something that looks like love

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Summary

During their years of hooking up, Shane and Ilya stopped booking hotel rooms altogether, instead choosing to stay at the other's apartment. It changes everything, it changes nothing.

Notes

lets pretend this is how being a traveling hockey player works...

also don't think about the timeline too much, it just starts in vaguely 2014-ish

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See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

The door closed behind him with a loud click, making Shane cringe into the dark hotel room. The light flicked on, revealing Hayden Pike sitting on the bed with a shit eating grin.

“How long have you been sitting there in the dark waiting for me?” Shane asked in a dry tone, shrugging his jacket off onto the desk chair. He already knew his friend’s antics, and this didn’t surprise him. If anything, he felt relieved that Hayden was still awake so he wouldn’t have to tiptoe around the room.

“Oh, way too long,” the other man replied a little too casually. Shane shook his head fondly and made his way over to his bed, right across from Hayden’s. As soon as he reached the edge he allowed himself to fall right over, eyes closed, letting the mattress catch him. After the game, post-game, and his personal post-game, he was bone tired, all of his muscles sore, some more pleasantly sore than others.

Silence stretched through the room. Shane turned his head to Hayden, who was still looking at him, but the glee of clearly having caught Shane coming back from a hookup had turned into a confused pensiveness. Shane raised his eyebrows at the look. Immediately Hayden put his hands up in an “I’m innocent” way.

“Nothing, just surprised you’re here is all.”

Shane rolled his eyes and looked straight. “We’re sharing the hotel room, why wouldn’t I be here?”

“You’re here at night man, but the entire day you’re out with your Boston girl.” Shane looked back at him, just in time to watch him shrug casually. “Doesn’t make sense, shouldn’t it be the other way around?” He hadn’t realized how much Hayden would know about his comings and goings, hadn’t expected him to even make the right judgement that Shane was out hooking up with someone. Though, with a quick look down at himself, he could admit that it was obvious.

Still, he let a teasing smile on his face. “You’re trying to kick me out?”

“Hell yes.” Hayden’s arms came behind his head. “Dude, if there’s one time to let me have the room all to myself it’s at night.”

“Don’t forget you have a wife.”

“Why do you think I need the alone time? We pay for an international phone plan for a reason.”

Shane cringed and looked away. He knew that Hayden would never cheat on Jacki, but it was fun to poke at him. Still, there were things he didn’t want to know about his friend.

“I’m just saying,” Hayden continued, “you’re over at her place all the time anyways. Might as well save the trip.”

He gave a small huff. “It’s nothing *that* serious.”

“You’ve been hooking up with her for years, right?” Hayden gave him an incredulous look, eyes going wide and brows furrowing, “I’m pretty sure that it’s also the girl you text all the time.” Shane’s eyes darted over in panic. “Lily? Anyways,” he continued, like Shane’s heart hadn’t started beating wildly in his chest at the thought that he wasn’t as secretive as he would’ve liked about his texting partner. Thank god that Ilya put in a different name. “You can’t say that it isn’t serious. I don’t even think I’ve seen you be interested in someone else.”

“I totally have been.”

“Name one other person. *Ever*.”

A pause. “Whatever. We have an early flight in the morning anyways.” Shane turned to flick off the two lamps in between the beds, casting the room into darkness.

Ilya set a soft kiss on Shane’s lips and rolled off of him. They both laid there for a second, just catching their breath, before Ilya slowly peeled himself away. “Shower,” he whispered, leaning in to press another kiss to Shane’s lips, pulling away too fast for the other man, who tried to chase him.

Shane pressed back further into the pillows, letting himself watch as Rozanov moved fluidly around the bedroom in his condo. They had met up here enough times that the Russian knew the floorplan as well as Shane did, but sometimes it still felt surreal to see the level of comfort the other man had.

It seemed like not even a minute later that Ilya walked back out of the bathroom, towel hung low on his waist. His blond curls had straightened out from the weight of the water that was now dripping from his hair. Shane was transfixed by the droplets as he watched Ilya sit back on the bed, relaxing into the other pillow.

“You have good soap. Smells nice.”

His head shifted to look at the Russian, the movement sounding noisily against the pillow. “You leave some for me?” he teased.

Rozanov looked at him in a way Shane couldn’t decipher. “I will buy you more.” He seemed faux guilty, playing into the tease.

Shane rolled his eyes and looked straight up at the ceiling. “Asshole. What am I supposed to use now?” His words were fond despite himself. He laid there for a moment as the sounds of sheets rustling filled the room, and he felt the bed ripple as Rozanov moved closer, laying on his side and peering down at Shane.

The blond slowly leaned in, but Shane didn't close his eyes, not wanting to look away from his face. There was a soft expression on it that he never saw at any other time, only when they were in between meetings like this, when one of them lingered and they allowed themselves to pretend for a second more that they didn't have to leave. He liked to pretend that these expressions were only for him.

Ilya stopped short, right before Shane's lips. He could feel the soft breath on his skin, coming out in short puffs. "You stink. Go take shower."

The moment was ruined. Shane rolled his eyes and pushed the other man off, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. As he padded around the room, picking up his miscellaneous clothes from the floor, he saw in his peripherals Rozanov prop himself against the bed, watching him. He bit back a smile as he gathered his clothes, careful to fold them.

As he quickly rinsed off, he wondered if Ilya was going to leave when he was in there, then reminded himself that he didn't care. Even if he cared, neither of them had ever snuck out like that, and they weren't going to start now.

On his way back, his eye caught on a nondescript black t-shirt on the floor. He recognized it as the shirt that Ilya was wearing when he opened the door. Not really thinking, he picked up the shirt and tossed it at Rozanov, who caught the crumpled ball. Shane's eyebrows furrowed as he watched the other man pull on the shirt. "I think you left a shirt the last time you were here."

Rozanov quirked an eyebrow and finished shrugging the piece of clothing over his torso. "Hm," he hummed, tilting his head side to side in consideration. "Yes. You can keep." He gave Shane a winning grin. "I know how you miss me."

The black-haired man rolled his eyes again and sat on the bed next to Rozanov, ignoring the heat that flushed over his cheeks. "You're just going to leave your shirts here on purpose so you don't have to pack as much." He leaned in so that they were sharing breaths, but neither made a move further than that.

Ilya hummed again. "Would be convenient." He met Shane's eyes. "I come here anyways, and you have closet."

A traitorous memory enters Shane's head and he gives a strained laugh at the coincidence. Ilya noticed it, of course he did, and gave Shane a questioning look, prompting him to explain. "Sorry, you just reminded me of something Hayden said."

Rozanov glared, but there was no real heat in it. "*I* remind you of Pike?" He makes a show of how offended he is, looking around the room and pointing to himself, then gesturing to the position they were in.

"Shut up." Shane smiled. His head pulled back straight, staring at the ceiling in front of him. He didn't know why, but he was nervous to bring up Hayden's suggestion, but there was no real choice, not when Rozanov was prompting him to continue. "He knows that I hang out with a 'Lily' when I'm in Boston-"

“Hang out? Is that what we do?”

“And,” Shane continued in a soft voice, not paying attention from the interruption beyond the hint of a smile on his mouth, “he joked about me moving in with her when we stay in Boston so he gets the room to himself. Said that I’m over there enough it wouldn’t make a difference.”

“Ah,” Rozanov relaxes further into the bed, but there’s still some tension there. “He is asshole,” he says, but it sounds halfhearted. Shane doesn’t respond. The silence grows in the room, penetrating through everything that was once alive and making it feel like nothing more than dust. Shane feels like his heart has climbed into his throat, but he swallows it down. What he said wasn’t anything serious, just repeating a joke.

But somehow, with the two of them in his room and one of Ilya’s shirts already hanging in his closet, it doesn’t feel like a joke.

He watched as the other man excused himself, saying that he should get to bed. Watched as Ilya went about the room, moving like he belonged there. Watched as he carefully took the black shirt off and replaced it with one of Shane’s hoodies, placed the shirt on the back of a chair and looked at Shane directly in the eyes, something unreadable in there.

And then he watched as he left and closed the door behind him.

The thing was, ever since Shane brought it up, Ilya thought he was going insane. Maybe he was. There was no other explanation for the way that he stumbled his way through the next few months, almost in a daze.

He couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Even worse, now that he had the idea in his mind nothing else felt like enough. He could fuck some girl, but that was all it would be for both of them. There wouldn’t be that same thrum in his veins, not when they didn’t push back the way Shane did, biting back and surprising him and getting on his knees like he was made for it, not because it was what he was supposed to do when having sex, how the girls he fucked did it.

It hadn’t seemed appealing in a long time.

Ilya looked down at his drink, the shitty club music reverberating through his head. It had been in his hand for hours, condensation gathering on the outside and making his hands slightly wet. He cursed in Russian and threw the whole drink back all at once.

He lost count of the drinks he had after that, he just knew that it wasn’t enough to get stupid pretty Hollander out of his mind with his freckles and his soap that smelled like tree bark and the fact that he now had Hollander’s sweatshirt hanging in his closet.

Ilya didn’t remember the taxi ride home or unlocking the door. He was just suddenly on his couch, phone in hand. He closed his eyes. He wondered if Hollander would stay next time, if he was able to frame it right. “Yes Hollander,” he said aloud to the empty house, “your idiot

friend Pike is correct. You should stay at my house because-" His mouth stayed open, trying to search for words, but he didn't say anything. He didn't know where he would go after that, didn't know what he could say to actually convince Hollander to stay. Worse, he didn't know what Hollander would say in response.

Because he knew why he wanted Hollander to stay, and he knew that it would scare him away, the flighty bird that he was.

He leaned his head back against the pillow behind him, tilted back all the way to expose his neck, and let out a frustrated sigh.

Briefly, he wondered if he should buy the soap. Maybe if Shane took a shower at his house and saw it he would stay, but Shane hadn't been to his house yet. Just like Ilya hadn't been to Shane's actual apartment. Besides, Shane seemed the type to be scared away by something that simple happening this soon. And maybe Ilya felt something in his chest at the idea of Shane using his soap, covering himself in the same scent that Ilya did.

He took a deep breath and checked the calendar, even though he already knew the dates by heart. The Voyagers would be coming down to Boston in three weeks. He had that long to prepare.

It would only be later that he realized he hadn't picked up a girl at the club, that he hadn't picked up anyone since Shane brought up the idea.

Shane stared at the address that Ilya texted him. It hadn't changed from the first time he saw it, the previous day, or from sitting in the airport and waiting for their plane. They had landed now and Shane had his bags in hand, but he hesitated, rereading the other texts that followed.

Lily: come after flight ;)

Jane: You're insatiable. It's only 10 am.

Lily: hmmm

don't go to hotel first

Jane: But I have to unpack.

Lily: so boring :/

why bother?

Shane hadn't responded to the last text. He didn't know how he *could* respond. An arm appeared around his shoulders, and he flinched away for a second, immediately going to shield his phone before he realized it was Hayden.

“She has a point,” he said with a knowing look.

“Don’t read my messages,” Shane scolded, face running hot.

Hayden rolled his eyes. “Just go dude. You have a beautiful girl wanting your ass fresh off the gross plane, after a day of traveling. You know I’m right.”

Shane ducked his head, putting his phone away. “This is your fault in the first place, I hope you know that.” It was as good as acceptance.

“Oh I know it,” he cupped Shane on the shoulder, “and I’ll remember when you ask me to be best man.” He winked and walked away before Shane could respond.

The ride there seemed to last forever. They had left the city early into the drive and were going through the suburbs. Shane’s heart was in his throat as they passed by houses, no apartment buildings or high-scale hotels to be seen. This was different for them; they had never met at each others’ actual residence before.

He got out of the car, suitcase in hand, staring up at the house in front of him. There were no neighbors close by, but he still didn’t want to be caught staring so he hurried to the front door, ringing the doorbell.

A few moments passed before it opened, revealing Ilya dressed casually in sweatpants and a fitted shirt. “Hollander,” he nodded, stepping to the side and letting him walk in. Ilya’s eyes caught on the suitcase and he fought back a grin. Of course, Shane caught his line of sight and rolled his eyes. “I told you I needed to unpack.”

Ilya pressed a kiss to his temple and closed the door behind him. “Later.”

Shane looked into his eyes and nodded. “Later,” he agreed.

Later, Shane was laying in bed with Ilya. He checked his watch and almost cursed. The hotel check-in window would close soon. He turned to Rozanov and placed a small kiss on his mouth, causing the other man to crack open his eyes and press their mouths together slowly, lazily kissing each other. Neither had it in them to make it more heated than it was, just kissing each other to kiss.

After a minute, Shane pulled back slowly, stopping Rozanov as he tried to follow. “I should go.”

Rozanov blinked. “Go?”

He nodded slowly. “Yeah, I need to leave now if I want to make it back to the hotel to check-in.”

Ilya looked at him, staring deep into his eyes. There was a tiredness in them that wasn’t there before. His eyes flickered to Shane’s lips and he kissed him again, slowly, then pulled back and let his forehead rest on Shane’s. “Stay.”

“What?” Shane’s voice cracked, sounding panicked, like he hadn’t heard Ilya correctly.

“Stay,” he repeated in the same soft tone, then swallowed and pulled back a little further. “Pike wants the room to himself, no?” He looked back into Shane’s eyes, wild and frantic as they were, matching his breathing. “Besides, I’m not done with you yet.”

A moment passed where Ilya thought that Shane was going to decline, running out of the house as fast as possible. He could see it all play out on his face and he closed his eyes, stopping his torture of trying to decipher Shane’s next move.

Slowly, Shane melted back into his body. He was tenser than before, but Ilya didn’t let it bother him, immediately snaking an arm around his waist. “Ok,” Shane agreed, voice small. “But the game is this evening–”

Ilya cut him off. “You forget, I play for Boston.” He styled his lips in a cocky smirk to stop himself from begging Shane to just stay and forget everything else. “I need to go to the stadium too.”

Shane huffed. “They’re going to notice.”

“They’re stupid.” Ilya shook his head. “We play for different teams. They won’t talk to each other.”

A few moments passed and then Shane fully relaxed. “Alright.”

“Alright,” Ilya parroted.

“And then what?” Shane asked, “I come back to your house after the game?” He tried not to show how his heart beat, just at the idea of it.

The Russian gave a devilish smile. “Yes. And when we beat you–”

“Not happening.”

“–I will fuck you how you like to be fucked after game.”

And that was that.

It went exactly as Ilya had proposed. He drove to the stadium, Shane in the passenger seat, and parked inside with all the other cars. Shane insisted on getting out of the car early, so Ilya spent the last few minutes by himself. The drive there wasn’t as awkward as he feared, but still wasn’t where he wanted them to be.

And then the game. Both Hollander and Rozanov gave it their all, chirping at each other, pushing each other into the boards. It was like nothing changed between them.

In the locker room afterwards, Hayden shot Shane smug looks, knowing where the captain had been just hours before. He also promised to cover for him missing curfew, but Shane knew that the coach wouldn’t care in this case. They won the game and didn’t have anything lined up except travel, and even that was in the afternoon. He was going to be easy on all the players, not just Shane. The coach rarely did room checks anyways. Still, he wasn’t going to make it a habit.

Waiting in the stadium's garage, Ilya's neon green sports car pulled up to the front and Shane quickly got in, not wanting to wait around for someone else to see. Rozanov laughed at his antics, but pulled out of the garage quickly, his hand finding Shane's leg easily and just resting there. The area that he touched felt on fire, but he never moved, steadily staying there the whole drive back to the house, even as Shane felt like he was going to vibrate out of his skin. He knew that Ilya saw how he was affecting him, even though he never took his eyes off the road to look over at the passenger seat.

