

## Their People

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# Their People

by [mansikka](#)

## Summary

It's the start of the Irina Foundation hockey camps. Ilya can't wait to meet the new kids, and work with his and Shane's friends. This year, they are surrounded by good people who are giving up time in their summer to help. Ilya appreciates every one of them, he really does, the camps wouldn't be the same without them, it's just a shame it's so obvious how much JJ doesn't like him. But they can be civil to one another for these camps, for Shane's sake if nothing else. Can't they?

## Notes

Hello! Here's another soft(ish) one because apparently I can't help myself.

Having reread The Long Game a... few times, I'm still just so pissed about how Montreal treated Shane, that felt brutal. Or, I'm very soft. It could be that.

And, I do not enjoy JJ's attitude towards Ilya or Shane! He's one of Shane's best friends!! He was horrible to him in between them being outed and when he comes to Shane's house, and even then! I just.... c'mon, JJ. Do better.

I would love to see some of that stuff with JJ changing if we get a third book/series where it's addressed, or if there are tweaks to the storyline in season 2 like we had in season 1. (side note; maybe it's me, but I got the impression from season 1 that JJ already suspects? The locker room scene when they're talking about how Ilya didn't go to Nashville? It's not just me, right?? Hayden, Svetlana, AND JJ all know about this, right? Please tell me it's not just me!)

Anyway. I need to see some earnest apologies so there can be some earned forgiveness. At this point, I'm not imagining those apologies are going to happen, so, here's me, being mad at JJ, for this entire story. I don't trust him to be nice to our boys. And I like the idea of Shane and Ilya being protective of one another, while being surrounded by good people.

The whole thing is written already, it's about 18k. I'm chaptering it only for proofreading purposes.

I don't think there are any warnings needed but if there are I'll add as I proofread.

Happy reading!



# Chapter 1

*Things to be happy about.*

One. Ilya presses his thumb pad into the back of his wedding band, knowing an instant flush of euphoria and a moment of relief. That ring has been around his neck for a handful of months, and he can count how long he's worn it on his finger in days, but already, Ilya knows it will ground him like nothing ever has before.

Two. Shane's house in Montreal is officially sold, so no more waiting around for paperwork to sign or unnecessary worrying about the sale going through. True, it does mean that when they do their camp this year, he and Shane will be staying in a hotel instead of at home, but they know their way around a hotel room by now. They won't be hiding anything. And Ilya will happily take a week in a hotel knowing after it they will come back here to Ottawa, calling this house their home.

Three. Anya is coming with him and Shane to camp today, and for the rest of the week. Harris is coming to hang out and take photos, and has already volunteered to keep her company when Ilya can't, and she'll be staying with him next week when they are away. So although Ilya knows he will miss her when they are in Montreal, he can be comforted knowing she is in good hands. That's not until next week, anyway. If it all gets too much this week, if his mood dips and he can't get out of the fog of it, Anya's soft fur will be a comfort not so far away.

Four. It's the start of the Irina Foundation's summer camps today. Ilya loves them; for this wonderful thing he and Shane have built together, all the people they get to help, and because they get to spend this time with kids. This year, it's going to be even more amazing, because they have so much help, so can take on more of them. It's the usual crowd—him and Shane, Ryan, Wyatt, Leah and Max, and Hayden and JJ will be there too—but Scott Hunter is coming to help at the Montreal camp next week, and Troy and Bood have committed to both full weeks as well. So not only do they get to spend this amazing time teaching kids hockey for a really important cause, they will be surrounded by friends.

Mostly friends, anyway. Ilya's heart sinks a little so he seeks Anya out, squatting down to pat her in her bed.

"Are you excited for today?" he whispers, watching Anya's tail thump.

"Hey."

There. Number five on his list, or really, his number one on any list. Ilya stands, already smiling for hearing Shane's sleep-roughened voice, heart fluttering for the sleepy look on his face when he meets him at the bottom of the stairs.

"Good morning," Ilya says, laughing softly when Shane stumbles his way forward with his eyes still closed, and still manages to land against his chest.

“Morning.”

“You were tired.”

“You weren’t?” Shane asks, throwing his arms over Ilya’s shoulders and tucking his face into his neck.

They did have a late night. The best kind of late night. Ilya will make a point of reminding Shane about the hickey over his hipbone, not because he will forget, but because Ilya knows the way Shane will flush when he does. That is a beautiful thing to think about. It would almost be better not to remind him, have that hickey on display when they shower at the rink at the end of the day, but that’s just the possessive side of Ilya showing. That they both know it is there, and Ilya can run his thumb over it at any moment he wants to remind Shane is enough.

It’s also pretty fucking hot that Shane was the one to get things started last night—admittedly, really late—despite his mom being in the house.

Is that weird? Ilya doesn’t know if it’s weird. He knows he doesn’t care too much, if it is.

“Not too tired,” he says, schooling his smile in about all of that.

“You never get up before me for camp.”

“Mm,” Ilya says, kissing the back of Shane’s head.

“Are you excited?”

“Of course. I checked the medical forms. One diabetic, one asthma, one nut allergy. Yuna already spoke to the medic at the rink. I think she woke him up.”

“Mom.”

“Mm?”

“*Mom*,” Shane says, pulling back and resting his hands on Ilya’s bare chest with a smile.

“You called her *mom* two days ago. She hasn’t stopped talking about it.”

He did. Ilya hadn’t meant to, hadn’t really thought about it, the word just slipped out, and felt right at the time. Yuna had teared up and hugged him, and Shane had kissed him silly for it when they got home, and that had felt pretty good. Ilya dreamt of his own mom that night, and it had been a peaceful dream, so he thinks she approves.

“Maybe I will again,” he says, and kisses Shane, who looks so happy, Ilya can’t really think about anything else.

They get lost in their kiss because they always do, but, being conscious of the time, Ilya is the one to break it. He gets a quick hug in then takes Shane’s hand, nodding towards the kitchen.

“Breakfast?”

“Mm. I made something already.”

Oh, no. Is this going to be one of those fat-free, fun-free things that Ilya had half-convinced himself Shane was done with eating? He smiles, ready for a conversation about it.

“Okay.”

Shane narrows his eyes, then grins, then smacks a kiss to his cheek before letting go of Ilya’s hand. “Not what you’re thinking.”

“What am I thinking?”

“Bad things, probably.”

“...maybe?”

“Make coffee,” Shane says with a soft shove to Ilya’s arm, already at the fridge.

Ilya gets a kiss to Shane’s shoulder as he passes him the creamer, unable to see what Shane is taking out because he immediately turns his back to him.

Okay, then.

They talk about the camp a little as they wait for the coffee, and Anya comes through in the hope of a second breakfast. Ilya takes his pill, glad they seem to be stabilising in his system, that slight nauseous feeling he had in the beginning not really noticeable anymore.

Ilya reads Svetlana’s *good luck for camp* message to Shane, knowing pride, and love, and a few other things when he translates the Russian near perfectly. Then, the coffee is ready, and Ilya is hoping for at least something edible for breakfast because he’s suddenly starving.

“So, I made overnight oats,” Shane says excitedly when Ilya comes over to the table with their coffees.

“Overnight oats?”

“Yes. This one, is mixed berry,” he says, tapping the first jar, then the second. “This, is cherry, with chocolate chips.”

Okay. Now Ilya is interested.

“For me.”

“No. For us both. This one, is probably more for you than for me,” Shane says, pushing a third jar towards him with a look that is part pride, part mischief, part exasperation, even.

Ilya pops the jar lid, suspicious as he peers inside.

“Oh,” he says in surprise, “that looks... pretty good.”

“It’s overnight oats, with chocolate chips, pecans, and maple syrup. Way too sweet for me this early,” Shane adds, grabbing a spoon and dunking it in the jar, then holding it up to Ilya’s mouth.

Ilya grins at him, eyes on Shane’s the entire time he opens his mouth and drags his lips along the spoon.

“Oh. That is really good.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. Come. You must taste it,” Ilya says, and holds Shane’s jaw as he kisses him.

Shane doesn’t so much as protest, flicking his tongue against Ilya’s and humming in approval.

“Not bad.”

“Really good. Thank you,” Ilya says, sure his smile must be ridiculous—not that he cares, actually.

“You’re welcome. Eat,” Shane says, gesturing at the jar Ilya is clutching on to and settling back in his seat, opening the others.

Breakfast is delicious, and laughter filled, the kind of perfect start to the day that Ilya lives for. Relaxed, at ease, comfortable Shane is his favourite to see, and to be honest, he’s had that look about him for a few weeks now. Even in the moments when things stress Shane out—like the ridiculous gossip article that came out yesterday from a journalist pissed they weren’t allowed at their wedding—seem softened now. There is a new confidence in Shane these days, that has been present more or less ever since they walked out of that meeting with Crowell. Ilya loves it. Though he loves every single thing about Shane anyway, so that isn’t a surprise to him.

“How are you feeling?” Shane says, as they wash and dry their breakfast dishes.

“Good.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes,” Ilya says, kissing Shane’s shoulder in reassurance as he passes behind him with a new dish towel.

“Ilya…”

Uh oh.

“Yes?”

“You know, when we talked about you starting your medication—”

“Everything is okay with that,” Ilya says quickly, not sure if he wants to talk about any of that today.

He doesn’t think he needs to right now, anyway. He’s taken his pill, he’s done his morning *things to be happy about* list, and he’s feeling pretty relaxed, really. Plus, his husband just made him a delicious breakfast and is looking absolutely gorgeous—as he always does.

“I know. I mean, I’m glad to hear it,” Shane says, then curls his hand over Ilya’s forearm before he can pick up the last mug to dry, wedding band glinting up at him.

“Good.”

“But, we did say, that we would talk. *You* would talk. About things, if anything was troubling you, if you were feeling anything you didn’t know how to—if you were feeling bad about things.”

"Shane—"

"And, we also talked about how, sometimes, I don't always get what anyone is saying, unless they're saying it, you know. Really directly," Shane adds, screwing up his face.

There is blush to his cheeks. Ilya has to smack kisses over them.

“Shane," he whispers. "We have camp.”

“I know.”

“And we have camp next week.”

“Yes.”

“And,” Ilya whispers, abandoning his dish towel to rest his hands on Shane’s waist, “soon, we will be on honeymoon.”

Shane’s eyes light up. “Can’t wait.”

“Yes.”

“But you need to tell me. What’s going on in there?” Shane says, tapping his fingers against Ilya’s temple. “I know you didn’t sleep too well.”

Shit. And to think he’d gotten away with it.

“It’s nothing. It’s nothing big. It’s stupid, maybe.”

Shane only stares at him, waiting.

Ilya sighs, turning to lean back against the counter, tugging Shane to him.

“I am looking forward to camp very much,” he says, smiling when Shane nods.

“Me, too.”

“Yes.”

“But?”

There is no way he says this without feeling an idiot, a childish, stupid idiot. He might as well get it all out in one go.

“Your friends. They do not like me so much.”

Okay. Now Ilya really feels pathetic. This isn’t exactly news to anyone. He doesn’t even blame them really, and it’s not as though he is crazy about them either. He knows he’s built himself a certain reputation, too. It’s just, it’s different now. A little. Or, it feels like it should be.

Shane frowns. “Rose likes you.”

“I met Rose once.”

"So far, anyway."

"Yes."

“Okay. So... you mean Hayden? And JJ?” Shane says, frowning when Ilya nods. “Ilya. You don’t exactly like them much either.”

“Not really. Not too much.”

Actually, he’s starting to not mind Hayden, but he’s not even close to telling him that yet, or changing the way he winds him up. Not much, anyway.

“It’s good that they’re helping at camp, though, right? I mean, it’s good, we have so many people helping?”

“Yes.”

“So...”

Ilya feels even more stupid now. “Most people at the camp, they are friendly. With everyone.”

“Yeah. We’re lucky.”

“Yes.”

“And,” Shane says, nodding slowly, like something might be occurring to him right this minute, “I mean... Wyatt, Troy, Bood... I barely know any of them, but, I don’t know. I feel like we’re all friends already, Sort of. I feel... welcome with them. Right?”

“Right,” Ilya says, knowing Shane’s first day actually practicing with the Centaurs is going to be the most incredible mindfuck to Shane, after Montreal.

In a good way.

