

for the lucky and the strong

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by [dressedupliketheking](#)

Summary

“Rose called. She flies to LA tomorrow but she’s gonna come visit us for a couple hours today. She’ll be here at 4, gone by dinner.” Shane delivers this news while placing his bundle down by the firepit. He stands and brushes his hands, then raises a smiling face towards Yuna and Ilya. Yuna will not deny she’s excited to meet Rose Landry, but the timing... if Ilya’s fixed glare on the rippling water was anything to go by, it admittedly could be better.

“Rose Landry is coming today.” Ilya says, confirmation rather than question.

“Yeah, I mean, she’s been so supportive and she’s been keen to see the cottage. I knew she was in the area but she didn’t think she’d have time to come by, but she does, and it seems like a good opportunity for you to meet her, and-”

~

Ilya and Shane steal away for a two night stay at the Cottage in fall. Yuna and David are there for the afternoon when Shane receives a call from Rose, who he invites over that afternoon to see his place and meet his mystery boyfriend. Ilya has feelings, Shane has regrets, Yuna and David have hearts of gold, and Rose, as usual, has what it takes to make a whole lot of male anxiety melt away.

Notes

This is a work of imagination set post-cottage/Heated Rival TV season 1 but pre-HR book epilogue/Heated Rivalry season 2. No Spoilers for either season 2 or The Long Game.

This will be a five chapter fic, with each named character having a turn sharing their POV as the story progresses chronologically. The other chapters are planned out but not written, but I'm not one to abandon works, so never fear! Updates as frequent as possible. Comments, feedback and ideas are welcome!

Some chapters will reference previous works in this series, but you won't need to have read them for this to make sense as a standalone work.

Chapter 1: Yuna

Chapter Notes

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

It's September before Shane and Ilya get another two night stretch at the cottage. To be honest Yuna isn't sure how they've managed it at all, given the training load and media circus at this time of year, but she is grateful nonetheless. She is even more grateful to be granted two hours of afternoon sunshine with them during their second day at Shane's cottage. Yuna and David can skip across to Montreal almost as they please (they do so, regularly), and while she's very pleased to see Ilya again, she would've understood if Shane had wanted to keep his boyfriend to himself for their short pre-season hideaway.

They arrive as instructed at 2pm on the dot, ten minutes after a reminder text, and enjoy a round of hugs and hellos before they make their way out onto the deck. Pleasantries dispensed with and first teapot drained, talk shifts to plans for the remainder of their stay. Yuna is fairly certain she doesn't want to know how they will be spending a good portion of their time, but at least she knows they are well stocked for... activities. Cooking is one thing not on the agenda, as Shane has brought meals prepared to his specifications along with him. Drinking isn't either – it's too close to season start for Shane to indulge, and Ilya, as per the trend Yuna has observed, is happy to fall into step with whatever Shane wants. Yuna suggests a swim, and both boys look at her as if she's grown a second head. Ilya mentions offhandedly he has at least five episodes of *Grand Designs* to catch up on, which leads to a punch to the bicep from Shane and a lengthy conversation with David about a concrete-only monstrosity built by a couple of engineers perilously close to the edge of a supposedly stable but very dicey looking cliff.

"They are confident. They will be right, or they will look very stupid." Ilya says with an air of finality. "Time will tell."

Yuna gives him a nod of approval – it is only two weeks since she had used the same phrase with him via one of their infrequent texts. Ilya beams back at her the way a young Shane did whenever he showed her a new skating manoeuvre or sleight of hand trick. She is proud of his increasing vocabulary and confidence with conversational English, prouder still of the way he is becoming more comfortable interacting with her and David without their son playing mediator.

Shane, who has been watching the rustling leaves that are gradually turning colour around them, snorts.

"You reckon people say the same about you, Mr. 50 Goals In Your Rookie Season? Too confident, will be right or look very stupid?"

"Eh, they say what they want anyway." Ilya shrugs. "I was close. Too bad there was annoying centre every time I play Metros though... maybe if he goes easy on me I get there."

"Dream on, Rozanov," Shane retorts, "never gonna happen."

“Would never, *dorogoy*, I have better things to dream of” Ilya drops a wink with the pet name and Shane blushes so rapidly Yuna has to look away with her hand pressed to her mouth to stop herself from laughing.

“I’m, ah- I’ll... grab some kindling for the fire.” Shane says, making his way off the southern side of the deck with more resolve than required. David shakes his head fondly and makes for the log pile on the far edge of the northern yard to collect a few larger pieces of firewood.

“Sorry,” Ilya says to Yuna. The apologetic tone and tilt of his head fails to hide the glint in his eye.

“No, you’re not.” Yuna answers, with a smirk of her own.

“Okay maybe a little sorry, a little not sorry,” Ilya corrects loudly with faux seriousness. “Number one goal in life is to make Shane Hollander blush. Makes his freckles extra pretty.”

“I can still hear you!” Shane hollers from his place under the autumnal trees, the higher than usual pitch to his voice betraying his ongoing embarrassment. “You say another word and you’ll-“

Ilya cuts him off to continue speaking directly to Yuna.

“See, does not matter I not get all 50 goals. I am very good at reaching other goals when they are important.”

Shane’s answering groan is enough to finally force Yuna’s laugh free. Despite his protests and the pine cone he lobs at Ilya’s head, her son is clearly besotted, and Ilya looks young and carefree. Despite the weight of the hockey world on their shoulders, in this moment both are genuinely *happy*. Yuna will never take these small miracles for granted.

The sound of chimes rings out and Shane stuffs the branches he’s been collecting under his left arm. Yuna watches as he pulls the phone from his pocket with his right hand, smiles at the caller ID and turns away from them as he raises it to his ear. To be honest she’s surprised his phone is even switched on during what she thought was protected Ilya time, but surprises and Shane seem to go hand in hand these days. She tries to let the thought slide rather than sting. She suspects Ilya is attempting a similar feat next to her, the looseness in his body now looking somewhat artificial compared to the natural relaxation of only ten seconds prior.

Shane paces back and forth for a while, bare feet crunching brown leaves and small twigs as he goes, speaking a little too quietly for them to hear the words. He laughs and nods occasionally, before checking the time on his screen. He seems satisfied with what he sees and has a final word with the caller before hanging up and pocketing the phone. He grabs a few more sticks and makes his way back up to the deck.

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As much as she loves her son, she wishes he would stop rambling. Shane is still talking, and Ilya is staring through the horizon with a storm building in his unblinking eyes. His words finally fail when Ilya stands and moves to the edge of the deck, sliding himself off it and down on to the grass. He takes off his shirt and leaves it in a crumpled pile on a rock by a solar garden light.

Shane looks crestfallen. Yuna makes a hurrying motion with her hands in the direction of Ilya’s back until Shane gets the message and scurries after him. They are too far away for Yuna to hear their conversation, but she has seen enough subtitled films to know that whatever is being said is getting no closer to a resolution.

Ilya walks to the water’s edge, kicks off his slides and continues forward until he is waist deep before shallow diving and beginning a sloppy freestyle. He is an elite athlete but his form says swimming is not his forte, and the island he appears headed for is a good distance away. Ten minutes constant swimming by Yuna’s memory, and she is confident her form and pace are both better than Ilya’s.

Shane picks up a few more sticks on his way back to the deck. He folds Ilya’s shirt, placing it carefully on the table before sinking into his original deck chair.

“Is Ilya okay?” She asks tentatively.

“Said he was hot, decided you were right about a swim.” Shane says quietly.

Yuna lets the words hang for a while, pulling her cardigan around her shoulders, both of them watching the back of Ilya’s head as he stops to tread water maybe a fifth of the way to the island.

“You don’t believe that, Shane.” Yuna says, and Shane sighs.

“I should have asked him first, about Rose coming. Like we’d agreed someday he’d meet her, and I said I’d meet Svetlana too, but hadn’t decided when. I said I could tell her not to come but he said it was fine. She’s actually so nice, Mom, she wouldn’t even mind.”

Ilya sets off again, Yuna watching him splash excessively as inexperienced swimmers tend to do. Rose was a piece of their strange and winding timeline that had perplexed both Yuna and David. Beyond “she’s my friend”, Shane had not been forthcoming about his short-lived (real? pretend?) relationship with Rose, and despite her burning intrigue, Yuna knew better than to ask Ilya. And so she had gone looking for other sources of information from that time. While articles and press conferences gave nothing away, it was Montreal’s 1-0 home win over Boston last fall, played at the height of Shane and Rose’s well documented public sightings, that spoke volumes. Yuna had watched every face off closely, every scuffle and check and bump. Shane and Ilya had both played appallingly, which is to say passably by

anyone else's standards, but it was Ilya's eyes she noticed most of all. They didn't rise higher than the logo on Shane's jersey once the entire game. Add a distinct lack of chirping (towards anyone, not just Shane), not managing a single goal or assist to his name that night and a post-game interview in which he didn't bother hiding his fatigue or disinterest, and Ilya had painted a sorry picture.

That tape was how Yuna knew Rose was not a cover story or PR stunt. Regardless of who had said what, who hurt who, which girls he was pictured with in the weeks prior or following, that godawful game was proof Ilya was hurting. Shane had seen him hurting, but Ilya would not have seen Shane, because he couldn't even bring himself to look. Ilya was not fine then, and clearly, eleven months later and partway across a very cold lake, he was not fine now.

"What does Ilya usually do when he's upset?" Yuna asks tentatively, probing for answers she is fairly certain she already knows.

Shane sits for a while, seemingly deciding if he will answer or ignore the question.

"He deflects, tries to laugh it off." He says eventually. "And if that doesn't work, like if I don't drop it... it doesn't happen so much now, but before, he'd close off. End the call. Leave, or tell me to."

Yuna is quiet for a while. The air feels thick between them, even as a faint breeze plays with her hair and sunshine tingles on the back of her neck.

"Okay. I guess some people need space when they're unhappy. Not for me, but sometimes for your Dad." Yuna says. She is aiming for guiding without patronizing, a needle she's not as confident in threading with Shane the adult with boyfriend troubles as she was with Shane the schoolkid with playground disagreements. Shane still hasn't responded, but she knows that whether he wants to or not, he is listening. "Is that how it works for Ilya? Does he come back better for that time alone?"

Shane sits for a long moment, still as a statue save for the muscles working either side of his clenched jaw.

"No." He says firmly, and stands.

Shane pushes off the front of the deck as Ilya did minutes before. He pulls his water shoes, two kayaks, paddles and life vests from underneath. Without another word, Yuna helps him take these down to the lake shore. While Shane connects the front of one kayak to the rear of another, Yuna collects Ilya's dry shirt and two of the larger beach towels from the storage compartment of the ottoman.

"In case he's cold." She says, pushing them into the seat of the rear kayak before returning to the deck.