It was too long from then that the driveway came into view, the car easily pulling into the garage.

Ilya casually got out of the car as if he hadn't been driving Shane insane for nearly half the night, even before he got in the car. Some of those chirps were straight-up flirting, an area that they never treaded during the game, at least, not as outright as it had been tonight. But that didn't stop him, even as Shane tried to warn him that he wasn't being subtle.

And now he was getting his hockey bag out of the back of the car, leaving the trunk open as he walked away and disappeared into the house, leaving the other man behind without so much as a glance. Shane shook his head in disbelief and then got out of the car as well, following Rozanov's steps and getting his hockey bag and then walking into the house.

He didn't expect to be jumped when he walked in, pushed against the wall. He immediately responded, but struggled to keep up with heavy equipment in his hand, not wanting to risk damaging it if he dropped it.

He pulled back and started tearing at Shane's shirt, mouth attaching to his neck. Shane took the moment to place his bag on the floor and shrug off his shirt, mourning the brief loss of contact, but it was back as fast as soon as he completed the movement. Rozanov slotted their lips back together as Shane's hands skirted up his shirt, trying to get it off without moving away from the other man.

"Where do you want?" Ilya asked, dotting kisses down from Shane's lips to his neck. "Bed? Couch? Kitchen? Table?"

Shane imagined it, the two of them on Ilya's couch. They hadn't done much outside of a bed before, definitely not as much as Shane was planning to do with him now, but there was something about it that was more appealing than the other options.

They were a blur of flinging clothes as they chased each other down the long hallway that outlined the entire house, laughing as they passed by windows that replaced the walls. It was freeing, Shane would realize later, all sweaty and laying in Ilya's bed by himself while the other man took a shower. To be with Ilya in a place like this without the constant tingle in the back of his neck, telling him to hide or check the windows or stop whatever he was doing and make sure there was no one else there. Even when they met in hotel rooms there was always the threat of someone being able to hear them through the walls.

He didn't get to think about it too hard before Ilya was walking out of the bathroom, throwing a towel at Shane's face. He caught it on reflex, then glared at the other man.

“Your turn.” Ilya flopped next to Shane on the bed, laying still for a moment before turning over to face him. “Unless you like to sleep gross.”

Shane laughed and sat up, shuffling his way to the bathroom. It would only be a few minutes until he was out again, taking his spot next to Ilya. The Russian immediately wrapped his arm around Shane.

They were silent for a moment, until Ilya spoke. “Jesus Christ, you are tense.” He looked over at Shane. They had both closed their eyes, but they were wide awake. “Relax, Hollander.”

Shane huffed but complied anyway, forcing himself to relax. This wasn’t weird, he was just going to sleep. With Rozanov, in his bed. Despite himself, his heart was racing, no matter how much he tried to will it down.

And then Ilya shifted so that his arm was over Shane instead of just behind him. With the weight on top of him, Shane immediately felt more relaxed. It wasn’t long until he was opening his eyes again, this time to the sun shining in them. He groaned and squeezed them shut, his hand coming up to his face to try and cover it more.

“Hmmm, Hollander?” Ilya mumbled from behind him, gravely and low with sleep. At the sound of his voice he felt more awake, but also guilty, knowing that he had probably woken him up. It was too late now, as he felt shifting beside him. Ilya propped himself up on his side to drop a kiss to Shane’s cheek, causing the other man to crack his eye open.

“What time is flight?” Ilya asked, his hand trailing along the side of Shane’s arm. He gave a sleepy smile. “Not until late afternoon. I should leave around one.” His voice was rough disuse. “And it’s,” he checked the time on his phone, “seven now.”

“You wake me up at seven? In the morning?” Now that he was more awake, Shane could hear the gruff in Ilya’s voice as well. It sounded good on him. It… fit in a way Shane thought it didn’t on himself.

Shane turned over so he was fully facing Ilya. “Didn’t mean to,” he mumbled. His eyes were a little blurry after just waking up, but he couldn’t tear them away from Ilya’s bedhead. His arm moved without him realizing, his hand petting the crumpled blond curls.

Ilya caught the arm after a second of it being on his head. “Better like this,” he teased, keeping the arm in his hold as he rolled to be on top of Shane.

“I hate to break the mood,” Shane started, even though he woke up more aroused than he had in years, “but I’m not going to kiss you without brushing our teeth first.”

Ilya paused for a moment and then got off him, swearing as he made his way to the bathroom. Shane was close behind him.

Thirty minutes later, they were in the kitchen. Ilya made eggs for Shane, then once it was in front of the man he pulled out a bowl and made himself some cereal. It was quiet as they ate, but a comfortable kind of quiet. Until it wasn’t, and Shane was trying to convince himself

that it wasn't weird that he spent the night with Rozanov. They'd slept together for years, this couldn't have been the most intimate thing they'd done together.

And yet.

It was nice, being able to go slow with Ilya. As much as he loved it when they had no time, when their schedules were slammed and they stole minutes or hours or however long they could get, he also liked waking up with him. He liked that he could just… be around Rozanov and not immediately jump his bones because every second spent with clothes on was a second wasted.

After breakfast, Ilya had taken both of their dishes and put them in the sink before leading Shane over to the living room. Ilya sat down and Shane tried to put some space between them, only to immediately be pulled closer by Rozanov putting his arm around him.

They watched tv in relative silence, occasionally making comments until they gradually stopped watching at all to just talk to each other. It was like they were just hanging out, which was something Shane never thought he'd be doing with Ilya.

"Pike had good idea," Ilya started after a lull in the conversation. Shane turned his head to look up at Ilya, having been pressed against his chest. "Very good idea," he agreed, and turned back to watch the tv, acutely aware of his heart beating in his chest and the time on the clock. He had twenty minutes at the latest if he wanted to be on time for his flight back to Montreal.

"Montreal is back next month" He looked down at Shane. His expression was vulnerable in a way Shane wasn't sure he'd seen before. "Maybe you do not get hotel."

"Maybe not," Shane agreed. "This way seems to be better."

"You've never been a light traveler before."

"Shut up," Shane said, speaking around the drawstring of his sweatshirt resting in his mouth. He hadn't checked in a bag, and barely had a carry on, which apparently couldn't go unnoticed. He didn't bother looking over at Hayden, but a big smile grew over the two of their faces. As he brushed his teeth that night in Ilya's house with some disposable toothbrush, he knew that Hayden wouldn't be smiling with him if he knew who Lily actually was.

Still, it gave him a little thrill less than a month later when it was Ilya in his apartment for the first time. He had decided to forgo the investment property, something that Rozanov made sure to tease him about. It was worth it to see him take in the space, suitcase in hand, and then decide to pay attention to Shane instead. And when he left Montreal, two days later and a smug look on his face because Boston won their match, he tried not to notice the suitcase that was *accidentally* left behind. Because it had to be an accident, for his own sake.

The suitcase wouldn't be touched on this trip, or in between Ilya staying with him, but if, the next time Boston played in Montreal, Ilya didn't bring anything, he tried not to notice. If, as

Shane was doing the laundry, he noticed a few pieces that seemed unfamiliar, he tried not to notice.

On his next trip to Boston, he replaced the disposable toothbrush with an electric one, the exact same model he kept in his own apartment. Ilya said nothing about it, but he could tell when he noticed, grin on his face as he tucked in next to Shane and they fell asleep tangled together.

Things progressed even further.

Montreal seemed to visit Boston more than the other way around, which Shane didn't have any problems with. It was nice to decompress in Ilya's house out in the suburbs, teasing each other and watching hockey and just existing around each other. It was weird, sure, but it was nice as long as Shane didn't think about it too hard. Of course, their routine had to break at some point.

Shane looked up from his phone. "You're going out after the game?" There was some game playing on the tv, but it wasn't hockey. He had quickly lost interest.

Ilya rolled his eyes, gesturing with the hand that wasn't around the Asian-Canadian's shoulders. "Team says is weird that I stay in now. They are making me." He gave Shane his best innocent face, as if he wasn't going to enjoy it.

"Woe is you," Shane deadpanned. "So what, are you going to drop me off here and then turn back around?" The roundtrip alone would be an hour.

"No, no, you take car, I take different car."

His eyebrows raised. "You trust me to drive one of your cars? I'm not on your insurance."

Ilya looked up at the ceiling, exasperated, but there was something fond in it. "Hollander, you go below speed limit. You will be fine. Besides," he looked back at Shane's face, "I was thinking of getting one."

Shane laughed. "You have a million cars here, you don't need more."

"Not here," Rozanov's voice was small, serious. "In Montreal."

His mouth opened and he had to look away, trying to get his heartbeat under control. "It would be easier," he acquiesced, mirroring the softness of Rozanov's tone, "You'll rack up a bunch of parking tickets at the airport when you're there."

That got a small laugh out of him. "It's good thing I have money." A few moments of quiet passed, Shane's head spinning at the idea of Ilya doing something that… permanent in Montreal. "You should have car here," Ilya looked over again, eyes big, "better than ride from airport."

"Oh, you don't want me to just take one of yours all the time?" he teased, doing a really bad job of pretending to be normal about it.

Ilya made a *click* with his mouth. “You want sports car?” He laughed and then shook his head. “Not sensible van?”

“Shut up,” he said, because he knew Rozanov was right.

Ilya sighed dramatically. “There is one problem.” He waited for Shane to respond, “What?” dryly before continuing. “You won’t always be stuck in house, waiting for me to get back and fuck you.” He made a mock pout, which Shane rolled his eyes at.

“You’re an asshole,” Shane responded, but there was a smile on his face.

Later that night, soothing himself from a hard loss against Boston, he found himself alone in Ilya’s house, scrolling on some used car website. He tried not to think too much about it. That’s how this arrangement worked. He didn’t think, just tried to be in the moment, and they didn’t talk about it as it drifted so far from what it was supposed to be.

Ilya always knew how to shut Shane’s brain off when he was around. But when he was gone, and it was the rare times Shane wasn’t traveling for games, it consumed him. There was no pretending when he was alone, not when there was an extra toothbrush next to his sink and an ever-growing collection of clothes that he tried to ignore in his closet.

But Ilya wasn’t here right now, and, sitting in his house alone, he couldn’t stop his brain.

What was he doing, thinking about buying a car just for it to live at the airport or be at his hookup’s house the few times a *year* he was there? Just for what, more convenient sex than they’ve already been having?

But, like Ilya said, it would be better than getting a ride from the airport, or even waiting until the team left for Ilya to pick him up, the few times they did that. Of course, when that happened Ilya didn’t want Shane to walk to the parking lot, so he picked him up in front of the terminal, flashy sports car on full display, nearly causing Shane to have a premature heart attack.

He closed his laptop, running his hand through his hair. There was something playing on the tv but it might as well have been off. He didn’t know how he got here, how he’s in the middle of Rozanov’s house without the man himself, and it felt natural to be there.

He was almost happy that Montreal made it to the playoffs and Boston didn’t, just so he could have some space from their situation, but felt guilty as soon as the thought entered his mind, and then felt weird about that guilt. He didn’t know what to do with that.

He sighed and stood up, deciding that he wasn’t going to do anything good by sitting around, getting deeper and deeper into his own head. Surely he was just overreacting. His feet took him through the house, the glint of the car and house keys on the kitchen table prompting him to move faster, landing in the bedroom. It was almost like he was in a daze as he walked over to the closet, knowing exactly what he was going to find there as he opened the doors.

Nothing but clothes greeted him. His own clothes, neatly hanging on one side of the closet. There must’ve been enough for Shane to stay for two weeks.

And the thing was, as much as Ilya seemed to embrace it, Shane had tried to not combine their wardrobes. He still packed clothes when he visited Boston and took care to not lose any. It seemed that, over the course of their… *whatever* this was, he had still left a decent amount behind, and Ilya took the opportunity to give him space in his closet.

Wasn't that what he was also doing at his apartment, every time Ilya casually chucked his clothes into Shane's hamper and he pretended not to notice? Every time he looked in his own closet for clothes, and dutifully avoided the corner full of Ilya's? He was getting good at pretending days.

He stumbled back until his knees hit the edge of the bed, his face slack as he sat down. It wasn't supposed to be like this. They weren't supposed to be this… entangled with each other.

Minutes must've passed. He wasn't sure. He just didn't want Rozanov to see him like this, freaking out over something that's been creeping up on him since the middle of last season, and it was now near the end of the next one. His hand rubbed down his face, trying to pull himself from his thoughts.

Later, he would lay down in their bed alone and wake up with Ilya wrapped around him and feel a strange sense of relief that he came back, even though it was never in question. Later, when Shane was alone in Montreal, he would browse used car websites again and make an offer on one. Later, he would realize that they hadn't even had sex that day, and he would find that it didn't bother him much.

But for now, he moved to sit against the headboard with his eyes closed and tried not to think about Rozanov.

"Captain," J.J.'s voice called out obnoxiously through the locker room. "You should come out with us tonight."

Shane shook his head politely, looking at the hopeful faces in the room. "Not tonight, sorry boys." He moved over to his cubby, hoping it was the end of the conversation, but he knew better.

J.J. followed behind him, leaning on the cubby next to him. "Come on, you've been single forever." Shane ignored the pointed look from Hayden. "With a home win, every girl will want you, so no need to worry."

"Very encouraging," he responded dryly, leaning over to take off his shoes. "But I don't like to go out during the season." Which had nothing to do with the blond Russian man that promised to be waiting at his apartment rewarding him for his win.

The quebecoise man lingered for a few more moments, then walked away, knowing it was useless. "If you change your mind I'll text you the address," he threw over his shoulder.

"So," Shane turned his head to look at Hayden, who was hunched over and untying his shoe. "You haven't told them about Lily." The other man nodded in the direction of the rest of the

room.

He shook his head and continued getting out of his pads. “There’s nothing to tell.”

“Nothing?” Hayden stopped and looked at him like he was insane. “You’ve been living with her for two years.”

“Year and a half,” he corrected. “And I only stay with her when we’re in Boston.” Unless Boston was in Montreal, which meant Rozanov would stay with him. But that wasn’t helpful to his argument.

“Yeah, and we’re there all the fucking time dude. You don’t even bring any bags anymore when we go there. Not even a fucking hockey bag.”

He shrugged. “It’s just more convenient for both of us. Besides, you’re the one who wanted it to happen.” He didn’t mention that he still brought a carry-on with the few things he refused to leave at Rozanov’s house. Those were dwindling anyways.

“I was being an asshole that wanted to see his friend happy with a girl. Sue me.”

“At least you’re finally admitting you’re an asshole.”

“But what do you mean there’s nothing?” He continued, as if Shane hadn’t spoken.

He forced himself to act casual about it. “We weren’t exclusive before I started… sharing Lily’s space. We didn’t talk about it afterwards, but I know she liked to get around before. No reason to stop.” His sentence turned bitter toward the end, but he tried not to read too much into it.

“And you’re ok with it being like that?” Hayden’s voice was soft, caring, and he was reminded that this was his friend who genuinely wanted the best for him, not one of the other guys on the team that just wanted him to live the stereotypical hockey life.

“It’s just how it is.”

“But *you’re* exclusive with her.” It wasn’t a question. Shane looked straight ahead, not wanting to look at his friend. He felt too exposed.

It was silent for a bit as they finished taking off their hockey uniforms completely, each movement slow instead of the rush that some of the other players did in the room.

