against the whole wall. "When we have our own place, we will have one just as big," Shane smiled and Ilya just grinned, he liked it when Shane spoke like that.

That morning Ilya had made his way to the food market on his own. He had used the map on his phone to find it, and it had been a nice walk. He spent an hour talking to Natalya the lady behind the counter, he reminded her so much of home that it hurt. He had brought pastries for everyone and an iced coffee for himself, it had been a good morning.

Now they were in the car, Ilya had Scott's glasses on, he had eaten a nice lunch with Kip and Scott and packed his bag with his clothes for tonight. He had taken a painkiller for his headache, he didn't want to be bothered by it when he got there.

"So tonight," Kip started and Ilya noticed that Scott gripped the steering wheel tighter.

"Tonight..." Ilya frowned.

"You and Shane will be sharing a room." Kip hummed. "And well, we don't really know what you are... But well, we wanted to talk to you about being safe."

"Sex talk?" Ilya laughed. "You give me sex talk?"

"It might not be our place but..." Ilya knew the end of the sentence, there was no one else to give him that talk. "Are you..."

"I met Shane not even month. I had traumatic head injury. No. We are not having sex." Ilya said bluntly.

"Okay, okay, good, I mean you're right." Scott said and Kip laughed a little.

"I had sex." Ilya shrugs. "No talk needed."

"Was it safe?" Kip asked, turning around so he could see him better. Ilya gave him a shrug.

“With a boy?” Kip asked and Scott looked at him.

“A... Older, yes.” Ilya nodded, he fiddled with his hands. “Shane asked if it was... If i wanted... It wasn’t...” He sighed and rubbed the back of his head. “If it did not happen, my coach would not have found out, I would not be here. Was... Was worth it in the end.” Ilya managed to get out.

“Ilya,” Kip whispered.

“Happy ending.” Ilya shrugged.

“Well, when you and Shane are ready there are things you both need to know...” Kip said gently.

“Scott is blushing.” Ilya smirked and Kip tried not to laugh as he finished the sentence.

The stadium was crowded and Ilya was bouncing in his seat beside Shane, Shane who was wearing a Montreal jumper, had brought them both foam fingers and was eating popcorn. Shane Hollander was eating popcorn., Ilya had made sure to take a photo of him. The lights bothered him and he put his sunglasses back on, he noticed he was not the only one in the crowd wearing them. He had taken so many photos, group ones, ones of him and Scott, and of Kip, one with him and Yuna and David. He was just so happy. When the game started Shane and his mum went into full analysis mode, Ilya couldn’t help but laugh at them. David and Kip looked vaguely interested and Scott was just smiling.

“You miss it?” Ilya asked.

“Every day.” Scott nodded. “But i am old man.”

“Very.” Ilya corrected.

“I like coaching though.”

Ilya just nodded, “You are good at it.” He smiled and he turned to focus on the team. He was watching the Captain closely, he was shouting at the team, giving them encouragement, he scored the two goals in the first period and the team seemed to love him. He tried to picture himself as Captain. Could he be as inspiring?

Shane leaned over and took his hand in his, “You okay?” He whispered.

“Yes.” Ilya nodded. “More than, yes.” Ilya smiled and he squeezed his hand softly. He took a handful of Shane’s popcorn and hummed. The rest of the game was just as loud, just as exciting.

“I cannot wait for that to be us.” Ilya whispered as he watched the winning team circle around in victory.

“Do you think we would get drafted to the same team?” Shane whispers.

“I do not know.” Ilya sighed. “Even if we are not, when you win, I will be screaming the loudest.”

“And what if I win against you?” Shane hummed.

“Will not happen.” Ilya smiles and Shane chuckles and leans into him more, Ilya wants to kiss him, he wants to kiss him so badly, but instead he squeezes his hand. The smile that Shane sends him tells him everything he needs to know; he wanted to kiss him just as bad.

They go for dinner, the six of them after the game. Shane orders a chicken salad with one slice of garlic bread and Ilya orders a chicken pasta. He feels nervous about eating with them all, he hates that these thoughts cross his mind, food had never been the issue so he didn’t know why it was all of a sudden. It was a nice restaurant and when the food came, Yuna was so busy talking with Scott about the game that no one focused on him or his eating, and he ate all of his food, and he couldn’t stop smiling.

“So, are you ready for your last surprise?” Scott asked.

“There is more?” Ilya asked.

“One more.” Scott nodded.

“What is it?” Ilya asked, eyes wide.

“Well the manager of the Montreal team is a good friend of mine, how I ended up with the box. I mentioned I was bringing two star players and he’s offered you the full tour and a go on the ice tomorrow. Both of you.”

“What?” Shane shrieked and Yuna couldn’t help but laugh at that.

“Tomorrow morning,” Kip smiled.

“I don’t have my skates.” Shane frowned.

“You do. You both do.” Yuna smiled. “Ilya we brought you some new ones, we thought you wouldn’t want rented ones...”

“You did?” Ilya whispered, he didn’t know why his eyes were watering so much. He felt like this all must be some sort of dream, he wiped his eyes quickly, he didn’t want anyone to look over and see him. Shane wrapped his arm around his waist and kissed his hair.

“It’s okay,” Shane promises.

“Sorry... I...” Ilya blinked up at Scott who walked around the table and wrapped him in a hug. “Thank you.”

“You deserve happiness Ilya, it’s okay to feel this.” Scott promised.

The second bed in the hotel room didn't even get looked at, well, it did for their bags. But when they got into bed, Shane in another Montreal top and his boxers and Ilya just in his boxers, they cuddled together. "I am proud of you." Shane whispered.

"I have done nothing." Ilya whispered.

"You have." Shane said, shaking his head. "Tomorrow is going to be amazing."

"I hope we do not fall." Ilya laughed.

"Me too." Shane hummed.

"Coming here. Kip gave me sex talk." Ilya hummed, he was idly drawing little patterns on Shane's chest under his top. It wasn't sexual, just comforting but it was making Shane shiver.

"He did?" Shane couldn't imagine that.

"It was funny. I said we not ready for sex." Ilya whispered.

"Good, I mean... I want to, one day." Shane added.

"One day." Ilya smiled and he leaned up and kissed him so slowly, a little whimper falling from Shane's lips. He pulled back, smiling softly. "Goodnight Shane,"

"Goodnight Ilya," Shane whispered and they fell asleep in each other's arms, no nightmares disturbing them and it was the longest that both boys had slept in such a long time.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

The skates fit perfectly, they were expensive, better than the ones he had at the school. He stepped on the ice first and then grinned at Shane who followed behind quickly. The tour of the stadium had been amazing, as soon as they set foot in the locker room Ilya knew that this really was what his life was going to be.

“Hey boys,”

“Holy fuck.” Shane whispered. “It’s Teddy Brooks.” Ilya just nodded, he recognised him from the game last night. The Captain. He skated over to them, Shane was embarrassingly aware that his mother was filming the encounter. “Scott, good to see you man,” He gave a wave “Kip.”

“Thank you for doing this, they are very excited. They are also the most talented players at the school.” Scott smiled and Ilya was pretty sure he forgot how to speak English.

“Lets see what you got.” Ilya had expected them just to skate, but Teddy stood back, watched them aim, and gave some tips on how to navigate the different zones. It was amazing. They stayed on the ice for what felt like hours, Scott even joined them for a light two on two. Ilya wasn’t too sure if Scott and Teddy had let Ilya and Shane score against them, but Ilya had put everything he had into it.

“Have you thought about what teams you’re looking for?” Teddy asked, they had moved to the stands.

“I’d like a home team, I don’t... I don’t think I’d be ready to move away from my family,” Shane said honestly. “But, to be honest the school, it’s helping me with that.”

“It can be tough, I was so homesick my Rookie year,” Teddy laughed. “And yourself Ilya?”

“Anywhere that would take me.” Ilya shrugged and he meant it. “But... Like Shane I think... I’d like to be close to home.” He whispered and he looked up at Scott who gave him a soft smile. They knew what home he was talking about.

“I hope you don’t mind me saying, but Scott has told me about your relationship.” Teddy said softly and Shane’s eyes went so wide. “We are trying, Scott here is an ambassador for LGBTQ rights, I can’t promise you that by the time you are drafted next year that the skating world will be different, but we are trying. There are policies being put in place.”

“That’s... Thank you for saying that,” Shane said, reaching out for Ilya’s hand who was already meeting his touch. “We said we wouldn’t hide it. Do you think...?”

“It would avoid a scandal in the end.” Teddy shrugged. “It can have its own challenges though, I think you are both extremely brave and if there is anything that I can do to help you when you do get drafted, then I want to help.”

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered.

The drive home Ilya was quiet, Scott and Kip kept on looking at him, Shane was going back with his parents, they had family to visit and he would be away for the rest of the weekend. Ilya had kissed him goodbye, hugged Yuna and David, thanked them again for the skates and climbed into the car.

“Ilya,” Kip's voice was so gentle and Ilya opened his eyes, he had fallen asleep. “We’re home.”

Ilya nodded slowly and he got out of the car, stretching a little. He grabbed his bag and his new skates and carried them up to his room. “Are you okay?” Scott’s voice filled in from the door as Ilya sat down on the bed.

“My head is hurting.” Ilya said quietly. “Not because,” He tapped the bruise. “Just thoughts,”

“Teddy was very amazed at your skill,” Scott smiled and he moved into the room and sat beside him.

“I want to be Captain.” Ilya whispered.

“You are the Captain.” Scott smiled. “And you are going to be fantastic at it.”

“Do you think... Do players ever get drafted to the same team?” Ilya asked.

“It’s rare.” Scott said lightly. “But I think that you and Shane, no matter what happens, you’ll make it work.”

“Thank you, I... I wish I knew more words to say it. But thank you.” Ilya breathed.

Scott just wrapped an arm around his shoulder and pulled him in close, holding him tight until he felt Ilya fall asleep against him.

Ilya opened the laptop and bit his lip, he couldn’t do this. He turned off his camera, turned it back on, turned it back off. “Ilya?” A thick Russian accent filled the speakers and he gulped. “Ilya, it’s nice to meet you, my name is Ivan,”

“Privet,” Ilya breathed.

“You do not need to keep the camera on, I just would like to know that you are in a safe space right now?” It was strange to hear Russian in Scott’s house.

“I am in my room.” Ilya repeated, “It is safe.” He added quickly. Suddenly he felt like his Russian wouldn’t even be enough for this type of conversation.

“This is session one, it’s an hour and then we will create a plan for regular talks, I must say that I will keep your confidence, but if you say anything that makes me feel that you are at risk or people around you are at risk then I have a duty to report it,”

“I understand.” Ilya breathes.

“Is there anything that you would like to start with? Or would you prefer me to ask questions and see where they lead?”

“Questions.” Ilya pulled his knees up to his chest. He could do this.

“Okay, how are you feeling right now? Talking to me.”

“Scared. Relieved.” Ilya whispered. “I feel scared a lot, but also, I am happy.”

“Happy is good, what makes you happy?”

“Shane, he’s my boyfriend. Scott and Kip. Shane’s parents. Being here in this house.”

“Tell me about Shane,”

“Shane is everything I cannot be. He is smart, confident, he can talk to anyone, fits in, always smiling and even when he is in pain he smiles through it. When I am in pain I just want to close my eyes.”

“What do you think is holding you back from talking to people?”

“I think it is because I don’t always understand what they say, sometimes I think people just put up with me. English is hard. Maybe I should try more,” Ilya rubbed his eyes, he felt drained already and they hadn’t really touched on anything too bad.

“Scott has told me you are the Captain, how does that make you feel?”

“I am a good player, probably the best player on the team. Maybe not as good as Shane, but I won’t tell him that, but I have never been good with people. But I think that I can do it. I think that I would be good. I love hockey. I love winning. I am scared to fail or that I would not be good enough, but I think Scott would not let me fail.” Ilya grabbed his orange juice and sipped it. Kip had been right, it was better from the orange rather than the bottle.

“It is nice to hear you have that positive view on it, it will be a lot of pressure. Sometimes we fail, but the important thing is that we get back up again.”

Ilya took a breath, he didn’t know what to say to that. “You are doing well so far with this session. Would you like to talk about what happened in Russia?”

Ilya gulped. “No.” He managed to get out. “Not yet, I... Maybe next time.” He knew he had promised to talk about it, to tell them everything, but he couldn’t. Not yet. “I know I do not... Cannot go back there. I don’t know if that is possible and that terrifies me.”

“There are programs that can help you with that,” Ivan assured him. “I can share some with Scott. Are you looking forward to going back to school?”

“Yes. I want to get back into my routine with hockey, I want to be the best. I want to try to be better when I go. To talk more. I think there is nice people there. But I don’t want to hide who I am. I am scared they will not take it well. Everyone keeps saying that we are brave, but I don’t want to have to be brave, I just want it to be normal.”

“I understand that Ilya, unfortunately we live in a world where sadly we are just not there yet.” Ivan said gently. “But you can be yourself, people will accept you and people will not, but it is your job to focus on the acceptance.”

“Shane was hurt because of who he is, It terrifies me that he would be hurt again.”

“Not you being hurt?” Ivan frowns.

“No, I don’t... I don’t care if I am hurt, or if anything happens to me. I have been through that, I don’t want Shane to have to go through that again. He still has nightmares.”

“You should care about you being hurt too,” Ivan said softly. “Have you ever hurt yourself before?”

“When I first got to the school. I felt so alone, even in Russia I didn’t have anyone there either but it was all so new, I didn’t understand. I cut my arm, I didn’t feel anything after. I didn’t like the blood, I haven’t done it again.” Ilya wiped his eyes, he hadn’t thought about it in so long, the scar was barely visible.

“And with the eating, that is a form of you hurting yourself, do you do that deliberately?”

“I really don’t know. I didn’t realise it was something I did.” Ilya sighed, he just hoped he would believe him. “I know it is important for hockey, to have energy, to build muscle. I wouldn’t deliberately do something that would stop me from doing well.”

“I understand,” Ivan nodded.

They spoke a little more and when the hour was up Ilya was already dreading the next session. If this was how it was without them talking about anything too serious, he wasn’t too sure what it would be like when they actually spoke about something more. He took a breath and closed the laptop. He sent a text to Shane, knowing that he was waiting to see how it went.

Ilya: It’s finished. I am tired. Miss you.

Shane: Have a little nap, I will see you tomorrow. X

Ilya smiled at the text, tomorrow was their last full day before they went back to school. He picked up Kip’s laptop and took it downstairs, he could hear Scott on the phone, he was shouting about something and Ilya frowned. He heard Scott shout before, at practice he would bark orders, his passion was a huge part of how he is but this wasn’t like that, he

looked angry. He saw Ilya and stopped before moving to the garden and closing the door and walking out of earshot.

“Hey, how did it go?” Kip asked, he was chewing his lip, he looked worried about something and Ilya felt sick.

“What is wrong?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Nothing, just some school stuff.” Kip said and Ilya knew that he was lying, could feel it in his bones. “Come here,” Kip whispered and held his arms out and Ilya wrapped himself into the embrace. “Do you want to talk about your call?” Ilya shook his head and Kip led him to the sofa.

“Scott is okay?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Yes, just a bad meeting, but it will be okay.” Kip nodded. “I’m sorry he had to take the call now, we wanted to both be here for when yours finished.”

“It’s okay,” He whispered. “My head is hurting,”

“Painkiller?” Kip asked softly.

“Please.” Ilya nodded. Kip stood up and Ilya curled back onto the sofa, his eyes kept looking towards the garden waiting for Scott to come back, he didn’t know why he had a knot in his stomach. Kip came back with the painkiller and a bottle of water and Ilya took it quickly. “I’m going to miss you.” Ilya whispered.

“I’m going to miss you too,” Kip smiled, “But I like to pop up at the school every now and again, and I’ll come to your games Captain.”

“Thank you.” Ilya smiles.

A few minutes later Scott walks back in, he smiles and crouches down and ruffles Ilya’s hair softly. “You okay?”

“I spoke.” Ilya nodded, knowing that was what he was asking. “A little.” He added.

“I’m proud of you.” Scott smiled and he sat on the chair beside him and Ilya blinked up at him. “It’s okay, I promise. The phone call, nothing to worry about.”

Ilya nodded and he allowed his brain to shut down for a while and fall asleep. As his eyes closed he missed the way that Scott wiped his eyes and the worried expression on Kip's face.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Ilya was surprised at how hard it was to say goodbye to Kip. Kip had become more than a friend, someone he looked up to, someone who was there unconditionally for him. Someone Ilya so desperately wanted to make proud.

“Next weekend, I’ll be up.” Kip promised and Scott smiled and kissed his husband on the lips with a promise to call him later and drove them to the school.

“Shane is meeting us at the school,” Scott said as he turned to Ilya in the front seat.

“Yes,” Ilya nodded. “He text me.”

“Good, we have practice tonight, you’ll be introduced as Captain,” Scott smiled. “Then you will work with me and the other assistants on what drills we need to do, the plays,”

“Big responsibility.” Ilya nodded, “I can do it.”

