Hideaway

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Hideaway

by MeepySlow

Summary

"How can Montreal be snowed in?" Ilya asks. "They are not ready for winter?"

"It's *Montreal*, man," Marleau snickers, like that's an explanation.

Ilya's phone buzzes.

Jane- 9:44 a.m.- Look on the bright side. If you're stuck another day, you can come back here.

_____

After Ilya leaves Shane's apartment for the first time, he knows he's on thin ice and at risk of falling into more serious feelings. He's ready to put distance back between them.

A Montreal blizzard has other ideas.

Notes

Unnecessary to Read Authors Note

A few things:

I regret to say I have not read Heated Rivalry yet. I did give it a skim, though. I've seen a few of Rachel Reid's shorts as well, which gave some more context.

After that, I decided I would be strictly writing from the timeline and context of the show. Also, from the framework of the show characters, their speech and vibes. The book characters felt a bit different, and I cannot emulate them. Meaning, this fic won't be book compliant, probably not even close. Any compliance is strictly (though welcomely) coincidental!

This also means I'm taking some liberties with their inner feelings and dialogues- where they're at, where they *think* they're at, etc. This is a vibes based fic.

Second, I don't watch hockey. I really know nothing more than 'puck goes into net.' Sometimes there's a fight. I did look through an old Bruins schedule from 2013 just to see what kind of timeline I could work with, and that was mildly helpful. It's fic, so I'm not set in it being completely accurate, just vaguely plausible.

One of my favorite scenes (aside from the end of ep 5 and all of ep 6) is from earlier in ep. 2. After the guys get finished in Shane's apartment, the scene in the stairwell is so… cozy to me. In a sad, bittersweet way. Because Shane's feeling feelings he can't reconcile with, but wants to squeeze out every last moment he can with Ilya before he goes, even as they still poke and prod at each other. They're emotionally naked in this scene. It's the epitome of yearning imo.

I decided to just start from there, in Fall of 2013. I chose November. This is a canon divergence, which sets the course of everything to follow off it's tracks.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Unprecedented

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One

Fall of 2013

Ilya stoops at the bottom step of the stairs to do up the laces of his boots. They're the sturdy sort that don't slip or slide in the snow. Shane wants to know why Ilya had decided to wear them tonight, when there's no snow to speak of. That, in itself, is a bit unusual.

November in Montreal. They must have a high of 10°C today, though it's much lower now that the sun is long down. The entrance to the stairwell is icy cold, an unheated column of the building where they can have as much privacy as they want.

Ilya's coat is warm where Shane holds it against himself, to his chest and draped between his legs.

"Obviously, we won't see each other during the Olympics. Right?" Shane asks, just to have something to say, just so he can get Ilya talking again. He wants to hear him, have his voice soothe him through these last vestiges of calm.

His afterglow is still heavy on him, a sated feeling deep in his body. But nervous energy is already trying to worm its way to the forefront again. He wants to stave it off, savor each moment he can, interacting with the one person who knows him— in this one particular way, at least. Who's now seen him at his most vulnerable.

He'd almost thought things would be different, lying in bed after getting himself fucked for the first time. Ilya had held him, stayed inside for a bit after the fact, hands massaging his haunches, kissing his skin absently.

Shane had thought this might be new ground for them. He hadn't been sure how to feel about it.

When Ilya had gone to shower, Shane had lain there and gone back over the memory of what they'd just done. From hesitancy to bliss, and Ilya in his ear the entire way, soothing him through it.

Not much had been said, but the pathway between them had felt wide open.

Ilya treats him distantly as they talk on the stairs, now. That doesn't faze Shane at all, though. He's come to expect it. As they converse about the Olympics and their families, Shane pressing and Ilya evading, Shane can see the walls coming back up behind his gaze.

"I've been dreaming of it my whole life."

"Dreaming of what? Bronze metal?" Ilya snarks at him, and Shane bites down on a grin.

"You fuckin' wish."

And then Ilya closes in, foot up a step higher, leaning over him. Shane feels like they're right back in bed for a split second. "Remember when I made you come hands-free?"

Shane's pulse stutters in his throat. He can smell Ilya's detergent, his cologne. His skin. Shane huffs a laugh. "Go fuck yourself, Rozanov."

He barely registers Ilya murmur to him as he leans in, *such a good trick,* and Shane stares at his mouth as he points out that Ilya's cab is likely waiting for him out there.

And then his mind quiets, stills.

A parting kiss, slow and syrupy sweet, and for seemingly no other reason than just to kiss.

"Bye."

Shane watches him go. The door squeals open, and Ilya takes a cursory glance around as he steps out. As the door shuts, a cold gust blows what looks to be a few stray snowflakes into the stairwell. They land on the concrete floor and sit for a few long seconds before slowly melting into dark spots.

Shane lets his eyes shut, wraps his arms over his chest to keep warm the parts of him that had been covered by Ilya's coat.

Ilya must've known it would snow. Maybe he'd guessed. Shane hadn't even looked at the weather report that morning.

As a rule, Shane tries not to ruminate on the impossible things he wants. Things he wishes.

He knows what this is. Rush of emotions after an intense round of sex. He's read about it. That doesn't stop him from feeling it full force. And even though it's only hormones,

dopamine and oxytocin, and whatever other cocktail of neurotransmitters is sparking together in his brain, it doesn't stop him from *wanting*.

Wanting Ilya to come back. Come back so they can do it all over again. Come back so they can lie together in Shane's bed, after the fact.

He sits in the cold stairwell and lets himself want, just for a bit longer.

*

Ilya sits in the darkened cab and stares at his text chain with Shane. He scrolls upward, past the text with the apartment address to Shane's lame attempts at sexting. He feels fond.

Then he pockets his phone and stares outward at the snow beginning to come down in flurries. A thin line of it has begun to accumulate against the curb.

He thinks about how Shane had looked in the low light of his room, head pressed against his pillow, and Ilya over him, covering him, pulling all those sweet sounds from his mouth. Later on, Shane propped against the same pillow and waiting for him to be done showering. It had been a delightful sight, and also something he never wished to see again. A scene only crafted to make him think about things he can't have.

A kiss to Ilya's lips, to his forehead, and Ilya knew he had to go.

He hadn't expected Shane to follow him down the stairs. Hadn't expected him to start conversing with him. Though, maybe he should have by now.

They'd told him, when he first came to join the North American leagues, that Shane Hollander was laser-focused and unsociable.

That had gone against Ilya's first impression of him, though, Shane seeking him out in a back alley to shake his hand and tell him not to smoke. To tell him that he liked watching Ilya play, or that's how Ilya had heard it, anyway, how he chose to remember it. He'd already known who Shane was, too, and though he'd never say it, he liked watching him play just as much.

He hadn't heard him *speak* until that moment, though.

His unassuming candor and upturned corners of his lips had caught Ilya by surprise. His freckled cheeks... Maybe that was when Ilya knew. Had an inkling of the danger he might be in.

Staring at his cute little ass as he'd turned to go, Ilya couldn't help but get one last word in. Ever the tease. Ilya should've known it'd get too far out of hand right from that moment.

It nearly had tonight.

He'd wanted to stay, overwhelmed with what they'd done, what Shane had *let* him do. That's exactly when he knew he should leave.

He still feels it, though. His pulse flutters just at the memory.

When he arrives at the hotel, he slips through a side door with a swipe of his keycard. Elevator up to the second floor, and then to his and Marleau's room. The light is off, and Marleau is slumped on his side, in the bed closest to the window.

Ilya removes his coat and boots, but doesn't bother removing anything else. Eases down onto the bed to stretch out. He knows he won't be getting much sleep, anyway. He props his arms behind his head.

Marleau turns over, and Ilya can see the whites of his eyes in the dark. "You go see your Montreal *sweetie*?" He's teasing, but Ilya scoffs harshly.

"Was at club."

"Sure you were." Marleau rolls onto his back. "You don't come back till later when you're clubbing. 'Sides, you were texting her before the game. Wet your wick, huh?"

These English turns of phrase become more ridiculous by the day.

Ilya doesn't answer, only throws an arm over his eyes and tries to shut his mind off. All he sees when he does, though, is a picture of Shane below him, head nestled in a pillow, flushed and freckled and dewy.

It'll be a long fucking night.

"Is… it snowing?" Marleau asks sleepily into the quiet room.

*

The next morning, everything is dampened in a thick blanket of white.

Ilya sits in the airport with the rest of his team at a gate destined for Dallas and looks out at the tarmac being scraped by multiple plows racing back and forth in long stretches. The snow isn't the biggest issue. The early morning had turned bitingly cold, and it's clear that the tarmac is icing up faster than they can clear it. The plows and trucks slide on their U-turns.

The wind has only picked up since the daylight broke. Flurries of frozen snow flick against the airport windows in sweeping gusts.

Ilya's phone buzzes in his hand.

Jane - 9:42 a.m.- Did your plane leave already?

Lily - 9:42 a.m.- Delayed. For over an hour.

Shane doesn't immediately respond, and Ilya looks at Marleau a seat away. Marleau meets his gaze with raised brows and blows a long breath out through puffed cheeks.

"Not lookin' good," he mutters.

"How can Montreal be snowed in?" Ilya asks, the *r's* rolling off his tongue with extra flair for his aggravation. "They are not ready for winter?"

"It's *Montreal*, man," Marleau snickers, like that's an explanation.

Ilya doesn't know what that means. He's played in North America for four years now, and he's never seen it such a mess out there. Then again, maybe he's just never had the pleasure of being caught up in a Canadian blizzard.

Still nothing compared to a bad winter in Moscow.

His phone buzzes.

Jane- 9:44 a.m.- Look on the bright side. If you're stuck another day, you can come back here.

Shane doesn't mean it that way, Ilya's sure. It's only another invitation to fuck, not a sleepover.

Despite all of his instincts to shy away from such a topic of conversation after feeling all he felt the night before... Ilya grins down at the phone and taps a message back before he can help it.

Lily - 9:44 a.m.- Better for you if it is not delayed.

Jane - 9:45 a.m.- Why?

Lily - 9:45 a.m.- Should I tell you everything I would do? To you?

"Jesus," Marleau huffs. "You already making plans for tonight? They haven't even called it yet."

"Shut up," Ilya says. He pushes his phone into his pocket, not waiting for Shane's reply. He feels he ought to save some face, at least now when he's feeling so exposed. Which is ridiculous. Marleau wouldn't even know what any of his expressions really mean, who they're aimed toward. And it's not a crime to be excited to see a girl.

They sit and continue to watch the snow plows begin to fail more miserably at their jobs when, fifteen minutes later, an airline representative stands on a fold-down seat to get all of

their attention.

“The flight to Dallas has been called off,” he announces. This is met by a series of groans all around. “Actually, all outbound and inbound flights have been canceled or diverted. We’re very sorry. The storm is predicted to carry on for a while. It’s very unexpected.” The man wipes at his brow, and Ilya grins at his nervousness, addressing a gate full of mostly Bostonian hockey players. “It’s possible we may resume operations by tonight.”

Their coach steps in at that point to put the poor fellow out of his nervous misery. “Keep your cell phones on.” He gives a few of them pointed looks. “I want you all within a ten-minute walk of this gate.”

He looks at Marleau, who gives a halfhearted shrug.

Ilya can’t help himself and pulls his phone back out. There’s a message waiting for him.

Jane - 9:47 a.m.- Yes.

Ilya takes a slow breath. Flash of Shane’s pretty bottom lip in his head. Now is not the time to be turned on, *focus.*

Lily - 10:02 a.m.- The flight is canceled. Maybe another tonight. Grounded here.

Jane - 10:03 a.m.- Shit really?

Three dots bounce below that message for a long moment. Ilya waits, slipping his necklace into his mouth for something to do, a nervous habit.

Jane - 10:04 a.m.- This is weird weather. It came on so suddenly.

*

Ilya meanders through the airport with Marleau and a handful of other guys for the first few hours. They get a meal, and then a drink. Ilya lounges across a bench seat he finds around the corner from their gate and holds his phone over his head to watch clips of the game they’d played against Montreal the night before.

He sends one of them to Shane, a pass he’d stolen right out from under Shane’s nose in the moment.

Jane - 12:34 p.m.- Very impressive.

Ilya can practically see Shane’s entirely unimpressed face. He grins to himself, taps out a message.

Lily - 12:35 p.m.- What are you doing?

Jane - 12:35 p.m.- Watching a movie.

Lily - 12:35 p.m.- What movie?

Jane - 12:35 p.m.- Princess Bride.

Lily - 12:35 p.m.- Kids movie. Lame.

Jane - 12:36 p.m.- Asshole. It's good. And it's what's on. You've seen it?

Lily - 12:36 p.m.- Yes. Both actors are hot.

Jane - 12:36 p.m.- Degenerate.

Lily - 12:37 p.m.- Oh big word. Describe him to me.

Jane - 12:37 p.m.- Who?

Lily - 12:37 p.m.- The man actor. Tell me what you like about him.

Jane - 12:38 p.m.- Not the girl?

Lily - 12:38 p.m.- No. The man.

*

Ilya is bored out of his mind, and bothering Shane only does so much to help him relax.

In fact, maybe Shane's making it worse. Ilya is beginning to realize that he's pent up. Which is ridiculous, considering what he'd gotten up to with Shane the night before. A night like that was sure to satiate any man for a few days, at least.

All he can think about is Shane, though, and the prospect, no matter how thin, of getting a repeat of the night before.

*

4:30 p.m. rolls around, and there is still no sign of the storm letting up. The last vestiges of sunlight show that the tarmac is still being plowed, trying to keep up with the work.

It's an *unprecedented* level of snow, the news station in the corner tells them all. Ilya doesn't know what 'unprecedented' means, but he imagines that it means that there's a shit-ton of snow on the ground that no one knows what to do with.

By 6:00 pm, the coach gathers them all up at the gate again. This time, he's the one to stand on a chair.

"The snow isn't letting up. And you all need proper sleep." He looks around at their weary faces, and Ilya can tell that he isn't sure what tomorrow will hold, either. "We've booked at two hotels nearby, whatever they had left, nothing fancy. Split off accordingly. Keep your cells *on*. We'll contact you in the morning to let you know if there's a flight out."

"Cutting it close, aren't we?" Connors mutters somewhere down the line of seats. Ilya feels for them all. No one wants to fly into Dallas and play a game on the same day, even if they get lucky with a non-stop flight in the early morning. They'll still have slept like shit the night before, muscles aching from spending the day at the airport.

He's buzzing next to Marleau as they walk back out of the airport through a private exit. Marleau looks at him warily, eyes shifting from him to the phone in his hand. Ilya makes sure it is turned away from him so that he cannot see any incoming texts.

Lily - 6:20 p.m.- You were serious about invitation? No flights tonight.

"Let me guess," Marleau says when they're standing apart from the rest of the team. Snow is getting into the tops of Ilya's boots, soaking into his socks, but he doesn't care a bit right now. "You've got *accommodations* set up."

"You will cover for me," Ilya tells more than he asks, brows raised.

"I will?"

"I cover for *you*," Ilya reminds him. Marleau rolls his eyes but nods. He folds his arms over his chest to block the cold.

"Shit. Just— keep your phone handy. Wherever this chick lives, it'd better be nearby."

"Is fine," Ilya says, then smirks. "See you later tonight."

Ilya pulls his phone. Three dots hover beneath his text to Shane, typing back.

Earlier in the day, he hadn't been sure going back to Shane's would be a good idea. But now that he's waiting with bated breath for Shane's reply, anything less than an invitation would be intolerable. He's been thinking about Shane's freckles, and he'd very much like to see them again before he leaves Montreal.

Jane - 6:22 p.m.- Shit really?

Jane - 6:22 p.m.- If you want to come back here, you can, I guess.

Ilya scowls at the phone.

Lily - 6:23 p.m.- Guess? You don't want?

Lily - 6:23 p.m.- You wanted earlier. Quite a bit.

Ilya is only mildly annoyed. He thinks he knows by now when Shane is playing coy. Still, he wants to be sure. He doesn't know if he could handle showing up and realizing Shane doesn't *actually* want to see him so soon. More than just his pride would be wounded.

Jane - 6:24 p.m.- Alright yes. I want you to. Jesus.

Lily - 6:24 p.m.- ?

Jane - 6:24 p.m.- Please.

Despite his empty promises to himself of reestablishing that careful boundary between Shane and him, the idea of seeing him again makes his groin twinge… and his chest squeeze. But lust can do that too, can't it?

Ilya sits with his overnight bag over his lap in the back of a taxi.

He's on his own, separate from Marleau or any of his other teammates. When they get to the first stoplight on the road out, he gives the taxi directions to Shane's apartment block, and they break away from the long line of cars leaving the airport. His taxi is one of dozens here, and their coach will never even notice him slipping away.

Lily - 6:36 p.m.- On my way.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 2: The Significance of a Pizza

Chapter Summary

You're starting to care too much about Rozanov's comfort, he thinks to himself.

Chapter Notes

Hello hello.

It continues.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two

On occasion, Shane can be a fitful sleeper.

After he climbs the stairs back to his apartment, he closes himself inside. The place feels so empty now that he's alone again, like a hollow cave. He shuts himself into the bathroom off his room. A hot shower washes all the dried salt from his skin, leaving him hazy and pliant. He holds onto that feeling as he goes to bed.

Then he sleeps like the dead.

He wakes later than he normally does, sore in some places, achy in others, but he savors all of it, stretching languidly in his bed. Still loose.

Out his window, the sky is pale grey. He can't see the tall buildings just a few miles away. Everything is blotted out by densely falling snow being blown around by the wind.

First snow for Montreal— it's about time.

He realizes he's... not *happy*. Not bubbly or outgoing. But calm. He feels quieted. There's still a lingering dis-ease from the last moments in the stairwell, when he lets himself think about it. But those are easy to smudge out with breakfast and turning on the news.

That's when he first begins to understand the full scope of what's happening out in Montreal on this freezing Friday morning.

The city had not expected so *much* snow so early in the season. Already, two feet have accumulated overnight. Now, it's coming down 20 centimeters in a single hour. The news cycles through clips of cars sliding around in slow, lazy spins in the middle of city intersections. A bus rear-ends a waste truck. No one is injured— so far— but it's clear that the citizens aren't quite ready for the snow, either. Come evening, when people return home from work, many will be installing their all-terrain or snow tires.

The plows have been deployed, but their journey is unending, scraping back and forth through the streets, only to return an hour later for another layer, thickening by the minute. The temperature had plummeted in the early morning. Now, things are beginning to ice up.

Shane sips warm water from a mug and checks his texts.

There's nothing from "Lily", but Hayden has updated the team group chat that school has been canceled, and that he's miserable at home.

Another from their coach contains a more serious message. Their practice has also been called off for the day. The game on Sunday is iffy, but they'll try their damnedest to get a practice in before then, and hopefully this storm calls it quits before the weekend is up. They could be playing to a half-empty arena.

Shane mutes the television and listens to the lack of city noise. There are no honking horns, no sounds of machinery whirring. No traveling highway ambiance, or yelling builders, or screaming couples with kids, or planes taking off overhead.

Planes.

Shane presses his lips together and checks his text chain with Ilya once more. Neither of them have said a thing to each other since last night, and Shane would be obliged to keep it that way. It's how they do things. Or at least, he thinks it is.

They've met up three times so far, and after each time, Shane doesn't hear from Ilya for at least a couple of weeks. Even though Shane *wants* to text him, he doesn't. That seems to be the boundary Ilya has set up, the line drawn in the sand.

He wants to say a great many things to Ilya about the night before. How it'd made him feel, even though he can't really parse those things out for himself. He'd been overwhelmed and ecstatic. Thankful more than anything. To Ilya.

Shane isn't very experienced with sex, not by a long shot. But even he can think of countless ways that your first time with a man could go wrong. None of them had happened last night, though. Any fumble was handled with a soft, teasing chuckle, and Ilya meeting his gaze, talking him through it.

Maybe that fact in itself, the care taken by Ilya, is what's bothering him the most.

'Bother' isn't quite the word, either.

He decides to break the silence.

Jane - 9:42 am- Did your plane leave already?

*

From the first moment Shane suggests that Ilya come back to his apartment, should the flight be canceled, Shane begins pacing aimlessly from room to room.

There's no logic to it.

His apartment doesn't *get* messy. He tidies it himself and, every once in a while, has it deep cleaned. There are no dirty dishes in his sink, no throw pillows on the floor. No messes on the kitchen table or crumbs on the countertops. No clutter surrounding the bathroom sink.

He still looks for things, though. Wanders upstairs to rearrange the pillows on his bed, re-stacks the books on his coffee table in the living room. He's looking through his fridge before he realizes what he's doing— nervously preparing for Ilya's return.

Which Ilya hasn't even agreed to, yet.

There's no need to do any of what he's doing. Ilya doesn't give two shits about what Shane's apartment actually looks like, even if he likes giving his unsolicited opinions about it. Ilya is there for sex, the same as Shane.

Instead of compulsively tidying, he makes himself sit down on his sectional with his reading glasses and a book.

*

The snow does not stop. In fact, it only begins to fall faster.

Shane reads an article on his phone about the Boston Raiders being held up in the airport with no flights scheduled in or out of Montreal for the rest of the night. There are half-blurred photos taken by fans who are also stranded at the airport. He finds one of Ilya lying across a bench on his back, legs propped up on the wall and crossed at the ankle. He holds his phone above him, face bored. Cool as ever, even with the next day's game in Dallas at risk.

The meteorologist on the news predicts that this storm has only just begun, and that if anyone is thinking about making travel plans over the weekend, they ought to forget about them.

Ilya texts him.

Lily - 6:20 pm- You were serious about invitation? No flights tonight.

Shane *had* been serious. The prospect of seeing Ilya again so soon has his body feeling like a live wire. He gets up and paces around the back of his sectional, weighing the pros and cons of hosting again. He already knows what he wants to do.

He can't be so eager about it. He has to show some kind of restraint lest Rozanov get the idea that Shane is happy to see *him.*

He plays coy.

And then Ilya, the bastard, makes him *say* exactly what he wants.

Shane is beginning to think that Ilya can see right through him. *That,* he doesn't like.

Lily - 6:36 pm- On my way.

Shane stands in the darkened living room of his apartment, still as a stone. His mind races on what to do.

Ilya has spent the entire day at the airport. He might want a shower before they get up to anything. Shane wanders to the bathroom and sets a towel out on the counter, folded into neat, grey squares. He checks that his body wash is still mostly full.

Back in the kitchen, he wonders if Ilya has eaten.

You're starting to care too much about Rozanov's comfort.

Still. Ilya ought to be well fed if they want to fuck. Right? That's logical. Shane's only looking out for himself, really. There's no one else he can get this from, so it makes sense to optimize their time together.

Ilya won't like any of the food that Shane has in his fridge. Even Shane finds it boring, some of the time. No, he ought to put in an order for something.

But is *eating* together a step too far?

No, it's just fuel for fucking.

He pulls out his phone to see what's nearby.

*

The taxi drives slowly and carefully through the streets. Ilya almost feels bad for asking the driver to take him a few blocks more from the hotels to Shane's apartment. The thought of seeing Shane again lessens his guilt, though.

Not many other cars are on the street, and no one is out walking. The taxi drops him off a block away, and Ilya tips the driver thrice over his rate. He pulls his coat up around his neck and zips it to the top. Hood up around his face. His overnight duffel is slung heavily over a shoulder.

If anyone *were* out, which they aren't, Ilya doubts that they would recognize him through the windblown snow and layers of warm clothes.

He turns down the alleyway before the complex and pulls his phone out.

Lily - 7:14 pm- here

The D1 stairwell door opens, this time just a crack. Shane's dark eye looks out at him from beneath a hood. No words are spoken as he holds the door open for Ilya.

Once they're both shut away inside, though, Ilya gets a look at him and frowns.

"You are all wet."

Shane pushes his hands into the pockets of his hoodie and shrugs. The tops of his shoulders are darkened with moisture. It clings nicely to his strong, muscly frame. The top of his hood is soaked through, too.

"Had to take a little walk outside."

"You walk outside in *this*?" Ilya scoffs, pinching a bit of the fabric of the hoodie and giving a short tug. "You have death wish?"

"Shut up," Shane sighs, averting his scowl up the stairs. "It was just across the street."

Ilya looks over his face. His cheeks and the tip of his nose are flushed pink, and his eyes are a tinge glassy. He looks like he got very cold, and not long ago.

"Foolish," Ilya comments. Before Shane can get irked with him, he pushes him gently back into the wall at the bottom of the steps. Shane's eyes drop to his mouth on cue, and Ilya kisses him.

He's slow about it, and it feels familiar, like they are picking up right where they left off.

Shane looks different from the last time Ilya had shown up at this back alley.

Instead of being pissed and perturbed by, *well*, everything about Ilya, he looks more akin to how he had when Ilya had departed. His face is mostly lax, only the corners of his eyes lifted in a barely noticeable smile. Small things with Shane Hollander. Easily missed, but Ilya is beginning to learn them.

Kissing is easier this time. Not nerve-wracking and thrilling like a hookup after months apart. No, he'd only kissed Shane a night ago.

And now he gets to do it again. What luxury he can find in small pockets of this city.

Shane kisses him back with a hand rubbing up his neck. When they part, his doe eyes are incrementally wider, looking over Ilya's face with mild curiosity. "C'mon," he says, and turns to head up the stairs.

Ilya thinks of racing him up for a second time, but then catches sight of his backside.

Without the adrenaline of a recent game to spur him into competitiveness, Ilya hangs back to admire Shane's broad shoulders and tapered waist beneath a thick, soft hoodie. Perky little rump beneath black sweats. He looks at *that* a touch longer, how it moves going up the steps.

Shane notices his lack of sport, because he pauses to look over his shoulder, clear suspicion written on his face.

Ilya shrugs nonchalantly. "Just enjoying view."

"Shut up," Shane mutters, but Ilya can see the flush spread further on his cheeks as he turns away. Shane takes the steps two at a time, and well, Ilya can't let him get too far without him, can he?

Shane's apartment looks the same as before, dimmed amber lamps and the city skyline out the large windows. This time, the fireplace under the television has been lit. A line of flame licks up behind glass. "Setting the mood, hm?" Ilya asks, turning to look at him.

Shane doesn't jump his bones right away as Ilya had expected, had *hoped.* Instead, he pads to the kitchen, and Ilya follows behind him silently, setting his overnight bag and coat down behind the long, low sofa.

On the counter is a closed cardboard pizza box. Ilya stops short when he sees it. It looks utterly out of place in Shane's neat and meticulous space. Shane pads to his fridge and pulls a liter bottle of cola out.

"Just," Shane starts, eyes flickering across his countertop, refusing to meet Ilya's. "Thought you might be hungry. Didn't know if you ate today."

"They have restaurants at airport," Ilya says dumbly.

"Right…"

"*This* is why you are all wet?"

Shane nods mutely. Ilya wonders why he wouldn't have someone deliver it to his apartment for him, but then, of course, Shane wouldn't. Not when he has two working legs of his own.

Ilya still thinks he ought to have put on a coat. He opens up the box to find a pizza covered in mostly meat. A few mushrooms and black olives are sparsely sprinkled about. He looks at Shane blankly. "*You* ordered pizza?"

"Yeah?"

"You eat?"

"Wha— no," Shane ducks his head. "It's not part of my diet. I just…" he shakes his head. "You don't have to eat it. I—"

Ilya slowly but pointedly takes a seat on one of Shane's barstools. He tugs the long sleeves of his shirt up to his elbows and pulls the pizza box closer. Picks up a slice. When he glances back up, Shane looks calmer, face relaxed again. That same small smile tugging at the corners of his eyes. He sets a glass on the counter next to Ilya and fills it with cola.

"I just drink from bottle, yes?" Ilya asks.

"Gross."

Ilya's brow furrows. "*You* plan to have some?"

Shane falters, scoffing and setting the bottle down. "That's… fair, I guess."

The pizza is still hot, steam rising up into his face as he eats. It feels good on his still-cold nose. Ilya hadn't known he was hungry before he arrived, but he puts away four slices before he begins to feel even a little full.

Shane sits on a barstool next to him, turned the opposite way and leaning back on the counter with his elbows. The television is on, a film playing that Ilya hasn't seen before. He turns to look at it every once in a while, but mostly opts to watch Shane from his peripheral.

It's not lost on him, the significance of a pizza.

It might not mean anything to your average hockey player. Pizza is about the most commodified meal in all of North America, especially a pizza from a chain, like the one Shane picked up. There are shops on every other corner, especially in a big city like Montreal.

Shane isn't just an average hockey player, though. He does not eat pizza. And there is no one to feed other than Illy tonight. No team meeting, no team party.

Only Ilya.

And Shane bought him a pizza.

“You’re not eating?” Ilya asks.

“No.”

“Not hungry? At all?”

“Uh…” Shane flushes, turning his face away to look out the big living room windows. “I ate earlier. I’m good.” When he looks back, Ilya raises a brow, wanting more information. “I took a *shower...* before you came.”

He says it with a lowered brow, and Ilya catches on that this is significant. He knows why, at least.

“I see,” he says, nodding. Playing coy. “And what does that mean?”

Shane scowls. “What do you *think* it means?”

“Could mean anything.”

Shane’s throat bobs; his gaze is hard on Ilya’s. Ilya wants him to *say it*, though.

“Means I’m washed up. And…”

“And?”

“And I want you to… You know.”

Ilya takes pity on him. He did buy him a pizza, after all. “Yes... I know,” he replies, smirking.

He pushes the pizza box away, finally, and stands up. “I will shower. Been sitting in airport all day.” He gives Shane a long look up and down. “Wait in bed, yes?”

“Yes— *er,* okay.”

He’s very cute when he’s nervous. Ilya would never tell him that, though.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

I realized I wasn't really sure what I was *doing* with this fic, or why I was writing it in the first place. It's essentially just a story about them falling in love in a slightly *different* way.

I guess it's just a way of coping while waiting for season 2, whenever that may be. I love the original story. The long term yearn.

A note about comments: I'm a person who tries to respond to every comment if I can, because someone took the time to make one. It may just be a heart to show I read it, but please know they are all read and appreciated, even if it's just a flurry of excited emojis. I like knowing that people were effected by my stories.

———

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 3: Trust

Chapter Summary

> “Pretty,” Ilya huffs at such a lovely sight before him— but isn’t everything about Shane Hollander? These days, Ilya thinks so.

Chapter Notes

> **Smut/18+ Chapter. Ye have been advised.**
>
> Technically, it is skip-able. You can just assume that they have had sex come the next chapter.
>
> It occurred to me that I'm writing them both as "Shane" and "Ilya", (as opposed to Hollander and Rozanov) no matter what POV I'm in. This is probably a departure from the book, but it's what felt right. It became more apparent to me writing the smut, but I'm not about to change it. To me, they're Shane and Ilya. Is this an issue??
>
> In my head, the first night in Shane's apartment is a turning point for their internal feelings about one another, no matter if they show it or not. Looking into the lore more, that seems to be true at least for Ilya to some degree. And when it comes to the show, which has had quite a few emotional departures from the book timeline anyway... I feel fine taking this artistic liberty!
>
> *They* still call each other by their last names to each other's faces, at least.
>
> For now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three

Predictably, Shane has set a towel out in the bathroom for him.

Ilya enjoys the steam from the shower and scrubs himself down with Shane's expensive body wash, more thoroughly than he might on any normal night.

When he's stepped out, he scrubs the towel through his hair, which begins curling back up immediately. He wipes fog from the mirror and checks the tired lines beneath his eyes. In any other situation, he'd be tapping out and going to sleep after the day he's had. Knowing that Shane is in bed waiting for him, though…

He leaves the towel hanging over a towel rack to air out for later, and pads back into the bedroom, bare-assed and half-hard.

Shane lies, lower half beneath his comforter, still seemingly embarrassed to be stripped down. Even in his own bed, in his own room, in front of a man who's already fucked him once.

His reservedness has always been what drew Ilya in the most. Had him coming back time and time again to their text chain to pester him, poke and prod, and try to see through the thick veil of aloofness

Ilya stands in the bathroom doorway until he notices him. When he does, Ilya can see the apprehension on his face.

"Don't look so scared, Hollander. I have not even touched you yet."

Shane presses his lips into a thin line, pulls his knees up to his chest, still covered. His eyes trace down Ilya's body, and Ilya relishes the feeling of being looked at and wanted.

"I'm not scared," Shane mumbles. "We've already..."

Ilya holds in a sarcastic laugh and trods across the carpet. He climbs up the end of the bed on his hands and knees, not willing to draw this out any longer. He's spent all day wanting Shane Hollander, and against all odds, and the Raiders' steadfast schedule, here he is.

He stops just in front of Shane's knees. "Alright. What is it you want, then?"

"What *I* want?" Shane scoffs, averting his eyes.

"Yes? You wanted something *specific*, no?"

Shane looks more nervous than even the night before. Ilya can't fathom why.

He places a hand on Shane's knee, an ill attempt at comfort. It draws Shane's attention to his face, at least. "Look, Hollander. I have already seen you. All of you. Why with this face?" he asks, reaching out to press his index finger into the thin corner of Shane's mouth. Shane ducks his head away quickly. Ilya puts on a tone of indifference. "I could blow you… fuck you..."

Shane rolls his lips in between his teeth, staring at Ilya with pinched contemplation. He looks embarrassed, averting his eyes past Ilya to the ceiling.

Ilya watches him, then shifts to be in his direct line of sight again, unwilling to let him look away. "What is it? Hm?"

“Would you… with your mouth again?”

“Would I what?”

Shane scoffs. “Don’t make me say it, asshole.”

“Ah, *asshole*. Should have just said *that*.”

Shane blinks, face faltering.

“It is so hard to ask?” Ilya murmurs quietly.

"Well, yeah. It's... It's..."

They will never get anywhere like this.

Ilya sighs and takes hold of the comforter. He meets Shane's eye, brows raising incrementally in a question. Shane nods once, letting go of the bedcovers.

Shane, through shuddering breath, lies back against his stack of pillows. Ilya eases the comforter down from Shane's knees, and there his cock is lying against his stomach. Ilya stares for a moment, admiring the slight curve and its pink head glistening. He's overcome again by how lucky he is to witness such a thing.

He knows for a fact that there isn’t another man alive who’s ever seen something as pretty as this. Probably not many women, either, going by how boring Shane’s personal life looks from the outside.

Ilya swallows thickly and moves without thinking, pressing himself between Shane’s legs. They part for him automatically, knees bracketing and squeezing on either side of his torso. Shane's face finally breaks into a small smile as Ilya lies out across him to kiss him many, many times on the mouth.

He works his way down from there, over his pecs and nipples, down his sternum. Shane's skin is perfect the whole way down, pleasant smelling like his body wash, soft and flushed. Ilya kisses over a few small scars he's accumulated over his hockey career. Down his faint treasure trail to his cock.

It jumps under Ilya's warm breath. He blows Shane for a few long moments, dick sliding halfway unto his mouth lazily before a hand brushes the hair from his forehead and reminds him what Shane *really* wants.

He gets his hands behind Shane's knees, pushing them up and back. His weight is more familiar now, and Ilya knows how to maneuver him and hold him there.

He doesn’t remember doing this with Sasha. He’s also never let anyone do it to *him*. He’d never thought *he’d* want to do it either, until he’d seen Shane Hollander in the showers.

He's imagined it frequently, ever since then.

The real thing is leagues better than anything he could think up on his own.

Shane breathes hot and heavy, murmuring incoherently as Ilya presses his mouth to his hole.

Ilya is lost, only focusing on what he feels, which is warmth and softness and muscle giving way to his tongue. Mind subdued to focus on this one task that makes Shane fall apart.

The trust Shane gives him is almost more intoxicating than anything they could do physically. Each time he loosens, even a fraction, it feels like a victory well earned. For the time that Shane allows him into his bed, Ilya *knows* that he’s being trusted with something delicate. Breakable. He likes how powerful it makes him feel, but there’s something that lies beneath even that. An emotion he can’t look head-on, lest he start panicking about it.

Ilya doesn't keep track of the time, but Shane’s panting eventually becomes more breathy, vocal, and Ilya feels a hand beating lightly on his shoulder. “Roz—Rozanov—”

He comes up breathing deep, saliva down his chin. He stares at Shane with half-lidded eyes, mouth slack. “Coming already, Hollander?”

Shane grimaces at him, brows drawn up in the middle with effort to control himself. “*Fuck* me— please, fuck—“

Ilya doesn’t have to be told twice. He realizes how desperate Shane is by the way he flops over onto his belly without any coaxing from Ilya.

Ilya reaches for Shane’s bedside drawer, retrieving the perforated strip of condoms Shane had brought out last night. He bets Shane hadn’t known he would be using them again so soon. Maybe he’s even proud of himself for having them on hand now. Ilya catches a glimpse of something *truly* exciting rolling around in the back of the drawer and makes a mental note to revisit it at a later time.

Maybe in a well-timed text.

For now, he focuses on Shane, who props his ass up in the air, head nestled into a pillow.

“Pretty,” Ilya huffs at such a lovely sight before him— but isn’t everything about Shane Hollander? These days, Ilya thinks so.

Shane had still been a touch loose from the night before, but Ilya had made sure to kiss and lick away any remaining tension from him. He still gasps when Ilya pushes in, slow and steady. Shane turns his head to the side to pant, and Ilya watches the side of his face for any sign of discomfort.

When he’s most of the way in, gritting his teeth against the melting heat and snugness, Ilya pauses. He breathes once, twice, then asks, “Is okay?”

“*Fuck*,” Shane groans, knees shifting. That makes Ilya hiss in pleasure. “Definitely okay.” Shane's breathing heaves, and Ilya watches the way his ribs expand outward with the effort. He’d never thought he’d get to look at another man *this* physically impressive in *this* context. Had never considered it until he laid eyes on Shane Hollander and clocked him as anything other than straight.

What luck.

Ilya pulls out slow, presses back in even slower, all the way to the hilt.

Shane lets out a shuddering moan. “You feel bigger. *Good*,” he gasps, and Ilya groans in return. Whether it’s true or not, it feels like Shane is saying it for his benefit.

He makes sure that Shane *continues* to feel it, every inch coming and going, with smooth, languid strokes of his hips. It’s not the careful start of the night before, but it’s not the rough and raunchy that Ilya had half expected, either.

It’s something else. Shane’s mouth slack and gasping against the pillow he grips beneath him. Ilya finds himself leaning down, wanting to get closer so he can watch the way Shane’s eyes squeeze shut, the way his freckled cheeks rise with the movement. His lips are flushed the same shade as his cockhead— *speaking of.*

Ilya slips a hand beneath Shane, patting around until he finds the wet head of it. He squeezes his fist down in a full stroke. Shane's hips jerk toward the bed, his legs giving way a bit more with each of Ilya's thrusts.

Shane groans anew with the added pressure, but when Ilya begins to pick up speed, he reaches beneath himself to bat Ilya’s hand away.

Ilya's brow furrows. “You don’t want?”

A near imperceptible shake of Shane’s head, and Ilya retracts his hand. He braces it on the bed next to Shane's shoulder and continues to watch his face, curiosity renewed.

“Is better without?” he asks, continuing his unhurried but strong thrusts.

He’s not an idiot. He’s watched plenty of porn, and he’s read plenty of forums about doing anal with men. He's fucked them before, too. But he’s never *felt* it for himself. It’s fascinating. And Shane is fascinating in his own boring way, already.

“Yeah,” Shane says shortly between pants. “Better.”

“More intense?” Ilya asks.

“*Jesus Christ*,” Shane huffs, turning his face into the pillow. His hips drop even lower, until they’re resting against the bed.

Ilya figures that maybe he’s exhausted from the night before. Playing a game and *then* being propped on his knees for a long period of time…

Ilya follows him down, bracketing his knees on either side of Shane's thighs.

This position angles his thrusts straight down. Shane lets him know just how intense that feels by his sudden growing volume.

"*Fuck*, Rozanov—" he cuts himself off, gasping into the pillow. Ilya wishes he could hear him better, all of the cut-off words and grunts, wasted into fabric. He parses out the next word, though. "*There."*

Ilya grins to himself and begins driving into the place inside Shane that has him practically mewling. "Da," Ilya begins muttering before he can help it. He's already lying mostly on top of him, and he presses his lips to Shane's ear, hips snapping against him and beginning to lose their even rhythm. "That's what you wanted, right?"

Shane nods shortly. Ilya wishes he could see his doe eyes that tell him when he's doing something right. He'll settle for the wordless sighs, for now. When Shane begins to arch into the bed, ass pressing back up into Ilya's thrusts insistently, Ilya knows that it comes down to these last few moments.

Shane's hand slides to one side, fisting into his top cover. Without thinking, Ilya slides his own hand over it, slipping their fingers together. He holds it down onto the bed, squeezing. Pounding into Shane, he rucks his hips against the bed with each meeting. The sound of it is all-consuming— that, and Shane's unhindered cries into the pillow as he comes with continuous shudders.

Ilya's hips thrust erratically, and he finishes with gritted teeth, staring at the side of Shane's face.

He feels as if he's floating above his body, looking down at the two of them lying there. He curls himself in closer to Shane, touching him in all the places he can reach as he comes down. He never stops focusing on dark lashes and freckles and beaded sweat on Shane's temple.

The strength is leeched from his thighs and abdomen by his orgasm. He presses his face between Shane's shoulders to breathe.

When they've both come back to themselves, Ilya feels at once like sleeping.

Shane turns slightly beneath him to look back at him over his shoulder. He doesn't say a word, but Ilya knows what it is he wants on instinct.

It's a very bad thing that he does it. There will be terrible repercussions down the line for him, maybe even both of them.

He kisses him.

Deep and unhurried, full of tenderness that's washed over him. He cups the side of Shane's face and kisses. His heart lurches painfully in his chest, and everything Ilya had tried to avoid

the night before, with Shane's gentle kisses to his face, comes knocking at the door again. Nearly bursting through the cracks in Ilya's walls.

He shudders against Shane's mouth. Shane slowly eases over all the way, Ilya slipping from him. Shane doesn't even flinch at the feeling. Both of his hands find Ilya's face and hold it there to kiss him back.

Ilya had felt in control before.

Now, he feels just the opposite. Terrified. The kind of feeling that would make him flee.

Shane breaks their kiss and lets his eyes drift down the bed. He's lying in his own cum, Ilya realizes. He must hate it.

"I'm…" Shane swallows. "I'm gonna shower."

"Okay," Ilya nods dumbly. When he rolls off of Shane, he realizes just how exhausted his body is. He, after all, played a game and fucked the night before, too.

Shane gets up, and Ilya can see the wet spots beginning to dry on his back. He doesn't have the energy to make a joke about it, though.

Then Shane turns to him, face more open than Ilya can remember. "You can rest a while, if you want."

Ilya considers it.

He's worn out.

"Just for a little while," Shane clarifies with a shrug. "I mean, what's the point of going back out in it right now? You'd probably get stranded, anyway." He smirks, first mark of confidence since before they'd fucked. "Freeze and die."

"And then who would fuck you?" Ilya says tiredly.

Shane makes a good point. Or maybe Ilya is just as weak as everyone back home always tells him he is. He's giving in to something he knows he ought not to. But doesn't have the energy to care.

"Just for a bit," he agrees.

He drags a pillow— the one Shane had gripped when he'd come— closer. Tucks his head into it and curls on his side. Enjoys the feeling of the luxurious fabric that an interior designer had probably picked out for Shane.

Shane watches him with an unreadable expression and then ducks into his bathroom.

Ilya listens to the sound of the shower spray and thinks to himself that he ought to get up and leave. Right now.

Don’t let this draw out any further than it's gone.

You will regret it, says a voice in his head. *You will make a mess of this.*

His eyes slip shut.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

I'm not sure that my smut is very "sexy". I try to make it more... Contemplative? lol. This is just what I find more interesting to write.

Unsurprisingly, this story is slowly expanding as I write it. I foolishly had in my head that it would be 7, *maybe* eight chapters. But at the rate it's going, it'll be a bit more. I was expecting it this time, at least. I know my writing.

Fare thee well.

_____

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

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Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 4: Change of Mind

Chapter Summary

Where would he rather be— well, it's a ridiculous question.

Chapter Notes

You guys should know I turn on winter storm sounds and turn down the aircon in order to immerse myself in this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four

Shane opts to sleep on the sofa after he gets out of the shower.

He comes back to his room to find Ilya passed out cold, breathing deep and heavy, comforter pulled half over himself.

Shane’s never seen him asleep before. It’s such an unusual and foreign sight that he stands in the bathroom doorway to stare for a moment. Ilya's mouth is slightly parted, face entirely relaxed.

It's no secret that Ilya Rozanov is hot. Anyone with eyes can see it, and it's talked about regularly amongst hockey fans and laypeople alike. Shane doubts that anyone has ever witnessed him like *this*, though. Muscles relaxed in a way that betrays Ilya's true youth.

Shane retrieves a fresh set of clothes and passes silently out into the hall, where he changes.

He can’t very well climb into bed next to Ilya. There’s cum still drying on the remaining strip of bed. Besides, he’s not sure that Ilya would appreciate waking up to the sight of him later on, not with their usual routine of parting ways after they’re done with each other.

He eases down the steps to his living room where he sets up on the sofa.

He doesn’t sleep well outside of his bedroom.

He *always* sleeps in his bed. Never even takes a nap on the slippery leather of his sectional. Still, he makes do. Curls up on his side in sweats and a hoodie and wraps himself in the throw blanket his mother had gifted him when he’d first moved into the apartment. He’s not had much use for it up until this moment.

He keeps waking with the odd impulse to go back up to his room and slide into bed next to Ilya. The thought of pressing up to Ilya's warm body is so enticing that he dreams about it a few times as he soothes himself back to sleep.

He chalks this up to how cold it is outside.

Perhaps deep down, he knows what he's *really* thinking about. The sex this time had been better than the first night.

Shane puts that down mostly to the fact that he'd known better what to expect this time. Hadn’t been as nervous. Had prepared better in his shower.

It’d be unfair to say that Ilya hadn’t played a role, too.

Shane's never felt something as intense as that, pressed down into the bed, Ilya’s weight on top of him, driving relentlessly into him. Nowhere to go and nothing to do but squirm and feel it.

It's easily the hottest thing Shane's ever experienced.

And it's left him feeling emotionally raw, too. Ilya's phantom fingertips are still brushing against his hair and temple, forehead pressed into his back, lips kissing his spine.

Shane could live in that kind of moment forever.

He wonders how it’d been for Ilya. He knows he has had more experience. With a man back in Russia. But have there been more? Was it good *because* Ilya has had so much experience?

Shane flops over. He doesn’t know why it matters either way.

Sleep is fitful, and Shane gets no rest. Finally, he gives up when the sky begins to slowly lighten.

He sits cross-legged in the corner section of his sofa and turns on the television, setting the volume just loud enough to hear. He sips on another mug of warm water.

When the news station begins showing more clips of Montreal weather-related accidents over the night, Ilya comes padding down the steps from the bedroom, no shoes on his feet, and, presumably, no clothes on beneath Shane's comforter, which he's wrapped around his shoulders.

When he gets to the bottom of the steps, he stares at Shane with something reminiscent of shellshock.

Shane doesn't know whether to say good morning or not. Ilya doesn't give him the chance.

"What time is it?" he questions, voice sounding toneless and strange. He squints, even though the sun isn't even close to being all the way up yet.

"Sometime after five."

"You did not wake me."

Normally, Ilya is in his public persona— sleek and confident, a bit sly. When he's not doing that, he's seducing Shane with haughty looks and banter.

He looks so open now, Shane isn't sure where to look.

Ilya shuffles closer to the end of the sofa. Shane thinks of asking him to pick the comforter ends off the ground, but then again, he's going to have to wash the rest of his bedding anyway.

Ilya looks down, blinking owlishly. Rubs sleep from his eyes. Asks, "You slept here?"

"Yup." Shane turns his gaze back on the television, keeping his bafflement to himself. He can feel his gaze boring into the side of his head. Ilya swallows, his throat clicking. "There's coffee," Shane says, jerking his chin back toward the kitchen.

"You should not have let me sleep," Ilya says strangely, and Shane finally scoffs.

"Looked like you could use it."

"Yes, well..." Ilya's mouth presses into a line. He finally leaves the comforter behind on the arm of the sofa. Shane sees that he's back in his underwear, at least.

There comes the sound of Ilya picking up the porcelain mug Shane had set out for him. The pouring of coffee. A little grunt Ilya makes after a hot sip.

When he returns, he does not sit. Instead, he stands there with a hand propped on his hip, staring at the news. Then, he crouches down to riffle through his overnight, until he finds his phone. Shane would've thought he'd keep it stashed on his person. Apparently not. When they're hooking up, at least.

He returns, still in his underwear, phone clutched in one hand. He sits down on the other end of the sofa and presumably looks through his messages. His face is perturbed.

Shane stays quiet, but Ilya glances up and catches him watching.

“Marleau messaged me,” Ilya explains. “I told him I would be back, and I was not.”

“Oh. Was he worried?”

“Not about me,” Ilya smiles wryly. “About himself. We are on curfew.”

“Not sure that’ll matter much longer,” Shane mutters, looking out the window at the snow flurries.

Ilya’s phone buzzes again. When he reads the incoming message, he sighs harshly through his nose. “The Dallas game has been canceled. Rescheduled, maybe. Later in the season.”

“Okay,” Shane nods. He'd expected that.

The Raiders can’t fly back to Boston any more than they can fly to Texas. If they aren't leaving until a later date, maybe he and Ilya can see each other again before he leaves. Maybe he'd want to hang around a bit longer this morning, too.

“What are you drinking?” Ilya asks, leaning over to look down into Shane's mug.

Shane holds the mug closer to his chest, but there's no hiding it. “Uh. Warm water.”

Ilya stares at him as if he might still be dreaming. He closes his eyes, shakes his head, and opens them again. “Warm water?”

“It’s supposed to be good for you,” Shane starts. He knows how it sounds, but he’d been enjoying it up until this point. “Just— with the cold, and the snow—” Ilya’s laughing at him already, though, and Shane resists rolling his eyes. “Shut the hell up.”

“At least put some *tea* in it, Hollander.”

The corner of Shane’s lip quivers, despite his agitation.

Ilya stares down at his phone, tapping a message, presumably to Marleau.

Shane wonders how the night before had made Ilya feel, but doesn't dare ask. He can’t think of anything less sexy in this moment.

Ilya makes a small noise in the back of his throat. “I will go.”

Shane bites down on a frown. “Back to your hotel?”

“To restaurant. A few of us are meeting there for breakfast.”

“You’re gonna try to get a cab?”

“Is only few blocks walk. Will be fine.”

“You’re gonna *walk*?” If Ilya is bothered by his questions, he doesn’t show it; he only stares down at his phone and waves his hand at Shane dismissively.

“Is nothing. Montreal is not Moscow.”

“Bullshit,” Shane scoffs, but Ilya only scoffs and sits back, eyes still glued to his phone. “You called me stupid for walking in this kind of weather.”

“You *were.* In hoodie and sweatpants? Foolish. I have proper coat and boots. Will be fine.” His English gets choppier the more irritated he gets.

Shane chews on his lip. “The Raiders' next game is Friday. You aren't flying out until, what, Wednesday? Thursday?"

“Yes. If all is good, we fly to Detroit.”

Shane stares at a spot on the wall below the television screen. “That's… Four or five days.”

Ilya looks at him then, a brow rising incrementally on his face. “Yes?”

Shane can’t look at him for fear of betraying some of the vulnerability he feels this morning, betraying that he doesn't want him to go— not yet.

“Hollander, we can fuck again if you want.” Ilya sounds like he’s grinning now. “But not for long. I need to get back, yes?”

Shane shrugs. “I guess. If you wanna be at a hotel.”

Ilya sets his cup on the coffee table. “You think I can stay *here?*”

The way he says it makes an embarrassed flush rise on Shane’s cheeks. “They think you’re with a girl anyway, don’t they?” He feels stupid for wanting something— *this*. Would Ilya stay if Shane were a girl? He’s sure it wouldn’t matter nearly as much if he were.

Ilya watches him silently.

“It doesn’t matter,” Shane says with a wave of his hand. “Was a dumb suggestion.” He'd only implied it, anyway.

“Yes,” Ilya shrugs. “Is not very smart.”

Shane scowls out his window at the pale flurries of snow outside. His nice feelings from before have been all but extinguished. Afterglow fading fast.

“Is not smart because… we are not like that, are we.” Ilya says it so matter-of-factly, like he’s talking about the weather. “And is too… risky. Too much hassle.” Shane’s cheeks feel warmer with each reason Ilya lists off. “And is not good idea to… play house. You know?”

Shane flinches back like he's been punched.

When Ilya says it like that, it makes a touch more sense. “Yeah, you’re right." Why does it still sting so badly, though?

“Don't be mad. Is not like I am your boy—”

“That’s *not* what I’m getting at,” Shane says, true irritation ringing through. He stands, taking his mug and heading for the kitchen. “Just drop it. It was a stupid idea. I get it. And I agree.“ He busies himself heating a new pot of water.

Ilya watches him with an arm thrown over the back of the sofa, and Shane pointedly avoids his gaze, even when Ilya clears his throat.

“What?” Shane asks, voice stiff.

“Do you want to…” Ilya trails off, apparently waiting for an answer.

Shane knows what he’s asking. If he wants to fuck again.

In truth, he wishes he did. He knows that they won't see each other again until the Olympics. Now is probably the last time they can eke out some kind of pleasure from each other.

The problem is, he couldn’t be further from wanting sex if he tried. A sour feeling has replaced all of the warmth he’d felt before.

It’s stupid, he thinks, because he shouldn’t have expected anything different, and he hadn’t *wanted* anything different, either.

Ilya’s right. They're not an item, and they don't *want* to be an item. Ilya doesn’t like him, and he doesn’t like Ilya, not outside of the bedroom.

And right now, Shane *really* doesn’t like him. For reasons left unthought about.

“No,” Ilya says, reading as much on his face. “I will shower, then.”

He stands and heads for the stairs once more. Shane scowls at his muscular back as he goes, the way his thighs and round ass flex and shift as he takes each step, and hates how much he still wants him.

When his water is done heating, he adds green tea to it.

*

When Ilya gets out of the shower, Shane has disappeared from the living room. The television is still on, but has been muted.

He stands in the living room listening and thinks that he can hear Shane in a separate room, one Ilya hasn’t been inside before. The door is closed, but he can hear the muffled clanking of weights being set down.

Ilya knows when he’s being sent on the walk of shame. He gathers his things as quickly as he can. Slips his coat on and then is out the door.

He knows the way to the back stairwell by now. It greets him in yellow-lit silence.

His lone footsteps echo up to the tall ceiling as he takes them slowly. When he stands at the bottom of the steps, he pauses to make sure his boots are done up right. Before, he'd thought it quaint that Shane had followed him down with no reason. Had sat and taken Ilya's coat without question when he'd handed it to him. It hadn't felt so important at the time, but now Ilya is sorely missing the sendoff.

The stairwell is dingy and lifeless without Shane's candid chatter to fill it up. And colder than anything.

Ilya scoffs and tries to shake himself out of the weird stupor it's fallen into.

Why would he want to stay at Shane Hollander’s boring apartment anyway? Where there is no music or beer of boisterous gloating, and where Shane drinks warm water out of mugs—because of course he does.

Stepping out into the snowy, windy day feels dreadful, though. Ilya lets himself wish, just for a moment, that he hadn't been in such a hurry to leave.

*

Exercise is a good distraction from all of the feelings that’ve come up.

Shane goes through his weights and then switches to the ergometer rower, and then, for good measure, gets on his stationary cycle.

When he's good and sweaty and sore and exhausted, he finally steps off and out into his living room. He stands in the doorway of his home gym and listens intently. He's not sure how much time has passed, and he doesn't care for the moment.

There is no movement in the apartment. No sound of the shower running or cabinets bumping. Ilya's mostly empty coffee cup sits on the table.

He wanders up to his bedroom to find that Ilya has left his towel hanging up to dry in the bathroom again. It's courteous in its own right. The bathroom shows no other sign he was there except for a few water droplets left on the glass shower door.

He's not sure why he let the morning get to him. Why Ilya refusing to even consider the idea of staying at Shane's for more than a few hours had gotten under his skin. In part, he supposes it's because there is the sneaking suspicion that Ilya thinks he's better than this. Better than staying at Shane's boring apartment. Those things are almost a given, though, so why would they matter?

The other reason he might have been upset is something he refuses to think about. He tucks it away as quickly as it comes up.

He eats a quick lunch in line with his macros, and then decides to shower and spend the rest of the day laid out on his sofa.

In a last-minute decision, he retrieves his dildo from the back of his bedside drawer.

He wishes he'd been more in control of his emotions earlier on, had set them aside in order to get one more experience out of Ilya before he left.

The shower spray is immediately hot, which he's thankful for. He takes time soaping himself up, and then takes even more time cleaning himself below the belt.

He fucks himself slowly at first, letting his eyes shut and the hot water spray down on him. He tries to imagine a man behind him, holding onto his hips, plastering himself along his back in place of the hot water.

None of it comes easily to mind, though. And when he finally starts hitting his prostate at a decent rhythm, his abdomen shuddering, all he can imagine is that it's Ilya behind him. Ilya huffing in his ear, Ilya's hands squeezing his waist, Ilya's hand pressing into the middle of his back.

He hates that it's always *him* that he sees in his fantasies, but if that's what it takes, that's what it takes. He ought to cut himself some slack. If he could sleep with anyone else without jeopardizing his whole life and career, he would, wouldn't he? It's only natural that Ilya is the first and only man to come to mind.

He hears his phone ringing in his bedroom and falters.

It goes on for a full cycle, and he thinks it's probably Hayden, or his mother, or maybe the coach with more news about their practice schedule in light of the storm.

When it finally goes silent, he continues on, trying to fall back into the rhythm he had before. He spreads his legs a bit wider, leans a bit heavier against the shower wall due to his exhaustion, tries to find a stroke that hits the right spot, but still goes deep enough to feel. It's strenuous work, and his legs are weak from his impromptu workout.

He curses more than once, trying desperately to reach his orgasm.

His phone begins ringing again.

"*Fuck,*" he mutters, pausing to listen. It rings three times and then stops. Before Shane can blink, it begins anew. That gives him pause.

What if it's more than one person calling?

He thinks.

What if something's happened? With one of his teammates? His family?

What if someone found out that he and Ilya—

He drops the dildo into the bottom of the shower and gives himself one last hurried rinse.

How would anyone know? *It's not possible*, he tries to reassure himself.

He wraps a towel around his waist and heads for his bedroom, where the phone begins ringing yet again.

*

Ilya steps into a gastropub and diner combo, one of the few businesses tucked into Montreal's streets that's still open. A man outside uses a scraper to remove the snow from the front window.

He spots a third of his team almost immediately. Seven big men wedged into one corner of the diner, all in various states of disarray. Marleau is at the end and raises a hand to Ilya when he catches sight of him.

The diner is full of mismatched people. Some look like they've been out all night or are nursing a hangover. Others look as if they've just popped in for a morning coffee before they head off to a corporate job.

Everyone, though, looks like they are taking refuge from the weather.

"There he is," Marleau announces as Ilya strides up. "You've never stayed out the whole night with this chick."

Ilya smiles wryly as he tosses his overnight bag over the back of a chair and slumps down next to his friend. He wishes Marleau would pipe down while they're in public, and in front of the rest of the team, no less. Most of the others know about his on-and-off again history with "*Jane*," but he'd rather not call it to mind right now.

Not when memories of the night before are still so fresh.

“Must be gettin’ serious, huh?” Marleau nudges him in the side.

Ilya snorts for show and ducks his head. “Is not serious even a little.”

Marleau raises a big, boisterous brow.

“Is only… she has big appetite." This sounds impressive on some front, doesn't it? "And have you seen the weather?”

Marleau chuckles.

Ilya thinks of Shane pressed into the bed below him, panting and gasping, and knows that it’s he himself who has the appetite. He’s starving for more. Even, and *especially* now, surrounded by his hungover teammates who reek of sweat and hotel bar. Ilya wishes that he'd hung around a little while with Shane. Shane and his quiet, boring apartment...

Why had Ilya been in such a hurry to get *here?*

There is much talk amongst them about the unexpected weather and the missed game in Dallas. A bit more about the game two nights ago against Montreal, and how they'd nearly had it.

Ilya drinks a bad cup of coffee, and it only serves to remind him of Shane’s white porcelain mug that he’d left on the coffee table. Coffee that was much better than this mud, that Shane had made and hadn't even drunk himself.

The conversation among the team turns to plans for the rest of the week. Their flight scheduled for early Thursday morning.

“We’re gonna have to practice at some point this week,” one of them says, and a few others pipe up in agreement. “You think Montreal will let us into their arena?”

That drums up a few chuckles, and even more jokes.

“Tight-asses probably won’t even let us near the block.”

Ilya doesn't feel much like bantering this morning.

He stares out the front window at the snow beginning to accumulate against the glass again. Wind blows through the overhang of the building, whistling. Ilya frowns, counting how many cars pass by the window over the next minute. Less and less come.

Marleau grabs his attention. “So, you going back after this?”

Ilya’s gaze drifts out the window again. “To hotel? Yes.”

“No, man. To *her* place,” Marleau smirks like this is a given. “Hell, if *I* had a girl who could stand to see me regularly, I’d be staying at hers every night I got the chance.” Marleau shrugs on his coat.

Ilya looks around and realizes that the rest of them are gathering their things, preparing to leave.

“We’re off until Wednesday night," Marleau points out.

Ilya stares down into his shitty cup of coffee. Frowns.

He follows the rest of the team as they wander out onto the sidewalk.

Connors pipes up, turning the collar of his coat up against the wind. “Does the weather seem... worse to you guys?” He has to speak loudly over the sound of the wind that's picked up considerably since Ilya arrived.

“Hotel’s just a few blocks that way. We're probably hitting the bar early.” Marleau points down the road. He looks at Ilya skeptically. “You coming with?”

Ilya stares at him, then turns to look in the opposite direction.

The snow is indeed picking up again. It blows hardening flakes of ice against his cheeks. There are already a few inches stacked against the sides of the buildings.

He could go back to the hotel with his team. Wait there until the storm lets up again. Watch some television, listen to Marleau tell stories about his summers in the States. Get drunk at the bar with the others. Watch one of them vomit into the corner.

And keep thinking about last night.

The snow makes him anxious, like a timer is ticking down. There is a decision to make, and he has a feeling that no matter where he goes, he's going to be stuck with that decision for at least the next twenty-four hours.

Where would he rather be— well, it's a ridiculous question.

Stuck in a hotel bar with a bunch of stale-smelling men, who, granted, he's friends with. Maybe there will be a pretty woman holed up there, too— one that would make a lot more sense for him to spend time with while they're stuck.

None of that seems to compare, though, to the idea of Shane Hollander, with freckles and blushing honeyed skin, who smells like salt and musk and expensive body wash and whatever cologne he uses, in his clean, quiet apartment in the sky.

What the hell.

Ilya had been welcomed, and maybe he'd jumped the gun leaving the offer behind. He also knows he insulted Shane. *Playing house.* He hadn't meant to be offensive, but he'd known as soon as he saw the look on Shane's face that he had been.

“I will…” Ilya starts, grimacing. He looks at Marleau, who raises a brow. “I will go to her house, I think.”

Marleau chuckles, smacking Ilya on the shoulder a few times in what's meant to be a friendly pat. “Can’t blame you.”

Ilya starts the walk back, turning the corner and pulling his phone out. He sends a hurried text.

Lily - 10:47 a.m. - Are you still home?

Shane does not text him back.

Ilya wonders if he's still mad, or if he's simply engrossed in something else— a workout, a shower, a nap. He doesn't know what Shane gets up to on his off days. He surely can't have gone out in this, though.

Ilya turns down the street of Shane's complex and decides that he'll just have to push his luck a little bit more.

When he arrives, Shane has still not texted him back. He trudges down the side alley to the D1 door and tries pulling on it. It, predictably, does not budge. He pulls out his phone again, and this time, he calls Shane.

There's no answer, so he calls again. He wonders if he is being purposely ignored, so he *keeps* calling. Shane wouldn't ignore him forever— he's not like that. The cold flakes blowing against his neck and ears give him the courage to keep trying.

After three tries, he thinks that he will not answer.

Then, Shane comes on the line, breathing heavily. "*What*?" he demands, voice hard and angry.

Ilya grins, despite himself. "Come open the door."

"What?"

"I am at the back door. Freezing my balls off. Come open," Ilya says.

Shane makes a sound of disbelief on the other end and then hangs up.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter felt all over the place, but I got 'er done.

Back to the building tension, now. The tension... within the building, one might say.

Fare thee well.

_____

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 5: First Steps

Chapter Summary

> “I may have made a… mistake.”

Chapter Notes

> howdy.
>
> **another 18+/nsfw chapter.**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Five

Shane curses the whole trip down the stairwell.

It's even colder today than it was the night before. And he's irritated.

Rushing through the end of his shower and forgoing an orgasm, picking up his phone in a panic. Whose number should he see disgracing his caller ID?

No, he's not irritated, he's *angry*.

He ought to send Ilya packing. There’s nothing he could possibly need except a quick fuck, and as much as Shane might privately want to indulge in that too, he’s trying to have some dignity.

Still, he goes.

Because, after all, there's still an unprecedented snowstorm raging outside. By the sound of the wind howling out in the outer passage, it's picking back up, too. How logical would it be to let the only man who can feasibly fuck him freeze to death in his back alley?

He'd thrown on some clothes after that and taken his sweet time, at least.

When he opens the back door, Ilya pushes inside immediately. His arms are wrapped around his chest, hands tucked tightly into his pits. He takes a shuddering breath as Shane lets the door close.

"Could you have taken longer?" His light eyes are glassy, and his pale cheeks have turned a rosy red. The tip of his nose is reddest of all.

"Thought you had a *decent coat*," Shane says sarcastically, but only means it halfway. He feels a touch guilty for leaving him out there so long, now that he sees the state of him.

"It seems the storm is not over. Is getting bad again."

"Okay?" Shane wants to know what the hell he's doing back after just a few hours. If he only wants sex, Shane doubts he'll have the fortitude to turn him down. He feels weak to his body's wants, most of the time.

"I… ah…" Ilya starts, trailing off.

He almost looks… *embarrassed*.

Shane steps back, folding his arms over his chest and letting his shoulders thud into the wall. He leans there, staring skeptically at Ilya, and waits.

"I may have made a… mistake."

"A *mistake*," Shane repeats.

"Little mistake."

Shane scoffs. "What was the mistake?"

"Not… *considering* your offer."

"You just wanna fuck."

"Of course," Ilya says, eyes glancing down at Shane's body quickly. He takes a step closer. "Don't you?"

Have some self-respect, Shane tells himself. He can't deny it, though; of course, he wants that.

"That is not all, though," Ilya continues, sighing through his nose. He averts his eyes to the stairs next to them, eyes dragging up them to the door leading to the second-floor hall. "I did not mean to be…."

Shane waits a long moment for Ilya to find the words. When he doesn't, Shane supplies them. "An asshole?"

"Yes, but…" Ilya snaps his fingers lightly a couple of times, the words not coming to him. "But different."

"A dick?"

Ilya smiles coyly. "It will come to me. But I am… sorry."

Shane stares at him blankly. "Come again?

"You heard me," Ilya says disdainfully.

"Yeah, but…" Shane breaks, a smirk forming on his mouth. "*I'm* the one sheltering you from a storm. I wanna hear it again."

Ilya closes in on him, hands coming up to break Shane's arms apart so he can press their chests together. He looks at Shane in that way that makes Shane's knees weak; down his nose, like Ilya is the one in control. Like he already knows what's going to happen, and Shane need not worry about the details.

Shane's throat clicks.

"I did not mean to be an asshole," Ilya says slowly, picking his words carefully. "And… I *would* rather be at your home than at hotel. If we are going to be stuck, anyway."

It's more words than Shane had expected to hear.

"And is not *just* to fuck," Ilya says with a shrug. "Coffee is better, also."

"My *coffee."* Shane turns to duck out from between Ilya and the wall, but Ilya braces a hand to his chest to hold him there. The chill of the wall hits him between the shoulders, but Shane doesn't mind one bit.

Ilya takes hold of his chin and kisses him firmly, and any resolve Shane had had left melts away on the spot.

As if by magic, that slow seep of afterglow seems to return to him. Hesitant revisiting of the warmer feelings he'd sat in that morning. His chest lurches, and Shane puts a cap on them quickly before they can take him over again. They obviously will only lead to sore feelings later on.

He breaks the kiss, turning to head up the stairs. "C'mon."

Ilya follows him silently back to the apartment. He even manages to keep his hands to himself.

Once the door is shut, the sound of Shane's dryer rumbles further back in the apartment. His bedding ought to be nearly dry, and he makes a mental note of retrieving it right when it's

finished so it doesn't wrinkle.

Ilya throws down his bag and begins shedding his coat and boots. Shane toes his own shoes off and wanders into the kitchen.

“I was about to make an early lunch,” he lies. “All I have right now is…” he opens up his fridge to take a look. “Leftover brown rice…. Salmon…”

“I am alright."

“I saved your pizza.” Each piece is wrapped up tightly in cling film to preserve it. He’d done it originally to keep it for Ilya, when there'd been a chance of him staying, but then had figured he’d give it to Hayden at the next practice. “I can heat it back up in the—“

“I am not hungry for *food*, Hollander,” Ilya says, hint of exasperation in his voice. He's much closer now, and an arm slips around Shane’s waist. He can feel Ilya’s body through the back of his hoodie, warmed from his coat.

Shane lets the fridge door go, and it eases closed. Ilya’s mouth finds the side of his neck, pressing a kiss there.

Shane's nearly ashamed of the way his lashes flutter, of the intense relief that fills him. He'd imagined a man at his back just a while ago, and now here he is in the flesh. He lets himself press back against Ilya, and Ilya takes his weight as if it's natural.

"You smell good," Ilya comments, voice muffled against his skin. "You took another shower, hm?"

Shane sighs through his nose, nodding.

"After your angry workout?"

"Fuck you," Shane huffs. He'd only been angry because of Ilya, after all.

“A little dramatic, yes?” Ilya begins walking him away from the fridge with two arms wrapped around his waist securely. One of them sits low on his belly, and it makes Shane want to grind forward. Ilya's other hand keeps Shane's ass tucked securely in the cradle of Ilya's hips. Shane can feel the way his cock begins to harden through his jeans.

“Was just a workout,” Shane breathes. “Nothing to do with you.”

“Mhm,” Ilya kisses him on the sensitive skin behind his ear. “Overreaction.”

“Don’t press your luck, Rozanov.”

“Yes,” Ilya agrees, walking him up to his dining table. Shane stares down at it in confusion. Ilya takes both of his hands, directing them to press down on the solid wooden top.

Shane gets the idea, then, and leans carefully over it at an angle, propped on his hands. He looks to his right, out into the greying white of the storm. His heart flutters at the idea of

doing it right here.

Maybe Ilya can read his mind. "Relax," he says huskily in his ear. "Even if your windows were not reflective... the snow is so dense, no one could see you even if you were pressed up to the glass."

Shane flushes at the thought of that. It's a terrifying idea, and also immediately arousing.

Maybe Ilya can't read his mind, but he can read Shane's face like a book. He cranes his head around to look him in the eye. A devilish grin spreads across his face. "Ah. This excites you."

Shane ducks his head. "Fuck off."

"You want people to see?"

"*No*," Shane says, before he can help it. It only spurs Ilya on.

"What do you think they would say?"

That thought isn't very sexy. Shane turns around to say as much, but Ilya's hand turns him right back around.

"Not what I meant."

"What the hell did you mean, then?" Shane mutters.

"Anyone would think you are pretty sight."

Extremely flattering, but Shane isn't about to tell him *that.*

"Taking cock."

"Alright," Shane says, making a show of getting up. Ilya chuckles and pushes him back down gently enough that Shane doesn't feel the need to resist.

"I will not tease you," Ilya tells him, hand petting down his shoulders and sides, over his ribs. Then he leans closer, voice hushed. “Stay,” he says against Shane's ear, and Shane’s eyes fall closed, goosebumps raising on his arms.

Ilya’s warmth leaves his back, and Shane waits.

Fingers slip inside the waistband of his sweats, giving them a tug. They slip easily over his ass, and Ilya makes a sighing sound.

“I guess your elastic clothes have *some* use, yes?”

“Shut up. I’m at *home,* asshole, of course I’m wearing sweatpants.“ He nearly turns around, but Ilya stops him with a hand to the shoulder.

“*Stay*, Hollander.”

Shane turns back, mouth gone dry. “What are you doing?” he asks, voice small. He doesn’t need to, though. He can already see where this is going.

“Apology, like you asked for,” Ilya tells him, but it sounds as if this apology will be no skin off *his* back. “You want?”

Shane shivers, looking around his pale-lit apartment. They’ve never done it like this before, in the daylight. His apartment is cast in cool blue tones, the whites starker, the shadows indigo. He’s used to the cover of night, warm amber lamps giving just enough light to not completely miss the mark.

He’s nervous, but so turned on that his dick is at full mast already.

“Yes,” he says, voice shakier than he’d meant.

“Mm?”

“Yeah.”

Ilya hooks his fingers into Shane's boxer briefs and drags them down as well, settling them just under the curve of his ass.

Shane feels a bit like he’s going to pass out.

“You’re shaking,” Ilya comments, hands kneading his ass. “Keep your knees bent, yes? Bloodflow—”

“I’m *fine*,” Shane says, and it’s true, mostly. He’s terribly turned on, but he’s never done this before.

“Is alright,” Ilya says, voice painfully soft. “You still want?” Shane bites down on the inside of his cheek to keep from feeling that softness too deeply in his chest.

“*Yes*,” Shane says, letting his eyes shut. If he doesn’t look around the apartment, he’ll be able to focus on the pleasure instead of the idea of someone walking in with a clear view of his ass. No one can or *would* come in unannounced, anyway.

He lowers himself onto his elbows to better balance, legs naturally parting a bit. Ilya groans suddenly, his thumbs spreading him apart, and Shane feels his face flush from ear to neck.

“Hollander…”

Shane hears the sound of him swallowing. That’s new. The reverence feels sincere at least, and it does a bit to ease some of the embarrassment from Shane.

He feels a few kisses peppered along the creases of his thighs, and then Ilya’s face presses between his cheeks. The breath leaves Shane’s lungs.

“Oh, fuck,” he huffs, head dropping to rest against his forearms. He feels Ilya’s nose brush along him, his tongue poke out to lick a stripe up his center. Ilya hums to himself before he

pulls away suddenly.

“You're loose.”

Shane keeps his head tucked down against his arms.

“What were you doing when I called, hm?” Ilya rubs the pad of a finger over his hole, and Shane can feel how pliable the muscle has become. “Touching yourself?”

“Fuck you,” Shane groans, squeezing his eyes closed.

“I am not the one already open,” Ilya says, like he’s smiling. He presses his mouth back to Shane, lips parting, and Shane can't help but gasp.

He leans heavily on his elbows, chest heaving. The moans begin to come whether he wants them to or not. He tries to stifle them into his arms, but this just seems to spur Ilya on more. A brush of teeth comes against his sensitive skin, feather light.

After a few floating moments of that, Ilya nips him on the cheek, and Shane's hand smacks down hard on the table. "Fucking *hell,* Rozanov," he huffs, and isn't sure if he's angry or about to come.

A finger is slipped into him, testing the give, and another joins it almost immediately. Shane realizes that the continuous low hum he's hearing is Ilya himself, leaning heavily against his leg. "*Fuck,* Hollander. Where is—“

Shane makes to stand up. “Bedroom."

“Ah—“ Ilya starts, shooting to his feet. He holds Shane down on the table with a hand to the middle of his back. “Don’t move, remember?”

Shane nods shortly, trembles from head to foot. He turns his head to the side and rests it on his fabric-covered arm, watching as Ilya comes into view, making the walk to the stairs. He takes his time, Shane notices. He knows it's only to tease him, like he'd just said he wouldn't do.

Shane clenches down on nothing, hoping he’s not *too* loose to make Ilya feel good.

He takes a quick stock of himself. His heated face and his ass exposed to the cool air. His sweats still around his thighs. He shimmies them down until they fall on their own, steps one leg out of them, but then Ilya returns, pausing in the first landing to watch him.

He watches Shane thoughtfully, lube and condom in hand. He pops the cap of the bottle and pours a bit across his fingers. Some of it drips down onto the floor, and the mess of it somehow turns Shane on even more.

Shane pants once, Ilya's eyes tracking his parting mouth. That's interesting. So, Shane lets his jaw drop further open and moans long and soft. Ilya's face shifts, some of his tight control giving way.

Shane thrills at that.

“Rozanov, *please*,” he says before he can think, his voice needy and almost wistful. He’d be embarrassed by how desperate he sounds... if the words didn’t make the remaining restraint drop away from Ilya’s face. It leaves behind unabashed want.

Shane did that.

Perhaps he's got a little more power than he thought.

Ilya takes the last steps two at a time and strides the rest of the room quickly until he's right up behind him again. Shane hears the sound of his fly and the rustle of clothes, and then his cock bumps against his ass. Shane clenches and then relaxes, eyes shutting.

