There have been threats

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There have been threats

by gsmaxwell

Summary

Shane wasn’t stupid. He figured this was some kind of fucking cowardly tactic to keep him from being at the Games. Hopefully, that’s all they wanted. If he just played nice maybe this would all be over soon.

No one was coming to save him.

No one, except maybe Rozanov. And he was pretty sure Rozanov would just be pissed off at being stood up.

Or: Shane goes missing before Sochi, and the only one who can save him is Ilya.

Notes

I'm focussing more on book timeline to make my little mind work better, so apologies in advance. However, this was based on Shane's comment in the TV show that he hadn't ever been kidnapped but there were threats. A note: based on the book, Shane and Ilya hookup in the rental property in December 2014, and I moved their game to January, right before they woud all leave.

Is this messing up the timeline? Yes. Is this fanfic and therefore not that serious? Also, yes.

I'm sorry for the bad Russian. And the bad Russians.

Please enjoy!

Chapter 1

January 2014, post-game

His head hurt.

That was the first sensation. The world was blissfully dark, but cold. He liked a cold room sometimes, but this was too much.

His hands caught on something, and there was a fraying pain around his wrists. Shane tried to open his eyes.

The darkness was so deep that, for a moment, he was terrified he had gone blind. His heart raced and his breath became shallow, but the air was too stuffy. He took a sharp breath as he realized that he wasn't in his bed.

His hands and ankles were bound with something, and the darkness was caused by something covering his head. He flailed, but his elbows and thighs banged painfully into something on all sides. He tried to sit up and smacked his head on a hard surface.

Was he in a box? A cage?

His breathing quickened. He couldn't even stretch his legs out, but he tried anyway, kicking hard. Everything was too small, too close. He was going to die.

"Hey!" he shouted, flailing now even though he kept painfully smashing into the side of whatever was holding him. "Help! Somebody!"

He was lightheaded, his breath turning into quick pants.

Oh God, maybe he was somewhere airtight. Was he suffocating?

He thought of his mom and dad, how they would feel when he was found, or never found. Fuck this would kill them.

He wished he could say one more thing, one more 'I love you'.

An image of Ilya floated through his mind, and his breathing turned from panting to hyperventilation, sucking up all the remaining air in whatever coffin he had been put into.

He didn't want to die. Not now, not before—

There was a loud sound, a bang, and the darkness softened as light, filtered through whatever heavy material was over his head. The stuffy air turned cold and fresh, but he couldn't slow his breathing.

"*Chert, nado bylo zatknut' yemu rot*," the voice was angry.

A second voice, rougher and not as pissed off. "*Konechno, skazhi bossu, chto on vso isportil. Ya podozhdu zdes."*

"*Zatknis*," the first voice said, and Shane at least understood that one. He had spent five years playing with enough Russian teammates to know when they were telling Rozanov to shut up.

"Hey, look," he struggled to speak, but his breathing was still too fast to let him get a lot out. "I don't know what—"

"Shut up," one man snapped at him in heavily accented English. He turned and spoke some more with his accomplice, more arguing and posturing. Shane took the time to take stock of where he was, and what he remembered.

They had played Boston, winning, which had pleased Shane to no end. Especially after Rozanov had broken their rule about pre-game texting. Shane remembered texting him the address of his new building from the Centre Bell parking lot. He had been paranoid driving to the building, thinking that every person he passed on the street was going to peer into his car window and know exactly where he was going and what he was doing.

He had gotten to the back lot of his three-story loft building, parking in a dark corner. He had bought this place because it was secluded, so he had let his guard down. The back lot had been empty except for the trucks left here by the construction crew. He hadn't gotten around to installing proper lights here, so it would have been hard for anyone to identify him or any illicit guests. They must have staked the place out, though he had no idea why they predicted he would go to the investment property tonight.

His hands were bound, but he realized he could still move them. He went to grab whatever was covering his eyes, yanking at a rough bag over his head.

"*Da poshol on nakhuy, yemu sledovalo svyazat' ruki za spinoy."*

Even though he had been working out every day since he was a teenager, those skills didn't translate to fighting off two people determined to pin him down, off balance. His head smacked against something and he felt the spot where they had initially hit him in the parking lot. He nearly vomited and went still.

Despite giving up, Shane pissed them off enough that they hauled from him whatever container space he had been in. He landed hard on snow and asphalt, scraping his knees and forearms as he tried to catch himself, his ankles still bound.

"Stop fucking moving!" A hard boot caught him in the midsection, and he curled up instinctively, covering his head. It was freezing, but he squirmed in the snow, trying to roll away from the blows until he hit frozen dirt. The hand seized him, hoisted him up, and stripped him of his meager freedom.

With a last-ditch effort, he yanked at the head covering, pulling the tied bag painfully over his head.

It took a moment for Shane's eyes to adjust. It was still dark, though he could see dawn on the horizon. He had been in the car's trunk, which made sense now that he thought about it. If he were still in Montreal, it was a place he didn't recognize. Squat, old buildings lined a small river that smelled like sewage. The recent snow had done a decent job of covering the broken and dirty alley road where they were parked. He had no clue why someone would bring him here.

His captors swore viciously in Russian as they shoved him in the trunk again, taking no care. One, the one who had spoken English, looked to be somewhere in his twenties, dark-haired with a shaved head and thick beard. The other was taller, older, with a nasty and freshly healed scar across his cheek.

Shit. He wasn't supposed to look at kidnappers. That was a survival tip he was pretty sure he had heard on a podcast once. Fuck.

Too late, he closed his eyes. The shorter guy cursed in Russian. Some words Shane recognized from pissed off rants in the locker room, then he switched to English. "Quiet and get in the car, Hollander."

God, that was not the Russian accent he was used to hearing speak his name.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Though his heart was pounding, he had to get away.

What if they had guns? He couldn't outrun a gun, even if he got out of the rope.

"Our business is private." The younger man's hands held Shane's arm and squeezed hard enough to bruise. "Shut up, and you live. Got it?"

"Do you want money? I can give it to you, just—"

The scarred guy punched him across the jaw, nothing like the rare scraps he got into on the ice, which felt like love taps now. This guy wanted to hurt him, badly. His head spun, and he spat blood onto the dirty snow.

Done talking, the man wrestled him into the back of the trunk. He saw a flash of a blade and tried to scramble away, but Scarface held him down as the Talker cut the bonds on his hands. Shane was confused until they bent his resisting arms behind his back.

He doubled his efforts to get free, to get the knife, to do *something for fuck's sake*, but these men were practiced. He felt his watch cut into his wrist as one of them ripped it off before a sickening ripping of duct tape bound his arms behind his back.

Another rip, and this time the tape went over his bloodied lips. The now snowy bag was shoved over his head, and the trunk violently closed.

He tried again to kick out, less panicked he was going to suffocate but more worried about where they were taking him. His head and ribs hurt, bile rising as he struggled to keep it back. He knew he had a concussion. Years of protocols and getting hit in the head had made him hyperaware of it. He had been knocked out after the first blow, so of course he had one.

What was he supposed to do? Limit screen times. Rest. No bright lights. Avoid strenuous activities or getting hit in the head.

Shut the fuck up, Shane, his inner voice felt high and panicky. How the fuck was that advice going to help him now? What, was he going to politely request his kidnapper *not* let him use the phone or smack him around?

At least they had made everything dark.

Stay awake, he told himself, trying to counter the building desire to scream and cry. There was more Russian speaking, though muffled through the car. Then, the engine turned off and they started to move.

Step one was to stay alive long enough to get away or for someone to find him.

Fuck.

Boston had been their last game before Moscow. Everyone would be busy with final preparations until next week, when they were all due to fly out. Even his parents had decided to spend the first week of January in Mexico. Shane had told them he wanted time alone to mentally prepare. Really, he hadn't been thinking much further than this last hookup with Rozanov. He had been nervous to show the man the rental property, and it had distracted him from a lot of other things.

Things like the Russian *mafia* apparently lurking in his parking lot.

Shane wasn't stupid. He figured this was some kind of fucking cowardly tactic to keep him from being at the Games. Hopefully, that's all they wanted. Maybe they were just going to keep him just long enough he wouldn't be able to play, then let him go. If he just played nice, maybe this would all be over soon.

He ran his tongue over his fat lip. He felt sick as several teeth moved too freely and choked back another sob.

No one was going to notice he was missing for at least a few days. That gave them a lot of time to stash him away.

No one was coming. Not in time to track him down.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

No one, except maybe Rozanov. And he was pretty sure Rozanov would just be pissed off at being stood up.

* * *

Six hours earlier

Ilya shivered as his cab dropped him off in front of an abandoned building. What the fuck was that idiot doing? He was pretty sure Hollander didn't actually want him dead, even though they had traded threats for years about it. Maybe this was some kind of Canadian prank. Over the years, Hollander was shedding his inhibitions little by little. Maybe fucking in a murder house was some kind of fear kink he was exploring. It was weird, but Ilya would be willing to go along with it for now.

Or maybe Hollander wanted to off him before the Olympics. Ilya wouldn't put it past him; he was too intense about hockey sometimes.

No, that was ridiculous. Hollander wasn't creative enough to have plotted a seven-year honeypot just on the off chance he could murder Team Russia's captain in a back alley in Montreal.

Right?

He shivered as he walked to the back of the building, which was mostly unlit. Construction equipment was neatly stored in the lee of the building, and a few white vans were parked nearby. There were a few tire tracks in the fresh snow, mostly leading to the dark corner where an SUV was parked, presumably Hollander's.

Ilya pulled out his phone and tapped a quick message.

Ilya: Here. wtf

A sharp wind made him hike his jacket up as he waited impatiently for a reply.

Murder or not, it was fucking cold. There had better be heat in whatever weird sex-death-torture-murder room Hollander was building.

He hadn't worn gloves, so he blew on his hands for warmth as he waited. There had been traffic, so he knew he was running late, but Hollander deserved it. He had scored a fucking dirty shot to seal the win, and Ilya was going to make him pay for it.

Several minutes went by, and the message remained unread.

Ilya: it's fucking cold. wtf man. let me in :(

There was another long stretch of time that seemed like hours, though Ilya's phone lied and told him it was only a few minutes. Cursing, Ilya walked to the back door that seemed to have the most activity around it and tugged, but it was locked. He banged irritability a few times, thinking of all the ways he was going to make that fucking Canadian squirm. If he wasn't murdered, that is.

Ilya: I'm going to fucking leave. You aren't the only person I can fuck in montreal you know

He stomped back through the snow to get a better look at the window. None of them were on, and he hadn't noticed lights from the front either.

If this were a prank, it was a fucking stupid one.

Ilya looked around again in case Hollander was hiding in a dumpster or something, waiting to jump out. A stupid idea, but one he would welcome more than Hollander standing him up like this.

He always knew each time might be the last time, that Hollander would come to his senses and tell Ilya to fuck off. Every time could be the last time, but he didn't expect this kind of cruelty from Hollander. He was a decent guy. If he was going to call things off, he would probably do it in as painfully awkward of a way as he could. Maybe over a candlelit dinner, or something just as dorky.

Ilya had always thought he would be able to talk him out of it when the time came.

Ilya: Hollander, did you hit your head or something? open the fucking door.

Ilya pocketed his phone and glanced around again. The SUV in the corner wasn't dusted with snow yet, so it was recent. He hadn't ever seen Hollander's car, but this was boring and practical, so he assumed it was his.

He pulled out his phone to light the way, and his steps slowed involuntarily. At first glance, it looked normal, doors closed. There was a Voyageur charm hanging from the rearview mirror, and as Ilya got closer, he could see a Bauer bag in the back seat. His dress shoe slipped on a patch of ice, and he caught himself on the car hood, dropping his phone.

"Fucking shit," he swore as he picked it up, the light luckily not turning off. But as he brushed it clear with his sleeve, the light flashed on something dark against the white ground.

His heart was pounding as he focused on it. Blood, not much, but still a few drops of dark red. The snow around here was disturbed, he realized, standing very still as he moved the light around.

Normally, the snow here would be crisp after a light snowfall, but he could see footsteps, flattened parts like something heavy had been dropped on it. His light caught a glint of metal, and he found a set of keys half buried and forgotten.

He followed the tracks to the other end of the lot, which was pitch dark. Tire tracks, fresh he assumed. There wasn't blood here, so hopefully if someone was injured it hadn't been bad.

Someone.

Hollander.

Ilya moved back to the SUV. Covering his hands with his sleeve, he unlocked and opened the passenger door with keys. It took a few minutes of rummaging before he found the insurance papers in a clear plastic bag in the glove compartment. What a fucking organized freak.

This was undeniably Shane's car.

Panic welled up.

He called Shane's phone, looking around until he saw light coming from a bush not far off. Ilya picked up and saw "Lily Calling" across the screen.

Fuck. *Fuck*.

This was fucking bad.

Ilya hung up the phone and called 911.

Chapter 2

4 hours missing

The waiting room in PDQ 16 was uncomfortable and too small for Ilya's legs. He stretched them out, his impatient shoe tapping the only sound in the room.

They had taken Shane's phone and keys and asked him questions, diligently writing his answers.

The questions had been stupid. His answers, even more so.

"When was the last time you saw Shane Hollander?"

"About two hours ago—there's footage, on ice."

"What's your relationship to Mr. Hollander?"

"We are… friends. I visit him after games, sometimes."

"Does he have a girlfriend; somewhere else he would be?"

"No, he… he's very private person. I don't think he is dating anyone."

"Is this his home?"

"No, I… I don't think so. Maybe."

Half-truths that he was pretty sure wouldn't hinder an investigation, but useless words that did nothing to speed it up. He had described over and over what he had done: where he had found the phone and keys, which footprints were his, what he had touched. It didn't help that the officers had thick accents and unreadable expressions, giving him no sign his answers were helpful or even understood.

He had to repeat himself so many times he felt like he wanted to punch something. His pulse kept up a frantic rhythm in his throat like a ticking clock.

They had told him to go back to his hotel, but he couldn't just walk away without answers. If anyone at the PDQ were hockey fans, they didn't show it. Ilya wasn't used to this level of anonymity. By now he could have flirted or signed an autograph and smoothed his way through. If this were Moscow, he would know who to bribe. But this was fucking Canada; he had to be more careful about that kind of thing.

His phone was nearly dead, but he tapped out a message to Victor St-Simon, the only person on his team he knew was from Montreal.

Ilya: give me the number of a voyageur

Victor: wtf its 2am roz. what r u going to do?

Ilya: just give me

Victor: fuck u

Victor: 514-555-6791

Victor: drapeau

Victor: don't drag me into it

Ilya called the number, his foot still tapping on the ground. It took a few rounds of hanging up and redialing before someone picked up.

"*Tabarnak, c'est mieux que quelqu'un soit mort*."

Fucking French Canadians. Ilya didn't have time for this.

"Drapeau, *ca*?" Ilya leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and gripping his hair. "Do you know where your captain is?"

There was a long pause, the sounds of sheets rustling and a female voice muttered in French. "*Who the fuck is this*?"

This was a stupid idea. A really fucking stupid idea, but Ilya didn't know what else to do, and no one was doing anything quickly.

"Rozanov. Have you heard from Hollander? Since the game."

"*Rozanov*?" Gilbert Drapeau said his name like he was peeling it off his shoes. "*What the fuck do you want?*"

"I need to talk to your captain," Ilya said. "Where is he?"

"*Home, watching the fucking highlight reel of your team getting fucked sideways tonight. How the fuck did you get this number?"*

Ilya's jaw clenched. "Give me his address."

"*Fuck off."*

"I'm serious."

"*I'm serious, fuck right off, buddy. You think I'm just going to give the home fucking address of Shane Hollander to Ilya Rozanov a week before he flies out to Russia to slaughter you in front of the fucking world? You've got another thing coming*."

"Is not the building in Verdun, right?" Ilya was too tired for this.

"*How do you know about his Verdun place*?"

“I know a lot of things,” Ilya said.

“*Not his fucking home address, apparently*.”

Ilya pulled the phone away from his ear for a moment, collecting himself before he said something he regretted.

“It is important, okay? He is… not where he said he would be. I need to find him.”

There was a long pause, and Drapeau shushed the woman in the background when she complained. “*Why were you meeting up with him after the game*?”

“Captain business. Goalies wouldn’t understand.”

“*Right*.”

“If you are useless and know nothing, then let me speak to someone else. Pike. What is Pike’s number?”

“*You want to talk to Hayden Pike? Jesus Christ, the world must be ending*.”

Yes, Ilya thought. It really fucking is.

Before Drapeau could answer, Ilya’s phone went dead in his hand, and he nearly threw it across the room. He glanced at the camera in the corner and thought better of it. Instead, he went to the unstaffed desk and peered through the glass until he caught someone’s eye and waved them over.

“Do you have a phone charger?” Ilya asked, holding his phone up. “I need to make a call.”

