Incoming Call

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Incoming Call

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Summary

After the news of Rose and Shane breaks, he receives a wedding invitation for Ilya and Svetlana's wedding and tries to be fine.

He's very much not fine.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

idk what this is. i just wrote it to feel something.

thanks for reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Shane received an email invite to a wedding, he thought it was spam.

He would have swiped it away if it wasn't for Ilya's full name staring back at him in the subject line. He was in public, at some stupid team gathering. Celebrating. Noise and laughter blurred together, and nothing quite reached him anymore. When he finally clicked the invitation, a big chunk of his heart sank straight into his stomach.

Please join us in celebration of Svetlana and Ilya's marriage!

A small gathering. With friends and family. Because that was what Shane was. A friend, adjacent at best. Close enough to be invited, far enough to not matter.

When he got with Rose, Shane and Ilya went through a silent breakup. No conversation, no closure. Shane had run out of that house with clothes that didn't belong to him and his feelings lodged painfully up his throat. His brain dared him to say more, to want more from Ilya. Ilya had said his name and it had been too much to hold back. If Shane had finished a sentence after that, it would have ended with an *I like you* or something worse, something irreversible.

He'd left that house determined to stop whatever this was. Ilya just wanted a warm mouth and a body to satisfy a need, a scratch to itch. That was all. The tuna melts, the cuddling, the easy smiles were part of it, and absolutely nothing more. They had to be *nothing more*. Because if they were, Shane would have to start thinking of solutions, of lies, of ways to make this work. The worst part was knowing he was willing to do exactly that.

He should have known it was Svetlana. Ilya had mentioned her when Shane had seen him last time, casually, like it meant nothing. How was Shane not supposed to take that as a warning, proof that this would inevitably end? It was the same reason he'd been with Rose. It satisfied his parents, looked good under a camera, and hid the festering feelings he had for his 'rival', feelings that were never supposed to exist.

Three months from now, Ilya would be a married man. Shane grimaced as the image forced itself into his mind. Ilya dressed up, smiling like the sun, someone else's hand in his, declaring his love to a room full of witnesses.

Shane was in public. He had to remember that. He shut his eyes and swallowed hard. The pain settled right on his chest, then spread, creeping into his shoulder, his back, his throat. It hurt that Ilya had invited him. People usually spared their exes from watching them get married. That would have been cruel.

Maybe they weren't even serious enough to be considered exes. Just a fling. A mistake or two that got out of hand.

This was ultimately Shane's doing.

He knew he was sending Ilya a message when he didn't return the texts, when he didn't bother to ask for his clothes back. When he let Ilya see the headlines of his new girlfriend instead of offering an explanation he didn't have the courage to give.
Shane had even kissed her in front of the paparazzi to make it clear, not to the world, but to a Russian boy he was scared to love.

If he RSVP'd 'no', Ilya would know Shane was suffering pathetically. That he'd been working out every second he was alone so he wouldn't have to think about Ilya when he finally laid down to sleep. Ilya would know he'd been moaning out, "*Roz, Roz*," when he finished with Rose. He would know that receiving that invitation had killed something in Shane, enough to matter.

"Hey! What are you doing on your phone?" Hayden crashed into him, too close, too loud. He smelled like tequila.

"Uh… Rozanov is getting married," Shane said, nodding without looking up, keeping his head down so Hayden wouldn't see his face.

"What?" Hayden gasped dramatically, already pulling out his own phone. The headlines were up. He dashed toward the rest of their teammates, shouting as he held the picture out like proof. Svetlana was prettier than Shane had allowed himself to imagine. Their heads were pressed together, and Ilya looked… happy.

Shane clicked "Yes" and watched confetti explode across his screen.

His body ran on autopilot after that. Shane said the right things, nodded at the right moments, laughed when it was expected of him, but he wasn't really there. All he could think about was the last time they'd touched. The smile on Ilya's face when he came back from that phone call. The kiss pressed gently to his head. His mind was full of Ilya, Ilya, fucking *Ilya*, looping endlessly.

Shane shouldn't have drunk all the shots shoved into his hands. His teammates caught on quickly that Shane wasn't saying no to much of anything tonight. He took the shots. He

thanked people for the cocktails. He even took a puff of a cigarette from a stranger just outside the bar because he missed Ilya so badly it felt like a physical ache. It was a mistake. He coughed it out immediately, apologized, and stumbled away toward his Uber.

It was a mistake because he smelled like cigarettes now, and his head was full of Ilya all over again.

The golden hair. The moaning right by his ear. The soft caress of Ilya's thumb along his jaw.

Ilya was never his, never would be, so why did it feel like he wanted to throw himself out of the car while it sped down the highway? Why was it always Ilya's face he saw when he closed his eyes?

Shane was getting drunker the longer the car ride went on, the alcohol settling heavy and loose in his veins. The city lights streaked past the window, smeared and distant. On his phone, he opened the familiar chat with Lily. The screen felt warm in his hand, too easy. He scrolled back through their banter, the sexts, the strings of ignored, boring texts Ilya never bothered to answer properly.

He stared at the empty message box for a long moment, his thumb hovering over the keyboard. The car swayed gently beneath him as he started typing a message.

(Congratulations.) J

No. Too stupid. Shane deleted it before he could overthink it any further.

(Thank you for the invitation.) J

Boring. Polite. The kind of text that would get ignored or, worse, answered with something equally empty. Did Shane even want a reply back?

(I can't believe you're getting married!) J

His thumb pressed down on delete again. It all sounded stupid, juvenile, like he was fishing for something he didn't deserve.

He stared at the blank space, the cursor blinking patiently, waiting.

(Does this kill you, too?) J

Shane stared at the most truthful text he'd ever typed out. It sat there, raw and unguarded, saying everything he'd spent months refusing to admit.

"Is this it?" The driver muttered.

He looked up and realized they'd pulled into his apartment complex. Shane struggled to open his eyes, the world tilting slightly as he stepped out. He mumbled a thanks to the driver and sent a tip that was probably too big. He stumbled toward the back doors, swiping his key card again and again until it finally let him in.

He once stumbled up these same stairs with Ilya and had gotten the most tender kiss of his life on the first few steps. He walked straight through the memory now, tried to leave it sitting there on the staircase where it belonged, but it followed him home anyway.

Jesus, how much had he actually drunk tonight? He nearly knocked over a painting and a collection of knick-knacks by the door. The kitchen spun gently. He poured himself a glass of water, then somehow there were two, then they blurred and merged back into one. He had to use both hands to lift it, concentrating like it was a serious task.

When he finished it, he giggled softly to himself, finding the whole thing far too funny, far too tragic, all at once.

“Oh, the great Ilya Rozanov is finally getting hitched!” Shane clapped dramatically, slurring his words as he whooped, all sarcasm and sharp edges. The tears were already back at the brim now that he was safe here, alone. Ilya had pressed him against the island the last time he’d been over, had fucked him on his bed like it meant something. Everything in this apartment was tainted by him.

“Ilya Rozanov is getting what he wanted. What I wanted.” Shane nodded to himself, tears spilling freely now, even as he kept smiling. “Yes, I wanted this.” He smacked his chest hard. “I wanted to be normal and not risk anything. I did this.”

