That's All It Takes

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That's All It Takes

by kingskindly

Summary

Based very loosely on events from The Long Game that my brain wanted to put into the first book, somewhere between Shane's injury, and before Scott Hunter wins the cup - for maximum angst, obviously.

What if Ilya's plane had actually crashed? And what if it had happened before he and Shane had the chance to confess their love and know what it was like to be together.

Or

A fic so I could write a really needy Shane who can't hide his feelings anymore, and an Ilya who is faced with the undeniable truth that someone cares for him.

Notes

Please ignore that I have conveniently taken information from both the TV show and the series and smushed it all together into one fic.

Also I don't look too hard into any timeline/game details - I made them all up :D

Also also I've been told I should warn that this is a little hurty before it gets comforty so please take care of yourselves, and feel free to come back when things are lighter (in maybe 3-4 chapters, I want to say????)

Chapter 1: Raiders down

Shane sat next to his parents and watched Rozanov make a pretty impressive slapshot on the TV. His head still throbbed in intervals and he found himself rubbing at his sore clavicle, before realizing it always made things worse and forcing himself to stop.

“You have to admit, he's a good player,” Shane’s dad said, giving his mom a sidelong glance.

His mom shrugged non-committally, “he’s okay.”

“Wow,” his dad laughed, “I never thought I’d hear you concede even that much.”

Shane laughed too as he watched the buzzers announce the end of the game, and another win for the Boston Raiders. “Rozanov visited me in the hospital. That’s why she’s being so nice.”

His mom just shrugged again. “It was very sportsmanlike,” she explained as she cleared the pigs in a blanket they were eating from the coffee table. “I can respect that.”

Shane smirked. Very sportsmanlike was one way to put it. While he was high enough that he didn’t remember most of the encounter, he hoped he would never forget the way Rozanov brushed his thumb to Shane’s freckles, almost reverent. The touch feather light, like any more pressure would shatter Shane. The way he looked at Shane like Shane mattered.

He settled further into the leather couch, the cushions behind his back finally warm enough for the seat to feel cozy.

Good game, he texted Lily.

Yes. Better than yours came the reply, and Shane rolled his eyes, looking back up at the screen. Rozanov was probably in the locker room. Shane imagined him, sweaty and on the high of a strong win, and the first thing he did was pull out his phone to reply to Shane. The idea of it was heady.

Shane: *You wish*

Lily: *I wish my cock was in your—*

Shane locked his phone and pushed it face down into the couch beside him. Nope. Not next to his parents. Definitely not.

Another buzz, and he let out a long, silent breath.

Lily: *How is your head?*

Shane: *Oh, yeah, it’s better. I’m finally allowed screens again*

Lily: *This means video sex is back on table?*

Shane: *I'm living with MY PARENTS right now*

Lily: *So, yes?*

Shane laughed softly to himself. He wondered if Rozanov would respond to his doped-up-on-hospital-strength-drugs proposal to come stay with him at his cottage. He wanted that. Lately, he wanted a lot of things he couldn't have. His brain supplied him with images of Rozanov at his cottage, lounging on his dock, eating food Shane made him on the patio. He shook his head. Impossible.

Shane sat on the bench in the same black and white suit he usually wore to hockey-related events and tried not to squirm as he watched his team play Ottawa. He hated that he wasn't on the ice, watching plays shake out in ways he knew he could have changed the outcome of if he had been on the ice. But the game was in his parents' hometown, where he happened to be staying, and his coach wanted him here; it was his duty as a captain.

"You look miserable, Hollander," J.J. Said, out of breath as he pushed up next to Shane, leaning forward on his stick.

"You would too if your team was losing 2-1 and you couldn't do anything but watch," Shane chirped back.

J.J. Laughed. "Yeah, fuck I would be."

They ended up losing the game in overtime, and that was the end of the Metros' time in the playoffs. The locker room was filled with the expected disappointed silence, and Shane tried to give a brief, rousing speech, but could tell no one was interested, and ended it early with some stupid joke about getting stupid drunk that managed to get a few laughs.

"You coming to the bar, captain?" Hayden asked, clapping a hand on Shane's good shoulder.

He grimaced. "Nah, my mom's waiting in the car. Can't drive, so she's taking me home."

"Come on, Hollander. Thats too lame, even for you. Come out with us. You don't even have to drink. Then go back home or whatever. Catch a cab."

Hayden wasn't the only one, and Shane's teammates joined in until Shane acquiesced. Rozanov was headed to his next game in Florida, which meant Shane had no other plans. He sent a text to his mom to let her know.

The team bus was quiet, that same dejected silence settling back over the team as they were ferried back to the hotel. Shane was in his head, going over the plays of the game, picturing how he could have done them better, changed the outcome.

"Holy fuck," J.J. piped up from the back, "did you guys see this?"

"See what?" Hayden asked from beside Shane, and reached over the seat to grab J.J.'s phone from him. Shane watched him scan the phone and then he visibly paled.

“What is it?” Shane asked, reaching for the phone, feeling strange.

”The Raiders’ plane…”

Shane’s whole world stopped. His chest was stone, he couldn’t draw a breath. Rozanov’s team, Rozanov was on that plane.

“The Raiders’ plane what, Hayden?” He asked, trying to keep his voice steady. It could be anything.

Hayden shook his head looking shell shocked, the whole bus was looking at them now. Shane repeated himself louder, annoyed and aware that he was getting strange looks from his teammates.

“It went down.”

“What, like it crashed?” someone said.

“Yeah, like it crashed,” Hayden didn’t look away from Shane.

Shane laughed then, something manic bubbling out of him. His breath shook, and Hayden frowned at him.

Fuck,” Patrice whispered in his French accent from somewhere behind Shane, “it says here the plane veered off course on a flight to Florida, the airline control centre got a mayday from the pilot, and the plane looked like it went down somewhere in the Appalachians.”

Shane laughed again. What a cosmic fucking joke. Just as Shane had felt excited, happy even with where his life was headed. Just as he had felt he was on the precipice of something he had only ever dreamed of with Rozanov. A life of being desired, being understood. They barely needed anymore time before Shane was sure they would push each other off the edge; he saw it in Rozanov’s eyes in the hospital, the way he touched Shane’s face, searched his eyes like what was behind them *mattered*. But they still needed it. More time. Shane needed more time. There were too many things unsaid.

“Hollander?” Someone said. Maybe Hayden. Shane didn’t know anymore.

“Do they know if everyone’s okay?” J.J. asked, trying to take his phone back from Hayden, who pulled it out of his reach.

“How would they know that information, dipshit?” Patrice said, “All it says is they think the plane went down in the Appalachians, and there’s search and rescue crews in the air now.”

“Fuuuuuck,” J.J. said, his face completely sober, “I know we hate them or whatever, but nobody wants shit like that to happen.”

There was something wrong with Shane. He couldn’t tell where anyone’s voices were coming from anymore. Everything was distorted, and all he could hear was his heartbeat in his ears. He pulled out his own phone and automatically dialled in Rozanov’s number,

vaguely aware it wasn't something he should be doing in public, let alone a bus full of his teammates.

He held the phone to his ear with a shaking hand. Voicemail.

"Shane?" A hand on his shoulder.

Shane stood, his body moving of its own accord.

"Stop the bus," he was saying, shouldering past Hayden, ignoring the bus driver who was yelling at him to sit down. "Stop the bus."

The bus must have pulled over because soon Shane was stumbling onto the side of the road, one hand on his knee, the other still stuck in its blasted sling, retching up the protein smoothie he had drunk before the game.

Shane flinched when he felt a hand on his upper back.

"Easy, buddy," Hayden said, "You okay?"

"Oh fuck," Shane moaned through clenched teeth, then spat onto the bush he had just puked in. He didn't have it in him right now to try and make up some excuse about food poisoning or motion sickness. He was free-falling, head aching with a hit he never saw coming.

He looked up at Hayden with wide, frightened eyes. He was sure everything he felt was plastered all over his face like an open wound.

"Ilya is on that plane," he said, hating how wobbly his voice sounded.

"Ilya Rozanov?" Hayden said, sounding genuinely confused, "yeah probably. I mean it's his team."

Shane retched again.

"Geez, Shane, I know you're an empathetic guy or whatever, but you can't be telling me you're having this reaction because you're worried Ilya Rozanov might have died in a plane crash." Hayden laughed nervously.

Might have died. Shane held desperately onto those words. Might have. It wasn't a forgone conclusion. He needed to pull his shit together, call someone, find more information, maybe help somehow. The article could be fake. He took a deep breath.

"I would have thought you'd be happy," Hayden joked, clearly trying to lighten the mood, and Shane's heart lurched, "no more arch rival keeping you from the cup and all that."

Shane gripped his hair, pulling harshly until he felt some strands come loose. The pain was somewhat sobering. "Fuck Hayden, can you just shut the fuck up for a second and let me think?" And then, pathetically, because he couldn't help it, "Do you think he's dead?"

“I’m—” Hayden tilted his head, looking at Shane strangely, “I don’t know, Shane,” he said slowly, “but you’re acting like you… Like you love the guy or something?”

Shane met Hayden's eyes with a look that felt like pure pleading.

I can’t give up this secret. Please just understand. I can’t say it out loud.

Hayden’s eyes widened in understanding, and a part of Shane felt raw relief while another equal part of him descended into pure panic. His heart beat a painful tattoo in his chest.

“Holy fuck,” Hayden breathed, “You and Rozanov— you can’t be— you and Rozanov?”

“You can’t tell anyone,” Shane said suddenly, desperately. “Please, Hayd, you can’t tell anyone.”

“You’re gay?” Hayden said dumbly, and Shane sent him a look of pure annoyance. This was, without competition, the worst day of his life.

“If you’re just going to call me a fag and laugh about this to the rest of the team, you can fuck off, Hayden,” Shane snarled, “I have other fucking things to worry about than you being a homophobe.”

Hayden looked hurt, but he put his hands up in a pacifying gesture.

“Whoa, Shane. Slow down. I would never out you like that. You’re my friend, man, I’m not — I don’t care about that stuff. It’s not what I was expecting but…. Give me some time before you go all Terminator on me, it’s a lot for a guy to digest.”

Shane deflated, “Sorry. Fuck. Sorry. I’m freaking out. Obviously.” He waved a hand in the general direction of the bush that was now covered in his vomit.

“Okay,” Hayden said, firmly enough that Shane looked at him sharply, “You need to calm down. I know how fucked up this is, but there’s a bus full of men who are really confused right now, and unless you want to come out and tell them you’re in some fucked up relationship with Ilya Rozanov and thats why you’re having a meltdown on the side of the road in the middle of fucking downtown Ottawa then you need to pull it together until we can at least get to the hotel okay?”

Hayden's words dully registered, and Shane was blindly grateful to Hayden in this moment for taking charge and for taking everything in stride. Even as he wanted to protest. His relationship wasn’t fucked up.

Shane was aware of the men peering curiously, some of them looking concerned, out of the bus windows.

“Yeah, okay. Breakdown at the hotel sounds better,” Shane gave his teammates a weak smile and tried to wave them away.

Some privacy did sound like the better option. Plus, he could call Rozanov once he was there and—

“Oh fuck,” the breath was pushed out of him as it freshly dawned on him why he was freaking out in front of his entire team. “Hayd,” he looked up at his worried friend with wide eyes, “what if he’s—”

And then he was retching again, mumbling apologies in between spitting the awful taste from his mouth.

“Jesus, Shane. This is on a whole other level for you.” Hayden said, then swore under his breath, mumbling something to himself, “shit, no, that’s not— listen, let’s try to stay positive, yeah? Plane crashes are uncommon, and the pilots can usually do emergency landings and stuff. Besides, He’s probably out there fighting bears or something and going all Russia man on the fucking wilderness.”

Shane let out a dry laugh, thinking of bears and tattoos and Ilya. He sobbed once. A desolate sound that had Hayden bending over and fussing over him like he was injured.

Rozanov was alive. he had to be alive. Shane couldn’t live in a world where he hadn’t told Rozanov how he really felt. Where he would never know how Rozanov felt about him.

He swallowed down the nausea that still squirmed in the back of his throat and straightened.

“Okay,” he said, his voice croaky, “I’m not— let's go.”

“You sure?” Hayden asked, and Shane felt irrationally angry at him for caring so much. Hayden hated Rozanov.

He didn’t bother with a response. Shane steeled himself and walked back onto the bus. He got some strange looks, but he ignored them and stared at the ground.

“Sorry, guys!” Hayden said, close on Shane’s heels, “bit of motion sickness or something, I think!”

Shane got some sympathetic answers to that and slid back into his seat, and stared at nothing the whole ride home, feeling numb and empty.

Chapter 2: Ilya Rozanov the hockey player

Chapter Notes

Maybe I'll give my chapters names eventually, but not now.
Please enjoy 2k plus words of baby Shane losing his mind and a cheeky lil Ilya POV

Ilya groaned, the pressure of his seat belt digging painfully into his waist.

He fumbled blindly for the clasp and released it, only to realize his mistake when he dropped like a dead weight and slid towards the cockpit.

The whole plane was at an angle. They had crashed. Fuck, they had crashed.

He pushed himself upright, leaning at a strange angle to balance himself on the uneven floor.

There were groans around him, and he sighed in relief, trying to see who seemed alive and uninjured. What he saw didn't look like carnage. He was met with nothing particularly gruesome, and he only hoped everyone was okay and accounted for.

"Guys?" He called, his accent especially thick, "you are okay?"

"Fuckin… did our plane just crash?" Cliff said from somewhere above Ilya.

"I am thinking yes," Ilya said.

"Shit, I could use some help over here," a panicked voice said. Ilya scrambled up, took stock of himself, thanked whatever higher power was out there looking over him that he had no injuries, and made his way back to the voice.

It was a German boy who had been recently drafted, looking young and frightened and about 2 seconds away from a panic attack. Ilya didn't blame him. To his left was an unconscious Brad, blood dripping from his head, leg bent at an angle that meant it was clearly broken. Ilya blew out a hard breath.

"Gus," he said— he thought that was the boy's name— needing to repeat it a few times before gripping him by the shoulders, "calm down! You are not helping Brad being like this. We will make sure he is okay, okay?"

Ilya pressed his fingers to Brad's neck, feeling the fluttering pulse point and loosed a sigh of relief. Thank god.

"Pilots dead… I'm pretty sure," Cliff said.

Gus made a choked-off sound.

“Rozanov?” Said someone raggedly behind him, and Ilya launched into action.

Shane’s team was out of the playoffs, but it didn’t matter; The entire NHL had paused their events in light of recent events, or at least that’s what the press release said.

That and some bullshit about praying for the safe return of all their players. Shane had hated the wording but been blindly grateful that he wasn’t expected to play while he was in such a sorry state.

He had gotten to the hotel and promptly called everyone he could think of who might have news on the Raiders, devolved into yelling when he couldn’t find out anything, which he knew wasn’t fair to the poor person on the other end of the line, but he couldn't seem to help himself. Until Hayden had returned, and told Shane he had called him a cab that would take him home.

Now, Shane stood on the front steps of his parents’ house feeling shivery and not like himself.

His mom opened the door, her face filled with concern, and Shane crumbled. Moaned low and miserable in the back of his throat, tears already hot on his cheeks. His mom enveloped him in a hug, smelling nostalgic and woodsy.

“Shane? Shane, what’s wrong?” She asked, her head pressed next to his, and he ducked so his forehead pressed against her shoulder.

“Whatever it is, we can fix it. Okay, baby? Come inside,” she murmured in his ear.

Shane didn’t move, and his mother didn’t stop hugging him until his dad appeared in the doorway and ushered them both inside.

His parents sat him at the kitchen table, placed a warm mug of what was most likely green tea in his hands, and sat across the table waiting patiently for him to pull himself together.

Finally, he sniffed, lashes clumped together and blurring his vision. He looked up. His parents looked back at him expectantly, concern written on their faces.

“So I’m gay,” he said, hearing how flat he sounded.

“Okay,” his mom said slowly, eyebrows creasing. And for one horrible second, Shane thought she was going to say that she didn’t believe him. But then, “I think… we always maybe thought you could be gay.”

“And I’m seeing someone,” he blurted before he could even process his mom’s words. His dad’s eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. Shane wanted to laugh. This was almost exactly the order he planned to tell his parents this information, just maybe over the course of like 10 years rather than 30 seconds.

“How long have you been seeing this person?” his mom asked.

It took Shane a moment to register the question. His next breath was ready to deliver an answer to *who is it*, not how long.

“Oh,” he said dumbly, “uh, since my rookie year.”

“Since your rookie year?” His mom repeated, dumbfounded, and Shane laughed awkwardly.

“Yeah, it’s been sort of a long-term thing, I guess.”

Now. Now was when he was supposed to tell them it was Ilya Rozanov, that he had been in a relationship with his arch rival for the past 7 years.

“A player?” His dad asked, and Shane felt like he was going insane as he thought vaguely of twenty questions. He nodded minutely, pressing his lips together.

His mom reached across the table and put her hand over his, looking at him sympathetically. “Did you break up?”

Oh. Another question out of left field. He had these conversations in his head so many times, and none of them had gone like this. If Rozanov was dead, then maybe this was kindof like a breakup.

“No, nothing like that, though I can see how you would think that. But, um, no, actually. Something…” he swallowed thickly, and looked up at the ceiling to stave off the tears he could feel collecting on his bottom lashes. “something bad happened, and I don’t know if he’s okay, and I don’t know how to find out if he’s okay.” He hated the way his voice cracked at the end.

He could see the wheels turning in his parents’ heads. Since his rookie year, another player, something bad happened. They would figure it out soon. Or maybe they wouldn’t. Shane never had a good sense of these things.

“Um, it’s Ilya Rozanov,” he blurted before he could think better of it. “The guy I’ve been seeing.”

“Ilya Rozanov…like the hockey player?”

He rolled his eyes, “I just said he was a player.”

His mom opened her mouth, then closed it, then did it again. She looked like a fish out of water. Shane didn’t think he’d ever seen his mom at a loss for words like this. It would be hilarious in any other context.

“So you and Ilya Rozanov have been in a long-term relationship since your rookie year?” His dad said, like he expected Shane to suddenly jump up from his chair and yell *you got pranked!*

“Yeah, that's the gist of it,” Shane muttered.

“Ilya Rozanov, the hockey play—“

“Oh!” His mom said suddenly. “The plane crash. Shane. Oh, baby, of course. No wonder you’re so upset.”

Shane opened his mouth subtly so he could let out a breath that didn’t sound like a whimper.

“So, um yup. And I don’t know if he’s even alive, or— and I didn’t get to—“ *I didn’t get to tell him I loved him.*

*“*Right, well, this I can help with,” she said firmly, and launched into what Shane always thought of as Yuna Hollander manager mode.

He was left at the table, hands cupped around a fast-cooling mug of green tea, listening as she paced back and forth, making calls to find out about the crash, and to rearrange his non-hockey schedule, his photoshoots, his endorsements and partnerships. Pausing each time she passed him to place a reassuring hand on his shoulder or back.

He wished he had the energy to feel thankful for his parents. For the support he knew he had. He felt ungrateful when all he wanted was Ilya.

Two days later, there was still no news of the downed Raiders plane. The Appalachians were unpredictable, and the recent slough of bad weather was making it difficult for search and rescue. Though the reports said they were narrowing the search.

Shane had no idea if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

He called Rozanov’s cell every few hours, thinking maybe service would go through if somehow he was moving around, trying to find service.

Shane even texted him once, feeling foolish for the hopeful feeling in his chest as he stared at the messages waiting for a reply that he knew wasn’t going to come.

Are you ok?

Please text me if you get this.

I need you to be okay.

He hadn't texted again.

Shane didn't have to worry about Rozanov starving to death yet; he had googled it before his mom had seen and told him to cut it out. A person could have up to 3 months without food as long as they had water. And Shane was sure they would have water, given the weather that was slowing down the search and rescue crews. They would have enough water. He was sure.

A knock at the door pulled him from his thoughts, and then he heard Hayden and Jackie, and his dad welcoming them inside.

"Hey, Mr. Hollander!" Hayden said brightly. "We just wanted to see Shane and make sure… he's healing up okay. Uh, from his accident and stuff."

"He's…" his dad hedged.

Shane rolled his eyes but was secretly appreciative of Hayden and his dad trying not to out him to each other.

"They know," he called from the living room, "I told them." He figured it applied to either of them.

A silence then.

"How's he holding up?" He heard Hayden ask in a hushed voice, like Shane couldn't hear him that way, and Shane shook his head at the idiots in his life.

"Oh, you know…" his dad sighed, "not great."

"Of course not," Jackie said heavily. After another short silence, "We brought food! I know Yuna must have it covered, but I thought you can never have too much. It's all freezable, so you can eat it whenever."

Shane tuned her out. Of course, Hayden told Jackie. Shane found he didn't care. He liked Jackie. He trusted her to keep a secret more than he trusted Hayden. The couch shifted as Hayden sat next to him.

"Hey" Hayden said, and Shane looked at him sidelong.

"Hey."

"I'm sorry I told Jackie. But she wont tell anyone"

"I know."

The news caster rambled on about some flood in some town Shane couldn't give less of a shit about. But he couldn't turn it off in case they had news about the Raiders.

"Are you… How are you doing?" Hayden asked.

"Fine."

Hayden looked sidelong at him, "I'm still having a hard time believing you and Rozanov."

A flash of annoyance, and Shane clenched his teeth. “Right, then don’t believe it.”

“I’m not trying to say that,” Hayden said slowly, “It’s just that you never tell anyone anything. You’re so secretive all the time, and honestly, there’s nothing that ties you to Rozanov. Like at all. I keep trying to think of something.”

“Then I guess it’s not true. I must have lied.”

“Shane, I’m not trying to say that either.” Hayden sounded frustrated. At Shane or at himself, Shane couldn’t tell. “You just keep everything so close to the chest.”

At that, Shane scoffed. *Have you ever thought maybe that was because I’m gay and playing professionally in one of the most homophobic sports in the world,* he wanted to snap. But even that felt like giving up too much of himself. He said nothing.

“What was I supposed to think, Shane? You even had that Lily girl you used to see in Boston…”

Shane finally turned to give Hayden a look of pure exasperation, and he watched as Hayden’s face morphed from genuine confusion to a horrified sort of understanding. Shane pushed his thumb and forefinger of the hand not stuck in a sling into the bridge of his nose. His head was pounding.

“Fuck me,” Hayden said quietly, almost to himself, “Ilya Rozanov.”

“Yup,” Shane said, popping the p sound.

They sat in a slightly uncomfortable silence as they both watched the newscaster describe the weather in Ottawa for the next week.

“You know we’re here for you, right, Hollander? Jackie and I. Whatever you need,” Hayden said eventually.

“You hate Rozanov,” Shane said flatly, “you think he’s an asshole. You’re sure you aren’t glad he’s probably dead or dying in the—“ he choked on what was about to embarrassingly be a whimper “the fucking Appalachian mountains?”

He laughed. It didn’t even sound like a real scenario.

His mind supplied him with memories of Rozanov, of the last time they spent the night together. Breathing in the hot air of the others' moans, saying each other's first names like it was a declaration of *something*.

Of the way Rozanov looked at him on the ice during the puck drop, an unguarded expression that Shane rarely got to see. Not a smirk, or a scoff, or the way his lips twitched up cockily when he knew Shane was about to give in to whatever he wanted, but a smile. A real one, all teeth and crinkly eyes.

But especially, he couldn’t stop hearing himself say he couldn’t do this anymore. It wasn’t even the last time they had talked. They had left off in a good place. A place that had Shane

imagining Rozanov in his future, spending summers at his cottage. Shane's brain didn't care; on a loop, all he could hear was himself saying he couldn't do this anymore and the look on Rozanov's face as he repeated Shane's name, and Shane ignored him.

Hayden was looking at him with wide, hurt eyes.

"I would never wish that, Shane. Never. I know I've… never liked Rozanov. And I still think he's an asshole, but," he continued when Shane opened his mouth to snap what he was sure would be nasty and unpleasant, "but, I care about you, and I know how I would feel if it were Jackie on that plane, and I hate that this is happening to you."

"But you don't care about Rozanov," Shane grumbled, knowing he was being unreasonable. Those two days of no sleep, no food, and no news were making him irritable.

"I don't like Rozanov, but I can care about him. On your behalf. Enough that I don't want him to die. I hope you don't think that lowly of me," Hayden sounded a little pissed, and Shane grimaced, then let out an explosive breath.

"I'm sorry, Hayden. I don't think that of you. You're a good friend. I'm not... in a great headspace, I think," he said lamely.

"No one expects you to be, brother." Hayden clapped a hand on his good shoulder, then stood, "I'm going to help Jackie and your mom with the food."

Chapter 3: Google Translate

Chapter Notes

> This chapter fought me and thus is a bit pieced together. So if it has that kindof a feel, please forgive me.
>
> I am just trying to get us to a Hollanov reunion, which is hopefully (not to spoiler you) next chapter.

They all sat huddled near the cockpit. It shouldn't take much longer, Ilya figured, for someone to find them. They were an all-star NHL team. He was one of the best players in the league. People would know they were missing almost immediately if they hadn't seen the plane go down. People tracked their movements obsessively. They would be found.

But it had been two days, and Ilya was feeling drained from trying to keep everyone else from losing it. There was plenty of food on the plane, snacks in little baggies, frozen pizzas, ramen packages, and even some of those plastic-wrapped tinfoil meals that planes liked to keep in stock so he wasn't worried about food.

The plane, although a bit uncomfortable, tipped at the strange angle that it was, offered relative comfort and, at the very least, shelter from the pissing rain outside. Brad was awake, propped up in the corner, his leg in some makeshift splint Gus had put together.

The biggest problem, at least for Ilya, was that there was nothing but time. Time to think about Shane. Time to regret. More time to think about Shane.

Ilya wondered what he was doing. Maybe he was relieved. Shane could finally move on with his life without Ilya dragging him into undesirable situations. He could come out as gay, find some hot guy who wasn't his arch rival—and the guy would be hot because once they knew Shane was gay, they'd fall all over themselves to get with him—and then Shane would be out and in a relationship he didn't have to hide, and happy. Without Ilya.

Some of the guys had found paper and pen and were writing morbid notes to their loved ones.

Cliff held out the pen to him. "Roz? You have a message you want to make for someone?"

Ilya waved him away with more bravado than he felt. Made a show of rolling his eyes. "Rescue crew will come in few hours, probably. We will not die out here."

Cliff shrugged. "Better safe than sorry," he shook the notepad at Ilya, "Not even that girl Jane you're always texting?"

Ilya pursed his lips, hoping he didn't look like he was about to cry. "Nyet," he said, Russian so much closer to the surface the past few days. Like his brain couldn't handle two languages on top of all the stress, "I already sent message. When fire started."

Cliff laughed, but retracted the pen and paper. "I knew you had a heart in there somewhere Rozanov."

"Fuck off, Marleau," Ilya said without any fervour.

"Fuck you, Rozanov," Cliff said, in the exact same tone.

They were all in it together, Ilya supposed.

He had sent Shane a message. When the plane had dipped, and people were shouting fire and scrambling for their seats, Ilya had pulled out his phone and send him a message over social media using the planes wifi.

He had no idea if it went through. Not that Shane would understand most of it anyway. He had gotten out what he had wanted Shane to know in English:

Shane, I am thinking only of you right now.

I wanted to come to your cottage with you. I wanted to do so many things with you.

Then, because he had so much more to say to Shane, for himself. Words he needed to speak and know they were out there somewhere. Concrete. And because English was coming too slowly to his panicked brain. He switched his keyboard to Russian and wrote what was in his heart. What he needed to exist in the world before he died.

He swiped a tear surreptitiously from his eye when he was pretty sure the others were all busy with their stupid letters. Sniffed once. He wondered if the message went through. If Shane had read it. Maybe one day—if he survived this—Ilya could translate it for him.

Shane hated the coaxing way they all tried to get him to eat.

The lasagna Jackie had brought over wasn't even close to something Shane could have. It had cheese, and empty carbs, and basically everything that was an antithesis to the diet he was on. He was still an athlete, for God's sake. And he wasn't particularly hungry anyway.

"Shane, you need energy," his mom said gently.

"I'm good, thanks."

"Come on, love. You can't do anything right now anyway."

They all looked at him with sympathetic faces. The same expression boring into Shane from all four of them. Poor gay Shane, who just lost his weird-arch-rival/on-again-off-again-boyfriend to a plane crash.

Then Shane's dad was saying, "You need to keep your strength for when they find—"

And Shane couldn't take it anymore.

"I can't eat this shit," he said angrily, standing up abruptly. The screech of his chair being pushed back was loud in the room. "You know that. I'm on a diet, and Lasagna is not on the list."

"I think this can be an exception—"

"No. No, I'm not eating it. Fuck," he spat the word out vehemently, "I'm going to my room."

He turned on his heel and left. He felt faintly bad about calling Jackie's Lasagna shit, but not so bad that he wanted to go back out and apologize. He would apologize to her later. Hopefully, she knew he didn't mean it like that. He thought maybe she would. He really liked Jackie.

Well, Shane guessed he could just add asshole to the list of things that were wrong with him.

He flopped down on his bed, and because he felt pathetic and losery, he dialled Rozanov's number again and listened to his voice over the voicemail when his call didn't go through.

He scrolled for news of the crash. Read through the NHL's statements again. Then, on a whim, he opened Instagram. He never went on Instagram, not particularly interested in the social aspect of it. Connecting with his fans in such an intimate way always made him feel like a fraud and a liar. His mom managed it for him, mostly posting professionally taken shots and whatever Shane was asked to post for his brand deals.

He had one unopened message. It was from Rozanov, and the date on the message was the same day as the crash, right around the time the plane went down. Had Rozanov's last act before the crash been to send Shane a message? Shane's breath came fast as he opened it. He frowned when he realized almost the entire thing was in Russian.

There were three English sentences at the top of the message, and as he read them, Shane felt something crack deep inside his chest. Something important snapped loose and plummeted somewhere inside the black inkiness that took up space where his organs should be. He couldn't be sure what it was, but it was integral to his very being. Of that he was pretty sure.

He rolled onto his stomach and keened into his pillow, hoping it muffled the sound enough that no one would come check on him. No one did.

He didn't know how long it had been before he reached back out for his phone, his vision blurry and eyes swollen. But the house was quiet, sounds of clinking forks and plates long gone, and the yellow light of street lamps filtered gently through his blinds. He opened the

message again. Stared in consternation at the alien letters on his screen. There was a lot of writing.

He didn't know why Ilya would send him this when Shane couldn't understand Russian at all. Did he want Shane to learn? Shane stared at it until the letters started to dance, and his head started to throb. Only then did he remember he still had a concussion and probably should, at the very least, be wearing his glasses. But it was too much effort to reach for them, so he let the letters dance and his head pound until he fell asleep.

It was only when he woke up in the morning that Shane had the brilliant idea to use Google Translate. He copied out the message, his heart pounding, and paused before pasting it into the site. He wasn't sure he wanted to know what Rozanov's dying message to him was.