“Mr. Rozanov, you really should go back to your hotel.” The officer looked annoyed but politely trying to hide it. Ilya had been back and forth to the desk for hours now. “We have your contact information if we have more questions.”

“What if I have more questions?” Ilya said. The edge crept into his voice despite his effort to stop it. “Like, what the fuck are you doing to find him?”

He regretted it immediately as the officer’s patience thinned even more, his expression flattening. “We’re doing everything we can be doing, Mr. Rozanov. I know you’re concerned for your friend, but you have to let us do our jobs.”

“Sorry,” Ilya rubbed at his eyes. “So… no news?”

“No.” The officer turned away, done with him. Ilya was certain that even if they did find Shane, it wouldn’t be him they rushed to tell.

There weren’t many taxis at two o’clock in the morning, so Ilya walked the block twice, barely registering the cold as his thoughts outpaced him.

Maybe Shane had just had some kind of emergency. Maybe cold feet. Maybe Ilya was overreacting by thinking that nothing short of a violent true crime scenario would have kept Shane Hollander from showing up. He was probably somewhere else, with someone else, naked and cute and sweaty, laughing at how pathetic Ilya looked calling fucking police.

Eventually, he found a taxi and sat with his thoughts rotting until they pulled up in front of the hotel. When Ilya plugged in his phone, he had angry, unhelpful texts from Drapeau and Victor St-Simon, but still nothing from Shane.

He had already searched every variation of *Shane Hollander, Montreal, address* in English, French and Russian, coming up with dozens of stalkerish posts and fan accounts that, under normal circumstances, he enjoyed teasing Shane about. Now, they were useless.

The realization crept in slowly that he might not get an answer at all. His vision blurred a bit and he blinked away the tears in frustration. There was no way this was it for tonight, not until he heard from someone that Shane was somewhere, naked and sweaty or not.

He typed in *Shane Hollander, family* and within fifteen minutes found himself staring at a government employee page listing an email and phone number for a David Hollander.

* * *

Morning, somewhere

Despite his efforts, Shane had fallen asleep in the back of the trunk. It felt like he had just closed his eyes, but daylight filtered in when they opened the trunk, thin and grey. His arms were screaming from where they were taped behind his back, muscles locked and cramping. His stomach was rolling again, but he still had tape over his mouth. He swallowed hard and tried to take deep breaths though his nose, willing himself not to vomit.

The same two men were still there. Shane had decided to call the English-speaker La Bouche because he wouldn't shut the fuck up. Scarface, in contrast, said little, but when he did, La Bouche voice dropped in deference.

Shane stayed still, hoping they'd think he was still out. He knew a handful of Russian words from the locker room—fucker, shut the fuck up, asshole—and had been reading travel guides to get ready for Sochi, but the two men didn't seem to be using phrases like, 'where's the bathroom' and 'I lost my passport'.

It was getting harder and harder to focus, though. His head felt fuzzy and wrapped in cotton; his mouth still tasted like blood, which wasn't helping his nausea.

He had been so stupid.

Buying a property in a secluded and quiet neighbourhood had seemed like a good idea at the time. It was supposed to be safer, a place where he wouldn't be caught. He hadn't gotten horribly unsafe vibes when he had visited throughout the last few weeks, making sure the place was ready for—

For what, exactly?

His thoughts turned sour. What had he imagined would happen? That Rozanov would be impressed with him? Buying a whole fucking building as a 'solution' to their problem? *Problem*. He had never thought that finding somewhere to fuck his Russian archrival would be a problem he would have to deal with.

It wasn't as if the property was that much of a secret. His parents had helped him with the paperwork. Drapeau and JJ had given him neighbourhood advice on a place that was up-and-coming but still 'peaceful' and 'quiet'.

He had kept it out of the press, not wanting the scarier fans to show up, or anyone else trying to leverage proximity to an NHL superstar. But he had told his teammates, friends.

And Rozanov.

Cold flooded his chest, sharp and sudden. No. That was fucking ridiculous. Rozanov wasn't that desperate. He liked to win, sure, and had devised some creative and dirty tactics over the years, like sexting before games and his borderline chirps when he knew no one else was in earshot— but this? There was no way.

Right?

His snapped out of his thoughts when Scarface finally said a word he recognised.

"—*vstretit'sya v* Hochelaga?"

Hochelaga.

Finally, a place he knew, though he wasn't sure ending up in one of Montreal's seedier neighbourhoods was a good thing.

He hadn't travelled as far as he had thought. Hope started to build. If he was still in the city, he could at least try to get away, find someone with a phone, call an ambulance. See his parents. A doctor. Get healed up, still be able to fly out next week, though he wasn't so excited about going to Russia right now.

He heard another car pull up, and doors open and close. He closed his eyes, even though things were still dark from the bag on his head. It was helping to push past the headache and concentrate.

Shane had to stop from crowing as La Bouche started to speak broken French.

"*Bonjour*, thanks for sharing space," the younger guy was not confident, and it showed. Shane wondered if he had only been dragged into this because he had oversold his language skills. He forced that thought down—it wasn't helpful to humanize his fucking kidnappers.

"Sure, sure. It's always interesting when Russia wants to pass some cargo through our territory." This voice had a fluent Quebecois accent, which Shane had gotten used to after seven years here. "What did this sick fuck do to piss off Medvedevy?"

“Gambling,” La Bouche said hesitantly. “Very bad.”

“Boring,” the Quebecer sighed. “What’s his name? Dante will want to know.”

“Lee. Mike Lee.”

Shane broke his silence, loudly protesting behind the tape. If he was going to be transported somewhere, he wanted to make sure they at least knew his name, even if this guy was some kind of criminal.

Between his bleeding lip and salivating mouth, he found a weak point in the tape and started to work a space open.

Scarface retorted something angrily La Bouche, and La Bouche said something back which included the words ‘shut up’. Shane struggled harder.

“Looks like your little fish wants free,” Quebec snickered as heavy hands lifted him out of the trunk, his arms wrenching even more behind his neck.

“Shut up, fucker,” La Bouche said in English. “We can break your jaw if you don’t like the tape.”

Shane could heal from a broken jaw. He wiggled his tongue more, furiously pushing his jaw against the loosened tape, the pull on his stubble sharp, pain flaring behind his eyes. Finally, enough had worked free.

“Shane Hollander,” he managed to say, loud though his voice was rough and hoarse. “*Je suis* Shane Hollander.”

Chapter 3

9 o'clock, Hotel Le Crystal Montreal

The phone number went to a very professional voicemail, so Ilya tried to leave professional messages.

"Hello, Mr. Hollander. This is Ilya Rozanov, from, uh, the Boston Bears. Please call me back at your earliest convenience. Yes. Thank you."

"Hello, Mr. Hollander, this is Ilya again. Please call me back when you get this message. It is very important."

"Hello, Mr. Hollander, you can also text or email me, it's okay. Whichever is easier. Thank you."

"Hello, again, Mr. Hollander. Maybe, you don't arrive to your office until 9, yes? If so, please call me back. Soon. This is Ilya Rozanov."

He had dozed for some hours remaining in the night, his phone in his hand. It wasn't restful, because he kept jolting awake at every creak or car bang outside the window, thinking it was someone knocking on his door to give him an update.

At 9:05, a reasonable time for government workers in Ottawa to arrive at their desks (Ilya Googled it), Ilya hit redial for a fifth time. He prepared himself for the inevitable beep, so he was caught off guard when the call was actually picked up.

"*Bonjour, good morning, how can I help you, comment puis-je vous aider?*" The voice was feminine, and Ilya frowned.

"Hello, I am looking for David Hollander? Is this his number?"

"*Yes, he works in this office. Unfortunately, he is out of office this week. Can I take a message?"*

Ilya didn't realise how much he had been counting on someone else to fucking care about this until they weren't. He felt irrational anger at the boring Canadian man he had never seen, but took an moment to calm down. "Is there another phone number? It is important."

"*Unfortunately, he is out of office, and won't be returning until next week*," the woman repeated firmly. "*I can put you in contact with another one of our officers, or if you send an email—"*

"No, no," Ilya's voice was tight. "Will be too late. It's not business. Is family. I need— There is no way, really, to contact him?"

"*I can take a message*."

What choice did Ilya have? He rubbed at his eyes. “Sure, yes. Please tell him to call, me, Ilya Rozanov.” He rattled off his number, thinking about what to do next. The useless police station? Drapeau again? Maybe Pike, if he could get the asshole’s number.

“*Wait, the Ilya Rozanov*?”

Fucking finally.

“Yes, yes,” his voice smoothed instinctively into the charming persona he cultivated for fans. “I know, it’s strange, but—”

“*My boyfriend is the biggest Bears fan!”*

“Your boyfriend has good taste, we will go to the playoffs this year. And you? Bears fan too?”

"*My parents would kill me. I’m a Centaur’s girl through and through*.”

“No, no, can’t be true. Someone as helpful as you can’t be a Centaur’s fan. I don’t believe it.”

There was a burst of unguarded laughter, and Ilya knew he was in.

“*I grew up ten minutes from the rink,”* she said. “*My whole family would disown me if I cheered for the Bears, sorry.”*

“That explains it,” Ilya said solemnly. “It is not loyalty, is—what do you call it—brainwashing?”

“*Oh my God*.”

“I forgive you,” he added. “But only because you answer phones before nine-thirty.”

Another laugh. “*You’re just as charming as they say*.”

“I try,” Ilya said, pushing just a little bit more. “But I have good success turning Centaurs into Bears. Is easy when I play for the best team in division.”

“*You have made my boyfriend very happy, last night aside*.”

“Don’t worry, we will rematch next month.”

There was a clacking of keys as she laughed again. “*Okay, Mr. Rozanov, what message do you want to pass along to David? More bragging about the Bears? Because I hear enough about the Voyagers from him to know he won’t like it.*”

“No, no,” Ilya said. “Not about Bears, I promise. Just, please, let him know I called? It is urgent.”

“*Alright, I can try to reach out. He sometimes checks his office messages on vacation, but no promises.”*

Relief loosened something tight in his chest. “Thank you—what is your name?”

“*Amanda. Pennings*.”

“Thank you, Amanda,” he said, before adding, “If you and you boyfriend ever want tickets to see real team play, I owe you.”

She huffed a laugh. “*I can’t accept bribes, Mr. Rozanov*.”

“Is not bribe,” he corrected lightly. “I’m trying to save you, from brainwash, right? Totally different. Next time Bears are in Ottawa, I’ll leave tickets in your name.”

“*I’ll think about it*.”

“Good, making smart decisions.”

She laughed again, softer. “*Don’t worry, Mr. Rozanov, I’ll pass along your message*.”

“Thank you, Amanda. And sorry in advance.”

“*For what?”*

“For beating the Centaurs and taking away their biggest fan.”

When he hung up the phone, he sighed, all the energy draining out of him. It wasn’t what he wanted, but hopefully the message would get through.

He brushed his teeth and splashed cold water on his face. He had already extended his stay in the room a few more days. If Hollander showed up, then he would just go home and get ready for Sochi. If not—

Ilya wasn’t going to think about that.

He avoided the coaching staff and their calls after he had texted to say he would stay behind, but he couldn’t ignore the knocks on the door.

LeClaire had sent one of the assistant coaches to do his grunt work. Ilya leaned on the door frame unimpressed as Turner, the newest defense coach, tried to reason with him.

“It’s an insurance thing, Rozanov.”

“It’s a few days, I promise I won’t slip on the ice.”

Turner closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Look, I might be able to sweet-talk them into letting you stay two extra days. But isn’t that cutting it tight for Sochi?”

“It’s fine,” Ilya lied. “I spoke with the international team coordinator. They said as long as I am in Russia by Friday, they don’t care.”

“Alright, I’ll email you the flight change when I get it. And this Montreal girl had better be worth it.”

A few days wasn't much, but if he couldn't track Shane down by then—

The wind was sharper today, but Ilya was dressed better for it now that he didn't have to wear a post-game suit. He collected the keys for the rental car he had arranged through the front desk and left before he could run into anyone from his team. A cup of bitter hotel coffee kept him fuelled as he drove to same address as last night. In the daytime, it looked less dramatic; a three-story, older brick building with a salon storefront that was still closed.

Ilya pulled in slowly, pushing up his sunglasses against the bright winter sun and squinting as if he was going to see Shane suddenly there, pointing and laughing at Ilya for taking this prank seriously.

The backdoor was propped open. The white vans were still there, and a few more cars were parked close to the building. Shane's car was still there, untouched and, to Ilya's mounting fury, no sign of more investigation. He parked his car and got out, scanning the bushes backing the property before heading towards the door.

It didn't take long to find several contractors going in and out of the back. At first, they were wary. Two of the guys recognised him, and it only took a couple of autographs for them to loosen up.

"Hollander, yeah, he's an okay guy," a guy with a thick beard and light accent smoked with Ilya a few feet back from the door. "Quiet, you know. But polite, and kind of just gets out of our way."

"You haven't seen him today?" Ilya asked.

"Nah, not today. Yesterday, though. He was in and out of the top suite," the guy shrugged. "It's functional, so I think he was staging for sales photos. Or," the guy winked, "he's got a lady friend."

Ilya snorted. "He's too boring for scandal." He took a drag, letting the nicotine settle. "No, we have a business plan with this building. I was supposed to meet him today, talk details."

The man laughed. "You and Hollander in bed together?"

Ilya nearly choked, and his pulse raced. What the fuck?

"I thought you two fucking hated each other," the guy went on amused. "But money fixes a lot of broken fences, huh? What are you planning? Condos?"

Maybe, *in bed* was a stupid Canadian idiom, one of many he still tripped over. Ilya blew out a large puff of smoke and forced his shoulders to relax. "Uh, no, nothing so exciting. And I'm still… prospecting. No money yet. I wanted to make sure I'm not buying problems."

The man took a final drag and flicked his cigarette into the snow, crushing it under his boot. "Na, it's got good bones." The man eyed him. "Seems kind of far from Boston, though."

Ilya tilted his head. "You're trustworthy guy, right?"

“Hell yeah,” the man leaned in. Ilya had to keep from rolling his eyes.

“I have family, moving to Montreal. Hollander offered to let me invest, give them a decent place without buying. Seemed easy,” Ilya shrugged. “Hollander is a shit hockey player, but probably okay landlord. Plus, he sucks at bargaining. Way too trusting. I would pay next to nothing for top floor.”

The guy laughed, delighted. “There’s a lot of you Russkis moving to Montreal lately, eh? We had a guy started last week. French sucks, though.”

“You got a Russian guy?” Ilya looked around.

“Didn’t show up today,” the man shrugged. He straightened up as the guy in charge stared hard at him. “Anyway, great talking to you, man. Good luck at the Olympics.”

“Thanks,” Ilya stared hard at the ground for a second, finishing the last of his cigarette.

It could be nothing.

Morning? Somewhere?

Shane had hoped that dropping his name would do something useful. Tons of criminals liked sports, right? Since the Team Canada roster was announced, every TV commercial, billboard and sports bar had displayed Shane’s face. And, though he didn't participate, he knew the gambling was ramping up.

He certainly hadn’t thought things could get worse.

The bag was pulled over his head, forcing him to close his eyes to the painfully bright light. The world was blurry; he squinted as Scarface tried to haul him back, smacking Shane’s knees on the car.

The Quebecois guy was gaping, the hood in his hand. “*Tabernak*, it’s really fucking Shane fucking Hollander.”

Shane flinched when the guy burst into high laughter. “I lost ten grand on the playoffs last year, you asshole! Whose idea was it to put Foremann on the third line?”

Scarface said something sharp to La Bouche, who just snarled back.

“Is there problem?” La Bouche asked in French. The Quebecois guy was getting too close for Scarface, who pulled Shane back. They were in a back parking lot somewhere, clearly a casual dumping ground because the space was filthy and filled with stained mattresses and broken scraps. Shane tried to pull away but he was having some trouble getting his feet under himself.

“‘Is there problem’?” the guy mocked La Bouche. “You’re trying to smuggle out the captain of the fucking Montreal Voyagers, man. Team Canada is going to go fucking crazy. This is treason or some shit.”

“No, is fine,” La Bouche was sweating. “Your boss says okay.”

“You think Dante is cool with this?” the guy was giggling now, and Shane felt frustrated that the organized criminal element of Montreal was this unprofessional. This guy was his best chance at getting away, and he looked like he was on something strong. “He’s got way too much money riding on the Games, man.”

“Medvedevy will pay,” La Bouche said. “We have promise. He goes through. Clean.”

“Clean?” the Quebecois guy waved a hand at Shane, restrained and bleeding. “You’ve got the most fucking recognizable face north of New York in a piss-filled alley with a bag over his head.”

Shane was shoved again as voices rose, a mix of Russian and French. His shoulder clipped the car, and pain bloomed sharp and white. He turned, using the car to rub the tape over his mouth the rest of the way off. Scarface must trust the ropes around Shane’s ankles, because he let go of Shane to concentrate on the argument. Good. They were distracted.