Shane curled over the island, his fist clenched tight. The sardonic laughter dissolved into choked sobs, breaking apart in his throat. The cool marble felt good against his flushed cheeks. He smacked it again, letting all the anxiety and ache crash over him at once. The alcohol made his head swim, twisting his thoughts into sour, whispering accusations.

Shane should’ve stayed that day. He should’ve stayed and tried harder. He should’ve had this gay epiphany a long time ago, before everything got so tangled and irreversible.

Rose had already helped him. She’d talked to him, explained gently why it wasn’t working, why it never really had. Shane had been ready to go back to Ilya and tell him that he couldn’t imagine a life where he didn’t like him anymore. And if Ilya had really finished it with Shane then, shut the door completely, he would’ve understood. It would’ve hurt, but it would’ve made sense.

Instead, the only answer he got was a wedding invitation.

Shane sniffled, dragging the back of his hand across his nose. The wave of his ocean crashed into his shore, chipping the sandstone down into dust, grain by grain.

Timing was everything. Just like in hockey, timing was the difference between losing and winning.

The buzz in his pocket pulled him out of his daze.

Incoming call

“*Fuck*.” Shane wiped his face and drank another cup of water before he answered.

“Hollander?” Ilya’s voice smoothed out of the speaker and straight into his ear. Shane had to clutch the edge of the island to keep himself upright.

“Hi,” Shane rasped, then cleared his throat. He had to sound normal. Like this wasn’t planting a C-4 directly on his chest. “Yes. Hi.”

“Is everything okay?” Ilya sounded genuinely concerned for him. He should stop that too.

“Yes! I’m fine. Why did you call?” Shane forced his voice brighter, kept his eyes closed so he could focus on every breath, every syllable brushing against his ear.

“Well, I saw you accepted the RSVP, but you didn’t answer Chicken or Beef.” Ilya chuckled softly. He sounded like he was alone. No Svetlana. Thank God. Shane couldn’t handle that.

“Uh. Right. Beef.” Shane slurred again, the word clumsy in his mouth. He slid down until he was sitting on the floor, his back pressed against the cabinets.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Hollander?” Ilya’s frown was audible now.

“I’m drunk.” Shane melted into the sound of his Russian accent. He missed his voice. This was their first phone call, and he couldn’t even enjoy it.

“You never drink during—”

“I know.”

A long silence stretched between them, heavy and charged.

“Don’t call again, Ilya,” Shane muttered, tears spilling all over again. “We’re done. Now that you’re getting married.”

The alcohol sharpened the bitterness in his voice.

“*You* left. You left me here. And the next time I saw you was on the headlines.” Ilya muttered back, teeth gritted, the words tight with something restrained.

“I know I did.” Shane covered his face with his hand. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I left like that.”

“Plus, you’ve got nothing to worry about,” Ilya added, colder now. “Since you’ve got your special celebrity girlfriend, right?”

“Yep. I got that.” Shane nodded sluggishly, the floor still calling to him. “That’s what I have. A girlfriend. Mhm.”

It sounded more sarcastic than he meant. He was supposed to keep the façade up. He kept forgetting. He didn't care anymore. The Ilya in his ear sounded unreal, like something pulled from a dream. This wasn't real. None of this was. Shane was convinced of it.

"Shane. You should sleep. Drink water—"

"Stop." Shane pulled the phone away from his ear, his voice sharper than he intended. "Stop. Don't call me- You *don't* need to worry about me anymore."

He forced himself off the floor and staggered toward the bedroom. He stopped at the doorway, staring at the bed like it might disappear if he looked too long.

Ilya's breathing on the line sounded shaky too. Maybe he was crying. The thought twisted something sharp in Shane's chest.

"You and I are just… rivals again." Shane nodded to himself. "That's all, Rozanov."

"You have… Rose there? To help you?" Ilya asked quietly.

Shane shook his head, then muttered out an apathetic lie anyway. "Yes. She's here. She'll hold my hair back while I puke."

"You're a terrible liar. Worse when you're drunk, I see," Ilya muttered, his voice drenched in concern.

It pissed Shane off. All of it. He just wanted to sound normal, to be normal. But he knew Svetlana had been Ilya's regular fuck buddy, and this marriage—a fucking *marriage*—felt permanent in a way nothing else ever had.

"I will be fine without you," Shane said, forcing the words out like an affirmation. "I will beat you in every game. I will be happy without you."

The room swirled again, slow and dizzying. Another tear slipped.

"I will be normal without you because I don't love you. I absolutely *do not* love you. So this doesn't affect me at all."

The words slurred together as Shane finally surrendered to the dark room, letting himself sink into it, clinging to the small, cruel comfort of Ilya's breathing on the line.

Since when was the sun this bright?

"Oh *god*." Shane slowly sat up and immediately regretted it, only to slump back down against the mattress. His head throbbed like a motherfucker, and every limb felt dry, hollowed out. He genuinely didn't understand how people did this often, how they woke up like this and chose to repeat it.

It took nearly an hour before he managed to drag himself out of bed and into the shower. The hot water helped a little, steam loosening the tightness in his chest, but his memory stayed stubbornly blank. He tried to remember how he'd left the party, how he'd gotten home, but there was nothing there. When he stepped out, towel slung low on his hips, he checked his Uber history. Well. At least he'd made it home safe.

He cracked open a ginger ale, the hiss too loud in the quiet apartment, and Ilya's voice surfaced uninvited in his head.

You're a terrible liar.

Maybe it was an old memory. Something buried that had floated back up. Why had he drunk so much last night? It wasn't like him. He didn't lose control. He didn't spiral like that.

Then he checked his emails.

Right. The wedding.

Shane's head throbbed again as another whisper of memory brushed too close.

"No." He scrambled for his phone, fingers clumsy as he opened his call history. "*No, no, no*."

Dread washed over him when he saw it. A twenty-minute call from Ilya.

"Fuckkkkk."

He tried to remember what he'd said, anything at all, but the only thing that came back was Ilya's voice. The concern that hadn't belonged to him anymore. The way it had sounded misplaced, dangerous. Surely he hadn't said anything stupid. Shane was smarter than that, even drunk.

He checked his messages next and froze.

(Does this kill you, too?) J

At least his spelling and punctuation had held up while he'd been drunk out of his mind.

He deleted it immediately, before his thumb could slip and accidentally send it, and sat there staring at the screen, his hangover suddenly the least of his problems.

—

All-Star games were coming faster than he'd like.

The thought of seeing Ilya again nearly put Shane into a coma for the entire week leading up to it. He barely put any effort into practice, his body showing up while his mind stayed somewhere else entirely. All he wanted to do was sleep. Shane had never slept this much in his life, not even close. In the past two weeks alone, he'd slept more than he had in years. He showed up late to things, snapped at his mom without meaning to, and food tasted vile no matter what it was.

Every day, he was reminded that Ilya was getting married. First it was JJ, then Hayden, then TMZ, then *The View*. Everybody was talking about it except for Shane, who pretended it didn't exist.

