

this is me trying

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Summary

At some point, Shane crawls into bed, feeling raw and open like a wound. He horrifyingly wishes more than anything that Ilya were there. That thought is shocking enough that it snaps something inside, and Shane decides that he absolutely, 100% does not have time to deal with what happened tonight.

He puts the entire thing — the rough hands, the tongue on his ear, the gravelly voice telling him to take it — into a box in his mind. And buries the box as deep as he can.

Or, a different take on Shane's experience with the "big, strong top" from Mexico

Notes

Like I'm sure a fair number of people who have read the book, I also wondered "what if Shane's answer was different to Ilya's question about if the other guy hurt him?"

Chapter 1: and it's hard to be at a party...

It goes like this: Shane is always trying to prove something.

To his parents. His teammates. His coach. The fans. Himself.

And tonight, he wants to prove to Ilya Rozanov that he is absolutely *not* ruined. He is going to prove to Rozanov, even if he never tells him, that Rozanov's dick is absolutely, 100% not the only one that gets him off. (Although, in theory, Shane can somewhat admit to himself that dicks in general get him off.) Unfortunately, the only dick in practice that's gotten him off is Ilya fucking Rozanov.

And tonight, in this anonymous bar in Mexico, Shane plans to change that.

It goes like this: Shane isn't stupid.

Yes, they say he has a high hockey IQ. But he is also smart in general. And he knows, after what just happened, that he should probably...tell someone. Or go to the hospital. Or call the police. Even if it is Mexico, and he speaks little to no Spanish.

But it's like the logical part of his brain shuts down, and instead, Shane robotically strips off his clothes and turns the shower on scalding hot. He refuses to look in the mirror. He stands under the hot water for a long time before eventually scrubbing himself in every place Tony – if that was even his real name – touched. He knows, logically, it wasn't his fault. He knows, logically, that what happened was not okay. He knows this. He does. But standing under that hot water, shame and disgust bubble up inside him so quickly that he sways and leans his head against the cool porcelain. It might be tears. Shane isn't sure. The water runs cold, and he feels himself slide to the ground, wincing as he lands against the tile.

At some point, Shane crawls into bed, feeling raw and open like a wound. He horrifyingly wishes more than anything that Ilya were there. That thought is shocking enough that it snaps something inside, and Shane decides that he absolutely, 100% does not have time to deal with what happened tonight.

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It goes like this: Shane's fine.

He's totally fine. He doesn't have nightmares. Not really. (At most, once a week). He focuses all his energy on hockey, on his diet, and exercise regimen. Which is fine because he's a professional athlete. It's totally normal.

“Hey, uh, you okay, man?” Hayden asks one day after a grueling practice.

"I'm fine," Shane answers quickly, eyes focused on stripping out of his practice gear.

"Right. Yeah. I mean, if you're not fine, you know you can talk to me, right?" Shane becomes aware of a warm body next to him on the bench. When he looks up, Hayden is sitting closer than normal, and for some totally inexplicable reason, Shane's stomach nervously clenches. "Like," Hayden continues, leaning in slightly and lowering his voice in a semblance of privacy in an otherwise crowded locker room. "I know you. And I know something is off."

"Wh-what do you mean? Did Coach say something? Someone else on the team?" Panic rises quickly in Shane's chest.

"No, man. Of course not," Hayden backpedals, hands raised in surrender. "I just told Jackie I would check in because we love you, and you just...seem not okay."

"I'm fine. I promise," he says as nonchalantly as he can and plasters a smile on his face for good measure, too. It isn't really lying, Shane tells himself. He is fine.

(And if he blows off Ilya that first time they face the Bears during the season, it's because he thinks he's coming down with a cold. Nothing else.)

It goes like this: Shane holds his breath the first time Ilya touches him since Mexico.

Part of him prepares to flinch away, but instead he focuses on Ilya's warm skin and his firm, gentle touch. It's harder to come than normal, but Shane does it. He wonders if Ilya can sense the difference because afterward, he holds Shane close to his large chest for a little longer than normal. He strokes his fingers through Shane's hair and runs a hand up and down his bare back, leaving goosebumps behind.

Surprisingly, Shane feels tears of relief prick the back of his eyes. Because it feels ***good***, and Shane is so grateful that this hasn't been taken from him.

But then later that night, after Ilya leaves (because Ilya always leaves), he bursts into confusing tears.

