

If it wasn't for that meddling kid

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If it wasn't for that meddling kid

by [ARustySpork](#)

Summary

“I feel really good about this kid, I think he could be great on your wing, he just needs some help settling in. Someone to show him the ropes.”

“Yes.”

The line went silent for a moment. Ilya wasn't really sure why his coach felt the need to run this by him.

“Rozanov,” his coach said at last. “I want him to live with you.”

Ilya blinked, then nearly shouted into the phone. “What?”

* * *

or, Ilya stays in Boston, gets a rookie, and tries to figure out how to make a secret long distance relationship work while there's a Russian teenager in his house

Chapter 1: You Can't Just Use Scooby Doo as a Replacement for Learning English

Chapter Notes

Hey gang, we are back, and I am attempting to write plot. Is this intended to be crack? Not really, but the truth is, I can't help but write with whimsy, so beware on that front.

This fic takes place following the events of Heated Rivalry. While there is deviation from canon, it does still follow a lot of the events of the Long Game, so beware of spoilers. I don't know how long this thing is gonna be, but I do have a plan. I'll have a chapter count added when I'm more sure.

There is a lot of Russian in this fic, which I have simply highlighted in italics. There is going to be a lot of switching back and forth in conversations, which is intentional. I've carried some references from my other fics, as well as some smaller OCs, but you don't need to have read any of those for them to make sense.

Once again, shoutout to my Newfie consultant for verifying all of Newf's lines. As well, all of my sister's Russian friends that gave their two cents.

I hope everyone enjoys it! Let me know what you think and I'm sorry for my lengthy end notes.

@arustyspork on tumblr

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

Ilya was not going to Ottawa.

It was a nice idea, sure, a fantasy hanging over them during their time at the cottage. But it was too much to give up. Ilya had a life in Boston, friends, a team, a reputation, a Stanley Cup. Not to mention, Ottawa could not afford him, they were rebuilding, scraping by on draft picks and veteran trades. They went back to the real world, and the fantasy couldn't follow them.

By the time September rolled around, Ilya had re-signed with Boston, and Shane stayed in Montreal.

"I miss you, Hollander," Ilya whined into the phone as he slunk around his house. "The bottom half of my fridge is just ginger ale. I bought six cases."

Shane laughed, the sound crackling through his phone speaker. "Very funny, I don't even drink that much."

Ilya examined the inside of his fridge, which did in fact have 72 cans of ginger ale staring back at him. "Yes, I am very funny. But you knew this already."

"I'm excited for this year," Shane said, rustling around on the other end. He had told Ilya that he wanted to clean his entire house before training camp started. Even though Shane was by no means required to attend the first part of training camp as a seasoned vet, he usually did anyway. He said it was important for the rookies to spend time with him, so they'd feel supported. Ilya lived under the

mindset that he would not let anyone interrupt more of his vacation than necessary. “First winter classic. You’re gonna love Quebec City, I’ll take you to the old town, oh! We can visit the Plains of Abraham.”

“Hollander, how old can this town be? We have lawnmowers in Russia older than your entire country.”

“Shut up. I’m just excited. I was thinking it would be a good idea to show off that we’re friends.”

“Ah. A soft launch.”

“How do you know about soft launches?”

“Are you asking me this, Hollander? I didn’t know you even knew how to use instagram.”

Ilya could practically hear Shane rolling his eyes through the phone. “Seriously though, I know it’s gonna be hard being apart now that we’re...us, but, at least it will be better than before.”

Ilya smiled softly to himself. “Yes. I think you are right.”

The fell into a short, comfortable silence, which was interrupted by a beeping in his ear.

Ilya frowned, pulling his phone down to see that he was getting a call from his coach. “Hold on, Shane, I am getting call. I will call you back later.”

He didn’t give Shane much of a chance to respond before hanging up and answering the call. He knew his boyfriend wouldn’t mind, if it was Shane’s coach calling him, he probably wouldn’t have warned Ilya he was going to hang up, just to save a half second of keeping his coach waiting.

“Coach?” Ilya said, lifting the phone back to his ear.

“Rozanov!” LeClaire replied. LeClaire had been his coach the entire time Ilya had played for the Bears, so Ilya had gotten pretty good at reading him. He was a nice enough guy, certainly a bit of a temper, especially when they were playing poorly, but never malicious. Never openly homophobic either. The worst thing about him was his atrocious Minnesotan accent that caused him to draw out all of his O’s. “How’s your summer treating you? You stayed on this side of the pond, didn’t’ya?”

“Yes. It has been nice. First American summer.” Canadian summer, mostly, but he didn’t need to know that.

“Well I won’t hold you too long, kid, but I just wanted to call to ask something of you, and I’m asking you to hear me out, here.”

Ilya squinted, well now he was suspicious. “Okay.”

“You know we have a new rookie coming in from the first round? Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky?”

Last year, Boston had made the playoffs, which would typically mean they wouldn’t get weighted very high in the draft lottery. However, when they traded Skinner last season, they also secured a first round draft pick that ended up sorting to number six overall.

“Yes. I still do not know how you fit his name on the jersey.”

“Anyway, the kid is from Ufa, so he knows hockey, but he unfortunately doesn’t know a lick of English.”

“Okay.”

“I think it’d be best if we placed him with a veteran for his first year at least. He doesn’t know anyone here, he doesn’t speak the language, and I don’t want him to fail just because he doesn’t have support.”

“Okay.”

“I feel really good about this kid, I think he could be great on your wing, he just needs some help settling in. Someone to show him the ropes.”

“Yes.”

The line went silent for a moment. Ilya wasn’t really sure why his coach felt the need to run this by him.

“Rozanov,” his coach said at last. “I want him to live with you.”

Ilya blinked, then nearly shouted into the phone. “What?”

“Look, a few years ago I wouldn’t have even considered it, but you’ve been captain for a few years, you aren’t partying like you used to, I think you’ve proven you’re capable of taking on this responsibility.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes. “And I am the only Bear that speaks Russian.”

“Also that, but I wouldn’t suggest this if I didn’t think it was a good idea.”

Ilya frowned. “I think it is a terrible idea.”

“We really need this for him, Rozanov, and unless you have a good reason...”

Ilya didn’t know how to explain that some Russian kid moving into his house would definitely disrupt his very limited opportunities to have sex with his boyfriend. Off the top of his head, he couldn’t think of any decent excuses to tell his coach.

Ilya paused, and looked around his house. Spending the summer with Shane had made him remember how nice it was to have people around all the time. Sveta would visit, but that was less and less now that she’d been seeing that doctor. Cliff and Newf would sometimes invade his house, but they had their own things going on. Newf was married, Cliff was still hitting the clubs most nights.

Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to have someone around.

“Fine.” Ilya said. “But I will not baby him.”

“Wouldn’t ask you to, Roz,” his coach replied, and Ilya could hear his smile through the phone. Maybe he shouldn’t have folded so fast. He could have gotten something else out of him. Maybe he could finally convince the social media team to let him do an Instagram takeover. “He’s getting in tomorrow, we’ve got him at a hotel for the first few days, but I wanna get you in for the first few days of training camp to meet him and help him get settled.”

“Lucky me.”

* * *

Ilya Rozanov was the only vet at training camp.

Everyone else, like sane people, used as much of their vacation as they could. They wouldn't be in for another week. The only people here were the new rookies, some AHL guys, a free agent that signed over the summer, and some of the guys that had only been in the league for a few years. A lot of third liners from last year.

Also Newf, for some reason. Didn't this guy have a wife and kids?

“I tell ya wha' b'y, these ol' bones need a step 'er two before you can expect me da get on da h'ice without turning da dust,” Newf had droned when Ilya made the mistake of asking him what he was doing. “I go stir crazy at home when da girls are workin'. Olive just started grade t'ree and doesn't want me drivin' 'er ta school anymore. I got ta come in or else I start watching too much Grey's Anatomy.”

“Okay,” Ilya replied. He'd gotten pretty good at decoding the Newfoundland accent, but he found that it was better not to encourage conversation with him too much anyway, or else they'd never get anything done.

“Rozanov, over here!” his coach called, causing Ilya to swing his head to the tunnel. Coach LeClaire, a shorter man with a limp, acquired during his last season in the NHL ten years ago, was completely dwarfed by the man standing next to him.

The kid was massive. Tall, with messy brown hair that stuck out in every direction below his helmet. His size should have made him intimidating, but he had a baby face, and the eyes of a baby deer being chased by a rabid wolf.

“This is Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky. Ilya, meet your new rookie.”

Coach had said the name like he'd practiced it. Which he probably had.

Ilya held out his hand to shake, and the kid took it. His hands were freezing cold.

“So,” Ilya said. “Have you heard you will be living with me?”

The kid had absolutely no thought behind his eyes. “Hello.”

Ilya furrowed his eyebrows, looking to his coach, who grimaced, then back to the kid. He tried again in Russian.

“Do you have any English?” he asked instead

The kid shrugged. “Hello.”

“That's it?”

“I am better at hockey than school.”

“God, I hope so. You need to practice. There are no other Russians here.”

The kid frowned, looking lost.

Ilya turned back to his coach. "Do you have an interpreter for him?"

LeClaire frowned. "We're hoping to get one more regularly when the season starts. Definitely for media appearances, but for now, we were hoping you could help him out? Just until he learns enough to get by."

Ilya rubbed his face in his hands. What had he gotten himself into?

"Lucky me," Ilya said. So much for his free time. He was now a babysitter for the foreseeable future. *"Your things are at the hotel?"*

The kid nodded. *"Just one bag."*

Ilya sighed. *"Okay, we will go after practice. You will come back with me. I don't live far."*

"Okay," he replied. Look at that, English word number two.

Coach tapped the kid on the shoulder, gesturing for him to head onto the ice. Once he was off the rubber, Ilya turned back to LeClaire.

"Are you serious?"

LeClaire sighed. "It's his first week, he'll learn. You did."

"Yes, by watching a lot of Gilmore Girls. When I was ten. I do not think he has time for this."

"Just wait 'til you see him play. I'm confident we'll get him out for our home opener."

Ilya looked back to the ice, where the rookie was warming up, somehow making himself look much smaller than he actually was.

"Whatever you say, coach."

* * *

"You live here?" The rookie asked, the first thing he had said since they left the practice rink.

"Like nothing you've ever seen in Russia, huh?" Ilya grinned, sliding out of his car. He gestured for the kid to follow as he made his way to the front door. The rookie hauled a singular duffel bag over his shoulder.

"You can take whatever food you want, except my chocolate milk, or I will kill you. This is the living room, the gym is back there, I have weights and a treadmill, use it whenever." Ilya paused for a moment, resting his hands on his hips. He was realizing he really didn't have any rules to give out. If this was Shane, he was sure he'd have a binder full of rules for when to clean, what groceries to restock, how to use the washing machine. But Ilya really didn't have much to say.

He rounded into one of the guestrooms, strategically placed as far away as possible from his own. He hadn't figured out how to deal with this situation in regards to Shane, but he figured better safe than sorry.

Fuck. He had forgotten to tell Shane.

“This is your room,” Ilya said. “Add any furniture if you want, I don’t care. Everything is washed. We can go to Ikea or something to get you some stuff, groceries too.”

The rookie looked around the space wide-eyed, standing awkwardly with his sock feet on the carpet.

Ilya leant against the door jamb. He would not be able to deal with this kid walking on eggshells in his own home. He needed to get him to chill out.

“Your last name is very long,” Ilya said, matter of fact.

“Da.”

“Do you have a nickname? Kosmo? Kozy?”

He frowned. *“I prefer to be called by my real name.”*

Ilya blinked. *“Okay, well, I don’t know if the Americans can pronounce Pavsikakiy.”*

The rookie shrugged. *“They can call me Kosmodemyansky.”*

Ilya gave him a look that tried to convey: are you serious?

“Okay, well as the only Russian, and because we are now such close personal friends, I have special permission to use diminutive, yes? I will call you Pava. Still your real name.”

He frowned. *“Sounds like something you'd call a child.”*

“To me you are a baby.”

“Should I call you Ilyusha?”

“Absolutely not. I am just Roz.”

The kid seemed to find this acceptable, at least that was what Ilya interpreted from him finally placing his bag on the floor.

“Now, Pava, have you ever heard of Dunkin Donuts?”

* * *

In some ways, the kid reminded Ilya a lot of himself when he first came to America.

Asides from the part where Ilya was extremely cool and suave and knew lots of English, where Pava here had been staring at the shelf of Oreos for the past fifteen minutes.

“And what is this one?”

“That is blueberry pie flavour.”

“And this one?”

“It’s the regular one, but with extra cream.”

“I thought this one had extra cream?”

“But this one has MEGA cream.”

“This is too many options.”

“Let’s get a few. We can keep them in the house.”

Ilya plucked out a few of the packages that had piled up in the rookie’s arms, tossing them into the cart. At this point, the cart had turned into 50% snacks. This included a dozen packages of Reese’s peanut butter cups, because Pava had had them once when he was a kid and hadn’t been able to find them back home since.

They continued down the aisle, Pava pushing the cart and Ilya directing him. He would occasionally quiz the kid on english words.

“I’m so sorry, are you Ilya Rozanov?”

Ilya turned to see a young woman standing beside him, politely holding her hand up to catch his attention.

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry, I know you’re probably busy, but my boyfriend is a huge fan. He’d be so jealous if he knew I ran into you without him, could I maybe get a photo?”

Ilya tipped his head to the side, letting a smile cross his face. “I can do you one better. Can I have your phone?”

She nodded eagerly, handing it over with the camera open.

“What is your boyfriend’s name?”

“Uh…it’s Austin.”

Ilya held up the camera, pointing it so that it was in selfie mode with him and the girl tucked in behind him. He pressed record. “Hello Austin! This is Ilya Rozanov. I am here with your very pretty girlfriend. I don’t think you are handsome enough for her, but I don’t know you, so who is to say? I hope you are crying out of jealousy when you watch this, we are having lots of fun without you! Goodbye!”

He stopped the recording, before handing it back to the young woman. She laughed.

“Thank you so much! He’s going to die.”

“It is my pleasure, nice to meet you.”

She smiled, “I’ll let you guys go, have a good rest of your day!”

Ilya turned back to the rookie, who looked at him in awe.

Ilya shrugged. *“Just a fan.”*

“Does that happen often?”

“Sometimes. A lot of people will recognize me, but won’t say anything. Hockey players aren’t that rare here.”

Pava nodded, continuing down the aisle. After a while, he spoke again.

“How long did it take you to learn English?”

“I learned it in Russia. But I was not fluent until I came to America.”

“What if I cannot learn it?”

Ilya turned to look at the kid, who was looking down at the floor as he spoke. Damn. He was probably supposed to be comforting right now.

“If you cannot speak English...who cares? They should learn Russian. Worst case, you can be mysterious and we will have secret conversations.”

The forlorn look on the kid’s face didn’t fully disappear, but he did chuckle a bit.

“Come on,” Ilya said, directing the cart towards the checkout. *“Let’s try something.”*

* * *

“It does not look like there is anything in their coffee cups.”

“Do not think about it too much,” Ilya responded.

Ilya stood up from his spot in front of the TV, reaching for his phone that was vibrating a storm in his pocket.

“Phone,” Ilya said in English, catching the attention of the rookie and waving the object in question up before darting into the hallway.

“Hello, lyubimiy,” Ilya said, already smiling into the phone.

“I missed you,” Shane said. “My dad keeps texting me asking for your number so he can get vodka recommendations.”

“Give it to him, I have curated list I will send him.”

Shane chuckled. “How’s it being back in Boston?”

“Fabulous. First thing I did was go to Target and buy three boxes of chocolate chip cookie dough pop-tarts.”

“I don’t understand how you’re a professional athlete. Between this and the smoking—”

“Ah, ah, Hollander! I am not smoker. Weekends do not count.”

Ilya could hear Shane rolling his eyes through the phone.

“How was training camp?” Ilya asked. “Any rookies bow at your feet?”

“Not quite. Actually I did get one that asked me to sign a hockey card. I think he knows he’s not making it out of the AHL this year.”

“I bet you did it too.”

“Of course I did. He was sweet.”

“Should I be jealous?”

“I think you know better than anyone that ‘sweet’ isn’t my thing.”

“Lucky for me.”

“Also, we got this new guy, he's got an Australian accent? I talked to him because I didn't know they even had hockey in Australia, turns out his parents were lifties in Banff.”

“What is Banff?”

“Place in Alberta. Anyway, point is, he's weirdly good. I'll have to see if he makes it through camp.”

Ilya smiled listening to his boyfriend rant about prospects, but quickly steeled himself. “Actually, I was at camp today too.”

“What? Bored at home already?”

Ilya grimaced. “I have to tell you something, Hollander. It’s not bad!” He added, practically able to hear Shane’s anxiety through the phone. “Is just...unexpected.”

“Well...what is it?”

“So, you know we drafted a Russian last year? Kosmodemyansky.”

“That’s a mouthful. Yeah, why did you go in to meet him?”

“Well, yes. But also, he did come home with me.”

The line went silent.

“What?”

“Oh, you know, I realize now that sounded bad. He is living with me. As my rookie. My first rookie! Yay?”

There was about thirty full seconds of silence over the phone that had Ilya check to see if the call had dropped.

“He’s living with you. At your house.”

“Yes. I have lots of room, coach asked, I said yes.”

Ilya could hear Shane choosing his words carefully. “That’s good, Ilya, I mean, that’s great! I just...”

“I know, I know, Shane, but I could not say no. He doesn’t speak any English, I was only one that could help. And really, I wish someone had done this for me when I first came here.”

“You’re right. You’re totally right, it’s really good, what you’re doing. And I’m sure you’re glad to have an excuse to speak more Russian.”

“Yes, but is okay to be upset. I know this will mess with our plans. But, is okay! He is scared of me, I will kick him out when you are here.”

“Ilya, you can’t do that,” Shane admonished. “He lives there too, now.”

“He will be fine, is like, four times in a year. I will tell him I have sexy lady friend coming over, I will threaten him with gun. He probably thinks that American houses have them in every drawer.”

“Please don’t threaten anyone with guns.”

“Ah, relax, is joke. I will threaten him with eviction instead.”

“Ilya...”

“Don’t worry about me, solnyshko, I am great host. We are watching Gilmore Girls with Russian subtitles.”

“I know you’re—wait, really?”

“Yes. I am taking his English education very seriously.”

“Huh. Well, what’s he like? Is he nice? Is he with you now?”

“He is very quiet, very tall, very Russian, very scared baby deer. Like you if you were tall and Russian.”

“Fuck off.”

“He is okay, has only been one day. I will mold him.”

“Please don’t let him start eating like you.”

“Trust me Hollander, I am very responsible. I have chef now, she will do meal planning. She even said I do not need to stop drinking chocolate milk. I will keep the malysh fed.”

“Okay, if you say so. Just keep me updated on the kid. And on you, I’m excited to see your career as a translator take off.”

“Ah, you have jokes now?”

“I love you, Ilya. Text me later.”

“Of course. Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Ilya let Shane hang up first, smiling softly as he listened for the click. When he rounded back into the living room, the rookie was elbows deep in a packet of mega-stuf oreos.

“Who was that?” he asked around a mouthful of cookies.

“Mind your business.”

* * *

By the second week of training camp, all the vets were back in the building.

Ilya and Pava had spent large parts of the first week off on their own, running drills, with Ilya there to explain to him what to do whenever he did join in on group drills. The kid was doing well, at least technically. He was fast, he was strong, he had some decent stickhandling. Where he was mostly

struggling was in his chemistry with others. Ilya couldn't blame him, it was hard to form bonds when you couldn't understand each other.

Ilya had hoped that maybe he would get along better with some of the older guys. More established, who weren't trying to figure themselves out while also figuring out the lines.

"Okay!" Ilya called, gesturing for his team to gather at center ice. He had decided that as captain and also the man that was apparently in charge of this teenaged boy, he should probably introduce him. "Everyone shut the fuck up and gather."

As his players rounded to take a knee, Ilya grabbed the rookie by the elbow and yanked him over to stand beside him.

"Everyone, this is Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky, one of our new rookies. You may know he has moved into my house."

"God help him."

"Shut up Cliff. Anyway, this is my announcement that you should all be nice to him. Or, actually, you probably could be mean to him and he would have no idea. He does not speak any English."

Cliff raised an eyebrow. "None?"

Newf interjected. "It's true b'ys, I was halfaways t'rough a conversation for I realize he didn't get a word!"

"That's because no one can understand a fuckin' word you say anyway."

"How are we supposed to talk to him?" St-Simon interjected.

Ilya shrugged. "Learn Russian? I don't know, he will learn eventually. Wave your hands a lot."

Cliff raised his hand.

"You don't need to raise your hand, I'm not your teacher."

"How do you say 'hello' in Russian?"

"Privet."

A smattering of "privet" echoed through the room.

"How do you say 'it is good to meet you' in Russian?" St-Simon asked.

"Priyatno poznamomit'sya"

"How do you say—"

"Okay we are not going to do this all day. I am not Google."

"So...wait, did you say his name is Pavi-sacka-sicky-sikikiy Komo-komosan-sandyninsku?" Cliff started again.

"That was terrible. Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky."

The conversation broke as each member of the team attempted their own pronunciation. Ilya let it go on for about a minute before cutting them off.

“Please stop, my ears burn. This feels racist somehow.”

“So...what should we call him?” Cliff asked.

Ilya turned to the kid, who had just been standing there silently.

“They want to know what you would like to be called.”

“My name is Kosmodemyansky.”

Ilya turned back to the group. “He said you could call him Kosmodemyansky.”

St-Simon made a face. “Does he use a nickname? Kosmo? Kozy? Yanny?”

“They are asking if you use a nickname.”

“I prefer my full name.”

Ilya turned back. “He says he prefers to be called by his actual name.”

The group of hockey players stared back at him in confusion.

“B’y, we can’t be callin’ ya that every single time, I could get ‘ta Cork and back in the time it takes to say ya name.”

Ilya relayed this to the rookie as best as he could.

“They could call me Pavsikakiy.”

“Do you want to hear them butcher that?”

The rookie shrugged. “Kosmodemyansky.” He settled on.

“Okay,” Ilya called. “Now that all this is settled, let’s play some fucking hockey.”

* * *

Having a roommate wasn’t too bad.

Sure, Ilya sometimes forgot he was no longer living alone and nearly tripped down the stairs that one time because he went to get a midnight snack and saw a silhouette moving through the living room, but otherwise it was okay.

The kid was clean, quiet, he never brought any dates home, and he was actually a fantastic baker. They had started going on morning runs together, and had reserved Thursday nights as their “stay up until 2 A.M. playing Chel” night. He didn’t tell Shane about that last one.

He had also been improving at training camp, being selected for the final roster come October, after an impressive start on the third line during their exhibition games.

His English...was not improving so much.

It turned out Gilmore Girls was not Pava's thing, but he had been watching a lot of Scooby-Doo ever since he had found a box set at Goodwill. This unfortunately meant that what English he had been learning was a weird mix of catchphrases.

"Zoinks," the rookie said, completely deadpan as he reacted to getting his arm stuck in the sleeve of his jersey.

"Jesus Christ," Ilya said, shaking his head as he reached over to tug the sweater up over his head. *"You can't just use Scooby-Doo words as a replacement for learning English."*

The rookie frowned. *"I am nervous. I have never played in front of so many people for something so serious."*

It was their home opener of the season, playing against Minnesota. The kid had done well enough in their exhibition games, especially with the language barrier. Yet, Ilya understood this was a different beast, way more pressure than any exhibition game.

His own first NHL game felt like so long ago. He couldn't remember what must have been going through his head.

Cliff appeared at his shoulder, clapping him hard over his gear. "Back for another season, huh boys? I've got a good feeling about this year."

"You say that every year."

"Yes, including the year we won!"

"And all the ones we lost."

"Whatever. It's exciting! Rookie's first game. Tell him to get a Gordie Howe while he's out there."

"I will not do that."

It was mean, but Ilya was glad that camp was over and they were back to his core guys. There had been four different Connors at training camp and Ilya just could not remember which was which. It was exhausting.

Ilya turned back to Pava, who was squinting in concentration as he tried to pick up any of what they were saying. *"You will be fine, kid. Besides, it's Minnesota. Hardly even a real team."*

"Will you still say that if we lose?"

"We won't lose. We have more Russians than them."

Chapter End Notes

Would Ilya be able to move to Ottawa? Unlikely, but not unprecedented. A few years back, Johnny Gaudreau shocked the hockey world when he left the Calgary Flames to sign with the Columbus Blue Jackets, for less money than Calgary offered. Columbus at this time is pretty similar to Ottawa in the books, low performing team, small market, and unpopular among free agents. But he moved to be closer to his family and because he loved the area.

I can't speak logistically for what goes into free agent signings, but both Shane and Ilya signing to Ottawa would be crazy. Like McDavid and Mathew Tkachuk signing to Buffalo and also being in love. The point is, Ilya moving to Ottawa would be a stretch. Even though they have cap room, a lot of small market teams aren't willing to spend to the ceiling, and would rather go through a rebuild via the draft.

The way the draft works is a weighted lottery, with the sixteen teams that don't make it to the playoffs getting highest priority for picks. However, draft pick spots can be traded alongside players to make offers more tempting, especially for teams that don't have much else to give.

The concept of a rookie living with a veteran player sounds like a rom com plot, but it's actually very common in the NHL. Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini both did it their rookie years, and Sidney Crosby lived with the owner of the Penguins, Mario Lamieux, for several years when he was starting out in the NHL.

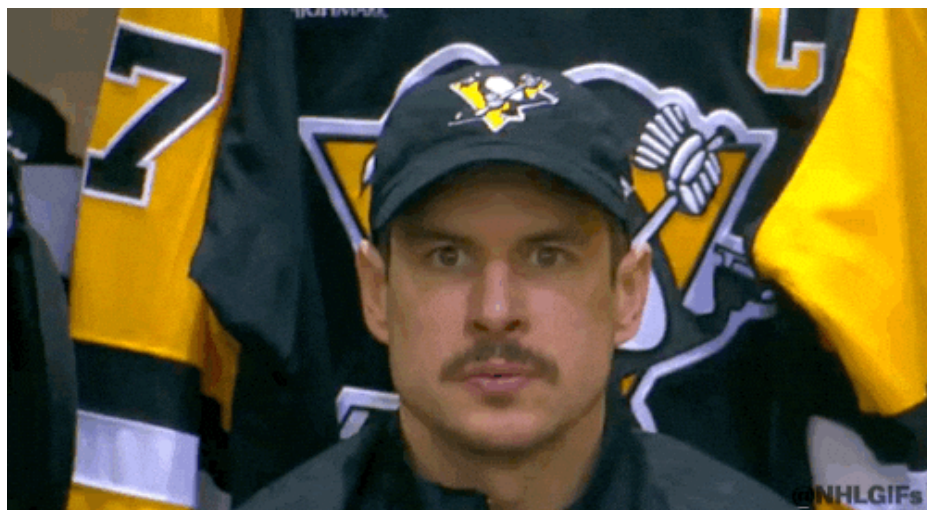
When it comes to players, the NHL doesn't have the best track record when it comes to providing interpreters for foreign players. Most often it's done through the buddy system, and players are just forced to learn English quickly.

Pava's lack of nicknames was inspired by the Jims from Shorsey. If you're unfamiliar, they are three guys on the same hockey team all named Jim, but they don't want to be called by their last names, or by nicknames. They all just go by Jim.

As a quick course on Russian diminutives, they're altered versions of first names, sometimes longer or shorter, and with different degrees of affection. They're only something that's used if a person knows you well, which is why the rookie only lets Ilya use it.

A Gordie Howe Hat Trick is when you get a goal, an assist, and a fight all in one game.

Edit: added for context, I added an Australian player here and mentioned that he was from Banff. For those who don't know, Banff is a national park in Alberta with tons of skiing, and it's notorious for having a huge population of Australians that come to work at the ski hills there. You can't throw a rock in Banff without hitting 10 aussies.



Chapter 2: Nurse? Yeah, she's out again

Chapter Summary

Ilya did not play nice.

In his defense, the first Montreal game of the season never relaxed. The rivalry was at the forefront, the stands were always packed, and the crowds were roaring.

This season, however, Ilya was taking it a bit more personally.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer, there is the use of a slur in this chapter.

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

After the first dozen games, Ilya had forgotten about the kid.

Not forgotten, but he hadn't worried so much. He was fitting in okay with his line, he had adjusted well to travelling, and he had gotten a decent grasp on the words he needed to communicate during play. Ilya was still there between shifts and periods to translate, explain line changes and feedback from LeClaire, but otherwise, he hadn't been hovering like he had at the start.

He was really trying not to be overbearing. He needed to let the kid swim for himself. Besides, this constant worrying about some kid was really unlike himself, Ilya had a reputation to maintain after all.

The point was, Ilya had chilled out. That was the excuse he gave for why he didn't notice what happened tonight.

They were playing Brooklyn, a team that had slowly been moving up through the rankings the past few years following a rebuild. It was halfway through the second period, and it started with a trip.

Pava had been very obviously tripped by a Brooklyn defenseman as he had been trying to get open for a pass. Obvious to everyone except the ref, it seemed, who refused to call it. Pava did not understand what the referee was saying, but he could understand from the series of head shakes, hand waving, and general uproar from his fellow teammates, that the penalty was not being called.

And so, Pava began a string of Russian shouting so loud and so volatile that the ref didn't need to know the language to understand that he and his family were probably being cursed for generations.

(Ilya, who was the only one in the stadium that could understand what the rookie was saying, knew that he was actually very colourfully describing all the ways in which the referee resembled a plethora of farm animals).

And, just to add to the chaos, a small scrum had broken out by the net. St-Simon had his hands full of the Brooklyn centre's jersey, and they were pushing and throwing each other around like ragdolls. Ilya was pretty sure that the Brooklyn guy had gotten a little too close to the goalie to start it all, but there was so much going on on the ice that he just could not keep track.

Pava rounded back to the bench, plunking down next to Ilya with a huff, gripping his stick like it had killed his dog. There was a brief break in play to announce minors for roughing for both teams.

"It happens," Ilya offered. "Maybe next game you can offer the ref a pair of glasses."

Pava looked concerned. *"Why?"*

"It's a joke. Because the refs are blind, because they didn't see you get tripped."

"Oh."

Ilya stood, shuffling to the door to rejoin the game. "You're doing good, kid. Keep it up."

Ilya was pretty sure Pava had gotten the gist of his English based on his smile when Ilya skated away.

His next shift was successful, Ilya getting a goal off of a beautiful pass from Newf, bringing the Bears up six. He let the praise of his teammates drown out the groans of the away crowd. He forgot how good it felt to crush dreams. All this was distraction enough that Ilya had completely forgotten about the chaos that had happened earlier in the game.

That was until the whistle blew for no reason at all, while he was proudly watching his rookie dangle the puck during his next shift.

The rest of the bench looked equally confused, as the ref took to the red line and began to speak into his mic.

"Number 10 received a 10-minute misconduct earlier in the period, and was no longer eligible to play. He was then on the ice, so there was an illegal player for Boston on the ice, they have a minor penalty for an illegal player, and number 10 for Boston is still removed from the hockey game."

Even during an away game, a general sound of confusion echoed through the crowd. Ilya watched as the official skated up to the bench to explain, with Pava following close behind at the sound of his number being announced.

"He doesn't speak English!" LeClaire shouted. "He only speaks Russian! He didn't know!"

The ref didn't appear to care, raising his hands in the universal sign for, "it is what it is". Ilya watched the official skate away, with half of the bench yelling after him, and half the bench keeling over laughing.

Ilya looked back to Pava, who was slowly rolling over the boards.

"The ref told you you had a penalty? What did you just smile and nod?" Ilya asked, failing to hold back his own laughter.

"He said ten, I thought he was just talking about me! I am ten!"

Ilya grinned, clapping Pava on the shoulder. *"I love you kid. Go hide in the tunnel for the rest of the period so you don't wander out again."*

Pava nodded, still looking a bit embarrassed as he shuffled past the rest of the bench. None of his teammates seemed to care, as they were all lovingly shoving him and calling out his name (which they had been practicing) as he passed.

“Okay everyone, let’s get back to crushing Brooklyn,” his coach called out, after he had finally calmed down. “Guys, please stop giggling, you can’t play hockey if you’re giggling.”

* * *

“I have never seen you drink this.”

Ilya looked up from where he was stirring a massive pot of pasta. It turned out that feeding two massive Russian professional athletes took a lot of resources. Pava was standing in front of the fridge, holding a can of ginger ale.

“What?”

“It takes up too much room. Can I move it?”

“Don’t touch my ginger ale, kid, it’s off limits.”

The rookie frowned, kneeling back down to continue making a ruckus in the fridge. He was looking for room to fit in his bottles of gatorade. He was obsessed, constantly walking around with blue lips.

Ilya served up two absolutely massive plates of pasta for them both, allowing himself to settle in at the counter as they ate in silence.

“Your English is very good,” Pava said. Head still buried in his supper.

Ilya blinked. *“Yes.”*

The rookie paused before starting up again. *“I hate it. I can never say what I mean to say. I sound stupid.”*

Ilya set his fork down with a clatter. *“You are not stupid. You speak more languages than most people in this country. That makes you smart.”*

Pava continued to quietly spear noodles onto his fork.

Ilya sighed. *“I still feel this way too. I’ve lived here for ten years and I still think my English is bad.”*

The rookie looked at him in disbelief. *“Really?”*

“Yes. But you are lucky. You have a very talented mentor that is here to translate for you in case you cannot think of the words. You will get there.”

Ilya really did believe it. Pava had started getting a decent handle on his vocabulary. His accent was very thick, and he dropped articles like crazy, but he was mostly able to communicate the basics with his teammates now. But at home with Ilya, he often returned to Russian, where he was more comfortable.

“We go to Montreal soon,” Pava said, changing the subject.

“Yes.”

“Are you glad?”

Ilya looked at him skeptically. *“Why?”*

“Cliff Marleau says you like to play Montreal.”

“Don’t listen to fucking Marly. He can’t mind his business.”

Pava raised his eyebrows. *“Okay.”*

“Do not look at me like that.”

Pava’s expression turned confused. *“Like what?”*

“Like you know something.”

“I know you like to play Montreal. That’s what Marleau said.”

Jesus Christ. *“Never mind. Eat your food. Let me worry about Montreal.”*

* * *

Ilya hovered at the red line, twisting back and forth, putting little effort into pretending he was doing a stretch. Shane slid up beside him.

“Long time no see, Rozanov.”

Ilya grinned, quickly letting his eyes rake up and down Shane’s body.

“Hollander! You are right, have you gotten shorter since I last saw you?”

“Fuck off.”

“Ah, you are happy to see me. Maybe less happy after we beat you, but, I cannot help myself.”

“Play nice today, Rozanov.”

Ilya shrugged, already skating backwards. As much as he loved to tease, he knew sticking around too long at the red line would start to look suspicious to anyone.

“No promises.”

* * *

Ilya did not play nice.

In his defense, the first Montreal game of the season never relaxed. The rivalry was at the forefront, the stands were always packed, and the crowds were roaring.

This season, however, Ilya was taking it a bit more personally.

At the start of the season, Shane had come out to his team, and had received a cold reception in return for his vulnerability.

It killed Ilya that he had to hear about it over FaceTime. That he wasn't there to hold Shane in his arms as his boyfriend held back tears. Shane kept trying to downplay it. No one was beating him up in the locker room, or calling him slurs, but he had admitted that besides Hayden, JJ, and a younger guy here and there, the vibes had changed. The room would get a little quieter when Shane entered, they didn't joke with him like they used to, they didn't trust him the same way.

Shane said that he had started waiting until everyone else was finished before he went into the showers for God's sake.

But Shane claimed it hadn't changed anything on the ice, which might've been true. Montreal had had a great start to their season. But that didn't change the fact that Shane's teammates were a bunch of dicks, and Ilya was going to treat them as such.

It wasn't like Ilya went crazy. Boston was always known for playing rough and chirping loud. So if the hits landed a little harder, and his chirps were a little more personal, who could tell?

Ilya had ended up with one stint in the box following a high sticking which, yeah, he probably deserved that one. But he hadn't planned on letting it escalate any further than that.

That was until Comeau opened his fucking mouth.

"You understand me?" He shouted, getting up in Pava's ear, skating up behind the rookie during a break in play. "You fucking retarded or something? No English?"

Ilya could tell that Pava understood every fucking word based on the rage that had set into his face as he rounded to his spot adjacent to the face-off circle.

See, Shane Hollander? Ilya had amazing control of his temper. Amazing self restraint. That's why he didn't go up to Comeau and deck him in the face at that very moment. Instead, he waited until the Voyageur had possession of the puck, corralling it against the boards, before he checked him so hard Ilya thought he might've given himself whiplash.

It turned out that, given Ilya had spent the duration of the game getting under the Voyageurs' skin, they had decided to take this personally, and an entire mob descended on Ilya.

There were hands everywhere, yanking at his jersey, punching his helmet. Ilya just started swinging. He could see that Comeau had managed to get up from the hit, but had now preoccupied himself with wrapping his arms around Ilya's neck and trying to bring him to the ground.

The fight must have gone on for over a minute, which was years in a hockey fight. Just when he thought that people were finally calming down, another fist went his way, and Ilya wasn't going to not defend himself, so of course he swung back. Apart from the refs and the goalies, there wasn't a body on the ice that wasn't doing some serious damage.

Finally, Ilya was able to skate away from the crowd, emerging with a split lip and a face that was definitely going to be bruised tomorrow. He put his arm around Pava, who had the biggest smile he'd ever seen from the kid.

A linesman followed behind him, preparing to keep him corralled. Not that he needed that, Ilya was already on his way to the box. He caught Shane's eye from across the ice. Shane had not been on shift at the time of the brawl, but he had a perfect view from his bench. The Canadian's jaw was hanging wide open in disbelief.

The referee took to center ice to announce the penalties.

“Number 81 from Boston, two minutes for boarding, and two minutes for roughing. Number 7 from Montreal, two minutes for roughing. As well, every player on the ice except for the goaltenders get 10-minute misconduct. Montreal will have a two minute power play.”

The crowd absolutely roared at this, and Ilya himself couldn't hold back the cackle that burst through. Well, there was a first time for everything.

Ilya removed himself from the box as players cleared from the ice. There were only nine minutes left in the game. He was done for the night.

Ilya sent a wave towards his boyfriend on the Montreal bench, which was looking incredibly empty. Shane looked like he was ready to kill him.

* * *

“You're fucking insane,” Shane said, closing the door behind Ilya as he slid into the apartment. Ilya slipped off his shoes before heading to the living room. “Why can't you play a normal game of hockey?”

“We won, didn't we?” Ilya shrugged, collapsing onto the couch. “Give me a moment before you jump my bones, please. My whole body aches.”

Shane sighed, seating himself on the couch next to Ilya, but being careful not to disturb him. “I hate you.”

“No, you love me. No take-backsies, remember?”

“What did you even say to him? Comeau was seething when he came back in.”

“I didn't say anything.”

Shane gave him a look.

“Serious! I didn't! He was the one that said something.”

Shane's eyebrows furrowed, signalling for Ilya to continue.

“He said something to my rookie. Something awful enough that even the Russian understood it was bad.”

Shane frowned. “What did he say?”

Ilya crossed his arms and slunk further into the couch.

Shane sighed. “Okay, I believe you. But I don't condone it.”

“Okay Mr. Referee.”

“Shut up.”

Shane reached his hand out, pulling Ilya in to rest his head on Shane's shoulder. “How's it going, with your rookie? He was doing well tonight.”

“Yes, he is good at hockey. Not like me, of course, but not bad.”

Shane laughed. “You don’t quit.”

“He is nice kid. Quiet, but less so than before. Is nice having someone around all the time.”

“I’m sorry.”

Ilya frowned, tilting his head to look up at his boyfriend. “Why, moya lyubov?”

“Just...that I’m not the one that’s there. I wish it was me.”

“Me too. And me for you. But it’s no one’s fault.”

Shane lifted his hand, combing his fingers through Ilya’s curly hair. “I know. I guess not.”

* * *

“I have applied for Green Card.”

Shane lifted his head from where it laid on his boyfriend’s bare chest.

“What?”

They were both curled up in Shane’s bed, under a massively fluffy duvet. Shane never told him, but he turned down the heating when Ilya was over, just as an excuse to curl up and use him as a space heater.

“I talked to immigration lawyer. Citizenship would be a hassle, but permanent residency means I can stay in America even if I lose hockey. I will not have to worry so much about Russia.”

“That’s true.”

“Besides, who wants to be American? I would much rather be Canadian.”

Shane smiled. “I might be able to help with that. One day.”

“Don’t talk so sexy to me Hollander, you have already exhausted me so.”

Ilya stretched his arms out in front of him, before dramatically dropping them on the mattress. “I will have to text Pava. Make sure he does not think I have been murdered.”

“He worries that much?”

“Yes, he is my roommate. I tell them, I am captain, I should not have a roommate. They tell me I must! I must take care of my child. He knows how to tell time. What does he need me for?”

Shane smiled. “It’s cute. He’s like your little puppy.”

“Puppies do not eat so much of my kitchen.”

Ilya reached for his phone from its place on the bedside table. He quickly tapped out a message stating that he would not be back that night. Pava responded with a simple “jinkies!”

“He thinks you’re out getting laid?” Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged. “Actually, Marly told him about my Montreal girl.”

“Your what?”

“They all know I text a Jane, who I only see when I’m in Montreal. Luckily, they are too stupid to realize that I also see her when Montreal is in Boston.”

“If you’re worried about your reputation, you could always say you were staying with a friend. I know you’re supposed to be the responsible one now.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “What? A friend who pushes me down the stairs? How to explain these?” He asked, gesturing to the small mouth-sized bruises littered across his chest and neck.

“Fuck off.”

* * *

“I think half of internet is talking about how weird it is that we are not killing each other, some are talking about actual foundation, and then rest is talking about how good your hair looks at press conference.”

“Seriously?” Shane replied, his voice slightly muffled through the phone speaker.

“Right? You did not even style it. You just moved your bangs out of your face.”

“No I mean—never mind. No one thinks it’s fake or anything, right?”

“No, everyone is very confused, but nothing like that.”

“Okay, well, that’s good. Has your team said anything?”

Ilya turned to look down the hallway where he had attempted to hide himself as he answered Shane’s call. He was in Chicago, having flown in for his first game since they had announced the Irina Foundation.

“Oh they haven’t shut up about it. Other than the kid, he does not get what big deal is.”

“Bad?”

“No, no, just teasing. Less than I expected, really, I think they are too confused to give their best. What about yours?”

Shane paused. “They had a lot of questions. Hayden was helpful, he defended it. I think it physically pained him, but he was trying to be on my side.”

“Wow, Hayden Pike. Give him crisp high five from me, yes?”

“Shut up. We should be grateful he didn’t take our friendship reveal as a personal dig. You’re such a dick to him.”

“Hey, he hated me first. He is just jealous I am so good at hockey. I cannot control it Shane! Is in my blood.”

“I’m just saying, please do not test him at the winter classic. There’s gonna be cameras everywhere and I do not wanna see any clips of you guys fist fighting in the locker rooms.”

“Fine. I will be good. Just for you.”

Shane laughed. Then sobered. “Should I tell Hayden? About us. I don’t know, it feels weird to be keeping it from him now that my parents know. But I’m not sure how he’d take it. It just feels like I’m really straight up lying to him now that he knows we’re supposed to be friends.”

“Maybe,” Ilya continued. “Should I tell Marly? About us?”

Shane paused. “Do you want to?”

Ilya shrugged. “I don’t know. He has been my friend for a long time. Could be nice for someone in Boston to know.”

“If you think he would be good, and if you think it would help, then I think you should. Or, if you’re worried about telling any players...maybe you could tell Svetlana? She’s working for the Bears now, right?”

Ilya paused. “Yes. But I am surprised you suggested it.”

“What? Why?”

“Because you are jealous of her.”

“Fuck off, no I’m not.”

“What about that time you broke one of your sticks because I mentioned we went on a trip to Hawaii?”

“The stick was already compromised, and maybe I was just jealous that you went to Hawaii!”

“You should have been Hollander. We went in a submarine. I ate so many pineapples.”

“Maybe we have to go to Hawaii.”

Ilya gasped. “Shane Hollander! Are you suggesting a real life vacation to me right now?”

“Fuck off. But if you tell Svetlana, I get to tell Rose.”

Ilya made a face.

“I can hear you making a face through the phone.”

“I’m not!”

“Yes you are, which is insane because I’m gay, and you literally were just talking about Svetlana.”

“You brought her up.”

Shane sighed, but with a laugh. “Think about it. But let me know if you’re gonna tell anyone. I need to think about Hayden, I’d have to go about it delicately.”

“Yes, he is very weak. Having seventeen children will age you like this.”

“Shut up. Anyway, I have to go, morning skate.”

“Yes, yes, please beat Arizona for me. Should be easy. They are terrible.”

“Love you.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Ilya pocketed his phone, turning back into the locker room where his team was preparing for morning skate before their game later tonight. Chicago was doing well this year, their number one draft pick from a few years back now one of the leading goal scorers in the league. But Boston had been doing well this year, too.

“Where you been Roz?” Cliff asked, nudging Ilya as he reached into his locker to throw on his practice jersey. “Chatting with your new buddy Hollander?” He laughed.

“Yes actually.”

Cliff blinked, obviously not expecting Ilya to answer him this way. “Oh.”

“We are going to be setting up a hockey camp in Montreal, starting this summer. We are trying to find coaches.”

The room of Bears actually looked thoughtful at this. St-Simon frowned. “You’re making us look bad, Roz.”

“Hey,” Cliff interjected. “You’re from Montreal, right? You should coach a camp!”

“Why?” Carmichael chimed in. “So he can teach the kids how to get three high sticking penalties in one game?”

“That was one time!”

“Who’s allowed to go da dese camps, b’y? My Olive’s been wantin’ ta start hockey, wan’s ta be a goalie, God bless ‘er, but I wants ta send her somewhere good. Somewhere Canadian y’know,” Newf interjected.

Ilya turned around, crossing his arms over his chest. He looked around skeptically.

“What is going on? Did someone ask you to be nice to me or something?”

The Bears stayed silent, but Ilya saw as several gazes flitted to Pava.

“What did you say?” Ilya asked the rookie.

Pava shrugged. “Am saying nothing. Am saying not surprise you are friends. You are nice.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “I am nice?”

Newf walked over, resting a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “S’alright b’y. We still like you, even if ya nice now.”

* * *

“And what do you think was the turning point for the team that allowed you to pull ahead in the second period?”

Ilya quickly relayed the question back to Pava in Russian, which he then retranslated to the interviewer. It wasn't often that the rookie was called for an interview, but he had scored the only goal of the game today, and so he had been chosen for locker room press.

He was also doing this interview wearing a bearskin draped over his head, teeth protruding over his forehead, as was tradition. Ilya was proud to say that he came up with the idea for the Player of the Game award, and had even smuggled in a bearskin back from Moscow for the job.

Pava's English was getting better every day, but he was still very self conscious, not confident enough to speak it for any press. Ilya would sit beside him and translate whenever needed, just so the Rookie could talk without worrying about his words. At least, without worrying more than he normally did.

"Um, I think that the fumble from Erickson gave me the breakaway. I can't take too much credit for that."

Man, Ilya needed to work on this guy's confidence. He was good! Not as good as Ilya's rookie year, of course, but he was racking up points, and the kid was basically the backbone of the third line at this point. They had been practicing a line that would have Pava on Ilya's left to try out down the road, and Ilya was optimistic they could be a force to be reckoned with.

"On a more personal note, how do you feel you're fitting into the team here? Are you enjoying Boston?"

Ilya waited for the interviewer to finish speaking before turning to relay the message. *"She is asking if you like Boston. If you like your team."*

Pava turned to the camera, squinting. "Yes."

The interviewers laughed, as did Ilya. *"I think they want you to elaborate a bit more."*

Pava thought for a moment. *"I have been enjoying the grocery stores."*

Boston Bears  [@BostonBears](#)

Check out the post game interview with the Bears' Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky!
[see link]

> **Raina** [@nicetoemtyou](#)

Now who tf gave him that name

syd [@worldsmostdangerousfrog](#)

will I ever support an american team? no. do i hate the bears and want my team to crush them? yes. Is ilya rozanov speaking russian making me feel something deep inside I cannot explain? also yes

Boston Bears  [@BostonBears](#)

Check out the post game interview with the Bears' Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky!
[see link]

> **Hammy!** [@elbowsallovertheplace](#)

no bc fr someone explain why i, a born and bred winnipeg fan am sitting here giggling kicking my feet watching a bears interview

>> **abby** @ilyarozanovsbackcheck

Now what have I been saying this whole time

> **Sonya** @rowantreerowantree

Omg that and also the way he's so gentle when talking to his rookie 🤔 somebody sedate me

> **benbam** @bostonpenaltybox

forget rozanov at this point. idk who this russian is with the name 3 miles long but i would climb him like a tree

> **hollanov #1 truther** @8124eva

There's a way I can make this about hollanov I just haven't figured it out yet...

>> **Josh Smith** @bearsfan1991

Man can't two guys just be friends? Why can't we appreciate Rozanov taking on a leadership role with his rookie

>>> **hollanov #1 truther** @8124eva

Omg Shane and Ilya would be such good co-parents to a rookie

>>>> **Kaiden** @mountainman22

Nurse? Yeah, she's out again

* * *

The NHL only had a three day break over Christmas, which was not enough considering Ilya had to be in Anaheim on the 27th, and Shane was away to Winnipeg. It wasn't different from most other years, except that he normally convinced Svetlana or Cliff to hang out with him during the holidays.

This year, Svetlana had a boyfriend, Cliff had a situationship, and Ilya had a rookie.

Being Russian, Ilya normally would celebrate Christmas in early January (not that there was much to celebrate, New Years was a much bigger deal back home). But honestly, Ilya had become a bit of a sucker for an American Christmas, and so he took it upon himself to introduce it to his rookie. They were stuck together for three days straight anyways.

He wasn't as sad about missing his first Christmas with Shane as he might've been, due to the fact that they would soon be on their way to Quebec for the Winter Classic. They would do something together with his parents when they were there, he even had a small pile of gifts hidden in the back of his closet.

"Did you just buy all this?" Pava asked, kicking lightly at the box of Christmas decorations.

"Just the tree. Margaret from down the road gave me the rest. She said she has too much."

"Is that why this all looks like it was made before the iron curtain fell?"

Ilya made a face, dropping his arms from where he was attempting to untangle a ball of string lights.

"I think I preferred when you were quiet and only spoke in catchphrases." He tossed the ball of lights towards Pava. *"You figure this out."*

Ilya did not have the energy to decorate his whole house, especially when he remembered he would have to take it all down, but he had committed to decorating his living room at least.

This included a tree, half a dozen garlands, two boxes of tree ornaments, 120 feet of lights, three nutcrackers, and a lowkey creepy santa doll that scared Ilya every time he turned the corner.

"Maybe I should have asked Margaret to come help," Ilya lamented, looking around the room. It looked like a reindeer had thrown up all over the place. *"She has such a good eye for design."*

"I like it," Pava shrugged. *"Like Scooby-Doo Haunted Holidays."*

Ilya had assembled a small list of activities vital to a successful Christmas, partially based on every Christmas movie he had seen, as well as some suggestions from Shane.

The gingerbread house was not successful, as both he and Pava kept sneaking bits of the roof before it had been fully assembled. It didn't help that he got a fancy kit from his favourite bakery, which meant that the cookie actually tasted good and not like cardboard.

The next step was watching a movie, but that had to be suspended when the rookie started getting a little too stressed about Kevin McAllister's safety in Home Alone. Ilya had decided it would be best not to inform him about Home Alone 2.

Ilya decided that at the very least, it was difficult to mess up presents. He settled the two of them down in front of the fireplace, two glasses of eggnog and a plate of sugar cookies nearby on the coffee table.

"Here," Ilya said, handing the bag over to his rookie. He hadn't even considered getting a nice gift bag until it was too late, so instead he wrapped it in an old Olive Garden takeout bag. It was clean.

Pava opened the bag, lifting out a six pack of blue gatorade.

"You can never have enough" Ilya shrugged. *"There's more."*

The rookie reached back in to pull out the main gift, which Ilya was particularly proud of. He held the plush package in his hands, turning it around so he could look at the description on the front.

"Blanket?" he asked.

"It's a whole duvet set," Ilya explained. *"Sheets, blanket, pillowcases."*

But it wasn't just a duvet set, it was Scooby-Doo themed. The sheets had little Scooby-Doos, and the blanket was reversible, with a massive print of the mystery gang on one side, and a pattern of different characters on the other.

"You would not believe how hard it was to find this in king size."

Pava grinned as he already began ripping open the package. *"These are for me?"*

"Yes, that is what a present is."

"I love it. I will sleep in them tonight. Your sheets are so boring."

"They are Egyptian cotton. These ones are probably shedding microplastics."

Pava shrugged, undeterred from his glee. *"Thank-you. Now open yours."*

The rookie handed over a package, which was flawlessly wrapped in a silver paper. He ripped in open indiscriminately.

There, in Ilya's hands, was a collection of Matryoshka dolls, painted with intricate detail. Ilya looked up at the kid, who was blushing.

"My mother makes them. She is very grateful to you for housing me."

Ilya took apart the first doll, seeing that the next one was painted to look like a blonde, curly haired hockey player. It was wearing a #81 Bears jersey.

"This is me?" Ilya asked.

"All of the inside ones are you, she insisted. But she said that the outside had to stay traditional."

Ilya continued to open the dolls, noticing that each doll was a different version of him. Him in his Olympic jersey, at the All-Star Game, at World Juniors. For a woman who gave her son the most outrageous name to ever be ridiculous, she had great taste. Ilya just about died laughing when he got to the center.

"Is this supposed to be you?"

Pava slumped down, hiding his face in his hands. *"This is so embarrassing. I told her not to do that."*

"No, I love it, I love it, it is perfect. This is going on the mantle."

Ilya began to close up the dolls, pausing when he finished to examine the outermost painting.

A traditional Matryoshka set would have the outer layer be a woman in a sarafan dress. This was true for this set, but the doll was also painted to have golden hair, pale skin, and bright blue eyes. She looked just like his mother.

Of course, there was no way Pava or his family could have known that. It was pure coincidence.

Ilya smiled, standing so he could put the set on display over his fireplace. "Thank you, malysh, and thank your mama for me."

Ilya clapped his hands together, turning back to the room. *"Now, in the final event, we see who can eat the most Christmas cookies before throwing up. It is tradition."*

Chapter End Notes

This is one of those stories that if I saw it written about in a fic, I would have thought it was unrealistic. However, Pava not knowing he got a penalty is exactly what happened to [Voronkov](#) of the Columbus Blue Jackets. The weird thing about this story is that whenever penalties are issued during games, they are also announced by refs on the ice, so everyone in the stadium should know what penalties have been distributed. So the fact that Voronkov didn't understand when the ref told him he had a penalty shouldn't have mattered, because it would have been announced, and his team would have known and been able to explain it to him. I was trying to figure out how all this happened, and I think it was just a combination of confusion, the crowd

being loud, and the coach assuming that Voronkov understood what had happened and was self-policing. The other theory is that since Voronkov is #10, he heard the ref say “10” and just nodded because, yes, that is his number.

Part of the confusion is also that when a player receives a 10-minute misconduct, the team is not down a player. That specific player is just barred from the game for that period of time, mainly to allow them to cool down when they’re upset. So there isn’t the visual reminder that there is an active penalty like there might be in other cases. Anyway, I recommend watching the clip of this. It wasn’t very high stakes because they were up six, and so the entire bench is just losing it laughing when this happens.

As for the Montreal game, it’s uncommon, but it happens that they penalize [every player on the ice](#). This was specifically inspired by an Ottawa vs Florida game. In cases where there are so many penalties, they will still put a minimum of three players each on the ice (excluding goalies). In this case, since it was a misconduct anyways, those won’t cause teams to be shorthanded. So here, the only penalties that remove men will be the roughing and boarding penalties.

Disclaimer, I am not an immigration lawyer. I’m sorry if this is not at all how American immigration works. I read that Ilya should qualify for a Green Card based on his work Visa, and with that in possession he should generally be safe to stay in the U.S. and be protected in the case he was outed. Later if he moves to Canada, he can be sponsored by Shane for permanent residency as a common law or conjugal partner.

Fun fact, with most of the NHL teams, they have an internal locker room award that they bestow upon the player of the game. Calgary has had a fireman’s hat, Chicago a championship belt, and the Florida Panthers a barbershop cape (beware, a lot of the trophies get retired so I can’t keep up with what is being used actively now). Recently, the Sharks adopted a giant shark tooth necklace that they make the player of the game wear as they give their interviews shirtless.

Double fun fact, whenever I travel to a new country my favourite thing is to go to grocery stores. Pava is me. When I was in the UK I just about spent my life savings on Cadbury chocolate to bring back to my mom.



Chapter 3: Cabane à Sucre

Chapter Summary

“How are you doing Rozanov?” Shane asked, sliding up to the faceoff circle. “Hands still cold? Need a nice warm cup of cocoa?”

“You tease, Hollander, but I will never say no to a cup of hot choccy.”

Ilya had to chirp, because he was otherwise worried his extremities would fall off. He had no idea how the people in the stands were surviving right now, at least Ilya was constantly moving. By the time they were done standing through two anthems, a land acknowledgement, and a ceremonial puck drop, Ilya couldn't feel his hands.

Chapter Notes

Another chapter for y'all. Thank you for all the comments! I am glad the hockey references are being enjoyed. Also I swear some of you guys live in my vents the way you're predicting plot points.

Connor and Hudson announced as torch bearers??? This is the best timeline. And the way the men's gold medal game is being played at 14:10?? Hello? I will be getting up at 5 am or whatever it is just to watch.

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

Ilya had never been to Quebec City before. He had never been anywhere in Canada besides Shane's cottage that wasn't required for hockey.

Quebec didn't have an NHL team anymore, but they had no shortage of Voyageurs fans. This was evident by the mass of people wearing blue and red jerseys that wandered the streets extending well past the stadium.

“Do you think we're gonna get jumped?” Cliff asked.

“No. Definitely not. Maybe,” Ilya replied, digging his fork further into the tray of poutine in front of him. “They can't be that violent in Quebec, yes? Otherwise they would have actually left the country by now.”

“Have you b'ys ever heard of the FLQ?” Newf chimed in.

“I do not need another history lesson,” Cliff interjected. “No one needs to hear you lecture for twenty full minutes about some harbour flooding.”

“It wasn't just a flood b'ys! It was a wave 'ah molasses 15 meters tall! Some say you can still smell tha' molasses in the harbour.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“You coming to the concert, Roz?” St-Simon asked “or are you gonna hide in the locker room for the whole thing?”

St-Simon had not shut up about the Winter Classic since it was announced. He was from Montreal, but didn’t have an accent, so it sometimes felt like he was overadjusting to show off just how Quebecois he was. He ordered for them all in French, and then went on to have a way too long conversation with the waiter that no one else could understand.

“Don’t you all have to learn French in school?” Carmy had asked Newf. “Why can’t you speak French?”

“Newf can barely speak English,” Connors interjected.

“Yes, I will go,” Ilya said, answering St-Simon. “You will miss me too much if I do not.”

“Who is playing?” Pava asked, poking at his now empty bowl of poutine.

“Riviere Rouge,” St-Simon said, overpronouncing every accent. “It’s a Quebecois band but they’re pretty popular around Canada.”

“Being a popular Canadian band is like being taller than Simone Biles. The bar is not very high,” Ilya said.

“Shut up! My girl loves them, she’s bringing up a bunch of her friends to see them.”

“Tell her to make sure she gets here early. There will be tens of people to fight off to get to the barricade.”

St-Simon rolled his eyes, hucking a packet of creamer at Ilya’s head, which he flawlessly dodged as he stood up from the table.

“Anyway, I must be going,” Ilya said. “I have much more important things to do than sit around and stare at your ugly faces all day.”

“Where you off to?” Cliff asked, a smug look crossing his face. “Off to see your Montreal girl?”

Ilya crossed his arms as well, mirroring Cliff. “No actually. I am going to have visit with my close personal friend Shane Hollander.”

Ilya figured there was no point in lying about it. They were going out in public together, they were sure to be seen. And that was fine, they were trying to get it out there that they were friends.

Cliff threw up his hands. “You’re telling me, you’re in the same province as your girl, and you’re deciding to spend your time with Hollander?”

“What girl Marly? I will not confirm or deny,” Ilya shrugged, which only caused the other man to roll his eyes. “Besides, if I am not nice to Hollander today, he will never forgive me when I destroy him tomorrow. Our friendship is very fragile, I must put in the work.”

Ilya swung his bag over his shoulder, giving Pava a quick pat on the shoulder. The rookie had started to spend a bit more time with some of the younger guys on the team, Sigurdson and DeLuca. Ilya couldn’t imagine what kind of conversations went on between them, or if there was any conversation,

he gathered Pava was more of the listening type in a group like that. Either way, Ilya thought it was good for him to expand a bit more. The three were supposed to be spending the rest of the day together, something about going to a giant toboggan slide.

“I will see you losers tomorrow,” Ilya said, already heading out the door. “Do not come to the game hungover tomorrow. You cannot embarrass me in front of Montreal.”

* * *

“Is fucking cold,” Ilya said, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Did you not check the weather before coming?”

“I thought it would be same as Boston! There is no good reason it should be this fucking cold.”

“Well...” Shane said, making his face that Ilya knew meant he was about to get an explanation he deeply did not want. “There actually is a good reason. It’s called an arctic front. And when you add in the windchill—”

“Shut up about the windchill Hollander I am fucking cold!”

“You always say Russians don’t get cold.”

“That is because Russians wear fur. And mittens. And layers.”

“And whose fault is that?”

Ilya sent Shane a glare colder than any windchill.

“Relax, we’re almost there.”

“Will I see you again tomorrow night?” Ilya asked, looking for any reason to ignore the cold.

“Yeah, tomorrow night, but we have a team dinner, so after that.”

Ilya pouted. “Will be a depressing losers dinner.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “No, it’ll be fun. We’ve got a reservation at a sugar shack. It’s one of the really good local ones too, on the waterfront.”

“Right, sugar shack, David has mentioned this.”

“We should go to one sometime. I think you’d like it. You’re encouraged to drown everything in syrup.”

“How will you survive then?”

“I knew you were gonna say something. Look, we’re here.”

It turned out that “here” was in fact a stone building in the middle of a field.

“Wow. Just when I think Canada cannot get more exciting.”

“Shut up! This is a really important battle site, okay? The Plains of Abraham? This was the turning point where the British took possession of Quebec. There’s a museum and everything, a bunch of

military memorabilia.”

“Wow. Very impressive for a country that is fifty whole years old.”

“Fuck off. This was, like, the coolest field trip I ever went on. Well, this or We Day.”

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya said. He quickly looked both directions over his shoulder before taking a step closer to his boyfriend, the snow squeaking beneath his feet. “I love you very much, but if you ask me to go to boring Canadian museum on one of my very few days off, I think I might die.”

Shane frowned, but nodded. “You’re right. I guess I’ve already been, and if it’s not your thing...”
Shane turned to look back towards where they came from. “What do you want to do instead?”

Ilya grinned, placing his hands on Shane’s shoulders. “So, I was told about this toboggan slide.”

* * *

“I feel like this has never come up before, but I actually really hate heights,” Shane said, as Ilya gripped onto the rope for the toboggan.

“You fly like six times a week.”

“That’s different. There are no rickety wooden ramps involved.”

“Relax, Hollander. I will keep you safe.”

As they approached the base of the ramp, Ilya whipped his head around, his attention drawn to a group of three men that had just arrived. Ilya started to jump around, waving his hands. It kind of reminded Shane of a little kid seeing his friends again on the first day of school. This was exacerbated by the fact that Ilya had now doubled up on several scarves, an extra wool sweater, and a thick pair of mittens that he made Shane retrieve from the car.

The group responded just as eagerly, two of them also jumping into the air and calling out Ilya’s name as they ran over, with the third man trailing behind dragging the sled.

“Yo Rozy! You came to do the slide?” The blond kid nearly shouted.

“You inspired me,” Ilya grinned. “And I had to bring Hollander, you know he has never done this before?”

The kid’s eyes whipped around as he suddenly realized that Shane Hollander was standing with his captain.

“Oh! Hi! I’m Justin. Sigurdson,” he held out his hand awkwardly. Shane smiled as he took it.

“I know. We’ve played each other many times.”

“Right.”

Ilya took over, sparing the boy any more embarrassment. “Just call him Siggie. And this is Delly,” he said, gesturing to the shorter boy. Then, Ilya reached out to wrap his arm around the remaining man, who had finally reached the group. “And this is my rookie, Pava. You are not allowed to call him this, only me, I am special. To you, Kosmodemyansky.”

Kosmodemyansky nodded. He had a look on his face Shane couldn't quite decipher. "Hello," he said, his accent thick. "You are very good hockey player."

"Thanks," Shane replied simply.

"Alright, alright, this is not networking event," Ilya interrupted. "We are here to go down this slide. Lucky for us, five people can fit on this toboggan."

"Rozanov. No. That is insane," Shane said.

"Is what the sign says!" Ilya defended. "Maximum five!"

"Yeah, five children maybe. Not five six-foot tall hockey players!"

"You know that six feet is generous, Hollander."

"Oh fuck right off."

Out of the corner of his eye, Shane could see the kids looking at them with a mix of fear and admiration.

"Well," Ilya said, placing his hands on his hips. "I am the captain, so these guys must do what I say. And if we go down the slide without you to balance out the back, then we get in terrible accident, I will tell everyone that you have sabotaged best team in the league."

"That is not how physics works."

"I can't hear you, Hollander!" Ilya called out, tugging on the toboggan as he began to speed walk up the ramp. "I am too busy having fun!"

After watching the kids follow after Ilya, Shane found himself standing alone with one thought on his mind. He was going to regret this.

"Is the back or the front safer?" Shane asked the attendant, once they had reached the top.

"I'd say the front," the girl said, her face barely visible as she was wrapped up in several scarves. "But if you're worried about all fitting, we could split you guys up onto two sleds—"

"No, no! Thank you Margeaux, we will be fine," Ilya interjected. "Hollander will take the front because he is afraid. I will go behind to keep him safe, then Pava, then Sigg, then Delly."

If Shane wasn't aware that Ilya normally talked like this, he would have been worried that Ilya was giving their whole relationship away.

They piled onto the toboggan, five grown professional athletes all sitting between each other's legs just to fit.

"This is so dumb," Shane whispered.

"Wait, wait!" Ilya said, nearly toppling the group over to reach for his phone, which he handed to Margeaux. "Please take picture of us."

Shane wanted to hide his face, which was nearly impossible since he had been placed at the front. He settled on tucking his chin down as far as he could into his coat collar.

“Alrighty,” Margeaux said, after returning Ilya’s phone and making sure everyone was secure. “On three. Un, Deux, Trois, Aller!”

They hurled down the slide, which suddenly felt much steeper when 1000 pounds of hockey players were the projectile. The cold air stung as it blew past Shane’s face, and he could feel Ilya’s hands gripping tightly on his shoulders as they tensed. The rest of the boys whooped, including one whoop that sounded distinctly Russian.

“I think my life flashed before my eyes,” Shane said, as he finally dismounted the sled.

“That was awesome!” Delly exclaimed, bouncing like he had a sugar rush. “Let’s go again.”

“Absolutely not.”

They did go again, several times, with the exception of Shane and Kosmodemyansky, who stayed at the bottom to take photos of the other men.

After several minutes of comfortable silence, Shane had not expected the Russian to speak.

“You are from Montreal?”

It took Shane a second to realize he was being asked a question. “Oh, uh, no, I’m from Ottawa. I just play there.”

“Ah.”

More silence.

“Where are you from?” Shane asked.

“Ufa.”

“Very cool.”

Shane took a picture of the boys at the top of the ramp, who were setting up a race, each with their own sleds.

“You are Rozanov friend?” Kosmodemyansky asked again.

“Me and Rozanov? Yeah, I mean, we’ve known each other for forever but, we’ve only kinda become friends as of last year.”

“Hm.”

“How is it living with him?” Shane tried. “I didn’t live with a vet my first year, but I kinda wished I did. Must be nice to have that support.” Shane belatedly realized he might’ve been talking too quickly and too much. He knew the kid’s English wasn’t great.

“Is good,” he replied. “He is thinking much.”

Huh. Well Shane wasn’t sure what that was supposed to mean. Maybe it was a mistranslation.

“Hollander! Hollander!” Ilya shouted, running over from the base of the ramp. His face was bright pink from the cold, but he was smiling. “Siggi...what is it you call it? He ate shit?”

Shane looked over at Siggi, who in fact had received a facewash from a snowbank.

“You guys are gonna get frostbite.”

“Whatever Hollander. All my fingers could fall off and we would still beat you.”

* * *

Ilya was both proud and shocked with his guys. Not a single one of them came to the game hungover.

“These jerseys are so cool,” Siggi said, as if they hadn’t been forced to do a million modelling shoots with them already.

A winter classic meant specialty jerseys, usually done up in the vintage style. For the Bears, that was a graphic of a roaring bear plastered across the front, and accent stripes all along the arm. Ilya thought it was fair to say that it was significantly cooler than Montreal’s jersey, which just had a big M on it. Missed opportunity, really, they could have had a boat or something.

The NHL loved to pull out all the stops for the Winter Classic, especially for two original six teams. It was supposed to be a push to get more people involved in the sport, and apparently they thought the best way to do that was to let a bunch of hockey players walk a faux red carpet.

Not that Ilya was complaining. He got to roll up in a brand new suit Svetlana had helped him pick out. It was black, but gilded in gold, emphasizing the crucifix that hung from his neck. He had tried to help Pava pick something that wasn’t a boring black suit, but he was hard to convince. The most he was able to achieve was getting the kid to add a gold handkerchief in his breast pocket.

Ilya had snuck a peek at his boyfriend, who arrived at the stadium just after him. He had been able to weedle out details from Shane, and knew that the Voyageurs had apparently coordinated matching french-style arrival outfits. Ilya had been praying that this meant pantaloons and white wigs, but he wasn’t so lucky. It was mostly just a lot of fleur-de-lis and shiny fabric.

“Okay everyone!” Ilya announced, raising his hands to grab the attention of the room. “This is the first classic for many of you, but do not be tricked, this is not an exhibition game. We are here to crush the Voyageurs just like any other game, send them home crying in their own province, yes? I want to see them begging for mercy in weird Quebec French, otherwise we have not done a good enough job. And before we go out, and I want you all looking at me when I say this.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes, taking the time to make eye contact with every player in the room as they waited in anticipation for their captain’s words.

“I don’t want to see a single, fucking one of you, walking out there wearing your toque like it is a condom. You look like idiots.”

Ilya saw out of the corner of his eye as Connors not so subtly tugged his toque further down his head.

“Okay!” Ilya said, clapping his hands together. “Let’s do this!”

* * *

This actually wasn’t Ilya’s first Winter Classic. Boston seemed to be a favourite for these games, as they had played it against Philadelphia at home his first year in the league. But he was glad, he loved the atmosphere of an outdoor game, and hockey was another level in Canada.

Traditionally, Winter Classics would be held in football stadiums. Since Quebec City didn't have a CFL team, this year they were hosted by one of the local universities. Ilya had assumed that it was only the Americans that went crazy with their college sports, but he had to admit that this arena was pretty impressive.

The stands were packed, and as Ilya reared up the walkout to the ice, he couldn't help but wonder how anyone would be able to see what was going on on the ice. Surely they all looked like a bunch of black and red ants from up there.

The game had a different feeling than he was used to. It was still tense, possibly more considering the significance of the game, but also an extra layer of performance along with it. Both teams were playing their best, with no injuries on the roster and all the players mostly revitalized from their short holiday break.

"How are you doing Rozanov?" Shane asked, sliding up to the faceoff circle. "Hands still cold? Need a nice warm cup of cocoa?"

"You tease, Hollander, but I will never say no to a cup of hot choccy."

Ilya had to chirp, because he was otherwise worried his extremities would fall off. He had no idea how the people in the stands were surviving right now, at least Ilya was constantly moving. By the time they were done standing through two anthems, a land acknowledgement, and a ceremonial puck drop, Ilya couldn't feel his hands.

Was it normal to not get upset whenever he was checked because it meant a very small transfer of body heat in the moment? Maybe, but he wasn't going to examine that too closely.

Maybe Ilya was reading into it, but he felt like the whole game was played...cold. Not quite as fast as usual, the puck handling a bit sloppier, but the effort was certainly there.

By the first intermission, the game was tied at zero-zero, and Ilya was just glad to get back into the locker room.

"Roz, what are you doing? You promised you'd come watch!"

Fuck. Ilya forgot that they were doing that stupid show at first intermission. This wasn't the SuperBow! But, he had promised to go, and he didn't take any more convincing once one of the managers informed him that they had outdoor space heaters set up in the viewing area.

Ilya was a hater, but even he had to admit that the band was pretty fun. They played eight songs, and Ilya was surprised that only a couple of them were in French. The band was made up of a group of three women, two playing guitars and one with a fucking accordian. Ilya thought it was sick as hell. They were all dressed effortlessly cool, and Ilya couldn't help standing in the crowd of hockey players wishing that he was one of them.

"These are like the Hex Girls," Pava said, speaking up beside Ilya to be heard over the music.

"What?"

"The Hex Girls." Pava repeated. *"The band from Scooby-Doo."*

"Jesus fucking Christ. Is Scooby-Doo your point of reference for everything?"

Pava shrugged, continuing to bob his head along to the music.

“They’re great, right?” St-Simon shouted, swinging his arm over Ilya’s shoulder. Even though they were all still in their gear, some of them still wearing their fucking skates, St-Simon was moving like he was at a rave, jumping and swaying and throwing his hands in the air. “I wonder if I have enough pull to get my girl in to meet them.”

“You have no pull.”

“Alright everybody!” Ilya’s gaze was pulled back to the stage as the girl with long black hair spoke into the microphone. She had the cool accent that St-Simon always wished he’d had. “Thank you so much for coming out today, we’ve got one more song before we’ll let you get back to your game,” she smiled.

The crowd whooped as they played the opening chords of their song.

“Oh my god,” St-Simon groaned.

“What?” Ilya asked.

Ilya quickly realized what the big deal was as they continued to sing, realizing that the main chorus of the song repeated the phrase “I hate Montreal!”

“I like this song!” Ilya shouted. “Why did no one tell me of this sooner? We must add this to our locker room playlist!”

As they continued to play throughout the song, Ilya found himself joining in on the dancing, sneaking into the back of Delly's video of the crowd that was definitely going to end up on his Instagram. The music lulled as the lead spoke into the microphone.

“Ladies, gentlemen, everyone in between, Captain Hollander!”

Ilya’s jaw dropped open as he watched Shane Hollander, dressed in his gear save a pair of winter boots, run onto the stage and join the singers. He only stayed for one round of the chorus, of which they temporarily changed the lyrics to “I love Montreal,” and he was met with uproarious cheering.

Shane could not dance to save his life, but he sort of jumped around and swayed as he sang along, taking to spinning the red-headed girl a couple times as she laughed. As soon as possible, Shane retreated from the stage waving to the crowd as he ran down the steps.

“You are so fucking jealous right now,” Cliff laughed, very rudely drawing attention to Ilya. “You wished it was you up there so bad.”

“Of course, Marly, I am much better dancer than Hollander,” Ilya pouted. “They would not even have had to change the lyrics for me. I am polite like this.”

Honestly, yeah, Ilya was a little jealous it wasn’t him that was asked to be on stage. Next time they had a concert in Boston, Ilya didn’t care, he was begging his agents to get him up there. Ilya was born for that. More than that, Ilya was absolutely shocked that Shane hadn’t mentioned this to him.

“It was last minute!” Shane exclaimed after Ilya had interrogated him during a TV timeout. “They asked me just before they went onstage. Well actually, they asked the team and they made me do it because they thought it would be funny.”

“It was very funny,” Ilya agreed. “I got a photo from Marly, is my new lock screen.”

“Shut up.”

The score didn't seem to want to budge through the second period, despite the efforts of both teams. Ilya was exhausted, Hollander had been running him coast to coast all game, but at least he could say he wasn't thinking about the cold anymore.

There was about nine minutes left in the second when Ilya once again found himself chasing down Shane. They barreled through the neutral zone with Shane in possession, but Boston's defenders were waiting for him by the net. As Shane rounded around to the left looking for a pass, Ilya tried to reach around and knock the puck out of his stick. Unfortunately, his balance was off, and he managed to knock himself over, taking down Shane as he went.

Shane went down onto his side, flying into the boards, and Ilya went down on his ass, his back hitting the boards as he continued to sit upright. The way they landed, Shane's head was practically in his lap. Ilya knew the moment they landed that Shane's landing was hard, and he immediately raised his hand to wave over a trainer.

At this, the whistle blew to halt play. Ilya kept his arm around Shane, gently patting his back. A vision of the last time Ilya saw Shane on the ice like this flashed before his eyes, but he quickly pushed it out.

“Shane? Are you okay?” Ilya spoke. Shane was facing towards the boards, but he was most definitely moving, his hand now cradling his head

“Ouch,” Shane replied simply. He rolled onto his front and moved to kneel, still keeping his head on the ice.

Ilya stayed seated next to Shane, his arm loosely resting on his back. He saw the trainer begin to make his way over as the referee reached Shane.

“Did you hit your head?” Ilya tried again, lowering his head down so he wouldn't have to speak so loud.

“I don't think so,” Shane moaned.

The trainer finally joined the party, towel in hand, getting to his knees to speak to Shane.

“How we doing Shane?” The trainer asked. “You think you can get off the ice yourself?”

Shane nodded minutely, “yeah, yeah, just give me a sec.”

Ilya finally got to his feet, realizing that it wouldn't take much longer of sitting on the ice, arm around Shane, for this to surpass good sportsmanship. A couple other players gathered round, Pike of course, because when wasn't that guy glued to Shane, as well as Marleau, who had been on Ilya's wing.

“You okay there bud?” Marleau asked, looking more concerned than he would've been in a similar situation a year ago.

Shane got to his feet, adjusting his helmet, squinting a bit at the light. The trainer had his hand resting on Shane's shoulder.

“I'm fine, just didn't get time to slow down,” Shane said. “I feel okay.”

“We'll take him in for concussion protocol,” the trainer assured. “Do you need a hand getting off?”

“I got it,” Shane said, his smile small but genuine. “Watch out,” he said, “they can’t keep me out for long.”

Ilya watched from the boards as Shane skated off, receiving pats on the back from his teammates. Once he was sure himself that Shane wasn’t going to pass out on the ice, Ilya returned to the bench.

“He is okay?” Pava asked.

“I think so,” Ilya said, though he still had the rising feeling of anxiety deep in his chest. “He went into the boards hard. I tripped him.”

“Was accident.”

Much to Ilya’s relief, Shane was back. By the start of the third period, he was out on the ice again and taking the first faceoff.

“Okay?” Ilya asked again.

Shane smiled, chewing on his mouthguard. “Okay. No concussion, just got the wind knocked outta me.”

“Good. It is no fun beating Montreal when you are not playing.”

“I’m a little disappointed in you. I was out for half a period and you still couldn’t put a point on the board.”

“I was waiting for you. There is plenty of time, Hollander.”

Ilya won the faceoff.

Ilya was sure the only reason they didn’t go into overtime was based on sheer willpower to get out of the cold. Ilya scored in the last five minutes of the game, an incredibly sexy bar down, which resulted in the Voyageurs eventually pulling their goalie. This of course resulted in the perfect opportunity for Pava to score into an empty net.

Ilya whooped as he leaned over to get a high five from the rookie as he skated along the bench, grinning as if he had just won a cup as opposed to getting an empty netter.

The two teams met at center ice for the handshake line, as was tradition for a Winter Classic. Ilya lingered as he shook Shane’s hand, because of course he had to. It had been a while since he’d had the chance.

“See you at All-Stars,” he grinned.

Shane rolled his eyes.

* * *

Nights like this, Shane thought that maybe nothing with Montreal had changed.

They sat at a table all together, laughing, yelling, drinking, eating. The room was cozy, warm lighting filling the space. Shane was grinning from ear to ear as he listened to JJ tell a story about the last time he was in QC, when he managed to get commandeered into helping an old lady change her flat tire, but he was also so drunk at the time that he ended up vomiting all over the spare.

“I still changed the tire!” JJ exclaimed proudly. “She could hose it down later! Without me, she wasn’t going anywhere.”

Shane took a sip of his ginger ale, leaning back in his chair as he watched over the table. They had lost tonight, but no one was taking it that hard. It was the Winter Classic, and they had the chance to be in a new city. Even if that city was Quebec.

“Oh, come fucking on.”

Shane turned in his seat to see what Drapeau was looking at, only to watch as about a dozen Boston Bears filed into the sugar shack, led by the one and only Ilya Rozanov.

“Voyageurs!” Ilya exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air. “My 30th favourite team in the league! I am so glad to see you here today!”

“What the fuck are you doing here, Rozanov?” Hayden asked, bringing his bottle to his lips.

“What? I can not enjoy the culture? I have heard I simply must visit a sugar shack while I am here. Cultural appreciation, yes?”

Shane did his best to level a glare at his boyfriend that wasn’t too obviously homicidal.

“Oh, look at that,” Ilya smiled. “How lucky! Our tables are right next to each other.” Ilya took the seat directly behind Shane. Luckily, the tables were not oriented parallel, which meant that only a few Voyageurs were forced to be neighbours to a table of rowdy Boston players.

And since the universe loved him, those two Voyageurs were Shane and Hayden.

“Please do not get into any fights at this restaurant,” Shane said, leaning in to talk to Hayden in a low voice as the Bears shuffled into their seats.

Hayden held up his hands in surrender. “I’m not the problem here, tell your new best friend over here.”

Shane frowned, peeking behind him to see that the table was weirdly very preoccupied with their menus. Shane leaned back to whisper over Ilya’s shoulder.

“Did you seriously get a reservation at the same restaurant as us at the same time?”

Ilya scoffed, but he didn’t take his nose out of his menu. “I do not know what you mean, Hollander. How would I possibly know what restaurant you were going to?”

Shane huffed. Shane had said he was going to a sugar shack by the waterfront, but there were loads of those. It was crazy to assume that somehow Ilya had guessed what restaurant they were going to, and at the last minute convinced his entire team to come along for dinner.

(Ilya had not guessed. He found the location in his and Shane’s shared calendar. And not all the Bears were able to make it, some had prior engagements, but he was able to gather an impressive dozen).

Shane turned back to his table, sipping lightly at his drink. He was actually surprised how uneventful the evening was from there, they were able to get their orders in without a fuss. He had half expected that the teams would be hurling insults across the room all night long.

Really, the only communication between the two tables occurred when Ilya periodically leaned over Shane's shoulder.

"What is cretons?" Ilya whispered.

"It's a pork spread. It's got onions in it, I think."

"Okay."

Ilya was back three minutes later.

"What is ori-elles dee chrissy?"

"It's oreilles de chriss, and it's a deep fried pork jowel."

"That sounds terrible. I will get some."

And again, thirty seconds later.

"What is—"

"Jesus Christ," Hayden interjected.

"No, my name is Ilya Rozanov."

"Stop bothering us. Just order your food."

Ilya scoffed and fully turned in his chair. "So rude, Pike. I am trying to talk here to my good friend Shane Hollander, expert on Quebec. Not 15th best Voyageurs player."

"You are such a dick."

"What is taffy?" Kosmodemyansky asked, joining in on the conversation. He was seated right behind Hayden.

"It's when they boil the maple syrup and then pour it in snow, and then roll it up on a popsicle stick. It's like a lollipop."

"Lollipop," Kosmodemyansky repeated.

"Ledenets," Ilya offered.

"Ah."

"This is not a conversation," Hayden interjected. "Stop using Shane as google."

"Ah, I see," Ilya said. "You hate Pava because he is immigrant?"

"What? No!" Hayden sputtered. "I don't hate Pava!"

"You can't call him that," Shane said. "He hates nicknames."

"What? How do you even know that?"

"SportsCentre."

“Well why does he get to call him that?”

“Because I am Russian.”

Hayden pouted, attempting to save face. “Well, fine, what’s your name then?”

“You do not know the name of the man you just played against! So rude, Pike,” Ilya scolded.

“I don’t know the name of every player in the NHL!”

“It’s Kosmodemyansky,” Shane offered.

Hayden paused. “Fucking come on.”

“Can I get pancakes?” Kosmodemyansky asked, turning to Ilya.

“You do not need my permission.”

“Is not weird?”

“I think I’ll also get pancakes,” Shane said. He actually hadn’t been planning that, but it wasn’t deep fried, which probably made it one of the healthier options on the menu. He’d probably just have a little bit then box the rest for Ilya. He could pick up something else on the way back.

“There,” Ilya said. “You and Hollander be weird together.”

Shane rolled his eyes, turning back to his own table, where the waitress finally approached to take their order. As the team from Montreal, they all attempted to make a point by each ordering in French. The Australian tried, but had to give up after three unintelligible goes of it.

Shane didn’t turn back around to talk to Ilya, but every once in a while through the night, he’d hear a snippet of Russian as Ilya conversed with his rookie. Shane smiled to himself. Even though things hadn’t worked out with Ottawa, and even though things were on edge with Montreal, in this moment, he was glad to be where he was.

Chapter End Notes

Newf mentions the FLQ very briefly, which was a terrorist group active as a part of the Quebec separatist movement in Quebec in the 60s responsible for several violent attacks including bombings and kidnappings. He then mentioned the Boston Molasses flood, which was in fact a massive flood of molasses in a Boston harbour that killed 21 people.

The 2018 Winter Classic actually occurred between the Rangers and Sabres. Oftentimes in Winter and Heritage classics, they’re used as an excuse to hold a game in a city that doesn’t have a hockey team, hence why I set this one in QC.

Also would you believe, I was researching the weather in QC at this time and it turns out they were going through a crazy cold snap. Sucks for all these guys who had to play outdoors in my made up story.

Yes, that's right everyone, I am headcannoning that Shane Hollander attended We Day with his high school in 2008 in Toronto, the second year it was hosted. Just wait until I find a way to fit Jump Rope for Heart or the Terry Fox Run into this thing.

The Quebecois band is totally made up but is inspired by two different artists. The first is The Weakerthans, which is a Winnipeg band. They have a song called "One Great City" in which the chorus is "I hate Winnipeg." As well, the vibe for the band I've gone with is meant to be reminiscent of Role Model, specifically the song "Sally, When the Wine Comes Out." This is due to the fact that this song was performed at the Winter classic this year in Florida, and Matthew Tkachuk went up on stage as Sally. Matthew Tkachuk, my number one opp, I'm coming for you. And I'm replacing you with Shane Hollander in my fic. I didn't wanna actually do a real singer because I feel weird writing about real people soooooo I made one up. Sorry to the readers who were excited for a french canadian girlband with accordion dance music :(((.

The moment of Shane crashing into the boards is specifically [inspired](#) by a hit between Nick Foligno and Leo Komarov. There's nothing specifically remarkable about this hit, I just cite it to better envision what goes on, particularly how Ilya ends up with his arm around Shane. Just know that it's not as obvious and homoerotic as it sounds when you describe it, it's much more chill and hockey bro in reality. Fellas, is it gay to hold your rival in your arms on the ice?

Quick comment on the toboggan, this is a real place in QC, but my sister has asked that I specify that real Canadian tobogganing is defined by its violence and danger. This [video](#) is a great point of reference for an average sledding experience, as well as a Canadian accent.



Chapter 4: Breakfast Society

Chapter Summary

God, Ilya was acting like such a dad right now. Shane would be teasing the shit out of him if he knew what he was thinking. Pava would be fine. He had a house full of food, and a box set of Scooby Doo.

Chapter Notes

I've decided to start adding links to some of the other chapters when I'm making specific references, so it's easier for you guys to see what I'm talking about. Feel free to go back and check them out if you're interested :)

Also, thanks to everyone in the comments that've been helping me out with Russian terms and Quebecois spellings. I really appreciate it!

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

The All Star Game was almost always something to be dreaded.

Not being chosen for All-Stars weekend meant at least a four day break. There had been only two years that Ilya had not been selected to go to the All-Star game, and he remembers those weeks fondly. One year, he didn't leave the house for all four days, and must have slept through half of it. The other year, he and Marly went out clubbing every single night of that break. Even on Monday. The NHL had to start giving out suspensions for players that tried to get out of the game.

That wasn't the case for Ilya. At least not anymore. In his mind, the All-Stars game was the anniversary of one of the best days of his life.

This year, the game was being held in Vancouver, which at least meant he wouldn't be freezing his ass off. He was the only Bear selected to go this year, and he found himself strangely worried about leaving Pava on his own. Not that he thought the Rookie would blow up his house or anything, but he didn't want him to get lonely.

God, Ilya was acting like such a dad right now. Shane would be teasing the shit out of him if he knew what he was thinking. Pava would be fine. He had a house full of food, and a box set of Scooby Doo.

"You're acting like such a dad right now," Shane said.

They were sitting in a Tim Hortons, getting lunch. Well, Ilya was getting lunch, Shane was sipping on his tea after he had already filled up on his nutritionist approved pre-made meal. He was probably the only person who took All-Stars seriously.

“I am just wondering if they would keep well on a plane. We aren’t playing in Canada until mid February, I thought he would appreciate if I brought some back,” he said, sounding way too defensive.

Ilya leant down to examine the options through the glass case. “He likes the maple ones. He says the ones at Dunkin aren’t maple enough. I cannot taste the difference.”

“I think you could keep the donuts on your counter for three weeks and they’d stay the same,” Shane said. “This isn’t exactly high class cuisine.”

Ilya tilted his head, considering. “You are right. I will get a box I think. But I will get them before we leave on Sunday. Keep them fresh.”

Shane smiled as he rolled his eyes. “I’m glad we’ve got that all settled.”

“Are you making fun of me?” Ilya replied, going to grab his bag before they departed from the Tims, beginning their walk towards the rink where the skills competition would be held.

“No, I would never do that,” Shane said, unconvincingly.

“Oh, hey guys.”

Ilya and Shane both swung their heads to the right, attention drawn to the man who had approached and begun to walk alongside them.

“Oh, hey!” Shane said, his smile polite.

Ilya squinted, taking a moment before he remembered who this guy was. Tall, shaggy hair that wasn’t quite a mullet, and a low, monotone voice. That man was a Doherty brother.

In Ilya’s defense, there were three of them, playing for two different NHL teams, and they all looked the same. The only reason Ilya could distinguish this one as Mason was because he was the only goalie, and significantly weirder than his brothers as a result. Apparently their dad had also been a hockey player, something Ilya only knew because the announcers made a point of mentioning it at every single game they played.

“Hello,” Ilya replied. He had never actually interacted with the man much. It was his first year at the All Stars, but Ilya was pretty sure that Shane had done some media with him before.

“You guys heading over?” Mason asked, adjusting the duffle over his shoulder. “Mind if I walk with you?”

“Sure,” Shane replied, speaking for them both. “First All-Stars weekend, right? How are you feeling?”

Mason shrugged. “Not bad, I guess it’s not as high-stakes for me as it is for you guys. How about you? Captain again.”

Ilya caught the look Shane gave from the corner of his eye. Ilya had been complaining about this since it was announced that Shane had won the fan voting for Captain of the Atlantic Division again, even though the Russian was named alternate. Ilya was trying not to make a big deal, since he knew Shane had been upset that the NHL weren’t allowing their players to participate in the Olympics this year. But damn, he loved to complain.

“Yeah,” Shane said, “I guess I did an okay job last year.”

“Ugh, Hollander, it's not a real captaincy anyway. The whole game is just for fun.”

“It’s literally a million dollar prize.”

“Pffft. Split eleven ways.”

“Yeah, and that’s \$200,000 going to our foundation if we win.”

Ilya glared. “Stop talking about charity when I am trying to be mean to you. It's so unfair.”

Mason chimed in. “Are you sure you guys don’t hate each other?”

“Anyway,” Shane started, giving Ilya a pointed glare. “It’s gonna be a great time.”

“How great a time can you have when you’re stuck on a team with Dallas Kent?” Ilya asked.

“Ilya.”

“It’s okay,” Mason shrugged. “I hate that guy too.”

Ilya smiled. “I knew I liked you. You are my favourite brother.”

“Thanks.”

The trio made it to the arena, checking in through security at the athlete’s entrance. Tonight was the skills competition, with each player choosing one event to participate in, for a \$25,000 prize. This had proven to be incredibly difficult for Shane and Ilya, who had to choose between competing against each other, and increasing their potential prize pool.

Eventually, they had decided to split into two competitions, as they had already made a statement that any of their All-Stars winnings would be going to the foundation. Shane would compete in the puck control competition, and Ilya in the hardest shot.

“Thank God,” Ilya said, as he looked over Shane’s shoulder to see the posted list of players in each competition. Mason had split off from the two, with the dressing rooms divided by conference. “I was worried I would be in the same group as Draisaitl, thought he would try to break my legs before the night was over. That guy hates me.”