When a crowd of paparazzi cornered him and asked if he'd be attending, Shane took the opportunity to look straight into the camera and give them his best smile. He said, calmly and clearly, "I'm happy for him. I'll be there in celebration with the happy couple."

The moment he slumped into the car, the smile dropped. He yanked his headphones over his ears and blasted a Russian playlist he'd found. Maybe Russians were depressed, because every song sounded like a long, cold winter after a war. He liked it.

L (Since when do you listen to Zemfira?)

Fuck. He'd forgotten he was friends with Ilya on Spotify. Had Ilya been seeing what he'd been listening to this whole time?

(I don't know. Since today.) J

Shane kept it short. Cold. He had to pretend every last cinder of his love for Ilya had burned out.

L (You know she is gay?)

Was she? Shane stared at Zemfira's portrait on her Spotify page.

(I see the lesbian haircut) J

L (She and her girlfriend are living in Paris now)

(Cool) J

Shane bit his lip, wondering where he was going with this.

L (Are you ready for the All-Star game?)

Since when was Ilya sending him boring texts?

(Sure) J

L (I still think I should have been captain)

(I'll forgive you)

Maybe the phone call had been normal. Ilya was pretending nothing had happened. It was good. They were good, then.

(When you get up to my level, we'll talk again) J

L (hahahahahhahahah)

(It's very funny. You're hilarious)

Shane cracked a smile for the first time in weeks.

Then he fixed it, remembering he shouldn't have.

—

In Miami, Ilya's hair shined a brighter, almost unreal golden hue. It was unfair—how could he be so nonchalant? Didn't it drive a stake through his chest when their eyes met? Didn't it make him falter even a bit?

Shane, on the other hand, winced visibly every time it happened, wishing he could be that cool, that detached about everything.

They brushed shoulders at the bar, knees in the pool, thumbs in the sand. None of it was painless. Every touch burned, a reminder that Ilya wanted him even as somebody's fiancé, and Shane found himself replying in kind: *yes, yes. Touch me. Pay attention to me. I missed you. I feel like I can breathe again.*

He knew it would all end the same way—him alone in his room, clutching his chest, reliving it over and over.

He couldn't even drink properly, afraid that every sip might push him toward knocking on Ilya's door.

The sunset warmed the sky above them, but Shane's heart remained icy. His thumb brushed Ilya's under the sand, and he couldn't pull away. He was thrilled, desperate even, to feel him again, to sense a grain of his heat in the sand. The sudden rush of connection made his knees weak; his brain melted as the constant ache in his body eased the moment their skin met.

"You feeling okay?" Ilya asked, peering at him. "You look like you're about to pass out."

Shane pulled back his hand, blinking rapidly. "Yes. I'm fine." He got up and retrieved his shoes. "I told you not to worry about me anymore."

The words left his mouth, and déjà vu hit him like a punch. When had he said that to Ilya? They hadn't spoken since the email.

Right. The call…

Shane froze in place, blinking at Ilya as more memories, scattered, impossible to ignore, surfaced all at once.

"You remember now?" Ilya scoffed, easing back into his spot on the sand. "Took you long enough."

"No. I don't remember… all of it," Shane muttered, slumping down beside him again. "What… did I say?"

Shane sighed and closed his eyes. He was completely unprepared for whatever came next.

"Not much." Ilya grabbed a fistful of sand and let it slip through his fingers. "You lied terribly."

"What *did I say*?" Shane asked, finally locking eyes with him. Properly this time.

"Were you fine? These past few weeks?" Ilya smirked, the teasing edge slipping back into his voice.

"Do I look fine?" Shane's eyes welled up, and he blamed the sting on the sunset.

"No." Ilya faltered, his expression softening. "You look miserable."

"Well, you look fine," Shane mumbled. "You look *perfect*."

He wanted to touch him. His curls. His shoulder. They were in public, surrounded by people and noise and light, but Shane wanted to tackle him into the sand and kiss him like none of that existed.

"Well, I was miserable," Ilya said quietly. "God, Shane, you should've seen me. Svetlana thought I was dead." He said Shane's name, and he was smiling. "I thought I was dead too. Then I decided to call this terribly slow hockey player with a weak backhand and beautiful freckles."

Shane swallowed hard.

"He told me this terrible lie," Ilya continued, his voice dropping into something serious, unguarded. "That he didn't love me. That he'd be fine. And I'm so glad his terrible lie was a lie. Then I listened to him sleep for a while."

Shane remembered how to breathe again, lungs dragging in air. He fucking said the L-word while he was drunk?

"I'm going to walk into the ocean now," Shane blurted, his face going beet red as he cursed his weak-willed mind. He set his shoes down beside Ilya and stepped toward the water. That

was it. Time to die. Time to meet his fate.

“Shane.” Ilya caught his wrist, firm and warm, and Shane didn’t even care that they were in public. “Don’t go.”

Shane wasn’t weak-willed. He was just weak for Ilya.

“What’s your room number?” Shane asked, looking down at him, unable to stop himself from smiling back at Ilya’s growing grin.

—

Shane knocked on Ilya’s door, more nervous than he’d ever been in his life. He didn’t even greet him. He just made a beeline for the bed and sat down, heart hammering.

“Come in. Sit down,” Ilya said, his voice dripping with sarcasm as he flopped down next to him.

The bed shifted under their weight, and Shane felt the heat radiating off him. It was impossible to stay in a private room with Ilya and not immediately want to strip, to close the distance and lose themselves again.

“What about Svetlana?”

“What about Rose?” Ilya shot right back. When Shane kept his mouth sealed tight, Ilya sighed and finally opened his mouth.

“I tried to, um, stop it. But my father…” Ilya cleared his throat. “Insisted. He doesn’t even like her. But he just set it up one day.”

Shane stole a glance at him. “How did *you* feel about it?”

If his father wanted it, Ilya would comply. That much Shane understood. Another long silence stretched between them, but this one was different. Comfortable. Vulnerable.

“After you left, I thought maybe you’d be glad,” Ilya said quietly. “That it was what you wanted.” He stared down at his knees. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“I’m not— I mean, I was. But not anymore,” Shane said, shuddering slightly.

“Yes. I did hurt you. You sounded like you were crying a lot. I’m sorry.” Ilya finally looked up, eyes glazed and soft, sincerity spilling from the bottom of his very Russian heart. “I

didn’t want to hear you cry.”

“Oh, I cried too?” Shane swiped at his face.

“You really don’t remember?” Ilya chuckled softly.

“Rose… helped me,” Shane sighed. “I think I’m gay.”

Ilya let out a short, surprised laugh, then slapped a hand over his mouth to stop himself.

“Shut up.” Shane shoved him lightly.

“No way~” Ilya laughed harder. “You? Gay? No way!”

The sarcasm was thick in his voice, but his eyes were still soft with love. God, fuck Ilya for looking at Shane like that. He did that shit on purpose, seducing Shane until he was completely dysfunctional.

“It’s not just that I’m gay,” Shane said, sliding his hand over Ilya’s. “It’s just… you.”

Ilya caught his breath, straightening slightly, but he didn’t pull away.