“Hayden’s not so bad with you now, maybe?”

“Mm.”

“And you’re not so bad with him,” Shane adds, raising an eyebrow, and smiling.

Ilya sighs, and claims a kiss. “I think so.”

Shane sighs out, hard, his shoulders slumping. “So. It’s JJ?”

Ilya wishes he could show indifference. The thing is, with everything that’s happened to them in the last few months, it’s become impossible for him to hide pretty much any emotion from Shane.

“He does not like me.”

“No. No, not really,” Shane says, looking pensive.

Also. That’s an understatement. There are plenty of people that Ilya can casually say hate him, but JJ? That is a whole other level.

“And you don’t like him.”

“Not too much.”

Not a bit, actually. Shane knows that already. Ilya doesn’t need to say it out loud.

“But?”

He wants the people in Shane’s life to accept his place in it? He wants to be seen as Shane’s husband, because he is, not the dirty little secret, the disdainful thing that some people—JJ—still make him feel he is? Ilya isn’t really sure.

Maybe it’s his fault. He’s spent so much time with his walls up, acting like he doesn’t care, that some people really believe that is who he is. Mostly, he doesn’t care what people think about him, but the people who are important to Shane... Ilya wants to be, at least, tolerable to them.

Shane’s eyes narrow.

“Has he said something to you?”

“No. Nothing.”

Not a word, actually. He barely looked at him at their wedding. The thought of spending two weeks with someone who so blatantly hates him after the roller-coaster these past few months

have been, it's not sitting easy for Ilya. He doesn't know what he's going to do about it, what he should do, or anything.

"Because if he's said something—"

"Nothing," Ilya assures him.

Sighing, Shane still looks... well, a little angry, to be honest.

Ilya hopes Shane has at least a little bit of anger towards JJ—not for how he is with *him*, but how he behaved with Shane. It's all messy, and imperfect, and Ilya gets it must have hurt JJ to have not been in on the secret that was them, but that doesn't justify the way JJ treated Shane. All Ilya can picture is how upset Shane had been after everything that everyone at Montreal, barring Hayden, had said to him. He's more pissed off at that than he is that JJ barely acknowledges his existence when they're in the same room, but, maybe it's all part of the same thing?

Shane kisses him firmly, leaning against him. "I'll talk to him."

"You don't need to."

"No. Maybe I do."

"Shane—"

"I know we're good now. We're friends. Me, and JJ," Shane says, letting his forehead fall against Ilya's. "But I miss the JJ who... I don't know. Always had my back before a game. Was like... maybe the person most responsible, for, you know. Getting me to go out. Have a social life. Whatever."

Oh, yes, Ilya knows that, he also knows how many times JJ tried to set Shane up with other people. He also knows JJ thought Shane had an unrequited crush on *him*. He has mixed feelings about all this, from the bittersweet thought that it's nice JJ was looking out for Shane making sure *he* wasn't lonely, or bored, to fierce jealousy, that anyone would consider anyone for Shane other than him.

"Yes. I know that," is all that Ilya says.

Shane fixes a serious look on Ilya that does make him slightly nervous. For no good reason.

"I miss... the JJ who was always the first person to try to cheer anyone up. Had a suggestion for, like, everything. Dinner recommendations. Gift ideas. Cold remedies. He's a good guy," Shane says, with a quiet sigh.

"Yes," Ilya says, having heard all these things from Shane even if he's not seen any of that for himself.

"He's great with the kids at the camps. He had his day with the Cup there. He... when, with the plane—"

Ilya's chest tightens, both for the horrible way his mind snatches back to being on that plane with the engine failing, the fire, the sheer terror they were about to plunge to their deaths, and the way Shane's face pales any time the almost-crash is mentioned. He kisses him, because he has to, both for Shane and himself.

"—he was the one to tell me it happened. And, even if he didn't exactly know he was the one doing it, or why, but, he was the one who reassured me that you were okay," Shane says.

Ilya is grateful to JJ for that if he can't bring himself to be for a lot else. "I am glad he did."

"And, it meant a lot to me that he came to our wedding. Even if it... it was only him, and Hayden," Shane says, sadly.

Ilya kisses him on the cheek. "Yes. I know."

"But," Shane says, sighing harder, a flash of anger crossing his eyes, "it's hard now. To remember all of that. To remember that... just a couple of months ago, he was one of my best friends. He still is. Maybe. I... I think the worst thing is, we are, but we aren't. I'm getting that same, I don't know. Walking on eggshells feeling with him that I felt from the moment I came out to the team. I'm tired of feeling like I can't, you know, just, *be*, around people. Breathe. I don't know..."

"I know," Ilya says, and kisses him again, his heart repeatedly broken over the last couple of years for seeing the way Montreal have treated Shane.

Like Shane, Ilya knows just how exhausting it is to pretend to be someone other than himself, in both similar and different ways. So he is just as protective over Shane's feelings about all of this as Shane is with him and his feelings. It's why Ilya is struggling so hard with how much JJ hating *him*, is getting to Shane.

"I think, maybe, everything will be okay at camp. Everybody is great with the kids. Everybody knows is important."

"It's our camp," Shane says. "We set this thing up. And we're grateful, obviously, for all the people who come to help us out."

"Yes. Including JJ," Ilya adds, because he is grateful for that, of course he is.

"You work just as hard on this thing as I do," Shane says, now boxing Ilya in against the counter.

"Is not a competition."

"No. It's not. But you shouldn't feel—this is your foundation too, Ilya. Nobody should be making you feel, I don't know. Unwelcome, or out of place, or anything."

Ilya knows that, too, and really, he doesn't feel those things, but wasn't it Shane—and Galina, of course—who told him to be open with what he's feeling?

“I know that. You asked what is problem, it is only this. Is not a problem. Not really. I am just sharing.”

Smiling at this, Shane kisses him slowly, then smiles against his cheek.

“Thank you for sharing.”

“You are welcome.”

“I’ll be watching him.”

“Shane—”

“I will. This is our camp. You’re my *husband*,” he adds, with a little pride, and, Ilya thinks a little possession, which he loves to see. “Your friends, they’ve all been good to me. Mine should be the same with you.”

“Even when I am an asshole?”

Snorting, Shane smacks another kiss on Ilya's cheek, then heads for the stairs. “Yes. Even then.”

## Chapter 2

The kids are starting to arrive. Excitement flares in Ilya's chest as he sneaks glances out the window, while still trying to give Yuna his full attention. Or rather, give attention to the usual speech that she gives to all the hockey players before they officially welcome the kids to the start of camp. He's heard it before, he doesn't want to be rude, but the urge to just get started is always strong around this time.

"Lastly, on behalf of the Irina Foundation, on behalf of my son, and my wonderful new son-in-law—"

Okay, that has Ilya's attention. He whips his head around at the words, unable to stop himself from glancing over the hockey players around them while holding his breath for their reaction.

A proud, confident smile on Shane's face.

Smiles from almost everyone else.

A silent, two-armed cheer from Wyatt, which has Ilya biting back a laugh.

Troy catching Ilya's with a beaming smile.

A sharp nod from Hayden before he looks over at Shane, then down at his own feet.

Not a single reaction from JJ.

Figures.

"—I just want to say, as always, thank you. Thank you all so much for volunteering your time to do this, and for helping to make these camps as special as they are. So... let's get started," Yuna says, to a round of applause, and cheers, and hoots and hollering that echoes around the walls.

This makes Anya bark, and though she's already been fussed over by everyone, there can never be enough pets and fusses—and treats snuck by Harris, Ilya caught that—for her.

"Ready to do this?"

Ilya is so focused on watching Anya being surrounded that he doesn't even notice Shane approaching him. He smiles, his heart thudding once for Shane standing unusually close. Unusually close in public. Unusually close in front of people they know. He's been getting used to it for weeks, but something about the look in Shane's eyes, and remembering their conversation over breakfast, has Ilya aware of how deliberate Shane is being.

"Yes. It will be good. There are so many," Ilya adds, glancing out the window again as the kids continue to gather and be dropped off.

Shane ducks too to look, and laughs softly. “Uh, yeah. I mean, I know we could take on more this time because we have more players, but, that looks like a lot.”

“Nah, that just looks like my backyard. It’s not so many,” Hayden says, joining them.

Ilya bites his tongue, he won’t make a snarky comment about how many Pike children there are.

“You would know,” Shane says, which isn’t really the same thing Ilya was thinking, but Ilya likes hearing anyway.

It still earns a half-glare from Hayden as he knocks Shane on the arm.

“Hey.”

“What?”

“Nothing. You, uh... ready for your speech, Ilya?” Hayden says.

There is hesitance in Hayden’s voice, that tone of *I can’t believe I have to talk civilly to you* that Ilya always hears, and is never quite sure is actually there or not.

“Speech?” Ilya repeats.

“Yeah, you know. *Welcome to Camp Rozanov*,” Hayden says, waving his hands around and doing a terrible Russian accent.

“Camp Hollander-Rozanov, now,” Shane says immediately.

Is that challenge in his voice? Something else? Ilya isn’t sure. But he also can’t help himself.

“I thought we agreed, Rozanov-Hollander?”

“No. Hollander-Rozanov makes way more sense. Alphabetical.”

“Your alphabet.”

“It’s your alphabet, too.”

“You two are weird. You know that, right?” Hayden says with an exasperated glance over both of them.

There is affection there, too, Ilya thinks, even if it’s just a little for him, and a lot for Shane. Which is how it should be, really, since Hayden is Shane’s best friend.

“Okay, let’s go,” Yuna calls then, her words immediately followed by the happy, excited sounds of kids starting to spill into the building.

Ilya’s been thinking about this moment, just before it all really starts, been wondering if he can plant a kiss on Shane like it’s nothing, when it’s actually huge to him. Now, he’s overthinking it, a little bit too lost in his own head to figure out if he should, or not.

“Ready?” Shane says, giving Ilya’s hand a quick squeeze, a very public hand squeeze.

“Ready,” Ilya says, so shocked by Shane’s boldness that he’s kind of frozen on the spot.

“You heard Mom. Let’s go,” Shane says, and then shocks Ilya again by leaning in and kissing him, brazenly, and openly.

Sure, there are only a couple of people left in the room so it’s not a big deal, but given their history, and everything leading up to it, Ilya’s mind is kind of blown. He follows Shane out with probably the most ridiculous smile on his face.

“Hello,” he calls out to the gathering kids, then points at Hayden. “Welcome to Camp Pike.”

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The kids are amazing. So eager to learn, so excited to be on the ice, and on that typical edge of awe that they get to play with famous hockey players while learning the art of chirping them hard. Out of all those hockey players Ilya is convinced that Ryan is the most natural, the most confident and effective with all of the kids. He’s starting some degree, or course, or something in a couple of months, which will qualify him to do what, specifically, Ilya isn’t sure, because Ryan gets bashful whenever Ilya asks him to explain it. He does know that, whatever kids Ryan works with in the future are going to thrive for learning with him.

“Hey. Fabian found us a new place for Friday,” Ryan says, stepping on to the ice beside Ilya and shoving his phone in his back pocket as he does.

Ilya is also looking forward to the dinner they’re all having—him and Shane, Ryan and Fabian, and Troy and Harris—on Friday night. Date night. Queer couple date night. Another newer, rarer thing for them that Ilya loves every moment of. Especially now that Shane is more relaxed. And he’s more daring with his clothes. And he’s just there, beside him, no longer having to hide.

“Great,” Ilya says, smiling when Ryan slowly spins to face him.

“Seafood.”

“Even better.”

Ryan nods, smiling when he realises Shane is so close behind them. “He booked us for eight, so. Should be good.”

“That all sounds great,” Shane says, casually coming to lean on the boards beside Ilya, arms touching.

That Shane is being openly affectionate with him here at camp—Shane’s version of openly affectionate, which is still a little more discreet than Ilya’s—is a continued shock to Ilya’s system. Shane has squeezed his shoulder, nudged against his arm, grinned at him across the ice in teasing, and flirtily pushed him away when they collided against the boards. He has also pulled him in closer, and put an arm around his shoulders when Harris asked them to

pose for a photo. Several photos, actually. Shane smiled happily and comfortably through every one, and Ilya? Ilya's a little bit spaced out by all of it.

His smile is probably a bit spaced out too, right? Judging by Shane's affectionate look for him.

