

Worth It

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Worth It

by [Xanthe_ori](#)

Summary

Kip loves Scott, so he's willing to join him wherever he's needed, whether that's at games or social events or - god forbid - MLH-mandated youth hockey initiatives.

Even if Ilya Rozanov is there.

OR: Kip and Ilya meet after the on-ice kiss. An unlikely friendship ensues, along with an even more unlikely double date.

OR: Scott Hunter thinks Rozanov might have found a new and unusual method of torture: making friends with his boyfriend. That alone is bad enough, but when Rozanov shows up at his door with Shane Hollander in tow, Scott is left to reckon with the frankly unfathomable fact of their secret decade-long relationship.

He still thinks he's too lazy to be a serial killer, but perhaps a single premeditated murder isn't off the table.

Chapter 1: Ripples

Chapter Notes

You can keep up with my writing over on [Tumblr](#)

It starts with an MLH-sponsored event in Toronto.

Youth initiatives. Inclusivity. Scott was invited as a seasoned veteran of the sport, along with numerous others from the league.

Kip sort of hates it.

Not the intention, of course. Empowering hockey youth is great, in theory. And inviting the only openly gay player is a nice gesture. But both he and Scott know it's bullshit, a thinly-veiled attempt at LGBT friendliness, in a sport that has never been friendly to their sort at all.

No actual changes to the culture or environment that had made coming out so impossible for Scott, just *here's a gay hockey player. We still involve him, even with kids around. Look how progressive we are.*

Again, Kip hates it.

It's late afternoon now, and Kip has spent an entire day watching the finest sportsmen in the league dart around on the ice with a bunch of fumbling kids.

It's cute. Scott, especially, is cute. Kip watches him correct passes, streamline turns, and manage their spacing. The kids all watch him in wide-eyed awe, clamouring for his attention and praise.

The kids are great. Scott's great. It's the other players, really, that are the problem.

Most are fine, focused on their own shit. But some side-eye Scott with obvious contempt, ignore him when he tries to make conversation.

"They'll treat you badly now that they know," Kip had said after that fateful kiss on the ice.

"They'll get over it," Scott had said simply. *"And if they don't, it was still worth it."*

Kit believed him then, and he believes him now, but that doesn't change the certainty that he *took* something from Scott. That he condemned him to something, that day he let him pull him onto the ice.

By the time the event winds down, Kip is a little angry, gut-achingly hungry, and riddled with a bone-deep exhaustion. The kids are ushered out, the players drift off in groups, and the rink empties of its noise.

Back at the hotel, there's nowhere to go except the bar. Kip follows the congregation of hockey players and seats himself firmly atop a barstool, letting the hum of conversation wash over him.

He's nursing a beer when Dallas Kent—centre for the Toronto Guardians and all-around hulking bully—sidles up beside him.

Kip glances up at him. Down at his drink. Scott is in the corner, corralled by a bunch of his teammates. "Hello...?" Kip ventures.

"You're Hunter's *boyfriend*."

Kent has about fifty pounds and five inches on Kip, but still, he finds himself straightening at the tone, the *derision*. "I am," he says proudly.

Kent's face twists. "He was so good. He could have been one of the best. I can't believe he threw it away for some—"

"Fuck off and die, Kent," says a new voice, with feeling.

Kip is fond of them immediately.

Then he chances a glance up (*why are hockey players so fucking tall?*) and realises *Ilya fucking Rozanov* has just told a fellow player to go die.

Kent whirls on Rozanov furiously, seems to realise who he is squaring up against, and storms away.

"That was Dallas Kent," says Kip stupidly, watching the man's retreating back. His tongue is tangled. He can't think of anything else to say. He might have just traded one homophobic asshole for another.

He knows of Rozanov, of course. Both from Scott's endless tirades and his now frequent viewings of hockey. He knows that Rozanov plays like a man with no sense of self-preservation and nothing to lose. He knows he pisses everyone else off in the league, including Scott—*especially* Scott.

"He's a cunt," says Rozanov succinctly. He nods at the barstool beside Kip's. "Can I sit?"

"Well—yeah." Kip decides to fuck the whole day off to hell and turns to face Rozanov fully. "Kip Grady," he says, extending a hand. "Nice to meet you."

To his surprise, Rozanov shakes it. "Ilya," he says. "I know your boyfriend."

“My boyfriend hates you.” The words emerge from him without forethought. It’s the way he’d speak to Elena. Teasing. A little biting. He’s certain he’s overstepped for a moment, but then Rozanov tips his head back and laughs—carefree, raucous—and Kip is left staring, a little off-kilter. Vertiginous.

“Your boyfriend is *old*. Probably has dementia.”

Kip bristles. “He is not *old*.”

Rozanov is still smiling. He is, Kip realises with some surprise, exceptionally handsome. He’d been so fixated on Scott for so long that the thought had never occurred to him before, but he’s not *blind*. “He is old in hockey years. The oldest man alive.”

“Why are you speaking to me?”

“I made Hunter a promise.”

“A promise?”

Rozanov winks. “That I would protect his boyfriend from all of the scary hockey players.”

Kip frowns. “I’m not scared.”

Rozanov’s still staring. His eyes crinkle at the corners. “You remind me of someone.”

“A friend?”

“A lover.”

Kip is jolted to attention like a man electrified.

“A male lover,” Rozanov clarifies quietly. “Your boyfriend knows. Is obvious he didn’t say anything.”

Kip shakes his head profusely. No. Scott had certainly never insinuated that Ilya Rozanov, famous womaniser of the league, had a male lover. “Why are you—”

“Telling you?” Rozanov takes a long sip of his drink. A vodka, Kip thinks, which, *stereotypes*, but—

“You and Scott did important thing for me on the ice. You did not mean to—but—” Rozanov trails off for a moment. His brow is furrowed. He looks incredibly faraway. “You showed me possibility, understand?”

Kip thinks of Scott’s lips on his own on the ice. The jumbotrons displaying their faces, their love. That same certainty, the one that has pitted itself in his gut like a weed, that he has taken something from him.