His wrists were still taped behind his back, but he forced the pain and agony aside, breathing through his nose as he bent until his fingers brushed the knots around his ankles. Yoga suddenly didn’t feel like a waste of time now, he wanted to tell every mocking Tweet.

“You fucking morons,” the Quebecois guy had slowed down his French as if he were talking to toddlers. “Team Canada’s captain goes missing? You think every cop from here to Ontario isn’t going to be fucking lit up?”

“If cross, not in Canada!”

“If cross,” the guy repeated.

Shane’s fingers finally caught something loose. He almost sobbed as he pulled, the wet rope finally giving. But before he could celebrate, he realised the talking slowed.

“Do you have any idea how much money that guy is worth right now?”

Shane glanced up but squinted, the vertigo catching him off guard. They still weren’t looking at him, but the Quebecois guy had gotten serious and his voice high from panic now, not giggles.

“Yes, we pay!”

“One fucking broken ankle and half the city loses money, fucker.”

Scarface said something that includes ‘motherfucker’, ‘bitch’ and ‘fuck’, before he turns back to Shane. His face darkened with anger when he sees Shane half free from his ankle restraints.

He moved, but the Quebecer moved faster.

There was a bang, and Shane cowered against the tire, waiting for more pain.

But, instead, he heard a loud thump and when he managed to open his eyes, he saw Scarface, his eyes open in disbelief and fury as if this were Shane's fault. There was red splattered across Shane's dress shoes.

"Oh, fuck," Shane was frozen, his heart pounding so hard it feels like the rest of his body has been consumed. The Russian cursed again his teeth red. But Shane couldn't respond, couldn't fucking move, as hands grabbed him again and hauled him up. The gun—the first time he's ever seen one—was by his head but, thank Christ, not pointed at him.

Instead, the Quebecer had it pointed at La Bouche, a wild look in his eyes. "Dante's gonna want to meet the great Shane Hollander, alright boys?"

The Russians had some choice words as Shane was hauled towards another car, but they didn't move to retaliate as the Quebecer kept the gun pointed at them. Shane could see the guy's hand shaking, the clammy skin and bloodshot eyes.

Was this better? One guy versus two, but this one was unhinged.

Shane barely managed to duck in time to keep his head from banging on the car as he was shoved in the back seat. The leather seats were gross, stained and covered in something sticky and crumbly at once.

Pull it together, he ordered the part of himself that was repulsed at the mess. *You have fucking bigger problems.*

He braced himself with his knees as the guy got in the driver's side and peeled out of the lot with another high-pitched giggle.

"Shane *fucking* Hollander! Can you sign my jersey?" there was more laughter. The car lurched again, picking up speed.

Shane took a deep breath, his ribs protesting as the guy took a sharp turn without slowing. "Look, I can pay whatever you want—"

"Shut up, Jesus fucking Christ!" the guy said. "You have no fucking idea how much Dante is going to reward me, man. No fucking idea. Shane *fucking* Hollander!" he slapped the steering wheel in excitement and the car jerked.

"Okay, yeah, maybe get us there in one piece, please?" Shane begged.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Why do I like writing such evil men all the time?

2012, post-game

Rozanov pressed Shane against the shower wall, the steam and heat making him feel closer than normal. Shane had to scramble to keep his feet from slipping under him. His large hand was steadily pumping Shane's cock, so he was no help as Shane whined and grabbed the wet wall. "We can't do this here."

"Why not?" Rozanov practically purred in Shane's ear, his hand moving so steadily and firm it felt like all of Shane's blood was funnelling through his dick. "You seem to enjoy it."

"Because someone fucking slashed me," Shane pulled back enough to glare. "My knee fucking hurts." Rozanov didn't have the decency to look guilty.

"Awe, it was not a slash if ref didn't call it."

"Fuck you."

"No, fuck you, if you just turn around…"

Shane pushed him away and stepped out of the shower. He heard Rozanov's huff of impatience, but they knew each other well enough at this point to dry off just enough to keep from dripping and then tumble onto the hotel bed.

The bruises were real, on both their bodies as it had been a tough game, and they exploited them. They wrestled, rolling a few times, yelping as they pressed painful points, until Shane found himself on his stomach, one arm pinned behind him as the other gripped the bedsheet. Shane gasped as Rozanov bit a purpling bruise on his bicep, an injury courtesy of a game last week.

"Jesus, you dirty bastard," Shane grimaced as Rozanov sucked the already marked skin, pain blossoming. "Fight fair."

"No," Rozanov ground against the back of Shane's thigh, his erection hard. Shane pushed back, his heart pounding like every time they did this. He hated how much he loved those hands on him, one holding his shoulder down so Ilya could bite his bruised arm again, the other hauling Shane's ass back in time with Rozanov's grinding.

His knee hit a painful angle as he spread them, but he didn't need to tell Rozanov to stop. The man must have felt him flinch because he moved, pulling Shane until he was on his back and Ilya was straddling his hips.

"You were supposed to get out of the way," Rozanov ran his hands down Shane's torso, poking another bruise, this one yellowing and older, just under his armpit.

"I would have lost the puck."

"Stupid. No self-preservation."

"You would have done the same."

Rozanov answered with a toothy kiss and pinned Shane's hands over his head.

Shane ended up on his side, a pillow under his bad knee as Rozanov held his hips and fucked into him. This wasn't a position they did often, if ever. It was too slow and didn't have enough leverage or the angles for Ilya to pin Shane down and take him. But it was perfect for right now, when they were both nursing mid-season injuries.

"Fuck, Hollander," Rozanov was biting and licking Shane's bicep again. The bruise was never going to heal at this rate. Shane buried his face in the pillow, the friction of Rozanov's cock slow and maddening. It was rubbing his prostate instead of slamming it, making the pleasure more like a burn than an inferno. To his embarrassment, the pillow was wet with saliva as he shuddered and moaned.

He felt Rozanov smirk against his shoulder blade. "You're wet everywhere." He gripped Shane's leaking cock.

"Shut up," Shane snapped, his voice hitching at the end. "I don't care about my knee, just fuck me."

"You are masochist now."

"I hate you."

Rozanov wrapped an arm under Shane, gripping his shoulder in a firm, gentle headlock. This time when he thrust Shane had nowhere to go, making the impact harder, rougher. Perfect.

"You like it when it hurts a little, huh?"

"Fuck."

"Yes." Rozanov drove harder, holding Shane in place so he could go limp, absorbing the sensation until he felt he couldn't take it anymore. He did like it, a little. It was shocking, and Shane couldn't believe the only person in the world who knew this about him was Ilya fucking Rozanov, the league's biggest pest, who knew exactly how to get under everyone's skin, and make even the most patient player throw gloves down.

He couldn't believe it was this mouthy, annoying, beautifully cocky guy who knew more about Shane than Shane knew himself. And that Shane somehow, stupidly, humiliatingly, trusted him with it.

Rozanov's hand sped up on Shane's cock. "Come for me, Hollander, like a good little loser."

"Fuck you," Shane's voice shook on the last syllable as he spilled into Rozanov's hand, on the towel beneath them, his knee digging into the pillow with a delicious bite of pain. Rozanov wasn't far behind, groaning and holding onto Shane's shoulder with his teeth like a dog as he came into the condom.

He shouldn't fucking trust this guy with all his secrets. He knew that. But for some fucking reason, he did.

Shane basked for a moment, heavy-limbed and spent, on the soft bed. But when he looked back at Rozanov the man's eyes were cold and blank.

"*Ostie qu'il m'énerve*," Rozanov's voice was unnaturally harsh. Shane blinked. He was pinching Shane's bruised arm hard now.

"What are you—"

"*Coliss, leve-toi, tabarnak*!"

Rozanov's face wavered as pain festered in his arm. The bed disappeared, turning hard, cold and smelling like copper and iron.

Shane forced his eyes open, blinding pain making him close them again. The copper smell was from the blood in his mouth; the iron from the cold, wet warehouse around him. He forced them open again and saw the blurry outlines of three men, one crouched over him, gripping his arm harshly, still restrained behind his back.

He closed his eyes, trying to get back to the memory of that hotel room, that bed and Ilya.

The crouching man shook Shane, and his teeth gritted against the rattling pain in his head. His voice came out hoarse, and his French shaky. "What do you want with me?"

The grip lessened; more hands joined, hauling Shane from the disgusting floor to a hard, metal chair. He kept his eyes closed, the pounding in his head enough to make his teeth ache.

"The captain wakes," said the man standing back.

"Just let me go. I'll pay you. Whatever it is."

"It might come to that but first let's lay out our options." La Bouche and Scarface had been professionals; Shane knew that. They were too good at knowing exactly how to overpower him. They had been strong and clever, but they were lackeys. The Quebecois guy had clearly been on something, unpredictable and terrifying because of that. This guy was calm. Somehow that was scarier.

Shane pried his eyes open. The room was a warehouse of some kind. They were in the centre of a room filled with machinery that smelled vaguely like fish. The only windows were along the top of the high ceiling, so the light in here was dim, and after a moment Shane could handle it. His eyes focused on the man. He looked so unassuming. White, medium height, stocky and middle-aged. He wore jeans and a workman's jacket. He had a weathered, handsome face with salt and pepper hair. Shane would not have known him from a thousand other blue-collar workers in Montreal.

"Options?" Shane asked.

"Option one. You're healthy enough to play next week. You take gold for Canada. You say nothing about this and never see us again." The man's hands were in the pocket of his jacket, casual, like he was discussing construction plans. Shane swallowed hard. He liked that option.

"Option two. We try option one, but you run your mouth and you end up like your Russian friends."

They're not my friends, Shane thought hotly. "Trust me, I don't want to remember anything about today."

"Option three. You're not healthy enough to play." There was a sudden stillness from the two men standing behind Shane. He turned his head a bit, triggering pain in his arms and neck. The Quebecois guy stood on the left, biting a disgusting fingernail. The guy on the right looked steadier and didn't meet Shane's eyes.

"I still won't talk."

"Of course," the man said. "But you ending up on IR costs me a lot of money."

"I didn't ask to get kidnapped," Shane's voice was too high. His chest clenched, and he could feel his pulse speed up. How was this fair?

The man ignored him. Instead, he turned to the guy on Shane's right. "Get him set up for the doctor."

***

Afternoon, Montreal, Verdun neighbourhood

Montreal had good cigarettes, which felt unfair. Canada, he'd learned years ago in Saskatchewan, hated letting people enjoy things. It was fucking cruel to have cigarettes that tasted this good and then police how you smoked them.

Ilya's stomach hurt from how much he had smoked today, but he didn't care. If the first thing Hollander did was chew him out for it, Ilya would take it. Happily. Gratefully.

He had to lean against the rental car in the parking lot behind a bistro, shivering. He blew out a thick cloud and glanced down at the phone in his other hand.

He'd exhausted every other lead. Drapeau wasn't answering texts, and Ilya was pretty sure his number was blocked. PDG 16 took so long to answer it felt personal, and even the central police line had told him to stop calling. He was tempted to call Amanda again, but he was pretty sure it would only annoy her, and he needed her focused on David Hollander.

Ilya squared his jaw, set his shoulders, and ground his cigarette into the snow as he dialled a Moscow number.

Andrei took a few minutes to pick up.

"Oh, the golden son calls." Ilya hated his brother's voice, even tinny through the phone. "To what honour do I owe the royal American majesty?"

Ilya took another moment to jab his toe at the crushed cigarette. "I need a favour."

"You?" There was an ugly snort. "No, I don't believe it. What ghost possessed you to finally talk like a fucking coward? Is there a gun to your head?"

It felt like it, Ilya thought soberly. "Don't be a fucking asshole."

"I thought we were all assholes, the way you speak to us when you lower yourself to actually fucking call."

"Andrei—"

"Did America teach you to beg, or is your natural talent for rolling over like a dog finally coming through?"

If Ilya's stomach didn't feel like it was eating him from the inside out, he would have more choice words. He took a breath, his hands trembling as he forced himself back into his head.

"What the fuck do you want, Ilya? Father won't shut up about your and the fucking Olympics. Everything is ready for your triumphant return. How much more dick do you want him to suck?"

"Enough, Andrei," Ilya snapped. "You've got your wish okay? I'm in trouble, and I need your help. Is that what you need? For me to say out loud?" The words felt like acid on his tongue.

There was a dark chuckle. "It helps."

"I'm in Montreal. If I needed some… discreet help, who would I ask for?"

"Does it pain you to be just as disgusting as the rest of us?" Andrei sounded delighted. "What dirty little habit has finally dragged you down here with the rest of us, *brakishka*? Gambling? Women? Boys?"

"Does it matter?"

"Not really. There's only one family friend who works in Montreal who can help you."

“Tell me.”

“Fifty thousand. Cash.”

“Andrei—”

“Bring it to Sochi. I’ll meet you there.”

“You expect me to carry a suitcase of fifty thousand American dollars in cash through customs? Did all the coke finally cook your brain?”

“You’re the one with a problem to solve, *brakit*, not me.”

“Fine,” Ilya closed his eyes. “Who do I talk to?”

“Not over the phone. I will email you an account. Put ten thousand in there.”

“Another ten thousand? You’re fucking crazy.”

“How bad is your habit?”

Ilya rested the phone on his forehead. He put the phone back to his ear. “What’s the account?”

Andrei told him, and Ilya hung up the phone. He spent the next few minutes sending the money. A group of women arrived to have lunch in the bistro, one of them whispering to her friends as they passed. It felt too normal, and Ilya tried his best to focus on his screen.

The money was sent, and he spent the next ten minutes thinking what a waste of time and money and heartache that had been. Was he stupid? Was Shane seriously just off somewhere on a silent retreat or something, getting mentally ready for the Games, while Ilya, for some God forsaken reason, couldn’t let this go? It felt like a disease, eating him from the inside out, and it was fucking pathetic how the only cure was a dumb, ugly, freckled Canadian.

It took a few messages over two different encrypted text apps for Ilya to get a name.

Anatoly.

Garma

Nov.

Medve

Devy.

He had just spent ten thousand dollars to his bully of a brother to play jigsaw with a mash of Russian-sounding names. He was a fucking idiot.

He went to close his phone, maybe call Turner and tell him he had changed his mind, that he was coming back to Boston, when he finally took notice of the account Andrei had sent him.

Something clicked.

23554385557452

Cell: 438-555-7452

Chapter 5

Afternoon, Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal

Unknown number. 3 missed calls.

Ilya fumbled with his phone in the CHUM's underground parking lot, nearly dropping it. He was getting tired; adrenaline could only fuel him for so long. He hadn't heard the ringing under his jacket in the passenger seat, and now he'd fucking missed David Hollander's call.

"Hello, Mr. Hollander?" Ilya took the stairs two steps at a time to get to a stronger signal.

"*Mr. Hollander?*" Hayden Pike's voice was indignant. "*My father is Mr. Hollander!*"

"What?" Ilya slowed, reaching the ground floor. He paused at the elevator.

"*Sorry, bad joke*," Pike sighed. "*You see, it's a joke when—never mind. This is Rozanov, right? Drapeau didn't punk me?*"

"Yes, this is Rozanov. I don't have time for this," Ilya pressed the up button, scanning the hospital's map. "Why the fuck are you calling me?"

"*I heard from Drapes that you were looking for Shane and, uh, I am too*."

"About fucking time," Ilya found the word 'URGENCE', in bright red, which seemed most likely for the emergency department.

"*Fuck you. Have you found him?"*

"No," Ilya leaned against the elevator, closing his eyes. For a moment, the exhaustion caught up with him. The pain of the game yesterday broke through. His hip throbbed. His eyes ached. His skin felt like it was vibrating. His felt drained down to his bones.

"*It's not like him not to answer texts.*"

"I know."

"*You… do?*"

The elevator doors slid open. Ilya opened his eyes. "I'm at CHUM. Do you know this hospital?"

"*Yes, of course, why are you—"*

"Meet me here. Urgence." He ended the call.

Pike annoyed him. He was a backseat player, passing more pucks than shooting them, but he had assisted more than half of Hollander's goals this season. He didn't like Pike, but he could

trust that he had Shane's back.

It took too long to find Anatoly Garmanov in the cafeteria. He was younger than Ilya expected with an ashen complexion and wild, darting eyes. His instructions had been short and cryptic, and Ilya's hands were clammy as he approached the table in the corner.

Ilya knew this world, with the back-alley conversations and dark promises. He had grown up in it.

When he had been too young to understand, his father often dragged him to random rinks or parks to play with strange children while he spoke with men in low voices nearby. He had thought it was normal and, as a naturally extraverted and friendly child, he had even found it fun. When he got older, he realized the truth. He wasn't there for his own enjoyment; he was a prop. But by then any protest was met with a swift, painful correction.

His mother had argued every time his father arranged a 'play date' or a midnight practice at a rink, but she never had enough power to stop them. When she was gone, Ilya had gone along without protest.

Soon, though, he was too old to pass as an innocent cover, and his father brought him along as an apprentice, the same way he had Andrei.

