

A Ghost in Boston

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A Ghost in Boston

by [sostarry](#).

Summary

Woken from sleep during the dead dawn hours after his father's funeral to texts and breaking news of explicit photos posted of him and a former male lover, Ilya has to flee Russia.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Fleeing Russia.

Chapter Notes

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

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.

I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;

so I love you because I know no other way

Sonnet XVII, Pablo Neruda

Moscow - 4:30AM

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Ilya felt his nose twitch in sleepy annoyance before rolling over onto his side and pressing his face further into his pillow.

Too late, too early, he didn't know but the phone was annoying.

Buzz.

Ilya grunted, throwing his arm over his head in hopes that between the pillow and his bicep he could block out the annoying vibration rattling against the water glass filled with vodka on his nightstand.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

“Shut up, stupid phone.” He huffed into his pillow.

“Ilya?” Svetlana hummed, pressing her hand gently on his stomach.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

He grunted, his arm moving away from his head and swatting at her hand. “Sleep.”

“Your phone keeps going off.” She spoke quietly in Russian. “Must be important. It’s middle of the night.”

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

Ilya huffed, ripping off the covers from his body and rotating just enough to grab the phone from the nightstand. He propped himself up on his elbow, his thumb sliding up the screen and seeing dozens, *dozens*, of missed calls and texts from *Jane*.

“Fuck.” His eyebrows furrowed, flashing from the notifications to the time.

4:37AM, Moscow.

8:37PM, Montreal.

Something was bad.

37 texts, 14 calls.

Something was very bad.

They’d hung up after Ilya had confessed that he loved Shane in Russian. Had Shane remembered the sounds of *ya tebya lyublyu* and searched on the internet until he knew for certain that it was what Ilya had said?

“Ilya?”

“Mm, no.” He waved his hand gently to his side. “Minute, please.”

The brightness of the screen made his eyes strain as he opened the chain of messages from *Jane*, starting with the most recent.

You have to leave.

You’re not safe.

Wake up, wake up, wake up.

He wasn’t safe?

Well to be fair, Russia was not a very safe country, a fact Ilya was well aware of.

His thumb kept swiping down, bringing the text chain further up. Uncertainty began clawing through his throat. A notification from a small sports blog became a banner across the top of his screen.

Boston's Ilya Rozanov pictured with unnamed male— the preview cut off and Ilya felt just how unsafe he was hit him like he was facing off with The Russian Bear.

“Svetlana,” he said, jolting out of bed and reaching for the pair of joggers he’d discarded at some point on the floor. “Yebat!”

Svetlana had the look on her face that matched Ilya’s insides: panic, fear. His eyes zeroed in on her phone in her hand, just making out the blur of himself and Sasha back when they were young and stupid and thinking that such photos would never see the light of day.

Fucking internet.

“You have to go. You have to leave.” She said quickly in Russian, ripping the blankets off of her “Go, go.”

Ilya grabbed the necklace on his throat, one he’d worn for so long that it felt like it was a limb on his body but now just felt suffocated by the weight of Mother Russia and the things she did to people who were *other*.

“Ilya, Ilya. You must go. Go *now*. ”

He nodded, his eyes seeing everything and nothing at once. He dropped his pendant from between his fingers and rushed around his apartment bedroom for items he needed to get back home.

Shit. To *Boston*.

They were not friendly people but they were kind.

“Svetlana, I—I, *yebat*. ”

“I will stay. I will get you a flight. I will see you soon, okay? Okay? Be brave.”

She kissed him the way she’d kissed him hundreds of times, lightly, there one moment and gone the next. She was shoving a sweatshirt at him, grabbing his passport from the small safe beside the tv cabinet in the living room.

His fucking Russian passport.

“Yebat!” He yelled, shoving the document into his pocket unceremoniously.

He tripped over a pile of his shoes as he searched for two of the same, foregoing socks because there was no time. *No time*.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

His phone vibrated in his pocket, ringing constantly, the short buzz of text messages boiling the ice in his veins into adrenaline.

You're not safe, you're not safe, you're not safe.

He could hear the pretty boy with the beautiful freckles say those words in his mind as he ripped open the door to his apartment, his head looming both ways for any of his neighbors or police.

Would he be arrested? Did anyone in Russia know yet? Would they be looking for his car? Waiting at the airport?

His car in Russia was not as nice as the ones he kept in Boston, showy still, but less so. His foot hit the clutch, his hand on the shifter seconds after his bag was tossed into the passenger seat.

Airport. Airport. Airport.

“Yebat!” He yelled, slamming his open palm into the steering wheel.

Svetlana’s name flashed over the screen of his car and he answered quickly. “Sheremetyevo.” She said in place of greeting. “Gate C.” Ilya could hear rustling on her end and knew she was putting the rest of his things together. “New York. Okay?”

“*Da.*”

Ilya licked his lips, his eyes flicking over the terminal numbers for North America. The ticket Svetlana had bought for him as he fled his fucking home country was already added to the pass app on his phone. There was no room for being picky when it came to getting out of Russia—the first flight out to a *safe* country for queer people was important, but *fucking New York?*

They hated him there.

Easy enough to get to Boston from New York though. Cannot be picky.

He stopped at a duty free store that was open all hours and plucked a ball cap from the top of a stack and threw rouble at the young girl working the counter. “Spasibo.” He said in thanks, pulling the ball cap on and pulling the brim down low over his brows.

He pulled his phone from his pocket once he got to a seat in the terminal, finding many more messages, each one more frantic and pleading than the last.

He pulled the text chain with *Jane* up and felt a sensation he didn’t like or know how to name settle low in his throat, trying to suffocate him.

I am leaving now. At airport, he texted, his thumb hovering over the send button before pressing it.

Fuck. Thank god, Shane texted back in what felt like barely a second after the message read as read. ***Fuck. How did this happen?***

Ilya pinched his lips, his tongue running over the front of his teeth. His eyes pricked and he took a deep breath in to steady himself.

Russians did not cry. They did not do that.

Is not new photo. If anything, Ilya needed Shane to know that.

I know. No bear.

Of course Hollander would know that it wasn't a random hookup. Ilya had been young, *too young*, and if he was in his right mind he would know that that photo being circulated was a *crime*.

More so a crime than just being two men in Russia doing what they were doing.

But Russia wouldn't care about such trivialities.

What are they saying? He sent to Shane, raising his crucifix to his mouth and biting down gently on the metal.

Nothing too bad right now. Mostly trashy sites and some low level blogs.

Ilya groaned.

Shane continued, the ellipses not doing the cute thing where they showed and disappeared several times before he committed to sending. ***TMZ has a short caption on breaking news. Said they reached out for comment.***

"Yebat!" He grunted too loudly, an old woman in a headscarf startling in the corner, bringing her hand to her chest. "Sorry." He said softer in Russian. "Bad news."

A fucking understatement.

Boarding now, he typed as the announcement came over the speaker, ***Landing in New York. Only flight to America this hour.***

Okay. Be safe. Let me know when you land.

Ilya sent a thumbs up emoji in response to stave off the raging terror that rushed through his veins and made his head whoosh with blood, ringing loudly in his ears.

Ilya didn't feel like he could breathe until he was safely into international airspace, no longer in danger of Mother Russia recalling the flight. He wasn't even sure if they could do that to detain a somewhat gay hockey player.

He'd stayed off his phone for most of the flight, leaving it mostly in airplane mode. He didn't need to know what the people were saying when he felt like a sitting duck. No, it was better to try and think of anything else.

He wondered, as he often did when bad things happened to him, what it was that he had done to deserve it. His mother, his father, his fucking brother—

“Yebat!” He snarled, his fists clenching.

His fucking brother.

He held his palm over his mouth, letting a silent scream of frustration out against his skin, his breath making his hand hot and clammy. Alexei.

The more he stewed in his seat, staring out the oblong window of clouds above the ocean, the more he knew it was true. Timing was too coincidental. Cut off, the night they buried their father, the fight.

That he was done. His niece could have his apartment. That he would send them no more money.

No longer being able to hide the tears welling in his eyes, Russian or not, Ilya pulled his cap almost all the way off the crown of his head to cover his eyes. He shouldn't be surprised or even disappointed. He knew how cruel his brother was, had always been, but he never expected such blatant outward sabotage.

He could have gone to prison for fucks sake. Wasted away in harsh jail just for being kind of gay.

Ilya wondered if Svetlana was safe—he knew she most likely would be, but he wondered if the police had come looking for him.

He wondered if Sasha was okay, if he knew, if Svetlana warned him to not go back to Russia. *Before*, it was not a great kept secret. Sasha was very flamboyant but was mostly safe in small dinners. Would not be so safe now.

He huffed out a breath, the cap holding the moist air against his face, and crossed his arms.

JFK — airport time

He hated New York City because Scott Hunter loved it and they loved Hunter and Ilya hated him. But desperate times and all that.

Getting flight to Boston. He sent to Shane as he waited in the customs line.

Traveling back to the US from Russia was always a long process because having Russian passport was like getting failing grade on a test you had no choice but to take. Ilya was used to it, had his passport and visa ready as he tapped his feet against the dirty, dirty floor.

He kept his ball cap pulled down low, covering mostly the top half of his face. He'd left his favorite sunglasses behind, no big deal, he *guessed*, in the grand scheme of things, but he'd have liked to have been able to lay low further.

Good thing about New York is that the people didn't care about you unless you took too long to order bagel and coffee or loitered too far left on the escalators or fast walk pads Ilya didn't have a name for.

He could respect New York for that. Almost like Russian *hospitality*.

"Next." The bored woman said, not looking up from her computer.

Ilya grimaced through a smile, handing his paperwork over.

"Anything to declare?"

"No." He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket.

"Reason for traveling to Russia?"

"My father is dead. His funeral, yes?" He answered.

"Reason for your return to the States?"

"Work."

On and on and on.

All said, not so bad. Could have been worse. She was very disinterested in him and he was very disinterested in the process and so it was not so bad.

Ilya slung his bag high up on his shoulder and trudged his way to the ticket machines situated not so far away from customs. He rolled his head over his shoulders, trying to loosen up the vestiges of travel from his muscles.

He felt *bad* but he felt *safe*.

He still had yet to check the slew of messages and emails and alerts on his phone. The only thing he'd done once he turned his phone back on from airplane mode was let Shane know that he had made it back to America.

His forefinger pulled at the little tear of flesh on his thumb as he scrolled through the flight booker to find the first flight to Logan.

He almost wanted to keep scrolling to find Montreal's airport.

That's dumb fucking idea, he scolded himself.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I haven't written for a new fandom in a long time and god I am just besotted. But I also love angst so ... buckle up?

Thanks for reading!

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

There is no more back to fucking Russia.

Southie —

Ilya's lip curled when he took in the parking garage dust that had settled on his beautiful, beautiful car after only a week of sitting in the Logan Airport long term parking. His car deserved better than to be covered with such filth.

He had yet to focus on his phone more, still trying to get to his apartment in, what Bostonians called, Southie. He liked it fine, was not a long drive to practice rink, even closer to the Garden. The people were weird. *Eclectic* was a word he had learned once.

It fit them.

Most of his teammates had places close to Fenway, wanting more sports than nightlife on their downtime. Ilya understood, but he also liked the ease at which he could mostly disappear into the *otherness* of this neighborhood.

Not *so many* people recognized him when he wished not to be famous—just normal hot man in crowd of less hot people.

It was fine. Good, even.

He tossed his bag to the floor beside the front door to his penthouse and pulled the deadbolt into position. He didn't normally bother, very secure building, but *Russia* weighed heavily on his mind.

"Fuck." He sighed, rubbing his hands over his face, his eyes seeing nothing but the blur of the city through the floor to ceiling windows.

He kicked his sneakers off, his bare feet easily finding the slides he kept by the door and shuffled wordlessly to the couch, falling over the arm rest and landing harshly on his stomach, his face buried into the seat cushions.

This was very bad.

He awkwardly fished his phone from his pocket and, taking a bracing breath, his lips pushed open against the cushion, unlocked his phone with the passcode.

So many missed calls. So many texts.

He should start with emails, that was how his agent usually contacted him due to time difference.

“Fuck.” His agent was Russian. Great, just fucking great.

He rolled onto his back, holding his phone above his head as he opened his email. His eyes glazed as he mentally filtered out all of the English words, searching for the Russian that would stick out in a sea of words he still wasn’t completely comfortable wading in.

And there it was.

Fired by his agent.

He’d known it was going to happen. He’d come to terms with it while he was on the plane somewhere over the Atlantic. No Russian agent would keep a gay athlete on their roster. He’d need to find a new one, an American probably.

His lips turned down as he typed a simple response to his former agent.

Ok.

He debated adding an emoji, wondering if a thumbs up was warranted. No. *Ok* was fine.

He returned to his inbox, seeing messages from his coach and the owners of *The Bears* and the NHL Commissioner’s office.