But perhaps taking something from Scott has given something to others. Perhaps people like Ilya Rozanov feel a little braver now.

Maybe it *mattered*. Beyond the two of them. Beyond what they felt.

“I’m happy for you,” says Kip.

The simplicity of this seems to bring Rozanov up short. “Happy. Yes. I am happy for you, too.”

Kip smiles. Something has lifted, some weight he hadn’t even recognised the burden of until now.

“Even if your boyfriend is more out of date than low-rise jeans.”

And of course, he can’t resist. “You’re wearing low-rise jeans.”

“I am special case.”

“Yes.” Kip is grinning back. “You are certainly that.”

Rozanov finishes his drink in one great gulp. “Maybe I bring my lover to next function, yes?”

Kip teasingly glances over his shoulder, surveying the bar. “Or maybe he’s here already.”

It’s only when Rozanov goes still that Kip realises he might have encroached on something too close to home.

Then Rozanov laughs, and Kip laughs too, and they both act like Rozanov’s lover isn’t definitely a part of the MLH, holy *shit*.

“Maybe,” Rozanov says. His fake laugh tapers off. “You’ll say nothing?”

Kip eyes Rozanov carefully, then he figures why the hell not and places a hand on the other man’s arm. “I’ll say nothing. Ever.”

Rozanov is looking increasingly—and suspiciously—glassy-eyed. “Of course you’re nice. Forces me to be nice, too, hm?”

But Kip hasn’t forced Rozanov to be anything. And isn’t it nice, he thinks, that Rozanov is coming to him as himself, *entirely* himself, because of what he and Scott did on the ice.

“Double date?” Kip ventures, half joking, half not.

Rozanov lifts his empty glass in salute. “Double date,” he says.

And Kip glances over at Scott, and smiles again, and knows now, with certainty, that it was all worth it.

Chapter 2: Quicksand

Chapter Notes

Thank you to lovely [Rhye](#) for beta-ing! (Praying I linked that correctly.)

Continuation soon, hopefully.

“I like Ilya Rozanov.”

Kip says this to Scott on an innocuous Saturday afternoon, seemingly apropos of nothing. He’s staring down at his phone, which Scott, from his sprawled-out position at the other end of the sofa, can see shows a text containing only an emoji of an old man and a hockey stick.

Scott says nothing for a moment. He considers, briefly, the merits of shooting a puck directly into Ilya Rozanov’s kneecap.

“Never say that again in my home.”

Kip waves the phone at him with a grin. “He’s funny.”

“He’s an evil Russian menace.”

“He’s queer,” Kip says with forced casualness. “Did you know?”

That brings Scott up short. “Yes. I did know.” He thinks of that conversation after the MLH awards. “How do *you* know?”

“You saw us talking after the hockey youth initiative.”

Scott recalls all too well. He’d been corralled by a bunch of his teammates in the corner of the hotel bar. And he’d been forced to watch, tight-jawed and unable to politely get away, as Ilya Rozanov plopped himself down at his boyfriend’s side.

“He came out to you?”

“In his own way, yes.”

Scott’s stunned for a moment. But this is Kip, after all, who inspires trust in even the very worst of mankind—even Ilya fucking Rozanov, apparently. And he can’t quite shake his own conversation with the Russian. (“*Was important, what you did. For me, and for my—for mine.*”)

Scott wants to still hate him. It would be so lovely to hate him.

But he can't get Rozanov's soft eyes out of his head, nor his strange, sharp-edged earnestness.

"And you're texting him, apparently," says Scott.

"He asked for my number; I gave it. Don't be jealous. He's a taken man." He shoots Scott a wink. "As am I."

"Damn straight you are." Scott leans over for a kiss.

Kip indulges him before settling back down, phone still in hand. "He wants us to meet him and his guy."

Scott winces. "A double date with Ilya Rozanov. *Really?*" He's had nightmares that happen just like it. He and Kip sat at a candlelit table; Rozanov sat across from them, smug and insufferable.

"Maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised." There's something self-satisfied in Kip's tone, something *knowing*.

"Tell me."

Kip glances up, surprised. "What?"

"You know something. *Tell me.*"

"I have suspicions about who the man might be, but I'm not saying anything." Kip's smile is so wide it's almost blinding.

"Suspicions?" Scott echoes, incredulous. He's run it over and over again in his head. What man could ever be enough to cure Ilya Rozanov of his womanising ways?

Some nasty, disdainful part of him is still convinced it's part of some joke Rozanov is playing with Scott as the punchline. The other part of him remembers Rozanov's words atop the empty rooftop bar, the cadence of his voice, the look in his eyes—nothing that can be faked nor feigned. His own pain and fear reflected back at him.

It's hard to hate him as much as he used to, knowing what he knows. Seeing what he's seen.

"Someone affiliated with the MLH," Kip says. He's still staring at his phone, acting for all the world like he hasn't just dropped an absolute bombshell.

Scott hisses a breath. "Rozanov would never—he wouldn't—"

Words fail him. Because he would, wouldn't he? If anyone would be brave—or stupid—enough to take up with someone else within the MLH, it would be Ilya Rozanov. No one else would have the balls. No one else would *dare*.

But who's his partner in crime? A coach? Sponsor? *Parent?* Or—

“A player?” Scott breathes.

Kip shrugs. “Don’t know. All I know is he seemed *very* nervous when I insinuated his partner might be somewhere at the youth hockey initiative.” He finally tosses the phone aside. He looks at Scott with surprising seriousness. “I also sort of—jokingly—promised him that double date. And even if you don’t like *Rozanov*, if you want to know who the other guy is...”

“I’m in,” Scott says abruptly. Because he has to know now. Someone in the MLH, someone bold enough or suicidal enough or in love enough to take up with Ilya Rozanov. “Message him,” Scott says. “And tell him I’m looking forward to meeting his boy.”

Ilya’s dreaming again.

He knows because it has that odd, hazy feeling, and the lighting is too perfect, like the Moscow summer of 2007, when the sky was all blue and perfect, and the sun was simmering and golden. The vague nebulousness of something half-remembered.

