

Be Simple With Me

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Be Simple With Me

by [distira](#)

Summary

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Shane puts his phone down and blinks a few times. He picks it up and checks the display again. The notification is still there.

He hasn't gotten a Snap from Ilya since the end of the season back in April, after they crashed out of the Frozen Four without making it to the final. Shane saw him a few times after that, at team meetings and at the annual sports awards dinner, but he's pretty sure Ilya left campus before the end of the semester. Shane wasn't expecting anything from him until the fall, when he's back at school.

He rubs his eyes and rolls onto his side, swiping the app open. It's a video.

or, the boys are in college, featuring self discovery, russian diminutives, and (to Ilya's chagrin) the Scott Hunter of it all.

Notes

folks, i don't even go here. i haven't written fic or properly been in any fandom in over a decade, but i watched the show, these boys reeled me right in, and this sprang more or less fully formed into my head. so...hello, new fandom, have a college au?

with undying gratitude to [lilah80](#) for helping me shake the dust off and come out of retirement, and also for clarifying some things about diminutives that Dostoevsky didn't get through my head. title is from Feist.

set nebulously in the early 2010s, when our idiot boys would've been playing college hockey if they had gone that route, school unspecified and unimportant.

Chapter 1: SUMMER

Shane wakes up tired. His traps are sore, and he spends a moment lying in bed with his eyes closed, experimentally rolling his shoulders back and forth, trying to remember what kind of workout is on the books for today and hoping it's legs, not arms. He squeezes his eyes tightly before he opens them and gropes around for his phone to check the time.

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He rubs his eyes and rolls onto his side, swiping the app open. It's a video.

Ilya's face fills the screen of his phone, an extreme closeup such that the rest of his body isn't visible in the frame. His eyes are half closed, looking at the camera through his lashes and blinking slowly, but Shane's eyes are drawn to his lips, which are slightly parted and twitching. There's a rustling sound in the background and Ilya bites down on his lower lip. Shane almost drops his phone, because he and Ilya aren't *friends*, but he knows Ilya in one very specific capacity: he knows that's the face Ilya makes when he's getting head, and heat flashes through Shane's body. He's turned on and annoyed at the same time, and he lets the video play out the full ten seconds before dropping his phone on the bed and rolling onto his back.

He lies there for a second, trying to wrap his mind around Ilya sending him a video of his face while he gets a blowjob, and eventually he slides his hand into his shorts and pulls out his cock, jerking off to the memory of Ilya's lips twitching and mostly hating himself for it.

Shane cleans his hand with a tissue when he's done and pulls out his phone again. He opens Snapchat to take a picture of himself to send back to Ilya but he waffles over how to frame it. Does he want Ilya to know he's in bed? Should he play unaffected? He takes a few, can't decide what to caption anything, and deletes them all, swipes out of the app.

The cashier doesn't even look up as Shane swipes his student ID through the register. Shane's seen her around campus a few times but doesn't know her name - he's pretty sure she's not an athlete. Or maybe she plays a spring sport, lacrosse or something. Shane definitely knows all the winter sport athletes and at least recognizes most of the fall season athletes, since they're

all in the gym at the same time, but he's not usually around much after the Frozen Four wraps so he has a much looser handle on who the spring athletes are. He reels his ID back in on its lanyard and loops the cloth around his wrist a few times. The card dangles and knocks gently against the plastic of the red cafeteria tray as he picks it up.

Turning around to face the dining hall, he sighs. Most of his teammates are gone for the summer, and most of his friends are his teammates. The football team is eating en masse in the middle of the room. Shane kind of knows a few of them, but doesn't want to intrude on a team meal. There's a cluster of soccer players taking up the big table by the windows, and a few cross country runners have room at their table, but Shane doesn't really know either group and the thought of making small talk with strangers makes him a little itchy. Sitting alone it is, then, he thinks, and sets off for an empty table behind the soccer players.

"Hollander!"

Shane nearly drops his tray. His brain, without permission, pulls up this morning's Snapchat, Ilya's lip twitching. He blinks hard and shakes his head, sure he's hallucinated, but when he opens his eyes, Ilya's lips are right in front of him.

So is the rest of Ilya, somehow, his curls messy and his arms bulging out of a grey team shirt he's cut the sleeves off of. Shane's eyes drift lower and snap back up comically quickly when he catches sight of Ilya's thighs in the almost obscenely short running shorts he's sporting.

"What the fuck," he hisses, and Ilya cocks his head slightly, raising an eyebrow.

"I am not allowed to say my teammate's name?" Ilya says, wry. "Might be problem, during practice, in games. Might draw attention if I have to say 'pretty boy with freckles' all the time, no?"

"You're drawing attention right now!" Shane shoots at him, trying and failing to ignore his stomach doing back flips over Ilya calling him pretty. "I didn't even know you were here."

"I am here," Ilya confirms. "Nothing to draw attention to. You are here, I am here, we eat together. This is normal teammate behavior, Hollander, not sure if you realize."

He moves off towards an empty table, partway across the room from the soccer players, and Shane follows him on autopilot.

"Why *are* you here?" he asks once they sit, picking up his fork and poking at the grilled chicken breast on his plate. "I thought you were in Russia for the summer."

"Hmm, same as you, probably," Ilya says, diving into his plate of pasta with happy abandon. "Work out, get more muscle. Use ice time. Take class."

Shane snorts. "You're a Slavic studies major and you're Russian, you don't need to take summer classes."

"Summer class is not for being stupid," Ilya snaps. "Is only offered winter and summer, but we will travel too much in winter. And then, we graduate, maybe draft happens, no more

school. So, this is only chance.”

Shane can't stop the disbelief from creeping into his voice. “You're going for the draft this year?” Ilya is good at hockey. Really good, even - Shane knows there are pretty credible rumors about him turning down a pro contract in Europe to come to North America and play college hockey, but it's never really made sense to Shane. If he wanted to get into the league, why not play a season or two in the pros overseas and then come?

Ilya looks up from his pasta, finally, and catches Shane's eye for the first time since they sat down. Shane has to stop himself from fidgeting under the intensity of it. Ilya looks like he's choosing his words carefully. “Student visa is not forever,” he says finally. He doesn't look away for a long moment.

“I know,” Shane says, trying to break the tension. “Canadian, remember?”

“Yes, of course, how could I forget,” Ilya rolls his eyes. “I know you are boring Canadian.”

“Why didn't you tell me you would be here this summer?” Shane asks, finally picking up his knife and starting to cut his chicken.

“I did,” Ilya says, and his voice is much lighter now. Shane frowns, tilts his head. “I know you saw Snap last night.”

“This morning,” Shane corrects automatically, and then feels his cheeks flush.

“Okay, this morning,” Ilya agrees easily.

“You didn't tell me anything,” Shane argues, willing his brain to stop replaying the image of Ilya biting his lip. Unfortunately, real-life Ilya is right in front of him, and now he's smirking and Shane is so, so fucked.

“I thought message is clear,” Ilya shrugs. He's still smirking.

“What the fuck message?”

“Well, yes,” Ilya says, and his lips twitch. Shane knows because he can't stop looking at them. Ilya is smiling for real now. “Exactly.”

“That's not what I— You know that's not what I meant,” Shane groans.

“Are you sure?” Ilya says, teasing, and tucks back into his pasta.

They've been hooking up since freshman year.

Nobody knows, or at least, Shane's pretty sure nobody knows. It's possible Ryan Price, another Canadian in their year, might have caught them during international student orientation their first week on campus, unwisely making out in the locker room like idiots, riding the high of being away from home for the first time and having the rink almost entirely

to themselves, but if he did, he's never said anything. Shane thinks about that moment sometimes, when Ilya gets a little too close to him in public, remembers springing away from Ilya at the sharp, sudden sound of a door closing, his cock half hard and his t-shirt shoved up over his pec where Ilya had been groping at him. He remembers the flood of fear that surged through his body, remembers looking up at Ilya to see his eyes darting around the room like a cornered animal.

"Is okay, I think," Ilya had breathed, his English much slower back then than it is now. "Nobody here."

"This is such a bad idea," Shane had told him. "We shouldn't be doing this." He'd meant to leave it at that, he really had, but then he'd looked back over at Ilya, his curls flopping boyishly onto his forehead, his lips shiny from Shane biting them, and felt a powerful desire to lick every single one of Ilya's many moles. "Not here."

"Not here," Ilya echoed. "Sure. Which is your dorm?"

Shane had taken some pains, after that, to make sure they weren't clocked. He hadn't wanted to fuck up team dynamics, he had told himself, studiously keeping his distance from Ilya once the rest of the guys arrived for the semester, even avoiding him at parties in favor of texting him as he was leaving to see whose room they would meet at in secret. Ilya had played along, and Shane had thought they were in the clear until Coach pulled him into the office before their first preseason scrimmage.

"I'm going to try you on a line with Rozanov this week," Coach had said, not looking up from his iPad. "Is that going to be a problem or are you gonna be able to handle it?"

"Why would it be a problem?" Shane had asked, his heart rate spiking.

"Because as far as I can tell, the two of you haven't spoken a word to each other since arriving on this team," Coach had told him. "I don't give a shit if you're friends or not, but I need to know you won't let it affect you on the ice."

Shane had almost laughed.

Coach had scrapped them on a line together after a few practice scrimmages – Shane's fault, he's pretty sure, he didn't adjust quickly enough to moving to the wing. Shane centers the second line now, Ilya the top. They keep their lockers on opposite sides of the room from each other and if some of the team thinks Shane avoiding Ilya outside of the rink is due to some sort of one-sided rivalry for the top line spot, Shane lets them.

Shane shoves his laptop into his bag and stands up, popping one of his hips as he does. He's only taking one summer class, an upper level Econ elective he wants to get out of the way before training starts. Summer term is his favorite in a lot of ways - he misses having the whole team around, and misses practice, of course, but he likes not having to factor in the travel schedule and he likes being able to put in real time in the weight room, building instead of maintaining.

He loves having the gym more or less to himself, if he goes when the fall teams are in practice sessions, so he heads out of the Econ building with the notion to head to north campus and get his lifting session in. He pulls out his phone to see if he has time to drop his bag off at his apartment before the soccer team would take over the weight room, only to see —

It's embarrassing, really, that the Snapchat icon and Ilya's name has him automatically blushing. They hadn't talked after leaving lunch yesterday, and Shane flashes back again to the close up of Ilya's face, his teeth sinking into his lower lip. He opens his phone.

come work out w me is the caption over a picture of Ilya definitely not in the gym — he's sprawled out on a twin bed, wearing the same cutoff t-shirt as yesterday. One arm is over his face, the other is extended to hold the phone, and there's a book open over Ilya's chest, obscuring the school logo. The title is in cyrillic, obscured by a glare catching the glossy library cover. Shane presses his thumb to the screen to freeze the photo without thinking, staring at how Ilya's cheek is smashed against his own bicep, then at the exposed hollow of his armpit.

Doesn't look like the gym, he shoots back over a picture of himself sticking his tongue out. He doesn't look at it for too long before sending it — he knows he's a little sweaty from walking outside, a light flush under his freckles, his hair mussed from running his hands through it during class, but there's nothing he can do to fix it now.

exactly!! can do cardio ;) is Ilya's almost-immediate reply. He's in largely the same pose but he's moved his arm to rest over his head now, his now-visible face winking at the camera. The chat notification pops up and Shane swipes over immediately. *east 221*.

"Why are you in a dorm and not your apartment?" Shane asks when Ilya opens the door of East 221. It's a single, with the standard-issue dorm furniture artlessly arranged, a mini fridge humming quietly in one corner. Ilya's laptop and the book from the photo earlier are on the desk, and there's just a light blue topsheet over the bed, no duvet. There's nothing on the walls.

"My lease is only nine months," Ilya says, closing the door behind Shane, who toes off his shoes and puts his bag down on the floor. "I never sign for whole year. They put me here when I register for summer class, I will move back to apartment in September."

Huh, Shane thinks. So Ilya being here for the summer was a last minute call. He turns around to ask Ilya about it, to call him out for lying yesterday at lunch — or, not lying really, but evading — but Ilya is suddenly so close to him, crowding him against the wall. The question flies out of Shane's head. The corner of Ilya's mouth quirks and one of his hands comes up to cup Shane's face. His thumb swipes over Shane's cheek and Shane lets out a shuddery breath.

Ilya takes it for an invitation, and maybe it is one, Shane doesn't know and can't figure it out because Ilya's lips are on his and Ilya's hand is on his jaw now, Ilya's chest is pressing against him, pushing him against the wall. Shane feels a thrill in his spine as Ilya scrapes his teeth lightly over Shane's lower lip, then chases his teeth with his tongue. Shane parts his lips

for him, arching off of the wall as best he can to get more contact, to feel Ilya in any way he can. Ilya loves kissing more than anyone else Shane's been with - not that that's a huge sample size, but. He's good at it too, takes his time with it, and it always seems to rev him up as much as it does Shane.

He feels more than hears the low rumble in Ilya's throat and it rocks through him. He should be embarrassed, he thinks distantly, that he's getting hard, all the way hard, from Ilya Rozanov kissing him in a single dorm room for all of a minute. They've barely gotten into it and Shane is already uncomfortable in his jeans, like he's still a teenager or something.

But Ilya pulls back from the kiss only to lick Shane's cheek and turn Shane's head, biting lightly on Shane's earlobe and then blowing air over it, and Shane doesn't give a shit. He is too turned on to be embarrassed, he's been thinking about this since Ilya sent him that stupid Snapchat. He pushes his hips pointedly against Ilya's thigh, which has slotted in between his legs, and lets himself feel a little wild with it as Ilya raises his leg just enough for Shane to grind against.

He tilts his head and Ilya follows, giving Shane's earlobe a final swipe with his tongue before moving down Shane's neck, nipping a little but mostly licking, not leaving any marks. Shane starts on the button of his own fly, forcing a little distance between them, and Ilya pulls back to look at him, pupils blown. Shane doesn't even have his zipper down but he feels naked with how Ilya is looking at him and it's making him squirm, uncomfortable. He reaches for Ilya's wrist and takes it, raises Ilya's hand up over his own head so Ilya is again pressing him into the wall, then he ducks down and buries his face in Ilya's armpit.

His eyes slide shut and he feels Ilya's other hand come to the back of his neck, fingers tangling in the hair Shane's been meaning to get trimmed. Shane opens his mouth and licks, feels Ilya's coarse armpit hair against his tongue and also the soft skin underneath, the tang of his sweat and the chemical taste of his deodorant. It's disgusting but it's also so, so hot. Shane pushes his face further into the hollow and Ilya cups the back of his head, lets out a quiet moan.

"So easy for me, Hollander," Ilya rumbles, and Shane nods into Ilya's armpit before releasing Ilya's wrist and pushing at his shoulder, making just enough space between them for Shane to slide down against the wall to his knees. He hooks his fingers into the waistband of Ilya's workout shorts - a safe-for-work length today, inexplicably - and slides them down as far as he can before Ilya takes over and steps out of them, kicking them behind himself towards the door. "Ah," Ilya breathes. Shane licks over his cockhead and feels his stomach flip at the bitter burst of pre that hits his tongue.

He's too far gone to tease much, he needs more - he holds up one hand as he closes his lips over Ilya's head and Ilya leans down slightly, licks up Shane's palm, wet and lewd. Shane brings his hand down to wrap around the base of Ilya's cock and pushes his head forward eagerly, until his lips meet his own knuckle. "Ah, ah," Ilya grunts again, and Shane hollows his cheeks.

Ilya's hips are twitching and Shane doesn't try to stop him, just runs his free hand up Ilya's thigh and around to knead at his ass. Ilya's noises are constant now, quiet, like he's trying to control himself, and Shane wants - Shane wants -

Shane drops his hand from Ilya's ass to his own lap, finally tugs his zipper the rest of the way down and gets his hand inside his own pants. He hears Ilya's sharp inhale and twists his tongue on the underside of Ilya's cock the way he knows Ilya likes. Ilya's stretched over him, his one hand still against the wall, and the other comes to touch Shane's cheek as Shane works his jaw.

It's over fast after that – Shane looks up at Ilya who is panting and nodding at him and then moves his hand from the base of Ilya's cock to his hip, pulling him in a little deeper. Ilya swears and Shane gets his hand on Ilya's balls, feels them tighten and shoves himself forward, as far as he can get Ilya into his mouth without gagging, not quite able to get his nose against Ilya's stomach. Ilya comes like that, bending forward as his abs contract and letting his forehead thunk against the wall as he spills into Shane's mouth.

"Fuck," Ilya mumbles as Shane pulls off. Shane swallows, because he sure as hell isn't going into the communal bathroom to spit, and moves to sit, his back against the wall. He licks his lips and gingerly takes his hand out of his own pants. "Let me – I will get you – one second," Ilya says from above him.

"Uh," Shane says. "You don't need –" He leans his head against the wall and wills the blush to go down from his cheeks.

"Of course I need," Ilya argues, gathering himself and turning to slide down the wall, sitting next to Shane. He's still wearing his stupid cut-off shirt. Shane turns his hand over and without looking at him, shows Ilya his palm, streaked with cum.

"You don't," Shane says. He's coming down, but not enough to be truly embarrassed yet. "I already, uh. Did."

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya breathes. "Fuck."

"Sorry," Shane says. "Sorry, it's just - been a while, and-"

"No sorry," Ilya cuts him off. "That is hot. Stupid hot."

"Yeah?" Shane asks, risking looking at Ilya. Ilya nods immediately.

"So hot," he confirms. Shane waits for him to follow it up with a joke or a dig but he doesn't, just nods again. "So hot."

"Okay," Shane says, and feels the knot he hadn't realized was in his chest loosen.

Shane gets on the ice over the weekend.

The facilities all have weird hours over the summer, but Shane doesn't care because almost nobody is here to use the rink, so he has his pick of the open times. He laces up without full pads and grabs a bag of pucks. His stick is newly taped, his gloves are perfectly broken in, the ice is fresh. He feels giddy, like a kid, as he pulls one of the goals out and gets it set up. He forgoes the other and takes a few lengths of the rink.

Shane is fast. In another life, he could have been a speed skater, his mom always jokes. Shane likes the sound of his blades in the ice, likes to see how perfectly rhythmic he can make it. He likes the repetition of digging in, pushing off, gliding. It frustrates him, sometimes, having to interrupt himself to change direction when a play doesn't go as planned, but he's gotten a lot better since he was a kid at not letting that throw him off of his game.

Speed isn't enough to be a good hockey player, of course. Shane is a good hockey player, but he's not in major juniors, he's not in the Team Canada dev system. He's a second line center on a good D1 team. He's not getting-drafted-out-of-college good.

He's mostly accepted that. He'd had stars in his eyes, a little bit, when he first arrived, knowing some of the older guys on the team had been drafted. But Shane knows hockey, it's maybe the only thing that he really, really knows – and he knows there's a bit of a distance between him and the guys who were getting drafted. The guys like Ilya. It's not a huge gulf, but it's there. Shane's mostly made his peace with it. He works as hard as he can, and he gets to play the sport he loves at a level most people can't even imagine, and he loves his team. He wants to win a championship before it's all over, and he thinks they have a real shot at it this year.

But Shane is fast, faster than Ilya, even. And by himself, on the ice, with nothing to interrupt him, it feels like he's flying.

He doesn't know how long he's been out there. He's shooting, trying to hit the left post as many times as he can in a row, when he hears the clang of the locker room door closing and whirls around.

There's only one other person here it could be, so he's not surprised to see Ilya walking out to the rink. He's wearing black sweatpants and a hoodie, and he's carrying just his gloves and a stick. Shane watches him stop at the barrier and pull off his guards.

Ilya skates out to him and Shane marvels at the power in Ilya's strokes, even when he's being casual about it. There's a constant coil of energy in Ilya, like something is about to be unleashed at all times, that is dizzying to look at for too long. It's part of why he's so good, Shane thinks.

"No pucks?" He asks when Ilya stops next to him.

"I thought you might be here already, decided to take my chances," Ilya says. "I can join you?"

Shane takes a puck and makes an easy circle around Ilya. "If you can catch me," he challenges, and waits just long enough to see it sink in before he pushes off hard for the other end of the rink.

Ilya shoots after him, laughing. Shane wheels through the corner, weaves around the goal, loops back towards center ice, and Ilya is on his heels through it all. Shane laughs, pushes himself a little harder, creates some separation between them.

Suddenly, Ilya switches gears. Shane feels him back off and almost slows down in his confusion before he feels Ilya creating a line between them, matching his speed and maintaining their distance. They're working together now, and Ilya keeps them connected as Shane does another lap of the ice, Ilya always in the corner of his eye. Shane pulls back on his speed as he crosses the blue line and lets Ilya surge forward, feels the puck on his tape and lets it fly towards the empty space Ilya is about to take over. Ilya doesn't look at him, just keeps his eyes forward and takes the puck onto his own tape, using his momentum to get a bit of lag going before releasing the shot, which dings perfectly against the left post and clatters to the ice.

Ilya punches the air and turns to point at Shane, smiling. Shane can't help grinning back, drifting towards the goal.

"Why aren't we on a line?" Ilya asks when he gets close. He's leaning against his stick, letting it flex and rebound.

"We're both centers," Shane tells him. "Remember, freshman year, Coach tried moving me to wing, it was a disaster?"

Ilya scoffs. "You are much better now. Would be different. Besides, I could play wing."

"What?" Shane shakes his head. "Don't be crazy, you're our top line center, you can't change positions. Especially not if you're trying to get drafted this year, that'd be suicide."

"Not crazy," Ilya says. "Not if you pass to me like this always!"

"Oh my god, one pass with nobody else on the ice doesn't mean you should change positions," Shane laughs.

"Maybe, maybe not," Ilya says. "Maybe is not just one pass. We go again?" He takes his weight off of his stick and retrieves the puck from the crease to tap it towards Shane.

"Okay," Shane says. He flips the puck up, catches it on his blade, puts it back on the ice. Glances over at Ilya, who's looking at him expectantly. "Okay, let's go."

It's kind of beautiful, is the thing. It takes them a few weeks, but Shane gets a feel very quickly for how Ilya moves – he's known intellectually how Ilya moves on the ice, they've been teammates for years, but it's different, playing with someone like this instead of watching them. He can tell where Ilya wants the puck, he can feel how Ilya moves around him, letting him dictate the pace, trusting him to set Ilya up for the right move.

