

careful all the time

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careful all the time

by Anonymous

Summary

“I was thinking about the honeymoon phase thing.”

“Yes?” Ilya said.

“I think it’s different for us. I don’t want us to be all blissful and then only start fighting when we’re back to barely seeing each other. I think it’s good if we figure things out now, when we have the time. Whatever needs figuring out. So we have a solid foundation going into the season. Sort of like training camp.”

“So this means you will keep getting mad at me for things,” Ilya said.

Shane smiled, rolled his eyes. “Yeah, exactly,” he said.

“Good, I find it very hot,” Ilya said, and kissed him.

An insecure over-thinker and a self-destructive thrill-seeker walk into a relationship.

Notes

i am making this part of a series just bc i am publishing in this fandom anonymously and i want the works to be in the same place but there's no need to read any of the others to understand this. series title from randy described eternity by built to spill.

heads up i have not read the books this fic may not be compatible with the sequel idk!

i will update this if not daily then every second day.

title taken from heavenfaced by the national, as in 'no one's careful all the time'... for sure in my make everything about shane and ilya era but that whole album is about them.

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [時刻小心](#) by [LimpossibiliteDaimer](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

The first thing Ilya did when they got home from Shane's parents' house was ask Shane to teach him spit. He didn't know it was called spit, but: "The card game that Yuna does not let David beat her in." Shane found this request touching and happily agreed.

He felt like he was floating. The dinner had been so much better than he had ever hoped. He had known his parents wouldn't hate him, but he thought they'd be sad – let down, put down, concerned for him. If there was anything beneath their shock and confusion it was relief, like they were worried about him less now than they had been before. And while the circumstances that had led to it were far from ideal, he couldn't entirely regret them when he felt so weightless in the aftermath. There were still people he was lying to, but his parents were always who he'd felt guiltiest about. Now he was unburdened and ready to enjoy the last few days of Ilya's visit without reservation.

Maybe a little reservation, if Ilya continued to demolish him at spit. They were usually pretty evenly matched at whatever they competed in, but Ilya took the first three hands easily.

"Beginner's luck," Shane said.

"Natural talent," Ilya countered, as a call came through on his phone. He glanced at the screen and rejected it.

"Who was that?" Shane asked. Ilya looked up at him and Shane hastened to explain his curiosity: "Just because it was Cyrillic, but I thought you weren't really in contact with anyone in Russia."

"You don't need to explain yourself," Ilya said, dealing out a new hand. "Boyfriends can ask these things."

"Right," Shane said, the floating feeling returning to him at the word.

"And you're right, I'm not," Ilya said. "It was Svetlana."

"Oh," Shane said, and cleared his throat. He'd been feeling pretty vindictive toward her last time she'd come up, but that was before boyfriend and I love you and the charity and coming out to his parents. Shane had evolved. "You could've taken the call, you know."

"I know," Ilya said. "I did not want to. Not when I am on a roll."

"You are not on a roll," Shane said, tuning back into the game.

"I am on a roll," Ilya repeated, sing-song. It was a game of speed, so they couldn't really have a conversation once it was in play. It wasn't until they got through the hand – Ilya taking

it again, Jesus, Shane would make them keep playing as long as it took for him to win just one – that Ilya said, “I will call her back, though. Maybe later tonight.”

“Okay,” Shane said, a little confused by the searching note in Ilya’s voice, almost like he was looking for permission. Shane hoped his maniacal jealousy hadn’t been too visible, that he hadn’t made Ilya feel insecure in this friendship that was obviously important to him. He wondered if Ilya had been hesitant to take the call around Shane, worried about how Shane might react. Shane wasn’t sure how he would himself. At least he wouldn’t suck Ilya off in the middle of it, although that was in part because he was pretty sure Ilya would just tell her what was happening.

He began to understand Ilya’s cautious tone when it held over in his next question. “How would you feel if I told her about us?”

Shane looked up, almost wanting to laugh at what should be a ridiculous suggestion – them telling anyone. But it wasn’t, because people knew, Shane’s parents knew, and the world (their world) hadn’t ended. “Would you like to?” he asked.

“Yes, very much,” Ilya said.

“You think she’d be okay with it?” Shane asked. “It’ll come as a shock.”

Ilya made a considering face, wobbled his hand. “Yes and no,” he said. “She knows there is someone. Has known it for a while.”

“Oh,” Shane said, pleased by this. “How long is a while?”

Ilya gave him a look, apparently not willing to indulge him. Shane moved on. “Does she know it’s a guy, does she know you’re bi?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “She has always known, she does not mind. She will probably be a little mad that I have been spending time with Shane Hollander and have not studied his moving drop pass.”

Shane smiled. “She likes my drop pass?”

“She is easily taken in by flash,” Ilya said, and before Shane could get in a jab about that explaining her friendship with Ilya, the card game started back up. Shane finally won.

After a couple more rounds they went outside and Shane tried to teach Ilya bird calls, but they were all in the fingers and tongue so it just got Ilya turned on. Then Shane tried to brainstorm activities they could do together without Ilya turning it into a sex thing, and Ilya detailed how he would turn each one into a sex thing. This led to them stargazing and making up dirty constellations, which still felt like maybe the most romantic experience of Shane’s life.

Through it all Shane waited for Ilya to excuse himself to call Svetlana, but he never did. Shane didn’t want to ask about it because he didn’t want to reveal that he for some reason

couldn't forget it, but he figured Ilya had decided to put it off until tomorrow. And he also thought that maybe Ilya didn't want to leave Shane's side, but that theory felt very needy and he tried not to foster it.

They were still outside under the stars when Shane yawned. It was past midnight. As though every day since Ilya got there was Christmas, Shane hadn't wanted any of them to end.

"You are sleepy," Ilya said, kissing the bridge of his nose and then between his eyes. "Sleepy baby."

Shane smiled, closed his eyes. Ilya took this as invitation to kiss his eyelids, and then his cheeks. Shane pointed to a spot above his left eyebrow to see what would happen and Ilya kissed there too. When Shane yawned again, Ilya kissed the stretched corner of his mouth. Shane asked, "You think you could carry me to bed?"

Ilya jumped into standing and put his hands on his hips as though surveying the situation. Shane laughed and Ilya rubbed his hands together. "Okay," he said. "I got this."

He bent down and slipped his hands around the small of Shane's back, heaving him up. Shane's legs automatically wrapped around Ilya's hips. Ilya had carried him before but this was the first time outside of a sexual context, and it was nice. For Shane at least. Ilya groaned exaggeratedly when he took the steps inside.

"I can walk," Shane said, dry, even though he really didn't want to. It felt base, almost embarrassing, but he loved Ilya's strength. His size. He loved feeling manageable, like he didn't overwhelm Ilya.

"No, no, never," Ilya said. "You will never walk again, I will carry you forever."

"Kind of sounds like a threat," Shane said. "A way to end my hockey career."

"Always thinking the worst of me," Ilya said, and shoved their bedroom door open with his shoulder. Shane was half expecting Ilya to fling him onto the bed, punctuation for their ribbing, but instead he laid Shane down very very gently, gentle enough Shane almost wanted to cry.

"I love you," Shane said quietly, looking up at Ilya, who was holding himself above Shane on his elbows. He loved how Ilya reacted to that, how much it seemed to shock him, destabilize him. He nodded for a while before repeating the words, first in Russian, then in English. It was the first Russian phrase Shane was beginning to properly recognize. He was working up the courage to repeat it back to Ilya. He remembered a couple Finnish teammates talking about how it was pretty easy for them to tell girls they loved them in English, whereas saying it in their native tongue felt like a much bigger deal. But Ilya had told Shane in Russian first.

Ilya had positioned himself on top of Shane and Shane hadn't bothered unlocking his legs from around Ilya's hips, so he felt when Ilya tried to pull away.

"You're not getting in?" Shane asked, letting himself sound whiny. They were becoming fairly obnoxious, even he could see that, but he sort of loved it. He had never had anyone to

get obnoxious about before.

Ilya shook his head. "I will call Svetlana now," he said, and it would be too dramatic to compare it to a bomb going off, but it did sort of burst a bubble. Ilya tilted his head at whatever he saw on Shane's face and smiled. "Unless you will be too lonely in bed without me?"

He seemed pleased by the idea, not like he thought Shane was overly needy or possessive. Still. "No, it's fine," Shane said. "It's just a little late, isn't it? You're sure it's okay to call her now? I have a rule against calling people past nine."

"Always so sweet," Ilya said. "She is night owl. I am surprised how early it was when she first called."

"Are you?" Shane asked.

"Yes," Ilya said, frowning, looking a little confused.

"No, sorry," Shane said. "I mean are you a night owl?" He hadn't put it together before but it occurred to him that he was always the first to start flagging. Ilya didn't seem to mind going to bed on Shane's schedule, but Shane wondered how late Ilya would stay up if Shane wasn't there.

"No, I am human person," Ilya said, for some reason playing coy. He planted a wet kiss on Shane's mouth and then left.

Shane sat on the edge of the bed for a while, listening to the low hum of Ilya talking in the next room. It was in Russian so Shane couldn't eavesdrop even if he wanted to, but he was trying to pick up on the tone. He wanted to make sure the call was going okay for Ilya. But Ilya must have wandered away, his voice fading out, and Shane sighed and stood. He stripped down to his boxers and went to the en suite to brush his teeth. A couple nights ago Ilya had brought his toothbrush out to him, toothpaste already on it, along with two glasses of water – one to wash his mouth out with, one to spit into – and Shane had brushed his teeth in bed. That had made him want to cry too. It was funny to think he had technically been in relationships before, and technically been a good boyfriend – he had brought women flowers, he had pulled chairs out for them at restaurants, he had texted them good morning and good night. But it was all formulaic, actions he could find in lists online. Real love made you inventive, made you constantly find new ways to show affection without even having to really think about it.

He brushed his teeth and then returned to his bed and wondered how long Ilya would be gone. If Svetlana had been calling to catch up, if they hadn't talked at least since Ilya got here, maybe it would be an hour or even more. That was okay, really it was, except that it would be a little bit of a shock to suddenly go without Ilya for anything longer than the length of a shower. Like a diver coming up to the surface too quick.

Shane didn't know exactly how long it ended up being because he'd staunchly refused to check the time, but maybe between twenty minutes and a half hour. Considering Ilya was delivering some pretty huge news, that seemed as brief as Shane could selfishly hope for.

Ilya kissed him on the forehead before going to brush his teeth. Shane moved into the center of the bed and pulled the blanket back a little, to remove all possible delays to Ilya getting in with him. When Ilya returned he seemed just as impatient, sliding up against Shane's body and knuckling at his sternum. Shane put his hand on Ilya's, unfolding it and pressing it down into his chest. "How was it?" he asked.

Ilya breathed in and out, considering. "Good," he said. "She didn't believe me, thought it was joke. She was very shocked, it was funny. She is hard to shock. I enjoyed that."

Shane smiled. "Why didn't she believe you?"

"Your parents hardly believed us and your dad saw me grab your ass," Ilya said.

Shane made a face but couldn't fault the logic. He ran a hand through Ilya's hair. "Once she got over the shock?"

Ilya shrugged, then rearranged himself so his head was resting on Shane's shoulder. "She is happy. She is very impressed with me, that I have Shane Hollander. I told her how good you are to me."

Shane felt a surge of warm pride. This was different to coming out to his parents, which had been sheer relief. This was somebody from Ilya's life who knew Ilya, knew how great he was (how great he was in bed, but Shane pushed that from his mind). And now she knew that he was Shane's, that he had chosen Shane, of all people.

"She doesn't mind you not telling her until now?" he asked.

"No," Ilya said. "She knows me, she knows how I am. And she could hear how happy I was to tell her now, so."

"I'm happy too," Shane said. "I'm happy for you."

Ilya lifted himself up on an elbow so he could lean in and kiss Shane, slow and easy. He pulled away sooner than Shane was expecting, his eyes running over Shane's face. Shane tried not to pout.

"She is in Boston for the next month," Ilya said.

Shane frowned. "Doesn't she live in Boston?"

"Yes but she travels a lot for work, like us," Ilya said. "She is taking next month off. She timed it with my off-season. We planned it. Before you and I made plans, obviously."

Shane nodded. It was Ilya's first off-season not going back to Russia, which he'd been very conscious of. Apparently Svetlana had been too. "That's nice. So you'll be seeing a lot of her?"

Ilya nodded, still contemplating Shane. "She said, and I agree, it would be nice for you to come visit," he said, and what he said next seemed to take a lot of guts. "I would like you to meet her."

“Oh,” Shane whispered. All his mixed feelings about Svetlana were washed away, at least for the moment. Ilya had met Shane’s family, and now he wanted Shane to meet his. Shane blinked. “Yeah, yeah, for sure. I could get away for a day, come by. I’d love to.”

“Okay,” Ilya said. “But what about more than a day? What about a real stay, with me?”

“I mean, I’d love that too,” Shane said slowly. “But I don’t see how—a city is different. There are so many people, it wouldn’t be safe. I’d need a good reason to be in Boston, of all places, and I can’t think of one.”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “This is what I was thinking too. But it would be nice to really have you there for a while, if we can find a way.”

Shane nodded. They had commitments, they couldn’t spend the whole off-season in the cottage. Already Shane was beginning to miss proper training and conditioning. At the same time, and maybe it was just Shane, but their stay in the cottage had made the prospect of going back to only occasionally seeing each other unbearable.

Shane pressed a finger into Ilya’s shoulder, dragged it down. “Who’s the best trainer in Boston?” he asked.

“My trainer,” Ilya said. “Obviously.”

“Your trainer doesn’t work with people who don’t speak Russian,” Shane said. Ilya trained with someone the Raiders had brought in for him special when he got drafted. He was weirdly loyal to him, which Shane supposed he could take as a good sign, considering he had now earned Ilya’s loyalty too. “Who is a trainer in Boston I could go to where it would make sense for me to go to them. Someone who specializes in a skill set I should work on.”

“Your shower head could use some work,” Ilya said.

It could; he always got water up his nose. Still Shane raised his eyebrows. “It’s in your best interest to apologize.”

“Sorry, I’m so sorry,” Ilya said. “A trainer is a good idea. So you would want to come? And get to know Svetlana.”

Shane hesitated. He’d sort of forgotten about the Svetlana element. He’d want to go to spend time with Ilya, and if it was important to Ilya for him to meet Svetlana he would. “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, I’d love that.”

Ilya fist pumped, which made Shane laugh. “So it begins,” Ilya said. “You will fall in love with Boston and request trade to Raiders.”

“You aren’t even in love with Boston and you’ve been there for years,” Shane said.

“Exactly, I am there,” Ilya said. “You will not be able to resist.”

Shane shook his head. “Never gonna happen,” he said.

“I will make it happen,” Ilya said. “I have secret plan.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Shane nodded and hummed. “Ilya, what’s your secret plan?”

“I can’t say.”

Shane pulled at Ilya’s bottom lip. “Please?”

“Okay,” Ilya said, giving in with a sigh. “I will make you come very very very hard and then when you are all fucked out and hazy I will get you to sign a contract.”

Shane closed his eyes. “It wouldn’t hold up in court,” he said.

“I have very good lawyers,” Ilya said, and kissed him.