Despite how he dominated on the ice, Ilya knew how fragile his distance was. He was one bad game or injury away from losing his old escape. He had seen how it had changed Andrei, and he was desperate to get out before he turned completely numb.

The NHL had been his ticket out. The first ticket to World Juniors in Regina had been a glimpse into a freedom he had conceptualized but not fully believed in. And the longer he was out of Russia, throwing money as his contribution to the family instead of his time, face and soul, the more he had deluded himself that he was different. Cleaner, somehow.

Stronger than his brother.

But standing here now, feeling the déjà vu wash over him, Ilya wasn't so sure he had escaped at all.

Garmanov half rose when he saw Ilya, a look of shocked recognition on his face. Ilya hadn't said his name when he had texted, just that he had gotten his name from a mutual contact and he had a problem Garmanov could help with. He was glad the man was caught off guard.

Ilya sat, keeping his face stony.

"Ilya Rozanov," the man said his name with Russian inflection, something that turned Ilya's stomach.

Just by meeting this man, Ilya knew he had put himself on the radar of some Russian oligarch or criminal family. Until now he had kept his nose clean. But in one stupid meeting, he had willingly put a target on his back.

And there was such a fucking slim chance this even had anything to do with Shane. Ilya knew that. What clues did he have? Some tire tracks at Shane's place? A flaky Russian contract worker?

This was single-handedly the stupidest, most reckless way he had fucked up his life. Right behind going up to Hollander's hotel room for the first time.

He let the silence stretch, watching as the shock shifted to anxiety. Then, guilt.

Ilya's heart beat faster in triumph at being right and then panic for the same fucking reason.

"You know where he is," Ilya said calmly.

"What?" the man's voice was high and his hands were shaking. "What are you talking about? I—I'm here to meet you as a friend. What exactly are you accusing me of?"

Ilya could see blood on the man's jacket sleeves. "Is he hurt?"

The trembling turned to full shaking as the man covered his face with his hands, gripping his hair hard. "It wasn't—we were supposed to just, like, talk to him. Convince him to sit out the Olympic you know? Kirill just acted so fast—"

"You didn't answer my fucking question," Ilya's voice was hard. "Is he hurt?"

"Kirill hit him in the head," Garmanov said quietly. "And… he tried to run so we had to stop him. But Kirill's fighting for his life in surgery now, so it's not like he hasn't paid for it, alright? The kid was fine when Dante's man grabbed him."

Ilya wanted to bash this guy's face in. Violence welled up inside of him, but he stopped himself from climbing over the table in a public hospital cafeteria. "Who's Dante. And where did they take him?"

"Dante Russo," the man hissed the name. "Not someone you want to tangle with."

"Oh, you think you know me well enough to tell me who I can and can't tangle with," Ilya leaned forward, his voice harsh. The man flinched. "Tell me where he operates."

"Down in Port du Montreal. He had a business there. We were supposed to meet one of Dante's guys to bring him across the border"

Ilya realized he was clenching his fists so hard, his nails were almost cutting through his hands. He forced them to relax. "When?"

"Well, I don't know if it's still on!" Garmanov burst angrily but calmed when a nearby table of nurses glanced over. He lowered his voice. "Medvedevy told Kirill to give them a fake name, and we did, but your fucking friend ruined it. Once Dante's guy realized who we had, he freaked out. Shot Kirill. Took the guy. I didn't know what to do. I'm just—it wasn't supposed to be like this."

“Wasn’t supposed to be like this?” Ilya raised his eyebrows. “How exactly did you expect it to be, getting involved with all this shit? Are you fucking stupid?”

“I needed the money,” the guy pleaded. “My sister—things are *bad* back home and I just wanted to bring her over. You have to understand—”

“You’re fucking lucky you weren’t shot too,” Ilya cut him off. “Is that everyone involved? This Kirill, you and Dante’s guy?”

“Yes.” The guy slumped in his seat.

Ilya thought for a moment. “Give me your phone.”

Garmanov stiffened. “What?”

“Your phone. Now.”

After a beat, the man fumbled it out of his pocket and slid it across the table. Ilya unlocked it with the passcode Garmanov muttered, scrolled quickly, memorizing names and numbers. He sent himself one message, then opened his own phone, sending the e-transfer. The man watched with hollowed eyes as Ilya factory-reset his phone and slid it back across the table.

“What the hell—”

“You have enough to get the fuck out of Montreal. Bus, train—it would be better to be gone before this gets back to Medvedevy. And I advise you to never get fucking involved with things over your head again, or your sister will have no one.”

Garmanov looked at him, breathing hard. “Why—”

“Just get the fuck out of here before I change my mind,” Ilya all but growled.

The man nodded frantically and left, his head down and walking fast.

Ilya stayed where he was, staring hard at the table. It wasn’t hypothetical anymore. It was both a relief and a disaster.

He tried to slow his mind, tried to not think about his nightmares coming true. He thought of Shane, his stupid fucking face smiling. Vulnerable, as it collided violently with the world Ilya had thought he was safe from.

Images that he half remembered surfaced suddenly surfaced from his time in Moscow, things he had never talked about: men with blacked eyes, bloodied noses, from a fight on the ice, but slipping out from back rooms.

This was fucking *Canada* for fuck’s sake. It was supposed to be safer.

His breath coming too quick until timely buzz from his phone snapped him back.

Pike: Here

***

Afternoon sunset, Warehouse

Getting him set up for the doctor thankfully meant cutting the tape from his arms and releasing his arms from their painful position. He had sobbed, his whole body trembling as he rubbed his hands together. What would he give for a bath, a thermal spa or steam room to relax his muscles which felt stretched and strained past their limits.

He was still in his post-game suit, but it was ripped and covered in grime, blood and vomit, though he didn't remember puking. They had brought him to a barebones but clean bathroom and stripped him down to his boxers. The older guy watched with cold eyes as Shane cleaned himself with a washcloth and bar of soap in the old sink, shivering.

There was a cracked and water-stained mirror so Shane could assess how truly awful he looked. His lower lip was swollen and his cheek cut just below his eye. Scarface's punch had been too low to give him a black eye, thankfully, but his teeth were still too mobile on that side. There was a thick lump behind his ear, which he was sure was the initial blow in the parking lot.

He was covered in scrapes and bruises, a large one under his ribs worryingly black. His hands were still swollen, and he was having trouble closing his hands into fists. It might just be from the muscle strain, but Shane wasn't sure he could hold a stick right now, let alone slap a puck across the zone. He was also worryingly unsteady on his feet and held on to the sink for balance.

He didn't feel like he could skate right now, let alone play in the Olympics. He still had a week and a half before the first game. If he rested, maybe he would be fine

He prayed whatever doctor this psycho was bring thought so too.

The guy passed Shane a hoodie, sweats that fit well, and a pair of Adidas that were only a size too big.

His mother would be pissed if she saw him in anything but Reeboks.

The thought made him laugh, but he swallowed it down then the guy glared.

"Can use the toilet?" he asked, in French. The guy grunted but didn't leave.

"Oh, come on," he sighed. "Can't I get a little bit of dignity? Where am I going to go?"

The guy rolled his eyes but stepped out of the room. He didn't close the door all the way, but Shane suspected this was the best it was going to get.

His urine was pink. He flushed quickly, feeling lightheaded with panic. Internal bleeding—that was bad. He washed his hands again, obsessively checking his nailbeds which he thought

looked a little pale. His face was definitely paler. How bad was he bleeding? He had read about this on one of his many spirals Wikipedia rabbit holes.

Pain, he remembered that symptom. Well, he hurt all over so that wasn't helpful. Dizziness, lightheadedness—yes, but he also had a head injury. Sweaty, clammy—yes, but he was freaking out.

He lifted the hoodie and checked his stomach again. There was bruising forming from where the Russians had kicked him, but it looked about as bad as a bad hit into the boards.

Maybe it wasn't too serious.

He just had to lie. Pretend that he was ready for the Games. Then he could go to a real hospital.

That was good. He was good at pretending.

Everything was going to be okay.

He rested his forehead on the cold sink, taking shallow breaths.

He was fine. He was *fine*. Everything would be *fine.*

He straightened quickly as the door opened. The guy watching him, hard and calculating. "Are you done?"

"Yeah," Shane took a final look in the mirror, steeling his expression. "Totally."

He concentrated on walking in a straight line as the guy led him across the warehouse. The lights were on now, and too bright. The sunlight from the windows had faded, meaning it must be getting into the afternoon. The sun set around five, so Shane had lost the entire day. He hoped he wouldn't lose more.

The guy let him into what looked like a nursing room he would see at a school. It smelled strongly of antiseptic and was bland. He wondered if it was for AOHS regulations; a warehouse was a dangerous place, after all. They probably had to have some serious first aid onsite for all the machinery.

Stop overthinking it, he scolded himself. This was a fucking underground bed of criminal and mafia activity. Why the fuck would they care about their WHMIS compliance?

He sat on the padded table, too hard under his bruised hip, wishing the lights were dimmer. After a few cold moments, the door opened and a woman stepped in. And older Asian woman stepped in, her expression unreadable. She was clearly the doctor the guy had mentioned, as she rifled drawers with unsettling familiarity.

"Uh, hi," Shane said, but she ignored him. "I'm feeling fine, so—"

"Take off your sweater," she said flatly in English. Shane froze for a second, then peeled it over his head, stifling any painful sounds or expressions. Every movement throbbed.

She pulled on latex gloves with crisp precision, eyes scanning him like he was a piece of machinery, not a person. Her hands were cold and unyielding as she poked and prodded, checking his range of movement in his upper body.

He tried his best to mask his reactions, but it *hurt*. Sharp, biting pain followed every movement. Tears pricked in his eyes as she rotated his shoulders, his breath hitching as she palpated his stomach. She had him shift weight from one foot to the other, hopping and walking, checking his balance. Shane felt his knees buckle, his stomach lurch, his whole body rebelling. Every test ended in a stumble, a gasp, a little more humiliation.

She didn't let up. She checked his head and neck next, moving him by his jaw, triggering vertigo and nausea so bad he gagged, swallowing bile. His vision blurred as she shone a penlight that felt like a stab wound on his brain. She didn't seem to have any mercy and kept at it until he broke.

Finally, he snapped. "Stop, okay!" He shoved her hands away, his stomach churning. She didn't fight, just began making notes.

"Is it bad?" he asked, voice trembling, swallowing rapidly to keep from being sick.

There was a long pause before she finally met his eyes. "You're fine," she said without inflection. She exchanged a glance with Shane's stoic guard, before closing her notebook and leaving.

Shane felt a thousand time worse, wanting nothing more than to lay down on the cold, hard, rubber plastic of the bed and cry.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Look, I'm just as eager to see how Shane gets out of this as much as everyone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Afternoon, on Rue Notre Dame

If someone had told Ilya that he would be spending the first month of 2014 in Hayden Pike's Nissan Pathfinder digging an Elmo rattle from under his ass, he would have done another shot off some girl's stomach and laughed at them.

"So, uh, Shane. I didn't realise you two kept such… close tabs on each other," Hayden glanced at him from the corner of his eye. He was driving at an infuriatingly reasonable speed. Ilya tossed the rattle into the back seat, hitting one of the empty car seats.

"Yes." Ilya said shortly.

"I mean, it's just that, I love the guy, but he doesn't exactly let people in easily. I once watched him hide in a closet for fifteen minutes because some rookie wanted to ask about his side fake."

"Are you saying I'm unlikeable guy?" Ilya rolled his eyes. "I am likeable."

Hayden laughed outright. "Not to him. No way. I've heard you chirp him. And you hunt him down every game."

"He is the same to me."

He shot Ilya a look. "Yeah, I know. You're the only guy who gets under his skin. Which, is kind of impressive, actually. And worrying."

Ilya snorted but glanced at his phone. Hayden's smile faded, and his jaw clenched.

"Anything?"

Ilya shook his head. He had sent a message to the contact Garmanov had met, the one who had supposedly taken Hollander. From the fry pan to the fire. Ilya had learned the expression a few months ago, and it aptly described the situation.

"Look," Hayden said after a beat. The man was allergic to silence. "Whatever is going on between you two—"

“There is nothing,” Ilya cut in.

“I said *whatever*,” Hayden said firmly. “This is still a fucking crazy story, alright? I mean, the Russian mafia?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “You didn’t have to come with me.”

“Yes. Yes, I did.” Hayden’s knuckles where white on the wheel. “I mean, I still think we should go to the police but—”

“Police are *useless*,” Ilya snapped. “I went to police; they sit and do nothing.”

“But, you have, like, proof now.”

Ilya kept clenching and unclenching his fist. “Okay, so we take proof to police, and then what? Hours of waiting while Hollander is somewhere. Hurt, maybe.” *Scared*, Ilya thought and pushed it way. “Maybe already crossing the border, right now. They are too slow.”

“It’s just… so unbelievable. Kidnapped before the Olympics. I mean, there’ve been threats but—”

“So, go home!” Ilya snapped. “I do this alone.”

“No fucking way,” Hayden shot back. “I mean, best case, we waste a few hours walking around the docks like idiots and go back to Shane sitting on his couch, meditating or whatever. But if he’s not—”

“He’s not.”

“—then I’m not going to be the one to fucking slow us down.”

“Is no us.”

“Fuck you, Rozanov.”

There were a few moments of silence as the city thinned, warehouses and squat buildings replacing the dense downtown. The St. Lawrence was dark and flat behind them.

Hayden spoke again, lower now. “So, what’s the plan if he is there?”

“I get him out.”

“And if he’s hurt?”

“He won’t be.”

“And what do I do?”

“Drive the fucking car.”

Hayden swallowed hard. His eyes were darting around as he drove, grip shifting on the wheel. For once Ilya could relate. His own heart was racing, even as he tried to hold it together. The sky had darkened, and the traffic faded as they passed the commercial entrance to the port.

Ilya didn't have much to go on. The storage containers of the shipping yard stretched for kilometers along the river's edge. It was going to be like finding a needle in a haystack, unless the contact messaged him back.

He had tried to be as vague as possible, posing as a random Medvedevy contact, hoping it would bait some kind of response, but so far nothing. Maybe he'd done the opposite and spooked the guy into silence.

He should have paid more attention to his father's lessons.

"Pull in here."

Hayden jerked the wheel, nearly overshooting the access road. "Jesus Christ!"

"Fucking, Pike!" Ilya barely kept his head from hitting the window. "Where the fuck are those reflexes in your game?"

"Shut up," Hayden said. He looked pale and sweaty.

"Turn off the lights, idiot."

Hayden turned the headlights off and slowed as they drove down the rough service road. It looked less used than the other. Ilya was getting worried they were running out of dock, so this was as much a starting point as any.

A large chain link fence blocking access into the actual yards. Hayden pulled right up to it. Ilya unbuckled, then froze when he saw Hayden do the same.

"What are you doing?"

"Coming with you."

"The fuck you are. You stay."

"What? Why? I'm not a fucking coward."

"You have kids, asshole. If things look dangerous, you leave."

Even in the dark, Ilya could see the conflict on Hayden's face.

"It does not make you bad friend," Ilya said.

Hayden swallowed. "I just can't believe you're the one risking your life," his voice cracking before he took a deep breath. "Look, I don't know if this is some macho bullshit where you won't feel good about winning gold if you don't beat the best player in the world—"

“Second best.”

“—or if you’re in love with the guy, but for some fucking reason, I’m fucking trusting you, Rozanov.”

“Me too,” Ilya said. “I have to trust the slowest player on the Voyageurs to be getaway driver. You think this is easy for me?”

“Don’t fucking die, Rozanov.”

Ilya didn’t answer as he stepped out, his boots crunching in the snow and breath freezing in a puff. The temperature had dropped; he zipped his dark jacket closed. He supposed it was good thing he liked black, because he hoped he was hard to see as he approached the tall, heavy gate.

It was meant to keep vehicles out, not people. There was slack in the heavy chain keeping it closed. He grunted as he pushed open as wide a gap as he could manage. He was almost too big, but he wasn’t about to turn around now.

He gave a final glance to Hayden’s shadow in the car and started into the yard.

He didn’t know what the fuck he was supposed to be looking for. A big sign that said, ‘*Mafia, this way”*? ‘*Hot Canadian Hockey Player Hostages Here”*?

Downriver was a massive crane and a large, dark ship just past it that looked half full of colourful shipping containers. The yard itself was eerily neat and quiet with giant rows of other containers, stacked two or three units high. The snow was cleared out and the walkways salted.

The opposite way was from the crane was a concrete building, two-stories and weather worn. The lights inside were on and there were three cars parked close to the river. Ilya supposed he really had no where else to look.

He glanced back to the gate to make sure it hadn’t disappeared by some freak accident and headed towards the crane and the boat. Ilya stuck to the shadows, moving between the spread-out flood lights.

As he got closer to the water, he heard large, flat slabs of ice knocking against each other. He glanced over and shivered at the short drop down and black water.

