

Silver Lining (Golden Seams)

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Silver Lining (Golden Seams)

by [dallystrings](#)

Summary

Ilya shifted the conversation to his upcoming game against Boston, promising to send Svetlana the details of the post-game bar the team decided to visit that night. Shane listened halfheartedly, his own mind working too hard to focus fully on the conversation happening around him.

He was so used to being on the other side of the conflict, the side that Ilya resided in now. He thought of the dinners assuring his friends of Ilya's tender heartedness hidden behind blunt humor amidst gentle scolding and good natured laughter. His stomach twisted, wondering if Ilya felt a similar way when he just couldn't click with Shane's friends off the bat. In the past he had little trouble getting along with others, but every time Svetlana's gaze shifted to him he felt the weight of her judgement.

or, A year into playing for Ottawa, Ilya introduces Shane to Svetlana. When he's hospitalized a week later, the two form an unexpected bond waiting for him to wake up.

Notes

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Shane looked in the mirror, smoothing out his button down shirt and tentatively unhooking a fourth button. After a few seconds of careful review he decided against the shirt entirely, digging through his closet for the fifth time for an alternative. He swiped through a number of Ilya's items, unable to stop himself from grinning when he thought of the times he'd seen him lounging around the cottage in each of them.

A loud bang came from the kitchen where Ilya prepared one of his favorite recipes, a Russian meat dumpling known as pelmeni. He had already prepared the meat stuffing and was in the assembly stage, deeply focused on the repetitive task at hand. Shane wasn't surprised to hear him trip over the garbage can as he paced the kitchen between steps.

The entire house already smelled of the beet borscht he made for their first course, and Ilya did a surprisingly good job of not staining their entire countertop red from the beets. The trial attempt two weeks prior resulted in an afternoon of scrubbing the kitchen top to bottom to rid it of the pale pink remnants.

Shane called out with yet another offer to assist with the preparation, feeling a familiar restless anxiety settle in as the evening progressed. He straightened out his shirt a final time before making his way out of their bedroom.

"If I need help boiling chicken breast I will let you know," Ilya teased, deep voice carrying across the foyer to where Shane stood in the doorway.

"Hilarious," Shane said dryly.

Ilya smiled to himself, hands covered in flour as he rolled the dumplings. Shane bought him a mold for Christmas that would make the process significantly easier, but Ilya preferred doing them by hand instead. Some days he spent hours in the kitchen, freezing enough to last the whole season as a quick meal between travel games. Shane did his best to assist when possible, but couldn't manage to keep from ripping the dough when he attempted to add the stuffing.

Shane approached Ilya from behind, counting the finished pelmeni in twos as he wrapped his arms around his waist. There were already at least twice as many as a group of three could reasonably finish in a few hours with about a quarter of the filling remaining. Shane eyed the reject pile, keenly aware that several of the pelmeni Ilya deemed unacceptable were better than any of those he managed to put together himself in the past.

"Let me do *something*," Shane sighed, nuzzling into the crook of Ilya's neck, "I'm trying to make a good impression."

Ilya's chest rumbled with his laughter. Shane squeezed his eyes closed, focused on the warmth of their embrace. Truthfully, the last thing that he wanted was to spend one of their few nights together late-season with anyone else. If Shane had it his way they wouldn't have gotten out of bed for more than a few microwave meals and bathroom breaks until he left for his flight tomorrow.

But when Ilya told him that Svetlana finally had a gap in her work schedule to come visit on a night they would both be in Ottawa he couldn't say no. It had been months of back and forth, one always unavailable when the other two could make it work. And Ilya was so *excited* to introduce them, even though the thought of sitting across the dinner table from her made Shane nauseous.

"Sveta is easy," Ilya shrugged, "But there is one thing I know she will appreciate."

Shane nodded eagerly, ducking around so that he got a better view of Ilya's face. He could see the playful smirk he tried to stifle down, but instead of scolding him for his taunting Shane played along.

"She *loves* a man that does the dishes," Ilya shrugged.

"Oh, fuck off. You used half the kitchen," Shane groaned, gesturing to the piled pots and pans in the sink.

"And you will be thankful when you eat my food," Ilya assured him.

Shane pressed one final kiss to Ilya's neck, fluttering his eyelashes against the sensitive skin before he made his way to the sink. They worked alongside one another, the silence comfortable and needed before a long night of socializing. Shane craved nothing more than time for the two of them to be alone together, but he knew how important Svetlana was to Ilya.

She was the last remaining piece of home Ilya had, and they saw each other far less now that he didn't return to Russia in the off season. Shane often heard them chatting on the phone during the summer, Ilya speaking rapid Russian until he was breathless. Usually it was from laughing hard enough to shake the couch he sprawled out on. But, every once in a while, Ilya ranted about something that angered him to the point of panting.

Shane occasionally sat in the adjoining room and focused on the breadth of Ilya's emotions when he spoke in his native language. He was *trying* to learn Russian, but it was taking longer than he first expected. Their time spent apart made it all the more difficult, limiting Shane's speaking opportunities. Ilya assured him that he would rather have a real conversation when they finally found time to speak while traveling, but a quiet guilt still gnawed at Shane's insides when he thought about it too hard.

It was, in truth, one of the reasons he was most nervous to meet Svetlana.

Ilya finished folding the pelmeni and glanced at the clock, foot tapping nervously. Their guest would arrive any minute, and Shane could see the sharp spike of Ilya's anxiety now that he

had nothing in his hands to focus on. Shane stepped towards him, taking Ilya's face in his hands as he kissed him.

"It's going to be great," Shane gently tugged the hair at the nape of his neck.

"You must remember she is Russian," Ilya reminded him for the tenth time that evening.

"Ilya, I know," Shane traced his thumb along Ilya's cheekbone.

"You Canadians are so fragile," Ilya continued, speaking more so to himself than to Shane, "Her teasing is all for fun, yes?"

Shane nodded, spending the next few minutes peppering reassuring kisses to Ilya's jawline. He reached around to untie the apron from his waist and hung it on the hook beside the pantry, making a mental note to throw it in the wash before bed. Ilya kept his cheek pressed to Shane's shoulder, fingers fidgeting with the hem of his shirt.

Before Shane had the opportunity to comfort him further they heard the sound of tires on the gravel outside.

"She is here," Ilya grinned, the nerves seemingly vanishing as excitement took over.

He looped his arm around Shane's waist and tugged him forward. Ilya hurriedly led them to the front door, throwing it open just as a tall woman raised her hand to knock. Her eyes met Shane's first as they stood directly across from one another, and though he had seen pictures of Svetlana before her beauty in person was enough to fluster him.

"Ilyusha," she exclaimed, the raised hand fluttering to her chest.

Svetlana spoke again, this time in Russian, and Ilya laughed in delight. He disconnected from Shane to pull her into the house by her hand, greeting her in Russian too speedy for Shane to make sense of. His expression faltered against his best efforts, and he hoped that no one else noticed his minor reaction. Ilya appeared too excited to think about anything other than their guest, shutting the door behind her the second she stepped over the threshold.

"Hello, Svetlana," Shane smiled, awkwardly sticking his hand out for her to shake, "I'm very happy to finally meet you. Ilya has told me so much about you."

Svetlana paused, slowly raising her arm to take Shane's hand in her own. Her eyes, however, slid to Ilya questioningly. She pointed to Shane with her free hand and said something else in Russian, the words quick and easy off of her tongue. Ilya continued to grin, but Shane noticed his smile twitch.

"Shane is still learning Russian," he explained, lifting a hand to squeeze Shane's shoulder, "Is best to speak English for the evening."

"Ah," Svetlana nodded, eyes flicking between them, "Very nice to meet you, *Shane Hollander*."

She dropped her voice slightly to exaggerate his name, emphasizing the formality. Shane tensed, sensing a joke in her tone but unsure of its meaning. Ilya seemed to scold her, again in Russian, but she feigned a look of innocence and gestured between the three of them.

“You just said we must only speak English, *Ilya*,” she exaggerated his name the same way she had Shane’s.

Svetlana held out a bouquet of eleven purple peonies, their stems wrapped in white tissue paper. They matched the glittery thread of her jacket, shining in the low light of the entryway. She appeared ethereal in their home, her delicate features staggering compared to Shane and Ilya’s bulk.