They didn’t talk for around twenty minutes after waking up the next morning, brushing their teeth and getting dressed and making out a bit all in silence. Shane only spoke while watching Ilya fiddle with the coffee pot. Ilya really struggled with it, and Shane refused to help. He got his thrills where he could. “I was thinking,” he said, and Ilya glanced back at him for a moment. “You know who would be great at coming up with a convincing hockey reason for me to be in Boston?”

“Who?” Ilya asked.

“My mom,” Shane said.

Ilya turned to him, smiling. “Yes,” he said. “She will give you thirty day itinerary.”

Shane liked how he said the word. “I texted her,” he said.

Ilya frowned but turned back to the coffee. “When?”

Shane scrunched his mouth up. “Five am last night,” he said, and Ilya laughed.

Yuna got back to him by noon, when they were collapsed on the couch after a work out. They should shower but hadn’t yet, gross and sweaty and undoubtedly compromising the cashmere throw. “Huh,” Shane said, reading the text.

“What?”

“It’s mom,” he said.

“She found you trainer?”

“Yeah, Reed Harris, you know him?”

“Yes,” Ilya said, and then laughed in the back of the throat. “All the little guys use him.”

Shane bit his collarbone.

“Why did this make you go huh?” Ilya asked, doing a goofy imitation of the sound Shane had made.

“Well, she also found a study that MIT are doing on athletes,” Shane said. “On our circadian rhythms. There’s rolling recruitment. She said it could be good for me to sign up – make me seem smart, and community-oriented, and—” he looked up to Ilya for this, smiled. “Like Boston doesn’t scare me.”

“Big, brave, Shane Hollander,” Ilya said, absently. “What is—thing, the study thing?”

"Circadian rhythms?"

Ilya nodded.

"Oh." Shane frowned. He thought he knew, but it was tricky to define. "Circadian rhythm is like the time your body is on. Do you know the phrase internal body clock?"

"How we get jet lag," Ilya said.

"Yeah," Shane said. "I guess circadian rhythms are like that. It's like seasons but for the body. It says when we do things. Sleep, mostly."

Ilya nodded. "Okay. That is enough? Is that convincing?"

Shane swallowed. To somebody who didn’t know him – if he had to give a public explanation for his presence – then he thought it would be sufficient. But if a teammate asked what the fuck he was doing in Boston, and he talked about Reed Harris and circadian rhythms, they would look at him like he was crazy. “I don’t know,” Shane said.

“Well,” Ilya said. “As convincing as a silent retreat.”

Shane went to hit him but Ilya grabbed his wrist. Shane struggled, pulled himself on top of Ilya, but Ilya got his other wrist too and kept him away. Held up like that, suspended above Ilya, Shane said, “I don’t know how believable it is but I’d take the chance.”

Ilya smiled and let go of his wrists, so Shane collapsed on top of him. Another idea occurred to him. “I mean, she could also come up here,” Shane said. “If you want to see her and if it’s important to you for me and her to spend time together, she could stay here for a while.”

He had to force the offer out. It made logistical sense, but this place was a refuge. Other than Ilya and his parents there wasn’t really anyone he’d want here, not even good friends. Svetlana would be a lot to take.

Ilya looked at him. “These two weeks have been maybe best of my life.”

Shane tried to tamp down his smile. He wasn't sure he ever did a good job. "Yeah?"

"Yes. I get why this place means what it does to you. You made something beautiful and special and I'm so happy you shared it with me. I have enjoyed all of it."

Shane moved his mouth around to disguise his smile. "I'm glad," he said.

"So you know I love it here, yes?"

"I'm getting the idea," Shane said.

"Good," Ilya said, and tapped Shane's cheek. "Svetlana would fucking hate it."

Despite Ilya's obvious attempts to soothe Shane, his hackles were instantly up. "What the fuck, why?"

Ilya shrugged. "She is city girl," he said.

"You're a city boy," Shane said.

"I have depth she lacks," Ilya said. "I think it's from falling in love with you."

Shane smiled, buried his face in the bend of Ilya's neck, his hair tickling Shane. "God," Shane said, pulling away slightly. "We really do need to shower."

They showered, ate leftover pasta Yuna and David had sent them home with, and then fell right back on the couch. Shane had his head on Ilya's chest, half on the rucked up fabric of Ilya's loose black tank top and half on his warm, still slightly damp skin. Ilya was scrolling through his socials and Shane was watching. After around twenty minutes of instagram stories, Shane frowned.

"Why don't you follow—anyone?" he asked, chickening out toward the end of the question.

"What?" Ilya asked. "I follow people. This is what this is."

"Right," Shane said, and sighed. If he wanted to know this, he'd have to be able to say it. "I mean women."

"I follow women," Ilya said.

"Right, but..." Shane faded off. Not the kind of women that showed up on his teammates' instas.

"What do you want to know, Hollander?" Ilya asked. Shane could tell from the tone change that Ilya had already figured it out, but he was still going to make Shane say it.

"Instagram models," Shane gritted out. "Or whatever. Just—hot women who post pictures of themselves. Isn't that where—I know people hook up that way."

“Yes, this is true,” Ilya said.

“Not you?” Shane asked, and tried not to remember Ilya in that club. “You always met women in person?”

“Not always,” Ilya said. “But I don’t follow them now.”

“What do you mean now?” Shane asked, slowly. “You unfollowed them?”

“Yes,” Ilya said, sounding uncomfortable, which made Shane smile very widely.

“When?”

“On the plane ride up here,” Ilya said after a pause. Shane laughed, delighted. “Because of something exactly like this. Because of you going through my phone all nosy.”

Shane leveraged himself up to look down at Ilya. “And because you don’t need them anymore,” he said, quiet.

Ilya’s eyes flickered over him. “Yes,” he said. “Because I have you.”

Shane smiled and settled back down on Ilya.

“Give me your phone,” Ilya said.

“What?”

“I am bored of my instagram, let me see yours.”

So Shane handed it over, giddy a little at the trust and entitlement it implied. “I didn’t even have to unfollow anyone,” Shane said.

“No?” Ilya asked. “You didn’t unfollow all the financial advisors and nutritionists, to make it harder for me to make fun of you?”

Shane flushed but said nothing as Ilya opened his stories. The very first one was a nutritionist, which made Ilya laugh. The second was one of Rose’s friends, and when Shane told him that Ilya made a teeth-sucking noise. “They don’t hate you, they don’t want to block you?” Ilya asked. “You are terrible ex boyfriend.”

The person after had posted a photo of their mom’s birthday, and Ilya asked who it was.

“A friend from high school,” Shane said. “We haven’t talked in years, but we like each other’s stuff sometimes.”

Obligingly Ilya liked the photo from the party. Then he tapped into the guy’s profile and started scrolling.

“We didn’t have instagram in high school,” Shane said dryly. “If that’s what you’re hoping to find.”

“No,” Ilya said. “Just getting a feel for things. Besides, I saw all the pictures of you already.”

“What?”

“All over the walls of your house.”

“Oh my God,” Shane said. That hadn't occurred to him at all.

“You have had the same haircut your whole life,” Ilya said. “So cute.”

Shane grumbled and Ilya squeezed his shoulders. He opened a picture of the high school classmate fishing. “Ah,” he said. “You fish?”

“No,” Shane said. “I mean I have done, I can.”

“And you are good at it?” Ilya asked.

“Well. Yeah, why?” It seemed like a weird thing to guess.

“Because as far as I know you are good at everything,” Ilya said, and then left the guy's profile. Something occurred to Shane.

“Ilya,” he said. “Is Svetlana on here?”

Ilya's hands stilled. Shane wasn't sure it was a good idea, either, but suddenly it seemed a lot worse to meet her in Boston with no idea what she even looked like. He should brace himself. God, she was definitely gorgeous. “Yes,” Ilya said, tightly.

“Okay,” Shane said. “Can I see?”

“You want to?”

“No,” Shane said. “Show me anyway.”

Ilya went to the search function and only had to type in sv before she was suggested. It wasn't just Ilya, a bunch of people Shane followed already followed her.

“What the fuck,” he said.

“She does a lot of work in hockey world,” Ilya said. “You would know this if you had better taste in cars.”

“Fuck you,” Shane said absently, and then repeated it a lot more passionately when Ilya tapped follow. Ilya laughed and Shane shoved him as best he could from his position.

“She will know it was me,” Ilya said. “She knows I want you to be friends.”

Shane let himself be warmed by that, braced himself, and said, “Okay.”

Ilya tapped into her profile. He scrolled quickly, but Shane put his hand on Ilya's wrist to still him, to actually get a look at the photos. “Holy fuck,” Shane whispered.

Svetlana was gorgeous. And not—Shane could now admit this probably had something to do with being gay, but he'd sort of always thought a lot of the women men salivated over were pretty boring. Not as people! But looks wise. Svetlana was not boring. Her beauty was unique and natural and full of life. She looked like a work of art. She looked fun, most of the pictures from nights out, her smiling or laughing and looking just as beautiful as in the staged photos. Shane could very easily imagine Ilya in the mix, laughing beside her, with his arm around her. He wouldn't look out of place. Ilya was a work of art too.

Shane cleared his throat. "I don't recognize her," he said.

"How would you?" Ilya asked.

"I mean she doesn't go to your games," Shane said. "And you guys haven't been photographed together."

He could hear the evil smile in Ilya's voice. "You would recognize her if we had been photographed together?"

Shane couldn't really spare the mental energy to get defensive. He couldn't imagine that Ilya was not attracted to Svetlana. She looked like that, and they obviously got on, and he'd been attracted enough to her in the past to sleep with her regularly. Shane knew Ilya didn't have feelings for her, not romantic feelings the way he had for Shane, but it wasn't like she'd turned into a blank space. Ilya could still see what she looked like. And Shane knew first hand Ilya had a pretty demanding sex drive. Even when he'd genuinely loathed sleeping with Ilya, Shane had found it impossible to want anyone else. He knew that wasn't how Ilya worked.

"I'm going to ask a bitchy, mean-spirited question, and I need you to be honest."

"What?"

Shane chewed his lip until Ilya pulled it free. "Are the photos doing all the work?" he asked, cringing at himself. "Like, is she one of those people who looks amazing online and then you meet them in person and they're kind of normal?"

"Oh," Ilya said. "No, I am sorry. She is beautiful."

Shane groaned and pulled Ilya's rucked up tank top over his head, so he was trapped in the warm dark against Ilya's chest. Ilya laughed, one hand cupping the back of Shane's head, over the black fabric, and the other skating up and down Shane's spine. Shane never wanted to move again. They stayed like that for a while without speaking.

Then: "Why did you think I wanted so bad to fuck you, when we first met?" Ilya asked, casual.

"I don't know," Shane said, flushing.

"Lies," Ilya said. "You are overthinker, I know you had your theory."

Shane sighed, cast his mind back to that first year. It was easier to admit to, hidden away like this. “I thought maybe you liked how neurotic and repressed and inexperienced I was. I thought undoing that was fun for you. And it was obviously risky, which you like.”

“Yes, that is all true,” Ilya said. “But also you were fucking hot. Obviously I think this now because I am in love with you, but even back then I thought you were most beautiful person. In different way than now, it didn’t make me feel warm, but I still thought it. You must know this, yes? That you are beautiful.”

Shane stayed quiet.

“Objectively,” Ilya continued. “I know it about myself, I am hot, people find me hot. I know because people tell me. They must tell you too. All these deals you have, it’s not just because you’re a star. Is because you’re handsome and people want to buy things with your face on them. You know this, right?”

“I guess,” Shane said, cringing. He wondered if Ilya could tell he was blushing, just from the heat of his cheek against Ilya’s skin.

Ilya made a dissatisfied noise. “How do you only guess?”

“I mean, you’re right, people have said it,” Shane said. “But hearing it and feeling it are different things.”

“You don’t believe it when people say it?”

“No, it’s not that,” Shane said. “It’s more just that it doesn’t feel real. Or relevant. Like, I believe that’s how I’m seen, I guess. But not—and there are different kinds of beautiful.”

“Ah, and you are one of the bad kinds,” Ilya said, sarcastic.

“Not bad,” Shane said. He didn’t want to say boring because he didn’t want to sound like he was accusing Ilya of making him feel insecure. He knew that wasn’t how Ilya meant it. “Just not... spectacular.” Ilya was spectacular. So, it seemed, was Svetlana.

Ilya squeezed the nape of his neck. “I have done a bad job, then,” he said. “Maybe I have said all the nicest things only in Russian. I will work harder to let you know what I see.”

“Yeah, but you’re in love with me,” Shane said, smiling.

“Is not just me.” Ilya said. He didn’t elaborate for a while and then said: “Heart breaker. First time I heard this phrase I thought of you.”

Shane brushed his nose over Ilya’s strong heartbeat and Ilya hummed. “Not my heart, you love me too much. But other people.”

Shane scoffed. “What other people?”

“Everybody,” Ilya said. “People who see you in coffee shops. Fans whose jerseys you sign. You are breaking their hearts.”

It was a ridiculous premise, but it pleased Shane to imagine Ilya perceiving him as holding that much power. “I don’t care,” he said. “As long as I don’t break yours.”

Ilya extracted him from his tank top, stroking through Shane’s hair. Shane was conflicted, not sure if he wanted to move upward to Ilya’s mouth or downward to where he was hardening against Shane’s leg. From barely anything at all, just from having Shane near. Ilya made the decision for him, guiding him up to a kiss. Shane’s mind blanked out with a peaceful putter like an old computer shutting down. This really was the best way to deal with his bitterness and insecurities and general mess. He had no hope he would ever untangle it, but Ilya could make him forget it existed for a while.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!! will post next chapter tomorrow

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

They traveled to Boston separately. Shane had been disappointed at the time that they hadn't been able to figure out how to make the trip together incognito, but as he neared his destination he began to enjoy it. It was fun, after so long never out of each other's sight, to have a little reunion. He entered the pass code on Ilya's front door, as he had after many games in Boston, but this time when he made his way inside and found Ilya in the kitchen he didn't have to curb any of his impulses, and Ilya didn't either. It was late afternoon and they'd parted ways that morning, but they embraced with the same crushing fervor as if it had been months. Ilya lifted his feet off the ground and swayed him, making Shane laugh. "Honey, I'm home," he said, right up against Ilya's mouth.

Ilya made a sound and then spun Shane around, pressed him down over the counter, and Shane laughed again, more jagged. This was more like how they fucked after games, too. Everything in the cottage had been gentler than their norm, slower, sweeter. Shane had loved it, but this was how he'd fallen for Ilya.

"Missed this," he said.

"Missed what," Ilya said, because he always tried to get Shane to be specific.

Shane shook his head as best he could against the cold counter top, as Ilya made quick work of their pants. "How much you need me," he said.

Ilya pressed a wet kiss against the back of Shane's neck and said, "We need each other."

Shane nodded, embarrassing tears behind his eyes. "All we need," he said, a variation on the theme, and Ilya made another noise in the back of his throat. It sounded sort of sad.

Ilya had no food in his kitchen except stale crackers and peanut butter, so they ordered in. Shane learned something new about Ilya: when he got take out, he got enough for five meals. "The delivery fee is same no matter how much you get," he said. "I am saving money."

"Which is so important to you," Shane said. He suspected Ilya was just bad at deciding what he wanted off the menu.