“Shane,” Hayden started slowly, trying to be cautious. Shane hung his head between his knees, not bothering to take off his compression wear. “You do realize you guys are practically dating already.”

A sharp intake of air. “Clearly not.” They couldn’t date. That was one of the only things they agreed on, although as the thought passed through his head he realized he couldn’t think of much they disagreed about either.

“Do you *know* if she’s been with other guys?”

Shane closed his eyes, desperately wanting to be away from this conversation. “We don’t talk. At least, not about things like that. But I… hear that she still flirts as much as she did before.” He didn’t want to reveal his source was the tabloids, that would give too much away. A moment passed before he continued. “It’s just part of her personality.” He didn’t bother trying to hide his bitter tone this time.

Hayden hummed. After a moment, he turned and clapped Shane on the shoulder unexpectedly. “Hey, maybe that’s changed. It seems like it has for you. Just ask.”

Shane glared up at him from under his lashes as Hayden walked away with an optimistic spring in his step. “Just ask,” he mocked under his breath. And, well, that was the problem wasn’t it? He and Ilya didn’t talk about what they were doing or how they were feeling or anything like that. They fucked and lingered and tried to pretend that it was normal, because now it kinda was. They shared houses and shared beds and walls and closets and gave each other soft looks and kisses and words and none of it was anything beyond the confines of passing moments together because it couldn’t be.

The drive back from the stadium was the same as always, but somehow it seemed quieter than normal. Every breath he took seemed to echo as he grew closer to his apartment, the elevator feeling restrictive as the numbers ticked by.

The doors opened. He walked into his foyer, kicking off his shoes without missing a step, and was greeted with the smell of something cooking. Turning the corner, he was greeted with a sight that he was sure would stick with him for years. Ilya Rozanov was standing in his kitchen, leaning over a pot, with two dishes on the side ready to be plated. While shirtless.

Shane didn’t know where to look first.

Rozanov must’ve heard him enter, because he turned to face him. “Ah Hollander, you are here in time.” He looked over at the stove again before walking away from it, giving Shane his full attention. A smirk grew on his face when he saw Shane’s dazed reaction and realized it was because of him. He leaned in, kissing Shane thoroughly, and the other man immediately responded with the same enthusiasm. Ilya hummed into the kiss, one of his hands running into Shane’s hair and using it to pull him closer.

He pulled away, leaving an even more dazed Hollander than before. Ilya’s hand grabbed onto Shane’s arm and led him over to the other side of the kitchen island, where there were a few bar stools, and sat Shane down on one of the chairs. After one more kiss, he walked back around to the other side. “I said earlier that I have surprise for you winning game.” He deadpanned, then gestured behind him at the stove. “Surprise.”

“What, uh, what is it?” Shane asked, looking at the pot on the stove, unable to see the contents inside.

“Is pasta. Easy to make, even with your no groceries.” He leaned on the counter. “And I have tuna melt in case you do not like.”

“Lot of options.” There was a small smile on Shane’s face.

Ilya shrugged, as if it were nothing, then went back to paying attention to their food. Shane watched as he finished whatever cooking was left and then plated the food, pasta and tuna melt and steamed zucchini. He slid Shane's plate over with a wink, the ceramic ringing against the marble countertop. Ilya sat next to him soon afterwards, and prompted him to start eating. He didn't start his own plate yet, watching intently as Shane took his first bites.

Shane met his eyes, not knowing why he wasn't eating yet. Ilya's eyes flickered down to his plate and then returned, expression prompting him to respond. "Oh," he looked down at himself, "it's really good."

Ilya reached over to squeeze his shoulder and then started in on his own plate.

They ate, making little quips at each other about their game tonight. Ilya cursed out Montreal's goalie for stopping his perfect goal that would've won the game for Boston, nevermind that Montreal had been up by several points by then. Shane commented on Ilya's dirty tricks to win the face-off, which quickly got the two off track as Ilya defended himself.

And then they had empty plates and were just sitting in the kitchen, talking. It was nice, but Shane felt a growing sense of urgency to ask the question.

He leaned back against his chair, heart pounding as he started his lead-in. "The team thinks I need to get laid."

Ilya smirked and leaned closer to the dark-haired man. "Oh? They think you can't?" His words were low as he leaned in closer, pressing a filthy kiss onto Hollander's mouth, teeth catching on his lower lip as he pulled away.

"Shut up," Shane smiled, eyes closed, after Ilya pulled away. "They've tried setting me up three times this month." *Lie*. The only one who cared that much about his love life was Hayden, who was invested in the 'Lily' story that Shane spun.

"Makes sense," he leaned against his own chair, not meeting Shane's eyes. "I don't hear of you with girls." It wasn't the response he wanted, but he didn't know what he expected, and why it would be anything different. It was stupid. He shouldn't have let Hayden into his head, shouldn't have allowed himself to hope that maybe he was right and things changed for Ilya in the way that they changed for Shane.

He wanted to say that he's heard of Rozanov with them, that it's plastered on the internet almost every week. He wanted to ask if it was true.

"Because it's not their business. I keep a lot of things private, clearly," he said instead, trying to be flirty at the end.

Instead, the air seemed to deflate from Rozanov's lungs in a single breath. "Private," he repeated. His eyes bore into Shane's. "You bring them here?" he asked.

"No," Shane's eyebrows furrowed. He tried to turn it around, feeling like he messed up. There was no reason for him to look for a girl, not when their meetings left him fulfilled in ways that he didn't want to name. "Rozanov, your stuff is all over my bathroom. You keep a

toothbrush here." Ilya had invaded his life. There was no reason to look for anyone else while that was true.

There was a small part of him that thought Ilya might be jealous, but he immediately dismissed it. Ilya knew that there was no one else that Shane was with, he said it himself earlier.

He tried to pivot, asking what he started the conversation to do. "Do you bring girls to your house?"

Ilya sent him an icy stare, looking more tired than he had in years, maybe. Definitely more tired than he had ever looked with Shane. Then he got up, taking both of their plates and placing them in the sink. Shane just watched as he moved to the cabinet at the far corner of the kitchen, the one that he had stocked with the alcohol that Ilya left there because he didn't have any in his apartment. It was silent as Ilya grabbed one of the nicer vodkas and got out a glass, quickly filling it up and downing it. After a moment he seemed to have decided against the glass, instead raising the bottle to his lips as he turned back around to face Shane.

"What are you doing?" he asked, confused and concerned. He didn't leave his seat, but he tensed just in case something happened. The tone had changed so suddenly, he couldn't keep up.

Rozanov pulled the bottle away from his lips. They were all red, and Shane was trying not to focus on them. It wasn't the time. "All my shit is in your bathroom." He gestured with the bottle. "All my liquor is in your cabinet." He brought it back to his mouth and drank like it was water.

"Rozanov," Shane tried. He had no clue what had changed with the other man, only that something about him mentioning their living together had caused it somehow. He bit his lip and settled into his seat. He knew that they didn't talk about it, had been through his own spirals and thoughts about their situation, but he didn't realize it would affect Ilya so strongly.

At least it answered his question. If this was how he was acting when reminded of how close they had gotten, there was no way he was only with Shane.

He bit his lip and looked down, eyes closing. His phone buzzed in his pocket and he checked it without thinking, seeing Ilya's eyes on him from the corner of his vision.

J.J.: you need to come out

we're at my buddy's restaurant

the whole cast of fucking X-Squad is here

Shane's eyes flickered to Ilya, who put the vodka bottle on the counter. A quarter of it was missing. An address quickly followed the other texts. He turned his phone off and placed it

on the counter, face down. Ilya raised his eyebrows, like he was daring Shane to tell him what it was. “It was just my team. They want me to come out.”

Ilya scoffed like he didn’t believe him. A moment passed before he shrugged, failing to be nonchalant. The alcohol must already be in his blood stream, as his movements were a bit jagged. “You should.”

“What?” Shane didn’t understand anything about Ilya right now, apart from the fact that the other man didn’t want to hear anything more about the two of them growing closer. “No. I’m not going to leave you here alone when you’re like this.”

“I will also go out,” he said, then nodded his head as if him saying it was the first time he thought about it. “Different bar, do not worry.” The words were bitter and dry and everything opposite of what Shane wanted from the night.

He pursed his lips. “You really shouldn’t,” he said, for more reasons than their next game against each other in two days. It was one of those rare times they had a game back to back, with a day in between. They were supposed to be using this extra time to their advantage, not splitting up to hang out with their teammates.

Ilya waved his hand, dismissing him.

Twenty minutes later, Shane found himself at Mile End, standing around with J.J. and a few other guys from their team. He wondered what bar Ilya was at, if he was with his own teammates, if they were watching after him. He wondered if Ilya was planning on finding a girl tonight, if he was even going to come back to the apartment.

He needed to get some air.

Shane gave some murmured excuse to the group and left, walking through the restaurant until he saw an open seat and sat down.

“Please tell me you’re hungry.” Shane looked up, not realizing he wasn’t alone at the table. There, in front of him, was Rose Landry.

She continued talking as if it were a normal thing. “Because the chef made these fritters for me, but I can’t possibly eat them all.”

He froze for a moment before reaching for one, deciding there was no harm done. But with the first bite a wave of nausea overcame him, so intense he didn’t know how he didn’t realize it before. It must’ve been there since he left for the restaurant. He gave her an awkward smile and placed the fritter on a nearby napkin.

“You don’t like it?” she asked, looking down at the plate like it offended her.

He gave the politest smile he could muster. “I’m just… not in the mood for it tonight.”

She hummed, accepting his answer. Her eyes lit up as she looked at him. “I’m Rose, by the way.”

That made a genuine smile break across his face. As if there was someone who wouldn't know who she was. "Nice to meet you. I'm–"

"Shane Hollander. Center for the Montreal Voyagers. You've scored 26 goals since the season started." She shrugged, giving him a lopsided smile. "I'm a fan."

"Really?" He sat back in his chair, fully turning his attention to her.

Rose hummed in confirmation. "I'm from Michigan," she said as if it were an explanation.

The two of them continued chatting a little bit, making small talk about his games or her movies. And then–

"Shit." She swore, cringing. "You can't tell anyone I said that. I'm serious," she scolded him, "I signed an NDA." They had been talking about her upcoming role in X-Squad when she let something slip.

"It's alright, I'm good at keeping secrets." His eyes bore into the wooden table, mood suddenly dropping.

"Let's hope," she laughed, then regarded him with an interesting look at his sudden change in demeanor. "You know, most guys would've asked me out by now."

His head whipped up. He hoped the shock on his face wasn't too obvious. "Oh," he said, blinking. The entire exchange flipped on its head as he went back through their conversations. Had she been flirting with him? "Right." Was he supposed to do that now? He didn't really want to.

"And," she continued, "you're moping." She made an exaggerated pout before reaching her hand over the table. "Girl problems?"

Shane deflated, lips pursed. His eyes darted out to each side, making sure there was no one from his team that could overhear. "Something like that," he allowed. His mouth opened to say more, but then he ducked his head.

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." The words were reassuring and firm.

Shane's mouth went dry. "I do." His hands wrung together under the table, eyes pressed shut. He needed someone he could talk to, someone other than Hayden. Someone who would actually be able to give perspective. Rose seemed as good as anyone, and she wasn't another player. "Not here," he gritted out.

She furrowed her eyebrows but nodded, seeming to understand. The two of them picked up their things and left the restaurant, but as soon as they were hit by the icy Montreal air, dozens of lights flashed, blinding Shane. He looked over at Rose, only to see that she wasn't as affected, probably used to it.

They picked up their pace, rushing to get out of the light. Belatedly, Shane realized that he had Rose's purse in his hand. He didn't want to think about this getting into the papers, didn't want to think about Ilya seeing it. Not after the exchange they just had.

He let Rose lead the way to her hotel. It was one of the ones he and Ilya used to use before this whole mess started.

When the door closed behind him, Rose pounced. Metaphorically. “So what is it?” She asked, trying to be sympathetic but also clearly hungry for the story.

Shane cringed and took off his jacket, walking further into the room. It was one of the sweets, so he sat down on the couch. Rose quickly followed, tucking her legs beneath her as she sat next to him. Somehow, she had a glass of red wine in her hand and handed one over to Shane, who took it without thinking. He set it on the side table.

His eyes looked up at the ceiling. He didn’t know where to start, how much of it he could say. “I’ve maybe been seeing someone.” She squealed next to him, slapping him on the arm.

“Tell me about her.” She took a sip of her wine.

“Lily.” Shane supplied. After a beat, he decided to take the plunge. “But that’s not- it’s another player.”

All the excited energy that Rose had stilled in that moment, and he could tell that she was halfway between understanding the threat that it faced, but also wanting to be more excited for him.

“Oh my God,” is what she settled on. She sat up straighter. “That’s… hard. How long has this been going on?”

He gave a halfhearted shrug, not-so-secretly relieved that Rose didn’t try to ask who it was. “It’s nothing serious. But…” he trailed off

She leveled him with a look. “Shane Hollander, I am about to lose my goddamned mind.”

He chuckled, fingers nervously playing against his leg. “Since rookie year?” he cringed.

Rose slapped his arm. “You rebel!” she accused.

“It gets worse,” he leaned his side against the back of the couch so he could still talk to her. “We play each other a lot. So, we,” he paused, trying to think of how to say it, “well, we don’t book hotels anymore when we do.”

She immediately read between the lines. “You live together?” she asked incredulously, staring at her glass of wine before blinking and refocusing on Shane’s face. “And you think it isn’t serious.”

Shane swallowed uncomfortably. “We had an argument about it recently.” She gave him a ‘no shit’ look. “He seemed uncomfortable when I brought up how we shared the space.”

“Hang on,” she interrupted, “I need more context than that.”

And so Shane told her. He told her how he tried to ask subtly if *the other person* was seeing anyone else still, because with everything he was going to say, he wouldn’t give up Ilya’s

name. He wouldn't dislodge him from anonymity like that. How the argument untangled. Rose made him stop a few times and give more context about their situation.

When he was finished, she sat with her hand massaging her temples. The bottle of wine had long been finished.

"So," she started, "What I'm hearing is that you guys have been fully dating for two years– *sorry, a year and a half*–" he sent Shane a dry look, knowing he was about to interrupt, "and haven't had any communication."

"We both agreed we couldn't date."

"*Couldn't*, not didn't want to." She gave him a soft look. "And you already got around that. What would change if you put a label on it?"

He stayed silent, eyes flickering shut. Nothing would change, not physically. But he would have to put his emotions out in the open, and he didn't even know what those were. He just knew that he wanted to continue as they had been forever, even if it had apparently not been what Rozanov wanted and resulted in some pent up feelings from the both of them. It was fine, even if every time they were quiet Shane felt this looming sense of dread that one day Rozanov would be tired of him and he would be back to hotels as quickly as he was out of them.

His eye cracked open briefly and he looked over at her.

She sighed. "You're not going to follow my advice, are you?"

"You know me so well already," he said, snuggling deeper into the couch. With his eyes closed like this, he could pretend it was the couch in Ilya's house.

"Alright." He heard her nails tapping on a screen. "I can work with this."

"It's not your job to fix it," he replies automatically. He didn't want to burden her more than he already had.

"Oh," she laughs, "no, I think I can make it worse actually." Her nails tapped more. "Do you know the paparazzi think we're dating?"

His eyes flew open and she showed him the social media post. People were talking about it, having seemingly accepted it as their new reality, even if it hadn't spread very far.