Shane thanked her, but it was overshadowed by Ilya attempting to turn down the gift graciously. Shane looked at him curiously, watching Svetlana demand that Ilya accept the flowers. Ilya laughed when he refused again and Svetlana threw up one of her hands in exasperation.

“Well what the fuck else am I supposed to do with them,” Svetlana huffed, pushing them into Shane’s arms before he could deny them as well.

Ilya grinned and shook his head, leading the group into the living room. Shane noticed how he tugged at his left earlobe, hand anxiously running through his hair to break up the pattern every so often. Svetlana tipped forward as she walked, linking her arm with Ilya’s after a few steps. Shane did his best not to let it bother him.

“You built this house yourself, yes?” Svetlana turned to smile at Shane behind them as they walked.

“I hired an architect,” Shane nodded.

“Big word, Ilyusha,” Svetlana leaned into Ilya tauntingly, “It is the person that designs houses.”

“I know what an architect is, Sveta,” Ilya nudged her back, rolling his eyes but grinning so wide Shane wondered if his cheeks ached.

Ilya retrieved three glasses and set them up around the table while Shane searched for a vase for the flowers. He settled on a large glass jar from a pasta sauce Ilya liked to drink out of, somewhat embarrassed that he didn’t have a vase in the home. When he saw Ilya sniffing the bouquet he immediately resented himself for never buying him flowers in the past.

Ilya poured the individually requested beverages in each of the cups he grabbed from the cabinet. Shane sipped his ginger ale, not wanting to feel even the slightest hangover on his flight to California in the morning. Ilya poured wine for himself and Svetlana, a heavy hand for each.

“It is a beautiful home,” Svetlana said between sips, “Very humble for Canada’s star hockey player.”

“Excuse me?” Ilya scoffed.

Shane sat up straighter, happy to have Ilya come to his defense. Yes, the cottage was modest compared to some of the other players’ homes, but he doubted anyone else would refer to it as *humble*. Shane spent a lot of time with the architect and the builders to make his home sleek and sophisticated, the perfect hideaway, though he knew that would sound less pretentious coming from Ilya than himself.

“You forget I play for Ottawa now,” Ilya leaned back in his seat, “Hollander is old news in Canada.”

Svetlana laughed, shaking her head so that her curls bounced. Shane raised a hand to his own hair, drawing his fingers through the length that Ilya continuously praised. He tried not to let the perceived insult bother him, knowing that he was being particularly sensitive. It irritated him that Ilya played along so easily, even though that type of joke would usually elicit at least a smirk from Shane.

“Well, you are certainly the star of the Centaurs,” Svetlana shot back.

“They’re doing well this season,” Shane said quickly, “Ilya has been a great captain.”

“It is a good thing you won the Cup when you played for Boston,” she continued, seemingly ignoring Shane’s interjection, “You will be lucky if you see the playoffs again before you retire.”

Shane clenched his jaw, ready to argue back, but Ilya only chuckled beside him. He appeared unbothered by Svetlana’s blunt observation. Of course the Centaurs were a less successful team than Boston, there was no debate there, but with Ilya at the helm they had just as good a chance as any other team in the league. Shane knew he would make it work. It would just take a few years of losing more than they won.

“The team is improving,” Ilya declared confidently.

“They could not have gotten much worse,” Svetlana agreed.

The conversation lulled briefly and Shane took the moment to catch his breath. Ilya and Svetlana bounced so easily off of one another he felt as though he was five steps behind, doing his best to keep up. He glanced at the clock, wondering just how long Ilya planned on chatting before they brought the food out. He chewed the inside of his cheek, eager to move the evening along.

“Are you hungry, Svetlana?” Shane asked, his well-practiced smile now back in full force.

“Oh, you are a mind reader, Shane Hollander,” she grinned.

Ilya popped up from his seat, dashing to the kitchen to retrieve the round loaf of bread he made that afternoon and a small salt cellar. He placed it in front of Svetlana on top of a white cloth and gestured to the loaf. Shane was about to remind him where he kept the bread

knives, but Svetlana ripped off one end with her bare hands before he had the chance. She dipped it in the salt and took a large bite, humming in approval.

“It is Russian custom,” Ilya explained.

“You are supposed to greet me at the door with it,” Svetlana swallowed.

“Always something with you,” Ilya waved his hand, grabbing a chunk of bread for himself.

“Some for Shane Hollander?” Svetlana held the loaf in his direction.

Shane saw Ilya open his mouth to cut in, likely to explain his macrobiotic diet, but he ripped off a small hunk and mirrored Svetlana’s dip into the salt cellar. Ilya appeared pleased, hand dropping to rest on Shane’s thigh as he chewed. After a few bites he excused himself to retrieve the borscht, taking a moment in the kitchen to calm himself down.

Ilya appeared delighted with the evening so far, bouncing off of Svetlana’s minor insults with ease. He had warned Shane several times about the cultural differences between Russians and Canadians, but he still expected something more polite for at least the first hour. Svetlana seemed comfortable straight away, something Shane always had trouble with in his own life. He knew it wasn’t fair to resent her relationship with Ilya, but he struggled to push past the unwanted feelings of jealousy.

When he approached with the tray of stew he heard Ilya and Svetlana chatting casually, back to Russian. He paused to allow the conversation to naturally taper, but after a minute of waiting he strode into the room to interrupt them. Ilya stood to help him, ushering Shane into his seat as he set Svetlana’s bowl in front of her.

“This is the recipe I sent you?” Svetlana asked, lifting the spoon to her lips.

Ilya nodded, his fingers drumming along the table. He had already had a few bites himself to taste test, but he clearly valued Svetlana’s opinion far beyond his own. She took her time tasting, taking an extra bite and tilting her head back and forth as if deep in thought.

“It’s amazing, Ilya,” Shane encouraged, hand rubbing Ilya’s back, the muscles rigid beneath his fingers.

“It is good,” Svetlana confirmed, and Ilya’s shoulders relaxed straight away.

They discussed more neutral topics, like Svetlana’s job and Ilya’s interest in expanding his cooking skills. Shane retrieved the pelmeni, unsurprised to hear that their conversation shifted back to Russian with him out of the room. He tried to fight off his guilt but ended up angrier than before, keeping quiet for the most part as he picked at his dumplings and the steamed vegetables Ilya made alongside them.

“Oh I can not take you seriously, Ilyusha,” Svetlana laughed as Ilya detailed the Centaurs’ latest loss, “Hearing you speak English, it is like watching you on TV!”

Shane’s heart skipped, eyes sliding over to check Ilya’s reaction. He appeared embarrassed, cheeks blushing as he muttered through something noncommittal. Svetlana continued to

giggle, one hand reaching across the table to cover Ilya's for just a second or two. Ilya didn't even look at Shane for his reaction, instead using his free hand to take another sip of his wine.

Shane flushed red hot from both embarrassment and irritation. Was Svetlana implying he didn't know the *real* Ilya? Of course there were misunderstandings that arose from the language and cultural barriers, but Shane thought they had overcome most of those issues. He *was* learning Russian, it was just taking a little longer than expected with the hockey season in full swing.

The more defensive he became in his own head, the more he was convinced Svetlana was targeting him intentionally.

"You are just jealous that I have caught up to your skill," Ilya accused, tipping his head back to hide the blush.

"Ah, and for this your Russian has suffered," Svetlana tutted.

Ilya chuckled, shaking his head. Shane smiled when he stretched his arm over the back of his chair and urged him to scoot a few inches closer. Ilya kissed Shane's cheek, nuzzling against him for a few seconds before he returned to his dinner. Shane wondered if this moment, this display of affection, would be what showed Svetlana that they were a good couple, that it was so obvious how in love they were.

"I'm really going to buckle down this summer," Shane forced a smile, "It's tough to keep up with it on the road."

"We have such little time during the season," Ilya sighed.

"How often do you practice with each other?" she asked, swirling the wine in her glass.

Ilya and Shane exchanged an uncomfortable look, neither wanting to outright admit that the amount of conversations they shared in Russian could be counted on one hand. Svetlana quirked an eyebrow, realization dawning on her face as she glanced between them.

"Oh, Ilyusha, tell me you are not speaking English during sex," Svetlana exclaimed.