"Great. Now, I am hungry," Ilya says, leaning back against Shane.

"We just had lunch."

"It was small."

"You're always hungry," Shane says, grinning over his shoulder as he skates away again when Troy calls to him for something.

"I'm still hungry," Ryan says, when Shane is out of earshot.

"Next year, we will have bigger lunches for us I think."

If he's already this hungry on day one, they definitely need to eat more.

"I am seriously thinking about raiding the vending machine when we next take a break," Ryan says.

Ilya starts feeling in his pockets. Dammit. He won't have cash on him right now, will he, not in these pockets.

"I will join you," Ilya says, then nods over Ryan's shoulder when Max beckons him forward with a question.

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The first day of camp is amazing, lots of fun for the kids, and the best kind of hard work for everyone else. It is, though, as is true for previous first days of camp, exhausting. By the time the last kids are leaving the rink, Ilya is ready for the day to be done. He wants quiet time at home on the couch, the slow cooked lemon chicken that Yuna put on at some ridiculous hour this morning, and to fall asleep on Shane's shoulder.

He might even get Shane to drive them home and fall asleep in the car.

Maybe.

He needs to keep his energy up for just a little longer, though. So Ilya groans, picks himself up off the bench that he's just dropped on to, rolls his neck, and heads off for the post-camp debriefing.

On his way to the offices, Ilya spots Shane speaking to a news crew, the same news crew from last year, from the look of things. A flare of jealousy hits Ilya when he spots the interviewer Laurent, even if he knows there is no need for it, daring Laurent to touch his husband's arm this time.

Which doesn't happen. Shane, as though he can feel Ilya's eyes on him, turns, smiles, and waves him forward. Ilya thinks to shake his head and leave him to it, but Shane waves again, more insistently. So Ilya clears his head, pushes that pointless jealousy back down, and puts a smile on his face.

"Laurent. You know my husband. Ilya," Shane says with a warm, loving smile.

Shane even runs a hand down Ilya's back and rests it there when he comes to a stop, perfectly relaxed.

"Hello," Ilya says, shaking Laurent's offered hand while something in his chest roars in triumph.

Ilya knows an appraising look when he receives one. He knows Laurent doesn't approve; of him, maybe of him and Shane, maybe of some other thing. Definitely him, though, in some way. Ilya is far too used to that look of mildly disguised disdain not to recognise it.

"Nice to meet you," Laurent says, not sounding it at all.

"We were talking about being bilingual. In hockey," Shane says, keeping his hand on Ilya.

"Oh. Yes. Very... common, yes? Here, and Montreal?" Ilya says.

"Yes," Laurent says, heavily accented, then switches immediately to French.

Shane immediately translates, and adds, "I think everyone here is bilingual. All the hockey players. I guess we're pretty international, with, you know. English. French. Russian."

"I prefer French."

Mm, okay, maybe his instant dislike of Laurent is less—or not entirely—down to jealousy. Just the tone of his voice makes Ilya think this guy is an ass.

"French is... difficult," Ilya says.

"Your English is basically perfect. You could learn French easily, I know you could," Shane tells Ilya with pride.

"Oh, no. I don't think so."

"Yes. You could. Now, Russian is hard. For me, anyway," Shane says, still smiling at Ilya.

Laurent shuffles a little where he's stood, eyes on Shane. "You are learning Russian?"

"Of course."

"Shane is almost... trilingual. No; what is four?" Ilya says with his own pride, even if Shane then shakes his head in denial.

"No way. Not even close."

“English. French. Japanese—”

“I barely remember anything! Just, you know. Some words. My grandparents used to try to teach me when I was really little. I haven’t practiced in a long, long time.”

“Is still some,” Ilya points out, “and now, Russian.”

“No. I am nowhere near good enough at that to be called fluent.”

“You are *good*.”

“I’m pretty sure only you understand me.”

“Svetlana understood when we had dinner,” Ilya says, watching Shane’s cheeks flare with blush.

Rightfully so. He messed up one particular word the first time he met Svetlana—admittedly, after Ilya insisted he practice a little Russian in front of her because he was so damn proud he was learning—and it was such a funny and rude mistake that Svetlana shrieked with laughter.

Laurent looks between them. Again Ilya senses discomfort, dislike, something else. Laurent clears his throat, and, according to Shane’s translation, says he needs to finish their interview.

“I will go—”

“Stay,” Shane says as Ilya goes to step away, taking his hand, then looking at Laurent, and asking a question.

He doesn’t translate. Ilya doesn’t need him to. Shane intends for him to stay right here, and Laurent would prefer he was elsewhere, and whatever reason he has for that, Ilya is going nowhere.

The interview finishes in under five minutes. There are awkward handshakes, and then Shane is steering Ilya away, snatching up his hand.

“He wanted you alone,” Ilya says before he can stop himself.

“I want you alone. But, you know. That’s just Tuesday.”

“Today is Monday,” Ilya points out, even if he is helplessly smiling already.

“I want you alone every day. But. Mom is going out for dinner with some friends tomorrow night. So...”

“So,” Ilya says, knowing exactly what Shane intends for their couple of hours alone.

“Can’t wait,” Shane whispers, and then surprises Ilya yet again on this strange, but wonderful first day of camp. He kisses him, in full view of the clean up crew, the manager of the rink, and whoever else is still around.

---

“Today went well,” Yuna says later that evening, when the three of them are sitting down to dinner.

“Really good,” Ilya says, waiting until Yuna picks up her fork, and then digs in to his lemon chicken and rice. “This is incredible.”

Yuna doesn’t really need to stay with them for this camp here in Ottawa, but it’s sort of become a tradition—and she likes the idea of fussing over them with good dinners for the week. She also will get up stupidly early every day this week, so this way she disturbs David less too. Ilya really does love his mother-in-law so very much already, and appreciates, even enjoys this time they share during camp. He won’t complain at all, though, when in Montreal they are in separate hotel rooms with some space between them. It is a sweet kind of torture having Shane so, so close—at home in bed with him—and not be able to touch him as much as he wants.

Not that this is a new experience. It’s just that things are different, they are different, and, well. Ilya thinks they’ve shown enough restraint for two lifetimes.

“I think that Madeline will be scouted, like, the moment she’s old enough,” Shane says, stretching beneath the table so his ankle can rest over Ilya’s.

Ilya smiles, loving signs that Shane is just as desperate for touch as him.

“Incredible,” Ilya agrees in between mouthfuls.

God, he is starving.

“She has a pretty good temperament. A little cocky, maybe,” Yuna says, thoughtfully. “If she can school that in, make her game be more about the team, than herself, I think she has a really good chance.”

She’s probably right. Ilya has learned that Yuna has impeccable instincts when it comes to all things hockey. He intends to get her and Svetlana in a room one day just to see what bizarre but beautiful analysis and predictions they make.

“I was cocky, when I was her age,” Ilya says anyway, which earns him smiles from both Hollanders.

“What you were, was confident,” Yuna says, gesturing at him. “You knew you were good. Adorable, too. I saw those videos of you in that documentary, of when you were a kid.”

“Maybe a little cocky,” Shane teases, which Ilya loves.

“And you were a perfect angel; I know it,” Ilya retorts.

“Oh, he was. Most days. Aside from the days he had tantrums on the ice,” Yuna adds, much to Shane’s objection, and Ilya’s delight.

“That was one time,” Shane protests.

“One epic time.”

“Okay. I have to know,” Ilya says, delighted already.

Yuna’s story about a seven-year-old Shane showing off about not wanting to wear a particular jersey is, predictably, delightful to Ilya.

“The label?” Ilya asks, gesturing at the back of his neck.

“Exactly,” Shane says, with a gesture at Ilya while he glares at his mom with a look that says, *see? He gets it.*

Ilya does get it. He’s walked in on Shane either cutting labels out of clothes, or trying to sew them down more firmly, and has been shopping with him, watching him avoid buying clothes altogether because of them. Ilya found him something called Undercover Tape which seems to help, because seeing just how uncomfortable Shane gets when a label is irritating always tugs on Ilya’s heart. Which doesn’t mean he is above calling him an angry kitten for it when it happens, but he does hate anything that causes Shane distress. So he winks at Shane in solidarity, which seems to placate him enough.

After dinner, as the three of them sit down to watch TV, Ilya receives a text from Harris. He reads it, snorts, and since he is sprawled out in Shane’s lap across the couch, holds his phone up for him to see.

“Uh. Was there an explosion in his kitchen, or something?” Shane asks, and goes to reach for his glasses on the coffee table.

Ilya reaches out to stop him. “Is okay. Nothing that interesting. Harris and Troy are making granola bars for us. Many granola bars,” he adds to himself as he zooms in and sees every kitchen surface apparently covered.

“For camp?”

“I think so. Ryan and me were hungry, too. Maybe Harris was listening.”

“Maybe we need to change the lunches, if you’re getting hungry so quickly,” Yuna says.

“And if Ryan’s hungry—”

“Oh, so when *I* say I’m hungry—”

“I was going to say, and you, too,” Shane says, tapping his thumb against Ilya’s chest in protest, “then maybe we need to, I don’t know. Just get more in? We should definitely buy something extra on the way to the rink tomorrow.”

“Or eat better breakfast,” Yuna says with a pointed look, that Shane objects to with a loud huff.

“I made us overnight oats. They were good.”

“They were amazing,” Ilya agrees.

“Mm,” Yuna replies. “I’ll make you some eggs before I leave tomorrow.”

Shane goes to protest, then gives Ilya a shrug that says, clearly, *what would be the point?*

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“Did JJ say anything to you today?” Shane asks later, when he is leaning in the ensuite doorway, and they are getting ready for bed.

Ilya finishes brushing his teeth and rinses his mouth out before answering. “No. Nothing.”

“Nothing, like, nothing bad? Or nothing, as in he didn’t talk to you at all?”

Ilya is a little too tired to talk about JJ. “Is fine.”

“So, no talking at all, then.”

“It was busy. Everyone was busy.”

“I made a point of telling him all these great things about you...”

Ilya can’t help smiling at that. He takes Shane by the waist, and backs him towards the bed.

“Tell me great things.”

“No. You already know,” Shane says, grinning at him, and tugging Ilya with him as he deliberately falls backwards.

Ilya shifts them quickly, just enough so they do actually land with Shane’s head on a pillow, bracing above him. “Tell me one thing.”

“I told *him*, because he needs to know.”

“Maybe he doesn’t believe you.”

Shane’s smile dips a little. He cups Ilya’s face in his hand. “Well. He should. He can see how great you are with the kids. With everyone.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Ilya says, kissing Shane’s cheek, then trailing more kisses down Shane’s neck.

“It does,” Shane says, though there is little strength to his words, because he’s already tilting his head and happily sighing for Ilya’s attention.

“Is okay,” Ilya repeats, really not wanting to think about JJ right now, or in fact anything beyond their bedroom.

## Chapter 3

The sound of kids laughing joyfully rings out around the rink, a better sound, maybe, than a full house of cheering fans. Ryan just slipped, after some pretty sneaky cross-checking by Troy, who is doubled over crying with laughter while trying to apologise, and is now dropping to his knees on the ice. He even starts trying to kneel walk towards Ryan but is laughing too hard.

He's not going to get anywhere near, anyway, because some of the kids who have been watching the hockey players goof off for their entertainment have piled on to Ryan in a giant hug. Ryan's laughter is loudest, bellowing even, because apparently one of them has found a ticklish spot, and by the time Troy actually gets to them—just seconds later—the laughter has turned into a roar.

Ilya slides to a stop to watch them, jolted softly when Shane skates into him and pretends to shove him into the boards. Shane grins at him over his shoulder as he skates off again, looking perfectly at ease as Wyatt throws an arm around his shoulders; something Ilya absolutely loves to see.

The Centaurs are already the most incredible team to Ilya, but when Shane starts officially, it's going to be perfect. Shane is going to be surrounded by good people, and that's almost as exciting to Ilya as knowing he'll get to live his whole life with him—like he's already doing. This is the first time in years Ilya is actually looking forward to the start of hockey season. So long as this summer takes forever to pass.

Eventually, the kids crawl off Ryan, and Troy extends his hand, hauling him up. The two of them hug; it's so good to see how relaxed and comfortable Ryan is looking too. Ilya can't resist a quick glance around at all of them. Look at this, look at this group of people coming together for something so special, how there is nothing but love on this ice.