It feels like Shane's blown through the ceiling, the freedom with which he can skate around Ilya. They spend hours whirling around the rink together, lining up cones as their imaginary defensemen, eventually moving from free skating to trying out various iterations of their playbook.

“We have to try this with real defense,” Ilya says one morning, knocking his stick against a cone. They’re in full pads today, helmets and all, and Shane can’t stop staring at one of Ilya’s curls, trapped underneath his cage.

“Yeah? It might not go so well if these guys could move,” Shane jokes, tapping the cone with his skate.

“Don’t be stupid, Hollander,” Ilya says. There’s an edge in his voice Shane wasn’t expecting, that wasn’t there before.

“I’m not being stupid, playing against a person is totally different,” Shane says.

Something flits over Ilya’s face, frustration maybe, Shane can’t tell. Then it clears and Ilya’s brow lightens. “You are always stupid,” he says, the edge gone, his tone flippant. “But it is okay, I know truth. We will break all their ankles.”

“What class are you even taking?”

Ilya looks up, startled. Shane tucks his thumbs under the straps of his backpack and shifts back and forth, all of a sudden nervous. He’d seen Ilya from across the library and had approached him without really thinking about it. All their rink time together must be going to his head, he thinks. And their time in Ilya’s shitty single dorm, crammed into that comically small twin bed.

Although to be fair, they don’t usually really make it to the bed. Shane would be getting a little flushed thinking about it if it wasn’t for the anxiety spike currently surging through him.

Ilya answers, finally. “Is literature class,” he says, gesturing at the books around him. Two are open, two more are piled up. He’s got an honest to god notebook out, a page half full of cramped handwriting Shane is pretty sure isn’t in English, his laptop nowhere in sight. “Russian identity post-Soviet Union.” He clears his throat a little.

“Oh,” Shane says. He isn’t sure what he had been expecting, but it wasn’t that. “Cool? It sounds cool, I think. I don’t really know what it means.”

“It is cool,” Ilya says. His fingers twitch on his pencil. “I think. I was just, you know, kid, when Soviet Union fell. Is interesting, to see how people write about this time.” He pauses. “You want to sit?”

Shane lets out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding. “Sure,” he says, sliding his backpack off. He glances around the library. It’s mostly empty, a bored underclassman chewing gum at the circulation desk and someone with blue hair Shane’s never seen before shelving reference books in the stacks behind Ilya’s table. “I don’t want to bother you, though? I just came to print something out, I didn’t bring work.”

Ilya tugs on his own earlobe. “You aren’t bothering me, Shane Hollander,” he says. Shane’s stomach swoops at the low rumble of his full name in Ilya’s throat. He pulls out the chair

opposite Ilya.

“Will it bother you if I ask you another question?”

“Hmm. Depends on question,” Ilya says, raising an eyebrow. Shane sees the invitation to return to familiar territory, to make a joke or bring it back to hockey or even make a clumsy attempt at hitting on Ilya, but he’s genuinely curious, so he makes himself stay the course.

“Why come here to study post-Soviet Russian identity?” he asks. “Like, wouldn’t it be better to do that kind of work...in Russia?”

Ilya blinks a few times and presses his lips together. The muscles around his eyes tighten just the slightest bit and something complicated passes over his features before he relaxes his mouth. “You ask big questions, Hollander,” he says, finally. Shane watches him think for another minute. “Sometimes, you have to leave somewhere to understand it,” Ilya says. He’s looking at Shane now, not the books, and Shane feels all of a sudden like it’s extremely important for him to try and understand what Ilya is saying. “I cannot understand from inside, so I have to approach from outside. I have to...change perspective.”

“Oh,” Shane says. “That, uh. I think that makes sense.” He taps his fingers against the table quietly. “Like how you can’t really see what you’re really doing on the ice until you watch the game tape back.”

Ilya laughs, not unkindly, and shakes his head at Shane. “Maybe,” he offers. “Maybe like this. Or maybe not like hockey at all. I don’t know.”

Everything is like hockey, to Shane. He doesn’t really know how to articulate that to Ilya, but he also doesn’t want to break the moment, so he smiles a little, reaches into his bag to pull out his headphones, and listens to a replay of his last Econ lecture without paying attention to it while Ilya resumes scribbling down notes.

They end up in the library together kind of a lot, after that. Shane’s never really spent much time there, but it’s nice, going over after his class ends and seeing if Ilya is camped out at what Shane now knows to be his usual table. Shane zips through his problem sets and spends most of his time watching film from last season on his laptop, but Ilya keeps his nose in his books. He’s using material from this class as a major point in his thesis, Shane gathers. He takes his work way more seriously than Shane had realized.

He’s learning, over their time in the library and on the ice and at their little lunch table of two, that maybe just because he’s known for years exactly where the sensitive spot on Ilya’s neck is and that his moles are in fact spotted over his whole body, including one on his ass that Shane particularly likes, that he didn’t know Ilya all that well before this summer. Shane always thought Ilya was doing Slavic studies for an easy A, majoring in a language he already speaks to maximize time for hockey. Ilya doesn’t tell Shane much about whatever he’s reading, but watching him do it, watching him go back and re-read passages, annotating his own notes, sliding sticky notes onto pages in library books he wants to come back to – it’s clear that Ilya’s really into this. That it’s really important to him.

Shane's business classes aren't like that. He's good at them, but he's never felt compelled to go back over material once he's finished an assignment. Not like he goes back over game tape, rewinding, pausing, watching again in slow motion.

He wonders, absently, what Ilya has learned about him over the last month, if anything. He kind of thinks there's not much to learn. He likes hockey. He wants to do well and graduate, but doesn't really care about school. He's not sure what comes next for him, after hockey is over. Ilya already knew all of that. Ilya's probably bored, spending all of this time with him because they're the only two hockey players around.

"Always with your ginger ale," Ilya teases as Shane sits down.

"That's not true," Shane frowns.

"Chocolate milk after workout does not count," Ilya tells him, popping a fry into his mouth. Shane's own plate is loaded with salad, rice, and a chicken breast, but Ilya's got what looks like three hamburger patties stuffed into one bun and a large pile of fries on his. "Nutritionist tells you to do that."

"It's still good," Shane says, defensive. "What's wrong with ginger ale?"

"Nothing wrong. Your little indulgence, is all."

Ginger ale isn't really the indulgence here, Shane thinks, watching Ilya eat another fry and lick the salt off of his fingers.

The women's soccer team is loud, a few tables over from them. Shane can see a few swimmers coming through the swipe line, their hair wet, the same girl who's been working all summer running their cards. All the fall teams will be back on campus by the end of the week for their official preseasons, he's pretty sure. He usually likes the feeling of the energy shift at the end of the summer, before everyone is actually back but the anticipation of it almost thick enough to touch. This year, though, it feels a little more like anxiety than Shane is really willing to admit.

Across from him, Ilya's retelling a joke he overheard from a football player in the training room. Shane laughs even though the punch line goes straight through his brain without registering, completely overridden by something that feels like a countdown settling into his mind like a fog.

"We're gonna have to stop doing this soon," Shane says. The thought has been brewing ever since that afternoon in the dining hall, and Shane is starting to feel crazy about it, has to get it out of his head.

They're in Ilya's bed - actually crammed into the stupid thing for once. Shane's tucked against the wall wearing a pair of Ilya's boxers, his own forgotten near the desk, and Ilya is

naked, curled with his back to Shane's chest, one arm spilling over the edge of the mattress, idly playing with the lid of a carton of cigarettes that's half squashed on the floor. Shane's face is pressed into Ilya's curls, one of his hands behind his own head and the other caught kind of awkwardly under Ilya's torso, but not so awkwardly that Shane wants to move.

Ilya had fucked him this afternoon, after they skated. They'd had lunch together, too, before coming to Ilya's little, spartan room. They didn't even talk about it, Ilya just started walking towards his building from the dining hall and Shane followed, talking about something else entirely, he doesn't remember what. It's hard to remember anything that happened before Ilya sat down on the edge of the bed, shucked his shorts, and pulled Shane onto his lap.

"Like this," he had said, gripping Shane's ass as Shane rolled towards him, his cock pushing against the fabric of his own shorts as it filled out. He rubbed himself against Ilya's abs. "I want to fuck you like this."

"Yeah," Shane said. "Yeah, please, I wanna —"

It felt like Ilya was touching him *everywhere* as Shane rode him. His big hands were all over Shane's chest, on his face, on his ass, tugging at his hair, on his cock. And his hands were all over Shane afterwards, too, cleaning Shane's come off of them both with a few tissues and petting Shane's sides as he pulled out and tied off the condom. It made it so easy to flop onto the bed next to Ilya, to take the pair of boxers Ilya flung at him after he got up to throw away the condom and tissues.

It's impossible to not feel Ilya freeze from how they're pressed against each other. His arm stills, the muscles in his back go rigid. "What do you mean," he asks with no inflection, without rolling over.

"Just, uh," Shane says. "The rest of the team will be here in a few days. Everyone else, too. The semester starts soon."

"So, people come back and what, you don't want to fuck anymore?"

"No! No, not like that," Shane scrambles. "Like, uh. Just that we should go back to normal?"

Ilya rolls over, finally. Shane's arm is still trapped underneath him. "Normal."

"Like before. Like last season," Shane tries.

Ilya's mouth tightens, then he lets out a slow breath. "So we still fuck," he says. Shane isn't sure if it's a question.

"If you want, yeah," Shane says. "But we just shouldn't — the team will think it's weird, if we're suddenly friends, you know?" He scrubs his free hand over his face. "We were so close to winning last year. We shouldn't do anything to fuck with the team. We could really make it happen this year."

Ilya blinks at him.

“Okay, Hollander.” Ilya sits up, his back to Shane again. Shane’s previously trapped arm floods with pins and needles. He wishes he could still see Ilya’s face. “Okay.”

Chapter 2: FALL

“Hey, where’s your friend?”

Shane’s head snaps up. “What?”

The girl at the register holds her hand out for his ID card. He passes it over. “Your friend, you guys were eating together all summer!”

He hadn’t realized she’d noticed. So stupid, he thought. She worked pretty much every day, there’s no way she wouldn’t have seen them together so often.

“Uh,” he shrugs. “I’m not sure? We’re not really friends, I guess. You know.”

She laughs. “I definitely don’t know, you seemed like friends to me.” She swipes his card and hangs on to it while the machine beeps.

“Oh, well. We’re teammates,” Shane says. “Nobody else was here until like, a week ago, so. That’s all.”

“Suuuuuure,” she says, smiling a little. “Okay. Whatever you say.” She hands his card back to him. “I’m Rose, by the way.”

“Shane,” he says.

“I know,” she tells him. “You’re on the hockey team. I run track. I’ve seen you around.”

“Oh, yeah, nice,” he says. He feels impossibly awkward. “Cool.”

She laughs again. It feels conspiratorial, though, like he’s told a joke she found funny instead of stammered out a bunch of nonsense. “Well, we should hang out sometime when I’m not working.” Her eyes flick over his shoulder to where there’s a small line forming.

“Right! Sorry.” Shane grabs his tray and drops his ID card onto it. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too, Shane,” she calls after him as he walks away, sticking her hand out for the next student.

Practice is good. Practice is normal, Shane tells himself as he tapes up his shin pads. Hayden’s in the locker next to him again this season, chatting with Price about the whole Scott Hunter situation.

“Fucking crazy,” Shane hears Hayden say, grunting as he jumps into his pads. “Brave or stupid, what do you think?”

Shane can't hear Price's response from Hayden's other side. He pulls his base layer over his head and tries to focus. Practice is not, he reminds himself, the first time he'd seen Ilya since he pumped the brakes at the end of the summer.

Shane had gone into the library a few times in the intervening weeks, always under the guise of printing a problem set or getting a shitty coffee from the cafe on the first floor, but whenever Shane had moved towards Ilya's table, Ilya had started packing up his books. They hadn't skated together, but they'd bumped into each other in the locker room on their way in and out.

They hadn't hooked up.

It's not like it's the longest they've gone without hooking up. Ilya usually goes to Russia over the summer, they've gone from April to the end of September before. But that hadn't stopped Shane from opening Snapchat more times than he could count, even taking a few pictures with the intent of using them to invite Ilya over. He deleted all of them, unsure of how to bridge the chasm he'd put between them that day in Ilya's bed. How had they done this last season? Shane remembers the shape of it, remembers going to Ilya's place every few weeks, usually late at night, and he definitely remembers Ilya's mouth, his hands, the flex of his thighs. But had Ilya invited him? Had he invited himself?

Across the locker room, Ilya is taping his stick, already in his pads. Shane's disappointed and relieved in equal measure not to see Ilya in any state of undress. Ilya doesn't look up.

It feels weird, after their summer of skating together. After having Ilya's eyes on him and nobody else on the ice for five weeks. Shane feels like he's crawling out of his skin.

Coach clangs into the locker room, trailed by two assistants, and pins up the lines for their practice scrimmage. "Check 'em before you get out there," he tells the room. "It's preseason, we're gonna be doing a lot of experimenting, don't get used to anything. You might not be where you expect to be right now, don't get in a twist about it."

Hayden jumps up. "I got you," he tells Shane, who nods and grabs his practice jersey, pulling it over his shoulder pads. When he emerges, Hayden is back.

"Not where you expect was an understatement," Hayden says, grabbing his helmet from the shelf in his locker. "You're centering Roz today."

"What?" Shane asks, glancing immediately over to Ilya's locker. It's empty, he must've already gone out to the ice. "He's on the wing? No fucking way."

"Yes way," Hayden tells him. "This is gonna be even worse than freshman year when it was the other way around!" He looks delighted.

"Fuck off," Shane groans. Hayden grabs Shane's helmet and chucks it at him.

"I can't wait to see this," he says, laughing as Shane clambers up from the bench. "This is gonna be great."

“Rozanov, Hollander, that was great!” Coach’s voice rings out through the empty stands. “Run it again, from the point, two on one!”

Shane’s sweating. His legs are screaming at him. He knows the whole team is watching them, even though they’re supposed to be doing other drills across the rink. He also knows they’ve completely destroyed all of their top blue liners in this drill. JJ skates out, the next to try and stop them, looking resigned.

“Come on, Hollander,” Ilya says quietly as they drift into their starting positions. He shoves the puck towards Shane. “Don’t get tired on me now.”

“Fuck you,” Shane says, without heat. “I’m not tired.”

“Perfect, good,” Ilya says. He smacks his stick against the ice. “Let’s go!”

They take off. And it’s like they rolled back the last few weeks, the awkwardness is gone, they’re just moving together on the ice, Shane with the puck, moving JJ to create a space he knows with absolute certainty Ilya will find, releasing the puck with a perfect snap. He watches Ilya crash forward and one time it into the goal, their goalie moving way too late.

They can do this, he thinks. They can do this. They can be normal. Ilya taps him on the helmet as they skate back towards Coach.

“Where the hell did that come from?” Hayden is sprawled over Shane’s couch, a half eaten Chipotle container balanced precariously on his stomach. Shane watches apprehensively as Hayden scoops rice and beans onto a tortilla chip and brings it towards his mouth, but he doesn’t spill anything. “Stop looking at me like that, I’m not going to ruin your stupid sofa.”

“Sorry,” Shane says automatically. “Where did what come from?”

“You and Roz today,” Hayden clarifies.

“Oh,” Shane says. He rubs the back of his neck. “We uh. Yeah, we played pretty well, huh?”

“Understatement.” Hayden’s mouth is full of chip. “You guys were like, borderline unstoppable. It was crazy. Nobody was expecting that!”

“Thanks, I think?” Shane laughs. “We skated together a few times this summer.”

“This summer? Wasn’t he in Russia?”

“No, no he was here,” Shane says. “For like, most of the summer. He came part way through the term, I think. I don’t really know why.”

“Huh,” Hayden says. “I didn’t realize you guys were spending any time together these days.”

“We aren’t,” Shane says quickly. Too quickly? He can’t tell. “We’re not friends. We just skated together a few times.”

“Okay!” Hayden putting his hands up dramatically. The Chipotle container teeters. “Back off, I didn’t mean to make it a big deal. I was just surprised, that’s all. I bet Coach is gonna keep the two of you on that line together.”

“Probably not,” Shane shakes his head. “Rozanov’s too good at center, Coach is just moving things around right now. He’s going for the draft this year, they won’t make him change positions.”

“We’ll see,” Hayden says, loading up another chip. “Turn the TV on, The Bachelorette is starting soon.”

“Come to the party with me!”

Shane looks at Rose over his coffee. They’ve hung a few times since the semester started: coffee, lunch, sitting around outside the theater building. Rose is an actress, he knows now, a theater major. She runs middle distance mostly just for fun, which Shane can’t fathom.

“You’ll have a good time,” she wheedles. “The track team is chill. Or like, not chill maybe, everyone’s kind of a freak, but they’re all really nice. Just don’t make fun of us for playing beer pong with water in the cups and you’ll be fine!”

She’s invited him to one other track team party since they started hanging out, which he declined because of an early practice. He doesn’t have an excuse this time.

“You guys play with water?”

“Shut up,” she says, but it’s playful, not mean. “A bunch of them do cross country, too, so they’re in season right now. We try to make it like, inclusive. So people don’t get left out if they aren’t drinking.”

“Huh,” he says. He takes a sip of his coffee. It’s a little burned. “That’s really cool, actually.”

“I told you,” she says. “Everyone’s really nice. Please come?”

She looks so pretty, with her big eyes, smiling at him across their little table. He looks down at the faint lipstick mark on the rim of her cup. He flashes forward to Friday in his mind, sees himself alone in his apartment, opening and closing Snapchat, still not sending anything. He thinks about how silly he’ll feel, Saturday morning, seeing the tagged photos of Rose having fun at a party and knowing he could have been there.

“Okay, okay! I’ll come.”

“Yay!” She beams at him. “I’m texting you the address right now, no chickening out!”

Shane wants so badly to chicken out.

He stares at himself in the mirror. His hair is flat, as always, and a little too long in the back. He likes his jeans but he feels stupid in his button up. His freckles are still a little too defined, lingering from summer, and he hasn't even left yet and he already doesn't know what to do with his hands.

He slumps forward, resting his forehead against the cool glass of the mirror. He could change his shirt? He should change his shirt. He digs his phone out of his back pocket and swipes open Snapchat to take a quick mirror selfie, not bothering to pose. *Does this look dumb*, he captions, positioning the text across his face, and fires it off.

Hayden's response comes back right away. *not dumb, just hollander*, it says in the chat window. Which is weird because Hayden has been exclusively texting via emoji for the last few weeks, driving Shane insane in the process trying to figure out what he's ever trying to say. Shane swipes back over to see his active conversations and –

Fuck.

He sent it to Ilya. Whose inactive streak was right below Hayden's.

Who responded immediately.

Shane crashes his head back against the mirror.

His phone lights up again. He swipes it open before he can talk himself out of it.

what are you dressed up for, Ilya has asked in the chat window. Shane sighs.

Just a party, it's stupid. He starts typing more, deletes, and then starts typing again. In for a penny, he thinks. *Should I change into a t shirt??*

would be more relaxed, yes, Ilya sends. *put on blue one, no logo*

Shane does know exactly which t-shirt Ilya is talking about, if only because he only owns a handful of shirts that aren't team-branded in some capacity. He launches himself at his dresser and digs it out, wriggling out of his button up.

The blue t-shirt ruffles his hair as he pulls it on. He opens his phone again and takes another mirror selfie before he can talk himself out of it. He poses a little this time, turns slightly so his biceps are in the shot. *This one? Better??*

looks nice, Ilya replies. Shane wishes he would send a picture back instead of just using the chat. *looked nice before too. but you look comfortable now*.

Thanks, Shane types. He doesn't know what else to say.

enjoy party, Ilya sends back.

Shane takes a last look at himself in the mirror, stuffs his phone back into his pocket, and grabs his keys.

Rose was right, the track team is really nice. Extremely weird, from what Shane could tell, if the two people building a card tower on a third person's naked torso were anything to go by, but very nice.

"I'm glad you're here!" Rose tells him as he steps away from the beer pong table, which is, as promised, set up with water in the cups. Shane's opponent had been drinking from his own cup of what looked like jungle juice, but hadn't remarked at all upon Shane's can of ginger ale. He'd then completely wiped the floor with Shane, but he'd been friendly about it, even shaking Shane's hand after the game.

"That's what you guys do after hockey games, right?" he'd laughed, miming shaking hands down the line, ending by grabbing Shane's hand enthusiastically. "Good game, good game, good game?"

It was nice, Shane thought. It felt like he was in on the joke, even though they'd just met.

"Me too," he tells Rose. "Thanks for pressuring me into coming."

She rolls her eyes. "You hold yourself back, you know." She's sipping a Four Loko but seems entirely unaffected. "I knew you'd have a good time. I wouldn't invite you somewhere you'd hate!"

"Thanks," he says again. "I know you wouldn't."

"I will, however, make you dance with me," she says, setting her drink down. "Even though I know you don't want to dance."

She takes his hand and leads him into another room, where the music is way louder. There are a few clumps of people dancing, none particularly well, and all completely unconcerned with each other. Shane shuffles a little, uncomfortable, and Rose takes his hand encouragingly. She wiggles close to him, but not so close that he can't see her properly, and shimmies her shoulders. Shane shimmies with her. His hips are stiff but he smiles and mimics her movements, feeling a little ridiculous. He looks down at her. She looks as ridiculous as he feels, but she's carrying it off, beaming at him anyway. She looks beautiful.

"I like your shirt," she says, touching the edge of his sleeve. Her fingers are cold from the Four Loko she'd been holding. "The color looks good on you!"

They leave together, sometime a little after midnight. Rose grasps his wrist and leads him back through the house, saying goodbye to a few of her friends as they go. She lets go of him to shrug her jacket on on the porch, but reaches back for him when they start walking.

“Hey,” she says softly when they get to her building. “Thanks for coming, tonight. I had a lot of fun.”

“Yeah,” Shane says. “Me too. Really.”

She smiles at him. Her hand is still in his.

He feels like he should, so he shuffles a little closer to her and leans in. He’s not expecting her to smoothly turn her face, though, and his lips land on her cheek.

“Shane,” she says. “You don’t – that’s not what this is, I think.”