"Yes," Ilya said. "You are not the only responsible person in the relationship."

"How many cars do you own?" Shane asked.

Ilya shook his head. "Who keeps count," he said. "Anyway, a lot of them are on lease."

Shane heard Ilya's phone buzz, but Ilya didn't check it. Shane swallowed. "Is that Svetlana?" he asked.

Ilya glanced at him, then pulled out his phone to check. "No," he said.

"Oh," Shane said. She had arrived back in Boston that day as well, from LA, and she was going to come over tomorrow afternoon. Shane suspected she normally just sort of let herself in and out of Ilya's house as she pleased, because Ilya had seemed to find it awkward arranging a specific time and date with her. Shane hadn't minded when this plan had first been made, because it gave him and Ilya a night together just the two of them, but now that didn't feel like enough. He still wasn't prepared. He didn't say any of this, but it was not the first time he'd proven transparent to Ilya.

"Look," Ilya said. His right index and middle fingers slid between Shane's shoulder and neck, which is how Shane realized how hunched he was. Ilya pressed down, forcing him to relax. "If it's too soon, we call it off. No big deal, is okay. She is busy girl, she can find things to do, she does not need me."

Shane looked at him, could see he meant it, wouldn't blame Shane at all. "No," Shane said. "Thanks, but I won't ask you to not see your friends. Especially since I want her to like me."

"She likes you."

Shane smiled. "She doesn't know me."

"No," Ilya said. "But you are very good at hockey, so she likes you."

Shane nodded. It made him hurt a little, how much Ilya obviously wanted Shane and Svetlana to get along. He'd done research on the plane ride, consulting relationship advice columns and forums about how acceptable jealousy was. 'My boyfriend is friends with his ex' had brought up a lot of results. It had given him at least a little comfort that he wasn't being completely unfair, that it was pretty normal to feel conflicted about it. Some people, apparently, didn't mind at all, but he thought it depended on context. If Shane had posted in one of those forums and said that the same day his boyfriend had told him he loved him he'd also seriously raised the possibility of marrying his ex, he suspected he'd have gotten a lot of sympathy.

Still. What he'd really been looking for was a way to stop feeling jealous, and apparently nobody had come up with an answer for that.

"You will like her too," Ilya said quietly. "What I think is happening is it is becoming very big in your head. Once you actually meet her it won't be so big."

Shane nodded, looking down. Ilya swiped a finger below Shane's eye and Shane leaned into him. He wondered if he'd feel comfortable seeking Ilya's touch out like this with someone else around. Shane had no idea how he felt about public displays of affection. He'd never had reason to figure it out before.

Shane couldn't sleep that night, and once he got his fill of watching Ilya, who always looked so boyish at rest, he reached across and grabbed Ilya's phone. It was only after pulling up Ilya's grocery order app that Shane realized going on his boyfriend's phone without his boyfriend's permission while his boyfriend slept might be one of the topics that showed up on those advice forums. But he really had just wanted to order good food for Ilya's fridge. He wouldn't go through Ilya's texts, or his photos. He'd been thinking about photos since Svetlana's instagram account. He hadn't seen Ilya on it, but he must have been there somewhere. Shane wanted to know what they looked like together, how at ease they were with each other, how well they matched. But Shane didn't seek out those photos. He wouldn't look at Ilya's DMs with all the women he had unfollowed, either. He just purchased a lot of leafy greens.

"What are you doing," Ilya said, his voice wrecked.

"Oh, fuck," Shane said, looking over. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"I don't think you did. Weird dream," Ilya said. "Why are you up?"

Shane slumped a little lower in the bed. "I was thinking about breakfast," he said.

"You're hungry?" Ilya asked.

"No," Shane said. "But we don't have anything for breakfast so I ordered a bunch of stuff. From your phone."

"Good thinking," Ilya said, leaning away and reaching to his bedside table. "Thank you."

Shane smiled. He didn't know if it was the kind of thing a lot of people would appreciate. He'd also half expected Ilya to insist take out leftovers counted as breakfast. Ilya righted himself with a cigarette and lighter in hand.

"Don't smoke inside, please," Shane said.

Ilya gave him a disbelieving look. "Is my house," he said, but he was balancing the cigarette back across a shot glass as he said it. Shane restrained himself from asking why there was a shot glass on Ilya's bedside table.

"Yeah, but I don't want our sheets to smell like cigarettes."

Ilya smiled, crowded up on Shane. "No?" he said. "What do you want them to smell like?"

"Gross, Ilya," Shane said, sinking lower in the bed.

"So gross," Ilya agreed. "Absolutely disgusting."

He started trailing his hand lightly up and down Shane's side, almost ticklish. "That's nice," Shane said, smiling.

"Nice?" Ilya's tone was offended. "I think I miss when we would go months without fucking. You are not as desperate as you should be."

Shane's smile spread further. "Then I guess you better up your game," he said. "Don't want to get boring."

Svetlana had said she would be there at two, but still wasn't when it hit three. "Unless there is money on the line she is very bad at keeping appointments," Ilya said.

"Oh," Shane said. He found that stressful, but Ilya seemed to think it was funny, so he ignored his own reaction. "Well, um, I have to—"

"Yes, go," Ilya said. "You should not wait around for her."

"Okay," Shane said. He had to call his agent about – he didn't know, probably about a dozen different things, because he hadn't talked to his agent in nearly a month. He'd sort of thought it would be a useful excuse if he needed to leave the room when Svetlana was there, but he'd made the mistake of letting his agent know he'd call this afternoon, and now he was feeling guilty about putting it off. He'd never been that clear about when afternoon ended and evening began.

He retreated to Ilya's yard to make the call. Ilya's yard was gorgeous; Shane would hardly know he was on the outskirts of a major city. Trees overhung it on all sides, giving them privacy, and Shane planned to spend at least one sunny day lying out there with Ilya. It had been landscaped and there was a little stream bracketing it, water gliding over smooth stones. Shane slipped off his slides and stood in the shallow water, trying to calm himself.

The call was very useful for his purposes, in that it was pretty mindless. His agent knew him well enough by now to break everything down for him, tell him everything that was expected of him. It made the conversations easy to participate in.

After forty minutes on the line, Shane heard sounds coming from indoors. He turned around quickly, peering through the large windows that made up Ilya's walls. Ilya – everything about him recognizable to Shane, even from a distance – had been joined in the kitchen by a second figure. They hugged briefly and then sat together at the island, Svetlana on a stool and Ilya on the countertop. Shane couldn't get a good look at her, not from this distance and not with the sun on the glass, but after a few moments he heard a laugh that wasn't Ilya's echo out from the house. He turned around and focused back on the call. He felt vaguely sick, and he knew it wasn't even the jealousy anymore, it was everything he had worked himself up into because of the jealousy, all the panic and worry. Ilya was right, he'd made it very big in his head.

Shane finished up the call and made his way inside. He could pick up Ilya and Svetlana's chatter from the yard, and it was pleasant to hear Ilya speak in his native tongue but not sound stressed or defensive or shut down. Shane wasn't sure he'd heard him sound light in Russian before. He made a note of that in his head. It would be important to remember the nice things about Ilya and Svetlana's friendship.

He stepped inside and Svetlana spun on the stool to face him, shooting into standing. She was beautiful, and had a beautiful wide smile. Shane should probably smile too.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi,” she said. “Would it be weird if I hugged you?”

Shane froze. “Yes it would be fucking weird,” Ilya said. “Calm down, don’t act like you never meet people.”

“I don’t all that often meet players this good,” she said, but sat back down easily.

“Uhuh,” Ilya said. “Shane, this is Svetlana.”

“Right,” Shane said. “Yeah.”

“He knows who I am, Ilya,” Svetlana said, with exaggerated impatience. “We follow each other on instagram.”

Ilya smiled at that, and it was a warm, happy smile. Shane could do this, for him. Svetlana glanced back at Ilya and said something in Russian. He responded in kind, sounding exasperated, and Svetlana said nothing further. Ilya groaned and turned to Shane. “Svetlana has idea,” he said.

“Oh?” Shane asked, hoping he didn’t sound too nervous. He took the other stool at the island, the one closer to Ilya. Ilya had a cut up apple on a plate on his lap and Shane took a slice. Ilya touched his hair, briefly.

“Yes, for making your presence in Boston less strange,” Ilya said.

Shane looked to Svetlana, hopeful. He was still worried about that. He’d be going out tomorrow, to meet his new trainer and get set up with a bio-tracker for the study, and the prospect of being noticed terrified him.

“You are here for me,” Svetlana said, smiling. “If you like.”

“You mean like we’re friends?” Shane asked, even though he knew that wasn’t what she meant.

“Well, no,” she said. “Like we’re seeing each other.”

“Oh,” Shane said.

“I think this idea sucks,” Ilya said.

“Oh,” Shane said, again. “No, I mean, it doesn’t suck, I mean – thank you, Svetlana. That’s very thoughtful. But I don’t know.” It was thoughtful, but it also freaked him out.

“I think it would make sense,” Svetlana said, shrugging her pretty shoulders. “We’re in the same circles. It’s the most obvious reason for why someone would be somewhere – I mean, it is why you’re in Boston, really. And it could pave the way to you and Ilya becoming friendly, if you guys want. In the public eye, I mean. People know Ilya and I go way back.”

She seemed to have given it a lot of thought, which only served to freak Shane out more. “No, yeah, I can see how it makes sense,” he said. “I just, um—I don’t really want to lie, I guess. I know I’m not coming out any time soon, but—with Scott Hunter, and really being with Ilya, I think I just want to... do nothing. I don’t want to pretend.”

Svetlana nodded. “You wouldn’t have to lie,” she said. “Or even pretend. We go out one night, as friends, people assume. We just let people talk. It’s not like you and Rose Landry ever released a statement.”

Shane’s gaze immediately whipped to Ilya, who did not disappoint. “Rose Landry wore his fucking jersey to a game,” Ilya said, without looking up from his apple. “That is not statement?”

Svetlana laughed. She looked at Shane as she did so, like they were in on it together. Shane tried to laugh too, but it still discombobulated him to see evidence that his relationship with Rose had bothered Ilya. He wouldn’t have believed it for a second at the time. He wouldn’t have believed Ilya was even aware of it.

“Well, maybe I’ll get a Hollander jersey,” Svetlana said, and Ilya shrugged.

Svetlana’s eyes widened. “Wow,” she said, quiet, almost to herself.

“What?” Shane asked, also quiet.

She kept looking at Ilya for a few moments before turning to Shane. “If I’d suggested getting your jersey a couple months ago he would’ve locked me out of the house,” she said.

“I feel bad for him now,” Ilya said. “Got to get those sales up.”

Ilya’s jersey had been the best selling in the league last season. “Fuck you,” Shane said, but he was smiling.

Svetlana’s suggestion of a PR relationship was the most awkward thing that happened that day. The second most awkward was her asking, once it got dark, if they wanted to go clubbing. Shane very much didn’t, but didn’t want to be a wet blanket either, and was bracing himself for Ilya’s enthusiasm when Ilya flatly said no. He didn’t offer a reason, but he did put an arm around Shane’s shoulders, which made him feel special and embarrassed. Svetlana groaned dramatically but gave in, instead rummaging through Ilya’s kitchen for alcohol. There was a lot of it, which Shane tried not to comment on.

He had two glasses of wine, just enough to get a little buzzed, but Ilya and Svetlana got drunk. It was nice. It wasn’t just nice, there were still all the stupid awful things Shane was feeling, but he could put those to the side and appreciate seeing Ilya happy and joking with someone he obviously liked, someone he obviously trusted.

And what came as a great relief was that there seemed to be no sexual chemistry between them. Maybe Shane just wasn’t the best at picking up on that, but he had also thought Ilya

was physically incapable of going ten seconds without flirting and yet none of the things he said to Svetlana could really be construed as such. He seemed to be primarily interested in making fun of her, and even then it was markedly different to how he made fun of Shane. It was more fraternal, which was maybe weird to think considering Shane knew for a fact that Svetlana and Ilya had slept together. But they just seemed like friends. Which made sense, Shane supposed, considering that was what Ilya said they were.

Shane started to feel tired and buried himself in Ilya's side. He would be content to drift in and out of consciousness there, listening to Ilya and Svetlana's giddy conversation which would occasionally slip into Russian, but only a few minutes passed before Ilya squeezed him and said, "Okay, is bed time."

Shane looked up. Svetlana said something in Russian and Ilya responded.

"Cool," Svetlana said, switching back to English. "I'll get a car."

"There is service, I have service, you can call," Ilya said. He bent awkwardly to reach for his phone without dislodging Shane. "I will give you the number."

It seemed weird to Shane that Svetlana wouldn't already have this number; surely she'd gotten drunk at Ilya's place before. "Oh," Shane said to himself. He bet that was what they'd said to each other in Russian. Changing their habits because of Shane. "Can't Svetlana stay here? You have a spare room."

Ilya looked down at him. "Maybe I don't want her getting in our way," Ilya said. "Or hearing us fuck."

Shane made a face, even though really it was sweet. Ilya was giving him an out. "No, it's okay," he said, and the wine must have made him say, "It's on the other side of the house from your bedroom, anyway."

Svetlana laughed and Shane cringed belatedly. "Okay, she can stay," Ilya said, like it was a hardship.

"Thank you Shane," Svetlana said, pointed. "You're a gracious host."

Shane smiled. He could tell it was a little bit of a joke, but he wanted to be a good host. His parents were great hosts. "My pleasure," he said, and it really was, especially when it earned him a forehead kiss from Ilya.

Shane woke up before Ilya the next morning and used the opportunity to make him breakfast. He'd done it a couple times in the cottage and was embarrassed by how much he liked it, how proud and at peace it made him feel. Ilya didn't have a tray or tray stand the way Shane did, and while wondering about the implications of ordering a set for Ilya's place, Shane improvised with a dusty chess board he found on a high shelf. He prepared coffee and eggs on toast and oatmeal because he was trying to surreptitiously cut the meat down in Ilya's diet. He'd been assuming he had the place to himself, leisurely navigating Ilya's kitchen, but on

one turn around the island he spotted Svetlana out in the yard – she was sitting upside down on a deck chair, her legs in the air and a phone to her ear. Shane left some coffee in the pot on the stove in case she wanted it and convinced himself it wasn't rude that it hadn't occurred to him to make her breakfast too. He took the loaded chess-board-tray and returned to Ilya's room, placing it on the bedside table and lying on his side on the edge of the bed, looking down at Ilya. He loved the way Ilya's face moved, all the little muscles at work, when he was first waking up.

Ilya started smiling before his eyes were even open. "Breakfast?" he said.

"Yeah," Shane said, flushed, almost humming.

"You are like dream," Ilya said, and sat up a little and stretched. Shane sat up again to pick up the tray and settle it on Ilya's lap, before returning to his place along Ilya's side.

"What time is it?" Ilya asked.

"Ten. Svetlana's already up, she's on the phone outside," Shane said. "I thought you said she was a night owl."

"She is," Ilya said, still sleepy. Shane often tried to keep him talking in the morning because of how his voice sounded. He put a forkful of eggs in his mouth and made a noise that made Shane bite his shoulder. "Time zone thing. Her best friend lives in Europe, she is talking to him."

Shane frowned. "Best friend?" he repeated, a little insulted on Ilya's behalf. "Aren't you her best friend?"