“Yebat.” He groaned, tossing his head further back into the cushions and dropping his phone to his chest.

Brighton — The Bears Practice Rink

Ilya felt as unsure as he’d ever felt as he made his way into the offices in Warrior Ice Arena. He had a meeting with his head coach, LeClaire, and one of the owners. He was nervous, this whole situation was *bad*. Very, very bad.

He knocked on the open door of LeClaire’s office, forcing him and Mr. Jacobs to look his way.

“Hi.”

Awkward, stunted and very Russian.

“Rozanov!” Mr. Jacobs greeted, waving him forward. “Shut the door, will you?”

He gave a short nod, letting the door click into the place behind him. He stood stoically by the door, his arms hanging tightly at his sides. “You want to see me?”

“Sit, Roz.” LeClaire gestured to the seat to the left of Mr. Jacobs.

Another jerky, stunted nod. Ilya crossed the black rug with the large gold emblem of the team in the center and took a seat on the worn leather chair.

“We are sorry about your father, Rozanov.” Mr. Jacobs said, clapping a hand over Ilya’s shoulder. He barely felt it because he was old and weak or maybe Ilya was just numb. “But... We, uh, well we need to discuss that *other* thing.”

Ilya’s eyes squinted slightly, his mouth making a sad smile. “Right.”

LeClaire leaned forward in his chair, his elbows resting on pieces of papers with schedules and plays and whatever else he worked on in the privacy of his office. “To be clear,” he said with a short look at the franchise owner, “*we* don’t have a problem with what you do in your personal life. But...”

“Is problem, yes?” Ilya asked blandly.

LeClaire tucked his lips over his teeth. “We’re more concerned that you look so, well, *young*.”

“Ah.” Ilya nodded, agreeing. That *was* very concerning. “I was teenager. Was before draft.”

LeClaire and Mr. Jacobs both knew that Ilya had only turned eighteen a couple of weeks before he was the number one draft pick. Ilya could see the color weaken on Mr. Jacobs’ face but he was very old and perhaps it just did that.

“Well, that’s not good.” Mr. Jacobs said in a wooden voice. “Rozanov, we’ll help you navigate this. Your agent—“

“Dropped me.” He intoned. “Russian.” A one word explanation.

LeClaire pinched the bridge of his nose and let put a long sigh. “I’ll make some calls—Marleau’s agent is good. The best probably. Alright. So, The Bears are going to draft a statement. We are going to get lawyers involved to discuss outlets disseminating child...”

Montreal —

Ilya was on the ice, stretching. He could hear the hums and murmurs and raucous chirps from the crowd of Montreal fans but he couldn't distinguish if they seemed more hostile than usual.

He hadn't talked to Shane much in the last week or so aside from letting him know he was back in Boston. There was too much on his mind and going on for him to really know which way was up or down. Now that he'd been outed, dropped by his agent and become unwelcome in his home country, he could hardly think about the beautiful boy with the smattering of freckles over his cute nose.

Well, he *could* think of him, and often did. But he didn't want Hollander to catch any of the blowback from the storm crashing through Ilya's life. He knew he'd have to end this so Shane could be free to move on and not have an extra layer of paranoia surrounding their hookups.

It was killing Ilya. He was sad and alone and afraid that his asylum seeking in America would be denied. He didn't really think it *would*, because again, *Russia*, but he could not be so sure.

He wanted non Russian passport but he didn't want this to be the way he got it.

"Hey." Shane greeted as he skated to the center line, facing Ilya. His befreckled boy bent forward, his elbows resting against his knees. "You okay? I haven't heard from you."

Ilya didn't let his eyes linger on him for too long. "You send boring texts." He drew out the *r* in boring for a moment or so longer than necessary. "I do not know what you want me to say, yes? *Oh Hollander, I cannot go home to Russia. I am so sad, please, please, please send me boring texts.*"

Shane scoffed, "Don't be such a dick." He looked to his left and right before leaning closer. "I've been worried."

"Is fine. Nothing to worry about."

"1919." Shane said, straightening back up.

"What is this? Hotel room?"

"My front door code."

Ilya tried to beat down the jump his heart made into his throat. He gave a short nod that Shane watched before he skated back towards his team, Hayden Pike watching him with curious eyes.

"What was that about?" Marleau asked, causing a spray of ice shavings to rocket over the rink as he came to a stop beside him.

"Is nothing."

“Was Hollander giving you shit, Roz?” Cliff asked, the corner of his lip turning to a snarl.

“Is nothing, like I said.” Ilya said, dismissively. “We have game to win.”

Hospital —

Ilya rubbed the corners of his mouth with the fingertips of his forefinger and thumb. The smell of antiseptic and old, dying people filled his nostrils. The lights were so cold, so sterile.

He hated hospitals.

Most injuries he had were treated by the team doctor in their own medical facility or guest suite in rival rinks, usually done in neutral colors with banners of the home team somewhere on the wall. Felt more personal, more... *cozy*.

He felt *very* scared, now.

He had fought with Marleau after he'd knocked Shane out cold, once they'd gotten back to the hotel. Ilya was *so mad* and *so scared*. No one would tell him anything, if Shane was alright, if anything was broken.

He'd asked LeClaire to find out where he was under the guise of Captain checking on injured rival player after he'd spent the whole night refreshing every news website, every Voyager player he knew the social media handles for and nothing.

LeClaire was a last resort.

He hesitated at the door to Shane's hospital room, his eyes seeing past the metal laid inside the glass pane and to the beautiful boy in the bed. His eyes were half closed and Ilya watched the machine change numbers next to him. He didn't really know what the machine was for but he was glad to see that whatever information was being monitored, doctors didn't seem concerned enough to be in the room.

His knuckles hit the door twice before he quietly opened it and slipped into the hospital room. He held the handle down as he closed the door softly, before letting the latch click into place.

“Ilya...” Shane smiled, dopey and stupid and maybe not so boring—this time only.

“Shh, shh.” Ilya shushed, not moving away from the door. “I, um... I just wanted to...” a deep breath, “*fuck*. Are you ok?”

Shane's eyes kind of closed further in lieu of being able to move much of his body. “Concussion. Fractured collarbone. Out for the playoffs, but...”

“Could have been worse.” Ilya said before Shane repeated the same words. “Marleau, he, *ah*, he feels bad. Terrible.” Ilya thought Marleau maybe felt more bad physically after he’d taken a few of Ilya’s hits. “He did not mean to hurt you.”

“I know. Part of the game. We all get rung eventually, right?”

“Hm, right.”

“Hey.... Hey!” Shane called in his voice, high on painkillers.

“Ok, ok.” Ilya said, moving his hands in a quick upwards and downwards motion as he moved across the hospital room, stopping beside the bed, his fingers reaching out and brushing over freckles that looked like someone took a paint brush to his cheeks. So beautiful.

“Yes. Yes.... Better.”

Ilya smiled softly, letting his thumb pad rest on the high of his cheekbone. “You scared me.”

“Hmm,” Shane sighed, a happy, dopey smile curling his beautiful lips. “Sorry I didn’t get to text you last night. My phone—“

“No, no. Is okay. I was worried but is okay. You needed rest.”

“I was excited about last night.” He continued like Ilya hadn’t interrupted him. “I’m mad Marleau messed it all up.”

“He feels very bad, yes.”

“I had this whole plan of something I wanted to ask you...”

Ilya’s heart did that new thing where it lodged in his throat and began to suffocate him. “It’s better if you just rest now. Yes?”

“I was gonna ask you...”

“*Hollander.*” Ilya said desperately, wondering if he could push a button and knock him out come with painkillers to stop whatever question Shane had from passing his lips.

“Will you come to my cottage this summer?”

“Hollander... I can’t do this.”

“Don’t go back to Russia. Come to my cottage. A week, maybe two... all... alone...”

Ilya dropped his hand from Shane’s cheek and scraped it over his own face. He knew Shane was high, knew he wasn’t in his right mind.

Don’t go back to Russia.

His heart turned to lead and sunk into his lungs like a lead balloon before popping. “I cannot go back to Russia!” He said with more force, more ire than the hurt boy in the hospital deserved. “There is no more *back to fucking Russia*, Hollander. I cannot go back. *Ever*.”

Shane blinked slowly, a small crease forming between his eyebrows, his lips turning downward in a confused pout. “So... so you’ll come to my cottage?” He asked.

Ilya curled his fingers into his hair and tugged so hard his scalp hurt. “I cannot do this. I cannot go to cottage, Hollander.”

“It’s so private. We’ll be so alone.”

Ilya took a step backward, shaking his head. “No. I cannot do this. I... I’m sorry, Hollander. I have to—“

“Uh oh.” A nurse said with a teasing lilt to her voice. “You’re not going to smother him with a pillow, are you, Mr. Rozanov?”

“No, no.” Ilya said quickly, taking a few sideways steps, keeping both Shane and the nurse in his sights as he moved back to the door. “But good thinking. Next time. I am going now. Uh, get better soon, Hollander. See you next season.”

“Ilya—“

“Sh, shh.” Ilya said again before slipping out of the door and letting it shut with a click behind him this time. “*Yebat!*”

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

You're not alone out here.

Boston —

Ilya stood in front of the refrigerator, his eyes glazing over as he took in the sight of dishes containing tuna fish and cheese. Almost unwillingly, his eyes flicked to the cans of ginger ale that still sat, untouched, on the side door. He inhaled deeply, his breath escaping his nostrils in a flare.

He loved tuna melts, but they were an unfriendly reminder of the last time Shane had been in his home, and the awful feeling of him being walked out on just afterwards. And Rose, and seeing Shane at the club with Rose, his father dying... being outed.

His fingers clenched into fists, his nails biting crescent moons into his palms.

He pulled the containers out and set them on the counter beside the refrigerator. He needed the protein. Their game against Detroit was at home, only in a few hours, and it would be the determining game on who would face The Admirals to advance to the Cup. He felt restless and more in his head than he should leading up to a big game.

His phone buzzed from the kitchen island and he turned slightly to glance over his shoulder. *Jane* shone on his screen and he felt his heart do its new trick of jumping into his throat. He'd been mostly ignoring Shane for the last few weeks since he'd last seen him, laid up in the hospital.

He needed the break, regardless of if it was clean or not. Shane may have been gay, Ilya may have loved him, but Shane was not ready to be out. Nevermind out with him

And he didn't even love Ilya.

And so Ilya tore himself away from one of the bright spots that had flickered in his life for the last eight years. Hockey, Cups and Shane.

Good luck tonight the text preview flashed across his lock-screen.

Ilya took a deep, bracing breath and turned back to the counter that his snack ingredients rested on. He didn't need good luck. He was the best.

Pieter Ivanov wasn't a center Ilya had much experience facing off with. He had only made it to the NHL after being locked into the KHL for a long contract. Longer than most, it felt like. He'd been on Team Russia in Sochi years previously and Ilya hadn't paid him much mind then. He'd been focused on their injured goalie and the general lack of willingness to work together. Everyone had their own agenda and that was why they'd lost to Latvia.

Now though, Ivanov was at the center line, his lip curled in a more pronounced snarl than Ilya was used to other Slavic players having towards him. More expression, more ire... more *hate*. And that felt more directed at him as a person than as a player.

Ah. Of course.

Detroit's coaches *would* want to put their Russian alternate center up against Ilya to knock him off his game. This was the match that would decide who got to move forward into the playoff against the Admirals and Scott Hunter who had been on a winning streak. Ilya was just happy that the old man was getting his last lick of cream before being put out to pasture.

And Ilya had plans to be the one to put him there.

"Is good to see you, Ivanov, yes?" Ilya said, the glare of the stadium lights refracting off his visor.

"You bring shame to Russia." Ivanov grunted in English before a flurry of bigoted phrases flew from his mouth. In another life, Ilya had heard these words from his brother at various points through his life.

Ivanov's fury and disgust caused spit to coat his chin which made Ilya frown. Globes of spit fell from his chin onto the ice, Ilya's eyes following it in distaste. His clean, fresh ice, covered in Russian slurs.

"So you don't want to come back to mine after?" Ilya asked with a slight raise of his eyebrows.

"Fucking fa—"

One of Ilya's favorite referees stopped the slur from landing when he skated to their side. "Enough." He said, shortly. "Fix your feet, Ivanov. Sticks on the ice!"

Ilya and Ivanov watched the puck drop, their blades crashing together in a hectic dance. Ilya won.

The cold air did nothing to cool the heat that radiated off of Ilya as he raced down around the ice, losing and taking control of the puck as the game wore on. He'd taken a particularly brutal hit to the stomach when Royce, a defenseman for Detroit, slammed him into the boards.

Ilya didn't know if he had put extra effort into the defense or if it was just instinctual.

“Fucking watch it.” Ilya grunted, shoving back at Royce.

“Go fuck yourself, Rozanov.”

“Ah, be more fun if you were there, Royce, yeah?”