Back to hockey, then. In theory this goofing off is supposed to be a demonstration for the kids, but it's not surprising how quickly it's descended into a five-a-side mini competition. It's playful, and it's fun, and the kids are cheering on all their silliness. Things really don't get much better than this.

Of course they're all a little rough with each other, it's to be expected both because they're all experienced hockey players, and they've been extra gentle with the kids. The shoving, the cut off curses, the slamming into boards; Ilya's here for all of it. He can't help be aware, though, how JJ continues to be just that little rougher with him.

Shane catches Ilya's eye, nodding at him questioningly. Ilya smiles, waves it off, cursing himself for not doing a better job of more discreetly massaging over the sharp stab JJ's elbow just made to the side of his ribs. He skates off, receiving a very confusing fist bump from Hayden, and a slap on the back from Wyatt.

"You good?" Ryan asks, when Ilya comes to a stop near to him.

Ilya nods, adjusting his grip on his stick.

He follows the tilt of Ryan's chin towards JJ.

"Having some problems?" Ryan asks.

"He is adjusting. To us," Ilya says, with a discreet gesture at Shane.

Rolling his eyes, Ryan rotates his stick in his hands. For a second, Ilya gets a glimpse of the fearsome enforcer Ryan used to be known as. By people who never took the time to get to know him, anyway.

"Like it hasn't been way, way harder for you two."

"It's okay."

"Let me know," Ryan says, with a raised eyebrow that says the rest of that sentence; *let me know if I need to do anything*.

Ilya is touched for it, a little mortified, and too slow in reacting to give his usual shrug-off. It's not like he has never had a fight on the ice, not like he isn't capable of defending himself if he needs to, but this is their camp. This isn't the place for it. Which is most of the reason he's trying to ignore it all, not react.

The part where he gets upset, frustrated, pissed off, all kinds of things, because it's offensive that anyone—anyone at all—has a problem with his and Shane's relationship, that's smaller. Or at least should be. A little voice in his head, that is most definitely Shane's, tells Ilya he doesn't have to feel guilty about feeling anything.

Their play continues. A few more minutes and then they'll pair off again, go back to coaching the kids, who are still watching them completely riveted.

Hopefully not too riveted. Less than a minute into them skating, Ilya is slamming hard into the boards, hard enough to wind him. JJ again. What the fuck?

"What the fuck are you doing?" Shane yells at JJ, skating over and quickly getting between them, squaring up so fast to JJ that he actually looks surprised as he stumbles backwards.

JJ composes himself immediately, though, brushing Shane off with a dismissive wave.

"I said," Shane says, getting right up in JJ's face, "what the fuck are you doing?"

"What? It's nothing. Right, Rozanov?" JJ calls out.

Ilya is furious. His stomach is in knots. But he won't react, he won't be that person, not in front of all these kids.

"Hollander. Calm down. Is fine," he says, skating up towards them.

JJ waves again. "See?"

“Enough,” Shane growls out at JJ, and then turns to Ilya and says, softer, “No. It’s not.”

The atmosphere on the ice is so weird now. The kids are all silent, and the hockey players are all circling round, all looking like they aren’t sure what to do.

Ilya is only glad that Yuna stepped out for some meetings, because he doesn’t like to think what her reaction might be. This is their camp, for their foundation. What the hell kind of image is this giving to these kids?

“Okay. Let’s get back to it. Let’s mix things up.”

Everyone turns when Ryan speaks. Without even checking in with Shane or Ilya—which Ilya really appreciates, actually—Ryan pairs them all up ready to work with the kids again. Ryan puts himself with JJ, and when he’s skating towards JJ looking even larger than normal, Ilya hears him quietly say, “There are fucking kids here, man. Whatever your issue is, keep it the fuck off the ice.”

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Thankfully, the moment they start coaching again, Ilya feels like himself, and everything seems to go back to normal. The kids are brilliant, impressing Ilya so much with how quickly they pick up and adopt the tips he and Bood give them. The afternoon flies by, and it’s almost a surprise to see the time when the kids are packing up to leave.

Ilya has more energy today than he did yesterday, so doesn’t feel the urge to collapse on to the first bench he sees when the last kid is gone. He is a little too tired to deal with Hayden seeking him out, though, and really doesn’t want to go into the small office Hayden is beckoning him in to.

“Sorry. I have a husband,” Ilya says before he can even stop himself.

“You wish,” Hayden says, and to Ilya’s surprise, locks the door behind him.

“No. Really not.”

“Look,” Hayden says, holding his hands out. “I just wanted to say, uh. I’m staying at the hotel with JJ. I’ll talk to him tonight.”

What? Ilya isn’t expecting that. He’s not sure what he’s expecting about anything, really.

“You don’t need to.”

“Oh, I do. JJ is being way out of line.”

What the hell is happening?

“Look. Ilya,” Hayden says; why does his name still sound so strange on his tongue? “I don’t... I didn’t get it, okay? You, and Shane. I didn’t... not that it’s any of my business, obviously. And you know, like, the whole... you know. Montreal, Boston thing?”

No. Ilya has no idea where Hayden is going with this.

“Okay?”

Sighing heavily, Hayden leans back against the door. “I think that... you’re good for him. You know? Shane. I see that. He’s happy, with you.”

Ilya swallows. “Hayden—”

“He’s always been happier, when he’s with you. Been with you. I don’t even know, man,” Hayden says then, pushing away from the door and throwing his hands up. “Every time I think back on it, like, before, and everything, with you two—”

“You think about us having sex?”

Hayden slaps his hands over his eyes, rapidly shaking his head. “Please, stop.”

“You said.”

“I’m trying to be nice.”

He is. That’s maybe the weirdest thing of all. So Ilya makes himself bite his tongue, and only nods.

“I’m not saying, that I wanna be your best friend or anything. But. I see how happy you make *my* best friend. And I don’t want—I’ll talk to JJ, okay? You shouldn’t feel like—we’re good, okay? Me and you,” Hayden says then, obviously frustrated with himself.

“Yes,” Ilya says, and actually means it, even if he is still very confused.

“So. Yeah. We’re good. I’ll talk to JJ. This camp is awesome, you know?” Hayden says then.

He waits only long enough for Ilya to nod then is unlocking the office door and awkwardly backing out of it. Ilya slumps to the end of the table and laughs, shaking his head.

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The weird just keeps on coming. After a much-needed minute to himself, Ilya heads for the locker room, hearing Shane yelling as he approaches. He starts jogging, and when he steps into the room, he finds all the hockey players in a circle. JJ, with his back against a locker, is stood rigidly at the head of it, and Shane is in his face, looking like like he’s about three seconds from punching him.

Okay. This needs to stop. Ilya pushes his way into the circle and steps into Shane’s side.

“Stop,” he says, softly, tapping him discreetly on the back of his arm.

Shane huffs, loudly, and folds his arm across his chest. “He started it.”

“What are you, five?” JJ says, which Ilya thinks is supposed to be jokey, but really just pisses him off.

“Ah, the same age as you,” Ilya says, and, fuck JJ, let him try some shit now there aren’t any kids to see.

JJ glares at him, looks Ilya over like he is something offensive. “Fuck you.”

Shane steps forward, grabbing at JJ’s jersey.

“Shane—”

“You know what, JJ??” Shane says. “If you hate being around us that much, if you hate being here—”

“I don’t!”

“No one is making you be here. If you’re that offended by us,” Shane says, still with his fist twisted in the front of JJ’s jersey as he jerks his head back at Ilya, “you don’t have to look at us. You don’t have to be here. You don’t have to be anywhere near either of us. Ever.”

Behind them, Ilya can hear Ryan and Hayden ushering everyone out of the locker room. This is all so ridiculous, so fucked up; how can the end of day two of their camp end up like this? He hates it. Ilya has the urge to just walk out right now and go home, crawl into bed, leave all of this behind.

JJ looks over their shoulders, clearly fuming, waiting until everyone else has left. His eyes dart between Shane and Ilya, and he goes to push Shane’s hand away; a soft, friendly-looking gesture.

Shane doesn’t move. Ilya knows what Shane is like when he won’t let go of something, and right now, he has a death grip on JJ’s jersey. Does JJ know that side of him?

“What the hell is your problem, JJ? I thought you were cool with this?” Shane says.

JJ’s hands flare up. “I am.”

“Right.”

“I am. I’m here, aren’t I? I came to your fucking *wedding*.”

“And yet you still can’t look my husband in the eye without being a complete dick about it,” Shane says.

JJ doesn’t manage, or doesn’t try, to hide his sneer at the word *husband*.

Ilya makes himself breathe deeply before he says something he can’t take back.

“I don’t care that you don’t like me,” Ilya tells JJ.

“Good.”

“*I* care,” Shane says.

“I don’t like you much,” Ilya adds. “But for Shane, I wanted to try. To be... okay.”

“Ilya—”

“Maybe you don’t like me, because I am me.”

“You’ve got that right.”

“Maybe you don’t like me, because we were rivals,” Ilya says, with emphasis on the *was* as he gestures at Shane. “Or, maybe you don’t like that your friend has a husband, not a wife.”

“Fuck off,” JJ seethes. “I always supported—”

“No. You didn’t,” Shane says, finally dropping his grip on JJ.

No. He didn’t. Ilya remembers that it took a full six weeks of him and Shane going back and forth planning how Shane would tell his team he was gay. He remembers the red-rimmed eyes that greeted him in their FaceTime call the night after that happened. He remembers that JJ wasn’t nice about it, that it took him more than a minute to come around. And while he did come around, the whole team aside from Hayden made Shane feel like he couldn’t put a foot out of place if he wanted their acceptance. JJ was a part of that. Ilya can’t bring himself to forgive him for it.

He has though, to a point, purely because it’s what Shane asked him to do. So, to hear Shane acknowledge that JJ wasn’t supportive immediately, it feels like a pretty big step to Ilya.

“You made me feel like I was something disgusting,” Shane says, quietly, completely breaking Ilya’s heart.

To JJ’s credit, his eyes flare wide in surprise. “Shane—”

“And that’s okay. It’s not, but, whatever. I’ve had some time to get used to people feeling like that about me. But then, we got outed,” Shane says, flicking his hand back at Ilya, “and you, and everyone else were... I don’t care if you don’t approve. Okay? I don’t. I don’t even care anymore that you all accused me of falling, deliberately.”

That’s not true. Shane has a very particular expression he pulls whenever he’s going over just how badly Montreal treated him. Ilya is sure he’ll be pulling that face for a long time.

“Shane,” JJ says, his voice both softening and getting higher, somehow. “I didn’t mean—”

“Well, you did. And, like I said. I don’t care. About any of that. Not now. But,” Shane adds, “you can’t keep being like you are with Ilya. It’s dumb. It’s asshole behaviour. I don’t expect you to, like, hug it out, or anything. But you can be polite. You can say more than three words to him. You can say *any* words to him, and not be a dick about it.”

JJ glares at Ilya, lips pinched in a thin line.

“And you can stay the fuck away from him, on the ice, at our camp, in front of the kids,” Shane says, shoving at JJ’s chest again. “If you don’t want to be here, if it’s too hard for you

not to be a dick, go. We have plenty of people helping us here. We don't need you. Not if you're acting like that."

For the first time, JJ actually looks sorry. He raises his hands in a placating gesture, and Ilya thinks he might even see tears in his eyes.

"Shane. We're friends. We've been friends, for years."

"Then, fucking act like my friend. I don't think I'm asking you too much when I'm asking you to be civil to Ilya, if you can't be anything else. I know I'm not."

Ilya would say more. He has so much pent up anger about how JJ treated Shane when he found out about them, and it's in danger of boiling over, but this whole situation is already far too tense. So he only taps his fingers against Shane's back.

He has to say something, though.

"I only care that you are a good friend to Shane. That he is not... uncomfortable, not worrying, when we need to spend time together," Ilya says, with a deliberately slow wave between him and JJ. "Is maybe better if we have no time together. If it is too difficult."

"It's not," JJ says, scowling at him. "I'm staying to help at these camps. I'm not going anywhere."

"Okay."

"Can *you* not be a complete asshole for these two weeks?" JJ asks Ilya, with a disbelieving eyebrow raise.