The condom wrapper crinkles, and then Ilya presses up close behind him, hands rubbing Shane up and down his sides in an almost soothing gesture.

“What do you need, hm?” Ilya hushes against the back of his ear. Shane’s never felt like he’s going to come out of his own skin more than he does now. He shifts, rubs his ass in gentle sways back against Ilya’s hips.

Never has he had the confidence to entice him back so blatantly, but right now, it feels as natural as breathing.

“This,” he says, feeling Ilya’s cock shift against him. He feels drunk. “*Please*, need it—“

Ilya's hands settle onto his hips, gripping him firmly. "Okay," he mutters thickly. "Okay."

Shane wishes he had something to hold onto— bedsheets, a pillow. He settles on folding his arms together and pressing his face into them.

The head of Ilya’s cock meets no resistance as he pushes in halfway. Shane groans at the stretch that doesn't even smart this time. Ilya pants between his shoulders, pulls out, pushes back in fully until his hips press into Shane's ass.

“That’s *good*, Hollander,” Ilya mutters into his ear. His hands slide from Shane’s waist to his shoulders, rubbing in large, soothing circles. Shane rolls his hips, lets his legs part a bit further, and settles against the table edge.

When Ilya starts to thrust, it's only slow for the first minute before he begins to pick up the pace.

It’s good, Shane finds out, being fucked in this position. It doesn’t hit him straight on, but because of that, it gives him plenty of time to pay attention to the nerves tingling all over his body. The feeling of each inch of Ilya's cock, how his hips bounce off of Shane as he begins picking up speed.

Shane grins into his arms, almost giddy with how easy this feels now, how much he loves it.

Ilya seems to notice.

“Is good?” he pants, voice soft.

Shane's voice comes out nearly a giggle, to his dismay. “It’s good."

Ilya doesn’t falter in his pace even a beat, but he pushes back up to stand, humming under his breath. Shane can tell he's thinking something over, and then Ilya says, “Not good *enough*.”

What could *that* mean? It certainly *feels* good enough, nerves tingling, and Ilya’s body over him, warm along his back. He could live in this kind of feeling for a long time, content and happy.

“What do you mean?”

“You are not making any sound."

Shane scoffs, glancing up over his shoulder. “Yeah, I am.”

“Not as much. Or as loud.”

Shane nearly starts laughing. Ilya Rozanov, complaining about the man he has bent over a table, was not what he expected their encounter to be.

“It feels good, Rozanov,” Shane reasons. "*Really* good."

Ilya reaches down and grasps Shane by the back of his hoodie, dragging him back up to nearly standing, hands spread on the table.

On Ilya's next thrust in, the angle has changed considerably.

“*Ah*—“ Shane cuts off, eyes falling shut as that *spot* is brushed over.

“Good,” Ilya mutters, a hand on Shane’s shoulder, holding him to that position. The other hand settles onto his hip as he picks up his careful thrusting again.

Shane lets his back arch, stomach dipping down toward the table as

Ilya builds the pace.

The smacking of their skin becomes louder and more consistent. Shane, too, is louder, no matter how much he tries not to be. He's self-conscious, out here in the open floor plan of his apartment. He tries to press his lips together with his teeth.

“Let me hear, Hollander. What is point of privacy if you will not be loud, hm?”

Shane thinks of pointing out that he still has neighbors, but the soundproofing of such an expensive building is top-notch. He begins huffing a bit louder.

Ilya’s hand squeezes encouragingly on his waist.

"Yes, good."

He curses in Russian, pistoning his hips a few times, and that makes Shane gasp and groan in a sudden outburst. Ilya chuckles behind him, and the hands on Shane pull him to stand taller, until his back meets Ilya's chest. He can feel Ilya's jeans scraping the skin of his ass, his t-shirt and Shane's hoodie catching and twisting against each other. Their state of partial undress makes him feel somehow more exposed than if they were entirely naked.

Ilya's arm encircles his shoulders from the front, splaying across his collarbone. The other one slides down Shane's cheek, turning his head to one side. Ilya comes into view in his peripheral.

"You're so *good,* Hollander," Ilya huffs against his cheek.

Shane's chest twists, the praise going straight to his cock. One of his hands squirms below to try to grasp himself.

He feels the urge to turn his head further, and can't stop himself from doing so. He catches sight of Ilya's face and is taken aback by how wrecked he looks, brows drawn up, lids lowered. There's sweat on his brow, and Shane is reminded of how long they've been going on like this.

Shane's mouth parts, and Ilya meets him there, lips pressing to his, messy and open and hot.

Shane is embarrassed that *that's* the thing to make him come. Over everything else— the sounds of their skin hitting together, the flawless way Ilya fucks him, his own hand squeezing around his cockhead— the thing that makes his brain shut off is Ilya's hot mouth, and looking him in the eye. Knowing someone is here with him, getting off on *him* getting off.

His orgasm is full of bliss, but a touch of shame as well. For the way he looks at Ilya and wishes to see something more than a rival, a colleague, a shaky friendship with great benefits.

Ilya grabs the side of his face to hold him firm as his hips strike quickly against him, and then he goes still, panting into Shane's mouth with shuddering groans.

Shane watches his face carefully, energy fast draining from them both.

Ilya rests his forehead against Shane's temple. The way his hand pets down Shane's opposite cheek, across his neck, makes it hard for Shane to hold onto his guilt.

He cranes his neck once more and kisses Ilya on the lips, soft and chaste this time. He kisses again, the corner of his mouth, and feels fuzzy warmth seeping back into his bones.

“You are very pretty, Hollander,” Ilya says syrupy slow, meeting his eye.

"Shut the fuck up."

“Is good thing,” Ilya says, lips finding Shane’s ear and nuzzling it. He grunts through his teeth, hips grinding in a last few small circles that make Shane tremble.

When he pulls out, Shane clenches down.

Ilya takes a weak step back, leaning heavily onto an arm propped on Shane's breakfast bar counter. When Shane straightens, he suddenly feels chilled and exposed. He bends down to pick his sweats off the ground and pull them back onto his other ankle and up his hips.

When he turns, Ilya's staring at him, mouth slightly parted as he pants.

Shane's never had to face him in the daylight directly after the fact. Usually, they can lie apart, or more usually than that, Ilya simply leaves.

"I remember the word," Ilya says suddenly, and Shane blinks.

"Word?"

"The word I was thinking of. In the stairwell."

Shane thinks back on the conversation, but it feels far away now.

Ilya pronounces it carefully. "Disrespect."

Shane blinks. "Disrespect?"

"I did not mean to be... *disrespectful*. Earlier. To you."

Shane feels a new flush start at his ears. "You *never* care about being disrespectful," he points out. Some might argue that Ilya Rozanov has made a whole career out of being disrespectful.

"Well, only this one time, then." Ilya shrugs, padding around the breakfast bar to the sink to wash his hands off.

Shane stares at the muscles in his shoulders rolling as he suds his hands together. He feels a little lightheaded, he realizes. He suddenly wishes he were lying down under a big blanket.

Ilya returns, his jeans done up as if they'd never fucked at all. He surprises Shane again with a hand to his lower back.

"You clean up first, yes?" he suggests, voice bereft of all command or control. He seems quite tired, himself.

"You're the one who's all sweaty," Shane points out.

Ilya considers him for another moment longer and then nods slowly. "Alright."

Shane follows him up the stairs, a few paces back. When Ilya goes into the ensuite, Shane begins retrieving his bedding from the dryer in the hall laundry closet and carries it in a big, still-warm pile to his room. As he begins sorting through, looking for his fitted sheet and pillow cases, he hears the knob in the shower twist on.

A warm sort of comfort threatens to consume him. The idea of Ilya taking a shower, and then getting out, probably to putter off to the kitchen to reheat some of his leftover pizza while a storm rages on outside...

Ilya makes a sound in the bathroom.

Memory comes flooding back to Shane. Mortification doesn't even have a moment to settle in before Ilya's head pokes around the cracked bathroom door, a shit-eating grin spread across his face.

"Hollander, you must come see what I found in your shower."

Chapter End Notes

- We have not one, but two uses of the word pretty in description of Shane Hollander in this chapter. I will tone it down next time. But there are not many other descriptors as apt as that for him.

- I can't write smut like this for *every* chapter, so we're gonna need to get into some more plot heavy scenes, with touches of spice along the way. This was a good start to their snow-in though. And definitely what would've happened.

- If there are ever any continuity errors, please kindly point them out. This chapter in particular went through a lot of technical changes-- like positions, what clothing was on when, etc. I read and reread and try to make sure to keep everything fluid, but sometimes I miss a detail here and there! I only use a grammar/proofreading software at the very end, so all other edits are going by eye.

- I'm not actually sure if the books ever state Shane and Ilya's body hair grooming preferences. In the show, we can see that Ilya has some amount of hair on his stomach (and in the dickpic lol) For now, I'm being a bit vague with Shane's situation. I personally prefer writing all people with some amount of body hair, so that's how *I'm* imagining it, but that's just me. Maybe Shane just keeps things trimmed and tidy? It's a mute point anyway.

- I'm thinking I may change the description slightly for this fic to an excerpt from this chapter. So if you see that, I *did* give a fair warning.

- Thank you for reading! I didn't realize how fun it would be to write for a fandom in it's peak days. Very rewarding and exciting and electric. And there's still more show to look forward to someday too🥰 what a time to be alive.

farewell for now.

_____

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 6: Forcasting

Chapter Summary

> Ilya's phone buzzes again, drawing both their attention. Ilya looks back at Shane, bottom lip poked out teasingly. He leans in closer, chin bumping his shoulder. “You are not even a little curious?”

Chapter Notes

> how about those Golden Globes outfits. they looked fantastic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Six

“I am finished, Hollander,” Ilya says when he steps out of the shower.

No reply comes.

Ilya towels off the water from his body, his skin turned pink in splotches from the overly-hot water he’d luxuriated in. He scrubs through his hair and then steps into the doorway of the bathroom to look out.

His eyes land automatically on the drawer that Shane had stuffed his prized dildo back into. Ilya had gotten a good look at it before he had, pleased with what he’d seen. A girthy seven inches, purple marbled silicone with a flared base and wide head. Realistic, aside from the fantastic color. A bend to it that he’s sure Shane picked out specifically to be able to use on himself.

Shane had rushed into the ensuite to retrieve it without a word, Ilya watching with amusement. He'd heard Shane's bedside drawer open and close loudly.

"*Is alright, Hollander,*" he'd called out the door. "*I like that it looks like me.*" Sure, not exactly like him, but he liked that Shane had a full-sized toy on hand. It reminded him that Shane wasn't just the focused, goody-two-shoes that the media sometimes portrayed him as.

Shane had closed the bathroom door himself, rather loudly.

Ilya had grinned through the whole first half of his shower. He'd nearly had to get himself off thinking about Shane using the thing on himself, but those thoughts had faded some once he'd begun to soap up his hair.

Now, in the doorway, his eyes drag to Shane, who looks to have lain down on his freshly made bed and rolled onto his side, facing his outer window.

"Hollander," Ilya says, maybe softer than he needs to.

Shane doesn't stir.

Carefully, he pads around the bottom of the bed, craning his neck to take a closer look.

Shane's eyes are closed. Ilya lets himself stare for a very long moment.

Shane Hollander's face is simply the cutest thing that one could ask for. Prettier than many women, more handsome than most men by far. A thick fan of dark lashes against his cheeks, and freckles abound. The lovely slope of his nose down to two plush lips that are turned upward at the corners. Ilya's stomach twists.

He turns, picking up the change of clothes Shane had set out for him on the end of the bed. He quickly slips into the sweats and T-shirt. The shirt pulls around his chest just a bit, but it smells strongly of Shane. Ilya brings it to his nose to breathe deeply.

He looks back once more and swallows. "Shane?" he says, softest of all. Just to try it out.

Shane still doesn't stir.

Ilya mouths the word over and over to himself as he pads back down to the living room. He loves the way the name sounds. Loves it so much that his chest aches, and not in a good way. He curses in Russian, pressing a hand to the base of his throat. His pulse flutters beneath his fingers, and he lets out a haggard breath.

Mind racing for a way out, he wanders to the windows. Looks out. Can barely see the street through the snow coming down. Can't see the buildings down the road at all. Looks upward, squints against the white storm raging on, accentuated by deep pits of dark cloud.

If it were afternoon, he imagines that the room would let in lovely warm sunlight.

Instead, it's murky and blue.

His pulse still pounds, his mind still races.

Shouldn't be here. Should leave, his mind offers as a solution to his swelling panic. *Too dangerous, too risky, too, too, too. Hollander is too much.*

Ilya *wants* too much, which is the real problem. Being around Shane for longer than a hookup had been a terrible idea.

What were you thinking?

Ilya sits down on the sofa, knee bouncing. He thinks of turning on the television, but that'd be getting too comfortable.

His mind turns over what might happen if someone knew he was here. What would happen if word got out to the press? What would happen to him, with his family and—

Worse than that, what's happening to him *right now?* The thought of Shane Hollander just in the next room, of facing him when he wakes up, has sent him into a tailspin.

He'd been foolish to come back here; he'd not thought things through, had only been thinking with his dick, and his stupid, stupid heart. His heart that wants too many things it can't—

"Rozanov?" Shane's voice breaks through the sudden storm in Ilya's mind.

Ilya looks up, finds Shane standing at the bottom of the stairs, hood still up, his eyes bleary from sleep. Ilya's chest shudders violently. Fear and want in one sweep. He'd been too distracted to hear his approach.

"What's wrong?" Shane asks, little frown on his mouth.

"Nothing."

Shane stares at him. "Liar," he says flatly. He doesn't press Ilya, though, to Ilya's great relief. Instead, he walks past the coffee table to the window. "I wonder how many people are stuck out there right now?" he murmurs, looking out. "Haven't seen it storm like this in a few years."

Ilya swallows. He's thankful for Shane's sudden interruption of his mental spiral. It had threatened to swallow him up, send him walking out into the snow to try to find his way back to the hotel on his own.

Ilya thinks of something normal to say. "It snowed like this in Moscow the last winter I spent there."

"Yeah?" Shane asks, looking back at him over his shoulder, genuine interest on his face.

Ilya breathes in slowly, remembering that cold winter. "Very terrible. Many people lost power. Some deaths on the roads."

Shane presses his lips together, nodding grimly. "Do you like winters here better?"

His dark eyes are touched with sweetness when he searches Ilya's face. Ilya is reminded of every time before. Eyes meeting on the rink or at a press event. After each shared game behind closed doors. Sparkling in the dark.

“Mm. Very much so."

Shane smiles softly, turning to look out the window once more. “I’m fixing food. Are you hungry?” he asks.

“Yes,” Ilya says, realizing it’s true. He probably should’ve eaten sooner than this. Maybe he could think better if he had. "I thought you wanted to take a shower, though."

"Later."

Ilya feels his stomach settle back into place as Shane pads past him for the kitchen.

*

“You could have little pizza, could you not?”

Shane looks away from the microwave where his salmon spins around in a slow circle as it heats. Ilya sits at the breakfast bar once more, a cold slice of pizza in front of him. He's already scarfed down the first in the time it took Shane to plate his own food.

Shane had offered to heat the slices up, but Ilya had declined.

A hockey game plays quietly on the television in the background— Florida up by two points against Los Angeles. Neither of them has been paying very much attention to it. Which secretly pleases Shane.

He thinks about Ilya’s question.

“I could *physically* eat pizza, sure.”

Ilya makes a face at him. Shane smirks back.

“It’s not part of my diet. Right *now*.”

“What would it do to you if you did, though?” Ilya asks, taking a large bite and chewing it, eyes never leaving Shane’s face.

Shane nibbles on the inside of his lip. “It would put off my daily macros. Too much fat, carbs, no protein.”

“There is meat,” Ilya points out.

“Processed and cured meat.”

Ilya tilts his head just so, a brow quirking up. Shane gives a little shrug, feeling a bit bare in front of him. “It would probably just give me a stomachache. Maybe not even that. But… following it every day is important. The days stack into weeks, into months, and that’s how I stay on track—“

“I understand, Hollander,” Ilya says, only slightly irritated. He sighs through his nose. “Is only... diet seems so boring to do *all* of the time.”

“I don’t follow it as closely in the summer.”

“Yes, but… You cannot celebrate your wins during the season.”

“I find other ways to celebrate,” Shane says, and hears his own innuendo as soon as he says it. Ilya’s mouth quirks up, and Shane mirrors it.

They only just fucked over the kitchen table a few hours ago, but Shane already feels a hint of arousal returning. He knows it’s being in Ilya’s presence that has him rearing to go. He wonders, abstractly, how long it would take being around Ilya consistently for his intense, near-constant physical attraction to wane.

The microwave dings, and Shane turns to retrieve his food.

He brings it around the bar counter and sits down a seat away from Ilya out of habit. Ilya looks down the length of the counter at his food. Shane can feel when his gaze shifts to his face, but instead of looking back, he begins eating.

A hand passes into view, Ilya reaching for his fork. He takes it from Shane, scoops his own bite of salmon and rice up, and eats it. Shane stares at his throat as he chews, a line of moles up onto his cheek.

Ilya smirks down at him, the melancholy broken. “Like what you see?”

Shane reaches up, feeling a bit braver. He runs his fingers over the first mole, up to the second. Lands on the one on his cheek that moves as Ilya chews. Ilya looks surprisingly bashful, and Shane feels that swell of control return.

Sometimes, it’s easy to think that Ilya is the one holding the power. Shane forgets that he, too, has an effect on Ilya, possibly just as strong.

“How do you like it?” Shane asks, nodding his head at the fork.

Ilya recovers. Shrugs. “Is fine.”

*

Marly - 6:52 pm - Hope you enjoy shacking up while the rest of us sleep in the slums.

Ilya stares down at the message, thinking over each word. He knows what slums are, and the hotels that the team is staying at are decidedly *not* slummy. They are simply not the over-the-top luxury that their status normally affords them in Montreal.

“Hollander.”

“Hm?” Shane grunts, eyes glazed over. He sits flicking through stations on the television. Ilya doesn’t know why he doesn’t just settle on a film of some sort while they wait for the next hockey game to start.

“What is ‘*shacking up*’?”

Shane drops the remote on his thigh, scrambles to catch it, and sends it flying off to the floor. He turns a confused look on Ilya, obviously flustered.

“What?”

“Marleau says we are *shacking up*. What is meaning?”

Shane swallows, looking past him hesitantly. Ilya suppresses a smirk. He still doesn’t know what it means, but he’s beginning to get the idea.

“Just, like…” Shane shrugs. “Like, staying together. Romantically or, I guess, sexually. In our case.”

Ilya’s smile wanes. “Of course.”

“For a little while. Like, not permanent.”

“Alright,” Ilya nods.

Roz - 6:54 pm - fuck off.

Ilya sets his phone on the coffee table and heads for the downstairs guest bathroom. It’s not as opulent as Shane’s ensuite, but it’s still nicer than most.

When he returns, he sees Shane sitting there from afar, legs curled up on the sofa beneath him. He looks soft and inviting, and Ilya’s appetite for such a thing begins to grow.

He sits down closer than he did last time.

“Your phone,” Shane says, pointing. “Buzzed.”

“Mm,” Ilya glances at it. “You did not check it?”

“No?” Shane frowns at him.

The thing is that Ilya believes him. There are many things Shane Hollander is and is not, but one thing that Ilya believes most know about him is that he is quietly upstanding. Not one nasty thing about him has come out since he rose to stardom in the league.

Ilya had almost hoped for something juicy— a secret, an ex, something he'd said in high school. Maybe he only hoped for such a thing so he'd feel better about the secrets they kept between them. But so far, Shane Hollander seemed to be exactly as he presented himself to be.

Aside from being more sexually adventurous than meets the eye, of course. Ilya is privy to a tad more information about him than most, and he *likes that.*

In recent months, he'd started to *worry* that he'd see an exposé on a secret lover that Shane kept out of the spotlight. Some nice girl-next-door that he'd been sweethearts with in high school, or whatever other classic western romance motif would befit Shane Hollander.

Looking at him now, in his clean, lonely apartment in the sky, curled up on the end of a couch with his hood up, Ilya can't imagine anything more laughable than a secret relationship with a girl, no less.

No secret relationships other than himself, then.

Which they are not. In a relationship, that is.

Ilya's phone buzzes again, drawing both their attention. Ilya looks back at Shane, bottom lip poked out teasingly. He leans in closer, chin bumping his shoulder. "You are not even a little curious?"

"It's not my phone," Shane says with a shrug. His eyes drag back to the television. "Not my business."

"So boring."

Shane surprises him by turning to kiss him quickly on the mouth. It's a *good* kiss, too. Hot and insistent. Then he breaks away, sitting back against the sofa again, a knee curled to his chest. There's the hint of a flush on his cheeks, but he looks pleased with himself. "Was *that* boring?"

Ilya blinks, his lips tingling.

He chases after Shane's mouth, crowding over him to kiss him again. "No, it was *not,"* Ilya smirks as he pushes Shane into the corner and kisses him. He can feel Shane grin against his mouth, and this is Ilya's favorite thing of all. Knowing how much Shane likes this, too. Sometimes, Ilya can even pretend that Shane likes *him.* Really likes him.

Ilya drags his lips down to the place just beneath Shane's jaw that always makes him shiver and moan. Shane's head falls back, and Ilya thinks that they're going to fall into it again. The hockey game won't matter, the storm won't matter, nothing will matter except where they— *how* they fit together, and Ilya can't *wait—*

A ding sounds in Shane's pocket. He groans. Carefully, he untangles himself from Ilya to pull his phone from his sweatpants. "It's my mom," he mumbles.

“So what?” Ilya murmurs, nuzzling back under Shane’s jaw to try to reattach his mouth to the other side.

“She’s just checking in. With the snow and everything.” Shane whines as Ilya begins sucking on his skin in earnest. “Just— wait a minute, okay?” he says, twisting to one side to open the message.

Ilya sighs and reaches for his own phone on the coffee table. He sits back, leans into Shane’s side this time in order to keep the electricity intact between them, and opens his messages.

Marly - 7:02 pm - you could at least send me a pic of her. how am I supposed to be jealous if I don’t even know who this chick is?

Marly - 7:06 pm - you’re doing it right now, aren't you? swear you must be in love with her by now.

Ilya scowls at the messages. He begins tapping a reply out before he glances to his right and sees Shane’s dark eyes watching his fingers. Ilya nearly panics, but covers it up with a smirk.

“So, you *are* nosy, Hollander.”

“You practically opened it in front of my face.”

He has a point, Ilya can agree. They are slumped up against each other, which feels nice considering how chilly it is. Shane’s open floor plan doesn’t heat itself as well as small rooms might.

“What are you saying to your mother?” Ilya asks, feeling curious.

“Nothing interesting.”

“Come on. I show you text from Marly.”

Shane sighs and holds up his phone for Ilya to read.

Mom - 7:08 pm - U r staying home aren’t you? Do you have everything you need? I can send groceries.

Shane - 7:08 pm - Yes, all good. Blankets, food. You and Dad okay?

Mom - 7:08 pm - You should be drinking hot tea. Practice tomorrow before the game right? Bone broth I gave you a few days ago, too.

“She’s in town for a sponsorship meeting,” Shane explains blandly. “She’s a little… overbearing.”

Ilya nods lightly, staring at the small, round picture of Yuna Hollander above Shane’s text chain. She’s a pretty woman with long hair. He’s seen her in passing a few times, but seeing the long chain of messages between her and her son reminds Ilya that Shane has a whole life outside of this apartment. Family, friends, teammates.

“She cares for you. Is good,” Ilya murmurs, returning his gaze to his own phone.

“Do… do you talk with your parents?” Shane asks casually.

“Mm,” Ilya hums. “My father calls sometimes. My brother, too.”

“Oh.” Shane’s throat clicks. He places a hand on Ilya’s wrist, giving it a short tug. “What does Marleau say?”

Ilya presses his mouth into a thin line and shows him. He tries to watch his expression from his peripheral, gauge how he reacts to what he reads.

“They know about *‘Jane’*?” Shane asks.

“I did not tell them,” Ilya starts.

Shane nods. “Some of my teammates know about Lily, too.”

Ilya swallows, staring at his text chain with Marleau. "You know... it would be bad for anyone to know. About *us*."

Shane scoffs. "Of course. Obviously."

"I know it would be bad for you, too. But, for me..."

“Your family wouldn’t be cool with it,” Shane concludes.

Ilya stares at him. “Yes. And that's only the start.” Shane watches him curiously, and he looks like he's about to start asking more questions. Ilya sighs flamboyantly, looking back at his phone. “I would not send him a picture, even if you were a girl.”

Shane ducks his head, little smile returned to his mouth. “No? How come?”

Because you’re mine, and no one else can see. Because I would have dated you for real by now, he thinks ashamedly.

Shane is not his. And Ilya *likes* his life of casual hookups. He does.

He just also likes *this*.

Ilya - 7:10 pm - not in your dreams would I send picture. Goodnight Marly.

Ilya puts his phone away, and instead of answering Shane, he gives him that salacious look he's perfected over the years.

Shane's face morphs from curious to half-lidded, soft and lustful. His eyes travel around Ilya's face. “You were doing something a minute ago that I liked.”

Ilya’s chest swells with something akin to pride.

He kisses Shane on the mouth, slowly working his way down his throat again, attaching to that place that has Shane humming wantonly, a hand pressed to Ilya's chest, the other lacing in the back of his hair.

Ilya loses himself to the sweet undertow of his mind, where he could do this with Shane for hours, just listening to his sighs.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading

_____

This is the closest to "filler" I hope I get! I guess it *is* also slice of life, and this would constitute that??

Anyway, more "events" to come.

Some thoughts: In the books, the emotions between Ilya and Shane take so much longer to develop, which is great for a book I think!

However, I'm glad I clarified that I've based this fic strictly on the show. In the show, it always felt like they had fallen for each other very early on, and just danced around the issue for years. I've heard Hudson and Connor say that they played their characters as having those hidden feelings much earlier on, too. I felt even on the rooftop that Shane wanted to ask Ilya if this was something more.

It makes me feel a bit better about my characterization in this fic, is all I'm saying.

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Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 7: Strange Times

Chapter Summary

> Ilya’s heart twists. Where Shane Hollander normally looks sturdy and strong in his skates and gear, he looks delicate and breakable, splayed on his sofa.

Chapter Notes

> **18+/nsfw Chapter**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seven

Sun down, fireplace lit. A muted European arthouse film plays on the television, nighttime scenes unobtrusive to the atmosphere. The room is warm-toned and dark, and Ilya feels like he's fallen into the loveliest dream.

Shane moans sweetly in front of him as Ilya takes him all the way down to the root, as he's done countless times over the last half-hour, slow and steady, sucking as he pulls off.

“Roz...anov…” Shane sighs, a hand petting through Ilya’s hair, fingers tangling with his curls.

Ilya has him wedged into the corner of the sofa, Shane's sweatpants stripped off and flung over the back long ago, his hoodie bunched up under his arms so Ilya can fondle his pecs and nipples. His knees are propped over Ilya's shoulders, soft inner thighs framing Ilya's face. Ilya uses a hand to push one against his cheek, nuzzling the skin with his jaw. Shane whines, probably at the feeling of Ilya's stubble scraping against him.

Everything he's done with Shane has been leagues better than it has been with anyone else.

Shane *looks* better, *smells* better, *tastes* better, *sounds* better. Maybe Ilya only thinks that because he's getting too caught up in the illusion of it. The fantasy that exists only in his head, that they might be *something else* for the time that they're holed up here.

Maybe the absences in between their games are making him more fond of Shane than he ought to be. If they spent a year apart, maybe they'd lose their taste for each other. They have just enough meetings throughout the year to keep one another on the hook.

At least, he *hopes* Shane thinks about him too, all the rest of the time they are apart.

Ilya texts him to make sure he doesn't forget about him. Maybe it's a mean thing to hope for, Shane waiting for him, when he himself sleeps with women throughout the year. Shane doesn't seem to have the same luxury, even though Ilya is sure he could pull women. If he wanted to.

Ilya is afraid of being forgotten. And Shane's the first and only man to ever treat him like he might be worth remembering. Even if it *is* only for his dick.

"Rozanov," Shane huffs, a bit more urgently.

"Hm?"

Ilya pulls off, an arm hooking around Shane's thigh to lazily stroke his cock. He pushes up closer to Shane's face. Shane's thighs slide slick against his neck and push back against his chest as he does. Without thinking, as if he knows exactly what Ilya wants, he takes Ilya's face in both hands and kisses him.

They share breath, and Ilya asks, "You want my cock, my mouth— what?"

"I can't," Shane mumbles against his mouth, breath puffing out between each word. "*Wish* you could fuck me, but— *ah*—" he gasps as Ilya's fist twists on the upstroke. "M'too sore," he whines, eyes cracking open to look at Ilya. Firelight reflects in his deep, dark pupils.

"Is no problem," Ilya assures him, shimmying back down to lick eagerly at the head of his cock. In fact, he'd been on his way to sucking Shane to completion before he'd interrupted him.

"Want— Want—" Shane huffs, a hand pushing between their bodies, past his own cock. It presses into the front of Ilya's shirt, but can reach no further. "Wanna touch you, too."

Ilya hums defiantly, pushing Shane's hand away and sucking his dick back into his mouth. He holds onto his wrist, pinning it to his hip.

“*Fuck*, Rozanov,” Shane gasps above him as Ilya begins bobbing his head quickly, working him back up to where he’d been before. Even as Shane’s hand tightens in his hair, pulling and pushing and tugging gently, Ilya keeps his mouth on him.

Ilya puts his free hand to his lips, collecting some of the built-up saliva there, and drags it down under, brushing past Shane’s balls until he comes to his furled entrance. It’s heated and still slightly swollen from earlier in the day. Ilya uses his spit to rub his thumb back and forth over it gently.

Shane rips his arm out of Ilya’s grasp and smacks his hand over his own mouth to hold in a ragged moan that tears through him. If Ilya’s mouth were free, he’d demand that Shane let him hear.

As it is, though, Shane’s coming.

His cockhead twitching in the back of his throat is all the warning Ilya gets. He begins swallowing, eyes falling shut to focus on not choking on it.

By the time Shane’s sucked dry, Ilya’s thumb has grown tacky against his hole, and he pulls his fingers away. He pulls off and looks up, knows his face looks messy and wet.

Shane doesn’t seem to mind one bit, staring down at him. A fat tear rolls from the outer corner of one of his bleary eyes, mouth slack as he pants. Ilya uses his free hand to wipe the tear away, and Shane turns his head to kiss his fingertips.

Ilya’s heart twists. Where Shane Hollander normally looks sturdy and strong in his skates and gear, he looks delicate and breakable, splayed on his sofa.

Ilya stretches his jaw out, wincing at the smarting little pain in one hinge. “Was so good you cry?” he asks.

Shane only mouths the words *fuck you,* and never stops panting.

Ilya drags himself up to sit on his knees and begins jerking himself, staring at Shane’s face, flushed and damp and starry-eyed.

Shane reaches a hand out for him, and Ilya pushes it away gently. He shuffles closer until Shane’s legs are splayed across his thighs and stares down at his body as he works himself over. Shane is pretty as a picture, face wrecked and body sweaty and flushed, head cradled in the angle where the sofa arm meets the back cushions.

Ilya comes just like that, looking down at him, and wishes he could keep this image plastered against the backs of his eyelids. He’d never want for anything to get off to ever again.

His come splatters across Shane’s stomach. Shane’s eyes drag down to it, blinking lazily at it.

“Wait,” Ilya says, once he's recovered, standing on wobbling legs. He goes to Shane’s kitchen, runs the water until it comes out hot. Soaks a thick wad of paper towels and comes back to clean him up.

He can be a gentleman when he knows he should be.

Shane watches his face as he does, and Ilya can't bear to look back at him, too afraid of what he'll see when he does. Worse than a harsh, distant expression would be anything remotely close to fond. He isn't sure he would survive such a thing without spilling his guts.

Shane makes a small sound as Ilya drags the paper towels over his asshole, legs parting a bit.

Ilya stills.

"Feels nice," Shane murmurs, eyes blinking languidly.

Ilya finishes the job with his teeth latched down on the inside of his mouth until it hurts too much to think about anything else. He tosses the wad and returns once more, settling down on the cushion next to Shane.

Shane rights himself, easing to sit upright. Ilya can tell he's a bit tender, but he looks extremely pleased, otherwise.

"I am tired," Ilya tells him quietly.

"Right," Shane nods, rubbing a hand over his face to collect himself. "Um… do you want…"

"I can sleep here," Ilya says, patting the leather sofa.

Shane watches the side of his face for a long moment, then nods. "Alright. Yeah." He stands, and Ilya gets to see his bare ass poking out from beneath his hoodie. That's a nice consolation prize for being *good* about this, he thinks.

Shane collects his pants. Then, he goes to a closet in the front foyer, stepping around and digging through storage bins. He returns with a large, thick blanket. Ilya feels a bit ill as he takes it from him.

"Uh..." Shane starts, folding his arms over his chest. "Might be going out for a morning practice tomorrow. Weather depending."

Ilya nods mutely.

He *wants* to treat him distantly. It's what he's used to, what *works* to keep his underlying emotions at bay.

But Shane looks so timid standing there looking down at him, almost expectantly. Ilya remembers how beautiful he'd looked lying beneath him just a few minutes ago.

It pains him to, but he stands, dropping the blanket onto the sofa, unable to part on such bittersweet terms.

Shane looks nervous as Ilya steps up into his personal space, but doesn't back away, his eyes flicking quickly between Ilya's.

Ilya fits a hand just under Shane's jaw to look over his face. "I am not making you breakfast, if it is what you're asking," Ilya says flatly.

Shane's nervousness breaks, grin spreading out as he swats Ilya's hand away. "I'm not asking *that*— you asshole."

Ilya smiles softly back, leans closer. Kisses him gently.

Shane makes a soft sound in the back of his throat, a hand flying up. His fingers brush over Ilya's jaw, petting along its roughness as he kisses back, devoid of any of the heat that had been there earlier. Now, it's all softness.

Ilya pulls away first, heart in his throat. "Goodnight," he says.

Shane doesn't look so sad, at least, turning to head up to his room.

Before Ilya can return to his makeshift bed, Shane appears halfway down the steps again, something clutched in his hands. "Catch," he says flatly before chucking the thing at Ilya.

On instinct, Ilya thrusts his arms out to catch it. It's soft and plush and familiar. One of Shane's many pillows.

Shane doesn't say a word after the fact.

Ilya lies down beneath his blanket and realizes how utterly fucked he is. He knows now that it had truly been a mistake to come here, to *stay* here. He'd been indulgent, living in the moment, and those things always came back to bite him in the ass. It's why he tries not to let *anything* matter too much to him.

He lies for hours, trying to calm his panic. The pillow smells like Shane.

*

Shane wakes to the sound of Ilya's quiet voice filtering up from downstairs.

It's morning. He must've slept clear through the night, and he's not surprised, with how much sex he'd had the day before.

He gets up slowly, body aching in a few select places, and peeks down the stairs toward the living room. He can see Ilya's shadow there, gesturing animatedly from where he sits on the sofa. He speaks in quiet, aggressive Russian. Shane can't understand most of it, except for the occasional word that sounds like *"papa"*. He wonders if it means father, as he suspects.

When Ilya finally hangs up with an aggravated sigh, Shane can't help but head down to see him. He wants to know Ilya's face when it's truly upset.

Ilya's brows are drawn together, the corners of his eyes hard. His mouth is set in a prominent glower, staring at nothing across the room. Eyes glazed, miles away.

Shane dislikes the look immediately.

He's sat leaning onto one of his knees, his blanket and pillow forgotten behind him.

Shane steps off the last step, casual as he can manage, and Ilya looks sharply up at him. Scrutinizing. "Were you listening?"

Shane shrugs. "Does it matter?"

Ilya rubs a hand roughly over his face, and the gesture takes some of his rage away. "I guess it does not."

"Everything okay?" Shane ventures.

"Of course. Is fine," Ilya says with a dismissive wave of his hand, looking out the far window.

Shane wants to know what he was saying on the phone; of course he does. But it's not his business, and they don't know each other well enough for him to be prying. He has to remind himself of that, sometimes.

They've sucked each other's dicks, Ilya's tongue has been up his asshole, been *inside* him, but still, they cannot talk about anything beneath the surface level of their lives.

Trying not to be disappointed about that, Shane heads for the kitchen to make food.

He wordlessly puts on coffee.

Somewhere in the middle of cooking eggs— eight instead of four, along with two extra slices of brown bread in the toaster— he receives word on his phone that a practice has been moved to an arena closer to the middle of the city. The roads to Montreal's main arena are still being worked on, according to city officials.

The snow has slowed some overnight, but it never stopped. Shane dreads going out into it.

He sets out the butter because he knows Ilya will want it. When the eggs start sizzling, Ilya wanders into the kitchen. He slouches onto the counter beside Shane, keeping a neat distance between them, and stares at the eggs with a blank look for a long time.

The coffee pot bubbles, a comforting sound to Shane. He'd heard it every day growing up, his father's morning pot like a daily ritual on school days and weekend hockey days alike.

Ilya looks from the eggs to Shane, slowly. He's calmed down since his phone call.

“They are all for you?” he asks, pointing a finger at the eggs in the pan.

Shane’s lip quivers upward. “No.”

They eat side by side at the breakfast bar, though Ilya scoots his stool a half foot further away than it originally was to give them elbow room. He has a cup of black coffee as well, and works his way through it quickly.

“Is your practice happening?” Ilya asks. “Is still snowing.”

Shane wonders if and when it’ll ever stop. “As far as I know.” He shrugs.

“And your game with Toronto, tonight?”

“As long as the weather holds like it is. I’m sure Toronto took the train in early this morning.” It’s not ideal, and the crowds won't be what they normally are. But as long as the Montreal players' cars can make it down to the arena, the show will go on. The network television executives demand it.

“There are not many people out, still. The news,” Ilya points to the television. “Says that buses are stranded. Metro is still running, but could stall any time.”

Shane chews, looking at him sideways. “You worried about me?”

“Of course not,” Ilya says easily. “Just wondering what will happen if half of team gets stranded on side of road.”

“Well, we’re not going to the main arena right now,” Shane says carefully, keeping his eyes on his plate. “It’s been moved to one nearby. Closer to most of the players' homes.”

Ilya nods shortly, a few loose curls bobbing on his head. “Is good.”

The uninhibited part of Shane’s mind, scant as it is, wants to ask Ilya to come with him. Wants him to sit in the stands and watch him practice. It reminds him of something girls would do in high school, sit and watch their boyfriends play on the ice.

Of course, he can’t ask such a thing. It would be breaking news to see the two of them in a car together, much less show up at the arena. It’s a childish idea, now that he thinks about it.

He supposes he should just be pleased that Ilya would still rather be holed up here instead of at a hotel. “I guess you’ll have the run of the place while I’m gone."

Ilya nods, brows raising in criticism. “Yes, well, I am not idiot who goes out in snowstorm.”

Shane licks his lips. “Rozanov, it’s *fine.* This happens pretty regularly. Montreal gets, like, over two meters of snow a year.”

“Yes, and then they ground planes over it,” Ilya scoffs, like the whole of the city is to blame for the weather.

“Hey— the planes are up and running again,” Shane points out. “I mean, mostly.” It’s been touch-and-go at the airport, some flights coming in, some going out, many delayed or canceled as they try to catch up with what the weather is doing. Anyone trying to get to a nearby city is better off taking a train.

“Look, it’ll probably blow over by tonight's game, anyway. Storms rarely last more than a couple days, even in Canada.”

“Let’s hope,” Ilya says, voice hard. He sounds agitated again.

After Shane has gotten dressed, he retrieves his bag from the hall closet, and when he comes back out, Ilya is sat up on the sofa again, phone in his hand. He only glances up at Shane briefly.

Shane hesitates in the foyer hall as he slips his boots on, doing up each lace precisely. Ilya says nothing to him as he does. The television clicks on.

“See you later,” Shane offers. Ilya grunts from the other room, and Shane supposes that that’s all he’s going to get out of him at this point.

Who knew? Maybe he'd decide he doesn't want to stay after all, and the place would be vacated by the time Shane returns.

He takes the building elevator to the garage, where his SUV is housed. Makes sure that Four Wheel Drive is enabled before he heads out onto the main road.

He doesn’t have to fight for a space on the lane with how few other cars are out. The speed limit is cast to the wayside as they all creep past each other at a snail's pace. Shane squints through the snowfall at the streetlights down the way.

By the time he makes it to the last intersection before the arena parking lot, his tires are so packed with snow that he comes to a sliding stop halfway into the cross-lane. Lucky for him, no one else is there.

*

Ilya mutes the television after Shane leaves.

He feels like a pouting child, but he can’t help feeling irate. It seems foolish for Shane to be going out with the weather as it is, even if everyone stupid enough to be out on the roads is moving slowly.

The Metro’s game tonight with Toronto will probably have barely any crowd attending, either. Being televised is the only incentive to keep it on schedule. If they were playing any team other than Toronto or Ottawa, the game would merely be canceled due to a lack of an opposing team being able to get into the city.

He curses to himself in Russian.

Then, his phone rings. He rips it from his pocket, expecting to see Alexei's name again. His brother had called him that morning to ask for another paycheck, which Ilya doesn't believe he deserves anymore. He'd also called to complain about their father, who he says has been speaking about Ilya as if he were still in Russia.

He's been doing this for a while. It's beginning to get worse.

It's disconcerting, and Ilya almost wishes Alexei would not tell him about it. Especially since he cannot do anything to help from where he is, except send money and *hope* that it ends up in the hands of a doctor who can do something more.

It's not Alexei calling. Instead, it's Marleau.

"Allo," Ilya says without thinking, but Marleau doesn't mind. He's come to learn what that means.

"Rozzy, you're awake. Good."

"Of course," Ilya scoffs.

"Small group of us are heading out. Wanted to see what you were up to."

"Heading where?" Ilya asks, put-upon boredom in his voice. He looks around Shane's apartment, planning where to start snooping first. He knows he wouldn't leave anything *too* important or personal within reach of him downstairs, so he feels obliged to start looking around.

"To the Metro's practice arena. Most of them are going in today, if you can believe it," Marleau barks a laugh.

Attention caught, Ilya sits up straighter. "They are?" he asks, feigning ignorance. "How foolish."

"Yeah, well… guess they're as driven as us."

"Not as good, though."

"Not a chance," Marleau agrees, and sounds like he's smirking. "So, you in? Connors has a friend who told him the details. It starts in a little while. They *probably* won't turn us away from sitting in. Strange times, and all."

Ilya's mind ticks over the options. He doesn't want to be out in this weather, but more than that, he *does* want to watch Shane on the ice. It'd be great fun, heckling him from the stands.

"You coming? Or, *let me guess*, you want to stay in bed with your sweetie?" Marleau asks, and doesn't sound nearly as mocking as he could.

"I can be ready in ten," Ilya says. "I will send you location."

When they've hung up, Ilya makes a mad dash to get dressed and collect his essentials.

He sneaks down Shane's apartment corridor to the back stairs, taking them two at a time. It's risky, going back out without a key or a plan to get back in should he need to. He supposes that if worse came to worst, he could rough it back at the hotel with the others.

He curses when the outside air hits his face, somehow even colder than before. He nearly slips on the concrete slab outside the door, but his tread catches.

He makes his way down the alley in the opposite direction, coming out on a different road and trudging down it through the blowing snow for nearly a block. He finally deems himself far enough from Shane's apartment to send his location to Marleau, who tells him their car will be around in a few minutes.

Those few minutes are icy hell for Ilya. His lashes hold ice crystals, and his fingers are aching by the time he climbs into the back with five other men, all greeting him with whoops and hollers.

"What, you didn't want us to see where she lives?" Marleau asks teasingly. They are in a business district, with no apartments up or down the road for blocks.

"Cannot be too careful. Even in this weather. Paparazzi, or fans..." Ilya says, more truthful than he means to be.

"She must be special if you're being *that* careful," Marleau comments.

"She is," Ilya says without thinking.

He sits with that as the car creeps down the road in the direction of the practice arena, and decides that it's true, and that it's too late to pretend like it's not.

Chapter End Notes

Smutty chapter again, but we got some plot in there, too.

I've not written this much for a new fic in a while. I can't believe how easy it's been to write. I'll take it for as long as it comes to me. I finished my outline, and that always makes things easier.

Cheers

_____

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 8: More Alike

Chapter Summary

> “Have you seen what’s sitting in the stands?”
>
> The few of them still left in the locker rooms go quiet, waiting to hear what the tall man has to say. “No?” one of them offers.
>
> “Boston’s starting line came to watch,” Boiziau says, his face stretched into disbelief.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Eight

“The kids are loving this snow,” Hayden mutters from a few lockers down.

Shane drags his attention away from the slight soreness in his hips. He's been testing them, shifting from foot to foot. He ought to get a massage after tonight's game to work out the knots. “Yeah?”

“Jackie and me… Not so much.”

Shane smiles. There's a low murmur around the locker room. For once, the main focus is not the game against Toronto later on in the evening. Instead, the theme is the weather, and whether or not they'll have anyone in the stands to cheer them on.

A handful of players themselves can't make it to practice this morning, due to engine trouble, lack of proper tires, or rural road closures into the city from their outer homes.

The ones who *have* shown up— Boiziau, Drapeau, Berkes, and a handful of others— have mostly filtered out into the arena by now to warm up.

"So what about you?" Hayden asks as they're adjusting their padding. This morning's practice will be short and sweet. Game-day practices always are.

"What *about* me?" Shane asks.

"You enjoying the quiet? Up in your little apartment?"

"*Little* apartment, is it?" Shane smirks. He already knows where the conversation is heading.

"Was just thinking, it's probably pretty lonely on off days. Especially when it's cold and snowing outside. They say winter is cuffing season, right? Jackie started calling it that last year."

"I'm not lonely," Shane says, a well-worn line in the locker room.

For once, he means it.

"So... what? You just cuddle with *yourself* at night?"

"Why do you care who I cuddle with?" Shane asks. "You want me to invite *you* around?" He shuts his locker door, phone sealed up inside. He hasn't heard from Ilya, and isn't going to be the first one to text him. He half expects him to have fled by the time he gets back, and he's not about to give him any unintentional nudges.

The idea of coming home to Ilya on his sofa is a welcoming thought.

"You're a young man in his prime," Hayden says, like that's an answer.

Shane is gearing up to deflect this newest onslaught of personal prying when J.J. Boiziau comes barreling back into the locker room, brows up his hairline in dismay.

“Have you *seen* what’s sitting in the stands?”

The few of them still left in the locker rooms go quiet, waiting to hear what the tall man has to say. “No?” one of them offers.

“Boston’s starting line came to watch,” Boiziau says, his face stretched into disbelief.

“What, their *whole* starting line? And they just let them *in*?” Hayden asks skeptically.

“*Most* of their starting line. And their goalie. Theriault isn't here. Hard to turn them away when they drove in through *this."* Boiziau says, waving his hand around to indicate the snow outside.

“Bullshit,” Hayden barks, face turning stormy. “What are they even still doing in Montreal? Didn’t they have a game last night? Dallas?”

“You not been keeping up with the news, Hay?” Shane asks. “They and everyone else missed their flight on Friday.”

Hayden huffs, shoulders slumping. “Guess I missed the memo, what with *three kids* and a *wife* to take care of.”

Shane scoffs. “We both know *Jackie's* the one taking care of the kids. *And* you.”

Hayden finally sighs in defeat. “Yeah." He still doesn't look happy, though. "You ought to send them packing."

"What are they gonna do, Hayden? We're not running through any plays this morning. It's just a warm-up and activation. Working out kinks. Besides, we're not playing them again this season. They probably want to use the ice after us."

"Can't believe what I'm hearing," Hayden grumbles.

"We oughta call a truce today."

Boston's starting line would consist of Marleau, Hammersmith, and a few others. Ilya won't be there, because he's back at Shane's apartment. It's a disappointing thought.

Shane glides out into center ice with Hayden, running tight circles around each other. Hayden jerks his chin toward the stands. "Look. Rozanov, front and center."

Shane's skates come to a halting V, and Hayden nearly runs into him.

"What the fuck, man?" Hayden mutters, dodging out of the way.

There in the stands, sitting between Marleau and Hammersmith, is Ilya. Slouched back in his stadium fold-down, hands pushed into his coat pockets. He looks like the Cheshire Cat as he watches Shane with a smirk.

"What's the problem?" Hayden asks.

"Nothing."

They pass a puck between them, and Shane thinks he feels Ilya's eyes on him the entire time. When they transition into quick laps, Shane sees Ilya leaning into Marleau, saying something into his ear, his eye on Shane.

A flare of... *something* ignites in Shane's chest. It's not jealousy, because Marleau seems like the exact opposite of Ilya's type. But he doesn't like seeing Ilya share something obviously about *him* with someone else.

Without further consideration, Shane flips the puck onto the end of his stick and sends it hurling across the arena. It connects with the glass in an ear-shattering smack that reverberates throughout the near-empty arena, no bodies to soak up the sound.

Hammersmith and Marleau jump, but Ilya's head snaps to look at him in a way that nearly makes Shane flush from head to toe. Instead of anger, Ilya looks like a wildcat, lips parted and curved upward in a thrilled, predatory expression, white teeth poking out from his lips.

His eyes are bright and clear, and so intensely focused on Shane that if there were no glass between them, Shane would be worried about Ilya pouncing on him then and there.

Ilya nudges Marleau in the side and says something else. The two of them chuckle.

"Quite feisty, Hollander," Ilya calls on their next pass.

“Smug bastard,” Hayden comments as he and Shane work the puck in wider arcs between each other. “You think they’re here to cause trouble?”

“Nah,” Shane says. “Let's give ‘em something to pay attention to.”

"What's gotten into you, huh? You never lash out." Hayden doesn't look unhappy about it, though. In fact, he's grinning.

Shane would find it impossible to explain. It's only that, with Ilya watching him, it feels as if anything is possible. He feels like he could beat Toronto on his own, one against six, many rounds over.

Shane could never tell anyone just how much he *wants* Ilya Rozanov’s attention on him. Not even Ilya himself.

*

Practice goes as planned, short and sweet. They finish doing rounds, puck work, make sure that their muscles are activated and warmed, in case they need to work anything out before the game. One or two practice plays at the end, but Shane can tell that everyone wants to get to lunch.

The Boston members are surprisingly docile throughout the entire hour, only piping up with a few whistles or jeers.

Shane loves hockey like he loves breathing. Even when it's hard, and sweaty, and bloody. Even when his thighs burn like it’s his first time on the ice, lungs cold. He’s not sure what he would do without all of it there for him. His touchstone.

By the time most of the team is stepping off the ice to head for steaming showers, Shane is still skating circles around Hayden as he cools down. He's not lost steam even once.

“Jesus, man. You’re the energize bunny today. What the hell’s up with you?” Hayden demands.

“Just feelin’ good,” Shane says with a shrug. He takes a peripheral glance at the five Raiders sitting in the stands. A few of them rise, stretching their spines. Shane wonders if they came to use the ice or simply to observe.

Ilya watches him as he skates past once, twice. The next time Shane passes, Ilya has come down the stairs to lean against the glass.

“He’s watching you,” Hayden mutters. “Skeevy fucker.”

Shane frowns down at his skates, instinct to pipe up and correct Hayden suddenly so strong that he has to bite his lips together. Ilya can be a fucker. But he's not skeevy.

On the next pass around, Ilya tilts his chin up at an angle, meeting Shane’s eye. “Hollander,” he says, loud enough that it echoes across the arena.

Shane comes to a *shushing* stop in front of the glass. He can feel a storm radiating off of Hayden from being in front of the Boston captain, but Shane realizes he himself feels nothing but eager. A racehorse trembling behind the starting gate.

“What do you want?” Shane asks, barely able to contain a grin.

Ilya shrugs his shoulders. “To play.”

Shane shifts from skate to skate, shuffling a half step closer. “Play?”

“Impromptu practice,” Ilya says.

"*Impromptu.* Impressive."

“You don’t mind if we skate, do you?” Ilya motions over his shoulder at two men— Marleau and goalie Eklund— who linger nearby. “We will not get to practice much between now and Thursday game.”

“Tough shit,” Hayden mutters. Shane can feel that Hayden wants him to turn him down immediately.

“What do we care if you use the ice?” Shane asks blandly.

Marleau pipes up from behind. “How about a little *friendly* three-on-three?”

Shane tilts his head thoughtfully, holding Ilya’s gaze. “You think Theriault’s gonna go along with that? When there’s a game tonight?”

“Does he have to know?” Ilya asks, brow quirking, making a show of swinging his head back and forth to look. He raises his arms in a wide splay. “I do not see him around. Is not *illegal*.”

Shane feels his mouth quirk upward, even as he hears Hayden muttering behind him, “Shane, this is bullshit. He’s just trying to fuck with—“

“*Hay*,” Shane says placatingly. Hayden stops talking when he sees the relaxed look on Shane’s face. “Why would they want to sabotage us?”

“Would not be very sportsmanlike,” Ilya says, keeping the delicate smirk on his face. He leans heavily against the glass, and if Shane did not know the true intent behind his gaze, he

would mistake it for extreme competitiveness. Like everyone else seems to be.

“We don’t play against each other again for the rest of the season, anyway,” Shane says. “You have skates?”

“Brought it all,” Marleau says gruffly from behind. He’s looking at Shane with the same distrust as Hayden does Ilya. He seems eager to get on the ice, though.

“See you out here in ten,” Shane says. "We should see if Drapeau is still around."

Ilya’s teeth flash, and he chuckles lowly. “Hollander breaking the rules, eh? What strange times.” The way he rolls the *r* makes Shane's stomach twinge with arousal.

“Must be the weather,” Shane replies.

“Jesus Christ,” Hayden mutters, turning in a circle on his skates, holding his stick behind his neck. “This is a bad idea.”

*

Only seven minutes later, Ilya and Marleau stand on opposite sides of the red line from Shane and Hayden. Eklund and Drapeau, the two members on either team who can actually stand to be around each other— and even grab a quiet beer on occasion— stand at opposite goals, relaxed as anything.

They’re under the strict agreement that hitting and checking be kept to a bare minimum.

It’s a risk, Shane knows.

He’d never be compromising the evening’s game under any other circumstances, but he’d been unable to resist the chance to play against Ilya Rozanov without a crowd or refs around.

“*Terrible* idea,” Hayden mutters. Hayden would never admit to it, but even *he* looks excited to be playing a few rounds against Boston’s best members.

The arena is entirely empty save for the six of them— seven, counting Connors, who stands between them all, looking more skeptical than anyone to be participating in unauthorized fraternization with their bitter rivals. Hammersmith had departed at the same time as Montreal.

Despite it all, Shane’s never felt more comfortable facing off against someone. Ilya can’t seem to keep the grin off his face as they crouch toward each other.

"Such a bad boy, Hollander."

The tone and implication make Shane's cheeks flush.

The puck drops, and then they're off, Shane taking it away and stretching out wide around the two Boston players, Hayden coming up the other side.

Eklund is grinning as he blocks the initial shot. That only gets Shane's blood pumping faster.

They go on like that, one puck drop after the other.

Things begin to loosen up. Soon, it no longer feels like a competition played for goals. Instead, it reminds Shane of winters nearly a decade ago, out on the first frozen lake of the season with the neighborhood boys. Boys who would treat him distantly in any other circumstance throughout the year. But with helmets on their heads and sticks in their hands, Shane had suddenly been welcomed into a team— more than that, he'd been a prized member of it.

Now, he's surrounded by the best of the best. He's never felt like he belonged anywhere more.

The sound of the puck connecting with the stick, the skates gliding on the ice.

"Marleau, you're too big for your own good," Hayden heckles, slightly breathless, but even Shane can tell he's having fun.

"You *talk* too much for your own good, Pike," Marleau mutters back.

"You guys are just trying to tire us out," Hayden huffs. "Make us lose tonight's game."

"It's *Toronto,*" Marleau laughs. "A pack of dogs with sticks could beat them!"

While the two of them begin to jeer each other, Shane and Ilya chase the puck into the far corner, where it's flung on a bad pass by Hayden. Eklund watches idly from the goal as they race down the ice.

Shane can see the hit coming a mile away.

He's wedged himself too close to the glass to try and shimmy the puck away from the siding in order to send it back down the ice before Ilya can catch up to him.

But Ilya's strong and fast, only meters behind him at any given point.

If it were a real game, it would be easy for Ilya to slam him right into the wall. Shoulder him out of the way with his momentum.

Shane braces for it on instinct, trying to go lax but stiffening up in anticipation regardless.

He suddenly realizes that this had been a stupid idea. He'll get bruised up before their *real* game tonight, maybe even pull something, and all because he'd wanted to be on the ice with Ilya Rozanov— Ilya, who is his professional enemy, who likes to win above all else—

The sharp crack of something colliding with the boards ricochets throughout the arena. Shane shies away from it, pressing himself flat into the walls, but the hit never comes. He whips his

head around quickly to look. Ilya's arms are outstretched, in front of Shane and behind him, caging him in, having caught himself on either side before their bodies collided.

Shane can see the wince on his face at the jamming of his elbows, but he recovers quickly, pushing off the wall and shaking his arms out. A barely audible hiss leaves his lips.

"Shane?" Hayden calls, the sound of his skates ripping down the ice. "*Goddamnit*, Rozanov —

"All good," Shane calls quickly, holding up a hand high in the air to show the OK.

Hayden stops short, watching as the two of them push off the walls. Marleau lingers behind Hayden, watching with similar interest. Shane carries the puck away from the wall with no real urgency. Ilya skates beside him.

"Alright?" Shane mutters to Ilya.

"Of course."

"Too close for comfort," Eklund calls from the other end. He looks just about done, and Shane nods.

He can see just how winded Ilya actually is. "Let's call it a day," he says, loud enough for all of them to hear. "Thanks," he says quietly, only to Ilya.

"How would the league like me if I injured their second-best hockey player in a forbidden practice game?" Ilya says with a self-satisfied grin.

Shane passes the puck to him, and Ilya takes it easily.

"If the fans could see us now," Hayden mutters as he makes his way around to Drapeau.

"Don't worry. We still hate each other's guts," Ilya calls blandly, and then passes the puck back to Shane in a slow glide.

They skate like that for another minute, and Shane suddenly wishes they were alone. He'd like to pass the puck with him and speak about things they can't say with others around. Wants to ask Ilya if he'd learned to skate on a frozen lake in Russia, or if he'd been taken to arenas to be trained. Had his parents encouraged him to skate, or had he been a rebel? There's so much that Shane suddenly wants to know.

Why does it feel so difficult to ask about when they're alone in the apartment, but here, it all wants to come spilling out?

He decides that if he's going to reserve any energy for tonight, he ought to get off the ice.

"Good game," Marleau says begrudgingly.

Ilya and Eklund meet Marleau on their side of the rink, Connors popping up from his seat in the stands. Shane gives one short glance over his shoulder at Ilya and catches him turning

away.

In the showers, Hayden can't stop talking about it.

“That was some Twilight Zone shit, wasn’t it?” They stand a few shower spouts apart, Drapeau down the way listening.

Shane chuckles. “You mean Rozanov and Marleau playing nice?”

“Yeah, for starters!” Hayden hisses, like someone else might hear them, like it's a dirty secret that they played a non-competitive game with the Boston Raiders. “They were a little too chummy, weren’t they? I don’t trust it.”

Shane continues to grin as he lets the hot water ease away some of his muscle soreness. “Well, Hayd, believe it or not... I think they might like skating and hockey just as much as we do.”

Hayden scoffs loudly. “You think they’re gonna come to the game tonight?”

“I’m sure the entire *team* is gonna come to the game tonight,” Shane points out. “Wouldn’t *you* go see *them* play?”

"Fair point," Hayden mutters. Then, just loud enough to be heard over the spray, he says, “He didn’t take you out when he could’ve.”

Shane blinks down at his feet, spray running over the back of his head. “No, he didn’t.”

He’d known Ilya wouldn’t, though, hadn't he? Ilya could’ve bumped into him, and for how fast they'd been going, Shane wouldn’t have blamed him. But Ilya had gone to extra lengths to avoid even that much contact.

Hearing Hayden’s quiet shock about the moment makes Shane feel a bit guilty. He lets everyone else assume Ilya Rozanov's maliciousness, because it protects what he and Ilya share in secret. Their rivalry is real and true, but everyone else thinks he hates Ilya to his core. He *lets* them think it.

They don’t know that he doesn’t hate him at all.

“He’s…” Shane hesitates. Hadn’t known where he was going with that sentence before he'd started it. “He’s an asshole. But he’s not *vicious*.”

“Huh?”

“He has respect for the game. It wouldn't be satisfying to win because of an injury.” He supposes that he and Ilya are the same in that way. It feels good to have that much in common.

“That’s about *all* he has respect for,” Hayden chuckles. “He probably just didn’t want the league on his back. They’d suspend him or worse for hurting you outside a game.”

“Right,” Shane says. They don’t know that *he* knows that Ilya would never intentionally hurt him. Not outside of an official game, and maybe not even during one.

“But Jesus, if any fans saw us playing like that, there would be anarchy in the streets.”

“That’s why we're not gonna tell anyone about it," Drapeau pipes up.

*

They all leave at similar times.

Hayden gives Drapeau a ride, and Shane gets into his SUV.

The weather doesn’t seem to have changed, except that the wind seems to be blowing extra hard. Shane wonders what he has time to do before the game tonight. Get home, make some lunch, put a heating pad on his hips.

He sees the four Boston players piling into a black SUV on the opposite side of the lot. Sees Marleau’s familiar giant form hunching down to climb into the back. Ilya is the last, and he only gives a quick glance across the lot at Shane's vehicle before following his friend in. The back door slides closed.

Shane tries to stuff down disappointment.

They’re lucky to have gotten away with what they did at all today. The rivalry has been upheld— most of the way, anyway. If a handful of players have seen something amiss, well, they're a handful of discrete, trustworthy players. Players who have more to lose than gain by spreading word that a three-on-three game took place the day of a blizzard.

He wonders if he ought to say something nasty about Ilya in the locker rooms tonight, to uphold the bitter rivalry between them. The thought of doing that leaves a sour taste in his mouth, though. He wonders what sort of shit Ilya is saying to his team about him right now.

His phone buzzes.

Lily - 11:34 am - Going to lunch.

Despite it all, Shane grins.

There are other questions on his mind. He wants to know if Ilya is going back to the hotel with his team after the game tonight, finally sick of being around Shane for such a prolonged time. He can't very well ask without showing his hand, though.

And what is his hand?

Even he's not sure, at this point.

He makes his way home before he responds. The roads are similarly empty, only the most desperate braving the snow-covered pavement. Shane's lane has been recently plowed, at least. The traffic lights all work.

Taps his fingers against his thighs as he takes the elevator back up from the garage to his apartment. Shuffles inside and takes off his snow boots. *Doesn't* take off his coat before making his way into the living room. He looks around wildly, eyes landing on Ilya's overnight bag still there, open, clothes half falling out.

Like he'd *hoped* to see.

Relief fills his chest.

He'd be ashamed by how happy it makes him, but he doesn't have the time. He pulls his phone out, taps a quick message.

Jane - 12:02 pm - Are the Raiders watching us decimate Toronto tonight?

Lily - 12:03 pm - Would not miss it.

Chapter End Notes

More terrifying than writing smut, is writing hockey and action scenes. I feel like they're just corny the way I write them. But, we're moving the plot along. The show must go on!

In my research, I found out that this impromptu practice game would just... not happen. Not this close to an official game, and not in season. Sometimes players from opposing teams get together in the summers to train, but they don't like to risk injury or giving away plays/strategies around games.

However... I think we can bend some rules here due to the extenuating circumstances of the... weather.

One thing I did read in The Long Game was about Ilya shooting a puck at the glass behind Shane to startle him, so that idea *was* born from that scene!

I'm sorry if you happen to be from Toronto. I just needed a nearby Canadian city it was feasible to take a train from. And it couldn't be Ottawa!

Cheers, and until next time.

_____

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things.

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Chapter 9: Proud

Chapter Summary

Ilya would never admit it, but it’s fascinating to watch Shane Hollander navigate the same career he’s chosen, and in such a different way. Shane does not demand attention, and yet, Ilya can't help but give it to him.

Chapter Notes

One change has been made to previous chapters.

I *foolishly* forgot that Shane's apartment has stairs!! What's worse is that this is something I knew-- very well. The stair kissing glimpses we see in that one montage are some of my favorites. I *studied* Shane's apartment from ep 2 to get a feel, and looked *right at them* for a long time!

But for some reason in my head, I was equating the stairs as being at a different apartment... but WHAT apartment? There's only the one!

Anyway, once I realized it, it was one thing I *had* to go back and rectify. It only took a little while, and a few lines changed here and there. The stairs have been returned to their rightful place.

Anyway, in case you noticed that, yes, you're correct, that's not how I was originally writing it. But now I can't think of it any other way. Hopefully it will not be too distracting a change!

On with the show.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nine

Alexei - 12:36 pm - You did not send the money you said you would.

*

Alexei - 3:08 pm - Answer your phone asshole.

*

Jane - 6:02 pm - Heard you're sitting up in VIP tonight.

Lily - 6:02 pm - Is not great view for seeing your assets.

Jane - 6:03 pm - That's too bad.

Lily - 6:03 pm - Will I see them later?

Jane - 6:03 pm - No.

Lily - 6:04 pm - Maybe I will sit closer then.

*

Montreal smokes Toronto.

Ilya watches the entire thing from the club seats of the Montreal Metros Arena.

Most of the Boston Raiders are happy to sit up in the luxury suites behind polished, tempered glass. Private rooms full of loungers and beer by the pitcher. Ilya would rather be close to the rink to see the players and the puck with his own eyes. And Shane.

Bradley Hammersmith joins him. Eklund and another player sit a few rows back.

Aside from one or two team executives sitting in rows even further up, the club seats are mostly empty.

The entire rest of the arena is at less than half capacity tonight. Only the most voracious fans have come to support Montreal, decked out in blue sweaters with the Metros' emblem stitched to the chests, warm hats tugged down on their heads. Many of them vie for Shane's

attention whenever he skates by during the warmup. Shane nods curtly with respect, but never betrays any of the other emotions that Ilya knows he must feel.

Ilya is normally one to play to the crowd in his own warmups. Winking at the women, smacking the glass, making faces at children. He does it all.

Shane, on the other hand, does not give anything away. Always reserved, always humble. Underselling himself, and then overdelivering.

Ilya would never admit it, but it's fascinating to watch Shane Hollander navigate the same career he's chosen, and in such a different way. Shane does not demand attention, and yet, Ilya can't help but give it to him.

Hammersmith slumps down in the seat next to him. He passes Ilya a tall, cold beer in a plastic cup, which he gratefully takes.

Ilya frowns at the lack of food. "No poutine?" It's one of his favorite things about visiting north of the American border. He's not been able to find a poutine in Boston quite as good as the Montreal Stadium fare.

"Only got two people working concessions," Hammersmith mutters. Not enough staff are able to make it in. "We can get dinner later on," Hammersmith points out. Ilya chews on his lip, watching the back of the sweater that reads Hollander skate down the ice in the opposite direction.

Ilya isn't sure that he'll feel like getting dinner with the rest of his team.

Shane doesn't look their way even once. Ilya had expected it. Still, his instinct to call out something crass to get a reaction out of him is strong. He restrains himself, not wanting to draw the ire of the Metros fans who have braved the weather to be here. They'd gotten one or two stray boos on their way to the club seats. Maybe that's why the rest of the Raiders had opted for the luxury suite.

"So… it true you and Marly played a few rounds with Hollander and Pike after I left?" Hammersmith murmurs when the players begin lining up on the red line.

"Eklund was there too," Ilya says boredly. "And Drapeau."

"And everything was a-ok?" He sounds incredulous.

Ilya can't tell why Hammersmith is asking. He continues to play it nonchalantly. "Not quite. Was a few rounds to keep in shape, that is all."

"Would've paid good money," Hammersmith chuckles wryly. He nurses his beer slowly. "Should've stayed. I could use a run around the ice, myself."

"Maybe we will get to practice yet."

After another bout of silence between them, Ilya thinks that's that. But then Hammersmith clears his throat in that way that older players do when they're about to pull the life-

experience card on the younger bucks. Ilya sets his jaw, preparing to settle in for a *talk.*

“You know I don’t give a shit, right?”

Not what he'd expected. Ilya stills, eyes on the back of Shane’s helmet as he skates an arc in the furthest corner, turning back.

His head swims. His breath comes short. *What does he mean?*

“What?” Ilya asks.

Hammersmith shrugs nonchalantly. “About the rivalry shit.” He clarifies. Ilya swallows. Breathes. Hammersmith goes on. “If you wanna get chummy with players on other teams… Maybe I’m just too old to care about that shit anymore. Even if it *is* Montreal.”

Of course. What else would he be talking about?

Ilya focuses on his breath to calm his quaking chest. In, out, in, and then, “Well, you *are* ancient.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Hammersmith says without any real feeling. “All I’m saying is, Marly and you playing against them for fun… not a big deal. To me.”

“Eklund was there too,” Ilya says faintly. But no one ever seems to treat the goalies quite the same as the starting line. He looks at Hammersmith sideways, taking in the relaxed, bored look on his face. He seems to mean what he says.

“We are not friends. Or friendly.” Ilya resists clearing his throat. “But… was not unfriendly game.”

“Okay,” Hammersmith says with a single, jerking nod of his head. He stares out at the two teams as they begin rallying.

Ilya can't help but add, “Don’t mention it to others." His words come out a bit clunkier than he’d like due to his nervousness. It probably betrays how conflicted he feels about the topic, but he can’t *not* ask it of Hammersmith.

Hammersmith turns a look on him, thick brow quirking in recognition. “Sure, Captain. And anyway, they’re not all *old and wise,* like me. They’re still under the illusion that it’s life or death.”

Ilya swallows. Nods.

The tension seems to break from the air as the teams get into position. Ilya feels a bit lighter after the fact. Like he’d been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and someone had given him a pass, had let him sneak something by without giving him much hassle.

And then Shane and Toronto’s center crouch face-to-face. Ilya goes still as he watches.

Shane's face. His perfectly focused dark eyes drop from his opponent's down to his stick blade. His honey-smooth skin, speckled cheeks, a high shine of oil to them. Ilya knows exactly how that skin feels under his hands, knows what it feels like against his lips and tongue. He can practically see the energy rolling off of Shane's shoulders. He's a big man, but the self-assured way he positions himself makes him look like a cat coiled to spring.

The ref's hand unclasps from the puck. In slow motion, it falls toward the ice.

The seconds turn very long, and Ilya thinks *now.* As if on cue, Shane's blade lashes out, stealing it out of the air, and then he streaks off.

Ilya grins before he can help it. He presses a hand to his mouth and coughs to cover it up. Takes a long sip of beer.

He and Shane may be competing against each other in every way. But Ilya has never *not* loved to watch him play. Never not loved seeing the power of Shane's muscles push him down the ice, fast as a whip— the fastest on his team by a mile.

Maybe— and he hates to admit it— faster than Ilya himself.

Strong, fast, and so powerful, each muscle trained for years to excel at this one task. In command of the game and his team. A calculating mind that can order the players around him in an instant, find a clear path through.

Ilya wants him.

And Shane will drop right to his knees for him, if he asks.

Worse— or better— Ilya would do just the same. In an instant.

He's filled with sudden desire, so strong that it nearly makes him dizzy.

He tucks his coat over his lap. Looks at Hammersmith sideways just to see if he's watching the ice. The man's eye tracks the game, gaze on Shane simply for the fact that he has the puck and no one else can touch him.

Ilya shouldn't feel proud. There's nothing out on that ice that is *his*.

"Hollander is a beast," Hammersmith murmurs.

Ilya is proud, regardless.

Shane comes in from a wide arc on the outside, swooping in toward the middle. He smacks the puck, sending it flying over Toronto's goalie's shoulder, and makes the goal as easy as breathing.

Ilya grins.

The crowd cheers, and before he can say anything to Hammersmith, Marleau sits down on his other side, beer and a vending machine bag of chips in hand.

“Too comfortable in your glass box?” Ilya asks with a little smirk.

“Too loud and obnoxious, if you can believe it,” Marleau mutters. “If they had one of those fake Hollanders, they’d set it on fire and dance circles around it.”

Ilya can imagine.

“They don’t hate Toronto more?”

“I think it’s hatred all around, tonight.” Marleau slouches back next to him, popping open the bag of chips and holding it out for him to take from.

When Shane scores his next goal in the second period, Ilya slowly shifts to the edge of his seat to watch.

“You don’t think…” Marleau says from next to him, equal parts disdainful and impressed.

“Could happen. He’s done it against better teams than *Toronto,*” Hammersmith chuckles, speaking of Shane.

Later, Ilya covertly watches Shane sitting on the bench during the second intermission. Marleau and Hammersmith talk over his hunched shoulders.

“His shoulder's gonna be black and blue. Field got him in that last minute,” Marleau comments.

Hammersmith shrugs. “Nothin’ he can’t shake off. I’ll bet he gets the hat trick.”

“No way,” Marleau says with a scoff, but all three of them know it’s only hollow contention. Ilya can tell by Shane’s face, sweaty but bright-eyed and hungry, that he’s going to be vying for that last goal to win him the night.

There comes a series of shrill, electronic sounds throughout the arena. Ilya feels his phone vibrate in his pocket. He pulls it out, along with Marleau and Hammersmith, and sees a weather alert flash across his phone screen. It’s not the first they’ve gotten over the last few days, but it is the most imminent.

It recommends that people stay indoors and shelter for the night as soon as possible. A handful of the crowd begins to collect their things, but the most adamant stay, beers in hand, not easily dissuaded by the weather.

“Do we wanna stay, fellas?” Marleau asks them both.

Ilya frowns at the bench where Hollander and his teammates talk, readjusting gear and rubbing out their calves.

“I’m ready,” Hammersmith says. “No point in watching. Montreal is wiping the floor with them.”

Ilya isn't sure what to do. If he were playing it safe, he'd go with them back to the hotel, get a meal. Maybe wait a while until Shane gets home, and then take a cab back over.

That feels so far away, though. Such a long time to wait.

And Ilya doesn't want to wait.

"I will stay," he murmurs, turning his eyes down to his lap.

He wishes he could blame his impatience and impulsiveness on the beer, but he's only had two. It takes a lot more than that to touch his psyche these days.

"Stay?" Marleau asks, mildly surprised. "Thought you'd be eager to get back to your—"

"I will get ride, after," Ilya says, not wanting Marleau to bring up his secret lover in front of Hammersmith so blatantly. "Is no problem. I'd like a bit more alcohol," he reasons.

His teammates study him for a moment and finally nod. "Whatever you say, man," Marleau says, voice stilted. He stands, a hand coming down on Ilya's shoulder once, and then the two of them depart.

Ilya turns to watch them go, along with Eklund. The rest of his team filters out of the luxury suite above.

He feels like he's on display, but he hopes that the team's belief in his and Shane's bitter rivalry holds up his lie better. It would make sense for him to study Shane, wouldn't it?

He can feel his cheeks burning. A rare occurrence, and it feels shameful. He keeps his eyes on Shane's helmet, dark eyes skating over the ice as he drinks from a water bottle.

Ilya takes another long glug of his beer and holds the side of it to his face, trying to cool his cheeks down.

*

Shane is buzzing when he comes off the ice.

He'd scored a goal in the last period. Three in one night, a hat trick that'll be in the game write-ups in tomorrow's paper. He hopes Ilya had seen, had stuck around long enough. The Boston Raiders had already filed out by the end of the game, probably not thinking it worth it to stay and get caught up with the crowd trying to leave.

"You're *a beauty,* Hollander," Boiziau says, slinging an arm around his shoulder. "We ought to celebrate!"

“You’re out of your *mind*, Boiziau,” Hayden gripes, coming up behind them. “Didn’t you hear the overhead about the weather advisory? No club is keeping its doors open tonight.”

“The plows are running, and there are still *bars*. It’s *Montreal*. In the winter!*”*

“It’s still technically fall,” Shane says absently, mind on other things. Specifically, whether Ilya is going to meet him back at his apartment tonight or not.

God, he hopes so. His things are still there, after all.

Shane had felt on fire tonight. He wants to see Ilya’s face, try to eke out his feelings about the game he'd watched. Secretly, deep down, he wants to hear Ilya say that he did well. Played well, destroyed the opposition, deserves a reward—

“I’m heading home after this,” he says.

Boiziau gives him a playful shove of annoyance, but none of them badger him about being antisocial, as they have in the past.

He does something he never does— skips his shower.

He feels filthy slipping back into his jeans and T-shirt, hoodie, and coat. But he feels the overwhelming desire to get home as fast as he can, be there in case Ilya is waiting for him to —

His phone buzzes in his pocket as he’s making his way out of the back hallway of the locker room.

When he pulls it out, he sees a message from Ilya.

Lily - 11:34 pm - Come to last corridor east before you leave.

Heart in his throat, Shane looks all around to make sure he’s alone. He hurries down the long hallway in the back of the stadium, searching for the corridor Ilya is talking about. He’s never been this far out of the way of the building, aside from when renovations had been done years ago, and they’d been given a new tour.

