

Haunting Your City

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Haunting Your City

by [mightydolphin](#)

Summary

“What is there to talk about?”

“What’s there to talk about?!” Hollander scoffed, shaking his head. “You’re playing for my fucking team!”

“I know.”

“Why did you have to go and get traded?! You realise we’re going to have to see each other every day from now on, and play together, and-”

“Yes,” Ilya interrupted. He didn’t want to know how long Hollander’s list was. “I know.”

Hollander took a deep breath. “Okay, listen,” he said. “Just so we’re clear - we don’t know each other outside of playing against each other, right?”

“Right.”

“And we can’t- can’t hook up anymore.”

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OR: Ilya gets traded to Montreal in October 2014. He's lonely, and angry, and he misses Boston. He doesn't know if it helps that Hollander is there or not.

title from Buckle by Florence and the Machine

Notes

okay, my first chaptered work for this fandom! it is all planned out, aiming to update once or twice a week
tw for racial slurs in the first chap

Chapter 1: Prologue

OCTOBER 2014

Ilya hated their new enforcer. He'd been annoyed when Price had been traded - he was unusual, sure, but he'd been a good enforcer, and hadn't pissed Ilya off the entire season. *Everyone* managed to piss Ilya off at some point, but Price had been harmless. And they'd won the fucking Cup with him, for fucks sake.

Their new guy - Isaak Gusev - pissed Ilya off every single day. They were only at the start of the new season, and already Ilya was gritting his teeth. He liked everyone else on his team; hell, the Bears were more family than his actual family, at this point, but Gusev was not part of that. He thought he was so fucking funny, and smart, and wouldn't leave Ilya the fuck alone.

It was worse that he was Russian, so he seemed to assume it meant he and Ilya would be best friends. He was constantly making sly comments to Ilya, in the language only they understood. About Coach, about other players, even about their own fucking teammates.

But Ilya ignored, and simply didn't engage. If other people wanted to be dicks, that was none of his business. Maybe he should have said something sooner, put a stop to it all, and none of this would have happened. But he didn't.

It came to a head after their first game against Montreal of the season. Boston had been defeated, at home as well, and the mood was sour as they all trudged back into the locker room. Ilya was in an especially bad mood - Hollander had won every single face off, and he knew social media would be ablaze talking about it.

Probably saying his Cup win was a fluke. That he was too young to Captain a team. That Hollander was the better Captain. Truthfully, Ilya wanted nothing more than to get home, wait for Hollander to arrive and use the man to fuck his frustrations out.

"Don't worry, Roz," Gusev said to him in Russian, as they were getting changed. *"We'll get them next time."*

Ilya hummed, not engaging. It didn't stop Gusev.

"Hollander is weak American bitch, would not last a second in KHL."

"Maybe." Ilya was so close to getting out of there.

"Chink like that would leave ice on stretchers."

Ilya froze for a second, then finished pulling on his sweater. *"Do not use words like that,"* he said shortly.

“*Oh, come on.*” Gusev grinned, like it was funny. “*A chink is still a chink, even if he’s mixed breed.*”

Ilya saw red. He punched Gusev, straight in the nose. Then he kept punching him, even when Gusev stopped grinning. He kept punching, even when Gusev was on the floor. He didn’t stop until Marlow and Connors had dragged him off, and Ilya’s knuckles were bright red and bruised, and there was blood all over.

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“Rozanov, what the fuck?!”

Coach had been yelling at him for the past fifteen minutes. Ilya sat in the room and took it. He was good at being yelled at - he kept his eyes downcast, his mouth shut, and nodded contritely.

“Management is pissed! The journalists are all up my ass! Gusev has a broken jaw and won’t be able to play for weeks! What the fuck happened?!!”

Ilya shrugged. “We had fight,” he said.

“Oh, no no no.” Coach shook his head. “This wasn’t a fight. This was *assault*. Assault, Rozanov! Of one employee to another! And on company property! Do you even know the type of shit Legal has been screaming at me the past twenty four hours?”

“Sorry, Coach.”

Coach LeClaire finally sat down. He didn’t look any less pissed. “This is not a “sorry” sort of situation, Rozanov,” he growled. “You better explain yourself, and fast, or I’m going to have to trade you.”

Ilya’s eyes widened, and he swallowed. “Do not trade me,” he said stiffly. “It will not happen again, I promise. I will- will take suspension or something. Pay fine.”

“Ilya, right now you are a danger to everyone the Bears employ. I need you to tell me what happened.”

Ilya almost did. Really, almost. But he could not do that to Hollander. He knew, if he told Coach, then HR and Legal and all of management would know, which means the media would know, and it would be everywhere. And Hollander would *hate* that. He would hate everyone talking about his ethnicity, he would hate being at the centre of a scandal where another player called him a slur, he would hate that Ilya had to be the one to stand up for him.

He would hate all of it, Ilya knew. He knew how hard Hollander worked to be seen as a hockey player and nothing else, and- God, they would make Hollander comment on it, and he

would hate that even more. Ilya couldn't do that to him, especially when this was all Ilya's fault, because Ilya couldn't control his own fucking emotions. He couldn't drag Hollander into this.

"Sorry, Coach," he said. "I cannot say."

"Rozanov. That's not good enough."

"I know."

Coach stared at him. "I'm not going to be able to keep you here."

"I know." Ilya swallowed. "I really am sorry."

Coach sighed. He didn't seem angry anymore, just disappointed. "Go pack your shit."

Ilya left.

~~

Ilya had thought he would get traded to Buffalo, maybe. Or Dallas, they had money left and their centre was shit. He had not expected to get traded to Montreal. He had argued with his agent when she told him - he didn't want to leave America, and going to play for Montreal felt like the biggest betrayal to Boston possible.

Ilya loved Boston. He loved the city, he loved the people, he loved his team. It had been home since he was eighteen. He didn't want to go and play for their sworn enemy. But it didn't matter how much he yelled at his agent - the trade had been made, and Montreal had taken him.

Marlow came to help him pack some of his shit. He was really only taking what he absolutely needed - clothes, sheets, the bare minimum of pots and pans. He was leaving his Boston apartment as close to normal as possible, because he was not ready to say goodbye yet.

He and Marlow loaded the suitcases into the only four-wheel drive Ilya owned, a black Range Rover. He stared longingly at the sports cars he was leaving in the garage.

"You will check on place every month or so?" Ilya asked, again.

"Sure, man," Marlow replied.

"Thanks."

"Eh, don't thank me yet. Now I have keys, I'm gonna have all the boys over as soon as you leave. We're going to absolutely destroy the place."

Ilya laughed despite himself. He shut the garage door and walked round to the driver's side of the Range Rover. "I will bill you for all damage," he said.

Marlow grinned, but it didn't reach his eyes. "You need anything else?"

"No. Thank you for help."

"S'okay." Marlow's grin faded. "You really can't tell me why you let yourself get traded, Roz?"

"No."

"...Okay." Marlow exhaled loudly. "I'm gonna miss you man. Team won't be the same without you."

"You will be good Captain," Ilya assured him.

"Not as good as you."

"No one is as good as me." The joke fell flat, and Ilya felt heavy. "I will miss you too," he said. "We will... we will keep in touch, yes?"

"Yeah, course." Marlow smiled grimly, and Ilya nodded.

"Okay... I should, ah, get going. Is long drive."

"Yeah, alright."

Ilya got into the car, starting the engine, and Marlow slapped the hood. "See you around," he said, and Ilya waved, driving off.

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He arrived at the lodge his agent had booked for him last-minute. It was a shitty sort of long-term motel set-up, because Ilya needed his space, and didn't want to live in a hotel where he had cleaners knocking every day until he found an apartment. This gave him a little room with a bed, an armchair and a tiny kitchenette, with a hob and a microwave and tiny fridge, along with a cramped bathroom with a shower.

It was shit, but he had his privacy, and no one would bother him, so he would take it. He checked in, and dragged his suitcases in from the car, and looked around the room. He didn't really know what to do, he realised. It was early in the evening on Saturday, and he wasn't expected at the rink until Monday morning.

He scrolled his phone for a while, but all his feeds were just reactions to his trade, and he didn't like seeing the Boston fans upset with him. So he googled where the nearest supermarket was instead, and drove there to buy himself food for the next couple of days. When he got back, he ate his pot noodle on the armchair, and then lay on his bed. He watched Jeopardy reruns until two in the morning, even though he hated American quiz shows because he didn't know any of the answers to their questions. They just made him feel stupid, but maybe he wanted to feel stupid that night. More stupid than he felt already.

He checked his phone one last time before he went to sleep. Because he was feeling particularly sorry for himself, he opened the text thread from Jane. The last message was still the one that had been sent over a week ago now, from the night Montreal came to Boston.

Jane: am i still seeing you tonight or are you too much of a sore loser?

Ilya had never replied, because he had been too busy beating Gusev into a pulp, and then getting screamed at. He'd never got to see Hollander that night, which meant the last time Ilya had been with him had been that night in Vegas.

Almost six months, by now. It felt longer.

Hollander hadn't texted him again since, even though he certainly saw the news about what Ilya had done, and certainly *certainly* knew where Ilya had been traded to. But whatever Hollander's thoughts were about it all, he hadn't chosen to share them with Ilya.

Ilya considered sending a message, but decided against it. What would he even say? He groaned, switching his phone off and letting the darkness of the room envelop him.

Chapter 2: October 2014

OCTOBER 2014

Ilya woke to his alarm on Monday morning and was already annoyed. He showered and dressed at a sluggish pace, like if he moved slowly enough he would miss his first day as a Voyageur entirely. But he couldn't do that. He packed his horrendous new uniform into his bag and drove to the rink, somewhat impressed with himself that he arrived only ten minutes late.

He had to follow signs to the locker room, and he heard the buzz of conversation as he approached. It fell silent as he opened the door though, and he was met with the suspicious stares of twenty-something hockey players.

His eyes found Hollander almost instantly, at a locker in the corner of the room. He was fiddling with his skates with intense focus, head kept steadfastly down. Ilya looked away.

"Um, hello," he said, shouldering his bag.

He got a few grumbled greetings.

He wondered if he should introduce himself, but decided that would be stupid. They all knew who he was. "Which locker is free?" he asked instead.

After a pause, Miitka tapped the locker next to his, and Ilya nodded, setting his things down. He changed quickly, and the room remained quiet.

He knew it was weird. He had been playing for Boston up until last week. He wasn't exactly happy with the situation either. But he thought it would be much less fucking awkward if everyone else decided to ignore him and carry on their conversations, rather than subject them all to the strained silence. But it wasn't his team, and he wasn't Captain anymore, so he simply kept quiet and put on his new uniform.

It felt a bit like treason, pulling on the blue jersey. He'd never considered he would wear anything other than Boston colours.

Finally, Hollander stood up. "Alright," he said, looking out into the team but not actually meeting anyone's eyes. "It's, um, a bit odd, I know. We're used to playing against, um..." he faltered, swallowing. "Rozanov."

Ilya grimaced. He hadn't realised it was such a pain for Hollander to even say his name.

"But he's a Voyageur now," Hollander continued determinedly. "So, let's have a good practice, yeah? Show him what sort of team we are."

There were grunts of agreement, half-hearted but something, at least. Hollander led the way out of the locker room, and everyone began to file out, skirting around Ilya. Ilya took an extra

thirty seconds to himself, gathering his thoughts, before following them out onto the rink.

The practice went shit. The Voyageurs' Coach - Coach Theriault, a stupid French Canadian name that Ilya hated on principle - wanted to put Ilya on the second line. Ilya hadn't played on the second line since he was nineteen, and his two wings were *slow*.

He got yelled at for not passing the puck, but how was he supposed to pass to them when they were halfway down the ice? But it wasn't like Ilya could go on the first line, that was Hollander's spot, and it was obviously untouchable.

But Montreal's second line was shit. Montreal did well because they had Hollander, two players who could keep up with him, and a semi-decent defence. They were not, however, a well-rounded team.

It made a bit more sense to Ilya now, why Montreal had wanted him. If Hollander got injured, they would be nothing. But he couldn't make the second line impressive all on his own. When he went to pass again, an hour into training, and could see neither of his wings nearby, he shot the puck into the net on his own and cursed loudly.

"*Blyat!*" He rounded on Wilson and Taylor, who were just catching up to him. "Why do you play in NHL?" he demanded. "My grandmother could skate faster than you two!"

"Rozanov!" Theriault yelled at him. "That's not the fucking play! Stop hogging the puck!"

"I cannot pass if no one is there!" Ilya argued.

"Then don't end up alone! Run the plays I tell you to!"

Rozanov scowled, looking at Wilson and Taylor. They both looked embarrassed, and he almost felt bad. They were both young players, he wasn't sure if either had even cracked twenty yet. But he felt too pissed off to be guilty. "Learn to fucking skate," he snapped at them, and went to reset.

Practice ended with Ilya frustrated, Theriault pissed at him, and every Voyageur giving him a wide berth in the gym afterwards. Ilya kept his post-practice workout short that day, and he was the first one to leave the facility.

It sucked, because he had wanted to get away from every single Voyageur that was eyeing him like he was a spy there to sabotage them, but as soon as he got to his car, he realised he had nothing to do except to go back to his shitty motel. He didn't know this city, he didn't know anyone in this city - no one except Hollander - and it wasn't like he was going to call Marlow and cry that his first day had been shit.

He had known it would be like this. It was fine. It was his fault, there was no point in getting upset about it now. He was done for the day now, he may as well just forget all about it.

He drove back to the motel and showered again, like he needed to wash off the remainder of the Voyageurs' presence. He ate another pot noodle, because it was that, pasta, or a

microwave meal. Then he opened the wikipedia for Montreal on his phone and started to read.

He hated it almost immediately, because apparently ninety percent of this city spoke French, and only sixty percent spoke English. He could not learn French as well, he had just started feeling confident in his English skills, he could *not* start from scratch all over again. He wondered if he'd get questions in French during press - he hated having to use a translator, but he didn't know a word of French other than *bonjour*.

Apparently Montreal was bigger than Boston - a lot bigger, like three times as many people. It didn't feel like that though. Boston had been loud, and fast-moving. The city had buzzed with tension, but Ilya had liked that, it had felt like Boston could handle him, like Boston had been the immovable object to Ilya's unstoppable force.

Montreal felt quiet, and delicate, like something peaceful Ilya would come in and shatter without even meaning to. He had gone for a run yesterday morning, and there had been no one swearing in the street, the cars didn't honk at the slightest inconvenience, even the birds had seemed quieter. It put him more on edge than the relentless storm that had been Boston.

His phone buzzed, interrupting his train of thought.

Jane: where are you staying?

Ilya stared at the message for a few seconds, taken aback, and then sent his address and lodge number. Hollander had barely looked at him all practice. It would be good, Ilya thought, to fuck Hollander again. It always helped to clear his mind, more than taking his anger out on the punching bag in the gym ever could.

Hollander was knocking at the door twenty minutes later. Ilya opened it, dragging him inside. His hands slipped under Hollander's hoodie as he kicked the door shut.

"Hollander," he hummed, moving his lips to Hollander's neck, "you finally work up courage to text me?"

"Rozanov," Hollander said evenly, pushing Ilya's hands away from his waist.

Ilya hesitated, unsure. "...Hollander?"

Hollander took a few steps into the room - away from Ilya. He stuffed his hands back into his pockets, going to lean against the wall furthest away. "So, uh..." he trailed off, his eyes darting around. He was holding himself tightly, like a coil ready to spring apart, but he often stood like that, so Ilya couldn't tell what it meant.

"You... want to fuck?" Ilya asked.

"No!" Hollander shook his head fiercely. "No, no, I-"

Ilya felt his stomach drop. He grit his teeth. “Why come then?”

“Because we need to talk, asshole!”

Ilya folded his arms, jutting his chin out. “Why?” he asked, and he hated the way his voice came out so sulky. “What is there to talk about?”

“What’s there to talk about?!” Hollander scoffed, shaking his head. “You’re playing for my fucking team!”

“I know.”

“Why did you have to go and get traded?! You realise we’re going to have to see each other every day from now on, and play together, and-”

“Yes,” Ilya interrupted. He didn’t want to know how long Hollander’s list was. “I know.”

Hollander took a deep breath. “Okay, listen,” he said, expression pained. “Just so we’re clear - we don’t know each other outside of playing against each other, right?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Right.”

“And we can’t- can’t hook up anymore.”

That made Ilya frown. “Why not?”

“Because!” Hollander declared, throwing his hands up, glaring at Ilya like he was an idiot. “Because we play together now, and people will realise, we’ll get *caught*! From now on, we barely know each other, okay?”

Ilya stared at him, testing.

“*Okay?*” Hollander pressed.

“...Fine,” Ilya muttered.

Hollander’s chest was heaving. “This is your fault, you fuckhead!” he swore. “Don’t look at me like that! Things were fine before you had to go and get kicked off the Bears! Why did you have to go and beat up a teammate, what the fuck is wrong with you?! You’re the one who fucked this up!” Hollander stared daggers at him, letting the words settle in the air. “I’m not risking my career over you, Rozanov,” he said resolutely.

“I’m not asking you too.”

“Yeah, well I bet you’re not worrying about it. What am I saved as in your phone right now?”

“Jane.”

Hollander *hmp*-ed in annoyance. “Well, I can’t be Jane anymore, can I?” he snapped. “They’re going to add you to the team groupchat, so I need to be saved as Shane.”

“Fine, so I change it!” exclaimed Ilya.

“Yes, change it! And you need to delete all our messages too.”

Ilya blinked. “What?”

“You can’t have all of them under my name!” Hollander groaned, and stalked over. “What if someone saw, how would you explain that? Get rid of them.”

Ilya pulled his phone out. He suddenly felt quite mournful, even though he had no reason to be. The texts were really nothing more than planning when to meet and the occasional dirty message. Still, it felt unfair. The text logs were the only actual evidence he and Hollander had ever been anything other than rivals on the ice. Deleting them felt almost like lying.

But Hollander was standing over him, watching, and his shoulders were so tense, and Ilya could see the panic in his eyes, even if his face was indignant. So he changed the contact name and deleted the history obediently.

Hollander’s shoulders relaxed slightly. “Thank you,” he breathed.

Ilya nodded.

“I should, uh, go.”

“Yes, okay.” Ilya pursed his lips. He had put Hollander through a lot of stress, he realised. He hadn’t meant to do that. “I am- sorry, by the way. I did not mean to come and invade your life.”

“Yeah, well, it’s-” Hollander huffed, running a hand through his hair. “It’s fine. I mean, it’s done now, so... whatever. It’s okay.”

“Okay,” Ilya said.

“I’ll... see you tomorrow, I guess?”

“Sure.”

Hollander left, the door falling shut behind him, and Ilya stared at the now-empty text thread in his phone. For the first time since he was told he would get traded, he felt tears well in his eyes. He hated this city, he hated this team, and now Hollander hated him. He was so tired of fucking everything up.

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The rest of the week went much the same. They had a game against Florida, which they won, but only because Florida was a shit team. Hollander and the first line scored all the goals, while Ilya was still fucking up with Wilson and Taylor. He didn't even get an assist - it had been his worst game in years.

He heard everyone planning to go out afterwards, but he didn't join in on the conversation, and no one invited him. He was starting to pick up on some of the in-jokes, though. Hollander only went out if they won, and even then, he only stayed for one drink. Pike only went out when they played away games, otherwise he was home with the wife and kids. Drapeau and a few of the others went out every time and drank too much.

There was an ease with which the team made the plans, like they already knew who was doing what, and were just saying it for the sake of saying it. Ilya had been part of that, with Boston. He didn't want to be part of it with any other team, especially not this team.

At least it had been a home game, and he didn't have to spend the night in a hotel surrounded by the other players. He slipped out of the locker room without notice and went back to the motel, and spent that night watching the highlights of the Boston game.

Even if the week was shit, he established his new routine easily enough. He would wake up and go to practice, and get yelled at by Theriault for not passing, not being a team player, for messing up the plays. He would eat lunch with the Voyageurs, scrolling his phone and avoiding conversation. He would workout in the gym, suffering through cardio before he got to pummel the punching bag for a bit as a reward. Then he would go back to the lodge and watch shitty TV until he fell asleep.

He noticed Hollander's eyes on him though. All the time. Hollander watched him constantly, and Ilya wasn't sure what to make of it. It was as though Hollander expected him to get up suddenly and announce to the team "*Guess what, I've been fucking your Captain for five years!*" Like they didn't have the same secret. Like Ilya would do that, even if they didn't.

It made him agitated, having Hollander watching him all the time. He ignored it, mostly - avoided meeting his eyes, keeping his own head down and doing as he was told until it was time to leave. He didn't bring attention to it.

On Saturday, he went out on his own. He went out to a club, and he had to queue for the first time in years, because he wouldn't be waved in automatically like he would be at his old spots in Boston. It was awkward, standing on the sidewalk alone, shivering in just his thin shirt.

It was better once he got inside though. He found a girl easily, with long hair and small, perky tits, grinding on her for a few songs until she invited Ilya back to her place. He ate her out for a while, and then he fucked her.

He felt better afterwards, falling asleep in her bed. He'd have to do the walk of shame in the morning, but he had never liked that English expression. He didn't see what was shameful about having sex, as long as everyone involved was having fun.

The girl - Jessica, Ilya thought, although he wasn't quite sure - wrapped her arms and legs around him as she drifted off. Ilya was less of a fan of that, but he let her do it. The city still sounded too quiet, even for the middle of the night, but eventually he managed to fall asleep too.

Chapter 3: November 2014 (I)

NOVEMBER 2014

They had to fly to play Detroit in an away game. Ilya was glad to be back in America though, even if it was fucking Michigan. Michigan was lame. But at least he escaped the clutches of Tim Horton's for a couple of days.

The match went badly (not that that was a surprise). Ilya got tired of passing to no one, or skating so slow the other team could steal the puck. By the time they got to third period he was done, and when he won the face off he skated down the ice without regard for his wings.

He fainted, slipping past Detroit's defence, and slapped the puck into the back of the net. Even as the crowd started cheering, Ilya knew he was in trouble. Theriault was yelling at him before he was even back behind the boards.

"What the fuck, Rozanov? What are you playing at?!"

"Hockey," Ilya snapped, tired of it all. "I wanted to score some fucking goals."

"You don't do what you want! This is a team sport! And you're not in charge, you're paid to run the plays I tell you to play!"

Ilya shrugged, aware of the glares he was getting from the other players. "Find plays that let me score some points," he muttered.

Theriault kept him off the ice for the rest of the game.

They won anyway - thanks to Hollander, of course. Ilya let the team make their plans to go out, heading back to his hotel room on his own.

He turned on the TV, flicking through the channels half-heartedly before leaving it showing the highlights of Boston's game. When that was over, he just let the news talk as he played candy crush. It wasn't the most exciting night, and he hated himself just a little when he actually spent \$1.99 to refill his lives, rather than find something else to do. He was aware how pathetic it was. He had a missed call from Alexei, but he didn't want to deal with that right now. He'd sent him money at the start of the month, he should be fine. If it was an emergency he'd have kept calling. Ilya ignored the notification and focused on beating the next level instead.

It couldn't have been more than an hour before he heard a knock on the door, and he frowned. The guys should all still be out - even if they weren't, they had no reason to be coming to Ilya's room. And it wasn't like he had ordered room service.

Nonetheless, he muted the TV and got up, going to open the door. He barely had time to register his surprise before Hollander barged his way in.

“...Hello,” Ilya said slowly, shutting the door.

“Yeah, hey.” Hollander leant against the room’s little table, almost knocking over the kettle. His arms were crossed over his chest.

Ilya was reminded of the last time Hollander had spoken to him, when he had pushed into Ilya’s lodge two weeks ago and stood as far away from him and berated him for being such an idiot. Something told Ilya this was going to be a repeat.

“I thought you were going out,” Ilya said.

“I was. I mean- I have. I’ve been out,” Hollander replied defensively.

“Ah, yes.” Ilya smirked. “One drink only, right?”

“God, fuck off.”

“You are the one who came to my room.”

“Yeah, because I need to yell at you.” Hollander’s nostrils flared. “You can’t play again like you did today.”

Ilya groaned. “I scored goal! If I play like Theriault wants, I would never score goal!”

“You played like an asshole,” Hollander growled. “And you embarrassed Taylor and Wilson! You can’t just take all the glory for yourself, it’s not fair on them.”

Ilya scoffed. “Then they should learn to play.”

“They know how to play! They’re just young! And you might be able to skate circles around Detroit, but you’re not going to be able to pull that shit against New York, or Toronto!”

Ilya scowled. He knew Hollander was right.

“Look,” Hollander said stiffly, flexing his jaw, “I don’t care who scores the goals, I want my team to win - not just this match, I want to get to the playoffs, I want to win the Cup. I can’t do that if my second line can’t get their shit together! And- Wilson and Taylor look up to you, you complete *asshole*. And you’ve done nothing but insult them since you got here!”

Ilya looked away, his face twisting up even more. “They do not look up to me,” he muttered. “Every fucking Voyageur thinks I still play for Boston.”

“No,” Hollander said. “*You* think you still play for Boston.”

Ilya sighed. He didn’t look at him. “...Fine,” he ground out. “I will try harder with the stupid kids. Happy?”

“You could try harder with the whole team.”

“They do not try with me.”

“Well, then be the bigger person, Rozanov!” Hollander exclaimed. “Sorry if they’re standoffish to you, but you got transferred to us because you beat the shit out of your old teammate! And you haven’t exactly acted approachable since you got here.”

“And what do you care?” Ilya’s eyes darted back up to meet Hollander’s, defiant.

“Because... I’m the Captain. I want my team to get along, and I *need* my team to play well together.”

Ilya rubbed the bridge of his nose with his thumb, exhaling heavily. “Whatever, Hollander,” he sighed. “I will try and play nice with your little team, okay? Go, now. I am tired.”

Hollander stared at him, and Ilya stared back. Ilya hadn’t really looked at him in ages. He always managed to forget how pretty Hollander was, even when he was furious. Eventually, Hollander just nodded, and slipped out of the room without another word.

~~

The next day, Ilya approached Wilson and Taylor in the gym. “You work out with me today,” he informed them bluntly.

The two baby-faced wings stared up at him, their faces some mix of shock and apprehension.

“...Uhm, what?” Taylor chuckled nervously.

“You work out with me,” Ilya repeated. “You both need to be faster, and your legs are skinny. Cannot accelerate quick enough with legs like that.”

“My legs aren’t *skinny*,” Wilson argued.

Ilya tapped his foot impatiently. “You want to keep up with me or not?”

The two glanced at each other and nodded.

“Good, come.” He led them away from the rowing machines. “We warm up with squats and lunges, then we focus on weights.” He eyed them both, and noticed they still looked somewhat nervous. He leaned in secretively. “Hollander is second fastest player on ice right now,” he murmured. “He will be fourth fastest by end of season, yes?”

The two kids started to grin tentatively.

Ilya pushed them through a pretty tough work out. He caught Hollander watching him, as always, and raised his eyebrows, daring him to make a comment. But Hollander just smiled at him, and turned back to Pike. Ilya thought that must have been the first time Hollander

smiled at him since Vegas. Maybe earlier. He hadn't realised he had missed it until he got to see it again.

Ilya took in a deep breath, banishing the thought, and returned to his rookies.

~~

They won their next game against New York. Ilya didn't manage to get any points, but he did manage to drag Wilson and Taylor farther up the ice than they had managed to get so far, so he supposed it was progress.

Hollander found him in the locker room. "You'll come out with us tonight?" he asked. His hair was still damp from the shower, sticking to his forehead. There were drops of water trickling down his neck, and Ilya wanted to lick them up.

"... I do not know," he said. "I am tired."

"Come on." Hollander kicked his ankle, almost playful. "We won. Come celebrate."

Ilya chewed the inside of his cheek. "I will go for as long as you do," he offered. If Hollander really wanted Ilya to bond with the Montreal team, he would have to compromise.

"Deal."

So Ilya ended up at a New York bar with the Montreal players, sipping his beer as they all chattered around him. He was still figuring out the dynamics of the team, so he kept pretty quiet, just listening and laughing at the jokes and chirps where appropriate.

Nobody complained about his presence, so Ilya let himself relax slightly. About half the players went to the dance floor pretty quickly - all the single ones, probably hoping to score tonight. Ilya hung back - Hollander had stayed at the table, his fingers tapping his glass even as he didn't drink from it. He looked happy. Or at least, as happy as he ever would in a loud bar surrounded by people.

"Look," Miitka said, "it looks like Wilson's managed to pull."

Ilya glanced over, and sure enough, his little left wing had found a girl to dance with, his hands palming at her ass shamelessly. He chuckled.

"I feel like proud father."

Eyes darted over to him, like they hadn't expected Ilya to speak, and Ilya took a long swig of his beer.

"You've been working them both pretty hard," Stedlund said.

Ilya shrugged. "They will thank me when they start scoring."

That elicited some laughs. Ilya caught Hollander smiling at him. He should be smiling, Ilya thought. He was only doing all this because Hollander had yelled at him.

"So," Drapeau said, leaning over like the ice had been broken, "how are you finding Montreal?"

"Montreal sucks," Ilya said honestly.

Drapeau barked a laugh. "Man, fuck you. What's wrong with Montreal?"

"It is stupid," Ilya groaned, letting his head fall back. "I miss Dunkin Donuts - why does Canada have a million fucking Tim Horton's and no Dunkin?"

"I dunno, man," Comeau said, chuckling. "Is Dunkin so much better?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm sorry for your loss."

"Another thing," Ilya groused. "You Canadians, you apologise too much. Is annoying. Do not apologise for Tim Horton's, stand up for your country's gross coffee. Have some pride!"

Renaud was snorting now as well. "I think Horton's is good," he said.

"And why is your money so colourful?" Ilya added. He was on a roll now. "I feel like I have monopoly money in my wallet, I look ridiculous." He shook his head. "Is stupid country."

The rest of the table was starting to crack up, and Ilya shrugged, letting them laugh. He met Hollander's eyes again - he thought Hollander would look pleased with him, he was playing nice with the team after all. But instead, Hollander was just staring at him thoughtfully, his eyebrows furrowed.

"Alright, alright," Drapeau said, shaking Ilya by his shoulders, "you've got your fucking complaints, noted. But you get healthcare without going bankrupt now, so take the fucking win."

Ilya nodded. "Yes," he admitted, "Canada gets one thing right. Although I did have very good insurance as a Bear."

They started booing him, and Ilya laughed. He finished his drink ten minutes later, but didn't go to get another one. He waited for Hollander to finish his, keeping an eye on him. When Hollander stood, and began making his excuses to leave, nobody looked surprised, waving him off easily and continuing their conversations.

Ilya stood as well, making his way to where Taylor was at the bar with some of the younger players. Ilya sidled next to him.

"Where has Wilson disappeared to?" he asked, smirking.

Taylor grinned broadly. "He left with the bird he was dancing with."

"Good. We tease him tomorrow, yes?"

"Oh, definitely."

Ilya nodded. "Good work today, Taylor. I am leaving now, try to get lucky also please. I cannot have my proteges being virgins, would be very bad for my reputation."

Taylor shoved him. "Fuck off, Roz. You get lucky."

"Is not luck for me," Ilya winked. He spotted Hollander heading towards the exit. "Have fun tonight," he said, clapping him on the back and hurrying after Hollander.

He caught up to him on the street, and slowed his jog to a walk, falling into step beside him.

Hollander started when Ilya appeared. "You're leaving?" he asked, sounding disappointed.

"I said I would stay as long as you did."

"Yeah, but you were getting along with everyone! I thought you were having fun."

"I was," Ilya said easily. It was trueish - he had been having a fine time. He'd still rather be walking home with Hollander than in the bar with everyone else. He was choosing not to examine that urge too finely. "I did good, yes? Made effort with team, like you said."

Hollander shot him a small smile. "Yeah. You, um- thanks."

"Is okay. Team must work together to win Cup. I want that also."

"Right." Hollander didn't say anything else - his forehead was creased, like he was distracted. Ilya wanted to smooth it out with his thumb. His fingers twitched, and he fished his pack of cigarettes and a lighter out of his pockets instead, lighting one.

Hollander sniffed distastefully. "That's a filthy habit," he told Ilya.

Ilya let out a plume of smoke. "Perhaps," he said softly. "But you know how filthy I am, no?"

"Fuck off."

Ilya shrugged. "Teammates only, I know," he said. "I am just having fun."

"If you're that horny, you could have stayed at the bar and found someone to fuck."

"Yes, but I have to give the kiddies a chance. The ladies would not look twice at them if I were there."

Hollander laughed. "God, you're such an asshole."

"Am only being realistic."

“Whatever.” Hollander’s expression turned preoccupied again as they reached their hotel. Ilya let him stay in his head as he led them to the elevator, pressing the button for the seventh floor.

“What are you?” he asked.

“Eight.”

Ilya pressed the button for the eighth floor as well, and the elevator doors slid closed. “What about you?” he asked. “Did you have fun tonight?”

“What?” Hollander’s head lifted again, looking at him. “Oh, yeah. It was good.”

“Not really your scene?”

“No, but... it’s good for the Captain to go to these things, yeah?”

Ilya nodded. “Team bonding,” he said wisely. “You are very dedicated to this.”

“Did you mean what you said?” Hollander asked out of the blue.

“About what?”

“Do you really hate Montreal?”

Ilya pulled a face. “It is fine,” he said. “I play hockey there now, so it does not matter.”

“Yeah, but-”

The elevator dinged, and the doors slid open. “Is me,” Ilya said. “I’ll see you in morning.”

“I- yeah, okay.”

Ilya stepped out, letting the elevator shut again behind him.

Chapter 4: November 2014 (II)

Chapter Notes

italics are used when characters are speaking in russian

NOVEMBER 2014

Their first practice after the game against New York was the best one yet. The Voyageurs seemed to have tentatively accepted Ilya - at least for now - and made small talk with him as everyone pulled on their skates and taped their sticks.

Drapeau sat with Ilya at lunch, Comeau following him. Ilya liked those two the best - they were both loud, aggressive assholes, but it meant Ilya got to be a bit of an asshole back without feeling like a dick.

“How’s whipping the rookies into shape going?” Drapeau asked without preamble.

“Is okay,” Ilya said. “I will make them fast.”

Comeau snorted. “You’ll break their spirits first.”

“Good.” Ilya grinned.

“Don’t let Coach get to you,” Drapeau said. “He’s a moody old fuck, he likes to torture us.”

“He is fine,” replied Ilya. “He is still better than Russian coaches.”

“Oh yeah? What kind of shit did they do in Russia?”

Ilya shrugged. “I used to get whacked with hockey stick if I miss goal.”

“Christ,” Comeau grimaced. “That’s hardcore.”

“It worked. I think is illegal here though, or Theriault would probably get off on beating us all.”

Drapeau nodded, smirking. “Yeah, I bet.”

“Hey,” Comeau said, “why’d you end up here anyway?”

Ilya tensed. “You know why.”

“Yeah, you beat on your new guy. No one knows why though.”

“You care so much?”

“We’re interested,” Drapeau said simply.

“Worry about your own fighting skills, Platner almost pummelled you in New York.”

“Man, fuck off, I could beat your ass!”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Yes, keep telling yourself this.” He stood up. “I must go terrorise rookies now. Goodbye.”

He dumped his tray and went to the gym. He continued with his new routine of training up his innocent rookies, pushing them until they were collapsed on the floor, red and panting. But they were doing as he said, and working hard, so he only made fun of them a little bit.

When he was finished with them, he made Drapeau spot him as he lifted, and then went to the punching bag. His arms and legs were burning by the time he was done, and the gym had emptied out of all but the last few players.

Hollander was still there of course, his face far too intensely focused as he used the exercise bike. Ilya left him and the rest of them to go and shower before putting on his normal clothes. He was just getting to his car when he heard his name being shouted.

“Rozanov! Wait up!”

Ilya turned around to see Hollander jogging through the car park towards him. He had changed as well, back in his non-exercise uniform of a hoodie and track pants. Ilya wasn’t sure he owned any other clothes.

“Hollander,” he said dubiously, as the man caught up to him. “What have I done wrong now?”

“You- what?” Hollander looked at him in confusion. “Why would you have done something wrong?”

“You only speak to me when you want to yell at me about something.”

“...Oh.” Hollander ran a hand through his hair self-consciously. “Yeah, I guess, um... Sorry.”

“Is okay. What is up?”

“Do you have plans right now?”

Ilya’s eyes widened. “You want to...”

“Oh, no!” Hollander flushed. “No, um... I was just- thinking.”

“Thinking,” Ilya repeated. He had no idea where this was going, if not sex. He tried not to let the blatant rejection sting so much.

“Yeah. About, well... I thought, you know, you’ve just moved here, and you were saying you didn’t like Montreal the other night but- well, no one’s really shown you round yet, have they? And it’s got to be hard, moving to a new city and, like, not knowing anyone.” Hollander kept shifting his weight from one leg to another.

“I do not know what you are saying to me,” Ilya said.

Hollander sighed. “I’m saying, if you’re free, let me show you round Montreal,” he said. “It’ll, like, help you settle in. Get to know your new home. It’s a pretty cool place, actually.”

Something in Ilya recoiled at the word *home*. Montreal was not, and never would be, his home. “I do not need your help,” he said plainly.

“Come on,” Hollander encouraged. “It’ll only take an hour or two. I think it’d be good for you.”

“Why do you want to hang out with me, Hollander? I thought we did not know each other.”

Hollander winced. “Yeah, but... we’re teammates now, right? We can be seen together in public, it’s not that weird. And besides, it’s like... a Captain’s duty, or something, to make sure new players settle in okay.”

Ilya wavered, looking back to his car. He could turn Hollander down, but then what would he do? Go back to his shitty room and watch TV in the dark? “Fine,” he said.

Hollander looked surprised at Ilya’s acquiescence. “Really? Okay, awesome, come on then.”

Ilya followed Hollander to his car instead - a boring Jeep. Typical. He got in the passenger side, and Hollander started up the car and pulled out of the parking lot.

“So, you are going to show off Montreal for me?” Ilya asked.

Hollander nodded. They drove in silence for a while, with Hollander only speaking to point out different bars or clubs that they drove past. He took them to an old church, slowing down as they passed it like Ilya would want to take pictures or something. Then he drove them to a museum, then to the biodome.

“Hollander,” Ilya said eventually, when he started telling Ilya about the different ecosystems inside the building. “I can read website that tells me top tourist attractions. Why are you showing me these things?”

Hollander paused, glancing at him as he was driving. “Well, I, uh... I dunno. They seemed like the stuff to start with.”

“I read wikipedia, I know Montreal has museums and churches. I am not tourist in this city, I do not need to go on sightseeing tour.”

“Right.” Hollander chuckled awkwardly. “I guess... well, I don’t really know the club scene all that well. But you should ask Drapeau! He’d take you out, he’d probably do a better job than me.”

“You think all I do is drink and party?”

Hollander glanced at him again. “I guess...” He looked annoyed with himself. “Sorry, I suppose I don’t really know you all that well.”

Ilya looked out his window. “Is fine,” he said. “You can take me back now.”

“No, come on. What about- Well, what did you like to do in Boston?”

“Drink and party.”

Hollander huffed a laugh, prodding Ilya’s shoulder. “I mean it, asshole,” he said. “Seriously. What do you miss the most?”

Ilya shrugged, still staring out the window. “...Was Russian district,” he said quietly. “Was small, but... I went there often. But I have looked, there is nothing like that here.”

Hollander hummed. “Yeah, it’s not a big immigrant group. We get a lot of people from France and Haiti - cause of the language, you know? Algeria too.”

“Stupid language,” Ilya muttered. “Why can’t you all speak English like the rest of Canada?”

“Yeah, well- oh!” Hollander made a quick right turn. “I have an idea, I think you’ll like this.”

“Like what?” Ilya asked suspiciously.

“Just wait.”

He drove for about twenty minutes, until they were on the outskirts of the south of the city. Then he pulled up along the curb, gesturing for Ilya to get out. “I hope I’m remembering this right,” he said, as he led Ilya down the sidewalk. “I used to drive past it, but I’ve never actually been inside.”

“Drive past *what*, Hollander?”

“That,” he said, pointing. There was what looked like a small diner on the end of the street, a sign just saying *Nadya’s*. “I think it’s Russian.” Hollander started to frown. “Actually, maybe it’s Polish or something, I’m not actually sure. I thought it was Russian.”

Ilya ignored him, striding down the tarmac. He pushed open the door, and noticed the menu above the counter immediately. The left side was in English, but the right side was in familiar Cyrillic letters. He let out a soft exhale.

Hollander came in behind him. “Is this right?” he asked.

Ilya nodded.

There was an older lady behind the counter, her hair graying. “Can I get you something?” she asked. Ilya heard the remnants of an accent in her voice.

"Yeah, thanks." Hollander smiled at her politely. "My friend here's from Russia, he just moved into the area."

The lady fixed her eyes on Ilya. "*You are Russian?*" she asked him.

Ilya felt like it had been years since he heard his mother's tongue. "Yes," he said eagerly. "*I've just moved here, I thought I was the only one.*" His feet moved automatically to bring him closer, until he was leaning across the counter.

She chuckled at him. "*There are a few of us,*" she said. "*What brings you to Montreal?*"

"*Work. I moved to America at eighteen, but they just moved me here last month.*"

"*Ah. And do you like it here?*"

"*I like it more now,*" Ilya said. "*How long have you been here?*"

"*Oh, decades now. My parents fled with me in the fifties.*"

"*Where were you from originally?*"

"*Moscow.*"

"*Me too!*" Ilya exclaimed. "*Luzhniki.*"

She smiled fondly. "*Ah, very nice area. Near River Moskva.*"

"*Yes, yes,*" Ilya nodded. "*I used to get drunk with my friends on the riverbank when I was a teenager.*"

The lady - Nadya, Ilya guessed - smiled at him like he was amusing. "*What can I get you, my dear?*"

Ilya looked at the menu, and glanced back at Hollander. "What do you want?"

"Oh, I, uh-" Shane looked slightly panicked. "I'm fine. I don't, uh... I don't know what any of this is."

Ilya shook his head. "*Can we get the beef pelmeni, the pirozhki, and he will have ukha.*" He tutted. "*He is health freak.*"

"*Of course,*" she smiled, and reached up to pat his cheek. "*Nice to get a taste of home sometimes, isn't it?*"

Ilya simply nodded. "*Thank you.*"

"*Go, sit down. I will bring it over when it is ready.*"

Ilya went to go and sit at one of the empty tables, Hollander following him closely. "Thank you," Ilya said earnestly, as they sat down. "This is amazing."

Hollander laughed, looking down. “No, it’s fine. I feel stupid, I should have taken you here earlier. I wasn’t- I was thinking about myself, I didn’t realise you might be feeling lonely.”

Ilya was feeling grateful enough that he decided to let that comment slide. “I ordered you ukha,” he said instead. “Is fish broth with vegetables, you will like. Healthy or whatever.”

“Oh. Thanks.”

“Is no problem.”

“So... do you think Montreal might not be so bad?” Hollander asked, like he was hopeful.

“I think it will be acceptable,” Ilya said. “Maybe- is good, knowing this is here. And the team is not so bad, I suppose.”

“Yeah, they’ll grow on you. Just stop being so obvious about missing Boston.”

Ilya snorted. “Yes, they might not like that, I know.”

“Are there other things you miss?”

“The people,” Ilya said. “I knew lots of the old team since I was drafted, so... is weird, not seeing them everyday. I left very suddenly.”

“Yeah.” Hollander’s face turned sombre. “I can’t imagine having to switch teams with no warning.”

“It’s fine. I just feel, ah...” Ilya waved his hands, missing the word. “What is it, when boat is not tied?”

“Unmoored?”

“Da. Like I have nothing tying me anywhere, you know?”

Hollander nodded, chewing on his lip. “It’s your third country. You’re only twenty-three.”

“Yes. But is okay. I’m used to it this time, yes?”

“I guess. I don’t really know what it’s like, I’ve moved a grand total of two hours from where I grew up.” Hollander smiled self-deprecatingly. “It must be hard.”

“Shut up, Hollander,” Ilya warned. “Do not start feeling sorry for me. I would hate to have to beat up second teammate.”

“Okay, okay. You’re fine, I know.”

“Exactly.” Ilya shot him a quick smile. He felt lighter, just sitting in this diner.

A man came over, interrupting them to deliver their food.

“*Thank you,*” Ilya said, sliding the broth over to Hollander. “Tell me what you think,” he said.

He tried a spoonful, nodding. "It's good," he said. "Really good."

Ilya tucked into his own - far less healthy - platter of dumplings. "So you take me to the big tourist spots," he said as he ate, "and you point out all the clubs. But what does Hollander do in Montreal?"

Hollander shrugged. "I dunno. I like to go for runs in the Olympic Park. And there's a cinema near my apartment, I have a membership there. I normally go see a film every week or two."

Ilya tried to keep his face straight. "Ah," he said, "crazy."

"Shut up. It's a really nice one - the seats are, like, proper armchairs. They recline and everything!"

"You do not get enough of reclining and watching films on planes?"

Hollander grinned. "It's different in a cinema, alright?"

"Okay." Ilya eyed him. "So, what? You jog, you watch films?"

"Pretty much. Like I said, you should go out with Drapeau, you'll have more fun."

"I think this is plenty fun."

"Yeah?" Hollander asked.

"Yes. Try dumpling."

"Oh, they're not part of my diet."

"Is cultural exchange, Hollander." Ilya waved one in front of his face. "I will be offended if you don't try my food. Would not be very Captain-y."

Hollander rolled his eyes, but stabbed the dumpling with his fork, taking a bite. "Oh, God," he groaned. "That is good. I don't think I've actually tasted dough in years."

"Yes, you torture yourself, this is known."

"Fuck off, Roz."

Ilya felt a flash of warmth at the shortened name. "Tell me about last movie you saw," he instructed.

He let Hollander chatter away for the rest of the meal. He suspected Hollander had a lot of thoughts, actually, he was just quiet, so no one really gave him the chance to say them. He definitely had a lot of opinions about Gone Girl, which Ilya hadn't seen yet, but he let Hollander tell him about it anyway.

"You should watch it, when you get a chance," Hollander said, when he'd basically given away the entire plot. "Affleck's a Boston boy, you can show your support."

“I do not know if there is much point anymore,” Ilya said dryly.

“Oh- um, sorry.” Hollander suddenly looked sheepish.

“Relax,” Ilya told him. “I will watch movie, tell you everything I think.”

“Yeah, okay. If you want to.”

“...You called me your friend earlier,” Ilya said, blunt.

Hollander froze for a second, his spoon halfway to his mouth, before he recovered. “Uh, yeah,” he said. “I guess I did.”

“You think we are that?”

“I dunno. We- um, we could be?”

Ilya nodded, thinking. “I suppose friends is okay, if you still refuse to fuck.”

“Shh!” Hollander hissed, ducking his head, eyes darting around. “We’re in public!”

Ilya surveyed the empty diner openly. “I think we are safe.”

“Just- don’t, okay?”

“Okay.”

Hollander let out a long breath. “Friends,” he said, holding a hand out to shake.

Ilya looked at it and rolled his eyes. He kicked him under the table instead.

~~

Hollander dropped him back at the rink, where Ilya had left his car. “Hey, Roz,” he said, as Ilya was jumping out of the vehicle.

“Yes?”

“Are you still staying at that lodge place?”

“Da.”

Hollander huffed. “You need to get a real place. I’ll send you my estate agent’s number.”

“You don’t have to-”

“Yes, I do.” Hollander looked at him knowingly. “You live in Montreal now, you can’t stay in a motel forever. You’re stuck here.”

“I... okay.” Ilya relented. “You can send me their details. I will find real apartment.”

“Good.” Hollander switched his engine back on. “You’re gonna end up liking it here, trust me.”

“Okay, okay.” Ilya let out a short laugh. “I will see you tomorrow. Hollzy.”

Hollander grinned. “See you tomorrow. Roz.”

Chapter 5: November 2014 (III)

Chapter Notes

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

NOVEMBER 2014

“No, Papa,” Ilya said, frustrated, “I can’t help you right now- because I’m in Canada!”

His father talked over him, telling him that it was past his curfew.

“Papa, I am twenty three!”

“You- what?” His father seemed to only get more agitated. *“Don’t be smart with me, boy.”*

Ilya sighed, steeling himself into staying calm. *“Papa, it’s not a good time right now,”* he said. *“I’m at work. Just- go to bed, okay? It’s late there.”*

“I...” His voice drifted off, vacant. *“Okay. Okay.”*

“Alright. I’ll have Alexei check on you tomorrow, okay? Don’t worry.”

“I am not worried! My son didn’t even tell me he was leaving the country, why should I care?”

Ilya ran a hand down his face, letting his nails dig into his skin. *“Goodbye, Papa,”* he said firmly, hanging up the phone.

He was getting worse. He had already been forgetful during the Winter Olympics, and then Ilya had caught him wandering the streets one evening last summer, lost. But lately he had been completely losing his sense of time, thinking Ilya was still a teenager, and still in Russia. Ilya would have to deal with it, somehow. And soon.

But he was currently hiding in the bathrooms of the rink, so now wasn’t the time. He stuffed his phone back in his pocket, heading back out.

He finished his workout quietly, keeping his headphones in to stop anyone from trying to talk to him as he used the treadmill. He’d have to have a proper conversation with Alexei, he realised. Maybe Ilya could pay for a live-in nurse. He didn’t want his father in a home, but he didn’t really know how bad things were. Alexei should be able to tell him, and they’d have to figure it out together.

He was sure that would go great.

When he was finished and had had his shower, he sat in the locker room half-dressed, staring at his phone. He tried to compose a text that would start the interaction in the most inoffensive way.

Ilya: *we need to talk about papa. When are you free to call?*

He stared at the message, not hitting send. It sounded distant, he knew, but it wasn't like he and Alexei were close. Alexei seemed to only get pissed off when Ilya acted like they were on good terms, but he also tended to take any more formal interaction as a signal Ilya thought he was better than him.

His thumb hovered over the send button for far too long before he realised what a pussy he was being and forced himself to just hit send. He switched his phone off, and let out a heavy breath before reaching for his sweater.

Shane walked into the locker room, a towel wrapped around his waist. Ilya kept his head down, because a couple of the other guys were in the room as well, and it wouldn't do any good to be caught eyeing Shane up. He finished getting dressed instead, tugging on his sneakers and stuffing all his shit into his bag haphazardly.

"Hey, wait up," Shane said, as Ilya was heading to the door.

Ilya turned back, raising his eyebrows. "What?"