Shane and his trailing kayak are 100 feet offshore by the time David returns, arms full of dry timber.

“What did I miss?” He asks, motioning his head towards the water as he stacks the pieces next to Shane’s branches by the firepit.

“Rose Landry will be here at 4pm.” Yuna answers, as if this explains everything.

“Right.” Says David. He squints at the lake where they can see Ilya around two thirds of the way to the island. “And there are... mixed feelings about the visit?”

“Yes.” Yuna nods. They can talk more later, but for now, there’s not much point elaborating. They watch for a beat more, Shane closing the gap between them at pace.

“I know they do ice baths and all sorts these days but the kid must be freezing out there.” David says, collecting the teapot and cups onto a tray. If Yuna knows her husband, and she does, his next move will be to make a new pot.

“He’s going to need some thawing out, that’s for sure.” Yuna agrees, opening the porch door for David and his tray. “I’ll get the bathtub going.” She says, and with one hour until Rose Landry arrives, heads up the stairs to do so.

Chapter End Notes

When Yuna says about Shane and Ilya being well stocked for "activities", she is referring to her own purchases in my previous fic, "you think there is enough?": <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77248406>

title from "the rose" by bette midler, one of my ultimate hollanov songs. Full lyrics, because it was really hard to choose just one for the title, and I love them.

[Verse 1]

Some say love, it is a river
That drowns the tender reed
Some say love, it is a razor
That leaves your soul to bleed
Some say love, it is a hunger
An endless aching need
I say love, it is a flower
And you, its only seed

[Verse 2]

It's the heart, afraid of breaking
That never learns to dance
It's the dream, afraid of waking
That never takes the chance
It's the one who won't be taken
Who cannot seem to give

And the soul, afraid of dying
That never learns to live

[Verse 3]

When the night has been too lonely
And the road has been too long
And you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong
Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snows
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose

Chapter 2: Shane

Chapter Summary

Shane and his kayak catch up with a very cold Ilya. They have the conversation that needs to happen before Rose arrives.

Chapter Notes

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

Shane paddles into a slight headwind, water splashing occasionally over the bow of his kayak. It is harder going than usual with a second kayak trailing behind, but given the amount of time he spends swinging a hockey stick, he is far from slow.

Shane makes ground quickly on Ilya, who isn't tiring exactly but seems to have eased up on his pace after powering away from the cottage (from Shane, more likely) like he did early on. Shane will reach him within a minute, he guesses. If he judges it just right the two of them will hit the shallow water near the edge of the island at the same time. And what's he meant to do then? Step one was to come after Ilya, but he's not sure how step two should go, what he should say. "Sorry" is the obvious one, but he's tried that and it didn't seem to help. "I love you" was met with a sad "I love you, too" and a dive into the lake.

It's embarrassing, but Shane truly isn't sure where he's gone wrong. There are a few main contenders, the short notice and timing being the most likely, but reading other people has never been his strong suit.

Admittedly, it usually gets easier the more time he spends with someone, the closer attention he pays to them, the more chances he has to clarify things with them. His Dad is easy, his mom he can read most of the time, and Hayden is an open book. Rose was an anomaly – he realizes now her directness was a big part of why he felt so comfortable with her from their first conversation. Despite their long history, this kind of romantic relationship with Ilya is still so fresh and the time they physically spend together so limited he's still sometimes unsure he's if he's interpreting it right. He knows the love is there, knows it goes both ways, but layer a language barrier, cultural differences and a past Ilya is rarely willing to talk about atop his own shortcomings, and sometimes a simple conversation can feel like walking through a minefield.

This is where Shane finds himself now. A simple conversation, he thought, that blew up in his face. The thing that troubles him most, other than Ilya's obvious upset, is that they have already talked about Ilya and Rose meeting – or at least, Shane thought they had. While Ilya started the wheels turning on his transfer to Ottawa, and Yuna started investigating requirements to open a charity, they had decided to gradually let a few carefully selected, trusted friends in on their secret. After the conversation they'd had over summer with his

parents about emergency contacts, Shane and Svetlana now had one another's phone numbers. They weren't yet in direct contact, and for now he was still 'Jane' to her, but that would change when he met her in January during his next two night stay in Boston. Ilya seemed confident she already knew of Shane's identity, and expected her response to be positive.

They hadn't put a timeline on it, but had decided together that Rose would be the next of Shane's inner circle to know about and meet Ilya. As much Shane hated lying to Hayden, Rose already knew he was gay, that there was someone he was seeing, and that the someone else was another top-level player. Rose understood hockey culture well enough to know the importance of keeping another layer of their secrets, didn't move in circles with mutual friends (reducing the likelihood of an accidental slip up), and like Svetlana, could be asked to provide cover in the public eye if needed. It also helped that unlike Hayden, Rose and Ilya had no history of fist fights on the ice, no front row seat to their supposedly fierce rivalry. Shane expected some awkwardness between his ex (if Rose even counted as one) and his boyfriend at first, but he truly believed once that was dealt with Ilya and Rose would get on so well he'd be the one playing third wheel through their conversations in no time.

Once Svetlana and Rose knew, they would tell one teammate each. They had both felt isolated for so long, and after Shane's injury last year, decided it was best if someone trustworthy on their squad knew so they could back them up in a crisis or cover for them if people became suspicious. Hayden would be Shane's pick, although for reasons to do with Hayden's extensive dental history, telling him was a conversation he didn't exactly look forward to having. Cliff Marleau was Ilya's most likely choice, but he was hesitant to tell someone only to switch teams the following season. Shane thinks it would strengthen the respect between Ilya and Cliff if his friend understood his reasons for requesting a transfer away from Boston. Their current predicament in the lake reminds Shane that any thoughts he might have about predicting the responses of people in general, let alone Ilya's closest teammate and recurrent on-road roommate, are best kept inside his head.

Shane slows his paddling, leaving enough gap between him and Ilya to go unnoticed. He trails a few boat lengths behind until Ilya stands in the shallow water, wading towards the edge of the island. Ilya reaches dry land, shakes himself off and turns, only to see Shane gliding towards the shore nearby.

"Fuck, Shane!" Ilya swears, taken by surprise.

"What's it like in?" Shane asks. The answer, according to Ilya's blue lips and rock hard nipples, is very fucking cold. Ilya turns his face away from him.

"Why you here, Shane? You not want to make your cottage pretty for your friend?"

'Your friend' Shane can take, but *'your cottage'* ricochets inside Shane's brain. Ilya only ever called it "the cottage" now. One night recently, on a night Shane had been a little melancholy and Ilya had been a little drunk, Ilya tried to console him.

"I miss you." Shane had admitted.

"Da. And I miss you. But is okay. Only two weeks and we are home."

Ilya had called the cottage *home*. Shane could have cried.

“Nope. The cottage is fine. Wanted to show my boyfriend around the island.” Shane says as he steps out of his kayak and pulls both boats further up the shore. He grabs one of the towels and comes to stand an arms’ length away from Ilya.

“There’s a tree I used to climb as a kid just around this bend. Wanna see it?”

Ilya doesn’t answer, but accepts the towel and wraps it around his shoulders. Shane moves off, hoping beyond hope Ilya will follow, and is wholly relieved when he does. They pick their way across rocks and logs, losing sight of the cottage as they round the small point. Shane is grateful for the change of angle – there’s no way his parents would grab binoculars and spy on them, but knowing this time and place are theirs alone feels important.

“This is it.” Shane says, stopping at the base of an impressive red oak. “Seemed even bigger when I was small. I always felt brave when I climbed it, even when I couldn’t make it to the top. I’d mostly sit in that fork. It was like my own secret hideaway. I could watch everything, but no one could see me. One year, I was maybe 13, there were birds nesting there, cardinals I think. They were so used to me being in the tree, they didn’t care I was close to their eggs. It was cool to watch the chicks hatch and grow, but then they begged for food all the time. It was so noisy.” Shane shakes his head fondly at the memory. “I guess I got busy with hockey after that. More focused on training. I probably haven’t climbed it since that summer.”

Within seconds Ilya is grabbing branches with strong hands and hauling himself up the tree, his toes catching footholds Shane used to know with his eyes closed. He pushes up another branch and looks back down at Shane. The expression isn’t a happy one, but Ilya isn’t ignoring him, so Shane takes it as a win.

“You will climb now, yes? Do your job showing boyfriend the island?” Ilya asks, and Shane races up the tree after him. They find a branch, angled less steeply than the rest and strong enough to hold them both 12 feet or so off the ground, and sit alongside each other. There’s still distance between them, but Shane hopes the gulf is closing. Ilya rearranges the towel around his shoulders and looks up and around him at the medley of green, yellow and orange leaves encompassing them. The leaves aren’t red yet, but Shane knows its only a couple weeks more until the tree will be a magnificent red. He wishes they’d be here to see it, rather than crisscrossing the continent on separate buses and places.

“Thank you.” He says. “For the towel.”

“That’s okay.” Shane answers. He waits a while then takes the leap. “Wanna talk about it?”

Ilya sighs and hangs his head. “No. But probably should.”

“Yeah. I fucked up, Ilya, you don’t have to pretend to be fine. I just- I am really bad at this. Bad at reading situations, people. I thought we’d talked about it enough, me meeting Svetlana and you meeting Rose, for a visit to be okay, but I upset you.”

“I am upset, yes. But is not your fault.” Ilya answers.

“Yeah, it is. Can you tell me where I fucked up, so I can try not to do it again? Was it the short notice? That it cuts into our alone time too much? Or like, because my parents know already, did you want me to meet Svetlana first so it’s more fair or something between us? Something else? I don’t know, Ilya. If I can’t fix it this time I at least want to know how to not fuck up the same way again.”

Shane waits for so long he’s not sure Ilya will answer at all. When he does, his voice is low, sad.

“Doesn’t matter reason, Shane. You can not fuck up again by checking with me first. Not assuming. Same like we do in sex, checking in before, during, after. Just that, in life together. Then we are always fine.”

“Okay.” Shane says, quietly. It’s a non-answer in a way, but it is practical advice he can apply in future, that is if he can get his excitement under control enough to remember in the moment. “Thank you. I love you.”

They sit together a couple minutes longer. When Ilya is shivering despite the towel, Shane speaks.

“Are you cold?” he asks, as if Ilya could be anything but.

Ilya wraps the towel tighter around him and stares resolutely through a gap in the leaves.

“Last time I saw Rose Landry she had her hands up your shirt.”

As if Shane needs reminding – that night is seared into his memory for all the wrong reasons. He huffs a little laugh, smiles a small smile.