Ilya shook his head and then laughed. "That is old joke with us," he said. "She is my best friend but I am not hers. Very, very sad."

Shane couldn't laugh at that. It was kind of sad. Ilya said, "Anyway, is not true anymore."

"No?" Shane asked. "Why not?"

Ilya shot him a skeptical look like Shane should know. Shane didn't. "What?" he asked.

"I think you are my best friend," Ilya said.

Shane mouthed oh and then stuck his face into Ilya's arm. Ilya lifted his hand up to stroke Shane's hair. Once Shane had recovered from that declaration, he turned his face to the side, cheek on Ilya's pec, and said, "Are you close with Svetlana's best friend too?"

Svetlana was the only non-hockey-player friend of Ilya's he knew of, but Ilya was pretty sociable. There must be other people in his life, important people. Ilya seemed to choose his words carefully. "Not close," he said. "But we have known each other for a long time and we like each other."

"That's nice," Shane said.

“It is Sasha,” Ilya said after a pause, as though it should bear significance. Shane propped his head up, chin digging into Ilya’s chest, to send him a questioning look. Ilya cocked his head. “I did not tell you his name?”

Shane paused. “You didn’t,” he said, clipped because understanding had immediately set in. There was only one person whose name Ilya hadn’t told him. “The guy you fucked before you fucked me?”

“Yes,” Ilya said, looking a little amused by the epithet.

Shane swung into sitting on the side of the bed, feet on the floor. “He’s Svetlana’s best friend?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “They have known each other since childhood.”

“Do you have any friends you haven’t fucked?” Shane asked, and then put his hand over his mouth at how awful that was. It had come out entirely without thinking. Ilya did not sound like he took offense.

“Yes, of course,” he said.

“Who?” Shane asked, turning in to look at Ilya.

“My teammates,” Ilya said.

“Awesome,” Shane said. “If I want to know the people in your life I can choose between Raiders players or your exes.”

“Svetlana is not my ex,” Ilya said, still sounding entirely unaffected. “Or Sasha, but you will probably not know him anyway. He hates America, he never visits. I haven’t seen him in years.”

“Good,” Shane said.

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up, for the first time perturbed. “How is Rose these days?”

Shane flushed. “That’s not the same. Also, obviously, I know I’m being irrational. It’s just a lot, right? It’s only been like a week since you told me you loved me, and now I’m fucking – meeting my sister wives.”

Ilya’s face crumpled into genuine confusion. “Your what?” he asked.

“My—” Shane felt immediately humiliated. “Like the show, you know the show?”

Ilya shook his head. “What is the show?”

“There’s a show about a guy who—” Shane closed his eyes. “I actually haven’t seen it either, I just know about it.”

“Okay,” Ilya said, beginning to smile. Shane didn’t know if he had an inkling of what the term meant, or if he was just enjoying Shane’s discomfort. “So what is sister wives?”

“Women who are married to the same man,” Shane said. “The show’s about a guy with a bunch of wives.”

“Ah,” Ilya said, smiling widely. “So you are saying you are my wife? One of my many wives?”

“Shut up,” Shane said. “Shut the fuck up.”

“Okay,” Ilya said. “I’m sorry. Next time you bring up sister wives I will say nothing. I will know what you mean.”

Shane shook his head. “I don’t know why I said that, God,” he said. “I’m feeling a little crazy.” Dread set into him and he scrambled up on the bed, hovering over Ilya. “I’ve just realized something pretty bad.”

“Yes, what?”

“You know this is new to me. Being in love, being in a real relationship.”

“Yes, for me also.”

“Well, I’ve just realized—I think I’m a... A jealous person.”

Ilya laughed.

“What?” Shane asked.

“Of course,” Ilya said. “You are deeply jealous, we know this, it is not new. It’s okay, I can also sometimes, occasionally, be jealous.”

“But the difference is you have no reason to be,” Shane said.

“And yet I find a way,” Ilya said, smiling a little.

“Shit,” Shane said, not comforted. “I thought – yesterday was pretty successful. I thought I was gonna be chill.”

“You were never going to be chill,” Ilya said.

“But now I’m spiraling,” Shane bit out.

“You are not spiraling either,” Ilya said. “I know Shane Hollander spiral, this is not that.”

“But it’s something,” Shane said. “Ilya, I don’t want to make a mess of things. I want to be a good boyfriend.”

Ilya looked at him disbelievingly. “You just brought me breakfast in bed,” he said.

“Because it’s supposed to be our honeymoon phase,” Shane said. “Things are supposed to be easy and fun.”

“First sister-wives, now honeymoon phase,” Ilya said. “These hints are not subtle. You have marriage on the mind.”

It shocked a laugh out of Shane. “Shut up.”

“No, is okay. You want to get married, we get married.”

Shane stared at him. Maybe this would be harder to fuck up than he thought. Ilya seemed pretty unphased. “I love you.”

Ilya nodded, looking satisfied. “I love you too.”

After breakfast Ilya tried to keep Shane in bed, but Shane refused. “Svetlana’s right outside,” he reminded Ilya, who groaned.

“This is why I wanted to send her the fuck home last night,” he said, which took Shane aback. He’d assumed Ilya had been doing that entirely on his behalf. They got dressed and ready and wandered out to the living room, pinkie fingers linked, where Svetlana was in an armchair with a cup of coffee, her long legs curled bare beneath her. Shane tightened his pinkie finger.

“Morning boys,” she said, sounding pretty bleary. “I assume Shane is to thank for the coffee.”

“Yeah,” Shane said, smiling uncertainly. “You’re welcome.”

“You make a very nice brew,” she said. “Ilya’s is way too strong.”

Shane cleared his throat and sat down. He agreed but he’d never actually said as much to Ilya before. Ilya widened his eyes at Shane, apparently noting the evasion, but before he could accuse him of anything Svetlana spoke again.

“Sasha says hi.”

Ilya only nodded in response. Shane worried momentarily that Ilya was catering to his jealousy before remembering Ilya’s general zero-tolerance approach to pleasantries.

“Will you see him soon?” Ilya asked.

Svetlana made a face. “He’s got this new group of friends I can’t stand, so I’m half waiting for him to drop them before I visit again,” she said. She spoke about visiting Europe so casually. Shane had traveled more than most people, but only ever for hockey, and he’d never chosen where to go. Until now, he realized. Until Boston. “But I’m also a little worried that he’s not doing so well, so I might check in on him.”

Flying to Europe to check in on someone, God. Shane's only close friends were Hayden and now Rose, and they both had their shit together and seemed pretty happy with their lives. Shane wondered what it was like to have a friend you worried about, how stressful it was. He wondered if that was what Svetlana had done for Ilya too, checking in on him, making sure he was okay.

It clicked for Shane then that he was hyper-analyzing every word out of Svetlana's mouth, and he committed himself to being more casual.

"What is he up to these days?" Ilya asked.

"Off skiing," Svetlana said, which presented the perfect opportunity for Shane to be casual. He loved skiing. Although Svetlana had sounded almost scathing, so he'd tone down his enthusiasm. That wasn't hyper-analysis, was it? That was just a normal level of social skill.

"Ah," Ilya said.

"Where?" Shane asked.

"Paris," she said, which made Shane frown. What skiing was there in Paris?

Ilya, apparently sensing Shane's confusion, said baldly, "He is on coke binge." Shane looked to him, taken aback, and Ilya imitated snorting but at a downward diagonal angle – like a ski slope. Ilya kissed him on the temple, which Shane tried not to find patronizing.

He turned himself to face Ilya more directly. "Do you do drugs?" he asked.

Ilya's eyes widened and he looked to Svetlana, who slurped noisily from her coffee, evidently leaving Ilya to fight this battle himself. "I don't know what doing drugs means," he said.

"Come on, Ilya," Shane said, rolling his eyes.

"No, I know the words, but I don't know what counts as doing drugs," he said. "I have in my life done drugs. I don't think I do drugs."

"How often?" Shane asked.

"Not often," Ilya said, shaking his head. "You can't during the season, with the testing."

"So in the off season," Shane said. "Like now."

Ilya shrugged.

"What kind of drugs?" Shane asked. "Weed?"

"Well, yes," Ilya said, with a tone like that was a given.

"Coke?"

"Not for a while," Ilya said, his eyes wide like a schoolboy lying to a teacher.

“How long’s a while?”

“Like a year,” Ilya said. “Maybe more.”

“So last off season,” Shane said.

“Little detective,” Ilya said, tilting his head.

“I’m just making conversation, you’re not in trouble,” Shane said. “What other drugs?”

“I don’t know,” Ilya said, audibly ready to be done with the conversation.

“You don’t know like you don’t want to tell me or you don’t know like you take drugs without knowing what they are?” Shane asked.

“Party drugs,” Ilya said. “Just party drugs, nothing dangerous.”

“Party drugs are dangerous,” Shane said, because he was physically incapable of stopping himself. It was the first thing he’d said that actually counted as judgmental. It was decidedly not honeymoon phase-y. “How much? Have you ever gone on a coke binge?”

The words sounded awkward coming out of his mouth. Ilya made a panicked noise in the back of his throat and looked again to Svetlana, who this time intervened. “Drugs aren’t really his vice,” she said, placating. “He does them socially when they’re around, but he still says no more often than he says yes. And that’s been even truer the last few years.”

“Your influence,” Ilya said to Shane, with wide earnest eyes.

Shane bit down on his cheeks to stop himself from smiling. “Suck up,” he said.

“Yes,” Ilya said, nodding slowly and grinning. “It works, yes? You love me again?”

Shane gave into his own smile and nodded. Ilya reacted theatrically, throwing up his arms and saying, “He loves me! He loves me!”

Shane shoved him away as Svetlana laughed.

With Ilya in tow, Shane retreated to the bedroom to pack a small bag for his first training session of the off-season. “I will miss you,” Ilya said, watching him from the doorway.

Shane blinked and nodded, not quite able to say it. He’d miss Ilya too, but he shouldn’t. It would be a matter of hours when they’d gone months without each other so many times before. They’d have to do that again once season started. Shane didn’t like to think about that, but sometimes it was unavoidable.

“You have clean socks?” Ilya asked, as Shane began to zip up his bag. Shane looked at him, smiling widely, taken aback but delighted.

“Shut up,” Ilya said. “Is the kind of thing you freak out about, that’s all.”

“Uhuh,” Shane said, and then cleared his throat. “I was thinking about the honeymoon phase thing.”

“Yes?” Ilya said.

“I think it’s different for us. I don’t want us to be all blissful and then only start fighting when we’re back to barely seeing each other. I think it’s good if we figure things out now, when we have the time. Whatever needs figuring out. So we have a solid foundation going into the season. Sort of like training camp.”

“So this means you will keep getting mad at me for things,” Ilya said.

Shane smiled, rolled his eyes. “Yeah, exactly,” he said.

“Good, I find it very hot,” Ilya said, and kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

The reason I write Shane's jealousy as sort of unhinged isn't because of how he reacted in the club or either time Ilya brought up Svetlana, all of which I think is basically w/in the bounds of normalcy. It's because of when they were about to present that award and he asked where Ilya had been and Ilya was like i was busy and Shane said "with who". That is like pathological levels honestly...

Thank you for reading!! And thanks especially to people for commenting, it means a lot
<3

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

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

Shane's new trainer was really a shot doctor and Shane could always stand to work on his accuracy, so he didn't feel like it was just an excuse to be in Boston. The first session was arduous and rewarding, and Shane smiled when he got out of the shower afterwards and pulled on his clean socks.

His trainer didn't seem to find Shane being in Boston strange, and Shane didn't get recognized during his brief time out in public between appointments. Boston wasn't a hockey town the way Montreal was – nowhere in the US was like Montreal, but the places that came closest were the smaller cities without much going on besides hockey except, usually, baseball. Boston had many other major league teams, including arguably the most storied franchise in the NBA. Ilya was who argued that, because he'd adopted every Boston sports team as his own, which Shane found secretly endearing even as he ragged on the Patriots. For the Boston sports fans who did follow the NHL they mostly still didn't follow closely enough to know non-Raiders players, and certainly wouldn't be on the look out for Shane Hollander on their turf.

After the training session Shane stopped by the university lab and was given what looked like a digital watch to wear for the next month, which would measure his heart rate and sleep patterns and other things he didn't yet understand – he'd been given a leaflet to read through, too. He failed to work up the courage to ask what the consequences of a pretty active sex life would be; he wondered if they'd be able to read it in the data.

All in all and save for the ache of missing Ilya, the afternoon was pretty painless, and he was in a good mood as he made his way home. Ilya had offered him one of his cars but Shane found the prospect of driving any of them pretty intimidating so he'd used uber instead. He got the driver to drop him off by a bus stop that was a ten minute walk from Ilya's, and that afternoon Shane made it back in six. And then drew to a halt on the sidewalk outside Ilya's home. Through the trees he made out a car in the driveway, dusty and inconspicuous in any other setting, definitely not one of Ilya's and not Svetlana's, either.

“Oh, fuck,” Shane breathed, and looked around him. There wasn't much on this road other than Ilya's house, and nowhere really for Shane to go. There was, however, a small woodland surrounding Ilya's house. Shane cringed, cursed, and hopped the low stone wall. About a year ago Shane had called it a grove and Ilya had laughed and Shane had asked what he called it and Ilya had said, no, grove. I have always called it a grove, I am always talking about my grove. Anyway, Shane hung out in the grove doing breathing exercises and stretches until the car left. He wondered how this experience would register on the watch. It took maybe twenty minutes, and Shane was pissed by the time it was safe for him to leave the grove and walk down the driveway. He punched in the pass code snappily and stomped into the kitchen, where he found Ilya pouring himself a glass of water. Svetlana was at the table, on her phone.

“Why the hell didn't you tell me you were having someone over?” Shane asked.

“Shane, you’re back,” Ilya said, smiling as he turned around.

“Yes. Hi,” Shane said, begrudging. “Why didn’t you tell me someone would be here?”

“I didn’t think you would be back until later,” Ilya said, eyes wide with apology. For a professional athlete his time management skills were atrocious. “Sorry. When did you get here?”

“Like twenty minutes ago,” Shane said. “I had to fucking hide. I’ve never in my life hid from someone before.”

“Oh,” Ilya said. “Why didn’t you text me? I would have gotten rid of them sooner.”

“I don’t know,” Shane said, after a beat. It hadn’t occurred to him to ask.

“Well, I’m sorry,” Ilya said. Shane started to suspect he was faintly amused. “Where did you hide?”

“The grove,” Shane said. “And I was there for like twenty minutes and there’s no way you could have known. Somebody could be watching you or casing your house or something, you should have better security.”

Ilya gave him a look. “Little kids play in the grove,” he said, and the word held no irony. He had apparently accepted the designation. “You want me to set the hounds on them?”

Shane stared at him and realized what he’d just said. Casing the house. Jesus Christ. “No,” he said. “I don’t know why I just ranted about security, I’m just—”

“Freaking out,” Ilya supplied. “Okay, sit down, relax. I will make you tea.”