"Just- gimme a sec." Shane was hurriedly pulling on his clothes, so Ilya waited until he was done, and let him gather his things before he started to leave.

"You alright?" Shane asked, as they made their way out of the building.

"Yes. Why?"

"You just look off."

"Am fine, Hollander."

"Okay." They made it to the car park, and Shane grabbed Ilya's arm when he started to turn away. "Hang out with me," he said.

Ilya frowned. "Why?"

"I thought of another thing to show you," Shane grinned. "Another hidden gem of Montreal - you'll like it."

"Oh?" Ilya was tired, and not really in the mood for company. But Shane looked excited, and Ilya would feel bad letting him down.

"Yeah. So get in my car, dickhead."

Ilya hesitated before nodding, going and dumping his bag in the boot of his car before jogging over to Shane's Jeep and jumping into the passenger seat. "Where are we going?"

"The mall," Shane said, driving off.

"...The mall? What is so good about the mall?"

“This is a special mall, shut up.”

Ilya’s lips twitched, but he shut up, letting Shane drive them to his ‘special mall’. When they got there, Shane led them down to the ground floor, guiding Ilya to where there was a small arcade. It was only half-full, mostly populated by younger teens. As they entered the more dimly-lit space, Ilya noted the various noises blaring out from all the different games. He glanced over at Shane, confused.

“You like it here? Is not too loud?”

Shane shook his head. “I’m fine. Besides, I wanted you to have a go at *that*.” He nodded his head to the back of the room.

Ilya looked over and saw the boxing machine. He grinned instantly, walking over. “Ah! Will you have a go too?”

“I think it’s more your thing.”

“We make bet.”

Shane’s eyes lit up at the mention of competition. He was so easy. “Okay, what do you get if you win?”

Ilya tugged his bottom lip between his teeth, eyeing Shane up and down blatantly. Shane laughed, shoving him.

“Not that, asshole. Pick something else.”

“Boring, Hollander,” Ilya tutted. “...Okay, if I win, you wear my jersey during practice tomorrow.”

“Fine. *When* I win, you have to let me post something on your instagram. And you can’t delete it.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes. “What do you want to post?”

“You’ll find out.”

“Alright. Deal.” Ilya bounced back on his heels. “You go first.”

Shane shook himself out, feinting once before slamming his fist into the small punching bag. Lights started flashing as the number on the screen started climbing higher and higher, until it landed on 778.

Ilya clapped slowly. “Not bad,” he said, teasing. “Let me show you how to do this.” He took off his jacket, shoving it into Shane’s arms and flexing. He kept his gaze focused on his target, waiting a couple of seconds before drawing his arm back and then punching forward with all the strength he could muster.

The machine exploded into lights and noise again. The score started running up higher and higher, slowing down until it stopped at 824. Ilya whooped.

“No, no, you cheated,” Shane started to protest.

“What? How am I cheat?”

“I don’t know, you cheated somehow!”

Ilya cackled, snatching his jacket back. “You will look so good wearing my name, Hollander.”

“Oh, fuck off,” Shane said, rolling his eyes.

“You knew I would like this?” Ilya asked.

“I figured, you use the punching bag every day.”

Ilya bit back a smile. Maybe Hollander’s intense watching of him all the time had paid off. “I’m hungry,” he announced, “we get food now.”

“Yeah, alright.”

The food court had a lot of options, so Ilya went to McDonalds to get a Big Mac while Shane went to one of the dull salad bars, and they met back at one of the rickety tables in the middle. Shane watched Ilya eat with a look of revulsion.

“You don’t need to eat it all in three bites, you know,” he said.

Ilya started purposefully chewing loudly, mouth open.

“Gross,” Shane told him, grimacing.

Ilya swallowed. “Your salad is gross.”

“At least I know no one spit in my salad.”

Ilya moved onto his fries. “What, you do not like spit anymore?” he asked innocently. “I remember you liking when I spit in your mouth.” He knew he shouldn’t - they were trying to be *friends* now, he was supposed to forget everything about them pre-trade. But he couldn’t help himself. He’d never been good at resisting his impulses.

Shane flushed, and threw a slice of pepper at Ilya’s face. “Fuck off,” he muttered. “Be normal, please.”

Ilya didn’t push. “Fine,” he said, “then stop insulting my McDonald’s.”

“Never. Hey, did you talk to my realtor?”

“Yes. I am looking at apartments this weekend.”

Shane smiled at him - a real, pure, happy smile. "That's great. Let me know how it goes."

"Okay," Ilya agreed.

~~

The next day started normal, at least until the team were getting ready for morning practice and Shane started to pull on his uniform.

"Ah ah ah," Ilya called, over the hum of conversation, "Hollander, not so quick."

The room quieted, as the rest of the players started glancing between them.

Shane glared at him. "I hate you."

"Yes, talk dirty to me." Ilya wagged his eyebrows, drawing jeers from some of the Voyageurs.

"Shut up." Shane flipped him the bird, even as his cheeks started to tinge red. See, how was Ilya supposed to bite his tongue when he got to see that lovely rush of blood every time?

He withdrew the spare jersey he had brought from his bag, and flung it in Shane's direction. "Get pretty for me, Captain."

"Um," Pike said, sounding affronted, "what's going on?"

"Nothing," Shane said grumpily, even as he pulled on Ilya's jersey.

That prompted an outcry from the rest of the team, as all the players started to scramble for their phones to take a picture. Ilya cooed.

"Hollzy, what did you do?" Boizeau cried out. "What happened?!"

"Roz has freaky upper body strength is what happened."

"Hollander lost bet," Ilya announced. He leant back against the lockers, eyeing him appreciatively. Something in his mind felt very pleased at the sight of Shane in his jersey.

"This should be exciting for you, Hollander," he said. "You get to wear jersey of Stanley Cup winner, might never happen for you again."

"Fuck you."

Ilya swallowed down a retort. He could flirt a little bit in front of the other players, mask it as chirping. Probably not what he wanted to say right now though. *Please.*

“Alright, alright,” Shane said, raising his arms and letting everyone get a good look. “Laugh it up now, we all need to focus when practice starts.”

“Give us a spin!” Drapeau shouted.

Shane hesitated, and then sighed good-naturedly, turning around slowly and letting everyone see the name *ROZANOV* plastered along his back. That prompted another round of hollering and pictures.

Comeau slammed a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. “This is fucking brilliant,” he said. “Nice work.”

Ilya hummed, his eyes never leaving the sight in front of him. God, he wanted Hollander. He wanted him so bad - wanted to strip him of everything but that jersey and press him into a mattress and fuck him until he was crying. He couldn’t help himself - he just wanted him, desperately. He’d never stopped wanting him. Ilya wanted to bruise and bite and mark, and then make up for it with tender lips, make Shane beg and plead and then give him everything. He wanted Shane back under his mercy, and Ilya would make him feel so good. He wanted to feel Shane clench around his cock again, hear his stuttered breaths that turned into unabashed moans when Ilya finally broke him.

Practice ended up being part fantasy, part torture, as Ilya watched Shane skate around the ice - *owning* the ice - while wearing Ilya’s name. Ilya couldn’t control his thoughts, and he kept getting distracted. He resented, not for the first time, Shane’s insistence that they had to keep things platonic now. All the fucking Canadian girls who spread their legs so willingly for Ilya had done nothing to satiate his desire for the man skating across the other side of the ice.

By the time practice was over, photos of Shane in Ilya’s jersey had been posted to many of the players’ social media. Shane took the ribbing well, although he snatched the jersey off the second that practice was over.

Ilya took it back, laughing. He sped through his workout with the rooks and practically raced back to his lodge. His hand was on his dick as soon as the door shut behind him, and he stroked himself furiously, screwing his eyes shut and picturing the image of Shane in his jersey. He fell back onto the bed. Shane bending over in hotel rooms. Shane dropping to his knees, taking Ilya’s cock in his mouth so prettily. Shane in Vegas, touching himself, putting on a show just for Ilya.

Ilya burst into his hand, surprising himself with his sudden orgasm. His head flopped backwards onto the pillow as he lay there, panting. After a couple of minutes, he wiped himself up with a few tissues and dug his phone out.

He and Shane were both trending on twitter - the photos from that day were causing a minor explosion among hockey fans. Most of the tweets were declaring Ilya the winner of their rivalry. Some Montreal fans were still mad that Ilya was even on the team at all, let alone that Shane seemed okay with it.

Ilya quote-tweeted the photos Drapeau had posted, of Shane glowering at the camera and a picture from behind displaying Ilya’s name.

Rozanov81_official: Just because we are on same team now, does not mean Hollander needs to stop losing to me. Is his favourite thing to do

Drapeau liked his tweet almost instantly, and over the course of the evening, lots of the others did as well. Shane didn't, but Ilya wasn't sure Shane even knew he had social media, the only things he ever posted came from his team.

He realised, as even JJ liked his tweet and replied with the crying-laughing emojis, that Shane had made himself the butt of the joke so that Ilya could ingratiate himself with the Voyageurs. It wasn't like he had *had* to put on the jersey. He certainly didn't need to let everyone take pictures and post them. But he had done.

He had found Ilya somewhere Russian in a city full of French fucks, and had noticed Ilya liked the punching bag in the gym so had taken him to an arcade where he could play at it, and had embarrassed himself just so Ilya could share a joke with the Voyageurs. No one put this much effort into someone other than themselves, no one ever put this much effort into *Ilya*.

Shane was far too nice, really.

Chapter End Notes

partially inspired by that vid of hudson hitting the boxing machine on nye, iykyk

Chapter 6: December 2014 (I)

DECEMBER 2014

Two months after moving to Montreal, Ilya finally signed a lease to an apartment. It felt a bit like waving a white flag, like he was accepting that this move was real - that it was permanent. He really was here now, for good. No more Boston.

He didn't quite hate Montreal like he had at first though. He'd insisted to his estate agent that she find him a place within a ten minute walk to Nadya's, because Ilya had been going there two or three times a week ever since finding it and he refused to give that up. He liked Nadya - she had taken Ilya under her wing a bit, and he was particularly weak when it came to older women who wanted to baby him. He didn't need a therapist to work that one out. And besides, he liked getting to speak in Russian; he didn't have to worry about translating everything that was said, or sounding stupid when he spoke.

He was settling into a proper routine with the Voyageurs as well. Being stuck on the second line was still annoying - Hollander was thrashing him in the scoring race, and it was a bit of an ego hit to go from Captain of a team that just won the Stanley Cup to playing frustratingly meagre hockey, but Ilya could put up with that. Wilson and Taylor had talent, and Ilya was determined to whip them into shape. When he wasn't playing, he could banter with Drapeau and Comeau and talk shit about Theriault or the girls they fucked or any other crap.

He didn't really talk to Shane that much in front of the team. It wasn't like they avoided each other, but Shane seemed content spending his time chatting with Boizeau and Pike, while Ilya was generally drawn to the loudest area of any room.

When practice was over, though, they sometimes hung out. Normally, Shane would come up with some new offering that Montreal had that he wanted to show Ilya, and Ilya would be dragged to some new corner of the city. He didn't mind - he liked hanging out with Shane. It was endearing how hard he was trying to convince Ilya of Montreal's benefits. It also made Ilya want to drop to his knees and take Shane's cock in his mouth, but he was holding himself back. Friends was better than nothing, so Ilya would take it. What he did when he got alone though, that was his business.

After signing the lease, he had to carry all his shit up two flights of stairs to his new apartment. It wasn't much - he'd left most of his stuff in Boston - but it was still three suitcases and four boxes. By the time he was done, he was sweaty and heaving, and collapsed on the couch without bothering to unpack.

The place had come with some sparse furnishing - a couch and a bookshelf in the living area, a bed and nightstand in the bedroom. He had most of everything else he needed, so it was okay. It was his day off today, so he had to unpack at some point. Then make a list of anything he had to buy; a TV was an urgent purchase, he thought, as he lay on the couch with nothing but an empty wall to stare at.

After fifteen minutes scrolling his phone, he pulled himself to his feet and set about unpacking, keeping a mental list of things he'd have to get. When he was done, he drove himself to the big superstore just outside the city to buy all the shit he was missing - he needed more than one fork and one plate, sadly, and bins for the bedroom and the bathroom.

He wasn't really thinking about how he'd decorate the apartment. His one in Boston had been bought already fully decorated and fancy, but this was much more small and simple. He grabbed a couple of basic lamps and fake plants as well, because he knew himself well enough to know that he'd never be able to look after real ones. He decided that was good enough and loaded everything into his car to drive it back.

By the time he'd finished unloading all of that stuff as well, it was well into the evening and Ilya could not be bothered to go out and buy food and cook. He ordered a pizza instead and spent the twenty minutes waiting for it to arrive setting up his new TV, and then watched sitcoms as he ate.

He started scrolling his phone, checking social media. His instagram was mostly full of models and hockey accounts, but he liked a photo Marlow had posted of the Boston team after a win. He checked twitter, where there was still a lively debate happening over Ilya's trade, with a lot of Boston fan accounts screaming about betrayal. He switched to reddit, where he only had an anonymous account. He saw people talking about the probability of more sanctions on Russia because of Crimea, and videos of clashes in Donetsk. Ilya hadn't really thought the Minsk agreements would hold, he knew the Russian government wasn't interested in peace, but a small part of him had hoped.

He loved Russia, but he hated it too. He never really let himself think about it that much unless he was feeling particularly melancholy and introspective, like tonight. It had been harder this year, with Russia in the news so much. He thought it made people look at him a little more judgementally, but he could also have just been being paranoid.

He clicked on the r/senttothegulag subreddit, because he didn't like to hear other people insult Russia, but he loved hearing Russians insult Russia. That was when he saw an image, only posted a few hours ago, with over five thousand upvotes. With the title *Found this on tumblr, does this count as me distributing the gay propaganda they're so worried about?*

It was a portrait picture of Putin, but had been so heavily edited that it looked like a piece of pop-art, with Putin in huge lashes and lipstick, like some sort of drag act, complete with a rainbow background. Ilya was so shocked he laughed out loud, and saved the image to his phone. He would have to remember to delete before he went back to Russia, he thought to himself.

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The next day, Ilya had to set his alarm extra early before going to practice so he could call Alexei. He phoned at six, the time they had agreed, two pm in Moscow. It went to voicemail. Ilya fired off an angry text.

Alexei called him back twenty minutes later.

"We said six, asshole," Ilya opened with, instead of hello.

"I am busy, Ilya! We don't all have such a cushy life!"

Ilya clenched his teeth together. *"Whatever,"* he said. *"We need to talk about Papa, he's not well."*

"He's fine."

"No, Alexei, he's not."

There was silence for a few moments. *"Well, what do you expect me to do? I have work, and a wife, and a kid."*

"Would Polina come back?"

Alexei barked a short, mocking laugh.

"Fine. What if we hire a live-in nurse? I'll pay for it."

"No! He would beat us black and blue if he knew we were letting a stranger care for him."

"Well he wouldn't know, would he?"

"Fuck you, Ilya," Alexei snapped. *"Papa's a proud man, I'm not letting some random bitch wipe his arse! He'd rather forget to eat and starve to death than live like that."*

Ilya shut his eyes, breathing deeply. He knew Alexei was right - Papa would have never allowed himself to be seen in such a weak state, if he knew what was going on. But Ilya was pretty sure, at this point, that he couldn't be living on his own. *"Could- could you and Karina do it?"* he asked.

"How are we supposed to do it? I work, Karina just gave birth!"

"You have time to waste my money on your coke habit," Ilya said snidely.

"I need to relax! You aren't here Ilya, you don't know what it's like! You're off living your glamorous American life, leaving me to deal with everything!"

"I'm trying to help!" Ilya exclaimed. *"What do you want me to do, quit the NHL and come back to look after him?! There would be no more money!"*

Alexei scoffed.

"Okay," Ilya sighed, "what... what if you and Karina and Eva move back in with Papa. It's a big enough house, there's space. And I will pay for a nanny. The nanny will look after Eva, and you and Karina can watch Papa. So he's only cared for by the family."

"...Fine," Alexei said bitterly. "Karina and I will do the work. You send your fucking money."

Ilya didn't have the energy to continue the fight. *"Okay,"* he said.

"...So, how's Canada?"

"I've been here two months now, you didn't feel like checking in earlier?"

"Oh, like how you check in on us?"

"...It's fine," Ilya said. "There's a lot of French and maple syrup. Fewer ads for prescriptions. What you'd expect."

Alexei huffed a laugh. *"The American lifestyle was soft enough, Canada will turn you into a real pussy. Heard they let you go for having a fight, pathetic."*

"That's the rules here."

"Do you think you would even survive the KHL anymore? Or have they made you too delicate already?"

"Fuck off. I'm the same as ever."

"Sure... Look, I need to go."

"Okay," Ilya said. "I'll talk to you... at some point."

Alexei hung up.

Ilya spent the next few days figuring out the new stipend he would send to Russia. He had legal stuff he had to deal with too - he'd had a green card in America, but had lost it with his transfer. Now he was stuck on a simple work visa in Canada, which was frustrating, because he'd only been a couple of years away from being able to apply for US citizenship. Now he had to start from scratch again, and start the process of getting permanent residency in Canada to keep him from being shipped back to Russia if something went wrong.

They had a couple more games, but they were both home games so they didn't interfere with his life too much. They had a trip down the East Coast before Christmas, where they'd be on the road for a couple of weeks, and Ilya wanted to get all of his other jobs sorted before then.

He started a few fights during the matches, more than normal. Maybe Alexei had got to him, saying he was going to turn soft. He was still the person who had spent the first eighteen years of his life in Russia, whatever Alexei said. He was proud like Papa. He wasn't soft.

Shane had been hassling him all week to see his new apartment, so Ilya texted him the address on Sunday. He went downstairs when he saw the Jeep sidling by in the window, going to grab him from down the block, because the building he lived in now didn't have much parking.

He met Shane as he was coming down the sidewalk.

"Here?" Shane looked around the neighbourhood, frowning. "You're a millionaire, Rozanov. Why the fuck are you living here?"

Ilya shrugged. "What is wrong with it?"

"Nothing's wrong with it, I just mean-... well, most of the guys are in, like, gated communities or something. Or at least a place with a doorman."

Ilya pushed open the door to his apartment building, which notably lacked a doorman. Or even an elevator. It wasn't like he was living in the ghetto or something. Just not a particularly fancy part of town. "I am just me, I do not need large place," he said. "I just wanted somewhere close to Nadya and available now. This is fine."

It was significantly less glamorous than Boston, but Ilya didn't really need glamour. *See, Alexei*, he thought to himself, *I'm not a materialistic American*.

"...Aw," Shane said, not really hiding his laughter, "you really like her, that's so sweet."

"Fuck off." Ilya was not sweet.

"I mean it!"

Ilya led them up the stairs and unlocked the door to his apartment, letting Shane inside. "Is not that exciting," he said, "but your lady was very helpful, she found what I wanted very quickly. I still need to change address on bank accounts and things, but I have signed a contract for at least the next year."

Shane had walked into the main area and stood, frozen, looking at the artwork on the wall. "What *the fuck* is that?" he said flatly.

Ilya grinned. He had decided keeping the Putin edit on his phone was too risky, but he had gone and ordered a large, five-foot print of it and hung it up as the centrepiece of the room. He'd even splurged on a fancy wooden frame. He'd been feeling rebellious lately, and a lot of other feelings he couldn't quite describe. This had felt like an appropriate fuck you to his government.

"We cannot all hire someone to do interior design," Ilya said blithely. "And I have, ah, personal taste."

"Roz, it's ridiculous," Shane said.

Ilya ignored him, staring at the print. "Is perfect," he said.

Shane sighed. "It's insane. *Why?*"

"Because I can. No one can stop me."

"So?"

"Freedom of speech can be very exciting, Hollander," Ilya said. "I like to use it when I have it."

Shane looked over his shoulder to stare at him, brows furrowing. "...Alright," he said, after a moment. He turned back around to face Ilya. "Well, whatever, I think it's good you've got yourself a real place now, anyway. Have you met any of your neighbours yet?"

Ilya didn't answer. He was stuck, eyes caught on Shane standing in front of the stupid, garish print that was framed on the wall.

"...Rozanov?"

Ilya walked forward, led purely by instinct, until his hands met Shane's hips and he was pressing him back against the frame. He took another step forward, slotting his thigh between Shane's legs.

Shane made a sharp inhale. "Um, what... what are you-"

"I need to suck you off," Ilya said, glad he didn't sound as needy as he felt.

"You- *what?!*" Shane's voice had raised an octave. "No, we can't-"

Ilya's head dropped, his forehead resting on Shane's shoulder. He pressed his thigh against Shane's groin a little more insistently. "I know what you said," he murmured, hoarse. "We don't need to do it again. Don't need to talk about it. But I- I need to get on my knees and suck your cock in front of blasphemous picture of the dear leader." He let out a shaky breath. "Please. Hollander, let me."

"You..." Shane trailed off, and Ilya turned his head to the side, laying hot, open-mouthed kisses along Shane's neck. He could feel Shane's hardness growing against his leg.

"Please," Ilya said again. He didn't know why, but he needed this. He needed to disgrace his country, and he needed to do it by offering up his mouth and getting Shane off. "Just this once," he said, lips brushing against Shane's pulse point. "One more time isn't big deal, I promise."

"*Fuck,*" Shane groaned. "Shit, okay."

That was all Ilya needed to hear. He dropped to the floor immediately, pulling down Shane's track pants and boxers and swallowing him down, sucking hard. He heard Shane cursing above him as he bobbed his head, his hands curled into fists at his sides.

Ilya pulled off for a second. "Pull my hair," he said. "Be mean to me."

Shane looked at him in confusion. "What?"

Ilya couldn't really explain it. "Be mean," he repeated. "Make fun of me." He returned his mouth to Shane's cock, swirling his tongue around the head, and Shane's hips jolted forward. Ilya pushed him back against the frame and continued to blow him, taking him so deep he was hitting the back of his throat, bringing tears to Ilya's eyes. He still wanted more, wanted to take him deeper, even when his nose was buried in Shane's pubic hair.

Shane's fingers suddenly found his curls, pulling. "You- you like this, don't you?" he asked, his voice breathy and unsure. "Sucking my cock."

Ilya moaned in agreement, looking up with wet eyes. It seemed to give Shane more confidence.

"Not such a tough guy now, are you? What would - fuck - people say if they knew, huh? Knew that Rozanov begged to suck his Captain's dick? Knew how- how pathetic you are? Would... Would Russia still be proud?"

Ilya gagged around Shane, moving his head even faster. He was so turned on, and his brain had gone all fuzzy as spit drooled around his mouth. One of his hands left Shane's hips to palm his own dick. He wasn't sure if the tears were just due to the cock in his mouth anymore.

Shane came with a shout, and Ilya swallowed it all down desperately, and carried on sucking until Shane was pulling him off, trembling.

"Was- was that-" Shane started, but Ilya interrupted him by standing up, pressing their bodies together and rutting greedily against Shane's bare thigh. Shane's hand found his hair again, but he didn't pull this time, just pet his hair while Ilya humped his leg like a dog. Ilya whined, biting the junction between Shane's shoulder and neck as he searched for more friction. Shane's other hand started creeping towards Ilya's crotch, and Ilya grabbed his wrist and pinned it back against the wall. He wanted to come like this.

"Hollander," he choked out, his voice wrecked. "I-"

"It's okay," Shane said, cautious. His fingers tangled in Ilya's curls. "You're... You're such a lovely mess," he said, soft and just a little patronising. "Just can't help yourself, yeah?"

Ilya let out an inhuman noise and nodded, coming in his pants like a teenager while he panted against Shane's neck. Shane continued stroking his head through the aftershocks, and while Ilya caught his breath.

"...That was okay?" Shane asked after a couple of minutes, voice quiet.

Ilya cleared his throat. "Yes, Hollander, was okay," he mumbled. His head started to clear, and he took a couple of steps back, letting Shane pull his trousers back up. Now it was over, Ilya was beginning to feel awkward, and his come was drying uncomfortably in his underwear. He was sure he looked ruined as well, tear tracks staining his cheeks and saliva smeared around his mouth.

Shane looked shocked, eyes wide. “We, um-” He ran a stressed hand through his hair. “We can’t-”

“I know. Won’t happen again.”

“Right.”

“I should, ah...” Ilya gestured at himself. “Clean up.”

Shane started to nod, as if he were relieved. “Yeah, okay. I’m- I’m going to head out.”

“You don’t have to-”

“I should.”

Ilya held back a plea. “Okay. I’ll see you at practice, I guess?”

Shane was already practically running for the door. “Yep. See you,” he said, fleeing the apartment. Ilya heard the slam, and it took him a few seconds before he started to move, heading for the shower.

Chapter 7: December 2014 (II)

DECEMBER 2014

Shane wasn't watching him during practice the next day, like he always did. Ilya tried not to look at him either. He could pretend everything was normal, he was good at that. He laughed with Drapeau as he boasted about the chick he'd pulled over the weekend, pushed Taylor and Wilson to do extra sets in the gym.

He wasn't really sure he wanted Shane to look at him, let alone talk to him. He didn't know what had come over him the other day, and didn't want to examine it too closely.

It didn't end up mattering, because then the Voyageurs were all boarding a flight to Massachusetts, the first stop on their long string of away games. Ilya spent the flight listening to music and trying to catch up on some sleep, but didn't manage more than half an hour of dozing before they landed. He went with the team to the hotel, but as soon as key cards were handed out and Ilya had escaped the watchful eyes of Theriault, he slipped away and ordered an Uber to his Boston apartment.

He let out a sigh of relief as he let himself back into his home, toeing his shoes off at the door. It was already the early evening, but he wasn't expected back at the hotel until tomorrow for a morning skate before the match.

It looked like the cleaning lady Ilya still paid to visit once a month had been earning her paychecks, because the place was spotless. There was nothing in the fridge of course, but Ilya could run to the shops when he got hungry.

He got to spend the night in his real bed, and awoke feeling more refreshed than he had in months. He joined the team before they headed to the rink, and ran plays with Wilson and Taylor in preparation.

He'd been working them hard, and he thought that it should start paying off now. They were clicking on the ice, finally, and Ilya knew how fast he could allow himself to go without losing them, and they knew what he needed them to do. He just really wanted it to pay off tonight, against Boston.

They had a break in the afternoon, and then all got ready for the evening match. Ilya was busy taping his stick in the locker room when Shane stood up.

The thing was, Shane was a good Captain. He was the best player on the team (except maybe Ilya himself), he understood the sport, knew everyone's strengths and weaknesses, and knew how to get them to play together and win. Even outside of the game, Shane spent an endless amount of time mediating the petty squabbles between players, listened to Boizeau bitch about his stupid problems for hours, put up with Drapeau's loud-mouthed assholery and generally forced the entire group to get along and play well together. Ilya saw all that, and he knew it took work, work that Shane did with complete dedication.

Speeches, however, were not his strong suit. So as they all waited to get on the ice, and Shane clapped his hands together, Ilya knew what was coming.

“Right, guys,” Shane said, stilted. “We all know Boston thinks they can win this one. Let’s prove them wrong, yeah? Show them what Montreal has to offer.”

It was hardly Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*, but Ilya was used to it by now. The Voyageurs all roared, crashing their helmets together and slapping each other as they headed out. Ilya grabbed Wilson and Taylor by the back of their necks as they strode past, pulling them into a huddle.

“We are going to fuck Boston up tonight, yes?” Ilya said, matter-of-factly.

Taylor looked pale. “Um, sure.”

Wilson gulped as he nodded.

This simply would not do. “Practice has been going well,” Ilya told them. “You have both been improving - you are good players, I know this. You just need to believe it. And I need to make the Bears management weep for thinking they could ever let me go, okay? So you both are going to help me do that tonight.”

“Alright, Roz,” Wilson murmured.

Ilya whacked them both, hitting the backs of their helmets with his palms. “Do you think I have been torturing you both for fun?”

Taylor shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Not *just* for fun,” Ilya grinned, wolfish. “You can do this for me, you will not let me down. I am sure. Make me proud, yes, and let me hear my old city boo me as we score?”

The two started to chuckle. “Okay,” Taylor said, taking a deep breath. Wilson nodded. Ilya pushed them down the hall and towards the rink.

It was still 0-0 when Ilya’s line was sent onto the ice. He nodded at his two wings, checking they knew what play to run, and settled in for the face-off against Dubek.

Dubek grinned at him. “Damn, is that you Rozanov? Didn’t recognise you in all the blue.”

“I know where you live,” Ilya said gravely. It was true, he did - Dubek hosted fourth of July parties for the team every year. But it still threw him off for a crucial second, and Ilya won the face-off, stealing the puck and zipping away.

He was doing well, aware of where his wings were out of the corner of his eye. They were running the play perfectly.

Then Ilya saw Gusev barrelling towards him, and slapped the puck over to Wilson a second before they crashed into each other. They went skidding across the ice, as Ilya began grappling with the other man, swinging a fist wildly as he tried to maintain his balance.

“Are you having fun playing shitty hockey?” Gusev spat, as they came to a halt. “Seems like you’re not a star player without a real team behind you.”

“Where is your girlfriend, is she here tonight?” Ilya shot back, getting up in his face. “Maybe I’ll fuck her after the game, I’m sure she misses feeling a real cock instead of your little twig.”

“She doesn’t want to touch your diseased dick, who knows where it’s been?”

“Inside your mother,” Ilya told him, scornful and ecstatic, dropping his gloves and slamming his fist into Gusev’s face.

The refs were there and pulling them apart in seconds. Clearly the higher-ups had decided a redo of Ilya’s fight with Gusev on the ice was not on the cards. Ilya cursed out the referee as he was sent to the penalty box for five minutes.

Shane was glaring at him when he returned to the bench. “What are you playing at?” he hissed. “You just threw away a chance at a fucking goal, you idiot! Fucking control yourself!”

Ilya growled and flipped him off, shoving his way down the bench to an empty spot. He waited for his opportunity to get back on the ice, and that time, he didn’t waste it on trying to get in another hit on Gusev. He won the faceoff and took off down the ice, passing to Taylor and dodging the Boston player coming for him. He caught back up, receiving the puck back, driving forward more and then tapping it over to Wilson, who slapped it onto the goal.

“Krasivyy!” Ilya exclaimed, skating over to Wilson and shaking his shoulders roughly as Wilson laughed, helpless. “Beautiful fucking goal, you bastard!” He didn’t even care that it wasn’t him who had scored.

Taylor came over as well, beaming, and Ilya shoved him in the chest with both hands. “What did I say, ah?” Ilya demanded. “Amazing play, you little shit, why were you not like this from the start?!”

Taylor grinned up at him. “That was *awesome*,” he said.

~~

“Oi, Roz,” Drapeau yelled, as they all filtered off the ice, high off the win, “where are we going tonight, where’s good?”

“You fucks can go wherever you want, I don’t give a shit,” Ilya yelled back. “I have plans.”

“What the fuck, we just won! What plans?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “I am seeing old team.”

“What, you can’t do that! That’s like fucking cheating on us! We just fucking humiliated Boston, you’re not going out with them!”

“Fuck you, I can do what I want,” Ilya said hotly. “You love my face so much I’ll sign you a poster, you can hang it on your wall for when you jerk off, yes?”

“Bitch, I’m going to-”

“Okay, okay,” Shane interjected tiredly. “Drapeau, just- let it go. If Rozanov wants to see his old team then he can, you can go out with him after any other game.”

Drapeau glanced at Shane and slumped. “Whatever,” he grumbled, looking at Ilya, “still think it’s a bitch move.”

“Could give a fuck what you think,” Ilya said plainly. He didn’t mind Drapeau really, you just had to give as good as you got, let him know he couldn’t push you around. Ilya was good at taking the aggression and responding in kind, it usually felt good, like blowing off steam. He was lacking patience tonight though.

He showered quickly, and got an Uber back to his apartment. He changed into some of the clothes he had left there, and texted Marlow, checking they were still meeting at the usual bar.

He still felt keyed up from the match - the goal, the fight with Gusev, Shane getting pissed at him, Drapeau being his usual level of dickhead. He was practically vibrating as he headed to the bar, and he knew he needed to fight someone or fuck someone before the night was over.

About half the players for Boston had come out, and Ilya grinned as he approached the table, sitting down and greeting Marlow with a loud, smacking kiss on the cheek.

“Boys,” he grinned, “how does it feel to lose at home? If you didn’t miss me before, you do now, yes?”

“Man, fuck you,” Connors laughed, sliding over a beer for him. “You didn’t even score.”

“Everything those two kids do is because of me, that was my goal in spirit.”

“Montreal hasn’t taught you any humility, I see,” Hammersmith said, eyes sparkling with amusement.

Ilya frowned in mock confusion. “Humility, what is this? I do not know this word.”

Marlow rapped his knuckles harshly against Ilya’s head. “Man, you’re the fucking worst. It’s good to see you again.”

“Yes, you too,” Ilya smiled. “How is it, being Captain?”

“Ugh, I don’t know how you ever managed to put up with these annoying fucks.”

“Fuck you, Marly,” Kane jeered.

“Yeah, bite me,” Sebbin added.

Marlow laughed heartily. “How’s it having Hollander as a Captain?” he asked Ilya.

“Everyone’s saying you guys are mates now, the rivalry’s dead.”

“Ah, I suppose.” Ilya shrugged, waving a dismissive hand. “He is sentimental guy who thinks team should be big, happy family. I am on team, so now he likes me. Is no big deal.”

“But Montreal is treating you alright?” Connors asked.

“Yes. Is not Boston, but it will do.” Ilya downed the rest of his drink. “We will get drunk now, please? Then I need to fuck someone who isn’t a fucking Canadian.”

~~

Ilya woke up late, and had to apologetically kick the woman in his bed out of his apartment so he could make it back to the hotel before the coach left. His head was pounding from his hangover, but he managed to make it back to the team without throwing up.

They were going down to Florida next, and that was a much longer flight. By the time they landed, there was a video of Ilya circulating on twitter from the night before, of him making out with his hook-up in the club.

He didn’t care that much - it wasn’t the first video like that, and it wouldn’t be the last. The other Voyageurs got a real kick out of ragging on him for it as they made their way to the Tampa hotel though. Shane didn’t join in. Then again, Shane never joined in on this stuff.

They won their game against Tampa, and Ilya did join Drapeau and the other guys this time as they went out to celebrate. Shane came for his obligatory single drink, but he didn’t meet Ilya’s eyes the entire time they were at the bar.

Ilya felt humiliation burn in his chest at the obvious avoidance - Shane was definitely weirded out by him now, after what Ilya had done last weekend. He shouldn’t have acted like that. His head got fucked up sometimes, it didn’t mean he needed anyone else to see that. He ignored Shane right back, and approached a group of women who had been eyeing him up.

He flirted blatantly, until one of them offered to dance. He took her to the dancefloor, sliding their bodies together until she tilted her head up to kiss him.

Ilya took her back to his hotel room, stripping as he pushed her onto the bed. She tried to blow him, but he only let it happen for a couple of minutes before manoeuvring her onto her back and eating her out instead. He wasn't really sure why, but he always got more out of giving than receiving. He couldn't explain it - he loved getting his dick sucked obviously, he wasn't a psycho, but he often felt like he couldn't fully enjoy it until he knew he'd made whoever he was with feel good first. It was like some sort of ego thing.

Either way, he stuck his head between her thighs, switching between playing with her clit and licking inside of her until she came on his tongue, and only then did he get a condom out and fuck her properly. She scratched up his back as he was pounding into her, moaning, and Ilya thrust harder. He made sure she orgasmed again before he came.

Two days later and they were playing in Miami, and Ilya was still getting chirps from the other Voyageurs for the red stripes down his back. Ilya took all the banter with pride, and when they won their match against Panthers as well, the mood on the way back was jubilant at their win-streak of five. They agreed to take some time in their rooms and meet back in the lobby of the hotel in an hour. Ilya showered again, trimming his pubes because he thought he'd probably get laid again tonight, and got dressed and watched TV until it was time to head down.

Most of the guys were already waiting - Drapeau and Comeau had cracked open their minibar by the looks of things, each holding the miniature beers they were stocked with, and lots of the other guests were eyeing the loud, boisterous group of athletes distastefully.

"Is this everyone?" Ilya asked as he approached.

"Still waiting for Hollzy," Pike replied.

Ilya sighed, and went over to stand with Drapeau and Comeau. "Have we found club?" Ilya asked.

"There's a load five minutes from here," Comeau said. "Why, are you gonna pull again?"

Ilya grabbed his dick lewdly. "He is feeling lonely."

Drapeau chortled, and Ilya looked around, impatient.

"Should someone go and check on Capitaine?" Boizeau called.

"Pike," Miitka said, "call him."

Pike nodded, taking his phone out and walking over to a quieter area. He spoke on the phone for thirty seconds, and then came back over, looking disappointed. "Says he's tired," Pike announced, "wants us to go ahead without him."

There were some groans, but everyone started filing out. Ilya followed them, but was stopped when Boizeau grabbed the collar of his shirt, holding him back.

"What?" Ilya snapped.

“Go and get Hollander,” Boizeau said.

“He says he is tired, who cares?”

Boizeau made a disbelieving noise. “He’s just in a mood, has been in one all week. Go and drag him out.”

Ilya scowled. “Why me?”

“Because he always takes the bait with you! So just go and goad him into coming, please, because I can’t put up with this lot without making him suffer too.” Boizeau looked at him expectantly.

“Fucking hell,” Ilya groaned. “Fine, I’ll go and talk to him! But I can’t make him do anything!”

Boizeau shoved Ilya towards the elevators. Ilya got in, dragging his feet, and checked the team chat, finding Shane’s room number. He went to the man’s room and knocked on the door.

“Hollander,” he called. “You’re alive?”

The door opened, and Shane stood there in just sweats and a t-shirt.

“Is not very appropriate outfit for a club,” Ilya commented, pursing his lips.

Shane looked ticked off. “I told Hayden I wasn’t going.”

Ilya pushed his way inside, and Shane sighed loudly as he stepped back, sitting on the foot of the bed. Ilya leant against the wall.

“We won. You’re supposed to come for a drink if we win.”

“What, you care if I go or not?” Shane said testily.

Ilya blinked. “Boizeau sent me.”

“Right,” Shane huffed. “Forget it. Tell him I’m going to bed.”

Ilya stared at him, as Shane stared steadfastly at the muted TV. “Was just a blowjob, Hollander,” he said, resentful and bitter. “You didn’t have to let me if you were just going to be mad at me afterwards.”

Shane’s jaw clenched. “I’m not mad at you.”

“So what is problem? Why are you refusing to look at me now?”

“There’s no problem.”

Ilya swallowed, folding his arms. “...I’m sorry,” he said quietly. “I know last time was- weird. I don’t... you know I’m not normally like that. I was in a funny mood. But just- forget it

happened, yes?”

Shane finally looked at him. “I’m not... did I, like... do what you wanted? Did I go too far?”

“No,” Ilya said quickly, feeling his cheeks burn. “It was... good.”

“Okay, because you’re normally the one who-”

“I know.”

Shane was turning red too. “We shouldn’t have hooked up again,” he said glumly. “It’s made things weird.”

“Sorry.”

“No, not-” Shane grimaced. “Not what we did. That’s- that was okay, Roz. If you, I mean- you wanting that, that’s fine.” Ilya’s stomach twisted grotesquely. “I just meant us doing *anything*,” Shane finished glumly.

“...Does not have to be weird,” Ilya said. “We were hooking up for years, was not weird.”

Shane shot him an incredulous look. “Yes, it *was*. We just didn’t have to look each other in the eye every day as well.”

“Fine, so we don’t do it again. Is no big deal.”

“Not for you, maybe.” Shane huffed, looking away again.

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Hollander, when was last time you had sex? Tell me it was not Vegas.”

“Oh my God, fuck off!” Shane snapped.

“Hollander, just go and get laid! It will stop you freaking out about us!”

“I don’t want to just go out and fuck random women, okay?! I’m not a fucking whore like you.”

Ilya let out a short, shocked laugh. “Wow, tell me how you really feel.”

“...Sorry,” Shane mumbled, looking guilty. “That was uncalled for. I just... don’t really get the appeal of hooking up with strangers.”

“Look, you know I will fuck you,” Ilya said straightforwardly. Shane’s eyes widened. “Is you who has all these rules, who thinks we will get caught, thinks it will cause problems,” Ilya continued. “That is your choice. But if you change your mind, you only need to let me know. I would not have to whore myself out if I had you waiting for me in hotel room.”

Shane inhaled shakily. “You’re an asshole.”

“Yes, but I am just being honest.”

“...I don’t want to fuck you. We should just go back to how things were.”

Ilya held back a disappointed sigh and nodded. “So you are not pissed at me?” he checked. “You will start looking at me again?”

Shane gave him an exasperated smile. “Yes, Rozanov, I’ll start looking at you again.”

“Good. You are sure you do not want to come out?”

“No, I really am tired. You go ahead.”

“Okay.” Ilya smirked. “I will think of you when I fuck Miami chick tonight.”

Shane laughed, lobbing the remote at him. “Get *out*, you manwhore.”

Ilya dodged it, getting up to go. “You can stop us fucking Hollzy, you cannot stop me thinking about it.”

Chapter 8: January 2015 (I)

JANUARY 2015

Ilya had a quiet Christmas - he'd never quite got into the spirit of celebrating it when the rest of the world did. He had his own traditions for Western Christmas by now, and he got himself a Chinese takeaway because they were open and played videogames in his apartment. He still liked getting to have a few days off. He would hate to be an American football player and have to go and run around a cold pitch while the rest of the continent got drunk and celebrated.

Shane texted him merry Christmas; Ilya was pretty sure he sent the same message to everyone else on the team, but he appreciated it nonetheless. He got a few messages from the Boston players too. Practice started again on the 27th, but they didn't have another match until after the new year. They played New Jersey at home on the 2nd, and Ilya managed to score two goals, with the help of an assist from Wilson in the second period and a backhand feint in the third. It had been his best game since he got traded, and he was in a good mood after the match, happily going out with the boys to a Montreal bar. He spotted Shane when he walked in, waiting to be served, and made a beeline for him.

"Hey," he said, squeezing past some of the other patrons and slipping into a spot at his side.

"Oh, hi," Shane said, shooting him a smile. "Nice playing today."

Ilya grinned. "Wilson and Taylor are coming along."

"Yeah, you're all playing together really well now. It's good, you've done a really good job with them."

"They're annoying little shits."

"They idolise you."

"Good, they should do. They're still annoying little shits."

Shane rolled his eyes, like he was amused with Ilya. "I don't know what they see in you, you're the worst."

Ilya leaned over the counter, waving down a bartender. Shane cringed at him, but Ilya didn't care. "Beer, please," he said. "Whatever's on tap. Hollzy?"

"Same," Shane said, addressing the bartender politely. "Thank you so much."

"So," Ilya said as they waited, "I watched that film. Gone Girl."

"You did?"

“Mhm. It was freaky, but I liked it. But I don’t know if I like them being stuck together in the end, I think she should have killed Affleck as well.”

Shane snorted, taking the drink that was handed to him. “I think it’s supposed to be, like, punishment for both of them. They’re stuck together.”

“Ah, but murder would have been much more fun.” Ilya took his beer as well, swigging it. “And Affleck was a dick. Maybe in sequel, his college girlfriend can team up with the blonde lady and they can kill him together.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Shane’s lips twitched upwards. “How was your Christmas?”

“Fine. Nothing exciting. You?”

“I went back to Ottawa, hung out with my parents. It was pretty boring.”

“Ah, so your favourite.”

“Asshole,” Shane said. “But yeah, I had a good time. I can only really relax when I go to Ottawa.”

Ilya hummed. “Come on, *buddy*,” he said, a little taunting, “we should hang out with the team. I get naughty thoughts if we are alone together for too long.”

Shane whacked him on the arm, but let Ilya drag him over to the rest of the guys.

~~

Ilya hung back when Theriault dismissed them from the ice at the next practice. “Hey, Coach,” he said, as everyone else skated away. “I need to let you know, I’m not coming in on the seventh.”

Theriault frowned. “What do you mean you’re not coming in?”

“Is Russian Christmas, I am busy.”

“Uh, well, tough shit, Rozanov.” Theriault shook his head. “We have practice scheduled. If you want to book a day off, you go and request it with a month’s warning.”

“I know, but I forgot. I had it booked off automatically at Boston.”

“Not my problem,” Theriault said bluntly. “You’re paid handsomely to show up, so you’re going to show up.”

Ilya grit his teeth. "It's not like we have a match."

"Rozanov, this team doesn't work around your schedule, *you* work around the *team's* schedule. You don't get to take a fucking holiday whenever you feel like it. If it's so important, remember to book it off next year."

"Okay," Ilya said.

"Good."

"I'm still not coming in. I will take punishment."

"Rozanov, that's not--"

"I am telling you now, Coach, I will not be here on the seventh."

"Go," Theriault said. "Sleep on it, and come in tomorrow with a better attitude."

"Yes, Coach."

~~

Ilya didn't bring it up again, but he certainly wouldn't be showing up on the seventh. Theriault was watching him like a hawk the entire practice the day before, and Ilya gave him a mocking little salute as he left.

The sixth was Russia's Christmas Eve, technically a pretty big day of celebrations. When Ilya was a kid, his mother had forced him and Alexei to all three church services held that day. Ilya wasn't quite a good enough son to suffer through all that now he was an adult, but he did find a youtube livestream from an orthodox church somewhere in America that he played on his laptop as he went on his phone. He figured he got like half-points for that. He found he still remembered most of it, able to mouth along to the hymns.

Christmas - real Christmas, Russian Christmas - was always funny for him. He had never been religious, but his mother had been. She had been strictly Orthodox, the type that prayed every morning. After she had died, his father stopped enforcing any type of religion in the house, even though Ilya knew she would be heartbroken if she knew both her sons grew up as non-believers.

Ilya would go to the Christmas morning service tomorrow - he always did that, for her. She would have wrung his neck if he didn't go to God's house on Christmas. Even though Ilya kind of hated church, he still went for her. He should probably be there now as well, but he was kind of a shit son. Always only doing the bare minimum.

His phone started buzzing, Shane's contact popping up, and he muted the youtube video.

"Hollander," he said in greeting.

"Hey," Shane said. "Why did Coach tell me to yell at you about turning up tomorrow? He seems to think you're skipping practice?"

"I am."

"Oh... Well, I'm supposed to make sure you don't. So could you, like, not?"

Ilya laughed despite himself. "Sorry, Captain. I have plans, I told Theriault this. He can't expect you to make me come in."

"What plans?"

"Is Russian Christmas."

"Oh, is your family visiting?" Shane asked. God, he sounded so fucking earnest and sweet. Ilya almost hated it.

"No. I need to go to church," he said flatly.

"Right," Shane said, drawing out the vowel. "I... I didn't know you were religious."

"I'm not."

"So why-"

"My mother would want me to go."

Shane was quiet for a few seconds. "She's, uh... she's dead, isn't she?" he asked, completely untactfully.

"Yes."

It went quiet again. Ilya didn't say anything else to fill the silence.

"...Okay. Well, uh... Listen, it's just practice, it's not the end of the world. Coach will be pissed, but he'll get over it."

Ilya nodded. "I know."

"Do you, like... need anything?"

"Like what?"

"I dunno. Do you want me to come with you?"

Ilya balked. "Is no big deal, Hollander," he said. "Is just church. I go alone. Besides, you have practice."

“Yeah, but...”

“Is fine. I put on suit, go to boring service, stand in big room for an hour and listen to a lecture by the priest. I will see be back on Thursday.”

“...Okay,” Shane said softly. “Well, um... have a good time, I guess.”

“Sure.”

~~

Ilya drove to the nearest Orthodox church the next morning, parking silently and going inside. The Orthodox Church was not a fun denomination, not like all the Christians Ilya had met in America that had passionate pastors, and hymns they clapped along to. Church was not supposed to be joyous - it was a solemn affair, because it was sacred. You didn't go to have fun, that wasn't the point. They didn't even get seats.

Ilya hadn't confessed since his mother was alive, and he hadn't been fasting either, so he didn't take the Eucharist. He followed the rest of the congregants up and crossed his arms over his chest instead, receiving a blessing from the priest. He tried to take it seriously, tried to think about the sins he had committed since he was last in church. He had been proud, he had been lustful, he had been violent, he had been selfish, he had been cruel, he had been greedy, he had been lazy. He thought only about half of them were actually bad, but this wasn't about his rules, it was about God's rules, so he prayed with as much sincerity as he could muster and apologised for all of them. He listened to the priest, and tried to be thankful that God had sent his only son to die for Ilya's sins, and sung the hymn dutifully.

When the service was over, he went back to his car and grabbed the two bundles of flowers he had left on the backseat. He walked around to the back of the church, where the cemetery was located, and slipped past the families that had gathered around various gravestones.

He found an old one deeper into the cemetery, for a lady that had died in 1923. Elena Varoskyy. He didn't think he'd be bothering any visitors to her grave.

Ilya said a sombre prayer for Elena, laying down one of the bundles of flowers for her. “*I hope you will not mind me borrowing your resting place,*” he said. “*I will not be long, I promise.*” He sat down, and repeated the prayer, this time for his mother.

“*Hello, Mama,*” he started. He looked over his shoulder, making sure he wasn't within earshot of anyone else. “*It's been, um, a while since I last spoke to you. Maybe you noticed, I'm talking to you from Montreal now. I... I know I was doing really well, last time. I'd just made the playoffs. I, uh, I've managed to fuck it all up since then, sorry.*” His fingers toyed with the pendant around his neck.

"I won the Stanley Cup, though. I did that with Boston, I know you would have been proud of me that day. I wanted to do that for you. Then I went home for summer... I tried to look after Papa, but he's getting very old now. And you remember what he's like, he doesn't want to accept any help. He's getting even more of a temper, but it's okay, I think that happens when you're confused all the time... Anyway, Alexei's looking after him now, so you don't need to worry. We're making sure he's okay."

Ilya took a deep breath. *"But, yeah, I got in trouble with the Bears. They traded me to Montreal. I- I fucked up. Lost my temper like Papa."* He smiled weakly. *"It's not- not so bad. I miss Boston, but I'm okay here. And I'm working hard, I promise. I'm on the second line now, but I'll make it work. I'll probably never be Captain again, but I'll play good hockey."*

"I know you're probably mad at me. I haven't been living a, uh, a very virtuous life lately, I know. But I don't have faith like you do, I don't think it's a bad thing if I sleep around. Sorry, I know you do, you'd want me to be honourable. But I still came to church for you, Mama. I prayed and asked for forgiveness to a God I don't believe in, just to make you happy. I took it seriously, I promise. I repented for it all."