It goes like this: Shane moves forward.

He wins cups. Wins awards. Shoots commercials. Falls more deeply in love with Ilya than he thought possible, except he can't admit that really. Not to himself and certainly not Ilya.

But time keeps going by, and Ilya's touch becomes the only one he can stand. He tolerates everything else, but it's like there's always a guard up, even if he isn't consciously thinking that. In fact, he learns not to consciously think of it. Life almost seems normal, except there's always a shiver of *something* in the back of his head, a weird pool of anxiety in his gut when someone hugs him too tightly or speaks too closely to his ear.

He thinks Rose clocks it. The tiny flinches. The terrible sex. But she also clocks other things about him, and Shane decided to focus more on that than anything else. Because maybe accepting that he's gay will actually be the secret key to fixing whatever is wrong with him. (Not that there's anything wrong with him.)

In Tampa, after he crawls into Ilya's lap and holds him while the other man silently sheds a few tears, Shane's heart swells. Because he's honored that he can see this side of Ilya, that Ilya trusts him. He wonders if he can do the same, although what does he really have to unburden? He just told Ilya he's gay, so that should be enough.

Once their naked, and Ilya has him spread out, Shane goes to turn over, but Ilya pins him with strong hands to his hips.

"No," he says, accent thick. "Like this. Let me see you."

And Ilya enters him so slowly that for one horrifying moment, Shane is afraid he'll break from the tenderness. He ends up turning over anyway. It's a little easier.

It goes like this: Shane feels a small sliver of hope.

When he sees Scott Hunter kiss a man on television, a weird bubbling emotion swells up inside him. It takes a moment for Shane to pinpoint exactly what that feeling is. Then, Ilya calls and says he'll come to the cottage, and Shane is left with a big dopey smile on his face and a warmth in his chest. It's hope. That hope explodes the moment Ilya walks through the door of his cottage.

Because suddenly, it's real. It's real, and everything is going to be okay.

It has to be okay.

Chapter 2: ...when I feel like an open wound

It goes like this: Ilya doesn't plan on telling Shane about his mother.

But he's really fucking glad he does. There's sadness because there's always sadness when he thinks of his mother, but there's also a warmth because Shane is there. He's right there. He never stops touching Ilya, doesn't pull away, doesn't ask too many questions.

He knows, in that moment, starting at that boring fire with the stupid Canadian wolf bird howling in the distance, that he will tell Shane he loves him. He's so stupidly in love that he can't keep it in anymore. When he came to the cottage, it was a matter of *if* he tells him.

But now it's a matter of when.

When he finally does say it, first in Russian before the English words scrape out of his chest, Ilya feels lighter than he thinks possible. But then Shane says it back, and Ilya is flying.

It goes like this: Ilya is not stupid. In fact, he's really fucking smart.

He was never the best student, sure. And he'll be the first to admit his hockey IQ is only slightly above average (nowhere near as high as Hollander's, although he would never actually tell Shane that). But he's always been perceptive; he's always seen people and just known things.

So, he knows things about Shane just from years of watching. He knows that eye contact gets difficult when he's overwhelmed. He knows his fake media smile and voice. He knows Shane's nervous twitching if they lie in dirty sheets for too long. He also knows the exact moment that Shane lets himself go during sex, when his head tips back to expose the long line of his neck, and Ilya feels that rush of power and trust at being able to do that to Mr. In-Control-Always-Anxious Shane Hollander.

He wishes, just for a moment, that he didn't know Shane so well. Because he knows the moment that Shane's body tenses, that it isn't good.

It goes like this: Ilya asks the question he's always wanted to ask.

And if he's honest, he expected the answer to be "no."

It's over a week after he told Shane about his mother, a few days after first meeting David and Yuna, and Ilya feels like he's been floating in a bubble. He's never seen Shane smile so much, laugh so much. Shit, Ilya isn't sure that he's ever felt himself smile so much. There's a lot that still needs to be figured out, and neither of them are under the impression it will be easy, but for the first time, it seems possible. And that's enough.

And Ilya's so fucking mad at himself for bursting it with that one fucking question.

"You know," he says, rubbing the base of Shane's neck, where his head rests on Ilya's thigh. They're watching another fire, except this time, Shane is lying across Ilya's lap. "I've always wanted to know..."

He can practically *feel* Shane's smirk against his thigh, "This oughta be good."