He met her eyes.

"So," she started conspiratorily, "this 'Lily' is obviously head over heels for you," he moved to interrupt her but she shushed him, "and now the press thinks we're dating." She motioned for him to continue her thought, but he was too confused. She rolled her eyes and continued. "We keep it up, make 'Lily' jealous."

He huffed dryly. "It wouldn't work." His lips pursed and he shook his head. "He doesn't care about that." Not when he acted how he did earlier.

Rose rolled her eyes. “Shane, if we’re going to be best friends, you need to get with the program. Also, this would be really good press for the two of us.”

“I didn’t agree to any of that.” She shushed him again.

“I’ll be at your game the day after tomorrow,” her words left no question about it, “and I’ll be wearing your jersey.”

“That’s an awful idea.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “But he’ll be watching. It’ll force him into making a move, one way or another.”

Shane was quiet for a few moments. “I don’t want to lie to him,” he said finally. “We’ll deny the rumors.”

Rose pouted. “You’re no fun.” She raised the glass to take another sip, then realized it was empty. “But I’m still wearing your jersey.” At his look, she raised her hands to defend herself. “What? I’m being a supportive friend.”

Shane rolled his eyes, but there was a smile on his face.

Somehow, Ilya got back before Shane did.

He didn’t know what to do with himself, alone in the apartment. Was this how Shane felt when Ilya left him to go out with his team? He frowned at the idea. His outings had become more and more frequent, and he always pictured Shane in his home, making food and doing whatever boring thing he liked to do. He thought it was good, that Shane would need more time by himself as they became more… more, that he would take comfort in not being around Ilya so he could adjust.

Now, in Shane’s apartment, he’d never felt more out of his depth. He was surrounded by things that weren’t his and walls that he knew but never too intimately. He never had a reason to pay attention to the space before, always too busy with Shane.

He walked through the apartment like a ghost. Phantoms of Shane and Ilya appeared all over, reenacting their scenes of passion around the rooms.

He stopped at the bedroom, closing his eyes. Shane was out right now, probably with some girl that his team wanted to set him up with. Ilya didn’t want to be in the bedroom alone. He took a step and breezed into the bathroom instead, looking at himself in the mirror. God, he looked like shit.

He needed to fix this.

So what if Shane wanted to fuck other women? Ilya had done the same, and he had come back to Shane. He just needed Shane to do the same.

His eyes were bloodshot. He looked away from the mirror, instead looking at the countertop. Ilya's things were perfectly organized next to Shane's. *Rozanov*, Shane had said, *your stuff is all over my bathroom.*

He hung his head.

He had tried so hard to not spook Shane off, knowing how the other man was about some of these things. And Ilya was patient, he would go at his pace. But maybe now they wanted different things.

No matter.

Ilya didn't know when Hollander would be back. It was already strange for the other man to be out, let alone being out this late. He didn't know how long he had, so he started thinking of how to win Shane back.

Immediately, he felt like an idiot. But he would rather feel like an idiot than push Shane into someone else's arms by accident.

With a confidence he didn't feel, he moved back into the bedroom, removing his shirt, and sat in the middle of the bed, slowly leaning back until he was laying down. His phone appeared in his hand and he opened his texts with 'Jane.'

Ilya took a picture of himself on the bed, careful not to get his face in it. He sent it over before he could overthink his decision, before he could talk himself out of it because Shane was probably with someone else by now.

Ilya: [image sent]

come over

10 minutes passed.

Ilya: you know address?

10 more minutes.

Ilya: is yours ;)

He didn’t understand why Shane wasn’t responding to his texts. Didn’t want to think of what else he could be doing.

And then a notification popped up on the top of his screen, immediately grabbing his attention. It read: ACTRESS ROSE LANDRY AND HOCKEY STAR SHANE HOLLANDER DATING?

He couldn’t resist it, despite the pit that formed in his stomach. His finger tapped on it, revealing the article. There were hoards of pictures proving their claim, showing the two leaving a restaurant together. Hadn’t Hollander said he was going to a bar? He was holding her purse, she was reaching for his hand.

They looked happy.

Ilya was going to be sick.

The article was published hours ago. If Shane was going to come back to the apartment with Rose fucking Landry, he would’ve done it already. He was at her apartment or house or condo or hotel, it didn’t matter what it was, just that he was with her instead of Ilya.

He got himself a hotel room that night, but he stayed at Shane’s apartment until the morning. It might’ve been the last time he would be able to.

And then he made himself scarce.

The next day was a shitshow of statements and press and confirming that Shane was just friends with Rose Landry, as hard as it seemed for people to believe. It didn’t help that Rose dragged him out again that night, determined to solidify her place as his “bestie.”

Shane didn’t know where Ilya stayed. When he returned to the apartment the other man wasn’t there. He tried to tell himself it didn’t matter.

The hours dragged by until it was the next day. Game day.

Rozanov ignored him on the ice, even when they were placed against each other for the face-off. Nothing Shane did or said got his attention. Ilya just acted like he wasn’t even there and he played like it too.

And then they showed Rose Landry on the center screen, decked out in a Montreal jersey. She blew a kiss to the camera, but when it lingered longer, she stood up and showed off the name ‘Hollander’ on her back. Her movements became intense, even though the video was silent it was obvious that she was telling Montreal to beat Boston. It was like she was demonstrating exactly how to do it, making her hand into a fist and slamming it into her hand, making muscles with her arms, miming a chokehold.

She sat down, laughing.

Boston won.

There was no stopping Rozanov in the periods following. He was like a man possessed. If Shane thought he was playing well before, now it was like there was no one else on the ice.

It was a rough locker room. Shane couldn't get away from the teases of his other teammates, and it was even worse when he could feel Hayden's eyes on him, clearly wondering what happened to 'Lily.'

He didn't give him a chance to ask. Rose texted him about going to a club afterwards, her follow-up texts leaving him no other option. In spite of it, his lips quirked into a small smile.

"Great game!" Rose said when he arrived, sitting next to her. She had changed out of the jersey and into a sparkling dress, making her stand out. He rolled his eyes. "No it wasn't."

"No it wasn't." She agreed, handing him a drink. "You got your ass beat." Her face scrunched in mock sympathy.

The two of them talked for a bit, Shane getting another drink –non-alcoholic this time– before his eye caught on someone.

Ilya was there, in the club, looking at Shane. It was almost like he was frozen, only moving his eyes, flickering between Shane and Rose, but ultimately settling on Shane.

Rose watched as his jaw set. She looked between the two of them, how Shane seemed like he was holding his breath, the gaunt look that the Boston player had. Her mind replayed Shane's words, how his 'Lily' was another player. The game recontextualized itself.

She leaned over. "You should invite him over here."

He turned to her like she was crazy and shook his head.

Her eyes went back to where Rozanov stood, a dark look on his face. Damn it, she didn't realize what it would look like to him. She was suddenly glad that Shane said no to the fake dating play, because she didn't want *him* going after her.

Rose rolled her eyes and waved Ilya over. He remained frozen. "What are you doing?" Shane hissed. She waved again more insistently. "Getting you your man," she looked over at him, "I know, I'm the best."

Shane was stiff before he slumped in his seat. Rozanov started walking towards them, stopping at the edge of their table as if he was intruding. His hands were in his pockets, almost like he was trying to be casual, but there was insecurity written all over.

Rose motioned for Shane to scoot over, which he did.

"So, Rozanov," she started, having to talk loudly over the club music. Her hand waved for him to sit down, which he did, albeit stiffly. The start of the night didn't bode well, not if she had to act for them. "Good game tonight. I've never seen you play like that before."

His expression was intense. It took a moment for her to realize he was glaring at her. "Yes."

Shane looked in between the two before he settled on Ilya. “She’s a big hockey fan.”

Ilya huffed and looked away. He didn’t respond for a moment, letting the table fall into silence for an uncomfortable amount of time. And then, “You didn’t seem to be a fan of Boston earlier.”

“And you proved me wrong,” she took a sip of her drink, “I was mostly just there to support Shane.” Her arm slung around his shoulders. “We’re besties now.”

Shane gave Ilya a long-suffering look, but the other man had frozen in place.

“Besties?” The word curved around his Russian accent, but the disbelief was evident.

Rose rolled her eyes, as if this was something she expected him to know already. True, they had made their statements to the press, but it was hard to shake the rumors, especially since it hadn’t been very long since they started. People loved believing things when they were still fresh. “Don’t tell me you believed the paparazzi.” The silence was enough to confirm it, but she kept going. “Shane here,” she placed her other hand on the front of his shoulder, “is already spoken for.”

Shane took a nervous sip of his soda, but Ilya perked up at the comment. “Oh?” he looked over at Shane, a teasing smirk growing on his face.

Rose nodded, as if she didn’t know that Ilya was the man in question. She untangled herself from Shane. “Yeah, he was talking on and on about this *Lily*–”

“I think that’s enough,” Shane interrupted her, keeping his face polite but glaring at her with his eyes.

“No, no,” Ilya waved, “tell more. What did he say about Lily?”

Rose met Shane’s eyes again and sighed dramatically. “It’s not my place to tell.” She caught Ilya’s gaze and winked. “But apparently they’re not even exclusive,” she stage-whispered, as if she were reciting a juicy piece of gossip.

“Rose!”

The life seemed to drain out of Ilya’s face. “Not exclusive.”

Rose nodded her head and took another sip of her drink. “That’s what I was told, at least.” She leaned forward, resting her elbows on the table. “He,” she nodded her head in Shane’s direction, “thinks that Lily is still seeing other people.”

“Am I not even here anymore?” It was nothing more than a mumble aimed at the ceiling.

“He thinks that?” Ilya looked over at Shane for a moment. His lips parted as he regarded him, Rose could see the thoughts forming in his head. “Well,” he started slowly, “I do not know this Lily. Obviously.”

“Obviously,” Rose parroted.

“But I think she has not been.” He looked softly at Shane as he said that. “What about Shane?”

His head lulled over to look at Ilya. “I haven’t been.” His words were soft. He had never heard his first name come out of Ilya’s mouth before. He was suddenly obsessed with the sound.

It was looser after that, the conversation flowing more freely between the three. Somehow it didn’t feel like Rose was third-wheeling, with her and Ilya teaming up to tease Shane good-naturedly.

Rose’s eyes wandered over to the dance floor, breath catching when she saw a woman with tanned skin and curly hair. She was turned away from her, but would occasionally tilt her head, allowing Rose to see a little bit of her face. She was beautiful. Maybe the most beautiful person Rose had ever seen.

“Shane,” she whispered, not bothering to take her eyes off the girl. She had an irrational fear that if she took her eyes off the girl, she would disappear into the crowd. Rose definitely interrupted something between him and Rozanov but she didn’t care. “I’m going to go dance.”

Shane frowned and followed her gaze. “Oh,” he looked over at Ilya briefly, who was also looking at where Rose was. “That’s Svetlana. Do you want me to introduce you to her?” He wondered what she was doing in Montreal, but assumed she came with Ilya. Is that where he was staying the night before?

Ilya turned to him confused as Rose’s mouth dropped. “You know her?”

“Yes Hollander, you know her?”

He shrugged. “She lives in Boston. We hang out sometimes when I’m by myself.” He turned to Rose, “She’s one of Ilya’s friends,” he explained, his cheeks burning at the use of the first name. He tried not to feel self-conscious about it. “You should go talk to her.”

Rose stared at him for a second before pecking his cheek and leaving the table. “Don’t bother waiting for me,” she said before immediately walking up to Svetlana and striking a conversation.

“That is what you do when I’m with team?” Ilya had abandoned all sense of secrecy. It was obvious that Rose already knew about the two of them, even if he couldn’t tell how much she knew. “You hang with my friend?”

Shane felt self-conscious all of a sudden. “She has a key.” He looked over at Ilya, who was still confused, expression telling him to continue. He rolled his eyes. “She was there one night when I got back by myself. Didn’t seem too surprised that I was there, just surprised that I was, uh, myself.”

“Ah. And you do… what together?” Ilya was trying to understand. Shane mumbled something under his breath. “What did you say?”

The other man seemed shy, cheeks tinted pink as he looked up. “She teaches me Russian.”

All the air left Ilya’s lungs. His face went slack. “Say something.” He needed to hear this, immediately. Shane didn’t have many friends, he knew this, especially not any that were Russian. And there weren’t any players on the Voyagers that spoke the language, not natively. There was no reason for him to learn.

Except for maybe the fact that Ilya spoke Russian.

He didn’t want to overthink it, overestimating his own importance.

“Что ты хочешь, чтобы я сказала?” *What do you want me to say?* Shane stumbled over the words a little, but the Russian rolled off his tongue fairly easily. It was clear that this had been going on for a while; he was no beginner and had a fairly decent accent.

A smile broke on Ilya’s face, blinding. He wondered how long Shane had been learning. He wondered if he was right, if Shane learned the language for him.

Shane ducked his head, a little embarrassed. “I know it’s not great but–”

“Is perfect,” Ilya stopped him. He looked around for a moment before leaning in close to Shane’s face. “We should go.”

“Go?” A small smile bloomed on Shane’s face.

Ilya shrugged one shoulder like he was trying to be casual, but his face gave away his feelings. “To the apartment.”

Shane tried not to smile at the idea of Ilya being back in his apartment after staying somewhere else the night before.

The first half of the season went by slowly, with Shane trying to savor every moment that he and Ilya were together. At best, they saw each other every two to three weeks. It stopped feeling like enough. They started taking later flights, rarely flying out with their teams unless they were going straight to another game.

It couldn’t last like this, hadn’t they just proven that?

Every time Shane tried to bring *it* up, Ilya distracted him or changed the subject. But Shane couldn’t get Rose’s question out of his head, *what would change if they put a label on it*?

Nothing would. Not really.

And it was different now, after their argument –if it could even be called that. They had resumed right where they left off, but sometimes Shane looked at Ilya, and he swore that Ilya could read his mind. They had gotten closer, but their *thing* felt more fragile. Maybe that’s why they were holding on tighter to each other.

They had to talk about it eventually.

The mid-season break was coming up. It was only a week long, but desperately needed. Shane was at Ilya's after the last game before the intermission, waiting for the Russian to get back. He had gone out again with his team but said he would be coming back soon.

In the meantime, Shane was watching some Russian show with Svetlana, only half paying attention as he texted his parents. He was going to visit them, didn't have a good reason not to, but he wished he could be with Ilya instead. They only ever got fleeting moments together; it would be nice to have more time. But he didn't know if he could ask. If Ilya would let him, or would just change the subject.

He wanted to ask.

Shane knew if he asked Sveta *or* Rose for advice they would both tell him that he and Ilya were being stupid. They seemed to be on the same page about the two men, which almost made Shane regret introducing them.

He tried imagining it. Ilya coming back, Svetlana leaving, and then they fall into bed together like always. He didn't know who would bring it up first, maybe Ilya asked about the break, maybe Shane asked about Ilya's plans. It didn't matter. Once someone brought it up, he would just ask "Do you want to come to Ottawa with me during break?" Simple. Straightforward.

Ilya would probably say no. He would let him down easy, though. Make up some reason why he couldn't so Shane didn't feel too embarrassed about being rejected. Or maybe he would just say it outright, maybe he would try and remind Shane that they needed to be a secret, that they were nothing more than hookups. They both know that it hadn't been true in a long time. But as long as they didn't talk about it that's all they were.