Ilya's vision began to blur, as the tears swam in his eyes. *"The girls don't mean anything anyway,"* he said. *"I know that makes it worse, sorry. It's not the worst sin, though... There's a boy as well. He's really- he's really nice to me, Mama. He's looked after me since I got here. I know you don't want me to want- I know you wouldn't like that it's a man. But you'd be happy I had someone looking out for me, I think."* Ilya laughed wetly. *"Besides, he doesn't even want to sleep with me, so you'd approve of that at least."*

"I've made some other friends here too. Not like in Boston, but I haven't been here that long yet. I still miss you, all the time. I'm trying to make you proud. I know I'm not- not living the life you'd want, but I don't have your beliefs. I'm still trying to live a good life. I'm trying to be a good teammate, and make sure Papa is okay... I'm trying to get along with Alexei, but it's hard. You used to knock our heads together and force us to make up when we fought, do you remember? There's no one to do that anymore, so we just carry on fighting. But I'm trying."

"Sorry," he sighed, wiping his eyes. *"I know you must be worried about me. I was doing really well last time we spoke, and now- everything's different. But I'm okay. I'm not going to stop doing the things you disapprove of, but I think you'll still love me anyway. You always did, even when I was difficult. And I'm going to try, Mama."*

He blinked rapidly, getting himself a little more under control. *"I have good news too. Alexei had a baby. A girl, Eva. He probably told you that, I don't know. But you're a grandmother now, congratulations."*

"...Alright, that's probably everything I needed to tell you. I'll talk to you again on your birthday. I miss you so much, Mama. I wish- I wish you were still here. But I'm not mad at you, I just miss you... Okay. I love you. I'll pray for you. Maybe you can pray for me too, it might mean more coming from you... I love you, Mama. Goodbye. I'll talk to you when it's summer... I love you."

Ilya let out a long exhale, laying down the second set of flowers. He said another prayer for her, and stood up. His hands were shaky as he walked back to his car, and he smoked two cigarettes before he felt steady enough to start driving.

He pulled off his tie as soon as he walked into his apartment, unbuttoning the collar of his shirt. He went and poured himself a generous glass of vodka, adding two ice cubes before taking it to the couch.

Now he had to call Alexei. The phone rang for a while before he answered.

"Ilya."

"Alexei," Ilya said neutrally. *"Merry Christmas."*

"...Merry Christmas."

"Is Papa there?"

"Yes, one second."

Ilya waited, and he heard the sounds of shuffling on the other end.

"Ilya," his father's voice said. *"Is that you?"*

"Yes, Papa. How are you?"

His father let out a grunt. *"The house is loud now. The baby is always crying, the woman- uh, Katya?"*

"Karina," Ilya said. *"Alexei's wife."*

"The baby cries, she screams, Alexei yells. Why did you send them here, Ilya? It was so peaceful before, now I cannot rest. I have no space."

"They're there to look after you, Papa."

"Pah! I don't need looking after, I keep telling Alexei this! No one listens to me anymore, Ilya!"

"I know, I know," Ilya sighed. *"Have you had a good Christmas at least?"*

"What?"

"Christmas. It's Christmas, Papa."

"...I know that," his father snapped after a pause.

"Okay. Can you give the phone back to Alexei, please?"

His father grumbled, but passed the phone back. *"He's always in a mood now,"* Alexei said. *"Moody old bastard."*

"Sorry," Ilya said. "...I sent Eva a present, a toy bear, did it arrive?"

"...Yes. Karina put it in her cot, I think she likes it."

"Okay. Good."

There wasn't much else Ilya and Alexei had to say to each other.

"Bye, Ilya."

"Bye, Alexei." Ilya hung up, and took a long, slow sip of his vodka. It was barely midday, but he already felt like he'd been awake for twenty-four hours. He was hungry, but didn't have the energy to get up off the couch, let alone cook something.

He put on his playlist of music his mother had listened to - Soviet era classical composers, because Mama had been a good girl, she'd never had a rebellious bone in her body. Even after the USSR collapsed, she never spoke badly about it. She'd always had faith in the system, like she had faith in God.

Ilya let himself sink into the melancholy. His fingers found his pendant again, twisting and untwisting it. If Mama were still here, she'd know how to look after Papa without making him so frustrated. She'd know how to fix things with Alexei.

But then again, maybe that was why she was dead. They'd taken advantage of her when she was alive, expected her to fix everything, always, because she never complained. No one had appreciated her back then, not even Ilya. She was probably the only person to ever love him, and he hadn't been able to love her back, not properly.

He was an easy person to like, but a hard person to love. Mama had managed anyway, and she'd got nothing back for it. And their family had never recovered after she left them.

His misery was interrupted by his phone. He looked at it, thinking maybe it was Alexei calling him back, but it was Shane. He checked the time, and realised it was already three pm, somehow. He'd been thinking for a long time.

He clicked accept, clearing his throat. "Hey," he said roughly. "How was practice? Was Theriault pissed?"

"Fine," Shane said. "I mean, kind of, but I tried to tell him to go easy on you."

"That wasn't necessary."

"Yeah, well." Shane snorted softly. "Dunno how much good it did. Sorry, is now a good time?"

"Sure. What's up?"

"...Just wanted to check in."

Ilya swallowed. "Yes, all fine. Like I said, boring service. You'd have had a blast, probably."

“Um, probably not,” Shane said bluntly. “But... do you feel better? For going?”

Ilya didn't know if he felt better. He didn't really go to feel good about himself. It was more like something he did out of respect, or duty. He'd hate himself for not going. “Mama would be pleased,” he chose to say.

"That's... that's good, I guess," murmured Shane.

“Yes.” It was quiet for a while. Ilya didn't know if he was supposed to say something else.

“...Listen,” Shane said, when the silence had stretched just long enough to be awkward. “If you're not, like, busy, then I could pop by. If you want company.”

“I am not fragile little thing, Hollander. You don't need to do all this.”

“I know,” Shane said defensively. “Christmas just makes people feel weird. You aren't special.”

Ilya laughed, otherwise he might sob. “Yeah,” he agreed. “Christmas is weird.”

“We can just watch a game or something? I won't make you talk.”

“...Alright,” Ilya said. “We can do that.”

Chapter 9: January 2015 (II)

Chapter Notes

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

JANUARY 2015

Theriault screamed at Ilya for a good ten minutes when he arrived on Thursday, in front of the entire team. Then he made him skate laps around the rink all of practice instead of joining in. It was a particularly petty punishment, but Ilya didn't have it in him to care all that much. He'd been aware he'd get punished for skipping practice, he was fine with taking it on the chin. He brushed off questions from the other players about where he had been, shutting them down with a particularly snappy response to Boizeau's hassling. They left him alone after that.

They had an away game in Pittsburgh over the weekend, then a home game against Ottawa the next week. Ilya managed one goal and one assist. Shane scored a combined seven goals, and Ilya tried not to feel too sore about it. It wasn't Shane's fault that Ilya was stuck on the second line. But Ilya was certainly not winning the MVP award this year.

The next Saturday, they had to play against Toronto. Toronto was a good team, and particularly good this year. The Voyageurs played their worst game of the season, losing 5-1. Everything had gone wrong - Miitka was playing injured, and as Ilya knew firsthand from the Olympics, an injured goalie was basically a death sentence. But even aside from that, they were all off their game. Missed passes, missed goals, Ilya getting sent to the penalty box multiple times and he wasn't the only one. As the game dragged on, and the loss became inevitable, more and more of the Voyageurs became frustrated, throwing punches too easily and making hits that were grey-area at best. Only Hollander managed to keep his cool, even if his face was stormy as he missed another shot.

The mood was murderous when they trampled back into the locker room. The one good thing about not being Captain anymore was that Ilya wasn't forced into doing press after such an embarrassing loss. He shot Shane a pitying smile as he was dragged away.

"That was fucking bullshit," Drapeau snarled. "What the fuck was that?"

"It was a bad game," Renaud said. "It happens. Gotta forget it and move on."

"I need to get drunk to forget that shitshow," Comeau said, shaking his t-shirt out angrily. "Anyone else?"

Most people begged off, just wanting to go home and wallow. In the end, it was just Drapeau, Comeau, Berkes and Ilya that were willing to go out. Ilya didn't want to go and wallow, he wanted to find a warm mouth and willing partner to help him erase the last two hours. He was still thrumming with leftover adrenaline, his fingers itching to grasp a cigarette and his mouth itching to spew expletives and his cock itching to fuck.

“Hey, Cap,” Berkes said, when Shane returned. “Some of us are gonna hit up Palazo tonight, you wanna come?”

“What?” Shane said, glancing over. “Uh, not tonight guys. Thanks though.”

Drapeau snorted derisively. “Only when we win, right?”

Shane nodded, but Pike’s eyes lit up.

“Not this time.” He elbowed Shane excitedly. “He has a date, don’t you Hollzy?”

It was impossible to miss the look of aggravation that Shane sent Pike. Regardless, it was like the entire room’s ears perked up. Ilya listened very carefully as he bent down to tie his laces.

“No way!” Boizeau laughed. “Hollander, is this true? You?”

“Shut up,” Shane said grumpily. “It’s a mate of Jackie’s, alright?”

“She’s been trying to set him up for *ages*,” Pike added.

“Cap’s finally getting some!” Miitka bellowed, to a chorus of laughs.

“It’s not a big deal,” Shane said, face red.

“Oh yes it is!” Comeau crowed. “You need any tips, Hollzy? You know you can’t get a chick to spread her legs just by telling her about your pass completion rate, yeah? That only turns you on.”

There were more jeers, and Shane scowled. “Thanks, Comeau,” he said sarcastically, “I’ll try to remember that.”

“Alright,” Ilya said, standing up, “let Hollander go on his boring date, will be good for him. He can check his dick still works.”

“*Fuck off*,” Shane growled, and Ilya smirked.

“We will have fun without him, it’s very easy to do this. Meet outside club in an hour?”

“That works,” Drapeau said, and Ilya nodded, grabbing his bag and heading out.

He arrived at the club early, the other three turning up just as Ilya was finishing his smoke. It was loud inside, dark with flashing lights that took a while for your eyes to adjust to. Heavy music thumped through the space, and Ilya headed straight for the bar. They started with shots, slamming back two each. Ilya scanned the dance floor.

“She’s hot,” Drapeau said loudly, nodding to a girl in a skintight dress, dancing with a group of friends.

“You can have her,” Ilya replied.

Drapeau pushed away, going to make his move. Ilya went with Comeau and Berkes to one of the VIP tables, needing to drink more before he found someone to take home. They ribbed on him for his outfit - apparently his silk shirt was too 'European', whatever that meant. Just because he didn't dress like a North American slob when he went out. He thought he looked hot.

He had two beers before he started making eyes at a girl at a table a few feet away. Her breasts were practically falling out of her dress, but Ilya thought that probably meant she'd be up for a one night stand. He walked over, and it only took a few words to convince her to ditch her group and come and dance with him.

She plastered her back to his front, rubbing her ass on his crotch as he swayed to the music, kissing her neck. She smelled like expensive perfume. One hand crept up her body, grazing her tit. She tangled her hand in his hair.

"Do you want to get out of here?" Ilya murmured into her ear.

She nodded. "Let me go and find my friends, let them know. Stay here?"

Ilya nodded, and she kissed him, long and dirty, before turning away. Ilya took a few steps back, out of the way of the other dancers and towards the bar. He checked his phone, seeing a text from twenty minutes ago that he'd missed.

Shane: are you busy right now?

Ilya stared at the text. Shane knew he was out.

Ilya: at club, not much happening

Ilya: whats up?

Shane typed for a long time. Ilya's eyes stayed glued to the screen, watching the three little dots appear and disappear, then reappear.

Shane: remember when you said i should let you know if i changed my mind

And then, answering the question Ilya had been about to ask

Shane: about us fucking

Ilya: omw

Ilya didn't even bother saying goodbye to the guys, or letting down the girl that was waiting for him. He strode straight out of the club and ordered an Uber to Shane's apartment. His knee bounced rapidly the entire drive, as the driver kept the car at five kilometres per hour slower than the speed limit for some godforsaken reason.

"Here's fine," Ilya said, as soon as they pulled onto Shane's road. He unbuckled his seatbelt before the car had even come to a stop, jumping out and making a mental note to remember to tip his driver later. Right now, he had much more important things to see to.

He jogged to the door, and then ran a hand through his hair. Tried to stand a bit more normally, like he hadn't dropped everything to run to Shane as soon as he was given permission.

He rang the doorbell, hooking his thumbs into the loops of his belt. Casual.

Shane opened the door halfway, his apprehensive face peering out. When he saw Ilya he opened it fully, stepping back.

Ilya entered, kicking the door shut behind him. "Hollander," he greeted.

"Uh, hey." His cheeks were already tinged pink; it was such a glorious sight.

"Date did not go well?" Ilya grinned.

"Jesus, you're such an *asshole*," Shane said angrily, and then grabbed Ilya by his shirt and pulled him into a heated kiss.

Oh, fuck, it had been so long since Ilya had felt Shane's lips on his. So long he couldn't actually remember the last time - he hadn't known how long he would have to wait, or else he would have savoured it. Ilya groaned, licking along the seam of Shane's mouth until he opened up, letting Ilya slip his tongue inside.

Ilya was too wound up to be nice. He jostled Shane until his back hit the wall with a thud and Ilya could press the length of his body alongside Shane's. "Fuck, Hollander," Ilya muttered, moving his mouth along Shane's jaw, "can't believe you made me wait so long. You've been such a fucking *brat*."

Shane let out a strangled whimper, hands grabbing at Ilya's hips. "Shut up," he said weakly.

“No.” Ilya reached down, palming Shane through his trousers. “I get to gloat now, yes? You finally admit you need me to fuck you, after all that bitching and moaning.”

“Fuck you, Rozanov.”

“Ask me nicely.” Ilya pulled back enough to grab by the chin, forcing him to look Ilya in the eyes. He looked so fucked out, even from just this, lips swollen and hair mussed, pupils entirely blown and black.

Shane’s face went slack. “F-fuck me, Roz. Please.”

Ilya tutted, digging his thumbnail into the meat of Shane’s cheek, leaving a little crescent moon imprint. “You act like prude for months, and you think that’s going to be good enough?” he asked meanly. “Try again.”

Shane turned his head, sucking the tip of Ilya’s thumb into his mouth. Ilya bit back a moan. Shane’s tongue swirled around Ilya’s thumb, as he looked at Ilya with wide, pleading eyes.

“You- you aren’t going to distract me,” Ilya said hoarsely, even though he was about thirty seconds from forgetting this little humiliation ritual and just carrying Shane to the bedroom.

Shane opened his mouth, letting Ilya’s thumb fall from his lips. “Need you,” Shane said, all soft and lovely. “Please. Need your cock, need you to fuck me. Please.”

“*Fuck*,” Ilya swore. “Yes, Hollander, I’ll fuck you, give you what you need. Shit.”

Shane nodded madly, capturing Ilya’s mouth again. Ilya ground against him as they kissed, feeling Shane’s erection against his thigh.

“Bedroom,” Ilya muttered, patting Shane’s side. “Now. Go.”

Shane pulled away with a pained noise, hurrying up the stairs, Ilya at his heels. God, Ilya had been so desperate for this. So desperate to have Shane under him again that now it was happening he was barely able to think straight. He pulled off his shirt as he climbed the stairs, leaving it forgotten in the hallway as he slammed Shane up against the wall to kiss him again.

Shane pulled him in tighter, his hands clawing at Ilya’s shoulderblades, his hips making these aborted little thrusts against Ilya’s groin. “Roz, you gotta- you gotta-”

“I know,” Ilya assured him. “Going to make you feel so good, fuck. Get your clothes off, get on the bed.”

“You need to let me go for that.”

Ilya growled, but took a reluctant step back, letting Shane make his way into the bedroom. He watched intently as Shane stripped, his clothes forming a neat little pile on the floor. His chest was flushed, the red spreading from his cheeks and down his neck and across his sweet little tits. Ilya wanted to bite them.

Shane settled with his back against the pillows, half-sitting on the bed. Ilya pulled off his jeans and underwear before clambering on top of him, boxing Shane in around his knees and elbows.

“You are such a *pretty* boy, Hollander,” he declared, swallowing Shane’s answering whine with his mouth. He kissed his way down Shane’s body, lapping over his nipple and scraping his teeth over Shane’s clenching abs until he reached Shane’s cock, hard and leaking. Ilya poked his tongue out, swiping over the head, keeping Shane’s hips pinned to the mattress when they tried to jolt upwards.

“*Rozanov.*”

“Be patient, Hollander,” Ilya said, glancing up at him. “You made me wait so long, I think you can wait too, da?”

“Just fucking-”

“Ah,” Ilya said sharply. “You will be patient for me. Okay?”

“I... okay,” Shane acquiesced, breathy. “I’ll be patient for you.”

“Very good,” Ilya murmured, returning to Shane’s dick. He took the head in his mouth, sucking lightly. Shane’s thighs were shaking underneath him, but he kept still, letting Ilya tease him, pulling off only to lick a slow, torturous path up along the side of his cock.

“Roz, fuck, please,” Shane was rambling. “Need more, please.”

Ilya took pity on him, swallowing him down properly, bobbing his head. He let a dry finger circle Shane’s hole, not entering him, just a reminder. He continued blowing him until he knew Shane was right on the edge, then removed himself, triumphant as he wiped his mouth.

“No no *no*,” Shane moaned in frustration, his chest heaving and his hips raising upwards, fruitlessly trying to chase after Ilya.

“Doing so well,” Ilya said, pressing a kiss to the inside of Shane’s thigh. “You can come when I’m inside you, I promise.”

“So get inside me!”

Ilya bit sharply into the meat of his thigh this time, digging his canines in. “Like I said, *bratty.*”

Shane’s whole body shook. “*Rozanov, please.*”

Something proud rumbled inside Ilya, hearing Shane beg for him. He drew his body back up, opening the nightstand drawer and getting the lube, squeezing some onto his fingers. He got in between Shane’s knees and pushed his legs apart, so wide it was practically pornographic. Ilya knelt back on his heels and slipped one finger inside, appreciating the lovely view in front of him. Shane panting, his broad shoulders rising and falling with each breath, his eyes

glassy, his cock slick with Ilya's spit and dripping with precome. Ilya crooked his finger, and was rewarded with another curse.

"Fuck, more. Give me more."

"So needy," Ilya cooed, but he pushed in a second finger, twisting and scissoring. "Shit, Hollander, you're so tight. Relax for me, that's it. Good boy."

"Come on, I'm ready. I'm ready, just- just fuck me now."

Ilya stretched his fingers a few more times, making sure he actually was ready. "Hands and knees," he said, grasping wildly for a condom and rolling it on. Shane rolled over, his head buried between his elbows as he presented himself, and Ilya ran his hands over Shane's asscheeks greedily, spreading him.

"Your date did not want to do this to you?" he asked, taunting and arrogant.

Shane whipped his head around to glare at him, incensed. "Oh my God, you *fucking*-"

Ilya thrust inside in one smooth motion, silencing him. He only gave him a second to adjust before he started to move, setting a punishing pace. He was too frantic to drag this out anymore - he just wanted Shane *ruined*.

He pounded into him fiercely, gripping his hips tight enough to bruise. "Fuck, Hollander, feel so good around my cock," he told him. "You missed this, didn't you?"

"I- yes. Yeah, fuck, keep going. *Fuck*." Shane's hands twisted around the sheets of the bed as he dropped his torso down and angled his hips up, pushing back to meet Ilya's thrusts.

Ilya lost the ability to focus on anything but the wet heat around his dick, the slick sounds as he pulled back and the slap of skin when he drove back in. It felt so fucking good. Shane was moaning beneath him, so wanton it was practically obscene. Only when Ilya knew he wasn't going to last much longer did he finally touch Shane's cock, grabbing it and pulling roughly.

Shane cried out as he came, clenching around Ilya. Ilya stilled, deep inside him, coming into the condom with a silent exclamation.

They cleaned up quietly - Ilya showered first, as Shane changed the sheets. Then Shane took the shower as Ilya got dressed. When he was back in his clothes, he lay back on the bed, hesitant, and waited.

Shane came back out with a towel around his waist, skin still damp and glistening with water.

"Sore?" Ilya asked.

Shane flipped him off, even though Ilya hadn't meant it as a jab, it had been sincere. He examined Shane closely.

"We are going to keep fucking," he said, because it needed to be said.

Shane stared at him for a while before nodding. “Yeah,” he said, pragmatic. “Probably.”

“Is not the end of the world. I’ve fucked lots of my friends.”

“I’m sure you have,” Shane sniffed.

“There’s even American term for it. Friends with benefits.”

“Oh my *God*.” A smile started to creep onto his face. “Don’t call us that.”

Ilya stood up, walking over until they were only an inch apart. “Fuckbuddies?” he offered.

“Ew. Worse.”

“Mm, what would you suggest then?” Ilya asked, reaching around to palm Shane’s ass over the towel.

“Um... I guess friends with benefits works.”

Ilya grinned. “I like fuckbuddy, but okay. As long as I still get to fuck you, buddy.”

“Shut up, you’re so annoying.” But Shane’s eyes were bright and amused.

Ilya pulled the towel away and dropped to his knees. Shane was already half-hard again. Ilya nosed him, teasing. “Be honest with me,” he said. “Date went bad?”

“Um- not really,” Shane replied, strained, as Ilya kept nuzzling his dick. “Just... I think she was a fan. Don’t really want to- you know. Someone who just wants me because they’re a fan.”

Ilya hummed, sucking Shane into his mouth. Shane exhaled heavily above him, as Ilya gripped the back of his thighs, massaging Shane’s cock with his tongue, feeling him grow to full hardness inside his mouth. He pulled off and looked up at him.

“Lucky for you, I am not fan of second best players.”

Shane’s eyes narrowed. “You wish, Rozanov.”

“So slow on the ice, Hollander. Lucky you come quick.”

Chapter End Notes

the one we've been waiting for :))

Chapter 10: February 2015

Chapter Notes

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

FEBRUARY 2015

The day was standard. Ilya arrived at the rink for practice, and ran drills, preparing for their next match. He ate lunch with Drapeau and Comeau, and they argued over whether Margot Robbie or Emilia Clarke was hotter. He went to the gym and worked out with Wilson and Taylor, then worked out on his own for a bit. He left with a wave goodbye to the few people remaining, getting in his car and driving home. He flopped on the sofa and flicked on the TV, waiting.

Twenty minutes later, there was a knock, and he got up to answer it. Shane was on him as soon as he was inside, and Ilya dragged him to the bed, pinning him down on the mattress and fucking him fiercely. Shane was writhing underneath him, and Ilya gripped his hips, holding him still as he pounded into him.

“Oh, fuck, Hollander,” he ground out. “So tight. Feels so- *fuck!*”

Shane moaned, clenching around Ilya’s cock in a way that was completely obscene. “Harder, p-please, Roz.”

Ilya grunted, redoubling his efforts.

“Shit, like that, yes, oh my God-”

Ilya’s thighs were burning, but he couldn’t have stopped if he wanted to, not with Shane falling apart like this, and not with the way Ilya was desperate to chase his own release, just not before-

Shane came with a jolt, going boneless, only held up by Ilya’s hands on his hips.

“You are okay?” Ilya asked hoarsely, barely able to hold back. “I can-”

“Yes, yeah, fuck me,” panted Shane, even as he was still limp. Ilya continued thrusting into him, becoming more erratic and uncontrolled until he burst into the condom.

He winced as he pulled out, still sensitive, and heard Shane’s little hiss as well. Ilya lay a comforting hand over his tailbone, patting him in reassurance, and removed the condom, throwing it away before collapsing on the bed next to Shane.

“My legs hurt,” Ilya complained, their skin sweaty and the sheets all tangled up. “You’re going to kill me, Hollander.”

“Oh, please,” Shane said. “It’s your own fault, you never cool down properly.”

“Is not!” protested Ilya. “You can ride me next time, see how you like doing all the work after a day of practice.”

Shane grinned. “I’ll like it just fine, because I always take my time cooling down.”

“Maybe I’m just eager to get out of there,” Ilya purred. “Such nice things waiting for me after I leave.”

Shane sighed, a hint of bashfulness on his face, and reached over to slap Ilya’s stomach. “Don’t try and charm me, you just said I was going to kill you.”

“But what a way to go, yes?”

Shane laughed, and then sat up. “I feel sticky,” he announced. “I’m going to shower.”

“Okay,” Ilya said, getting up as well.

He stripped the bed and through the sheets in the wash, too lazy to remake it again right now. He showered once Shane was out, quick and efficient, before getting dressed and heading back to the living area, where Shane was sitting on one corner of the couch. He was already loading up Chel, and Ilya collapsed onto the opposite corner, picking up the other controller.

“Ready to lose, Rozanov?”

Ilya scoffed. “As if.”

They had a nice little routine going now. They met after practice most days, unless there was a match or something else to get in the way. They fucked first, always - Ilya was always gagging for it, and Shane seemed to be too. Then they showered, dressed, and hung out without the looming need to get off in the way.

It amused Ilya, the way Shane so clearly categorised the difference. He would arrive at Ilya’s, so needy and pliant, let Ilya bend him and manhandle him any way Ilya desired as they fucked. Their showers were like Shane’s little reset period. Then they were friends. The benefits were kept strictly separate. Ilya didn’t care, as long as he still got both.

Shane headed off when it started to get dark, and Ilya made the quick walk to Nadya’s to get his dinner.

“*Ilya!*” she exclaimed when he walked in. “*How are you, milaya?*”

“*I’m good,*” Ilya grinned, going to lean over the counter. “*Where are the rascals, I have a present for them.*”

“*You spoil them.*”

Ilya raised his eyebrows expectantly, and she sighed.

“*Sophie! Alex! Someone’s come to visit!*”

There was the distant sound of thundering, and Nadya's grandchildren came peeling in from the back of the dinner.

"There you are," Ilya smiled, crouching down to get eye-level with them. "Now, did you watch the game on Saturday?"

"Yes," Sophie said, nodding earnestly. "You scored!"

"I did," Ilya said, fishing through his bag. "This is puck I scored against Buffalo with."

Their eyes went wide, as he held it just out of reach. "Now, if I give this to you and I see it on eBay, I'm going to be very disappointed."

"Never!"

"We won't!"

Ilya laughed, handing it to Alex's grabbing hands. "Share with your sister," he told him. "Or your babushka will be mad at me."

The seven year old boy groaned dramatically. "I *always* share with her."

"No you don't!" Sophie argued.

"Yes I do!"

"*Stop it,*" Nadya said firmly. "*Go on, you're both supposed to be doing your homework. Shoo.*"

The two kids both gave her innocent looks as they scampered away. Ilya privately thought there was no way they were running off to do their homework.

"*They'll bicker over that now,*" Nadya said, eyeing him disapprovingly.

"*Don't worry, I'll score again this week, get them one each.*"

"*Hmph. You want your usual?*"

"*Please and thank you.*" Ilya waited patiently for his takeaway, chatting to Nadya as one of her sons busied himself in the kitchen.

"*You've been playing well recently,*" Nadya said to him. She'd learned Ilya was a hockey player when he'd come in one day and Misha, Sophie and Alex's dad, had recognised him.

"*Oh, you watch hockey now?*"

"*No, but that's what Misha tells me. He watches your games with the kids.*"

"*I knew I liked him for more than just his cooking.*"

"*He says you're as good as the Captain, they shouldn't keep you stuck on the second line.*"

Ilya shook his head. *"It's alright,"* he said. *"Hollander was there first. I just want to get you watching, Nadya."*

"He's the one you brought in here, isn't he? The first time? When are you going to bring him back?"

"I don't know." Ilya smiled mischievously. *"He's shy."*

"Hmm. Well, he's always welcome."

The bell dinged, and Nadya collected his bag of food, handing it over to him. *"Come back soon, milaya,"* she said. *"And don't work too hard."*

"I never do!" Ilya called as he left. He ate on the sofa when he got back, channel surfing without really paying much attention. His legs really were killing him, and he decided he'd have an ice bath tomorrow. Shane probably had a point about cooling down. It was a good ache though, and he fell asleep easily.

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They flew to Philadelphia a week later, and Ilya *loved* Philly. It had the same energy as Boston - loud, aggressive, angry. None of Montreal's stifling serenity. The Philly players were brutish, and Ilya enjoyed getting to slam them into the boards, feeding off the boos of the home crowd.

It was a close game, winning in overtime thanks to a shot by Boizeau. They had a very good chance of making the playoffs this year, and Ilya could sense the hopefulness building amongst the team as they got further into the season. No one dared say it though. Saying it aloud would be like tempting fate, even if they were all thinking it.

They found a bar easily, piling in noisily and high off the win.

"Boizy isn't buying a drink all night!" Renaud yelled. *"Someone get him a beer!"*

"I've got him," Shane said quickly.

Boizeau was beaming, and ruffled Shane's hair. *"Mon Capitaine, merci."*

"S'alright, you deserve it."

Half of them went to find tables, the other half going to the bar. Ilya knew it would take ages to get served given the gaggle of hockey players that had just arrived, so he snuck outside to smoke a cigarette while he waited. It was slightly less chaotic when he came back in, and he

managed to get the attention of a bartender, getting himself two drinks because he knew it would be a fight every time he came back.

He found the others in a few booths near the back. Some had already splintered off; Taylor had gone to chat up a pretty young thing, and Renaud and Miitka looked like they were having far less success with a couple of women at another table.

Ilya sidled over and into the booth with Drapeau, Boizeau, Pike, Wilson and Shane. “Boys,” he said, “who wants to bet Renaud is going home with his right hand tonight?”

Drapeau snorted. “No shot. That’s every fucking night for that sucker.”

“He’s okay,” Shane put in diplomatically, always ready to go to bat for a teammate. “He was dating that paralegal for a bit last summer, remember?”

“Yeah, then she remembered she had brains and dumped his ass.”

Ilya tried to hide his laugh behind his drink. Shane shot him a disapproving glare anyway.

“I wish my girlfriend would dump me,” Boizeau said suddenly. “She’s hassling me about Valentine’s Day, she wants to go see that kinky sex movie. Have you heard about that? Looks like a fucking nightmare.”

“Oh my God, Jackie wants to see that too!” Pike exclaimed. “She’s fucking obsessed, read all the books last year. I tried, they were fucking awful.”

Ilya did laugh this time, loud and abrasive. The Fifty Shades of Grey movie had been being advertised like crazy in the lead up to Valentine’s Day - to be fair, Ilya commiserated with Boizeau and Pike, it did look like a load of bollocks. His gaze zeroed in on Shane.

“You’re a cinephile, right Hollander?” he asked, smirking. “Will you be seeing the sex film?”

Shane pulled a horrified face. “Uh, no,” he said firmly. “I don’t think so.”

“I think would be exciting for you. See what it’s like to have lots of great sex.” Ilya felt the familiar rush of heady smugness at teasing Shane in front of the others. Shane went bright red as he stared daggers at Ilya. “You must wonder what it's like.”

“I don’t think that movie has anything to show me,” he replied frankly, just a hint of annoyance making its way into his tone.

“Oh? You’re vanilla, Hollander?”

Drapeau started to chortle, as Ilya kept Shane locked under his gaze.

“Okay, stop ragging on Hollzy,” Pike said, ruining Ilya’s fun like he always did. “The bigger problem is why every wife on the planet seems to think they can drag their husband to a weird movie where Dakota Johnson gets spanked.”

“Tough shit, Pike,” Drapeau said. “Chicks run Valentine’s Day, that’s, like, the rule. Nothing you can do about it unless you wanna be blue-balled for the next month.”

Pike and Boizeau both grimaced, but notably didn’t argue. Ilya spotted that Shane was about halfway done with his beer, and chugged what was left of his first drink.

“What about you, Wilson?” he asked. “Any girlfriend trying to break your bank for Valentine’s Day?”

Wilson shook his head, looking embarrassed. “Nah. Single this year.”

“Wise choice,” Ilya said. “Hey, if you are lonely, maybe you and Hollander can go see sex movie together, da? That way neither of you are left out.”

“Fuck off, Roz,” Wilson said, as Shane groaned, staring hopelessly at the ceiling.

“You seem very concerned about everyone’s plans, Rozanov,” Pike said pissily. “I notice you don’t have any.”

Ilya shrugged. “I was raised under communism, I have no use for commercial American holidays.”

“Oh, bullshit!” Shane burst out. “You spent six months under communism, and you were a baby!”

“And you have, like, six sports cars,” Drapeau added.

“And a dozen watches,” piled on Wilson.

Ilya grinned widely. “Okay, so I am bad communist. Is good excuse when ladies want me to buy them things and watch cheesy sex film though.” Shane only had about a third of his beer left, so Ilya finished his second drink and stood up, putting on a yawn. “Alright, I am tired. I will see you all in the morning.”

Drapeau stared at him in annoyance. “Dude, *again*?” he complained. “I thought we were going to pull tonight.”

“Yes, you can’t get lucky without me, is very sad,” Ilya said blithely. “Maybe ask Renaud for tips, and do the opposite.”

“Whatever, fuck off then.”

Ilya shoved Drapeau’s cheek as he left, heading back to the hotel. His face lit up when the door knocked ten minutes later. He strode over to open it, smirking. “Mr Grey will see you now,” he said.

“That doesn’t even make sense,” Shane said as he came in, rolling his eyes. “Unless there’s someone else here who’s gonna fuck me.”

Ilya laughed and tackled him onto the bed. “No, just me.” He kissed him hungrily, squeezing Shane’s waist.

Shane pulled back. “You taste like smoke.”

“You’ll live,” Ilya told him, and kissed him again.

He had him naked in record time, prepping him and pounding into him from behind. “Fuck, Hollander. So good.”

Hollander let out a strangled cry. “Rozanov, I need- touch me. Touch me.”

“You can come like this.”

“No, I need-”

“Come on Hollander,” Ilya urged, fucking him even harder. “You can do it for me, know you can. *Come*.” He slapped Shane’s ass as he drove in, and Shane practically wailed, coming untouched. Ilya pulled out quickly, whipping off the condom and jerking himself twice, painting the reddening imprint of his hand with his own come.

“Fucking *God*,” Ilya snarled, watching the white liquid splatter across Shane ass. He fell, his limbs completely dead, just cognizant enough to fall sideways so he didn’t crush Shane.

“Jesus,” Shane mumbled, voice ragged, lying on his stomach. Ilya turned his head to look at him.

“You can call me Ilya. Or Mister Grey.”

Shane slapped him half-heartedly. “You aren’t funny.”

Ilya thought he was hilarious. He inhaled deeply, watching Shane. He knew this part wouldn’t last long - Shane would complain about feeling sticky soon, even quicker than usual because he currently had Ilya’s come drying on him. Probably another sixty seconds.

“I spank you like he does. You should watch film Hollander, you’d get a lot out of it.”

Shane buried his face in the pillow, a new flush creeping down his neck. “Shuddup,” he grumbled.

Ilya skated his fingertips along Shane’s neck. “Don’t hide,” he chastised. “Pretty boy, let me see you.”

Shane shivered underneath him, turning his face again to look at Ilya.

“Pretty, pretty,” Ilya whispered. He was. Pretty brown eyes, pretty pink lips, pretty tan skin. Pretty dusting of freckles, though they were currently hidden under his blush. Ilya leant over and kissed him, slow and deep, licking into his mouth.

Shane let out a little breath when Ilya pulled back. Ilya smiled, running his thumb over Shane's bottom lip, making him pout under his touch. Shane was watching him, eyes still hazy and satiated.

Then "...I feel gross," Shane announced, and Ilya lay back again. "And you still taste gross, by the way."

"Go use shower," Ilya said. "Don't roll over, I still need to sleep in this bed."

"It's your mess, asshole," Shane snarked, but he did crawl off the bed without rolling over. Ilya watched the show with great enjoyment.

He pulled his boxers back on as Shane showered. The room still had the musky smell of sex, but it was too cold to open a window. He wondered if it was too late to order room service.

"So, uh, listen," Shane said when he emerged from the bathroom, sadly fully clothed again. "You should, like, go out with Drapeau next time."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "Hollander, you are boring, but I promise I have more fun with you than that dickhead."

"Right, thanks," Shane huffed. "Not what I meant. They're starting to notice you don't go out anymore."

"So?"

"So you can still, like... fuck other people."

"I know." Ilya smiled sweetly. "But that's so much effort, and you are so *easy* for me."

"Fuck off," Shane snapped.

"Hollander," Ilya said. "Is fine. So I'm not going out, they're going to assume it's because we're fucking? No."

"I'm not saying that. Just, like-" Shane's eyes darted away. "You know what, forget it, you can do whatever you want. Just go out with Drapeau soon, he's getting lonely."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Okay, Hollander," he said, bored.

"Okay. I'm going to, uh, head back to my room."

"Alright. See you tomorrow."

"Yep."

remember when fifty shades of grey was the biggest movie of 2015? hayden does, and he's got ptsd. jackie thought it was when culture peaked. and i just know ilya heard about it and decided to make it shane's problem

Chapter 11: March 2015

Chapter Notes

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

MARCH 2015

Ilya thought God might be real after all, because heaven certainly was, and it was Shane Hollander riding him.

“Oh, fuck,” Ilya growled, “da, like that. Shit.”

Shane rolled his hips again, grinding down on Ilya’s cock. “Holy- Roz,” Shane hissed, “you feel so big.” He had his head thrown back in pleasure, hands groping Ilya’s pecs as he swivelled in little circles. Slowly, he rose up, and then dropped back down. Ilya swore he saw stars.

“Oh-” Shane gasped, doing it again, speeding up.

Ilya was trying his hardest not to come prematurely, his teeth gritted. “Look so good, bouncing on my cock.”

Shane keened, as his thighs trembled with the exertion. Ilya wanted to grab them, but he kept his hands curled into fists behind his head.

“That’s it, take what you need. Use me to get yourself off.”

Shane’s eyes went wide, and he moaned, his nails digging into Ilya’s chest as he rode him with abandon. “Roz, I can’t- I need-”

Ilya planted his feet into the mattress, and drove upwards, fucking into him. Shane cursed, his head falling forward into Ilya’s chest. Ilya grabbed onto him and started fucking up relentlessly.

“So good, Hollander,” he rumbled. “Like this, yes? Is good?”

“Yes, just- fuck-” Shane broke off into a chorus of moans, and Ilya carried on, punching more and more sounds out of him. It was more effort in this position, taking all of Shane’s weight, but he didn’t care. His hips snapped up with a singular focus, until Shane spasmed, spilling all over Ilya’s stomach, and Ilya finally got to let himself go too.

Ilya eased himself out, tying and tossing the condom with as little disturbance to the man currently collapsed on top of him as possible. He lay his head back against the pillow, Shane still breathing heavily against his chest. Ilya carded his hands through Shane’s hair.

“Okay?” he murmured.

“Mhm,” Shane replied, tilting his head to look up at him. “You were right, doing all the work is tiring.”

Ilya snorted, delighted. “Such a beautiful vision, though,” he said. “I will dream of what you look like sinking down on my cock.”

Shane smiled bashfully, nosing Ilya’s nipple. “Yeah?”

“Oh, definitely.”

Shane’s eyes closed, and Ilya continued his ministrations through Shane’s hair absent-mindedly. He thought Shane would have jumped up by now, but he really must be tired out. Ilya wasn’t going to press it. He liked their moments like this, when Shane was soft with him.

“Feels nice,” Shane said, when Ilya scratched his nails along Shane’s scalp, so Ilya did it again. Shane exhaled in satisfaction, opening his eyes to look up at him again. “Your hands are big.”

“Well, you know what they say.”

“Big gloves,” Shane said wisely, and Ilya grinned.

“Da. Big gloves. You should be comedian, Hollander.”

Shane started to play with Ilya’s necklace, turning it over in his fingers. Ilya hesitated, but decided to allow it, watching him carefully.

“Looks different,” Shane observed.

“Yes. Is orthodox cross.”

“Hm.” Shane let it drop back onto Ilya’s chest, his hand roaming up to lay over Ilya’s collarbone instead. Ilya’s heart was beating very fast, Shane would be able to feel it.

“You have nice hands,” Shane said.

Ilya inhaled deeply. “You have nice hair,” he replied, continuing to pet said hair.

Shane let out a soft sigh, pressing his nose deep against Ilya’s sternum. Then he got up. “Right,” he said, business-like. “Shower.”

Ilya let Shane climb off him, and they took their turns washing up. It was still early, only about four, and normally they’d watch TV or play video games or something afterwards, but Shane begged off this time.

“Sorry,” he said, as he was pulling on his shoes, “I have to get home, I have a Skype call with my agent and my mom.”

Ilya shrugged, from where he was flopped on the couch. “Is okay,” he said. “What does your agent want?”

“Urgh, they want me to do this cologne ad. It’s kind of annoying.”

“Really? You do many ads, Hollander.”

Shane grimaced, standing up properly to look at him. “Yeah, but this time they want me to get in my underwear or some shit. I’m sure the guys will have a blast with that.”

“I will defend you against mean teammates.”

“No you won’t, you’ll make fun of me more than anyone one.”

Ilya bit his lip, grinning. “Maybe.”

“Asshole.”

“Don’t do it if you don’t want to. You can say no to things.”

Shane sighed. “No, it’s fine. My mom thinks it’s a good idea, so.” He grabbed his keys, hand already on the door. “It’s not a big deal. See you tomorrow?”

Ilya pursed his lips and nodded. “Tomorrow.”

With Shane ditching him, Ilya decided he may as well have a frozen pizza for dinner, judgement-free. He ended up going out with Drapeau - there was no practice tomorrow, they were flying to Los Angeles, so Ilya was able to get drunk. He and Drapeau slammed back shots in the club they were at, and some girls recognised them and started to form a little circle.

Ilya sank back into the attention, his head a little fuzzy from the alcohol. Drapeau was sitting opposite him, some girl in his lap. He winked at him as he palmed the side of her ass, and Ilya snorted.

He ended up getting blown in one of the club bathrooms, and then stuck his hand up the girl’s dress, pulling her panties to the side and fingering her until she came, her juices running down his hand.

“You- fuck,” she said, high-pitched and breathy. “You’re good at that.”

Ilya smirked. He had nice hands. He kissed her, hard and demanding, before stepping out of the stall and going over to the sinks, turning the tap on.

“I’ll follow you on instagram,” the girl added.

Ilya nodded, drying his hands with one of the paper towels and turning back around. “Okay.”

“Maybe we can see each other again?”

“Sure.” Ilya was sure he would never see her again. Still, he kissed her one more time before he slipped out. Drapeau had disappeared, but Ilya figured he’d gone home with the chick that

had been all over him. He decided to go home as well, and try to get some sleep before he had to get up again and get on the plane.

~~

They lost against LA, so not many people went out afterwards. Ilya went with the small group, but he only stayed for about an hour before making his excuses, going back to the hotel and sneaking up to Shane's room.

"Hey," Shane said, when he let Ilya in. "You have fun?"

"Ah, was whatever," Ilya said. "Everyone was in bad mood, so not so fun really. LA is nice, though. Is not freezing."

"Hm." Shane eyed him, his shoulders tense and impatient. Ilya decided to drag out the conversation, fucking with him just a little.

"You like the warm weather?"

"Why the fuck are you talking about the weather right now?" Shane snapped, and Ilya barked a laugh, walking over and crowding Shane against the wall.

"You want to talk about something else?"

"I want you to get on with it, asshole."

Ilya grinned, hoisting Shane up by his thighs and throwing him on the bed.

When they were done, and the shower was running in the bathroom, Ilya stretched, checking his phone. Alexei had texted - his father had had a fall apparently. Sprained wrist, but otherwise okay.

Ilya replied, telling Alexei to forward any medical bills. Alexei read the message and didn't reply, and Ilya groaned, tossing his phone to the other side of the bed. He could shower in his own room, he decided, and started picking his clothes up from the floor and tugging them on.

"You're off?" Shane asked, emerging from the bathroom in just his boxers.

"Da. Need to call home."

"Oh, is everything okay?"

Ilya shot him a glance. Shane was wearing this concerned little frown that made Ilya's stomach clench uncomfortably. "Fine, yes. My father had fall, but he is okay."

“Shit, I’m sorry.”

“Is fine, Hollander. I just need to go and yell at Alexei for letting it happen.”

“Who?”

Ilya sat back on the edge of the bed, pulling on his socks. He forgot, sometimes, that Shane didn’t already know everything. “My bastard brother.”

“Oh.”

Ilya shook his head. “No- is. He is just-... I don’t know. He’s my brother, it’s difficult.”

Shane shrugged, walking a bit closer. “Wouldn’t know,” he said. “Only child.”

“Lucky.”

“Uh, maybe. Go on, go call him. Tell your dad I say get better soon.”

Ilya bit back a smile. “I won’t do that,” he said. “But thank you.”

“Sure.”

Ilya got up, patting Shane on the shoulder as he walked over to the door. Alexei ignored his calls when Ilya got back to his room, so Ilya didn’t get to speak to him. He showered instead, because his sweat was drying on his skin and starting to feel gross. He figured it was pretty early in Russia, he’d try and call Alexei at a better time. Maybe he’d pick up then.

~~

Ilya got back to Montreal and threw himself back into working with Taylor and Wilson. If they made the playoffs, they’d have to beat LA to win the Cup, and the other day’s performance wasn’t good enough. Theriault let him take them to one side of the ice where they could practice alone, and Ilya ran drills with them relentlessly, cursing them out for sloppy passes or weak shots.

“You are playing in NHL!” he yelled, when Wilson’s shot to him flew off to the side. “You see me, yes?! Is me you pass to, not fans watching from seats!”

“Sorry, Roz,” Wilson said, wiping a hand over his sweaty forehead.

“Again.” Ilya said. “We do it until we get it right.”

He kept them on the ice all through lunch, but by the time they were done, he was pretty sure they had three different plays nailed down to perfection.

“Good work,” he told them, taking in their red and bedraggled faces. “Skip gym today, I don’t want you overworking yourselves. Go home, we will win next match.”

“Um... are you allowed to send us home?” Taylor asked.

Ilya shrugged. “You want to leave or you want me to go and find Theriault?”

“We’ll go. Thanks, Rozy.”

“Yeah, thanks Roz.”

Ilya clapped them both on the back, following them off the ice. He was starving after his shower - he had missed lunch too - and left the facility, stopping at McDonald’s on the way back to his apartment. He made sure to toss the wrapping in trash when he got in, otherwise Shane would lecture him about his fast food habits again.

Shane got there a couple of hours later, knocking on the door once before opening it. Ilya paused the TV when he walked in.

“Why don’t you lock your door?” was the first thing Shane said, face perturbed.

“I’m here, nothing’s going to happen.”

“Anyone could just walk in! What if there was a robber?”

“What if there was a boring Captain who wanted to nag me?”

Shane gave him an exasperated look, and then flopped down on the other end of the couch. “You weren’t at the gym,” he said.

“Mm, I tortured the rooks for a long time. Figured they didn’t need to work out as well.”

“And what, you just sent them home?”

“Yes.”

Shane hmph-ed. “That’s not your job. You’re not the Captain.”

“You think I’m going to steal your job?” Ilya asked, smirking.

“No. You should just, like- remember you’re not actually in charge.”

Ilya frowned - Shane was normally climbing on top of him by now. Instead, he was still on the other end of the sofa, his arms crossed. “Are you annoyed with me?” Ilya asked.

“...No.” Shane pulled a face. “I don’t know, maybe. I’m annoyed in general.”

“What, because I let the kids go home? One missed workout is not end of the world.”

"I know that," Shane said through gritted teeth. "But they... listened to you."

"Okay?"

Shane ran a hand through his hair, shaking his head. "No, you know what, forget it. It's fine, it doesn't matter."

"Hollander," Ilya said bluntly. "What is problem?"

"It's just-" Shane cut himself off, and stared at Ilya. "They should have asked me. I'm supposed to be the Captain. But they act like you are."

"...We are on same line. That's all. And I yell at them and tell them what to do all the time. They know you're the Captain."

Shane snorted darkly. "Yeah, everyone *knows* I'm the Captain. They wish you were though."

"Uh, I don't think so," Ilya said, feeling dumb.

"They do. You're better, like-" Shane waved a hand. "They all think you're fun or whatever. They complain when you don't go out. They think you're funny. They all think you're *so great* or whatever, and you've only been here like six months. I think half the team still thought I was called Seth six months in."

"Hollzy," Ilya said, shuffling over to him. "You're being ridiculous."

"Shut up."

Ilya held Shane by his chin, forcing eye contact. "They think I am funny, good to party with. Okay, so what? Are these things that make a good Captain?"

Shane glared at him. "... I don't know. I guess not."

"You are one who wanted me to get along with team in the first place."

"I know. You didn't need to do it so *easily*."

Ilya smiled. "They tease you, I know. They don't think you are fun. But they know you are the best Captain, yes? I am the, um, what is... class joker?"

"Class clown."

"Yes," Ilya nodded. "I am the class clown. You are team captain. Different jobs, hm?"

"I... yeah, I guess," Shane said lamely.

Ilya slid down to his knees, settling between Shane's legs. "Clearly, I shouldn't have sent Taylor and Wilson home without your permission," he said, looking up at him seductively as he began to run his hand over Shane's length, squeezing. "You will let me make it up to you? *Captain?*"

Shane's breath caught, and his hands went to fist Ilya's curls. "Say that again."

Ilya grinned, pulling Shane's trousers and boxers down enough to get his dick out. "I've been bad, Captain." He stroked Shane's dick, letting it harden under his grip. "Are you going to give me punishment?"

"Fuck, Rozanov. Will you-"

"Ah ah ah," Ilya said, shaking his head. "No begging, not this time. Give me order, Captain."

Shane's hands pulled on his hair tighter. "Jesus. Suck me."

Ilya did as he was told.

~~

They had the next Sunday off, but Ilya had been roped into going over to Shane's to help him set up his new desk. He'd been manipulative - he'd asked right after Ilya had come, and Ilya had been too dazed and agreeable to realise what he was signing up for. Now they were stuck in Shane's office, surrounded by large planks of wood and a million little bolts and screws.

"Hollander," Ilya said, looking at the mess. "This will take ages."

"I didn't realise it was flatpack!" Shane exclaimed. "I just wanted a desk big enough to fit both my monitors on."

Ilya sighed. "Okay," he said. "You have instruction manual?"

"Yeah."

"Alright. We will try."

After ninety minutes, they were about half way done, with the desk upside down and two legs attached. Shane had taken over reading the instructions and bossing Ilya about, as Ilya kept screwed together different pieces.