“Yeah, not the best first impression, I’ll give it that. I’m guessing that was before you had that blonde’s earlobe in your mouth,”

“Fuck, Shane.” Ilya scrubs his hand down his face in frustration, and Shane knows his awkward attempt at humour has failed spectacularly. “Yes, was before. I wanted make you jealous like I am jealous.”

“It worked, if you’re wondering.” Shane says. He’s still trying to keep his tone light, but any progress they’d made feels like it’s slipping through his fingers. He knows he is not doing this right, but can’t seem to spot a path back to safer ground.

“No, Shane. Could never.” Ilya shakes his head.

“Well it did, Ilya. Seeing you with her... It hurt so bad I could’ve cried in the middle of the dancefloor.”

Ilya turns on Shane, the look on his face one of a broken man. “You wanted to cry? You? That night you see me touch someone else, imagine me in bed with a woman I just met. Is not same, Shane, does not hurt like I hurt. Every day and night for six fucking weeks I think you are making whole rest of life plan without me in it.”

Shane is trying to stay in the moment, with his boyfriend who is clearly struggling, but the reality is he is lost. If Ilya didn't want to meet Rose yet, if he *never* wanted to meet her, he could've just said so, and Shane would have accepted it. He might not have liked it, but he'd have respected Ilya's decision and kept them separate in his schedule until further notice. But that wasn't what had happened at all. They'd talked, uncharacteristically focused, and drafted a step-by-step community building plan together, with one of the very first steps being an in person meeting between the two of them. Cut back to the present and Rose is on her way, Ilya is shivering halfway up a tree in the middle of the lake, and they're rehashing a part of their convoluted history Shane thought they'd well and truly put to rest.

"We only dated for three weeks, Ilya, you know this." He tries for softness, soothing, and can only hope it lands. "And the last week of that was Rose trying to figure out how to break up with me and inform me just how gay I am in the same conversation without me having a complete breakdown."

Clearly this is still the wrong thing to say, because whatever dam has been holding back the tide of Ilya's emotions breaks.

"But this is it, Shane! You, Mr. Serious, are dating! That night you imagine me fucking random person I just met in sweaty club, but me? I spend seven fucking years growing balls to ask you to stay one night, and when I fuck up and you run... Fuck. No message, nothing. That is very bad but I can accept. Maybe you don't feel like I do, or I push too hard, you get scared, whatever. I am sad, yes, but still at start I have stupid hope you maybe come back if I give space.

But then you are on gym TV going on dates and holding hands with Rose Landry. She is on every teammate's phone, in stands at your game wearing your fucking jersey and you are *smiling* and *blushing* and I hate myself for fucking up what we have, thinking it could ever be anything else. Even on good day, when I think maybe you are not into women, maybe if I do everything right I have chance, all I see when my eyes close is you and Rose Landry and your perfect kids living your perfect life together in your perfect cottage from documentary. And then, when I play like fucking shit in Montreal and want to forget you want her not me, I go to club-

"Ilya, if you didn't want to meet-

"No, Shane, I am not done. I see it with my eyes that night, that you want it to work. With her. You might not love her yet but you want to, and I know how hard Shane Hollander works for what he wants. You say it was three weeks only with Rose, but I not know this then, because you not tell me til later. Pictures in Montreal, New York, all over. You say nothing, and I keep thinking I am nothing to you. Memory only, maybe, if I am lucky. Or forgotten, I don't know which is better. And my Dad is calling me and Alexei is terrible and Sveta pities me and I am angry all the fucking time, because it's that or crying. Three times I break phone screen, Shane, two times not even mine!

Then All Stars is coming up. I hope maybe I get sick, not come to Florida, not see you happy with someone else, even though you deserve happy life, best life. At bar you sit down and ask to tell me something. I am okay outside but inside I am so fucking scared what you will say. Maybe you are engaged already, speed romance. Maybe she is pregnant, I don't know. I

know now you not say this, but then inside I am dying. For six weeks I am dying because every time I think of you I think of you and Rose at this cottage and how-“

Ilya cuts himself off, tucking his chin below the towel and clamping his eyes shut. Shane's stomach is in knots, tears threatening at his waterline, a lump in his throat. Ilya looks scrubbed raw.

“How what?” Shane whispers. Ilya shakes his head and turns it away, but Shane has seen this before and doesn't let it slide. He swings one leg over the massive branch so he is straddling it, facing Ilya side on. “I love you so much, Ilya. I'm listening. I know I've run before, but there's nothing you could say right now that could make me turn away from you.”

Ilya lets out a long and shaky exhale. Shane rests both hands heavily on the tree branch between his legs and leans forward until his forehead rests lightly on Ilya's shoulder.

“Please.” Shane whispers, and waits. Ilya's breathing is rapid, his response as quiet as Shane's request.

“How my hurt is good because your life is better without me to fuck it up.”

A sob wrenches free. Whether it's from Ilya, himself or both of them, Shane isn't sure. His arms are moving of their own accord, wrapping Ilya into a tight embrace, pulling him sideways against his chest, cradling damp curls against his no-longer dry shirt. Shane is gripping the tree branch with his legs as if both their lives depend on it, gripping his boyfriend with his arms because he knows it does.

“No, baby, no.” Shane starts, and once the floodgates open, he can do nothing but bare his heart. “You are the *best* thing in my life. God, I was such a fucking idiot. Am an idiot for not telling you every single day how incredible you are. My life was grey without you in it, empty. Trust me, I tried it and it sucked. My life will *never* be better without you. I don't care how fucked up you think you are, you're *my* boyfriend and I love you *exactly* as you are and the *only* plans I want to make for my life are the ones I make with *you*.”

Ilya's gasps for breath slow gradually under the force of Shane's determined outburst and ongoing firm embrace.

“God, Ilya, I'm sorry. Seeing Rose and me together at the cottage is like your worst fear from that time come to life, isn't it? And I sprung it on you with no notice.”

Ilya manages a choked laugh. “Not worst fear, Shane. Unless she arrives with your baby in her belly, then maybe yes.”

“I can give you a 100% guarantee Rose is not pregnant with my baby.” Shane chuckles.

“You are that gay, huh?” Ilya says, rubbing his temple against Shane's chest.

“Yeah.” Shane answers. “100% on that one too.”

Ilya nods and shoulders drop, but doesn't make to move yet.

“Is not really about Rose Landry. Or cottage. Is about me. Worrying I not make you happy. Ruin your life.”

Shane’s heart breaks - how Ilya can’t see his goodness is beyond devastating.

“There’s no life worth ruining if you’re not in it, Ilya. I mean that.” Shane says firmly, and finally, *finally* Ilya raises his arms to the one Shane has wrapped around his front and hugs it .

“Why you so good to me, Shane Hollander?” Ilya sighs.

“Pretty sure we’re up here because I was an asshole.” Shane laughs.

“Is true. But you are still my favourite asshole.” Ilya says, pulling back just enough that Shane can see Ilya’s waggling his eyebrows at him.

Shane seizes the opportunity to steal a kiss in the branches of a tree that was once his safe haven, housing every dream and ambition he dared to let have.

Shane releases the hug, instead cradling Ilya’s face in his hands, and drops their foreheads together.

“I love you, Ilya. Thank you for telling me. Loving me.”

“Telling is hard. Loving is easy,” is Ilya’s earnest response. When he says shit like that, Shane’s not sure how his chest doesn’t physically burst from the sudden swell in pressure.

Shane brings him into one more hug. “Wanna head back?”

“Da, freezing my dick off up here.” Ilya says, his voice once again clear and strong. “Let’s go home.”

Home, Shane hears, and every feel good receptor in Shane’s brain cartwheels with joy and relief. *Thank fucking god*, he thinks. *We’re gonna be okay*.

Chapter End Notes

So I hadn't expected the Shane criticism on the first chapter, but had forgotten readers can't magically see inside my brain to know that in this canon divergence/AU the boys are actually making an effort to talk about things and proactively gather a supportive small community around them. The first (but not only) conversation they have about emergency contacts happens in part 3 of this series, “high like the kite”:
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/77037656>

Also, I am neurodivergent but not autistic - I have many autistic friends and am drawing on the lived experience they've discussed with me many times to write Shane's POV here. I hope these feel true to character and doesn't overstep, I am open to feedback but

please remember I'm operating in good faith here and don't hate on me for trying my best with his internal monologue. Ilya's English is generally good by this point in time but suffers in this scene the more upset he gets, which seems to happen in both book and TV. No beta reader, so any typo/error corrections are also welcome.

Next up will be Good Dad David Hollander.

Chapter 3: Rose

Chapter Summary

Rose arrives at the cottage and meets Ilya.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 3 was going to be David POV, but as I wrote it became clearer it really needed to be Rose's turn first.

This chapter references 'let's be best friends' - the fic I wrote about Rose introducing Shane to his stylist and reporting back to her on his successful mission after the All-Stars. You don't have to read it to make sense of this chapter, but this is it if you'd like to read. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75961071>

Rose pulls onto a non-descript gravel driveway that winds carefully between dense hedges. There is no gate or security system, which surprises her given Shane's superstardom, private nature and publicly declared love for his cottage. What surprises her more however is that her car is the fourth to join what has become a parking lot outside the glass-fronted 'cottage' – one sensible Jeep, one sensible VW and one low, sleek, black sportscar.

Rose unbuckles her seatbelt and shrugs her softest green cardigan on over her white tank top. She carefully gathers the delicious smelling parcel that has been teasing her from the front seat for the past hour and a half and swings open the door. Shane is jogging down the steps to meet her before her feet hit dirt.

"Heeeyyy" he calls, and it's so welcoming, so sincere in his happiness to see her, that Rose can't help but smile.

"Hey to you, Handsome. If I knew there was a party going on I would've brought wine, not sweets." Rose says, giving him a kiss to the cheek as she hands over the white, honey scented box.

"You didn't have to bring anything, but I'm sure Il- they'll be appreciated." Shane says. Rose notes the slip, but given all will be revealed in the next few minutes, lets it pass. "My, um, my parents were here when you rang and they're gonna to stay for a while. To meet you. And also, uh..." Shane trails off, trying to look anywhere except Rose's face.

"Also?" Rose asks gently.

“Well, my boyfriend, he is, um, he’s good to meet you too. We’d talked about it before and stuff. Just when I said you were coming today, with not much notice... Like he knows I’m gay. That you’re not a threat to him or whatever. But I guess I didn’t realise how hard he took it when there were photos and stuff of us in the media. And how that linked to this house? Mom and Dad are gonna be here for a while to add, like, a buffer?”

Rose marvels at how easily the words ‘my boyfriend’ fall from Shane’s lips. Yes, Shane’s sexuality and partnership remain a closely guarded secret, but for never having told anyone he was gay before Rose, she can see he has made great strides in regards to accepting himself in only six short months.

“That’s fine with me, Shane, I’d love to meet your folks. Your boyfriend though... are you sure he’s alright with meeting me? We can do it another time if he’s not ready.”