He almost past the crane when he heard the heavy door of the building behind him open. He slipped in the shadow behind a steel support beam as three figures stepped out.

***

Somewhere, night

It has been years since Shane had MacDonald fries, but he eagerly ate them, cold and stale though they were. They had taken him to an office that looked like it had been decorated in the seventies by an Italian grandmother with baby angels and scratchy wool cushion covers on mismatched chairs.

He didn't know what the doctor had told the head guy, but it hadn't taken them long to reach to a verdict. The Québécois guy had offered him the takeout bag, and Shane had a paranoid moment where he worried that guy had excavated the food from the footwell of his disgusting car.

However, he was starving and decided it wasn't the worst thing that had happened to him in the last twenty-four hours.

He was fishing the last fries from the bottom of the bag when the door opened.

Shane froze as the older man stepped in. The fries sat heavy in his stomach as the guy turned to face Shane, leaning on the bare metal desk, studying him.

"Looks like you're going to live, Hollander."

Relief hit Shane so hard it made his vision blur.

He felt like crying again. He was going to see his parents again. He was going home. If they were letting let him go, then his injuries couldn't be that bad. The doctor thought he was still healthy enough for the Olympics. Even the consistent pain in his head didn't scare him right now.

He was going to be able to play.

All the hopes and dreams he had kept at arm's length flooded back, making him dizzy. Russia. The Games. Playing against Rozanov on Roznov's real home turf. Winning gold.

Walking around Sochi with him. Finally seeing the man's home, maybe meeting his family. Understanding him better.

The man watched patently as Shane got himself under control. Shane loosening his grip on the takeout bag and wiped at his eyes, taking in a steadying breath.

"And, you're going to uphold your end of the bargain," the man's voice wasn't friendly, but it wasn't hard either. "Right, *captaine*?"

Shane nodded, his throat feeling tight. "I won't tell anyone. I promise."

It wasn't like anyone noticed he was gone.

"And you'll win."

Shane blinked and his chest tightened. "I mean, I'll try my best."

“Good.” The man’s held his gaze for a long moment before he cleared his throat and straightened up. “Come on. We’ll drop you off somewhere safe.”

Shane stood carefully, bracing his legs so he wouldn’t wobble. The food had helped to make him feel steadier.

The Québécois guy still looked high, his eyes flickering toward the ceiling as his hands twitched. The other guy stayed close, pressed right against Shane’s shoulder. They handed him an old, heavy jacket and waiting patiently for him to zip it up.

“Come on, kid.”

Shane really, really hoped the Québécois guy wasn’t going to be the one driving again, and that they weren’t going to be using his car.

The air was frigid when the opened the door. There were cars parked by the water’s edge. Shane pulled the jacket around, his bare feet cold in the running shoes as they walked across the salted ground. It crunched as they walked, and the night sky was so dark it felt late.

Shane felt light enough to float as the stoic guy guided him around the car, toward the passenger side of an SUV with tinted windows.

He reached for the handle.

The guy’s gloved hand closed on his bruised wrist.

Shane looked up, his mouth open as realization shot through him like a bolt of lightning.

“Sorry, *capitaine*.”

Shane didn’t have a chance to react, to reach out or scream, before the two men grabbed him and hurled him over the low roped barrier into the icy, black water below.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone wanted a second chapter today, right?

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

It's a bit short, but if Auston Matthews can score a hat trick tonight, so can I.

Three chapters in 24 hours!

It might not be perfectly edited, but that's what the morning is for.

Night, the fucking St Lawrence River

Even if they hadn't passed under a flood light, Ilya would recognise that ugly mid-season haircut anywhere.

Shane looked exhausted, favouring his left knee and half his face looked bruised, but he was walking. Ilya's heart was slamming so hard he had to put his hand on the rusty red steel support for a moment. But he didn't have time to process it properly.

Shane was fucking *alive*.

Ilya didn't believe in God. Not really. But what were the fucking odds that he would be here, right now, at this very moment?

He touched his mother's cross under his shirt as the two men marched Shane towards the cars.

Hayden had asked what the plan was, but Ilya didn't really have one. He has assumed there would be talking and a large sum of money. If they were Russian, he might even drop his father's name. If not, well, Ilya was good at thinking on his feet.

He didn't think he was going to have to follow Hollander to another fucking location.

One of the men, a large guy, had one hand nearly on Hollander's back. The other, reedy and nervous, kept looking around. Ilya leaned back into the shadows as they rounded the cars.

He saw Shane reach for the door handle, then chaos erupted.

Ilya knew he had superhuman reflexes. It wasn't a brag; it was simply a fact. A person doesn't rise to the kind of fame in an NHL career by hesitating or missing your moment. His instincts were unparalleled, except by a Canadian freak of nature.

So, when he froze, it felt like a betrayal.

They lifted Shane like he weighed nothing, and tipped him, limbs flailing, over the side of the river.

No.

Fuck.

Ilya's couldn't move. He couldn't think. He heard a yelp, and then a splash.

Years from now, Ilya still wouldn't be able to truthfully answer what broke him out of his paralysis.

It felt like icy hands push him forward, hot adrenaline flooded his veins, hijacking his body into a sprint.

He had not come this far to let Shane drown nearly within arms reach.

Absolutely fucking not.

The river was nearly black and there were no lights. The shipping channel hadn't frozen solid; instead, massive slabs of ice—some ten feet across—floated and collided, grinding against each other in the current. It obscured the surface and made it hard to spot anything, let alone someone in a black jacket and dark hair.

Ilya clung to the nylon webbing on the outer frame of the crane, leaning over the water. The crane hid him from view of the two men, who he heard arguing loudly in French. He didn't give a flying fuck except he knew at least one of them had a gun.

Shane could have been dragged down to the water by his thick jacket. He could be smashed between two of the ice floats. He could be disoriented, shocked by the freezing water, and already be dead.

But Ilya knew, somehow, he wasn't.

And he knew where to look.

There.

He stripped off his jacket and dove into the water.

Fucking cold, Hell.

His hands felt like sausages as he struggled with the zipper. Dimly, he knew the jacket had to come off.

Shane thought he was kicking, but he couldn't really feel his legs properly. He might be kicking himself deeper into the river, or his legs might just be sinking uselessly beneath him

It was too much.

It was too cold.

It was too hard.

He had learned to swim at his parent's cottage. He had taken swimming lessons at pools since he was a toddler but flunked every level until he refused to go anymore. He hadn't truly learned until he was in a real lake without clear water or walls to grab on it, and his survival instinct finally kicked in.

He couldn't believe this was how it was going to end. That his parents were going to have to find his body like this. If they found him at all.

He hoped they didn't blame the swimming lessons.

He hoped his mom would something else to pour herself into.

He hoped his dad wouldn't get stuck in grief.

The cold was turning warm, somehow.

His heart slowed, calming down.

The darkness was lightening. A point, brighter than the rest, was moving toward him. He reached for it.

Something closed his hand, hard enough to pinch through the numbness. It felt like being grabbed through a thousand layers of sweaters, a pressure without the sensation.

He was moving, somewhere, fast.

He closed his eyes.

Then, the cold hit like a slap.

His lungs had felt like flat bags, and now air was forced into them in a way that felt strangely unnatural.

He couldn't remember how to breathe out. A mouthful of wet, thick, disgusting water slapped up his nose, clogging his airway again.

"Don't you fucking drown, Hollander!"

He choked and gagged until he could try to pull in air again, managing at least half a lung before he had to breathe out again. He was going to suffocate, even though he had all the air in the world right now.

He tried to fight against whoever was clutching at him, panicking, wanting to turn over so he could cough more, but his limbs were too cold to move voluntarily. An arm wrapped around

his collarbone, a familiar embrace, though less sexy.

Ilya.

“Don’t fucking make a sound,” his voice was hoarse, panicked, and quiet.

Shane had to cough as water burned its way down his nose and throat. His next breath was better.

God, this river was disgusting. If he didn’t drown, he was going to catch some kind of infection.

He sucked in another breath, but a strong wave nearly dragged him under again.

“Fuck,” Ilya snarled in Russian. The heavy, waterlogged jacket suddenly slid off him as Ilya unzipped it. He felt ten times lighter.

Ilya was doing more than just keeping his head above the water; he was pulling Shane with the current.

“-lya,” Shane’s voice was shredded and useless. “Wha—”

“Shut up, almost there.”

A dirty slab of ice had shielded them from the worst of the current. Ilya’s free hand grabbed a rusty steel beam, yanking them from its lee.

The ice block drifted away, and Shane felt an irrational wave of gratitude for it.

More Russian, as Ilya seemed to summon some kind of herculean strength and started to drag Shane out of the water.

Shane hissed; each exposed inch of frigid air felt like a needle, sharp and too close to his core.

Frostbite. He must be experiencing frostbite. The pain receptors on his skin were probably frozen, that’s why the hurt was so close to his heart and internal organs. Organs that were already bleeding.

He was going to lose his fingers now, he thought, but for some reason he couldn’t make himself care.

“Don’t fucking die yet, Hollander,” Ilya grunted as he pulled Shane up some kind of webbing. Shane closed his eyes, half asleep, until they reached the top. He could feel the metal ground beneath him, but the sensation was dulled.

Hand grabbed at his sweater, and Shane finally found it in him to frown. “Let’go.”

“*O, teper' ty ne khochesh', chtoby ya tebya razdeval? Konechno*.”

“*P’rle an’las c'lisse, tabe'nak*,” Shane muttered back as the wet fabric was pulled over his head. His skin was a scary shade of sallow white before a dry jacket was pulled around him.

“Pike has the car. We have to get there.”

“Hays?” Shane focused blurrily on Ilya. His curled hair was dirty and flat on his face. His hazel eyes were red and wide.

“Up, Hollander. I saw you walk. You’re not going to let a little cold slow you down, huh?”

“Little cold?” Shane felt like cursing him out, but he hated it when Ilya teased him. He clamoured to his knees. He had lost one of the running shoes in the water.

“Come on Hollander, you’re useless. Slow. I dragged your dead weight for you, and I’m not complaining. Get up.”

“F’ck you,” he used Ilya’s hand and managed to get to his feet. Ilya pressed him against a rusty steel pole. It smelled like iron and fish. Shane closed his eyes again.

“Fucking wake up, you fucking fuck.”

Shane opened his eyes.

“They think you are under ice. Is good. Maybe they go away.”

“His car was gross,” Shane slurred his words, his eyes dropping again.

“Okay, let’s make this a race. If you can get to gate before me, I blow you, okay?”

“Whadda I get if I win?”

“I just said I would—” Ilya sounded pissed. “You—blow me? Yes?”

“M’kay.”

“I count three, we go.”

“M’kay.”

“One. Two. Three.”

Shane didn’t really run so much as he put one foot in front of the other, and Ilya kept him upright and moving forward. Still, he was moving pretty fucking good.

He didn’t really need to keep his eyes open for this, not if Ilya was going to steer. He started to close them.

Ilya pinched his side, and Shane snapped his eyes open.

He didn’t know how long they walked. The salt was sharp under his bare foot. It should sting more than it did. Shane should be worried about it, but he wasn't.

There was a large gate in front of them, and Shane had half a mind to complain that Ilya had brought them to a dead end. But then warm hands, warmer than Ilya's ice-cold ones, were pulling him through a gap.

"Shane?" Hayden looked terrified as he held Shane up now, his body a fucking furnace. Shane leaned his full weight on him. He didn't smell like iron, more like baby formula and detergent.

"We go, now," Ilya squeezed through behind Shane.

"I win," Shane mumbled to Hayden's chest as the man bodily pushed him into the back of his car. The car seats were in the trunk, and Shane frowned. They were always a bitch to install.

"You win?" Hayden asked as he wrapped Ruby's Rugrats blanket around him. A seatbelt clicked around him. God. Hayden was such a dad.

"Gonna blow Ilya."

"Don't listen to him. He's too cold. Running his mouth."

"That's all he'd better be doing, Rozanov."

The door closed, and heat blasted over him. The other doors opened and closed. Shane could feel Ilya beside him, propping him up. Hayden got in the driver's side, and the car lurched forward.

"Hang on, Shane okay?"

"M'kay."

"*Ne umiray, idiot. Ne ran'she, chem... poka my ne smozhem pogovorit.*"

Cold lips pressed against his temple, and Shane closed his eyes.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

36 hours later, CHUM

There was an annoying beeping sound, and something was tickling his hand. Shane wanted to swat it, but when he lifted his other hand, it felt like lead. A sharp pain in his shoulder made him freeze until the muscle cramp went away.

A warm and gentle pressure slipped over his fingers and squeezed; a hand brushed his forehead. He smiled. Mom. He knew that touch. Every time he had a slight fever or headache, she used to bundle him up on the couch, holding his head and rubbing her hands through his hair while he curled up on her lap.

Was he sick?

He cracked open his eyes and closed them as soon as the dim light hit. “Ouch.”

“Honey?”

Her voice was tight.

His mouth felt stuffed with cotton, and when he tried to speak, the words wouldn’t come out.

There was a flurry of sound and the light dimmed, so he tried looking again. There was his mom, using a button to raise the bed. On the other side, his dad opened a bottle of water and put a straw in.

It hurt to swallow. He coughed, and his mom wiped at his mouth, holding the Kleenex as he coughed phlegm, too desperate to clear his throat to be embarrassed about being disgusting. The bed raised more, and he took an easier breath.

He opened his eyes again and focused on the two hovering faces on either side of the bed. “Hey,” he managed to say.

His mother burst into tears. Shane was startled and tried to raise a hand to comfort her. One hand, the one that tickled, was hooked up to a monitor and IV, so he decided to leave that one alone. The other felt heavy, but he could raise it. She took it in hers and kissed the back of his hand.

“What happened?” Shane asked. His voice was still rough. His father offered another drink from the bottle. He looked older, somehow, like he had aged ten years overnight.

“Don’t worry about that right now,” his dad ran a hand through Shane’s hair, but avoided a patch on the side that Shane realised had been shaved.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in Mexico?”

His mom grabs her own tissues to wipe her eyes. “We got back a few hours ago.”

“How long have I been asleep?” Shane blinked a few times to clear the blurry edges. “I thought you weren’t going to be back until I left for Sochi.” The heart rate monitor spiked as Shane realised something. “What—what day is it? Did I miss my flight.”

“Calm down,” his mother squeezed his hand. “Honey, you aren’t going this year.”

“What? Why?”

His mother looked at him like he had said the dumbest thing she had ever heard.

“Shane, what do you remember?” his dad redirected the conversation.

Shane thought back, trying to ignore the dull ache concentrating gave him. They had won against Boston, and he had been nervous but eager to show Rozanov his rental building. He wasn’t about to tell his parents that part.

He had pulled into the parking lot. Gotten out, checking for Rozanov’s ETA, and then—

Scarface. La Bouche. He remembered trying to run, a kick to his ribs. The bag over his head. A gunshot and Scarface bleeding in the snow. The crusty backseat of the Quebecois guy’s ancient car. A warehouse. A faceless man in a workman’s jacket. A wash of relief as he walked to a car. Ice water, and an angelic face.

Rozanov, dragging him out of the water.

“Ilya.”

His parents exchanged glances.

Shane felt a rush of panic. Had he just given away his fucking secret by imagining Rozanov as some kind of angel saviour in his—

Oh, God, in his fucking kidnapping.

He looked down at himself and wiggled his toes, relieved when they all moved together. One foot was bandaged, and the moment he shifted, pain flared cross his body. His arm, his back, his ribs—everything tugged at everything, like his body was an uncooperative web of nerves and bruises. He had been injured before, but not all at once like this.

“Did I get kidnapped?”

“Yes, sweetie,” his mom kissed his hand again.

“Was there a ransom, or—”

“We don’t really know what happened,” she said. “The police are going to come in when you feel better to ask you some questions.”

“I think…. I think they were Russian? At first?” He tried to sort through the random images that flashed through his mind, until his father stopped him.

“Hey, don’t worry about it now,” he stroked Shane’s head again.

“How… hurt am I?”

His mother seemed relieved to have something concrete to focus on.

“You’ve been out about a day and a half,” she said. “We only got in this morning.”

A day and a half. That didn’t sound real.

“You have a serious concussion, but you’re improving. Nothing on the CT, they said. The doctors are optimistic it should resolve on its own, with rest.”

His dad added, “Your kidneys took a beating, but they’re healing.”

His mom squeezed his hand. “You’ll need physiotherapy now that you’re awake, but nothing looks torn or irreparable. Even your teeth are fine. They said you got lucky.” Her tone suggested how she felt about someone saying that.

“And the–I remember being in water. I couldn’t feel my feet.”

She hesitated. “The hypothermia and frostbite were a bit touch-and-go. They haven’t ruled out nerve damage yet, but you were only in the water for a few minutes. And your heart–they did some tests, and they said it looks fine.”

“And the antibiotics.”