Shane sat and hesitantly smiled. He’d made Ilya a cup of decaffeinated mint tea in the cottage and Ilya had been disgusted. Ilya – claiming to speak for all Russians – took tea very seriously, and never used bags, only leaves, and saw decaffeination as desecration. His house was stocked with real tea, as he’d demonstrated their first morning there, and Shane had fallen in love with watching him prepare it. It was a whole ritual, Ilya’s big hands on little silver spoons. Shane let the scene soothe him, controlling his breathing. After he’d somewhat regained his composure he said, “But who was that, who was here?”

“A moron,” Ilya said. “I banished him.”

Shane smiled. “You set your hounds on him?”

Ilya glanced back approvingly. “Exactly,” he said.

After a few moments it became clear he was leaving it at that, so Shane said, “No, really.”

Ilya sighed. “A trainer,” he said. “He is not good at his job.”

Shane frowned. “Why was he here?” Ilya was famously monogamous with his trainer – Nikolay something. Most players worked with different people for different skill sets, or

changed it up as their career developed. Ilya never had. It was one of the anecdotes commentators reliably shared about him when play was dead, often with innuendos about such long-term fidelity seeming out of character.

“I am looking for new one,” Ilya said.

Shane shook his head. “Since when?” he asked. “Did you fire Nikolay?”

“No, Nikolay is leaving,” Ilya said.

“Leaving?” Shane asked. “Like, he quit? Is he retiring?”

That was when Svetlana spoke up, her voice slightly curt. “He’s being deported,” she said.

Shane stared at her, and then turned to Ilya for confirmation. Ilya nodded, looking tired, as he slid a cup of tea toward Shane.

“Sorry,” Shane said, after a pause. “I don’t get it. I mean, international NHL staff don’t get deported. Not when the league is employing them.”

“I was employing him,” Ilya said. “And I am not a citizen. He was being sponsored by the Raiders.”

“And, what?” Shane asked. “They stopped sponsoring him? Why?”

“They do not think I am interested in being here long term,” Ilya said. “So they are fucking with me.”

“They know you’re not going to sign next off season,” Shane said, horror dawning.

“They want me to guarantee it and I have not guaranteed it,” Ilya said. “I have also not told them no.”

“So to get back at you they fuck up this guy’s life?” Shane asked.

“Yes,” Ilya said.

Shane stared at him, expecting more of a reaction. Ilya took a sip from his own tea. There was no way it had cooled enough. “What are you gonna do?” he asked.

“Try to find one other worthwhile trainer in New England,” Ilya said. “There must be one.”

“No, I mean about Nikolay,” Shane said. “Can’t you—isn’t there anything you can do?”

“I am not citizen,” Ilya repeated.

“I’ve seen if I could sponsor him,” Svetlana said. “But my connection to him is too tenuous, they’d see through it.”

Shane bit back a petty remark about her willingness to commit immigration fraud. “But, I mean,” Shane said. “What about—there must be someone who could intervene. Could I? I

mean, he could come work in Canada until you move there next season. This is so awful, it's so unfair. The poor man."

"Jesus," Ilya said, with frustration. It took Shane too long to realize it was directed at him, not the situation. "Russia is not hell. He has family back there, career prospects. He will be fine. Not what he planned, but life is like that. It's fine."

"No, it's not," Shane said. "Obviously it's not."

"Not everything bad can be fixed," Ilya said, slow like he was explaining a basic concept to a child.

"Well what about—" Shane shook his head. "How can you even play for the Raiders now? After everything you've given them, the best player in franchise history, bringing them back from irrelevancy, and they pull this stunt? You must hate them."

"They are business," Ilya said. "Who is there to hate? They sponsored him because I was good investment. I am not good investment if I leave."

They were a business, but Ilya could go on a fifteen minute uninterrupted rant on why Bill Russell had had the best career of any professional athlete ever. Boston was as much a home as he'd ever had. And yes, he was planning on leaving, but his memories shouldn't be tainted like this. Shane stared at him, searching for a crack and coming up empty. "So you're just totally fine with this," he said.

Ilya shrugged.

"If you're fine with it, why didn't you tell me?"

Ilya looked at him, face firm, and gestured at the space between them. "Why do you think, Shane," he said. He stood there for a moment, eyes locked with Shane, before shaking his head and taking his tea outside.

Shane stayed sitting at the counter, staring at the cabinets. Those words had been cruel, and deliberately so, not casual at all. Well-chosen. He had forgotten Svetlana had bore witness to the whole scene until she sidled up next to him.

"You look shocked," she said.

"I mean, yeah," he said, turning to her. "That was pretty fucking shocking."

She raised her eyebrows. "Was it?" she asked. "You're saying up until right now Ilya's been an open book to you?"

"Well, no," Shane admitted. "But I thought that was because..." He flushed, embarrassed.

"Ah," Svetlana said, and it was very like how Ilya said it. "You thought that now you are boyfriends and have said you love each other, now he will be an open book."

“It made sense to me he would keep things from me when we weren’t together,” Shane said. It was more or less what she had said, but framed more respectably. Back then he’d kept things from Ilya too.

“Well, I’m sorry to tell you it wasn’t personal,” she said. “That’s just how he is. He doesn’t know how to talk about things that hurt him.”

“But you knew about Nikolay,” Shane said, and hated how it sounded. Petty, jealous, hurt.

“Because I know Nikolay,” Svetlana said. “He told me, not Ilya.”

Shane remembered then what Ilya had said when Shane asked if Svetlana minded how long Ilya had kept their relationship from her: *She knows me, she knows how I am*. As though Svetlana expected Ilya to withhold.

Shane looked down at his tea, cooling. It made him sad to think about something Ilya had made for him going to waste, so he drank. It was strong and bitter. Ilya had set out a little bowl of honey too, but Shane ignored it. Last time they’d had tea Ilya had added the honey for him, because – Ilya claimed – there was a technique to it.

“You knew his family, right?” Shane asked.

After a pause, like she was protective of the knowledge, Svetlana nodded. Shane was quieter when he asked, “His mom?”

Svetlana nodded again, but he could tell from her expression she wouldn’t take follow ups on that. “You know, some of what Ilya said is true,” she said. “Plans don’t work out. Bad things happen. You just have to make it work. This is how Ilya is. You have to make it work.”

There was an urgency to her voice that surprised Shane. Nothing over the last day suggested she took any issue with their relationship, but he wouldn’t have thought she was actively rooting for them. That was what this sounded like. “I plan to,” he said.

She smiled and nodded and returned to her seat at the kitchen table. Shane picked up his tea and followed Ilya out to the yard.

“Storming off is pretty childish,” Shane said as he approached. Ilya was sitting on the grass, leaning back on his elbows. He hadn’t looked back, but he must have heard Shane coming because he’d stubbed out his cigarette on the saucer of his teacup.

“Yes, well,” Ilya said. “I cannot look at you when I have made you sad.”

“Oh,” Shane said. He sat down beside Ilya, surreptitiously holding his breath for a few seconds to wait for the smoke to clear. “I know that having me react very intensely to things you’re going through probably isn’t helpful,” he said.

Ilya shrugged. “I like how much you care,” he said.

Shane was heartened by that – not just the sentiment, but that Ilya had softened enough to share it. “I care a lot,” he said. “I like getting to care. I want to know what’s going on with

you.”

“It feels pointless to talk,” Ilya said. “When there is nothing to do about it.”

Shane nodded. He knew logically there was nothing he could say that would suddenly unlock Ilya, would change what might prove to be a pretty fundamental part of him. He still found himself searching for the words. Ilya reached out and touched his hand. “I will not be mad at you again,” he said. “For wanting to talk to me.”

Shane swallowed. “Thanks,” he said. “That’s as much as I can ask for right now, isn’t it?”

“Shane,” Ilya said, looking guilty.

“No, it’s okay,” Shane said. He moved in closer to Ilya, put his head on his shoulder. “I am really sorry. About Nikolay. Really, really sorry. It’s fucked up.”

He heard Ilya inhale, a little jagged. He was quiet for a long time. Then he said, “Yes, it is.”

Things felt quiet and off-kilter for the next few hours, like they were underwater, but normalcy made its return when they sat around the dinner table to the last of the leftover takeout.

“I’m going out after this,” Svetlana said. “The Milwaukee crew are in town. You want to come with? They’re really fun, Shane.”

Shane looked to Ilya, who shook his head without looking up from his food. “They’re annoying,” he said, sounding a little like a petulant child. Shane tried not to smile. He wondered if that tone came out in particular around Svetlana.

“They’re not, you like them,” Svetlana said. Ilya kept eating. “God, are you never going to leave the house again?”

“Never,” Ilya said. “We are in—honeymoon phase.” He smiled broadly at Shane, who shook his head. It was sweet, like it had been the night before, but he knew that if he wasn’t there Ilya would be saying yes. He wondered how long Ilya could tolerate living at Shane’s speed.

The dinner was mostly quiet, because Ilya never talked much while he ate and Svetlana was on her phone, working out logistics for her night out. Texting at a shared meal seemed very taboo to Shane, but he found himself a little endeared by it, and also awed. The ease it spoke to, just how comfortable she must feel in Ilya’s home.

A call came through and Shane glanced at her phone just as she hit reject. Another thing she had in common with Ilya – Shane never rejected any calls. If he didn’t want to talk he’d just let it ring out.

“I thought you liked Mike,” Ilya said, having apparently seen who was calling.

“He’s getting needy,” Svetlana said. “He doesn’t want me seeing other people.”

“Oh, boo,” Ilya said. “Kill him. Burn him.”

Svetlana laughed. Shane felt cold. He was glad there wasn't much conversation because he suddenly wasn't up for it. His thoughts felt a little murky. Was that Ilya's attitude to exclusivity? They hadn't actually talked about it, about not seeing other people. Except that Ilya had said he hadn't slept with anyone but Shane for months, even before they made it official, and he'd deleted all his hook ups from his phone. And it was one of the things he'd said, in the cottage, that other people just made him think of Shane.

But maybe that was just now, when things were new and exciting and they were wrapped up in each other. So far the fidelity had just been a matter of desire. Ilya didn't want anyone but Shane. Maybe once they were settled, once the shine had worn off, Ilya would start wanting other people again. Once he grew tired of turning down Svetlana's invitations to nights out. Once they exited the honeymoon phase. And maybe he would expect to indulge that want, because people who asked for exclusivity were needy.

Shane could barely swallow. He knew he was bringing this on himself, that other people wouldn't panic like this. He had thought love would let him transcend himself, but instead he just felt himself times a thousand, everything magnified, including his faults. It reminded him of the undercurrent of humiliation in his early relationship with Ilya, when every hook up had felt like some kind of defeat, when every thought in his head about Ilya was a capitulation. More than anything he'd felt out of control, completely at the whim of something he didn't fully understand. He should be more together than this, he should be better than this. He shouldn't be such a child. He swallowed it down, vacuum-sealed it and stuck it in a corner at the back of his mind. He hadn't done that in a while, not with Ilya.

Svetlana left after dinner and Ilya turned to Shane, looking suddenly like a jungle cat. “Would you take your clothes off for me?” Ilya asked, and Shane was as much thrown off by the request as by it being phrased as a question.

“What?” he said, even as his hands drifted to the bottom of his shirt. He left them there, not wanting to be quite that easy.

“We are alone now,” Ilya said. “First time in while. We should not waste it.” He'd already started stripping himself, and he continued. “I'm not even talking about fucking. When I thought about bringing you home I thought about being with you naked. In my kitchen, my living room. The yard. Make me happy please, baby.”

“I'm not going outside,” Shane said, but began unbuttoning his shirt.

Ilya smiled. “Okay,” he said. “We will work up to that.”

Shane felt a little awkward once he'd stripped, but Ilya put his arm around him and guided him to the living room. They lay together on the sofa, legs tangled, Ilya with a little double chin as he stared down the length of them. Shane wanted to bite it.

“We look good together,” Ilya said, which startled Shane. It must have been a coincidence, but Ilya was soothing one of his very specific insecurities. How Ilya and Svetlana seemed to match, looked like such a natural pairing.

“Yeah?” Shane asked, his voice shaky.

“So good,” Ilya said. “Wish we could have pictures.”

Shane closed his eyes. “I wish that too,” he said. “I’ve been thinking about that. I’ve been thinking about that since we were going through instagram.”

“Yes, me too,” Ilya said, and ran a rough hand through Shane’s hair. “Is okay. I can picture you very well in my head. You wouldn’t fade. Even when we went a long time without seeing each other, you never faded.”

Shane shuddered a little, and there was nowhere to hide it, pushed up against Ilya, skin on skin. “I’d always think I was seeing you places you weren’t,” Shane said. “Which is funny, because you’re pretty distinctive. I’ve never actually met anyone who looks like you. But I’d see you everywhere.”

Ilya hummed. Then he said, “I should get a mirror on bedroom ceiling. Like in hotels.”

Shane’s eyes widened, his mouth twisting. “What the fuck kind of hotels are you staying in?” he asked. Ilya laughed.

“Here I am totally innocent,” he said. “I only know that from movies.”

“Good,” Shane said.

“Yes,” Ilya said. “You can be my first time.”

Shane couldn’t hide his reaction to that, either, and Ilya laughed again. “That does it for you?” he asked. “Would you like me to play the virgin?”

Shane shook his head. This was getting too much for him, all these ideas Ilya was throwing at him. He slid himself into straddling Ilya, looking down at him. Ilya’s hands glided up his thighs to his stomach and down again. He was getting hard beneath Shane but seemed in no rush. “You are like dream,” he said, which was what he’d said that morning, too.

“Just fuck me,” Shane said. “Please.”

Ilya leaned up and kissed his collarbones, wet and extravagant. Shane couldn’t handle it. He pulled Ilya’s head away. “Ilya,” he said. “Fuck me.”

Ilya did, eventually falling into the tempo Shane wanted, quick and ruthless, panting and biting without coherent words or even thoughts. It was what Shane needed, obliterating the mess inside him, cleaning him out. He came hard, falling forward on Ilya and doing nothing to rearrange himself. Ilya held him like that for a while, then gently extracted himself from beneath Shane. Shane stayed where he was, not opening his eyes, and a few minutes later heard Ilya kneeling beside him. He could smell him, feel his warmth – and then the cold of a

gentle cloth across his stomach. Once satisfied with the clean up job, Ilya sighed and slotted into sitting beneath Shane, so Shane's head rested on his still naked lap. He ran his hands through Shane's hair, lightly tugging, and it gradually brought Shane back to earth. He nuzzled into Ilya's leg hair for a moment before sitting up. He was surprised by the way Ilya was watching him. It was contemplative – curious.

“What?” Shane asked, suddenly shy.

Ilya ran his thumb across Shane's bottom lip and said, “There was something wrong with that.”

Shane frowned, tensed. “The sex?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “It was like the sex we used to have. Before we knew how we felt.”

“There was something wrong with the sex we used to have?” Shane asked, defensive.

“Yes,” Ilya said. “It was still the best sex I ever had, but yes. For me, I was holding so much back. There was so much I could not give you.”

Shane blinked, struggling to get past best sex Ilya had ever had. Ilya hadn't said anything like that before. It was sort of hard to believe. “Were you holding something back this time?” Shane asked.

“No,” Ilya said. “Were you?”

“No,” Shane said. Lied. Ilya kept looking at him. Shane swallowed. “There's nothing wrong,” he said.

“Okay,” Ilya said, easy as anything. “Would you like ice cream?”

Shane closed his eyes. “I can't have ice cream,” he said.