“No, no. I checked with him many, many times. We went kayaking before and he’s just taking a bath upstairs, but he’ll be down after.” Shane says. “Come on, I’ll give you the tour.”

Shane leads Rose up the front steps, through the entry way and to the left, leading her into a room drenched in natural light. He’d told her how calming the cottage was for him. The photos he’d shown her hadn’t really done it justice (do they ever?) but being here in person she gets it. Through every one of the floor to ceiling windows Rose can see nothing but nature – clear sky, swaying tall trees, an occasional tiny white cap on the rippling water of the lake that stretches before them. To her right is an open plan living space plucked from a country escape magazine replete with kitchen, dining room, a sitting area that looks ripe for sups of tea and reading in the morning sunshine. To the left is a lounge room, a long leather couch with three cushions arranged neatly at each end faces the lake. A man who can only be Shane’s dad is seated right at its centre, leaning forwards as he methodically turns puzzle pieces face up on a large glass-topped coffee table.

“My dad, David.” Shane says as he gestures towards him with his free arm before placing her box onto the counter. Rose gives a little smile and wave as the man looks up and shifts his glasses to the top of his head.

“Hi, Mr. Hollander. I’m Rose.” She says.

“Good to meet you, Rose. Better call me David though, unless you’d like me to call you Miss Landry?” David answers good naturedly. Rose laughs.

“David it is, then.” She says, as Shane’s mom steps through the sliding doors between deck and dining room.

“And I’m Yuna,” Yuna says, extending her hand for a handshake. “It’s good to finally meet you, Rose. I didn’t expect to be sharing my weekend with three stars, but here we are. Shane only has good things to say about you.”

Three stars, Rose thinks, and for the hundredth time in the last two hours, feels the confidence in her hunch grow stronger.

“Glad to hear it, Yuna. If he was saying bad things I’d be in a dangerous place wouldn’t I? I’ve played enough victims to know secluded hideaways like this are the go-to if you’re hiding hostages or dumping bodies.”

Yuna laughs and Shane gives a little chuckle under his breath. Nothing like a joke about horrific crime to get everyone relaxed.

“There’s a, uh, guest bedroom through that door” Shane says, pointing past David. “If you need the bathroom the small one’s around here,” he says indicating back the way they’d come. “Outdoor shower just off the southern deck, but I’m guessing that won’t be required. What else... there’s another couple bedrooms and the main bathroom upstairs, which I can show you later if you want.”

Rose hears doors opening and closing upstairs and watches Shane take a deep inhale and close his eyes for a moment before he opens the fridge door. Rose can hear footsteps coming down the stairs, and knows from the way Shane is nervously rambling he can too.

“I’m not sure what you’d like from what I’ve got here, sorry. There’s coke, ginger ale, some Sav Blanc but it’s been open a long time so might not be great. There’s black tea, earl grey... I think maybe a box of different herbal teas in the pantry too, you know like those gift boxes you get from people who don’t know you very well? Also the, uh, water here is really good. I’ve got my own well, which you can see-“

“There is also vodka in freezer,” a deep and rich voice sounds behind Rose. She meets Shane’s eyes, knowing her own are dancing. She knows that voice. Has heard it a thousand times. Has heard its owner named in the same breath as Shane Hollander just as often. Of course it’s him. For Shane Hollander, it could never be anyone but the best.

I fucking knew it, Rose thinks triumphantly. Thinks too, in the nick of time, that saying the words aloud will send Shane into such a state of panic she’ll never forgive herself. “You lucky bitch,” she mouths at Shane, who blushes fiercely in response. God he’s adorable, sometimes she just wants to wrap him up in a fluffy blanket and cuddle him to death.

Rose turns slowly on her heel to take in the sight of Boston Raiders captain Ilya Rozanov in Montreal Metros captain Shane Hollander’s mansion of a cottage.

“The good kind, I’m guessing?” She asks playfully.

“Best kind. Is Russian.” Ilya answers unflinchingly, eye contact not challenging exactly but intense nonetheless.

Rose beams at him, can feel her face has split in pure delight. She wants to shake him. Hug him. Based on the feigned relaxation he is trying to pass over his body, neither of those is appropriate. Ilya Rozanov is Shane’s boyfriend. He’s so good at hockey. They’re both so good at hockey. Literally the best players the ice has seen in decades. Her brother would die of jealousy if he knew who she was with right now. Rose opens her mouth to say exactly this, thinks better of it, closes it again.

Shane starts. “This is-“ before Rozanov cuts him off.

“You are okay, Rose Landry?” Ilya asks, a mix of genuine concern, tension and nervousness rolling off him in waves. Rose sees Yuna find an excuse to move closer to him, straightening the throw rug over the arm of the lounge. She knows neither Rozanov or Yuna have any reason to trust her with what are now three very big secrets, and the little protective gesture warms her heart. *God*, Shane has it made. *God*, they are both so fit, their stamina must be out of this world. She banishes the inappropriate thought, only to have it replaced by another. *God*, if these two made a baby it would be *the* player of all time, if neither of them are already. Rose realizes she has been looking at Rozanov with a goofy smile a little too long, and pulls on all her acting training to get herself together.

“Yes, I-, I am okay. Thank you, Mr. Rozanov. I am just your standard hockey fan and I am trying very hard not to fangirl out loud right now,” Rose admits.

“I guarantee you I did not get this reaction,” Shane says, looking at his mom before shooting Rose a glare. “Also, you can not call my parents Yuna and David and my boyfriend Mr. Rozanov.”

“This is true. It’s Ilya,” Rozanov (no, *Ilya*) says, slowly extending his hand like the olive branch it is.

“Eel-ya,” she turns the unfamiliar shape over with her tongue as she returns the handshake. “Two syllables, not three. There is a reason I don’t do roles with any accents other than my own, but for Shane’s boyfriend, I’ll work on it. Eel-ya.”

Ilya gives a small nod and smile as he retracts his hand, and looks expectantly at Shane, who has traded his glare for a look of hopeful disbelief. Ilya passes by Rose to take his place is at Shane’s side, pulling them hip to hip. They fit perfectly together, better than she and Shane ever had or ever could, because of course they do. Rose is ecstatic for them.

“Are you going to ask questions?” Shane asks, seemingly steeling himself for an inquisition.

“No need.” Rose says firmly, shaking her head. She knows the look that passed over Shane’s face when they spoke about him being with a man, another player, before they dated. She knows how he turned down a chance with Miles in favour of working things out with someone else. She knows about his Operation All Stars fashion overhaul, and his successful climbing of the tree now known as Ilya Rozanov. She knows that his parents are here, that Shane is surrounded by love.

“I came to visit, not interrogate.” She says. “You can tell me whatever you want to, but I’m not going to ask questions. And anything you say, I’ll never tell.”

Rose punctuates this statement by zipping her lips.

“She can stay,” Ilya murmurs as he plants a soft kiss into Shane’s hair, and Shane visibly relaxes.

“Thank you, Rose.” Shane exhales, allowing Ilya to take more of his weight.

Rose nods, smiling warmly at them both.

“Actually, I do have one question.” She says hurriedly, “Probably more for Ilya than Shane.”

A look of alarm flashes in his eyes, until she reaches for the white box and opens the lid.

“Do you like baklava?”

Chapter 4: David

Chapter Summary

David creates a safe haven for Ilya during Rose's visit.

Chapter Notes

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

In the ebb between getting the kayaks washed and stored and Rose Landry arriving, David makes a plan. Not an elaborate, 4D checkers-type plan that Yuna or Shane might concoct, but a plan nonetheless. He roots around in the storage closet and finds what he's after: an unopened jigsaw he'd stashed there three (was it four?) summers ago.

The picture on the front of the box shows a cartoon drawing of a dog grooming salon. Five perfectly behaved small to medium sized dogs are being bathed, dried, clipped, blow-dried and combed at various stations in the room. Behind them, a huge, furry sheepdog drags its owner through the door, ready to run amok. The puzzle, when constructed, shows the chaos that ensues in the seconds after the giant dog's dramatic entrance.

As David tips the pieces onto the coffee table, grateful for the wonderful natural light for puzzling, he hopes the jigsaw isn't representative of what's about to go down. The peace had been restored after Ilya's unplanned swim earlier, but it's tenuous. David hopes Shane knows what he's doing bringing these two together so soon.

The initial introductions when Rose arrives are easy, jovial. The most charged, as one would expect when an ex meets a current partner, is when Rose and Ilya first converse. David's not one for people watching, but after the first tense minute or two, he can see things are going about as well as he could have hoped for.

The pastries, it turns out, were a stroke of genius. Ten seconds after Rose asked Ilya's opinions on baklava and nine seconds after seeing a huge bite disappear into Ilya's mouth, David is convinced Ilya likes this dessert as much as he likes vodka. Perhaps even more, if that's possible.

"Russian version is better. Less sticky see, but still is amazing. Shane you must try," Ilya looks at Shane meaningfully but doesn't press him further. He groans again when he takes another bite, loud enough to leave David shaking his head at the theatrics. It's in moments like these though that he can see how Ilya's public persona isn't a lie as much as an extension of an underlying character that's already outrageous in its own right.

"Okay, now I am very glad I chose food over wine." Rose says, clearly pleased, and offers the box to Shane who declines, Yuna who accepts the smallest piece in the box, and David who is happy with whichever piece his fingers land on.

David generally knows what he likes and sticks to it (a simple chocolate cake is his pick each and every birthday) but there is a taste of pistachio and lemon there within the intense hit of sweetness that is undeniably delicious. He may not share all of Ilya's enthusiasm, but he can see the appeal for a sweet tooth, particularly if it brings flavours of home.

"Mmm, okay. I'm no expert, but this is really good." Yuna agrees.

"Where did you get this, Rose Landry?" Ilya demands as he claims another piece.

"A Turkish bakery a couple blocks from my hotel. Address is here." Rose points to the sticker on the box. Ilya immediately takes his phone out and snaps a picture of the label.

"Next game in Ottawa I order for whole team. Good luck charm." Ilya says seriously.

"Boston needs that against Ottawa?" Rose asks.

"Not yet but someday, if everything goes to plan." Shane says.

"Oh? So there's a plan?" Rose asks, intrigued.

"Yeah. How about we sit outside?" Shane says.

Yuna turns to lead them outside, but David hangs back on the lounge. He recognises there is a social convention to join the four of them on the deck, and for a moment he is tempted. As much as he's interested in tales from film sets or hearing if the boys' plan has changed since summer, *his* plan for this visit involves him staying exactly where he is.