Shane's jaw dropped, shocked at how openly she discussed the topic of their sex life. It made it all the more difficult to push the image of Ilya and Svetlana from his mind, the two of them having slept together more recently than he wanted to acknowledge. Ilya shot her what appeared to be a warning, but she didn't seem to notice, turning to Shane instead.

"You are missing out, Shane Hollander," she leaned forward, flashing a grin across the table, "Ilya had such a way with words in Russian."

"Sveta," Ilya cautioned, voice tense.

"What?" Svetlana threw her hands up, "He cannot possibly know how smart you are if he's just hearing your shit English all the time."

“Ilya’s English is fantastic,” Shane interjected, but the second the words left his mouth he realized it had been the wrong thing to say.

Svetlana didn’t press further, returning to her meal. Ilya shifted the conversation to his upcoming game against Boston, promising to send her the details of the post-game bar the team decided to visit that night. Shane listened halfheartedly, his own mind working too hard to focus fully on the conversation happening around him.

He was so used to being on the other side of the conflict, the side that Ilya resided in now. He thought of the dinners assuring his friends of Ilya’s tender heartedness hidden behind blunt humor amidst gentle scolding and good natured laughter. His stomach twisted, wondering if Ilya felt a similar way when he just couldn’t click with Shane’s friends off the bat. In the past he had little trouble getting along with others, but every time Svetlana’s gaze shifted to him he felt the weight of her judgement.

“It is so kind of you both to invite me over for your one night together,” Svetlana thanked them, setting her silverware down.

“Ilya was very excited to have you visit,” Shane said, voice stiffer than intended.

He saw Ilya’s head turn in his direction from the corner of his eye, a frown crossing his face for the first time that evening. Shane blushed, stammering out something kinder about his own excitement, but knew the damage had already been done. He had gone into the evening so confident of his own performance that he never questioned the consequences of his jealousy bleeding through as obviously as it had.

“I wish you both luck in your games this week,” Svetlana pushed her chair back, standing with her dishes.

Ilya admonished her, grabbing the cutlery from her hands and scooping up Shane’s to bring the dirty plates to the kitchen. He looked frantically after Ilya, not having expected a moment alone with the two of them. His mind raced with the possible apologies he could offer for his behavior, but the stubborn anger in him refused to comply with the remorse he knew he should feel.

“It was nice meeting you, Shane Hollander,” Svetlana extended her hand.

“The pleasure was mine,” Shane returned, cursing himself for his stilted formal response.

Svetlana smiled slyly, but she didn’t point out his stiff reply. Shane wondered if that was worse, if it meant that he had been a poor sport. He heard Ilya’s footsteps returning in their direction and knew it was his last chance to make up for his awkward behavior throughout the night.

“I, uh, am glad you joined us. Ilya talks about you all the time,” Shane admitted quietly.

“Yes,” Svetlana nodded, “He speaks of you often as well.”

Shane let Ilya walk her out on his own, happy to give them a few minutes alone. As they traveled down the hall towards the door he was unsurprised to hear them speaking Russian, no longer needing to worry about including Shane in their conversation. He focused on clearing the rest of the table and starting on the dishes, ignoring the tears pricking his eyes as he scrubbed.

Ilya entered the kitchen after nearly fifteen minutes, just as Shane finished wiping down the counter. He approached him from behind, holding Shane the same way that he held Ilya just a few hours before to offer comfort.

“It was fun, yes?” Ilya questioned quietly.

“Yes, I,” Shane swallowed past the lump in his throat, “It was great.”

Ilya turned Shane around to get a better look at him, hands cupping his jaw. Shane knew he wore his emotions too openly after a long day, and he couldn’t help but frown. Ilya kissed him gently, shushing him as if he understood. Shane wondered how many times Ilya longed for the same reassurance, even if he never asked for it outright.

“It is okay. These things take time,” Ilya ran his fingers through Shane’s hair, “Remember our dinner with the Pikes?”

“Yeah,” Shane said softly, secretly resentful of the comparison.

Hayden had every reason to believe Ilya was the asshole the league portrayed him as when they started spending time together. And Ilya purposefully antagonized him, even if he was mostly kidding. Svetlana, on the other hand, disliked him from the second he spoke without real reason.

But deep down Shane knew the anger he felt for Svetlana was really his own shame.

Chapter End Notes

i am a svetlana lover first and foremost!!!! now watch me rupture this man's spleen

(kudos & comments appreciated!! <33)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

Shane entered the locker room, peeling the practice jersey over his head. He reached up to retrieve his phone, hoping to see a text from Ilya checking in. The last time they spoke was before Shane went to bed, just before they fell asleep together on FaceTime. Sometime overnight Ilya's phone died, so Shane woke up disoriented and alone.

He frowned, not seeing Ilya's contact on his notification screen as expected. He had a single missed call from his mom, and a brief text sent eighteen minutes prior.

Mom: Call me right away.

Shane's stomach dropped. Yuna often called him after practice to check in, but she never pushed him to respond quickly if he didn't pick up. He thought of his unanswered text to Ilya that morning. Shane fumbled with his phone, hitting the call button and squeezing his eyes closed in anticipation.

"Shane," Yuna answered on the second ring.

"Mom, hey," his voice skipped, "Practice went long and I--"

"Honey, I need you to listen to me carefully."

"Yeah," Shane croaked, leaning forward to rest his forehead on the back of his hand, "Yeah, I... I'm listening."

"Ilya's spleen ruptured. Your father and I are at the hospital and they're preparing him for surgery," Yuna said slowly, her voice firm and steady.

"They cleared him," Shane reminded her, "They- the doctor said he was fine."

"The rupture was delayed. They think it must have happened early this morning, so the team medic wouldn't have noticed anything unusual right after the game," Yuna explained.

Shane shook his head, thinking about the conversation he had with Ilya the night before. He had taken a particularly hard hit playing that afternoon and spent a few minutes complaining about the discomfort of bruised ribs. But it was nothing out of the ordinary. They even let him play the next period.

A few of Shane's teammates cast glances his way, their conversations stalling when they saw him. He could only imagine how frantic he looked, his free hand tugging at his hair as if he was trying to wake himself from a nightmare. Shane stumbled out of the room and into one of the halls before more of the team noticed his panic, leaning up against the wall to support himself.

“He was supposed to come to breakfast this morning. Your dad and I went to check on him around ten and he was out cold on the kitchen floor,” Yuna explained, “He was very confused when he woke up, speaking mostly Russian so we couldn’t figure out what he was even trying to tell us. He just... he kept asking for his mom.”

Shane slid down the wall, dropping his forehead to his knees. Yuna’s voice wavered, something he was wholly unfamiliar with. She always served as the emotional rock in his life, never so much as suggesting that anything could possibly be out of her control. But now when she spoke he heard the overwhelming fear behind her words.

“I’m sorry,” she cleared her throat, “That’s not helpful right now.”

“Mom-“

“I bought you a plane ticket for this afternoon. You’ll have to rush to the airport but you’ll make it.”

Shane’s heart twisted. His mom would never tell him to skip a game unless the situation was dire. He thought of Ilya hurting all alone in that big empty house and couldn’t hold back a shuddering sob. While Ilya suffered he skated around a rink thousands of miles away laughing with his teammates, not minding when the practice ran over its usual end time.

“Shane, focus,” Yuna coaxed him back into the moment, “Give the phone to Hayden, then change out of your equipment. Okay?”

Shane sniffled an affirmative and pushed himself to his feet. His body was as heavy as lead. His feet dragged as he trekked back into the locker room. Several voices cut out when he walked through the door and from their expressions he knew he must have looked at least half as bad as he felt.

Hayden’s face dropped when he saw him, but Shane could only hold up the phone to him. He returned to his cubby to numbly change out of his pads. Hayden’s questions to Yuna behind him warbled like he was trapped underwater. He stripped himself of the sweat slick clothes and changed into a new outfit, not bothering to shower as he usually would.

Shane felt more eyes on him now, watching him to wait for any clues into what had affected him so significantly. Hayden kept his responses to Yuna short and discreet, handing the phone back to Shane before changing into his own tracksuit. Shane held it up to his ear and listened to Yuna detail the plan, only half of her words registering.