He breathed shakily and pushed himself up against his pillows, hunching over his phone like it required his entire concentration. When he first pasted in the paragraph, he grunted in frustration as the site told him it was too long to translate. So he painstakingly translated it in chunks. Copying, pasting, copying, pasting.

It was a brutal task, each new sentence a punch to the gut. The words so intense and unbelievable that Shane started to wonder how accurate the translator was. But once Shane started, he couldn't stop. He was like a man possessed.

Shane, I am thinking only of you right now.

I wanted to come to your cottage with you. I wanted to do so many things with you.

I need you to know you have given me more than I ever deserved. My most precious memories are with you. They feel like treasures I have stolen, and I am thinking of them.

For me, I think maybe it was always just you. I truly hope for your happiness, Shane.

I love you.

It was too raw, too intense, too romantic. It couldn't have been Rozanov. And yet, it couldn't have been anyone else. Shane sat there, dumbfounded. He was so sure the last sentence was mistranslated that he pasted it into some other translation sites and then made a separate search for how to say 'I love you' in Russian.

But the rest of the wording was bleak. It felt final. Like Rozanov was already dead. Shane almost regretted looking it up. It felt so intensely private and raw that Shane wasn't even sure it was meant for him. He didn't know what he was supposed to do now that he had seen those words. Knew these things.

Later, Shane sat on the same couch he watched Rozanov take that epic slap shot only a week ago. The TV had played an update on the Raiders a few hours earlier, if it could even be called that; No news on the downed plane. Search and rescue still underway, now officially three days after the crash.

The woman on the screen droned on about unimportant things. Who was on the plane, Shane already knew. What they were known for, Shane already knew. She spoke about Rozanov in detail, his significance, his potential, his talent.

Now she had moved on to politics, and Shane stared without seeing, watching her read animatedly from a teleprompter. He had done that once too, with Rozanov.

He saw his mom approach and lean up against the doorframe that led to the kitchen out of the corner of his eye. He didn't look at her. She stood there watching him for a while, and Shane said nothing.

"Your father and I were thinking maybe it would be good to get up to the cottage." That made him look. She offered a small smile.

"Fresh air? Some new scenery? I know how much you love it up there, and it might feel better than all this waiting we're doing. I'm sorry there wasn't more I could find out for you." She winced.

"It's not your fault, Mom." He felt small and quiescent, like the words from Rozanov's message still slipped around his brain. So obviously *there*, but impossible to grab onto.

"I know. But I wish I could help you."

"You are helping me."

"Oh, Shane."

He felt the prickling behind his eyes and bit his cheek to quell the feeling.

"Maybe I could go to the cottage. I think—"

"Wait, Shane," his mom stared with wide eyes, and Shane followed her gaze to the TV.

> *Breaking news, NHL Hockey Team Boston Raiders' Downed Plane Located Three Days After Crash — Two casualties reported.*

Yuna Hollander Manager Mode was a scary experience. Shane watched her raptly, feeling like he was 16 again and waiting for his mom to fix everything for him. He felt sorry for whoever was on the other end of her phone calls. He scrutinized her face, trying to read her micro expressions as if she wasn't about to tell him everything she learned as soon as he was off the phone.

She met his eyes, frowned at whatever the person on the phone said, and then walked off into the kitchen, where Shane couldn't hear.

She walked out 15 minutes later, looking unhappy. She pulled a hand through her slightly greying hair.

“They won’t tell me anything that we don’t already know,” she said, “no one is giving up information on the deceased or the injured until families and partners are notified.”

“But I’m—” *I’m his partner*, Shane wanted to argue, but the words died in his throat. *I should be on the list of people who get notified if Ilya Rozanov dies or is hospitalized*. But he wasn’t. Not in any real way. Sure, they had been fucking each other for close to a decade, and Shane wasn’t anything to Rozanov. Not on paper, not to the public, not to anyone but the two of them. And right now, that meant next to nothing.

“I’ll keep trying, honey. But they’re pretty tight-lipped about notifying family and next of kin before going public with anymore information. I can respect it at least,” She said with a sigh.

As the day progressed, Shane kept checking his phone, thinking maybe he would get a text from Rozanov. At least something that would let him know he was alive.

The ball of anxiety, buzzing away in his chest, didn’t lessen now that the Raiders had been found and rescued. Two casualties, his brain kept throwing at him. Maybe Rozanov wasn’t texting him because he was dead.

Maybe he had survived, but his life and death experience had made him realize how useless Shane was. That he didn’t want to keep sneaking around when he could have a girlfriend, or a wife, that would make his life 100 times easier.

He must have access to a phone by now. Shane chewed on his lip.

“Okay, there’s news,” his mom said, walking into the living room again, where Shane had barely moved. He looked up. “It’s hush hush, but the crash victims who aren’t so injured that they need to be airlifted to Boston General are being flown into Boston Logan tomorrow night.”

“Okay,” Shane said, standing, “good, great. So I go to Boston then.”

“Honey, you can’t go to Boston.”

“Yes, I can.” Shane was already pulling up flights on his phone. His mind was going a million miles a minute. “There’s a red eye tonight I can get on.”

“What if he’s not there?”

“Then I go to the hospital and check there. But at least I'm there.”

“Shane…” his mom protested, then seemed to think better of it. She sighed heavily. “At least book a seat for your father to go with you.”

Chapter 4: Reunion

Chapter Notes

eeeek Hollanov reunion!!!!!!!
Hopefully, this is a satisfying reunion for y'all

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane and his dad didn't speak much during the flight, though Shane could tell his dad wanted to. But Shane was exhausted, and anxious, and his head *hurt*. He paid for the in-flight wifi, and kept checking his Instagram notifications. Just in case.

They arrived in Boston at 5 am, the sky a dusky purple, before dawn had turned the sky bright. They picked up the car his mom had arranged for them and booked into the last-minute hotel his mom booked for them.

Shane had spent the day wearing a hole through the carpet of his room.

"Hey Shane?" his dad interrupted Shane's pacing from where he sat on his bed, the magazine he was reading from the hotel lobby placed to the side, "I feel like I didn't get to properly tell you that... I love you. Things have been really chaotic, and I just want you to know that I love you so much. No matter what," he gave Shane a watery smile. "And that I'm looking forward to meeting the Rozanov boy."

"Dad, I—" Shane cleared his throat, at a loss for words. His dad was wonderful and supportive, but they rarely talked quite like this. "I want you to meet him, too," was all he ended up saying. He hoped his dad understood what was being conveyed beneath those words.

His dad's face softened, then he nodded. "Okay, so what's the plan?"

The plan was to wait at the airport for the Raiders' arrival that night. If Rozanov wasn't there, they would visit the hospital to see if he had been airlifted straight there. And if Rozanov wasn't there— well, Shane couldn't plan that far.

But the news had said that there were only two casualties, which meant that chances were high Rozanov was alive. Or at least that's what Shane kept telling himself.

When they pulled up to the airport, it was late. Shane had burned off the daylight pacing and checking his phone obsessively for messages. And now, the street lamps gave the airport a spooky glow, and the airport almost looked deserted. Once-full parking lots were mostly empty. The bus and cab stations quiet. There was, however, a small gaggle of reporters hanging around outside the front doors of the arrivals.

Shane cringed when he saw them. He had hoped the Raiders players' arrival wouldn't have made it to the press. He knew his presence wouldn't go unnoticed.

"We don't have to do this," his dad said from the driver's seat. "I'm sure he'll contact you soon. "

Shane's gut twisted. Why hadn't Rozanov called? Surely he had access to a phone since being rescued. Shane hated that he wasn't even one of Rozanov's emergency contacts. They had been some form of together for years. *Years*. And Shane didn't even get the privilege of being someone who was called if he died.

What if Rozanov wasn't among the survivors? No. Nope. Shane wasn't going there.

He shook his head at his dad.

"If he's there, I need to see him," Shane said firmly. His dad nodded.

The reporters were on him like flies on shit, flashes going off in Shane's face as he squinted past them.

"Mr. Hollander! What made you feel the need to be here today?"

"How important is it to you to show your support for the survivors, coming all the way from Montreal?"

"Despite your decades-long rivalry, it's great for you to support your fellow players to this extent."

Shane ignored them, letting his dad act as a bodyguard, keeping his body squarely between them and Shane.

The reporters were forced to wait outside, airport security keeping them at bay, and it was weirdly quiet in the arrivals section of the Boston airport, like everyone had gone home to bed—even the staff.

It somehow didn't feel appropriate to be waiting for the survivors of a plane crash at the general arrivals gate with so few people around. Shane thought there should be more fanfare or something and started to wonder if maybe the information his mom had gotten was wrong.

But then there was the Raiders coach, walking through the gates with a small bruise on his face, smiling as if nothing had happened. Waving to what must have been his wife and kids, who were clearly waiting for him with little hand-drawn signs and everything.

All around him, reunions were happening, and Shane's heart was in his throat as he stared intently at the gates.

And then there he was. Rozanov, looking a little tired and worse for wear, but walking upright and *not dead*. His golden curly hair was tousled and frizzy, the side of his face was scattered with tiny scratches, and there were heavy bags under his eyes, but otherwise, he

seemed fine. No limp, no casts, just a heaviness to his steps that spoke of exhaustion. Rozanov's eyes darted around until they found Shane and locked there, widening in shock.

Shane was striding forward, ignoring his dad's warnings about reporters and cameras, and then he was in Rozanov's arms, breathing him in like he was oxygen and Shane was suffocating.

"Ilya," he said, like a prayer, "Ilya." Over and over.

"Shane," Ilya's arms wrapped around him, and something snapped. The part of Shane that held his tightly coiled emotions together, bursting apart and scattering in every direction. It didn't matter if there were reporters and cameras; he couldn't help it. Right there in front of everyone, he started sobbing like a baby. Choking, heaving sobs that shuddered through his body, and stuffed up his nose.

"Oh, Shane," Ilya breathed above him, solid and warm and alive. He held the back of Shane's head with one hand and banded his other around Shane's shoulders, rocking them slightly.

"You are here," Ilya said eventually, his voice hoarse like maybe he was just as emotional as Shane felt. "In Boston."

"No one told me anything. Our names aren't connected on paper, so no one told me anything. And they said there were casualties, and you didn't call." His voice cracked. He was aware he wasn't making much sense.

"Ah, Shane, I am sorry," Ilya said, sounding genuinely sorry, "my phone was broken in crash. They had me on first flight to Boston. I was going to buy phone first thing and call."

Shane shook his head, face rubbing against the fabric of Ilya's jacket. "It's okay. I'm glad you're alive."

"Me too, *moy lyubimiy*. Me too."

Shane sniffed; his whole nose was blocked. Ilya pulled backwards just enough so he could look Shane in the eyes. Ilya scanned the room, then he planted a quick kiss on Shane's swollen lips and another one on Shane's ugly, stuffed-up nose.

"Look, I am alive, see? and we are in public, Shane, so I am thinking probably we should go?"

Shane found he didn't much care at the moment. "My dad's here," he gestured to where his dad was standing, looking a bit shell-shocked.

"Yes, great. Let's go."

"Did you not have anyone picking you up?" Shane asked.

Ilya looked at him strangely. "I have no family here. I was going to take cab." He waved a hand dismissively, but Shane felt his heart crack a bit at the idea that Ilya didn't expect anyone to greet him at the airport after he almost died.

He cleared his throat. “Right well, my dad can take us.”

“Hello, Mr. Hollander,” Ilya said when they walked up to Shane’s dad, with an awkward little wave.

Shane bit his lip.

“Hello, Mr. Rozanov.”

“Ilya,” Ilya said quietly.

“Ilya, then.” His dad nodded firmly, and Shane felt incredibly awkward, the back of his neck hot as he watched the two of them interact. But behind it was something else, something light. And Ilya, for his part, seemed surprisingly at ease.

“Do you boys want to meet me in the car park? Avoid the reporters that way?”

“*Da*, good.” Ilya nodded. “Come, Shane.”

He herded Shane forward with a hand brushing lightly at Shane’s back, not low enough to be suspicious, but just low enough that Shane shivered. He wanted to lean into the touch. He wanted the hand to curve downward, to press into his lower back where he would shiver and press into it. But they were in public, and though Shane didn’t particularly care in this moment, he knew he probably would later, and he was grateful that Rozanov was cautious of that.

He let himself be guided obediently, his body coming down from the adrenaline he felt when Rozanov had first walked out of the gate.

They sat in the back seat of the rental car together, and Shane looked out the window and tried to ignore the feeling of dread that still pooled in the pit of his stomach.

Ilya was here. And Alive. And clearly still cared for Shane. So he didn’t really have a reason to feel upset. He wanted to put his energy into Ilya; Shane wasn’t the one who had just been in a plane crash, for God's sake.

“Shane,” Ilya said, and Shane thought he had never heard Rozanov use his first name so often. Then a large, warm hand wrapped around the side of Shane’s head and pulled it down to rest on Ilya’s chest.

Ilya clucked impatiently as Shane awkwardly went with the movement, and started rearranging him, muttering something exasperated in Russian and then “be careful of your shoulder. I don’t want to make worse.”

“It’s fine, Rozanov,” Shane grumbled, “the sling comes off soon anyways”

“Mmm,” Ilya hummed like he wasn’t going to listen to anything Shane had to say about it, “then we do not want to jeopardize.”

“Jeopardize?” Shane’s lips quirked into a smirk.

“Yes, I am learning many new words these days,” Ilya said. Then, with a little bit of fake fanfare, “You know? Like, ahhh, our lives are in jeopardy!”

They both froze. Shane could feel it in the corded muscles of Ilya’s side. He tried to push back up, feeling hurt at how easily Ilya joked about something that had almost driven Shane crazy. But the pressure of Ilya’s hand on the side of his head didn’t let up, keeping his cheek pressed firmly to Ilya’s chest.

“No, Shane, I am sorry. I should not have said that. Shh, sweetheart, I am sorry.”

Tears prickled again, but Shane let himself be manhandled in place, and tried to focus on the way Ilya’s thumb swiped soothingly over the back of his neck, just above his pulse point, and not on his dad’s eyes, which kept flicking to them in the backseat through the rear view mirror.

He couldn’t believe he almost lost this. Almost ended up grieving in private, having to continue with his life like nothing was wrong. Maybe he would have had to make a statement. Something about how he and Rozanov were rivals on the ice, but Shane respected him. That he was an admiral opponent whom Shane loved playing against, and Shane was devastated by the loss to the hockey community.

“Shane?” Ilya’s voice broke through his thoughts. “Shane, breathe.”

Shane tried to control the breathing that had spiralled out of control without his notice, and reached up to tug on his hair. Ilya’s hands tangled with his and tried to loosen them. Shane just gripped tighter. Ilya sighed and stopped trying to pry Shane’s fingers loose and instead just rested his hand over Shane’s.

“I’m fine,” Shane said, sounding whiny, “I shouldn’t even be acting like this. You’re the one who went through a traumatic event.”

“Ah, but it looks like I am not traumatized one. I am here, Shane. I am alive and unharmed, yes? Your dad is here. We are safe here.”

“I’m— I had to tell them about us.” Shane waved his hand uselessly towards his dad. He hadn’t gotten Ilya’s consent for any of it. “I’m sorry.”

“*Da*, Hollander,” Ilya said gently, his fingers bumping over Shane's as he rubbed over Shane’s fisted hands. He pressed his lips to one of Shane's knuckles. “I was never worried about this. Of course, you had to tell. You have good parents. I was pretty sure they would accept me no problems. Well, very few problems. Maybe only that I can clean the rink with their son.”

Shane couldn’t help the little scoff he made.

“No problems,” Shane’s dad piped up from the front, sounding warm and pleased.

Shane let go of his hair and looked at Ilya, who was beaming at his dad through the rearview.

Shane blew out a breath. “Okay," he said.

“Better, *moy lyubimiy*?”

“Yes, better.”

Chapter End Notes

Little preview for the next chapter I'm editing because that's kindof fun right????

Ilya’s whole body locked up, arms stiffening around Shane.

“What?” He tried to push Shane back, and Shane gripped him tighter, not wanting space between them. He whimpered when Ilya kept it up, detangling their arms and pushing Shane away with more force.

Ilya held him at arm's length, gripping Shane's biceps. Ilya's pants were still, ridiculously, pooled around his ankles, softening cock still wet with Shane’s spit. Shane refused to look up.

(spoiler: it's porn. Just a lot of very emotional angsty porn :D)

Chapter 5: Confessions

Chapter Notes

yay for smut :) and yay for confessions :) and yay for two dummies in love :)

Also thank you to those who are commenting and leaving kudos - it is incredibly motivating <3

Shane's dad dropped them off at Ilya's apartment and left for the hotel, waving away Shane's promises that he was fine and his dad could catch a flight home if he wanted. Saying something about how Yuna would never forgive him if he left Shane alone right now.

But it was obvious Ilya wanted some privacy, so Shane told his dad he would text him and sent him off to the hotel. Now, Shane stood awkwardly in the middle of Ilya's apartment, looking at it with fresh eyes, thinking about how clean and empty it felt. Even the artwork on the walls was impersonal. There was nothing inherently Ilya Rozanov here.

Ilya sauntered in after locking the door behind Shane's dad, and they stared at each other from across the room. It felt like Ilya was so far away, even though he was right there.

"Fuck," Shane breathed. He wanted closeness. He didn't want to think anymore.

"Hollander, what—?"

He cut off Ilya's shocked voice with his mouth as he smashed it against Ilya's. The kiss was rough and toothy, and Ilya was shocked enough to let Shane take control, which twisted Shane up inside as he realized how much he didn't prefer it that way.

He dropped to his knees, the movement jarring, yanked Ilya's pants down, and sucked his half-hard cock into his mouth in one go, moaning lewdly around the length, lacking the filters he usually had.

"Shane, wait," Ilya breathed, hands gripping his hair and trying to pull him off.

But Shane needed this, and Ilya's cock was hardening rapidly in his mouth, so he pushed his head down farther, choking when Ilya hit the back of his throat. When the pressure in his hair didn't let up, he pulled off so only the head of Ilya's cock was in his mouth and sucked hard, like he could pull an orgasm from Ilya with the pressure alone.

"Oh fuck," Ilya grunted, like Shane had punched the breath out of him, and the fingers loosened. Shane moaned again in response. His fingers kneaded Ilya's muscular thighs rhythmically as he tried to focus on nothing but the taste of Ilya. Slightly salty and musky

from just having gotten off an airplane, but Shane knew eventually that would melt away, and what would be left would be inherently Ilya.

Ilya seemed to understand that Shane wouldn't give up on this, and his head thumped back into the wall. It wasn't long before Shane could feel the shaking of Ilya's thighs under his hands as he tried not to thrust into Shane's mouth, which meant he was about to come.

Shane doubled his efforts, finding a rhythm that allowed all his thoughts to melt into the background. Fisting the base of Ilya's cock with his hand, drawing in a breath on the upstroke, then pushing all the way down until his lips met his own hand.

Ilya was tugging on his head again, tapping him to let Shane know he was about to come. Signalling for Shane to get off, knowing Shane didn't usually like to swallow. But Shane wanted it right now.

"Shane." Ilya let out a stream of Russian as he came, and Shane swallowed everything. He sat back on his haunches. He was faintly disappointed it was over so quickly as his head cleared and the anxiety and unsureness of before trickled back in.

He looked up, and Ilya, who still had his head thrown back in pleasure, was breathing heavily through his nose. To his profound humiliation, Shane felt his bottom lip wobble.

"Fuck, Shane, that was…" Ilya looked down at Shane, eyes lidded and lustful before they transformed into worry. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," Shane sniffed and tried to decide if it would be more obvious he was crying if he wiped his eyes or just let the tear fall. He let a tear streak down his cheek, aware of how ridiculous it was that he didn't want to wipe it away out of fear it would make his crying more obvious. It was already obvious. He couldn't believe he was crying after a blowjob. It was mortifying.

"Come here, sweetheart." Ilya hauled Shane up and pulled him into a tight hug, tucking Shane's head into the warm space between his shoulder and jaw so he could have some semblance of privacy while he cried.

"You called me that before," Shane said, almost accusingly, the sound muffled in Ilya's neck.

"What? Sweetheart?" Ilya said, "I have called you many things today, *moy lyubimiy*."

"What does that mean?"

Ilya laughed indulgently, "Something like my darling."

Shane squeezed Ilya tighter until Ilya grunted and laughed again. Then, because Shane was feeling desperate, a little bit better, and strangely brave, he murmured something against Ilya's neck.

Ilya's whole body locked up, arms stiffening around Shane.

“What?” He tried to push Shane back, and Shane gripped him tighter, not wanting space between them. He whimpered when Ilya kept it up, detangling their arms and pushing Shane away with more force.

Ilya held him at arm's length, gripping Shane’s biceps. His pants were still, ridiculously, pooled around his ankles, softening cock still wet with Shane’s spit. Shane refused to look up.

“What did you just say?” Ilya’s fingers under his chin forced him to make eye contact. When Shane finally looked, he couldn’t tell what expression was on Ilya’s face. Maybe shock? A bit of confusion, possibly fear. His eyes searched Shane’s, rapidly flicking between Shane’s eyes.

“*Ya tebya lyublyu*,” Shane murmured, feeling like he probably wasn’t saying it right. His cheeks were flaming, heat spreading all the way to the tips of his ears..

“What the fuck?” Ilya said under his breath, eyes wide, “Since when do you speak Russian?”

Shane was aware that his own eyes were puffy and tearstained. He had never been a pretty crier. He lifted his lips in what he hoped looked like a smile, but was probably more like a grimace.

“Since you sent me that message on Instagram.”

“You got that? You learned Russian for that?” Ilya demanded, sounding so so confused. And Shane did smile then.

“Google Translate is a thing.”

“Ah fuck. Google Translate.”

Shane had nothing more to say and waited while Ilya seemed to pull himself together.

“You read it then? Whole thing?” Ilya sounded shaky all of a sudden. Uncertain.

Shane nodded.

“Was not meant to be read,” Ilya said.

Shane nodded again. He understood. The words were only meant to exist in a world where Ilya didn’t.

“Your pronunciation is good,” Ilya sounded faintly accusatory.

Shane’s fingers twitched. His face felt hot. “I, um,” he cleared his throat, “I looked up a few videos. On how to pronounce it.”

Then he was being kissed. But the way he preferred it. Ilya’s hands, big and soft and dominating, wrapped around his jaw and throat. His lips were slow and languid against Shane, like he was trying to memorize the feel of him. Shane even preferred the sounds of it

this way. The shlick of skin each time their lips came apart. The softness when Ilya pressed them back together.

Ilya drew his tongue along Shane's lips, and Shane chased it with his own, revelling in the feel of the wet muscles sliding against each other. Ilya kissed him with a possessiveness that was heady.

Shane was dizzy with it when Ilya finally pulled away, looking at him with an expression Shane didn't have words for.

"Bed, Hollander, now."

When Shane didn't move right away, he was manhandled down the hall, stumbling as Ilya kicked off his own pants and fumbled with Shane's shirt.

Ilya pushed him into the bed with enough force that Shane's head bounced against the soft mattress.

Ilya murmured the Russian phrase back at Shane in between kisses, as he arched over Shane and pushed a spit-wet finger inside of him. It sounded so familiar, and Shane realized he had heard it before. Over a phone call in a stairwell.

"holy shit," he said. then,

"Oh god, I love you too." on the back of a gasp, when Ilya found the spot inside him that made him feel like he was melting. Heat pooled in his gut.

Ilya kissed down his body, sucking gently in the sensitive area under his armpit, below his belly button, in the crease of his thigh. His hips twitched as Ilya swirled a finger around his prostate. Shane could feel the condensation of hot breath dampening his skin, right beside his twitching cock.

"Please," Shane gasped.

Ilya hummed a pleased sound and pushed a second finger inside, while simultaneously enveloping Shane's desperately hard length in the wet heat of his mouth.

Shane came almost immediately, breath forced out of him in embarrassing little "uh, uh, uhs" in time with the pulsing of his orgasm. So much stronger with Ilya's fingers inside him, feeling the way his body couldn't help it as he milked Ilya's fingers as he came.

Shane breathed heavily in the wake of it, and Ilya kissed languidly back up his body. Shane closed his eyes as Ilya made his way up, peppering kisses over the bridge of his nose.

Only then did Shane open his eyes. The smile Ilya gave him was disarming in its sweetness, and Shane's chest twisted.

"Come, shower with me," Ilya said, tugging at Shane's arms.

Shane grumbled at being asked to move in this state, but he wanted what Ilya was offering him. And so he went.

Chapter 6: Shower

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year, folks!
I hope you enjoy Shane and Ilya in the shower

The steam from the shower fogged the glass and made Shane feel like they were hidden away. They had been together in the shower before; Ilya on his knees, taking Shane apart with his mouth. But it felt different and strangely intimate this way, both of them soft and not interested in coming again just yet. Only interested in being near each other, feeling skin on skin.

Ilya soaped him gently from behind, running his hands over the plane of Shane's stomach. He soaped Shane's armpits, firming up the touch when Shane squirmed at the sensation. He teased his fingers over Shane's sparse pubic hair and brought his hands around to the top of Shane's ass.

Shane tipped his head back as Ilya rubbed the backs of his hands lightly up and down Shane's sides, the pretence of cleaning gone. Everything now was just sensory for the sake of it. Ilya kissed his neck.

Then, in the echoey chamber of the steamy shower, Ilya sniffled. Shane turned in his arms, and Ilya looked away immediately. It was obvious he was crying, despite the water from the shower that was hiding his tears.

"Sorry," he said, his accent thick.

Shane cupped a hand around his cheek.

"Sorry," Ilya said again, voice breaking.

"Hey," Shane said, "I had my breakdown earlier, and you were the one who was actually in a plane crash. So it's your turn now anyway."

Ilya laughed at that, and Shane swiped at his cheeks, even though Ilya's whole face was covered in water.

"I like it better when you are one freaking out," Ilya said, his voice gravelly. "I can… think less when I am looking after you."

"Happy to have helped," Shane said, blushing furiously. He thought maybe he preferred it that way, too.

“Shane, I—” Ilya’s voice cracked, “would you have grieved me if I died?”

Shane felt someone had dumped a bucket of ice water on his head. “What? What do you mean?”

“If plane crash had killed me. You would grieve? Is this right word? You would be sad and think of me?”

Shane could only imagine the stupid expression he was looking at Ilya with. He was at a loss for words and shook his head helplessly. “I don’t think I ate once the entire three days you were gone. I’m… I almost lost my mind trying to find news about you. I probably google searched your name a hundred times. I was a mess. I was so mean to Jackie’s Lasagna.”

Ilya just looked at him.

“You were mean to… Jackie's Lasagna? This is english saying?” he said, and Shane realized he wasn’t making much sense, and he ran a hand through his hair.

“I would have grieved you,” he said finally, quietly. He felt so small all of a sudden, “of course I would have.”

“No, I-I thought you would have. It brought me comfort to think this.”

“Comfort?” Shane said in disbelief.

“Yes,” Ilya said, “I think no one will miss me back home. Maybe Sveta, but… It made me glad to think someone would be sad if I had died. That you would be missing me.”

The words were like a chisel to Shane’s already battered heart. He didn’t want to cry, because Ilya was already crying, and it felt like some unspoken rule that only one of them could have a breakdown at the same time. So instead, he took the soap from Ilya’s hand.

“My turn,” he said softly.

He started at Ilya’s neck, trying to put everything he didn’t have words for into the soft touch. Massaging softly in the sensitive spot behind Ilya’s ears, enjoying the way his reddened eyes fluttered shut at the feeling. Then, methodically, he worked his way down. Shane was thorough, making sure to soap his armpits—using the same technique that Ilya used on him — the backs of Ilya’s knees. He lifted up each foot and soaped the bottom of his soles.

When he stood again, Ilya was looking at him.

“I still want to come to cottage with you,” he said.

“Really?”

“*Da*. If you still want?”

Shane smiled. “I still want.”

They kissed in the shower until Shane's fingers were wrinkly, and he had to get out, hating the feeling.

Afterwards, Ilya walked around half naked in shorts with no boxers, and Shane put on a pair of Ilya's track pants and pulled on one of Ilya's shirts and enjoyed the way Ilya's eyes dragged over his clothed body.

He sat on a barstool and watched the man crash around in his kitchen, swearing occasionally in Russian.

He looked at Shane apologetically, "I can make you only grilled cheese."

"I'm sorry," Shane said, "you're making a grilled cheese right now? For me?"

"You said you have not eaten." Ilya pulled four pieces of bread out of a bag and started buttering them.

"Yeah, but—"

"Oh, so you have eaten?"

"Well, no."

"So you will eat then," Ilya stared at him levelly. Shane looked away first, feeling like he had lost some invisible competition. Ilya went back to happily buttering his bread.

Soon, the smell of toasted bread and cheese wafted through the air. Shane's stomach grumbled. He hadn't felt hungry until the moment Ilya placed the perfectly cooked grilled cheese and a cold ginger ale in front of him.

"So what's next?" Shane asked around a mouthful of bread, wondering if Ilya had ketchup in his fridge.

"I come to cottage," Ilya said, like it should be obvious.

"You don't have any games or… anything else?"

"No, crashing plane apparently means you do not have to play hockey anymore," Ilya rolled his eyes.

"Wait, you're out of the playoffs?"

"Yes."

"Does that make you upset?"

"No. Team is very traumatized. Would not play well anyway. Plus, it means I can come to cottage." Ilya paused to take a bite of his own grilled cheese, "Maybe I will have to do statement as captain. I do not know."

He seemed incredibly unbothered for someone who was just crying in the shower, asking Shane if he would grieve him. But Shane let it go. He was beginning to see just how soft Rozanov was on the inside of his hard exterior.

It turned out Ilya had a few interviews and press conferences they wanted him to do before he was a free agent for the summer. So Shane would fly back to Ottawa with his dad, and a few weeks after that, Ilya would follow.

Shane felt strange as he thought of the future. Something he had almost lost with Ilya. He felt like he needed to be grateful for the here and now. Ilya was alive. That's all he could have hoped for. Hoping for more felt greedy.

Chapter 7: Svetlana

Chapter Notes

You guys Ilya pov!!!!!!!

if Ilya's broken English lowkey disappears its because he's speaking Russian with Svetlana.

Not even hours after Shane had been picked up by his dad, Ilya had been booking his flights to the cottage when there was a knock at the door.

His head was swimming with thoughts of the cottage. He could picture it from that one video where he had watched Shane do yoga on TV, feeling furious and lustful and desolate all at once while he watched Shane Hollander's lithe body push itself into positions Ilya had seen him do naked. It would be all glass and wood and sparkling lake surrounded by papery-looking birch trees.

He didn't think much as he opened the door until he was being shoved roughly backwards and swatted at.

He stumbled backwards, raising his hands against the onslaught.

"Ilya fucking Rozanov, what is wrong with you?" Each angry Russian word was punctuated by a hit.