“Yes, they have you on some powerful stuff. You swallowed a lot of water from the dock yards.” Her nose wrinkled at the idea.

“When can I play?”

His dad frowned, but his mother said, “As long as your head injuries continue to improve and your physiotherapy goes well, you might be okay for the playoffs.”

“If we make it.”

“Well, you’ve got the depth offensively this year, so I think—”

“Honey,” Shane’s dad cut her off.

“It doesn’t matter. You can be a captain from IR, alright?” she squeezed his hand. He nodded, and his head drooped to his chest. It felt like he had been awake for hours, not just a few

minutes. “You rest, okay? The doctors said it’s normal to sleep. And Hayden is going to stop by in a few hours, so you should rest.”

“Hayden?”

“Yes, he brought you to the hospital. He was here for most of yesterday. Do you remember?”

Shane vaguely remembered him buckling a seatbelt. “He was here?”

“Yes, honey. He and Rozanov, they’re the ones that found you. That pulled you from–” her voice seemed to seize.

Shane’s eyes flew open. “Rozanov?”

She looked like she was about to cry again. “He’s the one who called your dad.”

Rozanov had called his fucking parents? “He wanted to stay,” his dad said. “But there was some kind of insurance issue, and the Bears wanted him home.”

Shane tried to wrap his mind around the image of Rozanov talking to his parents, but it hurt to think.

His mom kissed his forehead. “Sleep, okay? We’ll stick around.”

“Okay,” he closed his eyes as she lowered the bed.

When he woke again later that afternoon, Hayden was there with Jackie. The kids were ushered out with Shane’s parents after a few minutes, thankfully. Shane loved them, but they were loud on a good day, and his head couldn’t take more than that right now.

Jackie lingered a little longer, wiping at her eyes. It was touching, if uncomfortable. Eventually she left to track down his parents, leaving Shane alone with Hayden in the dimmed room.

He hated the look in Hayden’s eyes. He had never seen his friend terrified, not even when Jackie had been in labour with the twins. Back then, he was panicked but excited. He just looked wrecked now, and when he looked at Shane, it was like he was staring at a ghost.

“Hayds,” Shane said flatly when they were alone. “I’m fine.”

“I know,” he twisted his hands through his hair. “I mean, I *know* that because you’re here, talking to me but–oh my God, dude. That was… terrifying.”

“Yeah, I know,” Shane snorted, trying to lighten the mood.

“No, you don’t,” Hayden insisted. “You were blue, man. And, I thought—I thought you were going to die on the way to the hospital. Rozanov kept yelling at you to stay awake, but you looked fucking dead, man—” Hayden looked away, his eyes shining.

Shit. Shane straightened up, hating the IV and monitors that kept him out of reach. “Hayden, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t you fucking apologise,” Hayden snapped.

“I just mean, I’m sorry you had to go through that,” Shane said quietly. “It must have been terrifying.”

Hayden deflated a bit. “Well, yes. It was.” He dropped heavily on a chair.

“If we had been a second later, or if Rozanov hadn’t figured it all out–well, I’m just telling you. I’m never finding a new best friend, so you can’t ever die, okay?”

“Back up,” Shane was reaching his quota of being able to concentrate without shooting pain. “Why was Rozanov there?”

There was a conflicted look on Hayden’s face, and he awkwardly patted Shane’s arm. “I was kind of hoping you could tell me that.”

Shane’s head throbbed suddenly, and he knew he must have gotten pale because Hayden’s expression went from supportive to worried. “Dude, I really don’t care if you’re dating Rozanov, not after today. Hell, you could announce your engagement to Roger Crowell, and I’ll be throwing fucking petals down the aisle, alright?”

Shane grimaced. “Jesus, Hayden. If I ever do that, fucking get me an MRI, okay?”

“So, you’re not–”

“Dating? No!”

Hayden looked at him, waiting.

“We’re not…” Shane rubbed around the bump on his head. “It’s not like that.”

“You’re just… blowing each other?”

“Hayden!”

“What? I’m just going with the info I got, dude!”

“It’s casual,” Shane said, his teeth gritted. “Nothing serious.”

Hayden snorted. “Right. He just casually tore up Montreal, bribed the fucking *mafia*, and jumped into the St Lawrence, in January, because you aren’t serious.”

“We’re not!” he protested.

“Well, you’d better explain that to him, dude. Because, if I didn’t know better, you’re stringing the guy along and he’s, like, half in love with you.”

“I’m not,” Shane said, quieter.

There was a long stretch of silence, then Hayden took his hand. “I’m glad you’re okay, dude.”

Shane smiled, his eyes closing. “Thanks.”

“But you are definitely gay, right? Just to be clear.”

The next day, a police officer stopped by to take Shane’s statement. It was shorter than he expected, because a lot of the ordeal was flashes of memory, and Shane couldn’t always remember what was true and what was a hallucination.

Scarface–Pavel Petrovich, Shane learned– had been arrested. He was a floor above Shane, recovering from surgery; news that made Shane suddenly very eager to be discharged.

They also gave him back his phone and keys, after telling him that Rozanov had found them. Shane pulled the phone from the plastic bag, but the battery was dead.

“Should, uh, I be worried?” Shane asked as the officer closed his notepad. “I mean, you caught one guy but–”

“I suggest investing in some cameras,” the officer said. “There’s always a spotlight on you, but it’s a lot bigger right now. If they try something, a lot of people are going to be pissed off.”

“They?”

The officer hesitated. “There’s big money in sports, legitimate and… otherwise. People get upset when someone tries to interfere. These problems sometimes solve themselves.”

“Sometimes?”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Hollander,” the officer said with a shrug. “Just stay out of back alleys for now, okay?”

That was not reassuring, and Shane’s parents didn’t think so either. When he was discharged, he went back to Ottawa with them, lying across the back seat with a dark towel over his head.

Team Canada was disappointed, and Shane stayed off the internet when the news broke. He let his mom field the emails and press, both because he could only handle short amounts of screen time for the first week but also because he didn’t want to have to keep apologising.

It had been his idea to keep the whole thing private, only saying he had been injured during a snowboarding accident (Hayden said it was cooler than skiing). He did vividly remember now the three options that the man had laid out for him, as much as he tried to forget.

Several days later, when the headaches and light sensitivity started to fade, he charged his phone.

Lily: Here. wtf

Lily: it's fucking cold. wtf man. let me in :(

Lily: I'm going to fucking leave. You aren't the only person I can fuck in montreal you know

Lily: Hollander, did you hit your head or something? open the fucking door.

Lily – Missed call (1)

His dad and Hayden had filled in a few more blanks. It had been Rozanov who made the initial police missing person's report, but the cops had been waiting for twenty-four hours until they would do anything. Rozanov had also tried to contact David earlier that day, and his parents had already been looking for flights back when they heard Shane was in the hospital. By the time Hayden got worried, Rozanov already had a lead on where Shane would be.

That was all Shane knew, though, and it left him more confused than ever and, for some reason, angry.

What the fuck was he supposed to write?

Hey man, thanks for saving my life. I owe you one.

Hey, thanks for not giving up. No one else would have–

Hey, sorry for missing out last time, I can make it up to you–

Hey–

Shane closed the app.

That night, Russia played Latvia, and Latvia demolished them. It was painful to listen to, but Shane stayed loyal and listened until the end of the third period.

Hey, sorry for the loss–

He quickly deleted it immediately. No one had fucking *died*.

Instead of dealing with the guilt, he focused on rehab, which was going well, and on not jumping at every shadow. His parents barely let him out of their sight, and Hayden made the two-hour drive often enough that Shane was never really bored for the three-week Olympic break.

Canada won silver, and the season started back up, but Shane couldn't bring himself to go back to Montreal and live alone. At least, not until he had figured out which security system he wanted.

His parents didn't complain, and he wasn't going to broach the subject sooner than he had to.

All the procrastination came to a head when the season started back up. The first week back, the Bears were set to play the Centaurs in Ottawa.

“We should go,” his dad suggested.

“Really?” Shane pushed his food around his plate. “We hate Bears.”

“We love Rozanov,” his mother said firmly. “I’d like to thank him, if we can.”

“I’ll text him,” his dad said casually, picking up his phone like he texted Rozanov all the time.

Shane’s hands felt clammy, and he rubbed them on his legs. “No, I’ll text him. I—I can do it.”

Later, alone in his room with his heart pounding out of his chest, he took a deep breath.

Shane: Hey. My parents want to thank you when you’re in Ottawa. Do you have time to meet up after the game?

His hand shook. “Stop being a fucking coward,” he whispered to himself. He hit send, and put the phone under his pillow.

A few seconds later, it buzzed.

Lily: I’ll get you tickets ;-)

Chapter End Notes

I think we're in the home stretch!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> I thought we were ready for a pure steamy chapter, but apparently Ilya needs to heal a bit.

Warmups, Boston vs. Ottawa, Canadian Tire Centre

Russia had been… awful.

Ilya had barely been present. He had left Montreal when Shane was still in and out of consciousness, but it was either stay, or have to explain to the Russian Olympic Committee he couldn't make it because his male lover was in the hospital thanks to the Russian mafia attempting to rig the hockey game.

There was nowhere on Earth Ilya would have been safe. He hated his brother, but his niece was innocent, and he wasn't stupid enough to believe they'd stop there. High school girlfriends, distant cousins, ex-teammates: he couldn't protect them all.

So he tucked his tail between his legs, hid fifty thousand dollars in the lining of his suitcase, and boarded the plane with the other Russian players being called up to serve their country in this farce.

David Hollander, of all people, had told Ilya that Shane had been discharged and was at home with them in Ottawa. He had opened his chat to Jane more than once, wondering what the fuck to say. In the end, he deleted the whole thread chain, erasing years of texts so he didn't have to see his own stupid, panicked words.

He had sat in his shitty, dank room on the uncomfortable cardboard bed and rested his head in his hands for an hour before his teammates, two older, bitter forwards, called him a pussy and forced him to come out drinking.

Ilya spent most of the Olympics drinking. It helped blur the edges of his dreams. Sometimes he woke up convinced his hands were numb, certain Shane had slipped through his fingers.

Someone had been willing to murder Shane Hollander over a fucking game; and he wasn't ready to step back on the ice like it hadn't happened.

He laced up. He skated. He shot the puck. He lost.

Andrei had met him at a bar just outside the Olympic Village. They had a drink in silence, sitting next to each other. His brother had lost weight, and his hands shook. Ilya wondered if he was looking at himself in the future.

“Thank you,” Ilya finally said.

“Go fuck yourself.” Andrei’s eyes darted around the room.

Ilya had brought a knapsack with the promised payout, so he left it under his chair when he finished his drink.

When his plane left the ground, he didn’t look out the window.

Once he was back in the US and more confident his phone wasn’t being monitored, he scoured the internet for any mention of ‘*Shane Hollander’, ‘kidnapping’* and *‘injury’*.

‘*Canada’s Shane Hollander injured in freak snowboarding accident, won’t go to Sochi, 2014’*

‘Team USA odds pull ahead as Canada’s Shane Hollander pulls out of Olympics’

‘Rideau to replace Hollander after sudden withdrawal from Team Canada’

‘Scott Hunter, surprised by Canada’s roster change, says he looks forward to ‘facing [Hollander] in Pyeongchang’.

‘The real reason Hollander won’t face Rozanov in Russia’s motherland’

Ilya had managed a smile at the last one, which went into wild details about Ilya’s illicit affair with Shane’s mother. That was a new one, but it was based on a blurry security camera still of Yuna Hollander and Ilya in the parking garage of CHUM, so it must be true.

He wondered if David Hollander, who had looked like he wouldn’t harm a fly, was angry about it. The thought tightened something unpleasant in his chest.

Luckily, his team assumed his uncharacteristic quiet was because of Russia’s standings, not because he couldn’t stop remembering how small and pale Shane had looked in the back of Pike’s Nissan.

They had lost their first home game back after the break, and Ilya was prepared to sleepwalk through the rest of the season when he had gotten a new text from Jane.

When he stepped onto the ice in Ottawa, the rink felt colder than he remembered. He glanced towards the stands and his heart stood still.

He looked good.

The bruise on Shane’s chin was almost healed, and he had his head turned, listening to something his mother was saying. He smiled, his eyes bright, and then he fucking laughed.

Even though it was still just the warmup, Ilya’s eyes burned, and he blinked, moving to the far end of the rink as he tried to breathe.

He was missing passes, and his shots went wide–he looked like complete shit. LeClaire pulled him aside as he went to walk down the tunnel before the start of the period.

“Rozanov, you good?” Ilya knew the question wasn’t because he was worried.

“Bad fish last night,” Ilya said. “I can push through.”

The puck dropped, but Ilya’s mind wasn’t on the game. Every slap on the ice or smash into the board felt like it was coming from underwater. He felt slow and awkward, but he was sweating like it was the playoffs.

Every time he caught a glimpse of Hollander in the stands, the man was leaning forward, his eyes trained on Ilya. For a moment, their eyes connected, and Shane smiled.

Ilya tripped and tangled with a Centaur, sliding into the boards.

“Fuck off, Rozanov,” the man growled, shoving Ilya down as he stood up. Marleau was there in a second, grabbing the guy and throwing gloves.

There was a flurry of a fight before the linesmen broke it up.

He shook his head and skated to the face off, trying to focus, but his hands felt heavy on his stick. He lost, and his attention was yanked from every play.

Halfway through the first period, LeClaire stopped sending him back on the ice, and Ilya didn’t blame him. The Centaurs were so terrible the Bears were already up two goals without him.

At the end of the period, they went back to the locker room and Ilya wasn’t surprised when LeClaire singled him out. The rest of the team looked away and busied themselves with their gear and water.

“Rozanov.” LeClaire had an unreadable expression on his face. “You know why I’m pulling you, right?”

“Yes.” Ilya muttered, trying to straighten his back but failed miserably.

“Good. Because I’m not risking an injury because you had some ‘bad fish’.”

Ilya couldn’t meet his team’s eyes as they headed back out. His phone buzzed a couple of minutes later.

Jane: Is everything okay?

Ilya: Yes. Just a bad lunch. Maybe we should cancel.

Hollander was typing and deleting a response for a few seconds before sending:

Jane: No, it’s fine. We can go to our house. Dad cooked, but we can just talk.

Talk.

Fuck.

Ilya: Okay.

9:30pm, Parking lot of the Canadian Tire Centre

Shane spotted Rozanov before his parents and stepped away from their car. They were near the side entrance, close to where the visiting team's bus would be parked. His dad was chatting with a coworker and her boyfriend who had been sitting next to them.

He felt his stomach flutter from nerves. Rozanov looked as handsome as ever; his fitted black jacket and toque not exactly hiding his appearance. He was growing a beard, adding to the ruggedness.

He tried to meet him first, before everyone else could notice, but it was like his mother had developed a sixth sense and could follow Shane's every movement.

"Rozanov!" She was the first to step forward, pulling him into a hug. Shane saw Rozanov stiffen briefly, before returning it politely. She held on tight for a few extra moments. "You have no idea what it means to us. You're the reason we still have our son. Anything you want, you come to us, okay?"

"This won't help the rumours of our love affair," Rozanov joked, and Shane's mother rolled her eyes.

As soon as she let go, Shane's dad was there, shaking his hand and pulling him into a half embrace. Shane shoved his hands into his pockets, cheeks for some fucking reason heating, feeling both irritated and embarrassed by the display.

But before he could take his turn to get out his rehearsed thank-you, his dad's coworker and her boyfriend stepped forward.

His irritation mounted when Rozanov smiled and hugged her too. "Ah, my favourite new Bears fan, right?"

"I thought you were going to convince me yourself why I should switch teams," she teased.

"I blame Ottawa. They tried to poison me with bad fish," he grabbed his stomach exaggeratedly. "But it doesn't matter. Bears still won, eh?"

She laughed, touching his arm. Shane glanced away, cheeks flushing more. Her boyfriend stepped forward eagerly, and Rozanov signed his jersey with another smile.

All of the words Shane was going to say disappeared when finally Rozanov turned toward him. His chest tightened, his throat felt thick, and his breath quickened.

His mom touched his elbow. "Let's get back to the house. Rozanov, I know Shane said you aren't feeling well, but our guest room is going to be a lot better than a hotel room. And David makes an amazing chicken noodle soup."

Rozanov paused, letting a genuine smile break across his face. “Thank you.”

Shane felt like a teenager on an awkward date as he sat in the backseat of his parent’s car with Rozanov. They were in the front seat talking about work, so Shane tuned out. Outside, the world was dark, lit only by passing streetlights on snowy banks.

Shane’s fingers drummed on his thighs. A hand covered his, pressing his fingers into his jeans. He glanced over, meeting Ilya’s hazel eyes. His gaze was intense, and Shane swallowed hard. Ilya turned his palm around to intertwine their fingers, and something finally settled in his chest.

When they pulled into the driveway of his parent’s house, Rozanov let go. They followed his parents inside, but Shane insisted on bringing Ilya to the downstairs den alone.