“Yeah,” Shane admitted, passing on the list to the next player to his left. “He does, because you call him a schnitzel every time you play him.”

Ilya chuckled to himself. “Yes, that was a very good one.”

Shane finished pulling on his Montreal sweater. For the skills competition, they stuck to wearing their home jerseys so that the crowd could better distinguish everyone’s teams. Tomorrow they’d be wearing their Atlantic Division gear.

Ilya watched, trying to figure out the best way to announce to the room that Shane looked hot that made it sound like he was teasing him rather than actually hitting on him, when his attention was suddenly pulled by his phone buzzing in his locker.

He reached for his phone, turning over the screen to see an incoming call from Pava.

“Hello?”

“How do I use the coffee maker?”

Ilya paused. *“What?”*

“There are many valves and buttons. How do I make a latte?”

“I have never once seen you drink coffee before.”

“I would like to try it.”

“Then go to a cafe!”

“That's expensive.”

Ilya sighed, rubbing his hand across his face. *“I will send you money. Do not break my coffee machine.”*

A brief moment of silence passed over the phone. *“That's okay. I'll try it another time.”*

Ilya waited to see if the kid would elaborate. *“Is this the only reason you called me?”*

“Yes. Is that bad? Should I not call you?”

“No, it's fine,” Ilya tried to reassure. He much preferred this to Pava not calling and also exploding his coffee maker. *“But I'm about to compete. I won't be able to answer until after.”*

“Okay. Good luck!”

Ilya hung up, placing his phone back in his locker.

“What was that?” Shane asked.

“Nothing, Pava just has questions.”

Shane smiled to himself as he wrapped his stick.

“I can feel you judging me from here, Hollander.”

“I'm not! Really. I think it's nice. Reminds me of when I first went to live in Montreal and I called my mom every other day to ask how she did my laundry.”

“You are comparing me to your mother?”

“You love my mom!”

Ilya considered this. “Never mind, you are right. I approve of this.”

The skills competition was always fairly relaxed, all the participants hung around at the bench watching each player participate. Ilya knew most of the guys here from interacting at previous All-Stars weekends, the NHL awards, or the media. He also knew them from playing them, of course, but he didn't tend to give off the best first impressions on the ice.

“Hunter!” Ilya exclaimed, dramatically flopping into the boards to greet the Metropolitan Division Captain. He was trying to occupy himself while Shane continued his eight hour long conversation

with Leah Campbell. “I saw you are doing puck control, do you think the arthritis will make this too difficult?”

“Fuck off, Rozanov.”

Ilya tapped along the top of the boards, bobbing his head to the music. “Is unfortunate that they still make you come to these. I know they must interrupt your afternoon naps.”

“And what about you, Rozanov? I heard you’ve started up a babysitting business. How’s that going?”

“Very good. I have much wisdom to share. Actually, you have given me great idea, I will get him to practice his chirping on you next time we play. He is not very good, but you are so easy that I’m sure he will boost his confidence.”

Scott rolled his eyes, turning to Carter Vaughan, who had slid into the seat beside him after finishing his go at the fastest skater competition. “It’s not fair,” he whined. “What’s the point of even doing this if McDavid wins every year?”

“You’re the one that signed up for it,” Scott argued.

“Because it’s the one I’m best at!”

“But you shouldn’t pick the one you’re best at,” Ilya said. “You pick the one that you’re the best at out of the people that think it is their best one.”

Carter blinked.

“Hey guys,” Shane said, skating up to join the party. “Did you know that this is the first time a woman has ever competed in the All-Stars competition?”

“I know that now,” Ilya said. “Hey, while we are at it let’s all go around the circle and share a fun fact.”

“Shut up, I’m serious, it’s cool! I don’t know why they don’t normally have national team members compete. I think it could go a really long way into bridging the inequalities between men’s and women’s sports. I mean just think—”

“Hunter, you’re up!” An official called, gesturing for Scott to take his place for the next event.

Hunter gave Shane a regretful look, before going onto the ice.

Shane frowned, turning back to Ilya. Vaughan had already wandered off to go talk to some guy from Buffalo.

Ilya sighed, reaching out his elbow to nudge Shane in the shoulder. “Okay, finish what you were saying. I am listening.”

* * *

Ilya and Shane both won their respective events. Ilya by a mile, and Shane squeaking into first place by 0.4 seconds.

Mason Doherty skated over to give Shane and Ilya silent fist bumps when Dallas Kent came in second in the shot accuracy contest. Mason also won his save streak event.

When Ilya made his way back into the locker room at the end of the night, the only thing on his mind was Shane's room number and a list of all the food he was going to order from Skip the Dishes.

He was distracted by this train of thought to find his phone buzzing so violently in his locker that it was a millimeter away from toppling to the floor. He took it into his hand to see his lock screen was now a wall of Cyrillic text notifications.

Pava: Can I borrow your sandals

Pava: Where do you keep the colander

Pava: Can I put a hot pot on the counter or do I need to use a trivet

Pava: Do you have a measuring tape

Pava: How do I turn off the smoke detector

Pava: Just theoretically

Pava: Can you send me verification code it went to your email

Pava: I need batteries for the remote do you have any in your room

Pava: Can I go look

Pava: What is the zip code of your house

Ilya immediately ignored the messages and hit the call button on Pava's contact.

"Did you set the house on fire?"

"No."

"Why did you ask how to turn off the smoke detector?"

"Just in case I needed to. And you weren't by the phone when it happened."

"So it hasn't happened?"

"No. I am very responsible. I would never set a fire."

Ilya could not imagine the look that was on his face. Shane seemed concerned by it though, as he had started hovering next to him. Ilya lowered his phone from his ear, muffling the speaker with his hand as he turned to his boyfriend.

"This child is trying to kill me," Ilya said. He lifted the phone back to his ear. *"Okay, I will reply to your texts. Please go to sleep."*

"Okay. Did you win your contest?"

"You weren't watching?"

"I couldn't figure out how to turn on the satellite. I have been watching only DVDs."

"You know what? That's probably for the best. Goodnight, kid."

Shane raised his eyebrows as Ilya finally hung up the phone. "Okay?"

Ilya shook his head, smiling. "Let's get out of here, Hollander, I have big plans for this evening."

* * *

The next day, Ilya didn't leave his boyfriend's bed until after noon. Why would he? Sure, they could go out to see the city, but he'd been in Vancouver dozens of times, he only had so many days throughout the season with Shane.

"I don't want to go," Ilya whined, stretching out on the sheets. The sun shone through the windows, casting a glow over the room. "Let me stay here forever."

Shane laughed. "There's only eleven people per team. And I'm the captain. They will definitely notice if we're missing."

"Boo. They will be fine without us. I will tell them we have mono."

"The kissing disease? That's what you go with?"

"You are right. Is believable for me. Not so much for you."

"It's weird how you love to say I have no game when you're literally in my bed right now."

Ilya dragged himself up the mattress just so he could plunk his head down on Shane's stomach. "Is all a part of my grand plan. I need to keep everyone else away so I have you all to myself."

"Well, I promise it's working." Shane leant down to plant a kiss on Ilya's lips, running his hands through curly blonde hair. "You should shower before we go. You smell."

"Only if you join. Is only fair, you are the reason I was so sweaty."

Shane relented, which resulted in the shower lasting much longer than it was supposed to.

"Okay, you go now, I'll meet you in the lobby in a couple minutes," Shane said as he pulled on a clean shirt.

"Okay, Mr. Superspy," Ilya grinned, swinging his bag over his shoulder. He hadn't even bothered to store any of his stuff in his room. He didn't want to be away from Shane any longer than necessary.

He ducked out the door, closing it softly. With the amount of hotels he'd stay in every week, his brain was scrambled every time he found himself in another mundane repetitive hallway with red carpeting. So which fucking way was the elevator?

"Oh."

Ilya looked up, pushing off from where he had been leaning on the door. Just having rounded the corner stood a short, curly haired man. He looked familiar.

Ilya squinted, pointing a finger accusatorily. "You are Scott Hunter's boyfriend."

The man paused, looking like he was deciding what to say. Unfortunately, Ilya recognized this specific look, he had seen it on Shane countless times when he was panicking.

"What is your name again? I know it is something weird" Ilya asked, taking a few steps closer so they weren't talking from across a hallway, but also making an effort not to be intimidating. That was

significantly harder to do when you had a Russian accent.

“It’s Kip,” the man said, holding out a tentative hand. “I’m Kip.”

Ilya took it. How did you shake a hand non-intimidatingly? Was it weird if he made his handshake too soft? Ilya had large hands.

“I am Ilya. Rozanov.”

“Oh. I know.” Kip said it in a dramatic way, slipping out like he had no other choice. He quickly reeled himself back in to sound more serious. “I mean, sorry, you’re kind of everywhere. And Scott...”

“Hates my guts.”

“Oh, no—”

“Ah, no, it is okay, I would become senile like this too if I was there for carving of Rosetta Stone,” Ilya shrugged. “I am sure Hunter has seen a lot since then.”

“Oh, so you’re exactly like they say huh?” Kip said, but he was fighting a smile.

“Yes, just as beautiful and sexy and talented. You would know this Kip, you are a very handsome man.”

“Oh. Thanks?”

“Yes, far too handsome for Scott Hunter.”

“Okay—”

“No, no, I am sorry, I should not insult your boyfriend.”

“Thank you.”

“It would not be fair when he cannot hear it. His hearing aids have been failing him.”

Kip laughed. “Wow, do you practice these or something?”

“Ah, yes, every night before bed, it helps me sleep. Where are you going Kip? You are all by yourself?”

“Oh, yeah, I’m just heading down to the lobby, I’m going to watch practice and then the game.”

“Is unfortunate you will have to see your team lose, but this is hockey, yes? Here, I am going the same way. Come, walk with me.”

Ilya patted Kip on the shoulder, signalling him to follow back the way Ilya had come. He assumed that since Kip had come from the other direction that it meant the elevator would be that way.

And of course, because he always had the best timing, that was the moment Shane decided to step out of his hotel room.

Ilya snuck a glance at Kip, whose eyes bounced to Ilya, then to Shane, then to the door that Ilya had exited from minutes earlier.

The truth was, it really wasn't that suspicious. It wasn't like it was the middle of the night, or that they were walking out half dressed. They were two teammates, two friends, that were on their way to the same event. If anything, it was more suspicious that they *hadn't* left at the same time, and that they were both freshly showered.

"Ah, Hollander!" Ilya said, before Shane had the chance to panic. "You are ready to go after all! Come, my new friend here Kip is going to watch the practice. We will have to show off so that he cheers for us instead."

Shane blinked, and seemed to recover remarkably fast for what Ilya was used to from the Canadian. "Oh, hi, I don't think we've met before. I'm Shane."

Kip lifted his hand with a shy wave, appearing to have decided not to comment on the shared exit. "Hi."

"You're Scott Hunter's boyfriend?"

"The one and only."

"You came up just for All-Stars?" Shane asked as they began their walk to the elevator. Ilya was actually quite impressed with how chill Shane was being. A year ago he would have been having a nervous breakdown over the idea of anyone suspecting something about the two of them.

"Yeah, I've never been to the West Coast before. Or Canada, actually."

"Ah!" Ilya exclaimed, pressing the button for the lobby. "Have you had the ketchup chips? They are truly awful."

By the time the three men had concluded the short walk to the stadium, Ilya had given Kip a run down on coffee crisps, nanaimo bars, caramilk, all-dressed chips, and the difference between Canadian and American smarties.

"Oh, god."

Ilya entered the rink first, immediately making eye contact with Scott Hunter, whose division was currently concluding their practice time on the ice.

"Relax, Hunter, we have not committed any hate crimes. I am getting to know this very handsome short man is all," Ilya proclaimed, swinging his arm over Kip's shoulders as he dragged him up to the boards.

"Hi Scott," Shane greeted as he joined the fray.

Scott skated up to meet them, an expression that showed he was already dreading this interaction was evident on his face. "I knew I shouldn't have left you alone."

"Is this guy bothering you?" Ilya asked Kip. "I know, it can be very scary when elderly men come up and hit on you."

"Go fuck yourself, Rozanov."

"All I am saying is you must not love him very much if you make him come to All-Stars Weekend. It is cruel and unusual."

“I asked to come actually,” Kip offered, remarkably unaffected by Ilya’s quips.

“Were you at the skills competition last night?” Shane asked.

“Yeah! It was really cool.”

“Ah, so you saw me and Shane make all the other players cry and give up?” Ilya asked.

“Shouldn’t you be getting ready for practice?” Scott asked.

Ilya opened his mouth, another barb already prepared, when he was interrupted by his phone vibrating.

Ilya sighed. “Give me a second,” he said, turning to take a few steps back as he answered. He didn’t need to check the caller id.

“Honestly, it was really nice to meet you,” Shane said, continuing the conversation in Ilya’s absence, because he was the polite one. “Maybe next time I play in New York we could grab dinner or something?”

“That would be nice,” Kip smiled. “Hey, maybe you’ll be down for playoffs.”

“For your boyfriend’s sake I hope not,” Shane teased. “We’re coming back for a cup this year.”

“It’s like I’m not even here,” Scott protested.

“At the very least it’s coming down to the Eastern Conference. I was talking to—”

“Hollander, Hollander!” Ilya interrupted. He was standing a few meters away, holding his phone away from his face. “How would you get blue Gatorade out of a rug?”

“What?”

* * *

In Ilya’s opinion, they might as well have been playing a team from the minors.

Shane said that was unfair, that it was an All-Star game and absolutely no one from the Metropolitan Division was putting in any effort, save Scott Hunter, but that was just out of spite. The game ended with a score of 7–4 with Shane and Ilya scoring three a piece.

They shared their line with Zane Boodram, the captain of the Centaurs. Shane had always liked Bood from their talks on the ice, but before this weekend he hadn’t had the chance to get to know him that much. He was a really nice guy, he even invited Shane over for barbeque next time he was back in Ottawa.

“Is this offer extended to me?” Ilya asked as they retreated into the locker room. They would have a bit of a break before the final game against the central division, who had won their round, but not enough time to fully change.

“You’re asking to spend extra time in Ottawa?” Bood asked.

“Oh yeah,” Shane teased. “This guy loves museums.”

“Hey, give me more credit than this,” Ilya said. “I have loved Ottawa ever since you told me about the McDonalds with the raccoon. That is my kind of town.”

Bood laughed. “Sure, Roz, you’re invited.”

Ilya reached for his phone again, expecting another flurry of texts, but there was nothing. He put it back on the shelf.

“Hollander, remind me to get donuts before we leave tomorrow.” They were both flying out tomorrow morning. Shane was going straight to Chicago, and Ilya to Boston for a few home games.

“Remind me to get those nanaimo bars my mom likes,” Shane replied. “She nearly killed me when I forgot last time I was in Van.”

“Deal.”

* * *

They won the game, and Shane and Ilya walked away \$200,000 richer.

“I will buy you a coffee,” Ilya offered, giving Mason a pat on the back and a helmet tap instead of shaking hands.

“Thanks,” Mason replied with an eye roll. “I’ll take a double double.”

“No, just one,” Ilya replied. “I am not rich.”

Ilya skated back to his team, who were all gathering to take a photo with the trophy. It was cute, professional, with a couple rounds of reporters gathering to take a turn. Just as the team started to disband, Ilya called out.

“Hollander, Bood, wait, wait, Captains’ photo, is the law.”

Shane pretended to protest, but immediately skated back at Ilya’s call.

“Hollander, get on my back.”

“What.”

“Bood, help him up.”

“I’m not getting on your—”

But Bood had already appeared behind him, placing his hands on Shane’s waist. Really, he had no choice but to boost himself up. He landed on Ilya’s hips, his legs surprisingly well supported by the kidney pads.

“Okay, now Bood, lay down in front of trophy. We are like Breakfast Society.”

“Breakfast Club.”

“Yes, this too. Say cheeses!”

A few reporters stuck around to take pictures, laughing at the antics of the captains. Shane recognized the Voyageurs’ own social media manager, Adithi, taking a video.

“Okay, let me down,” Shane said, tapping Ilya on the shoulder.

“But you have worked so hard,” Ilya protested. “I will give you a ride. Let you rest your feet.”

“I don’t need to—”

Ilya took off, forcing Shane to readjust to grab onto his shoulders so he didn’t plummet backwards. At least Ilya didn’t feel the need to do any laps around the arena, dropping Shane off at the tunnel entrance.

“You’re such a dick,” Shane complained, making his way onto the rubber. They both paused to take a few photos with some kids that were hanging out of their seats.

“Ah, you love it,” Ilya grinned. “Maybe your new lock screen?”

“Not a bad idea, actually,” Shane replied. “That way, every time I look at my phone, I can be reminded how much I love Bood.”

* * *

Ilya sat in the Uber, box of half a dozen donuts in hand, watching the familiar trees of his neighbourhood pass him by as they neared his house.

He unlocked his phone, opening up Instagram. Sveta was always posting something new, and Ilya had also hyped himself up enough to finally follow Rose Landry back.

What he didn’t expect was a post from Shane on his front page.

Shane rarely posted on instagram, but when he did, it was always Voyageurs branded professional media, or whatever his brand deals required. But this was something different.

It was the video of Bood, hoisting Shane up onto Ilya’s back. Ilya watched himself giggle on the screen, Bood laughing and throwing his head back at Shane’s expression as he grappled onto Ilya’s shoulders.

Looking at it now, they seemed so obvious. There was nothing especially suggestive to any average viewer, no gazes being held, no too comfortable touches. But still, it was so obvious to Ilya, just how in love they were.

He scrolled down to read through some of the comments.

@rowantreerowantree

Fuck you Ilya Rozanov for making me like you

@mrsquinnhughes

Wait so you’re telling me they’re actually friends? This isn’t a PR stunt?

@maddiedavs

Oh to be ilya rozanovs hips rn

Ilya smiled, typing out a comment of his own.

@ilyarozanov

That was you on my back? I couldn’t tell. I thought it was a small child.

The car finally pulled up to his gate. He hopped out, taking a hold of the bag that the driver had retrieved for him from the trunk. He quickly typed in the gate code and went inside.

He needed a nap. It had been an early morning. But first he needed to make sure that Pava had left the house all in one piece.

“Pava?” he called out. “Malysh?”

Nothing. Ilya frowned. He better not be dead in a ditch right now. Ilya had just secured a reputation as responsible.

“Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky!” He tried, to no avail.

Ilya pulled out his phone, quickly dialling the Rookie’s number. He picked up after two rings.

“Hello,” Pava greeted.

“Where are you? I don’t want to tell coach you have been kidnapped.”

“Oh. I am okay. I slept at Margaret’s house.”

In the realm of possibilities for where Pava might’ve gone, this wasn’t even on the list.

“What?”

“I couldn’t remember the gate code, I’ve never had to enter it when you weren’t here.”

“Then why didn’t you call me?”

“I didn’t want to bother you.”

Ilya blinked. Was he on a hidden camera show or something? What was going on. *“You didn’t want to bother me? Since when?”*

“It’s okay, she let me sleep on her couch. And she’s making me shovel the driveway, but I will be back once I’m done. Can you let me in?”

Ilya sighed. *“Okay. Call me when you’re in. I have maple donuts.”*

Ilya hung up, placing his phone down on the counter. He took a quick survey around the house, which was surprisingly intact. Asides from the giant blue stain on his carpet. He’d get cleaners out before Shane arrived in a few weeks.

Ilya would have to figure out a way to get Pava out of the house without feeling like he was kicking a puppy. Maybe he could convince Cliff to house him for the night or something. He was sure Pava would understand.

Chapter End Notes

Dare I say one of the more unrealistic things in the books/show is that All Star weekend is made to be a big deal. Nobody puts in much effort, and the scores of the games are always really high

because there isn't much for defense to try and prevent injuries. The games themselves are also only 20 minutes long and played 3v3. People will do anything to get out of All Stars, so they had to start issuing suspensions. In 2018, All-Stars was hosted in Tampa, but I don't know a thing about Tampa, so just to make it somewhere I was at least a bit familiar with, I did this one in Vancouver. Formatting and lore wise, I largely based this off the 2019 All-Star game in San Jose because I liked it more.

I'm pretty sure that in the books, the 2018 All-Stars game is the one that Ilya doesn't attend due to a funeral. However, this is mentioned in Tough Guy, and I don't particularly like that book, so I'm taking artistic license here.

The Doherty brothers are partially inspired by the Hughes brothers, who include Quinn Hughes from the Wild, and Jack and Luke from the Devils. Two of them are on the USA Olympic team this year. Another inspiration are my #1 opps the Tkachuks, whose dad Keith played for the Jets back in the day. Throw in Nick and Jason Robertson (WHO SHOULD HAVE MADE THE OLYMPIC TEAM), the NHL has a lot of brothers.

Fun fact! In 2019, after Nathan McKinnon pulled out of the fastest skater competition due to a bruised foot, Kendall Coyne Schofield from the USA national team took his place, placing 7th out of 8 participants. This was the first time a woman ever competed in All Stars. Also, for the premier passer competition, Brianna Decker demonstrated the course, and actually had a faster time than Leon Draisaitl, who won the competition. Because of this, a twitter hashtag protested saying that she should also win the \$25,000 prize, which was eventually gifted to her by CCM.

BTW, I'm seeing a lot of Ottawa slander, and I won't stand for it. I love Ottawa. If all you like is partying and concerts and stuff like that? Sure, it's not for you. But as a museum and architecture and farmers market enthusiast? That place is heaven on earth. Also, Canada Day on Parliament Hill is UNMATCHED.

Also, Ilya references the Rideau Street McDonalds, which has its own wikipedia page. It is most famous for a brawl that broke out at the counter, where also just off to the side of the video, some guy pulls a baby raccoon out of his jacket. Unfortunately, several more incidents have occurred at this McDonalds, including customers beating each other with wet floor signs.

I really tried to do my best to figure out all the little details, when practice rinks are used, the distinctions between All-Stars years, all that jazz, but lowkey that's exhausting. For any inconsistencies, just assume that this is my world and we're all living in it.



^ me omw to read all your lovely comments

Chapter 5: Go to the box, please

Chapter Summary

“Okay, listen. Tomorrow, after the game, I need you to find somewhere to stay for the night.”

Pava looked confused. *“Why?”*

“I need the house.”

“What for?”

Ilya gave him a look.

Chapter Notes

The jury is out on if I know how to write plot, but I certainly can write hockey. I finally got a SportsNet subscription so prepare to be sick of me. Leon Draisaitl can no longer escape my television screen. I am honoured to be blessing any hockey knowledge I can upon you all. I will try to make sure I explain all my references! Absolutely gagged by the nice comments, I love seeing everyone theorize. I keep telling myself I'm gonna space out updates but then one person says they're excited for an update and I take absolutely no convincing. Consider it done.

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

It was February, and Shane was finally back in Boston.

Ilya had thought he had been acting totally normal. Yes, he had double and triple checked that all 72 cans of ginger ale were still in the fridge, and yes, he stocked up on tuna melt ingredients, and yes, he called in cleaners for the house and immediately recleaned all the rooms again just in case.

He just wanted to make sure everything would be perfect. The last time Shane had been in his house...

He didn't want a repeat of last time. Not that he thought Shane would run again, just, it couldn't hurt to wipe down the shower walls one more time. Shane liked a clean house.

“Is there an infestation?”

Ilya looked up from where he was kneeling on the bathroom floor to see Pava standing in the doorway. The kid was looking extra rumped, having just woken up from his nap. His hair, which he hadn't cut since arriving in America, was uneven and sticking out in every direction, and even though his t-shirt was inside out, Ilya could recognize it as his second favourite Scooby-Doo branded one from Target.

“What are you talking about?”

“You have cleaned this whole house five times. Is there a disease? Do we have to quarantine?”

Ilya hucked one of the crumpled up paper towels across the room at Pava’s head, who dodged it like it was in fact carrying the plague.

“Relax, kid, no CDC agents are on their way. I am just being thorough.”

“For an apocalypse?”

Ilya rolled his eyes, getting to his feet.

“Okay, listen. Tomorrow, after the game, I need you to find somewhere to stay for the night.”

Pava looked confused. *“Why?”*

“I need the house.”

“What for?”

Ilya gave him a look.

“Oh. A girl?”

“I did not say that.”

“But I thought you did not pick up girls anymore?”

Ilya scrunched up his eyebrows. *“What, has someone given you a rundown on my entire sexual history or something?”*

“Cliff Marleau did.”

“I am not bringing home a girl, okay? You do not have to worry about us fucking on your Scooby-Doo sheets.”

Pava made a face at that. Maybe if Ilya made him uncomfortable enough he’d stop prying.

“Are you hosting a party? I was thinking we should host a games night. I like Clue.”

“No.”

“Is it the police? Are we under investigation?”

“What? No, that makes no sense.”

“Are you going to practice your singing and you are embarrassed for me to be in the house? Because I understand, I did this while you were at All-Stars.”

Ilya gave Pava a much sterner look this time. One that said, “please stop asking me about this.”

“Okay, well...” Pava started again. *“Where do I go?”*

“Wherever you want. Go out! Go do something, I never see you party. You just sit in the corner drinking pulpless orange juice. Go have fun! Go dance, go meet a girl, you are young.”

"I am not so good at talking to people."

"You know what kid?" Ilya said, slapping Pava on the shoulder as he slid past him in the doorway. Pava followed as he started walking back to the living room. "Next time we win, we will go out to a bar together, okay. We will talk, we will meet people, you will meet pretty girls. Whatever you want, we will just have a fun time. But not tomorrow, tomorrow you will go somewhere very far from me."

Pava sighed. *"Okay, maybe I will ask Siggi if I can stay."*

"Yes, I'm sure he has lots of room in his bunk bed for you."

* * *

"Hollander! I have written you a poem, yes?"

"Oh god."

"It goes like this." Ilya cleared his throat, preparing to monologue at Shane from across the red line. "Shane Hollander plays hockey, he is not very good."

"Come on—"

"But I think his freckles are so pretty, I would bathe in them if I could."

"Jesus Christ."

"Is good, yes? It is called Limerick. It is Irish."

"Wow, look at you, Mr. Worldwide."

Ilya could tell from the expression on Shane's face that he was proud of that one. Ilya leaned down, resting his stick across his knees, sliding in right up to the line where Shane was stretching.

"I got rid of the kid," he whispered. "You can come by right after."

"You didn't kick him out did you? We're not gonna find him on Margaret's couch again?"

"Hollander, you think so little of me. No, he will be on Siggi's couch probably. Is fine! He is grown up. I deserve this for my months of generous charity."

"Fine, okay. But hey, please don't get into any fights today. I don't feel like playing nurse."

"Just as long as you don't start any."

"Hello."

Ilya jumped, like a ghost had appeared over his shoulder. Instead it was a very tall Russian teenager.

"Blyat'! We are having a conversation here, Mr. Nosy."

"Hello Shane Hollander," Pava said, ignoring Ilya.

"Hi, Kosmodemyansky," Shane replied. "Back on the first line again?"

Pava opened his mouth to answer, but Ilya interrupted.

“Ah, ah, ah, is secret Hollander. You will find out after warmups.”

Their last game against Tampa was their first time testing a combined line of Pava, Ilya, and Marleau. It went remarkably well, their line scoring all three goals of their win. Of course they were going to keep it, but Shane didn't need to know that any earlier than necessary.

“Okay, well, good luck tonight. Don't do anything I wouldn't do,” Shane said, skating away.

“But Hollander! Then we would never score any goals!”

* * *

“He fucking dove!” Ilya shouted, waving his hands frantically at the ref. Pike was on his knees on the ice, and Ilya had just been called for tripping. “Tell him to stay on his fucking skates! He has the balance of one of his seventy toddlers!”

“Rozanov, I'm not gonna tell you again, go to the box,” the ref shouted, pointing like Ilya was a misbehaving dog.

“I didn't even touch him! He fucking—”

“Go to the box please, go to the box! Now.” The ref repeated. Now Ilya really did feel like a dog. He skated off, pouting as he slammed the penalty box door.

This had been one of the weirder games of his career, just for the sheer amount of things that had gone wrong. In the first period, one of the Voyageurs got a penalty for stealing the goalie stick after the Bears goalie had taken theirs after a toss up. The period after that, Pava got checked so hard over the boards he landed into the “inside the glass” box, taking out the poor commentator at the waist.

Then, just about twenty seconds after Ilya made it out of the box, play was stopped when St-Simon was called for goaltender interference, subsequently disallowing a goal.

“He didn't even touch you, Hollander!” Ilya argued, waving his hands dramatically. As Captains, they had the right to “respectfully” discuss rule interpretations. “He is here acting like he got shot—”

“He checked me from behind, Ilya!”

“He doesn't check anyone! He weighs fifty kilos—”

“You'd be complaining if it was me pushing you like that.”

“Maybe, but you do it all night anyway.”

“Alright,” the ref interjected, like he was mediating two children. Dan had been reffing these games for long enough to know that this type of bickering was actually relatively tame for the two of them. “Rozanov, you're not gonna like it, but the call's gonna stand.”

Ilya huffed, trying to restrain himself. He really did not need any misconducts today. And the smug look on Shane's face was not helping.

Just one more period, and he could go home. Though, Ilya was less excited for that than he had been before the game, considering the Voyageurs were crushing them.

“Still time for a hat trick?” Shane asked over the faceoff circle, echoing Ilya’s words from all those years ago. “Should I do it now? Or wait until the last second?”

Ilya won the faceoff, out of spite, passing back to St-Simon, then rocketing up to the net to receive it back. He caught it off of Pava’s pass as he rounded to the edge of the net, but had no room for a shot with the goalie all up in his business. He passed it across to Cliff, continuing to coast around behind the net.

Shane stuck his arm out, getting his stick in front of Ilya’s body, and Ilya felt his left foot slip out in front of him. He fell on his ass, landing softly against the boards with his feet sticking out in front of him, waiting to coast to a stop. But he just kept going.

Somehow, because god was not on the side of Ilya’s dignity today, Shane’s stick had perfectly slid in the space in Ilya’s skate mount. Shane had not noticed this, continuing to skate back towards the puck, and consequently towing Ilya across the ice by his leg.

“Hollander!” Ilya shouted, possibly for the first time in his life, truly genuinely at a loss for words on the ice.

Luckily, it didn’t take long for Shane to notice the extra weight of a 200 pound Russian dragging behind him, considering the fact that one yank too hard had caused Shane to faceplant into the ice. He turned to look back, still lying on the ice as he yanked and twisted his stick, trying to free it. It wasn’t until Ilya pulled his leg up to his chest and angled the blade just so that Shane was finally able to pull free. He immediately skated back to the puck, which had been in play the entire time.

Ilya scrambled to his feet to rejoin the game. Why could he never have a normal game against Montreal?

* * *

The Bears lost 1–6. But Ilya argued that what was even worse than that was the fact that he was pulled into an interview with just about every media outlet they could scramble. And then on top of that, everyone wanted to talk to Pava about his run in with the commentator, which Ilya joined to help with translations.

By the time he was finally let go, Ilya was so exhausted he just wanted to pass out in his bed.

“I had wondered why the landing was so soft,” Pava said as they began their walk to the parking lot, Siggi trailing behind. *“That man does not have a lot of muscle.”*

“I hope you didn’t tell him that, Pava,” Ilya replied.

“That was awesome!” Siggi exclaimed, running up to hook his arm around Pava. “The way you took that guy out! And Roz getting dragged around like a chicken. That was the best game of my life.”

“We lost.” Ilya reminded him. “Very badly.”

Siggi frowned, his light dimming a bit. “Well, you can’t win ‘em all. And at least no one got hurt. We’ll get them next time, maybe we’ll see them at the playoffs?”

“Maybe.”

Ilya split off from the pair, heading off to his own car. Even though Ilya hadn’t asked it of him, he was pretty sure that Pava hadn’t told Siggi the reason that he was asking to stay at his house. Siggi was the

team's biggest gossip, and he was sure that if he knew the reason, everyone would know the reason, and then Ilya would never hear the end of it.

Ilya got into his car, the only one that was acceptable to drive during the winter, and pulled out his phone.

Ilya: Need a ride?

Jane: From your car?

Jane: TMZ will spot you from a mile away

Ilya: (((((don't be mean to Katya

Jane: Stop naming your cars

Jane: I've got a rental. Omw

Ilya:))))))

Ilya smiled to himself as he shifted into drive. Shane didn't have to fly out until the afternoon tomorrow, where he would be off to Philly, and Ilya had plans for every hour that Shane was in his home.

Those plans started dramatically, by opening the door for his boyfriend, and swiping his arm out with a flourish.

"So sorry, sir, the butler is out for the week. I hope you do not mind if I take care of you tonight?"

Shane smiled, cocking his head to the side. His hair was still wet from his post game shower, and he was wrapped up in his Voyageurs branded puffer. After giving Ilya a short up and down, he held his bag out in front of him.

"Well of course, but if you want a good review, I'm expecting great service."

"Ah," Ilya replied, tossing Shane's bag to the side and wrapping his hands around his boyfriend's waist. In a move that was now well practiced by them both, he hoisted Shane up to straddle his hips. "I think I can guarantee you will be satisfied with your evening."

* * *

"I used to have the biggest crush on him as a kid," Shane said, sipping on his ginger ale. He had to have been on his third by now. "I didn't realize that's what it was, obviously. I thought I just wanted to be him."

They had moved to the couch. Still half dressed, but mostly wrapped in layers of fluffy blankets. It was dark outside at this time, but the room had a soft warm glow illuminated by one of Ilya's many lamps strewn about the house.

"He kind of looks like me," Ilya said, cocking his head as he looked at the screen.

"What? No he doesn't."

Dirty Dancing was playing on the TV. After Shane had learnt that Ilya had never seen it, he insisted. It was apparently a cultural necessity.

“Yes, he does, Shane. You have a type.”

“Shut up.”

“No, is okay, we are both very handsome. He does not have same sexy accent, but he is not bad.”

Shane went to lightly slap Ilya on the chest, and let his hand rest there. He moved to tuck it below the blanket, so his palm was flush with Ilya’s bare chest.

“I like you,” Shane said simply, tipping his head to rest on Ilya’s shoulder.

“I like you,” Ilya echoed.

“I like you more than Patrick Swayze,” Shane added.

“Oh, thank god.”

Ilya felt his phone vibrate a few times, and quickly unlocked it to check his messages.

“What is it?” Shane asked.

“Just Pava. He is complaining, apparently Siggi’s girlfriend is there.”

“Aw.”

Ilya shrugged. “I would prefer him hearing their loud sex than ours.”

Ilya lifted up his arm, adjusting so that Shane was resting his head against his chest. Shane nestled his head in as if Ilya was a teddy bear.

“What did you tell him? Why you needed the house?”

“Eh, I did not, really.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “So you actually did just kick him out?”

“No, no! You think I am so mean. Trust me I was much more mysterious about it. He thinks there is a girl here. Maybe I will get you to leave lipstick on a mug just to sell it.”

“Shut up.”

Ilya chuckled, the low rumble from his chest causing vibrations to echo through Shane’s skin.

“Have you thought about it?” Ilya asked, his voice low. They watch on the TV as Johnny pleads with Baby’s father.

“About what?” Shane asked.

“About telling Pike.”

Shane shifted his eyes to watch Ilya’s expression, but his head stayed in place. “Do you want me to?”

Ilya shrugged, minutely. “I don’t know. You know he doesn’t hate gay people or something.”

“No, he doesn’t.”

“I just wonder if it would be good to let some people know. It could make things easier.”

Shane shifted so he was looking at Ilya more directly. “I mean, I guess you’re right. It’s just...at this point I feel like I’ve waited too long. Like, he was already gonna be upset about it being you, but now I worry what he’ll think about me keeping it from him for so long. We’ve been best friends for years. I was there the night he met Jackie.”

“He will understand. You are in impossible situation. Just look at your team.” Shane shrunk a bit at that. “And if he is really that upset about me, about made up rivalry, then he is stupid.”

“To be fair,” Shane said, sitting up slightly. “I think it’s less about the rivalry and more about the fact that you get in his face every chance you get and call him an overly fertile extra from the Hobbit.”

“That is just hockey. He will get over it. You should tell him, you need someone in your corner other than me and your parents.”

Shane sighed. “I think you’re right. I just need to figure out when, I don’t wanna screw anything up right now. Maybe after playoffs. We could maybe do something together with him and Jackie. You’d like her.”

“Ah, okay, so in June, after we win the cup.”

“I think you mean after we win the cup. Third time’s the charm, baby.”

Ilya grinned, leaning over to plant a kiss in the crook of Shane’s neck. “I like when you call me baby, Kotik.”

Shane blushed all the way down to his neck. “What about you? You said something about telling Svetlana? Or Marleau.”

Ilya looked thoughtful. “Maybe Svetlana. I have not seen her so much recently, she has been very busy with work and her boyfriend.”

“What about Marleau?”

“Ehhh, I am not so sure. I don’t think he would be terrible, he has mentioned a gay nephew, but he got weird one time when our social media girl asked if he liked Troye Sivan. But it is less that, I think I am more worried that if I tell him, it might get out to the rest of the team. Even by accident. I don’t think I should risk that while Pava is here.”

Shane fully sat up at that, his eyebrows pushing together and creating a cute wrinkle through his forehead. “What do you mean? I thought things were going well with him.”

Ilya sighed. “Is not that. He is a sweet kid, but he is Russian, and he has only been here for six months. I do not know how he feels. He is in a new country, with people he does not know and does not understand. I do not want to make him feel unsafe or uncomfortable in his home.”

“But you’re not—”

“I know, I know. But even if he does not mind, I do not want him to have to keep my secret. I cannot ask this of him.”

Shane frowned, lifting his hand to run his fingers soothingly along his boyfriend’s scalp. “I know what you mean. It shouldn’t be that way, but I get it. But tell Svetlana. If you want. You should have

someone in Boston you can talk to.”

Ilya nodded, relaxing into Shane’s hands. “Okay.”

Ilya watched the screen. The music began to climax as Johnny made his way off the stage into the aisle. It was familiar to him.

“I think I have seen this part before,” Ilya said.

“Yeah,” Shane laughed. “It’s only one of the most iconic movie scenes ever.”

Baby took a running start, jumping up into Jonny’s embrace as he lifted her up over her head.

“I like this move,” Ilya said. “We should do this at our wedding. I think I could lift you like this.”

Ilya, still entranced by the television screen, didn’t notice the way Shane tensed, then softened at his words. Then, Shane reached up to grab Ilya by the neck, pulling him into a kiss.

* * *

Four hours after Shane Hollander had left Boston, Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky stared at the bottom two shelves of the refrigerator. Twenty four hours ago, there had been 72 cans of ginger ale in this fridge. He had counted. The rows had formed a perfect rectangle.

Now, there were 68 cans of ginger ale in the refrigerator. The perfect rectangle now lopsided. In the six months he had been in the house, that rectangle had not changed.

Looks like he had a mystery on his hands.

Chapter End Notes

The lines in hockey are often dictated by skill, with the best players on the first line, and the weaker ones on the fourth. The first line almost always has higher playing times. That being said, some teams will distribute their skill a bit more and put high scorers on the second line as well. Shifts in hockey are also very short! Typically around 30–45 seconds for forwards, and longer for defensemen. Goalies stay on the entire game unless they’re injured or pulled for poor performance, as whoever is in the net when the game ends gets the win/loss stat.

I was inspired to write the bit about Pava taking out the commentator after watching the Wild vs Leafs game the other day, and the poor on ice commentator got a puck to the chest. Crazy that those spots don’t have any protection. The argument between Shane and Ilya with the refs is similar to one that Sidney Crosby has with a Leafs Captain, I just found it funny because they’re arguing but also in the most polite way possible ([Crosby chirp](#)). I just use any excuse to reference Crosby, that’s my guy, we have a cosmic connection. A player accidentally grabbing the goalie stick in the middle of the game happened with Auston Matthews ([Auston Matthews Stick](#)). Also, Shane getting a stick stuck in his skate and getting dragged around happened to Holloway of the Blues (for some reason it’s impossible to find a video of this but I’ll link a similar [example](#)).

One of my favourite things to watch is clips of refs wrangling players. There’s a lot of general corralling, and it’s all very comparable to rounding up toddlers. Ilya getting yelled at by the ref

comes from a clip of Quinn Hughes who kept getting yelled at to get in the box when he tried to argue his penalty ([Hughes in the box](#)). It happens a lot. You can also be sure that Ilya's the kinda guy who is breaking his sticks in the box.

While he isn't explicitly referenced in this chapter, I wanna take this opportunity to shout out everyone's favourite ref, [Wes McCauley](#). Anytime Shane and Ilya talk to a ref, I try to emulate this guy. He's known for his very dramatic penalty announcements, and being a fun guy. I'm adding in a couple clips of him here, really what I want is to show the relationship that refs have with players. It's really a lot more like your high school teacher that you beef with but also joke with. Most of the time, the players and the refs all know each other and their names, it's a consistent relationship.



Chapter 6: Superstition

Chapter Summary

“What do you think about Karaoke?” Delly asked, sliding to a stop on Ilya’s left.

“What about it?”

“Do you like it?”

Ilya stopped what he was doing to look at the kid. “Who cares?”

Chapter Notes

Guys, what a crazy life I’m living. I’ve got two windows permanently open on my laptop. One is all my notes for my engineering classes, the other all my resources for writing this fic. I contain multitudes. Calculating that laminar flow and that hair flow.

Also, Hudson meeting MARK CARNEY? Connor hosting SNL? I could read an article saying they were shooting the Heated Rivalry guys into space and at this point I wouldn’t even blink.

P.S. if you think there are typos in Newf’s dialogue I can confirm there is not. That’s just authentic newfie speak baby. Here is an example:

[Newfie Accent](#)

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

As March came, the cold air finally began to drift away from Boston.

Ilya and Pava had resumed their morning runs. Ilya had thought it would be strange to run with a partner, having to change his pace, not listening to music, but Pava was actually a great workout partner. He was similar to Shane in that way, similar paces, similar stamina, just with Pava, there wasn’t the same layer of competitiveness. Sometimes they would chat as they ran, sometimes they listened to their own music, and sometimes they just ran in companionable silence.

Today they mostly ran in silence, listening to the hum of the street and the passersby as they ran through the park.

“*How was the other night?*” Pava asked, as they rounded the bend past the large chapel. Pava, for whatever reason, enjoyed going for runs in graveyards. Ilya had thought it was weird, but had decided to give it a go since there was a nice park right next to the Bears’ practice facility. It was nice. Pava said he liked to read the names on the graves as they ran, he said that this way, they would always have visitors.

“*It was good,*” Ilya replied, not giving himself any opportunity to slip up. “*How was Siggi?*”

Pava frowned. *"Eh. His house is small. And his girlfriend is loud. I was...what is it they say? When you are the number three?"*

"Third wheel?" Ilya offered.

"Yes. Third wheel."

Ilya frowned. *"I'm sorry, I don't mean to kick you out but, I really needed the house."*

Pava made a face. *"It's okay. I don't want to be in your way."*

"Hey," Ilya said, bumping his shoulder into the rookie's as an attempt to be sincere. "You are not in my way. It's just...it is very complicated. If there is a next time, we'll figure something out. Maybe we can go somewhere, or I'll bully Cliff into giving up a room and I'll make sure he doesn't bring back any girls."

It was most likely going to be the latter. He knew Shane did not want to get another hotel, and Ilya liked having his boyfriend in his house. Besides, if Shane was going to be back in Boston at all this season, it would be because they're seeded together in the playoffs.

"Okay," Pava replied. He was wearing a stupid looking headband to keep his shaggy hair out of his eyes. "Is it your girlfriend? The one from Montreal? Is it a secret?"

Ilya shook his head. "Malysh..."

"I could meet her? I would be polite. You can trust me. I won't be weird."

Ilya sighed. Well, fuck, he didn't want Pava to think he didn't trust him. But, honestly? Ilya didn't trust him. And that wasn't the kid's fault. How could he? He had only known him for a couple months, and he just couldn't risk putting something this big on him. Not when he had no clue how he would react. He hadn't even told Svetlana yet, or Cliff.

But now it was obvious that Pava thought that Ilya was kicking him out for a girl. It would be easy to go along with it, but Ilya hated the idea of so directly lying to him like that.

Maybe he should start putting out feelers for the kid. Was it weird to get him to watch Brokeback Mountain? Maybe something more lowkey would be better. What was that one Shane liked? With the cheerleaders?

"Maybe." Ilya replied. "We will see. It's complicated."

* * *

The game against San Jose was their last game before their final road trip of the season.

San Jose was doing well enough this season, becoming a serious contender for a wildcard spot, if not a regular spot. They had a lot more to lose than the Bears, who were comfortably nested at the top of their division. But Ilya wasn't letting his team relax just yet, there was still time to get knocked down.

He liked playing the Sharks, the team was young, and the guys were nice. He certainly didn't have to worry about any bad vibes on the ice like he did when they played Florida or Toronto. It was just good, genuine hockey, and it was fun.

Even though the game against Montreal ended poorly, Coach had continued the Pava—Ilya—Cliff line for the next few games, which had consistently been working out for the better, and had thus made it onto the regular lineup. Ilya was excited for Pava, he was performing well, making a name for himself. At this point, Ilya could see him being in talks for a Rookie of the Year nomination. He would have competition for sure, the first overall this year was making a lot of noise, as well as an AHL callup that had had some time to cook, but Ilya wouldn't count him out.

He had even started spending some extra time with the kid after practice to work on some of his weaker areas. He wasn't as fast as some guys, but his stick handling was getting more and more impressive, and he was very proud of how far his one timers had come.

Delly skated a loop around Ilya as they began to wrap up warmups. Ilya was completing his regular stick handling drills he always ended with, which included tracing the Dunkin logo painted into the ice with the puck.

"What do you think about Karaoke?" Delly asked, sliding to a stop on Ilya's left.

"What about it?"

"Do you like it?"

Ilya stopped what he was doing to look at the kid. "Who cares?"

Delly shrugged, undeterred. "I was thinking about how we always go to a club or a bar or whatever after a win. Maybe we could switch it up? We could go to a Karaoke room. Team bonding."

"What are we? Mighty Ducks? We are going to win with power of friendship?"

"It'll be fun!" He gasped dramatically, a verbal indicator of his eureka moment. "You could sing Rasputin!"

Ilya threw his hands up. "It is like I am a walking sign that says 'Russia' instead of 'very tall sexy man.' What if I wanted to sing Katy Perry?"

"So you *do* want to go to karaoke?"

"No."

Pava slid up in front of Ilya, carrying a puck with him in the cradle of his stick. "Can I?" he asked.

Two games ago, Pava had accidentally shot the puck wide during warmups and sent it straight through Ilya's legs. That game, he scored a goal. The next game, he repeated the same warmup routine, including shooting the puck at Ilya's legs, and scored a goal that game as well. Now, he was going for number three.

Ilya warned the kid that committing to superstitions was a slippery slope, but he was a bit of a hypocrite. Ilya wasn't as crazy as some, but his warmup routine was sacred.

"Sure," Ilya replied, widening his stance to give Pava a straight shot. "Please keep it low."

* * *

Ilya leant over the bench to get his high five from Newf as he skated by, sinking the first goal of the game. The arena was more alive than normal tonight, it was like the fans could tell that they were

having fun.

And Ilya was having fun. A couple of weeks ago, he had gone semi-viral in a press conference with Pava and Newf. While he was in the middle of answering a very boring question about what the Bears needed to do to secure a playoff spot, his phone started ringing. This wouldn't have been a big deal, except for the fact that Cliff had decided to prank him by changing his ringtone to "Rasputin" by Boney M.

This of course resulted in Newf keeling over in laughter, Pava looking very confused as to what was so funny, and the press room being thrust into chaos for several minutes. Since that day, many fans had taken to referencing it in their signs, most frequently by proclaiming Ilya "Russia's Greatest Love Machine."

Ilya thought it was funny. He smiled every time he saw one of the signs in the crowd. He even made Pava snap a few pictures of him with the signs so he could post them to his Instagram. Shane hated it, or, he pretended to hate it. Ilya was pretty sure he was jealous.

"Yes Newf!" Ilya whooped, plunking himself back down on the bench. Newf had started up a point streak in the past couple of games, and they were hoping to hold it until the end of the regulation season.

Ilya shuffled down the bench as the second line came on and the third replaced them.

"It was a beauty Newf! I could kiss you on the mouth" Ilya shouted from across the bench.

"Cam down now b'y, don't tempt me wit a good time," Newf called back.

"Jesus fuckin' Christ bud I've never seen you skate like that before," Cliff added, "was there a bottle of whisky on the goal or what?"

"Just ya' mudder's phone number."

"Fuck off."

Pava seemed to be very intently watching the game. Or Ilya thought he was, until he leant over to speak.

"What are we having for dinner tonight?"

Ilya laughed. *"Kelcie meal prepped for us. I think it's stir fry."*

"I hope so, I like the peanut sauce she makes."

Not that Ilya would ever admit it to Shane, but he was glad he got the personal chef. It turns out that eating real nutritionist approved food made him feel and perform better. Who knew?

Ilya's line was back on the ice, receiving the puck from St-Simon in the defensive zone. They sped off towards the Sharks' net, but were quickly thwarted by a show of force by their own defense. Ilya quickly got rid of the puck, passing it off to Marleau.

They had finally found a good rhythm with the combination, and it had Ilya hopeful for playoffs. Of course, anything could happen, it was just last year that his own bruised ribs had been their downfall against the Admirals.

Their passes turned into a game of keepaway, keeping the biscuit out of the hands of the Sharks until they could manage a shot on goal. Ilya was the one to finally shoot, but it was deflected by the goalie's shoulder pad and flew off towards Cliff, who went for the rebound. Unfortunately, this was intercepted by a Sharks defender, who sent the puck back up to one of the forwards.

Ilya raced off to the defensive zone, Pava close behind him. It was now their turn to race after the puck. San Jose's center made a shot on the goal, which hit the post, flying off to the boards. Pava bolted forward, joining Nowak, the Sharks' right wing at the boards as they fought for possession. The next thing Ilya saw was a stick go flying, Pava twisting and ducking his head, and the puck sliding towards center ice.

The ref quickly blew the whistle, already skating up to Pava. Ilya saw blood dripping onto the ice.

"Pava! You okay?" Ilya called, shoving Nowak out of the way from where he was hovering by his rookie. "He get a stick to the face?" He asked the ref.

Mike the ref was one of the nicer ones around. He never held it against Ilya when he yelled at him. "It was an accident," he said, nodding. "Slipped off the boards."

Ilya crouched a bit to try and get a better look at Pava. He was still on his feet, which was good, and hopefully meant no concussion.

"Let me have a look, kid," Ilya said, tapping Pava on the chin and gesturing for him to lift his head. Pava straightened up, his helmet hanging halfway off his head. A collective "oooh" echoed through the small crowd gathered around him as he showed his face.

His mouth was full of blood, and there was an impossible to ignore gap where his front teeth were supposed to be. The ref passed over a gatorade branded towel as Pava went to spit out a mouthful of blood on the ice.

"Is it very bad?" he asked Ilya, looking like an extra from the Walking Dead.

"Well, you won't be eating any apples for a while."

"But I love apples."

Ilya bent down towards the ice, where three of Pava's teeth now lay scattered at their feet. One by one he picked them up.

"Jeepers," Pava said once he recognized what they were.

"Is that your first time losin' your chicklets kid?" Mike asked.

Pava seemed to be too focused on his disembodied teeth to answer, or maybe he didn't quite understand Mike between the noise of the crowd, the Boston accent, and his already limited English. Ilya nodded in his place.

Ilya, with his hand that wasn't full of loose teeth, gripped onto Pava's shoulder and helped Mike lead him to the bench. He passed the teeth to the team dentist, who was already waiting at the boards.

Ilya couldn't go with him, he needed to stay on his line. He could only hope that Pava had enough English to get by, or could otherwise survive off of google translate.

Ilya watched as Nowak was dealt four minutes for high sticking. Ilya couldn't be too annoyed, the kid looked like he felt really bad about it. Besides, it wasn't the end of the world, losing teeth was a rite of passage, Ilya himself had more hardware in his mouth than real pearly whites.

Pava was back on the bench before the end of the second period, his mouth stuffed with cotton and a numbing shot generously doled out. The team whooped as he rejoined the game.

"Okay?" Ilya asked.

"I think the numbing shot hurt more than the stick to the face," he replied. Or, Ilya was 80% sure that's what he said. He was significantly harder to understand with the missing teeth and the cotton between his lips.

Ilya laughed. *"You're right about that. We'll have to take you out, get you a flipper."*

"My mama is going to be so mad. I had braces twice when I was little."

"Don't worry, we'll take care of your pretty face."

* * *

"You look good, kid!" Cliff exclaimed, patting Pava as he walked through the aisle of the Bears' plane.

Three days after the game against San Jose, Pava had received his new teeth just in time for their flight to Denver. From there, they'd be off to Minneapolis, then to Montreal to end off the season.

Pava held his mouth in a way that was probably supposed to resemble a smile, but it was just a bit awkward.

"It feels weird. Like gloves for my mouth," he had told Ilya.

"You don't need to wear it," Ilya offered. *"Lots of players show them off."*

Pava had frowned at that. *"I have a lisp without it. I don't want to make my English any worse."*

Ilya followed close behind through the aisle, the two having arrived together.

"He is very handsome, yes? He gets it from me."

Ilya plunked himself down in one of the seats in a row of two. The set of four seats with the table was reserved for the MarioKart tournament they ran whenever there was a substantial flight. Ilya wasn't so sure if he'd play tonight, he was over it. It absolutely had nothing to do with the last time they played, when he was hit by a blue shell just before the finish line and almost had a full blown meltdown.

They were leaving later in the day than they usually did, but since they were heading west, they wouldn't actually be arriving all that late. Still, Ilya was exhausted, he had been up in the early morning to get Pava to his dentist appointment, and then it was straight to afternoon practice, then it was back to the dentist for a final fitting before they had to board their flight.

Maybe it wasn't the smartest thing to screw up his sleep or whatever, but Ilya was ready to pass out. He had crossed his arms, getting ready to settle into a comfortable position, when he noticed Pava hovering over him.

“What?”

“Can I sit?”

“You do not need to ask every time. Yes, sit, there are only so many seats.”

Pava plunked himself down in the aisle seat, stretching out his extremely long legs. Thank god for charter jets. Pava had purchased a Bears branded neck pillow for all their plane rides. Ilya actually couldn't believe how much sleep this kid got, he was like a long Russian cat. Ilya wasn't so sure what the point of the neck pillow was, considering halfway through his nap he always ended up leaning on the person next to him. That was usually Ilya, but on occasion Siggi or Cliff would be victimized.

Just when Ilya was finally getting ready to lay back and drift to sleep, Delly popped his head over the seat in front of them.

“If I tried to convince the team to go to Karaoke after our next win will you guys back me up?”

Ilya opened one eye, staring a laser into the kid's skull. “I am sleeping,” he replied.

“Karaoke,” Pava said. “I know this one.”

Ilya sighed. “Look, kid, the day you get a hat trick, I will go to your karaoke and sing most beautiful ballad you have ever heard. Okay?”

Delly narrowed his eyes, but looked thoughtful. “Hm.”

He turned back around, likely to go bother someone else.

“What song will you sing?” Pava asked.

Ilya turned to rest his head on the plane window, keeping his eyes shut as he replied. *“I won't be singing shit. The kid hasn't scored ten goals all season.”*

With that, he shut off any opportunity for conversation, letting sleep overtake him.

* * *

Hayden Pike had acquired a superstition.

He had prided himself on not being one of those ritualistic players. He had heard some crazy stories. Eating the same meal before every game, going no contact, keeping the garage door open. He thought it was stupid.

This was hardly a superstition. If anything, it was a family bonding activity.

The last few days before his home games, he had made a stop at Tim Hortons to buy his kids a 20 pack of Timbits. The first time it was because they begged him to, the next time they had tried to convince him it was the only reason the Voyageurs had won, and so he humoured them. But then, they kept winning.

They were about to play Boston. He couldn't let his vendetta against superstitions be the reason they lost against Boston. Even just subconsciously. So, here he was, waiting in line at a Tim Hortons before the game tonight. Jackie, Ruby, and Jade were all attending the game, with the little ones being watched by his mom, so they'd be extra disappointed if he didn't follow through.

Hayden craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the selection through the display case. He hoped they were well glazed, Ruby hated it when there was hardly any glaze. He couldn't blame her, so did he.

The man in front of him was tall, obscuring his view. Despite the large size of the man, he was nonetheless dwarfed by his massive black hoodie. Hayden blinked, something catching his eye.

That wasn't just any hoodie, it was a Boston Bears hoodie, and the man wearing it was a Boston Bear.

Hayden knew that guy, but for the life of him he couldn't remember his name. It was something obscenely long. He shouldn't engage, right? That would be weird. If it was the Bears goalie or something, he wouldn't engage. But he had actually spoken to this kid, not that long ago, and it seemed like Shane kinda knew him. It would be rude not to. Jackie would say he was rude.

He reached his hand up to lightly tap the kid on the arm. He jumped a bit, before turning to look back at Hayden. At least he seemed to recognize him.

"Hey, sorry, I think we met at the Winter Classic? At the dinner?" Wow, Hayden really was a dick for not remembering this guy's name.

The kid nodded, his voice low and his accent thick. "Yes, Pike. You are Shane Hollander's friend."

Hayden blinked. He was used to being referred to in relation to Shane, but it felt weird coming from another player. He guessed it made some sense, word had made it around that Rozanov had a rookie living with him. It had been a shock honestly, Hayden couldn't imagine why they'd put any kid with him. They might as well move the rookie straight into a club.

"Yeah, that's me," Hayden replied. "Getting your fix before the game tonight? I didn't realize that a Tims run was vital for the non-Canadians as well," he joked.

The kid frowned, his eyebrows knitting together. "Sorry, English is new. I like the donuts."

Ah, fuck, now Hayden was talking too quickly at the guy who barely spoke English. Rozanov's "do you hate immigrants" comment had really been getting to his head. He loved immigrants! Yay immigration. Jackie's mom was an immigrant.

"Nice," Hayden replied, attempting to talk slower. "I like to get timbits for Ruby and Jade, it's become a ritual."

"Rock collection?"

It took Hayden a moment to realize what he was saying. "Oh, no, Ruby and Jade are my daughters."

"Ah."

Hayden wondered if his regret for starting this conversation was showing on his face. But the line was not moving, and it was too late to turn back.

"How are you enjoying the team? It's your first year, right?"

"Eh, yes, is good. Is fun."

"I heard you're living with Rozanov, how's that going?" Was Hayden getting too personal? He didn't know what else to ask.

“Is good,” he replied. “House is big. Many snacks. He has a lot of ginger ale, but...never drinks.”

Hayden paused. Ginger ale? Hayden knew exactly one person who drank ginger ale, and that person was Shane Hollander. What kind of coincidence was it that Ilya Rozanov also liked it?

Huh. Maybe ginger ale was more popular than he thought.

“That’s good,” Hayden replied. The line finally started to move, and the teller gestured for the kid to come up to the counter. “I’ll see you tonight,” he said.

The kid replied with a polite nod before going up to order an obscene amount of maple donuts. Hayden checked his watch, he had to be going soon if he was going to get to the rink at a reasonable time. Jackie had asked him to invite Shane out for dinner with them and the girls after the game, but Hayden knew the answer would be no. Shane never liked going out after Boston games anymore.

Maybe he would be hanging out with his new friend Ilya Rozanov. Hayden wasn’t jealous. He wasn’t! He got to see Shane way more than Rozanov ever did. Shane was his best man at his wedding. Take that!

When Hayden finally got up to the counter, he realized that they didn’t have any timbits ready at this location. Fuck. He definitely didn’t have time to go to another spot. His girls would just have to go without them tonight.

That night, Montreal lost to Boston.

Chapter End Notes

Just some hockey fun facts here.

Hockey of course lives up to the stereotype that a lot of teeth go missing. In the book, it’s stated that Ilya’s teeth are unusually white since so many of them are fake. In the NHL, a lot of players won’t get their teeth repaired as it’s a bit of a status symbol to show they’re missing. Or, they’ll get bridges or flippers (retainers) as more temporary fixes while they’re still playing so that the repairs don’t get rebroken. Teams actually have on-site dentists. In the case of missing teeth, it’s usually not enough to get them off the ice unless there’s a jaw injury or concussion, so they’ll just get numbing shots before heading back on the ice. The dentists are also able to get false teeth much quicker than is normal for your average guy, they can be fitting for flippers the same day.

Inspired to include the Sharks in this chapter after watching the Sharks v Oilers game. Now the Oilers are my team, but I have serious respect for the Sharks, and I like Macklin. Also, this game was crazy bonkers, the Sharks scored 3 times in the first, and then the Oilers didn’t score until the end of the third, when they tied the game with a minute left in regulation. AND THEN they won in overtime. Goal from my man Hyman. The commentators also had me dying talking about Hyman’s goal. Earlier they had referred to the crease as “The Hyman Zone” and then later remarked that when he scored they had “never seen him score from that far away from the net.” Please let my man rest. He lives in the blue. Anyways the point is the Oilers make all their strategic choices specifically based on what will raise my blood pressure the most.

The MarioKart Tourney on the plane is something the Edmonton Oilers do, though there is a specific group that plays poker instead. It’s an established fact in The Long Game that Ilya is a

MarioKart fiend, so you know I had to include it.

Lots of players are known for their superstitions, but one of the big ones is Sidney Crosby. Just to name a few: he reties his skates at exactly 5 minutes before the game starts, he doesn't talk to his family on game days, he eats the same PB&J before games, he wears the same hat for every post game media interview each season, and he retapes his stick if anyone else touches it. I also read in an interview that one of his teammates told him after they had won a game that he had accidentally left his garage door open, and Crosby tried to convince him to keep it open for the next game so they'd win. One other thing Crosby does is trace the outline of the McDonalds logo on the ice whenever he plays in Pittsburgh, which is where I got the idea for Ilya.



Chapter 7: Tuesday

Chapter Summary

“Why are there so many Scooby-Doo DVDs?” Shane asked, sorting through the pile below the TV.

“Ah, yes, I did not mention. Pava has a thing about Scooby-Doo, helps with his English.”

“Huh. I always loved Scooby-Doo as a kid. Velma was my favourite.”

“Hollander, you are most predictable person I have ever met.”

Chapter Notes

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

“Did you make a bet with some kid on your team to sing Karaoke if he scores a goal?” Shane asked as he walked through Ilya’s front door. “They’re talking about it in the Voyageurs chat.”

“Ah, no,” Ilya replied. “Only if he gets hat trick. I am not stupid, this he will never do. He is not good.”

Shane rolled his eyes, dropping his bag on the floor and heading straight to Ilya’s fridge to grab a ginger ale. “Apparently he’s started a twitter hashtag so you can’t take it back.”

Ilya’d had to kick Pava out again. He felt a bit bad about it, but he also knew that this was going to be the last time in a while. Boston had placed second in the Atlantic, and Montreal third, which meant they were seeded together in the first round of the playoffs, starting with two games in Boston. Shane was adamant that the playoffs meant no sex, but it technically wasn’t playoffs yet. They had one full day of rest before they played game one, and Ilya had every intention of using that day to its full potential.

“I just need one day,” Ilya promised. “Just give me the day with the house, and then the rest of the post season I will not ask anything of you. I swear.”

Pava had made a face, but didn’t protest. *“I will not stay with Siggi again. His house smells like tomato sauce.”*

“Go wherever you want, do whatever you want, I just do not want to see you at the house on Monday, yes? I will pay for a spa day if you need.”

“It’s okay. I will go see Delly. He wants to go to this restaurant where they cut meat off a stick.”

Ilya appreciated that Pava seemed to get what Ilya was asking, he supposed the assumption of a girlfriend made it easier. He was worried he’d take it personally, but he more so just complained about his lack of access to Ilya’s DVD player. As if Ilya owned the only DVD player in Boston.

“Does your rookie drink ginger ale or something?” Shane asked. “There’s so much of it in the fridge.”

Ilya ignored him, electing instead to move up behind his boyfriend and wrap his arms around his waist.

“Is unfair, Hollander. You come to my home and seduce me and then confuse me by asking me questions. I can only think of one thing at a time. And right now it is your hot ass.”

“Fuck off,” Shane laughed, but he spun around and draped his arms across Ilya’s shoulder. “Well, you better get it out of your system, because tomorrow, I might not be so sweet on the ice.”

“See, if anything, this makes me even more determined to chase you down. After all, I am so good at pressing you against walls.”

“And you’re so good at getting boarding penalties.”

“I cannot help it! I need to be near you, Hollander! Maybe I will ask Marly to start a fight just so I can put my arm around you.”

Ilya had been more lovey dovey than normal ever since he had told Svetlana about Shane. He had cornered her in her office located in one of the upper floors of the practice arena. She was taking a bite of her burrito.

“Sveta. I am bisexual, and I am in love with and dating Shane Hollander.”

She coughed, a bit of rice spewing across the table. *“Sorry?”*

Honestly, Ilya had thought Sveta had mostly known. She knew about the bisexuality, she knew that Jane was a man, she knew he was always busy whenever Montreal visited.

“I thought you knew! You kept talking about how hot he was!”

“Because he is hot!” She replied, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Well, I know that. I’ve seen it up close.”

She set her burrito down, which was not an invitation for Ilya to reach over and take a bite, but he did it anyway. *“How long?”* She asked.

He made a face.

“Ilyushenka.”

“Rookie season.”

“Rookie season?”

“Summer before, technically.”

She sat back in her chair. *“I am impressed. Was Jane really the best you could come up with?”*

“It worked on you, didn’t it?”

Since that day, Ilya suddenly had a go to person to gossip with about all things Shane. He had given her a full rundown of their relationship timeline, when they became official, when they went to the cottage, what the deal was with Rose Landry, even the temporary Ottawa plan. She looked incredibly

relieved that he had given up on that. Ilya wasn't sure she'd be able to stay his friend if he moved to a team that was that bad, willingly.

Now, she had taken to sending Ilya every Shane Hollander thirst edit that came across her desk, which was never in short supply. She seemed to have a lot of extra time on her hands since dumping her boyfriend.

Later, when Shane had finally dragged Ilya out of bed, insisting they couldn't stay there all day (no matter how hard Ilya tried), they found themselves in the gym.

"Hollander, they call this rest day for a reason. We are supposed to rest," Ilya sulked.

"Just something light," Shane insisted. "You said you wanted to try yoga with me."

"No, I said I would like to watch you do yoga. Important difference."

"Please? Just a half hour, then we can do what you want."

"Whatever I want?"

"Jesus Christ, do you ever think about anything else?"

Ilya gasped. "Hollander. I am talking about watching a film. Gosh, so inappropriate, is like you only view me as sex object. Wow."

Shane laughed, shutting Ilya up with a kiss so hard it was almost bruising.

* * *

"Why are there so many Scooby-Doo DVDs?" Shane asked, sorting through the pile below the TV.

"Ah, yes, I did not mention. Pava has a thing about Scooby-Doo, helps with his English."

"Huh. I always loved Scooby-Doo as a kid. Velma was my favourite."

"Hollander, you are most predictable person I have ever met."

"Shut up. I'm putting this one on, it used to give me nightmares as a kid."

He put in the DVD for *Scooby Doo: Zombie Island* before rejoining Ilya on the couch, who had poured out the pieces of a new puzzle on the coffee table.

"I will have to send a picture to David when it is done," Ilya said. "He will be so jealous. This one is Jane Austen theme."

Shane smiled, resting his head in his hand as Ilya started. He wasn't very good at puzzles, and he was always worrying he was getting in the way of Ilya's system, but he liked to watch him work.

"You know, you surprise me how you can be so much like a child and an old man all at once."

Ilya made a face that showed he was truly offended by this. "Hey! What does this mean?"

"You eat like a child and dress like a child, but yet you also sit here and puzzle like an old man. And you keep sending me pictures of birds in your yard."

“Hey, you should be very lucky to know that in 50 years you get to be in love with old man like me. I will not be old man that tries to jump out of planes to feel young again. And you will be old man that starts gardening. You will add a bird bath so I get to see more of my birds. Perfect pair.”

Shane smiled, reaching out to separate a corner piece he noticed. “You’re such a sap.”

“Yes, much sap, they should give Canadian Citizenship for this.”

“I can’t believe I’m in love with a US Green Card holder.”

“Not yet, maybe by this summer. Government moves like Hayden Pike. Very slow.”

* * *

Pava was not at Delly’s house.

They had gone out for lunch earlier that day, but he didn’t go with him back to his house. In fact, he never even mentioned to Delly that he was looking for somewhere to stay for the day.

He went to Margaret’s instead. She had said he was welcome any time.

He sat hunched over her dining room table, eating his bowl of clam chowder. “This is good.” He said. “What is word? Milky?”

“Creamy?” Margaret offered.

“Yes. Thank you.”

He liked hanging out with Margaret. She was patient with him, helping with his English. Her kids were in University, and she was divorced, so she had a lot of time on her hands. She had a lot of good stories. Apparently her ex-husband, Paul, once got in a fist fight with Mark Messier back in the day. Paul also used to be an investment man, but after he and Margaret got divorced and he came out, he decided to open a flower shop. Now, he and Margaret still get breakfast once a week.

Pava wasn’t quite sure what it was he came out of. He’d been meaning to ask.

Now that Margaret was living alone, she had a lot of time on her hands. Every time Pava saw her, she was always dressed up. She wore a lot of purple, and always had her hair dyed to an orangey-red colour. She seemed to divide all her time since retirement either doing her hair, or gossiping about anything and everything.

“I’ve been researching a clover lawn. Paul says they’re much easier to take care of, and use much less water. I used to walk in the climate parades, you know? In the seventies. Anyway, Donna, she lives at the house with the ugly gnomes on the front lawn, she tries telling me that it’s against HOA violations, and if I do it, they’ll fine me.” Margaret scoffed. “As if she’s queen of the HOA? Sounds like a power trip if you ask me.”

Pava hummed in agreement, cleaning up the last of his bowl as Margaret began to deal out cards. She was teaching him to play crib. Even though his spoken English was still quite weak, spending so much time around English speakers on the team had given him a pretty decent grasp of understanding conversation. Margaret, however, tended to push his limits. She used a lot of new words.

“So,” she said, placing down her first card, “how is your hockey going?”

Margaret didn't know a ton about hockey. As a lifelong Boston resident, she obviously knew the basics, and her ex-husband used to be a fan back in the day, but she was not at all up to date. Pava liked it that way.

"Is okay," Pava replied. "The guys trying teach me how to 'chirp.' I am not good, I cannot think of English fast."

"Chirping, that's like trash talk, right?"

Pava nodded.

"Well, we could practice? Then you don't have to think of it in the moment."

Pava looked skeptical. "Like how?"

"Like...imagine I just checked you into the boards. What do you say?"

Pava paused. "Eh, you are very bad at hockey. You should become baker."

Margaret made a face, considering. "Okay, maybe try saying something like 'hey, my grandma can skate better than you!'" Margaret looked proud of herself at that one.

Pava looked confused. "Yes, my grandmother Soviet ice dancer. Very good skater."

"Well there you go. It's a burn, and it's true."

Pava started putting together points from his hand. Margaret would point out anything he missed. He was still learning.

"So, what has you spending so much time with an old lady like me? Shouldn't you be out partying? Whatever it is young folks do?"

"I do not like party," Pava said. "Alcohol make my stomach sad."

"Ah. Paul was the same way. One drink and—" she snapped her fingers, "out like a light. But you have a playoff game tomorrow, right? Shouldn't you be getting some sleep?"

"I will. But I can not be at home today."

"Why?"

Pava shrugged. "I think that Ilya has girl at house."

"Ah," Margaret replied, leaning back in her chair. "He needs you out for the whole day just for a girl?"

"I understand, he do not see her much."

"Hm. Was she here back in February?"

Pava's eyebrows drew together. "Yes. Why?"

"I remember seeing a car pull into his gate. I remembered because I'd never seen such a boring car by his house before. Well, boring for him."

“Oh.”

“But it was very nice. Fancy,” Margaret gasped, and Pava could tell she had entered full theorizing mode. “Oh my god, what if she’s famous? It’s not a long shot, isn’t that player from Montreal dating Rose Landry?”

“I do not know who this is.”

“But it would explain why it’s kept a secret. Maybe it would be controversial. Forbidden love.”

“Controversial?”

“Like, people would have an issue with it.”

Pava frowned. “But I do not know why he would not tell this.”

“Maybe it’s new. What else do you know about her?”

Pava thought for a second. He didn’t really know anything, Ilya wouldn’t even admit that there was a her. “She is drinking a lot of ginger drink.”

“Oh.” Margaret moved her peg in the crib board. She was beating him by a lot, she never went easy on him. “Would you like some more tea?”

“Yes. Please.”

Margaret went up to retrieve the teapot from the kitchen. Pava liked Margaret’s house. It was big, like all the houses in the area, but it was older, and filled with old wooden mismatched furniture. She had the radio on in the background with oldies playing.

“Well, you can always come here, of course. But maybe he’ll tell you what’s up. Maybe he’s just nervous.”

“I do not think he is nervous ever.”

Margaret shrugged. “You’d be surprised. Isn’t he the one that’s a big ladies man?”

“Cliff Marleau says not anymore.”

“Well there you go. Maybe this is serious, and it’s new territory for him. It’s not about trusting you, it’s about trusting himself.”

Pava took another sip of his tea. Margaret was probably right. He had heard some of the other Bears joke a lot about how Ilya used to be, always flirting, always picking up women. Pava didn’t recognize that as Ilya at all. Of course, he was still a big flirt, and he always talked himself up, but there wasn’t a lot of follow through.

Maybe it was harder for Pava to understand his hesitance because he had never known Ilya any other way. He didn’t think of Ilya as nervous, if anything, he was the most sure person he’d ever met. He was a rock. Pava might’ve been a sponge in comparison.

Pava set down his tea. It was in a mug that was shaped like a duck.

“Any dessert, sweetheart?” Margaret asked.

“No, is okay.” He paused. “Do you have Australia biscuit again?”

Margaret smiled, getting back up from her chair.

* * *

“When we move on to the next round of the playoffs, you should come to Montreal. Stay with me, maybe come to a game.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows as he stirred the ground beef around the pan. “I see, you make me feel warm and fuzzy by saying you want to see me, but you think I will not notice you saying you will beat us.” Ilya tapped the side of his head. “Come on, Shane, I am much smarter than this.”

“Well, I know I can’t come stay with you if you guys win,” Shane said.

Ilya frowned. “I know. Maybe you could come to a game. Wear mask. Mr. Superspy.”

“Do you know what your rookie is doing for the summer?” Shane asked. “Is he staying here? Going back to Russia?”

Ilya shrugged, reaching around where Shane was sitting on the counter to grab some spices. “I have not asked. I think he will go back, he seems homesick. He talks about his mother a lot.”

Shane didn’t reply immediately, giving Ilya space to continue on if he wanted.

“He is from Ufa. Is further east. I have been there many times, big hockey town.” Ilya continued to stir, staring into the pan as he spoke. “I don’t think he has ever done anything except hockey.” He turned to look at Shane. “Like you.”

“Fuck off.”

Ilya smiled, shrugging as he turned off the stove. “He reminds me of you sometimes. He is very awkward. He thinks a lot about everything. Cannot read the room.”

Shane just rolled his eyes at that. “Now don’t go falling in love with him.”

“Ah, you do not have to worry about that Hollander, you have already used your magic on me, I cannot escape your clutches. They are very nice clutches.”

Shane grinned, replying with a soft, “I know.”

“He is also like me I think.” Ilya hoisted himself up on the counter opposite of where his boyfriend sat. It surprised Shane, he thought he might come closer. But instead he sat across from him, looking right at him as he spoke. “He is conscious of his English. Of his accent. He tries very hard. Like me if I was not so mean.”

Shane kicked out his foot so it tapped lightly on Ilya’s knee. “You aren’t mean.”

Ilya shrugged. “I can be.”

“No, it just seems like it sometimes. You’re not mean, I’d tell you if you were.”

Ilya looked up from where his head was dipped to see Shane looking at him, so damn sincere.

“It’s like me. People always think I’m a prick because I sound rude or self centered, but I’m just bad at reading people sometimes. It’s an accident. You tell me I’m not a jerk, I just read things differently. It’s the same with you.”

Ilya crossed his arms, letting a smile cross his face. “Wow. I don’t think you have ever been so nice to me unprompted.”

“So what I’ve been doing to you in your bed for the past two hours didn’t count as nice?”

“Ah, but that was prompted. I prompted it by being very sexy.”

* * *

It was dark outside.

Shane was laying with his head in Ilya’s lap on the couch, his boyfriend’s hands running through his hair. He wasn’t paying attention to the TV, Ilya had put on something he wasn’t familiar with. Something with a teenage girl who was very annoying about going to Harvard. He was looking above him at the sharp angles of Ilya’s face shadowed by the soft lighting of the living room.

“Are you coming straight out to the cottage after the playoffs?” Shane asked.

Ilya tipped his head to the side. “We will see. If I go to awards, then no. I will wait until after.”

“Do you think you’re being nominated?”

Even though awards were unaffected by the playoffs, the nominations weren’t announced until around the second round of playoffs. In Ilya’s opinion, it was terrible timing. Neither of them had won the scoring races this year, so they were out for the Art Ross and Rocket Richard. Lady Byng was obviously a no go for Ilya. But there were always the little ones in there that they could get a vote for. Ilya honestly thought Shane might have a shot at the Hart this year. Ilya would bet his salary that Scott Hunter would be receiving the Bill Masterson.

“I hope not, I hate jumping through their hoops. I’m more thinking about Pava, if he is nominated, I think he will probably ask me to come. For translations.”

Shane smiled. “Right, translating. Not because he’s obsessed with you.”

“I do not know what you mean.”

He huffed, closing his eyes as he enjoyed the feeling of fingers running across his scalp. “Hayden thinks I’m gonna get the Hart nom. Or Ted Lindsey. But I don’t think I really did anything all that special this year.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows.

“Nothing special that was public at least.”

“Yes, well, I think Pike is correct.”

“Wow, can I get that on video?”

“Never. Besides, you just about dragged your team to the playoffs with your pinkie finger. You will get Hart nomination. But you will not win.”

“Hey!”

“I think Leung will win. Most points. Or maybe Doherty, they like giving it to a goalie every now and then.”

“You’re probably right. You think your rookie will get the nom?”

“I hope so. The kid deserves it. And I think it would be funny to see him do networking,” Ilya mused.

“Well,” Shane said, nestling further into Ilya’s lap. He was getting tired. He should probably sleep, tomorrow was a big day. “Maybe I’ll see you there.”

* * *

“Fuck,” Shane huffed, finally collapsing back down onto the mattress. “Did you put a hole in the fucking drywall?”

Ilya cackled. Shane turned to see his boyfriend slumped on his back next to him. Some of the dust from the plaster had settled onto his chest, clinging to the sheen of sweat. “Hollander, you sound like you smoke a pack a day.”

Shane coughed. Jesus Christ, he could not show up to the game tomorrow having shouted himself hoarse. He couldn’t blame it on a cold.

“You have to fix that!” Shane exclaimed. He propped himself up as well as he could on his exhausted limbs to view the damage. In all honesty, it started as Shane’s fault. He wasn’t paying attention to where he was grabbing, and ended up tearing a frame from the wall, dragging the mount straight through the plaster.

But Ilya’s the one that made it worse. He slipped and punched his hand through it, then used it as a grip.

“Ah, was worth it,” Ilya shrugged. “Will be great story for the grandchildren.”

“Please do not tell any children about anything that just happened in this room.”

Ilya huffed, finally hoisting himself up to have his obligatory post-sex shower. There was an Ilya shaped void left on the mattress haloed in a cloud of dust. Shane watched his boyfriend walk towards the bathroom, somehow looking sexy while also covered in sweat and debris.

Shane laid back to let himself recover for a few more minutes. He heard the telltale sound of the shower turning on. He should probably shower too, but he barely had the stamina to get up and get some water for his sore throat, let alone join Ilya in the bathroom.

Just one more minute and he’d get up. He cleared his throat, sounding a bit like an unloading gravel truck. Hayden was never gonna let him live this down, he was already so proud that he was the only one who knew about Boston Lily.

Shane finally hoisted himself up, slipping on his underwear before padding into the kitchen. He didn’t need to do it, but he felt weird walking around naked in a house with so many windows. Even in the cottage, in the emptiest part of Muskoka, he was always wearing something.

He opened the fridge, letting the cold air wash over him. His hand went immediately for one of the water bottles lined in the door, then stopped. He shifted, reaching for a can of ginger ale. The can was

cool against his skin. He closed the door, turning back to Ilya's room.

From across the room, Shane Hollander locked eyes with a man. A tall, shaggy haired, Russian man, with a 1000 yard stare.

Every bone in Shane's body froze as he felt his skin go cold. He felt like he could hear every sound in the room, every creak in the floor boards, every shift from the radiator, and yet he also felt deafened by the sound of his own ringing ears.

There was no explaining this away. Shane was standing in Ilya Rozanov's kitchen, in his underwear, having just concluded the loudest sex of his life. You'd have to be an idiot to not know what was going on, and according to Ilya, this kid was not an idiot.

"How long have you been standing there?" Shane asked after about thirty full seconds of staring at each other in silence. He wasn't sure how much more embarrassment he could take. He was sure his whole body was blushing, and his heart was beating out of his chest.

"Roz says do not be at home on Monday. It is Tuesday," Kosmodemyansky replied quietly. His eyes were still the size of saucers.

Shane turned to look at the clock on the stove behind him. It read 12:23. He slowly turned back to the rookie.

"Have you been here...for twenty minutes?"

The kid blinked. "Did not want to bother."

Oh god, Shane was going to throw up. This was so much worse than his dad finding out, even ignoring the fact that this kid had just heard very loud sex, and was now staring at Shane in his underwear, this was worse. This kid was Russian, Ilya had made it very clear that they couldn't risk telling him. Not only did he now know, but he was being slapped in the fucking face with it.

Shane heard the shower shut off. Neither of them spoke. They just stared, a fifteen foot gap between them.

"Shane?" Ilya's voice echoed through the house. Shane didn't reply. He gripped the ginger ale in his hands like a vice, his fingertips stinging from the cold.

He heard the light thumps of Ilya walking through the house, approaching the kitchen. He did not turn around to see him enter. He wasn't sure if he was capable of any more eye contact today.

"Shane?" Ilya repeated, before the sound of his footsteps halted as he stopped behind Shane.

"Pava," Ilya said. Shane wasn't sure what to make of his tone, it was something he hadn't heard in a long time. Maybe not since the Olympics. He started speaking in Russian, too quickly for Shane to catch much. He'd been trying to learn, but it was slow going. It was mostly "where is the bathroom?" not, "are you homophobic? Are you going to out me and the love of my life?" Maybe those came in the next unit.

Kosmodemyansky replied, his eyebrows were drawn together, having finally broken eye contact with Shane. He caught a few words. Something about Margaret, something about a house, Ilya kept calling him "kid." All Shane could do was bounce his eyes back and forth between the two men as they conversed. He didn't know what they were saying, but he could see the tension. Ilya was still wet,

wearing only a towel wrapped around his waist, and Shane could see his shoulders drawn up to his ears.

There was a lull in the conversation, the room enveloping into silence for a brief moment. Ilya broke it, his eyes staying locked on the kid. “Hollander, go put on clothes. Pava,” he pointed to the couch, “go sit down. Do not go anywhere.”

Shane set down his drink on the counter, turning to beeline back to Ilya’s room. He heard footsteps close behind him.

Shane reached for his shirt and sweats that were lying on the floor, hearing the door click shut behind him. The room was still a disaster, the hole in the wall seeming much less dire than it had a few minutes ago. Shane took a deep breath, steeling himself.

As freaked out as he was, this was not his turn to panic. Shane had had his time during his debacle with his parents, Ilya had been his rock. Now, it was Shane’s turn to be that for him.

He turned, now fully dressed, to finally look Ilya in the eye. His arms were crossed tight across his chest, his eyes darting back and forth like they always did when he was thinking.

“Ilya?”

Ilya lifted his hands to run his hands through his hair. “Fuck.”

Shane closed the gap between them and reached out to take Ilya’s hands in his. “Hey. What are you thinking right now?”

“Fuck,” he repeated. “I don’t know. I don’t know what I am supposed to say.”

“Well...” Shane started. “It’s not automatically bad, right? He’s your rookie, he’s a sweet kid. He worships you. He didn’t start yelling, things already could be much worse. We just, you gotta give him a chance. Don’t panic until he’s had a chance.”

Ilya huffed. “It must be bad if you are the rational one here, Hollander. Okay, we will go.”

Shane grabbed his boyfriend's arm before he could take off back out the door. “Ilya. Please put on pants.”

* * *

The scene in front of him reminded Ilya of a movie he had watched on the plane ride from Seattle to Calgary once.

Shane had recommended it. He called it an Oscar bait movie, which Ilya learnt meant that it was mostly people sitting around, talking, and crying. No crying was going on in the Rozanov household, but there was definitely an awkward recreation of a family therapy session.

Pava sat alone on the edge of the couch, looking impossibly small in his Scooby-Doo t-shirt. Shane sat across from him in an armchair, Ilya about three feet away on an ottoman. It was a triangle of despair.

“Pava,” Ilya started. “You were not supposed to come home today.”

The kid looked sheepish. “Is not today. Is tomorrow.”

Ilya gave him a look. The rookie started chewing on his thumbnail.

“So,” Ilya said, holding out his arms. “You know.”

“I am not knowing what I know.” The kid’s puppy dog eyes flashed to Shane, like he was begging to be saved from this conversation.

Ilya sighed. He had the posture of a man who had just run two marathons. “Me and Shane.” He said. “We are together.”

“Together?”

“Dating. Boyfriends. We are in love.”

“Oh.” Pava seemed to shrink in on himself even more.

Shane looked over at the kid, seeming like he was trying to gauge his expression. Pava was hard to read. He wasn’t meeting their eyes as he chewed on his nails like they were a five course meal.

Ilya sat back, giving Shane a look that was both stressed and exasperated. He wondered what Shane was thinking. He hardly knew this kid, he didn’t know what was normal for him. If this was his normal kind of shy, or if he had completely shut down. Ilya wasn’t totally sure himself.

“*Kid,*” Ilya tried. He felt bad switching to Russian when Shane couldn’t understand, but he really needed Pava to start talking. “*What are you thinking?*”

Pava didn’t speak for a long moment, then finally held out his hand, gesturing toward Shane. “*He drinks the ginger ale?*”

“*What?*”

“*Your fridge is filled with ginger ale. You don’t drink it.*”

Ilya was a bit baffled that this was his first line of questioning. He noticed Shane looking to Ilya for an explanation.

“He’s asking if you’re the one drinking all the ginger ale.”

“Oh,” Shane replied. “Wait, so all that ginger ale is actually just for me?”

“Do not worry about it.”

“Ilya. That’s too much ginger ale.”

Pava was back to chewing his nails, looking between the two of them. Ilya tried again. “*Okay, aside from the contents of my fridge, you are freaking out.*”

“*No I’m not.*”

“*You are eating your nails like they’re a pack of Oreos.*”

Pava took his fingers out of his mouth. “*I am sorry.*”

Ilya sighed. “*You don’t need to be sorry. Just talk to me.*”

Pava looked at the floor. *"I have never met gay people before. I do not know what to say."*

Ilya should have expected this. From what Ilya had gathered during their chats, Pava was a sheltered kid. He wasn't like Ilya, he wasn't out getting into trouble back home. All he did was play hockey and hang out with his mom. He probably grew up thinking Vlas and Enik were just roommates.

"We do not have magic powers, Pava. You say the same things you would normally say."

Pava nodded, taking this very seriously. Ilya had meant it as a joke to defuse the tension. Ilya leant over to relay to Shane the gist of their conversation in a low voice. He looked thoughtfully at the kid.

"I know we've only met a couple times," Shane started, slowly and articulately, "but I've heard a lot about you from Ilya. I hope we can be friends."

Ilya refrained from rolling his eyes. Jesus Christ Hollander, this wasn't My Little Pony. They weren't going to fix this with the power of friendship. "Hollander, you make it sound like I am obsessed with him or something."

"Well you were very worried about him at All-Stars."

"Was not. Was worried about my house. And my rug."

Shane turned back to Pava, seemingly remembering that this was actually a very serious conversation, and it was rude to bicker during serious conversations.

"Anyway," Shane said. "It's a secret. To everyone. It's not that we don't trust you." Shane looked warily towards his boyfriend. "We can trust you...right?"

Pava nodded. "Yes. I will not say."

Ilya cocked his head as he looked at the teenaged boy sitting across from him. He wasn't sure what he was meant to hope for. Pava was never going to start whipping out the pride flags, but he was obviously uncomfortable. Ilya just wasn't sure if it was because he was disgusted, awkward, or confused. Maybe it was all three.

"Kid?" Ilya asked. "Are we okay?"

Pava got to his feet, looking anywhere but at the two men in front of him. "I am very tired. I think I will sleep. I will see you tomorrow, Shane Hollander. Goodnight."

He shuffled off to his room, hand picked by Ilya to be as far away as possible from his own bedroom. Shane and Ilya watched as he slowly disappeared from sight, hearing the soft click of his door shutting before they were enveloped back in silence.

"Fuck," Ilya whispered.

Shane shifted to sit next to Ilya on the ottoman, wrapping his arm around Ilya's waist. "It's gonna be okay. He's not upset...he just needs time."

Ilya frowned. Shane didn't know that, he barely knew the kid. And Ilya...he had no idea what he was seeing. The thing was, Ilya really couldn't blame Pava. There were a million awful sentiments he might have grown up with back home, so much he hadn't been exposed to. Ilya tried to remember his first year in America. He remembered how daunting and scary it had been to even just wear rainbow tape on his stick for the first time for his team's pride night. The idea of even acknowledging that gay

people existed in public was a foreign concept. And mixing in the hockey of it all? This kid was set up for failure.

The fact that the kid hadn't started off yelling and calling him slurs, well, he was already miles ahead of half the guys he played with growing up. Ilya felt grateful for that.

"I just don't know what to do next," Ilya admitted. "We have to play a series now."

Shane sighed. "Yeah. But I don't think he's gonna tell anyone."

"No. I do not think he even knows the English if he wanted to."

Shane gave Ilya's shoulder a squeeze.

"I will talk to him, after the game," Ilya said. "Maybe if you are not there he will be more open."

Shane frowned. "Maybe." He stood, still letting his hand rest on the back of Ilya's neck. "I don't wanna leave you right now, but...I don't think I should stay."

Ilya shook his head, planting a kiss on Shane's forehead. "No, you should go back to hotel. I know you like your routine. I will be fine, I promise. We will talk tomorrow."

"Ya tebya lyublyu," Shane whispered, like he had been born saying it.

"I love you too," Ilya replied.

Ilya stood on the front porch as Shane pulled out of his driveway, watching him go for as long as he could until his rental dipped behind the treeline. The cool air caused goosebumps on Ilya's arm, but he didn't care.

Fuck. He needed a cigarette.

Chapter End Notes

Obviously, I referenced a gazillion different NHL awards here, but a quick rundown:

Hart: MVP, voted by committee

Ted Lindsey: MVP, voted by players

Lady Byng: sportsmanship

Art Ross: most points in a season

Rocket Richard: most goals in a season

Bill Masterson: "Awarded to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to hockey." Over the past few years, it's been awarded to people with personal struggles. Cancer diagnosis, mental illness struggles, death of a close friend.

Therefore I feel confident that Scott Hunter would be awarded this following his coming out the year prior (since nominations are made before the playoffs, it wouldn't have affected last year's awards).

Since Pava is forced to speak a good chunk of English in this chapter, I did some research trying to figure out what mistakes a native Russian speaker might make. I mostly consulted a Tumblr

post from @sisituation when writing this, but if anyone has any tips for how to improve, please let me know!

On a similar note, when writing for Ilya, even though he's been in the US long enough that he's probably got a firm grasp on English grammar, he still will on occasion speak a bit lazier (dropping articles) if he's tired, drinking, or just around people he's comfortable with.

As you may have noticed, I try not to do tons of internal discussion from characters. I really like the idea of being able to interpret what someone is thinking through their actions, particularly when I'm rotating around multiple points of view. Lots of people in the comments interpret things differently than how I meant them, and I love seeing how different things are read and understood. With Pava, I do have specific ideas of what exactly his thought process is, but, like for Shane and Ilya, it's not obvious from his actions and that is exacerbated by the language barrier. I much prefer getting to think and guess what a character is thinking, rather than having everything told to me, so I tried to achieve that here.

I also spent a lot of time researching and trying to grasp what kind of relationship someone from Russia might have in relation to the queer community. What I understood based on my conversations with my go to Russians is that there is generally a don't ask don't tell policy, though in larger cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, there is a lot more exposure and pockets of vibrant queer communities. A statistic I found shows that in Russia, as of 2021, 69% of Russians oppose same-sex relationships. 38% of Russians state that they feel disgust or fear towards homosexuals. However, it is possible that these numbers might be high out of fear of the government obtaining personal data around these answers. Again, I'm framing Pava here around what I've grasped from all my resources, but of course, depending on how and where you grow up in Russia, other people may have very different experiences.