"God damnit," Ilya muttered back in Russian, as Svetlana rushed him, not letting up the attack. Ilya grappled with her a bit, trying to capture her hands with his own. It didn't hurt, but it was incredibly annoying. "Fuck*,* would you stop?"

He finally caught her wrists and held them, both of them breathing heavily. She snatched them away, and he let her.

"I thought you were dead," she accused.

Ilya pursed his lips. "I'm not dead."

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, Ilya, I see that, thanks."

She walked further into his house, picked up the remote control that was on the coffee table and turned it idly in her hands. Ilya watched her, then let out an explosive breath.

"I am sorry, Sveta. I've had a lot to deal with. I still don't have a phone. I only got home a few hours ago." *And I was busy spilling my deepest feelings to Shane Hollander in the*

shower.

She seemed to deflate, walking over to hug him. After a moment's hesitation, he hugged her back. It was nice.

“I was worried about you,” she said.

“I know.”

She pulled back and scrutinized him,

“Do you really?” she asked dubiously. “Are you aware that you have no emergency contacts? I tried phoning everywhere to get information on your whereabouts, and no one would tell me anything. What if you had been hurt? If you needed help in the hospital? Do you know how stupid it is to have no emergency contacts?”

Oops. Ilya had taken his brother off his emergency contacts a while back. They had asked who he wanted to replace him with, and Ilya said he needed to think about it. Then he hadn’t thought about it again and ignored all the follow-up calls.

“This is my second time having a conversation like this,” Ilya said, and Svetlana’s eyebrows rose.

“Oh, really? I thought you said you only got back a few hours ago.”

“With…Jane,” he clarified.

“Then you understand why I’m so upset? I’m sure Jane was just as freaked out as I am.”

Ilya tried to keep his face neutral. Shane had been a wreck. He had never seen stoic Shane wear his emotions so visibly before. And while Ilya hated that Shane was in pain, he couldn’t lie that his heart had given a little flip when Shane had rushed up to him in the airport and hugged him in front of Ilya’s teammates, then promptly burst into tears.

Ilya had already decided three days ago, when all he could feel was a swooping, falling feeling with hoarse screams and a frightening metal groaning in his ears, that he didn’t care about secrecy anymore. Life was too short to go back to Russia, too short not to spend his time with Shane. Whatever scraps Shane would offer, Ilya was going to take.

“Worse.”

“You’re a dick.”

“Yes, I know,” Ilya said.

“Update your emergency contacts, Ilya.”

They stared at eachother and Ilya sighed. “I will. I’m sorry I scared you.”

She softened immediately, “It’s not your fault. I’m sorry for getting angry. I was just so worried. The whole world thought you were dead for like three whole days.” A pause and then, “How is Jane doing?”

“Ah, better, I think.”

“So not great?” Svetlana was too observant sometimes.

“No, not great.” Then, because Ilya suddenly felt like he needed to say it out loud, “I’m not going back to Russia.” *Ever*.

“Oh,” Svetlana said, understanding immediately. “Maybe… that’s for the best.”

“I think so.”

“What will you do?”

“This summer I will stay with Jane,” Ilya said, wanting to tell someone that too.

Svetlana smiled knowingly. “I’m sure he’s very happy about that.”

Ilya shrugged; he thought maybe he was happier even than Shane about it. But when Ilya had brought it up in the shower, Shane didn’t hide his excited smile, and his eyes were sparkling with something Ilya didn’t think he had seen in Shane before. It made him want to crush Shane against the shower glass and fuck him until he couldn’t string proper sentences together anymore.

“And after?” Svetlana prompted.

“Maybe an American citizenship? Canadian residency? I’m not sure yet,” Ilya sighed, “I just know I’m not going back there.”

“I’m proud of you.”

The words twisted something inside of Ilya, and he coughed to hide whatever reaction was on his face. But he felt so fiercely fond of Svetlana in that moment that he couldn’t help pulling her into another hug.

"Hey, Ilya? Will you ever introduce me to him?"

That was a question Ilya had been expecting for a long time, knowing how nosy Svetlana should be.

"I hope so. I'd like that. someday," he said. He wondered if that was something he could look forward to. Someday.

The weeks dragged, and all Ilya could think about was Shane’s cottage. But there was no break for Ilya. Not like some of the other players, who put out statements about laying low to recover and being with their families. They had lost one player and the pilot. Ilya was

expected to say something about both, memorizing scripts his agent and the league sent him, so he could parrot them in perfect English to a grieving fan base.

They wanted Ilya to pull together the resulting media carnage because he had no family and no partner—that anyone knew of. So, of course, he must only have free time.

Only one photo had been leaked of his and Shane's embrace at the airport. It was fuzzy and dark, and through a window of the airport that reflected the flash of other cameras.

His teammates hadn't said anything. Ilya figured they either didn't see or, more likely, were too busy reuniting with their loved ones to leak anything to gossip magazines. He was surprised Shane wasn't more worried about it, but he hadn't brought it up at all since they had reunited at the airport, and Ilya wasn't about to bring it up himself.

Ilya had already decided he wasn't going back to Russia. And if he wasn't going to Russia, he didn't particularly give a fuck what anyone else thought about him.

After the crash when there was nothing but sitting and waiting, in between daydreaming about how to tell Shane that Ilya loved him (properly and in person without the barriers of a message on a social media app Shane never visited and in another language that Shane didn't speak) Ilya had turned over thoughts of how to get American Citizenship, what it would be like if he was American, what it would be like if he came out.

There was a small amount of buzz over the photo. People knew Shane was at the airport, so it was pretty obvious it was Shane in the photo. But no one had guessed the obvious. All the theories pointed to Hollander and Rozanov striking up a friendship. Hollanders' respect for him on the ice and Ilya's almost death created a newfound friendship. The most popular theories speculated about their rivalry being a long-time farce for the media. People were angry and didn't like it, but the fact that they had almost died seemed to temper people's anger, and there was nothing that suggested they liked sucking each other's dicks.

The NHL tentatively resumed their games, and Ilya was sent emails from the league with lists of resources to therapists, psychologists, and other avenues they would fund for him to deal with the fallout of the crash. Ilya didn't need them. He was surprisingly fine. The biggest stressor of his life was his feelings for Shane, and those had started to seem manageable ever since Shane had confessed his love for Ilya in God damn fucking Russian.

Ilya nearly had a heart attack when Shane mumbled those words into his neck. Words Ilya didn't think he'd hear ever again. Anyone who might have once said them to him was dead. Maybe Svetlana, if he asked her to. But he would never do that, and even if he did, it would not be the same.

If Shane could have made Ilya love him anymore, it would have been that moment; with his fucking pants around his ankles, post orgasm, learning that Shane had looked up pronunciation videos and *practiced*. Ilya could have cried.

They texted near constantly. Shane seemed to be afraid that Ilya would disappear if he didn't make contact every few hours, and Ilya would be annoyed about it if he didn't feel the same

neediness. Instead of finding it irritating, he thought it was endearing. He enjoyed the feeling of being important to Shane.

Ilya's first inkling that maybe he hadn't come out of the whole thing unscathed was in the airport terminal on his way to Ottawa. He had his cap slung low across his eyes, hoodie pulled over his head, trying to go unnoticed, when he felt a ringing in his ears and a strange sense that he was going to die.

He had to run to the bathroom, breathing through the unreasonable panic in one of the stalls. He felt a stab of anger that his brain was betraying him like this. He thought he wouldn't have any issues with planes when he made the trip after the crash to Boston with no problems.

He almost missed his plane because of it, rushing to the departure gate right as they made the last call. Then he spent the whole plane ride alert, heart thundering, gripping his armrest at every little turbulence. He was exhausted when he walked up to Shane's stupidly practical car.

"Hi," Shane said shyly.

"Hi."

"Did anyone recognize you?"

"I do not think, no."

"Okay," Shane said, "the drive is around two hours. We can stop somewhere to eat on the way if you're hungry? Or there's plenty of food at the cabin, my mom stocked us up."

"Too many questions, Hollander. It's whatever you want," he said tiredly.

It was then that Shane shifted in his seat to squint suspiciously at Ilya. "Are you okay? You look terrible."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Tell me what you really think."

"No, I mean you always look good," Shane fumbled with his words, and Ilya smirked a little, "You just look rough."

"Plane rides are," Ilya let his head thump back onto the headrest and rolled it to the side to look at Shane, "not so good right now."

"Oh shit," Shane's eyes widened, "of course. I'm so sorry, is there… is there anything I can do to help?"

"You could stop talking about it and take me to the cottage," Ilya suggested somewhat irritably.

"Right, sorry." Shane shifted into gear.

As they drove in silence, Ilya hoped he hadn’t hurt Shane’s feelings. As a peace offering, he pulled one of Shane's hands into his own and clasped their fingers. Shane smiled at him, and the silence felt more comfortable after that.

Chapter 8: Keyed up

Chapter Notes

> More Ilya because I got stuck in his head. But I think we'll be back with Shane after that. ngl I am winging the POV based on vibes alone, so who knows what's next. Not me ¯_(ツ)_/¯
>
> Ilya: god why is Shane exactly like my favourite porn
> Ilya's search history: horny half Asian hockey player with freckles gets topped
>
> There's something so fun about writing Ilya's cuteness aggression xD anyways, enjoy

The cottage was everything Ilya expected it to be. Modern and woodsy at the same time. All sun drenched windows and sparkling lake and smelling of fresh cedar. Shane carried his bag into the house.

"I can carry my own bag, Hollander," Ilya protested.

Shane ignored him, using his other hand to unlock the door. Ilya followed Shane inside.

"Wow, your obsession with real estate really paid off," he said, looking around in awe.

It was a beautiful building. Even Ilya could admit that much.

"I didn't buy it. I had it made."

"I know," Ilya turned to look at Shane, who was standing awkwardly, adorably, in the middle of the kitchen.

Shane started explaining the layout of the cabin, the property, the water system, looking flustered and like he didn't know what to do with himself. Ilya found it incredibly charming, and he said nothing, letting Shane squirm in his own awkwardness. He just watched as the guy petered out of things to say and then stood there with his thumbs in his pockets.

Stupid, Ilya thought, *Idiot*. But his heart was a bright thing in his chest, and he closed the distance between them, watching the way Shane's lips lifted in a little stupid smile.

"I missed you," Ilya said and leaned in to kiss him, breathing in a long, slow breath through his nose, like he could inhale Shane. He gripped the back of Shane's neck, massaging it possessively with his fingers and enjoyed how Shane shivered and then went lax.

It was nice like this, sunlight streaming in through the windows, bathing them in light. Ilya pulled back, rubbed his thumb over Shane's freckles.

“Your freckles are so beautiful,” he said.

Shane’s nose wrinkled up, “I know, you’ve told me before.”

“And I think I will keep telling you. Until you can see them like I see them.”

Shane laughed, “Wow, I didn’t realize you were such a romantic.”

“No? Not from Russian love confession?”

If Russians could blush, Ilya would be doing that every time he thought about Shane looking up words Ilya had never expected him to read. It was, without a doubt, one of the most romantic things he’d ever done. Shane made him crazy.

“Who would have thought a plane crash is all it takes for you to become a poet?”

Ilya smiled; two could play this game. “Who would have thought a plane crash is all it takes for you to learn how to tell me you love me in Russian,” he teased.

Shane’s cheeks flushed pink.

“Fuck off,” he said as he looked at Ilya with eyes that said anything but.

Ilya stroked Shane’s freckles again, liking the way they looked all pink like this, remembering how they looked when Shane had been taken down by Marleau, and they were all bruised. God, Ilya was so far gone it wasn't even funny anymore.

“You really like my freckles, hey?”

“Yes. They are my hobby. No, that’s wrong word. My…” Ilya reached for the word he was looking for: “My obsession.”

Shane’s eyebrows rose, but he was smiling. “You’re obsession, huh?”

Ilya couldn’t be teased about this. He was not ashamed. He peppered kisses over Shane’s cheeks. Then, because Shane *loved him* and Ilya felt little bit giddy with the knowledge of it, he grabbed Shane’s head, placed his tongue flat on Shane’s face and licked a stripe across the bridge of Shane’s nose, where most of his freckles were centred.

“Ew!” Shane spluttered, pushing him away. “What the fuck, Rozanov?”

Ilya let himself be pushed, laughing unapologetically. Shane glared like an angry kitten. Ilya laughed harder.

“No, Shane! You cannot be angry, come back,” Ilya said, reaching for him. Shane backed away, and they wrestled and fought their way to the couch, where Shane fell on top of Ilya, laughing.

When he leaned down to kiss Ilya, he was still laughing. He didn’t stay that way for long as Ilya gripped the back of Shane’s neck, deepening the kiss, plunging his tongue into Shane’s

hot mouth and turning his giggles rapidly into breathy-almost-moans.

Ilya reached down between them and massaged Shane's already hard dick through his shorts.

"Wait, wait," Shane breathed, and Ilya groaned internally. He had been waiting weeks for this, and now Shane was pumping the brakes? "I might not last long, it's… been a while."

"Yes," Ilya was nodding eagerly, "me too."

"No," Shane flushed, "I mean it's been a while."

"Yes, Hollander. Me too. This is easy problem to solve," Ilya said impatiently. He rubbed over the length of him through the fabric. He could feel a wet spot already starting to form through the thin fabric. Shane shuddered.

God, he would never get over how wet Shane got. Sometimes it was like Shane had stepped right out of a porno that was keyed to exactly Ilya's search history.

"Ilya," Shane said, strained. "I mean like at all."

Oh. Did he mean like….

"Hollander, you mean you have not masturbated for three weeks?" Ilya felt incredulous.

He hadn't been with anyone since they had last seen eachother. Of course, he hadn't. He had no interest in anyone else anymore. He hadn't been with anyone else for a long time before that, even. Shane was it for him now. But Ilya had jerked off. Of course, he had. He wasn't a monk. He would never make it three weeks.

"Ew, Ilya," Shane complained, "don't call it that."

Ilya smiled. Shane was such a prude sometimes. That's what it was called. Ilya ignored him. "I am right?"

Shane ground his teeth together. Then rolled his eyes in a show of trying to take back control of the conversation. "I just said—"

It was enough of a confession for Ilya.

"You must be dying, Hollander," Ilya smiled devilishly, "no wonder you are already so wet for me."

He rubbed along the wet spot on Shane's shorts to punctuate his point, and Shane's hips rolled forward automatically. Shane froze, seemed to realize he had little control over his body right now, and flushed an even darker pink. If that didn't shoot heat straight to Ilya's dick.

"Fuck, you are so keyed up," Ilya breathed to himself.

He kissed Shane until he was a puddle on his chest, and when Shane was pliant, he flipped them. He wanted to be on top. He knew Shane preferred it that way, too. Ilya rolled his hips forward, making his own erection obvious, and Shane *moaned*.

It was early for Shane to be this uninhibited. He usually needed a little bit of finesse from Ilya before he was letting loose moans like that. Shane's arousal in the beginning was usually in his eyes, the way he couldn't look away from Ilya's lips, in a heavier exhale, a whimper.

Ilya shoved a hand into Shane's pants. The angle was a little bit awkward for his wrist, but it was worth it for the sound it pulled from Shane at the contact.

"Poor, desperate Shane." He ran a finger lightly along the hard, velvety skin. Shane folded towards the contact, breathing wetly against Ilya's shoulder. "I think maybe you can come from only this."

Ilya dragged his finger back down.

"No, Ilya," Shane said, his begging voice already showing itself. "It's not enough, it won't be enou—fuck"

Ilya's own dick was so hard it was painful. He steeled himself.

"Hmm, I think not long now, and you will come in your pants like teenager," Ilya kept up the light teasing touches as Shane tensed and relaxed in turns under him.

Ilya's instincts were right, and soon Shane was coming hard underneath him. That more than anything had him feeling sated and pleased, even with his dick still hard against Shane's thigh. Shane's body convulsed, curling into Ilya's, and Shane bit down on his shoulder, garbling the sounds he was making.

Ilya ripped down his own shorts, pulled out his cock and fisted it furiously until he was coming only seconds after Shane over Shane's t-shirt. They had barely even taken off their clothes.

"Fuck," Shane breathed, "I didn't think—"

"You would come so fast?" Ilya asked smugly.

"Shut up."

Ilya flopped over beside Shane to avoid getting his own come all over himself and listened as they both breathed heavily.

"You really haven't been with anyone since?" Shane asked tentatively.

"No one," Ilya said seriously.

"Good."

They spent the rest of the day lounging. Shane read on the dock, insisting that it was relaxing and gave Ilya some book on hockey to read. Ilya mostly ignored his book in favour of watching Shane read, enjoying the playful way Shane scolded him when he realized what Ilya was doing.

He thought he could watch Shane all day and never get enough of the way his eyebrows creased as he concentrated on his book, or when he pulled his plump bottom lip between his teeth, reddening it desirably. Ilya wanted to suck it into his mouth.

Ilya liked the cottage. It felt like a little haven away from the real world, and he couldn't believe they had so much time.

Shane made Ilya dinner and looked pleased when Ilya ate almost three and a half of the ridiculous number of burgers he had made.

As the sun set, lighting up the dust particles that floated lazily in the air, they watched movies on the couch, cuddled up together, chest to chest. Ilya liked Shane's weight on top of him and didn't say anything when Shane fell asleep, drooling slightly on Ilya's shirt, petting Shane's head like a dog. He secretly preened that Shane could be like this. Feel safe enough to sleep on Ilya. It was something they hadn't done much of. It felt good.

He only half watched the movie as the sky darkened, drifting off into his own sleep when he felt Shane stir. A few twitches and a grumble, then a few moments later, a distressed little whimper. Ilya's attention zoned in on Shane.

"Shane?" he said quietly, "Are you okay?"

But Shane was asleep. His breathing ramped up, and he gasped himself awake, pushing up, eyes darting around wildly. He looked at Ilya and immediately his shoulders slumped.

"Sorry," he murmured, "did I wake you?"

"No," Ilya shook his head, "I was awake."

Shane lay back down, "Sorry. I didn't mean to fall asleep. I haven't really been sleeping much lately."

That was new information.

"No?" Ilya tried to ask the question casually. He knew what Shane could be like when he felt vulnerable. He would clam up, never say a thing about it again.

Shane sighed, "It's no big deal. I think things will go back to normal now that you're here."

Ilya liked to push Shane, but he wouldn't in this. He didn't want to scare Shane away. And while Shane liked being pushed during sex, Ilya knew Shane would not like to be pushed in this. They were on tentative ground. This whole thing was new to them, and Ilya was scared that he would burst it like a bubble.

"I am here," he said instead.

Shane was wrong. Things didn't go back to normal, and Ilya started to wonder how much sleep Shane had actually been losing in the weeks they were apart.

Ilya had always felt he knew more of Shane than the rest of the world, and in some respects, it was true; he knew Shane in bed in a way no one else did, he knew Shane's love, he knew Shane's most feared secret (the fact that he was gay and fucking his rival). But Ilya was beginning to wonder how much Shane dealt with completely alone. Things he would never give up to anyone.

They were sharing the master bedroom. An unspoken decision between them that had just felt natural, but they weren't really sharing it at all—every time Ilya woke, Shane would be absent, claiming he needed water, the bathroom, or had gotten up early for his morning run.

The next few days were filled with some of the best times of Ilya's life. Swimming off the end of his dock, dripping his soaking hair all over Shane as he read, eating the food Shane insisted on making him, learning new board games and watching movies, cuddled up late into the evening.

But sometimes, Ilya would catch Shane, eyes glazed, staring at nothing, head lolling and propped up on a hand, unhearing as Ilya walked up. Sometimes, Shane would find a doze in Ilya's arms as Ilya stroked Shane's hair, only to startle awake and refuse to look Ilya in the eyes for the rest of the evening.

It was concerning, and Ilya found himself watching Shane with sharp eyes, wondering how to fix it. He had forgotten how easily Shane could hide himself like this. One minute, his eyes glittering with raw emotion as he kissed his way down Ilya's body, and the next snapped into some strange, agitated, space where Ilya wasn't allowed.

Chapter 9: Fatigue

Chapter Notes

> wheeee I feel like a possessed person, I cannot get this story out of my head.
> Real life starts back up tomorrow, though, so we will see if I can keep it up.

Shane was enjoying his time with Ilya at the cottage. In fact, it was the best time he'd ever had with Ilya. Possibly the best time he's had in his life.

They spent their days as Shane imagined they would be if they lived together. Ilya would make breakfast, Shane would make dinner, they traded insults like they were flirting, then they would brush their teeth side by side in Shane's master bathroom in front of the double sinks, making soft eye contact in the mirrors. They kissed outside. Shane laid casual arms over Ilya's shoulder without having to worry about being caught.

It would be perfect. Except that Shane was *tired*.

Nightmares were something he had never dealt with before. He generally slept pretty soundly, even on game nights. And while he had fears—something more akin to waking nightmares—like being outed as gay, losing a game, or getting caught in a compromising situation with Ilya during one of their rendez-vous, they didn't tend to follow him into sleep.

He wasn't used to the vivid, gut-wrenching feeling of watching Ilya die over and over again. The few horrifying seconds after waking up where he was sure that it had actually happened. And then, the come down, whimpering on the end of every exhale as he tried not to cry and told himself over and over that it was only a dream. It didn't even have to be a plane crash anymore; Shane's brain supplied him with anything: a burning building, a hockey incident, dropping dead during the middle of sex—he didn't seem to be running out of ways to imagine Ilya dead.

His parents had noticed. Or, at least, they had noticed that Shane was essentially a walking zombie. His mom forced him back to the doctor, despite being already cleared, thinking maybe it was a side effect of his concussion. It would have made sense. His brain fog was worse, and he often found himself a million miles away, only to be snapped out of it in the middle of someone asking him a question.

Shane almost hoped they were right; if that was the case, he would heal, and it would go away. His doctors had said something about stress and fight-or-flight responses, and Shane had wished there were better instructions than 'just don't be stressed' because it wasn't like he could help it.

But he had one goal this summer, and that was not let it affect his time with Ilya. He didn't want to waste any of it by being a total loser, and he wasn't the one who had gone through something traumatizing anyway. If Ilya had a freak out, well, that was to be expected. Shane, rapidly deteriorating for no good reason, was just… weak. He could pull it together.

Unfortunately, he couldn't help the way his tired brain made him clumsy, and he was making salmon on the barbecue for dinner, while Ilya set the table—the whole scene so incredibly domestic—when his hand slipped on the tongs, and he burnt a finger.

"Fuck," he spat out, angry with himself for already letting the fatigue affect things.

"Shane?" Ilya came up behind him, "You are okay?"

"Yeah, fine," Shane said, hissing out a pained breath. It was more of a shock than anything else, but his finger still throbbed "Sorry, I just touched the grill accidentally. It doesn't even hurt that badly."

Ilya made a noise that Shane associated with mothers when their child scraped a knee and said, "Let me see."

Reluctantly, Shane held out his hand, part of him wanting to explain it away as nothing and the other part of him wanting whatever comfort Ilya was going to offer him. Ilya took his hand gently, turning it this way and that, looking at the only slightly reddened skin. The sting of it was worse than it looked.

Ilya tsked and then reached over to turn off the bbq. "Come."

Shane would never admit it. But he liked it when Ilya got like this. He let himself be led to the sink, his hand never leaving Ilya's grasp. Watched as his finger was run under cold water, feeling like he was underwater himself.

"—Shane?"

"What?" Shane startled, looking into Ilya's concerned gaze. His eyes searched Shane's.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I already told you it doesn't hurt."

"No," Ilya's eyes looked perceptive, and Shane tried not to shrink away from them, "I don't mean finger."

Shane licked his lips. Turned so his back was to the sink, his hips only inches away from Ilya's.

He put on his best smile.

"I'm totally fine. All good. You fixed me, see?" He held up his finger.

Ilya looked like he was going to say something else, but Shane cut him off with a clash of lips. Ilya let him, melting quickly into the kiss. Shane spent the next 20 minutes losing himself in Ilya.

The second time Shane slipped up, they were playing board games. The evening was quiet and warm, the air heavy with humidity. Cicada trilled in the background, and the whole world felt fuzzy and blurred around the edges.

They played mostly in companionable silence, occasionally chirping at each other in a way that felt like flirting. Ilya made an incredibly adorable grumpy concentration face while he studied the board as he decided what move to make next.

“I’m going to have grey hairs by the time you’re done, Rozanov,” Shane quipped quietly, his head heavy on his hand.

“Shut up, Hollander,” Ilya said, not looking up from the board, “You will not say these things once I win.”

"You wish," Shane smiled. His eyelids drooped. He thought he could just rest his eyes for a moment. Ilya was so concentrated on the board, his lips pursed and eyes darting over potential next moves. Shane didn’t think he’d notice.

But then he was being woken up by a gentle hand on his cheek. Ilya reached across the table.

“Shane?”

He sucked in a breath, forcing his eyes open. It took some effort to focus them.

“Shane, something is wrong,” Ilya stated it like a fact.

“Hmm? No, nothings wrong,” Shane shook his head, trying not to wince at the headache that was building.

“I think yes.”

“I’m fine, really. You took so long, I fell asleep waiting for you to make your move,” Shane tried to joke. It didn’t land. Ilya just stared at him levelly.

“Is it me? Is it because of plane cra—”

“Ilya,” Shane said pleadingly, “it’s nothing. Just… just leave it, okay? I just want to have a nice time with you.”

Ilya’s face was some mixture between confusion, worry, and uncertainty that Shane couldn’t quite parse.

“We will still have nice time, Hollander.”

“I know,” Shane said, feeling like maybe he actually didn't know. “I know. This is nice, right?”

He didn’t just mean tonight; he meant the whole trip. Them spending time together like a couple, with the words I love you out in the world. He could tell Ilya understood.

“Yes, Shane, it is very nice.”

“I love you,” Shane said quietly, "so much." He was testing the words out, wanting to make sure they were still real, that it was something they could say to each other outside of a life-and-death emergency. Ilya’s face did something, and then he looked at Shane in a way that made Shane’s stomach flip.

“I love you, too.”

Ilya didn't bring it up again. Even when Shane woke him up accidentally in the middle of the night, and gave some excuse about needing water.

“Hey, so my mom wants to come over for coffee,” Shane said tentatively the next morning, flipping idly through the pages of the book he had lent Ilya on hockey strategy.

Ilya denied it vociferously, insisting reading was ‘for boring people only,’ but Shane could tell he was getting into it.

The air was fresh and crisp in the morning with the promise of heat as the sun burned away the night. The birdsong here was somehow different and nostalgic to the birds back home, and Shane took a deep breath of it as he watched Ilya make eggs.

“She wants to meet you.”

Ilya lifted an eyebrow, and his lip lifted slightly as he whisked the eggs in a bowl, “Coffee?”

“Yeah, I mean, you met my dad at the airport, and they both know about us now, so she’s kind of wanting to meet you? I mean… only if you want to, of course. But I’d like to introduce you to them.”

The look Ilya gave him was soft. “I will meet your mother.”

“Really? Are you sure?” Shane asked, “Because we can wait for a better time if you want. And—”

“Hollander, calm down. I want to meet your mother.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Um, today?” Shane asked tentatively.

It was something Shane had been sitting on for the last few days. His mom hadn't left him alone about it since before Ilya had arrived, and Shane had been fending her off, wanting to make sure they were solid before he introduced something new to their dynamic.

"Today?" Ilya sounded surprised.

"I mean, not if you don't want to!" Shane backtracked, and Ilya groaned.

"Hollander, you are having panic attack. Yes, your mother can come over for coffee, and I will be perfect, boring boy to fit in with perfect Hollanders," he said with a sweet, innocent smile.

Shane squinted at him. "That," he said, pointing an accusing finger at Ilya, "makes me nervous."

"I promise," Ilya saluted him.

Shane couldn't help his giggle, "That's not how you promise something." He placed his hand on his heart, the other in the air, "This is scouts honour."

"I do not know your 'scouts honour'," Ilya said with a look of distain, "but this is how we do in Russia."

"That is not how you do it in Russia," Shane barked out a laugh.

"Is," Ilya insisted, sticking out his chin.

Shane's mom arrived only a few hours later, responding to Shane's text that she could come over almost immediately. Shane almost wondered if she was just waiting by the phone for his text.

It was nerve-wracking waiting for his mother to meet Ilya. Shane had a nervous energy buzzing through him by the time she was walking up to the cottage. He didn't know how to act.

He had oscillated between leaning against the counter and standing in the foyer with his hands dangling uselessly by his sides, before deciding that was too casual and going to sit on the couch while Ilya shot him a strange look.

In the end, it was Ilya who let his mom inside, taking the three coffees she had brought in their cardboard cup carrier.

"Hello, Mrs. Hollander," he said, and Shane could have died. It was deja vu from the airport, but Shane had been so high on adrenaline and panic, and he had been focused on other things that his dad's first meeting with Ilya had mostly slipped by.

"Ilya Rozanov," his mom said, sounding awed, like she hadn't truly expected to see Ilya at the door. "It's nice to finally meet you. Or well, meet you as Shane's..." she looked around, "where is Shane?"

Shane thought he could picture the look on Ilya's face when he heard the cheeky: "Shane is on the couch. He is very nervous."

Shane scowled.

"I'm fine," he grumbled, getting up from the couch and joining them where they were pulling out chairs at the table. His mom smiled reassuringly at him, and Shane smiled nervously back.

He wanted his mom to like Ilya. It was one of the first times he was able to introduce him to anyone as someone who meant something to Shane, and he wanted it to go well. He wanted her to see what he saw in the gentle, talented, wickedly sharp Russian man sitting next to him.

"I didn't know how you take your coffee, Ilya. So I just got it black."

"Yes, black is good. Thank you," Ilya said, taking a small sip out of the takeout cup and smiling awkwardly.

Shane didn't think he had ever seen Ilya so *polite* before. Shane thought nothing could tame his sharp mouth and cutting remarks, but apparently, meeting Yuna Hollander was what did it.

"So," she said, looking between the two of them, "since rookie season, huh?"

"Jesus Christ mom," Shane muttered under his breath.

"Shane told you this? Is wrong. It was before that," Ilya said, and Shane's head snapped up. They made eye contact. "Summer before," Ilya explained.

"That's not…" Shane blew out a breath. His mom did not need to know this.

She looked at them in shock. "So you've been in love since the summer before your rookie year?"

"No! Definitely not," Shane said, the same moment Ilya went,

"No, no, no, no."

His mom looked at them for a moment. Just long enough that Shane realized what they had admitted to.

"Oh. *Oh*."

Ilya actually laughed. Shane glared at him. "Seriously? How is that helpful?"

"Sorry," Ilya said, looking sheepish.

Shane pushed his fingers into the bridge of his nose. "You're going to kill me one day."

“And Ilya, don't you have a reputation for being a ladies' man?”

“Mom!” Shane said sharply. Ilya put a hand over Shane’s, where it rested on the table.