He pulls himself back into his own space. They’re still holding hands. “Is it not?”

She looks at him earnestly, her eyes wide. “I don’t think you want it to be?” She bites her lip. “Listen, tell me if I’m totally out of line, but...I haven’t really been getting the impression that you’re that into me. And that’s totally fine! I really like you, I think we could be really good friends.”

Shane stares at her. She squeezes his hand. “You’re, like,” he pauses. “You’re so beautiful.”

“I know,” she smiles. It doesn’t sound arrogant or condescending at all. “So are you, Shane. But I think maybe I’m not the kind of beautiful you are looking for?”

Shane lets out a long exhale. “Yeah,” he says. His voice sounds small even to his own ears. “Yeah, I think you’re right.”

Rose drops his hand and Shane’s heart lurches for a second, but then she steps towards him and puts her arms around him, pulling him into a hug. He pushes his face into the top of her head and closes his eyes.

“Have you told anyone that before?” Her voice is muffled against his chest.

“No,” Shane admits. A piece of her hair sticks to his lip.

“Okay,” she says easily. She squeezes him a little tighter. “Thank you for telling me.”

“I didn’t really tell you anything,” he mumbles. “You told me.”

“That’s what friends are for,” she says.

“So tonight, you asked me to go to this...as friends?” Shane asks. He feels her nod, his chin bobbing along with her head.

“Yeah,” she says. “Don’t get me wrong, I think you’re super cute. But I had a feeling. I’m a theater kid, you know?”

“I don’t know,” he says, smiling into her hair. “But. Thank you. Again.”

“Hallsy, where’s the sauce?”

Shane winces. He’s back on his own line today. They’re running a play he’s known since the summer before freshman year, and he’s mistimed his last two feeds.

“Anticipate more, kid,” Coach says. “You’re waiting to see where Pike’s gonna be, you know better than that! Put some mustard on it!”

In the corner of his eye, Shane can see Ilya. He’s against the boards with one of his own linemates, both of them trying to retrieve a puck with their skates.

“Hollander, you here with me?” Coach raps his knuckles on Shane’s helmet.

“Yeah, sorry Coach. I got it,” Shane says. “Anticipate. Got it!”

“How was party?” Ilya asks. Shane is acutely aware that it’s the first time they’ve talked about anything other than hockey face to face since the semester started. They’re in the locker room, of all places, teammates filtering in and out between the showers and the training room. Hayden’s phone is on aux, but Shane isn’t really sure how much more Nicki Minaj he can take and has been weighing the pros and cons of waiting until he gets home to shower.

“It was...good, actually,” he says. Ilya nods slowly. “Thanks for, you know. The shirt.”

Ilya smirks. “No problem, Hollander.”

He doesn’t move towards his own locker. Shane’s casting desperately around for something to say, some way to keep the conversation going, when Hayden strolls out of the shower and joins them, a towel around his waist.

“Oh right! You went to that track party this weekend!” He grabs the second towel from inside his locker and his head disappears briefly into it. Shane watches, bemused, then glances up at Ilya, who raises an eyebrow. His eyes make him look like he wants to be laughing. “With that girl Rose, right? She’s hot, nice work, man.” Hayden pulls the towel off of his head and swats it at Shane.

“Fuck off,” Shane mumbles, grabbing the towel so Hayden can’t roll it up again. They tussle over it briefly. When he looks back up for Ilya, he’s already crossed the room to his own locker, his back to Shane.

Hey, Shane types. He deletes it. *Hi*, he tries. That’s worse. He deletes it again. *What are you doing?*

He feels crazy.

His entire relationship with Ilya existed in perfunctory text messages and quick, clandestine hookups until this summer, when they actually hadn't been messaging much at all. The occasional Snapchat, but mostly they were just - hanging out. There was no need to send a selfie or a message when Ilya was sitting across from him, drinking Coke and complaining about the taste of his nicotine gum. Shane isn't sure how to stuff Ilya back into the little digital box.

It feels kind of urgent, though, that Shane reaches out to Ilya. Ilya helping him with his shirt and then asking him about the party had felt like an olive branch of sorts after the cold war Shane had inadvertently kicked off that afternoon in Ilya's summer dorm, and Shane feels like he's maybe failed to grab it.

What are you doing? stares up at him. He's in their Snapchat text thread. Should he send a photo instead? He looks up from his couch. It's getting dark but he's been sitting here since afternoon, and there are no lights on in the room aside from the blueish glow of his phone screen. He envisions getting up and turning the lights on, maybe fixing his hair, taking his shirt off and sending that as a snap to Ilya. It's an exciting possibility, but it also feels like he'd need to be an entirely different person to actually do it, someone who could figure out how to turn the clock back by about six weeks. He looks back down at his phone.

He can't look at the stupid message anymore. He hits the send arrow and closes his phone immediately. It doesn't feel like enough, so he tosses his phone to the other end of the couch. It lands, face up, partway wedged in between the cushion and the arm.

Shane's not sure how long he stares at it - it could have been thirty seconds or it could have been ten minutes, he'll never know. But when the screen lights up he shoots across the couch and swipes it open.

making dinner is Ilya's reply, the text banner over a photo of a kitchen counter. There's an unopened package of ground beef sitting on a shitty plastic cutting board.

Shane lets the photo expire and swipes over to his camera. He puts his hand in front of his face and flashes a thumbs up, taking the picture before he can overthink it. It comes out looking kind of blue from being in the dark. *Didn't realize you were back in your place.*

do you need more proof, Ilya sends back. He's in the photo this time, leaning against the counter. He's wearing a team hoodie, pulled up over his curls. Shane can't read his expression.

Is that an invitation? Shane sends it in the chat because he doesn't know what photo to take for it. Ilya's reply is instant, a shrugging emoticon. Shane taps his finger against the back of the phone a few times, then gets up.

Shane doesn't actually know Ilya's address, but he knows how to get there. Ilya's been in this place since sophomore year, when they could first move out of the dorms. Most people Shane knows find new off campus places every year, but Ilya has stayed in his same spot, a one

bedroom walk up on the opposite side of campus from the gym. Shane opens the front door and hits the buzzer for Ilya's unit.

Ilya buzzes him through and Shane takes the stairs two at a time, kicking his shoes off on the welcome mat he's pretty sure the landlord put in front of Ilya's door before knocking. Ilya's never actually asked him to not wear shoes inside, but Shane's also never seen Ilya in anything other than slides indoors.

"Hey," Shane says when Ilya opens the door. Ilya steps to the side to let him in, the hood of his sweatshirt still up. Shane follows Ilya down the short hallway and into the kitchen. The countertops are clear now, the cutting board sitting in the sink, and the oven timer is on.

"You want water or something?" Ilya asks.

"Sure," Shane shrugs. Ilya opens the fridge and pulls out a Brita and a can of ginger ale, sliding the ginger ale down the counter towards Shane. "Thanks."

"No problem."

"So, you're out of the dorms?"

Ilya pours himself a glass of water and leans against the counter. "Yes," he says, looking around pointedly. "Clearly."

"I didn't realize," Shane says. He fiddles with the tab of the soda can.

"Not like you have been coming over, lately," Ilya says. He takes a sip of water and looks at Shane. His eyebrow is up again, his mouth set. Shane's eyes get stuck on his cupid's bow.

"I, uh," Shane starts. "I was trying to give you some space? You know, after we said. That we should go back to normal."

Ilya snorts. "We said."

"We did, we talked about it!" Shane says.

Ilya keeps looking at him. Shane's hand is cold around the can of ginger ale. He pops the tab and takes a gulp, just to have something to do.

"I am not stupid, Hollander," Ilya says quietly.

"What?" Shane asks. "Of course you aren't, I don't –"

"You tell me we have to stop doing this, we can still hook up but we have to not be friends anymore, otherwise we will fuck up hockey," Ilya says. "We will not fuck up hockey, by the way, nobody cares." Shane frowns. "But now I know, you meet pretty girl. Rose. Makes more sense, that we don't fuck after you say we can still fuck. So, you like her, okay. I am not stupid."

"It's not like that," Shane says. "With Rose, it's not."

“You went to her party,” Ilya says. “You asked me what shirt to wear to her party.”

“Yeah, I went to her party,” Shane says. “As friends! We didn’t hook up, we aren’t – a thing, not like that. We aren’t, like. Um. Compatible.”

“Compatible,” Ilya says flatly.

“Yeah,” Shane says, exasperated. “No tab A into slot B for me and Rose, okay? It doesn’t work like that for me.”

Ilya’s mouth twitches.

“Don’t laugh at me,” Shane says. It came out a little more pleading than he meant for it to.

Ilya rubs his hand over his face. He’s hiding a smile, Shane can tell.

“Okay,” Ilya says, finally. He reaches up and pushes the hood off of his head, running his hands through his curls a few times. “Okay. So you go to party but do not hook up.”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“And now you are here,” Ilya continues. “Because, you are disappointed you did not get laid?” He looks at Shane expectantly.

“Why, are you offering?” Shane asks. Ilya does laugh now. It’s not mean; his eyes are dancing, his face looks so open that Shane feels his own lips tugging into a smile.

“Yes, Hollander,” Ilya says. He holds out a hand and Shane scrambles to put the can of ginger ale down on the counter, steps forward, lets Ilya grab his wrist and reel him in. “I am offering.”

Shane leans into Ilya’s space. Ilya lets go of his wrist and uses both hands to rub up and down Shane’s arms. Shane leans his forehead against Ilya’s. Ilya is still smiling. “Okay,” Shane says.

Ilya darts forward, catches Shane in a quick kiss, grabbing Shane’s biceps. “Okay,” he agrees, kissing Shane’s cheek, his chin. Shane bunches his hands in the sides of Ilya’s sweatshirt, relishes the feeling of Ilya’s open mouthed kiss on his jaw, and then tugs upwards, silently demanding. Ilya’s arms come up and Shane pulls the hoodie off. Ilya’s not wearing a shirt underneath and Shane immediately brings his hands to Ilya’s chest, pushing at the solid wall of muscle. Ilya lets out a harsh breath. Shane thumbs at one of Ilya’s nipples and Ilya groans.

Shane feels Ilya pushing against him and he lets Ilya manhandle him back across the tiny kitchen, so Shane’s pressed up against the counter. Ilya looks at him for a second, then hooks his arms around Shane’s thighs and hoists him up onto the counter. “Oh my god,” Shane breathes. Ilya’s hands rub up and down his thighs, squeezing.

Shane twists his fingers into Ilya’s curls, tugging gently. Ilya tips his face up towards Shane and Shane leans down, kisses Ilya again. Ilya’s tongue fucks into his mouth smoothly,

promisingly, and Shane's glad Ilya had set him up on the counter because his legs are turning to jelly. His hands scrabble over Ilya's neck, his shoulders, trying to touch everywhere.

Ilya pulls back from him to tug Shane's shirt off and immediately gets his hands on Shane's chest. He twists both of Shane's nipples and Shane feels electric from it. The heel of Ilya's palm pushes against his breastbone, kneading, and it's like Shane can't possibly get enough air into his lungs. He vaguely registers that he's moaning, but he can't stop.

"Can I fuck you please," Ilya is saying, his mouth on Shane's collarbone. Shane's fingers swipe over the big mole on Ilya's shoulderblade, once, twice. "I want to fuck you."

"Yeah, yes," Shane says. "Here?"

"Here," Ilya confirms. He bites down on Shane's collarbone, just once, then licks. Shane feels shaky all over.

"I don't have anything," Shane says, patting desperately at his own pockets. "Condom, or--"

"I will get," Ilya says, not moving from where his face is now pressed against Shane's neck. He thumbs at Shane's nipple again. "Stay here. Do not move." He finally withdraws and goosebumps erupt over Shane's skin where Ilya had been touching him. Ilya steps back, looking at Shane through his eyelashes. He lets out a low whistle.

"What," Shane says, feeling himself flush.

Ilya quirks his lips. "Do move," he says. "Take your pants off." He leans against the fridge, waiting.

"Okay," Shane says, going for the button of his jeans. He pops it open and watches Ilya watch him drag the zipper down. He lifts his hips as best he can to wiggle his jeans off of his ass, kicks them the rest of the way to the floor.

"Those too," Ilya says, his voice lower than usual, staring at Shane's boxers. The head of Shane's cock is pressed against them and he's sure Ilya can see the damp spot, there's no way he can't. He slides his hand under the waistband and curls his fingers around himself, taking in a shaky breath. Ilya nods at him and Shane draws himself out of his underwear, forcing them the rest of the way down his thighs. They get caught on his ankle and he kicks them off, strokes himself slowly once. Ilya swallows hard.

"Now do not move," he commands, and Shane freezes, his hand loosely around the base of his cock. He feels a bit of pre leak out of the tip and he wants so badly to keep stroking himself but he doesn't, grips the counter with his other hand instead. "Perfect," Ilya whispers. "So good." Shane's cock twitches in his hand. He doesn't know if Ilya sees it before he turns around and jogs, presumably to his bedroom. He's not gone for long but Shane feels like time has frozen. He's hyper aware of everything, his socks still on, his bare ass on Ilya's kitchen counter, the callous on his palm ghosting against the underside of his cock.

Ilya comes back into the kitchen with a condom packet held in his teeth, a bottle of lube in one hand. His other hand is pushing his own sweatpants off his hips, and he takes his boxers

down too, all in one go. He puts the lube down on the counter next to Shane and spits out the condom packet. It shouldn't be hot but Shane can't look away. Ilya bends down to take his own socks off and tosses them over to join his sweats.

"So good," he says again to Shane, looking at him from his crouch. "You can move now." He inches towards Shane. "Touch yourself, please."

Shane tightens his grip on himself immediately, starts stroking. He startles when he feels Ilya's lips on his calf and has to stop himself from kicking out. Ilya laughs against his shin and peels his socks off, folds them loosely and sets them down. He kisses his way up Shane's leg, licking at the back of his knee, and stops with his head pillowed on Shane's thigh, watching Shane stroke himself for a long moment.

"Ilya," Shane says quietly. Ilya's eyes snap up to meet his immediately. "Please."

Ilya nods. "Okay," he says. "I have you." He stands up, kisses Shane quickly, tugs him off of the counter. "Turn around."

Shane does, leaning forward against the counter with his elbows down. Ilya presses up behind him, mouthing at Shane's shoulderblade, reaching around Shane's body to get to the lube. Shane hears the bottle open with a click and whines in the back of his throat when Ilya stands up again, no longer blanketing Shane.

"I have you," Ilya says again, and Shane feels Ilya's fingers, cool and slick, move down to brush over his hole. He shifts forward and drops his head to rest on his forearm.

"Fuck," he pants. "Please."

Ilya fingers him for a while, Shane loses track of time. He's sweating onto Ilya's counter, canting his hips back towards Ilya. He's so hard he's sure he's dripping onto Ilya's floor but Ilya seems unconcerned, moving his hand in and out, spreading his fingers sometimes to hold Shane open. When Ilya finally reaches for the condom packet, Shane feels like he's going to explode.

"Please," he keeps saying. "I need -"

"I know," Ilya says, rolling the condom onto himself. "I know." He lines himself up and pushes in slowly. Shane can't breathe, can't move. One of Ilya's hands is petting his shoulder, his side, alternately gripping him and stroking him. Ilya's other hand is on Shane's ass cheek, pulling him open. Shane feels so, so exposed. Ilya's hand drifts towards Shane's hole and one of his fingers gently touches Shane's rim where he's stretched around Ilya's cock. Ilya pushes in a bit further. Shane doesn't even know what noises he's making, he didn't realize his voice had this register. Ilya keeps touching him there as he slides his cock deeper until he can't anymore, pulls his hand away and sinks all the way into Shane.

"Please," Shane gasps. "Please move."

"Okay," Ilya says. "One second."

“Now, please,” Shane begs.

“One second,” Ilya says again. “Or you will be very unhappy with me, I think.” He scrapes his teeth against Shane’s neck. “You are so tight, so good. Just, ah. Need a second.”

“Okay,” Shane says. “But I might die.”

Ilya huffs out a laugh against Shane’s back. “You will not die, I promise.” He starts to move, shallowly fucking in and out of Shane. Shane presses back against him, encouraging, and Ilya slides his hand around Shane’s hips to his cock.

“So hard for me,” Ilya murmurs as he starts to pick up speed. “You’ll come for me like this, yes?” He runs his thumb over Shane’s slit. “On my cock.”

“Yes,” Shane pants. “Yes, god, come on.”

He doesn’t last long, too keyed up, and Ilya holds Shane’s hips up with a sticky hand after Shane finishes. Ilya pounds into him, biting gently at his shoulderblade again, and Shane reaches blindly back to tug ineffectively at Ilya’s hip, urging him on.

“Where do you want it,” Ilya says, and then, before Shane can answer, “Can I come on your back?”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees, and he almost regrets it when Ilya pulls out of him to take the condom off. His hole twitches and Ilya strips himself rapidly, spilling over Shane’s lower back with a loud groan. He slumps over Shane, heedless of his own mess, and pushes them both up towards the counter, nosing up Shane’s neck and kissing Shane’s jaw.

“Fuck,” Ilya says. “Fuck, that was good.”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees. He pushes himself up to standing and Ilya clings to his back for a second before pulling away. “Shower?” he asks.

Ilya checks the oven timer. “We have time,” he says. He kisses the side of Shane’s face again and then retreats. “Come on.”

Shane comes back into the kitchen wearing a pair of Ilya’s sweats. Ilya has folded his clothes and put them on top of the microwave – Shane grabs his t-shirt and tugs it on.

“Do you want some?” Ilya asks, turning to Shane from where he’s standing in front of the oven. “They are ready, I think.”

“What did you make?” Shane asks.

“Golubtsi,” Ilya says. Shane blinks at him. “Cabbage rolls, nothing special. Is like, comfort food.”

“Okay,” Shane says. “Sure. Where do you keep your plates?”

Ilya gestures at a cabinet and Shane pulls out dishes while Ilya retrieves a pan from the oven and sets it on the stove. Ilya portions the food and gives the plates back to Shane, who backs out of the kitchen and into the living room. There's no dining table, just a couch with a coffee table in front of the TV where he sets down the plates.

Ilya heaves himself onto the couch and puts down Shane's long abandoned can of ginger ale on the table. "Brought you ice, that is warm now," he says, pushing a glass towards Shane. "Probably flat too, but I can't fix that for you."

"Thanks," Shane says. "I didn't realize you were such a cook?"

"M not," Ilya says, picking up a fork. "Dining hall is good, mostly. And when we travel in season, there is no time for anything else. But sometimes," he takes a bite and carries on with his mouth full. "Sometimes I feel like I have to have something from home, you know?"

Shane doesn't know exactly, but he thinks he gets the idea. "My mom does that sometimes," he offers, starting to eat. "She makes Japanese food at home. Not like, sushi, or whatever. But there's a curry she really likes?"

"Mm," Ilya says. He watches Shane take a bite. "You like it?"

"The curry? Yeah, it's good," Shane says.

"No, not curry," Ilya says. He gestures at the coffee table. "This."

"Oh, of course - yes! It's delicious," Shane says, kicking himself. "Really, it is. Thanks for letting me have some, I know I uh, interrupted your evening."

"Turned out to be pretty nice interruption," Ilya shrugs, winking so fast Shane almost misses it. Shane feels his cheeks heat up.

"Do you want to go back?" Shane asks, dragging another bite of cabbage roll through the sauce on the plate. "To Russia?"

"Is complicated," Ilya says. "Yes, but mostly no."

"How's that?"

Ilya puts his fork down, twists his lips. He shifts on the couch so his back is against the armrest and he tucks one of his legs up underneath himself, facing Shane.

"There are many beautiful things about Russia," he says slowly. "But also many ugly things." He pauses, like he's trying to decide if he should keep going or not. Shane nods. "I fuck men, you may have noticed."

Shane laughs. "Yeah, I've caught on to that." He pours some of the warm ginger ale over the ice in the glass, listening to the soda fizz. "But you're also into women, yeah?"

"Sure," Ilya shrugs. "But that matters less when people know you fuck men." He sighs. "My father is sick, I don't think I have told you. I will have to go back, probably in summer, to

help. But after that, I would prefer not to go back.” He looks at Shane. “To stay here.”

“Wherever you get drafted,” Shane says.

“Yes,” Ilya says. “If being drafted is how I can stay, yes.”

“Are there other ways you could stay?”

“Maybe. PhD programs, mostly. I will apply for a few. Here, visa is usually good for few extra years, after coursework. So I could have time to find job, or sponsor, get married, whatever - to stay for good.”

“Aren’t you worried about the uh, about people here knowing you like guys? Wouldn’t that fuck up getting drafted?” Shane asks. The condensation forming on the edge of the glass of ginger ale is starting to drip onto Ilya’s coffee table. Shane doesn’t see any coasters.

“We are in new territory, Hollander,” Ilya says. He smiles. “Scott Hunter, not so good at hockey, of course, but he kisses his boyfriend on TV? Surely you do not live under rock, you saw this.”

“He won the fucking Cup, what do you mean not so good at hockey,” Shane says in disbelief. He had seen it, of course – he’d watched Hunter lead New York to their first Cup win in however long, and then he’d had to pick his jaw up from the floor when he watched Hunter pull a guy out of the stands and kiss him on the ice. Everyone had seen it.

“I am just saying,” Ilya smirks. “I could be better, probably.”

“Isn’t it different, though?” Shane asks. “Like...He got to do that because he won the Cup, you know? Or maybe it’s like, he had to win the Cup in order to do that? For someone to come into the league as a rookie, it feels like. I don’t know. Not the same.”

“Seems like you have been thinking about this more than a little bit,” Ilya says, leaning towards Shane.

“Maybe,” Shane admits. “It’s hard not to think about, right? Especially ‘cause...” he gestures between them.

“Because...you like fucking other hockey player?” Ilya teases.

“Because I think I’m gay.” Shane doesn’t mean for it to come out as a whisper, but it does.

Ilya laughs. “Of course you are gay, Hollander.”

“What?” Shane says. “Hey!”

“Not a bad thing,” Ilya says. His laugh settles into a smile. “Is actually maybe very good thing.”

“Huh?”

“For me, I mean. Is very good thing. You like men, you definitely are not dating cute girl named Rose, works out well for me, no?”

“Shut up,” Shane moans. Ilya reaches his hand out and Shane takes it, lets Ilya gather Shane to his chest. “I’m not dating Rose.”