"You said sex with Rose Landry was the worst sex in the world."

"I don't think those were my exact words."

"Right, close enough. And sex with other women was equally terrible, yes?"

Shane lets out a soft laugh, so soft and relaxed under Ilya's hands. "I highly doubt any of them walked away wanting a repeat performance, no. Turns out actually being attracted to the person you're having sex with helps a lot."

"Yes, this is my point. What about men? Have you ever with another man?" And Shane tenses. His entire body locks up in a way that Ilya has never felt before, and a pool of dread forms in his stomach. "Shane?" He hedges, trying to keep his voice calm. He's hoping that maybe, just maybe, it's embarrassment. Maybe, like Ilya suspected, Shane has never been with another man, and he's embarrassed to admit that to Ilya.

But then, Shane admits, "Um, yeah. Yeah, I've been with another guy."

"Shane—" But before he can say anything else, Shane jumps up, out of Ilya's reach, not looking him in the eye and rambling about starting dinner. He's so nervous, not in the cute way but in the same way he was nervous after David caught them. In this real, bone-deep way that makes Ilya want to set the world on fire if it would make Shane feel better.

And it was all because he asked Shane, sweet, trusting Shane, if he had ever been with another guy.

And Ilya isn't dumb. But fuck, sometimes he wishes he were.

It goes like this: Ilya wishes they had all the time in the world.

He wishes their lives only existed at this cottage so he could give Shane all the time and space to figure it out, to come to him. But the reality is that they *don't* have all the time in the world. He's extended his stay to last through most of the summer, but he has to fly back to Boston for a few sponsorship commitments in just a few weeks.

As he watches Shane the rest of the night, trying so hard to be okay, or whatever Shane's version of "okay" is, Ilya can't help but want to walk up and shake him and say, "Just tell me. Tell me what happened. I will fix it."

Ilya can't stand the thought of their last few weeks together before a whole season apart to be spent in this tense silence. That night, he tells Shane that he has a headache and needs to just

sleep, pretending not to see the shuttered look on his boyfriend's face.

He can't help it and reaches a hand out to stroke Shane's hair. His boyfriend lets out a happy sigh, but he's still tense in a way that Ilya doesn't like. In a way, that actually breaks Ilya's heart. He'll give Shane two days, he decides. Then, he'll ask another question.

It goes like this: Ilya, as it turns out, can't wait two days.

In fact, he can't wait 24 hours.

After a restless night of sleep, he wakes up to the sun just starting to peek up over the horizon and an empty bed.

"Shane?" He calls out, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He's met with silence and immediately climbs out of bed. It doesn't take him long to find Shane, sitting down by the lake, staring at the water. It's actually beautiful, he thinks, until he gets closer and sees Shane's face. He looks both equal parts exhausted and strung out, like his brain can't decide whether to shut down and sleep or keep running 100 miles per hour. "Shane?" He says when he's close enough, and he's grateful that when the other man looks over, he smiles, however small.

Ilya wishes he had thought to grab a blanket because the early morning air is chilly, but he decides instead to sit as close as possible to Shane, looping an arm around his shoulder. He lets out a relieved breath when he feels Shane relax against him.

"Shane," he says again, mostly to give himself time to try to find the right thing to say. Because for most of his life, Ilya's always known the right thing to say. Even if it isn't wasn't in his native tongue, Ilya could do it. He could charm anyone, could put people at ease, or piss them off based on his own choice of words. This moment needed the right words, but he, frustratingly, couldn't seem to find them. He settles for the truth because that is at least *something*. "I love you very much. Nothing will change that."

For a moment, Shane tenses in his arms. Not like he tensed up last night, but his shoulders draw up slightly, and then Ilya feels the wetness of tears against his shoulder.

"I didn't want this to be a thing," Shane mumbles, tears leaking out of his beautiful, brown eyes. Ilya moves his hand to rub at the base of Shane's neck. "I thought I was fine. I mean, I *am* fine." Shane stresses, and honestly, Ilya can't argue that. Shane has seemed fine. Their time at the cottage has been a dream, and Ilya's reveled in getting to touch him and fuck him and blow him and kiss him more than he ever thought possible. And Shane never shied away from it, but Shane's always been like that. Even in the beginning, he was hesitant but not scared.