“Shane, is ok. She is only asking because she is protective of you.” Ilya turned to Shane’s mom. “Yes, I like both,” he explained, “but I have only been in love with one person.”

Shane was doomed. He wished he could kiss Ilya right now.

“Me too,” he said, refusing to look up at either of them, “only one person.”

Ilya’s hand squeezed his.

Things went smoothly after that, and Shane felt the tenseness of before melt away as he watched Ilya and his mom talk hockey. He forgot somehow that Ilya and his mom would have that one big thing in common: their love for hockey. It seemed like neither of them would run out of things to talk about anytime soon.

As his vigilance faded, and Shane felt more and more sure that his mom actually kind of loved Ilya, the tiredness before seeped back in and Shane let himself fade into the background of the conversation.

“—Shane?” his mom was looking at him worriedly, “Are you okay?”

“What?” Shane had no idea how much time he had lost, “Sorry. Sorry, I’m fine. What were you saying?”

She frowned. “Have you spoken to the doctors lately?”

“Doctors?” Ilya’s concerned voice piped up. Shane clenched his teeth.

“It’s fine,” he reassured Ilya. To his mom, “They didn’t say anything we don’t already know. I’m just supposed to be resting, avoiding stress, stuff like that.” He shrugged as nonchalantly as possible.

“Resting,” Ilya said quietly to himself, almost like he was unaware he said it out loud at all. To Shane, it felt like an accusation.

“It’s fine,” he said again, more firmly this time.

His mom didn’t look so sure. “Have you been resting?” she demanded, then she turned to Ilya, “Has he been resting?”

Ilya gave Shane a look that was knowing and much too observant. Like he could see through Shane and into the nightmares that plagued his sleep. Shane bristled.

“I don’t need you both looking after me like some kind of invalid,” Shane insisted, feeling a little like a cat with its hackles up, “I’m fine. The doctors cleared me already. There’s nothing wrong with me.”

“But you do not sleep well, Shane,” Ilya insisted.

Shane felt unreasonably betrayed.

“I sleep fine,” he snapped, “I feel fine.”

Shane really did not need this, especially in front of his mom. He didn’t want to waste any time he could spend with Ilya on a trip into town to see some doctor who would only tell him not to be so stressed, like Shane could magically just stop.

Ilya frowned at him, and Shane glared back.

“I upset you, *lyubimiy.* I am sorry,” Ilya said regretfully, grimacing at Shane. “I promised I would behave, and now I am being bad boyfriend.”

Shane immediately melted. “No, no, of course not,” he did a mental double-take. “Boyfriend?” Something warm bloomed in Shane’s chest, his irritation forgotten.

“I mean, yes. I think so, probably,” Ilya looked sincerely at Shane.

Shane smiled. The word felt right. It was everything he wanted. And in that moment, he didn’t want to look at all the ways it couldn’t be possible, but instead all the ways it could. His eyes flicked to Ilya’s lips. Shane wanted to kiss him, but—

Then, in front of Shane’s mom, Ilya leaned in and gave Shane a soft, sweet peck on the lips. Shane felt something in him settle.

“Your dad was right,” his mom said, gazing at them fondly.

“Right about what?” Shane asked, his whole body prickling from the blush that felt like it had spread all the way to his toes.

“It was hard to believe that you boys were together at first,” she held up a hand to keep Shane from interrupting her, “But it’s easy to understand once you see it.”

“Dad said that?”

“Well, something like that. He really likes Ilya, I think.” She smiled. “I do too, for the record.”

Ilya beamed. “I will make sure Shane is resting, Mrs. Hollander."

“You can call me Yuna.”

“Yuna,” Ilya smiled and nodded. “I will take care of Shane.”

Shane’s mom smiled with a gentle affection, “I think I can see that. Thank you, Ilya.”

Shane’s mom left shortly after, with an invitation for them to come over for dinner the next week and watch the Stanley Cup playoffs at their cabin with them.

Shane bid her goodbye, watching her drive off and then closed the door with a soft snick. It had gone better than he had expected at least.

But Shane could feel Ilya's eyes on him for the rest of the day, and Shane made a mental note to be more vigilant about not zoning out. He hadn't realized how much Ilya noticed. Shane felt dangerously close to ruining everything.

Chapter 10: Nightmare

Chapter Notes

> Real sex mechanics may say no way but I say yes hehehe. This! Is! Fiction! And I do what I want *runs away while cackling*
>
> Nightmare trope/dream sequence warning that I did not differentiate the dream from reality (with italics) so if anyone has very strong feelings about this, I'm open to hearing them.
>
> This is what I like to call fuck around find out writing - I write, I edit (barely), I post. Sincerest apologies if there are errors I did not catch.

Shane didn't waste any time before he made true on his fears.

Shane had been swimming. Not the splashing somersaults and handstands that Ilya liked to do, but laps around the nearby buoy stationed a few meters out from the shore. It helped his training, it was easy on his joints, and he knew he would enjoy the slight ache in his muscles afterwards. Most importantly, he had to concentrate so wholly on his breath and what he was doing that he didn't have to think so much.

It was early in the morning, mist still clinging to the surface of the water as the day started. He had slipped out of bed, early enough that the birds were still quiet, pulled on swim trunks and found an outlet for the anxious energy that slipped around like oil inside him.

On his second lap, Ilya was waiting for him on the dock. He had his hands on his hips, a pair of sweats slung low around his waist, and his hair was a nest of bed head.

Shane was panting as he swam up and hauled himself onto the dock, dripping wet. He had forgotten a towel up at the cottage.

“This is not safe,” Ilya said.

“What are you talking about?”

“This,” Ilya waved his hand around the general area, “not safe. What if you drown?”

“I’m a strong swimmer,” Shane rolled his eyes, “I come up here every summer, remember? I’m not going to drown.”

“What if you get cramp?”

“Then... I’ll float on my back until it goes away.”

“Not good enough,” Ilya said. And there was something in his tone that made Shane look up at him sharply. He realized Ilya was really upset.

“I’m not going to drown. Why are you so worried?”

“I wake up and you are not there. Of course I am worried!”

“Well, there’s nothing to be worried about,” Shane said, frustrated at this whole conversation.

“I look all over cabin. No Shane. I look outside. No Shane.” Ilya spread his hands and stared at him, the eye contact uncomfortable. Shane looked away.

“Well, I’m here. Where else would I have gone?”

“How am I supposed to know that, Shane?” Ilya shouted. There was silence for a moment. “Something is wrong with you.” The statement was placed like an ugly, gnarled bomb between them.

Shane gritted his teeth. He knew Ilya’s English got worse when he was agitated or stressed, but something about the wording of that sentence hit something sore inside him.

“There’s nothing wrong with me.”

“There is,” Ilya insisted.

“I thought I asked you to leave it alone?” Shane said coldly.

“I want to help. You are…" Ilya huffed out a stressed breath. "You are not good.”

“Not good,” Shane echoed. He wondered if he would cry. He didn’t think so; he was too tired to cry. But then again, he had so little control over himself these days, he had no idea what he’d do.

Ilya’s face immediately changed, “No, Shane. I did not mean like that—”

“You still said it.” Shane knew he wasn’t being fair.

He knew Ilya didn’t mean it like that. He was having an argument in his second language. But Shane felt unreasonably hurt. Probably because Ilya had cut to the truth of things. Shane wasn’t good. Not good for himself, definitely not good for Ilya.

“Shane…”

Shane refused to look him in the eyes. He was shivering and wet, the morning chill cutting through his damp skin. He wished he hadn’t forgotten that towel up in the house, wanting something to hide behind. He felt exposed.

He looked at Ilya, his heart aching at the expression he saw there.

“It’s fine. I know you didn’t mean it like that.” He rubbed his forehead, “I’m just tired—” He stopped abruptly as he realized what he was admitting. “It’s fine. I need to get a towel. ‘m cold.”

He didn’t look back as he shouldered past Ilya and made his way back up to the cottage. He paused when he stepped inside, saw the two coffees that Ilya had put out on the counter, so they’d be waiting for them when they got back. He had to take a solid minute to breathe through the strong urge to burst into tears.

The rest of the day was awkward. Shane had ruined everything.

He tried to make up for it by making breakfast, but only succeeded in taking away the thing that Ilya liked to do for them in the mornings and disrupting their routine.

Ilya tried to bring things up a few more times, but he was clearly nervous about his words, each sentence more thought out than usual. Responses came slower, so that Ilya could think about them before he said them aloud. Shane had done that. Had made him like that.

The guilt that crawled up his back and wrapped around his neck in black, smoky, tendrils didn’t stop Shane from rebuffing Ilya each time. And it was easy to do, because it turned out Shane could talk circles around Ilya when he was on the back foot.

They slipped into bed that night together, a strip of cold sheets between them that felt so solid and uncrossable it was like a wall. Shane wanted to so so badly. He imagined reaching out a hand; Ilya would thread their fingers together, warm, and safe, and familiar.

But Ilya wanted him to talk about it. And Shane couldn’t. So he rolled over and listened to Ilya’s breathing as it slowed.

They were sitting on the dock in white wooden Adirondack chairs: Shane, Ilya, his parents, Hayden Pike, and, for some strange reason, Cliff Marleau.

The sun beat down, and it was hot. Like unbearably hot, heat waves rippling in the air around them, the wood of the dock scalded on their bare feet. Shane was sweating. His mom fanned herself with a magazine that had Ilya on the cover.

“Sorry about clocking you one, last season, Hollander,” Cliff said good-naturedly, hands tucked leisurely behind his head, “I really didn’t mean to take you down like that.”

“No, it’s fine. No hard feelings. We all get our bell rung eventually, right?” Shane waved him off.

He was actively trying not to look at Ilya, who was leaning back in his chair in the most suggestive way possible, his sunglasses low on his nose, his swim shorts equally low on his hips. He looked like a walking, talking sex god.

Shane didn't think anyone suspected anything, and Ilya, for his part, seemed to have no interest in Shane at all.

"You are all so boring," Ilya said, sticking out his tongue and blowing a wet sound, "I am swimming now."

"I just hope you're better at swimming than you are at hockey, Rozanov," Hayden piped up from his chair, where he was flipping through a book that had a photo from Shane and Ilya's photoshoot back during their rookie year on the cover. Their heads close together, noses almost touching.

Ilya just smirked, "Maybe after you figure out hockey, you can join me. Maybe it will be sport you are finally good at."

Hayden scowled. "Why are we hanging out with him again?" he looked pleadingly at Shane.

There was a splash as Ilya jumped into the water. A groan from Hayden as his ridiculous cannonball got water all over the book. Hayden stood and held the book out like that would keep it from getting soggier than it already was.

"Rozanov!" He growled.

There was only silence. The water rippled and sloshed where Ilya had jumped. Shane waited for him to splutter back to the surface, but it didn't come. He sat up straighter in his chair.

"Oh shit," Cliff said, at the same time Shane's dad grabbed his wrist.

"I think it's time to go, Shane."

"Wait, but—" he was being tugged rapidly in the other direction. He hadn't remembered his dad being this strong since Shane was a little kid. Ilya still hadn't resurfaced.

"Wait! You need to help him! He's going to drown! Let me go!" Shane cried out.

"Shane, I don't know who you're talking about," his dad sounded genuinely confused.

"Please," Shane begged, tugging desperately. He didn't know how long a person could hold their breath underwater before they died. It had to be longer than Ilya had been under for.

He watched Cliff dive into the water.

"Wait!" Shane shouted, finally ripping his hand out of his dad's grip. His wrist burned. He walked back far enough to see Cliff emerge from the water, spluttering with an unconscious-looking Ilya in his arms. Shane was going to throw up.

"Come on, buddy," Hayden was there, arm around his shoulders, guiding him away once again. "Why do you care so much about Rozanov anyway?"

Shane opened his mouth to reply, to tell Hayden he loved Ilya, but nothing came out. He twisted his body desperately trying to catch a glimpse of Ilya as he was led away.

Cliff had managed to get Ilya from the water to the dock and was administering CPR. Jesus. Ilya really looked dead like this, his hair limp and sticking to the wet wood underneath his head, his lips an unnatural shade of blue. His body rippled behind a heat wave.

“Cliff!” Shane called, and Cliff looked up from what he was doing, “Is he okay? Is he—he’s not dead, right?”

Cliff tilted his head at Shane, looking confused, “Sorry, man, you know I can’t tell you that. He’s nothing to you.”

“What?” he exhaled the word on a shocked breath. That couldn’t be right.

“Time to go, Shane. He’s right, Rozanov means nothing to you, and besides, there’s no way to find any information right now anyway,” his mom said, as Shane stared, dumbfounded, at Cliff.

His heart pounded so loud that Shane felt like his whole body was vibrating. All he could see was Ilya’s slack, expressionless face. Ilya was *right there.* How could they not tell him? How could they not know?

“Shane?”

Shane gasped himself awake, eyes unseeing. He tried to thrash his head, but two warm hands bracketed it in. He was damp and shivering, his hair plastered to his forehead.

“Shane,” the voice sounded like Ilya’s, but Ilya was *dead*, and Shane made a guttural, distressed sound in the back of his throat, gagging on the thought of it. Ilya’s face hovered above him, looking horrified.

Oh fuck. A dream. Just another dream. He hadn’t meant to make Ilya look like that. He hoped he hadn’t said anything in his sleep, but it was pretty clear from Ilya’s face that he had.

“Shit, sorry,” he said, his voice rasping. “Sorry. I’m okay. You can go back to sleep. I just need—”

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice was firm. A command. Shane’s eyes snapped to his. “There you are,” Ilya said warmly, and Shane felt a tear track down the side of his face and into the pillow.

“I keep dreaming of you,” he whispered.

“Sounds romantic,” Ilya said dryly, but his face did something agonizing. In the moonlit shadows that lit up the sharp angles of Ilya’s face, Shane couldn’t be sure he was seeing correctly.

“You’re always—” Shane stared up at him. Trying to remind himself that Ilya was alive. He swallowed thickly. “You’re always dying,” he said, his voice turning whispery and paper-thin.

“In plane crash?” Ilya’s words cleaved Shane in two, but his tone was gentle.

Shane knew if they weren't cocooned in darkness, and Ilya's voice wasn't so soft and protective, Shane wouldn't be sharing so much of himself. But he didn't have a proper handle on it, and the words seemed to just fall out of him.

"Not always. It's different every time."

"What was it this time?"

Shane tried to turn away, shaking his head. Burying his face into the palm, Ilya still had pressed against his cheek.

"Tell me," Ilya pushed gently, and part of Shane liked the command in his voice. Rules felt good right now when he was losing himself in not-real-dream-memories. Rules felt safe.

"You drowned."

He shuddered, thinking of Ilya's blue lips. Like a cadaver.

"And they wouldn't let me go in after you. I kept screaming to help, and no one *knew,"* Shane said plaintively. "You— they were doing CPR on you, and no one would tell me if you were alive. They kept saying you were nothing to me."

Ilya winced.

"You could have died, and I would have no way to know," Shane continued, voice feathery, no longer talking about the dream. "I would have found out with everyone else when it was announced on the news. And then I would have died too. And I would have to live the rest of my life like that, lying about it, and no one would ever know."

"I think maybe we should have conversation about—"

"You don't mean nothing to me," Shane interrupted, barely hearing what Ilya had said, the words forced out of him in a sudden panic, "You don't mean nothing to me." Shane was gasping. "You don't mean—"

"Shhhh," Ilya hushed him with a gentle thumb over his mouth, looking pained. "I know. I know that, my love."

Shane gulped down a sob, and then, with a desperation not to think anymore. To remind himself of Ilya's presence, he pushed up on his elbows and pressed his mouth against Ilya's.

He used Ilya's surprise to flip them over so Shane was on top, and Shane kissed his way quickly down to Ilya's boxers, noticing how his clamminess had transferred to Ilya's skin and feeling like a stain. He mouthed at the bulge that was growing there.

"Shane, wait," Ilya said, and Shane felt like he'd lived this moment before. But he could bypass this. He knew how to shock Ilya into just letting him. He could—

"No," Ilya said firmly enough that Shane's brain paused. Couldn't help but obey. Felt Ilya's cock twitch even as Ilya hauled him back up.

“Hey,” Ilya said, searching Shane’s face.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, working hard to keep himself from crumbling.

“You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“But I do. I do. I was so awful this morning. I don’t want you to feel like you have to watch how you speak around me. I know you didn’t mean it like that. I knew it at the time. I’m just so tired,” he said plaintively. “I’m sorry.”

Ilya sighed, “I was never angry with you.”

“I’m sorry,” he said again. He was stuck in a loop. He needed Ilya to know he didn’t mean it.

“I forgive you, Shane. There is nothing to be sorry for. I’m sorry that my words hurt you.”

“They didn’t hurt me,” Shane said automatically.

“I think maybe they did.”

Shane had nothing to say to that.

“Oh, Shane, you look miserable. Tell me what you need?”

Shane shook his head, squeezing his eyes shut. His brain was mush.

“I don’t know,” he said plaintively, his voice scratchy and hoarse. He sounded so lost, even to himself. “Please, Ilya.”

“Okay,” Ilya said after a moment, and the sudden confidence made Shane open his eyes, “Do you trust me?” before Shane could answer: “Let me help you, sweetheart.”

Shane nodded dumbly. That’s what he needed. For Ilya to help him.

He let Ilya maneuver him so they were spooning, Shane’s bare back to Ilya’s chest. He felt scoured out, slightly apprehensive, but willing to take whatever Ilya could offer him. He would do anything to just stop seeing Ilya’s lifeless body laid out on the dock.

He was barely aware of Ilya fumbling around in Shane’s bedside drawer. He automatically lifted his hips off the bed as Ilya slid his boxers down to his knees and sidled back up to Shane, pushing his chest into Shane’s back like he could fuse their skin together.

A slick hand between the cleft of his ass, and Shane couldn’t help the little hitched breath he took as Ilya slid a finger inside with little preamble.

Shane pushed his hips back automatically, his breathing turning heavy as Ilya worked him open. As he ran the slightly calloused pad of his finger around Shane’s rim and shallowly dipped his finger inside him in intervals.

Shane wasn't sure what Ilya had planned. This was so different from whatever quick sex they could get away with during their secret rendezvous. He knew from Vegas that Ilya had ideas percolating in his head that Shane could never even dream of.

But he trusted Ilya. Ilya, who knew his body in a way no one else did. And some of the tumult in his head was already lessening, turning to white noise behind the sensations of Ilya pulling his strings like he was a puppet, and Ilya the puppet-master.

Shane's breath was audible in the room now, and he could feel the undeniable presence of the Russian man all around him. In the flex of his bicep, the tickle of his hair on Shane's ear, the sweat that stuck their skin together.

Shane's asshole and his entire crack were slicked with lube, way more than was necessary, and he knew he would hate it later, but right now he craved the slippery way Ilya's fingers dragged through the sensitive, vulnerable parts of him.

Ilya worked a second finger inside and scissored Shane open slowly. He took his time, sometimes brushing over Shane's prostate lightly, working Shane up until he was trembling. Then he pulled out both fingers and—

"Fuck," Shane breathed as Ilya notched the head of his cock against Shane's hole and bullied his way into the tight heat.

He wrapped an arm around Shane's stomach and pulled him in closer, grinding into him.

Shane gasped. "Jesus Christ," he choked out.

The presence of Ilya was undeniable now. He felt so full.

"Mmmm, good boy, Shane," Ilya said, his lips close to Shane's ear, "You are *so good*."

He laved open-mouthed kisses on the base of Shane's neck, and Shane groaned, trying to fuck his hips backwards. Ilya tightened his grip and didn't move, didn't let Shane move.

Shane made a questioning noise.

"Shh," Ilya hushed him, "we stay just like this for little while, okay? You will do that for me?"

Shane wanted to move, but Ilya held him securely, and with nowhere to go, Shane's need fell out of his lips instead; whimpers spilled unbidden, Shane unable to stop himself. But he wanted to be good. So he settled, made an effort to let his muscles go lax, and Ilya made a pleased sound that was molten in Shane's spine. Shane moaned softly.

Time seemed to slow, and for a while, Shane was intensely aware of every tiny movement of Ilya's. Every time his dick twitched inside of him, each of his breaths against Shane's back, his palm pressing into the hard planes of Shane's stomach like he could feel himself inside of Shane if he pressed hard enough.

His whole world became Ilya.

Shane's dick was flushed and wanting, but every time he wriggled impatiently, Ilya shushed him and ground up into him until Shane felt like Ilya's cock was in his throat, and Shane couldn't help but submit to what was happening to him.

He stayed hard, but eventually his breathing evened out, and his eyelids grew heavy. Ilya didn't seem like he planned on moving any time soon, rubbing grounding circles into Shane's chest. At some point, Shane dozed off.

He stirred once in the night, whimpering quietly as he woke. But Ilya was still hard and undeniable inside him, and it was shocking how quickly Shane's brain shut down when he realized that.

His ass clenched, and he moaned quietly, whatever nightmare he had slipping away so quickly he couldn't even remember what it was. Ilya stirred behind him, murmuring soothing sounds and scratching his fingers lazily into Shane's hair.

When he woke next, it was light out, and though Ilya was still plastered to his back, he had slipped himself out of Shane at some point during the night.

Ilya stirred behind him, "Mmm, good morning."

"Good morning," Shane whispered, feeling strangely shy.

He could feel Ilya's smirk against his neck. "How did you sleep?"

Shane blushed. Then he thought about the question. "Um, good actually," he said, turning to look at Ilya in surprise.

Ilya made a satisfied, sleepy sound. "So, it was okay?"

Shane met his eyes.

"I was worried I pushed too much, maybe." Ilya sounded slightly uncertain.

"Oh," Shane said, understanding dawning, "No, it was good. It… it helped. A lot, I think, actually."

Ilya let out a breath he must have been holding.

"Good." Ilya rolled onto his back and tucked Shane beneath his arm, encouraging him to rest his head on Ilya's chest, "Sleep, Shane, if you think you still can. We do not have to be awake yet."

Shane shook his head. The sun was up, though just barely, and he should go on his morning jog. But a voice in his head that sounded a lot like Ilya told him he could do it later, and he was warm and cozy and sleepy, so he let his eyelids droop, pulling him into sleep once more.

Chapter 11: Train wreck of a phone call

Chapter Notes

Protective Ilya is the best Ilya :D
I don't recall how accepting Cliff is about things in canon, but I wrote him like this soooooo

enjoy!

Ilya felt sated. The sunlight was soft and wafting as it filtered through the gauzy white curtains that covered the floor-to-ceiling windows of Shane's master bedroom.

Shane was tucked into his side, sleeping soundly, for the longest stretch of time that Ilya had seen since he'd gotten here. His breathing was even and slow, his face smooth. It reminded Ilya of how painfully innocent Shane was when they first met. It was peaceful. Ilya's instincts had paid off. He *knew* Shane, and it left him feeling *good*.

Shane had shared so much of himself last night, and while Ilya hated that Shane had been in pain, choking out noises that made Ilya want to rip the world apart, he had also felt closer to Shane than he ever had before. It was a moment for a lover, for a boyfriend.

Ilya wanted to know Shane. So that when people looked at him and saw Hollander, the polite hockey star, who worked hard and lived strictly, and they thought they knew him as a teammate and a friend, Ilya could look at him and see Shane. See the deepest parts of his soul. His fears, his secrets, his desires.

Shane's words last night were… something.

You could have died, and I would have no way to know. I would have found out with everyone else when it was announced on the news. And then I would have died too. And I would have to live the rest of my life like that, lying about it, and no one would ever know.

Ilya's heart had cracked slightly as he listened while Shane was unable to stop repeating that Ilya didn't mean nothing to him, like if he said it enough, the universe would somehow start believing him. It had made Ilya's chest physically hurt until he had to put fingers over his mouth. Less for Shane's well-being and more for Ilya's own, unable to keep listening to the broken words.

He remembered how it felt when Shane was injured. When Ilya sat awake and terrified all night, refreshing the news sites for information on Shane's accident, with no way to know he was okay. It was torture. His heart hurt for Shane.

It would have to be a longer conversation. Neither of them would survive it if something like this happened again, and Ilya had ideas he was turning over in his mind. Things he thought would help.

It could all wait until Shane woke up. Right now, Ilya was determined to enjoy this soft, peaceful moment they had managed to find.

He was revelling in the fact that Shane was drooling on him once again, an intimate fact that Ilya would have never known otherwise—Shane Hollander drools in his sleep—when his phone buzzed. He leaned over to pick it up, swearing softly as he almost dropped it on his face.

Cliff Marleau: *I know.*

The ground dropped away. A clean sweep at Ilya's knees, taking him down to the ice hard. A cold dread dripped into his spine, a kind of numbness.

Ilya had been prepared at first for their relationship to go public. Shane wasn't exactly careful when he had run up to Ilya in the airport and sobbed in his arms, and Ilya hadn't been so careful either when he had given Shane the world's quickest peck on the lips.

He had done his best to make sure no one was paying attention to them; everyone so hyper-focused on their own reunions that it really felt like they had just been part of the crowd. Everyone had been crying, sobbing, shrieking, laughing. They weren't making any more of a spectacle than anyone else. No one was paying attention to Ilya, and Shane had this way about him where he could blend into the background and somehow not look like the world's most famous hockey star.

But despite all of this, Ilya had been prepared. He was confident he was at a point in his career that the NHL wouldn't let him be deported, and he loved Shane, and it felt like that was all that really mattered. So he was prepared.

But then nothing had happened. Fan theories didn't point to romance but rather friendship, because of course, that made more sense. Ilya had stopped worrying. Marked it down as one more thing they could keep putting off.

Shane wasn't ready yet anyway. There would be more emotional fallout for Shane than for Ilya. It worked out that they could continue to have the peaceful little haven they had found. It had felt like the universe's little gift to Ilya for putting him through the horror that was his plane crashing in the Appalachian Mountains.

The outside world didn't exist. Except it did. And while Ilya had been prepared for this a few weeks ago, he wasn't prepared for it now. He didn't want whatever little bubble of happiness they'd found to burst.

He tried, for a moment, to convince himself that Cliff was talking about something else. *I know it was you who fucked with my tape that one time. I know you're looking into getting an American citizenship. I know you're bi*. But Ilya was kidding himself. It couldn't be anything else.

He was surprised he hadn't woken Shane with how hard his heart was beating; his chest practically rattled with it. He detangled himself from Shane, who thankfully slept through the whole thing. Shane was tired. And he was catching up on rest he desperately needed. Ilya brushed through his bangs fondly and placed a kiss on his forehead. Shane didn't stir.

He padded quietly out of the room, his finger pressing the call button.

"Hello? Roza—?"

"What kind of bullshit cryptic fucking text message is this, Marleau?" He demanded, snarling quietly enough that he didn't wake Shane.

"Rozanov, Christ, would you calm down?"

"No, and fuck you. You can't send me texts like this and expect friendly phone call."

"I didn't—God when did you learn words like cryptic?" Cliff said.

"Marleau, stop fucking with me. I am this close to driving to your house and—" Ilya followed up with a stream of angry Russian threats about murder and body disposal and something about how his face looked like a pisshole, all of which Cliff wouldn't understand, but Ilya was angry and panicked and throwing insults in his first language felt safer than saying them in English. From the silence on the other end of the line, he figured he got his point across.

"Jesus, Ilya. I'm your friend for Christ's sake."

"Are you?" Ilya's voice was flat. He didn't particularly trust anyone. Only Shane … And maybe Yuna and David could be added to his short list.

"Yes," Cliff said emphatically, "I've known you for a long time, kid. I'm your friend."

"Right," Ilya said, infusing the word with as much disbelief as possible. He blew out an explosive breath, "What do you want?"

"I'm not from your generation, okay? I'm sorry if the text came off a little weird."

"Came off like threat. You should not threaten Russian."

"Jesus, I—It's not a threat. I wanted you to know that I saw you and Hollander in the airport, and you've got support."

Ilya swore. "Who else saw?"

"I don't know, man. I didn't even think *I* saw correctly until I saw those paparazzi shots. It was just a glimpse anyway, I was too busy with my own— anyway, I still don't really believe it. But I've been thinking about it for a while, and it didn't seem like a hug between friends, and then you answered the phone like this—"

“Think, Marleau, or is your old person brain turning to mush?” Ilya interrupted, feeling savage, “Who else saw?”

“I just told you, I don’t know. But, Roz, listen, you’ve got people in your corner.”

People? What people?

“Who have you told?” His panic levels were edging dangerously close to his anger. Ilya needed the anger to overpower the panic. That was the only way he could function. He dreaded having to tell this to Shane. “Who!” he demanded.

“No one!” Marleau said quickly, “I swear, no one.”

“Then what the fuck do you mean ‘people’”

“I just mean that if you wanted to… You know, tell people, you would have—”

“Do not tell anyone.” Ilya made sure to enunciate each word clearly, “I will not have you ruining Shane’s career with this.”

There was silence on the other end of the line.

“Or yours,” Marleau said quietly.

Ilya made an impatient sound. This was not the time to get caught up in semantics.

“Marleau,” Ilya said, quietly, dangerously, “Let me make something very clear—”

“Ilya?” That was Shane’s sweet, sleepy voice as he emerged from the bedroom in nothing but his boxers, his hair a mess, rubbing at his eyes.

“Jesus,” Cliff breathed incredulously over the phone, “was that Hollander? Are you with him *right now*? So it’s true then?”

Ah fuck. He knew he should press the mute button on his phone, but it was too late now. Cliff had heard, and if Ilya reached for it now, Shane would know that too.

“Ilya? Is something wrong?” Shane asked, still rubbing sleepily at his face.

Ilya knew logically that Cliff couldn’t see anything through the phone, but he felt a sudden feral protectiveness over Shane, so intense that his vision momentarily blurred. He took a deep, steadying breath.

“No, *moy lyubimiy*, nothing is wrong,” Ilya said softly without thinking, his entire tone softening, “it is just Marleau, calling to check in.”

“Oh, is he okay?”

“He is fine. I was actually just in the middle of threatening him.”

“Ilya,” Shane said, clearly unimpressed, “he went through the same thing as you. Be nice.”

“Of course, I am always nice,” Ilya rolled his eyes, and Shane gave him a dubious look.

His stomach was a pit. He was going to have to tell Shane about this. But not while he was on the line with Cliff. Ilya could blow things up a little later. He could protect Shane’s peace for just a moment longer.

“Go back to bed. I will come in a minute.”

Shane wrinkled his nose, like a little kitten, which did nothing for Ilya’s instincts, already going haywire. “But it’s already almost noon—”

“Then go shower, *serdtse moyo*. I will come as soon as I’m done, I promise,” Ilya said.

“What does that one mean?” Shane asked.

Ilya hesitated, aware of how quiet Cliff had gone on the other end of the line, how damning this entire conversation was.

Oh well. He supposed the cat was out of the bag now.

“My heart,” he said.

It was worth it for the look on Shane’s face, like he was high on those same meds from the hospital during his injury. Ilya’s heart felt like it was being squeezed by a Shane-sized fist. *Serdtse moyo* indeed.