A hand reaches out to snatch him, and Shane holds in a yelp. Ilya pulls him into a shadowy nook with a smirk.

“*Goddamnit*, Rozanov,” Shane hisses, heart rate spiking as Ilya pushes him back against the wall. “What the hell are you doing back here?”

“Waiting, obviously,” Ilya says. Shane can smell a hint of beer on him, but he looks clear-eyed, otherwise. “Did not want you to leave without me.”

“You’re not getting a ride back with your team?”

“They have left already.” Ilya looks down between them, tries to take a step closer.

Shane holds a hand out to brace against his chest.

“There could be security cameras back here.”

Ilya looks around. "I checked. There is not,” he murmurs.

He takes a cautionary step back anyway, looking him up and down. Shane presses his lips together, unsure of what to say.

“You did well,” Ilya murmurs. “A hat trick. Very impressive.”

“You don’t look all that impressed.”

“Maybe not. I could *show* you how impressed I am. When we get back to apartment.” He says the last part very quietly, but the grin he gives Shane makes him flush from head to toe.

“You’re staying tonight?” Shane asks before he can help it. He sounds embarrassingly hopeful to his own ears. He hopes Ilya can't see it in his face through the shadows.

A brief flicker of something flashes through Ilya’s eyes. Something Shane knows he wasn’t meant to see. Maybe it’s beer that'd allowed him the brief glimpse of it. Either way, Ilya recovers, folding his arms over his chest.

“I will stay again. If you want.”

If Shane wants. Of *course* he wants.

He has a mind to be offended that Ilya would only stay because Shane asks him to.

Then again... wouldn't Ilya staying *because* Shane asks him to be a step in the right direction? *The direction of what,* his mind supplies. Maybe a better understanding of each other. At the very least.

Ilya must misread his expression. “You do not want?” He looks unsure, lost. Shane almost reaches for his face before he remembers the possibility of being seen, however small.

“I do,” Shane says instead. “I want... very much.”

Ilya’s face breaks into a smile more open and honest than Shane’s ever seen. It's beautiful.

Shane returns it, heart fluttering in his throat.

He gives the sleeve of his coat a little tug. “C’mon, asshole. Keep your head down.”

Chapter End Notes

There are some details I'm unsure of, like if Shane is *actually* the fastest skater on his team, and that sort of thing, and I'm unsure if the book mentions this at all too. Please excuse any inaccuracies, if you notice them!

Also, I don't know if Brad Hammersmith's personality is fleshed out in any other books, so I'm just winging it with him. My apologies if he happens to be mischaracterized, but his name only appears a few times in HR and not at all in The Long Game.

Thank you for reading! Adiós

Chapter 10: Hit Wires

Chapter Summary

> “It’s the whole block," Shane comments.

Chapter Notes

> Hello.
>
> **Smutty-ish/18+ Chapter.**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ten - Ice

The two of them stick to the outskirts of the building, working their way down the side of it that is little used but for smoking staff and trash disposal. Not so many people are in the back lot, but the ones who are do not hang around like they might on a normal game night.

Players and staff alike are in a hurry to get out of the frigid, blowing wind and get home to their warm houses and families.

Ilya thinks that Shane is more nervous than he ought to be.

They hover around the corner of the building, waiting for the Toronto bus to carry their team back to the hotel they're booked in. When it finally pulls out of the parking lot, Ilya grunts in irritation.

"Hollander, coast is clear?"

"Just a minute," Shane murmurs.

Ilya has pulled both his hoodie and coat hood up over his head. "*Blyat,"* Ilya spits, turning his face away from the specks of ice that blow into his face with a sudden gust. "All this fucking ice," he hisses, nudging against Shane's back to block some of it.

"Quiet," Shane huffs, and then suddenly he's moving. "C'mon!"

Ilya's boots slip a few times on some of the slickest patches of exposed ice. He makes his way around the side of Shane's black SUV and hurriedly climbs into the passenger seat, relieved to be out of the direct wind.

He's halfway buckled in before he sees Shane staring at him incredulously.

"What?"

"You don't think *maybe* someone might notice you sitting in the front seat of my car?"

Ilya falters, looking around them. No one is in the parking lot— for the moment, at least— and there's a thick layer of frosty snow blanketed across Shane's front window. The side windows are not any better.

"I don't think anyone will notice your boring car at all," Ilya comments, unable to help getting a dig at him.

Shane glares at him. "You'll *thank* this car when we get home in one piece."

Ilya watches him as he digs through the seat pockets and finds an ice scraper. Shane starts the car and then jerks his thumb pointedly toward the backseat. Then he climbs out to begin scraping the windows.

Ilya sits numbly in the seat on the passenger side and mouths the word over and over to himself: *home.*

Every time Marleau brings up going "home" for the summer, Ilya's mind conjures up images of Moscow streets. Familiar restaurants, broken asphalt in the back alleys, colorful church steeples. His father's estate, and its green grounds, cold interiors.

Ilya had put a downpayment on a large house on Beacon Street, where he spends weekends and downtime. It's the first thing he'd bought with his first big MLH paycheck, and it's even nearly paid off. It has begun to feel more like *home,* if Ilya had to put a name to it.

Nowhere has felt much like home since... well.

Shane gets back in the car, and the closing of the door jars Ilya from his thoughts. He realizes maybe a touch of alcohol in his system is loosening his mind too much to be comfortable. He's at risk of spiraling down a dark hole of memory.

"So," Shane grumbles. Ilya is glad for the distraction. "What sort of car do *you* drive, then?" He throws the stick into reverse and then turns around to look out the back window, despite the backup camera being enabled.

Ilya takes a moment to look at him, his lashes damp and clumped with a few ice crystals. It's very pretty, but he has a feeling Shane wouldn't take so kindly to being told so.

“Mercedes," Ilya murmurs. "I had McLaren, but was too… eh, for me.” Impractical, he means to say, for Boston streets, but then he’d be sounding too much like Shane Hollander, and they can’t have that. “I think I will buy Porsche next.”

“*Great*. So you’re a car guy,” Shane says flatly as they pull out onto the main road.

Ilya bites down on a grin, watching Shane's face as he scans the road ahead, then both mirrors, and back to the road. He's a careful driver. A trait Ilya can appreciate in weather like this. “A bit, yes. What, you don’t like them?”

“Cars are cool,” Shane says. “I’m just a… hockey guy. I guess.”

Ilya studies the shape of his ear. It’s lovely, as are all of Shane’s features that he’s taken the time to study— not that Ilya’s keeping a tally.

Ilya gives an exaggerated sigh. “I am hockey guy, too. But also car guy… party guy… club guy. Womanizer.”

Shane’s jaw tenses. “Not sure you *want* to be called a womanizer.”

“Maybe is not right word,” Ilya says.

“No, it is.”

Ilya can tell that he’s hit a nerve. He’d used to enjoy pressing Shane’s buttons when things had been light and fleeting between them.

Now, it doesn’t feel so nice. He switches gears. “There must be other things you like, too, Hollander. It cannot be hockey all the time.”

Shane takes his time answering, his head turning as he scans the road continuously. They come to the next stoplight, only one other car turning slowly against the wind in the opposite direction.

“I guess I like… yoga,” Shane starts. “Books. I don’t mind camping. Sitting by a lake.”

Ilya watches as Shane gives a short glance over his shoulder at him.

“All boring things, right?” Shane adds drolly.

Ilya chews on the inside of his cheek.

Sure, his first inclination is to say that. But now he can see that he's put Shane on edge. And he'd been so eager and flirtatious just a few moments ago in the stadium, sneaking around the back halls with Ilya. He wants *that* Shane back.

"So you are quiet guy. Is not *worst* thing to be, " Ilya says, shrugging like it doesn't matter either way.

Shane meets his eye in the rearview, flicker of confusion on his face. "Guess that's one word for it…"

Ilya begins to wonder if he's said too much. Goddamn beer.

"You are fun in bedroom where it counts," Ilya says, reaching up to touch his ear, playing with the shell of it between two fingers. He can see in the rearview mirror how a blush rises to Shane's cheeks. "And nobody can deny, one of best hockey players."

"*One* of the best?"

"Not better than me."

"Of course not," Shane replies facetiously.

"The best tonight, though," Ilya says, drawing Shane's attention back to his win. "No comparison. Fastest. Strongest." He grins. "Sexiest."

Shane chuckles quietly and shrugs away from Ilya's playful fingers. "What, no one else in the league caught your eye, then?"

Ilya sits back in his seat, hands dropping into his lap. "Men are different. The league… many of them *could* be sexy, yes, but… their personalities." Ilya waves his hand exaggeratedly. "Eh."

"So, I'm special?" Shane asks teasingly.

Of course you are, Ilya thinks, meeting his dark eyes in the mirror once more. *The quietest, prettiest, kindest, most boring man in the entire league.* At least, that Ilya has met so far. "Unlike the rest."

"Sounds special to me."

"Zero fun, though," Ilya mutters. But Shane's smiling again, and that's what he'd wanted.

*

"Is ice storm," Ilya comments as they're pulling into the underground garage of Shane's building.

“Yeah.”

Ilya doesn’t like ice storms even more than he doesn’t like snowstorms. Underground, at least, there is no ice *or* snow stuck to the ground. He has to admit that none of his fancy cars in Boston could’ve fared against the frozen Montreal roads nearly as well as Shane's *understated* SUV.

Shane is a careful driver, as well.

They sit inside the car after Shane parks, listening and watching for movement in the rest of the garage.

No one else seems to be around, and so they make a hasty exit, bypassing the elevator and heading for the stairs.

In the stairwell, Ilya can’t wait another moment to at least kiss him.

Shane seems to be on the same page, because as soon as the door closes behind them, *he's* the one to push Ilya up against the wall at the bottom of the steps.

The kiss is hurried and sloppy. Ilya can taste salt on Shane's lips. He groans into it, wrapping an arm around Shane's neck to haul him closer, pressing their bodies against each other. It's unsatisfactory, due to all of their winter layers padding against friction.

Shane's hands twist in the back of Ilya's curls and tug gently. His tongue slips past Ilya's lips, prodding. Ilya's mind slowly begins to focus only on the man in front of him. Cheeks and stubble brushing together, warm, damp heat between their faces from their breath. Shane's long lashes brush his cheek as he turns his head to switch sides, and Ilya's chest thrills.

It's dangerous.

Ilya likes dangerous things, most of the time. Now, he's beginning to consider the consequences more. Of losing this *thing.*

"Shouldn't—" he says in a breath between them. "Apartment."

Finally, they pull themselves away from the wall. Ilya's legs feel weak as they go up the steps. Shane is right next to him, leaning into him instead of trying to surpass him. Ilya can’t believe how feverish he's become in such a short time. Shane's cheeks are flushed pink.

The walk from the stairwell down the hallway to Shane's front door is a buzz of static in Ilya's mind, only thinking about how fast they can get the door open.

Once it's shut behind them, Ilya only gets one boot unlaced before Shane pushes him back into the wall. One shoulder brushes into a rack of hung coats, and Ilya's hand fists into one of them as he watches Shane drop to his knees in front of him.

"*Shit,* Hollander..." Ilya says with awe.

Shane’s eyes are glazed over as his fingers fumble for Ilya’s jean button. The zip comes down after that, and then Shane presses his face between the parted fabric and breathes in.

Ilya chokes off a strangled sound, his balls suddenly aching, dick jumping to attention.

Shane nuzzles against his growing erection with his nose and mouth, eyes opening to look up at him, half-lucid. "Want it," he mumbles.

Ilya has to look away, take a shuddering breath. Before he knows it, Shane has worked his cock out through the fly and takes it halfway into his mouth. His tongue laves over the head as he pulls off. Ilya reaches down to pull him up.

"Shower," he says stiffly, giving Shane a pat on the butt towards his stairs. "Will join in a minute."

He wants to give Shane time to clean up as he'd like to, but he also feels the need to take a minute for himself.

The overwhelming arousal had taken him by surprise, and he'd felt as if he could come at any moment. Shane's doe eyes looking up at him, eager and starving.

Ilya is dizzy.

It's not the first time they've done this, but it feels so much more intense. Feels like they are locked in on each other in a way that they haven't been before. Ilya wants to...

He shakily takes his coat off, then finishes unlacing his boots. Slips in his socks before removing them as well. He goes to the kitchen, splashes his face with water from the sink.

He can hear the shower upstairs, very faintly. He knows that Shane will be cleaning himself up, probably stretching himself out. Ilya would love to watch it, but he's feeling a dose of unease alongside his arousal.

Instead, he walks gingerly up the stairs to the bedroom to sit on Shane's made bed, listening to Shane bump around.

He opens Shane's side drawer, feeling around until he finds the bottle of lube. Sees that it's on the low side. He grins, despite his trepidation.

Shane's dildo sits in the back corner, and he thinks about bringing it out, but he doesn't want to embarrass Shane right now. He wants to keep the spark of focus between them burning bright.

He sits, listening, and palming himself through his jeans, trying not to get too carried away with touching himself.

“Rozanov,” Shane murmurs, and Ilya’s on his feet in a second, shedding clothes like he’s on fire as he steps into the bathroom.

*

He's got Shane up against the heated wall of his big, luxurious shower. Shane's hands and face are pressed up to the tile, his back a tight arch away from Ilya as his hips work against Shane's at a steady pace.

They'd soon turned the spray down after they'd started, to preserve lube, and after the first condom hadn't wanted to stay on with the continuous water flow. It still trickles down in warm droplets over Shane's shoulders, his skin illuminated and beautiful. Ilya had been captivated by it before he'd noticed the reflection of them in Shane's bathroom mirror.

That had really been something.

"You should see yourself, Hollander," Ilya had said, leaning down over his bent body to speak in his ear. That, in turn, had made Shane groan louder, the angle changing.

Ilya had described to him in great detail what *he* could see. Shane's beautiful, muscular body slumped against the wall, hips working back in tandem with Ilya's, showing just how much he loved what Ilya was doing to him.

If Ilya weren't afraid of what it'd mean, he'd have told Shane all of the other little details he'd begun to grow fond of. The silvery stretchmarks running in rivulets over his hips and ass and sides of his thighs. The raised scar on his shoulder that he likes to run his hand over. The valley of his spine up his muscular back that Ilya kisses up and down as his hips rut against Shane's ass.

"Rozanov," Shane huffs, and Ilya listens intently. "*Please*, harder. I'm almost—"

"Yes, okay," Ilya huffs, feels in that moment he would do anything Shane asks, when he's asking so desperately.

He fits his hands to Shane's hips and begins pulling him back into each thrust, the sound of their skin slapping together rising above the trickle of water, the wind howling outside—

The room is plunged into sudden darkness.

"Fuck," Shane yelps, straightening back into Ilya. Ilya steadies him with his hands to his hips, his cock slipping free. They look around, eyes wide in the pitch-black bathroom.

The darkness is accompanied by the sound of a low whir spiraling down to nothing.

"Ah," Ilya says flatly, recognizing the sound. "Power is out."

"Shit," Shane curses, shutting the water off the rest of the way. They stand there together, Shane's back to Ilya's front, looking out the cracked door of the bathroom, where the faint light from the city beyond still trickles into Shane's bedroom.

"Guess the shower's over," Shane mutters, feeling around for the shower door handle. When he finds it, Ilya reaches out for Shane's bicep and uses it to guide himself.

"Here," Shane says faintly, passing Ilya one of the towels he'd set out. "Wonder how long it's gonna be like this..."

Ilya dries himself and follows Shane into the bedroom, where he stands at the window in his towel. He feels around the end of Shane's bed for the pair of sweats— also left out by Shane — and a t-shirt. He joins him at the window, looking down.

“It’s not just the building. It’s the whole block," Shane comments.

The entire road below is white, but more than that, Ilya can see the ice buildup on the rooftops opposite them. It sticks to Shane’s windows as well, the corners white and pebbled with it, like the glass beginning to boil with bubbles. As the wind howls, it blows a gust of it up against them in specks.

“Is good building?” Ilya asks.

Shane gives a defeated shrug. “Sure. But that won’t matter. You can’t fight a storm like that,” he motions outside. “Just ride with it till the end.”

“You sound like surfer,” Ilya comments.

Shane turns to him, and he imagines that if he could see Shane’s face clearly, he'd be staring at him in bewilderment. “How many *surfers* have you met?”

“None. But I have seen some American films,” Ilya replies.

The air by the window is markedly chillier than in the rest of the room. Even double or triple-pained glass won't keep the heat in forever on a window that big. The building is made to give breathtaking views of the city, which means it’s *mostly* made of windows.

Further off, there is another visible block of the city that's gone dark.

Ilya thinks of that cold winter in Moscow.

Power outages, cars stranded on the sides of the road. His father hadn’t cared much for the public, never had. Ilya did, though. It had been a disheartening winter. He'd been glad to spend his next one traveling around North America, distracting himself from all the pain in the world with hockey.

Down below, can see the Montreal streets covered in snow, but he can also see plows already running. On the next street over, there are flashing red and blue lights. People are working around the clock. He takes a breath, tries to still the anxiety in his mind.

“Rozanov?” Shane asks, and Ilya feels him step closer to his side.

“Nothing,” Ilya answers the unspoken question. “Can we…”

Shane’s hand finds his arm, and he pulls him toward the bed. The bed with too many pillows and thick, soft blankets atop it. “We can keep going, if you want.”

Of course, Ilya wants. He’s never *not* wanting Shane these days. He thinks he could want him day or night, halfway across the world.

At first, Shane lies on his stomach, propping his ass in the air. It's easy for Ilya to go back to fucking him at a moderate pace. He marvels at how easy it can be between them.

By the end, though, they've migrated to their sides. He holds Shane against him as they look out the window at the city beyond, most of it still glowing. "Fuck," Ilya sighs against his ear, hips curling up against him rapidly.

Shane's hands grip onto Ilya's hand, where it holds his thigh up, the other clasping at his forearm, where it holds him around the chest. Ilya likes that. He's taken notice of Shane's hands searching him out, holding on whenever they can. It makes him feel important, in some way. Like Shane needs it to be *him*, there, holding him and fucking him.

"There, there," Shane chants softly as Ilya's hips work quickly, stroking up and aiming for where he thinks Shane needs it.

The sex feels softer like this, in the dark and on their sides, but no less intense. Ilya grinds into him and comes, and wishes at once that there wasn't a condom there separating them.

He buries his face in the back of Shane's neck as he reaches around to jerk him off, fist flying up and down his cock. He grinds into him until Shane is keening, and then he goes stiff in his arms, hips jerking shortly. Ilya collects his release in his hand, makes sure to get it all so Shane doesn't have to think about his bedsheets this time around.

Ilya feels a bittersweetness about the moment, wishing that he were looking at Shane's face to see it happen. He kisses him gently on the neck and then detangles himself.

He sits on the edge of the bed, removing the condom and tying it off. He pads back into the bathroom to rinse his hands and find a washcloth. Then he returns without a word to clean Shane up. Shane turns on his stomach to let him, sighing as Ilya gingerly wipes the lube from the crack of his ass.

They sit there in the silence for a long moment, Ilya feeling a bit numb. Then he stands, collecting his discarded sweatpants. He takes a step toward the door.

“Rozanov,” Shane says, voice quiet. The bedsheets rustle as he turns over.

“Hm?”

“Where are you going?”

Ilya looks back at the bedroom doorway. “Downstairs.”

“Why?”

Ilya hesitates. He doesn't know *why,* only that that's what they do, isn't it? They fuck, then create distance so that things don't get…

"Just stay here," Shane says. The blankets rustle, and Ilya can see in the dark the way Shane holds back the top cover for him. "It'll get colder if the power doesn't come back on. And I don't have any spare blankets to give you."

Ilya swallows. "Is not true."

"No. It's not," Shane sighs.

He pats the bed anyway. Ilya is helpless against his desire to join him.

"Only because *you* will get cold," Ilya mutters, sitting back down on the bed and swinging his legs up.

"Yeah. This bed *does* get cold," Shane murmurs sleepily. Ilya eases down on his back and stares at the ceiling.

Shane's mattress is firmer than his own, but holds him securely. The blankets are heavy, much heavier than anything he's ever bought for himself. They ground him in, make him feel a bit like he's being hugged.

Sleep comes on fast, but before it takes him entirely, he feels Shane's hand, just a little touch of fingertips against his bicep. Goosebumps rise along his arms, and he lies there still as a stone as Shane's fingers slide along his bicep, curling in around his arm to rest.

"Fingers are cold," Ilya mumbles after a moment.

Shane doesn't reply.

Chapter End Notes

My headcannon is that as soon as Shane got some of that sweet hockey money, he got a nice "practical car" because driving in the snowy city sucks, and he's a safe boy.

Hopefully you're safe with the north American ice storm stuff going on! I'm in the south now, but I remember how harsh winters were at the best of times. It sounds pretty bad. That goes for the rest of the world who may be experiencing bad winter events!

Thanks very much for reading. Until next time.

Chapter 11: Glass Wall

Chapter Summary

He wishes he could tell everyone— his teammates, their fans, the press— that Ilya Rozanov is nothing like he appears.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the longer wait. Many things have happened. Hope you are well, reader!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eleven

Shane's face is pressed into Ilya's ribs.

The wind blows, howling at an inhuman octave.

Shane's face is pressed into Ilya's ribs, and he’s lying across Ilya’s arm. Which is asleep.

Ilya himself can’t seem to get back to sleep at all, though.

Ice tapping against the window like grains of fine sand had woken him up. He'd felt Shane there immediately, heard his soft breath huffing against his skin. The backs of the fingers on one of his hands are there too, just beneath his chin.

Somewhere further in the city, a siren wails in yo-yoing ovals. The sirens in Canada sound like the ones in Boston, which both sound different from Moscow; a slightly different tone and slightly different pitch.

For his first three years with Boston, it seemed like every detail, every slight difference, was a reminder that Ilya was a foreigner to this continent.

More recently, he's begun to grow used to it all. Begun to expect the differences that'd used to make him feel off-kilter. Now, they excite him. Now, he has friends on his team. He has Svetlana to visit in the States. He has Shane in Montreal. As much as he can *have* Shane, at least.

Now, these differences make him feel curious, rather than homesick.

It's cold in the bedroom. Much colder than it had been before. He tries to crane his head to see Shane's alarm clock, but if he moves any further, Shane will be jostled. He'll probably wake up. Move away.

Can't risk that.

Shane mutters against his skin. Ilya strains to listen, watching the lit edge of Shane's cheek and his dark lashes, fluttering as his eyes turn beneath their lids.

"—*ya*," Shane mutters.

Ilya stares, not daring to hope.

Regretfully, that's all Shane has to say. He *does* curl in, turning his face inward toward the mattress beneath Ilya's back. Despite being covered up, he shrinks in on himself with a shiver.

Anyone would be a monster, wouldn't they, to not wrap an arm around his shoulder?

Ilya carefully wriggles his arm free, wincing at the pins and needles that bloom under his skin as he tucks it around Shane's shoulder. Shane's nose wedges between two ribs so hard it tickles. Ilya squirms.

This is nearly perfect.

That thought settles over him quietly, and for once, it doesn't scare the shit out of him.

He knows that this is what Shane wants, too. Had known it by the way he'd followed him down the steps like a puppy, that first night after they'd fucked. Had known it meant that Shane was the sort that liked to cuddle and linger and speak quietly in the afterglow.

Ilya supposes that, deep down, that's his natural inclination too. Only that he doesn't indulge it. Either because of curfew or an early flight. Sometimes he comes to his senses after being with someone, realizes that he'd only been horny, and that he doesn't *actually* want to linger and talk with someone if they have a particularly vapid personality.

He never wants to be alone when he's finished fucking Shane, though. He'd like to lie there and watch Shane come back down. He'd do it for hours if he could.

Shane murmurs something else unintelligible, and his palm slides up to press into Ilya's side.

"Hush," Ilya murmurs quietly, hand sliding up Shane's back to pet through his hair. There is another word on the end of his tongue that makes him nauseous when he thinks of saying it aloud. Still, he wants to.

Shane certainly feels like sunshine. But he is not Ilya's to call so.

*

Shane opens his eyes, and there's Ilya's broad back just a foot away. He stares at the splash of moles and freckles up his pale skin. An uncountable number of them, and he'd like to put his mouth on every one. The blankets are only half-pulled up Ilya's body.

Shane is cold. It's like a refrigerator in the room. He imagines that the rest of the apartment is no better. He thinks of his gas fireplace, wonders if it'll still work without power. Gas runs separately, doesn't it? He's never had to think about this in his adult life. Then again, this is the biggest storm in the last ten years.

Back to looking at Ilya's shoulders. They're very inviting, and he knows how warm Ilya runs. Carefully, he wriggles closer. Yes, he can feel the body heat radiating off him, even from a few inches away.

When he's close enough, he gently presses his face between Ilya's shoulders, letting his eyes shut. It feels so nice, and Ilya smells so good; he could go right back to sleep. Stay in bed all day.

Ilya shifts.

"Your nose is like ice cube."

Shane blinks. Wonders if he can feign being asleep, still.

"You are awake. Can feel your eyelashes."

Shane sits up abruptly, face flushed. He thinks of denials he could throw out, but then notices that Ilya is on his phone.

"Why are you awake this early?" Shane asks, rubbing an eye with his fingers.

Ilya turns to look at him over his shoulder. His under eyes are shadowed deeply. He looks to have been awake for a while.

"I am writing email to my publicist."

"Oh." Shane settles back down with his shoulder to Ilya's back. No use in feigning not wanting to touch. Could anyone blame him, with how cold it is? "What about?"

“About what I just wrote my accountant.”

Shane stares at his smooth ceiling, waiting. When Ilya doesn’t elaborate, he huffs. “What did you write your accountant?”

Ilya takes longer than normal to answer. First, he rolls onto his back, putting them shoulder to shoulder. His chest heaves with a sigh, and then, “I could not sleep. Too much thinking. I..." He sounds sheepish, and Shane looks at him sideways. He indeed looks embarrassed, mouth set into a hard line. "I asked my agent to make a donation.”

“A donation?”

“For... disaster relief. Snow removal. And the electrical workers.”

Ilya says this all very blandly, without feeling. He waves his hand at the window.

One look at his face, though, tells Shane that it means a great deal more to him than he’s letting on. His expression is solemn, the bridge of his nose so lovely, the corners of his eyes stiff.

Shane had thought Ilya shallow, flippant, vain, the first time they’d met. The first time those eyes had looked down his nose at him.

That's on him, he realizes. He hadn't known as much, back then, seventeen and in his last year of high school. He hadn't seen as much of the world, hadn't met all the people he would come to meet. Didn't understand life.

He still doesn't, but at least he *knows* he doesn't, now.

Ilya Rozanov is a complicated person. That had become apparent from the first night they'd hooked up, Ilya looking at him in the low light with a fire that had ignited previously unknown desire inside Shane. With humor and quiet understanding. He'd made it good and fun for Shane.

So many sides to Ilya, and Shane is still seeing new ones every day.

“That’s really good of you, Rozanov,” he murmurs.

Ilya glances at him, face twisted in a grimace. “Yes, well. Do not tell anybody.”

*

By 7 am, Ilya’s name is at the top of the trending page on most social media websites.

Shane is padding back across the cold floors from using the bathroom when he sees Ilya’s sour face staring hard at his phone.

“What’s the matter?”

Ilya says nothing, but turns his phone around for Shane to look at the article he has pulled up. Shane only gets a glance at the headline before Ilya scrolls to a news clip and presses play with his thumb. A pretty Canadian news anchor bundled in a trendy coat sits behind a news desk.

“Ilya Rozanov, captain of the Boston Raiders, the team who has been stranded in Montreal since Thursday, has made an unlikely show of goodwill to the city of Montreal—“

Ilya takes his phone back. "We are not *stranded.*" He curses in Russian. "Is no reason to fly out until—″ He flicks angrily through his phone, pulls up his messages before he begins typing. Shane can see a vein popping out on his forehead. “I asked not to mention my name,” Ilya mutters, pressing send and then tossing the phone down onto the bed between them.

“Everyone’s gonna know you care, now.”

“I did not want—“ Ilya cuts himself off.

Shane is surprised by how upset he actually seems. He watches Ilya look forelornly out the window at the grey sky, jaw tense as he grits his teeth.

Shane opens Twitter on his own phone. There, he sees Ilya’s name at the top of the trending topics. There are multiple news outlets that have posted a blurb about it, some reporting 30 thousand and others reporting 50. It's a good chunk of their yearly earnings if Ilya is making close to what Shane does.

The comments under the articles are a mixed bag. Some are complementary, claiming that they knew Ilya Rozanov wasn't *that* much of an asshole. Others claim that it isn't *enough* money. Why wouldn't a pro hockey player donate at least a million?

The worst comments claim that Ilya Rozanov would only do something like this out of pride and deceitfulness. They bring up every nasty rumor that's ever been spread about him. *This Slavic cocksucker is up to something*, one reads.

Shane grows so weary that he closes the app and rests his phone on his chest with a frown. He suddenly regrets the nature of their professional relationship. He likes competing against Ilya and likes trying to be the best at what he does. He likes to stare Ilya down across the red line, and likes knocking into each other with intent on the ice. He likes holding a victory over him, won fair and square.

He does not like what comes along with it, though.

He wishes he could tell everyone— his teammates, their fans, the press— that Ilya Rozanov is nothing like he appears. He can't tell the press that they're friends. It would upend everything they've built.

He feels a bit like he's trapped behind a thick wall of glass.

Ilya is strong and loud and cocky. But it still must bother him a bit, too.

Is there anything he can do?

"I have an idea," Shane says suddenly. Ilya only grunts to acknowledge that he's heard, keeping his eyes on the window. "What if I matched your donation?"

Ilya looks at him with narrowed eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Like— if I gave the same amount. And told everyone that I appreciated what you did."

"What will *that* do?" Ilya scoffs and waves his hand. Then he hesitates. "It would be strange, would it not?"

"Why?" Shane's frown deepens. "I *do* appreciate it."

As Ilya observes him, Shane feels that pull in his gut. He's surprised by its lack of physicalness, by how it feels tied to Ilya as a person. How it's stirred by imagining Ilya, up in the early hours, strewing over the state of the world outside the apartment. Worried for others.

"I thought it was attractive, actually," Shane says, his voice shaking a bit as he pulls his legs up beneath himself. He shuffles to the other side of the bed, swinging a leg over Ilya's thighs.

Ilya stares at him, expression wide and blank. He looks him up and down, hands tentatively coming to settle on his hips. They slide around, a finger dipping up under the leg of his briefs.

"It would be… uncharacteristic," Ilya says carefully. "For you to talk about me outside of interview."

Uncharacteristic. "Where'd you learn that word?" Shane teases.

Ilya bucks upward in retaliation, throwing him off balance. Shane falls forward, nearly busting his chin into Ilya's nose, but Ilya only laughs at him, pushing him back up with hands to his waist.

"Don't mind," Shane says once they've recovered. "It's for a good cause."

*

By 9 am, they've gotten each other off with lazy handjobs, and Shane's name has joined Ilya's on the news headlines.

"The most uplifting story in sports today has just gotten an update. Shane Hollander, captain of Montreal's very own Metros, has made a statement about Ilya Rozanov's generous donation to the city. In a written message, he says: 'I'm happy to share a human moment with Ilya Rozanov. I will be matching his donation to the city, in hopes that we can ease the burden

of the storm on Montreal's citizens.' This coming just an hour after Rozanov made his own substantial donation—"

Ilya lies with his temple tucked up against Shane's shoulder, watching the clip play out on Shane's phone. "Very diplomatic," he says, accent thick with his lazy tongue.

"Well… My publicist helped me write the statement. But… yeah," Shane says with a shrug. Then he adds as an afterthought, "Couldn't let you take all the glory. In my own city."

"Yes, is only reason," Ilya says, turning to press his lips to Shane's shoulder.

Shane shivers, loving that Ilya will continue to kiss his body even after they've gotten off. He isn't sure what it means, but he wants it to keep happening.

A hand braces on his chin, and Shane's heart jumps into his throat just as Ilya kisses him on the mouth.

It's one of their more chaste kisses. Maybe there's not a thing special about it, other than the context in which it's been given.

Which means a whole lot to Shane.

"What was that for?" He tries to keep the shake out of his voice.

"Nothing," Ilya says, head thunking back against his shoulder. "Others will talk now, you know."

"I know." Shane gives a half-hearted shrug. "It'll be hard for anyone to put a bad spin on *this*, though, won't it?"

The corner of Ilya's lip quirks up.

*

Shane doesn't know when the two of them fell back asleep, but his head jerks up at the sound of a text notification. He picks up the phone that had fallen across his belly and squints at the bright light of it.

Hayden - 9:36 am - What the fuck

Shane - 9:36 am - Good morning to you too.

Hayden - 9:37 am - You enjoy throwing money around?

Shane - 9:38 am - You could make a donation too.

Hayden - 9:38 am - I am. Half the team is.

In a moment, another text follows the last.

Hayden - 9:39 am - Did you and Rozanov come up with this together or something?

Shane can practically hear the suspicion in Hayden's voice.

Shane - 9:40 am - No. I heard about it through my agent. Decided it would be good to join in.

Hayden - 9:40 am - Who would have expected it from that asshole right?

Shane looks away from his phone at Ilya. He lies on his side, facing Shane this time, knees curled inward. His face is soft and relaxed, so young-looking, hair mussed on top. He smells like sex and sleep, and Shane wants to press his face to his chest and breathe it in.

Shane - 9:41 am - Maybe he's a better man than anyone gives him credit for.

Hayden - 9:42 am - Careful. People might think you're friends.

Shane chews on his bottom lip, staring at the message. That wouldn't be so bad, would it, after everything? He wonders if Hayden has any idea how close to the mark he is.

*

Ilya sits slouched in the corner of the sofa as he taps around on his phone. Shane fiddles with the fireplace.

Ilya makes a sound in the back of his throat. "Email," he announces, and Shane listens. "Montreal is allowing us to practice in their rink."

"That's nice of them." Shane doesn't bother to hide the smile on his face. He'd known from the email he'd read from the Montreal managers before they'd come downstairs that that'd be the case.

"Did you have something to do with it?" Ilya asks.

"No, actually. The higher-ups thought it'd be a good look. Considering half our teams are donating to Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa…"

"Is funny..." Ilya comments. "From outside view, it looks as if we are all... What is word? Philanthropist?" He says it thickly accented, but Shane still parses out what he means.

Shane bites down on a chuckle. "Yes. But really, we're all trying to outdo each other?"

"It would seem."

When Shane looks at him, Ilya is picking at the skin around a finger. Stormy look on his face.

“Not us, though,” Shane says quietly. Ilya looks back at him. “You did it because you wanted to help. You were the first."

Ilya looks reservedly at him, pressing his lips together. “Mm. And you?”

“Because it was a good thing to do. And I wanted to support your good habits.”

Shane expects him to needle him back, but instead, he gets that look on his face, soft and open and relaxed. Like there’s something hanging between them. Shane wishes he could reach out and take it, stoke it to life so he can get a clear look at it. For once. Figure out exactly what Ilya is thinking when he looks at him like that.

*

Shane only just lights the pilot light when Ilya's phone rings in his hand. Ilya curses quietly, looking at the screen. He brings it to his ear. “Da,” he says roughly. This close, Shane can hear Marleau’s voice crackling on the other end.

“You up?”

“Sadly,” Ilya mutters.

“*Get your ass down to the Metros' arena. Pronto,*” Marleau says, voice exhilarated.

Ilya groans aloud and slouches into the sofa, pulling the throw from the back where it’s folded neatly and covering himself up. "How can you say this? It is still snowing."

And it is. Even though it's nothing like it had been the night before, the power is still down in multiple blocks across Montreal.

“*You got no right to be complaining,*” Marleau laughs. “*It’s thanks to you that we get to have a practice in the full size today.*”

“Ah. Me and my generous heart,” Ilya says regretfully, eyes meeting Shane’s and flicking between them. His pupils are blown and dark against his sea foam eyes. Shane loves it when they're focused on him.

“*Can you believe that shit?*” Marleau goes on, voice tinny. “*Hollander ain't as humble as he likes to seem. He just had to get in on it, too. Stole your thunder.*”

Shane frowns at that.

"He asked me for permission," Ilya says easily. "Besides. Got everyone else to pitch in."

"*He called you?*" Marleau asks.

"Our agents."

Shane is thankful that Ilya is so good at lying.

“Will be down to arena in a while,” Ilya says, voice tightening. His eyes drag away from Shane to look out the window.

“*Not too long. We’ve got shit to run through,*” Marleau warns.

“*Okay,* okay,” Ilya grumbles and then hangs up.

Shane looks at the flame he'd just gotten going. Regrets that they can't spend the rest of the morning in front of it. He'd like to have tried cozying up on the couch. If Ilya would allow it. For how cold it is, maybe he would have.

Ilya had defended him, in some sense. "You didn't have to say that," Shane murmurs.

”I don't mind."

Shane stares at the fire behind the glass. There's a grate somewhere in a storage closet that he can replace one of the panels with. "They'll talk even more now."

"Is it bad if I do not care right now?” Ilya asks. Shane turns a grin into his shoulder to hide it, and his phone buzzes. He wishes that everyone would leave them alone today. He’d been looking forward to more time, just the two of them.

Hayden - 10:40 am - Carpooling to the arena to watch. You in?

Shane - 10:40 am - Watch what?

Hayden - 10:40 am - Don’t play dumb, you saw the email too. What other plans could you have today?

Shane grins down at his phone. He looks up to find Ilya watching him.

“The boys want to watch the Raiders practice.”

“Of course they do,” Ilya says deprecatingly. “They are hungry to be in the presence of good players.”

“Fuck off,” Shane scoffs. He reaches for the gas valve, shutting it off. At least he knows it works, still.

“You will make food?” Ilya asks with a small pout on his mouth.

“No power.”

“Is not gas stove, as well?”

Shane sighs. “Guess it’s eggs again.”

*

“They’re calling it a truce,” Hayden tells Shane when he climbs into his SUV passenger seat. The rest of the car is filled with Metros' team members. He toes an empty sippy cup aside in the bottom of the foot well and buckles in.

“Who is?” he asks incredulously.

“*Everyone*.” Boiziau from the back seat. “Montreal Times, TSN. Even ESPN has a piece on their website.”

“How can they have a *piece* out? There’s nothing to report,” Shane scoffs, but he knows how it goes with publications. “Rozanov made a donation. So did I.”

“You said *nice things* about him,” someone further back supplies helpfully.

Shane lets his temple thunk against the cold car window. Murmurs, “Well, he did a *nice thing*.”

“After the rest of the Raiders started making donations, we had to jump in too,” Hayden says, but doesn’t look too perturbed. “I guess it’s all for the best. Our managers are getting calls for quotes. It’s good press, as far as press goes."

They start driving, Hayden's SUV standing up to the snowy roads as well as Shane's. The Metros arena is further away than the first practice rink. Normally, Shane would be more comfortable driving himself. Hayden is probably the only person he thinks would be as careful as he is.

He thinks that's the end of the conversation, and prepares to start thinking up ways for him and Ilya to get closer in the coming evening. Things to bring home for dinner, music he could play. He has a feeling Ilya will find all of his tastes boring, the way he finds everything about Shane boring.

Maybe there's *something* about him that will make Ilya think he's interesting, though. They just need to find it. Maybe then Ilya would want... Well.

Hayden's voice reaches him over the sound of the rest talking in the backseat. "I’m sure everyone’s wondering what’s gonna happen once the weather finally blows over and everything goes back to normal.”

Shane wonders that, too.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly I'm not sure how much they'd be making money wise at this point in their careers, vs how much they'd have in savings. I did a bit of research and could not get a conclusive answer for 2013, so I went bold with it, maybe not bold enough, but just roll with it for now.

___

There's still a part of me that wants to go back and "fix" the Hollander/Rozanov thing. Like, in the narration, based on their pov's, having Shane refer to Ilya as Rozanov, and vice versa (at least until they've grown sufficiently close.) I find myself writing it that way sometimes, and it's hard to know if the story would be better if I fixed it, or if it would ruin the flow I've already made so far.

No solid plans on it. But if you have feelings about it one way or the other, do let me know. I can't tell if it would make it better or worse.

Thanks for reading, regardless!

Chapter 12: Compartmentalized

Chapter Summary

> “Are you okay?” Shane asks. “You looked… You know. Out on the ice.”

Chapter Notes

> Hello hello.
>
> I am still responding to comments from the last chapter, but I appreciate everyone's opinions on using their last names vs first names. I'm more comfortable keeping the fic as-is for now!
>
> edit: ALSO. I want everyone to know that I play two things in the background writing that you may also like. One is a playlist of ost songs on repeat, and the other is a raging snowstorm ambience on youtube. You play these at the same time. Peak vibes. My ost songs are as follows:
>
> Heartbeat II
> Let's Make a Deal
> Young and Restless I
> Young and Restless II
> Dark Glow
> Heartbeat IV
>
> I definitely don't use any of the happier tunes, because the vibes need to be kept in check. I need to be a *little bit* sad writing this because otherwise the yearning doesn't come through properly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twelve

“We’re going somewhere after this,” Marleau tells Ilya as they’re walking through the Metros' arena back entrance. “A place down the street. Called Longitude or something.”

“Stupid name,” Ilya scoffs.

Marleau laughs. “Well, it’s the only place open around here. It’s more of a bar than a club. But the team could use some bonding time, if you know what I mean.”

“You only want to get wasted,” Ilya says with a smirk.

“Course. Don’t you?”

Ilya thinks about that as they stroll into the away team’s locker rooms. “It has been a few weeks,” he admits. The last time they’d gone to party, they’d just beaten Florida.

In a bar in Miami, Ilya had found free drinks all around and multiple pretty women who’d wanted to take him home. He’d gone with a brunette in the end, taken her to a nice hotel he rented for a few hours, because he had the kind of money to do that, now.

It had been fun. Not as fun as it *could’ve* been.

“Maybe I will,” Ilya says, though he isn’t sure how honest he’s being. He likes to dance and lose himself, but Shane is also an enticing afterparty in himself.

*

The locker rooms at the Metros' arena don’t smell any better than the ones in Boston.

Ilya is half changed into his kit when his phone starts ringing. At first, he ignores it. Alexei has been calling him every midmorning for a week now. It’s not as if he doesn’t know what it’s about, either, because Alexei texts him after each missed call at least three times.

He wants the money Ilya told him he would send over. He hasn't yet, because the last time they'd been on a phone call, Alexei had been too fucked up to string a sentence together.

When Ilya finally takes a glance at the phone sitting up in the top of his chosen locker, he falters at the word “*father*” at the top of the screen in Russian. His father doesn’t call as often, and when he does, it’s usually not very important. Still, his instinct is to answer.

He glances around at the rest of his team, who are in good spirits as they get ready for a much-needed practice.

He takes his phone and heads around the corner for the bathrooms to get a bit of privacy.

He answers in Russian. "*Father*?"

"*He replies at last. I thought you would ignore my call again*."

"*I answer if I can,*" Ilya says, grimacing.

"*You are training? I have not heard from your coach in a while. I nearly called him.*"

"*Yes...*" Ilya hesitates. He doesn't know why his father would be calling his coach. He hears the rest of the team in the next room heading for the ice. "*There is a storm that delayed our game. Our next is on Thursday*."

His father laughs. "*What storm? A bit of winter snow is nothing. If you cannot handle a bit of snow, you will have no hope of being drafted*."

Ilya stares at the tile floor, mind ticking over his father's words. "*Drafted*?"

"*The North American league you are so set on will look down on you. But your future rides on it,*" his father carries on. Ilya's stomach begins to sink. "*You should bring your family prestige. Since you don't do anything other than play hockey. And hang around the park when the lake is frozen.*"

Ilya swallows thickly, slumping a shoulder into the wall. He doesn't know what to say or what to do. "*Father, where are you now?*"

"*At home. Where else would I be?"* He coughs harshly. *"Bring home herring tonight, we are nearly out. Polina will be out late... and you know how she gets. I cannot ask her to...*"

Ilya's mouth has dried up. A breath escapes his nose harshly. "*Yes, alright. I need to go. Practice is starting.*"

His father has never been one to say goodbye, even when he wasn't losing his mind.

Ilya hangs up and opens his texts. He starts a new one to Alexei, ignoring his brother's latest attempts at getting him to send money.

Ilya - 11:50 am - Where are you? You need to go check on our father. He is not well.

He thinks of adding something else to prove how serious he is.

Ilya- 11:50 am - I will find a doctor. But you need to stay with him. Something is wrong!

Alexei does not read his message that he can tell, and he does not respond right away.

Ilya knows that something is wrong with his father. Has known it for months. His father has never been a kind man, and sometimes, he can be downright cruel. He'd been a bit *too* unreasonable, though, in the months leading up to Ilya's departure from Russia. Nearly ruining his shot at being drafted by Boston, berating him when he'd wanted Ilya to do well for the entire family back home. Things that had only felt bad at the time. Looking back, they feel like bad omens that Ilya had only been too blind to miss.

He’s not sure what he can do about it halfway around the world. All he *can* do is hope to God that Alexei can be competent enough to hold things down until the summer when Ilya can return.

His phone buzzes in his hand. He expects it to be Alexei, but instead, it's Shane.

Jane - 11:51 am - The rest of your team is out here doing speed runs. You not up to it? ;)

Ilya swallows. His mind is a storm, and he can think of a dozen things to reply with, some of them sarcastic, some of them flirtatious, some of them just cruel. He can’t bear to send any of them, though, so he instead chucks the phone into the top of his locker and slams the door closed.

He shakes his head as he walks to the arena, tries to put everything out of his head, leave it back in the locker room. Compartmentalize, he’d heard Marleau call it. He recognized it as something he'd already been practicing since he was twelve years old. A tactic for being good at hockey, but also for getting through life.

When he steps foot out on the ice, as hard as he tries not to, he sees a large group of the Metros team clustered in the stands near the ice to watch. They whistle when Ilya steps out like he's a showgirl on a stage. He'd normally play up to their taunts. Today, he doesn't much feel like it.

There in the second row, Shane sits, hands stuffed into his hoodie pockets, eyes skating over him neutrally.

Ilya wishes he weren’t here to distract him, for once.

*

Shane can tell from the moment Ilya skates out that there’s something wrong.

He looks like he’s made of wood, shoulders held tight in tension. He hadn’t looked that way when the two of them had said goodbye in the foyer.

Ilya had looked bright in the eye, excited to be going to skate. He’d given Shane a biting kiss before he’d left, and it’d made Shane nearly giggle with how playful it’d been.

Then Ilya had whisked out the door, heading for the back alley to meet his team a few blocks over. Shane had waited a few minutes before leaving and meeting his own out front of the building.

He’d thought of Ilya the whole way, at how nice it’d felt to wake up next to him, to eat breakfast, to get dressed. To know they were coming back to the same place when the day was done.

He realized, on the drive over, that he could easily get used to this sort of thing. Which was a dangerous thing to think about. Because this is the exact sort of thing he can't have.

Still, he can daydream about it, can't he? There's no harm in it.

Now, Ilya looks a far cry from the loose, happy man who'd left his apartment. In fact, judging by the hard set of his jaw, he's angry.

Shane wonders if his team has given him a harder time than they thought about the donations. Marleau hadn't sounded upset on the phone. Shane had even thought he'd sounded secretly pleased with the turn of events, the chance to boost their public appeal.

"Looks like it's gonna be a hard practice," Hayden comments next to him, sucking on his teeth in anticipation.

"Yeah."

To say Ilya looks aggressive would be an understatement.

He looks like a wild animal on the ice. His accuracy is spot on— it always is— but the way he plays against his own team members as they make up an opposition is something else.

"*Jesus*," Boiziau mutters from the next row back. "You'd think he wants to kill them."

At one point, Ilya runs into Hammersmith at the opposite end of the rink.

Hammersmith is bigger than him. Older, too, Shane thinks. When he easily shoulders Ilya out of the way, Ilya spits something in Russian that echoes over the sounds of the other players sparring. He turns on his teammate, stick raised and held tight across his chest, and says something.

Shane watches, throat tight with nerves, as Marleau descends down the ice to intervene.

Hammersmith seems to already be placating Ilya, though, a hand outstretched to press into his shoulder, holding him at bay as he says something unintelligible.

Second by second, Ilya seems to disarm himself, the blade of his stick clacking against the ice as he drops it in defeat.

Shane can see the tension on his shoulders, rolling as he tries to shake off the bad mood that's taken hold of him.

"That's Rozanov, for you," Hayden says with a sigh. "Didn't know he'd even get onto his own team, though."

"Must be something wrong," Shane says absently, only loud enough for Hayden to hear.

Hayden looks at him sideways, and Shane can feel it. "Okay... But, not sure what good practice is doing for him right now with that kind of mood." He waves his hand at the ice. "You think they'll wanna spar afterward again?"

Shane is sure that Hayden would like a bit of time on the ice while they're there, because he likes hockey nearly as much as Shane does. But...

"Maybe…" Shane says, though he doubts it. By the closed-off look on Ilya's face, he can tell that there's not much that he will want to do after this at all. He doesn't look all there. He wonders what Ilya's truly bad moods entail.

*

A terrible practice. He's lucky he didn't get himself hurt with how reckless he'd been acting. And with such tension in his body, it'd be easy to pull something.

Ilya, freshly showered, is chucking his gear into his hockey bag when his phone begins ringing. He glances at it and then stops what he's doing. He carries the phone to the bathrooms again.

"*Why did you not answer earlier*?" Ilya says roughly in Russian.

Alexei scoffs on the other end. "*Why did you not send the money*?"

"*Because you are not there with him*!" Ilya hisses, trying to keep his volume down. "*He is confused again! More so this time.*"

"*He was fine when I left him,*" Alexei says shortly. "*He is only tired.*"

"*He's* not," Ilya insists. "*If you want money from me, pull your head from your ass and pay attention to him.*"

He can picture the shock on Alexei's face. Ilya is not typically one to throw verbal punches. He used to, when it came to his brother. But in his teen years, he'd found that staying quiet was what got him out of trouble— or allowed him to flee from home— the fastest. He can't be silent now, though.

"*You are not doing a good enough job,*" Ilya spits, and then, before Alexei can retort, which he no doubt is preparing to do, Ilya hangs up.

His phone rings a moment later, but he only silences it. He sends a single text in response to the missed call.

> *Ilya - 2:12 pm - If you want money, you will go see to him right now. Call Polina if there is more trouble.*

"Fuck," he spits.

He feels the overwhelming need to escape, to run away from home, but there is no home to run from here. It's only Montreal and snow and ice and—

He needs to get drunk. Very drunk. Needs to dance with a stranger. Lose his mind. That's what he always does when—

His phone buzzes. He glares at it, expecting to see Alexei's name. Instead, it's Shane's.

Jane - 2:13 pm - Meet me in the back hallway?

His heart feels like it sits at the base of his throat, choking him as he makes his way into the back corridors of the stadium. It's a well-built place. Ilya can't even hear the wind and snow outside.

He finds Shane leaning against a line of old lockers that look like they haven't been opened in a decade. When he smiles at Ilya, Ilya can see a tightness to it.

"Hey," Shane says, voice light.

"Hi." It's the least Ilya can offer, with Shane looking at him like that. No matter how much Ilya wants to turn away, disgusted with himself and not wanting anyone else to see—especially not pretty, kind Shane Hollander.

"Are you okay?" Shane asks. "You looked… You know. Out on the ice."

He avoids saying what Ilya knows he's thinking. Looked *rotten, mean, angry*. Like a bad man.

Ilya shrugs, trying to play the emotions off. "Fine. Only a bit tired."

Shane nods, hand lifting and then falling back to his side, an aborted attempt to reach out, Ilya guesses. He'd have loved to be touched, but it probably would've only made him feel guiltier, too. Best that Shane stays put.

"I was thinking," Shane starts, apparently wanting to move on. "I could pick something up for dinner tonight. Not sure what's going to happen with the power. It might be off, still. Is there… anything you prefer?"

Ilya feels stricken, his heart squeezing uncomfortably. He has the sudden urge to crawl into a hole and die. "I uh…" his voice comes out weak. He clears his throat. "My team wants to go to a bar. Lat… Latitude or something."

"Longitude? I know it. It's a lounge down the street."

Ilya nods, averting his eyes. The longer he stares, the more at risk he is of falling into Shane and spilling over, and— he can't have Shane looking at him with pity. Because that's what it'd be, pitiful and pathetic. And kind, *kind* Shane would treat him so nicely, and it would feel too good, and also terrible, and then Ilya would ruin it all— or he *wouldn't*, and they would become friends in the public eye, and then his brother would know it all, know *exactly* what Ilya has been up to with his arch rival, and then stupidly tell their father in a coked up bender, their father who is losing his mind, and then Ilya would go back home and he might not ever leave again, depending on if his father could remember what he'd been told, and Ilya would never get to see Shane again or play hockey—

“Rozanov?” Shane asks.

“I am going to go with them,” Ilya says. “To lounge, I mean. I… need to get out.” He swallows. “I like going out, yes?”

“Yeah, I know,” Shane nods, folding his arms across his chest. “Sure. Um… you coming back to mine later tonight?”

Ilya stares at him, lips pressed together almost painfully. He can go to the lounge, get drunk, and forget about all this. Maybe then he’ll be back to normal, can come home and salvage what time they have left together. “Yes. Sure. My things are still there, anyway.” He adds that on to the end to lighten it, an old habit. He can see Shane’s face shift minutely.

“Okay. Uh… Was your team okay with what happened?”

Ilya blinks. “What happened?”

“With the donations?”

“Ah. Yes, they were fine,” Ilya shrugs. “They did not have much to say. They made their own.”

“So did mine,” Shane says, trying to smile. “I think Hayden might be onto me or something, though. You know…” he hesitates. Ilya tries not to freak out at the idea of *Pike* knowing about his personal business. The guy seems like he might have a big mouth. “It wouldn’t be so bad, would it? If we didn’t have to be public rivals *all* the time? Fans don’t have to know, but… maybe our friends could.” Shane says, meeting Ilya’s eye.

His eyes are so big and brown. Ilya runs his tongue over his teeth to distract himself.

He wants so badly for what Shane says to be so. But he also fears that it would somehow ruin everything. The truth always seems to, in Ilya's world.

“Anyway,” Shane says quickly. “I’ll uh… pick something up, just in case you’re hungry when you get home tonight,” he says quietly.

“Okay.”

Ilya turns, feeling his heart squeeze and stretch, a thin feeling.

“Hey, Rozanov…” Shane reaches out, forefinger and thumb pinching Ilya’s coat sleeve.

Ilya pauses to look back at him, and Shane is right there, leaning into his space. He kisses Ilya on the corner of his mouth, just a short peck, but it makes Ilya’s nerves tingle across his shoulders and down his sides. He feels himself begin to flush, and he clears his throat.

“Careful on the roads,” Shane murmurs. The corners of his mouth quirk downward.

Sad. Ilya recognizes it through Shane’s straight face. In his eyes. He’s sad.

Ilya hates everything.

Shane's the first to go, turning and heading for the corridor that will take him to the front of the building. He doesn't look back, and even though that's for the best, because he won't be able to see Ilya's face twisting in agony, Ilya still wishes he would.

A few minutes later, he sits in the back seat of their hired car next to Marleau, feeling numb down to the ends of each of his fingers and toes.

"Glad you're comin' with us, Roz, but…" Marleau's mouth twists up. "What the hell happened? You were so happy when we picked you up. You miss your girl already?"

Ilya seethes, looking out his window.

The snow finally seems to be coming down at a manageable rate. He wonders if he can pull himself back from this. Things seemed so easy this morning, holed up in Shane's apartment. Nothing else had existed. Today feels like some sort of unwelcome wake-up call, reality crashing back down on him.

"I am just tired," Ilya says blandly. "I want to unwind."

"Sure, but…" Marleau sighs heavily.

"But what?"

"Nothin'," Marleau scoffs, sitting back in his seat.

Chapter End Notes

..... I'm sorry for putting you through angst, reader. I will make it up to you next chapter 😐

Thank you for reading. Until next time🖤

Chapter 13: The Spiral

Chapter Summary

This doesn’t normally happen. He can’t remember the last time it hit him this wrong.

Chapter Notes

Hi😐

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thirteen

A block from Shane’s apartment, there is a Mediterranean restaurant sandwiched between his usual grocery market and a smoke shop.

He stands in line behind a little old man ordering takeout. He’s thankful that the snow has prevented most of the public from venturing out. In one corner sit two women, a mother and daughter, talking quietly over a plate of falafel. On the opposite side of the restaurant, one of the workers sits taking his break, a steaming cup in one hand, a book in the other.

Shane finds the interior cozy and comforting, rich reds and terra cotta. No music playing overhead, lights low and warm and easy on the senses.

The menu, he finds, is not strictly Mediterranean food, but a selection of dishes from the eastern side of the world. He lets himself relax and steps up to the counter when the elderly man is done ordering.

“Yes?” the woman behind the counter says with a thin smile. She looks to have put in a day's work already.

Ilya hadn't told him what he wanted to eat. Shane rues that they've never talked about the food they like to eat. He'd only gotten lucky with pizza. *Most* guys like pizza. Ilya likes meat, Shane knows for certain.

He doesn't know exactly what he orders, only that they are the top-selling dishes. She asks him if he wants a side of garlic pita, he says yes. There are vegetarian stuffed grape leaves, and he adds those, hoping there isn't anything he can't eat in them, because he'd like to have something special, for once.

No one else comes into the shop as he waits, and Shane pulls out his phone to look at his text chain with Ilya.

He wants to send something, but can't think of anything he could say that wouldn't come off too… needy? Attention seeking? He cringes inwardly. Isn't that why Ilya had decided to go in the first place?

Shane shouldn't be surprised. He knows how Ilya is, what his reputation is like. Ilya loves to party nearly as much as he likes to win at hockey. There are countless photos of him online at clubs in other cities, dancing with women or throwing back shots at a bar. Things that Shane has never been inclined to do.

Someone like that is bound to get tired of Shane's boring lifestyle after a while, aren't they? Shane's apartment isn't very fun. Sterile and full of books and gym equipment, and has a game system he doesn't use much. He doesn't have people around very often.

Shane doesn't dance, doesn't even know how to. He'd not been asked to, growing up, and now that women *do* ask him to, on the rare occasion he goes out to celebrate with his team, he declines every time.

And that's the *only* reason he declines, he'll insist, if anyone ever asks him. Of course, he'd like to dance with a pretty woman, but he just has two left feet. Never mind that he's a professional hockey player.

He would dance with a woman if he found the right one. He's sure of it.

He taps out a message to Ilya, deletes it. Tries another, deletes it too.

Finally, he takes a picture of a stray menu on a nearby table.

Jane - 5:37 pm - Hope you like chicken shawarma.

Shane likes chicken, himself. He wishes it weren't smack in the middle of the season so he could try some.

His order is finally ready, and so he closes his phone and tucks it away.

The takeout comes in a paper sack, and he folds the top down securely to try to keep it warm, and then steps out onto the snowy sidewalk. He starts the trudge toward his building. If Ilya texts him back, he can't hear or feel it.

*

Normally, when Ilya drinks, it takes him out of his mind.

He can easily be persuaded onto the dance floor by any woman, whether he's had one cocktail or five shots. He holds his liquor well, and it's a point of pride in his relationship with his team. He is Russian, and he has a reputation to uphold, one he enjoys quite a bit.

Most of the time.

Now, he's two beers and one cocktail in, looking for the next thing he'll order on the fancy little table menu. The bar is busy, but when he sees an opening, he'll head up.

A sullenness has settled over him, one which he blames mostly on the atmosphere inside Longitude.

It's not quite a club, not quite a bar, not quite a lounge, but a disappointing mix of all three, and not enough of any to be fun. Music plays overhead, but none of the songs seem to hit the mark. Still, it's packed. They're lucky they'd gotten in as early as they had, because they'd started turning people away once it reached 6 o'clock.

"Must be the only place still open for blocks," Marleau mutters next to him. "At least the drinks are good."

By good, he means *strong.*

The Raiders' team takes up an entire back corner. Alcohol has already been spilled on the table between them, hoppy beer and the last inch of Ilya's sticky-sweet cocktail.

There are two new texts from Alexei— one that says that he is with their father, and that he seems fine, now. The next telling him that Polina had come home early. This is somewhat comforting, at least. It allows Ilya to fall further into drunkenness faster.

"Where have you been, Rozzy?" Connors pipes up across the table from him. "Marly won't give us the details about your amore."

"That's cause there's none to give," Marleau pipes up. He's had a few fewer drinks than normal, Ilya's noticed. "He's tight-lipped about her."

"Tight-lipped," Ilya repeats, testing the syllables out.

"Tight-*assed*," someone pipes up, and the rest of the table erupts gleefully. Ilya rolls his eyes.

"Not gonna talk about it?" Connors asks.

"Not to you. Or to *any* of you dogs," Ilya says, pointing around the table with a smirk.

“Come on,” Evans jeers from down the line. “Give us *something,* man. What does Ilya Rozanov like? You’re with a new woman every city we go to, does she know *that?*”

Ilya bristles. He tries to clear his thoughts, not wanting to snap at one of his team.

“Evans,” Hammersmith mutters, “Enough. He’s fuckin’ drunk, man.”

“I am not,” Ilya huffs. “She knows. It is… understanding between us.” It feels bad to say, though, in front of all of them. Even though it’s true, Shane’s not there to tell his side, and he never could be.

“Just one detail,” Evans whines, and Ilya rolls his eyes, more exaggeratedly this time.

“Is very pretty,” he says, and the table groans.

“We know *that* much.”

“Prettiest eyes,” Ilya says again, a little smirk playing on his mouth. No one will know, no one could possibly guess. “And cutest—“

“Enough,” Marleau huffs, a big, meaty hand smacking down on Ilya’s shoulders. “No more bothering him when he’s drunk. He’ll sober up and beat the rest of us blue on the ice.”

Ilya laughs to himself and finally notices how sloppy and unfiltered it sounds. “Music here is terrible,” he says, this time to Marleau. “I have not danced in weeks.”

“Yeah, well…” It’s Marleau’s turn to look put out. “There are plenty of girls here.”

“Yes…” Ilya looks around. The place is packed with all sorts. It’s not a typical night on the town, but plenty of women have come dressed up with their friends. Sequins and highlighter cheeks and hair curled in ringlets or straightened to a shine. An attractive crowd.

Marleau watches the side of his face, and Ilya is too perturbed by it to ask him why.

*

Shane steps into his apartment building, and there is no change in temperature. The security guard posted up in the lobby is bundled in a coat, and all but the emergency exit lights are still off.

Shane nods at him and heads for the stairs. It’s a long climb up to his floor, but he looks at it as a workout, taking them two at a time.

His apartment is dark when he steps inside. The only light comes from the opposite windows, where the city beyond shines through. He sighs deeply and toes his shoes off. Sets his groceries and takeout on the counter and walks to the window to look out.

Then he heads for his fireplace, using his phone as a light, and fiddles with the gas release. He lights it with a match, and the living room is filled with a warm glow, just bright enough to allow him to see.

From there, he begins digging through his storage closet for the backup power bank he'd been gifted the Christmas before. Every once in a while, he diligently gets it out to test its charge. Now, he sets it up on the counter and plugs his phone into it.

Unsure of what to do from there, he plates up a few of the stuffed grape leaves, which are thankfully cold, and plants himself on his sofa.

*

Before Ilya knows it, there's a pretty woman in his arms. He dances with her as easily as breathing. And even though it's nice, his mind still isn't all there.

In fact, it's mostly *not* there; instead wondering what's going on outside on the snowy roads. The people who were turned away, did they come here specifically because they like this place? Did they come because they knew the Raiders were there? Had they made it home after they were turned away?

Had Shane?

He's a careful driver, but Ilya hasn't checked his phone in a long while. He'd lost track of time, but now it's the number one burning question on his mind. He would've heard if famous hockey player Shane Hollander had gotten into a car accident by now, wouldn't he?

Someone on the team would've already gotten word about it.

Foolish, he tells himself.

His mind isn't very sound tonight.

The woman in front of him— smaller, brunette, fit— tries to turn in his arms, and Ilya knows she's going to try to grind her ass back on him. He shifts a bit, keeps her facing him, unwilling to feel that sort of stimulation right now. He likes the ease of swaying, close but not too close.

His mind's all full of Shane, anyway, and he has to rid it of that if he's going to enjoy anything.

The woman's ruby bottom lip pokes out, observing him thoughtfully. Then, she tries to kiss him.

Before he knows what he's doing, he turns his head away. It's only instinct. Her lips connect with his cheek, the sticky, slick feeling of her gloss planted there.

She stills in his arms.

“Ya’alright?” she asks, voice uneven.

Ilya’s brow furrows on his forehead. He feels the unusualness of the gesture, his face normally kept neutral even in the worst of times. Maybe he’s drunker than he thought.

“*Da*— yes,” he says, and the woman giggles, tossing her weight against his other arm, seemingly willing to let it go. He catches her, holds her upright, but he feels that he’s already been thrust off-kilter. “Shit,” he mutters under his breath.

She leans up to speak in his ear, her voice coming out more sultry than expected. “Kiss your mother with that mouth?” He feels her grin against his ear. “Didn’t she teach you any manners?”

Ilya falters. It feels as if a drain has opened up in the pit of his stomach. As they continue to dance, Ilya stops hearing the music and feeling the body in front of him.

His mother taught him plenty of manners, hadn’t she? How to talk to pretty girls, how to stay respectful about it, too. It’d seemed like she was teaching him the opposite of what his father tried to teach him. He liked listening to her because he trusted what she had to say. She was by far the kinder of his two parents.

She'd been younger than his father. His father had always seemed to hold that over her, too, which Ilya hadn’t understood at the time. Only when he’d gotten older had he begun to see what kind of man his father really was.

He’d barely been interested in girls or romance when his mother had sat him down and taught him about sex and love. She’d gotten to it just in time, it seemed. He’d gotten his first crush just a few weeks later. Right before… before… *before*...

Ilya shakes his head violently, abhorrent memories bubbling up from the depths of his mind. He stares past the woman in his arms at the wall behind the bar counter. It’s made up of mirrors and shelves, housing the most expensive bottles all the way to the ceiling. Ilya can see the back of the woman’s long hair tossing about over his own forearm.

He tries to focus on the feeling of her warmth against him.

It does not feel nearly as nice as it normally does.

It doesn’t feel very good at all, in fact.

He, unfortunately, is aware enough to realize why.

She’s beautiful, but her waist is too small, her shoulders too thin. She’s not the right height. Her eyes are not the right shade, and her cheeks are smoothed to perfection with makeup. She smells lovely, but nothing like cologne or sweat.

She’s very beautiful, and none of it’s her fault. No woman in the club would be who his body would like for them to be.

"*Fuck*," he mutters harshly, and she pauses to look back up at him, face twisted up.

"What?"

"S-sorry," Ilya shakes his head again, eyes shutting. "Not you."

She doesn't seem very into dancing anymore, and Ilya can't blame her. He doesn't much feel like it, either.

As he walks back to the table in the corner, his legs feel heavy and sluggish, just like his insides.

"Not lookin' so hot, Rozzy," Marleau comments as Ilya slumps down in the seat next to him.

Ilya opens his mouth, realizes that he's not going to say anything intelligent, and shuts it again. He shakes his head.

Then he requests another drink.

This doesn't normally happen. He can't remember the last time it hit him this wrong. Surely it'd been when he was still young and living in Russia, Sasha stealing bottles from his father's liquor cabinet to bring to their meetups, to take the edge of anxiety off.

Ilya's usually so good at steering his drunken nights, now, molding them into what he wants them to be.

He doesn't feel like he's at the wheel this time, though.

His drink comes back with Connors, a straight shot of vodka that doesn't taste like much of anything. Marleau watches him skeptically, like maybe he's noticing for the first time that something is amiss.

Some time later, Ilya stares down at his hands in his lap. He brings one of them up and looks at his fingers. Reaches to his throat and finds the chain there, the cross attached to it. Feels the solid metal between his thumb and forefinger and rubs it like a worry stone.

He doesn't feel very good.

There's a pit in his chest, a little to the right. It aches and throbs and feels hollow.

He doesn't feel good at all.

He fiddles with his phone, fingers so clumsy that it takes him three tries to put his password in. He pulls up his messages to Shane, but the light from the device is too bright, and he squints until he can lower it.

He thumbs to Shane's newest message. He hadn't heard the alarm chime. Shane has sent him a photo of a menu in a dim restaurant. Food that Ilya's not very familiar with, written in a scrawling font that's difficult for him to read.

Hope you like chicken shawarma, Shane's message says. Ilya mouths the words to himself. He likes reading the message, even though he doesn't know what shawarma means. Seeing Shane's alias there on the screen feels like he's cradling a little Shane in his palms. A little flame of warmth.

It takes him much longer than it should to tap out a reply.

Lily - 8:12 pm - have not hadd

He sends it, notices his spelling mistake. Hopes Shane doesn't mind. He swallows thickly, watching to see if Shane will read the message.

Shane had sent the text nearly three hours ago.

Ilya frowns, a little seed of guilt sprouting in his chest. Shane had gotten food for him. Very thoughtfully. And it had no doubt gone cold by now.

Was the power back on in Shane's apartment? Was Shane there alone?

He shakes his head, pressing the heel of a palm painfully into his eye. Shane's an adult. He's fine, no matter if the power is back on or not. He lives alone, and so does Ilya.

Why would it matter if Ilya were there with him?

"Roz…" Marleau says.

Ilya jerks back, smacking his phone to his chest. He knows it looks guilty as hell, but it's too late; he's already done it.

Marleau's brow furrows again. "You alright?"

No, he's not.

The lounge is too warm. It smells like alcohol, and sweat, and old grease, and people.

Ilya feels sick.

"Just…" Ilya tries to find the English to explain, but there is none that comes to mind. There are a thousand things he wants to say in Russian, but his friend would not understand any of them.

I want to stop thinking. I want things to feel normal again. I want to dance and not feel guilty about it. I want to sleep with someone, because it's a nice distraction.

I want my father to get better. I want my brother to be responsible. I want to stop worrying about them. I wish that they cared about me.

I want to play hockey with Shane. I wish I could take him to dinner and dance with him afterward. I want to hold his hand. I want my team to know we're friends. I want them to see how boring and kind he is.

I want things to be okay, but they won't be.

I want to talk to Shane.

I wish I could talk to my mother.

I want to go home.

“I… feel sick,” Ilya says, and his voice cracks. His eyes well up, throbbing painfully in their sockets, and *fuck*, that’s the last thing he wants. He scrubs his hands over his face, but Marleau has already seen, judging by the shocked blankness on his face.

“Oh…” Marleau frowns, looking uncomfortable.

Ilya turns his face away, trying to get a hold of himself. He doesn’t want *anyone* to look at him like that. Doesn’t want anyone catching wind of his internal turmoil. To look at him and get *uncomfortable*. He’s the captain of their team. He cannot look like this in front of them, *ever*.

“Rozzy…” Marleau starts, one of his hands grasping over Ilya’s shoulder gently. “Can I do somethin’, man?”

“I…” Ilya huffs, trying to blink away the wetness from his eyes. “No.”

“What about…” Marleau sighs and then starts again. “Why don’t you go back to your girl's place, huh?”

“My girl...” Ilya repeats blandly. *Right*, Shane.

“Yeah. She makes you happy, right? Looks like you could use her, right now…”

Ilya feels flayed open in front of his friend’s observations. He doesn’t have the wherewithal to argue, though, so he only jerkily nods.

Ilya blinks, and then Marleau is standing. He pulls Ilya up by his shoulders. Ilya’s head spins as he’s righted, one of Marleau’s hands guiding him between the shoulder blades.

He lets himself be led through the lounge. There are eyes on him from all sides, women and even a few men. Hungry gazes, who either know him through hockey or are only now seeing him for the first time. He wishes they would all stop. It feels like he’s in a fishbowl, people poking at the glass. All he wants is to curl up in the dark. He wants his head to stop throbbing.

Everything is too bright and too loud. Ilya normally thrives off of this. Now, it feels like he’s stuck in hell. That’s a horrifying thought, too.

Marleau gets him onto the sidewalk, and the cold air does a bit to shock his mind back into the present. Marleau pulls out his phone and makes a call.

“What… you doing?” Ilya slurs. He barely recognizes the English coming out of his own mouth.

“Calling the car,” Marleau tells him, hand to his shoulder to keep him balanced. “Waiting here with you.”

“Okay.”

Time does not move the same, it seems.

Before he knows it, the car is in front of them, a black SUV. It makes Ilya nervous, reminds him of the car he climbed into to go to his mother's funeral. But it’s the same driver who’s been driving them around for days.

Marleau directs him into the back seat, where Ilya slumps down. The alcohol is catching up to him, he realizes. That's why this had all come on so fast.

Marleau leans into the passenger window. “Take him to… uh...” he looks at Ilya.

Ilya thinks of Shane’s address. He knows it by now, and he’s tempted to say it aloud, but his teeth bite his lips closed, still aware enough to keep a grasp on that information. That life-altering information.

Marleau looks a bit hurt, still, that Ilya will not tell him. Ilya feels like shit.

He gives the cross streets on the next road over, instead.

“Right,” Marleau grunts. “Call one of us if something happens?”

Ilya wonders what could possibly happen between here and there. He realizes that Marleau is talking to the driver. He shifts to do up his safety belt, and his hand fumbles for the buckle too many times. He’s more fucked up than he thought.

“Roz,” Marleau grabs his attention. “Alright?”

“Mm,” Ilya nods. He’s thankful to Marleau, in more ways than one. He suddenly feels guilty for concealing the truth from him. Terribly guilty.

It seems like that’s all he *can* feel.

The car begins moving, and Ilya sorts through his thoughts. They are slow and syrupy, and he feels a bit like he’s drowning. He slumps back into the seat, looking down at his phone. Pulls up Shane’s messages.

Shane has not replied.

Lily - 8:30 pm - I am sorry

Ilya writes without thinking, then cringes inwardly.

Jane - 8:31 pm - Why?

Lily - 8:31 pm - I feel sick

He says it because he does not know what else to say. But he wants to talk to Shane, wants him to answer.

His next message comes fast.

Jane - 8:32 pm - Did you drink too much?

Lily - 8:33 pm - yes

Shane does not say anything more after that. Ilya has the impulse to apologize again, and nearly does, but something about it would be too much. He doesn't want to look weak in front of Shane.

He swallows and taps out another message, trying very hard to get all the letters right.

Lily - 8:38 pm - want to come home

He stares at it for a long second before he realizes what he's said. *How* he'd said it, what it looks like. He'd only meant that he wanted to go back to Shane's apartment.

His mind is too full of sludge. He wonders if there's anything he could say to rectify it, retract it, make Shane see that it was only a slip of his drunken mind. A new text comes in with a little chime.

Jane - 8:39 pm - Then come home.

Ilya swallows thickly and pulls his hood up around his face as he stares down at the message, reading it again. His heart squeezes painfully, and he feels like he could cry if he let himself. If the driver looks at him through the rearview, Ilya does not notice.

Lily - 8:39 pm - okay

Chapter End Notes

I honest to god, hand to my heart I thought this chapter would get further along into the "comfort" part of hurt/comfort. But hey, we know where it's heading now? Sorta kinda?

I cried a little writing this chapter. Unexpectedly, just cried. Wiped my face, kept writing.

Ilya's relationship with his father is specifically heartbreaking to me. He still cares about his father, even though the man is awful to him (presumably) his entire life. Then, the man starts to lose his memory, and when Ilya is home, he helps take care of him. Even in his father's moments of confusion, he's still a dick. I presume it starts to get worse (when Ilya hands him a glass of water, his father looks so blank) and it's hard to hold such ire for someone who is actively confused and deteriorating. It's just fucking terrible and heartbreaking all the way around.

And all Ilya wants is for his father to "know him" beyond what Ilya can do for him. Wants his remaining parent to give a shit, but now he physically couldn't even if he wanted to. I could tear up about it right now. But it's nothing you haven't already felt from the show, reader🥲

_____

In other news.

I don't know how a macrobiotic diet could sustain a professional athlete, given everything I've researched about it. I get that it's possible, but it would be so involved in order to meet the caloric requirements, protein requirements, the sticking to it on the road, the careful planning of every single thing... I mean, I guess if anyone could do it, Shane Hollander could, but... I'm not tackling the issues with it in this fic.

I do hope to have a few more conversations in this story about the *strictness* Shane keeps regarding his diet, because that's much easier to get my head around, but not the food itself. I just wouldn't even know how to approach it because the premise of the diet is already a little wonky to me.

Shane's Mediterranean restaurant is based off of a place nearby to me that I love. They call themselves Mediterranean cuisine, but they serve all sorts of dishes from many countries.

Chapter 14: Alright

Chapter Summary

> “Is not fun to be drunk alone. I missed… here.” He swallows thickly, says quieter, “I wish you were not so nice to me. Makes it hard to... to..."

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the delay in chapter. I've been under the weather the latter part of the week! But we're back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fourteen

In the back of the SUV, Ilya sleeps.