“Mom,” he asked, voice hoarse, “Mom, tell me he’s going to be okay.”

Yuna didn’t speak for five long seconds. Shane bent over, dropping his head between his legs. He couldn’t believe this was happening, so completely caught off guard that he struggled to mask the strength of his emotions. Hayden stepped in front of him, shielding him from view as he helped pack Shane’s bag.

“The situation is very serious. The rupture wasn’t severe, but he was bleeding for a long time,” she explained gently.

“Bleeding?” Shane gulped as Hayden’s hands tugged him up, “But I thought-”

“Internal bleeding, Shane,” Yuna specified.

But he could only think of getting home and seeing a puddle of Ilya’s blood on the kitchen floor. Shane had always shied away from the injuries that turned bloody on the ice, the mere sight of it turning his stomach. But he now had the inexplicable desire to run right home and roll in it, just to be closer to Ilya.

Hayden steered him out of the locker room and towards the parking lot. He carried Shane’s duffel bag and kept one hand on his shoulder at all times to guide him in the right direction. With his free hand Hayden typed out what must have been an explanation to their coach, but Shane didn’t bother trying to read it himself.

“They’re hoping to get him into surgery in the next fifteen minutes. It should last somewhere between two to three hours, so you will most likely be in the air when he gets out.”

“Oh, god,” Shane croaked, the weight of the situation hitting him full force.

Shane approached the passenger side of Hayden’s car and jiggled the handle, scowling when it didn’t open immediately. He tried to keep his reactions small to prevent anyone around them from looking too closely, but he was rapidly unraveling. By the time Hayden unlocked the doors he was bright red and hyperventilating.

“Shane, honey, you have to calm down,” Yuna instructed him to breathe, but no matter how hard he tried he felt as though no air was actually getting into his lungs.

He bent over so his forehead rested on his knees and burst into tears. Ragged, panicked breaths shook his body, so much so that he barely felt Hayden’s hand firmly between his shoulder blades. Yuna did her best to talk him down, but Shane could only think of Ilya alone on the kitchen floor while he laced up his skates that morning.

Hayden kept one hand on Shane’s back, rubbing soothing circles as best as he could as he drove. They weren’t far from the airport, but that was only the first leg of the arduous journey home. He wanted to get there sooner so desperately that it hurt, a deep and empty ache in the center of his chest.

By the time they hit the highway Shane’s breathing regulated enough to sit up, his sweatshirt sleeves soaked through with tears.

“One of us should call his coach,” Shane rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Svetlana already did,” Yuna revealed.

“What? Why would you... how did you get her phone number?” he frowned.

“She’s his emergency contact, Shane. The hospital called her right away.”

“*She’s* his emergency contact?” Shane asked incredulously.

“Honey,” Yuna said gently, “Who else could be?”

Shane’s heart dropped, the truth of his mother’s words ringing in his head. Of course Ilya chose Svetlana as his emergency contact. He certainly couldn’t list Shane, or either of his parents for that matter. Ilya still wasn’t on speaking terms with his brother, and he lived halfway across the world anyway. She was, as hard as it was for Shane to admit, the only reasonable choice.

It still hurt.

“Thank you for checking on him,” Shane managed, taking a long pull from his water bottle to rehydrate after a bout of tears.

Hayden glanced at him from the driver’s seat, clearly attempting to gauge his mental state. Shane hoped that he wouldn’t ask for all of the details when he finished the call with his mom. He didn’t think he could get through the words without devolving into another panic attack. He felt himself slipping from sanity as it was.

Yuna walked him through the timeline of the surgery once again to make sure he fully understood what he was walking into when he arrived in Ottawa. It would be at least six hours until he was at the hospital, but no one could do anything to lessen that time. He did his best to focus on the current step, not launching into vivid fantasies of the worst possible outcome.

“It’s going to be okay, Shane,” Yuna promised him.

Shane registered her choice of words. She very pointedly did not say that *Ilya* would be okay.

Yuna hung up as they approached the entrance to the airport. Shane’s heart fluttered as he looked between the planes already on the tarmac. He could only hope that one would be the one that took him to Ottawa, to Ilya.

“Almost there, bud,” Hayden assured him.

“Oh, god,” Shane repeated.

“I texted Coach, but I’ll talk to him when I head back to the rink,” Hayden reached over the console to squeeze his hand, “You focus on getting home, I’ll handle the team.”

“Thank you,” Shane choked, the tears already threatening to come back.

He navigated the airport on autopilot, allowing the staff to direct him to all of the right places as he moved through the large building. He did his best to obscure his identity, but he knew that it would be difficult to hide himself completely. If anyone did snap a secret picture, he imagined that he would see it somewhere in the tabloids after his absence at that evening’s game was announced.

Thankfully no one attempted to interact with him beyond the flight attendants asking his snack preference on the plane. Shane asked for the ginger cookies that Ilya liked best,

sticking them in his jacket pocket to save for later. Ilya's stomach was weak when it came to painkillers and Shane knew that the bland biscuits would help soothe the nausea. Every few minutes he reached back into his pocket, checking to make sure that they were still intact.

Shane spent the first half hour of his flight researching all of the things that could go *wrong* with a splenorrhaphy. Then, he looked into the best possible outcomes and recovery timelines. Shane opened his planner app and started mapping out the next three months, doing his best to keep himself focused on Ilya *living*.

After nearly two hours in the air Shane's phone dinged, the groupchat with his mom and dad flashing across the screen.

Mom: Surgery was a success! They moved Ilya to the recovery room.

Shane took a deep breath. He dropped his head to rest on the tray table, halfway between laughter and sobbing. The woman in the seat across from him cast a concerned look his way but Shane couldn't hide the intensity of his feelings if he tried. His body released its tension for just a moment before he opened his internet browser to read all of the things that could go wrong post-surgery.

When the plane landed in Ottawa Shane was the first person off of it.

He staggered through the airport, pulling his hat down to better hide his face. He knew he looked terrible, but he was in the home stretch. Soon enough he would have Ilya within arm's reach.

When he made it outside to the pick up area Shane nearly collapsed at the sight of David waiting with his car. He jogged over, the duffel bag bouncing against his hip. Shane dove into the car, quickly shutting the door behind him without properly saying hello to his dad. David reached out to squeeze his shoulder, pulling away to start the last leg of Shane's journey to Ilya as Shane buckled his seat belt.

"No updates?" Shane asked anxiously.

"Nothing since they moved him to his room," David confirmed, "Stable, mostly sleeping."

"Mostly?" Shane frowned.

"He's woken up three or four times. Just opens his eyes and looks around the room for a couple seconds before falling right back to sleep."

"I should've been there," Shane said miserably, burying his face in his hands.

"Come on, Shane, you can't do that," David sighed, "You caught the first plane out."

"He said he was hurting last night," Shane shook his head, "I should've come home right away. I should've *known* something was wrong."

The medic cleared Ilya, and neither of them were strangers to the occasional bruised rib. Shane knew that realistically there was nothing to distinguish this injury from the others that

Ilya had in the past, but he told himself there must have been a *sign*, something he *missed*.

He thought about Ilya alone on the kitchen floor.

Shane tugged at his hair, body so filled to the brim with emotion that he didn't know how to handle himself. His dad kept a hand on his shoulder, muttering reassurances to him that Shane could barely comprehend in his disheveled state. Part of him wanted to push his father away, and another wanted to climb over the console to be enveloped in one of David's strong hugs.

"Shane, you've got to keep breathing, bud," David reminded him.

"I'm trying," Shane pinched the inside of his wrist in an effort to ground himself.

David dropped him off at the entrance of the hospital where Yuna waited for him before parking the car. She took Shane into her arms and held him for a few seconds, swaying back and forth. Yuna cradled the back of his head and pressed a kiss to his cheek, her body tenser than he had ever seen her.

Shane was relieved that she let go much quicker than he was sure she wanted to, leading him instead to the front desk to sign in as a visitor. The nurse handed him a badge with his name printed out and Ilya's room number beneath it. He kept his eyes down and thanked her quietly, hoping that she didn't recognize his name or face.

Shane followed his mother diligently, sticking close to her like he would be completely lost without her guidance. She hugged him again when they got into the elevator, and he allowed himself one final moment of comfort before they made it to the fourth floor. Yuna brought him right to the door, opening it for him when she saw how badly his hands shook.