His mother is languishing on the sand beside the Moskva, her towel spread out beneath her. Her hand is hanging limply at her side, a parasol shadowing half of her face from Ilya’s view.

“Mama,” he says.

She turns toward him. She is 29, fresh-faced and beautiful. She has been frozen at this age, trapped like an insect in amber. Never growing, never aging.

She is looking at him like he is the only thing in the world. “Ilya,” she says, and it has Shane’s cadence in the hospital bed, loving and fond.

“He’s here,” he says. “My Shane. He’s here.”

He’s trying to approach her, but every step seems to get heavier, pulling him inexorably down.

“I keep trying to introduce you,” he says. “But you’re always gone by the time he arrives.”

“I’ve been waiting, Ilyushka,” she says.

“He’s coming,” Ilya says desperately. “He’s coming.”

“You’re so keen to show him off,” she says. Her laughter is a melodic tinkling of bells, distant and fading. “Show him off to others for me, yes?”

“No!” Ilya says. “He’s coming, mama. He’s coming!”

But he knows. Already, he knows. Shane never makes it in time to meet her. Either Shane is too late, or his mother is gone too early. But they never meet. Their paths cannot cross, no matter how much Ilya wills it.

“Ilyushka,” his mother says, but the sand is pulling him down, down, like quicksand, and he can’t reach her, he can’t—

“Ilya!”

Ilya comes to abruptly. Shane is at his side, shirtless and frowning. “You okay? You were moaning. Thought you might be having a nightmare.”

Ilya feels himself shaken back to reality with such force that he’s momentarily nauseous. His heart is thudding; his eyes are burning. He turns fully to Shane and presses a palm against his cheek. Shane nuzzles into it: instinctive, easy.

“Shane,” he says. (*“Show him off to others for me, yes?”*) “I think we should go on a double date.”

Chapter 3: Tides

Chapter Notes

Not beta'd, because I was too excited to get this immediately out there.

“You want to go on a double date,” Shane says slowly. He is trying very hard to follow Ilya’s reasoning. But this entire conversation has the same energy as his Duolingo notifications: nonsensical, aggressively Russian, and vaguely threatening.

“With Hunter and Kip,” confirms Ilya. It is early morning; the first few rays of dawn stream through the window, gilding his face with a faint golden glow. Shane finds himself staring for a moment, enamoured, charmed by the mere sight of him.

It’s enough that he almost says yes on a whim.

Then he catches sight of the messages on Ilya’s phone—an emoji of an old man and a hockey stick sent to *Kip*—and his hackles rise. “You’re *messaging* Scott’s boyfriend?”

“His boyfriend likes me very much.”

Shane’s glare is scathing.

“I have never fucked him!” Ilya holds his hands up in surrender. “Is not like that. Just—he is nice. Annoys Hunter that he is nice to *me*. And when Scott Hunter is annoyed, I am happy. Don’t you want to see me happy?”

Shane thinks this is a gross manipulation. He also thinks it is possibly a lie—or at least half of one. Ilya is deeply dedicated to many things—hockey, Shane, cars—but he wouldn’t subject himself to an evening with Scott Hunter without good reason. He must genuinely like this Kip to be willing to suffer Hunter, to expose their relationship to outsiders.

Risk. That’s the first thing Shane thinks of. His mom and dad already know. Soon, Svetlana and Rose will know too. Hayden, as well, probably. They’ve discussed it at length—involving the people who matter.

And as much as Shane loves the idea of showing Ilya off, of being shown off in return, of having the people they both love know *their* love, the part of him obsessed with order, with keeping things exactly as they have been, *hates* this. Hates the idea of changing what has kept them safe for so long.

Shane rolls over, the sheets tangling with his legs. They had sex last night, and he’d been too out of it afterwards to clean up as much as he would have liked; the feeling of bare, unwashed

sheets against bare, unwashed skin is beginning to bother him, but he shoves the discomfort aside.

“I’m scared,” he admits quietly.

Ilya has dropped his phone on the bedside table and is staring back at Shane with unusual seriousness. “I dreamt of my mother,” he says.

Shane bridges the gap between them. Places a hand against Ilya’s cheek. “Ilya...”

“Sometimes the place changes, but it’s the same dream. Always the same.” Ilya pulls back from Shane’s touch. His eyes drift away, his gaze impossibly distant. Shane hates it when this happens, when Ilya goes somewhere he cannot follow. “She is lying down somewhere: a beach, a hammock, a bed. She is reaching for me, just too far to actually touch. She asks about you, and I tell her you will meet soon. That you are coming.”

Ilya seems to refocus; his gaze sharpens. “But you never make it in time.”

“I’m sorry,” Shane says. It feels like his fault, somehow. Even in Ilya’s dreams, he is too slow—too cowardly—to show his face.

“You and her can never meet,” Ilya continues. “Not ever. And I can’t show you off to anyone else either, because this is secret between us, yes? But with Hunter and Kip, this does not need to be secret.”

“I...”

“I will not try to force this if it is not what you want,” Ilya says. “I do not say this to—what is word?—pressure you.”

“Manipulate.”

“Yes,” Ilya says, still serious. “Manipulate. Just...would be nice, yes?”

And Shane finds himself saying to hell with the risk, with the worry. Scott and Kip are gay, too, and hid what they had for the sake of Scott’s career. Surely they’d be protective and circumspect of Ilya and Shane’s predicament. And wouldn’t it be nice, Shane thinks, to share it with people who understand?

Shane reaches across the bed once more—this time with both hands—and turns Ilya’s face toward him. Ilya’s eyes are soft; the light is soft. And Shane is soft, too, somewhere right in the centre of himself, where this feeling sits. It’s actually pretty fucking terrifying, he realises, loving someone this much.

“Let’s do it,” he says.

Ilya closes his eyes and nods. Nuzzles into Shane’s hold. He inhales once, then exhales, as though in relief.

“Shower,” he says. “I know it is bothering you. I will strip bed and make disgusting diet smoothie, and you will come out of shower and pretend to like it.”

Shane lists forward, towed under by Ilya’s gravity, and presses a kiss to his lips. “Ya tebya lyublyu,” he says simply.