Maybe dozes is more correct, for he still knows he’s in the back of a car on his way through Montreal. But when he shuts his eyes, images play in his mind that he’s not in control of. Instead of passing through the streets of a Canadian city, he imagines he’s in Moscow. A large, colorful Orthodox church comes into view on one side of the car.

Ilya hates this memory. He doesn’t revisit it often, but suddenly it’s here in vivid color, just like it had been on the actual day. He swallows around a lump in his throat, wishes he could ask the driver to keep going, *don’t stop here, please*, but he must. He *must* go here on this day. There will be no other chance.

He’s not small anymore, at least, and when he climbs out of the car, he looks at the ornate steps leading up the path with the eyes of an adult. His father is there in front of him, looking back, expression solemn and blank.

Inside, it's a beautiful church, with its hundred lit candles flickering and a crowd of people all dressed in black. Icons are painted along the upper balconies and the walls between the darkened stained glass. So dreary and stuffy, this place is at night.

Ilya thinks his mother’s panakhyda should have happened in the daytime, with sunshine coming through the windows. That’s how he wishes he could remember her memorial. That is not tradition, though.

Everyone is standing. There are no pews or seats, except the benches down the sides.

Alexei is next to him. He looks younger than Ilya remembers seeing him last, face all tearstained but solemn as a rock, just the same as their father. Ilya looks behind them, sees Grigori Rozanov there in his decorated police uniform. Ilya wonders what he could possibly be thinking. Is he glad to be rid of the wife he seemed so jealous of? Or resentful of her for leaving him alone to raise their children?

Ilya wonders why they’d ever gotten married at all. His anger at his father matches his sadness in equal measure.

He turns back, watches the priest saying his words with a practiced, melodic intonation that makes Ilya uneasy. How many times has the man said these same words? How many people has he held mourning for this week? His mother had loved the church, but Ilya hadn’t. He’d only liked visiting with her, seeing it through her eyes when he had to.

Ilya resents the entire event before it’s even come to an end. To petition his mother’s soul into heaven feels preposterous. Where else would she go? There was no one else who deserved it more than her.

He fumes in place.

A hand nudges his shoulder, and Ilya rounds on the person, unwilling to thank another well-wisher for coming on this terrible day. He hadn’t handled it well at twelve, and he isn’t handling it now at… at…

“Hi,” Shane says to him, voice soft, face even softer. He’s done up in a black suit, perfect mourning clothes. His brow is pinched as he looks at Ilya. Asks, “Are you alright?”

Shane doesn’t belong in this room.

Ilya doesn’t have time to be angry or shocked or even happy to see him. He falls into sadness so deep and black that it wrenches a sob from his belly. It overtakes him, doesn’t stop coming, and the entire church turns to look at him. Their attention only makes him sob louder.

Sir, someone says faintly.

Ilya's eyes flutter open.

Cold car, woolen coat sleeves encasing his arms. He looks ahead to see the driver turned around in his seat, watching him with a guarded look.

"We're here, sir," he says, pointing out Ilya's window.

Ilya looks out, sees that they're sitting at the cross street behind Shane's apartments. Between it and the next building stretches the familiar, narrow alleyway that Ilya has to go down. Every building on the block is darkened. Even the streetlights are out. It looks as sketchy as they come, and Ilya doesn't blame the driver's nervous look.

"Sir?"

Ilya's face is damp. He presses his fingertips to his skin and realizes that he'd been crying. Quite a lot. He wonders for how long, and how loudly. He takes a shaking breath.

"Thanks…" he says, sitting up.

He feels like shit, body sore all over, stomach churning. He'd drunk far too much and eaten nothing.

He's going to be sick.

"Are you… okay to walk?" the driver asks, looking hesitantly up and down the darkened road. Ilya fumbles with his seatbelt.

"Am okay," Ilya says. His voice sounds so rough. He sounds the furthest thing from okay. The driver keeps watching him doubtfully. Ilya finds his phone and holds it up. "I will… call friend," he promises as he pushes the back door open.

The cold hits him like a brick, eyes twinging against the wall of cold. He curses as he climbs out on wobbling legs. Squints at his screen, tries to put the password in. Fails. Tries again, fails again. He curses louder and holds the command button in. "*Call… Jane,*" he mutters, and hopes that his accent isn't too thick to be understood. Everything has always been difficult, but now it feels ten times so.

The driver hesitates, idling behind him. Ilya shuts the door and waves him away. Finally, the car pulls off. Heads up the road, takes a left turn, presumably to head back for the bar.

Ilya takes a faltering step for the alley. It feels like he's walking through quicksand for the effort it takes to do so. "*Blyat*," he spits harshly.

He's never drinking this much again.

Another step, and he remembers that he'd called Shane. He puts the phone to his ear and finds Shane already there on the other line.

"Rozanov? What the fuck— You there?"

“I am here,” Ilya gets out. He struggles greatly with the following sentence, sluggish brain stumbling through all the English he knows. “I am… at building. Can you come… get me?”

“Yeah, okay,” Shane starts, and he sounds a bit out of breath. “Are you okay?” He sounds concerned.

“No,” Ilya admits, brushing a hand roughly up his face through his hair. The cold does a bit to help him stay present, but getting through it and the snow build-up on the ground feels like a monumental task. “I am… *fucked up.”*

His stomach churns, and he remembers too late that he’s going to be sick.

He’s going to be sick *right now.*

“*Shit*,” he curses— in Russian or English, he doesn’t know— and tries to make it to the alleyway where he at least can’t be seen from every single building on the street. He makes it, though just barely, slipping down to his knees next to a green electrical box covered in a thick layer of frost. He leans against it as he heaves, hand with the phone falling away.

He hates throwing up.

It’s all liquid, and it reeks like bile and alcohol. Ilya shuts his eyes and tries to breathe through his nose, the cold air icing his lungs, giving him something to focus on. He feels snow beginning to slowly gather on the shoulders of his coat, though he can’t feel the cold through it just yet.

He heaves in one breath, then two, and determines that it’s safe to stand. He puts his weight against the electrical box and tries, but his legs don’t seem to want to cooperate with him. He groans miserably, head thunking against the metal with a hollow sound.

If he could only get up and get down the alleyway, he’d be alright. Shane would be there, and he’d know what to do. Shane knows all sorts of boring things; he’s sure that he will know how to make his world stop spinning.

He wishes Shane knew how to make his chest stop aching, how to make his memories of Moscow go away.

“Rozanov?” a voice calls down the alleyway. Ilya groans again, looking around the edge of the metal. A familiar figure comes trudging out of the dark.

Shane, Ilya thinks, relief bursting in his chest.

*

Shane finds himself alone at the back stairwell door. He looks around the darkened alleyway but sees no sign of Ilya. He realizes that he's going to have to venture out further to take a

look.

He removes his coat and wedges it into the doorway to keep it propped open. "Shit," He curses, wrapping his arms around himself. His hoodie does very little to keep the cold at bay.

All night, he'd been expecting Ilya to call him to tell him he was going back to the hotel with his team after all, and that he'd be by the next day to pick up his things. It felt like the natural pull of things, tide coming in, tide going back out.

When he'd gotten Ilya's text, earlier than he'd thought, asking to come home... well, surprise had been an understatement. He'd spent every moment since then wringing his hands, wondering what would happen when Ilya walked back through the door.

Home. Shane could feel it through his few words. He knew just the feeling.

The call had given him a bit more insight into Ilya's state. Drunk with a capital D, and not in a fun way.

The snow continues to come down, but the wind has gone. He can hear the flakes patting against each other as they build up. It's very peaceful, and Shane might even enjoy going for a walk in it if he weren't freezing his balls off just from venturing a few feet in it.

The entire walk toward the next street, he doesn't see Ilya. He begins to worry that Ilya had gotten out at the wrong cross street altogether. With how drunk he'd been...

“Rozanov?” he tries. It's risky. No one is around, but all it would take is one person to recognize him, recognize the name he calls.

He's surprised to see movement on the ground. A curly head peaks out from around an electrical box, a hand waving sloppily.

“Here,” Ilya says, voice barely audible.

“*Fuck*,” Shane says, fearing the worst. He picks up the pace. “What happened?” he asks, looking down at Ilya hunched in the snow.

“Puke,” Ilya mutters, pointing helpfully at the mess before him.

Shane wrinkles his nose at the terrible color of it. It’s even melted through a bit. “Jesus. Okay,” he says, leaning down to put a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “Can you stand?”

“Legs do not want,” Ilya says. His voice is all over the place. Shane can see the slight glaze in his eyes.

"Okay," Shane repeats, and begins to kick snow over the vomit. "C'mon." He turns to Ilya, getting a hand under each arm. Ilya is big, just as big as Shane, and possibly even broader in the chest, too. It takes all his strength and a smidge of Ilya's to get him upright. Ilya slumps over the electrical box, resting his head against his forearms with a groan.

“It’s cold,” Shane comments, rubbing his hands together. He means it as an explanation to his worry, and for why he’s in a hurry to get him moving.

Ilya turns, looking at him through glassy eyes. “Oh *really*?”

Shane scoffs. “Wow. Still an asshole even when you’re hammered.”

Ilya stares at him for one long, silent moment. “Sorry,” he says thickly, hanging his head again. He even sounds like he really means it.

Shane frowns, coming closer, pulling the side of Ilya’s hood out to look. He finds that up close, Ilya's face is covered in salt lines, skin red and blotchy. He falters, fingertips tracing under Ilya's eyes. His skin is still damp with recent tears, icy cold, nearly frozen.

Ilya looks at him, his gaze full of misery. Shane’s heart lurches.

“It’s okay,” Shane tells him without thinking, without even knowing why it wouldn’t be alright in the first place. They always bite at each other verbally. That’s part of what makes this thing with Ilya so addicting. “What happened?”

Ilya shakes his head. Shane cups the sides of his face with both hands and uses his thumbs to wipe the wetness away. Ilya won’t look him in the eye now.

“C’mon,” Shane says, reaching for him. Ilya pushes off the box and sways before Shane deposits himself under Ilya’s arm. He gets a hold around Ilya's ribs, plastering their sides together, then begins leading them back down the alley. Ilya’s feet are clumsy, but Shane can tell he’s trying very hard to control them, gaze contorted in concentration.

“You… are not wearing coat,” Ilya comments slowly.

Shane clicks his tongue reproachfully. “And you’re *drunk*. Lucky I came out to find you. I guess we’re both idiots, hm?”

Ilya is quiet.

Shane had only meant to tease, but Ilya doesn’t seem to be in the headspace for banter. He looks even sadder.

“No, only me,” Ilya murmurs.

Shane's frown deepens. “Did you take anything?” he asks, and Ilya scoffs. It’s nearly cute for how exaggerated it is.

“I would *not*.”

“Okay,” Shane nods, keeping his voice light, hand squeezing Ilya’s ribs. “Just making sure.”

As they walk along, he can feel Ilya’s weight lean more heavily into him.

“I am sorry,” Ilya repeats, accent thicker.

“What? Why?”

“Just very sorry,” Ilya murmurs, mouth close to his ear. His breath is stale, but Shane can't bring himself to mind. “I am… fuck up.”

Shane falters. Up ahead, a thin strip of yellow light casts across the snowy alleyway, coming from the backup stairwell light. Nearly there.

“You’re not a fuck up,” Shane tells him, hand squeezing around his side reassuringly. He’s had to talk Hayden out of one or two bad nights of over-drinking over the years. He understands the basics, he thinks. Hopes. How different could Ilya's bad nights be?

“I *am*. Big, drunk, messy fuck up.” Ilya’s words blur together.

“Why are you saying this?” Shane readjusts Ilya’s arm over his shoulder, taking more of his weight to ease them along. The cold blows straight through his hoodie material, icing his chest. “You’re Ilya Rozanov. You have a million fans who adore you. You’re a captain, second best in the league,” Shane rattles on and tries once more to tease him at the end.

Ilya laughs humorlessly, head dropping. “Not even. I am… bad son. And bad friend. And… just *bad*.”

Shane swallows around a lump in his throat. “You’re not,” he murmurs.

Ilya only stares half-lidded at the ground as he tries to keep his feet walking in a straight line. Shane’s not even sure that he heard him over the sound of their boots compacting the snow beneath their weight.

He gets them through the stairwell door and is relieved when it shuts behind them. He leans Ilya against the wall while he shrugs into his coat, hissing at how cold the fabric has become. Soon, it begins to insulate his own heat to his skin. He warms his hands with his breath and watches Ilya.

Ilya has slumped into the wall, only just staying on his feet. His hands brace on the tops of his thighs, head hanging between his shoulders. His hands are beet red and white at the knuckles.

“Rozanov,” Shane starts, reaching for one of them. He clasps Ilya's palm between his own, and his fingers are like ice cubes. He holds it to his lips and breathes warm air onto them. Reaches for the other hand and does the same.

Ilya looks up at him from under a furrowed brow, inexplicable emotion there. "Stop," Ilya murmurs miserably.

Shane can’t bear to see that look on his face, so he gently pulls Ilya to his side again. “C’mon. Sooner we get upstairs, the sooner we get warm.”

*

Shane considers it a minor miracle that Ilya is able to make the climb to the apartment at all.

Every few steps, Ilya grunts, a few more, and he moans low in his throat. At the bottom of the last flight, he shoves Shane away tactlessly and hunches in the corner, body wracked with dry heaves as he braces a hand against the wall.

Shane recovers and is back on him in a moment, pressing his hands to Ilya's back, rubbing lightly through his coat at his shoulders, hoping that it does something to help and isn't making it worse. "You're alright, Rozanov," he murmurs. "You're alright."

In the end, Ilya does not puke, but he needs help standing back up. Then, they brave the last flight.

The walk down the hall to Shane's front door is a cake walk.

Once inside the darkened apartment, Shane finally heaves a sigh of relief. The hardest part of the night ought to be over with. He goes about shedding his coat and boots. Ilya gets his own coat undone with some effort, and Shane takes it from him to hang up. Then, he immediately stoops to undo the laces on Ilya's boots.

They've long since left any lingering traces of snow or salt on the stairs, for which Shane is thankful. He gets one boot unlaced and admires the quality of Ilya's chosen shoes. He's always buying the nicest things to wear. Shane wonders if he's always had good taste, or if that had only developed after he'd started making money with the league. Ilya's boots are lined with fleece and are entirely waterproof. Any lingering melt rolls right off their tops.

A few droplets land on the tops of Shane's hands, sliding between his knuckles. He frowns at how warm they are and finally looks upward to find their source.

Ilya's face is twisted up. Tears leak from his eyes.

Shane can only stare, fingers stilling on his laces. "What is it?" he asks faintly.

Ilya scrubs a hand over his face, embarrassed. "Sorry," he sniffs, his voice breaking strangely. "Don't need to... take care..." *Of him,* Shane finishes in his head, because Ilya can't seem to get the rest of the sentence out. Ilya presses his long shirtsleeve to his eyes and keeps it there.

Shane focuses on his own breathing as he undoes Ilya's laces and then stands to help him step out of his boots. Ilya's socked feet slip a bit on the wood, and Shane holds him chest to chest to steady him. Ilya turns his face away, curly hair falling from its typical pristine shape down onto his forehead. A small, upset sound escapes his lips.

"Rozanov," Shane tries softly, righting him. "C'mon, just a few more steps to the sofa."

They can deal with the tears once they're sitting.

"*No*," Ilya says, voice shot. He shakes his head. "I am… *disgusting.* Smell like… bar and puke. I cannot."

“It’s okay, Rozanov, I don’t mind.”

Ilya laughs humorlessly. “*You* do not mind? Your couch is expensive, yes?”

“You’re more lively, at least,” Shane murmurs, leading him.

“Will sit on floor,” Ilya protests, fighting Shane’s hold as they totter across the living room. Shane finally relents and steers them instead for the fire.

Ilya drops onto the area rug with less finesse than he might’ve if he were sober, but he seems determined to sit with his legs crossed.

Shane nudges the coffee table out of the way to make more space and then watches the back of Ilya’s head as he hunches over himself.

"You're going to eat," Shane tells him, wandering for the kitchen.

Ilya murmurs something to himself that Shane doesn’t catch.

*

The fire is very warm. Shane sits shoulder to shoulder with Ilya on the rug, a plate of pita bread between them because he doesn’t keep crackers in his house. Ilya’s terrible mood seems to subside some as he stares at the patternless licking of the gas flame before them.

Sometimes he looks to his left, seemingly surprised every time to find Shane sitting there.

“Is good,” Ilya comments, holding up a torn piece of pita. “You eat some?”

“No,” Shane says automatically. It does smell delicious, but... his diet.

Ilya only looks sad at that. Shane feels a ping of *something* regretful inside his chest.

Ilya murmurs something in Russian, and Shane watches his plush lips move. “What was that?” Shane asks.

“Should not see me. Like this,” Ilya murmurs, keeping his eyes on the fire.

Shane shrugs. “It’ll just give me something to tease you about later.” It doesn’t feel quite like the right thing to say. Ilya doesn’t react one way or another. “Do you like the fire?” Shane tries.

“Mm,” Ilya nods. “Is warm.”

Shane thinks. “My parents had campfires every summer at their cottage,” Shane comments quietly. “I guess it was like tradition. We did it once a week, from June to August.”

Ilya looks at him, face more open. “You and parents… Brother, sister?”

“Only me,” Shane says, quietly.

He remembers the years he’d been aware of, when he was young. His mother and father talking about wanting Shane to have a little brother or sister. It’d never happened.

“You have a brother, don’t you?” Shane asks. He sees Ilya’s shoulders tense, face shifting. He regrets it immediately.

“*Da*,” Ilya nods. “In Russia.”

“Oh.” Shane looks for anything else to change the subject to. He can see something on the side of Ilya’s face, a mark pinker than the rest of his freckles or moles. “Hey,” he says, rubbing a thumb over it. “What’s this?” He laughs lightly, showing Ilya. It’s a bit waxy from the cold, but it looks like a red mauve lipstick. “You were kissing a girl? You had some fun at least, huh?”

It doesn’t feel nice to notice, not when he has such *strong* feelings about Ilya. But maybe it'll get Ilya's mind off his family.

Ilya watches him, eyes tired. “No.”

“...No?”

“Was not fun. Did not want,” Ilya says, voice sounding almost petulant. He looks at Shane with a desperate kind of look. “Did not want,” he repeats.

“Alright…” Shane nods.

“Is your fault.”

Shane can’t help but scoff. “*What’s* my fault?”

“I could not dance or kiss or… I did not want to be there anymore.”

Shane is quiet for a long moment, their shoulders burning through their shirts where they’re pressed together. “I’m sorry,” he finally says.

Ilya sighs. “Do not be. I should have come back to be boring with you, instead.”

“Rozanov…”

“Is not fun to be drunk alone. I missed… here.” He swallows thickly, says quieter, “I wish you were not so nice to me. Makes it hard to... to..."

Shane doesn’t know what to make of that, but Ilya’s soft tone makes him nervous about where the conversation is heading. “Rozanov,” he says again, a hand bracing on his forearm. “Maybe you should stop talking. You’re drunk.”

“Yes?”

Shane frowns. “I don’t want you to... say something you’ll regret tomorrow,” Shane adds softly, rubbing his thumb against Ilya’s wrist.

Ilya looks even sadder at those words, head dropping. “I wish to tell you many things…” Ilya starts.

Shane hesitates. “Rozanov…”

As much as he’d love to hear the things Ilya wants to tell him, he would feel like shit. It wouldn’t be in good conscience. Ilya may very well regret it come morning.

“*Ilya*,” Ilya says quietly, catching him off guard.

“What?”

“Not ‘*Rozanov*’. I…” Ilya presses a hand to his eyes, and Shane can hear the way his voice chokes him in the back of his throat.

It’s all Shane can do not to reach out and pull his hand away to look at his face. To cup his cheeks and kiss him to soothe the obvious pain from him.

“Call me… call me…” Ilya swallows thickly, and Shane finally recognizes what he wants.

“Ilya,” Shane says, reaching a hand out to brush over his jaw. “I’ll call you *Ilya*, then.” He hesitates, feeling like he’s standing on a precipice, and once he slips over the edge, there will be no going back. “Call me Shane, too?”

Ilya blinks at him, finally. “Is okay?”

Shane’s throat bobs with a click. “Yes.” He’d like very much to call each other their names. He’s wanted it for a long time, in fact.

Ilya tilts sideways, laying his head against Shane’s shoulder, even though he has to bend a bit to do so. Shane hears him sniff loudly, messily, and doesn’t mind a bit. He wraps a hand around his back, holding him there.

The fear he feels about it is only rivaled by the high-flying elation he also feels. He drags his hand up Ilya’s back to tangle with his soft curls, brushing them through gently. Ilya’s eyes begin to slip shut.

Shane feels a seed of something bloom in him, protectiveness, adoration, he couldn’t really put a name to it.

Ilya murmurs something in Russian, long and slow. Shane wishes he could understand. To make up for it, he cranes his head down to press his lips to Ilya's cheek against his most prominent mole. Holds there, feels Ilya relax into him further.

“It’ll be alright, Ilya," he murmurs, even though he isn't sure it will be, for either of them. He can pretend that it will be, though, alone here together.

Chapter End Notes

I expected them to be a little further along and for them to have talked a bit more by now. They still could, actually, since they haven't definitively gone to bed lol.

I had like 90% of this chapter written and then fell on some bad physical times, if you will. I've been picking away at the last 10%, and I still think it's solid. But I left some room to expand in the beginning of next chapter!

The whole dream of the Russian memorial was a last minute addition. I just felt like exploring Ilya's memory of it, as I feel drunk-him would be being bombarded with sad memories on a bad night. I went down a little rabbit hole of Russian Orthodox practices, which was fun and interesting in its own right.

All that to say, hope it made up for some of the hurt lol. There's still pain to work through, but they're back together now, at least!

Cheers and thanks for reading!

Chapter 15: The Misunderstanding

Chapter Summary

> Ilya runs his tongue along the insides of his teeth, watching the way Shane's calculating eyes watch him. "Would be madness. Would you be okay with it?" Ilya asks mildly.

Chapter Notes

> Thanks for your well wishes in the last chapter, they are much appreciated!
>
> On to the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fifteen

Shane hasn't slept on the floor since he was at a classmate's sleepover in his youth.

After Ilya nods off on his shoulder, Shane eases him down until he's lying across the rug, propping him on his side for fear of him vomiting in his sleep. Ilya hadn't seemed drunk enough for that, but Shane is acutely afraid of letting himself rest without taking precautions.

He considers going to his room or climbing onto the sofa. But that would require him to act like he doesn't want to be there with Ilya lying on the ground. He isn't willing to put on such a show for himself tonight. Not when Ilya had worn some of his heart on his sleeve for him to see. Willingly or not was besides the point.

Shane retrieves a few sofa cushions and a large throw from the closet. At first, he sits cross-legged behind Ilya, watching the fire and wondering how much longer this blackout is going to last. He listens to the sound of Ilya's breathing, ensuring that it's even and deep.

Eventually, his eyes begin to burn with the effort to keep them open.

He gently eases down behind Ilya, covering them both up and wedging cushions beneath their heads. After a moment of thought, he gently nudges his arm beneath Ilya's, securing it around the sculpted waist he can feel beneath his shirt. Ilya's ribs expand and contract with each breath, and without meaning to, Shane matches his own to it. He lets his eyes close and shuffles forward, pressing his forehead to the back of Ilya's neck.

Finally, he sleeps.

He thinks he hears Ilya say his name. More than once.

Each time, he opens his eyes, and the room is still dim with night. Ilya's big shoulder is there to block out most of the firelight. "Yeah?" Shane murmurs, but Ilya is never actually awake to answer him, only shifting minutely against him. Shane continues to hold him.

Once, towards morning, he wakes and thinks he hears Ilya mutter the word *mama.* Shane wonders if it means what he thinks.

Ilya doesn't talk about his mother. Shane is at least savvy enough to know that that means he shouldn't ask about her. He'd be lying to say he didn't want to know, though. He wants to know desperately, sometimes, about Ilya's life back in Russia. Who is his father? His brother? Where do they live? Did he grow up in a big house, in an apartment, or in the country?

Would Ilya not talk about his mother if she were alive? Is she alive but estranged from him? If she were, would that make Ilya sad, or would he be glad for it?

If Ilya wanted to tell him, Shane would gladly listen.

He props up onto an elbow, craning his neck to see over Ilya's hunched shoulder. Ilya's face is held in a mask of stiff anxiety, the corners of his closed eyes tight and creased. There is a small wrinkle between his furrowed brows. His breath shakes out of his nose. Maybe it's only the firelight making him think he sees it, but Shane could swear there's moisture glistening in the corner of his eye. He looks like a grown man in the grimmest of senses. Aged by circumstances instead of by time simply passing.

Shane leans over him to kiss the side of his neck that he can reach, as light and gentle as he can manage.

"S'alright," he murmurs. His voice cracks with tiredness.

He loops his arm back under Ilya's, wrapping it across his sternum and feeling his breath shudder in and out. He holds him fast against his chest, like he can somehow soothe Ilya's worries by pulling them out through his ribs.

Shane's mother had held him like this in his earliest school days. Helping him fall asleep on nights when he didn't want to go to class the next day, for fear of facing loneliness or other boys commenting about how he looked. Everyone kept him at arm's length until he'd learned how to orient himself in the world without a rulebook.

Eventually, the tension melts out of Ilya's body. He shifts, leaning back into him, and when Shane looks at his face, it looks young once more.

They have accomplished many of the same achievements— more than most accomplish in their entire lives. They're incredibly lucky for it, but Shane isn't naive enough to think that Ilya hasn't gone through something wholly different from himself.

As he presses his forehead back into Ilya's hair, he breathes in his smell: musk, oil, sweat. All good things when they're coming off Ilya. Shane couldn't have imagined he'd be able to achieve *this* feeling in his life, no matter how much daydreaming he'd done as a lonely child. He hadn't thought it was possible for him.

He pets a hand gently up and down Ilya's stomach through his shirt. The repetitive movement of it lulls Shane back to sleep as well.

*

Two hours before sunup.

Somewhere down the block, an electrical worker stands on a bucket platform high up in the air. He fixes the last of the ice-damaged lines leading into a transformer. When he's done, he lowers his bucket and signals to the crew below. One man speaks into a handheld radio to another man even further down the road.

Once everyone is safely on the ground, they stand and wait for power to be restored to the area and to see if their hard work has paid off.

*

Ilya's back is toasty warm. There's an arm wrapped around his middle that's relaxed with sleep, but the pressure of it holding him to the ground is so nice that he lets himself doze back off for at least another thirty minutes before he rouses awake fully.

When he does, he recognizes Shane's fireplace in front of them, flame dead. Probably an automatic shutoff. Shane *would* have that sort of precaution built in.

When he shifts, Ilya's entire body aches. The ground is terribly hard beneath his hip. "Fuck," he mutters, and eases onto his back. He jostles Shane awake in doing so.

"Ilya?" Shane's head pops up to look down at him, dark eyes blinking and focusing.

Ilya's heart clenches at the sound of his own name. Despite how hammered he'd been, he remembers what had happened the night before. Most of it, anyway. Half of it. He swallows guiltily.

"Mm…" he murmurs as he searches Shane's face for signs of anything gone amiss. Had he said anything too out of line in the dim moments he can't remember? Besides asking to call each other by their first names— something he never would've dreamed of doing if he were sober.

Shane looks him up and down. The hand across his belly shifts, and Ilya feels it slide upward until it appears out from under the throw. It rests across the middle of his chest. Despite his trepidation, it feels very nice. He couldn't have said anything too nasty if Shane is looking at him like this.

"Do you feel okay?" Shane asks.

Ilya nods, though it isn't quite true. His stomach is queasy, and his head is pounding. "Did I say anything terrible to you?"

"What?"

Ilya shrugs one shoulder up. "When I drink, sometimes. Sometimes goes badly. I am mean."

"You weren't mean." He hesitates. "You were actually a big teddy bear."

Ilya stares at him, mortified. "What?"

"I'm joking… You were sort of upset, though."

Ilya remembers that much, at least. He'd had a terrible night of memories and guilt all muddled together in the swamp of his mind. It felt like he'd been wading through it for longer than a night. All he'd wanted to do was come home to Shane, and when he had…

"You were cute, too," Shane says quietly. "I've never seen that side of you before."

"Is not a side," Ilya insists with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Is silly, emotional reaction to alcohol. That is all."

Shane frowns at him. "I didn't think it was silly."

"Well… what do you know, you do not drink."

"Fuck off, yes I do," Shane says, some of his mild combativeness returning. "Not as much as you, apparently."

“Yes, well… It will not happen again,” Ilya mutters. He can’t *ever* let it happen. Not when he’d been drunk by his own volition, vomiting and crying and god-knows what else. Shane would surely not find their time together worth it if Ilya put him through looking after him like that again.

Shane is many things, kind and practical. It makes it all the more embarrassing to fall apart in front of him.

He’d *known* that Shane wouldn’t let anything happen to him while he was indisposed. Maybe that's one of the reasons he wanted to come back. He feels a bit like he's taken advantage of some unspoken thing between them, though.

He should make it up to Shane, somehow.

He turns his face, looking at the dead fire. His eyes drift up to the television, and he notices the little LED standby light on the television is lit up. “Hey…” he says, pointing. Shane’s eyes follow his finger. “Is power back?”

The two of them jump up in a scramble after that, Ilya going for the remote control, Shane heading for the thermostat.

The television turns on, tuned into the same news station as it had been on when it had been turned off the last time.

“-- with a high of 1 degree. Tomorrow, Wednesday, the high remains at 1-- “

“Finally,” Ilya groans, tossing himself onto Shane’s sofa with an exaggerated groan. “Return of civilization.”

The heating system kicks on, and Shane scoffs, thunking down next to him just a foot away. “Yeah, we were really *roughing* it, the last twenty-four hours.”

“Snow is letting up,” Ilya says, pointing at the television, where a meteorologist points out the predicted snowfall for the rest of the week. It seems that the plows are finally catching up with the work laid out ahead of them, salt and sand being dispersed across the city roads, groups collecting volunteers to clear driveways and walk-paths for the elderly.

They wake up with the television on, and the apartment finally begins to heat.

“Maybe we should make another donation,” Shane murmurs. “Homeless shelters are probably at full capacity... Animals, the elderly..."

Ilya turns to watch the side of his face. Shane’s tired eyes are still crusted with sleep, skin puffy, hair a mused-up mess. He looks perturbed, arms folded over his chest. He looks very serious.

I like you very much, Ilya realizes quietly.

“Yes, maybe so,” Ilya nods. He's not sure where Montreal's deficiencies lie, but he's sure they exist. They exist everywhere, no matter how modern. There is always someone who will

need help. “I suppose *you* want to make first move this time? Don’t want me to take the credit again?” He means it teasingly. He doesn’t actually care which one of them gets the credit for it.

“What if we made it together?”

“Together?”

Shane shrugs. “A joint donation.”

Ilya runs his tongue along the insides of his teeth, watching the way Shane’s calculating eyes watch him. “Would be madness. Would *you* be okay with it?” Ilya asks mildly.

Shane slides a half-foot closer, propping his arm up around the back of the sofa behind Ilya’s shoulders. “It’s stupid. Why do we have to be rivals *all* the time?”

Ilya swallows thickly. *Because people might notice how I look at you if we aren’t.* “I don’t know.”

“I mean… we don’t have to be best friends. But…” Shane hesitates. “I’d be… I dunno, sorta proud to make a donation with you. Officially. With both our names on it.”

“Mine first,” Ilya says, because he's in the habit of dispelling tension.

“Sure, whatever,” Shane says, because Shane’s *never* demanded attention.

“Is only about public opinion? You want us to look good?” Ilya asks, smirking.

“You know it’s not.”

“Yes. I know,” Ilya says, because he can’t disrespect Shane like that. It’s a step too far. He sees the care Shane gives to himself and to those around him. How could anyone ever doubt that Shane Hollander cares for struggling people? “Yes, okay. Today, I will call publicist.”

“Me too,” Shane says, his mouth breaking into a lovely smile.

Honest-to-god butterflies burst in Ilya's belly. To have Shane look at him like that, it'd be hard not to agree to anything he said. No matter how scared he is of it. Scared of the shift in their relationship, scared of what his family will think. Scared that Shane will regret it too, because he's been just as worried as Ilya has about being found out.

He's surprised that he would even suggest such a thing, but with how Shane *looks* at him, maybe he shouldn't be.

Before he can help it, Ilya takes Shane's chin in his hand, holding his face just so. Shane never pulls back from his hold. Ilya suspects that he likes it when Ilya takes physical control of him, and Ilya's grateful that he's trusted enough to do so.

Ilya brings their faces together, bumps their foreheads. Opens his mouth. Says, “I would kiss you, but your breath stinks.”

Shane wrenches away from him with a startled laugh. "*My* breath?" He sounds appalled, but a smile splits his face. "*You're* the one who puked your guts out onto the sidewalk and ate garlic pita!"

Ilya's head thunks onto the back of the sofa. "Ah, do not remind me. Never again," he says, and means it. "We must brush our teeth. And *then* I will kiss you so hard you will not remember your name, or last night."

They do brush their teeth, and Ilya does back Shane into the counter, and he does kiss him as hard as he can. His shame over the night before begins to fade, and his trepidation about their joint donation or the terrible future doesn't seem nearly as pressing a matter.

All that matters is where Shane's mouth yields to his, plush bottom lip dropping open as Ilya's tongue licks in to meet Shane's. This is all that should ever matter, he thinks, nearly feeling drunk again. He wishes he could do just this for the rest of eternity.

He could give up hockey and the league and fame and money and cars and even women, if he could just keep this. This person.

The thought used to scare him shitless. Now, it barely makes a dent.

*

They can't have sex. Not just yet. Shane wants to shower.

Ilya *needs* to shower.

As Shane is testing the hot water, Ilya looks through his duffel bag and announces that he can't find his phone.

The water begins to come out steamy, and Ilya comes up behind him.

"It's not on you?" Shane asks.

"Not in my pants," Ilya frowns, looking around with hands hitched on his hips. Shane thinks of making a joke about Ilya's half-mast erection that is clearly visible through his jeans. But the prospect of a missing phone has always filled his stomach with dread, even when he *wasn't* a world-famous hockey player.

"It's around here somewhere, right?" Shane's voice wavers.

Ilya turns back to him, a brow raised. "Do not worry pretty head… I do not keep anything incriminating on it."

"Not our messages?"

“Maybe last few. I delete every few days.” He notices Shane’s furrowed brow and smiles. “Nothing to worry about. I have lost it once or twice. Is password-protected. I just call, have it wiped. Will be fine.”

Shane nods, feeling minutely better. Not wanting to ruin the morning with his anxiety, he waves Ilya on. “Water's hot. You go clean up. I’ll find your phone.”

Ilya looks a bit surprised by the generosity. “Yes?”

“I don’t mind,” Shane says, and really, he’d like for Ilya to get washed up as fast as possible. So that Shane can get his mouth on his dick.

“Come join me before too long…” Ilya says, pale eyes flicking down Shane’s body appreciatively. “Would like to *thank you* for taking care of me.”

Shane’s blood begins draining south, and he mutters his way out of the bathroom before he starts stripping then and there.

He checks Ilya’s coat pockets and even inside his boots. Checks the kitchen counter, the coffee table, and the entire area rug. Then he checks *under* the rug, and under the couch, and when nothing turns up, he begins to think over the long trek they made the night before.

He looks upstairs at his open bedroom door, to his front door. He doesn’t see a reason to bother Ilya in the shower. He’ll only be out for a couple of minutes at the most. Ilya will just have to wait for him.

There is, unsurprisingly, nothing in the hallway. He checks each of the eight flights of stairs they’d climbed, though he thinks he would remember hearing a phone clatter out of Ilya’s pocket. It would’ve echoed the whole way down the hollow column.

Down, down he climbs until he reaches the bottom level. Nerves begin to bite at his insides as he slips out the side door. He’ll have to enter back around the front, which isn’t a big deal, but will take longer.

In the alley, he takes his time, scanning back and forth. There’s a fresh blanket of powdery snow on the ground, so he gets his own phone out and hopes that Ilya’s battery had had a decent charge in it when he’d dropped it.

The line rings, at least. He doesn’t hear it, so he keeps going, heading for the mouth of the alley where he’d found Ilya. There’s no sign of puke next to the electrical box anymore. Shane calls the phone again, and finally, he hears it. But it isn’t coming from the electrical box or the alleyway.

“Hollander?”

As Shane turns around, his mind files through his memories, attempting to place the voice that said his name. He’s sure he knows it. He doesn’t find the face to match it until it’s too late. When he does, his stomach drops into his feet.

"Marleau."

Marleau stands under the stoop of the building opposite his apartment complex. In his hand is Ilya's phone, the screen lit up as it rings away. Jane's name is plastered across the front of it, as it had no doubt been the first time Shane had tried calling it.

Shane stares at the phone. He clutches his own tightly in his palm.

Marleau looks a bit like he's seeing a ghost, looking down the alley and then back at him.

"What are you doing here?" Marleau asks. He stands half a foot taller than Shane. His big snow boots give him an extra boost.

"Uh…" Shane stammers because he can't think. "It's a long story."

He can't deny all knowledge. Marleau is holding Ilya's phone, the phone Shane came looking for, in this exact spot. "I... ran into Rozanov last night. He thought he might've dropped that somewhere out here." The phone stops ringing, the caller ID dropping into blackness.

Marleau watches him. Shane can tell that his lie isn't landing one bit.

"Right… So, why isn't *he* here looking for it?"

Shane swallows. "He… isn't feeling well."

Marleau blinks. "And why would he? He was plastered when I saw him last." His voice is deathly even, no sign of friendliness to be found. He looks up and down the road once more. "I tried calling him this morning. A few times. He didn't answer." Marleau's mouth presses into a severe line. "I had our driver bring me where he dropped him last night." Marleau's eyes narrow on him. "And here *you* are."

Shane knows he can't talk his way out of this. Can't think of a lie quickly enough. He's not Ilya; he has to think things through longer, plan ahead, can't just pull things out of his ass on the fly— he has to try, though.

"He called me last night," Shane says, and even he can hear his voice tremble. "He was pretty drunk… He was nearby, asked if he could sleep it off on my sofa…" He swallows thickly. "We're actually friends." It's their next best move, he realizes. Fuck it if they get found out as friends, plenty of opposing players are. At least the league won't know they *sleep* together.

Marleau watches him, and Shane can see his mind ticking. Finally, he sighs. "I know I may *look* like a big, stupid lughead. But I'm not. And you're a *really* bad liar, Hollander."

Doesn't Shane know it.

Marleau goes on, voice growing more intense. "Roz was going to his girl's place last night. His *girl*, who he texts at all hours, for years now. He came here." He holds his arms out. "And here *you* are. Don't lie to me anymore." He holds the phone up. "You've called this phone twice, now, haven't you? Came out looking for it?"

Shane swallows, feels like there's no moisture left in his body to wet his tongue.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He feels like he’s dreaming, like he’s floating above his body, but in a bad way. Like his soul is trying to leave. Can Shane’s body operate without it, he wonders vaguely.

“Cut the shit,” Marleau says, voice sharp. “You’re Jane.”

“I’m not.”

Marleau holds Ilya’s phone to his mouth, thumb pressing the command button. Shane opens his mouth, but his voice catches. “Call Jane,” Marleau says monotonously.

Calling Jane, the phone repeats. Shane reaches out a weak hand. “Marleau,” he finally chokes out. “Stop.”

Marleau watches him guardedly, and in another moment, the phone in Shane’s hand begins ringing.

He might shake— if he weren’t petrified. If his body weren’t screaming at him to turn and flee. But where could he go that this revelation wouldn’t follow him? There’s nowhere on earth that’s safe. Not now that someone knows— now that *Cliff Marleau* of the Boston Raiders knows his and Ilya’s secret.

Marleau hangs up his phone, sighing through his nose. “Like I said.” He nods at Shane’s phone. It goes quiet a moment later. “Jane.”

Shane’s breath shakes in and out of his chest.

“So, what, you two are fucking or something?” Marleau asks suspiciously.

“No,” Shane says, but he doesn’t know how much Marleau already knows about Ilya’s and Jane’s relationship. Doesn’t know if he can play them off for friends or not. “No, just—"

“I wanna see him,” Marleau says, voice hard, full of anger.

Shane doesn’t know Marleau, other than from their meetings on the ice. He’s big and strong, and what he lacks in speed he makes up for in brutality.

There’s righteous betrayal in Marleau’s face. Shane doesn’t know what it all adds up to in the moment, but he knows that he doesn’t want that scornful look directed at Ilya. Not after such a rough night, not when it might mean the end of Ilya and Marleau’s friendship, possibly the end of Ilya’s place on his team in Boston. What if it means a physical fight?

“Hollander,” Marleau repeats with a threatening step toward him.

“No way.”

Marleau blinks at him. “The fuck?” he snaps, and suddenly his fist is twisted in the front of Shane’s coat, and they’re stumbling through the snow into the alley, until Marleau has him

pinned back into the wall, the air between them electrified with the prospect of violence. “What do you mean, *no*? Why not? Where is he?”

Shane bristles. That same feeling blooms in his chest from the night before, the same fierceness he felt seeing Ilya in a near-helpless state. He shoves Marleau back, pretending he’s on the ice— it’s certainly cold enough. He squares his shoulders, glares.

“What are you gonna do to him, huh? Yell at him? Tell him he’s a traitor or something, over a *stupid fucking* rivalry?” Shane’s fists ball up at his sides, preparing for a fight. He hasn’t been in very many scraps on the ice, and not a single one off it, though there’d been a few close calls. “You gonna hurt him or something for this?” he hisses. Shane doesn’t want to believe him capable of it, but with the rage on Marleau’s face and in every line of his body, he doesn’t know what to think. All he *does* know is that Marleau isn't getting through him.

Marleau’s posture breaks. He lets go of Shane’s coat abruptly and straightens, shoulders falling. He looks bewildered. “Hurt him?” He makes a disgusted sound in the back of his throat. “I’ve been *worried* about him all goddamn night! And now he’s not here, and his phone is just abandoned in the alley— our driver said this entire neighborhood was in a blackout last night. Roz was *in tears.* And now you, of all people, won’t let me see him?” Marleau looks so affronted that it shocks Shane out of his defensiveness. “Goddamnit, Hollander, I wanna make sure *he’s okay."*

They stare at one another.

Maybe, in his own spiraling fear, Shane had mistook Marleau’s expression for anger instead of the fierce protectiveness it was.

Shane clears his throat. “You’re worried about him.”

Marleau gesticulates wildly. “Yeah, I’m fuckin’ worried! You being a freak about this isn’t making me feel any better. I know we've never trusted each other, Hollander, but— ” Marleau clicks his tongue. “Fuck, you think I’d beat his ass for— for— what, being gay?”

“I don’t know,” Shane admits, because up until this moment, he hadn’t. Marleau looks at him like the idea is preposterous. “Shit,” Shane mutters.

“Is he *alright?*” Marleau stresses, staring at Shane like he’s stupid. Credit to Marleau, he *feels* pretty stupid.

“Yeah, he’s fine,” Shane says, taking a deep breath. “We'd better get out of this alley before someone hears. C’mon.” He motions for Marleau to follow him.

“C’mon *where*?” Marleau demands, voice hard.

“To my apartment.”

Chapter End Notes

Based on the title, you thought it was gonna be a misunderstanding between Shane and Ilya, didn't you? I got your ass. We don't do (ridiculous) miscommunication here, folks. (They said, right after writing miscommunication between Shane and Marleau)

Marleau batman voice *"Where is he!?"*

I hope the hostility between Shane and Marleau makes sense. From an outsiders perspective, we can see and know all. But neither of them knows the other beyond a few passing words.

Shane is hard to read to any outsider, probably, and maybe he seems a bit weird to those who don't know him. Marleau seems big and brutish, and maybe even like a bigot to those who don't know him. At least that's my take. I think they'd be trying to suss each other out for a long time. Meanwhile, social butterfly Ilya can read them both like a book.

My headcanon for Shane is that he was a lonely child. I'm not sure if this is discussed in the books or not. He's autistic, so it's possible he had a hard time learning how to make close friends. It also makes sense to me that he would latch onto hockey and become amazing at it, and use that in his youth to make connections as well.

And that's all the notes I have.

Thanks for reading. We've made contact with this chapter. Ground control to Major Tom.

Until next chapter!

Extra Note: I should update readers about how I'm researching this story, in case anyone wonders! Originally, I was writing based off show facts only, and a handful of things I knew about from the books.

But every once in a while I see, in a comment under a video or post, a detail from the book that fits my needs, and I'll incorporate it. In the beginning, I was more focused on the show, but I'm willing to blend book elements in too, no problem. Like them deleting

evidence off their phones- I read somewhere that that was in the book. Though I haven't verified if this is actually in the book for myself.

So if you see something familiar from the book, I am not Nostradamus! I simply heard it down the grapevine, or read it in the wiki, or, sometimes, I even go digging through the books to try to find details. I try to defer to the show first for the characters, and the text secondary if I want to make sure I'm not going completely against canon. Anyway, making that clear! Goodnight.

Chapter 16: One of Many Reasons

Chapter Summary

> Marleau stares at Ilya, and his face slowly morphs into understanding. “Holy shit. It really is… all of that. You’re sleeping together.”

Chapter Notes

> I did *not* think I was going to get this out today. I've got a hard day coming up (taking myself to the doctor, which I hate.) But maybe I'll get a comfy new writing chair afterwards as a little treat.
>
> Thank you to those who pointed out that I (unintentionally!) renamed Cliff to "Chris." I'd like to say it was autocorrect, but it was definitely not! My tags even said "Chris Marleau" which is not a character, but in my head... it just equated to "Cliff Marleau."
>
> (I even saw the earliest comments just correctly referring to him as Cliff and my brain was like "Yeah, that's his name! And that's definitely what I've been referring to him as!" and I was *not.)* This is what I get for not reading the book to cerement his first name into my psyche.
>
> My pride is wounded. I have done Chri- I mean Cliff Marleau an injustice. Hopefully it didn't pull too many readers out of the story! (my biggest worry.) I will simply never refer to his first name again. He is simply Marly/Marleau, as he has always been in my mind. Off to lick my wounds. Can you tell I'm embarrassed?
>
> **Also!** I have thrown a quick playlist together of the HR OST songs I listen to while writing emotional scenes. In case you want to listen to it to read or write. Super basic, you could've made this yourself. Best listened to with a storm ambience, but that would require a laptop, probably.
>
> On a more serious note, thank you as always for reading, and onto the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sixteen

Ilya begins to lose patience in the shower.

He scrubs himself up with Shane’s bar soap, expecting him to walk in any minute. When he does, he’ll want to clean himself up, and maybe he’ll even try to blow Ilya.

Ilya won’t let him. Instead, he’ll turn Shane around, pin him in the corner so he’s just out of the spray. And Ilya will be the one to drop to his knees. He’ll tease and play and suck Shane so good that he never thinks about anyone else ever again.

Maybe that’s selfish of him.

Ilya will leave, come Thursday morning. He’ll board a plane with the rest of his teammates, and they’ll fly away from Montreal to the States. And the next time he sees Shane, it may very well be February.

And it will be in Russia, which means that Ilya will be doing everything he can to avoid being within twenty feet of Shane Hollander. He won't look at him, and he won't talk to him, and he certainly won't text him within his country's borders.

The thought of Russia needles into his brain, souring all the nice feelings he'd been holding onto from the morning. He wishes Shane would hurry up and come back so he can forget about it all again for a little while.

Shane does not come back, though.

Ilya stays under the spray long enough to start feeling guilty about using so much hot water. He finally steps out and takes one of the towels from the rack— his or Shane's, it does not matter to him. He looks at his reflection and rubs water from his hair. It begins to curl at the ends, and he uses his fingers to try to encourage them into an appealing shape. Hopefully, the shape will not matter for too long. Hopefully, Shane's fingers will tangle into them and tug and pull. Hopefully, soon.

He pokes his head out of the steamy bathroom to listen.

"Shane?" he calls, and is disquieted when he doesn't answer.

It would be the perfect time to snoop, only that there's not much to snoop on about Shane Hollander. Ilya looks through the bathroom cupboard and finds a folded terrycloth robe. He pulls it out and gives it a shake. The smell of detergent reaches his nose.

It's not a very cozy material. *Even his robes are boring,* Ilya thinks as he slips it on over his shoulders. Why put on clothes if he's only going to strip right back out of them? The robe stretches a bit tight around his chest, but fits him perfectly otherwise. He looks at himself in the mirror and nearly snorts at how docile his reflection looks. Limp hair and sash tied

around his middle. He looks like he’s about to read the morning paper in the black-and-white American films that constantly play on hotel televisions. They, in turn, remind him of some of the old Soviet films he'd grown up watching.

Best to keep his thoughts off Russia, though.

When he wanders downstairs, he finds that he is alone in the apartment. Shane’s coat and boots are gone, so he no doubt left to check the stairs, maybe even the alleyway.

Ilya would call him to tell him to forget about it for now, but, *well*.

Instead, he turns the television on and prepares to wait.

He could touch himself, work himself back up to a reasonable erection. He might get too overzealous, though. How much fun would it be if they had to wait for him to recover?

He’s not sure he wants to wait for Shane to shower after all this. Shane doesn’t have to prep so thoroughly *every* time, does he? Ilya isn’t some pearl-clutching stranger, after all. He can handle a little misadventure in the bedroom, especially if it’s with Shane. He doesn’t think he could ever find him gross or repulsive, not after he’s had his mouth on every point of his body he can get it on, and *loved* it.

He’d rather jump right to it when Shane returns. Maybe he could convince him…

The door lock clicks open, and Ilya turns to look. He stretches an arm across the back of the sofa, trying to look appealing enough to get Shane to come sit with him.

“Did you get lost?” he questions sarcastically as Shane comes through the door. “I have waited long time.” He can probably tease a blush onto Shane's face before he even gets his boots unlaced.

Shane’s face is grim, though.

Ilya falters. A large shape joins Shane in the doorway. It reminds Ilya a bit of a church funeral, long shadows and dour expressions.

It’s Marleau.

Time comes to a halt, and Ilya doesn’t take a breath for far too long.

Then, he curses in Russian and jumps to his feet. "What—“ he starts, and then snaps his mouth closed, looking from Shane's reddened face to Marleau. His friend has got a stiff look on his already severe features. When he spots Ilya, he freezes as well.

“Roz.”

"*Hollander,"* Ilya stresses carefully, eyes ticking over Shane’s face, searching for any clue, any context to what could possibly be going on. Surely this is a dream. He’d fallen asleep on Shane’s sofa waiting for him; that’s got to be it.

"He knows," Shane says quietly, and Marleau steps in behind him, the door shutting quietly.

“Roz,” Marleau repeats, brow furrowing up in confusion. Obviously. Because Ilya is only wearing a fucking bathrobe in Shane Hollander’s apartment. Because it's obvious that Ilya is quite comfortable here, that he'd been waiting for Shane to return so they could—

Marleau knows?

Knows what?

What is Marleau even doing here? *Here,* in Shane’s apartment, of all places. Their one safe haven away from all the eyes of the world. Shane’s apartment, where nobody else comes except Ilya. Where Ilya expected to be able to dream the rest of their impromptu break away without having to think about the past or the future or Russia or Boston.

“I will change,” Ilya says.

His limbs feel stiff as he walks. He has to brush past them both to reach the stairs.

He feels ridiculous in Shane’s robe now. Shame bubbles in his stomach. He’d been so *happy* just a few moments before, waiting for Shane to come back so they could be together… Ilya can’t even *think* about being with Shane now, with Marleau there. It’s as if his brain has cracked in half, one half in Shane’s world, the other flooding with cold, stark reality.

“Shit,” he mutters to himself as he gets changed into sweats and a long-sleeve shirt. *Fuck fuck fuck.* He can already feel this scar setting in deep into his psyche. And he doesn’t want to think about what still waits for him down below, how this day will turn out by the end. He very well could be sent packing before their next game.

The thought of it, of leaving Montreal, of leaving the States, leaving Shane, all because Marleau decided to get nosy, makes rage bloom in his belly.

When he returns, his friend is standing in the middle of Shane’s apartment, coat laid over the back of one of Shane’s dining chairs. He looks around with an appraising eye at Shane’s clean, neat living space. Ilya wonders what he sees. Does he see the cold interiors of a stranger's house, or can he see all the touches of Shane there like Ilya had the first night?

Shane has busied himself in his kitchen. The coffee pot bubbles behind him, and he stands in the awkward way he always does when he doesn’t know what to do with his hands or his face. He watches Ilya blankly. Ilya pities him and wishes he could stand next to him, hold his face, and massage his thumbs into the downturned corners of his mouth until they curl up again.

But he has to face Marleau.

At least Shane is still on his feet. Ilya thought he’d be beside himself for how nervous he'd been. Maybe this is how Shane reacts to pure fear.

Marleau’s eyes land on the rumpled throw still strewn across the area rug in front of the fireplace, along with a few of the couch cushions. It's plain to see that they've had a

sleepover. It looks as incriminating as it possibly could. *Didn't even get to have sex*, Ilya thinks ruefully.

Marleau finally turns to Ilya, mouth hard. He reaches into his coat and pulls Ilya's phone out, handing it over. Ilya takes it. It's got 8% battery, two missed calls from Jane, and five from Marleau.

It's not hard to figure out what'd happened in Shane's absence. Shane is braced against the kitchen counter, fingers tapping in a nervous rhythm as he stares into the space between Ilya and Marleau.

It makes Ilya all the angrier. Their peace, ruined.

"I called you, Roz. A few times."

Ilya's voice is the perfect mask of nonchalance. "Misplaced my phone."

"S'one way of putting it." Marleau scowls. "When you wouldn't pick up, I came down here."

"Yes. And here you are. *Found me*," he says wryly,

Marleau is properly annoyed. He looks at Ilya irritably. "Don't be like that. What the fuck's going on?"

"Be like *what*? Sorry if I do not feel like explaining myself to you; you are not supposed to *be* here." Maybe it's a petulant thing to say, but Ilya feels a bit out of control.

Marleau blinks. It's impossible to miss the hurt in his expression.

"Ilya—" Shane says quietly.

Marleau doesn't give either of them a chance to speak. "You were real fucked up last night, man. Never seen you look like that before. Of *course*, I came looking! You have any idea the crazy shit people do? I thought… Jesus, I thought you'd been mugged or picked up. Or that you'd just fallen ass-first into a snowbank and froze to death. It's pretty shitty to make people worry like that."

Whatever Ilya had been preparing to say suddenly can't come past his lips.

Marleau looks Shane's way. "Didn't expect to find you with... *Hollander* of all people. Thought he'd done something to you, at first."

Ilya nibbles on the inside of his cheek. The idea of Shane Hollander hurting anyone is quite laughable to him. But he supposes Shane appears differently to everyone who encounters him. "Yes, well. I am fine. Not dead. Sober. Fucking hungover. Now you know."

"And what do I *know*, exactly?" Marleau asks, shoulders tense. "That you two are fucking or something? He's Jane, right? The same Jane that gets you all worked up before games, that you sometimes text until three in the morning?"

Ilya keeps his mouth shut, puffs his chest, folds his arms. It's all the answer any of them needs. He can hear Shane's fingers tapping on the countertop, and then they stop abruptly. He turns to the coffee pot, pulling down two mugs from a rack and filling them. He seems to be running on autopilot, like a robot. Ilya wonders if he's checked out of the conversation altogether.

Marleau stares at Ilya, and his face slowly morphs into understanding. "Holy shit. It really is… all of that. You're sleeping together."

"*Da,"* Ilya spits venomously.

Marleau looks at Shane. He must not have quite believed it before Ilya confirmed it. Ilya doesn't need to look to know that Shane's flushed from head to collarbone. Probably even broken a sweat across his temple.

Ilya doesn't like the quiet. "Now what will you do?" he demands. Shane shifts back into action, setting the mugs down onto the bar top in front of him and Marleau. There's a tight look to his face. Ilya's heart pounds against his ribs.

Marleau scoffs. "What do you mean?"

"Will you go to Desjourneys now? The league? For fraternization?" Ilya just wants to know. He wanted to know the minute he saw Marleau's face in Shane's doorway what exactly his friend would do now that he had inserted himself into their lives. Now that he'd found out the one thing Ilya had never wanted him to find out.

"Wow," Marleau says. His anger has morphed into something more pained-looking. "You really don't trust me after all, huh?"

Ilya freezes. How can he possibly articulate his thoughts to Marleau in English and in a timely manner? There are too many layers, too many complications. Too many risks. And too much guilt wrapped up with it all. "I do not trust anybody with this," he says quietly.

"I'm not going to the league. You think I'd do that to you? Over some *fucking*?"

Ilya hesitates. Waves his hand dismissively. "I do not know what anyone will do to me, one moment to the next." Except for maybe Sveta or Shane. Not once has Ilya ever had to guess what either will say or do. He motions at Shane. "Not when it concerns *him*. Boston hates him. I thought *you* hated him. It would be shit show."

Marleau's mouth presses into a line.

"He's protecting both of us, Marleau," Shane supplies quietly. He clutches a porcelain cup of his own between his palms, the string of a teabag dangling down one side of it. "*Nobody* knows."

Marleau looks slowly from Shane to Ilya, hard face cracking. "Not anyone?"

"Of course not," Ilya huffs. He motions between him and Shane. "We would be barred from playing, surely. But even if not forever…" He swallows. "I could not go home if it got to the

press. But if I lost my work visa... I would *have* to."

"Home?" Marleau asks, and even Shane is looking at him now.

"Back to Russia."

Dawning on Marleau's face, then. He finally picks up the mug that Shane set down for him. He looks less intimidating, the delicate little porcelain cup clutched between two giant palms. "Jesus Christ. That's heavy shit, man."

A smile finally cracks Ilya's mouth, one he can't help. "Yes. The heaviest."

Marleau takes a sip of coffee, and something in Ilya's chest begins to uncinch.

Marleau continues. "The donations... they have something to do with all this, too? You two trying to… soften the blowback if you get caught?"

"No," Ilya frowns. "I don't know." He hadn't been thinking about his and Shane's reputation when he'd suggested the donations. It had been more of an afterthought. *We will not get caught,* he thinks, but Marleau has just proven him wrong today. His illusion of safety has been cracked through.

"He made the donation on his own," Shane murmurs, drawing both their gazes. Shane immediately drops it, looking elsewhere, ever the awkward conversationalist.

Marleau looks intensely at Ilya. "Look… I know I'm not the nicest guy on the ice, Rozzy. But I thought I was doing good. Being better."

"What?"

"You didn't trust me enough to tell me you're gay."

For the years Ilya's been with the Raiders, Marleau has turned into one of the more decent men in the league. He shit-talks with the best of them, but after his first year of being drafted, Ilya has never heard him make a disparaging remark about anyone for being different from him. It's more than he can say for the vast majority. Marleau tends to take after Hammersmith in that regard. Good-natured Hammersmith, who'd been Marleau's idol in high school.

"You *are* good, Marly," Ilya says, finally stepping forward to pat a hand on his shoulder. Marleau looks him in the eye, then, and Ilya recognizes his friend. Ilya feels like a captain once more. "And I am not gay. I like women, still. I just…" He looks at Shane, whose eyes flit away skittishly. "Well."

"Shit," Marleau says, like the tension has been released from his body. "Didn't expect the day to go like this." He sets down his empty cup, and Shane is there with the carafe to fill it back up. "And you, Hollander..." he says, like they're out on the ice.

Shane's eyes turn to Marleau, guarded. Ilya watches.

“I don't get your deal. Always thought you were sort of a weirdo. Gotta hand it to you, though. You were ready to go out swinging in that alley.”

Ilya blinks. “What?”

“I’ll explain later,” Shane mutters, but there’s a new light in his eye that Ilya recognizes from the ice. He very much likes seeing it here in his kitchen.

Marleau chuckles. “He wasn’t letting me through for nothin’. He’s ballsy.”

“Ballsy Hollzy,” Ilya murmurs, and that draws a familiar, barking laugh from Marleau. The two of them grin at each other, and Ilya realizes that things might be alright after all. For today, at least.

“Yeah, well,” Shane cuts in, looking embarrassed by the nickname, and probably by Marleau’s assessment of his *everything*. “You looked like you were gonna kill someone.”

“He just looks like that,” Ilya says in mock defensiveness. “Is his unibrow.”

“At least I can *grow* hair.”

"Women prefer a shaved face," Ilya snarks. "Maybe you could keep one if you followed my lead."

It's his usual comeback, something they joke with each other about often. Marleau’s brute persona, complemented by Ilya’s playboy. But it has Shane ducking his head to take a long, uncomfortable sip of his tea. Ilya realizes too late that he ought to have caught his tongue before saying such a thing. He will have to explain what he and Marleau are like with each other once he and Shane are alone.

“S’good fucking coffee,” Marleau admits, looking down at his fresh cup.

“Yes. And he does not even drink it. One of many reasons I prefer to stay here," Ilya says.

“And this is where you’ve been *all week*?" Marleau raises a brow. "You two in love or something?” He sounds as if he’s only half joking.

“*What*—“ Shane starts, at the same time Ilya says “*No*,” both of them floundering to talk over one another.

Marleau looks between the two of them like they’ve grown an extra head each. “Jesus, alright.” He waves a hand and finishes off half his mug in one gulp. “*Whatever*. But you care about each other. You’re not exactly rivals who hate each other.”

Ilya’s first instinct is to deny that too, even that little bit of truth, too much to bear to the world— or his friend. He swallows down the urge, afraid that if he did, Shane might take it to heart. "No," he finally says. "We are not."

After another moment of silence, Marleau sets his mug down on the counter.

“The others are going to start wondering where I am." He looks at Ilya closely. "Guess I shouldn't expect you back at the hotel?”

"No," Ilya says dumbly. “I have… things to do.”

Marleau blinks, then his eyes drift off to the ceiling. “Right… Everyone thinks you're with a girl, so... not much covering I need to do. But tomorrow night, curfew is being reinstated," he warns. "Flight early the next morning." He shakes his head. "Guess there's no point in saying how risky this is."

Ilya shakes his head. It's nothing they haven't already thought about.

Ilya follows him to the door, with promises to charge his phone and keep Marleau updated so that he can keep Desjourneys at bay. Their coach has already realized that Ilya has fucked off somewhere in the city. He’s only tolerating it because he himself has been lax with his time off, as well.

Ilya watches Marleau head for the back stairwell and then shuts the door quietly.

When he turns back around, Shane is there waiting just a few feet away, face hesitant. Ilya stares at him, licking his lips, before taking him in both arms and pulling him in.

Shane lets out a short sound just before their mouths meet, their breath mingling between their noses, coffee and tea, but Ilya doesn’t care. He feels high, probably on adrenaline, and his pulse pounds in his ears.

“Fuck,” Shane pants between their kisses. Ilya is walking him slowly backward, arms clutched around his waist. “That— was scary,” he sighs.

“Marleau is not so bad,” Ilya murmurs as he eases Shane down onto his back on the sofa. He climbs on top of him straight away, lying their bodies out along each other, finally touching from chest to toe, warm pressure through their clothes. Ilya sighs in delight.

“Did *you* know that, though?” Shane asks.

“No,” Ilya admits. “I was never sure what he might think. Or do.”

They kiss and kiss, and Ilya’s hips begin to work against his, hard dicks through two pairs of sweatpants. Ilya is lost in a haze as they makeout, all thoughts of Marleau and Boston and Russia finally falling away. Only Shane on his mind.

“Gonna make me come if we keep this up,” Shane pants.

“Maybe is what I want,” Ilya returns, hips working in continuous, grinding circles.

“We should talk— *ah*— about what happened.”

“Yes, probably. But later,” Ilya grunts, pressing his face into Shane’s throat, teeth opening up around his pulse to scrape and nibble. It draws out a high sound from Shane. “After I make you come. Then, we will kiss, and then I will fuck you again. For very long time. In many

positions.” He says all of this into Shane’s skin, and Shane squirms beneath him, panting with each thrust.

Shane’s hips work back against his, thighs parted and heels digging into the cushions below for leverage. Ilya loves being able to go hard and fast with him, get as good as he gives. To have someone beneath him just as hungry for him as he is for them.

Shane comes, mouth stretched open in a silent cry, thighs trembling around Ilya’s hips, and Ilya follows soon after, chasing it with his mouth attached to Shane’s neck, breathing in his scent behind his ear.

When the two of them have lain sprawled together, still fully clothed, for another ten minutes, Shane pats Ilya’s back. “I’m showering before we do any of that.”

Ilya lifts his head to look glumly down at him. “You must?”

Shane gives him a smacking kiss on the mouth. “I must. If you want me to enjoy it.”

Ilya finally lets him up. “Then you will tell me all about what happened in the alleyway while you do,” Ilya says, following him to the stairs. He feels a bit like a puppy, but his post-glow doesn't allow him to care.

Shane glances back at him, cheeks still flushed. “I will?”

“Yes.”

"And what will you tell me?" Shane asks, starting up the stairs.

It feels like a loaded question. One Ilya doesn't know the answer to. He takes a steadying breath, and decides, "Whatever you ask."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

I must admit, there was a part of me that wanted to write the beginning scene as Ilya hearing Shane downstairs and coming out in nothing but a towel on his head to try to seduce him, only to come face to face with Marleau. But that felt way too 90s/00s romcom. It was a funny daydream, at least.

Marleau still isn't perfect, calling Shane a weirdo, etc. But he's a work in progress. I think he's gonna get there. He's got the makings of a formidable ally.

The Sochi Olympic surveillance thing was something I hadn't heard in-depth about until recently (I was younger and ignorant in 2014, I'm sorry.) I want to make more notes about this when it becomes more relevant to the plot, but I think Ilya would've been at least a little aware of the circumstances beforehand. Enough to be worried about it.

I think that's all my notes, for now.

If there are any more glaringly obvious mistakes, feel free to tell me🥲

Thank you for reading, adiós!

Chapter 17: The Final Nail

Chapter Summary

> “Let’s forget about girls right now,” Ilya says lowly, reaching through to cup his cheek.

Chapter Notes

> **18+/NSFW Chapter.** Ye have been advised.
>
> Note: Still working on answering comments!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seventeen

Marleau - 11:52 am - Charge your phone.

Ilya - 11:52 am - I did. Will not be leaving here until tomorrow night anyway.

Marleau - 11:53 am - I’ve still got questions.

Ilya - 11:53 am - I do too. for you.

Something else eases in Ilya’s chest at the sight of Marleau's message. He still has a hard time believing that someone else knows. That Marleau had come and gone, and that their friendship had not broken off. In fact, Ilya thinks that it might've even changed— for the

better. Marleau knows him, just a little bit more now. Has found out this thing about him, and not been sent running.

He'd been terrified, before, at the thought of anyone knowing. Thought it would throw a wrench into the middle of this thing he has with Shane. Thought he'd never be able to even *look* at Shane again if someone else knew about it, for shame and fear and heartbreak.

So far, the opposite has happened.

*

Before anything, the two of them stand side by side in Shane's bathroom, phones clutched in hand as they email their publicists and accountants.

They decide to increase their donations by ten thousand— a number that Ilya could scarcely comprehend five years ago boarding a plane from Moscow to Saskatoon.

He makes more than that in a month, now.

A little while later, Ilya sits on Shane's bathroom floor, leaning up against the cabinets under the sink.

"And then what happened?" he draws the words out, staring at Shane's form, muddled through the foggy shower door. His eyes are half-lidded, sleepy from the steam.

Shane huffs a little laugh, turned away from him as he washes his chest. "I had to come in through the front door. Then go all the way down the back stairwell again to get him. He looked even angrier. Bet he thought I was just gonna leave him out there in the alley."

"You should have," Ilya says, but doesn't really mean it.

Shane had made Ilya stand in his bedroom while Shane flushed himself out in his little toilet room, separated from the rest of the bathroom by a wall. His cheeks had been a bit flushed by the time Ilya had come back in and seen him, and he'd quickly climbed into the shower. Ilya doesn't know why he would be squeamish about a thing like this, when Ilya has seen every part of him many times now.

Shane is meticulous in everything he does, though, from what he eats to how he makes up his bed, to how he folds his socks, and to how he keeps himself clean. If Ilya had to guess, he'd say that Shane is trying to keep a grasp on how Ilya sees him. Ilya doesn't have the heart to tell him it's too late for that. He's imagined Shane doing just about anything and everything at this point.

When Shane had gotten into the shower, he'd shut the door all the way, to Ilya's chagrin. Ilya knew better than to complain, so instead, he'd asked Shane to tell him the story of how he'd gone to look for his phone in the alley.

Many surprising minutes later, Ilya understands the full scope of what'd happened.

"He's very protective," Shane comments mildly.

Ilya snorts. "And he did not actually hit you?" Nonchalant as can be.

"No," Shane confirms. "He was just being big and mean."

"Hm. He is good at that."

There's not a lot he could've done, even if Marleau *had* physically attacked. It would've been a misunderstanding on all accounts. But Ilya still would've been compelled to do… something. He's not sure what, and he's glad he doesn't have to think about it now. Lucky for all three of them, Marleau is better at holding his temper than he looks.

The smell of Shane's fancy shampoo and conditioner is lovely. Ilya feels like he's being wrapped in a cloud of his favorite smells. He watches as Shane slowly turns under the spray, running his fingers through his hair. His eyes are shut, and Ilya stares at the perfect angles of his face.

"Are you going to shave?" Shane asks out of the blue.

Ilya blinks. "Huh?"

One of Shane's dark eyes opens to look at him. "You told Marleau that women like a clean-shaved face."

Ilya's jaw goes slack. "Yes…"

"I like it, too." That dark eye is still on him, glinting. "You've never even asked me."

Ilya pushes off the floor, wandering closer to the shower stall. He can see a bit more of him, down in the steam. Shane is half hard. "Do not be jealous," Ilya murmurs, leaning an arm into the thick glass so he can stare at all of him.

"I'm not," Shane scoffs.

"I only mention women to Marleau because that is all his brain can comprehend."

Shane does laugh at that, and Ilya grins in return.

One of Shane's hands trails over his abdomen, fingertips light. They trace over his hip, back around behind him. The view from there goes hazy with steam, but Shane tips his head back into the spray, and Ilya watches his face morph from relaxed to tense. He's fingering himself.

"Why can I not help you with that?" Ilya asks, jerking his chin at Shane's hidden hand.

"Because. Making sure I'm good to go."

“I cannot check for you?” Ilya asks. He’s already had his shower, but he’d gladly get wet again if it meant a bit more foreplay.

“*No*,” Shane scoffs. “Go shave.”

Ilya wanders away disappointedly. His electric razor charges on one corner of Shane’s bathroom counter, so he sets to quickly taking away what stubble has grown since the morning before, which isn’t a lot.

“Never seen a guy so eager to do the gross parts,” Shane mutters quietly, and Ilya meets his eye in the mirror.

“Oh, are there many others?” Ilya asks, half sarcastic and half serious.

Shane scowls at him. “What do *you* think?”

Ilya studies his expression and quickly determines that there are no others at all. It quiets something wild inside his chest, but he feels a bit sullen about it, too, for some reason. “There is no one else? Really?” he asks quietly.

“Of course not,” Shane says. “How could there be? It’s not like— like *you* with all your women. I don't go to clubs.”

“Plenty of women must throw themselves at you, club or not,” Ilya says, eyes on Shane’s through the bathroom mirror. “You do not sleep with any of them?” He can see the way Shane’s throat bobs, eyes flitting away to the back corner of the room. Ilya begins to get an inkling.

“I could,” Shane starts. “That’s not really something I do.”

“You do not like them?”

“I didn’t say that.” He sounds annoyed.

“Is fine to not like them.”

“That’s easy for you to say.”

No, it's not, Ilya wants to argue.

He'd had to do a lot of thinking about it, once upon a time, when he was fourteen and realized that he liked his coach's son just as much as he liked some girls in his class. It was either okay or it wasn't. According to his father— and the rest of the adults he'd known— it wasn't. But by that time, he'd begun to question *a lot* of things, including his father.

This is obviously a touchy subject for Shane, too. Ilya considers that a day ago, he might’ve gotten pissy about it right back. Now, he’s riding the high from their confrontation with Marleau and his better-than-expected reaction. He doesn’t want to ruin all of the good energy between them, regardless.

Ilya sets the razor down. Shane watches him closely as he approaches the shower once more. This time, Ilya cracks the door open, looking in. Shane stares, expression flat, hand behind him stilling. Ilya can see that his half-chub is more like one-quarter now, if that. He must *really* not like talking about women.

“Let’s forget about girls right now,” Ilya says lowly, reaching through to cup his cheek. His hand and forearm get soaked with water almost immediately, but that’s not a problem for right now. He rubs his thumb along Shane’s bottom lip until his mouth goes slack. Ilya presses the pad against his gums and a blunted canine, velvety smooth on the inner side of his lip. It makes his stomach ache with want. “You want to ask me something?”

“What?” Shane says around his thumb. Ilya pulls it from his mouth slowly, dragging out the corner.

“You told me all about the alley. Anything you would like to know?”

Shane blinks.

“You said you could never go home if someone found out about us.”

Not this, Ilya thinks, regretting everything he’d said leading up to this moment. He’d thought Shane would switch topics to something sexy. He doesn’t want to think about *this* right now.

“Yes,” he murmurs in reply.

Shane stares at him, eyes wider, searching Ilya’s face. Ilya can tell there are probably one hundred and one questions he has. “*Marleau* found out. What if it happens again?” Shane hesitates, cheek rubbing against Ilya’s hand. Blatant concern laces his features. Ilya understands the underlying question that Shane has.

It’s the same question Ilya’s had at every one of their meetings. When he sees the stern look on Shane’s face across the red line.

Is this worth it? Their meetings? The secret? Worth it to their careers, worth the possible upending of their lives?

“No one else will find out,” Ilya murmurs.

“How do you know?”

Ilya chuckles. “Because nobody but Marleau would come looking for me.” He means it teasingly, a way to lighten the mood.

Shane catches his hand before he can pull it back. His face is twisted grim, and Ilya nearly asks what’s the matter before Shane pulls his palm to his lips, kissing it right in the center against his life line.

Ilya stares, mouth dry. Chills run across his shoulders, down each side of his back.

“Don’t say that,” Shane says stiffly.

Ilya feels lightheaded.

Before he can stop himself, he reaches his other hand into the shower, cups the other side of Shane's face, pulls him close. Shane comes without an ounce of resistance, and they kiss.

It's one long, slow, continuous press of lips, and the whole front of Ilya's shirt gets soaked, even parts of his pants. He doesn't feel it, with how Shane's hands find the sides of his face, slide back to lace into his nape. It turns hard, nearly painful by the end, and Ilya feels a lump of emotion in the back of his throat.

When they part, he has to gasp for air. He realizes he's been breathing in steam. "Fuck," he mutters, looking at Shane's fluttering eyes. When Ilya looks down, Shane's dick has risen back up. "Bedroom."

Ilya leaves his soaked shirt over the towel rack. He strips his sweats off and hears the shower shut off abruptly. The glass door slides open as Ilya strips his underwear off.

He hears Shane's labored breathing as he towels himself dry. Ilya goes to the window, pulls the blackout curtains open to let light come through the filter sheers, casting the room in gray sunlight. Then he climbs onto the bed, propping himself against Shane's ridiculous stack of pillows, square in the middle.

His dick is already achingly hard, still riding the feeling of the kiss, harsh but so tender, the perfect combination to get him going. He wants to hold onto this feeling, somehow, bottle it and take a swig from it during all the worst moments of his life. He could get through anything with a kiss like that waiting for him.

Shane is close behind, not bothering with dressing and heading straight for the bed, climbing up on his knees, desire blowing his pupils wide so that his already dark eyes look black.

The sunlight coming through the sheers lights up all of the dark corners of the room, and Ilya delights in seeing every part of Shane illuminated. The only way he could look better would be at sunset, skin lit up in melting gold.

His shoulders glisten with moisture from his shower, his abdominals peeking from beneath his skin as he shifts. His cock bobs ruddy pink between his legs, nestled in dark hair trimmed neatly.

Ilya reaches for him, and they move together like they already know what each other will do, like it's a dance they've rehearsed.

"Sit, sit," Ilya pants, bringing him closer. Shane swings a leg over his waist and sits face to face with him. He puts his weight back against Ilya's dick, ass grinding down automatically. "*Wait*," Ilya hisses, hands landing on Shane's hips to still him.

"Why?" Shane pants, face twisted in want now instead of discomfort. Such a beautiful look, Shane should always look like this.

Ilya swallows around the lump in his throat. "I want to look at you for a minute."

"*Look* at me?" Shane asks in disbelief.

"Yes," Ilya murmurs, eyes drinking him in. The beige of his skin is glowy, even in harsh midday light coming through cold clouds. His hair is still damp, deeper black than when it's dry. Every part of him is shapely from years of hockey and training. Rounded pecs curving into delts into biceps, Ilya runs his hands over each muscle, cataloguing the shapes of them beneath his skin. Goosebumps rise on Shane's arms in the wake of his hands.

"You are very pretty," Ilya tells him, words coming carefully.

Shane can't seem to help rolling his eyes. "You've said that before. Cut it out."