“Okay,” Ilya said again. “Would you like to watch me eat ice cream with two spoons?”

Shane laughed. “Fuck you,” he said. “You're cruel.”

Ilya kissed his forehead and left, Shane watching him for as long as he could. Ilya returned a few moments later, a tub of ice cream in one hand and his phone and two spoons in the other. “I have told Svetlana she is not welcome back here,” he said as he settled back in beside Shane. “Until tomorrow afternoon.”

“Ambitious,” Shane said.

“Ilya Rozanov meets every goal he sets himself,” Ilya said with a janky American accent, like a sports reporter. Shane smiled. He relaxed back into the couch and watched Ilya go to town on the ice cream. It filled him with love. He wanted to cry. He couldn't keep himself in check any longer.

“What do you think about monogamy?” Shane asked.

Ilya frowned at him. “Clearly I am in favor,” he said, waving a spoon between the two of them.

“You can have relationships without monogamy,” Shane said. “Some people see it as outdated. Conservative.” In contrast with Svetlana and Ilya, Shane very much felt outdated and conservative.

“Ah,” Ilya said. “And you think I am one of these people.”

His tone suggested he thought Shane was being ridiculous, which put Shane on the defensive. “Earlier tonight you literally booed exclusivity,” he said.

Ilya looked clueless.

“Svetlana said a guy didn’t want her seeing other people and you booed,” Shane said. “You booed the idea of exclusivity.”

“For Svetlana,” Ilya said, exasperated. “Because I know it annoys her, these men who don’t want her seeing other people.”

“And that’s why you guys were so suited to each other,” Shane said.

“Yes, she liked that I did not care who she fucked,” Ilya said.

“Am I not supposed to care who you fuck?”

Ilya made a face like he couldn’t understand what was happening. “I only fuck you,” he said.

“Why?” Shane asked. “Why would you not fuck other people?”

“I do not want to,” Ilya said, and Shane shook his head. “Is truth. I don’t—even if someone is hot, that just reminds me of you. It all just reminds me of you. It would feel wrong, and like waste of time.”

Shane nodded. “And even if you did want to fuck someone else, you wouldn’t, because it’d... It’d hurt me. Right?”

“Okay,” Ilya said.

“Okay?” Shane repeated, indignant.

“Yes, if it would hurt you I would never.”

“Of course it would hurt me!” Shane said, a little too loud.

“Okay,” Ilya said, holding his hands up, spoon and all.

“Wouldn’t it hurt you? If I were to fuck someone else?”

Ilya frowned, looking uncertain. “You want to?”

“No.” Shane wasn’t even sure he’d ever been really attracted to anyone other than Ilya. Maybe he’d never given himself the chance to be. Nobody had ever made themselves inevitable the way Ilya had. Nobody else had ever jerked off in a shower in front of him. “But wouldn’t it hurt you if I did?”

“So this is—” Ilya waved a hand around. “We are arguing about something that is not real.”

“We’re not arguing,” Shane said, losing some of his fervor.

“Right.” Ilya looked at him, sighed. “I would not like it, but I wouldn’t feel like I could stop you from doing something you wanted. If you really wanted it.”

Shane wasn’t entirely sure what they were even talking about anymore, but he felt genuine panic at Ilya’s words. “If you wouldn’t want me to do something you have to ask me not to,” he said. “You have to. I don’t want to hurt you, ever.”

“You will not hurt me,” Ilya said easily. Too easily. “You make me very happy.”

“Cigarettes make you happy,” Shane said, and Ilya smiled like it was a clever joke. Shane’s eyes burned. “I think I could really, really hurt you.”

Ilya looked at him for a while and said, quietly, “It’s okay if you do. It will be worth it.”

“Not to me,” Shane said. “It’d make me sick. You can’t just let me away with things, Rozanov.”

Ilya looked almost guilty, and Shane could see he wouldn’t promise that. Ilya would let him away with anything. Shane really did feel sick. “Okay,” he said. “Okay, so I’ll just know. Because you’re—you never deserve to feel any pain again in your life, Ilya.”

Ilya laughed. “I am professional hockey player,” he said.

Shane remembered his first few months of high school, how lonely and alien and out of place he’d felt, like a ghost in the corridors. And he remembered coming home from school and feeling like a person again, because of his parents. His mom gossiping about her annoying coworkers to him and his dad asking him earnest questions about the comics he was reading. Like he was somebody worth confiding in, worth listening to, worth having around. Like he was important; like there were good things he deserved and bad things he didn’t. He suspected Ilya hadn’t had much of that feeling in his life. Seeing as he couldn’t fly his parents out to Boston in the next ten minutes, he tried something else.

“You’re right,” he said. “And you and Svetlana were right earlier, about how things don’t go to plan. You’ll get injured and you’ll have scoring droughts and you’ll suffer humiliating losses to terrible teams, and we’ll go way too long without seeing each other, and we won’t take photos together, and all of that will hurt. But I’m right too. You don’t deserve to ever feel hurt again. Even if it’s something you love causing it. Like hockey, or me.”

Ilya looked at him, then looked away, which was so rare – Shane being too much for him. After a few breaths Ilya said, “This is why I don’t want to fuck anyone else.”

Shane laughed, then flushed at the reminder of how this conversation had started. It seemed silly now, really. "I'm sorry about that," he said. "I don't know..."

"You were feeling insecure," Ilya said. "It's okay."

Shane nodded. He didn't think there was any reason to say it to Ilya, who would just feel guilty, but he also thought maybe the reason it was hard for him to get over this fear wasn't just his own propensity for insecurity but because of the years where it had been very real - where Ilya had wanted other people, along with Shane. "Do you ever feel insecure?" he asked. "About us?"

Ilya took the question seriously, which Shane appreciated. After a few moments he said, "You are very easy to read, Shane Hollander."

"Yeah?" Shane wouldn't describe Ilya that way, but he did think he was getting better at it.

Ilya nodded. "Sometimes I have thoughts. But then I see the way you look at me, and you are very easy to read."

Chapter End Notes

thank you again for reading i hope you enjoyed!! and extra big thank you to people for commenting, it means a whole lot <3

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

this is basically the last chapter but chapter count went up bc in the coming days i'll also post a short little svetlana pov epilogue as a treat. the treat is for me i really want to write her

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

Shane woke up early the next morning with too much energy to linger in bed. He slipped out, careful to not wake Ilya, and went to the home gym. He was looking for a quick light work out, and while he kept it light he was there for over an hour, reflecting on last night. His worry for Ilya hadn't abated, but it had stopped feeling so sharp. In fact, feeling responsible for Ilya was strangely soothing. It seemed to curb his insecurities; knowing he wasn't just there to passively soak up everything good Ilya gave him. He had a clearer idea of what he could do for Ilya, something more fundamental than blowjobs and breakfast in bed. Although he'd keep giving him those, too.

It was still too early to make Ilya breakfast when he finished up in the gym, so he made himself up a plate and took it outside, sitting where the patio met the grass. It was a beautiful day, bright and warm with a light breeze that made the trees rustle. The fantasy was completed when the door slid back open and Ilya appeared. Shane watched his approach.

Ilya handed him a coffee and Shane smiled up at him. "You're up earlier than I expected," he said.

"Weird dream," Ilya said, and sat down beside Shane. It was the second time he'd said that since they got to Boston. It occurred to Shane that it could be Ilya's obscure way of saying bad dream.

"Do you have those often?" he asked.

Ilya squinted at him. "All dreams are weird," he said. It was an obvious evasion, but Shane didn't want to nag right now. The morning was too nice. There was birdsong.

"I would've brought you breakfast if you'd stayed in bed a little longer," he said.

"I know," Ilya said. "You are very good to me."

Shane felt as warm as he would have if he had brought Ilya breakfast.

"You want to finish mine?" Shane asked. "I'm full."

When Ilya nodded he handed over his scraps. Ilya didn't start eating straight away, though. He said, "Am I good to you?"

"Yes," Shane said, almost before the question was out of Ilya's mouth. "Ilya, you're amazing. You're..." Shane shook his head, at a loss for words.

Ilya smiled. "Good," he said. "The thoughts in your head, sometimes. You seem to worry about me with other people. I want to make sure you know how important this is to me."

"I do," Shane insisted, but he understood where Ilya was coming from – how it must feel to be second-guessed the way Shane second-guessed him – and felt he owed him more than that. "I know you love me, and I know this is real and important, but—Ilya, it's not perfect. And the ways it's not perfect, other people are."

Ilya shook his head, frowning. "I do not fucking care about perfect," he said, almost like Shane was being annoying. "I do not think about perfect, with anything. Definitely not with us. You need to get it out of your mind. I do not know how hockey player thinks this way. All teams have weaknesses. It's what makes them fight. I like fighters, I like you. I like how scrappy you are."

Shane smiled, overwhelmed. "You like me?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes almost as much as I love you," Ilya said. Shane rearranged himself so he could look at Ilya, who had started on the plate of Shane's leftovers, like the main business of the day was done with. After a while Ilya said, "I think you like watching me eat."

"Yeah," Shane said. "I like watching you do anything."

Ilya nodded then stuck out his tongue, half-chewed food and all.

"What the fuck, Ilya," Shane said, flinching away.

"I'm testing your theory," Ilya said. "You failed quick."

"Okay," Shane said. "I like watching you do anything that isn't disgusting."

Ilya made an unconvinced noise. "You like watching me do some disgusting things," he said, and smacked at Shane's crotch.

Shane shook his head. "I say one romantic thing, and this is how you act." His voice came out weak and adoring, rather than admonishing.

"Yes," Ilya said, returning to his food with a small smile. "You should know better by now."

Shane resumed watching him eat in silence and when the plate was scraped clean Ilya said, "You are training today?"

"Yeah," Shane said. "I'll leave soon, be back by two. You have another trainer try out?"

“Yes,” Ilya said. “I will go to theirs, not have them here. Less messy.”

Shane felt inexplicably guilty. “How long will you be gone?”

“I will leave after you,” Ilya said. “And it depends how much time I give them. Maybe back by three, four.”

Shane nodded. Ilya didn’t sound especially enthused. “It could be good,” Shane said. “It could be better than yesterday.”

Ilya shrugged, unconvinced.

“Well,” Shane said. “I’ll be here when you get home.”

Ilya’s eyebrows went up and he leaned in and kissed Shane, harder and deeper than Shane associated with the morning, with sunlight.

Shane’s training session was even more intense than yesterday’s, or maybe it was just the cumulative effect of it. He was comforted in a way he supposed was weird when Reed told him that he’d had guys throw up before. Shane wasn’t close to being that fucked up by it. A ruthless, ungracious part of him always liked knowing he was doing better than other people.

He let himself into a still empty home afterwards, and while he couldn’t commit to enjoying Ilya’s absence it was thrilling to be allowed in his house unsupervised. Shane could do anything. What he actually did was sit at the kitchen counter drinking water and listening to a podcast series about the 1988 Summer Olympics, but, in theory.

On the second episode he heard someone enter, and could tell from the way the door opened it wasn’t Ilya. He barged in everywhere. Svetlana rounded the corner and smiled widely when she saw him. He wondered if she ever felt awkward, and if she did if it was ever visible. “Hey,” he said. “Have fun last night?” She was wearing the dress she’d left in, slinky and glittering, but he wasn’t sure if that always meant what it did in movies.

“Plenty,” she said. “You?”

It was more like an emotional odyssey, but Shane nodded anyway. Svetlana glanced at the bag at Shane’s feet. “You’re back from another training session?”

“Yeah,” Shane said.

“How do you find Reed?”

The first name basis surprised him. He hadn’t told her who his trainer was, so Ilya must have. “He’s good,” Shane said, and then remembered, with relief, that Svetlana loved hockey. He could actually talk to her about this. “It’s pretty intense. His whole philosophy is that you never only work on one thing at a time, he’s always got me practicing like three different skills simultaneously, you know? He says it’ll make me more play ready, better able to

transfer what I learn from him to a game environment. Which makes sense, but it also makes it way more exhausting than normal off-season training.”

Svetlana nodded, hopped up beside him at the counter. “He’s good for young players, to test what they’re made of,” she said. “If they can hack it. Coaches love sending sophomores his way, especially the smaller ones who can’t rely on brute strength. I bet he gets sick of that. It’ll be nice for him to work with a player at the top of his game.”

Ilya had told him once that Svetlana knew everything about hockey, stretching out ‘everything’ so it almost sounded dirty, but at the time Shane had assumed that was a statement designed in a lab to make him miserable. Knowing what kind of player to send to which trainer was pretty advanced. He probably didn’t mask his shock, because she laughed.

“Can you do that for every trainer?” Shane asked. “Do you know every trainer?”

“Not every trainer everywhere,” she said. “But in Boston, yeah. And a lot of the ones working the east coast.”

“Wow,” Shane said, and then frowned. “Are you gonna help with Ilya’s search, then? You must have known he’d have hated that first guy. Can you think of anyone to send his way?”

Svetlana pursed her lips and her voice dropped to a conspiratorial tone. “I can,” she said. “There’s one guy I think he’d love, but the thing with Ilya is he’s not going to say yes to any of the first five he meets no matter what. He can’t have replacing Nikolay be easy, he’s too loyal. So I’ll wait until he’s worked out his anger on some of the canon fodder I’m sending him, and then I’ll send him what he actually wants.”

“Oh my God,” Shane said, awed. “Jesus, Svetlana, how much of his success does he owe to you?”

She tapped her nose like it was need to know and Shane laughed. It also occurred to him that he and Svetlana had a secret now; he wasn’t going to give up her gambit to Ilya. Rose had told him that back in middle school girls cemented friendships by sharing secrets.

“Do you ever use your hockey powers for evil?” Shane asked.

“How do you mean?”

“Like, sabotage,” Shane said. “You could definitely sell someone bad advice.”

“Huh,” Svetlana said, considering. “That’s never occurred to me. Interesting idea, though. There are some really shitty people in your league.”

“Yeah,” Shane agreed. “A few people I wouldn’t mind not making it to all-star weekend. You could be like a double agent.”

“That’s hot,” Svetlana said, and Shane didn’t really know how to react to that, but he nodded to be safe.

Svetlana laughed. "He talks about you like you're a sweet angel, and I'm sure you are," she said. "But you're also kind of bitchy."

Shane looked up at her and she hastened to clarify. "In the good way, the fun way. It helps me see how you guys work."

"Me and Ilya?" Shane asked, his heart thudding. "You think we work?"

Svetlana cocked her head. "You don't?" she asked.

"No, of course," Shane said. He realized where his surprise had come from and it wasn't good. "I guess I just assume other people would think we're a bad idea. Wouldn't get us." He understood why, but it sort of hurt how long it had taken to explain their relationship to his parents.

"Oh," Svetlana said. She cleared her throat. "That's kind of sad."

"Yeah." He looked at her. People would get her and Ilya, but he really needed to put an end to those thoughts. "Can I ask you something – it's embarrassing."

"I know what it is," she said.

"You do?"

"You want to know if I have feelings for him."

Shane flushed hard. He would have tried to find a less direct way of getting at it. "Do you?" he asked, not letting himself back down.

"When I was fifteen I thought I was in love with him," she said. "Maybe I was, I don't know."

"And now?" Shane asked, looking down. If she'd ever been, he didn't understand it not still being the case. Falling out of love with Ilya seemed like an impossibility.