Ilya’s gaze traces the constellation of freckles across the bridge of his nose; he smiles. *Thank God for that menacing, slave-driving Duolingo owl.* “I love you, too,” he says.

Tonight, Scott thinks, is as good a night as any to kill Ilya Rozanov.

The Raiders’ centre had been texting his boyfriend *all day*: confirmations about times, questions about dietary requirements, hockey-based memes. The most recent of them shows Scott’s face photoshopped onto the body of an elderly man pushing a walker.

“Why are we doing this again?” Scott asks.

Kip is darting about the kitchen of Scott’s penthouse with the frenetic energy of a man with a fire lit under his ass. Why he’s so intent on impressing Ilya Rozanov and his mystery man is beyond Scott.

“*Because*,” Kip says, “it would be nice to hang out with another gay hockey player. And because we should support him—the way you should have been supported.”

“Rozanov doesn’t need *support*. He’s the most conceited, self-assured son of a bitch I’ve ever met.”

“Ah,” Kip hums. He’s wearing an apron that has KISS THE COOK printed across the ass. “That’s what he *wants* you to think.”

It’s hard, Scott laments, being in love with the kindest person in the world.

“Sure. The Earth is flat. The Metros are the worst in the league. Rozanov is secretly super insecure.”

Kip is stirring something vaguely herbal-scented vigorously over the stove. He whirls on Scott, wooden spoon in hand. “You,” he says, brandishing the spoon threateningly in Scott’s direction, “will be nice.”

Scott nods, cowed. “I will be nice.”

“You will not insult him.”

“I will not insult him.”

“You will not insult his boyfriend or his dietary requirements.”

That gives Scott pause. He *won't* insult Rozanov's boyfriend's dietary requirements, because he's not an asshole, but it surprises him that Rozanov would take up with someone so high-maintenance—and be so insistent on catering to them. He doesn't seem the type.

Still, Scott diligently agrees: “I won't insult his boyfriend's dietary requirements.”

The knock comes then, as if on cue, and Scott slinks toward the door with great reluctance. He takes a deep breath, then reaches for the deadbolt. The door swings open.

It is, to Scott's surprise, not Rozanov he sees first, but his carb-refusing, MLH-affiliated boyfriend.

And it's someone Scott knows.

“Oh, for fucks sake.”

Staring at him sheepishly is Shane *fucking* Hollander.

Chapter 4: Undertow

Chapter Summary

Scott's no-good, very bad double date.

(Pt 1)

Chapter Notes

No beta - again, too eager to get this out.

Lotta f-bombs in this one.

“You—I can’t believe—*Hollander*—”

Scott has yet to string together a fully-realised sentence. Kip is still in the kitchen, and Scott has never been angrier at him, because his absence means Scott’s trapped here alone at the front door to his penthouse with dickhead Rozanov and his rival—and apparent sweetheart—Shane Hollander.

“Aneurysm,” Rozanov says conversationally. “Fatal, for someone of your age.”

Scott can’t believe the nerve of this fucker.

Hollander blinks owlshly. “Where the hell did you learn the word aneurysm?”

A shadow flickers in Rozanov’s eyes briefly. A question that seemed to be asked in light-hearted earnestness brings a sickly pallor over the Russian’s skin. “Playing Scrabble with your father,” he says, but it’s clear even to Scott, who doesn’t know him that well, that this is a lie.

Hollander seems to know it, too. His mouth opens, but then Rozanov shakes his head, jaw tight, and Hollander desists.

This silent communication surprises Scott somehow. It’s so fucking weird, seeing Hollander and Rozanov do what he and Kip do so seamlessly. *Knowing* someone well enough that you can understand them without words.

It’s curiosity, more than anything, that prompts Scott to step aside and motion the two into his home. If this is some intricate prank on Rozanov’s part, it’s a pretty convincing one. And at

any rate, Kip wants this dinner to happen, so happen it shall.

Rozanov and Hollander follow him over the threshold and through into the dining room. Scott takes the scant few seconds of silence to reorient everything he thought he knew. Queer Ilya Rozanov is one thing. But queer Ilya Rozanov shacking up with *Shane Hollander* is so audacious it's actually almost funny.

Maybe I am getting old, Scott thinks, half hysterical. *Maybe I have early-onset dementia*.

"You can sit," Scott says absently. Hollander does so immediately, fingers twining together atop the oak tabletop so hard that his knuckles blanch white. He has the look of a child braced for a scolding.

Rozanov doesn't sit. He hovers at Hollander's side, hands pressed to the back of his chair. He's standing with practised nonchalance, but the position is curiously protective. Scott chafes at the implication that Hollander needs to be protected here, in his home. As though he or Kip—*Kip*—could possibly pose any danger.

But he also remembers those hazy few days after he first kissed Kip on the ice. There was joy, of course, to have it out in the open, but also the blinding terror of being seen after avoiding scrutiny for so long. Protecting what was theirs had not prepared him to have this delicate, precious thing between them opened up to conjecture and ridicule.

Perhaps, on a smaller scale, Rozanov and Hollander were feeling the same way.

Scott takes a deep, fortifying breath and tells himself to be cool. He watches the two across the table for a moment before dropping into the seat opposite Hollander. "When?" he asks.

"Rookie season." Hollander won't meet his gaze as he says it.

"Summer before," Rozanov interjects.

"*Ilya*," Hollander hisses.

"That's not—" Scott's beginning to feel a little light-headed. "*Really?*"

"No, Hunter, I lie to old men for sport."

"I wouldn't put it past you," Scott snipes back, because apparently being around Rozanov causes him to regress into a petty teenager.

"Summer before Rookie season," Rozanov says steadily. "Is the truth."

Scott sighs. "Rozanov, you were famously fucking women during that time. A lot of women."

Hollander flinches. "It wasn't..." He trails off.

Scott jumps on the hesitation with the desperation of a drowning man latching onto a buoy. "So it was just casual?"

“It was just some...fun, at first,” Hollander says. “But I’m not sure that it was ever exactly casual.” He’s looking up at Rozanov, now, and Rozanov is looking back with a shocking amount of softness.