Then Shane said he was going to take that shower, muttering something about being all sweaty from last night, and Ilya had the strong urge to rip Cliffs ears off. It was lucky they were separated by hundreds of miles. He said nothing as he watched Shane disappear into the bedroom, listened to the shower start.

Cliff let out a little laugh of disbelief from where the phone was still pressed to Ilya’s ear, and Ilya startled back to the present.

“Do you realize what you sound like, Roz? Shane Hollander has you *whipped*. Like, the captain of the Montreal Metros has you *so*—”

“If you tell anyone of this, I will fly back to Boston right now and murder you in cold blood,” Ilya said, but the bite was gone. Cliff was right, and Ilya had nothing to say that could hide the truth of things now.

“You were full-on-romantic-embracing in public, Rozanov. But message received, okay? I swear I won’t tell anyone. If this hits the public somehow, it won’t be because of me. I swear on my mother's life, alright?”

Ilya felt marginally placated.

“I’m happy for you, Ilya,” Cliff continued, “I always wondered if… You might have a thing for Hollander, actually. You’ve always been obsessed with him. I just never thought it went both ways.”

“You thought— me? That I had—” Ilya spluttered.

Was Cliff trying to tell him that he was the obvious one? Hollander was so eager for it, Ilya always thought of Shane as the obvious one, unable to help looking at Ilya with those fuck me eyes, even on the ice. If they were to be discovered, Ilya had always thought it was going to be Shane’s fault.

“No,” he said finally, “You did not think this.”

“You forget I know you. You’re not as subtle as you think.”

“Shut up, Marleau,” Ilya hissed.

“Listen,” Cliff said, his voice dropping a register, serious, “I texted because I wanted to confirm things for myself, but also because I want you to know I’ve got your back. I know not all of the guys in the league will, but there are a good number who would.”

Ilya’s anger was rapidly fading, replaced with a bone-deep weariness. He scowled.

“That text was like train wreck. You are idiot. Worse, maybe. Took years off my life. I will not thank you.” *But thank you*. The unspoken words hung in the air between them.

Cliff laughed. “Then don’t, buddy. It’s not something you should have to thank me for anyway. You ever want to talk, you call me up, okay?”

Ilya suddenly felt like a kid again. He felt all the years Marleau had on him.

“Okay.”

“Shane’s a lucky man.”

The click in his ear told him Cliff had hung up. Ilya exhaled heavily. He could have one shower with Shane before he imploded their safe haven. Just a few more minutes of peace.

Chapter 12: Important Conversations

Chapter Summary

Just two boys chatting :)

Shane stood under the water of the shower feeling a calmness in his head that he hadn't had in a long time. He didn't know how Ilya had managed to make him feel so settled, but he wasn't about to question it. One decent stretch of sleep hadn't solved all his problems. Sure, he was still tired. But he felt leagues better.

And okay, maybe he could admit to himself that it wasn't just the uninterrupted sleep, but also the soft way Ilya held him. The whispered reassurances. The way his normally stoic face was as raw and open as Shane had felt.

He wondered if he would be willing to go through more nightmares just to experience that. The thought turned lazily around in his head. Maybe. Maybe.

Ilya was quiet but attentive in the shower when he joined Shane. He took the bar of soap automatically from where Shane was washing himself and took over the task.

"How did you do that?" Shane asked quietly, his eyes closed, as he let Ilya shampoo his hair.

"Do what?"

"You basically like, shut off my brain. I feel like I'm still offline."

"Because I know you." Shane would have imagined a smirk with the cocky sentence, but Ilya's voice was uncharacteristically serious. He wanted to open his eyes to check, but he was afraid of getting soap in them.

"I was hard for such a long time," the words came out almost dreamily.

Ilya hummed, "Yes, me too. Almost all night," There was definitely a smirk in his voice now. Shane smiled in response.

"Really?"

"Really. You are very beautiful, Hollander. I could not help it."

"Did you even get to come?"

"No, but neither did you. Seems fair to me," Ilya said, kissing his collarbone.

Shane was sure he was blushing. He could only hope the hot water from the shower and his already heated skin would hide it.

“You are too, you know,” he said awkwardly, then, for clarity, “beautiful.”

Ilya’s response was a low, satisfied noise in the back of his throat.

“You can’t even see me.” Ilya brushed a knuckle over Shane’s nose.

“I know what you look like.” Shane would have rolled his eyes if they were open.

“Too beautiful to look at even,” Ilya huffed sadly.

Shane automatically opened his eyes, unable to back down from a challenge, and then had to blink because of how blurred they were by water. He rubbed his eyes while Ilya laughed indulgently.

“I can see you,” Shane said.

Ilya didn’t respond, watched Shane with something heated in his eyes, and Shane couldn’t help the way his eyes flicked down to Ilya’s lips. Then lower. Ilya leaned in slowly and kissed him. The shower made the kiss warmer than usual, and Ilya’s lips were gentle but firm as he pushed Shane into the wall and pressed their bodies together.

They didn’t speak much after that. But Shane didn’t mind. He didn’t feel like speaking much while his brain was so quiet anyway, so they washed each other slowly, in between kisses, enjoying the warm water drumming on his back.

It was only once they were out of the shower, and Shane felt a little more alert, that he started to wonder if something was wrong. Ilya chewed on his cheek relentlessly as he made yogurt bowls for both of them. He kept sneaking glances at Shane and looking strangely nervous.

“We need to talk,” Ilya said finally as they sat at the breakfast table, a fancily decorated bowl of yogurt in front of each of them.

Shane looked up apprehensively, mouth full of fruit and yogurt and little coconut shavings.

Those words immediately made him feel unsteady, snapping him out of the comfortable space he had found.

“That’s what people say before they break up with you,” Shane said, the words spilling past his lips before he could catch them. *Shit*. Not what he wanted to say.

Ilya paused, shook his head. “Nothing like this, Shane.”

But Ilya didn’t come any closer, didn’t look any less nervous. Shane chewed slowly, buying himself time. His nervousness didn’t dissipate. Ilya looked pale.

He laughed nervously, “You’re scaring me. If you’re not breaking up with me, then what is it?”

“Listen,” Ilya said, with an expression Shane wasn’t sure he had ever seen before, “when I was on phone with Marleau…”

Shane waited expectantly.

“He,” Ilya cleared his throat, “told me he saw us in airport. Uh, hugging. He guessed us, that we are, uh, boyfriends.”

The words came out in a rush, clumsy and thickly accented, giving away how panicked Ilya really felt.

“What did you tell him?”

“I didn’t have to tell him. He heard.”

“Oh,” Shane said.

“Shane, I am sorry, I think—”

“I kind of already thought all the Raiders knew, honestly,” Shane said.

No one seemed to have mentioned anything to the news sites, but Shane had figured that was because they were probably dealing with their own trauma. People were generally less malicious when they had gone through a life-or-death ordeal. It was a blessing. He wasn’t going to question it.

And Shane had vaguely been aware of the consequences while his dad whispered urgently about reporters and cameras, and Shane had ignored him and held Ilya in an airport like he was the only thing that mattered. Then more sharply aware of it in the weeks after, while he waited with bated breath for his life to blow up.

Shane had decided, when he was preparing himself to mourn Ilya, what was important to him in life. His parents loved and supported him—they made that abundantly clear. He would still play hockey. He was too good, not too.

But Shane had realized something during those three days of pure torture, when he spent his nights crying until his eyes were puffy and sore or feeling so ill he had to sit on his bathroom floor, feeling pathetic and lovesick. And that was that he could live without the NHL. But he couldn’t live without Ilya.

“You… you did?” Ilya seemed genuinely shocked.

“Yeah, I mean, we weren’t exactly subtle,” Shane shrugged, trying to be braver than he felt. “The reporters never figured it out, but I really thought they would. I guess us being like, romantically together, was too far-fetched for them. But I was ready for the shit storm, anyway.”

“You…” Ilya was actually speechless for a moment, “You are amazing, man, Shane Hollander.”

Shane made a face. “Why are you saying that now?”

Ilya pushed up in his seat and reached over the kitchen table to wrap a broad hand around the back of his head and plant a hard kiss on Shane’s lips.

“You are always amazing me. So brave.” He murmured against Shane’s lips.

“Shut up.”

“So brave,” Ilya insisted. He sat back down. “You were really ready?”

“I mean, no, it’s fucking terrifying to think about. But also kind of yes? I figured it was inevitable. It all felt less important than you just…being alive.”

Ilya’s gaze was intense, eyes locked with Shane’s and shining with something too big for words. “Me too.”

“Okay,” Shane said eventually, “So Marleau knows. Did he say anything else?”

“Just that he won’t tell, and he is supportive.”

“Oh, that’s… really nice actually.”

“Yes. Marleau is not so bad.”

“We haven’t really talked about this,” Shane said tentatively, “like, what happens if things get out. We could probably just deny it. I could start seeing Rose again to throw off—”

“No.” Ilya interupted, his eyes dark, lips pursed. “No. Other option. Not Rose.”

“I’m *gay*, Ilya,” Shane laughed at the obvious display of jealousy, but his stomach did that little flip it always did when Ilya got like this.

“No so gay you can’t fuck Rose Landry.”

“Hey so, we only did that twice, and both times were disasters.”

Ilya glowered, “Don’t care. Why don’t I marry Svetlana then. Good for citizenship. Perfect solution.”

It was Shane’s turn to glare. Jealousy sparked. It didn’t matter that Shane knew exactly what Ilya was doing.

“That’s different.”

Ilya put his hands out in a ‘*see how you like it*’ gesture, but his eyes sparkled with his victory.

Shane couldn’t help but scoff out a laugh. They were both so ridiculous.

“Okay, so then what do we do?”

“I think nothing will happen now. As long as Marleau can keep his idiot mouth shut.”

“Okay, but if someone else saw? And they say something?”

Ilya paused, thinking. His jaw worked. “I would like to have some protection from Russia first, if I can get. But then after, I would announce, or confirm, whichever comes first. Only if you wanted… I think I would enjoy telling everyone you are mine one day.”

“It’s scary,” Shane whispered, “to think about.”

Ilya nodded seriously. “Yes. But it does not have to be right now.”

“Then,” Shane said slowly, looking at Ilya through his lashes, “maybe I would like that too. One day.”

Ilya’s face morphed into a smile. It changed the way he looked entirely, brightening his eyes, which made him look younger. His teeth were white and perfect, his Adam's apple bobbed as he let out a breathless laugh.

Shane continued, “I was thinking, actually, that we could even use the narrative they’re spinning right now.”

“Narrative? I do not know this word.”

“Like, the story they’re telling. That we’re not enemies, that we were never enemies. We could at least confirm that. Say that we’re actually good friends or something. Then maybe, in the future, if we go out in public, it wouldn’t be so weird? And,” Shane said, feeling breathless, like maybe this all wasn’t allowed, “our contracts are up soon, so we could see if one of us could move to be closer, or—”

“You would leave Metros for me?” Ilya said incredulously.

“I mean,” Shane bit his lip, “my mom would be so furious, but yeah.”

It would be crazy. Just thinking about it made him feel insane. But he would. He was only just learning that for Ilya he would.

“No. You cannot leave your team. You love your team, your family loves your team,” Ilya said with finality, “But me? I will win cups wherever I go. I am best player in league.”

“Stop trying to one up me, asshole.” He shoved at Ilya playfully.

“Shane Hollander,” was all Ilya said, but Shane had heard that inflection in Ilya’s voice before and seen that look in his eyes, and it was the same way he said I love you. Shane had never thought of his own name as special until that moment.

As they ate their breakfast, Shane felt lighter than he had in weeks. Something akin to helium felt like it was being pumped into his lungs every time he looked at Ilya.

Later in the day, they were tangled up in the hammock. It wasn't the most comfortable thing, but Shane was willing to forgo comfort if he could lay like this with Ilya, their legs intertwined. Ilya held one of Shane's feet, thumb stroking up and down the sole absently. Shane had complained initially, muttering something about feet being dirty until Ilya had pressed harder, massaging in a way that felt drugging, and Shane had shut up.

"I had something else to talk about, too," Ilya said, sounding like he hadn't been relaxing at all. Shane cracked an eye open.

"Oh no."

"About last night."

Shane had been trying not to think about it.

Ilya continued. "Last night you said—"

"Last night was embarrassing," Shane interrupted. "We don't have to talk about it."

Ilya pushed himself up, and the hammock tilted until Shane also had no choice but to push himself up too.

"No," Ilya said seriously, grabbing Shane's chin, making sure Shane was looking him in the eyes, "last night was important."

"It was just my brain being stupid."

"I don't think it's stupid."

Ilya hesitated, then, with English smooth enough that suggested maybe the sentences were practiced:

"Listen, Shane, I remember when you got hurt on the ice, and I did not sleep all night. I had to refresh the news over and over to see if there was any update on you. There was no way for me to know you were okay. I even thought about getting Pike's number from Carmichael —they played together, I think. I was so scared. And at the hospital, I was not family, so I must wait until visiting hours to see you. The waiting was— the waiting killed me, yes? I am imagining it was like this for you…but maybe worse. Not knowing if I died? Not having a way to find out?"

Shane's heart suddenly felt like it was in his throat. He had no idea Ilya had stayed up the night worrying about him. He had only known their brief hospital visit, where Shane wished Ilya would stay and sit beside him, maybe hold his hand like a boyfriend would. Where Ilya had grimaced when Shane had invited him up to the cottage and said "maybe," like it was a painful word.

"I didn't know you did that," Shane said softly.

"You scared me."

Ilya's expression was open. Vulnerable. Shane figured he could give something back in return.

"Maybe it was a little bit like that," Shane whispered, looking down.

Ilya nodded, like Shane had confirmed something for him. "Yes, so I am thinking…" Ilya paused.

"Thinking what?" Shane prompted, putting his hand over Ilya's wrist where it still held his chin.

"Maybe we tell Svetlana? Then I can make her emergency contact, and I will make sure she will tell you everything she knows." Ilya looked so achingly hopeful, and Shane couldn't help gently brushing a curl from his forehead. "I also want to… I want to introduce you to her…as mine."

"That actually sounds really good."

"Yes? It's okay to tell Sveta?"

"If you trust her with this, so do I," Shane said.

"And I think your parents will tell me for you, yes?"

"Oh yeah, definitely. I think they're both actually pretty big fans of you right now."

Shane's mom had just texted him that morning, asking about Ilya's favourite foods for next week's game.

"I think you should tell someone else about me too," Ilya said, "so you have someone to talk to who is not your parents. Like Rose, maybe," the name sounded like a bad taste in Ilya's mouth. "Or," he said reluctantly, "I think maybe Hayden could be option. He is…your friend."

It was the nicest thing Shane had heard Ilya say about Hayden. Sometimes, he wondered if Ilya was so intensely jealous that he was also jealous of Hayden. Though the thought was so ridiculous, he usually discounted it right away.

He opened his mouth to reply when his eyes widened with realization.

"Oh shit," he said.

"What?"

"I forgot to tell you. Hayden already knows."

"Hayden knows? About us." Ilya said flatly.

"Fuck. I can't believe I forgot. I— I might have been on the team bus when we found out your plane went down, and I might have really freaked out. Hayden just guessed," Shane said

in a rush, “Shit, I’m so sorry, I didn’t even tell you. Here you are asking my consent to tell your best friend and I—”

“Shane, I am not angry. I think Hayden is good friend to you.”

Shane swallowed, then nodded. “Yeah, he is. He won’t tell anyone.”

“Okay, then I trust you. I do not love Hayden Pike, but I trust you.”

Shane laughed, feeling lighter. “I don’t think he’s your biggest fan either.”

“Yes, well, he has bad taste.”

Chapter 13: My Ilya

Chapter Notes

I genuinely can't tell you how lovely it is to read all the comments y'all are leaving me <3
It is probably the reason I have consistently been writing 2k+ words almost every day since I started this fic!
So thank you, thank you

I can see the end of the tunnel, and I think this fic will end up being like 18-19 chapters?

Anyways!! Here is a chapter!! I hope you like it :3

They called Svetlana pretty much right away. Now that the idea was out there, Shane really wanted to solidify the plan, and Ilya was more than willing to introduce Shane to one of his friends. In fact, Shane would have ventured to say he looked excited.

There was an extra bounce to his movements, the way he drummed his hands on Shane's knee, grinning as he hopped up to get his phone.

It was amazing how, in some ways, he and Ilya still barely knew each other. But every time Shane unlocked a new part of Ilya, he only felt like he was falling more in love. It was like there was a special, Ilya-shaped spot inside him that was softer than the rest of Shane. It was where all the good parts of Shane were.

They sat on the couch while Ilya pressed the FaceTime call button. They watched the phone ring twice. Shane reached out and hit the end call button.

"What the hell, Hollander?" Ilya exclaimed, pulling his phone away from Shane.

"What if she doesn't like me?" Shane asked.

"She will like you."

"Well, I'm… boring. And I—"

"You are Shane Hollander," Ilya interrupted. "You forget you are big, heart-throb hockey star? Sveta already loves you, she thinks you are *hot*," Ilya purred.

"But what if she gets to know me and—"

Ilya's face softened, "she will only love you more. Like I do."

He placed the phone beside him, threaded hands through Shane's hair and pressed his lips to Shane's chastely. They were smooth and dry, and Shane enjoyed the feeling of a kiss with no tongue. It was a different kind of intimate, seeing Ilya Rozanov being sweet rather than lustful.

Everyone knew Ilya could be sexy and flirtatious; it was part of the European personality he put on in rink and for interviews, but Shane thought maybe only he knew that Ilya could be like this. Gentle and soft and protective.

"Okay. Let's do this," he said, letting loose a nervous breath and readjusting his hoodie, pulling it down where it had ridden up over his hips.

"Okay?" Ilya double checked, and Shane nodded. "You will not hang up my call?" The words were teasing.

"I'm sorry," Shane let out a nervous, breathy chuckle. "I swear, I won't."

"I will talk to her first. Then I will introduce," he looked at Shane warmly, excitement clear in his eyes.

Svetlana picked up on the fourth ring, and a flurry of Russian came out of the phone, faster than Shane had ever heard.

Ilya's Russian was deep and melodic when Shane had listened to him in the stairwell. It was comforting and so so full of emotion that Shane could barely tell if this was the same language. He looked at Ilya from where he sat off to the side with wide eyes as Svetlana kept it up, and Ilya laughed.

Ilya responded easily and confidently, and Shane could do nothing but watch as they volleyed back and forth in words Shane couldn't even dream of understanding. He thought maybe he heard the word 'Jane' a few times.

Shane didn't know why or how they had decided it, but at some point, they switched to English.

"No," Ilya said, his voice sounding deeper than usual as he switched from his first language. "He is not Russian."

"Too bad. Someone you work with?"

"Maybe."

"A player?"

"Ah, that didn't take long," Ilya said.

"So who is it then? You obviously called me to tell me who it is," Svetlana's voice was excited, and carried the tone of someone who had known Ilya for a long time. Someone was comfortable with him. "Ilyusha, you're blushing. Do you looove him? Oh my god, you do!"

Ilya met eyes with Shane offside the camera, “I do. Very much.”

“Is he there right now? Ilya!” She sounded downright scandalized, “introduce me.”

Finally, Ilya looked a little nervous. “Yes, okay. But be normal, Sveta, please.”

“Why wouldn’t I be normal?”

Ilya tilted the phone to the side, and Shane leaned into the frame. Svetlana was beautiful, with perfect skin, bright almond eyes, and an overall alluring presence—even through the phone. Shane’s first instinct was a spark of jealousy to know Ilya spent time with a woman who looked like that.

“Say hello, Shane.”

“Hello,” Shane said, and gave a little awkward wave to the camera, and Ilya grinned almost manically.

Svetlana was silent. She stared at Shane for so long that Shane had to look over at Ilya to make sure he hadn’t done something wrong.

Then Svetlana was yelling something angry in Russian, and Shane fidgeted with his fingers.

Ilya’s eyes sparkled.

“Did I do something wrong?” he asked.

Ilya barked out a laugh. “No. Sveta is very angry with me that I didn’t properly prepare her. She is a *very big* fan.”

That sparked more angry words from Svetlana that Shane couldn’t understand, and Ilya laughed harder.

“Now she is mad I have told you she is big fan.”

“Ilya!” Svetlana shouted from behind the phone. “Oh god, I’m so embarrassed.”

“Would it help if I said same?” Shane said, and Svetlana laughed. His shoulders relaxed slightly. Maybe this would be okay.

“He is right, though,” she said, recovering so quickly it reminded him a little of Ilya. Maybe it was a Russian thing, to never be embarrassed for long.“I am a big fan. Are you like Ilya at all?”

“I’m not sure what you mean?”

“Do you also like girls?” she purred, “because—”

“He is mine,” Ilya snapped, glowering.

Svetlana rolled her eyes. “You were never so possessive, Ilyusha,” she tutted.

“Blah blah. Whatever,” Ilya said, but his cheeks had turned a little pink.

Shane, for his part, was as bright as a tomato.

“Well, you always did have a flair for dramatics. And you two make a very hot couple.”

“You forget sexy and talented,” Ilya drawled. That did nothing to calm Shane’s burning face.

“So, Shane, is my Ilya treating you well?” She asked.

Shane stiffened, he had to admit he didn’t love hearing *my Ilya* come out of someone else’s mouth. Ilya must have felt it, their thighs pressed up next to eachother on the couch.

“Shane, for the record, is also possessive,” Ilya interjected. Shane glared at him, and Ilya shrugged. “What? Is true. I am Shane’s Ilya now.”

Shane was honey, melting and golden, and so completely head over heels. He looked at Ilya, and the thought, *My Ilya* was the only thing running through his head.

Svetlana laughed, jarring him out of his thoughts, “I can tell. I am happy for you both, truly.”

“Thank you, Sveta. We are not…” Ilya grunted, trying to find the right words, “You can keep this to yourself?”

“Seriously?” she rolled her eyes, “I was friends with you and Sasha in Russia, you think I can’t keep a secret?”

“Actually, I have something important to ask you,” Ilya said, and then glanced at Shane. “I can make you my emergency contact? I want to make sure Shane can have access to information about me if something happens.”

Svetlana looked between the two of them. “Shane has finally knocked sense into you?”

“Knocked… sucked… one of those things, yes.”

Ilya momentarily dropped the phone, laughing as Shane battered him, hissing out a quiet “*What is wrong with you*,” and they wrestled on the couch. Svetlana’s beautiful, tinkling laugh came through the speakers.

Ilya picked the phone back up, his other hand pulling Shane roughly into his side.

“You already know I think this is a good idea.” She said when they had calmed down. “Give me Shane’s number, and I will make sure he’s the first one I contact if I ever need to.”

Shane let out a little sigh, and Ilya put a hand on his thigh and squeezed.

“God, you two make a sexy couple,” Svetlana said wistfully, “hey, if you ever want a third…”

“Sveta you are going to break Shane! He is so innocent. He is not like us.”

“I’m not that innocent,” Shane protested, starting to feel a little more confident as he watched way Ilya and Svetlana interacted.

“You are. He is.” Ilya said with mock seriousness, “like Virgin Mary.”

“It wasn’t so innocent when I—” Ilya slapped the hand not holding the over Shane’s mouth, muffling the rest of the words.

“I said you are mine,” he growled playfully, “Sveta doesn’t need to know these things.”

Svetlana watched them with a bemused expression, and Shane, despite his embarrassment, licked a stripe up Ilya’s hand. Ilya didn’t budge.

“You think this bothers me? I like it,” Ilya grinned wolfishly.

“Okay, enough, Ilya, how am I supposed to speak to Shane when you are like this? Shane?” She said his name warmly.

Ilya lowered his hand, and Shane had to wipe his spit-slick mouth with the back of his hand, face burning. He thought maybe this could be a record for him. Throughout the entire phone call, he was just one constant blush.

“Oh, um, yeah?”

“I’ve never seen Ilya this happy before,” she said softly.

Oh. Shane bit his cheek.

“Yeah?” he said softly, “Me too. I’ve never been this happy before either, I mean.”

Ilya planted a big wet smooch on the side of Shane’s face, and Shane stared at him in shock. He had never considered that Ilya might be someone who liked PDA. Everything they did was always in secret touches, everything they said in hidden meanings, it was strange to think that Ilya—who was caustic, and edgy on the ice, curt and cocky in interviews, and so incredibly private about his family and home life—could lean towards such public displays of affection.

It made Shane’s heart hurt all over again to think that Ilya had been deprived of this for so long.

“Ah shit,” Svetlana said, looking off-screen, “I have to go. Shane, it was so nice to meet you.”

She finished the call in Russian, and Ilya said something in return. Then the call was over. Shane looked over at Ilya, feeling like he had just been through a fever dream or something.

“She said she wants to meet you in person. And that she is happy for us.”

“Oh, that would be nice. Would you… want that?”

“I would like that, Shane, yes.”

“You’re my Ilya, for the record,” Shane said, wanting to make that very clear.

“Ugh,” Ilya threw his head back in feigned annoyance, “I already said this first.”

“Just making sure.”

Chapter 14: Against a tree

Chapter Notes

Yay for new chapters (I love y'all sm)
This is me giving canon Shane what he wanted :D

Ilya was terrible at canoing. Somehow his balance on skates did not translate to his balance on a boat and the whole wooden structure rocked dangerously as Ilya tried to find a comfortable position, grumbling about flimsy Canadian banana boats.

“It’s relaxing, I swear,” Shane had assured him, and Ilya had given him a dubious look.

They had spent the next hour trying to get to the nearby island while Ilya paddled them in circles and Shane kept yelling at him to stop, breathless from laughter. He figured it wouldn’t matter if they fell in; the water was sun-warmed and smooth, and they both knew how to swim well enough.

They barely made it to the small island before Ilya was knee deep in the water, splashing noisily onto shore and miming kissing the ground. He pointed an accusing finger at Shane.

“I will never listen to you again. You have terrible ideas. Relaxing is drinking by poolside in florida with woman on each arm, relaxing is not this,” he waved his hand around the general area where Shane was tying the canoe to a nearby tree root.

“It would have been relaxing if you had listened to me.”

“Oh god,” Ilya groaned, “we will be stuck here. Cottage is so far away.”

Shane pulled out the little basket he had prepared for the trip. He felt a little embarrassed, but he pushed the feeling down. They were here, and they still had a whole week and a half, and he was determined to do everything he could think of that couples did while he had Ilya’s undivided attention and time, away from judgmental eyes.

“Is it really so bad? To be stuck here with me?” he asked, the slight tremor in his voice ruining the flirty vibe he was going for. Instead, he just sounded insecure. He cringed.

Ilya paused and turned to look at Shane, raking his eyes obviously over Shane’s body. Shane had caught Ilya blatantly checking him out ever since their phone call with Svetlana, something about introducing Shane to someone as his boyfriend had flipped some switch in Ilya. He was full of buzzing energy, throwing out more of his quips than usual, freer in his affection, louder in his dramatics. Shane wondered how often Ilya got to let this side of himself out. It couldn’t be often.

“Hmm, no, I think not so bad,” Ilya said, crossing the distance between them, eyes dark.

Kissing Ilya was all-encompassing. It was nothing like Shane had ever experienced with a woman. Ilya’s lips were stronger, surer, his hands calloused and large as they sank into Shane’s hair. Shane tried, at first, to take some agency over the kiss, tangling his tongue with Ilya’s and mimicking what Ilya often did to Shane by putting a hand around his jaw and throat.

Ilya slid a hand up Shane’s t-shirt and thumbed at his nipple until Shane felt like there was a line connecting straight from his nipple to his dick. It did something to him, to be overwhelmed like this, crowded up against a tree and completely surrounded by Ilya, the scent of Shane’s teatree oil shampoo in his hair.

Shane abandoned his grip of Ilya’s jaw; it was too much work to maintain while he felt so utterly undone. He ended up grabbing at the fabric of Ilya’s shirt, fisting it in his hands while he tried to keep up.

Ilya hummed, satisfied as Shane submitted to his lead, kissing him so intensely that Shane couldn’t help the noises he made. He hadn’t realized they were moving until his back hit a tree, the bark scratchy on his skin where Ilya had rucked his shirt up. His lips felt swollen he was out of breath when Ilya pulled away, breathing just as heavily.

“Fuck, Shane,” Ilya breathed. “Have you ever wanted to be fucked against a tree?”

He ground his hips almost painfully against Shane and then groaned again.

“I think you have,” Ilya said against his lips, reaching between them and palming Shane’s hard length through his swim shorts.

“Jesus, Rozanov, there are people around,” Shane gasped as Ilya massaged him harder than was fully comfortable. There was some tree cover, and they were on a small, uninhabited island, but it was still technically a public space.

“People? I see no people.”

“It’s a public lake. They could boat by or,” Shane gasped again, “like swim,” he finished breathlessly.

“Come on, Hollander,” Ilya whined, “I didn’t come last night. And neither did you. I want to fuck you.”

He ground his hips against Shane, emphasizing how hard they both were. Then, with his lips pressed to Shane’s ear, breath hot on his skin, “and I think you want to be fucked.”

“I brought—*oh fuck*,” Shane choked as Ilya bit down on his collar bone, not hard enough to bruise but enough that Shane could feel teeth pressing down over the thin skin. Threatening, possessive. It made his cock jerk. “I brought us a picnic,” he protested.

“And we will have picnic. Later. It will be perfect food for after sex,” Ilya licked a wet stripe over the sensitive spot behind Shane’s ear. Everything felt sharper.

Shane was impossibly hard. He had, in fact, daydreamed about Ilya fucking him up against a tree, or anywhere outside for that matter— a fact that he had never planned to share—but it had been a fantasy, not something they could ever have.

“Ilya,” he breathed, his hips bucking of their own accord, “someone will see.”

Ilya ran two fingers over Shane’s lips and waited patiently while Shane hesitated. Someone really could boat by or fly their drone overhead… or something. Shane swallowed thickly and then, already feeling debauched, opened his mouth for Ilya’s fingers to slide inside.

They sat there for a moment, still and tasting of lake water on Shane’s tongue while saliva collected.

Ilya looked like he wanted to devour Shane, and Shane shuddered.

“Suck,” he ordered.

Shane did, watching the way Ilya’s nostrils flared, his eyes intently trained on Shane’s mouth. Ilya’s lips pulled up in that knowing little smirk that Shane was so familiar with—the smile that meant Ilya knew he had won. Shane closed his eyes.

“No one will see,” Ilya promised, as he planted a kiss on Shane’s neck, just under his jaw. Then another, a bit lower down.

Shane groaned softly, the sound muffled around Ilya’s fingers. He sucked harder. God, he did want Ilya to fuck him against a tree.

He let Ilya trail spit wet fingers over the hem of his swim shorts, rucking his shirt up until Shane just pulled it off, covering his face with his forearms. Ilya enveloped Shane’s cock in the heat of his mouth, sucking hard enough that Shane reached a hand down and fisted Ilya’s hair hard as a warning. Ilya just laughed, and the sound vibrated through Shane’s cock.

This was maybe the most reckless thing he had ever done.