Then it was his turn to well up, tears gathering fast. “Fuck. You shouldn’t. You know I can’t. But I can’t even get myself to end this properly.” A tear slipped free and traced down his cheek.

Shane had never seen Ilya cry before. It felt new, like a version of him he’d never let anyone see.

“Because you love me,” Ilya said, shaking his head, smiling through his tears. Were they happy tears? Hesitant ones? Selfish ones? “How can I ever say no to that?”

Shane climbed over his thigh, finally understanding the storm that must be raging inside Ilya’s mind.

How many words had he bitten back on his tongue because the English words didn’t exist for them? How many struggles had he waded through just to admit out loud that he loved Shane back? He didn’t have to ever say it—because Shane knew now that Ilya did—but the words just didn’t come. It didn’t matter. There was more joy, more hope, in this gray area than Shane could muster at the thought of never touching him again. The thought of pulling away for good had been absolute hell.

He pulled Ilya closer into his chest, squeezing him to say without words that Shane was here. With his thumbs, he wiped away the tears, then leaned down and kissed him.

Shane felt like a white whale leaping from the ocean to take a breath.

He couldn’t contain the shudder that ran through him when Ilya’s hand slid up his back.

“I love you,” Shane muttered as he pulled back. “Don’t get married to her.”

Ilya stopped breathing again. He sighed when Shane ran a thumb down his cheek.

“We’ll figure something out.” Shane kissed his forehead. “Please.”

“Okay.” Ilya looked up, eyes puffy and sniffling. The word came hoarse, thick with his accent.

“I’d rather tell the press that I married you as a best friend in need of citizenship than see you… get married.” Shane swallowed hard. He was basically proposing. Somebody gag him.

“You want to marry me?” Ilya’s sniffle turned into heavier, uneven breaths.

“The last month has been the most miserable month of my entire existence,” Shane said, shaking his head as he kissed him again. “I never want to feel that way again. If that means marriage, I’m ready to fly to Vegas, right now.”

Shane pushed Ilya back gently, kissing up his neck, savoring the taste, the warmth, the feeling of having him here, finally.

Ilya was his now. He had him in his grasp, and Shane was finally allowed to love him without restraint.

“Tebya lyublyu,” Ilya whispered against his shoulder, trailing kisses up his neck. “I love you.”

Ilya studied his face, and Shane grinned ear to ear, certain he looked stupider than he felt—but he didn’t care. He hadn’t expected to hear it back tonight, and yet here it was.

“You do?” Shane’s heart fluttered. It felt brand new, this. Like a different relationship than before, fresh and innocent, full of love and possibility.

He crashed their mouths together, trying to pour all the months of yearning, all the love he’d held back, into that kiss. Their tongues tangled and swirled, urgent and hungry. Shane’s hands gripped Ilya’s waist, then moved lower, fumbling at his pants with desperate need.

He trailed kisses down Ilya’s neck, pushing his own shirt up as he went, inhaling deeply. He missed him, missed everything about him. Shane had survived the last month by pressing his face into the shirt he’d taken from Ilya, letting himself smell it, letting himself feel that ache for a few seconds a day.

Kissing down to his navel and leaving wet, sloppy marks along his length, Shane worked Ilya until he was hot on his lips.

“You missed me, huh?” Ilya groaned, already gripping Shane’s hair to guide him, helping him bob down.

Shane kicked off his pants, touching himself while taking Ilya in his throat. He honestly thought his dick was broken for the last month. He’d been so depressed to even think about sex or touching himself which would only lead to him thinking about Ilya.

"*Ah, mm*," Ilya panted, straining slightly as he moaned, but he pulled Shane back before he could spill. "Stop, stop."

Shane crawled up his body, wiping his mouth, then linked their lips again. It was never enough now. Ilya loved him—really loved him. Every brush, every kiss, confirmed it. This was going to be the kind of fuck that either destroyed him or saved him.

Ilya rolled them over, settling between Shane's legs.

"You want me to turn around?" Shane sat up, but Ilya gripped his waist, keeping him pinned.

"No. I'm not done kissing you." The hold on his waist pulled him closer, and Shane giggled at the eagerness in both Ilya's hands and their tangled tongues.

A finger traced over his hole. There wasn't even lube, but Shane was already moaning, burning at the touch.

"You're tighter than usual. What? You didn't ask Rose to peg you?" Ilya teased, and Shane threw a pillow at him, laughing despite himself.

He stood up, shrugging off the rest of his layers, then leaned down to his suitcase to grab the lube.

"Yeah, let's just say seeing her naked did not provide me with this reaction," Shane said, pointing at his twitching cock.

Ilya chuckled, crashing down over him. "Do tell me."

"No. Never. It's actually so embarrassing," Shane groaned, burying his face in his pillow.

Ilya didn't move, his eyes fixed on him, one brow raised.

"I was thinking about you every time," Shane admitted, voice muffled.

"How many times are we talking here?" Ilya asked, a little too seriously, jealousy thick in his tone.

"I literally couldn't cum until I was imagining you jacking off in the showers, and that's what you're asking?" Shane emphasized, rolling his eyes at him. "I'm not telling you that."

"Oh really?" Ilya sat up, opening the lube and squirting a generous amount onto his fingers. He rubbed it against Shane's hole, and Shane forgot everything else, letting out a long, breathy moan. "Let's see if I can work it out of you."

Ilya worked over Shane's cock, ignoring the small twitches that shook his body as he teased the sensitive head. His fingers traced the rim while his thumb circled over Shane's slit, each motion measured to drive him wild without letting him slip too soon.

The dual sensation had Shane gripping the sheets, frozen under the weight of Ilya pressing over his legs. Ilya's knees pried his thighs apart, leaving him no escape. Shane suddenly

wanted to apologize, to confess whatever Ilya wanted to hear, but he bit down on his cheeks, refusing to give in.

Ilya's first finger pushed in, then worked the second one in. Both digits hit that spot dead on. He knew exactly where every nerve and muscle responded, and it was driving Shane crazy. The hand over his cock teased the head lightly and pushed the foreskin, leaving him aching for more.

"*Ah—fuck*, Ilya. Please." Shane didn't even know why he was begging.

"Ah-ah. No," Ilya said, pumping faster, hitting that spot with deliberate cruelty. "You love being a good boy. You're a long way from being ready for me." There was a sly smirk on his face, and for a moment, Shane felt scared and turned on at the same time. "And you know I'm going hard today."

The lighting in the room cast soft yellow glows across his face, but the intent in his eyes burned a vivid red. Ilya leaned down slowly, tongue already out, the warm softness gliding over Shane's slit, licking up his pre-cum. Another thrust of his fingers was paired with a kiss over the head, leaving a string of slickness behind.

"Holy shit, Ilya."

Shane felt high just watching Ilya play with him. He was deliberate, moving slow like he wanted Shane to see everything he was doing—to *show off*. His lips sucked over the head, bobbing a few inches as the fingers worked inside him, teasing, driving him wild.

Then Ilya's fingers sped up, pressing harder over the spot that made Shane feel like he could cum any second. He tried to find the words to stop it, to warn him before it was too late, but it had been so long since he'd come that the pleasure was unstoppable.