“Good,” Ilya says. He nudges Shane’s cheek with his nose.

“I’m not, uh. Sleeping with anyone else, either,” Shane says. He’s not sure what compels him to say it.

“Okay,” Ilya says. “Me neither.”

“What? But you were, over the summer,” Shane says, surprised.

“When was I fucking someone not you in summer? You kept me pretty busy, Hollander,” Ilya chuckles.

“You sent me that fucking Snapchat!” Shane says. “Right when you got back? It looked like you were getting a blowjob!”

Ilya takes Shane’s face between his hands and rapidly presses a kiss to one of Shane’s eyebrows, then the other. “Did you see anyone else in video?”

“Well, no, but—”

“No but,” Ilya says, dragging his mouth over Shane’s temple. “Only me in video. Thinking about you.”

“Oh,” Shane says. “Fuck, okay, that’s uh.”

“Hot?” Ilya suggests.

“I think I fucked up,” Shane says. Ilya pulls back to look at Shane, frowning slightly. “When I said we had to stop hanging out”

Ilya closes his eyes and lets out a long breath. “You do not want the team to know we are friends. Yes, this is stupid.” He opens his eyes. “Are we friends?”

“No, I guess not,” Shane says. “I’m sorry. But we could be?”

“Is that what you want?” Ilya asks. “To be friends?”

Shane thinks about it. Ilya’s chest rises and falls beneath him, steady. He thinks of Ilya in the library, surrounded by his books while Shane watched game tape. He thinks of Ilya on skates, moving around Shane so fluidly, he thinks of Ilya, bringing him ice so his ginger ale wouldn’t be warm. His eyes scan Ilya’s face, his strong browbone, the sculpted curve of his lips.

“No,” he says. “I want —”

He leans forward, kisses Ilya. Ilya lets him for a second, then pulls Shane's head back.

"I need you to say it," Ilya says, so quiet Shane barely catches it..

He looks scared, Shane realizes. Ilya looks scared.

"I want you," Shane says. "I like you, Ilya."

Ilya strokes his thumb over Shane's cheek and then crashes their mouths together. "I like you too, Shane Hollander," he rumbles.

"I fucking knew it!" Rose exclaims, swatting at Shane's arms. They're on Shane's couch; she'd brought coffees over without being asked when Shane had texted her, *Can I tell you something?*

"Knew what?"

"Knew you were lying when you said you guys didn't hang out, dumbass," she says. "I saw you together like, every day this summer! I knew something was going on between you two!"

"Yeah, but then I royally fucked it up."

"Sure, because you panicked," Rose says wisely.

"What? That's not what happened," Shane says.

"That is *exactly* what happened," Rose contradicts. "You were having big feelings you didn't realize you were having, we've all been there. You freaked out."

"Okay, I freaked out," Shane concedes.

"Was the makeup sex good?" she asks, grinning at him.

Shane blushes. "Definitely."

"So what's the deal now?"

"I'm not exactly sure," Shane says. "I told him I like him – stop looking at me like that – and we're definitely gonna keep hanging out, but I still don't want the team to know."

Rose hums softly. "What did he say about that?"

"He said okay, but that it won't matter if they think we're friends. So we're gonna try to like, melt the ice a little or whatever, around them."

"Do you think it will matter?"

Shane sighs. "I don't know. Probably not. I think maybe it never would have."

“Yeah?”

“I think I was maybe using that as an excuse,” Shane admits. “I think maybe I knew...that I would like him, and was trying to keep some space between us.”

Rose puts her coffee down on a coaster and scoots closer to him, puts her chin on his shoulder. “What changed?”

“Scott Hunter coming out, I guess. You,” Shane laughs. “You kind of gave me a kick in the ass, you know.”

“I’ve been known to do that,” she nods.

Chapter 3: WINTER

They're tied 2-2 in the third and Shane really doesn't want overtime. It's the last night of a three game road trip that's had them off campus all week and Shane's been fantasizing about sleeping in his own bed instead of on hotel sheets with Hayden snoring across the room for at least two nights.

"Roz, Hallsy, your kill," Coach barks.

JJ's skating to the penalty box, shaking his head, and the ref is calling two minutes. Shane stands up and hoists himself over the boards.

Ilya's next to him on the ice, right away. He doesn't say anything, but when Shane looks over, he winks.

Shane lines up to take the faceoff. He likes being on the kill. It's tough to find openings, of course, being a player down, but taking someone off of the ice just gives Shane that little bit of extra space to play with and he loves it. They've been really successful on it this season, too - their top unit has more goals than their power play at the moment, which is both cool and concerning, and Ilya's currently second in the country for shorthanded goals.

Shane looks his opponent up and down. He hasn't taken a faceoff against this guy yet tonight, but Shane can visualize his notes document with his film breakdown for this team. This guy is a little bit bigger than him, but not too much. Not the fastest hands, but good vision. Solid face off percentages, but definitely not unbeatable. Shane digs his edges in and sinks into position.

The ref drops the puck and Shane swipes at it immediately, pushing it to his left where he knows he has open ice. He turns to follow the move and Ilya is somehow there already, the puck on his tape, streaking up along the boards.

Shane pushes off and follows. Ilya takes the puck through the neutral zone and then comes to an abrupt stop, putting space between himself and his defender. Shane crosses the line, bringing the opposing center just close enough to Ilya that he starts to cheat in Ilya's direction, and Ilya takes advantage, flicks the puck over to Shane hard. Shane leans right, dragging his man back towards him, and Ilya darts into the open space. Shane doesn't think, just fires the puck towards the crease, and Ilya gets there for the deflection, Shane sees his stick outstretched, just enough to flick the puck into the air and redirect it.

The horn goes off as the puck sails over the goalie's shoulder. Shane punches the air. Ilya's arms go up in celebration and he turns smoothly, looks at Shane, points at him. "You," he sees Ilya yelling, but he can't hear him over the noise in the arena. Someone's hand is on Shane's helmet, congratulating him on the assist, as their unit makes their way over to the bench. Ilya catches up to them and slings an arm around Shane's neck.

"Fucking perfect!" he yells. Shane hears it this time, in full volume, right against his ear. He grins. Ilya smacks a kiss against Shane's helmet, right where the plastic connects to the cage.

Shane feels Ilya's exhale on his forehead.

"Great finish," he tells Ilya, who kisses his helmet again, wet and exaggerated, before releasing him to fist bump the team and climb over the boards. Shane can't help it, he glances nervously to their bench.

If anyone thinks it's weird that Ilya is kissing his helmet after a goal, nobody shows it. The guys look excited, maybe also just as relieved as Shane to have a lead and a solid chance of making it out of this game in regulation. Everyone's congratulating Ilya, passing water bottles down the bench, getting ready for their shifts.

"Good play, Hollander," Coach says, tapping Shane's helmet with his clipboard as Shane squeezes onto the bench. "Nice anticipation."

"What's up," Hayden calls, closing the door behind him. Shane opens the fridge, grabbing a beer for Hayden and an unopened jar of salsa. He hears Hayden shuffling around in the entryway.

It's snowing, which Shane loves. They've only got two weeks left until the holiday break and no more road trips, just two home games. The snow started coming down during practice and by the time Shane walked home from the gym, there was a quiet, fluffy blanket over the sidewalks, transforming even the bleak, brutalist dorm buildings into something almost pretty.

Shane's place is a few streets over from where most of the student housing is, close to the practice rink. He'd considered taking Hayden up on his offer to move into a house with him and JJ this year, but the idea of having his own place, and being able to move in for summer term and call it a day, was too appealing. Not that it has ended up mattering, really, because Hayden has Shane's spare key and uses it liberally.

"In here," Shane calls, putting the salsa down and reaching into the cabinet for a bag of chips. He considers pouring the salsa into a bowl but stops himself, knowing Hayden will chirp him for it.

"I can't wait for fucking break," Hayden says, coming into the kitchen and immediately grabbing the beer off of the counter. He has, Shane notes, pleased, remembered to take his shoes off.

"Same," Shane says. He opens the bag of chips and shakes them towards Hayden.

"I'm gonna not skate for at least like, five days. It's gonna be amazing," Hayden tells him. Shane laughs.

"We have to be back before New Years for the Holiday Face Off, five days is like, most of break," he says.

Hayden shrugs. "Don't care, if Coach isn't on my ass in person, my ass is gonna be on the couch." He collects the jar of salsa and takes it out to the living room, setting things down on the coffee table. He gets a coaster for his beer but not the salsa. Nobody's perfect, Shane thinks, dropping the bag of chips on the couch and pulling a coaster out for the jar. "You going home?"

"Yeah," Shane says. "Yeah, gonna fly out the night of my last final, it'll be nice to see my folks. You?"

"For sure," Hayden says, fishing around in Shane's couch cushions. Shane thinks he's looking for the remote, which is on the coffee table. He wonders how long it will take Hayden to notice. "I think it's just the Euro crew sticking around, not worth the long haul for less than a week for those guys."

"Oh, yeah, Ilya mentioned they were gonna maybe get dinner together or something," Shane says.

"You and Roz on first name terms now?"

Shane shrugs. "Yeah, uh. Yeah." He feels his shoulders get tense, but he makes himself just let it hang there. Ilya had said nobody cared. If nobody cared, Shane didn't need an elaborate explanation.

"Jesus H, there it fucking is," Hayden says, finally noticing the remote on the table. Shane snorts. "I guess there's nothing like running the best penalty kill in the conference with a guy to break down some barriers."

"Like you would know," Shane teases. Hayden throws a chip at him.

"Fuck off," he says, flicking the TV on. He starts manually clicking through the channels. "It's cool though, that you guys don't hate each other anymore or whatever. I mean, it feels like we're all gelling a bit more."

"I think that's just the win streak going to your head," Shane tells him. Hayden stops channel surfing when he hits ABC and turns the volume up.

"Listen, whatever keeps the W's coming," he says. "Now okay, last week there was a cliff hanger at the rose ceremony, I gotta catch you up—"

there's a hang at my place tonight! super chill, just some theater ppl. bring Ilya!!

Shane has drafted a reply to Rose, a thanks-but-no-thanks, but he hasn't sent it. He should stay home tonight and study, it's not even a lie - he's going home tomorrow and still has one more final to get through - but he does want to see her before he leaves. And he also wants to see Ilya before he takes off, which clearly Rose knows; it makes Shane equal parts happy and nervous.

He opens Snapchat. *What are you doing tonight?* he sends in his chat thread with Ilya.

Ilya sends back a photo right away. He's pushing a hand through his hair, biting his lip up at the camera. He's wearing a t-shirt with a hole in the collar that Shane really, really wants to put his finger through. *you, hopefully ;)* is Ilya's caption, the banner over his head.

Come to Rose's with me? She's having a hang

okay, Ilya sends back in the chat. *i will like to meet famous rose*. Shane shakes his head fondly.

Another photo comes through. This time it's Ilya's open closet door, zoomed in on his game day button ups. *do i get to pick out your shirt again???*

Rose's place is nice.

She shares it with her friend Miles, who greets Shane and Ilya at the door. There are some framed posters on the walls, a few for movies, a few it looks like for campus productions Rose has been in. There's a colorful rug in the living room and the coffee table is currently shoved against the wall, playing host to a few cartons of boxed wine. Three girls are perched on the sectional, deep in discussion about something, and two guys Shane doesn't know are sprawled out on the rug, wiggling around in a way that looks intentional but that Shane cannot figure out.

"Don't mind them, they're doing contact improv," Miles tells him, rolling his eyes. "Wine? Beer? Something else?"

"Wine, please," Ilya says. Miles pours a glass for Shane too, and points over his shoulder into the kitchen. "Rose is just getting a freezer pizza in the oven, she'll be out in a sec. What was your name?"

"Ilya," Ilya says, switching his glass to his left hand and holding his right out to Miles, who shakes it, looking bemused. "Rozanov."

"I'm Miles. How do you know Rose?"

"I don't." Ilya bumps his shoulder against Shane's, and Shane forces himself not to tense up. "I know Shane, Shane knows Rose."

"Oh, cool," Miles says. "Where are you from? What's your accent?"

"Russia," Ilya says. "I am in Slavic studies department."

"Oh! So you must know Svetlana," Miles says, suddenly excited. "She did some dialect coaching for us last year when we were doing our production of *The Cherry Orchard*, she was great."

"Yes, Sveta is good friend of mine!" Ilya says. Shane sips his wine and listens to Ilya and Miles talk. Ilya looks –

Well, Ilya looks about ten times more relaxed than Shane feels. He's smiling, talking about his friend, sipping on bottom shelf red wine. Shane feels itchy, wishing he could contribute to the conversation. He can't remember if Ilya has mentioned Svetlana to him before – if Shane's being totally honest, he hadn't really realized Ilya had friends outside of the hockey team.

"I'm gonna find Rose," he says, not able to stop himself from interrupting.

"Okay," Ilya says, reaching out to Shane and squeezing his elbow lightly. Shane smiles gratefully at him and flees into the kitchen.

"Hey! There you are!"

"Hey, Rose," Shane says. She's crumpling up a plastic wrapper over the sink, beaming at him.

"I'm glad you came! I know it's not a party party, but I just wanted to see everyone who's still around one more time before break," she says. "Did you bring Ilya? Do I finally get to meet him?"

"You've met him before, you've swiped his card at the dining hall like, a million times," Shane says, reaching over to hug her. "He's talking to Miles."

"That doesn't count," she says, smacking the side of his head lightly. She kisses his cheek as she pulls out of the hug, tosses the plastic wrap into the open garbage can.

Shane follows Rose back out to the living room and they stand in the doorway for a second. Shane's eyes are on Ilya, who's listening to Miles still, but he looks over at Shane and smiles when he catches Shane's gaze. Rose elbows him and pushes herself up onto her toes to whisper, "Cute!" into his ear.

"Come on," Shane says, taking Rose's hand and leading her over to Ilya and Miles.

"Hi, you must be Ilya!" Rose says. She gives Ilya a brief, one armed hug before he can offer her a handshake. "Thanks for dragging Shane out tonight, I'm really glad you both came."

"Of course," Ilya says. "Thank you for hosting, is nice to have help getting Shane out of his apartment."

"Hey! I'm standing right here!" Shane laughs.

Ilya smirks at him.

"So, Rose knows?" Ilya asks as they walk up the stairs to his apartment. He's got a dark grey beanie on and Shane can see Ilya's curls poking out of the bottom, against his neck. He wants to tug on them.

"Huh?"

“About us, Rose knows?” Ilya presses. He digs his keys out of his back pocket and unlocks the door.

“Oh, uh. Yeah, she does,” Shane says. “Is that okay? Sorry, I should’ve said – I told her after we, you know. Made up?”

“Yes, is okay, of course,” Ilya says. He toes his shoes off and Shane follows suit, shrugging out of his jacket and hanging it up on the loose hook by the door. “It was nice, her party.”

“Yeah, it was,” Shane agrees. He had relaxed after Ilya and Rose had met, enjoying how cozy it was in Rose’s little apartment, warm from the people and the wine. Shane had spent a chunk of the party nestled into the sofa with Rose, while Ilya and Miles continued to chat behind them, Ilya’s hand often coming to rest on Shane’s shoulder. It was a much different vibe to hanging out with Hayden and the rest of the team, but it had felt – peaceful, Shane thinks. To be with two of his favorite people, to have Ilya’s hand on his shoulder, to let himself lean his head against Ilya’s forearm and not worry who saw. To leave with Ilya at the end of the night and not try to make it look like a coincidence. “Thanks for coming with me.”

“I am always happy to come with you,” Ilya leers, raising an eyebrow at Shane as he pulls off his hat.

Shane groans. “Horrible joke,” he says, swatting at Ilya. Ilya catches his hand and brings it to his mouth, kisses Shane’s palm. With his other hand, he tugs his hat ineffectively onto Shane’s head.

“Careful, I might not give it back,” Shane says, reaching up reflexively to stop the hat from falling off. He pulls it more firmly down around his ears. It smells very faintly of cigarettes, even though Ilya hadn’t smoked tonight.

“Keep it,” Ilya says, licking the webbing between Shane’s thumb and forefinger. “For break.” He brings Shane’s hand away from his mouth and closes the distance between them, presses a kiss to Shane’s cheekbone. “Looks good on you.”

Shane catches Ilya’s lips with his own, grasping finally at the curls at the back of Ilya’s neck. He tugs a little and Ilya opens his mouth, letting Shane slide his tongue behind his teeth. Shane moans softly at the feeling of Ilya’s tongue against his and Ilya’s hands come again to his shoulders, squeezing his traps.

“On your knees,” Ilya says when they pull back. “I want you on your knees.”

“Yeah,” Shane breathes, and lets Ilya push him down, shoving at Ilya’s shirt as he slides to the floor. Ilya grabs at his hat on Shane’s head, pulling Shane forward, and Shane presses his face into the zipper of Ilya’s jeans, feeling the outline of his cock against his cheekbone.

“I take this off of you now,” Ilya says, yanking at the hat. “Otherwise I will never be able to wear again, I will get hard just thinking of my cock in your mouth every time I put it on.”

Shane closes his eyes against the flush of arousal that fills his body at Ilya’s words. He pops the button of Ilya’s jeans and tugs his zipper down urgently, shoving Ilya’s boxers down

around his thighs and not giving Ilya a chance to kick them the rest of the way off before flattening his tongue and licking a stripe down Ilya's cock. He's most of the way hard already, and big against Shane's lips. He hears Ilya's head fall back hard against the wall.

"Don't concuss yourself," he chastizes, then swirls his tongue around the head of Ilya's cock. Ilya swears and brings one hand to cup Shane's face, pushing at his cheek, then pulling him back forward. Shane licks his lips and then opens his mouth, waiting for a second before Ilya gets with the program and moves his hand to guide himself into Shane's mouth.

Shane brings his hands to Ilya's hips, encouraging him, and lets Ilya set the pace, reveling in the fucked out sounds Ilya is making above him.

"M going to come soon," Ilya warns. "Sorry, you are too good, ah -"

Shane pulls off and clambers to his feet, getting a hand around Ilya. He strokes Ilya fast, surges towards Ilya and bites his neck. Ilya's cock twitches in his hand and Shane feels emboldened, bites again at the same spot and sucks gently. He's never left a mark on Ilya before, but Ilya is letting out these whines that are making Shane's head spin and he thinks, maybe he should have been doing this all along. He pulls back and looks at the hickey, still jacking Ilya off. It's small, next to one of Ilya's moles, but it's definitely there, red against the pale of Ilya's skin. Shane dives back down and licks over it as Ilya comes, mumbling something Shane can't make out.

"I wanted to fuck you," Ilya says, rueful, pushing Shane backwards so he can step the rest of the way out of his jeans.

"Sorry," Shane says, reaching out and thumbing the mark on Ilya's neck.

"No, you are not," Ilya growls. "Is okay, I will fuck you in morning, before you leave. You will go to exam still thinking about me fucking you."

Shane grins. "You promise?"

"I promise," Ilya says. He loops a finger through Shane's belt loop and tugs him down the hallway. "Bedroom now, I will make new plan for you tonight."

"-- Your dad made pasta for dinner, I think it should be just about ready when we get in! And I know you're on break, but I checked just in case and if you want some ice time, we could book for tomorrow afternoon, or we could do an early morning later in the week," Yuna Hollander says over the public radio filtering through the car speakers on low volume.

"Okay, sounds good." Shane doesn't look up from his phone.

"Which sounds good, afternoon or early morning?"

"Sure," Shane says.

"Shane! Have you been paying attention at all?"

Shane startles and turns his phone over, turning to look at his mom as she puts her blinker on for their street. “Yes! We’re having pasta for dinner.”

“Who are you so busy texting?” his mom asks, raising her eyebrow. “You are seriously distracted.”

“Nobody, it’s nothing – I’m just tired from my exam today, Mom,” Shane says.

She purses her lips but lets it go, pulling into their driveway. “Okay, hon. But no phone at the dinner table, got it?”

“Sure, Mom,” Shane agrees. He flips his phone back over as she cuts the engine.

are u warm enough in canada??

Shane risks taking a quick selfie as he steps out of the car. He’s backlit from standing in front of the Christmas lights his parents have put up around the front door. *Yes, I have your hat*, he types, and goes to the trunk to grab his duffel.

Shane drives himself to the rink on Christmas afternoon.

He doesn’t actually have any ice time booked, but his parents had accepted his excuse readily enough when he had asked for the car keys after clearing the lunch table. They’d had a nice morning together, exchanging gifts over coffee and hanging out by the tree, but Shane has been itching to get out for a little bit.

The parking lot is pretty empty, just two cars near the service entrance. Shane pulls into a spot as far away from them as he can get and pulls out his phone.

Sorry if this is weird but can I call you? he sends.

He unbuckles his seatbelt and reaches for the lever at the side of the driver’s seat to recline a little. He doesn’t know what Ilya’s up to at the moment, if he’s spending the whole day with their Swedish goalie and their two Czech underclassmen or if he’s got other Christmas plans. He might not respond right away, Shane knows. He’s got two hours before he’s expected back, he can wait.

He doesn’t have to.

“Everything is okay?” Ilya asks, his accent a little harder to understand over the phone than in person.

“What? Yeah, everything is good. Hi,” Shane says.

“You worried me, your text seemed serious,” Ilya tells him.

“Shit, sorry,” Shane says. “I just wanted to say Merry Christmas, that’s all.”

Ilya chuckles into the receiver. "You already texted me this, this morning."

"I know, I know, I just uh, feel bad that you're like, not with your family or anything for the holiday," Shane says.

Ilya's silent for a moment. "I think maybe you just missed hearing me talk," he says finally. "You need to hear my sexy, beautiful accent to have good Christmas, is okay." Shane can practically hear the smirk in his voice.

Shane smiles into the phone. "Maybe."

"Definitely."

"Your day is good, though?"

"Yes, is fine," Ilya says, dismissive. "Like any other day. Christmas is not so much big deal, in Russia. New Year's Eve is more important for us."

"Oh, I didn't know that!" Shane taps the keys where they're still hanging in the ignition, lets them jingle back and forth in rhythm. He's never seen Ilya without the cross he wears around his neck, so he'd just assumed Ilya would be celebrating Christmas. "But wait, we'll be on the road for New Years Eve, that sucks, then."