"I don't think that's the right screw," Shane frowned. "It's supposed to be E4."

"You said E5!"

"No, I said E4!"

Ilya grumbled to himself, unscrewing what he had just screwed. "This is torture, Hollander. Why am I stuck doing this?"

“Come on, we’re finding a rhythm!”

“*Finding a rhythm*,” Ilya mimicked. “I could be in bed right now. You know how often I get to lie in? Almost never.”

“Don’t be a baby,” Shane said. “Just think how satisfied you’ll be when it’s done.”

“I’ll be satisfied when I bend you over and fuck you on this fucking desk,” Ilya muttered murderously.

“You won’t do that,” Shane sniped, all prissy in a way that made the corner of Ilya’s lips twitch upwards. “We’re not putting it together just for you to break it again.”

“Ugh. So I am doing this for free?”

Shane flicked him, then handed him the correct screw. “You can still fuck me after, you drama queen. Just in the bed, like normal people.”

“Like *boring* people.”

“Asshole.”

“...I have question,” Ilya said casually, as he twisted the screwdriver. “About French.”

“Yeah?”

“Boizeau said I am plot magnet, what is this?”

“Oh.”

Ilya glanced up, and Shane had gone bright red. “What, he was insulting me?”

“No, he- uh, was it more like *plotte*?” Shane slipped into a perfect French accent seamlessly. Ilya tried not to feel jealous. He didn’t like even having to ask what things meant, but google had been unhelpful. At least Shane wouldn’t laugh at him, Ilya was pretty sure.

“Yes. What does it mean?”

“It- Um, he was saying, like... vagina magnet.”

“It means vagina?”

“Well, um... cunt.” The blush spread to Shane’s ears.

“Ah,” Ilya nodded. “So it was not insult, it was compliment.”

“I guess. Here, you need to screw this one in next.”

Ilya took the next screw. “I can’t keep up with all these fucking languages,” he said. “You know Mitty speaks four? And now I must learn slang in all these languages as well?”

“French is quite similar to English, now you know that it wouldn’t be as hard.”

Ilya scoffed. “Is bad enough I know English - I hate the English, they always act like they were the ones who won the war. I’m not learning the language of the people that surrendered too.”

Shane laughed, like he was joking.

“You aren’t European,” Ilya said haughtily. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Hey, Canada fought in World War two too!”

“Oh, did they also lose twenty-seven million?”

“No.”

“Then shut up.”

“You know...” Shane said airily. “At least Canada was fighting the nazis from the start. I remember learning something about Hitler and Stalin in school, something about Poland?”

“Do *not* bring up Molotov-Ribbentrop pact,” Ilya warned, shaking the screwdriver at him threateningly, “or I will bring up what Japan was up to back then, hm? How would you like that?”

Shane snorted, passing Ilya another screw. “Stop insulting both my languages, then,” he grinned.

Ilya didn’t want to smile back, but his face did anyway.

When they were finally done, Ilya had to admit he was somewhat proud. “It looks good,” he said. “Big. Plenty of space for your fancy business meetings about underwear ads.”

“Shut up,” Shane said. “It’s a cologne ad, I just happen to be in my underwear.”

“Are you sure I cannot fuck you on it?”

Shane hummed. “I guess it looks pretty study...”

Ilya started to manhandle him towards the desk, making Shane laugh.

Chapter End Notes

no hate to the english (as one) or the french, ilya just engages in the classic european pastime of arguing over which country did the most to beat the nazis (the one thing we all agree on is it wasnt america)

Chapter 12: April 2015

Chapter Notes

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

APRIL 2015

Ilya was bored. It was Friday night, and he was alone. Hollander was on another *date*, so Ilya was left with just his right hand to occupy himself with. Technically, he could go out and pick someone up, but he was feeling lazy.

He was starting to really resent Pike and his wife, and their relentless quest to set Shane up. It was getting in the way of his own plans with Hollander. He jerked off in the shower, more for something to do than because he was particularly horny. He wondered if he could fuck Shane in here. Shane would probably refuse at first, he'd be worried about slipping, but Ilya reckoned he could convince him. He was pretty good at convincing Hollander of things when they involved Ilya's dick.

He came to the thought of Shane, wet under the shower and clenching around him, and watched his release trickle down the drain. Well. That was that.

He got out of the shower and towelled himself off, only bothering to put on boxers before going to the kitchen and heating up some soup over the hob. He ate standing up at the counter, dunking bread in the bowl so it would fill him up properly. Then he decided, if he really was going to have a boring night, he may as well go all the way.

He went back to his bedroom, and retrieved one of his books that he kept stuffed in the bottom of his drawer and settled on the bed. He read slowly in English, especially with books like this, and he often had to pause to google a word, but he knew he could do it if he focused.

Political and economic institutions, which are ultimately the choice of society, can be inclusive and encourage economic growth. Or they can be extractive and become impediments to economic growth.

Nations fail when they have extractive economic institutions, supported by extractive political institutions that impede and even block economic growth. But this means that the choice of institutions—that is, the politics of institutions—is central to our quest for understanding the reasons for the success and failure of nations. We

have to understand why the politics of some societies lead to inclusive institutions that foster economic growth, while the politics of the vast majority of societies throughout history has led, and still leads today, to extractive institutions that hamper economic growth.

Ilya had to stop and search up the word ‘impediments’, and the sentences were so long that he kept getting lost, but he pushed through. He was finally a hundred pages in, and he gave himself a mental pat on the back for making it so far. He read slowly and intently as the sun went down outside, following the words with a finger and mouthing along.

He was so engrossed that he jumped when he heard knocking. Glancing at his phone, he saw it was gone half ten, and wondered if one of his neighbours had managed to lock themselves out or something. He dragged himself up and went to his front door.

He blinked when he opened it. Shane was standing there, sheepish. He was dressed all fancy, in slacks and a proper shirt, light blue with just the top button open. Ilya hadn’t known he owned anything other than athletic wear.

“Hollander. I thought you were busy tonight?”

“Uh, yeah. Are you, um-” Shane’s eyes were raking him up and down, apprehensive. “I can go if you’re-”

Ilya glanced down at himself. He was still just in his boxers. “Am not doing anything,” he told Shane quickly. “What happened to your date?”

Shane’s shoulders loosened somewhat. “It was fine. Just... she seemed quite- determined? Was asking about if I wanted kids and shit, I need to focus on hockey. Thought it’d be better not to lead her on.”

Ilya eyed him. Shane was a bad liar. He decided not to press it; at least Shane was here. He jerked his head to invite him in, and Shane smiled in relief. As soon as the door shut behind them, Ilya was grabbing at Shane’s waist as he walked them both to the bedroom.

“Too many clothes, Hollander,” he grinned against Shane’s lips. “This is unfair.”

Shane kissed him hurriedly, as he started unbuttoning his shirt. They tumbled into the bedroom, Ilya knocking Shane onto the bed and getting yanked down on top of him in the process.

“Fuck, you’re needy tonight, hm?” he murmured.

“Piss off, I just- What’s that?” Shane stopped undressing, frowning and reaching underneath himself. Ilya blanched, as Shane pulled out his book.

“Nothing,” he said, trying to snatch it off of him. Shane batted his hands away.

“Why Nations Fail,” he read aloud, smiling delightedly. “What’s this? You tease me about my hockey books and you read this shit?”

Ilya glared at him. “What, I am not allowed to have interests?”

“Are you seriously reading this?”

Ilya kept his mouth glued shut, rolling off of Shane and staring out the window.

Shane paused, and then clambered on top of Ilya, reversing their positions and straddling his lap. “Hey,” he said, gentle, “so you read boring books, it’s not like *I’m* going to judge you for that.”

“Okay. You want to keep talking about this?”

Shane examined the book again, and then looked back at Ilya. Ilya forced himself to look him in the eye.

“I’m just surprised,” Shane said, coaxing. He leant down and kissed Ilya once, close-mouthed. Ilya was too frozen to kiss him back. They didn’t do that. Shane withdrew, looking at him uncertainly.

Ilya swallowed. “...We have to go to events sometimes and talk to men in suits,” he said reluctantly. “They already think I am stupid. I want to be able to keep up with intelligent conversations sometimes, not just talk hockey.”

Shane’s eyebrows furrowed. “No one thinks you’re stupid.”

Ilya laughed shortly. “Yes, they do. My English makes me sound... slow.” He stared at Shane, suddenly urgent, needing him to know. “I’m smart in Russian,” he told him. “I could have gone to university, if not for hockey.”

“Hey, yeah, I know that. I know you’re smart.”

Ilya grimaced. “Is stupid. I cannot even read these books, it has taken me months to get this far.”

“I dunno,” Shane said, glancing at the book, “it would probably take me just as long. I was only ever average at school. I don’t know anything about...” He flipped it over, to the page Ilya had been reading. “‘Urbanization and the emergence of a socially conscious middle and working class’, what the fuck is that?”

Ilya gave him a rueful smile. “I’m not totally sure either. I... Russia is very old country, older than America or Canada. But it has never had freedom, or wealth. I think sometimes about if it ever could, or if those things here might go away.”

“...That makes sense,” Shane said quietly. He still looked slightly perplexed.

“Russia is... complicated, for me,” Ilya said.

“Yeah, I, uh... I figured.” Shane’s eyes darted towards the main room, where the print of Putin still hung on the wall. Ilya’s cheeks burned even more than they were already, humiliation rearing its head at the memory evoked.

“I like to think it could be better, someday. And I read these books, so I can... understand how. And I learn new words. Helps with my grammar.” Ilya wanted to stop talking about this. He prised the book out of Shane’s hands. This time Shane let it go, and Ilya tossed it to the floor. “Does not matter,” he said. “Interruption is done now.” He leaned up to kiss him, but Shane planted his palm on Ilya’s chest, holding him back.

“You really are smart, Roz. It’s obvious.”

Ilya sucked his bottom lip between his teeth harshly. “...You are too polite, Hollander,” he said. “I know how I sound, is okay.”

“Ask me something in Russian.”

“What?”

“Just do it, asshole.”

Ilya sighed. “*What’s your name?*”

“Nyet,” Shane replied confidently.

“That makes no sense.”

“Ask something else.”

Ilya hesitated. “*What position do you play?*”

“Da.”

Ilya stared at him, his throat thick. “Hollander, what are you-”

Shane pressed his hand more firmly into Ilya’s chest. “One more,” he said. “Go on.”

“...*You might be the loveliest person I’ve ever met.*”

“Nyet. See, that’s the extent of my Russian. Two words.” Shane’s hand moved to rest on the side of Ilya’s neck. He looked so sincere, Ilya felt trapped under his gaze. “You live a whole life in another language. You think a few dropped articles matter? Anyone who judges you should fly to Russia and see how well they do.”

Ilya grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him down to kiss him. He squeezed his eyes shut, banishing the tears that were threatening to surface. “Lovely, polite boy,” Ilya whispered

against Shane's mouth. "You let me make you feel good now, yes?"

"Fuck, okay. Yeah."

Ilya rolled them over, finishing stripping Shane of his shirt and the rest of his clothes. He still felt incredibly overwhelmed, and ridiculously charmed and *seen* by the man beneath him. His heart felt uncomfortably large, physically too big, like it was pressing up against his ribs. He kept pressing kisses to Shane's neck as he opened him up.

Ilya didn't get Shane to turn over before he lined himself up. He wanted it like this, wanted to see him, even though he wasn't sure he wanted Shane to be able to see him back. It meant Shane could touch him though, he normally couldn't really do that, and Ilya felt the hands on his back like they were iron-hot as he pressed inside.

"Jesus, Hollander-" he croaked, voice scratchy. His forehead dropped down against Shane's shoulder as he rolled his hips.

"Yeah, like that. S'good, Roz. S'so good." Shane's hands were roaming all over his back, and Ilya bit at Shane's collarbone, mouthing all the skin his lips could touch as he fucked into him.

"Mm, yes. Fuck, you're so- so-" Ilya mumbled, unable to find any words that were appropriate. "You want harder?"

"No, like this."

Ilya moaned, grateful, and continued his slow pace, his mind hazy and every nerve sensitive. It felt like almost too much. Shane whined softly beneath him, and Ilya touched his dick, stroking it in time with his thrusts.

"I've got you, malysh," Ilya whispered. "Is okay, I've got you."

Shane came into Ilya's hand, and Ilya shuddered, hiding his face in Shane's neck as he came too. He held himself there for a few moments, gathering himself, before he withdrew, tossing the condom and wiping his hand with a tissue. He wiped up the lube smeared around Shane's hole as well. Shane's breath caught when Ilya touched him there, and Ilya pressed a kiss to the inside of his thigh, continuing without a word. It was so intimate, but Ilya felt like he was the one exposed right now. He tossed the tissues into the bin beside his bed when he was finished, and dared - almost terrified - to look down at Shane, who was looking at the door regretfully.

"I should go..." he murmured.

"Is late," Ilya said, not wanting him to leave. "You can stay, if you want."

"Yeah?"

"Mhm. Is no problem."

"I'll go in the morning," Shane said.

“Alright,” Ilya said, lying back down and curling around Shane’s body. “Sleep now, yes?”

“Yeah,” Shane sighed, his bones going lax, “okay.”

Ilya rested his head on the pillow, tucking Shane’s head under his chin. As he drifted off, he thought maybe he liked Shane a little more than he had let himself believe.

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Shane was gone when Ilya woke up. Ilya thought maybe he was glad, even though it stung a little too. He knew he’d find it hard to look at Shane right now, until he got his thoughts in order.

He’d always been attracted to Shane. Since they were teenagers, and Shane had approached him in Saskatchewan, cheeks rosy and still a little full from baby fat, so earnest and so fucking *cute* that Ilya felt like he was committing a sin just by shaking his hand. Yeah, Ilya had always been attracted to Shane Hollander.

And yeah, when they had spent those years meeting up whenever they got the chance... Ilya supposed he had been charmed. The way Shane was so dedicated to his craft, the way he rolled his eyes at Ilya’s dumb jokes but still smiled anyway. The way he always reminded Ilya to leave a big tip in the hotel room before he left, because he was embarrassed by their mess but still polite and thoughtful of the fucking hotel staff even as an NHL Captain. Ilya had been endlessly charmed by him.

But that had been okay. This was... more. Ilya didn’t think he was just charmed anymore. He thought he might like to kiss Shane in a way that wasn’t just a prelude to sex again, but tender. He thought he might want to hold Shane’s hand. He wanted to be unbearably soft with him, in a way Ilya had never wanted to be with anyone.

He didn’t know what to do about it.

They had an afternoon game that day, against New Jersey. At least it meant Ilya didn’t have to rush to get to the arena, he had time to shower and talk himself down. It was fine. He would figure it out.

He drove to the arena at midday, getting changed and letting the conversation of the team wash over him. It was their second-to-last game of the official season, and then they were onto the playoffs. They were practically guaranteed a spot, unless Buffalo somehow managed eleven goals in their next game. Still, no one mentioned it. Not until it was official.

“Alright, guys,” Shane started, once everyone had finished getting ready and taping their sticks. “We’re almost there, I know. That doesn’t mean we aren’t going to keep giving it our

all. Don't let us lose this one."

"As if!" Comeau chirped. "New Jersey is for shit!"

"Right!" Drapeau bellowed, banging on his locker.

Shane shot them an annoyed look. "So let's not lose because we got cocky, yeah? Don't start celebrating until the game is over and it's our fans that are cheering."

"Yes, Cap," Stedlund saluted, and the other players started banging on their lockers as well, roaring.

"Come on, then," said Shane, and they all began to file out.

They won, of course they won. Shane was too sportsmanlike to say it, but New Jersey really was a shit team. Even Ilya managed to get two points. He made a show of hassling Taylor and Wilson on their way off the ice, jabbing them in their back with his hockey stick.

"See, that was good hockey," Ilya told them, leaning over their shoulders and grinning. "I didn't know you knew what that was."

"Piss off, Rozy," Wilson complained, as Taylor huffed loudly.

"Now I have seen that, I expect even more. You are going to play like that every game from now on, da?" He bashed their two heads together, helmets slamming into each other. "No more holding out on me, you two."

They shoved him away, grumbling but obviously pleased, and Ilya laughed, following them back to the locker room. Plans to go out were made quickly - an hour for everyone to go home and get ready, and then they would hit the clubs.

"You will be there, right Hollzy?" Boizeau called.

"Sorry, not tonight," Shane said.

"But we won! We won 6-0, even you must want to party after that!"

Shane shrugged, shaking his head. "I've been stuck on babysitting duty, sorry."

"My fault," Pike grinned. "It's date night."

Privately, Ilya thought Pike should just hire a babysitter, rather than use his friend for free childcare on what might be their last night out before the playoffs. And that Shane should learn to say no when people asked things of him. But he kept his mouth shut. It probably wasn't the worst thing if Hollander was busy tonight; Ilya could do with some distance.

He arrived at the club the same time as Drapeau and Miitka, and they headed in together. They found the other guys in the VIP area - practically everyone had joined them tonight, and they were all milling around the tables they had taken, yelling over the thumping music.

“We get hammered tonight, yes?” Ilya said to Drapeau.

Drapeau grinned at him. “Shots?”

“Da.”

They called over one of the serves carrying a tray, taking two each and throwing them back.

“So what do you think, Roz?” Drapeau asked. “Think you might win a second Cup this year?”

“Ah... I do not like to think more than one game ahead.”

“But...?”

“But... we are good team,” Ilya admitted, feeling a little sacrilegious talking about this. “If we are lucky - then maybe. Is certainly not impossible.”

Drapeau nodded, smiling manically. “We’re gonna get so much pussy if we’re Cup winners.”

“Yes, will be very new for you. I will give you tips.”

“Fuck you.”

“No no, I fuck the girls who get wet when they hear I *already* have Stanley Cup.”

Drapeau shoved his chest, and Ilya grabbed onto him, half-wrestling until they nearly knocked over a table.

“You fucking prick,” Drapeau cackled, pushing him away. “Want to try and score again?”

“Yes, I feel like a hat trick.”

Drapeau barked a laugh, and they set off in search of women. It didn’t take long. They found a group that recognised them, and soon enough Ilya was letting a gaggle of tipsy, skantily-clad girls do body shots off him, laying back on a table with his shirt unbuttoned as they took turns balancing shots of tequila on his abs and licking salt off his pecs.

Their lipstick left stains on his chest - it felt tacky, sticking to him even over a thin layer of sweat. He sat up after they had all had a go, and realised he didn’t want to fuck any of them. He was completely disinterested.

He excused himself to the bathroom, slipping out of the crowd and leaving behind an ecstatic Drapeau. He pushed open the door to the bathroom and found an empty stall, relieving himself. He shook his dick when he was done, tucking himself back into his jeans, and took out his phone.

Ilya: hows babysitting?

Shane: im never having kids.

Ilya laughed, muffling it under his palm.

Ilya: is that bad?

Shane: i just got them to bed. bedtime was supposed to be three hours ago

Shane: did you know babies like to pee on you when you try and change their diaper?

Shane: because i learnt that tonight

Shane: i think i need to take a bath in disinfectant when i get home

Ilya: oh no

Ilya: well, im relieved

Ilya: now i know you aren't going to ask me to piss on you

Shane: gross. you're not funny.

Ilya: not a joke! i would do it if you asked, but it would be very hard

Ilya: or rather, not hard at all

Shane: arent you supposed to be out? why are you bullying me right now?

Ilya: bullying you is more fun than body shots

He sent it without thinking. Maybe he had had too much to drink. It took Shane a couple of minutes to reply.

Shane: well, i guess being bullied by you is marginally more fun than getting pissed on

Shane: MARGINALLY

Ilya grinned. He went home alone that night.

Chapter End Notes

maybe no updates for the next few days, im kinda busy, but i'll be back by the end of the week :)

Chapter 13: May 2015 (I)

Chapter Notes

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

MAY 2015

They made the playoffs. Immediately, Theriault threw them into even more punishing practices. They got through the first round, but the first round was the easiest - they were playing against the wild card, Detroit, and progressed to the second round without too much trouble, winning five of the seven games. But then they had to play Toronto, and Toronto was a much better team. Toronto won the first match, Montreal won the second. Now they were onto the third. Playing at home, at least, but they all knew they had lost on that first game, they didn't want to let that happen again.

The locker room was sour as they got ready, everyone quiet as they went about their own individual little superstitions. Even Drapeau and Comeau were quiet and focused as they taped their sticks. There was no more going out, no more partying, no more time off. Not until they were either knocked out, or got to hoist the Cup.

Shane was even quieter than normal as they padded up in the locker room the day of the first Toronto game, glaring at his skates as he laced them tightly. The crowd outside was already loud, echoing down the hallways and reverberating around the room. Ilya pulled on his jersey and sidled over to Shane.

"Relax, Hollander," he said. "We will win, yes? Toronto won't know what hit them."

Shane's shoulders stiffened. "Fuck off," he snapped.

It took Ilya aback - Shane often told him to fuck off, he rarely sounded like he meant it. "...Are you okay?"

"Fine," Shane bit out, standing up. "Get out of my way, I want to go warm up on the ice."

Ilya took a silent step back, letting Shane go. He stared after him in confusion.

"It's not you," Boizeau said.

Ilya looked over. "What?"

"It's not you. It's his birthday today, Capitaine hates his birthday. Best not to talk to him."

Ilya frowned, staring at the door again. "What's so bad about his birthday?"

"Who knows?" Boizeau shrugged. "Maybe he just doesn't like the attention. But he's always in a bad mood today. Just let him mope, he'll play fine, and be back to normal by tomorrow."

Ilya grimaced, and went back to his own spot to go and tape his stick.

The game was tough. Brutal. Ilya stopped chirping after the first period, because he couldn't risk getting thrown into the penalty box for even two minutes. Toronto would score, then Montreal would. Shane would make a goal, and then Toronto would match it. The tension felt heavy enough to crack the ice they were skating on as they entered the third period, the score still tied 4-4.

Hollander was playing like a beast. His face was all flat, hard lines as he shot across the ice, darting between Toronto players and guiding the puck with a deft touch that was a stark contrast to the way his eyes were practically ablaze.

They could only have won the game with Hollander, thanks to a frankly beautiful goal in the last ninety seconds of the match. The team burst into cheers when the buzzer sounded, roaring and throwing their bodies against each other. Shane ignored the celebrations, his expression still one of quiet intensity as they shook hands with the other team and left the ice.

Some of the players clapped Shane on the back as they went back to the locker room, complimenting him briefly, but they didn't try and engage him. Ilya watched the charade, unsure. He didn't like it. Shane had just got them a hard-fought victory, he should be able to smile at least.

There was no going out after this win - they weren't done yet, so even though the mood was jubilant as they all showered and changed, everyone knew they were all going home. Ilya gathered his stuff, walking out of the arena with Drapeau before saying goodbye and heading to his car.

He started driving to his apartment, and then sighed, pulling over and opening the maps on his phone. There was a Whole Foods about forty minutes drive away. He pressed go and followed the directions to the store instead. He went to the bakery section, picking a vanilla-flavoured cupcake with no refined sugar and all-organic ingredients. It looked suitably overpriced and overly-healthy, so Ilya took it to the counter and paid.

He drove to Shane's apartment, taking the cupcake with him and going to knock on the door. It took a couple of minutes for Shane to come and open it.

"Happy birthday," Ilya said, holding the cupcake out.

Shane took one look and slammed the door in his face.

"Oh, Hollander, come on!" Ilya called, knocking again. "Let me in! Don't be in a mood, we just won game! You are twenty-four! Lots to celebrate!"

The door whipped open again, and Shane glared at him. "I don't want to celebrate. Go away, Rozanov."

Ilya shoved the cupcake towards him once more. "You will like. Is boring, like you."

"I don't want it," Shane said flatly.

Ilya pouted. "Well, will you let me in at least? Is cold."

“You could leave.”

“Yes, but we both know I won’t do that.”

“...I- Oh, Jesus Christ, fine!” Shane said, flinging his arms out in exasperation. But he stepped back, and Ilya came in, taking his shoes off, putting the cupcake down on the hallway table.

“Why are you so grumpy?” he asked.

“I’m not.”

“Ah.” Ilya looked at him in amusement. “I see. This is you in a good mood.”

“Look, what do you want?”

Ilya stared at him - the way he was practically vibrating with tension, his jaw clenched, agitation radiating off his body. “I want you to get on your knees.”

“You- what?” Shane said, his voice catching. “Fuck off.”

“Is that what you want?” Ilya asked, furrowing his brows in mock-concern. “I think you are too in your head. Maybe you want to let go for a while, yes?”

“I-...”

Ilya smiled knowingly. “On your knees, Hollander.”

Shane dropped down right there in the hallway, eyes going wide as he gazed up at Ilya.

“That’s it,” Ilya murmured, running his fingers through Shane’s hair. “Such a good boy, when you want to be.”

Shane whined, reaching for Ilya’s waistband. Ilya held his wrist, stopping him.

“No. Use your mouth.”

Shane hesitated, Ilya could see his mind fighting an internal battle, but then he nodded, leaning forward and biting the top of Ilya’s sweats, pulling them down to his knees. God, he looked fucking divine like this. He raised his head again, canines scraping Ilya’s skin as he took Ilya’s briefs in between his teeth and pulled them down too, tugging them over his dick.

“Very good,” Ilya praised. Shane knelt in front of him, mouth still slightly open, waiting like such a good boy. Ilya gripped his dick with his other hand, stroking it, and Shane moaned, needy. “You want?” Ilya asked, and Shane nodded. “I don’t know if you deserve... so rude today, Hollander.”

“Please,” Shane said, his eyes starting to glaze over like they did sometimes, when things got like this.

“Acting like such a bitch. Maybe I remind you what your mouth should be used for, hm?”

Shane nodded, his mouth opening wider in anticipation, tongue hanging out. Ilya tapped the head of his cock on it, once, twice.

“Give it kiss, Hollander. Nice one, in apology.”

Shane flushed, but kissed the tip of Ilya’s dick, tongue running over the slit. Ilya suppressed a groan, his knuckles going white in Shane’s hair.

“There we go,” he said. “See, this is much better.”

Shane looked up at Ilya hopefully, face burning red but still waiting, pliant and obedient.

“I’m going to fuck your face now,” Ilya told him. “Hands behind your back.”

Shane nodded again, eagerly this time, putting his hands behind his back. Ilya guided Shane’s head onto his cock - fuck, he felt so good, every time. A perfect fucking mouth to wrap around Ilya’s dick, sucking him so well. Ilya moved Shane’s head up and down, controlling the pace, and Shane let himself be moved as Ilya started to move him faster, gagging slightly when Ilya brought him even deeper down, but not resisting at all.

Ilya’s hips started to take over, thrusting, and he switched to holding Shane’s head still as he fucked into his mouth. Shane kept looking up at him as his eyes started to water, Ilya’s cock hitting the back of his throat. He was obviously hard as well, but his hands didn’t move from their place behind his back, keeping still from the neck down as Ilya fucked his face.

“Oh, you’re being such a good boy for me Hollander,” Ilya rambled, as tears began to leak out of Shane’s eyes and drool down his chin. “Made for this, weren’t you? Made to take my cock?”

Shane groaned back, the sound vibrating on Ilya’s dick and making his abs clench. He yanked Shane down on his cock, until his nose was pressed tight against his skin, held him there as he came down Shane’s throat.

As soon as he was done, he knocked Shane backwards so he was lying on the floor, getting down as well and pulling Shane’s dick out, swallowing it down. He barely had it around his lips before Shane was coming too.

After a few seconds, Ilya got up, pulling up his sweats. He helped Shane to his feet in silence, walking him to the living room and lowering him down on the couch. “Feel okay?” he asked, tentative, crouching down in front of him.

“I’m good,” Shane said, but his voice came out wrecked, scratching against the vocal chords with each word. Ilya suddenly felt an immense rush of guilt.

“I get you drink,” he said quickly, getting back up and hurrying to get a ginger ale out of the fridge. He came back, popping the cap and holding it to Shane’s lips. Shane could probably do this himself, but something in Ilya needed to do this, needed to fix what he’d fucked up.

He grabbed a pack of wipes as well, gently wiping away the tear tracks and spit. "Is-... better?" Ilya asked.

"...Yeah," Shane said, voice still hoarse but not as bad as it had been. Ilya felt an almost overwhelming need to wrap him up in his arms and kiss apologies into his skin and tell him how wonderful he was.

"Too rough," he said, stilted. "I'm sorry."

Shane's eyes darted up to meet his. "No, no. It was- I liked it," he said awkwardly, his fingers twitching. "I would have stopped you if I didn't."

Logically, Ilya knew this. He knew Shane could have moved his hands at any time and pushed Ilya away. He could have tapped him and Ilya would have stopped. He still didn't feel reassured.

"You did so well, so-" He cut himself off.

Shane was still staring at him, not looking totally comfortable either. "...Yeah?" he asked, voice small.

Ilya couldn't prevent himself anymore, he clambered urgently onto the couch next to Shane and wrapped his arms around him tightly, holding his head against his chest. "Yes, yes," he said, dropping kisses onto his head. "Loved it, was so hot. You were so hot."

"Mhm?" Shane hummed, letting Ilya indulge himself.

"So good, malysh, amazing. You are like no one else, Hollander."

Shane tilted his head up to look at him, smiling softly. "Okay."

"Okay," Ilya nodded, feeling slightly better now.

They stayed like that for a few more minutes, and then slowly began to detangle and separate themselves. Ilya ran a hand through his hair; he didn't know what he was doing. He wanted so much. He wanted to stay like they had been for hours, with him whispering sweet compliments and Shane nuzzling against him. He shifted away anyway, straightening his clothes and glancing around.

"So, uh..." he started, and then didn't know how to go on.

Shane looked bewildered with himself and slightly panicked, eyes darting around the room like it would provide answers. Ilya wanted so badly to hold him again.

"Do you- did you seriously get me a cake?" Shane asked eventually, huffing a skeptical laugh.

Ilya shrugged. "A cupcake," he corrected. "Does not matter."

"...Could I still have it?"

Ilya blinked in surprise, and then started to nod quickly. “Yes. Yes, of course, one moment.” He barely held himself back from running to the hallway, getting the silly little cupcake that had been left there, ridiculously pleased that Shane wanted it after all. “Is organic, low sugar, all that shit,” Ilya said as he returned, sticking it in Shane’s face ungraciously, too eager. “Vanilla, boring like you.”

Shane smiled sheepishly, taking it from Ilya’s hands and trying it with a small bite.

“Is good?” Ilya asked, before he had even swallowed.

Shane nodded. “...Uh, yeah,” he said. “Sorry I was, like-... whatever. Thank you.”

“Boizeau said you didn’t like your birthday. I didn’t realise how much.”

Shane grimaced, chewing a little more violently. “Yeah. I’m not really a fan of, like, aging. I, um... I shouldn’t take it out on everyone else though. Sorry.”

“Is okay,” Ilya said immediately. He would grant Shane endless bad moods. “And do not worry about aging, Hollander. You are still sexy young thing.”

Shane snorted, looking at Ilya with a mix of exasperation and amusement. Ilya grinned encouragingly, sitting back down on the couch as Shane finished the cupcake, wiping his mouth.

“What is so bad about aging?” he pressed.

Shane sighed heavily. “I dunno. Well, I do- I just... I’m not a prodigy anymore. The older I get, the less I get called that. The less likely it is that I’m going to break records, be the youngest player to ever... anything. I’m just... aging into normalcy.”

“This is not true,” Ilya said bluntly. “Scott Hunter, he is a million years old, he has aged into normalcy. You are- just, ah... hitting your prime, they say?”

“I don’t know,” Shane said. “I thought- thought I’d have achieved more by now. I was supposed to be- you know. The best.”

Ilya frowned. “What have you not achieved?”

“Well, for starters, I don’t have a Stanley Cup yet,” Shane said.

“Give it two months.”

“Still a year after you got one.”

“So?”

“So I won’t be the youngest Captain to ever win a Stanley Cup. That’s still going to be *you*.” Shane rolled his eyes, his fingers playing with the cupcake wrapper, starting to tear it into little pieces. “We even got made Captains the same year, so I wasn’t even the youngest

Captain. They all just said I was the first Asian player to be one instead, they always do that when I do something after you. I hate that shit. I'm not even Asian, I'm Asian-*Canadian*."

"...Sorry," Ilya said lamely.

Shane looked at him, eyes tired. "No, it's not- it's not your fault, sorry. That came out wrong. Though I wouldn't have minded if you were born two months earlier." He smiled grimly. "I guess I'm- every year it gets harder to break records, you know? I don't really like the reminder."

Ilya nodded, trying to understand. "Harder to break youngest player records, maybe," he said. "I think you are not aiming high enough, Hollander."

Shane's eyebrows flew up his head. "What, *me*?"

"Yes. So what, I am youngest player to ever score hat trick in Stanley Cup match. Is true, you can never beat that record. You know what you will do? Be first player to *ever* score four goals. Age does not matter that way, da?"

Shane stared at him. "That's not realistic."

"Not when you were younger, maybe," Ilya said. "You are still getting better every year, okay? Not old and creaky yet. You are going to break records no one even knows *exist*, Hollander."

"...You think so?"

"Oh, yes. I am sure of this."

Shane smiled at him appreciatively. "...Thanks."

"You feel better now?"

"...Uh, I guess. Yeah."

Ilya hummed, chewing the inside of his cheek. He wished he knew the perfect thing to say - he thought even if he was fluent in English, he still wouldn't know. Shane's mind was hard to work out. But Ilya thought he understood bits and pieces, more than he had six months ago. Maybe more than most people. But still not enough. "You want to watch game highlights?" he offered. "We can see you humiliate Toronto in slow motion. Fun, yes? Might even get me hard again, then I can fuck you."

Shane snorted, but tossed him the remote. "You're an asshole."

"Is your birthday, Hollander. I have to see you in your birthday suit, is the rules."

"What rules?"

"Rules of stupid English. You cannot have that saying and then not follow through. False advertising. I will sue."

“Sue who?” Shane grinned.

“I don’t know. Shakespeare?”

Shane laughed, and Ilya felt a deep purr of satisfaction as he turned on the TV.

~~

“Hollander,” Ilya said, when Shane picked up. “Feel like spending your day off getting split open?”

A shocked laugh echoed down the phone. “It’s supposed to be a rest day.”

“I will stretch you out. Very good for muscles. Like yoga, but with orgasms.”

“Oh my God,” Shane said, “you’re ridiculous. Look, I would, but I’ve only got a couple of hours before I need to go to a shoot, then I have a meeting with my agent about a new sponsorship. Today’s the only day I have with no training, so. It’s pretty booked up.”

“It’s supposed to be a *rest day*, Hollzy,” Ilya parroted.

“Yeah, my mom didn’t, uh, get that message.”

Ilya thought, again, that Shane was maybe the nicest person on Earth, and also should be better at saying no to people. “So what are you doing with your precious two hours?”

“I was gonna go for a run.”

“*Rest day*, Jesus.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Shane sighed. “I’m not going to get through the day without going, though.”

“I could go for run,” Ilya said casually.

“...Yeah? You want to?” Shane sounded hesitant. “We won’t have time to fuck after, you know.”

Ilya scoffed. “Yes, I want to. Is very boring doing nothing. Olympic Park, da? I can be there in twenty minutes.”

“...Uh, yes. How did you know that?” Shane asked.

“You told me you liked to jog there, remember? Back when I first joined the team.”

“Oh, right,” Shane said, something in his voice that Ilya couldn’t understand. “I didn’t think- Nevermind. Okay then, um, twenty minutes.”

Ilya changed into gym shorts and a vest and got in his car, driving over to the park. He found Shane at the entrance, stretching in a deliciously tight t-shirt and shorts showing off his thick thighs. Ilya tried to compose himself as he walked over.

“Hollander,” he said. “You are ready?”

Shane grinned at him. “Yeah. You?”

“Yes. How long do you usually run for?”

“Normally five k, but I’m not doing any other exercise today, so I was going to do a ten k. Is that cool?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. Go now?”

Shane set off, and Ilya fell into step beside him. After about five minutes, Ilya realised Shane was keeping determinedly about half a foot ahead of him. Ilya narrowed his eyes and sped up, so he was just in front instead. Immediately, Shane quickened his pace, retaking his place. Ilya huffed, and sped up once more, running at a speed that probably didn’t count as a jog anymore. Before long, they were both sprinting at maximum effort, flying past other members of the public. Ilya was getting out of breath, his face red, but he was *not* going to stop before Shane did.

In the end, they were brought to a sudden halt when a toddler ran out into the footpath, stumbling in an effort not to knock her over. Ilya crouched down, hands on his knees and his lungs burning, fighting to inhale properly. He heard, more than saw, Shane doing the same thing next to him.

“You- asshole,” Shane cursed through his panting. “That was- I think I’m dying.”

Ilya felt similarly. He wobbled off the footpath and collapsed onto the ground, lying back and staring up at the sky, waiting for it to stop spinning. His chest was heaving. “Your fault,” he said. “You- *fuck*.”

Shane sat down opposite him. His face was red, his skin all sweaty. “Well,” he said, still breathless. “Looks like I’m only running however far that was. I dunno if I’m getting back up.”

“So much for rest day,” Ilya grinned.

Shane snorted.

Ilya heaved himself into a sitting position, wishing he had had the foresight to bring a bottle of water with him. He wiped a sweaty hand across his sweaty forehead - it didn’t do much good. His phone buzzed, and he took it out of his pocket. Three missed calls from Alexei, and a voicemail. A text telling Ilya to send more money. Ilya groaned, shoving the phone back in his pocket.

“Everything okay?” Shane asked.

“Yes. Just Alexei.”

“Your brother?”

“Mhm. Siblings are the worst,” Ilya said. “You are lucky you are only child.”

“Uh, maybe,” Shane said, rubbing his nose. “I wouldn’t have minded one.”

“Why? All they do is annoy you and ask for money.”

Shane snorted. “That might just be Alexei.”

“Alexei is especially bad.” Ilya looked at him. “What would you want, brother or sister?” he asked. He wanted to know everything Shane wanted.

“Eh, I wouldn’t really mind. Really, I think it would just be a relief to not have my parents placing all their eggs in one basket.”

“Eggs?” Ilya raised his eyebrows, confused. “What eggs, I do not understand.”

“It just means, like... they have to put all their hopes into me. Because if you put all your eggs into one basket, and then you drop it, then you break all your eggs. So you should, like... have multiple baskets.” Shane frowned. “I guess it’s a weird saying.”

“English is weird,” Ilya agreed, nodding. “But what, you think you are your parents’ only egg?”

“Yeah, like. Literally.” Shane smiled, kind of bitter, as he picked at one of his fingernails.

“They had a pretty hard time getting pregnant. My mom actually had two miscarriages before she had me. They had given up on, like, having children before I came along.”

“That is very sad,” Ilya said quietly. “But a happy ending, yes? They got Shane Hollander.”

Shane sighed heavily. “Yeah.”

“No? This is wrong?”

“No, it’s not, it’s just that- I don’t know. I guess I was like their miracle birth or whatever, so my mom’s a bit... intense. Always wants to make everything in my life perfect. And if they’d had more kids, then maybe I wouldn’t have to, like, be all that.” He sighed again, looking away, staring at a group of teenagers across the grass. “It’s fine, it’s not like a big deal or anything.”

Ilya watched him carefully. “I have heard about your mother. Very big fan of yours. Very... involved.”

“Right,” Shane said, nodding. “I know the guys say, like, tiger mom or whatever. But it’s really not that. She just wants to make my life perfect, and it can be a little much.”

“Like organising sexy underwear ads for you.”

Shane laughed sharply. “Yeah. Or hockey training every day since I was seven. Or meal plans when I was thirteen. Or media training before I was even drafted.”

“That is a lot. Lots of pressure.”

“It’s fine,” Shane said automatically. “I wanted to play in the NHL, she helped me get there. I just- get frustrated, sometimes. I know she means well.”

“Is okay,” Ilya told him. “Family can be, ah, complicated, yes? They love in challenging ways sometimes.”

Shane shot him a smile. “Yeah. Exactly.”

“You are allowed to complain. Is normal to complain about mothers.”

Shane’s face fell. “Shit. I shouldn’t- I’m lucky to have her, I know that. I didn’t mean-”

“Hollander,” Ilya said firmly, “is okay.”

“...What was yours like?”

Ilya stiffened, looking back up at the sky. It was clear blue, nice and soothing, like Mama. “She was... she was a good girl. Traditional. She loved her family and God, she had no use for anything else.” He shrugged listlessly. “Maybe too good. She let Papa walk all over her. But she could be so funny, sometimes, when she wanted to. And very beautiful, always.”

“How- how did she die?” Shane asked.

Ilya took a deep breath. He hated answering that question. “She killed herself when I was eleven,” he said stiffly.

“Oh God,” Shane winced, “I’m sorry.”

“Was long ago.”

Shane shuffled across the grass, and tugged on Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya swallowed and forced himself not to shove the hand away. He looked at Shane instead, dragging his eyes back down to Earth. Shane’s face was sympathetic in a way that should have felt suffocating.

“That’s awful,” Shane murmured, his lips twisting downwards.

It wasn’t like Ilya could disagree, or brush him off. “Yes.”

“You can... you know you can always talk to me about her, yeah? If you want. Or your family, or just... whatever.”

People had said that to Ilya before. Teachers, after his mother had passed, coaches, teammates. Ilya had always nodded, but he had never wanted to accept their offerings.

Carrying all his memories alone had seemed much easier than having to let someone else know all of the weight in order to take some. But Shane was so... sincere, that Ilya thought letting him know might be nice. Might be a relief.

Ilya smiled at him, a little pained. "I... I go to church on her birthday also," he said. He couldn't believe what he was about to ask. "Or, well, Sunday closest. Is next week. I go to cemetery afterwards, talk to her. You could... come with me? If you would want to, I mean. Is not very fun."

"No- I mean, yeah, of course I'll come," Shane said, nodding rapidly. "Of course. I'd love to do that for you."

Ilya nodded back, letting out a long, shaky breath, a huge wave of relief washing over him that he hadn't been shot down. "Okay."

Chapter End Notes

okay for timeline reasons ilya was actually eleven when his mother died in this fic, just think of it as part of the au

Chapter 14: May 2015 (II)

Chapter Notes

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

MAY 2015

They fought Toronto until they scraped through the best-of-seven, winning their fourth game in the sixth round, and the stress of the team was getting heavier and stickier as the possibility of the Stanley Cup became more and more believable. It was like a suffocating fog drenched the rink and the locker room every practice. They were still waiting to see if they were going to play New York or Columbus - Ilya hoped for New York. Scott Hunter wasn't as good as he once was, and easy to wind up on the ice and throw off his game. Columbus was more disciplined.

Even with the crunch and burden that was the playoffs, Ilya found himself going about his life stupidly pleased. He got to talk to Shane Hollander every day, chirp and him and tease him in front of the team and then fuck him when they were alone. He had Shane laughing at his dumb jokes and kissing him in secret. Ilya didn't feel unmoored in Montreal anymore, not when Shane was there to guide him, captaining Ilya's ship and steering him towards calm, safely boring waters.

He was alone tonight - at least so far. Shane was out, another date courtesy of Hayden fucking Pike, but Ilya had a sneaking suspicion of how the evening would end. He occupied himself with mindless TV and scrolling on his phone as he waited.

There was a knock on his door. It wasn't even eight pm yet, and Ilya let himself beam, because the room was still empty and there was no one around to see. He felt smug, and schooled his face into something more arrogant and less infatuated as he opened the door. Shane pushed his way inside, kissing Ilya deeply as soon as the door shut behind them.

"What was wrong this time?" Ilya asked.

"Uh- I don't like gingers?" Shane said, already slightly breathless.

"Good enough," Ilya grinned, picking Shane up by his thighs. Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist, letting Ilya carry him to the bedroom. Ilya fucked him hard and fast - possessive, because Hollander was *his*, no matter what Pike or any stupid dates thought. Only he made Shane come like he was about to die, only he got to see him afterwards, when he was tired out and lovely, only he got to make Shane cry with pleasure and then lick his tears up like they were an aphrodisiac.

Afterwards, when they were both showered and Shane was put together once more, Ilya walked him to the door, unable to resist laying continued kisses on his neck, plastering himself to Shane's side.

“Rozanov,” Shane complained, but doing absolutely nothing to push Ilya away. “I have to go. It’s late.”

“Not that late,” Ilya argued. “You were here in record time.”

“Shut up.” Shane did push him away then, putting a few feet between them. Ilya pouted.

“Fine, I’m stopping,” he said, hands up in surrender. “We could still hang out. I will let you pick something on Netflix, you can show me one of your movies.”

Shane visibly wavered, and then shook his head. “I’m exhausted from all the training, and we have to get up early tomorrow,” he said. “It’s better if I just go home and go to bed.”

“Alright,” Ilya sighed. “Bye, Hollander. Was good to see you.”

“Uh, yeah. You too.” Shane slipped out the front door.

They found out a couple of days later that Columbus had progressed to the third round. Surprise surprise, Scott Hunter had managed to shit the bed at the most crucial time once more. Ilya wished he could have waited another week for his cosmic fuck-up to roll around again, so that Montreal could have glided through to the finals. As it was, they would now have to seriously try, and hope that they outplayed whatever Columbus threw at them.

Ilya kept running plays with Wilson and Taylor - now that the competition was so stiff, they couldn’t rely on Hollander and the first line to carry them to a win. Ilya would have to pull his own weight, and he’d feel more confident if his wings were just a little bit older. He knew they were talented, there was a reason that Montreal wanted them. And having young blood was good, developing your own talent and deepening your bench - it was a good strategy long term. It was less good when you really needed everyone to play perfectly right now. Ilya could see the stress was starting to affect the rooks, and it wasn’t like he could blame them. But he wasn’t sure if they knew how to handle that stress yet, or if they were going to crack on the day.

Ilya woke up early that Thursday, because he had to call Alexei. It was the twenty-first, Mama’s birthday. They had their first match against Columbus that evening, and Ilya wasn’t really looking forward to it. Really, he wanted to curl up in bed all day and rot, but he couldn’t do that.

Alexei picked up after the first ring. For all his faults, Alexei was as serious as Ilya was about their mother.

“*Alexei*,” Ilya said. “*How are you?*”

“...*Fine. You?*”

“*Yes. Okay, I suppose. Is Papa...*”

Alexei grunted. “*He doesn’t realise what today is. We thought it would be better not to tell him.*”

Ilya figured that was probably the right thing to do. *"Have you visited her?"*

"Yes. I took Eva."

"And did you-"

"Yes, Ilya, I got her grave cleaned. It looks nice, I promise. We left flowers."

Ilya exhaled slowly. *"Okay. Thank you."*

"Yeah, well... Don't worry. Mama would-... I don't know."

"...Yeah."

Alexei made a short noise of agreement. They always called on this day, because Mama would want them to talk and to get along. Besides, no one really had really known Mama except her family. And now Papa was losing his memory, only Ilya and Alexei were left.

"Do you remember her thirtieth birthday?" Ilya asked.

"Yes," Alexei said, his voice going somewhat soft in a way it never did. *"You had made her that stupid ceramic pot, it was awful. She loved it."*

"And she got mad at Papa for letting us drink. You were throwing up in the bathroom by the end of the night, I had to distract her so she wouldn't find out."

Alexei chuckled. *"Yeah. That was a good day."*

They didn't mention the next year.

"I should go," Alexei said. *"Take it easy today, okay?"*

"Mhm. You too, Alexei."

Ilya didn't play his best that evening. They lost, and Ilya wished he cared more. But nothing really mattered to him that day. He cornered Shane in the parking lot as they were leaving.

"Hey," he said, the word sounding awkward coming out of his mouth, too big and clumsy.

"Hey," Shane said, leaning against his car. "Don't beat yourself up, yeah? We can still win this thing."

Ilya nodded. "I know. I wanted to, uh-" He swallowed. "I am going to church this Sunday. If you still wanted- you said you would-"

"Oh!" Shane's eyes widened. "Yeah, right. I still want to go. If you want me there."

"Okay," Ilya said. "Come to mine about eight thirty? I can drive us."

"Alright."

“You don’t have to-”

“I’ll be there.”

Ilya managed a smile. “Thank you.”

~~

Shane knocked on his door at eight twenty-five on the dot. Ilya felt all out of sorts, in a suit that was too tight around his neck, and a pit of nausea in his stomach. He grabbed his flowers and keys and went to answer the door.

Shane looked nice. Ilya hadn’t even known he owned a suit, but he’d put one on.

“Hi,” Shane said. “Sorry, I wasn’t sure what to wear, but my mom says it’s better to be overdressed than underdressed, and I can take off the tie if you think-”

“No,” Ilya said. “Is good, don’t worry.”

“...Okay,” Shane breathed. “How, um, how are you?”

Ilya shrugged. “Fine. You- I may not be very chatty, today.”

“That’s okay,” Shane said instantly. “Just tell me what you need, alright?”

Fuck, he was so lovely. Ilya didn’t really want to go to church right now, he just wanted to burrow into Shane’s arms and cry for the next twelve hours. But he took in a deep breath instead. “We can go now,” he said. “I will drive.”

“Okay.”

Ilya had to drive a little farther than necessary to get to the right church - the ones in the city centre had their services in English, and Mama wouldn’t have liked that. She hadn’t liked when their priest used modern Russian during services as well as Church Slavonic, so she certainly wouldn’t have appreciated letting God’s Word be bastardised into an English translation. Ilya went to the one out in the suburbs, a more traditional one that she would have approved of.

“You won’t understand much,” Ilya said, as they got out of the car. “I will let you know if you have to do anything. You mostly just stand there. I won’t make you chant or sing or anything.”

Shane nodded. “Okay. I’m sure I’d just embarrass myself if I tried anyway.”

Ilya shot him a small smile. “Yes, probably. Just stand there and look pretty, you are good at that.”

“Shut up,” Shane grumbled, and they went inside.

It was far less busy than it had been at Christmas. Ilya guessed only the true believers turned up every week. He and Shane stood at the back of the gathering, but it was still relatively close to where the priest would speak, with over half the room empty.

Shane was looking around with wide eyes. Ilya supposed the Orthodox Church did grandeur well, if nothing else. Even a small one like this had the plush red carpeting, paintings and icons with golden frames and a marble lectern for the priest. The Catholics were good at grandeur too, but no one was really as good as the Russians.

When the priest took his place, everyone quieted. He began the Divine Liturgy, and Ilya was able to slip into muscle memory from when he was a child. He knew when to answer, when to bow, when to make the sign of the cross. He noticed, out of the corner of his eye, Shane trying to copy him, half a second behind all the other congregants. It was sweet, in a graceless, bumbling sort of way that made Ilya want to worship him instead.