Shane smacked the bed, his body taut, the load ready to flood Ilya's mouth, the peak of his pleasure—the culmination of everything that was Ilya—finally within reach. His moans pitched higher, oh, fuck, here it was-

And then, both the mouth and the fingers left him.

Shane's breathing stopped entirely. He whimpered and twitched violently, thrashing involuntarily. "No, *no*—why?"

His hands shot to his cock, desperate to finish the job, but Ilya's strong grip pinned both wrists to the mattress. Ilya's body weight trapped his legs, and Shane had no choice but to breathe through the cruel cooldown.

"You're still tight." Ilya's menacing voice left no room for doubt, and Shane couldn't do anything. He wanted to be a good boy, just like he said. "Let's see how many times it takes to break you in, Shane Hollander."

The words dripped from Ilya's lips like honey. Shane's cock twitched at the sound.

The finger slid back inside him, easier this time, but Shane kept forgetting to breathe. Ilya's other hand played idly with the head of his cock, teasing, driving him wild. Shane let out a strained, choked moan.

This fucker kept targeting that sensitive spot while tormenting the head of his cock. His balls drew up tight, ready to blow again, his breathing ragged, body straining against the sheets. Shane knew what was coming, but that didn't mean he was ready.

Then all movement ceased, and Ilya pulled away, leaving Shane bucking his hips and whining harshly. He looked up, eyes pleading. His hands instinctively flew to his cock, but Ilya caught them, this time tying them firmly with his belt.

Shane already felt exhausted. He didn't have the energy to fight Ilya over his bound hands.

He could feel his hole pulse, aching for the girthy fingers that had left, sweat forming across his chest, every nerve on fire.

"You think you can do one more?" Ilya whispered, pressing a kiss to his cheek, then over the freckles scattered across his shoulders. "Just one more, and I'll fuck you until you're dry."

The promise hit Shane like a jolt. He nodded hard. "Please. *Please*, Ilya."

He was desperately aching for Ilya's hard cock, all nine inches, to rearrange him, to make him permanently used to Ilya. Shane just needed to ride one more edge, to let another orgasm fail so he could cum around Ilya's cock like he'd been dreaming of for the past month.

This time, Ilya added another finger and pressed Shane's cock flat against his stomach. Pumping against it with slow, deliberate pressure, he hit that sensitive spot again, making it tender and raw, primed for his cock to wreck him. Shane knew Ilya would fuck him until he saw lights if he could just survive this edge—this unbearable height that climbed with every ruined orgasm.

Shane was hypersensitive now, every inch of body. Waves of sensation rolled through him, relentless and untamed, all under Ilya's hands. He strained against his bound wrists, thrashing harshly, bucking for any release, finding only air.

Ilya's hands smoothed over his chest and thighs, grounding him, calming him. "Breathe, malish."

He tried to draw a deep breath, but it came out choked, stifled by the tight pull of the restraints. "Please… fuck me. I'm ready, Ilya. Please."

Shane opened his legs wider, hooking his bound hands over Ilya's head. Through ragged breaths, he kissed him like he might die after this fuck, because that's exactly how it felt.

The hot head of Ilya's cock slid over his lubed hole, pushing in slowly.

Shane gasped at the fullness, every nerve igniting. Ilya groaned harshly as he pressed deeper. Shane was still tight, still desperate, but he kept nodding, letting himself sink into it. Every

thrust filled the void Shane had been carrying for the past month, leaving nothing behind but pure, consuming pleasure.

Burying his face in Ilya's neck, Shane let himself melt into the rhythm, moving entirely to his pace. Within minutes, they were both slamming hard against the bed, bodies taut and trembling, skin slick with sweat, hearts hammering like war drums.

"Oh fuck—" Shane's hands were still bound, but he didn't care. Ilya drove deep inside him, scraping that achingly sensitive spot he'd been torturing for the past thirty minutes. Every nerve in his body screamed for release, every muscle coiling tighter, ready to snap. His cock throbbed uncontrollably, desperate, but Ilya ignored it, letting the friction inside him build a storm. "Wait, Ilya, I'm gonna—fuck, I'm—"

Ilya sped up with his hot breath ragged against Shane's ear. He whispered, low and commanding, telling him to hold on, to cum for him, to let go like the good boy he was. Then he began muttering the Russian words again, slow and deliberate at first, then jagged and relentless, hammering against Shane with each thrust.

Shane's moans ripped out of him, guttural and raw, as his body arched violently, overwhelmed by the intensity. The language, the accent, the dominance—it was a tidal wave, dragging him under, leaving him trembling and desperate. His thighs shook, chest heaving, mind obliterated by pleasure.

When the tsunami finally hit, it tore through him like lightning, body convulsing, warm release spraying across his chest, each spasm more violent than the last. Ilya didn't let up—still moving, still claiming him—and Shane screamed, utterly powerless, drowning in the chaos of raw need and sensation.

The release didn't stop. Every pump of Ilya's cock drove another wave through him, the edging, the commanding whispers, the Russian words twisting Shane blind, trapped in the lingering tingles of overstimulated pleasure. He couldn't hold back his moans, and he didn't want to. Every endorphin surged through his brain, especially as Ilya murmured soft "I love you" over and over, dragging him higher.

Ilya's cock stayed buried deep, twitching and heavy, waiting.

"Cum inside me, baby," he breathed, harsh and ragged. Shane nodded instinctively, rocking his hips again despite the overstimulation, desperate to keep the friction building.

Ilya moved with him, burying his face in Shane's hair, one hand gripping his hips to lift and drive deeper. The new angle made it effortless for Ilya to thrust, but for Shane, every nerve fired past its limit, every sensitive spot on fire, every motion tearing him closer to the edge again and again.

The cock hit his spot perfectly, then dragged even deeper with each pull back and slam in. Shane yelped, his body still trembling from cumming just seconds ago.

Ilya's thighs slammed against him harshly, knocking the air out of him. Shane gasped, helpless under the weight and force. Thankfully, it was long before he felt Ilya's hot, heavy

load flood inside him. Ilya panted, curling forward to press kisses across Shane's chest.

"It's been a while for me too," Ilya groaned, letting out a long, guttural *fuck* as he thrust a few more times, chasing the release. "You're so warm."

He strained to pull back, feeling Shane's grip trying to hold him. Shane didn't know where he was anymore—his room, Ilya's, or somewhere in between. He didn't know what year it was. Nothing mattered except Ilya, the warmth of him buried inside, and the lingering The heaviness settled in Shane's stomach as he tugged Ilya down again, pressing his lips to his. "Wait… you haven't… since the last time?"

Ilya blinked up at him, flushed, tired, but still finding the energy for this.

"Yeah, I mean… I told you, me and Svetlana are friends. We do that sometimes, but I didn't… want to," he admitted, shaking his head as he kissed Shane back.

"Because of me?" Shane's eyes lit up.

"You thought you were miserable? I was dying. I couldn't do anything the last month," Ilya said, shaking his head again. "So unless you want to completely ruin my career, stay with me. Yes?"

"Yes," Shane breathed, pressing a soft kiss to Ilya's nose.