“Fuck you!” He yelled, slamming him back into the boards again, smashing the front of his helmet into the side of Ilya’s.

He heard the slurs in Russian before he was barreled into by Ivanov. Ilya felt the force of the tackle take the breath from his lungs but didn’t let the force of the hit stop his chirps.

“You wish to join, Ivanov? No need to be jealous! Plenty of Rozanov for all!” He chirped.

Marleau and Connors were quick to the pile, faster than the referees from the crease. The brawl didn’t last long, but long enough for Ilya’s ribs to take a beating.

Worth it, he thought, to use Russia’s homophobic culture against the opposing team.

Shit. Are your ribs okay?

Ilya was laying in his bed, an ice pack that had long since gone lukewarm resting against his ribs. His phone was in his hand and he was watching a replay of the game he’d just won. The tension was evident as soon as cameras panned the ice and into the center as he and Ivanov were getting settled in their spots.

Ilya had been mic’d up through the game and he wondered if they ran the game on a delay to be able to take the sound bites away.

Is fine. Ivanov is weak. He typed, his thumb once again hovering before he pressed send. He’d been doing decently at ignoring Hollander, but it would be rude to not answer a question about his health.

Shane was just returning the favor of checking in on his injury.

Never had an issue with him before. Was it because of the photo? Did he say something?

“Ugh. Much too many questions, Hollander.” Ilya grumbled to himself, dropping his phone onto the comforter.

Ilya watched as Royce got him into the boards first, the scuffle after before Ivanov saw his opening and finally joined in. His team wasn’t far behind and the brawl began. Ilya felt a way he didn’t have the English word for as he watched his team jump in. They knew, of course, at the core of it, what Ilya was fighting about.

The Boston people were not friendly, but kind. Insulted you with affection. Very little bad intent behind it.

He loved his team.

Well, congratulations on making the playoffs. You guys deserve it. Beat Hunter.

Ilya watched *Jane's* message disappear from his screen with a small smile.

Ilya was stretching his hips out on the ice, his eyes not focused on anything in particular other than taking in the mix of red jerseys interspersed with black and gold in the crowd. His eyes fell on a young boy, sitting next to who Ilya figured to be his dad, a rainbow painted onto a sign with his last name and his number on it.

His heart did that thing again, lodging in his throat and feeling like it would suffocate him. He *liked* seeing that. Seeing that even though his life was a shitstorm right now, at least *one* boy saw themselves in him.

He finished his stretches before returning towards his bench, waving their social media coordinator, Morgan, towards him.

“You see this boy, yeah?” He asked, gesturing towards the boy and his father. “Bring them to my seats.”

“Got it.” She said, putting her phone into her pocket.

Ilya tipped his chin in thanks and returned to the center of the rink, meeting the old man in the center.

“Hunter,” he greeted.

“Rozanov.”

Scott Hunter had a few inches on Ilya, not many, but enough that Ilya had to tilt his head upwards a bit to meet his eye. Ilya didn't find any of the hostility in his gaze as he had in the other centers he'd faced since his father passed away and his sexual preferences became public knowledge.

“How are you holding up?” Hunter asked quietly.

“Ok.”

Hunter's old face scrunched in thought and Ilya watched as Hunter looked away from his face, to his skates. “You, uh, you're not alone out here. Okay?”

Well, fuck. Ilya didn't let his body jerk with the surprise he felt. Perhaps Hunter was only middle aged. "Yeah?" Ilya asked, tapping the toe of his hockey stick into the ice.

Scott Hunter nodded, the corner of his mouth tipping up with a small smirk. "No hard feelings tonight, Rozanov."

Ilya's Apartment --

Ilya was half focused on the game, busy packing away small trinkets and gifts for his niece into Svetlana's luggage. While his brother had ruined any chance he'd ever be able to return to Russia, and he *knew* it was Alexei who had sold those photos of him and a still unidentified Sasha, his niece was innocent in the mess. He still loved her, wanted to care for her even if she was born from a monster.

"Can't believe Hunter is going to finally win a Cup." Marleau grunted from the corner arm chair, swirling dregs of beer in his pint glass.

Ilya spared the large television a glance over his shoulder. "He is old. Will probably die on the ice from shock of winning."

He resumed his task, gently folding in clothes and hats and mittens for the harshness of Russian winter even though summer had barely dawned. It was going to be Svetlana's final trip home to Russia of the year and the first since Ilya had come to America to play in the NHL that he wasn't going back with her.

He was unwelcome, unwanted.

"What's Hunter doing?" Hammersmith asked at large, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his thighs. "Why is he grabbing a guy?"

Ilya's hands froze, buried in the suitcase, his body slowly rotating towards the tv. He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket but he was entranced by the vision of geriatric Scott Hunter helping a man hop the boards, his hand gripped tightly around the unknown's hand, helping him walk on the ice without falling.

Blood whooshed in his ears, ringing and deafening and he couldn't hear what his friends and teammates were saying, couldn't translate what the commentator's voices were saying from English to Russian. He just watched as Scott *fucking* Hunter said words to that man, gripping his face before swooping and kissing him.

On the ice. In front of the Stanley fucking Cup. In front of the *world*.

"You're not alone out here."

Ilya dropped to the couch next to Svetlana, keeping his eyes glued to the television, the chattering in his living room a dull murmur compared to the thoughts racing in his mind. He felt Svetlana's hand over his, a gentle squeeze.

"Damn, Rozy." Marleau boomed, setting his pint glass down on the side table. "Who fucking knew Hunter would outdo your coming out?"

Ilya pulled his phone from his pocket, pulling his hand free from Svetlana's, and left the room. He pulled the messages that were incoming from *Jane*. He'd been brief, short, trying to distance himself for months.

Holy shit. Are you seeing this?

Who knew Hunter was gay. This is crazy.

Ilya knew. Ilya knew Scott Hunter was gay, or maybe bisexual. *You're not alone out here*. It had only been two weeks since he'd heard it. He'd taken it in and wrapped it in a shiny package that was only for him and Hunter to know. He didn't want to chirp about that with anyone.

He didn't know what to say to Shane, what to type, if he should call. He *wanted* to call. But what could he say? That now there were three gay or kind of gay hockey players in whole of NHL and two of them were fucking? Had been fucking? For years?

Too messy. Too complicated. Ilya had enough complications with the state of his Russian citizenship on the table of being revoked and becoming an asylum seeking foreigner in the country he'd considered a second home for close to a decade. That needed to be his focus—become an American.

Is crazy to announce during Cup. He settled on, sending it quickly before he could change his mind.

not beta'd.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Shane's mind is threadbare and exhausted.

Buffalo — March 2017

Shane chewed on the drawstring of his hoodie, his head nestled against the subpar hotel pillows. Hayden had the television on mute, background visuals as they both scrolled aimlessly on their phones.

"JJ wants to know if we want to see what Buffalo has to offer for nightlife." Hayden said, no serious curiosity laced in his tone.

They felt like the team's grandfathers. *Boring* is what Ilya would say. Everyone knew that he Hayden would go back to their room, which they always shared, and never break curfew. Only Hayden knew that Shane would sneak off when they were in Boston. *Only* Boston.

Shane's teeth paused on the wet cotton string and he glanced at his roommate with a small upwards tick of his eyebrow. "Pass."

Hayden grinned, his thumbs flying over the phone screen. "*We've already had our steamed milk and digestive biscuits. You kids have fun.*" He drawled, his voice taking on a crackly, geriatric accent.

"You're the worst." Shane laughed, returning his eyes to his own phone.

"But effective."

That, Shane thought, *was true*. He always felt guilty for pushing away JJ's invitations to go out. It always settled in his stomach like sour milk but he just wasn't that type of guy. He didn't enjoy loud music, didn't really drink, hated the flashing lights and sweaty bodies and how up felt down and down felt up when he was outside of his element. It just had never been a situation he'd enjoyed putting himself in.

"Who were you talking to earlier? Before the game?" Hayden asked suddenly.

"What?"

"You were just gone for a while. Everything okay?"

Ilya's Russian words washed through his bloodstream, and though Shane didn't understand the words that were said, he had committed *how* Ilya had sounded as he spoke them. It was intimate and private.

"Uh, yeah. It was... it was my mom." He said lamely.

Hayden's face was skeptical and his mouth turned down as he nodded. "Your mom."

"Yeah, uh, it was just, like, sponsorship stuff. For the summer."

"Oh, yeah? What are you schilling this summer?"

Shane swallowed, his eyebrows narrowing even as his eyes became unfocused, his phone screen blurring. "Um, coffee. I think."

"You don't drink coffee."

Shane's brain felt like it was short circuiting in panic. "Yeah, well... I didn't wear a Rolex before I had a campaign, so..."

Shane felt Hayden's eyes leave the side of his face. "Right."

"Right."

They sat in silence, the scrolling on their phones resuming. Shane dutifully traversed the sports websites, taking in the final scores of games that had been played throughout the day, starting with the afternoon game they'd destroyed Buffalo in. They'd be on the road again tomorrow morning, to NYC. Shane knew that the guys would have rather have had the night in the city over Buffalo but you could never predict how late an afternoon game would go.

"*Hoooooooly shit!*" Hayden exhaled sharply, his body pushing away from the headboard in such a quick movement, startling Shane and causing him to drop his phone onto his face. "Holy *shit!*"

"What? Jackie send you—"

"Fuck! No! Shane, *Jesus*. Look at this!"

Hayden tossed his phone across the small space between their beds. His phone landed face down on Shane's chest. He rubbed away the smarting sting of dropping a brick of technology onto his face and sat up, his hand pushing away his own phone and picking up Hayden's with trepidation. It obviously *wasn't* a picture of Jackie. Hayden wasn't that type of guy but what the fuck had him so scandalized?

"God, is it something gross? Is it JJ? He hasn't even been out of the hotel for an hour—"

Shane's words died in his brain and rotted in his throat.

Hayden's phone was open to one of the absolute trashiest sports blogs. Truly, one of the *fucking worst* that the internet or the world had to offer. If it had been anything, *anything*,

else, Shane would have given Hayden *so much shit* about reading this trash.

“Wha—?” He pursed his lips, a frown marring his face. “Is that—?”

“Rozanov! Fucking *Rozanov!*” Hayden yelled. He bounced out of his own bed and slammed down on Shane’s mattress beside him, his hand reaching for his phone.

Shane slapped his hand away and used his thumb to scroll down the article. No, not an article, a literal abomination of gleeful hate and vitriol.

“Fuck.” He hissed, his eyes focusing on Ilya in one of the most compromising positions he could be in. “Oh, *fuck.*” He gagged, throwing the phone away from himself as he took in the distinct lack of a snarling bear on his chest. “Shit!”

“Gross, right?” Hayden asked rhetorically, snatching his phone. “I never—Shane?”

Shane threw himself off the bed. He stubbed his toes against the bedframe of Hayden’s bed as he stumbled towards the bathroom, cloying nausea and despair and fury clawing their way up from his stomach. He retched into the toilet, his bland, boring dinner making a grisly reappearance. He heard Hayden stop in the doorway of the bathroom. A sharp, surprised intake of breath.

“Shane?” He asked quietly, uncertainly.

His stomach seized again, more bile erupting from his mouth into the toilet bowl. He felt tears leak from his eyes, rolling down his cheeks. From vomiting, from the photos, from knowing that Ilya was in Russia.

Hayden’s hand connected with Shane’s shoulder, a gentle tap, not unlike he was trying to soothe one of his many children. “Shane.”

“That’s not recent.” He mumbled pitifully, despondently. “He doesn’t have his tattoo.”

He didn’t need to see his best friend’s face to know that he was wondering how Shane knew when Ilya Rozanov got his stupid bear tattoo, he could feel it in the tension that threaded itself through the fingers that still rested against his shoulder.

“Did you... did you know about Rozanov?” He asked quietly, withdrawing his hand from Shane.

Shane wondered if this was the moment he’d lose his best friend. Before that thought could take root in his brain, he felt and heard Hayden sitting down, his back braced against the sink cabinet, his legs extended in front of him and touching the wall opposite.

“Yes. Yeah. I knew. I...” Shane blew a breath out of his lungs which caused his stomach to lurch uncomfortably again. “Fuck. He’s in *Russia!*” He said suddenly, scrambling to his feet, tossing the bile halfway up his throat before he swallowed it back. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

He kept over Hayden, leaving him alone and confused on the bathroom floor, and lunged across the room, grabbing his phone from the bed. His fingers flew to *Lily’s* contact, pressing

call. He chewed nervously on his thumbnail as it rang through.

“Who are you calling?”

Shane’s eyes flicked to Hayden standing still in the center of their hotel room. “Ilya. He has to get out of Russia. This is illegal there. Fuck!”

This is Ilya. I will never listen to your message.

“Ilya! Pick up. Fuck, pick up, pick up, pick up.”

He ended the call and let his thumbs fly over the keyboard as he sent streams of texts with the same message in varying words.