The Australian cookies Pava mentions are TimTams. I love them so much.

I made a joke here about Vlas and Enik, who are the Russian equivalents to Bert and Ernie, from the show Ulitsa Sezam, the Russian coproduction of Sesame Street, which ran from 1996 to 2010.

Arustyspork on tumblr



^Pava locking eyes with Shane across the room

Chapter 8: Pigeons

Chapter Summary

“You fucking pigeon!” Ilya shouted, as the ref pulled him backwards by the hem of his jersey. “You sure you’re in the right place buddy? You take wrong turn on your way to the minors?” he said as his teammates finally took their hands off the Voyageur. Melnyk was seething.

“Rozanov, no calling guys pigeons,” the ref scolded as Ilya finally retreated back to the faceoff circle.

Chapter Notes

Watched the opening ceremonies for one reason and one alone: seeing my guy Draisaitl be the flag bearer for Germany. Haven’t seen that man this happy since he went on a joint honeymoon with McDavid. While we’re all here let’s all go physically fight the Olympics organizers that thought it was okay to use AI animation. My elbows are already up.

I also watched the USA v Canada game while working on this. THAT THIRD GOAL WAS TOTALLY INTERFERENCE.

Also, I made an update to Chapter 4. I realize I messed up the timeline and thought that it was 2019 at this point, so I went to correct it since it should be 2018. It’s still all based off the 2019 all star game (I like it better anyway). Nothing else was altered. I am just outrageous about trying to make everything correct.

Sorry this one took a bit longer. I’ve been trying to keep up with my chapters in advance, which is harder to do now that I actually have to do classwork. In the future, I will have more time to work on this because my Tuesdays are open now, it turns out the CEO of the trivia company who’s bar trivia I attend is going to prison so, those have been cancelled.

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

The drive to morning skate was dead silent.

Ilya kept willing himself to start a conversation, but then kept second guessing himself. Shane said Pava needed time, Ilya was giving time. How long was a normal amount of time between overhearing your captain fucking like bunnies with the captain of the Montreal Voyageurs, and having a real conversation about it? An hour? A day?

Ilya kept glancing over to Pava from the corner of his eye. The kid’s eyes were locked on his phone. He had been playing a lot of Hay Day recently.

Maybe if the drive to the practice rink had been longer, he might have had the time to psych himself up before they arrived. Curse his real estate agent for getting him such a prime location.

They spoke at practice, but exclusively to translate. Ilya sat next to him at video review, leaning in to speak lowly into Pava's ear and relaying everything their coach was saying. Was he leaning in closer than normal? Did he always lean too close? Was the kid uncomfortable?

God, Ilya was overthinking this. Was this what it was like to be Shane? Ilya was just about ready to pass out from the stress.

He tried to get a read on Pava. He really could not tell what he was thinking. He was more closed off than he had been, much more similar to how he had been that first month when he moved into Ilya's house. He was quieter, more careful. He probably appeared unchanged to his teammates, he had never been much of a talker with them, but he wasn't like that anymore. Ilya was his exception.

But Pava didn't seem to be looking at him differently. That had to be something, right?

"Do you feel okay?" Ilya asked on the drive back. "First playoff game."

Pava shrugged, his attention still mainly focused on his phone. He was feeding chickens. *"I don't know. I think I will know after I have played."*

"Right," Ilya replied simply. "I think you will do well."

When they arrived home, Pava went straight to his room for his pregame nap. This also wasn't abnormal for him, but Ilya was currently the top student at Shane Hollander's School of Overthinking Everything, so of course he read into it.

He sat at the island. He should probably try to nap too, he didn't get much sleep last night, which was definitely not an ideal way to start off a playoff run. None of this was an ideal start to anything, other than giving him high blood pressure. Besides, if he went to his room to go nap, he'd probably just end up staring at the massive hole in his wall. He needed to fix that. Maybe he could cover it with the picture frame.

He pulled out his phone, quickly tapping out a message.

Ilya: hi

Maybe he should add something. If Ilya wasn't opening a text conversation with some kind of innuendo, Shane would surely think he was being held at gunpoint.

Jane: Are you okay?

Yeah, there it was.

Ilya: maybe if you send me picture in sexy glasses i will feel better

Jane: No

Jane: How is your kid

Ilya: OK he did not smother me with pillow in my sleep

Jane: Were we worried about that???

Ilya: probably not

Ilya: how was your skate

Jane: Okay. Hayden was bothering me about Boston Lily.

Ilya: and you told him she is very tall and sexy and breaks walls?

Jane: Absolutely not

Jane: Are you sure you're okay?

Ilya: I will be asking you this when we beat you today

Jane: :(

Ilya shut off his phone, placing it face down on the counter. It would be fine, everything was fine. He just needed to get some sleep.

* * *

Ilya felt like a powder keg.

When he got dressed in the locker room, he could feel it. When he stepped on the ice for warmups, he could feel it. He could only be grateful that everyone else assumed it to be regular playoff jitters.

Ilya really didn't know what was wrong with him. This was not him. The threat of outing? Of being deported or losing his chance at residency? Sure, that would be a normal thing for him to stress about. But Ilya wasn't worried about that. He genuinely trusted that Pava wouldn't say anything. The only thing that was causing his gut to twist like a rollercoaster was simple, the idea of losing the kid.

It was outrageous. Ilya had played with countless rookies, most of whom ended up being knocked down to the AHL. Even the ones who had stuck around, Ilya hadn't really gotten to know them. He'd known it was different elsewhere, with some teams having their paternal captains always in the news for stories about how they took their rookies under their wing. That wasn't Ilya. To be honest, he could be kind of a dick to the new guys, it was a rite of passage if anything.

But Ilya had never been like that to Pava. He didn't know what it was about the kid that caused him to turn into such a sap. It was infuriating. Even his teammates were calling him "nice" now. It should have been driving him up the wall. The only thing worse than losing his reputation, was the losing this kid. He'd been such a positive addition to his life. He couldn't lose that over...something like this.

Ilya was unfortunately very obvious about the way he watched Pava all throughout warmups. His attention was only pulled by a sharp whistle coming from the red line. When the fuck had Shane Hollander lost all sense of subtlety? It must have been when he threw hands with Scott Hunter. Or when he bought his sex condo.

Ilya skated over, coasting to a stop across from Shane, who wasn't even pretending like he was going to stretch.

"Why not call everyone else over here, Hollander?" Ilya asked. "Marly can be great fun even without alcohol."

"Shut up," Shane said. It wasn't mean, but Ilya could tell he wasn't in the mood for jokes. "This is me having a sportsmanlike chat before a playoff series, okay?"

"Okay," Ilya said, resting his face against his stick. "You are going to tell me to play fair?"

“Rozanov,” Shane said, giving him a serious look. “Are you okay? Do you want to come to mine tonight? I know we said no seeing each other during playoffs but...these feel like extenuating circumstances.”

“What is this one?”

“It means that things got crazy.”

“Ah. Well, yes.”

“So...would you like to?”

“Eh, no,” Ilya said, shaking his head. “No, I will be fine. I should not run away.”

Shane nodded in understanding, then schooled his expression into something more professional.

“Well, good luck out there, Rozanov. May the best team win.”

“We will.”

Ilya skated off back to his side of the rink, beginning his regular practice drills. He stood at the Dunkin logo as normal, tracing the outline with the puck as he practiced his stickhandling.

Ilya heard the telltale sound of a skater scraping to a stop in front of him. It took a moment for him to look up.

Pava stood across from him, puck in the cradle. He looked at Ilya, then down to Ilya’s legs, then back to Ilya. He blinked.

Wordlessly, Ilya widened his stance, and Pava shot right through his legs, the puck never leaving the ice.

Pava skated by to retrieve the puck, and headed into the tunnel. Curious.

Ilya finished his routine a few minutes later, smoothly gliding across the ice and stepping into the tunnel to return to the locker room as warmups concluded. He was flagged down and pulled to the side immediately by his coach.

“Rozanov, just giving you a heads up, we’re making a last minute change to the line combos,” LeClaire said, shoving a clipboard in front of him. This wasn’t unusual, during playoffs especially, these kinds of changes could come at the last second. But that was usually more to do if they were watching a player injury, and as far as Ilya was aware, there was nobody on their radar.

Ilya looked down at the linesheet as his coach spoke. “We’re moving Kosmodemyansky back to the second line with Connie and Delly. You’re back with Marly and Newf on the first.”

Ilya blinked, he felt his stomach turn. “Why?”

LeClaire gave him a look. “Because I fucking said so. Now get the fuck in there, you’ve got a series to win.” He gave Ilya a hard but not unkind slap on the back, ushering him into the locker room.

When Ilya made it to his stall, he immediately took a seat, pretending to retie his skates. He kept sneaking glances at Pava from across the room.

Why would his coach change the lines like this? He and Pava had been playing on the same line successfully for weeks. This new alternative wasn't bad, exactly, but neither was the old one. He wasn't sure what the strategy was.

Unless...it didn't have to do with strategy. Maybe Pava had asked to switch lines. Maybe he told their coach that he couldn't or wouldn't play with Ilya anymore. Maybe this was the beginning of the end.

* * *

Ilya was losing his fucking mind.

He sat on the bench as he watched Pava skate up and down the ice. This might've been the best he'd ever seen him play. Maybe he had gained more confidence since playing on the first line with Ilya, or maybe he was just fuelled by playoffs.

The heads of every player on the bench turned, watching Pava assist on Delly's second goal of the game. That in and of itself was insane, Delly had only scored twelve goals all season, and now he scored twice in one game in the playoffs. Fuckin' insane.

Delly lunged down the ice for his celly before being swarmed by the rest of his line, the Boston crowd roaring as they went up 2-0. Ilya dutifully leant over the bench to get his high five as Delly skated by.

Ilya plays the entire game tense. He's tense when he assists on Newf's goal, he's tense when he slams Pike against the boards, and he's tense when he gives Melnyk a shove after he pushes Boston's goalie into the net.

"You fucking pigeon!" Ilya shouted, as the ref pulled him backwards by the hem of his jersey. "You sure you're in the right place buddy? You take wrong turn on your way to the minors?" he said as his teammates finally took their hands off the Voyageur. Melnyk was seething.

"Rozanov, no calling guys pigeons," the ref scolded as Ilya finally retreated back to the faceoff circle.

Ilya hovered over the dot, his eyes flitting up to Shane standing across from him. He didn't speak, but he had that all too familiar concerned look in his eyes. Shane won that faceoff.

Pava hadn't spoken to him all game. They didn't sit together on the bench, and they didn't meet on the ice. Anytime Pava was on the ice, he was the only thing Ilya was watching. Every time there was a break in play when Ilya was on the ice, he was looking to Pava on the bench. Honestly, it was a miracle that Ilya hadn't tanked the game with the way he was playing so distractedly.

By the last five minutes of the third period, Boston was up one, and Montreal had pulled their goalie.

The stadium was electric, the crowd roaring every time Boston touched the puck. Ilya was nearly falling out of the bench the way he was leaning over the boards in anticipation. Shane had possession of the puck, passing up to Pike, who sent it to Beaulieu. Beaulieu took a shot, which Boston's goalie deflected with his pad.

The deflection was picked up by Pava, who, as he was being swarmed by two Montreal players, shot the puck straight between Pike's legs, landing in Delly's cradle. Delly, wasting absolutely no time, shot the puck up the ice towards a wide open net.

Shane raced off after it, but there was no point. The puck slid through the crease, and the goal horn blared across the stadium.

Gloves started flying as the Boston players on the ice began to rush around Delly, hooting and hollering and whooping and making any sort of ridiculous sound in the name of celebration. Pava was right there next to him, his arm wrapped around his shoulder.

Then the hats started flying. Hundreds of hats, hurled from the stands and onto the ice.

Of course the day this kid would score his first hat trick, it would be at home, and during a playoff game. What a show off. Ilya whooped along with the bench. He was happy for the kid, genuinely happy, but all his worries had been looming over him the entire game, and this wasn't quite enough to take those away.

Ilya caught Shane's eye from across the ice. The Voyageurs were dejected, and Ilya couldn't blame them. With thirty seconds left in the game, it was over for them. But there were still at least three games to be played. Shane sent him a small shrug, before turning back to confer with his team.

Ilya sat back on the bench, watching as the cleanup crew went around to collect the piles of hats on the ice so that the 30 seconds of the remaining game could conclude. One game down.

* * *

Ilya pulled his clean shirt over his head, then moved to zip up his duffel bag. He just wanted to go home. He wanted to nap. He wanted Shane, but he knew that would be a bad idea.

He needed to talk to Pava.

"Pava?" Ilya asked, appearing behind the kid, who was pulling on his hoodie. He tried to tune out the sound of 'Material Girl' blaring in the background. "*Can we talk?*"

Pava gave a hesitant look, then nodded. Good. Ilya just needed to get out of here and clear the air. All this stress was not helping him get through the playoffs.

"Alright boys!" Cliff shouted. He was standing up on one of the benches. "Delly got a fuckin' hatty!" Cheers erupted. "So you know what that means!"

Oh, fuck. Ilya had forgotten. How could he have forgotten? Delly hadn't shut up about it since that day on the plane.

"Karaoke!" Cliff shouted, drawing out the 'e' sound and being joined in harmony with half the team. "Roz has promised to serenade us in beautiful song."

Ilya frowned as all eyes turned to him, whooping. "No, I do not want to go."

Delly walked up to him, his smile leaving his face for the first time since he scored his first goal. "What? But you promised."

Well, fuck. Five seconds ago, Ilya had been sure that there was nothing anyone could say to convince him to go to a karaoke bar after the day he'd just had. But now, being met face to face with the concept of singlehandedly disappointing yet another doe eyed kid? Fuck.

Ilya sighed, his shoulders deflating. "Fine. Just one song."

The room exploded.

* * *

Ilya winced as he watched Newf complete his rendition of “How to Save a Life.” Someone needed to take Grey’s Anatomy away from him.

“Roz!” Delly slid up beside him, beer pint in hand. “You gotta go put your name in!”

Ilya slouched down further in the seat where he was sipping on his vodka. At least they were in one of those private karaoke rooms. Ilya would not have been able to tolerate a karaoke night in some random bar. Still, the purple lighting and retro couches were a bit much. It was like the mystery machine threw up all over the room.

“I don’t care,” Ilya said, his accent more prominent than normal when influenced by alcohol. “You choose. Sign me up.”

Delly’s eyes went wide. “Really?”

Ilya nodded, watching the kid race off to the front to go choose a song before Ilya changed his mind. Ilya set down his drink, leaning back into the couch cushions. Cliff was up now, and the crowd roared laughing as he began to sing some Britney Spears song. Of course, because there was nothing funnier to a group of hockey players than a man singing a song by a girl. Fuck them, he loved Britney Spears. Her music didn’t deserve to be butchered like that.

Newf sat down next to him.

“Fer someone who just won a playoff game, yer lookin’ like ya cat’s been shot.”

Ilya shrugged. “Series is not over yet. I will smile when we win.”

“Shoulda known. Montreal’s always got ya in a mood.” He turned to watch Cliff sing. “Marly’s got the voice of an angel, doesn’t he, b’y?”

“This is what you think angels sound like?” He asked, as Cliff failed to hit a particularly high note.

Out of the corner of his eye, Pava caught his attention. He was sitting near the wall, orange juice in hand, chatting with Siggi. During any other team outing, Pava would normally sit with Ilya while most everyone else went off to find a girl to hit on. Tonight, he didn’t even spare Ilya a second glance as he went off with Siggi.

Ilya felt like his entire life was falling apart in front of his eyes. Pava was avoiding him. Pava had asked to switch lines. Shane was in Montreal. Ilya was in Boston. He had sixty-something cans of undrunk ginger ale in his fridge. And through it all, he was expected to just play hockey. Playoff hockey.

“Alright gentlemen, the moment you’ve been waiting for,” Connors announced into the mic. He had designated himself emcee for the night. “Our Captain, the man, the myth, the legend, Russia’s Greatest Love Machine, the one, the only, Ilya Rozanov!”

He drew out the last syllable, sounding like a siren as it echoed through the room, trumped only by the cheers that overlaid at the sound of Ilya’s name. Fuck this. Ilya was never making another bet ever again.

Ilya handed his glass to Newf before getting to his feet and approaching the small stage. He took the microphone in hand with a roll of his eyes. Connie gave him a slap on the back as he went to take his seat. Ilya was surprised to see Delly run up to join Ilya on stage, picking up the second microphone that had been resting on a stool. At Ilya’s questioning look, he spoke.

“It’s a duet! I’m doing the boy part, though,” he clarified.

Well, Ilya wasn’t sure whether or not having someone up here would make things better. He decided yes, it was better, since at least someone else would be included in the many videos that were bound to be sent around.

Ilya turned, the crowd of about thirty hockey players and staff staring back at him in anticipation. He was the only reason they were here, all to see him fulfill his half of the stupid bet.

The music kicked on, and he heard the sound of a piano come through the speaker.

If you had asked Ilya, he was almost sure that Delly was going to put on Rasputin for him to sing. What a video that would be. But that wasn’t his choice at all. It took a couple of seconds for Ilya to recognize the song that was playing, much longer compared to his teammates that immediately started laughing and whooping as the instrumentals kicked on. At least it was one Ilya knew.

“Summer lovin’, had me a blast...” Delly started, horrendously off tune.

“Summer lovin’ happened so fast,” Ilya replied.

“I met a girl, crazy for me.”

“I met a boy, cute as can be.”

He saw several phones fly up as he kept singing. Ilya was maybe putting a bit too much effort into this, but it took a lot of concentration to keep with the melody. At least he’d only had one drink, he couldn’t imagine doing this drunk. Any other night, when Ilya wasn’t in the middle of one of the bigger crises of his life, he would have been milking this, dancing and embellishing and making a real show of it. But now? He was singing Grease like his life depended on it.

His team probably read it as him being upset he had lost the bet, and that only seemed to make it better for them. He saw them grinning behind their phones, he was sure these videos would be all over twitter by the end of the night.

“I saved her life, she nearly drowned.”

“He showed off splashing around—”

Was it stupid that the song made him think of Shane? Of their time at the cottage? That time, just before Shane’s dad had arrived. And all the times after, when Ilya had finally been able to drag Shane into the water. When Ilya went out to the dock to show off his cannonball. Or when they had gone out for a midnight swim, only illuminated by the moon.

“Tell me more, tell me more,” at this point, the whole room had joined in for the ensemble. “Was it love at first sight?”

Ilya thought about that day in Regina, freezing his ass off trying to light a cigarette. Shane had come up and introduced himself. He had shaken his hand twice. Ilya remembered that the first thing he had noticed had been Shane’s freckles, he couldn’t take his eyes off them. He had known he needed to see him again. Maybe it wasn’t love at first sight, but Ilya was pretty sure that was as close as it came.

“He got friendly holding my hand,” Ilya sang, unable to hide the soft smile that came onto his face as he read the lyrics off the screen.

“Well, she got friendly down in the sand,” Delly belted, his voice cracking and the room bursting into laughter as it echoed into the crowd.

Ilya thought of that night in Florida, when he found Shane on the beach. The way he reached out for his hand, tangling their fingers together in the warm sand. He still remembered that night as one of the best in his life, one of the first times he felt like he wasn’t alone anymore. Fuck, he loved Shane so much.

“Summer heat, boy and girl meet...” Ilya and Delly harmonized together. Somehow, the crowd had not died down.

Of course, because Ilya’s gaze had always been drawn towards him lately, Ilya’s eyes met Pava’s. Pava, who sat in the middle of the couch with Siggi’s arm around him. His big brown eyes looked at Ilya for a moment, before darting side to side, looking around the room with a concerned expression as he observed the cheering and laughing.

Fuck. Ilya felt his shoulders droop a bit. In all his concentration singing and daydreaming about Shane, he hadn’t thought about what he was doing. He was standing up here, in front of the room, singing about loving a man. No wonder Pava looked so uncomfortable, here he was, rubbing it in his face, treating the whole thing like it was a joke.

He was ruining everything. It would be easy to blame himself, tell himself that he fucked up, but how could he do that to Shane? He loved Shane, he was his world. He was going to move to Canada for him. He had met Shane’s parents. They were going to spend their lives together.

Just why did everything have to get so fucked up? Ilya scolded himself whenever the thought came up, but he couldn’t stop it this time around. As he stood there, at the front of a room bathed in purple light, surrounded by his team, his closest friends who didn’t truly know him, Ilya just wished he could be normal. That he didn’t have all this baggage, this responsibility, the looming threat of his country and of public opinion. It was just yet another hurdle he had to jump to be with the man he loved.

He was so fucking tired. And locking eyes with Pava across the room, the kid he had grown to love in just a few short months, the kid that had unknowingly been his support during all the nights he missed his boyfriend, had been one of his last connections to home, looking at him like that. Well, that was enough to break the dam.

* * *

Cliff Marleau slowly lowered his phone, quietly stopping the recording.

He looked to Newf who was sitting to his left, a look of bewilderment and shock also plastered on his face. Then he turned back to the stage, where his captain, one of the best hockey players in the world, an absolute brick wall of a man, was brought to tears while singing along to a song from Grease.

He was crying, right? Cliff wasn’t hallucinating? He felt like he was hallucinating. But the sudden hush that came over the room as more people realized what was occurring only confirmed that, yes, his captain was failing to hold back tears as he sang.

Roz’s voice was cracking and wobbling as he finished the last stanza, something about the weather turning cold. Delly was still singing, but his eyes were wide as he looked at his partner like he was a stray cat that might spook.

The room stayed silent until the end of the song, the only sounds filling the room were that of the backing track, Delly's nervous, unenthusiastic belts, and Roz's poorly masked snuffles in between words.

When the song ended, every person in the room froze, waiting to see what Roz would do. Maybe yell? Maybe faint? What normally happened at the end of a nervous breakdown?

Instead, their captain simply set his mic into the stand, and leaned in to speak with that familiar accented drawl.

"Okie. The end."

He stepped back, retreating from the stage, and beelined straight out the door of their sad little karaoke room.

It must have been a full minute of silence, of hockey players looking around the room, waiting for someone to say something. The deafening sound of silence was finally broken by Coach LeClaire, who had mostly spent the duration of the night at the back of the room, observing his players but not partaking.

"Everyone," he barked, getting to his feet. "Delete those fucking videos. Not a word of this fucking leaves this room."

Cliff watched as players across the room scrambled to unlock their phones and delete any evidence of what had just occurred, him included. He wasn't sure what had just happened, but he was sure that no one in this room was going to speak of it ever again.

* * *

Ilya sat on a lonely bench, somewhere in the Public Garden. He hadn't been there much before, but it was a nice park. Right downtown, it had lots of statues. If Shane was here, he could probably tell him what every single statue was for. He had mentioned to Ilya once that one of the first times he had played in Boston, he had gone on a walking tour. Because of course that's how Shane spent his free time in Boston.

There were a few people out at this time. Some evening runners, some couples out for a stroll, a couple of sketchy looking guys, a hoard of pigeons pecking away near his feet. Luckily, the passersby were sparse enough that no one would be nearing close enough to recognize him as he threw small rocks into the pond across the way.

He was planning his next steps. Maybe he should run away to Canada? He would make a fantastic WAG. He's always wanted to try hosting a dinner party. And he's always been critical of the playoff jacket designs, if it were up to him, there'd be more animal print. Either way, he could not walk back into a room with the Bears again. He had no idea how to unburn the "bursting into tears while singing Grease" bridge. Maybe he could say it was a nervous break? Would they bench him for that? He could say it was hormones.

The truth was, it just felt like everything was going wrong. Just when he thought he had gotten to a good place with his boyfriend, and then with his rookie, everything just collapses under him. Maybe Ilya Rozanov just wasn't meant to be happy.

Ilya's head cocked to the side, as he heard the sound of soft footsteps landing on the grass behind him. Maybe it was his Coach, coming to tell him he was being scratched. Maybe it was Cliff, dropping off

the jacket he left at the bar. Or, hey, maybe it was a serial killer coming to claim his prey. Who was Ilya to mess with fate?

It was impossible not to immediately identify the massive frame that took a seat next to him on the bench, leaving a respectable foot of distance between the two.

"You forgot your jacket," he said simply, holding it out between them.

Ilya turned to his left. He looked at Pava, then his jacket, then back to Pava. He grabbed the jacket, and quickly threw it on. It was a bit chilly tonight.

"You're a good singer," Pava said. *"I like that movie."*

Ilya raised an eyebrow. *"You are the only person in that room that came out of that thinking I was a good singer."*

Pava went silent for a bit, nervously fiddling with the fabric of his pants.

"You were crying," he said, after a while.

"Yup," Ilya replied.

"Why?"

Ilya sighed, slumping back against the hard wood of the bench. *"Kid, I'm really not in the mood for this. You ignore me all day long? Fine, I can deal with that. But please don't ask me about my feelings."*

Pava frowned. *"I wasn't ignoring you."*

"No? What else do you call it when you don't speak to me on purpose?"

Pava reached out to brush his hair away from his eyes. It had actually gotten a bit outrageous. Ilya hadn't been able to convince him to cut his hair before playoffs, and now he had absolutely zero chance. He wasn't sure if the kid growing a playoff beard would make his hair look better or worse.

"I was not ignoring you," Pava repeated, *"I just didn't want to say the wrong thing."*

Ilya raised an eyebrow, encouraging him to go on.

"I've never done this before. And...I was surprised, I never thought that...I don't know...I don't understand. And I've never seen you so worried before. I wasn't supposed to be there, I didn't want you to be mad at me."

"Pava..." Ilya started. *"I'm not mad at you. I'm only worried that...that you would hate me."*

Pava looked absolutely shocked at what Ilya had admitted. *"I could never hate you. You're my best friend."*

Well, holy fuck. *"I am?"* Ilya asked.

Pava nodded like it was obvious. *"Of course."*

Ilya might actually cry again, and he wasn't sure if it would be more or less embarrassing than crying while singing an Olivia Newton John song.

"Can I ask a question?" Pava asked after a moment.

"Okay."

"Are you like this in Russia?"

Ilya paused. *"Queer? Not out loud but...yes, of course."*

Pava started chewing on his thumbnail again, but Ilya batted his hand out of his mouth.

"If people know...you can't go back to Russia."

Ilya sighed. *"Yes, but I won't be going back anyway. There are many things I love about Russia, but I think...Russia does not love me back."* He shrugged. *"For now, it's mostly a concern until I can gain permanent residency in America."*

"What about your family?"

"There's nothing for me there."

"Your mother..."

It was jarring, remembering that his mother's story was now public knowledge. If anything, the Irina Foundation was one of the first things that came up when Googling his name.

"Yes."

Pava looked at Ilya thoughtfully. *"I don't know if I could exist in a world without my mama."*

This didn't make Ilya quite as sad as he thought it would. He let a small smile grace his lips. *"I thought this too. But then you find some things to stick around for."*

"Ah. Shane Hollander."

Ilya smiled. *"Yes, Shane."*

"I like Shane Hollander. He's nice. And very good at hockey."

Ilya made a face. *"I'm very good at hockey. I've won the Hart, like, twice."*

"So has he."

"What are you a Shane Hollander expert now or something?"

Pava shrugged. *"Does the team know? That you are...homosexual?"*

"Hm? No, none of them know. The only people in Boston that know about this are you and Sveta."

Pava frowned at this.

"What?" Ilya asked.

"I don't understand why everyone was laughing when you were singing the song then. I thought maybe they thought it was funny because you were singing about Shane Hollander."

“Oh. No, they thought it was funny because I was singing the girl part.”

“Why is that funny?”

“Because they’re hockey players. And they’re idiots.”

“I would love to sing Olivia Newton John.”

“Next time.”

Pava paused. *“I’m confused again.”*

“Are you ever not confused?”

Pava shot him a glare, which was the least intimidating thing Ilya had ever seen. *“Did you lie to Marly about always seeing girls?”*

“No.”

The kid stared into space, and Ilya could practically see the gears spinning.

“Pava,” Ilya said. “I am bisexual.”

Based on the kid’s expression, that did not seem to clear anything up.

“I like both. Men and women.”

“You can do that?”

Ilya shrugged. *“Well, not in Russia you can’t.”*

Pava nodded solemnly. *“I think I understand. Like David Bowie.”*

They lapsed into a comfortable silence, just like they used to back home. Maybe things actually would be okay, they could go back to normal.

He let a sliver of optimism worm itself into his brain. Maybe things could be better. One more person knowing about Shane meant one more person he didn’t have to lie to. Maybe Pava and Shane could be friends.

Ilya wasn’t delusional. He knew things wouldn’t be sunshine and rainbows from now on. But, he hoped that maybe they were on their way.

“If we’re real friends now, does this mean I can call you Ilya instead of Roz?”

Ilya smirked. *“Sure.”*

“What about ‘Ilyusha?’” he tried.

“Absolutely not.”

It's me, resident overresearcher. When I was looking into details about playoff schedules in regards to practices during a playoff series, I found out that there's actually a bit of a debate going on about whether morning skates should even happen. It sounds like the only good reason to host a morning skate is actually for the media availability.

Would Pava be able to ask to switch lines? NO. That's up to the coach, and Pava is a rookie. But Ilya is being irrational and has lost all common sense while in panic mode.

I stole the line about the [pigeons](#) from Marchand and a ref at 4 Nations. In hockey, a pigeon is basically a player that only gets garbage goals and parks himself by the net. It's also just generally making fun of someone who's not very good and a bit of a benchwarmer.

For those who don't know, a hat trick is when one player scores three goals in a game. When this happens, fans throw hats onto the ice. They're then collected and some of them are donated, and some are kept by the player or displayed in the stadium. A fun story about this is that when hat tricks are scored for away teams, often not many hats will be thrown down for the player. In October of last year after Celebrini got a hat trick at an away game, his teammate Reaves threw his helmet on the ice just to make sure he had something thrown for him.

Also, if anyone is confused, in the last minutes of regulation time, if a team is losing, they will often pull their goalie off the ice and put on an extra attacker to try to tie the game. This is why empty netter goals happen.

Fun fact, last year during the playoffs, the Edmonton Oilers started playing Pink Pony Club in their locker room after wins. Unfortunately, Pink Pony Club did not exist in 2019, so I've replaced it here with Material Girl.

And yes, the bench Ilya and Pava spoke on is the bench from Good Will Hunting.

Fun facts for giggles: Siggi is inspired by Trevor Zegras, and Delly by Macklin Celebrini (not for skill but more for just vibes)

Thank you for the comments! I really especially appreciate getting your insights and opinions on Pava and how someone with his upbringing would react in this kind of situation. You guys are all so smart and powerful I am learning so much.



Chapter 9: Mac N Cheese Cupcakes

Chapter Summary

But then, four days before they were supposed to leave for the awards, Ilya's appendix tried to kill him.

Chapter Notes

THANK GOD we got a fight at the Olympics, that arena did not know what to do with themselves. Poor Sid had to deal with his circus and his monkeys. Bless you Tom Wilson, we got an Olympic Gordie Howe Hat Trick. And bless the men's hockey team who keeps adopting Macklin Celebrini left and right. Let it be known, fighting is NOT allowed at international tournaments, so both players got a game misconduct for it.

The Olympics is really curing everything that's ever been wrong with me. Connor McDavid has been possessed by a demon and has started checking and even the commentators were shocked (but also please don't get injured Davo). Quinn Hughes's ghosts came with him. Elmo has to teach the Tkachuk Brothers how to count. Draisaitl is inhaling mustard. Emma Maltais named her Loon "Wolfbird." The sun is shining, my pores are clear.



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

Boston made it to game six against Montreal before being knocked out of the playoffs.

It had been a fight, but Boston was too young. They'd had a lot of veteran turnover in recent years, they were still figuring themselves out, and most of their players didn't have much playoff experience at all.

The only consolation was that Shane had been wrong when he said that the Eastern Conference was a shoo-in for the cup. In the end, after three straight losses and then four straight wins in the cup final, Lord Stanley went to Edmonton.

Ilya was sure that Carter Vaughan was probably somewhere crashing out at the prospect of McDavid hoisting the cup. Ilya would have to make sure he rubbed it in his face next time they saw each other.

Or, actually, there was one other good thing that came with playoffs, and that was announcements for the NHL Awards. Just as Ilya assumed, he hadn't been nominated for anything this year. However, Shane had been nominated for the Hart, and Pava for the Calder.

Ilya had been downright giddy when Pava had asked him to accompany him to Vegas for the awards. He had many plans. They'd have to get him a suit, and Ilya would need to figure out how to keep him away from the Casinos. Maybe the kid would like to go to that giant pyramid.

But then, four days before they were supposed to leave for the awards, Ilya's appendix tried to kill him.

Ilya had no idea what had happened, he had been sure someone had stabbed him in his sleep or something. Pava had run up to find him when he heard him shout out and promptly panicked as he found Ilya throwing up all over his bedroom floor.

Pava attempted to call 911, but just about forgot every word of English he knew at that moment, which meant Ilya had to speak to the operator in between bouts of vomiting. Ilya hadn't even been sure that this was ambulance worthy, but he knew that Pava was a nervous driver (which he had learnt after Ilya had taken him for a few laps around a Trader Joe's with Pava white-knuckling the steering wheel), so he figured it best to get the professionals involved.

Pava rode with him to the hospital, forgetting to grab a coat as he climbed in wearing only Scooby-Doo pyjama pants and a Boston Bears t-shirt. He tried to listen as the paramedic scolded Ilya for not seeing a doctor when the symptoms had started. In Ilya's defense, he had thought it was just a really weird tummy ache.

It really wasn't as bad as Shane made it out to be. He had to go in for surgery, but it was barely a surgery, he'd be out of the hospital in a few days, and the nurse was a fan and kept sneaking him extra pudding cups.

Mostly he just felt bad for Pava, who sat panicking in the waiting room for an hour until Sveta could show up and take over.

"Why didn't you go to the doctor?" Shane asked, his voice slightly muffled through video call. "You're an athlete, you know your body. You should be on top of this stuff when something feels off."

Ilya rolled his eyes as he shoveled another spoonful of chocolate pudding into his mouth. He was snuggled up in Pava's favourite fuzzy throw, which the kid had brought back when he and Sveta went to the house to grab some clothes for Ilya. Pava was sitting across the room in an uncomfortable chair, his hands clasped together in his lap.

Shane had called four times since he had been in the hospital. Which had been less than twenty-four hours. Ilya supposed maybe Shane didn't have much else to do but worry now that the post-season was over.

While things had mostly gone back to normal between Ilya and Pava, that had not been the case with Pava and Shane's budding relationship. The kid had been incredibly awkward every time Shane had called, always retreating to the corner of the room, never contributing to the conversation. Ilya wasn't sure if he was still being weird about the gay thing, or maybe it was the Shane Hollander thing, or the Captain of the Montreal Voyageurs thing. It could also be the "I saw you in your underwear in my Captain's kitchen after I heard you have outrageously loud sex for half an hour while I stood in the living room like a crazy person" thing, and Ilya really couldn't blame him for taking this long to get over that. Shane and Pava had not interacted face to face since that night, aside from the handshake line after Game 6.

"Ugh, Hollander, how was I meant to know? I had just eaten entire package of double stuf oreos, I thought that was reason for tummy ache."

"You ate an entire package of oreos?"

"Is post-season. I shared with Pava."

"I have two," Pava chimed in. Why did he wait until there was an opportunity to throw Ilya under the bus when he finally decided to speak? Ilya silenced him with a glare.

"Dude," Shane huffed.

"Do not 'dude' me, Shane. I am wounded. I have stitches. Do not scold a man on his deathbed."

"You are not on your deathbed."

Ilya scoffed. "What happened to you being worried about me? I miss this. Let's do this."

"The longer I talk to you, the less worried I am. Or maybe I'm less worried about your appendix and more that you're gonna try and escape the hospital through the window and steal a horse or something."

"Why would I steal horse? I can afford."

"Never mind. Have you got any updates from your doctor?"

"Yes, yes, I will go home tomorrow. Sveta is coming to watch me, she will be very mean to me I am sure. Will not make me any chicken noodle soup."

"I will make soup," Pava chimed in.

Simultaneously, Ilya and Shane both twisted up their faces. Shane looked through the screen at Ilya, and Ilya looked at Pava.

"What?" Ilya asked. "No you will not, you will be in Vegas."

Pava frowned. *"I do not want to go without you."*

Ilya scoffed. *"I do not care, you are going."*

"I don't know anyone, and everyone can barely understand me."

"It's the NHL!" Ilya exclaimed. "There are Russians everywhere."

"The only one nominated is Sokolov and he is so old and boring. All he does is talk about his ranch."

"Maybe if you listen to him it will help with your phone game!" Ilya argued.

"What are you guys saying?" Shane asked, still only visible through Ilya's phone screen. "Is he not coming to the awards?"

"He is going," Ilya declared.

"No I will not," Pava insisted.

"Pava if you don't go to those awards, I will permanently take away the DVD player."

Pava's jaw dropped at the prospect.

"I don't know what you just said," Shane interjected, "but that sounded like a threat."

"It is a threat," Ilya replied.

"Should I be concerned?"

"Only if this kid does not do what I want. I will call you later, Shane."

"Ilya—"

Ilya hung up, facing Pava down from his hospital bed.

"You refuse to fulfill a dying man's last wish?"

Pava's eyebrows knit together. *"You are not dying."*

"Life is unpredictable. I could get an infection."

"If you are going to die from an infection then I would like to spend what time we have left together."

Ilya groaned, which did cause the wound on his abdomen to ache. *"Pava, shut the fuck up. You are going. What would your mother say if she knew you were refusing to go? I will call her myself. I know the password to your phone."*

Pava's eyes widened. He didn't take much convincing after that.

* * *

Shane Hollander loved hockey.

He had loved it from the first moment he had ever stepped on the ice. He had been good at it from the moment he had held a stick. He had known at a very young age that he was heading in one direction.

It wasn't until middle school, when his mother started talking about agents, that he realized that that direction wasn't just about hockey. It was also about media relations, and public image, and dressing up and saying the right things to the camera.

Shane Hollander hated the NHL Awards.

It was a shame he was so damn good at hockey. He'd been forced to come to more of these than he'd missed. The only good thing about them had been the few times they had allowed Shane to meet with Ilya again before the season ended. At least it was only one night, it wasn't nearly as exhausting as All-Stars. But it was just one more hurdle he had to jump before he was free to enjoy the off season.

He wasn't saying he wished his appendix had burst. That would be awful. But he definitely was a little jealous of the photo Ilya had sent of him curled up in bed with a bowl of ice cream watching the show in his pyjamas. Shane tugged at the collar of his stupid tux. He could feel the tag scratching on his neck.

There were a couple of people he knew here tonight. Scott Hunter, of course, who hadn't dragged his poor boyfriend along with him this year. One of his All-Star teammates from this year was here as well, up for the James Norris. Mason Doherty was here, he was almost certain to win the Vezina.

And of course, Kosmodemyansky.

Ilya had bullied the kid into coming. Shane knew it was for the best, you could only be nominated for the Calder once, he shouldn't miss it. Besides, it could be good for the kid to spend some time away from Ilya.

According to Ilya, since he had to pull out of accompanying the kid at the last minute, there was a bit of a scramble to get Kosmodemyansky a translator. Luckily, there was already one at the event for Sokolov, who, despite being a veteran player, knew less English than the kid. Since they were having to share, the translator was only going to accompany the kid to help him get checked into the event, and during his specific awards presentation. Otherwise, he was on his own.

Shane hadn't seen him yet tonight. He wasn't sure he was even going to show up to anything before he absolutely had to. Shane already hated being forced to mingle throughout the conference hall enough as it was, it must've been ten times worse for the kid. He checked his watch. Fifteen minutes until the show started.

"Hey, Shane."

Shane's attention was caught by Mason Doherty, who swirled his half empty glass around in his hand, more focused on making the ice clink against the edges than he was about anything going on in the crowd. His emotionless expression, which was something he'd become notorious for after being spotted staring into space on multiple fan cams whenever he was on the bench, was evident on his face.

"Hey, Mason."

"Did you see they're serving little mac n cheese cupcakes?" the goalie asked. "The guys with the trays."

"I did not." That definitely was not in Shane's diet. But, the season was over. Ilya had kept telling him he'd needed to treat himself. If they came to him, he couldn't be blamed for accepting one. That was just polite.

"You played a good season," Mason said, between sips of his drink. "I mean, you always do."

"Thanks. Sorry about Edmonton." Edmonton had knocked out Minnesota during the conference final.

Mason shrugged. "Happens. I'm just glad Florida didn't win."

Shane chuckled. "I'll drink to that." Shane noticed Scott Hunter had made an appearance, almost immediately being flocked around by several different people of importance. Shane was glad that his presence took some of the attention off of him. "You'll get 'em next season."

Mason tipped his head to the side. "Maybe, but I'm not so sure it'll be with Minnesota."

Shane raised his eyebrows. "They trading you?"

The goalie shrugged. "I don't know what you mean. I would never suggest to a rival player that I was going to be traded before it was announced. That's so unprofessional."

Shane whistled. "They must be getting something good in exchange for you."

"I assure you, they are." Mason set down his empty glass on the bar. "Anyway, I should go find Connor, he's probably been following Crosby around from a distance all night." Connor was one of the other Doherty brothers, he was also nominated for the Calder for his year with Vancouver. With a wave, he departed into the crowd with a belated "see you next season."

Huh. Shane wondered where he'd be in September.

Shane also set down his watered down glass of ginger ale. He'd taken too long to drink it and the ice had melted. He leant over the bar to order another. He deserved it.

Shane was up for the Hart again this year. He was certain he wasn't going to win, and that was a relief. He'd run out of things to say in his speeches, and the prewritten one his mom had given him "just in case" this year seemed even more insufferable than usual.

He'd be flying back tomorrow morning. To Montreal, but then straight to the cottage once his apartment was all settled. Ilya would be joining him in a week once he was cleared to fly. He couldn't wait to finally have his uninterrupted time with his boyfriend again.

An entire month, together, at the cottage. Then they'd be off to Ottawa to host their first camp with the Irina Foundation. Shane was excited, and he had put all his energy into planning since the playoffs concluded. He had been able to rope a few people into coaching. Scott Hunter (who Shane couldn't believe said yes), Leah Campbell and her husband, and of course, Hayden.

Shane really needed to tell Hayden what was going on before camp started.

It was just when he had received a fresh glass of ginger ale that Shane finally spotted him through the crowd. He was hard to miss, about a head taller than the rest of the room, and looking around with a permanent wrinkle between his eyebrows. Shane wouldn't admit it, but he hesitated before moving to catch his attention. Shane had not interacted with this kid in person since that fateful night at Ilya's house. He was a little afraid to make eye contact with him again. He'd never had to mentally recover from being caught half naked in the kitchen by a tall, horrified looking Russian kid.

He probably could just disappear into the crowd and pretend he'd never noticed him. Save himself the renewed embarrassment. But that wasn't really an option. The kid was alone, and even though the kid mostly knew him as some weird brother in law via his adopted Russian captain, at least he knew him.

Shane slipped through the crowd as he approached the kid. Kosmodemyansky had attached himself to one of the back walls. He was wearing a suit that didn't quite fit, and gripping a yellow drink in his hands. Maybe a mimosa?

“Don’t drink too much tonight,” Shane said, trying to sound casual. The kid jumped when he noticed him. “You might have to make a speech.”

Kosmodemyansky looked down at his drink, then back to Shane. “Is juice,” he replied simply.

Shane blinked. “Oh.”

He turned so they were standing side by side, looking out to the crowd.

“Are you excited?” He tried. “Calder, it’s a big one.”

“I will not win.”

“Oh, you don’t know that.”

“I want to not win,” he said. “I am worrying speaking.”

Shane frowned. “Your translator is gonna be here, right?”

Kosmodemyansky gave Shane a look, and, yeah, Shane understood.

“I get it,” he said. “I’m not a fan of speeches either.”

The kid nodded, taking another sip of his juice. There were two more empty yellow-tinted glasses on the table next to him. Shane couldn’t begin to imagine the amount of sugar this guy had consumed.

“So…” Shane said. What was he supposed to say to this guy? With any other rookie, he had lists of preapproved lines asking him how the league was treating him, giving advice. Obviously, this was not just any other rookie, this was Ilya’s rookie. And Shane was…the First Man of Boston? No, that was weird. Ilya might’ve been begging to be secretly added to the Montreal WAG chat, but Shane did not share his sentiments.

“Are you going home to Russia after this?”

Fuck, maybe Shane shouldn’t have asked that. Ilya had always gotten upset when he asked him about summers in Russia. Did the kid hate Russia? Did all Russians hate Russia? No, that was dumb.

The kid smiled, thank god. He spoke slowly, considering each of his words. “Yes. Until August. I will see my mother, my sisters.”

“I didn’t know you had sisters.”

“Yes. Very little.”

“Must be nice. I don’t have any siblings,” at the kid’s confused look, Shane rephrased. “No brothers or sisters.”

“Ah. Yes. Very…loud, yes?”

Shane huffed out a laugh. “I can imagine. So you’re back end of August?”

“Eh…no, start. Family is busy. My mother, eh…she go for work, north. My sisters skate, at camp in Moscow, in summer.”

“Oh,” Shane thought. “So are you travelling for the month or…?”

The kid shrugged. "I will go Boston. I will need and find house."

Shane nodded. Honestly, he had forgotten that with the end of the season, Kosmodemyansky was likely preparing to move out. Few rookies ever stuck with their vet past their first year. Ilya hadn't said anything to Shane about it, surely this was something they'd have to have been planning for a while? Knowing Ilya, he wasn't just gonna kick the kid out, he'd probably help him find his own place.

Was he just gonna be in Boston by himself for a whole month? Shane was too selfish to suggest that Ilya go back early. Besides, August was when they were hosting their first ever Game Changers camp, he had to be there.

Shane and the kid lapsed back into a somewhat awkward silence for a bit. It was hard enough making conversation with him, according to Ilya his main interests were Scooby-Doo and hockey. Shane was racking his brain for any hockey conversation that wouldn't come off as spying. Would it be too on the nose to ask about his perception of the Russian Five and their defection from the Soviet Union? Was that more politics than hockey? Was that even worse? Throw in the massive language barrier, that left their options even more limited.

Shane briefly considered using some of the Russian he had been practicing in an effort to make the kid more comfortable, but now that they'd already had half a conversation, it felt weird to go back to his trusty "how are you?" and "where are you from?"

"Where are you sitting?" Shane eventually settled on, after several minutes of the two men staring at the room in silence, sipping at their drinks.

"Eh..." Kosmodemyansky started, staring into space like he was trying to remember. "Row two, yes. Next to Doherty and Turunen," he said the names slowly and carefully.

"That's good, they're good guys. I think I'm just a bit behind you."

The lights in the room blinked off and on as a tone rang out over the speakers, signalling that it was time to enter the theatre. Thank God, the small talk was killing him. From the look on Kosmodemyansky's face, Shane was sure the feeling was mutual.

"Well," Shane said, setting down his glass. "I'll see you in there. Good luck."

The kid didn't reply, but sent Shane a small nod before immediately retreating to the doors, likely on a mission to find his translator.

Shane allowed himself to release one more exasperated sigh before he forced himself to walk into the auditorium. He was bound to have a camera in his face all night like it was the Oscars, as some of the best of the league sat trapped in a room listening to a comedian tell awful jokes all night long.

He tugged on the collar of his shirt again, slightly loosening his tie. Here we go again.

* * *

Shane awoke to the sound of his phone vibrating relentlessly on his bedside table.

It took him a moment to finally regain full awareness, enough to grab his phone and unlock it, blinded by the brightness of the call screen.

Lily.

Shane answered immediately.

“What? What is it? What’s wrong?” Shane asked, his voice noticeably disoriented.

There was a pause on the line. “Were you sleeping?”

Shane frowned, rubbing his eye with the heel of his hand. “I was trying to.”

“It is not even midnight there.”

“It’s completely normal to go to sleep before midnight.”

“But you are at awards show. You should be drinking, having fun.”

Shane scoffed, finally regaining his bearings as he realized he was being made fun of immediately after waking up. Maybe he would have made more of an effort to socialize if he had won, but he didn’t. Neither did Kosmodemyansky. The most Shane did before retreating to his room was going to congratulate Connor Doherty for his Calder win. One Calder winner to another. “What, so I should stay up all night just to hang out with Scott Hunter and all fifty of the Doherty brothers? Sounds like a great time.”

Ilya paused. “You are right. It is better to be sleeping.”

“Why did you call me?” Shane asked. “Please do not tell me this is for emergency phone sex, because I am not awake enough for that.”

“Ah, no, not this time. But good idea. No, I need you to go down to lobby.”

Shane blinked. “What?”

“Lobby? It is communal area in hotels. Where the reception is.”

“Shut up. Why do you need me to go to the lobby in the middle of the night?”

“It is 11:30 Shane. Basically afternoon.”

“Dude.”

“Okay, okay, I need you to go help Pava.”

Now Shane was even more confused. “What?”

“He is texting me. He locked himself out of his room and he is afraid to talk to front desk without translator. I think he is preparing to sleep in the hallway.”

Shane took a second, running his hand over his face. “Wait, didn’t you tell me that he got locked out of the house when we were at All-Stars?”

“Yes.”

“Is he allergic to keys or something?”

“Actually, he does not like keeping things in his pocket. He always puts it in his bag. But then he forgets his bag.”

“Jesus.”

“No, this is Ilya.”

“Stop making that joke.”

“Please Hollander, go help him get a key. He is too adorable to sleep in the hallway, someone from KHL might try to come kidnap him.”

“Fine. I’ll go.”

“Hollander, you are acting like I am asking you to rip out your fingernails.”

Shane sighed, getting out of bed to throw on his t-shirt and sweats. “I’m just so bad at talking to this kid. I feel like I’m his mom’s boyfriend trying to make him like me or something.”

“He already likes you, you are Shane Hollander.”

“But I don’t want him to like me as Shane Hollander, hockey player. I want him to like me as Shane Hollander, your boyfriend.”

Ilya giggled through the phone.

“Shut up!”

“No, is cute. You are very worried.”

“Oh, but why would I be worried? It’s not like we met properly for the first time under the worst possible circumstances!”

“Do not try to compete with me, Hollander. The first time I met David, he saw me grab your ass.”

“Whatever. I’m heading down, I’ll talk to you in the morning.”

“I love you, Shane,” Ilya said, and Shane could hear the smile in his voice. “Please make sure you are fully dressed this time.”

Shane hung up.

He slipped on his sneakers, double checking that he had his roomkey before he began his descent to the lobby. There were NHL players lurking all over the hotel. In the lobby, he ran into one of the Rookie nominees, half dressed and hanging off a bottle with someone who was probably his brother. In the elevator, he was swarmed by a trio of Tampa players who seemed to have brought each other as dates. On the short walk to the lobby, he ducked away to hide from the view of Scott Hunter, who was talking very animatedly with some well dressed young woman.

When he finally neared the lobby, he spotted the kid sitting slumped down in one of the too fancy couches, typing away on his phone.

“Kosmodemyansky?” Shane asked.

He spooked when he noticed Shane. It was honestly insane how jumpy the kid was considering he loomed over most of the population.

“Ilya said you got locked out?”

The kid frowned. “He tell you?”

“I mean...yeah. I thought I’d help you get a new key.”

The kid raised his arm to scratch awkwardly at his hairline. “Ah, is okay, was going to ask.”

Shane looked the kid up and down. He didn’t look as though he was planning on moving anytime soon. Would he really prefer to sleep on the couch in the lobby over getting help from Shane?

“Well, let’s go now,” Shane said. “C’mon.”

Apparently, Shane’s statement was authoritative enough that the kid got to his feet pretty quickly, following Shane quietly to the front desk. A man that looked to be in his thirties stood behind the counter, dressed up in a way too fancy uniform.

“Hi,” Shane said, trying to muster up all the politeness he was capable of while mostly still asleep. “My friend here got locked out of his room, he needs a new key.”

The desk guy shot Shane a fake smile. “Of course, sir, what is the room number?”

Shane looked at Kosmodemyansky, who took a second to realize he was being asked a question.

“Eh...seven-zero-nine.”

“Perfect, now, if I can just get a piece of ID...”

The expression on the kid’s face made it very obvious that he did not have a piece of ID on him.

“The thing is,” Shane started, resting his arms on the counter. “All his stuff is in the room, including his ID.”

The desk guy made a face that was probably supposed to be sympathetic, but ended up just being passive aggressive. “I’m so sorry, but, for security reasons, without proof of identity we aren’t able to give access to the room.”

Shane clenched his teeth together. He squinted to read the nametag the man was wearing.

“Look...Neil,” Shane started. “Surely this happens all the time. You never have someone pop out of their room to go to the vending machine and they forget their key?”

Neil gave him a blank look. “No.”

Shane sent a look back to Kosmodemyansky as if saying: you see this guy? The kid just looked at him wide-eyed and silent.

Shane threw his hands up. “So, what? You want this kid to go sleep in the hallway? All his stuff is in his room.”

“We can have someone accompany you to your room so that you can retrieve your proof of identity, but we’re a bit short staffed tonight. It’ll probably be a twenty minute wait—”

“Proving his identity? We are NHL players. At the NHL Awards. Surely you’ve noticed the hallways crawling with hockey players. You need proof of identity? He’s got a fucking Wikipedia page, google him.”

Neil raised his eyebrows. "I can't give special treatment just because you've been on TV."

"Is okay," Kosmodemyansky said, tapping Shane on the shoulder.

"Listen Neil, I really should be asleep right now," Shane said, a little too loudly for a hotel lobby.

"But instead I'm here in a hotel in Vegas trying to get this kid a room key. You don't want me to be here, I don't want to be here, and you definitely don't want me calling over your manager and making a big fucking scene, Neil. I don't care what you need to do, but if you don't get a key for room 709 out here in the next couple of minutes, I just might start crying. I am tired, he's tired, I've been wearing an uncomfortable suit all night, and I never even got to eat a macaroni cupcake, I do not need to be waiting in this lobby for twenty minutes."

Heads were starting to turn in the lobby now, Neil looked nervous.

"Well...can you give me the name the reservation is under?"

"Kosmodemyansky," Shane said.

"I don't know how to spell that."

"Fucking try, Neil."

After half a minute of aggressive typing, some swiping of cards, and mouse clicking, Neil placed a key card on the counter.

"I hope you have a nice night, sir," Neil said, in a way that very much implied he did not mean it.

"Thank you," Shane said, slapping his hand on the counter as he grabbed the key card.

He turned, knowing without looking that the kid was following him. Once they got into the elevator, Shane handed him his card.

"Here," Shane said.

"Thank-you," the kid said, holding the card as if it was going to run away.

Shane nodded sharply. It wasn't until they passed the third floor that he realized what it was he had just done. He had never spoken to someone like that in his life.

Still staring up at the slowly rising numbers, Shane spoke.

"When I said I didn't want to be there, I meant talking to the desk man, because he's an asshole. Not that I didn't wanna help you get your key," he explained. Was he overexplaining? Maybe the kid hadn't even understood what Shane had said, but now that he brought it up, maybe he was worried about it now. Should he double down? Did the kid think Shane hated him?

"Okie," the kid replied. He sounded just like Ilya when he did that.

"Okay," Shane echoed.

Kosmodemyansky got off on the seventh floor, and Shane stayed on. He didn't say anything as he exited, but he sent a small wave Shane's way.

Ilya could never find out about what happened at that desk. Shane would never live it down.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah. That's right. I gave the cup to Edmonton. And you know what? I DESERVE THIS. After the past two years? I'm doing whatever I want in my silly little story. For some context, two years ago, Edmonton made it to the Stanley Cup final against Florida. Playoffs are played best of seven, and in this series, Edmonton lost the first three games, then went on to win the next three, forcing game seven. Which they lost. I was in downtown Edmonton for that game, there were police lining the streets waiting for a riot that never came. Everyone was just too damn depressed.

Then, last year, Edmonton made it to the cup final again, and lost to Florida, again. Someone please give Connor McDavid a Stanley Cup or else he'll leave us.

The big deal is that no Canadian team has won the Stanley Cup since 1993, when the Canadiens won. I love the Oilers, but I'll literally take any Canadian team winning. Even the Flames. Even the Sens.

I did not go into much description about the playoffs. I know you guys like to read hockey, but I think it's fair to say that 5 more games of unremarkable hockey would make you hate it. I'm a hockey fan, and I get bored as hell reading about too much hockey. How many times can you use the word "sauce" in one paragraph before I start hallucinating? The answer is two.

I've also decided for no good reason that Carter Vaughan's mortal enemy is Connor McDavid.

Disclaimer, I'm not totally sure what goes on at the NHL awards, if they do a dinner or whatever or how it works, it sounds like they keep changing it every year. Sometimes it's a full awards show, sometimes they give out the awards all at different times. For this, I'm just going with a full day event awards show style.

Shane mentions the Russian 5 because I'm insufferable and it seems like the kind of thing Shane would be equally insufferable about considering all the hockey books he reads. I could talk forever about this but I'll just leave a lil tidbit for anyone interested in hockey history. My favourite ever hockey lore is the Punch-up in Piestany, which occurred during the 1987 World Juniors in Czechoslovakia. It happened during a game between Canada and Russia, where a brawl broke out, involving everyone on the ice. Then, it escalated, and both benches went onto the ice to join in. Then, the fighting continued for TWENTY MINUTES, during which the organizers turned off the lights in the rink to try to get the fighting to stop, which did not work. Canada and Russia were removed from the tournament (at that point Canada was in contention for the gold medal). Now what's extra cool about this, is that on the Canadian team was Brendan Shanahan, and on the Russian team was Sergei Federov and Vladimir Konstantinov, who would go on to defect from the USSR (smuggled out by the Detroit Redwings). The three would all go on to play together for Detroit and with the cup in 1997 and 1998. There are way more crazy specifics about that brawl that I can't fit in here, but if you're interested, please give it a Google. I also highly recommend the documentary "The Russian Five" which recounts the five Russian superstars that Detroit smuggled out of the USSR via funding from Little Caesars.

[Punch-up in Piestany](#)

I consulted my doctor friend about appendectomies so if any of it is wrong blame that guy not me.

I don't support verbal abuse of hotel workers, neither does Shane, he was just very sleepy. That being said. Fuck you, Neil. I can also say that my sister, who is studying hotel management, gave me a thorough review of the protocol Neil would have to follow in this situation, so, I guess that's got a stamp of approval too.

As always I am very receptive to feedback especially when it comes to the Russian characters. I try to look up Russian translations so I can see if there are certain words that Pava might be more likely to use if it's similar in Russian (like "collection"), or the opposite, if there's a word without a Russian equivalent (like "siblings"). Hopefully this makes it more realistic, but let me know if y'all have suggestions!

Fun fact there are 22 guys named Connor in the NHL currently. That's enough for a full roster.

I'm adding several gifs here so you can really understand the full vibe of what went down with the Olympic fight





Chapter 10: Like Two Goalies Hugging

Chapter Summary

Shane made a noncommittal sound. “Just wondering. Is he getting his own place?”

Ilya perked at that. “Why? Did he say?”

“No, I mean, I just assumed, rookies usually move out after that first year.”

Ilya frowned. Yeah, Shane knew his boyfriend. “Right.”

Chapter Notes

Canada and Sweden have a tumultuous relationship right now. On one hand, we're beefing over curling. (I admit that our guy absolutely touched the stone and I find the memes about it hilarious, though I will say idk if you can really consider it cheating when there's no way it did anything to aid it. I do think curling needs more chirping though because that was great). On the other hand, I've been sitting here cheering for Sweden's men's hockey to crush the USA. I'm cheering out loud alone in my room.

Sidney Crosby please get better. We need mama Canada. You guys were giving me an aneurysm today and it's only quarter-finals. I still have to watch the women's finals and I don't know if my blood pressure can handle it. ALSO THE CZECHS HAD 6 PLAYERS ON THE ICE WHEN THEY TOOK THE LEAD. Suzuki ily Marner ily pls take my first borns.

Sorry I'm just feeling so patriotic right now. I've also given up any notion of only doing one gif a chapter because I just have too many feelings to express rn. If I don't post for a while it's because I've flown to Italy to physically fight the Tkachuks. Tell Matthew to stop flirting with Drai.

Anyway, thank you so much for all your comments! I've been reading all of them and also sending many to my mom. Special shoutout to Alexis_SD who gave me some excellent advice (and an academic paper!) about writing for Russian speakers. Also to the people that have been sliding into my Tumblr to give advice.

I'm also so happy to see all the people that know nothing about hockey that are getting to learn about it through my fics. I really pride myself on being able to make things accessible to people who don't know all the terms or logistics, so please pepper me with any questions you have if something is unclear, I am at your service.



I survived the CAN vs CZE Olympic men's hockey game

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

Ilya had no clue that the whole thing was Shane's idea.

That was the point. He would quietly drop hints until Ilya believed he had thought of it. It was better this way, it felt a bit too aggressive if it came from him. Ilya said that Shane tried too hard to be liked, but Shane was pretty sure he tried the perfect amount.

Ilya was cleared for light exercise pretty quickly, considering his appendectomy was a minor surgery. Shane had suggested that they embark on a hike a few days after arriving at the cottage. Ilya complained, more so about the fact that he was forced to layer up with sunscreen and bug spray than the general exercise. He was being a baby. Shane's dad once drove down to the States just to buy

100% deet bug spray that was banned in Canada, that stuff practically burnt a hole in your skin. Ilya could survive some children's OFF! for a few hours.

“So,” Shane said, trying his best to sound casual as they reached the first clearing. “Your rookie comes back start of August?”

Ilya squinted, giving Shane a skeptical look. “How do you know that?”

Shane shrugged. “I talked to him at the awards, remember?”

“Yes, but the way you describe it I assumed you only spoke about the weather or something equally boring until you could run away.”

“Shut up. It was a normal conversation. I was very polite.”

“Oh I do not doubt this. I cannot imagine a conversation between you two, just ‘sorry’ back and forth until someone interrupts.”

“Anyway,” Shane interjected. “August, right?”

“Yes, why?”

Shane made a noncommittal sound. “Just wondering. Is he getting his own place?”

Ilya perked at that. “Why? Did he say?”

“No, I mean, I just assumed, rookies usually move out after that first year.”

Ilya frowned. Yeah, Shane knew his boyfriend. “Right.”

“But, I mean,” Shane started, doing his best to sound casual. “His situation is a bit different, right? He’s still struggling with his English.”

Ilya looked thoughtful as he took a sip from his water bottle. “This is true.”

“It might be a bit of a leap for him to live on his own now. He’s just got his bearings.”

“Yes, I was thinking same thing.”

“But also,” Shane offered, just to give him an out. “No one would blame you if you wanted him out. Housing a rookie for a whole year is already a big thing.”

“I did not mind,” Ilya said, too quickly. “It was nothing. I am very responsible, yes? And I was best one to do it.”

“Exactly,” Shane said. “Did he say he was wanting to move out? Or does he just think he has to?”

Ilya twisted his face up a bit at this. “I do not know. I don’t want him to think he is kicked out. He is not so bad to have around.” He looked at Shane hesitantly, as if asking permission. “He could probably stay another year. Only because I am so generous.”

Shane bit his lip to keep from grinning. “I think that’s a good idea. He’d probably play better with that kind of support at home.”

“Yes, exactly. His hockey would be better,” Ilya clarified.

Shane smiled into his water bottle. As much as Shane enjoyed having Ilya's house all to themselves, that was only a few times in the season. He worried about Ilya, spending all that time alone. He knew that his boyfriend had enjoyed living with the kid, having consistent company. He was getting texts once a day telling him some new anecdote about something the rookie had baked him, or giving him a synopsis of the latest Scooby Doo movie they had watched. It was good for him. He shouldn't lose that just because it was the thing he was "supposed to do."

"You should text him, or call, or whatever. Let him know the offer's there."

Ilya nodded. They finally reached the peak of the slope, which opened into a lakeside view from the top of the hill. It was nearing the evening, and the air was finally beginning to cool down.

"Actually, I was thinking..." Ilya started, turning to look at Shane. "Instead of Pava spending all month at home alone, what if...we invited him to camp?"

Shane did his best to act surprised, as if he hadn't been waiting for Ilya to ask him this for weeks. "Huh," he said, going through the motions of appearing like he was thinking it through. "Is he any good with kids?"

Ilya shrugged. "He is like tall child. They will love him."

Shane smiled. "Sounds good to me."

* * *

The first Game Changers camp was two weeks long, and hosted in Ottawa at the community centre Shane learnt to skate in. They had chosen to host in Ottawa, partially because it was Shane's hometown, but also because it served as a neutral zone between Montreal and Boston. Maybe if they expanded in the future, they could host in the cities of their teams, but this seemed like a good way to start. Besides, Ilya just liked any opportunity to hang out with Shane's parents.

Shane and Ilya, like the rest of the coaches, were staying at a hotel they had partnered with for these few weeks. Ilya understood why it made sense, but part of him wished they were staying with David and Yuna so he could see all the posters Shane kept on the walls of his childhood bedroom. He'd find a way, even if he had to check Shane to the floor on the way there the next time they were invited over for dinner.

Ilya had very loudly declared to the group that he would be sharing a room with Pava. Despite all the turmoil it had caused, it was a relief that another person knew, and it made Shane feel less guilty at the prospect of paying for a room that would lie empty while Ilya snuck off to Shane's every night of camp.

Ilya knew that Shane had been stressed about this camp. He wanted everything to go absolutely perfectly, there was no room for error this first year.

"I'm so bad at this," Shane said, hunched over the picnic table, stabbing his salad with his fork. They were only two days into the camp, and Shane had learnt quickly that he was not so great when it came to teaching kids.

"Now what makes you think that?" Ilya laughed. Just moments before they broke for lunch, Shane's group (who he was supposed to be leading in stickhandling drills) ended up in a full blown dogpile, crashing into one another after Shane did an awful job of explaining the path they were supposed to take through the cones. He spent ten minutes just trying to clean up the yard sale.

“It is fine, Hollander,” Ilya said. “It is supposed to be fun. No nine-year-olds are winning any cups.”

“Speak for yourself,” Shane retorted. “You didn’t know me at nine.”

“And thank god for this, I can imagine it, equally boring, just much shorter and skinnier.”

“Fuck off.”

“Please, no killing each other in front of the children,” Scott Hunter said, moving to take a seat beside Shane.

Ilya wasn’t sure why the dinosaur had decided to sit there when there were plenty of other seats. The spot beside Ilya was occupied by Pava, who had dug into his tupperware full of lunch. The kid had been on a vareniki kick lately, and Ilya had convinced the staff at the hotel that were making the coach’s lunches to make them specially for Pava. What they didn’t realize was that in Canada, it was typical to make their vareniki with cheese whiz, something that nearly caused Ilya to keel over. Pava, the traitor, thought they were delicious, and was now even more fixated on having them every single day of this camp.

“Relax, Hunter,” Ilya chided. “I know you will miss me if I go to prison for killing Hollander. By the time I get out in two or three years, you will already be in a nursing home.”

“You think you’re only getting two to three for murdering me?” Shane asked incredulously.

“I have connections with the Bratva, if I am lucky I will serve no time at all.”

Hunter rolled his eyes, smiling at Ilya’s retort, then paused. “That’s a joke, right?”

Ilya did not answer, reaching over to grab one of the croutons that Shane had been avoiding in his salad.

“Hey!”

“Shush, you were not going to eat it anyway.”

Hayden joined the party with a soft thunk as he sat in the seat next to Shane. Was Ilya doing something wrong? Since when had he started giving the impression that people were welcome at their table? He should start being mean again. Or tell Pava to start looking more intimidating, which was difficult when the kid had sour cream smeared all over his face.

“I think I’m gonna be limping for the next week,” Hayden whined, reaching down to rub at his shin. One of the girls in his group had a penchant for turning her stick into a deadly projectile. She had said that it was an accident, and she was having trouble with her grip, but Ilya stopped believing it after the fourth time it happened.

“Oh no, Pike,” Ilya said. “Do you think it will affect next season? Will Voyageurs have to play without their fifteenth best player? Hollander, how will you ever win another cup?”

“Oh fuck right off,” Hayden said, his face turning red.

“Let’s not,” Shane said, giving Ilya a stern look. “Anyway, Scott, I was gonna ask, I’m surprised you were able to come out for this. I would have thought Kip would try to keep you in New York as long as he could.”

“Hollander, you should know by now that the only thing Hunter is good at is coming out.”

“Hey,” Hayden interjected, furrowing his eyebrows together. “Don’t be homophobic.”

Ilya noticed as both Shane and Pava’s eyes shot to meet his. Pava stuffed another mouthful of vareniki into his mouth, and Shane muffled a laugh with his hand.

“Ah, no,” Ilya said, smirking. “Just Scott Hunter-phobic. Would be discrimination if I suddenly decide to be nice to him just because he is gay.” He held his palm to his heart. “I am ally like this.”

Scott rubbed his hand over his forehead. “Jesus Christ.”

“No, my name is Ily—”

“Rozanov, don’t you dare,” Shane interjected.

Ilya threw up his hands dramatically.

“Anyway,” Scott said, looking back to Shane. “Kip’s working a lot while he’s off from school, but he’s actually coming up to visit the last couple days I’m here.”

“To Ottawa?”

“Hunter the more you talk the more I think you must hate your boyfriend. First you bring him to All-Stars, now Ottawa? What is he going to do all day? Stare at boring building with green roofs?”

“He was actually talking about going to the National Gallery.”

“To see what? Paintings of empty fields?”

“You’re one to talk,” Shane said, “no one should be looking to you for artistic opinions. You literally own a leopard print shirt.”

Hayden scrunched up his face. “When did he wear a leopard shirt?”

Shane’s eye twitched, avoiding contact with Ilya. “Oh, uh...I ran into him in a club in Montreal last year.”

“You went to a club? In Montreal? Without me?”

“I went with Rose.”

Ilya gripped his fork a little bit tighter.

“Riiiiight,” Hayden drawled with a grin, before schooling himself. Ilya had to imagine that he had remembered that Shane was gay, and so it would be weird for him to start teasing him about his ex-girlfriend. “What a time that was.”

“No kidding,” Scott said. “I can’t believe that you dating Rose Fucking Landry is just a casual footnote in your life now.”

“Rose Landry?” Pava asked, chiming in for the first time. “Who is this?”

“She’s an actress,” Hayden said. “She and Shane used to date.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Ilya could see Shane giving Pava the stare down of his life. Pava did not seem to get the message.

“Shane Hollander’s girlfriend?”

Ilya nudged Pava with his elbow.

“For like, a month,” Hayden added.

Pava made a confused face.

“Yes, I do not believe it either,” Ilya joked, “she can do so much better than Hollander. It is no wonder you broke up.”

“Let me guess,” Scott joined in. “You think you could’ve done better?”

“Wow, Scott Hunter,” Ilya huffed. “You talk about women like they are objects that can be passed around? This is very sexist.”

Scott sputtered.

“Rozanov, stop trying to get Scott cancelled,” Shane chided.

“Yeah,” Hayden added. “Didn’t you literally just get cancelled on twitter for following a porn star?”

“I thought she was a political person. She kept tweeting about Planned Parenthood. It was a bad look to unfollow.”

“Someone needs to take your phone away from you.”

“They try,” Pava said. “Try to give manager. He keep changing password.”

“I thought America was about free speech?” Ilya argued. “You try to censor me, like Putin.”

“Not like taking away his phone is gonna help,” Scott added. “This is the guy who went around licking his opponents on the ice like four seasons ago.”

“It took until the third time before commissioner had to call me and tell me to stop,” Ilya offered.

In an effort to redirect the conversation, Shane slid over the rest of his salad to Ilya, which was mostly croutons at this point. “Here, I’m done.”

Hayden raised an eyebrow. “What if I wanted that?” He protested.

“He made me promise to give him my leftovers,” Shane shrugged.

“What, did he hold you at gunpoint?”

“Didn’t you hear, Pike?” Ilya said, taking a bite of the salad as obnoxiously as he could manage. “Me and Hollander are friends now. We share things.”

“I can’t imagine what you have to give him,” Hayden grumbled. “Other than STDs.”

Shane coughed, and Scott Hunter did a double take. Ilya cackled around his fork.

“Wait—” Hayden sputtered. “That sounded bad.”

“Are you jealous. Pike?” Ilya asked, “is this how you flirt? Like little boy pulling on pigtails.”

“Fuck off, you know I didn’t mean it like that—”

“I am very flattered, truly. But you are not my type.”

Pike got to his feet, closing his tupperware in a disgruntled manner. “Don’t we have to start the next session or something?”

Ilya laughed as he watched Pike return into the arena, Hunter following close behind with his own lunch packed back up.

“Don’t tease him like that,” Shane scolded, his face redder than normal.

“He was literally asking for it,” Ilya argued.

“I do not understand,” Pava interjected. “What is S-T-D?”

* * *

“Okay, listen up!” Ilya announced. “Take a knee zaychiki.”

Ilya watched the group of U5s settle on the ice in front of him. About half made it to their knees, the other half plopping down whatever way gravity took them. Ilya often ended up working with the younger kids, as opposed to Shane, who could only be trusted with the preteens.

“Next to me is my friend Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky, say hi, Pava.”

Pava raised his hand to wave at the group of kids.

“I call him Pava, but you are not allowed to, only for me, because we are best friends,” Ilya put his arm over Pava’s shoulder and shook him lightly. “You can call him Coach Kosmodemyansky.”

The kids looked back at him wide eyed. One of the more extroverted girls threw up her hands and huffed, “I can’t say that!”

Yeah, Ilya figured that was fair. “Well, okay, maybe you can just call him coach. Everyone say ‘hi coach.’”

“Hi coach!” The kids chorused back.

“Okay, he is going to be helping us with our drills. He is very big and tall so you will always be able to find him if you are stuck.”

Pava held out a polite thumbs up.

“So, we are going to start by practicing our C-cuts, yes? Everyone line up on this wall here, we will go back and forth.”

* * *

“I don’t think either of them understands a word being said in that conversation,” Hayden said, looking over at where Kosmodemyansky had been pulled aside by one of the kids, initially for help

with his C-cuts, but was now being told a very long winded story that was really just babbling.

“I don’t think I understand him either.”

“He’s talking about his cat named Tux who ran away last week, but then they found him stuck in the mailbox.”

Shane looked over, impressed. “You got all that?”

“I get much worse from Arthur on a daily basis.”

They watched as the kid finally skated back into the drill, leaving the Russian with a very confused look on his face.

“Is he seriously making the four-year-olds use his long-ass name?” Hayden asked. “Why is Rozanov the only one he lets use a nickname?”

Shane shrugged. “Honestly, I never thought to ask. Ilya always says it’s because he’s Russian, so, he gets special privileges.”

Hayden raised an eyebrow. “Since when do you call him Ilya?”

“Okay kids!” Ilya shouted from his half of the ice, drawing back the attention of the younger players. “We will now practice our balancing on one skate. I promise you, this will be very useful for when idiot players from Montreal knock you into boards and blade falls off.”

Shane felt his face heat up, hoping it wasn’t obvious. “I told you we’re friends, it’s not a big deal.”

Hayden pressed his lips together. “You keep saying that, but it’s like, you make it seem like you’ve been buds forever, and I know that’s not true. I’ve heard you complain about the guy for years.”

Shane shrugged. “I don’t know, I guess I just realized that he’s not so bad.”

“It just really felt like it came out of nowhere, man. Like, what if I turned around and told you I was friends with fuckin’ Kadri or something?”

“Then I would support you in your newfound friendship.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “Shut up. It’s just weird, I feel like you act so different around him. Not in a bad way, just...like at lunch today. You were riffing with him like you do with me or J.J., like you’ve known him forever.”

“I mean, I have known him forever.”

Hayden scrunched up his face. “Yeah, yeah. I feel like I’ve entered the Twilight Zone. What other secret friendships are you hiding, Shane?” Hayden joked. “Soon you’re gonna tell me that you and Justin Trudeau go way back.”

This was probably a terrible thing to do in the middle of center ice, but Shane was feeling brave right now. And every other time Ilya had come up in conversation between them, Hayden had spent the whole time complaining about the Russian’s penchant for showboating, and how he wasn’t “for the club.” This was the nicest he’d been about the Ilya thing.

“Actually, Hayden, I wanted to—”

“Coach Pike!” A shrill voice echoed across their half of the ice. They had left their U13s running a puck handling course while their coaches gossiped at the red line. “Oliver licked me!”

Hayden looked over his shoulder, to where one of the kids was holding his hand over his face, looking like he was about to scream bloody murder. “Hold on, one second,” Hayden said as he skated back into their half. Shane followed close behind. “Oliver! Stop licking people!”

“But Coach Roz does it!”

It was okay. It wasn’t the right time anyway.

* * *

“I don’t think he likes me,” Shane said.

Ilya looked up from where he was scrolling on his phone, stretched out like a starfish on the mattress. “Huh?”

Shane frowned. “What are you looking at?”

“Ah, is beekeeper on YouTube. Do you think I could keep bees?”

Shane shot him a bewildered look. “Why would you want to keep bees?”

“So I can make my own honey, Shane. Would be great Christmas gift.”

“When are you gonna have time to take care of bees? You don’t even have time to separate loads of laundry.”

“Shane, my clothes are fine when I put them in all together. Why change what is not broken? And maybe I will get retirement bees. I would look sexy in bee suit.”

“I’m sure you would,” Shane relented.

“What were you saying? Who doesn’t like you?”

“Kosmodemyansky.”

Ilya frowned, putting down his phone and sitting back against the bedframe. “What? Why do you think this?”

Shane moved to sit on the bed in the small space Ilya did not occupy, tucked in by his hip. He was wrapped up in sweats and a Voyageurs hoodie, a stark contrast to Ilya, who was in only a pair of thin pyjama pants and still radiating heat.

“I feel like he always avoids conversation with me. He’s only ever in my vicinity when you’re also there, and then he’s avoiding eye contact. I don’t know what to say to him.”

“In his defense,” Ilya offered, reaching for Shane’s hand, “he does not speak much to anyone who is not me. And also, we are always in public. Maybe he is afraid he will say something about us.”

Shane sighed. “I just need things to be more...comfortable. I mean, especially if he’s living with you for another year. I want to be able to go over to your place without feeling like I’m walking on

eggshells. I meant it when I said he should stay, but I can't cope if things stay the same as they are now."

"Hollander, he likes you. He told me he likes you."

"Okay, but what *exactly* did he say?"

"He said 'I like Shane Hollander. He is good at hockey.'"

"See! He likes me in relation to hockey, not as just a guy."

"Jesus."

"No, my name is Shane," he replied, but his heart wasn't in it.

Ilya shot him a look. "Hollander. You are overthinking this."

Shane huffed, sliding down the bed so that his head was resting on Ilya's shoulder.

"It's just...we finally got to a good place. We spent ten years sneaking around and pretending we didn't like each other, and we don't have to do that anymore. We wasted so much time, and I don't wanna waste any more."

"Well, if it makes you feel better, this is maybe the most normal thing that has happened in our relationship," Ilya offered. "Trying to get each other's friends to like us. At least you do not have to worry about Pava trying to fight you. Hayden Pike will probably threaten me with gun when he finds out."

Shane elbowed his boyfriend lightly in the ribs. "Shut up."

"No, I am serious. Laws may be stricter in Canada but not impossible. He is probably getting his PAL."

"Did you research gun laws in Canada or something?"

"I ask Yuna, from when she did the biathlon."

"I'm serious, though, I can't just have him tolerate me. I know you said he needs time, but..." Shane began, then petered off.

Ilya reached his hands up to lightly brush along Shane's cheek. "Honestly, I do not think it is the gay thing. I mean, maybe we should not be making out in front of him, but I think it is just because he is weird guy. You just need to bond, talk like normal."

"I tried to do that at the awards. It was a disaster."

Ilya chuckled. "Yes, yes, you yelled at desk man about cupcake."

Shane sat up suddenly, a look of panic on his face. "He told you?"

Ilya laughed as Shane started to whack him with a pillow. "Stop laughing, it's humiliating! I was one tweet away from getting cancelled."

"True lovers get cancelled together, Hollander," Ilya replied, wrestling his boyfriend back into his arms. "Really, stop worrying. If anything, you are like two drops of water. Basically same person."

He believed it. Watching Shane and Pava converse was like watching two goalies hug. There was a whole lot of awkward getting in the way.

“It will be fine,” Ilya added. “You need time too. It took you very long time to like me, and I am much more charming than Pava.”

* * *

Ilya was not jealous. He was cool and collected.

He certainly didn't care that their kids liked Pava more than they liked him. He didn't care, but he certainly didn't understand it.

They couldn't even understand each other! Pava couldn't understand the unintelligible mumblings of four-year-olds, and they couldn't understand his accent and broken English. Half the time, Pava just gave up and started throwing in Russian words whenever he needed.

That must have worked well enough, considering that somehow, the group was able to convince him to tow a line a dozen kids strong across the ice by the blade of his stick, occasionally flinging them so that they went off flying in all directions.

Ilya watched from the bench, his hands fiddling with his helmet. Shane had insisted that they needed to set a good precedent and wear their helmets on the ice, even just as coaches. Ilya hated it.

Ilya's eyes narrowed as he observed Shane, casually skating onto the ice, water bottle in hand. Pava had seemed to catch some respite for a bit, the kids deciding to spend their short break trying to slide across the ice on their stomach like seals. Shane skidded to a stop next to Pava, silently holding out the bottle, which the kid took.

“*Everything okay?*” Shane asked. His accent was perfect when he practiced, but his nervousness here showed. Ilya had to strain to hear them, but the echo throughout the rink helped.

Surprise was evident on Pava's face. “*Yes, it's okay. They're working me like horse.*”

Ilya saw the gears turning in Shane's head. Did he ever learn “horse?”

“*They like you. You are good with kids.*”

“Sib-i-lings,” Pava said, switching back to English. This made Shane smile. Ilya didn't get it.

“Right,” Shane replied.

Pava handed back the water bottle as the group of children began to swarm the taller man again. Ilya smiled to himself.

“I don't like you.”

Ilya looked to his left, where Hayden Pike had joined him on the bench. He left a generous three feet between them.

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “Really? I could not tell.”

“Shane likes you,” Hayden added.

“Many people like me.”

“I don’t get it. You’re such a dick.”

“Yes, so are you, and yet you are his best friend for some reason.”

Hayden frowned. “Just because he’s too nice to say anything doesn’t mean that you can just treat him however you want.”

Ilya laughed. “Pike, I can promise you that Hollander is not so nice to me. He is not as weak as you make him sound.”

“What? I don’t—stop changing the subject.”

“Do you not trust Hollander’s judgement? He is very smart.”

“No, obviously I know that—”

“You do not even know me, Pike. I am fun guy, who happens to be best player in the league.”

“Oh fuck off.”

“You would not understand, because you are terrible, but Hollander, he understands this. He is okay at hockey.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “I seriously don’t get this.”

“And I am a great friend. I do not even make fun of his glasses.”

Hayden blinked. “How the fuck do you know about his glasses? He didn’t let me see him wearing them until we roomed together for three years.”

Ilya froze a bit. Fuck, he was in such a rush to school Pike that he didn’t realize what he was saying.

“Ran into him in the middle of the night at a vending machine at All-Stars. All-Stars, you have heard of this, yes? It’s an event for very good hockey players.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

Ilya shrugged. “Maybe later.”

For better or for worse, Shane chose that moment to skate up to the bench.

“You guys aren’t killing each other, are you?”

“Not for lack of effort,” Hayden replied.

Ilya raised his hands in surrender. “He is bullying me for my accent. I think your best friend is racist.”

Hayden huffed. “Stop saying that! And you’re white!”

“Fine,” Ilya shrugged. “You are xenophobic.”

“How the fuck do you know that word?”

“I am very cultured of these things.”

Hayden glared at Ilya before getting to his feet. “I’m leaving.”

As they watched Hayden walk away, Ilya prepared himself to be scolded by his boyfriend. Instead, Shane turned back to Ilya.

“How *do* you know that word?”

“Is same in Russian.”

Chapter End Notes

Typically, most rookies will move out after that first year living with a vet. However, sometimes they stick around, like in the case of Sidney Crosby, who lived with Mario Lemieux for several years. I figured with Pava, it’d make sense that he’d stay longer than was normal, large in part due to his struggle adapting to the language and culture, but also since Ilya enjoys having him and otherwise doesn’t have much of a community in Boston. Also because he should not be trusted to drive himself to the arena.

I’m not totally clear on all the details about the Game Changers camps since they aren’t overly explained in the books. I’m going to say that they’re day camps, but have programs to host and billet kids who travel for them.

Guess who spent an hour on Hockey Canada’s website looking up age appropriate lesson plans for all the age groups.

If you’ve read my other fics, you’ll know about the licking incident, but I’ll reiterate it here. Basically, a few years back, Brad Marchand of the Bruins (now Panthers) had a series of incidents where he started licking other players in the middle of scrums. I like to headcanon that Ilya Rozanov ABSOLUTELY did this at some point in time.

[Marchand Licking Comp](#)

I wrote about this in one of my other fics, but the vareniki Ilya complains about are called perogies in Canada. They are very popular here, especially in western Canada, due to the large number of slavic immigrants that populated a lot of (especially rural) communities. Here, the default type of perogy is cheddar–potato, which I thought was normal everywhere. Fast forward to my visit to Poland, and everyone looks at me in horror when I bring this up. Anywho, they’re actually delicious. I believe that cheddar was popularized since it was British, inexpensive, and flavourful, so it made sense as an affordable option for new immigrants to Canada to integrate.

Extra fun fact, I grew up calling them pyrohy (pronounced peh-deh-heh), which I didn’t realize until a few years ago is an incredibly niche term only used in rural Saskatchewan. The more you know.

I know the term “yard sale” from when I did skiing, but I believe it’s sometimes used in hockey too. It’s basically when you crash and all your equipment goes flying, you’re “having a yard sale.”

Nazem Kadri is a player for the Colorado Avalanche (as of March 2026), winning the cup with them in 2022 and becoming the first ever Muslim player to hoist the Stanley Cup. He's also known for being a bit of a pest. He's been suspended multiple times for illegal hits to the head, and has also been fined for diving several times. I still kinda like him.

Edit: someone asked about it in the comments so I'll put it up here as well, but the instance of Ilya getting cancelled for following a porn star is a reference to the general chaos of 2010s hockey twitter. There is a good Tumblr post that inspired it I will link, but basically everyone was on twitter getting cancelled for the most insane things. This instance with Ilya is specifically referencing when Evgeni Malkin and Logan Couture went around accidentally liking/retweeting a bunch of porn on their professional twitter accounts. On an unrelated note I think Hayden might be the type to rep a cursed amulet (see: John Tavares).

[Tumblr Post](#)







Chapter 11: Parmesan Shrimp Alfredo

Chapter Summary

“Are you conspiring with a child over a U7 game?” Shane asked.

“I do not know what you mean,” Ilya shrugged. “I am treating this very casual. It is just for fun.”

“If any of these kids start slewfooting—”

“Relax, Hollander. I do not need to resort to dirty tactics to beat you. Is already easy, I am superior coach.”

Chapter Notes

Heyyy.

So I actually wasn't gonna post this today since I was planning on going into mourning following those gold medal games, but I figured maybe it would help knowing how many hockey people are in my comments.

I am taking this hard. The women's game was rough, even though there are several players on the US team I was happy for, it was hard to see that kind of national pride, considering a lot of us view the US as a symbol of fascism right now, that really sucked. I'm glad for Hilary Knight and Laila Edwards, but not for America.

The men's game hit me a bit harder for a few reasons. One, because I know most of these guys have never had the chance to compete for a medal. Especially for guys like Connor McDavid, I really wanted to see this for them. The other reason was particularly because of the makeup of the US team. I'm sure there are some good guys, but the vast majority of hockey players are conservative, and the Tkachuk brothers specifically are vocal misogynists and Trump supporters. Seeing them getting a gold medal actually made me wanna throw up. It really upset me just seeing how much coverage in general the Tkachuks got throughout the games.

Of course I can mention the actual hockey of it. I think Hellebuyck was actually insane, he really carried the US through to overtime. There were definitely some calls I didn't agree with. Too many men?? Probably a roughing for the Tkachuks. I still think 3 on 3 overtime for a gold medal game is ridiculous. Canada definitely missed a lot of shots they shouldn't have, and locked in a bit too late. But, the Americans won fair and square. I wish Crosby was there :(

Anyway. I'm sad. The political messaging makes it all that much harder right now. I think back a few years ago to the freedom convoy when we were all embarrassed to be waving Canadian flags since we recognized the danger of nationalism. It became very taboo to wave the Canadian flag for a long time, and the only reason it became okay again was due to the sovereignty threats from the US.

Edit: Heyyyy to all the Americans. I wanna be clear, I don't hate you guys, I know there's so many of you in a bad situation you can't fix. I have spent the games cheering on a lot of US

athletes (especially the figure skaters!), and I know that cheering for your athletes doesn't mean you condone everything your country is doing. This is really directed at the US hockey team. The US/Canada hockey rivalry has become very tied in with the US political climate ever since 4 Nations, and knowing how many active Trump supporters are on the team, it's hard not to view the celebrating I'm watching on my screen as direct support of the administration. The US team literally went into the locker room and called Trump on speaker phone after the game. It IS that serious.

Love to my Americans that are in a terrible situation right now!

Edit 2: even when the Canadians were depressed about losing they were still serving face

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

The second week of camp, the rest of the Pikes made an appearance.

Ruby and Jade were joining in for the second week of camp, and being the age they were, they were unfortunately being coached by Ilya and Pava. Well, unfortunately for Hayden.

“Hi, it’s good to meet you guys,” Jackie smiled, reaching out to shake Ilya and Pava’s hands. Her daughters were practically hanging off of her legs. “I’ve heard a lot from Hayden.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows, sending Jackie his best charming grin. “Yes, I am sure. Must always be complaining I am so much better than him. Is hard for him.”

She laughed. “You are exactly like he said.”

“And he has never mentioned you,” Ilya replied. “I see why now, he is afraid if I find out about you, I will not be able to stop from stealing his beautiful wife. Big risk.”

“Watch yourself.” She turned to Pava, giving him a kind smile. “And you are Kosmodemyansky, right?”

Pava looked impressed at her flawless pronunciation. “Yes. Hi.”

“This is Ruby, and this is Jade,” Jackie said, gesturing with her head to the two girls at her feet. “They haven’t stopped talking about this all summer long, so I apologize in advance if they’re a bit of a handful.”

At that, Jade looked up, grinning. The twin was distinguishable by the way her hair was done up in an intricate braid, courtesy of her mother (it definitely wasn’t from Hayden).

“You’re tall,” she said, her smile showing off her gums.

“Yes,” Pava replied.

“You talk funny!” Ruby joined in, mostly aimed at Ilya.

“I think you talk funny!” Ilya exclaimed back. “These Canadians with their funny accents, I can hardly understand.”

The girls giggled at this, Ruby hiding her face in her mom’s pants as she did so.

“Alright, girls, let’s go get changed, we don’t want them starting without you,” Jackie said, ushering the girls off into the locker room.

Ilya watched them go, joining the group of other U7s as they funnelled through the hallway.

“This is going to be fun,” Ilya declared.

* * *

Hayden hadn’t meant to eavesdrop.

He and Leah had been preparing to run a scrimmage on the neighbouring practice rink, when one of the kids had broken their stick. They had all brought extras, of course, but Riley had forgotten hers in the bench next door. Rather than take the 10 minutes it took to wrangle her skate guards on, Hayden had run to go get it.

This week, they were working with a few larger groups, mostly U7s and U9s, as well as a separate goalie group. Hayden had been split off to join Leah Campbell and Scott Hunter to coach the older kids, while Shane joined Ilya and Pava with the U7s. Max Riley had somehow managed to get Wyatt Hayes, a goalie who had recently been traded to Ottawa, to join him that week for their goalie sessions.

The two other groups were in the main rink when Hayden arrived, the coaches leading their own drills. Hayden watched his best friend skate effortlessly through the groups of kids rushing around the ice in a series of choreographed paths. Hayden loved Shane, but he was so bad at this.

It wasn’t like he was bad with kids, Ruby and Jade, and Arthur especially, loved the guy. They called him Uncle Shane. The fact was, Shane’s greatest strength was also his greatest weakness: he loved hockey. He loved it so much that he understood it to a degree far beyond comprehension, and far beyond his ability to translate any of his ideas into the minds of a bunch of six-year-olds. He still tried his best.

But what really got Hayden? Fucking Rozanov. The kids were absolutely obsessed with him. Jade and Ruby were absolutely obsessed with him. Every time Hayden had ended up in remotely the same vicinity as their group, he was assaulted with the sounds of giggling children and annoying Russian accents.

This time, as he lurked on the bench, tightly gripping a child-sized hockey stick, his eyes locked onto the Russian with a glare. It was because of this malice that he wasn’t paying attention to Jade when she face-planted onto the ice, her cage hitting the cold sheet with a clang.