Ilya took his mouth off Shane with a pop and then swore. He looked up at Shane, his lips red and plumper than usual. “No lube.”

The words didn’t register at first, “What?”

“Ah, no problem actually,” Ilya’s concerned face morphed into something more dangerous. Before Shane even understood what was happening, Ilya, still kneeling, flipped him and pushed with a hand on Shane’s lower back so that he was bent over in front of Ilya’s face, hands steadying himself against the tree.

He made a squawking sound of discomfort. “Rozanov!” he protested loudly.

But Ilya’s hands were already gripping the thick muscle of Shane’s ass, pulling it apart, his breath hot against Shane’s hole.

“Oh *jesus fuck*,” Shane choked out, as Ilya laved his tongue, wet and slick and hot, over the seam of Shane’s ass. Shane could feel acutely the way it dipped slightly as it made a pass over his hole.

He swore he could feel Ilya’s responding rumble directly in his prostate. Ilya tongue fucked him until Shane was trembling with want; the only thing keeping his knees from buckling was Ilya’s hands on his hips and Shane’s desperate grip on the rough bark of the thick tree trunk in front of him. His fingers felt raw from where they scraped against it.

Shane was not proud of the garbled, completely uninhibited sound he made when Ilya sucked Shane’s balls into his mouth. But then he was being turned around and pulled up.

He expected to see some form of the cocky, smug look that Ilya gave him whenever he managed to draw sounds like that out of Shane. What he didn’t expect to see was Ilya, staring at him, pupils blown wide, looking like he wanted to *devour* him.

Ilya looked down. “Ah shit, condom—”

“Jesus Christ, I don’t care, just fuck me,” Shane said impatiently on the back of a breathy whimper.

"You are sure, Shane?"

“Fuck me against a tree. God. Please.”

That seemed to be the magic word. Ilya hoisted him up, and Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya’s waist. He dropped his head to Ilya’s shoulder, panting in anticipation, as Ilya lined himself up.

Shane knew he wasn’t a small person. He was a professional athlete, all corded muscle and lean fat. By all accounts, he was heavy. But Ilya held him up with two hands under his thighs, his back pressed against the tree, and lowered Shane slowly onto his cock like he weighed nothing.

Heat bloomed sharply in his gut. His arms flailed, and with nothing to hold onto, he gripped the back of Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya didn’t speed up. Only lowered Shane inch by inch, his arms shaking slightly with the effort. The result was that Ilya felt longer and bigger than Shane ever remembered.

Every time he thought he was about to bottom out, there was more. He groaned wetly into Ilya’s shoulder, and Ilya responded in turn.

“You are going to come hands-free for me.”

“Fucking— fucking make me.”

“Mmm, challenge accepted, Hollander.”

It was different, like this, the angle was deeper. When Shane finally felt the press of Ilya's pelvis against his ass, he sucked in a deep breath, only for Ilya to grind his hips upward, in

short, sharp movements that sent sparks through Shane's stomach.

Shane could feel his orgasm building, wanted to get a hand around himself, but he was too scared to let go of Ilya, in case he fell. He could feel the way his cock pounded in time with his own heartbeat.

A reprieve, then, and Ilya stopped, pressing deeply inside of Shane and just holding there.

"Shane," Ilya said, and Shane lifted his head, staring dazedly back. Then that smirk, full of confidence and propriety, "Have you realized it yet?"

Realized what? Shane fought for more awareness, and Ilya tilted his head, directing Shane's gaze to Ilya's hands braced on either side of his head. He realized with horror that the only thing keeping him propped up against this tree was Ilya's cock.

"Oh fu—" the breath was punched out of him, and he tried to drop his head back down, only for Ilya to grab his jaw and keep his head pushed up against the tree. Shane was coming untouched, ass clenching rhythmically around Ilya's cock, mouth open, unable to hide whatever blissed out face he was making as he came harder than he ever had before.

"That's good," Ilya said, his face inches away from Shane's, sounding out of breath. Shane barely heard him. "That's so good, Shane, *fuck*."

"I hate you," Shane managed, and Ilya laughed roughly. Then, Ilya's hands were back around Shane, one hefting under his left thigh, the other steadying his flank, and Ilya's was fucking up into him properly, breathing hard against his skin. He groaned thickly as he came inside Shane.

When he finally put Shane down, Shane's legs buckled almost immediately, and Ilya had to hold him up for a few moments while Shane found his balance again.

"Wait here," Ilya said, like Shane could do anything else but lean against the tree, feeling the way his back already itched from the abrasive bark.

He thought maybe he'd have some sort of friction burn when he looked in the mirror. But the thought didn't bother him. He liked that something of Ilya would be left from this. Something that wasn't too obvious. No one would make the same guesses, the way they would with a hickey or a bite. But Shane would know.

Ilya had taken it upon himself to find the perfect patch of island to lay down the picnic blanket Shane had brought. It was mostly flat and spongy with moss, and Shane lay on his back, eyes closed, while Ilya rubbed a foot absently along Shane's leg and fed him little morsels of food.

Shane was enjoying the surprise of what food would come next, even though he had packed the basket himself. He could hear Ilya combing through the containers for the best-looking piece of cheese, or fruit, or nut, before placing it gently against Shane's lips. It made Shane feel special. Like he was worthwhile.

“Do you think you’ll go back to Russia?” Shane asked as he chewed on a cube of sharp cheddar, trying to keep his tone neutral, and Ilya paused.

“You don’t want me to?”

Was it that obvious?

“I mean,” Shane bit his lip, “that photo exists now, in the world. And no one said anything, but what if you go back to Russia and then they figure it out?” He opened his eyes to look at Ilya, who was propped up on his elbow, fingering through the container of trail mix. He looked thoughtful.

“You are worried for me,” Ilya said.

Shane furrowed his eyebrows, only for Ilya to immediately smooth them out with a gentle thumb. “Of course I am. I looked it up, after the olympics, what could happen to you,” Shane heard the tremble in his own voice, “if they found out, and—”

“You should not be looking this up.”

“Well, I did. And now—”

“I will not go back to Russia, Shane.”

“Really?”

“No.”

Shane wanted to feel relieved. Ever since he had done that Google search after the Russian Olympics, he worried for Ilya. When Ilya had flown back for his dad’s funeral, Shane had been worried. Ilya had lived there almost his entire life; of course, he knew how to handle himself, but Shane couldn’t help it.

Then Ilya had brought up wanting protection from Russia, and Shane hadn’t been able to get it out of his mind. Now, with that photo out in the world, with Cliff Marleau knowing what he knew, with the reckless things they were doing, the thought wouldn’t leave him alone.

Ilya had given Shane the answer he wanted, but it didn’t feel like it.

“Because of me?” Shane asked.

“I could not love you the way I want and still go back Russia.”

“Doesn’t that make you sad?” Shane’s voice wavered even as his heart flipped. He didn’t want to be the person standing in the way of Ilya and his home.

Ilya pursed his lips, “No, I am not sad. Russia was no good for me. My father, my brother, they were not good family.”

“But don’t you think—”

“Shane,” Ilya interrupted, playing with a lock of Shane’s hair that curled over his ear. It was getting too long. He needed a haircut. “I do not *want* to go back to Russia. My mother is dead. There is nothing for me there. You are here. It is easy decision.”

“What was she like? Your mom?”

Shane tried to place the words down carefully, quietly, feeling as if he didn’t, they would shatter this quiet space. Ilya so rarely spoke about anything to do with his family. He was so guarded about this. Shane knew Ilya's father had Alzheimer’s and was maybe a bit homophobic, and even sharing that had Ilya’s careful mask cracking to reveal the profound hurt underneath.

“She was amazing,” Ilya said. “She was beautiful, and kind, and what you think a mother should be. But sometimes I wish,” he swallowed around the emotion that had built up in his throat, “I wish I could have known her better.”

“How old were you when she died?”

“Twelve.”

Shane felt like he was walking on glass, and if he stepped wrongly, cracks would spider outwards.

“How did… how did she die?”

“My father says it was accident,” Ilya said dully, “She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills. Oops”

Ilya didn’t look at him, still playing with Shane’s hair. Shane didn’t dare breathe.

“I found her.”

“Ilya,” Shane couldn’t help the soft words, “I’m so sorry.”

“I don’t want you to think she was weak. She was…amazing. But she was so sad. And my father was so hard on her…”

“I don’t think that,” Shane said quietly, watching as Ilya reeled himself in, his eyes glassy. Refusing to cry.

“Okay,” Ilya said, and the word was full of something thankful.

That seemed to be the end of the conversation. Some unspoken understanding Shane had that Ilya’s capacity for this conversation was finished. Shane felt profoundly grateful that Ilya was willing to share even that much. He made a mental note to give Ilya more chances to talk about his mother.

“Hey,” he said, “come here.”

He pulled Ilya onto his chest, placed careful kisses on his face, the thin skin of his eyelids, the top of his head, grunting a little at the weight of him.

Chapter 15: What is it like to be in a plane crash?

Chapter Notes

> you guys, this chapter *fought me* and I do not know if I came out a winner, but my new weird personal goal since I started this fic is to post a chapter every day, so here she is.
> Sorry if she is terrible I no longer can tell :D
>
> I promise we will have a happier Hayden ending by the end of the fic!

You can't wear that," Shane said.

Ilya frowned at him.

"What? He does not know I play for Raiders?"

Shane frowned back. Hayden was coming over. He was in town with Jackie and the kids, visiting family, and he was coming to visit.

Shane just wanted Hayden to see the real Ilya, the Ilya that Shane knew and not the menace that he was on the ice. Especially since Ilya always seemed to target Hayden with his chirps whenever they played Boston. Some part of Shane was sure it was because he was weirdly jealous of Hayden.

"Of course he knows that, but I'm saying it won't *help*."

"I don't need help," Ilya insisted, "I am very charming man."

Shane pinched the bridge of his nose. "I should never have agreed to this."

"You agreed to nothing," Ilya said with that spark in his eyes that meant he knew he was toying the line between what was Shane's aimable exasperation and true frustration, "This was my idea."

Shane sighed. "Fine. Wear the stupid shirt. See if I care."

Ilya placed a noisy, wet kiss on the side of Shane's face, and Shane couldn't help his smile, even as he tried to glare at Ilya.

Hayden had texted Shane in the days between Ilya arriving home in Boston, and their time at the cottage, when Shane had to let Ilya 'work' and do whatever else the league wanted him to do, because their relationship was a *secret* and Ilya couldn't claim any time to spend with his

family, because for all intents and purposes, as far as the NHL was concerned, he didn't have one

Shane had been tired and lonely and having nightmares every night he slept—which was not every night; sometimes he would walk around his parents neighbourhood under the lamplight trying to keep himself awake, not wanting to keep experiencing what it was like to wakeup and have to shove a fist in mouth while he tried not to wake his parents in the room next door.

Shane couldn't even work out because his stupid sling was still on, and he wasn't cleared from his concussion. So the best he got was texting Ilya, not nearly enough for his liking, but already more than he knew was normal.

Shane had brushed off Hayden's texts, telling him he was okay and that he needed some time, and Hayden had given it to him. But ever since their conversation with Svetlana, Ilya had been bringing Hayden up more and more. Insisting Shane call him, or just text. It was somewhat endearing to know that Ilya cared that Shane had someone to talk to, who he could be open with, who wasn't his parents.

Shane would be more into the idea if he didn't cringe every time he thought of the two of them meeting.

"Call him," Ilya insisted one morning.

"You don't even like him."

"But you like him."

So Shane had called that evening, his phone face up on the counter, speakerphone on, while he chopped vegetables for dinner, and Ilya read in the lounge, claiming he was almost finished with his book and just needed to finish the page.

"Hey buddy! I'm so glad you called!" Hayden sounded more excited than usual, and Shane felt a pang of shame for ignoring his best friend for so long.

"Yeah," Shane said sheepishly, "I've been—I wasn't in a great headspace for a while."

There was an awkward pause on the other end of the line, and then "I'm sorry, Shane. I wish I could've been there for you more. I've been a bad friend."

Shane immediately felt guilty.

"No, you haven't," he sighed, "I've been bad about, you know, um… opening up, I guess," he finished lamely. "I've wanted to tell you about…me, you're my best friend, you know? But, I don't know, I was scared."

"Shane, buddy. I love you, man. I don't care about the fact that you're gay. Maybe I care a little bit about your choice of partners, but I support *you*. I want you to be happy. Always."

“Unfortunately for you, I think that means you’re stuck with Ilya,” Shane smiled a little. It felt daring to say Ilya’s name out loud to someone else like this. If he could help it, he’d be stuck with Ilya forever.

“It’s still so weird to hear you call him Ilya,” Hayden said.

“I mean, that’s just who he is to me,” Shane glanced at Ilya, who was putting his book down, sauntering over to the kitchen. He wondered how much he had heard. Probably all of it.

Shane watched him appreciatively. He was shirtless, and his muscles rippled over his body even as he did something as simple as walking up the few steps to the kitchen. Shane looked away, not wanting to fuel Ilya’s already too-big ego, but couldn’t help glancing back up. By the smirk on Ilya’s face, he had definitely noticed.

“You know, you’re going to have to get to know him eventually,” Shane said.

Hayden sighed. Ilya bracketed Shane against the counter with both hands. Pressing his hips to Shane’s ass and kissing the side of his neck. Shane couldn’t help his full-body shiver.

He batted Ilya away half-heartedly.

“I know you think he’s an asshole, but—”

“You thought that too!” Hayden said defensively.

Shane couldn’t help the small, private smile he made. “I mean, never really thought that.”

“Oh god,” Hayden said, in a way that made Shane think maybe Hayden couldn’t handle too much Ilya talk. He changed the subject.

Hayden caught Shane up on what was going on with the kids, with Jackie, all the while Ilya sucked a slow pressure into the base of Shane’s neck, running his hands along the hemline of Shane’s pants.

Shane ignored him pointedly. Tried to keep his breathing even.

“Jackie and I will be in Ottawa visiting family later this week. I thought maybe I could drop by?”

“Oh,” Shane said as Ilya sucked his earlobe into his mouth, “I’m—I’m actually not at my parents' house, I’m up at the cottage.”

“Well, I can come out to you! I mean, if you don’t mind. It’s been way too long, man. And Jackie’s been kind of on my ass about meeting up with you. I think I’m annoying her,” Hayden said sheepishly.

Ilya’s hand slipped playfully beneath his hemline.

“Would you stop it?” Shane hissed.

Hayden went silent.

“Sorry, Hayd not you—”

“Oh my god,” Hayden said suddenly, “is Rozanov there with you right now? Please say no.”

“Hello, Pike,” Ilya drawled before Shane could stop him.

A short whispered argument ensued, which consisted mostly of Shane hissing out ‘*What is wrong with you?’* and Ilya’s responding shit eating grin.

“You’ve got to be— Shane, you’re—please tell me you guys weren’t—” Hayden spluttered.

“Oh no. Pike has lost his tongue,” Ilya teased.

“Oh my god, that’s not even a saying. Shane. Were there really no better men in Montreal?”

Shane blushed. It was still alarming and strange to hear people talk about his gayness openly.

“I don’t know, maybe?” he said, still flustered. Ilya wasn’t helping as he nuzzled cheekily at Shane’s neck.

“Hmm, I think no,” Ilya said.

“I’m hallucinating,” Hayden declared, sounding dazed.

Then, to Shane’s surprise—and Hayden’s, judging by the silence on the other end of the line—Ilya said, “You should come visit. Shane’s social life is so sad. Yuna and David cannot be his only friends.”

Shane just smiled. The jab didn’t have much impact when Shane knew this was Ilya’s way of making it seem like this wasn’t important to him. Shane knew better.

“Ilya’s right, you should come by. It would be good to see you, man,” Shane piped up before Hayden could come up with some kind of excuse.

He thought the excuse would come anyway because the line was quiet for a moment.

“I mean, if this asshole’s really here to stay, I guess I have to meet him at some point, right?”

And that was how Shane ended up standing anxiously by the front door of his cottage, watching Hayden stare flatly at Ilya in his Boston Raiders t-shirt.

“He wore that on purpose, didn’t he?”

“Hey, man,” Shane said quickly, stepping in between them before Ilya could respond. “Long time no see.”

He hesitated, not sure if he should reach out for a hug. Maybe Hayden didn't want to be hugged by Shane, now that he knew he was gay. He didn't want to make Hayden uncomfortable. His hands twitched where they dangled by his sides.

He didn't have to linger on the thought too long before Hayden was pulling Shane in for a tight embrace.

"It's so good to see you, dude."

It was nice. Shane realized how much he had missed his best friend. He wrapped his arms around Hayden's back and relaxed into it.

"Any longer, I might get jealous," Ilya drawled, and Hayden jerked back, glaring, his cheeks tinged just the slightest pink.

"Seriously, Shane? This guy?"

"Pike, I went through.. What is from the press release? Oh yes, *traumatizing ordeal*. You have to be nice to me."

"Being on the ice with you is a traumatizing ordeal, Rozanov."

Ilya grinned like this was fun for him, "Only if you are scaredy cat."

"I'm just saying, Shane can do better. Like, *way* better."

"Oh my god," Shane muttered to no one in particular.

Shane pressed his hands into his eyes. The idea of mediating these two made his head pound. They sniped back and forth while Shane wondered why he had ever thought this was a good idea. He hadn't realized they had gone mysteriously quiet, some silent conversation happening while he slowly spiralled until:

"We are teasing only, Shane," Ilya said gently, "Right, Pike?"

Ilya knocked his shoulder into Shane's, and Shane was so incredibly grateful for the thoughtful contact. Not so much PDA as with Svetlana, which somehow felt more comfortable than in front of Hayden, but enough touch that Shane felt a little bit of his tension melt away. Sometimes he felt like he'd never find anyone who understood him so wholly as Ilya seemed to.

"Yeah, sorry, man, just teasing," Hayden said, putting on a game smile as they walked further into the cottage.

Shane got them all a beer from the fridge, after hesitating over a ginger ale for himself, then deciding maybe he needed a bit of liquid courage. Ilya and Hayden stood nearby and said nothing to each other, both just watching Shane. The back of Shane's neck prickled from being the center of attention like this.

"So, how's it been going?" Hayden asked, awkwardly, finally. Breaking the silence.

“Yeah, great,” Shane passed them both their beers and ignored the look Ilya was giving. Okay, so maybe he wasn’t great, but he was good enough. Ilya was alive, and Shane was doing better, especially compared to the last time Hayden had seen him. “Ilya’s been staying the last week. It’s been really nice.”

“Nice,” Hayden said a little too casually.

Shane reached for something to say.

“We’re um, going to watch the game tomorrow with my parents, actually. You and Jackie are welcome to come if you'd like. My mom's doing a whole thing."

"Oh, we'd love to. A night off from the kids would be incredible for Jackie."

"Can’t believe Scott Hunter has a shot at the cup.”

“Should have been us,” Hayden scoffed.

“No, should have been *me*,” Ilya lamented sadly, “but my plane tried to kill me. Not my fault. Metros lose fair and square.”

“Fair and square?” Hayden shot a pointed glare at Ilya. “Maybe if our star player hadn’t been injured…”

“Don’t look at me. I almost killed Marleau for that.”

Hayden frowned, eyebrows pulling together, and then, “Oh, right. You two were already… Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

Shane led them all outside. The wood of the deck was warm under his bare feet, and they all sat on the lounge chairs there, watching the sun shine off the water while they sipped their beers.

They ended up talking puck. The conversation was still slightly stilted, but Shane could tell both Ilya and Hayden were trying their best. Shane always forgot somehow that hockey was such a constant between everyone in his life. It was a blessing in this moment.

“Okay, I have to ask,” Hayden said after a while, “what’s it like to be in a plane crash?”

“Hayden,” Shane said sharply.

“Sorry,” Hayden looked over somewhat apologetically at him, “but I’m so curious. How many people do you know who have been in a plane crash and actually survived?”

Despite the heat of the day, something cold crept over Shane. He didn’t like thinking about Ilya’s time during the crash. He knew he should ask about it, let Ilya share his experiences. Maybe it would be therapeutic for him. But Shane didn’t want to know. He would rather just forget the entire thing.

Sometimes it was funny how the thought of Ilya dying was what really stuck in his brain; his dreams supplied him with many different options for that. But the actual plane crash itself was something that his thoughts could only skirt around, shying away from the thought of Ilya, traumatized and scared, for three days in the torrent of Appalachian rain that kept the search and rescue crews from locating them.

Ilya just laughed, “What, you wished it had taken me out of the competition, Pike?”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “There would be less racket on the ice at least, which might be nice.”

“Hayden,” Shane snapped.

“I’m kidding. Obviously. I wanted you to be okay for Shane’s sake.”

“Wow. So thoughtful,” Ilya snickered.

Shane picked at his nail beds until they stung. He imagined pulling at his hangnail, and the skin would rip all the way up his finger, leaving a bloody, painful line.

“Whatever. I’m serious, though, did those masks all drop from the ceiling like in the movies?”

Ilya looked almost delighted at Hayden’s lack of tact. “Yes! Like the movies. Useless fucking things,” Ilya made a face. “No one used. Everyone is too busy screaming like—”

Shane stood up. He felt queasy. He didn’t like this conversation at all. They both looked at him.

“I’m—” he took a deep breath. He didn’t want to ruin this. Hayden and Ilya’s first time getting along, talking about the most horrifying moment in Ilya’s life like it was a joke. “I need the bathroom. You two can just keep…” He didn’t bother with the rest of the sentence as he walked off.

Shane was used to panic attacks. Mostly, they happened when he was in his head about being outed, or in recent months, about the horrifying thought that he would never be able to live an authentic life with the person he loved.

He went to the ensuite bathroom, feeling like he needed the extra layer of protection that the bedroom gave him. Now he could hide behind two doors, muffling the conversation Ilya and Hayden were having.

His hands gripped the cold marble countertop as he tried to control his breathing, swallowing continually around the nausea that coiled in the back of his throat. This was so stupid. It wasn’t his trauma. It wasn’t his plane crash. Ilya should be allowed to joke about it.

In fact, if Shane were a better partner, he would probably be asking about it. Coaxing Ilya to share whatever awful experiences he had with his boyfriend, who should comfort him and tell him everything was okay now. Shane felt like a stain on their relationship.

He made a noise in the back of his throat. The strength of his self-hatred in this moment was sharp and dizzying, but at least he wasn't thinking about Ilya on that goddamn plane.

It took him longer than he would have liked to school himself back to normal. But he knew if he didn't pull it together, Ilya would inevitably come looking for him, so he splashed some water on his face, held his breath until his chest unlocked enough that he could hide his erratic breathing, and went back outside.

The topic of conversation had changed back to hockey when he sat back down, ignoring the way Ilya tried to catch his eye. Even Hayden was looking at him quizzically, and Shane had forgotten that these were two of the people in his life who knew him best.

"You okay?" Hayden asked tentatively, "I shouldn't have brought up—"

"No, no, yeah, I'm fine," Shane said, plastering on a smile, "I just was texting my mom about you and Jackie coming over tomorrow."

Lie.

Hayden looked like he knew it, too. He studied Shane with narrowed eyes. He opened his mouth to say something, but Ilya piped up.

"Too bad you missed Pike admitting he likes me."

"I did not."

"Okay."

"I did not!"

"I said, okay."

Hayden scowled and Ilya leaned back in his chair, looking smug. Shane didn't miss what Ilya had done, redirecting the conversation like that.

The rest of the visit went fine. Ilya couldn't seem to help riling up Hayden, but he kept it mostly PG and kept Shane out of it, which Shane was grateful for. Shane felt floaty and a bit out of it after forcing himself out of a panic attack, but he had always been awkward and quiet, so it was easy to imagine Ilya and Hayden didn't notice anything out of the ordinary.

When Hayden left, with the promise he and Jackie would come watch the game tomorrow, all Shane wanted to do was sleep.

Chapter 16: I think you should hear about it

Chapter Notes

weeeee we're getting close to the end!
If you want the Russian translation of some of the phrases Ilya is using, I've put them in the endnotes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The meeting with Hayden Pike had gone as well as could be hoped. Ilya had been on his best behaviour for Shane because he could tell how nervous he was about the meeting, all adorably twitchy and grumpy. It made Ilya want to debauch him. To wipe the stressed-out look off his face and replace it with the unrestrained yielding that made Shane's eyes shine in glassy arousal.

"I think that went well," Ilya said later as they cuddled on the couch.

They were crowded into the corner of Shane's L-shaped couch. Shane's head was on Ilya's lower belly, his arms wrapped around Ilya's thigh like it was a body pillow. It was nice.

Shane grumbled. "I could have done without all the smart ass comments."

Ilya grinned, even though he knew Shane couldn't see. "I should not be blamed. He makes it too easy."

Hayden Pike was annoying. He clearly didn't mind that Shane was gay, but he also made it pretty clear he didn't approve of Ilya specifically as Shane's choice of partner. So naturally, Ilya wasn't a huge fan.

There was also something particularly delightful about annoying Hayden. The feeling similar to chirping someone on the ice with a particularly savage comment and watching as they tried not to let it get to them, eyes flashing, jaw clenching. Satisfying.

"I just want him to like you," Shane insisted, playing his fingers through the soft hairs that ran from Ilya's navel to his hemline.

"What's not to like?" Ilya stretched out, hands behind his head.

"Maybe the fact that you're an asshole?"

"I think you like it."

"Yeah, well, Hayden doesn't," Shane shot back.

Ilya rolled his eyes. “I do not care what Hayden Pike likes.”

“Well, I do.”

Ilya softened. Shane was like a grumpy old cat sometimes. It was more endearing than it should have been.

“Okay, *moy lyubov*,” he said, caving immediately, helpless to it, thinking back to Cliff telling him he was whipped. Ilya supposed that was a good word for it. “I’m sorry. I will be better for you. Best friends with Hayden Pike.”

That seemed to be the right answer because in return, Shane sighed and then said darkly, “Yeah, well, he’s not much better. When he said that stuff about there being less racket on the ice if you died, I sort of wanted to kill him.”

Ilya didn’t know he would like hearing that until Shane said it. It felt good to be defended, especially by Shane.

Ilya could hold his own; there was no doubt in his mind. He could destroy Hayden Pike in a physical fight and in a verbal duel (in his second language, no less), but knowing Shane was there in the background, ready to stand up for him, even to Shane’s best friend, was special for Ilya. He didn’t think he had someone to stand up for him since his mother died.

“Actually, Shane, I think maybe I should tell you about it.”

“What?” Shane stiffened.

“The crash.”

“I don’t— do you want to tell me about it?” Shane looked up at Ilya, fear prominent in his eyes.

“I think maybe you need to hear it.”

Ilya hadn’t been ignorant to the fact that Shane’s face had gone white when Hayden had brought up the crash. He saw the way Shane picked at his hands and then excused himself, looking nauseous and unsteady, and didn't return for a good 10 minutes.

He and Hayden had changed the topic quickly, sharing an unspoken look that told Ilya they both knew very well why Shane had abruptly left. Ilya was also aware that Shane pointedly ignored or steered the conversation elsewhere every time Ilya brought it up.

Surprisingly, the whole experience hadn’t affected Ilya like he expected. He thought at first maybe it would, but between walking in on his dead mother at twelve, a homophobic, abusive father with Alzheimer's, a coke addict brother, and the fact that he was so impossibly, painfully in love with a man he thought he could never have, it was like Ilya’s brain didn’t have anymore space for trauma.

He was a bit apprehensive about flying again, but otherwise, he was pretty unbothered by the whole thing. He sometimes wondered idly whether it would catch up to him later, but it

wasn't in his nature to dwell on something that might never become a problem.

And while it did kill him, how much Shane was struggling with the whole thing, it ironically helped Ilya to have someone to look after. To put his energy into.

"Is it something you *want* to talk about?" Shane asked tentatively, sounding like he'd rather talk about anything else.

"It was good to talk about with Pike."

"That wasn't talking about it. That was screwing around and joking about it. There's a difference," Shane muttered blackly.

"*Moy lyubimiy,* I didn't mean for it to upset you."

Shane went still. His fingers no longer tracing patterns on Ilya's stomach.

"It didn't upset me. You should be allowed to joke about it if you want to."

"I think maybe it did."

There was silence then, and Ilya waited through it. He knew Shane needed some time to work through what he wanted to say, and all things considered, Ilya was comfortable; Shane was warm and soft in all the right ways, and Ilya enjoyed being able to look down at him like this as he played with his wiry black hair. For Shane, he could be patient.

"Do you think I'm a terrible partner?" Shane finally whispered.

Ah. Ilya hadn't expected that.

"Of course not. Do you think that?"

Shane shifted his head so he was looking up at Ilya, biting at the inside of his cheek.

"Don't you think it makes me a bad person that I somehow always manage to make this about me?"

"Shane…"

Shane looked away, breaking eye contact.

"I'm serious. I mean, you should be able to talk about it. You went through it. It's *your* thing not mine. It's really selfish of me that I can't hear it. And I don't know what's wrong with me, but I *can't* hear it, Ilya. I know you deserve better."

Ilya's heart hurt at the self-hatred that dripped from Shane's voice.

But Shane didn't stop. "I'm always losing it, and you're always looking after me, and it's not fair to you. I hate that I'm like this. I should be looking after you. You're the one who was in a plane crash for fucks sake."

“You look after me,” Ilya said quietly.

“But I don’t, though.”

“You do,” he insisted, “from the very beginning you have looked after me, Shane. You help me with my interviews when I cannot understand questions—this was before we even really knew each other, yes?—you listened to my problems in Russian when my father died, you love me so much when I’m…” *not worth it*, a voice in his head said.

“You’re worth it to me,” Shane said quietly, and Ilya was rocked by how easily Shane could read what he was thinking sometimes.

He cleared his throat around the choked-up feeling in his throat. “See? You are so good to me. And Shane, I *like* to look after you. It helps me too, you know?”

“I still hate it,” Shane complained into his lap, and Ilya almost smiled. Shane sounded petulant.

“I think it would help,” Ilya said. “To hear about crash.”

When Shane looked at him, his expression was so raw and unguarded that Ilya was breathless with it for a moment. He could see the way tears collected in Shane’s eyes.

“I’m— I really meant it when I said can’t, Ilya. Please. Not now. I’m really sorry.”

And Ilya knew he should push, that telling Shane how truly uneventful his time on that stupid tilted plane was, would go a long way to soothing whatever Shane had dredged up in his imagination. But Ilya was helpless to Shane, looking at him like that. It could wait for another day. It could wait.

So instead, he threaded his fingers through Shane’s hair and swiped his thumb along Shane’s pulse point while he watched those tears collect and spill, tumbling down his lover's cheeks and dampening Ilya’s shirt.

“Okay, *dusha moya*,” Ilya said, “not now.”

“I’m really sorry,” Shane whispered again, voice cracking on the words.

Shane cried himself to sleep, and Ilya worried the entire time he was having some sort of heart event, the way his chest ached as he listened to Shane’s quiet sniffles.