“Don’t keep him up too late.” His mom warned. “If he’s not feeling well, and I’m sure he has an early flight.”

“Yes, mom.” Shane rolled his eyes. “It’s a school night, I know.”

“Don’t sass me.” Her voice lacked heat as she followed his dad upstairs.

When Shane was a teenager, he had begged his parents to let him switch his bedroom to the basement. There had been a larger guestroom down here, and he had turned it into a hockey shrine with posters, pictures and jerseys plastered over the walls. He had made a wall of pucks on the back of his desk signed by almost a dozen players.

He led Rozanov in there now, embarrassed for him to see but needed to get him alone.

The door closed, and Shane turned around, ready to say his perfectly constructed speech.

But like before, the words died on his tongue as he saw the intense hunger on Rozanov’s face. Their hands were on each other, and Shane didn’t know who was leading who. The kisses were borderline painful as Rozanov gripped his jaw, tilting his head to align them better. His teeth were mostly healed, but they stung a bit. When he whimpered, Rozanov loosened his grip and pulled back.

“Did I hurt you?”

“No,” Shane shoved Rozanov’s suit jacket off, not caring as it crumbled to the floor. Ilya didn’t get gentler as he pulled Shane’s hoodie off, and they stripped each other with a desperation Shane hadn’t felt before.

Rozanov had his mouth on him as soon as his back hit the bed, nipping and licking over his stubble. His large hands were running up and down his arms, cataloging every inch before moving on.

“Fuck–” Shane choked out as Rozanov closed his teeth around Shane’s neck, sucking right over his heartbeat. “You’re going to leave a mark.”

Rozanov let go, but nuzzled, his beard scratching his collarbone.

“I need you,” he said, his breath hot. Shane moved to turn over, but Rozanov held him down by his grip on Shane’s arms. “No, like this.”

When he kissed him, it was like he was trying to climb under Shane’s skin. He released Shane’s arms and gripped him everywhere: his ribs, his ass, and he pulled his thighs up around his waist so he could grind on Shane’s hip.

It was hard, rough and perfect.

Shane wasn’t passive as he gripped Roznov’s curls, his fingers pulling and directed his head as he squeezed his knees on Rozanov’s sides. He was aching to have Rozanov inside him, but all his attempts to push Rozanov to progress to that point seemed to be thwarted by Rozanov’s mounting desperation until Shane realised something was off.

Rozanov’s hands had no pattern, no plan. Usually, he relied on Rozanov’s confidence and leaned on it when they tried something new, or something fast. At first, Shane had thought it was just because they hadn’t been together in a while, but their movements didn’t settle down and organize as they usually did.

“Hey,” Shane whispered as Rozanov gripped too hard, his head buried in Shane’s neck, frantic breathing on his skin. “Hey, Rozanov.” He said more firmly, but the panting just got harder and erratic.

His teenage bed was only a double, but he managed to flip them, spreading his knees and grabbing Rozanov’s wrists to pin him on the blue bedspread. He leaned back, and Rozanov struggled; not a playful wrestle, but a more serious intention to get free.

“Hey, hey,” Shane tried again to get his attention, but Rozanov was turning his head, trying to hide. “Rozanov, stop.”

The man took a heaving breath, and Shane finally met his eyes, seeing them glistening. Was he… crying?

Shane kept him pinned with his hips, pressing him down as he released his wrists. Shane still wasn’t back to a hundred percent, and his muscles were already screaming at him that he was at his limits. He laid his chest down, using his weight to keep Rozanov down instead of force, but he knew the man could easily get out of the hold if he truly wanted.

Now that Shane was paying more attention, he could tell that Rozanov had lost some muscle. There were dark circles under his eyes, and his skin looked dry and pale. Shane gripped his hair on either side of his head and forced him to face Shane.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Shane said softly. He leaned in and kissed Rozanov, still deep but coaxing his tongue to match Shane’s movements. Rozanov let out a sobbing gasp, breaking the kiss.

“Sorry.” The word broke in the middle, and Shane felt a surge of protectiveness.

“Sorry?” he repeated. “Ilya–”

He had let Rozanov's wrists go, so the man wrapped his arms around Shane, buried his face in his neck, and cried.

"*A dumal, ty umer,*" he muttered into Shane's skin.

"It's okay," Shane held him tight. "I'm here, I'm okay."

"*Tebe nikogda ne pozvoleno umeret',*" he sniffed. Shane had no idea what he was saying, but it was with a conviction that made him tighten his grip.

"I'm not going anywhere, okay? I'm sorry I scared you."

"You better not," Ilya said, this time in English.

They didn't do tender or caring. That wasn't what they *did*. Ilya, of course, had always been a reciprocal and attentive partner, listening to Shane when they were having sex and knowing exactly when to push and pull, but Shane had always felt that was just because Ilya was, surprisingly, a very compassionate person.

Under all the layers of asshole, of charisma, of showmanship, was someone who wanted to meet people on their level; and Shane had always taken it for granted that Ilya would be able to match Shane's desires because he understood him in a way no one else did.

But here, now–

Shane covered Ilya's face in soft kisses, holding and letting the man hold him, trying his best to be what Ilya needed, hoping he was doing something right.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morning, Shane Hollander's bed

Hair tickled his nose. He breathed deeply, knowing what Hollander smelled like without opening his eyes.

Fuck.

He had fucking cried like a baby on Hollander last night. Where the fuck had that come from?

He deliberately kept his eyes closed. Maybe if he didn't open them, he wouldn't have to face the aftermath. Or maybe he could wake Hollander up with a blowjob and skip the awkward stage.

They hadn't gotten dressed after his embarrassing breakdown, so it was easy to run his hands up and down Hollander's sides until he could feel him harden in his sleep.

The basement bedroom had a window high up the wall that was letting in the morning light. Ilya peeked, pulling the blanket down so he could take a better look at the healing bruises. They looked… fine. If Ilya didn't know better, they could have just come from an aggressive game.

He pushed the thought down as Hollander squirmed in his arms, slowly rousing.

"Ilya," Hollander said, using his first name again. Ilya ignored morning breath and tilted Hollander's face to kiss him awake.

It was too tender, but Rozanov was forgetting where the line was.

The bed wasn't big, but they kissed and moved around until Ilya was hovering over Hollander, the man's legs bracketing his hips as their cocks rubbed against each other.

"Fuck," Hollander moaned. Ilya kissed along the bridge of his nose, then dropped to his shoulder. "I can't tell if I like the beard or not."

Ilya chuckled. "I shave later."

Hollander's cock was leaking now, and Ilya took them both in his hand, bringing them both harder. Hollander was panting and biting his lip.

"Make noise for me," Ilya said, squeezing on an upstroke.

Hollander barely stifled his moan. "My parents are probably awake and making breakfast."

“Are you not practiced at this?” Ilya teased, speeding up. “No sneaking girls in at night?”

“Fuck you,” Hollander kissed him, rocking his hips up in time with Ilya’s hand. They found a rhythm instinctively, like they always had.

“I want to fuck you,” Ilya turned his head enough to whisper in Hollander’s ear. “I want to be inside you when I come.”

“N-not here, fuck,” Shane whispered. “We really have to get upstairs.”

“You want to do this in front of your parents? Hm, I think you found my limit, Hollander.”

“Rozanov,” his voice sounded like he was trying to be angry, but Ilya slid down his body, under the blanket, and took his cock in his mouth.

Hollander pushed the blanket down so it was around his shoulders, then clamped a hand over his mouth as Ilya sucked, tugging his balls just the way he knew he liked it. It didn’t take long for Hollander’s thighs to tense, and for him to give a muffled wail, coming in Ilya’s mouth. He swallowed and kept gently sucking until he was soft and oversensitive.

“Jesus,” Shane took only a moment to recover before he pushed Ilya to the end of the bed and got on his knees on the carpeted floor.

Ilya gripped his hair with one hand, while the other braced himself on the bed. His hair was shorter than Ilya was used to, and a raised scar on the right side, just behind his ear, was new. Iyla avoided the spot.

The feeling of Hollander’s mouth, always so fucking eager, brought him to the edge quickly. He had to look away as he felt his climax mounting, focusing instead on the far wall, where a poster of Scott Hunter watched him reproachfully.

He glanced back down, feeling embarrassed. Shane was watching him, obscene with Ilya’s cock in his mouth. It was the most gorgeous sight in the world, and Ilya had to bite his tongue to keep from coming right then and there. Hollander’s face was flush, his freckles standing out as his dark eyes dilated. He paused, keeping only the tip in his mouth as so he could swirl his tongue over the slit on Ilya’s cock.

“Christ, Hollander,” he braced himself with his core so he could hold Hollander’s face with both hands. “Just like that. You’re fucking perfect.”

His hands dropped to the meaty area where Hollander’s shoulder met his neck, and massaged, digging his fingers in as Hollander relaxed his throat, taking him deep. His hands wrapped around Ilya’s thighs and hips, grabbing Ilya’s ass so he pushed deeper still.

“I’m going to come,” he bit out, his voice strained. Hollander swallowed around his cock, his breath shaky through his nose as it almost touched the skin on Ilya’s pelvis. “Fuck, fuck, Shane–”

He didn’t know how Hollander managed to keep swallowing. He came so hard it was nearly impossible to keep from thrusting. When he was finally done, he felt empty–his balls, his

thoughts, his fucking soul.

Ilya collapsed forward, his hands on Shane's shoulders the only thing keeping him from sliding off the bed as Shane wiped his mouth and caught him. Ilya buried his face in the crook of Shane's neck, his hair tickling Ilya's nose again as he pushed back tears.

"Thank you." Ilya was sure the hoarseness in Shane's voice was from both the effort he had just given and the emotion he could feel in the tightness of Shane's grip. "I never fucking got to thank you."

This was when Ilya would make a stupid joke, but he couldn't do anything but hold on.

"It all comes back in bits and pieces," Shane continued. His bare skin was warm, and Ilya couldn't stop breathing him in. "I thought I was going to die, and that no one would know. But you did, you knew. And if you had given up–"

"I don't want to think about it," Ilya admitted.

Shane rubbed his shoulders. Ilya slid to his knees on the floor with Shane, so they could be chest to chest, and he could feel Shane's heart beating.

"I do. I think about it all the time," Shane confessed. "And, it makes me realise that I don't want you to just be a bit or piece of my life. I want you here all the fucking time."

"We can't do that."

"Why not?"

He wasn't clean. Whatever instincts or luck had put him in the right place that night didn't make him a hero. He knew people like Garmanov would crack. He knew the money he'd given Andrei wasn't going to orphans or anything innocent. When it all came apart, and Ilya knew it would, he didn't want Shane anywhere near the fallout.

If anyone found out about them it would be the end of their careers as they knew them. Hockey was everything to Shane, and loving Ilya was going to take it away from him. Eventually.Ilya could live without hockey. Shane couldn't, and he would resent Ilya for it. And without hockey, Ilya would end up back in Russia, where things became dangerous in ways he refused to think about.

But worst of all, Shane was loved.

He was loved by his parents, his friends, his teammates. Ilya didn't come from anything like that. How could he possibly know how to love Shane like he deserved?

"Hollander–" Ilya tried to compress all of it into something Shane could understand, and failed. "We just can't."

"I'm not letting you go without a fight, Ilya," Shane countered. As if to prove it, he tightened his grip. "And I'll fucking fight you."

Ilya pressed his lips against Shane's shoulder, his heart sinking. "You will win."

"I fucking will," he laughed softly.

And Ilya gave up a little.

They moved on to the bed, lying there for a while. Shane had his eyes closed, a furrow in his brow. Ilya knew that kind of furrow as the beginning of a headache. He rubbed the back of his neck, pressing down hard where he knew it might give some relief. The furrow eventually went away, and Ilya found himself half dozing.

Ilya didn't know how much time passed until they heard footsteps on the stairs and a gentle knock on the door. "Shane? Breakfast is ready."

Shane cleared his throat, finally pulling away. "Okay, we'll be up in a bit."

There was a long pause before Shane's mom said hesitantly. "Rozanov, how do you like your eggs?"

Ilya had never really met parents before, but Shane was looking at him, nervous but expectant. This was terrifying for both of them, and he gripped Shane's hip to brace himself.

"Uh, scrambled?"

A longer pause, then: "Okay, sounds good!"

The footsteps retreated quickly up the stairs, and both men broke out in laughter.

They got dressed. Ilya's suit was wrinkled from being balled up on the floor, so he borrowed some clothes from Shane. He plugged in his nearly dead phone, and left it on the bed, ignoring the stream of texts and calls from the Bears's management team.

Breakfast was awkward. They sat around the kitchen table with a plate of eggs and turkey bacon. Shane's parents kept tripping over the line of casual and curious. It was entertaining to watch them acting as though Ilya Rozanov slept over and ate breakfast with them every day, while also clearly desperate to know *why*.

"So," Yuna, as she had asked Ilya to call her, asked. "When is your flight back to Boston?"

Ilya glanced at the clock on the wall. "About half an hour ago."

Her eyes flew open. "You should have told us! We could have eaten in the car–"

"It is okay," Ilya waved his hand, uncomfortable with her concern. "We have today, then home game. I can catch a later flight."

"No practice?" She narrowed her eyes. Ilya wondered if she was asking out of concern or if she was trying to analyze Boston's practice schedule.

Ilya shoved more plastic-like turkey bacon in his mouth. “I can miss a practice once or twice. It is not a big deal.”

That was a complete lie. Ilya knew he was going to face a fine, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. He glanced over and saw Shane watching him intently.

“I’ll drive him to the airport,” Shane said. “We’ll figure it out.”

“Is your knee okay to drive?” she asked. “Maybe your father can–”

“I’ll be fine,” Shane rolled his eyes. “The airport is twenty minutes away.”

“You’ll have your location on your phone turned on?”

“*Yes*.”

Ilya sat back and absorbed the soft bickering with a smile.

Morning, en route to Ottawa Macdonald–Cartier International Airport

Shane and Ilya showered separately, and Ilya charged his phone. There weren’t that many flights direct to Boston, so he had to book one leaving in a few hours. Shane’s knee was perfectly fine to drive the short distance, but Ilya had insisted on driving Shane’s car at least one way.

“I think I demonstrated my knees were perfectly fine this morning,” he grumbled as Ilya adjusted the driver’s seat.

Ilya snorted. “Right, I don’t trust your judgement when you have a chance to suck dick.”

Shane flushed but didn’t argue. He gave Ilya the directions to the airport, and they drove in silence for a while.

“I assume all those calls were from the Bears.”

Ilya sighed. “Yes. They are a little upset with me. Don’t worry about it.”

Shane crossed his arms over his chest, squeezing a little to alleviate his stress. “If they give you a fine, I can help cover it.”

“Is not a problem.”

“I asked you to come over. I don’t want you to get in trouble with your team.”

“I said, is not a problem.”

Shane frowned harder. “It *is* a problem.”

Ilya waved his concerns off. “I will tell them I was sick. Is same lie I told them yesterday, so they will believe it.

“You shouldn’t be lying to your team.”

“They will get over it.”

Ilay could feel Shaen glaring at him. He sighed, switching lanes to exit the highway for the airport. “Fine. I will let you know if they fine me.”

That seemed to appease Shane as Ilya went to get into the drop off area. Shane touched his arm nervously. “Can you go to underground parking?”

Ilya shrugged and moved back over, following the signs. Shane slid down in his seat, covering his face with his hand as he directed Ilya around the lot until they found a reasonably dark and empty corner.

“Is this where you murder me in a revenge plot against Russia?” Ilya raised his eyebrow.

Shane pulled a face. “That’s not funny.” Ilya watched him as Shane glanced at the ceilings, looking for cameras but seemed to find none. His shoulder slumped, then he turned to face Ilya with a determined expression.

“So…. yes, murder?”

Shane did look like he might murder Ilya but instead grabbed him by the front of his sweater and pulled him into a kiss. Ilya closed his eyes, cupping Shane’s face as he leaned over the car’s console, matching the ferocity.

He was breathing heavily when Shane pulled away, ready to climb into the backseat, but quickly noticed the hitch in Shane’s chest as he pressed his forehead onto Ilya’s shoulder.

Ilya felt paralysed for a moment. He both knew exactly how Shane was feeling, but helpless to do anything about it. The thought of leaving, of getting on that plane made him feel like he was breaking off a piece of his soul. How could he leave when a part of him would always be right here, held by this man?

He didn’t care about a fine. He didn’t care if they drained all his bank accounts as punishment for staying here another night.

“What are we doing?” Ilya wasn’t really asking Shane the question so much as he whispered it to himself.

“Fuck if I know.”

“I don’t want to leave.” It felt like a relief to admit.

“I don’t want you to go.” Shane’s hand tightened on his shirt.

His phone buzzed, and reason caught up to him. He had to go. As empty as he felt getting on the ice right now, he knew without hockey, he would be getting back on a very different plane to a life he knew for certain he didn't want. He could pretend through the emptiness for now; he couldn't go back to Russia.