Hayden’s first instinct was to go run onto the ice, and he almost did. But he remembered what Jackie had told him before this started, he wasn’t supposed to be their dad at camp. His girls didn’t want him “embarrassing” them. Besides, Shane was already skating over, along with the two Russians, and Jade didn’t look like she was crying.

“You okay, kiddo?” Shane asked, taking a knee.

Jade didn’t respond as a small group formed around her, as children always seemed to do when someone got hurt. Instead, she silently moved to flip up her cage, sticking her fingers into her mouth. A few seconds later, she emerged, pearly white tooth in hand.

If Hayden hadn't already been aware that her front tooth was on its last limbs, barely hanging on by a thread, he'd have been worried. This wasn't even Jade's first lost tooth, she was an expert by now.

Still, this didn't stop the group of kids from squealing as she placed it into Shane's hand like a pearl. Based on Shane's expression, he didn't feel the same way about its value.

"Ah!" Rozanov exclaimed, resting his hands on his knees. "Big day!"

"Will the toof fairy come thee me?" Jade asked. At the sound of her own voice, she made a panicked expression, one that Hayden was all too familiar with as a sign that her eyes were watering. Maybe now was the time to step in as dad.

It didn't help that a couple kids around her giggled at her newly acquired lisp. "I thound weird," she whined.

"You look weird," Ruby supplied, unhelpfully.

Jade looked like the dam was about to break. Hayden shuffled, ready to make his way over.

"What?" Rozanov interjected. "She looks cool! Now this, this is look of real hockey player. Tooth lost in battle, you put your body on the line for game. Very impressive."

Hayden paused, watching as Jade looked up hopefully at the Russian. "Really?"

"Yes, yes, of course," Ilya insisted, giving her a light tap on her helmet. "You think your dad becomes such good hockey player by worrying about little teeth? No way, this is how all professionals look. Very intimidating."

Hayden blinked. Did Rozanov just...compliment him? Sure, it was somewhere he didn't know he could hear about it, but he did it. In front of Shane and in front of his daughter.

Jade seemed to agree with this sentiment, but then frowned again. "But I thtill thound funny."

To Hayden's surprise, the giant kid skated forward, getting to his knees. He reached for his mouth, taking out his flipper with a popping sound.

An "ooh" echoed through the group of kids, as they looked at the man holding his front three teeth out in front of him.

"Thee?" the Russian said, somehow even more unintelligible when his accent was mixed with a lisp. "We thound thame."

The kids, including Jade, giggled at this, which grew louder as the kid widened his grin to show off his toothless smile.

"Okay," Shane said, getting to his feet. "I'll go put this somewhere safe, and we can get back to our drill, okay guys?" He reached down to pull Jade to her feet. "Make sure you show off that grin kid, let them all know who they're dealing with."

Hayden watched as the group dispersed again, and Jade joined in, skating side by side with her sister. No tears shed.

He stepped off the bench, retreating back into the tunnel, never letting them know he was there.

The last day of camp, Yuna had insisted it was only proper for the coaches to have a celebratory dinner.

Ilya agreed, it would be fun to go out and be friendly with everyone before they all became his mortal enemies again for a season. Shane took a bit more convincing, more so because he was stressed about trying to organize the logistics required to close up camp, but Yuna had made it clear that she would handle it, and he wasn't allowed to think about it any more.

The decision of what restaurant they would go to came down to a bet, at Ilya's suggestion. He needed something to raise the stakes of their end of camp U7 game, and Ilya had been certain that his team had what it takes.

"Listen Emma," Ilya said, crouching down next to the goaltender. The poor girl was absolutely dwarfed by her pads. "Five minutes in regulation, I know you have this. This is the biggest game of your life, yes? This is moment to prove yourself. Watch your five-hole, and we got this thing in the bag."

Emma looked back at him with a serious expression through her mask, nodding. Ilya skated back up to the faceoff circle.

"Are you conspiring with a child over a U7 game?" Shane asked.

"I do not know what you mean," Ilya shrugged. "I am treating this very casual. It is just for fun."

"If any of these kids start slewfooting—"

"Relax, Hollander. I do not need to resort to dirty tactics to beat you. Is already easy, I am superior coach."

Shane rolled his eyes, signalling at Pava to drop the puck.

Unfortunately, Shane's team did win, which meant that he got to choose the restaurant that night. Luckily, Shane had enough awareness not to choose somewhere that would be pure rabbit food. He also had no spine, which was how Jade and Ruby had convinced him to bring them to Boston Pizza with no effort at all.

"If this is Boston Pizza, why are there none in Boston?" Pava asked as he stuck his nose in the menu.

"Because this is a fake Canadian chain that has nothing to do with Boston," Ilya said. "Order your fake food."

"So, Kip," Shane started, gesturing to the shorter man who sat next to him. Hayden was to his left, with Ilya and Pava across from them. The Pikes practically took up half the table all on their own, the other side of the table balanced by Kip, Scott, Leah, Max, and Wyatt Hayes and his wife. Ilya would feel bad for their server, except he knew she'd be getting a massive tip. "How have you been enjoying Ottawa?"

Kip smiled, taking a sip from his wine glass. "It's been really nice! I've been walking around Byward Market a lot, Rideau Canal, I did a tour of parliament, and I went to just about every museum in the city."

"Were you very impressed with all the stuffed beavers?" Ilya asked.

Shane glared at Ilya from across the table, “shut up.” He turned back to Kip. “It’s too bad you couldn’t be here last year for Canada 150. I came down for Canada Day with my parents, it was awesome.”

“Wow, 150,” Ilya started. “That is almost as old as Scott Hunter.”

Scott rolled his eyes, but Kip smiled.

“Is that what it is?” Kip asked. “Or is it the number of goals Boston gave up in the playoffs?”

Ilya’s jaw dropped, and a collective bout of laughing mixed in with “oohs” echoed around the table. Shane laughed the loudest of all, clapping his hands together.

“Kip Grady,” Ilya said, the look of shock on his face replaced with one of reluctant respect. “I am impressed, who taught you to chirp like that? Certainly not Scott Hunter.”

Kip shook his head. “No, my dad’s a lifelong Scouts fan. Hard not to pick it up.”

“Ah,” Ilya said, leaning back in his seat. “This must be very hard for him,” he gestured between Scott and Kip. “His son is not only dating elderly man, but also Admiral.”

“I’ll have you know, Kip’s dad loves me,” Scott said, with a look of confidence that quickly dwindled at a look from Kip.

“No,” Kip rushed to reassure his boyfriend. “He does love you, a lot. Just...he’d love you a bit more if you were a Scout.”

Now it was Ilya’s turn to cackle. “This is fun,” Ilya said, resting his elbows on the table. “We should do this more, I am having fun.” Ilya’s eye was caught by Pava, who looked far too concentrated looking at the menu. “Do you know what you are getting?” He asked the kid.

Pava looked thoughtfully. “What is Bugs–N–Cheese?”

Ilya blinked, not actually knowing the answer. Luckily, Leah Thompson chimed in from down the table.

“It’s for kids,” she said. “It’s just noodles with alfredo sauce, but the noodles are shaped like bugs.”

“Ah,” Pava replied. “So I not get?”

She shrugged. “Just ‘cause it’s meant for kids doesn’t mean you can’t get it.”

“Is not weird?”

“Since when has that ever stopped you?” Ilya asked. “You eat like weirdo.”

“I’ve literally never seen you eat a vegetable, Rozanov,” Shane interjected, not looking up from his own menu.

“And yet I am still better at hockey.”

“You know,” Wyatt interjected, speaking up to be heard from the opposite end of the table. “Now that we’re talking about it, I lowkey want some Bugs N Cheese.”

“You are not getting Bugs N Cheese,” Wyatt’s wife, Lisa, declared.

“Why?”

“Because we’re having a nice dinner.”

“It’s Boston Pizza, how nice can it be?”

“What are you getting, Shane?” Hayden asked, but continued before Shane could answer. “Wait, I know, bird food. No sauce, plain fish, and brown rice.”

Shane frowned. “You don’t know that.”

“Come on,” Hayden laughed. “You’re zero fun. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you eat something that wasn’t stripped of all sense of flavour. Honestly, I can’t believe you even picked this place, I don’t think they even have anything you’re willing to eat.”

Ilya looked at Shane across the table, his shoulders tightened as he grew defensive but tried not to show it. “I can be fun,” Shane said simply, crossing his arms. “I just like to eat healthy.”

“Shane,” Hayden said, looking unconvinced. “It’s the offseason. You’ll live if you eat a slice of garlic toast. Don’t be a bi—boring guy,” he corrected quickly after a stern look from Jackie. “I dare you.”

Shane hardened his gaze. “Fine,” he said. “I was gonna get this anyway,” he said, gesturing to some sort of cheesy Italian dish. It only took one flutter of his eyelashes for Ilya to know that Shane had absolutely no intention of ever ordering that before Hayden had pressured him in front of the whole table.

When their server came around, Ilya watched with amusement as Wyatt ordered Bugs N Cheese, triggering both Pava, Leah, and all three Pike children that weren’t babies to order it as well.

“Um,” Shane said, looking at the menu hesitantly. “I’ll get the parmesan shrimp alfredo.”

The server nodded, dutifully writing in her notepad. Ilya narrowed his eyes on his boyfriend. For anyone else, it was pretty basic, certainly not adventurous. But for Shane? Ilya had never seen him touch cheese outside of the time he made him the tuna melt, and that was just because he was being polite. He knew the last thing Shane wanted was to sit here in front of everyone and eat fucking cheese pasta.

Ilya made a decision. When the server came his way, he pointed at the menu. “I will have chicken power bowl. Grilled, not breaded, please. And sauce on the side, also.”

Shane raised an eyebrow at him from across the table. Ilya shrugged.

“What? I can be healthy. I am professional hockey player too, yes?”

Pava was also giving him a skeptical look, but was quickly distracted after Jackie started chatting with him about Boston. Apparently she was wanting to train to run marathons, not that Pava knew anything about that.

When the food came around, Ilya watched Shane carefully as his meal was placed in front of him. It looked delicious, and Shane knew it looked delicious, but Ilya also knew that for his boyfriend, the stress of eating something that wasn’t a part of his meal plan outweighed any pleasure he derived from its taste.

The table was overcome with the song of cutlery clinking together as everyone dug into their meals. Shane took his time cutting into his shrimp and distributing it around the dish. He mixed his plate, twisting it around his fork but not raising it to his lips.

Ilya looked at his own dish, which, as boring and healthy as it was, looked pretty good. Honestly, it was already more exciting than what Shane would normally eat.

Ilya leant across the table, dipping his fork into Shane's plate and emerging with a scoop of pasta.

"Hey!" Shane exclaimed, throwing his hands up.

Ilya shrugged, shoving his fork into his mouth and chewing dramatically. "I cannot help it, Hollander, it looks so delicious. I have made terrible mistake, ordering healthy meal."

Shane blinked, giving Ilya a look that said: I know what you're doing. "Is that so?"

"Yes. I'm am sitting here filled with regret. If only I had close personal friend at this table who would switch meals with me."

"What are you, twelve?" Hayden interjected.

"You really wanna switch?" Shane asked, disguising his hopeful look as one of skepticism.

"Please, please, Hollander. If you do this I will never make fun of your stupid boring food ever again," Ilya said, holding his hands together.

Shane sighed. "Okay," he said, reaching to lift up his own plate to pass over.

"Wait," Ilya said. "At least try yours first."

Shane looked down, seemingly giving in as he took a bite of the creamy pasta. He smiled, looking satisfied, before finally passing his dish to swap with Ilya.

* * *

Hayden was grateful that he wasn't sitting beside Ilya Rozanov. He thought that if he and the Russian so much as accidentally bumped elbows, he would spontaneously combust.

He spent the entire start of the dinner rolling his eyes every time Rozanov opened his mouth, which was always to make some sort of jab or joke. He had expected to spend the rest of the dinner glaring at him, that was, until the server came around.

Hayden watched from his spot next to Shane, as Ilya Rozanov ordered a meal exactly in Shane's diet, then effortlessly created a ruse to switch with him. To anyone else at the table, it was just another occurrence of Ilya Rozanov being a pest, and making a big deal of something just to annoy Shane.

But Hayden saw the look in his eyes. Shane wasn't annoyed at all, he was grateful. Hayden's eyes moved over to look at Rozanov. He didn't have that smug look on his face, as he always did whenever he won a battle. He looked satiated, his gaze flitted back and forth from his meal to Shane, the two kept sending each other small smiles that could've been passed off as reaction to the conversations going on around them. It probably seemed that way to everyone else, but Hayden knew his friend, he knew Shane Hollander, and—

Holy fuck.

Hayden's eyes were drawn to the Russian kid, then to the can of ginger ale sitting in front of Shane.

Holy motherfucking fuck.

He thought about Shane learning Russian on his stupid Duolingo app. How he would always disappear when they played Boston. How he seemed weirdly well acquainted with the Russian rookie.

He looked at Rozanov as he laughed at some joke Max made, taking a sip of his coke.

Boston Lily. Lily. Ilya.

Hayden didn't contribute to the conversation for the rest of dinner.

* * *

When they returned to the hotel, Shane was looking forward to his bed. While all the other coaches were leaving tomorrow, Shane and Ilya would remain in Ottawa for a couple more days, staying with his parents. Shane was trying to figure out the best way to keep his boyfriend out of his childhood bedroom, but he didn't think he'd be able to succeed.

Just as they approached the elevators, he felt Hayden sidle up next to him. "Can I come talk to you? In your room?"

Shane furrowed his eyebrows. "Sure, is everything okay?"

"Oh, yeah, no, yeah," Hayden said, almost overly casual.

"Okay, sure, come up with me," Shane said. He sent a quick look to Ilya, who nodded. He would go back to Kosmodemyansky's room for now.

It wasn't until he was already letting Hayden in that Shane realized that Ilya's stuff was still strewn about the room.

"Actually, Hayden—" Shane started, but Hayden had already plunked himself down on the edge of the bed.

"You and Rozanov," Hayden declared. "You're together."

"What?" Shane said, but the look on his face had been enough to confirm.

"Holy shit!" Hayden said, pumping his arms into the air. Shane couldn't tell if the shock on his face was more prominent than the satisfaction from guessing right. "Fuck! I fucking knew it! You-re—oh my god, oh my god, holy shit."

"Hayden—"

"I knew it, Jackie says I have terrible intuition but I was fucking right."

"Hayden—" Shane tried again.

"You know, at first I thought, maybe you had a bit of a crush on him, why else would you be tolerating him? But then, then! I saw you two interact in person, and dude, you walk him like a fucking dog. The way he ordered your weird food, just so he could swap with you? I wouldn't even do that for Jackie."

Shane scrunched his face together. “You thought I had a crush on him?”

“And then it all fucking came together! He has ginger ale at his house, the girl you always see in Boston, the way you’re always busy whenever we play Boston, I can’t believe I didn’t see it before. And—oh my fuck,” Hayden said, stopping dramatically to slap his hands on his head. “The glasses! Your glasses! Jesus Christ.”

That seemed to be the end of Hayden’s spiel, signified as he dramatically huffed and flopped down on the mattress.

“How did you know about the ginger ale in his house?” Shane asked after a few minutes of silence.

Hayden frowned, popping back up to rest on his hands. “Seriously? That’s your first question?”

“I’m not sure what else to say,” Shane said. “I mean...you’re right.”

Honestly, Shane was surprised. The last thing he had expected was for Hayden to figure it out on his own. He wasn’t known for being all that perceptive. But the more he laid it out, Shane didn’t realize how obvious they had been.

He also knew it was his fault. He had meant to tell Hayden well before camp had started, but with everything that went down with Kosmodemyansky, he had gotten cold feet. He wouldn’t blame Hayden for hating him, this was a big secret to keep.

“So...it’s real?” Hayden asked. “You and Ilya Rozanov.” He made a face as he said the name. “Is it...like...serious?”

“I mean...yeah,” Shane admitted. He stood awkwardly in the middle of the hotel room. He could feel his walls coming up, his stomach shrinking in on himself as Hayden bored his gaze into him. “Rookie year serious.”

Any amusement on Hayden’s face dropped. “What? You’ve been together since rookie fucking year?”

“Well...no, not officially, that wasn’t until last summer. But...it’s always kind of been there.”

“What the fuck?” Hayden said, his voice starting to rise. “Since before you even knew me. We’ve been friends for almost a decade and you didn’t tell me?”

He looked hurt, and Shane felt awful.

“It’s not that simple.”

“Fuck off, it’s not that simple. You were there the day I met Jackie. I tell you everything.”

“It’s not the same and you know it,” Shane said, properly steeling himself. Part of him just wanted to shrink down and just take it, but the other part of him remembered all those nights he spent on the phone with Ilya, talking about Montreal, talking about Hayden, his parents, all of his worries about what everyone would think of him. He wasn’t going to let that go ignored. “It’s not the fucking same, you saw how the team reacted after I came out, you know it’s been different. It’s like I’ve got fucking cooties.”

Hayden frowned, his brows knitting together. “I know that, but...Shane, it’s me. I haven’t treated you different.” He paused, looking properly panicked. “Have I?”

“No,” Shane was quick to reassure, running his hands over his face. “No, that’s exactly the thing, Hayds. You’re the only person from the team who hasn’t treated me differently. You’re my best friend, I couldn’t lose that, not after I lost the locker room.”

“You weren’t going to—”

“Are you telling me,” Shane interrupted, giving Hayden an exasperated look. “That you would have been totally fine if I came up to you that day and told you that I was in love with Ilya Rozanov?”

The room went silent for a moment, and Hayden’s expression softened. He got to his feet, looked at the ground, and then back up at Shane. “You’re in love with him?”

Shane had never seen Hayden look so earnest before.

They had been best friends for years. Shane had been his best man at his wedding, he had been the first one outside of the family to hold Arthur after he’d been born. They still roomed together on road trips even though the union hadn’t mandated it since 2013. Shane went as Hayden’s plus one to the awards when he was nominated for the Lady Byng a few years back.

Shane felt like such an asshole. Hayden had shared so much of his life with Shane, and Shane hadn’t trusted him enough to share his own.

“I am,” Shane said. “And he loves me back. The way you feel about Jackie? That’s how it is with me and him, it’s...it’s everything.”

Hayden sighed, looking at Shane with his giant cow eyes. “Shane, you coulda told me. I know I always say he’s a dick, which I still think, by the way, but...I can get over it for you. You’re my best friend.”

Shane felt like he was on the verge of tears. He could feel his eyes starting to water, and his expressions going blank like they always did when he tried to keep himself from crying. “It’s not because of you, man. I was just so fucking scared. I’ve been so scared this whole time, and I didn’t even know what any of it was until last year. I’m sorry, I should have told you earlier, I just...I’m sorry.”

Now it was Hayden’s turn to frown. “No, don’t...don’t apologize. Now I feel like a dick. I feel like an awful friend. I wasn’t there for you this whole time.”

Shane shrugged. “You’re not a mindreader. How could you have known?”

Hayden huffed dramatically. “Well, now we have to hug it out, right?”

“Do we?”

“I think we do,” Hayden said, reaching out to clamp his arms around Shane, rocking him back and forth. It was a bit bro-ey, considering the circumstances, but Shane figured Hayden was just trying to set boundaries. “Can I tell Jackie?” Hayden asked, his head still resting on Shane’s shoulder.

“Yes, you can tell Jackie.”

“Sick. Does this mean I get to give Rozanov the shovel talk now?”

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

Chapter End Notes

Did I go digging trying to find what was on the Boston Pizza menu in Ottawa 8 years ago? Yeah, I did. Was that necessary? Absolutely not. Is this the reason it took me like a week to write this? Probably yes.

Also, I wanna explain something here regarding Hayden's dislike for Ilya. It's really not just the fact that he's a bit of an asshole, it goes a lot deeper than that. Hockey is not like football or soccer, it's really taboo to be a big flashy star. The big stars like McDavid and Crosby are known for having the personality of a piece of cardboard, but part of that is because they can't be showing off all the time. Hockey is really big into the idea of being a collective team, making passes rather than taking the win for yourself. Taking salary cuts to stay with the team that drafted you. For example, Kirill Kaprizov just signed a new deal with the Wild, becoming the highest paid NHL player currently, but it was controversial, especially to a lot of Wild fans. Taking such a large portion of the salary cap prevents teams from signing other big players, it's seen as not being "for the team." Humility is a big deal. Even players that are massive pests on the ice, it's typically only on the ice, they aren't flaunting so much outside the game. So Ilya, even though he's a very good player, would probably not be beloved by many fans and players because he's such a showboat. In Boston, he's getting away with it because they benefit from his success, but he would otherwise be a pretty controversial figure in hockey.

I know some of you guys might be thinking Hayden kind of sucks in this. To be honest, even though I generally like Hayden, he does kind of suck in the books. He's got a record of being a bad friend to Shane, and he definitely shows some misogynistic and homophobic tendencies, even if unintentionally (telling his son only girls can wear nail polish). He's not a bad guy, but he's got work to do. He is similar to Pava in that way, though I think Pava has a bit of a leg up in some ways because he's so empathetic and grew up in a family of women.

Also, I disagree with Rachel Reid saying that Shane doesn't have an eating disorder. While it's true many athletes have strict diets, I think the extent of his obsession and anxiety surrounding food surpasses typical athlete behaviour. I'm not like Shane quite in the same way, but I do have OCD that largely manifests through my relationship with food, so I very much relate to the stress he has surrounding meals and eating in public, and it was really something I wanted to write about. If someone did for me what Ilya does for Shane, I'd marry them that second.



Chapter 12: What's in a name?

Chapter Summary

Ilya had forgotten.

The first few weeks that the kid had been here last year, he had waited for it. He had expected it. He probably wouldn't have cared as much if it had been a problem back then. But after months went by, then an entire season, it stopped crossing his mind. He forgot it was something that might ever be a problem.

Chapter Notes

I'm gonna try and keep this short, mostly because I don't wanna make anyone too sad before reading this chapter (my bad for that last one). This is a long chapter, and my end notes are already full of plot-relevant notes. Someone complained that I wrote too much in my end notes soooo here's my longest one yet. Also, a chapter count has been added, but is subject to change slightly.

The truth is, I'm feeling a bit disenchanted with hockey lately.

I have been reading a book (which I highly recommend for any hockey fan) called *We Breed Lions*. It details toxic hockey culture in Canada, particularly in junior and minor hockey. This brought a lot of insight into how bad it really is. I'm going to get into it more in my notes in later chapters, and I hope to explore how I think this culture might've affected Shane growing up since it isn't really addressed in the books. Reading this book, now exacerbated by all the stuff going on with the USA hockey locker room, it's got me feeling not great.

I know there's a lot of people who have told me that they want to get into hockey because of this fic, but I hope that if you do, you go into it conscious that there is a lot of toxicity engrained in the sport, and we have to hold people accountable. I've been trying to do that, even if it means being critical of players I like. On that note, please do support the PWHL, I know I'll be making that shift.

Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. This is my little fantasy hockey world that I will continue to write and love. That being said, it is just a fantasy.

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

Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky hated being sung at in general, but particularly on his birthday.

He wasn't exactly a popular kid growing up, he didn't have a lot of friends. One of the only proper birthday parties he'd ever had involved half of his class and had ended in total disaster. He never did anything big after that. Usually it was just him and his family. Last year, he had just arrived in America, and he didn't do anything at all.

This year, he sat at Margaret's dinner table as she and Ilya sang at him. Margaret was a great singer, Ilya was not so much, but he had a lot of heart. It was a different song than what he was used to, but he had heard it before in movies.

In front of him was a cake, purple and green, with a candy Scooby Doo figurine on top, all hand made by Margaret. Ilya's contribution had been the oreos that lined the edges of the cake, and an "It's a Boy!" banner hanging from the wall (Ilya said the store had birthday ones, but he thought this was funnier).

"Blow out the candles!" Margaret exclaimed, and Pava did, pursing his lips and blowing until all nineteen candles were extinguished.

Ilya held up his phone to snap a picture, no doubt fuelled by the amusement of the paper party hat that he had forced Pava to wear.

"It's a double chocolate cookies and cream cake," Margaret said, as she cut the first giant slice for Pava. "Family recipe."

She cut a smaller piece for herself and Ilya, and the three began to dig in.

"Is very good," Pava said. He had finally gotten used to chewing with so many teeth missing.

"I can give you the recipe," Margaret smiled. "I heard you're quite the baker."

Pava shrugged. "I like to. Am not so good."

"Wrong," Ilya declared loudly, talking with his mouth full. "You make the best banana bread. I keep trying to let bananas go bad so you'll make more but then you keep eating them."

Pava made a face. "Whole time I eat so many, do not want to go bad. Why you no tell me?"

Ilya laughed to himself. "Sometimes I wonder what goes on in your head, malysh."

"I think it's sweet," Margaret chimed in. "From what I've heard, if Pavsikakiy wasn't taking care of that house, it would just about implode."

Ilya started cackling at that, throwing his hands up dramatically. "Really? What has this child been telling you? He must have not mentioned when he almost set house on fire."

Pava gave an affronted look. "Was one time."

"It's not about that," Margaret argued. "It's about the atmosphere he brings to the house."

"Yes" Pava said. "Atmosfera."

"I should never have introduced you two," Ilya said, gesturing between them. "Bad combination. Evil grows here."

Margaret flipped her hair dramatically, tossing her neon green scarf along with it. "I'm only telling it like I see it. You're lucky you get to have this kid around."

Pava pressed his lips together, willing himself not to blush. Ilya just grinned at him.

"Ah, yes, maybe, even if he is eating all of my food."

“Is hardly food,” Pava shrugged. “Is just junk.”

“You are so mean to me. Wow.”

“Much sour candy.”

“Now you must stop or I will lock you out. You embarrass me in front of Margaret.”

“Did she think you were cool before?”

Ilya threw a napkin at his head, but he was laughing.

“Look at this guy,” Ilya said, talking to Margaret now. “So confident, so edgy. This is thanks to me, yes? I am great influence. They must make award for this now.”

Ilya’s speech was cut off by the incessant ringing of his phone. Pava had developed a Pavlovian response to this specific ringtone, as it made Ilya groan everytime it went off. It was most definitely his publicist.

“Fuck,” he said, quickly remembering himself as he sent an apologetic glance to Margaret. “I forgot, I am supposed to call about some commercial they want. I will get him to call later.”

“No, it’s okay, go on,” Margaret said. “Just be quick with it, go take it in the garden, great reception. We’ll manage fifteen minutes without you.”

Ilya looked hesitant, but finally agreed at Pava’s nod. He disappeared into the garden.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Margaret turned back to him excitedly.

“So?”

Pava looked up from his plate. “Hm?”

“What did you find out? About the secret girlfriend?”

Pava blinked. “Secret girlfriend.”

The thing was, Pava should have been expecting this line of questioning. If he had been prepared, he would have planned some sort of explanation that would have made it easier to avoid slipping up. Pava was not prepared.

“I am not knowing this word,” he said. He definitely did know that word.

Margaret gave him a look that suggested maybe she knew that. “The girl he had over, when he kicked you out? With the fancy car?”

He nodded slowly. “Ah. Yes.”

She raised her eyebrows. “So?”

Pava wondered if enough blank staring would be enough to get Margaret to leave him alone. It wasn’t. He was so stressed out about this whole thing, why did he have to find out about any of this? He hated secrets. He was so bad at keeping them. He almost threw up when he had to hide Ilya’s Christmas present from him for a week last year.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “I am not knowing. I see nothing.”

Margaret frowned. “Really? He hasn’t seen her again? She didn’t leave anything behind at the house?”

Pava shook his head. “Nothing.”

Margaret sighed. “You think they’re together? Maybe I was wrong, maybe it’s not serious.”

“No, is serious,” Pava said, quicker than his brain could comprehend.

Margaret raised a brow. “Now how do you know that?”

Pava froze. “Ah, just guess.”

He figured the less he said about this the better. The very last thing he wanted was to say anything wrong, anything that would give Ilya away. He had been trusted with this secret, even though it was by accident, and he wasn’t going to let Ilya down.

Luckily, Margaret seemed to pick up on the way Pava had shut down, and decided to change the subject.

“How was your summer? You spent some time at home?”

Pava smiled instinctually. “Yes. With my mama and sisters.”

Coming home had been harder than he thought it would be. He hadn’t realized how much he had missed it. He spent the days taking care of his sisters while his mama worked, and spent the evenings with her, mostly helping her cook. When they had time they went on a few day trips out to the lake. He stuffed himself full every day at supper until he ached while he slept.

Every night in the kitchen, he’d talk with his mama, sipping at cups of tea brewed in a great big samovar that had been in their family for generations. She had him tell her everything about his life in Boston. His house, his teammates, but mostly she asked about Ilya. She had been so worried about her boy when he went away, a strange country where he didn’t speak the language. Pava had been scared too. Terrified. He couldn’t imagine how much worse it would have been if he didn’t have Ilya.

He cried the day he left for Ottawa. He cried when he hugged his mama, and half of the plane ride to Moscow.

In some ways, being back in Boston the second time around was almost harder. Just when he felt like he was settled and maybe starting to belong, the world shook him up like a nevalyashka and threw him back.

“I bet they were happy to see you,” Margaret said.

“Yes, I think they come visit.”

“This year?”

Pava nodded. His mama had said she wanted to see him play in America. Maybe he could bring them over the holidays, when she was not working.

“How exciting!” She gushed. “Hopefully I’ll get to meet them! I’d love to see what kind of woman raises a young man like you.”

Honestly, Pava was not totally sure what his mama would think of Margaret. He thinks it would be like watching a lynx shake hands with an antelope. He wasn’t sure who would be which.

“Yes,” he said, scooping the last bite of cake into his mouth. “Cake is very good.”

“Would you like some more?”

Pava thought for a moment. “I think no. Will make stomach sad.” He looked at Margaret’s plate, which had hardly been touched. “You not eat?”

She shook her head. “Maybe some, a bit later.” She gestured to the device on her arm. “I’ve gotta watch my sugars. I’ll probably bring a slice down to Paul tomorrow, but, if you two don’t eat it, no one will.”

Pava set his fork down lightly on the table cloth. He wanted to concentrate on his words, and on Margaret’s reply, he didn’t want to have to ask her to clarify.

“Paul is past husband?”

If she was surprised by Pava’s line of questioning, Margaret didn’t show it. “Yes, divorced eight years now.”

“And you divorce...why?”

She raised her eyebrows. “Well, after he came out as gay, staying together didn’t make much sense.”

Pava nodded. “Ah, yes.”

After Ilya had taught him what bisexual meant, Pava had figured he should learn some more terms, just so he wouldn’t embarrass himself around his captain. He was too afraid to look it up on his phone, he wasn’t sure who could see what was on there. Did his Russian phone number get monitored? Would his search history be saved?

He ended up temporarily swiping one of the team iPads meant for reviewing plays, and hunkering down in a storage closet. He learned a lot of words. He learned what a closet was (which had made him a bit nervous at first before he realized it was just a metaphor), he learned about a stone wall (he hadn’t totally figured that one out yet), and he read the words “come out.” It took him a bit to remember where he had heard those words before.

He had been pretty sure he knew what it meant, and what that meant about Margaret’s ex-husband. But he wanted to be absolutely sure.

“And...is not weird?” Pava asked. “Still seeing him?”

Margaret shrugged, taking a sip of her tea. “At first, maybe. But before we were in love, we were best friends. It just took some time to get back to that.”

Pava pressed his lips together, thinking. “But, he would not love you, if he was...”

It shouldn’t be weird to say the word. But Pava felt weird. Like he was calling him a name.

“Maybe he wasn’t in love with me,” Margaret said, her face soft. “But he loved me, and he still does. And I love him, he’s still my best friend.”

“You were not mad?”

“Oh, I was. Absolutely,” she laughed. It shocked Pava a bit. “I was furious for a long time, but...I also saw how hard it was for him. How scared he was for a long time. He did hurt me, but he didn’t want to hurt me. It wasn’t hard to forgive him.”

That word. Scared. He read it a hundred times in those articles he found. He’d seen Ilya’s face up on that stage in the karaoke room. It had been hard to see how someone as strong as Ilya would ever be able to feel scared. Now it felt hard to see how he wouldn’t be.

“How did you show?” Pava asked. “That you were not mad anymore?”

Margaret sat back, looking a bit surprised. Was that a bad question? Was it weird to ask?

“Well,” she started, before Pava could take it back. “I didn’t do anything specific. I just...I started being his friend again. We went out for breakfast, I met his new boyfriend, just things here and there to show that I care, that I was listening, you know?”

Pava nodded. “I see. That is nice of you.”

Margaret smiled. “People don’t usually call me nice, but I suppose I must be doing something right if I suddenly have all these Russians in my house.”

As if on cue, Ilya reappeared in the room, poking his head around the door jam. Pava jumped a bit in surprise. “Pava! Do you want to be in commercial with me?”

Pava gave Margaret a bewildered look, before turning to Ilya. “What?”

Ilya approached the table, lifting up his slice of cake, taking a bit as he held it in his hands. “They want me to do ESPN commercial, they need another Russian.”

“For what?”

“We are going to be Russian spies, but also hockey players. I don’t know, media people come up with it. You do not have to speak English.”

Pava furrowed his eyebrows. “We will not be in trouble?”

Ilya shook his head confidently. “No, it is funny. And they will give you lots of money, maybe you can buy your own DVD player.”

Pava contemplated for a moment. “You are doing?”

“Yes, yes. Will be fun.”

Pava had never done a commercial before. “Okie.”

Ilya resumed taking bites from his slice of cake.

“Did you say Russian spies?” Margaret asked.

Mason Doherty was a weird guy.

He had been traded over the summer as part of a three-way trade, in which Boston gave up their goalie, a first-round draft pick, and Hammersmith, who had spent so much of last season a healthy scratch, Ilya was sure he would've otherwise been placed on waivers. He knew Boston had been wanting to get a new goalie for a while, considering their last guy was basically Swiss cheese, but he didn't realize they were going for such a big fish.

The trade was big for Boston, but they weren't the only ones making waves. The third team involved in the trade was Montreal, who gave up defenseman J.J. Boizieu to Minnesota, and retained a chunk of Doherty's contract in exchange for Boston's first round pick next year. Boizieu wasn't a superstar, but he had been a reliable enough part of Montreal's defense for years that his trade had been a surprise.

Ilya didn't know much about J.J., other than that he was Shane's friend. Ilya had been with Shane when he found out about the trade that summer, and he had been heartbroken. He and J.J. had been playing together for as long as Shane had been in the NHL, and he was one of the few Voyageurs who hadn't started treating him differently after he came out. Of course, this wasn't the first trade Shane had witnessed, but it was certainly the most impactful. Ilya made a mental note to check in on his boyfriend.

Mason had arrived in Boston with little flair. Mason was good, and he knew it, but he wasn't cocky. He kind of just lived in his own little world in that net. Some goalies named their posts or sang songs to stay occupied, but Mason just stared into space.

Ilya had also heard from Pava that the goalie also ran an instagram account where all he did was rate plain glazed donuts he got from bakeries around the country. From what Pava showed him, it looked like he just scored them higher the more glaze they had. Ilya respected that.

Mason's arrival came with some changes for Pava. In Boston, Pava wore number ten, but in Minnesota, so had Doherty.

"You know you have to take that off when you get on the ice," Ilya said.

Pava flashed his brand new Rolex that was wrapped around his wrist, which had been gifted to him by Doherty in exchange for his number. Pava now wore the number 71 on his back, the days his sisters had been born.

"I just want to look at it a bit longer," Pava said, his eyes practically sparkling as he admired it. He looked a bit ridiculous, donned in his full practice gear and a \$10,000 watch on his wrist.

"Nice piece'a hardware," Josh Cloutier said, appearing from the neighbouring locker. He had just signed as a free agent over the summer, some American defenseman that last played for the Blues. Ilya didn't know what to think of him yet, he performed well in training camp, and was managing to fit in okay for their exhibition games.

"Thank-you," Pava said, finally pulling off the watch and tucking it in the deepest corner of his cubby. He was so tall in his skates that the "Property of Boston" that was stamped across his chest was level with the divider.

"I'm more of a TAG guy myself," Cloutier said, leaning his arm up on the lockers.

"I am sure we were all dying to know," Ilya said.

“I got a Swatch for my birthday,” Delly chimed in. “It’s got the Simpsons on it.”

Ilya blinked. “How exciting.”

For the start of the new season, they had reverted their first line to the Pava—Ilya—Marly combo. Obviously (though it had not been obvious to Ilya in the moment), the change had just been a temporary switch for playoffs.

Siggi also moved teams this summer, being traded to Philly on request. Ilya had worried Pava might take it a bit hard, Siggi had been one of the few guys on the team that the kid had been properly friendly with.

“It will be weird to play against him,” Pava had said. “Do you think we can still be friends?”

“Of course,” Ilya had shrugged. “Hollander and I are a weird exception. Lots of guys are friends with players from other teams, people usually don’t care so much.”

That was all it took for Pava to make plans to get ice cream with Siggi after their first game in Philly.

They had brought up some new guy that had sat cooking in their AHL affiliate for the past few years to replace Siggi on the third line. He was nothing special, but he seemed solid enough so far.

Following their first Game Changers camp, Ilya liked to think he had picked up a thing or two from Hollander about planning ahead. He had helped him to organize a more put together summer training plan, which he actually ended up liking (though he’d never admit that to Hollander). He thought he’d try out some of the drills he and Shane had worked through over the summer during his Captain’s skates, and they had gone well enough that LeClaire had continued many of them in their regular training. He thought it was overall going well.

“Are you trying to fucking kill us?” Marly asked, skating up to Ilya as soon as he called off the bag skate.

Ilya shrugged, not nearly breathing as hard as his teammates. “It’s to build endurance. You skate like you spend all summer on the couch.”

Marly spit onto the ice. “I think I can taste my stomach lining.”

“You are acting like a little baby.”

Pava skated up to grab a sip of water. When he lifted the bottle to waterfall, the lid fell off, dousing his jersey with water.

“Zoinks,” Pava said, trying to shake off whatever droplets he could.

Cloutier skated up, laughing through his panting. “Gotcha!”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Cloud, this is the oldest trick in the book. At least be creative.”

“Yeah,” Marly said. “Like that time Roz convinced half the team that the Leaning Tower of Pisa fell over and then got us to mention it in a press conference. Twitter didn’t shut up about that for months.”

Pava frowned. “This was lie?”

Ilya grimaced. “Ehh, sorry, I forgot to translate that for you.”

“You hang noodles on my ears.”

“Was an accident.”

“I tell my mother about this.”

“Can we go back to the noodles thing?” Cloutier interjected.

“It is a Russian saying,” Ilya explained.

“How did you not figure out that it didn’t fall over by now?” Marly asked. “Isn’t the tower in Russia?”

“No, idiot,” Cloutier said, elbowing him in the pads. “It’s in Italy. Milan, or something.”

“You are both so stupid,” Ilya said, looking at them in disbelief. “I do not know if it's because you are hockey players, or just American.”

“Probably both,” Delly said. Not that he was any better, he was from fucking Alberta.

“Okay, guys, let’s get going,” their newest assistant coach, Maya, appeared behind them. She was one of the only female coaches in the league. Ilya had sat down the entire team before their first practice with her and peppered them with threats for if they ever said something shitty to or about her that wasn’t regular complaining about coaches. Ilya wondered if he maybe went a bit far, considering that his team had taken to treating her like a drill sergeant. Or maybe that was less about what he said specifically, and more about them generally being afraid to disagree with him in this post-karaoke climate. No one had explicitly said a word to him about it, but he could sense an extra layer of caution.

He needed to interrogate Pava some more about what everyone was thinking. Most of these guys had the emotional intelligence of brick walls.

They were on their feet as soon as she opened her mouth, taking off back to center ice to start the next drill. She caught Ilya before he could follow.

“Ilya, hold on a sec.”

Ilya spun around. He wasn’t sure if it was respectful or rude to crouch when talking to her. She was so short.

“I wanted to keep Kosmodemyanky behind a bit to work on some defensive tactics. I know you’re his ride home, so I just wanted to check. You’re welcome to join, but I might make you help.”

Ilya nodded, wiping some of the sweat off his face with his glove. “Yes, it is okay, I will probably bother Sumaya. I think I am this close to getting her to let me do an Instagram takeover.”

Maya smiled. “Good, okay, get out there.”

“Thank you coach!” He exclaimed dramatically, skating off with a salute.

It turned out that Sumaya had other plans. She was lying in wait in the tunnel as the team filed out from practice, pointing her camera at the incoming flood of players.

“Roz,” she said, a mischievous smile on her face. “What sport would you play if you were more athletic?”

Ilya blinked. “What?”

“You know, like, if you were a bit stronger and more athletic, what sport would you wanna play?”

“More strong?” He looked down at himself. “I am very big and strong already. Much bigger and stronger than Shane Hollander.”

“Is he talking about Hollander again?” Marly asked, clammering up behind him.

“Marly,” Sumaya tried again, “What sport would you play if you were more athletic?”

Marly huffed out a breath. “Geeze, ouch. Maybe football? I’d like to play in the SuperBowl.”

“American football? Terrible,” Ilya said.

“What the hell? Well what did you say?”

“Eh...I will say surfing.”

Marly raised his eyebrows. “Do they even have surfing in Russia?”

“I think it is a big loss to the world that I must wear so many clothes when playing hockey,” Ilya said. “Surfing is good in this way, it is like...public service.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“No, my name is Ilya Rozanov.”

Sumaya laughed, ending her recording. “That’s perfect, thanks guys.”

Ilya began to continue down the tunnel, but lingered behind Sumaya when he saw that Pava was following close behind.

“Are you not staying with Maya?” Ilya asked.

“Ah, yes, eh...she says to ‘give ten.’ I will eat snack,” Pava replied sheepishly.

“Kosmodemyansky,” Sumaya said, starting up a new recording. “What sport would you play if you were more athletic?”

“More athletic? If no hockey?”

“If you were more athletic.”

“What is it more?”

“Like, if you were a better athlete,” Sumaya said, trying to be nonchalant.

“Oh,” Pava said, “better athlete...” he repeated, looking thoughtful. Ilya would need to explain to him that this whole thing was a joke later, just in case he really took it to heart. “Eh...maybe just...ice dance? My grandmother was ice dancer, very good. I am not...what is word, grace?”

“Graceful?”

“This.”

“Who on the team would be your partner?”

“Ilya. I think he can lift me.”

* * *

Ilya had forgotten.

The first few weeks that the kid had been here last year, he had waited for it. He had expected it. He probably wouldn't have cared as much if it had been a problem back then. But after months went by, then an entire season, it stopped crossing his mind. He forgot it was something that might ever be a problem.

It came to a head in October, at home, four games into the regular season. They were playing Arizona, who had the first overall draft pick last summer. The kid was Matvey Ignatyev, a hotshot defenseman from Pskov. The way Arizona talked about this kid, it seemed like they were ready to build an entire franchise around him.

He was loud and cocky, and the comparisons to Ilya had already started flowing. He had been asked about it at their media availability at morning skate.

“I will tell you after I play him,” Ilya shrugged. God, they hadn't even let him shower before getting their journo claws into him. “We will see if he is as good as they say. He must be, if he was trained in Russia,” he joked, collecting the effortless laughs that spilled out from the reporters.

The kid was good. He was blocking shots like his body was made of memory foam instead of flesh and bones. He was fast, his passes connected, and he hit hard. But on top of all that, the kid would not shut the fuck up.

The way Ilya chirped, as annoying as it was, was smart. He was funny at least, clever with his words, and never crossed any lines that could veer into unsportsmanlike conduct. He also never said anything truly *mean*.

That was not the case with Ignatyev. While their lines weren't often matched up, Ilya had experienced enough crossover that even with the limited amount of time on the ice with the rookie, Ilya had heard him insult two Boston players' wives, make a very tasteless cocksucking joke, and question very loudly if Newf had been dropped on his head as a child, all by the second period.

With three minutes left in the second, Boston drew their first power play of the game, bringing Ilya, Pava, Newf, Marly, and St-Simon onto the ice together. The Coyotes were up by one after the Bears had a shaky start in the first period. The defense was still finding their groove, which was probably making Doherty wish he had been traded anywhere but Boston. Nevertheless, he was making some impressive saves, it was a miracle that Arizona wasn't crushing them.

Boston spent the first minute of the power play pretty much camped in Arizona's zone, playing keepaway around their defensemen. There was one slipup giving Arizona possession, which was quickly turned over by St-Simon in the neutral zone, and tossed up the ice to Pava. Pava wrapped around the back of the net to try and secure it against the boards, met with a harsh hit from Ignatyev as they wrestled for possession. Newf joined in from the back, poking the puck out in Ilya's direction.

Ilya was distracted after that, bringing the puck around front and shooting with his backhand for the top shelf. Arizona's goalie batted it down, and Ilya had been preparing for a rebound when the whistle blew.

He wasn't sure why, at first. It had been a good play, and the goalie hadn't frozen the puck.

"Call me that one more fucking time."

"Did I hurt your feelings? Fucking pussy."

"Say my fucking name again."

Ilya's eyes snapped to the boards, where Pava was grappling with Ignatyev, the taller man's hands gripping onto the jersey of the defenseman. Ilya had never seen Pava like this before, this angry or this vocal.

He caught a confused look from Cliff, who was hovering by the net. He had no idea what was being said, no one did, other than the three Russians on the ice. Ilya knew as soon as the words came out of Pava's mouth what this was about.

Before he even had a chance to consider interfering, Pava had dropped his gloves, and Ignatyev wasn't far behind.

Here's the thing, Pava wasn't some weak kid. He was massive, he could take and give out hits, and he always did his part in a scrum. But he didn't fight, he never dropped gloves like this. That job was usually left for Marly or St-Simon, sometimes Ilya. Ilya wasn't sure if Pava even knew how to throw a punch without breaking his hand.

The kid on the ice right now, Ilya didn't recognize him. He was brutal, yelling and gripping onto the defenceman like he was a rag doll. Blood was pouring from his hairline where Ignatyev had split skin with his knuckles, but he didn't slow down, even when he toppled Ignatyev onto his back, even when the linesmen tried to pry them apart.

Pava didn't fully snap out of it until Ilya finally called out to him, telling him to stop. The linesman grabbed him by the shoulders harshly, yanking him so he fell backwards. There was blood running into his eyes, and Ignatyev looked like he was sporting a broken nose, though not severe enough to prevent him from continuing to spit vitriol across the ice.

Pava didn't make eye contact with Ilya as the ref ushered him in the tunnel to serve his game misconduct. Ilya heard the clatter before he saw the splintered shards fly across the ice as Pava broke his stick on the boards just before stepping onto the rubber.

The stadium was roaring, the linesmen were trying to clean the blood off the ice, and every single Boston Bear in the barn was looking at Ilya.

Ilya glanced up at the clock. Two more minutes until intermission, then he could go see the kid. He spent all of those 120 seconds dead silent, ignoring the looks of his teammates as he finally skated into the tunnel. He beelined straight for the locker room, his eyes locked on Pava's locker, which lay empty.

"Where is Kosmodemyansky?" Ilya asked the locker room attendant, probably a bit too roughly based on the timid look on his face.

"I'm not sure," he said, "he went straight through."

Ilya made a move to reach for his skate guards so he could continue on. Just when he had slipped them on and reached the door jamb, he was stopped.

“Rozanov!”

Ilya turned slowly, only to find that the eyes of his coach and 18 Boston Bears all rested on him. The room was dead quiet aside from the stern voice of his coach.

“Wanna tell us what the fuck that was?”

As firm as LeClaire was being, Ilya could also see the concern in his eyes, mirrored by the rest of the team as they slowly filed into their cubbies.

“Eh...” Ilya began. “I think he is maybe upset.”

LeClaire raised his eyebrows. “You think? Well I don’t need to fucking think, obviously he’s fucking upset. What the fuck happened?”

Ilya sighed, taking a seat in his locker. How best to explain this that wouldn’t make things worse for the kid? He caught Delly’s eye from across the room.

“I’ve never seen him so mad,” Delly said quietly. “He’s normally so calm and cool. What did that Russian guy say?”

Ilya frowned, pressing his lips together. “He made fun of his name.”

The room stayed silent as 18 fully geared up hockey players looked around the room in confusion.

“He made fun of his name?” LeClaire repeated.

Ilya scratched his hairline. “Yes.”

Marly cocked his head to the side. “But we all make fun of his name. It’s like eight-million letters long.”

Ilya winced. “Well, yes, but...it is different. In Russian.”

The whole room continued to look at him in anticipation. Whelp, he wasn’t getting out of this.

“In Russian, his name is very...weird. It is very old and uncommon, very easy to make fun of.”

“Like how?” Connors asked.

“Like...well, Pavsikakiy, sort of sounds like, if you translate...like ‘shit everywhere.’”

The whole room stared blankly at Ilya for several moments, which was better than the laughter he had been expecting. Not one player had a smile on their face, in fact, most of them looked like Ilya had just presented them with a complex physics comparison as opposed to a name translation.

“So, yer tellin’ me,” Newf said at last, with disbelief on his face, “You knew that b’y’s bin walkin’ around wi’ a name like tha’ for the past year, and ya ne’er once said a thing?”

Ilya shrugged. He remembered being taken aback by the name the very first time he heard it at the draft. It was fucking weird. More than anything, he had wondered what kind of person would name

their kid something like that. Ilya Rozanov from five years ago probably would have said something, he'd have made a joke the very first time he met the kid. He'd never have let him live it down.

He remembered last September when he first met Pava. The kid waddling into the rink with his brand new practice gear, towering over his coach, not speaking a single word of English. The last thing he needed was for the one person who understood him to start ribbing him for his fucking name.

"I did not think he needed to hear it," Ilya said simply. "It was not a big deal."

It really wasn't a big deal. Back in Moscow, Ilya had a cousin with one of those insane Soviet-Era names that were supposed to have gone out of fashion in the 30s. It was weird, but after a while, you sort of forgot about it. It was just a name.

"Ohhhh," Delly said, loudly declaring his epiphany. "That's why he hates nicknames so much."

"Wow," Ilya said dryly. "Great solve Mr. Detective."

"Wait, I called the kid way worse on the ice myself last year. How the fuck is this the thing that makes him snap?" Cloutier asked.

Before Ilya could jump in to defend the kid, Marly interjected. "Fuck off, Cloud, everyone's got their thing. You flipped your shit two seasons ago when someone said you were balding prematurely."

"Fuck off!"

"And Delly got into his first fight just because someone made a 'your mom' joke."

"It was hardly a fight," Ilya shrugged. "He missed the punch and fell over."

Delly threw up his hands. "Why are we bringing me into this? I never said anything!"

The volume of the room started to rise as accusations were thrown around. Most of them seemed to have blown past the whole thing with Pava.

"Alright everyone shut the fuck up!" LeClaire shouted. "We still have to play another fucking period!"

The bickering simmered down, most of the guys starting to begin their intermission rituals as one of the assistant coaches brought out the whiteboard so they could actually talk strategy. Ilya was still itching to go find the kid. He knew he wasn't supposed to, he was the captain, he was supposed to be in this room.

"Rozanov," LeClaire said, approaching him with a hard look on his face. "Go find the kid, be back before puck drop," he lifted up his hand and rested it lightly on Ilya's shoulder, like it was physically painful for him to show any kind of affection. "Don't worry about the locker room, I'll handle it. No one's gonna say shit."

He caught Cloutier's eye, who noticed immediately. He raised his hands in surrender. "Geeze, why you lookin' at me? I'm not some 80s movie villain, I'm not gonna say shit."

"Good," LeClaire said, his hand slapping Ilya on the shoulder gruffly before retreating to the front of the room.

Ilya found Pava in a storage closet.

It was a pretty big closet, at least, so while he was on the floor, he wasn't being enclosed by mops or anything. His feet were splayed out in front of him, all his gear on, even his bloodied helmet, his skates without their guards. If Ilya had looked down he probably could have tracked the kid here by the marks in the linoleum.

"Kid," Ilya said. "We need to get trainer out here, you are all fucked up."

The blood on his face had mostly dried, but Ilya was worried about a concussion. He was definitely leaving here with a black eye.

Pava shrugged. He stayed silent, keeping his eyes trained to the floor. Ilya sighed, moving to seat himself on the floor as smoothly as he could in all of his gear. He didn't say anything for a full minute, waiting for the kid to speak.

"I am sorry," Pava said finally.

"You can't do that, Pava. I know you were upset, but, if you're going to play in America, you need to control your temper."

Pava slumped his shoulders down even more, which Ilya hadn't thought was possible. *"I know."*

"What happened?" Ilya asked. *"I know you've probably heard this garbage before. Why are you letting it get to you?"*

Pava tapped the toes of his skates together like a child waiting for his turn in the dentist's office. *"I thought it would be different. In Russia, my whole team would make fun of me, making up names, everywhere I went. When I got here, I thought no one would understand. And you didn't say anything..."* he petered off at a loss for words. *"I was hoping I'd just get to be normal for once. Maybe make some real friends, not be a walking joke."*

"I didn't say anything," Ilya repeated. *"I may be an asshole, but I'm not mean. At least, that's what Hollander tells me."*

"He's right," Pava said. *"You're nice."*

"Well, we don't have to go that far."

Pava finally took off his helmet, exposing his sweat-drenched hair to the air. At least he had finally gotten a haircut, it didn't look as bad as it normally was.

"Everyone gets heat on the ice," Ilya said. *"You wouldn't believe half of what Hollander has had said to him,"* Pava frowned at this. *"But you can't go getting yourself kicked out of the game. It's much sweeter to beat them."*

"I know you're right." Pava admitted. *"I just wish I did not have this thing. My mama would get so angry when I complained, it was her father's name. But why couldn't he have a normal name? Why couldn't I be a Sasha?"*

Ilya shrugged. *"Sasha is a girl name in America anyway."*

Pava threw up his hands in defeat.

“No, it’s fine, I get it, I get it,” Ilya said. “I sometimes wish I was not so handsome. It gets exhausting. So many beautiful women fawning over me, so many hot men in my DMs, but these are the battles we have been given.”

Pava huffed out a laugh. *“You’re the worst.”*

Ilya smiled. *“Yes, I know.”* He threw an arm around Pava, pulling him into a side-hug. *“Now, kid, I have to go back and win us this game, and you need to go see a doctor so your brain doesn’t start leaking out your nose.”*

Pava reached up to his nostrils, just to check. *“I need to say sorry to Nick.”*

Ilya huffed out a laugh. Nick was their equipment manager. Of course Pava’s first course of action would be to apologize for a broken stick.

Boston did end up winning the game, and Ilya was pretty sure that you could attribute it entirely to spite. He could see the daggers the Bears were shooting with their eyes on the ice every time a Coyote came close to touching the puck.

When they returned to the locker room, the mood was mostly jovial. Ilya spotted Pava sitting in his locker, wearing his suit, his face bandaged up, perched awkwardly with his hands clasped together. Ilya gave him a pat on the head with his still-gloved hand.

“You win?” Pava asked.

“We won,” Ilya replied.

“Quite the shiner there, kid,” Marly bellowed, gesturing to his own eye. “Think you’ll still be able to see the biscuit out there?”

“Wooo!” Delly whooped, practically sprinting into the room. He had been a bit too excited about his singular goal. He rounded past Pava to collect a high-five. “We should celebrate!” he exclaimed. “It’s only fair, we did it after my first fight, we should do it for Kosmodemyansky.”

“Is now a bad time to suggest karaoke?” Ilya joked.

The room went silent.

Chapter End Notes

Well, guys. The reveal you probably weren’t expecting (unless you were one of the Russians crashing out in my comments section).

So here’s the thing. From the very beginning, a lot of planning went into selecting the rookie’s name. I knew I wanted to do the bit about him hating nicknames from the start, but I also wanted to give him a reason for it. It started with deciding that I was going to find a ridiculously long surname for him. Kosmodemyansky is formed from the Saints Cosmas and Damian, and the name is most famously associated with Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a Russian resistance fighter who was executed for sabotage against the invading Nazi army.

For his first name, I wanted to do something long and difficult to pronounce, but I also wanted something with a negative connotation that would make it so that Pava would have a hesitance for nicknames. So, Pavsikakiy. According to my Russian consultants, there are a few reasons this name is weird. First, it's incredibly old and rare, with Greek origin meaning "he who stops evil." Something strange about it is also that it ends with "iy" which is something typically only found in surnames. The name contains the syllable "kak" which is the root of most poop-based words. I was told that you could almost read the name as a slang shortening of "one who poops everywhere."

The thing is, while this name is easy to make fun of, it's very much a legitimate (albeit rare) name. I would say it can be compared to the name Gaylord (which weirdly enough, I knew two Gaylords growing up, and as far as I know they didn't get bullied for it). You could also compare it to the surname "Poulin," technically, yeah, it's got the word "poo" in it, but it's also just a name.

The commercial Ilya talks about is based on a real [commercial](#) that Ovechkin did with rookie Semyon Varlamov. Would it be made in 2018? Probably not, but assume there's been some modifications in the version made in this fic. It just felt too perfect not to have them do it.

I based the trade value for Doherty off of when Ullmark was traded to Ottawa. Typically goaltenders aren't seen as having that high of a trade value, but when it comes to a really good goalie, they can be worth a lot.

Three-way trades are typically done with one team facilitating a trade between two teams, most often with the third team taking on a portion of one of the more expensive salaries in exchange for something. Here I based the three-way trade off the Rantanen deal, with Montreal acting as Chicago. I spent way too much time trying to come up with a trade that made sense for this silly little story. I compared J.J.'s value to that of Kane being traded to Vancouver (but a bit higher because everyone hates Kane).

At the start of this chapter, I mentioned a player being put on waivers, and previously being a healthy scratch. A healthy scratch is a player that is removed from the starting lineup, but isn't injured (as opposed to an injury scratch). This is usually due to performance or behaviour issues. If a player is placed on waivers, it basically means that their team has released their contract, and any other team in the NHL has 24 hours to claim it. If the contract is not claimed, it is either terminated or they are sent down to the AHL.

Aerin Frankle, the goalie for the Boston Fleet and the American Olympic team, is arguably the best goalie in the world right now. She is also known for running a caesar salad review instagram.

It's often an issue that players will trade teams, and their number is taken or retired. Oftentimes players will just pick a new number, or the veteran player will take priority. It is also common that a player will buy a number off of another player, this happened with Mikko Rantanen when he was traded to the Canes, and he gifted Salmela a rolex and a silver chain in exchange for number 96, which he only wore for fourteen games before moving to Dallas.

There is a Russian saying вешать лапшу на уши that translates to "having noodles on your ears" which is similar to the saying "pulling your leg."

The first and only female coach in the NHL is Jessica Campbell, who started with the Seattle Kraken in 2024 as an assistant coach. She's the coolest (and Canadian). In my fantasy world, I'm going to say that happened earlier.

The “Do you wish you were a better athlete?” trend has been done by a bunch of different teams, but I specifically based Pava’s answer off of [Kaprizov](#) in this video.



Chapter 13: Am I Julia Stiles?

Chapter Summary

It was not Ilya that skated up to the line. It was instead a very tall Russian man that Shane had become all too familiar with. He didn't say anything, he just sort of stared at Shane.

"Privet," Shane said, after a few awkward moments.

Chapter Notes

So it turns out you guys are actually invested about the CEO of the trivia company, and believe it or not, it does get crazier. Basically, the guy was on trial for possession of CP, and he used to be an elementary school teacher. He owned this company and even though he was going to jail he was refusing to sell, so half the company resigned in protest. An update though, he did recently give up ownership of the company, so I was actually gonna return, but then they added a \$20 minimum at the bar if you were gonna play and I'm too poor for that so I have to abstain again. It's too bad because I was always the ringer for questions about hockey and american presidents and also muppets.

Did I want the Canadian women's hockey team to win at the Olympics? Of course, but I'm seeing more and more now that the USA team really needed this. Hilary Knight get behind me, I don't know why they keep making you do press with the Hughes brothers. Someone free her.

I've also been crashing out because I can't watch my hockey games lately. All the Oilers games spontaneously decided to blackout when they didn't before. And why aren't the PWHL games appearing for me? Why do I even have Sportsnet?? The only game I could watch the other day was Flyers vs Leafs and I just did it to boo the Leafs. Also, someone PLEASE tell the Oilers to lock the fuck in. Do I need to pull up the dictionary definition of defense?

Thank you for the comments and the love for my yapping in the notes! It makes me feel vindicated for all my ridiculous research. Honestly at this point I'm having to trim down my notes because I keep hitting the character limit so if anyone knows a way to get around that pls let me know

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

When Ilya and Pava walked through the parking garage for their first game against Montreal this season, Ilya admitted he tried to dress up a bit more than usual.

As required by the league, all the players had to wear suits for their walk-ins. They were used to it by now, they had been doing it for games since they were kids. Some guys mostly just did the bare minimum, but some would have more fun with it, trying to add pizazz where they could.

Ilya wasn't normally one of those guys. He kept it pretty relaxed. Today, however, he was feeling adventurous. The cameras always paid extra attention to him for Montreal games, even just the ones filming the walk-ins. It was nothing crazy. Just a nice shirt, unbuttoned a bit lower than was appropriate, its silk shimmering in the light.

Pava on the other hand...well, Pava had discovered instagram. More specifically, he had discovered a niche of middle aged men posting about classic fashions. Pava had been...inspired, he had decided that this year, now that he was no longer a rookie, he should be making a statement.

He had also decided that the best way to make this statement was via hat.

Ilya had no idea at what point the kid had gone out and obtained these hats. Because there were several, each of which had specific names. Today it was a bowler, with a red feather in it.

The hats, while a bit ridiculous, weren't even the main problem. The problem was that Pava's suits didn't fit for shit. It was too short everywhere, the shoulders too wide, and he had to cinch the waist in with a belt. He looked both like a little boy who had borrowed a suit from his dad, but also like a teenager still trying to fit in his christening outfit. Apparently, his new interest in fashion did not extend below his neck. His only saving grace was that, matched with his baby face, it just made him look adorable.

"Are you sure about the scarf?" Ilya asked, gesturing to the knotted strip of silk Pava wore in place of a tie.

Pava looked down. *"It's an ascot. Like Fred."*

"Who the fuck is Fred?"

"From Scooby-Doo," Pava said, like Ilya was an idiot.

"Of course," Ilya replied. *"How stupid of me."*

They approached the tunnel that connected the stadium to the parking garage. Some of the guys, like Delly, always came in pretty early. Others, like Doherty and Newf, scooted in just before they were due. Ilya and Pava usually rolled up in the middle of the pack.

"Looking good, Roz!" Sumaya grinned, holding up her camera. "I like the fit!"

Ilya spun dramatically as he approached, grabbing his lapels and shaking them with a flourish. He sent a wink to the camera as he passed.

"Amazing hat, as always," Sumaya said as Pava approached. "This is new?" She asked, gesturing to her neck.

"Ascot," Pava said.

"Like Fred! Very cool."

* * *

Ilya was shit at sewerball.

It wasn't as much a thing, back when he played in Russia, but every hockey player in the North American league insisted that sewerball was a vital part of warmups. He had refused to play at all the

first few years, but eventually gave in, even though he still pretended to hate it.

It actually wasn't so bad. He liked the opportunity to hang with the guys before the game, loosen up, listen to music. They had a roster for who was in charge of the aux each day, in the locker room, during workouts, on the bus. Connors was in charge of the schedule, and he ran it like he was a sergeant in the military. If the Bears had one hill they would die on, it was the integrity of the schedule. It was sacred. If it was your day, you had full control over the music, no ifs, ands, or buts.

That was why the Bears were stuck listening to an endless loop of Nickelback today. Fucking Delly. Ilya turned his focus away from the awful twanging sounds, and across the circle of his teammates as the ball was passed to Pava.

Pava was freakishly good at sewerball, he would even show off doing tricks and flipping it over his leg. Maybe that was easy to do when the kid had giraffe legs.

Ilya watched as the kid kicked the ball a little too hard, causing it to fly up into the rafters and behind a ventilation duct.

"Jinkies," Pava said, looking up at where the ball had disappeared, and then to Ilya. *"I don't think I can reach up there."*

Delly bounded over from his place in the circle. "Lift me!" He exclaimed. "I bet I can reach if you give me a boost."

Pava seemed to have no issues with this plan, nor did Cloutier, who wasted no time in gripping Delly's calves and hoisting him up like a well rehearsed cheerleading squad. Ilya watched from a distance with his arms crossed as Delly wobbled back and forth, Cloutier having to plant a hand on his ass at the last minute to keep him from tumbling. Ilya noticed Sumaya in the corner of the hallway, no doubt filming the interaction for Instagram.

"Huh," Ilya said. "If only we were in a building with several long sticks that would be good for knocking things down. What a shame."

"Your knee is too boney," Pava complained. *"Do you have no core strength? You're shaking like a chihuahua."*

"I don't know what the fuck you're saying," Delly replied, his head hovering around the rafters.

Ilya sometimes wondered if he was actually inhibiting Pava's English skills by letting him speak so much Russian at home all the time. Maybe they should be like one of those families where they agree to only speak English at the dinner table.

Delly finally batted the ball down, sending it on a path to bounce directly off of Pava's head, then onto the ground. He nearly fell onto his ass as he was lowered down by his teammates as ungently as possible.

"Got it!" He exclaimed with a smile.

"Maybe you should join a cheerleading squad," Cloutier said, ruffling Delly's hair. "You're already halfway there with that gay-ass watch."

"Fuck off," Delly laughed, elbowing Cloutier in the gut.

Ilya had frowned. He wasn't surprised, this was the NHL, these guys weren't exactly known for being politically correct. It had been much worse when Ilya started with the Bears, back when he didn't have the power to say anything. To be honest, he hadn't cared as much back then. When he became captain, that changed. He set some boundaries with his teammate, drew a line at what could and couldn't be said, usually with the guise of keeping up with 'public image.' It was easier that way.

He knew the guys were never gonna be perfect. Ilya wasn't going to fix lifelong prejudice just by yelling at some hockey players, he hadn't even fully fixed it in himself. But Cloutier was new here, and it was Ilya's job to lay out the law of the land.

Just when Ilya was preparing to tell Cloutier to shut his stupid fucking mouth, someone beat him to it.

"You should not say this," Pava said, his accent thick as ever as he stood in the center of the hallway.

Cloutier blinked, looking confused. "Huh?"

"You call him gay? This is mean thing child say."

Delly looked absolutely bewildered as he looked back and forth between Pava and Cloutier. He wasn't looking like he was agreeing any which way.

"I mean..." Cloutier said, "It's just a joke, dude."

Pava tipped his head to the side, looking genuinely confused. "But you are not funny."

"Ha!" Marly cackled from the opposite end of the hall. "Cloud, you just got called homophobic by the fucking Russian."

"Fuck off."

"Pava is right," Ilya said, taking a step forward. Pava was pointedly not looking at him. "Gay jokes are very pathetic. There are much more clever things you can say. For example, you do your hair like you read instructions in a book for 1950s housewives."

Cloutier frowned as he petted his hair. "It's just gel."

"I havta agree, b'y," Newf chimed in. "It's combed up so tall it's shakin' hands with the Lard Jaysus."

* * *

Shane took his place hovering at the red line for stretches like he always did when they played Boston. He waited for Ilya to skate up to him as usual, pretending (but also not really pretending) to chirp Shane.

It was not Ilya that skated up to the line. It was instead a very tall Russian man that Shane had become all too familiar with. He didn't say anything, he just sort of stared at Shane.

"Privet," Shane said, after a few awkward moments.

"Privet," Kosmodemyansky replied, smiling. "*You will come to Ilya's house today?*"

Shane darted his eyes from side to side quickly. Part of him was feeling proud that the kid had felt confident enough to come up and talk to Shane alone. The other part of him was paranoid that one of his teammates would overhear him attempting to speak Russian. He should keep this short.

“Yes. *Is that okay?*”

The kid nodded. “*Ilya bought me naushniki.*” Shane didn’t recognize the last word.

“Naushniki?” He asked.

The kid nodded in understanding, tucking his stick under his armpit so he could raise both hands, tapping them on either side of his ears.

Shane felt his face get hot. “Oh.”

“Noise-cancelling,” Kosmodemyansky said, carefully sounding out the words.

“Pava!” Ilya called, skating up and stopping hard next to the kid. “Leave Hollander alone. He is already so stressed out knowing he is going to lose tonight.”

“Shut up, Rozanov.”

Kosmodemyansky frowned. “You are fighting?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Just playing, Pava. Get out of here, before someone starts a rumour that you are being traded to Montreal.”

The kid looked very concerned at this idea, wasting no time following his Captain’s orders.

Shane gave Ilya a stern look. “You shouldn’t tease him.”

“Relax, Ilya shrugged. “It is just a joke.”

“Is he known to like jokes?”

Ilya looked like he was considering. “Like them? Sure. He usually just does not know when they are happening. Anyway, shall we make bet for this game?”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “Is center ice really the best place to be discussing the terms of your kinds of bets?”

Ilya scoffed. “Wow, Hollander, I am very professional man. I would never say anything inappropriate on the ice.”

Shane started chewing on his mouthguard. Ilya usually made fun of him for wearing it even during warmups. “Fine, what’s your bet?”

“If I win, I get to post picture of you falling asleep on Scott Hunter in the van.”

Shane blinked. “You got a picture of that?”

“Yes. Yuna took it, I am also in it looking very handsome. I will caption it: ‘the father, the son, and the holy spirit.’”

“Are you the holy spirit in this situation?”

“Of course.”

“Well, what if I win?” Shane asked, cocking his head to the side.

“Hm,” Ilya said, looking up to the crowd as if pretending to think. Shane was sure he had been plotting this for days. “If you win, you get to post video of me.”

Shane waited for him to finish. He didn’t.

“What video?”

“Any video.”

Shane gave him a look. “You’re serious?”

“Serious as heart attack, Hollander. It is no worry, because I will not lose today.”

Shane sent his boyfriend a smirk. He ungloved his hand and held it across the red line to shake Ilya’s hand.

“Deal.”

* * *

“I thought you were playing in Swedish League?” Ilya called to the Montreal bench as he skated in for a line change. “Would be nice for you, your fists are too pretty to get into real hockey fights.”

“Fuck off, Rozanov,” Pike called back from where he was sitting. “Shouldn’t you be out getting a perm or something?”

“This is all natural, Pike,” Ilya grinned, tapping at his bucket. “Unlike Viagra in your bloodstream. Is bad for your health, yes?”

Pike didn’t reply to that, but Ilya saw him turn to Shane with an exasperated look. To Ilya’s surprise, Shane spoke up.

“Maybe if you cared as much about your game as you did chirping us, you wouldn’t have missed that penalty shot. Are you sure you’re a righty?”

Ilya laughed, actually laughed. “Hollander! Have you been practicing? I have never heard you chirp before, was terrible, but a very good first try.”

Ilya shuffled as close as he could to the Montreal bench, which was partially obstructed by a small bubble of fan seating. If Ilya craned his neck, he got a perfect view of Shane, who was trying very hard not to look at Ilya.

Montreal was up by two at this point, so Ilya probably definitely should have been paying attention. It wasn’t the end of the world, though, Boston had a penchant for coming back at the last minute, and conveniently, Montreal had a reputation of gaining a lead in the first and fucking it up in the back end.

“Oof,” Ilya heard Pava exclaim, his eyes trained on the Bears’ defensive zone. Newf had just accidentally tripped one of Montreal’s defensemen, which caused Beaulieu to check Newf. Then, of course, Cloutier appeared to give Beaulieu a shove. Next thing he knew, half the ice was crowded against the glass pushing and shoving and grabbing.

Cloutier was skating back into the fray to pull back a Voyageur, but any progress that he was making was immediately halted when Doherty decided to skate into the pile and start wailing on the guy who hit Newf.

The crowd went wild watching the goalie join in the scrum. The linesman was already joining in trying to pull him back when the noise kicked up another notch.

“Holy shit,” Ilya whispered as he watched Drapeau, Montreal’s goalie, absolutely book it down the ice towards Doherty.

He collided hard, immediately stumbling back onto his ass. He was back up quickly, and Doherty wasted no time latching onto the other goalie’s jersey and starting to swing. This course of action seemed to halt the rest of the scrum, with the players on the ice turning to witness the much more interesting goalie fight. The refs weren’t even trying to stop it, just hovering around as they did with any other fight.

The crowd wasn’t the only one going wild. Both players benches were on their feet, banging their sticks against the boards as they hooted and hollered. Pava was nearly jumping up and down with excitement, one arm hanging off Ilya. Ilya snuck a peek at Shane, who was also on his feet, but giving his Disappointed Captain Look.

The cheering from the crowd didn’t stop for several minutes as the goalies retreated into their respective tunnels to get checked out before they’d return to the game. They’d get to go back onto the ice, with another player substituted for their penalties.

“I fucking love hockey,” Marly mused.

* * *

When Shane opened up the door, Kosmodemyansky was the one to greet him.

“Hi,” Shane said awkwardly, adjusting the duffel bag on his shoulder.

“Hi,” he replied. He gestured over his shoulder. “Ilya is tweet about you.”

Before Shane could respond, Ilya’s voice began to echo through the foyer.

“Shane Hollander!”

He came barrelling around the corner, holding up his phone. “This is what you pick?”

Playing on the screen was a clip that had been uploaded to Shane’s Instagram after the game. It was a video of Ilya at All-Stars last year when he and Shane had gone out to Granville Island one morning when they had some free time. After Ilya had bought his Lee’s Doughnut, Shane had very slyly suggested that they go sit by the waterfront as he ate it. Shane proceeded to not so subtly video him as the seagulls began to descend on him, with one landing flat on his head, his webbed feet slapping loudly against Ilya’s skull. The video ended with Ilya hucking his doughnut into False Creek.

“I thought it was fun,” Shane said, setting down his bag as he stepped inside. “My mom texted me to ask if I’d been hacked.”

“Twitter is saying I scream like girl,” Ilya said, looking very concerned at his phone screen. “They do not know how serious this is. That was last Cookie Monster doughnut.”

“You can’t complain. You’re the one that made the bet.”

“Maybe I will post my picture anyway. You look very cute when you are sleeping.”

Shane rolled his eyes, looking over Ilya's shoulder to his phone screen where he had Shane's comments open.

@ShaneHollanderHockeyPlayer ✓

[video post]

Memories from All-Stars Vancouver

@rowantreerowantree

Ilya Rozanov??? They're hanging out for real?? What went down at that all-star weekend

@getpucked

is that shane giggling in the background? I didnt know he knew how to do that

@allyallyoxen

Broke: ilya rozanov and shane hollander are rivals

Woke: ilya rozanov and shane hollander are besties who go on adventures together

@8124eva

SO CLOSE theyre actually lovers

@worldsmostdangerousfrog

*I dont care what it takes someone get rozanov canadian citizenship so i have a reason to cheer for him
ill marry him myself*

@madsforhabs

Now someone just needs to get shane that mac n cheese cupcake

Shane only read halfway down the page when he stopped. He grabbed the phone to look a little closer.

"Why is someone commenting that we're secretly lovers?"

Ilya gave Shane a look, which he had enough experience with to recognize as the one he got whenever he was about to be talked down from spiralling. "Hollander. Surely you know of the internet shippers. This is nothing."

Shane still wasn't convinced, and it must have showed on his face.

"Trust me, Shane," Ilya said. "There are more fanfictions about Draisaitl and Tkachuk than us."

"What? Seriously?"

"Oh yes. Siggi's girlfriend showed me. Some of it is quite good."

Weirdly enough, that actually made Shane feel better. If people were saying this kind of stuff about those guys, surely they weren't serious about him and Ilya.

Shane blinked as he fully registered Ilya's earlier words. "Wait, more than us? We have fanfiction?"

Ilya grinned at this. "Oh yes. Though they always write like I am the repressed one just because I am Russian. They know nothing, it was me that opened you like flower."

"Ew."

Kosmodemyansky appeared at the kitchen island, saving Shane from having to hear Ilya come up with any more metaphors for how he seduced him. The kid was already wearing his noise cancelling headphones, one ear shifted onto his temple.

"I will go watch film," he said, gesturing behind him to his room.

"Scooby-doo?" Shane asked.

"Eh, maybe," Kosmodemyansky pondered. "Ilya say I watch something new."

Shane shrugged. "If you like it, you should watch it."

"Of course you say this, Hollander," Ilya interjected. "You watch nothing but hockey documentaries."

"They're educational and entertaining," Shane argued. Ilya would probably do well to watch some of his documentaries. They helped improve his information processing.

It seemed Kosmodemyansky had chosen to ignore Ilya entirely, looking at Shane instead. "You are right. I will watch. Goodnight Shane Hollander."

With that, Pava was gone, disappearing into his room, noise cancelling headphones in tow.

"You are bad influence," Ilya said as he watched the kid leave. "Now he will never watch anything else, all because Shane Hollander gave permission."

** * **

When Ilya returned from the shower, towel wrapped around his waist, he found Shane still sprawled out on his back on the mattress. He would have assumed he was asleep if it weren't for the way his eyebrows were drawn together.

"That frame wasn't there before."

"I do not know what you mean."

Shane sat up, getting to his knees on the mattress. He leaned forward to grab at the frame, revealing a massive hole in the plaster behind it.

"Dude," Shane said. "You didn't even try to fix it?"

"Do not touch, Shane, is very rude. Took me forever to get placement right."

"It looks ridiculous. It doesn't line up with any of the other wall art."

"Is functional. Maybe I do not want to fix. Maybe I will need to use as handle again in future."

Shane rolled his eyes, softly placing the picture frame back. "You're literally a millionaire. You can pay someone to fix this."

Ilya put a hand across his heart. "And erase the beautiful memories we create?"

Ilya flopped down on the bed next to Shane, grabbing his chest and forcing him back down away from the picture frame.

"Your hair is all wet," Shane complained.

"I am helping clean you."

Ilya kissed Shane up his chest, but made no moves to escalate. He was tired enough.

"Sleepy?" Shane asked.

"No," Ilya replied. "I will get up soon. Just gimme second."

Shane lifted his hands to run his fingers through Ilya's damp curls. It seemed to be a favourite pastime of his.

"So," Shane started, his voice low. "How are things in Boston? I know you were worried."

Ilya's first instinct was to say that, no, he wasn't really worried. But that wasn't true. He had been worried about some of the trades. He wasn't sure how Siggi's move would affect Pava, or how Doherty would fit in. He also had heard some talk about Cloutier before he had come over.

"Is going okay," Ilya said, his eyes still closed as he focused on the movement of Shane's hands. "Pava is getting better with his English, and he has been okay after Siggi left. I was worried about that. We are working on his defense, also, I think he has a lot of promise there."

Shane gave him a look.

"What?"

"That's great for him, but I was more wondering about you."

"Oh," Ilya replied. Right. "Yes, yes, is fine. I am amazing captain as always, Cloutier is bit of an idiot, but nothing I cannot handle. The replacement for Siggi is shit, all of our centers are. Except me, of course." He paused, trying to take the opportunity Shane had given him to be a bit more serious. "Is good. I am glad Pava is here, I think I forgot how much I hate to be alone. He is like glue, but good glue. Like glitter."

"And...how is the thing we talked about?" Shane asked hesitantly.

Ilya let out a breath. Over the summer at the cottage, Ilya had begun to open up to Shane a bit more about his feelings. About his nightmares, about the times when he felt he couldn't get out of bed.

He wasn't sure he'd have brought it up if it wasn't for Pava. It was one thing when it was only affecting Ilya alone in Boston, but now that he had the kid who depended on him, he found himself worrying more than usual. What if one of the days he couldn't get out of bed was a day he was supposed to drive them to the rink? What if he snapped at him for no reason? What if he shut him out when the kid was needing support?

Shane had handled the situation so well, Ilya figured he must have planned for it. Knowing Shane, he probably did, he was always so good at reading what was going on with Ilya, right from the day they met. Ilya remembered at Sochi, he felt like Shane could hear every thought that went through his head.

Shane had suggested a therapist, but Ilya had vetoed that. That was...no, he didn't need that. But he did make a deal with Shane.

"We'll be completely honest with each other," Shane had said. "Like at the cottage. Whatever we're feeling."

Ilya had accepted that. He really didn't think it was so bad. It got worse when he was alone, when he didn't have something to focus on. He could manage this.

"I am okay," Ilya said. "I think maybe Pava has noticed. He has not said anything, he probably does not know what it is."

"What do you mean?"

Ilya shrugged. "He keeps asking me to go on runs with him, and he has started baking too much banana bread. Once he walked into bathroom while I was showering to ask me to watch a film with him."

Ilya hadn't realized how much he changed when he was at home compared to when he was with his team until there was someone coming along with him. After games were especially hard, when he had put so much time and energy into one thing, he had a tendency to just shut down once it was all over.

Shane blinked. "Sounds a bit suffocating."

Ilya shrugged. "No, is nice. The bread is very good, I think he has been adding cinnamon."

Shane laughed. "I'd ask to try, but, I'm not so sure it fits into my diet."

"Ah, is bananas, fruit, it is healthy."

"You said the same thing about strawberry pop-tarts."

Ilya flipped himself so he was on his stomach, his head cushioned in the pillow as he looked at Shane. "What about you?"

Shane reached out to hold Ilya's hand. "What about me?"

"Your friend is gone."

Shane frowned. "Players get traded all the time. I don't know why it's been so hard."

"J.J. was not just a player," Ilya offered. "He is your friend."

Shane paused, making the face he always did when he was mulling over his words. "Yeah. It just...it fucking sucks."

"What about rest of team? Are they still awful?"

"They're not awful," Shane defended half-heartedly. "They're just getting used to it."

"Hollander. They have had a year to get over it. Pava got over it faster than them and he is Russian. I think they are maybe just assholes."

Shane sighed, turning his head so he was looking at the ceiling instead of his boyfriend. "It's just hockey. I don't know why I feel like I need to try so hard for them to like me. I should be able to just play the fucking game."

"Is true, yes, but is not your fault. They are the ones that are making problem, not you."

Shane ran his hands over his face. Ilya was trying his best to let Shane process, but sometimes he just wanted to grab him by the shoulders and shake him, shouting at him to say "it's not your fault."

"I always thought that even if all the other guys threw me away, at least I'd have Hayden and J.J. in my corner. And now...J.J. is gone and I feel like I've taken ten steps back. And this new guy who's replacing him is the fucking worst, it's like, I forgot that I wouldn't just have to come out the one time. I have to keep on fucking doing it, and every single time I get to see the look in their eyes shift, like they've just lost a bit of respect for me. It shouldn't be so fucking hard."

He huffed, throwing his arm over his eyes. "Fuck, I'm sorry. I don't wanna spend my time with you complaining."

"No, Hollander," Ilya said, moving to push Shane's arm away from his face. It should be a crime to try and cover that up. "I am asking because I want to know. And because I need to know who goes on hit list. I will go get in fights with every Montreal player. I was going to do it anyway."

Shane chuckled, but Ilya could see his eyes were watery. "Just not Hayden. If he goes, I've got no one left."

Shane was trying to make a joke, but Ilya frowned. It was strange, it had felt for years that Ilya had always been the one of the two lacking a support system, but now it was like that had flipped. He had Sveta and Pava, and a good relationship with his team. He shouldn't be taking that for granted. He didn't want to admit it, but Shane's experience with his team had made Ilya more hesitant about his initial plans to come out to Cliff.

As he looked at the crease between his boyfriend's eyebrows that wouldn't cease, Ilya knew that something else was wrong. Whatever was upsetting Shane, it wasn't just the loss of his friend, and it wasn't just regular coldness from his team.

But Ilya also worried that if he pushed too much, Shane might close off completely.

"Fine, Pike is safe for now. But very thin ice."

Shane offered Ilya a small smile, moving his hand to cover Ilya's.

"I wish I could fix it," Ilya said.

"I know," Shane said, "and I love you." He leant in to kiss his boyfriend. "Still wanna watch something?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes. I have bag of Doritos calling my name. And I got you weird health chips you like."

Shane grinned. "If I didn't know any better I woulda thought you're trying to get lucky."

"Ah, still time for round two."

When Shane and Ilya emerged into the kitchen (fully dressed), Pava was already there, wearing his headphones with his head stuck in the cupboard.

Ilya snuck up behind him, harshly grabbing his shoulders to alert him of their presence.

"Batyushki moi!" Pava exclaimed, nearly dropping the canister of tea in his hands. He pulled his headphones off his ears.

Ilya laughed. "You even curse like my grandmother." He looked over Pava's shoulder at the counter. "Are you making zavarka?"

"What's zavarka?" Shane asked, hovering by the island.

"Tea," Pava replied. He lifted up the teapot on the counter to move it to the island. "Do not touch," he said to Ilya.

Ilya raised his hands up dramatically in surrender. He hoisted himself to sit up on the island precariously close to the teapot as Pava turned back around to rummage in the cupboard.

"It is concentrated," Ilya explained to Shane. "You water down in your cup." He looked at Pava, "this will keep you up all night."

Pava shrugged, turning back around with a bowl of sushki in his hands. "Does not bother."

Ilya reached to grab at one of the rings, popping it into his mouth. "Do we have any zefir left?"

"You eat them all."

Ilya had never been much of a tea drinker, or especially attached to much of his home cuisine. He had gotten by just fine with the meals given to him by his team, or whatever unhealthy American junk food he could find at Trader Joes.

That wasn't the case with Pava. He made Ilya drive him to the Slavic supermarket once a month to stock up on sunflower seeds, pastila, syrok, and oreshki. He was also very specific about the brand of black tea he used. He had started regularly making tea every night before bed, because, somehow, caffeine didn't affect the kid.

Ilya had been tempted to join in after the first few times. Sure, he'd join in for tea whenever he was in Moscow, but it had always been in insufferably formal settings. Sitting down with Pava, drinking from mugs and snacking from a shared bowl, it reminded him of when his mother would make him tea when he got home from school, and he, his mom, and his brother would all sit together talking about their day.

Ilya had started hunting around for authentic Russian restaurants in the area that he could maybe pick something up for him and Pava. He hadn't had a decent borsch since the last time he was in Russia. He couldn't believe it had taken him this long to want to look for a piece of home in Boston.

Pava returned to the cupboard once more to pull out some mugs. He looked to Ilya.

"You want?"

Ilya nodded. "Tea, Hollander?"

Shane scrunched up his face in the adorable way he always did. "I don't really drink tea."

"Ah, just try. Maybe you will like the Russian way."

Shane looked thoughtful, then eventually nodded. Ilya couldn't help but smile.

Pava placed down three mugs, all of which were from a Scooby-Doo themed set that Ilya picked up last time he took Pava to Goodwill. Pava claimed the one with Daphne on it (who was his favourite), which left Velma and Fred.

Ilya frowned. "Pava, do you think I am Fred?"

Pava didn't reply as he grabbed the bowls of snacks to bring over to the coffee table.

"I am not Fred," Ilya insisted. "If anything I am Daphne, I am the hot one."

Pava was long gone, already fiddling with the TV remote.

"Fred is pretty hot," Shane offered.

"He is slice of bread," Ilya grumbled. "Does not even have catchphrase." Ilya started filling up the mugs, making sure to dilute Shane's a bit more, he wouldn't like it too strong. "Shane, grab the jam from fridge."

Shane made a sound of surprise. "Jam? For the bread things?"

"For the tea," Ilya replied. "Is good, you will see."

Ilya was just finishing with the mugs when Shane spoke again, his head stuck in the fridge.

"Why do you feel the need to have 72 cans of ginger ale in your fridge at all times?"

Ilya was only half paying attention when he responded with a "hm?"

Shane stood, a jar of jam in his hand but the refrigerator door still open. "This isn't a grocery store," he laughed. "You don't need to refill it back to capacity when I go."

Ilya finally turned, bending slightly to look in the fridge. There, lined up in a perfect rectangle, was 72 cans of ginger ale. Four more than there were yesterday. Four more cans that Ilya did not place there. His gaze moved across the room to where Pava sat on the couch, happily munching on his bowl of sushki.

Huh.

"What are we watching?" Shane asked, taking a seat on the opposite end of the couch from Pava. A bit of an extreme buffer, if you asked Ilya.

"I have film," Pava said, clicking around through the menu until it connected to the DVD player.

"Let me guess," Ilya said, plunking himself down next to Shane and handing Pava his mug. "Scooby-Doo?"

"Eh, no," Pava said. His eyes were concentrated on the screen. "I pick something."

Ilya settled back. He propped his feet up on the table and let his shoulder rest against Shane's. The screen lit up and the intro to the movie started playing, a pop song playing over the credits.

"You picked this?" Shane asked immediately.

"Pava, why do we even own this movie?" Ilya asked. "I did not have this before."

"Delly make me watch," Pava replied. "I get copy."

Ilya shared his look of confusion with Shane. It was already a surprise that 10 Things I Hate About You was the kind of movie Pava would like, but it was even weirder that this would be the selection he

decided Shane and Ilya had needed to watch.

"You have seen?" Ilya asked, whispering to his boyfriend.

"Yeah," Shane said. "Watched it in English class after we read Taming of the Shrew."

Ilya raised an eyebrow.

"It's based off the play," Shane explained. "Like She's the Man." Now Shane was the one making a confused face. "Have you seen it?"

"Yes, for normal reasons. Because Heath Ledger is hot."

"You are talking over," Pava complained, giving them a stern look. Ilya promised to shut up.

It was a good movie. Ilya spent most of it seeing how high up on Shane's thigh he could rest his hand before he got elbowed in the ribs. Shane was extra irritable considering the fact that Pava seemed to look back at them every other scene.

It must have been the 20th time that Pava had given them a pointed look, this time after Julia Stiles had complained about how Heath Ledger was a smoker.

"Pavsikakiy Konstantinovich, you have head like owl, why do you keep looking over here?" Ilya huffed.

"Is that seriously his middle name?" Shane whispered to himself.

Pava's eyes went round, darting between Shane and Ilya. He pointed at the TV. "Is you."

Ilya looked back at the screen, where the two leads argued in front of the bar at a concert.

"Am I the Julia Stiles?" Shane asked, but he didn't seem particularly offended.

"I do not know what you mean," Ilya said. "My accent is much sexier, and Shane is not as cool as Julia."

"He's got a point," Shane said. "This is just like that time you orchestrated a CCM commercial together after meeting me twice."

"You make it sound like it was a part of evil master plan. No one gave me 500 dollars to do this," he poked at his chest. "I did it, it was all me. Out of pure love."

Pava shrugged, his eyes still trained on the screen. "Is love. He is not knowing."

Out of the corner of his eye, Ilya saw Shane smile.

Through the rest of the movie, Pava wasn't the only one looking over. Every time Kat did something that reminded him of Shane, Ilya reached up a hand to brush it against the nape of Shane's neck.

Pava giggled when Heath Ledger ran through the bleachers, singing for his girl.

"He is better singing than you."

When the movie ended, Pava sat watching the credits all the way through as Shane and Ilya got up to clean the tea. Shane observed from the kitchen.

*“He likes to try and read it all,” Ilya said, resting his elbows on the counter beside Shane.
“Practice.”*

Shane smiled, nudging Ilya with his shoulder. “He thinks I’m Julia Stiles.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “I would not expect you to be so excited about this.”

“No, it’s just...I don’t know. I’m just happy.”

Ilya leant over to kiss his boyfriend on his temple. He allowed Shane a brief moment of reprieve before speaking again.

“Does this mean I will find secret black underwear in your drawer?”

“Shut up.”

Chapter End Notes

Up until last year, NHL players were required to wear suits for stadium walk-ins. Since they got rid of that rule, we have largely been exposed to the unfortunate style of many NHL players. This is your sign to go check out the PWHL (Sarah Nurse!) who have the sickest styles.

Sewerball is a large part of hockey culture. It’s a game that players do as a warmup, usually in hallways and back corridors before games. It’s basically a game of keepy-uppy, and you’re allowed maximum two touches with your feet before you have to pass it on. It’s meant to keep loose before a game, and also as a form of team bonding, but is known to get incredibly competitive and even cause injuries.

Goalie fights happen, but they are pretty rare for two reasons. One, because what do y’all have to fight about?? You are on opposite ends of the ice. Two, because refs are much more proactive about preventing goalie fights compared to regular fights, where they usually observe and step in when someone gets overpowered. There’s a pretty good video of Marc-Andre Fleury trying to goalie fight but the refs are on them before they can even touch each other. The fight in this chapter is inspired by the Panthers/Sharks goalie fight from earlier this year. The benches were having the time of their lives watching.

[Goalie Fight](#)

[Fleury Fight](#)

When I was writing this, I wondered, is it outrageous that the only thing Pava watches is Scooby Doo? Then I remembered the days of my youth when I had the How to Train Your Dragon DVD in the TV in my room for several years straight, and I’d just watch it on a loop. I also did this with the first 3 seasons of Glee a few years later. Therefore I’m dedicating this one to myself and all of us with hyperfixations.

Massive shoutout to Gvozdichka who left a big ol’ comment suggesting a bunch of Russian culture aspects I could implement into this fic. Ilya discusses traditional Russian tea here, which is made by diluting a tea concentrate called zavarka. Also, tea should always be consumed with a snack, most commonly sushki, which are small crunchy bread rings. Also zefir, which is like a meringue.