And so David does. He positions himself near the left corner of the coffee table, and stands the puzzle box up at the far edge of the table top. He turns every piece face up, then sets about collecting corners and edge pieces. He completes the left side border, top and is just starting to work down the right side when Ilya reenters the house. He refills his water glass at the kitchen tap then comes to sit at David's right, in the convenient space David left precisely for this purpose.

"How's it going out there?" David asks, as Ilya picks up the puzzle box.

"Is fine. She is nice." Ilya answers. "Not an asshole."

"Shane doesn't keep company with assholes." David says simply.

"You are sure we have met?" Ilya tries to sound mischievous, but his nerves are too close to the surface to hide them fully.

"I'm sure, Ilya. Rose isn't the only actor here." David says, continuing on his quest for the next piece without making eye contact. The piece will need a brown tab, closer to the border than standard placement, to fit into the brown socket of the previous piece. He notices it not far from Ilya's hand, and ignores it until Ilya finds it himself and presses it into place. A few more pieces are found and situated before either of them speak again.

"One day I will have a dog." Ilya says.

“Is there a breed you like best?” David asks.

Ilya shakes his head.

“Not really. Friendly. Cuddly. Likes walks but will not chew my couch if we have lazy day. No silly haircuts.”

David laughs as Ilya waves the box with the image of heavily groomed poodles, schnauzers and long, silky-haired pooches around. He places it back down again and squints at the image, eyes flicking between the edges already complete and the front of the box.

“This is the right box?”

David nods and explains the premise of this kind of jigsaw. By the end of it, Ilya is the one smiling.

“Shane would hate this.”

David nods sagely. “And that is exactly why I gave it to him.” He says, deadpan.

Ilya cackles, and David’s heart swells. He and Ilya will be learning one another for a while yet, but he is proud that he managed to draw true laughter from the boy on an emotionally taxing afternoon like this one.

Ilya claps him on the shoulder before heading back out to take his spot beside Shane. Another ten minutes though, and he’s back on the lounge, collecting pieces of what will likely turn out to be an upturned pink wastebasket.

“To be fair it was a regift.” David admits after a lengthy, mostly comfortable silence. He’d tried to tell himself not to let the truth get in the way of a good story, but couldn’t hold the line long. At Ilya’s raised eyebrows, he clarifies.

“The puzzle. A coworker gave it to me for Christmas one year. The next summer I brought it here. Partly to get a rise from Shane, partly so I’d have a jigsaw here just in case.”

“Hmmm. In case what? In case of being snowed in? Or in case your sensible, boring son hosts unexpected meeting with famous movie star ex-girlfriend and hockey rival boyfriend with complicated timeline?”

David huffs a laugh.

“I couldn’t have predicted a day like today, no. But sometimes I don’t feel like talking, no matter how fancy the company is. If I’m doing my puzzle, it’s less weird for me to leave you to it.”

“And if you are doing puzzle,” Ilya inhales deeply, “is not weird for me to join you when the talking is enough.”

David says nothing, slotting another piece of a dangerously swinging light fixture into place.

A familiar repetitive thudding noise drags their attention outside to where Shane and Rose have started playing swingball. Shane is connecting every shot, rallying with Rose as they chat, but holding himself back in a way he never seems capable of doing during any activity with Ilya. David can bet Yuna is taking in very little of the book she appears to be reading on the deck: he knows he will get the gossip later whether he wants it or not.

They have been watching only a few seconds when Shane seems to sense Ilya watching him. David watches as Shane catches the ball, turns their direction, and mouths "you okay?" to his boyfriend. Ilya gives him a small nod and a thumbs up in return. Shane's slow blooming smile is so bright it could outshine the late afternoon sun.

Ilya exhales heavily.

"Thank you. For staying extra. I am good now."

"We can stay longer, but if you're sure, we'll go." David says.

"I am sure." Ilya says.

David nods at this, satisfied in both the execution and outcome of his plan, and reaches for the puzzle box. He opens it and makes to disassemble the last hour of work, knowing Shane will undoubtedly do the same anyway the second he and Yuna leave.

"Stop. Please. Do not pack away." Ilya says, a devious glint in his eyes. "I will ask Shane to do new hobby with me later."

His son, David knows with greater certainty every day, has absolutely met his match.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this one, for some reason this chapter fought me every step of the way. It has been started and restarted multiple times over. Many darlings were killed to end up with this version.

This is the jigsaw they were doing for those playing at home:

<https://www.mrtoys.com.au/games/wasgij-puzzles/wasgij-mystery-23-pooch-parlr-68848.html>

Apparently there are some very good Turkish bakeries in Ottawa. The internet tells me Russian versions of baklava vary region to region, but in generally are drier/less sticky than if Turkish or Greek recipes are used.

Canadians - is swingball the right word here? In Australia it's called totem tennis. We'd also say "bin" instead of "wastebasket" but you get the idea!

One chapter to go - Ilya, my beloved.

Chapter 5: Ilya

Chapter Summary

The last part of Rose's visit to the cottage, after Shane's parents leave, from Ilya's POV.

Chapter Notes

So my computer died an untimely death, hence the long and expensive gap between chapters. Thank you for your patience and lovely comments! Ilya goes through it here, up and down and sideways. It is not a linear path but he will be happy by the end, so have faith.

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

The dust from the elder Hollanders' tyres is yet to settle when Rose rounds on Shane, her polished starlet façade giving way to volcanic levels of excitement in front of Ilya's eyes.

"Your cottage is beautiful and your parents are lovely but holy fucking shitballs Shane Hollander how dare you drop this on me when I have to be polite?!"

"Rose, I-" Shane doesn't get far before he's cut off.

"No, okay, sorry, that didn't come out right. I am very starstruck to meet your famous boyfriend but also just so fucking *happy* for you, *both* of you, and it was extremely hard to keep myself contained to anywhere close a sane person level to not freak your very intimidating mother the fuck out."

She is talking too fast with too many waving hands for Ilya to catch all of it, but he gets the gist. It takes half a second to realise he is mirroring Rose's smile. For all his hesitation earlier in the day, Ilya suspects between the baklava, Rose's gentle care for Shane and his mirror neurons, his opinion of Rose is being reshaped without his conscious control.

"Mom isn't *that* scary." Shane tries, but his tone is unconvincing. He is quickly met by twin "are you serious?" tilted head, eyebrow hiked looks from Rose and Ilya.

"Okay. Maybe she is a little protective." He admits with a sheepish look and thumbs hooked adorably into his pockets.

"Shane," Ilya starts, "Yuna is like bear mom. Come too close to her... word for baby bears?"

"Cubs?" Rose supplies in response to Ilya's snapping fingers.

“Yes, get too close to Yuna’s baby cubs and-“ Ilya gnashes his teeth inches from Shane’s face in a simulated bite, molars snapping together loudly. Shane jumps a little in surprise, scowling when Ilya and Rose both dare to be entertained by his reaction.

“She means well, and she’s not *that* intense.” Shane says to Rose. “Well, maybe when I was small, but not now. She hasn’t pulled the Mama Bear act on Ilya once.”

“Because I am one of the cubs,” Ilya says with a shrug. That’s the impression he’s getting anyway, now Yuna’s had some time to settle into the idea of the two of them. He isn’t sure he believes it yet, but the simultaneous smile and blush that bloom across Shane’s freckled cheeks makes him want to. The invitation to Christmas he received from Yuna and David at lunchtime didn’t hurt either.

Rose coos, Shane swats at her arm, and Ilya taps Shane’s butt hard enough to make his boyfriend yelp as he skips up the steps back inside the cottage.

Ilya is on a mission, or perhaps three.

First: the freezer, for vodka and ice.

Second: the fridge, for the rest of the baklava he is near certain he can convince Shane to eat.

Third: waiting out the next 45 minutes until Rose leaves and he can suction himself like a limpet to his irresistible boyfriend’s mouth and cock until they’re both seeing stars.

Shane and Rose join him in the kitchen, drawing him back from the semi-hard edge of fantasy while he slices the single remaining pastry into sixths.

“I gotta hand it to you, Shane,” says Rose, “Operation All Stars makes a lot more sense now I know your tree was Ilya Rozanov.”

“Your tree?” Ilya asks, eyes trained on Shane and ice clinking against the glass as he swirls the drink and ice cubes in his tumbler. “This is code for something?”

“Yeah, in that context it means, um” Shane stammers. “kinda like my ‘target’? Rose’s friend saw some photos of me after the appointment with the stylist. He suggested there’d be guys who’d like to ‘climb me like a tree’. I told Rose I, uh, hoped to do the climbing? I’m not sure how well that translates...”

“Enough. I get it.” He turns to Rose, trying to shut heinous thoughts of other men viewing or climbing Shane from his mind, and trying harder to shut memories of what they got up to in Florida from his dick. 42 minutes to go.

“Yes,” Ilya tells Rose. “Shane did very successful tree climbing at All Stars. Also scored many beautiful goals. Very hot. Stunning man. These photos though, you still have them?”

Shane groans. “They’re just me standing awkwardly wearing clothes, clothes that you have now seen. Not exciting.”

“I have also seen under them, many years.” He waggles his eyebrows suggestively. “Still want to see your photoshoot.”

“Ugh. Fine. Rose, you can show him.” Shane relents. “I’m going to the bathroom. By the time I get back, this conversation will be over, yes?”

“Maybe.” Ilya says, sidling up to Rose as she opens her message history with his boyfriend, who is in her phone simply as “Shane”. She scrolls up to find the images, which simply exist there, without the need for immediate deletion, layers of password protection or storage on a hard drive at his in-laws’ home and passes him her glitter-cased phone. It hurts, *aches* really, breath and jaw locking down unbidden at the reminder of what they can’t be. *Yet*, he tells himself, *not yet*. One day, they can be, will be. Whether that’s in 15 months or 15 years, it doesn’t matter to Ilya so long as Shane keeps him around for the time it takes to get his too loud head around going public.

Thankfully, the sight of Shane looking nervous, gorgeous, sometimes cheeky on the screen in his palm is just enough to bring him back from the hurricane his own thoughts are rapidly whirling into. He scans each photo, lingering on some longer than others. He is amused but not surprised by what he now understands is Shane’s staunch adherence to the shirt/pants/shoes combinations. He has, after all, always been good at following orders. He manages to keep that thought inside his head, returns Rose’s phone and watches as she exits out of the final picture in the series and locks her screen. Now is the time for a clever quip, probably, but after the day they’ve had, Ilya finds he doesn’t have it in him.

“Thank you. Very pretty.” Ilya says, before taking a long sip of his liquor. It is only after it slides down far too easily that Ilya realizes the photos were sent *to* Shane, not received *from* him.

“Rose Landry, how did you get these photos?” He asks.