There was a knock on the door. Svetlana looked at him, confused. "Didn't Ilya say he would be coming back near midnight?" Shane glanced at his watch. If it were Ilya, he was more than half an hour early. He had never come back early from the club, but maybe he was just being impatient. Shane definitely was.

The knocking resumed. Shane sighed, pocketing his phone, and stood, walking to the door. Ilya must've forgotten his key. After all, they had been occupied before they left for the game.

He opened the door.

Cliff Marlow.

Both men stood frozen, staring at each other. Shane was immediately aware of how casually he was dressed, in a white shirt and sweatpants. They were probably Ilya's.

"Hollander?" Cliff spoke first, breaking the silence. His head peered into the house, as if to make sure he was at the right place. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Footsteps sounded in the hallway, drawing their attention. Svetlana, wide-eyed, had clearly heard that it wasn't Ilya.

Shane felt like he couldn't breathe, even as Svetlana stepped next to him. They shared a panicked look, before Svetlana gave a nervous giggle. It sounded intentional. "Marlow," she started. She had clearly met him before. "I wanted to surprise Ilya with his *friend* after the game."

Shane looked back at her, and she discretely elbowed him. "Right. Yes. I wanted to," he stumbled, trying to come up with some excuse, "play a prank?" Svetlana glared at him. "You know, leave a bunch of jerseys with my name on them. Leave the place trashed." He swallowed, his hands finding his pockets. "Stuff like that."

"Looks pretty clean to me."

Shane laughed too loudly. Svetlana elbowed him again. He shut up.

"Anyways," Shane winced at the volume of his own voice, "What are you doing here, man?"

Marlow looked between the two like he didn't believe them. "I wanted to give Roz something, he left it at the barn." It was then that Shane noticed the fabric in his hands.

Shit, that wasn't Rozanov's, that was Shane's.

Had Rozanov taken to bringing Shane's jacket to the rink? He'd have to tease him about it later.

"Right." Shane reached out. "I can take that for you."

Cliff huffed. "As if, Hollander." He shouldered his way inside, past Shane and Svetlana and into the living room.

"Это было ужасно," Svetlana said quietly, watching Shane close the door. *That was awful.*

"Что мы делаем?" *What do we do?* Shane asked, the Russian still feeling foreign in his mouth.

Svetlana inspected him. "Мы подождем, пока он уйдет." *We wait until he leaves*. At Shane's inquiring look, she continued. "Хотите сохранить ваши отношения в тайне? Тогда не давайте ему повода для подозрений." *You want to keep your relationship a secret? Then don't make him suspicious.*

He understood immediately, nodding.

It was the worst half hour of his life. As soon as they reentered the living room he saw Cliff on the couch, arms stretched over the back like he owned the place. He looked over when he noticed them. "I'm just going to wait for Ilya to get back to give it to him." He gave them a predatory smile. "You don't mind, right?"

"Боже мой, он думает, что мы занимаемся сексом." *Oh my God, he thinks we're fucking*. Shane made a disgusted face before he realized he should probably hide the fact that he's been learning Russian in front of Cliff.

Marlow just looked between them like it was a confirmation.

Somehow, it got worse. Shane and Svetlana sat down on the couch. Cliff changed the channel to some west coast hockey game. He kept trying to make small talk with Shane, as if they had ever talked before.

It was too long afterwards that he heard the garage open. He braced himself to keep up with the lie. This was a prank. That's all it was.

And then Ilya's voice rang out through the house, and Shane knew it was all over. "Shane, you need to move your car, you parked like shit. I could barely get into the garage." Marlow looked over at Shane, one eyebrow raised in confusion as he looked at the other man again. Shane closed his eyes. A moment later, Ilya's voice came again, but this time it was a little closer. "Shaneeeeeee. Has Svetlana left yet? I have some plans for your as–"

Ilya stopped when he reached the living room, seeing Cliff. He quickly shook himself off, and sent Shane a glare, but there was no heat in it. "You didn't say that we have guest."

Shane looked between Ilya and Svetlana, who seemed like she wanted to be anywhere but in the middle of their drama. "Rozanov," he gritted, "aren't you surprised that I'm here? It's a great prank."

"Yes," he said after a moment, deadpan. "Great prank." He was a worse actor than Shane was.

Svetlana looked up to the ceiling, exasperated. She mumbled something in Russian then stood up and left, having decided she didn't have to deal with this situation.

Ilya's gaze went to Marlow, then caught Shane's eyes again and winked. He moved smoothly, walking behind Shane on the couch and bending down to give him a kiss on the cheek. Shane immediately pulled away, scared eyes darting over to Cliff. Ilya paid it no mind, walking around the couch and sitting next to Shane, arm slinging over his shoulder.

"Ilya."

He shushed Shane, head leaning back to look at Marlow. There was a barely concealed threat in his face. "Don't worry. He will not tell."

"He better not," Shane mumbled, finally seeming to get comfortable. "I know where he lives."

"Mm. No you don't."

"It can't be that hard to find out."

"I'm so fucking confused," Cliff looked between the two. "I thought you were in love with your Montreal girl, Jane." As he said it, understanding bloomed on his face.

Ilya's hand tightened around Shane's shoulders for a moment at the word *love*, but he forced himself to relax. "Yes," he said slowly, "And *Shane* lives in Montreal."

“Holy shit,” he breathed. “You’ve been talking to her for *years*. Me and some of the boys have a bet if you’re secretly married. I’m happy for you man, but seriously–”

Shane didn’t want to deal with this right now. “Marlow,” he rolled his head over to look at the taller man. “Didn’t you want to give Ilya something?”

He gaped for a moment before tossing the jacket over, Ilya catching it on reflex. “Ah yes,” he turned it over, trying to discern what it was, “Thank you for my jacket.”

“It’s *my* jacket, asshole.” Shane smiled at him. “He said you left it at the rink.”

Ilya shrugged. “Is good jacket.” He leaned in close to Shane’s ear and whispered something that made the Montreal player flush and shoot him a glare.

“Marlow,” Ilya called, looking back over at him, “We talk later. I’m busy now.” He looked down at Shane.

“I hate you so much.”

“I second that, Roz. Don’t need to know that much about your love life.” Cliff clapped his hands on his knees and then stood up. “People won’t hear about this from me,” he reassured, then left.

It wasn’t until the door closed that Shane allowed himself to panic. “Holy shit, Ilya.”

The blond man hummed and pressed a kiss to his cheek, then moved down to his neck.

“*Ilya*,” he repeated. “He knows.”

Rozanov pulled away to give him a dry look. “Yes, I was there.”

Shane felt like he was falling upside down. Nothing made sense anymore. Cliff fucking Marlow knew that he and Rozanov were… close. That they had been close for years. And then he just fucking left.

“Shane,” Ilya breathed. “Look at me.” Shane forced himself to meet Rozanov’s eyes. His breathing slowed automatically. “He will not tell.” Ilya placed a tender kiss on Shane’s lips then pulled back. “Ok?” Shane nodded.

“Sweetheart, I need you to say it.”

Sweetheart? Shane wondered where that came from. “I’m alright.” He sounded a million miles away. He looked up at Ilya, whose thumb was rubbing across Shane’s cheek. He hadn’t even realized it was there. “I can’t believe Marlow is the first player to find out.” And the world didn’t end when he did. It was a dangerous realization.

Ilya hummed. “He will give me shit about fucking enemy later.”

Shane smiled and looked away, a weak laugh shaking through his body. “Yeah, I think we’ll be getting a lot of that in the future.”

The Russian stilled. He looked at the other man, mouth parted. “In the future?”

Shane closed his eyes. “Ilya–” he was cut off by another mouth on his. He responded immediately, intimately familiar with Rozanov’s lips. Their hands moved from each others’ faces as they pulled each other closer.

It was a few moments later that they pulled back, both panting. Shane kept his eyes closed. He didn’t want Ilya to distract him away from asking, not when he had the courage right now. “Come home with me.”

“We are at my home Hollander,” Ilya responded with a faux lightness in his voice.

Hollander. A moment ago it was Shane. It’s been Shane for months, unless Ilya wanted to tease him. He forced his eyes open. “You know what I mean,” his voice was soft. Ilya looked so open, so raw in a way Shane never got to see them. He leaned in to kiss Shane again, but Shane placed his hand on his chest, stopping him. “I want to spend mid-season and Christmas and New Year’s with you.” He looked him straight in the eyes, trying to steel himself for his next words. “And I want you to meet my parents.”

Ilya pulled away. He was closed off now. “Hollander, you know I cannot–”

“Shane,” he interrupted. He couldn’t stand hearing his last name, not right now. Not when Ilya was using it to distance himself.

Rozanov’s lips pursed. “Shane.” He said it reverently, as if the word had never left his mouth before. “I can’t.”

“Ok.” The word is delicate.

Ilya pulled him in close, Shane resting on his chest. “I’m sorry.”

“I knew it was a long shot.”

That broke Ilya’s heart even more, the fact that the words weren’t bitter, just accepting. Like he expected that answer.

A few moments passed in silence. Words were building up in Ilya, explanations. He couldn’t stop a few from spilling through.

“I would not be able to go back to Russia.”

Shane turned his head to look at him. “What?”

“They have… laws. Against this.” *Against them.* He bit his lip. “I don’t want to know what would happen to me.”

“Oh.” Shane didn’t know what to say. “They can get you in America?”

Ilya closed his eyes and shook his head. He felt tears beading up but he wasn’t going to let any of them fall. “I don’t know. My visa is for playing hockey. I am Russian citizen.” He

looked over at Shane, eyes wet. They both knew the danger of coming out while playing professional hockey, but Ilya depended on it in a way that Shane didn't. He couldn't risk losing his visa and going back to Russia.

"What would change?" Shane asked, voice soft as he repeated the words Rose Landry had asked him. "Because we already act like we're dating," his voice shook on that last word, "and apparently both of our friends are waiting for us to come out as married–"

"Hollander," Ilya says, and it sounds like stop.

"–and the girls both think we're idiots for dancing around each other like this. Fuck." Shane looked away. "I really like you Ilya."

"No. You don't."

Shane laughed humorlessly. "Yeah, I do. I like you a little too much." He dared to look over at Ilya, face slack and wide eyed. "I like coming here and knowing that I'll get to wake up next to you, because before I could only see you in the dark. I like having my toothbrush in your bathroom and your body soap in my shower. I like living in your house, even when you're not here. I like hanging out with your friends even though they don't like me. I–" his voice broke. A hot tear streamed down his cheek. He didn't even realize he had started crying. "I like imaging myself talking to Hayden, and he teases me about Lily, and I tell him that your name is Ilya. I like the idea of you meeting my parents, even though I know they're going to love you more than me."

He looked down at his lap, the tears spilling out of his eyes. "I like when I forget that we're not in a relationship, or when I forget it isn't *our* apartment or *our* house. I–"

"I love you," Ilya interrupted him. Shane looked up to find the blond man just as teary.

"I love you too." It was like when he went to bed alone and woke up wrapped around Ilya. Like the first time he saw Ilya and felt ashamed for being attracted to him, but then saw that Ilya was attracted to him too. It was like winning the Stanley Cup, after months and years and a lifetime of preparation, only to ditch the trophy once he saw the person he loved in the crowd.

He had never felt more relieved in his life.

Although–

"Did you really have to beat me in saying it first?"

They left a few days later for Ottawa. Shane had texted his parents that he was bringing someone for the holidays, but that he needed them to keep an open mind. Their responses were reassuring in the gay sense, but he still dreaded introducing them to Ilya, as if his mom didn't picture his head on a pike every time Boston scored a goal.

But it was different, now that they were pulling up to his parents' driveway. Ilya insisted on driving the car that he kept in Montreal, since it was already waiting for them at the airport.

Shane had decided it was better if he went in first to prepare them. Ilya stood in the driveway leaning against the hood of the car, several feet away and not quite in full view of the front door.

As soon as he rang the bell the door opened. His mom had an excited expression on her face that faded when she realized it was just Shane at the door. Still, she was very happy and embraced him immediately.

"So," she said when they pulled away, "I thought you were bringing someone over this year."

"Yeah, about that," Shane took a deep breath, "I'm gay."

"Oh, honey." She embraced him again, but her tone of voice told him that she wasn't surprised by the news. "You know your dad and I support you no matter what."

"Where is he?" Shane looked over her shoulder into the house, but there was no sight of him.

Yuna rolled her eyes. "He was making dinner, didn't want to leave the food to burn."

"Ok." Shane repositioned himself. He had planned it all out in his mind and didn't want to have to calm his parents separately, but his dad really didn't care for hockey. He probably wouldn't even remember Ilya's name or the fact that he was supposed to be Shane's greatest adversary. It was his mom that was the challenge. "Can you," he started, unsure, "When you meet him, can it not be as a hockey fan?"

His mom blinked in surprise. "Oh, sure!" She readily agreed. "Is he another player? Do I know him?" Her head tried to peer around him, but Shane blocked her view, cringing.

"It's Ilya Rozanov."

Immediately, she started laughing like it was just an unfunny joke. Shane stayed serious, looking down at his feet, making her realize that he was telling the truth. "Oh!" she sounded surprised, caught off guard but obviously still trying to be supportive. Her eyes flickered to the driveway and Shane stepped aside so she could see him.

"So.." she seemed to be trying to wrap her brain around it, "how long has this been going on exactly?"

"Remember that CCM shoot? It was like, right after I got drafted or something, and Ilya was there too?"

Her face went slack. "Your entire professional career?" Suddenly, a moment of clarity bloomed across her face. "Oh my God, you never let him win, have you?"

He looked at her like she was crazy. "Me? Let someone else win? In *hockey*?"

She rolled his eyes, but he could see her let out some tension at his words. “You’re right,” she said dryly.

This entire exchange was exactly why he wanted to have a moment to talk with his parents in person before he brought in Ilya. He didn’t want Ilya to deal with any judgement on this trip, not when it was such a big step for the both of them.

He hummed. “Are you done freaking out?”

“I wasn’t freaking out,” she was immediately defensive. He gave her a knowing look. “It’s just… interesting.”

“Interesting?” He smiled around the word, reminded of all the times Ilya called him boring.

“Yes. And I’m all done now, so you’re not allowed to surprise me any more.”

He hummed, then took her hand. “Come on, let me introduce you two.” He started walking back to Ilya, taking his mom with him. She didn’t expect the movement at first, so he was practically dragging her, but then she caught up.

The blond quickly came into view, immediately straightening at the sight of Shane’s mom.

“Mom, this is my boyfriend, Ilya. Ilya, this is my mom.” Shane had never felt happier than in that moment, even as he watched his mom visibly set aside all her preexisting notions about Rozanov.

Ilya stuck out his hand in greeting. “Is very nice to meet you, Ms. Hollander. Shane talks of you a lot.”

She looked at his hand and then back to his face. A moment passed where Ilya was visibly nervous. And then she did something that neither boy expected, and she pulled Ilya into a hug.

“It’s nice to finally meet you. And please, call me Yuna,” she said, pulling back with a warm, motherly look on her face. Ilya looked shell-shocked. If he wasn’t so nervous about everything going well, Shane would’ve laughed at the scene.

“Come on,” she looked over at Shane, “let’s give your father a heart attack.”

“I thought you said she was scary one,” Ilya mumbled, falling in line next to Shane as they followed Yuna into the house.

“David,” Yuna called as they stepped through the hallway into the kitchen, “Shane has someone he needs to introduce you to.”