He watched Hayden move from the corner of his eye as he called Ilya again. *This is Ilya. I will never listen to your message.* Another desperate plea for him to wake up.

More texts. More calls.

“Are you—? Is he—?”

“Lily.” Shane said, desperation and horror and fear lacing the singular name that had been a constant in his life for almost as long as Hayden had known him, had been his best friend.

“Shit.” Hayden said simply, scraping a hand over his face. “Okay. Okay. Um... can I? What can I do? Fuck. This is bad.”

Shane’s voice was throaty, wet and desperate as he left the next voicemail. “Ilya, fuck. Wake up. Answer your fucking phone.” He went back to his text thread, ***you’re not safe, you need to leave. You’re not safe. You’re not safe.***

His breathing was short, stunted and desperate as he alternated between calls and voicemails and texts. Hayden dutifully sat in silence, probably processing his own emotions for finding a minute ounce of glee at an opposing athlete’s scandal before Shane’s reaction hit him like a two hundred and fifty pound brick wall of an opposing defenseman.

“Please pick up, Ilya. Fuck.”

More texts. Normally Shane would be reserved and did his best not to send multiple texts in a row—not just to Ilya, but to anyone. He didn’t want to steal other people’s time with unnecessary messages, always trying to contain his thoughts to one message at a time. Now though, *now*, he had no choice but to send many texts in a row in an effort to get through to Ilya.

“Fuck. *Thank god.*” He breathed as a text from *Lily* updated in the text thread that had just been Shane spiraling.

“What? He get back to you? Is he okay?”

Shane nodded, letting relieved tears drench his cheeks. “He’s at the airport.”

“Good. That’s good. *Fuck*. ” Hayden fell backwards onto his mattress, throwing his arm over his eyes. “I have so many questions, dude.”

“I know. I know.” Shane drank in the sight of the text bubbles.

“Fuck. Shane, I’m getting news alerts. TMZ has breaking news. *Fuck*. ”

Shane fought back the bile rising in his throat. “Shit. They’re fucking vultures.” He hissed, swiping away the text chain and putting in a google search for *Ilya Rozanov*. “ESPN doesn’t have anything yet. So just trash sites. God, fuck people who spread this shit.”

“They’re ruining people’s lives.” Hayden agreed. “Where did they even get that photo?”

Shane shrugged, just as at loss of the origin as Ilya probably was. He didn’t see the other guy’s face but Ilya had looked *young*. Too young. Illegally young. And that made Shane feel so many things simultaneously that he couldn’t pick threads apart and isolate which feeling was predominate. He wanted to bleach his brain, schedule a lobotomy. That was probably Ilya’s former coach’s son. More illegality.

“He just boarded the plane.” He said, dropping his phone and mimicking Hayden’s position by falling onto his back.

Shane’s eyes traveled the settling crack in the ceiling, taking stray paths to focus on stains that should make him more curious to know how they got there.

“So,” Hayden said quietly, “you and Rozanov?”

Shane’s eyes closed, his mouth tightening. “Yeah.” He said simply. There was no use in denying it when Hayden had watched him throw up seven years of terror and dread in the bathroom.

“Boston Lily... is Rozanov.” Hayden said, and Shane was sure he was saying it out loud to himself in order to let his mind wrap around the idea. “Fuck, man. That’s crazy.”

It *was* crazy. Shane agreed whole heartedly with that statement. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“Dude, no!” He said quickly and Shane heard him rustling on the bed. “Fuck, man. I don’t give a shit. I just wish—god I tried to set you up with so many girls!”

Shane laughed despite not finding anything funny at all. “I said no, though.”

“I could have been trying to find you a nice guy! Had to settle for *Rozanov*. ”

“Hey!” He protested abruptly. “It’s too fucking soon.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re right. Shit. Sorry.” He was quiet for a while. “So what now?”

“I don’t know. Fucking pray he gets out of Russia and back to the States, I guess.”

“He said he was on a plane, though. It’s gotta be early there, no big news probably has picked up the story yet.” Hayden offered.

“I guess.” Shane sat up on the bed, resting his elbows against his thighs and stared straight ahead at the thermostat on the wall. “Don’t tell Jackie.”

“Uh, buddy... Rozanov being gay is gonna be huge news. I don’t think I can keep that from my wife.”

“No,” Shane shook his head, turning to press his chin into his shoulder, his eyes finding Hayden in the dark. “About me. I’m not... you’re the only person who knows. Well, besides Ilya, obviously. I’m not... I’m not ready.”

“Shit, dude. I’d never. *Never*. Look, I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry I reacted that way about Rozanov. That was insensitive and I wasn’t thinking.”

Shane licked his lips as he jerked his head in abrupt, short nods. “I get it.”

“We good? I’ll grovel if I have to.”

“Yeah, we’re good.”

Shane had woken with his eyes crusted from sleep and residual tears. The first thing he did was reach for his phone and check the flight status of the one, lonely flight from Russia to JFK. Still in the air. That was good. *Good*.

What wasn’t good was the player’s group chat with over a hundred messages sitting on his notification docket, or the tsunami of news and blog alerts breaking *the* story. Outing Ilya. Making his entire life dangerous and unsafe.

Anything for engagement and advertising dollars. *Disgusting*.

“Definitely don’t read the group chat.” Hayden said when the bathroom door opened, a plume of steam billowing out behind him. “It’s... well,” He grimaced, “it’s exactly what you’d expect from a bunch of hockey players.”

“Yeah.” Shane nodded, his throat feeling tight. “Yeah, I figured.” He hummed, rubbing his forefinger over the cuticle of his thumb in quick, soothing swipes. “Are we good?”

Hayden deflated, a huff of air escaping his lungs. “Of *course*. What the fuck do I care about what you’re into? I mean... The Rozanov of it all is, I think, the hardest part. Ew, no, not hardest. Shit that’s so gross.” He gagged, pressing the heels of his palms to his eyes. “Fuck, I’m never gonna unsee that image.”

Shane couldn't help the laugh that bubbled out of him. His hand swept a pillow out from behind him and launched it across the room at his friend. "Fuck off!"

Hayden, blinded by his hands over his eyes, took the pillow to the gut. "Rude." He sniffed, picking it up from the floor and tossing it back at Shane.

"Capitaine! Hayden! Did you see this shit about Rozanov?"

Shane and Hayden's heads both snapped in the direction of the hotel door, the sound of JJ yelling and knocking on the heavy wood reverberating through their hotel room.

"Fuck." Hayden grumped, throwing a cautious look towards Shane before he moved towards the door. "Shit, JJ, people are still sleeping."

JJ brushed past Hayden once the door was open, his feet leading him to the chair tucked underneath the vanity counter at the foot of Shane's bed. "Did you see, Capitaine?"

Shane cleared his throat, his fingers running over his clavicle in a motion he hoped would give off confusion. "See what, JJ?"

"Rozanov is gay. Can you imagine? All over the Internet."

Hayden didn't move his eyes off his captain. "I, uh, saw the group chat. Kind of fucked up that it got leaked like that." He offered to the room.

"Everyone is reporting it now! ESPN reached out to Boston for comment. No one can find Rozanov for comment." JJ hooked his phone dramatically with his hand. "His agent released a statement dropping him. C'est magnifique!"

"It's fucked up." Hayden countered, dropping to the corner of his bed, his eyes finally moving from Shane to JJ. "So uncool, JJ. Rozanov looks fucking *young* in that photo. I feel like I need to turn myself in just for seeing it."

Shane worried his lip between his teeth, his eyebrows furrowed, his eyes staring unfocused on the fucking hideous hotel carpeting. "His agent dropped him? That's..."

JJ was either stupid, hungover or just had no clue how to read a room. Hayden was currently betting on all three. "Well, c'est un scandale! Gay hockey captain? Unheard of!"

Shane's nostrils flared and he finally turned his head to look at Hayden who was trying to imperceptibly shake his head. *No!* Hayden wanted to scream. Launch himself off his bed and smother Shane with a pillow to stop whatever halfbrained thought or idea he could see circling through his captain's eyes.

"I don't care." Hayden shrugged, his teeth gritted, his eyes warning Shane to let him take heat off of the way he could clearly see he was feeling. "Hate the guy, but he's good at hockey. Who gives a shit if he's gay?"

JJ's eyebrow ticked upwards, his eyes glancing between captain and assistant captain. "This is not a problem for you, Capitaine?"

“Nah. No. Not a problem.” Shane answered, his throat croaking like a bullfrog on a misty night. “Fucked up to get outed.”

“Hm. Yes.” JJ said, a put out tone littering his words like junk on a sidewalk on trash day, not receiving the joyous fanfare he’d expected when he came to break the news. “He kissed you. At All Stars. Did he... did he come onto you, Hollander?”

Shane’s laugh choked him and he looked at JJ, panic zipping through his bloodstream like a puck at a hundred miles per hour. “What? No! I mean, yes! He kissed my cheek!”

Hayden’s eyes widened as Shane floundered. “JJ, is everyone ready to catch the shuttle to the airport? We gotta finish packing up. Can you make the rounds for us?”

Montreal — April 2017

Shane had wanted the shuttle to crash, the plane to fall from the sky, anything at all really, the day Ilya’s illicit photos leaked. He’d been glued to his phone, both waiting for a text that Ilya had made it to New York and refreshing a flight tracking website to make sure there had been no blips in travel.

While he had waited in the terminal he had pulled up an email to his agent, Farah, and asked her to reach out to Ilya—as a professional courtesy and favor. Shane had dutifully explained that during a time like this, Ilya shouldn’t have no one solely in his corner and, yes, Shane would cover the cost of the professional outreach hours.

Farah hadn’t gotten back to him until a few days later with a short email that Ilya had signed with an agent out of Boston recommended by the Bears. It had been a relief, of course, that Ilya’s team had been immediately supportive and in his corner. Shane wasn’t privy to what the commissioner’s office had to say, yet, but given that the league had no openly LGBTQ+ players on rosters, he could only imagine it wasn’t great.

And that made Shane feel, and spiral, even worse.

Ilya had quickly pulled back from him. He’d stopped instigating text conversations and would hardly reply at all to Shane when Shane had reached out. Which was... more often. He didn’t feel great about it, he actually felt pretty shitty if he sat inside his brain, as he was wont to do, and pick threads apart until the memories and meanings became frayed from mishandling.

The conversations he’d overheard from his teammates that first day, and the days and weeks after that followed, festered in his stomach like battery acid. He’d heard slurs and catcalls and names being called out in locker rooms and on rinks his *entire* life. He’d always managed to

shut out chirps and move on with his game, his life, and only let it scratch his carefully molded armor a few times.

But *these* slurs and insults felt *personal*. He was the things his friends and teammates were throwing around about Ilya. Crass and full of vinegar, speculating if Ilya was big on cock sucking, or if he liked it up his ass, who the guy was in the photo with him. All of these things slipped into Shane's ear and swirled around his brain like cream in a coffee cup until it became part of his psyche.

He'd done his best to steer locker room chatter away from Homophobia Street and onto topics that actually concerned their games. He'd bitten his tongue until the metallic tang of blood washed over his tastebuds and Hayden had done his best to help reel in their teammates to the best of his abilities.

But Shane was *exhausted*. He felt like an exposed nerve and was sure that if any of his teammates really looked at him as a person and not just as a hockey robot, they'd see that the slurs that dripped from their tongues mottled his skin like barbed wire fencing.

"You good?" Hayden asked quietly as he clipped his pads together next to Shane's cubby.

Shane looked up from his phone, his text thread with *Lily* open to countless unanswered messages, and frowned at Hayden. "Sure."

Hayden nodded skeptically. "This is, uh, the first time you've, uh... *seen*... you know?"

"Yeah." He sighed, his nostrils flaring with the breath. He locked his phone and placed it face down on the shelf of his stall. "We, uh, haven't really talked much."

"I get it, man." Hayden pulled his jersey down over his torso, his arms slipping into the arms with well practiced ease. "You want me to do the rally tonight?"

"Nah," he refused with a shake of his head, "I got it. Thanks though, Hayd."

Getting twenty-something men's attention was not an overtly hard task. They were all filled with vitriol and lust for blood and while Shane had never found himself wholly comfortable stoking flames with words, he found himself even more at a loss now. Normally his quiet intensity was enough but the air in the Voyager's locker room was filled with bigotry and homophobia and itching for a chance to chirp obscenities at Ilya Rozanov and his team.

"Look," he started, his eyes sweeping over a sea of blue and unclipped helmets, "we all know that tonight is a game that fucking matters. They *all* fucking matter, but tonight we bring it all out onto the ice and leave it there. There's been a lot of *shit* in the news—"

"*God, still can't believe Rozanov is a fag—*"

Shane's mouth snapped shut, his eyes zeroing in on Stedlund as he snickered towards the back of the huddle near Gagnon. "Does it fucking matter?" He snapped. "Because I'm pretty fucking sure every time he's beaten us he's been fucking *gay*, Stedlund. Doesn't seem to stop

him from being one of the best fucking hockey players of our generation, does it? What the fuck does it matter?”