“I know.” Scott smiled. “I know.”

“Ilya,” Shane grinned as soon as the door opened. Ilya was already on his bed, Shane rushed in and didn’t even give Ilya a chance to stand up before he wrapped his arms around him.

“Missed you.”

“Missed you too,” Ilya smiled and he pressed a kiss to his neck, the only skin he could reach. He loved the little sound that left Shane’s lips and he pulled back quickly when he realised Yuna and David were standing there, bags in hand.

“My parents brought us things,” Shane says softly and he sits on the bed and takes Ilya’s hand.

“It’s good to see you again Ilya, those cakes you gave us were delicious.” Yuna smiled and she deposited bags on Shane’s bed and walked over and hugged him, Ilya smiled and hugged David too.

“You are welcome.” Ilya smiles and he rocks on his feet. “You have been spoiled?” He asks, looking at Shane.

“We.” Shane grinned.

“So, we took Shane shopping for school things, just essential bits, socks, underwear, some new sweats and things. We got you the same, if you need to change anything we can get them for you next weekend.”

“You... Underwear and socks?” Ilya whispered.

“Yes,” Yuna nodded as if it was the simplest thing in the world and all Ilya could think about was asking his brother when he needed new ones and his brother just laughing at him.

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered and he hugged her again. He really couldn’t believe how lucky he was.

“I picked up some different flavour granola bars and protein shakes, there’s a weird orange one that I like but Shane thinks smells weird,” David grins.

“Thank you,” Ilya whispers.

“Well, we are going to go. If you need anything you have our number and we will come up for the next game. Have a great practice, both of you.” She smiles and hugs them both one more time as does David and then they leave.

“Sorry, they are a little much,” Shane whispers.

“I love them.” Ilya breathes and he picks up the bag with his underwear, nothing fancy, just nice boxers. “Did you help pick them?” Ilya grins.

“No, I didn’t even know until they came home.” Shane chuckles and Ilya smiles and puts his things away. “Are you doing okay?”

“Better.” Ilya smiles. He lays on the bed and Shane cuddles into him and for a few minutes they just breathe each other in, legs tangled together. There’s a knock at the door and Ilya curses and looks at Shane, “Come in,” He shouts and doesn’t move.

Sam walks in, he sees the two of them and freezes, but then he walks in and sits on the chair at the desk. “Good to see you alive man.”

“Is it?” Ilya asks.

“You made me worried. Shane told me you were good, I realised I didn’t have your number. So…” He hands him his phone and Ilya frowns. “You put your number in.”

“I do not know if I want you to have my number.” Ilya says but he grabs his and copies it in.

“I got it now,” Sam grins. “But honestly, we were all worried, we’re sorry man.”

“You did not drug my drink.” Ilya shrugs and Shane takes his hand and plays with his fingers. “Thank you. Scott, Hunter, he said that you helped Shane. Thank you.” Ilya says with a serious tone.

“Friends are for.” Sam nods. “So this…” He waves his hand between them.

“This.” Shane nods.

“Happy for the two of you,” Sam smiles and spins around on the chair a little. “Wait, is that a foam finger? You went to the game?” He asks excitedly and Shane grins, he grabs his phone and shows him all of the photos, talks about their encounter with Teddy Brooks and Sam is

just grinning at them. Ilya closes his eyes on the bed, rests his head on the cushion and listens to the chatter of his boyfriend and friend.

Sam stayed in their room for a little longer before leaving when he realised that Ilya had fallen asleep on the bed. Shane had grabbed the posters he had brought from the game and started to stick them on the wall. He wished he had printed off some photos of them, he sent some to his mum asking her to print them for next time, he wanted their room to be a reflection of them. He wanted Ilya to have somewhere nice.

“You look nervous,” Shane whispered as they walked down to the gym.

“I am.” Ilya said honestly. “Sam was good, he is good friend for you.”

“For us.” Shane corrected and Ilya pulled a face and Shane just rolled his eyes.

When they walked in they were the first ones there. Shane couldn’t help but look around the room, he had been in the crowd, been in the rink, but he hadn’t been in the locker rooms.

“You are safe. I will not let anyone hurt you.” Ilya breathed and he pulled Shane into his arms.

“Thank you,” Shane whispered. “I’m okay.”

“You’re safe.” Ilya promised and pressed a kiss to his neck again, he realised quickly that it was his sweet spot and he wanted to explore it more, wanting to hear that sound come from his lips over and over.

Within ten minutes the whole team was in the room, Scott and the assistants and Ilya’s hands were trembling. Could he do this? Shane was right there, eyes big and brown and Ilya wanted to talk to him again, just triple check that he was ready for this.

“So of course we all know that Winters and Michaels have left, we are sad that they have gone a few months earlier than planned, but it is a good opportunity for them both. We have ten games left of our season before the Summer break. There is a cup with our names on it and I know that your Captain is going to lead us there.” Scott’s voice took charge and the room erupted in cheers and then suddenly everyone was looking at Ilya.

“You can do this.” Shane whispered.

“Before we talk about the game.” Ilya started, there was a nervous tilt in his voice, he had been thinking about everything he wanted to say, wrote it on his phone in Russian and translated it to English, he had tried to memorise it all. “I do not want to go into this hiding. I respect each of you.”

“You couldn’t stop calling us idiots, losers and useless last term,” One of the guys laughed.

“I respect you, but that does not change what I said. Or that it is true.” Ilya says with a smirk and to his and Shane’s surprise the group laugh. “I love hockey. I am good at hockey. Hockey was escape for me.” He breathes. “Hockey is escape for all of us. But this hockey. This team needs to have respect.” He wants to take his phone out, to read what he needs to say next but

he looks at Shane and the words come back to him. “No slurs. No racism. No homophobic language. I hear it. I report it. You’re gone.”

Sam cheered at that and Ilya gave him a nod.

“I am your Captain. I will make sure we win. We will win. But we will not be a team to hurt others. I am with Shane. Shane is my boyfriend. It is simple. We play good hockey. We win cup.”

There was a moment of hesitation, but Sam started the cheer and though a few of the older players exchanged glances no one said anything negative. “Now. We need drills.” Ilya decided and he started to throw out what they were doing.

“You did amazing.” Shane smiled and he wrapped his arms around him.

“I forgot to say things.” Ilya grumbled.

“Put it in a newsletter,” Shane hummed and Ilya hit his arm playfully.

The practice was good, Shane was an amazing asset to the team and Ilya had seen him mess around on the ice, but playing - he was the best player on the team. When it finished, Ilya was sweating, he thought maybe he had pushed himself a little harder than he should have.

“Ilya, you good?” Scott asked, walking over to him.

“Tired, maybe too much.” Ilya sighed.

“You did amazing. I knew you’d be a fantastic Captain.” Scott smiled. “Go have a shower, get something to eat and go to sleep, headache?”

“No, just tired. Not used to moving so much. You made me lazy.” Ilya pouted.

“Okay.” Scott chuckled.

Ilya finished tidying up and headed to the changing room. He put his skates in his locker and realised everyone was waiting for him to say something. “What I need to constantly tell you, you did okay?” Ilya asked and they laughed and he took a breath and told them what went well, what needs to improve on, but he tried to be nice. When they finished Ilya rubbed his eyes and smiled at Shane.

“Shall we shower upstairs?” Ilya asked nervously.

“I…” Shane nodded.

Sam who had watched the two of them rolled his eyes, “You two are kinda cute.”

“Just kinda?” Shane pouted and Ilya stared at Shane, he couldn’t believe how confident he was about their relationship, after everything he had been through, he could smile and pout and tease. He wished he could be like that.

“I need to get something from Hunter.” Ilya said and stood up and walked to the office.

“Hey,” Scott said gently when he saw Ilya poke his head in.

“Need play book.” Ilya said softly. Scott nodded and he grabbed it from the shelf and handed it to him. “Thanks.”

“Don’t do too much tonight, sleep. We can go through it tomorrow,” Scott assured him. Ilya just nodded and he smiled when he saw the photo of Kip and Scott from their wedding day on the desk. He hadn’t really noticed it before. “What you said in the locker room, it was good. We will support you as well, make sure that it happens.”

“I do not want Shane to get hurt in locker room.” Ilya whispered.

“No one will.” Scott promised. He went to say something else when his phone started to ring and he sighed, “I need to take this, I will see you later.”

Ilya frowned and nodded before heading out and up to his room, he could already hear the shower running and he stripped off down to his boxers and put the dirty clothes in their basket and smiled at the domesticatedness of it. Shane came out with his towel wrapped around his waist, his hair wet and he grinned at him.

“You’re back.” Shane smiled.

“Picked up book.” Ilya gestures to the book he had thrown onto the desk. “I will shower now.” Ilya breathed, if he didn’t he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from kissing or touching Shane. Shane nodded his head slowly and he stepped to the side to get his clothes as Ilya made his way into the bathroom.

The first week back at the school was good, he loved the routine of classes, hockey and practice and being the Captain was fun. Shane was spending a little time in the common room, building on the team spirit and Ilya had even spent some time with them too. Shane’s bed wasn’t slept in at all and Ilya loved falling asleep on Shane’s chest. His headaches were still there and he had gone down twice for headache tablets.

“Are you okay?” Misha asked. It was Sunday and Ilya was happy to spend some time with the young boy. “Mum said that you were hurt.”

“I fell, hit my head.” Ilya nodded. “But better now.”

“Oh, I’m glad you’re okay.” Misha smiled and he tightened his skates. Ilya did the same and they skated around. Ilya taught him his technique, showing him how to move his knees and Misha was doing really well.

“Rozanov, what’s a fag?”

The word made Ilya freeze.

“Rozanov...” Misha frowned, there must have been something in his voice because Scott who had been setting out drills for another practice looked over. “Ilya...”

“You do not say that word.” Ilya finally breathes.

“Some... Someone was saying it and I didn’t know,” Misha looks down, his eyes watering and Scott watches the two of them. Ilya skates closer and crouches down, “Is it bad?”

“Yes.” Ilya whispered. “It’s a bad word for men who love men. It is not... not tolerated on the ice.”

“I don’t think there is anything wrong with it, Ilya.” Misha whispered. “I’m sorry for hurting you.”

“Shh, it is okay.” Ilya wrapped the young boy in his arms. “Come on, we will beat Hunters accuracy score.” Ilya said and pulled back and he continued to work on his aim.

Once his two hours were up Misha headed out, hugging Ilya tight again and whispering another apology to him.

“Are you okay?” Scott asked as he leaned across the boards.

“You heard.” Ilya breathed.

“I heard what you said, we can’t fix the world in a day Ilya.” Scott whispered as Ilya skated over to him.

“The world shouldn’t be broken.” Ilya mumbled.

“Come on, lets go through the runs for tomorrow's practice, your first game on Saturday as Captain,” Scott smiled. Ilya just nodded, “Shane is doing well on the team.” Another nod, Scott could practically see Ilya closing himself off. “You know, I was going to face time Kip, he wanted to show off some new art he wanted to buy. Should we call him?”

Ilya sucked his lip and then nodded his head and even though he knew Ilya was upset about the word he had heard, he still smiled knowing that his husband was the one he wanted to help him.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Their first game is at home. The rink is full with families of the team and some of the other schools. It feels different from the practices or any games he's played before. The rink is loud, the lights are dimmer and brighter all at the same time. His hands have never been this sweaty before.

"Ilya," Shane whispered.

"I feel sick." Ilya breathed.

"It's just nerves." Shane says softly. Ilya nodded slowly, nerves and headache, he didn't tell anyone that he had thrown up twice.

"Ready Cap?" Sam and the team walked in and Ilya gripped Shane's hand tighter.

Ilya took a breath, he had done the same on his phone, wrote it in Russian, translated it to English and he tried to think about the words, but he couldn't remember them, even in Russian.

"We win." Ilya shouted. "First game, we show them we are the best." He shouted it louder that time, his words screaming against his skull. The group erupted in cheers and then they were on the ice.

It's a fast paced first period, Ilya pushes the thoughts of everything away, he gets the puck, he plays hard, shoulders into another player, ref whistles as a warning but he scores. He gets the puck again against their Captain, passes it to Shane, he zooms forward, Shane passes it back to him, he scores. Ilya grins at that and Shane skates over to him and wraps his arms around him and kisses his cheek. Ilya grins and nudges his shoulder playfully.

It continues like that for the second period, during their break Ilya shouts words of encouragement, shouts when they need to pass and commands the team with everything he has. The other school gets a goal in and Ilya retaliates by getting another two. When the final whistle blows his team swarm the rink as if they had just won the championships.

"A fucking hatrick!" One of them shouts, "A fucking hatrick, first game back, you fucking did it Cap."

"We did it." Ilya corrects.

They line up to shake their hands, and that's when it happens. Shane is at the end of the line and Ilya doesn't know why he's not by his side, it just happened that way, but he misses having him so close. But then he's glad he's not there.

“Fucking cocksucker.” The Captain spits at him. A physical spit lands on his face and Ilya’s hands tremble, before he realises what he is doing he connects his fist with his jaw and all hell breaks loose.

“Rozanov!” The team is pulling him back and the other schools don’t try to get the Captain away from them, instead they join in. It takes Scott and the referees to break it up and Ilya can see from the look Scott gives him that he’s pissed at him. Guilt swarms inside of him and Ilya rushes off the ice, makes his way as quickly as he can to the bathrooms before he throws up again.

“Let it out bud,” Kip is there. “That was an impressive punch.”

Ilya throws up again, it’s just bile and water and he slumps back against the wall. Kip bends down and takes off the skates and crouches beside him. “What did he say?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Ilya breathes. “I messed it up.”

“You reacted.” Kip agrees. “We need to work on that.”

The locker room suddenly became full of noise and Ilya groaned, hands coming up to his eyes. He stood up shakily and walked out, he found Shane straight away. His eyes were wide, terrified.

“Fucking suckerpunched.” Sam claps Ilya on the back and Ilya shakes his head. The group don’t stop talking, shouting, and Ilya stands up on the bench, grabs one of the sticks and hits it against the locker to shut them up.

“Enough!” Ilya shouts.

They all stop and look at him, “That should not happen.” Ilya breathes. Scott is standing beside Kip, Shane’s parents have managed to come in too. God, he really fucked it up in front of everyone. “I made mistake. Punching prick. Bad.” He breathes. “We cannot change the world in one day.” Ilya doesn’t look at Scott, he can feel the tears coming down his cheeks. “But I can’t... We cannot punch. We smile. We ignore. We report.”

“But what he said...” Ilya looks down at the player who had been standing next to him.

“Would you punch if said you eat pussy?” Ilya asks and the boy burns red but shakes his head. “So why I punch for what he said? Fact?” Ilya shakes his head. “Words should not be able to hurt. No one in stands heard, they saw me punch. We be better.” Ilya climbed down, surprising himself by not falling and he walked out of the room.

“Ilya.” Scott called after him.

“Let him go, just... let him breathe.” Kip whispered.

“He’s right.” Shane speaks now. “You guys have been... honestly, I’m surprised and that makes me so angry because I shouldn’t have to be surprised that our team has accepted us. You’ve known Ilya for a year... you’ve known me less than a month but we feel how you

have accepted us. We need to focus on the hockey, we are good at hockey, we fucking smashed them. That needs to be what they talk about. Not the gay players on the team.”

“They are always going to talk about it,” A senior member, one who hadn’t been positive and one who hadn’t been negative. Just one who had been quiet on it all.

“Then we dictate that narrative.” Shane shrugged simply. “We won, guys, we won. Let’s just think about that.”

They all nodded, clapped him on the back and hit the showers. Shane looked around, all he wanted to do was go and find Ilya. “Good speech kid.” Yuna smiled and wrapped her arms around him, “And good game.”

“Thanks mum, where’s Ilya?”

“He’s gone for some air,” Scott said, rubbing a hand through his hair.

“He was sick,” Kip said quietly, “When he came in, bile and water.” He whispered to Scott.

“I’ll go and find him.” Scott breathed.

Ilya wasn’t hard to find, he was sitting behind his favourite tree, cigarette between his lips. He had changed into sweats and his favourite hooded jumper and his hair was still wet with sweat.

“You should not be smoking.” Scott sat down beside him. “Let me see your hand.”

“Not broken.” Ilya whispered.

“His nose is,” Scott hummed.

“I am sorry.” Ilya looked down. “I saw... I saw your eyes. You were... you are disappointed.”

“I’ve punched a fair few players in my time.” Scott sighed. “But I wish you hadn’t had to. What you said in the locker room, that’s what you need to focus on, ignore it.” Ilya just nodded his head and took a long drag.

“When is my... tomorrow, Ivan?” Ilya rubbed his eyes.

“Ten,” Scott said softly. “My office, then we will go for lunch.”

Ilya nodded slowly, he finished the cigarette and rested his head on his knees. “Shane okay?”

“Yes, you will be very proud of him as a Captain for what he said back there.” Scott whispered.

“He should be Captain,” Ilya whispered. Scott just rested his hand on his back and rubbed it softly.