It was a cozy scene, the warm light in the kitchen making it feel small but not cramped. There were newspapers neatly piled in a corner, and the smell of food filled the air. Shane’s dad – *David*– stood by the oven, wearing some sort of long apron. He turned around at the sound of his wife’s voice, facing the three.

“Oh hello,” he stepped forward, arms already outstretched before he pulled Ilya into a hug. When he pulled away, Ilya looked a tad overwhelmed. “Nice to meet you, you must be Shane’s boyfriend.” He gave his son a wink. Shane didn’t miss the fact that he never came out to his dad.

“Nice to meet you too, Mr. Hollander.” Ilya’s Russian accent came out thicker than usual. Immediately, Shane’s dad waved his hand. “Please, call me David. And what’s your name, son?”

Ilya grinned, looking over to Shane and Yuna. They both seemed lovingly exasperated at the question. He could feel tears start to sting the back of his eyes at the warmth in the word *son*, but he blinked them away before they could make an appearance. “Ilya.” When it seemed like Shane’s dad still didn’t recognize him from that, he continued: “Rozanov.”

David looked between Shane and Ilya, then to Yuna, then back to Ilya. “Huh.” Then he shook his head, as if to clear his thoughts. “Well, I guess you’ve already heard every joke there is about that whole rivalry business.”

Ilya bobbed his head side to side. “Not really.” He looked over to Shane. There was a little bit of sadness in his eyes. “We haven’t told many people.” A cover of silence came over those in the room. Ilya looked back at David, smiling. “Though they will probably get old really quickly.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” David responded, a glint in his eye. He walked back over to the stove. “We’ll I sure hope you boys are hungry.” He gave Shane a knowing look. “There’s some of your food in the fridge if you don’t want any.”

“No, no,” Ilya cut in, his arm going around Shane’s shoulders. “He is off diet.”

Shane looked at him, confused. “No I’m not?” They had never even talked about it.

Ilya nodded. “Yes, it was condition of me coming.” He looked over at David and winked. “No bird food this week.” Shane’s dad smiled, the crinkles around his eyes showing his amusement at the scene.

“Dad, did you know that Ilya reads the New Yorker?” Ilya gave him a panicked look, “I’m sure he’d love to talk with you about it.”

The Russian looked over at the older man. “He is liar.” He turned back to Shane. “Do not lie to your parents.” Shane rolled his eyes, smiling fondly.

Beside him, Yuna looked between the two as they continued bickering back and forth. She leaned back until she was resting on the wall. “I get it,” her voice was quiet, but it cut through the scene like a knife, drawing everyone’s attention to her. She gestured between the two of them. “You’re good for each other.” She walked over and rested her hand against David’s shoulder. He looked back for a moment, stars visible in his eyes at the sight of his wife. She looked back to Ilya, a genuine smile on her face. “Welcome to the family.”

In that moment, Ilya could envision his future here with Shane. After hockey, when they were both retired and had nothing to do but live and love. They would settle down somewhere near Shane's parents and they would all do boring things like love each other. The thought of it was nearly blinding.

Later, Ilya would sit in Shane's childhood bedroom and cry, feeling more part of a family than he had in a while. Shane would hold him while he explained his father's situation, dementia, getting worse every day. He wished he could be there for his father and hated that it was his brother taking care of him instead. And then he cried about his brother, about how he hated Ilya. Then he started talking about his mother, and Shane started crying too.

After he had gone to sleep, Shane would slowly creep downstairs and talk with his parents. He wouldn't tell them what Ilya had just confided, but he knew they had questions for him about Rozanov.

When they both left, Yuna held Ilya in an even tighter hug than she had given Shane, and made him promise to visit whenever he was in Ottawa.

On the drive back to the airport in Montreal –for Ilya, he was going to drop Shane off first– Shane looked out the window and thought about the week. It had taken his mom less than five minutes to see that the two of them were good for each other, but his parents were good for Ilya too.

Through the week that they were there, Shane could slowly see how he was right; his parents were going to love Ilya just as much as they loved him. Maybe they already did. He could see how Ilya preened under their love and attention and tried not to think about all those things that he had confided on the first night they were there.

It was nice, remembering how quickly his mom welcomed Rozanov into the family. It made him think of what Marlow had said, barely longer than a week ago, about Ilya being secretly married to his Montreal girl.

There was a selfish, greedy part of Shane that wanted that to be true. And wasn't that awful? They had just decided to date –well, more like Shane had finally convinced Ilya after enough pestering– and it wasn't enough for him anymore. He wanted to show the world, to prove that there was no one else for him. He wanted Ilya to go to his parents' house when he wasn't there and become the favorite son because he was their son-in-law. He wanted to be allowed to miss Ilya because he was his husband. It didn't sound nearly as needy to be constantly missing a husband as it did to be constantly missing a boyfriend.

Shane looked over at Ilya, his gaze dropping to his left hand on the steering wheel. The other was on Shane's thigh, as usual. Without taking his eyes off the road, Ilya must've noticed Shane staring. The hand that was on his thigh moved over to grab his hand, bringing it up to kiss.

Maybe it was just his imagination that he kissed the ring finger, but he could pretend that, in this moment, he and Ilya were day dreaming about the same thing.

Chapter 2: Maybe Someday

Chapter Summary

> Ilya would love to be married to Shane. It could never happen.
>
> But the longer they went on, sneaking moments and falling in and out of beds and telling each other how much they loved them, the more he stopped caring. He even stopped caring about it being a secret, but of course he still kept it. He knew how much it mattered to Shane.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> “Hey,” Shane said casually as his heart beat out of his chest. Hayden looked over as the two continued to put on their hockey gear. “Do you have plans for dinner after the game?” It was an afternoon game, meaning they would work up an appetite by the end of the third period, just in time to shower and change into some real clothes to get dinner.
>
> “No,” Hayden slipped his shirt over his head, “you want to get something?”
>
> Shane’s cheeks tinged pink and he looked down. “Uh,” he looked around, making sure that no one was listening in. “Lily is in town. She’s being an asshole about meeting you since I met her friend.” He took a deep breath. “Anyways,” he looked over at Hayden, “it would be at my place.”
>
> “Dude. Are you serious?” Hayden’s eyes lit up, mouth parted at the news. “Of course I’d love to meet your girlfriend.” Shane cringed, which didn’t go unnoticed by Hayden. “Unless you don’t want me to?” he added, unsure.
>
> “No, I want you to.” Shane couldn’t look at him. “But… when you meet *Lily*,” he emphasized her name, “you’re going to have to keep an open mind. Like, really open.”
>
> “What, is she a criminal or something?”
>
> Shane laughed humorlessly. “I think it would be easier if she were. No, uh,” he trailed off, not sure how to say it. He didn’t want to just come out in the locker room, but he needed to prepare Hayden. He expected it to be easier than preparing his mom, but he had forgotten how much more Hayden was invested into the whole *Lily* thing. “The thing is, Lily isn’t her real name.”
>
> “Well what’s her name?” Hayden was confused, not yet seeing what the problem was.

Shane looked behind them, where the other Montreal players were pushing each other around to hype themselves for the game. The whole thing reeked, invading Shane's senses and making him feel unsafe as he tried to talk about Ilya. His lips set in a line as he turned back to Hayden. "Not here."

Something like understanding creeped into his friend's face, but there wasn't enough of it. "Alright," he agreed, "you can tell me after."

Shane smiled, hoping it didn't come off as strained as it felt.

Montreal won, of course. Ilya seemed as distracted as Shane felt, unable to ask how the conversation went before the game started. Still, it didn't stop him from scoring a respectable two goals.

After a brief celebration, Shane and Hayden got into Shane's car and headed back to Shane's apartment.

As soon as Hayden closed the passenger's door behind him, he spoke. "So, what was it you wanted to tell me?"

The car peeled away from the stadium, putting it behind them. "I'm gay."

Shane was grateful that he was driving, giving him an excuse to not look over at Hayden as he processed. He dry swallowed, trying to focus on the road instead of the silence that had taken over the small car.

"Oh. So Lily is…" he trailed off.

"A guy." Just saying that alone felt like he was trying to cough with an elephant sitting on his chest. His lips darted out to wet his lips. "He's another player."

Hayden sat straight up and fully turned to him. "What?" From his peripherals, he could see some pieces come together on his face. "He plays for Boston?"

Shane's heart was in his throat. "Yes." The words were barely audible. He let out a bitter chuckle. "God, you're really not gonna like who it is."

"Who?" It was harsher than Shane had ever heard Hayden's voice. He was suddenly regretting the idea to confess while in a confined space.

He didn't answer for a moment, pulling off to the side of the road and stopping the car. He closed his eyes, resting his forehead against the steering wheel, trying to stir up some courage. With a deep breath he turned to face Hayden, who looked at him like he was a stranger. "It's Ilya Rozanov."

"No," Hayden denied immediately.

"And I know you don't like him–"

“Yeah, no shit. He’s the worst guy in the league! What were you thinking Shane?! Are there no nice guys in Montreal–”

“I love him!” Shane all but shouted. Hayden pulled back, shocked. Shane closed his eyes again and ran a hand down his face, trying to calm down. “I know,” his voice was tired, “That he’s an asshole. God, I tell him enough that you probably never need to again. I don’t need you to like him, or get along or whatever. Well, please get along,” he smiled, “it would make my life easier. Even if you have to pretend. I just want my best friend to meet my boyfriend, *officially*, off the ice. No chirping, no pushing each other into boards. Just meeting someone that we *happen* to play against.” He looked into Hayden’s eyes. “You don’t have to do it.”

“Fuck man,” Hayden slumped back into his chair. “He’s got you monologuing for me.”

Shane rolled his eyes, relieved at the tease. “Yeah, yeah.”

“No, really, this must be serious,” he leaned over to the center console, expression still teasing. “You’ve been together for like two years now–”

“*–year and a half*. Only a month officially–”

“–and now you’re practically begging me for my approval, for *Rozanov* of all people.” Shane looked away, feeling a little embarrassed. “This is it for you, huh?”

“Yeah,” Shane replied softly. He wanted it to be, at least.

A few more moments passed. Shane started the car again, gently pulling onto the highway. “Who else knows?”

“My parents. One of Ilya’s friends in Boston. Rose. Cliff Marlow.”

“Fucking Marlow knew before me?”

Shane tossed him a smile. “Believe me, it was not by choice. I was alone at the house and he showed up. Scared the shit out of me.”

“Shit, yeah, I forgot you guys live together.”

Shane laughed. “Yeah man, it was your idea.”

“Don’t put this on me.”

Ilya Rozanov was *not* worried about how the night was going to go. Anyone who said otherwise was a liar.

So what if he sighed several times in the past few minutes? What if he checked his watch every other minute, even though he knew Shane wouldn’t be back for another while, now that he had Hayden on his hands. They had talked about it earlier, and Shane said that Hayden was probably going to freak out. Badly. So they included it in the timetable, because now Ilya

was a boring person who stuck to timetables, and they wouldn't be arriving for another ten minutes.

At least it gave him time to finish cooking, even though it felt like the minutes were dragging by.

He had just put the portioned plates of chicken parmesan –David's recipe– on the table when he heard the door open.

"Good timing," he called out, his Russian accent ringing through the house. "I just finished." He looked back, seeing Shane and Pike walking towards him. Shane looked amazing, as always, but Pike looked like he was having trouble believing what he was seeing.

"Rozanov," he greeted stiffly, looking like he wanted to be anywhere but there.

Ilya grinned. "Pike," he returned, a small edge to his words. Shane glared at both of them.

It was going to be a long night.

Later, when Shane walked with Hayden to the door, he would give his approval… in his own way.

"He's still an asshole, and I can't stand him," he said, not caring that they were still within earshot of Ilya. "But you're… good together, I guess. It's not as weird as I thought it would be, and clearly he makes you happy."

Relief poured throughout Shane. "I'm glad. I mean, I already knew that, and even if you didn't approve I wouldn't leave him, but I'm glad."

Hayden nodded, then, as he was almost out the door. "Just remember that I already called being your best man."

Shane's cheeks burned as he pushed his friend out the doors.

It became a routine. Hayden clearly hated it but was being supportive. After the first meeting, they added Jacki, whom they had agreed to tell over chicken parmesan. It made the nights less awkward, although they quickly devolved into a contest between Ilya and Jacki over who could cook the best, and then turned into the two cooking together while Shane and Hayden hung out. But these nights were few and far between, as Shane and Ilya already didn't get much time to themselves during the season, much less to spend time with friends. Still, they tried to plan something with the Pikes at least every other visit to Montreal.

"He's becoming a WAG already," Hayden joked, bringing a bottle of beer to his lips. They were supposed to be watching some action movie, but Shane's eyes kept slipping over to the kitchen, where Ilya and Jacki moved around each other. Sometimes, they were a well oiled machine. Most of the time, they argued about the best way to do things. Shane had tried to help them a few times, but they were both surprisingly stubborn. Well, it wasn't that

surprising. Still, he felt a little bad about lazing around when they were cooking for them, no matter how many times they told him to just sit down because he would just get in their way.

“Maybe Jacki should add him to the group chat,” Shane replied, though his smile dimmed as he said it. He’s known for years that he and Ilya would never be like the other hockey couples, and not just because they were in a relationship as two men. There was just so much culture that they weren’t part of because they had to keep their secret.

He knew that Ilya would love to be added to the WAG chat. He had brought it up before, with a joke of course, but there was a sadness in his eyes that almost made Shane regret that their relationship wasn’t “normal” by hockey standards.

It was hard sometimes for him too, whenever Hayden or whoever would talk to him in the locker room and mention something the WAGs did for the players, or how they planned hangouts or watched games together.

There was a community there that he desperately wanted Ilya to be a part of, if only for his own sake. He wanted to hear how his boyfriend had worked and coordinated with the others to make something for him, wanted Ilya to just have a support system in general. No one would know about a long-distance relationship like they would.

He worried about Ilya sometimes. He worried about Ilya all the time.

“What?” Jacki called over. “Did you say my name?”

Shane waved it away, but Hayden turned over to her, calculating look in his eyes. “We were saying that Ilya should be added to the Montreal WAGs group chat, since he already acts like one.”

“Fuck you, Pike,” Ilya’s voice called out, but he didn’t turn around from the stove.

Jacki looked between the three boys, eyebrows furrowed, like she was trying to figure something out. “They have been asking about Lily,” she said slowly, as if she wanted to make sure she was saying the right thing.

“They know about Lily?” Ilya asked, his head turning to look at her.

She shrugged. “Hayden’s known about ‘her,’” she put the word in air quotes, “for years. I’m pretty active with the other WAGS. I don’t remember what they know about Lily, but they definitely have known about her for a few years. Ever since you guys started living together.”

Ilya met her eyes, shaking his head, then looked up at the ceiling. “He tells you everything?”

“I’m his wife,” she winked, “He doesn’t have a choice.”

They were silent for a moment, the only noise coming from the living room. “I wouldn’t be able to do anything,” Ilya said finally, his voice defeated. He didn’t look over at Jacki, instead focusing on the pot in front of him. “There is no point.” The words left no room for argument.

And yet…

“You can still join the group chat,” Jacki walked to be next to Rozanov, leaning on the countertop. “I’m pretty sure they know that you live in Boston, so they know they won’t see you in person. They’re nice people, very supportive. It’s a good community to be in.”

“Ugh,” he groaned. “Fine. I give you number later.” He acted reserved, like he was being forced to do it, but there was a ghost of a smile on his lips.

Ilya didn’t tell Shane that he got added to the group chat. It was fun, texting with the girls, and Jacki was right, they were great people. It helped, whenever he and Shane were in different countries, being able to talk about it with people who understood.