"I'll be right outside, okay?" she promised.

Shane stepped into the room, eyes immediately falling upon Ilya. He was paler than usual, and his hair stuck to his head from the sweat. He didn't have the same peaceful face he made when he slept, looking pained rather than restful. There was a small bruise on his cheek, one that Shane certainly hadn't seen during their call the night before. The oversized hospital gown made him look smaller than usual, like a little kid in his first grown up bed.

Most notably, however, was the sight of Svetlana laying with her head on Ilya's thigh. She had one hand wrapped around his ankle and the other around his wrist, like she needed to have a hold on as much of him as possible. When Shane took a few steps in their direction she sat up and looked at him, her expression blank.

"He is still sleeping," she confirmed what David told him at the airport.

Shane opened his mouth to speak, but froze when he heard a nurse enter the room behind him. She spoke to Svetlana immediately, asking for any updates since they last came by to check on him twenty minutes prior. Shane stood awkwardly in the corner of the room, eyes focused intently on Ilya's face for any sign of consciousness.

Svetlana thanked the nurse as she left, returning to her previous position as soon as the door closed. Shane took a few steps closer, unable to swallow the bitterness he felt at Svetlana's presence. He wished his mother had gone in first and demanded she return to the waiting room.

"You are staring," Svetlana turned to him after a few seconds of silence.

Shane clenched and unclenched his fists several times, trying his best to remain calm. When he saw Svetlana adjust so that her fingers linked with Ilya's, his chest constricted and he lost any semblance of the typical polite persona he put on.

"It's irresponsible to list you as his emergency contact," he muttered, "You live in another country."

Svetlana raised an eyebrow, clearly not having expected the immediate anger on Shane's part. She still didn't move away from Ilya, rubbing the back of his hand with her thumb to soothe him. Shane felt like there was a barrier keeping him back from Ilya, as though his feet were glued to the floor. He tried telling himself it was *her*, but he knew his real fear was another nurse entering unannounced.

"I have been here three hours longer than you," she noted.

Shane gritted his teeth, deeply aware that his jabs were not productive. Svetlana cared about Ilya. She was there to help. He was angry about the reality of their situation, not at Svetlana herself. But he watched the way she draped herself over his partner and resented his inability to put his anxiety aside so that he could do the same.

Svetlana's gaze shifted from Shane to Ilya.

"The worst of it is over," she stated plainly.

Shane's expression soured. He crossed his arms over his chest and shifted his weight from one hip to the other. It took everything in him not to lash out at her, to scream that he wanted her to leave until his throat was hoarse. He was so close to Ilya, only feet apart, but he couldn't bring himself to close the gap with another person watching them.

"Yeah, I took a long time to get here," he seethed, "I get it, I'm a bad partner. I feel like shit already, you don't have to make it worse."

Svetlana looked at him, tilting her head to one side and studying him carefully. His rage dissipated when he noticed her red rimmed eyes and pajama top. Like Shane, she dropped everything to immediately be with Ilya when he needed her.

"I am trying to comfort you, Shane Hollander," she clarified.

Shane blinked, his mind short circuiting.

"I'm sorry," he apologized quietly, "I'm scared."

Svetlana released a huff of bitter laughter, shifting in her seat. Her joints popped from having been in what must have been an uncomfortable position for so long, her body practically having been draped over Ilya's thighs. She walked in the direction of the door, not bothering to look at him as she passed.

"I will give you a moment alone," she called over her shoulder.

The door closed before Shane could fully register her actions. He stood in the center of the room for another second or two before the relief of being alone hit him. Shane staggered to Ilya's bedside and collapsed in the chair, his hands immediately tracing every inch of bare skin he could reach. He pressed his nose to the top of Ilya's hair and breathed in the scent of his hair until he was lightheaded.

"I love you, I love you, I'm sorry, I love you," he murmured, fingers brushing the curve of Ilya's cheekbone as he peppered kisses to the side of his face.

Shane sat quietly at Ilya's bedside for a few minutes, staring intently at his face like it would wake him up. He laid perfectly still, his chest barely rising as opposed to his usual intense snoring when he slept. Shane wanted to climb onto the bed and hide underneath him, or to press his ear to Ilya's chest and listen to the steady beat of his heart.

"I'm sorry I didn't get here sooner," he whispered, taking Ilya's hand in his own, "I came as fast as I could."

Ilya didn't respond, the only sound in the room the rhythmic beeping of his vitals on the machine beside the bed.

"This is the part where you make an inappropriate sex joke," Shane nudged him, "I gave you the perfect setup and everything."

But Ilya stayed silent.

Shane took a different approach, talking and talking about anything and everything just in case Ilya could hear him. He detailed their summer plans, walking through the itinerary they had been working on for the last few months to maximize their time together during the off-season. Even though they got to see each other far more with Ilya playing for Ottawa, Shane knew it wasn't enough for either of them.

They fantasized so much about the future, never acknowledging that those years together were not a given.

"Things will be different when you wake up," Shane whispered, "Please wake up."

Shane repeated the request several times, the tears running freely as he begged Ilya to give him a sign. He kept his hands on Ilya in one way or another, cognizant of the surgery wound on his abdomen as he touched him. The hospital staff would be back soon enough to check on him, and then Shane would have to pull himself together and act like a concerned friend rather than Ilya's partner.

“*Please*, Ilya,” Shane kissed his forehead softly.

Ilya took a deeper breath than usual, his body stirring so little that Shane wouldn’t have noticed if he wasn’t clinging to him. For just a second Ilya opened his eyes, looking directly into Shane’s. They were less than a foot apart, so close that Shane could feel him exhale against his cheek. The beginning of a smile ghosted across Ilya’s face, just enough for Shane to register before he was asleep again.

The door opened behind him, but Shane didn’t flinch away. He kept his hold on Ilya’s face, whispering over and over that he loved him and hoping that he could understand him. The slow click of heels against the floor confirmed that it was Svetlana in the room with them, not a nurse, and Shane heard her fiddle with the blinds on the glass wall to fix a small gap between them.

“He opened his eyes,” Shane sniffled, “Just for a second. But that’s a good sign, right?”

“That is what the doctor says,” she confirmed.

Svetlana went to grab the heavier chair in the corner but Shane popped up, maintaining his grip on Ilya’s hand as he gestured for her to take the seat. Shane waited to detangle their fingers until Svetlana was sitting with her forearm resting on Ilya’s thigh. He retrieved the second chair and set it up on the other side of the bed so that they faced each other directly, both clinging to Ilya where he laid between them.

“You smell terrible,” Svetlana commented.

“Well, I didn’t exactly have time to shower,” Shane rolled his eyes, too exhausted to take offense.

“It is good that you came,” she noted, “I am sorry you had to miss your game tonight.”

“What? I wouldn’t have... of course I came,” Shane frowned.

“Ilya says you care very much about hockey,” Svetlana shrugged.

“I care about *Ilya*,” he insisted.

Svetlana hummed, searching Shane’s expression. He wanted to scream, to make her see how serious he was about Ilya. At every turn she appeared skeptical of him, always watching to see when he would make a mistake. In his fragile state Shane could barely parse through his own thoughts, let alone work out what her perspective must have been.

“What is your *problem* with me, Svetlana?” Shane scowled.

“You are asking *me* this?” she scoffed.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You are acting like a spoiled child, Shane Hollander,” Svetlana declared, “So angry that you have to share.”

“He’s *my* boyfriend, not yours,” Shane said angrily.

Svetlana muttered something in Russian under her breath. Shane flushed bright red, furious with the reminder that he still hadn’t learned the language. Before the argument could continue there was a short knock at the door to signal an incoming visitor. Shane pulled back, putting his hands in his lap and calming his expression as the nurse entered again.

Shane stood and moved the chair to give her better access to checking Ilya’s IV bag. Svetlana stayed put, one part of her always touching somewhere on Ilya. Shane had to turn away, the jealousy so consuming that he struggled to breathe. But as much as he wanted to hold on, he knew it wasn’t fair to put Ilya in a position like that when he was unconscious. His skipping a game to visit the hospital was suspicious enough, and he could only hope that the staff didn’t recognize him.