“The right person is the Captain, you won that game, a hatrick,” Scott smiled. “I was so fucking proud of you. I am so fucking proud of you.”

Ilya wiped his eyes, “I wish...” He stopped talking.

“You wish what?” Scott whispered.

“Does not matter.” Ilya shakes his head and stands up slowly. “I ordered pizzas for team. For game. Should be arriving soon.”

“That was nice of you,” Scott smiled.

“Used your card.” Ilya shrugs and tucks his hand in his pocket and walks back into the building.

The common room was in full swing, Ilya had organised pizzas for the team and they were celebrating. When he walked in, he wished he hadn’t. Shane walked over to him quickly and wrapped his arms around him. “Hi.”

“Hi.” Ilya smiled and he leaned down and pressed a kiss to his lips.

“Taste like cigarettes.” Shane whispered.

“Sorry.” Ilya mumbled. “For punch. For shouting. For walking away.”

“It’s okay, you needed some space, I get it.” Shane takes his hand and leads him to one of the bean bags at the back wall. “Pizza? Our Captain was very generous and ordered us pizza and ice cream cookies.”

“Ice cream cookies for me.” Ilya grins.

“Pizza first.” Shane kisses his cheek again and Ilya looks around at everyone, his team, other people in their year, they are smiling and laughing. They are a team and Ilya wishes he could feel part of it. Shane comes and sits back down beside him. He has a plate of pizza and the smell is making Ilya want to be sick again.

He picks up a slice, tears at the crust, chews it, he can’t taste anything. “Where are your parents?” Ilya asks.

“They are staying at a nearby hotel, tomorrow we are going for lunch, six of us.” Shane smiles. “After...”

“Yes.” Ilya nods. “I thought you would be with them now?”

“I wanted to be with the team. I want to be with you.” Shane whispers. “I’ve never... My team in my old school wasn’t close. We didn’t... I wanted to enjoy your win.”

“Our win.” Ilya whispers. “I’ve never joined celebration before.”

“You look like you’d rather be anywhere else.” Shane chuckles and kisses his forehead softly.

“I want to be with you.” Ilya promises and he takes another bite of the pizza. “But I will not stay long.”

“Headache?” Shane whispers.

“Mm.” Ilya nods. He finishes the slice of pizza, makes sure everyone is okay. He tells Shane to stay with the team, Shane argues but Ilya just kisses his nose and tells him it’s Captains orders with a wink and he heads down to Scott’s office.

The door is slightly ajar, Ilya can hear Kip’s voice and it feels of some comfort to him. But then he hears the words, “His father is demanding he returns, the only option we have is for him to seek official refuge here.” Scott breathes.

“I won’t let him go back,” Kip says fiercely. “I’ve been looking into it, there are things we can do. We can...”

“I’ve spoken to lawyers,” Scott sighed. “We have a chance, but if we lose...”

“Then he might not ever be able to come back,” Kip’s voice broke and Ilya turned and walked away, tears streaming down his face.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17

“Ilya, good morning.” Ivan’s voice filled the air, Ilya was locked in Scott’s office, no one would be able to come in to disturb him. He had one of Shane’s Montreal jumpers on, his scent was so soothing to him. He was sitting on the floor behind the desk, he could see Kip and Scott’s wedding photo and he wiped his eyes. He hadn’t bothered to turn the camera off.

“I am not going back home.” Ilya started straight away, he hadn’t slept - not really. He hadn’t come for painkillers. He had curled up on the bed with Shane, smiled, kissed, told him he was fine. He wasn’t too sure if Shane believed him, but he didn’t question him. “I will separate from my family. I looked into it. I can do that.”

“Okay, lets slow down,” Ivan frowned.

Ilya took a breath. “We have one hour, no time to slow down.” He shook his head. “My father wants me to go back. I heard Scott last night. I will not go back.” Ilya said, determined.

“Heard him? He told you?” Ivan asked.

“No, I heard him talk to Kip. They are trying. Ivan, I will not go back. I will kill myself before I have to go back there.” Ilya didn’t cry as he said it, it was a solid statement, truth in every word.

“Ilya...”

“I can separate. I have evidence of why I cannot go back there.” Ilya breathed.

“Evidence?” Ivan asked. “Tell me what happened in Russia.”

Ilya took a breath, “My father he beat my mother into submission, she killed herself when I was twelve. He said accident. It was not.” Ilya wiped his eyes at the thought of his mum.

“When she was gone it was my turn. He is police. No one questioned any bruises they saw. My brother is police too.” Ilya took a breath. “I went to hockey camp, I was so fucking good, I was happy, away from my family. I realised then that that was what I was going to be. My coach was good to me. Strict, but he was good. I learned a lot. There was a party on the last night. Coaches son, Sasha, he told me I was so special. I believed him. He took photos of me, we did things and his dad walked in.”

“Ilya...”

“His dad saw the alcohol, saw what Sasha had done and he was not happy. He took me to a doctor, asked if I was okay, was nice. Then he took me home. I wished I had told him not to. He explained what happened, used words I didn’t understand, my dad was angry. Angry that

I had embarrassed the family. My brother always called me the words, he was so angry. He didn't let it show, the coach left and that was it. He hurt me so bad that night I thought I was going to die. I wanted to die. I begged for my mother to take me. She did not." Ilya picked at his hands, nails scratching at his skin, his knuckles were still red from last night, he pressed into it.

"Ilya, you need to stop doing that. I will call Scott, get him to come in with you." Ilya could already see Ivan on the phone, English words, go to Ilya. Within ten seconds the door unlocked and then locked again and Scott was there. He took his hands in his.

"Ilya..."

"I was in cupboard, belt on my back, no food, force to piss my pants, it hurt so bad." Ilya sobbed in English. "My coach came back a week later. I missed practice. He found me and took me to hospital. Took photos of me. Said if my dad did not let me go he would release them."

"Ilya," Scott didn't know what to say, he moved the laptop and moved Ilya so he could sit him on his lap.

"I will not go back. I will end it all before I ever go back." Ilya sobbed.

Silence fell over them and Scott wrapped his arms around him tighter. "He heard you talking to Kip." Ivan said and Scott tensed.

"Ilya, I am so sorry you heard like that. We were going to talk to you, we have been speaking to lawyers we have..."

"I don't want to go back." Ilya sobbed. "Don't want it hard for you."

"Keeping you here will be hard, but it is the easiest decision I've ever made." Scott promised.

"Ilya has been researching emancipation, a step that would be easy for him to file. It can be a long process, immigration will have questions..." Ilya blocked it all out, he closed his eyes. Caught small phrases 'Yuna has been talking to lawyers,' 'David has connections,' 'We will take on guardianship.' But Ilya was back trapped in that small cupboard.

"Ilya," Ivan explained the next steps to him in Russian. Filling out forms, papers and then he asked for the evidence.

"I have the photos that Coach took of me, my injuries. I stole them from him. I stole my records from the hospital too. I didn't want anyone to use it against me."

"We can use them to protect you, children who are at risk of going back to their home countries can seek asylum, you can stay at the school."

"If it goes through? If my father allows it?"

"I am confident." Ivan nodded. "I have seen familiar cases, seen them win." Ilya didn't allow himself to let him give him hope. Instead he fisted his hands into Scott's shirt. He was done talking now.

Scott ended the call, thanked Ivan and closed the laptop. “I got you, Ilya. I got you.” He whispered and Ilya cried. He couldn’t stop crying.

There was a little knock at the door and Scott sighed he didn’t want to move. Ilya was asleep or passed out against his chest, his fists clenched around his jumper. He picked him up and held him on his chest, he knew that it was Kip. He opened the door with Ilya in his arms and as soon as Kip saw him he shook his head, stepping in and locking the door again.

“What happened?” Kip asked as they sat down on the sofa, Scott kept Ilya against him.

Scott took a breath, he didn’t know what to say, instead he shook his head. “We can’t let him go back.”

“Then he won’t.” Kip said with as much certainty as possible. “Yuna and David have taken Shane out for the morning, if he’s not up to lunch I’ll text him.”

“I don’t think he will be,” Scott whispered. “He heard us last night. He heard...”

“Fuck.” Kip pressed his lips together.

“Kip, he said he would kill himself if he had to go back...” Scott wiped his eyes quickly.

“He isn’t going to hurt himself, he isn’t going to go back there.” Kip promised. “I mean it, we can... Fuck it, they say he has to then we pack the car and we drive.”

Ilya let out a sad laugh at that and Kip looked down at him and played with his hair. “Hey you,”

“Hi Kip,” Ilya whispered.

“I mean it,” Kip whispered. “We’ll run away if we have to. No one will take you back there, Look at Scott’s muscles. He can fight anyone.”

“He old man. You do better.” Ilya whispered but he didn’t let go of Scott.

“Less of the old,” Scott chuckled.

“Ilya, we have been looking into guardianship of you. When you came here you were signed to the school and I was the key person in that. But... We have been looking into something more formal.”

“Formal?”

“Adoption.” Kip whispered.

“You want to adopt me? Grown teenager.” Ilya frowned.

“Yes.” Kip smiled. “We want to. If you...”

“It will be that simple? You sign paper?” Ilya asked.

“I don’t think that it will be simple,” Scott answered honestly. “But it is not impossible.”

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered and he wiped his eyes.

“But Ilya, you need to promise me, what you said, you would not hurt yourself. We will find a way.” Scott breathed.

“I can’t go back.” Ilya said, shaking his head. “I will not hurt myself if I don’t have to go back. I do not want to give it to my father for his hands to kill me.” Ilya breathed.

“Won’t happen.” Kip whispered, his own eyes watering. “I promise, it won’t happen.”

Ilya closed his eyes and nodded his head and he let Scott just hold him.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18

Weeks passed and nothing happened. Ilya wasn't too sure what he expected, immigration people to come and pull him from his room. To be questioned. His father showing up? But nothing, and Ilya was scared to relax. Scared that it would all come crashing down the second he let himself breathe.

Shane felt it too. Ilya had told him everything the next day, well, not everything. Not about what really happened to him in Russia, but that his father was fighting for him to get back there. Ilya didn't tell him he would hurt himself, instead he told them of Kip's plan of running away and Shane had promised he would be there too.

They had won their next game, Shane scoring two goals, Ilya scoring one and their defense blocking all goals against them. Ilya was doing well as Captain, he was sure of it.

"I think I will not do my exams." Ilya said one night, they were sitting on the floor, both a little tired from practice, Shane was laying down on his stomach, legs up in the air and Ilya had been staring at his ass with no shame. Shane turned his head, he had a highlighter between his lips, and a little smudged on his cheek.

"What do you mean?" Shane asked.

"I will opt out. It is not essential. With everything... I failed my maths test today, I think too much." Ilya sighed.

"Okay," Shane nodded. "If that's what you think is best, no one will say no."

"I know. I'll tell you first. Hunter tomorrow." Ilya nodded and he closed his book with a satisfied smile. "You go back to boring books."

"And what will you do?" Shane pouted.

"I will watch." Ilya winks at him and he loves the way Shane blushes.

They've been kissing a lot. Kissing more than the gentle little pecks and chaste stolen moments. They've become more heated, more needed, which would end in them both awkwardly taking separate cold showers.

Shane turned back to his books but after a few minutes he shifted as Ilya stretched his legs out and he moved so he could rest his head on his lap as he read, Ilya played with his hair softly, nails on his skin. "You are beautiful." Ilya whispered.

"I'm not." Shane blushed more, turning into his thigh a little more.

“You are.” Ilya smiled and he let his fingers explore his face, just gentle touches and Shane’s eyelids fluttered shut. Ilya leaned down, tilting his chin up and pressing his lips to his, a little harder than before. “You believe me? You believe when I say you are beautiful.”

“No,” Shane whispers against his lips, his tongue darting out a little.

“I will make you believe.” Ilya said and Shane picked himself up, straddled his lap and kissed him a little harder. Ilya’s hand ran down his back and Shane rocked forward against him. “We should stop before I cannot.” Ilya whispered.

“I don’t want to stop,” Shane whispered. “Unless... Is it too much?”

“Not enough,” Ilya breathed and he tightened his hold on his hips a little as the friction became even greater. Slowly, Ilya moved his hand down his back and cupped his ass, it was their first real sexual touch and Shane whimpered, grinding down even more. “Can I?” Ilya whispered and Shane nodded his head and Ilya dipped his fingers down the back of his shorts, pushing them down a little and moving his hand over Shane’s growing erection. Shane was a mess against his neck, tiny little whimpers against his skin and Ilya wrapped his hand around him a little more and began to jerk him off so slowly.

“Ilya,” Shane whimpered, a moan leaving his lips. “Please... I...” Shane’s hand fumbled down to Ilya’s shorts and Ilya lifted his hips so he could wiggle them down a little and as soon as Shane had his nervous fingers wrapped around his cock he thought he could explode then and there.

They didn’t last long, moans and whimpers filled the room as they came, names spilling from each other’s lips and Shane pulled a face at the sticky mess on top of them both and Ilya just chuckled. He stood up, walking to their bathroom and grabbing a warm cloth and he took his time cleaning Shane before giving himself a quick wipe down and kissing his hair.

“Was I okay?” Shane asks quietly.

“You were perfect.” Ilya promised and he takes his hand and pulls him up, kissing him so slowly.

Ilya didn’t know why he was nervous to talk to Scott about his exams, he felt like he was disappointing him, but he knew Scott would understand. He tapped on his office door and smiled as Scott called him in. “Ilya, you’re early for our meeting for once.” Scott chuckled.

“I wanted to talk about something.” Ilya sucked his lip. “Can... Can we call Kip too?”

“Of course.” Scott nodded and he grabbed his phone, “Hey babe, Ilya wants to talk to us both, I’m going to put you on speaker.” Scott said and did that.

“Hi Kip.” Ilya sat down on the sofa, crossing his legs. He was once again in Shane’s Montreal jumper and his worn grey sweats.

“Hey buddy, you okay?”

Ilya took a breath. "I will not take exams. Not... Not now."

"Okay, that's an option right? It's not mandatory for this type of school right?" Kip asked.

"No, it's not. Of course we try to encourage students to take them, something to fall on if needed. I understand that you don't want to do them now, thank you for telling us." Scott smiles.

"You are not mad?" Ilya asks.

"The opposite. I'm proud of you for realising it is too much for you right now," Kip's voice chirped down the phone. "Other than the realization of your studies, you doing okay?"

"I am." Ilya nodded, a little blush running up his neck. "Very okay."

"Did you and Shane have..." Scott asked.

"No." Ilya coughed and he looked away. "Has there... Any news?" Ilya hadn't asked about it since their last conversation three weeks ago.

"We have a meeting on Tuesday with a lawyer," Scott said softly. "Me and Kip. Then they will want to interview you. Ivan has said that he will make himself available for translations."

"What is the meeting about?" Ilya asked quietly.

"To go through the papers you have already filled out, we will have to create the case with the photos." Scott explained. "We are also trying to reach out to your old Coach, a statement from him or a testimony will be very good."

"Oh." Ilya gulped and nodded his head slowly, a part of him wished he hadn't asked. "He might say no. It will bring shame to his name." Ilya whispered.

"He might say yes," Kip countered. "I miss you buddy, sorry I couldn't come to yesterday's game. Scott sent me the video of your goal."

"It was okay game. How was gallery?"

"It was nice," Kip spoke about the pieces of art he saw and Ilya tried to picture what they might have looked like. They spoke casually for a few minutes before they ended the call and turned their focus back on the plays for the next game.

Tuesday, Ilya felt nervous. He didn't like being at the practice without Scott, the other coaches and assistants were good, but they weren't Scott. Ilya led the drills, shouted out the plays, but he was nervous, but he refused to let it show. Once it was finished, he just skated around on the ice with Shane.

"This is nice, when it's quiet," Shane hummed.

“It is,” Ilya smiled and he pushed his feet to do a little spin.

“You could have been a figure skater, the way you move.” Shane smiles.

“I am not beautiful enough.” Ilya smiles and skates over to him. “Thank you for today.”

“I haven’t done anything,” Shane frowns.

“You helped in practice. I forgot words. You shouted them.” Ilya said and stroked his cheek softly.

“You have a lot on your mind,” Shane whispered and leaned forward and kissed his lips softly. “They’re back.” Shane whispered and pointed to Kip and Scott walking in, hand in hand. Scott had a folder tucked under his arm and Ilya licked his lips when he recognised the bag in his hand. “And they’ve been to your bakery.”

“Please be Blini, I miss blini.” Ilya grinned and he skated forward to the boards. “How did meeting go?”

“Let’s go to the office” Scott said softly and Ilya gulped and nodded his head slowly. Shane skated over and they took their boots off and made their way to the office. “How was practice?”

“How was meeting?” Ilya pressed.

“Ilya,” Kip sighed softly and wrapped his arms around him tightly. “Relax,”

Ilya nodded his head slowly and sat on the sofa, Shane sitting beside him and the two men sitting opposite on the chairs. Scott opened the bag and handed out the pastries and Ilya was suddenly not hungry.

“The meeting went well.” Kip said softly. “The forms you have filled out have gone through, if all goes well by the end of the month you will be emancipated from your family.”