Ilya tried, like he always did, to take the service seriously. He thanked God for blessing him with his talent for hockey, and his wealth, and good people in his life. He asked for forgiveness for his pride, his envy, his lustfulness, his anger. He promised to try harder, to not be so sinful.

He held Shane back when it was time to take Communion. “Not for us,” he whispered, as other congregants started to queue up. “We go to the back, take blessing.”

Shane frowned, but nodded, following him.

Orthodox Mass was always long, normally close to two hours. Worship was a hardship, like everything else from Russia. But the Eucharist meant it was close to being done. Ilya took his blessing from the priest and guided Shane back to their spot at the back.

Ilya tried not to think about Mama, even though she was the whole reason he was here. It didn’t count if he didn’t go sincerely. She still snuck into his thoughts, though. She had lived such a holy life, until the end. He had never been able to work it out. She must have been so hopeless, to be willing to commit the sin of suicide. She must have lost her faith in the end, to even consider it. He didn’t understand - he probably never would.

When the service ended, Ilya realised his eyes were wet, and wiped them quickly. Shane was staring at him, and Ilya took a shaky breath, leading them outside.

“Boring enough for you, Hollander?” he asked, joking hollowly.

Shane looked at him. “It seemed... morose,” he said.

“I... I don’t...”

“Like, sad. Gloomy.”

“Ah. Yes. Maybe not so much if you understand the words, but... we are there to give thanks and repent, not to have fun.”

Shane nodded. “We didn’t want the bread and wine or whatever? Isn’t that, like, one of the important parts?”

“Yes, is a sacrament,” Ilya told him. “But you are not baptised.”

“Aren’t you?”

“...I am. But I am not in good standing with the church, so I am not allowed to have.”

Shane frowned. “How are you not-”

“Hollander.” Ilya looked at him meaningfully, not saying it.

“I- *oh*.” Shane suddenly looked distressed.

Ilya smiled tightly. “I would have to sit through a very painful Confession if I wanted to ever take the Eucharist again. Is okay. Is not something I believe, remember?”

“...Yeah,” Shane muttered, glancing back at the church.

“Do you want to go home?”

Shane’s eyes fixed back on his. “Don’t you- didn’t you say you, like, talked to your mother or something?”

“We don’t have to, if you are uncomfortable. I will take you home.”

“No, no,” Shane said, shaking his head. “This is- I’m here for you. We’ll do what you normally do.”

“...Okay,” Ilya said, relenting. “We go to cemetery now, then.” He got the two bunches of flowers out of his car and started walking off, Shane following a couple of feet behind. He found Elena’s grave again and stopped in front of it, looking back at Shane. “I just, uh... talk for a bit,” he said. “Let me know if you get bored, we can stop. Or you can leave, I think there is coffee shop down the block.”

“I’m okay,” Shane said quietly. “Take your time.”

Ilya nodded, turning back to the grave. “*Hello, Elena,*” he said, speaking in Russian. “*It’s me again. I hope you don’t mind me coming back.*” He laid the first bunch of flowers at her grave, reciting a prayer for her. Once he had finished making the sign of the cross he sat down, crossing his legs in front of the grave. He took a deep breath.

“*Hello, Mama,*” he started. “*Happy birthday. You would be forty-nine now, if you were still here. Sorry I’m not at your real grave - Alexei said he visited, though. He took Eva. I don’t know if you’d already met her or not, but you have now.*”

"I, um, I suppose I have some things to tell you about. Papa is still struggling. He's not going to get better. Alexei says some days are better than others, but... He forgot your birthday, this year. I know you wouldn't blame him, so I'm trying not to either. It's hard, though. It feels like he just doesn't care enough. He never cared enough about you."

"Sorry, I know you wouldn't want me saying things like that. I think it's the truth, though. He never treated you well. I don't think any of us treated you as well as you deserved, and I'm sorry about that. I could have been a better son for you, when you were alive. I was- was easy to like, and hard to love, I know that." Ilya's voice broke, and he sensed Shane stiffening behind him. He took a few seconds to breathe steadily, and then continued.

"I'll tell you about what you've missed," he said, steering himself to safer topics that wouldn't make him sob. *"We're in the playoffs again. Well, again for me. First time in a while for Montreal. I don't know if we'll win, but we have a shot. I won't win as Captain this time, but if we win, I'll still win for you."*

"You know the Captain. He is, uh, the one I mentioned to you last time. Who was looking out for me. I am- I like him so much, Mama. He's so lovely, to everyone, like you were. So nice to me. He's here today. Because I asked him to come. He came to Mass as well, you'd like that. I know- know you wouldn't approve. But even if you wouldn't approve of what we do together, I think you'd probably still like him. He's, um..."

Ilya took another pained breath. *"He's very kind. Has made being sent to Montreal worth it. And I want so much with him... Okay, okay. I'll stop. But I don't think I'm ever finding my way back to God, Mama. Not if it's between God and him, I'm sorry. I'll still go to church, for you, but I'm not coming back to the faith, if there was ever even a chance of that after you left."*

"Sorry, I know you'd hate to hear that. I... let me think of good things to tell you. I've made some other friends on the team, that's nice. I'm starting to score some more goals, now that my wings are improving. Not like I was in Boston, but more than I was in January... Me and Alexei had a whole conversation without snapping at each other, for you. Things are going okay. Better than they were last time. I don't- I don't want you worrying about me, okay? I'm alright, I promise."

"Okay, Mama. I'll let you go. I'll be back next Christmas, maybe I'll have another Stanley Cup for you then. I- I miss you. I feel your absence all the time, but I hope you're at peace now. You weren't happy, when you were with us, so- so I hope you are now. All that matters is you're happy." Tears were falling down his cheeks now, but Ilya pressed on. *"I'll visit your real grave when I'm back in Russia,"* he promised. *"I'll pray for you, Mama, like you'd want... I love you."* He choked out the last three words, and carefully lay the second bundle of flowers at the grave as he stood up. "Alright," he said, voice thick as he switched back to English, "I am done."

Shane took a step towards him, closing the distance between them and holding Ilya's forearm. "Are you okay?" he asked softly.

Ilya nodded, blinking. "Let's go," he said.

Shane didn't complain when Ilya lit a cigarette as they walked back to the car. He did prise the keys out of Ilya's hands, and Ilya let him, his fingers trembling. Shane drove them home, and Ilya opened the passenger side window to blow the smoke out of. They drove in silence, and Shane parked and walked Ilya up to his apartment.

"What do you want?" Shane asked, when they entered. "Do you want a shower, maybe? Or food?"

Ilya shook his head. "No. I don't know."

"Okay... sit down?"

Ilya sat on the couch obediently. Shane went over to the kitchen area and started making tea. Ilya almost laughed in shock. No one made tea for him. But Shane did, pressing a mug into Ilya's hands. Ilya took it.

"Thank you," he said.

"That's alright."

Ilya drank his tea. He was glad they didn't have a game this evening - he didn't think he'd be able to play. Shane didn't press him to talk, but he was watching Ilya intently as Ilya sipped from his mug. Ilya's brain felt overworked, drained from church and God and graves with the wrong name. Thinking was too hard, right now. He only knew *want*.

"Mama would have liked you," he said after a while, breaking the quiet.

"Oh," Shane said, his eyebrows flying up. "Um, that's nice."

Ilya nodded. He wished Shane was closer, not all the way on the other side of the sofa. "I like you," he added. He put the mug down, turning to look at Shane properly.

Shane laughed, stilted, and ran a hand through his hair. "Yeah, Roz, I like you too."

"No. *Shane*." Ilya stared at him, begging him silently to understand. "I *like* you."

Shane's face went hard. "No," he said shortly. "You, uh- you don't."

"I do."

Shane jumped up suddenly. "Well, yeah," he said, smiling in a way that didn't reach his eyes. "We- we're friends. Listen, I think I should, um, get out of your hair."

"Shane--"

"I- I'm sorry," Shane said, practically fleeing to the door. "I can't- I'll see you at practice." He left, and Ilya stared at his empty mug.

He had thought- well, it didn't matter what he had thought. He'd been wrong, clearly. He sat there, not even crying. He felt terrifyingly empty, sickeningly alone, and worst of all,

betrayed. He hadn't thought Shane would do that.

Chapter End Notes

ik y'all have been eyeing that angst tab... it's about to start earning its keep

Chapter 15: June 2015

I wanna call you on the telephone

I made a thousand people love me

Now I'm all alone

And my resolve is sinking like a stone

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

JUNE 2015

They lost the playoffs to Columbus. Didn't even make it through all seven rounds. Ilya played what was probably the worst hockey of his life, and he couldn't bring himself to care. He blamed it on Wilson and Taylor, even though, in the end, they weren't the ones who had faltered when it mattered.

Ilya hadn't spoken to Shane in ten days, not that he was counting. Had barely even looked at him. Shane hadn't tried to talk to him, and Ilya understood rejection. Shane didn't even yell at him when Ilya fucked up the power plays. He kept his gaze away from Ilya with a steadfast determination.

He was relieved, in fact, when they finally were booted out of the playoffs. It meant he didn't have to come in every day and see Shane's face. He was sick of seeing Shane's face - it felt like a knife to his gut every single time.

Ilya had been so stupid. He never should have said anything, he didn't know what he'd been thinking. He *hadn't* been thinking. His brain hadn't even been working properly, and he'd just gone and- and fucked everything up. He shouldn't have done that. Should never have even thought to take Shane to that fucking church in the first place, that wasn't right, they didn't do things like that. Ilya didn't know why he'd even assumed he could.

Marlow had texted him. *Hey man, tough break. When you going back to Russia, it'd be nice to catch up before you leave if you've got time.* That had been two days ago now, and Ilya still hadn't responded. So now he had three missed calls to deal with as well. At the fourth call, Ilya picked up.

"Oh, he's alive!" Marlow exclaimed. "What, were you drowning your sorrows?"

Ilya had been spending his time in a dark room, alone, drinking vodka. Not because of the loss of the Cup, though. "Yes," he said shortly.

“It’s unlucky, man. I’d say there’s always next year, but you know the Bears are winning it next year.”

“Sure.”

“...You alright, Roz?” Marlow asked, his voice softening. “I know it sucks, you gotta shake it off.”

“I know...” Ilya sighed. “How is the team?”

“Yeah, they’re good. Most of them have fucked off back to wherever they’re from by now. Connors is still here. You hear his girl’s pregnant? He’s had to sell the bachelor pad, he’s living in the suburbs now. Wild stuff.”

Ilya hummed, something inside him pulling on his organs and making him sick. “Is he happy?”

“Uh, yeah, I think so. Caught him looking at rings the other day, so...”

“That’s nice. He deserves that.”

“Yeah, sure... You sure everything’s okay? You sound weird. Are the Voyageurs being dicks, because those games weren’t your fault. Hollander was playing crap, they should be taking it out on him.”

Ilya’s breath caught at Shane’s name. “They’re being fine,” he said. “I am just... tired, I guess. And I hate Montreal.”

“You should come down,” Marlow said. “When do you go home, are you going to the MLH Awards?”

“No, not this year.”

“Well, come back to Boston this weekend. It’d be good to see you. You can forget all about the stupid playoffs.”

“...Alright,” Ilya agreed quietly. He did want to get the fuck out of Montreal. And it would be nice to be back in Boston.

“Awesome. Let me know when you’re back, yeah? We’ll hang out.”

“Yes, okay.”

Ilya drove down the next day. It was a long-ish drive, but it wasn’t like his time was precious. He got to his Boston place early in the evening and texted Marlow, asking him to bring food, because Ilya’s fridge was empty. Marlow turned up with a Chinese takeaway and two six-packs.

“You look like shit,” he told Ilya unceremoniously, as he entered.

“I’ve missed you too.”

Marlow grinned, placing the food on the kitchen island and putting the beer in the fridge. Ilya started digging through the bags - the chicken chow mein was his, he was glad Marlow had remembered correctly.

“I thought you might be too tired to go out,” Marlow said, popping one can for Ilya and sliding it over, before opening his own. “I figured we can hit up some of the bars tomorrow, once you’ve settled in.”

“Okay.” Ilya took his food and his beer and went to sit on the couch. Marlow followed him, stopping to get a fork, because for all the Chinese food he ate, he’d never been able to figure out chopsticks. Ilya rolled his eyes.

“Shut up,” Marlow said as he sat down.

“You have plans for this summer?” Ilya asked.

“Dunno. I’ll probably visit my sister at some point, she’s living in Philly now. Other than that I’ll just hang round here. Connors will probably rope me into doing a bunch of baby-preperation stuff.”

Ilya nodded. “Not so bad,” he said. “Get some rest, eat like shit, sleep.”

“Yeah. What about you?”

“I’m flying back home on Tuesday.”

“Shit, that soon? You normally wait until at least July.”

That had been when Ilya had things to stay for. He had nothing keeping him on this continent right now. He didn’t really want to get into it all with Marlow though. “My father has got quite a bit worse,” he said instead. “It’s best for me to be there at the moment.”

“Damn, I’m sorry. You’re brother still being a dick?”

“Yes.”

“Typical.”

“Very,” Ilya agreed.

“What else is up?” Marlow asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Roz, you look like someone just shot your puppy. What happened?”

“I-” Ilya stopped. What was he even supposed to say? “...I did something stupid.”

“...What did you do?”

Ilya shook his head. "It doesn't matter. It's happened now, no changing it."

"Listen," Marlow said slowly, "if it's that bad, I'm sure you can fix it... Unless, what, is it doping? Money troubles?"

"No," Ilya said, emphatic. "Not- not anything like that. Stop asking about it."

"Girl problems?"

Ilya swallowed, staring down at his food.

"Yes? It's a girl? Fuck, Roz, if it's just a chick, that's fine. Fixable. Apologise for whatever stupid shit you did, buy her something nice and expensive. Problem solved."

"No," Ilya said again, taking a long swig of his beer. "Not fixable. She just- does not want me. So. Nothing to fix."

Marlow stared at him in silence for a few seconds. "...You really like her, huh?"

"Yes. It was a very stupid thing to let happen."

"...Well, you can- Look, break-ups suck, yeah? But you get through them. We'll go out tomorrow, find you the hottest fucking rebound in all of Boston."

The idea didn't appeal to Ilya at all, but he nodded anyway.

~~

Ilya went out with Marlow on Friday, and fucked a girl with big tits and a feather tattoo. On Saturday, he had a threesome with two girls who thought he still played for Boston. On Sunday, he swiped through Tinder until he found a girl who was down to hook-up and went to fuck her. By the time Tuesday arrived, and he was flying back to Russia, he had fucked seven different women.

He felt a little better, for a while. He liked sex, he liked to be desired, he liked to know he was making other people feel good. It didn't do much to stop the feeling of something gnawing at his stomach though, making every step he took feel off-kilter. He still felt embarrassed, for thinking Shane would have wanted more with him. Ilya wasn't the sort of person people wanted more with.

Marlow was good, at least. Ilya wished, not for the first time, he'd never been transferred, and just got to talk shit with Marlow and the Boston players every day, and that he never got caught up in the charms of boring Canadians who made you believe only to slam the door in

your face. Marlow just bought him beers and helped him find women to fuck, it was all so much easier.

He flew directly from Boston - he didn't need to take anything with him, he had clothes and things in Russia. He went with only a rucksack, catching an overnight flight so he could sleep on it.

He landed about ten am Moscow time, queueing to get through passport control and then going to get a cab to Luzhniki. His father's house was a nice one, old and much more extravagant than the Soviet-era buildings. It had been his grandfather's originally - he had been high up in the government, and the Rozanovs had been upper class, even though there weren't supposed to be classes back then or whatever. Then money had got tighter, as the Soviet economy stalled, and Ilya's father had never been quite as successful as his father had been.

But Ilya's father had been proud, he lived a life like he was rich even when he wasn't. It had been okay when Mama was around - she had grown up in a small village before moving to Moscow at eighteen for work, so she was good at saving, and making things last. She sewed and stitched old clothes instead of buying new ones, collected leftovers to make something new the next day, never let anything go to waste. It was only once she was gone that the family finances really fell off a cliff. Now this house was the only thing left. And Ilya's chequebook.

He had his own apartment too, now. He could have gone there. But Ilya wanted to see his family, even though he didn't know why. In his head, it always was better than it was in reality.

It was quiet when he entered, other than the sounds of the TV. Ilya followed the muffled noise to the living room, and found Papa and Karina.

"Hello," he said.

They both turned to look at him. Ilya clocked the look of confusion on Papa's face for half a second, before recognition.

"Ilya," he said. *"You finally decided to come back."*

"I had the playoffs, Papa."

Papa's face went blank again, then angry. *"I don't care what you had, you should be coming home more often. What's so important you think you can ignore your family?!"*

Ilya faltered. *"...Hockey, Papa. In Canada. You know I'm living in Canada, yes?"*

"...Did you win?"

"No. Next year."

Papa scoffed, turning back to the TV. Ilya looked at Karina, and she smiled tiredly at him, getting up. There were bags under her eyes, her hair greasy and pulled back into a tight

ponytail. He followed her out into the hall.

"Sorry," she said. "He gets moods now, don't mind him."

"He always got moods," Ilya replied. "How are you?"

"Fine." She didn't look fine, but Ilya didn't push her.

"Where's Alexei?"

"Work. He should be home by six."

"Okay. Do you want a break? I can watch Papa."

She shook her head. *"You just got in, you must be exhausted."*

"I'm fine, I slept on the flight. Go on, I haven't seen him in ages, I can watch him today."

"...Alright," she sighed. "I have chores I should do anyway. He's fine just watching TV, but you have to remind him to use the bathroom every couple of hours. He's in a diaper, so an accident isn't the end of the world, but-"

Ilya grimaced. *"Okay,"* he said.

"And Ulyana has taken Eva out for a walk, but they should be back soon."

"The nanny?"

Her eyes tightened. *"Yes."*

"Alright. Take a nap or something, Rina, you look tired."

She gave him a blank look and walked away. Ilya went back and watched TV with his father. He got him to go to the toilet every few hours and made him a beef sandwich for lunch. He met the nanny - Ulyana, a young woman with a pretty face and the only person in the house who seemed happy - and got to hold his niece, who cried in his arms until he gave her back.

Alexei got home, and they gave each other a stiff greeting, shaking hands. Karina made them dinner, and they ate in a tense quiet. Alexei gave Papa a cocktail of meds that Ilya hadn't realised he was on, and helped Papa up the stairs and into bed. Ilya went to bed as well, and felt just as empty and alone as he had in America.

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When Ilya woke the next morning, he tried to give his father breakfast, but he refused to eat it. After fifteen minutes of trying to convince him, Ilya had to go and get Karina to help, even though he'd wanted to give her a lie in. She solved the problem instantly - the porridge wasn't in the blue bowl. She emptied the porridge Ilya had made into the correct bowl, and when she put it in front of his father, he immediately started to eat.

"Routine is good for him," she said, as she started to make coffee. *"He won't function if you break it."*

"Sorry."

She clicked her tongue. *"You'll learn. Or not. You'll be gone again soon anyway, so don't worry. We can handle it."*

Ilya looked down at his feet- he wanted to help, but he felt woefully inept. He couldn't even get his father to have his breakfast without asking for assistance. *"Let me know if there's anything I can do,"* he said.

She gave him a stiff smile. *"You keep us afloat, Ilya. You're fine."*

"...Is Alexei...?"

"Work."

Ilya nodded. *"Are you busy today? I was going to go to the gym, but I can stay if you need to-"*

"Go," she told him. *"I will watch Gregori. That's the routine."*

It felt like an insult, but Ilya nodded. He took the coffee she made him and brought it up to his childhood bedroom. The bed was too small for him now, and he'd woken up with a backache. He decided he could stretch it out at the gym, getting changed and leaving for the one he paid for a membership for year-round just to use over summer.

Moscow was cold, in a way that neither Boston or Montreal was. Even in summer, it felt frigid. And things moved slowly in Moscow - burdened with creaking infrastructure and corruption and inflation. The streets were familiar, but not known, like something you saw in a dream that you knew from somewhere but didn't look quite right.

Ilya thought it would be good for him to stay here over summer. He needed as much distance from Shane as possible right now, a continent didn't feel like far enough. Every time Ilya thought about him, shame wrapped around his bones like poison ivy, freezing him in that moment where Shane had said no.

No. You, uh- you don't.

It wasn't true. But it was kinder than what Shane meant, which was *I don't. I don't like you, Ilya.*

Ilya felt so fucking humiliated, because how had he let himself be put in that position? He never let himself get stuck in a place like that, where someone could reject him so bluntly and totally.

Ilya was half-sure he must have imagined the last six months. Because he didn't understand how Shane could live those same six months and not feel something too. They had- Ilya had cried in front of him. Shane had *wanted* him. Shane had been the one to start things up again, he had kept coming back for more.

For more sex, Ilya thought dumbly. It was Ilya who had made it into something it wasn't.

He worked out for three hours. Summer didn't mean he got to stop training, not if he wanted to be in shape for preseason. He used the rowing machine, then pummelled the punching bag until the muscles in his arms were screaming.

When he left, he smoked a cigarette before driving to the cemetery. He probably should have dressed nicer to go and see Mama, but he felt too lazy to do that, even if it was disrespectful or whatever. He didn't have anything for her, and when he got to her grave, the flowers Alexei had left on her birthday must have been cleared away, because it was empty.

He sat down, and opened his mouth, and realised he had nothing to say. What would he tell her? *Mama, a boy has broken my heart. I'm sorry, you were right, I should have found a nice Orthodox girl instead, I never should have left Russia.* He couldn't say any of that. He just sat there, and wished, again, that he wasn't the only one between them who spoke now. He wanted her to say something to him, even though she couldn't. All that was left was a gravestone and a necklace, and neither could tell him that everything was going to be okay.

Eventually, he left to go back home. Ulyana was there when he got back, feeding Eva from her high chair. She smiled at him, waving, and Ilya noticed a fancy bracelet dangling from her wrist. He nodded at her, but didn't stop to talk, going back up to his room.

The Voyageurs group chat was blowing up, and Ilya didn't know whether he had the energy to read whatever they were yelling about today. He was about to ignore it when the preview of a message popped up from Boizeau.

Boizeau: Hollzy, you dog!!! who knew you had it in you?!

Ilya opened his phone, scrolling through the groupchat urgently until he found the link that had started the conversation. It was a People magazine article.

Rose Landry Steps Out With Potential New Love, Ice Hockey's Shane Hollander

Ilya almost didn't believe it, not until he clicked on the link and saw the photos. There Hollander was, walking down the street with Rose *fucking* Landry, his hand in hers, shielding themselves from the flash of cameras.

Ilya felt sick. That wasn't- Shane didn't do this. He went on dates, but he didn't enjoy them, and he always ended up in Ilya's bed. He didn't go out with famous movie stars and let himself be papped.

Ilya wanted to call him, yell at him, plead with him, even. Ilya would take it back. They could pretend it had never happened. Shane didn't have to do *this*. Not unless he wanted to send a very clear message - that Ilya wasn't wanted. At all.

Chapter 16: July 2015

Chapter Notes

cw for homophobic language

What would I even say

I guess it's something that just never goes away

A crowd of thousands came to see me

And you couldn't reply for three days

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

JULY 2015

Ilya spent the next couple of weeks punishing himself by re-reading every article about Shane Hollander and Rose Landry. The press - and the public - already fucking loved them. They had fan accounts on twitter. It was all so-

Rose was showing Shane the high life. They were papped everywhere: a French bistro in Montreal, a Michelin-star restaurant in New York, a sushi bar in LA. All so fucking glamorous and luxurious, as Rose Landry clung to Hollander's arm dressed in Gucci and Louis Vuitton and looked every bit a moviestar darling. Ilya hadn't realised Shane wanted that shit - Ilya could have done better than Russian dinners and homemade sandwiches, if he'd known. They needn't have hung out in his shitty one-bedroom apartment and played video games. Ilya wouldn't have been able to take him out exactly like Rose, but if Hollander had wanted- fancy shit, or whatever, Ilya could have done that for him.

It wasn't the real problem, Ilya knew that. The real problem was Ilya himself. Shane was sending him a message - stay away, I've moved on, keep your distance. Well, Ilya heard that message, loud and clear. Or, even worse, maybe Shane wasn't trying to send a message at all. And Shane just *liked her*, like he hadn't liked Ilya.

People didn't really want Ilya. They wanted him to fuck them, but they didn't really want him. He didn't know why he'd let himself think Shane would be different.

Except... it *had* been different. Ilya had felt it, when they were in bed together, when Shane had smiled at him, when Shane let Ilya be soft and gentle like it was something he wanted

too. He didn't get it. It had *mattered*. It was all that mattered. Ilya wasn't like that with anyone else, he had never been like that with anyone else.

Ilya was sat on the porch, looking at the latest stupid article about Rose Landry and Hollander and wondering, yet again, why he ever tried to be honest with Shane in the first place. Things had been fine - they'd been *good*, why did Ilya think he should go and try and change things? He was on his second vodka and third cigarette. They were keeping him warm, even though it wasn't actually that cold by Moscow standards. The sun didn't set until about nine this time of year, which meant Ilya had a couple more hours until he had to go back inside. Even the sun wasn't that warm in Russia, the rays were cool and sharp and biting, exposing all the desolation of the city. It had a way of worming into the crevices and corners and showing everything for what it was, unflinching and unapologetic.

He didn't really want to go inside until he had to. Papa was in there, and Papa was always confused and mad about something. Karina was always tired and snappy. Eva was always crying. Ilya just needed some quiet, somewhere he could wallow in self-loathing in peace. Let the sun hit his face and bare him and his misery as well, for everyone to see.

The front door opened, and Ilya switched his phone off quickly. Alexei stopped when he saw him, shoulders drooping. He had his own vodka, Ilya noticed.

"...*Oh*," Alexei said. "*You're here.*"

Ilya smiled sardonically. "*Avoiding everyone too?*"

"*Eva is throwing a fit, Karina's pissed. I needed quiet.*"

Ilya tilted his head to the other deck chair. "*I can be quiet.*"

Alexei wavered, looking beleaguered, but sat down. Ilya pushed the pack of cigarettes towards him, and Alexei took one, lighting it. "...*This house is a fucking nightmare*," he sighed, letting out a cloud of smoke.

Ilya hummed. Alexei wasn't wrong. "*Papa isn't really Papa anymore*," he said. "*I didn't realise how bad it had gotten.*"

"...*Yeah*," said Alexei. "*If he could see himself now... he'd want to be put down. But the doctors say it's probably not long anyway.*"

It wasn't unexpected, but it still hurt to hear. Ilya inhaled his smoke, wishing it still burnt his throat the way it did when he was thirteen. "*You and Karina - you're making him as comfortable as possible. I guess that's all you can do.*"

Alexei grunted, tapping his foot and smoking as they watched the road in front of them. There was the occasional car, but the street was mostly empty. "*So, what's the problem Ilya? You're acting like more of a bitch than normal.*"

Ilya sipped his vodka. That didn't burn on the way down anymore either. "...*Is there not enough for me to be pissed about? Mama killed herself, Papa's lost his mind, I'm stuck in*

Canada on a team that can't win a Stanley Cup." He snorted, tapping the ash from his cigarette and letting it fall to the ground. *"Life's going so fucking well."*

"Yeah, you have it so hard, with all your fucking money and cushy fucking life," Andrei grouched. *"You think it's hard seeing Papa like this, try being the one who has to keep telling him that Mama's dead, and Polina's left, and his favourite son fucked off to America."*

"...You asked, Alexei," Ilya sighed. *"I don't want to bitch to you."*

"No, you just want to fucking mope around and pretend you have real problems."

"Don't act so moralistic," Ilya said. *"You don't get to look down on me."* The sun here finds all of us, he thought. No one gets to pretend, not here. Everything gets ripped open and put on display, whether you like it or not.

"No? I'm the one trying to hold our family together, Ilya. You were always spoiled, I always had to be the one to hold everything together, even when we were kids. And you're just as whiny now as you were then."

Ilya looked at his glass, tilting it and watching the liquid slosh around. *"...Ulyana is pretty,"* he mused.

Alexei's eyes widened slightly, alert. *"...I guess,"* he said after a pause.

"She has very nice jewellery, I noticed. How does a nanny afford stuff like that, do you think?"

Alexei glared at him, his jaw tightening. *"Don't, Ilya,"* he muttered.

Ilya dropped the act and scoffed. *"How old is she? Eighteen?"*

"Nineteen."

"Right. No issue, then."

"Fuck you, Ilya! You don't get it!"

"I don't get it?" Ilya growled. *"What's there to get, Alexei? You have a wife, and a kid. What the fuck are you doing, fucking a teenager?"*

"A wife that fucking hates me!" Alexei snapped. *"Ever since Eva was born, she's hated me! Then I made her come back here, to look after our father, and she doesn't look at me with anything but fucking contempt. Papa is angry, always. My job fucking sucks. I have one thing, Ilya, one thing that makes me feel good about my life."*

Ilya shook his head in disgust. *"I send you ridiculous amounts of money so you can snort it away. That's supposed to be your 'one thing', Alexei. Not a teenage fucking mistress."*

"Fuck you, Ilya. She's nice to me. Pretty." Alexei stared forward, his expression downturned and depressed. *"She laughs at my jokes."*

Ilya raised his hands incredulously. *"She laughs at your jokes? That's all it takes? She's practically a child."*

"She's the same age Mama was. And I'm younger than Papa."

"Right," Ilya said, sarcastic, *"because Mama and Papa were so goddamn perfect."*

"It's not like I'm going to marry her. It's just- fun." Alexei swigged from his drink, finishing it in one and wiping his mouth afterwards.

Ilya sighed. *"You're a bad person, Alexei."* He stated it plainly.

"Yeah... Are you going to tell Rina?"

Ilya eyed him, and then turned away, looking forward too. He probably should, it would be the right thing to do. He suspected she might know anyway, based on the way her eyes sharpened whenever Ulyana entered the room. *"The man I love is dating someone else,"* he said bluntly.

Alexei froze, and swivelled his head. *"You- what? Man?"*

"Yes."

"You're a fucking fag?"

Ilya shrugged. *"Half, but I suppose that half matters, especially now."*

"You fucking-" Alexei stopped, mouth hanging open, and then closed his eyes, tilting his head towards the sky. *"...Don't tell Papa, I think hearing that would actually kill him."*

"Of course I won't tell Papa! What, you think I'm stupid?"

"Well why the fuck are you telling me?!"

"I don't know! We've both fucked up, I guess?!" Ilya exclaimed. Then all the fight left him, and he slumped. *"...You asked,"* he said simply. *"I wanted to tell someone. Tell you. And you need me, so you can't tell anyone."*

Alexei rubbed the side of his face with his hand, like he was in physical pain. *"You're such a fucking dick, Ilya,"* he said, his voice strained. *"Leaving us behind for fame and money wasn't enough, you had to go and become a fag as well? It's like you're trying to insult everything about where you come from."*

"I was a fag when I lived in Russia too," Ilya said calmly, taking another sip of his vodka and finishing it, *"but point taken."*

Alexei made a short, disdainful noise. *"Don't act fucking smart. Just keep your- whatever-fucking lifestyle quiet, alright? The Rozanovs don't need their name dragged through the mud any more. I still have to exist here while you go and become an American liberal."*

“...I’m in Canada now. You always forget that.”

“This is so fucking typical of you. You always find a new way to-... whatever.”

“Whatever,” Ilya echoed.

Alexei looked away again. *“Keep it quiet, Ilya. I don’t want to hear about it, and neither does anyone else.”*

“Sure. Try and only fuck the woman you married.”

Alexei rolled his eyes. Ilya waited for him to say something else, but nothing came. He supposed he hadn’t expected anything else.

“Do you want another drink?” he asked eventually.

Alexei paused, and then sighed, nodding once. Ilya poured them both another. They drank together in silence until it got dark. It was probably the closest to getting along that was possible for them. It wasn’t the worst thing, to be tragic and self-pitying with someone else. Then the sun finally disappeared for a few hours. Ilya got to hide again, for a while.

~~

Ilya was tired of fucking women. There were clubs in Russia he kept hitting up, with plenty of women who went home with him and let him fuck them. He was still thinking about Shane, and Rose Landry, and if Shane was fucking her like Ilya was fucking Russian girls. If Shane even thought about him still, when Rose kissed him and undressed for him and sucked his dick. Did she do it better than Ilya?

He thought maybe a guy would stop him from seeing Shane’s face in his eyelids every time he blinked. He knew it was stupid - Moscow had a gay scene; it might be Russia, but it was still a major European city, of course there was a gay scene. It was more underground now than it had been in Ilya’s youth, ever since the propaganda law was passed in 2013, but it still existed. Even so, it would be stupid for Ilya to participate, he was a semi-public figure, more so since Sochi.

But he didn’t care. He felt reckless - more than that, his nerves were practically screaming at him to do something brash and idiotic. He went to one of the seedier places, one that looked discreet from the outside. When he got inside, he got himself a drink, and sat alone, scanning the room. His vodka was watered down, but Ilya should have expected that. He wasn’t here to drink anyway. There was a dark room somewhere in the back, but Ilya didn’t really want to go there.

A guy was making eyes at him. Young, probably Ilya's age, attractive. Smiling at him in question. Another night, they probably would have had a great time together, Ilya could imagine bending him in half and fucking his brains out. Not what Ilya wanted right now, not with the way his stomach was rolling and his head was so loud. He looked away.

He found someone else - older, maybe forties or fifties. He looked angry to even be there. Not someone who would want to talk, not someone who looked like they'd be gentle. Ilya stared at him as he sipped his drink, until the guy looked over and they made eye contact. Ilya swallowed down the rest of his vodka as he stood up, tilting his head as he walked to one of the private rooms.

It was dark inside, it took Ilya's eyes a few seconds to adjust. The room was empty, other than a shelf with lube, condoms and wipes and a bin in the corner. Then the door opened, and the man from the bar entered.

Ilya looked up at him as he lowered himself to his knees.

"Fucking bitch," the man muttered, even as he started undoing his flies. Ilya's cock twitched, and he opened his mouth, waiting as the man stroked himself to full hardness. Then he thrust in, not giving Ilya any time to adjust, and Ilya gagged around him.

The man held Ilya by the sides of his head, fingers fisting into his hair, as he fucked into Ilya's mouth. Ilya took it, trying to lap around the head and swallow when he went in deeper, but the man was going too fast and it was more messy than anything else.

"Take it, you fucking faggot," the man hissed, shoving his dick down Ilya's throat.

Ilya groaned, his mind going hazy as the sensations overpowered him. He started palming himself through his jeans as the man used his mouth, treating him so carelessly, and- *fuck*. Ilya wanted to do a better job, he could give a better blowjob than this, but he could just be a warm mouth too. He let his jaw go slack, focused on letting his throat relax and making the slide easier. It felt like a reprieve, to just be used for a few minutes. He thought about what he looked like now, what a pathetic image he must make, and rutted against his hand, precome leaking into his underwear.

The man came with a groan, holding Ilya down tightly on the length of his cock. When he let go, it took Ilya a few seconds to lean back. He was still touching himself over his jeans, trying to get off even though the friction wasn't quite enough. The man looked down at him, and Ilya didn't know what he was going to do. Offer to return the favour? Or maybe spit on him. Slap him.

He was ashamed how much the thought turned him on. He ground against his palm more insistently, whining softly. In the end, the man just grumbled *"thanks"* and left the room without another word. Ilya pulled himself out of his jeans immediately, jerking off with one hand while sticking his fingers in his mouth with the other, a poor imitation of what he had just had. It was enough, though, and he came all over his palm.

He felt gross afterwards. He cleaned his hands with one of the wipes and left the room, slipping out of the establishment with his hood up and his head down.

He didn't know why he wanted it like that sometimes. He usually liked to be in charge during sex, liked to make whoever he was with feel good. It was simple. But occasionally he just wanted to feel small and stupid and insignificant, which was- weird. Not who he was.

He felt shit now. If it felt good during, for whatever reason, it always felt shit after. He went back to his apartment - not the family house, but his own apartment. He was sure he couldn't bear to look his father in the eyes right now, even if his father wasn't really behind those eyes anymore. Ilya thought seeing his father or Alexei right now would cause him to sink into the ground in humiliation.

He showered when he got back, scrubbing his body until it was red and raw. Like he could erase what he'd just done. It wasn't- he was so needy, all the time, for someone to just pay attention to him. It made him into something wretched. He was supposed to be proud, like Papa, and he let people use him and degrade him, because- what? Because it made him hard? He was so fucked up.

It was late by the time he was finished, and he didn't feel just pure misery anymore. He felt a healthy dose of anger too. It wasn't fair, that this was Ilya's life right now, and Hollander was flying all over North America in a perfect fucking relationship with a perfect fucking moviestar girlfriend. Why did Shane always get to be the perfect one? Why did Ilya never get to have the perfect fucking life?

He knew it was cruel and petty, but he texted Shane anyway.

Ilya: tell me, is the sex terrible??

Ilya: or does she wear a strap-on and fuck you?

Ilya: pretty adventurous for little miss girl-next-door

There was no response, and Ilya growled in frustration, switching his phone back off.

Chapter 17: August 2015

Chapter Notes

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

AUGUST 2015 - SHANE

Does she wear a strap-on and fuck you?

Shane didn't know why he was thinking about this while he was inside his girlfriend. He tried to focus on what he was doing right now. He had Rose underneath him, and her vagina was warm and wet and objectively should feel fucking amazing, so he shouldn't be struggling to stay hard.

He grit his teeth, thrusting harder, and she moaned softly, her hands tangling in his hair. They felt too small, and her long, manicured nails were foreign against his scalp.

"Shane," she said, gentle and pleading. "More, please."

Shane nodded and sped up. Her tits were bouncing, nipples brushing against his chest, and he thought he probably should come soon. It must have been long enough, he wasn't really sure. It felt like it had been a while.

This was always the worst part. He tried to come to the sensations of his girlfriend squeezing around his cock, her sounds, anything. He never did.

Does she wear a strap-on and fuck you?

Fuck. Shane came, like he always did, thinking about things he had absolutely no business thinking about. He rolled off of Rose, not wanting to crush her under his weight, and tossed the condom away. She wasn't panting - she was barely even flushed.

"Did you, uh...?" he asked.

"...Oh, yeah," Rose said. "I'm good, don't worry."

Shane wasn't sure if she was lying or not, but he didn't want to push her, not if that meant the night's activities might be extended any longer. "Are you tired?" he asked. "We can watch TV or something, if you want."

Rose nodded. "Sure," she said, yawning. "I might doze off though. I need to be up early for the shoot tomorrow."

"Me too, I've got to get a work out in before a sponsorship meeting. Alarm for five thirty?"

"Make it five."

“Okay.” Shane tossed her the remote. He had a TV in his bedroom, which was good for when you wanted to fall asleep without silence. “You pick something, I don’t care what.” He set the alarm on his phone as Rose started browsing.

~~

The thing was, he did really like Rose. She was like him - career-minded, wary of the public eye despite it being an inescapable part of her life, and she was genuinely sweet, which Shane hadn’t expected for someone of her level of fame. She hadn’t met his parents yet, except over Facetime, but they were both over the moon.

His dad already had like three jokes about them. “You found someone who’ll give *you* the prenup, huh Shane?” Or, “Look, they’re calling you *Rose Landry’s boyfriend*, do they know you have a name?” They were mostly about how Rose was so much richer and more famous than Shane. But that was fine, he knew his dad was just having fun, and honestly, it was nice to see his parents happy with him rather than quizzing him relentlessly about when he was going to bring someone home. He felt normal, getting teased by his parents and the guys about his girlfriend. Like how they teased Couillard or Berkes. It was good.

So yeah, the sex wasn’t great. Shane thought, if maybe the bullshit with Rozanov had never started, it wouldn’t be such a big deal. Shane wouldn’t know what he was missing out on, and the fine sex would be just that - fine. Acceptable. But he had made a huge fucking mistake that day he gave Rozanov his room number, and a million more after that, so he did know.

Rose had to know too. Even if she was too nice to say anything, there was no way Shane was blowing her mind when they had sex. Which was pretty rare to begin with. They were both busy, and either schedules or exhaustion usually provided Shane with an excuse. But they still had sex, occasionally. Unsatisfying, awkward sex.

Does she wear a strap on and fuck you?

Fuck Rozanov. Really, seriously, honestly - *fuck* Rozanov. Shane didn’t know who the man thought he was, mocking Shane like that. Like it was fucking funny. Like he knew what Shane needed.

Because he did. Because Shane had *let* him know. Because Shane, who was so fucking careful and disciplined all the fucking time, in every area of his fucking life, had for some reason decided that repeatedly bending over for the biggest asshole in the league wouldn’t come back to haunt him.

Of course Rozanov wasn’t just going to let it go. Shane knew - okay, Shane knew he’d been a dick. He’d run away, he shouldn’t have done that. But he couldn’t have let Rozanov just *say*

what it was he'd been about to say. That wasn't their deal. They'd had rules, they'd had a label - friends with benefits. Rozanov had come up with that label, it had been his idea. That had been workable, for Shane. Not what Rozanov had been about to ask for, that wasn't something Shane could give, that wasn't who Shane *was*.

So yeah, Shane had been a bit of a coward, running away, but Rozanov had been the one who started it. He'd been the one to try to change things, when there was no reason to. When things had been fine as they were. And now Rozanov thought he could mock and humiliate Shane for- for what? For things Shane had done *with* him?

But Shane had been... he'd been the one to let Rozanov fuck him. He'd been the more gay one, or whatever. He knew you weren't supposed to say that, but it was true. Rozanov wasn't the one getting on his hands and knees and asking Shane to stick his dick in him. God, Shane never should have done it, especially not with Rozanov.

The thing was, even if Rozanov was an asshole, he'd never made fun of Shane for anything they did in the bedroom before. He'd never acted like what Shane wanted was anything bad, or to be mocked. Shane had even started believing Rozanov didn't actually think Shane's secret desires were anything *to* ridicule.

Of course, Rozanov had just been acting that way because Shane was still sleeping with him. Now Shane had put an end to it all, apparently Rozanov thought Shane was a complete laughing stock. And, unfortunately, he had all the ammunition in the world, and it was all accurate.

Shane hadn't dignified the messages with a response. They'd been sent over a week ago now, and there hadn't been any further contact. Shane hoped that was the end of it, but he was sure it wouldn't be. They'd have to be in the same room come September, and see each other every day. Shane was sure Rozanov would think up new ways to torture him and get back at him.

He finished his zoom meeting - he hadn't been paying attention, but his mom always spoke for him during all this stuff anyway. He'd been roped into doing a new campaign for Rolex, he'd have to do a two-day photoshoot next week. He'd been going to go to his cottage next week, but he supposed he could cut that down to five days.

He thought, a little snarkily, that he had only asked his mom for one week free this year, and he still hadn't got that. But he didn't say anything.

He thought of Rozanov again. *You can say no to things, Hollander.*

Which was so fucking typical, of him to say something like that, like it was so simple. Shane wasn't going to let down his mom, and his agent, and Rolex, who'd been paying him for years at this point, just because Shane wanted a vacation.

But God, it would be so nice to hear Rozanov say that to him again right now. It didn't even matter if Shane actually listened to him - Rozanov was the only person who ever even *noticed* how much Shane did, and acted like Shane didn't have to. God, sometimes it felt like Rozanov was the only person that had ever actually *seen* Shane. Why did it have to be him?

Rose was away for the next few days, shooting in Vancouver, so Shane shot her a quick text, and then was ready to get changed out of his shirt and maybe go and burn some calories on his exercise bike. He didn't get to, because JJ texted, demanding he come over and hang out with the rest of the team.

Shane knew he should be organising this stuff. He knew some of the other captains did - especially over summer, they would organise team get-togethers and things like that. Shane would have an easier job than most, seeing as a lot of the Voyageurs lived in Montreal full-time. But that sort of stuff had never been Shane's specialty, so he mostly left it to JJ, and showed his face maybe one in four times.

He went to this one, because it had been a couple of weeks since he'd seen any Voyageur except Hayden. Luckily, it wasn't too crazy - some of the guys were on holiday, a few (like Rozanov) were back in their home countries. There were still about ten guys milling around JJ's garden when Shane let himself in.

"Capitaine!" JJ exclaimed, throwing his arms up. "You came! Where is the girlfriend?"

Shane chuckled. "She's, uh, filming in Vancouver. Sorry, you're stuck with me."

Drapeau laughed, booming, and grabbed Shane in a headlock, messing with his hair. "We didn't think you had it in you, Hollzy!" he cackled. "What the fuck does she see in you, ay?"

Shane wriggled out of his grip, flushing. He managed another laugh. "Yeah, it's fucking wild."

Drapeau shoved his back, pushing Shane towards the cooler. "Beers and shit in there, help yourself."

Shane looked to JJ.

"Soft drinks inside, if you would prefer," JJ told him. "But don't complain if you get guilt-tripped into being everyone's designated driver."

"No, that's fine," Shane said, going inside. He was sure he'd gone red at Drapeau's manhandling, and really just needed a couple of minutes to compose himself.

He loved hockey, but he thought if there was one thing he would change about it, he'd somehow stop it from being a team sport. The guys on the team were all perfectly nice, but Shane had just never done well in these environments. He'd never been good with casual touch, he struggled sometimes to figure out what was friendly chirping and what were genuine insults.

Even when he was a little kid, he'd never felt like he fit in with the other boys learning to skate. He'd been too focused already, not interested in messing around with the rest of them. Then puberty had hit, and it had all got exponentially worse, as he realised he sometimes thought about men in a way that wasn't allowed if you were going to be sharing locker rooms and showers with other guys. He'd overthought everything, kept to himself the whole time, convinced everyone would be able to tell with just one look at him.

He'd gotten better over the years, but he was never entirely comfortable. But he accepted it as just another thing he'd have to learn to deal with, another way his brain just made life difficult for him. Being awkward in the locker room didn't even raise eyebrows, because Shane was awkward everywhere.

Then *Rozanov* arrived in Montreal, and practically spat in Shane's face. Not intentionally, but that actually made it worse. Roz didn't seem to have any of the same hang ups that Shane did - he was tactile with the whole team, wrestling with Drapeau, shoving around the rooks, physical with all the players in a way that was easy and natural. He held conversations in the showers like it was no big deal, stood naked and proud in the locker room like it didn't even matter. Everything that Shane had had sleepless nights worrying about, Rozanov did so easily. When he was supposed to be the same.

Shane had realised, as they became friends, a part of him also resented Roz. He felt bad about it, because it wasn't like it was Rozanov's fault or anything. But Shane had never done well in the aggressive/playful dichotomy of competitive sports, and for a while he'd been able to blame that on who he sometimes wanted. But then Roz turned up and suddenly, no, it was just Shane who was the problem. Again.

Sometimes, he wasn't sure if he wanted Rozanov, or wanted to *be* Rozanov. It would be easier if he felt just one thing towards the other man. But it was some infuriating mix of envy, awe, desire-

And a nauseating tenderness that Shane refused to examine.

He grabbed himself a ginger ale and headed back out. The guys all wanted to hear about Rose, so Shane told them about when he went to visit her in LA and met some of her famous friends, and they seemed suitably starstruck. He liked this part, at least. He'd never got to join in these conversations before, and even felt a little proud as Comeau slapped him on the back and called him a player.

Everyone else got drunk, and Shane did get roped into giving Drapeau, Stedlund and Wilson a lift home. He really didn't mind; he wasn't going to drink anyway, and it felt good to do favours for the team. Make it up to them for being so dull.

Drapeau stole the aux cord, as Shane started heading to Stedlund's house first.

"...Have you all been keeping up with your training?" Shane asked. "Preseason starts soon."

Drapeau groaned loudly. "Cap, it's a night off. No nagging, please."

Stedlund laughed, and Shane bit back a retort.

"Has anyone heard from Roz?" Wilson asked, frowning. "He hasn't replied to me since the playoffs."

Shane felt a stab of guilt. He really didn't want to talk about Rozanov. He didn't want to think about Roz, let alone talk about him, let alone talk about him with guys on the team. He was

sure he was going red again, and was just glad it was dark now and hopefully no one would notice.

“Me neither,” Drapeau grumbled. “Fucker’s disappeared off the face of the earth.”

“He’s normally sending me and Taylor new plays or something every week. I don’t know-”

“I, uh, I think he’s in Russia,” Shane said, hoping to end the conversation. “He goes back every summer.”

Drapeau scowled. “What, they don’t have cell service over there?”

“Well, I guess he’s just- busy, or whatever.”

“Asshole,” Drapeau muttered. Then they got to Stedlund’s house, and Shane pulled over to let him jump out. He drove to Drapeau’s next, and then he was stuck in the car alone with Wilson. At least they weren’t being subjected to Drapeau’s shitty music anymore. Shane turned on the radio instead, twisting the knob to a more appropriate volume.

Turning the music down just highlighted the silence of the car. Shane didn’t really know how to talk to Wilson - he’d only been on the team a couple of years. Which was probably enough time for Shane to have established a rapport with him by now, but he hadn’t. Shane just knew Wilson and Taylor had flocked under Roz’s wings the first chance they got. Shane couldn’t even blame them, but he still felt like Wilson was aligned against him now, even if Wilson had no idea. He tried to tell himself that his head was being stupid again. He couldn’t take his falling out with Rozanov out on the kid.

“...Looking forward to getting back into it?” Shane asked.

“Yeah,” Wilson nodded. “I know we shit the bed at the playoffs, but I really think we have a chance at the Cup next year.”

“Oh, sure. I think so too.” Shane smiled at him through the rearview mirror. “You’ve come a really long way. We’re lucky to have you on the team.”

Wilson sighed heavily, resting his head against the window. “Thanks,” he said. “Most of the credit goes to Roz, though.”

“Don’t say that, you put in all the work.”

“...You really think he’s just busy in Russia? He seemed down, before we lost. Wouldn’t say why.”

Shane swallowed. “I’m sure he’s out partying and having fun,” he said firmly. “Trust me. It’s Rozanov. He can handle himself just fine, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright, we’re here.” Shane put the car into park. “Drink some water before you go to bed, okay? Or you’ll get a killer hangover.”

Wilson grinned at him. "What, like you would know?"

"I've looked after enough wasted hockey players in my time," Shane said. "Water and a snack, then sleep, yeah?"

"Okay, *Dad*."

"Don't be smart with me, young man."

Wilson laughed at him, climbing out of the car. Shane waited to see him get inside before setting off again, going home. He had a missed call from Rose when he got in, so he called her back as he toed his shoes off, heading for bed himself.