Gvozdichka also mentioned how it's common to use full name–patronym when scolding or teasing, which is something else I threw in here :)

Discussions about 10 Things I Hate About You, phenomenal movie, of course. If you haven't seen it, it is based on the play The Taming of the Shrew. Also, the last line here is a reference to a scene in the movie, where Cameron and Bianca are snooping through Kat's room and find a pair of black underwear. Bianca proclaims that if a girl owns black underwear, it's because she's wanting to have sex. Or maybe it just doesn't stain Bianca??? Smh

My sibling wanted you to know that originally I was going to write that Shane was going to put on Kim's Convenience, but then decided a movie would have a better flow to write. I highly want to recommend this show though! It's Canadian made, and Simu Liu is in it. It's about a Korean family in Toronto that runs a convenience store, and the entire first episode is about the dad trying to prove he's not homophobic, so he gives out a gay discount in his store. Using purely his gaydar.

Edit: fun fact Ilya having a bird land on his head while eating a donut is something that exactly happened to me when I was visiting Dublin. I'll never be able to describe what went through my head as bird feet slapped against my head.



Chapter 14: Community Outreach

Chapter Summary

“Does this count as baking supplies, or does it go with junk food?” Cloutier asked, holding up a bag of chocolate chips.

“Bakin’.”

“But it’s chocolate,” Cloutier argued.

“Chocolate ya bake whi’,” Newf said. “By the Lard Jaysus, did ya mudder drop ya on ya head, b’y?”

Chapter Notes

A warning for this chapter, it does go into some specifics about assault, hazing, and harassment, in relation to Canadian junior hockey culture, and there is the use of a slur. Before you read, know that every experience discussed in this chapter is taken directly from accounts of actual junior and minor hockey players in Canada.

Something that inspired me when writing was a post I read talking about Connor McDavid as a young player. It said that when he was little he would cry and shake with anxiety after games because he was so overwhelmed by the pressure of trying to produce for his team and for his friends. When he was five years old, he asked to write a letter to Sidney Crosby (who was only 15 at the time) looking for advice on how to handle the pressure.

Anyway, that story reminded me a lot of Shane, and I think it informs a lot in how I try to write about him in regards to his anxiety and relationship with the game as a young prodigy.

Thank you for the comments. I haven't had as much time to write lately since I've had to lock in for my last semester, but I especially love seeing you guys analyze and interpret the story and pick up on all the nuances. It always gets me excited to keep writing. Also, a couple people tagged me in a Tumblr post that was a fic idea for Shane and Sveta running a hockey podcast together. I think I might be tempted to write it, and I'm honestly tickled that anyone thought of me for the job. Let me know if there's anything else you'd like to see from me when this one is all done :)

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

“Ilyukha!”

Ilya looked up from his phone to see Pava poking his head into the hallway.

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “So I am Ilyukha now?”

Pava frowned. *"I feel weird calling you Ilya. Like you are my coworker."*

"I am your coworker," Ilya reminded him. As Pava's frown deepened, Ilya decided to put him out of his misery. *"I'm just teasing. Call me whatever you want, I don't care."*

He looked down at his phone screen once more, pressing send. It was a video of a pig and golden retriever that had become friends, he sent it to Shane along with a text that read: "is us."

Ilya got to his feet, slipping his phone into his pocket. *"Are they finally ready?"* He asked Pava, getting to his feet and ruffling the kid's hair in the way that always annoyed him.

They had been called in during one of their days off to take part in the community initiative that the Bears loved to advertise. There were a couple of foundations that the Bears supported, and they would often cycle around each year doing a big community day to raise awareness and show support. The team had all gathered at the stadium for a briefing before they'd all take the bus to the local food bank.

When he made it to the media room, he saw the crowd of players gathered around Sumaya, who was distributing black and gold t-shirts from a cardboard box. Marly hucked one at him, and Ilya held it up in front of him to examine it.

It was a black shirt, decorated with the Boston logo and gold lettering that read: "Bears in the Community."

"These are so nice!" Delly exclaimed. He was already wearing the shirt, spinning around to show it off. "Can someone take a picture of me to send to my mom?"

Ilya raised an eyebrow. He looked around the room to see if anyone else saw what he saw. Pava was currently pulling on his size XL t-shirt, which was much too wide, but anything smaller would be too short. Ilya turned his t-shirt around in his hands so that he was displaying it to Sumaya.

"Are we sure this is saying what we are wanting it to say?"

Marly gave him a confused look. "What do you mean?"

Ilya met eyes with Sumaya, who was sharing a look that said she knew exactly what he was thinking.

"Bears in the Community," Ilya repeated. "Do you know of any other meanings of the word 'bear?'"

Marly shook his head, the rest of the team—now all decked out in their new shirts—looked equally confused.

"Uh," Sumaya chimed in. "A bear is also a term for a burly gay man in the queer community."

The room went eerily silent, which was quickly broken by a loud laugh from Marly. That immediately stopped when he looked down at his chest as he remembered that he, too, was wearing the shirt.

"Oh my god," Delly said. "This explains that time I went to the Bears Night at that bar near my apartment to surprise everyone. I was wondering why no one seemed to know who I was."

"Dells. You literally live in the gay village," St-Simon said.

"It's a great apartment!" Delly defended. "It has air conditioning."

“Maybe it really was a hockey night,” Ilya offered as he slipped on his own shirt. “They just did not know you because you play six minutes a game.”

Before Delly could come up with a retort, Newf interjected. “Now why in tha Jaysus do you know wha’ a bear is, b’y?”

Ilya very casually smoothed out his own shirt. “I am very popular with gay men. Especially when I am growing playoff beard. You would not know this, Newf, because you look like Bigfoot when you grow a beard.”

“Some people actually find Bigfoot hot,” St-Simon interjected.

“I did not need to know that,” Marly replied.

* * *

The food bank had decided to hide the group of hockey players in the back room.

They had been split up into two groups, one that would sort through all their donations checking the expiration dates, and one that would pick out orders for clients to come collect. Ilya and Pava had been placed on the latter, largely because they didn’t trust Pava to read all the English on the packages to determine their categories. This way, he’d just be assisting Ilya in grabbing things from the shelves.

“Okay,” Ilya said, looking down at the ticket in his hand. *“They are requesting peanut butter, tampons, and dog food.”* He looked up to Pava, who was pushing the cart. *“Do you think they brought the dog with them?”*

Pava shrugged. They were stopped at the pantry section, and he was holding a package in his hand.

“Should I give them this?”

Ilya looked to Pava, who was holding an absolutely massive tub of molasses. Ilya gave it a skeptical look.

“This place has the weirdest stuff.”

“I add?”

“This order is for two people.”

He shrugged. “They use slow.”

Ilya couldn’t argue with that. “Throw it in.”

Pava tossed it in the cart with a thump.

“Excuse me?” Ilya asked, tapping on the shoulder of one of the volunteers. She was a young university student named Bobby. Apparently she didn’t care about hockey, which was unfortunate considering she was named after Bobby Orr. “Where do I find peanut butter?”

“Uh...” she said, looking around. “If it’s not up here in these extra pantry items, it might be where they’re sorting right now, or it could be in the back warehouse with the baking supplies. Otherwise, you’re outta luck.”

Ilya nodded, starting off towards the back where the other Bears were sorting.

Rounding up behind the table, it seemed like Newf had taken the managerial role of the group, walking around supervising everyone and making sure each of the bins had emptied after they were full. He also seemed to be the only one who was good at categorizing.

“Does this count as baking supplies, or does it go with junk food?” Cloutier asked, holding up a bag of chocolate chips.

“Bakin’.”

“But it’s chocolate,” Cloutier argued.

“Chocolate ya bake whi’,” Newf said. “By the Lard Jaysus, did ya mudder drop ya on ya head, b’y?”

“Newf,” Ilya interjected. “Did you find any peanut butter?”

“Naw,” Newf replied. “Check in the back, b’y. Make sure ya wearin’ tha vest.”

Damn, Ilya figured by the end of this they might be offering Newf a job here. He was running the place.

Ilya and Pava continued deeper into the warehouse, tossing on hi-vis vests to enter the back room. After dodging a forklift, they found the shelf with the baking supplies tucked in the back.

Pava got down on his knees to dig through the lower bins (Ilya was too old for this), while Ilya looked through the middle.

“I found some,” Pava said, his voice echoing from between the shelves. His head emerged, he was holding a jar in his hand. *“Ew, it’s all oily.”*

Ilya squinted as he looked at it. *“That is the natural kind. We can’t do that to them, find the fake kind.”*

Pava dug back in, returning with a much larger jar of Skippy peanut butter.

“Perfect,” Ilya decided.

When they emerged back at their cart in the front room, Ilya stopped Bobby before she could go out to deliver it.

“Wait,” he said. “This couple, they have dog?”

She took a quick look at the slip. “Yeah. I guess so.”

He looked at her very seriously. “Is the dog here?”

She shrugged. “I dunno.”

Ilya looked at her for a moment using his most charming smile. Her expression didn’t change. “Can you find out?”

“Yeah. Okay.”

Her lack of enthusiasm didn't give much hope to Ilya, but five minutes later, the doors swung open as an adorable pitbull mix bounded in.

Ilya gasped as she ran straight to his feet. He crouched down to let her jump on him, immediately going to lick his face. "So much energy, my lapushka."

"Oh my god," Ilya looked up to see the pup's owners, two women who looked to be in their thirties. "I thought she was fucking with me, but it's actually you."

"Yes! It is me," Ilya grinned. "And who is this lovely girl?"

The shorter woman who had been hanging back spoke up. She was conveniently wearing a Boston Bears cap. "That's Zoey."

"Beautiful name for beautiful girl," Ilya cooed, finally forcing himself up and to his feet.

"Can we get a picture?" The taller girl asked. "Sorry, we're just big Bears fans."

Ilya pretended to consider it for a moment. "Can Zoey join the picture?"

The women laughed, nodding in the affirmative. The shorter one handed her phone out to Bobby to take the photo. Ilya scooped the dog into his arms, which took a decent amount of effort considering she was not a small guy. The women rounded around him, one on each side of Ilya.

Ilya didn't noticed that Pava had moved to stand beside Bobby, behind the camera, until one of Zoey's moms spoke. "Could we get a picture with you too?"

Pava's eyebrows flew up. He gestured a hesitant finger at his own chest in question.

"You're my favourite player," the shorter one said. "I have your jersey."

If Ilya thought that Shane was intense when he blushed, it was nothing compared to what Pava was putting out. He nodded minutely before joining in beside Ilya. He wasn't sure where to put his hands, so he just held them tightly behind his back.

Pava leaned in a bit towards Ilya, the dog's head had flopped backwards and her nose was resting on Pava's arm. "She looks like Scooby-Doo," he whispered.

"Alright," Bobby said, holding up the phone. "Everyone say...I dunno. Everyone smile."

* * *

Boston Bears  *@BostonBears*

Today the Boston Bears lent a hand at the *@GreaterBostonFoodBank* as part of our Bears in the Community outreach program. Check out how you can help contribute to the community!
[see link]

> **Greater Boston Food Bank** *@GreaterBostonFoodBank*

So happy to have you guys! Come back any time :)

syd *@worldsmostdangerousfrog*

Guys can we be so for real right now what PR person approved this

Boston Bears ✓ *@BostonBears*

Today the Boston Bears lent a hand at the *@GreaterBostonFoodBank* as part of our Bears in the Community outreach program. Check out how you can help contribute to the community!
[see link]

> **Ally** *@mrswillsmithhockey*

Boston bears try not to make me crash out level: IMPOSSIBLE

> **abby** *@ilyarozanovsbackcheck*

Does this mean ilya rozanov doesn't know what a bear is bc i find that hard to believe

>> **Robbie** *@robbie_anks*

Guys lets not be too parasocial remember this guy is a Russian

>>> **syd** *@worldsmostdangerousfrog*

Isnt rozanov the one who accidentally liked bisexual pegging porn on main

>>>> **Robbie** *@robbie_anks*

Yeah you got me there

> **yaya** *@feralgoblin69*

I'm literally begging for you guys to change these t-shirts

>> **mills** *@mcmackmak*

Couldnt be me im begging for them to wear these 24/7

> **benbam** *@bostonpenaltybox*

Why does that russian kid always look like he's about to throw up

>> **Hammy!** *@elbowsallovertheplace*

I'd look like that too if I had to live in the same house as Rozanov

>>> **benbam** *@bostonpenaltybox*

THEY LIVE TOGETHER???

>>>> **hollanov #1 truther** *@8124eva*

Yes and ilya is the dad and shane hollander is the mom and newf is the weird uncle keep up

>>>>> **benbam** *@bostonpenaltybox*

Do you live in the Bears comment section or something what are you doing here

* * *

"Uh...can I get a medium strawberry cheesecake blizzard?" Siggi turned to Pava. "What're you getting? It's on me."

Pava tilted his head, squinting as he looked at the menu. "Ehh...please may I have vanilla with chocolate?"

"A chocolate dip?" Asked the cashier. "What size do you want?"

"Eh...I think medium. Can I please get in cup?"

"For sure," she said. "Just swipe here."

Siggi paid for their ice cream, and Pava followed him down to slide into one of the booths. There weren't many people in the Dairy Queen at this point on a Monday evening, so the boys could take their time without much worry about getting bothered.

"Is that really all you wanted?" Siggi asked, digging into his blizzard. "You coulda got something more exciting."

"No," Pava replied. "Is best." He liked his ice cream on the plainer side, adding in all the candies just made it so there was too much going on. He also liked getting the chocolate dip in the cup so that they would have to pour it on and he'd get a bunch of extra chocolate pooled at the bottom.

"You played well today," Siggi said after a moment. "Must be nice playing first line already. I didn't get a shot until, like, three years in."

Pava shrugged. "Did not matter."

The Flyers had played better than the Bears tonight, plain and simple. The only reason the Bears had scraped by in overtime was thanks to Doherty standing on his head and a puck that bounced into the net off of Delly's shin guard. Pava had discussed it with Sveta and Ilya. Or, he had mostly listened while the two discussed it. Since Siggi had left, Boston was seriously lacking depth at center. Ilya was a superstar, but he could only carry the team so far. Delly was doing an okay job holding up the second line, but they needed a lot more if they were gonna make a run for the cup this year. They had been wondering if management would try to make some last minute trades before the deadline this year, to bring in a decent center.

Pava didn't like the idea of any more big changes. He felt like he had no time at all to get to know the guys he was playing with. He didn't know how Siggi seemed to do it all so easily. He at least had requested a move, most guys just got shipped out wherever management decided.

What would Pava do if he had to move?

"I don't know if we're gonna be ready this year," Siggi admitted. "Ridley's been so inconsistent, and our defense is shit on a good day, I don't know how they haven't kicked Gill back to the minors yet."

Pava wasn't so sure if it was normal to be complaining about all your team's weaknesses to a rival player. To be fair, Pava wasn't sure how he could go about using this information anyway. Everyone knew their defense was terrible.

Boston had a great defense, it was mostly their consistent offense that was struggling.

"How is Philly-delphia?" Pava asked. It was always helpful to ask a lot of questions when it came to hanging around Siggi. Once he got going, he didn't stop, and then Pava didn't have to talk as much.

"It's good!" Siggis said. "The guys are great, I actually played with a couple in juniors. And it's nicer to be closer to family, ya know? And I like the football team here too. Never too far from a cheesesteak. Fuck, my nutritionist is fuckin' sick of me."

Siggi proceeded to go on for a solid five minutes discussing what made a good cheesesteak, and by the end of it, Pava still wasn't totally sure what a cheesesteak was. Was is just a steak with cheese on it? Was there bread involved?

"Anyway," Siggi concluded. He had ice cream smeared all over his lips by the end of it due to his attempt to both talk and eat. "I heard you're still living with Roz, that true?"

“Yes.” He started chipping away at the solidified chocolate with his spoon.

“Honestly I’m kinda surprised. He still kickin’ you out for his girlfriend?”

Pava paled a bit. Why did Siggi think Ilya had a girlfriend? Had he said something by accident? Even when Pava had been theorizing about Ilya having a girlfriend, he didn’t think he had said anything to Siggi. What if he heard something about Shane?

“He does not have girlfriend,” Pava said. His gaze towards Siggi was a bit too firm considering this was a casual conversation. “Or, person. He is not date. No, have never seen girl. Except girls at rink. Or girls at club. But no girls with Ilyukha. Unless he is talk to them.”

Siggi blinked. “I think that’s the most words I’ve ever heard you say at once, dude.” He scraped out the last of his ice cream. “Where is Roz, anyway? Actually, I dunno why I’m asking, he’s making use of the free night I’m sure.”

Siggi wasn’t wrong, at the knowledge that Pava had somewhere to be tonight, the captain had immediately peeled off with the rest of the team to go to a club. Pava hated clubs. They were so loud, and people would try to talk to him or get him to drink. He knew Ilya liked clubs, and even if he wasn’t picking up girls anymore, he liked dancing and drinking. Pava sometimes felt bad that it seemed like he would leave early or hold back just to make Pava more comfortable.

“Yes. Con-course.” He replied, remembering the name of the club that had popped up in the group chat.

“A buncha my guys are going too. We should roll up.”

Pava really did not want to go. This sounded like one of the worst possible ways to spend one of his nights off. But he was glad that Ilya was wanting to go out at all. He had been spending a lot of time in bed recently, sleeping a lot more than normal. He had also refused to cook in the last few days and was living off of fast food and meal prep unless Pava was able to make something.

Pava had started panicking, he had seen Ilya go into bouts like this before, and every time he worried that it was never going to end. He tried googling “why is friend sleeping much?” and it gave him a lot of mixed results. He had been contemplating asking coach Maya about it to see if she could help. She was nice.

The point was, Ilya had been there a lot for Pava. Surely he would be a bad friend if he didn’t try and be there for him in return. Even if that meant going into a club.

* * *

Shane sat on the floor of the empty Montreal dressing room, scrolling through his phone as he worked through his pregame stretches.

It was a ritual for him to be the first one there before every game. He found doing his stretches at the rink instead of at home helped him get in the right mindset, and he liked being able to greet his teammates as they came in. The one and only time in his NHL career that he hadn’t been the first in the dressing room had been the first game after he came out.

He had wanted to give his team some space.

Shane paused his scroll through instagram as a notification from his mom popped up. He had been fielding text messages from her for the past week already working to coordinate camps for the next

summer. They were hoping to expand, and while it was nice for their opening year, it just wasn't feasible to have NHLers making up the majority of their coaching staff. Shane was sure most wouldn't be able to come back next year, and Shane honestly thought it was maybe better that way, the last thing he wanted was for these camps to become too inaccessible all because parents wanted to sign their kids up to meet celebrities.

They were currently trying to find some organizations that could help hire coaches for Ottawa, as well as putting out feelers for possible Boston and Montreal expansions. Unfortunately, Shane was incredibly picky.

Shane spent most of his life in minor and junior hockey in Canada, and he knew the impacts coaching made. Not what techniques they had or what experience, it was about how they treated their players. The last thing he wanted was to invite in one of the many power-hungry men that seemed to gravitate towards youth hockey programs, Shane was all too familiar with them.

Part of him did want to beg everyone to come back next year, remove any risk from the equation and keep the staff within his inner circle, people that he could trust. But that just wasn't realistic. His mom didn't quite understand why he was being so critical, or why he had been making such a big point to search for more female coaches. Shane didn't know how to explain it to her without also telling her about his own experiences with some of the coaches she had suggested.

"But what about Coach Tremblay? He's the one that fixed your backhand," his mom had asked on the phone one evening.

Coach Tremblay had been his coach for the last part of his minor career, before Shane was drafted to Kingston for juniors when he was 16. Tremblay had fixed his backhand, but he had also berated Shane whenever he made a mistake, mocked his appearance, and used insults as a way to motivate. Shane remembered when he was around eleven, and his coach had spent part of a practice forcing the entire team to get on their hands and knees and push pucks across the ice with their noses, all because their passing had been weak the game before.

Shane hadn't told his mom about that. It would have made her upset, and he didn't want to risk her pulling him from the team. Besides, it had seemed bad then, but it was nothing compared to some of the stuff that went down in juniors.

"I'm not so sure," Shane had said to his mom. "He was a bit...serious. I want the camps to be fun, you know? Make it about the joy of the game, not about trying to make it pro."

Shane had been so in his head about this whole thing. Part of him worried he was being too controlling, he knew he had been a particularly sensitive kid, and that had only been exacerbated by his skill. There was a period of time when every game had turned him into such a nervous wreck with the stress and the expectation, he'd come off the ice crying. Even still, Shane was simultaneously worried he hadn't been cautious enough. Ilya understood, to a degree, he too had been a victim of harsh coaching growing up in Russia. He understood the difference a coach can make in the development of the sport. He also didn't want to invite in any coaches that they hadn't properly vetted.

What he didn't understand was why Shane had spent so much time worried about everything else. The culture of the camps, how the kids were talking about their futures, he didn't want the point of the camps to be eventually playing professionally.

"They are just kids, Hollander," Ilya had said on the phone, after Shane had called in a middle of the night spiral. "They just want to play hockey."

But Ilya didn't get it. No one cared about junior hockey players in Russia. When Shane first moved out to his junior team, he felt like he had entered a whole new world. The community treated them like gods, they let them get away with anything they wanted. Even Shane had somewhat been sucked into it, it was hard not to when agents had been contacting him at the age of eleven, and he had spent most of his life spoken about like the second coming of Christ.

Not that that had saved him from the locker room.

Even though they were just kids, Shane couldn't help but worry what would become of the boys at his camps. Would the boys he coached go on to make a junior team? Would they be in the same kinds of conversations Shane had been in? Would they be hazed the same way? Would they sit in the locker room and shut in on themselves as they heard their teammates degrade women and send around nudes as some kind of trophy? Or worse, would they be the ones leading the charge?

Part of him knew that it was irrational to expect that he could fix a systemic issue all through who he chose as coaches for his camps, but surely he had to try? Maybe if they learnt what they should expect from their coaches from the beginning, they'd be more likely to fight back when they got older.

Shane typed out a response to his mom stating that he'd look at some of the names she had sent over after the game. It seemed like they were going in a better direction.

He flipped back to instagram as he shifted to stretch out his hamstrings, at the top of the story queue was Ilya's profile picture. He clicked.

It was a video of Ilya at some club in Philadelphia, totally white girl wasted. He was wearing a pair of multicolour shield glasses that blinked with the strobe lights, his curls sticking out every which way around the arms. He had Kosmodemyansky under one of his arms, having a significantly less fun time, but who at least didn't seem like he was resisting the urge to bolt. Cliff Marleau was also in the frame chugging a bottle of vodka.

He had added a caption over the video that read: "The Bears are back in town." Shane thought it was a bit much for a team that won due to an accident.

"Hey man."

Shane looked up to see Hayden walk in, slinging off his bag and chucking it into his locker.

"You're in early," Shane remarked.

"Yeah," Hayden said. "The girls are also playing tonight, their game starts—" he checked his watch. "Right now actually. Sucks I have to miss it, but, it's not like watching a bunch of six-year old girls fall all over the ice is all that exciting anyway." He looked over Shane's shoulder. "That Rozanov?"

"Yeah," Shane replied, quickly shutting off his phone. "We still on for after?" He asked, changing the subject before Hayden could make any comments about his boyfriend.

"Yeah, Jackie's making wings. And something boring for you, don't worry."

They were playing Minnesota today, the first game with J.J. since he'd been traded. They had decided the three would go to Hayden's after the game for dinner so they could catch up, and Shane couldn't help but worry that everything was going to be different.

It felt like so much had changed in Montreal. Shane had come out. J.J. had left. They had gotten a new defenseman that had seemed to have taken over the room.

Shane used to have control of the room. He was well liked, even if he wasn't especially close with the team. He had been made captain for a reason. Ever since coming out to the team, it was like a hole had been poked in the fabric of the room, and every new change just began to tear at it a little bit more.

Shane didn't like how frequently he had been forced to think about his experience in juniors lately. He had hoped he had left that all behind. But between everything with coaching, and now the changes in the locker room, he felt like he was being pulled right back to his sixteen year-old self.

"No fucking way!"

Shane looked up from where he was taping his stick. The locker room had filled up as they grew closer to puck drop, and directly across the room, a small cluster had formed around Murray, their newest defenseman, who was showing off something on his phone.

"No fucking way she sent you that."

"Why so suspicious? Is it 'cause you're so fucking ugly even puck sluts won't give you any?"

"Fuck off."

"She's fucking insane too, I coulda brought in half the team and she wouldn'ta minded."

Shane could feel his shoulders tensing as he realized what they were talking about. He looked to his right for Hayden, who was busy on his phone. Shane wasn't sure if he wasn't paying attention, or if he just didn't care.

"Hey," Shane called. "Cut it out, I don't wanna see that shit."

The group of men looked to Shane in unison. The look on their faces wasn't one of shame, or respect, it was annoyance. The only exception was one of the younger guys, who had been giggling on the wings. He looked uncertainly between Shane and Murray.

Murray rolled his eyes. "Right, my bad," he said, unconvincingly. He got to his feet and set his phone in his locker.

Shane frowned. It was a shitty response, but at least he had put the phone away.

As the rest of the players turned back to their lockers to start dressing, Shane heard one of them mutter, "course Hollzy doesn't wanna see it, he gets his fill in the fuckin' room."

Shane pretended not to hear it.

* * *

"Hey 'Ollzy."

J.J. stopped hard at the red line, spraying ice shavings all over Shane's legs.

"Asshole," Shane replied, grinning.

Shane had been thinking a lot about how he'd want to reunite with J.J., whether they would shake hands or just chat across the line. He was sure cameras would be on them.

Any planning Shane had made went through the window when J.J. threw his arms around Shane and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug.

“Oof,” Shane said, doing little to resist his friend. “If you’re not careful, they’re gonna think we’re conspiring.”

“I do not care Capitaine,” J.J. replied, muffled against Shane’s sweater. Before Shane could make a remark about how he was no longer his captain, he was interrupted.

“Can I get in on this?”

Shane felt another body slam against his back as Hayden came to engulf him from the other side. He was a Shane sandwich.

“Guys, I can’t play hockey if I’ve been suffocated,” Shane complained.

“It is all a part of my plan, ‘Ollzy,” J.J. announced, his Quebecois accent thick as ever. He finally released Shane from his hold, readjusting his stick in his hand. “If I get you off the ice, we will have a much better chance of winning. We need all the help we can get.”

Shane frowned. J.J. was joking, he knew he was, but Shane wondered if there was a bit of truth to it. Minnesota was a worse team than Montreal, surely his friend was affected by the move? J.J. was always one to cover up his feelings with jokes. Like that time that Shane hadn’t known J.J. had broken up with his girlfriend until a full week afterwards, he had been so good at avoiding the subject. Was J.J. upset? Did he blame the Voyageurs? Did he blame Shane?

“You wish, dude,” Hayden said with a laugh. He moved to slap J.J. on the back in a particularly bro-y way. “Prepare to get a fuckin’ piece of us tonight. Don’t think we’ll go easy on you just because we have to eat with you after.”

“I would not dream of it.”

* * *

It was 3 A.M. and Shane was wide awake.

He made a point to try and be asleep at least before midnight in order to maintain a regular sleep schedule. As he laid on his back on the left side of his bed tucked under the perfectly made covers, he did everything he could think of to will himself to sleep.

He probably should have taken melatonin, but now it was too late. If he took it now, it would take an hour to work, and surely he would fall asleep on his own by then? And taking it now could make things worse, keeping him drowsy when he needed to wake up in the morning.

He wasn’t sure why he had been so in his head recently. He was up worrying about things he hadn’t thought about in years.

Shane had been playing in the NHL for almost a decade now. He knew what a locker room was like, he knew the culture, and he had figured out how to navigate it a long time ago. He had thought that through all the bad things, he’d be able to persevere, maybe even change it.

But last year, something changed.

Shane had thought the worst thing that could happen after coming out to his team was hate. They would call him slurs, they would openly reject him, they would out him. He was beginning to wonder if he'd been wrong, if the not knowing was chipping away at him more than if the bandaid had been ripped off.

Against his will, Shane had found himself thinking of his time in juniors more and more these days. There were a few things that kept bringing him back. His struggles to find coaches, losing J.J., the shift in the locker room. Every time another memory crossed his mind, he felt sick to his stomach, he just needed to get it out.

Shane sat up in his bed. He reached for his phone, squinting as the lock screen illuminated the room. It was 3:23, Ilya had played earlier today and flown back to Boston this evening. He was sure to be exhausted, the last thing he needed was for Shane to call him in the middle of the night just to talk him down from his spiral.

Shane dialled.

The voice that answered was gravelly and tired sounding, and Shane immediately felt guilty.

“Shane? Ty v poryadke?”

Ilya always struggled with English when he was tired. Shane shouldn't have called. He was definitely asking too much from Ilya right now.

“Hey, I'm sorry, I'm okay, I shouldn't have called, I know it's late. You're probably tired.”

“Is okay, Shane, what is wrong?”

Shane paused. Part of him wanted to just vent everything he was feeling, but the other part didn't want to get into it at all. “I'm just...I've been thinking a lot. About everything.”

“Ah,” Ilya replied. “I see. You have gone down gopher hole.”

Shane smiled despite himself. “Rabbit hole.”

“Yes, yes, is same.”

Shane reached up to rub at his eyes. He sighed.

“Tell me what is wrong, moy lyubimyy,” Ilya said so softly it just about caused Shane to crack open.

“I'm just,” Shane started, and suddenly he couldn't stop. “I think things here are worse than I wanted to admit. I thought I could handle it, I thought that I had been here long enough that I could fix it, but every time I stand in that fucking locker room and I hear another joke, or someone making a stupid comment they think doesn't matter, or I get the cold shoulder because I'm not in their circle anymore, I feel like I'm sixteen years old again and back on my fucking junior team all alone just trying to survive. And the only reason I got through that was because I knew that if I did, I'd get here, and when I got to the show, it would be better. There'd be cameras everywhere, we'd be in the public eye, everyone wouldn't be able to get away with the same shit that they always were. But...now I just feel like a fucking idiot, like I've been so fucking naive.”

Ilya paused for some time. When he spoke again, it was much calmer than Shane was feeling. “Shane, did something happen?”

Shane lowered the phone for a moment. He started to recognize that feeling of tears welling up in the back of his throat. He pushed it down.

“Nothing happened. I mean, not one thing happened. It’s just all these little small things that I didn’t notice or made excuses for this whole time, I’m just seeing it now.” He took a breath. “Did I ever tell you about my junior team?”

“Eh, sort of. Was in America, yes?”

“No, I mean, it was right on the border, but still Canada. I went when I was sixteen, I was the best player on the team.”

Shane could hear the small smile coming through the phone. “I already knew this.”

“Yeah, but, I guess it really didn’t matter. It didn’t change things, if anything I think it made it worse in some ways.”

“Made what worse?”

Shane frowned. He had never told anyone about it before. Not his friends, not his teammates, definitely not his parents. But he thought that Ilya might understand, and even if he didn’t...he always knew what to say.

“My very first game was away, so we took the bus, and it was like a three hour drive. We won the game, and I scored a goal, and I was so happy.”

Ilya didn’t say anything on the other end, but he could imagine the expression on his face. That look of concern where his lips pressed together, waiting for what was to come.

“But then, when we started the drive back, one of the veterans stood up and said that all of the rookies had to go to the back of the bus to do the hot box.”

“What?” Ilya said. “What is this?”

“They made us all get undressed, then the five of us had to jam ourselves into the bathroom at the back of the bus. They locked the door, and one of them shoved a bunch of change through the door, and said we weren’t allowed to come out until we picked up the three dollars in coins.” Shane scoffed. “They only threw in \$2.75. I don’t even know how long we were in that bathroom for. And the whole time the coaches were at the front of the bus, as if they didn’t notice a group of teenagers naked in the back of the fucking bus! They didn’t care, they didn’t think it was a big deal.”

Shane took a deep breath, trying to calm his breathing before he did something stupid like break down. “And I think the worst thing too, is that I didn’t think it was that bad either at the time. Everyone was telling me that they all did it, that it wasn’t as bad as it used to be and I should be grateful. And I believed them.”

Still, Ilya didn’t speak. He just listened as Shane continued.

“I remember the whole time I spent on that team just feeling so alone. I swear, it was like every single night that the team would go out partying and drinking until they blacked out, and if I wasn’t participating, or if I wasn’t talking about girls the way they did, or if I even seemed uncomfortable, then I was a bad teammate. Or a fag. And I tried, I tried to go along with it and stay quiet and suck it up, because I knew that if I made waves, it could ruin my entire career. If I said anything to the coaches or anyone in charge, I would have no chance at making the NHL. They were letting us get

away with anything, just because there was a chance we might be stars, even my fucking teachers didn't care about the grades as long as we played well. No one was policing us."

Now that he was going, he couldn't stop. He hadn't realized how much all of this had built up until he finally got the chance to say it.

"I wonder, what the fuck didn't I know about? How much worse was it actually? What things were they doing that they didn't tell me because I was the weird one? I mean I've been seeing it in the news now, all the stuff about the sexual assault by junior hockey players, and I can't help but think all I've been doing is fucking enabling it. I mean, Jesus fucking Christ, our locker room had a sign in it that said that nothing said in there should leave the room."

Shane let out a huff, moving his hands to run over his face. He could feel his heart beating out of his chest. It was a strange feeling, he wasn't normally one to get so worked up like this.

The line was silent for some time, the only thing Shane could hear was the sound of Ilya breathing through the speaker. Or maybe it was his own breathing.

As the silence stretched on, Shane started going back to think about what he said, about everything he had just admitted. All the things he had never said out loud before. All the awful things he had been a part of, all the things he had enabled.

Shane felt like he was going to throw up. He sat up a bit straighter, trying to calm himself. What was Ilya thinking? Was the reason he hadn't replied was because he was just so appalled? In shock of what Shane had been a part of? Shane was embarrassed and ashamed, and what made it worse was that it hadn't stopped when he left juniors. It had been going on this entire time on his own team and he hadn't even realized, or maybe he just hadn't wanted to see it.

"Shane," Ilya said after some time. His voice sounded different. "Is not your fault."

Just like that, Shane started to crumble. He dropped his head, resting it in his hands. "I think it is." He could let himself speak in short sentences, anything more and his voice might break.

"Shane, you were sixteen, and you were scared. You were sharing room with adults, you were afraid to say no. What would happen if you complain?"

Shane shrugged even though Ilya couldn't see. "They would have told me to shut up. That or...they would have pushed me out of the team. My mom might've pulled me."

"You were scared," Ilya repeated. "You were alone, away from family. Your whole life is hockey. I think I would have done anything to stay in hockey, if it got me out of Russia."

"But that's the thing," Shane argued. "If you went through it, it's something you had to do. What excuse do I have? Just because it was the only thing I was good at?"

"But, is different for you too, hockey is...what is word? Is you, is life."

"My identity?"

"Da, yes, some things...they seem normal when they are happening. Was bad, but...you were hurt too, yes? They hurt you, and they leave you out, and they put you in bad places."

Shane rubbed his eyes. He had always struggled when it came to locker rooms. He wasn't the most sociable. He couldn't do bro talk, or make jokes the same way everyone else did. Even on the ice, he

would frustrate his coaches. He remembered his juniors coach berating him because he thought he was too “grumpy.” He said that it didn’t matter how good he was on the ice if he didn’t get along with the room. Getting along with the room always seemed to mean succumbing to demands to get blackout drunk at parties or degrading whatever woman they had in their phones. He just couldn’t do that.

“I just always thought...” Shane started again. He found himself staring at the empty wall on the opposite end of his bedroom. “I thought that it would be over now. I thought it was. When I got to Montreal, it was so different, so professional. There was some teasing, sure, but no one was getting hazed, I wasn’t being threatened by my coaches. I was so happy about all the things that weren’t there that I didn’t even notice what was. It’s like it’s been there this whole time, everyone’s just better at hiding it.”

“What do you mean? Now? In Montreal?”

Shane sighed. “I thought I was fixing it. I thought that I was shutting it down, the jokes about girls, the bragging, the slurs. But this whole time, they were just keeping it away from me. And now they don’t even care, they don’t even try to hide it because they don’t respect me now. Not after...”

Shane trailed off. They both knew what he was referring to.

“So, is still bad.” Ilya said. Shane could hear some rusting on his end, it sounded like he was properly getting up. Shane was too upset to take the time to feel guilty. “Montreal has not been better.” It wasn’t much of a question.

Shane shook his head. “I guess I really thought...I thought that they would get over it. For me. Because I’m their friend. But now every time I walk into that room, I feel like I’m back in juniors. Like I’m having to put on a mask just to stay alive.” He laughed humourlessly, “I don’t want to go back to feeling like that again, and I honestly don’t know if I can do it anymore.”

Shane cut himself off before he could say something he regretted. The line went silent again. Shane counted the seconds.

“What do you mean, Shane?” Ilya asked, finally.

“I really don’t know.” Honestly, Shane hadn’t realized this was how he felt until he had gotten it all out. He thought he was handling it, he could handle the stares, and the isolation, and the tension. He could maybe fix the locker room talk, at least make them think twice.

But he fucking missed his boyfriend. Enough time would pass that he would forget what it was like when he was with Ilya, how much he felt like himself. Then when they were finally together, it made it that much worse to be apart again.

“What if...” Ilya started. He sounded hesitant, like he was approaching a kicked puppy. “What if you left?”

Shane blinked. What?

“What are you talking about?”

“Montreal. What if you left Montreal?”

Leave Montreal. Shane wasn’t sure if he could even comprehend it. The team that drafted him, the team he’d captained, the team he had led to two Stanley Cups. It was unthinkable.

“That’s insane,” Shane said.

“Is it? I was going to go to Ottawa.”

Shane frowned. Ilya had been willing, despite the career he built up. Sure, there was the added benefit that a move to a Canadian city would help him in obtaining citizenship, and it brought them closer to Shane’s family, but it had still been a big ask. And Ilya had genuinely planned to do it. He had wanted to do it for Shane.

“I don’t know if I can do that. They would hate me. Montreal would hate me, and my team, I’d be betraying them.”

“Shane,” Ilya said softly. “I think you are caring about your team more than they are caring about you. They have hurt you, and they keep hurting you. They do not deserve you.”

Shane felt like his heart had just been cracked open with a sledgehammer. He felt like every bone in his body was telling him to stay in Montreal, stay loyal, try to fix things, wait it out. But Ilya had said it so simply, like it was so obvious. If staying in Montreal was hurting him, then leave Montreal.

“I still have another year on my contract. And I doubt I could convince Montreal to trade me.”

“You can sign and trade,” Ilya offered. Shane could hear the hope in his voice, and felt guilty for giving it to him. “If you say you do not plan to resign, they will want to get their worth.”

Ilya wasn’t wrong about that. But just because it was possible, didn’t mean he was sure he wanted to do it.

“Where would I even go?” Shane tried. Ilya didn’t immediately respond, and Shane took the time to cycle through his options. Ottawa, maybe, but they really were terrible. He wasn’t sure he had enough time left in his career for another rebuild. Toronto was even worse than Montreal, that was a no-go. He heard that Winnipeg was looking to increase their depth at center, Calgary as well. It could be nice to live near the mountains.

“What about Boston?”

Shane blinked. Boston?

“How would that even...Boston would never take me.”

“We are needing depth at center since Siggi left,” Ilya said. “We have Doherty, but he is not really taking up much of the cap. I did not take big raise when I resigned to leave space for team, we have many young players, I think we would have room.”

Shane thought that Ilya sounded like he had been thinking about this prior to this conversation. “They hate me in Boston.”

“They will love you if you win. And you will win. We will win.”

Shane shook his head. This was ridiculous. “I don’t know how we’re even talking about this. I can’t leave Montreal, I can’t. They drafted me, they’re my team, I can’t leave just because of something stupid like this.”

“Is not stupid, Shane,” Ilya said, his voice growing stronger. “They are hurting you. Is not safe for you. You do not owe them anything.”

“Yeah? And what’s going to Boston gonna fix? Are you telling me that the guys in Boston aren’t sitting around the locker room bragging about the girls they’ve fucked? They’re not showing pictures? They’re not making crude jokes? It’s all Kumbaya there? If I came out, can you guarantee that the exact same fucking thing won’t happen?”

Ilya went silent, and Shane immediately regretted his words. Ilya was only trying to help, he wasn’t the problem here.

Just as Shane opened his mouth to apologize, Ilya replied.

“No. I cannot.”

Shane curled in on himself. How did things get so easily fucked up again? Two summers ago at the cottage, it seemed like everything was finally working out, that they might have a chance to be properly happy together. Shane should have known better.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, his voice small. “I know you’re trying to help. I appreciate it, I really do.”

Shane wished things were just as easy as moving. But leaving Montreal would mean leaving his team, his city, his legacy. He’d be leaving Hayden, he’d be disappointing his mom. He’d be disappointed in himself.

As Shane sat alone in his bed in Montreal, he thought about what tomorrow would bring. Another practice, another day in the locker room, another instance where he felt like he was 16 years old again, like he’d been stripped of his voice. Another day worlds away from the man he loved.

“I just don’t wanna go back to feeling like this again,” Shane uttered, his voice barely above a whisper.”

“We will figure it out, moy lyubimyy,” Ilya said, his voice just as low. “We will figure it out.”

Chapter End Notes

Ever since I started reading this book on toxic hockey culture in Canada, I really have been wanting to spend some time exploring how I think that impacted Shane. I’m honestly surprised I haven’t seen it be talked about more.

The book I’m referring to is called *We Breed Lions*. It covers a lot of aspects that I got into here. Every story that Shane references in regards to hazing and abuse from coaches and teammates is directly taken from accounts from players and parents in this book.

To explain a bit how youth hockey works, basically, a kid will play in the minors in a local league. If you’re really good, you can be drafted to a junior team when you’re 16. The junior teams are for players 16 to 20, and they’re essentially the gateway to the NHL. They draft players, which means you can get kids having to move to different cities. Usually this means that they get billeted out to families.

In Canada, junior hockey players are often treated like celebrities. The book details how in many of these communities, being a hockey player would let you get away with a lot. Cops would help you get into bars underage, girls would fawn over you, grown men would ask for your signature,

and the community would back you. There were several cases detailed in which, following rape accusations, the community would rally behind the hockey players, and ostracize the victims. Since the players are often living away from their families, they don't get much supervision or discipline of any kind. The book also details how different this is to the hockey culture in Europe, specifically Russia. People don't particularly care about junior hockey players there, so while hazing and toxic sporting culture is still prominent there, it isn't exacerbated by enabling the behaviour of the players in quite the same way.

The incidents Shane discusses, the sign in the locker room, pushing pucks with your nose, the hotbox, they're all stories directly from the book. These ones were actually quite tame, there were much more horrific stories of hazing in here that detailed sexual assault, humiliation, and forced drug use. Another common theme was forced binge drinking by rookies to the point of blackout to show loyalty. Hockey Canada also has a history of covering up sexual abuse of players by their coaches, as well as abuse by hockey players (either individually or in a group) towards women and girls. Though I mostly center Shane's story around hazing, group encouragement and endorsement of sexual assault is a major theme in the book. Objectification of women is a serious issue in hockey culture, a lot of these boys feel entitlement to women due to their celebrity status in the community, which leads to very high rates of sexual assault and degradation.

Another story in the book is about Liam Hughes, who played for the Oil Kings when he was a teenager. Hughes had been diagnosed with autism, and received no support from the team in regards to his mental health and was often verbally abused by his coaches due to his awkward demeanor. He talked about how if he wasn't participating in certain rituals, such as drinking and partying, he was ostracized. He eventually was pushed out of the club because he didn't "fit in."

The risk of objecting or speaking up in the room is heavily emphasized in the book. When Akim Aliu famously spoke to the news about a hazing incident (a hot box, which was common across many teams), he was booed by fans, shunned by his teammates, and even suspended for a game. He would inexplicably be left off several U18 tournament rosters, though was eventually drafted into the NHL in the second round, where he played sporadically.

Following the whole thing going on with USA Hockey, I really just wanted to emphasize how deep rooted the toxicity is in hockey culture in Canada. It's engrained in these guys from the very beginning. I think it goes to show why Shane has such a fear of coming out and rocking the boat. It really is that bad. If you're interested, I highly suggest reading this book. I got it well before the Olympics and knew I wanted to implement it, but now it seems more timely than ever.

The "Bears in the Community" bit is inspired by the Nashville Predators, who unfortunately use the significantly worse tagline: Preds in the Community.

The organization of this food bank is based on the one I volunteer at once a week. I, like Ilya, also demand to pet the dogs of everyone who brings them to the food bank. The dog is based on my own childhood dog named Zoey, who lowkey looked like Scooby Doo.

Unfortunately, Geno Malkin did accidentally like bisexual pegging porn on main. On a completely unrelated note, he was one of the main inspos for Pava. Here's some SidGeno to soothe your soul.



Chapter 15: This Episode is Sponsored by...

Chapter Summary

Phase two started on an unsuspecting Thursday in the Bears' practice facility.

Most of the team was gathered in the weights room, repping through their strength training. Ilya liked days like this, where everyone got to do their own thing, but they were all still together. He always tended to buddy up with Cliff, spotting each other as they switched back and forth across the weight rack.

Chapter Notes

Thinking about how much I miss Stuart Skinner. The day he got traded, my mom texted my family separately to tell them they needed to be kind to me that day. I am such a big goalie defender, they always get treated so badly when teams are losing. I love you Stu, and I hope you're doing well in Pittsburgh.

Leon Draisaitl is down. Everyone please win for Leon.

Also, because I am a freak, I watched the warmup livestream for the Oilers v Panthers game just so I could investigate which players used the pride tape. I then quickly learnt that this was not a good gauge because in fact they only use their pride tape for a small section of warmups and then try to wear in the tape on their game sticks for the rest of it. But for the good news, they had a former Oilers captain interviewed at intermission and they asked him about pride tape and he kept bringing up Heated Rivalry and how good it was and then told the interviewer that all the best college parties were the ones with the gays. Anyway we don't talk about how that game ended.

Thank you for everyone in the comments, especially everyone talking about their experiences with hockey culture. I wish we could all just get together and have a big group hug. I like to think these comments are where we get to hide from all of the evil hockey men on all other parts of the internet. This one is more lighthearted, so please enjoy.

One more thing, I've been thinking a lot about the podcast fic idea and I'm thinking I want to write it. I'm considering writing it now while I still have the will to do it, but that might mean the next chapter is a bit delay. Let me know y'all's thoughts.

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

Ilya Rozanov bounded down the hallways of the offices of the Boston Bears with a mission.

He hadn't stopped thinking about Shane ever since their talk a few nights ago. It had been hard, hearing him hurt from afar when Ilya could do little to comfort him. Things seemed to only get harder the longer they were apart, and Ilya worried what time might do.

Ilya was sure that he could be worlds away from Shane until the end of time, and his love wouldn't falter. There were no other options, Shane was it for him.

But what if it wasn't the same for Shane? What if the distance was chipping away at him in other ways? What if the distance, combined with his recent unhappiness at home, was enough to push them apart?

Ilya wasn't going to let that happen. He couldn't, he couldn't lose Shane. But his boyfriend had been right, it wouldn't be as easy as just moving to Boston. He wasn't sure if they would even take him, it would be hard to convince them that Shane would be amenable to the move, even if they can fit him in their cap. And even if he can make that work, Ilya would need to do more to make sure Shane felt safe in the locker room.

Of course, Ilya had known that he had always had things easier with his attraction to girls, but he had been thinking a lot about his own experiences in the locker room ever since talking to Shane. Ilya had thought himself to be one of the good ones, really. He was generally respectful when he had talked about his hookups, maybe he had bragged a bit, but he never showed off photos or had been insulting. He never made any homophobic jokes, and was never especially harsh on rookies. But there had been things his teammates had said that never particularly bothered him, when they probably should have. He should have said something before, he was the captain, and it was his job to set the tone.

He hadn't done a good enough job before. But he would now. He would fix things. For Shane. And so began the first step of his plan.

He knocked lightly on the door to the General Manager's office.

"Yeah?"

Ilya stepped in, closing the door softly behind him. When he met eyes with the GM, the man's eyebrows shot up into his hairline.

Michael Walsh was a young guy, who had only recently taken on the mantle of Boston's GM. After their poor playoff performance in the last few years, the owners had decided that they needed a fresh face to shake things up.

Walsh didn't think the Bears were ready for a rebuild, he thought they had the capabilities to win the cup if they just gave the players the support they needed. Hence the trade for Doherty, and trading away draft picks in exchange for more seasoned, but still young, talent.

Ilya knew he could get Walsh to agree to this. It was in everyone's best interest. He just needed to play it right.

"Hi," he said. Oof, he sounded a bit intimidating, didn't he? It didn't help that he was looming over the guy's desk. Maybe a little intimidation was actually what he needed here.

"Rozanov," Walsh said, still looking surprised. "I thought you were someone else."

"No, it is me," Ilya said unnecessarily.

"Uh...is there something I can help you with?"

Admittedly, this was a crazy thing to do. Players didn't often interact with GMs much unless it was in regards to a trade, being placed on waivers, or performance issues. If you were being called into the

GM's office, it was almost always bad. As captain, Ilya would sometimes speak with him for team check-ins.

But a player coming into the GM's without being invited? That was unheard of. Shane always did tell Ilya he had a lot of audacity.

"Yes," Ilya said simply. He gave a pointed look to the fancy leather chair in front of his desk. "Can I sit?"

"Sure, yeah, sure go ahead."

Ilya sat in the chair, leaning back a bit too comfortably. Maybe he should have been a bit more professional, but it was hard to feel serious when he was talking to a guy a year younger than he was, who sported a clean shaven baby face and was always smacking a piece of gum between his teeth.

Ilya drew his eyebrows together and forced himself to sit up a bit straighter. He could hear Shane's voice in the back of his head saying "be serious."

"We are needing depth at centre," Ilya said simply.

Walsh looked at him like Ilya was speaking in gibberish. Anyone with even a bit more experience than him probably would already be yelling at Ilya to get the fuck out, but Walsh seemed a bit too bewildered to even consider the option.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm...working on it."

"I have a solution," Ilya said.

Walsh raised his eyebrows.

"Shane Hollander."

Walsh looked at Ilya like he had just watched him rip off his own ear and start chewing on it.

"What about him?" He said, after Ilya had not elaborated.

"You can get him."

Walsh looked at him like he was telling a bad joke. "Funny."

"I am serious."

Walsh paused, waiting for Ilya to start laughing. He did not. "Montreal would rather fold than ever trade Hollander."

Ilya shrugged. He leaned forward in his seat. "Hollander does not want to stay in Montreal. He will be free agent after next year, they may be wanting to trade him if they think they will not keep him."

"How would you even know this?"

"We are friends."

Walsh gave him a doubtful look.

Ilya threw up his hands. "It is true, why does no one ever believe me of this?"

Walsh sighed, leaning back in his chair and letting it swivel side to side. “Okay, well, if it’s true, and even if I could get Montreal to budge and give up their franchise fucking player, what makes you think he’d come to fucking Boston?”

Ilya crossed his arms. It would seem outlandish to anyone who didn’t know the real reason. Ilya obviously couldn’t tell it to the GM, but any other excuse would be unbelievable.

“He will come. Trust me.”

Walsh gave him a serious look, as if analyzing his sincerity. After a few moments, he seemed to decide on something, shifting to lean his forearms against his desk. He huffed out a breath.

“Okay, well...I’ll look into it. If you’re right about this...it would be a big deal for us, he’s just what we need to fill out our roster. Ted could really use a center that can keep up with him.”

Ilya blinked. “Who the fuck is Ted?”

Walsh looked at him incredulously. “Ted? Ted Kehoe? Newf.”

“Oh. Right, I knew that.”

Ilya actually hadn’t known that. Not once in his five years playing with Newf had he ever wondered what his actual name was.

“Anyway, it will be good. You will get Hollander. He will come,” Ilya said, a little too smugly.

Walsh looked at him a little longer, as if giving Ilya one more chance to say he was joking. When that didn’t come, he raised his hand to gesture for Ilya to leave. Not wanting to test his luck any more than he already had, Ilya got to his feet.

Phase one was complete.

* * *

Phase two started on an unsuspecting Thursday in the Bears’ practice facility.

Most of the team was gathered in the weights room, repping through their strength training. Ilya liked days like this, where everyone got to do their own thing, but they were all still together. He always tended to buddy up with Cliff, spotting each other as they switched back and forth across the weight rack.

Today was Ilya’s day to man the aux, and he let the low sounds of rap music fill the air as more players began to file into the room. Once he decided the room was sufficiently full, he unlocked his phone and tapped through his Spotify. A low, professional voice began to boom out of the speaker.

“When we talk about gender equality in the US, there’s one statistic you see all the time: Women earn 79 cents for every dollar men make. And while that statistic is factually correct, there’s a lot it doesn’t tell you.”

From where he was completing his bench presses, Ilya watched as Cliff Marleau’s eyebrows drew together in confusion.

“Part of the wage gap reflects that women are more highly concentrated in lower-paying occupations, but to fully understand the issue, you have to look within the occupations too.”

Cliff racked the bar, then sat up, turning to Ilya. “What the fuck are we listening to?”

Ilya shrugged nonchalantly. “Eh, is a podcast. Sveta suggested to me, is helping improve English.” Ilya purposefully dropped some articles in that sentence to sell the point, hoping that it wouldn’t remind his teammates that he was fluent after a decade in the US.

“In a Chicago MBA study, women with kids had a gap twice as large as women without. The truth is that women take on a disproportionate share of child-rearing tasks.”

“Okay...” Marly continued. Ilya noticed that the rest of the room had joined in shooting him confused looks when the music cut out. “But why are we listening to some weird feminist shit?”

“Woah, Marly!” Ilya exclaimed dramatically. “What is wrong with feminist podcast? I love women very much, yes? Do you love women, Marly?”

Ilya could see the gears turning in his head. “Yeah?”

“Then I cannot think of better way to spend afternoon than all of us sitting in this room together, thinking about women. Together.”

Ilya looked around the room. Half the team appeared to be skeptical, and the other half looked like they were in the middle of solving a complex math equation. The only one who didn’t look conflicted was Pava.

“Is his day,” Pava said, his usually soft tone echoing through the room. “No complaining.”

Ilya grinned. “Exactly. It is my day, I play whatever I want. If you can put up with Newf’s weird Irish music, you can put up with my podcast.”

* * *

“But it’s not my fault that women pick lower paying jobs,” Cloutier argued.

“Are you fucking stupid?” Marly asked, he was on his feet now. “Did you not listen to anything she said? They don’t pick lower paying jobs, they become lower paying because there’s women in them. Like she said about nursing.”

“But I thought she was saying women made less because they take care of kids?” Delly chimed in, looking genuinely confused.

“Is both,” Pava said.

“Tha’ mudderhood penalty, b’y,” Newf said. “My Siobhan was tellin’ me about it, the ladies at her job aren’t gettin’ promoted like the b’ys, the bosses don’t like they’re takin’ the time off for maternity leave.”

“Okay well, if women want to be paid the same, maybe they should start working in the oil fields! Obviously they aren’t making as much if they aren’t doing dangerous work!” Cloutier continued, causing half the room to let out a groan.

“Actually,” Doherty chimed in, he was slowly eating a packet of cashews. “My wife used to work as a cleaner when she was finishing university. She was telling me it’s way more hazardous than people think working with all those chemicals, and there’s like no regulation.”

“And there won’t be any regulation, because people like you think it’s not dangerous,” Marly said, pointing a finger at Cloutier.

“Okay,” Ilya said, raising his hands in an attempt to calm the room. “I did not think you would get so heated about this. Maybe I should turn it off.”

Ilya had already had to pause it near the end just to allow for this argument. He was mostly surprised by Marly, he didn’t seem the type to do any critical thinking, but Ilya remembered he had said something about a new girlfriend. Maybe he was wanting to impress her.

A chorus of “No!” chimed through the room, muffling the one “please” that came from Cloutier.

“You said you were gonna play the one about the history of the colour pink,” Delly frowned.

Ilya scanned the room, watching as a dozen hopeful eyes turned to him at the prospect of him putting on another podcast. Ilya looked at Cloutier, raising an eyebrow.

Cloutier shrugged. “It’s better than Irish music.”

Ilya picked his phone back up and pressed play.

** * **

The squeal that echoed through the room would have probably caught the attention of the entire restaurant if it weren’t for the fact that they had already been ushered into a private room.

Rose Landry giggled as she nearly launched herself into Shane’s arms. It had been months since they’d last seen each other in person, and Shane had missed her dearly.

They weren’t the only ones in the room, Ilya and Kosmodemyansky had already arrived before him. It was a miracle that they were able to arrange this at all, the Bears and the Voyageurs were both in New York for games against the Scouts and the Admirals that had concluded earlier that evening, leaving them just enough time to get a late supper with Rose, who was in town for some press.

“Fallon tomorrow,” she said, unable to diminish the grin on her face. “I’m so excited, this feels like the real thing.”

“It didn’t feel like the real thing when you were cast in a superhero movie?” Shane asked.

“That wasn’t the same. It was only a side character. It’s not like I was Black Widow or something.”

They settled in the crescent booth, with Shane sandwiched between Ilya and Rose. Kosmodemyansky was fit in at the end. He had asked Ilya if he could join at the last minute, not because he wanted to meet Rose, apparently he had no idea who she was outside of being Shane’s ex-girlfriend, but just because he didn’t want to get dragged to a club with the rest of the team.

“You guys must be hungry,” Rose proclaimed as she looked over the menu. The place they were at was fancy, the kind of place where the menu was only one page and didn’t have any prices. “I have to admit, I’m glad you guys both won today, or this would have been a lot more depressing.”

“Should not have been as close as it was,” Ilya moaned.

The Bears won tonight, but just barely, scraping by after dragging the Scouts into a shootout. Shane knew that his boyfriend had been unhappy with how they were playing lately. Not to sound like a

cliche, but they just hadn't been moving pucks. Their defense wasn't bad, but it wasn't good enough to compensate for an offense that wasn't putting pucks in the net. Every game it seemed like Ilya's line was being run off their feet trying to compensate. Ilya was playing around 25 minutes every night.

"Lucky we don't have to worry about that," Shane mused. "You wouldn't believe how he gets when he loses."

"It only turns me on when I lose to you, Hollander."

Rose's eyebrows flew up to her hairline, and Shane was temporarily confused until he noticed her looking between Ilya and Kosmodemyansky.

"He knows," Shane said, sending her a meaningful look.

"Oh," she said. "Really? Sorry, I'm just surprised. I had to needle it outta you."

"Well, it wasn't on purpose."

Rose giggled. "Oh, well now I'm dying to know."

"I would really rather not relive it."

"I relive it every night," Ilya interjected. "Every night, in the mornings, in the shower, it was very memorable night before Pava showed up. We broke my wall."

"You broke the wall?" Rose said, dropping her jaw in scandal.

Shane pressed his hands over his ears as he felt the blush creep up his cheeks. "I am literally begging you to stop." He wasn't averse to talking about sex, he actually didn't mind it when it came to Rose. What he was averse to was talking to her about it while in front of his boyfriend and his Russian rookie.

"So boring, Hollander," Ilya said, but he relented. He instead brought the menu up to his nose as he read it over. "What are we getting? I will eat this table if we do not order something soon."

"Pizza?" Pava asked, his brow furrowing.

Ilya snapped his fingers. "Yes, I like this idea. Let's do this."

"Ilya," Shane said. "This place is way too fancy, there's no way they're gonna have pizza."

"They do, actually!" Rose said. "But they aren't called that on the menu, it's called 'wood fired Napoletana.'"

Shane sighed. He hated fancy restaurants. Unfortunately, they were often the only places that he could go with Rose and actually have some sort of privacy. "Do they at least have a healthy option? I can't do dairy."

"I'm sure we can ask."

Within a few minutes, Ilya had waved down their waiter, and ordered them each a 'wood fired Napoletana' dish, along with a bottle of far too expensive wine for the table.

“So,” Rose said, leaning forward with her elbows on the table, turning her eyes to Kosmodemyansky. Shane recognized this as her ‘I’m being welcoming’ position. “I haven’t formally introduced myself. I’m Rose.”

Pava nodded shyly, a light blush dusting his face. “Hi.”

“What can I call you?”

“Eh, Pavsikakiy. Kosmodemyansky.”

Rose nodded with a smile. “Okay, I like it. Very ‘Harrison Ford’ of you.”

Kosmodemyansky nodded, but it seemed obvious to everyone that he had no idea who that was. He didn’t watch much Western television.

“I’ve actually been excited to meet you,” Rose continued. “I mean, Shane mentioned you a couple times, but now that you’ve become a whole thing, I feel like I see you everywhere!”

“Ah, yes,” Pava replied with a frown.

Shane had heard the tale of woe straight from Ilya. Back in November, Kosmodemyansky had been interviewed after their morning practice prior to a game against the Penguins. Shane didn’t admit it to Ilya, but he liked to watch all of Ilya’s interviews, it helped when he was missing him. What he liked even more was watching Ilya’s interviews with his rookie, where Shane got to hear his boyfriend speaking Russian.

That had been less frequent these days. Kosmodemyansky had gotten a lot more confident lately when it came to interviewing in English, though Ilya would often sit alongside him just in case he needed a translation clarified before the kid tried to answer in English.

“So the Boston Bears have won three of their last five games against the Penguins, but the Penguins have had a much stronger defense and consistent goaltending, particularly during home games.” She paused for a moment, as if remembering she was talking to the kid who barely spoke English. She spoke slowly and enunciated for her question. “What do you think the biggest threat is for the Penguins tonight?”

Kosmodemyansky had paused for a moment, looking off to the side in thought. Ilya had made a gesture as if asking if he needed a translation, but the kid had waved him off. He leaned into the microphone.

“I think...bear, maybe. Polar bear.”

The video had gone viral. Well, at least hockey viral. When Shane saw it, tucked in his hotel bed for a pregame nap, his first instinct had been to text Ilya and tell him that polar bears and penguins lived on opposite sides of the globe.

The video going viral hadn’t been a problem. It was adorable, if anything. The main problem was that it had caused fans outside Boston to pay attention to him, or more particularly, his pregame walk-ins.

“For the record,” Rose said, “I love your hats. Some people just don’t get style, too many hockey players dress like such losers, they just don’t appreciate it when someone tries something new.”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “Like Hollander, he dresses so bad that he must hire a stylist. People on the internet bully him too.”

Shane thought that was a bit of a reach. Sure, he wasn't exactly acclaimed for his fashion, but he hadn't been singled out either. Poor Kosmodemyansky had been turned into a meme. Some people started wearing weird and fancy hats to the games or holding up signs with the kid's head superimposed on David Byrne in his outrageous suit. According to Ilya, the kid had not been taking the attention well. Shane didn't understand why he didn't just stop wearing the hats.

"People comment on what I'm doing all the time," Rose said, reassuringly. "I'm sure we aren't gonna be able to leave here without a swarm of paps that will be gossiping about how me and Shane are back together."

Shane scrunched up his face. If public attention was the price to pay for being Rose's friend, Shane would give it any day, but he didn't have to like it. He had already gotten enough ribbing from Hayden earlier today when Rose came up on the jumbotron attending his game. At least she wasn't wearing his jersey this time.

"Yes, yes, and you going viral just means you are interesting, no?" Ilya said. "It was bound to happen, even Shane has gone viral."

Shane nodded along subconsciously before registering what Ilya said.

"What, like when I dated Rose? I don't know if that counts."

"No, the other thing," Rose interjected. "The video."

"What video?"

"In June, from the awards show."

Shane looked across the table to his boyfriend, who was doing a poor job covering up his smile.

"Did I go viral and no one told me?"

"Here," Rose said, pulling up her phone. After scrolling for a bit, she shoved it in front of Shane.

"Shane Hollander has posted at least three points every time he has played on the west coast the day after holiday break while using white tape..." he read aloud. "This is just some weirdly specific stat about me."

"Oh, oops," Rose said, reaching over to scroll a bit more. "There, this one."

Shane looked at the screen, peering down at the shaky video of himself standing exhausted and sleep rumpled at the hotel desk yelling something about mac n cheese cupcakes. The video seemed to catch the tail end of his conversation, when he was most manic, waving his hands around dramatically at Neil.

"What the fuck?" Shane said. "How many people saw this? Why the fuck did no one say something?"

"It's not so bad!" Rose said. "You can't even fully hear most of what you're saying."

"I look like such an asshole," Shane said, his frown deepening. Surely his mom hadn't seen this? If she had, she surely would have called to scold him for being rude.

"You are an asshole," Ilya said, unhelpfully. "Mostly people think you just look cute here."

Shane put his head in his hands. "Fuuuuuck."

"It's fine, Shane," Rose said. "The internet has a short memory, everyone already forgot. Like they already forgot about that time Ilya retweeted his teammate's mom and everyone thought they were banging, or when everyone found out that guy from the Bears had a sex spreadsheet, and those were way worse."

"Which guy?" Shane asked, turning to Ilya with an incredulous look.

"That was Connors. Was very surprising, he is not normally so organized."

"Dude."

"What? You are best friends with the guy who goes to a megachurch."

"Hayden's not even that religious. He said he just likes the concerts."

"I can't believe he didn't tell you about the video!" Rose chimed in, gesturing to Ilya. "He's the one that sent it to me in the first place."

Shane blinked. "He sent it to you? Like, you guys text?"

Ilya and Rose had only properly met once before, this past July. After their stint at the cottage, both Ilya and Shane had flown down to L.A. for their respective brand obligations. After Shane had mentioned he was making plans to grab dinner with Rose while he was in town, Ilya had demanded to come along.

Shane had raised his eyebrows. "You want to come see Rose?"

"Yes. I would very much like to meet the woman who has seen you naked."

Shane frowned. "Are you going to threaten her or something?"

Ilya held up his hands defensively. "You think so little of me, Shane? I am very polite, I will be very good. I just want to make it very clear to Rose Landry that she has no more chances."

"Ilya. I'm gay."

Watching Rose and Ilya interact kind of felt like watching a bomb go off in slow motion. He had spent the entire first half of dinner sure that they were two seconds away from killing each other until Rose had reassured him when Ilya had gone off to the washroom.

"What? No, we're getting along. We're just riffing."

Shane blinked. "Does he know that?"

She laughed. "Yes. Trust me, I'd know if he didn't like me. He's so obvious."

Shane wouldn't have considered Ilya obvious, until he remembered that they only hooked up in the first place after Ilya had jerked off in front of him in the shower. Maybe Shane was just bad at reading people.

But while Shane knew that Ilya and Rose were cordial, he didn't know that they had been texting each other. Let alone sending each other videos about Shane. This is what he got for not being active on

Instagram.

By the time their annoyingly delicious pizzas were delivered to the table, Rose had made the effort to shift the conversation away from Shane's virality, lest he begin to spiral any more. She was deep in some story about her high school days back in Michigan.

"So this girl was my friend, right? But I guess just no one thought to tell me, even though everyone else at school knew. I mean, we used to change together for gym class, but I just thought she was gaining weight! I wasn't gonna assume she was pregnant! And then she just like, has a baby, the only reason I even found out was because I was asking why she missed the exam."

"Was she not glowing?" Ilya asked.

"Glowing?"

"Yes, pregnant lady glow."

"Ilya, a teenage girl is not gonna be glowing from her pregnancy," Shane interjected.

"Maybe not to you," he replied, holding up a hand sentimentally over his heart. "To me, all women glow."

"No," Rose said, rolling her eyes with a smile. "There was no glow. Just some very baggy clothes. But anyway, that's not even the crazy part. After she had the baby, she invited me to the baptism, but I didn't wanna tell my parents about the whole teenage pregnancy thing since I thought they'd get weird about it. So instead, I went with my friend Hailey, and told my parents we were going to see a movie but we actually drove to the next town over to go to church."

Shane laughed as he took a small bite from his pizza. He liked to pace himself as he ate to aid digestion, even though Ilya always teased him for it. "What happened?"

"Oh, ya know," Rose said, shrugging as she sipped at her glass. "They put the water on the baby or whatever, I got to hold her, her head smelled so good. They had a big party at the town hall, lots of watermelon."

"No," Shane said. "I mean, what happened with your parents?"

"Oh, yeah so they accidentally found out immediately after I got home because as part of the party I got this weird angel statue which I couldn't really explain away. So I just told them."

"And?"

"Oh, my mom was all apologetic that I felt I had to hide it, but then my dad was immediately kind of a dick about the whole teenage pregnancy thing, so he kind of proved my point. It's whatever, now it's just another bit of my lore I guess."

"Wow," Ilya said. "Rose Landry, kidnapped, sneaking out to church, dating hockey players, what will TMZ say about you next?"

Rose shot him a cheeky smile. "I'm a woman of mystery. And don't act so astonished, Shane, surely you have some cool teenage story? You've lived away from home since you were sixteen."

"I have no good stories," Shane admitted, dabbing at his mouth with his napkin. He looked over at Kosmodemyansky, who seemed content to just listen in on the conversation as he annihilated his own

plate. "All I've ever done is just hockey. Like, yeah, my junior team would party a lot, but I hated it, I always tried to get out of it."

He saw Ilya frowning beside him. He wasn't sure why, normally this would be his cue to rib Shane about how boring he was.

Rose didn't seem to notice. "You still try to get out of it. As if you even need any more ice time, at this point it's like you're just trying to humiliate the league's defensemen."

Shane shrugged. "Well, it's not my offense I'm complaining about. It's my defense that needs work, I have to be effective on the backcheck too."

"No one's complaining about your backcheck."

"I think there's some pundits that would disagree with you."

"Fuck the pundits," Rose said, a lot more confident than Shane felt.

Shane sent her a weak smile, trying to get the message across that he wasn't bothered. He shouldn't be bothered, really, Hayden always tried to drill that into him whenever he noticed Shane feeling down. But that was easy for him to say, Hayden wasn't getting microanalyzed the way Shane was. Hayden wasn't getting picked apart on podcasts or getting posts made about him reading "Shane Hollander: Past his Prime?" every time he fumbled. Hayden wasn't the face of an entire marginalized community.

"How's your food?" Shane asked, turning to Kosmodemyansky in an attempt to move the subject away from him.

The kid looked up, only raising his eyes while his face was still directed into his plate. It looked like he was trying to prevent the cheese from flying all over the place.

"Is good."

Rose leaned in a bit, also turning her attention towards the Russian. "So, what's your deal? I feel like I don't know anything about you except that you have cool hats and live with Ilya." She rested her head on her hands in such a way that it felt like she was lasering the poor kid with her eyes. Shane probably should have warned her more that Kosmodemyansky wasn't much of a talker. "What do you normally get up to? Do you have any hobbies? Oh, do you have a girlfriend?"

Kosmodemyansky swallowed. He looked like he was right in the center of an FBI interrogation.

"Eh...no. No girlfriend." He tapped his fingers across the tabletop.

"Pava is terrible with girls," Ilya interjected. "Once I saw a girl flirting with him at the club and asked for his number, he just told her 'seventy-one.' He is like a scared goose."

"Well my makeup artist is actually from Boston," Rose said, wagging her eyebrows. "She's really sweet, she likes hockey, I could set you guys up."

Shane notices as the kid dipped his head back down to the table. Since he had cleaned his plate, he no longer had the excuse of shoving more food in his mouth. He scrunched up his nose when he replied.

"Eh...no thank you."

The poor kid seemed uncomfortable. Shane couldn't blame him, he was the same way whenever someone tried to dig into his love life.

"Leave him alone," Shane interjected, trying to keep things light. "You can't go around setting up everyone you just met. Don't you have your own love life to worry about?"

Rose laughed, tossing her hair behind her shoulder. "Hey, I'll have you know I am far too busy for a relationship right now. I'm a working woman, you know."

"What are you working on right now?" Ilya asked, reaching over to steal one of Shane's remaining slices of his boring cheese-less pizza. Shane shifted his plate closer to him.

"I'm actually going to Winnipeg after this, we're starting filming next week."

Shane made a face. "You're filming in Winnipeg? I didn't know they even made movies there."

"Some of it, yeah," Rose nodded. "They love filming in Canada. Way cheaper than anywhere here. And it doesn't really matter the setting, the movie is set in a fake city anyway."

Shane raised an eyebrow. "What are you filming?"

Rose looked side to side, as if they weren't already in a private room. "Okay, if I tell you guys, you have to promise to keep it on the down low. It hasn't been announced yet."

Shane nodded, Ilya dramatically drew a cross over his heart, and Kosmodemyansky just nodded.

"They're doing a live action Scooby-Doo movie. You're looking at your new Daphne!" Rose said it with a smile, which quickly fell as she noticed the look on the boys' faces. "What?"

Both Shane and Ilya turned to look at Kosmodemyansky, who looked both as if he just saw a ghost, but also like he was on the verge of throwing up.

"You are Daphne?" He asked.

Rose looked bewildered, as if she was trying to figure out what she had done wrong. "Yes?"

"What is movie?"

Rose blinked. "Um...it's kind of a modern take. There's like this thing with a museum and a bunch of the past monsters from old episodes."

Rose looked to Shane, desperate for an explanation.

"He really likes Scooby-Doo," Shane said. "It's how he's learning English."

"Oh," Rose said, then she smiled like she was hearing a story about a puppy dog. "That's amazing, you'll love it then."

The expression on Kosmodemyansky's face did not suggest he was overly excited. More like overwhelmed.

"It is fine, Pava. It is just a movie," Ilya said, giving him a slap on the back. "Hey, maybe Rose can get you something from the set. T-shirt or something."

"Yeah!" Rose smiled. "I bet I can swipe one of the crew shirts for you."

The kid turned to Rose very seriously. "Will movie have Captain Cutler? Or The Creeper? Or Tar Monster?"

Rose blinked. "I don't know. I don't really know what any of those are."

Kosmodemyansky frowned. "Why they give you movie?"

Rose looked at a loss for words.

"Bet you never thought this role would need so much research, Rose Landry," Ilya smirked. He looked a bit too giddy at the scene in front of him.

"Well," she replied, leaning back in her chair with a huff. "I'll have to brush up on my history."

* * *

Ilya slumped up against the tunnel wall as he scrolled through his phone.

He was waiting for Newf to finish up with his media availability prior to their game against Ottawa, so Ilya could eventually have his turn. It had been about a week since their outing with Rose, and yet the headlines still seemed to keep popping up.

TMZ  **@TMZ**

Rose Landry spotted hitting the town in NYC with the NHL's Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. Can we hope a romance has been rekindled?
[see link]

> **Rose Landry's Left Foot** **@bbemery8**

Please don't let her date any more hockey players 🙏🙏🙏

> **Sonya** **@rowantreeerowantree**

Ain't no way they're back together i actually don't think i could handle it ill parasocial too hard. That era was the least productive of my life

> **benbam** **@bostonpenaltybox**

Am I the only one that never really liked them together? I thought it was at least a pr relationship they never were doing pda or anything

>> **jennab** **@mushyroomy223**

I think thats just how hollander is tho not everyone wants to be mackin on eachother all the time

>> **mads** **@pucknduck02**

Am i crazy bc i thought that after they broke up we were all just assuming shane was gay. Am i delulu. I mean it in a loving way tho

> **billie** **@voyageurvillanelle**

Why is no one talking about the fact that Ilya is also there? Like come on guys they're not gonna get together and then invite shanes russian rival with them on a date

> **allyally** **@roselandryswife**

Lets be real if rose has the option btw shane and ilya its obvious like have u seen those freckles

Layla **@bearsbunny88**

Okay but hear me out guys: new throuple unlocked???

TMZ  **@TMZ**

Rose Landry spotted hitting the town in NYC with the NHL's Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. Can we hope a romance has been rekindled?
[see link]

> **Hammy!** **@elbowsallovertheplace**

Guys wtf are we doing here

> **abby** **@ilyarozanovsbackcheck**

Rose just wants two boyfriends and she wants her boyfriends to be boyfriends

> **hollanov #1 truther** **@8124eva**

I think I can work with this

TMZ seemed to have completely disregarded the fact that Pava had also been with them. In fact, he had been walking with Rose the majority of the time that they had been visible to the paps, attempting to explain in broken English the difference between Daphne's outfits through the different Scooby-Doo eras. It was very important to him that she have the green scarf in this movie.

Ilya couldn't be too upset that people were speculating about Shane and Rose. In fact, it was probably better for them, keeping their own relationship under wraps.

But Ilya couldn't help but feel jealous. Not jealous of Rose, but jealous that if she and Shane had still been together, they could have been open about it. They could be holding hands in public, they could have happily let the public speculate, they could go to premieres together or whatever it was that movie stars did.

They could do everything that Ilya couldn't give him.

He scrolled down and tapped one of the comments to leave a reply.

> **allyally** **@roselandryswife**

Lets be real if rose has the option btw shane and ilya its obvious like have u seen those freckles

>> **Ilya Rozanov**  **@ilyarozanov**

I don't know I think Rozanov is pretty handsome. Maybe more handsome than Shane Hollander perhaps. Better at hockey too.

He tucked his phone in his pocket. Shane would probably call him to yell at him about it later, they didn't need to give the press anymore fuel. But Ilya thought it was worth it to see his cute angry kitten face. Ilya turned his attention back to the press circle.

"Boston has been playing a very physical game lately, are you worried about the toll that could take on the team as the playoffs come closer?" The journo asked, holding her phone up in front of the Newfoundlander.

"Ah, I wouldna worry about it, b'y," Newf said, shaking his head. "Now, the b'ys 'n I have been talkin' lately, and there's a quote by a Walt Whitman that comes to me. Now he says, 'I am large.'"

Newf paused, looking into the distance as if he was considering something profound. The reporters leaned in, confusion on their faces as he waited for him to complete the quote.

"You are large," the reporter repeated.

“That’s right, b’y,” Newf said. “All the b’ys are large, harder ta knock us down, ya hear?”

Ilya sighed as he watched the reporters scramble to react.

After Ilya’s first attempt at educating the training room a few weeks ago, Ilya had successfully commandeered both Pava and Cliff’s turn at controlling music to instead play educational podcasts. On Pava’s day, they listened to a series about Walt Whitman, and another about Katherine Johnson.

Ilya hadn’t even taken Cliff’s day on purpose. Cliff was the one who had suggested some podcast his girlfriend liked that was about two drag queens analyzing movies or something. That one had ended up being a favourite amongst the team.

It really hadn’t been Ilya’s intention to get the entire team overly invested in podcasts, he had just wanted to subconsciously educate them a bit. But by the end of the next week, Delly, Doherty, and Newf had all played podcasts during their music days. Doherty had forced them to listen to a two hour podcast all about moths.

Ilya feared that his plan had severely backfired. He really only expected to maybe subconsciously get these guys to think about their words more, prevent them from saying some of their worse locker room lines. His intention had been to improve things for Shane.

However, things had escalated quickly. Ever since Connors had come back from a bar one night and loudly proclaimed to the room that he was able to get laid all by having one conversation with a girl about Rocky Horror Picture Show, everyone was hooked.

Maybe their intentions weren’t the best, but their newfound quest did seem to be having positive side effects.

Newf had started watching Ru Paul’s Drag Race with his wife. Carmy was reading a book about the prison industrial complex. Marly started wearing the pink sweater his girlfriend had gotten him that he had always refused to wear in public.

In fact, it was such a 180 that Ilya was a bit worried how he was going to explain this to Shane without admitting that he had been meddling.

“So, Ilya, you guys are back from your road trip, bringing home two wins and two losses, how is the mood of the team and how is that going to bring you into tonight?”

Ilya shrugged. Interviews were always easy. Pucks in net, shoot the puck, bla bla bla. “Yes, we did not play very good last game, but...we can play better, I know we can, and sometimes I think we play best after we have been slapped in the face, yes? So...we get more comfortable with new lines, we play better, and hopefully that starts today.”

The reporters filed through a few more typical questions about the game. Ilya was not nearly as good as Hollander when it came to these interviews. He wasn’t so good at hiding his frustration, and he was feeling fucking frustrated lately. It didn’t matter if their defense was better than the other teams if they couldn’t score any fucking goals. They were being outplayed, they weren’t getting enough scoring chances across their lines, and they had played way too much overtime. This just wasn’t a cup winning team.

“I wanted to ask you,” another reporter chimed in. “There were some videos that went out the other day of you and a couple of teammates out at a Boston University game, you wanna tell us how that came about?”

Ilya ran his fingers through his hair, letting a smile show through.

A few days ago, after a particularly impassioned podcast session about the concussion rate in women's versus men's hockey, Doherty had put out an invitation to accompany him to a Boston University hockey game, where his sister played. Since it was short notice, only some of them could go, but the group included Ilya, Pava, Marly and his girlfriend, as well as Newf and his wife and daughter.

It had been a fun night. They had gone largely unbothered considering the stands for college hockey, particularly women's hockey, tended to be pretty sparse. But they had made an impressive cheering section up behind the penalty box. Ilya was pretty sure Newf's daughter just about screamed herself deaf when two of the players got in a full blown donnybrook.

Ilya also got to meet Cliff's new girlfriend for the first time. She was not at all what Ilya had expected. All of Cliff's old girlfriend's and hookups had very much fit into the typical WAG stereotype. White, blonde, thin, ready to settle down. Noor was nothing like that. She was doing her masters in geotechnical engineering, and she did kickboxing as a pastime. Based on her build, Ilya was pretty sure she could take down Marly if she needed to. She was cool as hell, Ilya had no idea how Marly was able to pull her. Maybe it helped that she seemed to walk him like a fucking dog.

"Yes, yes," Ilya replied. "We went to go see Doey's sister, she is a much better player than him."

"Dude!" Doherty protested from across the hall. "She's a defenseman, you can't even compare us."

"Exactly!" Ilya argued back. "She is defenseman and yet she blocks more shots than you. Maybe we traded for the wrong Doherty, yes?"

"Fuck off," Doherty called back.

Ilya wrapped up his media availability and finally retreated to the locker room so he could shower and go home. He wanted to get as long of a pregame nap in as possible.

He pulled out his phone as he stood in front of his locker.

Jane: I need to delete your twitter account.

Ilya:)))))

Ilya: you should b proud of me

Ilya: it was that or getting wax about freckles

Jane: Do you mean waxing poetic?

Ilya: ok

Ilya smiled. He had just seen Shane, but he already couldn't wait until Christmas. This year, he and Pava were headed to Ottawa at the invitation of the Hollanders. They were able to spare two full days over the short break in play, to make sure that they were able to get back to Boston with enough time before their next game.

"Your Montreal girl?" Cliff asked, appearing suddenly beside Ilya.

Ilya blinked, putting his phone face down in the top cubby. "Maybe."

Cliff also turned back to his locker, taking out his jacket. He tried to look nonchalant as he spoke.

“You know, next time she’s in town, maybe you guys can come out with me and Noor. She’s really cool, we won’t make her feel weird or anything, you know?”

Ilya frowned. He slipped his bag onto his shoulder. It really wasn’t like Marly to ask about his personal life other than the occasional tease here and there.

“Eh...maybe. She does not really like to go out.”

Cliff nodded. “You guys are serious though, right? I mean, it’s been like, years.”

“Yes,” Ilya replied, scratching at his temple. “It is serious. But, she is very shy.”

“Okay, well, just tell her we don’t bite. We’d like to get to know her.”

Cliff gave Ilya a slap on the back before walking off to the parking lot. Ilya didn’t know that he even had that kind of sincerity in him.

Ilya had never before felt bad about not telling Cliff about Shane. Any feelings he had about telling him had more been about Ilya wanting someone to know for his own comfort, so he would have someone on the team he could talk to. But he had never wondered if him hiding so much of himself had been something Cliff had even cared at all about.

Before, it was different. Ilya was picking up girls all the time, he was sleeping with Svetlana, it wasn’t a big deal. But now, it seemed obvious to anyone with eyes that Ilya had something more going on, and so it was just as obvious that whatever it was, he was hiding it.

Recently, Ilya had largely changed his mind about coming out to the Bears. The reaction from Montreal had set him back, especially now that there was a chance Shane would come to Boston.

Maybe it wouldn’t be such a bad idea to tell Cliff. It could help to have some more backup in the locker room. Maybe he could even tell him about Shane.

Chapter End Notes

I am not an NHL guy. I really don’t know all the logistics on what exactly goes into trades and all the different responsible parties, but I tried to make it as accurate as possible from my research. General Managers are responsible for trades and player acquisitions, and they usually correspond with players and their agents in order to arrange trades, along with opposing GMs. When it comes to a situation like this, where a player is wanting to be traded, they of course have a lot more say. I talked about a sign and trade deal for Shane, this is when a player is re-signed before being traded to another team. For example, when Mitch Marner moved from Toronto to Vegas, he had one year left on his contract. Vegas didn’t want to give up a lot for a guy who might not resign after a year, so in order to ensure that he was gonna stick around, Toronto resigned him for eight years before trading him (Marner signed with the knowledge that he would be traded). This meant that Vegas was willing to give a lot more for him, and it also provided the added benefit that teams who draft a player can sign them for up to 8 years, as opposed to the usual 7.

Regarding a potential move for Shane to Boston. The idea of Boston having two star forwards isn’t too crazy, I’d liken it to Edmonton having McDavid and Draisaitl on their first and second

lines, and up until recently Draisaitl was the highest paid player in the league. This thing that would make it more shocking for them to be there together is that they were not both drafted there, as is the case for Drai and McDavid. In the NHL, while there are some players that are constantly traded around, for big stars, it's common that they're gonna spend their entire career as a franchise player on the same team. That being said, it's not ridiculous that Shane might move. Players want to win cups, and if they aren't on a cup winning team, they'll move. I'd liken a move by Shane to Mitch Marner, Quinn Hughes, or Mark Messier. He would definitely be hated in Montreal afterwards.

Also a joke I've been dying to make is about the weirdly specific stats that are used for NHL games. Here the stat was that Shane has scored at least three points every time he's played on the west coast the day after holiday break while using white tape. This is a bit of an outrageous example, but also not really. One thing about watching an NHL game, is out of nowhere the commentators will always pull the most insanely specific stat out of thin air to share.

Pava's [interview](#) that went viral is, of course, inspired by a real life interview by Ilya Bryzgalov. You may recognize him, as he is also famous for the line "is only game, why you heff to be mad?"

If anyone thinks it's unrealistic that Rose wouldn't notice her friend getting pregnant, well, this story is something that actually happened to me. Yes I didn't notice even though we had gym together, yes I lied to my parents about going to church, and yes I got a weird angel statue. It was totally worth it though because I got to hold the baby.

It's true that Winnipeg is a very popular filming destination! It often doubles as Chicago, and is used since it's much cheaper to film in Canada compared to the states. My sibling worked on some films there, including Violent Night 2 and an A24 film. Parts of the live action Scooby Doo were filmed in Winnipeg!

Shoutout to y'all that predicted Rose Landry being Daphne way back in chapter one. I have to credit my sibling for giving me the idea back when I first floated the Scooby-Doo thing, I've just been waiting to be able to write it.

The Walt Whitman quote in full is: "I am large, I contain multitudes." Newf doesn't care so much about that last part.

Ilya's pregame interview is based on one [Leon Draisaitl](#) did back in 2025. Lately he has been very outspoken to the press saying that the Oilers kind of suck right now, and he's blaming the coaches but he's also blaming himself and all the other players. I feel for the man.

The mention of a sex spreadsheet, as well as rumours of a player sleeping with his teammate's mom, are based on actual rumours that went around the NHL a few years back.

This picture was created by my dear sibling, as an example of what one of Pava's memes might look like. Apologies in advance and for everyone who already witnessed it on my Tumblr.



([@arustyspork](#) on tumblr)

Chapter 16: The Doherty Bowl

Chapter Summary

“I think you’re the only person who’s ever said I’m any good in front of a camera,” Shane replied. He was concentrating on the guy from Edmonton who was taking 5 tries to get the LGBTQ2S+ acronym right. “Ilya tells me I look like a scared cat whenever I get in front of the camera.”

Mason blinked. “Ilya? Oh, Rozanov?”

Shane’s eyes widened a bit like he had said something wrong. Mason wasn’t sure what that would be. “Yeah.”

“I guess you guys do a lot of these together, huh?” Mason remarked.

“He’s not so bad,” Shane said, a bit defensively.

Chapter Notes

I had a very busy week. I got my iron ring (it’s like a white coat ceremony but for engineers) and the whole thing was way cultier than I thought it would be.

BTW I love it when you guys write memes in the comments. Please keep doing this forever. On that note, also please be nice to me. I got a four paragraph long hate comment and honestly I was mostly impressed someone wrote that whole thing out with such fiery passion.

I have started writing the podcast fic as inspired by [this](#) tumblr post, so if updates are a bit slower blame that. I’d like to apologize in advance because it has unleashed the depths of my inner hockey nerd. I fear you won’t be able to read it without it feeling like an actual education podcast so that’s my bad. That’s almost finished, and past that I don’t have anything set for what I’ll write when this fic is done. On that note, if you have anything you’d like to see from me, please let me know! Either in the comments or ask me on [Tumblr](#) :)

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

Mason Doherty really liked being a goalie.

A lot of people didn’t understand it. His brothers didn’t understand it, his parents didn’t understand it, his sister didn’t understand it. Everyone in his immediate family, his siblings, his mom, his dad, had played high level hockey, and yet Mason had been the only goalie.

Most people didn’t like the stress. They didn’t like having pucks shot at you at 100 mph. Sure, it got tough, a lot of fans loved to blame the goalie whenever things weren’t going their way. But Mason could handle it. It was worth it.

He liked the solitary aspect of it. There, in the net, all by himself. He would listen to the crowd echoing around him. The sounds of skates scraping across the ice. He felt zen, like his own form of meditation. Some people said he was zoning out, seeing into the future, but he always just described it as the way he cleared his mind.

“Make sure you get your nap in today,” Mia said. “I’m sure you’ll be getting pulled for every interview under the sun.”

His wife placed the plate in front of him, taking a seat across from him at the dinner table with her bowl of granola. She had taken the move to Boston like a champ, if it wasn’t for her, Mason would surely be living out of boxes still.

“You’re coming to the game, right?” Mason asked.

“You think I’d miss another bowl? Come on, I still send Connor videos of him crashing the net at the last one.”

Tonight, Boston was playing Vancouver, meaning that Mason would be playing both of his brothers. These games had been dubbed “Doherty Bowls” by fans, and this was his first since being traded to Boston. They always had a lot of publicity surrounding them.

Mason bit into his PB&J. He always had one before games. Smooth peanut butter and his wife’s homemade raspberry jam. Mason had been weirdly protective when she decided to start her own cooking blog. He wanted to keep all her recipes to himself.

“I think Marly’s new girlfriend is coming too. You should talk to her, make her feel welcome.”

“Maybe if she sticks around she can take over some of the WAG duties, I have no idea what I’d do for jackets,” Mia mused.

Organizing the WAGs usually tended to fall to the Captain’s wife, but given that Roz still hadn’t settled down, those duties typically got split between the next most senior ladies. The Bears in general were a pretty young team. Only half the guys had serious relationships, meaning the WAG group chat remained pretty small.

It was very different from Minnesota. There, pretty much the entire team had gotten married and started popping out kids by 25, Mason included. Though, Mason had heard some rumblings among the team that not all was as it seemed when it came to their captain.

When Mason first arrived in Boston, he had made a point to try and get some intel on what he was walking into. Some of these guys had been with the Bears for their entire career, but he wasn’t the only new guy.

DeLuca was one of the younger guys on the team, but he had been around for a few years still. He also had the backbone of an Olive Garden breadstick. It took about one beer and no effort at all before Mason had convinced the kid to spill all about some karaoke outing the team did during playoffs last year.

“Oh my god,” Delly had said, running the backs of his hands over his blushing cheeks. “You can’t tell anyone about it. I was sworn to secrecy. They’ll kill me.”

“I don’t get it. He sang Grease and then cried?”

“It was so fucking weird,” Delly said, taking another sip from his beer. “I seriously thought we were this close to checking him into the loony bin. I thought we were all having a collective stroke.”

Mason wasn’t totally sure what the big deal was. He cried when Sybil died in Downton Abbey, some guys were just more emotional than others. But he soon realized that the Bears took this karaoke thing very seriously, like even the smallest mention of it would curse them and their families for a hundred generations.

Ilya Rozanov was a bit of a mystery to Mason.

He hadn’t interacted with the Russian much off the ice before. Even then, they only really spoke whenever Rozanov would linger around the crease to chirp at him, which he quickly gave up on when he realized that Mason wasn’t the type to react.

In fact, the majority of what Mason knew about Rozanov outside of his media persona had actually come from Shane Hollander. Mason had gotten to know the Canadian pretty well after the two had shot a promotional commercial for You Can Play two summers ago. They had ended up spending an entire afternoon at a rink together along with a couple of other players across the league.

“I’m so bad at these,” Mason had lamented, watching as a forward from Toronto stumbled through his script. Shane passed him a water bottle from behind the bench. “You’d think they’d have put more public speaking classes in hockey school.”

“That’s why you don’t go to hockey school,” Shane replied. “Go to a regular school and play hockey on top of it. Otherwise you get a league full of guys with no social skills.”

“Guilty,” he replied. “Is that why you’re so good at this? It’s like they’ve got you on speed dial for these things.”