"Tell me one thing he's done that made him an asshole so far," Shane says immediately, and the moment JJ stumbles, snorts, and adds, "See? You can't."

"But—"

"Help us out with camp, or don't. I literally don't care right now. Maybe we'll see you tomorrow. Maybe we won't. C'mon, Ilya," Shane says, taking his hand, and leading Ilya out of the room.

Outside, the rest of the players are standing awkwardly.

"Show's over," Ilya says, aiming for a joke but sure his voice fails him.

"Shit," Shane says, dropping his head back.

"What?"

Shane gestures at the two of them. "We still need to get showered, changed. We need our stuff. It's in there, still."

“I’m done in my locker room. Go use that one,” Leah says, waving for their attention, giving a small, almost apologetic smile.

Clearly, she’s been caught up on the drama while standing out here. Ilya is embarrassed that their friends have been dragged into this but doesn’t know what he’s supposed to say about it.

Hayden grips Shane’s arm in passing, nodding towards the locker room. “I’ll go get your stuff. Give me a sec.”

The rest of the players smile, give hugs, little understanding gestures. It all feels both surreal and silly, and Ilya can’t wait to be home. He lets his forehead land on Shane’s shoulder the moment they are alone in the other locker room, closing his eyes as Shane gets his arms around him.

“Hayden is being very nice to me today.”

“Good.”

“It is strange.”

“Stop complaining.”

“I’m not. I will be very happy when we are home,” Ilya says, getting a kiss into Shane’s neck before pulling back.

Sighing, Shane draws back too, absently adjusting something on Ilya’s jersey. “Me, too.”

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“Can we talk about JJ?” Shane says once they have eaten and cleared up after dinner, and are cuddled up on the couch.

Ilya doesn’t want to. He hides his face in Shane’s neck, ignoring the thought that yes, actually, they probably should talk about that.

“Ilya...”

What can he do but blow a raspberry against Shane’s neck before he hoists himself up enough to look at him?

“What?”

Shane tucks his fingers beneath Ilya’s t-shirt hem. “I hate that he’s upsetting you.”

“I am not upset,” Ilya replies. When Shane just stares at him, he amends this to, “I’m not very upset.”

“Any kind of upset is not good, Ilya. He shouldn’t be like that with you.”

He wants to say it’s okay, and knows Shane won’t want to hear that, so gives a one-shoulder shrug.

“But it’s like... I don’t know. I guess I’m not actually... I’m not surprised that he’s, you know. Acting like that. No,” Shane says, and shakes his head, stretching up to kiss him. “That’s not what I mean. I mean, I guess I’m not surprised that he lied when he said he was okay with this. Us.”

“Maybe is not a lie?”

“It’s definitely not true.”

“Maybe. But maybe... it is just because it is me.”

“Ilya. That’s sort of the whole point. You’re *mine*,” Shane says, squeezing Ilya’s waist. “I don’t give a fuck who has a problem with that. Least of all JJ.”

Ilya doesn’t even try to fight his smile. “*And you are mine*,” he whispers in Russian, loving how it makes Shane’s eyes light up.

“Exactly.”

“Maybe... I don’t know. Maybe JJ is angry because without you, Montreal are nothing.”

That light in Shane’s eyes changes to something a little smugger, and then a little more humble.

“They’re still a good team. Even without me there.”

“Mm. We will see soon enough,” Ilya says, and kisses him on the cheek.

“And even if that was true,” Shane says, turning his head for another kiss, “that isn’t your fault. I left Montreal because of them. Not you.”

Why does that bring such relief to Ilya? He keeps being hit with these stupid moments of imagining that Shane does blame him for having to leave his team. It’s pretty obvious, when his brain isn’t taking over, that that isn’t true at all, but Ilya can’t help thinking it. So to hear Shane so easily say the very thing to take away that fear, is a little overwhelming for Ilya. He doesn’t want Shane to think he’s crying, or upset, and he knows he won’t get away with brushing this off, or trying to be playful. So instead he just kisses him, slow and steady, unhurried like he always wants to kiss him.

“If he bothered to get to know you, even a little, he’d know he was being an ass about all this,” Shane says in between those kisses.

“He doesn’t want. I don’t think I want. I just want... simple. I want you to not worry. I want... I don’t know.”

“You want, the most normal thing to want,” Shane says, slotting his fingers together against Ilya’s back.

“Yes?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“What is normal to want?”

“Acceptance. Acceptance that you’re the most important thing in my life. Because you are,” Shane says, kissing him. “And you want—and *I* want—the other people in my life to be okay with that. To be good with it.”

He really does always know Ilya better than he thinks, taking the very words from his thoughts.

“Everyone else is okay,” he says.

“Exactly. Literally everybody else. Even Hayden,” Shane says, his lips twitching.

Ilya sighs. “Even Hayden.”

“You like him. You do,” Shane says gleefully, when Ilya waves his hand in a *maybe* gesture.

“He was nice to me today.”

“Good. He should be.”

“Maybe not always...”

“Oh, because then you’ll always have to be nice to him?” Shane says with a knowing smile.

“Maybe. Hayden is... not bad,” Ilya then admits, in part because it’s true, and in part because he knows that, even though Shane would never say it, it means a lot to him.

“Hayden’s awesome.”

“Just okay. No. He’s good. He has been good with you. Always. About us.”

Even in the moments when he really hasn’t liked Hayden, Ilya has always known that.

Shane runs a hand down the back of his arm, smiling softly in that relaxed way he does that makes Ilya’s heart soar. Obviously, he has to kiss him for it.

“Mom will be back soon,” Shane says after a while, fingertips beneath the waistband of Ilya’s sweatpants, but making no other move.

“I know.”

“So...”

“Comfortable,” Ilya mumbles, slipping further down the couch so he can better drop his face into Shane’s neck.

Laughing softly, Shane pulls a throw from the back of the couch, covers them over, and snuggles in.



## Chapter 4

“Oh my god; how did you eat three already?” Shane says, watching in bemusement as Ilya works through his current granola bar.

Harris brought in one large box of granola bars yesterday, and they were gone within five minutes. On top of the ridiculous amount of stuff Ilya and Shane picked up on the way to the rink.

Yes. They definitely need to get more food in for the hockey players, or at least for Ilya, who has a nice idea of clearing this entire table right now.

“Four.”

“Oh my god.”

“Is good,” Ilya says around a bite, swallowing, then deciding Shane needs a taste.

He leans in and kisses him, with a fairly polite flick of his tongue against his lips.

Shane narrows his eyes at him, but smiles, even licks his lips when Ilya moves back.

“So, you prefer Harris’ granola bars to my overnight oats?” Shane says, not even close to keeping the smile off his face.

“No, no,” Ilya says, holding his waist, “I can have both.”

“Maybe we should just come here tomorrow to eat if they're so much better...”

“No,” Ilya whispers again, pretending to pout, which makes Shane’s eyes light up.

“No?”

“No,” Ilya says, grabbing another granola bar without looking. He holds it up for Shane to take a bite, then pops the rest of it into his mouth.

Sighing, Shane chews, not taking his eyes off Ilya as he swallows.

“Okay. Yeah, they’re pretty good.”

“Let me taste,” Ilya says, pulling Shane in by the waist again and kissing him with another dart of his tongue against his lips.

“I just put them in here, Rozanov. Five minutes ago. What the hell? You have no food at home?”

Why it’s such a thrill that Shane doesn’t even flinch for the sound of another person walking in on them, Ilya doesn’t know. He won’t be getting completely used to it any time soon,

though.

“Harris. Is only because they taste so good,” Ilya says, tangling his fingers through Shane’s before he drops his hand.

“Yes. They’re really good. Thank you,” Shane says, watching with Ilya as Harris lowers yet more Tupperware boxes to the table, then slapping Ilya’s hand away when he reaches for one.

“No problem. Troy’s bringing the rest in.”

“There are more?”

“For the kids. Don’t worry. All labelled, all allergen free, no nuts, and I have a batch for our kid with diabetes. And,” Hayden adds, tapping the smallest box, “I even made some dog-friendly ones for Anya.”

“You made dog treats?” Ilya says, reaching for and cracking open the box Harris just tapped, calling out for Anya. He gasps, holding it up. "Look, Shane. They are little bones!"

Shane peers in the box, plucking one of the bones out to inspect. "Oh, that's amazing. She'll love them."

Harris smiles, pleased. “She’s with Ryan. I think Ryan will be talking Fabian into getting a dog in about, oh, maybe ten seconds.”

“*Good.*”

“You can make dog treats?” Shane says in surprise as he hands the bone treat over to Ilya, then laughs at himself. “I mean, I guess, obviously.”

Laughing too, Harris peels the lid back off yet another Tupperware box. “I got some recipes recommended by our vet.”

“That’s awesome. You... think you can make treats for cats, too?”

“Shane wants a cat next. For our next pet,” Ilya says, briefly hooking his chin over Shane’s shoulder before he heads out in search of Anya.

“I’ll keep an eye out for you at the farm,” Harris says.

“Seriously?”

“Just one,” Ilya calls over his shoulder as he leaves the room, as though he would actually object to any number.

He almost walks straight into Troy, who has four Tupperware boxes wedged under his chin.

“Don’t look at me. I think he wanted to make enough for the whole rest of week,” Troy says with a laugh as Ilya raises an eyebrow.

“I said nothing.”

“Hey. You doing okay?”

Troy already texted Ilya last night, and he wasn't the only one. It feels weird, in a good way, to have so much support, and in a worse way, that it's even needed.

“Yes. No problem now.”

“Did he message, or anything?”

“He does not have my number.” And Ilya doesn't want to give JJ his number. He just wants a little peace again.

“Well. He won't be pulling a stunt like that again,” Troy says, squaring his shoulders. “And don't even try and tell me it's okay. I don't know what his problem is, but he's out of order.”

Ilya is too touched to stand here and hear anything else, so he smiles, holds up the dog treat, and nods to the door. “I should take this. To Anya.”

“She's with Ryan. And in danger of being dognapped.”

No, she isn't. Ilya marches off in search of Ryan and Anya, hearing Troy laughing behind him.

---

Hayden and JJ are the last of the players to arrive, both looking tired. Hayden seems troubled, and JJ just looks pissed. Ilya refuses to acknowledge how his stomach knots just for seeing him, keeping himself busy putting equipment in place on the ice.

“Rozanov.”

Oh, fuck, here we go, starting already. Ilya has the nice idea of ignoring him, but chooses to play nice. He straightens up from the ice and turns, unhurried, arranging his face into the most unbothered expression he can.

JJ studies him, pinched lips, clenched jaw, a mixture of loathing and fury in his eyes. “I'm not apologising.”

Of course he isn't. Ilya never expected he would. He never expected he'd care, though, but again, keeps that hidden with a shrug.

“I'll back off today. Here,” JJ says, gesturing at the rink before glaring back at him. “Now. For camp.”

Got it. Ilya hears the message loud and clear. JJ will try to behave himself now, but once the season starts, he has an enemy. Another one. A worse one than he had before. Ilya's heart sinks for thinking about it, hating what that will do to Shane. Personally, he'll happily knock JJ out on the ice mid game if he needs to come October, but knowing what it will do to his husband leaves a bitter taste in Ilya's mouth.

“Okay,” Ilya says, getting back to readying the equipment.

He hears JJ slap his hands by his sides, and his cold laugh.

“That’s it?”

Spinning on the ice Ilya skids towards JJ before he even realises, stopping himself in time from shoving him backwards. “You want me to say thank you?”

“What’s going on?”

Great. Shane picked this moment to come out here. Ilya steps back, cursing himself, pointlessly rearranging the cone he just put down.

Not before he catches JJ making a gesture implying that Ilya is the problem, not him.

Whatever.

“Nothing. Morning, Shane,” JJ says in an overly friendly voice that has Ilya gritting his teeth.

“Apologising, are you?” Shane says, not sounding friendly at all.

“Is fine,” Ilya says, straightening up, and, fuck JJ. He slides closer to Shane and kisses him, winking as he passes to leave them to it.

---

Thankfully, JJ doesn’t so much as look in Ilya’s direction all day. Ilya is aware that Hayden is covering JJ like they are in the playoffs and there is a cup at stake, which is, well. Something. He’s in trouble, because he can’t pretend he isn’t endeared by Hayden’s attempts at being friendly for all that much longer. Ilya does wish all of this wasn’t necessary, though.