Except—

That one time. Back in 2015. It should've been their second hookup of the season, but it was only the first because Shane blew off the first chance. Ilya had been sure that was going to be it. That they were done. But then the next time their teams met, 'Jane' had texted him, and

Ilya had shown up (because, of course, he would). And he remembers that night that Shane seemed—different. Timid. Overthinking. He flinched when Ilya sucked his earlobe and seemed tensed on all fours. He wasn't as hard as quick and didn't come as quickly. Ilya remembers thinking it was like a challenge and had laid Shane out, kissed as much of him as he could get away with it, and held Shane's knees in the crook of his elbows. When Shane came that night, Ilya still remembers that flicker of relief on his face.

It was different, and Ilya, at the time, had thought of a million different things that could cause uptight Shane Hollander to act this way. But none of them were this.

"Was it 2015?" He asked because suddenly he has to know. He actually has a lot of questions that he equally wants to know and does not want to know the answers to. The date seems like a good place to start. He feels Shane nod slowly, forehead pressing into Ilya's neck, before his body sags and the tears fall freely.

It goes like this: Ilya has truly loved very few people in his life.

His mother was one, the first. And he thinks that his hatred for his father probably stemmed from his intense love for his mother.

Svetlana is another. And when his brother had called her a whore, it felt like his world narrowed because Alexei could be a piece of shit to him all he wanted but could *never* speak to her that way. Not Svetlana, who had been so many things to him over the years, who had been constant and loyal. There was a time when he wished his love for her were *more*. Surely, it would be easier to be in love with her, even though she had never been in love with him.

That kind of heartache seems like it would be easier to handle than the heartache he feels in this moment: on the couch, arms wrapped around the man he loves, as Shane tearfully tells him what Ilya knows he had never told anyone else. Shane is resting his head on Ilya's chest, staring out the window as he talks, says things that make tears well up in Ilya's own eyes.

Calls himself stupid and naive. Won't actually call what happened for what it is. *Rape*. That is an English word Ilya wishes he didn't know. But he knows it, and he wonders if Shane will ever acknowledge that that is what happened.

When Ilya asks if he went to the hospital or doctor after, Shane says no, but after a moment, he raises his head to look at Ilya. "I mean, no, I didn't, but later, I did...I got tested. Before we—so, you weren't, like exposed to anything. I promise," Shane says, like it's important. Like that has even crossed Ilya's mind. And Ilya's heart breaks all over again.

"I know, *moya lyubov*," Ilya says, the endearment slipping out. "I just meant...were you hurt?"

Shane gives a small shake of his head, cheeks slightly flushed and eyes still wet. "No, I mean, I was really sore," Ilya feels anger swell up in his chest. "But I was able to, you know, check myself, and there were no...tears or anything." Ilya wishes he couldn't imagine it, but he can. Shane Hollander alone, when he never should've been alone, in a hotel room in Mexico, checking himself for tears.

Shane goes to turn away, but Ilya stops him by cupping his cheek, forcing eye contact that he knows might make Shane uncomfortable. But he needs Shane to hear him, to understand him. He needs his words to reach the deepest part of Shane and settle in his bones.

"I love you," Ilya says, voice calmer than the storm swirling in his head. He'll deal with that storm later.

Shane snuffles and closes his eyes, but doesn't pull away from Ilya's touch; if anything, he leans into it. "I am fine, Ilya. I put it all away and just chose not to think about it. And I think it's worked? Your question last night just...caught me off guard."

Ilya wants to tell him that he knows what it's like to put things away and never think about them. But he's realized that things never stay put away forever. He wants to tell Shane he's sorry he's asked, but he's also not sorry because he's glad Shane told him. But he also wants to tell him that part of him is so incredibly angry and sad that this was something Shane had to tell, that he wants to fly to Mexico right now, and tear the country apart until he finds this man. Even though he was angry at his father and brother for being cruel to the people he loved, Ilya never felt the desire to tear them apart, as he feels right now for this faceless man in Mexico.

For a shocking moment, he realizes he would probably kill that man if given the chance.

But he doesn't say any of that because he knows Shane and knows those are not the right things to say in this moment. Maybe someday.

Instead, he presses a firm kiss to the corner of his mouth and tells him, "You are maybe the strongest person I know. But I don't want you to have to be strong alone anymore."

Shane lets out a shaky exhale and finds Ilya's mouth in a soft, chaste kiss before lying back against his chest.

Ilya strokes his hair and holds the person that he loves more than anything, and knows that for a moment, this is enough.

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