Not only did Shane have brand deals with Rolex, Tim Hortons, and Gatorade, but he was always popping up in ESPN, Sportsnet, and the NHL promos. Mason could understand why, Shane Hollander was hot as hell.

“I think you’re the only person who’s ever said I’m any good in front of a camera,” Shane replied. He was concentrating on the guy from Edmonton who was taking 5 tries to get the LGBTQ2S+ acronym right. “Ilya tells me I look like a scared cat whenever I get in front of the camera.”

Mason blinked. “Ilya? Oh, Rozanov?”

Shane’s eyes widened a bit like he had said something wrong. Mason wasn’t sure what that would be. “Yeah.”

“I guess you guys do a lot of these together, huh?” Mason remarked.

“He’s not so bad,” Shane said, a bit defensively.

“Oh, I know. I mean, I don’t know the guy that well, but even I have to admit he’s pretty funny.”

Shane laughed. “Don’t let him hear you say that, he’ll never let it go. But...yeah, I mean ten years of playing and the league still hasn’t gotten sick of putting us together for everything. He at least likes doing the media, I think he’d be a movie star if they let him.”

“Not you?”

“God no. I just wanna play hockey.”

“They should put that on your trading card.”

It turned out Shane had been right about the Russian. His persona wasn't just for the media, but he was the star of every room he walked into. He was loud, flamboyant, and loved by his team, and yet they didn't know a thing about him.

Mason had learned more than he wanted to about his teammates. Newf and his extensive collection of ugly sticks, Marly and his unfortunate tattoo of Winnie the Pooh when he was drunk after their cup celebration, and St-Simon's sister, who had two mysteriously deceased husbands, causing the entire team to establish a conspiracy theory that she had been poisoning them.

Not a thing about Roz. They knew nothing about his family, about his love life. They knew he was childhood friends with Svetlana from scouting, and was newly friends with Shane Hollander. Mason seemed to be the only one who was really convinced of that last part. They also knew that he apparently wasn't slutting around the way he used to.

It was all very strange how little they seemed to know about a man who was the face of the NHL.

When Mason skated onto the ice for warmups, the small crowd that bothered to come in early to watch was significantly larger than normal. It always was, for the bowls.

His brothers Connor and Jamie were already on the ice, hovering at the red line.

“Hey man,” Mason said, getting pulled in for a hug by the both of them. They were standing right in front of the commentator booth, where a camera was already hovering. “Ready for another one?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Connor replied. “Go show off your pretty face.”

The three lined up centered on the red line, with Mason flanked by his brothers.

Mason wore number 10, as did Connor, to honour their mother from when she played on the national team. Jamie was stuck wearing their dad's number 74, since he and Connor couldn't both wear 10 as members of the same team.

They smiled for their pictures, lined up in a row like little ducks. After the photographer was satisfied, she released the boys.

“What time do y'all leave again?” Mason asked.

“Right after the game,” Jamie said. “No time to get dinner.”

“Aw, shit,” Mason replied. “How will I make it through the day if I can't watch you inhale an entire pie from across the table?”

“Fuck off. Keep your eye on your five-hole, Mazy, we're coming for you tonight.”

“Yeah, yeah, I'll see you guys later.”

Mason skated back off to his half where the rest of the Bears were revolving around the ice. He retreated to his crease to begin warming up with the backup goalie, Wolkowski.

As they started their stretches, they both observed the scene in front of them. Mason had been playing with the Bears long enough now that he had a grasp of how warmups went and everyone's rituals that went along with it. The Bears weren't nearly as superstitious as the Nomads were, but there were a few things here and there.

Delly always skated three loops around their half before he started stretching. St-Simon did a weird figure skating thing. Marly always gave a puck to a fan. Roz would always stick-handle over the Dunkin logo. Kosmodemyansky liked to shoot the puck between Roz's legs before getting off the ice.

"You think I can bum a ride home after this?" Wolkowski asked, turning to Mason. "I've started getting so sleepy when I drive home after games. You know when you're driving and the window is open and you start to get kinda cold and you just wanna fall asleep?"

"I think that's called dying."

"Doey!"

Mason looked up to see Roz round by the net. "What?"

"Doey, Doey, do you ever sing?"

Mason raised his eyebrows beneath his mask. "What, like...for fun?"

"No, no, our old goalie used to sing in his crease. He was very bad at it, very annoying, you do this?"

"Nah, man. I don't really do anything. I kinda just...sit. Or, kneel, I guess."

"This is very boring. You will go crazy, yes?"

"Do you...want me to sing?"

Roz shrugged, skating backwards slowly before rounding back to him. "Here, let's see, let's match pitch."

Roz started to sing a note, and Mason really couldn't think of any reason not to join in.

"That was very good," Roz said, strangely sincerely.

"Is this what I missed out on at karaoke?" Mason asked before he could remember he wasn't supposed to bring it up.

Roz froze for a second, before his look of shock quickly morphed into a toothy grin. "Very funny, this is very good. You will have to wait until next time."

He skated off back towards the group of players that were hovering near the bench.

Man, that guy was strange.

* * *

"Alright fuckers!" St-Simon exclaimed, standing up on the bench in the locker room. "If we beat Vancouver tonight, I will personally suck the dicks of everyone in this room." He paused, gesturing to coach Maya, who was standing by the whiteboard. "Except you, sorry coach." Coach Maya honestly looked touched to be included.

“That’s not the incentive ya think it is, b’y,” Newf shouted back. “Sure way to get us to t’row it.”

St-Simon always got very passionate whenever they played Vancouver. They had drafted him, but traded him at the deadline his second year on the team. He was always trying to prove some kind of point, but Ilya wasn’t so sure Vancouver cared much at all what Victor got up to.

Pava was standing beside Ilya, adjusting the straps of his shoulder pads. He peeked over his shoulder, perking up as he noticed something. Ilya watched as the kid turned away from his locker and beelined over to Coach Maya with a smile.

Ilya watched out of the corner of his eye as Pava spoke to the woman. Maya was already so short, but standing next to Pava, she looked like an ant. He was waving his hands dramatically as he spoke to her, watching Maya intently as she drew some figures and arrows on the whiteboard.

After a couple minutes of talking, Pava retreated back to his locker.

Ilya tried to catch Pava’s eyes, waggling his eyebrows a bit. *“You’ve been talking to Coach Maya a lot lately.”*

Pava shrugged, tugging on his sweater. “Da.”

Ilya looked back at Coach Maya, who was now speaking with LeClaire as they looked over a clipboard. *“Do you like her?”*

Pava nodded. *“She is very nice.”*

Ilya grinned. *“This whole time, I was wondering what your type must be. I should have known it would be a woman of authority.”*

Pava’s eyebrows drew together as he registered what Ilya was saying. *“Coach Maya is just my friend.”*

Ilya reached out to nudge him with his elbow. *“For now, yes? But you are going to charm her, woo her, use one of my amazing pick-up lines? Seduce her with your sexy accent?”*

Ilya had another bout of teasing locked and loaded, but he found himself stopping himself when he saw the look on Pava’s face. His frown only deepened as his shoulders tightened.

“She is my friend,” he repeated.

Ilya let his smile drop from his face. Pava didn’t have the expression of a kid who was embarrassed he was being teased for a crush. He wasn’t blushing or stammering, if anything, he looked a bit like he was being accused of arson.

“I’m kidding, just kidding,” Ilya backtracked. *“It’s good for you to make friends. She is very nice, maybe she will finally fix your edgework.”*

Pava huffed, fixing in place the last of his gear. *“My edgework is fine,”* he whined, as if this had been the hundredth time Ilya had mentioned it. Which it probably was.

“Fine, but could be better.”

Pava grabbed his phone from his cubby and turned to sit on the bench, opening Hay Day to putter around while he waited for puck drop. Ilya watched him out of the corner of his eye.

Ilya had noticed from the first time he had ever taken Pava to a club that the kid seemed relatively indifferent to girls. At first he thought it was the language barrier and general awkwardness getting in the way. Then maybe that he was just very specific about who he liked. But now, it was starting to become clear to Ilya that there had to be more to it than that. Pava's discomfort seemed a lot more than just cold feet or self consciousness.

Of course, Ilya had considered that maybe Pava was gay. He obviously wasn't one to immediately assume everyone around him was straight, even though that would probably be a statistically reliable guess considering his field of work.

Ilya's gaydar was one of his best assets (aside from his rocking bod and charming personality), but he could admit that maybe he was miscalibrated this time.

Except, that didn't seem to be it either. Ilya had tested this theory at the club in Philly, when they ran into a group of figure skaters that had just competed that weekend. Pava had even gotten into a pretty exuberant conversation with one, talking about his sisters and their training. The man had spent all night flirting with the kid, and by the end of the night Ilya was 90% sure something was gonna go down.

But Pava had ended up right back next to Ilya, whose inhibitions were lowered enough by the vodka to have no subtlety at all when asking about the figure skater.

"He didn't ask you out?"

"Out where?"

Ilya had levelled Pava a look. *"On a date. After all the flirting."*

"Oh. No. I don't want to go anywhere."

Maybe Pava did like guys, and he was just super repressed. Not everyone was as obvious as Shane "Fuck Me Eyes" Hollander.

All it took was one Tuesday night with Sveta to disprove that.

The three had spent the night in, eating Chinese takeaway and watching the Penguins play the Canes. It was a pretty exciting game, they had spent most of the first period tied at 1-1, and already a fight had broken out. According to Sveta, it was everything you could ask for from a hockey game. Ilya argued that the only thing that could make him praise a Penguins game was if Crosby scored a Michigan goal.

"He's fucking hot, though, even I can admit that," Ilya relented. The camera was zeroed in on Crosby as he talked to a ref, arguing an interference penalty. Man, the jawline on that guy.

"I still prefer Malkin," Sveta argued, her legs flung across Pava's lap, and her shoulders nestled in Ilya's as she took up the length of the couch. *"Much more physical."*

Ilya scoffed. *"You only like him because he's Russian. He has fish lips."*

"His play makes him inherently hotter, Ilyusha," Sveta argued. *"Pavsik, what do you think?"*

Pava shrugged. *"He's very good. Scary to play against, but those are usually the best players."*

Ilya raised his eyebrows. *"She's asking which is hotter, Pava."*

Pava tipped his head to the side. *“What do you mean?”*

“Just pick one!” Sveta laughed.

“Um...Sidney Crosby. He’s very handsome?”

“So smash or pass?”

Pava’s eyebrows drew together, but he looked more confused than defensive. *“Why would I do that?”*

“It’s just a game.”

“Then pass.”

Sveta giggled, lightly kicking Pava in the knee. *“You are taking this too seriously. It’s just a way of saying if you find them hot.”*

Pava shrugged, gesturing to the screen. *“He’s handsome.”*

“Yeah, obviously, but do you think he’s hot?”

“I don’t know what the difference is.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. *“Okay, what about someone else, someone who isn’t a million years old. What about Swayman? Or Tom Wilson.”*

Pava looked incredulous. *“I don’t know them very well.”*

“You don’t have to know them,” Sveta argued. *“Just like, if you saw them in the street, would you think: yeah, I’d fuck you.”*

Pava blinked. *“Never in my life have I thought this before.”*

“Seriously?” Ilya asked. *“Never?”*

“Okay, okay, how about this?” Sveta said, sitting up so she was sitting criss-cross between the two men. She splayed out her hands dramatically. *“Leon Draisaitl.”*

Pava made a face, considering. He looked between Ilya and Sveta. *“He has very nice hair.”*

After that night, Ilya thought it was fair to conclude that if Leon Draisaitl didn’t do it for him, then Pava being gay was probably off the table.

So, girls. Pava had to just be shy, Ilya got that. Well, he didn’t get it, but he could at least be understanding. He could help him out, get him out of his shell. He just had to be careful about it, it seemed that any mention of dating had Pava spooked like a wounded puppy.

“If you score today, I will let you make me watch Cyberchase,” Ilya said, nudging Pava in the shoulder.

Pava smiled minutely as he looked up from his game. *“Okie,”* he replied. *“I will get hat trick.”*

* * *

Ilya tugged off his shoulder pads and tossed them into his locker. They were the same set he'd had since he was fourteen years old, and they looked like they had been thrown into a garbage disposal.

The game had ended with a Vancouver win, 6 to 1. The only Boston goal had been scored by St-Simon, who probably should have been called for goaltender interference at the time, he practically pushed the goalie pads into the net.

The locker room was dead silent. This wasn't just a loss. This was a humiliation.

Pava was taking it especially hard. He had flubbed several scoring chances, including a wide shot on a practically open net off a pass from Ilya. Ilya knew that one or two goals from Pava wouldn't have made a difference, but he also knew trying to convince the kid of that would be pointless.

"We can still watch your movie," Ilya offered. *"Tonight."*

Pava shrugged, pulling on his sweater over his still wet curls. *"No, that's okay,"* he said. *"I think I'll just go to sleep."*

Ilya opened his mouth, ready to say something reassuring. It was one of the weaker points in his captaincy, he was usually much better at ramping up the team during and before the game. Luckily, he didn't have to say anything at all as Coach Maya appeared.

"Hey guys," she said. "Tough game, but it's just one game, okay? Don't let it get to you."

Pava frowned. "I missed."

She shrugged. "And you'll miss a hundred more, I'm sure. We'll get better, we'll win the next one."

She looked somber as she nodded to them both before turning back into the office.

Ilya and Pava drove home in silence that night, the only sound echoing through the cabin was the drum of Ilya's fingertips across the steering wheel.

"It's okay if you're upset," Ilya offered. *"I get upset after games all the time, you've seen this."*

Pava raised his eyebrows, barely visible in the dark. *"I am not a child, Ilyukha. I know how to deal with losing."*

"I know," Ilya said. *"I'm just...trying to be nice."*

"Well, stop," Pava said, colder than Ilya had ever seen him. *"I want to be left alone."*

Ilya went silent, turning his eyes back to the road, feeling just a bit helpless.

The two stewed in silence for ten minutes, the only sounds filling the space was the turn signal flicking on and off.

"I'm sorry," Pava said, looking ahead at the road, slumped in his seat.

Ilya shrugged. *"You don't need to apologize,"* he replied. *"I don't mean to treat you like a kid."*

Pava shook his head, running his fingers through his unruly head of hair. *"You don't. You're the only one who doesn't. I just...I hate it when everyone thinks I'm stupid because my English is no good, or because of what I like, or because I don't do the things they do."*

Ilya frowned, turning to sneak glances at his kid. *"Did someone say something? Do I need to kill someone? I will do it."*

Pava puffed out a laugh. A good sign. *"No, it's not like they mean to do it. I should be used to it."*

"No, be mad at them, it's fine. I get it, I felt the same way with my English. I still do sometimes."

"But it's not just that," Pava said. *"You're at least more normal. People find me weird."*

"Yes," Ilya replied simply. *"You are very weird, you like Scooby-Doo and you take everything too literally."*

Pava blinked.

Ilya quickly looked his way before turning to the road. *"Newf is also weird. He talks like a fisherman and owns an accordion. Marly eats tiramisu for breakfast every morning. Delly is afraid of horses. Doherty talks in slow motion. You are hockey players, you're all fucking weird."* Ilya paused. *"But not me. I am very cool and normal."*

"Shane Hollander only drinks ginger ale," Pava offered.

Ilya narrowed his eyes. *"That isn't weird. Ginger ale is a very normal drink. Hollander is not weird, he is just very boring and bad at hockey."*

Pava nodded, very obviously not believing a word Ilya was saying.

"You like that he is boring," Pava said. *"That is a weird thing about you."*

Ilya threw up his hands dramatically before flopping them back onto the steering wheel. *"How do you always manage to end up making fun of me? It's my job to make fun of you. You're abusing my kindness. I'll start being mean again."*

When Ilya turned to look at Pava again, it seemed the tension had drained from his shoulders, and he was smiling again. How could Ilya ever be upset by that?

"If anyone says to you something you don't like," Ilya started seriously, *"just tell them to fuck off. They will probably be so shocked to hear you swear that they will shut up anyway."*

Pava looked considerate. *"I don't like swearing. It feels wrong."*

"Well. I give you full permission, yes?"

* * *

Ilya and Pava arrived in Ottawa late afternoon on Christmas Eve.

Shane had picked them up at the airport, having arrived from Montreal the evening before. He pulled up in his overly sensible car, even taking the time to hop out and help them load in their bags.

"Not worried about being seen, Hollander?" Ilya teased.

"I don't think I could recognize you from a foot away," Shane retorted, gesturing to his boyfriend, who was wrapped head to toe in Adidas puffers, as well as a Boston Bears scarf looped several times around his face.

Pava was not dressed so severely, and Shane had made sure to compliment his very stylish fur hat as he approached.

"I thought global warming was supposed to fix this," Ilya complained as he slid into the passenger's seat. Shane already had the heat and the seat warmers blasting in anticipation. "I thought this was first world country? They cannot find some way to make the air not hurt my lungs?"

"Actually, climate change doesn't just result in global warming, but more severe temperature fluctuations in both directions," Shane offered, like he was reciting it out of a book. He looked over at his boyfriend, who slumped down shivering in his seat as Pava climbed in the back. "For someone who talks so big about Russians being tough, you sure don't do well with the cold."

Ilya scowled. "This is not cold. This is the work of an evil demon wanting to steal my fingertips."

"That's a polar vortex for you," Shane shrugged. "You get used to it."

"I will never get used to it."

"You are baby," Pava said, poking his head between the seats. "Is not so bad."

"Pfft," Ilya pouted. "Ufa probably does not even have heaters. Just honey and weird smells."

Pava kicked the back of Ilya's seat, causing Ilya to reach back and knock off his hat.

"Guys," Shane scolded. "Please don't tell me I'm gonna spend this holiday trying to keep you from acting like children in front of my parents."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Relax, Hollander. We are very mature, very adult. Yes, Pava?"

Pava nodded, reaching forward when Shane wasn't looking to flick Ilya's ear.

Ilya couldn't even be properly annoyed at the kid's audacity. If anything, he was actually secretly thrilled that Pava was feeling as confident as he was in front of Shane. Last time they had interacted, Pava hadn't said much at all to the Canadian, and anything he did say was careful and shy.

Sure, Pava wasn't speaking directly to Shane now, but it was a step in the right direction. They had two whole days to make some progress.

It was only about twenty minutes to Shane's parents' house, which apparently wasn't enough time for Ilya to convince Shane to stop at McDonald's on the way.

"Can we go Tims?" Pava asked, his voice small as he spoke directly to Shane.

"Is it for your maple donuts?" Shane asked, quickly peeking over his shoulder into the backseat before turning back to the road. Ilya smiled as he remembered the ten minute lecture he got last time he was in the car with his boyfriend about road safety. It had taken every ounce of willpower Ilya had not to pull over right then and jump his bones, he probably would have if they hadn't already been running late for a flight. "Because we got you a box this morning, it's at the house."

Ilya watched Pava's eyes widen marginally, turning to Ilya with his eyebrows drawn together. He sat back in his seat, looking at Shane again. "Thank-you."

Ilya turned to his right to look out the window, trying to hide his smile from the other two men.

When they pulled up to Shane's childhood home, David was the first to greet them, appearing at the door and letting out whatever amazing smell was wafting out of the kitchen as he wiped his hands on his apron. The apron was decorated with tiny little hockey sticks scattered across the fabric.

"Come in, come in, how long have you been standing there? You must be freezing!"

"Da," Ilya said, rushing inside and kicking off his shoes, not even complaining this time that Shane had carried in his bag.

David took each of their coats as they made their way in, hooking them neatly on the coatrack in the mudroom. Ilya wasted no time ditching the boys to find Yuna in the living room.

"Out, out!" Yuna exclaimed as soon as Ilya reached the threshold. He didn't see much but the flutter of wrapping paper before his hands flew over his eyes. "I thought I'd be done in time. No peeking."

"Yuna, you are tempting me," Ilya whined, though he didn't shift his hands away from in front of his face.

"I'll be with you in a second," she said, sternly. "Go unpack, we have your rooms all set up."

Ilya spun around, driving back into the hallway where David was now leading Shane and Pava towards the rear of the house.

"Alright, so we're setting you boys up in Shane's old room," David said, the group pausing in the door jamb. Shane set Ilya's bag down neatly on the desk chair.

"Yes!" Ilya exclaimed, flopping down on the bed. "For two whole nights, I will have Steve Yzerman watching us sleep," Ilya said, gesturing at the poster up on the ceiling.

"Shut up," Shane said, without much heat. This wasn't his first rodeo.

"I am thinking we need to get Fedorov poster. Put them next to each other. Or maybe opposite, so they can gaze into each other's eyes."

Shane turned to his dad. "How long would it take to remove every trace of childhood Shane from this room?"

"Nooooo!" Ilya whined, propping himself up on the mattress. "It is most beautiful window into your life." He gestured to the opposite wall, which had a truly awful painting of a turtle with one too many legs and a top hat. "Like this, what was going through his conflicted mind when he makes this?"

"Dude, I was literally five, give me a break," Shane said, reaching to pull down the painting.

"No, no, please keep it up. Or give it to me, I will display over the hole in my wall."

"There's a hole in your wall?" David asked.

"No," Shane declared, a little too loudly, giving Ilya a pointed look. "No there isn't."

Ilya shrugged. "I trip."

Pava was hovering near the bulletin board over the desk, which was covered in pictures of a smaller Shane, along with a couple of certificates.

“Is you?” He asked, gesturing to a Timbits trading card that was pinned up.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “When I was in Timbits.”

“Timbits?”

“Yeah, it’s like the peewee hockey program in Canada, it’s sponsored by Tim Hortons, so, we were called Timbits.”

Pava nodded. “Very cute.”

Shane made a face.

“Alright, kid,” David said, gesturing back out to the hallway. “You’re out in the guest room just across the hall.”

As David made his way through the doorway, Pava caught Ilya’s eye, narrowing his gaze threateningly. Honestly, the audacity of this kid, did he think they were gonna have sound barrier breaking sex while Shane’s parents were in the house? Probably not, but Ilya did have plans to corner Shane in the shower. Quietly.

Ilya loomed behind Pava as he made his way into the plain guest bedroom, which had an annoyingly larger bed than the one in Shane and Ilya’s room.

“Shane said I can call you Pavsikakiy?” David asked. “Is that okay?”

“Yes,” Pava replied stiffly, he looked anywhere except for at the man beside him. “Room is nice. Thank-you.”

“Alright,” David said, finally releasing them. “Well, I’m sure you’re hungry. I’m just finishing up dinner, we have the full spread and everything, I hope you like mashed potatoes, because I made enough to feed an army.”

“You need any help Dad?” Shane asked.

“No, you boys relax, get settled in. We’re doing presents tonight, so you won’t have to get too antsy.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows as they watched David retreat. “Presents on Christmas Eve?” Ilya asked. “What is this fake Christmas? You are cheating.”

“We always do presents on Christmas Eve,” Shane said. “Then we get to sleep on Christmas morning.”

“You will sleep in?”

Shane tipped his head to the side, looking sheepish. “At least until eight.”

Ilya groaned, walking over to throw his arm around his boyfriend. “Shane, I will tie you to the bed tonight if it means you will actually sleep in on the holiday. I was already planning to do this eventually.”

Shane’s face went tomato red. “You seriously need to behave around my parents.”

“I will behave, only if you tell me how very good I am.”

Shane elbowed him in the ribs.

* * *

Ilya was just about fit to burst as he settled on the living room floor. The pot of mashed potatoes seemed no match for him as he made his way through David's spread.

It had been...nice. All of them sitting around the table like that, eating like a real family. Ilya had spent the night playing footsie with Shane under the table. They had listened to David try to explain for 15 minutes straight what the treasury board of Canada was to the two Russians. Yuna spent another ten complaining about the goalie from Winnipeg. Even Pava had been contributing to the conversation, albeit in very small amounts, mostly discussing his banana bread recipe with David in stilted English. Overall, it was a great night. Maybe the most fun Ilya had had in a long time.

Now, Ilya let Pava join him on the floor to his left, tucked in between him and the tree, with his massive legs stretched out under the coffee table.

"You don't have to sit on the floor," Ilya said. "You can take the couch."

Pava shrugged. *"I like it down here."*

Shane did take the couch, but close enough to Ilya that he could still reach out and tug at the Canadian's leg every time he wanted to get his attention.

"Alright boys," Yuna said, sitting down excitedly with her camera in her lap. "First one you have to open up all together."

Yuna and David had gone a bit overboard, though Ilya gave up on trying to tell them that after his sixth gift. Ilya, Pava, and Shane had all received matching pyjamas, chocolate bears, socks, and pairs of mukluks.

For David, Ilya had gotten him yet another puzzle. This one straight from the Boston Bears fan shop, which Ilya insisted would have to be framed afterwards. For Yuna, he gifted her a vintage Hockey Canada sweater that he found on Ebay. Pava was easy, Ilya had ordered him custom Scooby Doo stick tape to use for practices.

Shane's gift, Ilya was saving to give him away from prying eyes.

Pava pulled up two flawlessly wrapped packages, depositing them in front of Shane's parents, who looked shocked to be receiving anything from him at all.

"I did not have time to get from Russia," Pava explained. Ilya had remembered how stressed the kid had been when Ilya first invited him out for Christmas, he would have to buy gifts in Boston. Ilya insisted they'd be happy with whatever he gave them.

They opened the packages simultaneously, and emerging from the wrapping paper were two identically sized boxes. One branded with "Ilya Rozanov" and the other with "Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky."

"Bobbleheads?" Yuna asked with a beaming smile.

Pava shrugged. "Put all together." He gestured at the fireplace, which already had a Shane Hollander bobblehead at its center.

Yuna plucked the package from her husband's hand and pulled the figurines out of the box. She set them up with each Bears player situated on either side of Shane.

"Perfect," she smiled, looking back at the group. "The whole family is here."

Pava blushed as he turned back to his pile of presents. He handed an envelope to Ilya, which contained a slip of paper.

"For your mama," Pava said simply.

Ilya retrieved the paper, which was a simple proof of donation to the Irina Foundation, amounting to \$250,000. Ilya raised his eyebrows. Along with it was a homemade card made of yellow construction paper, signed by dozens of Bears players and covered in little hockey player stickers.

"I asked the team," Pava explained. "And some of the staff. Coach Maya, Mr. Walsh."

"You talked to the general manager?"

Pava shrugged.

Ilya could feel the tears starting to well up. God, it would be embarrassing to cry in front of everyone right now. He reached out to wrap an arm around Pava, pulling him into a hug.

"Thank-you, Malysh."

Pava smiled sheepishly, producing one more bag that he had behind him, gesturing for Shane to take it.

Shane's eyebrows flew up to his hairline, despite the fact that Ilya had warned him ahead of time that Pava was getting him a gift. He opened it carefully, pulling out a jar of jam, a tin of Pava's favourite black tea, a package of sushki, and two mugs shaped like a chicken and a duck.

"Is for house," Pava explained. "Have with Ilyukha, when away from Boston."

Ilya looked between the two men, absolutely overcome by the desire to burst into tears. Did this kid even know what he did to him? The sincerity of everything he did? He saw that Shane and Ilya drank tea together in Boston, and he wanted them to be able to do the same in Montreal, that simple.

"Thank you," Shane said, smiling. "I like the mugs."

"Margaret help me find."

Shane set everything neatly back into the bag, closing it up by tying the strings closed. He pulled out his own gift he had brought for Pava, which came in a paper bag.

"It's from a company out of Winnipeg," Shane explained, as Pava pulled out a red checkered wool hat. To Ilya, it looked a bit like a baseball cap without the brim. "I know you like your hats, I thought this one would be good, it's kind of Canadian looking. I don't know, I thought you could pull it off."

Pava grinned, throwing the hat over his mop of curly hair. "Is very nice. Thank-you, Shane Hollander."

"Watch out," Ilya joked. "If they see you out in that, they might kidnap you to become lumberjack."

“What is this?”

“Like a forestry worker,” David chimed in. “A person that cuts down trees.”

“I do not know how to do this,” Pava said, looking mildly concerned at the prospect.

“He’s just joking,” Shane said, whacking Ilya lightly in the shoulder. “I’m glad you like it.”

Pava looked down at his lap, busying himself with folding up a piece of wrapping paper rather than have any more attention placed on him.

“Well,” David said, slapping his thighs loudly as he got to his feet. “I think there’s a brand new puzzle burning a hole through the coffee table that’s dying to be put together. Who’s gonna help me?”

* * *

Ilya wandered over to the kitchen island, carrying an empty tray that was previously filled with an assortment of dainties. Yuna was hovering around the kitchen, putting out a set of mugs.

“Do you want help?” Ilya asked.

“That would be lovely,” Yuna said, smiling at him softly. “Would you put on the kettle? I’m making hot chocolate but I know Shane will want his green tea.”

Ilya nodded, moving past her towards the sink. He snuck a glance back to the living room, which was occupied by David, Shane, and Pava, all huddled around the coffee table, their attention entirely dedicated to the puzzle.

“Sometimes I think they’re all different flavours of the same person,” Yuna said, appearing over Ilya’s shoulder. They watched as David shifted a pile of edge pieces towards Pava to sort through.

“I am glad he seems to like it here,” Ilya said, referring to Pava. “I was worried he would be uncomfortable around so many new people.”

“He fits right in,” Yuna agreed. “Honestly, when Shane first mentioned you had a rookie living with you, I didn’t know what to think. But it’s very obvious he worships you.”

Ilya shrugged, moving to turn on the kettle. “He should not,” Ilya said. “I am a terrible role model.”

“Oh, I don’t think that’s true. Shane certainly doesn’t think so. Neither do I.”

Ilya watched as Pava laughed, full belly laughed, at something Shane said. He still hadn’t taken off the hat that Shane had gifted him.

“Can I ask you something?” Ilya asked, lowering his voice as he turned away from the line of sight to the living room.

Yuna turned with him, drawing her eyebrows together. “Of course, hon, what’s up?”

Ilya frowned, reaching up to scratch his temple. “I am worried. About Montreal.”

Yuna snuck a glance back at her son, before leaning in closer to Ilya.

“What do you mean?”

“What has Shane told you? About his team?”

“I know things have been a bit tough lately, he said they’re just working out some kinks with their new line. I know he said that Murray has been awful, frankly I don’t know why he’s getting so much ice time anyway when he can’t make passes for shit.”

Ilya nodded. Of course. Of course Shane would only tell his mother about the hockey of it all. Ilya didn’t want to break Shane’s trust by telling Yuna about his troubles, but his concern for Shane’s wellbeing overruled that. He needed to help.

“It is more than that,” he admitted. “Things have been bad there, in the locker room, since Shane told them that he’s gay.”

Yuna frowned, but she didn’t speak immediately.

“It has been very bad,” Ilya continued. “He has been trying to wait it out, see if it would take time, but it is only getting worse. I think he is miserable, and I worry about him if he stays there.”

Yuna shook her head a bit in disbelief. “He hasn’t said anything to me about this at all.”

Ilya shrugged, crossing his arms tightly across his chest. “He does not want to upset you. You know how he does this, it is annoying. I have had to force it out of him.”

“Maybe he’s right,” Yuna offered. “They just need some time, they’ll figure out something new. But they’ll get through it, they always have. It’s his team.”

Ilya turned to look directly at Yuna, mustering as serious an expression as he could. “Yuna, I do not want to say all he has told me, but please trust me when I say it is bad. It has been bad since last season.” He took a deep, lowering his voice so it was hardly audible. “I think he should leave Montreal.”

Yuna’s eyes widened. “Leave Montreal? He would never do that.”

Ilya shrugged. “If he never left Montreal, it would not be because he does not want to. It is because he feels he cannot. He is afraid to disappoint Montreal, and to disappoint you. He does not care if it would be better for himself, he is too worried about everyone else. You need to tell him it is okay.”

Yuna looked down, her eyes darting across the floor. She was thinking.

“You really think leaving is the best thing for him.”

“I am selfish, I want for him to come to Boston and stay with me forever,” Ilya said. “But I want him to leave more, I want him to go anywhere else, even if he went to western conference. I worry about him very much, I do not want him to lose his happiness, and I do not want him to be unsafe.”

She moved again to look at her son. He was smiling and laughing. “I haven’t seen him light up like that in a while,” she admitted. “I thought he had seemed more reserved lately, whenever we called or saw him for dinner.” She frowned. “I thought he was just stressed out. He always worries so much about performing well.”

“This is true,” Ilya said. “He was performing more than you thought, yes?”

Yuna nodded. Her eyes were beginning to glisten in the same way Shane’s always did when he was preventing himself from crying.

“If he wants to move, I’ll support it,” she said, reaching out to rub her hand along Ilya’s shoulder. “I’ll even buy the Bears jersey if it helps,” she said.

Ilya smiled, placing his hand over Yuna’s. “If you do this, he may think you have hit your head.”

* * *

The cold air bit against Ilya’s skin. He was sure that his fingertips were about to fall off, despite the fact that they were buried inside Shane’s heaviest pair of mitts, and still packed with handwarmers.

He and Shane stood on the edge of Rideau Canal on Christmas Day, waiting in line to pick up two hot chocolates and a tea for Shane. Pava had somehow managed to be roped into serving as a goaltender for a group of kids who didn’t recognize him under his layers.

“I have been thinking about Pava,” Ilya declared.

Shane blinked, causing some of the ice crystals littered throughout his eyelashes to dislodge. “What about him?”

“I do not think he liked girls.”

Shane raised his eyebrows, looking side to side to ensure no one was nearing too close. “What, like he’s gay?”

Ilya shook his head, looking to the ice where Pava was stretched out between the goal posts. “I do not think so. He does not find Leon Draisaitl handsome.”

“You do realize he’s not the end-all-be-all for male attractiveness?”

Ilya shrugged. “It’s not just that. It is like he did not even understand the concept of finding someone hot, like he was being so literal about everything, just because you say smash does not mean you actually do it.”

“You tried to play smash or pass with him?” Shane asked incredulously.

“Yes, with Sveta. Group bonding.”

“Maybe he just doesn’t like talking about that kind of stuff in front of other people,” Shane offered. “I don’t.”

Ilya shook his head. “It is not that. It is something more, I think.”

“Okay, well...” Shane started. “Why don’t you think he likes girls?”

“Same thing. He is handsome man, girls flirt with him all the time, he never does anything. He does not even see when they are flirting. Like he does not care.”

“Maybe he’s just shy?”

“I thought this too, but he does not talk about it either. Does not say he finds any girls pretty. Even when we watch films.”

Ilya waited for Shane to throw out another idea, another insistence that maybe Pava was just awkward. Instead, the other man took a few moments to look out across the ice.

“Maybe he’s asexual,” Shane offered.

Ilya blinked. “What? What is this?”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “Aren’t you the one that always brags about your ‘gay sixth sense?’”
Shane teased. “Do I actually know something you don’t?”

Ilya scoffed. “So what? All because I do not have your American obsession with labelling?” he tutted.
“Just say.”

Shane huffed out a breath. “It’s like, when you don’t like anyone. Like the opposite of bisexual, I guess.”

Ilya made a face. “This is an option?”

“I mean, I guess so.”

Ilya was a bit embarrassed to admit that it had never even crossed his mind. He had an expert gaydar, it was one of his pride and joys. Sveta had told him he could sniff out a closeted hockey player from a mile away. He could spot desire, he could spot lust, but it seemed what he couldn’t spot was the complete absence of it.

“I cannot imagine living a life where Shane Hollander is in front of you and you do not want to jump his bones,” Ilya said.

“Ilya,” Shane scolded, elbowing him in the ribs, though he hardly felt it through all the layers.

“So what? He does not want to fuck at all?”

“I don’t know!” Shane said, the pitch of his voice rising. “I don’t even know if it’s the case, it was just an idea.”

“But what, if you are an asexual, you do not kiss? You do not fuck? Nothing?”

Shane threw up his hands. “All I know is it’s one of the letters. I don’t know all the details.”

Shane and Ilya were finally called up to the counter to order their hot chocolate. Ilya reached up to press his gloved fingers against his chain, his mother’s cross now resting beside his gift from Shane.

They had exchanged gifts together last night in bed. Shane gave him a key to the cottage, which Ilya had immediately placed on his chain. Ilya gave Shane a very cheesy Plains of Abraham keychain which he had begged Yuna to drive up to Quebec City to get for him, even though she had no idea why. Shane put it on his hockey bag, so it went with him to every game.

Shane handed Ilya both hot chocolates, taking his own tea in hand. They skated back onto the canal, approaching the small scrimmage. Pava had somehow ended up being compelled to spin the kids around on their backs like starfish using a stick.

“So you said that he never picks up girls or anything?” Shane started as they watched Pava being pulled every which way by the kids.

Ilya looked at Shane out of the corner of his eye. “No.”

“And...the guys on your team, do they ever tease him or anything about it?”

Ilya tipped his head to the side. “Not really. They are not very curious guys. Do not ask about anything unless it is right in front of their faces.”

“Huh,” Shane replied. Ilya could recognize the look on his face.

They hovered for a few moments longer, watching the kid try to corral the team. “Do you think he likes his gift?” Shane asked.

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “Shane. You are fishing for compliments? He is still wearing it.”

He was in fact still wearing the hat, even though it wasn’t the most suitable for this weather.

“I wasn’t sure if it was stupid. It was that or a Disney Plus membership.”

“No,” Ilya said. “He would not use it. He does not trust streamers, he only likes to use the DVD.”

“Oh, so he’s a conspiracy theorist now?”

Ilya shrugged. “It’s not a bad idea, Hollander. You never know when the government will take down the internet. How will he watch Scooby-Doo then?”

“Ilyukha!” Pava called out from the ice. He was not at the bottom of a dogpile. “Can you give drink please?”

“One second!” Ilya called back. He turned to Shane again. “Come on, Hollander, let us join the game. Show these kids how it is done.”

Chapter End Notes

The concept of the Doherty Bowl is based on the Hughes Bowl, which occurs when the three Hughes brothers play one another in Minnesota v New Jersey games. When I first introduced Mason, he was meant to be a reference to Quinn Hughes. However, I have decided I hate the Hughes brothers now, as we all should, and therefore I am rebranding my Dohertys and forcing them to drink their respect women juice.

An [ugly stick](#) is a traditional Newfoundlander instrument, which consists of a broomstick with a bunch of household items attached to it to create music. It’s typically played in kitchen parties.

Weirdly enough, the matching pitch thing Ilya does happened in the [PWHL mic'd up](#).

A [Michigan goal](#) is when a player comes up behind the net and lifts the puck with their stick to wrap it around into the net. It was first ever performed in a game in the NCAA in 1996, but it wouldn’t be performed in the NHL until 2019, and since then it’s been done four times overall, and once recently in the PWHL. It’s controversial to a lot of people and can be seen as unsportsmanlike.

Unrelated, but while doing research for this chapter, I learnt about Phil Kessel. More specifically, his outrageous diet. This man, a highly decorated NHL player, doesn’t drink water, only pop. He threatened to quit when the Leafs tried to remove soft drinks from the locker room. His pregame meal is a bowl of cheddar cheese. It was also rumoured that he eats a street vendor hot dog every

single day while in Toronto. The point is, I have decided to stop worrying that I'm writing Ilya as eating too unrealistically. At least he drinks water.

According to my research, Ontario generally experiences colder temperatures than most of Russia due to the movement of polar vortexes and lack of coastal temperature regulation. For Ilya, being from Moscow, the typical temperatures would not be as severe as a typical Ontario winter, though places like Siberia would have more similarities to Canada. Ufa, where Pava is from, would get colder than Moscow due to it being further from the coast.

I was researching Ufa for this, and discovered that in 2020 the city built the first ever monument dedicated to a tick. The inscription read "same as you I also want to live." Devastated I couldn't put it in the story timeline wise but I had to mention it here. Ufa is known for its oil refineries, but it also has an unfortunate history of pollution and a recurring chemical odour throughout the city. Ufa also has no city sanitation services. No hate to the city of Ufa, Ilya is just a certified hater.

This is the [hat](#) Shane got Pava.

About the conversation Ilya and Shane have regarding asexuality: obviously the aroace spectrum is very broad and nuanced. In Ilya's case, he comes from a culture that not only isn't very vocal about sexuality, but also doesn't make such a big deal about labels. In Shane's case, it's established throughout the series that he's a bit uncomfortable with certain aspects of the queer community. He took a long time to accept himself, and anything outside the basics of gay and straight, or outside of typical gender norms, isn't something he's particularly educated or understanding about. Even in the queer community now, asexuality is a very underrepresented and misunderstood label, so I thought it would be realistic to assume that two hockey boys don't know a thing about it.

Reminder in case anyone is confused, the Plains of Abraham is the museum Shane attempts to take Ilya to in QC, hence why Ilya gets him a keychain from there for Christmas.

Also, great point that's been raised, is Ilya talking to his GM about Shane wanting to move considered tampering? Prooooobably not, but it's definitely frowned upon. If Shane isn't doing the communication, it's probably okay. It could be considered soft-tampering, but this is usually more of an issue in regards to free agency, as long as the Bears aren't reaching out to Shane or his agent directly, and instead coordinating with the Voyageurs it's probs fine.



^ Fun fact unrelated to this chapter, but my favourite hockey player of all time is Zach Hyman! He's a forward for the Oilers and is known for camping in the crease and also landing some crazy hits lately. He's also an acclaimed children's book author, and is nicknamed "Shaq Hyman."

Chapter 17: Pocket-Sized

Chapter Summary

“Hollander!” Ilya exclaimed, his booming voice echoing throughout the entire room. “Do you have nothing better to do than wait around for us?”

Shane rolled his eyes, getting up from the couch. “Do you have a volume button?” He asked.

“Ouch,” Ilya replied. He turned to Wyatt. “You see this? He is our Captain and he bullies me, it is workplace harassment.”

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all your kind words :) You guys are my strongest soldiers fr. I’ve seen lots of not the best stuff around HR fics right now so I’m grateful y’all are so chill. I’ve seen a lot of love for Pava in the comments, and even some stuff on reddit (crazy!) and I’m so glad he’s been well received. I know a lot of people are hesitant to get into fics that are OC heavy. I’m the same way, but then I thought about it and I realized that when I think about my top fics of all time, all of them are actually ones that have tons of OCs, I feel like they can make the story so much richer when done right, which is why I decided to give it a shot. Anyway, I’m glad to see that I’ve done a okay job with it, and thanks for giving this fic a chance :)

I also would like to make a request for advice! If anyone is knowledgeable about etiquette and cultural norms in Russia, please reach out to me on Tumblr if you’re willing to let me pick your brain! (I can’t reveal too much in the notes...)

Also...this fic was not nearly supposed to be as long as it’s become. The chapters just keep getting longer and longer. You may notice this has turned into a series, I won’t divulge specifics yet because I like to be mysterious, but do watch out for that.

One more thing, I've finished the podcast fic! You can find it linked [here](#).

Edit: putting this fun fact here because I ran out of room in the end notes. Shane refers to the Voyageurs as the Habs here, which is the nickname for the Canadiens in real life. Habs is short for Habitants, which is the name for the early French Canadian settlers. Considering that the name in the books means relatively the same thing, I figured the nickname could stick.

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

“Pava, I swear to god if you do not get in this car in the next two minutes I will leave you here!” Ilya called into the house.

“It doesn’t work if you don’t do it with me!” Pava shouted back.

Ilya rolled his eyes. Honestly, the longer Ilya got to know this kid, the more he thought he had to be his babushka reincarnated. He did this every fucking time they left for a road trip, no matter how late they were running. He thought it would have gotten old after the first few times, but Pava persevered.

Ilya huffed, returning to the living room where Pava was sitting on the edge of the couch with his eyes closed. He cracked one open as he heard Ilya enter, gesturing with a jerk of his head to sit down beside him. Ilya huffed, taking a seat and looking around the room.

It was a Russian tradition that Ilya had never particularly liked. If he forgot something, that was on him, a minute of hovering around the living room wasn't going to fix that. Especially when they were already running late for their flights.

After Pava had decided they had sat on their suitcases enough, he gave the signal to get up and go.

"We wouldn't be running late if you didn't take half an hour trying to cram all your hair products into your carry-on. Your bag is gonna be over the weight limit."

"I am seeing Shane, I need to look more handsome than normal. Besides, two kilos won't make the plane suddenly fall out of the sky, it'll just make it fall a bit faster. Quicker death. You're welcome."

Pava frowned. *"That's not even true. The weight of an object doesn't dictate the speed it falls. Gravity is a constant rate of acceleration, it would only affect the force which is applied to the ground when it hits, since that's directly proportional to the mass."*

Ilya gave him an incredulous look. *"I didn't realize my rookie had spontaneously turned into a science textbook."*

"Not a rookie."

It was the All-Star break, and both Pava and Ilya had made the rosters. Pava had been voted in as the Atlantic Division's last man in, no doubt fuelled by his newfound social media fame.

Shane was voted in as the Captain of the division for the third time in a row. Not that Ilya cared or anything.

This year, All-Stars was in Montreal, though Shane had still decided to stay at the hotel just for the sake of travel. Ilya told him that he should be making sure to bring extra insulation for the walls.

They arrived at the hotel just before noon, following the early flight from Boston. Shane was already waiting for them in the lobby, Wyatt Hayes at his side.

"Hollander!" Ilya exclaimed, his booming voice echoing throughout the entire room. "Do you have nothing better to do than wait around for us?"

Shane rolled his eyes, getting up from the couch. "Do you have a volume button?" He asked.

"Ouch," Ilya replied. He turned to Wyatt. "You see this? He is our Captain and he bullies me, it is workplace harassment."

"You like when he is mean," Pava said.

"Shut up," Ilya said. "What is the plan? I could eat this entire building."

“Yeah,” Shane said, already pulling out his phone. “There’s a restaurant here that looks okay, but there’s also a really great pho place just down the street.”

Ilya remembered Shane talking about that place, apparently he had invited the Voyageurs a couple of times, but most of them agreed they didn’t like ethnic food after games. Ilya wondered if he pulled out a map, if any of the Voyageurs would even be capable of pointing out the continent of Asia.

“Let us get the pho,” Ilya declared, not allowing anyone else the opportunity to disagree.

Shane sent him a small smile. “Should I invite Scott? I was just gonna see if he was around.”

“Ugh,” Ilya groaned. “Why, so we can mash up his food in tiny little bits so he does not choke?”

“I’m telling him you said that.”

“Yes, please do. I am sure you have a very important text chain that is just: ‘hello Scott Hunter, what was the Ice Age like?’ or: ‘Mr. Scott Hunter, what is your favourite brand of ballpoint pen?’”

“Yeah, well I can’t ask you, I always assumed you write with a chisel considering how illegible your handwriting is.”

“I seriously don’t understand you guys,” Wyatt said.

Not twenty minutes later, the quartet was seated at a quaint little restaurant a short walk from Centre Bell.

“Yes, and also the bun cha gio, and a mango salad. Oh, and also seafood fried rice. And extra spring rolls. Please.”

Ilya watched with a smile as the waitress walked away. He turned to Shane across the table, who was giving him a stern look.

“There’s no way you’re eating all that.”

Ilya shrugged. “It is All-Star break, Hollander, I must keep myself fuelled. Feed my big strong muscles, you would not know what this is like, of course.”

Shane rolled his eyes, not so subtly shrugging off his coat and resting it on the back of his chair, showing off his short sleeve shirt. Ilya knew this shirt, it was one that Rose had picked out for him with the purpose of showing off his arms. Ilya raised his eyebrows.

“So,” Wyatt said, and Ilya had been so laser focused in on Shane’s shoulders that he’d almost forgotten anyone else was there with them. “What else are you guys up to today? I’m getting called in for some media stuff, you know how they always like to stock up on those weird question videos?”

“Ah, yes,” Ilya said, taking a sip of his coke. “Me too, right after this. They are always making me do these, it must be because I am so fun and charming.”

“You always pretend you don’t like doing media, but I know you do,” Shane chimed in. “It’s like your favourite game, ‘how much can I bring up Shane in one interview?’”

“I do not know what you mean.”

“You do this,” Pava chimed in. “Like when they ask who most famous person in phone is. You say ‘not Shane Hollander.’ And then say Rose Landry.”

“Honestly, Hollander, I should be offended you never bring me up in interviews. It is like you are embarrassed of me.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“No, my name is Ilya, you would know this if you said it in interviews.”

“Anyway,” Shane continued, “I’m not doing them today, I think they scheduled me for after the skills competition.”

“Me too,” Pava said. “Before game.”

“So what are y’all gonna do now?” Wyatt asked. “I mean, it’s your home turf Shane, I figured you might’ve had plans already.”

Shane shrugged. “Nothing in particular, I was hoping to just catch up with some of the guys. J.J. is here, but I know he also has media right now, so that’ll have to wait.”

“Oh, I was gonna ask,” Wyatt said, “do you have any recommendations for a decent suit shop around here? I only brought one dress shirt for the red carpet tomorrow, and my shampoo exploded all over it in my suitcase on the flight over here. I need something decent I can grab today.”

“Yeah, no, for sure,” Shane said. “I’ll just ask my—let me just check, there’s a good place on Rue Sainte-Catherine.”

Ilya smiled to himself at Shane’s near slip up. That man was keeping the knowledge of his stylist locked down tight.

“You should not even bother,” Ilya said. “You could walk the carpet wearing a paper bag and they would not notice, they will be too distracted by my charming smile.”

“Let me guess,” Shane said, “black suit and a silk shirt?”

Shane didn’t need to guess. Ilya had video called him last week to show off his outfit, he had been very proud of what he put together.

“It is important to keep it classic, Hollander. Do not want to distract from the natural beauty.”

“Right, right.”

“Man, are you guys dressing up properly?” Wyatt asked. “I was just gonna wear like a regular walk-in suit. Was I supposed to be fancy?”

His eyebrows drew together in concern. Ilya remembered that this was Hazy’s first time at the All-Stars game. Up until recently, he had been Toronto’s backup goalie before being traded to Ottawa in the summer. Ilya couldn’t imagine what a guy like Hazy was doing in a place like Toronto, it had to be ten times worse than whatever was going on in Montreal.

“Don’t let him stress you out,” Shane said, “he’s just peacocking. No one cares about this stuff, and no one expects hockey players to be fashionable.” Shane smiled. “Well, except Kosmodemyansky, maybe.”

Ilya looked to Pava, expecting the kid to be blushing with the compliment. Instead he was frowning at his cutlery.

“Eh,” he said. “I do not know if I want to go on carpet.”

“What? Why?” Shane asked, his brow furrowing. “It’s your first All-Stars, you have to go.”

Pava shrugged. “Too many cameras.”

Before Ilya could open his mouth to pry, the food came around, and the group was forced to occupy themselves with finding room for the insane amount of food that Ilya had ordered for himself.

After that, the conversation had mostly turned to other things, involving Hazy going around the table naming which superhero everyone was most like, but Ilya kept his eye on Pava. The removed look never quite seemed to leave his face.

* * *

Shane watched Ilya and Wyatt get scooped up by the PR team to be taken to the studio, no doubt to be asked questions like “who in the league has the best flow?” and “can you juggle?”

“So...” Shane said, turning to Kosmodemyansky, who somehow had remained glued to his side.

“Maybe will go nap now,” he said, but he didn’t actually make any moves to leave the lobby.

“Actually,” Shane said. He had spent half of lunch psyching himself up, and the other half planning the best way to ask this. “I was gonna ask you...you were saying you didn’t want to do the red carpet? Why is that?”

Kosmodemyansky blinked. “Eh...I am not dressing so well. I think is bad idea.”

“I like the way you dress,” Shane offered sincerely. “But, I was gonna offer, the person who helps me pick out my clothes works around here, if you want I could ask her to come look at some stuff with us? We could get you something new for tomorrow.”

Kosmodemyansky frowned, but in confusion rather than distaste. “Someone picking clothes?”

Shane grimaced. “Yeah, like...I have a stylist, and she’s really cool and everything, she just helps me put stuff together. You know, I’ve never been very good with clothes or anything, and she really helped.”

Kosmodemyansky seemed to consider this. “I would not wanting to bother.”

Well, it was too late for that. Shane had already frantically started texting Amelie underneath the table at lunch to see if she was free.

“You wouldn’t be bothering her,” Shane said. “Actually, I was already gonna go see her just to check in for tomorrow.”

No he was not, but Amelie was really cool, and would definitely go along with his lie if he told her he was trying to convince a skeptical Russian to buy a suit that actually fits. Shane had seen the photos of the kid during their walk-ins, and he had been surprised Ilya hadn’t said something earlier. Then again, Ilya would probably wear an Adidas branded tuxedo to the carpet if it existed, so he probably shouldn’t have put that much trust in him.

“Really?” Kosmodemyansky asked, and Shane knew he was in.

“For sure, let’s go right now.”

* * *

Kosmodemyansky emerged from the changing room gingerly, like one wrong move was going to tear the fabric of his suit.

They were in a small boutique, one of Amelie’s favourites, but also one that specialized in crazy tall proportions. Shane felt a bit like he was in the middle of a montage from Princess Diaries as he sat in the cushioned velvet chair outside the dressing room.

“Or Pretty Woman,” Amelie offered, her Quebecois accent charming as ever.

She tipped her head to the side, examining the Russian, and gesturing eloquently for him to give her a spin.

“Is tight,” Kosmodemyansky said.

Amelie shrugged. “It’s supposed to fit like that, it’s a fitted look. Our options are limited today since we won’t have much time for tailoring,” she got to her feet, pulling another set that she had pulled aside onto a rack outside the dressing room. She handed it to the kid. “Here, this one is a more vintage look. Higher waist, a bit looser, but very fashionable right now.”

Kosmodemyansky nodded, returning into the room. Amelie retreated back to her seat, turning to Shane.

“Where did you find him?” She asked in a whisper. “He is adorable. I’d like to put him in my pocket.”

“He’s uh,” Shane said, hesitating, before figuring there was no point in hiding it. Kosmodemyansky was a public figure, and Amelie didn’t seem to care much about hockey. “He’s Ilya Rozanov’s rookie. Or I guess he’s not a rookie anymore. Anyway, Ilya’s busy, so I thought I’d help him out.”

She nodded. “Yes, well it is very lucky for me. You are bringing me a blank canvas of hockey players with no style. It is a beautiful gift, yes?”

They watched as Kosmodemyansky reemerged, looking much more comfortable in his brown suit. It reminded Shane a bit like something out of Peaky Blinders.

Amelie got to her feet, moving around Kosmodemyansky and gesturing for him to move so she could check the fit.

“This is very good,” she said, after observing to her satisfaction. “You like?”

Kosmodemyansky smiled at himself, turning to look in the mirror. He looked to Shane.

“Is very nice. I feel like detective.”

Amelie crouched down to check the hem, folding it a bit. “The fit is nice, I would want to hem it before you wear it, maybe nip in the waist on the trousers, but we can do that easy enough for you to wear it tomorrow.”

Shane nodded, also getting to his feet. “I like the style on you, and it’ll go really well with your hats.”

Kosmodemyansky frowned, reaching up to scratch at his temple. “Eh, I do not think I will wear hat.”

Shane’s smile dropped. “What? Why? I thought you loved your hats?”

The kid shrugged, scrunching up his nose. “They are silly, yes? People make fun.”

“But you like them, right?” Shane said. “You shouldn’t quit just because other people are assholes.”

“Yes,” Amelie chimed in, authoritative as ever. “And it all depends on the hat, yes? It is an art, choosing the hat to go with the outfit.”

Kosmodemyansky’s eyes narrowed a bit, as if he was trying to hash out if this was all a trick.

“Really?”

Amelie nodded, crossing her arms in a matter that made it clear she’d made a decision she wasn’t about to budge on. “There is a haberdasher just down the street, Bruce, he is very annoying but he is good at his job and owes me a favour. We will go while your suit is tailored.”

“What is haber-dasher?”

“It’s a hat man. The whole store is just hats.”

Shane met eyes with the kid. He looked like Amelie had just told him he’d won the lottery.

* * *

It was a relatively warm day in Montreal considering it was late January, which was why Shane didn’t protest when Kosmodemyansky suggested walking back to the hotel. It was a short trek, only slightly hindered by the hat box under the kid’s arm.

Shane had redirected them to take the route along the St. Lawrence, the wind biting a bit at his neck where it crept through the collar of his coat. Something caught his eye, a big red sign on the waterfront.

“Are you hungry?” Shane asked.

“Hm?”

Shane gestured with his head towards the storefront. Kosmodemyansky drew his eyebrows together in concentration as he read the sign. His eyes widened a bit as he turned back to Shane.

“What is this?”

“Beavertails,” Shane said. “They’re really popular in Quebec.”

Pava blinked. “You eat this?”

“Yeah!” Shane replied. “They’re really good, I used to get them after all my games when I was little. I would usually get them with sugar on it, but they have nutella and oreo ones as well.”

The kid’s expression only grew in concern. “How do you cook this? Is not scratchy?”

Now it was Shane’s turn to look concerned. It took him a moment to register what the hell he was talking about. “Oh,” he said, “oh, no, no, it’s not actually a beaver’s tail, that’s just what they call it. It’s just like a fried dough.”

“Ah,” Kosmodemyansky said, finally relaxing. “I was not sure.” He paused, thinking, “is true they eat buffalo in Canada too?”

“I mean, sure. I’ve never had it, but I think they’ve got bison farms more in the west.”

“Ah,” he replied thoughtfully. “In Russia, some places they are eating...eh...what is word? Sperma? I also not have.”

Shane scrunched up his face. “Oh. That sounds...unique.”

“It sounds very terrible, I know this.”

Shane nodded. “Well, on that note, do you wanna try one? I think you’d like them.”

Kosmodemyansky agreed, and he trailed behind Shane as they made their way into the store. There was a bit of a line considering the weather and the time of day, including a small gaggle of teenage girls that asked for pictures with them both. If they were surprised to see them together, they didn’t show it.

Kosmodemyansky looked up at the menu, not having to angle his neck much at all. “What do I get?” He asked.

“The banana one is really good. My mom’s favourite is the pistachio, or the cheesecake. The original one is also really good if you don’t want to start too crazy. Ilya will sometimes get the poutail, which is just the beavertail with poutine on it, and I don’t know how it doesn’t give him a heart attack.”

Shane was probably talking too fast. The kid was not asking for an analysis of the entire menu.

“What is ‘trip–le trip?’”

“That one’s got nutella and some peanut butter candies.”

Kosmodemyansky proceeded to then interrogate Shane about every other item on the menu, until eventually settling on the original style. He gestured to Shane as he ordered.

“What will you get?”

“Oh,” Shane said hesitating. “No, I’m not really hungry.”

The kid frowned. “But you like?”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s just...a lot of sugar, right? I don’t usually eat like that during the season. I have a thing about it.”

Kosmodemyansky looked at him for a moment longer, but didn’t push. He turned back to the girl at the till. “That is it. Thank-you.”

The girl was smiling at him. She was leaning casually against the counter, looking about as cool as was possible in her uniform. “I like your accent,” she said, batting her eyelashes a bit. “Are you Ukrainian?”

“Ah, no. Russian.”

“Very cool,” she said. “What brings you to town?”

Kosmodemyansky blinked, still holding out the purple bill in front of him, waiting to be taken.

“Eh, working,” he said.

“Nice,” she said, letting her gaze drop a bit before pulling it back up to his eyes. “What do you do?”

“Athlete,” he replied simply.

“Ah,” she said, her expression sliding into a smile. “I shoulda guessed. You look it.”

She finally took the bill from his hands, and Kosmodemyansky quickly lowered his arm, as if by holding it up any longer than necessary, she was going to snatch him across the counter.

“Okie.”

Shane waited until they were back outside, walking along the waterfront.

“I think she was flirting with you,” Shane said unceremoniously.

Kosmodemyansky looked up, his face already dusted with sugar. He took a second to finish chewing before replying. “Hm?”

“The girl. At the store.”

“Oh.”

Shane looked to the water, then back to the kid. “Did you like her?”

He shrugged. “She seems nice.”

“But I mean...did you like her, like her? Like, wanting to date her.”

Shane cringed a bit at herself. Jesus Christ, he felt like he was really in awkward step-dad mode. Girls these days, amiright? Fuck. Ilya would be ribbing him so hard if he were here to see this.

Kosmodemyansky reset his focus to demolishing his beavertail. “Eh...no. I do not...really. Is not...”

He kept trailing off, like Ilya would when he was struggling to find exactly the right English.

“You know,” Shane said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible. Unfortunately for Shane, he didn’t have a nonchalant bone in his body. “It’s okay if you don’t wanna...date anyone. Ever, I mean.”

Kosmodemyansky didn’t say anything, but he hummed invitingly.

“Y’know, lots of people don’t like that kind of stuff. So...if anyone ever bothers you or anything, fuck them, right?”

Shane did not know what he was trying to do. For a guy who had been fucking Ilya Rozanov since he was seventeen, he was so bad at being gay. He didn’t know any of the words, or what he was supposed to say. He knew he liked guys, but he didn’t know so much about the rest of it. He didn’t want to paint his nails, or wear makeup, or watch drag race.

He was honestly ashamed of it, the way he still got uncomfortable around certain types of men. Sometimes he just didn’t know how to act. He once accompanied Rose to a show when he was in LA, and they ran into a friend of hers, some model she had once done a campaign with. His face was

painted with vibrant makeup, he had piercings all over, and wore an extravagant skirt with ankle-breaking heels.

Shane hadn't realized he had been staring until Rose pulled him aside and slapped him upside the back of the head.

He just hadn't been exposed to it much, was all. Not to mention, a part of him still was in constant panic mode that anything he did could be seen as an admission. The first time he put on pride tape for an NHL game, he hid in the bathroom hyperventilating for a full ten minutes.

Ilya wasn't like that, and Shane didn't get it. He was Russian, he was supposed to be the repressed one. Yet, nothing ever seemed to phase him.

Not Shane. Sometimes he felt like his grandpa who still had to be reminded of what words were slurs. He should be better at this.

"Yes," Kosmodemyansky replied, oblivious to the spiralling going on in Shane's mind. "You are right."

Shane nodded, electing to close his mouth before he made this any more awkward for the two of them.

"Rose Landry," Kosmodemyansky said, surprising Shane. "You date Rose Landry?"

Shane raised his eyebrows. That's not what he was expecting, exactly. "Oh. Yeah, not for very long, just a few weeks."

"You are...bisexual?"

He pronounced it strangely, like he'd never said it out loud before. Where did he learn that word?

"Uh...no, no," Shane paused, looking over his shoulder, but still lowering his voice even though no one was around. "I'm gay."

Kosmodemyansky gave him a confused look. "Why you date Rose Landry?"

Shane huffed. Was this kid seriously asking him to get into the depths of his repression while walking through downtown Montreal? "I like her, a lot, but just as my friend. But back then...I guess I did it because I thought it was what I was supposed to do. I was too afraid to be with Ilya, I thought this would be easier."

"But it was not."

Shane shook his head. "No. It wasn't. I was just forcing myself to do it because I thought I had to. But I didn't. I was just making myself miserable."

The kid nodded. "Is good. You are not doing this anymore. Ilyukha likes you very much."

Shane felt his cheeks warm in the cool air. "Well, I like him a lot too."

"He is very sad sometimes. But less sad with you."

They dropped back into a comfortable silence, and Shane congratulated himself on not totally fucking up that conversation. He'd have to tell Ilya about it, and check in with him while he was at it. He'd

been thinking about bringing up therapy again, or maybe medication. One step at a time.

“Shane Hollander?” Kosmodemyansky said, just as they approached the entrance to the hotel.

“Yeah.”

“You can call me Pava.”

* * *

“Davay!” Ilya shouted, watching Shane round the ice for the fastest skater competition.

They changed the formatting this year, so now twelve of the forty-four all-stars would be competing in every event of the skills competition, with the overall winner being awarded a million dollars. Unfortunately, this meant Ilya was forced to partake in the passing challenge, and Shane the hardest shot, where they were sure to humiliate themselves.

“You are cheering for him?” Pava asked, cocking his head. He hadn’t been selected for the skills competition, but Ilya had practically dragged him onto the ice to watch the competition with him. It hadn’t been hard to convince the organizers, the cameras loved Pava.

“Yes, it will get in his head,” Ilya lied. “Reverse psychology.”

Shane skated up to Ilya, stopping hard and sending a spray of snow into the boards. He huffed, turning his head up to the jumbotron to look at his time.

13.458 seconds.

Shane turned back to Ilya, sending him a toothy grin. “Not bad.”

Ilya shrugged. “Just okay.”

“Faster than you.”

“Barely.”

Ilya shuffled a bit from where he was settled on the bench, making room for Shane to squeeze in next to them.

“Good job Shane Hollander,” Pava said, poking his head out in front of Ilya.

“Thanks, Pava.”

Ilya smiled to himself.

“Nice one, man,” Carter Vaughan said, appearing at Shane’s other side. Sweat was absolutely pouring down his face, a casualty of his own competition round. Both him and Scott were taking part in the skills competition this year. “Knocked me down to fourth, but hey, I’ll take it. At least it’s not fuckin’ McDavid in first.”

No, it was not. Because McDavid was out with a fucked up knee. “You are weirdly obsessed with that guy,” Ilya said. “It is even worse because he probably does not think of you at all.”

“Fuck off, Rozanov,” Vaughan said. “As if you don’t get all hot and bothered every time someone brings up Hollzy. I bet you have a manifesto written about him in your diary.”

Ilya was moments away from leaning into it, telling Vaughan that, yes, he counted Shane's freckles every night before he went to sleep, and he doodled his name in hearts on the cover of his notebook. But before he could get the chance, Pava spoke up.

"You think because he is Russian, he does manifesto?"

Now the thing was, whenever Ilya made those jokes, it became pretty immediately obvious that he was joking. That was not the case with Pava.

Vaughan went quiet, and all the blood seemed to drain from his face. "No, no, I didn't mean like... maybe that was the wrong word. It was just a joke."

Ilya shifted his hands from where they were resting on his stick to hide his smile.

"You are xenophobny?" Pava asked.

Ilya just about keeled over in laughter. He tried to bury his face in Shane's shoulder, who only elbowed him in the response.

"No, I'm not, I'm not," Vaughan said, turning to Shane and Ilya as if asking for backup. "It was just because he never shuts up, ya know? A joke, we always joke with each other."

Pava didn't respond, he just continued to stare at Vaughan.

"I love immigrants," he said. "Matti Jalo, you know, he's from Finland, and—"

"Hey guys," Scott Hunter said, very conveniently skating up just in time to be Vaughn's saving grace. He was breathing hard.

Ilya flicked his eyes up to the screen. "Wow! 14.2 seconds, Hunter, must be new record for you. Sorry I missed it, I was too busy taking long nap during this time. Was very refreshing."

"Fuck off, Rozanov."

"Hello Scott Hunter," Pava said.

"Hey," Scott replied, skating over to sit down beside the kid. "First All-Stars, right? Having fun?"

"Ah, yes, happy I am not doing this," Pava replied, gesturing to the skills competition.

"Yeah, looks like it's not my year," Scott replied.

The top eight scorers from the first six events would go on to the one-on-one event, and that did not include Scott Hunter.

"Ah, it's okay, Hunter," Ilya said, getting back to his feet. Shane joined him as they got ready for the next leg. "Watch from back here, maybe you will learn something."

* * *

"Next up for the one-on-one, we have Shane Hollander. This is Hollander's sixth time attending the All-Stars game, always a pleasure to watch. This is everyone's first time trying out this new format, so we'll have to see how well he handles it."

“You know, Dan, Hollander’s greatest weakness is his defense. He isn’t the most aggressive of players, so the one-on-one competition is something we should expect to see him struggle with.”

“Currently, Hollander is leading the rankings of the skills competition, so I don’t think he needs to worry too much here.”

“And off he goes, he’s got sixty seconds here to make as many shots as he can. He’s up against Nick Bjarnason, the goalie for Winnipeg. And just like that, he sinks it in the top shelf.”

“He makes it look easy, doesn’t he?”

“And he brings it back around and—oh! Straight into Bjarnason’s glove.”

“Third shot goes wide...fourth shot...and right through the five hole!”

“Hardly even saw it go in.”

“Now he heads back around for the two-point pucks on the blue line...”

“And Bjarnason just poke-checks it outta there.”

“Now this is his sixth shot, he sneaks it in through the five-hole again.”

“Old-reliable.”

“Thirty seconds left for Hollander, let’s see how he does, all these pucks worth double now.”

“Honestly, I think it might be a humiliation ritual having Hollander go after you in this event. I can’t see anyone else keeping up with this.”

“Just like that, another one snuck right past Bjarnason’s left skate.”

“He brings another around here now, and looks like it goes wide.”

“Next puck bounces off of Bjarnason’s pad, just about snuck in there.”

“And alright, Hollander grabbed this last puck just before the time round down so it’s still live, let’s see what he does for his last shot here.”

“Oh! Gorgeous bar down, did he even do that on purpose?”

“And with that, Hollander starts out the first round with six points, let’s see how the rest of our competitors match up.”

“And look at that, it seems it’s only natural for Hollander to be followed up by Ilya Rozanov, who is closing out the competition.”

“Dan, you know that Rozanov is a favourite of mine, he’s an intense, physical player, perfect for this kind of event.”

“Don’t I know it Gord, and even if you don’t love him, you gotta respect him. He is an impressive player, on and off the ice. He’s been in the media lately, he and Hollander started their own charity just last year, the Irina Foundation, and they’ve stated that any winnings from All-Stars will be donated there.”

“I heard they run a hockey camp together. Can you believe that? Do you think they fistfight in front of the kids?”

“You know, Gord, when I was researching for this event, I looked into it. It turns out that Hollander and Rozanov have never actually had an on-ice altercation before.”

“Really? Has Hollander ever fought anyone?”

“Just once, in 2014 after a post-horn scrum with Scott Hunter. But of course, that’s typical for big stars like Hollander, they like to keep their fists to themselves. Rozanov’s an outlier in that respect with his whopping 10 fights, which is high for a player of his calibre.”

“And don’t we love him for it?”

“Alright, off he goes, skating up quite aggressively. First shot goes wide, bounces off the pipe.”

“Rozanov is currently shooting on his own countrymen, Mikhail Sokolov of the Florida Panthers.”

“Next shot makes it through the five-hole, and, ope, and nice stop by Sokolov after that.”

“He is honestly just whipping around that ice like Russian lightning.”

“Or just lightning, Gord.”

“Last of the one-pointers sneaks in over the shoulder there, and Rozanov’s off for the two-pointers, thirty-five seconds to go.”

“Rozanov is currently on a seven game goal streak, registering at least a goal a game going into the All-Star Break. He is also in the top five points leaders this year.”

“Okay, and, wow, two two-point pucks just like that.”

“Sokolov is making some impressive saves here but Rozanov is basically defying gravity the way he’s getting around those pads.”

“And another one into the back of the net has tied him up with Hollander.”

“He’s got twenty seconds left, we’ll see him wrap around here to grab another puck and—oh, where’s he off to?”

“Looks like Rozanov’s skated off the bench while his timer’s still running, and, oh he’s grabbing some props for this last one.”

“Looks like he’s got some sunglasses, a Canada flag hat, and of course he’s gotta take a shot of gatorade before heading back out there.”

“Ha! And look who’s giving him his stuff, he’s got Shane Hollander roped into it, and his rookie, Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky keeping him hydrated.”

“Did you practice that name, Gord?”

“Yes I did, Dan.”

“And Rozanov is back into play, grabbing that last puck just before his time’s up.”

“Right through the five hole! That brings him up to eight points, surpassing Hollander’s previous score.”

“Frankly, Gord, I’m not sure what else I expected.”

“I’m sure Hollander’s gonna make him pay for that later.”

* * *

Ilya hovered behind the camera. It had taken only some mild flirting with the producer in order to get permission to be in the room while they were filming the next batch of media. It probably would’ve been easier to pull the translator card, but that wasn’t as fun.

Shane was currently filming his bit. Pava was up next, but for the life of him, Ilya had no idea where the kid had gone. He had terrible time management skills.

Ilya liked doing media, or, most of the time. He’d happily take answering a million questions intended to go TikTok viral if it meant he didn’t have to take part in any of the leagues more ridiculous PR stunts. Though, he had to admit, he’d love to see Shane be live-animated as a pixar character. Ilya tried to concentrate his attention on his boyfriend. He was currently being forced to attempt to draw his team logo by memory.

“Oh, geeze,” Shane said, scrunching up his nose. “Okay, it looks a bit like an alien face, but, I’m not an artist.” He put the cap back on the marker and placed it gently on the board.

“Alright, just a couple more,” the producer said, flipping through a clipboard. “Okay, and make sure to repeat the question before answering. What phone app could you not live without?”

“What phone app could I not live without...” Shane repeated. He looked up into space as he thought. “Probably the weather app.”

Ilya audibly face palmed from behind the camera.

“Really?” The producer asked.

“Yeah, I mean, it dictates how I dress every day. If I bring my rain jacket, if I should bring layers. No one ever prepares for the rain, and then they always complain. And I run pretty cold so I like to make sure I have enough layers.”

“Huh, okay,” the producer relented. “Next one, do you thank the penalty box attendant when they open the door for you?”

Shane tipped his head to the side, thinking. “Do I thank the penalty box attendant...yes, at least on the way out. Sometimes when I’m on the way in I’m really frustrated and I forget. But always on the way out, I think.”

If this were any other player, Ilya would think he was lying. But not Shane.

“What is your favourite arena to play in on the road?”

“Just for the arena? I think maybe Winnipeg? Any hockey town is great to play in, and there are a lot of Habs fans anywhere you go in Canada, but Winnipeg is always really packed. It’s especially cool during the playoffs with the whiteout.”

“Alright, next one, why did you pick your jersey number?”

“Oh, actually it’s just the number they assigned to me at my first World Juniors. I kind of just stuck with it.”

“Really? This whole time?”

Shane shrugged.

“Okay, what is your favourite french fry cut?”

Shane made a face, like he was appalled at the idea that he was being asked anything unrelated to hockey. “I like wedges, I guess? I can make them myself in the oven and then they’re pretty healthy. I don’t eat fries very often though.”

“Alright, here’s a good one for you. Who has the worst tape job in the league?”

Ilya rolled his eyes and crossed his arms behind the camera.

“Well, that’s easy,” Shane said. “Definitely Ilya Rozanov.”

Ilya smiled to himself. Shane pronounced his name the Russian way, even in front of the camera. Eel-ya Ro-ZA-nov.

“I don’t get it,” Shane continued, his eyes flicking behind the camera. “He leaves, like, half the stick bare. He says he’s saving tape but then he throws away half the roll just wrapping the top.”

“If you are great player, you do not need the tape to do all the work for you,” Ilya said, he just couldn’t help himself.

The producer tried to give him a stern look for interjecting, but he knew he didn’t mean it. The internet would love it. Shane rolled his eyes and gestured to the producer for the next question.

“Okay, this is a tricky one. We want you to spell out the name ‘Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky.’” He said the name slowly and carefully.

Ilya smirked. He had known this one was coming, they had asked him the same thing the other day. Shane tried to hide his own look of satisfaction.

“P-A-V-S-I-K-A-K-I-Y K-O-S-M-O-D-E-M-Y-A-N-S-K-Y,” Shane said proudly.

“Holy shit,” the producer said, quickly covering his mouth after the curse. “Sorry, just, only like two people got that, even most of the Russians couldn’t spell it. You did that so easily.”

Shane shrugged. “He was an instructor at our camp,” he explained. “Kinda have to know it.”

“Oh, right,” the producer said, seeming to accept this answer. As if anyone else at that camp had learnt the proper spelling of the name. “Well, last one,” he said.

Shane nodded, straightening up in his seat.

“What is love?”

Shane blinked.

Ilya had forgotten about this question. It was probably meant to be cute, a little something to throw off the players and force them to give a semi-sentimental answer. Ilya had made a joke, something about how love is not complaining that he's a bad driver.

But when the producer asked Shane, his eyes immediately flitted to behind the camera, locking with Ilya. His eyes softened, his professional mask falling from where it had been raised for the camera.

"Oh, uh..." he paused, looking quickly at his feet, before looking back up towards the camera. Yet, his eyes slowly drifted back to Ilya as he spoke. "I think...love is just someone who understands you. You don't have to explain yourself all the time, they just get it...and they're there for you, no matter what." He blushed, rubbing his neck with the back of his hand. "Sorry, that's not very poetic."

Ilya smiled, tucking his chin against his chest. He feared if he looked over at Shane again, he wouldn't be able to stop himself from bounding over and kissing him.

"No, that's good!" The producer said, completely oblivious to the subtext that had taken over the room. "That's all we need from you, Shane, you're good to go."

Shane nodded, slipping off the stool and beelining straight for Ilya. Initially, when Shane was sitting there, Ilya had planned to make a joke about his terribly boring answers as soon as he was done. But now? Ilya reached over, his hand mostly blocked by the bulk of the camera. He gripped onto Shane's wrist, giving him a light squeeze as he felt for his pulse.

"Where is Pava?" Shane asked, letting his hand linger for a moment before removing himself from Ilya's grasp.

Ilya narrowed his eyes, turning to look about the room. "I don't know, I should call him."

It turned out this wouldn't be necessary. As if summoned by a bat signal, Pava appeared, barrelling through the door into the studio, a large tupperware grasped in his hands.

"Hi," he said, looking a bit ruffled.

"You are cutting it close, kid," Ilya said.

Pava looked confused. "What am I cutting?"

"It means you're late."

"Oh. Was busy."

He held up the tupperware. He turned to Shane, holding it out between them. Shane raised an eyebrow.

"For me?"

Pava nodded. Shane raised his eyebrows as he peeled open the lid. Ilya craned his neck to look inside. There, nestled in a bed of parchment paper, was over a dozen mac n cheese cupcakes.

Shane blinked. "Where did you get these?"

"Kitchen," Pava replied simply.

"They just gave them to you."

Pava looked side to side. "Yes."

"Did you steal these, Pava?" Ilya asked.

"No," he replied, unconvincingly.

"This is a lot of food," Shane said.

"Do not wanting to run out," he said.

Shane looked to Ilya, then to Pava, who was shyly smiling. "Thank you, Pava. Really. I can't believe you remembered."

Pava shrugged. "Is nothing."

"Oh, perfect," the producer said, appearing in front of them. "We were just looking for you, Komodanski."

"Kosmodemyansky," Shane and Ilya said in unison.

"Right. Anyway, you're up next."

* * *

"What do you think he is doing?" Ilya asked, nudging Shane from where he sat next to him on the bench. Ilya was back on his wing for the All-Stars game against the Metropolitan Division. This year, they had a left winger from Carolina sharing their line.

Shane followed Ilya's gaze. He was chatting with his center, a young guy from Detroit who was also attending his first All-Stars game.

"I think he's having a conversation."

Ilya squinted skeptically. "They are talking like they know each other."

"Maybe they're friends."

Ilya frowned. "When would they be friends? I have never seen them talk before."

"Maybe they met last night. Or this morning. Or literally any of the times you've told him to get lost this weekend."

Well, that sounded harsh when Shane said it like that. With full context (that Shane was not able to include due to their present location) it had been a totally reasonable request. He could hang out with Pava whenever he wanted, but he only had so many opportunities to ravish the captain of the Montreal Voyageurs.

"Do you think he is being nice?" Ilya asked.

Shane raised his eyebrows. "Who, Kleinikkink?"

Ilya groaned. "Of course you know his name. And of course it is just as stupid as Pava's. Maybe that's why they are best friends now."

Shane laughed, elbowing Ilya in the shoulder. “Relax. It’s one tournament. I’m sure he’ll forget all about him when you’re back in Boston. Also,” he added as an afterthought, “you really need to start learning people’s names.”

“Not that I care,” Ilya said, ignoring that last point. “It is fine, he can talk to whoever he wants.”

Ilya stood, following Shane out of the bench as Pava’s line made their way back in. The All-Star games were played three-on-three, which meant it turned out to be little more than a game of keepaway. He rounded outside the faceoff circle as he watched the puck between Shane and Scott Hunter.

Ilya loved playing with Shane. Back in Boston, Ilya had great chemistry with Cliff and Pava, but this was something different. He felt like every move Shane made, he could feel it himself. Like a dance, or a game where only they knew the rules, yet everyone else was forced to play.

He couldn’t help but imagine what it would be like if this wasn’t just every once in a while. If it was every game. If every morning, instead of waking up to text Shane, all he had to do was roll over and see him by his side.

Ilya collected a pass from Shane, sending a one timer right into the top shelf.

Shane swung around to wrap his arm over Ilya’s shoulders. This time, he kissed Ilya’s helmet, giving him a knowing look. Their celebrations were a bit over the top considering it was an All-Star game, and the score was already 4-3 in fifteen minutes, but Ilya couldn’t care less.

It was obvious to the room that he was having more fun than he had any right to have. It was especially evident to Scott Hunter, who was trying to remove Ilya from his spot screening the goalie.

“Hunter, what are you doing here?” Ilya said. “They just keep letting you wander onto the ice, confused, yes?”

“Shut it, Rozanov,” Scott replied.

Ilya tsked, trying to fight off Scott’s shoves to get him away from the crease. “So sensitive! It is okay, I know how jumpy old people can get because of the war. I will let this one go.”

Scott gave him another shove. His heart wasn’t fully in it considering the low stakes of the game, as well as the unwritten rules that no one was allowed to get hurt at All-Stars. Ilya moved as he saw Shane approach, puck in his cradle. Ilya had meant to move and get himself open, but he felt resistance at his foot, causing him to slip and fall onto his knee.

“Fucking—Rozanov!” Hunter called out, yanking at his own foot.

Ilya got back to his feet, his right leg now flush with Hunter’s left, trying to tug and pull at his skate laces while the game went on around them. It took a full ten seconds of embarrassing fumbling before the whistle was finally blown.

Shane made it over at the same time as the ref, who was quick to start untangling their skate laces.

Shane laughed openly and proudly. “I’m sorry,” he said, not really seeming sorry. “I’ve never seen you look so...ungraceful.”

“Shut up, Hollander,” Ilya said, trying to lean as far away from Scott Hunter as possible.

“Well if you keep moving away it just makes the laces tighter,” Scott complained.

“Everyone shut up, just cut it off.”

“Your laces?” Shane asked.

“No, Hunter’s leg. It is not useful anyway.”

“Fuck off.”

The referee was finally able to release the two, to the raucous applause of the fans. Ilya rolled his eyes as he skated back to the bench along with Shane for their line change.

“Should I be jealous?” Shane asked, his voice low.

“So you are a comedian now?”

* * *

Shane had never seen Pava with a smile so big as when he held the giant winner’s check following the finals. He tucked himself in under Ilya’s arm, his gloves and helmet long gone. It was the first big win the kid had ever had, considering they’d been knocked out of the first round of the playoffs last year. He didn’t seem to care that no one took All-Stars seriously (Shane was sure the only reason they had won was because Shane and Ilya had been unreasonably competitive in an attempt to earn Pava a prize).

Surely the league had to have been sick of having Shane and Ilya on the same All-Stars team three years in a row. He wouldn’t be surprised if they didn’t get an invite next year, just so some other division could win for the first time in three years. Not that Shane minded, it’d been a while since he’d gotten to utilize an All-Stars break

Once again, Shane humoured the many social media managers that made their way onto the ice to take photos, but he was ready to get some rest. It had been a long day.

“Shane, Shane, Shaaaaane!” Ilya called, like a schoolboy who wanted a later bedtime. “You cannot sneak away, we need another group photo.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “You want me to call over Andersen?” He was the other alternate captain for the Atlantic team, from Toronto. As far as Shane knew, Ilya wasn’t a fan.

“No, no, his ugly face will ruin the picture. You me and Pava.”

Shane sighed, but relented. “Fine, but this time, you’re going on my back.”

Ilya grinned. “Shane Hollander! I was not going to suggest this at all, but of course if you insist.”

Before Shane could protest, Ilya practically launched himself onto Shane’s back.

“Jesus Christ, you’re heavy.”

“Yes, yes, must be all the milk I drink, it makes my bones big and strong. Sumaya! Please take photo!” Ilya called.

A girl who couldn't be older than twenty five shuffled across the ice. Shane had heard the name enough to know who she was. She raised up her camera, ushering for Pava to move in closer.

"Maybe crouch down in front?" She suggested. "So you're all in a line?"

Pava obliged, though with his size he probably could've placed himself behind Ilya and still be visible. Sumaya snapped a few photos. "This is awesome guys, congrats by the way!"

"Thank-you Sumaya," Pava said, sending her an awkward salute.

Shane moved to drop Ilya off his hips, but the Russian protested.

"Uh-uh, Hollander, I paid for full experience. Take me to the tunnel or I will have no choice but to give a terrible review."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Fine, but if you start trying to steer or something, I'm throwing you off."

Chapter End Notes

The thing Ilya and Pava do is called "sitting for the journey" which is a Russian tradition that was suggested to me by Gvozdichka in the comments. You're meant to do it before going on a trip, just taking the time to make sure that you think about anything you might've forgotten. It's also just supposed to give good luck and safe travels.

Beavertails are my favourite sweet treat in this world, unfortunately there aren't really any near where I live right now. Also, according to google, in some regions of Russia, they consume fried milt (fish sperm). Yikes.

I've changed the formatting to this All-Star Game to that of the 2024 game. It's kind of funny, because for that game the organizers talked about how they consulted Connor McDavid for suggestions in designing the skills competition, and used a bunch of his typical summer training. Then, surprise, McDavid won the competition, and also a million dollars. In the actual event, competitors participated in 4 of the 6 events, but for this I chose to make it all of them because I like to think that Shane is very much a Connor McDavid, and would absolutely hate the hardest shot competition.

Fun fact, Connor McDavid is afraid of ketchup. Hot take, so am I, so I stand by him on that one.

The phonetic spelling of the Russian word for xenophobic is "ksenofobnyy," but it's pronounced like "xenophobny." I wanted to make sure it came across correctly, but the point is that Pava directly used the Russian word here, he doesn't quite have the language skills yet to know what the change would be for that word in English.

Something else I did was add components of the breakaway challenge into the one-on-one event. In 2024, the one-on-one competition was based on scoring, but in the past they've done a similar challenge at all-stars that's based on creativity, basically about trick shots. What Ilya does here is [Ovi's](#) breakaway in 2009, which he won through a fan vote.

I read a Tumblr post saying that it's ridiculous that people think that Shane Hollander would never get into a fight. I don't quite think that's true. I often liken Shane to Connor McDavid, who

famously does not fight. He was in one fight during his junior career where he broke his hand, and since then has not dropped gloves. Don't get me wrong, he's still getting in scrums and was even suspended for cross-checking, but I think it's totally reasonable that Shane would prioritize his ability to play above all. Even though enforcers aren't a thing in the same way today as they used to be, there are definitely guys on each team who fights are reserved for in order to protect their stars.

I also referenced the Winnipeg Whiteout, which is a tradition in Winnipeg during the playoffs where Jets fans wear all white and have massive street parties. Some other playoff traditions include throwing octopus on the ice, smashing a car with a sledgehammer, and waving a white towel in surrender.

I couldn't find any reference that explains Shane's jersey number, but if there's something I missed, please let me know. Shane's answer is weirdly common among NHL players though, and it felt to me like a very Shane thing to do, just to get put with a number and never changing it.

All the questions Shane is asked in the interview are actual questions from the NHL's puck personality series. Some gems I considered including were: how many Disney princesses can you name? And who has the best hair in the league? In the NHL video, they were asked to spell the last name [Vasilevskiy](#), and it seemed too perfect not to have them do this for Pava.

Another quick reference I threw in there is when Ilya mentioned Shane being animated as a Pixar character. This is a personal attack on commentator joeltroman, who asked for an Inside Out Classic reference. The Inside Out Classic is something that was put on in the NHL this past week which was basically a live animated version of the Rangers v Caps game where the whole thing was broadcast as an animated version, with the Caps being characters from Inside Out. I watched about two minutes of it. Please never do anything like that again.

Ilya and Scott getting their [skate laces](#) stuck together is of course a reference. This happened to my man Nuge and Vince Dunn a few years back.

Ilya's method of taping his stick is based on [David Pastrnak](#).

[Find me on Tumblr.](#)



Chapter 18: Pride Night

Chapter Summary

Jane: The journos keep asking me why I pronounced your name the Russian way in the All-Star media.

Jane: I panicked and said I went to see The Nutcracker last month and wanted to connect to the culture

Jane: I've never seen the Nutcracker

Chapter Notes

I feel like I have a little magical wand that has summoned the entire aro/ace community to assemble in my comments. I love it :)

Oilers playoff hockey has started and my exams are finished. The sky is blue and my skin is clear. Zach Hyman is taking souls on the ice. I tuned in to watch a fight and a Habs v Lightning game broke out. Quinn Hughes embarrassed himself. The Avs fans broke a sheet of glass on the Kings head coach. Crosby embellishment penalty. I'm back to my several gifs a chapter era I just can't help it.

CW: use of a slur



Ilya had never been called to talk to the head of public relations before.

He had gotten his fair share of emails, usually when he went a bit overboard on Twitter, but this time, whatever they wanted to talk about seemed a lot more serious. He'd been called in after video review, Ilya heading up to the offices while his teammates were packing up to head home. Maybe he'd go debrief with Sveta afterwards since he was in the area.

When Ilya walked into the office, the small smattering of voices went quiet, and all heads turned to him.

He recognized almost everyone in the room. The head of PR, the Director of Communications, an intern he didn't recognize who had his laptop open, and Sumaya. Leaning against the wall towards the back, was Coach LeClaire.

Finally, perched in one of the chairs, was Pava, looking a bit paler than usual, and just as confused as Ilya.

Ilya raised an eyebrow, turning to his coach. "Am I in trouble?"

"No, no," said the tall man that Ilya knew to be the PR guy. His name was...Alan? Probably. "No one's in trouble, we just have something to discuss with the both of you. Take a seat."

Ilya shrugged, hoping that his nonchalant appearance would do some work in getting Pava to calm down. He should've known that was a long shot.

"Are we in trouble?" Pava whispered as soon as Ilya took a seat.

"They just said we aren't in trouble."

"Maybe they're luring us into a false sense of security."

"Pava, stop it."

They both turned their attention back to the front of the room, where Alan sat behind his desk.

"So," he said, "this year, we've brought back our Bears Pride Night. It's scheduled for the second week of February."

Ilya looked side to side, trying to gauge the reactions of the room. They were keeping it locked down tight. "Okay."

"So here's the thing," Alan continued, his demeanor tired. "In the past for our pride nights, the players have worn themed warmup jerseys and used pride tape, we then would auction off the jerseys and the sticks for charity." He sighed. "But, as you may have heard, recently a couple of other teams in the league have...had issues, with their pride nights, particularly with their Russian players."

Oh, Ilya was all too familiar with that. Despite the fact that most teams had been doing it for years, something changed this year. Multiple NHL teams had, at short notice, forbade their teams from using tape or wearing themed jerseys during warmups out of "concerns for the safety of their Russian players." Ilya knew that was bullshit. There was no reason to believe that wearing rainbows would have any impact on the players back home. Athletes got away with plenty.

“We’re keeping out regularly scheduled pride night,” Alan said, “but we haven’t yet made any public announcements about whether our players will be wearing the warmup jerseys and using the tape. Since you’re our only Russian players, we wanted to sit and check in with you before we made any formal decisions.”

Ilya blinked. He looked to Alan, as well as the communications lady. They both had very neutral and professional expressions on their faces. He looked to Sumaya, who wasn’t quite as good at masking her expression. She looked between Ilya and Pava with skepticism.

Ilya pointed to Coach LeClaire. “Why is he here?”

LeClaire looked like he wanted to ask the very same question.

“We thought that it would be good to have a representative for player support,” the communications lady offered.

Ilya wouldn’t exactly call LeClaire much of a supportive figure. He was more like the uncle that coaches your high school football team. You try to tell him you’re going through a breakup and he doesn’t know what to do when you start crying.

“Okay,” Ilya said. “So…what are you asking us exactly?”

Alan paused for a second, as if he was running through every piece of sensitivity training he’d ever received. “We would like you to consider what you’re comfortable with. We are aware that you two… come from a different cultural background, and we don’t want to put you in a position where you feel you aren’t comfortable. We’ll…follow your lead.”

Ilya’s first instinct was to tell them all to shut the fuck up. They were tiptoeing around this like they were being asked to do a centerfold. It was just some fucking rainbows.

He turned to Pava, ready to get confirmation about how ridiculous this all was, when he noticed the kid looking down at his hands. Looking anywhere but at Ilya.

Ilya frowned. He looked at his coach. “Can we discuss it first?”

LeClaire nodded, then gestured to Alan as if to confirm he was allowed to be nodding.

“Of course, of course, take as long as you need,” Alan said. “Or, actually, let us know by Thursday. We need to get moving on our press releases.”

Ilya hardly held himself back from rolling his eyes as he stood. “We will be in touch.”

They were being a bit dramatic about the whole thing. They dragged in half the PR department and an uncomfortable former NHLer turned coach just to ask if two Russians approved of their outfit ideas. As soon as the door to the office closed behind them, Ilya gripped Pava by the arm and dragged him into the nearest empty office.

Pava’s eyes were still a bit downcast as he circled the room.