“That’s good,” Shane said and grabbed Ilya’s hand tightly.

“My father can still fight.” Ilya whispered.

“Yes. But we have a case against him, he is unfit as a father, they would not put you back in his custody.” Scott nodded.

“But they… They can still send me back.” Ilya finished.

“We cannot file our adoption papers until your emancipation is complete.” Kip played with his fingers a little.

“Between the emancipation and the adoption, can his father force him to go back?” Shane asked.

“No, Ilya is seventeen, he has a student visa here. Normally no, however if his father presses or puts pressure...”

“Blackmails.” Ilya sighs. “He would.”

“We will be able to fight it, I promise you.” Scott whispered. “But I have got another plan.”

“You are full of plans.” Ilya whispered.

“We put you forward for a draft early,” Scott breathed. “It is not unheard of. You are phenomenal you will get picked, maybe not first, but you would get picked. You would be a rookie, a working professional hockey player. They would not be able to touch you.”

“I am too young, seventeen.” Ilya frowned.

“You will be eighteen in three months,” Scott breathed. “I think, for our timeline, I think this is something we should be thinking about. The lawyers agreed.”

“Then you get drafted.” Shane grins.

Ilya sucks his lip, his hands feel so sweaty and he shakes his head and grips at Shane’s hand tighter before taking a breath. He lowers his head to his knees and tries to take a breath.

Drafted.

“What do you think, Ilya?” Kip asked softly.

“I think it’s good. Good plan.” Ilya nods.

“I’ll start putting it out there,” Scott whispered.

Ilya just nodded his head and played with Shane’s fingers. “Shall we take the pastries outside, eat them there? It’s a little stuffy in here.” Kip hums.

“Please.” Ilya nods and they all stands up and then Ilya stops. “What’s the folder?”

“Paperwork of everything me and Kip need to fill out for the adoption, even though we have to wait, we are going to get it filed now. They have to do checks and things, we don’t want to wait.”

“If I get drafted...”

“We are still filing the paperwork.” Kip says and hugs him tight.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

“Seperate your hands, remember.” Ilya said to Misha, “That’s it, pass the puck to me.” He calls out and Misha hesitates but does it, “I’ll pass it back now you don’t stop and you shoot.”

“But I’ve never done it on a pass...” Misha shakes his head.

“Misha, hockey we don’t stand still. Ready?” Ilya didn’t wait for the answer, he passed the puck and Misha hit it to the goal. He missed and Ilya nodded. “No panic this time.” He says and does it again. It takes five times before Misha manages to score on the pass. Misha looks delighted, he skates around Ilya and hugs him tighter. “You did it Misha.” Ilya grins.

“Can... Oh our two hours are up.” Misha sighs when he sees Scott walking out to him.

“We can go again.” Ilya nods and he sets up another five and this time Misha gets two in a row and he hugs Ilya again. “You did good. You will be fine player.” Ilya praises.

“Really?” Misha smiles and they skate back to the boards.

“Really.” Ilya nods.

Scott smiles and pats Misha on the back before sitting on the stands with Ilya. “You look serious.”

“I have news.” Scott nodded. “You are on the list for players to be drafted, so we need to start prepping you for the interviews.”

“Oh.” Ilya almost forgot about that bit.

The media classes and meetings were his least favourite thing and he hadn’t bothered to go to the formal interview sessions because he hadn’t thought he needed it, not yet anyway. “The draft pick is before the Summer break.” Ilya breathes. “I have one month.”

“We can do this,” Scott promised.

“This is all you need to say?” Ilya asked.

“Tomorrow you have your check up, Kip will come and pick you up. I wish I could come with you too,” Scott sighed.

“I will be okay with Kip.” Ilya nodded. “But... I wish you could too.” Ilya wrapped his arms around him in a tight hug. “I want to give Scott the A. We do not have one, I know it’s not.. Our league it is not really, but I want to.”

“He deserves it.” Scott smiled. “The two of you make a good team. Good leaders. And you are a fantastic teacher. Your work with Misha has been really good.”

“I liked it. Helping... Maybe later I try and work in the summer at the camps.”

“That would be very good for you.” Scott smiled.

Ilya walked into his room and groaned as Shane practically jumped into his arms. “How was your appointment?” Shane asked as he pressed a kiss against his neck.

“Mm, was okay. Here.” He handed Shane his phone from his pocket and opened up the voice memo app and pressed play. The sound of Kip’s voice filled the air as Ilya pulled Shane onto their bed.

“Hey Shane, Ilya did really well. He had another IV drip for his iron intake, the levels are rising slowly so they have upped the dose for his daily tablets for one week then we will go back to the previous dose. He is still having migraines, the tablets for that are the same, hoping that when his iron levels improve that these can fade a little. Weight is okay, the workouts he is doing is meaning any weight gained is muscles, they are changing the diet plan a little but he is doing well. He was very honest, said he can’t eat too much because he feels sick all of the time with nerves. So for breakfast he will have fruit and oats, lunch time a protein smoothie if he does not feel like eating and a full meal at dinner. He had a nice lunch with me and some ice cream. I think he has a headache now, he said he will go to Scott for a painkiller later. If you need anything call me.”

“He talked a lot.” Ilya smiled.

“Said you did really well.” Shane smiled and kissed his lips softly. “How was the ice cream?”

“Cherry flavour, I liked it.” Ilya hummed.

“I thought I could taste it.” Shane grinned and he dipped his tongue over his lips and Ilya opened his lips, kissing him deeper. “We have some time before practice.”

“We do.” Ilya grinned and his hands slid down his back slowly, just as there was a knock on the door and Scott walked in.

“Scott!” Ilya shouted and Scott chuckled and rolled his eyes. Shane hid his face against Ilya’s chest. “We need lock. Lock for door.” Ilya pointed.

“Or you could not do that when you could get caught,” Scott grinned. “I brought these up for you,” he held out the two tablets. “Kip and I are going for coffee before practice. I hear your appointment went well.”

“Was okay. You want voice note too? Or you have real thing.” Ilya sat up a little and put the tablets on the side. “Thank you.”

“Kip will tell me then.” Scott hummed and he looked between them. “I will see the two of you in a few hours.”

“Mm, goodbye Scott. Lock the door.” Ilya called and Scott rolled his eyes as he walked out, closing the door behind him.

“That was embarrassing,” Shane pouted and Ilya tilted his chin back up and kissed him again.

“What are your strengths when it comes to your hockey ability?” Scott asked. They were sitting outside, Ilya had his back against the tree and he wished he had a cigarette.

Ilya took a breath, “I am a strong Captain, I want what is best for the team, I know when to pass, I know when to shoot.”

“That’s a good answer,” Scott grinned.

“If you had to tell me your weakness, what would that be?”

Ilya hit his head against the tree, “Too many to list.” He mumbled.

“Ilya,” Scott said gently.

“I can be nervous, I put a lot of pressure on myself, but when I am on the ice, it fades away and that is what my focus is. Maybe sometimes I can be selfish with puck, but we win.” He shrugs and smirks a little.

“Good answer.” Scott laughed.

They go through another ten or so questions and Ilya really wishes he had a cigarette. “You then can read a personal statement,” Scott says at the end.

“I have not prepared that yet,” Ilya mumbles.

“That is okay, when you’re ready, or if you’re not ready to share it with me that’s fine.” Scott smiled. “You did really well.” Ilya nods and he picks up at his phone. “You waiting for something?” He asks.

“Shane has therapy call.” Ilya sighs. “Waiting for him to say I can come to room,”

“It’s good that he’s talking to someone,” Scott said gently.

“He still has nightmares.” Ilya sighed. “Not as bad as when he first, but he thinks that I don’t know.” Ilya mumbled.

“You two are good for each other,” Scott said gently.

“We are. I think I…” Ilya shakes his head.

“I know.” Scott smiled.

“Hey you,” Ilya whispered and walked in to the room. Shane had sent him five minutes ago and Ilya had left the common room straight away. Sam was nice but he missed his boyfriend. “Are you okay?”

“A little drained,” Shane answered honestly and Ilya moved over and wrapped his arms around him tight.

“Proud of you.” Ilya whispered and kissed his cheek, they lay together on the bed, legs tangled, fingers holding onto each other. “Do you want to talk?”

“Not right now.” Shane whispered.

“Of course. What do you need?” Ilya asked.

“This.” Shane smiled and he cuddled into him tighter and the two of them fell asleep cuddled together.

“Before we start game.” Ilya’s voice was raised, but he didn’t need to shout. “Before we start game. I say we are good team. We are good players. We will win.” Cheers and banging on lockers. “I want to say thank you for being good team. And to give this to Hollander.” Scott chucks over the jersey over, the A visible to everyone to see. “I would not be good Captain without you.” Ilya whispered.

“Ilya,” Shane gasps.

The group cheer and huddle around Shane and one of the players at the back scoffs and Ilya’s eyes snap to them straight away. “Problem Manford?”

“We have been on this team for two years, we work hard, you give it to your boyfriend? It seems a little...”

Scott steps forward to say something, to cut in before anything starts but Ilya shakes his head. “You have been on team for two years, you have not performed as leader. I trust that Shane can run leads, drills, when I cannot, which he has already proven to do. If I was not his boyfriend, just Captain, he would still be my alternate. If you have problem, now is time to state.”

“No problem.” He says and shakes his head.

“Good.” Ilya fists his hands together. “We play now. We win. If you win good there's cookies.” He winks and leads them out.

Ilya collapses on the bed, a smile on his face, he’s sweaty, chest still panting. They won. Scott scored two goals from Ilya’s assists and Ilya scored another two. Their defense was great, and needed some work as two goals went past, but they had won.

“Want to shower first?” Shane asked as he kicked the door shut. They still didn’t shower in the rooms with the rest of the team. Ilya knew that it was something Shane had been a little nervous about.

“Come here.” Ilya breathes and Shane pulls a face.

“We are sweaty.” Shane pouts but he moves forward anyway.

“We have twenty minutes before Sam drags us to the common room to celebrate. Twenty minutes where I want to celebrate just with you.” Ilya tugs at his top and pulls Shane on top of him. Shane smiles and kisses him slowly, hands roaming across each other's body.

“Wait,” Shane jumped up quickly.

“Hollander,” Ilya growled and he sat up on his elbows and watched as Shane dragged the chair to the door and pushed it under the lock. Shane turned, a grin on his face and Ilya stood up slowly, walking over and pushing him back against the wall and claiming his mouth with his own. “You trust me?”

“More than anyone,” Shane whispered.

“Can I...” Ilya ran his hands down his body and to his cock, he smiled when he felt that it was already hard and ready for him. “I want to...”

“Please.” Shane whispered and that was all Ilya needed before he fell to his knees in front of him. “Fuck, Ilya...”

Ilya pulled down Shane’s sweatpants and kissed and licked over him through his boxers, he was so addicted to him already and he pulled the boxers down quickly. He wrapped his lips around the tip before taking him down slowly, moaning around him. Shane’s hand found his hair and tugged at it roughly, moans pouring from his mouth and Ilya groaned. Ilya twisted his tongue around him, he wanted to find all of the spots that made Shane’s knees go weak and he held onto his hips tighter. “Ilya i...”

Ilya knew what Shane was trying to say, but he didn’t move, instead he pushed forward a little more, gagging around him as he came hard down his throat. Ilya swallowed, licking his lips.

“Fuck Shane,” Ilya breathed, he pushed his own trousers down and took hold of his own leaking cock, it took a second for Shane to come out of his own orgasmic daze and he wrapped his hand around him, Ilya came quickly over their hands and grinned at him lazily.

“Now, we should really shower.” Ilya whispered and Shane just grinned, dragging him to the bathroom to shower.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

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

Chapter 20

“I look like an idiot.” Ilya breathed as he stared at his reflection in the mirror. Kip was standing behind him, shaking his head.

“You look very handsome,” Ilya shied away from Kip’s words, he hardly recognised himself. Kip had taken him to get a haircut, nothing too drastic, his curls were pretty unruly but the products they used had calmed it down, Kip had purchased them for him.

“Why I cannot wear my uniform?” Ilya asked.

“Because they need to see what they are getting, they are getting a young man, not a school boy. Do you like the blue or would you like to try the black?” Ilya stared again at the dark blue suit, he wore a pale blue - practically white shirt underneath with a dark blue tie.

“I like the blue.” Ilya nodded.

“Are you nervous?” Kip asked.

“Terrified.” Ilya breathed. “But normal, right?”

“Normal.” Kip smiled.

“We’ll take this one then, get changed and we will pay.” Kip smiled and he stepped out of the changing room. When he came back out he smiled at him, “I think we should go to the pharmacy as well.”

“The pharmacy?” Ilya frowned. “I still have all of my tablets.”

“Not for tablets.” Kip said and they walked out of the shop and once they were in the pharmacy down a particular aisle, reading particular leaflets Ily was sure he just wanted to curl up and die.

“We have not spoken about it.” Ilya sat on his bed, Shane moving beside him. It had been a busy day with Kip and Ilya was tired, but the happy kind of tired he was slowly getting used to.

“Spoke about what?” Shane frowns and he sits beside him, taking his hand.

“What will happen if I get drafted?” Ilya whispers.

“Not if, when.” Shane breathes.

“I could get drafted far away,” Ilya whispers. “I could go far, LA, Texas. They are taking younger players.”

“You would be amazing Ilya, no matter where you go.”

“I will not be near you.” Ilya whispered.

“I will always be here,” Shane tapped at Ilya’s heart and Ilya moved them so they were laying back on the bed. “No matter what happens, we will... we will find a way.”

“I do not think I can do anything without you,” Ilya says sadly.

“Ilya, look at me, no matter where you end up, I will be a phone call away. I will visit you whenever I can.” Shane whispered, Ilya nodded slowly, he had been researching it, he knew the statistics, knew which teams were more likely to take the younger players. He also knew if he was to stay somewhere close they still wouldn’t see each other, he would travel, he would be alone. He gulped, he knew it was better than the alternative, but he still couldn’t help but cry.

Shane held him through his tears, played with his hair, cried against his shoulder for the big change he knew was coming. Ilya was just calming down when there was a tap on the door, Shane sighed, he recognised the tap as Scott and called to come in.

“Hey, hey wait, what's going on?” Scott frowned, at first he thought the boys were just cuddling, but when he saw their faces he rushed over.

“We’re okay,” Shane promised. “Just feeling a little emotional, a lot happening.”

“That’s why I’m here actually,” Scott said and sat down on the edge of the bed and Ilya sat up quickly. “Your coach from Russia, he’s a good man, he’s going to help us.”

“He is?” Ilya gasped.

“He’s on a flight, he will come Saturday to your game.” Ilya’s eyes went wide. “Is that okay?”

“Mikhail is good man,” Ilya nodded.

“We told him about the two of you, we only want people around you who are supportive, he said that as long as you are happy.” Scott smiles.

“Thank you.” Ilya let out a little breath.

“Have you eaten?” Scott asked softly.

“I had a big lunch with Kip, but I will take a tuna melt from canteen.” Ilya nodded.

“Good, Shane you good buddy?” Scott asked.

“Mmhmm.” Shane smiled.

“Good. I will see tomorrow for practice. Kip sent me photos of you in the suit, you looked good.”

“I want to see.” Shane gasps.

“No. I look stupid.” Ilya mumbled.

“I’ll show you later,” Scott smiled before leaving.

“Shane,” Ilya whispered once Scott was gone.

“Mm?”

“I love you.” Ilya said quickly.

“Ilya,” Shane turned into him, “I love you too.” He whispered and pressed his lips to his again.

“Okay, listen!” Ilya stood up from his seat on the bus, they were travelling to the rival school and all he could think about was seeing Mikhail again. “This is first game this season not at home. We do not need home to win. Everything we have done we keep, we smile, we show respect, they say something, we ignore. We are better players. We are better men.” The group cheered loudly and then Scott handed him the list of hotel rooms and he started to read out the rooms everyone was staying in.

“What about you Cap?” Sam winked and the team laughed.

“Do not be jealous. Maybe kingsize bed Sam. Room for three.” He winked and the boys laughed even more. Ilya sat back down and took Shane’s hand. “I was joking.” Ilya said when he saw Shane’s face.

All of the colour drained from him and his hands were trembling.

“I can’t.” Shane whispered.

Once the bus stopped it was like everyone was waiting for Ilya to get up first, but Ilya refused to move. “Sam, get them the fuck off.” Ilya shouted and Sam did as he was told, the assistant coach going with them.

“Shane, baby, I need you to talk to me.” Ilya whispered, it was uncomfortable to crouch down in front of him on the coach chair, but he was doing his best. “You having panic attack.”

Shane nodded his head, his breathing coming in hard and fast. “I promise you. I promise no one will hurt you.” Ilya whispered. “I love you, you are safe. You are safe here. Your parents they wait for you inside. Kip too. Scott is here with me. I got you.”

“Scared.” Shane sobbed out.

Ilya nodded, "I know, I know. I call Yuna?" Ilya whispered.