"Hey, you," she said when she picked up. "Where were you?"

"JJ organised a get-together with the guys, I just got back. How's the film going?"

"Eh, it's alright. The director's super nice, but we're not gonna get to leave until like three am. I think I might actually overdose on shitty coffee at this rate."

Shane laughed. "I'm sure it'll be worth it," he told her. "Are you on a break?"

"Mhm. I miss you. I wish I was in bed with you right now, in your nice warm apartment."

"Yeah. I- I wish you were here too. The guys were all begging to hear about you."

"Oh?" She sounded intrigued. "Did you brag about me, Shane Hollander?"

"Of course."

She paused. "...Okay, well, I actually don't have that much time, so--"

"Yeah, yeah. Course. I'll talk to you tomorrow?"

"Sure. And I'll see you again in four days."

"Can't wait," Shane said. "Bye, babe."

"Bye."

She hung up, and Shane was left in the quiet dark of his apartment. He got himself a glass of water and headed up to bed. He wondered if Roza-

No, he didn't want to think about Roz. Shane had purposefully kept distance to try and *stop* thinking about Rozanov. He wasn't indulging himself anymore, and he didn't want to feel like shit.

He couldn't get the image out of his head, of Rozanov's face when Shane had left his apartment. God, he'd looked at Shane like Shane had hit him. Shane had never wanted-

Shane turned the TV on. He didn't want to think about Rozanov.

Chapter End Notes

a shane pov cos my other baby is struggling too

Chapter 18: September 2015

Chapter Notes

spoilers for game of thrones if you still care about that in 2026

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

Cos I know it won't work but make it ache, make it hurt

Keep me a secret

Choose someone else

I'm still hanging off the buckle on your belt

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

SEPTEMBER 2015

"I'll be back next summer," Ilya said. *"Let me know if anything happens."*

Alexei nodded. *"Yeah... you, uh, need a ride?"*

"No. I can get a cab."

"Good."

Ilya shook his hand, polite but with a sharp edge, and left the house. His flight was on time, and he landed in Montreal early on Sunday morning. He'd be jetlagged for the first part of preseason, but it was just preseason. He didn't have to wait for any luggage, so he got through the other side of the airport relatively quickly. He got another cab back to his apartment and let himself in for the first time in months.

He slept fitfully, unsurprisingly. He didn't think he was ready to see Shane again tomorrow. He'd seen him practically every day over summer, in pap photos on his phone, had been shamefully obsessed with looking at them, but still. Seeing Shane in person would be worse. Having to pretend nothing was the matter when he saw him would be worse.

Ilya felt like he'd barely closed his eyes when his alarm started to go off. He cursed himself wordlessly for the millionth time, for ever being stupid enough to let himself get in this position. Just stupid decision after stupid decision.

But he got up and dragged himself to the rink. They had their first friendly in just two days, and Ilya hadn't actually been on the ice in months. It was just a friendly. And Ilya didn't care about hockey right now.

"Roz!" Wilson exclaimed, when Ilya walked into the locker room. Ilya blinked in surprise as he was practically assaulted by his two rooks jumping on top of him.

"The fuck?" he grumbled, elbowing them until they got off him.

"We heard nothing from you, you shit!" Taylor grinned at him. "Just wait till you see how much better Willsy and I have got! My backhand is killer now!"

Ilya huffed a laugh, shoving them out of his way. "Yeah, yeah. I'll believe it when I see it."

The locker room was still only half-full. Ilya's eyes dragged, without his permission, to Shane's locker. Hollander was already here, of course he was. He probably got here at six, waited for someone to come and unlock the doors. He was sat on the bench in front of his locker, looking at his phone. *Probably texting Rose*, a traitorous voice in his head said.

A hand whacked the back of his head, and Ilya looked over.

"Couldn't fucking text, huh?" Drapeau said.

"Fuck you, did you get lonely without me?" Ilya replied, grinned. "Get a life."

"As if. It was a gift, not having to put up with your ugly mug for three months."

"Tell that to your mom, she was sucking my dick last night."

"Shit head," Drapeau chuckled, and Ilya flipped him off, turning back to his locker.

Shane coughed. "Good summer, Rozanov?" he asked. Polite. Too formal.

"Sure," Ilya scoffed, blasé. "I'd missed Russian pussy."

He didn't get a response, not that he'd expected one. Shane turned back to his cubby, shoulders stiff. Ilya carried on talking shit with Drapeau as more players trickled in, avoiding everyone's questions about why he'd gone zero-contact over the summer. Other than Ilya's absence, the big topic of conversation in the locker room was Rose Landry.

Ilya did not involve himself with the guys chirping Shane about his girlfriend. He grit his teeth and ignored them as they teased him. Rose was *too hot* for Shane, she was *out of his league*, *how did you manage to pull her, Hollzy?*

Ilya fucking hated it. Rose Landry wasn't that fucking great. Her movies weren't even good - they were mass market box office slop. Who cared if everyone watched X-Squad. Shane actually liked films, surely he knew that Landry's career was mainstream bullshit. And she wasn't that hot. Anyone could look hot with a team of make up artists and stylists. She should try looking hot after playing a game of hockey and getting punched in the face.

Eventually, it was time to hit the ice, and Ilya wasn't subjected to anymore chatter about how perfect Rose Landry was. Theriault had them taking their time with the warm-ups as they got back into the swing of things. It felt good to be back on the ice, at least. Ilya started racing Drapeau, cheering when he slammed into the boards first, laughing in the other man's face as he followed, seconds behind.

"Boys!" Theriault yelled at them. "Stop fucking about!"

"Sorry, Coach," Drapeau shouted, as Ilya turned his face away and rolled his eyes.

They switched to strategy talk, and then Ilya got to train with Wilson and Taylor, and he let them show off for him a bit. They seemed excited, so he tried to appear pleased with them, even though he really wanted to get out of there. Shane was mere feet away, shooting puck after puck into the net, and Ilya felt like each *whoosh* of the stick was aimed at the back of his knees, like Shane wanted to knock him off balance and bring him crashing to the floor. That's what it felt like.

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Their first game of the pre-season was against Toronto, and they had to travel there to play it. No one took preseason games too seriously, and coaches were more focused on trying out new combinations than fighting for a win. Ilya didn't mind, as long as Theriault wasn't going to take him off centre. He put his headphones on during the long coach journey, ignoring everyone and staring out the window.

He should have been paying attention to what the team was chatting about. Instead, he got a punch to the gut when he skated onto the ice and realised Rose fucking Landry was in the stands. He froze for a second, staring when they put her on the jumbotron, and she showed off her Hollander jersey.

Ilya turned away, as Boizeau started nudging Hollander and waving in delight. Stupid, it was all so stupid. Shane could invite her to his games if he wanted. Who was Ilya to get annoyed? Fucking nobody, that's who. He was absolutely nothing to Shane, clearly.

The crowd fucking loved her. The game started, and every time Shane scored, there was Rose, back on the jumbotron. The crowd was cheering for Hollander, then cheering for Rose. God, what a perfect fucking couple. Ilya wanted to throw his stick onto the ice in a tantrum, but he resigned himself to biting down on his mouthguard and pretending he was anywhere else in the world.

He was itching to get off the ice the whole game. As soon as it was over, he was rushing through the handshakes. He just wanted to get back to the hotel and stuff his head into a

pillow and scream. He was forced to endure more locker room banter about how Shane wasn't going out with the team that night - no no, he had plans with the perfect Rose Landry.

Ilya kept his head firmly down, and did not agree to go out. He snarled at Drapeau to fuck off when asked about his plans, and stalked out as soon as he was dressed. Back in the hotel room, he turned on the sports channel, but they were talking about Rose too, like they were fucking E! and not ESPN. He switched it off. It was like the whole world could think of nothing better to talk about than Shane Hollander and Rose Landry.

He tortured himself with thoughts of what Shane was doing right now. In some fancy restaurant, surely, with tiny portions of a million courses that cost an arm and a leg. Maybe with menus in French that Ilya would be too dumb to read. Rose was probably flirting with him, playing footsie under the table, making Shane blush and grin and- fuck. There were going to be more photos of them online tomorrow that Ilya would have to see. They were going to fuck tonight, probably in this hotel. Ilya was going to be just a few doors down, wide awake and alone and on the verge of tears, and Shane was going to be fucking his beautiful goddamn girlfriend. It was all so fucking awful.

He didn't want to be like this. He didn't want to be so helplessly pathetic. He couldn't let Shane do this to him. Ilya wasn't helpless, he *wasn't* pathetic. He might not be nice or generous or honourable, but he was supposed to be fucking strong. He didn't need anyone, he'd never needed anyone. He told himself he wasn't going to let Hollander make himself feel like this. Hollander could do whatever he wanted, Ilya wasn't going to care anymore.

~~

They played their next four preseason games, and Ilya only managed to get into two fights. No one else wanted to bother getting their face punched over a preseason game; it was so disappointing. He blocked all mention of Hollander and Landry on his socials, he refused to keep up with them anymore. He went out with Drapeau and Comeau and came back the next day with his back scratched up and felt a little better. The wolf-whistles in the locker room helped too, it meant Shane would know. Then he reminded himself he *wasn't caring* about Shane anymore.

They had a dull home game against Philly - neither side got many points, as the younger players spent most of their time on the ice. Theriault was still figuring out who he wanted where, but Ilya didn't care if he was going to spend most of the match on the bench. He just wanted to get back to the regular season, where games actually mattered, and players were feisty and matches were bloody. He wasn't made for this nicey-nice shit. They all trampled back to the showers, and then to the locker room, and Ilya got stuck in an argument with Miity about Game of Thrones.

"He's not fucking dead," Ilya said, *again*, as Miity shook his head.

“We saw him die, dude! He literally bled out on screen!”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “They’re not killing Jon Snow. Get your head out of your ass, Miitka.”

“They killed Ned! And Robb!”

“Yeah, well, they’re not killing Jon. It’s just not happening.”

“But-”

“Oh my God,” Boizeau said loudly, interrupting everyone’s conversations. “Has anyone seen twitter?”

“Why, what the fuck are people on about now?” Stedlund asked, grinning.

“It’s... it’s Roz’s fight,” Boizeau said, sounding dazed.

Ilya snorted. “Which one, Boizy? I’ve had a few.”

“The one with Gusev.”

Ilya’s stomach dropped. “Fuck off,” he said, snatching Comeau’s phone out of his hands, purely because he was closest. Boizeau couldn’t be right; but he was, Ilya saw it, the first thing that popped up on Comeau’s timeline. It was shaky, someone was filming Connors as he struggled to undo the buckle of his helmet and laughing. Probably one of the rookies. But Ilya and Gusev were there in the corner of the footage. Their voices were clear and audible. Not translated yet, but if this was online then it was only a matter of minutes. Ilya watched his own face go flat on the screen a second before he slammed his fist into Gusev’s face.

“Jesus Christ, Roz,” Miity said, staring at his own phone. “You really laid into him.”

Ilya shoved Comeau his phone back, going and gathering up his stuff as quickly as possible.

“Damn,” Drapeau whistled. “What the fuck did he say to you?”

“Nothing,” Ilya snapped. He glanced over - even Shane was peering over Pike’s shoulder to get a look at the video. *Shit*. He finally finished packing his shit and strode out of the room, ignoring all the cries after him.

He drove back to his apartment white-knuckled. His phone kept buzzing and he ignored it. He parked and stormed up the stairs, slamming his door behind him. He already had three missed calls from Shane. Fuck. He texted Marlow.

Ilya: find out which fucker took that video

Ilya: i want them doing suicides until theyre in tears

Ilya: benched. everything. i don’t give a shit

Shane started calling him again. Ilya clicked decline.

Marly: jesus roz, ive just seen

Marly: did gusev really say that shit??

Ilya: find out who it was, marlow

Marly: why'd you let yourself get traded over this???

Shane called again. Ilya clicked decline again. He threw his phone across the room; it landed with a clatter on the floor, he'd probably broken the screen. Whatever.

Fuck fuck fuck. There wasn't supposed to be a fucking video. Jesus fucking Christ. This couldn't be happening, not now. Shane was going to be furious.

Someone started pounding at his door. "Rozanov! Roazanov, open up! I mean it!"

Yeah, definitely furious. Ilya didn't make a move towards the door. The handle clicked anyway, and Shane stormed in.

"I've told you to lock your fucking door," he hissed.

Ilya gulped. "Listen-" he started.

"What the fuck, Rozanov?" Shane yelled. He was red-faced, eyes wide and blazing. "You didn't fucking tell me?! You- How could you never have told me?!"

"It had nothing to do with you," Ilya said curtly.

"It was about me!"

"It was nothing to do with you," Ilya repeated. "I don't allow racists on my team."

Shane threw his arms up, making a strangled, frustrated sound. "You still should have- And what the fuck? You can't just beat someone up because they call me a-" His mouth snapped shut. "...That. Go to your fucking coach or something, you deranged *dickhead*! Why the fuck did you think breaking his jaw was the right thing to do?!"

"I know!" Ilya snapped. "I got mad! He was-"

“I don’t need you fighting my battles for me!” Shane bellowed. “I don’t need a fucking- It’s not your place, Rozanov!” His hands were balled into fists against his head as he half curled in on himself, hunching down.

“He was my teammate! You weren’t there!”

“So you make a complaint!”

“I know! I said I know!”

Shane stood back up straight. “You never fucking think, Rozanov,” he said angrily. “I’m going to need to make a statement about this shit now, you realise that? They’re going to ask me about this at every press conference for the next three months! God, I hope you’re happy with yourself.”

“I’m *not*,” Ilya said emphatically, looking away. “I didn’t know there was a fucking video, did I? No one was ever supposed to know.”

Shane didn’t respond, and Ilya swallowed, still staring at the wall obstinately. He heard footsteps coming towards him, but didn’t turn his head, not until Shane grabbed his face with one hand and forced him to. Ilya felt Shane’s fingers digging into his gums through the skin of his cheeks, like he could squeeze something satisfactory out of Ilya’s mouth.

Shane was looking at him - still mad, but something desperate was in his face as well. “Why didn’t you tell anyone?” he asked, voice cold and trembling. “You might not have got traded, if...”

Ilya sighed, trapped under Shane’s eyes. “I knew you would hate it,” he said. It came out garbled and almost slurred because of the way Shane was still grabbing him. “I beat someone up because of you. Because they called you that. If I said why... I was the one who fucked up. I didn’t want you to have to deal with it all because I fucked up.”

“So you let yourself get traded?”

Ilya shrugged.

“God, Rozanov,” Shane growled, “you’re so fucking- frustrating. You can’t just-” Then Shane yanked him forward the last few inches and kissed him.

Ilya gasped into it, opening his mouth. Immediately, he had his hands on Shane’s waist, holding him tight, attaching their mouths together like he had been parched of it. Ilya’s tongue slid against Shane’s, as Shane’s hands moved to clasp at Ilya’s hair, tugging. Ilya thought they still weren’t close enough, even as their bodies aligned from head to toe. Fuck, he had missed this. He had missed the way Shane kissed, messy and frantic and demanding, like he couldn’t get enough. Like no amount of Ilya was enough for him. Ilya never felt wanted like he did when Shane kissed him.

Ilya moved his hands to Shane’s thighs, picking him up. Shane’s legs wrapped around Ilya at once, and Ilya walked them to the bedroom, not breaking the kiss. He deposited Shane on the

bed, climbing on top of him and grinding down, feeling Shane's hardness against his own. "Fuck, Hollander," he groaned, moving his lips to Shane's jaw.

"Roz."

"Clothes off," Ilya said. "Now."

Shane nodded, scrambling to kick off his track pants and underwear, as Ilya tore his own t-shirt off. He grabbed Shane's dick as soon as it was free, stroking it and spreading the liquid already leaking out around, making it wet. Shane shuddered, a plea falling from his lips.

"Feels good?" Ilya muttered, moving his wrist quicker.

"Get- Roz, I want-"

Ilya grunted in acknowledgement, twisting and using his free hand to take off the rest of his clothes without letting go. Shane pulled on his ass, pulling Ilya back down. Ilya sucked on Shane's pulse point as his dick rutted against Shane's stomach, smearing it with his precome.

"Shane," he whined, overcome with need. "Fuck."

He heard Shane's breath catch. "...Rozanov," he breathed, avoiding Ilya's gaze.

Ilya clenched his eyes shut. His dick was so hard, and he also felt like he was being stabbed with a million tiny needles, pricking every single inch of him and drawing blood. He still didn't want to stop.

He wrapped his hand around both of them. "It's okay," he whispered into Shane's shoulder. "Let me- I'll make you feel good, promise."

"Yeah, just- *do it*, Roz," Shane hissed, nails digging into Ilya's skin.

Ilya jerked them both quickly, panting and slack-jawed. Shane moaned, his hips jolting into Ilya's hand. Ilya didn't want to hear anything but that sound, over and over again. He didn't want Shane able to talk, not if Shane was just going to say *Rozanov* again. He hadn't known his own name could hurt so much. He twisted his wrist, speeding up and scraping his teeth against Shane's collarbone at the same time, too overwhelmed to bite properly.

Shane came with a whimper, his hands clutching Ilya's head and pressing it down against his chest. Ilya came seconds later, even though he didn't want to, didn't want this to end. He hid his face from Shane's gaze, keeping it buried against Shane's heart.

"...Roz," Shane said after a few moments, voice quiet. "You gotta get off."

Ilya didn't want to. He clenched his teeth and pushed himself up, moving to the other side of the bed and lying on his back.

"We- we shouldn't have done that," Shane said.

Ilya shut his eyes, and pretended he was anywhere else. "You kissed me," he said sourly.

“I know, but- We can’t. I have a *girlfriend*.”

“Some fucking boyfriend you are.”

“I don’t- I need to go,” Shane said. Ilya felt the bed move as he got up. He opened his eyes and watched as Shane pulled on his clothes hurriedly, his face a familiar panic that Ilya was growing to hate.

“You’re going to run away? Again?”

“This is- this isn’t my fault!” Shane exclaimed. “You’re the one who- who changed everything! You’re the one who fucked us up! Things were fine, before you went and- and-”

“Just- I’m sorry,” Ilya said, pleading. “You don’t- you don’t need to go. We can talk, we’ll... we’ll figure it out.”

“Figure what out?! We’re not anything, there’s nothing *to* figure out! We had a- a fucking *arrangement*, and we had rules, and you-” Shane shook his head.

“Shane,” Ilya said desperately, his face twisting into something grotesque.

“Just- just don’t post anything, okay? Let the Voyageurs make a statement about the video, and...”

Ilya covered his face with his hand. “Go on, then. Run away again. Back to your fucking *girlfriend*.”

“Shut up,” Shane hissed, but he did leave, and Ilya heard the door slam shut.

Chapter End Notes

okay I KNOW you all hate me

Chapter 19: October 2015 (I)

Chapter Notes

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

Drinking it down

Haunting your city

Falling for anyone awful who tells me I'm pretty

I blocked your number but you didn't notice

Oh god I thought I was too old for this

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

OCTOBER 2015

The video circulated everywhere. Theriault banned Ilya from doing press until the whole thing blew over; Hollander, as Captain, was not granted the same luxury. Ilya watched the interviews in the dark of his apartment or hotel room, alone, after each game. Heard Hollander's same canned answer every time, his eyes dull and absent.

Yes, that language is inappropriate, but violence is never the answer. No, Rozanov shouldn't have responded that way, no, I certainly wouldn't. No, I've never felt hockey was anything but welcoming. This had nothing to do with me, I'd really like to just move on and talk about the game.

All fucking rehearsed and fake. Ilya felt so fucking guilty about it all - it would never have become a thing that needed commenting on if he'd been able to control his temper. The league had suspended Gusev, while they conducted their own 'investigation', but Ilya wasn't holding his breath. The league had never seemed to care all that much about racism, they just didn't like the bad PR. He'd be surprised if there was even a fine at the end of it all.

He was, annoyingly, desperate for nothing but to know whether Hollander had forgiven him yet for causing such a scandal. He had texted Marlow about the leak - the video had been filmed by one of the rooks like Ilya had suspected, just trying to capture an embarrassing moment of Connors'. He had only sent it to his girlfriend, but then she had sent it to her friends, and it had spread through group chats and text threads until eventually it ended up getting posted online.

The locker room was awkward now - no one really seemed to know what to say. Shane and Ilya blatantly ignored each other, although Ilya would give anything to *not* be ignoring Shane

right now. He could respect the wish for distance though, if it meant Shane might talk to him again once the worst of it was over.

They had to fly to play New York. Normally, Ilya would be looking forward to the opportunity to chirp Scott Hunter and see if he could make that vein in his forehead really pop. The idea didn't hold much appeal to him right now though.

They arrived at the hotel when it was already dark, and everyone was quiet and tired as Theriault handed out the room keys. Ilya trailed at the back of the group of players as they all trudged up to their rooms. He was glad when he got to his door and finally got to be alone after so many hours cramped and travelling.

He dumped his bag on the ground and kicked off his shoes, opening the plastic bottle of water the hotel provided and chugging it as he flopped down onto the bed. They had an afternoon game the next day, so at least he could get something of a lie in.

He thought about Shane. He always ended up thinking about Shane. He wondered if he was calling Rose right now, if she was giving him all her attention and reassuring him that yes, Ilya was rotten, no, Shane shouldn't speak to him again. If they would fall asleep on the phone to each other because they just couldn't bear to hang up, like some couple out of a romcom that were so in love they were sick with it. He bet Shane didn't cut short their soft moments after sex, he bet Shane held her for as long as she wanted, because Shane wouldn't hate himself for having sex with her like he did with Ilya.

He wondered if she was going to be at the game tomorrow. Probably - it was fucking New York, there was a decent chance she'd be here even if Montreal didn't have a game. Ilya was going to have to see her face again, see her wearing that jersey with HOLLANDER emblazoned on the back and pretend he didn't want to shriek.

He switched the lamp off and tried to sleep.

~~

Ilya kept his head down as they got ready for the game. Things were still quieter than they should be, the tension between him and Shane clear and stark in the locker room. He didn't care. Let everyone feel awkward, he bet they all still felt better than he did right now.

"So, Cap," Renaud said, breaking the muggy atmosphere. "Your girlfriend gonna be in the stands again? Are we finally going to get to meet her this time?"

"What?" Shane asked, glancing over to Renaud from where he was putting on his pads. "Uh, no. She's not here."

Boizeau pouted. "Come on, Hollzy. I want to hang out with the rich and famous."

"Yeah, well." Shane pulled on his jersey with more force than was necessary. "We broke up, actually. So you'll need to find another in."

Ilya's heart stopped in his chest. The room broke out into murmured questions as he stared at Shane with wide, pleading eyes. *Why? What happened? Look at me.* He was probably being too obvious; this couldn't be a normal reaction. But it was all he could do not to stride over and shake Shane and demand to know everything. When did they break up? Was it because of Ilya? Did it mean there was a chance-

"Tough break, man," Comeau said. "What, did she finally realise you only had eyes for the puck?"

Shane snorted, a beat too late to be natural. "Yeah, something like that. The distance was just too much."

Drapeau reached past Pike to clap Shane on the shoulder. "Plenty more bitches in the sea, yeah?"

"Ye- Um, no," Shane said, frowning. "She's not- We're still friends. You don't need to, like, call her that."

Drapeau blinked, and then shrugged. "Whatever, man."

Ilya realised he was still frozen, and turned around, finishing getting dressed. He played the game, but honestly, he didn't remember much of it. He was too focused on when his next opportunity was to get Shane alone, to talk to him, to figure out what this all meant.

With Rose gone... Rose gone just a week after they had- Maybe it wasn't all hopeless. They won the game, but Ilya refused any offers to go out. He had a good excuse - by all accounts, he and Shane weren't speaking. He let Hollander go out with the team, and went back to the hotel on his own.

He gave it ninety minutes. Even Shane had to be able to finish a single beer and get back to his room in ninety minutes. Ilya wished his heart didn't feel like his heart was beating in his throat as he snuck out and approached Shane's room. He knocked on the hotel door, and waited for Shane to open up. When he did, Ilya pushed his way inside before Shane could argue.

"It's true?" he asked, practically vibrating with the need to know. "You've broken up?"

Shane stared at him; he folded his arms and leaned back against the door. "...Yeah," he said, voice low. "We broke up. Obviously."

"Why?"

"Why?" Shane's eyes widened in disbelief. "Why the fuck do you think? I- I fucking *cheated* on her, Rozanov."

Ilya shrugged. "Plenty of players cheat on their girlfriends. It's not like she was going to find out."

Shane's expression turned to one of outrage. "Yeah, well," he huffed. "I'm not that sort of person. And- and you know what, she's actually really nice."

Ilya heard the words like a slap in the face. He scowled, unable to play it cool.

"She's nice," Shane continued, "and we actually got along, and it was *working*, and I had to fucking dump her, because-..."

"Because you didn't want her," Ilya finished. "You want *me*."

"No."

"Yes. You fucking - you came to my apartment!"

"To yell at you!"

"You kissed me! You wanted it! You *asked* for me to get you off!"

Shane swallowed, not meeting his eyes. "Shut up, Rozanov."

"Did you tell her?" Ilya asked. Stupidly, he wanted Shane to say yes. He wanted Rose Landry to know that she hadn't been enough, that Shane had still wanted Ilya even when he was with her. He wanted Rose to know who he was, and to hate him.

"I... I told her I cheated," Shane said quietly. "Not with who, obviously."

"Was she mad?"

Shane raised his eyebrows. "What the fuck do you think?" he snapped. "I cheated, of course she was fucking mad. She, um..." He trailed off.

"She what?" Ilya pressed.

"...She asked if it was with a guy." Shane's eyes screwed shut for a second.

"Ah." Ilya couldn't help but sound pleased.

"Shut up," Shane said again. "I'm not-"

Ilya didn't want to shut up. He started stepping closer. "She couldn't do it for you, not like I can. She might have been able to suck your dick, she wasn't going to be able to fuck you like you need. You couldn't beg *her* for her nine inches, could you? You need *me*."

It didn't sound as confident as Ilya would have liked. It sounded like he was trying to convince Shane, not that he was informing him. Nonetheless, he kept moving forward, pulled by an undefined force until he was only inches away.

“Oh my God, fuck you!” Shane exclaimed, and Ilya froze when he spotted tears in Shane’s eyes.

“...Hollander,” he said, somewhere between furious and despairing, “tell me you are not crying over *Rose* right now.” Don’t be, he thought. Don’t be crying over her, when you keep leaving me so easily.

“You can’t make fun of me, you asshole!” Shane hissed, wiping at the corner of his eyes frantically. “You weren’t laughing when we were having sex, were you? So don’t laugh at me now.”

“What- Shane, I am not laughing at you.”

“Don’t call me that!” Shane said hysterically. “Stop- stop fucking- I’m not supposed to be fucking Shane to you!”

Ilya held his hands up in surrender, completely lost as to where the conversation had gone. He just knew he’d managed to fuck up somehow, royally. “Okay, Hollander. *Hollander*. Just- no one is laughing at you, okay? Calm, please. No crying.”

“Jesus, *fuck you*,” Shane said, looking at the ceiling like it might provide answers, voice still thick and eyes still shiny with unshed tears. “Just because- because I wanted to stop, you can’t mock me.”

“I do not-”

“*Does she wear a strap-on and fuck you?*” Shane bit back. “*I can’t beg for her nine inches?* You don’t- You can’t use that shit against me, okay? It’s not fair, just because I was the one who- we both did it!”

Ilya felt bile in the back of his throat. “Hollander,” he said gently, “I am not- I’m not mocking you for these things. I would never do that. Is nothing to mock.”

Shane laughed, delirious like he was light-headed. “What would you call it?”

“I was- being mean,” Ilya admitted. “Mocking you for chasing something you didn’t want, maybe. Never mocking you for what you do want. Why would I do that? Your wants match mine, da?”

Shane let out a shaky breath, wiping his eyes again. “I don’t- I’m not gay,” he said.

Ilya wavered. Honestly, he doubted that, but he didn’t think now was the time to pick that battle. “Okay,” he said placatingly. “You must know, Shane, how I-”

“Don’t.”

Ilya couldn’t fucking do this. Why wasn’t he even allowed to say Shane’s name? “Shane,” he said again. “I- I miss you. We can go back. Do it your way, I promise. Rose is gone now.”

“No, we can’t!” Shane sniped. “Because now it’s- it’s all different. We can’t just go back.”

“You really-... you don’t feel anything for me?” Ilya asked, searching his face, looking for a sign of anything. “Because I-”

“I don’t feel anything,” Shane said blankly, looking at the wall. “It was- was just sex. Casual.”

“No.”

“Yes!”

Ilya tried not to physically recoil. “Then we go back to that,” he said, a tinge of desperation seeping into his voice. “I will- will not talk like this again. We just hang out, we fuck, like before.”

“...I think you should go, Rozanov.”

“Sha- Hollander,” Ilya said, correcting himself. “Come on.”

“We’re a bad idea. It’s not- I should have ended it earlier. We shouldn’t have even started to begin with.”

Ilya stared at him, as Shane stubbornly kept his face turned away. Ilya didn’t know what to do. He’d settle for any piece of Shane at this point, and he was being denied all of them.

“...Fine,” he said hoarsely. “If it’s what you want.”

“It is.” Shane straightened himself, and squeezed past Ilya, careful not to even brush against him. “I’ll just- see you at practice,” he said.

Ilya’s eyes closed for a couple of seconds, and he nodded. “Okay,” he said. He left the room.

~~

“You really play in the NHL?” the lady asked.

Ilya nodded. The edges of his vision were hazy, the alcohol making his thoughts sluggish, but the lady in front of him was leaning forward with interest. “For Montreal,” he said.

“Oh, you’re a hometown player!”

“Da.”

“I’m surprised, I thought all hockey players were, like, missing teeth and had bashed in noses. You’re far too good-looking.”

Ilya didn't mention how many of his teeth were false. "I am special case."

She leaned in further, and Ilya slipped his tongue into her mouth. He heard Drapeau causing a commotion somewhere behind him and ignored it. She tangled her fingers in his hair, and the kiss turned sloppy, both of them too drunk for any finesse. Ilya still enjoyed having someone's hands on him, having their lips on his.

"You are very beautiful woman," he murmured in her ear. He felt her shiver under him.

"Do you want to-"

"Yes. Da. Let's go."

She took him back to her place; Ilya sobered up enough on the cab ride back that he could eat her out. She squeezed her thighs around his head, he liked that, liked that she seemed desperate for his tongue and his fingers and his cock. Then she flipped them over and rode him, and he thrust up into her. He kissed her when he came, and tried to feel something other than utter loneliness.

He didn't spend the night. He'd been on a tear recently, stalking every Montreal nightclub and bar and going home with the first woman that smiled at him. It didn't help like it used to. He used to be able to switch one body with another - even when it came to Shane, he used to be able to distract himself for a few hours with a willing partner. Not anymore.

He walked home, because his phone told him it was only thirty minutes, and he thought maybe it was poetic, or something. To walk home alone in the dark and feel sorry for himself. He realised he knew the streets now, the city wasn't as foreign to him as it once was. He knew where to cut through the park to take a shortcut, he knew where would still be open if he wanted to get food, even though it was one in the morning. It was a bittersweet realisation - Montreal had become his new home without him even realising it, and as soon as he did, he wished it never had. Montreal didn't even want him.

~~

"Ilya! I haven't seen you in months!"

Ilya smiled grimly as he entered the diner. *"Sorry. I was back in Russia over summer."*

"Hmm," Nadya hummed, eyeing him. *"I heard you've had enough time to go out partying since you got back."*

"...How did you-"

"My children have the internet, Ilya."

Ilya grimaced. *"Sorry,"* he said again. *"I did miss you."*

"Sit," she told him, leaving no room for argument. *"I'll put in your order."*

Ilya sat at one of the tables near the counter, as Nadya rang him up. She poked her head into the kitchen, saying something Ilya couldn't hear, and then walked over and sat opposite him. She looked at him appraisingly.

"You look down, why are there those bags under your eyes? Are you sleeping well?"

"Sure," Ilya shrugged. *"I mean, I've been busy."*

"Busy plastering yourself all over random women."

"So?"

Nadya tutted. *"I hope your wearing protection, because-"*

"Oh my God!" Ilya hid his face behind his hands. *"Don't talk about sex, ever. Yes, I'm wearing protection. Shut up."*

"...You weren't going out like this before summer."

"...No."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Ilya sighed, looking at the table. *"I dunno. I guess I was... sort of dating someone? Not really, but- We were hanging out. It was nice. Now we're not hanging out."*

"What did she do?" Nadya asked.

Ilya huffed a laugh. *"How do you know I didn't do something?"*

"You? You've never done anything wrong in your life."

Ilya smiled, shaking his head. It was still nice to hear. *"She didn't do anything. She just wasn't interested in me like that."*

Nadya reached over, taking one of Ilya's hands in both of hers. *"Ilya, don't worry. Life has a way of working out. If this girl doesn't want you, it means there is someone better out there. All you can do is focus on what you have control over."*

"I don't... I don't think I really have any control," he said. *"It's always- It's always what does Alexei need, what does Papa need, what does the team need. I don't have control over- anything."*

"...I know," Nadya replied quietly. *"How was Russia?"*

Ilya shrugged. *"The same as ever. I took some pictures for you, do you want to see?"*

“Of course.”

Ilya took his phone out, and showed her the pictures he'd taken of the city when he went on runs. *“Do you remember any of it?”* he asked, as he swiped through the photos.

“Not like this, not what it looks like,” Nadya said. *“I only really remember moments. It looks a lot grander than it feels when you're there.”*

Ilya nodded. *“Yes. Like a house of cards. Grand, but about to collapse at any moment. It was stressful just being there.”*

Nadya squeezed his hand. *“My parents fled with me because they wanted a better life for me,”* she said. *“Our environments... they shape us, especially when we're young. Don't become a house of cards, Ilyusha.”*

Ilya stared at her. *“...I'll try.”*

“Get some rest, okay? I want to see you looking fresh-faced when you come back next time. You need to look after yourself.”

“Okay, Nadya.”

Chapter End Notes

trust the process guys - also i had to update the chapter count because there's still so much to say, and i think shorter chaps with more regular updates just works better, so even though the outline is still pretty much the same, we've still got a ways to go

Chapter 20: October 2015 (II)

Chapter Notes

probably medically inaccurate but just go with it

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

And you close the door and leave me screaming on the floor

Oh baby I just buckle

I can't take it anymore

I let you walk all over me honey

You make me think my therapy is a waste of money

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

OCTOBER 2015

St Louis flew into Montreal the next week for a game. Ilya took his place alongside Wilson and Taylor, crouching down for the face-off. He won, and as soon as he took off, he knew something was wrong, based on the sudden shot of pain going down his left thigh. Still, he carried on down the ice, passing the puck to Wilson.

His leg bothered him the whole game. It wasn't stopping him from skating, though, so he played through it. It wasn't like St Louis was a particularly hard team to beat, and Ilya wasn't one to complain. As he left the ice half-way through the second period, he noticed Shane whispering something to Theriault, and then Theriault turned to frown at him. Ilya grit his teeth and turned to watch the rink.

Theriault grabbed him as Ilya was trying to get to the showers. "Rozanov," he said warningly.

"It's fine," Ilya said.

"What's the problem?"

"...My leg."

"Physio. Now." His tone left no room for argument, and Ilya scowled. He took off all his uniform and padding, so he was just in his base layer, and hauled himself off towards the

Voyageurs' physiotherapists. Their main guy was a grumpy bastard with a French name, so Ilya hated him on principle. He took one look at the door to his office and knocked on the one three doors down instead, for the assistant physio. Ilya thought his name might be Dave. He remembered it wasn't French.

"Come in."

Ilya poked his head in. Dave(?) was typing away at his computer, his examination bed set up in the middle of the room. He was younger than the main guy, probably about thirty, with dark hair and blue eyes that made him look sort of intense. His desk was covered in a mess of papers, bandages, compression tape and other junk. Ilya clocked the mug full of pens and a miniature pride flag.

"Coach sent me," Ilya said. "My leg is hurting."

The physio looked up, and gestured to the bed. Ilya took a deep breath and came into the room, lying down. He was used to this, you didn't play sports professionally and not get used to it, but lying back and complaining about what hurt was never going to be something he was entirely comfortable with.

"What's the problem?"

"Hamstring. I think I maybe pulled it during the game or something."

"Hm. And you played until the end?"

Ilya nodded, and Dave tsk-ed.

"I'm going to try some stretches, okay? Tell me if anything feels wrong."

"Sure."

He held Ilya's knee, bending it and moving it from side to side. Then he pushed it up towards Ilya's chest, and Ilya winced.

"Pain?" Dave asked.

"A little."

"Can you roll over for me?"

Ilya got on his stomach, and Dave started to bend his knee again. This time, Ilya had to stop him. "Ow ow ow," he said, when his leg was at a little over ninety degrees. Dave let him go.

"Yep, definitely a strain. You're walking okay though, and managed to play, so it's not a bad one."

Ilya grimaced, flipping himself back over onto his back and sitting up. "Shit."

“Relax,” Dave said, smiling. “You know the drill. Rest for seventy-two hours, keep your leg iced and elevated. You should be good to play Denver next week if you do all that.”

Ilya nodded. In the grand scheme of things, it really was just a minor injury. Still, it was annoying. “Did you watch the game?” he asked.

“Of course. Nice goal, by the way.”

“Yes. I suppose I’m not allowed to go out and celebrate now.”

Dave laughed. “It’s not swelling, so I’m going to allow you to keep walking. But try and keep being on your feet to a minimum, yeah? You can go for a drink, but no hitting the clubs tonight.”

“Whatever,” Ilya sighed. “Thank you, I guess... Um, Dave?”

“Dan,” Dan replied, and Ilya gave what he hoped was a charming smile.

“Right. Dan. I knew that.”

“Take an ice bath before you head out, okay? And come back if the pain gets worse, or if it starts to swell.”

Ilya nodded, getting off the bed. With the time wasted on the physio, then letting Theriault know about the injury, then taking his ice bath, the locker room was empty when he got back. He changed into his regular clothes, and wondered whether it was worth it to text Drapeau and see where everyone was going. But they’d won, so he’d have to see Shane there, and he’d probably only be able to stay for half an hour anyway, so he decided it wasn’t worth it.

He bumped into Dan again on his way out, and held the door open for him.

“Thanks,” Dan said, and Ilya eyed him as he walked past. He supposed he was good-looking.

“Are you going home?” Ilya asked.

“Hm? Oh, yeah.”

“You want to get a drink?”

Dan blinked. “What happened to the team?”

“Eh, there is only so many hours I can spend listening to hockey players talk about their sticks.” Ilya raised his eyebrows, quirking his lip upwards.

Dan chuckled, glancing around. “...One,” he said, “then you need to go home and rest.”

“Yep. Do you know somewhere?”

“...Uh, sure. If you want.” He seemed hesitant, but Ilya gestured for him to go on. He followed Dan to his car, keeping his eyes on him carefully. He was being a bit impulsive, but there was a thrill that came with it. Dan started to drive, and Ilya hummed.

“Where are you taking me?”

“There’s a bar I like about ten minutes away. It does good food as well, if you’re hungry.”

“Ah. Not really.” Ilya reached over, and placed his hand on the other man’s thigh. Dan jumped under his touch, glancing over as he was driving.

“What are you-”

“How close is your place?”

“...Close.”

“Why don’t we go there instead?”

“Yeah, okay.”

Ilya grinned, and squeezed Dan’s leg. They drove in silence, but Ilya kept moving his hand, teasing, watching for what effect he had. Then they were parking, and Dan led him up to the second floor of an apartment building.

“Probably not as fancy as you’re used to,” he said as he fiddled with his keys.

“I’m sure it’s fine.”

Dan opened the door, and Ilya pushed him inside, kicking the door shut behind both of them. He attached his lips to Dan’s neck, his chest to Dan’s back, holding him still by his waist as Ilya pressed his crotch against his ass. “I want to fuck you,” he murmured. “Where is bedroom?”

“We’re not fucking!”

Ilya went cold, taking two quick steps back. “Sorry. I, ah-”

“No, uh-” Dan chuckled, turning around to face him. “I mean, you’re on rest. You’re not having sex right now.”

Ilya frowned. “Then why-”

“We can figure out some stuff to do, I’m sure.”

Ilya began to smile. “Okay. What stuff, Mr Physio?”

“Come on.”

~~

Ilya lay back on the bed, naked, his head propped up by the pillows, and Dan swung his legs over Ilya's chest. His cock hung heavy in front of Ilya's mouth, and Ilya leaned forward, sucking the head between his lips.

"Oh, fuck," Dan groaned, as Ilya grabbed at the back of his thighs, encouraging him to move. Dan shuffled forward a few inches, allowing Ilya to get more of it into his mouth. He bobbed his head, the angle slightly awkward from this position. It took more effort to hold his head up, his neck already starting to ache, but he was rewarded with another groan.

Ilya sucked his cock, Dan's hands finding a place on his head but not really guiding him, letting Ilya set his own pace. Ilya took him deeper, swallowing around him, swirling his tongue each time he pulled off.

"Shit," Dan hissed. "Yeah, like that."

Ilya preened, his nails digging into Dan's skin he was holding as he sped up. He hollowed his cheeks, sucking hard, and tasted Dan's come as it spurted into his mouth. Ilya swallowed, his head falling back against the pillows.

Dan leaned down, kissing him, and Ilya slid their tongues together, holding Dan's face still so he could make him taste his own release.

"Was good?" Ilya asked.

"Fucking amazing."

Ilya grinned, and started pushing him down by his shoulders. "Your turn."

Dan slid down Ilya's body, and took Ilya's cock into his mouth. Ilya exhaled heavily; he'd got so worked up, just feeling any touch was a relief. He fucked into Dan's mouth gently, and Dan pulled off, laying a hand over Ilya's stomach, holding him down.

"Stay still," he said. "You'll fuck up your thigh even more."

Ilya growled. "Fine. Be good and suck my cock now, yes?"

"Bossy."

Ilya waited, and Dan smirked, and sucked Ilya down again. Ilya restrained himself from moving, but did fist his hands through Dan's hair, moving him up and down. His breathing got more staggered as he got closer to his climax, and he bit down on his lips. "That's good," he hissed. "Going to come down your throat, da? You want it?"

Dan squeezed his hips, looking up at Ilya from under his eyelashes and moaning.

“Good boy. Take it.” Ilya came, some of it leaking between Dan’s lips even as he swallowed most of it. Ilya yanked him back upwards, kissing him again. Dan angled himself over Ilya’s body, seemingly trying to avoid Ilya’s injured thigh, as he kissed him back. Eventually he withdrew, and Ilya let out a breath.

“You liked?” Ilya asked. “Was good for you?”

Dan smiled in amusement. “Yeah, could you not tell?”

Ilya shrugged. “I like to know I did good job.”

“You did...” Dan kissed him again, just a slip of tongue swiping against Ilya’s lips. “A very good job.”

~~

Ilya stayed home the next day, because the team had an away game that he wasn’t allowed to play in. It was annoying, and boring, and he watched it on the TV that night. Hollander got two goals and two assists; Ilya wished he was watching in person. Pixels on a screen didn’t do his face justice, especially when he was high off a game. His heart panged when he saw Hollander grin after a beautiful shot into the bottom left corner of the goal.

Ilya had to stay home the next day as well, because the team was flying back from Florida. On the third day he went in, even though he wasn’t allowed on the ice yet. He sat on the bench and yelled at Wilson and Taylor as they practised shot accuracy, because he thought he might die if he spent another hour lying on his couch alone.

He ate with the kids once practice was over, and then sent them to go start warming up in the gym. He was considering his options - he could just do arms, if he wanted to go and work out. Or he could take another ice bath, but those were especially painful if you hadn’t just done a shit ton of exercise.

“Yo.” Drapeau dumped his tray down opposite Ilya. “We gotta talk to you.”

Ilya looked up from his lunch, as Drapeau and Comeau sat down opposite him. He sighed loudly, to let them know what an inconvenience he thought they were. “What is problem?”

“You and Hollander need to stop fighting,” Drapeau said. “You’re making the whole team out of whack.”

Ilya stabbed his chicken violently. “Oh, sorry you all feel so awkward. Boo hoo.”

“Come one, man,” Comeau said. “It’s worse than when you first joined. I thought you guys hated each other then, this is just plain awkward.”

“Well, I’m not the one with the problem. Talk to Hollander.”

“Boizy tried!” Drapeau darted his eyes around furtively, and leaned in. “Apparently it didn’t go well.”

“Hollzy *yelled* at him,” Comeau added, eyebrows raised in shock.

Ilya grunted.

“Listen, just apologise,” Drapeau said. “Say you’re sorry for beating the shit out of Gusev or whatever Hollander wants to hear, and make nice. You guys were getting along so well last season!”

“Yeah, well. Now Hollander wants to be a whiny asshole. Not my problem.”

“Yes, it is. It’s *all* of our problem, he’s on a warpath right now. You know Hollzy can’t hold a grudge, just man up and apologise.”

Ilya wondered how well Drapeau knew his Captain, if he thought Shane couldn’t hold a grudge. “...Fine,” he said. “I will talk to Hollander. Now go away, stop bothering me.”

The two grinned and left, and Ilya ate the rest of his lunch in blissful silence. He decided he would go to the gym, focus on arms, and annoy the living daylights out of the rooks. He made them do extra squats, because it was the only time he wouldn’t have to do it with them, laughing as they cursed him out, and then focused on weights.

He showered afterwards, and took his stuff back to his car. He was still one of the first to finish; there wasn’t that much to do when you were semi-immobile. He sat in the driver’s seat, opening the window while he waited so he could smoke. He ended up waiting for a little over ninety minutes, as more and more players trickled out of the facility. His fingers drummed against the steering wheel as he watched, chain smoking.

Finally, he spotted Shane leaving with Pike. The last to leave, always. He rolled his eyes and got out of the car, walking over to them.

“Hollander,” he called.

The two looked over to him. Shane instantly looked wary, Pike just looked annoyed.

“What do you want, Rozanov?”

“I need to talk to Hollander,” Ilya said brusquely. “Go away.”

“Hey-”

“It’s fine, Hayd,” Shane said. “Seriously. Go get home, I can deal with him.”

Pike huffed, glancing between Ilya and Shane for a few seconds before leaving. Ilya stood where he was, waiting for him to disappear. Shane eyed the half-smoked cigarette still in Ilya’s hand disapprovingly.

“Put that out.”

Ilya lifted it to his mouth, taking one last inhale before dropping it, stamping it out with his shoe. He nodded his head towards his car and started walking. He heard Shane following.

“How’s your leg?” Shane asked.

“Fine.”

“Does it hur-”

“Get in,” Ilya said, reaching his car and opening the driver’s side door.

Shane wavered at the hood. “I, uh... I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“What, you don’t want to be trapped alone with me?”

“No.”

Ilya paused, pursing his lips in distaste, and then shut the door. He walked over to lean against the hood. They were close like this, only a couple of feet apart. He could have counted the freckles on Shane’s face, if that was something he wanted to do. “...We have problem,” he said.

“What’s that?” Shane said evenly.

“Drapeau and Comeau were hassling me today. Team wants us to kiss and make up.”

Shane’s eyes widened for half a second, before an annoyed expression slid onto his face. “Don’t say it like that, asshole.”

“Okay.” Ilya scanned the empty parking lot. No one was around. He never did well when he got Shane alone, it was much easier to pretend he didn’t want him when there were twenty other raucous hockey players around. Right now, all he wanted to do was grab him and kiss those lips that were pressed into a thin, displeased line. “Still,” he continued. “We need to be able to be around each other.”

“We’re around each other every day.”

“...Are you really still pissed about the video?” Ilya asked.

Shane folded his arms, looking away. “No.”

“Yes?”

“I guess.”

Ilya clenched his jaw. “People are moving on. Will all be forgotten in another couple of weeks.”

“Right,” Shane said sarcastically. “No big deal then.”

“Hollander. Look at me.”

It took a few seconds, but Shane dragged his gaze back to Ilya’s.

“I have apologised,” Ilya said. “You want again? I am sorry. Was big mistake, I know this, but I cannot take it back.”

Shane’s foot scuffed against the gravel. “...Yeah,” he sighed, “I know. It’s- look, it’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

“No it’s not. Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not! I’m saying it’s fine!”

“It’s clearly not fine.”

“I just-” Shane swallowed. “You embarrassed me, Roz.”

“How did I embarrass you?”

“Because, it looks like I had to get my fucking- fucking *rival* to defend me! As if being the only Asian guy in the league isn’t enough, now everyone knows someone insulted me for it, and I look *weak*. You get to be the fucking... white knight, or whatever, and I’m just... helpless.”

“You’re not helpless,” Ilya said. “You weren’t there.”

“Yeah, but it *looks* like-”

“I know. I didn’t want people seeing, remember? I knew you would not like. I didn’t know there was video, I swear.”

Shane’s jaw trembled, and he sucked his bottom lip between his teeth. “...Yeah,” he said quietly. “You- you fucking infuriate me, did you know that?”

“Sorry.”

“You can’t do something stupid and insane, and then go and- and fucking take a transfer for me and just never mention it!”

Ilya smiled grimly. “I moved to stupid French-speaking city for you, Shane. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t do it for thanks. I am just- I’m never going to cause you pain, if I can help it.”

“Jesus Christ,” Shane whispered. His eyes were wet, *again*, but his face was determined. “Why did you break Gusev’s jaw?” he asked hollowly.

“He used- bad language,” Ilya said, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck prick up at Shane’s tone. “I got mad.”

“That would explain a punch. Why did you break his jaw?”

Ilya exhaled a shaky, rattled breath. He didn't want to look Shane in the eyes right now, but he also didn't think he could look away if he tried. “...He used it about you.”

“And why did you let yourself get traded?”

“...Because of you,” Ilya admitted softly.

Shane nodded. “When you said you liked me-”

“Shane, please,” Ilya begged. He wondered if this was Shane's way of getting back at him, if he was trying to embarrass Ilya like Ilya had embarrassed him.

“When you said you liked me,” Shane repeated, slow and deliberate. “How long had you liked me for?”

“I don't...” Ilya shook his head, helpless. “In April, I knew. But probably longer.”

“When we started hooking up again?”

“...Yes, probably.”

“When you got transferred?”

Ilya nodded.

Shane's eyes closed for a second. “...Vegas?” he asked, his voice thick.

“Yes. I think so.” Ilya didn't think he'd ever felt so ripped open and laid bare. “A long time, Shane.”

“You should have told me.”