"Pinky promise," Ilya said, holding his pinkie up in front of Shane's face.

"Pinky promise," Shane laughed, hooking his pinkie with Ilya's, sealing it as they grinned at each other, hearts still racing.

Chapter End Notes

listen to Zemfira 🔪

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ilya's POV from the break up and sending the invitation of his wedding to Shane.

Chapter Notes

I have always wanted to integrate Korean in a fic and this felt perfect. Uh... wish it wasn't such an angsty idea lmao but y'know i love a good juicy angst and i was crying like the entire time writing this so i hope it hurts you too.
i hurt. u hurt. <3

Russian depression!Ilya makes me feel so seen. I hate it.

TW: discussion of suicide. a dash of suicidal ideation (maybe? not sure. do tell me.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something was wrong with Ilya.

He never cried or felt sorrow over things—not since his mother—especially things he never had to begin with. It was foolish to feel heartbroken over someone who hadn't offered him a heart to break in the first place. Still, all of it felt wrong right then. His blood felt out of place in his veins, his skin too prickly, too cold, like it didn't belong to him anymore.

In that moment, he didn't know what to do other than breathe deep into Hollander's shirt he'd left behind, clutching it like he could have him back in his arms. The images wouldn't leave him alone. The stutter. The wary steps back. The regret welling up in his eyes. The simple, yet effective "*I can't-.*"

None of it felt anything like the cupid's arrow Ilya had been expecting, or the clean, simple ache he thought heartbreak was supposed to be.

"Fuck," Ilya muffled into the shirt, pouring all his regret into the fabric until it felt soaked through.

For a while, all he could manage were broken curses, while tears pressed down on the aching sore spot in his chest, dulling it without easing it.

The only conclusion he could come to was that Ilya was the problem. He had too much proof to ignore it. There was some broken, wretched part of him that kept insisting he wasn't worth

sticking around for, that this was inevitable.

His mom didn't stick around. That had been a choice made without Ilya in mind.

His father was the man who cut the head clean off the golden goose and then demanded more.

His brother demanded more simply because the asshole could.

"*Fuck*," Ilya softly cried into the shirt again, his voice nearly gone.

It had been so nice while it lasted. Ilya should've known that his destiny in this matter always stopped at playing house. He never had a home, not really. So he guessed he'd only ever been allowed a pretend version, a mirage of what he wanted, close enough to hurt when it vanished.

It had been so *nice*, but this was real life.

He decided to take his father's advice for once.

Listen. Don't speak.

—

Ilya didn't even have twenty four hours to process the fact that Hollander was dating Rose Landry.

Well, Hollander hadn't waited at all before jumping straight onto that ship.

Ilya felt like an idiot from the moment he saw the news. He should've known how little it meant. How easy it would be for him to move on. To leave just like that. To leave Ilya like that.

It must be easy for superstar Shane Hollander to forget small, menial things like Ilya, especially when it was clear he wasn't worth going through trouble for. Even if Ilya had been considering sacrificing his entire life for this, he should've known better. He should've known that kind of consideration would lead nowhere.

The entire day, he muttered '*idiot, idiot, idiot*' under his breath. All through practice. All through extra strength training. He weighed out all the protein he was supposed to eat, but it looked vile today. There was a whirlpool sitting at the pit of his stomach, churning and tight.

He couldn’t even finish the meal before his phone rang.

“Father, yes. What’s wrong?” Ilya picked up right away, swallowing his food too fast.

“Nothing. Nothing. I just talked to Svetlana’s dad and sealed the deal!” The gruff voice sounded surprisingly perky today.

“Uh… what deal?” Ilya frowned. “Is Alexei there?”

“Isn’t this great, son. I can now go in peace knowing you’re perfected. You’re set! The timing is convenient, and I saw your rival getting serious with that fancy celebrity… mmm, it’ll look good in comparison, no?”

“What are you talking about, father?” Ilya groaned. His Russian felt far away right now, like his brain was lagging behind his body.

“I’ll send you the invitation for you to invite whoever you’d like.”

Ilya felt the vibration against his cheek and checked his email.

Oh. This was real. This was getting really real.

“What the fuck?” Ilya shouted in English before switching back. “No. No. Why would you do this without talking to me? Don’t I get a choice in *at least* who I marry?”

“Since when did you have choices?” A cruel laugh. “You don’t get choices. You go where I tell you. I tell you how hard to work to get your lazy ass to where you needed to be—”

His father’s voice was rising. Ilya knew he should consider that his father had a weak heart, but right now he didn’t care.

“I got to where I am because of *me*! I worked hard! I did my very best even when I had nothing left to give,” Ilya shouted back. “I did it for mom, not you.”

“This is why…” His father’s voice came sharpened, edged with knives. “This is why you’ll never beat that Shane Hollander. This is why you’ll always be weak.”

“*Really*?” Ilya wanted to hurl the knives straight back. “Because you and Alexei could at least send me halfway across the world to avoid looking into mom’s eyes, but I don’t get that luxury. I have to see it every time I look in the mirror. I’d say that makes *you* the coward.”

“I’m releasing the news to the team and the world by the end of the week. Just know it’s happening.” His father pretended the knives thrown back hadn’t landed. “Eat more. You look like you’re in worse condition than last week.”

“Yes. It’s your favorite strategy, isn’t it? Listen. Don’t speak. Attack. Don’t hide.” Ilya nodded to no one, dropping his fork and pushing the plate away. “The Rozanov classic.”

“Weakness is genetic, and that sure doesn’t come from me, son,” his father sneered.

“Mother was strong enough to escape you,” Ilya said quietly. “She’s stronger than me and you.”

He hung up and stared off into space. He dragged his hands through his hair, gripping hard, groaning out loud like he could physically shake himself free of this reality. There was no one left to blame. Blaming some nameless God for giving him the parents he had would do nothing. Blaming Hollander for leaving wouldn’t make Rose Landry suddenly drop dead.

Ilya had no one to blame but himself.

Back in his hotel room, he summoned his teammates to go out. He couldn’t stand sitting still, waiting for his feelings to infiltrate his mind with the one thing he didn’t want to think about. Looking for refuge anywhere else, he ordered drinks and found someone starkly opposite of what his body actually wanted. A blonde woman whose name he didn’t want to know, just in case it sounded even remotely like his.

He didn’t want to think. He didn’t want to feel. He just wanted to get lost in the music, in the dark, in the sweat of the night. He wanted to dig the hole deeper than six feet so he wouldn’t have to remember what light, what joy felt like. This was his future. Nameless women. Transactional relationships.

Ilya knocked back another high shelf vodka and turned to find the girl again.

Instead, he found Shane Hollander frozen on the dance floor.

Staring.

Ilya kept his face cold, unreadable, but his eyes winced and his breathing picked up when he saw Rose *fucking* Landry there with him again. Despite her dancing around him, Shane stood stiff, unmoving. Still staring.

You left me. Don’t look surprised.

Ilya found the woman again, dancing close, letting him watch her. In the corner of his eye, he saw Shane flinch when Ilya’s lips brushed her ear.

Good. This should hurt. Be hurt.