Jesus *fucking* Christ. These *moronic fucking*—

“There are other gay men, you know, in the world. Those who aren’t—I don’t know—your *hockey-playing archrival*.”

“Ah, but can they suck cock as well as I can?” Rozanov asks. “I doubt it.”

“Ilya,” Hollander says quietly. He is blushing all the way down to his neck. “Not helpful. Incredibly fucking unhelpful, actually.”

Scott buries his head in his hands and tries not to think too much about it. He recalls those early days: the famous rivalry, the media circus surrounding it. He recalls, too, the Rookie of the Year award, where Shane Hollander won, and Ilya Rozanov was nowhere to be found.

(“*Where’s your boy Rozanov?*”)

(“*We’re not, like, friends or anything.*”)

Hollander had been incredibly fucking weird about it. But that wasn’t entirely out of the ordinary—Hollander had a reputation for being a little socially awkward. Scott hadn’t overanalysed it at the time, and now he felt like an idiot for missing what was, in hindsight, painfully obvious. And then—

“The ice,” he breathes. His head snaps up. “The fight. Your reaction.”

(“*You’re starting to sound like him.*”)

Hollander is tracing invisible patterns in the grain of the wooden tabletop, his gaze still avidly avoiding Scott’s. “I thought—I thought you knew. When you said it.”

And Scott’s a little hurt, honestly, that Hollander thought him capable of using something like that against him publicly on the ice. “I—*no*. I knew what everyone else knew—that you hated each other. I just thought it would annoy you if I told you you sounded like him.”

He remembers all too well visiting that art sale with Kip in his stupid sunglasses and stupid cap, and the absolute paranoia that someone, somehow, would know. It worked against you sometimes. Made every person seem like an enemy, every word seem like a threat.

“I should apologise,” Hollander says quietly. “For the fight. I swung first.”

“You probably shouldn’t,” Rozanov mutters.

Scott bristles. “What’s your problem now, Rozanov?”

“He made little chirp. The littlest chirp I’ve ever heard. You shouldn’t have taken it so personally. You’re old enough to know better.”

It's to his shame that Scott realises Rozanov's probably right. He'd been having a shitty season, but chirping was a part of the sport, and Hollander's had been incredibly mild, all things considered. Certainly nothing worth fighting a man several years his junior over.

"It was a bad time for me," Scott says. "And *you*,"—he shoots a pointed glare at Rozanov—"had run your mouth during the game before. I snapped. But I probably shouldn't have."

Hollander stares down at his hands. "Just a misunderstanding."

"I wouldn't have said what I said, had I known. Obviously."

It's important to Scott that Hollander knows this, that he'd have never dangled that secret in a fellow queer player's face like bait, like a *threat*.

Hollander swallows; his leg is juddering so hard that it shakes the table. It strikes Scott, in that moment, that if this *isn't* serious, if this is some game Rozanov's playing, Hollander won't survive it.

The door connecting the kitchen to the dining room swings open, and Kip steps into the room. Bright light spills into the space, followed by the upbeat thrum of Madonna and the surprisingly appetising scent of herbs. Kip stands before them all, beaming, still clad in his silly little apron and comically overlarge oven mitts.

"Ilya!" he says. "So glad you could come."

Rozanov smiles back, and it is undeniably genuine. Scott blinks. "Thank you for having us." He motions to Hollander, who offers an awkward half-wave. "This is my—this is Shane."

"Shane," Kip echoes. Scott sees the realisation of just who Shane is and what his presence actually means flicker in his gaze, but his smile doesn't budge, and his open demeanour doesn't waver. "It's so lovely to meet you! I'd hug you both, but—" He holds up his gigantic mitts.

"You could be a goalie with those things," Rozanov says.

Kip rolls his eyes. "Hockey players. *Honestly*. Do you ever think about anything else?"

Rozanov seems to genuinely consider this. "Sometimes I think about Shane's—"

"Ilya," Hollander says warningly.

"You are no fun, *moya lyubov*." But it's said fondly, without bite.

Scott turns to Kip with a *what the fuck?* expression, but Kip, who neither knows nor could possibly comprehend the full extent of the Rozanov-Hollander rivalry, only smiles back warmly, visibly charmed by the two of them.

For fucks—

“Can I get you guys a drink? We have wine, vodka, beer, soda. Whatever you want.” Kip’s voice is staunchly upbeat. If he senses any of the lingering tension in the room, he doesn’t show it.

“Vodka, please,” Rozanov says.

Kip looks to Hollander, who says, “Uh—I’ll have a beer, if that’s okay?”

Kip nods, still smiling, and backs out of the room with a warning glance shot in Scott’s direction. It’s a glance that quite clearly communicates: *Be nice*.

Rozanov looks at Hollander as though his requesting a beer is akin to him declaring himself sick with a terminal illness. “You are more stressed than I thought.”

“I’m *fine*.”

Rozanov finally pulls up a seat. He lowers himself beside Hollander, then extends a hand. Hollander pauses, softens, and reaches back. Their fingers intertwine. “Liar,” Rozanov says.

“You, too,” Hollander shoots back.

Scott sits back, realising, suddenly, that he has become an afterthought in his own home.

Rozanov cocks a brow. “Liar?” he demands. “Me?”

“Aneurysm,” is all Hollander says.

It takes Scott a second to realise what Hollander’s talking about—that moment in the doorway; the dark look in Rozanov’s eyes, something haunted and deeply pitted.

Rozanov exhales a long breath. He looks like he dearly needs a drink. Scott, for once, can empathise. “I learnt the word aneurysm,” he says softly, “the day you hit your head on the ice.”

Scott can only stare.

He wants to leave. He wants a drink. He wants *ten* drinks. He wants to ignore the realisation he’s currently having.

This is real. This is happening. And unbelievably—*horrifically*—these two fucking idiots are actually in love.

Chapter 5: Crest

Chapter Notes

Just one chapter left, I think.

Thank you very much for all of the lovely comments. I've been genuinely surprised by how many people have enjoyed this.

If anyone has any scenes in particular they want to see, let me know! I'm more than open to writing them.