"I'll do it," Scott said softly and he stepped off of the bus.

Ilya had asked Yuna at one of their last dinners what school it had been that Shane had been hurt in, he wanted to make sure that Shane would never go against them, never have to set foot in the locker room where he had been attacked. But he should have realised that any away locker room would be terrifying for him. He hated how selfish he had been.

By the time Yuna ran to the coach, Shane was already calmer, Ilya had sung to him, played with his hair, laid him on the chair with him and just held him in his arms. That's how Yuna found him.

"Shane baby, you good?" Ilya whispered.

"I'm so sorry." Shane breathed.

"Nothing to be sorry for." Ilya said and stroked his cheek. "You sit game out?"

"No." Shane shook his head. "No." He said again this time a little firmer. "I can do it."

"Of course. You are Shane Hollander." Ilya said his name so proudly, as if his name meant something. Ilya stood up, craning his neck a little and held his hand out and Shane took it.

"Looks like my boy is in very good hands," Yuna smiles and Ilya blushes and looks down.

"You do not let go of my hand." Ilya says and he grabs both of their bags and manages to get out until Scott takes the bags.

Ilya gets changed quickly, he is focused on Shane. Shane who is trembling so much he can't do his skates so Ilya bends down to do them for him.

"Holy shit are you proposing?" One of the team shouts and Ilya turns and looks at him, Shane's eyes are wide and Ilya presses a kiss to Shane's ankle, even though it is over his gear, Shane feels the kiss burning into his skin.

"When I propose it will be romantic. Not stinky losers locker room." Ilya says and everyone exchanges a look, they all put it up to his bad English, but Scott smiled. "You okay?" Ilya whispered.

"Yes." Shane nodded.

Ilya kissed his cheek softly, when he did his speech, everyone cheered and Ilya took Shane's hand as they skated on the ice. It was a rough first period, Ilya was too focused on Shane, he had missed two passes and he cursed himself. During the break Shane skated to him. "Ilya, we are losing because you are too worried about me. I am okay. I promise you I am okay." Shane whispered, they were in the hallway just outside of the locker room. "I promise you Ilya, I promise."

“Okay. Okay.” Ilya nodded his head and wrapped his arms around him.

The rest of the game Ilya snapped himself out of it. Shane passed him the winning puck and he scored. It was not the win he wanted, but he took the 1-2 win. “I am so sorry for messing up your game.” Shane whispered.

“Don’t ever be sorry.” Ilya said, shaking his head. “I love you,”

“I love you.” Shane smiled and they both hesitated.

“Come and shower with us, you freaks.” Sam laughed. “Honestly, you two are so into each other you wouldn’t notice any other cocks anyway.”

Ilya rolled his eyes and grabbed his towel and took Shane’s from his bag and they went to the showers. When they got out, Ilya dressed into a pair of new jeans and Shane’s Nike jumper.

“Did you guys fucking hear who was watching from the stands?” Sam shouted as he looked at his phone. Ilya looked at him. “Teddy fucking Brooks.”

“Teddy was here?” Shane grins. “You should have stolen my Metroes jumper instead.”

Ilya just chuckled and rolled his eyes, “Good game everyone. I sucked. I am sorry for the beginning. But we won. Do not get in trouble tonight. Bus leaves at...” He looks at Shane.

“Ten.” Shane adds.

“Bus leaves at 10!” Ilya gets them all onto the bus and kisses Shane’s hair.

“Your coach is here too.” Shane smiles. “We are all going for dinner, mum is waiting at the hotel.”

Ilya nods, “She messaged me too. And Kip. And Scott. Your dad did not.”

“He is not much of a texter.” Shane chuckles.

“Hm.” Ilya smiles and kisses his cheek softly. “I am proud of you.”

“For what?” Shane frowns.

“For being scared but being brilliant.” Ilya whispers.

“I couldn’t have done that without you,” Shane smiles and kisses him again.

Ilya is pacing in their room, Kip had sent him his nicer clothes to wear for the dinner and even though it was just black jeans and a nice jumper he still felt like an idiot. Shane came out dressed in something similar and he walked over. “Hey, you look so good.”

“I look like fool.” Ilya shook his head. “I want sweats.”

“When we get back. Shane chuckled.

“When we get back. No clothes.” Ilya decided and Shane blushed and Ilya grinned and kissed his cheek.

Shane took his hand and walked down to the lobby of the restaurant, he hugged Yuna and David and then when Scott and Kip walked down he rushed over to Kip too.

“Good game boys, rocky start, but you pulled it back.” Scott smiled. Shane nodded, he felt a little guilty but Ilya took his hand back and squeezed it, as if he could read his mind.

“Mikhail,” Scott smiled as the tall Russian walked forward.

As if on instinct, Ilya pushed his body into standing up tall, his eyes blinked, it had only been a year but it felt like a lifetime since he had seen him. “Privet,” Mikhail smiled at everyone and then he looked at Ilya.

He spoke in strong Russian, “It is good to see you, come here my boy,” He held out his arms and Shane gave his hand a squeeze before Ilya rushed into them. “You are too thin. They not feed you in fancy school?”

“I’m trying,” Ilya responded back in Russian. “It was not my best game, but I am so happy to see you. “

“It was not your best game. You played with your heart. But it was worth it, I see.” Mikhail looks over at Shane who suddenly looks uncomfortable under his gaze.

“Shane is my boyfriend, Mikhail. I love him with everything I have. I think if it wasn’t for him I would have been dead.” Ilya says honestly.

“Then he is family.” Mikhail smiles and he walks over and shakes Shane’s hand. “It is a pleasure.” He says, moving to English.

“Ilya has told me a lot about you, it’s nice to meet you.” Shane says.

“You play good hockey, Ilya is not as fast as you, but his backhand is a little stronger. You make an amazing team.” He grins.

They move into the restaurant, they are in a private room and Ilya looks around and frowns. “Teddy will be joining us as well.” Yuna says so conversationally.

“Oh, because you and Teddy are such good friends.” Shane laughs, Kip just grins at them, but he sees the way Ilya and Mikhail are talking so animatedly in Russian and something aches inside his chest.

“Hey, it’s okay.” Scott whispers and presses a hand on his knee.

Kip nods slowly, pressing a hand on top of his and he squeezes it tightly. “I don’t want to lose him.” He whispers.

“We will not,” Scott says and he leans over and kisses his lips softly.

Teddy comes in and pats both boys on the back, “Good game boys,” Ilya and Shane just exchange looks and grin up at him.

The dinner goes well, Ilya is surrounded by so many people who love him and he doesn’t stop touching Shane’s hand. He manages to eat all of his fries and chicken and picks at the vegetables a little. It’s the most he’s eaten in a group sitting and he settles back a little. His eyes find Kip’s across the table and he smiles.

“How is your gallery?” Ilya asks.

“It is going well,” Kip smiles.

“Your event is on Friday, can I come?” Kip raises an eyebrow at the question.

“You want to come to the event at the gallery?” Kip asks.

“You have been to nearly every game for me. I want to.” Ilya nods. “If I am allowed.”

“Of course,” Scott nods and he squeezes his husband's hand.

“Good thing you buy me fancy clothes.” Ilya teases.

Ilya isn’t too sure how it happens, he needed some air and says that he is going to the bathroom but finds the hotel gardens instead. He sits down and fishes a cigarette from his pocket, he takes a long drag and closes his eyes.

“You really should not be smoking here,” Teddy Brooks comes and sits beside him.

“It helps.” Ilya says but he hesitates before going to put it out, but Teddy shakes his head and takes it from him, takes a drag and hands it back.

“Do not tell my coach.” He grins.

“I will not. Do not tell my da... do not tell Scott.” Ilya breathes.

“I will not.” Teddy smiles.

“You are from Texas, right?” Ilya asked.

“You’ve been googling me.” Teddy grins. “But yes, yes I am.”

“You were drafted to Montreal, do... you left everyone behind?”

“I did.” Teddy says softly. “It was incredibly hard, but your team became your family.”

“If you’re accepted.” Ilya whispers.

“You will find your family, Ilya. I promise. It will work out.”

“What are you two doing out here?” Scott asked. “Ilya are you smoking?”

“My bad, he asked for a drag, I couldn’t say no. He’s had a good game.” Teddy winks and Ilya nods.

“You both should quit.” Scott says shaking his head. “Mikhail is heading to bed, he wanted to say goodnight. He’d like to spend the day with you tomorrow, just the two of you. He asked if he could, I said it was your choice.”

“I’d like to.” Ilya nodded. “Thank you.” He pocketed his lighter and smokes and winked at Teddy before heading back in.

“Don’t lie for him, I know he has some hidden abundance of cigarettes in his room.” Scott said, shaking his head.

“Let him have his vice.” Teddy sighed. “It’s not healthy but it beats the alternative.” Scott just nodded at that. “You looked worried at dinner, you and Kip.”

“Kip is worried, Mikhail is a father figure to Ilya, someone he can speak to without being worried he is saying the wrong thing. The adoption process it’s slower then we thought,”

“I don’t think you need it on paper,” Teddy frowned.

“What do you mean?” Scott asked.

“Well, he may have almost called you dad when we were talking.” Scott’s eyes went wide. “So, tell Kip not to worry. Because, yes, maybe it is nice for Ilya to be around Mikhail, but what teenage boy would volunteer to go to an art gallery?” Scott nodded at that. “He’s a good kid.”

“He’s been through more than any adult I know has, and he’s a fucking fighter. I’m so proud of him for making this year’s draft, but I am terrified.”

“What are you scared of?” Teddy asked softly.

“Selfishly, I’m scared that he’s going to get drafted somewhere amazing, create his new family around him and not need me anymore.”

“I don’t think that is going to happen,” Teddy says softly. “No matter where he gets drafted, he’s always going to need his dad.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year Everyone <3

I just want to take this moment to thank you all for your wonderful comments, writing

this has just really made me feel so better over this period. I did not expect this to have taken this shape but I am so in love with it. I am also planning the sequel :D

My insta is @writerpenelopegray if you want to come and hang :p

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Ilya is nervous about spending time with Mikhail on his own, he isn't too sure why. But it's okay. Ilya isn't surprised when he takes him back to the ice rink, but then he thinks this is probably where they have the most neutral ground.

"Skate on, we will work on your speed." Ilya just nods his head. He's had his breakfast, kissed Shane goodbye and watched his team get back on the coach. It was an hour drive and Mikhail would drive him back later.

Mikhail is a hard coach, pushes him through his limits, he does drills, gets him to go faster and he is exhausted. Ilya had forgotten how hard Russian coaches were.

"I need break." Ilya wanted to be sick.

"You want to be drafted to good team?" Mikhail said shaking his head. "One more."

Ilya had never said no, but his body was not the same as when he was back in Russia. He trains hard but Scott doesn't push them beyond their limits. He does one more lap across the ice, beats his time and he falls against the boards.

"It will be like this Ilya. When you are drafted. This is how you need to push your body." Mikhail sighed. "I know it is not easy for you. I know you cannot go to Russia. But you cannot be lazy. You are the best player on that team."

"One of." Ilya pants, he grabs his water bottle. Kip had found electrolytes that didn't taste like acid and he mixed them with his water before training and he drank it quickly. "One of best players."

"Hollander is okay, weak back hand, but in time he will be just as good. If Coach doesn't get him lazy."

"Scott wouldn't..." Ilya feels his hands shaking. He knows it's just a different culture. "Scott is not lazy coach. He is amazing. Best man I've ever known. You will not say bad things about him." Ilya shakes his head.

"I know he is trying to help you, but Ilya, you cannot believe that his magic plan will work. I will do my testimony, I reported your father to the head police, he is being looked into for many crimes. That is why he has not forced you back, because he cannot. Not because of Scott Hunter or the many papers they are filing. The papers do not mean anything in Russia."

"They mean something to me." Ilya snapped.

“I am going to shower and call Scott to pick me up. You... You can make the testimony or you can go. You don’t... I am so scared and you...”

“Everyone around you is telling you it will be fine, that there is a plan, but you need to be reasonable Ilya. Filing these papers means you can never go back. Do you understand?”

“I don’t want to go back! I don’t want to set foot on land where I can be killed for being in love. Where my father beat me and locked me in fucking cupboard. I want to stay here. I want to be teenager in love, to date and not be worried that I cannot go to a restaurant because the food makes me sick. I want to play hockey, I love hockey, but I want my family. I want to be with Shane and show the world that you can have both, you can have hockey and you can have love. I want children to grow up and see people like me on the screen and not care if they are gay but still want to follow their dream. I want to be like Scott and Kip and be good man.” Ilya isn’t too sure at what part he switched to English, he isn’t too sure when he started to cry.

“Ilya,” Ilya frowned when he heard Teddy’s voice, he hadn’t realised other people had started to come into the rink, a film crew, he wiped his eyes so quickly and rushed off. “Ilya.” Teddy’s voice was louder now and Ilya stopped. “Where’s Scott?”

“Home.” Ilya wiped his eyes but the tears wouldn’t stop coming.

“You are shaking, did he...” Teddy looks concerned.

“He was honest.” Ilya whispers. “Russians do not hold hope.”

“Well fuck that.” Teddy shrugs. “Let’s sit, I am doing a commercial. You can watch whilst you wait for Scott to come and pick you up.”

“Ok.” Ilya just nods, he showers quickly and he changes into his fresh sweats and Shane’s jumper and Teddy is waiting, he had heard voices know that Teddy was talking to someone, he ends the call and smiles at Ilya. “Come on.”

Mikhail is not anywhere to be seen and Ilya pulls his knees up on the bench and holds himself as he watches the commercial. It’s for new sticks, it’s cheesy and tacky but Ilya smiles. He feels Scott sit beside him and he moves so he is resting his head against his shoulder. They stay quiet for the rest of the commercial, Teddy comes over and smiles at Ilya.

“Better now bud?” He asks.

Ilya just nods his head, he’s in a floaty space, his head isn’t quite hurting but he’s still so tired. “Thank you.” Ilya manages to say, his voice sounds raw, had he been shouting at Mikhail? He doesn’t quite remember.

“Come on, let’s get you home.” Scott whispers and he kisses his hair, hugs Teddy and leads him back to the car.

“It’s really nice of you to do this,” Shane smiles as he tucks a stray curl behind Ilya’s ear.

“Kip has done so much for me. I want to show him I care.” Ilya whispered. “I will stay at Scott’s house tonight, then your parents are taking you home for the weekend?”

“Yes, to see my grandmother.” Shane nods.

“I will miss you,” Ilya whispered.

“Not as much as I will miss you.” Shane leans in and kisses him slowly and hard. Ilya moans against his lips and pulls him a little closer.

“I will be back on Sunday,” Ilya hums.

“Yes, for your lesson with Misha.” Shane nods.

They kiss again and Scott sends him a message to say they are ready to leave and Ilya tugs at his jumper again. “You look handsome. Such a handsome boyfriend, I have.” Shane grins.

“Call me before you go to bed.” Ilya whispers.

Shane nods with a kiss before watching Ilya grab his backpack and head downstairs. Scott is in a nice shirt and chinos, he looks handsome and Ilya smiles. “Kip buy this too?”

“Kip has good taste in clothes.” Scott chuckles.

“Can we stop to buy flowers?” Ilya asks as they get in the car.

“You trying to show me up as a husband?” Scott teases and Ilya pokes his tongue out playfully. But they stop by a shop and Ilya picks up a beautiful bouquet of flowers. He uses the money that he has made from training Misha and carries them back to the car.

“It means a lot you wanting to be there for him tonight,” Scott whispers.

“Kip has done a lot for me.” Ilya shrugs.

Scott doesn’t say anything, he just parks up at the small gallery Kip had set up. Scott still didn’t really understand anything about art, but he would do anything for his husband. Ilya walked in with him and looked around, it was a redbrick building with black framed photos on the wall, some paintings, there were drinks and small little foods being served and Ilya grinned when he saw Kip come from one of the back rooms. He was in tight trousers and a dark blue shirt, his eyes were shining and when he saw Ilya they watered a little.

“Hi Kip.” Ilya whispered and he wrapped his arm around him. “These are for you.”

“You got me flowers?” Kip asked, looking between the two of them.

“Ilya’s idea.” Scott smiled and kissed his husband. “This place looks amazing,”

“Thank you.” Kip breathed and he took a deep breath.

Ilya stayed by Kip's side for the first hour, Kip told him about the paintings and the photos and Ilya nodded along, he liked looking at them but he was certain he didn't like them as much as Kip did. Scott was standing at the bar, not drinking, but just looking around.

"Thank you for coming," Kip smiled. "It really means a lot to me."

"It means a lot to me, everything that you have done for me." Ilya whispers.

"We love you Ilya, we want to be the family that you deserve. It might look conventional but we want you to be happy." Kip brushed his hand on Ilya's shoulder and Ilya nodded his head.

"I am happy. I lost my family in Russia, but I feel like I have two new sets of parents now. Yuna and David, they buy me underwear and David saves the protein bars that I like from his box and brings them every weekend. But I have you and I have Scott. My father in Russia, he was hard, even Mikhail was very strict. But you and Scott you have shown me love and what it actually means to have a father, and I am lucky I have two fathers now."