Ilya didn’t stop stroking his hair as Shane’s breathing deepened—only once, to wipe away the crusted salt on Shane’s cheeks. Shane mumbled something in his sleep in response, but didn’t wake up.

It was hours later when Ilya startled out of a doze to a noise at the door. It was early evening, the sun turning everything warm and golden.

Ilya heard the beeping of the code being put in, footsteps. Maybe David or Yuna? They had come over a few times over the last week to ‘get to know’ Ilya, and he couldn’t think of

anyone else who had the door code. Ilya sat up straighter, careful not to wake Shane, but he was sleeping like the dead. It was almost like when he did finally sleep, Shane was catching up on all the sleep he had lost over the past few weeks.

Then, Hayden Pike appeared in front of them. He took in the sight before him; Shane sprawled over Ilya's lap, hand on his stomach, rucking up his shirt, fast asleep, and Ilya could have laughed at the expression on his face.

Horrified, confused, a little grossed out, definitely shocked, and something… soft? But Ilya didn't laugh. Instead, he felt that protectiveness surging. Shane was so vulnerable asleep like this. Touching Ilya freely was not something he was ready to do so much in front of others, and while Ilya basked in the PDA of it all, he knew Shane would be embarrassed by his friend witnessing this moment.

And Shane was asleep, which meant Ilya didn't have to be on his best behaviour. So he glared.

"Why are you back here?" he asked lowly.

"Shit, sorry. I'm just—" Hayden started, the volume of his voice loud in his shock

"Keep your voice—" Ilya made a lowering motion with his hand. "Do not wake Shane."

What he wanted to say was *If you wake up Shane, I'll kill you*. But he figured Shane wouldn't like that so much.

Hayden glared and opened his mouth to chirp something back at him, but then looked at Shane and seemed to think better of it.

"I forgot Tootie here," Hayden said quietly, "and Shane said I could come get it. Texted me the house code and everything. I didn't realize—"

"What the fuck is Tootie?"

"Its Amber's— it's my kids' stuffed turtle. It was in my bag…" Hayden trailed off.

His eyes lingered a little too long on where Shane's hand was placed, right under Ilya's navel, half covered by his shirt. Hayden's cheeks pinked.

Ilya knew Shane was convinced Hayden was 100% straight, but Ilya was pretty sure Hayden had some sort of subconscious flame burning for Shane the way he looked at him sometimes. *Too bad*, Ilya thought. *Mine*.

"Okay, get your Tootie and then get out," he infused as much disinterested impatience into his voice.

Hayden scowled at him. Ilya didn't care. He was well aware that Shane could do much better than Ilya Rozanov. He didn't need Hayden to tell him that.

But Ilya was selfish. He hadn't known how truly selfish he was until the world had brought him Shane. And Hayden—or anyone else for that matter—would have to drag Shane out of his cold, dead hands if they wanted Ilya to give him up now.

Hayden fumbled around the opposite end of the room, finally picking up a black and navy blue backpack that had been tucked between the loveseat and the wall, all the while stealing glances at Ilya and Shane (who was still sleeping like the dead) like he thought the next time he looked, they wouldn't be lying there.

Hayden swung the backpack over one shoulder and then paused.

"Shane doesn't nap."

"Clearly, he does," Ilya rolled his eyes, unable to help the protective hand he curled around Shane's shoulder. From the flick of Hayden's eyes, he caught that too.

"Is he…okay? I've known the guy for years, and I've never seen him nap before."

Ilya hesitated. "Yes, well, he needs it."

"Why does he need it?" The question was sharp, carried a bit of worry and accusation, like Ilya was the reason Shane was basically comatose. Ilya glared. Too nosy for his own good. Maybe Hayden was Shane's best friend, but Ilya was his partner. That meant Ilya was privy to information Hayden wasn't.

"That's Shane's business," he said shortly.

Hayden's eyes flashed. "Listen, Shane's my best friend. You have no idea what that plane crash put him through—"

"I think maybe I know," Ilya said quietly.

"He was so worried about you. I've never seen him like that before. He was literally, physically sick at the thought of you dying. If you do that to him again, I'll kill you, got that?"

Ilya looked at Hayden like he was stupid, "You think I did on purpose?"

"Obviously not. I'm just saying—"

"Pike," Ilya interrupted, "I do not want Shane to hurt. You understand I love him, yes?"

Ilya was glad Shane had people in his corner. People like Hayden Pike, who were protective of him and accepted him. But Hayden looked shocked at the confession, and Ilya really did think he was kind of stupid.

And then, to Ilya's dismay, before Hayden could respond, Shane made a distressed noise in his sleep, fingers curling on Ilya's stomach. *Fuck*. Ilya had been on tenterhooks, hoping that exactly this wouldn't happen while Hayden was in the room.

“What—?” Hayden started.

Shane murmured something incomprehensible, a version of words Ilya had heard him say in his sleep enough times that he knew what they meant. Shane’s fingers twitched, and his breathing ratcheted up.

“Get out,” Ilya said flatly.

“Wait, is he—?”

“Time to leave now.”

“Ilya?” Shane’s voice was sleepy and lost and panicked.

Ilya was trying to be nice to Shane’s best friend, like Shane wanted, but he was losing his patience.

“Get the fuck out, Pike. I’m serious. This is not fair to Shane.”

“Jesus, yeah, okay, I’m going,” Hayden backed away, looking worried.

And before he could say anything else, Shane was startling awake, gasping Ilya’s name on the back of every breath.

“I am here, *moy lyubov*. It’s only a dream,” Ilya murmured while Shane, in his post-nightmare desperation, completely unaware of Hayden, climbed his way into Ilya’s lap, thighs bracketing Ilya’s hips, and shoved his nose into Ilya’s neck, breathing in the scent of him.

Ilya held him close. Stroked the back of his neck as Shane reminded himself Ilya was alive and shuddered out the tension in his body. Ilya murmured reassuring things in Russian, things his mother used to say to him, things he was slowly teaching to Shane during late nights when Shane couldn’t sleep.

“Ty ne odin. Ya zdes’, milyy mal’chik.”

He kissed the shell of Shane’s ear.

When he looked up Hayden was already closing the door quietly behind him with a snick.

Chapter End Notes

dusha moya - my soul

Ty ne odin. Ya zdes’, milyy mal’chik. - You are not alone. I am right here, sweet boy.

Chapter 17: Kraft Dinner

Chapter Notes

We are gonna have a few more chapters than I thought but we will get there!

For my non-Canadians out there KD/Kraft Dinner = Kraft Macaroni and Cheese

Shane stayed pressed to Ilya until his legs started to go numb, and even then, he couldn't bring himself to move. He had shivered through the worst of it in Ilya's arms, soothed by the melodic sound of Ilya's first language in his ears. He kept his face pressed into Ilya's neck, breathing in the smoky amber scent of him, revelling in the slight smell of sweat and something inherently Ilya that he could only catch in whiffs when he breathed deep and concentrated.

They had found a routine, after Shane's nightmares, where Shane would seek out Ilya, sometimes even before he was fully awake. And Ilya would pull him into his arms and whisper soothing things in Russian until Shane calmed down and one or both of them fell asleep.

"What was it this time?" Ilya's hand stroked the back of his neck.

Shane shook his head, enjoying the way the fabric of Ilya's shirt rubbed against his face. He kept doing it until Ilya laughed. He took a deep breath.

"You got outed while you were visiting Russia. I had to watch it on the news."

Ilya was quiet for a moment. "That's new one."

"They're always new ones. I think they tortured you." Shane shuddered.

"That will never happen, Shane. I already told you I will not go back. My home is here now."

"What if you have no choice?"

"Then I will marry Svetlana."

Shane made a noise into Ilya's shoulder that had him making shushing noises. "Shhh, *bud' spokoyen*, Shane."

"I know that one," Shane said automatically. Ilya used it often. *Be calm*.

"You are quick study, Hollander." Shane could hear the smile in Ilya's voice.

“You could marry me,” Shane said, and felt the sharp breath Ilya took in response.

“I—Shane I’m—”

Shit. *Shit*. It had just come out. His brain was fuzzy. He hadn’t been thinking. He pushed away, and Ilya let him, dropping his arms from Shane’s neck. It was horrifyingly vulnerable like this, straddling Ilya’s lap. Sitting this way, Shane was easily a head taller than Ilya. He didn’t like the feeling of looking down at him.

“I mean— I meant for a citizenship. Obviously, you can’t marry me. *Obviously*. Not that you’d even want to. I mean, we only just— this is our first time even being—I wasn’t thinking— *fuck*.” He looked at Ilya with wide, terrified eyes.

Oh god. Was this the equivalent of telling someone they loved them on the first date? It was too fast.

Ilya cleared his throat. When Shane met his eyes, Ilya was looking at him like he had hung the moon.

“I would rather marry you than Svetlana,” he said finally, firmly. “For citizenship,” he added.

It was way too soon for them to be talking like this. But Ilya’s words settled over him, and Shane would be lying if he said he hadn’t thought about it. The best his daydreams ever got, when he was feeling brave and hopeful and optimistic, he and Ilya would have a life together. Like the one they were living now, only in a home that was theirs, with people who knew about them.

“For citizenship,” Shane echoed, feeling like the words were like some safety clause that was just there until they decided to take it away.

“For citizenship,” Ilya said again, like reassurance. “Come back, Shane, come back.” And then he was pulling Shane in, and Shane was relaxing back into him. “I think I would like being Canadian citizen,” Ilya said softly, and Shane heard what Ilya wasn’t saying: *I think I would like being married to you.*

The evening passed Shane by in a blur. He clung to Ilya like a koala and only allowed himself to be detangled when the golden hue of sunset melted into shadows, and Ilya insisted that they needed food.

Shane cursed Hayden for bringing up the plane crash so explicitly. It was like it had unlocked some door inside him, and now Shane couldn’t stop imagining it. It felt like a betrayal of his own mind. All Shane could see was Ilya screaming as the plane nose dived. Ilya hanging from his seatbelt. Ilya cold, wet and shivering in the dark woods.

Eventually, Shane found some disassociated space where the thoughts bothered him less. They were still there, but behind a distorted wall in Shane’s mind where the sounds of Ilya’s screaming was muffled and blurred.

Sometimes he felt like this when he played important games, knowing what his body needed to do without thinking about it. When the deafening sound of the crowds would disappear, the insults thrown by other players would bounce off of him, and it was just Shane and the ice.

He couldn't shake himself out of it and didn't want to either. He was on autopilot, and letting Ilya take the lead felt easy.

He let Ilya sit him down at the table, smiled when he hoped it was appropriate. Mumbled something about being tired that was actually truthful.

Shane hadn't prepared anything for dinner, so Ilya had found a box of Kraft Dinner in one of the cabinets and held it up to Shane in question.

When Shane just nodded, Ilya frowned.

Shane didn't know how much time he lost when Ilya placed a bowl of bright orange macaroni and a cold ginger ale in front of him. Shane took a bite and chewed slowly. Ilya watched him with concern. He nudged the ginger ale towards Shane. Shane took a sip.

It was the sweet, sharp carbonation of the soda that snapped him out of it. He took in a breath.

"Are you back? Space Cadet?"

"Where did you learn that?"

Ilya shrugged. "You are eating fake cheese noodles," he stated.

Shane looked down at the bowl in front of him. "You mean the KD?"

"Yes, that. Something is very wrong when Shane Hollander eats… KD." Ilya's accent wrapped around the word strangely, like he still wasn't sure it was right.

Shane chased the taste in his mouth. It was sharp, and cheddary, and very synthetic. It reminded him of his summers as a kid, before he cared so much about diets and food and hockey. Simpler times, when he would run up to his parents' cottage, still dripping from the lake, and his mom would yell at him about '*not on the hardwood floors!*' and then place a bowl of Kraft Dinner with hot dogs on the table in front of him.

"I don't think I've eaten it since I was a kid."

"Shane."

Shane looked up at the tone of Ilya's voice.

"I am worried about you," he said seriously, as he studied Shane carefully.

"You're eating it too," Shane pointed out.

“Not the same thing. I always eat anything. Also, not what I meant.”

Shane looked down at his bowl of KD and grimaced. Yeah, okay, maybe Ilya was right.

“I want to help.”

“You already help,” Shane said quietly.

“Shane…”

“I’m just really tired,” Shane said, feeling like that was true, “between the concussion and like never being able to sleep, I can’t control— My brain’s just being weird. I just need actual sleep I think.”

“Have you ever thought of medication?”

“Medication?”

“Yes, like maybe sleeping pills?”

Shane’s heart rate picked up. *Nope. No way*. He shook his head soundlessly

“No?” From the way Ilya grimaced, Shane wondered what expression he was making.

“I—” He wasn’t even really sure how to put into words how even the mention of a sleeping pill sent his pulse skyrocketing.

The idea of being stuck in one of those horrible dreams, unable to wake up, without control over his own body, made him feel sick. Shane liked control. A sleeping pill was the opposite of that. And his brain latched onto the fact that Ilya’s mother had killed herself overdosing on pills, and Shane didn’t want to be another person in his life who made him worry about that. And he was an athlete. And… and… and pills were just off the table.

All he could do was shake his head.

“Shane, breathe. Was just a suggestion.”

“Sorry,” Shane said, the words strangled, “I can’t. I need to—I need to be able to wake up.”

Ilya’s face transformed into understanding, then again into something unhappy. “I just thought—”

“No, I know. It’s not even a bad idea. I know why you suggested it, it’s not like it hadn’t crossed my mind either. But it’s just...” Shane trailed off, not sure how to explain.

“I understand, Shane. You don’t have to explain.”

Shane let out a shaky breath, and Ilya chose that moment to change the subject. Shane didn’t know how to express how grateful he was.

“Thank you.”

“You still need to eat.”

“I know.”

“So you will eat…KD?”

Shane hesitated. Now that he was a little more present, the idea of eating something so far from his list of foods made him feel twitchy and anxious.

“Uh, maybe…” he didn’t want to be ungrateful. He looked at Ilya in apology, but Ilya was smiling.

“I will make chicken,” he declared, like he had been waiting for Shane to say something, like he was pleased that Shane had. He pressed a soft kiss into Shane’s temple before clearing the bowl away from in front of Shane.

Chapter 18: Wolves

Chapter Notes

> Angst angst angst! Smut smut smut! I chant into the abyss. If you are still reading this, I love you :)
>
> P.S. I am aware there are actually not a lot of wolves in the Appalachian mountains (I googled it), but this is fiction, so (aka I decided I didn't care)… I thank you for your willing suspension of disbelief
>
> I really love this chap and so I hope you do tooo <3
>
> Ilya's very minimal amount of Russian is in the endnotes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane couldn’t sleep. Not that this was anything new.

But tonight, the idea of giving in to sleep when his awake brain was already supplying him with nightmarish images was hard to contemplate. Shane watched Ilya sleep. Waited until he could see the gentle rise and fall of his chest. A new habit he had picked up. The digital clock on his bedside table glowed 2:42 am.

Shane had been sleeping better ever since they had talked to Svetlana. The knowledge now that he would have access to Ilya should the worst happen seemed to embed itself deep into his subconscious.

And having Ilya beside him every night helped. Having an Ilya who knew about his nightmares, who didn’t laugh at him, and who worked hard to coax him into a different headspace was even better.

It didn’t mean Shane was perfect, and after this evening, he was already feeling like a burden. Ilya had said he didn’t mind. But Shane minded, and he really didn’t want to bother Ilya with yet another problem.

He pushed up in bed and pushed off the covers, careful not to disturb the sleeping man next to him. The wood floors were cold on his bare feet, and he padded out into the lounge where he poured himself a glass of water.

He liked the way he could see down to the water from the floor-to-ceiling windows. When it was dark, and there were no lights to reflect on the windows, he felt like he was invisible. Part of the lake, almost.

He heard a lonely loon call. And he watched the way the dock bobbed gently on the water, and wished he could hear the soft lapping of water against the shore. He knew why his mom had suggested the cottage initially, when Shane was glued to the front of the TV for news on the Raiders. It always calmed him to be here, and it was frightening to know the anxiety he felt would be worse if he were at home.

He would go outside, but he didn't really feel like braving the mosquitoes. The moon glowed faintly behind a thin sheet of clouds. Little lightning bugs lit up randomly across the grass.

He heard Ilya's footsteps and waited until a soft kiss was pressed to the back of his neck.

"Come back to bed." Shane could feel the words murmured into his skin. It made him shiver.

"I can't sleep," Shane said.

"Mmm," Ilya hummed into his skin, sending vibrations down the back of Shane's spine. "I will help you."

Shane turned to say no when another loon call interrupted the silence. Ilya's head turned sharply, eyes wide.

"What the fuck was that?"

Shane smiled. "A loon?"

"What the fuck is a loon?" Ilya stared at him in horror.

"It's a bird, Ilya," Shane couldn't help the little laugh that escaped his lips, and Ilya's eyes softened. "What did you think it was?"

"I think wolf. But then I have heard wolf, and this is not wolf sound. So then I think worse, like Baba Yaga."

Shane guffawed, "Baba Yaga?"

Ilya glared at him. "Baba Yaga is frightening tale in Russia. I do not want to meet her, do you?"

"Wait, when have you heard a wolf howl? Are there lots in Russia?"

"I think yes, but I have not heard in Russia. In Appalachia there were many wolves."

He felt, unreasonably, betrayed that Ilya brought things up like that so casually when each new piece of information felt like it rocked Shane's world.

"Right," Shane said, his throat tight.

"Ah, *izvini* Shane, I am sorry. I should not have said."

“No, I want you to be able to say. I’m just… all I can picture now is you in the cold rain, shivering, while wolves surround you.”

Ilya laughed gently, “Was not like that.”

“What was…” Shane could feel his heart rate pick up. He didn’t want to ask. But he had to. Ilya wanted to tell him. “What is it like?”

Ilya wrapped a hand around Shane's waist, the other lifting his chin to search Shane’s eyes. “You want to know? Truly?”

“Um. If you want to tell me, I want to know.” The words barely made their way past Shane’s lips.

“I do want to tell you. I think it is not what you are thinking, and I think it will help you.”

Shane doubted it, but nights at the cottage with Ilya had, at somepoint, started to feel like some private sanctuary. The dark wrapped around them softly and made Shane feel like whatever words were said would be cushioned by the quietness of the world around them.

“Okay,” Shane steeled himself. “Tell me.”

“It was very boring,” Ilya said with a slight smile, and Shane let out the breath he was holding.

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Scary at first, sure. Like I told Hayden, the masks dropped, people screamed.”

Shane took an unconscious step back, and Ilya followed the movement, crowding Shane up against the window. He pressed his forehead to Shane’s, and like this, Shane felt weirdly protected. Even though it was Ilya saying the words that had the power to break him.

“But Shane, once we were on ground we just sat on the plane. Seats were comfortable, there was airplane snacks, we told stories. It was dry, and I had jacket, and I could only hear wolves from distance. We were NHL all-star team, yes? Everyone knew we would be rescued. I don’t know what you came up with in your head, Shane, but it’s not like movies. Was very boring.” Ilya drawled out the last words exaggeratedly and pressed a kiss to Shane’s nose, barely separating their foreheads to do it.

It was nothing like what Shane had been picturing, and he wondered if Ilya was exaggerating for his sake.

“Really?”

“Really,” Ilya said, pulling back to meet his eyes, serious once more. “The scariest part was when I thought I would never get to tell you how I felt.”

Shane couldn’t help rubbing at his solar plexus to try to dispel the feeling that bloomed there.

“That was the scariest part for me, too,” he whispered.

“But we have said it. So, we have nothing to be scared of now, yes?”

“What if something happens again?” There were so many ways for someone to die, get hurt or be injured. Shane’s brain knew better than anyone how many ways Ilya could get himself killed.

“It will be different,” Ilya said firmly, “You will have Svetlana with my information, your parents, and Hayden and Shane?” Ilya dropped lower, his voice so heavy with emotion that Shane couldn’t help the way he hung onto every word that was said next. “You will know now that I would do *anything* to come back to you.”

The words hung suspended between them for a moment, and Shane wondered if they’d both start crying right there. But Shane felt too overwhelmed to do anything but focus on breathing properly, and while Ilya’s blue eyes glistened, no tears spilled. His golden hair was molten in the moonlit shadows, dishevelled with bedhead. He was beautiful.

Shane reached out and ghosted a hand over his cheek, like if he put any more pressure, Ilya would disappear like something Shane had dreamt up. Ilya cupped a hand over Shane’s and pressed it to his face. Shane could feel the slight stubble as it rubbed over his palm.

“Will you say it again? In Russian?”

Ilya’s expression was tender as he matched Shane’s whispered tones. “*Ya tebya lyublu*.”

“Me too,” Shane sighed, “*Ya tebya lyublu*.”

“*Da,* of course, you sound perfect. No accent.”

The loon called again, and Ilya jolted. Shane laughed breathlessly.

“Fucking Canadian wolf bird,” Ilya muttered.

“Go back to bed, my love,” Shane said, not missing the way Ilya’s breath caught at the endearment. He made a mental note to use them more often. “I won’t be able to sleep for a while.”

Ilya pressed his lips softly to Shane’s, breathing deeply through his nose. When he pulled back, he was smiling sadly.

“You need sleep, Shane. You said so yourself. Come. I will help.”

“How?”

Ilya smiled dangerously, and Shane shivered.

“I have helped you before, yes? You will trust me?” Ilya asked, looking entirely too innocent.

Shane chewed on his lip. But of course, he would trust Ilya, and Ilya knew it. His lips curved up seductively, knowing he had won. Shane let himself be led back to bed.

Ilya undressed him quietly. It didn't feel sexy but rather gentleness for the sake of gentleness. Ilya taking control. Shane was only in a shirt and boxers, so he was naked rather quickly, and while he was interested, his dick remained soft between his legs.

"Hmm, I have not seen this before. Shane Hollander not flushed purple and leaking for me as soon as I look at him," Ilya teased. Shane had forgotten how filthy he could be.

"Fuck off," he said, halfheartedly.

Ilya made a warm sound and pushed Shane towards the bed. "Get on the bed."

Shane did, watching Ilya's eyes darken as Shane obeyed, lying on his back with his head propped up by the pillows. Ilya divested himself of his own clothing quickly and then settled himself next to Shane on his side, head propped up on one hand, looking like some Greek god. He traced spirals on Shane's stomach, and they both watched the muscles jump at the touch.

Shane's cock was already hardening with interest. This was new.

"Ilya, I don't—"

"Shhh, Shane, just let me."

Ilya kissed his stomach, and then his nipple, swirling his tongue around it, until Shane was properly hard.

Ilya wrapped a hand around him and stroked once, the touch confident and possessive. Shane grunted, his body curling towards it. Ilya hummed happily and moved himself between Shane's legs, wrapping an arm around his thigh.

Shane knew what came next, but he was still shocked by the feel of Ilya's mouth on him. He didn't know if he'd ever truly be used to it. It was a pornographic sight, looking down as Ilya bobbed on his cock. His blue eyes flicked upwards towards Shane's and maintained the eye contact they found.

Oh fuck. He was going to come.

Ilya pulled off him with a popping sound, and Shane sketched out a distressed syllable. He was so close. He glared at Ilya, who looked back at him playfully. Like he knew exactly what he had done.

Shane opened his mouth to say something angry, but Ilya's hand wrapped around him once again, and the sensation was stronger than before. Shane's skin sensitive from being so close to orgasm once already, his dick slick with Ilya's saliva. He groaned.

"That's it, *moy kotik*," Ilya purred, and Shane didn't have the wherewithal to ask what that meant.

Ilya teased him, stroking fast and slow by turns, keeping Shane from orgasm. Sometimes, when Shane was close, he would stop moving altogether and just squeeze his fist around Shane so harshly it almost ached. Shane tried hide the oncoming orgasm, schooling his face, closing his eyes. But Ilya seemed to know every time.

“Ilya,” he gasped. “Ilya, please.”

“What is that now? Maybe five?” Shane realized he was talking about his almost orgasms. He hadn’t realized Ilya was *counting them*. He wanted to protest, but Ilya sounded pleased, and Shane wanted Ilya to be pleased. “Tell me what you need, Shane.”

Ilya sped his hand, licked a stripe along the seam of Shane’s thigh and groin, making him choke.

“I need— I need you.”

“You have me, *Solnyshko*. What else?” Ilya said.

Shane frowned. He didn’t know what the right answer was. Ilya was still stoking him steadily. He was so close. He could feel it in the heat in his gut, the way his balls drew up.

“I don’t…” he panted, let out a garbled string of words.

“I can’t understand you, Shane.” The words were teasing.

He was going to come.

And then Ilya stopped. Pulled his hands off of Shane altogether, and Shane shouted. His hips thrust into the empty air automatically. Ilya pushed him back to the bed with strong hands so he couldn’t even thrust anymore. He lifted his head to glare at Ilya, and Ilya grinned wolfishly.

“There you are,” Ilya said. “What do you need, Shane?”

Shane stared at him for a moment, still glaring, and pressed his lips together. Ilya circled the tip of a finger around his slit, and Shane bit back a sound.

“Please,” he whimpered.

“Yes?”

“Please let me come?” It was the right answer. He could tell by the look on Ilya’s face.

“Hmmm, not yet,” Ilya said. “I think you need to work harder before your reward.”

Then his hand was back around Shane’s cock, which was bobbing desperately against his belly. Ilya held his fist loosely about an inch above the base of Shane’s dick and gave Shane almost no friction at all. Shane wriggled unhappily.

Ilya looked at him expectantly, then down to his hand—where it was wrapped around Shane—meaningfully. Shane flushed hot when he realized what Ilya wanted. For Shane to fuck his fist.

He thought it would be harder, but his hips already wanted to thrust, and he rolled them upwards experimentally. Ilya's hand tightened as Shane pushed up into it, and Shane moaned.

Ilya's quiet groan followed. A sound that shot right to the base of Shane's dick. He fucked up into Ilya's hand harder, chasing his own orgasm. Ilya didn't move his hand except to loosen his grip when Shane pulled back and tighten it as Shane pushed up.

At some point, right when Shane was teetering on the edge, Ilya changed tactics, so instead of a fist, Shane was just fucking the circle of Ilya's thumb and forefinger. Shane must have been close, but he was so delirious with the need to come that he wasn't even sure anymore.

It wasn't enough stimulation, and Shane felt mindless with it.

"It's not enough, Ilya," he moaned between thrusts, "It's not enough. I can't..." He dissolved into nonsensical sentences, not even sure what he was saying.

He was barely coherent anymore. His entire body felt like it was in his dick. It felt like it should look red and engorged, but when he looked down, it only looked a little bit more flushed than usual. He whimpered and tossed his head.

"Shhh, Shane. You are being so good for me right now. So good." Ilya surged up and swallowed the sounds Shane made as they sketched out of his mouth, as though if he tried hard enough, he could ingest them.

Shane was in a space where he barely registered words, but he could tell Ilya was saying reassuring things against his mouth, rubbing his hands along Shane's body.

Shane panted through it as Ilya fucked fingers into his ass and took him to the edge again, and Shane wondered distantly when he had gotten lube.

Then Ilya was moaning deeply as he notched himself against Shane's hole and pushed himself in by millimetres. It was slow and deliberate, like Ilya knew if he thrust too hard too quickly, Shane would probably come right then and there. Shane's mouth opened in an 'o', and he tried to breathe through the feeling.

"*Fuck* Shane, you are so good," Ilya said breathlessly, "look at you," the words were reverent, "you are not thinking so much now."

Then he started fucking Shane properly, hooking his legs over Ilya's shoulders, and rolling into him so that Shane was making sounds on every thrust. He adjusted the angle slightly, and Shane cried out when the head of Ilya's cock rolled against his prostate.

It barely registered that he was going to come, the pleasure-pain of being held so close to orgasm for so long making his nerve endings muddled. It was so much more intense this way,

and he made a noise like he had been hit as he came, spurting in streaks onto his stomach. It felt like it lasted forever, maybe he blacked out a little, and when he came to, he was still stuck in the pleasure of it, like trying to swim up out of honey, before he was coming back to himself.

“Good boy, well done,” Ilya was murmuring above him as he drove towards his own orgasm. Shane felt pleased. He liked that Ilya made it seem like he had done something hard. That he had been rewarded for it.

He was oversensitive to Ilya’s cock against his prostate as Ilya chased his climax, but Shane was too tired to care, hoping Ilya didn’t mind that he was lying there, sweaty and limp, moaning quietly from overstimulation while he was fucked.

It didn’t take long for Ilya to come, pressing deep inside Shane and curling around him.

He didn’t react as Ilya pulled himself out and pressed a kiss to Shane’s shin. He was aware of Ilya moving around him, and then a warm cloth wiping away the sweat that gathered on his skin, brushing gently between his legs. Even that was too much for his sensitive cock, and he winced.

“Sorry,” Ilya whispered, pressing another kiss to his stomach.

“S’okay,” he could hear how slurred his words were.

Shane was drifting off as the bed dipped beside him, and Ilya slid next to him, pulling the covers up around them both.

“You will sleep tonight, I think,” Ilya said, sounding smug. Shane agreed. He made a sound, hoping it conveyed the right meaning. Ilya kissed his temple. “We should do this more often. I like you like this.”

Shane agreed. But he didn’t have the energy to tell Ilya that, and used the last of his energy to mumble “I love you,” the words so slurred they were barely understandable, before he dropped into a deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Solnyshko - sunshine

moy kotik - my kitten

Chapter 19: Sunshine and Skates

Chapter Notes

> Something soft as we head into our HEA :)
> Also obviously, all the hockey team stuff is made up, and I hope you enjoy the team name I gave them ;)

Shane woke up because a sunbeam was slanting right across his eyes. He groaned and shifted.

“Good morning,” Ilya’s sleep-heavy voice rasped in his ear.

“Morning.”

“You slept well?”

Shane wiggled so he was facing Ilya, who was blinking himself awake, his eyelids still droopy. Shane, for his part, felt alert and awake and sated. He had slept like the dead.

“No dreams.”

“*Da* good. I’m glad.”

“I would um, do that, again.” Shane blushed as he thought of the desperate way he had fucked up into Ilya’s hand, barely aware of himself in the waterfall of arousal that Ilya had poured into him. “It uh, it helped.”

“You only have to ask, *Solnyshko.* We can do every night. I like to have you squirming under me.*”*

Shane shoved at him halfheartedly. “I do not squirm.”

Ilya's responding laugh was slow and lazy and laced with traces of sleep. “You squirm.”

“Fuck off.” But Shane’s smiling too. He felt good. Awake.

Shane let Ilya pull him into his chest, liking how overwarm everything felt under the covers like this.

“Ilya?”

“Mmm?”

“Thank you.” He hoped Ilya could tell how much he meant it.

Ilya opened his eyes fully, raised a hand to cup Shane's cheek, like he always needed to be touching him in some way.

"Do not thank me, Hollander. I enjoyed very much too."

"I love you." It wasn't the perfect segue, but Shane wanted to say it.