Rose cocks her head and gives Ilya a puzzled look. “I took them? Did Shane not... no, of course he didn’t tell you.” She says, shaking her head with exasperation. “When Shane asked about getting a stylist I recommended a friend in New York. Pia isn’t the most famous, but I knew she’d be gentle with him. I was in town the day she and Shane met for him to try on the clothes she suggested, so I joined them at a hotel on the Upper East Side. I was so fucking hungover, but it was nice to be there for Shane. He was very nervous, very sweet, as you can imagine.”

Ilya can. He nods but says nothing, hoping Rose takes the hint to continue before his tongue can betray him with words so pathetic they are wholly unfit to share.

“Pia would give Shane an armful of clothes, he’d go put them on in the bedroom, then come back to the lounge room where I was dying on the couch. If he liked the outfit he’d get me to take a picture of it so later he’d know what items went together. It was very clear he cared a lot about the opinion of whoever he was trying to impress,” Rose elbowed Ilya’s ribs playfully, “and didn’t want to get any of the combinations wrong. I sent all the photos to him after we wrapped. Oh, and funnily enough he wanted to have his new clothes by the All-Star weekend, which is why we called his wardrobe makeover *Operation All-Stars*.”

Rose and Shane, in New York. Paparazzi shots of them arriving separately to a hotel, exiting it together only a couple of hours later, are burned into Ilya's brain. In the images, taken less than a week before the trip to Tampa, Shane left the hotel towing a giant suitcase behind him. In Ilya's lowest moments, the ones he'd considered feigning illness before the very All-Star weekend Shane had been preparing for, Ilya had imagined how much sex Rose and Shane had managed to fit into those two hours, tortured himself speculating upon which of her possessions Shane may have been taking back to Montreal with him to fill the perfect home they were creating together. The picture Rose is painting of that day is so starkly opposed it makes Ilya's head spin.

Ilya's throat burns more now than it did from the vodka. He tries to laugh, he really does, but what comes out is a disbelieving huff that turns wet as Shane reenters the room.

"Oh my god, Rose!" Shane admonishes. "I leave you two alone for two minutes! What did you say to him?"

Rose goes to speak but Ilya manages to slide in first.

"Nothing bad, *moy lyubimyy*, no problem."

Rose has the sense to give Ilya some space, allowing Shane to take her place by his side. Ilya leans into him. Shane waits and waits until Ilya, as usual with everything when it comes to Shane, gives in.

"I just am, ah, changing in my head what happened with you and Rose at hotel in New York. I saw photos online of you leaving with big bag and thought then maybe you are moving in together? Then later I think maybe this is when you break up, getting your many, many things back. But Rose tells me bag was full of clothes she helps you get to impress *me* and is, uh..."

"Overwhelming?" Shane suggests as he wraps an arm around Ilya's back. Ilya nods, leaning into Shane's unyielding embrace as he studies the flooring before Shane speaks again, a teasing tone to his voice that Ilya is thankful for. "If you really want to get specific, the clothes were for me to feel better about myself. Impressing you was a bonus."

Ilya gives another chuckle, one of genuine amusement this time, at the same time Rose snorts.

"You keep telling yourself that, babe. I think we all know those priorities were the other way around."

"I would argue, but..." Shane trails off and Ilya can't help but jab at his waist in a way he knows will make Shane squirm. His pleasure when Shane does exactly as predicted is excessive, but he revels in it.

"You should go next time," Rose winks at Ilya, "he'll need a winter wardrobe too."

Shane deflates a little and Ilya feels his own heart clench.

“It’s not that easy, Rose.” Shane says sadly, and Ilya sees the moment she computes the implications of what she’s said.

“One day, but not yet.” Ilya interjects. His own pain is so familiar he sometimes wears it like an old hoodie, but Shane’s upset is simply unacceptable. If Ilya had his way, Shane would never know sadness again. “Our schedules are tricky anyway. I can watch fashion show on video call.” He bumps Shane’s shoulder again, who gives a close-lipped smile that doesn’t quite meet his eyes. Time for the big guns then. Ilya fixes him with a predatory glare, a sweep up and down his body. “Maybe is better I am not there or you would not spend so much time in clothes at all.”

“I would spend my time doing exactly as I did last time, because unlike you I can be *professional* when I meet a *professional doing her job!*” Shane says vehemently.

“Oh my god, you two are too much!” Rose laughs before placing one of the tiny baklava pieces into her mouth and groaning with the ecstasy of it. “Shane, I know your body is a temple and whatnot but there is only a tiny bit of this left and you need to try it before my self-control really dies in the ass.”

Shane goes to argue but Rose holds up a hand in warning.

“Don’t want to hear it, Hollander. I’ve seen you drink beer and eat six fries in the same night *during the season*. One Polly Pocket sized cube of pastry will not derail your athletic career.”

“Shane!” Ilya says, turning on his boyfriend and putting on his most scandalized voice. “You drink beer and eat fries with pretty lady, but won’t taste flavours of loving boyfriend’s homeland?”

Ilya sees a flicker of hesitation, or perhaps guilt, flicker across Shane’s face, and pounces on it. He snatches a teensy piece from the board on the kitchen island and wafts it under Shane’s nose, delighting as his nostrils flare at the rich scent.

“Technically this is Turkish, Ilya, not Russian. And you know this is not-”

“No, is not part of macrobiotic wheatgrass performance diet. But,” Ilya wraps his right hand around Shane’s neck and leans in until he is whispering into his ear, well below the volume Rose could hear “neither is your cum when I catch it on my tongue and feed it back to you.”

“Ilya!” Shane’s jaw hits the floor, his cheeks and ears turning beet red. “You can not-”

“I can say it, and give it to you too, if you eat this tiny baby pastry. Of course, if you don’t, your loss,” Ilya shrugs, pushing out his bottom lip, “I tell Rose what you are missing out on, she is sad for you. But imagine, if you have second piece? Well, we will see...”

Ilya watches joyously as agitation and desire war in his eyes, the furious blaze of his pupils. Rose’s laugh spills across the room.

“Ah, if only I’d known this is how to get Shane Hollander to eat ice cream with me,” she sighs, resting her elbow on the counter and chin in her palm as Ilya brushes the piece against

Shane's lower lip.

Shane turns his face away from the food defiantly, but hasn't moved off or attempted to shrug away from Ilya's bracing grip on his neck. Shane would never admit to enjoying this, but Ilya can see the way he is pressing his lips together, the small smile tugging at the corners.

"No, Rose Landry. Would never work for you. Or anyone else. Only me. Because I have what he wants, and what he wants is--"

Shane whips his head around and snatches the piece so quickly his teeth nip Ilya's fingertips in the process. Ilya presses the leftover sticky sweetness from his fingertips into his own mouth, laughing uproariously as Shane throws dagger eyes at him as he chews.

"Shut your fucking mouth, Rozanov," he grits out through his mouthful.

"Never," Ilya says, booping Shane's nose with the backs of his knuckles, "too much fun."

"Fuck you." Shane says with feigned heat. His face is happy. Ilya knows this is the sweetest thing Shane has tasted in months, can only imagine the unhinged dancing of the dopamine receptors fizzing in his brain. He chews leisurely for a while, then swallows, eyes closing in satisfaction.

Rose sighs again, her face whimsical as she watches them bicker and bait and swoon. Three times Ilya thinks she is going to speak, and three times, she reels her words back down her throat.

"Spit it out, Rose Landry. What is it you want to say so bad?"

"You guys are so sweet together," Rose smiles innocently. "It's lovely to meet you, Ilya, and to see my friend so happy."

A memory of Shane in his Team Canada fleece flashes into his mind as Ilya watches his innocent lamb of a boyfriend beam at Rose's words. Ilya, himself more wolf than sheep, is not fooled.

"You are taking media lessons from Shane Hollander now, huh?" Ilya says. He leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees, arranging his body and face in a way that he knows is more likely than not to get him what he wants, when he wants it, celebrates inside when he sees the flicker of alarm in Rose's eyes. "What happened to fangirl Rose? What would she write on internet burner account?"

"Don't be mean, Ilya," Shane says, smacking him on the thigh as he stands. "Rose is our *guest*. Besides, you should be *thanking* her. After all she did bring us this *delicious* baklava." Shane fixes Ilya with an intent stare as he unhurriedly reaches for the board, his finger tracing the edges of a second piece before raising it to his lips.

Ilya falls slackjawed, then gulps audibly as Shane curls his tongue around it seductively. *But imagine, if you have second piece? Well, we will see...*

Rose bursts out laughing and Shane's eyes sparkle with mischief. Shane wrestling back control has the dam on Rose's thoughts breaking, and Ilya is here for it.

"Oh my god, you guys, fine. This is the best day of my life. Your chemistry is otherworldly and your banter is top tier. Holy shit, the *stamina* you must have together. I bet if I searched this house, I'd find lube in every room. Please, please tell me you dirty talk him in Russian. No, but seriously. Ilya. Shane. If you ever want to make a sex tape, I will film, produce and leak it for you. If hockey doesn't work out, you could do one of those audiobook pornos. Maybe you should do one anyway because *holy fucking shit*. Girls, gays and theys everywhere would pay a bomb to listen to you lust and moan and whimper over one another for a couple hours." Rose sighs dreamily as she lets herself collapse against the suspiciously clear door of Shane's fridge. "I've ascended to fujo heaven and no one can ever make me leave."

Ilya makes a mental note to look up "fujo" later, too busy basking like a lizard in the summer sun to clarify it now. Rose's monologue is better than he could've hoped for, that someone else can see how *right* they are together is something he didn't know how badly he coveted until he heard it spoken aloud, felt that flower of pride bloom inside him.

It helps that Rose is right of course: they do have incredible stamina together; there is lube in every room (well, except the downstairs toilet, but Shane says that would be weird with the lack of cupboards); he does dirty talk Shane in Russian; they would make exceptional pornography in any and all formats if Shane would let him. It also helps that Shane looks close to dying of embarrassment. Ilya wants to lick the flushed skin of his neck until Shane moaning and sweating then taste that too. He wonders how soon is too soon to push Rose out the door and get started on this very important task.

"Is true, Rose Landry. Me and Shane would make very sexy sex tape together. Then you would see exactly what good Canadian boy Shane likes." Ilya says, smirking and rolling his shoulders and chest side to side subtly in a way he knows Shane finds highly distracting.

"Shut up, Ilya!" Shane hisses angrily.

"Oh don't you worry, I know what Shane likes," Rose says, and the fire burning inside Ilya is all but extinguished in a millisecond.

Had they...?

No.

Surely not.

Shane had said...

Ilya's face must tell Shane exactly what he's thinking, because the kindhearted man he is switches from anger to concern in a heartbeat.

"Not like that, Ilya! Fuck, not at all. Trust me, it was awful." He implores.

“Terrible.” Rose nods, solemnly.