"Why?" Ilya frowns, hands sliding back up to his chest to feel at his curved muscles. His thumbs drag over each pretty, brown nipple, down and back up, watching them pebble. "Is true." Shane's cock jumps against his belly, and Ilya's eyes drag down to it. The head glistens. He grins. "*Very* pretty."

"You're fucking embarrassing," Shane mutters.

Ilya takes him by the hips again and encourages him to grind, just a bit. It feels nice, and Ilya gets to see the muscles in his legs tense, his hips rotating in small circles. Shane tries to lean over him, but Ilya holds him in place, hand to his chest, asking him with careful pressure to stretch back. Shane obliges, sucking his bottom lip into his mouth, biting down on it.

Ilya thinks of all the sculptures and paintings of the male form spread out across Europe, created in the distant past and based on some idealized human form, and realizes that none of them could compare to the person he has sitting atop him.

Shane averts his eyes upward toward the ceiling, face flushed from his freckles to the middle of his chest. Ilya realizes that maybe some of his reverence had been showing on his face.

"A picture would last longer," Shane says, and Ilya squeezes his hips.

"I *wish.* I would look at it each night."

Shane's blush deepens, and Ilya is aware that it sounds almost romantic. He can't be bothered to care, with how hard he is.

"I want to do it like this," he tells Shane.

"This?" Shane's gaze darts back down to him, skates down Ilya's torso, his hips slowing until they go still. "I've never… like this. On top."

"Do you want to try?" Ilya asks. He could do whatever Shane wants in this moment and be happy. Even if Shane only asked to have his ass eaten and nothing else, Ilya would happily oblige.

"Yeah, I want to," Shane says finally. He leans over, reaching for his bedside drawer. His knees lock around Ilya's hips to balance himself, and Ilya latches onto his waist with his hands, craning his neck to look over the small of his back at his ass, cute dimples topping

each cheek. His hands drag down to squeeze, and Shane whines, fumbling through his drawer.

He comes back with a condom and lube. Ilya reaches for the foil packet, but Shane holds it out of his reach with a playful little smirk.

Ilya's cock gives a little kick beneath him.

"I'll do it," Shane says. He shimmies back onto Ilya's thighs, looking down at Ilya's dick, lying against his belly. For once, Ilya is the one to feel like he's on display. Shane gives his cock an appreciative stroke. He even ducks down quickly, swiping his tongue across the shiny head that peaks out of his foreskin. Ilya chokes off an embarrassingly shrill sound that tries to come out of his throat.

Then, Shane tears the condom open and takes Ilya's cock in hand. He slides the foreskin back, eyes intently focused on his task as he slips the condom on. "Wish we didn't have to use these," he murmurs.

Ilya thinks he might pass out. Shane watches him closely. "Yes," Ilya agrees, mouth full of cotton. "I wish that too." He probably wouldn't last long with nothing to buffer the feeling of Shane around him. But it would probably be heaven while it lasted.

After he slicks up his cock, Shane shuffles forward, breath coming out of his mouth raggedly. Ilya steadies him with one hand to the hip and uses the other, covered in excess slick, to reach around and feel at his entrance. Shane bites down on a protest, eyes hazing up as Ilya rubs a finger around the rim. The hot muscle flutters under his touch. He stares into Shane's eyes, transfixed.

He slips a finger inside easily, and Shane gasps above him. "Il—" he cuts himself off, biting his lips together. Ilya watches the way his tongue presses into the inside of his cheek, eyes hesitant. Ilya slips another finger in and meets no resistance.

Shane hunches down over him, searching out his mouth. Ilya meets him, an instant press of tongues together that makes his brain spark erratically.

"Need it," Shane murmurs against him. "Please."

The sudden urge to hurry takes both of them over. Ilya slips both fingers from Shane and holds his dick steady so that Shane can focus on balancing. When the head bumps against his entrance, Shane whines in the back of his throat, and his thighs tremble. They let it catch again, and Shane holds himself there, hips gently moving back and forth, introducing the feeling.

Finally, he settles, eyes slipping closed as he lets himself down onto it.

Immediately, Ilya is reminded that this is the best thing. One of his favorite things. Shane's eyes fluttering, and his body opening up to take him. The head slips past the rim, Shane openly moaning as he slides down one inch, two, then holds.

Ilya's breath shakes out of him. He reaches up to pet a hand over Shane's cheek. "Alright?"

"Mhm," Shane nods. He slides down another inch, breath gasping out of him. "S'just… really full feeling."

"Is okay, though?"

"It's great," Shane says, eyes fluttering open to smirk at him. "Don't worry."

Ilya realizes he's been petting his cheek this entire time. He lets his hand instead drag down the front of him, over his clavicle, and lower to toy with one of his nipples, rolling it gently between two fingers.

Shane moans, one of his hands finding Ilya's wrist to hold fast to it, not stopping him but grasping like Ilya is the only thing that can give him air. He continues his slow descent downward.

Once all of his weight settles onto Ilya's hips, the two of them groan aloud, staring at one another's faces, half shock, half pleasure.

"You're so perfect," Ilya tells him without thinking.

Shane laughs brokenly. Speaks like it's hard to breathe. "Shut up. You're— only saying that — because your dick's inside me."

It's not true, Ilya thinks. He's thought that since the first time he laid eyes on Shane, seventeen and out back of a big Canadian ice rink, his first time in Saskatchewan. The biggest brown eyes seeking him out, fluttering lashes at him like they weren't about to be at each other's throats for five years.

He's thought it every time Shane opens his mouth to say something quiet and boring and sincere. Not an ounce of arrogance to be found in his head, Ilya is sure.

But Ilya can't very well tell him any of that without flaying his heart open for Shane to see.

Instead, he laments about safer things. "Perfect legs, strong thighs." They frame Ilya's hips perfectly, shaking as Shane adjusts to his cock. "Perfect body. Face."

Shane stares at him, brows furrowed, eyes staring right into his. He doesn't say anything, and Ilya wonders if he's overstepped with the face comment. Finally, Shane swallows, mouth wet when he opens it. "Well. Look at you."

Shane's hands do the talking for him, leaning forward to brace both hands against Ilya's chest. They both hiss at the change in angle. Shane gropes at his pectorals, nails raking over nipples, down to Ilya's abdominal muscles, more prominent than his own. "You look like a statue."

"Rude," Ilya murmurs.

"I meant it in a good way." Shane breathes carefully, labored. "Like you're made of marble."

“Am I cold like it, too?”

Shane presses his hand over Ilya’s mouth gently with a hissed *shut up.* Ilya’s lips strain to smile beneath the pressure, and he gives a little buck upward with his hips.

Shane’s mouth falls open.

That’s what sets them going, Shane rising on his own, *up, up*, one inch, two, falling back down with gravity to reseat himself with a breathy sigh.

Ilya can only lie there and stare at him. For the longest time, he watches all of Shane’s muscles work in tandem. One hand braced on Ilya’s chest, the other flat against the headboard as he starts up a steady rhythm.

He stares down at Ilya, face open and wanting and vulnerable.

This moment must be the single best thing to ever happen to Ilya. He knows this for certain, but knows that he will think the same thing the next time they are like this. His hands find Shane’s hips, holding tight as he begins to bring Shane down after each rise, gravity and Ilya’s arm strength working together to make the meeting of their hips harder and faster.

Shane gasps over the wet slap of their skin. His head falls back, mouth open. Ilya begins to move too, the sides of his feet planting for leverage as he begins meeting Shane’s hips with his own.

“Ilya, *please*,” Shane gasps. “Need you—“ It makes all sorts of forbidden things spark in Ilya’s mind, running down his spine, into his balls, his dick.

“*Da*,” Ilya murmurs. “Is good?”

“*So* good, don’t—“ Shane gasps again as Ilya scoops his hips under on the upstroke, Shane's voice falling into a cry. Ilya repeats it, works it into each thrust so that Shane begins to babble wordlessly, voice ragged and cut off.

Ilya looks down between them, Shane’s perfect, pink cock bouncing between their stomachs, steadily drooling and leaving wet patches behind on both their skin. Ilya’s thick treasure trail glistens with it. Possibly the most erotic thing he’s ever seen, but it makes him inexplicably emotional, too. He wants to reach up and hold it, pull him off, but he knows Shane doesn’t want that.

“*Fuck*, Shane,” Ilya mutters. *You’re incredible.*

“I’m gonna— gonna—“ Shane pants, voice helpless and climbing. He falls forward, hands bracing on Ilya’s shoulders as he rucks his hips erratically, all of his previous rhythm vanishing.

Yes, yes, Ilya thinks, *take from me, use me.*

“*Ilya, Ilya—*” Shane’s voice staccatos. His face is suddenly pressed into Ilya’s neck as his hips buck and writhe, body squeezing tight. Shane’s cock, trapped tight between their

stomachs, kicks and spasms, followed by the feeling of hot stripes of come streaking up between them, immediately smeared into each other's skin for how close they move against each other.

That's all that's needed to send Ilya over the edge. He grasps onto Shane's hips and holds him tight as he pistons up into him, flooding the condom with a long groan that he hides in the side of Shane's head. He grips a hand against Shane's nape, holding him there.

Their chests slide together as they gulp down air.

As Ilya begins to slowly come back to himself, he can hear Shane muttering against the skin of his neck. "*— ruined, you've ruined me—*"

His voice is wrecked, and Ilya can't tell if he sounds blissed out or upset. *Ruined for anyone else.* It's probably even more true for Ilya, more than he could ever explain to Shane or *anyone*. No matter who he sleeps with, from here onward, he'll always think of Shane Hollander. He squeezes Shane tighter against himk.

"I'm sorry," Ilya murmurs.

Shane huffs against him. "No, you're not."

That's true, too. Ilya isn't sorry. Maybe he should be.

Shane tries to push up on wobbling arms, sitting back to look down at him. He searches Ilya's face, unsure.

Ilya locks a hand around his wrist, chest trembling as he asks, *pleads,* "Don't go."

"What?"

"Stay?"

Shane's face slowly melts, going soft. Ilya almost can't bear to look at it, but he does, makes himself, lets it wash over him, even as his skin crawls with the threat of anxiety, telling him to *run, run, run*.

"Okay," Shane mumbles, settling back down onto him, chest to chest.

He looks into Ilya's eyes with hazy contentment, and Ilya knows what he'll do next. He should stop him. He should, but he doesn't.

Shane kisses him on the mouth, deep and unhurried, and Ilya knows that that's it, the final nail in the coffin he's built for himself, plank by plank. He'd laid the foundation for it the moment he called after Shane that cold day when they were seventeen, challenging him. Ilya clutches at Shane's face to kiss him back and never wants to let go again.

Chapter End Notes

Wow.

- We will never ever see live dicks in the show, and that is all well and good! However, I just read in The Long Game that Shane is circumcised, Ilya is uncut. This was **fantastic** news that I IMMEDIATELY uploaded into the HR-Lore-Bank in my head. Hopefully the show does not prove me wrong later on down the line.

- I realize I write some of my characters a little... grimy? (edit, and stop me if I'm overexplaining here: To further clarify "grimy", I mean in the way that they like body hair, don't mind mess, pick their nose, shit, vomit, get stomach aches, etc. I like a level of "imperfection" and "humanness" to them, as opposed to a sanitized book character, not that these guys were ever completely sanitized.) This is how I am, and how I like to see characters be.

Ilya's lack of disgust about the grittier aspects of Shane's body feels true to him in my head, so I write him that way. Whereas I think Shane would feel a bit more closed off about it all, find it difficult to let Ilya see him like that, vulnerable. Just an observation I made about my own characterization, I guess. I refuse to change!

- I constantly edit my latest chapters, so if you happen to notice bits and pieces change on rereads, no, you aren't misremembering! It's never anything plot or dialogue or theme altering, but usually just sentence flow, typos, grammar, etc. You see, I have to post when the editing is just "good enough" or else I'll NEVER post due to perfectionism. Writing hack.

- Thank you again for your well wishes. In case you wanted to know, I did NOT end up going to the doctor because I was in too much pain. I injured myself somehow (lifting something heavy? Exercising? idfk) and really fucked up my body for like a week and a half. Whew. That was a shitty time. But now, my pain is nearly all better! I feel a bit like I have a new lease on life rn, so that's nice. When they tell you you should start stretching in your early 20s, they really mean it🙃

- Concerning comments: You may have noticed, I reply to every comment. This was just good etiquette in the smaller fandoms I come from. You reply to comments, have convos, etc. If someone takes the time to make a comment, I try to take the time to reply, even if it's just an emoji, because I appreciate each one! This fic gets more and more

comments each upload, and I intend to try my damnedest to keep up with them. May get behind sometimes, but we'll get there. I notice some big fics never reply to comments ever but I like to if I can! idk why I'm saying any of this, but just, thanks for liking this fic.🧡

Thank you for reading! Until next time.

Chapter 18: The Thing Wrong

Chapter Summary

> Shane doesn't want to believe it, but he's not sure. “We didn’t do anything wrong, did we?”

Chapter Notes

> Hello!
>
> (all caught up!)
>
> **Content Warning:** There is more discussion on Shane's diet and restrictive eating in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eighteen

There’s a certain contentment and peace that Ilya finds in knowing that he’s completely and utterly fucked.

Contentment because he knows that even if he could change the circumstances, he wouldn’t. He’d still choose to end up where he is now, should he have to do it all over again. Maybe he’d even end up here sooner.

In Shane Hollander’s bed, with Shane Hollander sprawled out on top of him, dozing quietly. Lying on a comfortable mattress, in a warm room, in a beautiful, clean, boring apartment. No sound but the quiet hum of the heating system. No one seeking them out but each other.

He imagines for a moment that this is his new life, just lying under Shane. It shouldn't sound as wonderful as it does.

The buzz of his phone breaks the perfect silence. Ilya watches Shane's face for any sign of disturbance. When he doesn't see any, he reaches over, slow and careful, to retrieve his cell from the nightstand. He reads his new text over Shane's muscular shoulder that rises and falls with each of Ilya's breaths.

Marleau - 1:18 pm - The internet loves and hates you.

Ilya - 1:19 pm - Is nothing new.

Marleau - 1:19 pm - Desjourneys asked about you. I told him I had no idea where you fucked off to.

Then, before Ilya can think of something clever to say:

Marleau - 1:20 pm - They have this. Do you want it? For tomorrow?

Attached to Marleau's text is a photograph of a flaky, raspberry pastry sitting pretty in a glass case in a patisserie. He must be out in Montreal with some of the other players.

Ilya - 1:21 pm - Yes. 2 of them. I will pay you back.

Which they both know is not true, but Ilya always says anyway. It's a running joke between him and his team by now. Ilya finds himself grinning ear to ear without meaning to. His breath shushes out, blowing a bit of dark hair ruffled over Shane's forehead.

"Ilya," Shane murmurs against his neck.

"Hm?"

"…Thought you were asleep."

"You are too heavy to sleep under."

Shane brushes his hand over Ilya's curls, fingers digging in. Ilya drops his phone on the bed. "That was really good," Shane murmurs, obviously referring to the wildly hot sex they'd had just a little while ago.

“Yes?”

“I liked it a lot.” Shane opens his mouth again, begins to say something, then shuts it.

“I did too,” Ilya replies, and then kisses him on the lips. There have been countless kisses in the time since they came down from their highs, before Shane had drifted off. Ilya has never liked kissing the way he does now with Shane. In fact, he *loves* it.

He picks up his phone, finds one more message.

Marleau - 1:25 pm - Does Hollander really follow that serial killer diet?

Shane’s reputation precedes him in the league. There is no shortage of rumors about him, and the odd pre-game rituals he may or may not follow. Ilya has found most of them to be untrue. His diet, though…

Ilya - 1:26 pm - What does this mean? Serial killer diet?

Marleau - 1:26 pm - Never mind. There’s a movie I have to show you later.

It puts Ilya’s mind at ease to be texting with Marleau so normally. There is someone else in the hundred-mile vicinity besides Shane who cares if he lives or dies, and they even know that he likes men, too. Someone who knows and is asking him if he wants a pastry from a bakery.

*

Shane might drift back off to sleep, or maybe he only gets caught up in a very nice daydream about lying with Ilya in a bed of soft grass under the summer sunshine. In his daydream, there’s no place where one of them begins or ends.

His phone dings on the nightstand, and he stirs awake. They both turn their heads to look at it, cheeks brushing. Shane blinks, watching the lit screen as it slowly fades to black again. He considers whether he ought to bother checking it or not. He very much likes having all of his limbs tangled with Ilya’s.

It dings again, and Shane’s pragmatism wins out. He stretches an arm over and picks up his phone. Has a look at the screen with bleary eyes. Sighs. “It’s my mom. And Hayden.”

“Ah,” Ilya nods, studying Shane’s face as he reads his mother’s message.

“She wants to bring by groceries before she leaves for Ottawa later today.”

“I could hide in shower,” Ilya suggests. Shane grins cheekily as he taps out a reply to her.

“Not necessary. I can do my own grocery shopping. It’s not even snowing right now.”

“What if it starts again?” Ilya asks, looking out the window at the slate colored daylight.

Shane shrugs. “I’m a pro athlete. I can take a walk in the snow, can’t I?”

He switches to Hayden’s message, which is decidedly less friendly.

Hayden - 1:52 pm - What the fuck is happening?

Shane frowns.

Shane - 1:54 pm - What do you mean?

He doesn’t get the chance to reply before his phone suddenly rings. The sound is shrill, and it makes both him and Ilya jump. Shane stares at Hayden’s name across the screen, wondering what sort of conversation he would be answering to. Hayden already knows he has his phone, so there’s no hiding from it.

He answers and holds the phone gingerly to his ear. Ilya stares at him in mild annoyance. “Hello?” he mumbles.

“What the fuck is going on with you, Hollander?”

Shane bites down on the inside of his cheek. “Jeez, last name, Hayd? What did I do?” When Hayden doesn’t reply, a sinking feeling starts in his belly. “What are you talking about?”

“Just saw the headline. About your and Rozanov’s donation. Together. Do you *like* making us look bad?”

Shane wants to know how it could possibly make them look *bad* to be donating to disaster relief, but he has a feeling that if he said something like that, Hayden would be obliged to rip into him.

“It’s just some charity,” Shane says placatingly.

"*Just* charity. And what, you're on casual terms with him, now? You should see what's trending online."

"It's not a big deal," Shane starts. Ilya turns to look at him, and Shane gets distracted by his perfect mouth. "He suggested it—" Ilya makes a face at him, and Shane can only shrug in response.

"So you're just going along with whatever *he* suggests now?"

Before Shane can formulate a reply, someone on the other end pipes up from further off. "*Is that Hollander*?" There's rustling on the other end of the phone, and then a new voice.

"Hollander, will you explain to the rest of us why you are making business moves with *Rozanov* without even talking to your team?" It's J.J. "We have a vested interest in *hating* his ass. The first time… was tongue in cheek, yes? But again? What the fuck gives? Is this a regular thing for you, now?"

Shane can hear a few more voices agreeing with him. He feels a bit sick to his stomach.

"What, are you all together? Is this an intervention?" Shane asks semi-sarcastically, hoping that the nonchalance will put them off the trail of just how uneasy he really feels.

"Just lunch," J.J. tells him. "But we'd all *love* to hear your answer."

Shane hesitates. Maybe he hadn't really been thinking about the team, or Ilya's team, or anyone else *but* Ilya. He hadn't meant to exclude them. Now that he thinks about it, maybe they ought to have been the first thing he thought of.

"It was just last minute," Shane says, rubbing a hand over his face. Ilya's chin touches down gently against his shoulder, watching him closely with half-lidded eyes. Shane can't tell if he's trying to be seductive or if he's only listening. Shane keeps his eyes on the wall ahead. "It was just something we thought of to—"

"*Don't get mixed up with that cocksucking dog, Hollander*." Someone else says. Maybe Comeau. "*You know this. You hate him most of all. Or you did.*"

Ilya blinks, staring at Shane's phone with an expression Shane can't read.

Shane feels like a deer caught in headlights. Under normal circumstances, he might agree, if only to not stand out amongst the rest of them. The path of least resistance. But Comeau's words sit lodged all wrong behind his heart. Like he himself has been insulted.

The pressure of Ilya's chin lifts from his shoulder. Shane's voice croaks out, icy fear sliding through his veins, like he's a rabbit that's found its way into a fox den.

"He's—" Shane starts, clears his throat. He can feel Ilya watching the side of his face. "Doesn't what he did count for anything with you guys?" All is silent for one beat, two.

A scoff comes on the other end.

“Not for much,” J.J. admits, and then a flurry of voices erupts. Shane can’t decipher if they’re in agreement or denial of what’s been said, but they all sound irritated.

The phone is wrestled back, and Hayden comes back in, sighing deeply. “Fucking hell. It’s a mixed bag, Shane. But you’re playing with fire. I don’t trust Rozanov, and you didn’t used to either.”

“I know,” Shane says hollowly. “But he’s done something good, right?”

“That’s fine,” Hayden says, voice careful like he’s talking to a child, and *god* Shane has always hated being talked to like that more than anything. “Donating is one thing. Partnering with him publicly is another. Aside from not trusting him as far as I can throw him… It’s confusing for the fans, too. They’re invested in our image, and part of our image is hating Boston and their captain, and fucking them up whenever we get the chance. The fans— *and* the board— are wondering if that’s changing. The top trending article is questioning if our captains will play as hard against each other if they’re ‘*friends’*.”

“That’s so fucking stupid,” Shane reasons. “There are plenty of friends who play hard against each other in the league.”

Hayden is quiet on the other end. They *all* are. Shane realizes what he’s just admitted to. He sucks in a harsh breath.

“So you’re his friend,” Hayden says quietly. “Fuck.”

“Hayden—“

“*Fuck*, whatever.“ Hayden cuts himself off. “I gotta go, man.”

“Hayden, it’s not like—“ He doesn’t know what to say to make the situation any better, mostly because it doesn’t make good sense to him in the first place. He understands the optics of public perception. But he doesn’t understand how his team could look at something good and turn it into something bad. Maybe there’s nothing he *could* say to soften this blow. “I still want to win against him more than anything. You know that, right?”

That’s always been true, and it’ll continue to be true until one or both of them decide to hang up their skates for good.

The comforting weight of Ilya’s hand slides up his shoulder, massaging into his trapezius muscle. Heavy deep pressure. Shane leans into it, biting down on his bottom lip.

Hayden sounds tired. “Just… sort your shit. We’re still your team, we come first, right? Or maybe we don’t, since you’re keeping us in the dark.”

It feels like a piece of himself is being chipped away with Hayden’s dismissal. *That’s not fair,* he wants to say. He's given so much to the team already. Isn’t it his own choice who he’s friends with? Maybe there’s money riding on his and Ilya’s rivalry, but shouldn’t his *actual* life come first? He wants to plead with Hayden, make him understand, but for him to really understand, Shane would have to tell him the entirety of it.

And he can't.

"Wow." Hayden sighs. "Is that picture fucking real, too? I didn't think it was. Now… I don't even fucking know anymore."

Shane's stomach drops. "What picture?"

"You need to keep up with the news, Hollander," Hayden says harshly. "I gotta go."

Before Shane can question him further, he hangs up.

Shane's thumbs fly across his phone, mind in a panic.

"Shane," Ilya says, but Shane can't focus on him. "Is okay," Ilya soothes.

"Ilya, what—" Shane mutters, fingers shaking as he tries to navigate to his social media apps. Twitter begins updating itself as he taps it, circular progress bar filling up at a snail's pace. Shane feels like he's going to scream.

"*Shane*," Ilya says, thrusting his own phone in front of his face. Shane looks. There is the top photograph under the Metros' tag.

It's not what he'd feared— not of him and Ilya. Nothing as incriminating as he'd imagined in his worst nightmares. "Is okay," Ilya repeats, zooming in.

The photo is taken from up high in a building, looking down on a snowy street. On one edge of the sidewalk, Shane recognizes the block behind his building and two figures standing in an alleyway. It's clear, at least to him, that it's Marleau and himself, standing a few feet apart from each other. Shane's hood is up, concealing part of his face. Even less of Marleau is shown, just the back of his dark head. He looks like he towers over Shane at this angle. They look to be in mid-conversation.

The photo must have been taken on an older phone from far away, because when Ilya zooms in on the faces, it's too grainy and pixelated to make out any facial features. Clothes aside, it could really be anybody.

"Is nothing," Ilya tells him, taking his phone back. "A fan took the photo from many stories up. Swears it's you two, but they only got this picture before you went down the alley."

Shane's insides feel shaky.

"Most people do not believe it is you."

"No?"

"No. Why *would* it be you? Why would you be talking to Cliff Marleau on the sidewalk?" Ilya laughs humorlessly. "There is no context. Of course is not you." Ilya shrugs. "I will send this to Marleau, though."

“*Fuck*.” Shane feels like he’s barely holding himself together, nerves all rattled. He’d felt on cloud nine just a while ago. And now suddenly, his relationship with his team feels like it's in jeopardy. “Hayden’s pissed.” The rest are, too, but Hayden's reaction feels the worst.

“Yes, well…” Ilya sighs, temple tucking down against Shane’s shoulder as he scrolls through his timeline. “He only needs time to cool off. A head as small as his gets hotter faster.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Do not think about him,” Ilya tells him.

Shane takes a deep breath, counts to three, lets it out, and counts to six. “That’s easy for you to say. Your teammate accepted you.”

Ilya is quiet for a moment. Shane thinks he will not answer. Then, “Yes. It is quite lucky, isn’t it.” Almost reverent.

Shane nods. He’s not sure how Hayden would react to finding out he and Ilya are sleeping together, but he knows that it would not go as gracefully as it had with Marleau. He has a feeling that it would cause a rift between them that would take a long time to mend. And then, maybe Hayden wouldn’t even care to try to mend it. He doesn’t even want to think about what it would do to his team's relationship with him. He can imagine Theriault sitting him down to tell him that he’s not a good fit for the Metros anymore. Sending him packing. He hasn’t even won them a cup yet, but he’s close, *so* close, Shane just needs his chance.

“You know…” Ilya starts, voice quiet and contemplative. “I thought it would be scarier for him to know. Marleau. One more loose end to look after.”

Shane swallows. “It’s not?”

“No.” Ilya shakes his head slowly. “Is more like… weight has been lifted. How you say… *redistributed*.”

“Impressive word.”

Ilya snorts. “Is true. I feel… better.” Shane watches the side of his face. “Is too hard to explain in English.”

“Oh.”

“Your team sounds nice…”

Shane turns his face into his pillow, rolling to press into Ilya’s arm. “They are, really. Just…”

“Just?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes I think maybe the narrative matters more than the game to them.”

“Dramatic,” Ilya murmurs.

“Hey. They’re still my team.”

“They turn on their captain at the drop of a hat?” Ilya points out.

Shane doesn’t have a counterargument. He sighs, unsure if he ought to be bundling up to go out and find them and plead his case, or if he should forget about them for now and let them cool off.

“What’s Twitter saying?” Shane asks, hoping to get his mind off his team.

Ilya pulls his phone back out, a small grin to his face, like he’s reporting salacious news.

“About picture? Is mostly jokes. And very outlandish theories. There is nothing to it.” Ilya clears his throat. “For donation… is mostly good. Everyone is on their best behavior. A few reporters wonder if they could interview us together. Others wonder what board of governors thinks about us. If it was their idea, or ours.”

“I don’t want to think about the board, or the commissioner, or our coaches,” Shane says, his heart fluttering in his chest. He’s surprised that he hasn’t heard from Theriault all morning. Then again, maybe their coach had been the one to sic Hayden on him in the first place, knowing that that would get to him more than anything. Hayden surely couldn’t care as much as it had seemed, right? Shane doesn't want to believe it, but he's not sure. “We didn’t do anything wrong, did we?”

Ilya tosses his phone somewhere down the bed and turns to him, throwing an arm over his shoulder and pressing him into the pillow. “You think it is wrong to donate to city?”

“No?”

“Is wrong to be associated with me?”

“*No.*”

“Is nothing wrong with what we did. The thing wrong is your team.”

Chapter End Notes

- This chapter was very unexpected. I didn't know before writing that there would be the confrontation with Shane's team, or the diet discussion at the end. They both felt right to bring into the story at this time. I do not question the muse, after all.

- Honestly, I only know a little about J.J., and even less about Comeau. I know some people are sympathetic to J.J.'s reaction in Long Game, but I'm not making any calls in this chapter about him for now. My apologies if Comeau is out of character, I just could not find much about him one way or the other. If he's some sort of sweetheart, DO let me know lol.

- I also do not know how much or little the Montreal team hates Ilya in the book, or their reasoning besides being rival teams. It seems, in the show at least, that a lot of the rivalry is just for public show. Like, why is it THAT big of a deal in the locker room, too, just among the players? Is it a money thing or something? That's sort of the angle I've taken here. Rivalry=more investment by fans=more money to be made by the league. Do they just love hating each other, too? Anyway, your thoughts on this are welcome.

- I'm really against making Marleau too PC in the typical sense. (I mean, I don't want him to be terribly insensitive either, make no mistake!) But I do think he'd be a bit callous or ignorant about Shane's diet and other particulars, at least until he's gotten to know him better. I probably don't need to say this to readers and lovers of storytelling, but Marleau is meant to grow as a character.

_____

My notes sound a lot like disclaimers this chapter, don't they lol.

Thank you very much for reading. I'm still amazed by the reaction to this story, and I appreciate it more than I can say! Cheers

Chapter 19: Walls

Chapter Summary

God, he’s sick of lying.

Chapter Notes

Amendment Announcement In my overzealousness to get out a chapter at least once every four days, I overlooked something big: Shane Hollander would not be doing his own grocery shopping! I often forget how famous they are.

This is the only issue with writing from an outline and posting each chapter as it's written and edited. If I'd written one chapter ahead, this is probably something I would've caught and reworked before posting. No one has mentioned it yet, but now that *I've* thought of it, I cannot unsee it.

So I'm going to have to commit the fanfic sin of rewriting the last scene of Chapter 18. The corrected scene will be posted here at the beginning of this chapter, and deleted from the last chapter. If you skim the beginning of this chapter, the changes start when Ilya talks about wanting to feed Shane dessert.

If you began reading this fic after March 1, 2026, you can disregard all of this, because it will not matter!

Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nineteen

“I should probably go grocery shopping,” Shane mutters.

They sit next to each other at his breakfast bar once more.

Shane seems to be doing better now. Especially after Ilya had kissed him stupid for the following twenty minutes after his nonconstructive phone call with Hayden Pike. That was fun for Ilya, helpful for Shane. As soon as Shane’s dick had started to chub up against his leg, Ilya had leapt up from the bed and dragged him to the bathroom to clean themselves off, and then he’d whisked down the stairs, making Shane trail after him.

Ilya likes the chicken shawarma wraps.

Shane sits next to him, with no pretense of an extra seat of space between them. Their knees bump together under the counter.

Ilya doesn't blame him for being sullen about his team. Neither of them has won a cup yet, but Ilya thinks that his team must be more loyal than Shane's seems to be. He couldn't believe what he'd heard on the call, all of the Metros turning criticism and speculation onto Shane. Shane, who cares so much about hockey, and sportsmanship, and winning. Who shapes his entire life around doing his best at the game, for himself and the men who follow him. How could they doubt? Do they not see the same Shane Hollander that Ilya sees?

When Ilya chances a look, he catches Shane looking at his wrap from the corner of his eye.

“Would you like a bite?” Ilya asks, holding it out.

“No.” Shane shakes his head and turns his eye back on his little green leafy wraps.

“I do not understand why you can’t try other things on your diet,” Ilya admits. “Is protein, vegetables, fat.” All good things, according to his nutrition coach.

“It’s… hard to explain,” Shane says.

“I am interested,” Ilya tells him, keeping his tone neutral. Shane seems to do better when he isn’t being pressed on something.

Shane shrugs, staring down at his grape leaves. “My nutritionist worked it out with me and… well, me. I’ve been on it for years. During the season, I mean. I don’t deviate from it, ever. If I stay on it, I always know I’m doing the very best I can.”

Ilya nods. He understands, to a certain degree. But even the most rigid athlete he’s ever met slacks about their diet on occasion.

“It was really easy when I started,” Shane goes on, voice quieter. His fork stabs into a leaf. “It was kind of a relief. To not have to think about what to eat. I don’t know. Sometimes I do want other things, you know?”

“What happens if you eat this, just today?” Ilya asks, holding up the end of his wrap. He tries his best not to sound patronizing. He does, sometimes, albeit unintentionally, and for that, he blames English.

Shane shrugs, keeping his eyes down. Ilya doesn’t like it very much. “Dunno. If I break… then what’s the point?”

“Break?” Ilya asks.

“My willpower.”

“Your willpower is fine, Hollander,” Ilya says, old habits slipping back. “I have never met anyone with more. Is only…”

“What?”

“I don’t know.” Ilya isn’t sure how to articulate how he feels. How unbalanced Shane seems when it comes to food. How he stiffens up, eats just to get through it. Won’t look at Ilya or his plate head-on. “Maybe I would just like to feed you dessert sometimes. Sexily.”

That makes Shane flush. When he looks back at Ilya, he’s got a shy grin on, and some of the discomfort in the air eases. Really, that’s all Ilya can ask for at a time like this. He has no place to say his *real* piece. He finishes off his wrap, filled with a glob of tahini, and takes both of their plates from the countertop to the sink.

“You will go to market?” he asks as he uses Shane’s scrub sponge to clean the dishes.

“My management team usually sends someone to pick them up, but…”

Ilya can tell where this is going. “You will not do that today?” He knows. Because there’s too much snow on the ground still, too much chaos as Montreal tries to catch up and reestablish itself under feet of accumulated snow.

“They’ve had a few slow days. Don’t want to ruin their time off,” Shane says with a shrug. “It’s not very far. I can put in the order myself and go pick it up. No big deal.”

“*No big deal,*” Ilya repeats to himself, lips shaping over the words as he follows Shane to the sofa. Shane pulls his phone out and slumps into the corner seat. Ilya thinks of things he’d like to eat. He shuffles up closer to him as he watches Shane navigate through his messages to start a new one.

A notification pops up on Shane’s phone, and Ilya gets to read the name *Hayden* before Shane swipes it out of the way with irritation.

“Hayden is your good friend, yes?”

“Yeah,” Shane nods, thumbs typing up items absently into the body of a message. After a minute, Shane huffs. “I’m not so close with that many guys on the team. But… he’s the one I know best. I have dinner with his family sometimes. He has two kids— twins.”

Ilya hums noncommittally. Truthfully, he doesn't care so much about Hayden Pike's personal life. More so, he cares about Shane's relationship with him. Shane had been hurt by the phone call. It no doubt bothered him that Pike seemed to feel a level of betrayal at Shane's friendliness with Ilya.

Ilya can understand, to a degree. On one hand, he's sure more than a few guys on his own team would take issue knowing he and Shane were so close. They hadn't called him up to complain about a joint press release, though. Perhaps the Metros were more insecure than they liked to let on.

Shane clears his throat. "I… don't think I'm quite the captain they wanted."

Ilya feels his face twist in confusion. "Do they not follow your lead?"

"They do. But…" Shane lets his hand fall to the sofa, phone going with it. He looks at Ilya, brows drawn together. He's thinking hard. Ilya waits, propping an elbow up onto the back of the sofa. "I'm not…" He waves his hand at Ilya. "Charismatic. My whole life, people liked that I could play hockey. I was really good at it. But outside that, I don't know. It's like there's a… *wall*. Between them and me. My team."

Not only them, Ilya thinks. He knows Shane's reputation in the league and online. Cordial, polite, Canadian golden boy, but undoubtedly reserved. A face that does not often betray what he's thinking. One might even consider him cold if they did not know how deeply he thought about everything.

Shane stares ahead at his darkened fireplace. "And that was okay, but… I thought when I became captain that maybe the wall would come down. So far, it hasn't. People are nice, but…"

They don't know you, Ilya thinks, gazing at the side of Shane's face.

Shane turns an embarrassed smile on him. "Sometimes, I feel like I haven't grown up at all." He laughs. "Isn't that stupid?"

Ilya doesn't answer in words. He leans in and presses his lips to Shane's jaw, just under his cheek. He feels Shane's lashes flutter briefly, and when he pulls back, Shane can't seem to keep the true smile off his face.

"Maybe is a bit silly. You are very grown." Ilya sets a palm on the back of his neck, rubbing soothingly down into the collar of his shirt. "You are their best captain in a long time. Never have they gotten so far in playoffs before last season. They must know this, yes?" And if they don't, Ilya knows that they'll see it someday. Maybe someday soon. He points at Shane's phone to break the tension. "Order me another bottle of Coke, will you?"

Shane's face eases as he types out the rest of his order. Ilya busies himself cataloguing each little freckle on his cheek.

A bit of waiting later, and Ilya has tried no less than three times to get into Shane's pants. Each time he's met with pleased chuckles, and Shane fending him off half-heartedly,

distracting him with his mouth or something on the news. Ilya eventually gives up, and then Shane gets word that his order is waiting for him.

Ilya trails after him to his front door, leaning his shoulder up against a wall to watch him slip on his coat and boots.

“How far is market?” Ilya asks curiously.

“Just down the street. It’s a high-end convenience store under some office buildings— they have organic produce—”

“Ahh,” Ilya says, lifting his brows like this is very impressive.

Shane rolls his eyes and crouches to do up his laces. “You stay here.”

“Of course,” Ilya spreads his arms to each side. “Where else would I go?”

“I don’t know,” Shane mutters.

When he stands back up, Ilya is there to greet him, taking his chin in one hand. He loves the way Shane melts into the touch. They kiss, a chaste brush of lips, and Ilya is terribly aware of how domestic it feels. “Pick up more lube and condoms,” he tells him teasingly. A nervous bubble of laughter nearly bursts through Shane’s lips as he shrugs out of Ilya’s hold.

“They’re in the order,” he says awkwardly, which he didn’t have to admit in the first place. Ilya finds it endearing that he had. “Don’t go wandering around,” Shane warns halfheartedly. “One possible Raider sighting on the block is nothing.”

“But two would draw a crowd,” Ilya says, watching Shane open the door. “Yes, yes.”

Safe trip, he thinks. When the door shuts, he admonishes himself for not saying it out loud. He throws the door back open, and Shane is halfway down the hall toward the elevator, turning to look at him in bewilderment. Ilya feels self-conscious suddenly, and he tries to think of something good.

“Don’t talk to strangers,” he says flatly. Shane tucks his face into his shoulder to hide his pleased grin. He throws a small wave back as he turns to go.

Ilya feels giddy as he shuts the door. He’d nailed it. Now, to watch television and wait for Shane to come back.

Just like the dog they say you are, he thinks to himself wryly. For once, he doesn’t mind the comparison. He sprawls out on the sofa and turns on the Montreal weather report, hoping against hope that somehow, there will be another blizzard en route to Montreal.

There is not.

*

Hayden taps out a message on his phone.

Are you actually meeting with him or—

He erases it, scowling at how needy it sounds. Hayden hates to be nosy, and he even makes it a point not to be, no matter *what* his teammates say otherwise. But he's watched Shane cling tight to his personal privacy for years and never pried, and this is where it's gotten them. He tries again.

Sorry about earlier. I didn't know everyone would dogpile on—

He erases it.

Then he puts his phone away without sending anything, resting his chin in his palm.

He feels a little silly for not having put it together sooner.

Brunch with the guys had started out tongue-in-cheek years ago. Over time, though, they've found a few places around Montreal with good food and enough table space to seat seven to twelve of them, whoever can spare the time, with some semblance of privacy. Once every few weeks, if they're in town, they meet up.

Hayden had arrived this morning in good spirits. Shane hadn't been there, which wasn't so unusual. Sometimes he wouldn't come if the place didn't have anything he could eat— and sometimes he would, just to socialize. A high-end greasy spoon— which is the only thing Hayden can think of to describe Carlos— isn't likely to have anything "*macrobiotic*".

Then J.J. had shown him the newest headline and joint statement put out by Shane and Rozanov, or, more likely, by their publicists, for how chic it had sounded.

It'd felt a bit like a punch to the face.

Maybe punch was too strong a word.

A slap. A small one. Small slaps still stung, though, didn't they?

He ought to have called Shane on his own time. But then Comeau had pulled up the supposed picture of Cliff Marleau and Shane Hollander, and Hayden had been into his second Bloody Mary, and—

Even an hour later, sobering up from his buzz, the conversation is still bouncing around inside Hayden's head, along with the minutes after he'd hung up, the ping-ponging shit talk from Comeau and Drapeau, fueled by a few midday cocktails and a few other teammates. They'd garnered a few agreements as well as some pushback, nearly taking their distaste for both Rozanov and Shane's association with him too far.

Hayden pulls his phone back out and stares at the blinking text cursor. Frowns.

Shane and Rozanov are friends. Of course. The first sign ought to have been Shane's peppy attitude at their last practice. Energy for miles, uncharacteristically sending a puck at the glass. The wild look in his eye, skating circles around Rozanov. He'd been smiling. Not nearly as ruffled by his rival's presence as he should have been. Hayden just thought he was being the bigger man. *Golden-boy Hollander.*

Friends.

Shane's never mentioned it even once to Hayden. Maybe that's the real seed of his irritation. The squirming little feeling in his stomach that he doesn't know Shane Hollander as well as he would've liked. As well as he's been *trying* to.

Shane doesn't make it easy, most of the time. He's… well. Shane is Shane. Master of hockey, and a pretty decent captain— better than their last, for sure. But outside of hockey, he's stingy with his personal details, and quiet, and that doesn't always go over well when you're trying to make friends with a group of men who like to lay others flat out on the ice for fun and talk afterward in the locker room about the women they fuck each night they have off. When you're supposed to rally them together into a team.

Hayden is nothing if not persistent, or so Jackie tells him. Shane is a tough nut to crack, but he thought they'd made some good progress over the last year.

And now you've set that back three steps, you idiot, he thinks to himself, putting the phone away again.

It's only that he thought they were close enough that Shane would've mentioned having friends on other teams. Especially if one of those friends was *Ilya-fucking-Rozanov*, notorious asshole, captain of Montreal's biggest rival. A man who Hayden takes great pleasure in shit-talking on and off the ice— and in front of Shane, no less.

Hayden rests his head on his arms, willing the last of the vodka to wear off. He ought to order a few slices of toast.

Sometimes it seems like Jackie understands Shane better than he does. She explains this to Hayden by the fact that she had a quiet little brother growing up. Maybe he ought to talk to her more about this. He'd call her, but then she'd know he had been drinking mid-day cocktails. He's not even tipsy anymore, but she'd know.

Half the team has trickled out of Carlos's when Bowens sidles up to him, taking the seat J.J. had been sitting in before his departure.

"Comeau's something else, huh?"

"You're telling me," Hayden sighs.

"I don't like it. Seems like he's out for blood. Some of the others were egging him on. You think he's gonna stir shit up with Theriault?"

Hayden looks at his phone again. “He wouldn’t dare, right? Shane’s our captain. And our friend.”

“He’s *your* friend. J.J.’s. Berkes’ maybe. To most of us, he’s a teammate. A captain.” Bowens sighs, like this weighs heavily on him, too. “Tell you one thing, though. Comeau’s causing ripples on purpose.”

Hayden’s a bad friend.

“Not with me,” Hayden says grudgingly. “Fuck.”

Bowens leaves, and Hayden sits staring at his text chain with Shane.

He wants to confront Shane, but first, he’ll have to apologize. Nothing he hasn’t done a hundred times over with his wife. If he can admit to Jackie when he’s been an ass, doing it with Shane ought to be a piece of cake.

*

Shane sits in his car around the side alley of the grocery store, waiting for the back door to open up. He stares down at his most recent message from Hayden.

Hayden - 2:32 pm - Lunch is over. Do you have a minute?

He’s been walking a tightrope with his team for the year he’s been their captain. They’re a nice bunch, especially at the beginning. Shane still gets the feeling that he’s trying to prove himself to them, though. That they’re all still waiting to see if he’s worth his salary and worth investing their time and energy into taking seriously. Shane thinks they’ve won enough games with each other to warrant some amount of mutual respect.

Hayden’s dismissal stings the most, though.

Half of him wants to blow Hayden off, put his focus on Ilya, waiting for him back home. To see where the day will take them, and fall into it mindlessly. He’d opened up a bit, back in the apartment, and Ilya hadn’t even made fun of him. It’s good progress. Shane wants very much to ask him some big, important questions. But he isn't sure if it'll ruin the time they have left together.

A new message pops up as he’s about to put his phone away.

Hayden - 3:10 pm - Are you home?

A sharp rap of knuckles on his window startles him. It’s one of the workers, a bored-looking kid smacking gum. When Shane rolls down his window, the kid doesn’t look any less bored, and if he *does* recognize him, he doesn’t seem to care. “You’re picking up the order?” the kid asks monotonously.

Shane nods. As the kid turns to leave, Shane catches him. “I needed to add an extra thing,” he says, and passes him the cash tip he’d prepared, a wad of bills that the kid stares at wide-eyed and blank.

“Uh, alright. Sure. What is it?” The kid asks, demeanor significantly brightened.

When the kid heads back inside, Shane returns to his messages, gnawing on the inside of his lip as he thinks of what to say. In the middle of tapping out a reply message, the phone begins ringing in his hand.

“Hello?” he answers.

It’s the doorman at his building. “Mr. Hollander? You’re not answering your intercom, but you have company in the lobby. Hayden Pike. He’s on your approved guest list. Would you like me to send him up anyway?”

“*No*,” Shane says, louder than necessary

A long pause on the other end. “You, uh, want me to send him away?”

Shane rubs his fingers into his eyes, thinking. “No, just— tell him I’ll be there soon. Ten minutes.”

“Yes, sir,” the doorman agrees.

For the next two minutes and fifty-three seconds, Shane sweats in the front seat of his SUV. The kid finally comes back, a last straggling plastic bag in hand. Shane thanks him, tips him a second time, far too much money in all, and leaves.

His mind is blank on the journey back. He parks in the underground. Carries all the bags in two fists to the elevator. He ought to take them up to the apartment; he has cold things, but his intense need to know why Hayden is there— and to keep him far away from his front door— overshadows everything else.

The apartment's ground floor is lavish, like a fine hotel. Shane doesn’t need to go there very often anymore. It’s overflowing with large potted plants, hanging chandeliers, and many spaces for visitors to lounge. Shane carries his two fistfuls of groceries into the middle of the room and scans.

Hayden sits not far away, staring at his phone. When he sees Shane, he stands abruptly. Shane can see that he’s not… *happy* to see him, exactly, but there’s a peculiar look on his face.

“Hey…” Hayden says, looking Shane up and down.

Shane stares at him dumbly. He feels part angry and part remorseful, and can’t decide what the *correct* thing to feel is, given the circumstances.

“Caught you at a bad time?” Hayden asks.

“No.” Shane sets the bags down on the floor next to the lounge sofa. A few of them dump onto their sides. Shane ignores them, rubbing his hands against his jeans to bring feeling back into his fingers. “Um. What are you doing here?” he asks.

Hayden clears his throat. “Just— visiting. Didn’t know you’d be out.”

“Last-minute trip.” The tension is thick and awkward between them. “How are, um, Jackie and the twins? You guys weren’t in a blackout, too, were you?”

Hayden blinks. Then, his shoulders fall, and the air whooshes out from between his lips like he’s been holding his breath for a long time. “Goddamnit, Shane.”

“What?”

“You make it so fucking hard to stay mad at you.”

A slow smile starts on Shane’s mouth. “You’re not any better.”

Hayden hitches a hand onto his hip. “Look, the call was—

“Bullshit?”

Hayden has the decency to look embarrassed. “Partially. It was… unexpected.”

“You’re the one who made it.”

“Look, I’m trying to apologize here,” Hayden says. “I was out with some of the guys, and they were already worked up. It was just blowing off some steam, but then… Well, you know how it is with guys. Sometimes they take it too far.”

Shane shifts between his feet. He *does* know. It’s why he finds it hard to navigate his position. He wants to be a part of the team, but sometimes the locker room talk dwindles into a level of vulgarity that Shane can’t really follow. Sometimes anger overflows from the game and causes scuffles amongst them. Still…

“I’m not trying to go against the team.”

Hayden drops back into his seat in a slump. Shane takes the one across from him, hands sitting awkwardly on his knees. “I know,” Hayden says, rubbing a hand over his face. “Just thought I’d finally gotten a grasp on you. You’re kind of predictable, but then you seem to keep on surprising me.” He says this like it’s a bad thing. “Look— Comeau and some of the others were saying some shitty things. About Rozanov. And you. But… I don’t want to just blow you off. And I’m not taking sides with any of them.”

“This is an apology?” Shane asks, biting down a coy smile.

“I… I’m *sorry*.” He says it like it pains him. “But… I’m a little worried that Comeau and his big mouth are going to make it onto Theriault’s radar.

Shane's face falls flat. "Theriault doesn't have a say in what I do with my personal time and money."

"Not officially… But you know how it is. If they say you're harming the reputation of the team…" Hayden shrugs. "I mean, I don't agree, by the way."

"Really?" Shane asks, leaning back skeptically. "Because you sounded pretty *with them* on the phone, earlier."

Hayden meets his eye sheepishly. "I *am* a little angry. Or… confused. Weirded out. I don't get it. You and Ilya Rozanov *hate* each other, but suddenly you're friends? It came out of nowhere. I've never heard of you two talking outside of a game. You might've thought to tell me something like that."

Shane's gut twinges in guilt as he thinks about the breadth of what Hayden still doesn't know. He wishes that he could spill his guts to him. He doesn't know Hayden to be a homophobe, and he probably wouldn't cut Shane off entirely. The idea of it getting back to the others, though… that thought is unthinkable. Not something he can ever risk.

Marleau had found out on his own volition. They'd *had* to tell him. He can't very well do the same with Hayden when he has no inkling in the first place, no matter how much he wishes he could share this thing about himself with someone, *anyone.*

Afraid that Hayden will be able to read all of his thoughts on his face, Shane tries for a joke. "So you're jealous?"

"Fuck no. Not of that Russian bastard," Hayden scoffs, predictably. "We've watched you and Rozanov be at each other's throats for years. Our teams try to murder each other every time we're on the ice together. I guess… it kind of makes us all feel like fools."

"Even you?"

Hayden's mouth turns down in a scowl. "I feel dumb for different reasons."

"You could've said all this on the phone."

"I was around," Hayden says, waving his hand. Then he goes quiet, looking at Shane expectantly.

Shane steels himself. Tries to say only true things, but not in their entirety. "We... came to an unexpected agreement," Shane starts. "He's different from what you might think."

"That's for sure. He's not exactly known for being nice. He shit-talks at every press conference."

Shane's fingers fidget together. "It's mostly an act. He cares a lot more than he lets on." *He's so much more than that*, *too,* Shane wants to gush. He's kind and thoughtful. Perceptive in a way that sometimes scares Shane. A fantastic lover. The opposite of selfish. Who cries sometimes when he's drunk, who moved to a new country on his own, who repeats English

words and phrases to himself silently, committing them to memory. Who likes to kiss and tease and make Shane blush like it's a sport in itself.

"I'll have to take your word for it," Hayden says, like the idea of Ilya Rozanov being nice is uncomfortable to him. "He's not *my* friend. Look, let's put this shit behind us, for now. You wanna kick back, watch a movie or game or…"

Shane does, actually. Hayden doesn't come over that often, but Shane would like for him to. Unfortunately, it's the exact wrong moment for him to ask. "I can't, today. How about Friday, day after we play Minnesota?"

Hayden frowns. "Not tomorrow after practice?"

"Uh… no," Shane swallows, mind racing to think up a lie. Fuck, he needs to ask Ilya how he does it so easily. "I'm uh… I have to put these away. And I'm trying a new home workout."

Hayden's eyes trace over the plastic grocery bags as Shane gathers them back into his fists. "You need some help with those?"

"No."

"I don't mind."

"Really, I'm good," Shane says, straightening up.

A new suspicion returns to Hayden's face. He looks from the bags to Shane, scrutinizing. "You don't drink Coke," he says, pointing at the very obvious 2-liter bottle in one bag.

Shane hadn't thought of that. The suspicion on Hayden's face gives way to a devious smile.

"No way."

"What?"

"You have someone over, don't you?"

"No. The Coke is for my dad."

"Your dad's not in Montreal right now. Oh, this makes up for everything," Hayden says, which Shane doesn't know if he ought to take offense to or not. Hayden claps a hand on his shoulder, and Shane shrugs under the added weight. "Atta boy, Hollander."

"Hayd…" Shane starts. He tries to do the math, figure out if it's worth Hayden believing *this* lie or not.

God, he's sick of lying.

Hayden continues, a manic grin on his face. "If it gets serious, you gotta let me meet her. Jackie too. She's been asking about you."

“It’s not serious— it’s not *anything,*” Shane insists. “I gotta go.”

“Right, right,” Hayden lets him go, a knowing grin on his mouth.

Shane feels guilty as he stands in the elevator and watches Hayden mosey out the front door of the building, with no clue of who is waiting for Shane in his apartment. No clue what Shane gets up to behind closed doors.

Part of him feels better for having— mostly— reconciled with one person. Maybe he can work on J.J. and the others at practice the next day. He’s sure that this isn’t the last he’s heard about Ilya. It’s not a big deal, though. They can work through this.

As much as he feels better, Shane has suddenly been made aware of *the wall* again. Now, he’s noticed it between him and Hayden. He’s sure it’s always been there, but he’s never noticed it so blatantly before.

Thinking about practice tomorrow, he suddenly feels strikingly like he once did in school. Dreading the walk into the building, dreading looking at all of his peers, and having to try to connect to them.

By the time the elevator reaches his floor, he realizes how lonely it feels.

He trudges to his apartment, the thought of seeing Ilya again the only thing that seems like it could make him feel better.

The apartment is deadly quiet, though.

He stands in his foyer, listening to the silence, the lack of television noise or movement. He takes a few steps to the kitchen, looking around. His stomach sinks an inch.

After setting everything on the counter, he looks around the living room and sees a lack of any of Ilya’s belongings. The blanket is folded onto the back of the couch, the throw pillows replaced. The coffee table is back in its rightful place.

For all intents and purposes, it looks as if Ilya has vacated the apartment entirely.

Shane’s chest and throat tighten up. Suddenly, it's hard to breathe. An inexplicable, terrible feeling spreads through his chest. It feels like a bucket of ice water has been tipped over his head.

He stands there in front of his dining table. He feels ridiculous. His voice sounds all wrong as he asks loudly, “Ilya?”

After a long moment, there is a small thump from upstairs, echoing as if it’d come from his bathroom. Shane’s heart lurches.

Ilya appears at the top of the stairs, wide blue eyes peering down in apprehension.

“*Fuck,*” Shane says. He feels like he could double over, in pain *or* relief. “What are you doing?”

“Hiding,” Ilya tells him, bare feet thumping down the stairs. He’s wearing a pair of loose gym shorts and a T-shirt. “Voice from intercom,” Ilya explains, pointing at the little speaker box by the door. “Said Pike came to see you. I thought he might come up even if you were not home. So I hid in your shower.”

Shane swallows thickly, and even though he’s relieved to see Ilya still here, the sudden sorrow that’d overcome him refuses to dissipate. He takes a breath that sounds ragged to his own ears.

Ilya frowns. “What is wrong? What is this face?” he asks, stepping off the stairs.

Shane’s jaw tightens as Ilya comes to him. His teeth grind together as he tries to contain the bursting feeling at the base of his throat.

“Shane?” Ilya asks, a hand reaching for him. As it touches his shoulder, Shane’s face twists, and he looks away.

“I met Hayden in the lobby,” he says, his voice cracking.

Ilya’s brow quirks. “Was he terrible?”

“No. He apologized… It was good. I had to lie to him to get him to go.”

Ilya stares at him in the way he does when he’s on the ice, looking at an opposing team, trying to work out all of their angles and strategies. Reading him. Shane bites down on his lip so hard that it sends shooting sparks of pain through his face.

“And I thought you… Left.” He looks at his pristine living room. Ilya must have tidied it in a rush, thinking that Hayden might show up at any moment. He did too good a job.

“Shane… you are crying,” Ilya says quietly.

“No, I’m not,” Shane huffs. Ilya’s hand gently touches his face, turning it back toward him, and Shane must admit that Ilya looks more blurry than before. “I’m not.” His face is dry.

Ilya’s warm palm cups the side of his face. A thumb ghosts across his cheek. “Okay,” he says solemnly. “So you’re not. Come here.”

Ilya takes up his entire field of vision, a hand to the back of his neck, pulling him closer. Shane presses his face into his throat and collar and breathes. Pain spreads outward from his heart, and Shane’s hands scramble clumsily for the back of Ilya’s shirt, holding on tightly.

“Is okay,” Ilya murmurs, arms encircling him. They’re the same size, but Shane feels very small in that moment, Ilya holding onto him like he's holding him together.

“Don’t do that shit, okay?” Shane asks, voice rough.

“What shit?” Ilya asks placatingly.

“Don’t just… leave suddenly. Without saying anything.” *It would hurt too much,* he thinks, ashamed.

After everything— the days they’ve spent together, the ease that they’ve fallen into— stacked on top of the turmoil Shane feels about his team, Shane can’t think of anything worse than suddenly finding himself alone in his apartment. It’d be like being left high and dry after the first time he’d made Ilya come with his mouth. Ilya had only teased it once, but Shane had felt the badness of it down to his core.

Somehow, being left now, Ilya cutting him off without a word, would be infinitely worse. He doesn’t dare to name the reason why.

Shane’s hands turn to fists, probably stretching Ilya’s shirt out of shape. Ilya doesn’t seem to care. “Don’t," Shane repeats.

“Okay,” Ilya murmurs, a hand rubbing his shoulder. “I will not.”

Shane is tempted to ask him to promise, but he can’t think of anything more needy or humiliating, so he stays quiet.

When he pulls back, Ilya’s neck glistens wet, and Shane wipes it hastily with the sleeve of his sweatshirt. Ilya's hands return to his cheeks, both thumbs swiping beneath his eyes as he looks at him appraisingly.

“There. Not crying. No tears,” Ilya says, holding his face in his hands.

Shane has never felt more like an open book. Like there is no wall.

“Should we watch a movie, or play a game? Or something more interesting?” Ilya grins slyly at him.

Shane nods, clearing his throat. “I got you something, actually,” he says, turning and heading for the kitchen. He can feel Ilya close behind him, which makes him feel warm all over. For a little while more, he can pretend that tomorrow will not come. He finds the last, straggling grocery bag amongst the rest and hands it over. “It… might be a little melty by now, though.”

Chapter End Notes

If there's one thing writing a bigger fic with eyes on it is teaching me, it's how to bite the bullet and not squirm when I need to make a technical change mid-way through. My pride has been wounded a few times through this process, but hopefully that's doing something beneficial for me in the long run?

For the first time, I genuinely have no idea how this chapter will be received. I'm kinda nervous. Hayden's a weird character for me to write, but I wanted to do a bit from his pov. Maybe this will go over well, or maybe readers will think it's a big old bore. Either way, *I* feel like I understand him a bit better, or at least, my version of him! Hopefully this isn't too weird of a chapter. My brain feels miles off, and I've had a lot of weird "dissonance" trying to figure out if this update is decent or not. I'm a chronic over-thinker, in case you didn't pick up on that from my tomes of author's notes.

_____

About other players: I've been doing my best to cross reference the timeline with all the characters. This is tough when the show has deviated from the book so much. I keep having to remind myself to be loose with it and refer to the show first.

I was reviewing the show timeline and noticed that Shane was drafted to Montreal in 2009, but only in 2011 does Hayden ask him to come to his house for dinner. Do I have that right??? huh.

I've read more analysis that implies Hayden is less close in the show to Shane (this early on) than in the books, so I feel a little more validated about my personal take on his character so far. Sorry to ye book-Hayden lovers for my treatment of him, if he feels ooc! He's had his moments, but there's hope for him yet. I did enjoy writing from him, though.

_____

I've started reading Role Model, and I'm actually enjoying myself. I've found it difficult to get into HR or Long Game simply because I know the show so well, and love what the actors have brought to the table for the characters. But I figured I would need to get a clue about The Centaurs eventually, and heard Role Model was a good one, so decided to give it a shot.

It's been much easier to get into, not comparing any characters (besides Ilya) to a show counterpart. It rids the brain of friction! Anyway, would recommend, so far.

That's a lot of long-winded notes. If you read these, you have my respect lol

Thank you as always, more soon. Fare thee well.

Chapter 20: Fireside

Chapter Summary

“Is there anyone else you see like me?” Shane finally asks.

Chapter Notes

NSFW/18+ Chapter. Ye have been advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty

“Is a shame he is such a bad actor,” Ilya says, pointing his spoon at the man on Shane’s television screen. Said man runs next to his woman counterpart down a winding forest trail. There’s a masked killer after them. It’s easy to see that the woman’s talent far surpasses her co-star's. She probably has a future of bigger gigs and stardom ahead of her. Ilya goes on. “She is very good, though. Very cute, too. *Scream queen,”* he says, accent thick around the words.

Ilya’s spread out on the couch on his side like a cat, his head propped on a pillow half a foot from Shane’s thigh. Shane lies back in the crease of the cushions and pouts at the back of Ilya’s curly head as he brings another spoon of ice cream to his mouth. When Ilya glances back, he’s grinning, and Shane knows he’s being teased. He tries to see it as a good thing. If Ilya knows he’s bothered by it, it means he knows that Shane’s feelings are not merely surface-level. Right?

The ice cream is pale and laced with streaks of chocolate and cookie bits, one of a few flavors Shane had gotten him, little pint containers with blue skies and dairy cows. *You bought so*

many, Ilya had said, and well, of course he had. Shane didn't know what kind Ilya liked, and it was supposed to be a surprise. *I will have to finish them all before the end of tomorrow. Do not want you to be tempted,* Ilya had said with an impish grin.

Shane had finished drying his misty eyes, and Ilya had dragged him to the couch to finish watching some B-movie he'd seen advertised on television earlier. Shane thinks it's terrible, but it's made more fun by Ilya's scathing commentary. He has a lot to say about the man, less to say about the woman, and *plenty* to say about the plot. It's about a grand cottage on a lake and a supernatural killer with a knife. It's easy to see that most of the budget went into renting the location.

"Is silly that he is affected by electricity," Ilya says, referring to the killer. "Is he a ghost or not?"

"This looks like where my parents' cottage is," Shane comments, because he's been thinking it for the last ten minutes. "I'll bet it was filmed in Canada."

"Their summer house? Where is it?"

"Eastern Quebec. I paid for it to be expanded a few years ago."

"Ah."

"Yeah," Shane eyes the back of his head. "It's something I always wanted to do for them."

He wants to ask Ilya if he has made any big purchases for his own family, but he's unsure if it's prying too much. He sees Ilya periodically pick up his phone to answer a text or ignore a call. Now, Shane begins to wonder if he talks to his parents regularly. His brother? Friends back home? He knows nothing about his life.

"Did you buy yourself a cottage too?" Ilya asks absently.

"I bought some land on a private lake," Shane replies. "I started building a house on it. It's not quite done yet. It'll probably get finished this spring."

"So you will spend your warm days there?"

"Yeah. A few weeks at least." Shane swallows. "Do you, um… go back to Russia every summer?"

"Mm," Ilya nods.

"Right. That's good."

"Mm."

After another moment, Ilya points at the woman on screen.

"I wonder if she knows who we are."

Shane scowls, irritated that Ilya is still circling around this. “The guy’s hot too, isn’t he?” Shane says without thinking. Ilya takes another bite of ice cream. Shane goes on. “I like brunettes. Even if he *is* a bad actor.” He’s never been one to tease back, but maybe it’s a skill worth learning.

Ilya sits up, setting the pint container down on the coffee table, spoon clanking next to it. Shane is about to admonish him for just leaving it there, but then Ilya turns, face positively devilish. He takes Shane, big hands on his waist, and presses him into the back cushion, crowding over him.

“You like *brunettes,* do you?” Ilya chuckles like this is the stupidest thing Shane has ever said. “Do not act jealous,” he adds, not for the first time that day. Shane rolls his eyes.

“Of her? I’m fucking not.”

“Oh. Is why you try to make me jealous back?”

Shane flushes hotly down his neck and turns his face away. Ilya takes the opportunity to attach his mouth to the underside of his jaw, teeth coming out to nip just this side of painful. “*Ah*,” Shane sighs, eyes slipping shut. Ilya’s teeth scrape over his pulse point, hot tongue following after to soothe. Shane resists letting his legs fall apart to invite him closer. “You started it,” he says instead, voice tight.

“Mm…”

“Do you do it just to be an asshole? Or do you *actually* want to meet and hook up with her?” He doesn’t mean to sound so irate, but he doesn’t like that Ilya keeps dancing around it.

Finally, Ilya pulls back to look down at him, eyes half-lidded. “*You* do not want to meet her?”

Shane understands the real question now. The reason Ilya keeps bringing it up.

Ilya goes on. “You do not like women at all, do you?” The second time *that’s* come up, too, and Shane doesn’t want to talk about it any more now than he did earlier.

“I like them. They’re nicer than men, that’s for sure.” He gives a pointed shove at Ilya’s shoulder.

Ilya bites down on a chuckle. “Is not what I mean. And you know it.” He presses a calming hand to Shane’s chest. “Is alright.”

"It's not," Shane says, and turns to look at the woman on screen. Her full, rosy cheeks and softly arched brows. Pretty eyes framed by mascara lashes and pink lips. By all accounts, a beautiful woman, with a body to match, based on the fade-to-black bedroom scene from earlier in the film. Shane ought to be attracted to her. He *wants* to be.

Ilya presses his lips together, an unreadable expression. “I think you would know by now if you liked them,” he says quietly.

This is unfortunate news. Something quietly cracks in Shane's subconscious. He looks past Ilya at his high ceiling, thinking back on all his years of high school waiting to meet the right girl. The few dates he's gone on since being drafted have all led to nowhere, nothing, zilch. He doesn't want to think about this right now, though. He just wants to think about Ilya, focus on their day and a quarter left.

Ilya must pick up on it because he drops another kiss on the corner of Shane's mouth. "But you do not think *he* is attractive, either," Ilya says, matter-of-factly.

"What?"

"Him," Ilya points at the man on the screen, face twisted like he's looking at a bug. "He is not hot. At all. Even *you* could do better."

Shane stuffs down the anxiety that looms over him always and directs his attention back to Ilya, who watches him like a big cat stalking prey.

"I could?" A grin slowly pulls at Shane's mouth as he lets himself fall back into the game. "Like who?"

Ilya doesn't answer him in words. Instead, it's with bites along his throat, downward, until Shane's sweatshirt gets in the way. Ilya slides his hands beneath it, rucking it up until Shane's chest is exposed. He drops his head, and Shane can't see his mouth anymore, but it nips along his sternum and pecs, lips parting over a nipple.

Shane lets himself moan softly, a hand working its way into Ilya's curls to hold on. He finally lets his legs slide open, and Ilya settles down between them, muscular core giving Shane something firm to leisurely grind against.

Ilya spends a long time mouthing his way over Shane's body, searching out places Shane can't remember anyone ever touching before. Over old scars raised on his skin, creases that he didn't know existed until Ilya's tongue finds them. Any worry he'd held about past girlfriends and his lack of interest in them falls away, until only the present moment matters.

"*Fuck*," Shane sighs as Ilya works his sweats down, just enough, until his cock pops free. Ilya takes him in his mouth, and the sound of the film on TV fades into the background. Shane shuts his eyes and laces both hands into Ilya's hair. What a wonderful distraction from all the problems this life presents him with.

Ilya expertly brings him ninety percent of the way, and when Shane's nearly lost himself, he hurriedly pushes Ilya back. "*Wait, wait,*" he whispers hastily. Ilya sits up, eyes bleary and lips reddened and slick. Shane slides from the couch onto his shaky knees, cock still hanging free but forgotten. Ilya sits back with renewed interest, eyes wide as he takes in the view of Shane kneeling between his legs.

"Fuck, Hollander…"

Shane uses what he's learned so far from his handful of times with Ilya. He runs his cheek along the inseam of his sweatpants, dropping his lids halfway down to show how much he

wants it, how much he's affected. Shane finally shuts his eyes and presses his face into Ilya's crotch, feeling out every firm shape under the fabric with nuzzling lips and cheeks. He breathes in, scent concentrated and dizzying in its intensity. Shane's cock aches, and he presses the heel of one palm into it, his other hand coming up to pull Ilya's pants down.

He takes his time before he gets his mouth around Ilya, licking and sucking marks from tip to base. Ilya watches with unadulterated wonder. Shane never thought he'd have this much influence over someone. In all his time being captain, this is the most he's ever affected anyone. He imagines that if he asked, Ilya might do anything he wanted him to. Which makes Shane all the more content to stay right where he is, working Ilya's foreskin and frenulum with his tongue and wondering if he'll ever have anyone else like this, if he'll ever *want* anyone else like this.

He takes him in his mouth, and Ilya's breath shushes through his teeth as he grips a throw pillow tightly in his fist, the other brushing through the short sides of Shane's hair.

In all of Shane's most private, secret desires, nights spent up late watching porn on his phone or imagining a faceless man, he never thought he'd be content to swallow. Never thought he'd *crave* to. But Ilya has blown any expectations he'd ever had about his sexuality out of the water. When Ilya begins breathing heavier, chest rising and falling rapidly, Shane hooks one of Ilya's thighs over his shoulder and holds onto it tightly, pushes his mouth down the shaft until his nose is buried in the wiry hair at the base, and looks Ilya in the eye as he swallows around the head, asking him to finish.

Ilya curls in on himself as he comes, brows drawn tight and hands bracing on either side of Shane's head. "*Shane, Shane—"*

Fuck, Shane thinks, his own hand pressing against his cock. He can't *breathe*, and before he knows it, he's coming onto the floor below, mind whiting out and forgetting entirely about the dick blocking up his airway.

Before he can reorient himself, Ilya pulls him onto the sofa, chest to chest. Air fills Shane's lungs, and their mouths collide in the next second, Ilya holding tightly to him. Shane wonders distantly if it's gross for Ilya to be kissing him when his mouth is such a mess.

Ilya doesn't seem to care, tongue licking in greedily as he hums.

He slouches back, pulling Shane with him as Shane begins to recover.

"Are you okay?" Ilya asks him, breath ragged. He pets over the top of his head.

"Mhm," Shane nods, temple resting against Ilya's collar.

"Love how much you love it," Ilya murmurs, and Shane huffs a tired laugh. "Not everyone does. You do."

In this quiet moment of clarity, Shane can admit to himself that he does. He *likes* men, and he *likes* sex, and he likes *cock* specifically— feeling it, smelling it, tasting it. He used to feel

ashamed of that, in the years after his first encounter with Ilya. There had been many feelings to contend with, mental blocks to get over. He can admit at least that much to himself now.

He swallows thickly, taste of Ilya still in the back of his throat, and wonders what it means about him. He should probably figure it out soon.

Ilya squeezes his waist. “Let's light the fireplace, yes?”

Shane grins slowly. “Yeah. You like it?”

“Is warm,” Ilya shrugs, but Shane knows that he *does* like it. “Do you have any vodka?”

“I do… You sure you want some?”

“Only a little. Is nice by a fire,” Ilya says. “Do not worry. I will not overdo it like the other night.”

“You’d have to drink a lot to get that bad again.”

“Ah, never again.”

*

Ilya holds a short, clear glass in one hand. He lies comfortably on the area rug, his head cushioned on one of Shane’s thick thighs. The fireplace is lit, clean flame blazing. The sky outside is only half cloudy, now, painted in peachy oranges as the sun sets. The skin of Shane’s legs glows warm and golden. Ilya absently runs a hand up and down one, the coarse hair along his shin becoming displaced before he smoothes it back into place.

Shane runs his own hand along Ilya’s jaw, feeling the curve of his bones, down over his chin. The pads of his fingers brush over the raised mole high on one cheekbone. Along the hollows of his cheek. Traces his lips until Ilya’s tongue presses out to lick.

Ilya’s phone buzzes on the counter, a new text.

Ilya ignores it and is content.

It could be Alexei, it could be Sveta. It could be his team, trying to arrange another practice for tomorrow. Shane's team may be messaging him, too, but he hasn't heard from Shane's phone in a long time, either. Shane will have to get up tomorrow and go to practice, either way. Ilya knows he must be nervous about what he's going to say to his team. Ilya wishes he could be a fly on the wall in the locker room.

But that is tomorrow.

Shane clears his throat, the third time in the last five minutes. Ilya knows he's gearing up to say something. He doesn't rush him.

Shane reaches down and takes the glass from Ilya's hand. Has a sip. Gives it back.

"Is there anyone else you see like me?" Shane finally asks.

Ilya wets his lips. "Like you?"

"More than once. Or… regularly." He sounds apprehensive.

When Ilya turns to chance a glance, Shane's face is perfectly even, eyes glazed over as he stares at the fire. Only the slight line between his brows gives away any feeling on the matter.

Ilya has never been one to lie about his sex life. He certainly can't start now. Not when he's being asked outright.

"Only one other. There is a woman, Svetlana. She is a childhood friend from Moscow. We fuck sometimes, out of convenience." He watches the tendon in Shane's neck tense up. The bob of his throat as he swallows. Ilya runs his palm down Shane's leg again, squeezing his ankle. "Is nothing more than that, though. Only convenience."

Shane looks down at him, eyes still glassy. "Any men?" he asks carefully, devoid of any emotion. Ilya wonders what he feels, deep down in his gut— rage or sorrow? Both? Is this something he would cry about alone, or take out on the ice with him, direct into a puck or a shoulder check?

"No," Ilya says honestly. "Is only you." It's only been him for a little while, in fact.

Shane nods.

"And you?"

"Me?" Shane's eyes shift around. Out the window, to the fire, back to Ilya's face.

That's all the answer Ilya needs. What he'd already known. He figures he ought to give Shane the dignity to say it himself, though. "You don't see anyone else? Out of convenience?"

Shane shakes his head, nibbling on his lip. "It can only be us, though, right? Because of who we are? It's not like we can go out and sleep with other men anyway." He sounds dejected.

He's right. They are famous hockey players. There are not many options for them, outside of other people in their position. To go out and find a random man to sleep with could easily shoot their career point-blank. If it didn't get out immediately, it would no doubt work its way to the public eye eventually.

Still. That's not the point. At least not to Ilya.

“I think,” Ilya starts, turning all the way onto his back to look at him. He reaches up to hold Shane’s chin gently in his fingers. “Even if I could fuck as many men as I like… I would not find many like you.”

Shane rolls his eyes, jerking his chin out of Ilya’s grasp. “Shut up. Be serious.” His frown deepens. “I’m the most inexperienced guy in the league. Just about anyone else out there would be better.”

Ilya’s throat aches, looking at that downtrodden expression on Shane’s face. He catches his chin again, holds it firmer. “Yes, maybe. But it would not be the same.” *Please understand, don’t make me say it, please—* “Would you go out and find other men to fuck you? If you could? Would just *anyone* do?”

Shane’s eyes flicker between Ilya’s gaze and his mouth.

“No.”

Ilya’s lids flutter. “Is same for me. You understand?”

Shane reaches down, holds Ilya’s face just the same. “I do.”

Ilya pushes up, glass set onto the edge of the fireplace, and he doesn’t have to ask Shane to kiss him; he’s already there waiting for it.

*

It’s Shane's turn to have his head pillowed on Ilya’s thigh.

It’d gotten dark out, but it'd started snowing again. They’d briefly turned on the news, nervous energy between them as they’d waited for the commercial break to end. Sadly, there were only a few inches expected overnight, and no plans for anything to stop running.

Ilya runs a hand over Shane’s shoulders and up into the back of his sweatshirt, feeling along warm, smooth skin.

"Remember when you thought I was asshole the first time we had sex?” he murmurs.

“What, a few days ago?”

Ilya frowns. "No, first time. In hotel. Two years ago." How could Shane have forgotten? Ilya couldn’t forget a single detail about that encounter if he tried.

"You mean when we blew each other for five minutes? I didn't think that counted as sex.” Shane laughs.

"What else would it be?" Ilya lightly pinches the skin at his waist, and Shane squirms. "You looked very cute, that first night. Sitting with your legs together. After I had sucked your dick."

"That was so fucking embarrassing afterward," Shane groans.

"I thought it was very cute. Your first time with a man. How lucky for me."

Shane's mouth cracks into a grin, and he nuzzles his cheek into Ilya's thigh. It makes Ilya want to say the sappiest, softest things that live in his heart, deep down in places he hasn't ventured in a decade... since…

He shakes his head.

"I wanted to stay, even then."

"You could've."

"Ah, no." Ilya scoffs. "You were panicking."

"Still. I would've liked it if you had."

"Me too." Ilya slips his hand around the front, pressing it over Shane's naval. A bit of stubbly hair grows there at the soft of his stomach, a treasure trail that he must shave. "Your little face was so sad when I teased you about leaving."

"I thought you'd used me," Shane admits. "Sometimes I can't tell teasing from… not teasing." He huffs a little laugh. "I used to get bullied when I was little."

Ilya tries to imagine Shane when he was younger. He wonders if he'd been small or if he'd gotten a growth spurt early on. "Bullied? Like, hit and kicked?"

"No. Sometimes. Mostly just words. For how quiet I was. Or how I looked."