Ilya smiled, sleepy and sweet. "I love you, too."

Their morning was domestic. Ilya made them eggs, and Shane went through emails he hadn't looked at for the last three weeks. His mom had been managing his inbox, but he usually liked to at least be in the know on whatever sponsorships he was going to be doing. He was surprised at the number of photoshoots and sponsorships she had turned down, using his injury as an excuse. But he was grateful for it. It meant that he had a lot of freedom for the rest of the off-season.

He was excited to spend the evening with his parents and Ilya all together. His mom was always super into Stanley Cup night, making too much food and yelling at the TV louder than Shane and his dad combined. Although Shane always felt some form of sharp jealousy at the teams that had their chance at the cup, this year didn't feel quite the same. He felt pretty pleased to be exactly where he was.

They spent the morning swimming, then skating, when Shane remembered the reason he was so excited to have Ilya up to the cottage in the first place: his practice rink.

The moment his blades hit the ice, everything felt like it slotted into place. His head was clear for the first time in weeks, his heart didn't hurt, he had an Ilya beside him who was willing to say 'I love you' freely, and in multiple languages. Who was open in his affection, and dramatic, and full of life, and personality that Shane wasn't sure he had let anyone see before. Somewhere deep in his chest, Shane felt settled.

Everything always made more sense on skates, his world narrowing to clean lines and familiar rhythms. It struck Shane that despite years of playing against each other, despite so much of their relationship existing on the ice, he and Ilya had never skated together like this. Even during All-Star games, they'd been teammates chasing a win—responsible to the other players, to the public.

This was just the two of them, in sweatpants and Shane's old, battered sweatshirts. This was different. And from the spark in Ilya's eyes, he was realizing it too.

It was exhilarating, having someone who could match him stride for stride. Who could steal his puck in a way he never expected. Who never let Shane leave him behind. No matter how fast Shane skated or pivoted or dodged, Ilya was there. Keeping up.

They chirped at each other naturally, Shane flirted somewhat less naturally, and Ilya somehow managed to do both at the same time.

"Is my talent," he said smugly when Shane pointed it out. "And your talent is losing to me," Ilya laughed as he tried to swipe the puck away from Shane, but Shane dodged out of his

way, flying back down the ice, the puck still nestled neatly in his stick.

"A little slow for the first draft pick," he called as he skated up the rink.

"Fuck you, Hollander!"

"You wish," Shane tossed over his shoulder, turning to grin at Ilya, hot on his heels.

Ilya's eyes darkened as he came after Shane, "Mmm, yes, please."

Ilya was barreling towards him, and in the momentum Shane lost, looking over his shoulder, Ilya checked Shane into the boards, careful of his strength, pinning him there, gaze heated through. Shane was full of breathless laughter. He went to push away, but then Ilya was kissing him, practice gloves pawing at his face, until Ilya shucked them off and was plunging fingers into Shane's hair.

Shane kissed back with equal fervour, feeling exhilarated and in his element.

"God, Hollander, you are so sexy on the ice," Ilya groaned, the words barely making it past Shane's mouth. "So." Kiss. "Fucking." Kiss. "Talented." Kiss. "*Fuck*."

Shane kissed down Ilya's neck, sucking at the slightly salty film of sweat. He licked a flat, hot stripe from the dip in Ilya's collar bone to the back of his ear and revelled in the sound it produced from Ilya.

"Rozanov," he gasped when Ilya gripped his hair, pulled his head back and did the exact same thing to Shane in retribution.

They ended up sliding down to the ice, and Shane barely noticed the cold seeping through his pants. Not when Ilya's mouth was warm and insistent and nothing else seemed to matter at all.

Later, they sat on the couch, the soles of their feet pressed together, hair wet from a shower, both smelling like the same tea-tree oil shampoo. Shane was scrolling through his emails, nudging Ilya's foot in response, every time Ilya nudged him first.

"What do you think about Ottawa?" Shane asked casually, not looking up from his phone.

"We are in Ottawa now, yes?"

Shane nodded.

"Then I love Ottawa."

Shane laughed under his breath and looked up to Ilya. "I meant more like the team."

"Centaurs?" Ilya's nose scrunched in distaste.

"Yeah, the Centaurs. Ottawa is close to Montreal, and they need a star center…" He hoped Ilya would understand what he was driving at.

“You want me to play for Centaurs?” Ilya raised his eyebrows, and Shane blushed.

“I mean, I just thought Ottawa is only two hours away from Montreal and—”

“They’re still rival teams,” Ilya pointed out.

“But it’s not as intense as Boston and Montreal,” Shane insisted. Ilya tilted his head in reluctant acknowledgement. “We could confirm the rumours from the airport. Tell everyone we’ve always been friends and the rivalry was mostly just media stuff. And then we could visit each other on weekends, and then maybe when we retire, we can be together. For real.”

Shane was trying not to feel too excited, but the idea had been percolating. He knew the Centaurs wouldn’t pass up a player like Ilya, and then they could start building something permanent. Something that could be more than snatched moments every few months in hotel rooms when they were in the same city.

Ilya’s face scrunched up again. “You want me to play for Centaurs.”

Shane shrugged, “Or I could play for New Jersey.”

Ilya’s face morphed from teasingly goading to actual shock. He pushed himself into a sitting position.

“You would play for New Jersey Jackalopes?” he said incredulously, “Jackalopes are worse than Centaurs.”

Shane shrugged again. He had talked about this. He was prepared to move teams. He had, for a while, been prepared to be kicked out of the NHL altogether. A small price to pay, Shane had decided, for Ilya being alive.

“I thought about New York, but they probably don’t have the budget for me, and they already have a star center.”

“So you would play for Jackalopes?” He still sounded like he didn’t believe it.

“It’s close to Boston. Like a 5-hour drive, I think, so we could still see each other on weekends. Wait, I’ll look it up.”

Shane pulled out his phone to look up the travel time from New Jersey to Boston and didn’t notice how quiet Ilya had gone.

“You would leave your team? To be closer to me?” Something in the tone of Ilya’s voice made Shane look up, no longer incredulous or shocked, but quiet and heavy.

“I mean, I already said I would. I meant it.” Shane blushed a little, could feel it in the tips of his ears. But he maintained eye contact. He felt strongly about this; he wouldn’t change his mind.

Ilya’s looked away, and Shane knew that look. The one where he pursed his lips and clenched his jaw, even as his bottom lip betrayed him as it wobbled. Shane didn’t quite move fast

enough to get to him before the first tear fell, but he was crawling over the couch, up the length of Ilya's body to kiss him.

Ilya grabbed his face and kissed him back, whispering '*ya tebya lyublyu*' into Shane's mouth even as the kiss turned salty with his tears.

Shane kissed him until Ilya's breath slowed, and his whispered confessions petered out. He pulled back to look at Ilya beneath him.

"So?" he asked hopefully. Ilya stared at him with wide, glassy eyes.

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya's voice cracked on Shane's name. But Shane thought maybe the words sounded relieved. "You can't just say things like this."

Shane cupped his cheek and thumbed away an errant tear.

Then Ilya took a deep breath and croaked out, "Okay."

"Okay?" Shane smiled widely. It felt like it might split his face if it were any wider. "I'll need to figure out a visa then… or what do they use in the States?"

Ilya laughed, the sound still broken and jagged from his tears, "No. You will not leave your team. I mean, okay, I will play for Centaurs."

"What? Really? Are you sure? I already said I would—"

"Ottawa is closer, you already said," he sniffled. "I can win Stanley Cups anywhere. You *need* Metros." Ilya's smile was a little too impish for someone whose eyes were still red and watery. "To make you look good," he explained.

Shane shoved him playfully, "Asshole!"

"I am only telling truth."

"Shut up," Shane said with so much affection it hurt. "So Ottawa?"

"Ottawa," Ilya agreed.

"And then I was thinking—"

"Oh my god, Hollander, too many ideas. You will kill me today." Ilya groaned.

"Fuck off, Rozanov, this one's good. Just listen." Shane paused to make sure Ilya didn't have any more quips to throw, but Ilya gave him an impatient look that said '*go on*'.

"I was thinking we could start a charity together. Something that means a lot to both of us, and then we could spend more time together without it being weird. I was thinking, like mental health maybe?" Shane finished, starting to feel a little hesitant, "for your mom?" He dropped his voice to a murmur, "Um, will you tell me her name?"

He couldn’t parse the expression on Ilya’s face as he said, “Irina.”

The name was beautiful, wrapped in Ilya’s russian accent like silk.

“I was thinking we could call it the Irina Foundation, maybe.”

He hoped he hadn’t taken it too far, but he had been thinking about it for a while. The idea was stewing in his mind. Something he could do for Ilya. Something that would give Ilya a chance to connect with his mother, providing him with more opportunities to talk about her. Ilya didn’t say anything.

“If it's too much, I—”

“The Irina Foundation,” Ilya said, sounding stunned. His dazed eyes locked onto Shane’s, and he shook his head. “Where did you come from?” he asked in awe.

“Ottawa,” Shane said automatically. That’s where he was born.

Ilya’s eyes flashed in amusement, and he smiled up at Shane tenderly, “She would have loved you,” he whispered, “like I love you.”

Shane felt his body unlock. He had done it right. He had made the right decision. He smiled back at Ilya, sure his expression matched the same lovestruck one on Ilya’s face.

“So I did okay?”

“You did perfect, Shane. You’re perfect.”

Later still, when they had returned to their spot on the couch, a movie playing on mute in the background as they waited to go over to Shane’s parents, Ilya snorted and turned his phone towards Shane.

“Hollander, look.”

Shane peered at the phone, not sure what he was seeing, then his stomach swooped, and he snatched the phone from Ilya.

“Oh god,” he said.

On Ilya’s phone was an Instagram account. @Hollanov4ever. The profile picture was the blurry shot of Ilya and Shane hugging in the airport. The bio read: Fan account for Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov's secret love affair. #Hollanovisreal.

“Ilya,” Shane said, high and panicked, “they know about us.”

Ilya let out a breath of amusement, “No, no one believes. Look at the comments.”

Shane looked at the comments, and Ilya was right. People were claiming it was the craziest take they'd ever heard, that there was 'literally no way', and one comment was just a bunch of laughing emojis all lined up next to each other. But others supported the account, who made comments that they wished it were true.

His panic subsided. He scrolled through the account. There were so many photos.

The most recent one was their airport hug. But there were others from throughout the years.

One photo of them, clearly taken by a fan, during the prospect cup. Shane in Canadian red and Ilya in the Russian colours, grainy and zoomed in from somewhere in the stands. It was their first-ever face-off.

There were multiple photos of them at different press conferences and interviews, sitting side by side. In one, Ilya looked smug, and Shane glared at him. In another, Ilya looked unsure while Shane clearly answered a question for him.

There were multiple posts from their first promotional shoot, their noses almost touching as they stared intensely into each others eyes in full hockey gear.

There was a photo from the time they announced that award together. Both looked stiff and awkward in their tuxes as they read off the teleprompter.

Shane felt something warm spark in his chest, and he smiled as he looked through the pictures.

"Funny, yes?"

"It's kind of nice actually," Shane said, looking up, and Ilya quirked an eyebrow at him. "I always had to delete all the photos you sent me."

Shane rolled his eyes at Ilya's suggestive grin. "Oh, so you wanted to keep?"

"Not those! God, you're impossible sometimes. I mean, the selfies, the other photos, I could never keep them… just in case. So it's nice, isn't it? To see all these photos of us. It feels like this proves we actually were something this whole time."

Ilya's gaze softened. "Yes, is nice."

"Someone out there knows about us—or at least thinks about us like that—and supports us. And other people in the comments do too. It's kind of cool."

"Yes, Hollander, is kind of cool."

Shane looked up from the account and furrowed his eyebrows. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Because I want to kiss you so bad right now."

Shane smiled. "Then do it."

Chapter 20: Better than the Stanley Cup

Chapter Notes

double chapter!!! As a treat!!!!!

I hope this is a satisfying ending for y'all.

I doubt my HR fanfiction journey is over tho so we'll see what my brain hyperfixates on next!

TY for reading friends, ilysm, and as always, your comments make me so so giddy and happy <3

There weren't many times in Ilya's life where he felt gangly and awkward. He was a professional athlete. The best in the world, some would argue. He knew his body, the way it moved, the way it worked. But standing in the doorway in front of Yuna and David Hollander, he felt like a kid again.

"Hi mom, hi dad," Shane said as he walked into the room, pulling Ilya behind him.

"Hello, Yuna and David," Ilya said with his best not-awkward-at-all smile.

The pre-game analysis was on in the background, and the smell of food permeated the air. It was a real family home. The furniture was cozy and lived in; there were dog-eared books on the table, a laptop open to someone's emails. Pictures of Shane with his friends, his parents, and playing hockey as a kid were hung up on the walls and propped up on shelves.

"Come in, boys," Yuna said warmly as she ushered them inside.

Ilya followed. "You have a beautiful house," he said, careful of his English.

There, that was something Canadians said.

"Thank you, Ilya." Yuna smiled warmly.

She was intimidating, even as she welcomed them, and Ilya was struck with the thought that he wanted her to like him. He wanted to impress her.

"Uh mom? What the hell is this?" Shane asked, holding up a framed photo.

Ilya squinted at it and realized it was a photo of them, clearly pulled from a Google search, grainy and off-center. Ilya's heart did something in his chest.

“Oh! I just wanted a photo of you two in the house,” Yuna said.

“Mom,” Shane said in an exasperated tone that was reserved only for his parents, “you can’t have photos like this. We’re not even out yet.”

“I only put it out today, and besides, it’s always just your dad and me up here anyway.”

“You’re literally having Hayden and Jackie over tonight.”

“Don’t they already know?” Yuna looked confused.

“That’s not the point,” Shane said exasperatedly.

From the couch, David caught Ilya’s eye and shrugged like this happened often.

“Do you like the photo?” Yuna asked.

“Oh my god,” Shane whispered, his cheeks and the tips of his ears going delightfully red.

“It’s a little blurry, but it’s the best one I could find,” she continued. Either she was oblivious to Shane’s discomfort, or she was ignoring it. Ilya guessed the latter. “I couldn’t use the professional ones, because you both look… well, you look like rivals.”

“Because we are! Or… were. I mean…” Shane’s face scrunched up adorably.

“We are,” Ilya supplied helpfully. “On ice, we are rivals. Also, I have a better picture.” He looked to Yuna. “If you want.”

“A better one?”

“Yes,” Ilya smiled, choosing to take the Yuna Hollander route and ignore the look Shane was giving him. He pulled out his phone and scrolled through his camera roll. They were the selfies he had taken at the award show. They were old photos, and he never bothered to put them under a passcode because he figured he could always just pass it off as a joke. He had taken those selfies publicly, in front of an audience. People wouldn’t have thought twice.

There were six in total. Both of them in tuxes, Shane’s hair gelled alluringly off his forehead. They were both smiling. For a long time, these had been his favourite photos. He turned his phone towards Yuna, who clapped her hands.

“Oh! Those are perfect, you’ll send those to me?”

Ilya’s heart was doing that thing again as he nodded.

“You kept those?” Shane’s quiet voice pulled Ilya’s attention.

“Uh, yes. I wanted something to remember. In case…” *In case you decided you never wanted to talk to me again. In case I couldn’t have you. In case the future and life, and our careers made it impossible to be together.* “… Just in case.”

“Will you send them to me, too?” Shane asked.

It was that more than anything that made Ilya bite at the inside of his cheek. His sweet, skittish Shane, who deleted every photo Ilya sent him out of caution, wanted selfies of the two of them on his phone. It was the most obvious sign so far that their relationship had changed. Ilya nodded wordlessly and sent the photo to Yuna after exchanging numbers with her. And then sent it to Shane.

He watched as the Hollander family fell into what was clearly a practiced habit, Shane and his dad gluing themselves to the pre-game talk that was being played on the TV, while Yuna came and went from the kitchen, making sharp quips about players or the game as she passed.

Ilya sat beside Shane and watched with something huge in his chest as Shane surreptitiously brought out his phone and scrolled on the fan account Ilya had shown him earlier, clicking into the different photos.

Jackie and Hayden showed up not long after, with a knock on the door.

“Ilya, would you mind grabbing the door?” Yuna asked from the kitchen, her hands clearly greasy with some sort of food.

Ilya immediately looked to Shane. He felt so out of his depth here, but Shane only smiled at him and tilted his head towards the door.

Ilya opened it to Pike and what must have been his wife, who was, very obviously, way out of his league. Pike looked shocked to see him at the door, and Ilya couldn’t help himself,

“Welcome to the Hollanders,” he gave his most obnoxious grin.

Hayden scowled and opened his mouth to reply, but was cut off by his wife.

“You must be Ilya!” Hayden’s wife said like she wasn’t the wife of an NHL player and didn’t know who Ilya Rozanov was.

“Um, yes. You must be Jackie.”

She pulled him into a hug, and Ilya froze, staring at Pike over her shoulder, who just shrugged.

“We’re so glad you’re okay. Shane was so worried about you,” she said, giving him an extra squeeze before she let go, “It’s so, *so* great to meet you.”

“How are the kids?” Shane asked, coming up from behind Ilya. Like this, he could almost pretend that they were a normal couple having guests over to their home.

“My god are they a lot of work. But so rewarding,” Hayden said.

“You’re one to talk,” Jackie shot back, but it was a familiar and good-natured ribbing that Ilya recognized, “away games are the worst. I’m so glad we have Hayden back to ourselves.”

“Poor Jackie, and looking after her five kids,” Ilya said.

“We have four kids, Rozanov.” Hayden rolled his eyes.

Ilya gave Hayden a once-over, “I think five.”

“I think I know how many kids I have— hey!” he protested as the meaning of Ilya’s chirp sank in.

Jackie cackled. “Oh my god, Shane, he’s funny. You’re funny.”

Hayden glowered. “He’s not that funny.”

“Oh! Yuna,” Jackie pushed inside, ignoring her husband. “Can I help with anything? I brought that lasagna recipe you were asking for.”

“Ah,” said Ilya, something clicking in his memories, “This is the lasagna Shane was so mean to. Jackie’s Lasagna.”

Hayden looked at him like he had grown a second head, but Shane laughed sheepishly.

“Yeah, I’ve been meaning to tell you I’m sorry I called your Lasagna…um, not good the last time you were over.”

Jackie just smiled. “Oh god are you kidding? I knew you didn’t mean it. You were going through something so crazy. Don’t even think about it again. Seriously.” She waved Shane off.

Ilya thought he liked Jackie, as she disappeared into the kitchen after Yuna, David not far behind, singing the praises of this Lasagna recipe.

It left the three of them in the living room. They watched the pre-game, Shane and Ilya on the couch, Hayden in an armchair beside them.

Ilya watched the way Hayden kept glancing at Shane. He hadn’t told Shane about Hayden’s surprise visit, thinking that it was a conversation between Hayden and Shane. Ilya didn’t want to be the one to throw a wrench in their relationship. Shane needed people around him. People who supported him. People who weren’t just Ilya.

“Hey Shane?”

Oh great. Here he goes. Ilya braced himself.

“I just wanted to apologize for yesterday. I shouldn’t have been so inconsiderate about bringing up Rozanov’s accident like that.”

Ilya cringed. There had to be a better way to word it that didn’t make Ilya sound like he had pissed his own pants. But it was better than what he was expecting, which was something more along the lines of ‘*I watched you have a nightmare, and your boyfriend swore at me and then kicked me out of the house*’.

“Hayden, it’s fine, really,” Shane said, waving him off.

“No, but it’s not. Listen, I know I can be an ass sometimes, and I know I’ve never loved Rozanov. But I can… I can see he’s good for you.” He paused. Then turned to Ilya, something sincere on his face, “You’re a good guy, Rozanov. I’m glad Shane has you.”

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up, and Shane was looking at Hayden with one of those small, genuine smiles that he gave when he was trying not to give away how happy he was.

“That means a lot, Hayd.”

“You’re okay too, Pike,” Ilya conceded. He could give Shane that much. He was rewarded with fingers threading through his. Ilya squeezed, Shane squeezed back. Hayden nodded once, like he had accomplished a mission. Ilya nodded back.

Yuna, David and Jackie came out of the kitchen.

“This is Scott Hunter's year,” Yuna said, glancing at the TV where a photo of Hunter was displayed as they discussed his stats. She set a tray of food down on the coffee table.

“Yuck,” Ilya said, “Scott Hunter is old man.”

“And old man who’s going to win the cup,” She insisted.

“How are you so sure?” Hayden joined the conversation.

David chuckled from where he settled into the couch. “Yuna has a sixth hockey sense.”

Shane laughed. “It’s true. You can’t question her.”

Ilya felt strange. These people, the cozy home, the way they all laughed easily and said whatever was on their minds. The way they folded Ilya into their lives so simply. His breath strangled in his throat.

“Would someone mind helping me out in the kitchen?” Yuna asked, and Ilya was grateful for something to focus on.

“Yes,” he said quickly, already following her into the kitchen with a backwards glance at Shane.

The kitchen was filled with little finger foods on trays, and Ilya couldn’t imagine that the six of them would be able to eat all this food.

“This is a lot of food,” he stated dumbly.

Yuna just laughed. “Yeah, Shane used to have all his friends over back in middle school, and we always made it a big night. I guess some habits just die hard. Obviously, it would be preferable if one of you were playing tonight, but then we wouldn’t be able to spend this time together. So, silver linings, right?”

“Okay.” Ilya cringed at himself. It felt like he was back in front of flashing cameras and hordes of interviewers, feeling so nervous that his English escaped him. But Yuna spoke fast, and he didn’t understand everything she was saying.

He studied the food that was on the counter, his gaze stumbling on one in particular.

“What is…” he swallowed thickly, “what is that?”

“Oh!” Yuna said, “Shane mentioned to me that it was something you liked! Pirozhki? Am I saying that right? It might not be any good, but I thought I would try my hand at it. It’s not so different from Japanese kare-pan, so I think they should taste okay.”

Oh god. Ilya was going to cry in front of Shane’s mom. He rubbed at the back of his neck. His eyes felt hot and his nose prickled. He tried to keep his face schooled.

“You make Pirozhki.”

“Of course. I asked Shane a while ago what you liked and— oh sweetheart, are you okay?”

Yuna sounded so motherly sometimes it was painful. Shane didn’t tend towards pet names like Ilya did, besides ‘my love’, which was slowly becoming a new staple in his vocabulary as he realized how much Ilya liked it. Ilya couldn’t think of the last time he was called sweetheart, but it was probably sometime before his mother died.

And now Ilya was crying. And not in a masculine, one tear dripping down his cheek way. But in a crumpled face, cheek biting, trying to keep it in and failing badly.

“Sorry,” he said, trying to school his face back to normal. But it wasn’t working.

“Oh, Ilya. Come here, hon,” Yuna said. And then she was hugging him, smelling like cedar and something so quintessentially *mom*. Hugging her was so different from hugging Shane, and Ilya couldn’t help the soft sob he let out into her shoulder as he realized that the last time he was hugged like this was probably when he was 12 years old.

She hushed him and rubbed his back soothingly while he struggled to compose himself, hyper aware of how mortifying this all was.

“Sorry,” he said again, his accent thick and his voice croaky, “I don’t mean to—”

“Hey, Ilya?” She interrupted. “No sorry’s. You’re part of the family now. Shane loves you and so do we.”

“You don’t know me.”

She pulled away to look up into his eyes.

“Listen to me,” she said almost sternly, “as a mother, I am *so* grateful to you. You gave Shane something so important, something even David and I weren’t able to give him— although I wish we could have. And that is someplace safe. A person he could be himself with.” She was looking at him with earnest brown eyes that reminded him so much of Shane.

“My heart breaks that Shane felt like he had to hide himself from the world. But he told you. And you kept that safe for him for years, honey. You have *no idea* what that means to us. That Shane had a person who he could safely be himself with throughout all those years. A person who knows him and protects him and helps him. Honey, it's so obvious how much you love him.”

Ilya stared at her, his eyes wet and lashes clumped. He had stopped crying, at least.

“And Ilya?”

He nodded, sniffing. Gave a grunted noise of assent to show he was listening when in fact he was hanging on to every word she said.

“I really hope that Shane was able to give you the same thing. You deserve someplace safe to be yourself, too.”

So much for not crying anymore. Ilya felt his self-preservation crumble, and he hunched back over, so the tiny woman that was Shane Hollanders' mother could rub his back and coo soft noises at him like he was a little boy. He didn’t know how long they stood there, but Yuna never pulled away, and Ilya couldn’t bring himself to.

It was only once Shane, obliviously from the living room, called “game’s on!” that Ilya pulled himself away and rubbed vigorously at his eyes.

“Sorry.”

“What did I say about sorry?”

“No sorry’s,” he said. She smiled.

“Good, now grab a tray and let’s watch the game.”

Shane was right about his mother, and she yelled louder than anyone else in the room, standing up during almost every goal, making snide remarks about how Shane could have done it better. But the rest of them weren’t far behind, an entire room of people who lived and breathed hockey. The only thing that would have made this better, Ilya thought, was Svetlana.

And then he remembered that she knew about Shane, and that one day, maybe he could invite her here, and he could *have that*.

Shane held his hand the entire game. He would let go during intense moments, his hands half raised in anticipation, and when those moments were over, he would thread his fingers back through Ilya’s and lean into him.

Ilya made his fair share of snarky comments, finding a good balance between what riled up Hayden Pike, made Shane smile with a kind of fond exasperation and clearly amused Shane’s parents. It was perfect.

Scott Hunter's team won just like Yuna said he would, and Ilya was in such a good mood that he was happy for him.

"He deserves it," Yuna was saying, "This was probably his last chance at a cup." But Ilya was focused on the TV.

Scott Hunter was doing something strange. He was looking into the stands, motioning someone down onto the ice.

"What's he doing?" Shane asked, leaning forward in his seat.

"I have no idea," someone else said. Ilya didn't know who. His attention had tunnelled to the screen in front of him.

The camera zoomed in on Scott. The announcers droned on about the best day of this fan's life, as a short, handsome man stepped onto the ice looking flustered.

But Ilya knew the face that Scott Hunter was making. Ilya had made that face at Shane before. The entire living room had gone silent, like the whole world was holding its breath. Everyone was leaning forward in their chairs.

Ilya knew what was going to happen before it happened, but it was like his brain still couldn't wrap around the idea of it and his breath caught as Scott pulled the man into him and kissed him on the mouth. Suddenly, Ilya felt something bright and fizzy and too big for words as he watched Scott Hunter kiss his boyfriends on national TV.

He turned towards Shane, who was already looking at Ilya with an identical look on his face. Mouth slightly open, eyes wide with disbelief. Ilya a breath of laughter escaped from the bright thing fizzling inside him. Shane just stared.

"We should have done that," Ilya said, the words thickly accented.

"Oh my god, Ilya," Shane said.

And then he was laughing, and Ilya was right behind him. Laughter bubbled up and spilled out of him like sunshine. Shane grasped his shoulder, wheezing, with tears in his eyes, and they grappled uselessly through their gasping breaths, needing something to do, someone to hold on to.

Ilya was aware that the rest of the living room was watching them with concerned shock. He wasn't sure he had ever laughed this hard or this long in his life. He wasn't sure Shane had either. Shane had fallen half onto the ground and dragged Ilya with him, and they slowly caught their breath as they sank to the floor.

"Are you guys okay?" Hayden asked, stunned.

Shane opened his mouth to respond.

"Hayd, now we have to win the Stanley cup so I can—so I can— "the words barely made it past Shane's lips, broken up by his giggles.

The meaning was obvious. It just set them off into that uncontrollable laughter again. And it felt precious to Ilya, this moment that was theirs. Where nothing existed inside of him except Shane and this delight and a gleaming sense of *hope*.

At one point, Ilya had thought they were done, and then Shane's dad, in the silence, said,

"So Scott Hunter's gay."

And it took them another 10 minutes to catch their breath.

It was a long time before they calmed down. Every attempt Yuna or David made to break through the moment just sent them into another fit of teary laughter. The whole thing was a bit ridiculous, and Ilya knew they were acting like teenagers who had heard a bad joke.

A smile still played on Shane's lips, the corner of his eyes sparkled with unshed tears, and Ilya couldn't help but grab his face and kiss him.

He ignored the small 'oh my god" that Hayden uttered, and the happy sighs of Yuna and Jackie and kissed Shane better than Scott Hunter could ever kiss his dumb boyfriend. A kiss that actually deserved to be on national television. That felt better than winning the Stanley Cup ever did.

And Shane kissed him back. On the floor of his parents' living room, Shane kissed him back.

They stayed at Shane's parents' late into the evening. Long after David had finished showing them his favourite YouTube videos of different animals being best friends, and Yuna and Shane teased him for being so behind in his knowledge of technology. And long after Hayden and Jackie bid everyone goodbye, Jackie had pulled him into a fierce hug and made them promise he would come for dinner the next time he was in Montreal, and Hayden nodded at him with some unspoken truce.

Long after, even, Shane's capacity to stay awake, as he cuddled into Ilya's side unconsciously on the couch, while Ilya's heart flipped at the fact that Shane was sleeping. Soundly, and peacefully, and in Ilya's arms. He grazed a hand up and down Shane's arm as he spoke quietly with Yuna and David.

"Ottawa could definitely be in the cards," Yuna was saying after Shane had roused, brought up their plan and then promptly fell back asleep, "they're in need of a star center, and they would absolutely have the budget for you."

Ilya nodded.

"I could make some calls if you'd like."

"No, I could't ask—"

"What if I said I wanted to?"

"Then… thank you. That would be nice." Nice was a mundane word for what Ilya felt.

“Happy to help. But I have to ask, you’d really leave the Raiders?”

Ilya nodded automatically. For Shane, of course, he would. “Yes.”

“You don’t feel... any loyalty to them?”

Ilya was saved from having to answer that.

“Mom!” Shane protested sleepily, without opening his eyes. “he’s trying to be loyal to me.”

“I’m just saying…” Yuna said defensively, “The Raiders were the ones who signed him.”

Shane grumbled and cracked an eye open, glaring at no one in particular, “My mom cares a little too much about hockey.”

“Yes, I see where you get it from,” Ilya smiled, chuckling softly.

If only Yuna knew her son was willing to play with the Jackalopes for Ilya. It was something he’d never speak aloud to her. But it was that knowledge that had him completely unbothered by Yuna’s comment. For Shane, Ilya would go anywhere. And Shane would go anywhere for him.

“Well, in that case, I'd better dig up some contacts in Ottawa,” Yuna said, standing up and disappearing down a hallway.

Ilya wondered how he ended up here, with his boyfriend tucked under his arm, in a warm, lived-in, house with a framed photo of him and Shane sitting proudly on the mantle, and people who supported him. People who didn’t want anything from Ilya except what he already was. It was a strange feeling.

“Hey,” Shane smiled up at him, the expression sweet and charming. He kissed Ilya's shoulder where his head was resting.

“Hi,” Ilya said back.

“Okay?”

“Yes, of course.” And Ilya was.

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