Kip doesn't hold back the tears, he pulls Ilya in his arms and hugs him. It's caught on camera and Kip takes Scott's hand and hugs him tight too. "Tell him." Kip whispers to Scott.

"We were going to wait for tomorrow..." Scott whispers.

"Tell me what?" Ilya asks.

"Your paperwork is all finished, it's gone through. You are no longer attached to your father." Scott said gently.

"I... I am free?" Ilya breathed.

"You're not just free," Kip smiled. "You're going to be our son."

"The adoption process has gone through," Scott whispered. "We were going to tell you tomorrow night at the party."

"Party?" Ilya whispered.

"Surprise party." Kip grinned through tears. "I am shocked that Shane didn't tell you already."

"Shane visits his grandma tomorrow," Ilya frowned.

"Sweetheart," Scott chuckled. "He is currently at his house with his parents baking you cookies."

"He will put fruit in them," Ilya said and the group laughed through their tears. "This was your night, I am sorry." Ilya whispered to Kip.

"I couldn't think of a better opening to the gallery than to share it with my beautiful husband and our son," Kip says and he holds him closer. "I love you."

"Love you," Ilya whispered. "Dad."

Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Ilya is grinning, he can't stop smiling. Like his world is complete. Scott's house is full of people, Teddy Brooks is there, a few other hockey players that Scott has known over the years. Sam, Misha, the rest of the team. Shane and his parents. Everyone who mattered to him was there.

"You kept a secret." Ilya grinned as he wrapped his arms around Shane. Music was playing in the backyard and Ilya had never danced with anyone, though they were mostly swaying. Shane was wearing his swim trunks and Ilya was wearing a new pair that Kip had brought him. It was a pool party, it was fun and loud and Ilya just couldn't stop grinning.

"I did." Shane grinned, "I found out when you left because I obviously cannot be trusted." Shane rest his head on his shoulder and breathed him in.

"I can't believe this is real." Ilya whispered.

"It is." Shane grinned and he tilted his head up and kissed him on the lips, it was a loving kiss, the most they had really done in front of any of the team and Ilya wrapped his arms around him tighter.

"I want to thank you all for coming," Scott's voice filled the garden, "To those of you who don't know, me and Kip have been married for almost seven years now and we've been thinking about extending the family, we thought we would get a little boy. A toddler, adopt him. We would learn to change diapers and toilet train and all of that fun stuff, teach them to skate."

"Teach them the importance of art and history," Kip adds on.

"What we didn't expect was to adopt a seventeen year old teenager who would have destroyed me at hockey, who could compete with my husband for the biggest heart. Ilya, welcome to the family."

There's a big cheer and Ilya just grins, he wipes his eyes quickly and hugs them both, he doesn't say anything, but he goes back to Shane. There's cake and pizza and it's fun. Ilya takes so many photos of everyone, even Sam and the team and he's so happy.

Ilya laid on the lounge, Shane was laying between his legs, chest against his back and Ilya was drawing little patterns against his skin. "I love you." Ilya whispered.

“I love you too,” Shane turned and kissed his cheek softly. “I love you so much. I know it’s... We still have our whole future ahead of us and I know it’s scary, hockey is everything to both of us and I never thought I would have room for anything else, but I do. I love you. I love you so much.”

“You make me cry more.” Ilya pouted and he pulled his arms around him tighter. “I love you.”

When the party is finished, Ilya and Shane are tidying up, only a few of Scott and Kip’s friends are left and Ilya thinks it’s cute that they are a little drunk. He was just glad that all of this paperwork and everything finished.

“I am going to stay tonight,” Shane smiles.

“Oh is that so?” Ilya grins and he throws the cups in the recycling.

“Yes, I asked my parents. They asked your... dads.” Shane grins, “They all said it was fine.”

“I wish we were alone,” Ilya smiles and he pulls him close to him. “I wish we could just be somewhere you and me, so I can show you how I love you.”

Shane blushed against him, he ran his fingers down Ilya’s chest and kissed him hard. “Soon. Next away game.” Shane added.

“Promises.” Ilya winked but he pressed a little kiss to his cheek.

The next morning Ilya wakes up against Shane’s chest, it’s so comforting and so familiar. He can smell pancakes, can smell orange juice and he grins. He kisses over his heart and slides off of the bed and pads downstairs.

“Good Morning,” Ilya smiles and he hugs Kip.

“Hey you, Shane is still sleeping?” Kip asks and he pours him a glass of orange juice.

“Snoring away.” Ilya nods and takes it from him, he sips it slowly and leans back against the counter. “Scott is running?”

“Actually he is a little hung over,” Kip laughed. “He is fast asleep.”

“Wow.” Ilya grinned, “Old man.”

Ilya started to help make the table, he finished his orange juice and grabbed his tablets taking the daily ones he needed to do. He was feeling better, it was a good feeling. He didn’t feel so tired, the headaches were there but never so fierce. Breakfast was fun, Shane who had spent far too much time swimming and in the sun was just as wrecked as Scott who had taken to drinking whiskey with the ex-hockey players. The morning continued just as slow and lazy, Shane and Ilya walked to the food market, stocked up on some snacks for their room and enjoyed some time alone.

“I love you,” Ilya grinned as he took yet another selfie of them, this time they were drinking iced lattes, big smiles around the straws.

“I love you too.” Shane grinned.

“Misha, today we will continue the passes, this time you pass to me. I will be moving.” Ilya explained and Misha gulped. First Ilya warmed him up, it was late afternoon and it was so calm in the rink. It was Ilya’s favourite time. After their walk this morning Shane had gone home, he would be back soon. Misha was skating a lot better, he was able to dive in and out of the cones Ilya had set up. The passes were not as good as his skating, but they worked hard on it and by the end Misha managed to get the puck in Ilya’s moving direction.

Ilya tidied everything up and skated alone for a little bit before heading back to his room. Shane wasn’t there yet, he tidied up the bags and everything that had kind of been left out and smiled.

When Scott walked into the room he felt a little disappointed that it was not Shane. “Hey you,”

“Hey dad,” Ilya grinned. He had been saying it teasingly, playful, but it made his heart clench that this man wanted to be his dad.

“Got a minute?” Scott smiled.

“Shane is not here yet, so yes.” Ilya nodded and he crossed his legs on the bed.

“I have just received the schedule for the drafts.” Scott said softly and Ilya frowned, he had forgotten. Forgotten that he would be leaving Shane. That he didn’t need to. He could stay.

“Oh...” Ilya looked down.

“I can take your name off of the list,” Scott said softly. “But Ilya, teams are interested, there are four teams actually fighting for a bid,”

“You’re liar?” Ilya frowned.

“I am not,” Scott chuckled. “I don’t know what teams they are, of course they cannot divulge that information, but they are excited about you. Excited to have you for the games.”

“You think I should not take my name down.” Ilya whispered.

“I think that no matter what you decide, it is going to be a hard decision. But I know that no matter what your family, Shane will be here to support you.”

“Shane could end up on the other side of the country,” Ilya whispered.

“He could,” Scott nodded. “But I don’t think he would want you to pass up this opportunity.”

“But I could have a chance of doing this with him,” Ilya whispered. “I could have a chance of staying, of being with you, being with my family.”

“We are always going to be here, always going to be a family.” Scott whispered. “I promise you, no matter what you pick, whether you are here in Montreal, in LA or wherever, we will always be your family. You will shine, Ilya.”

“I will speak with Shane.” Ilya breathed. “When is the camp?”

“Next week, you will miss a game here.” Scott said softly. “They will do the interviews there too. It’s a week of four games, they put you into teams, it’s a mini tournament. A lot of eyes will be on you.”

“What if I fail?” Ilya asked quietly. “I try again next year?”

“Yes,” Scott promised. “But I really don’t think that you will.”

Ilya just nodded his head, that happy feeling that he had allowed to consume him was slipping away and he brought his knees up to his chest. He would talk to Shane, but he knew exactly what he would say and Ilya was terrified.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23

“Of course you need to go,” Shane whispered once Ilya had spoken to him. Ilya had surprised himself by not crying through the conversation. Shane had his arms around him, Ilya’s head on his chest, fingers in his hair. “I think you need to do this.”

“I do?” Ilya breathed.

“This year, the past, Ilya, your whole life has been dictated by everything with your family. This is a chance to prove to yourself that it wasn’t all for nothing. You are an amazing Captain, you are an amazing hockey player. You are an amazing boyfriend. An amazing son. But you need to believe that, and I think... I think you will only believe that if you are living that dream.”

“This all feels like a dream to me,” Ilya whispered. “Being with you, being their son. Having a family. I want this.”

“And you have it.” Shane whispered. “Forever.”

“I will have you forever?” Ilya blinked up.

“As long as you want me,”

“Forever.” Shane smiled. “It’s not... I haven’t known you long, but I know I will always know you. I will always love you.”

“When I am on the other side of the country?” Ilya whispered.

“Especially then. When I am watching, wearing your jersey, screaming that my boyfriend is the best player in the league.” Shane grinned.

“I will be Rookie, not the best player.” Ilya chuckled.

“You will be the Rookie of the year.” Shane smiled.

“I wish you were doing this with me.” Ilya breathed.

“I might not be drafted with you, but I am going to be there. Every step of the way.”

“But you need to be here. There is a game. They need Captain,” Ilya smiled sadly, fingers in his hair.

“Where is the Camp?” Shane asked.

“Toronto. Not too far. But not close enough.” Ilya sighed. “I leave on Tuesday, will be back

next Tuesday afternoon.”

“We haven’t been apart that long,” Shane eventually whispered and they both knew this feeling was something they would have to get used to.

“Have you got everything you need?” Shane asks, Ilya is standing at the edge of Shane’s bed. He has his duffle bag full of sweats and jumpers.

“No.” Ilya pouts. “I do not have you.”

“I will not fit in your bag,” Shane smiles and he wraps Ilya in his arms. “It’s one week.”

“One week.” Ilya shakes his head. “One week without you,”

“You are going to be so busy that you won’t even miss me.” Shane says softly, fingers coming to stroke his cheek. “You are going to smash this.”

“I think I might be sick.” Ilya whispers and that’s all the warning he needs before he runs to the bathroom and throws up.

“Ilya,” Shane sits beside him and rubs his back softly.

“When you wake up with nightmares, I won’t be there.” Ilya whispers quietly.

“You will be.” Shane nods. “I’ll wear your jumper every night. You’ve stolen all of mine anyway.” Shane kisses his hair.

“You will call me every night?” Ilya whispers.

“Every night, every morning, every day.” Shane smiles. “I will be okay here Ilya, I promise you. You need to focus on this week.”

“I want to not.” Ilya pouted.

“You have four games to play, there will be scouts, management there, this is it.” Shane whispered.

“I don’t... I’m not ready.” Ilya let out a shaky sob. He knew he needed to get it out now, knew he couldn’t do this once they got there.

They stay hugged together for another hour, Ilya isn’t sick again, but he doesn’t move. It’s not until there is a knock at the door that Ilya stands up slowly. Kip and Scott walk in, they see them in the bathroom and Scott sighs softly. “Ilya...”

“I’m just nervous.” Ilya whispers.

“It’s a good thing to be nervous, it means you care.” Kip said softly. “We do need to go though,”

“I know.” Ilya sat up slowly, rinsed his mouth and grabbed his bag.

“I got you this,” Shane whispered and he grabbed a small black bound book. “It’s a journal,” Shane whispers. “You can write down... for your memories.”

“And there’s this,” Scott hands him a small box. “You connect your phone to it, it can print out your photos like polaroids to go in your journal.”

“You... I love them. Thank you.” Ilya wiped his eyes and he put the presents in the bag.

“I’ll come down to the car with you.” Shane whispered and took his bag from him and walked down hand in hand. When they got to the car park the whole team were gathered there, and Misha. There were banners of good luck and balloons and Ilya wanted to cry again.

“You have practice in ten minutes.” Ilya shouted. “Do not use me as an excuse to be lazy.” He said and they all cheered. Misha ran up to him and hugged his legs. “Hey Misha,” Ilya whispered.

“I’m going to miss you on Sunday.” Misha whispered. “But I’ll keep practicing.”

“Yes. You must keep practicing.” Ilya nodded. “Shane will help. I told him not to let you pout.”

“I won’t. I’ll be the best.” Misha nodded and he hugged him again.

Ilya watched everyone slowly walk away and he turned to Shane, “I... I got you something too.” Ilya whispered.

“You did?” Shane frowned.

Ilya bit his lip and looked at Kip who handed him a small white leather box. “It is a promise. Forever.” Ilya handed it to him slowly, Shane’s hands were shaking and he opened it so slowly.

“Ilya...”

Inside was a grey thin leather bracelet, a small heart entwined with the material, Shane could make out ‘Ilya’ in a beautiful italic.

“I have yours,” Ilya whispered and he rolled up his sleeve and showed him the matching bracelet.

“We will always be together.” Shane promised and he wrapped his arms around him, kissing him slow and hard.

“I will see you in one week.” Ilya breathed. “I love you.”

“I love you too. So fucking much,” Shane let out a sob that he had been holding and Ilya used his thumb to brush away the tears.

“Forever.” Ilya winked and he grabbed his bag and hugged Scott tightly, promising to call him as soon as he got there.

“Come on, our flight leaves in a few hours.” Kip hummed.

“Coming... Our?” Ilya gasped.

“You didn’t think I would let my son get on a plane on his own and go to a strange city without me?” Kip said, shaking his head. “I thought I would be one of those delusional dance mums, but I have been speaking to Yuna and I think sexy hockey dad suits me quite well.” Ilya rushed over and hugged him tight. He had been so terrified of doing this on his own, that this was how it was going to be, but deep down he knew he should have known better.

His family wouldn’t let him do this alone.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Ilya tightened his skates and looked around at the players, today they would be running drills and getting to see how each other skate, then they would pick the Captain. Ilya had been terrified up until this point.

Now all he could think about was how much he wanted to be Captain. He was the youngest player there. Kip and the other parents were watching on the stands and Ilya smiled at him once he was ready.

He nailed the drills.

He didn't have to look over at the management tables to know that they were impressed. They did the accuracy shots and he was the best at it, beating his own record that he had set at the school. Kip had filmed it and sent it to Scott. Kip never pretended to understand much about hockey, but he knew Ilya was smashing it.

He was made Captain.

The team listened to him, but it was clear they were against the idea of being shouted at by someone a little younger than them. Not that Ilya really gave a shit about that.

"Rozanov." One of the players called, Ilya didn't catch his name just tilted his head and looked up at him. "You won't get drafted first. That spot is mine."

"You think?" Ilya grinned and he swerved around him on the ice. "Cause you think so, but I think they think not." He skates to the boards when it's time for the break and takes off his skates and walks over to Kip.

"That one looks a little salty." Kip frowned.

"He does not like me too much." Ilya shrugs and he sits down beside him. "You do not need to stay all day. You are bored."

"I'm not, I have my kindle." Kip grins. "You look like you were having fun."

"I... I am." Ilya smiles.

"What do you need to do now?" Kip asks.

"It is time for lunch. When we come back more drills. Then it is the first game tonight. It is same every day for the week but the interview schedule has not been released yet."

"Are you nervous?" Kip asks softly.

"I am." Ilya shrugs. "But I can do it."

“You can.” Kip smiles. “Captain.”

Ilya leads their small team to victory in all games, every game he played he scored at least two goals and assisted with the majority of other goals scored. Ilya didn't try to talk to the other players, he spoke to Shane at every opportunity he could, it hurt how much he missed him but he needed to do this.

The day of Ilya's interview he threw up. He had been doing so well with the nerves, he had eaten every day, two meals, and he felt stronger.

“Remember, you can do this.” Shane breathed down the phone. They were face timing each other, Ilya was standing awkwardly in the stadium lobby, dressed in his suit and tie. “You look so handsome Ilya, I promise you, this is it, this is going to be okay.”

“I miss you so much.” Ilya sighed.

“Two more days.” Shane promised.

“You have a game tonight,” Ilya changed the subject, “The team is being good for you?”

“Yes.” Shane chuckled. “Misha came to watch our practice.”

“How did he like?” Ilya asks, he paces a little along the corridor. Kip isn't allowed in this area and Ilya wishes he was there with him.

“He was a little scared,” Shane says softly.

“He is very small,” Ilya nods. The door opens and the player who hated him the most walked out of the interview room, he saw Ilya and glared at him. “I am next. I love you.”

“Call me when you are finished, okay?”

“Okay.” Ilya smiled.

“I love you too,” Shane grins before ending the call.

“Who was that? Boyfriend?” The player, Ilya wishes he could remember his name, he knows it was probably stupid.

“Yes.” Ilya shrugs simply.

He falters for a second “Fucking disgusting, and you think you are going to get first draft?”

Ilya clenches his hands together, he will not retaliate, not when he is about to have his interview. Not when this is the one thing he was supposed to be rising above.

“Not so cocky now?”