The kids are, as always, incredible. Their confidence is really coming out today, their energy on the ice starting to feel like a real hockey game. Ilya’s heart still skips every time he sees Shane being sweet with the kids, he can’t help himself.

“You think our kids will come to camp?” Ilya lets slip out as, towards the end of the day, they watch Wyatt run drills with three kids who look destined to be future, phenomenal goalies.

Shane snorts. “Of course.”

“You don’t think they will be embarrassed?”

Shane’s look for him is incredulous. “About what?”

“I don’t know,” Ilya says, shrugging. “Is kids. Maybe they think their parents are embarrassing. Maybe they think our camp is embarrassing.”

Shane visibly pales. “What if they don’t even like hockey?”

Ilya can’t help bursting out laughing. “Oh, no…”

“I’m serious.”

“Shane. We cannot make them love hockey like you love hockey.”

Shane shoves half-heartedly at his arm. “You love hockey, too.”

“Not like you. Nobody does.”

“Mom does.”

“Okay. Yes. True.”

“Ilya. What if our kids don’t even like hockey?” Shane says, looking actually concerned.

“Is terrible. Maybe they will go to baseball camp instead.”

“No.”

“Or, I don’t know. Astronaut. No... you know. Astronom.”

Shane’s lips pinch together. “Astronomy isn’t so bad.”

“Oh, you approve?”

“I like star gazing with you.”

“Mm. Me, too,” Ilya says, planning already that they’re having a night out under the stars the moment camp is done, and they’re at the cottage alone.

“What if our kids don’t like hockey?” Shane says again, actually looking like he is going over such a scenario and figuring out what they’ll do about it.

Ilya is in love, so very in love. He kisses him on the cheek, knowing the moment Shane is back from his spiralling thoughts for the rueful smile he gives him.

“Stop being angry at our kids. They are not here yet. And we will love them, hockey or no hockey.”

Now, Shane’s smile is beautiful. “Yeah. We will.”

“Yes.”

“But, you know. Not yet.”

“No. In a few years.”

“Yeah.”

Ilya tilts his chin towards Hayden. “We have plenty of practice being cool uncles. Me, anyway.”

“Hey.”

Ilya winks at him. Shane rolls his eyes, but is grinning over his shoulder as he skates away.

---

“So. Jackie found a recipe she wants to try out on you.”

Ilya pauses from putting on his skate, mostly for how enthusiastically Hayden sits down beside him. So enthusiastic, that the bench actually creaks.

It’s Thursday morning. Ilya is still loving camp, but he’s also very much looking forward to Saturday morning when there is a whole day stretched out in front of them with absolutely no plans. That Shane was the one who mumbled into his chest this morning how he couldn’t wait to do nothing with him, makes Saturday sound even more incredible. Right now, it feels a bit too far away.

For a second, Ilya can’t focus on the phone screen Hayden just shoved in his face for how the bench wobbles beneath them.

“Meatballs?” he says, finally looking at the screen.

“No,” Hayden says, exasperated as he actually knocks his arm against Ilya’s. “It’s... this thing. Uh... *tefteli*?”

A wall of emotions hits Ilya.

He’s touched, because Jackie has gone out of her way in recent months trying to find Russian recipes, their afternoon making *pelmeni* together one of Ilya’s favourites spent with the Pikes.

He’s bewildered, by how enthusiastically Hayden just sat down with him.

He’s amused, and oddly swallowing back a slight lump in his throat, for Hayden’s butchering of the word *tefteli*. So amused, and whatever, touched, that he can’t even bring himself to point out that *tefteli* are, in fact, meatballs.

“Looks good,” he says instead.

“Monday is a no. First day of camp we’re always wiped out. But, we were thinking you and Shane could come over for dinner on Tuesday?”

This is new. Normally Ilya hears about dinner plans with the Pikes through Shane.

“Oh. Yes. I think we can.”

“Better than hotel food,” Hayden says.

“Jackie is a good cook.”

“She’s the best. So... is that a yes?”

Why does he look so eager? Why is Ilya fighting back a smile for that?

“I think so. I don’t think we made any plans yet.”

“Hey. Do you think Yuna would want to come too? She’d be at the hotel by herself, otherwise, but, I don’t know. What do you think?”

He’s asking him? Instead of Shane. This continues to be the weirdest week he’s spent with Hayden by far, but again Ilya just finds himself oddly touched for it all.

“I think she would like that.”

“Good. David could come too, but, you know.”

“He will be here.”

Secretly, Ilya thinks David loves these camp weeks that he gets to himself. David has sent him photos of two puzzles he’s done already, and last night he was happily nursing the vodka Ilya had specially imported for him.

“It’s too bad David misses out on all this,” Hayden says.

“Maybe. He is working, though. We will have lunch together before we come to Montreal on Sunday.”

“That’s good. I’m heading back right after we’re done on Friday. I owe like, a million bedtime stories,” Hayden says, attempting to inject a grumble into his voice, even if his eyes are saying something completely different.

He won’t be telling Hayden this either, but when he and Shane do eventually have kids, Ilya will be looking to Hayden as an example. For some things, anyway.

“You will do voices,” Ilya teases.

“Hey. My kids love my voices.”

“Yes. Of course.”

Sighing, Hayden stands up. “But. Don’t be surprised if they don’t ask Uncle Ilya for a bedtime story on Tuesday.”

“They like my voices too.”

“Voice. You have one voice.”

“I think you like my voice.”

Hayden flushes, immediately seeking out Shane across the room, and nodding at him. “Someone does.”

“Yes. Very much.”

“Alright. That’s my cue to go. I’m gonna…”

Ilya schools in a smile, nodding when Hayden thumbs over his shoulder and turns away. He catches Shane’s eye too, nodding at him as well when Shane raises an eyebrow and looks at Hayden, as if to say, *is everything okay?*

Ilya winks back, loving that he can picture the bunching up of Shane’s freckles, even from all the way over here.

---

“Did Bood tell you he’s doing a barbecue for us all next Saturday? When we’re back from Montreal?” Shane says to Ilya later that day, as they pick at what’s left of Harris’ granola bars during an afternoon break.

“No. I thought he would, though.”

“That jerk chicken thing he does? I could eat ten pieces right now,” Shane says, which Ilya loves to hear.

Shane has only been to one of Bood’s grill nights so far, but that he looked so at home immediately made Ilya’s heart feel easy.

“Oh, that’s my favourite too,” Troy says as he joins them, reaching across the table for one of the granola bars. “And. Harris’ sisters are sending us with a couple of cases with cider. Some of it’s new stuff. We’re their guinea pigs for a couple new flavours.”

“Oh, that cider’s pretty good too,” Shane says.

Ilya smirks at this, and pats Shane on the hip. “I will drive. So you can drink more.”

“We can get a cab.”

“Or that.”

“Actually, I think…” Shane glances around the room, then lowers his voice. “Hayden was saying, maybe, Jackie’s mom might have the kids for the night. So they can come. To Bood’s.”

“They can stay with us,” Ilya says before he can overthink it.

It’s no surprise, really, that Shane looks so startled.

“Seriously?”

Ilya shrugs, wanting this to come across as not a big deal, when it is, really. This is the first time that they will have had friends over to stay, since getting married, since living together. It’s huge. It’s exciting, too, that they actually get to do something like this.

“It makes sense. We need to clean the spare rooms when Mom goes home. Yuna. You know,” Ilya says, pleased that such few words can make Shane’s face light up like it is.

He's not expecting Shane to look at him like he is about to tackle him to the nearest horizontal surface, but he does like he might. It's almost a pity that he doesn't go through with it.

Instead, Shane pats him on the chest, and says, "I can't believe she claimed the second room for her office."

"You can't?"

Laughing, Shane wrinkles his nose. "Okay. Maybe I can."

"Yes."

"So... I'll go tell him? Hayden?"

"Yes," Ilya says, giving Shane's hand a discreet squeeze.

Troy waits until Shane is out of earshot. "Bood didn't invite JJ."

The fact that his stomach knots for even hearing JJ's name right now, is really starting to piss Ilya off.

"Okay. He probably wouldn't go anyway."

"Maybe. But you know that's not why he's not invited. And if he hears about it, and he's pissed? Fuck him."

Ilya resists the urge to agree, or say it's fine again, because he knows Troy won't buy that. So he only nods, and grabs another granola bar.

"Maybe you will make more of these," he says around a bite, holding the rest of the bar up.

Sighing, Troy tosses another piece into his mouth. "No offence, but, after how many we made, and ate at home before we even got here, I'll be good if I don't see another granola bar for a while."

"Shane wanted to order protein shakes for next week."

Troy does his best not to grimace. "Well. That's... not granola bars at least?"

"We are not having protein shakes," Ilya says, laughing. "No. We hired a caterer. For breakfast things."

"Oh, thank fuck, that's way better. I mean..."

"Is okay. I am the same."

Troy snorts, and tosses a last crumb of granola bar into his mouth. "So... JJ hasn't so much as looked at you since Shane called him out, right? I mean... after that. I know he didn't apologise."

“I don’t need that.”

“But he should.”

He’d love to stop talking about this already. He would absolutely love that none of this was a thing. There is a part of Ilya now, that sounds suspiciously like his brother, telling him how pathetic it is, that all of these people around him—*his* people—are so concerned about him. That he’s weak for it. That’s he’s nothing. On his *things to be happy about list* he made this morning, Ilya added, *I am lucky I have such good friends*, so his brother, and his brain, can fuck off. They don’t get to take that away from him.

“Thank you,” he says, squashing those horrible words down.

Stretching, Troy looks around the room before at his watch. “You know what?”

“What?”

“We’re gonna make Montreal cry next season. You just watch. They won’t be anything without him.”

“Oh, I know.”

“And obviously, you have all our backs,” Troy says, gesturing at the Centaurs players around him. “But I don’t think he’ll be so big and brave as to start shit with Ilya Rozanov when it’s not in front of a bunch of kids.”

Ilya can only smile at that. It’s amazing to think that he’s had his walls up all this time, always managed to keep some kind of mystery around himself. Look at what a facade that has proved to be. His people—his friends, his new family—they see right through all of it. They know him. It’s such a weird, but wonderful feeling, to know that he is seen.

## Chapter 5

Friday morning. This week has passed so quickly, and at the same time has felt twice as long. Ilya is excited to see the kids on their final day, even a little sad that he won't be seeing them again, but is also longing for the weekend. He'll never get enough of alone time with Shane, no matter how much time they'll now get.

He is thinking about a very nice long morning in bed as he sorts through the nets in the equipment room, when he hears footfall behind him.

And the door closing.

"Hey," Shane says, grinning at him when Ilya turns, then looks around the room, and laughs. "Oh. I really do keep forgetting how small this room is."

"Not too small," Ilya says.

"Maybe not for us, but, I kind of trapped Ryan in here last year," Shane says, with a guilty wince.

For picturing the look on Ryan's face, Ilya can't help snorting. "You wanted to be alone with Ryan?"

"No. I mean—I was asking him about us having dinner. You know. That first one."

Ilya does know. God, what a whirlwind of a year it has been for them.

"I know. Is everything okay?"

"Yes. Sorry," Shane says, clearing his throat, and two seconds after Ilya hears a rustling paper bag, adds, "Open up."

Of course Ilya does, smiling around the cookie now hanging out of his mouth.

Oh, it's good, those pecan chocolate chip ones that he could eat his body weight in.

"You hid these when we were buying breakfast things?"

"I did," Shane says, looking so, so pleased with himself.

Ilya holds the cookie out, and around a mouthful, asks, "You want?"

Shane shakes his head, taking another cookie from the bag and then passing the bag to Ilya. "Just one for me. There are four more in there for you."

"My favourite cookie."

"I know. Also," Shane says, taking him by the waist, then stops speaking.

Ilya knows it's going to be good, whatever it is, because Shane's freckles are now scrunched up and standing out .

“What?”

“You know. Happy two week anniversary. Of being married, anyway.”

Ilya can only grin at him, euphoria roaring in his chest. Look at his sappy husband, so pleased with himself, and giving him cookies. Is there really a better start to the day than this?

Yes, actually.