"Yes, Sveta is mad at me for this," Ilya tells him. "But she will come over tonight, we will have midnight toast few days early. Swedes are doing Christmas things, but Krejci and Vanacek will probably come also, is not exactly same in Czech Republic, I think, but also not so different."

"Maybe we can do something with them in the hotel, after our game," Shane suggests. "For New Years."

"Hmm, if we can get out of curfew," Ilya hums.

The sun has set by the time they finish chatting, and Shane is reluctant to end the call and make the drive home.

"Hey," David Hollander says, coming down the stairs holding two mugs of tea. "Can I come sit?"

"Yeah, of course," Shane says, righting himself from where he's been sprawled out on the sofa in the basement to make room for his dad. He reaches into the coffee table drawer to pull out two coasters, and his dad sets the mugs down.

"Decaf," he says, nodding at Shane.

"Thanks." The tea is too hot to drink, but Shane picks up the mug anyway, blows on the steam. His dad looks at him for a long moment. "Everything okay, Dad?"

“You tell me, kid,” his dad says. He props his elbow against the back of the sofa and looks at Shane. “I know you didn’t have ice time today, my buddy who drives the zamboni gave me a call to see if I wanted to get you in there this afternoon since nobody had it booked.”

Shane can’t remember how his face normally moves. What shape does he usually hold his mouth in? His breathing feels impossibly loud.

“You aren’t in trouble,” his dad says when it becomes clear Shane isn’t going to speak. “I just want to know what’s up. I won’t tell your mom if you don’t want me to.”

Shane blinks hard. “It’s nothing,” he says. Is his voice always this high? “I just wanted to call someone, out of the house.”

“A girlfriend?” his dad prompts.

“No, no, no girlfriend,” Shane says. He focuses on the teabag, flapping gently against the side of the mug. He follows the purple lines of the logo with his eyes studiously. “A teammate, actually. He’s still on campus and I just uh, wanted to make sure he was doing okay since he didn’t go home for the holiday.”

“That’s, well. That’s very nice of you, Shane,” his dad says. “You two must be pretty close, then.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Shane says.

“Someone we’ve met?” His dad presses. “Or will you introduce us when we come for your homestand in February?”

“I don’t think you’ve met yet,” Shane says. “It’s, uh, Rozanov.”

“I always thought you hated that guy,” his dad says. Shane risks a glance up. His dad is sipping his tea, his face relaxed.

“Yeah, we weren’t really friends until this year,” Shane says. “Guess we didn’t know each other that well.”

“You’ve been playing very well on the penalty kill with him this season.” His dad sounds so casual, meanwhile Shane’s fingers are starting to sweat against the handle of the mug. He puts it back down on the coaster so he doesn’t drop it. “Your mom thinks you two should be on a line together, even.”

“Coach tries it out in practice sometimes,” Shane says. Hockey is safe territory. “I dunno, I think we’ve got a pretty good thing going right now. Changing lines mid-season might not be great, you know?”

“That’s a conversation you’ll have to have with your mom, not me,” his dad chuckles. He takes another sip of his tea. “No more sneaking around, okay Shane? If you want to call your friends, your mom and I won’t mind.”

The last day of break, Shane's mom knocks on his door gently, waking him up. "Let's get breakfast out," she suggests as Shane blinks awake. "Just you and me, like old times."

It had been their tradition, before Shane left for school, to get breakfast before morning practices. His mom was always the one to drive him to hockey - she loved the sport as much as he did, if not more. His dad came to most games, but his mom was at *everything*.

They go to their old spot, an upscale diner near the rink Shane had grown up on. Shane loves the nostalgia of the big, plastic-covered menu. He also likes that they've never given him a hard time for substituting egg whites in the Mediterranean omelette he always orders.

"So we'll be in for your homestand in February," Yuna says. "And of course we'll come for Senior Day, we would never miss that! I wish we could make it out to more games, but I think we both are going to save our days off for the postseason." She looks at Shane over her coffee mug. "I think you guys can make another deep run this year! I'm not going to jinx anything by buying plane tickets early, but I've had mid-April blocked off on my work calendar already."

"Please don't buy tickets yet!" Shane yelps.

"I won't, I won't!" Yuna laughs. "I swear."

"Knock on wood or something, jeez."

"And then after the season – do you have graduation tickets for us yet?"

"Uh, no, I don't think they're available yet," Shane says, fiddling with his water glass. "Are you sure you guys want to come to that? It's like, basically right after championship weekend, that's so much traveling."

"Of course we do! Why wouldn't we?"

"I'm just saying, I'd rather have you at Senior Day and for the postseason games," Shane explains. "So if you have to pick or work gets busy or something, graduation isn't that important."

"I know it's not hockey," Yuna says. "But our only son graduating from college is still a pretty big deal!"

"If you say so," Shane shrugs.

"You're not secretly trying to tell me you're flunking all of your classes and you won't be graduating, are you?" Yuna says wryly, arching an eyebrow.

"Oh my god, Mom," Shane groans. "I'm not flunking anything! I'm not like, on the honor roll or anything, but I'm definitely gonna graduate."

"I know, sweetie, I'm just teasing you," Yuna says. She takes a sip of her coffee and Shane can tell she's not finished yet. "I know you're still in season and I don't want to put any

pressure on you. But have you thought much about what you want to do after you finish school yet?"

Shane wishes he was about ten years younger so he could hide his head on the table. As it is, he starts shredding a paper napkin in what he hopes is an unnoticeable way.

"Not really," he says. "Apply for jobs, I guess. That's what a business degree is for, right?"

"Sure," Yuna says. "And I'm sure you'll be successful where you end up. But do you know what might appeal to you?"

"Aside from hockey? Nope," Shane says, popping the p a little bit more than strictly necessary.

"Well, why aside from hockey?"

"I don't think playing in a beer league after college is like, a great career prospect," Shane tries to joke, but it comes out with a little bitter edge to it.

"Okay, but playing isn't the only way to be in the sport professionally," Yuna says. "Have you ever thought about coaching, or looking into working on the business side of a franchise? Management?"

"No, I guess not," Shane says. "I guess I've been kind of figuring...that hockey's gonna be over for me after this spring." It's a hard thought to admit out loud, even though the shape of it has been haunting Shane all year.

"Sweetie, if that's what you want, that's great," Yuna tells him, reaching across the table to put her hand over his, stopping him from continuing to decimate the tattered napkin. "But, and tell me if I'm way off base here, I have a hard time imagining your life without hockey in it. And I think maybe you do, too."

It's the truth, Shane knows. It's a truth he's been avoiding admitting to himself, but it's impossible to ignore now that she's put it on the table.

"Yeah," he says, a little choked up. "I do have a hard time with that."

"That's okay, Shane," she tells him, squeezing his hand. "It's gonna be a big change no matter what, going from D1 athlete to anything else. But if you don't want hockey to be over after this season, it doesn't have to be."

"This blows," Hayden grumbles. "We lost and they won't even give us a later curfew for New Years? Bullshit."

Privately, Shane agrees, but that's mostly just because he wanted to toast at midnight with Ilya. "Dude, our flight back is at like, six in the morning, being out late and getting up for that would suck," is what he actually says.

Hayden flips him off. Shane gropes around, grabs one of the flat hotel pillows piled up by the headboard, and chucks it at him.

“Don’t be a wet blanket.”

“You’re the one complaining, how am I the wet blanket?”

“Because the complaining was part of convincing you to sneak out,” Hayden says, looking at Shane like he’s stupid. “JJ tested the door to the roof, he says there’s no alarm.” He taps his phone meaningfully.

Shane sits up, pulling his own phone out of his back pocket. Sure enough, their WhatsApp team thread has a stack of unread messages. Shane ignores them and opens Snapchat instead. *Do you want to go to the roof at midnight?* he says Ilya in the chat window.

Ilya, as usual, replies immediately. A text banner saying *i thought you’d never ask* is in front of a brown paper bag full of airplane sized liquor bottles.

When did you go to the liquor store??

was not me Ilya sends back, this time over a photo of Marlow, his roommate for this trip.

“Earth to Shane, are you in or do I have to knock you out so you don’t narc?”

“Fuck you!” Shane says. “I’ll come, fuck off. I’m not a narc.”

Hayden whoops.

Shane does make Hayden push the emergency exit door at the top of the stairs open, just in case JJ was wrong about the alarm. Hayden rolls his eyes but indulges Shane, and they emerge onto the rooftop together to see a few clusters of their teammates grouped together by the railing.

It’s cold enough that Shane thinks wistfully of Ilya’s hat, stashed in his duffle bag downstairs, as he and Hayden greet their teammates. Someone passes them a paper bag and Shane reaches in without looking at what bottle he gets, then hands it off to Hayden.

“You do not want that, is terrible vodka,” Ilya says, appearing at Shane’s other side. “Pike, switch with him!”

“Get fucked, Roz,” Hayden says, wiggling the bottle of Fireball he’d ended up with tauntingly.

“Fine, I switch,” Ilya says, sticking his hand out. Shane hands him the vodka and snorts when Ilya immediately tosses it over his shoulder. Ilya passes him a tiny bottle of gin and pulls out a cigarette for himself.

“That’s gross,” Hayden says, voicing Shane’s thoughts. Ilya’s fumbling for his lighter, but the way he raises his eyebrows is just as effective as if he’d flipped them off.

“Is holiday, you don’t like, you don’t stand by me,” Ilya challenges.

“Did you just say that to get rid of him or are you gonna actually smoke?” Shane asks after Hayden moves closer to the ledge, leaving Shane and Ilya a bit behind the rest of their team.

“I am actually going to smoke,” Ilya says, flicking the lighter on. He drops his voice to just above a whisper. “Cannot kiss you at midnight anyway so, does not matter how I taste.”

“Shhhhhh!” Shane hisses, glancing meaningfully over at their teammates.

“Don’t worry, nobody pays attention to us,” Ilya says. “They’re getting drunk, Marlow brought big bottle of terrible vodka also. Is okay.” He lights the cigarette and takes a drag, turning away from Shane to exhale. He brings his voice back up to its usual level. “I will go back to horrible gum tomorrow. New Year’s resolution.”

The emergency exit opens once more and a few more players join the group.

“One minute til midnight,” Shane says. Ilya takes another drag of his cigarette.

Out above the balcony, the city’s fireworks display starts. Their hotel must be pretty close to it, the pops loud in the cold air.

“We go join them?” Ilya asks, tilting his head towards the cluster of their teammates.

“Yeah,” Shane says. “One sec.” He sucks in a breath. “Um. S novym godom?”

Ilya’s face transforms with delight, smiling around his cigarette. “Your pronunciation is terrible,” he crows. Shane blushes. Ilya’s eyes are glittering in the dark.

“Fuck off, I tried!”

“You will have to keep trying,” Ilya says. “Your Russian is making me feel amazing about my English.”

“Your English is good, shut up” Shane tells him. “Come on, come on.” He shuffles over to the railing, opening the bottle of gin.

Someone is leading a countdown from ten, and everyone is shouting along. The fireworks continue overhead.

“Happy New Year, Shane,” Ilya murmurs, leaning close so he can speak directly into Shane’s ear. “S novym godom.” He ashes the cigarette over the railing and stands up straight to join the countdown. “Three! Two! One!”

January passes by in a blur of arenas, bus rides, and face offs.

Conference play has started, and it’s the time of year when Shane stops feeling like a student entirely. He’s barely making his weekly meetings with his athletic department-mandated tutor

to go over all of the lectures he's missed for game day travel, and on top of it all, they're riding a two game losing streak to finish it out the month.

It's not how he'd wanted to start the year, but at least they are finally, blessedly, heading back to campus. They're off next week with a bye week and Shane is so relieved he feels like he could cry as he shoves his backpack into the overhead and slides into his seat.

The team has two busses, which means that even with all of their gear, there's enough space for everyone to have their own row of seats. Some guys take advantage, like JJ, who always sprawls over two seats and naps on the road. A lot of the others sit together regardless, casual in each other's space the way only years in locker rooms and on the ice together can make people. Shane sometimes sits with Hayden, but often prefers to have his own row. Physical ease with his team has never come naturally to him, not like it seems to do for so many of the others. Hayden has always been the exception and Shane knows he's lucky for it, breezing past Shane's barriers and making himself comfortable in Shane's life despite, sometimes, Shane himself.

Shane has chalked it up to awkwardness, for a long time. He knows he's a little more straight laced than the rest of the guys; a lifetime of chirping and joking with his teammates has afforded him a certain level of fluency in the intimacy of existing on a team, but it has never been without a not-insignificant amount of stiffness for him. He's been wondering, lately, if the distance he'd been so insistent upon cultivating between himself and Ilya, had inadvertently spilled over to the rest of the team. And it's a non-zero chance, if he's being totally honest, that he's kept everyone except Hayden at arms length to protect himself not for being found out necessarily about wanting Ilya specifically, but wanting men in general. He wonders, fleetingly, if Scott Hunter had ever felt this way.

Someone kicks the back of his seat.

"Do you want," Ilya asks quietly through the gap between the two seats. He's parked himself in the row behind Shane. "I can sit with you?"

A few rows ahead of Shane, he can see Marlow already passed out, his head lolling between his headrest and his seat-mate's shoulder. He's getting a dick Sharpie'd onto his forehead tonight, without a doubt, but the easy camaraderie of it catches in Shane's chest.

"Sure, yeah," he says. Ilya gets up, grabs something off of the seat next to him, and hauls himself into the empty seat next to Shane. He slouches down a little, scraping his knees against the row in front of him as he lets his legs sprawl. His left thigh bumps Shane's right, and his other leg extends into the aisle. To anyone walking past, it would look like the most obnoxious manspread, Shane is sure. Ilya winks at him, quick as a flash. "Take nap, I will keep you safe from pranks."

"You'd shave my eyebrows off yourself," Shane snorts. He presses his leg against Ilya's, just a bit. Ilya looks impossibly fond for just a second, before he schools his features. "I'm so fucking tired."

"I know," Ilya says. "Take nap. We will be back after midnight, plenty of time."

Shane wakes up while they're still on the highway. Ilya's leg is no longer against his – Ilya's not next to him at all. He pushes his hood off and sits up, twisting to crack his spine and look around. Ilya is back in the seat behind him with his phone pressed to his ear and his forehead pressed to the bus window, speaking softly and rapidly in Russian. He sounds angry, or stressed, Shane can't tell. He feels a fierce surge of want, suddenly, just to touch Ilya's face and see his eyebrows smooth out.

"Are you okay?" Shane asks when Ilya hangs up.

"Shit, sorry," Ilya says. "Did not mean to wake you." He gets up and returns to the seat next to Shane, fiddling with his phone.

"That sounded intense."

"Is just Russian. Intense language," Ilya says, but the joke falls flat when he doesn't lighten his voice. He seems to realize it and scrubs a hand over his face. "It was my brother."

"Oh," Shane says. He casts his mind back, trying to remember if Ilya had mentioned a brother before. He doesn't think so.

"I don't want to talk about it," Ilya tells him.

"Okay," Shane says. It doesn't feel like enough.

Most of the rest of the team is asleep. It's the middle of the night, they're god-knows-where, and the only person in Shane's line of vision who is awake is Price, who's watching a movie on his iPad and has a pair of big, over-ear headphones on.

Shane glances around again to make sure they won't be noticed, a conspicuous move in and of itself that he can't stop himself from, and then reaches out across the armrest and puts his hand over the back of Ilya's. He feels so, so dumb, for making such a middle school move, but Ilya stops turning his phone over and looks at Shane with wide eyes, his eyebrows are still drawn, his mouth tight. Shane fights the insane urge to reach out and push Ilya's lips into their usual smile. After a beat, Ilya drops his phone entirely and turns his hand over, lacing his fingers with Shane's. He squeezes.

Coach's office is small. Shane's always sort of wondered why he doesn't ask for a bigger one - the team is successful enough, and the department definitely has the funding. There isn't enough shelf space for the pile of replica trophies crowded onto the bookcase behind the desk, and there's no TV, just an external monitor perched on the corner of Coach's desk that Shane has suspected for over a year to be broken.

Coach sets his iPad down on the desk and looks at Shane. Unsure what this meeting had been about, Shane has dressed nicely - he's got slacks and a button down on, with a team zip-up jacket. It's basically his game day outfit, he realized too late after he left his apartment to come to the gym. He had also realized as he trudged over the few blocks, trying not to get

slush into his dress shoes, that he was inadvertently wearing Ilya's hat, which he's now twisting between his hands.

"We've gotta pick things up this next few weeks," Coach tells him. "We had a great fall, but January wasn't quite where we needed to be to get back to the Frozen Four. We are a good enough team to get an automatic bid and a high seed and I need to make sure we make that happen."

Shane knows he's right. They'd lost in the Holiday Face Off over New Year's, then bounced back for a game, and then reeled off two more losses in a row. Shane knows.

"So we've gotta make some changes," Coach continues. "I want to move you up to center the top line for the next few games and see how it goes."

"What?" Shane says quickly. His heart leaps into his throat. "Coach, that's - no offense, but that's crazy, you can't move Ilya down!"

"I'm not going to," Coach says. "Rozanov will move to the right wing, Barrett will stay where he is on the left. Krejci will move up to the second line to take your spot."

Shane's knuckles are white where he's squeezing Ilya's hat like it's a stress ball. "That'll fuck up his chances at getting drafted," he blurts before he can stop himself.

Coach barks out a laugh. "Hallsy, I've been beating back NHL offers on that kid for three years because he asked me to. If Roz wants to actually fucking go to the draft this year, he's not gonna have any issues, even if I send him down to the fourth line. But that's not your problem." He raps his fingers against the desk. "We good here?"

Shane is so not good. "Yeah, Coach," he says, standing up. "We're good."

Shane can't manage to bring it up to Ilya.

Not that he's moving up a line – Ilya is thrilled about that, Shane's doesn't think he's ever seen him happier in practice. And it does feel good, it feels fucking great. They move just as well together with Barrett as they did by themselves over the summer, and their first game with the new lines ends in a 3-1 win, two of the goals Ilya's.

"I love you," Ilya had told Shane as he skated off of the ice towards the tunnel, tapping him on the helmet. Shane's stomach had done some complicated gymnastics, his eyes wide and his heart in his throat, and then Ilya had said "I love you!" to Barrett, tapping him on the head, too. Shane had rolled his eyes, trying to shake off the way his heart was still hammering away, and made his way to the locker rooms, Ilya's delighted smile seared into his brain.

Shane's mom was thrilled with the new lines, too, keeping up a steady stream of text messages with Shane's updated stats. His plus minus was up, she made sure to let him know. He was riding a streak of an assist in every game since the move.

But every time Shane tries to bring up Coach's offhand remark, that Ilya had had the option to go to the draft every year he'd been on the team and had apparently declined each time, he hasn't been able to make himself spit it out.

It's unfathomable, to Shane, to have the option to go to the league and not take it. It feels –

It feels like Ilya has lied to him, somehow, but Shane doesn't know how to articulate that. Ilya hasn't lied. There was no reason for Ilya to tell him about this back when their entire relationship was sneaking around and hooking up when nobody knew, not talking to each other. And that hadn't yet changed when Ilya had mentioned the draft to Shane this summer, when they started properly hanging out.

But all the times Ilya had said on the ice that Shane should move up and center his line, that he would move to the wing – every time Shane had deflected, saying he hadn't wanted to fuck up Ilya's chances at getting drafted. Ilya had known it wouldn't have, and he hadn't said anything.

"You bringing Rose tonight?" Hayden asks.

"I dunno," Shane says. "I hadn't really thought about it."

"You should, you guys have been hanging out forever," Hayden tells him.

Shane had come over to Hayden's place after getting dinner with his parents, who had flown in for their back to back home games, to help him move furniture and set up for a party; he and JJ had wanted to celebrate their two wins.

"That good?" Shane asks, dropping the arm of the sofa he's just shoved against the wall.

"Yeah, perf."

Shane's not sure if Hayden thinks he and Rose are dating.

That's not true. Shane is pretty sure Hayden thinks he and Rose are dating. He's been careful to neither confirm nor deny, and Hayden hasn't pressed him for a straight answer, but Hayden's his best friend, he knows what the guy's assumption is. Shane feels a little weird about the lie of omission, but if he's being honest, having the plausible deniability of Rose, even if it's just in Hayden's mind, is reassuring to him.

He feels a little gross about it all.

"Bring her," Hayden says. "Tell her to bring her weird track friends, the more the merrier!"

Rose does come, with three girls she apparently runs a relay with, and she kisses Shane's cheek when she finds him, leaning against a wall and sipping a shitty beer. Hayden's house is stuffed to the brim with people. One of the Czech guys, Shane isn't sure which, brought a

disco ball, and JJ is on aux with a playlist he swears is straight out of the hottest clubs in Montreal. Shane's not so sure about that one, but then again, he's from Ottawa and hardly an expert on Montreal's club scene.

"So this is how the hockey team parties!"

"Yeah, sometimes," he laughs, kissing Rose back. "Need a drink?"

"A drink and a dance, in that order, please," she says. Shane groans.

"I shouldn't have invited you, I knew you'd fucking make me dance," he tells her, taking her wrist and leading her into the kitchen.

She helps herself to the bright blue, lightly radioactive-looking concoction that's in an oversized mixing bowl on the counter. "Is Ilya here?" she asks, taking a sip and wrinkling her nose.

"Somewhere, I think," Shane says. "I haven't seen him yet."

"Should I pretend I don't know him?"

"Oh," Shane says. He hadn't thought about that. "Yeah, maybe?"

"Can do," she tells him. "But just – maybe I should've asked before I brought them, but. You aren't keeping that secret because the team is like, homophobic or something, right? Because Sophie and Kate are dating."

"Your teammates? They are?"

"Yeah, since last year," Rose says, waving her hand like it's not important. "Is anyone gonna be weird about it?"

"Oh," Shane says. "No, no, I don't think so. I mean. Straight guys love girls making out." Rose punches him on the arm. "Sorry! It's just true!"

"You know what I mean, though."

"Yeah," he says. "Sorry. Again. But no I think, you know. I haven't heard anyone talking shit about Scott Hunter or anything." He thinks of Ilya and then corrects himself. "At least, not for having come out."

"That's very cool of him to have done," she says. She drains the rest of her cup and tosses it into the sink. "Okay, come dance with me now!"