Ilya laughed, hoarse and scornful. “Should I have? I only said when I thought- I thought you felt the same way. I didn't want *this*.”

“It's not- I didn't want this either!” Shane exclaimed. “But I can't- I can't be what you want. That's not me, that's not my life. It *can't* be.”

“Right.” Ilya didn't care anymore, he dug the pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit another. “So what now?”

“I don't... I don't want to hate you, Roz.”

“I don't hate you,” Ilya replied.

“Just...” Shane sighed. “I'm sorry. I'm sorry I can't- be that.”

Ilya stiffened. “You can be whatever you want,” he said. “I don't- Just- We can be whatever. I'll call you Hollander again, if that's what you want. I don't care.”

“But you do. You do care.”

“So?”

Shane shook his head. “I hope your leg gets better soon,” he said, and turned around, walking away. Ilya watched him leave; he felt like he was always watching Shane leave. He watched Shane drive out of the parking lot, and finally got into his own car. He hit the steering wheel with his free fist. Jesus fuck, there was something wrong with him. Why did he keep letting himself get so humiliated?

He started his car, and managed to make it all the way to his apartment before the tears fell. Then he wept - he wept like a child, and he hated himself for it, but it didn't stop the sobs from coming. Why would Shane do that? Why would he force Ilya to bear his heart, if it wasn't going to change anything. And why had Ilya gone along with it. Recently, it felt like all he did was lie down and offer himself up as something to be trampled all over. It hurt so much. He cried for so long, shaking with heartache and self-pity, tasting the saltiness on his lips, that when he finally stopped, he felt more exhausted than he did after a game.

For some reason, he thought of Mama. He'd used to get mad at her, the way she let his father walk all over her and would still never hear a bad word about him. The way she put up with his drinking and his moods and never once complained, how she loved him so loyally, even when he didn't deserve it.

Ilya had been trying so hard not to become his father, he hadn't realised he'd become the spitting image of Mama. He thought maybe, when he loved someone, he saw them with rose-coloured glasses. Wouldn't admit their faults. And maybe he let them walk all over him too, like she did.

He inhaled a lungful of smoke. He loved Mama, but he didn't want to become her. She had loved so deeply, but perhaps not always in the healthiest way. He wanted to do better.

Chapter End Notes

guys?? has ilya?? had a realisation?? is this... character growth???

Chapter 21: November 2015 (I)

NOVEMBER 2015

Ilya knocked on the door to the physio's office, poking his head in. "Hello," he said. "I need to get cleared for game tomorrow."

Dan nodded, his face neutral. "Lie down, I'll check out your leg."

Ilya did as he was told, and Dan held his knee like last time, bending it this way and that. There was no twinge of pain anymore, and the bruise was a fading yellowy-brown. Ilya stared as Dan brought his knee to his chest. "What are you doing tonight?" Ilya asked casually. "Maybe I bend you in half instead."

Dan's eyes narrowed. "We're at work. Behave."

It wasn't a no. Ilya grinned, as he flipped onto his stomach. Dan continued bending his leg, pressing his fingers into the meat of Ilya's thigh.

"Any pain?"

"No."

"...Okay," he said, withdrawing. "You can sit up."

Ilya did, dangling his legs off the edge of the bed. "I am good to play?"

"Yes. But make sure to tell me if you feel anything weird, we don't want a strain to turn into a tear. I mean it, no playing through the pain this time, okay?"

"Okay. If I'm allowed to play, does this mean I'm allowed to fuck again as well?"

Dan stared at him, unamused.

"In your professional opinion," Ilya added.

"...You're allowed to engage in any strenuous activity."

"Good. What time should I come over tonight?"

Dan held his gaze, and he looked like he was trying to glare, but the corners of his lips twitched upwards. "You're a menace. Come at eight."

Ilya grinned widely, and Dan rolled his eyes.

He finished training for the day in a relatively good mood, and went home to eat a protein-heavy meal. He had been slowly allowed more and more activity over the past week, but it would be good to get back to playing proper, contact, violent hockey. He hadn't realised what

an outlet it was, and not being able to throw his body all over the place had pushed him to his limits.

He needed to burn calories, he needed to fight and he needed to fuck. Otherwise, he felt like he was locked in a cage.

Also, it gave him way too much time to think. Thinking about Shane was kind of all he'd been doing for the past year, but at least when he was busy there was a limit to how much thinking he had time for. With nothing to do, his mind always drifted back to Shane.

Honestly, he felt kind of bad about himself. He still wanted Shane - God, he wanted Shane so badly. But he hated the way he wanted Shane, the way it made him weak and small and robbed him of any self-respect. He'd been thinking about that a lot. It was why he wanted to hook-up with Dan again. Dan was *normal*. Dan didn't make Ilya want to prostrate himself just for a scrap of affection.

It didn't stop him from wanting Shane. Hell, it didn't stop him from loving Shane. Ilya wasn't quite sure how to stop loving Shane. He was furious with him - the more he thought about it, the more he felt led on, even lied to. Ilya hadn't been imagining everything, he knew that, no matter what Shane wanted to say. It *hadn't* been just sex, it *hadn't* been casual. It felt cruel to say it was.

But Shane had always wanted to deny things. Like when he'd made Ilya delete their text history way back when, like he thought he could just erase their whole history just like that. This was just the same, but worse, because Ilya felt this exponentially more. This wasn't erasing a text thread, this was like erasing a part of Ilya's own heart. He couldn't do it and expect his blood to keep pumping, no matter what Shane demanded.

Even knowing all of that, Ilya still loved him. Shane was still buried deep in his heart, impossible to remove. But Ilya wasn't going to beg and plead anymore, he wasn't going to keep prostrating himself, asking for something that wasn't being reciprocated.

So he showered and groomed himself and drove over to Dan's.

~~

Ilya lay on the bed, catching his breath, as Dan lay beside him. "Good, yes?" he asked.

"How's your leg?"

Ilya pulled a face at the response, and rolled on top of the other man, staring down at him. "My leg is fine. Was good? You had fun?"

Dan gave him a small, entertained smile. "Yes, Ilya. I had fun, you did a good job."

Ilya nodded, satisfied, and kissed him quickly before rolling back off. "Of course I did. You came so hard you cried."

"Mhm." Dan rolled onto his side, looking at Ilya. "...So," he said, in a tone that was deceptively spontaneous, "I didn't know you were gay."

"Half. And yes, is not something I really talk about."

"But you came onto me?"

"You were hot," Ilya shrugged. "And I was horny."

"Wow, really sweeping me off my feet."

Ilya frowned - he assumed this was another English idiom that didn't make any sense. "You will keep secret?" he asked instead.

"Course. I get not wanting to be out. Hockey, and all that."

"Right."

Dan reached over, toying with the edge of the sheet that was lying over Ilya's waist, his fingers grazing Ilya's hipbones. "But do you want to like... keep hooking up?" Dan asked.

Ilya made a small, non-committal noise. "Maybe," he said. "I am not... interested in much more right now, though."

"I'm not interested in dating someone closeted," Dan said plainly. "No offense or anything, it's just I did that enough as a teenager. But you fuck good."

Ilya nodded, relieved. "Okay," he said. "Just fun, then."

"Sure. Do you want to stay the night, or are you going home?"

"I will go, we have early flight to Denver in morning."

"Alright. I'll be watching." Dan grinned. "Maybe if you score, you can fuck me again."

"Oh? Maybe?"

"Mhm."

Ilya laughed, and grabbed Dan's wrist, moving it down and onto his cock. "I think I will fuck you again," he said, self-assured, stroking himself with Dan's hand. Dan gripped him tighter.

~~

They won against Denver, and Ilya was careful to avoid Shane over the whole trip. He sat with Drapeau on the flight there, and when they went out afterwards, he made sure to spend all his time on the dancefloor with the younger guys until Shane had left.

It had been a week now, since that last conversation in the parking lot, and Ilya had been doing really well. He was still pining, but he wasn't letting himself wallow in it anymore. It was made easier by the fact that Shane seemed to have a similar attitude - they slipped past each other during training without acknowledgement, and it stung but it was for the best. Ilya focused on skating hard enough to win the Cup again, and getting in stupid arguments with Drapeau, and bullying Wilson and Taylor for being slow until they wanted to hit him.

They were all back to practice the next day. Ilya was in the gym, pushing Wilson and Taylor to do another twenty reps when he spotted Dan leaning against the doorframe, watching him. They met eyes, and Dan started to walk over.

"Take a break," Ilya told Wilson and Taylor, and they both dropped their weights on the floor immediately.

"Rozanov," Dan said, his expression neutral, reaching the three of them. "Good game yesterday."

"Thanks," Ilya said, smiling slyly. "What are you doing here?"

"Just checking up on my patient. How's your hamstring feeling?"

"Good. So good I scored twice."

"I saw." Dan's eyes danced, glancing down at the rooks and back to Ilya. "I wonder when you'll score next."

"Soon," Ilya said confidently, staring Dan down and puffing his chest out. Dan looked him up and down, his lips pressing together in a tight line.

"Well, listen, keep an eye on your leg. Make sure you cool down properly, okay?"

"Yes, Doctor." Ilya winked, and Dan huffed a laugh, turning to leave. Ilya turned back to Wilson and Taylor. They were staring at him in confusion.

"What was that about?" Taylor asked.

Ilya shrugged. "He's worried about my thigh," he said. "It's called being a professional, you two would never understand. Come on now, back to it."

They spent another five minutes on weights, and then Ilya dismissed them, going and stacking the dumbbells back on the racks. He used the treadmill for thirty minutes, just because he hadn't done enough cardio the last week because of his hamstring, and then took one of the mats to stretch.

He noticed Shane's gaze on him, from where he was using the rowing machine, and changed direction so they didn't have to look at each other. He spent ten minutes stretching, because he'd really like not to pull another muscle this season, and then went to the showers.

He was in the locker room, packing up his stuff, when Shane came in, a towel around his waist. Ilya tensed, keeping his eyes down, as Shane walked past him, heading to his own locker.

"So," Shane said, breaking the silence. "You're taking cool down periods seriously now?"

Ilya focused on tying his shoelaces. "Doctor's orders."

"He's not a doctor," Shane said flatly.

"What?" Ilya actually looked over.

Shane was pulling his hoodie over his head. "He's not a doctor," he repeated, face blank. "He's a physiotherapist. He didn't go to medical school."

"...Okay," Ilya said.

"Your leg's better now?"

"I played well against Denver, didn't I?"

"Sure," Shane said. "I just don't want any more injuries that could get in the way of us making the playoffs."

"Yes, well. I am all good now."

Shane nodded. "Cool."

Ilya finally was ready to go, and grabbed his bag. "...See you," he said lamely, leaving before Shane had an opportunity to reply.

~~

"Oh, fuck, that feels so good," Dan moaned.

Ilya bobbed his head faster, letting spit slide between his lips and down Dan's dick, wet and sloppy. He worked him open at the same time, two fingers stretching his hole, pressing in and out and scissoring. After a few more minutes he pulled off. "On your stomach," he instructed, breathless, and Dan rolled over as Ilya put on a condom, slicking himself up with lube.

He pushed in slowly, biting down on his lip as he entered, holding himself back and giving Dan some time to adjust. He started thrusting shallowly, just rocking back and forth.

“Come on,” Dan said. “You can go harder than that.”

Ilya grinned, his hands digging into Dan’s waist and hoisting him up. “You want harder?”

“Yes.”

Ilya started fucking into him properly, grunting as he picked up his speed. His breathing started to get heavier as he continued, driving in as hard as he could. “Feel so fucking tight,” he muttered, one hand moving to press Dan’s back further into the mattress. “Desperate for my cock, aren’t you?”

“Fuck, yes,” Dan groaned. “So good. Fucking me so good, Ilya, keep going.”

Ilya cursed, and hammered Dan’s ass relentlessly. “Ah, fuck,” he said through gritted teeth. “You going to come for me?”

“Yeah. Yeah, fuck, make me come.”

Ilya reached around and wrapped a hand around his dick, gripping it tight and stroking it as well as he could while he continued to fuck him. He felt Dan clench, and come all over Ilya’s hand and the bedsheets. Ilya let himself go, his thrusts becoming erratic until he came too, spilling into the condom with a cry.

He pulled out slowly, tying the condom and tossing it before laying back on the bed. “Fuck,” he sighed, chest heaving.

“Agreed,” Dan chuckled.

Ilya turned his head to look at him. “...I should be going,” he said. “Is late.”

“You don’t have to,” Dan said easily. “Stay the night, I’ll drive you in tomorrow.”

Ilya chewed on the inside of his cheek, considering. He could order an Uber back to his apartment, it wouldn’t take so long. But he was tired. “...You would not mind?” he asked, uncertain.

“Course not. There’s spare toothbrushes in the bathroom cabinet if you want.”

“What, for all your other hook-ups you let spend the night?” Ilya grinned.

“Yeah. I’m a good host.” Dan raised his eyebrows. “You want to stay or not?”

Ilya nodded. “Okay,” he said. “If you are sure you don’t mind.”

Dan rolled his eyes, and then leaned over and kissed Ilya. “You just had your dick inside me, I think we can sleep in the same bed. You closeted guys can be so weird about this stuff, it’s not a big deal.”

“I...” Ilya didn’t really know what to say. He supposed it was true; he wasn’t so against staying the night when it was a woman he had hooked up with. And he’d been hooking up with Dan for a few weeks now.

Dan prodded his shoulder. “Hm?” he asked expectantly.

Ilya stared at him. “I had... I am going through- break up, I guess.” He laughed emptily. “If you can call it that, without ever being in a relationship. But we didn’t really... He spent the night once. But he was gone when I woke up.”

Dan’s eyes softened. “You liked him?”

“Yes.”

“...Well, this is my place, so you know I’ll still be here in the morning.”

Ilya snorted. “Maybe I will run away.”

Dan sat up, and swung a leg over Ilya’s hips, leaning over him. “Or maybe you’ll want to fuck me in the morning too, huh?” He kissed Ilya again, a little longer this time, with a hint on tongue, teasing. Ilya chased his mouth when he started to pull back, holding the back of his neck and carrying on. He slid their tongues together, moaning quietly.

“...I think I will be here in the morning,” he murmured. “Show me where toothbrush is, please?”

Dan grinned, and slapped the side of Ilya’s chest. “Come on, then.”

~~

Dan popped up during training and games a bit more regularly now. Ilya liked seeing him; they played Toronto, and when Ilya scored, his eyes didn’t immediately search for Shane’s, like they usually did. He looked to the Voyageurs’ medical team instead, and grinned when he saw Dan clapping.

He hadn’t thought it would be that big a deal. Ilya was allowed to have friends. But Drapeau approached him in the gym a few days later, while Ilya was stretching and warming up.

“Hey, Roz,” he said. “You got a minute?”

Ilya shrugged. “You want to know how I scored against Toronto? Your stick has to touch the puck, Drapeau. I thought Theriault would have told you this, but maybe not.”

“Man, fuck off,” Drapeau snapped, and Ilya snorted. “Seriously, I wanted to talk to you about that physio guy. He seems pretty, like, keen on you.”

“We chat,” Ilya said. “What, this is problem?”

Drapeau pulled a face. “I thought I should let you know, I think he’s... y’know.”

“I don’t.”

Drapeau lowered his voice. “Like, *gay*, or whatever.”

“Ah.”

“So, like... I dunno, seems like he’s giving you some extra attention. You might want to put a stop to it?”

“You think he is attracted to me?” Ilya asked.

“Maybe,” Drapeau shrugged, grimacing.

“Good. I am very good-looking, everyone should be attracted to me.”

“Gross, dude.” Drapeau shoved his shoulder lightly. “I wouldn’t want some cocksucker fantasising about me.”

“Well, lucky for you, I doubt anyone is.”

“Man, fuck you. I was just trying to be helpful.”

Ilya felt immensely bored, and his gaze drifted over to the bench. “If you want to be helpful you can spot me,” he said. “Or you can go away and worry about who else isn’t jerking off about you.”

“Jesus, you’re a fucking delight,” Drapeau shot back, but he went and spotted Ilya as he used the bench press.

Ilya drove over to Dan’s that evening. He didn’t really care if Drapeau and some of the other guys were cavemen, it wasn’t like he expected much more from a bunch of meathead hockey players.

When he got to Dan’s, he bent him over the couch and fucked him until they both came. Then Dan got mad about the new stain in the fabric and Ilya laughed at him.

“Whatever,” Dan grumbled, “we should be meeting at yours anyway. Probably nicer than this shithole.”

“Mm, not really,” Ilya said. “Is pretty equalivent.”

Dan looked at him and smiled. “That’s cute,” he said, “say that again.”

“What?”

“Equivalent.”

Ilya frowned. “Is wrong?” he asked.

Dan leaned over and kissed him. “It’s equivalent. But I like your way of saying it.”

Ilya swallowed, and forced himself to smile as well. He knew it wasn’t meant in a mean way, but he always hated when people laughed at his English. “Equivalent,” he repeated. “Right.”

“Your way makes more sense.”

Ilya shook his head. “I’m hungry,” he said, changing the subject. “You have food?”

Dan put some chicken kievies in the oven, and turned on the TV. They were replaying highlights of Montreal’s game against Winnipeg last night, and Ilya watched a clip of Hollander sending the puck flying past Winnipeg’s goalie.

He always looked so different on the ice. So in control of everything. It was hot.

Dan sat down next to him, one hand reaching over the back of the couch to play with Ilya’s hair. Ilya leant into the touch. It was nice, the casual way Dan touched him, even when they weren’t hooking up.

“Hey, do you know if I’ve done something that would piss Captain off?” Dan asked.

Ilya’s heart skipped a beat. “...What? Why would you think that?”

“I dunno, I think I’ve caught him glaring at me like three times this week. Maybe I’m imagining things. Has he said anything?”

“Not that I have heard.”

Dan hummed. “It’s not like him, he’s always been friendly. I don’t know-”

“Is probably me,” Ilya said.

“You? Why?”

“He is... still pretty mad at me about that video,” Ilya said, staring forward at the TV. “He’s probably pissed you’re being nice to me. Just ignore him, he’ll get over it.”

“...Oh,” Dan said, frowning. “Okay, I guess. If that’s what you think is best.”

“Ignore him,” Ilya said again. “Don’t worry about it. You want to go again?”

“Christ, already?”

Ilya leered. “What, am I too much for you, old man?”

“I’m thirty-one.”

“I get scared every time I fuck you, I think I’m going to break your hips.”

Dan laughed, slapping Ilya’s stomach. “Doesn’t stop you though, does it?”

“You are hot. For old man.”

“Food’s almost done. We’ll eat, then you can try and break my old man hips, yeah?”

“Okay.”

Dan's hand went back to Ilya's hair, and Ilya hummed, relaxed.

Chapter 22: November 2015 (II)

NOVEMBER 2015

Ilya drove over to Dan's that evening, and as soon as he was let in, immediately started walking the other man towards the bedroom. Dan laughed, letting Ilya manhandle him, until Ilya pushed him onto the bed, climbing on top of him.

Ilya had his mouth licking a trail down Dan's neck when Dan put a hand to his chest.

"Wait, wait," Dan said.

Ilya paused, leaning back slightly. "Problem?" he asked.

"Just... slow down for a sec." Dan pushed a little harder, and Ilya rolled off him.

"Is something wrong?"

"No. I just think we've been hooking up for a while now."

Ilya looked at him warily. "Yes. So?"

"I think we should have, like, have a talk. About what we like."

"...You don't like what we do?"

"No, *no*," Dan said, reaching out and rubbing Ilya's arm. "Not like that. It's just... good to talk about this stuff, yeah? If we're going to keep having sex."

Ilya felt slightly uneasy. Before now, the only person he'd fucked more than two or three times had been Shane, otherwise it had pretty much been one night stands. And he and Shane had never really talked about what they did together. They had just- done it.

There hadn't really been a need to talk about it. Ilya looked at Shane like a walking wet dream, everything he did - when he would make Ilya work for it, and then turn so lovely and soft, when he would be so overwhelmingly eager that Ilya felt like the most powerful person on the planet, when he occasionally got a burst of confidence and would be so demanding that Ilya would do anything to satisfy him. Whatever it was, they had always just *clicked*. Really, sex had been the one thing that came easily to them. But God, they may have teased and chirped each other about it, but they had never *talked* about it.

"What would you... want to talk about?" Ilya asked cautiously.

"Well, you always top," Dan said, blunt. "Would you ever want to change that?"

Ilya hesitated, unsure what to say.

“Okay, that’s a no,” Dan smiled, squeezing Ilya’s bicep. “The point is to be honest, not tell me what you think I want to hear.”

“...Sorry,” Ilya said, his mouth feeling dry. He didn’t like saying no to things in bed, it felt like he was fucking up somehow. He wanted to do whatever the other person wanted, generally, whatever would make them feel good. “I just... it’s never really appealed to me. I suppose we could-”

“Nope,” Dan said firmly, watching Ilya with knowing eyes that were almost unsettling. “We do things we both want to do. If I want to fuck someone, I’ll go and find someone else, yeah?”

Ilya nodded at once. “Yes,” he said, “do that. I hope you find many excellent bottoms, if that is something you want.”

Dan laughed. “Okay,” he said, “thanks for your blessing. Now your turn, what do you like?”

“I like everything,” Ilya said. “I like getting you off.”

“Try harder.”

Ilya inhaled deeply - he could do this. He’d been having sex since he was fourteen, he could talk about it. “Um, I guess I like to be in charge,” he said.

“Yeah, I’d picked up on that,” Dan grinned. “How far does that go?”

“Just, like- what we do.” Ilya felt his cheeks burn, and felt kind of ridiculous. Dan kept grinning, like Ilya was amusing him with his awkwardness. It didn’t feel mean, though, so Ilya decided it was okay. “Do you have- stuff?” Ilya added. “That you’d want to try?”

Dan winked at him. “I was an out gay man for all my twenties, I’ve tried most things.”

“Alright, are you trying to make me jealous?”

“Maybe...”

Ilya grabbed his waist, hoisting him into his lap. “What things have you tried?” he asked, aiming for sultry, but honestly he was curious. “Things I can do to you?”

“I like marks,” Dan said. “The possessiveness... I find that kinda hot.”

Ilya nodded importantly. He could do that.

He’d actively avoided leaving any sort of marks up until now - again, that had been out of the question with Shane. Marks were evidence, especially when you were in a locker room every day. But he supposed that wasn’t a problem with Dan.

“I can mark you up,” Ilya told him. “Like, hickeys? Bruises?”

Dan nodded. “Both. Probably not on my neck, I still have to, like, be a professional. But everywhere else is good.”

“Okay. I will do this.”

Dan snorted, and looped his hands around Ilya’s neck. “More about you,” he said. “Is there stuff I can do for you?”

“You already-”

“Ilya.” Dan gave him a look.

“I guess...” Ilya swallowed, feeling a little sick. “Sometimes... I like, ah... I like when people are a bit mean to me. Not always. But... occasionally.”

“Okay, that’s okay.” Dan frowned, and then kissed him, close-mouthed and soft. Ilya let out a sigh.

“You don’t think...?”

“Babe, I’m an old man, remember? I promise you I’ve seen every weird kink possible. Besides, it makes sense.”

“What?” Ilya asked. “How?”

“You already have a praise kink, a degradation kink is just the other side of the same coin.”

Ilya didn’t even have the brain power to figure out that new English phrase, he was stuck on everything else Dan had just said. “What? I don’t have a praise kink.”

“Really?” Dan raised his eyebrows. “*You like? Good for you? Am I doing a good job? Please tell me I’m doing a good job.*”

Ilya bit back a smile. “You made half of those up.”

“Am I wrong, though?”

“I like to know I’m doing a good job! I’m generous lover!”

“You are,” Dan said easily. “You also like being *told* you’re doing a good job.”

“...Maybe,” Ilya conceded. “But I don’t- degra- no.”

“No? What do you mean then?”

“Just, like...” Ilya searched for how to explain it. “Making me feel- small, I guess. Like...” God, this was hard to say. “Maybe, ah, patronising?”

“You want to be called a slut, like that?”

Ilya shook his head. “No, more like... dumb, or weak. A guy called me a faggot once, while I was blowing him. That- I-” He carried on moving his mouth, but he couldn’t get any more words to come out.

“Alright,” Dan said, bringing his hands to the sides of Ilya’s neck, his thumbs stroking Ilya’s jaw. “I think I get it. Stuff you’re, like, insecure about, yeah?”

“N-... Maybe.”

“Well, I don’t want to call you a fag. Sorry, but I’m not going to find that hot. I can do the other stuff, though.”

Ilya stared at him. “Really? You don’t find it, like... weird?”

“No. You want to try right now?”

“I- I don’t know. Maybe?”

Dan glanced down. “I think your dick is interested,” he said, smirking.

“...Okay. We can try.”

“Alright. Hey.” Dan’s thumb tapped Ilya’s jaw insistently, until Ilya met his eyes. “If you want to stop, or pause, you just say so, yeah?”

“Yes.”

Dan nodded, and then one hand snaked down, cupping Ilya’s cock through his trousers. It was already half-hard, and Dan started to stroke it. “Got such a big dick, don’t you?” he murmured, voice getting heavier.

Ilya huffed a laugh. “Is that supposed to make me feel bad?”

Dan’s other hand, still on Ilya’s jaw, yanked his earlobe. “Go with it,” he said. “You like having a big dick?”

“...Yes,” Ilya said, bemused.

Dan lifted himself up onto his knees, pulling down Ilya’s sweats and boxers and letting his cock spring free. He licked his palm and returned to stroking Ilya, running his thumb over the tip. “Mm, I like it too,” he said softly. “Feels so good inside me, fills me up so well. Can feel you for days afterwards.”

Ilya groaned, his hips jerking up involuntarily. “I’ll fuck you right now,” he said. “You want? Will fuck you so well.”

“I know,” Dan said. “Such a good cock. All you’re good for really, isn’t it?”

Something in Ilya’s chest twisted, and his eyes widened. Dan raised his eyebrows in question, and Ilya nodded quickly. Dan leaned down, and kissed him once more before pulling back

again.

“Such a dumb fucking hockey player,” he cooed, still jerking Ilya off torturously slowly. Ilya felt frozen underneath him. “Can’t do much else but fuck, can you?”

Ilya whimpered, biting down on his lip so hard he might be drawing blood, he wasn’t sure.

“It’s okay, you’re such a good fuck Ilya. Don’t need to be good at much else.”

“I am,” Ilya said, agreeing before he knew what he was doing. “Can fuck you so well, promise.”

“Yeah? Is that what you want?”

“Da. Please.”

Dan smiled. “Look at you, so needy. So fuckdumb. Not good for anything but getting me off, are you?”

“Yes. No.” Ilya thrust upwards again, desperate. “Let me fuck you.”

“Think you know how to use this cock? Sure it’s not wasted on someone like you?”

Ilya’s breathing felt unsteady. “I know how to use it,” he said, his voice coming out whiny. “Will make you come so hard, you’ll see.”

Dan squeezed his dick again, hard, just on the right edge of painful. “Show me what you’ve got, big guy.”

Ilya let out a cry of relief, and flipped them over.

Afterwards, they lay in the bed, and Ilya tensed when Dan threw an arm over his chest. He felt cold.

“Okay?” Dan asked, and Ilya nodded. Dan tugged him closer, bringing Ilya down and underneath his chin. “Was so good,” Dan whispered into Ilya’s hair. “You’re so good.”

“...What are you doing?” Ilya asked.

Dan hummed. “Making sure you know that we just did that for fun,” he said. “It wasn’t real.”

“I know that,” Ilya said.

“Okay,” Dan said, continuing to hold Ilya close anyway. “I’m just reminding you. S’good to do that, yeah?”

“...If you want,” Ilya said, relaxing slightly. It did feel good.

“Fucking kid,” Dan said affectionately. He pressed a kiss to the top of Ilya’s head. “Messing around with this stuff and you don’t even know about aftercare. Just let me hold you for a bit, okay?”

“Okay,” Ilya said.

~~

They had their first game against the Bears of the season that evening. Ilya always liked playing against the Bears - even more so when it meant he got to go back to Boston, like today. When they were let onto the ice to warm up, Ilya immediately skated to the centre line, whistling at Marlow.

Marlow grinned at him, skating over. “Rozy, what’s up? Still on for after?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “After we beat you.”

“Ha! Keep shit talking, we’ll see how cocky you are once the game’s over.”

Ilya opened his mouth to fire off a retort, when Marlow’s eyes locked on something behind Ilya’s shoulder, and he raised his hockey stick.

“Oi, Hollander!” Marlow yelled, beckoning him. “Yeah, you heard me! Come here!”

Ilya winced, as Shane slowly skated towards them.

“Marlow,” Shane said, ever-so cordial, coming to a stop at Ilya’s side. “Everything okay?”

Marlow nodded. “Wanted to clear the air,” he said gruffly. “Let you know no one on the team has any patience for that shit Gusev was saying.”

“Oh.” Shane blinked, looking taken aback. “Uh, thanks. It’s okay.”

“It’s not, but Gusev’s riding the bench for the foreseeable future.”

“That- Yeah, that’s not necessary. I’d rather he played, and I’ll score on him.”

Marlow snorted. “I’m sure you would. But the rest of the guys don’t want to play with him. I think management’s trying to figure out a trade, but it’s taking a while. Gusev’s far less desirable than Roz.”

Shane glanced at Ilya, and Ilya kept his eyes trained on the ice determinedly. “...Yeah,” Shane said. “Well, Gusev’s average. Rozanov’s the second best player.”

“Best,” Ilya corrected automatically.

“Well,” Marlow chuckled, “nice to see being on the same team hasn’t entirely put a stop to the rivalry.”

“Right,” Shane said, exhaling. “Uh, well, thanks for- saying that.”

“Yeah, well. We all still hate you, Hollander. But I hope there’s no hard feelings.”

“No, of course not.”

“I would’ve spoken to you earlier, but none of us even knew what the fight was over until that video came out.”

“Yeah,” Shane huffed. “Seems like Rozanov neglected to mention that to anyone.”

Ilya wished he was anywhere else.

“He didn’t tell you either?” Marlow asked. “Roz, man, how didn’t that come up?”

Ilya shrugged. “I didn’t know someone fucking filmed it, did I?”

“Fucking martyr,” Marlow said, shaking his head at Ilya. “We’ll meet you at Lucky’s at nine?”

“Sure.”

Marlow gave them both a little salute and skated off. Ilya took a deep breath and looked at Shane.

“Did you tell him to say that?” Shane asked.

Ilya frowned. “No. Why would I do that?”

“I don’t- He just didn’t have to apologise. I wasn’t expecting him to.”

“The Bears aren’t all assholes,” Ilya said. “Take me and Gusev out, they’re good people.”

Shane’s gaze drifted over to the other side of the ice, where the Boston players were warming up, stretching and trading pucks back and forth. “No, I mean, of course they are,” Shane said, his face unsettled. “I just... None of the Voyageurs have, like, brought it up.”

“They haven’t?”

“I mean- sure, they have.” Shane gave a little shake of his head, his brows creased. “They haven’t, like, said Gusev was wrong or anything though. I think they think it’s funny, you beating him up.”

Ilya felt weird. “They do think he was wrong,” he said. “I’m sure they just, like, think it’s so obvious they don’t need to say it.”

“...Yeah, probably.” Shane looked away from the Bears, his Captain expression sliding back into its place. “Anyway, you can tell Marlow that the gesture was appreciated. It was a good show of sportsmanship.”

“...Okay,” Ilya said. “Let’s make sure we destroy them anyway, yeah?”

Shane smiled at him roughly. “Yeah.” He knocked his helmet against Ilya’s and skated away.

~~

A few days later, Ilya had spent the night with Dan again, and was woken up to the sound of his alarm blaring from the nightstand. Ilya groaned, still half-asleep, and whacked the other man with his arm.

“Snooze it,” he mumbled.

Dan made some noise, Ilya couldn’t really tell, but the offensive noise stopped. He fell back into his slumber, only to be re-awoken what felt like seconds later by someone shoving at him.

“Wha?” Ilya garbled.

“We overslept! Come on, get up!”

Ilya blinked, and reached blindly for his phone. The light of the screen blinded him, and he squinted, trying to make out the time. Yep - somehow, it had been forty minutes. “Shit,” he cursed, starting to move. “I told you to snooze it, not turn it off!”

“Well, at least I set an alarm!” Dan snapped from the bathroom.

Ilya rolled his eyes, and went to have the quickest shower of his life. They got dressed as quickly as they could, and Dan tossed him an energy bar as they left. No time for breakfast.

“I’m going to be starving all day now,” Ilya grumbled, as they got into the car.

“Why did you tell me to snooze it, then?”

“Why *did* you snooze it?”

Dan took off, and Ilya sighed, eating his energy bar. He hadn’t even had time to have his coffee either. They drove in silence, as Ilya scrolled through his phone. Alexei hadn’t contacted him since Ilya had been in Russia, and Ilya wasn’t really sure what to make of it. It wasn’t like they talked often, but Alexei usually texted to ask for more money, if nothing else. Ilya had to assume no news was good news.

“...Sorry,” Dan said after a while. “I meant to press snooze. I must’ve switched it off accidentally or something.”

Ilya sighed. “Is okay,” he said. “I sleep in all the time. Is just annoying.”

“Yeah.” Dan huffed a small laugh. “Me too.”

They got to the facility and parked up, Ilya jumping out of the car. Technically, he was only five minutes late. If he rushed getting ready, Theriault might not even notice.

“Oh, hey guys.”

Ilya whipped his head around, and saw Miity getting out of his own car. “You are late too?” he asked, relieved.

“Yeah, traffic was...” Miitka trailed off, glancing between Ilya and Dan. “Did you two... come in together?”

“My car is broken,” Ilya said quickly. “Dan is giving me rides while it is in shop.”

“He’s on my way,” Dan added, giving Miitka a winning smile.

“Oh. Okay then.” Miitka jerked his head towards the entrance. “Come on, Roz. Let’s get in there before Theriault makes us do suicides.”

Ilya slapped Dan on the shoulder and jogged off with Miitka. Everyone was still in the locker room when they entered, about ready to go out, and Ilya headed straight for his locker, digging through his bag to get his gear on.

“You’re both late,” Hollander said disapprovingly.

“Sorry, Cap,” Miitka said, slightly out of breath. “Road closure, traffic was a nightmare.”

Hollander hummed, unimpressed. “Come on then. Quick, now.”

Ilya took off his coat, and Comeau whistled. “Fun night last night, Roz?”

“What?”

“You’re wearing yesterday’s clothes,” Comeau grinned, snorting. “What, did you go out and pick someone up on a Tuesday? You dog.”

Ilya paused, his eyes swivelling back to Miitka. Miitka, who was currently gawking at him, open-mouthed. Ilya really wished, right now, that Miitka had suffered a few more concussions over the course of his career.

“Holy shit,” Miitka said. “Are you and...”

Ilya stared at him.

“What?” Drapeau asked.

“Roz... Nothing.” Miitka shook his head, his face going red, turning back around to face his locker. “It’s nothing.”

“Um, it’s obviously not nothing,” Stedlund said, looking between them. “What is it?”

“Wait a minute,” Renaud said. “Miity, do you know who Roz was with last night?”

“I know nothing!” Miitka snapped.

“Okay!” Hollander butt in. His voice had gotten higher than normal. “This doesn’t matter, we’re already running late.”

“Oh, give it a rest, Cap,” Drapeau said, sounding delighted. “Miity, you know who Roz was fucking? Does that mean it’s someone we all know?”

“Yeah, who is it?”

“I don’t know anything!” Miitka exclaimed. “Forget it.”

“Yeah,” Hollander said, eyes wide, darting all over the room. “Guys, come on, we need to get on the ice.”

“Wait a second,” Comeau grinned. “Is it an ex-WAG? A *current* WAG? Rozy, who’ve you fucked now?”

Ilya considered his options. The whole room was looking at him, and, surprisingly, he felt rather calm. “Is not a WAG,” he said deliberately. “Miity is freaking out because he just realised I am fucking a man.”

The room fell silent.

Boizeau laughed uncertainly. “...You’re fucking with us, right?”

“No,” Ilya said. “Now, do you all need to hear more about my sex life, or am I allowed to get ready for practice?”

“...Uh.” Renaud was the one to speak up, looking bewildered. “You can get ready, I guess.”

Ilya smiled. “Good. Glad we all had this chat.”

The room mumbled, and Ilya started putting on his padding. He still felt shockingly relaxed about what he had just said. It felt good to have just- said it.

He caught Hollander staring at him. He looked... uncomfortable. Upset, maybe. Ilya couldn’t tell. He inhaled deeply through his nose. He wasn’t going to be the one to approach him. If Hollander had a problem, he could say something. He finished getting his uniform on and grabbed his hockey stick.

It seemed to trigger something in the room, as everyone else started grabbing their sticks as well. The team started to file out towards the rink.

Chapter 23: December 2015

Chapter Notes

another shane pov for y'all

DECEMBER 2015 - SHANE

It had taken a few days for the team to work out it was Dan who Rozanov was fucking. Sometimes Shane wondered if hockey really did cause brain damage, because it had been so obvious. The one gay guy in the facility starts hanging round Rozanov at every opportunity, then Rozanov announces he's fucking a man, and somehow the Voyageurs took seventy-two hours to put that together.

It was something of an open secret now. No one really talked about it, but it was known.

Shane didn't really get why Rozanov had had to do it. Miitka hadn't been going to say anything. He hadn't had to announce it like that.

It was real, now. That Rozanov had sex with Dan - had sex with men, in general. Which meant that what Shane had done with Rozanov was real too. Like, a real, actual thing that had really, actually existed. Not- not just something that happened to occur, out in the ether, undefined and unfalsifiable. Rozanov had basically just spoken their entire history into existence. Even if just for Shane.

Shane put his headphones in, even though no music was playing. It stopped people trying to talk to him as he took one of the exercise bikes. Rozanov was over hogging the mats with Wilson and Taylor, pushing them too far like he usually did. They were following his instructions though, like they always did, even though Roz was being a real asshole about it. Shane supposed he couldn't judge - he knew all too well the allure of following Rozanov's instructions, especially when he was being an asshole.

He grit his teeth, turning up the resistance. The layout of this gym fucking sucked, he wished the bikes just faced the wall. Then he wouldn't be stuck staring at Rozanov, and his huge fucking biceps that were out on display because of his stupid vest. And his stupid huge calves. And stupid golden hair that was sticking to his forehead due to sweat, damp like it got during sex.

Stupid fucking gym.

"Is that all you've got?" Rozanov taunted his rooks. "Another twenty, come on! Do you want to be puny forever?"

"Fuck you," Taylor growled, but he and Wilson continued their weighted sit-ups.

Rozanov laughed, standing over them. “Ah, sorry, you are too young for me. But the ladies will like it when you finally put on some muscle.”

It was ridiculous - Rozanov’s taunting didn’t even make any sense, Wilson and Taylor played in the NHL, they weren’t small or puny. But that wasn’t what put Shane on edge. Rozanov had kept doing this since his big announcement, making these little jabs and references to it. Like he was daring someone else to say something. He could never just leave anything alone.

It was that day, in the gym, that someone finally took the bait. Drapeau, of course.

“Don’t say shit like that, Rozanov,” he spat, from where he was messing around with Comeau by the dumbbells.

Rozanov spun around, grinning maniacally. “Say what?”

“You know what.” Drapeau started to walk over, and Shane tensed. He wondered if he’d be forced to intervene. “We don’t want to hear about that shit,” Drapeau added.

Rozanov wasn’t backing down. “Right, because we all love hearing about every time you get your dick wet,” he said.

“Man, just shut the fuck up.”

“Or what?” Rozanov said, closing the distance and getting right up in Drapeau’s face.

This is exactly what Shane hadn’t wanted. He couldn’t let a fight break out between two of his players. He started getting off the bike.

“Or I’ll make you shut up,” Drapeau bit.

“Promise?” Rozanov asked, and then he fucking *winked*.

Shane was sure Drapeau was about to throw a punch. It was like the whole room sucked in a breath, or maybe that was just Shane’s imagination. But then Drapeau was huffing a laugh, shoving Rozanov away and shaking his head.

“Man, you’re fucking impossible.”

Rozanov cackled, bouncing right back and grabbing Drapeau into a headlock. They ended up in a scuffle, both laughing and swearing at each other, and Shane just stood there, watching.

In the end, he just turned around and got back on his bike.

How did Rozanov just *do that*? He’d always been a charmer, had an uncanny ability to get absolutely everyone wrapped around his little finger, but Shane had thought surely this would be the limit.

He shouldn’t have doubted Roz. Maybe all those church services had done him some good, because Shane reckoned he must be touched by God in some way. How else could someone be the centre of gravity in every room they walked into?

~~

They flew to Columbus the next day for a game. The whole team was twitchy, because they remembered the playoffs last season, and no one wanted a repeat of that. Shane woke up early in his hotel room, and knew he wouldn't be able to just sit around and wait until that afternoon when they were due to arrive at the arena.

He decided to go for a run - just a short one, to burn off some of his nervous energy. Of course, he managed to end up running for far longer than intended, trying to work his way out of the maze that was Columbus' major park. Just another reason to hate Columbus, he decided.

It meant he was far more tired and sweaty than he would have liked to be when he finally managed to work his way back to the hotel. He slowed his pace to a walk once it was in his eyesight, letting out a long exhale.

"Hollander."

It made Shane jump, and he spun around to see Rozanov leaning against the wall of the alley next to the building. Shane spotted the cigarette in his hand immediately, his eyes zeroing in on it. He tried to resist making a comment.

"Oh," he said, coming to a stop. "Hey."

Roz looked at him, blowing smoke out of his nose. "Hey."

"You, um, I don't think you're supposed to smoke here."

The corner of Roz's lip quirked upwards, and Shane cringed. Rozanov didn't say anything, just let his eyes scan Shane up and down, leaving Shane feeling horribly on display. He felt like he was seventeen again, back in Saskatchewan.

"...Have good run?" Roz asked finally.

"Uh, yeah, I guess." Shane glanced towards the hotel, and then, against all his better instincts, took a couple of steps into the alley. "I got lost," he admitted sheepishly.

Rozanov's lips were fully twitching now. "You have maps on your phone."

"Yeah, I know."

Rozanov brought the cigarette back to his mouth. Shane wondered whether he should leave, and go back to his room. But Roz kept his eyes glued on Shane, so Shane felt like he wasn't

allowed to move yet.

“How, um, how’re you doing?” he asked.

“Fine.”

“You...” Shane didn’t even know how to say it. “You told them,” is what he settled on.

Rozanov nodded.

“Do you expect- Because you know I’m not-”

“Was not about you, Hollander,” Rozanov said. He was eerily calm. “Was about me. Had nothing to do with you.”

“Okay,” Shane breathed. “Well... it’s... I didn’t know you wanted to tell people.”

Rozanov shrugged a shoulder. “I did not feel like hiding anymore. Not from team.”

“Why not?”

“They are my team... Friends, even. Maybe.” Rozanov’s forehead creased as he ashed the cigarette. “I did not want to keep lying.”

“Okay,” Shane said again. He felt like he was fucking this up. “It’s- it’s good. I mean, if you’re happy. Then it’s- good. Good for you.”

Rozanov finally graced him with a real smile. “Thank you.”

“Tell me if the team, like, says anything. To you. I don’t- don’t want that sort of environment.”

“You are good Captain.”

“I mean it,” Shane said. “Seriously. Don’t let them, like, be dicks or anything.”

“They are fine. A little weirded out, I think, but fine. I know how to handle them.”

Shane nodded, swallowing. “Alright. Are you, like, doing okay?”

Rozanov hummed, still pinning Shane to the spot with his gaze. “I think so.”

“Does he make you happy?” Shane blurted out, before he could stop himself.

Rozanov’s hand froze mid-air, where it had been bringing his cigarette back up to his lips. He dropped the hand back down to his side. “...He is nice,” Rozanov said quietly. “Nice to me.”

The words hit Shane like a battering ram. He knew he didn’t have the right to feel mad, but God, he was anyway. And also, he was pathetically relieved, because Roz deserved nothing less than being treated well. The implication of the words blossomed slower, like a bruise aching over every inch of his skin. He was saying Shane *hadn’t* been nice to him.

“Good,” Shane managed to say. “That’s good.”

“Is not... not, ah, serious,” Rozanov said. “Just... you know.”

Shane ran a hand through his hair, trying not to grimace. “Cool.”

“He is showing me new sex things. I am not normally the one learning things, is fun.”

Shane felt his face darken instantly. He wasn’t aware there *was* anything new for Rozanov to discover, but fucking fantastic, brilliant, it was great that Dan was doing that now. “He’s old enough to know a lot, I guess,” he muttered.

Roz snorted, looking delighted. “Yes, I tell him this all the time.”

Oh, so they had inside jokes now too. Shane wasn’t normally a violent person, but he really wanted to hit something right now

“Maybe I have thing for older men,” Rozanov added, looking at Shane heatedly from under his eyelashes.

Shane’s stomach flipped. He was so goddamn easy for Rozanov, always had been. Even now, with just that look, Shane wanted nothing more than to drag him deeper into the alley and shove his tongue down Rozanov’s throat.

He didn’t do any of that - he rolled his eyes instead. “I’m, like, six weeks older than you, asshole.”

Rozanov grinned. “Very important six weeks. To both of us, da? Lucky me, I get to be younger.”

“Lucky you.”

Rozanov dropped his cigarette, grinding it into the ground with his shoe. “Is nice to- to talk with you,” he said suddenly, face becoming earnest. “I have missed it.”

“Yeah,” Shane said. An iron hand felt like it was gripping his heart, squeezing it. “Me too.”

“Maybe we can... talk again. Now it is less weird. I am not going to keep crying over you.” Roz chuckled self-consciously, a hand scratching the back of his neck. “Be... real teammates? Or something.”

“Yeah. That- that would be nice,” Shane said.

Roz nodded, smiling. “Okay.”

“I should, uh...” Shane nodded towards the building. “I need to shower. But I’ll see you in a bit?”

“In a bit, Hollander,” Rozanov said softly.

Shane turned around, hurrying into the hotel and up to his room. He wasn't sure- Fuck, he missed Roz like he missed breathing. The last few months had been awful. Shane didn't know how he'd thought he was enjoying life, before Roz came to Montreal and forced his presence onto Shane every day. Shane missed last season, when everything had been easy and simple and *lovely*.

Everything had been fucked up since last May. Disasterously fucked up. And things couldn't go back to before, Shane knew that. Even though Roz had offered that, a few times, they couldn't do that. It wouldn't be fair to either of them, so Shane had said no. He didn't want to take advantage like that.

But still. He missed Roz. Maybe just teammates was for the best. It was better than nothing.

He showered quickly, and helped himself to one of the plastic water bottles that were in the minifridge.

Rozanov had seemed - relaxed, when they talked. Not fraught, like he had been so repeatedly recently whenever they were together, like he was hanging by a thread. In general, now, he seemed... better.

Shane had never needed to worry about what Roz wanted - it was one of the things that Shane had always felt soothed about, with the two of them. Shane was terrible at reading people, but he'd never had to stress about it with Roz, because Roz was so straightforward he would just say. Maybe other people might find it rude, but Shane had always found it such a relief.

Hollander, I want to fuck you... Show off for me, I want to watch you... Friends is okay, if you still refuse to fuck... There's American term for it - friends with benefits... Shane, I like you... And now, real teammates, or something.

Christ, what a massive downgrade. Teammates, or something.

But Shane loved it, how blunt and unapologetic Roz was about what he wanted, always. Shane always knew where he stood. Even when Shane would shoot him down, Roz never pretended to want something he didn't.

It was why it had hurt to find out how long Roz *had* liked him for. Since Vegas. When he fucked Shane but hadn't even kissed him, and Shane had gone back to his hotel room feeling utterly tossed aside. Even then, apparently. Then they hadn't spoken for months, until Roz turned up in Montreal with a blue jersey like it was no big deal.

But generally, Rozanov was always up front with what he wanted. Shane could do teammates. It was for the best. Hell, maybe one day they could even work their way back up to being friends.

Shane had decided he hated Dan. He knew that wasn't fair, but as he watched Rozanov talk to him at the vending machine, laughing like he'd just heard the funniest joke in the world, he *hated* Dan.

He's showing me new sex things. What did that even mean? Shane thought he and Rozanov had had a pretty good sex life, what else was there? What had Shane not done, that Dan was now doing?

Dan pressed a hand lightly into Rozanov's chest, and Shane had had enough.

"Right!" he barked, making Hayden, sitting beside him, jump. "Break's over! Everyone back on the ice!"

"It's barely been five minutes!" Stedlund moaned.

Shane glared at him. "You can have a longer break when we don't lose to Columbus again. Now, everyone! Come on, move it!"

He hassled the whole team back onto the ice, and only felt a little bit guilty about it. They had a game that evening, so practice ended early anyway, and they all got to go home for a few hours before heading to the arena.

The LA Kings were in town, and Shane popped his mouthguard in as he went to take the first face-off. He snagged the puck easily, and went tearing down the ice.

He dodged the first LA player coming at him, but he could sense another coming up behind him. He fired the puck off to Boizeau, and started looking for space he could create near the goal.

That was when he felt something *catch* in his left skate, and suddenly all of the momentum he was carrying came to a blinding halt, and he was yanked backwards. He didn't have any time to work out what the fuck was going on. His head hit the ice, and he blacked out instantly.

He came to - he thought it could have only been a few seconds. He couldn't see anything but *bright*, but he must still be on the rink, because he could hear all the chaos around him. The crowd was apoplectic, screaming bloody murder, and he could hear a referee shouting.

"Rozanov! Rozanov, get off him!"

Shane blinked, and the world came a little more into focus. The team medic was leaning over him, and Shane groaned.

"I'm okay," he said. "I'm up, I'm okay, I can get up."

"Are you seeing straight? How many fingers, Shane?"

Shane honestly wasn't sure.

"We're getting you off the ice," the medic said firmly. "Come on, buddy."

~~

Shane ended up at home five hours later. He had a grade A concussion, and would be out until after Christmas, and his back was bruising like a peach, but it could have been worse.

His parents were driving down tomorrow morning, to bring him back up to Ottawa. He'd lied to them, and told them Hayden was staying with him tonight, and told Hayden that his parents were with him. He felt a little guilty about it, but he knew he was going to be stuck alone with his parents for at least the next two weeks now. He needed at least one night on his own before dealing with all that, and he'd had enough concussions to know if something was really wrong.