He –or, rather, *Lily*– became a core part of the chat, supporting whatever endeavor he could without being there in person. Baby shower? He bought most of the registry. Making gifts for the players? He worked with Jacki to get them the materials, and secretly made his own for Shane.

His only issue with them was that they kept joking about him and Shane getting married. Most people who knew joked about it.

Ilya would love to be married to Shane. It could never happen.

But the longer they went on, sneaking moments and falling in and out of beds and telling each other how much they loved them, the more he stopped caring. He even stopped caring about it being a secret, but of course he still kept it. He knew how much it mattered to Shane.

Ilya kept his promise to Shane’s parents and visited them when he was in Ottawa. They cooked him food and sat in on his games. He had never felt as much warmth as he had when he first sat down on the bench and saw them waving at him. David was wearing his jersey, but Yuna clearly hadn’t been able to do it. Still, she was wearing Boston’s colors. That wasn’t an accident.

The All-Stars game in Florida marked the first time that Ilya and Shane were placed on the same team. They flew down separately and wouldn’t be seeing each other until the hotel. Still, it was a little bit of a shock when Shane sat next to Ilya at the bar. The two talked a little bit, because they were allowed to interact now, before one of the other players interrupted.

“Cats and dogs,” Carter Vaughn, the alternate captain to the New York Admirals, placed his arms around the two of them, as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. “Careful, Cap,” he rung his arm a little tighter around Ilya’s neck, “can’t trust this one.”

Shane laughed it off, the title of captain still feeling weird at the All-Stars game. Normally the oldest player was appointed captain, but they had the fans vote on it this year and they chose Shane. “Don’t worry Vaughn, I know how to handle him.”

Ilya shot him a wink, just out of sight of the other player.

Being on the ice was amazing. It was always amazing playing against Rozanov, the only one who he felt could truly keep up with him and challenged him in a way other players couldn't, but it was even better playing with him. Ilya had taken ring wing so he could play on the same line as Shane.

It was like there was no one else on ice. The two of them were practically showing off, passing the puck between each other and weaving it and themselves through the west coast All-Star team. Shane slid the puck over to Ilya, passing it behind his legs as he skated in the opposite direction. Shane stayed near the middle of the rink while Ilya took the puck to the outside, bringing it almost to the goal. But it would be a hard shot for him from that angle, with so many players set up to block it. He met Shane's eyes, the two of them on the same page, and passed the puck over.

And then Shane did something Ilya never would've expected. He shot the puck to the left, then, after the goalie moved over to block it, hooked the puck again with his stick mid-air and shot it to the right, easily making the goal.

He raised his arms in celebration as the stadium went crazy at his display. Ilya all but slammed into him, embracing him for a moment and pressing a kiss to the side of his helmet. He lingered with his lips there and his arm around Shane longer than usual for a normal teammate teasing.

When he pulled back, Shane couldn't contain his smile.

"Nice assist," he said, head tilted up in a half nod.

"Nice goal," Ilya responded, clearly proud. His hand, the one that was still around Shane, clapped twice on his shoulder, and then he forced himself to pull his hand away. His eyes darted to the crowd, where he knew David and Yuna were sitting. They were cheering harder than those around them, to no one's surprise.

The two were called over to the bench. A shit eating grin crossed Ilya's face and he slapped Shane's ass, then raced over to the bench before he could get a lecture. He got one later, but he wasn't complaining about his punishment that night.

And then they were at the end of the season, just before the playoffs, and none of the games mattered except the ones where he saw Shane or his parents. Ilya was in Montreal, having arrived two days early so he and Shane could continue with their social life while still having time to themselves.

Like always, they fucked and whispered little confessions and Ilya teased Shane about his Russian, then they drove separate cars to the stadium. Despite leaving at the same time, Ilya always got there first.

"I'm surprised you're still intact, Roz."

"Go fuck yourself, Marley," Ilya replied, voice bored. Ever since Marlow learned about their relationship, he made it his mission to comment every time Ilya came back from spending time with Shane. A few times, *recent* times, Ilya had shown up with love marks and scratches

on his back. No one cared, especially not when he had the reputation that he did. Cliff didn't even care until he knew they were from Hollander.

They finished getting ready and got out on the ice. Ilya immediately scanned the Montreal bench, finding Shane's eyes and winking. Hollander rolled his eyes and turned around, a move that told Ilya his cheeks were a beautiful pink.

As the two teams stretched and warmed up on their respective sides of the rink, Ilya looked into the audience, immediately finding Yuna and David. From what he knew, they occasionally came to Shane's home games. Sometimes the opponent was too bad, or the timing was not right for the drive, so they skipped. But they always came whenever Ilya played against Shane. They had been doing it for years, but this was the first season that they cared about more than just their son on the ice.

The game started. Montreal had the advantage in the first two periods. Boston was getting restless.

Ilya and Shane crouched across from each other near the middle of the third period. Their sticks tapped against each other in quick succession, bringing a smile to both of their faces. It was fun, playing against Shane. He was the only one that could make Ilya smile like that in a game, even if they weren't on the same team.

The puck dropped.

They were off.

Shane won the face-off, and immediately skated back, making a big loop to get around the Boston players with ease.

Ilya skated behind. He saw Cliff Marlow before Shane did and sped up. He saw how fast Marlow was going with his weight. He knew it would be a bad hit. He wasn't fast enough to stop it from happening.

Marlow collided with Shane, taking the puck but leaving the player on the ground. Ilya's world stopped and he stopped with it. Shane had never gone down before.

He recovered a second later, before everyone else, and skated over to Shane. His eyes were closed. Ilya couldn't even tell if he was breathing under all his padding. Distantly, he heard Pike curse out Marlow and start a fight, but he couldn't take his attention away.

"Shane," he whispered, getting down to one knee and placing a hand on Shane's chest. Where were the medics? Shouldn't they be here by now?

To his surprise, the other man cracked open an eye. "Ilya." The word was slurred.

Immediate relief poured through Ilya's body. He looked around until his eye caught on the medics heading over.

"Ilya," Shane repeated. His head lulled to the side. "They can see us."

His heart broke. “I do not care.” He gave Shane a stern look, right as the medics arrived at their location on the ice. “You will not be hurt badly.”

“Bit late.”

Ilya shook his head. “See. You are fine if you can make jokes.” He was saying it more to himself than anything. Shane was fine. He was not hurt badly, he would recover, and next time he would pay more attention.

“Rozanov.” He looked back to see a referee. “Back to your bench.” He nodded, knowing it was expected of him. There was no part of him that wanted to be away from Shane right now.

“Mr. Hollander, you need to keep your eyes open.” The words stopped Ilya in his tracks, not two feet from Shane. He turned back, just in time to see the love of his life start seizing.

He didn’t really remember what happened next. He fought the ref? He seemed to remember arms restraining him. Somehow he ended up back at his bench, but he didn’t have his helmet.

As soon as he saw Marlow, across the rink in the penalty box, he couldn’t help the death glare that bloomed across his face. He felt more tired than he had in years.

To his credit, Marlow looked horrible, but not enough for Ilya. If he wasn’t going straight to the hospital afterwards, he would have stayed and lectured Marlow for an hour. Maybe two. And then maybe he would drop his gloves and throw a punch.

He forced himself to look away. He knew that his friend didn’t do it on purpose, especially not when he knew about their relationship and how much he meant to Ilya. He also knew that Marlow had occasionally texted Shane, since Hollander was very confused the first time it happened and had to ask Ilya for help on how to respond. The other few times it occurred, it was dry commentary on one of Shane’s games, or talking about Ilya.

Instead, he looked in the stands. Yuna was no longer there, no doubt leaving to immediately follow Shane to the hospital. It didn’t surprise him. What did surprise him was David, still sitting in his seat.

He didn’t remember how the last of the game went once they were cleared to resume play. He didn’t even remember if he had any time on the ice after Shane’s accident. He must’ve, since he remembered skating close to the penalty box –where Marlow was confined to for the rest of the game on top of his other penalties– and bringing his finger across his neck. Hollander would probably scold him for it later. There was no way the cameras missed it.

He wasn’t looking forward to the press after this game. It was expected of him, as captain. And after his performance, there was no one they wanted more.

Somehow, Ilya found himself in the locker room. He sat with his head between his hands, his phone balancing on his knee. David had texted, telling him where to meet up, saying that he shouldn’t be driving right now.

His teammates were probably talking about him.

“Sir, you cannot be in here.” The security guard’s voice got his attention. It got everyone’s attention.

“I’m not here for trouble.” That was Pike’s voice. Ilya rolled his eyes. Of course Hollander’s idiot friend would be dumb enough to come to the Boston locker room after that shitshow of a game.

The door was cracked just enough that his face could be seen over the guard’s shoulder. Curious, Ilya stood and moved a little closer.

“Pike, go back to your room with other people that sleep with nightlights.” The insult had no heat to it.

“Hey asshole,” he greeted, just as unenthusiastically. “I’m helping you.”

Ilya’s eyebrows furrowed. “Helping me?” He looked around the room, to his shocked teammates, and then pointed a finger to himself.

“I’m covering press for you.”

“Ah.” Ilya wasn’t sure that was how it worked, if a player from the other team could cover for him. But Hollander’s idiot friend was being nice and Shane was injured, so maybe he should take the olive branch for what it was. “Ok.”

At Pike’s prompting look, he started moving, getting his bags and leaving with him. As they walked through the hallway they passed a room with a solid closed door and no windows. Still, the sound of the Boston coach berating Marlow was clear.

Ilya typed with one hand, letting David know he was on his way. He would have to come back for Shane’s car later. It wasn’t important right now.

Eventually, their paths split as Hayden covered press and Ilya hopped in the car. It was weird to be a passenger in his own car. Silence followed them the whole way to the hospital, despite David’s constant mutterings about Shane’s resilience.

Then they got to the lobby. “I’m here for Shane Hollander.”

“What is your relationship with the patient?”

“I’m his father.” David took out his ID and handed it over as proof. The girl at the front desk nodded and slid over a piece of paper.

“And what about you?” Her attention was placed on Ilya.

“He’s with me,” David tried to wave through the question.

“I’m sorry sir, but only immediate family are allowed at this time.” She bore into his eyes. “Are you his immediate family?”

“What is immediate family?” Ilya asked, his Russian accent clearly distancing him from the Hollanders.

The woman’s lips turned down. “Parents. Siblings. Husbands and wives. Children.”

“This is ridiculous,” David complained. “It’s just going to be his mom and I, there’s room for this young man.”

She shook her head. “I’m sorry sir, but we cannot allow that. Visitor hours start at 8am tomorrow. By then, they might have cleared him for more guests.”

David looked over at Ilya. “Come, I’ll take you home.”

Ilya shook his head. “No. Go to your son. I can drive.” At the older man’s grim look, he continued. “Is my car. Just tell me update.”

After a moment David nodded slowly, clearly not liking the plan but wanting to be with Shane.

Ilya couldn’t get back to the apartment fast enough. He tried his best to not speed, knowing that he wasn’t in the right mindset to be going that fast. Luckily, the apartment was only ten minutes away from the hospital. He’d keep that in mind in the morning.

He just about broke open the doors from flinging them open so strongly, then moved like a man possessed to the kitchen. He was fully on autopilot when his hands opened the liquor cabinet and he poured himself a drink. And then another. And another. And then he stopped counting and it seemed like every other moment he was bringing a freshly topped up glass of vodka to his mouth.

Then he paused, the glass right in front of his lips. He still downed it, not wanting to waste any alcohol but then he placed the glass in the sink. Both hands bared against the counter as his vision spun. He wasn’t entirely sure it was just from the vodka.

Fuck.

Somehow he ended up on the couch. He couldn’t stand to be in their bedroom right now, knowing that Shane wouldn’t come back tonight and he would be left with an empty bed. Feeling defeated, he pulled out his phone and let himself hover on *Jane*’s contact.

He’d never felt more upset about their secrecy at that moment. Shane was in the *hospital*, he was unconscious and unresponsive and had convulsed on the ice, and Ilya didn’t even have his contact under his real name. He debated changing it. It wouldn’t matter anymore, not after his display on the ice, but he didn’t want to give Shane any reasons to freak out once he was released back home.

Shit. He navigated out of his messaging app and opened ESPN, looking to see what Pike had said on his behalf. There were already many articles about his outburst, all speculating on the real reason. He ignored them in favor of watching Pike’s interview.

Immediately, it was clear that Pike was not who they wanted to see, which he joked about, getting it out of the way. Then he solidified his own place as one of Shane's closest friends, and gave his own opinion on what happened on the ice.

"Look, Shane and Rozanov have been playing each other their entire professional career. They've always been pitted against each other, which meant that they were always around each other. But all that stuff is just on the ice, alright? To know someone for that long and watch them get hurt is hard, especially when those two act like they're the only ones who are at each other's level. And the worst part is that they're right. Shane Hollander is the best player this century, and Ilya Rozanov helps keep him that way." Pike looked straight into the camera, as if he knew that Ilya was going to be watching. "They have a lot of respect for each other. No one wants to see anyone go down like that, and if it were the other way around Shane would act the same way."

Ilya closed the page. He had to admit, Pike had done a good job of covering for him. Still, it didn't help the speculation. At least most of the theories were about their secret friendship.

It was only when he opened social media that he saw a few people speculate on the nature of their relationship. Most people didn't take those accounts seriously, and many chastised them for implying Ilya and Shane were madly in love when Shane was in the hospital. At a closer look, the accounts themselves didn't really seem to believe what they were peddling.

He closed his eyes. They were too close to the truth.

It hurt to see them talk about their relationship, even as jokes, and speculate on their sudden closeness when Ilya wasn't even allowed in the same hospital room as Shane. He was the man he loved and Ilya wasn't there during his hardest moment. He would only be let in with everyone else, as if he were just another person to Shane. As if Shane were just another person to him.

He got a text from Yuna. Shane hadn't woken up yet, but there was still strong hope for his recovery. She told Ilya to rest, so he could visit in the morning. When he opened the messaging app, he noticed the WAG group chat was wishing him well after Shane's injury. They were still calling him Lily. It stung more than he wanted it to, even amidst the warm feeling that settled in his chest at the idea of them caring for him.

When he eventually fell asleep that night, folded over on the couch, his phone was open to pictures of engagement rings.

First thing in the morning, Ilya was back at the hospital. This time he was allowed to go straight to Shane's room and was the first one there.

Shane was still unconscious. It broke Ilya's heart to see him dressed in the hospital gown, all tucked into the bed with wires coming out of him. He lingered by the door for a second after he closed it behind him, taking in the scene. It almost felt like he was intruding, his black clothes staining the clean white of the hospital.

After a moment, he convinced his legs to move and stood next to Shane. The monitor beeped in the background as his hand came up to Shane's face, tracing along the side. "моя любовь," *my love*, he whispered, his hand trailing down to Shane's and holding it. "Выздоравливай. Тебе нельзя болеть, ты меня слышишь?" *Get better. You are not allowed to hurt, you hear me?*

A tear welled up in Ilya's eyes and he blinked them out, looking away from Shane's face as if he were going to wake up right then. If he did, Ilya did not want him to see him crying.

But Shane didn't wake up. Not in the three hours that Ilya was there alone, having moved to a chair next to the bed. Every so often a nurse came in to check on him, but they couldn't tell him much about Shane's condition. What they could say was that Shane had a fractured collarbone, broken ribs, and a concussion, and that they think the concussion was the reason why he had a seizure. They had induced sleep to help his brain heal, but he was supposed to be awake sometime later in the day.