Shane felt Hayden shift, his hand coming up to rest on his shoulder, close to his neck in warning. “Shane...”

Shane shrugged himself free and took a step forward. “Why does it matter, Stedlund?” Shane didn’t think Geoff Stedlund ever expected for his captain to call him out so spectacularly in front of the whole team—they’d all been making the same jokes and comments for *weeks*.

“It’s just a fucking joke, Hollander. Shit, calm your fucking tits.” Stedlund tried to brush the attention off. “Who cares? He’s a fag and it’s funny.”

It’s funny, Shane thought humorlessly to himself. The threads in his mind, threadbare and frayed as they were from the exhumation he’d been running them through for weeks if not years, snapped. He nodded, seemingly to himself, his his neck turning so he could see Hayden from the corner of his eye, vigorously shaking his head *no*.

“Everyone else find it funny?” Shane asked. A chorus of half hearted yeses and no’s sounding through the locker room. His eyes moved from face to face to face of his teammates before they finally landed on his coach, a dark look on his face, looming in the doorway, cataloguing every single one of them who found making jokes about Ilya’s sexuality a joke. “Great. That’s fucking great to know. Because you know why?”

“Shane.” Hayden tried again. “Don’t.”

“No, Hayden. Let them know.” Shane waved his hand dismissively towards his best friend, “I’m glad to know who on this team thinks it’s funny to call another player a faggot because I’m fucking gay, too.”

There was an intake of breath that ricocheted through the locker room. Low grumbling and uncomfortable chuckles like Shane was playing a joke on *them*.

“*Well?*” Shane hissed, throwing his arms wide. “Tell me your fucking jokes—“

“Hollander!” Theriault called from the doorway, “That’s enough.”

“Yeah, okay. Let’s go play some hockey.”

June 2017 — Eastern Quebec

Shane didn’t really remember much of that game between Montreal and Boston. He’d gotten his bell rung, bruised, battered and out of contention for the playoffs. He *vaguely*

remembered outing himself in the locker room because his teammates had found it funny to ridicule Ilya for his queerness.

That memory was there, but foggy like a misty morning over the private lake that his cottage overlooked. Hayden had glossed over the retelling while Shane was doped up in the hospital room. He had slipped in not long after Ilya had visited.

Ilya, who he had scared by getting taken down by the behemoth Bears defenseman that Shane knew Ilya considered his friend. The flush of his body and the beat of his heart calming the moment Ilya had crossed the room to brush his fingers over his cheek were the clearest things he remembered from the hospital.

And asking Ilya to come to his cottage. To be alone. To be together. In private. With no prying eyes or homophobic teammates.

“I’m so happy for Scott Hunter.” His mother said as she raised her glass of wine to her mouth.

Shane glanced up from his phone, open to *Lily’s* text chain. He couldn’t help himself—couldn’t stop himself from trying to remind Ilya that he was here, that he wasn’t alone, and that Shane *cared*. A lot. Too much, probably. “What?”

His mother waved her hand to the television, tuned to the Stanley Cup broadcast. Of course Shane knew what they were watching. His thumbs had been hovering over his phone looking for anything noteworthy on the screen that he thought would get Ilya to respond.

“He’s finally winning the Cup. If it couldn’t be you, I’m glad it was him.”

“Uh, yeah. Definitely.” Shane didn’t really agree—he’d wished that it had been Ilya and The Bears over Hunter and The Admirals.

“It’s sad that he doesn’t have any family.” His mom said as an after thought as families of the New York players spilled onto the ice, getting swept up and embraced by their players.

“Yeah.” He agreed quietly, thinking of another hockey captain with basically no family but his team.

“Oh, that’s sweet. Look at him looking at the fans. Taking it all in.”

Shane leaned forward, his eyes focusing on Hunter in the background of the camera that was currently broadcasting the celebration. Hunter was waving at the crowd—no. Gesturing at the crowd, a *come here* gesture that was unmistakable. “Looks like he’s got someone in the stands.”

“Oh! You’re right!” She set her glass on the coffee table. “David! Come watch!”

“Already saw the Admirals win. Don’t need to watch them celebrate it, too.” His dad called back from the kitchen but Shane could already hear his voice grow closer as he stepped into the living room, a dish towel thrown over his shoulder. “What am I watching?”

Scott Hunter was skating to the boards and a camera was following behind him now, eager to see who the hockey captain wanted to celebrate his first Cup win with. And was that... is that... “Holy *shit!*”

“Oh!” His mom exhaled in a surprised, short breath.

Holy shit. Are you seeing this?

Who knew Hunter was gay. This is crazy.

This certainly *was* a text that would get Ilya to respond to him. How could he not?

Is crazy to announce during Cup.

It *was* fucking crazy to do it at the Cup but Shane was... well, he was fucking *stoked*. Ilya. Hunter. *Him*. All gay, or gay adjacent and all captains of their respective teams and—

“I’m gay.” He announced abruptly.

not beta'd

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Fuck the Voyagers.

Chapter Notes

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

Shane had spent a long time, years probably, envisioning the way he'd tell his parents he liked men. Sure, at first, Shane had thought that Ilya was a passing fancy and eventually the novelty and thrill would wear off and he would return to pretty, but bland, girls that had easy smiles and low expectations set by asshole guys that came before him.

He'd be nice and polite to their parents, hold doors for them, push their chair in. He'd send them flowers and thinking of you texts and say he *wish you were here* while he laid in his hotel bed next to Hayden as he made moon eyes at Jackie through FaceTime and told his thousand kids a silly story if they were free from their obligations by their bedtime.

He'd be the nice, smart, quiet and polite Canadian boy his parents had raised and if he wasn't great at sex, the girls would overlook it because he was *nice*. Respectful. Treat them like a human and it would be *fine*.

Instead, the infatuation with Ilya had only grown and festered inside of him until he felt like the only way he'd be fine and good again was if he was pinned to his mattress with a behemoth Russian man on top of him, devouring him whole and spinning tangled webs of whispered words into his ear and over his body.

He had tried to find some innocuous hookups, men that looked nothing like Ilya Rozanov and girls that had—that was half the reason he had *tried so fucking hard* to date Rose successfully. If he couldn't have Roz he could have Rose and if he was lost in a lustful moment in his mind where the hands buried in the hair covering his lap was curly instead of straight, darker blonde instead of bright, and if words happened to fall out of his mouth in a moan of *Roz*, it could be chalked up to a lustful slur of *Rose*. He could still fuck himself with the toy that Ilya had teased him about years ago while he was on his own.

And it would be fine.

He could find a *nice* girl. A girl willing to settle for just okay because life would have always have had thrown a disaster of a man at her before Shane would come skating in, a knight on sharpened blades. And he would be fine, okay even, probably even *great*, at being a husband. He'd provide, he'd love in a bland, perfunctory way, but he would be *good*. He could live the rest of his life with a secret locked so tightly inside of him that he'd eventually wonder if it had all even happened or if he'd just gotten really good at telling himself stories to get by.

But then Hollander had become *Shane*, and Rozanov became *Ilya*, and suddenly *fine* didn't seem so fine. Or so good. But he still tried. He went out, he met Rose, and he *really* liked her. He did. She was funny and sweet and looked passingly like she could be a relative of Ilya's in the right light. And yeah, the sex was *bad*. The sex was always not great with women. He didn't enjoy the softness of their bodies, or the feel of breasts in his hands. He didn't enjoy pressing his mouth to a pussy and sucking on a clit the way he enjoyed having his mouth fucked by a cock. He fumbled and stumbled, both with his mouth and with his fingers, and condoms always felt strange when he was putting it on *his* dick and god why didn't pussy feel as good as Ilya's mouth? His hands?

And a few bumbling attempts and Rose knew. *Of course* she'd figure it out. She probably wasn't used to a man forcing himself to have sex with her, nevertheless being so fucking, god awfully bad at it.

So there would be no nice girls, Michigan born or Canadian bred, for Shane. He'd resigned himself to the fact that, irrefutably, he was gay. Would always be gay. He wasn't bisexual or curious. And yeah, Ilya ghosting him hadn't been particularly joyful—it actually really fucking sucked—but Shane could still confidently say that having his heart broken wasn't a deterrent to liking men.

Particularly one man. Who was all Shane could really think about, day in and day out.

“What?” His mother asked in a tone that left Shane feeling colder than if he was skating naked on ice.

And this definitely wasn't how he had planned to come out to his parents. Not that he could say that he really *had* planned on coming out the way he did to his teammates either.

“I'm gay.” He said again, rolling his head over his shoulders and ignoring the slight burn from the movement in his mending collarbone. “I didn't... I had this grand idea... but—“ he gestured at the television, the camera panning around Scott Hunter and his boyfriend, embracing but no longer kissing. “And Ilya—I mean, *Rozanov*.”

His dad moved away from the doorframe and sat at the edge of the sectional closest to him. “I think,” he started, filling the silence left by his wife and son, “that we kind of thought... you could be.”

“What? Since when?”

His mom had her hands clasped together in her lap, and Shane noticed that her knuckles were pale from the grip. “A while now, I guess. We know you pretty well.”

Shane felt his head nod of its own accord, his eyes unfocused and his mind zipping down the highway at a 100 kilometers per hour. “I’m sorry,” he said brokenly, his uninjured arm raising and his hand swiping at his cheeks as tears pooled in his lashes. “I tried... I tried *really* hard not to be.”

“Hey, hey, hey.” Yuna shushed, slipping over the couch cushion and wrapping her arms around him. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. Hey, *hey*. Look at me.” Her fingers, cool from her wine glass, ghosted over his cheek as she wiped tears. “There is *nothing* to be sorry for, okay?”

His dad’s hand fell gently on his injured shoulder, his other wrapping around his wife with familial ease. “We love you.” He said, bending forward, touching his forehead to Shane’s like a hockey helmet kiss.

Shane’s tears were in earnest now. Uninhibited, snotty tears that his mother caught with her fingers. “I know I’m supposed to be... to be different. Kids look up to me and I—I’m *sorry*. I really *tried* to stop. I just—I *couldn’t*.”

“We don’t want you to be anyone you aren’t, Shane.” His dad said softly, his hand running a comforting path over the back of his neck.

“You’re safe here.” His mother told him, a kiss to his forehead like he was sick in bed and a kiss from mom would heal everything wrong with him. “We love you. Okay? There’s nothing you could say or do that would change anything. Okay?” She implored, her hands curling around his cheeks, her thumbs swiping at his temples as she raised his face to look her in the eyes.

“Okay.” He agreed with a choked cry.

Shane laid in his childhood bed, surrounded by blue ribbons and trophies and signed jerseys from hockey players he grown up idolizing. Some he’d met on the rink and surpassed the greatness they’d held in his mind and he shook their hands in lines and told them *good game* while fighting the urge to tell them about their place of honor on his bedroom walls.

He wondered how many jerseys, photos, posters he had signed for kids and adults over the years. How many walls he had a place of pride on and if—*when*—news of his sexuality broke, how many of those items would be tossed, burned, discarded. He wondered if he’d feel each destruction like a chip being chiseled from his soul.

He felt sick with sadness and fitfully turned onto his uninjured side. His eyes stared at the pale blue wall that looked white in the moonlight, making his childhood room feel more like an asylum than a sanctuary. He played his mom’s words over in his mind and wondered if he told her about combusting and announcing that he was gay in the locker room because he

couldn't take how his teammates had continued to go in on Ilya would change the way she felt.

About him, about the team *she'd* spent *her* entire life rooting for. He wondered how she would handle knowing his coach let slurs fly like snowballs around the locker room. How his teammates, outside of Hayden and one lone text from JJ, hadn't even sent him a message to check in on him after he was laid out by the Bears.

When even his mortal enemy had shown up in his hospital room to see how he was. Ulterior motives aside, the captain of the opposing team caring more about an injured player than said player's *own* team.

His hand punched his pillow, trying to fluff it without raising his head.

"I'm so fucked." He whispered to the wall.

"I know it's still early," his mother said in lieu of good morning when he ventured into the dining room for breakfast. A French press half full of coffee sat on a trivet in front of his dad, who had *The New Yorker* in his hand, and his mom was idly dunking her tea bag in steaming water as her eyes focused on her phone, "but Farah wants to connect about your contract renewal with the Voyagers. She thinks that even though your season ended in injury that we could re-sign an extension for four years—Shane?"

Shane was pinching the bridge of his nose before his hand pressed over his eyes, making stars explode behind his eyelids. This was it. *This* was his moment. "I don't want to re-sign with Montreal."

He heard his father drop the magazine, a surprised gust of breath filling the room from both of his parents. His mom set her phone down with purpose and he could hear her lean back in the creaky wooden chair that was probably as old as he was.