Shane sort of feels like he should've had some of the foul-looking blue drink too as he lets Rose tug him back to the living room. He tries to loosen up his hips as she dances against him, but this has just never really been his thing. He doesn't know what to do with his arms so he puts his hands on her waist to not have to think about it.

It's dark and the music is a little too loud and the disco ball is making Shane feel a little drunker than he actually is, which is what he chalks up the lurch in his heart to as he sees Ilya across the room.

Ilya is also dancing, not really by himself, he's in a group of people, but not with anyone in particular, either, and he looks incredible. He's wearing a white shirt that looks impossibly soft and exposes his collarbones, and his curls are springing loose from whatever product he'd used to try and slick them back. He's holding a bottle of Corona in one hand and his movements are smooth and fluid, belying a hint of power, the same coiled energy he has on the ice.

Rose must sense something because she peels herself off of Shane and looks up at him, still swaying. She turns and looks over her shoulder, following Shane's gaze, and then turns back to Shane, smirking and leaning in to whisper in his ear. "Go get your man!"

"Shut up, I can't do that here!"

"He wants you to," Rose says. She turns them around so she's the one facing Ilya and tugs on Shane's neck so he bends down to her. "He's looking at us," she says into Shane's ear.

"I can't," Shane says again. "I'm not good at like, making a joke out of things."

"So don't make a joke," Rose says. Shane shakes his head. "I'm not saying fuck him right here! Go take him home, I know you want to."

"But you just got here, I can't ditch you," Shane protests.

"Yes you can, I'll be fine," she tells him. "Shane, that man looks so sad looking at you right now. And so hot."

"Fuck," Shane says. "Fuck, okay."

Rose squeezes his neck once and then releases him, winking. Shane turns around.

Ilya does look sad, he realizes, horrified, as he squeezes past people to cross the room. His face is closed off even as his body moves in graceful rhythm..

"Hey, can I?" Shane shouts when he gets close enough, gesturing at the bottle in Ilya's hand. Ilya holds it out and Shane grabs for it, feeling Ilya's fingers over his as Ilya hands the bottle off and wondering if he's been electrocuted for how charged it is. He takes a swig and passes it back. "Wanna get out of here?"

Surprise flits over Ilya's face. He brings the bottle up and rests it against his lips for a second, then takes a slow sip, watching Shane watch him the whole time.

"Yes, but no," he says.

"What?"

“I want to dance with you,” Ilya says, leaning in so he can speak quietly. “Like she danced with you.”

Shane can imagine it. Being pressed against Ilya’s sculpted chest in this crowded, loud room. He can imagine Ilya’s hands on his hips, huge, moving him with the beat. He gets goosebumps on his arms thinking about Ilya whispering in his ear as they moved together, Ilya’s breath on his neck. He squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head.

“Not here,” he says.

Ilya’s nostrils flare and he brings the bottle back up, draining it. “Okay, so, we go.”

Shane doesn’t have the patience to stagger their exit. He follows Ilya to the door right away, fumbling for his coat. Ilya looks back at him once and then opens the door.

It’s cold, the February air cruel against Shane’s cheeks. He reaches into his pocket for Ilya’s hat and crams it onto his head, jogging a little to keep up with Ilya’s long strides. Ilya scoffs.

“So, you wear my hat everywhere but you will not dance with me,” he says flatly. They cross the street, tracing the familiar path towards Ilya’s apartment.

“Nobody knows it’s your hat,” Shane says, baffled. “You gave it to me, you said it looks good.”

Ilya looks at him, finally, not breaking stride. “It does look good. Not the point.”

It dawns on Shane that they’re fighting. He feels like an idiot for not realizing it sooner.

“We couldn’t – not there, come on, Ilya,” he pleads. “I didn’t even want to be dancing with Rose.”

“I am much better dancer,” Ilya says. “I would have made it so good for you.”

“Fuck, Ilya!” Shane shouts. He glances around, kicking himself, but the street is empty. “That’s not the point either!”

“I know,” Ilya says, and finally stops walking. His building is at the end of the block. “Point is, you will dance with Rose even though you do not like to dance, but you will not dance with *me*.”

“Not in a room full of our fucking teammates,” Shane says. “Let’s - Ilya, let’s go inside right now and I will dance with you. I want to, come on, I swear.”

“That is the point,” Ilya says, enunciating very carefully. “Only in secret you will do these things.”

“I’m trying to protect you!” Shane exclaims. “You’re trying to fucking get drafted and I don’t want you to throw it away, not everyone can be Scott fucking Hunter!” He’s breathing hard, he realizes distantly. His face is hot.

“Do you protect me or do you protect yourself?” Ilya asks coldly, his voice low. “I am not the one who cares about this.”

“About what?”

“About being secret always,” Ilya snaps. “I do not care. You care.”

“You do care,” Shane says, drawing his eyebrows together. “You said— you can’t go back to Russia if—”

“I don’t *want* to go back to Russia,” Ilya roars. It’s so loud after how quiet he’s been this whole time that Shane takes a small step backwards. “I am trying to stay *here*! That is whole point of stupid fucking draft!”

“Is it?” Shane asks, and he hates himself before he says it but he continues, “If you’re even actually trying to get drafted at all? Doesn’t seem like it, from what Coach said. He said they’ve been asking about you since you joined the fucking team and you keep turning them down. So forgive me for being a little fucking confused!”

Ilya puts both hands over his face. Shane thinks he’s going to scream as he sees Ilya draw in a huge, shuddering breath, but he just blows it out slowly, slowly, and sinks into a crouch on the cold sidewalk.

“I did not need draft to stay here until this year,” Ilya says. His voice is quiet again, and he’s talking into his hands, almost too muffled for Shane to hear properly. “There was always next season. But now, we will graduate.”

“But - but if you’d gotten drafted ages ago, you wouldn’t have had to worry about that,” Shane asks, confused. “You’d have a contract, your team would have already gotten you a visa.”

“But then I could not keep studying,” Ilya says, expressionless. “I wanted – I always wanted that, always.”

“Oh,” Shane says. “Then why play, like, at all?”

“I have to play to come here in first place. Reading books is not good reason to leave Russia.” There’s an edge in his voice, still soft, that makes Shane shudder for how ugly it is. He looks up at Shane, resting his chin on his knees, and Shane feels tears gathering in the corners of his eyes, whether from the cold or from the raw way Ilya is looking at him, he can’t be sure. “I had offer, from minor league team in Moscow. But I could not stay, not after— everything. So I tell my father, I will go to North America, play in college to get drafted to NHL. This, he allows.”

“I thought you loved hockey?” Shane asks. He knows it’s not the right thing to fixate on, of everything Ilya has just said, but he can’t stop himself.

“Not like you love hockey,” Ilya says. “I will go to NHL if I have to. I will play. Playing will be good. But my brother —” He pauses and drops his head into his hands again. Shane steps

towards him slowly and sinks down, sitting on the sidewalk. Cold seeps through the seat of his pants immediately. Shane reaches for Ilya and puts his hand on the curve of Ilya's spine. Ilya turns and rests his cheek on his knee, gazing at Shane. "My brother, we do not have good relationship. He is not – he is police. I don't know exactly what he does." His lips twist. "Is best, this way. I came back in summer because we fought, worse than usual. I could not stay there with him. I am afraid-" he cuts himself off. Shane lets his hand run up and down Ilya's back, trying to soothe him.

"I am afraid if I get big contract, go to NHL, I will never be free from them," Ilya murmurs. "They will ask for money, always money. I will maybe have to join Team Russia, keep going back. I will never escape." Ilya closes his eyes. "I applied to stay here, at this university," he continues. "To do PhD here. So I am hoping, maybe I can do this instead. But if not, if I become professional hockey player, I think maybe, if I have boyfriend, in public like Scott Hunter, they will be too ashamed of me to bring me back."

Shane moves his hand up to Ilya's shoulder and tugs. Ilya lets himself become unbalanced, tips into Shane's space. He stretches his legs out in front of him and fully sits on the sidewalk next to Shane, turning his head away. Shane grabs his jaw and turns Ilya to face him, and sees the tears leaking out of Ilya's closed eyes. He cups Ilya's face, brushing his thumb over Ilya's cheekbone.

"What does your mom think?" he asks.

"My mother is dead."

"Fuck," Shane breathes. "How did she-?"

"Accident," Ilya says. "This is what my father says." He looks up, away from Shane, even though Shane is still cupping his face. "Accidentally she swallowed whole bottle of pills. I found her. And then I had to leave."

Lost for words, Shane pulls Ilya into his chest. Ilya slumps against him, pushes his face into Shane's shoulder, and lets out a strangled sob. His arms come around Shane, squeezing, and Shane pushes his nose into the top of Ilya's head. Ilya's curls flutter with Shane's exhales and he wonders, absently, if Ilya is going to crack his ribs for how hard he's holding Shane as he cries, but Shane can't bring himself to care.

Chapter 4: SPRING

Mathematically, they've secured the conference title. It feels good to know that the post season is on the table, that hockey doesn't end on Senior Day.

Shane's parents are flying out for it, of course, Shane's last home game. They'd never miss it, the chance to walk him out to center ice and shake hands with Coach in front of all their fans, getting all the team memorabilia, celebrating Shane's college career. Shane's excited to have them there. He's been named to the all conference team this year, and he's proud to have one more accolade for the announcer to read out as he walks out.

"Are you sure you don't want to come to lunch?" Shane asks, straightening his collar in Ilya's mirror. Ilya is lounging on his bed in a pair of black sweatpants and no shirt, the gold of his crucifix catching the overhead light as he opens and closes the lid of an empty carton of cigarettes.

"Shane." Ilya's voice has a hint of warning in it.

"Sorry," Shane says. "Sorry, I know."

"Then why do you ask?"

"I will tell them. I will tell them soon, I swear. I just— can't, today. Not yet. I just want this weekend to be about, you know. Senior Day, enjoying that moment and everything."

"I know," Ilya sighs. "I know. I am not mad. But I still do not want to meet your parents as liar."

"It wouldn't *really* be a lie," Shane reasons. "I mean, we are friends? You're probably one of my best friends, besides Hayden and Rose."

"Oh, you give all your friends blowjobs before lunch with your parents?" Ilya asks, adjusting himself rather obviously in his sweats.

"Fuck off, I haven't blown you today," Shane says, turning back to the mirror.

"Yet," Ilya says. "You want to, though."

And fuck, but Shane does. He checks his phone for the time. "You are the worst," he tells Ilya, abandoning his collar and striding over to the bed.

Ilya smiles up at him innocently. "Is good thing you keep toothbrush here, now," he says, and slides his pants off of his hips.

The fanfare of Senior Day is everything Shane had hoped it would be. The crowd cheers for him as the announcer reads out his accomplishments and his parents are beaming in every

photo the team photographer snaps. Hayden's parents hug him, too, and he shakes hands with Price's mom. The coaching staff presents them all with framed jerseys bearing their names and numbers, which Shane's mom immediately takes from him, saying she's already got a spot on the wall picked out for it at home.

Ilya is the only one there without his family, escorted instead by Svetlana, who is beautiful and who looks at home around the rink in a way that makes Shane wonder if she played hockey growing up.

"Is that Vetrova as in, Sergei Vetrov?" His mother whispered to him when the announcer read out her name and she and Ilya had made their way out to center ice. "The goalie?"

"No clue," Shane whispered back. He's met Svetlana, just once, when he had gone with Ilya to hear her give a talk that went mostly over his head on mid-20th century satire and censorship in the Soviet Union. Ilya hadn't brought up hockey with anyone at the reception afterwards, and Shane had followed his lead.

They're arguing now, Ilya and Svetlana, as the rest of the team takes the ice for a few minutes of warming up after the ceremonies. Svetlana is leaning against the boards, looking annoyed but fond, and Ilya is frowning. Shane makes his way over to them, fist bumping JJ and Marlow on his way, and slings his arm around Ilya's neck in what he hopes is a friendly, casual way.

"Ready for this game?" he asks. Ilya startles.

"You have to go now, see? Is time for game," he says in English to Svetlana. "Assistant captain says so. Bye bye!"

Svetlana rolls her eyes harder than anyone Shane's witnessed in his life. "Give me the jersey and I will go sit."

"You don't need it, it will be fine," Ilya says insistently. The framed jersey with *ROZANOV* emblazoned on it, Shane realizes, is propped up against the boards.

"Ilyushka is being stupid," Svetlana says to Shane. Her accent is much less pronounced than Ilya's. "He'll conveniently lose this if I don't take it, or forget it in the dumpster. And then in probably not too many years, when he is bald and fat and out of shape and he wishes to look back on these nice memories, he'll be sad that he didn't give this stupid thing to his good friend for safekeeping!"

"She's got your number," Shane tells Ilya, knocking his stick against Ilya's shin pads. "Stop being stubborn and give it to her, we have a game to play."

"It will be many, many years before I am bald and fat and out of shape," Ilya says darkly, but he hands over the jersey.

"Nice to see you, Shane Hollander," Svetlana says as she heads off of the ice, jersey in tow. She adds something in Russian over her shoulder that makes Ilya burst into a surprised laugh.

“What did she say?”

Ilya skates backwards in a circle, drawing them a bit further away from the bench. “She said I’ll thank her for saving the jersey when I break the frame and give it to you to wear while we fuck,” he says, just above a whisper.

“Shut up,” Shane reflexively glances around. “What the fuck, she did not.”

“She did, she looks nice but is all lies, Sveta is very dirty girl,” Ilya tells him. “She has good ideas, though, maybe we will try this?”

“Fuck off,” Shane says. “Keep it in your pants, you have to go talk to the refs!”

“Boner killer,” Ilya mutters. He taps his stick against Shane’s before Shane can skate back to the bench. “You are okay, that she knows?”

Shane nods. “She’s your friend,” he says. “I said I wanted to take some time and be slow about it, and I do, but. It’s only fair, right? Rose knows, she knows.”

Ilya exhales and his face softens into Shane’s favorite version of his smile, one side of his lips tugging up more than the other. “Thank you.”

Google is not helping Shane.

Typing *Ilyushka* into the search bar has given him a headache – the SparkNotes page for “Analysis of Ilya in *The Brothers Karamazov*” is not helping him, an article entitled “List of Russian Names and Nicknames” has about five nicknames, some seemingly completely unrelated, for every given name on the list but no explanations, and a Reddit thread about an anime series he’s not familiar with gets so complicated within five comments that Shane closes the tab.

It’s probably just a nickname, Shane knows, like how Ilya always shortens Svetlana’s name to Sveta. But Ilya’s nickname is Roz, to the best of Shane’s knowledge - it’s what most of the team calls him, or sometimes Rozy.

Shane pulls out his phone. *You busy?*

me? i am never busy, Ilya responds with characteristic speed, the accompanying photo a picture of his usual library table, littered with open books.

Come over when you finish your work, if you want?

i always want.

Shane putters, mostly texting Hayden about their power play while he waits. He’s optimistic about their chances in regionals coming up, the anticipation of it carrying him along like a balloon. They get pretty deep into it, Shane going so far as to put on his glasses and open his laptop to isolate a play from a few weeks ago that illustrates a problem with their forecheck

he's convinced they haven't quite solved yet. He makes a smoothie and relocates to the couch, forgets to turn the lights on as the sun sets.

He also forgets that Ilya doesn't have a spare key, only Hayden does, and startles when a knock comes at the front door. He shoves his laptop aside and straightens his shirt.

"You wear glasses?" Ilya asks, delighted, when Shane opens the door. "Why so dark in here?"

"Oh shit, I forgot," Shane says, pulling his glasses off and folding the arms in. "They're just for like, reading, or being on the computer."

"And yet I never see you wearing them in library," Ilya teases, toeing off his shoes and dropping his backpack. "You are reading now?"

"No, no, I was texting Hayden and going over some film," Shane says, leading Ilya into the living room. "I think our forecheck is still kind of fucked and our power play needs work before regionals, don't you?"

"Hmm," Ilya shrugs. "Yes, probably. But also is Coach's job, not mine."

"I know," Shane says. "I just, you know. I like breaking things down, it's not a big deal."

"Is cute," Ilya tells him. "Maybe you will be Coach Shane someday."

"Yeah, maybe. I've thought about it, a little. My mom thinks it would be a good idea."

"Is great idea," Ilya agrees. "But you will have to have different office than Coach."

"What's wrong with his office?"

"There is window in door," Ilya says, his voice suspiciously casual.

"So?"

"Coach Hollander calls star player Rozanov into office wearing sexy glasses, I will have no choice but to thank you for sharing your hockey IQ with me by giving you blowjob," Ilya smirks. "You sit at desk, keep your glasses on. I think you will wear slacks and shirt, not workout clothes, when you are coach, yes? I will unzip your pants with my teeth, will be very good thank you."

"Fuck, Ilya," Shane breathes, dizzy from the rush of arousal Ilya's words have spurred. "Wait, you think the glasses are sexy?"

"Very," Ilya says. "Put them back on."

He does sink to his knees then, after Shane puts his glasses back on, and presses Shane back into the arm of the couch. He blows Shane just the right side of sloppy, reducing Shane to a wet, sticky mess. It's so, so good, even though Shane knows he'll think it's gross in a few minutes, how Ilya lets so much spit out of his mouth, barely getting his hands involved. He

comes almost by surprise when Ilya dances his fingers just behind his balls and he can't stop his hips from stuttering, forcing himself deeper down Ilya's throat as he spills.

"Sorry, sorry," he pants, tangling his fingers in Ilya's hair as Ilya pulls off. Ilya swallows, licks his lips, and doesn't seem to mind at all. "Can I — what do you want?"

"Couch, for now," Ilya says, his voice rough in a way that makes Shane's stomach swoop. "I will fuck you later."

"Are you sure?"

Ilya responds by standing up and tucking Shane back into his underwear, then pushing Shane backwards over the arm of the couch and crawling over him. "Is nice, right?"

It is nice. Ilya is heavy on top of Shane, and his knees are awkwardly hooked over the arm of the couch, but Ilya seems unconcerned with his own hard cock, digging slightly into Shane's belly, and more preoccupied with wrapping his arms under Shane's torso and kissing the side of his face, nosing at Shane's glasses. They stay there for a while, unhurried, and Shane feels Ilya soften, but Ilya doesn't seem inclined to do anything about it just yet.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Ilya murmurs, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane's ear.

"Why does Svetlana call you Ilyushka?"

Ilya stills, his face still pressed close to Shane. Shane feels him breathe in and out, his belly rising and falling against Shane's, one, two, three times before he unhooks his arms from underneath Shane and rolls off of him, righting himself to sit against the other armrest. Shane follows suit, swinging his legs around, and turns to face Ilya.

"Is like nickname, kind of," Ilya tells him. "No, maybe not. I am Ilya, but Ilya is, what is phrase, government name?"

Shane snorts. "Like if my mom uses my middle name to let me know I'm in trouble?"

"Hm, okay, so not quite," Ilya says. "Maybe more like...If I only call you Mr. Shane. Or Mr. Hollander. But not in sexy way. Is just...formal. Not for friends."

"Oh," Shane hums. "Okay. Should I, I mean. Would you want me to call you Ilyushka?"

"Maybe if I am being asshole," Ilya says, winking. "But I would like very much if you would call me Ilyusha, yes."

"You're always being an asshole," Shane teases. "Are there other versions? I looked at this one website and there were so many names and so many nicknames, I couldn't figure out what was happening."

"You looked this up?" Ilya asks. His face looks almost fragile in its happiness as he blinks at Shane, tugging lightly on his own ear.

“Yeah, I don’t know, I was curious when I heard her call you that and it just seemed like something I should know? Like, if your nickname isn’t Roz?”

“Roz is hockey name,” Ilya says. “Not Russian, just hockey. Sveta usually calls me Ilyusha, Ilyushka is when she wants me to know I am being stupid. And then—”

There’s a long pause, but Shane makes himself sit in it. Ilya will keep going, he knows, he just clearly needs a second. He pulls his feet onto the sofa and tucks one underneath himself, extending the other towards Ilya.

“My mother called me Ilyushenka,” he says quietly. “That one is for kids, everyone calls you this when you are kid, but only parents when you are older. Or also, you know. Husband, wife, probably. For me, only her.”

Shane presses his toes into Ilya’s thigh. “Ilyusha,” he tries, rolling it around in his mouth.

Ilya smiles at him, the sadness still in his eyes, but unclouded. Shane feels like his chest is going to crack in two. “Your pronunciation is still terrible,” Ilya says. He brings his hand to Shane’s ankle, rubs the thin skin over the bone. “Thank you.”

Shane rolls over and goes back to sleep the first time Ilya’s phone buzzes them awake, around four in the morning.

It’s rare for them to stay over at Shane’s apartment. Shane has moved a toothbrush and an armful of workout clothes into Ilya’s place, and he knows it’s a little shitty of him to insist on spending most of their time at Ilya’s because it’s further away from the gym and they’re less likely to be spotted by their teammates, but he can’t help it. Ilya has always been affectionate during sex, even back when they were eighteen and Shane was bolting out of the room as soon as they’d cleaned up. Since they’ve started doing this for real, Ilya’s affection has spilled over into easy touches, smiles, the way he always finds Shane and makes eye contact when he walks into a room, and Shane is starting to understand it to mean that Ilya is serious about not needing to hide their relationship. Shane isn’t there yet; he’s still grappling with the idea that he could go from everyone knowing him as Shane Hollander, hockey player, to Shane Hollander, gay. Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov’s boyfriend.

A scary thought, but also, well. Shane likes how he feels when he thinks of himself as Ilya’s boyfriend. Maybe having other people think of him that way wouldn’t be so bad.

He has a plan. A loose one, at least. Rose already knows. He’s going to tell his parents after the postseason ends, whether that’s at regionals in a few days or at the Frozen Four in two weeks. Being the center of attention off of the ice has never been comfortable for Shane, so he knows he won’t tell the team all at once. He wants to tell Hayden first, in private, then maybe JJ. Shane’s not even sure the rest of the team needs to know, once the post season is over – or maybe that’s just wishful thinking, that he can procrastinate and get off of the hook.

It hurts Ilya, Shane knows with no small amount of guilt, that Shane has been stalling. He doesn’t want to hurt Ilya; he wants to make Ilya smile and laugh and run his hands through

Ilya's wild curls, reveling in the softness in Ilya's eyes.