“Happy two week anniversary,” Ilya replies, then backs him against the equipment room door, shushing Shane when his laughter rings out.

---

The last sessions of camps are always a little chaotic in the best kinds of ways, lots more goofing off instead of coaching. Ilya is sure the kids have learned a lot this week anyway, judging by how good they all are.

There are mini trophies, competitions, speeches, jokes, and underwriting all of this, laughter. So much laughter it feels like they are all doubled over at one point, clutching their sides.

“Damn. I'm always so sad when they start leaving,” Hayden says, as parents drift in to pick up their kids and mingle, some go off to change, and those who weren't already brave enough to ask for autographs and selfies finally find the courage.

“It makes you miss your kids?” Ilya asks.

Hayden's eyes close, and he drops his head back. “I can't wait to get home to them. But, I mean, of course it's that, but, you know. We get to know them all. All week long. And then they're just gone again. I don't know.”

Ilya watches Hayden's gaze across the ice, also feeling a little bittersweet.

“Yes. It is strange.”

“Next week though, right?” Hayden says, turning a smile on him. “And I bet, in a few years, these camps will go on for more than two weeks.”

It's true, they probably will be doing that. But as much as Ilya loves these camps, he can't imagine wanting to give more than two weeks of his summer up for the actual camps themselves. They put so much time in throughout the year with other things as it is.

Maybe it will feel different going forward, because he gets to actually live his life with Shane by his side now?

He doesn't say any of this to Hayden, though, just gives him a semi-awkward pat on the shoulder before stepping off the ice. He and Shane have a final round of paperwork to sign and their last debriefing with Yuna. The sooner they do that, the sooner they can head home.

Or, Yuna can. By the time they have finished, him and Shane will end up going for a drink and heading to dinner straight from here. Ilya is still looking forward to all of it, but he won't complain about falling into bed later tonight.

He finds Shane talking on his phone in French, leaning against the wall outside the locker room looking beautiful, but tired. He smiles at Ilya, reaching out to take his hand. Ilya raises Shane's to kiss it, echoing Shane's immediate smile.

"It's a good thing we didn't risk having time to go home and get ready," Shane says when he finishes the call. "That was another journalist. They're gonna be here in, I don't know, maybe ten minutes?"

"Another French one, yes?"

"Yes. Which means you're done for the day and can take a break," Shane says, twisting their hands up so he can prod Ilya softly in the stomach.

"We need to do our last meeting."

"I know," Shane says, getting a quick kiss in, "but like, maybe in half an hour or so now. Sorry."

"No. No sorry," Ilya says, cupping Shane's face for another kiss. "I will make sure everything is put away, go make coffee. Where will you take them? The journalist?"

"Maybe at that place at the back of the rink again, with the better light? They always want the better light."

"They want to see your freckles."

Freckles which immediately stand out against red cheeks. It's so easy to make that happen. Ilya kisses over Shane's cheeks until he laughs, then tugs him away from the wall to hug him.

"It was a good week."

"Mm," Shane says, tucking his face in his neck, "it was great. I'm glad it's the weekend, though."

"Yes, me too."

Shane sighs softly, the happy kind of sigh Ilya usually hears when Shane is sleepy, and snuggling in at home. This is nice here too, though. It's nice getting to touch Shane wherever they are, whenever he wants, especially since they have so long been deprived of it. Ilya closes his eyes, happy to just stand here, quietly, for as long as possible.

There are still things to do, though. Ilya helps Ryan finish tidying the equipment room, gets hugs in with Bood and Wyatt, and then Max and Leah, since they all have other plans tonight so are the first to head out. Troy and Harris try to push the very last granola bar on Ilya, but even he is done with looking at them.

“Hey, are we going to Monks before dinner?” Troy asks, as they tie off the last bag of trash. “I don’t know this restaurant we’re going to, but, I looked it up. It’s not far.”

“I think so? Everybody is arriving maybe a different time. Shane and me will be last, probably.”

“Okay. So, we can probably head straight home, shower there, then head out again?” Harris says, perching on the end of the table beside them.

Ilya nods. “Good idea.”

“I hope you and Shane don’t need to stay here too late.”

“Mm, me, too. Maybe one more hour. No more than two. I hope.”

“Sucks to be you,” Troy teases, laughing when Ilya flips him off. “Okay. So... we’ll get going? See you soon?”

Now sure that everything that needed to be done has been, Ilya heads for a shower. He is surprised by Hayden again, who hugs him on the way out of the locker room, laughing as he pushes the door open and steps inside.

The shower is good and hot, much needed after a long, but good week. Not as good as their shower at home, and obviously nowhere near as good as sharing a shower alone with Shane, but it does feel really good to be clean.

Of course he’s forgotten that JJ is still here. Ilya’s good mood dips the moment he walks around the side of the showers to grab his clothes and get dressed, finding JJ standing there by his locker.

Of course JJ glares at him, like he shouldn’t even be there.

“I thought you had left,” Ilya says, pulling the towel he has for his hair from around his shoulders, tossing it into the giant laundry hamper at the back of the room.

JJ narrows his eyes. “Yeah, you’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes?”

“Yeah, well, tough,” JJ says, slamming his locker door back as he opens it.

Ilya starts getting dressed, wanting to be anywhere else, but fuck JJ. He’s not rushing just because he is here. “I don’t care. You do what you want.”

“I want to talk to Shane. He’s been avoiding me basically all week.”

“Oh, really? Why do you think?”

“Because of *you*,” JJ says, raising his voice and looking absolutely furious.

It's not untrue. It's also not Ilya's fault, he knows that. He also doesn't care right now.

"Shane is busy, probably, for some time," he says, slinging his second towel in the hamper.

"Why? Did you give him shit to do so he couldn't talk to me?"

Ilya laughs, not bothering to answer.

"You did, didn't you?"

Ilya just keeps dressing, glad he's put on the jeans he knows are one of Shane's favourite pairs to see him in.

"I'm fucking talking to you."

For the growled out words, Ilya rolls his eyes, but the hard grab around his upper arm is the thing to make him snap. He turns quickly, shoving JJ against the lockers so hard that the entire frame rattles, shoving again when he tries to push him off.

"Enough," he says, quietly, watching JJ pant and seethe, for absolutely no good reason at all. "This is fucking bullshit."

"I'm losing my friend because of you," JJ shouts at him.

"I don't think you are losing your friend. Shane is a good person. Better than me."

"Yeah. You got that right."

"You don't treat him like you think I am right," Ilya points out, dropping his hand.

"Whatever."

"No. Not whatever," Ilya says, while grabbing his shirt from the bench behind him and pulling it on. "You hurt him very much. Me, you can hate, you can dislike, you can be rude, you can do all of it. I don't care. I care, that you upset him."

JJ's mouth opens and closes. "We're good."

"Oh yes?"

"Yes. It's just *you*," JJ says, looking like he's thinking of shoving at Ilya, or something.

Ilya only glares at him, daring him to, watching as JJ lowers his hands.

"He defended you. Defended Montreal. Defended everyone. For a long time," Ilya says. "It was terrible to watch. It was even more terrible when he couldn't defend you. I think you broke his heart, a little."

JJ's breathing becomes shallow. His hands are in fists, and Ilya thinks he sees angry tears in his eyes.

“You don’t like me,” Ilya continues. “That is okay. Is not a problem for me. I only wanted us to be okay, for Shane. If we can’t be, we can’t. But you will stop making him unhappy. And it makes him unhappy, if you keep showing how much you hate me. I think you can hate me, more quietly. You can be quiet, yes? For him?”

“Why you?” JJ says, exasperated and defeated, it seems, in equal measure. The sound of his hand slapping against his side rings out against the lockers. “Why you, when it could have been literally anyone else, any other guy in the world?”

“We are good. We are happy. If Shane is your friend—”

“He *is*.”

“—you can be happy that he is happy, yes? You can be happy for your friend?”

JJ continues to stare at him, breathing hard.

Ilya closes his eyes, composes his thoughts a little before speaking again. “I owe you nothing. But, I promise you, that I will always do everything I can, to make him happy. I can promise you that. I can do no more.”

Again, JJ says nothing. Ilya rolls his eyes, sitting on the bench to put on his socks and shoes.

“One more thing.”

“What?” JJ says.

“Next week. If you are helping at the camp in Montreal—”

“I am.

“Then you will not be like this week,” Ilya says, pausing, and looking up at him. “These camps are important. These kids are important. Your problem with me, is not.”

“Fine,” JJ says, standing there with his arms folded.

Ilya says nothing else until he stands again, stepping closer.

“If you do one thing, any single thing, next week, you will not be helping us again. Do you understand me?” Ilya says, letting all the anger he feels about all of this show for several seconds, watching JJ start to look unsure of himself, then his shoulders slump. “I said,” Ilya says, stepping closer still, “do you understand me?”

“Fine. Yeah. Whatever.”

“You will not ruin these camps. You will not upset these kids. You will not upset my husband,” Ilya adds, knowing a moment of glee, that that word, *husband*, still seems to make JJ squirm.

He waits only long enough for JJ to nod then is stuffing everything in his bag, leaving him in the locker room without another word.

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“JJ’s not coming next week,” Shane tells Ilya later, when they have settled in a corner booth at Monks with Ryan and Fabian, waiting for Troy and Harris to arrive.

Fabian is at the bar getting drinks for all of them, and Ryan left to use the restroom—Ilya half-suspects it’s to give Shane a minute to share this news. Though why would Ryan know before he does?

“Oh?” Ilya says, knowing a swell of emotions, including guilt for being the reason JJ isn’t coming, and anger that he couldn’t be a better friend to Shane.

Shane seems unconcerned, genuinely so. He leans against him squeezing his hand around Ilya’s thigh, and tilts his head for Ilya to kiss him.

“He’s been a dick all week. Not with everything, but, enough stuff. Mom... told him he wasn’t welcome if he came with an attitude, but, I kinda got the impression he’d decided he wouldn’t come anyway.”

“When did this happen?” Ilya says, running over the events of the evening, trying to imagine when there would have been time for this conversation.

“When you were taking Anya for a walk, before Mom took her home for us.”

That wasn’t all that long ago, because Yuna was good enough to wait until they were changed so she could take their bags back with Anya as well. All Ilya can picture now is JJ hanging around at the rink out of sight, waiting to talk to Shane.

“We argued,” Ilya says with a long sigh, letting his forehead fall against Shane’s.

Shane laughs softly, bringing his hand up to rest on his arm. “I figured.”

“Really?”

“Just from the look on his face, and, some of the things he said. Not about you,” Shane asks, apparently reading the question on Ilya’s face. “He said something about how he knew he hadn’t been a great friend to me.”

“I told him that. And it is true.”

“Yeah,” Shane says, laughing again, and kissing him, “I figured that, too.”

“It *is* true.”

“I know it is.”

Well, that is good to hear. Ilya wraps his arm around Shane and nuzzles against his hair.

“Sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for. It’s him. It was him all week. It’s stupid. And, you know. You are Mom’s favourite son,” Shane adds, teasing him. “She was so pissed at him, I thought he was gonna cry.”

Oh, shit. Shane's words now sink in for Ilya.

“She knows what happened?”

“She’s known all week. I don’t even know how she managed not to say anything. You know Mom.”

Ilya does. Yuna is never one to bite her tongue, so this is pretty amazing to hear.

“Oh,” he says, because he doesn’t know what else to.

“Yeah. I can’t figure out what JJ thought she was maddest about. How he was with you, or, the fact that one of the kids told their parent that JJ was being a dick.”

Shit. That’s exactly what the foundation does not need. He must looked panicked, because Shane kisses him in reassurance, and stays up close to him even when Ryan returns.

“Fabian’s coming. He got talking,” Ryan says with an affectionate eye roll, handing out their drinks from a tray.

“Thanks. And thanks for, you know,” Shane says to Ryan, and to Ilya, “Ryan’s scheduling our practices next week. Working out who to pair up, how many kids.”

“I don’t mind helping. It’s been a great week,” Ryan says.

Shane, unleashing a little bit of control, not immediately trying to micromanage the changes JJ’s absence brings himself? That’s new. It’s also nice to think about.

“Thank you,” Ilya tells Ryan, raising his bottle in toast.

“No problem. I’m happy to do it. But, it’s... kind of impossible saying no to your mom,” Ryan says with a bashful smile, as Shane groans.