"I have to go."

Shane nodded against him and pulled away. His expression was stony, but his eyes were wet. "Call me when you land?"

"*You* call me when you get home," Ilya said. "And tonight before you go to sleep. And in the morning when you wake up."

Shane smiled at him, a strange and fond expression on his face. "That's a bit obsessive, Ilya."

"Well, I'm obsessed," Ilya said. Quietly he said, "I try not to think about it, but I do, Shane. I think about it, and the only way it goes quiet is when I can see you."

Shane kissed him again, softly. "This is real, right?"

Ilya was quiet for a moment. Then, his voice unsteady, he said, "I'm afraid it is."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, don't quote me on it, but I do have an idea for an epilogue, so keep an eye on that.

I almost might do a lower paced sequel. I wanted to wrap this up before I went back to work, so chapters would likely be slower. But Shane and Ilya just kept trying to deal with the trauma, and I had to cut them short for the sake of finishing this up. Would anyone be interested in it? This would continue on the timeline as a canon-divergent fic.

Chapter 11: Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

February 2026, Milano

"*Shane Hollander, last time NHL players were eligible to play in the Olympics, you had to pull out at the last minute due to a snowboarding incident. How are you feeling now that you're in Milano, safe and sound?*"

"*Good*," Shane looked calm on the video, but Ilya knew he was nervous. He hated interviews that were more concerned with him as a person than hockey, especially when he had to lie. "*Uh, I was banned from the slopes this year.*"

"*And how does it feel to be named as captain on Team Canada again?* "

"*I'm grateful for the opportunity to lead the team this year. Missing that chance in 2014 was one of my biggest regrets, so I'm honoured to be chosen."*

"No animosity from your current captain at being chosen over him?"

"No, we're both just excited to represent our country." He paused, then added without thinking, *"I've learned a lot under Rozanov since joining the Centaurs."*

Ilya could stop himself from laughing. The reporter stared at Shane, who flushed when he realized what he had just said on international television.

To her credit, the reporter recovered quickly. "*And it must feel great having your husband on Team Canada with you this year?*'

Shane swallowed hard. Ilya could almost see his brain recalibrating. "*It does. We've got a winning combo with everyone this year. We're here for the gold.*"

"*Thank you, Shane, and good luck!*"

When Shane stepped back into the locker room, all of the Team Canada men's hockey team were hiding smiles or busying themselves with getting changed. Their morning practice on Milano's ice had been less than stellar, but it seemed like Shane's interview, live broadcast into the room, had lifted some of their spirits.

"Don't listen to them," Ilya pulled him into a fierce hug and kissed his heated cheek. "They are just jealous they don't get to learn under their captain like you."

"Fuck. Off."

Ilya had already done his media questions, in which he had made sure all his innuendos were on purpose.

Ever since the IOC allowed NHL players on the Olympic teams again, both Shane and Ilya had realised that, despite twelve years since the incident, old scars could feel new.

It had been a tense-filled week. Shane had buzzed with anxiety the last week leading up to the Olympics, jumping at every shadow despite his medications. Ilya had doubled up his therapy appointments, pushing back his irrational desire to keep Shane in sight at all times, and keeping the nightmares at bay.

It had worked, somewhat.

Still, boarding the plane after a sleepless night at Shane's parents' house made them both sigh with relief.

"Okay," Ilya had said softly. "Step one: we're in the airplane. Already better than the last Olympics."

Normally, Shane would have glared or cursed him out. Instead, he just said, "Let's just get there without, I don't know, the plane being hijacked.

They had made it safely ("Step two," Ilya had said gleefully when they cleared customs, and Shane had held his hand), and they had settled into a hotel near the Olympic Village with most of Team Canada.

That's where they were headed now. The first practice on the newly constructed rink hadn't gone well. Although they were all used to playing with different players for international games, showcases, trades or exhibitions, they were all feeling the pressure to mesh well. The stakes were high, and any beef from the League had already started to come out on the ice.

Even though the lines had been made with chemistry in mind, there was friction. Shane had broken up verbal spats between two French-Canadian defensemen who were supposed to be a pair, and had to convince a forward from Vegas to pass to a Vancouver player who had broken his teammate's nose in a dirty play the week before.

Ilya had watched, not wanting to overstep on the first day. The reporter had alluded to it, but there had already been serious gossip and provoking comments about Shane being appointed captain over Ilya.

It didn't help that the rink was smaller than usual, and the ice was still new and settling. It was a small thing, but there were a million small things on top of each other, and it was making Shane's fingers drum restlessly.

Their elevator ride was quiet. Shane was lost in his head, and Ilya's eyes were fixed on Shane.

When they got in the room, Ilya reached out, but Shane didn't notice and was already moving to flick through the channels. Ilya sighed and followed him, wrapping him up from behind. Shane's body was a line of tension, but he relaxed fractionally back.

"It's only the first day," Ilya muttered in his ear. "They will get better."

“Right,” Shane flipped through until he found the international channels and put on the BBC coverage. “We should figure out how to get CBC on our laptops.”

Ilya kissed the back of his neck, and Shane loosened a little more. “We could. Or we could fuck.”

Shane snorted. “That’s your solution to everything.”

“It’s a one-size-fits-all,” Ilya bit his ear.

Shane leaned back, and Ilya easily braced for him. Shane’s head tipped to the side, giving Ilya better access.

“Any ideas on how to get them all to get along?”

“Well…” Ilya grinned against Shane’s neck. “Fucking worked for us.”

“You think we need a team orgy for cohesion?”

“Well, maybe it would have helped the Russian Team in Sochi.”

“How about I let you pitch that one, um?”

Shane turned in Ilya’s arms, the tension mostly gone as he met Ilya’s eyes. Whatever he saw on Ilya’s face made his mouth soften before he kissed him, unrushed, grounding.

Ilya ran his hands down Shane’s sides, turning them until he could back Shane up to the bed. He lowered them down, not breaking their kiss after years of practice with this. A low groan rumbled in Ilya’s chest as Shane’s body gave beneath him, pliant and welcoming.He could feel Shane already half hard against his thigh. He nudged a knee between Shane’s, parting his legs.

With a deft hook of his fingers, Ilya dragged Shane’s joggers and briefs down in one move. He grinned wickedly as he took Shane’s cock in his hand. “How about I practice on you before we demonstrate to the team, huh?”

A huff of laughter escaped Shane before he could stop it. “You’re a fucking idiot.” The words lost their bite as Ilya’s hot, wet mouth closed over him. The sharp inhale was the only answer Ilya needed. Shane gripped Ilya’s hair, needing to anchor himself as the world fell away.

The voice in the back of his head–the one that kept replaying flashes of dark spaces, the coppery tang of blood, and the shocking burn of icy water–faded away as Ilya’s slick tongue worked him over, making his whole body light up in heat.

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane’s voice was ragged. His eyes, dark and pupils blown wide, trained on Ilya when he looked up. The sight of Ilya’s reddened lips around him was enough to almost undo him.

Ilya pulled off, slow and tortuous, leaving Shane’s cock glistening and painfully hard. A bead of pre-cum welled at the tip. Shane watched, panting and mesmerized as Ilya slowly wiped it

away with his thumb, making Shane's toes curl.

"Move back," Ilya said with a rasp in his voice, low and commanding.

As Shane shuffled back, Ilya pulled off his sweater, revealing the hard lines of his chest and shoulders. He went to drop it on the floor but paused and gave Shane an amused look before draping it neatly over the desk's chair. He did the same with his pants. Shane's breath hitched as the fabric slid down, revealing the perfect curve of his ass

As Ilya crawled up the bed, Shane's legs were wrapping around his waist, pulling him down heavy and hard. Their mouths crashed together, a mess of teeth and tongues as Ilya settled his weight, pressing Shane deep into the mattress. There was no space left between them, nothing but skin and heat and shared breath.

He let Ilya work, feeling the last bit of control drain away. Ilya knew every inch of him, every spot that made him shudder. His hands roamed possessive and confident over all the lines of Shane's body as if he were committing them to his memory all over again. His mouth left Shane's, dragging down under his jaw, over his collarbone and on his chest, leaving a trail of fire in its wake.

Shane arched into it, his hands gripping the sweaty expanse of Ilya's back, digging into the meat of his shoulders as Ilya rocked their hips together. He wanted to be closer, as if crawling in Ilya's skin wouldn't be enough.

If the ghost of the icy water had turned into an inferno for Shane, Ilya was feeding it with the rocking of their hips. Their cocks slid together in a maddening friction that seemed to steal the air from Shane's lungs, but he wasn't afraid.

The rhythm was hypnotic, a steady, grounding beat. He felt Ilya's lips brush against his ear, the stubble on his jaw a tantalizing scrape against his skin.

"You're beautiful like this, *lyubov*," Ilya murmured, the words making Shane's heart clench.

Ilya shifted his weight and reached for the travel bag Shane had placed between the beds. He was too nervous to leave their sex supplies out in the open for any cleaning staff to see, so he usually kept the discrete bag nearby.

He heard the familiar click of a lube cap and just waited, his entire body thrumming with anticipation. When Ilya's slick fingers returned, circling his entrance, Shane couldn't stop the needy whine that escaped his throat.

It wasn't just Shane who needed this reassurance tonight. He could see Ilya's hands gripping too tight, as if he was afraid Shane was going to slip out of his grasp. Shane kissed his neck, tasting the salt and sweat, pushing into Ilya's grip, wordlessly trying to convey he understood. "I'm not going anywhere, " he whispered against Ilya's neck, the pulse hammering.

There was a low rumble in Ilya's chest. "I wouldn't let anyone take you," Ilya vowed, his voice dropping into the lower register it always did when he spoke Russian. Shane nodded,

pressing his forehead against Ilya's jaw, nuzzling the corded muscles of his neck.

"I know," he replied in Russian, his voice shaking as Ilya opened him up with practiced ease. "I know you won't let anything happen to me."

"Fuck, Shane." The slick sound of Ilya withdrawing his fingers was followed by the slide of his palm over his own cock, coating it. Shane barely had time to draw a proper breath before the blunt, heavy head was pressing against him.

There was a deep, guttural groan as Ilya pushed inside. There was no hesitation, only a confident pressure that Shane pushed back on, taking Ilya with the same pleasurable and dizzying excitement that had never diminished. The glorious burning always left Shane feeling helpless, but today it was accompanied by sharp flare of anxiety.

He pushed at Ilya's chest, and he moved back, eyes hazy but questioning. Shane panted, the irrational spike of fear fading as soon as he saw Ilya's face. "Okay?" Ilya asked, his voice rough but concerned.

"Just, uh, keep looking at me?"

"Do you want to stop–"

"No," Shane wrapped his leg tighter around Ilya's hip, drawing him closer. "Just… want to keep you in focus, okay?"

Ilya searched his face for a moment as if he was reading a book, then leaned in and claimed a deep kiss, holding his hips flush against Shane,letting him feel every single inch. "You're the bravest man I know," Ilya said, pulling just far enough that their eyes could meet.

Shane was afraid to blink, to break their connection as Ilya slowly started to move. His eyes wanted to close and surrendered to the sensation, but he forced them open. It was irrational, but he felt like if he closed his eyes he was going to lose this moment.

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*," Shane said as their breath mingled.

The words made Ilya lose his slow, measured pace. His thrusts became harder, deeper, driven by a desperate urgency that matched the pounding of Shane's heart.

The coil in Shane's stomach tightened with each snap of Ilya's hips against him, winding him up until he felt dizzy and hot. "Fuck," he groaned as his world shrank down to only this heat, this pressure, Ilya above him, around him, in him.

Ilya's hand slide between them, taking his leaking cock and stroking it hard and sure. "Come for me, Shane," Ilya ordered, his voice sounded raw. "Let go. I've got you."

Shane's back bowed off the bed, a strangled cry tearing from his throat as his orgasm ripped through him. The faint tendrils of fear and cold melted as Ilya drove into him, uncoordinated as he came a few beats behind Shane, his eyes still half open and dazed.

His kiss missed Ilya's mouth as they both collapsed, their skin sweaty as they both refused to be seperated by even a millimetre.

"So," Ilya's voice was muffled at the nape of Shane's neck. Shane clung to him tighter in case Ilya was thinking of moving away to get cleaned up. He didn't want Ilya to leave, even though he was getting crushed. "Should we show the team our special bonding technique?"

Despite how raw and open he felt, he couldn't help but laugh. "Not sure the IOC will approve."

"Okay, we keep it secret then," Ilya's voice was sluggish. He did move back a bit, but Shane forgave him when Ilya intertwined his fingers in Shane's and kissed him deeply.

Over the next few weeks, things settled in the locker room. It wasn't as though Ilya didn't know, empirically, that Shane was a good captain. Obviously, he had led Montreal from the bottom of the League to the Cup twice, and as an alternate captain for the Centaurs, Ilya trusted him with his team.

But he didn't think about how it would be to sit back and watch him work. He had always held the C on the Centaurs, and Shane had never seemed to want the job. Afterall, Ilya had, for the most part, shifted to wing so they could play on the same line.

He had thought he would struggle to push down his habit of stepping up in the leadership position, but he was so fucking wrong.

Shane was personable in a way that was so different to Ilya. While Ilya was comfortable with jokes and laughter and putting the pressure on, Shane led from behind. He was quiet where Ilya was loud, compassionate where Ilya was protective. He listened and let grievances air out, only stepping in when he needed to. When he pushed it was because he needed to, and the team responded to it without resentment.

Ilya was a bit ashamed to think after almost eighteen years of knowing him, this was the first time Ilya truly got out of his way and paid attention.

It was eyeopening and humbling.

And really fucking sexy.

Ilya was immensely glad they had opted for a hotel rather than the Olympic Village.

The final gold medal game was between Canada and Sweden.

The whole month had been gruelling, more so than he remembered 2014 being. Maybe it was because he had been drunk and numb for most of the Games back then, and twelve years younger. Or maybe because this time it was Shane's time to lead. His intensity set a different pace and every decision, every victory and loss, felt heavier. With Shane at the centre, everything seemed to click in place behind him.

Ilya was exhausted as he braced around the circle for the face off. The game was tied in overtime. For a split second, he thought about easing off, catching his breath for the last two

minutes. What did it matter? Silver was respectable. He had already gotten his citizenship. Surely Canada would be more understanding that Russia with failure.

But then he looked at Shane.

He was laser focused on Albin Östergren, the second line centre for Sweden. Shane looked calm, cool, like this was Game 1, as if he hadn't been pushing himself to the limit every second.

This was Shane's dream. He had spent his childhood thinking about it. He had almost lost his life to it.

Ilya could never give half an effort when Shane was involved.

The puck dropped, and Shane won the face off.

He didn't need to know where Shane was going to send it; he was already there. His blades flashed over the shitty ice, gritting his teeth because he wasn't going to fucking lose due to poor craftmanship.

Noah Isackson was an inch behind him, but Ilya had played with him in Boston enough to know he fell for every fake to the left.

Sure enough, Isackson went left; Ilya shot right.

Shane had the puck again, and was racing to the net.

Ilya was half a second faster than him.

LeBlanc, the other forward on their line, was around the Swedish net, tying up the defensemen. One broke free, angling cut Shane off.

Shane dragged his toe, setting up the shot.

But Ilya was three feet ahead of Shane – the wrong place. He dropped back.

Shane danced the puck left, then right, less than ten feet from the crease. He wound up for the shot, and instead slipped the puck back between his blades.

Right towards Ilya.

He didn't hesitate as he shot towards the only opening on the net.

The horn sounded, and the arena erupted around them.

A rush of white hot relief washed over him, stronger than any drug. He didn't even react, just went slack jawed as he let his momentum carry him into Shane's arms.

His teammates piled off the bench, their impacting bodies and shouts bringing him back from that perfect place into the exhilarating feeling of comradery.

The massive huddle of hard helmets, shoulder pads and sticks hurt and he ripped off his helmet, throwing it away as he whooped and hollered.

Shane grabbed his face, kissing him hard as it sunk in.

They fucking won Gold.

He had won Gold. For Shane. For himself.

He grabbed a hold of his husband as the group dragged them along back to their bench where the coaches and staff joined in on the celebration.

Twelve years ago, the ice had felt hollow and cold in the place where he had been born and called home.

Now, it felt solid, and like he belonged. He wanted to be here.

Shane held his hand up, and cameras flashed. He knew there would be speeches, media, and questions later.

But after all of that would be this memory like an antidote to chase away the others.

He pulled Shane towards him, felt his husband warm, sweaty and alive in his arms, and breathed.

Chapter End Notes

Ah. The end for real this time. I just really wanted them to get to the Olympics :)

Thank you everyone for the response! The comments have been so kind and encouraging! I can't believe how many people enjoyed my silly little brainworm.

I do plan on doing a bit of a sequel between Chapter 10 and the epilogue about the immediate aftermath, so keep an eye out!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!