“Mr Rozanov.” One of the managers calls and he is looking between the two of them, Ilya takes a breath and he walks in. It is set like a board room, there’s five men in suits at one side, a bottle of water and an empty chair for Ilya to sit in. “Please, have a seat.”

Ilya nods and he sits down, he fists his hands together under the table. He can feel the bile in his stomach, but he forces it down.

The questions are easy at first. Weaknesses. Strengths. What is a team player? Why hockey? Does he understand the pressure he will be under? Ilya answers all of them, at first he is shaky, his words are slow and it takes him a while to get them out in English.

“That is all of our questions, thank you for your time.” One of the men, Ilya recognises his logo - Boston Raiders dismisses him but Ilya shakes his head.

“I have questions.” Ilya says and they all look at each other a little stunned.

“You have questions for us?” Boston asks.

“A few, if I can?” Ilya asks.

“Please,” Ilya recognises this one, Montreal. He thinks of the game that he saw, he thinks of Teddy and he smiles.

“Thank you.” Ilya takes a breath. “You have read my personal statement?”

“We read them at the end, after the interviews.” Montreal nods.

“In my statement you will read I am gay. I have boyfriend at my school, he will be drafted next year. My question is what policies do you have for players like me to be protected in your league?” He had rehearsed the questions. Wanted to sound strong, wanted to sound determined.

They are stunned, they all look to each other, no one knowing who to answer. “You do not know?” Ilya frowns.

Montreal takes the lead, “Thank you for being so open with us. It is not unheard of for players to be gay, I will not pretend to you that everything will be easy, there is still homophobic behaviours but I can tell you that we are trying our very best to make it inclusive.”

Ilya nods his head slowly. “As I said my boyfriend, he will be drafted. We will not split up despite whatever team he is on. I understand there are rules about fraternising with other teams...”

New York Admirals this time, “If it does not interfere with the games,” He says and he looks bored. Ilya is a little disappointed. “Do you think that you would be able to handle the pressure of being open about your sexuality in front of the world?”

“When you read my statement you will know the answer.” Ilya nods and he stands up, Scott had told him to shake all of their hands, to be polite. Instead, he shakes one. Montreal. And

then he walks out.

Ilya marches out of the building quickly, he finds Kip pacing outside, he's on the phone. "Here he comes." Kip says and as soon as Kip is there he wraps his arms around him and lets out a sob.

"I think I fucked it." Ilya whispers and Kip takes him to one of the benches and puts Scott on speaker.

"Ilya, I need you to breathe," Kip whispered.

Ilya hadn't realised he was holding his breath. His hands were shaking. "I didn't shake hands."

"Okay, that's okay..." Scott was frowning.

"I shook one. The one I liked. I shook their hands." Ilya hiccuped.

"Who's hand did you shake?"

"Montreal." Ilya whispered.

"Kevin Bridge is a good man, a good manager. A good friend." Scott sounded proud.

"I asked questions. He answered honest."

"Wait you asked them questions?" Scott asked.

"I did. I asked about me being gay. What they would do for people like me." Ilya rubbed his eyes tiredly. "They will not draft me now."

"They will, they are probably a little stunned." Scott said, but Kip knew his husband, could hear that uncertainty in his voice. "You are doing amazing Ilya, tomorrow is the final game, then you will be home."

"Home. I want to come home now." Ilya sobbed.

Kip pulled Ilya into his arms and cradled him, he didn't care that anyone could see them, his son needed him. "It's okay, you have an hour before you need to be back on the ice. Let's go to the hotel room. Scott honey, I'll call you back later."

"I love you. Both of you." Scott breathed.

Ilya had told Kip to text Shane what happened. Told him not to include his crying or his panic attack, but he wanted Shane to know that he had tried and that he wanted to make a safer environment for them. Shane had called him back as soon as he received the message, telling

Ilya how proud he was of him. Then Shane had to go for practice and the game. Ilya managed to record a message for the team, telling them to make their Captain proud.

Back on the ice, Ilya put all of his worries and anxiety into the game. He was determined, he may have messed up the interviews but he would not let that mess up his game. He scored three goals, one after the other and Kip was the loudest in the stand.

“That fag your dad? Is it genetic?” Ilya knew his name, saw it on his jersey. Ferguson. Stupid name.

Ilya gripped his stick tighter, his knuckles were white beneath the gloves.

“Not going to answer? Saw you crying. Such a fucking pussy.” He barged into him hard, Ilya took a breath. He pushed on his skates, barged back into him, took the puck and scored again.

“Fucking fag.”

“Your English is limited.” Ilya snaps back and he advances on him quickly. Ilya isn’t scared of him. He’s scared that the managers will realise he is more trouble than he is worth, he doesn’t even have the puck but this Ferguson is coming at him. Ilya skates backwards, just as he is about to launch he spins away, using the graceful skating that Shane teases him about and watches as Ferguson stumbles and crashes into the boards.

By the end of the game Ilya is shaking, he doesn’t listen to the coaches, his ears are ringing. Ferguson is glaring at him, he has never hated someone so quickly in his life and he knows that this is what his life is going to be like now. Full of players just like him. There was no way that he was going to just be able to ignore them, he knew that. But he was determined.

Ilya had won the last game with his team. Every game he played, he won. He was the MVP of all of them - according to Kip anyway. The coaches praised him, offered tips and he took them all. Shane had called him as soon as his game had finished, they had won as well. Ilya told him how proud he was of him, how excited he was that the team was doing well with Shane as Captain. They will be in good hands next year.

“It’s over now, the drafts will be released in a few weeks.” Kip says softly once Ilya is off of the phone. “Do you want me to schedule another call with Ivan?”

“I just want to see Shane.” Ilya answers honestly.

“Tomorrow.” Kip promises.

“Tomorrow.” Ilya nods.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25

“This is not the school,” Ilya blinked awake, his head was aching from the travelling and he had asked Kip for his migraine tablet which had pretty much knocked him out in the drive back.

“Nope.” Kip hummed.

“Where are we going?” Ilya asked and he looked around as the car stopped. “This is Shane’s street...”

“Mhm.” Kip nodded.

“I should be meeting him at the school? Is something...”

“He wanted to surprise you when you got back, I will pick you both up in the morning to take you to school.”

“The morning?” Ilya raises an eyebrow.

“Remember our conversations?” Kip asked.

“All of them.” Ilya looked down, blushing. He knew exactly what Kip was saying.

“If you’re not ready...” Ilya looked up at him alarmed.

“May I go inside now?” Ilya asks.

“Of course, here.” Kip pulls out one sleeve of the migraine tablets and tears two off. “You can take the next one in two hours, then one for the morning if you need it.”

Ilya nodded, he knew that the two tablets wouldn’t harm him, and he felt a little silly that this was all he could trust himself with. “Thank you, and thank you for coming and thank you for surprise and thank you.” Ilya didn’t know what else to say.

“Call me if you need anything,” Kip stroked his cheek softly and Ilya grabbed his bag and walked up to the door.

He had barely had to knock on it before it opened. Shane was standing there, tight jeans, white tee, no shoes or socks, his hair was freshly washed and he practically jumped onto Ilya. Ilya caught him though, would always catch him.

“I missed you.” Shane breathes against him and Ilya finds that spot against his neck, kisses and breathes him in.

“I missed you.” Ilya whispers and he moves forward, somehow still not letting go of Shane

and managing to get him and the bags inside. “I watched the game. You did good. Better then good. Brilliant.”

“I watched the videos Kip had sent Scott, you... you were phenomenal.” Ilya grinned and kissed him.

“We are both...Phen...”

“Phenomenal.” Shane finished for him.

“Where are Yuna and David?” Ilya asks.

“They are out...” Shane hums.

“We have the house to ourselves?” Ilya grinned.

“We do.” Shane smiled and kissed him again. “I made us dinner.”

“You can cook?” Ilya raised an eyebrow and he kicked off his trainers, tucking them neatly onto the shoe rack and then let Shane drag him through the house and to the kitchen. “You put fruit in biscuits.”

“They were fruit cookies.” Shane says shaking his head.

“No such thing.” Ilya mumbles and he sees the table, it’s set with a candle and flowers and Ilya thinks that Shane is secretly very romantic. Or maybe not so secret anymore. “This is beautiful.”

“I thought... Next year, it will be like this. You away, coming home after training or a game and I would do this for you.” Shane rocked on his feet.

Ilya felt his heart crush inside his chest. “You think about that far ahead?”

“I do.” Shane nods.

“Me too.” Ilya leans in for a kiss, it’s so full of love and tenderness. “Then the year after, when you are travelling and if I am home, you come home to me cooking you dinner.”

“I think you’d be a terrible cook.” Shane grins.

“You are right.” Ilya nods. “But I have time to learn.”

Shane had cooked grilled chicken with salad and potatoes, Ilya had eaten everything. It had felt so full of love and they spoke about everything that had happened in their week apart, despite the fact that they had called every night and every day when little things had happened.

“I will show you my journal later,” Ilya smiled. “The photos I took.”

“Only if you want to, if it’s private...”

“I do not have secrets from you.” Ilya cut him off and kissed his cheek softly. “I will wash up.”

“You don’t have to,” Shane whispered, Ilya kissed his hair and washed the dishes and tidied up any mess that had been left.

“Kip said that I am staying tonight,” Ilya hummed.

“I did ask.” Shane grinned.

“And your parents...”

“Well, I told Kip that they might be back tonight, but I think i meant to have said tomorrow night.”

“You lied?” Ilya laughed.

“I misled.” Shane decides. “I feel awful but I wanted...”

“There is family group chat. The adults. Kip will know your parents are not here.” Ilya smiled. “He knows that we wanted some real time, to be us.” Ilya nods.

“He gave you the sex talk, again?” Shane giggled.

“He tried.” Ilya winked.

Shane smiled and pulled him into his arms and kissed him slowly, hands running through Ilya’s hair and pulling him as close as physically possible, “Do you want to?” Ilya asked quietly.

“I’m scared,” Shane whispered.

“We don’t have to, I’m scared too.” Ilya whispered quietly.

“You are?”

“I want it to be perfect for us.” Ilya said quietly. “I want good memories for you.”

“Oh baby,” Shane pressed his lips to his, “Every memory is good with you.” He takes his hand and leads him up to his bedroom and Ilya is suddenly struck with the thought that he had never really been in here, they had spent time in the garden or they had been at Kips and Scotts place. Never really here.

“It is very you.” Ilya smiled at all of the medals and then sat down on the bed. “Come here,” Shane walked over slowly, Ilya thought he saw a little teasing motion in his hips and he couldn’t help but grin. When he was close to him, Ilya pulled him onto his lap which Shane straddled and the kiss was like fire running through them.

“I want to...” Shane sat back a little and stared at him, his lips so red, so plump.

“What do you want?” Ilya whispers.

Shane pushes Ilya back so he lays down on the bed and slides down his body, kissing against his clothes before tugging down his sweats and boxers, pulling them off his legs quickly. He groans when he sees him, hard and ready for him and he kisses up his body legs slowly before licking over his shaft slowly, tongue teasing the slit before taking him in his mouth.

“Oh fuck,” Ilya moaned loudly, his hands fisting the bed sheets and he pushed his hips up a little. He ran his hands down to Shane’s hair, running his fingers through it and bushing up slowly. It felt so good, Shane’s mouth was so warm and so tight. “Please.” Ilya let out a few words in Russian, moaning against him and when he felt so close he pulled his boy back up.

“Was I bad?” Shane whispered and Ilya used his thumb to wipe the edges of his mouth and shook his head.

“Opposite.” He breathes.

“Are... Can you... Can you fuck me?” Shane whispers.

Ilya stares at him, eyes wide and he nods his head slowly. “Are you sure?”

“It’s all I’ve been thinking about, I... I did some research I got...” He blushes and Ilya kisses him, of course Shane did research. “I got lube and condoms.”

“Okay,” Ilya sucks his lip.

“But we don’t have to, Ilya if you’re not ready.” Shane whispers.

“I am ready,” Ilya nods. “Just thinking about how lucky I am.”

“We are.” Shane pulls him down on top of him and kisses him so slowly. They get rid of their clothes, kissing any exposed skin they have seen, touching and exploring each other lazily. Shane leans over and takes the lube and condoms from his drawer and Ilya kisses him so softly. He grabs a pillow and puts it under his hips, because maybe, he won’t tell Kip - but he did listen.

“Are you ready?” Ilya whispers as he lubed his fingers up, Shane nodded, reaching down and holding onto Ilya’s hand and slowly he pushed a finger inside. He took his time, making sure he was open, adding a second finger, kissing against his thigh, licking over his leaking cock. When he thought he was ready he pulled his fingers away, grabbed a condom and slipped it on, adding some more lube. He moved Shane’s legs open and pulled his hips up a little more. “Are you comfortable?” He whispered, pressing against his hole slowly.

“Yes,” Shane breathed, “Please, I...” Ilya nods.

Ilya pushes into him slowly, he’s so tight and he doesn’t know how to hold back, he moves slowly, Shane stares up at him, eyes so big, yearning.

“It’s okay?” Ilya asks.

“Fuck. Yes. It... Oh, do that again.” Ilya chuckled softly and pressed a kiss against his lips, hard and messy as he rolled his hips against that sweet little sensitive spot.

It didn't take long, Shane came first moaning Ilya's name in a desperate kiss and Ilya collapsed ontop of him not long after, slowly he pulled away and disposed of the condom, he knew Shane hated being messy and he quickly grabbed a cloth from the bathroom and cleaned him up.

“Shane, are you okay?” Ilya asked as he cuddled back into him.

“Fucking love you,” Shane pants and he curls up on his chest. Ilya just grins, pressing a kiss against his hair.

“Love you too.”

Chapter 26

Chapter 26

It's a slow week, Ilya and Shane go back to school with their normal routine. Ilya tries not to think about the drafts, he focuses on their upcoming away game which of course they win. They share a hotel room, have sex again, twice. Ilya thinks he can easily become addicted to Shane and his body. It's like a fire has been unleashed between them.

"What do you want to do for your birthday?" Shane asks, they are sitting against Ilya's tree, Shane between his legs, reading one of his texts and Ilya is smoking. He has cut down a lot. But it is helping, easing the nerves.

"My birthday?" Ilya frowns.

"It's soon."

Next week.

"Oh, I don't celebrate." Ilya shrugs.

"Ilya, you are going to be eighteen, it is a very big moment." Shane frowns.

"We can watch movie." Ilya says with a little shrug and he takes another long drag of his cigarette.

"Okay," Shane whispers.

Ilya just smiles, "Go back to boring book."

"It's actually quite interesting," Ilya rolls his eyes and he moves so he's laying on his back, Shane adjusts so his head on his stomach.

"Read me boring book." Shane rolls his eyes but starts to read out loud and Ilya thinks maybe this is all he needs for his birthday.

Ilya's birthday falls on a Saturday and Scott takes Shane and Ilya home that Friday. "Kip is working late tonight, the gallery is having a party. But he said he cooked and left it for us."

"That was nice of him." Ilya nods, he feels a little disappointed that Kip wouldn't be there. He hadn't seen him since their trip and he missed him. Scott pulled into the drive and got out of the car, Ilya grabbed his and Shane's bag and walked in with him. The three of them had dinner, Scott and Shane talking a lot about hockey. Ilya sat back a little. His head was a little spaced out, Shane had his hand in his and was playing with his fingers.

Ilya had eaten the macaroni that Kip had cooked, even Shane had gone in for two helpings. "I think we have some ice cream," Scott smiled. "Ilya,"

Ilya blinked and turned to Scott, “Sorry, what?”

“You okay bud?” Scott asked softly.

“Sorry, was just... What did you say?”

“Ice cream, do you want some?” Scott smiled.

“Maybe later,” Ilya stood up and took their plates and cleaned them up, he put the rest of the pasta in the fridge for Kip.

“I’ll leave you two to it, if you need anything I’ll be in my office.” Scott said before heading out of the room.

“Can we sit outside for a bit?” Ilya asked Shane and his boyfriend nodded, “Of course.” Hand in hand they headed to the large outdoor bench, it was cushioned and cosy and Shane sat down and tugged Ilya down so he was laying on his lap.

“Do you want to talk?” Shane asks, his nails slowly running over his scalp.

“Just thinking about tomorrow,” Ilya says slowly.

“The team wanted to throw you a party,” Shane says softly. “But I said no, you said you didn’t want to celebrate.” Shane chews his lip, worried if he had done the right thing.

“I don’t... I am glad you said no,” Ilya breathes. “Thank you.”

“I’m sure Kip and Scott will want to do something,”

“I want you, my dads and your parents. That’s all I need.” Ilya smiles and he kisses his leg. “Being eighteen it is big in Russia.”

“It’s a big milestone. What would you... what are the Russian traditions?” Shane asks softly.

“Lots of food.” Ilya pulls a face at that. “Dinner, with family. I would be the host, greetings. Very formal.” Ilya shivers a little and Shane grabs the outdoor blanket and drapes it over him. “Then I can drink alcohol. I drink in front of people, becoming adult.”