“Yeah, she put him on speaker phone, talked to him like it was a done deal, and that’s that.”

Ilya laughs. “She does that.”

Ryan laughs too. “I don’t mind, though. It’s good. It’s probably even good for me, for later. You know. When I start studying.”

“Thank you,” Ilya says, for not knowing what else to.

Luckily, Fabian joins them then, so he doesn’t have to think about it.

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The seafood restaurant is incredible, with so many amazing dishes, really good company, and, best thing of all for Ilya, getting to watch Shane relax. He was the one to suggest they take a cab tonight so they could both drink, which Ilya thinks is even better. Shane eats a ton, too, not pausing before he tries anything, not studying the menu for the healthiest choices, or looking longingly at what's on Ilya's plate as he has done so many times in the past. He has even helped himself twice, now, stealing some of Ilya's noodles and one of his shrimp. Ilya is so enchanted by this it feels like he hasn't stopped smiling.

Things will probably be different once hockey season starts, Ilya fully expecting many a conversation about the food they eat. He's not worried about it. In fact he's sure they'll probably meet in the middle, because while it's a relief to see Shane letting himself eat more liberally, Ilya knows for himself that he should probably eat a little healthier than he probably is.

This is a thing to think about in October, though.

"You would look incredible with some eyeliner," Fabian is telling Shane, who has his hand curled in Ilya's against his lap.

"He's right," Ilya says, jubilant because he can lean in, kiss Shane behind the ear, and absolutely not need to think about it.

Shane still blushes, though, obviously. And obviously, it is beautiful to look at.

"Yeah, it would probably suit you, too," he says, tapping his thumb against Ilya's knee.

"Oh, for sure," Fabian says, his gaze flicking over Ilya's face.

"He tried to put it on me once," Ryan says with a wince that turns into a smile the moment Fabian pouts. "It was more painful than the time I tried contacts."

"Which looked amazing," Fabian says, with a look of heat, and adds, "it was for Halloween last year."

"Amazing, for maybe two minutes. Turns out, I'm allergic to both things."

"I was thinking about contacts," Shane says, which is a lie, and Ilya knows he only says to wind him up.

Ilya takes the bait anyway, whining in complaint, "Don't you dare."

"What? Then I could see everything better."

"You only need for reading. Who needs to read so much? I will read to you," Ilya says, which just has Shane's eyes lighting up with a look of intent.

"Promise?"

"Yes."

“In Russian?”

“In anything,” Ilya says, nudging his shoulder against Shane’s.

Ryan’s snorts with laughter at them, while Fabian lets out a soft, sensual chuckle. Troy and Harris look a little lost in one another so probably haven’t heard much of this conversation, both looking sheepish when Ilya waggles his eyebrows at them when he finally gets Troy’s attention.

“What time are you thinking you’ll drop Anya with us on Sunday?” Harris says, as Troy coughs discreetly, turning more to face the group instead of just Harris.

“Maybe... eleven?” Ilya says, looking at Shane.

“Makes sense, right?” Shane agrees, nodding. “Before we go for lunch?”

“Then we can leave for Montreal.”

Troy nods too, looking at Harris. “We’re helping out at the farm on Sunday, so, I’ll be driving straight up Monday morning.”

“Anya is visiting the farm?” Ilya says, loving the thought.

Harris smiles. “She is. She’ll be spoiled.”

“She deserves everything. Spoil her all week.”

“Oh, I will,” Harris says, and to Shane adds, “And I’ll let you know if we see any cats. I’ll tell Mom to be on the lookout.”

“Or kittens,” Troy says, nudging Harris’ knee. “Remember that sweet black one that Chiron found, had that litter of six?”

“Six kittens?” Shane says in disbelief.

“They can have more. Multi-birth animals all have big litters, just so, you know. They have a better chance of survival,” Harris tells him.

Ilya taps his fingers against Shane’s arm where he has his thrown around him. “You want six kittens?”

“...one to start with maybe. But, if six need homes—”

“So, only one dog, but many kittens?”

“I didn’t say that,” Shane says, grinning back at him.

“But you would.”

“It’s not even happening yet. After our honeymoon.”

“Yes. After that,” Ilya says, picturing jugs of sangria, endless beaches, and nothing but Shane and him.

“We need a dog,” Ryan tells Fabian then, who shakes his head, laughing.

“Yes. I know. You told me on Monday. And Tuesday. Wednesday, too,”

“And I’ll keep telling you,” Ryan says with a private smile.

Shane nudges Ilya, ducking his head.

“You want me to look out for a dog for you, too?” Harris asks, to which Fabian gives a mock-protest, and Ryan pretends to pout.

Shane slaps Ilya’s leg again, and Ilya has to hold his laughter in. There will absolutely be another conversation about what they imagine Ryan and Fabian’s sex life is like, before the evening is out. Knowing Shane, he’ll wait only as long as them getting in the cab on the way home.

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The house feels so quiet when they eventually get home, Anya sleepily coming for a pet and a quick toilet break in the yard before going straight back to her bed. Ilya and Shane are, not drunk, just the cosy kind of having a good amount of alcohol in their system, and not quite tired enough to climb the stairs for bed.

“We can sleep all day tomorrow. Apart from taking Anya out,” Shane says, sprawled out across Ilya on the couch so his words are half-muffled into his shoulder.

“Sounds good.”

“Mm,” Shane says, letting out a contented sigh, and giving Ilya a squeeze.

They don’t say much, a few words about some of the kids from camp, a few more about how delicious their dinner was. They make out a little, in that unhurried, effortless way Ilya loves so much, only stopping because when Shane moves to get more comfortable, his knee slips off the couch.

“If you want me on the floor, is okay,” Ilya says, holding him tight so he doesn’t fall.

“Always. But, maybe tomorrow now.”

“We should go to bed?”

Shane wrinkles his nose, then smiles. “Probably.”

They do need to sleep, even if they do have a full day of nothing ahead, because it has been a really long week. But, so their weekend is free to do and think about only the things they want, Ilya wants to have one more conversation, one thing that he doesn’t want looming over them.

“Shane,” he says, watching him from the bathroom doorway as he goes through his usual lengthy moisturising routine.

“Come here,” Shane says, waving him in, and before Ilya can say anything—as he always does—reaches up and blobs moisturiser on Ilya’s forehead and cheeks. “Better.”

Snorting, Ilya turns to the mirror, dutifully rubbing the moisturiser in. “Happy?”

“Happier. You wanted to talk about something?”

Ilya sees his own nose twitch in the mirror. “I think so.”

Sighing, Shane looks back at his own reflection, finishing his routine. “JJ.”

“Yes. We should.”

“I am so mad.”

“I know.”

“And I’m sorry. That he’s still like this with you. I don’t get it,” Shane says, with obvious frustration in his voice.

“I am sorry too. Not about that,” Ilya adds quickly the moment he sees Shane’s face fall. “I really don’t care if he likes me, or doesn’t.”

“You’re amazing.”

“You love me.”

“Yes. You’re still amazing,” Shane grumbles, screwing the lid back on his face cream.

Ilya smiles at this, but still isn’t sure how to word what he wants to say.

“I am sorry,” he says, leaning his hands against the bathroom counter, “that, maybe you lost a friend. Because of me.”

A flush of anger crosses Shane’s face, but it drops again quickly, though Shane does then slap Ilya’s arm for him to straighten up.

“Listen to me,” he says, his voice a little low and a little growly, and oh; it’s never a surprise that the smallest thing Shane does make Ilya horny, but he’s suddenly so much more wide awake. “If JJ never speaks to me again, or whatever, that’s his choice. I don’t care.”

“Shane—”

“No,” Shane says, and walks Ilya back against a bathroom wall. “None of this is your fault.”

“I don’t want you to lose a friend because of me. I don’t want you to lose anything because of me.”

He's thinking of JJ, obviously, but Ilya is also thinking of what Montreal meant to Shane just a few months ago, as well as his privacy, and his reputation in the league. So much has changed, and whether Shane wants to acknowledge it or not, it is because of him. Because of them.

Shane pokes him in the chest, then boxes him in against the wall.

"You left Boston for me. You came to Ottawa and took so much shit, from players, from fans, from the league. From media. From everyone. And you did it all without complaining once, when you could have. I'd have understood."

"I love the Centaurs."

"I know you do. And I know I will," Shane says, with a brief, excited smile. "But you gave up winning—not completely, because, I know it was hard, but you built that team up to what it is now—you gave up a chance at more cups, more competitions, just to be closer to me."

"It has worked out," Ilya says, even though he can acknowledge—and has acknowledged in therapy—that everything Shane is saying is true.

"Yeah. But you gave that all up. For me. And you went through so much, got so lonely, because of me."

"No. That is depression. Not you," Ilya says, because it's important to.

"I know. But you still went through so much on your own, gave up so much, that, fuck, I didn't even understand anywhere near enough at the time."

"Shane—"

"So if I do lose one single friend over this, I'm okay with it. And don't tell me you'd do it all again," Shane adds, knocking his foot against Ilya's.

How does he always know what is on the tip of his tongue? Ilya laughs, and kisses him for it.

"I don't want you to lose anything because of me."

"My mind, maybe?"

"Only sometimes. Special occasions."

"Every time you have me on my back," Shane says, grinning.

"Not just your back. Stomach. Wall. Everywhere," Ilya whispers, kissing up Shane's throat.

Shane sighs for it, tilting his head back to give Ilya better access.

"Stop distracting me."

"Okay."

“No, don’t stop,” Shane says, and laughs, as Ilya mouths at him harder. But he does stop eventually, kissing Shane firmly and raising an eyebrow to say he hasn’t finished what he wanted to talk about.

“You know, you lost more than maybe JJ,” Ilya says, slotting his fingers at Shane’s lower back.

Shane sighs. “I might not have lost him. We might work it out. But it’s on my terms. He’s not acting like that with you.”

“I know.”

“And I’m just saying. If I have lost him, sure, I’ll be sad I’ve lost a friend, someone I thought was... someone I thought I could trust. But. You know you’re more important. *We* are more important than that.”

How can Ilya not smile for this, not get a little teary eyed? He drops his head back against the wall, smiling when Shane kisses his throat.

“There will be more friends. For both of us.”

“Exactly. It’s gonna be so, so different in October,” Shane says, excitement evident in his voice even if Ilya isn’t looking at him right now.

“Yes.”

“And, sure. I’m... I think it’s going to take some time, for me to stop getting, I don’t know. Upset. Pissed. Fucked off—embarrassed, even, about Montreal. But it’s okay. Or, it will be.”

“You have nothing to be embarrassed about,” Ilya says, dropping his head forward so he can look Shane in the eye.

“No. I do,” Shane says, scoffing, “I need to be embarrassed that I was so loyal, put so much into a team that just... fucked me over. The second I wasn’t perfect enough. And then they were pissed at me again when I didn’t re-sign. When, why would I, after all of that?”

Pissed doesn’t come close to Montreal’s attitude towards Shane the moment it was announced he was signing with the Centaurs. Neither of them could look at their phones for a couple of days, for all the comments, and think pieces, and opinions, and accusations slung at them. It was almost louder than when they’d been outed, it was that bad.

“It will be... interesting, playing them, next season,” Ilya says.

Shane snorts, and shakes his head. “It’ll be something. We’ll deal with it. When we have to.”

“We always do.”

“Exactly,” Shane says, and smiles. “So. JJ. No JJ. Hundreds of Montreal fans hating me—”

“Oh, thousands. All the players. Hating us both so, so much.”

“I don’t care. I really don’t care,” Shane says, laughing, and to Ilya, he sounds so carefree.

It’s the best thing he could hope to hear right now.

“Hayden doesn’t hate us,” Ilya says, as Shane pulls him from the wall and sways him.

“No. He doesn't."

"Hayden is good. Maybe I will tell him that some day."

“Maybe... Tuesday? At dinner?”

Ilya waves a dismissive hand, smiling at him. “I think he already knows.”

“Still. You could tell him.”

“What. You want me to confess my friendship to Hayden?” Ilya says, and that’s it, that’s enough words about anything that isn’t just him and Shane.

He backs Shane out of the bathroom, echoing Shane’s grin as they stumble towards the bed.

“Not right now,” Shane says, then tugs Ilya towards him, shrieking with laughter as they start to fall.

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