I also recently read TLG, and was wondering what difference more Kip/Scott involvement might have had in the aftermath of Ilya and Shane's coming out. It boils my piss that the Metros never faced more comeuppance for their actions - perhaps I should fix that.

I also finally made a [Tumblr](#)! You can find me @xantheori. If you want to keep up with my writing, you'll probably be able to find it there.

Additional note: I wrote this listening to Futile Devices and now I'm in my feelings a bit.

Kip has made lentil stew.

Ilya was very clear about the parameters of his boyfriend's dietary requirements: no sugar, no dairy, no red meat. Kip was more than happy to accommodate. He was just glad, really, to have an opportunity to hang out with Scott's coworkers publicly without hiding, without shame.

He bustles into the dining room with the drinks; he is dedicated to making this dinner welcoming. He felt the tenseness earlier, felt the distance between his boyfriend and the two men across the table.

He'd recognised Shane Hollander immediately, of course. Shane Hollander, captain of the Montreal Metros. Shane Hollander, hockey prodigy.

Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov's rival.

It's a little hot, Kip can admit. That level of forbidden. He can see the allure. But it's also sort of...sad. The sexiness of hidden trysts with the enemy must abate eventually, and the stark reality is devastating to imagine. With Scott, it was hard enough. Scott, who isn't fucking the enemy captain, only a smoothie-making history major. His coming out resulted only in the expected bullshit, not accusations of bending over for the opposition.

Kip can imagine the backlash already.

It's with this in mind that he places the drinks on the table and brushes his hands along the front of his apron. There's something weighted still in the room, and although before he'd been happy to leave his boyfriend to hash it out, he finds he's had *enough* of the misery. They—a queer couple—get to spend an evening with another queer couple. It's something to celebrate, and Kip refuses to spend it wallowing over old grievances.

“So,” Kip says, “food’s almost ready. What did I miss?”

Shane Hollander barely spares Kip a glance. He’s staring unblinkingly at Ilya, something a bit devastated in his eyes. “Anyeurism...?” he says.

Ilya flinches. “Later,” he says sternly.

Kip glances wide-eyed at Scott, who is watching the two hockey players across from him with visible surprise.

Ilya tears his gaze away from Shane long enough to say, “Is nothing. Thank you for the drinks.”

Kip nods, suddenly very nervous. “Shane,” he says, “I made a lentil stew, so I hope you like lentils, because it’s sort of all it has going for it.”

Shane blinks. Seems to return to himself. His gaze softens. “That’s really kind of you, Kip. Thank you. And sorry, you know, for being difficult.”

“Not at all! I’m a smoothie-maker. You think I don’t know health nuts?” He levies a pointed glance in Scott’s direction. “You don’t know this guy.”

Shane’s lips twitch toward a grin, which Kip takes as a win.

“Is not the same thing,” Ilya says. “Hunter drinks smoothies out of...need?”

“Necessity,” Shane mutters, as though filling the blanks of Ilya’s sentences is second nature.

“Yes!” Ilya says. “Necessity. Can no longer manage solid food.”

“I lied, Kip,” Scott says abruptly. “I’m not too lazy to be a killer. With the right motivation, I could do it. I could absolutely do it.” He’s staring at Ilya with bloody-minded intensity.

Kip approaches his boyfriend. Presses a kiss to the top of his head. “Homicide is an ugly dinner conversation, love.”

Scott turns to him, momentarily distracted. “Conversation about homicide charmed *you*, didn’t it?”

“Well, you’re *you*, aren’t you? I’d be charmed if you read the phone book.”

“Will you be charmed when he is drooling into his dinner and screaming at shadows?” Ilya says. “Because I think you are only a few years away from it.”

“*Ilya*,” Shane says, with the tone of someone who has said it several times already.

“I would be charmed if he were a shepherd from Texas.” Kip turns his soft gaze from Scott to Ilya. Smirks. “I would be charmed if he were my professional arch-nemesis.”

Ilya pauses. Smirks back. “Ah, you are so fun, Kip! Not boring at all.”

“Food will be ready soon,” Kip says again. He places a soft kiss against Scott’s lips, feeling the weight of the eyes watching him across the table. It’s not *weird*, Kip knows. Not voyeuristic. It’s two men watching what they could have.

He squeezes Scott’s arm as he goes—a subtle caution. He hopes Scott can see what he sees. That Ilya’s digs are a front hiding real vulnerability, that Shane is *terrified* to be here, and that they both need just two people to show them how kind and forgiving love can be when there aren’t a thousand people watching.

Scott squeezes back, and Kip can see the reluctant agreement in his eyes.

These are *their* idiot rival hockey players now, it seems.

Shane eats his lentil stew with gusto.

He’s pleasantly surprised, really, by how genuinely lovely Kip is. He’s been braced for scorn for so long that it feels like second nature. He’s always watching for it: that hidden hatred. It’s like prodding at a loose tooth, checking if the pain still lingers.

It does. It always does.

This is an ache that endures.

But Kip is kind—abjectly kind. And Scott is kind, too, in his own way.

Ilya is...Ilya. Biting. Caustic. But in that way Shane knows disguises real nervousness.

Kip makes light-hearted smalltalk at the table, and Scott clears his dish with *compliments to the chef*, and Kip takes his hand with ease. And Shane looks at Ilya and thinks *that could be us. Couldn’t that be us?*

Ilya looks back. He’s on his third vodka, and his eyes are glassy. Shane, for his part, is on his second beer—an indulgence he rarely allows himself.

Ilya shovels the last spoonful of stew into his mouth. It's so swift that Shane has to bite back the urge to caution him. It reminds him of that evening with his parents: Ilya throwing back forkfuls of spaghetti with abandon. But it must have been some time since Ilya had someone cook for him. Homemade food. People who know him. People who care. It's a devastating enough thought that Shane doesn't say a word.

"Must be weird," Ilya says, mouth still half-full. "People knowing you, I mean."

Kip nods. "A little," he admits. "I was nobody. And now I'm, you know, *Scott Hunter's boyfriend*."

Scott frowns. "You were never *nobody*."