“That sounds...” Shane wasn’t too sure what it sounded like, very much not like Ilya.

“It is not fun. I went to many. But it is... I am thinking of my mother.” Ilya whispers. “She made birthdays special.”

“Tell me about them?” Shane whispers.

Ilya takes a little breath and nods slowly. “If I was not at school, my dad made me go to the ice. But on my birthday, there was no ice. No skating. We did not tell him that. There was a funfair. We would go. Then we had Karavai,”

“What’s that?” Shane asks, sucking on his lip.

“Bread. But sweet. She would bake it. Then,” Ilya wipes his eyes quickly and smiles. “If you are good a ghost gives you gift.”

“A ghost?” Shane asks, “As in... Boo.”

Ilya lets out a teary laugh and nods, “You would not understand.” Ilya whispers.

“Try me.” Shane smiles.

Ilya turns a little so instead of facing the garden he is now looking up at Shane. Shane presses a kiss to his forehead, using his thumb he gently brushes the tears away. “The thieving ghost, they take a toy from you if you are bad, naughty.” Ilya nods, “Then you are good, the ghost gives it back on your next birthday.”

Shane smiles, “Did the ghosts steal any of your toys?”

“Oh yes.” Ilya nods and he closes his eyes as the memory washes over him. His favourite soldier figure was gone and then returned, his beloved red race car missing and suddenly found in his skates. “I got them back,”

“I’m sorry that she isn’t here to see just how amazing you are,” Shane whispers. “But I promise you, she’s up there, she’s watching you and she’s so proud.”

Ilya nods his head, “She is my real ghost now. But... Talking about her, it makes her not feel so dead.”

“Then we will talk about her, whenever you need.” Shane promised.

“Thank you.” Ilya smiles and he takes Shane’s hand and kisses it softly.

“Do you want to go inside?” Shane asks softly.

“Not yet.” Ilya whispers. “Not yet.”

Chapter 27

Chapter 27

Ilya woke up to the feeling of being kissed against his chest, soft little pecks and teasing licks across his skin and he shivered. “Mm?”

“Happy Birthday,” Shane whispered and he trailed kisses a little lower.

“Shane,” Ilya groaned, his body already reacting to Shane and his devilish touches. “Shane they could...”

“Scott is running, Kip is making breakfast.” Shane promised as he slid lower down his body. Ilya lost all sense of his very weak argument when Shane wrapped his lips around the tip of his cock and all he could think was if this was how his birthday started then maybe it would be a good day.

They walked down to breakfast hand in hand, both showered and dressed an hour after Shane had woken him up. Kip grinned when he saw them and he rushed over to Ilya, hugging him tightly. “Happy Birthday,”

“Thank you,” Ilya smiled and he held onto him tighter. “How was the event at the gallery?” He asks.

“Was fun, some of my friends from New York turned up and we went for a drink. I’m sorry I wasn’t here when you came home yesterday.”

“It is okay, as long as you had a fun time?” Ilya smiled.

“I spent most of the night gushing about my son,” Kip grinned proudly. Ilya ducked his head at that and he went to start setting the table. “Shall we eat outside?” Kip suggested. “It’s nice and sunny,”

“Okay,” Ilya nodded, “Just us...”

“Yuna and David are on their way,” Kip nodded.

Ilya smiled and he grabbed the plates to take outside and Kip turned to Shane, “He seems a little down.” Kip frowned.

“He’s okay, we had a good conversation yesterday about his mum, I think it helped. Thank you for letting me stay the night.” Shane smiled.

“You’re welcome, thank you for being so amazing to him.” Kip smiled and he flipped the pancakes onto the large serving plate, he had made another dish of bacon and the fruit was

already cut and ready. “In the top cupboard are the sauces, strawberry and chocolate.” He said and Shane nodded and reached for them and carried them out to the table.

Breakfast was fun, Scott teased Kip so playfully about coming home drunk last night and Ilya wished he had got to see it. Kip was such a kind spirit, always happy and he could just imagine how sweet he would have been. Kip then reminded Scott of how drunk he had been after his MVP award, how he had mistaken the closet for the bathroom and had woken Kip up by peeing in his shoes. Ilya laughed at that.

“Old man Kip, bladder more sensitive.” Ilya teased.

Yuna and David just grinned, watching them all fondly. Ilya looked over at Shane, he wanted to add how cute Shane had been drunk, but he didn’t want to bring that up. So he just settled back and took Shane’s hand in his, he felt like they were both still in the afterglow of their time together this morning.

“Shall we do presents?” Kip asked once the breakfast had been finished. Ilya had eaten two pancakes and a bowl of fruit.

“I...” Ilya looked between them all.

“You didn’t think we would not have presents for you for your eighteenth birthday did you?” Yuna said and shook her head, she leaned over and kissed his cheek softly.

Ilya shut his mouth, he really didn’t know what to expect. They had all done so much for him over the past couple of months, he didn’t deserve presents. Yuna and David went first, some soft jumpers and a new pair of trainers. Ilya hugged them both and instantly put one of his new jumpers on, it was so soft and he cuddled into it.

“I was thinking one of the things that you need well would be driving lessons.” Scott hummed.

“Driving lessons?” Ilya frowned.

“Well, you would need a car. Can’t have you going into your Rookie league without being able to get to and from places.” Scott smiled.

“Which then means you’d probably need a car.” Kip hummed. “And we know that you would never accept a car from us, so,” Kip handed him an envelope. “I know in Russia you would get envelopes of cash, but inside is a promise, when you pass your test then we will go halves on whatever car that you want when you get your draft signing cheque.”

“What if I don’t get drafted?” Ilya asked quietly.

“We will be richer,” Scott winked. “But that won’t happen.”

Ilya just smiled and hugged them both tightly.

Then everyone turned to Shane, “Oh I... I’ll give you your present later,” Kip let out a little giggle at that and Ilya gave him a pointed look, but also one that said maybe I already got it. “I didn’t mean...”

Ilya silenced his rambling boyfriend with a soft kiss.

The day was fun, easy. Shane and his dad set out a little hockey pitch on the grass and they all played, even Kip who was terrible. They then jumped into the pool, swimming, laughing, it was so easy, no expectations to be anything other than this.

“I love you,” Ilya smiled as he swam up to Shane. “This is.. This is a nice birthday.” He whispered.

“I’m glad.” Shane grinned and he wrapped his arms around him. “Did you start driving in Russia?”

“Yes,” Ilya smiled. “We start when we are sixteen for lessons. I did not crash that many times.” Ilya winks.

“Oh god,” Shane grinned.

“I did learn to ride bike.” Ilya smiled.

“That’s sexy.” Shane grinned.

“Oh really?” Ilya teased and he tickled Shane’s sides, both of them laughing, neither of them noticing Yuna taking the photos of them.

“I could sleep for a while.” Ilya yawned, he had changed into sweats and one of his new jumpers and was cuddled into Shane’s side on one of the armchairs in the movie room.

“Have a little nap, I think my mum is cooking dinner.” Shane smiled.

“You told them about lots of food?” Ilya pouted. “I want my favourite. My favourite chicken and potatoes.”

“I think I burned the chicken a little.” Shane said softly.

“I think it could be cooked more.” Ilya teased and kissed his hair.

“Have a little sleep, I know you didn’t sleep much last night,” Shane said softly, fingers playing with his hair.

“I did try.” Ilya whispered.

“I know baby, I know.” Shane promised. Ilya let the soft breathing of his boyfriend, the gentle touch in his hair lull him to sleep.

Scott walked into the kitchen where Yuna and David were cooking, Kip was watching the married couple work in his kitchen with a smile and looked at his husband. “You’re smiling very big.” Kip hummed.

“I have news.” Scott grinned.

“What is it?” Kip asked, standing up and walking over to him. “Scott...”

Scott looked to the basement to make sure the door was closed and the boys couldn’t hear. “Ilya, he’s been... he’s been drafted.”

“What number?” Yuna asked.

“What team?” Kip asked at the same time.

“Montreal and Ottawa were fighting for him.” Scott hummed. “But he did it, he got Montreal.”

Kip could feel his eyes watering, and then Yuna asked again. “What number on the draft?”

“First.” Scott whispered. “He got first draft.”

Chapter 28

Chapter 28

Kip wasn't too sure what the boys were doing downstairs, they had left to go and watch movies a few hours ago and hadn't emerged since. He had decorated the dining room, birthday banners and balloons and had everything set. When dinner was ready, he opened the door slowly, he wasn't sure if he was going to be disturbing anything.

He couldn't hear the movie, the screen was on the title page of some fast car action film that he was sure Scott and Ilya had watched a few times together. They were sat in one of the corner sofas, both of them fast asleep, Ilya against Shane's lap and Shane leaning back, but his fingers were still moving in his hair. He snapped a photo, a part of him wanted to leave them there, it was clear all day to everyone that Ilya had been pushing through some tiredness.

"Ilya, Shane," Kip said gently and he crouched down and stroked Ilya's cheek. His eyes fluttered open and he frowned, "Dinner is ready." Ilya nodded slowly and looked up as Shane woke too.

They walked up together and Ilya held onto his hand tighter, he felt a little out of it, but not in the weird horrible way he had felt yesterday. "Still sleepy?" Kip asked softly.

"No, I'm okay. I'm actually hungry." Ilya said honestly and that simple sentence made Kip break into a smile.

"Well, we better get it whilst it's warm." Kip smiled and the three of them headed into the dining room.

Ilya gasped when he saw the decorations, he held onto Shane's hand tight and just grinned. "This... This is nice."

"Happy Birthday." Yuna smiled. "Come on, let's sit."

Ilya sat beside Shane and grinned at everyone, all he could think was everyone just looked happy and that was a memory he would cherish. Dinner was delicious. Ilya ate it all, even went in for a little extra but didn't quite finish it.

The doorbell rang and Scott answered it, hugging Teddy and grinning at him. He had wanted to tell Ilya as soon as they had come up, but he held back.

"Where's the birthday boy?" Teddy sung as he walked in. "I hope I haven't missed the cake."

"Teddy." Ilya smiled, he hadn't seen him since the incident with Mikhail. "Good to see you."
"You too." Teddy smiled and he hugged him tight. "Shane," Teddy greeted him with the same hug and Shane just grinned, he still couldn't believe that this was so normal.

“So, Teddy here has something for you.” Kip smiled, it was only then that Ilya noticed the large box.

“You didn’t...” Ilya frowns.

“Oh, I did.” Teddy winks, and he looks at Scott and Kip and hands them the box.

“Open it,” Kip whispered and it was then that Ilya saw that his eyes were watering.

Ilya took the box slowly, he opened it as if it was the most delicate thing in the world and he gasped when he saw what was inside. The oh so familiar blue and white jersey, Rozanov stitched into the back with the number 81.

“Congratulations,” Scott whispered.

“I... I got Montreal?” Ilya asked quietly.

“No,” Teddy grins. “Montreal got you. Congratulations.”

Ilya turned his head to Shane who had a look in his eye something Ilya couldn’t quite make out, but then he smiled and wrapped his arms around him. “I’m so proud of you.” He said and kissed his cheek.

“This is not dream?” Ilya breathes.

“No bud, it’s not a dream. You did it. I’m so fucking proud of you.” Scott had tears streaming down his face now and he pulled Ilya into his arms.

“I don’t know what you said to them, but they realised I knew you, asked me so many questions I felt like I was about to be interviewed,” Teddy laughs. “They fought for you, it was between us and Ottawa. We got you man.”

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered and he stared at the shirt again.

“Tell him,” Yuna grinned excitedly.

“Tell me what?”

“You were number one draft pick,” Kip grins, “Whatever that means.”

Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya again, kissing his face and wiping his tears away. Everyone hugged and cheered and Ilya couldn’t believe that this was real. He was certain that this must have been a dream.

That night Ilya curled up against Shane, Kip had brought out a bottle of vodka and they all had a glass, Shane smiled, “I may have told them about the importance of alcohol.” Ilya and Shane just had the one but the adults got a little merrier and they could still hear them downstairs.

“Are you sad?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Sad?” Shane frowned.

“That I got...”

“That you got Montreal? Of course not, I’m so proud of you.”

“Montreal was your dream.” Ilya whispered.

“Hockey was my dream, I liked the idea of Montreal because of being close to my family, but you never know there might be room for me next year too. It doesn’t matter about me, I am so happy for you.”

“I don’t want you mad at me.” Ilya said quietly.

“Oh baby, I promise you I’m not. This is the best thing for us, you will be an hour away from me, that’s doable.” Shane smiled. “It’s not like you’re going to be across the country every week.”

“Do you think I could still stay at school?” Ilya asked shyly. “I doubt it.”

“I don’t think so.” Shane said honestly. “But we still have the summer.”

“We do.” Ilya nods. “We will make it the best summer.”

“Mmhmm.” Shane hummed and he turned against him more, kissing him slow and hard. “I love you,”

“I love you,” Ilya repeated and kissed him again.

The school league finished with them holding the cup above their heads, the whole team cheering and screaming. Ilya wasn’t too sure when he had started crying. It felt so final. “We did it,” Ilya breathed pulling Shane closer to him, he handed the cup over to Sam.

“You did it.” Shane insisted.

“We.” Ilya said shaking his head, he tilts his chin up and kissed him with everything he could. It wasn’t their first kiss on the ice, but it was their first kiss at a game, a game full to the brink.

“I love you so fucking much,” Shane whispered against his lips.

“Mm.” Ilya smiled. “I love you even more than that,”

“Not possible.” Shane giggled against him and kissed him again. Ilya took his hands and spun him around on the ice. “When you win the Stanley cup next year, will you do this with me on the ice too?” Shane whispered.

“Every time.” Ilya grinned. “Even if I win against you.”

“Won’t happen.” Shane smiled and nuzzled his head against his neck.

“Are you ready to go?” Scott asked softly, he stood behind Ilya. They were in his room at the school. He had packed everything up, everything that he wouldn’t leave for Shane.

“He will be okay here?” Ilya asked quietly, staring at the bed that he and Shane had shared every night since they met.

“He will be, I will make sure of it.” Scott promised. “Every chance he has he’ll be with you anyway.”

Ilya nodded his head slowly. “I will... I will miss it here. I wish I hadn’t hid.”

“You were adjusting Ilya, everything was new and scary, I think you did what anyone would have done if they were in your position.” Scott said gently. Ilya just nodded, it was similar to what Ivan had said so many times. “Come on, let’s get these boxes home.”

Ilya nodded, he took one last look at the bed and smiled. Last night they had made love, he had worshipped every inch of Shane’s body, neither caring if anyone could hear them or not. He smiled at the photo of the two of them he had printed and left on the pillow, the whole room was a gallery of their love, photos, mementos of their time together. His own room back at Scott and Kips was the same.

“Are you sure I can live with you?” Ilya asked as they made their way to the car.

“Are you sure you want to live with us?” That should be the question Scott chuckled.

“I am sure.” Ilya nodded.

“Ilya,” Shane smiled as he stared at his boyfriend.

Ilya was dressed in a deep blue suit, his hair perfectly curled back with a little spray to keep it in place, he had put a little weight on, his cheeks no longer so drawn in. His eyes were bright, full of love and life.

“What my tie is crooked?” Ilya looked down at the tie.

“No, you... You look so handsome,” Shane whispered.

“Oh.” Ilya blushed and took Shane’s hand. “Not as handsome as you,” Ilya smiled down at Shane, his own black suit was tight against his body, he looked perfect.

“My boyfriend is the number one draft,” Shane hummed, “I had to dress to impress.”

“Yes,” Ilya grinned.

“You doing okay?” Shane asked.

“I am terrified,” Ilya smiles, “But I am okay.”

“We should go down, you can’t be late, not today.”

“No. I think Dad would kill me, and Yuna.” He shakes his head. “Surprised they are not kno...” A knock on the door caused them both to laugh.

“We’re going to be late.” Ilya laughed at Scott’s voice and Shane kissed him again.

“Okay, let’s see those numbers.” Ilya stood in the middle of the stage, his Montreal jersey open in front of him, his name on there for the world to see and he held up one finger, a smile plastered on his face.

The cameras flashed a little more and Ilya moved his hand quickly, pulling out the chain he wore around his neck, a gold delicate band hung around it.

“Shane, are you proposing?” Ilya whispered. It was the night of his birthday, they were alone in his room, Shane on his knee holding open a red velvet box.

“Not yet.” Shane smiled. “But it’s a promise of one day. One day we will be, one day we will have it all. I’ve never believed in soul mates, but I know that is what you are Ilya Rozanov, you are my soul mate.” Shane wiped his eyes quickly. “One day we will be married, we will have a house bigger than Scott’s, we will have a beautiful dog, we will have a family.”

“One day.” Ilya smiled and he pulled Shane up into his arms and he kissed him.

Ilya held up the shirt and brought the ring to his lips, pressing a kiss to the band, he winked to the camera. As excited as he was for the season ahead, all he could think about was the future he had never thought possible. He found Shane’s eyes in the crowd, he was crying, they all were, and Ilya did the only thing he could think to do - he winked.

The End

Look out for the sequel coming soon...

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