Ilya plays with his ear. "A shame."

"Shut up, please," Shane groans.

"Is true. Your mother… she is Japanese, yes?"

Shane nods, eyes drifting shut.

"Was it very difficult growing up in Canada?" Ilya doesn't know what it's like compared to Moscow. In Russia, lots of things could get you targeted in school, including being anything but white. Ilya hadn't known of anyone other than Sveta. And he'd definitely never met anyone like Shane until he'd gotten older.

Shane shrugs, a hand coming up to cushion his face against Ilya's leg. "Not as much as it could've been, I guess. I wasn't the only Asian kid. When I started playing hockey, I worked

really hard to be better than everyone else. The other kids liked me a bit more after that. Got picked first for teams. I'd go till sundown on a dead-end street in the summers."

Ilya hums, staring down at the perfect shape of his nose. "And now you are the best," Ilya murmurs.

After a moment, Shane turns his head to look up at him. A grin breaks out on his face.

"Wait—" Ilya starts, face morphing into horror.

"You said it."

"Was hyper— hyper— *fuck,"* Ilya covers his face with a hand, trying to remember the term. "*Exaggeration.*"

"Hyperbole? I can't believe you know that word," Shane laughs.

Ilya bends down to shut him up with a kiss.

"You said it," Shane says between kisses, "You said—" Ilya kisses him harder, until Shane is purring happily beneath him, pressed back into the rug. When Ilya lets him up for air, his eyes have darkened once more. "Need you."

Ilya swallows thickly. He can't believe it, but he needs him too, even still, after so many times today. His appetite for Shane may never diminish.

"Ilya," Shane pants, a hand reaching down to cup his dick. "Can we, again?"

"Mm," Ilya nods, head swimming. "You can have anything you want." *Anything.* Ilya is afraid because it's true, in every way. If Shane asked him, he's afraid he'd do it, *anything,* no matter how wild or reckless.

"Want you, then," Shane sighs, mouth pulling into a delicate smile.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for an entirely indulgent chapter. Not a damn thing happened except that they had some talks. I got done editing and thought... should I cut this down and put off the next update until I can add some of the next day in? Then thought, well, *someone* out there may want to read this. So here it is.

I promise you reader, next chapter, we'll get on with the plot. PROMISE. CROSS MY HEART. Thank god I'm not trying to please an editor. They'd despise me👀

———

Something I've seen talked about is how unrealistic it is for Shane to go without sex for long spans. Maybe it's only because I'm demi (but mind you, not low libido) but that doesn't seem very unrealistic at all? For a closeted man in the NHL/MLH who just isn't that into girls, and is very focused on hockey, and has access to the internet? I've seen plenty of non-demi men- straight and gay- talk about dry spells that last for years. Some people are fine, and others can't fathom it, but show-Shane very much seems like the type to be alright. Like no doubt frustrated-- but alright.

I know in the book, he has a bit more experience with both men and women, but if you didn't know that and were *only* going by the show, you'd assume that Ilya was sleeping around (we see it) and Shane had a "girlfriend" once (that we NEVER see) and really spent most of his free time reading and working out.

All that to say... I'm going my own way with Shane. He's tried dating women, he only recently has realized that he only feels real desire for men, and he's pretty inexperienced. Maybe further on in canon, years down the way, it'd make more sense for him to have those few hookups with other guys. Fine. But we're in 2013/14. Referencing Hudson Williams, my headcanon is that Shane has never had a sexual experience he actually wanted to be there for until Ilya.

———

I'm not sure if the books ever delve into Shane's life growing up, but I'd love to know what it was like for him and his extended family, specifically with being biracial. It very well could've not been an issue, but there are some ways it could have been! Really, I'm just nosy with all the characters I love hehe. I want to know about their early experiences and how it shaped them. That's why it's fun to write Ilya's memories of childhood.

———

- I swear Ilya was going to eat ice cream on the couch *before* I saw Connor eating Haagen Dazs... but the visual sure helped👀

———

As always I'm trying to write and get updates out every 4-5 days, but I'm dealing with some irl stressors at the moment. I never know when I'm getting the free time (and

mental alignment) to write, so, you know, your patience is always appreciated🧡 (I've never gotten a mean comment though, for which I'm also appreciative☺!)

Thanks as always for reading. More soon!

March 10 Note: I haven't been able to write at all in the last few days, so I'm expecting the next update to be a couple days later than normal. Apologies😩

Chapter 21: The Shadow of the Thing

Chapter Summary

He's never fallen in love before, and he can't talk to a single soul about it.

Chapter Notes

Hello. Look at me posting on a Monday.

A note about captains: Something I wasn't thinking closely about is that, being this early in his career, Shane wouldn't have even been captain for very long.

For now, I'm going to headcanon (just for this fic) that he's been their captain for the 2012/13 season, and now this 2013/14 season. Unless this goes against some major plot point. It'd have to be pretty major, though.

I realize that putting him as captain back in 2012 is even more unrealistic than it is in the books, but we can suspend our disbelief just a little bit more, can't we? Capeesh? My apologies, I was distracted by all the yearning, and failed to consider the hockey of it all.

In the books Ilya is only assistant captain by 2013. I've bumped him up a year too, so 2013 is his first year as captain.

The good thing is that it makes my own plot work better. Shane being captain is pretty much brand new. His relationships to the whole team are still shaky and unknown.

Thanks for your time. Onto the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-One

The muscles in Ilya's thighs ache sharply as he stretches them out. He rolls to one side and sees the back of Shane's dark head nestled into a pillow, curve of his smooth shoulder marred by a small mark Ilya had sucked into it the night before. Shane's ribs expand incrementally with slow breath, asleep. Ilya presses his face into the mattress, mouth pulling into an involuntary smile.

He’s happy. It’s one of the best things he’s ever felt.

It’s the last day, and Ilya tries very hard not to consider anything beyond the confines of Shane’s bed. Beyond the next day or the next hour. He shuffles closer to him, gazing at the bare expanse of his back, the various bites and hickies sucked into his perfect skin. He pulls the blankets up over them both and slips his arm beneath, over the notch of Shane’s waist.

Ilya presses his nose to Shane's nape and breathes deep like it’ll help him hold onto it longer than this morning. Unthinkable that he won’t get to do this anymore after today. It’s the nicest he’s felt, maybe ever. Just over a decade ago, someone sat him down to tell him that this kind of thing between men wasn’t normal. Or natural. That it wouldn’t lead to good things, and in fact might lead to very bad things.

This thing with Shane is the best thing in the world, though, in Ilya's opinion. Something fluttering and soft eases into place inside Ilya’s chest, like a bird landing. A piece of himself found. He hadn’t even known to go looking for it. Instead, Shane had found it for him, picked it up off the dirty ground, brushed it off, smoothed over its ruffles, and handed it back to him. And not by doing a thing except for smiling at him and sharing his air and letting him in close.

His mouth purses to kiss the back of Shane’s neck, baby hairs tickling the bow of his lips. “*I don't want to go,”* he whispers, so quiet he may as well not have said it.

Once more in Russian. Just so that he knows he bore his heart on his sleeve fully. This once.

Shane stirs, rolling onto his back and twisting around to look at him. He blinks, eyes not nearly as bleary as they should be. Ilya goes still.

“I don't want you to either,” Shane murmurs, small grin on his mouth like he already knew. God help Ilya, someone like Shane knowing him is too good a thing to hope to hold onto. Shane keeps rolling until they’re facing each other, and Ilya has no choice but to snake his arms around him and draw him the rest of the way in.

They kiss, and Shane doesn’t complain even once about morning breath.

*

They stand in the bathroom later on, brushing their teeth in silence. Ilya watches Shane through the mirror, and Shane flushes when he notices, but doesn’t look away. Outside of

bed, reality begins to creep closer around the periphery. The pool of black in Ilya's stomach churns, and he's reminded that he'll spend tonight in a bed by himself.

Shane takes a shower to rinse the smell of sex off.

Ilya doesn't. Not yet. He doesn't mind carrying it with him downstairs to make coffee. To pick through Shane's fridge, prepared meals stacked in glass storage containers and cans of ginger ale, bottles of nicer ginger beer. He finds an apple that will have to do until Shane comes down to make eggs, as seems his routine.

This could be so easy, Ilya thinks as he turns on the television. If either of them had any other job, it could be. Cohabitating with someone. Ilya had never thought himself capable of it long-term. He wouldn't think Shane was either, with all his particulars, but Ilya seems to slot right into his life in an unobtrusive way. Without even trying. Without any bending.

He receives a text while waiting for Shane.

Marleau - 8:43 am - We're meeting at the rink on 57th. You coming?

*

After they've eaten, Ilya watches Shane gather his essentials, wallet, phone, keys, and chuck them into a gym bag. "Be back in a few hours," Shane tells him. Ilya hadn't asked, but he'd wondered. "Soon as I can," Shane adds, turning to him. Ilya likes the sound of that. "Your team isn't practicing before the flight tomorrow?"

"Nope," Ilya says, popping the 'p'. If he tells Shane that they are, he'll no doubt admonish him for shirking his captain's duties. He'll worry about it enough for the both of them, which is silly. Ilya will tell him later, if he doesn't find out anyway.

They stare at each other. Ilya holds his breath.

Then, Shane closes the two steps between them and kisses him, his breath still smelling of toothpaste.

"Bye," Ilya tells him.

*

When Ilya's alone, the pit in his stomach slowly begins to expand until it becomes harder to ignore.

He turns the television on low and lets it eat up the background noise in his brain. He feels twitchy. Fidgety. He decides he ought to blow off a bit of steam in Shane's workout room to distract himself.

He stands in the middle of it, dark wood floors and exercise equipment sitting on protective mats, a nice view of the city out its big floor-to-ceiling windows. When he's on the stationary cycle, he finally texts Marleau back.

Ilya - 9:15 am - I am not coming.

As captain, he ought to be heading down to the rink right now, go over any changes to their plans with Desjourneys. He ought to be keeping himself in the know with his team, checking to make sure that everyone is doing alright. He does his best to be a good captain, and things are going well so far in his first year. He is well liked by nearly everyone on his team.

If he left now, he'd get to the rink and practice for at least an hour, maybe two. He'd get caught up talking, and they'd all want to go to lunch, the last afternoon in Montreal. Ilya would have a hard time slipping away after that.

Shane would come home in the time he was gone, and who knew how long it'd be before Ilya arrived back?

Any time wasted at all is intolerable. Not when he has to return to his hotel that evening. When their time is so little, so valuable to him.

Marleau - 9:17 am - ok.

If Marleau is upset with him about skipping out, it isn't apparent.

He lifts on Shane's weight bench, a stupid thing to do without anyone else around. Shane would have a fit, but that only makes Ilya grin faintly to himself as he finishes his reps. He wants to feel it, let the strain in his arms take up his concentration.

His phone buzzes again, and he expects it to be Marleau, probably with one final remark about what Ilya might be getting up to at Shane's apartment. Ilya leaves it to check later, but when he gets up to do leg presses, the phone starts ringing where he left it on the weight bench.

He stares at it, a pinch of worry in his chest. His team does not call him, not unless there's an emergency. The only people who call him are Sveta, Alexei, and his father. It's his brother's name on the caller I.D.

*

Shane is chock full of conflicting feelings. He's warm down to the bone, even walking through the snow-covered parking lot of the Montreal arena. Ilya's words stick to his skin, cover him in a welcome haze. *I don't want to go.* Is that what he'd said in Russian, too? Shane wants to ask Ilya to start telling him what specific words mean.

The other, deeper feeling he pins is dread for the end of the day. It makes his nerves prickle under his skin, only made worse by the anticipation of seeing his team.

The air about the locker room is a murky soup of feelings. Everyone takes glances at him, and Shane is at least glad to see that some of them look embarrassed in the light of a practice day.

Both Hayden and J.J. linger near his changing stall. Shane drops his gym bag in front of it to announce his arrival.

"Speak of the devil," Hayden says, but he's got a small smile on his face.

"Guys," Shane murmurs.

"*Capitaine*…" J.J. says hesitantly, looking Shane up and down. Shane wonders what he looks like. If they can tell he's spent the last twelve hours cooped up with Ilya Rozanov, mouths and hands touching and rarely ever parting. He almost wishes they *could* tell. That someone knew, driven by a touch of pride that makes him want to show off the fact that he, *he* pulled someone like Ilya.

"So what's the damage?" Shane says, trying for nonchalance. He looks around the room at the remaining players getting ready. "Everyone still pissed?"

Hayden shrugs in that noncommittal way he always does. "Could be worse. Out of the guys who were at lunch yesterday, majority of them are embarrassed about the whole thing. Probably wish they could all just forget about it." He eyes J.J.

"I'd be fine with that," Shane mutters, beginning to strip out of his winter layer.

"Shane," J.J. starts.

Shane holds up a hand. This sort of confrontation makes his insides shrivel up, and he also doesn't like seeing such conflicting emotions on the young man's face. J.J. is normally so bright and cheery, eager to play hockey and joke the entire way. "It's alright, J.J. You were out with the guys, I know how it gets sometimes."

"Still," J.J. sighs through his nose. "I do not *like* Rozanov. Since I joined this team, the only thing I have heard is that we try to massacre Boston. Every time. Even off the ice, if the liquor flows right and the boys get to talking."

Shane can understand. Sometimes they get so worked up that it's like a riot in the locker room, insults thrown from every side directed mostly at Boston's front line. Shane even joins in sometimes. It's fun when he's not taking it very seriously. Sometimes, it gets taken too far for comfort, though.

The Metros had always been his mother's favorite team. He'd grown up watching them, admiring their practical, focused strategies that he could recognize and follow as if he'd planned them himself. They were the best in the league at using speed and agility to snake their way to goals.

By the time he'd joined them, he'd begun to see the team— and the world— more clearly. They were fast and smart, yes, but their locker room was like every other locker room he'd been warned about coming up in the juniors. The Metros were not so much a shining beacon in the dark as they were simply efficient.

And they happened to employ a very good and thorough PR team.

Shane had gotten with the program. Made himself the *most* efficient, and now here he is at the top. The captain of the team he grew up idolizing.

"But," J.J. says, drawing his attention back as he leans into the edge of his stall with a shoulder. "Many things are different from how I thought they would be. Maybe this is just one more thing." He eyes Shane thoughtfully. "You and Rozanov are friends?" Everyone seems to need confirmation lately. Double, triple-checking.

Shane nods stiffly. "We've become… friendly. This past week. Just by phone."

J.J. sighs, throwing his hands up. "I still hate his fucking guts. And I'll knock his teeth in if he comes after you. But… if you say he is good... then I must believe our captain."

Shane swallows thickly, heart panging at the sentiment and the way J.J. grins at him. He realizes just how much his team's opinion mattered to him by how relieved he feels. "I appreciate it. Not sure the rest of the guys are convinced I'm a good fit, though," Shane says. "Don't hedge your bets on me just yet."

"Yeah, well, that's not saying much," Hayden pipes up, finally. "Their idea of a good captain is someone who'll get shitfaced with them after the fact and make even worse jokes than they do."

J.J. chimes in, "You are much better than the Metros' previous."

"How would you know? You only just started," Hayden gripes.

"I *know* this team," J.J. insists, looking indignant. "I know every player on the roster for the last three years, and Hollander is the best of them all."

Hayden rolls his eyes. "*Thanks."*

J.J. laughs at him. "There is no point in denying. He is the best. It is why he is where he is."

Shane lets himself grin between the two of them, finally beginning to feel better. Even if things continue to go south with the rest of his team, he at least seems to have two people who will stick by him through the thick of it.

The idea that that might not be true if they knew *everything* is something he doesn't let himself consider for the moment. He can't, if he's going to continue to play hockey with them.

"Drapeau was running his mouth earlier," Hayden warns him as the three of them make their way to the ice. "Within earshot of Theriault. On purpose, I think."

"Great."

"Hollander," J.J. says before they reach the end of the tunnel. "Pike told me you are finally seeing someone."

"What?" Shane scoffs with disbelief, turning to Hayden on his other side. Even in the shadowy light, Hayden looks red in the face.

"I didn't fucking *tell* him. The kid overheard me telling Jackie on the phone. She took the twins to see the grandparents yester—"

"You're telling Jackie about me, too?"

"She's my wife. Of *course* I am!"

"I don't want the team to get ideas."

J.J. laughs. "We'll keep it between us, then."

We'll see how long that lasts, Shane thinks, watching Hayden's shoulders as he steps onto the ice first. It won't be the worst thing in the world if the team thinks he's dating a woman. It might even endear him to them, give them something more to relate to, present a path into being accepted. *Being one of the guys.* That's a lot of lying, though. And Shane is tired.

He wonders how bad it would be if they knew that it was a man he had for a lover. How bad it would be if they knew it was Ilya.

Theriault stops him with a short *"Hollander"* before he gets to the ice. J.J. side-eyes them as he skates out.

"Yeah?" Shane asks evenly.

"Team's wiley today. Wrangle them in, yeah? Motivate them."

"Of course," Shane nods.

Theriault takes a breath, hands cocked on his hips, and Shane knows that that's not all. "Mingling with Boston isn't the smartest choice. Business or otherwise," Theriault says.

"I understand," Shane says, trying to keep things strictly professional. That's one of his major roles, after all, being a main line of communication. Only, now he has to advocate for himself. "I didn't think it would reflect too badly on either of our teams."

"Sure." Theriault waves a hand. "Mushy stories are nice for the public. But what drives sales is the competition. The *fight*." Theriault scowls. "You might be asked about it before tomorrow's game."

Shane frowns. "I'll make sure it's clear Boston and Montreal still hate each other," he says mechanically.

"Make sure you do," Theriault sighs, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and forefinger tiredly. "It's not just gameplay and sportsmanship, Hollander. I know that's your *thing,* but it's money, too. I don't have to explain that to you. Considering who your manager is."

Shane grinds his molars together. Nods. He can tell that there is a lot more Theriault would like to say off the record, but can't for one reason or another.

Which is fine. Shane can only fight one battle at a time, anyway.

*

He's as fast and efficient as he's ever been during practice. The puck sticks to his blade… whenever someone decides to pass it to him, which is the crux of the problem.

He thinks he can feel it after ten minutes into the first scrimmage. Call it intuition, or what his junior coach had called "an uncanny ability to recognize patterns, the likes of which he hadn't seen in half a decade," but Shane thinks that his own team is keeping the puck from him.

Not Hayden. Because Hayden is playing the opposing side today. Both he and J.J. are. This is so that Shane can observe them better and mention anything he notices, as asked for by Theriault.

Comeau is on his right today, Laine on his left. And when Shane is open for a pass down at one end or the other, only once is it slapped his way, and it skitters out too far behind him to connect. His team is not *that* bad at passing; he knows this for sure.

Shane doesn't want to be paranoid, but it's hard when Comeau and Laine are chuckling together as they get back into position for the next face-off.

Hayden meets his eye across the line.

Drapeau laughs at something down at the goal, and Shane tries not to feel insane about it.

"Don't let 'em get to you, man," Hayden says as he skates up during a break, both retrieving their water bottles from over the boards. "They're just messing around."

It doesn't feel like messing around. "So I'm not imagining it? Feels like rookie hazing all over again," Shane mutters.

"You know how it is with these old hats. Give 'em an inch, they'll take a mile? Is that how it goes?"

"What did I give them in the first place?" Shane asks, eyeing Laine and Renaud as they skate by.

"If they know where your soft spots are, they'll press on them," Hayden says.

"You heard that from Jackie, didn't you?"

"I definitely didn't come up with it," Hayden laughs. "They're just trying to get a rise out of you."

It's working, Shane thinks.

They're nearing the end of the second hour, and all Shane wants is to get out and get home. He'll pick something up for lunch on the way, maybe something he can eat as well, now that most of the restaurants have opened back up. There's a Japanese place halfway between the arena and his apartment that makes a good brown-rice sushi roll that they created just for him. He always makes sure to tip above and beyond for the trouble, and mentions them every once in a while in a press interview.

Just as he's wondering if Ilya likes sushi, he's knocked in his side into the boards, pain sparking out for his ribs. It seems far too hard a hit for a scrimmage with your own team.

Shane pushes off, bouncing back like a spring, and whirls to look at Renaud as he skates away. "My bad, Hollander," he calls back gruffly, searching out the puck.

Hayden ices Renaud's skates as he comes to a stop in front of him, a heated exchange starting up.

Shane is about to tell them both to knock it off when Comeau brushes past him with another bump to the shoulder, easily avoidable. Shane feels a dull swell of anger bubble up inside him. He's so used to keeping his cool. But something about today has him on edge. He uses his gloved hand to shove at Comeau's shoulder before he gets too far.

Comeau is only thrown off balance for a moment before he rights himself, but his face is twisted up when he rounds on Shane. "What's your fucking problem, Hollander?" he spits.

"What the fuck is *your* problem?" Shane demands, pushing into his face. Shane is pleased at how stunned he looks. "You guys've been blowing off passes to me all morning."

Comeau looks down his nose at him. "You're outta your mind," he says wryly, and Shane knows then that he's gunning for a fight— a real fight. Shane has half a mind to give it to him, his prickling nerves turning to boiling rage.

"You're acting like a child playing keepaway because your *feelings* were a little hurt?" Shane spits.

Comeau grits his teeth in a grin, helmet bumping into Shane's as he gets down in his face.

"*My* feelings? You're the one out of control here." He motions around them to the others, who've all turned toward them to watch. "No one's keeping the puck from you, Hollander. You're just not where you're supposed to be. You forget to bring your head with you this morning? Leave it at home?"

Anger roils off Shane's shoulders in waves, and he realizes that he's let Comeau get to him. More than that, Shane recognizes the anger that had already been there before he'd even arrived at practice. He's unused to feeling this *much* of it.

Anger at his team and at this world, anger that Ilya is leaving, and that they'll go back to how they used to be, still a secret to everyone but themselves. Anger at the knowledge that none of the men around him would ever back him up if he turned out to be different than them. And Shane is fast realizing that he *is* different*,* and he feels helpless to do anything about it.

"There are guys checking him from both sides," Hayden pipes up. "We can all see that*,* Comeau. Just lay off. We all just need to get over it." Hayden eyes Shane apologetically, and Shane hates it, hates to be the center of this sort of attention, at the center of repeat apologies that don't actually get to the root of the problem. The problem being that Comeau seems to be *looking* for a reason to treat him this way.

He glares at Comeau. "If you have a problem with me, bring it to me. Don't interfere with a team practice."

"Aye-aye," Comeau says, saluting with two fingers. His mouth is stretched into a thin line, a grimace instead of a grin. "Lead on, *Capitaine."*

Theriault watches from the boards, face hard and a bit pale, and Shane knows that he's only really thinking about the bottom line of a team that can't gel. Shane is supposed to be the one to rally them, handle relations, but all he's done in an hour is cause them to further splinter.

It doesn't seem like it should be his fault, but it *feels* like it is. He's distracted, and can't keep a hold on himself.

They disperse, finally.

"Asshole," Hayden mutters when Shane is within hearing distance.

"I'm done for the day," Shane says, heading for the tunnel. Theriault doesn't stop him. Shane can only hope he'll pull aside some of the others to reason with them, but it seem unlikely in light of everything. "We good?" he asks halfheartedly, looking at Hayden over his shoulder.

Hayden doesn't hide his confusion. "Yeah, man, of course, but..."

Shane only nods, turning away. He catches a glimpse of J.J. staring after them from center ice, a similar look on his face.

Shane wishes that he could explain all of the things going on inside of him. His anxiety about the team and leading them to the playoffs, of being their new captain. Deeper than that, he wishes he could tell one of them that it's not just that he and Ilya are friends, but that Shane's

life has begun to shift drastically in the last few days without him even meaning for it to happen. That he's begun to figure some things out about himself, things he didn't think he'd ever have to consider so deeply. Things he can't reconcile with his current life trajectory. He wishes he could tell them, tell *anyone,* all of the brand new feelings that he's having for the first time.

He's never fallen in love before, and he can't talk to a single soul about it.

He's ashamed at how choked up that makes him as he sheds his gear off alone in the locker room. He pushes it all down, forcing his face into a mask of indifference as he makes a beeline for the shower. He wants to get in and out as fast as possible. There are marks all over his back that he hadn't considered, and he would like if none of the others saw them.

By the time he's slipping into a shirt and track pants, the others are filing off the ice. Unlike before, all eyes are off him now, and he's glad for the semblance of privacy.

Hayden stares at him as he's lacing up his boots, trying to grab his attention. Shane only looks at him when he stands to gather his things.

"You coming to lunch?" Hayden asks, eyes flicking to J.J. "Just a few of us. Friends," he says the last part quietly. Shane appreciates the offer, and at the same time, it makes a new spike of guilt stab in his gut. How much of this can his body take? Will he ever feel balanced again?

"I can't," he says, keeping his voice down.

Hayden's face shifts to a self-satisfied grin. "Got a hot date?"

He wishes he were able to joke about it. But the idea of admitting it only makes him want to shrink further in on himself. "No," he mutters, slinging his gym bag over his shoulder. "Let's have lunch another time— soon," he promises. He nods at J.J. on his way out, feeling guilty that he looks even more confused than Hayden. Shane just needs to get out. He needs cold air and to get out of this stinking locker room.

His boots echo down the empty hallway to the parking lot, and his brain is on autopilot the whole way to the first light down the street. There, he pulls off into an empty parking lot and rests his forehead against his steering wheel until he can breathe normally, all of the anxiety and anger and self-loathing finally easing up.

He pulls his phone out and sees a new text from his mother asking if the Metros have practice today. A new wave of guilt crashes over him at the sight of her name, and he realizes that out of everyone, he most wishes he could talk to her.

He wishes he could talk to her without feeling like a scared, pathetic little boy, but he knows that that's what he'll feel if he does. He wishes he could lament to her about his fragmented dynamics within his team, about his coach, about the media. About the league, and Boston and Montreal. He wishes very much that he could tell her about Ilya.

He has no idea what she might say to him. They've never talked much about romance or dating or love. She'd left that up to his father, and his father, well-meaning and softspoken as

he is, had only covered the basics. It had been all about women, too, and how to treat them well, and though Shane appreciated it, it hadn't been anything revolutionary to how he'd previously thought of girls. Neither of his parents had ever talked about anything even remotely gay, except for the basics of not being a bigot. He doesn't know what they'd say if they found out that he's...

A tear tickles his cheek, leaking out of the corner of his eye. He scrubs his sleeve across his face harshly until it hurts. He doesn't answer his mother's message, instead pulling up Ilya's texts. He asks Ilya if he likes sushi. When Ilya doesn't respond right away, Shane makes a call to the restaurant anyway.

*

“You have been ignoring my calls,” Alexei says sharply in Russian.

Ilya swallows down the vitriol that is his first instinct. He takes a breath, counts to three. “How is our father?” he asks.

“Oh, spare me,” Alexei spits. “It’s always ‘How is father?’ or ‘Where is Ilya?’ with you two.”

Ilya frowns. “He still asks for me? How often?”

He can picture the vein popping on Alexei’s forehead. “He said it twice last week.”

Ilya lets his phone fall from his ear. It rests against his sweaty shorts, and he stares out Shane’s big gym window at Montreal before him. His throat tightens, breath coming shorter.

Images of both his parents come in and out of his mind, unwanted in every regard. He remembers when his mother had died, the intense fear he'd had about something happening to Grigori Rozanov, and what would happen to him and his brother in the event.

Now, despite Ilya's independence and success in adulthood, that same childhood fear rears its ugly face to look at him from the depths of that pit in his stomach. Does everything bad in life stem from there? Why does it seem to live inside of him?

When he puts the phone back to his ear, Alexei is cursing.

“What?” Ilya asks.

“I said his doctor wants to try one more medication. He thinks it is anxiety in his old age causing this.” The same doctor who gets Grigori Rozanov the prescription drugs he wants, the papers he needs, the same doctor who'd supplied his mother with— *not now.*

“His doctor is on his personal payroll,” Ilya hisses. “He is a crook, father knows this. Of course he does not want to refer him to someone else!”

For once, Alexei doesn't disagree with him. "Yes, well. Father and Polina both want to try it. It is hard to go against both of them together. He is about to receive an award of recognition next month. It will disgrace him if this comes up."

It won't, Ilya wants to insist, but he knows that Alexei only means that their *father* will feel disgraced. Too proud to receive help or let anyone else in the family receive help. Ilya squeezes his phone tight in his fist. He feels defenseless. He wonders if Alexei does too. Neither of them will ask each other, though.

"I cannot help him if he refuses to help himself," Alexei says flippantly.

"But you must keep an eye on him. If he is ill…" Ilya says, voice tight. He sighs harshly. "Alexei."

Alexei doesn't say a word, and Ilya already knows the next six turns the conversation will take. For once, he's too tired to go down this road. He does not want to be thinking about this now, in Shane's apartment, waiting for Shane to come home so that they can enjoy one last evening together.

"Fuck. I will send you the money."

"An increase," Alexei grunts. "If I have to be with him that often, it's the least you can do. You're not here to do any of it, after all."

Angry tears fill Ilya's eyes, but his voice does not betray them. "Fine."

They hang up without any goodbyes. Ilya opens his bank app and authorizes the transfer. Sends a note to his accountant. It is not so much money that he'll notice its absence. But sending it feels filthy, like he's paying someone else off to handle his problems, just like the rest of his family does. Even if that person is his own flesh and blood, and bears just as much responsibility.

He curses again, tossing the phone away like it's infected. It lands on the exercise bench, bounces off onto the mat below. Ilya can't care about whether the screen is broken or not.

He thinks of his father asking for him. The guilt Ilya feels for not being there to see him gnaws on his insides. And even more so, for being *glad* to be so far away from his entire family.

He jogs on the treadmill until his legs want to give out. He vaguely thinks that he'll be too tired to hold himself up to fuck Shane later, but that thought seems so silly and inconsequential in the shadow of this *thing* that has followed him over land and sea. He needs to run and run until all of his strength gives out.

When he's done, he drags himself to the shower and sits there beneath the spray, filling his lungs with too-moist air and warming his muscles. He cleans himself off and dresses in yesterday's pair of sweats. He looks at the selection of shirts he has left, all dirty, and then bypasses them for Shane's closet. He flips the light on and snorts at the array of mostly

athletic clothing hanging up. In one corner are a few dark suits that draw Ilya over. He looks through them, noting how plain they are. Shane does not like to stick out, unlike Ilya himself.

There is a hoodie laid out over the top of the laundry hamper in the corner. None of the clothes in the hamper smell or seem very dirty at all, a testament to how few wears Shane puts his things through before washing them. This hoodie has the Metros logo stitched to the front of it. Last year's edition. It smells faintly of detergent and Shane, and so Ilya slips it on over his wet head.

He feels hollow as he heads back to Shane's sofa to flop down. He’s hungry, but couldn’t make himself eat if he tried.

Everything feels wrong once more, and he wishes for Shane to walk through the door to take it all away again, to soothe the ache out of life that has always seemed to be there.

He turns the television on to a station showing old films and turns the volume down low. He drags a cushion beneath his head and stares blankly at the TV until his eyes burn, and then eventually slip shut. As he falls asleep, he imagines a dozen times Shane walking through the door.

*

The apartment is quiet when Shane comes home, but standing in the foyer, he can hear the faint sound of the living room television. "Ilya?" he asks, removing his boots and coat.

He finds Ilya curled on his side on the sofa, hair matted to his head, eyes shut in a deep sleep. It's a very lovely sight to soothe the deep ache in Shane's chest. He sets the bag of takeout onto the coffee table and crouches down in front of Ilya at his head.

It only takes one look for Shane to notice that his hoodie is different from any other Shane has seen him wear. One more look, and Shane recognizes it as his own, the distinct cut of it at the arm and the metal aglet of one hood string dented up from times he's chewed on it.

Shane reaches out to poke Ilya's cheek. "Wake up," he murmurs. Normally, he'd let Ilya sleep, but he wants to talk to him, about anything or nothing, just to speak to someone he knows. They only have a little while left. "Ilya."

When Ilya's eyes flutter open, Shane can see just how tired he still looks. Deep down tired, the same kind of tired Shane feels.

He keeps his voice low. "I got us lunch." Presses his lips together. "We should eat. And then in a little while... I want you to come shower with me." A nice, long, *thorough* shower. Shane will let Ilya do all the things he wants. It'll make Ilya feel better, and Shane would like very much to give up another ounce of control.

Ilya blinks, staring at him despondently. Shane nearly asks if he's alright, when one corner of Ilya's mouth finally quirks up. "I already showered. But that sounds very nice. Something must be wrong, hm?"

Shane swallows thickly. Then nods.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for your extreme patience in waiting for this chapter, reader. Life has tripped me up a bit. This is really frustrating, because I had such a good routine and momentum going up until now.

This chapter has been cobbled together repeatedly, and I'll probably be editing it a bit more over the next week (nothing major), but I HAVE to post it for my mental health. I need it OUT of my drafts so I can think more about Hollanov.

I really hope to be able to update more frequently, at or near the rate I was before, but it may take a short while to re-regulate my schedule to handle a new workload. No matter what, I enjoy writing so much. It's my refuge, and it's always my aim to get back to it asap. You're all really kind and understanding though, and I appreciate it☺ ☺ ☺

_____ Unnecessary-to-Read Writing Notes _____

- This chapter in particular, with team dynamics and a lot of characters, in a place and a sport I am extremely unfamiliar with, was daunting. I knew that even in the best of times, it was going to be laborious. It just happened to arrive on the week(s) from hell for me. So it's taken me four times as long to work through it.

- I think that J.J. is still fairly ooc, and Hayden isn't much better. Who even knows about Comeau and Drapeau, I'm still trying to pin down any semblance of personality from them from the books, other than "asshole." Let's just say that I'm really glad to be getting back to the Ilya and Shane of it all. I need the comfort of writing those boys together again😭

- The first mention of J.J. in the books (chronologically) is in 2013. I see on the wiki that his age isn't listed, and neither is the year he joined. So I'm just headcanoning him as a few years younger than Shane. He just seems more youthful in his energy, but that could be because Shane is a bit subdued anyway.

- Doing my best to not make Comeau and Drapeau comically evil or anything. Like, I just want them to be assholes. I don't see much to base them on in HR/TLG, so I'm winging it.

- Can Hayden speak French? Does it even *matter* at this point?😩 Keeping track of all these little details is getting tedious, especially when I'm not sure which are book canon vs show canon. I've also learned- and they tell you this in school- sometimes the wiki is *wrong*.🙃

- I still refer to Marleau as Chris in my head sometimes🥲 I control f for Chris now, just to make sure I haven't accidentally put it in the story. Ffffff-

_____On Playlists_____

- Some songs added to the playlist recently are In My Room by Chance Peña, If I Could Choose It Would Be You by Ruti, and Tenenbaum by The Paper Kites.

- I have yet another playlist I'm compiling for the last arc of the story (because I do that constantly.) Still tinkering with it before I unleash it, but one song that has become my "Ilya song" is No Fun by Novo Amor and Gia Margaret. Super calm and slow (and boring Ilya would say) but that's what my writing mind requires.

_____

The coming week will be another hard one, but after that, things should settle down in my life again! Until next time🧡

Chapter 22: Best Laid Plans

Chapter Summary

> The air feels as if it's been sucked from the room.

Chapter Notes

> Hello. Thanks for your patience in waiting for this chapter.
>
> Still working on answering all the lovely comments from the last chapter, I really dropped the ball on that. (I've read them all though, and love each one🧡)
>
> **18+/NSFW Chapter**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Two

“Your teammates are bigger fools than I could have imagined.” Ilya dunks his spicy tuna roll into soy sauce.

Shane has been watching him eat for the last half hour, after he’d finished his meager three brown rice rolls. Ilya holds his chopsticks a bit wrong, but with plenty of confidence to make up for it. He eats nearly twice as many rolls as Shane had, but Shane had anticipated that. Ilya seems to like spicy mayo, but is partial to the soy sauce. Ginger and wasabi on every fourth roll, to which he airs his mouth out but hums in satisfaction.

Shane remembers to reply. *His team. Fools.* “They’re normally not.” How true that is, he’s not sure anymore. Not after the donation debacle and the veteran players' dissatisfaction with

him. Still, shouldn't he stand up for them? They're his team after all; they drafted him. "J.J. and Hayden weren't that—"

"*Ah,* do not talk to me about Pike while I am eating," Ilya gripes, waving a hand.

Shane bites down on his lip hard to keep from grinning. "Do you just hate him because he's my best friend?"

"*Best friend*?" Ilya repeats, making a face. "You call him that. But is he actually?"

"Well... kinda?" Shane shrugs. "I don't have many friends. He and his wife are good people. Mostly her. I mean, him too, but—" Shane stops himself. "Yes, he's my best friend."

Ilya goes on. "Is nice that your *friends* are on your side. But does not help when your *team* isn't behind you." Ilya takes a bite, talks around it. "You are their captain. You are the face of the Metros." He doesn't mention that that means that Shane is also one of the main faces of the league as a whole. They both are.

"That's the problem. Not sure they like me being their '*face*'." Shane leans back, watching Ilya's defined jaw as it works, his blue eyes as they snap up to the television for a glance at the highlights replay, back down to the last roll on his plate. Shane lets his head thud down onto the low back of the sofa and slouches. "They *really* wouldn't like it if they knew… *everything*…"

This fact is easy enough to ignore in the day-to-day. He doesn't have to be gay or straight in the league— only be a good hockey player. When he starts thinking about it, though, usually at night when he's trying to fall asleep, his mind tends to run away with all of the what-ifs.

Ilya points his chopsticks at him. "They are nasty team."

"Don't do that," Shane huffs, reaching out to snatch the chopsticks away. Ilya doesn't seem to mind, since he's finished eating. He scoots his plate across the coffee table to make room for his socked feet. Shane goes on, "And they're not *nasty*... they're just…"

Ilya laughs. "Everyone knows they are nasty. Underneath. Is their…" he snaps his fingers, searching for the word. "*Reputation*. Especially in Boston."

"That doesn't surprise me. It's Boston. Aren't you guys 'nasty', too?"

"We are blunt. Is no hiding how we feel. But Montreal… *ugh*. Their players have reputation. All smiles to your face, to the public. And then will conspire behind your back. Pass along rumors over drinks. Is no surprise to me how they are acting."

Shane frowns. "That's how you see us?"

"Is how *smart* people see you," Ilya shrugs. "Not *you*... specifically. You are…" Ilya trails off, pressing his lips together.

"What?"

“Nothing.”

Shane scoffs. “C’mon, tell me.”

Ilya waves a dismissive hand. “Is nothing. Some on the Boston team think you are like the rest of the Metros. Playing nice to camera, acting good, ‘golden’.” Shane doesn’t have to ask for more specifics. He’s heard plenty of his own rumors around the league and on social media. “Smart people, though,” Ilya carries on, “can see it is not an act at all. You are like open book. Simple, boring.”

Shane stares at the side of his grinning face. “Smart people, huh? You?”

“I am one of them, yes. Marleau, too, most recently.”

Shane hadn’t really thought that *that* was the reputation his team had. He knew that other teams thought of them as fast and strategic, and that they were hated for it. The *conniving* part was a new one. Why would anyone tell him to his face, though?

“Is only talk,” Ilya says, rolling toward him. Maybe he’s mistaken Shane’s quietness for hurt feelings. He tucks an arm around Shane’s waist, slouches down to look up at him. “You should join Boston team. The Metros do not even know what they have.”

Shane laughs out loud before he can help it, attempting to push Ilya off him. “That’s the funniest thing you’ve ever said," he deadpans. Ilya doesn’t get pushed far before he comes crawling back on top, body pressing him down more fully on the cushions. Shane averts his eyes toward the highlight reel of the Admirals on the television. “Can you *imagine?*”

“City of Montreal might explode,” Ilya says, little smile on his mouth. He drops a small kiss against Shane’s pulse, and Shane tries not to focus on how casual and natural it feels. “And then what would our donations have been for? A city turned to rubble. All because their team captain…”

The smile slips from Shane’s lips.

“None of that,” Ilya says, frowning exaggeratedly. “It will not happen, anyway. If they lose you, they lose any chance of winning Stanley Cup. Is that simple.” He reaches up to give Shane’s earlobe a soft tug. “Can we shower yet?”

“I need to wait a little bit,” Shane says, cheeks flushing. “You want me to get you off? I could use a hand or my—”

Ilya shakes his head. “No, is alright. I’m not in a hurry.” His tongue pokes out to run across his bottom lip, and Shane’s eyes follow it. "I think I will have some more ice cream."

*

Shane stands staring at the black bulb of his douche sitting in its clear-frosted storage bag on the tank of the toilet. Behind him, he can hear Ilya fiddling with the knobs of the shower, humming tunelessly under his breath. He says something in Russian, and then, “Hollander.”

“What?” Shane answers too quickly.

“Quit thinking and come here.”

“I just need…” Shane swallows. “It’d be better if I cleaned out.”

He can hear Ilya’s approach, bare feet on the bathroom tile, though he keeps his distance for Shane’s sake, doesn’t come into the toilet cubby. “You take cleanest shits in Montreal, probably."

“Please don’t say that.”

"Probably in all of Canada." There’s a pause, and then Ilya clears his throat. “Makes you feel better to do it?”

“Of course,” Shane admits, though it’s not exactly true. It’s never a *comfortable* process, per se, and if he accidentally gives himself a full enema, they’ll be waiting here a lot longer than either of them wants to. “I just… don’t want anything embarrassing to happen.”

“You would feel embarrassed in front of me?”

“Obviously.”

“*Shane,*” Ilya says carefully, accent thick. His face appears around the divider wall. “You will not gross me out. You know how brain shuts down during sex?”

Shane wets his lips. “Kinda. Yeah.”

“Then you *know*.” A hand reaches out, rubbing along his hip. “You can do it, if you want to. Or you can come get in shower with me. Let me finger you in the water. But you will not gross me out, no matter what. I think you are clean enough to eat off of.”

“*Fuck*,” Shane mutters. He isn’t sure if he’s grossed out or painfully turned on by his words. In truth, he *would* rather be able to get to it on the fly, in the heat of the moment. In his five or so years of being on his specialized diet, his body has become woefully predictable. He’s not even had so much as a grumbling stomach in months. Maybe it would be alright, just to try. And maybe Ilya is telling the truth, that if something *did* happen, it’d be easily brushed off, laughed about…

He comes out of the toilet cubicle and wanders after Ilya to the shower. Ilya flashes a scathing grin at him over his shoulder as he steps in.

*

Shane pants into Ilya’s mouth, glad for Ilya's arm to be cinched around his lower back, holding him upright. He presses his face into the damp junction between Ilya’s throat and collarbone and tries not to let his unsteady weight knock them into the glass door. Ilya chuckles and hooks his chin over Shane’s shoulder. His free hand stretches down the length of Shane’s back, hand wedged against the cleft of his ass.

Shane’s breath hitches as Ilya’s fingers dip into him for the dozenth time. Water isn’t the best lube, but it’s warm and constant and gives him some amount of reassurance that anything *unexpected* will be washed away quickly. Ilya’s fingers had felt like nearly nothing slipping in, knowing just how to touch him. Then they’d felt very much like *something*, opening him up with ease.

Of course, there’s nothing *unexpected* to speak of. Maybe he’d been paranoid about it this whole time for nothing. He's beginning to think that there's a lot of things he overthinks. Ilya talks him through it, murmuring praise against his shoulder as he goes. Shane should probably learn a thing or two from Ilya about trusting his own body more. Ilya seems to have all the trust in the world in it.

Ilya hums, the sound vibrating through his chest into Shane's. “Feeling good?” he asks against the side of his wet head.

Shane wonders how uncommon it is to find someone as caring as Ilya is about sex. He’s spent the latter half of his life in locker rooms hearing about the sexual escapades of the guys around him, but those stories are always laced with the raunchiness or anonymity or novelty of one encounter to the next. Shane has, unsurprisingly, never heard much locker room talk about the slow, doting touch of someone who is entirely focused on you and your pleasure. Maybe if he had, the idea of this wouldn't have felt so foreign to him his entire life.

"Quit thinking, Shane." Ilya nuzzles his temple, fingertips barely brushing his prostate.

"Sorry," Shane replies, answering his question. "It's really good. You're good at this. Anyone — *ah*— ever told you that?"

Ilya chuckles, the sound bouncing around the large, glass stall. "A few times, maybe."

Shane doesn't really want to think about who else might've told Ilya that he's a sex master, or who else might still. He's embarrassingly close to coming just from a little bit of thoughtful fingering, and he'd like for them to move things to a more stable place.

“C’mon,” he says, pushing Ilya away gently. “On the bed?”

It’s a scramble to get out of the shower without slipping or tripping over one another.

Ilya scrubs a towel over his head and then Shane’s, rough and clumsy on purpose. Goosebumps rise along Shane’s arms and legs as Ilya crouches before him to chase drops of water down his legs. Ilya leans in quickly to press his lips to the underside of Shane’s cockhead in an open-mouthed kiss.

Shane jumps— *Butterflies*. His stomach is full of butterflies in a way that's still new and unexpected. He'd thought he was over this nervous energy after all the time they've spent together over the last week, fucking at random. Ilya still surprises him, still evokes new sensations that he's never dreamed of feeling.

Ilya compels him onto the bed, hands firm on his waist as he pushes him down. The bedside drawer is thrown open, condoms and lube retrieved. They don't think to get under the covers, and Shane doesn't even mind that they're lying on his bedspread— *again*— he only cares about Ilya's solid weight holding him down.

"What do you want?" Ilya asks. The blue of his eyes is only a ring around his blown pupils.

Shane makes a strangled sound in the back of his throat. Then, he twists around, wriggling onto his stomach and pressing his ass back into Ilya's hips. He feels wanton and out of control, and entirely safe to be so. The hot line of Ilya's cock wedges itself between his cheeks as Ilya's hips roll forward. "Like this," Shane tells him, looking back over his shoulder.

"This?" Ilya murmurs, hands sliding up his sides. Without waiting for an answer, his knees plant onto either side of Shane's. Shane keens in the back of his throat as Ilya's cock slides down the cleft of his ass, head catching on his rim a few times, slick with lube. There's barely any resistance as Ilya pushes into him, both of them groaning at how deep it already feels. Shane's entire pelvis is alight with nerves, delicious pressure bumping down into his prostate at each long drag of Ilya's dick on its way in.

Every time they do this, it seems to get better and better. Shane isn't sure if it's because he's getting used to the feeling, gaining his confidence, or if Ilya is somehow learning him like a map, memorizing the ways to make him feel good. Probably a mix of both. Hopefully.

"Ilya," Shane pants mindlessly, hands scrabbling at the bed. All of Ilya's weight settles atop him, and Shane relishes the thought that he's trapped like this, entirely at Ilya's mercy. Instead of fear, this realization elicits a bone-deep surrender. Ilya will never hurt him. It's not even a thought in Shane's head that Ilya would, *could* do anything other than exactly what Shane wants him to. And what Shane wants is to be pinned. He lets himself melt into the bed, any residual tension draining from his body.

"You're perfect, perfect," Ilya mutters in his ear as his hips start up a steady, rhythmic thrust.

"Shut up," Shane huffs into the bedcovers.

"Is true," Ilya says thickly. His breath is hot over the back of Shane's neck, so close. His hands rub down Shane's arms, kneading at his muscles as they go. They slide all the way down his forearms until they cover each of Shane's hands, fingers tangling together, holding them to the bed. Ilya presses his face down next to Shane's, mouthing over the shell of his ear. Ilya's voice shakes as he murmurs, "We are perfect like this, yes?" He thrusts, languid and slow, and Shane trembles, nodding in agreement. One of Ilya's hands untangles from his and curves beneath his jaw, tilting it further to the side and up so Ilya can kiss him.

"Is good?" Ilya asks against his mouth.

“Faster, please,” Shane pants.

Ilya plants his knees as his hips begin working more quickly. The stretch is slick and hot, and Shane’s mind begins to fuzz out, focusing only on the places they connect.

In a moment of brilliance, he slips his free hand behind himself, palm upward to feel. His fingertips flex, raking over Ilya's abdominals, which flex and flutter, covered in a sheen of slick sweat. His hand drags lower, index dipping into Ilya’s navel before his fingers rake through his thick treasure trail. Shane moans, still unused to feeling so much hair. He shaves it off his own stomach, but it looks so appealing on Ilya, untamed curls of it that Shane wishes he could bury his face in suddenly.

Ilya’s hips slow. He pushes up, making room as Shane's hand presses into the soft of his lower belly.

“Ah, Shane,” Ilya murmurs against him as his fingertips touch where they’re connected.

He can feel the velvety base of Ilya’s cock, nearly buried to the hilt. It gives a small kick, and both of them gasp, Shane pressing his temple into the bed. Then, there’s the latex of the condom, and finally, where they're connected. His rim flutters, and Ilya's cock burns even through the condom.

“Wish you could see."

Shane would normally be embarrassed by even the mere thought of this. For the moment, he wishes the same. Wishes he could watch them from outside of himself. He wonders if it would be an appealing sight, or if seeing himself that way would make him shrink back in disgust. He decides not to care for now, focusing on the feeling of Ilya starting up again, more pointed thrusts so that Shane can feel every inch of him.

Eventually, his arm grows tired, and after another moment, Shane’s hand returns to the mattress, where Ilya quickly pins it down again.

Shane lets his own voice come out, first in panted huffs, and then in small sounds, each punctuated by Ilya's body meeting his. They're uneven and out of control, and loud, and he'll be terribly embarrassed by them later once he's come out of his lust-drunkness. When he turns to look over his shoulder, Ilya is staring down at him in awe, and that makes all the embarrassment worthwhile.

Ilya strokes over his prostate so perfectly, it has the bed beneath Shane's hips growing ever wet, liquid soaking into the top cover and spreading out against his belly. He's never leaked so much over anything, but it's so good that he can't care about the laundry that he'll have to do. “Don’t stop,” he gasps.

He presses his ass back into Ilya insistently, nearly there, and feels Ilya muffle a groan against his shoulder. Ilya's hips jerk once and then still abruptly as he comes.

“*No, no*, please,” Shane whines. He's so close, and mindlessly he tries to hump the bed to get himself over the edge too, but there's not enough pressure, not enough friction.

Ilya swallows next to his ear, breath shaking as he lifts onto his hands again. He musters the last of his strength to keep going, hips bullying Shane's down hard into the bed, grinding against that perfect spot. Shane clenches down to keep Ilya there where he needs it.

"*Fuck,*" Ilya curses, pushing through obvious overstimulation, molars grinding. His thrusts are so short and stilted that he's practically humping. One of his hands pushes beneath Shane and takes a rough hold of his cock, squeezing it in a few short jerks. That and the persistent press of hips is exactly what Shane needs. He turns his head to the side and sobs, the wet patch beneath him growing hotter. Ilya coaxes him through it, lips pressed to his ear, and finally collapses on top of him.

When Shane turns to look, Ilya is right there, brows drawn up as he seeks out Shane for a kiss. Shane's heart feels like it's going to burst. He wishes they didn't have to use condoms. He'd like for Ilya to stay there a while, holding him down. "Don't fall asleep," Shane tells him, even as his own eyes begin to drift closed.

“I will not,” Ilya says, rolling off of him tiredly. He tucks an arm over Shane's back. “But you look like you will.”

“Just for a minute,” Shane tells him, and hears Ilya laugh huskily into his ear. *Don't let me sleep,* he wants to say. He doesn't want to waste a minute.

*

Ilya lies petting gently along Shane’s shoulder as his skin begins to cool down, sweat drying.

After a while, he begins to grow restless, missing him. *I am fucked*, he thinks. If he can’t even stand to be awake while Shane is asleep, how will he walk out the door later that day? He kisses Shane’s shoulder, his skin smooth under his lips, and Shane stirs.

“Nearly died,” he mutters, and Ilya grins.

“That would be terrible. Second greatest hockey player of all time, and greatest lay of Canada; killed.”

Shane blinks at him. "I'm not..." He shakes his head, letting it go. They lay looking at each other, and Ilya thinks that maybe nothing else will be said. Then, Shane opens his mouth. “Never thanked you. For being so good about it all.”

Ilya stares blankly, not knowing what he means. “Good about it? What? When?”

“When we fucked the first time. You were… really accommodating.” Shane yawns in the middle of his sentence.

Ilya snorts. “*Accommodating?* Very sexy word, Hollander,” he says facetiously. “Why are you saying this?”

Shane turns his face into a pillow, ears reddening. “Just. You were kind and gentle. When you didn’t have to be.”

Ilya frowns. “Of course, I needed to be. Was first time for you, yes?”

“Yeah, but— I could’ve handled—“ he stops, starts again. Ilya can tell that talking openly like this is difficult for him. “A lot of guys wouldn’t have been so sweet about it. So just— *thanks,* is all I’m trying to say.”

Ilya grins, “Mm, I am sweet now, am I?”

“I'm never complimenting you again. Let’s drop it,” Shane says, trying to get his bearings again. He pushes up onto an elbow.

“No. You said I am sweet. Is what you tell your teammates about me, too?”

“Asshole.”

“Yes,” Ilya grins again. “But is why you like me, yes?”

“I *don’t* like you,” Shane says.

Not true, Ilya thinks. He has a good sense for these things.

*

"Find something good on TV," Shane tells him as he gathers up the bedding. The second time in a week they'll be washed, but Ilya would've half expected him to be changing them out daily.

They'd done a rudimentary cleanup of each other with damp cloths and a fresh change of clothes, though Ilya had slipped back into Shane's Montreal sweatshirt when Shane wasn't looking. He doesn't comment on it.

"What do you want to see?" Ilya asks him, slouched in the bedroom doorway.

“Whatever. Are you gonna give commentary the whole way through?”

“Yes.”

“Pick something shitty then.” Shane grins. Ilya grins back.

Ilya wonders if it’s possible to be addicted to another person. The emotional release paired with the sex, that’s all nice. Wonderful, even. But it feels like something is missing even as he trudges out of the room, when he’s only just heading downstairs to pull out a beer and a ginger ale from the fridge and find a film to put on. He wants to plaster himself to Shane's

back, follow him around like a shadow. He wonders if this sort of thing is normal or healthy to feel, or if he should be concerned. There's no one to ask.

He sits down on the sofa, listening to the sound of the washer door being flung open upstairs. Shane ought to keep a few sets of bedding around. For times when Ilya comes to visit, at least. And he hopes to visit again.

They can keep this up, can't they? Maybe they can work out a better schedule, steal more time away. Overnight trips, hotels with private spas. Ilya doesn't want to give this up, though. He'd be willing to jump through a lot of hoops to keep it. Maybe Shane will have some ideas. He always seems to have a plan three steps ahead.

He pops the top of Shane's ginger ale, setting it on a coaster on the coffee table. As he's flicking through the premium channels, he hears a faint jingle of keys.

Ears perking, he looks up. The front door swings inward.

Ilya blanches, feeling very much like he's caught in a bout of deja vu. But instead of Marleau's intimidating shape filling up the doorway, a much smaller person steps in.

Oh no, Ilya thinks vaguely, all of the feeling draining out of his hands. *Oh Christ.*

Large brown eyes land on him immediately, narrowing. Ilya is struck by an out-of-place thought; that bewildered expression looks so much like Shane's, it's uncanny. *Fuck,* his mind supplies. He knows who this is, this woman. She's got a refined, feminine face, framed by wispy layers of hair that grow dark at her scalp and fade to mid-brown.

The air feels as if it's been sucked from the room.

Ilya's jaw loosens, lips falling open. He wants to call for Shane, but he can't find his voice.

Yuna Hollander has found her own, though. "*Shane?"* she says loudly.

The apartment is deathly silent for a moment. Ilya can only imagine the look on Shane's face upstairs.

Then, there's Shane's feet bounding too quickly down the steps. He stumbles on the landing, hissing as his ankle twists, but keeps coming, hopping the rest of the way. If Ilya were more in control of his body, he might leap up, or at least ask if Shane's alright. Instead, he can't move, and he can't take his eyes off of Shane's mother standing there in the foyer.

She doesn't stop staring at him, either.

"Mom?" Shane hisses, holding onto the railing at the bottom. He looks quickly at Ilya on the sofa, and back to her.

Oh no.

"I thought you were back in Ottawa." Shane's voice is monotone, entirely flat, and strange-sounding. Ilya's come to recognize this as some sort of self-defense mechanism, and that it

really means Shane is on the verge of panic.

The Hollanders stand staring at one another, equal parts dumbfounded and shocked. If Ilya prayed, he would be praying for the ground to swallow him up. To go back two minutes and let Shane come down first, offer to do the laundry for him, anything to keep him upstairs and out of sight.

As it stands, his belief is shaky. And they can't go back in time.

Yuna Hollander's mouth opens, bottom lip quivering like she can't think of exactly what to say. Her eyes dart between Shane and Ilya, and Ilya is astounded at how much she looks like her son in that moment, how much *Shane* looks like *her*, mind working a mile a minute, calculating, putting pieces in their place.

Fuck, he thinks. Ilya is afraid, but more prominent on his mind is that he can tell Shane is terrified.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks once again for your patience. I know this chapter was a bit shorter than others. (I mean it's still over 4k, so I don't feel too guilty lol)

As always, I'll work as diligently as I can to get another update out, hopefully sooner than I did this time. You've all been very kind though, so thank you ☺

_____ Writing Notes_____

- I realized (and maybe I should've sooner) that I'm a razors edge away from characterizing Shane as demi in this fic. Not on purpose, mind you. I just can't seem to help it. This happens in most of my fics, so I'm not surprised, but I was kind of trying to actively avoid it!👀

- In that same vein, I've put quite a lot of focus on the "tender loving sex" that they're having early on, but I want to make it clear that I'm also a kinky!Shane truther, too. That'll come up more down the line (not to an extreme, because that isn't the focus of this fic) but in case anyone was worried that they'd stay saccharine sweet for the duration, worry not. They'll get into "raunchier" territory eventually.

- And segueing from there, because it's been asked a few times and I realized that I never put it into an **Official Note:** the fic will be exploring beyond their week together in Montreal. I plan to take them through 2014. There are too many delicious plot points in 2014 to stop before we get to them. I have the basic outline on paper and a landing point for the story in mind.

- My goal is to keep the theme of "Hideaway" intact throughout the rest of the fic. I realized that my main "thing" about this story is them having *a* hideaway that gives them the time and space to know one another better, greatly altering the course of their relationship. Still room for hurt/comfort and angst, but I love that people love the "cozy" aspect of this story. That's probably why it's so comforting to write, too.

Thank you for reading🧡

Chapter 23: Almost Like

Chapter Summary

> “That wouldn’t be so bad. Would it?” He stares past Ilya into the corner, unable to meet his eye. When Ilya doesn’t say anything, Shane hurries to correct. “I’m joking.”

Chapter Notes

> Back again.
>
> My brain is soup, and if I reread this chapter one more time today, I'll lose my mind, so I'm posting it.
>
> I'm trying so so hard to keep up with comments. Every time I get my inbox below a certain number, it spikes back up the next day. Please know that I read every single one, and that they are all appreciated!🧡
>
> Onto this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Three

Ilya watches mutely from the living room.

Shane stares at his mother, one hand gripping the railing of the stairs, the other held midway through the air, frozen. He angles his body as if there's a shred of possibility of hiding Ilya,

sitting on his sofa. It's far too late for that, though.

"I thought you already went back to Ottawa," Shane starts, barely masking the panic in his voice.

Yuna Hollander looks at her son, and then trains her eyes over his shoulder to Ilya once more. "I had a last-minute meeting this morning… Shane, what—"

"You can't just let yourself in." Shane's voice is high and off-kilter with nerves. Ilya finally stands, feeling like he's going to come out of his skin if he sits any longer. His legs itch to flee, but that would be absurd; there's nowhere to go.

Yuna shrugs at her son. "I messaged you. A while ago." The air is electrified. "Shane," she says, tone stern and parental. "Do you want to explain what's happening?"

Ilya's insides shrink in on themselves. She can't find out like this. She *hates* Boston. Ilya has no idea what kind of person she is. If she were to find out about the *true* reason he's there, would she go to the league with it in order to get him suspended? Surely not. Not if it meant harm to her own son, too. But one can never be certain, and he's only one good push away from freaking out.

"This—" Shane's voice wavers. "This is Rozanov."

She stares, all but rolling her eyes. "I can see that. What's he doing *here?*"

Shane's lips part. Ilya can see a bead of sweat gather on his temple and inch its way down the side of his face. Shane shifts on his feet, hopping and hissing at his sore ankle. He can't seem to find the right words.

"Raiders are stuck in Montreal," Ilya says for him, taking a few steps closer. He tries to conjure up his typical air of confidence, the one he uses during press conferences or dealing with the odd bouncer he may encounter at clubs. Yuna Hollander is as formidable as any of those, and her eyes narrow on him. "I came to visit Hollander. To discuss publicity."

Yuna blinks, perhaps not having expected Ilya to be the one to speak up first. It's better this way, because aside from Shane's one big secret that he keeps from the entire world, it doesn't seem like he's very good at lying to his parents on the fly.

"Why don't—" Shane readjusts his grip on the handrail, a pinch of pain to his face. "Can we all sit down, please?"

*

Ilya can see a small sliver of the leg of Shane's sweats shifting and creasing as he bounces his leg under the dining table by the toe of his socked foot. Ilya counts three, no, four beats per second. Quite a fast pace. Shane's other leg is still, a bag of frozen broccoli florets slumped

against his ankle beneath the table to try to mitigate any swelling from his slip. He has a home game tomorrow against Minnesota.

Ilya sits in one of the end seats, his back to the daylit window, Yuna Hollander to his right, Shane to his left. Shane would look stoic to anyone looking in, but his eyes are full of the dread of being caught by a parent doing something he shouldn't. Ilya hates that it still feels like this, even into their twenties.

"So… Rozanov is visiting you," she says incredulously, looking between the two of them. Ilya can't decipher her emotions on the matter beyond well-hidden shock.

Shane nods, brows low. "He is."

Ilya keeps his eyes focused on a point on Shane's stairs, the landing where he'd slipped, until Yuna catches his attention with her gaze. Her eyes flick down to his sweatshirt, and Ilya swallows. The Metros logo is plastered across his chest from collar to sternum, double M's stacked on top of each other. There's no hiding that.

"He is letting me do some laundry," Ilya explains slowly, trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice. "Before early flight tomorrow."

Yuna's eyes trace over his face with distrust, arms folded over her expensive-looking business casual blouse. "They don't have laundry service at your hotel?" she asks, though not meanly, which Ilya had been half expecting. He'd half been expecting *a lot* of things, like yelling or screaming, possibly an immediate understanding of what she'd walked in on. That Shane has been in bed with the enemy, or whatever else enthusiastic fans of hockey would like to call it.

Instead, she is measured and restrained like a TV detective at an interrogation.

"The pipes burst at the hotel," Ilya says easily. "During the ice storm. No laundry."

This is a lie, of course. Ilya isn't sure if Yuna Hollander is the type to follow up on details like burst pipes in the laundry room at a rival team's hotel, but if she's anything like her son, she might. However, Ilya's only trying to defuse the situation directly in front of them. He can't work miracles, after all.

Yuna looks to Shane, who is already nodding along. To Ilya, it looks entirely unconvincing.

Finally, she sighs. "I had a meeting with the marketing manager at Rolex. A last-minute deal. I thought I'd surprise you with lunch. Or at least drop it off for you to have later."

Shane looks ashamed. "Thank you, that's… thanks."

Finally, Yuna leans back in her chair. Her short, manicured nails drum across the opposite arm as she considers them both. Maybe she figures that she will not get much more out of either of them. She looks pointedly at Ilya. "Well. There's enough for three."

*

One mildly unpleasant but quick meal of vegetable stir-fry later, Ilya has a better grasp on what sort of person Yuna Hollander is.

In one column, he's tallied up her faults; she'd walked into her son's apartment without so much as a knock on the door. Then questioned him about the nature of his guest. This, he could expect from any parent. Even and especially his own. When he stays in his father's house, privacy isn't complimentary or even earned. It's simply something you forgo.

On the other hand, Yuna Hollander seems desperate to take things in stride and to put her son at ease. It's almost painful to watch. The two of them dance around each other, stilted small talk and questions between slow-chewed bites, followed up by meager non-answers. Ilya's eyes ping-pong between the two of them, listening. It's obvious that they are reaching out for each other, but they can't seem to make the connection. Like there's still a glass wall up between them. Ilya is starting to realize that that's how Shane moves through the world. Present but separate from everything else.

Yuna eventually turns her attention to Ilya, face still pinched as she asks strictly business questions like, *where is Boston playing next?* Which she no doubt already knows the answer to. Other questions asked include *How are you finding Montreal?* Good. *Where are you playing after Detroit?* Florida. And, *that ref at the last Montreal game was too harsh, don't you think?* And Ilya doesn't remember what ref she's talking about, but he nods in agreement anyway, which makes her grin. Small. But she does grin, which Ilya considers a victory.

"That's an unusual necklace," she says, eyes on his cross. Ilya feels blindsided by the observation. Half the time, he keeps the pendant tucked inside his clothing. As she waits for a response, her eyes seeking, Ilya can feel Shane looking at him too.

"Is um. Eastern... ah... *Orthodox,*" he says slowly, his accent shaping itself around the word.

"Oh," she nods, brows raised. "Are you..."

"Ah, no," Ilya says, more confidently. "Is just a gift passed down from a relative." All responses he's given before, mostly to his teammates.

She merely nods, and then the uncomfortableness is over.

Ilya glances at Shane and notices that he's barely touched his own food, picking around vegetables with chopsticks and stacking pieces of tempeh on top of each other. There's no way that he isn't hungry after their earlier… *activities.* Ilya feels famished. But maybe Shane's nerves take precedence over his appetite.

Yuna frowns at her son. "You're not hungry, honey?"

Shane glances up at her, looking almost pained for one split second. He smiles thinly, shaking his head. "Sorry. Just… feeling a little under the weather. I'm fine."

“Is your ankle still hurting?”

“No. I think it’ll be good to go tomorrow.”

Ilya can see that there are many questions she’d like to ask, but she refrains. He wonders if she’d ask him if he weren’t sitting there as a witness, then realizes that if he weren’t sitting there, there would probably be no questions to ask in the first place.

The concern on her face sparks a twinge of dull pain down in Ilya’s chest. She's a bit different from how he remembers his own, but the underlying motherliness is the same. Ilya is happy for Shane, but terribly envious, as well.

When she’s mostly finished her meal, leaving behind a few pieces of squash in her shallow bowl, she sets her chopsticks down and presses her fingertips together pensively. One last-ditch effort at connecting is coming, Ilya can tell.

“So… You’re friends,” she says.

Shane clears his throat, caught off guard.

“It’s just a little hard to believe,” She laughs uncomfortably, looking between the two of them, and Ilya can see the crease between her brows growing deeper, signifying just how confused she still is. “I thought you hated him, honey. I mean, you play… very *well*," she directs to Ilya, then looks back at her son. "But he… he seems like such a different kind of person from you. Entirely.” She’s trying to be polite about it, but she shares some of her son's awkwardness.

Ilya knows his own reputation amongst Montreal fans, among fans of many other teams. Pompous, egotistical, womanizer, *'dirty Russian bastard'*. He's heard it all, even though he’s never once tried to make an illegal hit, and he hasn’t taken illicit drugs since before he came to North America, and he tries very, *very* hard not to cause trouble for people who don’t deserve it. People like Shane.

Shane’s throat bobs, and he sets his chopsticks down. Ilya can see in the storm of his dark eyes that he’s gearing up to say what he wants to say.

Ilya wants to nod, give him some sort of signal that it’s okay to say so, to agree with her, to say that he *does* dislike him, at the base of things. They'd only come together for some sort of publicity stunt. Ilya won’t take it personally. He would say the very same and worse in front of his father and brother if it meant keeping the thing they have safe and shielded from any prying eyes.

“No,” Shane murmurs finally. His eyes track up to Ilya. He looks very tired. “He pisses me off all the time. But he,” Shane falters. “He’s my friend. And he's... good.”

Ilya sets his utensils down, throat constricting unexpectedly. He averts his gaze to the living room, studying a piece of art on the opposite wall, some nondescript shapes of paint that mean nothing to him.

He can see in his peripheral as Yuna looks at him with true consideration.

“An internal notice went around an hour after it was announced. It said you made the first donation?”

Ilya latently realizes that it’s a question. He nods stiffly. “Yes.”

Shane’s head bobs. “It was his idea.”

The silence is deafening, and Ilya would still rather sink into a hole and be buried alive than have to sit through this kind of familial awkwardness for another moment. But finally, Yuna places her hands on the table, some of the tension releasing from her slight shoulders.

“Well,” she sighs. “It’s hard to hate that, isn’t it.”

*

“It was... surprising to meet you, Rozanov,” Yuna tells him when she’s slipping her boots on. Shane is right there, helping her put on her coat with an unreadable expression on his face.

“You too,” Ilya says, standing by awkwardly.

She watches him from the corner of her eye, as if trying to decipher something about him that she still can’t understand. It takes everything in Ilya to meet her gaze and not look away. Finally, she clicks her tongue. “Shane…” she starts, looking up at her son, brow drawn up. It looks for a moment as if she’s about to plead. Ilya’s chest seizes.

She knows.

Shane looks back at her, blinking in confusion. “Yeah?” he says, and then wets his lips. Only half present, the rest of him off somewhere far away to keep calm. Ilya wants to reach out and touch his shoulder, bring him back. But he stays put.

Yuna’s shoulders drop, resignation on her face. *Wait,* Ilya wants to say, but doesn’t know why. He ought to be glad that she’s leaving them be on their last day together.

“Never mind. Something about Rolex. I’ll email you the details later,” Yuna says, and pats Shane on the shoulder. “Call me in a few days?”

“Of course,” Shane says. “Thanks for the food, Mom.”

They hug, and she rubs the middle of his back, a frown on her face over his shoulder. Ilya looks away. She says, "I love you, honey."

"Love you, too."

She looks once more at Ilya, too quickly for him to determine why, and then she's out the door. When Shane has closed it behind her, his forehead thumps against the doorjamb.

Ilya watches, waiting to see if Shane will spiral.

He turns around, shoulders pressed into the door as he heaves a breath. "Fuck, that was stressful," he says.

Ilya nods. "Yes."

When Shane looks at him, there's a small, relieved smile on his face. "I don't think she suspected anything, though."

Ilya falters. He isn't so sure. In fact, he's wondering how Shane could've missed it, but then again, it's *Shane*.

"Do you?" Shane asks, frown growing.

Ilya sighs and comes closer, putting his hands on Shane's shoulders to rub at them. "I would not know. She isn't my mother." Maybe Ilya had read her wrong. It's been known to happen. Just not very often. Either way, the fear and grief he'd stewed in upon her arrival had slowly lifted by the end of her visit. Yuna Hollander seems like the type of woman to accept her son no matter what he turns out to be. She'd also been cordial, at the very least, to his unlikely friendship with Ilya. He supposes he ought to let them work it out in their own time. Shane doesn't need another thing to worry about today.

Shane takes another audible breath. "I need a drink."

This, they can agree on.

*

Shane holds a glass of vodka in one hand. The other is pressed across Ilya's chest as he lies across Shane's lap. Upstairs, the washer bumps quietly, turning Ilya's clothes. This time, they're on the sofa so that they can both watch the television screen comfortably, as well as the fire below it. There's a French-language arthouse film playing. Ilya complains only once about not being able to keep up with all the English subtitles before Shane scoffs. *Do you actually* want *to watch the film?* He'd asked, and Ilya had settled down, head in his lap. Ilya's half-finished beer sweats on the coffee table, coaster soaking up condensation beneath it.

Shane's the one with a game tomorrow, but he can't be bothered about drinking vodka after the harrowing experience of having a late lunch with both his mother and Ilya sitting at the same table.

He'd felt only half in his body, like he was dreaming, hands and feet a bit numb, hunger nonexistent. It's not the first time he's felt such a thing, but it's the most prominent he's felt it

since he was a teenager.

He hopes that nothing they'd done had seemed suspicious. He wonders if trying not to act suspicious had been suspicious in itself. His mind is running circles around itself.

He takes a long sip of vodka.

"Your mother is…"

Shane grunts. "Intrusive?"

Ilya chuckles. "She seems nice, too."

"Yeah. She is that." Shane shrugs. "I'm not a fan of her coming in here on her own, though."

"Have you talked to her about it before?"

Shane rubs a hand over his face. "No."

"No?"

"She's not very… receptive. I mean, you know what it's like trying to get your parents to do something. Or *not* do something."

Ilya blinks up at him. "Yes. Is not fun. But your mother seems reasonable. Underneath the business." He waves his hand.

Shane finally concedes that she is. "She's the only reason I got this far."

"Not your skill?"

Shane chuckles. "Not skill alone, no. It's because she pushed me to try as hard as I could. Convinced me I could make it if I did. She drove me to every practice, every game, and made sure I never missed even one."

"So we have her to thank for this apartment then, hm?"

"I guess so."

This apartment. Shane looks out the window. The sun has slowly begun to descend, turning the clouds congregating around it a faint, warm grey. He doesn't dare ask Ilya when his curfew is. He doesn't want to know. He wants to imagine, for an hour or two, that Ilya has all the time in the world to stay. That they'll drink and lounge around and go to bed and wake up together again. They didn't get enough time. He would've liked a full week to spend with Ilya. Maybe even two. He wonders if they would've gotten along the entire way, or if their differences would've started showing through eventually.

Shane takes another swig of vodka. "Did your parents push you, too? Is that why you're here?"

Ilya grimaces. He’s quiet for a moment, leaning over to take a draw from his bottle. He resettles onto Shane’s lap, and Shane lets one of his hands lace through his curls. They’re very soft and fun to play with.

“Ah… sort of.” He seems to be in deep contemplation. Shane has half a mind to tell him to forget about it.

“What, father didn’t approve?” Shane asks instead.

Ilya blinks. “How do you know?”

“Tale as old as time,” Shane says, mouth pulling into a lopsided grin. The vodka finally seems to have loosened him up. “A lot of dads are hard on their kids.”

Ilya nods. “Yes, well, mine is hard on everyone he ever meets.” Ilya’s eyes drift past Shane, staring at the orange-lit and purple-shadowed ceiling. "Is your father kind?"

Shane falters, caught off guard. “Yeah. He is.” He might be the most gentle man Shane’s ever known. For which he’s eternally grateful. He doesn't know how he would've fared if *both* of his parents were as intense as his mother.

Ilya nods, pressing his hand across his own face. “Is good. I am glad.”

“What’s wrong?” Shane asks. Maybe he shouldn’t, but his mind is too loosened.

Ilya hesitates, looking forlorn. Finally, he sighs. “There is something wrong with my father, I think.”

“Oh.” Shane frowns. “You mean like… mentally? Or medically?”

Ilya sighs, pushing up. Shane misses the warmth of him on his lap immediately. Ilya tucks one of his heels beneath himself and bends the other leg toward his chest as he resettles on the sofa cushion. “Both, I think. I worry he is starting to lose his mind.”

“Oh,” Shane frowns. He sets his nearly empty glass down on the table. The arthouse film is at a quiet part, and Shane mutes the television and scoots closer. “Like Alzheimer's, or…”

“I don’t know,” Ilya answers, voice tight. “Is too early on. And he is too proud to get help. It will have to get much worse.”

“I'm sorry, Ilya."

Ilya shrugs, but the grim stretch of his mouth makes it obvious that he's trying not to cry. “I do not know what to do," he says, his voice cracking around the edges.

Shane reaches with his other hand to wrap around Ilya’s shoulders. He doesn’t know what to say, and he's always found hugging awkward. He can’t say it’ll be alright when he doesn’t know that it will be, so he only clings tightly to him. Ilya returns the embrace, sighing heavily into Shane's hair.

"I will go back this summer," he says faintly. "I will try to convince him." Shane can feel a bit of dampness seep against his scalp.

*

Once Ilya's clothes are in the dryer, Shane returns to the sofa to find him wiping roughly at his face.

"I am blubbering on last evening together." Ilya sniffs loudly.

"It's alright," Shane says meekly, sitting back down.

"I do not want to think about anything else tonight. No family, or Russia, or hockey. Just…" Ilya looks at him, going mute.

Shane doesn't need him to finish. He nods. "Alright. Would you fuck me again?"

Ilya rubs a fist over his eyes, chuckling softly. "No. You must be so sore."

It's true, he is. More sore than he's ever been before, probably. But he also aches for it, can't imagine not having it at least one more time before Ilya leaves. "Please?"

Ilya looks like he could cry all over again, but then he takes Shane in his arms and kisses him solidly on the lips, easing him back down onto the sofa and crawling on top of him.

"Tell you what," Ilya murmurs against his mouth. Shane watches him, eye half-lidded. Ilya presses his hips down, line of his cock hot against Shane's hip. Shane readjusts his position until his own is pressing back through the fabric of their sweats. "Let's do it just like this."

Shane makes a face. "What, with our clothes on?"

Ilya chuckles and leans back, shucking his sweats and underwear down his hips. Shane scrambles up to follow his lead, pants coming all the way off. He doesn't even mind sitting bare-assed on his sofa if it means getting off with Ilya.