By the time the nurse left Shane’s anger subsided to a deep sadness. He moved the chair back to its previous spot and dropped his head to rest on Ilya’s thigh, ignoring Svetlana’s gaze for a few minutes until he felt well enough to sit up again.

“I love him,” Shane spoke softly, “I really, *really* love him.”

Svetlana nodded, shifting in her seat so that she got a better look at Shane. He faced her head on, keenly aware of his puffy red eyes and splotchy face. He hoped it would make her more sympathetic, more likely to take pity on him. She sighed and nodded, seemingly steeling herself for her next words.

“Imagine you are me,” Svetlana leaned towards him, “You have a friend, your dearest, oldest friend. You have known him since you could barely talk.”

Shane clenched his jaw, swallowing his irritation with the reminder of Ilya’s history with Svetlana.

“Your friend leaves your country to play hockey, but this is okay. You hope to move there soon anyway, and you see him every summer when he comes home. He is the best person you know, always giving you gossip about the teams you watch, and so fun to go clubbing with. And sometimes, when there is nothing else to do, you have sex.”

She said it so flippantly, like it wasn’t the detail of their relationship that Shane fixated on the most.

“One summer he comes home and everything is different. When you go to the club he stares at his phone, typing messages to someone he tells you nothing about. You ask and he says it is not serious. But this is your oldest friend, remember, so you know something is wrong,” Svetlana brushed a strand of Ilya’s hair back, “He is sad. It is different from his usual sulking about his family. Every day you can see him getting sadder, even when he is smiling at the screen. You *know* something is wrong but he will not tell you.”

Shane knew the summer she referred to without having to clarify. His own friends commented on his texting habits, teasing him over the girlfriend he assured them he wasn’t

hiding. He felt a rush of relief knowing that Ilya had been acting similarly, wondering how they managed to deny their feelings for each other for as long as they did.

“You stop sleeping together, but this is okay. It was never about the sex. You make sure he knows this the last time you kiss him, that you love him without it. By now he is so miserable that you hate the person that made him this way before you know for certain who they are.”

Svetlana looked at him, eyes narrowed like she was sizing him up. Shane shook with guilt, wishing now more than ever that he had been honest with Ilya sooner instead of sacrificing years of time they could have had together.

“He stops coming home in the summer. This is fine, because you are still nearby for the rest of the year,” Svetlana’s voice clipped, her eyes back on Ilya, “But one day he tells you he is leaving again. He is giving up a great team to play for the one whose games you do not even watch because they are so terrible. You know the losing will kill him, but he does not want to hear this. He finally tells you about the man he has been hiding for almost ten years so you have to be happy for him. There is no other choice.”

Svetlana paused, allowing the words to sink in. Shane kept his eyes on the floor.

“Svetlana,” he tried, but she shook her head.

“He tells you this man loves him, and that is supposed to make it all better. But your friend is all alone in Canada. He has left behind his good friends in Boston. He never goes home to Russia. The summers are so *lonely* without him there.”

Shane understood the loneliness. He felt it every time he and Ilya were in separate cities for games. Even the weeks they had together in the off season went by too quickly. The promise of their separation in the near future clouded the moments they shared, both men always aware that they could never have as much as they wanted.

“But it is for love, yes?” Svetlana continued, “This man loves your friend so much. This is what he tells you. So it confuses you when he calls in the middle of the night and reveals what this man’s friends say when they all get together. They call your friend, your *best* friend, a bad man. They say, ‘*weren’t there any nice men in Montreal?*’ when he is sitting right there. Every joke he makes they take offense. They switch sometimes to a language he does not speak, because it is *French* Canada.”

“It’s... it’s not like that,” Shane said weakly.

“Every time you see him he is sadder. It is not the same sad as before, but it is for a similar reason. The man who loves him is always gone, always winning his games and going out with the teammates he did *not* have to leave behind to be with your friend, the teammates who are still so cruel every time they are together.”

Shane felt his world crumbling apart, Svetlana’s words contextualizing the reality of his relationship. He knew that Ilya had been struggling with the Centaurs’ performance, but Shane had such strong faith that he would whip the team into winning shape that he didn’t fully recognize the toll it must have taken on him.

The tougher truth to confront was the behavior of his friends. Ilya knew so few people in Ottawa that Shane thought it would be helpful to introduce him to his own support system. But Svetlana was right, they still hadn't fully accepted him as Shane's partner. He knew most of it was lighthearted, Hayden was much more mellowed out now, but given Shane's reaction to Svetlana's mild dislike of him in their initial meeting he couldn't imagine how hard the last year had been for Ilya.

"And then after all this time you finally meet this man, the man your oldest and dearest friend has given up so much of his life for," Svetlana met his eyes, "And he has not even learned Russian."

Shane wanted to tell her that it wasn't fair. But when she laid it out in front of him, he realized fully how much Ilya's life had changed in such a short period of time. And even though Shane felt that his own life had been upended, he understood that it was nowhere near the changes Ilya underwent to be closer to him. He clung to Ilya's hand, trying to quiet the static in his mind.

"That guy sounds like a real asshole," Shane sniffled, keeping his eyes down.

"Yes, but your friend loves him," Svetlana sighed dramatically.

Shane sniffled, the sound wet and sad. He wiped his eyes roughly, surprised at how easily he continued to cry with Svetlana in the room. She wordlessly handed him a napkin she fished out of her bag, keeping her gaze away from him for a moment of privacy.

"I understand it is not... easy to have me around," Svetlana said thoughtfully, "You think there is something between us."

"I mean... yeah," Shane snorted.

"It is not like that," she shook her head, "Trust me. We are friends, that is all."

Shane studied her expression, trying to discern how truthful she was being. Being with Svetlana would be so much *easier* for Ilya. It was hard for Shane to let that go. She could give Ilya a life that Shane could only dream of after they retired. But her earnestness shone through.

"I guess I just can't imagine knowing him like that and not falling in love with him," Shane admitted.

"Blech," Svetlana pretended to gag.

Shane laughed at that, surprised at how light he felt after outright admitting to his jealousy. All this time when he compared himself to Svetlana he thought only of what he lacked. He believed that everything good about her was a danger to his own relationship. It was easier than addressing his own shortcomings as a partner to Ilya.

"You know, you are not so bad, Shane Hollander," Svetlana smiled, "Perhaps I could even get used to you."

“Lucky me,” Shane grinned.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!!! it was so fun reading the comments on the first chapter - i hope you like the second :D <33

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

made some minor edits to ch2 if you read before i posted ch3!

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

Ilya spent the next hour drifting in and out of sleep. Shane and Svetlana stayed close by, at least one of them watching his face for any sign of consciousness. Every so often Ilya opened his eyes and dazedly looked around the room. Shane and Svetlana gave him their full attention each time, assuring him that he was stable and safe.

They never got more than a slurred word or two out of him before he went back to sleep, but the time spent awake continued to get longer. Shane kissed his knuckles when Svetlana wasn't looking, counting each of his fingers again and again to remind himself that Ilya was secure in his grasp.

When Ilya woke up in earnest, Shane and Svetlana were in the middle of discussing her ballet career prior to moving to the United States. In the middle of a sentence Svetlana's jaw dropped, her eyes widening. Shane turned to meet Ilya's eyes, his gaze undoubtedly focused on where he sat beside him.

"Ilya," Shane cried out, scrambling out of the chair to get closer.

"Shane," Ilya beamed, his voice an octave higher than usual, "You are here."

Ilya smiled dreamily, one hand lifting to grab Shane by the hair. Shane laughed, happier than ever to be manhandled. He was sure the morphine they gave Ilya after his surgery had something to do with his loopy behavior, but he was too happy to pry himself free. Ilya's touch, however rough, grounded him immediately.

"I will call the nurse," Svetlana grabbed the remote next to the bed.

Ilya turned to his right and gasped when he saw Svetlana, his grin widening when he looked between them. He spoke in Russian, stuttering slightly as he tried to get the words out. Svetlana laughed and patted him on top of his head, looking at Shane briefly before her eyes were back on Ilya.

"His two favorite people," she translated, her hands shaking so badly that she nearly dropped the remote when she went to set it back down.