When Ilya's phone goes off the second time, Ilya untangles himself from Shane and gets up, pressing a kiss to Shane's shoulder and mumbling "Go back to sleep," as he answers the call. He switches immediately to Russian and Shane drifts in and out, sleepily rolling over into the warm space on Ilya's side of the bed.

He must have fallen properly back asleep because Ilya shakes him awake some time later, fully dressed and with his backpack over one shoulder.

"What's going on," Shane asks, his tongue thick with sleep.

"I have to go home," Ilya says. "To Russia. Sveta is coming to take me to airport - my flight is in few hours."

"What?" Shane sits up. "But regionals - we leave tomorrow?"

"Yes, I will miss them," Ilya says. "I am sorry. But you will still win without me."

"Ilya, what's going on?"

"My father is dead," Ilya says. There's no expression in his voice. "I have to go home."

"What the fuck, Ilya, I'm so sorry," Shane says, reaching out for him. He gets his arms around Ilya's middle and presses his face into Ilya's chest. "Is there anything I can do? What do you need?"

Ilya pets his hair, gently twisting the too-long strands at the back of Shane's neck. "I will call you maybe? Once I am there?"

"Of course, yeah," Shane says. "Anything."

"You should get coffee with Sveta," Ilya says. "Before I come back. She will also be worried about me, you can be worried together."

Shane nods into Ilya's chest. "I'm so sorry, Ilya."

"Is okay," Ilya tells him. "No, is not okay. I don't know. But I have to go now."

He pushes Shane's shoulders until Shane releases him, then ducks down and presses a kiss to Shane's lips, impossibly sweet. He draws back but Shane follows him, steals a second kiss, and then Ilya swipes his thumb over Shane's cheek and heads for the door.

"Where the fuck have you been?"

Shane slides into the seat next to Hayden, who shoves a to-go cup at him. He's exactly on time for team breakfast, which means he's late, but he had a hard time getting out of the apartment this morning after Ilya's abrupt departure. Shane's pretty sure getting himself to

the meeting room in the gym was an out of body experience, because he has no recollection of getting dressed or walking over the few blocks.

“Rough morning,” he says, gratefully accepting the coffee from Hayden. “Talk after?”

“Okay,” Hayden says, and then they both shut up as Coach starts running down their logistics for tomorrow’s trip.

Shane zones out for most of the meeting. He manages to eat about two bites of the bagel Hayden had saved for him, ripping off pieces of the rest until it’s a pile of crumbs on a paper plate, and he knows he’s gonna have to wait for the email checklist to go out to get any of the travel details straight. He’s already at the airport, in his mind, with Ilya, waiting on a flight to Moscow.

“Okay, boys,” Coach is saying when Shane tunes back in. “We’ll have an evening practice at the arena after we get in tomorrow. Don’t you dare fucking go out tonight, you’re officially on the 48 hour rule and I want you all in bed early so the travel doesn’t take too much out of us.”

“There’s one more thing,” he continues. “I know this is not going to be easy, but you’ve all noticed the elephant in the room is that Roz isn’t here with us this morning. I want to assure you all, this is *not* a disciplinary matter. He has asked me for privacy and I’m gonna respect that, but Rozanov won’t be traveling with us this week because of a family emergency. Hollander will have the C, Pike will move up to the top line right wing, and we’ll have the rest of the lines sorted out before we hit the ice tomorrow. I know you all want to finish this season with your captain, so you’d better win for him at regionals so we can get him back out there for the Frozen Four.”

The team is buzzing as they spill out of the meeting room, but Shane grabs Hayden’s arm and they slip away, heading out of the gym instead of to the locker room to start packing gear with the rest of the team.

“What’s going on, dude? You show up late to a team meeting looking like death and Roz isn’t traveling for regionals, what the fuck is happening?”

Shane takes a sip of the long-cold coffee. “Ilya’s not traveling because his dad died,” he tells Hayden.

“Woah, shit,” Hayden says. “That fucking sucks.” He lets out a low whistle. “Wait, how do you know that?”

Shane takes a deep breath. “He got a call at like, four in the morning. He’s probably on his flight to Russia already.”

“And he what, texted you before he left?”

The impulse to say yes is so strong, but Shane thinks of Ilya, alone on a flight across the world to bury his father, and tries to be brave. “No, I was there,” he tells Hayden. “That’s why it was a rough morning for me. Ilya stayed over at my place last night.”

The cogs are visibly turning in Hayden's mind. Shane can see the moment when it clicks. "Hang on, you and Roz?"

Shane nods.

"For how long?"

"Summer, kind of, I guess," Shane says. "Or, well. Really since freshman year but it wasn't serious until this year."

"So you and Rose...?"

"We were never a thing," Shane confirms. "She's just, uh, my best friend who isn't you?"

"Does she know?"

"She guessed a while ago, yeah."

Hayden socks him on the shoulder. "I can't believe I'm only the second to know, what the fuck, dude." He narrows his eyes. "I am second, right?"

"Kind of," Shane says, rubbing the back of his neck. "Price might've walked in on us like, years ago, but he's never said anything. And one of Ilya's friends who's not an athlete knows, the girl who walked him out for senior day."

"So I'm fourth, jeez," Hayden moans. "Unbelievable. Wait, that girl was suuuuper hot, can you get me her number?"

"I can't believe that's what you're focusing on here!"

"Hallsy, before I thought you were dating Rose, which, fuck you for letting me carry on about, by the way, I was worried you were going to die a virgin monk," Hayden snorts. "Do I think banging your teammate is probably a terrible fucking idea? Yeah, but that's kind of irrelevant now, you guys are only gonna be teammates for two more games max, and that's only if we win without him this week."

"True," Shane says. "I'm sorry for not telling you, I just - we weren't anything, for so long, and then we were, and I didn't know how to say it."

"Are you gonna be his WAG if he gets drafted? What if he goes to New York, you and Scott Hunter's boyfriend can sit together at games," Hayden says, wiggling his eyebrows. "What's the term for a man WAG?"

"Shut the fuck up," Shane says. The lightness that floods through him as Hayden continues to chatter pushes some of his absolute exhaustion aside and Shane feels, maybe for the first time since he and Ilya fought outside of Ilya's apartment two months ago, that everything might actually be okay.

Regionals passes by in a blur.

There's one moment that Shane thinks he will always remember, deep into the third period of their second round game. He'd had the puck and wrapped it around behind the net for Barrett, who had pulled the goalie just a little bit off of his line and then snapped the puck back to Shane on the near side. He'd taken the shot and launched it hard towards the left post, and he knows intellectually that it was less than a second between the puck leaving his tape and dinging off of the pipe, but in that fraction of a second he was back on the ice with Ilya, alone over the summer, racing around like kids and trying to hit as many dingers as possible.

The puck had rocketed back out of the crease to where Hayden had been waiting to pounce on it on the far side and Hayden had flung it glove side top shelf, lighting up the buzzer before the goalie could even get his hand up.

But off of the ice, Shane mostly remembers just checking his phone, always looking for a message, a photo, anything, from Ilya.

It finally comes when they're back in the hotel after winning their second game. Hayden's napping instead of packing for their early morning flight back to campus and Shane is contemplating how silly he would feel going down to the hotel bar to see if he could get a can of ginger ale to bring back up to the room, when his phone lights up with a text from Ilya. *are you free? can i call you?*

Yes, Shane taps out right away, shoving his feet into his shoes and grabbing his room key before letting himself out, trying not to slam the door and wake Hayden up. He looks up and down the hallway and heads for the stairwell, figuring it'll be the most private spot he's gonna be able to find.

"Hello," Ilya says, his voice crackling over the line when Shane picks up.

"Ilya," Shane says, then corrects himself. "Ilyusha. How - stupid question, I know, but how are you?"

"Okay," Ilya says. "Not good. Probably bad."

Shane pushes the phone to his ear in an impossible attempt to get closer to Ilya. "How's your, uh, family?"

"Funeral is tomorrow," Ilya says. "My brother is terrible. He makes me terrible back. I wish it could be different, that he could know me, or something, but this has always been how we are."

"I'm sorry," Shane says.

"I will not come back, after this, I think," Ilya says.

"Ever?"

"Maybe ever. Maybe just for very long time." There's a long silence, almost long enough that Shane thinks they've lost their connection, before Ilya speaks again. "I will go tomorrow

after funeral to visit my mother. To say goodbye.”

“Shit. Okay.”

“She is all I have left here, you know?”

Shane really, really doesn’t know. He thinks of his own mother, downstairs in the same hotel, probably watching highlights of this afternoon’s game and getting ready to go to dinner with his dad. He wants, suddenly and fiercely, to go hug her.

“I am sorry,” Ilya says. “English is hard and I am tired, I am being depressed.”

“It’s okay,” Shane tells him. “I wish I spoke Russian so you could just– talk.”

“This would be nice,” Ilya says, his voice deep. “I have different personality in Russian, you know.”

“A better personality?” Shane risks a joke and some of the tension leaves his shoulders when Ilya huffs out a small laugh.

“You will be less boring, in Russian,” Ilya carries on. “Is hard to be boring when you do not know any words. You have to be very creative.”

“I like your personality in English,” Shane says. “Even though you’re an asshole. I’m sure I’ll like you in Russian too.”

“I like your English personality too, Shane Hollander, even though your brain is only full of hockey, very boring,” Ilya says, and then drops his voice and says something in Russian. It feels like too much of a moment for Shane to ask for a translation, so he mouths the syllables silently, trying to remember them to look up later. It’s probably a lost cause, but he wants to try.

He writes it down as best as he can remember after they hang up, and pulls up the number Ilya had sent him for Svetlana.

Hi, this is Shane. I get back tomorrow, coffee in the afternoon? Ilya says hi and to let you know he’s ok

She sends him back a Google Maps address for a coffee shop not far from Ilya’s apartment.

“So,” Coach says, leaning forward on his desk. Shane’s tired from the early morning flight back and was hoping he’d have time to go to his place to nap and shower before meeting Svetlana, but as acting captain, he couldn’t skip the debrief with Coach. “I think we’ll have Roz back for the Frozen Four, he’s supposed to email me tomorrow. That’s gonna be plan A. Plan B, he’s not back and Pike will stay up on the top line, but I think we need to change up the kill.”

“Put Barrett on with me,” Shane suggests. “He can cover space better.”

“It’s worth a shot,” Coach says. He takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. “We’ll try that out at practice this week.”

Shane fights the urge to grab his duffel bag and get out of there during the silence. It feels like Coach is winding up to something, and sure enough—

“What are your plans for next year, Hallsy?”

“Sorry?”

“You got a job lined up?”

“Oh, no,” Shane says, shaking his head. “I should probably start applying for things, I guess, but I uh, haven’t really been thinking about it that much. Trying to focus on hockey, you know?”

“It’s been paying off,” Coach tells him. Shane tamps down on a smile, pleased. “You know we’re gonna have an assistantship open next year, right?”

“We are?”

“Yeah, I’m losing Vaughn to the A, Providence offered him an assistant coaching spot,” Coach says. “I can’t guarantee anything, you’d have to apply to the Masters in Sports Science program and get in. But I can give them a call and tell them to take a late application since we didn’t know the spot would be open at the original deadline, if you’re interested.”

“Oh, wow, that’s- uh, that’s really nice of you, Coach, thank you,” Shane manages to get out.

“Think about it,” Coach says. “But don’t take too long, I’m sure they’ll want an application in sooner than later.”

“I will,” Shane says. “Thank you.”

“Go get some rest, kid,” Coach tells him. “We’ve got a championship weekend to get ready for!”

Svetlana is already at the coffee shop when Shane comes in, his hair still a little damp from the shower he’d rushed through after his meeting with Coach. There’s a teapot on her table that reminds Shane a little of the one his mom uses at home, and she has two cups, so Shane abandons the line and sits down.

“I hope you don’t mind, I ordered,” Svetlana says, pouring the tea into the cups. “Just black tea, it reminds me of home.”

“Oh no, that’s fine,” Shane says. “Thank you.”

“It’s nice, I think,” she pushes his cup towards him. The saucer rattles a little. “We have our tea here, Ilyusha is probably having his tea there.”

“Does he drink tea?” Shane’s never seen him go for anything other than Coke or water.

“Everyone does, in Russia,” Svetlana says. “Maybe he doesn’t here, but he does there.”

“Can I ask you something? I don’t want to pry or like, know things he doesn’t want me to know, but - How did his dad die?”

“I think it’s okay for you to ask me this,” Svetlana tells him. “His father had dementia, he has been sick for some years, now.” She stirs a little sugar into her teacup. “I think this is why he told you to meet with me. It’s hard for him to talk about some things, our Ilyusha.”

“Like his mom,” Shane agrees.

“Yes,” Svetlana nods. “I had wondered if he’d told you about her.”

“Just a little. Just that she died, and he -”

“Yes,” Svetlana says again, cutting him off gently. “I hope one day, he will tell you stories of her before that.”

“Did you know her?”

“Only a little,” Svetlana says. “I lived between Boston and Moscow, growing up. I know Ilyusha’s family a bit, but I was in the States when she died.”

Shane swirls his tea around his cup. “He told me he doesn’t want to go back, after this trip.”

“Yes,” Svetlana says. “I think he is serious about that. His plan has always been to try and stay here. He told you they offered him a spot in the PhD program here, yes?”

Shane nods. “Yeah, he said he’s gonna decide after the season. Won’t that be, I don’t know, hard? To never go home?”

Svetlana puts her teacup down. “I don’t think Moscow is his home, ever since he came here. Maybe before, even,” she says. “You have nice parents, I imagine - you seemed very happy with them on Senior Day.” He nods. “So it’ll be hard for you to understand, but you should try – his father was very hard on him, and on his mother, and his brother has never been his family. There are things he will always miss, and I think he will always carry sadness from it, but his home is here now. Maybe with you, someday.”

Shane’s stomach flips. “I would like that,” he says. “But I don’t want to keep him from anything, like, going back or whatever, if he changes his mind.”

Svetlana hums softly. “Don’t think of it as keeping him from doing something he may never want to do,” she advises. “Just show him reasons to follow his heart.” She smiles to herself. “Listen to me, I’m getting mushy. I’m reading too much poetry lately.”

“Can I ask you one more thing?” Shane can feel the conversation winding down and doesn’t want to overstay, but he has to know. She nods, and he reaches into his pocket to pull out a scrap of paper. He’d written down the syllables as best he could remember them from Ilya’s

phone call. “I know it’s not like, correct, or anything, but can you tell me what this means? If you can figure it out?”

She takes the paper and he watches her sound out his poor transliteration a few times.

“He said this to you?”

Shane nods.

“I can tell you many things about his life,” Svetlana says. “But this, I will leave between you and Ilyusha. Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Shane says, biting back disappointment. “I’ll ask him about it. Thanks.”

She nods and hands the paper back to him. “I TA the Intro to Russian class,” she says. “If you’re interested next semester.”

landed

Want me to come over when you get home?

no, i need sleep

That’s okay

You could come here? Closer to the gym for morning practice

u sure? someone could see

Yes

Ilya looks like he’s going to collapse when Shane opens the door to him. He kicks his shoes off and Shane wrestles his duffel bag out of his hands, taking it to the bedroom. “There’s like, decaf tea, if you want it, or Coke,” he calls. “Are you hungry?”

Ilya’s in the doorway when he turns around. “No,” Ilya says. “Just tired.”

Shane crawls into bed with him even though it’s only nine pm.

“You do not have to,” Ilya protests weakly. “I have been sleeping without you for whole week.”

“I know,” Shane says. He props himself up against the headboard and gathers Ilya to his chest. “Go to sleep, I’m here. You’re here.”

There’s coffee waiting for him when he wakes up and stumbles into the kitchen.

Ilya's standing at the counter, drinking water and eating the remains of what looks like a pb and j, but the coffee pot is full. The April morning light filtering in through Shane's tiny kitchen window makes Ilya's curls look like some sort of wild halo.

"How long have you been up?"

"Few hours. Jet lag."

Shane stands next to Ilya, letting their shoulders bump together.

"Thank you for letting me come here," Ilya says quietly. "Was nice, to not sleep alone."

Guilt floods through Shane, who abruptly puts his coffee cup down and grips the edge of the counter, trying not to shake. He takes in a deep breath and counts to five. "I'm sorry," he says, his throat tight, after his four-count exhale.

"Why sorry?"

"That you feel like you have to say thank you when you come over here, that's so fucked up," Shane says. "I'm sorry I made you feel that way. I don't want that."

"Okay," Ilya says. "Yes, is fucked up a little. Thank you for apologizing."

"I want you here," Shane says. "Like, all the time, it's embarrassing."

"Is not embarrassing if I also want to be here always," Ilya shrugs, and then stuffs the rest of the sandwich into his mouth.

"I really am sorry. And I'm trying," Shane says. "I'm- I'm getting there, I swear. I told Hayden, while you were gone. He knows."

"Really?" Ilya asks, sounding like his tongue is stuck to his teeth from the peanut butter.

Shane nods. "He wants Svetlana's number."

Ilya snorts. "She would eat him alive."

"I fucking know. Should I give it to him?"

"Do not make her suffer like this, she is nice girl." Ilya takes a gulp of water and swishes it around his mouth. Shane watches the column of his throat as he swallows. "You feel okay, after telling him?"

"Yeah," Shane says. "Yeah, it felt pretty good, actually."

"Okay," Ilya hums. "I do not want you to do things that make you feel bad. I just cannot be secret forever, yes?"

"Yeah," Shane says. Scott Hunter flashes into his mind, kissing that guy in the jean jacket on national television. "I know."

“We should get dressed, go to gym,” Ilya says, putting his water glass down. “Practice soon.”

They walk out of the building together, Ilya wearing a full sweatsuit and Shane in yesterday’s jeans. Shane doesn’t let himself check the street for anyone he knows before opening the front door and holding it for Ilya. He’s pretty sure the small small at the corner of Ilya’s lips isn’t his imagination.

His fingers brush against the scrap of paper with the mystery words on them when he puts his keys into his pocket.

Their semifinal game flies by, a 3-2 win with two goals from the Krejci line and the other coming from Ilya off of the penalty kill to clinch it. A flash of jealousy had shot through Shane when Price beat him to hug Ilya in celebration, but looking at the wild focus in Ilya’s eyes, Shane figured he wouldn’t be waiting long to celebrate again.

He had screenshotted Rose’s good-luck snapchat, a mirror selfie of her wearing a replica jersey captioned *have so much fun!!! no matter what happens!!!* and set it as his lock screen for the weekend. His parents are here, fully decked out in team gear; the cameras find them in the pregame for the final and Shane blushes to see them waving at him on the jumbotron. Hayden chirps him for being the worst looking Hollander. Ilya smirks at him from where he’s stretching his hips out across the ice. Shane’s not sure if he’s ever felt this loved before, which is a crazy thought to be having while lining up to take a faceoff against a guy who’s got at least twenty pounds on him and looks ready to fight, even though fighting isn’t a thing in college hockey.

The game and its aftermath exist in snapshots for Shane.

The feeling of his stick resting on his thighs before each face off. The way the sound of the crowd dropped away and all he could hear was the scrape of his blades cutting through the ice. The puck behind the cage, the way time stretched out until Shane could see the right pass. The flash of his stick coming around the crease. The power of the wrist pass he sent to Ilya. His parents, cheering and climbing over the boards to hug him after the final whistle. The look on Ilya’s face when he raised the huge, ugly, brown and gold trophy over his head. The way Ilya cried, right there on the ice, screaming something in Russian and looking heavenward. The sweat of Ilya’s forehead against his as their teammates pressed them together, everyone trying to touch the trophy. Ilya’s blotchy, beautiful face as he accepted his Most Outstanding Player medal. Ilya forcing the too-big, freshly printed national champions t-shirt over Shane’s head.

What Shane remembers, in the end, is Ilya.

“You look good, I look good, can we please go already?”

“*You* look good,” Shane corrects. “I look like I lost a battle with a lawn mower, I need a fucking haircut.”

“I like your long hair,” Ilya says. “Easier to pull. Anyway, you cannot get haircut before lunch reservation, no chop chop, time to go!”

Shane doesn't budge from the mirror, turning on the tap to get his hands wet and run them through his hair. Maybe if he pushes his part more to the side? No, that's worse. He shakes his head until his hair falls back into place and is reaching for Ilya's bottle of gel when Ilya grabs his wrist, his grip firm.

“Shane.”

“Fuck, sorry,” Shane says. He's stalling, he knows he's stalling, he can't stop himself. “I just need – I need a second, fuck –”

He's not stalling, he realizes distantly. He's panicking. Has Ilya's bathroom ceiling always been this low? Shane feels like it's pressing down on him, and he can't get enough air into his lungs, did he stop breathing? Or is he breathing too much? There's a toothpaste splatter on the mirror and he suddenly, desperately, needs to get to the Windex to wipe it off.

“Shane,” Ilya says again, gentler this time. “You are okay, you are good.” He rubs his thumb back and forth over the thin skin at Shane's wrist.

“What if I can't do it,” Shane asks, his voice horribly small. He meets Ilya's eyes in the mirror. “What if I can't tell them, what if I lie to them and then you hate me?”

“You will be okay,” Ilya says. “You can tell them. Is easy, hi Mom, hi Dad, you remember this man, best hockey player on team? Scored winning goal in championship game? He fucks me and I love it, we order lunch now!”

A laugh escapes Shane, despite himself. “Oh my god, no.”

“Is not what you said last night.” Ilya's thumb keeps moving in small circles over Shane's pulse point.

“I don't even know how to introduce you to them,” Shane says, the spiral starting again. “What do I say?”

“Tell them truth,” Ilya suggests. “We are lovers.”

“Gross, Ilyusha, no.”

Ilya frowns. “Is not gross, is true. But okay, we can find other word. Boyfriend?”

“Boyfriend,” Shane tries. “This is Ilya, my boyfriend.”

“I like this,” Ilya declares. “You like this?”

Shane nods, feels the panic start to well up again, and squeezes his eyes shut. Ilya moves to stand behind him, blanketing his broad chest across Shane's back, and rubs up and down Shane's arms.

“Your parents love you,” Ilya tells him. “I do not know them yet, but I know this. Your mom is big hockey fan, yes?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Did she have anything bad to say about Hunter, last summer?”

Shane shakes his head. “No,” he says. Ilya’s breathing deeply behind him, his belly expanding and contracting against Shane’s back, and he zeroes in on the rhythm, trying to match it.