"Shane? I don't understand. What brought this on? Sit down, sweetheart."

Shane kicked the chair away from the table and dropped heavily into the seat, the wood giving a groan from the force. He stared at the tablecloth, a piece of fabric that his mother had found in a store that had hockey pucks and sticks and goalie nets dotted over it. It was on the nose of their family interest but they'd had it since he was a kid. There were random stains of various origins scattered over the expanse but it was a comforting visual.

"I'm UFA this year and I... I don't want to sign with Montreal."

"Shane, honey, they *drafted* you."

"I know. Shit, *I know*." He grumbled, leaning back in the chair and choosing to stare at the ceiling. "They're just... my team is... Thierault. *Fuck!*"

“Shane. Buddy, tell us what’s going on. What has the team done that makes you want to go?”

“You’re going to be mad. Disappointed, I guess. I just...” Shane let a heavy breath out of his nostrils. “I came out. To them. Before the last game.”

“And they... weren’t good about it?” His mom asked quietly, delicately.

Shane’s lower lip trembled over his bottom teeth and tears pooled in the corners of his eyes, gravity winning and flooding them down his cheeks. “They were calling Il—*Rozanov*—well, you can guess. For *weeks*. The team group chat, the locker room, chirping around the ice and I just—I snapped. I’m *sorry*. And Theriault did *nothing*. Said *nothing*. I just... *fuck*. No one but Hayden even came to see me in the hospital. JJ only texted me once. I’ve heard from *no one*. Not even just to see how I’m feeling—fuck the telling them I’m gay thing. I’ve been their captain for *years* and it’s like they don’t even know me. And I just... I can’t. I *can’t*.” He sniffed, his nose full of snot and his mouth tasting like tears. “And I know they’ve been your favorite team since you were a kid, Mom, and I don’t want to disappoint you but I just *can’t*.”

Shane didn’t look at his parents as he lowered his gaze from the ceiling, instead choosing to focus on the space between them, eyes glazed over and staring at the silhouette of the arm chair in the front room.

His dad was always quiet, more reserved than his mom, and so he wasn’t surprised when it was his mom who broke the silence. “Well *fuck them*.” She said, an air of finality in her voice. “Fuck them. I don’t have a favorite team. I have a favorite player and, honey, that’s always going to be *you*.” She sniffed, curling her hand around her tea cup. “*Fuck them*.” She repeated. “I said it. Fuck the *Voyagers*.”

Shane choked as a laugh bubbled out of him. “So what now?”

“Well, I will be sending Farah an email telling her we are declining the contract and that we are looking at other teams when trades open. Where do you want to go? Toronto *could* use a center but...” she waved her hand dismissively, “Kent seems like a real asshole. Vancouver?”

“No. I think... I think I want to stay in the Eastern Conference.”

His mother nodded and he felt her eyes focusing on his face like she could read his mind. “Would you go to... Boston?”

His eyes flashed to hers, his mouth dropping in surprise. She may be on the *fuck the Voyagers* train right now but she bypassed every stop and landed right at their rival’s doorstep.

“What?” He choked in surprise. “They don’t need a starting center. Ilya—*Rozanov*—shit.”

“Well, they might need a second line center.”

“How do you know that?”

“She’s a witch.” His dad piped in as he picked up *The New Yorker* and began flipping through pages to find the one he lost.

“David, shush.” She swatted at his elbow. “I hear things, Shane.” She told him, her phone back in her hand. “Obviously we are going to float ideas to other teams but I just want to know how far you’re willing to go on giving it to Montreal.”

“It’s your call, bud.” His dad said, his eyes popping up over the glossy paper of his magazine.

Shane licked his lips. He turned his head, his eyes traveling through the window and out into the side yard where he could see sunshine glinting off the lake in the distance. “Let’s do it.”

not beta'd

Chapter End Notes

my hockey knowledge is minimal and casual at best so just out here doing my okay-est.

thanks for reading!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

I'm coming back to the city.

Boston — July 2017

Ilya had never taken the time to realize just how many of his teammates lived in Boston year round. Sure, some still had family from where they originated, but most had taken to Boston like the duckboats to water. He was only realizing this now, seven years after moving to the city, because this was the first time he was staying for the summer.

He'd only left Boston once to fly to Vegas for the NHL awards in June. He'd regretted RSVPing the moment it was finalized, thought about calling and say "*is prank! Just kidding!*" and abruptly ending the call.

But Scott Hunter was the Cup winner and most likely going to get the MVP award and Ilya found himself actually *wanting* to talk to the million year old Admirals captain about what it was like to *choose* to come out. How was his experience different than Ilya's?

Turning Boston into his year round home was how Ilya had found himself at the beach house in Hull that Connors and Marleau had gone in on together a few seasons previously. Ilya knew it was probably expensive but it was outdated and badly lit, with red brick walls and wood paneling floor to ceiling that reminded him of a restaurant he used to frequent in Moscow.

Ilya was thankful to be bounced around between his teammate's homes for short breaks to get him out of his penthouse that felt more like a prison than his home these days. He liked sitting on the widow's walk at the top of the house, smoking a cigarette, and staring out over the endless Atlantic. He was on his third day of trying to persuade a curious seagull to be his friend by offering torn scraps of his breakfast sandwich.

The first time it wailed at him he'd startled in his chair, knocking himself over and landed heavily on the creaky wood porch wood. Ilya could have sworn it laughed at him as it stole the entirety of his breakfast.

"You are not so bad, da?" He cooed around his cigarette, tearing the bread of his English muffin sandwich apart and tossing it in its direction. "Just hungry, yes? No fish in the sea? On special diet of bread?"

The squawk that answered him only caused him to flinch a *tiny* bit, not that he'd ever admit to it or own up being *slightly* intimidated by a flying thief. Especially not to Marleau or

Connors who he could hear having a muffled conversation through the open windows on the first floor.

Ilya was glad to be here. His teammates for the most part had taken his photo leak scandal with the gruff, brash brevity of what he'd come to expect from Boston people. Texts of calls of "*bro, this fucking sucks*", "*that's wicked fucked up*", "*who fuckin' cares, brother? You're a fuckin' beast!*" had blown his phone up before his first practice back after the photos had gone public. The tone in the locker room hadn't even taken a dip. His team didn't care. Ilya was there to play hockey and be good at it and that's all they cared about.

He felt... at home. Boston felt more like his home than Russia. Especially since his mother died and he was left unmoored and tethered by the fragile rope of his father's disease.

"*What the fuck!*" Marleau shouted from inside the house. "*Roz! Roz! Get down here! Holy fucking shit!*"

"Ah," he said to the bird who watched him from the railing pose with needy eyes full of thievery and menace. "I see you tomorrow, yes? Stupid American, screaming, sandwich thief bird. Coming!" He shouted, tossing the rest of his sandwich in the seagull's direction and crawling through the window that was not made to be a doorway for a six foot three Russian.

The floorboards creaked underfoot as he stomped his way downstairs, shouts and *fuck!* a honing beacon for his friends location in the house.

"What is all this?" He asked, scratching at his stomach as he stopped in the doorway to the musty den filled with random sports equipment, a foosball table and a ratty couch that Ilya was sure came with the house. "Why so loud, Marly? Is early. Some of us need sleep for beauty."

"Fuck off, Roz. It's noon." Marleau said, his hand gesturing towards the television. "Look at this shit!"

"Is UFA day, so what?"

"Roz, fuckin' *Hollander* is UFA. He didn't re-sign with the fuckin' *Voyagers*."

Ilya felt his mouth drop with surprise. He'd known, of course, when Montreal had released contracts before free agent season started and Shane hadn't been one of the player contracts announced, that something was afoot. It wasn't uncommon for negotiations for salaries for key players to take longer. Hollander was a Voyager through and through and Ilya figured he just happened to miss the contract release while he was lazing on the sandy beach of Nantasket and befriending birds.

"What? No. What is this?" He asked dumbly, moving into the room and resting over the back of the musty couch on his elbows. "Hollander is UFA?"

"Fuckin' *crazy*, right?" Connors face was doing the dumb thing where it was half a laugh and half surprise.

Ilya slapped at his pocket, looking for the phone that his brain belatedly remembered leaving on the nightstand next to his borrowed bed. He wondered if Shane *had* told him that he wasn't re-signing with the Voyagers and he'd missed it because he had all but ceased texting him back, choosing instead to skim messages with unfocused eyes.

Yebat!

"Whoever signs Hollander is gonna be wicked fuckin' lucky." Marly grunted. "Shit, you think he's still fucked from my hit?" He glanced nervously over to Ilya with a grimace, remembering the fallout of that on ice encounter with the encounter of Ilya's fist in the locker room later.

"No, no." Ilya waved his hand in dismissal.

His mind was swirling, reeling in wild discontent. He was pissed he didn't know about such a big thing going on in Shane's life but had the sight of mind to know it was his own fault.

Ilya wondered where he'd sign—if he'd go to the Western Conference and he'd see him even less times a year.

Ilya didn't like the way that made his chest feel.

Ilya's thumb scrolled over the messages. Ones he'd ignored, some he'd responded to, looking for a hint, a clue, a smoke signal of what was going on with Shane. The fact he was in the dark was his own doing but it still stung him in a way that he didn't anticipate.

Ilya's career was the second side of the same coin as Shane's. Intertwined, together, rivals and in the world's pocket, he'd found his own personal life clattering against Shane's like spare change. Together. Belonging.

And now he felt like the pocket was turned inside out and all of the coins that had accrued over years of saving scattered against pavement, into crevices where only weeds grew.

He pressed the tip of his tongue to the back of his teeth and took a deep breath. His eyes flicked over to the closed bedroom door and back to his phone. His thumbs hovered over the keyboard, doing a tiny dance as he sifted through words he wanted to type in his mind.

You admit defeat? I am better hockey player and you must retire now?

His face pinched, nose scrunching. He deleted the message.

They are not giving you enough money?

No. He deleted that message as well.

“Fuck.” He groaned, dropping his phone to his lap and collapsing against the headboard in agitation.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, his thumb and ring fingers digging into the corners of his eyes. He felt stupid and out of his depth. He knew he had his own shit to sift through regarding his citizenship and the fallout of Alexei selling illicit photos of him to the media. Ilya was well within his rights to press charges against his brother. He *should* press charges, but his sister in law didn’t work and he had his niece to think about.

His brother ruined his life but Ilya didn’t want to ruin his niece’s.

A rock and a hard place.

He didn’t have time to focus on Shane Hollander and all of the ways he made Ilya feel.

“Fuck! Holy shit!”

Ilya startled, his fingers stabbing into his eyes instead of just pressing and stars exploded behind his eyelids.

“Roz! Fuck! Roz, Roz, Rozy!”

Marleau slammed through the bedroom door with Connors at his heels, both holding their phones. “Roz!”

“What? What?” He asked, pushing himself up, his hand gesturing out with a snap of his wrist. “What is all this noise? This is supposed to be vacation, da?”

“We fuckin’ signed *Hollander*, Rozanov! Fucking motherfucking *Hollander!*” Marly sat heavily on the end of the bed causing Ilya to jostle.

“What is this? No.”

Ilya snatched Marleau’s phone from his hand and stared at the photo *The Athletic* had posted with their announcement—a photo of Shane and Ilya at a face off. ***“Hollander on a Voyage(r) to Boston Bears’ Den”***.

Ilya’s throat felt tight, like his entire heart had lodged itself in his windpipe, thumping and crushing and *fuck*. “This is fake. Deep fake, yes? Like Connors’ girlfriend?”

“Bro, what the *fuck* with the fucking stray?”

Ilya and Marleau ignored him. “Brother, we’re going to win so many fuckin’ Cups. What was Montreal fucking *thinking* not locking Hollander down?”

Ilya’s brows were furrowed as he scrolled the article. It was a good contract, probably one of the *best*, but... Shane was worth *more*. In fact, Ilya was sure that Shane was paid more in Montreal than he was signing for in Boston. And he was losing his Captainship in the process.

“Fuck.” Ilya grunted, thrusting Marleau’s phone back at him. “I need cigarette.”

He scooped his phone from his lap with one hand while the other grabbed his pack and lighter from the side table. He left Connors and Marleau in his borrowed room and headed back to the widow walk’s window.

In a daze, he smashed his forehead against the vinyl as he climbed through, swearing quite loudly in Russian and grabbing at his forehead. He plopped into the lone chair, the only piece of furniture that even fit on the tiny little porch, and lit up his first cigarette. He continued rubbing at his face as he held the cigarette between his fingers and tried to understand *what the fuck he was going to do*.

Shane Hollander. Coming to Boston. *His city. His team. His...*

Finally decided Boston is best team?

He sent it before he could think once, twice (thrice...)

He watched the tiny little dots appear and disappear. Appear. Disappear. Again and again for many minutes. It made Ilya smile, made him imagine the cute furrow of Shane’s brows as he overthought everything. He wondered what was running through Shane’s mind and if there was a blush under his pretty freckles.