And though only an hour ago that may have filled Shane with jealousy, he now could only nod along between laughter. Ilya held onto both of them, his hands tangled in their hair as he pulled them closer for further affection. Svetlana seemed to scold him gently and he released

her curls, linking their fingers instead. Shane didn't mind the feeling of Ilya yanking him back and forth, his heart light at the mere sight of Ilya's smile.

Shane braced himself against the bed with one hand, bringing the other up to cradle Ilya's cheek.

"Ya lyublyu tebya," he whispered.

Ilya blinked slowly, the dreamy look in his eyes highlighted by the faint blush that spread across his cheeks. Shane knew that this was the moment to pull back, that the nurse would be there within a minute to check on Ilya. But when Ilya dragged him closer he couldn't bring himself to move away.

Shane's restraint crumbled completely the second their lips met. Ilya kissed him messily, swaying back and forth from the pain medication. Shane held his face with both hands and ignored the salty taste of his tears. He spent half of his day convinced he would never get the chance to see Ilya again. He couldn't bear to turn down the chance to hold him this way.

"I love you," Shane murmured against his mouth, "*God*, Ilya I love you."

"Stop talking," Ilya demanded, the kiss clumsy enough without Shane's interruption.

Shane giggled, feeling invincible from the relief that flooded his body. If he could stay in this moment forever he would. The only thing that he wanted was *Ilya*. He couldn't believe how close he had come to losing him, to being forced to continue living without the reason he woke up happy each and every morning.

"Footsteps," Svetlana alerted them, her body standing between them and the door to give some sort of cover.

Shane pressed one final chaste kiss to Ilya's temple and straightened up. But he kept their hands clasped together, even when the nurse entered. She asked a few questions about pain levels and memory, Ilya's answers growing drowsier the more they spoke. Shane moved out of the way when she requested to check the IV bag, but he stayed within Ilya's sight at all times.

Svetlana translated the mixture of Russian and English, her voice void of emotion as she did so. Shane noticed that her eyes fell on him less, focused more on the floor than even Ilya. The nurse thanked her for her help and promised to return within the hour, shooting Shane a supportive smile before she left the room.

"My parents are in the waiting room," Shane informed Ilya, "Do you want to say hi before you fall back to sleep?"

Ilya nodded excitedly, repeating Yuna's name a few times before he distracted himself with his fingers. Shane watched him for another minute, his heart aching when he thought about being more than a few feet away from him. Even stepping into the waiting room felt like repeating his journey to Ottawa from the start.

“I will get them,” Svetlana spoke up.

Shane looked at her in surprise, not having expected the offer. Svetlana hadn’t moved more than an arm’s reach away from Ilya since she re-entered the room, standing over him like a guard dog on duty. In spite of the soft expression she put on when Ilya looked at her, Shane could see the exhaustion weighing on her body.

“I will give you a minute of privacy with your boyfriend,” Svetlana smiled, brushing Ilya’s hair back from his eyes.

“You are leaving me?” Ilya pouted, holding her wrist in place against the top of his head.

“So dramatic, Ilyusha,” Svetlana teased, “Shane will watch over you.”

Shane smiled, noticing that she referred to him without his last name for the first time. It seemed like a good sign, but he couldn’t help but notice how distraught Svetlana appeared as she stepped away.

“I need coffee anyway,” she explained casually.

Before Shane could turn her down Svetlana pressed a kiss to the tip of her fingers and patted Ilya’s cheek, turning on her heels and striding to the door. He noticed the slight tremor in her gait as she exited, not looking back over her shoulder before she disappeared down the hall. Though she made sure to close the door softly behind her, the noise made Shane flinch.

“Kiss,” Ilya whined, yanking at Shane’s arm.

“Ilya,” Shane glanced at the door hesitantly.

When he looked back at Ilya he saw his watery eyes, the pout on his face more pronounced than Shane had ever seen it. He bent down again, more tender with this kiss than the one before. Ilya sighed into it, seemingly content when Shane pulled back in anticipation of his parents entering the room.

“Yuna!” Ilya exclaimed when the door opened, “*And* David! You have come to visit me.”

“They’ve been here the whole time, Ilya,” Shane reminded him.

Yuna went to his bedside immediately, David following immediately behind. Shane saw how close they both were to tears, their reactions similar to the hard hit he took against Boston a few years prior that benched him for the remainder of the hockey season. They adored Ilya so openly that it made Shane’s chest ache, still half convinced that he didn’t *deserve* the happiness his relationship had given him.

“I am sorry I missed breakfast,” Ilya apologized.

“Oh, Ilya,” Yuna shook her head, “We’re so relieved that you’re alright.”

“Does anything hurt?” David frowned, looking at the screen with Ilya’s vitals.

“No,” Ilya drew out the word, “Feels good.”

They all laughed at that. Shane remembered how out of it he felt when he was on pain medication and only hoped that the come down wouldn't be overwhelming for him. Ilya fought to stay awake no matter how many times they assured him that he could sleep. Secretly, Shane was dreading the moment that Ilya slipped back into unconsciousness, already overwhelmed with dread at the thought of their being separated again.

Ilya fell asleep in the middle of a sentence, his words too slurred to decipher. Shane clung to his hand for another few minutes, sitting in silence just in case he awoke. When Ilya began to gently snore he chuckled, happier than ever before to hear the sound. Yuna reached across the bed to squeeze his shoulder.

“You doing okay?” she asked gently.

“Yeah,” Shane exhaled slowly, “Yeah, I'm okay.”

“You look much better than when I picked you up at the airport,” David agreed.

“David,” Yuna scolded him.

But Shane could only laugh, the honesty of the statement driving him out of his own head and into the moment. It would be a long time before he could look back at this day without dredging up feelings of dread and helplessness, but he did his best to internalize the feeling of security with the people he loved most safe within his reach. When the high of the comfort wore off, however, he looked around the room and felt an important piece missing.

Svetlana still had not returned from her coffee run after almost thirty minutes. Shane opened his mouth to ask his parents if they saw which way she went, but when he turned in their direction he caught a glimpse of Svetlana through the window, down in the courtyard outside. She sat on a bench with her chin resting on her knees, a small paper cup abandoned beside her.

“Mom, can you stay with him for a few minutes?” Shane asked, peering out into the courtyard, “I have my phone if he wakes up again.”

“Of course, honey,” she followed his gaze, her eyes landing on Svetlana.

Shane knew that his parents had questions. His reaction on the phone when Yuna revealed Svetlana to be Ilya's emergency contact was harsh, especially for him. He wouldn't have been surprised if they put together Ilya and Svetlana's history themselves without him having to clarify. They had heard the rumors about Ilya's dalliances with women throughout the first decade of their careers, even if that was over by the time Shane introduced them properly.

“Svetlana was nothing but kind to us,” Yuna insisted.

“Oh, yes,” David nodded, “She included us in the conversations with the doctors even after she arrived, and asked for our opinions about the treatment options.”

“And the first thing she did when I spoke to her was make sure you knew what was going on,” Yuna continued.

Shane looked down at Ilya’s hand clasped in his own. He thought about Svetlana’s words earlier that day, about how he must have appeared from an outside perspective. All of this time he spent resenting her, and the only thing that she cared about was Ilya’s happiness. It weighed on him to know that he treated her relationship with Ilya as something to be wary of, rather than a source of support for his partner.

Yuna took over, fussing with Ilya’s blanket to better cover him after his most recent exam. David looked between his phone screen and the beeping machine, likely looking into what the different numbers meant and whether there was any cause for concern. Shane swelled with pride, overwhelmed with gratefulness that his parents so wholeheartedly accepted Ilya as their own. It made leaving the room easier, if only slightly.

By the time Shane made it downstairs to the courtyard Svetlana was nearly curled in on herself, her arms wrapped around her calves and thighs pressed tightly to her chest. He saw her notice him out of the corner of her eye, but she didn’t turn to face him as he approached.

“He’s asleep again,” Shane sat down on the opposite side of the bench, “My parents are with him. They’ll text if he wakes up, but he’s probably the heaviest sleeper I know so I think we have some time.”

Svetlana didn’t answer. Shane noticed her coffee cup beside her, still full but no longer steaming. She hadn’t even bothered to put a top over it, or a sleeve around the middle to prevent burning her hand. Shane picked it up and put it on his other side, scooting a foot closer to her so they could keep their voices low.