“This is a nice table,” he said, running his hands along the desk. *“Do you think they order these in bulk? Or does each person pick their own out?”*

“Pava,” Ilya said, trying his best not to put on what Shane had coined his “dad voice.”

Pava looked up with a wince. He knew he wasn't getting out of this conversation.

"Ilyukha," he echoed.

Ilya tossed up his hands. *"What was that? Is something wrong?"*

Pava frowned, reaching up to scratch at his temple. *"Nothing's wrong."*

Ilya crossed his arms, trying to urge Pava to look anywhere but the floor. *"What they were talking about in there. What did you think?"*

Pava shrugged.

"Pava," Ilya said, trying to keep his tone as neutral as possible. *"Do you not want to wear the pride jerseys?"*

Pava finally made eye contact. His eyebrows were drawn up in concern. *"I don't want you to think I think there's something wrong with you. I don't think that. But I'm scared."*

Ilya huffed, letting his shoulders drop from where they'd been hiked up to his ears. This fucking kid. He rubbed the heel of his hand over his face. *"What are you scared of?"*

Ilya could practically see every muscle in the kid's body tense up as he spoke. *"I don't want to do anything that will get me in trouble. It's illegal at home, and it will be all over the TV. What if I get in trouble? What if my family gets in trouble? We're literally wearing crimes on our chests. Everyone will be looking at us and talking about us. Aren't you afraid? Aren't you afraid that people will see and will know?"*

Ilya watched with concern as Pava let all of his fears come flooding out. This might've been the most Ilya had ever heard him speak at once before.

"Pava," Ilya started again. *"I get it's scary, I really do, but it isn't as big a deal as it feels."*

"But why are all the other teams changing their minds?" Pava asked. *"They said it's unsafe for Russians."*

"They just saying that," Ilya said, matter of fact. *"That's just an excuse. They're not doing it because they're bigots, and it's cover for all the religious freaks on their team."*

"But—"

"Pava, lots of Russians have been doing it for years. Bobrovsky, Malkin, people more and less famous than you have done it and no one has cared."

Ilya watched Pava carefully, trying to read his expressions.

"And," Ilya went on. *"Nobody will pay attention to you if you do what everyone else does. All the other Bears will be doing it. If anything, it will only be a big deal if we make a point of not doing it."*

Pava nodded, seeming to agree with Ilya. Pava was just concerned about the optics, about complications back home. Ilya could understand that, he remembered what it was like back before he had the pull he has now.

But yet, that string of doubt began to pull at him.

“If you really don’t want to do it...” Ilya said, “we don’t have to do it. I wouldn’t be upset.”

That wasn’t true. Ilya would be devastated.

“I want to do it,” Pava insisted. “You are my friend, I want to do it for you. And for Shane Hollander. Even if no one else knows what it’s for. You’re right, I’m overthinking it.”

Ilya smiled. A real, true, genuine smile. He slung an arm over Pava’s shoulder.

“Trust me, there is nothing to worry about. I will fight Putin myself if I must.”

“I would like to see that.”

* * *

Ilya kept sneaking glances at Marly from where he sat on the couch, a respectable three feet apart.

They were spending their Wednesday playing Halo, as they often tried to do at least a few times a month when they had free afternoons. Nowadays, it was restricted to free afternoons where Marly wasn’t seeing his girlfriend, and where Montreal wasn’t in town.

Pava was off having a post practice nap. If they weren’t already being constantly monitored by doctors, Ilya might’ve tried to get his iron checked. He’d never met a person that napped so consistently.

“Fuck,” Ilya said, tossing his controller next to him with a huff.

“For someone who’s so good at hockey, you’re shit at gaming,” Marly remarked.

“Ah, could be worse,” Ilya replied, reaching forward to grab at the bag of hot cheetos. “It is sad for you that you are bad at this and hockey.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Marly replied, snatching the bag from Ilya’s hands. One of the downsides of being a millionaire is that everyone thought they had the right to eat all your food.

Marly got up from where he was sitting and wandered into the kitchen. “I’m getting a drink, you want anything?”

Ilya shrugged. “Grab me a coke.”

Ilya unsubtly watched Marly out of the corner of his eye. Ilya wasn’t sure what was wrong with the guy, he had been over at his house dozens of times and yet he always wore jeans to hang out. Even if they were just sitting on the couch for hours. Not to mention the first time he was here and he tried to wear his fucking shoes around the house.

Ilya quickly checked his phone. Shane had been texting him a lot more lately ever since Christmas. He never explicitly said, but he knew he was missing him. Ilya missed him too.

Jane: The journos keep asking me why I pronounced your name the Russian way in the All-Star media.

Jane: I panicked and said I went to see The Nutcracker last month and wanted to connect to the culture

Jane: I’ve never seen the Nutcracker

Ilya smiled. Shane was not so secretly trying to learn Russian. Ilya had caught him sneaking into the bathroom at 11:55 on Christmas Day just so he could save his streak on Rosetta Stone. As far as Ilya knew, the app didn't have streaks, Shane just liked consistency. Ilya tried to encourage it where he could, he was pondering getting a label maker just so he could plaster Cyrillic text onto every object in the house so Shane could get more practice reading.

Ilya: i will take you next christmas

Ilya locked his phone and set it face down on the table.

“Can I have a ginger ale?” Marly called out.

“No,” Ilya called back.

“I’ve literally never seen you drink this shit.”

Ilya ignored him. He wiped his palms, slick with sweat, against his sweats in an attempt to dry them off.

Phase three of the plan had been the most stressful. Everything else, he had the benefit of the doubt. It didn’t actually mean anything, it could all be taken back.

Ilya had never really understood the American affinity for coming out, surely it was better just to do what you do and let everyone else figure it out? But, the longer he was here, he started to get it. When Shane told Ilya he was gay, he wasn’t telling him he liked men, he was saying he didn’t like women, and to Shane, that was as good as admitting failure.

Ilya wanted to tell Marly. He wanted him to know about Shane, but he knew that for Cliff Marleau from middle of fucking nowhere North Dakota, he’d need to take this one step at a time. Tell him he likes men, take a breather, tell him he loves Shane. He just needed to suck it up and fucking do it.

Cliff returned to the couch, dropping two cokes onto the coffee table. He retrieved the bag of Cheetos and resumed stuffing them into his face. “You wanna go again?” He asked, his mouth full.

“Marly,” Ilya said, leaning back casually into the couch cushions. He actively refrained from resting his hand in his pants, Shane told him that wasn’t appropriate during serious conversations. “Can I tell you something?”

“Hmf?” Marly replied, his eyebrows raising. “If this is about me getting an ear piercing then the answer is no. Noor told me she’d dump me if I got it.”

“No, no, not that,” Ilya said, “but I stand by that actually. No, it’s something about me.”

“Oh, what’s up?”

“I’m bisexual.”

Cliff froze, looking at Ilya out of the corner of his eye, still sucking the cheeto dust off his thumb. He waited awkwardly, as if expecting Ilya to continue. Ilya did not, at least a little bit because the surprised look on Cliff’s face was somewhat comedic.

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” Cliff repeated. “So, like, are you a chick now?”

Ilya restrained himself from slapping Cliff upside the head.

“That’s the wrong word, Marly. No, it means I fuck men and women.”

“Ohhhhhh,” Cliff replied, a drawn out revelation. “Like...at the same time?”

Ilya shrugged. “Not usually. Sometimes. Not lately.”

“Oh. Okay. So...like, are you fuckin’ guys now?”

“At this moment?” Ilya said. It was meant to be a joke, but Cliff seemed to be taking this all very seriously.

“No, like, just...in general.”

“Yes.”

“But like...I’ve only seen you with girls before.”

Ilya levelled him a look. “It is not exactly smart for Russian superstars to pick up random men from clubs.”

“Riiight,” Cliff replied with a nod. “Wait, what if you’ve actually been gay this whole time but you just keep fucking girls because you’re trying to be straight? Like in Brokeback Mountain.”

Ilya pretended to consider this. “No, I don’t think that’s it.”

“Okay but have you ever been fuckin’ a girl and at the same time been thinking, man, I wish I was fuckin’ a guy right now?”

“No.” Well, that wasn’t totally true. For the two painful months that Shane had been dating Rose Landry, that was pretty much all he had been doing. Just, in that case, he was thinking about fucking one guy in particular. He didn’t think that was an important detail in Marly’s case.

“Huh,” Cliff replied, looking thoughtful. “This kinda makes sense actually. I thought you were just really European, but you really do act like a massive fuckin’ homo.”

Ilya threw up his hands. “What? How?”

“Like, the way you walk.”

“How do I walk?”

“With your hips dude. And your ass is massive.”

“Pretty gay of you to be looking at my ass.”

“It’s fucking distracting. I was gonna ask if you ever check anyone out in the shower but I think everyone else is checking you out. You’re packing two fuckin’ dinner rolls.”

“Yes,” Ilya agreed. “I am very attractive, and you are all very ugly.”

Marly paused for a moment. Ilya could see the gears turning in his head. “Am I, like, the only one that knows?”

Ilya shook his head. “Sveta knows, and Pava, then you.” He’d tell him about Shane and company later.

“Oh, sick. So, I’m like...special.”

“Not really.”

“So that time you had that big handprint on your arm and I was talking about how that chick must have massive hands, was it actually a dude the whole time?”

“No, that actually was a girl with very big hands.”

“Do you—”

“Marly I really was not planning for this day to turn into a Q&A.”

“Just one more?”

Ilya huffed. “Fine.”

“Okay, so, like, when you sext a dude, do you like getting dick pics, or is it weird because, it’s like, you have a dick, so you can see one whenever you want?”

* * *

Ilya had thought things went well with Marly.

Key word, “thought.”

He had been a fucking idiot, but no more than Ilya had been expecting. After everything, they had gone back to playing their stupid video game until Cliff had to go pick up his girlfriend from class, and he never brought it up again.

It’d gone fine, well even. And if Marly, the straightest and stupidest man in the world had taken it well, then surely that meant the rest of the team was promising. He had been excited to tell Shane, casually and indirectly.

But the next day, a quick away game to Buffalo, something was a bit off. If Ilya hadn’t known this man for nearly ten years, it probably wouldn’t have been noticeable. He was still speaking to him, still wishing him luck before the game, still knocking his helmet against his. But something was off. His jokes weren’t quite the same, he was a bit more removed, where he used to be relatively handsy, he wouldn’t even give Ilya a pat on the back.

The most damning point of all, was that Cliff had stopped texting him completely. He used to send Ilya the stupidest Instagram posts he ever had the displeasure of seeing, several a day, usually painfully unfunny memes or inspirational quotes from fitness influencers. Sure, Ilya never responded to them, but Marly kept sending them. But today? Nothing. Even when Ilya tried to force his hand by asking him about the game, he responded like a fucking coworker.

But, Ilya wasn’t one to spiral. That was Shane’s thing, Ilya was much more reasonable. Maybe Marly just needed a day or two. Or three. Or a week.

Ilya really had no right to be upset about it. Compared to Montreal, this was nothing. He wasn't being disrespected or ostracized. Marly hadn't technically done anything wrong. He was reacting better than he could have expected, really. What had he expected?

He had maybe expected that he could tell Shane everything was going to be alright. That Boston was different. That he could be himself, that he could be happy, that they could be together, that nothing needed to change. That Ilya would fix things for him, that Shane could lose the burden.

But Ilya couldn't do that. He hadn't "figured it out" like he had promised all those months ago. Just when he thought things were finally coming together, that he finally had a family again, Ilya could see where it was all starting to crumble. In Montreal, in Boston, inside his stupid fucking head.

* * *

Pava was freaking the fuck out.

He stood at the stove, patting lightly at the grilled cheese on the pan, waiting impatient for it to brown evenly. His mom always made him grilled cheese when he was sad.

Of course, Ilya wasn't just sad.

Pava wasn't stupid. He might not know all the words for things, in English or in Russian, but he'd heard of this kind of stuff. He had the CNN app, and he'd read Robin Williams's Wikipedia page. He got the gist.

What the internet hadn't done a very good job of explaining, was how he was supposed to fix it. He had also learned quickly that people of Margaret's age seemed to know even less about this stuff than him. She had told him that Ilya just needed more exercise. Pava wasn't an expert, but he was pretty sure that wasn't the problem.

So while Pava couldn't call a hotline for Ilya, or get him a doctor, he could at least feed him.

"Ilyukha?" Pava said, knocking lightly on the door. *"I made too much food. I'm full, do you want the rest?"*

After their game against Toronto the other night, Ilya had crawled into his bed and hadn't gotten out. He missed the optional skate yesterday. It had been over 36 hours now. Today was one of their rare full days off, but tomorrow they had a game against Chicago at home. Pava wasn't sure what he was supposed to do if Ilya hadn't gotten up by then, he had already spent two hours this morning sitting outside the door listening to see if Ilya had gotten up at all.

Ilya's head moved incrementally from under the covers. He only nodded as Pava shuffled forward and placed the plate on the mattress.

"Spasibo," he said.

When it became quickly obvious that he didn't have anything more to say, Pava retreated, closing the door behind him.

He didn't know what to do. Before when this happened, it was never this bad. Ilya was withdrawn, but he was still functional. He was still moving. What was he supposed to do tomorrow? What if Ilya just didn't show up to the game? What if he got in trouble? What if Pava went to go play, Ilya stayed behind, and something awful happened?

He couldn't call anyone on the team, Ilya would hate for them to know about this. He couldn't call Sveta, she wasn't so good at talking about feelings. If he called her over, she'd probably know about as much as Pava about what to do, she might just pour a bucket of water over Ilya in his bed.

Pava didn't know what to do, but he could think of one person who might. He took out his phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi."

Pava heard him hesitate on the other line. "Hi...this is Shane, did you mean to call me?"

"Eh, yes," Pava said. He moved away from the door and lowered his voice. "I need help?"

"Oh, yeah, of course, what's up?" Shane asked. Pava could hear his voice tightening in concern.

"Is Ilyukha," Pava said, watching the door to Ilya's bedroom, which remained unmoving. "I am worry. He is very sad today. In bad way."

"Okay...um," Shane sounded like he was moving around on the other side. "What's going on with him exactly? What's he doing?"

"He is in bed," Pava said. "He is since Sunday, after game. He is not moving, or talking really. He only is eating because I bring food."

Shane paused on the other end. "Okay, okay...uh, he hasn't been out at all? Are you sure? Have you talked to him?"

Pava frowned. "No, he will not talking. Nothing, he will be like this before but this is worse. What do I do?"

"I think..." Shane started. "I think he just needs a push, right? He's usually okay when he gets going, when he has something going on, a distraction. Maybe just try and get him talking."

"Okay," Pava said. "I will try."

After hanging up the phone, Pava took a moment to psych himself up. He wasn't the best at talking about hard things like this, it always made him uncomfortable. He didn't have many friends growing up, and sometimes it felt like he had missed out on all of his chances to learn how to be a good friend.

He cracked open the door.

"Ilyukha?"

Ilya didn't respond. Pava walked around the side of the bed. His eyes were open, he was looking at his phone lock screen, the occasional notification popping up. Pava noticed a text from Svetlana.

He reached out to touch Ilya's shoulder.

"Leave me alone, kid."

Pava persisted. *"I really think you should get up. It's not good for you to be in bed all day."*

Ilya raised his eyebrow as he gave Pava a hard look. *"I think I know what's good for me. Fuck off."*

Pava frowned as Ilya turned onto his other side so that his back was now facing him.

"We could go for a walk," Pava offered. "Go do something. Or I could invite Marly over—"

That seemed to get his attention. Ilya sat up suddenly, his hair was stuck to one side of his face, he had bags under his eyes even though he must have slept for half the day, and he levelled a glare that made Pava go silent.

"You're not my fucking mother, leave me the fuck alone."

Somehow, Pava had a bit of courage left. *"You can't keep doing this, Ilyukha, it's bad for you. I can't do anything if you—"*

"Do you thinking I fucking wanna be like this?" Ilya shouted, his voice echoing through the empty house. He swung his legs over the edge of the mattress. *"Do you think I'm trying to do this? That this is fucking fun for me?"*

Pava took a step back, he could feel himself tensing up. He didn't like it when people shouted.

"I know it's not fucking okay Pava, I know all the things I'm supposed to be doing and I'm not, that's all I fucking think about and I can't fucking do them. I don't know how to fix it, yeah? Neither the fuck do you, so you have no fucking right to tell me what I should be doing."

Pava looked over at his friend with wide eyes. *"I just wanna help you."*

"Well you can't fucking help me. Apparently there's something seriously fucking wrong with me."

Ilya's voice started to break a bit. It was different than that day in the karaoke club.

"Everything's fucked, Pava. It's fucked in Montreal, and it's fucked here, Marly won't fucking talk to me, and I was supposed to fix it and I can't fix it. I think I'm fucking delusional, and I'm roping Shane and everyone else into it just because of my stupid ego, and I'm just fucking it up more."

"You're not," Pava tried. *"You're not messing anything up, you're a good person."*

"You don't know me," Ilya said. *"You really don't know me. I'm selfish, and I'm lazy, and I'm not so delusional I don't know it's true. And I can't get my stupid fucking brain to do what I need it to do, and I know I'm letting you down, and I'm letting Shane down, but I don't know what I'm supposed to do about it. If my mother couldn't fix it, how the fuck can I? And how will Shane ever forgive me?"*

With that, Ilya fully gave in. He dropped his head into his hands and started sobbing, his shoulder's shaking uncontrollably as he tried and failed to regulate his breathing.

Pava stood stiffly in place. The small stretch of space between them felt like kilometers.

He had never been in a situation like this before, at least not where he was the only one around to help. Where he was the one who was supposed to know what to do. He didn't know what to do exactly. What would a six foot tall sobbing hockey player need right now?

Back home, Pava sometimes had moments like these. It hadn't happened in a long time, but back when he was just starting with his new minor team, he got overwhelmed easily. He would get so stressed and filled with guilt after losing a game that he would break down and start crying as soon as he got in the car with his mom. She'd reach over the console and hold him. It helped.

Pava took a few steps forward and sat next to Ilya on the mattress. He stretched out both arms and wrapped them around his friend, holding him close.

He hoped it helped.

* * *

Ilya went to the game the next day.

Weirdly, his incredibly humiliating breakdown helped. It was like a massive release of energy that finally got him to move his ass.

He didn't look Pava in the eye for several hours after, but he called Shane, and he finally agreed to find a therapist. For their sake, at least.

They lost the game that afternoon. It was a close one, too, they were three minutes from going to overtime before Chicago tied it up. Despite the fact that they played 82 games a year and lost a good chunk of those, his team always took the losses to heart. Tonight, Ilya just didn't have it in him to give any words of encouragement.

He sat on the concrete barrier in the hallway leading to the parkade entryway. Pava had fucked up his ankle in the last period and was getting it wrapped, so Ilya was waiting until he was ready to go. He practically sunk back into his hoodie as he tapped through his phone.

He was, possibly embarrassingly, looking through his secret album of his photos with Shane. He definitely wasn't supposed to have it, but he couldn't help it. Him and Shane at the cottage. Him and Shane swimming. Shane driving. Shane in his Christmas pyjamas. All of them, Shane smiling and happy.

Like some stupid fantasy he constructed in his gallery app.

"Hey, man."

Ilya looked up, startled by the sound of the all-too familiar voice. He looked completely normal, like their friendship hadn't recently curled up and died.

"Rough game," he continued, seemingly unable to recognize the look behind Ilya's eyes. "Everyone's going out for pity drinks, you coming?"

Ilya levelled him a glare just to really get his point across. "Leave me alone Marly."

Marly made a face like he was surprised. What was there to be surprised about? "Dude, what's wrong? It's just fuckin' Chicago."

Ilya shoved his phone into his pocket and slid off the barrier to his feet. It didn't help much considering Cliff still towered over him, but it made him feel more serious. "You're the one who's acting like I'm diseased, you tell me what the fuck is wrong."

Cliff frowned. "I haven't been—what?"

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "Yes you fucking are, ever since I fucking told you. You don't send me your stupid texts and you aren't talking like normal. If you don't want to talk to me, and you're uncomfortable with a fag in the locker room at least say it to my fucking face, and get the fuck over yourself."

Cliff's eyes flew wide open, and he quickly turned to look over his shoulder. "That's—That's not—no, no I'm not. It's not 'cause you like sucking cock, or whatever. Or, I guess it kinda is, but not that shit. Like, I have a girlfriend."

Ilya blinked. "So fucking what?"

"Well, if you like dudes, then it's like, weird to be texting you. Like, what if I were regularly texting some girl that slid into my DMs? That's basically cheating, that's fucked up."

Ilya took a moment to collect himself. This was what he got for being friends with a bunch of guys who barely finished high school. He pressed his hands together and gestured toward Cliff as genuinely as he could muster. "Marly. That is so fucking stupid. I don't want to fuck you and your weird fucking hairline. You are not my type."

Cliff frowned and reached a hand to his forehead. "What? I mean..." he narrowed his eyes. "Well, you're not my type. Bitch."

Ilya's jaw dropped. "Why the fuck not?"

"What do you mean why not?"

"Why am I not your type, Marly?"

"You're...you're too European."

"What does that even mean?"

"Like, you're not rugged enough."

Ilya threw up his hands. "What does that even mean? I am Russian."

"You're afraid of the outdoors. You own too much white clothing."

"What, so I am not sexy to you just because I do not wear stupid Carhartt and know how to use a razor?"

"Why are you so upset? You just told me I'm not your type!"

"Yes but that is because you are you," he said, gesturing to the taller man. "I am universally handsome. This is just a fact."

Marly narrowed his eyes. "Noor says I'm Burt Reynolds handsome."

"The point is," Ilya started again, "you being normal friends with your captain who happens to fuck dudes is not the same as sexting an Instagram model."

Cliff threw up his hands. "I don't fucking know! I'm trying to be, like, respectful. The last chick dumped me for texting other girls, I'm not gonna fucking risk it. Isn't that, like, how equal rights work? Just because you don't have a pussy doesn't mean it doesn't count, you could still hit on me."

"Marly," Ilya said, his face must have looked absolutely bewildered. "Did Noor tell you you're not allowed to be friendly with gay men?"

Cliff narrowed his eyes. “Well...no. But I’m trying to be proactive. Like, in that one podcast where they said the bar was in the ground for men. I’m trying to—” he gestured his hands upward, “—raise the bar.”

Ilya let silence fill the space for a moment. What the actual fuck was wrong with straight men? Ilya would say that at least his heart was in the right place, but even that was generous.

“You’re such a fucking idiot, Marly,” Ilya said. “I’m not trying to fuck you, I’m not trying to show you my dick. I have a boyfriend.”

Now it was Cliff’s turn to look bewildered. “What? I didn’t know you...did that.”

“What? Men?”

“Boyfriends. Wait, I thought you were seeing that girl from Montreal.”

Ilya took a step forward and placed his hands on Cliff’s shoulders. He was relieved to feel that the taller man didn’t flinch or move away.

“I am going to tell you something, and I need you to be fucking chill about it, yes?”

Cliff nodded as though Ilya was about to divulge state secrets.

“The Montreal girl is actually a Montreal man. Jane is a fake name.”

Cliff’s lips moved to form a small “O.”

“And,” Ilya started a little too dramatically.

Cliff leaned forward.

“Jane is actually Shane Hollander. And Shane Hollander is my lover.”

Cliff blinked, his face weirdly neutral. He moved to cross his arms. “This makes so much sense.”

Ilya made a face. “What?”

“Like, if someone’s gonna lock you down, of course it’s Shane Fucking Hollander. A fucking model. Top player in the league. And he’s a fuckin’ dreamboat. Like, I don’t wanna try dick, but if I did, I’d probably go with Hollander. I bet it’s fuckin’ massive too. Honestly I probably should’ve known something was up, you never shut up about that guy.”

Ilya frowned. “I am best player in the league.”

“Too bad you can’t have babies together,” Cliff said. “Imagine the offspring.”

“Trust me, I am trying my best.”

“How did you even pull him? You locked him down for real?”

Ilya shrugged. “I am irresistible.”

“Oh, shit. Now I’m just thinking of all the times I saw your Jane texts. This actually makes a lot of sense, Hollander seemed too boring, I thought he had to be a bit of a low-key freak. You’d be into that.”

“Is it weird if I keep slapping your ass?”

“That was always weird, Marly.”

Marly nodded. “But if I stop slapping your ass then I gotta stop slapping everyone else’s ass. Then they’ll know something’s up.”

Ilya looked up from where he was clear taping his socks. He raised his eyebrows. “If you want to touch my ass, Marly, I don’t care.”

“Huh.”

Honestly, Marly had been overcompensating since everything went down last week. Ilya probably would have assumed that he hadn’t thought much of it at all if it weren’t for the fact that he received a call from him the very next day.

“Hello?”

“Hi,” a female voice had answered. “Ilya?”

Ilya looked from side to side even though he was standing alone in the kitchen. “Yes?”

“Hey, sorry, it’s Noor, Cliff’s girlfriend.”

“Ah, yes, Noor,” Ilya replied. “You have finally killed Marly and stolen his phone?”

“Not quite, but it came close,” she said. “Anyway, I’m just calling because Cliff—” Ilya could head some sort of ruckus on the other end, “—has something he wants to say to you.”

Muffled sounds came through the speaker as it was transferred. “Hey Roz—ow! I’m doing it, I’m doing it!” Cliff’s voice echoed through. Ilya could practically hear Noor coaching him through the phone. “Hey Roz,” he repeated. “I just want to apologize for, like, ignoring you. I shouldn’t’ve assumed anything about you.” Ilya heard a whack sound on the other end. “Or about what Noor would want. Anyway, I’m sorry. I have learned...and I am...trying to do better. Noor said I’m an idiot. And...I support you. As an ally.” He was pausing a lot in weird spaces. Ilya was almost certain Noor must’ve been doing insane charades for him.

Ilya let the line go silent for a moment, just to make Marly sweat. “You are whipped,” he said eventually.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Whatever Noor said had worked, things were pretty much back to normal. The one difference is that Marly had now latched onto the podcast thing even more, if that was even possible. He was playing exclusively gay-informative media, and always gave Ilya a low-key thumbs up every time he did. Jesus Christ, did Ilya regret ever starting this whole thing. He knew too much about the Roman Empire now.

Today though, for Pride Night, Marly had taken control of the aux for a different reason.

“Okay, everyone,” Marly announced, standing in the middle of the room with his hands up. “I have a gay playlist that’s approved by my gay nephew. He said we have to play it today, for solidarity.”

Delly raised his hand as if he was in class. “What makes it a gay playlist?”

Marly shrugged. “I dunno. I think there’s Lady Gaga.”

“Nice.”

Ilya took the roll of tape that Marly passed to him. The guys only really used the rainbow tape for a small portion of warmups before switching to regular tape so they could break in their tape job before the game. It didn’t matter if the guy was the biggest ally out there, you would never catch a hockey player swapping his favourite tape for a game.

Ilya was included in this, though he had decided to use some rainbow tape on his handle to carry through into the game. He finished wrapping up his warmup stick, along with the handles of his game sticks, before passing it on to Pava.

Pava gave him a small smile as he took it and began working on his own stick.

One thing Ilya hadn’t thought about, was the fact that Pava taped his stick like a crazy person. When the media at All-Stars had asked who had the worst tape job, Ilya had said Pava. Probably everyone said Pava (except Shane, because he was obsessed with Ilya). The kid only used about eight inches of tape, placed horizontally along the blade, one on each side. With the way that the colours worked out, he was left with a single strip of purple on the backhand, and red on the forehand.

Ilya cocked his head to the side. *“If you look at it from this side, it kinda just looks like you’re repping the red army.”*

Pava frowned. *“That’s not what I was going for.”*

“Just use lots on the handle,” Ilya said. *“It’ll show up fine.”*

“Okay.”

Ilya scanned the room. He couldn’t help but feel the warm and fuzzy feeling as he watched each of his teammates wrapping up their sticks and tugging on their rainbow warmup jerseys. Ilya tossed an extra roll to Connors, who hadn’t put any tape on yet.

“Here,” he called, nearly whacking him in the head with it.

Connors groaned as he looked at the tape in distaste. “Dude, do I have to? You know I like breaking in my tape during warmups.”

Ilya made a face. “Just put it on your handle then, use your head.”

Connors didn’t seem to be a fan of this idea either.

“You should just put it on,” Cloutier chimed in, “you know they’ll be a fuckin’ witch hunt if you don’t.”

Ilya was about to shoot a retort at the defenseman, something about his stupid hair again, but he was cut off by Cliff.

“Don’t be a pussy,” he said. “It’s just some rainbow tape, dude, doesn’t make you a homo.”

Ilya squinted. Okay, the spirit was there, even if he hadn't quite gotten the words right. "Yes," Ilya agreed. "Besides, you should be supporting Marly's gay nephew."

"Yeah!" Marly added. "What about my gay nephew?"

Connors looked confused. "I don't know your gay nephew."

"And you never will if you don't use that tape."

"My sister is a lesbian, b'y," Newf chimed in from across the room. "Ran off wi' the girl from down the road she did. Let me do a speech at'er wedding, by the Lard Jaysus do those type know 'ow to party."

Connors sighed, but that seemed to be enough to convince him. He wrapped a few rounds right in the middle of his stick, where it wouldn't affect the rest of his tape job. He passed the roll off to Cloutier.

Cloutier seemed to notice half the room staring at him as he held the rainbow roll of tape. "Christ guys, I'll use the fucking tape. I'm not fucking homophobic, I literally watched Orange is the New Black."

"And we're proud of you for that," Marly said. "Progress."

"I do not watch," Pava interjected. "Is much too American."

"You might like," Ilya said. "There is a Russian lady."

Pava seemed to consider this.

It was then that Alan, public relations extraordinaire, burst into the room. He first made eye contact with Ilya, sending a quick thumbs up before turning to address the room.

"Hey guys, just wanted to say good luck tonight, we're gonna have a lot of media today," he said. He always waved his hands too much when he talked. "There'll be a lot of extra cameras in today, before you go out for warmups we'll have a few of you guys pulled for media, just some stuff about what supporting pride means to you, all that stuff, if that's something you're comfortable doing, please let us know. Otherwise, good luck, I want to thank you all for participating, this is a big night for us, we've got some staff from one of the LBGT shelters in the area coming in for puck drop, it's gonna be a very exciting night." He ended with a double thumbs up aimed all around the room.

"Don't even worry about it," Marly said, and Ilya knew before it even happened that he was going to listen to him say something incredibly stupid. "You know my nephew's gay?" He added.

Alan nodded vigorously, temporarily unsure of what to say. "Awesome. Yes, good for him. Great news. Anyway, I'll see you all in ten with the cameras. Make sure you're all decent."

Alan practically beelined out of the room. Ilya reached out to pat Cliff on the arm. "What is it they say in America? You are God's strongest soldier?"

Cliff looked genuinely touched.

* * *

As Ilya stood in the Bears dressing room, journalists and cameras roaming the floor, getting shots of the walls and lockers plastered in rainbow lettering and logos, he failed to tamp down his smile. Of

course, he knew much of it was performative. The dressing room makeover, the rainbow jerseys, the media, mostly it was there to win people over and make money. The Voyageurs did the same exact thing. Ilya remembered one of his first years in the league, watching his Captain, a man who used slurs in the locker room like it was his job, stand in front of a reporter and endorse You Can Play, talking about how important inclusivity in hockey is.

Maybe it was just wishful thinking, but it really did feel different this time. Maybe it was the way that, this year, unlike their last pride night, every single Bear was using pride tape. Or, the way that several of the journalists had told them that their opponents were also taping up their sticks in rainbow tape. Most likely, he was probably just persuaded by Marly, who was trying with all his might not to bring up his gay nephew on camera after Ilya told him to knock it off.

Pava stood beside Ilya, gripping his stick like a lifeline. The locker room hadn't been this hectic since the playoffs last year.

"Ilya, Kosmodemyansky, can we get you in for a shot?" one of the press asked, appearing in front of the two. Before Pava had the chance to respond, Ilya spoke up for him. "Just me, today," he said. "Don't worry, I will be interesting enough for two."

With Pava's hesitation with using the tape and jerseys at all, Ilya assured him he wouldn't have to do any media. Talking about it directly on camera was a bit outside his comfort zone.

Ilya assumed his position in front of his locker, his name plastered behind him in rainbow letters as he was swarmed by a smattering of reporters thrusting recording devices in his face. This wasn't anything new, the whole team had pretty much cycled through the regular bottled up replies. Just happy to support the community. Hockey is for everyone. Blah blah blah.

"So, Ilya," one of the reporters started up, "what does it mean for the Bears to be putting on a pride night again this year?"

Ilya knew what the question was going to be, and he also knew that the reporters had been explicitly told that they weren't allowed to ask him any questions about Russia today. That actually wasn't new, reporters usually weren't allowed to ask him about Russia anyway outside of the Olympics. If there was one thing about the NHL, they hated politics. Well, unless it was the Stanley Cup winners going to the White House, that was acceptable for some reason.

Ilya shrugged. "Yes, yes," he said. "We are always very glad to host these nights, show our support for the community. It is...very easy, to put some tape on your stick, yes? I think it is the least we can do."

"There's a lot of discussion about the several teams that have rescinded their plans for themed jerseys for their own pride nights. It seems especially concerning considering that it was only two years ago that Scott Hunter came out as the first openly gay NHL player, do you think there's any connection here?"

Ilya could see Alan sweating bullets behind the interviewers, if he had caught him in time, there was no way Ilya would've been allowed to talk to the press. But he wasn't intervening. Ilya was probably supposed to say "no comment." Shane was probably watching this and begging him through the screen to say something reasonable.

"Scott Hunter, you should stop talking about him so much, if his head gets too big then his old weak knees will not be able to support it." Ilya paused as a smattering of laughs amongst the reporters seemed to defuse the tension a bit. "No, no, I think we will not let other teams decide what we do,

yes? We have done our pride nights long before Hunter and we will keep doing them. Besides, look how excited Marly is for this, he will throw himself into the harbour if we stop. He loves whenever we get to wear the fun jerseys.”

Ilya hoped that would be the end of it, but that was too optimistic.

“But what do you think about the opinion that maybe politics should stay out of hockey? That by doing all this, having the players skate around and declare their beliefs, it’s distracting from the game?” An older man chimed in.

At the last second, Ilya prevented himself from rolling his eyes. He could play this better.

“What is distracting about rainbows?” He asked the journalist, playing dumb.

“Just, every year it seems to spark a conversation about what player supports what, it gets more attention than the actual game. It seems like some people just look for an excuse to get angry.”

This time Ilya actually did roll his eyes, publicist be damned. “I think...” he said, giving himself the opportunity to collect his English. “It does not matter to you, if someone used the tape or not, yes? But if you are feeling like you do not belong, it can mean very much. The media, they are always talking about growing the game. You do not grow the game by ignoring its problems.”

It was then that Alan finally decided to step in, placing a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “Alright, I think that’s all for our captain. I think we have Victor up next. If you guys would like to assemble, he’ll be over by his locker in just a second.”

Ilya watched Alan’s face carefully as the reporters dispersed. “Am I in trouble?” Ilya asked.

“No, no,” Alan assured. “You handled yourself very well, and don’t worry, the team will fully support you.”

Huh. Maybe Alan wasn’t as boring as Ilya thought. Of course, the fact that Ilya was their franchise player probably helped, they probably wouldn’t be so generous with their support if he was a third-liner.

Ilya felt Marly appear back at his side. This guy had turned into a fucking magnet recently. “Maybe next time we play in Winnipeg, I should invite my gay nephew.”

Ilya turned to look at him. “You don’t need to keep calling him gay nephew. You can just say nephew.”

“Yeah...but honestly, knowing him, I think he’d like to be known that way. He’s, like, eyeshadow gay.”

* * *

“Ilya Grigorovich Rozanov.”

Ilya grimaced. Sveta using his full name was never a good sign.

“Hello Svetlana Sergeevna Vetrova,” Ilya replied as he watched her clammer into his home. He suddenly wished he had Pava here for backup, but the kid was currently at Margaret’s house fixing a taillight that went out. Or maybe it was something about a fan. Or the oil. Ilya wasn’t sure, he loved driving fancy cars, but he didn’t know a thing about them. That’s what you pay mechanics for.

Sveta approached his dining table, pulling out a chair for herself and gesturing to the one just across. Oh, looks like this was serious then.

Once Ilya was settled, she laced her hands together and placed them on the table. *"Ilyusha, I am going to tell you something, and it can't leave this room. Not unless you want me to lose my job."*

Ilya raised his eyebrows. *"Since when did you become responsible, Sveta? I could almost forget you're the same girl that did coke in a porta-potty at Burning Man."*

Sveta gave him a stern look. *"Promise?"*

Ilya raised his hands in surrender. *"Promise."*

Sveta huffed, leaning back in her seat as she crossed her arms. *"I don't know why I even bother. I'm sure you're well aware."*

"Well aware of what?"

"Can you explain to me why the general manager was in my office today requesting that I compile a report on Hollander and what we should be offering to Montreal for him?"

Ilya scratched at his nose. *"What? Crazy."*

Sveta looked unimpressed. *"I said to Mike, 'what do you mean? Hollander has a NMC,' he said, 'maybe not.'"* She raised her eyebrows. *"How do you think he would know that?"*

Ilya shrugged. *"Michael must be very good at his job. Going for the big fish. I guess Montreal must be looking to trade. Weird."*

"Ilyusha," she said. *"How long has this been going on? You're so obvious when you're plotting."*

"I've broken no rules," Ilya insisted. *"Just sharing about a friend. I'm not Hollander, I'm not his agent, they're allowed to talk to me. It's not my fault if they're persuaded to talk to Montreal."*

"And does Hollander know you're doing this?"

Ilya was suddenly very interested in some fluff on the sleeve of his sweater. *"I may have suggested to Hollander that Montreal is a garbage fuckwad of a team and that maybe he'd have a better time if he moved to Boston. Then maybe he said 'noooo, Ilya, it could never work.'"* Ilya shrugged. *"I'm making it work."*

Sveta raised her eyebrows. *"Behind his back?"*

Ilya threw up his hands with a huff. *"Look, Sveta, ever since he came out to Montreal, it's been awful. He can't stay there, he's fucking miserable. So, maybe I can't fix Montreal, but I can at least try to fix Boston. I can get him here, and I can make it better. They listen to me."*

Sveta paused for a few moments, then loudly clapped her hands together before pointing accusatorily at Ilya. *"Are you fucking kidding me? You guys actually were listening to a podcast about the Laurentide Ice Sheet in the locker room, I thought I was going fucking crazy!"*

"That was Doherty's idea. He always picks the most boring topics."

"You think you're going to fix your locker room through the power of podcasts?"

"I didn't think it could hurt, Sveta! Is it so bad that I want my boyfriend to be somewhere safe? That one day I want us to be able to come out together? So I can show him off to the world?"

"Do you seriously think that even if you can woke-ify your locker room, that's suddenly gonna make Shane Hollander ready to come out?"

"I'm not stupid, Sveta, I know it's not gonna be easy, and it doesn't need to happen right away, but if Scott Hunter did it, we can too! And I told Marly and it was fine, if anything he's just impressed with my game. I think the team would be fine."

"But that's the thing, Ilyusha, Shane isn't you."

"What does that even mean?"

"Shane isn't white, you moron."

Ilya blinked, so taken aback that he was temporarily at a loss for words. *"I know this Sveta."*

"Really? Because you aren't acting like it."

Ilya shook his head, confused. *"Of course, I know, Sveta, I get it. I know things are harder for him, he's told me about it. I know he gets shit on the ice, I know he feels like he doesn't belong. But what does that have to do with—"*

"Everything, Ilya, everything!" Sveta huffed, pushing back her curls. She gave Ilya an exasperated, but sympathetic look. *"I'm going to say something, and I need you to listen to me. Don't get defensive."*

"I don't get defensive."

Sveta gave him a look.

"Fine. I'm listening."

She set her hands flat on the table and spoke carefully. *"Ilyusha, you should never have been drafted first overall."*

Ilya blinked. He stayed silent.

"If I were the GM at that draft, I would have picked Hollander," she continued. *"Anyone should have picked Hollander. You're amazing, Ilyusha, but Hollander was better."*

Ilya didn't find himself particularly hurt by that statement. Sveta was always so blunt, and besides, while he loved hockey, it wasn't everything. Not like it was to Shane.

"The only reason they didn't draft Hollander first is because of what he looks like," she said. *"You heard it then and you still hear it now. He's not physical, his presence is too small, he's weak defensively."*

"That's not true," Ilya protested. Sure, he loved to tease Hollander about it, that he wasn't as big and strong as Ilya, but statistically that just wasn't the case. Maybe he wasn't making hits like Ilya was, but his defense was above average.

"No, it's not," Sveta agreed. "I mean, remember Sochi? He was this close to being left off the team despite the fact that he was the leading goal scorer in the league, all because the GM said he wanted a physical team."

Ilya was ashamed to admit that he never thought that closely about it all. But now, when Sveta laid it out in front of him so clearly, it was obvious. And Ilya was an idiot.

"Shane is so worried about being perfect at everything," Ilya admitted. "He's always so critical of himself."

"Now, if something like being Asian can fuck with his career that much, imagine coming out on top of all that. Do you think he's gonna be afforded any grace? Do you think anyone's gonna take him seriously? Think of all the ways he's already criticized for being soft and weak, and multiply that ten-fold."

Ilya blinked. *"I didn't think..."*

"I'm not saying it's easy for you, you don't have to explain Russia to me," she said. "And if you come out, it won't be easy here for you either. But it'll be easier, you have a reputation as a ladies man, no one's gonna question your masculinity."

Suddenly, Ilya couldn't help but feel absolutely terrible. All those small jabs Ilya would always use to tease Shane, they never seemed to actually bother him all that much, but what if they did? Every time Ilya called him second-best. Boring and serious. Pretty.

"I'm not saying this to make you feel bad," Sveta said, as if she was reading his mind. "I just want you to be careful. He's...he's not overreacting. This is the kind of thing that could ruin his career. It kinda seems like it almost has already."

Ilya nodded. He knew that his own precarious situation with his country was a major barrier for them, but part of him had sort of imagined that if he was able to get citizenship, there'd be little stopping them from coming out. Eventually, of course. He knew it wouldn't be easy, there were always going to be assholes in the league, but it would be worth it if it meant they could be together.

But maybe it wasn't worth it. Maybe there would always be too big a risk. Not just because of Russia, and not just because of the bigots. Ilya wasn't sure he could ask Shane to potentially give up his career, just, for what? So Ilya could hold his hand in public?

"This is so fucking unfair," Ilya huffed.

Sveta shrugged. *"Welcome to my world."*

Ilya leaned over to rest his chin on his arms. *"Did I fuck up?"*

"No, no," Sveta said, reaching forward to place a soothing hand on his wrist. "I still agree, whatever the Bears have going on must be worlds better than the fucking Voyageurs. All I'm saying is...your happy ending might not be the same as Scott Hunter's. And you need to be okay with that."

Ilya smirked. *"Happy ending, huh? You make me sound like a tragic prince."*

"You are very tragic."

"And I am very lucky to have you."

Sveta smiled, a twinkle in her eye. *“This is true. And Boston will be very lucky to have Shane Hollander.”*

Chapter End Notes

I knew from the start of this story that I wanted to explore the rookie’s relationship with Pride. Over the past few years, the NHL has had a very controversial and chaotic past with pride nights. The first NHL Pride night was put on by the Florida Panthers in 2013, and by 2018, every single team was hosting a pride night. Often this included wearing pride themed jerseys, and putting rainbow tape on their sticks.

Things started going downhill in 2023, when several players put out statements that they would not be wearing pride jerseys. Some players, like the Staal brothers, Ivan Provorov, and James Reimer, cited their religion. Other players such as Ilya Lyubushkin and Andrei Kuzmenko put out statements that they would abstain from wearing the jerseys due to fear of Russian law. This eventually led to several teams, such as the Wild, the Blackhawks, and the Rangers, having their entire teams opt out of the jerseys, citing concern for Russian players. Though, several Russian players, like Geno Malkin and Sergei Bobrovsky have worn pride jerseys without issue, and the deputy commissioner of the NHL stated that they had no reason to believe it was unsafe for Russian players to wear pride jerseys.

Shoutout to the Russians in my DMs that have discussed this with me. The general consensus is that it’s unlikely someone might get in trouble back home for something like this done overseas. If you’re just wearing tape/jerseys, it probably wouldn’t make trouble back home. However, if you’re outspoken in the media about pride (especially if you’re anti-government), it’s more likely you’d face repercussions. The language in the anti LGBT law is purposefully vague in order to make people more likely to self police. Ilya here is definitely flying too close to the sun, but since he has no intention of returning to Russia, he can be a little bold.

Even so, in 2023, the NHL put out a league-wide ban on ALL themed jerseys. This included pride, military appreciation, cancer awareness, the works. They then went on to explicitly ban the use of pride tape. Obviously, a lot of people were very mad about this, and players like Connor McDavid and Rasmus Andersson openly objected to the ban.

The ban on tape very quickly was reversed after Travis Dermott of the Coyotes defied the ban and wore the tape for warmups. To this day, specialty jerseys for theme nights are still banned. This all took place around 2023 exacerbated by an alteration in the anti-LGBT propaganda law. The law aimed to prevent the promotion of LGBT relationships among minors, but then shifted in 2022 to apply as a blanket ban regardless of the age of exposure. I’m moving it up to 2018/2019 in this timeline because it’s something I really wanted to explore in this fic.

The conversation between Ilya and Sveta concerning Shane and his experience with race is really something I've been wanting to explore. I've hinted a bit about it in previous chapters, but given that they're mostly in Ilya's POV, it hadn't been explicitly discussed. I feel like Shane is not done justice in the books, and I feel like sometimes Shane is framed as being ridiculous for being so hesitant to come out, but the reality is that for someone who is already being faced with scrutiny and expectations associated with his race, that would only elevate ten fold if he came out as a gay man.

Anyway, here's a really great tumblr post that discusses [racism in the NHL](#) and specifically how it would affect Shane. While it's not canon, the bit about Shane hardly making the Olympic team is based on what happened with Jason Robertson with the USA Olympic team this year, though in his case, he actually was left off the roster.

Note: I can't say for sure that race is the reason Shane is drafted second, we don't have enough information as readers regarding Shane and Ilya's performance before they're drafted. However, I do think it's very much a possibility, and it was something I thought would be interesting to explicitly examine here.

I've hit the character limit, however I have too much to say that I refuse to remove, so I'm putting that in the first comment if you're inclined to read it. I was up until 4 am googling NMC mechanics this trying to make sure I got the math right with when free agency would kick in.





Chapter 19: Moms Trip

Chapter Summary

Ilya watched Pava fumble his way out of the car, trying to balance the pile of gifts he had brought.

“You know you could’ve left those at home?” Ilya said.

“Shut up.”

Chapter Notes

Of course I want the Oilers to win every Stanley cup for the rest of time, but I also kinda saw this coming. By game two we had McDavid, Hyman, Draisaitl, Dickinson, and Henrique all injured, and at that point what are you gonna do? I have high hopes for next year when we aren't too burnt out and battered. The vibes have been off this year and I hope they can get some rest.

The thing that does make me sad is seeing the fan reaction online. I’m really not one to bash athletes if they're having a rough performance, they're trying their best and I’m sitting on the couch watching. It makes me sad how mean and pessimistic so many fans are after a loss. I'm proud of my team and I'll keep on believing in them.

Anyway that’s all the sadness I have for the Oilers here. Sending positive vibes to McDavid and his Greek tragedy level struggles (I hope you stick around. We love you. I worry about you like a neighbour. My TikTok is filled to the brim with sad McDavid edits), and good luck to the Canadiens!! I return to my relentless quest to figure out how to consistently watch PWHL games (no they don't stream on YouTube in Canada).

Thank you for the comments!!! Especially the ones hyping up my notes, it is very healing. As an engineering student I had to take only one humanities course in my entire degree, and I ended up doing a history class. I had to write an essay for the final submission and I put all this work in and the final note I got was “great research and information in here but you never actually argued anything” and honestly yeah he got me there. I simply never learnt creative writing so we are running off pure vibes.

Find me on [Tumblr!](#)



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

Pava was practically vibrating out of his seat, if his seatbelt wasn't done up, Ilya might've thought he'd float away. Today was a big week for the Bears, but especially so for Pava.

It was the Moms Trip.

It was something the Bears did usually once a season. Sometimes it was the Dads Trip, sometimes the Moms Trip, an occasion where each player's family would tag along to an away game or two. Ilya had never gotten to participate.

Last year, the Bears held their annual Dads trip, but Pava hadn't taken part. Ilya wasn't exactly sure what the situation with his dad was, if he was alive or around. The kid never mentioned him when he talked about home, and Ilya never pushed. Him not coming to the Dads trip wasn't all that telling, a lot of the international dads only came sporadically.

This year, however, Ilya pulled into a parking spot at Logan International, ready to pick up Pava's mother and both his sisters. The kid had been anticipating this for weeks. The spare rooms were made up, they had bought house slippers in bulk from Ikea, and their pantry was stocked full of tea. Ilya watched Pava fumble his way out of the car, trying to balance the pile of gifts he had brought.

"You know you could've left those at home?" Ilya said.

"Shut up."

Ilya was sure that their sad excuse for disguises (sunglasses and baseball caps) would hold off fans well enough, this wasn't Montreal, after all. Still, he had arrived close to their arrival time just to be sure they wouldn't have to wait for long at the arrivals gate.

Pava leaned against the gate, craning his neck as if the extra millisecond of seeing his family would make a difference.

“What do you have in there?” Ilya asked, gesturing to the bag with his chin.

Pava held open the plastic, showing off his haul. It was about 50% cartons of Oreos, two Boston Bears branded plushies, and a bag of saltwater taffy. Pava plucked the taffy out of the bag.

“It’s my mama’s favourite,” he explained. *“She likes sweet things. I brought some for her this summer and she ate it all in a day.”*

Ilya smiled. *“Sounds like someone I know.”*

Pava’s attention was suddenly jerked to the arrivals gate at the telltale sounds of French speaking passengers funnelling through the door with their luggage in tow. His family had connected through Paris.

Pava’s family was nothing like what Ilya expected, though he supposed he didn’t really have any expectations. Maybe he thought they’d be taller.

Pava’s mother, when she emerged through the doors, was barely visible above the luggage cart she was pushing (which was admittedly piled high). She was short and stocky, and much younger than Ilya had expected for someone that had a son Pava’s age. She couldn’t be out of her thirties.

Ilya knew that Pava’s sisters, at seven and ten, were significantly younger than him. The youngest, Katya, seemed to take after her mother. She, too, was quite small in size, though there was still time for her to grow. Pava had informed Ilya on the car ride over that she was the figure skater of the family, she loved sparkly dresses, and she loved climbing on her brother like a jungle gym. The oldest sister, Zhenya, had apparently shot up in height since Pava had last seen her. She was also entering her angsty pre-teen phase, which she mainly expressed by wearing big black boots and hating school. She was the family speed skater, a family of athletes.

“Zdravstvuyte, Anna Pavsikakiyevna,” Ilya said, reaching out to shake hands with Pava’s mother. His hands were immediately batted away to kiss him on both cheeks.

“None of that, Ilyusha,” she said, proceeding to pull him into a hug. *“I’ve been looking forward to meeting you. Call me Anna.”*

That was the other thing, the rest of Pava’s family seemed to have completely reasonable names. Boring names, even, you could pick them out of a top ten list. What went wrong with Pava?

Ilya also received a shy wave from Katya, and a casual nod from Zhenya, who decided to speak for the first time since setting foot in Boston.

“Can we go to McDonalds?” Zhenya asked.

Pava huffed. *“Zhenya, you have McDonalds at home.”*

“It’s different here,” she insisted. *“I want a happy meal.”*

Watching Pava with his family was a strange shift. Ilya was so used to seeing Pava as the little one, the rookie, the kid. Now, he watched as Pava hovered over his siblings, cleaning the ketchup off of Katya’s face and attempting to tame Zhenya’s hair as she consistently batted him away. He looked... so grown up.

Ilya found that he didn't have much to contribute to the conversation as he sat and ate his Big Mac, happy to let everyone else fill the silence. Ilya had a hard time describing how exactly it felt to be there, surrounded by conversation almost as if he was a part of the family. It was strange. It was a bit like being with the Hollanders, yet somehow both more familiar and more foreign. He couldn't help but feel like he wasn't supposed to be there at all.

"We get to watch you play?" Katya asked, absolutely demolishing her fries.

"Yes," Pava replied. *"Three games."*

"Are we gonna see Sidney Crosby?"

Pava frowned. *"Eh, no."*

"Can we see the White House?" Zhenya asked.

"No, that's in Washington. We aren't going there."

Both girls scrunched up their faces in distaste. It was so fucking cute.

"What are we gonna do for a whole week?" Zhenya huffed.

"We're going to New York," Pava said. *"You can see the Statue of Liberty."* The girls seemed to perk up significantly at that. *"And Montreal. You get to go to Canada. There's lots of French people."*

"French people are weird," Katya declared.

"You are absolutely right," Ilya interjected. *"And they're even weirder in Quebec. You'll have fun there, all their money is plastic."*

"And we can get Beavertails," Pava offered.

Ilya raised an eyebrow. *"When did you have a Beavertail?"*

Pava only shrugged in response.

Zhenya's eyes widened in response. *"They eat beavers there?"*

"Yes," Pava said seriously. *"They're not bad, you should try."*

"No way," Zhenya said. *"That's so gross!"*

"You're so picky," Ilya said, joining in. *"What's the point of going to a new country if you don't try new foods?"*

Pava's mother reached over to pet Katya on the head, who seemed to be entering a proper state of panic. *"Relax bunny,"* Anna said, before raising a conspiratorial gaze, *"you only have to try a little bit, we'll make sure they get rid of all of the fur."*

* * *

Pava couldn't stop staring at the family box.

"You're distracted," Ilya said, elbowing the kid in the ribs. *"I think they'd prefer if you paid attention to the hockey game."*

Pava frowned. *"What if they have no one to talk to?"*

"They're fine," Ilya said. *"They have a translator, I'm sure everyone is dying to talk to them. Besides, Wolly's mom is in the same boat, and Svenny."*

That last one might've been a stretch. Svensson was Swedish, but Ilya was pretty sure his parents were fluent in English. It was unfortunate that the Bears had the highest proportion of North American players in the league. Ilya had almost asked Sveta if she might come to keep Pava's family company, but then he remembered that time she very drunkenly ranted at him that she liked children as a concept, but she hated being around them and their sticky hands. Ilya respected that.

"If anyone needs to worry about being understood," Ilya continued, *"it's Newf's mom. She doesn't even have a translator."*

Their conversation was interrupted as Schneider, one of their recent AHL callups, sank a puck in the back of the net off a one-timer while shorthanded. The Bears roster seemed to have been changing so frequently these days, it seemed at least twice a month they had guys being sent down and called up, or third liners traded from god knows where. The bench jumped up to cheer as the winger skated by to receive his high-fives.

"More of that!" Ilya shouted as he watched Delly's line take to the ice. "Your turn," Ilya said, turning to Pava, "you have some people to impress, yes?"

Pava seemed to agree with this, grabbing the iPad to flip through some footage of the game. Ilya leaned over him and snatched it from his grasp. *"Put it away, kid."*

Pava whined. *"Give it."*

"You're too attached to this thing. Pay attention to the ice, that's where the game is."

Pava was like Shane in that way, always glued to the iPad. Sometimes he'd do something useful with it, analyze the penalty kill, look for passing lanes, but half the time he just obsessively reviewed every missed play.

"The game is on there too," Pava argued.

"Not anymore."

Ilya gave Pava a slap on the shoulder as he got up to straddle the boards, waiting for the right moment to take to the ice. He watched Cloutier corral the puck behind their net as he waited for shifts to change.

Ilya was the first to receive the puck. He attempted to speed through the neutral zone, but was quickly shut down as two Admirals closed in on him. He dumped the puck back to St-Simon, who passed it up to Marly.

It was a quick run at the net, chaotic, with a shot rebounding off the post straight into Vaughan's shoulder, dropping down and landing in his cradle. The Admirals pushed back, causing the Bears to regroup in their defensive zone. Ilya skated in reverse, attempting to knock the puck from Vaughan's control. Vaughan passed the puck to Jalo, who quickly dumped it back to Vaughan when it became clear he had no lane.

But then, before Vaughan could fully regain control of the puck, Pava was there, snatching it right out of his cradle in a perfect poke check.

Just like that, he was off, sprinting down the ice, the Admirals defense taken by surprise. By the time they reacted to chase off after him, Pava was too far gone for anyone to catch up. Ilya could see what the kid was gonna do before he did it.

Forehand, backhand, forehand, around the right leg pad. Bears up by one.

Pava leaped into the air, and Ilya was quick to slam him into the boards, temporarily suspending him as Marly, Cloutier, and St-Simon all rounded on him to slap him on the back and pat his helmet.

Ilya was the last to let him go, giving him one more shake of congratulations. "Looks like you can follow instructions."

The teasing didn't seem to bother Pava. Instead, he just turned to Ilya with a smug look. "Your turn."

* * *

The reporter held the microphone up to Pava's face, catching him still sweat drenched on his way out the tunnel. Ilya lingered off to the side. He had absolutely no good excuse for being there. Pava's English still had a long way to go, but it was more than sufficient for a basic hockey interview. You only needed to know three sentences maximum.

"So, how's it feel to score the game-winning goal with your family in the stands watching?" The reporter asked.

"Is good, yes, is good," Pava said, between his huffing and puffing. "I am not score last game, I try and score next round, next game. Is good game, I try help my team, and, I am score."

Ilya rubbed his hand over his face. Maybe he should ask Shane about Rosetta Stone? Or was that only for English speakers?

Ilya took up next to Pava's side as they walked down the tunnel into the dressing room. "*If this is all it takes for you to play like that, maybe we should just move your family here,*" Ilya joked.

"*I wish,*" Pava replied, more sincerely than Ilya was expecting.

They both changed quickly, Pava excited to go up to the family room, and Ilya excited to see Pava excited. When they arrived, Anna was first to greet them, like she'd been hovering by the door.

"*My sunshine,*" she said, reaching to pull Pava down into a hug. This forced him to bend down quite a lot in order for her to reach around his shoulders, but he didn't seem to mind. "*You did so wonderful! I missed watching you play.*" She paused abruptly, frowning, then reached up to pet at his hair. "*You need a haircut.*"

"*Mama,*" Pava whined. "*This is how everyone wears it. It's called flow.*"

She turned to Ilya with a stern look. "*Do they not have barbers in America?*"

Ilya laughed. Pava's hair was actually significantly tamer than it had been this time last year, now it was just purposely styled into that classic hockey look, swooped back past his ears.

"*He's an adult!*" Ilya argued. "*I can only stop so many bad choices.*"

It was then that Katya appeared behind her brother, drowning in an adult sized Kosmodemyansky jersey. "*That was the best game ever!*" she exclaimed. "*We were on the TV!*"

"I saw," Pava replied. "You had fun?"

Zhenya appeared, slightly less exuberant, but still unable to hide her joy under her angsty tween persona. *"That was pretty cool,"* she admitted. *"It was really loud."*

"We can get you earmuffs for the next game," Anna said.

"Mama, I'm not a baby, I don't need earmuffs. Give Katya earmuffs."

"I don't want earmuffs," Katya complained back.

"Nobody needs earmuffs," Ilya interjected.

"Hello, Kosmodemyanskys!" Cliff explained, bounding up behind the group. He was flanked on his right by his mother, who Ilya had met before. She looked like she might have been pulled straight from one of those Dairy Farmers of Canada commercials that always ran on the Sportsnet broadcast. She seemed nice enough.

Ilya raised his eyebrows as they approached. "Hello...Marly's mom," Ilya said, suddenly remembering that he didn't actually remember her names. "This is Anna, Pava's mother, and Katya and Zhenya, his sisters." Ilya then turned to the girls. *"This is Marly and Marly's mom. They're from North Dakota."* He watched Anna shake their hands.

"What's that?" Katya asked.

"It's a state."

"Is there anything cool there?"

"No."

"This is fun," Cliff grinned, slapping Ilya on the shoulder. "I never get to see you do family days. I mean, I guess you still haven't, but this is kinda close."

"You think all Russians are related?" Ilya asked.

"Ha, nice," Cliff replied. Those jokes never seemed to work on him. "Anyway, we're making our rounds, just wanted to say hi." He turned to Pava's family, and very carefully and a little too loudly said "dasvidaniya."

"Nice to meet you!" Cliff's mother said. She also seemed to think that by talking louder, the Kosmodemyanskys would somehow be able to better understand a foreign language. Luckily, the trio was quickly pulled away by Sumaya asking for a picture.

Anna narrowed her eyes as they walked away, then turned to her son. *"So it's true? Americans really are that loud in person?"*

* * *

The Bears and their moms were being put to work.

After their win against New York, the group was packed up into the charter plane as they flew straight to Montreal that night. The flight was mostly quiet, the lights dimmed as the families huddled

together in packs. Pava's sisters slept through most of the short flight, with Zhenya curled up on her brother's lap despite the fact that she wasn't really small enough for it anymore.

Ilya sat in the next row back with Carmichael, the only other player who didn't have a mom on the trip. Apparently his parents were on vacation in Korea or something.

Ilya leant back and rested his head against the plush seat of the charter jet. He never thought about it much before, all his years before this missing out on parents days. If anything, he had felt relief back then. He would've hated for his father to interact with his team. It was so much better this way.

He had never even let himself dream about what it would've been like if his mother could have come. Until now.

Anna wasn't all that similar to Ilya's mother. She didn't look at all like her. Her voice was all different, lower and a bit rough. A dryer sense of humour. But she was kind, and affectionate, and everything Ilya had so desperately missed.

He reached up to pull his mother's cross out from under his shirt and pressed it into the pad of his thumb, tucked in right next to the key to the cottage. His reminder that he always had somewhere he belonged, even if he didn't always believe it.

Just when Ilya was about to drift to sleep, he felt a small hand tugging at his sweater.

"Ilya?"

Ilya opened his eyes to see Katya standing before him, barely visible in the dimmed cabin.

"What's up, little fish?" Ilya asked, stretching his legs out a bit in an attempt to regain alertness.

"I need the bathroom. My brother is asleep."

Ilya poked his head over the row in front of him to see that Pava was stretched out across the two seats, his other sister asleep on his shoulder. He was out cold.

"Ah," Ilya said. *"Let me take you."*

Katya held his hand as he led her down the aisle. It was so cute he wanted to cry. When they arrived outside the door, the bathroom was occupied, so the pair had to linger off to the side as they waited.

"Your brother told me you're a figure skater," Ilya said, crouching down a bit so he was closer to her height.

Katya shrugged. *"I guess."*

"You guess? You don't know."

"I dunno," she shrugged. *"I'm good at it, but I don't wanna do it forever."*

"No?" Ilya asked. *"What do you wanna do?"*

Katya seemed to think for a moment. *"I want to be a fireman."*

Ilya nodded. *"That's a good choice. Much more useful than a skater. Our jobs are not very important."*

"I don't think my mama will let me quit skating, though."

"Why not?"

"I'm a really good skater," Katya admitted.

"Ah," Ilya said. *"I know what that's like."*

Ilya let go of her hand when she finally ducked into the bathroom, but he waited around for her to come out anyway, just so she wouldn't have to wander back down the aisle alone.

It was a shame they were only here for the week, but maybe it was for the best. Any longer and Ilya might've stolen their passports himself and never let them leave. The other night, Anna had made enough borshch for them to freeze for months, and Ilya had almost burst into tears at the taste. It had been so long.

Pava had been going nonstop. The weeks before they arrived, he had been putting together a plan of everywhere he wanted to take his family. Harvard, Forest Hills cemetery, that one slide outside of city hall that almost killed everyone that went down it, the Boston Tea Party Museum, the grocery store, but specifically the one that was built over a highway for some reason.

The kid had been so happy since they'd been there, Ilya hadn't even noticed all the ways he was unhappy when they weren't. Ilya knew he was an anomaly, he was never homesick in the same way the other foreign players often were. Had Ilya not been doing a good enough job at making Pava feel at home? Maybe he would have been better off with Newf, or one of the other Bears, someone who had more of a family environment. Ilya was barely managing to feed this kid the whole food pyramid.

Katya emerged from the bathroom, closing the door a little too harshly behind her.

"Did you wash your hands?" Ilya asked.

"Yes," Katya replied, unconvincingly.

It was fine, Ilya kept hand sanitizer in his bag. He started keeping it there for Pava, the kid didn't like the feeling of his hands being unclean, but he only liked a very specific brand of sanitizer. It had come in handy many times on the road.

"Come on," Ilya said, guiding the girl along in front of him back down the aisle. Hopefully they could all get a bit of rest before they landed in Montreal.

* * *

Sumaya slid through the stands at morning skate, phone in hand. She loved Parents Trips, they were always the best for content, and it meant she got to travel with the team.

"Hi, Mrs. Marleau!" Sumaya said, sliding into the row just next to the couple. Every family was all decked out in their kids' jerseys. "Do you mind if I ask you a question for a video for our social media?"

"Of course, hon," Mrs. Marleau smiled. "Hit me with it."

"Alright," Sumaya said, raising her camera and lining up the frame. "If your son wasn't a hockey player, what job would he be doing?"

The woman looked off into the distance, pondering for a moment. “I think he’d be a rancher. Take over the farm. He loves Yellowstone.”

Cut

“I think Victor would be a professional chef.”

Cut

“Oh, he loves hockey too much, so it probably wouldn’t be too far off. I think he’d be a play-by-play announcer, he loves to talk.”

Cut

“Well, ah tell ya wha’ b’y, that b’y’s already far gawn off the ol’ family business. I imagine wi’out hockey the b’y’d be a musician. He’s a beauty on the piana.”

Sumaya blinked. She might have to add subtitles to that one.

Cut

“Connor would probably work in construction, maybe he’d be a carpenter. He’s really good with his hands, and building, and working with wood.”

Cut

“Mason, well, you know we call him Jar Jar? It’s a very long story, but part of it is that he loves Star Wars, and all movies really. I think he’d be a film director, or maybe an animator. Not drawing though, models.”

Cut

Sumaya was patient as she watched the translator relay her question to Kosmodemyansky’s family. The younger sister was up on her mother’s lap, giggling as she listened. Kosmodemyansky’s mother considered for some time, before speaking back to the translator.

“Pavsikakiy would be a scientist,” the translator said, but Sumaya kept the camera trained on Kosmodemyansky’s mother. “He is very smart. He has always been very good at physics and math.”

“Really?” Sumaya asked before she could think better of it.

The woman spoke again, and the translator relayed. “Oh, yes. He almost didn’t enter the draft, so he could go to university. But he wanted to come to America.”

Huh. Sumaya never would have guessed.

Cut

“Josh’d be a back country fisherman. We go out up to Alaska every summer for a trip. That boy was born for the outdoors.”

Cut

“Jan would be a veterinarian. He’s always loved animals, I could see him going to school for that.”

Cut

“He would be a football player, or maybe a comedian.”

Cut

“Hey, Ilya?”

Ilya turned, she had caught him just before he went onto the ice for morning skate.

“Hi,” he said, leaning on his stick. “Are you finally letting me do Instagram takeover?”

“Nice try,” she smiled. “No, uh, I wanted to ask you, I’m about to take some clips of the parents, just for a little social media thing, I’m asking questions about their sons. I was just wondering if maybe you wanted me to ask someone again for you this year, or I could just leave you out...whatever you want.”

The past few years since she’d been social media manager, Sumaya would normally just leave Ilya out. But last year, she had gotten LeClaire to answer for him, and it had gotten a lot of engagement. She was thinking about maybe asking their equipment manager, or maybe Coach Maya.

Ilya paused for a moment, looking off into the distance. He looked strangely serious, narrowing his eyes, before seeming to decide on something.

“You know Yuna and David? Hollander?”

Sumaya blinked. “Like...Shane Hollander’s parents?”

“Yes, yes. Ask them.”

Sumaya waited for him to laugh. Literally anything to signify this was a joke that she shouldn’t take seriously.

“What?” She asked, dumbly.

“Yes, they know me. Will be funny, yes?”

Before she could argue any more, he gave her a pat on the shoulder and took off onto the ice.

And so, Sumaya found herself lingering in the aisles of the lower bowl, feeling incredibly out of place. She couldn’t believe she had even swindled her way down here, Bears jersey and all. She was constantly looking over her shoulder wondering if someone was gonna throw a tub of popcorn at her head. She spotted the Hollanders based on their seat assignment alone, there was no shortage of Hollander jerseys at the Centre Bell.

“Um, excuse me? Hello, hi, you guys are Shane’s parents?” The couple looked up at her, and Sumaya could immediately recognize the narrowed look in their eyes. She spoke quickly, before they could let her down gently, assuming she was a fan. “I’m Sumaya, I work with the Bears, I do social media. Sorry, this is really weird, and I’m not fully sure this isn’t a joke. Anyway, it’s our Moms Trip this week, and I’m filming some content with all the players’ families. Ilya, Ilya Rozanov, he said that he knew you guys and said that you guys might be willing to participate on his behalf?”

Sumaya came over here fully prepared to be shot down. She did not expect for a smile to spread across Yuna Hollander’s face as she beckoned Sumaya to take the seat next to her.

“Of course he did. We’d be happy to, come on over.”

Sumaya blinked as she took a seat. “I didn’t realize you guys even knew each other.”

“We help out a lot with the foundation,” David said, leaning over to shake her hand. “We’ve gotten to know him pretty well.”

“Right, of course.”

Sumaya didn’t think that the Hollander–Rozanov feud was as big a deal as everyone made it out to be. It was pretty clear that the rivalry was largely fabricated by the league for monetary gain, that was just smart business. Lots of players from rival teams were friends. What had really shocked her was the way they announced it. A whole foundation? And not only that, but the reveal that Shane Hollander had known personal information about his family that, according to the other players on his team, no one else had known about. That had really thrown everyone for a loop.

“Do you mind if I film?” Sumaya asked.

“Of course, we’re used to it by now,” Yuna smiled.

“Alright,” Sumaya said, raising her camera, poking her head out behind it so she could speak directly to them. “So, if Ilya wasn’t a hockey player, what would his job be?”

Yuna looked to her husband with a smile. “I think we know the answer to this one.”

“Ilya would be a racecar driver,” David said. “He loves fast, flashy cars. I could see him in F1.”

“You know what else I could see?” Yuna said conversationally. “I could see him being a model. High fashion, where he just gets dressed up and flown all over the world.”

“As long as he doesn’t have to dress himself.”

Sumaya laughed, halting the recording. “That’s perfect, guys, thanks so much for humouring me.”

“Our pleasure,” David said. “Happy to do anything that will annoy our son.”

* * *

Ilya skated up to Shane, throwing out his arms and catching his boyfriend in a bearhug.

Shane had started wandering into the scrum, attempting to pull Newf back by his jersey, Ilya couldn’t have that. Shane’s first instinct was to push Ilya off, probably assuming that he was trying to start something, but he quickly relaxed when he realized who it was.

“Is this necessary?” Shane asked, his voice muffled against Ilya’s chest.

“I do not know what you mean,” Ilya replied. “I’m just finding a dance partner. Is what a good teammate does.”

Shane finally freed himself, shifting so they just had their arms around each other. “I don’t think this measure of aggression is typically warranted.”

“You never know, you could be getting ready to drop gloves. The temper on you, Hollander.”

Shane rolled his eyes as they both watched the scrum slowly dissipate. Hayden had gotten a little too close to Doherty, so of course Marleau was right there to step in, which forced everyone else to get involved. It was a high tension game, both teams were starting their push to make the playoffs, and the Metropolitan division was at the top of the league this year. This meant that it was looking unlikely that any wildcard slots were going to be going to an Atlantic team. It was a close battle for the top of the division, and a win against their rivals would do well to encourage Boston in their run.

The trade deadline was next week, and Boston had already begun to buy. This was not the case for Montreal, who had admittedly been struggling this year. Ever since trading away Boizeau, their defense had flopped. It didn't matter how good their goalie was if the rest of his team couldn't keep the puck out of their defensive zone. Ilya knew Shane had been growing more and more frustrated, and to make it worse, he had been taking the brunt of the blame. It didn't matter how many goals Shane scored, it didn't matter that he was carrying the team on his back, they weren't winning games, and so it was the captain's fault.

Ilya could admit that he didn't fully understand the pressure. It was one thing when Boston was doing poorly, he might get a few jeers in line at Dunkin. But in Montreal? That city lived and breathed hockey. Shane couldn't walk a block down the street without someone recognizing him. The pressure had been weighing on him, Montreal hadn't missed the playoffs for four years now.

"I'm surprised you're not in there," Shane said, gesturing to the scrum that had the half a dozen guys squished against the glass.

"What is it they say?" Ilya asked. "These monkeys are not in my circus."

Shane blinked. "You mean, not my circus, not my monkeys?"

"Yes, this too."

Shane looked considerate. "You know, considering we're the captains, I think these might actually be our monkeys."

Ilya shrugged. "Does this make me the sexy Michelle Williams? Are you Hugh Jackman?"

"I don't know what that means."

Shane finally pushed off when the refs pulled everyone apart and the penalties were doled out. Ilya watched with a grin as he skated away.

"The b'y shouldn't look so rotted for a team up three," Newf said. His helmet had been knocked sideways and he'd made no effort to fix it.

"You shouldn't look so happy for a team down three," Ilya reminded him.

* * *

Shane leant over the faceoff circle, watching as Ilya drifted in across from him. Ilya didn't say anything, just a slight raise of his eyebrows. Ilya placed his stick on the ice, then Shane. He took a deep breath as he waited for the draw.

"Out, Rozanov," the ref said suddenly, gesturing for Ilya to move.

Ilya groaned, gesturing to the ref. "I did not even move! Was totally fair—"

“Not gonna say it again, out.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, but skated backwards, replaced at the dot by Pava.

“Hello Shane Hollander,” Pava said with a soft smile.

“Hi Pava,” Shane replied.

Pava placed down his stick, then Shane, and the puck dropped.

Shane won the face off, dumping the puck behind him into Murray’s possession. Shane rounded to the opposite side of the crease, receiving the puck back immediately. With only one defender between him and the goalie, he charged the net, attempting to bring the puck wide and turn into a backhand.

It didn’t quite go as he’d planned. He caught an edge on his right skate, sending him tumbling onto his ass and right into one of the goal posts. Luckily, his continued momentum flung the puck backwards through a Boston player’s legs, and landed right back in Montreal’s possession.

Shane was quick to get back to his feet, rolling onto his knees and hoisting himself up. He was ready to charge back into the action, but out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that the net had slipped off one of its pegs.

Shane looked at where the puck was in play. Since the attacking team was in possession, the whistle should’ve been blown already. But the net was only a little bit dislodged, the refs probably hadn’t even noticed, though he was sure the announcers would be all over it. Montreal wouldn’t be able to score like this, it was sure to be disallowed.

Surely it would be okay...

As subtly as possible, and not totally sure if it was legal, Shane lifted one of the posts and placed it back on its mooring. Mentally running through the NHL rulebook, there wasn’t technically anything that prohibited it, since the refs never stopped the play. Montreal had possession.

No one stopped him, so it was probably fine. Shane rounded back away from the crease, laying in wait as Stedlund rounded behind the net and passed it right to Shane’s tape.

Shane paused for a moment. The angle was too sharp, there was a defenceman straight in front of him, and the goalie was pressed to the right side of the net. At most, there was a tiny sliver of space in the top left corner.

Shane shot anyway, and the puck landed in the net with a satisfying snap.

Doherty stayed frozen for several moments, as if in disbelief. Hayden whooped, launching himself to land on Shane’s shoulders. It was a bit extreme, considering they were now up four. That was probably why no one else on his team skated over to slap him on the back.

“What the fuck Hollander?” Marly said, skating past Shane for a line change. “You change the laws of physics or something?”

Shane shrugged. “I didn’t know you knew what those were?”

* * *

When the Bears first arrived in Montreal, they had only been given a few hours of respite at the hotel before they were back up and out for morning skate, then out for dinner, then to the hotel again, and off to the Centre Bell. At least they were staying the night in the city after the game. Ilya could see Shane while the others were off. Ilya was pretty sure Pava and his family were going with the translator for an evening tour of the Old Town.

Ilya was selfish, he just wanted to be alone with Shane. Maybe he wanted to earn some sort of forgiveness following his talk with Sveta.

Ilya let himself into Shane's apartment, something he had started doing last year. He could hear the sounds of Shane clinking around in the kitchen. Shane didn't look up when Ilya entered, didn't acknowledge him at all until Ilya slunk down onto a barstool.

"Hollander, you must make me feel better. I lost my hockey game today."

Shane raised his eyebrow with a smile. He had just finished doing the dishes. "Oh, really? I hadn't heard."

"Yes," Ilya said solemnly. "Was even worse because my boyfriend was there. He did not even let me win. Was extra embarrassing because his team is awful."

"You got kicked out of the faceoff circle five times. That was all you."

"I was distracted. Your chain was peeking out of your jersey. How can I play when I am hard in my jock?"

Shane didn't humour that with a response, but walked around the island so that he could slide up next to Ilya and plant a chaste kiss on his lips.

"How's the Moms' Trip?"

Ilya shrugged. "Is fun. They had Newf's mom read the lineup in the locker room. Coach Maya had to redo it after just so everyone understood."

"I'm always jealous I've never got to play with a Newfie," Shane said. "Apparently they always host the best parties."

"Maybe someday."

Ilya felt a spark of hope deep in his chest as he saw the way Shane's smile softened. He tried his best to tamp it down.

"Maybe someday," Shane replied.

It wasn't until they had settled into the couch, both well showered and tuckered out from more than just hockey that the topic came up again.

"Have you ever heard of personal space?" Shane said, as Ilya threaded both legs around Shane's knees and shoved a hand up his hoodie.

"Nyet, is *our* personal space Shane, this is how it is in Russia." Ilya used his free hand to thumb through the Skip app. "What you want for dinner? If we get very boring cheeseless pizza, will you eat this? You know I have read that macro-biotic diets do not give you all the vitamins. I think big hearty pizza will even you out."

“I’m not doing the macrobiotic thing anymore,” Shane reminded him. “My nutritionist kept getting mad at me. But no, still no cheese. I’m trying paleo now.”

Ilya’s eyebrows drew together. “What is this?”

“It’s like a lot of whole grain, unprocessed foods. No dairy, no gluten.”

“Shane. This is miserable.”

“It’s just for the rest of the season. It’s been working really well for me, actually,” he said. “I promise I’ll share a pizza with you as soon as we’re out of the playoffs. As long as it’s semi-healthy.”

Ilya’s first instinct was to make a joke about how Montreal might not even make the playoffs, and even if they did, they’d be out long before Boston. But he stopped himself, looking at Shane carefully.

It was like Shane was reading his mind. He shifted his hand to pull Ilya’s leg closer to him, though it had already been thrown comfortably over Shane’s lap.

“I talked to my agent,” Shane said, unprompted. “About a trade.”

Ilya tried to keep his face neutral. He didn’t speak.

“I didn’t even know I was gonna do it,” Shane admitted. “I wasn’t going to. I was gonna stick it out, at least until free agency. But...” he trailed off, moving to pick at his cuticles. Ilya took his hand in his. “My mom called me. It was...it was weird. Normally the first thing she does when she calls is updates me, about brands, about schedules, whatever. But this time she just...she just kept asking me how I was. Asking about the team, about J.J., about Hayden. I kept trying to brush it off and say it was fine but she kept pushing.” He huffed, “I honestly don’t know what came over me. I just...I told her. I told her the truth.”

He looked up at Ilya, his gaze soft. It made Ilya want to break into a million pieces. He looked tired.

“I mean, I didn’t tell her everything. There’s some stuff that...I don’t even know how I’d tell her. And I don’t think it’d make it better. But I told her I was unhappy. And she...she told me to leave.” Shane looked up at his boyfriend, an incredulous expression on his face. “I honestly had to check the call screen to make sure I wasn’t hallucinating the whole thing. For years and years, she’s been telling me to stick it out, and now, just like that?” He shook his head. “Is there something I’m not seeing?”

Ilya tipped his head to the side as he rubbed his thumb back and forth across Shane’s fingers. “Your family knows you better than you think, solnyshko,” Ilya said. “They can tell when something is wrong. Is why David makes sure to serve the sauce separate from the pasta. Why Yuna stopped booking you for events in the evenings. They want what is best for you.”

“Since when?” Shane said instinctually, then closed his eyes with a sigh. “I mean, I know they love me, but I know they also want me to be successful. It’s why I’ve been skating since I was two. When I was in Timbits, sometimes during practice my feet would hurt so much I’d start crying, but they told me I had to suck it up and stay on the ice the whole time. And, I mean, I’m not upset about it now. If I’d given up when I was little I’d never have made it here. I know what I mean to people. This is what it’s always been about, making it to the NHL. Now I’m here and, what? I’m just giving it all up when it gets hard?”

Ilya gave Shane a stern look. “Shane, this isn’t hard. Hard is losing in cup finals. Hard is knocking a tooth out. This? Montreal? Is impossible. You are Shane Fucking Hollander. You are face of the

league. What is the point of making it to the top if you're just going to lie back and let yourself be used like punching bag? Don't you see? You have power. You don't owe them anything anymore."

Shane ran his hands over his face. "My agent doesn't agree. She thinks I'm fucking insane, she spent two hours trying to talk me out of it. I don't know what came over me, honestly, if it had been any other day I'd have folded."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "Did something happen?"

Shane shrugged, avoiding eye contact. "Nothing new, honestly. Just...you know Hayden was out for a few games with a concussion?"

Ilya nodded.

"I guess it all just got really clear. Without him, without J.J.," Ilya could see his eyes starting to water. "I just realized I really have no one."

Sometimes when Shane got like this, Ilya wished he'd just cry. He wished he didn't hold it in, that he could just cry and let himself be held. But still, Shane remained stoic.

"Lyubimiy—"

"I know, I know," Shane interjected, allowing a soft smile to seep through. "I know," he said again, and Ilya didn't need him to explain.

Shane leaned over, allowing for his head to fall on Ilya's chest, and Ilya wrapped his arms tightly around him.

"Anyway, I told my agent I was serious," Shane continued, nuzzling into Ilya's sweater. "That she needed to figure something out or I'd find someone else who would."

Ilya smiled to himself. "I like it when you're bossy. You should do this more often."

"Shut up," Shane said, lightly slapping Ilya on the arm. "She's talking to Montreal, I gave her a few teams I'd accept. Management is pissed," he said. "Coach knows, and he's letting it show, but none of the other guys know. Well, except Hayden."

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "Oh?"

"I had to tell him," Shane said, and Ilya could recognize his guilty voice. "He's...he's so fucking mad at me. I mean, I get it, first J.J., now me, and at least J.J. didn't ditch him on purpose."

"You are not ditching him," Ilya said. "You are doing what you need to do. If he doesn't understand, then fuck Pike."

"Ilya...he's not being unreasonable. He just doesn't get it."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Boo hoo, the straight white man does not understand why you need to leave. Let us all jerk him off and tell him he's gonna be okay."

"Gross, Ilya."

Ilya shrugged. "So...you gave list of teams to your agent?" He said in a way that was totally casual.

Shane shifted his head so he was looking up properly. "Yes."

"And...what teams were these?"

"Oh, you know, all the clear options. Winnipeg, Calgary, Ottawa, Philly, Brooklyn."

Ilya blinked. "You are teasing me, Hollander?"

Shane chuckled. "You're not subtle, you know. She knows Boston is my first choice, but you know it's not a guarantee, right? I'll talk to you if I get offered anything else, just...I don't wanna get my hopes up."

"I think your hopes deserve a little up-ness," Ilya said.

"Oh yeah?" Shane replied. "That sounds like the start of a come-on."

"No? Well, if you're asking, I'd be happy to come on—"

Shane halted him with a kiss before he could say anything else obnoxious.

* * *

Ilya sat on the floor of his living room, three suitcases spread out open in front of him.

When the girls had arrived, these bags had been filled with an assortment of gifts. Pyjamas, chocolate, cookies, varenye, and kazy. Now, Ilya struggled to stuff them full of everything they were bringing back. Tubs of peanut butter, packs of Oreos and Reeses, bottles of ginger ale, three Bears jerseys, an I Heart New York t-shirt, cans of Canadian maple syrup for the entire extended family and their neighbours, a Harvard baseball cap, and a Montreal fridge magnet, to name a few.

"We'll need to weigh these," Ilya said, zipping up the last one. "Everything fits, but a lot of this stuff is really heavy. What's the weight limit?"

"23 kilograms," Anna said, rounding into the living room. She had even more stuff in her hands, a stack of Hard Rock Cafe merch. According to Pava, shopping and eating was basically all they got up to in New York and Montreal.

She walked around to the other side of the bags, forcing Ilya to reopen one. She sat down criss-cross on the rug, the mug of tea already placed on the floor next to her.

Ilya looked back out the hallway, where the sounds of Pava and the girls off giggling and playing mini sticks echoed down the halls. Ilya had not properly been left alone with Pava's mom before, and honestly, he wasn't quite sure how to act. He was great with Yuna, but for some reason...this felt different. He couldn't place why.

"It'll be fine," Anna said, much more confident than Ilya felt. "If it's too heavy, we can just get the girls to layer their clothes."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. *"Or we could pay for overweight baggage,"* he turned to glance around the massive house. *"We aren't exactly on a budget."*

She shook her head simply. *"No, no, we won't take anything else. Pavsikakiy already pays for too much, our flights, our home, his sisters' lessons. We can handle a little budget travel."*

"I think you've made up for it plenty," Ilya said, "you just left an entire Magnit in my freezer."

That was certainly true. It seemed like every evening they were in Boston, Anna spent hours in the kitchen cooking up something from home. Pava kept trying to help, which meant Ilya would try to help, and the girls were obsessed with Ilya, so of course they also joined in. It resulted in a very packed kitchen, and two freezers stuffed full of echpochmak, belyash, vareniki, pelmeni, and several tubs of borchsch. Ilya actually wasn't aware he even had a chest freezer tucked in the garage until Anna found it.

She waved her hand. *"It looks like you'd starve without it. I thought hockey players in America paid everyone to do everything for them?"*

Ilya shrugged. *"If they had it their way, all I'd be eating is chicken and rice. Then everyone would be miserable."*

Anna laughed at that as she attempted to zip the suitcase back up. She leaned forward with her knee on the plastic, trying to keep the zipper from splitting. When it was closed, she settled back to sit on her heels. *"I'm getting old,"* she said. *"It's easy to forget when I'm chasing around a bunch of kids."*

If this was Marly's mom, Ilya would probably make some flirty comment telling her that she didn't look a day over twenty-three, mostly just in an attempt to get Cliff riled up. Ilya didn't even think about doing that now. That just felt wrong.

"They're good kids," Ilya said instead. *"Pavsikakiy, too."*

Anna smiled, her skin crinkling near her eyes. *"I'm glad he has you,"* she said. *"I never wanted him to come to America, I wanted him to play in the KHL, or even just go to school. He wanted so badly to come here."* She shrugged. *"I don't really get it, he's such a homebody. But he seems happy."*

Ilya shrugged. *"I haven't done much. Just gave him a place to sleep."*

A place to sleep. And a penchant for Scooby-Doo. And a secret he may have to take to his grave. And a few missing teeth. Also an inexplicable and awkward relationship with the NHL's Shane Hollander.

"You've done more than that," she said. *"You've given him a home here. Even when he comes back, you're all he talks about."*

Ilya's first instinct was to shake his head, say no, that's ridiculous. Ilya was no role model, and everyday he felt like he was rolling the dice when attempting to make responsible decisions. It was a miracle that Ilya hadn't lost Pava in an airport already. Knowing the kid, he seemed like the type to fall into a hole in the middle of the park and not be found for days.

At a loss for anything else to say, Ilya stayed silent. It had always annoyed his mother when he talked like that, like he was no good. He usually just started thinking it instead. Even then, she'd been able to tell, like a mind-reading Vedma. His mother had never been all that good about talking about feelings, her own or anyone else's, so she let it be.

"He's doing well," Ilya said instead. *"He's playing well, his English is improving. Don't worry about him."*

Anna tipped her head to the side and gave Ilya a look. *"A mother always worries."*

* * *

Before Pava's family entered the security line, Anna took both of Ilya's shoulders, then drew a cross over his chest with her hand.

It wasn't an unfamiliar gesture. His grandmother used to do it for him when he was little at the end of their visits. His aunt would do it for his cousins at least twice a day. It was a superstition. Good luck, good fortune.

The last person who drew a cross for Ilya was his mother.

Anna smiled, before moving onto Pava to do the same thing. She then pulled her son into a hug, forcing him to hunch down in a fashion that looked very uncomfortable so he could rest his head on her shoulder.

Ilya felt a tightness in his chest. He missed his mom.

Ilya stood back to watch as Pava hugged Katya and Zhenya goodbye. Katya cried in his arms, and Zhenya pretended (poorly) that she was unbothered by their departure.

Finally, after about twenty full minutes of drawn out goodbyes, and many reminders from Anna that they needed to get going, the Kosmodemyanskys departed. Pava didn't even try to wipe away the tears that trailed down his cheeks.

On the car ride back, Pava didn't speak for a while. Ilya could recognize what it looked like when he was trying to get his feelings together. It took about ten minutes before the kid was ready to turn on the music at a low volume.

Pava listened almost exclusively to Russian music. Recently, he'd been on a bit of a kick where he just listened on a loop to this one song by this rock group from Ufa. If there was one thing about that kid, if he liked something, he stuck to it.

"It's nice that they were able to visit," Ilya said conversationally. "Let's hope all the peanut butter makes it through customs."

Pava shrugged, sniffing a bit. *"Yeah."*

Ilya frowned. Normally Ilya might assume he was just a bit sad with his family leaving, but this seemed like a different kind of withdrawn.

"What's wrong, Pava? Do we need to put on Zombie Island again?"

Pava shook his head. *"No, it's okay. I'll probably just go have a nap. It's been a long day."*

"You'll see them again soon," Ilya said. "Hopefully not that soon, but at least by July."

Pava scrunched up his nose a bit. *"It's not that. I was...I was glad to see them, but, sometimes it seems better in my head, you know?"*

Ilya blinked. That's not what he was expecting. *"What do you mean? I thought you liked having them around."*

"No, I do, I do," Pava said. He huffed, slumping down in his seat. Well, he tried too, but it wasn't all that easy considering he already had the passenger seat pushed as far back as it would go. He looked at Ilya, his face still a bit splotchy. "I had an argument with my mama. The other day."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. *“Oh? About what?”*

“About Russia.”

Ilya nodded, tapping his fingers lightly over the steering wheel. Recently, he had begun to realize how much he didn't know about Pava. He didn't talk about himself a lot, not about his family, not about back home. Ilya never even thought to ask. After all, he hated it when people asked him.

Ilya didn't say anything, but raised an eyebrow, knowing that would be enough to get Pava to proceed. He wouldn't have said anything if he didn't want to talk about it in the first place.

Pava sighed. *“My mama and I...we disagree on a lot of things. About home. She trusts the government too much. She believes the news, and she supports the military, and she doesn't listen to anything I have to say about it. If it was up to me, they'd all leave. I have an easy way out, and I know it would be better for my sisters. Things are only getting worse there.”*

Ilya knew that to be true. Things had been escalating lately. Censorship was increasing, the government becoming more controlling. Ilya wasn't one to keep up with the news much, but it was hard to ignore. Every new headline that came out about Chechnya, about Navalyny, about that stupid fucking propaganda law; it only solidified why he could never return.

“My father...” Pava said. *“He and my mother are divorced. I haven't seen him in a long time, but he is military. My mother is too stubborn. I don't know if I can ever change their minds, and it's driving me crazy.”* He shook his head. *“I don't want to leave. I want to be at home, I love home. I just want it to be better.”*

Ilya blinked. Then he said something stupid. *“This whole time, I assumed your father was dead.”*

Weirdly, Pava chuckled at that. *“He might as well be. The only thing he ever gave me was my height.”*

“Nice farewell gift,” Ilya said, because he didn't know how to be normal about fathers.

Luckily, Pava didn't seem bothered. *“I agree. It's good he's gone, he was very annoying.”*

Ilya laughed. *“Maybe we have more in common than I thought. Terrible fathers and good at hockey.”*

“Yes, and very handsome,” Pava added. *“Me more than you, but you're still up there.”*

Ilya's jaw dropped as he looked between Pava and the road. The kid was doing absolutely nothing to cover the proud look on his face.

“Wow,” Ilya said. *“I thought you were supposed to be the humble one. I see how it is. I'll have you know, many people find me very handsome.”*

“Yes, Shane Hollander,” Pava said. *“Didn't you say he needs glasses?”*

* * *

Shane had not been expecting a knock at the door.

It was an uneventful Friday morning in Montreal, and it wasn't a game day. At this time in his routine, he was just finishing his smoothie, where he'd take half an hour to digest before going on a run along the Lachine Canal. Ilya and the rest of the Bears had flown back to Boston early this morning, and

Shane had insisted on getting up with him to drive him to the hotel for pickup. He didn't even park a block away this time, he dropped him right at the front door.