His hips pressed against hers as they ground together, but his mind stayed glued to Shane’s frozen gaze as it dragged down his body.

Fuck you, Shane Hollander.

Fuck you for making me fall in love with you…

…and for pretending you don’t love me either.

Ilya went home alone, earbuds shoved in his ears. In a taxi, without his teammates, he blasted Zemfira until he reached the hotel.

And in the shower, he leaned forward against the glass and touched himself, his head full of the one person he couldn't have.

—

"Are you sure about going through with this?" Svetlana sat on the couch beside him. "I can still convince my dad to back off if I want to."

"No. It's fine. If it makes the parents shut up, I'll take it." Ilya hadn't slept more than three hours at a time. Exhausted didn't even begin to cover it.

"What about… Jane?" She glanced over at him nervously.

"She's busy now." Ilya looked away, irritation still simmering under his skin. "Too busy for me. Don't worry. She won't miss me."

"At least try to look like you don't want to go on a murder rampage while you say that," Svetlana tried again. "I'm sure Jane would have something to say when he sees the wedding invite."

The '*he*' didn't go unnoticed. Ilya had always despised her for being smarter than him.

"Jane won't mind a bit." He turned away from her and lingered on the edge of the couch for a moment. "This is exactly what *Jane* wanted."

"Okay, I still have enough integrity not to get married just so you can spite someone," Svetlana rolled her eyes. "I know this is for appearances and a passport, but I'm still a human being."

"Please? Can we just do this?" Ilya covered his eyes and squeezed his temples. "It's not spite. I want to stay here. I just want to be normal here."

"Sure," she nodded, clearly taken aback by his tone, but Ilya was already at the end of his rope.

"Thank you," Ilya muttered quietly.

She knew better than to sleep in the same bed with him, at least not tonight. Ilya scrolled through the invite list on his phone and stared at Shane Hollander (+1 allowed) until the letters blurred together. He wanted to disappear at the thought of meeting Shane's eyes while standing at the end of that altar. When the flowers fell around him and the rice showered

down, Ilya would be holding Svetlana's hand, but his eyes would be locked on Shane's beautiful face.

Shane would be fine. Happy for him. Smiling.

The thought made his chest tighten as he curled into his blankets. A wave of nausea hit him, and a ripple of pain settled in his chest, threatening to migrate into every limb if he didn't contain it.

If he took even a second break from bottling everything up and holding himself together, it would spread like an infection. It would eat him alive until he'd have to amputate everything that mattered, leaving nothing but his brain behind.

So Ilya pretended. As best as he could.

The next day, it only took one teammate cracking open a ginger ale for him to loosen his grip on his own bottle. Another wobble came when he saw someone wearing a Hollander jersey on the street. A picture of Hollander kissing Landry nearly broke him until he bit down on his tongue hard enough to hurt.

The wedding invitations were going out tonight.

Ilya tried not to think about it, but it was happening any minute now. He wanted shut off his phone so he couldn't confront Hollander, just so he wouldn't have to hear a yes or a no and get that final confirmation of how he would react.

Only minutes passed before Ilya got an email back.

Yes. He answered *yes*.

Ilya lit the lighter with a shaky hand, forcing himself to process the fact that he was going to have to see him on the very day that killed any remaining chance of them. He was willing to stand there and watch it all melt away like a candle in a house fire.

Leaning over the balcony, he wanted to scream into the Boston night. Instead, he took another puff and let it burn. Letting the cold air press against his overheated body, Ilya stared into the darkness and wondered where Shane might be right now. What he might be doing. What possible reason he could have had for answering yes. What kind of sadist could hold someone else's hand while his heart was already thousands of miles away, with him.

Ilya tried to numb whatever he was feeling. He tried to deny that he loved him. He tried to hate him, to find something, anything, to despise, only to come up empty. He tried to convince himself that he loved Svetlana. He tried to pretend this wasn't agony, that it wasn't torture carved straight into his soul.

Hours must've passed, because he didn't even realize he was calling Shane until the ringing started.

He pulled away sharply, startled by what he was doing. But it was already dialed. It was late, and Shane might not answer, but maybe Ilya would get to hear his voice on the voicemail at the end.

It connected.

"Hollander?" Ilya tried when all he heard at first was shuffling.

"Hi." Shane cleared his throat, but he sounded stuffy. Wrong. "Yes. Hi."

Something wasn't right, and it made Ilya's fist tighten. Shane sniffled, but his tone was too bright, too polished. Like an interview voice.

Ilya tried to figure out what the problem was. It couldn't be the invitation. He'd already said yes.

"Yes! I'm fine." Nothing about him sounded fine. His voice cracked in the middle of the word, wavered despite the effort. "Why did you call?"

Because I love you.

Instead, Ilya scrambled for a stupid excuse. He even tried to laugh, but it came out dry and hollow. There was more shuffling on Shane's end. He already sounded like he was putting the happy front back up, and then he started sniffling again.

Part of Ilya wished Hollander would keep the front up until the end. Because right now, Ilya was starting to think that maybe he loved him back. The seed of hope was so dangerous he didn't know what to do with it.

"I'm drunk."

It came out like both a confession and an explanation for the less than composed Shane Hollander. Not the perfect version Ilya was used to.

Ilya remembered the strict diet, the rules around alcohol but the "I know" that followed was clipped, tight. It told Ilya everything he needed to know about why Shane was drunk. Why he was crying.

Because of me.

He apologized, and Ilya decided to put his spikes back up and make it Shane's fault. It was his fault. Ilya spat the blame back at him, knowing it wouldn't fix anything and would only hurt him, just to crush that seedling of hope before it had the chance to take root. Before it could threaten to bloom.

"That's what I have. A girlfriend. *Mhm*."

So… he wasn't with Landry anymore? Ilya couldn't fully tell.

Then came the guillotine.

"You and I are just… rivals again."

Really, Ilya was mostly worried Shane might choke on his own vomit. Even though he hated it, he forced himself to say Rose's name. Maybe she was there. Maybe she could take care of him.

Another lie followed, and fuck his feelings right now. He didn't want Shane to be alone when he was this drunk. And hurting.

"I'll be fine without you."

Please. Don't need me. I'm the last thing you need.

"I'll beat you in every game."

Take every cup. Every medal.

"I'll be happy without you."

That's… okay. Be happy with someone else and I'll take all your ache.

"I'll be normal without you because I don't love you. I absolutely do not love you. So this doesn't affect me at all."

Good. Love anyone else but me. Don't love me. Lie to yourself until it's true.

Ilya's tears fell like byproducts of his regrets, his fears, his cowardice. Shane drifted into a quiet lull, his breathing rising and falling steadily. Pressing the phone closer to his ear, he caught every sound to plant them into the hollow space in his chest where his heart felt carved out.

There were no words left to say as the tether between them thinned. Shane might no longer be with Rose Landry, but Ilya was still engaged, with no way out unless he defected from his family entirely. This was better, and Shane was right about that. It was easier for everyone. Safer for everyone. This was what they'd learned best from their parents. If ignored long enough, it didn't exist.