"No," she said. "I've wanted to be, sometimes. Before you, before it became clear he had someone. I kind of felt like he was my one shot. He gets me and doesn't mind how I live my life and that's hard to find. I thought if I couldn't want a real relationship with him I wouldn't want it with anyone."

"Oh," Shane said. He could appreciate her honesty, at least. It didn't feel like she was keeping anything from him.

"I feel less that way these days," she said. "Seeing you two together."

"How do you mean?" Shane asked.

"It just makes it clear why he and I wouldn't work," she said. "We're too alike, I suppose. He needs someone like you. I probably need someone like you too. Maybe he's the one who should be jealous." She laughed, and Shane did too. *He needs someone like you.* It felt

important, hearing that, and from someone who knew Ilya so well. He truncated the phrase: he needs you.

It was needy but he couldn't stop himself. "You think I'm good for him?" he asked.

"Shane," Svetlana said, reaching to grab his wrist. "God, I think you saved him."

Shane went wide-eyed and Svetlana dropped his wrist. "Sorry," she said. "Too intense. I don't want to put pressure on you."

"I like pressure," Shane said. "I do very well under pressure."

She smiled. "What I mean is he... He needs people who see him the way you do."

"Everyone sees him how I do," Shane said. "He's so—" Bright, undeniable. He was a heart breaker.

But Svetlana shook her head vehemently. "No," she said. "Very few people see him how you do. And how you're seen changes how you are."

Shane nodded, feeling like he'd just been entrusted with something. Svetlana's face brightened. "Okay," she said. "Ilya probably thinks you and I have nothing to talk about except him, and we can't let him be right. There was some crazy drama last night, can I tell you about it? I know you don't know these people, but I need to tell someone, and an outsider perspective could be useful."

"Okay," Shane said. "Sure. You can test how bitchy I am."

Svetlana rubbed her hands together and Shane smiled.

Ilya came home around three, announcing his entrance with unexplained thudding and a dramatic groan. Shane and Svetlana were still in the kitchen, although they'd migrated from the island to the table. Ilya dropped his bag on the floor, flicked Svetlana on the chin, dodged her slap, kissed Shane on the crown of his head, and then went to get a glass of water.

"How was it?" Shane asked, craning back to track Ilya.

"I am very hopeful I have scared him into leaving the profession," Ilya said. "Very good use of my time. Noble."

Svetlana smiled at Shane and Shane sent a secret one back, straightening up when Ilya came to join them. "Next one, maybe," he said. Ilya grumbled and kissed the top of his head again.

"Yours?" he asked, sitting down. "You like your trainer?"

Shane nodded. "He's intense. I'm curious to see how it manifests in season, but it's at least keeping me in shape."

“You have only such tiny opportunities for improvement now,” Ilya said, which Shane took a second to realize was probably the biggest hockey compliment Ilya had ever paid him. By the time he did, Ilya had already turned to Svetlana. “And you Sveta?” he asked. “You have been hard at work in the gym too, yes?”

It was a joke about her clothes, Shane realized, and Svetlana looked down at herself and grimaced. “I should change,” she said. Ilya nodded at her like she’d just said the most obvious thing in the world, and Svetlana rolled her eyes and stood.

“You look beautiful!” Ilya called after her as she walked away, and Shane surprised himself by not minding. Especially not when Ilya immediately turned his attention to him, putting his hands on Shane’s hips and guiding him up to sit on the table. Ilya stood and surrounded him in a crushing hug. Shane sunk into it. Having Ilya like this, all over him, always hit like a narcotic. Ilya rocked them, then squeezed Shane extra hard before relaxing his grip.

“Me and Svetlana had a breakthrough,” Shane said, against Ilya’s cheek, barely able to keep his eyes open.

Ilya pulled just enough away to look at Shane, their noses brushing. “Yes?”

“Yeah,” Shane said. “I think we’re friends now.”

Ilya’s smile was breathtaking. “Yes,” he said. “My secret plan worked.”

Shane held his own smile back. “This was not your secret plan.”

“I have many secret plans,” Ilya said. “As many secret plans as sister wives.”

“Fuck you,” Shane said. “You have one secret plan, and one wife.”

“But you are my wife?” Ilya asked, sounding genuinely hopeful.

“Fuck you,” Shane said again, resting his forehead against Ilya’s cheekbone.

“My wife is so mean to me,” Ilya said. “But so hot, with a dream mouth, so I take it.”

Shane shook his head and refocused. “Svetlana’s a good friend.”

“Very good,” Ilya said. “The best.”

“I’m glad she was there to look after you,” Shane said. “Before I got here.”

Ilya smiled. He was really impossibly beautiful. “I’m glad she has someone to share the work with now,” he said.

They stayed like that until they heard Svetlana emerge from her room, at which point Ilya sat back down and Shane took their glasses to refill, not wanting to be found right up against Ilya. Svetlana reclaimed her seat, now in a tank top and sweats, as Shane placed a glass before Ilya. Before he could return to his own seat, though, Ilya caught a fistful of fabric from the back of Shane’s t-shirt and tugged him back, pulling him into sitting sideways on his lap, Shane’s legs between Ilya’s. Shane tried to play it cool, despite his flushing cheeks, and

looped his arm around Ilya's neck. Ilya's hand smoothed out the back of his t-shirt before slipping beneath it, thumbing at his spine.

Svetlana raised her phone, and the idyllic peace evaporated as soon as Shane realized what she was doing. "Svetlana, no," he said, and it came out sharp.

Beneath him Ilya had tensed. Svetlana looked at him, alarmed, and Shane tried to calm his voice.

"We can't be in photos together," Shane said.

"Oh," she said. "But you look so cute."

"Right," Shane said slowly. "That's kind of why."

She looked at him and then at Ilya behind him. Whatever she saw on Ilya's face changed her own, made it firmer. She stood up. "Well, sure, you can't take pictures where you're giving each other head, but that doesn't mean you can't be in any photos ever. Come on, come here. Get on either side of me."

Shane looked back at Ilya, who seemed just as caught off guard as Shane felt. It was a sweet, rare, look on him, and bolstered Shane's confidence. He stood and took Ilya's hand, led him around the table. He stood on Svetlana's right side and herded Ilya to her left. She laughed. "Come on," she said. "You can get closer than that."

They stepped in closer. Unerringly, Ilya's hand found the small of Shane's back. Shane reached around Svetlana too, tangling his fingers in the neck of Ilya's t-shirt. Svetlana held up her phone, and the ways Shane and Ilya were touching didn't show up on the screen, but Shane knew he'd always remember. They both tilted their heads over Svetlana's, so there was hardly any space between them at all. Shane had studied an embarrassing number of photos of Ilya over the years, candid and professional shots, and he'd never seen him look like this before – at ease, open. Shane had no idea what his own face was doing.

"There," Svetlana said, once she had taken a rapid series of photos. "There are like a dozen different ways to explain that if it ever gets out. Hockey's a small world, you guys have a mutual friend who thought it'd be funny to get a picture of the rivals together. Easy."

"Thank you," Shane said, his voice a little strangled. Ilya stayed quiet. Svetlana patted Shane's cheek and then sat back down again, tapping away on her phone like it was no big deal. Shane slumped into Ilya's side.

Svetlana sent them the photos and Shane spent a stupid amount of the rest of the day scrolling through them, even though they were all virtually identical. The only comfort was that Ilya was doing it too. The rest of the afternoon and early evening was taken up by Svetlana and Ilya deciding to give him an induction into Russian culture, which mostly meant playing club music from ten years ago and teaching him a pretty brutal slap fight game from

their childhood. When Shane said, “What about, like, Tolstoy?” they pretended to have never heard of him.

They ordered in again, which Shane felt a little conflicted about. He’d chosen healthy options but it still felt indulgent. Ilya had offered to cook but Shane had a sneaking suspicion that without his supervision it wouldn’t prove healthy either, and also that Ilya would resent his supervision, or at least take a lot of joy out of thwarting it. Toward the end of the dinner Svetlana slapped her hands down on either side of her plate, which was on the coffee table, she herself sitting on the floor. Ilya and Shane were on the couch, their plates on their laps. Ilya groaned, and Shane had a pretty good guess of what was coming too.

“Okay,” Svetlana said. “There’s only so long we can play this game, Rozanov. You can’t hold out forever. Let’s go out tonight. Jesus Christ, let’s go out tonight.”

“No thanks,” Ilya said, placidly, and it would almost make Shane laugh.

Svetlana threw back her head and groaned. “What is wrong with you?” she said.

Shane was a little taken aback when Ilya responded in Russian, and sort of at length. He didn’t hear his name but he couldn’t help but suspect Ilya was talking about him. Whatever he said proved convincing.

“Fine,” Svetlana said, standing. “Fine, fine, fine. Enjoy your evening in. Make sure the lights are off by nine.”

“She is very dramatic,” Ilya said to Shane. “Best to ignore her.”

Svetlana picked up her plate and on the way out of the room said, “Ilya thought unicorns were real until he was fourteen.”

“I was not fourteen,” Ilya said, with genuine annoyance, and they heard Svetlana’s laugh from the kitchen.

Shane finished his food and put his plate on the table, waited until Svetlana was in her room to speak. “You can go out with her, you know,” he said.

“I know,” Ilya said, glancing at him.

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“Good,” Ilya said, nodding.

“Come on, Ilya,” Shane said, convinced he was playing dense.

“What?”

Shane huffed. “I’m happy to go out every now and then. I do during the season with my teammates. And even if I didn’t want to go, I could handle an evening here by myself. It’s fine, it’s really not that big a deal. You shouldn’t deny yourself to keep me happy, I don’t want that.”

Ilya frowned. “This is what you have been thinking?” Ilya asked. “This is why I am saying no to Svetlana?”

“Well,” Shane said, suddenly uncertain. “Yeah.”

“This is not why. I do not want to go to club with you and not be able to touch you. That is why.”

“Oh,” Shane said, breathless. He couldn’t call it a relief, because it was a hell of a lot sadder than what he had been thinking.

“Shane,” Ilya said, gentle in a way that was pretty rare. “I think often you make things up in your head. It’s a little bit my fault because I do not say things, but I will say if you ask. So ask, please.”

Shane swallowed. “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, that sounds like a good rule.”

Ilya kissed his ear and pulled him under his arm. Shane took one of Ilya’s hands in both of his, started massaging his palm.

“Well, there is something I could ask,” Shane said.

“Yes?”

“Back in the cottage, when I asked if you were a night owl, why didn’t you answer?”

“I could see you were thinking very hard,” Ilya said. “That scares me.” He gave an exaggerated shiver.

“You are, aren’t you?” Shane said. “You’d normally stay up later than I do.”

“Yes,” Ilya said slowly. “But my sleep has always been fucked. Probably good to go to bed earlier.”

Shane nodded.

“This is the kind of thing that bothers you because you need things to be perfect,” Ilya said. “It does not doom a relationship for people to have different—” He broke off.

Shane smiled a little. “Circadian rhythms,” he said.

“Yes,” Ilya said, smiling back.

Shane nodded. “Thank you,” he said. “For telling me.”

“Thank you for asking,” Ilya said.

“Twice,” Shane said.

“Yes,” Ilya said. “Maybe sometimes you will have to ask twice. Sorry.”

Shane shook his head. “I can handle that.”

Ilya nodded. “And last thing,” he said. “I am sorry for speaking in Russian to Svetlana then.”

Shane frowned. “No, God, Ilya, I would never want to—of course you two would speak in Russian to each other.”

“I know,” Ilya said, looking a little taken aback by Shane’s strong reaction. “But I spoke in Russian then because I didn’t want you to know what I was saying, and I didn’t like doing that, so. I won’t do that again.”

“Oh,” Shane said, and smiled a little. “Well, you know, there’s another way to solve that problem.”

Ilya made a questioning noise.

“I could learn Russian.”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “No big deal. Maybe read Tolstoy in the original. That is what you’d use it for, yes?”

Shane didn’t know why he was being made fun of for, like, knowing Tolstoy existed. “Among other things,” he said. “I’m serious.”

Ilya seemed taken aback. Shane wanted to kiss him but he didn’t want to interrupt the conversation. “It’s a hard language to learn,” Ilya said, cautious, like he was feeling Shane out.

“Yeah, well,” Shane said. “You said I’m good at everything.”

“So good,” Ilya said, pulling Shane tighter against him and stroking his face. “So talented, so hard working. You will be natural, it will fall off your tongue so beautifully.”

And he rubbed a finger into Shane’s mouth, touching the tip of his tongue as though to demonstrate. Ilya could get effusive like this during or after sex, sometimes, and it made Shane feel knocked off balance that him wanting to learn Russian seemed to have the same effect. It triggered a Pavlovian response in him, anyway.

“Once Svetlana leaves I want you to fuck me, please,” Shane said, Ilya’s hand still playing at his mouth.

Ilya’s eyes widened, pained. “Don’t say that, fuck,” he said. “She takes so fucking long to get ready.”

Shane laughed, Ilya shook his head. “Let’s go now,” he said. “I’ll keep you quiet, it’s okay.”

“No,” Shane said.

“Please, baby,” Ilya said, all dramatic. Shane felt like he was flying when Ilya got like this, his smugness and self-control falling away entirely. The only problem was it was hard for Shane to maintain control himself, Ilya’s need always raising his own. He extracted himself from Ilya’s grip, backing himself up against the far corner of the couch, holding Ilya away

with his feet when he tried to follow, laughing. Ilya gave in, collapsing on Shane with his head at Shane's knees.

What had been a few moments away from foreplay turned into a post-dinner nap, the both of them drifting off on the couch. When Svetlana did emerge, incredibly glamorous in a way Shane could appreciate relatively free from the burden of jealousy, she took one look at them and said, "Pathetic."

"Maybe it's time you find a nice young man and settle down," Ilya said to her, not raising his head from Shane's legs, and she flipped him off.

"Have fun," Shane said. "You look very nice."

"Thank you, Shane," she said, and walked out. Once they heard the door close Ilya elbowed his way up Shane's body.

"Hmm," he said. "You are tired."

Shane nodded. He'd been up since pretty early that morning.

"I can still fuck you," Ilya said. "Just different."

Shane nodded again. They'd fucked exhausted before, usually after rock-fight games where their adrenaline had already crashed by the time they got together. In the early days it was the closest the sex got to gentle. Ilya pulled himself off Shane and then bent down to pick him up, one arm around his back and the other under his legs. Shane let his head fall into Ilya's shoulder as they made their way to the bedroom. They had different circadian rhythms. Ilya carried him to bed, Shane brought him breakfast. It worked.

Ilya laid him out on the bed and stripped him without otherwise touching him, which frustrated Shane and pushed him past coherent thought. Probably Ilya liked him like that. Then Ilya left him lying there naked as he stripped himself, retrieved lube and a condom. Finally, Shane almost shaking with how much he wanted it, Ilya joined him on the bed, covering him. Ilya took him slow and careful and not quite gentle, not when his control started slipping, and Shane fell apart.

They must have drifted off afterwards, which was a little embarrassingly early even by Shane's standards, and when they woke, seemingly simultaneously, at around one in the morning, Shane no longer felt all that tired. Ilya settled between Shane's legs, his back to Shane's chest, his head resting against Shane's sternum. Shane ran his nails lightly up and down Ilya's torso, from his belly button to his collarbones.