“Yes, so I have heard. Not compatible.” Ilya says. Silence falls, something crackling in the air between the three of them, only to be broken by Rose turning pleading eyes on Shane.

“Please can I tell him? Please, please? It was so cute. Like I said, best thing a gay boyfriend has ever said to me.” She turns to Ilya to confirm he heard that last part right. “Theatre school. *Musical* theatre school. Utopia for queer boys.”

Ilya adds “utopia” to today’s list of new words to define, but gets the idea from the context.

She swings back to Shane. “So can I tell him? Pleeeeeaaaaase?”

Shane heaves a put upon sigh and scrunches his eyes closed. “Fine. Now he knows he’s gonna get the story one way or the other anyway. Might as well tell him now, I guess.”

Rose clasps hands and jumps up and down with the most stereotypical glee possible.

“Your hot man here told me he prefers to bottom, approximately one minute after I came out to him, for him.” Rose takes her turn to raise her brows wickedly at Shane, who flicks her a murderous glare as well. “The hole, not the peg, if I remember correctly?”

“Fuck, Shane! First conversation with anyone about being gay and you tell her this?” Ilya laughs, and laughs some more. His heart, the one that had been inadvertently crushed under Rose’s heel a fraction of a second ago, soars above the clouds. Only Shane, *his* Shane, would be so honest. “Lucky I come with you to talk with your parents or you start listing favourite positions! Oh Shane, *moy malysh*. You are precious baby gay and I love you.”

Rose is cackling now and Ilya is wheezing as he tries to wrap Shane into a hug. Shane pushes away from him and folds his arms over his own chest, glowering and pouting in equal measure.

“Shut the fuck up, both of you!” He protests, which only sends them into further peals of laughter. “Oh my god, stop fucking laughing! I get you two together thinking we’ll all have a nice time and you start ganging up me! Just you wait until I meet Svetlana, Ilya. We will gang up on you just like this and I swear to god you will never know peace again.”

“Ooooh. Who is this Svetlana?” Rose asks between giggles, her curiosity evident.

“Svetlana is friend of mine,” Ilya manages, massaging the happy ache from his cheeks.

“From when we are kids. From Moscow, but lives in Boston now. She, ah, may have figured us out before I did. Shane will meet her soon. She says you have great style, by the way.”

“Smart woman, I like her already.” Rose says, eyes narrowing. “Have you and Svetlana been photographed together before?”

“Yes, often.” Shane grumbles, and Rose cocks her head in quiet assessment.

“Not for a while, but yes, mostly arriving to clubs or concerts. Some people on team know her.”

“Last concert you went to together?” Rose asks.

Ilya considers a moment before answering. “Beyonce, last year.”

“No way! I went to the Michigan show!” Rose says. “Amazing. Incredible. Goddess-tier brilliance. Also, “European or gay” my ass.”

Ilya chuckles, but Rose squints at Shane, who has remained quiet through the exchange, eyes boring a hole through one of the kitchen cabinets. “Oh Shane. I’m guessing that glare is not about Beyonce. Why am I getting the feeling meeting Svetlana will be just as awkward for you as meeting me was for Ilya?”

“The decade of *successful* casual sex for a start.” Shane all but spits. Ilya can’t tell if it’s the duration or the knowledge that Ilya is attracted to women that grates on him worse. Maybe, in this situation, the scales are equal. They have been over this so many times – never in love, never dating – but it doesn’t seem to land in Shane’s stubborn skull. He hopes meeting her will prove she is no threat and melt his anxiety a little, the same way Rose in the flesh is unnervingly doing (has already done, really) to him.

“Oh, fuck you guys, whyyyy?” Rose wails. “You are the exact people Avril Lavigne wrote that fucking song for!”

Ilya sees Shane’s eyes track to him despite his ire, the way they have begun to do unconsciously when there’s a gap in his understanding. It’s one of his tells, Ilya knows, that will be hard to hide when they begin their public ‘friendship’, but he likes it too much to tell him to stop.

“You know it if you hear it, I think.” Ilya says. “Big when we were 14, 15 maybe, even in Russia. *Why’d you have to go and make things so complicated?*”

There is no recognition, but Shane’s face softens, like Ilya knew it would. The latest weapon he’s added to his arsenal is learning he can sing the shittiest tune and turn Shane into a puddle. Shane has slutty glasses, Ilya has barely passable singing, and just like that, they are once again evenly matched.

“You really don’t know it, Shane? Pretty sure the singer is Canadian. She wears lots of black eye makeup, talks about playing hockey in the boys league when she was a kid in some of her interviews.”

Shane gives up and shrugs. “Doesn’t ring a bell, sorry.”

Ilya shakes his head fondly. The focus of Shane’s interest in hockey to the exclusion of all else is so narrow that sometimes he thanks his lucky stars his parents pushed a hockey stick into his hands. Without it he surely would never have had a chance with Shane, even if he had made it to North America and their paths had crossed another way.

“Wow. Given your movie knowledge, I am shocked Shane Hollander.” Rose says.

“I told you, I fly a lot, so I watch a lot of movies.” He counters.

“Ok, so before we were rudely diverted by Shane’s lack of pop culture awareness, I was going somewhere.” Rose says as she squares her shoulders towards Ilya. “This friend of yours lives in Boston. She has been photographed with you before. She likes my style and took you to Beyonce, so she clearly has good taste.”

Technically Ilya took her to Beyonce, but Ilya is not going to argue specifics. He nods curtly, unsure where this is going.

“So. Say I was to run into Svetlana somewhere by chance, make a new friend for myself when I’m shooting in Boston early November, do you think she’d like to come shopping with me? Maybe somewhere exclusive together, with some tipped-off paparazzi lurking?”

“Um, yes? I am sure Sveta would love to shop with you.” Ilya says, question more than statement.

“And if Svetlana and I were friends, and sometimes were seen together, maybe it wouldn’t be so weird if we wanted to meet for dinner with our respective maybe-maybe-not-boyfriends at a nice restaurant? You never know, maybe taking two famous hockey rivals for a meal might help them find some common ground, especially given how well they played together at the All-Stars. I wonder... perhaps if this happens a few times, they could catch up occasionally in public when one of them moves to Ottawa without it being big news?”

Ilya is gobsmacked. He sees it now, how Rose was able to give Shane a vision of what his life could be if he looked wider, dreamed bigger, gently opening him up to possibility with kindness rather than steamrolling. This is how he came back to Ilya stronger, surer in himself, shoulders squared rather than cowed. The hope it breathes into him is beautiful, but also dizzying. How and why Rose, who’s known him for under two hours is able to come up with another layer of coverage, one that she gives her precious time willingly to help him and Shane navigate their secret life *and* involves his dearest friend living out one her dreams, is near incomprehensible.

Shane, of course, has concerns. He points out that Rose’s ideas may not be possible to execute. They have four very different schedules to try and match here. How a fake relationship between Ilya and Svetlana could be reconciled alongside his story about moving to Ottawa for personal reasons is unclear. Plus, Ilya and Shane meeting in the light of day would likely always be big news in the hockey world until after their retirement, whether their relationship remained secret or not.

Ilya, of course, points out that Sveta would likely have an out of body experience going shopping with Rose Landry, and whether they follow the rest of the ideas or not, it can’t hurt to have extra layers of publicly documented connection. Done carefully, this could accelerate their ability to be in public together by almost two full years, diluting the rivalry to on-ice only well before the announcement of a foundation. It would no longer be out of the blue then that the two of them were friends, only support for the initiative rather than the full media circus at the time of the announcement that they were expecting with the original plan. It would also mean that he and Shane could go on a date, even if it’s a chaperoned one, for the first time in the nine years since they met. It is on voicing this last point that he chokes up, and every doubt lining Shane’s forehead smooths away.

“Okay.” Shane breathes. “Yeah. You’re right, both of you. Let’s make this happen.”

For what feels like the millionth time today, Ilya’s world reshapes itself. He is elated. He is exhausted. He could fuck Shane for hours, sleep for weeks. They are doing this. They are going to be okay.

Ilya isn’t sure when he stopped counting down the minutes, but before long they are taking turns to hug Rose Landry goodbye. As they make their way down the front steps, she is hit by another wave of excitement. Ilya is expecting more comments on their sex-related plans for the remainder of their time at the cottage, only to be met with something better.

“Oh my god! What if? No. Surely not. Let me see your game schedules. Do you have them on you?”

Ilya pulls his phone from his pocket and moves to the password protected note he keeps the Boston and Montreal schedules one after the other.

“Holy shit! If Svetlana and I are friends publicly by February, we can all go to Stefani Germanotta together in Montreal!” She squeals, eyes sparkling at Ilya as she passes his phone back.

“Is not sold out already?” Ilya asks, eagerness bleeding through his accent.

“Do I know-” Shane tries, but Rose cuts him off.

“Pfft. Ilya Rozanov. You think if *you and Shane Hollander* want to go to a concert *together*, with *me* and another very good looking plus one who is my friend and maybe your girlfriend, they are not going to find a way to make that happen?”

Another bubble of hope forms in Ilya’s chest. He feels light enough to float away, and tethers his arms around Shane’s waist just in case he does.

“Okay, is decided. We go, all four together. You will organize?”

“Um, yes? You boys took seven fucking years to talk to one another properly, and clearly there are still gaps. I am not leaving you in charge of getting VIP tickets for a concert in less than four months’ time.”

She blows them a kiss as she strides across the gravel.

“You have no faith in me, Landry.” Ilya calls, squeezing Shane’s waist tighter and hooking his chin over a broad shoulder as Rose folds herself into the rental.

“About Gaga? No.” Rose says, flatly. “About this?” She continues, pointing between him and Shane, “Yes.”

Ilya can’t help but preen as Shane’s back melts further into his chest.

“Ok. Fair, probably.” Ilya says loudly, smiling. “You think she will wear the meat dress?”

Shane tries again. "Oh my god, will someone *please* tell me what is going on?"

"I'll leave it to your boyfriend, Shane Hollander. Goodbye, my loves."

A hand waves out the window, dust kicks up behind tyres, and Rose is gone.

Ilya will tell Shane, eventually. He will also find the track listing from earlier concerts of the tour and make Shane a playlist so he can feel more prepared, take earplugs for him to make him more comfortable if it's too loud. Maybe he will fuck him with the playlist on in the background too, see if he can make Shane hard at the concert just from his memories and weighted looks alone. That will all come later though, as a future they never thought they'd get begins to not only take shape but accelerate towards them at what is, for them at least, warp speed.

Tomorrow, Ilya will return to Boston, go directly to Svetlana at work, and video her reaction when Shane sends her Rose Landry's contact details.