Around noon, David and Yuna showed up, both looking worse than Ilya felt. It was obvious they were with Shane late the night before, and Ilya would be surprised if they got more than four hours of sleep. Still, Yuna sat next to Ilya and handed him a small container of food.

"Thank you," he said, not bothering to open the box. Opening meant taking his hand back from Shane. "I am not hungry."

"Eat anyways," Yuna's voice was gentle but firm in the way that only mothers' voices could be. Ilya ate.

The three of them sat around for the next few hours, just talking. They talked about Pike's statement, the media's thoughts on Ilya's reaction, how people were speculating online. All things that Ilya knew already. And then they started talking about other things. How Marlow had texted Shane's phone apologizing. Marlow's suspension from play for the next game. *Ilya* being benched for the next week after threatening a player on his own team. He was surprised to find out from Yuna and David instead of his team. He was surprised they had even been looking at the news aside from Shane.

Ilya quietly canceled his flight.

Eventually, Ilya opened his phone again and was brought to the page that he was looking at before he fell asleep, full of rings. His cheeks warmed as he saw Yuna looking over his shoulder, but she never said anything.

The next day was the same. This time Pike came over, warning that the rest of the Montreal team would be visiting on another day later that week, now that the Voyagers had been bumped out of the playoffs. He said he would text Rozanov the details so he wouldn't be caught in between. As much as Ilya wanted to just stay and be exposed to Shane's team, he agreed to leave before the Voyagers showed up.

Shane woke up on that second day, but it was clear he was still out of it. Ilya could've cried tears of relief when Shane squeezed his hand, as light as it was. He wasn't fully conscious, but his eyes were cracked open, so the nurses said he was awake.

The next two days were back to just Ilya and Shane's parents in the hospital. Shane was a lot more aware, but he was constantly exhausted. And high.

"Ilyaaaaaaa," Shane greeted, the day after he woke up. Ilya had just walked in the room, flowers in hand, careful to close the door behind him.

"How are you?" he asked, lingering by the door.

"Hey," Shane complained, frowning. "Heyyyyyyyyy."

"Ok, ok," Ilya rushed over to take his spot on the bedside and held Shane's hand.

"Bet-ter," Shane sounded out, closing his eyes.

Ilya sighed, his thumb anxiously fidgeting against the skin on Shane's hand.

"You're here!" he almost sounded surprised.

"Yes." Ilya brought Shane's hand up to his mouth and placed a small kiss on it. "I'm here, моя любовь." *My love*. He wondered if Shane was conscious enough to understand the Russian.

He stayed there, listening to Shane babble on for the next few hours. Every so often, Shane would fall into a nap and would wake up, happy and surprised to see Ilya next to him.

Ilya was pretty sure every single nurse knew about them. They were subject to privacy laws, but just in case, each night before he headed back home, Ilya left some money for them. It was always gone when he got there in the morning, and the nurses never commented on anything that went on inside that room.

Whenever Ilya was alone in the room, when Shane's parents were gone and Shane was asleep, Ilya would pull up that site again, looking at rings. None of them felt right for him. He felt silly just thinking about it.

Then, the day after as he was back on the website, he got the text from Pike that the Voyagers were headed over to the hospital. With their media team. Ilya looked over to the vase, where the flowers he bought were unmistakable. He was lucky, at least, that he decided to sign them with the name *Lily*, just in case someone walked in. It broke his heart to sign the wrong name, but he needed Shane to be safe and being safe meant not letting him freak out.

Yuna and David were in the room with him, and he was sure they would be staying for the team's visit, so it was a surprise when they left with him.

"Where to?" Yuna asked, her arm resting gently behind Ilya's back as if to help him continue moving forward. Ilya felt like he was walking in a daze as they slowly inched away from Shane's room. He didn't want to leave.

He looked over at Shane's parents, their faces unwavering in support. His mouth felt dry. "Jewelry store."

Ten minutes later, they were at a mall looking at rings. Every so often, Yuna would point out a style that seemed to fit Shane, and they would ask to be given a closer look, only to agree it wasn't the right one.

"So," Yuna said once they hit the third store, "what happens once you're married?"

Ilya was leaning over the counter, looking down through the glass at all the rings. It was a shame that the men's styles were all so boring, but despite that none of them were the right fit for Shane.

"I do not know." He didn't look up at her. "But I will not be turned away from hospital next time."

Yuna pursed her lips, her mouth downturned. "Hockey is a dangerous sport," she agreed. "But are you going to go public?"

Ilya stopped mid motion and looked back at her. "I will do what he wants. If he wants public, I will support and be happy. If he wants private, I will keep private."

"But you won't be happy."

"I will be happy to be married." He looked away, feeling silly. "I wish I could tell everyone. But maybe we cannot." He remembered the last All-Stars game, where he kissed Shane on the cheek in front of everyone. He wanted to do it again. He wanted to do it every time they were on ice.

Yuna put her hand on Ilya's shoulder comfortingly. "Someday."

"Someday," he agreed easily and continued looking at rings.

Three hours later, David waved them over to look at one. Ilya and Yuna shared matching looks. "Is perfect," Ilya declared, waving the attendant over. "I want this one."

The jeweler looked at the ring with approval and brought it out of the case. It looked even more perfect up close. "You're in luck. We happen to carry this style in multiple styles, so you might be able to leave the store with the ring today."

Ilya looked over at Yuna, panicked. "What is his size?" he stage-whispered.

"Ten and a half," she told the attendant. He nodded and went to the back, appearing a few minutes later with a small bag.

"We normally sell out of half sizes pretty quickly," the jeweler explained as he rang them up. "Must be your lucky day."

The ring was sealed inside a velvet box and given to Ilya, who took it gingerly.

Later, Ilya was at the apartment, admiring his new purchase and picturing how it would look on Shane. His phone started buzzing out of nowhere, snapping his attention away from the

ring. It was the Montreal WAG group chat, reacting to their husbands visiting Shane in the hospital. He smiled as he read through their messages, many of them supportive.

And then he remembered that the Voyagers' media team was coming with, and quickly went on his social media to see if they had posted anything. There were three posts, but only one of them actually had Shane in it, and it was a video. He quickly tapped on it and was graced with Shane's voice slurring from the drugs, reassuring that he was going to recover and thanking everyone for their support.

It wasn't a very long video so Ilya checked the comments. Of course, there were many very supportive ones, wishing Shane a good recovery, but there were also ones that seemed a bit preoccupied with the flowers that were briefly shown next to his hospital bed, with many users wondering who Lily could be.

Ilya rolled his eyes, feeling a little annoyed at the speculation, and went back into the WAG chat, thanking them all for their well wishes.

The next day, Ilya visited Shane in the hospital. The ring box bore a hole in his pocket as he spent time with Shane, heart skipping as he learned that Shane would be released the next day.

When the time finally came, Ilya offered to take him to the apartment first, but the plan was for Shane to recover with his parents at their house in Ottawa. Luckily, Boston had also been kicked out of the playoffs after their last game without Ilya, because of his benching. Technically, he was still supposed to be there for it, but he would happily take whatever penalty to be able to stay with Shane.

So the plan had changed a little, with that recent development. Ilya was going to stay in Canada and play nurse until Shane got better. They were going to stay at Shane's Cottage, which Ilya had only ever heard of and never seen, and Shane's parents would help.

But he had to do something first.

He kept his hand on Shane's back as the man slowly limped into the apartment, being careful to not disrupt his ribs. There was nothing wrong with his legs, but being in the hospital for almost a week had left them weaker than before.

They had just gotten past the threshold when Ilya made Shane stop and walked around to be in front of him. "Hollander," he started, visibly nervous.

"Rozanov," Shane mirrored him, voice fond.

"You scared me." Ilya frowned.

"Oh, did I?" Shane asked dryly.

"Hush. When you were first brought there, I was not allowed to visit. Only immediate family." He looked down. "I wanted to be there. I always want to be with you."

“Ilya–”

He got down on one knee. “Shane Hollander. You are boring and annoying and second best hockey player with a weak backhand. You fold your clothes before we have sex and only drink ginger ale. Your toothbrush is in my bathroom. Your parents beat me at Yahtzee. I love you. Marry me?” He brought out the ring box. Shane looked between him and the box, silent for a moment. It made Ilya anxious, which was ridiculous.

“That was awful,” Shane said softly. “But yes.”

There wasn’t a real wedding. Shane tried not to be too disappointed about it. Instead, they had a quick civil ceremony that weekend, with only Shane’s parents and Hayden’s family present. Ilya wore jeans and a nice shirt but Shane wore sweatpants because they were easier to put on with his injury.

And then they were married.

But Shane was still in recovery.

Somehow, it felt harder with Ilya around. Just the thought made him feel guilty, but it was true. He wanted to be alone with his husband and start their honeymoon as soon as possible, but he wasn’t allowed to be *active* for the next six weeks at the earliest. It was tearing him apart, every time he watched Ilya casually move throughout his house –his cottage, where he had wished for Ilya to be there with him every single summer, but had never had the chance to ask– and kiss Shane like he loved him, because he did and they were married. They were *husbands*.

Still, the weeks went by decently quickly. Shane’s concussion was healing nicely so he was gradually allowed more screentime. Eventually, he was able to watch the rest of the playoff games with Ilya and his parents, *his family*, instead of just listening to them.

“Good for Scott Hunter,” Yuna said pushing herself off the couch and following David into the other room.

“Why good for Scott Hunter?” Ilya asked, offended. He let his hand play with Shane’s hair as he rested on his chest.

“I don’t know, it’s just his year.”

Two weeks later, she would be proven right when the Admirals won the cup.

“I wish my concussion didn’t heal so quickly so I wouldn’t have to see Scott Hunter win the cup,” he grumbled to Ilya.

“Is awful. I should yell at Marley again for getting Montreal and Boston out of playoffs.”

“Stop, you know he already feels terrible.” He’s been non-stop texting Shane for weeks.

Ilya shrugged with one shoulder. “He should. Now grandpa Hunter has won the cup.”

Shane looked up at him, a soft smile on his face. He leaned in and kissed Ilya, lips moving slowly against each other. The tv sounded behind them, probably following the players as they skated holding the cup.

Ilya slowly pulled back, a smile on his face. His eyes went to the tv, his unabashed happiness quickly turning into shock. Shane followed his movement, expression dropping similarly.

Scott fucking Hunter was kissing a man. Very passionately.

The stadium behind them exploded with cheers. It was so loud that it could be heard in the background of the commentary, which took place in a soundproof booth in the stadium.

Shane met Ilya's eyes again and pulled him into a hug, pulling him closer and closer until it felt like Ilya could become part of him.

Maybe someday was closer than they thought.

EPILOGUE

Ilya stepped out of the car, checking his watch. He wasn't too late, but the driveway was littered with cars already.

It was a short walk to the familiar front door of the Pike residence. He knew that Hayden Pike wasn't there, but he wasn't there for the man.

Jacki opened the door and immediately let him inside. As soon as she closed the door behind him she embraced him in a welcoming hug. "Ilya, so nice to see you! The other WAGs are over in the kitchen. Do you want me to take your coat?" Ilya shook his head.

"I brought cookies." He held out the tupperware. Jacki thanked him and took it, then walked further into the house where he knew the kitchen was. He felt glued to the floor for a moment, but forced himself to move forward.

When he entered the large space, he was immediately greeted by a group of women looking over at him in confusion.

He took a deep breath, fitting his hands in his pockets. "Hello. I am Ilya. Sorry for being late."

"Rozanov?" one of them asked, hesitantly breaking the silence. He nodded. "Yes." He looked over to Jacki, who was prompting him to continue.

His mouth felt dry. "You know me as Lily. In the chat. I am sorry for lie."

A red headed girl made the first move, walking towards him. "Oh hon," she had a slight southern accent. It was like a dam broke and the other girls reacted. An hour later, he was sitting down and sipping some disgusting wine, being bombarded with questions.

“No, no, not boyfriend,” he corrected someone, who had referred to Shane as Ilya’s boyfriend while talking about the players. “Husband.”

Immediately the room broke into squeals.

“When did you get married?” Sarah, a blonde woman who was dating the left wing, asked as she took a sip of her glass.

“Right after his injury.” He looked down at the table, sadly. “They would not let me in at first because I was not family. Hockey is dangerous sport. I didn’t want it to happen again.”

A silence washed over them, broken when Jacki moved over and placed her arm around Rozanov supportively. “It was just a civil service. Apart from Shane’s family, we were the only guests.”

Ilya looked up at her in gratitude and patted her hand. “Shane… he gets sad sometimes when he thinks about our wedding. He does not tell me but I can see. Me too, sometimes. I know he would have liked more. But is hard with how we have to be.”

Later, Ilya left the house with promises to attend more WAG events. There was no getting out of them, now that they knew just how often he was in Montreal. Privately, Jacki told him there was no pressure to come, but he wanted to.

Just over a year had passed since Shane and Ilya got married when they had their official ceremony, to their surprise. It was originally sold to Ilya as another Montreal WAG event during that year’s off-season that he and Shane just *had* to go to. Once they got to the event center, not realizing that the address given to them wasn’t someone’s house, they were quickly separated and told what was happening.

They were given time to write their vows and someone managed to get their measurements for tuxes.

More people knew about them now. It turned out they were getting worse and worse at keeping the secret the longer they were married. Most of the players who went to the All-Star game knew, since Shane couldn’t keep his eyes off of Ilya.

Worst of all, Scott Hunter knew.

After Scott very publicly came out, Shane sent him a nice email on behalf of himself and Ilya, but he kept it very general about opening paths and how he was inspired by his bravery as the first man to come out in the sport. He responded with an email basically telling Shane and Ilya that they weren’t very quiet, that night in 2014. It was funny how Shane barely remembered it now, but it was during that year’s All-Star’s game, when Scott Hunter was placed next door to Ilya.

Most of them were there for their surprise wedding with their respective partners. All of those who knew had sworn not to spread any rumors, knowing what it could mean for their careers. Even though Scott Hunter had come out, prompting other closeted players to follow in his

footsteps, once it was proved safe, there was no precedent for being with another player. And the commissioner, Crowell, hadn’t been subtle with how he viewed the appearance of these players, even if he said a different thing in public.

During the ceremony, there were around fifty people there in total. Shane wouldn’t consider most of them his close friends, beyond Hayden, J.J., Rose, and Svetlana. They said their vows and kissed and then danced at their reception. Very quickly afterwards, they disappeared into the bathroom and wouldn’t return for another hour, visibility disheveled. Shane, at least, had attempted to smooth himself out. Ilya didn’t seem to care about his crumpled shirt and jacket.

It was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

thanks to everyone for the support on the first part! I've had this for a while (before I even posted the first part) and have been debating on publishing it or not

I think there will be one more part to this, but it's going to be its own work because it's a social media AU and sooooo different tonally. but hollanov social media AUs have been my obsession recently
if I ever finish it lol...

also if you're my friend who found my ao3 account, you don't see this upload <3

2/10/26 edit
fucking curse. why was I in a car accident two days after posting this???????????? (I'm fine, just annoyed at magic ig)

End Notes

don't know if I'm quite in love with this but it's been rotting in my google docs since Christmas...

I do have a few more drafts that I might publish and make this into a series but idk, we'll see how I feel

also if you're one of my friend that I sent this to, you don't see this and you don't know this account :)))

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!