"You have all these pointy sharp edges," Ilya said. "But when I get inside you you are nothing but soft." Shane smiled, in part because he was pretty sure when Ilya said inside him he didn't mean fucking, or didn't just mean fucking, that it was a metaphor, Ilya under his skin, in his heart. Then Ilya added: "Like crab."

"Sorry, what?" Shane's movements stilled. He was a little too confused to be offended.

"What's soft about a crab?"

“The meat,” Ilya said, like it was obvious.

Now Shane was offended. “Of all the soft things in the world you could compare me to, you chose crab meat?”

Ilya smiled up at him. “Here are your sharp little pincers.”

“No,” Shane said. “Absolutely not. I’m vetoing this.”

“My sweet little crab,” Ilya said. “Is Russian pet name.”

“It is not,” Shane said, and dug his nails into Ilya's chest. “I’ll ask Svetlana.”

Ilya’s face did something new. “You cannot tell Svetlana I say shit like this,” he said.

“Why?” Shane asked. “Are you scared of her?”

“Of course not,” Ilya said.

“You are,” Shane said, awed. “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you from her. I won’t ever tell her what a sap you are. As long as you don’t call me a crab.”

“Not just any crab, my crab,” Ilya said.

“Ilya, I swear to God,” Shane said.

“Okay, fine,” Ilya said, and sighed. “These are all those sharp edges I was talking about. I love them too, you know.”

“I know,” Shane said.

“I love you,” Ilya said.

“I know,” Shane said, smiling.

Ilya turned himself over and kissed Shane's neck and Shane counted to three internally. Then he said I love you, or tried to, imitating the Russian syllables he could hear in Ilya’s voice in his head. Ilya’s head popped up, his eyes wide and mouth slightly open.

“How was that, was it awful?” Shane asked.

“It was really very bad,” Ilya said, beginning to smile, slow and wondering. “But also the best thing I have ever heard.”

Shane smiled back, quite possibly for the first time in his life happy to be far from perfect.

hope you enjoyed!! thank you for reading and thank you so so much for all the kind comments, they've meant a lot <3 <3

Chapter 5: epilogue

Chapter Notes

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

Svetlana remembered what Ilya had been like before his mother died – softer, brighter. His father didn't have as much power back then. He was busy with work and happy to leave the child-rearing to his wife.

Svetlana didn't, however, remember much of Ilya's mom, which she regretted now. Back then she was too young to really care about adults, and Irina had only mattered insofar as she was willing to let Ilya play in the lot between their houses after sunset. She had been beautiful, Svetlana remembered that, and she'd had gentle hands applying a band aid to Svetlana's knee one day. Her real sense of Irina came from the ways that Ilya was special, different from other kids. He was the best hockey player their age for miles and miles and he still played with her even though most boys wouldn't. Svetlana remembered freaking out about a spider in her room that had disappeared and Ilya had sent her outside and spent an hour looking for it, eventually telling her dutifully that he had killed it, even though she knew he didn't usually kill bugs. Years later, as adults, she'd brought it up and he'd said he'd lied, that he'd never found the spider, but he figured it was the best way to make her feel safe in her room again. Svetlana had been shocked; it sounded so unlike him. Ilya didn't indulge people like that, humor their baseless fears, but he had when he was eleven.

He must have been younger still when he'd let Svetlana tie her new set of ribbons into his hair, awkward and asymmetrical and definitely pulling at his scalp, but he didn't complain. Svetlana had loved his golden curls, like something from a picture book. Sometimes his hair would get dirty from playing outside and she'd make him go wash it. They did the ribbons in his room, secretly, and when Irina saw she was kind about it, but she did eventually take the ribbons out, again with those gentle hands. Svetlana couldn't remember if Irina had said anything or if Svetlana had just intuited it, but she knew it was because they couldn't let Ilya's father see.

And even though Ilya had changed when Irina died, Svetlana still caught glimpses of that boy in him. There had been times, nights, where she doubted herself, wondered if she was projecting a memory onto Ilya, whether he'd been able to scrape that kid out of himself entirely. But inevitably something would happen soon after, his uninhibited playfulness, his concern for a struggling friend, his hatred of being alone, and she would see it again. She was used to being the only person who could see it – which made sense, because at least when they were in America she was the only one who had known that boy. It made her feel responsible for him. Nobody else knew he had soft spots, much less where they were. If she didn't look out for him, no one would.

It was reciprocal. One time a guy she'd been seeing accused her in some pretty crass language of playing mommy for Ilya, in front of Ilya, and she hadn't really minded when Ilya had kned him in the stomach – didn't punch him because his fist was all fucked up from a fight on the ice the night before; it hadn't been a great time for him. As well as being insulting

the sentiment was inaccurate. They were equals. Ilya looked out for her too, he always had. He kept the ingredients for her miracle hangover cure – which he found disgusting – in his fridge, he introduced her to some contacts when she was starting her business, he stepped in on a few occasions when guys started verging on creepy. It was a silly thing to hold onto, but he'd also thought she was pretty before she'd grown into herself, before it became undeniable.

When she began to suspect he had serious feelings for someone called Jane it put her on alert – in part because she hadn't thought it was within the realm of possibility. She'd nursed a secret little heartbreak as a teen when she found out he'd hooked up with Sasha and then accepted the apparent reality of Ilya's unattainability. Eventually it became something she valued, part of what made them so well-matched as friends and occasional lovers.

She would have felt protective about Ilya getting emotionally involved with anyone, but it was heightened with Jane because Ilya didn't seem happy. They'd be having a fun night and slowly his mood would turn, becoming agitated, snappy, inevitably accompanied by him staring at his phone. At first she'd thought Jane was being cruel to Ilya, stringing him along, because sometimes he'd be kept waiting for a response for days and when it did come in it would be a single word, but she'd also seen Ilya leave Jane on read for weeks. Whatever was fucked up between them, it went both ways.

She thought she could have made Ilya tell her. If she'd really insisted, if she'd worn him down over time. Maybe not the full story, but she could get him to give her something. She didn't have the guts to try; it would upset their paradigm. That wasn't how they worked and she loved how they worked. Ilya refused to talk about things, Svetlana used her serial killer powers of observation (Ilya's words) to figure it out anyway. But she couldn't really figure out Jane, why Ilya kept going back to something that seemed to make him miserable. If it had lasted six months it would be one thing. She watched it repeat itself for years.

She'd worked out it was probably a guy. She suspected someone from the hockey world, or at least in the public eye, someone equally invested in privacy. She thought it was someone Ilya didn't actually get to see all that often, because of how dependent he was on the texts.

In a way she was a little disappointed when Ilya called and just told her it was Shane Hollander. She'd have liked to figure it out. That was a secondary or tertiary reaction, the primary one being: what the fuck. It was so sensational, so – ridiculous, so needlessly dramatic. If it got out it would be the sports story of the decade. "You couldn't have chosen literally anyone else?" she had asked, laughing.

"No," Ilya had said. "That's the thing. I really couldn't."

She was pretty surprised that Ilya seemed happy to tell her, that he was presenting it as good news. If anything was going to make him break and finally confide in her, she would have guessed it would be the whole thing falling apart. It had seemed like a tragedy waiting to happen. Maybe this was on her, her own cynicism and lack of faith, but she had never imagined it working out for Ilya.

“And he’s like...” She had cleared her throat, unsure how to say it. “Nice? I mean, he treats you well?”

Ilya had cleared his throat back, apparently equally uncomfortable. “He’s like...” he’d said. “He’s sort of like an angel.”

Ilya probably didn’t remember, because he’d been completely wasted at the time, but a few years prior to that he’d told her that Irina had been like an angel, too.

“And this isn’t some kind of elaborate joke?” she’d asked, after having already triple checked earlier in the call.

“I don’t know,” Ilya had said. “It can feel like that to me too. But I think it’s real.”

She got off the phone still reeling from the reveal, but an hour later, sitting on her couch with a glass of wine, she switched to kicking herself for not having figured it out already. Everything added up. It wasn’t as though Shane was Ilya’s type because, almost as a point of pride, Ilya didn’t have a type, but it still just – fit.

Svetlana had never met Shane Hollander but she knew about him the way she knew about every worthwhile hockey player; which was to say, to a degree they would probably find creepy if they ever figured it out. She knew his stats and accomplishments, his style and inclinations, and she knew his reputation in locker rooms and with coaches – quiet, hardworking, eager to please. A complete psycho too, of course, because any top-tier professional athlete had to be. His IQ was legendary, and while the media viewed him as a boring interview – impossible to get anything juicy out of – Svetlana had always thought that was because they were asking the wrong questions. Some of the more analytics-focused media members, usually local beat reporters, would ask him questions about particular plays or rotations, and he’d go into startling detail about exactly what had transpired and what he had seen on the ice and how he had made his decisions. Actually, he was one of Svetlana’s favorite hockey players to listen to talk about the game.

He was obsessive about the game but not a control freak – that was the first thing Svetlana heard about him that made him less of a cliché. He probably knew more about the sport than most of his coaches put together but he was apparently very amenable in locker rooms, happy to go along with what others wanted. Third rate rookies often struggled to fall in line, but apparently it was the NHL’s golden boy’s default.

The second interesting thing she learned about Shane Hollander was that he did not have sex with the women hockey players usually had sex with. Svetlana was friendly with a lot of these women in different cities across North America, even though Ilya was the only pro she’d ever hooked up with. She liked the sport a lot more than she liked the people who played it. Shane had become a white whale in these circles, handsome, single, by all accounts decent, and with one of the highest net worths in hockey. But he rarely showed up to nights out, and when he did he left early and alone. It was one thing to not be a prolific playboy; it was another to just not have sex at all. The other hockey players who didn’t fuck around were usually married, and usually to blond women they had met before turning twenty one. A wife

like that would have made sense for Shane, but Svetlana had never come across anyone who'd so much as danced with him, and she was embarrassed to admit she'd asked a few pointed questions over the years. Rose Landry happened, which Svetlana had found exciting, but it ended too quick for it to make much sense to her either.

And if he didn't have sex, what did he do? What was Shane Hollander's vice, his outlet? Every meticulous obsessive had one. Ilya had about a dozen, half his life spent chasing catharsis. From the same girls who told her Shane couldn't make eye contact when they flirted, she also knew he didn't drink or do drugs. Illegal gambling was an option, and one she found pretty in keeping with what she knew of his personality, but he never seemed to show up in those circles either. Where did Shane Hollander get his thrills?

She posed this question to Ilya one day slumped on his couch, when the highlights show they were watching started on Montreal's game from the previous night, naturally heavily featuring Shane. Without looking away from the screen, his thumb rubbing over his crucifix, Ilya had said, "I hear he buys a lot of real estate." In retrospect she needed to give him a dead arm for that. She couldn't remember his reaction when she'd told him that all the girls said Shane doesn't fuck, but probably he deserved a dead arm for that too.

She'd always been frustrated that Ilya never gave her any insight into Shane, because she knew he had it. Shane got under Ilya's skin like no other opponent ever had, which she hadn't made much of – he was the only opponent who had ever matched Ilya's talent, or at least came close to it, depending on how patriotic Svetlana was feeling. What was a little more striking was that the way Shane got under his skin didn't seem to manifest as hatred. She knew that Ilya must have given real thought to Shane, in part because one of the ways in which Ilya was meticulously obsessive was his encyclopedic knowledge of the deep-rooted insecurities of every all-star level talent in the league for the purposes of psychological warfare. She asked Ilya what he pressed Shane on during games and he said, "I don't know, his mom."

Svetlana didn't buy it. Ilya made mom jokes to rookies he'd never heard of. He'd have something special for Shane, and she didn't know why he wouldn't tell her what it was. At first she thought maybe he actually hadn't figured out a way to get under Shane's skin, which would fit with how untouchable Shane generally seemed, but that didn't make sense either. She'd watched Montreal Boston match ups and Shane absolutely got bothered by Ilya, flushed and staring during breaks in play.

Her serial killer powers of observation had failed her. If she'd ever laid out these questions beside each other – what is Shane Hollander's outlet? Who does Shane Hollander have sex with? Why won't Ilya say how he gets under Shane Hollander's skin? How and why does Shane Hollander so effectively get under Ilya's? – she would've found the only answer that addressed each one. Shane and Ilya were fucking. And if she'd known Shane and Ilya were fucking, she'd have connected that with Ilya's years-long secret affair that dictated his every mood. Christ, Ilya had chosen a code name that rhymed.

The facts added up, but she couldn't actually picture it. The sex, yes, that was nice to picture, but Ilya had called Shane his boyfriend. She had no idea what that would look like. She'd

suggested that Ilya invite Shane to Boston more out of curiosity than anything, but it became clear pretty quickly she wouldn't get to see them comfortable around each other straight away. Ilya was comfortable, teasing Shane and touching him with casual entitlement, but Shane was on edge, awkward and watchful and overly polite, not at all angelic. It was because of her, she realized. She found it a little funny and a little sad and made an executive decision to not wear any of her Boston Raiders merch around him. Her dynamic with Ilya had always been hard to explain, and if anyone could do it it wouldn't be Ilya. She didn't blame Shane for not yet understanding.

The first crack in the armor showed that evening when they'd gotten drunk together. Or at least Ilya and Svetlana had gotten drunk, and Shane had nursed the same glass of wine for ninety minutes. That was one of those times she'd seen the boy in Ilya again, loose and fun-loving, defenses down. He was talking about shaving his head, and then said she should shave her head, and then that Shane should too and they could start a new religion.

For a moment, out of nowhere, she'd found it hard to stay lighthearted, hit by the weight of memories, everything Ilya had been through, and she'd had to force her smile. The emotion had gotten harder to contain when she looked to Shane and found some version of what she was feeling unconcealed on his face. He was looking at Ilya, his mouth curved in something a little too awed to be a smile, his gaze attentive, nearly studious, like he knew he was witnessing something special.

She was used to being the only one who saw the ghost of Ilya's childhood, but somehow, impossibly, it seemed like Shane Hollander saw it too. It shook her to her core. Maybe she was too possessive of Ilya, too accustomed to being his sole interpreter. She hadn't thought about what it meant that Shane, apparently, loved him – that this was more than an extended fling.

Over the next few days she caught more glimpses of the kind of person Shane was, of the ways he loved Ilya. She felt intense gratitude toward him every time his brow creased in concern over one of Ilya's flippant comments, at every quiet effort he made to ensure Ilya's comfort, every time he made Ilya smile, which was more often than anyone else she'd ever known. Love looked good on Ilya too. She never liked to admit just how badly he could make her worry, but God. Sometimes she got caught on how depression was often hereditary. Probably she was pinning too many hopes on Shane Hollander, but it was the first time she'd felt any kind of hope in a while, so she let herself have it. Selfishly she felt some loss too – so help her God she would get Ilya back at the club – but mostly it was sheer relief, finding a beloved possession she'd misplaced. She was seeing Ilya like she hadn't seen him in a long, long time – softer, brighter. She was pretty sure Ilya would lie about killing a spider if it would help put Shane at ease.

Chapter End Notes

okay thats it. thank you so much for reading i hope you enjoyed and thanks especially to everyone for their kind and thoughtful comments!!!! means so much

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