“I want to thank you, Svetlana,” Shane started.

Svetlana turned her head enough to get a good look at him. Shane’s heart dropped, the sight of her red eyes a clear tell that she had been crying. She hurriedly covered her face again, the knees of her jeans covered in dark splotches from where her tears fell. It hurt him to know that she had come outside to suffer alone, away from the support his parents showed him in Ilya’s room upstairs.

“You should not thank me,” she mumbled.

“You’re kidding, right?” Shane scoffed, “You dropped everything and flew here from Boston. You explained everything to his coach mid-travel. *And* you made the right decision for his surgery, *saving his life*.”

“He would not have needed the surgery if I…” her voice trailed off, muffled by the fabric of her clothes.

Shane scooted another few inches closer to her, hesitantly raising a hand to hover over her back. When she didn’t shift away he let it drop to rest between her shoulders, pressing down to show her that she had his support. Svetlana held her legs even tighter, her muscles clenched tightly beneath his fingertips.

“It is my fault,” her voice trembled, “He told me he was in pain, and I said that Canada made him soft.”

Shane frowned, recognizing the guilt. He had said the words to his own dad just hours before, so convinced that he missed some sort of sign that would have warned him about Ilya’s impending rupture. To hear Svetlana express the same feelings made him realize how ridiculous the thought was.

“The medic cleared him. They let him back on the ice that same game,” Shane reminded her.

“I should have known,” she pushed back, “Ilya does not complain this way with me. He is too proud, too stubborn.”

Shane smiled sadly at that, knowing himself how much Ilya hated to admit to an injury. Those he received on the ice were hidden even further, addressed only through brief grunts or melodramatic bursts that he quickly turned into jokes. For the first time, he realized how *wonderful* it was to have someone that understood Ilya so intimately, who *knew* him the way Shane did.

“Svetlana,” Shane wrapped his arm around her shoulders, “You couldn’t have known.”

Svetlana accepted the hug, but she remained stiff in Shane’s arms. He felt her trembling increase, like she was holding in an overwhelming amount of pressure. He understood all too well the physical feeling of emotions too strong to stifle down. They sat in silence for a few minutes, both leaning on each other to stay upright.

The weight of Ilya’s emergency still loomed in the front of their minds, but Svetlana was right. The worst of it was over.

“It was much easier to dislike you, Shane Hollander,” she sighed.

“Yeah?” Shane nudged her with his shoulder.

“You are a good man,” Svetlana admitted, “I know now why Ilya moved to Canada for you.”

Shane smirked at the formality of Svetlana’s compliment but didn’t tease her. They would have time for that later, when Ilya was out of the hospital and the world didn’t feel quite as fragile. Instead he helped her to her feet and gestured in the direction of the entrance, letting Svetlana take the lead once she felt ready.

They trekked back through the first floor of the hospital, Shane fishing out a pack of tissues from his pocket to share before they made it back to Ilya’s room. Svetlana dumped her cold coffee and bought a water instead, placing the cool bottle under her eyes to alleviate the puffiness. Shane patted her on the shoulder, holding the door open so that she could enter first.

David sat in one of the chairs reading his book with Yuna in the other, her head resting on his shoulder. One of her hands was wrapped around Ilya’s wrist, connecting the three of them

together. David looked up from his book and smiled softly at the sight of Shane and Svetlana approaching together.

“She passed out a minute and a half after you left,” he nodded towards Yuna.

“You guys should go home and get some rest,” Shane suggested, “Visiting hours are almost over anyway.”

Shane realized that meant he would need to leave with them and slumped forward, unable to hide his disappointment as he approached Ilya from the opposite side. He had the overwhelming desire to wake Ilya up, to share one final conversation before he was forced to leave. The thought of sleeping alone in Ottawa made him nauseous, even if it was under his parents’ roof.

“Perhaps you can recommend a hotel for me,” Svetlana requested, “Since only one visitor is allowed overnight I will need a place to sleep.”

Shane looked at her with wide eyes. Svetlana glanced his way with a sly smile, rolling her eyes but nodding her head at the same time.

“I spoke to the nurse. It is fine, since you are his back up contact,” she revealed.

Shane looked back at Ilya and restrained himself from kissing every inch of bare skin he could see. It was ridiculous for Ilya to include him on any paperwork, especially for something usually reserved for family, but he couldn’t be happier to hear that he had done it. Shane crossed the room quickly and pulled Svetlana into a real hug, smiling against the curve of her shoulder.

“Thank you,” he whispered, releasing her after a firm squeeze.

“Maybe you can use the time to work on your Russian, *da?*” Svetlana stepped back, smoothing out her shirt.

Shane helped wake Yuna, who immediately dragged him into her arms. He remembered the tremble in her voice when she called him that morning, how devastated she was at the thought of Ilya suffering, what it must have been like to listen to him plead for his mother in a language she didn’t understand. So Shane let her cling to him while David gathered their belongings.

“I love you so much,” Yuna squeezed him tightly, “Both of you. *So*, so much.”

“Okay, Mom, I get it,” Shane struggled to breathe, “I love you too, really.”

Yuna swayed back and forth, using one hand to hold onto Ilya behind her. David chuckled from his spot across the room, but Shane saw his gaze linger on Ilya in the bed. They both had been so terrified, so Shane let them dote on him as they prepared to leave without complaint.

“Svetlana, we would love to have you stay with us,” Yuna offered, “We have toiletries and extra clothes, anything you could possibly need. I know you came straight from work.”

“This is very kind of you,” Svetlana appeared to look between Yuna and David, as if trying to determine the legitimacy of the offer.

“She’s not saying it to be polite, they really mean it,” Shane assured her.

He nearly laughed at the thought of Svetlana in his parents’ home. Earlier that day he would never have considered it to be a real possibility, let alone an offer he would urge her to accept. Svetlana considered it for another moment before nodding. Yuna shifted into planning mode, rattling off a list of dinner and dessert options when they arrived at the house. David herded her in the direction of the door to pull the car around, their bag slung over his shoulder.

“We’ll call you when we’re outside,” David waved, giving them a few minutes alone before Svetlana’s departure.

They listened to Yuna’s voice disappear as they traveled down the hall, the silence heavy between them.

“At least three months with no hockey,” Svetlana commented, “He is going to be a nightmare.”

“Speaking of the recovery,” Shane scuffed the back of his shoe against the floor, “I’m sure he’d really appreciate having you around. If you’re open to spending some time in Ottawa.”

Svetlana raised an eyebrow, searching Shane’s expression. The regular season was quickly coming to a close, but Shane knew his team would likely be in the playoffs. If Ilya asked, he would drop everything to spend those months at his side. But, realistically, he knew Ilya would never allow it.

“I’d really appreciate it too, Svetlana,” Shane admitted.

Svetlana didn’t accept his proposal outright. Instead, she pulled Shane in for a hug and held him close for all of three seconds.

“We are friends now, yes? You call me Sveta,” she sniffled.

Shane took it as a positive sign, smiling when she stepped back and turned her attention to Ilya instead. He gave the two of them a few minutes together, waiting patiently outside until his parents called to let him know they were out front whenever she was ready to come down.

“I will see you first thing in the morning,” Svetlana promised, “And you will call if anything changes before then.”

“Of course,” Shane nodded sternly.

Svetlana smiled. She patted Shane on the shoulder, pressing one final kiss to the top of Ilya’s head before she went down to meet his parents in the parking lot. Shane listened to her heels click against the floor, the elevator ding loud enough to be heard from down the hall.

He took a seat next to Ilya's bed, looking him over carefully. Ilya jerked awake, the frantic look in his eyes settling when he met Shane's gaze.

"Kiss?" Ilya yawned, raising one hand to weakly grab at Shane's shirt.

Shane grinned, ducking down to connect their lips. In the morning he would start working on the logistics of Ilya's recovery plan, mapping the next six months with the people that cared most about him. But for the time being he reveled in Ilya's presence, happy to shut out the rest of the world and stay wrapped up in each other.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so, so much to everyone who left comments and kudos on the previous chapters!! it was so great reading everyone's thoughts <33 i hope you enjoyed the final chapter :D

End Notes

i am a svetlana lover first and foremost!!!! now watch me rupture this man's spleen

(kudos & comments appreciated!! <33)

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