Today though, he will pretend to be very interested in a jigsaw puzzle that looks nothing like the picture on the box. Then he will let the day's emotions drain from his body into Shane's, drowning himself in his boyfriend's skin and breath and two-pieces-of-baklava-worshipful-sex until sleep pulls them both under. Ilya is the luckiest man to ever live, and after a day like this one, god does he know it.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter count updated to reflect a very indulgent epilogue, likely from Svetlana's POV. Thoughts?

moy lyubimyy = my beloved

moy malysh = my baby

I previously wrote fic about Shane, Rose and Pia the stylist, which you can read here: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75961071>

It's true, Rose had the idea of hudcon/hollanov making Ember & Ice.

In writing this chapter I learnt that:

-Avril Lavigne is Canadian. She has spoken in interviews about playing hockey in the boys league, and being neurodivergent/ADHD (something I started segueing into and then decided was not the vibe of this fic).

-Beyonce did her "The Formation" tour in 2016, my guess is Ilya and Sveta went to the NY show because how convenient he had enough break from hockey to go? Don't think too hard on it. I imagine Rose went to the show in her home state with her pre-fame friends because she is real like that.

-Gaga did her "Joanne" tour 2017-2018. The Montreal show was held at Centre Bell (which I'm pretty sure is Voyageurs/Metros home stadium) at the start of the run of dates, but for the sake of this story let's pretend it was the final show, which was held

early February. Let's also pretend their schedules somehow do make a combined attendance possible, and that Bell was available by happy coincidence rather than because Shane's team was on an away run of games. This is the meat dress Ilya was referring to, which Gaga says she wore in response to the US Armed Forces "don't ask, don't tell" policy about sexuality:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meat_dress_of_Lady_Gaga

Added a new tag - Ilya Rozanov Loves Lady Gaga, so look out for chapter six! Already had it in my head for this fic after listening to Connor's interviews and decision cemented after devouring this now completed bodyguard/popstar AU which you absolutely must read: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/78453931>

Finally, this work is mine, with references to the novels by Rachel Reid and TV series by Jacob Tierney. Fuck AI.

Chapter 6: Svetlana

Chapter Summary

Svetlana and Rose join forces to make things happen.

Chapter Notes

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

September 2017 - Boston

Ilya Rozanov stands in Svetlana's exclusive showroom in his all black airport clothes, flanked by some of the most coveted cars perverse amounts of money can buy, with a duffel bag slung over one shoulder. He has the decency to push his sunglasses onto his head before Jane's message arrives, the indecency to film Svetlana's reaction as she registers firstly, that Rose Landry's contact card is sitting in her inbox, and secondly, that she has been right about Jane's identity for literally *years*.

Forget workplace decorum, Svetlana screams at him, his phone clattering to the floor as she flings herself into his arms. She is caught and swung ragdoll-style by the strong arms that have done this for two decades, as Ilya laughs and laughs. When her feet are reacquainted with the ground, she hugs Ilya like she is trying to crush the air from his lungs, feeling him hug her back with just as much feeling, if not as much force. When she pulls back to hold his shoulders, he is crying happy tears.

"*Sveta*. There is *so much* to tell you," Ilya blubbers.

"No, Ilyusha, you will tell me nothing," she says sternly, "until you say I was right."

"Svetlana Vetrova," Ilya concedes, "you are very annoyingly always right."

"And apologise for lying to me."

"I am sorry I lied to you," he says regretfully.

"And" Svetlana says, pausing for effect only to lean in closer and drop her voice low, "admit you jerked off to the lake house yoga documentary many, *many* times."

Ilya barks a laugh, his entire body communicating elation, relief, gratitude, *joy*.

"What can I say," he responds, smile brighter than the sun, "is a very, *very* beautiful house."

October 2017, Boston

Svetlana sits at a white linen-covered tablecloth for two. At her feet are a veritable mountain of designer shopping bags. Across from Svetlana is one of her style icons, naming her own: Marilyn Monroe, Princess Diana and Rihanna amongst the eclectic mix of names.

They drink wine, eat scallops, do their best to gossip as covertly as possible. Rose's eyes twinkle when she notices the first camera with zoom lens arrive and focus in on them through the glass. Date already set for their next public rendezvous, they leave the restaurant with twin cheek kisses before separating to their waiting cars to a chorus of yelling men and camera shutters.

Tomorrow, Svetlana will attend a fundraising dinner with Ilya. Within hours, keen-eyed people online will start connecting dots. She smiles to herself. There are many steps to go, but already, their plan is in motion.

-

February 2018, Montreal

By February, Svetlana and Rose have been photographed in public together three times. Each meeting is more fun than the last, their friendship already genuine rather than performative. They love their respective men, who have loved each other from too close or too far for years, and tonight, they are finally on their first public date. Bearded, chaperoned and long overdue, yes, but what a first date it is.

When the tickets were secured, Svetlana had cleared her work schedule and Ilya had simply refused to tell his teammates where he was spending his night off. Rose had pulled strings with the hotel manager and car service, Shane (via Yuna) had come through with the security clearances to have them drive under Centre Bell and use the service lifts to enter the venue. They'll leave through the standard exits later, but for now without public awareness of their presence and tucked behind the tinted glass of their private box, the likelihood of being spotted during the performance is slim. The servers have strict orders to stay out, and Svetlana placed her mink wrap carefully over the room's CCTV camera earlier. This has helped allay some of Shane's remaining anxiety, but still the boys are careful to keep their touches only to what could be construed as platonic to an outside observer.

Gaga's concert is undeniably spectacular. The choreography, costuming and theatrics are to die for, the vocals fierce and beat pounding. The four of them push every piece of furniture to the edges to make their own dance floor. For someone who is so graceful on the ice, Shane's attempts at dancing are nothing short of pitiful. Svetlana ignores this in favour of belting out every lyric from every track from The Fame into Ilya's face, who gives it back to her as hard as he gets. She's disappointed her favourite track doesn't get a spin, but given the way Ilya spends more time looking at Shane than the stage, probably a song about losing a lover with brown eyes isn't such a bad one to skip.

The show draws to a close, and to exactly no one's surprise, an encore is called. Gaga arranges herself at a grand piano on a platform in the centre of the crowd, silver sequined

coat flowing over the back of her stool. A single spotlight illuminates her, leaving the remainder of the arena cloaked in darkness.

For the first time all show, the four of them step out onto the balcony of their box together. Svetlana and Rose lean against the railing, shoulders touching lightly, the boys close behind them. Ilya and Sveta hold hands over her left shoulder, Rose and Shane mirror them on Rose's right. And this, this *exact* moment is the reason Svetlana happily dropped \$12 000 of Ilya's cash on Shane's designer leather trench with super high split seam up the back.

Svetlana peeks to see Shane's left arm reach inside his coat as if he is hugging his own waist, brow furrowing until his hand seems to find what it's looking for. He melts, soft smile and warm eyes replacing the poorly concealed irritation from seconds before. Her best friend, the man who is supposedly one of the most arrogant, most feared, most ruthless men in world hockey, is looking somewhere through the performance with watery eyes and a quivering chin. The four of them stay pressed together, their burgeoning friendship a united front as the closing lyrics ring out.

*I've got a hundred million reasons to walk away...
Baby, I just need one good one to stay.*

Svetlana gives Ilya's hand a quick squeeze, and receives a kiss to the top of her head in return. Shane leans down between her ear and Rose's, his "thank you, both of you, so much" cutting through the deafening roar of the crowd.

It's years overdue, but Svetlana knows that this time, with friends on their side, the hundred million reasons Ilya and Shane have to walk away will lose out to the only good one powerful enough to make the hardship worth it.

Love.

Chapter End Notes

-Rose's style icons listed here are some of the people Hudson listed as own style icons on the Shut Up Evan podcast.

-Sveta and Ilya's extra appreciation of tracks from The Fame is based on Connor's episode of the Shut Up Evan podcast, where he named that album as an important one in his upbringing and spoke about crying in his best friend's car to "Brown Eyes". [Also he acted one Joker Folie

-Lady Gaga's outfit and encore describe footage taken from the Boston show of her 2017/18 Joanne tour. The song she sang was "A Million Reasons", which is (obviously) what the italicised lyrics are from.

-Shane's coat is inspired by this one Hudson wore. Just pretend the split goes right up the back to where the yoke (upper back/shoulder panel) joins -
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DTPdVpkjFeX/>

-One super mini chapter to go

Chapter 7: The Wrap

Chapter Notes

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

Sports Illustrated

April issue, 2018

[Excerpt from interview with Boston Raiders captain Ilya Rozanov]

In a move that rocked MLH fans everywhere you were spotted leaving the Lady Gaga's Montreal show in February with a lady friend, Rose Landry and Metros captain, Shane Hollander. What does this mean for your rivalry?

Rivalry doesn't change. Boston and Montreal still hate each other. Hollander is still second best player in league, still my favourite player to beat. Off ice though, he is not so bad. Shane and me have known each other long time, nearly 10 years since 2008 World Juniors. Since then there are many games, press conferences, campaigns, fundraisers, awards shows. And All Stars, of course. Last year especially was fun, playing on same team for the first time. Even though we meet often in season still I did not expect to go to concert with him this year, so big surprise for me as well as fans. But Gaga is great artist, and makes my partner happy to go with friend Rose Landry to show, so I go. There is saying in English, yes? 'Happy wife, happy life?' I can tell you they are very happy after show. Is worth spending night with Hollander for this.

-

Group chat

[4 members]

Rose: Shane have you seen this?!

Shane: Yes [angel emoji]

Rose: @Ilya You really pulled the 'Happy wife, happy life' card?

Ilya: What? Is truth. My Jane is very happy after concert, all night long ;)

Svetlana: Ilya Rozanov. If I never get laid again I will kill you with my bare hands.

Ilya: Do not worry @Svetlana. I tell Marly truth soon. He will still want to fuck you

Ilya: Good skills

Ilya: I have seen them

Svetlana: Go fuck yourself @Ilya

Rose: If Ilya is gonna tell him anyway you might as well go for it @Svetlana. Marleau is hot

Shane: He is.

Svetlana: Ilya is going to tell him, or Marly is hot?

Shane: Both.

Ilya: @Shane NO

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading my fic! It's the longest I've written so far (yes, I am a baby fan fic-er) and appreciate all your encouragement. I have loved reading every comment (even if I haven't written back to them all yet) and would love to hear your final thoughts.

I have learnt much during the writing of this, the main thing being I hate releasing things as I go because PRESSURE! Even if it is self-imposed and perceived only. Still, lesson learned, write the whole thing and only publish when it's ready to edit.

I've been in an HR phase for a while (um, who hasn't?) but I think this series is done. I'm hoping to get back into some of my other WIPs for All For the Game and Captive Prince alongside some other HR/Game Changers oneshots or mini AUs that will inevitably crop up, so don't be surprised if you get a mix from me over the next few months. Until next time :)

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