I’m in Boston right now.

Ilya figured as much but his heart thumped quickly anyway.

Staying at The Liberty. The Charles River suite.

Ilya ran his finger over his bottom lip as he took a heavy drag from his cigarette.

I’m coming back to the city. He typed out, thumb hovering over the send button before pressing down. ***See you soon.***

not beta’d.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Ya tebya lyublyu.

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya barely spared Connors and Marly a goodbye after he shoved all of the clothing he'd discarded at various spots and points across his borrowed bedroom floor. "Going back to city."

"Whoa, Roz, what the fuck? We were gonna light off fireworks on the 4th. You've never been in the States for the Fourth of July."

"Do not care. Sounds boring. Bye, fuckers!"

Ilya was lying, of course, because setting off fireworks *did* sound fun and not at *all* boring, but he had to make it back to the city as fucking quickly as possible. He was lucky, of course, that most traffic was heading towards where he was leaving and the roads were as clear as Massachusetts roads usually were.

One thing he appreciated about driving here was that everyone was always in a hurry and aggressive, screaming and fingers flipping off other drivers—turn signals and yellow lights optional and disregarded.

Ilya made it to his apartment with little fanfare, barely letting the door click shut behind him before he was stripping his clothes, leaving them like a trail of breadcrumbs to his shower. He scrubbed his skin raw, washing away the salt breeze, cigarette smoke and months of his mental poltergeist.

When his skin felt new, he finally let himself lead the shower, wrapping a towel around his waist, and placed himself at his vanity. He stared at himself, skin pink and wet, his pupils dark and focused. He let himself breathe deeply, the damp of the humid air settling heavy in his lungs.

Shane. In Boston. For hockey. For... *him*?

His throat felt tight, full of longing and uncertainty and what-ifs. He talked himself into the thoughts just as quickly as he pushed them back out, but *Shane, Shane, Shane* echoed and dripped in his mind like a leaky faucet.

He combed his fingers through his wet hair, pushing curls back away from his face and took a good long look at the faint shadow of stubble that covered his jaw. He wondered if he should shave or if he wanted to keep a shroud of casual indifference cloaked over him like a security blanket.

His face was slathered with shaving cream and a fresh razor was against his skin before he had the conscious thought that *this*, Shane Hollander signing with his team, in a new country, was *anything* but casual.

He's not doing this for you, he told his reflection as he scraped away a few days worth of hair, *this is for him*.

Ilya barely ever went to Charles Street. The area was nice, *charming*, he'd say if he used words like that. Cobblestones and gas lamps, snobbish women pushing prams, men wearing popped collars and chinos and not at all what Ilya sought out in life. He liked the vibrant and weird parts of the city, not the parts that echoed history so thoroughly that it was like he stepped back in time.

No one paid him any attention as he stepped off the escalator in the atrium of *The Liberty*. It wasn't his first time in this hotel, knew his way around from parties and events that took place in the former jail, so he moved forward towards the bank of elevators, turning his head away from the bar that lined the wall, preferring not to be recognized by locals or tourists.

The elevator ride to Shane's floor was very quick while simultaneously being the longest of Ilya's life. His palms felt a bit clammy and he rubbed them against the pants he already regret putting on in the sweltering summer heat of the city. The hallway was quiet when the elevator emptied him onto one of the top floors, only a few doors to choose from.

Discrete. Isolated.

His eyes focused on the door at the far end of the hallway and his feet moved without much second guessing on Ilya's behalf.

He felt uncertain, vulnerable and at peace, somehow, all at once. His knuckles hit the door with practiced ease before he slid his hands through his hair, pushing his curls away from his face.

The movement was muffled on the other side of the door before a click—a slide of a lock, a deadbolt and Shane stood there in the doorway, backlit by the lamps in the room. Ilya felt like Icarus, flying too close to the sun, just from looking at Shane in the flesh. His eyes cataloguing new, darker freckles on his cheeks, a strand of hair swooping down over his forehead, and a tentative smile gracing lips that Ilya longed to kiss like a soldier returning home from war.

“Hey.” Shane greeted casually, a bit stiff but open.

“Hi.” He returned, clenching his hands to fight back the urge to touch him. “Can I...?”

“Oh. Yeah, of course. Come in.”

Shane stood aside, his fingers curled around the door edge as Ilya stepped into the suite. He moved forward down the small hallway that emptied into the sitting room. His eyes settled on the box of Bears gear, merch and swag that sat on the dining table and he felt the corner of his mouth tick upwards.

“In bed with enemy, now, Hollander?” His last name felt acrid on his tongue, and he turned his back to the table and watched as Shane moved his body to the tufted leather couch.

Shane perched on the edge of the sofa, his elbows resting on his thighs and his hands cradled together, midair, between his knees. “I think I’ve been in bed with the enemy for a long time.”

“Da,” Ilya agreed easily. He took a seat across from Shane in an armchair that was deceptively comfortable.

Ilya stared at Shane, wetting his lips subconsciously, his throat bobbing as he tried to swat away nerves. Shane was quiet, reserved in a way that Ilya wasn’t used to but knew he was the cause of.

“So...” he said with a hum, leaning back in the chair, letting it support his back, his arms resting against the armrests. “How are you? How is summer?”

Shane scoffed, the sound derisive and corrosive in the room. “Really?” He grunted. “How am I? You haven’t talked to me in *months*.”

“Been busy. Very popular, yes? Lots of friends, Hollander. Surely you understand this, da?” Ilya hummed, crossing his arms over his chest.

“*Don’t*.” He snapped, breaking his hands apart, holding a finger up to Ilya. “Don’t fucking act like that.”

“Act like what, Hollander?”

“It’s Shane.” He said, immediately, forcefully. “We... it’s—it’s *Shane*.” His voice broke on his name and he cleared his throat. He squeezed his eyes shut. “You haven’t talked to me in months. I’ve been fucking miserable, Ilya. I know... look, I *know* you’ve had a mountain of shit to deal with. I fucking know that, okay? But I’m—*fuck*.”

“Shane.” He amended, rolling the name around in his mouth like he’d never tasted it before.

Shane pressed his hands to his face, covering his freckles from Ilya, which he hated but thought perhaps it was for the best. “I wanted to tell you—needed you to know—“

“Know what? What did you need to tell?”

“I came out. To my team. Before our last game.” Shane sniffled and the fissure in Ilya’s heart cracked further. “It was fucking weeks of them talking shit about you, cracking jokes like what happened to you was fucking funny. It.. I couldn’t take it and I—“

Shane’s body heaved a sob and Ilya was out of the arm chair and on the couch beside him in a moment. His arm curled around Shane’s shoulders and with very little hesitation, Shane went willingly into Ilya’s personal space. “Shane, hey. Shh, hey, hey. Is ok, ok? Shh.”

“I wanted—fuck, I wanted to tell you. But Marleau and that fucking hit. And then I was *so* high on painkillers and I just—“ he took a deep breath, and pressed the heels of his hands against his cheeks, furiously wiping away tears. “And you, *fuck*, you ghosted me.”

Ilya’s heart lodged heavily in his throat and his lungs felt full and empty all at once. “I... I was asshole. I did not realize that it would hurt you like this.”

Shane pulled away from his grip and Ilya loosened his arm but didn’t drop it from him. Shane’s freckles were shiny with shed tears and Ilya couldn’t help himself from raising his free hand and wiping away the moisture with the pad of his thumb.

“Sorry.” Shane mumbled, using the back of his hand to wipe away his tears from his other cheek.

“No, no.” Ilya whispered. “No polite Canadian boy today. I deserve this—your anger.”

“That’s the fucked up part, Ilya, I’m not even pissed at you. I fucking hate everything that’s happened. *Fuck!* It felt like, Jesus, I don’t know, after All-Stars and while... while you were in Russia—before...”

“Da. My brother. He is awful.” Ilya stated.

“What? No. It felt like we were *something*.” Shane threw *something* out there with all of the meaning of what it could have been, could *be*. “Wait. What do you mean your brother?”

Yebat, Ilya thought. His body tensed and Shane responded to the tightness with his hand moving to rest on his thigh, gently, softly, reassurance and a question. “He is source of leak. I do not know for *sure*, of course, but...”

“But?”

Ilya rocked his head over his shoulders, trying to convey without words but searching for them anyway. “But, we fought. Before I called you, da? I, ah, what is saying? Scissors,” he used his middle and forefinger in motion, “him.”

“You cut him off?”

“Da! Yes. Cut off. He was unhappy.” He widened his eyes and let his mouth turn down in an *obviously* kind of motion. “Not hard to... assume how photo got out.”

“Fuck, Ilya. Why wouldn’t you tell me?”

Ilya sucked in a breath and let the air swirl in his lungs. He slid his arm from off of Shane's shoulders and wrapped it around his waist, his fingers gripping into the fabric of his (*Bears!*) tshirt. He pulled him closer until the top of his head was nuzzled under Ilya's chin, two puzzle pieces fitting together after being flipped upside down and lost.

"I did not want to burden you." Ilya told him simply, pressing a kiss to the crown of Shane's head and inhaling the scent of him. "Was heavy. Did not want it to destroy you, too."

"That was fucking stupid."

Ilya smiled sadly into Shane's hair. "On this one thing, you are right."

Shane scoffed, the back of his hand hitting against Ilya's stomach causing an *oof!* to expel from his mouth uninvited. "I'm right about a lot of things."

"Mm." He hummed, beginning to stroke his knuckles against Shane's side. "Tell me about Montreal. Your team."

"Old team, you mean. I don't know if you saw the news but I'm officially on the Bears roster."

"Ah, ah. Yes. Of course. My apologies. As your Captain, I am official welcome committee."

"Such an asshole." Shane grumbled without a bite behind it. "We were in Buffalo. The guys went out but Hayden and I aren't into that—"

"Because you are boring and Pike is old—"

"—and he was reading fucking trash. Honestly, if it was any other situation and it wasn't about you, I'd have given him so much fucking shit for scrolling on it but... but it kind of worked out. Because they had the story before ESPN or TMZ got it and I got to you sooner and you were able to get out."

"Hm, I'm very thankful for this. Was very scary. I was..." Ilya's heart seized with leftover adrenaline, "very scared. Sveta—got me plane ticket. It was... it was good you kept messaging. I... it would not have been good for me to be there. To be... in Russia. When news broke in the morning."

"What would have happened to you?"

"Nothing good." Ilya tells him, morosely. "I do not know if being famous hockey player would be worse or better. Probably, I think, worse. Arrested, probably. Maybe prison? Beaten? My money frozen, ah, confiscated. Fines. Nothing good." He reiterates. "I think... I think I am feeling very scared but free."

Shane squeezed his fingers into Ilya's thigh in comfort. "Free?"

"Yes. With my father dead, there was no reason to return to Russia except for my niece. But," he hummed, "my brother. He is selfish. Awful. *Clearly.*"

“Was... was it your coach’s son? In the photo?”

“Da. Sasha. Sasha lives in Paris and I do not think... he will go back to Russia. But it is only me that can be seen in photo. I think he will be okay.” Ilya rested the flesh of his cheek against Shane’s head. “I am sorry you saw photo of that.”

Shane turned, his face no longer looking forward but instead turning to look up at Ilya like he had hung the moon and painted the sky with stars, which made Ilya feel overwhelmed and undeserving. He felt tears pool in the corner of his eyes and he closed them to try and stem the flow of feelings.

“Hey, hey.” Shane whispered before Ilya felt his lips brush over his jaw, his cheek, his temple.

“I’m sorry.” He rasped brokenly as he began furiously wiping at his face.

“It’s okay to cry, Ilya.”

“Nyet, no. No. I am Russian. Russians do not cry.”

Shane’s arm looped around Ilya’s neck, his finger tips pressing into the side of his face and gently guiding Ilya’s face to his. He was quiet, letting his eyes drink in their fill of him after so long without seeing him. Shane didn’t make eye contact if he could help it, it always felt too vulnerable, too raw, exposed, but it seemed he couldn’t get enough of hazel tinged red with tears that Russian’s didn’t cry

Ilya’s eyes dropped from Shane’s, smoothing a path over the the smattering of freckles on his cheeks and flecked across his nose to the tiny freckle that Ilya wasn’t even sure Shane realized was on his bottom lip.

“What now?” Shane asked, slipping one of Ilya’s curls through his fingers.

“You come to Boston to play for best team in the league with best Captain to ever be Captain of best team in league.”

Shane’s eyes crinkled as he smiled. “Such an asshole.” His fingers tightened in Ilya’s hair and caused Ilya’s stomach to coil tightly. “What now about... about *this*? Us?”

“I think...” he trailed off, dipping his chin and resting his forehead against Shane’s, “that as a good Captain, you will move in with me so I can keep eye on you. Make sure you are not such trouble. Be good influence on you. Rub off on you.”