“Did she maybe have something nice to say? Not about his hockey, of course, he is shit player, but maybe about his cute boyfriend?”

“She said she thought he was brave,” Shane gets out.

“Okay, there we go,” Ilya says. “She thinks Scott Hunter is brave. What is difference between you and Scott Hunter?”

“A Stanley Cup.”

“No difference,” Ilya corrects. “Well, okay, not true, you have beautiful freckles and he looks like chewed up gum, but other than that, no difference.”

Firmly, Ilya runs his hands up Shane’s arms and squeezes his shoulders, then pulls his hands down to stroke Shane’s sides, gripping his waist gently before sliding his hands into the front pockets of Shane’s jeans. Shane feels less trapped, pinned to the bathroom counter by Ilya’s full body weight, than he did a few minutes ago when the ceiling was closing in on him. He forces his eyes open.

“What is this, is someone giving you phone number?” Ilya asks, fishing a piece of paper out of Shane’s pocket. “I will kill them, you know.”

“Oh, fuck, I forgot about –”

Ilya unfolds the scrap of paper that’s been in the pocket of Shane’s jeans for weeks with one hand and squints at it.

“You said it, on the phone, and I didn’t know what it meant but it didn’t seem like the right time to ask,” Shane tells him. “I’m sure it’s like, wrong, I don’t know how to write in Russian, I just wanted to know. I asked Svetlana but she told me it was between us, and then championship weekend happened, and I forgot.”

Ilya folds the paper back up and puts it on the counter.

“You aren’t going to look?” Shane asks.

“I don’t need to,” Ilya says, his hands coming to Shane’s hips. He turns Shane around and presses their foreheads together. “I remember what I said. Sveta did not tell you?”

Shane shakes his head.

“She is good friend,” Ilya murmurs. “I said, I love you.”

“Holy shit,” Shane breathes. Ilya stares at him, unblinking, and his mouth starts to tighten. Shane realizes— “No, I mean. Ilya, Ilyusha, I love you too.”

Ilya lets out the breath he must have been holding all at once, cups the back of Shane’s head with his hand, and closes what little distance there is between them for a kiss, his lips hot and insistent against Shane’s. Shane brings his arms around Ilya and tries to haul him even closer. He wants to crawl inside Ilya’s skin, but he settles for biting Ilya’s lower lip and breathing into his mouth.

“We have to go,” Ilya whispers. “If we are late to meet your parents because I am fucking you, they will never forgive me.”

Shane lets out a shaky laugh. “Say it again, in Russian?”

“Ya tebya lyublyu.”

They are late to lunch, enough so that Shane’s parents are already sharing an appetizer when they arrive.

“Sorry,” Shane says, immediately going to his mom and hugging her. “Sorry, we lost track of time, sorry.”

“We took the liberty of ordering drinks, since we were waiting,” his mom says, kissing his cheek. He waves at his dad and goes around the table to sit across from him, where there’s a glass of ginger ale waiting for him.

“Mom, Dad, this is Ilya,” Shane introduces as Ilya pulls out his chair.

“Nice to meet you, Ilya,” his dad says. “We didn’t know what you would want, so you’re stuck with water for now.”

“Water is good,” Ilya says. He shakes David’s hand and nods at Yuna, who smiles at him.

“Beautiful goal in the championship,” she says by way of greeting.

“Thank you.”

A waiter arrives and Shane’s wound too tightly to pay attention to what he orders, the anticipatory dread of the conversation to come growing in his stomach by the second.

“So,” Shane’s mom continues as if they were never interrupted, and Shane realizes with a sudden flash of clarity that she’s going to beat him to the punch. “We were surprised when Shane said he wanted to bring a friend to lunch and it turned out to be you, Ilya, not Hayden. I didn’t realize the two of you were so close.”

“Ilya isn’t my friend,” Shane blurts out, immediately kicking himself. Ilya reaches for him under the table and puts his hand on Shane’s knee.

“What—”

“He’s my boyfriend,” Shane finishes before he can chicken out. His voice sounds horrifyingly loud in his own ears. Did the whole restaurant hear? Shane can’t look up to check, can’t look anywhere other than the tablecloth. He wishes they were somewhere shittier, somewhere he could tear a paper napkin to have something to do with his hands.

“Boyfriend?” David asks, and Shane can feel his dad’s eyes on him even though he still can’t look up.

“Yes,” Ilya says, squeezing Shane’s leg gently.

“I’m gay,” Shane blurts again. “I— sorry, I had a whole speech planned—”

“He did not,” Ilya says. Shane does look up now, to glare at him.

“Not helping!”

“Yes helping,” Ilya chides.

“For how long?” Yuna asks.

“Forever, probably,” Shane says.

“What? Oh, sweetie, no, I meant how long have you and Ilya been seeing each other?”

“Oh.” Shane’s cheeks heat up furiously. “Uh, since summer.”

Ilya scoffs. “No, longer. Since freshman year.”

“Since freshman year? Shane, why didn’t you say anything?” Yuna only now starts to sound put out.

“I didn’t want— I mean, we weren’t like, serious, until this year,” Shane says. Ilya squeezes at his thigh more insistently, and Shane forces himself to look up. His mom’s hands are on the table and his dad has one arm draped over the back of his mom’s chair. “I just didn’t know how.”

“And you’re serious, now?” Shane’s dad asks.

“Yes,” Ilya says.

Shane looks at his mom. Her eyes are shining, and he realizes that there are tears on his own cheeks. She smiles at him, the curve of her lips impossibly comforting, and he nods. Yuna nods back and sits up straighter in her chair, clearing her throat.

“Well, then,” she says. She’s got her business voice on. “Ilya, I’ve been seeing some chatter about your draft stock online, are you planning to go to the league? Maybe you should get in touch with Scott Hunter, I’m not saying that you should be out if you don’t want to be, but I’m sure he would be a good person to talk to regardless.”

“I DM’d him last summer, actually,” Ilya says. “Not to talk about me, just to say, coming out was nice thing for him to do. Important for many people.”

“What? But you hate him,” Shane says, surprised.

“Sure, but that does not mean he was not...inspiring,” Ilya shrugs. “Anyway, I will not go to NHL, so. Does not matter.”

“Oh,” Yuna says, looking genuinely confused for the first time in the whole exchange. “Why...why not?”

“I am accepted to PhD program here,” Ilya tells her. “In Slavic studies, I will start in fall semester.”

“Congratulations,” David offers. Yuna raises her eyebrow at Shane, who widens his eyes and tries to telepathically tell her he doesn’t fucking understand it either. “Maybe that’ll work out perfectly for you both to stay here next year, if Shane gets that assistantship position he applied for.”

“Don’t jinx it, Dad! I haven’t heard back yet!”

“Knocking on wood,” David says, rapping his knuckles against the table.

“I feel like I ruined lunch,” Shane mumbles. “Can we leave and come back in and start this all over? Except maybe don’t forget anything so I don’t have to fuck it up again?”

“I am not leaving, my pasta will be here soon,” Ilya says, winking at Shane.

“Shane, sweetie, you haven’t ruined anything,” his mom tells him. “We’re happy that you’re happy, and I’m sorry you felt like you couldn’t tell us sooner. We can’t wait to get to know Ilya better.”

The crucifix around Ilya’s neck falls out of his shirt when Ilya leans forward to take the glass of Coke that’s appeared on the table for him. Shane watches how the chain cuts into the strong line of his neck, how the cross bumps back into place against his collarbone when he sits up straight. He watches as Ilya makes conversation with his parents, his hand coming once more to rest almost idly on Shane’s knee, and then he looks again at his mom.

I love you, she mouths across the table.

Shane is lost.

Technically, Shane and Hayden are lost together, but that's not exactly comforting, given that Ilya's thesis defense started five minutes ago and they're still bumbling their way around the building on the humanities side of campus that houses the Slavic studies department.

"These room numbers don't make sense, what the fuck," Hayden mutters for at least the third time. He's not wrong, Shane can't figure out either why there are classrooms with signs reading 202, 203, and 204 all in a row but 201, where Ilya's defense is supposedly taking place, is nowhere to be found.

"It has to be somewhere."

"It's definitely fucking not here," Hayden says unhelpfully, and starts backtracking down the hallway. "Come on, let's try the other way."

They do eventually find 201, inexplicably clear on the other side of the building, and shuffle in not-quite-inconspicuously. Shane grabs the print out containing Ilya's abstract from the table by the door and hustles himself and Hayden into seats at the back, fleetingly grateful that neither of them are wearing team gear. The abstract is in cyrillic, but there's an English translation when Shane flips the page over.

"Hold this," he whispers, shoving at Hayden so he can dig into his backpack and pull out his glasses.

"Nerd," Hayden chirps, slouching in his chair.

Someone in front of them turns around, not quite glaring, and Shane mouths *sorry* hastily. 201 has turned out to be a smallish lecture hall, way too big for the fifteen or so people who have turned up, most of whom Shane doesn't recognize, but also much, much smaller than the halls Shane's used to in the business school. It feels weirdly intimate, watching Ilya hold court at the lectern, his curls askew under the fluorescent lights. Shane spots Svetlana a few rows away and gives her a small wave. Coach, unexpectedly, is sitting towards the front.

Most of Ilya's defense is in English, even though all of his materials, from what Shane could tell, were in Russian, as was his thesis itself, but there's a Q & A at the end that is all in Russian. "To make sure I have language proficiency," Ilya had laughed when he'd explained the format to Shane. "Maybe whole time you are right, I am taking this degree for easy A." Shane gets a little nervous for him when they hit the question portion, not because Ilya seems uncomfortable, but because he can't follow the proceedings anymore. He folds and unfolds the corner of the abstract so many times it rips off; next to him, Hayden is scrolling through Reddit on his phone.

"It was nice of you boys to come," Coach says when he finds Shane and Hayden in the hallway after. Everyone is milling around, chatting and helping themselves to coffee and cookies on a table that Shane is quite sure Svetlana, not Ilya, set up outside the hall. "Good to have the team represented."

"Course," Hayden says through a mouthful of cookie. "Gotta support the captain."

“And here he is, congrats, Rozanov!” Coach exclaims. Ilya has emerged, finally, trailed by his committee members. He makes his way over and shakes Coach’s hand. “Didn’t understand a thing, but I’m sure you’ve done well.”

“Thank you,” Ilya demures. He fist bumps Hayden and puts his arm around Shane’s shoulders, squeezing lightly. He looks at Shane questioningly, one eyebrow almost imperceptibly raised. Shane gives a tiny nod and Ilya lets his hand drop off of Shane’s shoulder, coming to rest at the small of his back.

“I think the old man didn’t even notice,” Hayden tells him later. “For real, dude, if you were trying to have a big like, coming out moment or whatever, he did not get the memo.”

“I wasn’t,” Shane says. “Seriously.”

“I’m just saying,” Hayden shrugs. “I think he’d have to full on walk in on you guys banging in his office or something to figure it out.”

“You’re disgusting,” Shane says. “Go away.”

“It’s hot,” Ilya complains.

“You wore all black, you brought this upon yourself,” Shane says. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“I am wearing black *shorts*, should not be this fucking hot.”

“I am extremely aware of your shorts,” Shane tells him. They’re indecently small, Ilya almost looks like he could be on the track himself for how short they are, instead of sitting in the stands and manspreading next to Shane. Ilya leers at him over the top of his sunglasses and Shane reaches out and shoves Ilya’s cheek. Ilya catches his hand and presses a kiss to Shane’s palm before releasing him.

Rose’s relay semi-final is next on the meet program. Shane had dragged Ilya to the stadium early enough to see her 800 meter qualifying, where she’d only placed fifth and hadn’t moved on to the next heat, but she’d seemed in good spirits over text when he sent a sad face emoji.

There’s been a steady trickle of people coming in and out of the spectators section all afternoon. Shane recognizes a few people from Rose’s parties, and at one point during the steeplechase, the men’s soccer team arrives en masse and does a surprisingly decent cheer routine. Ryan Price waves at them from the other end of the bleachers, where he’s chatting with someone Shane thinks is on the lacrosse team. It’s a nice atmosphere, even though Shane won’t admit to Ilya that he too is sweating through his t-shirt. It feels comfortable in the way most things Rose is involved with do.

It had felt like it would be a good place to practice just *being* with Ilya, when Rose had invited Shane to come. Shane does feel a little hyper aware of his thigh, clad in appropriately-cut gym shorts, rubbing against Ilya’s bare one, but it’s not making him feel itchy and like he

needs to check over his shoulder every time someone new comes into the stands. It helps, to have Rose in his sightline, stretching with her relay teammates and occasionally waving over at Shane and Ilya. Kate and Sophie, who Shane remembers from the hockey party Rose had come to, are with her; seeing their easy warmth with each other give way to their focus in preparing for the race also bolsters Shane.

It also helps to look over and see Ilya smiling at him, completely at home on the sweaty bleacher seats despite his complaints, his arm draped effortlessly behind Shane. He gives his affection to Shane so freely it takes Shane's breath away.

Shane's phone buzzes. He digs it out as the announcer comes on over the loudspeaker to read the relay lineups. There are a few WhatsApp messages from the team group chat, and a Snapchat from Hayden that Shane is positive is about tomorrow night's Bachelorette finale, and then –

He opens his phone and pulls up his email. *There is a new message in your application portal for the Master in Sports Science program.* Shane clicks the link immediately and curses under his breath as he mistypes his password twice in a row.

“What are you doing, Rose is about to run,” Ilya says, poking Shane in the ribs.

Shane hands Ilya his phone, the screen open to the message portal. “Can you? I can't-”

Ilya pushes his sunglasses onto his head and takes Shane's phone. He taps the screen a few times and then looks at Shane, his eyes serious.

“Well?”

“Bad news and good news, Hollander,” Ilya drawls. “Bad news, you have to take anatomy class for this degree, is supposed to be very hard. Good news, you have boyfriend with beautiful body to practice anatomy with.”

“I don't think that's really how anatomy class works,” Shane says automatically, and then—
“Wait, I got in?”

Ilya beams at him. “Of course you did.”

“Oh thank fuck,” Shane exhales.

The starting gun goes off and Ilya hands Shane back his phone with an unnecessary brush of fingers that Shane finds impossibly sweet. They stand up, watching Sophie lead out the first lap; Rose is third in their order.

“I'm proud of you,” Ilya tells Shane, putting his sunglasses back on. “You will be good coach.”

“Grad assistant,” Shane corrects.

“Whatever,” Ilya dismisses. Sophie makes the first hand off and Shane ignores most of the second leg in favor of watching Rose bounce back and forth on the line, trying presumably to

stay loose. “You will be in gym more than me next year. Will you still love me when I lose hockey butt?”

Rose takes the baton smoothly and sets out on her leg of the race. Shane grabs Ilya’s hand and squeezes as they cheer for her.

“She will overtake,” Ilya says confidently as she heads into the final curve. “I think she will get them into second place for last leg.”

He’s exactly right - Rose slingshots onto the straight and pulls into second place, stretching out and handing the baton to Kate before doubling over with her hands on her knees.

The sun beats down on them as Kate runs the final lap; Shane tries to release Ilya’s hand but Ilya doesn’t let him, interlacing their fingers instead. The callouses on Ilya’s palm rub against Shane’s skin as they watch the four runners pile on top of each other, celebrating the second place finish that guarantees a spot in the final; Sophie lifts Kate up into the air and twirls her around. Part of Shane wishes – wishes he had been braver, maybe, and had come out to the team before championship weekend. He looks at Rose’s relay team and wonders what it would have been like, to let Ilya kiss him for real after the final buzzer. He thinks again of Scott Hunter, bringing his boyfriend onto the ice to celebrate winning the Stanley Cup, of the way they’d smiled at each other even with the cameras shoved in their faces.

But Shane knows, really, that he’s been as brave as he could have been. If he could reconstruct their season, he’s not sure he would have been able to do it any differently, or love Ilya any better or any louder. Maybe in a few years, if he wins again as a coach, he will be able to bring Ilya out of the stands and onto the ice and hold him as the confetti falls. He’s working on it, his heart bursting with the possibility that the future holds many more days like this one, drenched in sun and filled with Ilya’s crooked smile.

Chapter 5: EPILOGUE - SUMMER

Shane wakes up to his phone buzzing incessantly.

“What the fuck,” he mumbles as he picks up, his tongue heavy with sleep.

“Let me in,” Ilya demands. “Is moving day?”

“It’s like, seven in the fucking morning!”

“Yes,” Ilya says simply. “I did not want to wait any longer.”

Shane can’t really argue with that. “I’ll be right there,” he says, hanging up.

The early morning sun is streaming into Shane’s living room. He blinks fruitlessly against it and shoves his feet into a pair of slides, heading for the front door.

Shane spent the weeks on either side of graduation slowly offloading stuff in his apartment to make space. He’s keeping the sofa and the TV, but they’re bringing Ilya’s coffee table over, and his many bookcases. Shane’s kitchen wasn’t fully kitted out to begin with, so he’d more or less emptied the cabinets; there’s already a box of pots and pans from Ilya’s place sitting on the counter, waiting to be organized.

Ilya kisses him full on the mouth when Shane props open the front door and waves him through. He’s wearing a team t-shirt with the sleeves cut off and a pair of thin sweatpants that look like they might be a size too small. Shane isn’t complaining.

“Take, please,” Ilya says, shoving a duffel bag at Shane. “Clothes. I get other suitcase, then we come back for shelves.”

It’s quick work, between the two of them, to get everything Ilya had decided to keep into Shane’s apartment. Into *their* apartment, Shane mentally corrects, grabbing what he hopes is the last of the small but heavy boxes labeled BOOKS!!!!!!

“That’s everything, right?”

“Almost,” Ilya says.

“What’s left, I didn’t see anything down there?”

“You have to get spare key back from Hayden,” Ilya tells him. “Then we are done moving.”

“What? Why?”

“So he cannot walk in on us if I decide I need to fuck you in living room,” Ilya says simply. “Or kitchen. Or hallway.”

Shane laughs. “He’s moving after he finishes summer term anyway.”

Ilya puts his own freshly cut set of keys down on the table and strides across the room towards Shane. Shane smiles at him, unable not to, and then gasps when Ilya brings his hands to Shane's chest and twists at his nipples through his t-shirt. Ilya's hands feel so good on him that Shane can't bring himself to be embarrassed at how fast he's starting to get hard.

"You're sweaty," he murmurs when Ilya finally, finally, puts his arm around Shane's neck and draws him close.

"You love my sweat," Ilya tells him and ducks in for a kiss, licking into Shane's mouth and gripping Shane's jaw firmly. A big part of Shane wants to lazily make out with Ilya all morning, but a bigger part of him wants Ilya to make good on his promise of fucking him in every room.

He gets his hands on Ilya's ass through the thin material of his sweatpants and pulls Ilya closer to him, his stomach swooping to feel Ilya also already hard. Ilya shifts his thigh in between Shane's legs and breaks their kiss to smile when Shane groans in the back of his throat.

"Like this," Ilya says. "Feels good?"

"So good," Shane pants, giving in to the urge to let his hips go. He grinds on Ilya's thigh shamelessly, feeling electric with it. Ilya presses an open mouthed kiss to Shane's hairline, then tilts Shane's head to tongue at his ear and Shane whines, his hips jerking.

"You can come like this?"

"Yeah," Shane admits.

"You want to?"

"Fuck – no, want you – "

"Anything, Shane," Ilya whispers low in his ear. Shane moans softly and pushes ineffectively at Ilya's hips.

"Fuck me," Shane says. "Please, please."

Ilya bites down on his earlobe. "Yes, okay, yes. Couch? Bed? Floor?"

"I don't care," Shane tells him.

Ilya moves his leg from between Shane's to a noise of protest, but he then hooks his thumbs into Shane's waistband and rids Shane of his shorts and boxers. "Here," he says, moving Shane over towards the couch. Shane strips his shirt, folds it and puts it on the coffee table, and follows, letting Ilya push him gently down to the cushions and then grabbing for Ilya and tugging him down as well.

Shane feels a little insane for how turned on he is to be naked and pressing himself against Ilya, still fully clothed. "So easy for me, always so easy for me," Ilya says into the skin of

Shane's neck and Shane just opens his legs and pulls Ilya to lie in between them, because it's true. "We made mistake."

"What?"

"Lube is packed. Or in your room, is not here," Ilya explains, twisting his hips against Shane in a way that makes goosebumps appear over Shane's whole body. "You want me to get?"

"No," Shane decides. He can't bear the thought of Ilya not touching him, even briefly. "Don't - don't go, just, like this -" He arches against Ilya, who lets out a little punched out sound that Shane wants to hear again and again. He pushes his hands under Ilya's t-shirt and shoves it up towards his shoulders, lets Ilya tug it the rest of the way off and fling it across the room.

Ilya gets his shorts down and kicks them off and then he brings his hand up to Shane's mouth, expectant. Shane spits, his cock twitching for how Ilya's eyes flash dark, and then he loses his train of thought entirely as Ilya gets his hand around them both.

"I'm gonna come, Ilyusha, fuck," Shane gasps. Ilya twists his hand ruthlessly over the head of Shane's cock a few times and Shane is done for, comes with a shout.

"So perfect for me," Ilya says, working Shane through it and kissing at the corner of Shane's mouth. When Shane fully comes back to himself, Ilya is rutting against his hip, using Shane's mess to ease the way. Shane rakes his nails down Ilya's back and Ilya's hips stutter once, twice, and he spills onto Shane's belly.

There are boxes to unpack and drawers to rearrange, but none of it feels more important than the patterns Ilya is idly tracing against his sides with his fingertips as he comes down. Shane hooks his ankles more firmly around Ilya's waist and pushes his face into Ilya's shoulder. He would melt into Ilya's body if he could, wrapped up in the morning sunlight.

"I love you," he breathes into Ilya's skin.

"Stay," Ilya mumbles into Shane's neck. "We shower soon but stay, just for little bit, stay here."

Shane blinks and feels the sweep of his eyelashes against Ilya's shoulder. He can feel Ilya's heartbeat against his own chest, gradually slowing down. His skin is tacky with sweat and come, and he knows it's going to be gross soon but at the moment, he can't bring himself to complain. Ilya nudges the top of his head with his nose and Shane laughs, knows he's hopeless against the indulgence. "Okay," he says. "We can stay."

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