Kip unlooses a breathy laugh. "I didn't mean it self-deprecatingly."

Ilya twitches—a tell Shane recalls from that press conference so very long ago. "Like—mean to himself," Shane explains, without having to be asked.

"Yes." Kip nods. "Sorry. I don't mean it in a nasty way to myself. Just—I wasn't in the public eye. And now I am."

There's a long pause. Scott has been suspiciously quiet throughout the meal, watching Ilya and Shane with a furrowed brow, like he's figuring something out.

Shane hopes he comes to his conclusion soon. He'd been sort of embarrassingly in awe of Scott, once. Older. Wiser. More confident. Captain of the Admirals. That fight on the ice had shattered the illusion, but Shane still stupidly hopes for Scott to *like* him. Respect him.

"What about you two?" Kip has finished with his food. He leans back in his chair, head cocked. "I mean, it can't be easy. Everyone knowing you both. Facing off on the ice."

Shane stiffens. *I learnt the word aneurysm the day you hit your head on the ice.*

"It can be tough," Shane admits quietly. "I got hurt a while back. Ilya...he had to pretend it didn't bother him."

Ilya is quiet for a moment. He takes a long swig of his drink. "It was..." he trails off.

"Tough?" Kip prompts softly.

"I left rink, that day," Ilya admits. "Couldn't follow Shane to hospital, not without suspicion, so I hid. I got out my phone and searched and searched and searched. Concussions. Complications. Memory loss, personality changes, seizures, fractures, strokes, aneurysm." Ilya rattles these off as though from a list he has read repeatedly.

"Personality changes," Ilya repeats. "What if he wakes up and he is not Shane—not *my* Shane? What if he has lost all memory of me? What if he is different, less kind, less boring, less *him*? What if I have to grieve him, who he was, without him ever remembering me at all?"

Shane's mouth has gone dry. It's devastating, hearing this all coming tumbling from Ilya's mouth. He hadn't considered—not truly—how it must have felt in that moment. But if it had been Ilya in his place, unresponsive on the ice...

"Impossible." It's Scott's dry voice that cuts through the quiet. "Hollander looks at you like the light shines out of your ass. An hour with the two of you has been enough to see that. Short of a lobotomy, I don't think he's forgetting you any time soon, Rozanov."

Ilya goes still. His gaze meets Scott's, and for the first time, Shane sees a look entirely free of animosity pass between them. "Well, of course not," Ilya says, voice thick. "I am pretty unforgettable."

Scott tips his glass in Ilya's direction. "That you are, Rozanov. That you are."

Shane is two beers deep—which for him might as well be five—and he feels warm, and affectionate, and horribly optimistic. And it's giving him dangerous ideas. Like maybe it could be like this with Hayden and JJ and Rose and Svetlana and—

A hand takes his own. Ilya's eyes are soft. "Ya tebya lyublyu," he says, pressing a kiss to the back of Shane's hand.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," Shane echoes.

Kip is beaming at them across the table, his own hand intertwined with Scott's. "You speak his language?"

Shane goes to say *no*, because he doesn't speak Russian, only the very basic phrases. But Ilya shushes him with a look. "Yes," he says, "we speak each other's language."

Chapter 6: Flood

Chapter Notes

CW: Depression (sort of, nothing too crazy). Also, a tiny bit smutty (also nothing crazy).

There will likely be more parts to this series. To keep up with my writing, find me over on [Tumblr](#)

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

Scott begins the evening with Rozanov and Hollander, and he ends it with Ilya and Shane.

He's not entirely sure when it happened—the switch. He knows only that he finds it impossible to draw on his usual reserves of disdain for Rozanov—Ilya—when said man is sitting soft-eyed on the opposite sofa from him with Shane Hollander half in his lap.

They're playing, of all things, Monopoly, with Shane making only half-hearted contributions, and Ilya smiling gleefully down at his plethora of properties and money as he proceeds to tax the hell out of the rest of them.

Scott figures he should have known better than to play such a cold-blooded game against Ilya Rozanov. He's proven rather adept at obtaining that which should be unobtainable.

The fact that it's *Rozanov* maniacally filching his Monopoly money chafes on some primal, instinctive level. Still, he suppresses that old impulse and orders himself sternly to grow the fuck up.

Ilya is allowed to be something other than expected, just as Scott once broke his own mould, bold and bullish and batshit insane when he'd motioned Kip to join him on the ice.

He'd looked around him that day, cup set aside, families and loved ones swarming the ice, and been forced to reckon—finally, painfully—with the detritus of his own life strewn about him; the meaninglessness of achievement without anyone to share it with.

And then he'd looked up and seen Kip in the stands, and he'd felt, with sudden debilitating certainty, the way he'd held his own happiness hostage.

He sees it in Ilya and Shane.

Now that he's finally convinced this isn't some intricate ploy on the Russian's part, the worry is setting in. He can see the newness of it—not the feelings, perhaps, but the admittance of them—and he wonders when they will tire of it. The shadows. The hiding.

Nothing grows strong in the dark; Scott knows this.

But he also knows not to say anything. Not yet, with Ilya Rozanov so surprisingly open. Not yet, with Shane Hollander still looking like, at any second, he expects the other shoe to drop.

“You know, *Scott*,” Ilya says pointedly, as though Scott’s name feels as misplaced on his tongue as Ilya’s does on his, “we only made our relationship official because of you.” He’s counting his money with practised nonchalance.

Scott briefly closes his eyes. He can’t stand to look at them, at what his bravery has wrought. He wonders if this is how Oppenheimer felt when he created the A-bomb. “*Please*, don’t tell me that.” *Don’t make me responsible for that.*

“Is true,” Ilya says. “Shane wanted me to come to his cottage for the summer instead of Russia. I was not sure I would say yes. Then I see you kiss boyfriend and I think, well, why not? If Scott Hunter can do it, surely I can do it, too. Do it *better*.”

“You’re telling me you entered a committed relationship out of spite against me?”

“Spite for you. Love for Shane. I am...how do you say? Many things.”

“Multi-faceted,” Shane says.

“Da. That.”