Ilya reaches for him, pulling him onto his lap hastily. Shane makes to grind back on him, but before he can, Ilya slots their cocks together and wraps his fist around them. Shane gasps, back going straight. He looks down at them, both held in Ilya's large hand. He strokes them slowly together until they're both fully hard, moisture gathering at the heads. Ilya's palm runs over both to collect it, twisting his hand on the stroke back down.

It goes on like that, growing warmer and wetter with each passing minute. Shane doesn't know when he closes his eyes, but suddenly his forehead is pressing heavily into Ilya's, their breath hot and mingling together between them.

"Ilya," he murmurs, feeling drunk and underwater, like he can't collect himself enough to say anything coherent. Ilya's hand kneads at his hip, Russian words spilling from his mouth, so beautiful, Shane wishes he could understand any of it. He repeats Ilya's name, kissing him messily.

His hips tremble and jerk, and Ilya encourages him to thrust, both of them working in tandem together to get off.

Shane opens his eyes, and Ilya is staring up at him, lips parted and panting, with an expression that Shane can only describe as reverence. Warmth floods his belly. He feels like he should thank Ilya for looking at him like that, like he's something special. “Like you so much,” he whispers instead, before he can help it.

It has the desired effect; Ilya’s eyes fall shut, and his fist squeezes too tightly around them both.

Shane loses his sense of rhythm after that, both hands falling onto Ilya’s shoulders to ruck his hips into Ilya’s grip continuously. Ilya's breath punches out of him, and Shane hunches down to kiss him hard on the mouth as he bursts in Ilya’s hand.

Ilya comes soon after, voice muffled by Shane's mouth, but Shane swears that he's saying his name, lips forming the shapes. Shane kisses him again, even though he's breathless and lightheaded. *I'll miss you so much,* he thinks over and over.

Finally, Shane carefully eases off of him, falling onto his back against the cushions. He reaches out to drag Ilya on top of him. There's no room for them both here, but he doesn’t care, only wants to feel Ilya’s damp body pressed against his own. “Stay just a little longer?” he asks, hand fisting into Ilya’s curls.

Ilya presses his face into the side of his neck and breaths. He nods. “Alright.”

One final night of pushing curfew. Shane wonders if Ilya can manage it. If anyone could, it would be him. Shane is the golden boy, but Ilya is the one who gets to get away with things.

If Ilya’s face feels excessively damp against Shane’s neck, well, it’s only that the heating had been set too high in the apartment and they're sweating. If his shoulders jerk once, well, Ilya's only thinking about his sick father, and Shane simply holds onto him tighter. He pets through his curls for good measure, trying to stave away the melancholy that threatens to overwhelm them.

*

He wakes alone on the sofa. The place next to him is still warm, though. When he sits up, he can hear Ilya upstairs. The sound of his duffel rustling, a zip unzipping. A look at his phone tells him that it's ten minutes until four am. They'd slept a long time in a cramped space. He

didn't think he'd be able to convince Ilya to move up to his room, so he'd simply held him for as long as he could on the sofa.

Shane pads upstairs. Ilya is bent over a pile of clothing laid out on Shane's bed, slowly folding the pieces into uneven squares and stuffing them into his bag. He looks up when he notices Shane standing there. His undereyes are dark.

“You weren’t going to leave without saying goodbye, were you?” Shane asks, folding his arms.

“Of course not,” Ilya says.

“I’d be really mad at you.”

Ilya approaches. He looks dead tired, and Shane wonders if he’d gotten any sleep at all. He can only manage a small smile. “We don’t want that.”

“I mean it. If you just… left without saying anything. Or didn’t call me after this...” Shane hopes he doesn’t have to say how hurt he would feel.

Ilya’s face cracks into a frown, reaching up to poke the corner of his mouth. “I know, I know. Do not look like this, please.” He must mean it as a joke, but it comes out too sincere for either of them to laugh.

Shane sighs and tries to keep a handle on his facial expression. “I’ll help you pack.”

Ilya looks grateful, disappearing into the bathroom to gather up his toothbrush and shaving kit. Shane begins looking through the clothing on the bed, eyes cataloging each piece.

Ilya doesn't look at him much as they finish giving the room a once-over for any stray socks or underwear.

Shane leads the way down the stairs. The apartment is mostly dark, save for the foyer light. "Do you want some coffee before you go?" he asks, sure to keep hope out of his voice. He feels that all of the avenues he could show emotion the day before are closed off now. Too hard to tap into. It's easier if he doesn't let himself feel any of it, anyway.

"Ah, no," Ilya shakes his head, curls falling in his eyes. He brushes them back with his hand. "I must get to hotel. They are leaving for the airport early. And Desjourneys will have it out with me if he knows I spent whole night out."

Shane nods and tries to stave off the worry that Ilya is pulling away.

"I'll walk you down.

*

The hallways and stairwell are icy cold and silent. Shane's heart pounds in his ears, stomach rolling with... not anxiety. This is something worse, dread, but not any kind of dread he's ever felt before.

It's four thirty in the morning, and not another soul is around at this dark hour. They descend the stairs without a word, walking too close together to be safe.

At the bottom, in front of the door to the alley, Ilya sets his bag down, hands Shane his coat, and props his boots up on the steps to tighten the laces. Shane doesn't bother sitting. Instead, he leans up against the wall, watching intently as the muscles in Ilya's shoulders move under his shirt.

Ilya huffs a quiet laugh, glancing up at him.

“Is almost like we are boyfriends," he says quietly.

Shane shrugs, feeling unsteady, and it's desperation that makes him say, “That wouldn’t be so bad. Would it?” He stares past Ilya into the corner, unable to meet his eye. When Ilya doesn’t say anything, Shane hurries to correct. “I’m joking.”

Ilya straightens up, eyes downcast. “Is not that I..." He stops, starts again. "We cannot. Is just... the league. And my country.” He swallows. Hesitates. Then, a look of genuine unease passes over his face. “Shane, I must tell you something important.”

Shane frowns and straightens up, meets his eye. “What?”

“When we are in Sochi together… you must not talk to me. At all.” Ilya nibbles on the inside of his lip. “In fact, you should not even look my way.”

Shane swallows thickly. “Okay…” He hadn’t been planning on getting lunch or spending any time with Ilya. Maybe a passing hello or wave, if they happened to be in the same place at the same time.

“Is unsafe for me. Maybe for you, too, but… I worry I will give myself away if you are around.” Ilya gives him a small smile that does not reach his eyes. “You understand?”

“Yeah, of course,” Shane nods, chest pulling tight. And though he only knows a bit about Russia and its conservative values, he’s never given it much heavy thought. Now that he knows he's in love with a Russian man, maybe he ought to. “That means we won’t see each other again until…”

“Much later, yes.” Ilya looks downtrodden himself, but he leans in and quickly kisses Shane on the chin. “But... does not mean I will not be thinking of you.”

Shane’s mouth pulls into a smile. “Yeah? How often?” he teases.

Ilya takes the bait. His hand slides up Shane’s chest to take his chin into his hand, holding it fast to look at him. Shane loves this look. At first, it’d felt like he’d been being evaluated. Now, it feels as if Ilya is putting his attention solely on him, taking his fill with his eyes, because Shane means something to him. “Every night in shower, at least,” Ilya says.

Shane shoves his hand away exaggeratedly. “Asshole. Is that the only time?”

Ilya sighs through his nose, shakes his head. “No. It is not.”

One last peck to the lips, and Ilya steps back. He picks his duffel off the floor and slings it over his shoulder. He looks ready to face the entire world, bundled up in his coat, scarf tucked into the front, gloves on his hands, boots laced up tight.

Shane’s feet are compelled to follow him as he opens up the door, but he keeps them firmly planted on the ground.

“Well,” Ilya says, hand stalled on the door. “I will see you.”

Shane nods. His jaw is tight, molars pressed together so tightly that his head starts to ache. Ilya looks at him for a long moment, then nods to himself. Pushes the door open and steps out into the dark.

Only once the door has swung closed with a click does Shane breathe out. He listens to the deathly quiet of the stairwell and the roaring of blood in his ears.

He’s never experienced this feeling before. Inexplicable pain. He presses his hand against his sternum, taking a harsh breath in. The stairwell becomes a blur of yellow mottled colors as his eyes well up. *Fuck,* he thinks. He’d never imagined that it would feel quite this bad.

His chest heaves, animal mind scrambling for something to hold onto, to bring him back down from such terrible heights. *It can't go on like this, can it?* This kind of feeling must subside somehow. How long will he sit with it today? Will it still be with him at the game tonight? Tomorrow?

A rapid knocking comes on the door, and Shane jerks back. The knocking continues, a muffled voice filtering through.

Shane throws his weight into the crash bar, and the door swings out, opening unexpectedly fast with a hand wrapped tightly around the edge of it. Ilya pushes back inside, coming face-to-face with him again. His eyes are glassy and red-rimmed, and to anyone else, it would look like he’d been walking in the cold for an hour.

“Ah,” Ilya says, looking over his face.

The door clicks closed, and Ilya drops his duffel on the floor and reaches for Shane without another word. Shane lets himself be pulled in, arms coming up to grip desperately at the back of Ilya’s coat, tucking his chin over his shoulder tightly. He sniffs.

“Miss me so much already that you cry?” Ilya mumbles against his ear, teasing.

“Who’s crying?” Shane mutters, his own voice gone nasally from how stuffy his nose has become.

“Ah,” Ilya hushes, hands clutching tightly around Shane's back, rubbing at his spine soothingly through his shirt. He doesn’t sound like he’s crying at all, but Shane knows that he

must be, because of how he sniffs too. “Don't cry,” he murmurs, and then repeats it.

Shane doesn’t have it in him to tell him to shut up. Instead, he presses his face to the shoulder of Ilya’s coat and scrubs his eyes with it. But the tears just don’t seem to stop.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading.

Absolute, unadulterated melodramatics.

_____

Notes:

- Can you *imagine* if I just ended the fic there? Ilya walking out the door? I wouldn't know how to live with myself.

- Technically, in the book, I think they meet one more time between the Montreal apartment and the Olympics. (I could be dead wrong about this, I'm not going to go check.) This would make more sense to real life hockey schedules too, I believe. However, we're going by show timeline here, "We won't see each other again until the Olympics". So now they have to wait a while😬

- As usual, thanks for your patience in waiting for this update. Also, comments have increased significantly, and though this is a great problem to have, I'm not making great headway in replying to them all.

- Hideaway has gotten a big increase in readership this past week. Very grateful that people have been loving this fic as much as I've been enjoying writing it.🧡

Until next time.

Chapter 24: Sober Up

Chapter Summary

> She shrugs, lip poking out in disappointment. "It's only dancing, isn't it?"

Chapter Notes

> There was an overwhelming amount of comments left on the last chapter, as well as more new readership. I wanted to say thank you very much to every person who took the time to leave a comment! I read every single one, and often more than once.
>
> This fandom is in a constant ebb and flow of turmoil, but I see mostly a lot of good people coming out to support fan-creators, and it's very heartening🧡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Four

There's a memory that lives deep inside Ilya's mind that he only ever lets himself look at from the edges. Most of his memories of home, he treats this way. Sometimes, he'll remember this one when he's eating a meat pie in a North American city. They all have slightly different names for them, here, and they're never *quite* like the ones they make in Russia unless he finds a shop owned by a Slavic immigrant. The contents of the memory are from *before,* and it's never been very pertinent to this life of hockey and fast flings. Until now.

There are, sadly, no meat pies in the airport.

That early morning, he sits in one of the premium waiting lounges designated to the Raiders, cup of shitty airport coffee in one hand, staring out the floor-to-ceiling windows at the pale tarmac. It's not iced up, the attendant assures them nervously. Just a bit of morning frost. It'll be cleared away by the time the charter jet is ready for takeoff.

There, he lets the memory surface, and he lets himself look at it head-on, trying to recall every detail he'd taken in on that winter afternoon in Moscow.

His mother walks next to him, wearing nice boots and a nice coat that comes down to the middle of her calves, because they wear nice things *always*, outside of the house.

Ilya carries his hockey gear in a duffel bag over his shoulder. He balances his stick on his shoulders and drapes his arms over it as they walk. He's not anywhere near as big as he'll someday be.

"I can walk home alone," he'd told her when he first turned 9. "It's not very far from the rink."

"I know you can," she'd told him. "But I like to walk with you. It keeps my mind healthy."

He's at the age where walking with your mother is becoming embarrassing.

He still likes walking with her, secretly, but he won't tell her that except for when she gets sad, which she does at the strangest of moments, these days. It bubbles out of her in grimaces and tears, and he can't understand what's set her off. She'll apologize to him after she's pulled herself together and fixed her hair. And Ilya will ask her to go on a walk, even if he has no practice and nowhere else to go. He wants her mind to stay healthy.

Things are normal today. There's snow on the ground, but the sun is bright, and the sky is cerulean blue.

They take a shortcut through a park that's not really a shortcut because it's longer, but it's prettier, and his mother likes to look at bullfinches with their orange breast feathers. Because there aren't any of his classmates or teammates around, Ilya allows himself to admit that he likes walking with her, even if he's grown enough to not need to.

"Alexei doesn't come to practice anymore," he tells her. For some reason, he thought she didn't know. But of course she would. She always knew where her children were.

She nods. "That's because he's at Nadya's house." Her pale eyes watch the trail ahead of them.

Ilya knows about Alexei's friend only vaguely. He'd met her once or twice when she'd come by the house.

"It's a new relationship," his mother teases. "He's busy focusing on her. That always happens at the beginning of young love."

"He's only 13. How can he be in *love*?" Ilya gripes.

His mother chuckles. “You're right. Young love is different from grown-up love. Your brother will date a few girls before he knows what real love is like.”

“How is it different?” Ilya asks. He doesn't know much about romance, only that it does things like make Alexei late for meals or hog the phone line after school when Ilya would like to be talking to a teammate or Sveta. He didn't used to be like this, just a year ago. In fact, he'd made fun of Ilya for having Sveta as a best friend.

“When you’re a teenager, and you have a crush, it feels very new and bright. Like walking on clouds. It’s a lot of fun. But when you’re grown… It’s still fun. But it’s different. You must learn to bend to another person. And they bend to you. Like dancing.” She looks away from the trail, down at him. He’s grown taller since he turned ten, but she’s still bigger. She assures him that he’ll continue to grow. Her expression is somber now. “And it can be very painful, too.”

"If it's so great, why would it be painful?" he asks flippantly.

She presses her lips together, eyes back on the path. “If something happens to them, like they get sick or die, or if they decide that they don’t love you anymore… it feels very bad.” She hums, like she does when thinking. “You feel it in your body. Like in the middle of your chest. Or all over, like withdrawal.”

“Withdrawal…” Ilya repeats.

He pauses in the path for a moment. It had never occurred to him that that could happen. Everyone expects their grandparents to die, and everyone knows that it'll happen to their parents, one day, in the inconceivably faraway future. But to a girlfriend? A spouse? He realises all at once that anything could happen. *To anyone*. Out of the blue, bam, gone. It nearly scares him. How hadn't he realized it sooner?

She's paused in the path, waiting for him.

“Why do it at all, then? If it can be so bad?” he asks, catching up to her.

She laughs. Not meanly, because she never tries to make Ilya feel bad when they talk and he asks questions. He greatly prefers her to his father for many reasons, but especially for this one.

“Because, Ilyusha, it's one of the greatest things in life to fall in love and be loved back. You’ll understand.” She flashes a little grin down at him. “Maybe you and Sveta will fall in love one day.”

Not this again. Ilya groans exaggeratedly. “That won’t happen.”

“She’s a very pretty girl.”

“She’s not a *girl*, she’s—“ She’s Svetlana. She’s his friend, and even though she’s started experimenting with makeup and hairstyles, she’s still always down at the rink or at the park, watching Ilya's team, pointing out all of the flaws she sees in them at their practice meets. She's relentless.

His best friend. *Love?* Not a chance.

His mother only laughs at him. “Maybe you’re right. But it’ll be a long time before you have to worry about any of that, anyway. When you do fall in love, though, I can tell you *‘I told you so’*.”

Ilya grins to himself as they walk. Alexei won’t stay with Nadya for long. She’ll be his second girlfriend this year, and he’s not a very good boyfriend, anyway. He's selfish and only thinks about what he wants.

Ilya looks back up at his mother. “When did you fall in love with Papa?”

“Hey, Roz.”

His mother’s smile fades, face subdued. “Ah. It’s hard to pick a moment,” she says, and then looks down at him. “If we hurry, we can stop by the shop on the way home and get pirozhki.”

“I’m starving,” Ilya tells her.

“Well, in that case, we *must* go. We’ll eat them on the way home.”

Whenever they eat pirozhki on the way home, they toss the paper bag in a waste bin to dispose of the evidence before they arrive back at the house. They never tell his father about it, and Ilya had never had to be taught that, either. Some innate knowing has him clamming up about the details of his life when his father is around.

He's learned that Grigory Rozanov gets unreasonably irritable when he thinks that his wife is spoiling their sons.

Ilya ought to have told his mother that he liked their walks more often. He ought to have thanked her more for buying him pirozhki on cold days.

“Rozzy?”

Ilya blinks away from the grey tarmac. Men in hi-vis vests and warm hats pulled down over their ears trot from one side of the runway to another.

“Mm?” Ilya looks up.

Marleau stands, duffel slung heavily over his shoulder, looking down at him. “You okay, man? You’re zoned out.”

“Yes,” Ilya says blankly. “I’m fine.”

Marleau frowns. He nods his head at Ilya's to-go cup. “The coffee here any good?”

“Terrible,” Ilya says, looking down at the half-finished cup in his hand. He takes a tepid sip. Makes a face. Misses Shane's fancy roast.

Marleau looks out at the tarmac. “Oh, hey— I know what'll make it better," he starts, and turns to unzip his bag. He pulls something out of the top of it, a small parchment bag with the end folded over. “Shit. Got a little crunched.” He hands it over to Ilya.

Ilya takes it, looking inside, and without thinking, his mouth splits into a smile. He pulls out the half-crushed raspberry danish, pastry flaking off onto his jeans.

With that, Marleau sits down next to him, slouching to match his height. “So uh… How’s Jane?” he asks awkwardly, keeping his voice low.

Ilya takes a bite of the pastry and is thankful when the filling is not overly sweet. It's a little dry, probably from being a few days old. He sighs, takes a sip of coffee, which the pastry has greatly improved, and shrugs. He tries very hard not to think about Shane’s watery eyes and flushed nose, running, and continuing to run, as he’d scrubbed his sleeve across it.

“Is fine.”

“No teary farewells?” Marleau cracks a grin. Ilya must not react fast enough with his return chuckle, because Marleau’s face falls into mortification. “Oh, shit… Fuck. I’m sorry, man.”

“We are not— Is nothing.” His worst lie to date.

Marleau doesn’t say anything, only continues staring at him, like he's seeing him for the first time. Ilya feels put on the spot.

“We… We cannot be anything. Not really. This is obvious, yes?”

“I mean… yeah. I guess,” Marleau says. He takes a precautionary look around them, then sighs heavily. “This… this *sucks*. I never even thought about it before. What it’d be like for a… a gay guy, with the league and all?”

“Yes, well…” Ilya shrugs. “Is not great.”

“I dunno, man. I’m sure there are other guys on the team that'd be alright with it.”

“Ha,” Ilya scoffs. All it takes is *one* to cause a stink. To leak something to the media or the board. And it’s not just any guy that Ilya has gotten involved with. It’s Shane Hollander. Up and coming, expected to break records and become the new face of hockey, which he's already doing a good job of, despite only being captain for one complete season.

Marleau sighs. “The commissioner, though… Fuck."

Fuck, indeed. Ilya tries not to let his sour mood be directed at his friend. His anger is better directed at the world around them. The league that would kick him out and send him back to his country as a public disgrace.

Not even one season as captain, and he’s already worried about it all coming to an end.

“Let us just focus on our game in Detroit tomorrow,” Ilya mumbles around the pastry, glad for the sugar to give him a bit of energy.

“Sure, but…” Marleau frowns. “You seem sad, man.”

I am. Of course I am. This thing with Shane is the single best thing he could've ever hoped to happen to him. A thing of love songs and fairy tales. Opened up new vistas inside him that he hadn't a clue even existed. And it's also the very thing that could send his career hurtling toward a very public and tragic end. Maybe more than his career.

“Yes, well. I will be fine.”

In this moment, he misses the ease of how things were before. Before his week grounded in Canada. Before he knew how amazing just being alive could feel under the right circumstances. Before he knew the delight of a monotonous existence in close quarters with someone else he liked. Before he knew that there was someone else who felt the same way about him.

In the first two years after his mother had passed, Ilya had wished, only a few times and very briefly, that he'd never known her to begin with. Why couldn't she have abandoned him and Alexei with their father from the start? Why not move away and leave them behind? Why show him what a patient, loving parent was and then rip it away? Why drive herself into suffering so great that she could not stay anymore?

The thoughts of a child, he recognizes now, born out of anguish and wishing he himself could've gone with her, wherever it was that she went, because he refused to believe that she simply did not exist anymore.

Until they're called to board their plane, Ilys sits sipping his lukewarm coffee and eating his pastry, staring out at the tarmac. He feels the relentless, nagging pain in his chest, and not for the first time, wishes that he'd never met Shane Hollander to begin with.

*

Shane finishes off a cup of green tea and tries not to think about what sits inside his freezer. The impulse to reach in and pick up the hand-sized pint container is nearly all-consuming. He's been thinking about it since Ilya had left the second time, for good.

Coming back in, he'd stood in the middle of his house and wondered what to do with himself in the many hours until the warmup before tonight's game began. He'd thought about calling Hayden as soon as seemed appropriate, but he wasn't sure he could hold himself together all that well if he was one-on-one with a friend.

He thinks about texting Ilya. He wonders if it would be a bother, at this point, when he's obviously busy getting on a plane, focusing on the next game, and catching up with his team

— which he's the leader of. No matter how much Shane already misses him, he refuses to start acting like a needy teenager with a crush.

Even though things have gone too far to be a crush anymore.

He looks through his phone for a while, sitting on the sofa. Gets onto social media and then makes himself delete the apps until a later time when he can look and not be consumed by flashes of photos of the Raiders boarding their charter, taken through a window or from around a corner, or stills from their last game played against each other.

He watches the weather channel, the comforting drone of the weatherman's voice lulling him down into drowsiness. When he tries to go fully back to sleep, though, he can't.

*

Ilya doesn't text Shane that morning. Or all that afternoon. He wants to. But numbing fear has him paralyzed. Every time he pulls out his phone to check, he starts to wonder what would happen if he lost this thing with Shane. If it was found out, or if Shane decided that Ilya wasn't worth the risk anymore.

He wishes Shane would text him first, take away the decision from him. He wouldn't ignore it if it came through. Couldn't.

The team practices in a designated Detroit rink, and Ilya works as hard as he ever does. Or at least, he thinks that's the case, until Connors gives him a look during one of their breaks, and Ilya asks him what he's looking at.

"You feelin' alright, man?" Connors asks.

"Yes. Why would I be not alright?"

"Just, you know. You're pretty aggro today."

Ilya blinks at him.

"Aggressive."

Ilya schools his face into neutrality. He shrugs and points around to the rest of the team, some doing lazy laps around the ice as they talk, others perched up on the opposite wall. "Just preparing for tonight," Ilya says. "We did not practice as much as normal during break in Montreal."

"Yeah, well… you kinda missed the last one."

Ilya grits his teeth and pushes off the wall, back onto the ice, before he says something stupid to his teammate that he really doesn't deserve. Ilya's their captain; he's supposed to be

composed when the others aren't. Face of the team, and all.

“You get any sleep last night, Roz? Or did Montreal-Jane zap your good mood?” Dubek asks, sloping little quirk to his mouth as he skates past.

*

"This place is weird," Marleau comments quietly.

It's nighttime. A handful of Boston players filter through the open room of a darkened club. Ilya's eyes immediately search for the bar, set up along the back wall. Bottles and crystal glasses are spread out in stacks across a mirror that makes the already large room look twice as big. He makes a beeline for it, some of the others in tow.

He hasn't texted Shane at all. He's not sure he will, for a while.

"One vodka," he tells the woman working. Only after he settles onto one of the few open barstools does he spot the monitor wedged into a corner behind the counter. A commercial flashes through a highlight reel of Toronto and Montreal players at their last game. Rookie names and downtrodden faces, and then Shane's, Pike's, and goalie Drapeau's triumph. Then, it switches back to the current game, which is, luck of all luck, Montreal and Minnesota. "Fuck," he mutters under his breath.

"Make it two," Marleau says next to him, depositing himself onto the last stool.

Desjourney's is a decent coach, in Ilya's opinion. He's strict on them where it counts, lax when he can be. But as a former Boston player, he tends to turn a blind eye to most of the Raiders' nightly activities. He told Ilya once that he recognizes that player morale is strongest when they're "bonding" and having fun. Ilya takes that to also include when they're getting laid.

The dance floor is tinged pink and blue, bodies mashed together on a Thursday night. The weekend has started early here. The music is too loud, which suits Ilya fine. He tries not to stare openly at the game playing, but Marleau catches him looking anyway.

"You call him today?"

"We do not call," Ilya deadpans. When Marleau lifts a brow, Ilya goes on. "And no, I did not text either. Why are you asking?"

"Dunno. You seem off. Just thought you'd feel better if you did."

Ilya downs his shot, orders a beer, and turns to Marleau with a scowl. "Since when are *you* an expert, hm?" He has to raise his voice and repeat it when Marleau doesn't hear. Then, Marleau scowls, and Ilya gets waved off for his bad mood. Marleau drifts away to chat up a group of local women in cocktail dresses. Ilya stews over what a bad friend he's turning into.

He sips his beer, stomach already churning uncomfortably. He'll need to cut himself off from vodka entirely, at this rate. He can't keep using it to paint over whatever he doesn't want to see. That's what his father and brother do.

Ilya glances too many times at the television screen showing the game.

Montreal is drowning. They're already nearly an hour in. Ilya finds Shane's name on the blue sweaters skating across the screen. He used to dislike those team colors, *Bleu, Blanc et Rouge.* So many teams use those colors, and many countries too, including his own. Then, he'd seen Shane in them, all freckles and warm skin, and suddenly the prominent blue had seemed earnest and inviting.

He's two beers in before he realizes he's about to spend the entire night out staring at a screen.

"Hollander's having a rough night," Connors says. Ilya startles. He hadn't noticed the other man leaning up against the bar to order.

"Yes," Ilya agrees, recovering quickly. It's true.

Shane's not scored any goals, but more than that, he's entirely off his game. His feet cannot keep up with his head, or maybe it's his head that's not keeping up with his feet. His passes land perfectly, muscle memory probably doing all the heavy lifting. But when he looks around the ice, he's distracted, eyes not sparking with the intensity Ilya knows they're capable of.

Connors shakes his head, loose hair falling around the side of his face. He takes a long draw from a bottle of beer and wanders away.

Ilya makes himself get up and prowl the room. There's no other reason to be in a club if he isn't going to dance. He could've stayed back in the hotel and ordered room service if he wanted to watch Shane play against Minnesota.

Half of him wishes he had.

The current DJ steps off her platform, trading places with an older man. She's the one he catches the attention of. She's got two-tone dark hair and a skin-tight sequin dress wrapped around her torso. She looks over the top of her yellow-tinted sunglasses at him. His stomach drops into his feet. Not in a good way. Under normal circumstances, she would be a perfect fit for him. Easy swaying and nonchalance to match his own. It's only dancing. He loves dancing.

He *normally* loves dancing.

She walks right up to him, easy confidence in her step, and he realizes with perfect clarity that he can't do it.

"*Blyat*," he mutters.

"Huh?"

"I cannot."

She frowns, hip cocking to the side. "What, you got a girlfriend?"

Ilya finds himself nodding, because it's the easiest thing to do.

She shrugs, lip poking out in disappointment. "It's only dancing, isn't it?"

Just over a week ago, he would've agreed. Why couldn't couples dance with others if it was just platonic? Just fun?

He and Shane aren't a couple, anyway. Not exclusively. He's sure that Shane would tell him to dance with her, eager to maintain the facade of casualness. He might even tell Ilya that he could, *should* sleep with her, but Ilya knows in his heart of hearts that Shane wouldn't really mean it. Not deep down. He knows it because of the salt stains on the shoulder of his dark winter coat, and because of how Shane Hollander is, how Ilya has come to know him.

Ilya shakes his head, stepping away from her. He doesn't wait to see her reaction, instead turning back for the bar. There, he catches a glimpse of the screen again, fluorescent light contrasting with the colors of the rest of the club, casting an eerie glow.

What's he doing here, anyway?

On the TV, Shane takes a pass from Berkes and heads down the ice with it. A Minnesota player steals it away, throws Shane off balance, and he nearly recovers. But one of his own teammates, Gilbert Comeau, has come in too close, perhaps trying to take the steal back. Shane looks surprised to see him there, and he knocks into the boards, goes down onto a knee.

Ilya frowns. Here comes Pike, saying something that can't be heard. Laird ices Hayden's skates as he passes by, words thrown between the three of them.

The encounter doesn't last more than a few milliseconds before the cameras are pushing down the ice again, Shane having left them all behind, racing after the Minnesota player himself with fury, even though Ilya can see he's favoring his sore ankle. But he can't get through the sea of green on his own. Ilya only notices the strangeness of it all because he's looking for it. This player, Comeau, whom he doesn't know much about, does not like his captain. And Ilya knows that it goes beyond just a fleeting moment of misunderstanding.

The music changes, and with it, Ilya's appetite for clubs and dancing and smoke and alcohol all but evaporates. He has a feeling that he will not be doing this again. Not for a long while, at least.

"Fuck," he mutters, slumping heavily against the bar top. He waves down the tender to close his tab. Marleau returns, looking much more relaxed and happy than he had when they arrived. Ilya will apologize properly to him later.

"This place isn't so bad," Marleau says. "But Hollander's team is way outta sync." He nods at the screen.

"Yes, something like that."

Marleau stares at him, dark eyes widening a fraction. "Do they *know*?"

Ilya waves a hand, shaking his head. "No, no. Definitely not." He tries to think of how to explain to Marleau the complexities that seem to exist inside the Montreal team. Complexities that even he doesn't seem to understand from his position in his own team. "They do not like *me*. So they are punishing him, I think."

Marleau scoffs, shaking his head. "That's fucked. Fuckin' Montreal. You know, Dubek played one year with them. 2008."

"Yes, I know."

Ilya had started a season after Dubek's first. Dubek is only a couple of years older, but more reserved in nature. A bit like Hollander, though he's begun to open up. He likes strong cocktails over beer and playing basketball in the off-season.

"He never wants to say why he got traded. But we all know it's because Montreal iced him out of the team. Old captain was a piece'a work," Marleau mutters.

Ilya watches Shane's red, sweaty face on the screen, darkness brewing behind his eyes, anger. "I think I will head back," Ilya murmurs. "Something is wrong with me."

Marleau frowns. "You sick?"

"I must be. Do not want to dance. Probably couldn't even get it up," he huffs a small laugh, only half joking. Even presented with the most beautiful person in the world, wanting and willing, he would probably not even be able to look at them right now.

Marleau shrugs his big shoulders. He's got an odd look on his face. "Well, *yeah*. You're a little heartsick, aren't you?" Ilya flinches away at that. He hadn't expected him to say it so plainly, to his face. "I was down for a while after I left my high school sweetheart for Boston."

I thought maybe I could fix myself, Ilya thinks. Can everyone see through him, now?

"You talk too much when you're drinking, Marly," Ilya tells him, and pats his shoulder in parting.

It's silly to think he could go back to feeling how he had before. Not when he's lain next to Shane in his bed, kissing his shoulder. When Ilya has hugged him tightly in a stairwell, asking him not to cry because he's leaving. When he's all but admitted how much Shane means to him beyond a good lay.

Ilya thinks the entire way out the side door and back hall.

Despite his few drinks, he finally feels sober. The day had passed in a haze, and he recognizes it now as some mild form of shock.

He's come out of it.

*

He arrives at the hotel.

The heating in the room doesn't seem to be doing the trick. Maybe the walls are poorly insulated, despite supposedly being a nice place. He chucks his duffel bag into the spare chair in the corner and begins sorting through it, searching out his favored sleeping sweatshirt.

He ought to order room service before he does anything else, but he has a feeling he's going to go to bed without eating. Can't stomach the idea, even though he knows he must be hungry. *Must really be sick,* he thinks again. *Heartsick,* Marleau had called it. He's not stupid enough not to know what it is. He just never thought it'd happen to him.

Ilya's stupid sweatshirt isn't here. He must've tossed it into some corner in Shane's apartment, behind a fake potted plant, or kicked it under the bed, even though he and Shane scoured the bedroom and living room for any of his things left behind.

Ilya looks through what's left in his bag. It all smells clean and homey from Shane's detergent, fabric softened by the ridiculous wool balls he insists on using to help dry them. He sees something tucked into the bottom of his bag, the first thing that must have been packed. It's a slate blue, thick quality fabric folded into a neat, tidy square, like it just came off a high-end shop table. A brand he never would have bought for himself.

Ilya's heart constricts, already knowing what it is. He brings it up to his nose and breathes in, eyes shutting.

It smells so acutely like Shane, detergent, cologne, and *him* that it makes Ilya dizzy. He backs up to his bed to sit. He can picture Shane so clearly standing in front of him, pretty mouth curled into a coy smile.

He knows then that it's useless to even try to pretend that he's going to cool things down. Any thoughts he's been entertaining about cutting things off with Shane Hollander are laid to rest.

He slips the sweatshirt on over his head. Then, he scrambles to retrieve his phone from the bedside table.

Lily - 11:42 pm - Are you home?

Ilya lies back on his bed, front of the sweatshirt pulled up over his nose as he waits impatiently. Nearly twenty minutes pass before Shane responds.

Jane - 12:01 am - Didn't see this. I'm home.

Ilya sits up, drawing his legs up onto the bed. This contact is the antidote to the feeling that's been sitting in his chest all day. He also knows that it'll cause it to come back even stronger tomorrow. That's the cycle he's caught up in now. He'll have to make peace with it, stewing in longing, waiting for the next moments he can steal away.

Shane picks up on the third ring. "Hullo?" he says.

“What are you doing right now?” Ilya asks, voice low. He means for it to sound sexy, but it comes out a bit ragged around the edges, emotion pushing through.

Shane doesn’t answer for a long time. Finally, he sniffs. “Eating ice cream.”

Ilya blinks, spine straightening up. It's a very sobering answer. Not one he'd expect to get in a million years. “Ah...”

“Just a few bites. Just…” Shane sniffs again and clears his throat. His voice comes out huskier, and Ilya would find it wildly attractive if it weren't for the fact that Shane is so upset. “I’ll regret it in an hour. I’m throwing it away. After one more bite.”

Ilya cradles the phone closer, frowning down at the dark hotel carpet. He ought to have video-called him. He doesn't know when Marleau will be back, though. “Do not regret too badly, Hollander. You deserve ice cream sometimes, don't you? Eat extra for me.”

"It's so bad for you," Shane grunts.

Ilya jiggles his ankle continuously. "What kind is it?"

"Strawberry."

"Ah, see? Is healthy. It has fruit."

It makes Shane laugh. "That doesn't mean it's healthy, Ilya." Which is obvious, but very endearing for Shane to point out. And that only makes Ilya wish they were sitting in front of each other more.

“How's your ankle?” Ilya asks.

“I’ll live."

"And how is your team?"

Shane doesn't respond to that. Ilya hears a metallic click on the other end, maybe metal spoon meeting teeth. "Did you watch the game?" Shane asks.

"Yes. Your defeat was very distracting. I could not enjoy club."

"Yeah, well… It was distracting for me, too." He sighs deeply. "No way we're making it to the playoffs this year. We're floundering. Cause of me."

Ilya grits his teeth. "Did not seem to be your fault, Hollander."

"Yeah. Well, maybe it isn't. Either way… it was shit." A rustle on the other end. "So… you were at a club?"

"Mm," Ilya presses his lips together. *I'm sorry,* even though he doesn't technically have anything to be sorry about. "Yes. And I did not overdrink."

"I didn't think you would," Shane murmurs. Then goes quiet.

Ilya can feel the question underneath that Shane doesn't feel he's allowed to ask. Ilya wouldn't normally feel obliged to answer, either, except that now he *does*. He desperately wants to answer and say a lot of other things that are a bad idea when they're hundreds of miles away from each other. "And I met a very pretty woman. A DJ. Very stylish, very cool." A confession of sorts. *Please forgive me for even considering it.*

"Oh."

Ilya wonders how much time he has before Marleau comes back. *If* he comes back. "But I did not like the music in the club. And the people were all very dull under their stylish clothes... I think maybe I will not go dancing so much anymore. Not unless I am visiting old friends." Maybe with Sveta. Someone he knows and trusts, who he doesn't have to worry about getting the wrong idea, who he doesn't have to worry about touching, or *not* touching. He'll call her up when they're on their way back to Boston for a round of home games.

"Really?" Shane's voice pitches up slightly.

"Yes. Maybe I will pick up new hobby. Something boring like reading. Or real estate. Maybe I will add more cars to my collection." Shane laughs wetly, and Ilya lies back on the bed, gravity pulling him into the worn-out center of it. "I'm wearing your sweatshirt," he says, quietly.

Rustling on the other end. "You are?" He sounds a bit happier now. Which makes Ilya happier. Love is a ridiculous thing.

"Mm. Is funny. My own sweatshirt went missing. Maybe nosy airport worker took it when I was not looking?"

"I hope it's okay," Shane says, ignoring his antics. "I'm wearing yours now, too."

Ilya shuts his eyes, a thrill of pleased arousal washing through him. "Is my favorite one."

"Oh. Sorry," Shane replies. He doesn't sound very sorry.

“Is good that you took it. Sweatshirt of Boston player will bring you luck.”

“Fuck you. Mine’s luckier.”

It feels normal, speaking like this to each other. Or it would if Ilya weren't shut up in some chilly hotel room, using a hushed tone and cradling his phone like it's a lifeline. If he discounts all of that, it's just the same as it'd used to be.

There's some rustling on the other end of the line, and then silence. Ilya listens to Shane yawn.

"Ilya?" he asks quietly.

"Mm?"

"Could we…?"

Ilya knows, and he thrills at the idea of getting off with Shane like this. He swallows. "Not tonight."

Shane makes a sound of disappointment. "Okay."

Ilya's mind races. "You are in Montreal until Monday morning, yes?"

"Yeah."

"Then... Tomorrow, after we beat Detroit, I will come back to hotel. Get a private room for the night. And I will text you to make sure you are alone." Which is unnecessary. Shane will be.

"Okay."

"And then, I will call you. And you will pick up. Yes?"

"What if I'm busy?"

"You will not be, because we are making plans, *yes*?"

"Yeah," Shane breathes. "What'll we talk about?"

"You will not be talking."

Shane's breath wooshes over the line. "Ilya…" Ilya knows that he's turned on, which is better than being sad. Maybe he even has a hand pressed to his dick.

Something bumps in the hallway, accompanied by Marleau's grumbling voice, cursing to himself. Seems he'd decided to come home without a date after all.

"Eat some more ice cream, Shane. Do not throw it out, at least. Such a waste. Save it for next time I'm in town."

"Maybe," Shane sighs. "You have to go?"

"Mhm," Ilya hums as Marleau steps inside. He trudges through the room, weary-faced. He sprawls out on his own bed.

"I… Wish you were here. Not *just* 'cause I want you to fuck me," Shane murmurs.

Ilya swallows thickly, shutting his eyes again. "Feeling is… mutual," he says carefully.

Once they hang up, Marleau looks up from his own phone. "*Friend*?"

"Mm," Ilya nods.

This is it, then. This is how he's got to learn to exist for the foreseeable future. If he can't cut things off— and he *can't*— and he can't make himself sleep with other people to distract himself... then he'll just learn to deal with this. The same way he's learned to deal with everything else.

At least he's not alone in it, this time.

After the lights have been shut off and Ilya has thought through the rest of this season's schedule, all the way up to the playoffs, Marleau grunts from his side of the darkened room and asks, "Are you wearing new cologne?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading.

_____

- Edit: I now see that this chapter was necessary! Thank you to readers who have expressed so! The next one should cover a lot of ground. Leaps and bounds! *they said, hopefully*
- Connor may not eat pasta, but Ilya definitely will. I know it does not compute, a body like that and carbs. But I will not deprive my Ilya of pasta. Ever!

- In my earlier chapters, I had a few comments mention the use of "the other" when the guys are referring to one another. Honestly, this just didn't sound weird in my head at all, and I didn't clock it in my edits, either. (It feels like I'm always saying things backwards or out of order, even in these author notes)

It was throwing enough people off that it was mentioned a few times, so I started to subconsciously steer away from it. I will probably not go back and fix the older uses of it at this point in time, but will when I've finished the story and can take a little break and then look at it with fresh eyes again. Thanks if you've pushed through this far!

- One quick note about messages. I have a small presence outside of ao3 on tumblr and threads. I did want to apologize to the readers who have pm'd me on tumblr. Nothing wrong with your messages, they were all very lovely, but I'm trying to avoid any private messages from readers of this fic for the moment.

A public ask on tumblr, anonymous or not, is totally fine, or talking to/@ ing me on threads- also fine! Just not looking to communicate privately for the moment, with everything going on in the fandom.

Again, no harm done by people who have reached out, it's been overwhelmingly positive! Everyone is very cool, kind, and enthusiastic☺ I just wanted to give an explanation as to why I haven't answered those private requests. I do appreciate them, nevertheless🧡

- Comments. There are currently 700 comments sitting in my inbox, some from the last chapter, and even more from those who have been working their way through the fic from the beginning. It's very fun to see new people find the story and comment their hopes and predictions in earlier chapters!

I don't know if I can reply to 700+ comments🥺 It feels very insignificant to leave a "Thank you🧡" on a long, well thought-out comment that took someone 10 minutes to think up and write. Idk what I'm doing yet about it, except for jumping in randomly. I think part of the problem is that... I'm also a procrastinator. There, I said it.

These notes are too long. Thank you very much if you read them, and thanks even if you only read the chapters. I've said it before, but I never expected this many people to say they liked a story I wrote. It means a great deal to me at this point in my life!🧡

Cheers

Chapter 25: Fragments/Just to Be Safe

Chapter Summary

He's just in a dark room, in a dark house. Alone.

Chapter Notes

Hello hello. Thanks for your patience, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Five

Late November

Mom - 12:24 pm - Honey, when you're in Ottawa next week, your dad and I want to take you to dinner. That place you loved when you were in the juniors.

Shane - 1:10 pm - I'll try to make time. We won't have a spare day, though.

Mom - 1:12 pm - We have to go soon. We haven't had a family meal in months!

Shane frowns at the message, another ounce of guilt accumulating in his chest. He's been avoiding them, with one excuse or another. He's tempted to think of another one now, but he can't keep this up forever.

He wants to see them. He misses his mom and dad, but the idea of seeing his mother again after the awkward lunch with Ilya makes his stomach cramp with anxiety. He wonders if she'd told his father, if the two of them have been mulling over all the reasons Shane could have for being friends with Ilya Rozanov.

He's overthinking it. But that's how he's always been.

Mom - 1:15 pm - You're our boy, we want to see you!

Shane feels sick to his stomach with anxiety.

*

Early December

Lily - 10:37 am - Look.

Attached to Ilya's text is a photograph. In it, Ilya is wedged up next to the window of a plane in a wide, comfortable seat, glass of dark liquor in his hand. He stares staidly up at the camera, but the two most notable things about the photo are the sweatshirt that he wears— *Shane's,* the color of which brings out the blue of Ilya's eyes— and the view out the window. Shane squints and realizes that he's looking at the faint grid lines of city streets far below.

Lily - 10:38 am - We are flying over St. Louis. Look up and wave.

Shane is inside the St. Louis arena locker room. Even if Ilya's plane were overhead at that precise moment, there are at least two levels of ceiling between them.

Jane - 10:39 am - I'll take your word for it.

Lily - 10:39 am - Are you wearing?

He means the sweatshirt.

Shane suppresses a grin. Most of the team is already out on the ice for warmup. Laird and J.J. pass by, chatting in French as they exit the room, paying him no mind.

Jane - 10:40 am - I'm in hockey gear. I'm not sending you a picture.

Lily - 10:41 am - :(

He'd worn Ilya's sweatshirt to the arena.

He's worn it on the way to *every* arena, coming from the airport or a hotel, ever since he and Ilya parted ways at the bottom of the apartment stairs. It's become something of an unexpected good luck charm for him. It doesn't feel right not to wear it to a game or to a practice, and he finds himself rushing to find it some days before heading out the door.

He needs to run it through the wash eventually, but he doesn't want to rid it of Ilya's smell.

Jane - 10:42 am - What cologne do you wear?

Lily - 10:42 am - :)

Jane - 10:43 am - Never mind.

Lily - 10:43 am - You should call me tonight. If you are alone.

*

Mid December

Hayden's house is decked out from foundation to roof with twinkling lights. When Jackie opens the door to let Shane in, he can see the den to the left with a massive, perfectly lit and decorated Christmas tree. She catches him staring at it over her shoulder and grins sheepishly. "Hayd hired someone to decorate this year."

"It's pretty," he tells her.

"The kids really love it." Her grin turns proud at that. "And I didn't have to break my back doing it."

He wanders past the den to the less formal family room off the kitchen. The large windows in the back of the house let in a lot of daylight. Hayden and J.J. sit on the sofa, the living room scattered with art supplies and newspapers covering the area rug, left abandoned. The television is already tuned to ESPN.

Shane greets the two of them, and Jackie hands him a ginger ale without asking. The sound of the top cracking open puts Shane at ease.

It's an impromptu early dinner with Hayden and Jackie that Jackie had suggested. One of their only free days in Montreal before Christmas, without a flight the very next morning. Hayden had asked J.J. to come as well, their promised hangout that Shane had done well enough to dodge.

It's easy to sit and watch a game being played. It just so happens that Boston is playing just a few hours away in Toronto.

Shane listens to Jackie shuffling around the kitchen for nearly twenty minutes before he wanders his way to the end of the counter.

"Put me to work," he says.

"It's alright. You're here to hang with your friends, right?" Despite the strains of parenthood, her face is bright and youthful. She makes a shooing motion with her hand.

Shane shifts awkwardly.

"*Please* put me to work?" he asks. It's not that he's particularly good in a kitchen or at cooking, or that he even *wants* to work. Only that he'd rather not have to watch Ilya play under the watchful gaze of his two friends. He's not sure what he'd reveal, and he doesn't want them to start asking any questions either.

She hands him a cutting board and an array of vegetables for a salad. "Nothing to it," she says.

Shane cuts cucumbers into even slices, treating it like a game, and finds that the repetitive motion calms some of his nerves. When he's moved onto the carrots, Hayden huffs.

"Look who it is," he says wryly. J.J.'s side of the sofa creaks as he leans forward.

Shane keeps his eyes on the cutting board and knife beneath his hands. Hayden turns up the television to hear, and Shane recognizes Ilya's voice. He takes a small glance up at the screen.

Ilya is there, hands cocked on his hips as they always are for his press bits, dingy concrete wall for a background. Shane feels the pull in his chest, even as he looks back down at the cutting board, trying to focus on the vegetables. He still takes glances up.

An eager reporter holds a microphone up for Ilya as she says, "A handful of the Guardian's new rookies are chomping at the bit to face you on the ice. They say they're here to throw some of the big names off their thrones."

Ilya's blue eyes sparkle, despite the terrible hallway lighting. Shane notices that he puts all of his attention on the reporter. He wonders if she's young and pretty, and then rolls his eyes at himself.

"I am sure," Ilya says wryly. "Toronto has not won a game so far this season?"

"Just one. Ottawa, earlier in November. Ever since they played Montreal a few weeks ago, though, it's been straight losses. Any words of wisdom for them?" Ilya smirks at the camera, then his eyes dart around the small group of interviewers as if he's about to let them in on a secret. Shane leans minutely closer, waiting to hear.

"Shane, watch your fingers," Jackie tells him. He hadn't realized he was still chopping. He sets the knife down, fingers tapping across the wooden handle of it as he watches the screen.

He'd missed what short comment Ilya had provided. Whatever it was has the interviewer laughing, and Ilya smirking straight down the lens. Shane can nearly feel the look in his toes. Ilya goes on, "But Toronto is cute. They will try their best, and go on to win many games— if half of league dies in fiery plane crash."

Ilya looks behind himself, impatience showing in his eyes. Before he can tell them he needs to go, one more interviewee grabs his attention, this time, an older man with a sharp voice. "A plane crashing into the Metros team, and perhaps they would. Your donations with Shane Hollander were a nice surprise. Any more plans to donate as the holidays come closer?"

Ilya looks caught off guard, but his attention has returned tenfold to the reporters. "Not so far. If Toronto gets blizzard… why not? I will call up Hollander to split the bill." This draws a series of laughs from all around. Ilya looks down the lens. "You hear that, Hollander? Prepare checkbook."

The hairs on the back of Shane's neck stand on end, and he can't tell if he's thrilled or infuriated to be called out directly on live television. Hayden turns around to give him a similar look of disbelief.

The interviewer goes on, obviously eager to gain any more tidbits of information he can for his publication. "So you're still in contact?"

Ilya gives a nonchalant shrug, even as he's being pulled away by a handler. "We are on business terms. We made donation. Simple."

"Esquire put out an article about it on their website. Any chance you'll do an interview with *them*?" One of the other interviewers, now.

Ilya narrows his gaze on the faceless man. "Hollander was on cover last month, yes?" Shane feels his cheeks turn pink because *no*, he wasn't. He can tell Ilya is having fun now, too comfortable running his mouth on camera, like talking and quipping is a game for him.

The reporter responds, "Not the cover, but an article. It's thought he'll be considered for the cover in the summer if he takes Montreal to the Finals. I'm sure they'll contact *you* at some point, too."

"This has nothing to do with hockey," J.J. complains, waving a hand at the TV. Shane can tell that Ilya's antics are pissing both him and Hayden off.

Ilya flashes a grin at the camera that Shane can't help but feel is meant just for him. "Maybe they will have us on cover together someday, eh? Then we can really compare who dresses better," Ilya says, in such a way that it inspires good-natured laughter among the group. They think he's only teasing, getting a small jab at Shane and the way he dresses.

Shane wonders if Ilya has any idea how intrigued he is by the idea of doing a joint cover. A joint *anything*.

And how much his little jabs light a fire inside him. Shane is grinning before he can help it.

"Can you believe him?" Hayden mutters, looking back again. Shane must not school his face quickly enough, because Hayden's face morphs into disdain. "Oh, for fuck's sake, Shane."

"*Hayden*," Jackie barks from over the stove top.

"What— the girls are at a sleepover!" Hayden runs a hand over his hair. "Shane, don't tell me you're *charmed* by the shit coming out of this asshole's mouth."

"Who's charmed?" Shane scoffs, guard coming back up. "He's just working the room, Hayd. Giving the press things to talk about."

"He's taking shots at you. You can't see it?" Hayden sighs exaggeratedly. "And did you hear him talk about Toronto?"

J.J. is the one to laugh this time. "Since when do *you* care about Toronto*?* Look at them." He points at the television, where the broadcast has cut to a clip of the three new rookies on Toronto's team, boyish glint in their eyes as they're being interviewed. Nilsson, Barrett, and Kent.

Shane only knows a little about them. He makes a point to go over each team's roster at the start of the season, refreshing his memory of everything he knows about everyone. There's nothing too notable about these rookies, except for the fact that Kent has a look on his face like a shark when there's blood in the water.

The interviewers ask them about facing Boston, and Ilya Rozanov. Whatever they say, Shane gets distracted from hearing by the sound of a pot lid set down onto the counter. He looks to see Jackie running a spoon through her stew. "It's ready," she announces, and turns to retrieve two tea towels.

"I'll get it," Shane tells her, nudging at her shoulder. She smiles gratefully at him, handing over the towels so he can lift the pot by the handles. He carries it to the Pikes' lavish kitchen table.

"Hayd, get off your ass and get the drinks," Jackie says, and Hayden shoots to his feet, but not without a furrow to his brow.

"What happened to not cursing?"

"What happened to helping your *wife*? Shane's been more help than you!"

Hayden grumbles to himself as he moseys to the refrigerator to pull out Coke and beer and another can of ginger ale. He catches Shane's eye as Shane passes by with the piping hot pot. "Can you believe he mentioned sharing a *cover* with you?"

Shane's lip quirks up. "He just likes riling people up. Looks like he's gotten to someone, too. He's not so bad, one-on-one."

"Oh, and I'm sure *you've* been alone with him plenty of times," Hayden mutters. He means it facetiously. He probably doesn't believe that Shane's been alone with Ilya at all. Shane tries not to look too guilty, anyway.

*

"How do you like being Captain?" Jackie asks him. Her stew is very good, and more importantly, aligns with his diet— *mostly.*

Shane thinks as he chews on the skin of a sliced cucumber. "It's good. Still getting used to it."

"Have you worked things out with Comeau privately?" J.J. asks. He's always eager for any wrinkles to smooth themselves out among his fellow players. J.J. thrives when everything is in harmony. Shane can tell that he's been waiting to ask this question for a while.

"I haven't talked to him, just us," Shane says, stabbing at some steamed squash. "But it's alright. Things have settled down on their own."

"Yeah. Finally back to normal. I don't know why anyone would start stirring up shit now," Hayden supplies. He shovels baked potato with butter and cheese into his mouth. The idea of salted butter makes Shane's mouth water. A baked potato on a cold winter's day used to be a nice thing to have, before he'd started thinking so seriously about food and nutrition.

He's not sure that things have gone back to normal with the team, but they've stabilized. And anyway, Shane would rather not speak to Comeau, or any of them, one-on-one. He feels pathetic. Too awkward to tolerate being alone with his teammates for a chat?

All except Hayden or J.J.

J.J. doesn't look convinced. He glances between Shane and Hayden skeptically. "He still makes comments. About Rozanov and you." J.J. jerks his chin at the television. "It's mostly just jokes now. *Mostly*."

"You mean Gil Comeau?" Jackie asks her husband. She looks to Shane. "He's giving you a hard time?"

Shane tries not to feel like a schoolchild being queried by a parent, but it does feel a bit like that. "Not exactly. Just… a bit of disagreement between the guys about—"

Hayden cuts in eagerly. "About *Ilya Rozanov*. He and Shane are '*friends*' now." He makes finger quotes in the air.

Jackie's brows raise. "Really? Good for you."

Hayden falters. "What?"

"Yeah, I think it's great. Rivalries are cute and all, but you two are the best players in the league. Maybe you'd have some things in common to talk about. You're in the same boat."

"Jac," Hayden says, voice small with a hint of wounded pride. "I'm sitting right here."

Jackie stares at him, and then realization hits her. She presses her lips together. "Hayd, you're *my* greatest player." J.J. ducks his head, hiding a short laugh behind a cough.

"Top ten," Hayden says, pointing a fork at his teammates. When no one agrees quickly enough, he scoffs in disbelief. "Fuck you guys. Top twenty at least, right?"

"*Right,*" Shane says.

"Though, wouldn't you be going to Sochi if that were the case?" J.J. asks, and that earns him a withering glare. J.J. looks to Shane curiously. "So *have* you spoken to him since? Rozanov, I mean?"

Shane considers denying it altogether. He knows how the other two feel about it, but something about Jackie's approval of the situation has struck him differently. It would be nice not to have to deny *everything* all the time, at least among his friends.

"We've talked a bit."

Hayden pops a piece of asparagus into his mouth, scowling across the room at the Raiders' game still playing. J.J. laughs uncomfortably. "What do you talk about?"

"Just— just the donations. Montreal." Shane tries to think of what to say. "He was surprisingly considerate, thinking about all the workers stuck fixing the power lines. The snow plowers, the first responders. I was a little surprised, too, honestly."

And that, he hates to admit, is the truth. He hadn't known that Ilya would be thinking so deeply about the world around him. It was easy not to when you were a man in the MLH. Enough money to never worry again, managers, PR team, and every service you could ever need at your disposal. No one looking down on you. Ilya had the advantages of being big and attractive, too charming for his own good, white. Shane feels a bit bad for expecting so little out of him. Maybe even a little guilty for assuming that Ilya didn't hold much compassion to speak of.

"He seems like a good guy," Shane murmurs. Hearing himself, it does very little to make up for all the terrible things said about Ilya Rozanov.

Jackie grins at him, turns it briefly on Hayden in a *told-you-so* fashion. "That's great, Shane. You could use more allies in the league, right?"

"Allies?"

"*Acquaintances*," Jackie waves a hand. "You've got Hayden and J.J. But if your own team is having a rough go, having friends on other teams might offer perspective. Rozanov's a captain too, right?"

"Since when have you been keeping track of all these other teams and their captains?" Hayden gripes.

Jackie rolls her eyes. "Not other teams. *Boston.* Since I have to hear about them all the time. From you!"

Shane smiles as the two of them bicker, no real heat behind their words.

"Hollander," J.J. starts, ignoring the Pikes. "Have you made any ground with your new relationship?"

Shane's stomach dips. "Oh. Uh…" He uses the prong of his fork to poke at a cucumber seed in his salad. His appetite has all at once dissipated. "Not really. It was just a few dates."

"You're seeing someone?" Jackie asks with the most excitement he's seen all night.

"Not only that. She was over at his *house*," Hayden supplies. It seems that the prospect of Shane dating has united the table once more.

Shane plasters a grin on his face. "It went alright. Not sure how much we'll see each other. Neither of us is in town that often at the same time."

"So she travels," Hayden hums, tapping his fork to his plate. "For work or for pleasure?"

"Both," Shane says easily, averting his eyes. He forces himself to eat a cucumber slice, and when he looks around the table, J.J. and Hayden are smirking at each other. Jackie grins at him, brow drawn up in surprise, perhaps at his unwillingness to divulge any further information. "Everyone at this table will be the first to know if anything serious happens with her," Shane says.

Just another lie in a long line of them.

*

Mid December

Jane - 9:02 pm - I'm alone. Call?

Lily - 9:03 pm - I am out. Be home in a little while. Entertain yourself until then?

Shane scowls at the texts. Ilya had been the one to tell him to call in the first place. They've done this a few times, Ilya's low voice over the phone telling him what to do, how to touch himself.

Shane can certainly entertain himself, at least. He's rented his own room tonight, on his own dime. There's no pretense of lying to Hayden anymore, at least not about *what* he's doing. His friend thinks he has a semi-serious relationship going on. He congratulates Shane when Shane slips away to be alone.

Annoyed with Ilya, he taps back a message.

Jane - 9:05 pm - I'm going to sleep. Goodnight

Lily - 9:06 pm - No

Lily - 9:06 pm - I will be home soon.

Lily - 9:06 pm - Touch yourself until I get there.

Shane grins. He knows how to get Ilya to show his hand these days. He's probably in a taxi as they speak, tapping his fingers along the car door impatiently as it navigates congested Boston streets.

Shane's been doing research.

That's what he calls it, looking up porn when he's home alone in his apartment. Exploring things that, up until recently, he hadn't let himself. It was one thing to watch straight porn and look at the man more than the woman. It was another thing to type the word "gay" into the search bar and be introduced to a world he'd never let himself delve into longer than a one-off recommended video.

When he was younger, before he'd been drafted, there'd been one clip in particular he'd kept close to his chest. Straight. Vanilla. The clip had spent an unusually long amount of time focusing on the man— for straight porn, at least— camera panning on his big, rounded muscles, soft, fuzzy belly. Big dick, bigger balls, dark body hair.

He'd used to catch himself staring far too long at the actor, and for a long time, he couldn't recall specifics about the woman, even after seeing the clip a dozen times.

Now, he understands better why it had taken up so much of his spare brain space.

Shane isn't sure that he has a type other than "big and strong," which is saying something, considering that he himself is big and strong, in a professional field surrounded by other big and strong men. Finding Ilya was like finding a perfect needle in a giant pile of needles.

He doesn't keep anything on his local computer anymore, no videos, gifs, pictures. His anxiety is too high to keep even bookmarks in his browser for favored videos. But he knows how to find what he likes in under 60 seconds, for times when just his hand simply won't do.

Since he's been with Ilya, though, he's been hard-pressed to find anything that tops his memories.

*

Ilya gets back to his big, empty, freezing Boston house from the airport. He chucks his bag into one corner and kicks off his shoes. Downs a glass of tap water, spilling rivulets out the corners of his mouth. Turns the heating on.

He doesn't bother going to his room, pulling his phone from his pocket, and sprawling on his sofa. He wants to hear Shane's voice as soon as possible.

He ignores the awaiting text from Alexei, likely giving a nothing update on their father's condition and probably asking for more money in return for it.

Just a week ago, Ilya had received a phone call in the evening. It'd been his father, entirely confused about where he was and what was going on. Ilya had quickly figured out that it was midnight in Moscow, and his father had woken up this way. The older man had recovered rather quickly, blaming the episode on a sleep-heavy mind. He didn't remember that Ilya was coming home for the Olympics, though, so when they hung up, he'd called Alexei and asked him to go over.

Ilya hasn't been faring all that well. He's been trying to conceal that from Shane. They get so few times to truly talk; he doesn't want to taint them with any personal problems.

Over a month since they've seen each other, a handful of calls, and a lot of texts. More sex than Ilya thought was possible to have long distance, but it's not quite cutting it lately. Sometimes, when they're done, he just wants to sit and talk to Shane, usually about nothing. About hockey or teammates, or the news, or the weather. Basically nothing. Shane indulges him as long as he can before either of their roommates comes back.

Once, Shane had fallen asleep in his apartment with the phone near his head, and Ilya had gotten to listen to his soft breathing for as long as he could keep himself awake.

The only thing keeping him sane has been Marleau. They don't talk about Shane nearly at all, but just knowing that his friend is aware somehow makes all the difference. If Ilya could pick his family, he wishes he'd had someone like Marleau for a brother, instead of the one he'd gotten.

He finds Shane's contact and slips the phone between his ear and shoulder, squeezing it there as he begins undoing his belt buckle and fly. It's his house. He's allowed to jack off in his own living room.

"Hey," Shane answers, voice breathy.

"Hi." Ilya listens to Shane. A little gasp comes down the line. "Hollander…" Ilya says, hesitant. "Are you…"

"*Yes*," Shane says, voice pinched. "Want you."

Ilya shuts his eyes, slipping a hand down the front of his jeans, fly unzipping as he does. He presses his palm against his cock, already fattening up. "What are you doing?" he asks. Shane gasps again. "Tell me."

"Entertaining myself."

"*How?* Where?"

"Two fingers," Shane says.

In his mind's eye, Ilya can see it. Shane's beautiful, strong hands, sliding over his waist and hips. Long fingers, slicked up and catching the light.

Shane's voice is low but desperate. "Been like this for almost an hour. Waiting for you."

"Yes? Waiting?" Ilya wets his lips, wishes he'd drunk more water than he had. "Waiting for me to do what?"

"Talk to me. Tell me what to do."

"It sounds like you're already doing plenty," Ilya murmurs. He listens to Shane's breathing, followed by a small whine. "What do you want to hear?" Ilya asks, some of the spell of eroticism breaking. He wants to know how Shane is, what he wants, what he *needs*. Does he want Ilya to tease and needle him? Or does he want sweetness?

"Be nice," Shane says, voice small. "Miss you."

"Ah," Ilya manages. He misses Shane so much that it makes him sick some days. It must be too much to feel for something so short-lived as the week they'd spend together. The same "young love" his mother had told him about, but then, why does it feel so heavy and painful? "You sound *so cute,*" Ilya finishes in Russian without thinking. "So desperate. Are you sitting up? Or on your belly? On your back?"

"On my back."

"So *good,* Shane. Your legs are apart, yes?"

Shane's breath shakes. "Uh-huh."

Ilya slips his hand into the front of his briefs, dry palm squeezing and rubbing himself to full hardness.

"I bet you look very good. Legs wide open. Is nothing prettier."

"I'm not," Shane murmurs.

"Mm, you are," Ilya insists, gripping himself tightly. He thinks of going to find lube, but he can deal without, relying on his foreskin to keep the friction right. "Where are you touching, Shane?"

"You know."

"Tell me," Ilya says lowly. "Want to hear it. I talk to you, you talk to me."

Shane swallows thickly. "Inside," is all he can manage, voice nearly a whisper.

"So shy," Ilya coos. "Even after everything." After Ilya's seen everything there is to see of Shane, from most angles. He could never get his fill of it, and already, his memory of it does not compare to the real thing. He'd ask Shane to send him a photo if it wasn't such a compromising thing to risk.

"Shut up," Shane mutters before he can help it, and Ilya laughs.

"What do you feel like, hm? Describe for me." He glides his foreskin lazily over the head of his dick, enjoying listening to Shane take himself apart.

Shane is quiet for a moment, and Ilya gives him time. He isn't used to this, after all, and Ilya can't expect him to jump right into dirty talk so easily, even after a few times practice—

"So *tight*," Shane murmurs. Ilya hears a wet sound accompanied by it that suddenly inflames his whole face. His eyes crack open, and he listens more intently. "Hot and tight," Shane whines.

"*Fuck*, Hollander," Ilya growls. "You need something bigger than fingers, don't you?"

Because he knows that Shane does. Shane likes to feel it.

"Wish it was you—" his breath hitches. "Wish it was your hands, your mouth. Your cock—"

"*Da,* fuck," Ilya swallows. "Get your toy."

He listens to Shane's bed shift, his bedside drawer. Imagines that purple shaft and wide head. He listens to Shane's breath shush out as he gets himself back into place. *Curling his hips, legs splayed, cushiony soft skin of his pelvis and thighs all slick with sweat, dusted in dark hair.* Mouthwatering to imagine.

"*Mm*," Shane sighs. "Not as good as you."

"*Da*, yes," Ilya grins. "But fuck yourself on it anyway."

"I'm already so close," Shane mutters, and Ilya can hear his efforts by the way his breath punches out of him in rhythm with his own thrusting hand, little *ah—ah's* interspersed occasionally with Ilya's name.

"*Good,"* Ilya murmurs in Russian. He wonders if Shane has parsed out any words of his language, yet. "I want you to come," Ilya murmurs and begins stroking himself in earnest.

In a way, it's not really about Ilya at all. Shane's sounds have captivated his mind, like a very good story or witnessing a beautiful scene. All he can do is listen and get himself off as an afterthought. He only comes back to himself at the last moment when he's on the edge, orgasm in his sights.

He pictures Shane's face, long dark lashes, pinched brow, sweat sheen on his forehead. "*Shane*," Ilya grits, more wanton than he'd meant for it to sound.

"*Ilya—"*

That's the most wonderful thing of all. Saying each other's name, feeling so close to someone who's so far away. For just one, stupefying, mind-blowing instance, Ilya's not alone in his Boston house. He's not alone in the great sea of reality, treading water for something, *anything* to keep him afloat.

"*Ilya,*" Shane sighs, spent.

In Ilya's mind, he's with Shane, out in the open sun, no snow or cold or dark, tangled together and unashamed.

*

Ilya lies on his side on the sofa, listening to Shane murmur to himself, probably cleaning himself up. Something Ilya would be doing for him, if he were there. Taking great pleasure in taking care.

"Where did you learn to say these things, hm?" Ilya asks, his own mouth cottony. "So filthy. Do you seduce many men over the phone?" he asks playfully.

Shane laughs, muffled by a pillow, maybe. "I've never tried it before."

"Unbelievable," Ilya murmurs. "No one would ever believe Shane Hollander is so secretly sexy."

"I'm not," Shane complains.

"So *slutty,"* Ilya says, accent thick. Shane doesn't say anything for a moment, and Ilya wonders if he's overstepped. "Is okay?" he asks.

"Yeah" Shane says. "I think… I like it."

"You think?"

Shane hums, but Ilya can hear his smile when he says, "Definitely."

"You sounded so good," Ilya murmurs. In Russian, "*So pretty, I wish I could see your face right now.*"

"You should teach me some Russian."

"Perhaps."

"I gotta go," Shane sighs. "Gotta be up early."

Not yet, just a bit longer, Ilya thinks. He misses a time when he and Shane could go at it hard and recover next to one another. Then roll over, go down to the kitchen for a drink, or turn on the shower, one of them following the other wherever they went.

Ilya had never thought he was lonely before. But now he's cursed by the knowledge that he is.

"Me too," he lies.

"Goodnight," Shane murmurs.

"Bye."

Ilya sits on his sofa, staring at his darkened television screen, darkened windows, darkened living room. He hadn't even bothered to turn on any lights other than the one in the dining room, only focused on thinking about Shane and what he might be doing, what he would look like.

All at once, his eyes well up and his throat grows tight, and he can't see any of it clearly. He's just in a dark room, in a dark house. Alone.

He feels very much like a child again, silently crying, missing his mother, missing *any* friendly face. He very much wishes that things were not the way they were.

*

Late December

Shane blinks awake to the dark wood of the ceiling. It's not his apartment, and it's faintly lit up by a fluorescent glow.

He's in his room at his parents' cottage. It'd been the chime of his phone to wake him. He rubs at an eye and finds his glasses on the bedside table, slipping them on. He wonders who the hell would be texting him in the middle of the night on a holiday, but then sees the name.

Lily - 12:02 am - Merry Christmas

Shane stares bleary-eyed at the text. It's officially December 25th. Yes, technically Christmas. He sits up.

Jane - 12:04 am - Merry Christmas. Are you in Boston?

Ilya takes a little while to answer, and Shane looks out the crack in his blinds at the darkened night sky.

Lily - 12:07 am - Yes. Where are you?

He'd driven here from Montreal the day before. The outside of his parents' cottage has been decorated in lights that turn the snow sitting atop them into shades of glowing rainbow.

Shane rubs his eyes and taps back a response. He's suddenly wide awake, so he swings his legs out of bed, taking his phone with him. He stands in the recently refinished hallway and listens. His father's telltale snoring comes from his parents' room.

He wanders through the kitchen to the living room, standing at the sliding glass doors and pulling back the curtains. The path down to the frozen lake is covered in snow on both sides. There's no moonlight, but the snow and ice bounce starlight in all directions, very clear this far out of the city.

He pulls up one of the ottomans and sits down in front of the doors, looking at his phone again. He hasn't got a response yet.

Jane - 12:12 am - Do you celebrate Christmas?

Another two minutes pass.

Lily - 12:14 am - Not really. Is a bit different in Russia. New Year is bigger. You should see it.

Shane would love to see it.

It's too cold to sit outside, or he would go out and walk along the path to the lake to get a bit of air and privacy. He'd used to do that, growing up here, the only time he would ever do anything that could be classified as "sneaking out".

Driving up from Montreal this time, he'd met his parents at his own property, recently purchased and even more recently built upon, to look over the work that'd been done over the last summer. A new sewer line was installed, a water well, electricity, along with the building. Amazing what could get done when there was an abundance of money involved.

It's still not quite finished, the contractors tell him. It still looks very good. Maybe he can arrange for the final work to be done before the coming summer, so he'll be able to spend his break there. If not, he can always come back here to his parents.

He craves the solitude, though.

Jane - 12:16 am - Why are you awake?

Lily - 12:17 am - Why are you asleep? I am with friends. Party.

Jane - 12:17 am - A party on Christmas Eve night?

Lily - 12:18 am - They are friends who do not celebrate either.

Jane - 12:18 am - So why are you talking to me then?

Another long bout of silence. Shane wonders if he's pushed too far, but then a reply comes.

Lily - 12:21 am - You know why.

Shane's heart flutters.

He has his suspicions. There's one *big* reason that he wishes Ilya were contacting him. He doesn't suppose he'd get the whole truth out of Ilya by asking, though.

Jane - 12:21 am - I'm at my parents, I can't call. You're drunk, aren't you?

Ilya takes a long time to answer, and before he does, Shane hears someone's heels in the hallway, stopping at the living room entrance. Icy shock slides down Shane's arms, but he relaxes as he hears his mother's sound of confusion.

"What are you doing?" she asks. "It's freezing in here."

"Couldn't sleep." Shane shrugs, slipping his phone discreetly into his pocket. "Thought I'd get a little cold. Then go back to bed."

One of her fine brows arches. She steps up next to him and looks down the path as well, face relaxing into a small smile. She takes a seat in the freestanding armchair a few feet away, perched on the edge.

"I remember you skating on that lake every winter break. From the time you could walk until you started your serious training." She grins at him, tinged with nostalgia.

Shane remembers all those winters, mostly with his dad on the ice, the older man teaching him everything there was to know about hockey before he even had a firm grasp on the English language.

"You wanted to figure skate one year," his mother laughed. "I think you were seven or eight. You saw the Olympics on TV and got obsessed."

Shane smiles for real, then. "Dad must have been upset, right?"

"He wanted you to do whatever you wanted," she says. Slowly, her smile morphs into a grimace. "I think *I* was more upset than he was. I would've come around, though. I would've supported you, too, you know?"

Shane shrugs and nods, unsure why it even matters now. "Well, look at me now. Going to the Olympics in two months. I ought to thank you. You were behind me the whole way, pushing me." He means it in a good way. Professional athletes really only ever make it because their parents push them, provide everything they possibly can. Make sacrifices for their children, drive them to games, buy them the gear, get them the trainers. Hockey is important to his mother, and it's just as important to Shane. He couldn't have done it without her.

When he looks back at her, though, she's distressed.

"Maybe I pushed you too hard into it. Do you ever think about that?" she asks.

"What?" Shane feels blindsided. He laughs quietly. "No? Where is this coming from?"

She stares at him with subtle sadness in her eyes. She shakes her head, waving a hand. "I'm still half asleep, I guess. I just want you to know, Shane, that if you ever wanted to do something that you thought you couldn't… I'd be there for you. I'd be right behind you, still, even if it wasn't what I, well… expected. If you wanted to be… a figure skater instead of a

hockey player, or if…" She clams up, mouth a thin line, looking at him. "Do you understand?"

Shane is struck dumb, staring at her. Why would this matter when he already chose hockey? When he's continued to choose hockey for his entire life? When he's a professional athlete, at the top of his game, heading for the top of the league. An *Olympian*.

"I'm a hockey player, Mom. I *love* hockey." Sometimes, he hates it, too, but most of the time, he loves it as much as breathing. "That's not going to change, ever. Besides, it's a bit late to start figure skating, isn't it?" He laughs nervously, trying to dispel the tension that's filled the room.

His phone buzzes in his pocket, drawing both their attention.

She stares at the pocket of his sweats. "Hayden?"

"Uh-huh," Shane nods automatically.

Her shoulders fall, and she looks more tired than ever. She props her hands on her knees and pushes up. "Well. Tell him I said Merry Christmas." She pauses as she passes him by. "And Shane… I'm very proud of you."

He flashes a smile up at her. "I know."

"I mean it," she leans down, kisses the top of his head, which she hasn't done in a while.

He stares up at her. "I know you are." She's proud that he's excelled at hockey. She's proud that he plays for the Metros, her favorite team, and that he's their captain. That he's playing for Canada at the Olympics. That he's done his very best with every opportunity he was ever given.

What mother wouldn't be proud of that?

"I love you," she says.

If you knew, would you still?

He ducks his head, slightly embarrassed. "Love you, too."

It feels illogical to even consider it— his mother is a good person.

But it's always the worry, seeded deep down in the pit of his heart. That some small, revelatory truth about himself will change everything. Change the way his parents look at him, the way the world looks at him. The unknown of that is far more frightening than staying hidden for a few more decades, keeping himself locked away, curled up tight where no one can get to his soft underbelly.

When she's gone back to bed, he pulls his phone out. The cold makes him shiver a bit.

Lily - 12:38 am - I am not drunk. And I'm going home. I want to be in bed.

Shane smiles softly at the message.

Jane - 12:40 am - I want to be in bed too.

Lily - 12:40 am - With me?

Jane - 12:41 am - Sure. You run warm.

*

Late January

Shane visits his primary care physician before the Olympic designated doctors get their hands on him. He gets his basics checked over, his vaccine records in order. He gets his vitals checked, his blood drawn. His joints are checked before he does any last-minute conditioning.

Shane stops the doctor at the very end, a hand held out to keep him from leaving.

"You um… You do STD testing, right?"

"Sure thing," his doctor answers, unfazed. "Anything in particular you're looking out for? Any symptoms?"

"I don't know. No, no symptoms." Shane shrugs. He's only had a handful of partners, ever. The few girls he's tried to be with, well, they didn't get very far into the experiences before things petered out, so to speak. He's used a condom every time with Ilya, but he'd love it if

that weren't the case, the next time... "Could you just check everything?" he asks awkwardly. "I don't know. Just to be safe?" He wants to have the record of it. On hand.

"We can run a full panel. I'll send in a nurse to gather a few more samples. I assume you don't mind filling a cup?"

On his way out of the building, Shane gets a call. He hopes it's Ilya, because he *always* hopes it's Ilya, but in the end, he's glad it isn't.

It's his contractors.

He eagerly picks up, heading for his car.

They tell him that the last of the water hookups inside the house went flawlessly. One floorboard was damaged when the crew dropped the corner of his new tub on it, 200lbs into one point of contact. The tub was undamaged, but they'd had to refinish the shine.