“Rub off on me, huh?”

“Da. The rubbing is very important. Team building.”

“Right, right. So should I expect Marleau to team build next? St-Simon?”

“No, no. Just Captain duties. No other team building does rubbing on new, impressionable teammate. Bad luck, of course.”

“Of course.” Shane agreed, nudging the tip of his nose against Ilya’s.

“And, ah, you cannot drive. Too polite, too Canadian. You will need, ah, what is word? Choofuer?”

“Chauffeur, Ilya.”

“Yes! That! You will need ride and I am very accommodating Captain.”

“Ilya.”

“*Shane.*”

“Shut *up.*”

Ilya met Shane halfway, translating the words his body wrote better than he could ever understand words. Actions speaking louder and Shane’s the loudest in the room. Their lips slotted together, not hesitant, but like a coming home after months of Ilya being lost at sea.

It wasn’t hurried or frenzied. There wasn’t a stopwatch counting down the seconds they had together until one of them had to leave. He let Shane push at his chest, his back falling against the back of the couch, Shane’s thighs quickly straddling Ilya’s lap.

His arm looped around Shane’s hips, pulling him closer, chest to chest as he sought asylum in Shane’s mouth and his fingers found citizenship against skin. Ilya didn’t stop the droplets of tears this time as he broke their kiss with an awe filled smile. “You came to Boston for this. For me?”

Shane smiled against his mouth, “Because Montreal fucking *sucks.*” He answered quickly.

“This is grand romantic gesture, Shane.” Ilya protested. “Move countries for *me.* Because you lo—I mean—no, sorry—“

“God, you’re such an idiot. Of course I fucking *love* you.”

The emotion swelled in Ilya’s throat, suddenly too small to contain the words for himself. “*Fuck.*” He surged forward, stealing Shane’s mouth for a kiss that felt like a promise written in the stars. “Ya tebya lyublyu. *Ya tebya lyublyu.* I love you.”

“So much.” Shane whispered. “So fucking much it kills me.”

“Da.” He agreed. “But not anymore.”

“No. Not anymore.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a short epilogue. Thank you so much for reading.

I am working on other HOLLANOV fics because they have taken over my hyperfixation and my life.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

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

Montreal - October 2017

It felt strange to be in Centre Bell and not be wearing blue. The mostly white away uniform still felt strange on Shane's body after his entire career on one team. What he did like was that the Bears uniform felt like battle armor. He felt... safe. Secure. He felt more belonging in three months than he had in seven seasons in Montreal.

It was humbling to realize that everything he worked for his entire, everything he had accomplished under the spell of the Voyagers felt hollow.

The visiting team locker room was devoid of personality—just a room of borrowed stalls and harsh lighting. Shane had known this, of course, having it be his home arena for seven years. Even still, it was like being assaulted by the undercurrent of *you don't belong here*, something he was still coming to terms with.

He didn't think he ever belonged in Montreal.

The strings that tied him to the city began and ended with his contract with subclauses for his friendship with Hayden and his real estate portfolio.

"I'm going to sell my condo." He'd told Ilya midway through September. "I've been meaning to for years."

"But where will we fuck? Sex condo has many memories, Hollander."

Shane's eyebrows furrowed. "What?" He'd asked, turning away from the fridge in Ilya's (their!) apartment. "I'm going to keep my apartment."

Ilya had clutched at his heart through his shirt. "Nyet! I finally get to see Shane Hollander's real home? I cannot believe."

He'd scoffed, turning back to his task of collecting glass containers of prepped food. "You're such an asshole." He mumbled. "And this is my real home."

Shane barely had a moment to set the dishes down on the counter before his hips were pinned to the cabinets, Ilya's arms caging him in. Ilya's lips pressed against the back of his neck as he gently pressed his entire body against Shane's.

"What are you doing?"

"You cannot say such things like this and not expect me to want to ravish. Real home here, with me. Not Montreal. Not fuck condo. Here. Boston."

Shane's skin had flushed, not that he could see it, but could feel the gentle thrum of pleasure rush through his veins like a bobsled. "Well, I guess my cottage is my real home, actually." He adjusted his answer with a smirk.

Ilya's groin punished Shane in a deliriously delicious thrust that stole away his breath. Ilya's lips moved from the back of his neck and soon his teeth were nibbling at the lobe of Shane's ear before lovebites burned over the curve of his jaw. "It will be our real home, too, da?"

Shane's eyes had rolled back in his head, his head lolling onto the shelf of Ilya's shoulder, opening his body up for the offered affection. "I invited you."

"Mm, yes. This is true. But it wasn't... ah, it wasn't time."

"We could, uh, we could go for Christmas." Shane whispered, his eyes closing as Ilya's hands moved from the counter and ghosted up under Shane's shirt. "We have a bye week."

"Mm," Ilya murmured again, fingers pressing and releasing into the flesh of Shane's abdomen. "Will you wrap yourself up under tree for me to unwrap? I have been very good boy. Deserve good present."

Shane's mouth turned upwards in a smile. "I don't know. You might get some coal."

"Me? Coal! Is not true!"

"You'll have to prove that you're a good boy, then, I guess."

Ilya had taken that as a command and had proceeded to show Shane how good of a boy he could be, the tupperware and talk of selling Shane's sex condo abandoned in favor of actual sex.

"You good, Holz?" Marleau asked, clapping Shane on the shoulder as he sidled up to the cubby beside him. "Probably feels wicked weird to be in here, huh?"

"What? Yeah. Yeah, it does." Shane agreed, with a twitch of his nose.

"Sucks that our first game with these asshats is an away game."

"Yeah. I guess." Shane agreed, pulling his compression shirt over his torso.

"No." Ilya disagreed, a maniacal smile falling on his face. "It will feel so good to fuck Montreal on their own ice. How dumb are they? Let best player go to best team in league and get nothing in exchange."

"Hell yeah, brother!" Marly grinned. "Buncha fuckin' idiots."

Shane watched as Ilya and Marleau began to feed off each other's hatred of his former team, the rest of his new teammates getting swept into the current of rivalry with quips and throw

away comments. Nothing degrading, debasing or corrosive. Normal chirping that didn't make Shane's skin crawl with discomfort.

While he'd acquiesced to living with Ilya relatively quickly—basically hiring a moving company within 24 hours—he'd lived with quiet discomfort of what his new teammates would say about the development. He'd been... surprised—pleasantly, irrationally ecstatic—that the guys he'd considered his mortal enemies on ice for literal years had accepted the news with *"Huh. Cool, brother. Hey, did you check out Faneuil Hall, yet?"*

Shane wasn't sure if the team didn't quite realize what Ilya and Shane living together *meant*. He had broached the subject later, at home, with Ilya, and had just been met with a confused, affectionate look from his boyfriend.

"They do not care." Ilya had told him. "These are good people, Shane."

"But... they know you're bi. And I'm gay. And they just... have no questions?"

Ilya's eyebrows raised almost to his hairline. "What is the question?"

"That, I don't know, why are we living together? I don't know!"

Ilya had crossed the room, his hands cupping Shane's face, his thumbs swiping over his freckles. "Lyubimyy moy," he said softly, his head dipping and pressing a kiss to the button of Shane's nose, "there is not a question. There is acceptance. There is... good people who do not care what other people do in their bedrooms, or living room, or shower..."

"I know that. But... it's just... hockey players are not—"

"Fuck Montreal." Ilya cut him off, his fingers carding through the hair at the back of Shane's skull. "Terrible people for terrible team."

"Hayden isn't so bad. Or JJ."

Ilya's face scrunched in distaste. "Eh. This we disagree on."

It hadn't really been an issue after that. Or, if it ever had been, Shane wasn't sure, because within weeks of moving in with Ilya, Marleau had gotten so shitfaced at the penthouse that Shane didn't think he'd be able to even get back to his own townhouse by the T or car share. Marleau had barely given it a second thought and went directly to the second bedroom, passing out ineloquently face down on top of the comforter.

Shane had blinked with surprise. He'd assumed that Cliff would have just crashed on the couch, assuming the second bedroom was *Shane's*, but he just... *knew*.

Ilya had given him a smug look, *see?* he'd gestured with his hands as he dragged Shane from the doorway and hustled him into their bedroom.

"God, these fuckers." St-Simon hollered loudly, holding his phone out in front of him, waving the screen. "Burning Holz's old jersey out front."

That had made Shane's insides feel tight and uncomfortable. He'd given the phone a cursory glance but quickly turned away once what was happening in the video became clear.

Ilya snatched the phone from St-Simon, a snarl curling over his face. "Yebat! We will kill them."

"No. It's fine. I, uh, I expected this." Shane mumbled as he continued going through the motions of getting ready for the game.

Ilya shoved Victor's phone back into his hand and moved closer to Shane, his hand ghosting over the small of his back in a quiet, radiating comfort. "Lyubimyy moy."

"I'm fine, Ilya. I swear. I just really want to win this game."

"We will win for you, da?" He agreed, his fingers pressing and releasing into Shane's back once, twice, thrice. "You hear this?" He asked, raising his voice and turning to face the locker room. "We *fuck* Montreal tonight. We destroy them. This is *our* fucking game. We win, we destroy them. Show Montreal how fucking dumb they are to let Shane fucking Hollander go!"

"Fuck yeah!" "Fuck Montreal!" "Bears! Bears! Bears!" "Holz! Holz!"

Shane let the echoing chant of the locker room energize him. He *loved* this team in a way that he'd never come close to with the Voyagers. Accepting in a way that Shane had never experienced, crass in a way that he was intricately familiar with in hockey locker rooms. Home was not the Centre Bell. It was wherever Ilya was, where this team was, regardless of the uniform color.

Shane hadn't found himself not at the front of the hockey tunnel in years. He was used to being the first on the ice as Captain for warmups. It had been a shock to his system to be placed third in the lineup. Of course, Ilya was first, the *C* on his jersey a badge of leadership. Marleau and he wore *A*, which all things considered for Shane, was a testament to how respected he was on this team, already, his first season there.

He'd eaten the pay cut and his mom had immediately begun to set up Boston sponsorships. So, in the end, Shane *hadn't* lied to Hayden after all. He really *did* shill coffee now. Shane had seen the social media war between Dunkin and Tim Horton's through screenshots sent in the group chat he was in with Ilya, Marly, Connors and St-Simon after his first commercial aired.

He'd let his grip on being Captain go and had come to terms with having to wait a season or two to become an alternate but the Bears had immediately given it to him without waiting to see if he could prove himself.

"Don't be dumb, Hollander. If Roz wouldn't burn the city down, you'd be Captain." LeClaire had laughed as he'd shoved the jersey at him.

Ilya had nodded, a mock somber look washing over his face. "Is true. I have many lighters."

“Ready, Holz?” Connors asked, nudging him with his elbow.

Shane could hear the thrum in the arena, felt the electricity in the air. It was brisk, cold, and felt strange because he could feel the tension radiating in his bones. “Yeah. We got this.”

“Yeah! We fuckin’ got this!” Marleau agreed, tapping his helmet against Shane’s. “Fuck Montreal!”

“*Fuck Montreal!*” Echo chambered in the tunnel.

At some point, probably immediately after Shane had signed, after fucking *decades* of using the same music, the Bears had decided that they wanted to switch the song they left the tunnel to. Shane wasn’t dumb, knew that the choice of *I’m Shipping up to Boston* was chosen as a *fuck you* to Montreal. To have your best player not re-sign and immediately sign to your legacy rival was already a slap in the throat with a puck, but the Dropkick Murphys song was a rallying cry that couldn’t be missed by anyone with functioning ears.

The bagpipes had felt a bit dumb to Shane at first, but after a few games, it had lit a fire in him that, over the years, had faded to a smolder, but it burned, now, fierce and bright again.

“... *and tonight we have the Boston Bears...*”

Ilya disappeared onto the ice first, quickly followed by Marleau who had reached up and grabbed a jersey from a fan that was dangling it over the tunnel wall and threw it to the ground. Shane’s eyes dropped to it, half to make sure it didn’t get caught in his skates, and felt his heart clench tightly.

His old jersey, in Voyagers blue, his name written over in marker with just “*aitor*” legible through the folds of crumpled polyester.

Traitor.

Shane didn’t let the word settle on his skin or in his mind. He knew he wasn’t a traitor because this team had betrayed him by not accepting who he was.

And Marleau had shown him just where he belonged by snatching it from the hands of a former fan and tossing it to the ground so Shane wouldn’t have to be confronted by it.

Shane couldn’t stop himself from following Marleau onto his position on the ice for warmups, tapping his helmet with his own for the second time in as many minutes.

“*Fuck Montreal.*” Shane said under his breath.

“Atta boy, Holz.”

And in his first game against the Voyagers in his first season as a Bear, Shane fucked Montreal, **5-1**, and proceeded to bring Ilya back to his sex condo for one last fuck.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for reading.

looking forward to spending more time in this fandom.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!