The Voyageurs were still hoping to push to make the playoffs, and they had just over a month to do so. Shane couldn't take any chances, from this point on, he was a machine. He wasn't going to be the reason the Voyageurs didn't make the playoffs for the first time in four years.

When the knocking started, Shane barely heard it over the sound of his blender. It was strange, whoever it was hadn't needed to be buzzed through the front. Was it his parents? A mailman? His neighbour who kept letting their cat roam the halls and then went knocking on everyone's doors when she couldn't find her?

It turned out to be none of the above. There, looking frazzled and sleep deprived with a child strapped to his chest, was Hayden Pike.

It was strange on any occasion for Hayden to drop by unexpectedly. His schedule was stricter than Shane's, and when they weren't on the road or at practice, he was usually spending every chance he had to be at home with the kids. Now, it was especially strange due to the fact that Shane and Hayden were in a bit of a rough spot.

He had not taken the news of Shane's trade request well. Shane could understand, to some degree. From Hayden's point of view, it looked like Shane was ditching him to go play with his boyfriend. For Hayden, this was coming out of nowhere. The problem was that he hadn't been especially open when Shane tried to explain that, no, actually, this was coming from many places.

"Uh..." Shane said, looking down at Amber. The almost two-year old seemed to be glaring at Shane. At what age could babies start glaring? Were two-year-olds considered babies? Maybe he wasn't giving babies enough credit. Surely that wasn't a baby, though, that was a whole-ass toddler strapped to his chest. "What's up?"

Hayden nudged past Shane into his apartment, holding both of Amber's hands in an attempt to keep her entertained. "Amber would *not* stay down last night, which kept up the girls, which kept up Arthur, which meant I've had a total of thirty minutes of continuous sleep."

He spun around so he was looking back at Shane. "Jackie needed a break, so I dropped everyone at school. Well...not everyone. I don't know how she does it, honestly, I only have to do this like, once a week, she does it constantly."

Shane raised an eyebrow. "So are you here for help?"

Hayden frowned. "No, no man, this is just, this was unplanned, I was gonna come here anyway. She's just...tagging along."

"Okay," Shane said, scratching the back of his neck. "I'm making a smoothie...do you want some?"

"I would actually hate that," Hayden said honestly. "Look, man...I just wanted to say sorry. I know I've been kind of a dick lately."

"Yeah," Shane said. "Kind of."

Hayden furrowed his eyebrows. "So, you're really leaving?"

Shane shrugged, moving around the island so he'd at least have something to do with his hands. Hayden pulled out a stool. "I'm trying to."

“I just...” Hayden started. “Why? I don’t get why? What’s changed? I know the guys haven’t been the best about the whole...gay thing, but that’s been the case the whole time.”

Shane sighed. He moved to start packaging up his smoothie ingredients. “That’s the thing, Hayd, they haven’t changed, not really. I guess...I have.”

Hayden blinked, but he didn’t speak. He just looked to Shane, urging him to continue.

“I hate it here,” Shane admitted. “I know it’d be easier to understand if it was obvious, if they started calling me slurs in the locker room, but it’s not that simple. It’s all the little things. They won’t shower with me, they don’t listen to me. The casual racism, the gay jokes. I feel like I’m walking on eggshells in that fucking dressing room. And now it’s so much worse without J.J. to back me up.”

Hayden shook his head. “I mean, I know they can be assholes, but it’s just teasing, right? It’s not because you’re...” he gestured towards Shane.

Shane blinked. “What? Gay? Asian?”

“No, I mean, I don’t know, that’s not what—”

“Hayden,” Shane said. “You don’t get it. You can never get it. And that’s fine, but you have to try, and you have to believe me when I tell you what it is. The shit they say? The small dick jokes? The cocksucking jokes? That’s not just teasing.”

Hayden closed his eyes and rubbed his hands over his face. “Fuck, man, I’m so fucking bad at this. You know Jackie downloaded me a bunch of allyship audiobooks to listen to on the plane, but I haven’t gotten this far.”

“You listen to audiobooks?”

“Well, I’m like, two chapters into one. It’s really boring. But, look man, I’m sorry, you’re right, the shit they say isn’t cool. But...we can fix it, right? You’re the captain! I’m the alternate, I should’ve been shutting it down, and I haven’t, but I’ll do better. We’ll fix it.”

Shane shook his head. “Hayds, there’s some things you just can’t fix.”

Hayden frowned. “Shane. You’re my best friend. I don’t wanna play hockey without you.”

And, well, if that didn’t make Shane feel like a total asshole.

“You’re my best friend too, man,” Shane said, his shoulders hunched. “But, at this point you’re kind of my only reason to stay. And...I’m so miserable here, things are better with you here, but you can’t fix everything.”

“Just...” Hayden started. “This fucking sucks dude. I shouldn’t be mad at you, I know you probably made a ten page spreadsheet of pros and cons before you decided to do this. I just, man, I’m selfish. I want my best friend here.”

It was actually a word document, and it was only three pages long.

Shane smiled. “I know. But I think we’ve had a pretty good run, yeah? Was only a matter of time before you signed somewhere else. Didn’t you say Jackie’s been wanting to move west?”

Hayden shrugged. "As long as it's not Vancouver. Maybe Winnipeg?" He looked down at Amber, raising his voice a bit. "What do you think? You wanna go to Manitoba?"

"Fuck!" Amber replied.

Hayden's eyes widened as he turned to Shane. "Well. Shit."

Shane laughed, glad the tension had been defused. "You can't actually be surprised."

"Jackie's gonna kill me." He turned back to Shane. "So...are you actually gonna get traded? I mean, you have, what, a week?"

"Four days," Shane replied.

"So...probably not," Hayden said.

"Probably not," Shane agreed. "My agent said she'd talk to me as soon as she heard anything, but management's keeping it locked down tight. And they can't move me anywhere I don't approve, so, we'll see. This summer at least, I'm sure, they'll wanna get their money's worth after the playoffs."

"If we make the playoffs," Hayden huffed. "Well, wherever you go, you're still stuck with me. I'll keep luring you to my house with promises of ginger ale."

Shane smiled. A lot of people thought he and Hayden were an odd pair. The only reason they had started becoming friends was because Hayden kept dragging Shane places, and Shane eventually ran out of excuses to not go. Friendship by proximity. Yet, as much as Shane was stuck with Hayden, Hayden was stuck with him too.

"I think they have ginger ale in Boston," Shane said.

"Shit," Hayden replied. "Montreal is gonna hate you anyway, but they'll crucify you if you go to Boston."

Shane sucked in a breath. "Yeah. I know. The entire country is gonna hate me."

Hayden nodded. "Well, now I definitely can't be mad at you. If you're throwing yourself to the wolves, it's gotta be worth it."

"Yeah," Shane said, resting up against the counter. "I think it is."

* * *

"I think I'm gonna find an apartment."

Ilya looked up from where he was examining the pallet full of flour in the Costco. Last year immediately following the trade deadline, Pava had baked himself a congratulatory cake as a reward for not being traded. Unfortunately, he had accidentally quadrupled the batch, which left him with about six dozen cupcakes and an inability to eat them all. He'd ended up icing them and bringing them to practice to hand out to the players and the staff. It had been successful enough that Pava had decided to do it again this year.

Ilya knew that trade deadlines were stressful for most players. It had never been much of a concern for Ilya, even before he had his NMC.

“What?” Ilya said. “Why?”

Pava shrugged as he pushed the cart down the aisle. They’d been out shopping around for the most of the day, and hadn’t been recognized at all, which was a bit surprising considering how distinct the two Russians were, especially when one always towered over the crowd.

“It’s time, yes? I can’t live with you forever.”

Ilya frowned. He wasn’t sure that was true exactly, though if Shane did make it to Boston, it would probably be more difficult. But...he liked having Pava around. He was used to it now, they had a system, a routine.

“You shouldn’t feel like you need to leave,” Ilya said. “You’re not bothering me. Except maybe when you watch Scooby Doo until four in the morning.”

Pava shook his head. *“No, it’s not that. I just feel like I should. I’ve never lived alone before, I should learn. And maybe I’ll get my license.”*

“I fear for the motorists of Boston.”

Pava frowned. *“Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’ll just get an apartment between you and the arena. Then you can drive me.”*

Ilya chuckled lightly, and hoped his expression seemed nonchalant. He knew it was stupid, but it stung a bit. Did he do something wrong? Had he pushed Pava out? No, Pava was being completely reasonable. It was normal to want to be more independent, after all, the types of things Ilya was getting up to when he was Pava’s age were downright irresponsible.

Pava was an adult. He could make his own choices. Even if that choice was to leave.

“Maybe,” Ilya said. “How long have you been thinking about this?”

“I always figured I would eventually. And I don’t think I want to be in the house when Shane Hollander is living there.”

Ilya blinked. *“What?”*

Pava raised his eyebrows. *“You’re not subtle. Podcasts? Really?”*

“They’re effective!”

“You’re so obvious.”

“It doesn’t matter anyway, he might not even come to Boston.”

“Well, if he does, I’m definitely moving out. I like living with you, but I like a good night’s sleep more.”

Ilya wagged his eyebrows. *“So you do like living with me? Tell me more about all my good qualities,”* he joked.

“You’re very helpful,” Pava said seriously. *“And I like hanging out with you. I feel very at home.”*

He hadn't actually meant for Pava to start listing things off, but maybe Ilya needed to hear it. Some sort of confirmation that he wasn't actually sick of him. *"Don't get sentimental, kid,"* Ilya said, turning his face forward so Pava couldn't see his expression. *"The Scooby Gang isn't breaking up."*

"I know," Pava said. *"I'm still coming to your house all the time. To use the kitchen. And visit Margaret. And eat your food."*

Ilya shook his head. God, he loved this kid. He knew that even if he moved out, Ilya was keeping his room the same. Just in case he needed to come back, though he'd never tell Pava that.

"Maybe I can give you my realtor," Ilya said. *"Or, if I asked Shane, I'm sure he'd put together a spreadsheet in under an hour. You probably should ask him, he'll make sure you ask about build dates and foundation types or whatever."*

"I just want somewhere with air conditioning."

* * *

"Dude, is my ass too fat?"

Ilya's attention was pulled across the dressing room to where Cloutier was standing in front of the mirror. He was dressed in only his base layers.

Connors appeared next to him. "I don't think so, man, I think it's a normal size."

"It'd be weird if you didn't have a fat ass," Marly interjected. "You're a hockey player."

"Yeah, but is it too fat? Like, does it make me look uneven?"

"Let me feel," Connors said, reaching forward with both hands to cup Cloutier's ass. "I think it's like, a good handful."

"But you have massive fuckin' hands dude."

"You know what they say about guys with big hands."

"I literally see your dick everyday. You have absolutely no leg to stand on."

"Speaking of legs," Marly chimed in, "can we address the fact that Newf is packing an extra limb?"

"I'm a married man, b'ys," Newf said, still in just a towel. "Ain't so hard to lock 'em down when you've got something to offer."

"While we're on the topic," Delly interjected, also shirtless, "I'm wondering if I should be doing more upper body. Like, girls don't really like the lean look these days, do they?"

"No, you're fuckin' hot bro," St-Simon joined in. "I'd totally bang you. Your traps are insane."

Ilya turned to Pava, who was sitting next to him by his locker. *"This conversation is so fucking gay."*

Pava shrugged. *"The good news is, if Shane Hollander does come here, you could probably make out with him in the middle of this room and everyone will just think it's out of respect for his game."*

Ilya stood, reaching up into his cubby to grab at his phone. Today was February 26th, the last day for playoff eligible trades. The deadline would formally be reached in one hour, or three o'clock Eastern

time. Now, the Bears were dressing for a matinee game in LA.

Jane: Do you prefer XL or L for a hoodie?

Ilya: large

Ilya: then u can see my super sexy muscles better 💪😓💋

Jane: Shut up

Jane: My mom is getting us matching Roots sweaters

Jane: I think she's trying to get me a sponsorship

Ilya: have u heard anything from ur agent???

Jane: No. Nothing. Probably in the summer.

Ilya tried not to sulk at this. He should've known that a mid-season trade was a long shot. The Voyageurs were likely to make one more run for a cup before giving up Shane. Still, he had been hoping.

Ilya: boo

Ilya: 🍅🍅🍅

Jane: Are you calling me a tomato again?

Ilya: no im throwing them

Jane: At me?

Ilya: no at ur gm

Jane: Why?

Ilya: to hurt him

Jane: Leon is actually pretty nice

Ilya smiled as he shook his head. He tucked his phone back in the cubby.

"Shane Hollander?" Pava asked.

"Yes," Ilya replied, then paused. "What is your sweater size?"

Pava opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off as LeClaire entered the room, looking serious. All heads turned to look at their coach. "Listen up," he said, his voice gruff. "Carmichael, Brown, go meet Janmark in the coach's room, Walsh needs to talk with you."

Ilya raised his eyebrows as he watched the three men look between one another warily, Janny was still in his walk-in suit, set to be a healthy scratch. Despite the fact they were asking to be spoken to in private, it was no secret to the room what this was about. There was usually only one reason a player would be asked to speak to the GM.

As soon as the door closed behind the three men, LeClaire spoke again. "Davies, Stewart, you're suiting up today."

Delly raised his hand awkwardly. “So...are they, like, gone?”

LeClaire frowned. “Last minute trade. Don’t get too broken up, we’ve got a job to do, boys. That’s hockey.”

The room watched as LeClaire exited, the mood of the room significantly more solemn than it had been. Trades were always hard.

“We better be getting someone fucking good,” Doherty said, shaking his head from his distant goalie’s cubicle.

“Do you think we’re getting Sørensen?” Connors said. “I saw some people talking about it on reddit.”

“Dude,” St-Simon interjected, “you need to get off of reddit.”

Connors threw up his head in surrender. “So sue me if I like getting my advice from real people.”

Ilya turned back to face his locker, tugging on his shoulderpads. Out of the corner of his eye, Pava caught his attention. He was frowning.

“Okay?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah,” Pava said. “I know I should be used to it, but trades always make me sad. Imagine having to move like that in the blink of an eye.”

“They’ll be fine,” Ilya reassured. “Those guys have all played for at least four different teams already. They were probably getting bored here.”

Pava shrugged, seemingly placated. He started taping his stick. He liked to add a small strip of the Scooby Doo tape at the top of each one, just so he could ration it. Ilya had pointed out that they could technically order more anytime they wanted, but Pava insisted it was better this way.

“Holy fucking shit,” Cloutier said, his voice booming throughout the room. “Holy motherfucking fucking shit fuck.”

“Shut the fuck up Cloutier, we do not care that your child has stopped shitting his pants,” Ilya called back. “I have not done this in years and no one is impressed.”

“No, no, holy shit, look at this.”

Ilya perked up a bit at that, as a small group started to form around Cloutier, who was looking down at his phone screen.

“What is it?” Ilya asked at last, though he had a feeling he might know the answer.

It was Marly that looked up at him, a massive grin on his face.

“We got Shane Fucking Hollander.”

I don't even know where to start. MASSIVE shoutout to everyone who reached out to me on Tumblr and in the comments about my request for help. In particular, thanks to Gzodvicha, grungegreentea, and ayu-uwu for sending me paragraphs upon paragraphs (I love paragraphs). I can't even quantify my gratitude, y'all have been answering all my questions and working your networks for me!!

There's a lot of Russian things in this one. First of all, since Pava's mother is older, it would be a sign of respect for Ilya to initially call her by her first name and patronymic (which Pava would have told Ilya ahead of time), though if she's informal/affectionate then she'd likely let him call her by just her first name.

Here's a good article about the political/social state of [Russia in 2019](#). At this point, things have begun escalating in terms of censorship and corruption in the government, peaceful protesters were frequently detained and beaten, and the anti-gay purges in Chechnya were gaining attention, as well as the continued occupation of Crimea. Many of the really severe changes came around in 2022 during the invasion of Ukraine, which would result in much more political pressure across the globe.

According to everyone I had discussions with, the general consensus I received is that in Russia, most young people generally are anti-government and against the war. Due to the high amounts of censorship, in order to access other news platforms and social media, you can only do so with a VPN. Because of this, many older people only have access to the government TV and newspapers, and so are more likely to be supportive of the government and anti-western. Again, this largely escalated following the invasion of Ukraine and the death of Navalny, where most outspoken protesters were forced to flee the country. At this point in time (2019), there was a lot more active protest/pushback within Russia compared to now. Nowadays, all anti-war sentiment is censored, promotion of VPNs is illegal, and regular citizens are being arrested for expressing anti-government sentiments. Any platforms where you could potentially see anti-Russian or anti-war material (or just any foreign information) is blocked.

You may also be thinking, gee, author, I would have thought that we would have lost one of the Bears that we love? Totally possible, of course, but I'm attached to them, and honestly it's not very often that teams will trade their core player groups. Even in trades for big players like Shane, you usually get an abundance of lower tier guys rather than any bigger names or vets, as well as a smattering of draft picks. That being said, Delly you were so close to being on the chopping block but I had mercy on you and your cheap contract. RIP Carmichael, you only appeared in this fic like twice.

The NHL's trade deadline is in February or March (in 2019 it was February 26), and it is the latest date that players who are traded are eligible to compete in the playoffs. Because of this, you see a lot of movement at this date, as teams that are pushing to make the playoffs will often buy up players, and teams that aren't doing so well take the chance to sell. The trade deadline is at 3 pm EST, and if you're traded, you immediately stop everything you're doing and prepare to move teams. Unfortunately, this means you can get traded right before, or even during games. The idea that Shane could be texting Ilya minutes before and not know the trade is about to happen is actually quite realistic, sometimes players find out from media leaks before they even get a call from their agent. Here, three players get pulled to be traded prior to the game, which is a bit bonkers, however since teams keep 3 healthy scratches on their roster that would be travelling with them, it means they'd still have enough for a full game roster.

I'd also like to say, when I started this fic, Shane was never supposed to go to Boston. I'm a big believer that you have to tear Canada out of Shane's cold dead hands, but the more I wrote this, I realized I didn't have a choice. They made me do it. Sorry Canada. More notes in the comments!





Chapter 20: Epilogue

Chapter Summary

The day Shane had been traded had been pure chaos. He managed to get through the call with his agent, but after that, his phone had just about had a stroke with the amount of notifications that were coming through. An insurmountable number of calls and texts from his mom, his dad, Hayden, Rose, the Voyageurs groupchat, his emails, even some of the Boston Bears had managed to get ahold of his number.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long, I've been moving provinces. And I had to drive 9 hours in a snowstorm. Yes, a snowstorm in May. Thank-you Canada.

I would like to formally apologize for all the times I keep accidentally stressing you guys out. Like the time I made you think I was gonna trade Pava for Doherty. Or Pava for Shane. Or that Shane was gonna get in trouble for fixing the net (if it was illegal it would have been reviewed and called a no goal during the game, I just wanted to include a lil Draï reference and show how quick thinking Shane is on the ice, there is nothing wrong with what he did).

The more I write about these guys, the more I've been comparing the Shane/Ilya dynamic to that of Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid. Do with that what you will.

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

June 2020

Game Seven of the Stanley Cup Finals was a miserable affair.

At this point in the playoffs, the players were practically held together by glue. So battered, bruised, and broken, one wrong hit could send them shattering into a million pieces.

Shane himself was playing with a broken rib, which had him grinding his teeth whenever he wasn't hopped up on painkillers. On top of that, Ilya was playing with a torn adductor, Newf had dislocated his shoulder twice, and Pava was somehow managing with a broken hand.

Shane had made it to the Stanley Cup Finals four times in his career. Two wins and two losses, one of those losses was last year following his trade to Boston. None of those four series had made it to game seven. It was a different level of stress and a different level of pain, to be playing at this level. Knowing that you've played as much hockey as you possibly could, he wasn't sure if that made it better or worse to lose.

He could hear the roar of the fans causing the walls of the Garden to shake. The atmosphere was totally different from Montreal, but it wasn't unwelcome. The city had taken Shane in with open arms

during this past year, no doubt fuelled by the fact that Shane had helped drag this team screaming and kicking into the cup final. At the end of the regular season when Ilya was out with an injury, they were unsure if the Bears would even make the playoffs. Now, it was anyone's game.

But win or lose, it wouldn't change Shane's decision. He would re-sign with Boston come July.

Shane watched Pava from across the dressing room struggle to tie his skates, his fingers were taped so heavily they were practically immobile. Shane stood and made his way over.

"Need some help?" he asked.

Pava looked up, his eyebrows drawn together. "Yes. I think so."

Shane moved to stand directly in front of him, then grabbed hold of Pava's leg, lifting until the blade of his skate was resting between his thighs. It was exactly the way he tied skates for the kids at camp, which was the way his parents and coaches had tied his skates for him when he was too small to do it himself.

Right now, Pava looked anything but childlike. He had grown an impressive playoff beard over the past two months, and mixed with his already unruly head of hair, he looked a bit like a viking.

When he was done with tightening the skate, Shane dropped it to the ground and motioned for Pava to lift up the other one.

"Is your leg okay?" Pava asked.

Shane looked up briefly from where he was concentrating on tying the skate. He shrugged. "I'll make it through. Just one more game, right?"

Pava nodded. "Yes. One more."

* * *

February 2019

The day Shane had been traded had been pure chaos. He managed to get through the call with his agent, but after that, his phone had just about had a stroke with the amount of notifications that were coming through. An insurmountable number of calls and texts from his mom, his dad, Hayden, Rose, the Voyageurs groupchat, his emails, even some of the Boston Bears had managed to get ahold of his number.

He couldn't open up a single social media app without being bombarded with opinions. Voyageurs fans hating his guts, Voyageurs fans hating the GM's guts, Boston fans cheering, a large following that was sure this had to be a joke, generally, everyone who knew anything about hockey was freaking the fuck out.

Shane included, honestly. He had all but resigned himself to playing with the Voyageurs for the rest of the season before he had any shot at getting traded. Then, his whole world had been turned on its axis at the drop of a hat. Four hours after getting off the phone with his agent, Shane was on a plane to Boston.

The Bears were returning from a road trip in California when Shane landed in Boston. Ilya was bound to arrive not long after, leaving Shane to fend for himself for a bit.

“Go to my place, solnyshko,” Ilya said over the phone. “I will text you alarm code. Wait for me there.”

Shane wouldn’t admit it, but it was kind of nice, letting someone else take the reins, even for this one thing. He planned, it was what he did, but this wasn’t something he was able to plan. He was flying by the seat of his pants as he tried not to think too hard about the fact that he was now being faced with the consequences of his actions, and that those consequences were the destruction of a legacy in Montreal.

Trades moved quickly. Boston was planning to get Shane in for their next game against Nashville two days from now, which meant that tomorrow he was sure to go in for practice, physicals, and press. He wouldn’t even have time to break in his gear before he would take the ice as a Bear. All his stuff was still packed into a Montreal Voyageurs branded duffel bag.

Before Shane began his first official day as a Boston Bear, he spoke to Ilya.

He had been afraid to talk to him. He knew that they had a plan, and that plan included eventually coming out to their teammates. Ilya had talked to Sveta, and Marly, and he had said it had gone well. He’d been excited. Shane was sure that eventually, Ilya would want more. He wasn’t the type to love in secret.

But Shane couldn’t do it again. He couldn’t put himself through that, he couldn’t allow himself to be vulnerable again only for his team to turn their backs on him. This time, it might just kill him. Boston was a fresh start, and he didn’t want to fuck that up.

When he said this to Ilya, his eyes were anywhere but on his boyfriend. He felt like he was admitting his cowardice.

But Ilya just shrugged and nodded. “I understand,” he had said. He reached out to hold Shane’s hand in his. “I have you here with me, what more could I need?”

Shane felt as if a massive weight had been lifted off his chest. It wasn’t perfect, not by a long shot, but it was something.

He smiled softly. “And, I mean, it’s not like I’m gonna pretend I don’t know you. We can be friends, right? We can...we don’t have to explain ourselves to anyone. Let them think what they want.”

Ilya had tipped his head to the side. “Luckily, my team is very stupid,” he said. “We do it right, we could practically climb inside each other and they think we are just good friends.”

“Is true, Shane Hollander.”

Shane’s head whipped around behind him to find Pava looming in the hallway. He had emerged from his room and was now eating yogurt straight from the tub.

“Team are weird. Everyone is slapping butts,” he continued.

“Oh,” Shane replied. He wasn’t sure what else to say to that.

Ilya nodded. “Yes, there are lots of things in this league that no one thinks too hard about.”

Shane blinked. Maybe they didn’t have to address it at all. They could just...be. No labels, no announcements. They could love each other openly, without giving up their careers. It would just look a little different than they had thought.

* * *

Ted Kehoe, known affectionately to most of the world as “Newf,” had played with Ilya Rozanov for six years.

Before that, he had spent the entirety of his career in Dallas, where he had been drafted. He had won a cup with them, and he had expected to stay. But, when Dallas dropped in the ranks, they had to make a change.

He enjoyed Boston. It reminded him a lot of home. The people weren’t as friendly, but they certainly loved hockey. The main downside was that his poor daughter was now developing a Boston accent. She sounded like an extra from Good Will Hunting.

The team was different too. They had a style of play similar to Dallas, physical and aggressive, but the locker room was different. A bit more relaxed, less like coworkers and more like teammates. The kind of guys he hung around with off the ice as well as on. Newf had been in Boston for six years. He knew the locker room, and he knew what the guys were like.

That’s why he also knew that whatever was going on between Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov was not normal.

When Rozy and Hollander first announced their charity, the Bears were stunned as a lump. It wasn’t even the fact that they were suddenly friends after years of seemingly no interaction, though that was strange. It was more so the fact that Rozy had gone into that press conference and revealed very personal information about his mother that no one else had known about.

Well, no one else except Shane Hollander.

Newf’s phone had blown up immediately after the presser; dozens of texts from teammates asking him what he knew.

Marly: ?????

Marly: dude???

Marly: did u know about rozs mom???

Connor: say sike rn

Siggi: I thought his mom was KGB and that’s why he never mentioned her.

Vic: are we bad friends

Delly: this is just like that time i found out that my aunt who i thought was single her whole life was actually married to this guy that fled belarus because he was scamming insurance companies and then he also got hit by a car and they only told me that after her funeral like ten years later

What kind of hypnotism did Shane Hollander possess in order to get Roz to open up like that? Newf had been on the team for years, and anytime they tried to get to know their captain, they never got past the porch. After that little bombshell, it was just stupid to think that their friendship would be PR. The whole thing was a little out of nowhere, but it wasn’t that weird. Lots of guys from different teams were friends. Newf still went golfing with some of his former teammates from Dallas.

Maybe Shane Hollander was different than he thought. He hadn’t interacted with him much outside of games, and once at All-Stars, but he had gotten the impression that he was a stereotypical hockey robot. Him and Roz seemed like polar opposites.

Then, Hollander was traded to Boston.

It was a right shock. No one had even been aware that Hollander had waived his NMC. The man was Montreal's franchise player, he was expected to spend his entire career there. Everyone knew that something must've gone down behind the scenes, but both Montreal and Hollander were keeping it under the water.

Maybe it just came down to worth. Montreal looked at Hollander versus the acquisition of three players and two draft picks and made a choice. Maybe Hollander had made it clear he wasn't going to re-sign when his contract was up. But why? He couldn't think of a single worthy reason.

Six months after Shane Hollander was traded to Boston, he could think of maybe one.

* * *

August 2019

"I like the tall, eh..." Pava gestured above him.

"Ceiling?" Shane offered.

"Ah, yes. Ceiling."

Shane looked around the one bedroom apartment. It was located directly on a T line, and also was pretty much a straight shot between Ilya's house and the practice arena.

"It's nice," Shane said. "Are you sure you don't want a bigger place? You could afford a two bed at least, then you have room for guests, or when your family stays."

Pava shrugged. "They stay at Ilyukha's."

Ilya raised his eyebrows. He had been lurking in the bathroom seeing if the tub was deep enough to stretch out. "See? He has no respect for me, Shane," Ilya said. "He is moving out and still he steals my house."

Shane ignored his boyfriend, moving to poke his head into the bedroom. "Nice big walk-in closet. You could use this shelf just for your hats, I bet."

Pava nodded. "Is nice. I need to learn to take train."

Ilya rounded in, beginning to flip all the different lightswitches just to see what they did. "There is cemetery a block away. Nice neighbourhood."

It was then that Shane paused, hooking his thumbs in his pockets like he always did when he didn't know how to stand. "Are you sure about this, Pava? You're welcome to stay with us as long as you want, we like having you around. It's more your house than mine, really, I don't wanna kick you out."

Pava cocked his head to the side. "Is okay, Shane Hollander. I know you will be missing me. You will be okay."

"He is a big boy, Shane," Ilya said. "As soon as he moves away he will forget all about us. Like we are birds without chicks."

"Empty nesters?" Shane offered.

“Yes, this,” Ilya replied. He walked over and slung an arm around Pava’s neck, forcing him to crouch a bit. “They grow so fast. We are so boring now, we must live excitingly through him.”

“Vicariously,” Shane said.

“Ugh,” Ilya groaned. “See how he corrects me?” He said to Pava. “Always so mean.”

“He is right,” Pava said. “You are very boring now. Always with puzzles.”

Shane laughed at that. Ilya shot him an offended look.

“Wow, okay. I open my home to young man and this is how he treats me? Let’s pack his things, where is closest U-Haul rental?”

Shane rolled his eyes as he retreated out of the closet and back into the main room where their realtor was waiting.

The realtor, a middle aged woman who didn’t care that they were NHL players aside from the fact that it meant they had NHL money, sent Shane a perfectly cheesy smile. “So, what do we think?”

“I think we like it,” Shane said. “I do have a few questions.”

“Fire away.”

“How long ago was this place renovated?” Shane asked,

“The original building was in 1905, but it’s been updated several times since then. The appliances were all updated in 2015, and the flooring was redone as well. All real hardwood. It’s also equipped with air conditioning. Of course in a building this age parking is difficult but there is an option for heated underground parking in a separate building across the back alley.”

Shane crossed his arms consideringly. “What’s the total monthly cost? Are utilities included?”

“Utilities are separate, we’d set you up with our provider. They have an app and everything.”

“And what’s your subletting policy? In case he gets traded?”

Pava blinked. “Why am I trading?”

“Just in case,” Shane said. “We wanna cover our bases.”

“Do you think they will trade?”

“Relax, malysh,” Ilya said. He had draped his upper body on the kitchen island as he watched Shane’s interrogation. “No one is trading you.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “I don’t know, apparently he was this close to being traded to Montreal for me.”

Ilya’s eyes blew wide. “What? No, you are lying. They would not do this. You are lying, Shane Hollander.”

“Of course I’m lying, I have no idea,” Shane replied with a quirk of his eyebrows. “But still, you never know.”

“Sublets need to be approved by management, but it’s a simple process. It’s just an application on our website,” the realtor interjected.

“And what about pets?” Shane asked. “Is there an extra fee? Size restrictions?”

“I don’t have pet,” Pava interjected.

“Do you think you might want a pet one day?” Shane asked.

Pava drew his eyebrows together. “Maybe dog?”

“What size of dog?” Ilya asked.

Pava paused for a moment before holding up his hand around his waist.

“Are you wanting a dog or a horse?” Ilya said.

“Are there size restrictions?” Shane asked, looking to the realtor again.

“No, no restrictions, but we do require everyone to register their dog and pay a monthly pet fee.”

Shane nodded. “Pava, do you have anything you want to ask?”

Pava looked around the room, spinning a full 360 degrees. He turned back around to face the group. “Eh...how thick are walls? My neighbours now is so loud.”

By the time the trio finally left the apartment, they had been there asking questions long enough that Ilya declared they needed sustenance, which was how he ended up driving them to his favourite Chinese place.

As Ilya drove, hand on Shane’s thigh, Pava popped his head out from the backseat. Shane felt bad, he offered him the front for the sake of his ridiculously long legs, but the kid insisted on the back.

“I make list,” he said.

Shane looked back, his eyebrows drawn together. “For what?”

“For Ilyukha.”

He pulled out his phone, the screen open to the notes app. “What he will need to do when I am gone.” He started reading. “I will show how to fill dish machine, you are always doing wrong. I make list of hand wash.”

Ilya scrunched up his nose. “I am capable of loading the dishwasher.”

“Then why am I always doing?” He replied, and before Ilya could come up with a retort, he continued. “Also, I put instruction for making mama’s food, is tape on freezer door.”

Shane raised an eyebrow. “He’s been doing the dishes this whole time?”

Ilya threw up his hands. “We have cleaner. She comes once a week.”

“Is rude to leave house dirty,” Pava said.

“He’s right,” Shane replied.

Ilya rolled his eyes. "If I clean whole house, she will have nothing to do."

"But you should be doing dishes more than once a week. Doesn't your sink get full?"

"Why are you ganging up on me?" Ilya whined.

"Shane Hollander," Pava said. "I will show you where I have hiding cigarette."

Ilya blinked. "That was you? I thought I was going crazy, Pava!"

Pava shrugged. "They will kill you. And make you smelly."

"Where are you hiding them?"

"I will not tell," Pava replied, shaking his head. "Also, you need to change mouses trap, I know you are afraid but is weird to pay someone to do."

"Sue me if I don't want to touch a dead animal!" Ilya exclaimed.

"Ilya," Shane said. "I love you, but I actually don't know how you lived by yourself for ten years."

"I am very responsible."

"Did you call an electrician every time a lightbulb goes out?"

"No," Ilya said at the same time Pava said "Yes."

"You are gorodskoy zhitel," Pava laughed.

"What does that mean?" Shane asked.

"I am not," Ilya said instead of answering. "I am strong, rugged Russian man."

Pava turned to Shane. "It is...eh, person who does not go outside. Is in city."

Shane raised his eyebrows. "Like a city slicker?"

"Ah, yes, that is it."

Ilya looked around the car as if he'd lost any chance of being defended. "Should I pull the car over? Leave you to survive in wilderness?"

"We're literally in Somerville."

"Same thing."

* * *

September 2019

Victor St-Simon fucking loved playing in Boston.

He loved wearing black and gold, he loved hearing the fans chant his name, and he loved beating fucking Vancouver.

Now, with Shane Hollander on their side of the ice? Victor could see rows upon rows of Stanley Cups in his future.

“Hey, Holly,” Victor said, sliding up next to his fellow teammate. His locker was sandwiched between him and Newf. He liked to call it the Canadian Alley. It was bound to catch on soon. “Good to be back?”

Holly raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, no, happy to be here. Ready to dial in, bring it all the way this year.”

Victor smiled, glad he wasn’t the only one feeling optimistic. They were so close last year, and he was sure that if they just had a little more time to test their lines and find their rhythm, they’d be unstoppable.

“I saw you were up in Muskoka for the summer? With Roz?” Victor asked. Roz was posting just about every day on Instagram this summer. He couldn’t blame him, Victor would do the same if he had access to a friend with a jet ski. He came from a “stay in an air conditioned city all summer long” kind of family.

Holly made an expression he couldn’t quite place as he started to pull on his base layers. It was the first day of training camp for the vets, and Victor’s first time seeing most of these guys since the cup finals. “Uh, yeah,” Holly replied. “I always spend my summers there at my cottage, it’s a nice place, I had it built a few years back.”

“Now what do I have to do to earn an invite?” He joked.

Holly laughed at that. “You don’t wanna know.”

“So you found a place in Boston then?”

When Holly was first traded to Boston, he ended up staying with Roz and Kosmodemyansky for those three months. It made sense, it was worlds better than being put up in a hotel like some of the other guys. It was unexpected the way the Russian’s house had turned into a Hostel for Wandering Hockey Players.

“Oh,” Holly said. “No, I’m still at Ilya’s. I was thinking about finding somewhere, but...y’know, I’m not sure they’ll offer me a new contract. I don’t wanna put down roots.”

Victor nodded. “Totally get it. Plus, the housing market is crazy right now. I’ve seen Roz’s house, the place is massive. You probably could spend a whole day there and not even bump into him.”

“Yeah, no, for sure,” Holly replied, before turning back to his locker.

It was then that the man himself came bounding across the room. Roz threw his arms around the two men, forcing their heads against his bare chest.

“Ah, my teammates! Has been so long since I have seen your beautiful faces,” Roz said.

Holly shoved him away with a roll of his eyes. “We drove here together.”

Roz shrugged. “And yet, I still ache for more,” he placed his hands on Shane’s cheeks, turning him to face the room. “Look at this gorgeous man, how could you not be pulled to it like magnet?”

“Just jerk him off already,” Cloutier laughed as he strolled into the dressing room.

“Ah, you would like to watch?” Roz said with a toothy grin. “I do not kink shame, Cloud, but there are some things I like to keep to myself.”

“Fuck off.”

“Roz isn’t wrong, though,” Victor chimed in. “Holly, your skin is amazing. What do you use? My girlfriend is really into skincare and she’s trying to get me into it, but all her stuff is branded for chicks and I don’t really wanna carry it around everywhere.”

“Oh,” Holly said, like he was surprised anyone was still talking to him. “I guess I just wash it? With soap.”

“Which soap?”

“Uh...it’s the one my mom always got me. I think it’s just Cetaphil.”

“What moisturizer do you use?”

Holly blinked. “Am I supposed to?”

“Dude, you know more about skincare than Holly,” Marly chimed in. “You probably already use toner and shit.”

“Now how do you know about toner?” Victor questioned.

“Is it bad that I just use one soap for everything?” Delly asked. “It’s the Head & Shoulders 3-in-1.”

“Yeah dude,” Marly said. “The skin on your face is way more delicate, and prone to acne. You need to use a water based cleanser, then a toner, then any serums, then moisturizer, and always finish with an SPF.”

The room turned to look at him blankly.

“What?” Marly shrugged. “Noor showed me. She’s got some really nice stuff.”

“Can you send me a list?” Victor asked.

“Of course, bro.”

So what if Victor wanted to take care of his skin a little bit? Sue him. He spent most of the day pouring sweat, he had to be proactive if he wanted to keep from breaking out.

“Did you hear Holly’s still staying with Roz?” He asked Marly, lingering by his locker. It was only fair, Roz had monopolized his spot just so he could yap with Holly.

Marly raised his eyebrows. “Oh?”

Victor nodded, stretching out on the bench. Roz was splayed out in his spot, in absolutely no hurry to get dressed while watching Holly pull on his gear. “I just hope that if they’re spending all this time together it’ll translate to the ice. They were insane together last season.”

Marly looked considerate. “Well, I think they’re gonna be pretty close, that’s for sure.”

* * *

“Adrita, do you have a second?”

Adrita Uddin had been working with the Boston Bears for eight years now. Five years as an assistant, and three years as the head athletic trainer. She had grown into the role by now, and she felt confident in her ability to manage her team. There’d been little she hadn’t seen at this point. Broken teeth, fractured noses, cracked ribs, torn groins, nothing phased her anymore.

“What’s up?” she asked, leaning back in her seat. She watched Shane Hollander walk into the room. This wasn’t too much of a surprise. He was new to the team, he might still have questions.

“Hey, you asked me earlier for information to put down as my emergency contact in Boston?”

“Yeah, sure,” Adrita said, already pulling up the forms on the computer. “Whaddaya got for me?”

“Yeah um, so…” Shane started, shuffling a bit closer around the side of the desk. He was looking at the computer screen instead of at Adrita. “You can just put down Ilya. Rozanov.”

Adrita blinked, her fingers hovering over the keyboard. She looked at Shane, who was pointedly not looking at her.

“Ilya Rozanov,” she repeated.

“Yeah,” Shane said. “You can just use whatever info he has in the system.”

“Okay…” Adrita trailed off. “So…can I ask why? You guys are on the team together, so if you’re injured at work he’d probably already know about it. Are you sure you don’t want to put someone else? Anyone you might want notified.”

“But this is also the person that would get updates if I was in the hospital, right?”

“That’s true, but it might be helpful to add another person in the area just in case? Someone…not on the team?”

“Sure, sure, yeah,” Shand said, trailing off a bit. “You could put Svetlana Vetrova?”

Adrita paused. Svetlana Vetrova…that name sounded familiar. “Like, Svetlana from scouting? Rozanov’s friend?”

Shane grimaced. “Yeah, that’s her.”

Adrita raised her eyebrows. “Yeah, sure, okay. You guys know each other?”

“We go way back.”

“And you and Ilya are still at the same address, is that correct?” She asked, clacking away on the keyboard as she filled in the information. Svetlana was also one of Rozanov’s emergency contacts, so it would be an easy addition.

“Yes.”

“Okay, it’s all in there, just let me know if you need it changed again.”

“Thanks Adrita,” Shane said, before retreating out the door.

She watched him as he went, her eyes narrowed. She wasn't one to speculate on the personal lives of players but...come on. There was no way. Was there?

No. That would be crazy.

Unless?

No. Well, obviously there were gay hockey players, look at Scott Hunter. But hockey was also homoerotic as fuck, if she went by regular standards, she'd be forced to assume all hockey players were gay.

And surely if it was true, it wasn't gonna be Hollander and Rozanov. That was some romance novel level insanity.

* * *

Ilya was so close to bashing his stick into splinters on the glass of the penalty box.

Yeah, he crossed checked the guy, so fucking what? Anaheim had been getting away with everything all game long. Cross checks, late hits, tripping, and they hadn't been called for any of it. The one time Ilya gets frustrated? Straight to the box.

If he had it his way, he'd be chewing out the officials loud enough that the entire Honda Center could hear. But that was sure to get him another penalty, or possibly a misconduct. The refs were a bunch of pussies that couldn't handle a taste of their own medicine.

But even with the refs fucking them over, it was a tied game, and Shane would kill him if he did anything more to damper their play. He was already shaking his head as he got on the ice for the penalty kill, Pava on his wing.

Ilya was sure there was a camera trained on him absolutely glowering in that box. It was the end of the third period, and they did not have room to be giving Anaheim a powerplay.

Ilya watched from the box as the Ducks won the draw, carrying the puck back to the blue line. Shane moved up on the forecheck as the rest pulled back into defense. Penalty kills always felt longer than they were, but that was even worse than you were the one in the sin bin.

The Bears had one of the best PKs in the league, but that didn't lower Ilya's stress levels at all as he watched the Ducks fire one shot after the other on the goal. Finally, St-Simon turned the puck over, shooting up to the boards to Pava, who started racing towards the Ducks' net.

Shane was at his side, joining him for a two on three against the ducks. Shane was quick, accelerating straight through the Anaheim defense, parking himself at the edge of the crease. He was in the perfect place to tip in the puck off Pava's pass.

Ilya shot up from his seat as he watched the puck go in, shouting loud enough to cover the collective groan of the Anaheim fans. Shane had a grin on his face as the referee blew the whistle to signal a good goal. Though the rest of his line had begun to move towards him for a celly, Ilya furrowed his brow as he watched Shane skate away from the goal and straight towards the penalty box.

Shane practically threw himself against the door, banging on the glass with a whoop. His hair was plastered against his forehead, his face red, and Ilya didn't waste any time in joining him in his celebration. The rest of the line were quick to swarm around Shane, pressing him even closer to Ilya, though they were separated by glass.

Eventually, they were forced to disperse and resume the game. Ilya slunk back to his seat, still stuck in the fucking box. Still, as Shane returned to the bench for a change, Ilya was the last person he looked at, sending him a wink across the ice, there for the world to see.

* * *

October 2019

Newf was the first to figure it out.

Cliff hovered at his kitchen island, dutifully refilling the bowls with an assortment of snacks. He had never properly hosted the team before, and he wanted to do a good job. Mostly because Noor was also there, and it took a lot to impress her.

He was hosting a World Series watch party. Cliff himself didn't care much about baseball, but the rest of the team did. Cliff didn't mind the excuse to gather.

Cliff had just finished refilling the bowl of popcorn when Newf sidled up to him. He grabbed a handful from the bag and stuffed it into his mouth all at once. "I'm gut foundered."

"Dude, I literally just put it in the bowl."

Newf didn't reply, he just chewed and looked into the distance. Marly followed his gaze and found that it rested on Roz and Holly. The pair sat side by side on the couch, with Roz's legs thrown across Holly's lap. Holly seemed unbothered, deep in conversation with Doherty about the statistics of... something.

"So," Newf said. "Are we just nawt talkin' about it then, b'y?"

Marly blinked. "About what?"

Newf gestured to the two men. "The b'ys. They're tick as teeves. More married than me and my Siobhan."

"I don't know what you mean."

Newf gave him a look. "Don't be a hard ticket, b'y, I'm nawt blind in both eyes."

Cliff narrowed his eyes. "We're not gonna say anything, okay?"

Newf shrugged. "What odds? It's nunna my business, b'y. They play good hockey."

Cliff wouldn't describe it as an open secret. Maybe more like a secret that was behind an unlocked glass door that had a sign reading "hey, don't open me." Yet apparently some people couldn't see through the glass.

Marly overheard a couple of guys talking about it later, some AHL callups that were only there as temporary injury replacements.

"Don't you think it's kinda weird?" Muller asked.

"What is?" Ericson replied. The two were chatting as they leant against the boards during an optional skate. The coaches were busy setting up the next drill.

“Hollander and Rozanov,” Muller continued. “They live together, they spend all their time together. Roz is always touching him.”

Ericson shrugged. “Some dudes are just like that. Like bonded guinea pigs.”

“But they’re like, really bonded. Like I wouldn’t be surprised if they’re blowin’ each other in the showers.”

“Fuck off, man,” Ericson laughed.

“I’m serious! It’s some gay shit if I’ve ever seen it.”

“Roz’s already fucked half the women of Boston. And remember Hollander and Rose Landry? Holy shit my sister wouldn’t shut up about it.”

“I wonder why they broke up,” Muller mused. “If I got to bang Rose Landry I’d lock that shit down.”

“Maybe she was fuckin’ with his game. I mean, Hollander and Rozanov have been insane on the power play, maybe living together gave them insane puck wizard skills.”

Muller looked considerate. “Do you think if we—”

“Fuck off.”

It was for the best, really, that it was just staying between the vets. The guys that were just temporary could be left to theorize as much as they wanted, but no one needed to know for sure.

Or, Marly had thought that the vets were all in on the secret. Newf knew, and Doherty was too perceptive to not know. Connors connected the dots eventually. But some of these guys had some thick fucking skulls.

“Do you think Roz broke up with that girl from Montreal?” Delly asked one night, as they rode the bus into downtown Edmonton from Leduc.

Cliff blinked. The kid had turned to poke his head over the seat to look in the row behind him.

“What?”

“Well,” Delly shrugged. “They used to text all the time, and now we never hear anything. And he never went out with us after games in Montreal so he could see her, now he goes out all the time.”

Marly looked to Doherty, who was in the seat next to him, sharing an incredulous look. He then twisted in his own seat to look at the back row of the bus, where Roz was fast asleep, his head tucked into Hollander’s neck.

Kosmodemyansky poked his head up from where he was seated beside Delly. “You are not very smart.”

Cliff supposed they could’ve been a bit more subtle. When he visited their house, they didn’t even try to make it look like the guest bedroom was occupied. They also gave a joint gift for Wolkowski’s baby shower, and once left practice wearing each other’s numbered sweaters.

But it seemed like they didn’t need to be subtle. The concept of them being together was just so unfathomable for most people, that it never even crossed their minds.

It was like Roz was a whole new person now. Like there was a part of him that had locked away until Hollander showed up. It looked like ten years later, the Bears were finally getting to know their captain.

* * *

November 2019

Ilya sat side by side with Pava on the bench.

He had managed to pry that godforsaken iPad away from him, forcing him to keep his eyes on the ice. It was a good view, anyway, with Shane there. He had started regularly sharing the second line with Newf and Connors. They had been through several different combinations, including a disastrous preseason game that had Ilya on Shane's wing. This line was gelling well, and with firepower in both their first and second lines, their opponents could never really catch a break.

Shane was a fucking bullet. He could go from stationary to flying in a moment, halfway down the ice with the puck before their opponents even knew he was gone. There were few players that could keep up with him, and Newf and Connors weren't that. But, if there was one thing about those guys, they knew where they needed to be. Newf spent half the game camped in the crease, just screening the goalie and waiting for the right moment to get open. Connors could find a passing lane through a brick wall. Shane could be the fast one, they could be the rocks.

Ilya was happily admiring another one of these speed bursts along the boards, Shane taking off with the puck in his control. Shane had also seen the defenceman from Toronto coming after him, forcing him to pass up the puck, and try to shift to avoid the incoming hit. They had been playing dirty all night.

And, well, Shane certainly did avoid it, but he was moving at such a high speed, and his balance was off just a bit, that rather than flying forward, he flew up. Up and over the boards, right into the Boston bench.

More conveniently, landing right on Ilya and Pava's laps, his legs still hanging over the boards. Ilya tried to grab onto Shane's arms, but he was already slipping, his ass sinking to the ground, forcing him to fold like a pretzel and flounder around like a toddler.

When it became clear Shane wasn't immediately able to return to play, LeClaire sent in Delly to replace him. He's been on for long enough anyway. Ilya hooked an elbow under Shane's armpits and moved to yank him up.

"Relax," Ilya said, still chewing on his mouthguard. "You wiggle like slug. You're making it worse."

"I help, Shane Hollander," Pava chimed in. He grabbed onto Shane's thighs, throwing him backwards a bit too aggressively. Though, it was effective, finally getting Shane's legs back on the right side of the boards and his ass onto the bench, though not before nearly tipping all the way backwards. Luckily, Ilya was there to catch him on the back of the neck and hoist him back up into a sitting position.

"That's one way to make a line change," Shane said with a huff. Ilya wasn't sure if he was more exerted from the shift or from the struggle to extract himself from the pit of the bench.

"Next time you will have to do a flip," Ilya suggested. "Skates in the air and everything."

“Next time,” Shane replied.

Connors appeared then, swinging himself over the boards for a shift change. He wedged himself in between Shane and Ilya, forcing them to make space, either ignoring or not noticing Ilya’s death glare.

“That was awesome!” Connors laughed. “You went fuckin’ flying, buddy looked like you were abouta float outta the stands.”

“Yeah, I—”

“Woah!” Connors shouted suddenly to the ice, throwing his hands up. He had the attention span of a squirrel. “I’ll fuckin’ fold your clothes while you’re in ‘em bud!” He shouted at Frye, one of the forwards from Toronto that had just checked Cloutier into the boards later than should’ve been allowed. “This is a fuckin’ gongshow, I’m telling you,” he said with a shake of his head. “We needa find these refs some fucking glasses.”

Ilya blinked. Connie’s hockey player accent always dialled to a hundred when he was upset.

“It’s shit,” Shane agreed, readjusting his helmet. “But I think we can draw some penalties, they’re getting sloppy. Tyndall cares more about landing hits than actually releasing the puck.” He paused, reaching behind him to grab an iPad from Maya with a quiet thanks. “Get Newf over here.”

Ilya watched Shane’s linemates gather around him. They leaned in close, eyes carefully watching the screen as they listened raptly to Shane explaining a play. Ilya turned his eyes back to the ice and hid his smile beneath his glove.

* * *

December 2019

Svetlana Vetrova had known Ilya Rozanov since before she could walk.

She knew him probably better than anyone on this earth, they had been through a lot together. They had grown up together, they had moved to America together, they even got arrested together once. When other men came and went in her life, Ilya stuck around.

Sveta knew Ilya better than anyone, which was why she had been secretly skeptical of Shane.

Ilya spent nights out at clubs. He made fun of his teammates who got married and started popping out babies at twenty. He loved spending every week with a new woman hanging off his arm. He loved freedom, he loved the unexpected, he loved the chance to be able to let loose.

It wasn’t even so much the fact that he had been locked down. That wasn’t so surprising, deep inside, Ilya was a giant softie who loved hard and without shame. It was easy to imagine Ilya down bad for an imaginary woman (then man), who had him wrapped around their finger from another country.

What Sveta found a little harder to believe was that the man in question was Shane Fucking Hollander.

As soon as Ilya finally told Sveta the truth about Jane, he was an open book. He honestly wouldn’t shut up, it seemed every other day he was up in her office bothering her and talking about Shane. What Shane was up to, Shane’s new ad that just came out, a complete timeline including pictures of

his and Shane's full relationship, and once a full hour of drunken raving about how hot Shane was (Sveta couldn't blame him for that one).

Sveta was supportive. She was a good friend like that. But she was confused. Shane Hollander? Hockey Robot? She liked Shane Hollander... from a distance at least. He was a phenomenal player, lightning quick, insane hockey IQ, and knew just how far to push the refs before taking a penalty. Sure, she could see how the competitiveness of it all might be a draw, but the rest of it? Hollander was the reason Sveta had hardly been able to get Ilya out to a club for the past year. Yoga doing, party hating, nonsmoking, glasses wearing, ultra-neurotic, Golden Boy of Hockey Shane Hollander. For Christ's sake, Ilya was almost about to move to Ottawa for him. Ottawa! How was Sveta supposed to believe that any of that was good for Ilya, that any of that would make him happy?

But why would he be doing it otherwise? Was it just convenience? Someone who had as big a secret as he did?

It only took about an hour and a bottle of wine for Sveta's curiosity to be satiated.

Svetlana had interacted with Shane a couple of times since he had been traded to Boston. They had all been short, awkward interactions, no doubt fuelled by the fact that they had both fucked the same guy. Sveta didn't care, it never meant much with Ilya. Shane did not feel soothed by that detail.

When the door to Ilya's house opened that Sunday afternoon, Sveta wasn't surprised to see Shane on the other side of the door. She was dressed in sweatpants and a hoodie, her hair in two pigtail plaits, and a ridiculously expensive bottle of wine tucked under her arm.

Shane, however, was surprised to see her.

"Oh," he said. "Hey, Sveta? Do you need something?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Ilyusha and I are watching Love is Blind."

Shane frowned. "Ilya isn't here," he said. "He's out with Pava, he's taking him driving."

"That bitch," Sveta said, already pushing past Shane into the house. She slipped off her shoes and slid on a pair of house slippers. "The one day he's free this week to hang out, and he double-books me."

She turned to see Shane standing a bit awkwardly near the entryway, dressed in sweats and a faded Terry Fox Run shirt. "I can call him, if you want? I'm not sure how long they were gonna be out."

She shook her head. "Don't worry about it. Knowing him he'll pick up the phone, and then Pavsik will crash into a ditch." She cocked her head to the side, looking at where the television was playing at a low volume. "You watching your own game?" She asked.

"Yeah," he replied sheepishly. "Just background noise. I'm just doing laundry."

Sveta raised an eyebrow. "You don't get your laundry sent out?"

"I mean, some of the fancier stuff, yeah, but it feels ridiculous to do it for everything. Besides, I'm pretty particular about the detergent and the ironing and stuff."

She nodded, rounding beside the couch. "I watched this game," she said, because she watched every game, it was her job. "Your backcheck was awful. The only reason you even made it to overtime was because Doherty was standing on his head."

Shane frowned, moving to stand beside her. "I know. It wouldn't be so shit if we weren't turning over the puck like we were giving out candy. I've been saying we need better puck control, some of these guys just don't wanna pass."

Sveta nodded. She was impressed at his ability to critique his own team, so many players of his calibre would get defensive.

"Do you like wine, Hollander?" She asked, lifting the bottle.

Shane pressed his lips together. "I don't usually drink during the season."

She shrugged. "No game today, no game tomorrow. Besides, wine doesn't count, it's basically grape juice. And this shit's expensive."

Shane looked like he was actually considering it. "I've always wanted to go to Italy, but my mom says there's no point if I don't go on a wine tour."

"There's always time to learn. I can even get out all the best glasses and do a proper tasting. We can swirl it around and everything."

Shane laughed lightly, the tension in his body still visible. "I don't think that's necessary. But...okay, I'll have a glass. Just one, until Ilya gets back."

* * *

"Yeah I fucking said it! And I'll say it again!"

Pava looked at Ilya with wide eyes as they slipped through the doorway. Was Shane being attacked? What was he screaming about?

Ilya rushed into the living room, not even bothering to take off his shoes.

"I don't think he's even that great!" Shane continued, his face red as he held a bottle of wine in his hand. He was stretched out on the couch opposite Sveta, who was wrapped up in a throw and snapping her fingers furiously in agreement. The beginning of the Pens versus Flyers game was playing in the background.

"And you should fucking say it!" She called back.

"I don't get what the big deal is, if I were playing hockey in the 80s when the goalies were shit, I'd be breaking all the records too! I'm just as good as Gretzky! I'm faster, and my defense is better."

"If I filmed this I could sell it to ESPN for a million dollars," Sveta mused.

"Cancel me!" Shane shouted far too loudly for one in the afternoon. "I said what I said and I mean it! Fuck you Wayne Gretzky."

"Yeah! Fuck you!"

"And Mario Lemieux!"

"Yeah! Fuck that guy."

Ilya blinked as he looked over the room. "What is happening?"

Shane whipped his head to the side dramatically as Ilya approached. “What are you doing here?”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “In my own home?”

Sveta turned as well, glaring. “Well, well, look who decided to show up. Forget something?”

Ilya frowned. “No?”

“We were supposed to watch Love is Blind, bitch. Instead you abandoned me for your tall Russian ward.”

Ilya shook his head. “No, we were going to do that Sunday.”

“Today is Sunday.”

“No, is Saturday,” Pava chimed in.

“Oh,” Sveta said. “Well I’m not coming back tomorrow. I’ve got plans.” She slumped back into the cushions and plucked the bottle from Shane’s hand to take another swig.

Ilya looked between the pair, his eyebrows drawn. “You are very drunk.”

“No, I don’t think so,” Shane replied drunkenly. “Could a drunk person list the name of every Conn Smythe winner for the past fifty-four years?”

“Please do not try—”

“1965 was John Beliveau, 1966 was Roger Crozier—”

“And he is doing it anyway.”

“That’s not fair,” Sveta interjected. “If he gets to do that, I get to name every Stanley Cup Winner and their finals opponent.”

Ilya rubbed his eyes.

“Can I say name of every Scooby–Doo episode? Please?” Pava chimed in.

“Aren’t there like, hundreds of those?” Sveta asked.

“Yes,” Pava replied, unphased.

“No one is naming things,” Ilya interjected, taking the bottle from Sveta’s hands. She tried to come after him with grabby hands, but his long arms were sufficient in keeping her away. Ilya knew that Sveta had a high tolerance, but even she seemed to be pretty far gone. “How much did you drink?”

Sveta shrugged. “Hollander is a lightweight, he only had three glasses and some. I had the rest.”

Ilya looked at the nearly empty bottle of wine in his hand, as well as the second empty one on the coffee table.

Shane shot Sveta a glare. “Don’t come crawling to me in ten years when you need a liver, Vetrova. I’m in top fucking shape.”

“You should all go to sleep,” Ilya said with a sigh.

“It’s not even two,” Shane said, sporting his angry kitten face.

“You see why this makes it worse?”

Since when was Ilya the responsible one? Ilya had fantasized several times about what might happen if Shane and Sveta were left in a room together, it usually involved them gushing about how hot and sexy Ilya is. Them getting drunk and passionate about hockey wasn’t one of the predicted outcomes.

“Don’t be boring, Rozanov,” Shane said with a roll of his eyes. “I thought you knew how to have fun.”

Ilya raised his eyebrows. “You are trying to trick me. I am smarter than this.”

Shane changed tactics, propping himself up on the back cushions and parting his lips as he looked Ilya up and down. “C’mon, Ilyusha. It would make me happy if you gave us that bottle back. I might just have to show you just how happy...tonight.”

Holy turned tables. Normally Ilya was the one making Shane blush by flirting in public, and now Ilya found his eyes widening as Shane spoke. Ilya looked at Pava from the corner of his eye, and the kid looked like he was worried that they were about to drop to the floor and go at it, right in front of him.

“You are cruel, Hollander,” Ilya said before his face got any redder. Sveta was already laughing at him. Ilya rounded the couch and pulled Shane up to his feet. Shane seemed conflicted, both wanting to bat Ilya away and also touch every part of him. “We are getting you water. And food, I will...make sandwiches.”

“Banana bread in freezer,” Pava offered.

“Yes, I will get you that.”

“Just because you can’t get it up after too many shots doesn’t mean it’s the same for me,” Shane reasoned.

“Wow,” Ilya replied slack jawed. “You are such a bitch when you’re drunk.”

“It’s okay, babe, I don’t mind.” Shane turned to Sveta. “That’s what Viagra’s for.”

As Sveta began to cackle so hard she almost fell off the couch, Pava looked confused.

“What is Viagra? Ah, like waterfall.”

“No, that’s Niagara,” Shane said. “Viagra is—”

“He does not need to know because I do not take Viagra,” Ilya interjected. “This is all natural, I am manly man. All it takes is a small breeze.” Ilya didn’t resist when Shane started hanging off his neck.

“It’s okay,” Shane said, “I still love you, even if you take too many unnecessary penalties. And you play Clash of Clans at full volume when I’m trying to sleep. And—”

“Okay,” Ilya said, wrapping his arm around Shane’s waist. “I think we are done.”

“Weewooweewool!” Sveta bellowed, reclining on the couch cushions. “The fun police is here, Officer Rozanov is taking away my new friend. Can you believe this Pavsik?”

Pava frowned. "Where is police?"

"Come sit," Sveta demanded. "We still need to watch our show. No more wine, just soda. *I give my tooth,*" She held out her hand to shake.

Ilya gave her a skeptical look. They were already at home, it couldn't hurt to hang around while they were sobering up. Besides, Shane may be a bitchy drunk, but he was also a clingy drunk, and Ilya wouldn't mind taking advantage of an opportunity for PDA where he could.

Pava was already shaking hands with Sveta, taking a seat on the couch next to her. Shane started drifting backwards to his spot in the corner.

Ilya narrowed his eyes. "You are going to feel like shit tomorrow," he said, but relented. "I will get water."

"Can you get me Gatorade?" Pava asked, already wrapped up under Sveta's fuzzy throw.

* * *

January 2020

Shane exhaled a breath through his nose.

Ilya raised an eyebrow from where he was sitting opposite him on the couch, their toes touching. "Who are you talking to?"

"Hm?"

"You are laughing at something."

Shane looked up. "It wasn't a laugh, it was more of an exhale."

"Is the same for you. What are you looking at?"

Shane shrugged. "I'm just texting Sveta."

Ilya frowned. "Did she get arrested again or something?"

"What? No, we're just chatting."

"For fun?"

Shane raised his eyebrows. "Yes. That's usually what chatting means."

"I didn't realize you talked to Sveta."

Shane gave him a look. "You were literally just on FaceTime with Rose helping her pick her outfit for SNL. I thought you wanted me and Sveta to be friends?"

"Because I thought you two would bond over how sexy I am," Ilya said. "You are talking about hockey?"

"No, actually," Shane said, closing the thread. "She said she was wanting to try yoga and asked if I'd go with her to a class. Normally I just do it on my own, but...I think I might go. She has a gym she likes that does classes."

“Can I come?”

Shane looked up. “You hate yoga.”

Ilya looked like he actually needed to be reminded of that. “Ah, yes, yes I do.”

“Then you don’t need to come. You can hang out with Pava or something, go to one of your gross restaurants.”

“Maybe,” Ilya said. “Maybe I will invite Rose Landry.”

“You should do that.”

Ilya threw up his hands. “Shane, this is no fun. You are stealing my friend and you do not even care when I steal yours.”

Shane laughed, but didn't respond, instead unlocking his phone and tapping out a reply to Sveta.

“Wow, and now he is sitting here texting a beautiful girl. Ignoring his very sexy boyfriend sitting across from him.”

“You've literally been playing candy crush for an hour.”

“Ah, not anymore,” Ilya said. “I am on Twitter. Have you seen what they are doing for Pava?”

Shane's eyebrows furrowed in concern. “No?”

“Is nothing bad. Look.”

Ilya hoisted himself up and laid across Shane, his head tucked into Shane's neck as he displayed his phone screen.

Gen @gsmith02

Guys I’m game day ready, sombrero secured #hattyforthehatman
[image attached]

> **billie** @voyageurvillanelle

Pleasepleaseplease let him get his first hatty during the Montreal game on the 10th!!! I can’t afford to go to boston 😭😭😭

> **Layla** @bearsbunny88

Guys yes or no to an abe lincoln hat

>> **Sonya** @rowantreeerowantree

YES

> **benbam** @bostonpenaltybox

I have a cowboy hat! It’s from the dollar store in case I have to huck it on the ice but still!!

abby @ilyarozanovsbackcheck

What we need is for all the rich people to get in on this because they’re the only ones that can actually get them to the ice #hattyforthehatman

> **hollanov #1 truther @8124eva**

This!!! And make sure to bring signs so we can spread the word!!

mads @pucknduck02

I'm so attached to this little russian boy I'm custom making a mystery machine hat and praying I can get it to him

Shane blinked. "I don't know what I'm looking at."

"Fans have started hashtag," Ilya explained. "They want to get him a hat trick, they have plans to throw a bunch of weird hats on the ice. Because—"

"Because of his hats. Right," Shane finished. "That's sweet. Too bad we can't know when it'll happen. Could happen at an away game. Or it won't ever happen."

Ilya clicked his tongue and pinched Shane's thigh in admonishment. "You are manifesting bad energy. He will get hat trick. I will make it happen."

* * *

Ilya chuckled as he watched the jumbotron during the TV timeout. They were forced off the ice as the ice crew went on to clean up the rink. He pointed with one arm and nudged Shane with the other.

Shane shook his head as he looked to see what Ilya was gesturing to. The Bears mascot had found some unsuspecting New Jersey fans in the stand to harass. It included a lot of gesturing and over-exaggerated movements from the mascot.

"You're such a child," Shane said. Ilya giggled as Barry the Bear brought out pie tins of whipped cream to pie the fans in the face.

"Come on, Hollander," Ilya said. "Lighten up. You get it, right Pava?"

Pava shook his head furiously. "No, I do not like."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Right, I forget you are scared of the mascot."

"Am not scared," Pava said defensively. "But, is not natural, for man to be in suit."

"You are scared," Ilya said. "You refuse to take pictures with him."

"It." Pava insisted.

Shane poked his head out past Ilya. "You've literally met Marc," Shane said. Marc was the guy who was normally in the suit.

Pava shrugged. "Marc is fine," he said, unconvincingly.

"You should be grateful," Ilya said, getting to his feet as the TV timeout came to a close, "that you are not playing for Philadelphia. Then you would have to see Gritty at half your games."

Pava scrunched up his face. "I see him in my sleep sometimes."

Ilya grinned as Pava followed him out to the faceoff circle as they proceeded through the first period. He tapped him on the chest, pausing him as the kid skated by.

“One more goal for a hat trick, yes?” Ilya said. “I will pass to you.”

Pava frowned. *“You should only pass to me if you think I will score. Just because I’ve scored twice doesn’t increase the probability that I’ll score again. The probability is independent. If anything, my above average performance may cause the other team to target me defensively.”* He cocked his head to the side, considering. *“Though, it’s also possible that previous successes can have a positive mental effect on me and my confidence on the ice, further improving my play for the rest of the game.”*

Ilya rolled his eyes. *“I miss when I didn’t know you were smart.”*

* * *

“And Rozanov wins the draw, dumping it back behind the net to regroup. St-Simon to Cloutier, and back to St-Simon. St-Simon carries it up, and tosses it over to Marleau against the boards. Bit of a battle there at the boards for possession, and Marleau to Kosmodemyansky at the crease. Rozanov receives the puck, a bit of keepaway going on here for Boston, the Devils defense is struggling to break through. Rozanov shoots and—denied by Rhéaume and—Kosmodemyansky sinks it on the rebound! Absolutely unbelievable! This is Pavsikakiy Kosmodemyansky’s first ever career hat trick, and he makes it on home ice! The hats are raining down! Three goals in three periods by Kosmodemyansky has the Garden absolutely erupting! And...wow, I don’t think I’ve ever seen that many hats come down before.”

The announcer paused as the broadcast began to zoom in on the scene on the ice.

“They really just keep coming down, huh? And Kosmodemyansky is making his rounds, looking to wave to the fans...ope, no, he’s not waving. Looks like he’s...pickup up the hats? Maybe he doesn’t know there are people for that. He’s gathering them all in his arms...is that a cowboy hat? Okay, here comes his captain, Ilya Rozanov, looks like he’ll probably bring him back to the bench. And...no, okay, he has also started picking up hats, now stacking them in a pile on top of his teammate’s helmet. Harold, can you tell us what’s going on down there?”

The camera cut to the on-ice announcer from his spot near the boards.

“That’s right, Michael, it looks like the whole team is getting out there to pick up the hats. The ice crews seem to be at a bit of a loss there. Wow, this is phenomenal, I’ve never quite seen a showing like this before. I’m seeing top hats, cowboy hats, deerstalkers, trapper hats, bucket hats, gambler hats, bowlers, fedoras, straw hats—”

“We get the point, Harold.”

“Now it looks like Shane Hollander is finally taking to the ice to congratulate the kid, and, ope—no, he’s finally getting things under control. Ladies and gentlemen, they are putting the hats down.”

“Shane Hollander, voice of reason as always. You know, we’ve talked about it before, but I’ll say it again. Hollander has been a monumental addition to this team. We’ve seen the chemistry between Hollander and Rozanov, you just can’t force that.”

“Absolutely, Mike. Those men are close on and off the ice, practically inseparable. That kind of trust and friendship translates to the game.”

“We love to see it. If only more teams had whatever Hollander and Rozanov had going on, we’d be watching some phenomenal hockey every single night.”

* * *

“These will not fit in your house,” Ilya said.

Pava was sitting cross legged on the floor of the empty press room, the only place that had room for them at this time of day. Dozens of hats had been piled around him.

“You know, usually you only keep a couple,” Shane said. “They put one on display, donate the rest.”

Pava reached out and plucked a particularly vibrant one from the piles he’d been sorting. “Look. Is painted. Like Mystery Machine.”

Ilya sighed, crossing his arms. “Pick ten. No more.”

Pava frowned, looking over his shoulder and training his puppy dog eyes at Ilya. “Twenty?”

Ilya shook his head. “You have no room! They will take up your whole house.”

Rather than argue, Pava shifted his gaze to Shane.

Shane looked at Pava. Then at the hats. Then at Pava.

“Surely he could have twenty.”

* * *

February, 2020

Shane was in Boston. He shared a home with Ilya, a bed. They drove to work together, they sat next to one another on flights, they played on the penalty kill together. Shane had his own set of house slippers tucked in by the front door. The hoard of ginger ale in the fridge was slowly depleting.

Shane was here, and things were better. Ilya was taking his medication, he was talking to Dr. Kelly, and things were better than they were. He was managing.

“Ilya?”

Ilya looked up from where he had been spaced out, staring at the loaf of bread he had meant to be turning into a sandwich. Shane’s eyebrows were drawn together as he approached the island.

“Yes, sorry,” he said, grabbing for the bag. He was supposed to be making them lunch.

“You okay?” Shane asked, hoisting himself up onto a stool. “You’ve been...off.”

Ilya blinked, then shrugged. It hadn’t been that bad, he wasn’t getting stuck in bed for hours on end. He was just a bit...withdrawn. Irritable, maybe, he felt a bit guilty at the thought that he might be getting on Shane’s nerves. “No, is normal. I just get like this sometimes, yes?”

Shane frowned. “Have you been taking your meds on time?”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Yes.”

“Maybe we should call Dr. Kelly, try something else out.”

Ilya shook his head, confused. “Why? They are working, I am better, was much worse before, yes? You always say bad days are normal.”

“Yeah, but...” Shane paused, as if carefully choosing his words. “This isn’t just a bad day, is it? I know it’s better than it has been, but...I don’t think it’s meant to be this hard, Ilya.”

Ilya frowned, finally giving up on whatever he was trying to achieve with the butter knife in his hand. He reached up to run a hand through his hair. “I don’t know how much more I can be fixed.”

Shane gave him a look. “I know I’m not the best at...at knowing what to do or what to say. But Kelly said if things aren’t working, we try something new. So let’s try something new. It’s not about fixing you, it’s about getting you back on track.” He raised his eyebrows. “If Pava broke his leg or something, and was refusing to get treatment because it ‘wouldn’t fix him all the way,’ you’d tell him he was an idiot.”

Ilya sighed dramatically, throwing his head back. “Don’t pull the Pava card on me. You are so mean.”

Shane smiled, a satisfied look on his face. “Call Kelly, see what she suggests. We’ll figure it out.”

Ilya nodded in defeat, resuming his lackluster sandwich efforts.

* * *

March, 2020

“Is this cooked through? I can never tell, I don’t want to make them sick,” Cliff said.

“I don’t fucking know,” Ilya replied. “Just keep cooking it. If it is burned, we will just order something in.”

“No, we can’t do that dude. That’s weaponized incompetence.”

“I don’t think you are using that correctly.”

Noor raised her eyebrows as she took a sip from her wine glass. She looked away from the loud whispers echoing out from the kitchen towards Shane, who was sitting across from her at the dinner table.

“He likes trying to impress me,” she said. “I honestly don’t care that he can’t cook, I can’t either. He’s a pretty good bartender anyway.”

Shane turned his attention away from the kitchen, where the clattering of pots and pans seemed to be growing louder. He took his own sip from his ginger ale.

“Just as long as they don’t set anything on fire,” Shane replied.

They were at Cliff’s house, which, according to Ilya, had slowly turned from a sad minimalist bachelor pad to something resembling a home in the past few months that Noor had been in influence. Now there were things like throw pillows and table cloths. There was even a bookshelf packed to the brim with books Shane wasn’t so confident that Cliff had ever read.

“I’m glad we finally got to do this,” Noor said. “Sit down properly. It’s my fault, really, I’ve been so busy with school.”

“MIT, right?” Shane asked.

“Yeah,” she smiled. “Almost done, then I’m planning on sticking around. I’m from Chicago, originally.”

Shane nodded. “I’m always so impressed with people who do their degree, and all that. I wasn’t so suited for school, I was mostly just getting through it until I could play.”

“No kidding. What would you do if they didn’t draft you?”

Shane blinked. Honestly, that was never an option. He’d been followed by scouts since he was eleven years old, hand picked to go top of the draft. Him ever going on to do anything else was out of the question.

“I don’t know,” Shane answered honestly. He tipped his head to the side a bit, “probably something in sports, still. Maybe a physical therapist, or a trainer, or something.”

“Well,” Noor smiled. “I’m glad you’re not. Lord knows the Bears need you. I was never a hockey fan, but it looks like I got sucked into it a bit. Besides, Cliff is way more fun after he’s won.”

“So, how did you guys meet, then?”

“At my gym, actually. I do kickboxing, just for fun, but pretty regularly. He and Connor came by for a session and we got paired up. I kicked the shit out of him. I guess he liked it.”

“Ta da!” Ilya said, appearing from the kitchen, waving a tea towel like a flag. “Your dinner is served.”

Cliff followed closely behind, carrying a tray of roast chicken. It was looking a little burnt. Noor narrowed her eyes as he placed it on the trivet in the middle of the table.

“Well,” she said. “The inside is probably okay.”

“This is why I say we should order KFC,” Ilya interjected.

* * *

June 2020

“Alright boys, gather up,” LeClaire bellowed as he walked into the room. He was wearing his very best suit, along with the paisley tie his wife bought him that he wore to all the playoff games. “We’re just looking for one more. I know you motherfuckers play best with your backs against the fucking wall, and I don’t think there’s any more walls past this. Buckle the fuck up, and crush these Vegas fans’ fucking hearts.”

The team whooped, the energy not dying down as he read out the lineup. When he finished, all eyes turned to the captain.

“You heard the man,” Ilya bellowed. “Let’s fucking win this! I don’t have to tell you how to play good fucking hockey! We will send those sad pathetic excuses for hockey players back to their sad lives, where they gamble and cheat on their wives, but before that we will crush their spirit and sprinkle it over their own ice! I want to see grown men in tears today, yes? Fuck Vegas!”

Shane grinned as the room roared, a couple of guys grabbing him by the shoulder and slapping him on the back. Ilya rounded to the goalie lockers to start his own pregame tradition. He didn’t do his big

speeches so much these days, he usually liked to talk to each player individually, tell them he loved them. If Shane hadn't already seen him do that on the ice back when he was a Voyageur, he would have assumed he only made it up so he had an excuse to tell Shane he loved him in front of everyone.

Shane sat on his bench, taking a moment to close his eyes and take a deep breath. Shane had already won two Stanley Cups, this wasn't new, he had proved himself before. And yet...he felt like he needed to do this. To prove that he was just as good without Montreal. That he could help bring his team to victory.

And on a more selfish note, he wanted to win with Ilya. He wanted to win the cup, and he wanted Ilya on the ice with him when he did. Take that Scott Hunter.

"I am very nervous," Pava said. He had walked across the dressing room just to hover over him. He was clutching his freshly taped stick against his chest. He had recently changed his curve, and was now wielding the longest blade in the league. The thing was so massive it was basically a paddle.

"It would be strange if you weren't," Shane admitted. "But you've been playing well so far. You don't have anything to make up for. Do you have your socks inside out?"

Pava looked down at his skates. He had worn his socks inside out by accident when they won their first playoff game, so of course he had to keep doing it. And apparently he wasn't allowed to wash them. Shane couldn't get behind that bit.

"Yes," he said. "Also have my nap, and banana bread."

"Then I think you've done everything you can do so far," Shane said. "You've got this. We've got this."

"Yes, we do," Ilya said, appearing out of nowhere. "We do not have Ellis anymore, cursed us last year. Will be easy without him."

Pava frowned. "He was very good?"

Shane rolled his eyes at his boyfriend, and turned to Pava instead. "He's talking about his playoff curse. He's been in the cup finals every year for the past five years, and lost every time. It's a running joke."

Pava's eyebrows furrowed together, like he was thinking very hard about something. "We were curse?"

Ilya nodded very seriously. "Yes, but not anymore. So there is nothing to worry about."

Shane was just about ready to give Ilya a shove, tell him to stop telling ghost stories. But he noticed that Pava seemed to be notably reassured from the statement. Whatever he needed to relax before the game, Shane wasn't gonna mess with that.

Shane watched Pava slick his hair back as he slid on his helmet.

"Holy," Connors bellowed as he sauntered across the room, yanking his jersey on. "You're making me look bad. How the hell do you grow a mane like that in two months?"

Pava looked down at himself. Connors wasn't wrong, he had the most impressive beard by far, and his hair went down to his shoulders. It was a bit of a strange combination with his baby face.

“I’m glad someone’s sayin’ it,” St-Simon chimed in. “Shaggy over here putting us to shame.” He paused for a moment before tacking on. “Sorry, you don’t like nicknames.”

Pava hesitated, his eyebrows furrowed as his eyes flitted to Ilya and Shane. He turned back to the room. “Shaggy...like Scooby-Doo?”

St-Simon blinked. “I mean...yeah? I guess.”

Pava nodded. “I like it. Is good nickname.”

“Wait really?” Delly interjected, who was looking a little too giddy. “I have been dying to finally call you a nickname, you have no idea.”

“Calm down, Scrappy,” Ilya said.

“Why am I Scrappy?”

“You’re totally a Scrappy,” Connors agreed. “Just like Doherty’s a Velma and Cap’s a Fred.”

“What the fuck!” Ilya exclaimed, throwing up his hands. “I am not Fred, I’m clearly a Daphne.”

Marly appeared then, placing a consoling hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “Sorry, man, I’m the only Daphne on this team.”

* * *

First Period

As the national anthem played, Shane watched Ilya from the bench. He was bathed in an array of red and blue lights. Shane had finally gotten used to playing games where they didn’t sing the Canadian anthem, it was one of those little changes that hadn’t even crossed his mind when he left Montreal.

The crowd was filled with Vegas fans dressed in gold, but there was a healthy smattering of Boston fans if you looked close enough. During warmups, he even spotted a lone red Montreal 24 jersey, pressed up against the boards.

“And the home of the braaaaave,” the crowd petered out, evolving into a raucous cheer as the lights turned and the announcer boomed across the arena.

Connors nudged him from where they settled side by side back on the bench. “Yeah, we fuckin’ got this.”

* * *

Second Period

They had to be setting some sort of record for the amount of loose sticks on the ice. Between that and Doherty’s left skate blade flying halfway across the ice midgame, there were a bit too many projectiles for Ilya’s liking.

Ilya took the faceoff in their offensive zone, winning it in a messy way that caused him to flop down on his stomach. Once he was finally back on his feet, he found himself moving along the boards to try and get open for Marly, who was trying to wrestle the puck from behind the net.

Marly flung it up the boards right to Ilya, who was unfortunately being flanked on his right by a Vegas player. Ilya was braced facing the glass as he tried to wrestle the puck back into control, but what he hadn't been prepared for was a sudden check from behind that caused him not only to lose possession of the puck, but also whip his head back hard as his chest slammed into the boards.

He looked up, waiting for the whistle to be blown. It seems his entire team and half the stadium were waiting for the whistle to be blown. But nothing.

"The fuck?" Ilya shouted at the ref. "He checked me from behind! That's a fucking five!"

The ref just shook his head. He knew he needed to keep his cool, but this was a high stress situation, and he suddenly felt compelled to pull a classic Rozanov and start verbally laying out the ref.

He took a deep breath. Fuck. He skated to the bench seething.

Just as he took a seat, Vegas turned the puck over and scored on the breakaway. Ilya slammed his stick against the boards.

* * *

Third period

The Bears were hanging on by a thread. They'd had enough injuries that they'd seriously needed to rearrange their lines to balance out the Black Aces. There was a twenty-three year old kid, newly on Shane's wing that had never played an NHL game until the playoffs. He always looked like he was one breeze away from fainting on the ice.

Despite Shane's reservations, it would be that same kid who would draw four minutes for a high sticking that left him with a broken tooth. Shane took a deep breath as Ilya joined him on the ice for the power play.

Shane took the faceoff with Ilya on his wing, winning the draw in their defensive zone and sending it behind him straight to Cloutier, who brought it behind the net.

Ilya crossed over to receive the pass, and the pair began to race up the ice towards Vegas's net.

When Ilya makes it up past the blue line, he's already being swarmed by two defenders, and he just can't get a shot on net. He carries it around behind, waiting for backup that is quick to arrive.

Shane found himself somewhere he didn't normally go, right in front of the net, screening the goalie. Newf was to his right, Ilya straight down the middle of the ice, passing back and forth between Cloutier and St-Simon. It was crowded in front of the net, any shot on goal would be a longshot.

As the puck went back into Ilya's control, he hesitated. It was small, unnoticeable to anyone but Shane. To anyone else, the clear move here would be to pass back to Cloutier, wait for a better chance.

Ilya was going to shoot the puck right then, and Shane was in the way. He was in the way, and he wasn't going to get out of the way by skating there.

So, he jumped.

Shane launched himself into the air, tucking his knees up as Ilya fired, the puck gliding through the air just under his skates, and just over the goalie pads, landing deep in the back of the net.

“Do you guys have fucking mind powers or something?” St-Simon shouted with a laugh as he joined in on the hug.

* * *

Overtime intermission

Five minutes before they were set to go back onto the ice, LeClaire pulled Shane and Ilya off to the side. Ilya wasn't totally sure what it was going to be about. Maybe a shift in the lines? But they had been playing so well. Some information about an injury, maybe?

He certainly hadn't expected what LeClaire was going to say next.

“Listen,” he said, hands on his hips. They were off in the corridor just outside the locker room. There wasn't a corner of this arena that wasn't bustling considering the circumstances. “I just wanted to say...I'm proud of you.”

Ilya's eyebrows flew into his hairline.

“You two,” LeClaire continued awkwardly. “You're good together. At hockey, you're great teammates. And...of course outside of hockey.” The poor man seemed to be looking in any direction that wouldn't result in direct eye contact with Shane or Ilya. “The point is, this,” he gestured between them, “is good, and I support it, we all support it. I'm glad you're...together. On the team, and...all that.” He nodded with a jerk. “Now, get out there and win it. If anyone can do it, it's you two. You hear? You understand?”

Ilya couldn't keep the grin off his face. “Yes, coach, I get what you mean.”

* * *

Overtime

Ilya was fucking exhausted. His whole body hurt, he was jacked up on painkillers, and he was 50% sure he had a bruised rib that he was electing not to tell the trainer about.

LeClaire had moved Shane and Ilya onto the same line for overtime, an attempt to get some life into their offense. The roar of the Vegas fans and their stupid fucking chant was beating into his brain.

Ilya tried to concentrate as Coach Maya gestured over the whiteboard, drawing arrows in a million directions and using every word that must exist in a hockey vocabulary book.

“Keep pressure around the net, play it off the boards and keep it moving. Trust your D-men. Got it?”

Pava looked at Ilya with a confused and slightly panicked expression as he tried to piece together exactly what Maya wanted him specifically to do.

“Just get fucking open and he'll get you the fucking puck,” Ilya explained.

Pava nodded, and the group dispersed.

* * *

Second Overtime

Shane was on the bench when it happened. Straddled on the boards, waiting for a turnover so the lines could change. Ilya's line had been on the ice for over a minute now, and their exhaustion was showing.

Doherty had been a fucking wall, blocking forty shots on goal. Now, he had blocked three shots in just as many seconds, windmilling in front of the net to keep the puck out. The final rebound finally landed in St-Simon's possession, who dumped the puck out of their zone, picked up by Ilya in the neutral zone.

Shane waited for Ilya to come off so he could take his place, but he didn't, he kept on, not wanting to lose whatever momentum they had gathered with the turnover. He stayed holding onto the puck until he spotted Newf, fresh legs taking to the ice, nothing between them but a wide open passing lane of bright white ice.

It was a greasy goal that finally finished them off. A shot from Newf that ricocheted off a Vegas defenseman's skate, flying just over the goalie pads in a nearly unblockable fashion.

Shane had won the Stanley Cup twice before, but neither time felt like this. When he won in Montreal, it felt like a culmination of everything he had been working towards his entire life, like a fuck you to everyone who ever doubted him. He held the cup over his head and whooped, and laughed, and smiled for the cameras. He felt happy.

But this? He couldn't quite describe it. He felt all the things he felt in Montreal and more, but now? It felt like a beginning, instead of an end.

He launched himself across the ice, hardly registering the groan that spread throughout the arena, partially supplemented by pockets of cheering in the crowd. He only had one thing on his mind.

The main pile-up was assembling behind the net, Newf as its epicenter. Ilya was still at the blue line, stick and helmet thrown aside. His curls were wild, his beard a slightly different colour from the hair on his head. He was looking at Shane, grinning ear to ear. Shane tackled him to the ice.

He didn't care how it looked to anyone else. Two grown men, rolling around clutching each other on the ice. Shane's mind wasn't anywhere else other than on what was in front of him right now. The cool touch of the ice below him. The smell of sweat in the air. The feeling of his cheek tucked against Ilya's neck.

It felt like a do-over. For every tainted memory from Montreal. He could achieve all his dreams all over again, and this time he could look back on these memories without all the scars.

By the time Shane had finally come back to his senses and gotten to his feet, the main swarm had started to dissolve. Pava came bounding over to the pair, wrapping one arm around each of them and yanking them together like ragdolls.

"Shane Hollander we did it!" He exclaimed, hopping in place on his skates.

"What about me?" Ilya laughed. "I did it too!"

Pava didn't respond, just continued his little hops as he spun the trio around in a circle. "Will you take picture for mama?"

Shane grinned. "I think there's a lot of people taking a lot of pictures already."

In the chaos of it all, bearhugs from his teammates, the handshake line with Vegas, congratulations from management, Shane hadn't even noticed. Not until Ilya pointed it out.

"Shane, Shane, listen," he said, looking up into the stands and lifting a finger to his ear.

Shane furrowed his eyebrows, trying to tune out the constant buzz of the crowd around him.

"I love you baby, and if it's quite alright, I need you, baby..."

He turned back to Ilya, who was smiling. "Is kind of like...our song, yes? Julia Stiles?"

Shane laughed. "Yeah. I guess so."

Shane felt a bit out of his body as he watched the commissioner take to the ice. As he watched Ilya lift the cup, then Pava, Marly, Doherty. As he took the cup for a lap. As Doherty received the Conn Smythe.

Newf was skating around the ice, all smiles, grabbing each and every one of his teammates and giving them a dramatic smooch right on the lips.

Ilya scrunched up his face when Newf locked eyes with him. "Is this really necessary?" he asked.

Newf grinned as he grabbed Ilya by the ears and planted one on him. "Just pretend ya kissin' a cod, b'y."

It all felt like something out of a dream. Like something Shane had only dared to think about, hunkered down in his cottage alone, when the idea of having Ilya as anything other than a dangerous hookup seemed impossible.

Shane stood side by side with Pava as he watched Ilya be pulled off for a quick interview, towel wrapped around his neck and his championship hat flipped backwards, looking smug as ever.

"Shane Hollander?" Pava asked, still huffing and puffing from the excitement.

"Yeah?"

"Can I stay with you and Ilyukha tonight?" he asked. "We can get ice cream? Watch Scooby Doo? One with Hex Girls."

Shane let out a light chuckle, shaking his head fondly.

"Sure," he said. "That sounds like a plan to me."

* * *

Ilya sat on the couch. His feet were propped up on the coffee table, a quilt gifted to him by Margaret tucked around his lap, and an Oreo blizzard in his hands. To his left, Pava was eating his soft serve with chocolate dip, one hand now in a cast. To his right, Shane, who Ilya had convinced to get a Dilly Bar.

"Is Hex Girls second movie," Pava said, gesturing at the screen and speaking over a mouthful of soft serve. "Eights Scooby-Doo movie. Fives direct-to-video."

Shane nodded. "I always liked the Hex Girls. I didn't even realize they were in other movies."

“TV, too,” Pava added.

They ate in silence for a few more minutes, the only sounds filling the room coming from the TV.

“Did you know,” Pava started up again. “Fred and Scooby have same voice? Frank Welker. Is only original voice still doing Scooby Doo.”

“Very cool, Pava,” Ilya said, licking the dollops of ice cream that had ended up all around his mouth.

They made it about seven minutes before Pava chimed in again. “Did you know Shaggy’s real name is Norville? And Scooby is Scoobert.”

That was enough for Ilya to give in, hanging his head as his chest shook lightly from his laughter. He turned to Pava, reaching up to ruffle his hair with a grin, far too sentimental for what it was.

“I love you, kid,” Ilya said.

Pava looked confused. *“Why? Because of Scooby-Doo?”*

Ilya shook his head. Pava was still munching away, chocolate melted into a stain on his t-shirt that he was sure Shane would tell him to spray with stain remover before going to bed. He felt Shane on his other side, pressed up against him and munching happily on his dessert, surprisingly invested in the movie. It was well past midnight, but Ilya didn’t feel anything close to tired. Ilya elbowed Pava lightly in the shoulder.

“Yeah. And for a couple other reasons too.”

Chapter End Notes

Guys, you would not believe how much this fic has changed since I started writing it. The ending was going to be very different, and would ultimately result in Shane and Ilya coming out to their teams and the world. However, as I've been working on this and doing a lot of exploration into Shane and his relationship with hockey culture, not just as a player but as a gay, asian, autistic man, I began to switch gears. I think that *The Long Game* doesn't do the greatest job of reflecting just how severely coming out would affect Shane's career as someone who is already constantly questioned and viewed as weak due to his race. I think that at the point that Ilya has cut himself off from Russia, Shane has a lot more to lose by coming out, and I also have faith that Ilya would be more understanding about that than he does in the books.

Another thing, I really wanted to go the route that Shane and Ilya never explicitly come out during their careers. I truly believe that this is probably the most realistic way for them to proceed without coming out publicly, especially since in this version of the story Ilya's green card status makes him a bit more wishy washy in his protections than if he moved to Canada. There's something interesting that happens when you're in such a heteronormative environment, where homosexuality is so unthinkable that a shield of reasonable doubt is created. There's no way they're gay, they're obviously just really close friends. This was partially inspired by the Edmonton polycule. There's literally so much going on here but this is kind of a [masterlist](#), but basically McDavid and Draisaitl (some of the biggest stars in the league) have been getting up to some of the craziest homoerotic stuff together and no one bats an eye (they live next to each other, they married a set of best friends, they went on a joint honeymoon). I think that Shane and

Ilya could absolutely get away with living together and being physically affectionate and just having it be passed off as them being best friends and bonded teammates.

As you've seen, this has become a series. Now, I'm gonna be honest with y'all, I'm not sure I have enough content in mind to create a full fledged sequel, the last thing I want to do is put out something that's no good because I've got no direction, and honestly too much fluff would get me bored. So, unless something sparks an idea for a sequel, I'm planning on putting out oneshots as a part of this universe. If there's anything in particular you want to see, or anything you would want in a sequel, please let me know in the comments! At the very least, I do have planned a fic covering the two months in Boston when Shane is initially traded, so if you were disappointed that it was skipped over in this chapter, have no fear! (and yes, you'll get to see them play Montreal).

Thank you so much for the support and your comments!!! This fic has exploded way past what I ever expected. If you have anything else you'd like to see from me I'd love to hear it :) keep on tagging me in Tumblr prompts or dropping your ideas, I don't have anything in particular planned for the future but I'm easily convinced.

As always, fun facts ahead, once again forced into the comments because I can't shut up.



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