Not a problem, Shane tells them, and they go over the rest of what needs to be done. Finishing the garage before next winter. A boat dock, which the contractor's associate can handle. More work needs to be done on the guest rooms downstairs, finishing putting in drywall, and lighting fixtures. He has a recommendation for a painter who can't come out until possibly the beginning of summer, but the walls won't be finished until then, anyway, usually the final piece of a house to come together.

At the end of the call, his contractor mentions a car that stopped along the main road, at the mouth of the property's long drive. A film scout searching out nearby locations for a movie looking to film in the summer after next. They provided a company card to pass on to landowners in the area. They hadn't said what film was being shot, only that it would require the "pristine natural landscape of a lakeside cabin."

"That's interesting," Shane says, and takes the number down. He probably won't get back to them. He's got a lot on his plate right now. The playoffs that the Metros will almost certainly not be going to. The Olympics he's leaving for in a few weeks. A doomed romance with his biggest public rival.

He doesn't mention any of this to his contractor, of course.

*

February

A little over a week before his flight to Russia is scheduled, Shane sits in bed with his reading glasses on, a book about the Olympics of years past and Canada's part in them propped on his bent knees.

His phone lights up on the nightstand.

Lily - 9:04 pm - May I call?

Jane - 9:04 pm - Yes

It's a video call, and Shane answers eagerly. They don't do video calls very often, usually due to practicality, and he hasn't seen Ilya in a while, though he desperately wants to. Ilya looks freshly showered, hair still dark and damp and curling at the ends. He's pink in the cheeks, and his face looks remarkably youthful despite the sternness at the corners of his eyes.

"Hi," Shane says, small smile.

Ilya's eyes flit around the screen. "I have not seen you in your glasses before. I saw them at your house. I thought they were a prop."

Shane scoffs. "I only wear them when I'm reading." He reaches up to remove them.

"Keep them on?" Ilya asks, a brow quirking.

Shane's hand lowers back to the bed. "Okay. Are you still in Boston?"

"Mm," Ilya nods, brow lowering again. "I leave in a few days for Moscow. I will see my family briefly. My father and I will fly to Sochi."

"Oh," Shane nods. He knows that that isn't necessarily a good thing. "I leave in a week."

Ilya's mouth cracks. "You and Boiziau, yes?"

"We're rooming together. It'll be nice to be with a friend." There are others on his team coming, too, but none that he would quite classify as "friends". He's been doing his best to keep the peace and keep the team on track. It's mostly been alright, but only in that there is no outright hostility.

They're not making it to the playoffs this year. They haven't even made it to April yet, but Shane can feel it down in his gut. Unless something drastic changes, he'll be watching another team lift the Stanley Cup from Hayden's living room.

Shane clears his throat. "I uh… didn't forget what you said. About not talking to you. Or looking at you."

"Yes," Ilya's face goes somber. "Is why I am calling. There is one more thing I wanted to tell you. After we hang up… please do not text me again."

Shane falters. "What?"

"Yes. Do not text or call me. At all." Ilya's mouth goes thin. "I think we should delete our texts to each other, as well."

"Ilya—" Shane's breath stutters. He sits up in bed, spare hand grabbing onto one of his ankles. "Just wait— did something happen—?" *Did I do something wrong?*

Ilya's face softens a touch. "Shane, is alright."

"It doesn't fucking *feel* alright," Shane says. "What do you mean?" He doesn't intend to sound so pathetic, but Ilya's caught him entirely off guard.

"Shane, is not what you are thinking. Please, listen." He waits, and Shane bites down hard on his tongue. Ilya nods to himself. "I have heard rumors. I'm sure they are true. The land phones in the park might be tapped. The WiFi may be surveilled, so do not look up anything… unusual." Shane's cheeks flush. Ilya clears his throat, as if this is a script or list he's been memorizing. "I do not know what else they will do. But I do not want any evidence on our phones. Any photos, texts, please delete them all. Just to be safe."

"I already do that," Shane says, but he understands better now. He begins to feel the creep of embarrassment at his ears. "But I'll make sure."

"Yes. Good." Ilya nods. His lashes flutter as he blinks rapidly, looking at his phone screen more intently. Shane licks his lips, watches as Ilya's eyes track the motion.

"Has it always been that bad there?" Shane asks quietly. "I read some articles."

"No. Never has it been good. But is getting worse. And worser, still." Then, in a lighter tone of voice, "Also, maybe the rooms will be bugged, too, so don't bring any other big, sexy, non-Russian men back, either."

Shane snorts. "Shut the fuck up."

Ilya's eyes narrow. "I am serious."

"So am I." Shane frowns. "You think I'd bring someone back to my room?"

"Not with Boiziau there, no."

"Well— even if he wasn't there, and no one was watching, I wouldn't do that."

Ilya watches him, face beginning to soften. "No? Why not?" He's teasing, of course. But Shane can tell that he's still fascinated by Shane's answers to his stupid questions.

"You know why, asshole."

"There will be many attractive people there. Extremely fit people… with lots of stamina… does not even tempt you a little bit?"

"No." How can he be tempted when there's only one person who will do? "Does it tempt *you*?"

Ilya smiles, eyes downcast. "Not so much, no. I must be turning into you."

Boring, he means. But for the first time, Shane thinks that that might not be such a bad thing to Ilya. Judging by the look on his face.

"I'm not sleeping with anyone else," Shane asserts quietly. "I don't want to."

"No?"

"No."

Ilya's gaze is fiery and intense. "Good."

Shane thrills down his spine, through his pelvis. His hand trembles in anticipatory excitement as he holds the phone out, showing a bit more of himself in his bed. He's always been embarrassed, seeing himself on a camera, but Ilya seems to like it enough for Shane to override his aversion. "Since we won't talk again… maybe we could…?"

Ilya's lips part, breath sucking in loudly as he nods eagerly. "Yes, I think we should."

Shane grins, setting his phone down to strip his shirt off.

"But you will keep your glasses on, yes?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading this incredibly long chapter. 8k words. If I ever try to upload anything over 4999 words again, someone needs to smack me.

_____

- If this fic were a music album, this chapter would be an interlude.

- A little nod to the canon with the glasses on during a video call.

- Something I've noticed myself doing is taking moments from the show or book and altering them, often by pulling a good, old-fashioned switcharoo. Like Ilya being the one to use his hand when they frot, or Shane being the one to say "you've ruined me," Ilya wearing a Montreal sweatshirt instead of a Boston one when *"meeting"* Shane's mom, so on and so forth. Sometimes this is on purpose, and other times it's just the muse's mighty hand. I look back on it later like, "Oh yeah, of course! That's why it felt balanced."

This is an tactic that really only fanfic specifically gets to use, referencing the original text/media and riffing on it. And it's only understood and interpreted by readers because they also know the source material! I just think it's neat.

- I'm not sure if I made this clear in the previous chapters, but neither of the sweatshirts they took from each other have any team names/logos on them. They were their personal clothing, like Shane's blue hoodie in the show. Just wanted to make that abundantly clear, if it wasn't already by the fact that they wear them in front of their own teams.

- One note on podfics: I've had a few readers interested in creating podfics of this fic! First, thank you! Second, I'm still working on getting comfortable with the idea of this. I appreciate podfics as a medium, but I just have anxiety of handing over control, sometimes. I think I'll become more comfortable with this idea by the time I finish this fic and fix anything I want to fix in the earlier chapters. (I will add this to my rollover end notes as well, and update if/when I change my mind!) Thank you for your understanding.

- Of course, any transformational works-- fics based on this fic-- are welcome. I couldn't stop you even if I wanted to, but I don't want to. Write away.

- I don't care if Hayden went to Sochi in canon. No Sochi for Hayden. Jail for Hayden.

That's all for now folks. I'm gonna go take a nap

Chapter 26: Glimpse

Chapter Summary

> He's been hoping to catch a glimpse of him on one of their runs. No luck, so far, and maybe it's for the best. He's not sure how either of them would react, and maybe it'd be more painful in the long run anyway, seeing each other and not able to do anything about it.

Chapter Notes

> **Content Warning** for homophobia in this chapter.
>
> Hello! Another longish one today.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Six

Headline: Morin of the New York Admirals out of Olympics following medical emergency late last night. Who will take his place on Team Canada?

Ilya only gets halfway through reading the top trending headlines before the shrill screaming laugh of a child drags his attention away from his phone. His niece plays with her young, distant relatives, running around the front garden of his father's house. Ilya's reminded of the house he grew up in, more modest with a small stoop and walk. He'd run around screaming with his own cousins when they'd all been too young to have much of an opinion about anything, especially each other.

He tucks his phone away for the fifth time in an hour. He's had to resist the automatic impulse to send Shane a message in his boredom. He'd like to check in on him, through teasing and prodding, to see how he is, what he's doing, find out if he's boarded his plane to Russia yet. And perhaps tell him that he misses him very, very much. It's a dull ache that never leaves him. He can distract himself from it by texting someone else— Sveta, mostly. But it's always there, ready to remind him that it's not going away.

It's his last day in Moscow. He's spent a few days here upon his father's request. From the moment he arrived, Ilya wished he'd made an excuse not to come. Anything to avoid being paraded around to his father's retired friends and sitting through terrible family dinners.

No one in his family seems to favor him very much, even though Ilya is the reason for the nice house his father lives in, as well as his aunt's and brother's apartments. The reason their children, few as there are now, have plenty of diapers and get the best education they can when they get older. The reason they all have the warmest coats and base layers in the winter, and can go to high-end shops for their housewares.

Sveta is the only one from his old life who doesn't look at him with disdain. And she's the only one who doesn't, no, *refuses* to take any money from him, no matter how many times he's offered to get her something nice. *I don't need a* sponsor*, Ilya,* she'll tease him without fail. He knows that she means a *sugar daddy*, but she refuses to ever utter those words, either. *That's not what our relationship is.*

He decides to send her a text in his desperation.

Ilya - 2:35 pm - Are you flying in today? I could use a night out after this day from hell.

A night in, more like, spent at her apartment over beers and catching up and watching a game. He hasn't had a chance to explain to her that his life of debauchery seems to have run its course. He can't get the same thing out of it that he used to crave.

Sveta - 2:37 pm - My plane won't arrive until after you've left for Sochi :(I'll see you at the gala though!

If his extended family doesn't look at him very much, Alexei spends far too long making up for it. Every time Ilya turns around, his brother's scornful eye is on him. Enough so that it makes him want to bow out and find a hotel to stay at, so he doesn't have to face whatever Alexei wants to say to him.

Ilya is finally cornered in their father's large kitchen when he's retrieving a stiff drink to get him through the end of the day. Alexei stands in the doorway, waiting until Ilya notices him there. From the sound of things, they're the only two within hearing range. Ilya presses his lower back into the kitchen counter, folding one arm protectively across his chest.

"How is your career in the North American league?" Alexei doesn't ask these things with any genuine interest. Ilya knows that it's because he has something to criticize about it.

"Adequate. As we can see." Ilya motions around the kitchen with one hand, the other clutching tight to a short glass filled with vodka. "How's your two-bedroom apartment?"

Alexei scoffs, still unashamed. "It has rats, I think."

"Well, you live in a big city, that's what happens." Ilya holds his glass out, shaking it in offering, more a distraction than anything.

Alexei scowls at it, eyes flicking back up to Ilya, pale and boring into him. "I've seen a recent interview with you. And I think you're up to something."

"What could I be up to?" Ilya scoffs, taking another sip. He'd down the whole thing if he didn't think it'd further Alexei's suspicion. "Leading the Russian team? Taking Boston to the playoffs? Being the best at what I do?" He counts off on his fingers.

Alexei's expression is half irritation and half something that looks like slow-mounting disgust. "Don't think I don't see things, Ilya, like when you've been messing around with things you shouldn't. You're just the same as you always were, even as a kid."

Ilya scoffs. "What, talented, motivated?" All the things Alexei hadn't been known to be. It's a low blow. Alexei had had his own struggles. Just beginning his driving lessons, just starting his life when their mother had taken hers. And then there was their father…

Alexei's lip curls. "*Perverse*," he mutters.

Ilya's mouth snaps shut. There are no more words needed to understand what Alexei means. To his credit, he's never brought it up to their father. Alexei's one small blessing to him. One brotherly act.

"You don't know what you're talking about," Ilya scoffs, determined to throw him off the scent, anyway. "I don't know what you think you've seen. I talk a lot of shit, that's how I handle my image. It works very well for me in the West."

"I know *you,*" Alexei says disdainfully. "And the West has only made you worse."

Ilya doesn't know what to say to him. Any denial will only make him look guiltier in his brother's eyes.

You don't know me, Ilya wants to shout in his face. *You don't know even one percent of me, who I am or who matters to me.* He wants to sock the smug look off Alexei's face.

Alexei sighs after some time. Ilya's silence is all the confirmation he needs.

"Watch yourself, Ilya. If this family knew what you were really like, the public might find out, too. You could be made into an example. Then where would you be?"

Ilya can't tell if it's a thinly veiled threat or a genuine warning, but he's been preparing for it for years. "Where would *you* be?"

Alexei shakes his head, turning away from him like he's a lost cause, but Ilya can see the twinge of indignation there, too, just before he does.

Ilya knows that no matter what else happens in his life, there will be no repairing this relationship. No matter if he wins Olympic gold for Russia or saves a hundred people from a burning building. His brother hates him for many more reasons than suspecting him of being queer, but his sexuality is the easiest and most outward thing to go after.

In terms of insulting conversations, it's remarkably tame compared to past rows they've gotten into. Normally, it's Alexei, slurred voice or otherwise affected by alcohol and drugs, calling him things, *disgusting, immoral, slow and stupid. Traitor. You abandoned us, Ilya, we don't need you anymore.* Ilya has heard it all. His worst adversary. His own brother.

Forgive me, Mama. I cannot make him love me.

Despite all of that, seeing his father has been the worst part of returning home, but not for the reason he'd expected.

He's still cruel. Critical of nearly everything about him. Sometimes, Ilya is jealous of his brother, simply for the fact that their father hadn't been as tough on him growing up as he had been on Ilya. Ilya had often wondered why; was it because he was younger or more free-spirited than his brother? That he liked hockey more than the idea of getting a "respectable job" back when the professional league had felt so far away? Was it because Ilya reminded him more of their mother than Alexei did?

But his father's cruelness isn't what disturbs him the most during his few days in Moscow.

When they're finally at the airport, leaving for Sochi, he watches his father pat around for his identification for nearly sixty seconds before Ilya carefully reaches into the top of his father's carry-on. His father had only put it there ten minutes prior.

His father stares at him for one blank moment before he scoffs and waves him off. "I don't need your help, ah… ah... Ilya," he mutters.

Ilya and Alexei look at each other, and for one instance, they're united by equal concern.

*

Shane sits in the small cafe set up inside one of the Montreal Airport VIP waiting rooms. It's still dim outside, mostly quiet, only a few Canadian-born players nursing hangovers with mediocre coffee. The rest of them are at the windows, looking out at the distant city lights and murmuring quietly, excited about the games hopefully to come.

Shane scrolls mindlessly through his social media feed and resists opening his texts. He knows his chain with Ilya will be gone, entirely erased, and that'll put a damper on his own brewing excitement. He sips on green tea, not nearly as good as the loose leaf his mother continuously sends him. It'll do to get him awake, at least, while he waits for J.J. to arrive.

A figure comes to a stop in his peripheral, big, tall, and dark. Shane glances up, freezing when he sees who it is, to-go cup halfway to his mouth. A wide, prominent brow and a few days of dark stubble from ear to throat.

"Hot damn," Marleau says, and drops his heavy-looking duffel bag to the ground. "Hollander in the flesh. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed."

Shane blinks owlishly as Marleau sets his own to-go cup of piping hot coffee down on the other side of the table, pulling out the faux-leather chair to sit.

"What are you doing here?" Shane asks blankly, sitting up straighter.

Marleau gives a short roll of his eyes. "What, not happy to see me?"

"That's not— no. I mean, yes…" Only a few faces have looked up at Marleau's arrival. Even fewer show any surprise, though the ones that do lean down to chat quietly with anyone they're seated with. "I just had no idea you were playing for Canada."

"You didn't get the memo?" Marleau holds his hands out as if presenting himself. "Morin's appendix burst right before his flight into Canada. I got the call in the middle of the night. Took a red-eye to be here. What luck." Despite looking dead tired, with deep hollows in his skin, Marleau's eyes sparkle with the same excitement Shane has seen on most of the other faces at the airport. Twenty-five men, all eager to prove themselves to the world… even if some, like Marleau, are only there as backups.

"You don't mind me cramping your style, do you?" Marleau still looks smug, and Shane knows that he's teasing. It makes more and more sense why he and Ilya are such easy friends. Two sides of the same coin, driven to work hard and excel, but also make room to party and play.

"Of course not." Shane's mouth quirks up. "Anyone else on your team here?" Which he already knows the answer to, but he's trying to make conversation.

"Nah." Marleau shrugs. "I know some of the other guys here, though. Good thing, cause I missed out on some team practice."

"Right." Shane can't say the same. When the rest of Team Canada— or, half of them at least — had gotten together the day before for a short practice, it had been Shane's first time meeting most of them. He knows *of* every player in the league, knows their records, and most of last year's stats. Trying to integrate himself into them had been… fine. He's still a bit too quiet for his own good. But he's been learning about his temporary team in other ways, eyes tracking them all on the ice like a radar.

He hates to admit it, but he's glad to see someone familiar, even if he and Marleau aren't necessarily friends. They both care very much about a mutual party, one which Shane is desperately curious about.

"Have you, um… talked to…"

"A little," Marleau says. "Haven't messaged him since I found out I was going, though."

"Right."

Marleau sits back, tilting his head thoughtfully. "You two not talking or something?"

"No. I mean… *Yes,* but it's not really a great place to get caught," Shane says quietly. "Better to play it safe."

"Damn," Marleau's face slowly turns more serious. "So you two won't even see each other at all?"

"No." Shane shrugs like it doesn't bother him, even though the opposite is true. "Not if we can help it."

"Jesus. That's rough... Well, good for you two for sticking it out, anyway." Marleau says. Then, he grins and stands. Shane is surprised when he pats his shoulder in a friendly gesture as he leaves. "Ballsy Hollzy takes Russia," he says teasingly.

Shane's face turns marginally redder as Marleau saunters away to say hello to the rest of the team. Faces brighten wherever he goes, and Shane observes, taking it all in. Marleau is an easy person to get along with.

"Shane?" J.J. appears on his other side, and Shane jerks back in his seat, nerves jarred. J.J. grins at him, looking far too awake. "Was that Cliff Marleau?"

"Yeah," Shane says. He motions for J.J. to sit, which he does, and Shane finally feels the last of his nerves begin to ease in the presence of a real friend. He smiles. "You ready for this?"

"Absolutely," J.J. says, slinging the strap of his carry-on over the back of the chair. He looks over his shoulder at Marleau again, watching as the big man makes introductions. J.J. turns back to him with a look of confusion. "Did he just call you '*Ballsy Hollzy*'?"

*

Ilya keeps an eye on the news on the short flight from Moscow to Sochi. He looks through every headline, all of the torch-bearing and announcing and fanfare. He keeps a special eye on the hockey teams arriving at the park, looking to make sure that Canada made it without a hitch. He feels silly for worrying about such a thing, but he does. There's a marginal sense of relief when he spots a few photos of Team Canada arriving at the park in Sochi.

There's one of Shane getting out of a black SUV, dark sunglasses over his eyes, and bundled up in his muted colors. Next to him is his friend, Jean-Jacques Boiziau, both of their mouths open as if they're speaking quietly to each other.

He's floored when he sees Marleau there, a few photos down the page, rough around the edges, but with a big grin on his handsome face, expensive sunglasses, and tousled hair.

He taps out a message to him.

Roz - 12:55 pm - Who let you into Russia?

If his messages are being watched by a faceless government lackey somewhere, what harm could come from talking to his friend? They're teammates. It wouldn't be unusual for him to check in, would it?

In Sochi, his father and brother are put up in very lavish rooms. Ilya takes a quick look around the quarters, brows raising in admiration. He wonders what Shane would think of a place like this, with his quiet love of property and architecture. Ilya would take pictures for him if it wouldn't draw questions and admonishment from his father, for what reason, he couldn't possibly predict.

"I'll go on to the park from here," Ilya tells them. They pause to look at him, his brother nodding curtly, lips pressed together.

Ilya had learned a bit too late that not all families are like his, strangers to one another. Some fathers are warm and encouraging. Some brothers look after their younger siblings. He wonders what being in one of those families might be like, under these circumstances. Would they be excited for him, *about* him? Hug and kiss his cheeks, wish him luck? He doesn't want that from his father and brother, and in fact, he'd like to leave as soon as possible. But if they were entirely different people, who'd raised him in an entirely different way… would he wish for that kind of support?

"See you," he says shortly.

His father's expression flickers, that opaque ghost of confusion taking over his gaze, and for a brief moment, Ilya feels like he's looking at a complete stranger. Ilya's breath catches, and before he can say anything, Alexei steps in.

"He'll lead the Russian hockey team to victory, Papa," he tells their father. "In the Olympics." As many details as he can provide, in as nonchalant a way as possible.

Ilya is stricken by such profound grief that he has to turn his face away before either of them can see it. Not only at such a clear demonstration of their father's deteriorating condition, but also at hearing such rare praise come from his brother's mouth. And most of all, because the praise is not really directed at Ilya at all. It's directed at their father to merely remind him of their purpose there.

It does the trick, and his father is once again in the room, present and nodding along. "Of course," he says, and waves Ilya away, returning to unpacking his suitcase. "You will succeed," he says, like that's a given.

Ilya leaves, sick to his stomach and sweating all over.

*

Hayden - 12:33 pm - Game on, baby! We're rooting for you!

The text comes in along with a photo of the Pikes and their two daughters, sleepy-eyed and sitting in their den. It's sometime in the early morning in Montreal. Hayden must have gotten the whole family up to support Canada in their second game today.

Shane holds the phone up to show J.J. They jog along one of the paths in the Olympic park. A short warmup before the *actual* warmup begins on the ice.

J.J. grins at the photo and then looks at Shane curiously. "So... what about Rozanov? You talked to him yet?"

"No?" Shane frowns, looking out at one of the large buildings opposite them.

"Just thought you might've. They barely beat Norway yesterday. Dude seems off his game."

"Maybe. Their goalie got hurt, and they're not working together efficiently," Shane forces a short laugh. "He won't say anything to me about it, though."

"Maybe they'll be out of the game before we even have the chance to go up against them." J.J. grins, pleased with the idea of Russia falling out of the running this early.

Shane isn't sure how to feel. On one hand, he wants to win. Of course he does. He's been dreaming about coming to the Olympics since he first decided he'd try to make it into the professional league. His entire country is watching, his family and friends too, and he doesn't want to disappoint them. Or himself.

On the other hand, he'd be lying to say that a small part of him doesn't hope that Ilya makes it at least far enough into the games to meet his eye across the red line. Maybe even in a gold medal game. Then again, maybe that would be too intense. Still, Shane wants to see him very badly. When he's not thinking about gold medals, he's thinking of Ilya. Two full-time jobs.

He's been hoping to catch a glimpse of him on one of their runs. No luck, so far, and maybe it's for the best. He's not sure how either of them would react, and maybe it'd be more painful in the long run anyway, seeing each other and not able to do anything about it.

"I met a woman here," J.J. tells him, nudging his shoulder, drawing Shane's attention back to the present. "She's a cross-country skier. She's incredible!"

"Canadian? American?" Shane asks.

"French," J.J. sighs. "*Coralie***.** There's no way it'll work beyond this, though. She lives across the ocean."

Shane wants to point out that J.J. surely has enough money to make trips out to see her if he wanted to. Shane wishes it were *only* the ocean keeping him and Ilya apart. Instead, it's 5 hours as the crow flies and nearly a century of heterosexual hockey culture and expectation pushing down on them. Not to mention their careers… reputations… families… safety. *Russia.*

"Maybe you should give it a chance, J.J. Not every day you get to date an Olympian."

"Date?" J.J. laughs. "We're only having fun. We're both too serious about our careers to bother dating right now."

Shane thinks about that the entire rest of the jog, and also for the time it takes to get his kit on in the locker rooms.

He ought to be more serious about his career, too, right? He shouldn't be thinking about Ilya constantly, about *anyone* constantly, other than his teammates. It's the reason he made it this far to the Olympics.

Then again, he's known Ilya the entire time he's been a professional athlete. He's thought about him more times than he can count, years spent flirtatiously texting one another. In that time, he's climbed the ranks, landed himself as captain, and here he is in Sochi, Russia. All while thinking about, and secretly longing for, Ilya Rozanov. Does this make him very strong, or just pathetic?

"You should hook up with someone here," J.J. tells him later on, when they're observing the women's cross-country event. "There're so many women who would go for you here. And you don't have to date them, either. Nothing wrong with casual, as long as you're up front."

Shane nods along, all the while cringing inwardly at the idea of trying to be *casual* with someone. He's not sure he's built for something like that. The one attempt he's made at *casual* has officially failed.

*

Canada wins against Sweden.

The next day, Russia loses to Latvia. It's painful to watch.

After the initial broadcast, Shane goes online to see the replays and close-ups. He sees Ilya's face, eyes hard, jaw stiff, every bit the Slavic caricature that the West likes to imagine Russians being, except that Shane can recognize all of the ways that isn't true. The pain and defeat in his expression, like he's begging for the misery to end. The distant, despondent look in his eye as he skates off the ice at the end.

Shane can tell that Ilya is favoring his left side. He wishes more than anything that he could text him. Just a short message, reaching out to ask if he's alright.

He doesn't. And it feels terrible not to. His animal brain worries that Ilya will think he doesn't care if he doesn't say something, reach out to comfort someone he cares so deeply for. His logical brain knows that it's Ilya himself who asked him not to do that.

Ilya will be alright, he reasons. Plenty more people lose than win the Olympics. Shane might lose, too. Ilya will recover, return to the States, and Shane will see him again as soon as he can.

He just wishes that the road there didn't feel like hell.

He goes to Kafe Myod, a little place set up in the middle of the park. Their window signs welcome people inside in many different languages, and their offerings include coffees and teas, pastries, ice cream.

Shane tells himself he's only going in for tea, and then he gets a coffee. While he's waiting, he glances over the ice cream flavors behind the glass case in their big, metal tubs. Ice cream in particular has become a siren call to him, cool and sweet and soothing. Milk and sugar, fat and carbohydrates, *lactose*, all things he shouldn't be having, but that feel oh-so nice going down.

He sits with his cup of coffee and watches more clips on his phone, first from Canada's own game, and then switching back to Russia's when he can't stave off the urge anymore. He checks his messages needlessly, unnerved to see no sign of Lily at all. It's like they never even knew each other.

Their entire relationship exists in digital format. Apart from one blissful, near heavenly week spent in his apartment together, it all comes down to this little brick of plastic and wiring in his hand. The last link.

This isn't fair.

Grumpier, Shane downs the rest of his coffee and gets another. The potent caffeine hits him nicely. He'll have to work it off with another run later if he wants to get any sleep tonight.

He doesn't know how long he's been sitting there stewing when Marleau suddenly sits down across from him. Shane starts, flinching back in his seat.

"Jesus Christ. Jumpy, huh?" Marleau chuckles quietly. "Didn't think I'd see you out and about. Enjoying the Russian cuisine?" he asks, looking skeptically into Shane's cup.

"Not quite." Shane swallows. No one would think anything of him and Marleau speaking, would they? Maybe it's a convenient cover, sharing an Olympic team and operating in close quarters. Why wouldn't they get to know each other better? "Have you, um… talked to him?"

Marleau sits back. "Messaged him a minute ago. He hasn't replied. I don't blame him. It's rough, losing this early on."

"Yeah."

Marleau sighs. "But… yesterday, he asked me." *About you,* Marleau doesn't say.

Shane tries to keep the hope off his face, biting the inside of his lip. "He did?"

"Well. He implied it." Marleau taps around on his phone and slides it across the table. Shane picks it up, cursory glance around to see if they're being observed, which, of course, they aren't.

He looks at the text chain.

Roz - 6:55 pm - Your team is good, yes?

Marly - 6:57 pm - Tired. But got their eye on you.

Roz - 6:58 pm - Good. I've thought of nothing else. Except for beating you.

They go on to talk about the stats of the games so far, and it devolves into talking about the Admiral's captain, Scott Hunter, and the U.S. team's near fumble of their game against Finland, which they'd pulled back at the last second.

"That doesn't mean anything," Shane says, passing the phone back.

Marleau stares like he's studying him. "You don't read between the lines very well, do you, Hollander."

"What?"

"He doesn't give a shit about the Canadian team."

Shane blinks. "But… Oh. So…"

"Yeah." Marleau lowers his voice, speaking just over a murmur. "Think he just wants to know if you're thinking about him. He's really… You know, interested."

"Interested?"

"*Invested.*"

"Oh." Shane's face flushes. Despite his embarrassment at having *Marleau* of all people tell him this, he feels happiness blooming in the center of his chest. "I'm… *invested,* too."

"Great," Marleau huffs, looking slightly uncomfortable and on the verge of irritation. "Well, I might see him later on, if I ever get a hold of him. Any messages *you* want passed on? Since that seems to be my job now?"

Shane has quite a few things he wants to say to Ilya, but none that he would ever repeat to Marleau. He shakes his head. "No. That's plenty, just... the feeling is mutual." He motions at the phone. "I wonder what his family will say about Latvia."

"His family?" Marleau asks, a thick brow lifting. Shane sees the lack of recognition on his face.

Marleau, apparently, has no idea about Ilya's father, how hard Ilya says he is on everyone, which probably includes Ilya himself. Marleau probably has no idea about his father's illness, either.

"Never mind. Just… His family's here, I think." Shane waves his hand.

If Ilya doesn't even tell his best friend about his family, is Shane the only one he's spoken to about any of it? Does Ilya have anyone else to tell?

Marleau leaves with a curt nod, looking down at his phone as he heads for the door. "See ya, Hollzy."

Shane finishes his second coffee and is thinking of leaving when two hands cage his shoulders. "*Hollander*," Carter Vaughan says, jostling him. "What's up motherfucker?"

Shane starts again and wonders if the caffeine is making him extra jumpy. "Boys," he says hesitantly, looking between Carter and Scott Hunter, two Admirals with easy grins on their faces.

"Can you believe Russia?"

*

They're in agreement that the rooms in the park probably have black mold. Shane tries not to let the idea of that freak him out too much. He still has to sleep there for another week.

He sits between the two veteran players, eating ice cream.

Ilya would be both smug and proud of him, Shane hopes. As embarrassing as it is, he likes to imagine Ilya's thrilled little smirk he'd wear as he watches Shane indulge yet again. He'd probably think he deserved credit for corrupting him. Shane finds it hard to mind when the bad habit is simply another reminder of his and Ilya's secret time together.

Before his diet, ice cream had been his favorite dessert. Cold and comforting. Soft and smooth. Calming to a disquieted stomach. It's a shame it doesn't fit into his normal diet, but, well, *when in Russia.* Maybe Ilya is rubbing off on him too much.

"The men's short form figure skating is happening tonight," Carter says, pointing at his phone. He looks to Scott, and it's obvious that the two of them are looking for things to do.

"My buddy Joe is in that program," Shane says. "We trained together." Shane remembers a tall, lithe man with a full head of hair, two summers in a row, skating in Ottawa. "Would you guys be cool to do that? I'd love to show up for him."

"Hell yeah, man," Carter says, grinning. "I'll show up for any dude who's that brave."

Shane blinks, and when Scott doesn't add to the comment, asks, "What do you mean?" through a mouthful of ice cream.

Carter looks at him, a brow quirking up. "I mean… I'm assuming your buddy might be gay?"

Shane blanks, first at the word itself, *gay*, then at the implication that Joe might be. "I don't…" he shrugs, because he really doesn't know. He'd never even considered it before.

"It's fucking brave for a dude to show up to a place like this—" Carter goes on, but Shane's mind is already going, tuning out the rest of the conversation. Thinking of Joe, and Ilya, and himself, and many other Olympians who no doubt hold a secret close to their chests. "Balls of steel," Carter says.

"There was a 'propaganda' law passed here last year," Shane says without thinking, the first thing that comes to his mind. It was something he'd read about before he'd left Montreal, in his nights of researching Ilya's home country. The two older men look at him, mild surprise on their faces. Scott Hunter clears his throat, and Shane ducks his head. "I mean… I just saw it on the news when it happened."

After a beat of silence, Carter nods. "Well, like I said. Balls of steel. You wanna come with? To support him?"

The fist of anxiety squeezing Shane's lungs slowly begins to uncurl a finger. Neither Scott Hunter nor Carter Vaughan has said anything disparaging so far, and now, they've invited Shane to go see his friend, whom they assume is gay, in order to support him.

Shane grins before he can help it. "Yeah. That'd be nice."

*

Joe gives a flawless performance.

Shane gives a cursory glance around the stadium to see if Ilya is around. If he is, he doesn't show himself.

*

"Going back to house Canada, rook?" Scott jokes, nudging Shane in the shoulder when they step outside the stadium. Shane thinks to point out that he's a captain, now, but then, Scott already knows that and is maybe further teasing him. He's getting better at noticing these things.

"I don't know," Shane shrugs. "Feeling a little…" He doesn't know how to explain it without giving away the turmoil in his belly. He's invigorated by Joe's performance, along with the rest of the competitors. He's feeling stressed out about the state of the world and his place in it. Mostly, he's still jittery from the coffee.

"Restless?" Scott asks.

Shane shrugs. "One word for it, I guess."

"I understand," Scott says, in that easy, sure way he has about him.

Shane has admired his disposition ever since Scott joined the league, when Shane was still going to the rink after school for fun instead of in preparation for his future. Since he started following his career from up close, Shane has noticed how at ease others are around Scott Hunter. He rallies his team with a reassuring smile, most of the time. He's got Ilya's charm, but he's smoothed out his edges into a poster boy for good-tempered leadership.

Shane wishes that he could harness some of that. He'd like it if people thought *he* was as charming and smooth, on top of being efficient at hockey.

"Uh, well… thanks, boys," Shane says, smiling at both of them. "Think I'll go for a run before bed."

"Don't stay out too late," Carter says with a smirk. "Quiet hour starts at 10."

"I'm not loud," Shane says, and Carter and Scott chuckle.

"We know, Hollander. He's messing with you. See you for gold, huh?" Scott says, and then he and Carter are on their way, heading for the U.S.A team quarters.

"Ballsy Hollzy!" Carter calls when they're far enough down the path for it to project outward. Shane tries to ask where the hell they heard that name, but by that time, they're already out of earshot.

*

J.J. isn't in the room when he goes back. Shane figures that he's probably with the French skier, and sends a quick text to make sure. It's clear from J.J.'s response that he won't be back that night.

Shane changes into joggers and layers. Cold runs are something he likes very much now, conditioning his lungs to operate in icy temperatures. He wonders briefly if the rooms really are bugged like Ilya had said, and tries not to feel too self-conscious changing.

The day's warmth won't last for long, but he's hoping that a lap around the park will be enough to send him to sleep. And help him stop thinking about seeing Ilya.

*

Ilya can't sleep.

Russia's loss to Latvia is too prominent on his mind. The shame he feels, the unanswered texts from his father, and now his brother. He knows he'll have to face the music at some point, but for now, he can pretend that he's still enjoying his time here.

Naturally, he finds himself walking the paths of the Olympic park, searching out a place to get something warm to eat.

A text from Svetlana comes as he's walking down a path, bundled in his fleece and an overcoat. Round bulbs zigzag back and forth above the path as he goes, casting amber light onto the bits of snow that have been cleared to the side. An arena in the distance is still lit up, cheers and shouts coming from within. Ilya checks his messages.

Sveta - 8:22 pm - You're not sulking, are you? And don't ignore my texts this time!

Ilya sighs, little smile pulling at his mouth.

Ilya - 8:22 pm - I will not sulk. The Russian team was no good this year.

Sveta - 8:23 pm - Good. This gold doesn't matter, anyway. I'm coming to the gala with my father. Look for me there?

Ilya - 8:24 pm - Promise.

Ilya tries not to think of snowstorms and how he wishes he could root out Shane and take him somewhere to hole up till the end of time. At *least* the end of winter. He could use a getaway, right about now.

In the more populated cluster of buildings, there's a small restaurant with just enough seating for a dozen people. When he steps in, he's filled with smells of home. Only one woman sits in the back, on her phone and speaking in what sounds like Italian. They have pirozhki on the menu, and Ilya orders two stuffed with beef, rice, and onions.

He sits down at the window. The first bite is very comforting, even if the pies aren't as good as the ones at the bakery near his childhood home. Maybe none will ever be as good as those, because the pies hadn't mattered as much as the company he'd eaten them with.

I made it here, Mama, he thinks sullenly. He feels closer to her now that he's back in his home country. That's how it always goes. When he goes back to Boston, it'll feel like he's leaving her behind. He wishes he could find a way to take her with him. At least it makes it easier to make the trip back to Russia each summer.

I'm sorry that I lost, but I made it to the Olympics anyway. I'll win the Stanley Cup for you, instead.

He knows, realistically, that his mother wouldn't have cared about winning the Olympics or winning the Stanley Cup. She would've cared only that *he* cared about it. He tries to see it that way. That he's still *trying* at his life, in her memory.

He's nearly done with his first meat pie when a pale flash on the opposite side of the road catches his eye through the glass window. He looks and sees white fleece, the red maple leaf of Canada stitched into the shoulder of it. The familiar slope of a perfect nose.

There's Shane on the opposite side of the path.

Ilya's chest aches deeply, the feeling pushing up into his throat with a small sound that he stifles. He hadn't realized how badly he *physically* missed Shane until now.

His dark head of hair is covered by a hat pulled down over his ears. He's wearing workout clothes, layers on top to guard against the encroaching Russian night.

Ilya's mouth has run dry, and he takes a long sip of water, eyes never leaving Shane, drinking him in as well.

Shane looks through the window of Cafe Honey, maybe checking to see that they're still open. Then, he opens the door and goes inside. Because it's dark enough, Ilya can see him through the large glass windows, walking up to the counter, and then he's obscured.

Ilya's body longs to get up and cross the wide path.

They haven't touched since November. Ilya has jerked off countless times thinking about him, but what he'd *really* like is to hold Shane's face between his hands. Feel Shane's hands slip under his shirt and hold him around the waist. To wrap their arms around each other to guard against the cold. Very simple things that Ilya craves. He'd never thought he'd want anything more with someone than good sex, but God, does he want to hold Shane Hollander as tightly as he can. Tuck his face into Shane's neck and breathe, bring himself back down to a baseline he hasn't been able to reach since he left Montreal.

Please come back to the window so that I can see you for one more moment, Ilya thinks. He'll sit here for an hour if he has to, but no, there Shane is again after another minute, a small paper cup in his hand. Ilya stares and wishes he had binoculars, no matter how ridiculous he'd look.

He watches as Shane sits down at a table next to the window, thanking the fates for such a clear view. Ilya takes a small bite of his pirozhki, eyes never leaving Shane. He watches as Shane pulls his phone out to look, then puts it away again. Takes a bite of whatever is in his cup— ice cream, is it? Ilya grins to himself, wishing more than anything that he could text Shane to tease him, tell him that he's been caught.

Shane tilts his head just so, looking out his own window, and then he freezes, eyes meeting Ilya's.

Ilya's breath shakes. Neither of them moves, faces stilled by nerves, but then Shane's mouth turns upward, just a touch, and he lifts the spoon to his mouth, taking a bite of something pink colored. Ilya's heart melts. He lifts his meat pie just barely, a small toast to him, and takes another bite.

They can't seem to help but keep watching each other as they eat. They're safe, two building walls and a wide walking path apart from one another. After such a terrible day, Ilya deserves to indulge with his eyes, just this little bit, doesn't he?

Shane's big, dark eyes blink rapidly, sad little pout on his mouth at one point.

Don't cry, Ilya thinks, though he knows Shane would never in this kind of setting. They're both too good at stuffing down their emotions in public. Still, Ilya can feel his own grief and longing being returned. It soothes some of the terrible ache that's been eating him alive.

I hope you would like him, Mama. Because I'm sure that I love him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

_____

- Marleau can have a little Sochi. As a treat.
For being so good.

- Maybe writing Marleau into the Olympics is more like a treat for *me,* actually. And with his last name spelled as "Marleau" don't even try to tell me he wouldn't be playing for team Canada. Maybe Marlow would play for USA, but Marleau? C'mon.

- I've pushed the Gala to later, because it's not like they only spent two days in Sochi/Russia.

- I hadn't thought to add the Homophobia tag at the beginning of the fic, but I should have as soon as I knew Ilya was going home to Russia😅 I think a certain level of homophobia is assumed in this fandom, but it's been updated now.

- Did Alexei know in the canon? Show-wise, I don't really think he did. I took it in a slightly different direction for this story. Show-Alexei was almost comically villainous in his dialogue, and he's the only character I thought could've used a bit more fleshing out for realism. Like just give us two minutes of context on this guy. I don't really plan to do a lot of fleshing out, myself, but I did want to make him interesting. Anyway, we'll see what, if anything, happens with him here.

- Just a quick reminder: I have no posting schedule. I post as often as I finish writing and editing a chapter (or two). The time I get to write is based on my free time, which is erratic and unpredictable, and my mental health, which is equally erratic and unpredictable. This is just my style of posting. I realize it might be frustrating when you're a scheduled sort of person, but sadly, I am not. This means sometimes there's a chapter every 4 days, lately, it means 10 days. We practice the old ways, here. Thanks for your understanding :)

- A very quick (emotional) note on comments: There's just not enough I could do or say to show how appreciative I am of each and every nice comment left for this fic. Even the simplest "I like your writing" makes my week, a heart emoji makes me beam, and there were plenty of longer ones left that get me all misty eyed. Many were left since the last update across multiple chapters. I wish I could pause time for a week to think up very good replies to them all. I try to answer the ones that come in hot just after uploading, but then life often drags me away.

Writing this fic has been so rewarding.

I'm just very "Peace and love on planet earth" in my feelings right now. So just, thanks, you lovely reader, you.

Chapter 27: The Bad Day

Chapter Summary

"What sort of surprise?" Ilya asks warily.

Chapter Notes

you guys are so nice😭

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twenty-Seven

Canada is going to lose the Olympic gold medal.

If someone were to ask Shane, he'd tell them that he knew by the start of the third period that the U.S. Team had it in the bag. In truth, he'd started to suspect it by the end of the first period, and he'd known for certain by the middle of the second.

Team Canada meshes well enough, but team U.S.A play like they have some kind of extrasensory perception. Anything Shane tries to pull past them, Hunter, Klein, and especially their goalie, seems to be able to anticipate.

Shane squeezes water into his mouth and catches his breath, and his eyes scan the crowd up where he knows that the rest of the competing teams are observing. He only catches Ilya's blue eyes for a moment, intense and focused on him. He doesn't hold his gaze, but he hopes that the quick glance is enough.

Scott Hunter scores a hat trick, on top of it all. The end of the game passes in a blur of fanfare and swelling music and thanking and skating off the ice. The locker room is predictably

sombre after the fact. There are still a few smiles, because winning silver at the Olympics is no small feat in itself. They were *almost* the best.

The back of Shane's mouth burns with envy as he watches Hunter and his team being awarded.

"Won't be our last Olympics, Hollander," J.J. tells him with a solid pat to the shoulder. "I'm sure of it. Not for you, especially."

The next four years feel like such a long stretch, but then, that's nearly how long he's been a professional player. He'll still be playing hockey if he has anything to say about it. He hopes he'll still be at the top of his game, uninjured and ready to try again. J.J. is even younger, bright eyes and never tired.

"You too," Shane says, turning to give him a small smile. "Maybe you'll even be our captain by then."

J.J.'s face falls into a flash of a frown before his beaming smile returns. "No way. Next time, you'll still be our captain, and we'll have won three Stanley Cups by then, too."

Shane is unsure of how to feel. He's glad for the vote of confidence, and he wants those cups as much as J.J., but they feel so far away. It's a long, hard road to get there. He sighs. "Between you and me, I'm not sure Montreal is making it to the playoffs this year."

J.J.'s shoulders drop. "Maybe not. But that leaves three more years for my prophecy to come true."

"Prophecy?" Shane laughs, finally feeling some of the heaviness lift off his chest. Leave it to J.J. to cast a wide net on their future. "If you say so."

Marleau sits down in the vacated stall on Shane's other side, looking much more lively than the rest of them, having not actually played. "You're right about one thing, Hollander. No way you're makin' it to playoffs."

J.J. cranes his neck around Shane and glares at him. "Fuck off, Marleau," he scoffs.

Marleau laughs, unperturbed. One of his big hands shakes Shane by the shoulder gently. "Was some good playing out there, though, kid. You can't do much against a team on fire like that. Be proud," he says.

J.J. still scowls, but some of his disdain fizzles out. "What did Scott Hunter put in his coffee this morning?" he mutters, stripping off the rest of his padding. "I've never seen the Admirals play like that."

"Hell if I know," Marleau says, then turns his eye to Shane pointedly. "I'm heading out to see some of the Russian team off."

Shane frowns. "Uh— Aren't the rooms still booked out till tomorrow?"

Marleau shrugs, standing up. "There's a gala in Moscow. A big honor, I guess. Their shuttle's leaving in twenty."

Shane stills his impulse to flee the locker room and head for the front of the park. He's still half in his kit, still stinks terribly from the game. Still has the walk of shame through the press junket. He doesn't have time to catch a last glimpse of Ilya.

He nods, gnawing on his lip. There's nothing more to be done about it.

Marleau leaves, and J.J. watches him pass by with a scowl. "Cocksucker," he mutters, nudging Shane in the shoulder. "Don't tell me you've become pals with him, too, Hollander. Just because we've played on the same team?"

Shane blanches, shrugging his shoulders. "Marleau knows a ton of guys in the league. But no, we're just… acquainted."

J.J. clicks his tongue. "He's so proud of himself."

Shane feels prickly and ragged by the time he steps into the press room. His teammates are speaking to publications and news broadcasters, and Shane gets swept into the storm of it, mind a blur of disappointment in Canada's loss, and his own personal loss of a man about to get on a plane.

"What has it meant to you to play with this team of Canadian brothers, scattered across the MLH, coming together for their country?" he's asked. *It's an honor, of course. We did our best to make the nation proud. It just didn't pan out.* He says this and one dozen other variations of it over the course of a half hour.

Ilya's shuttle has no doubt left.

He's thinking of skipping out, slipping away from the junket to go get one last ice cream— or maybe a stiff drink— when his ear catches hold of the question he's being asked. A man with a mean gleam in his eye. "Tough loss, we really feel for you," he says, rushing through, perhaps sensing Shane's want to leave the hall. "Hollander, your Boston rival, Ilya Rozanov, led the Russian team to defeat against Latvia. You both ultimately lost out on gold. What, if any, reassurance does this bring to you about Boston's chances at the Stanley Cup? Surely you feel some pleasure in seeing him knocked down a peg."

Shane's heart flutters in his throat. He can hear J.J. and Hayden both in his head, telling him not to take the bait. It's extremely unprofessional to be asked this at the Olympics. Shane is normally so good about it, too, media trained with the best that Montreal has to offer.

He's not feeling very in control, though. He glowers, voice carefully even as he leans down to speak into the man's handheld.

"Seeing Russia lose isn't a victory for Montreal. The victory would be to win against Rozanov at his very best." Shane presses his lips together, knowing he's probably sticking his own foot in his mouth. He shouldn't even be touching this question. "I take no pleasure in watching a good player struggle to click with his team."

"His plays have been reviewed by professionals. It was like he wasn't even *trying* to win."

Shane really isn't having a good day.

*

Vadilevich - 12:01 pm - [attachment] The Americans are talking about us on their podcasts.

Connors - 1:10 pm - That overview is bunk. They're just armchair critics.

Marly - 1:27 pm - Your English isn't even bad!

Smithy - 3:42 pm - Don't sweat these things, Rozzy. Press is press.

*

Ilya stands stone-faced between his father and Svetlana's.

Sergi Vetrov had found the two of them standing next to platters of hors d'oeuvres, glasses of alcohol in their hands. Now, the two older men chat with each other, one voice leading into the next, no room for Ilya to cut in, not that he'd wanted to anyway. He supposes part of him should be thankful to Sergi. He's one of the voices who'd convinced Ilya's father early on to let Ilya continue training, along with Sasha's father, who is also around. Still, he doesn't favor any of the older men much these days. Not now that he's a man himself, and he can see why they all get along.

Sergi goes on. "It always comes down to goal-tending. And Vadilevich…" He clicks his tongue. Their goaltender, Vadilevich, had gotten hurt in their first game in Sochi. Ilya had had

many reasons to think their team was not going to go far, but that had been the first bad omen. The backup goalie had tried to step in during practice, but Vadilevich had outperformed him, even injured.

"He was not sharp," Ilya's father agrees.

"And Kitchov stays home to rest for American prizes. Too good for his country now."

At this point, Ilya wishes he'd done the same. It'd seemed like such a point of pride to come home to play for Russia. After feeling the pressure and the taste of defeat, he isn't sure he really cares about home pride, or any pride but the Raiders.

"Terrible, yes, terrible," his father agrees, nodding solemnly. Amazing how the old man can hold it together under a pressurized environment like this, speaking clearly and cognizant, masking any small lapses in his memory with ease. "But there was no leadership." Ilya's father looks at Ilya sharply, and he barely registers it, eyes cast on the wall before them. It'll do no good to look at him anyway. "That's always the problem, leadership."

"Too much confidence, Ilya?" Sergi says, glancing between Ilya and his father. "Or too much pressure, maybe?"

Ilya feels shame down to his core, coating his insides from belly to fingertips. He wishes the ground would swallow him up, or maybe that he could climb out of his skin—

"Too much *talking*, probably, Mr. Minister," a familiar voice says, lighter in tone and so *intensely* familiar. It snaps Ilya right out of the blanket of fog that had begun to settle over his mind. He looks, and there is Svetlana, a sight for the sorest eyes. He sighs through his nose, relieved like a child being rescued.

"I'm taking Ilya to the bar," she announces, reaching between them to take Ilya by the elbow. "He clearly needs another drink."

"Always leading him around," Sergi comments as they trail away, voice softening in the presence of his daughter.

"Since they were kids."

"Thank you," Ilya mutters when they're far enough away. Her hand is firm through the arm of his suit jacket. "I don't know how much longer I could continue listening. They've been going over it for hours, it seems. I feel like death."

"If you're Death, then I'm an angel," Sveta reminds him, coy grin on her mouth. Her brows meet in the middle once she gets a good look at him. "You do look terrible, though." She pauses near the top of the stairs, taking Ilya's chin in her hand and pointing his face toward one of the chandeliers, humming under her breath. "Like you haven't slept since your loss."

"Maybe I haven't," Ilya sighs.

"This isn't about all those half-rate critics online, is it? Who cares what tabloids and podcasters say?"

It's not about that, really, but Ilya shrugs, willing to wallow in his defeat for a moment more. "A lot of people listen to podcasts, don't they? They're the new journalists. Or something."

Svetlana scoffs. "They are *not*. Most of them don't even skate. Besides, it's all about the Stanley now, isn't it? I didn't think Sochi would matter to you this much."

Ilya shrugs. *Sochi* doesn't, not really, beyond his family's disapproval. It's more that he's been in rough shape since seeing Shane in the cafe. It's all he's been able to think about, besides his regret of losing to Latvia. After seeing Shane's team lose to the U.S., he's been picturing his face looking back through the window at him. Glassy doe eyes, pouting mouth.

Ilya has also been wishing he could finally return home to Boston and, somehow, stay there for good. He lies awake thinking of ways to make it work, ways to sever his ties to his home country, and then feeling an avalanche of guilt for it. His father is sick. Ilya can't possibly leave his family to fend for themselves, not with the old man on his slow way out.

But he wants this thing with Shane to be solid and tangible, too. He's not sure how to go on with things as they are, just ghosts of conversation and a quick FaceTime fuck. He doesn't know how to cope with the immaterialness of it, when it *means* so much more than that to him.

After a week of thinking about it, he's no closer to any answers. And it's misery.

Svetlana's frown deepens. Her lips part to say something, but Ilya's phone suddenly buzzes against his thigh.

He pulls it out. There's Marleau's drunken image, taken on a late night out, blinking to life on the screen.

"I would like to take this," he tells Svetlana hesitantly. She holds her hand out as if to say, *Be my guest.*

"Hello?" Ilya answers in English, phone to his ear.

"Roz."

Ilya's brow furrows. "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah. For sure," Marleau says hesitantly. "You got a minute?"

Ilya looks at Svetlana, jerking his head for her to follow. They descend the stairs down to the ground floor, and Ilya turns right at the bottom, skirting past an older couple to the double doors that lead out into the beautiful courtyard of the historic estate.

Rows of evergreen hedges and paved paths, maintained daily for decades on end for events just like this. The snow has been cleared from all of the exposed tile and concrete, and it juts out over an expanse of trees and city lights. He shivers against the cold, but he'd rather have the privacy.

"I can speak," Ilya says.

Marleau clears his throat awkwardly. "Nothing major. Just… Our *trainer friend* thought it was important that you know he reviewed the footage of the Latvia game. Many times. And he said you weren't a bad captain, and I quote, *'at all'*. That you… made openings that should've been taken advantage of, and made passes that should have been received. Your plays at the end of the second period were… *masterful.*" It sounds like Marleau is reading from a script, or more likely, a list that he'd probably jotted down in the midst of one of Shane's rambles. "He also said that he's never been on a team with you, but that he's sure you were better at leading your team than the press says you were." Marleau clears his throat again, his voice coming back more sure. "And for the record, I agree. I *have* played with you. You're a good captain."

Ilya presses his lips together, throat tightening. He feels very thankful. "Is that all of the message, Marly?" he asks roughly.

"No. But I'm not saying the rest of it out loud. In fact, I'm burning it."

That makes Ilya laugh, because there's no way that Shane would say anything even remotely salacious in the company of anyone but Ilya.

"He stood up for you. Some pushy reporter," Marleau continues, quietly, like it's a secret.

"*Ah*," Ilya sighs. They ought not to say anything more over the phone, though. "Thank you, Marleau. Would you tell him… the press does not bother me at all. But his assessment means very much."

Marleau sighs. "Sure. But it's the last time. Call me when you're back in Boston, yeah?"

"Of course."

"See ya, brother."

When Ilya hangs up, he realizes that Sveta is standing there next to him, her slender arms wrapped around her middle, a crease of frustration between her brows. She's nearly trembling from the cold. The ornate, gold necklace attached to the front of her dress shifts against itself with a tinkling sound.

"Ah," Ilya says sheepishly. He quickly shrugs out of his suit jacket and brings it around her shoulders. "Sorry, sorry. I needed to take that."

"Can't we go back in?" she asks, though her shivering slows considerably as she holds the jacket tightly around herself.

"I need to smoke a moment," Ilya tells her. "You can wait inside, if you'd like."

She ignores his words and follows him further into the courtyard, toward the wide balcony that overlooks an outcropping of trees and artistically arranged stones. Ilya fishes the pack of smokes and a lighter from his pocket.

"That was your teammate, Cliff Marleau?" she asks.

"Yes."

"And who was he speaking of?"

Ilya leans against the railing and looks at her sideways. "Eavesdropping?"

"It's hard not to when your phone is turned up so loud. Your hearing must be shot from all that stadium cheering." She knocks her shoulder into his and reaches over to steal his cigarette after he takes a few drags from it. She watches him thoughtfully. "Whoever reviewed your footage is right."

"That's not what my father, *or yours*, thinks."

"Who cares what two stuffy old men think? You're leading Boston to the playoffs. You're going to win a cup your first year being captain." She sounds very sure of it, and it makes him want to believe it too.

"Don't jinx us, please."

She rolls her eyes. "It's true. You shouldn't let the last few weeks mean anything. Your goal should be the cup."

He grins wryly. "Be careful that your father doesn't hear you talking like that. He might call you a traitor, too."

"He does *not* call you a traitor, Ilyusha."

"He may as well. That's what he called Kitchov. I know both Sergei and my father believe my head is back in Boston."

"Isn't it?" she asks.

Ilya shifts awkwardly. The sharp look on her face is intentional. She's always known him better than he's known himself.

There's no use in trying to hide from her. "Not *Boston*," he replies.

"Hm. You know… I actually came to find you because I had a surprise. But maybe it's not such a good surprise anymore," she says, reaching out to take his cigarette again.

"What sort of surprise?" Ilya asks warily.

"Sasha is here. He brought some fun with him, too. In the secondary bathroom, the one out of the way. Asked me to invite you to partake..."

Ilya sighs. He'd like to get some kind of high to distract himself from his failures. But then, it'd probably cause more trouble than it was worth at his next drug testing. Not to mention the kind of trouble it could get him into with Sasha on this very night. The other man is always testing boundaries, pushing them too far. Ilya would rather go back to his father's house than

have to hold his own against his old flame tonight. "It's a shame I don't do that sort of thing anymore."

Sveta observes him closely. "You don't? Good for you, then." She sighs wistfully. "I'll text him and tell him you aren't interested."

A small chill runs up Ilya's spine.

"In drugs," she adds innocently.

"Right."

After she's typed out a message and slipped her phone away, she plucks up Ilya's cigarette again, takes a drag, and then drops it to the concrete patio.

"Hey—"

"You're being *good*, so I'm helping you out," she says, stamping on the end of it with the toe of her shoe.

Ilya glances behind them. "Don't let anyone catch you doing that," he mutters.

"This must mean you've done some growing," she says. "Which probably means... You met someone you're serious about."

Ilya scoffs, turning his face away to preserve at least some of his dignity. It's not fair that she can read him so well. "Don't be fucking ridiculous. Can you imagine *me* being serious?"

"Of course. I imagine it all the time."

He smirks. "That's perverted."

She laughs and shoves lightly at his shoulder. "Believe it or not, I want you to have good things, Ilya. I even want you to be happy." Her smile is sincere, but it begins to wane. "I do wish if you found someone, you'd want to tell me. Aren't we still that close?"

"Of course we are," he sighs, slipping an arm around her shoulders. Her frame tucks under his arm comfortably, as it always has. "It's… very complicated for me."

"Is it Jane?" she asks, hair bobbing as she glances at him. A few flakes of snow land in her curls, and Ilya brushes them aside, glancing upward to the sky. Clouds loom overhead.

"Why would you think that?"

"That's not a no. And, call it women's intuition."

"Is that a real thing?" Ilya asks and begins to steer them back for the double doors, avoiding giving her a clear answer. He'd like to go collect his father and see if he can possibly convince him to call the night off early.

"It is," Svetlana says. She seems to let him off the hook for now and sighs, an arm slipping comfortably around his middle. "So… is Cliff Marleau single?" she asks after a moment, and Ilya can hear the flirtatious tease in her voice. He feels the metaphorical hackles prick on his shoulders, and knows immediately that she's only saying this to get under his skin.

"I'm going to pretend like you didn't ask me that," he sighs.

"What, you don't think we'd make a handsome couple?"

"Sveta, he's very nice. But he's… and you're… You could marry a prince, you know? Or a film star. Why a big, dumb hockey player?"

She laughs. "I don't need to marry a prince. Besides, you and I both know Marleau is smarter than he seems. I'm sure he has other nice qualities, too."

"Please, do not make me talk about Marleau's *qualities,*" Ilya groans as they retreat into the warmth of the estate.

"Perhaps I'll message him when I get back to Boston. Maybe I can sell him a car."

Ilya's ear perks at that. "When is your return flight?"

"In just a few days," she says, leaning her weight into him. It's always nice picking back up where they leave off as friends each time they meet. Ilya never feels pressure from her to be anything that he's not. They have no qualms about telling each other no, either.

He nods. "Maybe I'll book my ticket with yours, then. I'd like to leave as soon as possible."

"You don't enjoy seeing your family?" she asks facetiously.

"Of course, of course," he plays along. "But, you know… those guys in Boston, they're missing their captain. No doubt." He's not sure if that's true, but he'd like for it to be. He misses his team, too.

They skip the downstairs secondary bathroom. Sasha only sends Sveta a disappointed emoji and a thumbs down. Ilya doesn't feel too badly about it— it's probably better that they avoid each other for now. He already knows what Sasha will try to bait him into doing, and he already knows what answer he'll have for him.

*

There is a marked difference in his father's disposition by the time they make it back upstairs. The old man has found an ornate wingback chair to rest in, his pale eyes a bit glazed and tired. The tungsten lighting from incandescent bulbs casts a yellowy, sickish hue to his skin that Ilya tries to ignore. The man takes deep breaths that tremble at the ends, giving away his exhaustion. In one hand is a mostly empty beer bottle.

Sergi stands nearby, Svetlana branching off to join him and watching with mild concern as Ilya leans down to look at his father's face. He doesn't meet Ilya's eye.

"You should not drink so much, Papa. It's bad for your health," Ilya says quietly, just for him to hear. His father doesn't even so much as reprimand him as he carefully takes the bottle from his hand. "I'm quite tired," Ilya says to Sergi, taking on the blame for their departure. "Sorry to pull you from your friends, but let's go home?"

"Yes, yes," Grigori says gruffly. He stands, smoothing out the lapels of his uniform as they make their way to the stairs. He murmurs a goodnight to Sergi and Svetlana, and Ilya nods respectfully at them in parting.

He keeps his hands to himself until they make it to the pavement walk out front of the estate. There are fewer people there, and he places a hand on his father's shoulder to guide him toward the valets.

"I'll drive us home, Papa," Ilya says quietly. His father really must be tired, because he doesn't argue with him.

It scares Ilya nearly more than anything else to see such a conflicting change. His father isn't angry, but he's also not himself. He'd always seemed so sturdy and tall to Ilya when he was a boy. Now, in his 70s, Ilya realizes how different things actually are.

He wonders what his mother would be like now, if she were still alive, and then banishes the thought immediately.

*

Back at his father's house, Ilya directs him to his room. He waves Ilya off with a muttered, "I can put myself to bed," and a slam of the bedroom door. He's back to his old self. At least, more than he had been on the ride home.

Ilya is left standing in the dark hallway. "Goodnight," he says to no one.

He thinks of heading to the guest bedroom where his things are, but makes a detour for the kitchen, intent on finding himself another drink to help ease him into sleep. He stops in the doorway when he finds Alexei already there, hand on an open bottle of vodka.

They stare at one another in dismay.

Ilya hadn't realized Alexei was still around. He'd assumed he'd gone back to his apartment at some point in the last day since they got back from the airport. To see his wife and kids, or return to his supposed job as a police officer.

His brother is the one to break the silence with a heavy sigh. He turns his back to Ilya and pulls down a glass from a cabinet. "Is the old man in bed?" Based on his voice, Ilya wonders

how many swigs he's had from the bottle before getting caught.

"Mm," Ilya grunts, eyeing the glass. "Tired. But lucid."

Alexei nods. "And how was the *gala of kings*?" he asks mockingly.

Ilya folds his arms over his chest. "You could have come if you wanted. No one would have said anything."

Alexei glances back at him, sneering. "Why would I want to? So that I can listen to our father ignore my own accomplishments? At least he *talks* about *your* failures."

"Isn't it better when he just leaves you alone?" Ilya scoffs and finally strides up to take the vodka from him. He pulls his own glass down and makes space between them. "You're lucky he's not as hard on you, Alexei. To have every part of you scrutinized, your whole life, down to—"

The look of stark malice Alexei gives him brings Ilya to silence. He takes another half-step back, which he blames on the lack of liquid courage in his system.

"He is not as hard on me because he doesn't care about me, *Ilyushka.*" Alexei says his name as if it disgusts him. "If you can't see that, you're even dumber than you look. He is critical of you because he cares more about you. No matter what you do, you're always his favorite, his youngest. A *golden* boy." He shakes his head, spitting on the tile floor. "He asks for *you.* Calls *you* when he's confused, asks *you* to bring home tea and bread. He's not called me once, even when I live a few blocks away. Even when he's out of his mind, he remembers *you.* Even when you're the one who left us."

Ilya swallows around the growing lump in his throat. Alexei's intoxicated face feels truer than any facade he wears in the day.

"Alexei…" Ilya says, his voice wavering and breaking around the edges. *How did we come to this?*

Alexei glares, deep tired lines around his eyes, and for a moment, Ilya can see him just as he was at nine years old.

Fallen from his bike with a scraped-up leg on the rough brick path of their childhood house. Their father, turning to go inside with a sharp, disapproving click of his tongue. Their mother, rushing to scoop Alexei into her arms, consoling him. Alexei's watery eyes and red face, trying to hold back his sobs, because their father had told him he was too old to be crying like a child. His knee is red with oozing blood. Alexei is nine, and Ilya is only five, and unsure of the world. He stands back to watch, wondering at their father turning his back on them all. He's barely old enough to understand why his coldness feels wrong.

It may be Ilya's first memory of his old man.

"*Don't*," Alexei snaps, pulling him back to the present. He turns away from Ilya again, and he's grown up once again, with stocky shoulders and a jaw covered in a dark beard. A man

whom Ilya is sure hates him to the bone. "Don't you dare look at me like that. I don't want any pity from *you*, Ilya."

"Why?" Ilya spits, understanding the implication. The disgust in his brother's voice takes away some of the sympathy that had swelled in him. "Why go through any of this at all then? One word from you to our father, and I would not be his favorite anymore. Why not throw me to the wolves once and for all?" He's playing with fire, and he knows it, but he's lost control of his tongue. He's not the drunken one, but he feels inebriated with sadness and rage and exhaustion.

Alexei has the audacity to roll his eyes, like Ilya is the irrational one. "Why do you think I've never told him what I know, hm?"

"Because you're a good brother?" Ilya asks sarcastically.

Alexei's shoulders hunch up by his ears. "Because he'd hate you, yes, but he'd hate *me* even more. Even when it's *you* who's done something wrong, he'd still hate *me* for being the one to tell him!" Ilya can hear his molars grinding together. "And besides all of that, we don't need you causing any more harm to our family. If he *is* losing his mind, then he shouldn't be burdened with your faults, the shame it would bring. " Alexei waves his hand at him, as if shooing Ilya away like an insect.

Ilya *feels* like an insect. His brother doesn't care one iota for Ilya's personal safety in the matter, only their reputation being affected by Ilya's fame and who he's attracted to.

"We do not *need* you," Alexei repeats.

Only my money.

Ilya doesn't respond. As much work as he's done to accept himself, to see differently than he'd been raised, he does agree that it will only burden their father needlessly. And even when he hates his father sometimes, the thought of his father telling him he hates him back sends icy dread through his gut. A little child, still afraid of being abandoned.

Why can't I just let go of all of this? This place?

What Alexei says about Grigori Rozanov is true. Their father had had no qualms about playing favorites with them, and he never hid that fact, either. Ilya had *hated* being his favorite, hated being pushed around, pushed to his limits. Hated fighting with the old man about playing hockey, and later on, about wanting to join the North American league instead of staying in Russia.

Alexei had become a police officer, following their father's path. They'd both probably hoped that it would turn Grigori Rozanov's attention toward Alexei, but it hadn't. Ilya is where his attention goes, and Ilya suffers all the more for it.

"I wish everything were different, Lyosha. I really do," Ilya says, the only thing he can possibly offer. He means it with his whole heart, his entire being. Before Alexei can respond, Ilya turns, leaving his vodka on the counter, untouched.

Against his better judgment, Ilya logs onto social media that night.

He lies curled up on his side in bed and scrolls through clips of his game, as well as Canada's gold medal game, and countless fan opinions about them all. He scrolls through soundbites from news shows and podcasts. *Man in the Crease* gives a scathing review of his performance against Latvia, and remarks that he looked bored and dismissive in his after-game interviews. They even take a low-hanging jab at his English skills. Ilya scoffs and scrolls on.

Ilya watches the clips from the press conference after the final game. There are many of Shane's face twisted all wrong, brows drawn up, and lip curled with disdain.

Ilya can tell that the reporter had been searching for a bad word from him about Ilya or Boston. Something to keep the fire of competition burning. He can also see the moment that the reporter changes gears, realizing that he's not going to get such a thing from good-sport Shane Hollander, and begins goading him.

Shane, normally collected and quiet, looks agitated. Spent. At the end of his rope. Ilya imagines that Canada's loss would do that to him, but it's the interviewers who mention Ilya that seem to tip him over the edge.

In the final clip, Ilya watches through blurry eyes as Shane pulls a lav mic from the front of his shirt a moment after it's clipped on, scowling and ducking his head. He tosses it carelessly to the side and leaves the interviewers there, booking it for the exit.

Ilya wants very badly to call him. But he knows that if he did, he would cry inconsolably. So it's a good thing that he can't.

*

A few days later.

It's night. Shane sits on his sofa reading. He's glad to be back in Montreal, ready to resume his career with a practice the next morning, no matter how worn out he is from the entire Sochi ordeal.

He's bundled up in Ilya's hoodie, fresh spritz of cologne on it that he applies weekly, a pale imitation of Ilya's real complexity. A throw is draped over his legs. Snow comes down softly outside, frosting the window, and Shane finds himself watching it accumulate there, thinking of that week in November.

He glances back at his book on occasion, reading and rereading the same pages, over and over. It's a short overview of MLH players before the year 2000. He's stuck on Sergi Vetrov, former goaltender for Boston. Shane wonders about the man's daughter and how well she and

Ilya know each other. He resists looking her up online, feeling that that might be taking too close a step toward obsessive. It doesn't stop his curiosity, though.

He doesn't know exactly when Ilya is supposed to arrive home. He thinks, more than once, of messaging Marleau about it, but he's bugged the other man enough. He's also trying to hold onto a shred of his pride.

After a while, he nods off, head lolled onto the back of the sofa, book resting against his chest.

Sometime in the night, he's jarred awake by the sound of his phone.

He picks it up, expecting to see Hayden or his mother's name, perhaps even J.J. or his father. Instead, Lily's name is there, requesting a video call, and Shane's heart seizes in his chest. He drags a hand through his hair, rubs his eyes with clumsy fingers, glasses going askew. His finger slides across the screen three times before it catches, and he answers.

There's Ilya, sitting in a darkened room, looking weary and tired in the face. His eyes are half-lidded, and he wears an overcoat over Shane's slate blue hoodie. His pretty lips slowly curve upward.

"You're home?" Shane asks.

"Mm," Ilya nods slowly. "I just arrived. Sorry, is so late at night. You count the days, hm?" he teases.

"You're the one who called me without even taking off your coat," Shane points out with a little huff. Ilya's brows raise minutely, perhaps surprised by Shane's quick comeback. They spend a moment just looking at each other, Ilya's pale eyes tracing around the screen carefully. Shane wishes he could climb through the screen onto his lap. "How was Moscow?"

"What you would expect," he says. Shane can tell it's the last thing he wants to talk about, because he changes the subject. "You're looking very pretty. New glasses?"

"I just… decided to change them." Really, he'd done it in an effort to take more care of his appearance. He'd seen more than one compilation of Ilya's stunning fashion efforts in between his reviewing of the Olympic games.

Ilya laughs halfheartedly. "Trying to attract someone's attention?"

No point in denying it. "Maybe. I uh..." He sighs harshly through his nose, suddenly nervous again. "I... I missed you." *A lot,* so much that it made him sick at some points.

Ilya rubs one of his big hands over his face, fingers pressing into his eyes for a long time, and Shane can't tell what he's thinking. "Yes," he finally agrees, his voice stilted. "Was a very long time to go without speaking." He stares at Shane, eyes red from rubbing or something else, Shane can't tell, and he guesses that might have been the point. "But is okay now, right? We can speak again, at least..."

It's not enough. Maybe it never has been enough. Shane's stomach churns.

"We'll, uh… play against each other in a few weeks."

"Yes," Ilya says, brow lowering. "I would like to see you. Is it possible?"

"We fly in that morning and fly out right after. It's a tight day."

Ilya sighs, nodding. "Is a shame. I will try to find more time... but…"

"Boston's going to the playoffs this year," Shane says, matter-of-factly.

"Everyone keeps saying. You don't think Metros will?"

"No." Shane sighs. "Not if you ask me. There's gotta be some time we can meet. What if you *didn't* make it to the Cup? You could fly out..."

"But we will," Ilya says, finally grinning. "You wait and see."

I hope you do, Shane thinks. No matter how much he'd like to win it himself. He just wishes that their schedules weren't so packed. All he wants is a night with him, to touch him again. Kiss him.

Sochi was harder than he'd thought it would be. Both of them taking so many hits and no time to regroup, to rebalance each other, as Shane has come to think of it.

"Do not look so sad, Hollander, please. First time I speak to you, and you're crying?"

"I'm not fucking crying," Shane scoffs. It's true this time. "*You're* crying."

"*Ohh*," Ilya wails, rolling around on his sofa, giving a faux groan of anguish and throwing an arm over his eyes. "How will I survive another three months without seeing my Shane?"

He trails off, and Shane stares at him, heart fluttering in his throat. "Your what?" he asks before he can help it.

Ilya removes his arm and looks at him, cheeks flushed. "Ah…" He waves his hand dismissively. "Slip of tongue. English is silly."

It goes without saying that Shane would like very much to be Ilya's *anything.* But he can't say that without jeopardizing the rest of their call. The last thing he wants is to send Ilya running again. He's not sure anymore where the line in the sand is, or if there's a line at all.

"You'll go to the MLH awards, right?" Shane asks.

"Of course. I have to pick up MVP prize."

"Fuck off, what if I win?"

"If I win Stanley Cup, how could I *not* win MVP?"

He has a point.

"Tell you what," Ilya goes on. "I will find you on that night. And we will make up for some lost time, hm?"

"Okay," Shane agrees, because he's easy, deep down.

The awards are so far away, though. So far that, if Shane starts thinking about it for too long, he'll fall back into melancholy. He ought to be thankful for what he can get at this point. Having Ilya on a video call is a lot more than he's been able to have all month. "What about tonight?"

"What about it?" Ilya asks, mouth waning. "*Ah*, I'm so tired, Hollander. I come all the way across ocean, and you still want me to get you off, hm? To be in charge?"

"I could be in charge, this time," Shane says, voice small.

Ilya stares at him, lip twitching. "That would be interesting."

Shane grins, finally feeling some of his longing ease as his arousal grows. "Then start by taking off your coat."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

These guys just can't catch a break. It's one problem or battle after the next, breaking them down... thank goodness they're able to call now, at least.

_____

- A reader has previously made this joke, but when I picture Shane speaking to the journalists, I picture his eye twitching and the Kill Bill sirens going off.

- I'll be honest with you, reader. I just really did not want to deal with writing Sasha. I get it was necessary in the show, but that scene always gives me the willies. So I thought, well, *my* Ilya is in a different place emotionally. What new detail could arise to change how the scene goes? Marleau, my beloved. With Ilya finding out that Sasha is there, I think he might try to avoid him anyway, being more aware of his strong feelings for Shane. Anyway. I weaseled my way out of it :)

-Here is an interesting thread about Ilya's Russian cultural background. It's far from the only one I've seen, but it's recent. There are a lot of other good videos and articles out there about Russian family dynamics, culture, and homophobia, specifically regarding men. It can be hard stuff to swallow, but it may inform some conversations in future chapters. I'll link anything applicable, if the conversations go that deep.

- I'm alright with certain inaccuracies in this fic. If there are too many reporters at an Olympic game press talk, for example, that's fine with me. If the snowstorm was a few days longer than the biggest one on record, that's fine. These sorts of details are not weight-bearing for the fic, imo.

- In that same vein: I originally read on the wiki that Sergei Vetrov played for the Boston Bears in the books. I think I may have refereed to that in a previous chapter, too. But reviewing the show for this chapter, Ilya says he's a famous goaltender for the Soviet team. So... meh. Either/or is true to me, and doesn't really matter in the end. But I thought I'd point it out in case anyone caught it.

- I'm trying to do J.J. justice here, but in the show canon, he is the one to call Ilya a "animal shitshow cocksucking Russian" I believe? In all honestly, if that's the worst thing he said in the year 2014 as a pro hockey player, great! Still a redeemable character. But also a representative of how Shane's team would realistically be in that time. Actually, realistically they'd be saying way worse, but I don't want to take it down that route :(

-Edit* I forgot to mention that I favor Sveta/Rose a lot! I think Sveta/Marleau would be cute too, but mostly she says these things in this chapter to get under Ilya's skin. Not making any calls about other ships in this particular story, they'll have to write themselves if they want to be included👀

- I'm really putting my own spin on Alexei and Ilya's relationship with this fic. Not sure how much of it is backed by canon, and I don't mind either way.

Those are all the thoughts I've collected over the last ten days. See you next time🧡

End Notes

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Podfics: I very much appreciate that people like the story enough to want to do this! For the moment, I'd like to hold off on giving permission for it. If this changes, I'll be sure to add it to this note asap with a big blinking neon sign. Thank you again to those who have asked🧡

Playlists: Hideaway [Hollanov]

Tumblr: meepyslow (18+ please) I sometimes talk about fic updates and original fiction. Mostly, I reblog fanart and funny things. (please note I don't respond to private messages on any site, just out of personal comfort. Asks ((anon or not)) on tumblr or @ing me on threads is perfectly fine, though!)

Threads, under the same name. (I don't have plans to use it very much, but it is in fact me on there. I'm a snoop.)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!