Kip’s boot lands on one of Ilya’s hotels. The Russian cackles. Holds out a hand. “Give.”

Kip passes the money over good-naturedly.

Shane shifts in Ilya’s lap. He’s looking over his two property cards with vague disinterest. He rises slightly, and his hair catches the light, followed by the glassy black of his pupils. He says, “Was it worth it, do you think? Do you feel braver now?”

The game pauses. Scott blinks at Shane and considers. The word *braver* instead of *better* strikes him as curious. “I do feel braver,” he says carefully. He reaches for Kip. Intertwines their fingers. Grounds himself. “But that wasn’t exactly why I did it. The choice had to be made—and so I made it. I couldn’t hide in that hole forever. If I went any deeper, I’d never find my way back out.”

Shane smiles, but it isn’t very warm. Scott feels the space between them like a cavern, and he also feels, oddly, that he is staring at some distorted version of himself, some echo across time.

“The strain of hiding is hard, but I doubt I have to tell you that,” he feels compelled to add. “You might have to be brave, too, eventually.”

“He has already been brave,” Ilya snaps, immediately defensive. “His parents know.”

“It’s different for you,” Kip says softly. “Two hockey players. We know that.”

Ilya immediately relents. Kip should venture into animal control, Scott thinks. He’d be good at it. “It was also different because Scott was—”

“Old,” Shane murmurs sleepily from Ilya’s lap. “The oldest man alive.”

Ilya leans down and presses a soft kiss to Shane’s lips.

Scott can only shudder and reckon with the consequences of his actions.

He’s created a monster.

They return to the hotel room in unusual silence.

“Tonight was nice,” Shane says.

“It was,” Ilya replies, surprising himself.

“But the aneurysm thing...”

Ilya looks away. He will not look at Shane. He will *not*. The vodka-induced haze is clearing, and in its wake is the mortifying realisation of what he admitted. His own fear. His own weakness.

“I know it must have been...hard,” Shane continues. “But I don’t think I realised how hard, until tonight.”

How can Ilya explain it? His mother’s hand, hanging limply over the edge of the bed. Shane on the ice. The way the two of them had amalgamated in that moment. One person. One tragedy.

But that’s not Shane’s problem to deal with. Ilya’s unreasonable fears aren’t Shane’s to alleviate. “It’s not...”

“Not what?” Shane looks up at him through his lashes. His one hand finds Ilya’s hip. It rubs a smooth circle. “Tell me your fears,” he whispers.

Ilya’s own hand finds Shane’s cheek. “I am scared you will leave me. Not because you want to, but because something takes you. The way something took her.”

His father had always said it was an accident. Alexei had always said that Irina took herself away. But Ilya does not believe that it was a real choice on her part. He knows she wouldn’t have left, had she had any other option. Suicide is the choice someone makes when there’s no other choice at all.

Whatever had infected her brain had consumed all of her will, all of her happiness. It’d gobbled her up, piece by piece. Ilya doesn’t begrudge her the exit she took.

“Just...gone,” Ilya says thickly. “You can’t go. Please don’t go.”

Don't go. Not somewhere I can't follow.

"I won't go. I'm here. I love you."

Ilya kisses him. It's hard. Forceful. An affirmation of life.

Shane kisses back. Hard. Hot. Then he drops to his knees. "I'm here," he says. "Can't you see? I'm right here."

He unbuttons Ilya's trousers. Next comes the zip. Ilya is left with his pants around his legs, boxer briefs on, already hard. Shane is on his knees, so of *course* he's hard.

Shane nuzzles his clothed crotch. "I'm right here," he murmurs.

Ilya lets himself sink into it—Shane's words, the hot warmth of his mouth.

Shane reaches for the band of Ilya's briefs, lowering them. Ilya feels more exposed than he's ever been, left at the mercy of Shane's lips and words.

"Let me," Shane murmurs. "Let me take care of you."

They don't do it like this often. Normally, it's Ilya in charge. Ordering. Dominating. But every once in a while, Ilya likes to be taken care of, taken out of his own head. It's novel—something he never allowed with anyone before Shane.

Shane seems to know. His mouth finds the tip of Ilya and suckles. Ilya works not to thrust into the heat, to let Shane hold the reins. "*Pozhaluysta*," says Ilya. *Please please please*.

"You can fuck my mouth until I choke. You can throw me on the bed and have your way with me. You can do whatever you want, because I'm here—I'm *here*—and I'm not going anywhere."

Ilya feels something choking him, some degree of emotion he's repressed until now.

"I love you," Shane says, and then he drives every other thought out of his head.

Shane wakes bleary-eyed the next morning.

His head is foggy. Not a full hangover, but something close to it.

He stares at Ilya across the starched sheets of the hotel bed. For a moment, it is too reminiscent of all their little trysts in rooms from Montreal to Vegas, where they both refused to name precisely what this was.

Now, they're in New York, thousands of miles away from the versions of themselves who slept together and loved each other and lied about it.

Still, Shane finds his gaze tracing Ilya's face as though it's the last time he'll see it. As though their hours together are still numbered.

In sleep, Ilya's face is smooth, unlined. It is a stark contrast to his waking face, which harbours a darkness Shane can't quite quantify.

It's there when he speaks of his mother's death. It's there when they speak of Shane's accident on the ice. It's there in the quiet moments, when Ilya's looking away, and Shane's looking at him.

Something haunted. Something hurting. An enemy of Ilya's that, unlike Scott Hunter, Shane can't fight.

Shane leans forward. Breathes in Ilya's scent. Tells himself last night went well—better than well. Tells himself Ilya will beat whatever plagues him, with time.

"I love you," he whispers. And the words get lost between him and his sleeping boyfriend. They dissipate into the air, unheard. But Shane knows, and he knows Ilya knows, and now Scott and Kip know. And the truth of it burns within him, this internal glow.

And Shane tells himself that love is enough to protect them both.

That all of their risks were worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the slightly ominous ending. Ilya's depression snuck up on me (as it did on him and Shane). I might write a fic exploring that more.

Thank you for taking this little journey with me, and thank you for all of the lovely comments 

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