Ilya thought Shane had fallen asleep, and he took those quiet moments as a sign, or maybe a mercy, to savor it one last time. This would be their first and last phone call, and Ilya had to take every second he could steal.

Then Shane started speaking again.

Like he was alone. Like he'd forgotten all about the call, still connected, still tethered to Ilya.

"널… 어떻게 사랑하지 않겠니?" *How could I... not love you?*

Ilya startled. He hadn't known Shane spoke another language besides French. Of course he did. He really was Mr. Perfect.

"잔인하잖아." *You're cruel.* Shane let out a bitter chuckle. "난 널 사랑하는데 넌… 결혼하니, 난 여기서 썩을 수밖에." *I love you, but you… are getting married, so I have no choice but to rot here.*

Ilya didn't need to understand the words to know what they meant. He felt them seep into his skin anyway, letting the hurt in Shane's voice reach straight through him. Shane let out another choked sob, coughing lightly afterward.

"우리 절대 안 되겠지?" *We'll never work, right?*

"그래서 너도 나 보호하려고 이러는 거겠지?" *So this is you trying to protect me, right?*

"그렇다고 얘기해줘." *Tell me that's what it is.*

"거짓말해줘." *Lie to me.*

"날 사랑하지만, 우린 그냥 안 되는 거라고 해줘." *Tell me you love me, but we just can't be together.*

"아니면, 나 죽을 것 같아." *Otherwise, I feel like I'm going to die.*

Another whine slipped out of Shane, and he sounded pained, raw.

"그냥 내가 이래서가 아니라, 다른 사람들 때문에 안 된다고 해줘." *Tell me it's not because of me, but because of other people.*

"결혼은 사랑이 아니라, 다른 사람들 때문에 하는 거라고." *That your marriage isn't about love, but about everyone else.*

"내가 아니라." *Not me.*

His breathing picked up again before slowly settling.

"여기가…" *Here…*

A heavy thump echoed through the phone.

"아프다." *It hurts.*

"왜 여기가 불탄 것처럼 아플까?" *Why does it feel like it's burning here?*

There was a long pause. Then, within minutes, a soft snore filled the line.

Ilya stayed on for ten more minutes, just to listen to him breathe, just to let the words hurt him exactly as they were meant to. Only then did he hang up.

—

Ilya spent the next week moving through a thick fog.

He'd already caught his coach's attention, as well as the rest of the team's, as he slumped through practice. Ilya was giving it everything he had, but none of the goals landed. The team watched him with open concern, as they should have. The bags under his eyes looked worse by the day, and his attitude had worn thin.

Nothing worked. Sleeping only gave him dreams. Good dreams. Dreams of waking up next to Shane. Dreams of standing at the altar with his mom sitting right up front and Shane beaming at him from across the aisle.

He stayed awake instead, afraid of getting them again.

When Ilya got confirmation that Shane and Rose had broken up, it only made things worse. Knowing Shane was probably just as miserable as he'd sounded on the phone—alone—maybe even more alone than Ilya felt right now, twisted something deep in his chest. His skin prickled at any human touch, making him recoil. None of it felt right. None of it felt warm enough the way Shane had.

He wished Shane was fine, the way he'd promised he would be.

Opening Spotify on his laptop, he played his usual playlist and froze when he saw @Hollander24 at the top of his activity list.

Zemfira – Wait for Me.

Ilya texted him immediately, wondering what he could possibly be doing listening to Zemfira at two in the afternoon on a Thursday. He imagined Shane wandering around his place with the music blasting, not even knowing the lyrics.

Wait for me, I will leave the room someday.
Wait for me, I will come this autumn, it seems.
Wait for me, everyone there is praying for me, squinting their eyes shut.
How not to burn out, how not to hurt them.

Ilya imagined him absorbing the song the same way Ilya had absorbed Shane's soft murmurs of Korean.

After sending a few tentative follow-up texts to Shane, which were answered with a colder wind than he'd expected, Ilya opened Google and searched for common Korean words. Immediately, 사랑 appeared. Love.

"Sarang," Ilya tested it on his tongue, trying to shape it the way Shane had, even though Shane had been drunk. He listened to a flat, monotone recording instead and tried again. "Sarang. Sarang hae."

He practiced to no one, to the empty air. Then the thought hit him. Shane could have been the one to teach him this word.

Ilya stopped. He shut the laptop and stepped away, deciding he'd never try again.

—

Before Ilya left Miami, he caught Shane by the elbow and pulled him into a nearby supplies closet in the hotel.

"Wha—" Shane yelped, but Ilya slapped a hand over his mouth.

"Be cool. Jesus," Ilya whispered, quickly locking the door behind them.

"My flight's soon," Shane giggled, but he still let Ilya hold him and press kisses into his neck. "I'll see you in two weeks."

"It's going to be the longest two weeks." Ilya kissed up his neck, savoring the feeling that Shane was all his now—free to love and to tease with his mouth. "I'm going to miss you too much."

He crashed their mouths together, pushing Shane gently toward the shelves, but kept his head careful to protect him from the sharp metal edges. His hands tangled in Shane's shirt, gripping him to memorize every inch, every moment.

"Don't be miserable—or dead—without me, please," Shane panted softly into his ear, biting back a moan as Ilya's knees pressed between his legs.

"I'll try my best." Ilya pulled back slightly, cupping Shane's chin to imprint the warmth and flush of his love into memory. "Sarang-heh."

He said it softly, deliberately, like he'd practiced. Like he remembered from their phone call. This time, it was drenched in love, not the weight of resentment.

Shane blinked, startled, and then smiled wide like he might die if Ilya said it again.

So Ilya said it again.

It must have been perfect, because Shane crashed into him, pulling him in for several seconds more.

“God, I love you so much,” Shane chuckled, pressing a deeper kiss to his lips. Pulling back, he whispered, “Lyublyu tebya,” just like Ilya had taught him during their short stay here.

Ilya promised himself that they would come back here for the honeymoon they were destined to have. If not destiny, then he would make it happen. If everyone they’d ever known tried to stand in their way, he would carve a road for them to push through.

Mustering every ounce of courage he had, Ilya pulled back and let Shane go. On his way out, he opened the door and nearly crashed into a startled cleaning lady. She promptly pointed to the front desk and informed him this was not a hotel room.

Nodding and awkwardly smiling, he dragged his suitcase out, pulling his phone from his pocket, already thinking about Shane.

J (If I get a negative review, I’m killing you.)

(Oh no. Not your 5 star ratings!) L

J (Still an asshole.)

(You chose to love this asshole.) L

(It is literally not my problem.) L

(Your problem now.) L

(😈) L

J (sigh)

J (I guess you’re right)

J (This uber driver is definitely mad at me)

(Shane. Nobody is mad at you) L

(You’re just being anxious) L

(Just think about what you want

to do when I go to the cottage) L

J (It’s going to be winter)

J (So… fuck. Sleep. Eat. Fuck again.)

J (How’s that?)

(Yep. Sounds perfect.) L

(Should I bring my special bag?) L

J (I’m scared.)

(In a good way?) L

J (maybe)

J (?)

(I’ll bring everything.) L

Chapter End Notes

Zemfira - жди меня (wait for me) 🔪

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