The medic had told him what happened - the LA player that had been chasing him, Daniels, had stuck his stick out, snagging it in Shane's skate. A blatant foul, especially when Shane didn't even have the puck, which is what pissed Shane off more than anything. Accidental injuries were to be expected, it was part of the game, but he really fucking hated this shit. He didn't even get the point - even if it worked, and gave you an advantage, how would you feel good about yourself when you won? It wouldn't be a real win.

His phone was going crazy, it kept buzzing. Shane was trying to just listen to his audiobook, because he knew screens weren't technically allowed, but he figured a quick glance couldn't hurt. Just to make sure it wasn't anything important.

He had a lot of messages and missed calls from his parents, but he'd dealt with them. The team were all sending him get better soon messages, but they wouldn't be expecting a response for a few days.

Rozanov had sent a lot of messages. Shane took a deep breath, and clicked on the contact.

It looked absurd, their history. Roz's message from summer was still there on the screen, the last thing either of them had sent.

Roz: tell me, is the sex terrible??

Roz: or does she wear a strap-on and fuck you?

Roz: pretty adventurous for little miss girl-next-door

Months of nothing. And then, today.

Roz: are you okay???

Roz: shane????

Roz: theriault says concussion

Roz: i will murder all of la team

Roz: pike says your parents are coming down?

Roz: are you vomiting? how bad is it?

Shane squinted, and managed to type out a reply.

Shane: all good. sorry, not supposed to be on phone

He sent it, and almost immediately, a call started coming through. Shane hesitated, and then clicked accept, bringing the phone to his ear.

“Shane?” Rozanov asked urgently.

“Yeah.”

“You are okay? Where are you?”

“I’m fine,” Shane said. “I’m at home.”

“Fuck. Sorry. You- It looked bad. You scared me.”

Shane closed his eyes, inhaling deeply. “I’m fine,” he repeated. “Concussion, and I think half my body is bruised. But I’m okay.”

“...Okay.”

“You-” Shane shook his head, and immediately regretted it, as he was hit with a wave of dizziness. “I heard you fought Daniels.”

“I knocked two of his teeth out. He deserved worse. Dirty fucking player.”

“You weren’t even on the ice.”

It was quiet for a few seconds. “...Stedlund was going for him too. But I was faster, I just got there first.”

“You don’t- I thought we agreed that you don’t have to defend me.”

“...I know,” Roz murmured. “But I needed to. You were- just lying there. I had to do something.”

Shane felt like he might be about to cry. “Sorry.”

“No, don’t- not your fault. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to be sorry.” But Shane really didn’t want Rozanov fighting other players for him. Honestly, all he wanted right now was for Rozanov to be *here*, in person, touching him. Being gentle. Roz was a bruiser through and through, but Shane knew how sweet and gentle he could be. He wanted that right now, when everything ached and he felt dizzy every time he moved. He *couldn’t* want that, but he did.

“...I should let you go,” Rozanov said. He sounded as sad as Shane felt.

“Yeah,” Shane said, fighting back the tears. “Keep the team in line until I get back, okay?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“...Bye, Roz.”

“Goodbye, Shane.”

~~

Shane was stuck in Ottawa. He couldn’t think of anything but Rozanov. He had nothing to do but think, and it was awful. He was so alone, and the one person he wanted was the one person he couldn’t talk to.

He couldn’t. He couldn’t, he couldn’t, he couldn’t. He wasn’t allowed to, Rozanov wasn’t part of his plan. He’d followed that plan perfectly since he eight years old - train, every day after school, every weekend, miss out on parties and friends and everything to get drafted. Get drafted, become Captain, win Stanley Cups. Be a role model. Don’t get into scandals. Settle down with a wife and two point five kids and a labrador and make his parents proud, make his community proud. Make hockey proud. Rozanov wasn’t a part of any of that.

Rose could have been a part of the plan. But Shane had fucked that up, he'd betrayed her after she'd been so great with him. Too great, maybe. She could read him too easily.

They'd said they'd stay friends, but that was just what you said when you broke up. They hadn't spoken at all since Shane had told her what he'd done, other than the lone message he'd sent wishing her a happy birthday, which had gone unresponded to, and the single, brief get-well-soon text she had sent a few days ago.

Shane stared at that message now, as he was stuck in his childhood bedroom. He still didn't understand how he could've ever let her down like he did. Except he did, he knew how. He was so fucking weak - weak for what he ached for, even when he pretended he didn't.

She'd known, she'd fucking called him out on it. And he'd been such a coward, denying it. Lying to her on top of everything else. When she was so nice. Maybe if- if things had gone differently, if Shane had been better, she'd still be acting nice towards him. Even though she'd figured him out, if he hadn't-

She would probably have been nice about, if Shane hadn't done that. She was a nice person.

His parents were out, and the house was empty, and Shane felt like he was about to fall apart, that was the only reason he called her. He was so desperate.

The phone rang for a long time before she picked up.

"Shane?" Her voice was wary. "Is everything okay?"

"Why did you ask if it was a man?" Shane asked, unable to stop himself.

"...Shane?"

"Sorry," Shane said. "Sorry, sorry. Just- I need to know. Why would you- why would you think that? What did I do?"

Rose sighed heavily. "You didn't... *do* anything, Shane. That was the problem. You just never... I never felt like you were actually attracted to me."

"Sorry," Shane said again.

"You don't need to apologise for that. *That's* not your fault," Rose said. She didn't need to say the rest.

"I'm sorry for- for all of it," Shane babbled, the words spilling out. It was true. "I didn't- I know I was a shit boyfriend, you didn't deserve that. Um, any of it. I... I..."

"Was I right, then?" Rose asked quietly. "It was a man?"

Shane choked back a sob. "...Yes," he admitted.

"Was I - what, a beard?"

“No. No, I really wanted us to work out, Rose. Really. I wanted to make it work so badly.”

“Then why did you-”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t-” Shane took a deep breath in, steeling himself. “I was selfish. I was trying to- to do what everyone wanted, and do the right thing, but I... I just forgot about everyone else, and I was selfish. I’m really sorry.”

“I believe you,” Rose said. It wasn’t rude, but it wasn’t exactly friendly either. An acknowledgement, rather than forgiveness.

“Really. I’m so sorry. I treated you- so poorly. When you were amazing. Are amazing. I’m just- I need you to know how sorry I am.”

“I know.” She paused. “Why are you calling me, Shane?”

“I don’t know who else to talk to.”

“About what?”

“That I- I-” Shane swallowed. “That I might be gay,” he whispered.

“Is it something you need to talk about?” she asked evenly.

“Yes. Because it’s- it’s going to fuck everything up. I can’t- my parents want grandkids! They didn’t think they’d even have me, I *have* to give them grandkids. And my team- hockey- the brands. I’m going to let everyone down, if I-...”

Rose hummed. “So, you think you can just- what? Ignore it?”

“Yeah. Maybe.”

“And then you won’t fuck over other people?”

“Yeah.”

“But you were already doing that, and you fucked over me.”

Shane’s lips started to wobble uncontrollably, as he tried to hold himself together. “I’m sorry,” he said yet again. He didn’t know what else to say.

“...Shane, you need to be honest with yourself,” Rose said softly, “or you’ll hurt other people too. You’re not just screwing over yourself when you do this.”

“But what about-”

“Shane.”

Shane nodded, biting down on his knuckles. “I’m gay,” he confessed, voice thick and cheeks wet.

“I know, honey. It’s okay.”

Chapter 24: January 2016 (I)

Cos I'm stupid and I'm damaged and you're a disaster

When you walk into the room

Oh none of it matters

Oh baby I just buckle

— Buckle, Florence and the Machine

JANUARY 2016

Ilya had taken over centering the first line while Shane was recovering. It was good, to be playing at the top level again, really getting to push himself, but he couldn't really enjoy it too much. Not while Shane was gone.

They only had two games before Western Christmas, and then a few more after they got back. Pike had taken the helm, as Alternate Captain, but he was no Shane Hollander. Ilya missed Hollander - not Shane, although he missed Shane too - but Hollander, his reserved Captain who led the team with a quiet, steely resolve and owned the ice like it wasn't even hard. Really, Pike stood no chance.

Still, they managed to play pretty well, even with their lack of Hollander. But this time of year was always rough for Ilya, notwithstanding Shane's absence. He had remembered to book the seventh off this year, so he didn't have to worry about fighting with Theriault at least. He was lucky they didn't have a game scheduled that day, or Theriault would probably have made Ilya come in anyway, rather than play missing both himself and Hollander.

Ilya woke up on his Christmas to the familiar feeling of melancholy. He dressed and put on his suit in sort of a haze, already thinking about Mama. He wouldn't let himself think about her once he entered the church, so he did it now.

He checked his phone before he got into his car, and was surprised to see a text from Shane.

Shane: hey, i know things are weird between us right now, but i just wanted to say i'll be thinking of you today. i hope it all goes well. i'll say a prayer for your mom.

Ilya grit his teeth and stared at the sky. God, why was he like this? How did he know the most perfect, most gut-wrenching thing to possibly say? He was so utterly, undeniably softhearted.

It made something deep inside himself wail.

Ilya: thank you

He didn't say anything else, because otherwise he'd say everything. He got in his car instead, and drove to the church.

The service was long, dragging on like it always did. Ilya tried to be sincere about it, like he always did. He thought about the birth of the man who had died for their sins - for *his* sins, Ilya's sins. Someone had cared enough, to die for his faults. It would be nice, if it was true.

He thought of his sins as he took his blessing from the priest. What had happened since last time? Envy, endless envy, he needed to repent for that. Wrath, he'd committed that sin too. Lust, obviously. Not so much pride, not this time. He'd been pretty self-hating since last May. Maybe the lack of pride in his list of sins was progress, but he didn't think so. Mama would think it was progress, but Mama had been wrong about some things. Ilya thought he could probably do with a bit more pride, a bit more self-love. Mama probably could have too.

He decided he wouldn't repent for pride, next time.

After the service, he followed his routine, taking his flowers and going to find Elena's grave, saying hello to her and offering a prayer on her behalf. Then he sat down to talk to Mama.

"Hi Mama," he said. "It's good to talk to you again. Lots- lots has happened, again. I know I talked to you in Russia, sorry I'm not at your real grave again. I'm back in Montreal now.

"I haven't spoken to Alexei in a while, but I'll talk to him when I get home. Papa's- Papa's getting worse, but Alexei and Karina are doing their best. Eva is one now. You would love her." Ilya smiled. "No one can get her to stop crying, but I bet you'd be able to. If you were still here, I bet we'd just put her in your arms and she'd settle, happy. You'd love her, you always loved your family so much. She'd be able to tell, and be calm just like that.

"What about me? Well, the team is doing well. I think we're going to make the playoffs again. We'll try for the cup, maybe this year's our year. I've got to play on the first line again, that's been fun. I feel a little bad about liking it, because I'm only on it because Hollander got injured. But it has been fun."

He took a deep breath. *"Okay, well. I've had to see Shane again, now I'm back in Canada. It was- really hard, for a while. It's better now. I still love him, but... I think I'm learning how to love better. Even though he didn't want me like that... it doesn't hurt like it did. It doesn't make me hate myself anymore.*

"I've started, um, working on myself, I guess? Dan thinks I need to know how to set boundaries. He's... Sorry, he's another guy I'm sleeping with. Sorry. But he's good. He just-says no to things. When he doesn't want to do them. Said he didn't want to date someone who

wasn't out. Said he didn't want to call me a-... um, bad things, in bed. I found it weird, at first. I never said no to things, when I liked someone. I'd do anything to make them happy, even if it would make me miserable. I think... I think I got that from you. But I'm not doing that anymore. I think you'd be proud of me. You wouldn't want me sad, like you were.

He was tearing up. Ilya supposed it should have been expected - he always cried when he talked to Mama. Still, he felt bad. Like he was insulting her. She had been perfect - she had always been perfect, to him. It felt like betraying her, to admit her faults.

"Sorry," he said. "You know you're still- still the best person who ever lived. Everyone loved you, even if they didn't show it enough, should have been better for you. Maybe that's where we're different. You were so easy to love, and I'm hard to love. I know that. But I'm more like you than I thought, Mama. I'm proud of that. I hope I keep discovering more ways I'm like you. Better ways." He did want to be more like Mama. Wanted some of her endless good attributes too. Her kindness, her generosity, her humility. He hoped he had all that somewhere inside him too, from her.

He nodded to himself, staring at the gravestone with the wrong name. *"Okay. That's everything. I'll be back on your birthday. I love you."*

He sat in front of the grave for a few seconds, but of course it couldn't say anything back. He coughed, bringing himself out of his reverie, and said a prayer for her, laying down her flowers too.

He smoked a cigarette before he drove back to his apartment. He waited for a while before calling Russia, let himself have a vodka and get himself under control. Then he called Alexei.

"Ilya," Alexei answered, sombre. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas. How... how are you?"

Alexei grunted. *"Fine. You?"*

"Yeah, fine. Is Papa there?"

"...He is," Alexei said slowly. "But he's not really... present."

"What do you mean?"

"He doesn't know where he is, Ilya. Doesn't know who he is."

Ilya pushed down the torrent of worry that rose inside of him. *"Can you just- put him on? Please?"*

Alexei sighed, and there was the sounds of shuffling. Ilya heard, muffled, *"Papa, Ilya's calling. You remember Ilya?... Just, yeah, hold it to your ear, so you can hear him."*

"...Hello, Papa," Ilya said.

There was nothing but the sound of breathing coming down the line. Ilya clenched the phone tightly. *“Papa?”* he tried again. *“Are you there?”*

Nothing.

“It’s me, Ilya. I... I miss you, Papa. Merry Christmas.”

Nothing.

“How is the house, is it still too loud?”

Nothing.

Ilya knew he couldn’t yell. *“Okay, Papa,”* he said, with exhausted acceptance. *“It’s- I know it’s not your fault. I hope you’re- you’re comfortable. I love you.”* He hung up.

Jesus. He shut his eyes, digging the heels of his palms into them until he saw colours dancing among the black. That was his second parent gone, then. Not dead yet, but pretty much.

He heaved himself to his feet, and went to pour himself another vodka. He missed Christmas when he was a kid, when they all played at being a happy family for Mama, and he was in a house that was *loud*, and he wasn’t alone. He was always alone, now.

He put on Mama’s music again. He wanted sound, and it made it easier to pretend she was still here, just in the next room. But it wasn’t right, he was playing it off his TV, and the quality was too clean, not like Mama’s old CD player that had always had a background hum of static. He let it carry on playing for a while anyway.

He thought of Shane’s text. He thought about how, for a few moments this morning, when he had read that message, he hadn’t felt so alone. He thought about the fact that he hadn’t been the only one to pray for Mama today, for once.

He paused the music, and got his phone out, staring at the text. He got so lost in the words, he jumped when another message appeared suddenly.

Shane: did you get back home okay?

Ilya clicked the call button impulsively. He was shocked when Shane answered almost immediately.

“Roz? Are you okay?”

Ilya nodded, and then remembered that Shane couldn’t see him. *“Yes,”* he said. *“Just-lonely.”* He heard Shane let out a harsh exhale. *“Sorry.”*

“No, no, it’s okay.”

“Can you just- talk to me?” Ilya asked, trying not to sound as desperate as he felt. “Please?”

“...What do you want to talk about?”

“I don’t know. Anything.” Ilya closed his eyes. “I need- distraction. Tell me about whatever film you saw recently.”

“Really? Are you sure you don’t want to-”

“Just tell me about it.”

“...Okay,” Shane said. “If that’s what you want.”

“It is.”

“Okay. Well, I’ve, uh, seen a few recently. Not much to do in Ottawa. And being stuck with just my parents gets tiring quickly. I saw The Big Short a week ago, have you seen it yet?”

“No,” Ilya said. “Was it good?”

“I think so. It was about the financial crisis, so it was kind of complicated, even though they tried to dumb it down. You’d probably understand it better than me, you’re so much smarter about that sort of stuff.”

Ilya smiled to himself. Shane had such faith in him, it made his insides turn into hot, liquidy goo. “So you didn’t like it?” he asked.

“I dunno, it was still entertaining. I wouldn’t have seen it if I hadn’t already watched everything else they were showing. They had Michael Scott playing, like, a serious banker. It was funny seeing him swear.”

“Mm. That would be funny.”

“Yeah. I think you’d like it. It had a really famous cast, and it kept, like, breaking the fourth wall to try and explain things. They did it in a funny way, they had Margot Robbie in a bathtub trying to explain- something, I dunno. About the mortgages, or whatever.”

“Did you get distracted?” Ilya asked, teasing.

“No.”

Ilya sucked in a breath at the flat response. “Oh.”

“...You’d like that scene, though,” Shane said. “You think she’s hot, right?”

“Not as pretty as you,” Ilya said.

“Roz-”

“I’m always going to call you pretty, Shane,” Ilya told him bluntly. “Is my favourite thing to do. You cannot deny me this. Is true, you are the prettiest.”

“...Alright,” Shane murmured.

Ilya nodded, breathing a sigh of relief. “Your parents are being a lot, then?” he guessed.

“Yeah. You’d- you’d be proud of me, actually.”

“Oh? Why?”

“I- I *yelled* at my Mom,” Shane said, whispering like it was something scandalous.

“You did?” Ilya asked, intrigued. “Good boy Shane Hollander?”

“Mhm. She was just- trying to get me to do this documentary, but they wanted to film my personal life, and I didn’t want to, but she wasn’t letting it go, and I just- snapped.”

“You finally said no. Well done.”

“Thanks.”

“Is she mad at you?”

Shane chuckled. “No. I apologised, like, twenty minutes later. But I’m, uh, still glad I did it. We talked and she- she said she was going to try and put less pressure on me. Stop being so controlling. It’s been... good, since.”

Ilya smiled, feeling a ludicrous amount of pride. “That’s nice,” he said. “I’m glad.”

“Yeah.”

“How is your head?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s- it’s all good, now. I’m coming back this weekend, it’ll be good to get back to playing.”

“I’ve missed you,” Ilya said. “Is not the same, when you are not there.”

“I’ve been watching, it looks like you're doing great. I might be knocked off the first line when I come back.”

Ilya let out a short laugh. “No, is your spot. Everyone wants you back.”

“...Yeah?” Shane asked, sounding unsure.

“Yes,” Ilya said firmly. “Especially me. I miss your pretty face.”

“Fuck. Yeah, I- I miss you too.”

“Can we- Facetime?”

“Yes. Please.”

Ilya scrambled to bring the phone in front of his face, accepting the Facetime request. Shane's face appeared on his screen, a little pixelated but *there*. Warm and soft and- fuck, he was wearing glasses. Ilya wanted to kiss his nose, he also wanted to come all over those glasses.

"Hey," Shane said, a small, shy smile appearing on his face.

"There you are," Ilya whispered.

"Here I am." Shane stared at Ilya through the phone screen. His eyes looked so big - maybe it was the glasses. Ilya felt like he was drowning in them. "...How was today?" Shane asked tentatively.

Ilya sighed. "Sad," he said. "Mama is- it's always sad. Papa wasn't talking when I called him. He's not- there, anymore. I talked so much today, and... no one talked back. I just wanted to hear someone's voice." He paused, then shook his head. "Your voice," he corrected.

"I- I'm sorry," Shane said. "I'm sorry I'm not there with you."

"Is okay. You're in Ottawa."

"Yeah." He looked so forlorn. "But that's not why I'm not there right now."

Ilya swallowed. "Is okay," he said again. "You- did not want. You're allowed to not want."

"I was-" Shane cut himself off, his face screwing up for a second. "Where's, um, where's Dan?" he asked.

Ilya shrugged. "Home, I'm guessing. We're not, like-... He is not who I want to see me like this, right now."

"You still- me?"

"Of course."

"Ilya, I-"

Ilya inhaled sharply.

"I mean-" Shane started, eyes widening.

"Say it again."

"...Ilya."

"*Shane.*" Ilya was going to cry. "Shane."

"Ilya. I- I care about you so much," Shane said, the words tumbling out of his mouth, rapid-fire, so quick that Ilya struggled to keep up. "You know that, yeah? Even with all the- everything. I've always cared about you. You're so- so important to me."

"Yes?"

“Yes. Yes, of course.” Shane made an aborted movement with his hand, like he was going to touch the screen.

Ilya felt the words wash over him like a baptism. “I care about you too,” he said.

“Yeah,” Shane said, smiling tightly. “I know. You’ve never let me doubt that.”

“I would never.”

“I know. You’re- fucking fearless, like that.”

Ilya smiled. “I like your glasses.”

“Wha- oh. Oh, I forgot I was wearing them.”

“I like them. Very pretty.”

Shane flushed, he was so easy. Ilya loved it.

“Ilya,” he said, “I... I wish I was there. Wish I was with you right now.”

“Me too. Phone screen does not do you justice. I cannot see your freckles properly.”

Shane shook his head bashfully. “...Yeah, it doesn’t do you justice either,” he said.

It sent a rush down Ilya’s spine. “Tell me,” he instructed.

“You...” Shane’s eyes bore into the screen. “I wish I could touch you right now. I miss touching you.”

Ilya felt his dick start to fatten up. One hand drifted to his zipper. “Miss touching you too,” he said, voice getting heavier. “Your hair- your tits, fuck. Perfect handfuls, made for me.”

Shane’s mouth fell open. “Are you-”

“Yes. You want?”

Shane nodded instantly. His arm moved somewhere below the screen, and Ilya groaned.

“You are touching yourself, Hollander?”

“Yes. What about y-”

“Mhm.” Ilya took his cock out of his trousers. He spat into his hand, making sure Shane could see, and brought it back down to grip himself. “Thinking about your perfect chest. Your ass- shit. Shane. So gorgeous, all of you.”

“Jesus.” Shane already looked worked up, his arm moving up and down. Ilya wanted to see, but he thought he’d rather keep watching Shane’s face.

“Are you wet for me?”

“Yeah. Yeah, fuck, Ilya.”

Ilya growled, jerking himself quicker. “Good boy. God, touch yourself, Shane. Imagine it’s me, imagine I’m there.”

Shane whined, his face getting more red. “I want- want you to fuck me again. Fuck.”

“Yes. You need me, don’t you? Need my cock inside you?”

“Ah- yeah. Yeah, I do.”

“Fuck. Fuck, I’m going to-”

“Me too.”

“Come for me, Shane.”

Shane let out a cry, stilling, as Ilya burst into his own hand. He took a deep breath.

“Are you... going to go, now?” he asked regrettably.

Shane’s face fell. “No. No, I’m not going anywhere, Ilya.”

“Oh.” Ilya blinked, surprised.

“I’m not- not going to run away, anymore. I’m here, however you want me.”

“...Oh.”

Shane looked worried. “I know you might- I know I’ve-... I don’t know. I meant it, before. I care about you. I’m sorry I-... I don’t know what we are anymore.”

“You said you are coming back to Montreal, this weekend?” Ilya asked.

Shane hesitated. “Uh, yeah. On Sunday.”

“Would you... want to come over? We could- talk. About- about us.”

“Yes. Yes, God, I want to do that.”

Ilya couldn’t help himself, he beamed. Shane huffed a laugh, smiling back at him.

“Okay,” Ilya said.

“Okay.”

“Go on, you can go. I know you want to clean yourself up.”

Shane glanced down at himself, then back up. “Yeah... Sunday, though? You and me?”

“Sunday,” Ilya agreed. “You and me.”

Chapter 25: January 2016 (II)

Chapter Notes

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

JANUARY 2016

Ilya had another match on Saturday. It would be his last one playing first line, so he tried to make the most of it. But really, he couldn't wait for it to be over. He was desperate to get to tomorrow, because tomorrow he would get to see Shane again.

See him, and- talk. Ilya was actually incredibly... hopeful, about it. Shane had said he cared. He'd accepted all of Ilya's affection. Returned it. They'd jerked off together, and he hadn't run away afterwards. It felt like, maybe, they might be on the same page. Or at least, if they weren't, they would be able to actually talk to each other without it all falling apart.

Ilya just wanted to get in the same room as him, after weeks of him being stuck in Ottawa. He wanted- God, he wanted everything. But most importantly, he wanted to know what Shane wanted. He wanted a real conversation. And Shane had agreed to that.

They won their match, and Ilya was trotted out to speak to the media afterwards. He breezed through it, and showered quickly, before heading to Dan's office. He wasn't sure if the man would have left already or not, but he was still in there when Ilya knocked, peeking his head in.

"Are you busy?" he asked.

"Never too busy for my favourite patient."

Ilya grinned, entering the room and shutting the door behind him. He perched on the medical bed, swinging his legs a little. "Your favourite?"

"Mhm." Dan looked at him fondly. "Although as soon as Renaud decides to start blowing me, you get bumped down to second place."

"Renaud? Ew, you have awful taste."

"What does that say about you, then?"

Ilya snorted.

"What's up? Is this visit for business or pleasure?"

"Pleasure. I am fit and healthy."

"Good. But I'm not hooking up with you in my office."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Disappointing. But I, ah... I wanted to talk, actually."

“Oh?”

Ilya nodded. “I, um... do you remember I told you about an ex?”

Dan pursed his lips, leaning back and watching Ilya carefully. “I do.”

“He, um... We...”

“Ilya, it’s okay. We were never dating. Is he back in the picture?”

“I think so.”

“Okay.” Dan tapped his foot against the floor. “Is he serious, this time?”

“I think so.”

Dan sighed.

“I have to- to try,” Ilya said. “I won’t- it won’t be like last time. I’m not going to do that to myself again. But he’s been... different, recently. And I want to give us a real shot.”

“Alright,” Dan said gently. “But make sure you look after yourself, okay? You know-”

“Boundaries,” Ilya said. “I know. Saying no to things, I’ll do that.” He smiled. “You taught me that.”

“Yeah. I hope he treats you well, Ilya.”

“Thank you. We will still talk, yes? We can still be friends?”

Dan laughed. “Yeah, we can still be friends. You’re a good kid.”

“You are hot old man.”

Dan shook his head, his lips twitching. “Yeah, yeah. Get out of my office, you little shit.”

Ilya bit his lip delightedly, getting to his feet. He paused at the door. “...Thank you. Really,” he said. “You helped me very much.”

Dan’s face softened. “Yeah. I didn’t mind. You were the opposite of a hardship, babe. You were lovely.”

Ilya felt something stick in his chest. “So were you,” he told him quietly, reverent.

He slipped out of the office, ducking his head to wipe away a stray tear. He hadn’t expected to get so emotional, but he supposed he had got attached to Dan. He felt ridiculously grateful towards the older man, for being so good with him.

He drove home, and did his best to tidy up in preparation for Shane. He went to the Whole Foods and bought a twelve-pack of ginger ale, and some healthy snacks that Shane would want, instead of the chips and chocolate that currently stacked Ilya’s shelves.

He paused, and impulsively bought another of their cupcakes. He figured he could hide it, and only bring it out if things went well.

He got back to his apartment and unpacked everything, and looked around. He decided to put fresh sheets on the bed, even if it was maybe being a bit presumptuous. Better to be prepared.

Finally, he felt that it was time to go to sleep. *Only a matter of hours now*, he thought to himself, as his head hit the pillow.

He woke up to the insistent buzzing of an incoming call. He rolled over, and it stopped, before immediately starting to ring again. A glance at the window told him it was still dark outside. He reached for his phone, bleary-eyed, and saw Alexei's contact. Rubbing a hand down his face, he clicked accept.

"Alexei? What is it, are you out of money?"

"Ilya. It's happened."

~~

Ilya threw anything nearby into a rucksack and called an Uber to the airport. He booked the first flight to Moscow, was boarding the plane before he'd even fully processed what was happening.

He was stuck in economy - he hadn't flown economy in years. The seat was too small for his six foot three frame, his legs were cramped, and his knees pressing up against the seat in front of him. He supposed it didn't matter; it wasn't like this was going to be an enjoyable flight either way.

It's not like he hadn't known this was coming. Papa had been failing. Ilya just wished he had still been talking, for that last phone call. Now Ilya couldn't even remember what Papa's last words were to him. He was glad, now, that he had stopped himself from getting angry. He'd told Papa he loved him, at least. He hadn't been able to do that with Mama.

He was an hour into the flight when he suddenly shot up straight. *Shane*. They were supposed to meet today. Ilya had- completely forgotten. He wasn't going to be there.

He turned airplane mode off on his phone, but it didn't do any good. There was no service. Fuck, he felt like hitting himself.

The ten hour flight felt like ten years instead. Ilya's leg bounced the whole way, desperate to land. When they finally did, and he could get service again, he switched airplane mode off, and watched as a series of texts came through.

Shane: leaving now, drive back is about two hours. what time should i come over?

Shane: haven't heard from you, but im back. okay if i come now?

Missed call from Shane

Missed call from Shane

Shane: im at your place. im guessing you changed your mind. its okay, dont worry. i get it

Ilya cursed, fighting his way off the plane, shoving past other passengers rudely. As soon as he got into the airport, he went to find a space he could loiter undisturbed and huddled down, calling Shane, pressing his phone hard against his ear.

"Ily-"

"Shane," Ilya said quickly. "I'm sorry. Sorry I wasn't there."

"It's okay, you don't have to-"

"No, I wanted to be there. God, I was so excited, you have no idea."

"...So what happened?" Shane asked. He sounded so resigned, fuck.

"I'm in Moscow," Ilya said.

"*What?!'*"

"Papa. He- he died. I- I just got on plane, I wasn't thinking. Shit, I'm so sorry."

"No, no, it's alright. Fuck, Ilya, are you okay?"

"I'm sorry."

"No, God," Shane said. "It's- it's fine really. I thought- nevermind. How are you?"

"...I don't know. He was old. I knew it was coming." Ilya huffed weakly. "I wish it had happened any other time. Wish I was there right now. I can't believe I fucking-"

“No, it’s- it’s not a problem. It’s okay. We can still talk when you get back, yeah?”

“Yes. Please. I’m sorry.”

“Please stop apologising,” Shane said. “Really, it’s okay. I’m just... God, I’m so sorry, Ilya. I’m here, if you need anything.”

Ilya smiled. “Is good just to talk to you,” he said.

Shane let out a soft sigh.

“I should, um- the security is starting to stare at me.”

“What? Where are you?”

“I just got off plane. I still need to go through passport control. I just needed to- call you, first. Tell you I didn’t mean to miss our...”

“Oh, Ilya, you’re so-... Don’t worry. Go, get home, be with your family. I’ll be here when you get back.”

Ilya nodded. “I think I will be a week,” he said.

“Take as long as you need. Call me again, if you want.”

“...Okay. Bye, Shane.”

“Bye, Ilya.”

~~

The funeral was on Tuesday - the third day after the death, as was the Orthodox tradition. Even though Papa hadn’t been religious, it was just when you buried people. At least they could leave him in the morgue until then. Mama had had the full religious burial, her body laid to rest in the house for the three days before they buried her. Ilya had hated that. Her skin had gone all waxy and grey. He shuddered at the memory. He’d never understood how that practice was supposed to help the grieving process. It had only succeeded in giving him nightmares for a year afterwards.

He and Alexei were forced to talk to each other, organising the funeral and the wake, and starting to go through the house and clear out all of Papa’s things. Ilya told him he would stay for the full week, help him get everything sorted. Alexei had shrugged, unenthusiastic, but he hadn’t argued. But Ilya wanted to do it. He hadn’t been able to be there, as Papa declined. He wanted to help with this part, at least.

The funeral was solemn, but that was what funerals were. Ilya didn't speak, he let Alexei do that. Alexei was the one who had spent the most time with Papa, had carried all the weight at the end. Ilya let him have the eulogy.

There weren't loads of people there. About fifteen of Papa's old colleagues, and then Karina seemed to have whipped up some of her friends to fill the empty space, make things seem less sparse.

Afterwards, they went to a bar that Ilya had rented a private room in, for the pominki. He realised, when they arrived, that he had seriously overcatered. There was far too much food for the lack of people. And all of Papa's old colleagues seemed more interested in the free alcohol than anything else.

They were a dull, bitter lot. Still emasculated about the fall of the USSR, and making up for it by being overly loud and making lewd comments about Karina's female friends, a few being blatantly handsy. Ilya sat with a couple of them, and let them tell him stories about Papa as a young man, which then turned to general stories about the 1950s that Ilya had no interest in.

Eventually, Ilya excused himself, stepping outside. He sat down on the steps of the entrance to the bar, rubbing his hands together at the cold. He thought maybe he should feel more sad, but he didn't. He'd been mourning his father for more than a year now.

He lit a cigarette, and heard the door behind him open. He knew who it was without turning around, knew him just by the weight of him.

"Taking a break?"

Ilya nodded. *"You would think those men lost an inch off their dicks for each Soviet state that became independent."*

Alexei snorted, and sat down on the steps next to Ilya. He held his hand out, and Ilya sighed, digging his pack back out of his pocket and handing it to him. Alexei took a cigarette out, lighting it with his own lighter.

"You have your own," Ilya grumbled.

"I bought you your cigarettes until you were fifteen. You owe me."

"Whatever." Ilya took his pack back. *"...I think we overcatered."*

"Yeah. People can take home leftovers, it's fine. Karina will save anything that's left."

"She's a good woman," Ilya said.

Alexei sighed. *"I know."*

"With Papa gone, you don't need a nanny anymore."

"Karina's already fired her, Ilya. She fired Ulyana the second Papa stopped breathing."

"Good for her," Ilya said plainly.

"I came out here to avoid being judged. If I wanted a lecture, I would have carried on talking to Papa's colleagues."

"Sorry." Ilya breathed in more smoke.

"Yeah, well. Maybe things will be easier. Now he's gone."

"I think so. Feels bad to say though, doesn't it?"

"...Yeah. It does." Alexei stared forward glumly.

"Better than Mama's funeral at least," Ilya offered. That had been an awful day. This was just... bittersweet.

"God, yeah," Alexei said. "At least she didn't have to watch him die."

"...We're the only ones left now. Who really knew her."

"Mhm."

The sky was cloudy, a sea of grey, and Ilya wondered if it was going to rain. He hoped not, he didn't want to have to go back inside. He and Alexei sat in silence for a while, just smoking. When they finished their cigarettes, Ilya produced two more, passing one over. Alexei had had a point, he had supplied Ilya for many years when they were younger. Ilya didn't mind sharing now.

"You're really going to stay for a bit longer?" Alexei asked, flicking his lighter.

"Yeah."

"Okay. Karina will like that. And it will be good for Eva to learn your face."

"Will you like it?"

"...I don't mind you staying," Alexei said. "You're just normally running off at the first opportunity. If you want to stay and help me deal with all Papa's shit, then be my guest."

The sky rumbled threateningly. Ilya, again, hoped the rain would hold off for a little while longer.

"How's Canada?"

Ilya smiled grimly. *"Right country. Well done."*

"Dick."

"...It's okay. I think we're going to make the playoffs again. I want to win another cup for Mama."

Alexei nodded.

"I'm still in love," Ilya added.

Alexei pulled a face, grimacing. *"The man?"*

"Yeah."

"...He still banging someone else?"

"No," Ilya said. "He- he told me he cares about me."

"So what's the problem?"

"I love him. I don't think he'll ever love me."

"Why not?"

Ilya shrugged. *"I'm easy to like, hard to love."*

"Yeah, right." Alexei scoffed, shaking the ash off his cigarette. "Who the fuck told you that?"

"Mama."

Alexei stiffened, turning to actually look at Ilya. *"She did?"*

Ilya nodded. He remembered it like it was yesterday, it was seared into his brain. He'd been ten, so excited because he got his first girlfriend. They'd held hands in the playground, and he had kissed her cheek, and they had decided they were getting married. She'd invited him for a playdate, and when the weekend arrived, Ilya had practically barrelled into Mama's bedroom, desperate for her to take him and meet the girl he was going to marry.

It had been one of Mama's bad days, where she stayed in bed and refused to move. Ilya normally left her alone during her bad days, Alexei always yelled at him for disturbing her, but he had been too eager that day. He had been undeterred, grabbing at her hand and trying to physically pull her out of the bed, pleading with her to just get up and come and meet his girlfriend.

She'd snapped at him, eventually. *"Stop talking about her, Ilya,"* she'd snarled. *"She won't stick around, you aren't in love."*

"We are!" Ilya had exclaimed, stomping his foot. *"She loves me, she held my hand in front of everyone!"*

"She doesn't really love you. You're easy to like, Ilya, but you're hard to love."

Ilya had stopped tugging at her hand, slumping like a puppet which had all its strings cut. His eyes had started to well up, and Mama's face had turned distraught, and she'd scooped him up, lifting him onto the bed and holding him tight against her.

"It's okay, baby," she'd whispered. "It's okay, because I still love you. You've always got me."

Ilya had stayed in bed with her, missing his playdate. His girlfriend had broken up with him the next Monday on the school playground in front of the whole class.

Ilya remembered every second of it. *"Yeah,"* he said to Alexei. *"She did."*

"Didn't know she said shit like that to you. Thought I hid all that from you."

Ilya frowned at him. *"She said it to you too?"*

"Stuff like that, yeah." He sighed heavily, and let out a hollow laugh. *"She caught me jerking off once. Almost beat me with her Bible, then said I was lucky she loved me, because no other woman ever would."*

"Oh."

"...It wasn't her, Ilya. She was sick, her brain..." Alexei shook his head, his hands waving helplessly. *"She got so down, and so lonely. Sometimes she'd drag others down with her, just to have some company. But it wasn't her, you understand? It was just- her brain, it didn't always work right. She didn't mean it. It wasn't Mama, it was her sickness. It wasn't Mama."*

Ilya took a deep inhale; he still felt short of breath. *"Maybe,"* he conceded. *"I think she might've been right anyway, though."*

"She wasn't right."

"How'd you know?"

"Because I don't like you at all. But I'm stuck loving you."

Ilya stared at him. Alexei kept looking forward.

"You do?"

"Sure," he said brusquely. *"I think you're the most frustrating person on the planet. I don't like you one bit. You think you're so much better than me, than us, than your home. But I know you like I know myself. And you know me. We come from the same place. I remember the day you were born. I don't like you, but I still love you. Loved you since you took your first breath. Can't do anything about it."*

Ilya swallowed thickly. *"...Yeah,"* he said, after a moment. *"I don't like you either. You treat people like shit. But I suppose I'm stuck loving you too."*

Alexei chuckled. *"Do you think Mama would be proud of us right now?"*

"No," Ilya smiled. *"She'd want us to be best friends."*

"Eh. Oh well. Not the only way we're letting her down, right?"

“The fag and the adulterer. Maybe it’s better she died before she had to see it.”

Alexei started to laugh, and Ilya did too. It overtook him, the absolute absurdity of it all, until he and Alexei were both completely breaking down, breathless with laughter, sitting on the steps outside a dilapidated Moscow building, tears running down their faces.

They were interrupted by Ilya’s phone ringing. It confused him, because his settings only allowed two people to call when he had Do Not Disturb enabled. One was sitting right next to him. The other was-

“Is that the boyfriend?” Alexei said, rolling his eyes.

“Shut up,” Ilya muttered, clicking decline. *“He’s not my boyfriend.”* He’d call back later, he decided. But Shane immediately started calling again.

“Seems keen on you,” Alexei taunted. *“What, queers don’t know about playing it cool?”*

“Fuck off.” Ilya stood up, walking a few feet away and clicking accept. *“Hollander, I’m at wake, what is so important?”*

Chapter End Notes

i bet you all thought the angst was over...

Chapter 26: January 2016 (III)

JANUARY 2016 - SHANE

Shane went back to the team feeling glum. He wished he'd been able to talk to Ilya on Sunday. Of course, it was Ilya's fault. When Shane hadn't heard from him on Sunday, and had arrived at his apartment and knocked for fifteen minutes to no avail, he honestly thought Ilya had just... changed his mind. Decided Shane had already fucked up too much.

He'd felt such a flood of relief when Ilya finally called him back. Then an immense rush of guilt for feeling relieved, when he realised what had happened. He'd picked up on the fact that Ilya's dad had been sick for a while, but still. It was such an awful thing to happen. Ilya had already lost his mother, and he was still so young.

An orphan at twenty-four. It wasn't fair. Ilya got such a raw deal, he deserved so much better.

Anyway, it meant Shane had to get back to work without getting his chance to talk with Ilya. It was okay, though. They could talk when Ilya got back. And Shane would be brave, and honest, for once in his life. Tell Ilya how much he'd fucked up, what he'd let his cowardice ruin. Ask for another chance. Promise to make him happy this time, if Ilya would let him.

They had a game on Monday, and Shane was a little rusty, but they still won. It did feel good to be back on the ice again, helped calm the hurricane that was his mind right now. He went back in on Tuesday for practice, and couldn't help but notice how empty the locker room felt without Ilya.

He let Hayden chatter away to him as he got changed, listened to him talk about Jackie's morning sickness. Drapeau and Comeau were arguing loudly on the other side of the room about some influencer they both wanted to fuck, while Renaud was complaining that his back hurt. Shane hoped it didn't - with Ilya's injury, then Shane's concussion, the Voyageurs had been unlucky enough this season. It'd be hard to make the playoffs if another person had to take time off. He made a mental note to make Renaud go and get checked out before he went home today.

The door opened abruptly, and Coach Theriault walked in. The room quieted, because Coach didn't normally come in before practice, not unless he had some reason to yell at them all.

"...All good, Coach?" JJ asked cautiously.

Coach ignored him. "Has anyone heard from Rozanov?" he asked, and he sounded normal, but his face was uneasy. Shane's stomach tightened instantly.

"Nah," Drapeau said, "not since he went back to Russia. Why, what's the problem?"

Coach frowned. "His agent called me, she can't get in touch with him."

Shane swallowed, his worry building. "What does she want?" he asked.

Coach glanced at him. “Don’t worry about it. Just let me know if anyone hears from him, okay?”

“I- I texted him last night,” Shane said hastily. “It’s- I mean, I think it’s his dad’s funeral today. He’s probably not going to be on his phone for a while.”

Coach started to look more concerned, and Shane started reaching for his phone.

“What does his agent want?” he asked again, already looking for Ilya’s contact.

Coach was quiet for a while, stiff. Shane looked up and stared at him, his heart jackhammering in his chest.

“...She was asked for a comment,” Coach sighed, scanning the room to glare at every single one of them. “About his *proclivities*. Apparently an article’s coming out. Today. She’s worried about him being at home when it does.”

The locker room exploded into a frenzy of talk and questions, as Coach started yelling at them all to shut up. Shane smashed the call button, rising to his feet, but it only rang for a few seconds before going silent. He cursed, shoving his way past the others and out of the room, into the hallway, calling again.

It rang for longer this time, and then-

“Hollander, I’m at wake, what is so important?” Ilya answered. He sounded impatient.

“Ilya. You need to come back. Right now. Shit, your- your agent’s been trying to get in touch with you.”

“What? Why? Shane, what is happening?”

“There’s-” Shane felt like he might throw up. “There’s an article coming out. About you. About- it’s saying you’re-... you know.”

There was a long silence. “Ah,” Ilya said eventually.

“Look, we’ll- we’ll deal with it, okay?” Shane said, trying to force his voice into something calm despite the panic building inside himself. “But you- you can’t be in Russia right now. You need to get on a plane, like, right away. Just come home, where you’re safe, and we’ll figure it out.”

“...No,” Ilya said, blunt and decisive. “I will be back on Sunday, like I planned.”

“*What?*” Shane gaped, shaking his head. “No- Ilya, you *can’t*. You need to get out of there, the article’s going live *today*.”

“I need to stay here. I need to help Alexei with Papa’s things. He- I can’t leave him to deal with everything again.” Ilya let out a short, manic laugh. “I can’t leave him again, not now. We are finally-”

“Ilya,” Shane said desperately. “I’m sorry, but- you can’t. It’s not *safe*.”

“Will be fine. You think Putin reads TMZ?”

“Don’t make fucking jokes right now!” Shane snapped. “Just get on a fucking plane, your brother’s not fucking important.”

“...I have things to do here,” Ilya said resolutely.

Shane leant against the wall, resisting the urge to tear his hair out. “Not anymore,” he said.

“And I haven’t visited Mama yet. I need to go to her real grave before I leave. For good, apparently.”

Shane’s eyes screwed shut. “I- I know, Ilya,” he whispered. “I know it’s not fair, but you need to come home. Now.”

“But I-”

“*Ilya*,” Shane hissed. “You said you cared about me. I swear to God, you are *not* going to stay in Russia and leave me here going crazy. I’m freaking out, I’m going to fall apart if you’re not safe. I *need* you to come home. Now.”

For a while there was just the sound of breathing on the other end. “...Okay,” Ilya murmured. “I go to airport now.”

Shane choked on his relief. “Thank you. Thank you, Ilya.”

“Is okay. See you soon.” He hung up, and Shane clutched the phone to his chest, breathing deeply. After a few minutes, he walked back to the locker room, heading back to the team.

They were all glued to their phones, some mid-call, when he reappeared, necks snapping over to look at him.

“I got in touch with him,” Shane said. “He’s coming back.”

“Good, Hollander,” Coach sighed. “That’s good.”

~~

Shane was going to have a heart attack, or a stroke. Possibly both. Ilya had texted him half an hour after he hung up, saying he had arrived at the airport. Since then, nothing. Shane had texted, and called, but was getting nothing back.

Coach had forced them all onto the ice, but practice had been half-hearted and agitated. No one spoke about it, but they were all missing passes, skidding on the ice. Shane's eyes weren't working properly, the whole world looked fuzzy.

When practice ended, he skipped the gym and drove halfway home before realising he couldn't just go and sit on his sofa doing nothing. He felt utterly helpless, so he did the only thing he could think to do, and turned his car around, driving to Montreal airport instead.

He went to arrivals, and looked at the board, searching for flights coming in from Moscow. The next one didn't get in until one am. It was only half one in the afternoon. Shane ran a hand through his hair, and went and bought a coffee from Timmies. He settled on one of the hard chairs in the waiting area and stared at the arrivals board, watching the minutes tick forward.

A little before four, Shane saw Wilson and Taylor walk into the airport. He stared at them, and when they spotted him, they started hurrying over.

"Hollzy," Wilson said. "Have you-"

"I haven't heard anything," Shane said flatly. "No updates."

They both nodded, looking dejected. Worried. Shane felt the same, but he didn't want to show them that.

"Take a seat," he said, nodding to the empty chairs beside him. "I'll get you both a coffee."

"You don't have to-" Taylor started.

Shane silenced him with a look. "Sit. I'll get you coffee. We'll wait together."

He went and got two black coffees, and a tea for himself because his nerves were already frayed. He went back to sit with the rooks, handing over their drinks and settling back into the uncomfortable airport waiting chair.

An hour later, Renaud and Stedlund turned up. Shane jerked his head in acknowledgement, and they smiled awkwardly, taking the seats opposite. After a while, Hayden and JJ trailed in as well, sitting down wordlessly.

Shane got them all coffees too. He checked his phone again, but there was nothing new. Hopefully because Ilya was in the sky right now.

At eight, Drapeau and Comeau arrived. Comeau went and sat down, putting his headphones in. Drapeau stood in front of Shane.

"Take a walk with me, Cap," he said.

Shane shook his head. "I'm fine."

"Yeah. Walk with me anyway." Drapeau stared at him expectantly, and Shane clenched his jaw. He stood, following Drapeau as he led them outside.

"I haven't heard anything new," Shane told him. He'd been checking his phone every five minutes. Nothing from Ilya.

"Yeah, I heard. I wanted to, uh..." Drapeau wavered, looking uncomfortable. "Wanted to have a word with you."

"It's not really a great time, Drap."

"Kinda is." Drapeau shrugged. "I just wanted to say- It's fucking weird, I know, but- would you let Roz down easy?"

Shane faltered. He felt like he must have misunderstood. "Uh... what?"

Drapeau scratched the back of his head, pulling a face. "Dude, listen, I wouldn't want some guy thinking about me like that either. I get it. But... y'know, I'm pretty sure he doesn't mean anything bad by it. Just... I know it's a big ask, but could you try and be chill about it? I mean, it's Rozy, yeah?"

"Hang on," Shane said, his brain still trying to catch up with the conversation. "Are you- Do you think Ilya..."

"Pretty sure he's obsessed with you, yeah."

"How do you-"

"Figured it out, didn't I?" Drapeau rolled his eyes. "M not actually a fucking idiot. After he had his extravagant fuckin' announcement, or whatever. All made sense. Him beating on Gusev. On Daniels. The way he looks at you. Dude's pretty fucking obvious about it, if you ask me."

"Oh."

"Wasn't sure if he'd already tried to make a move on you or not. Thought maybe it was why you guys fell out so bad, earlier this year? You were so pissed, then when I found out that Roz was... y'know. Well, I figured maybe he tried it on with you? And you got mad."

Shane gaped, wordless.

"Listen, man, I get where you're coming from," Drapeau said lowly, eyes darting around before coming back to meet Shane's. "If that's what happened. Or maybe he hasn't said anything to you yet. But, well... gotta feel gross, I know, but I don't think he's just perverting on you, yeah? I think he's pretty gone for you, so... if you could just try and let him down easy. It's still Roz. And he'll have enough shit to deal with."

Shane couldn't tell if Drapeau was being homophobic, or a loyal friend. Somehow, he was managing to be both.

"It's-... you don't have to worry," Shane said, brain malfunctioning but somehow formulating a reply. "I don't want to hurt him."

Drapeau grinned at him, looking appeased. “Thanks, Hollzy. Lotta guys wouldn’t be so cool about this. You’re a real stand-up dude.”

“Uh... sure. If you say so. Want to go back in?”

“Yeah. Let’s pretend this conversation never happened.”

“Gladly.”

They walked back inside. Shane took a moment to go to the mini airport shop and take a second to breathe. Well, alright. Now wasn’t the time to figure out what to do about Drapeau... But God, was that really what he and Ilya looked like from the outside? Like Shane didn’t care at all? That couldn’t be right. Shane had been so scared of showing too much, he’d never considered that in fact he was showing nothing at all. When at the same time, Ilya was there wearing his heart on his sleeve, unapologetic. That couldn’t be right, could it?

He bought the team a bunch of junk food, because they’d all fucking shown up, and that meant something, so Shane was going to ignore the nutritionist’s orders right now. He paid, and made his way back to the team, dumping the bag of chips and sweet treats onto the floor.

“Everyone help yourselves,” he said. “Few more hours yet.”

Hands started reaching out, some tentative and some eager, and Shane collapsed back down into his seat. He looked at the arrivals board. It was almost eight thirty now. Getting there.

As long as Ilya was actually on the fucking plane. Shane’s mind kept conjuring up scenarios, unbidden, of Russian men in uniforms and that one history lesson from when he was thirteen where they learned about gulags. Russia didn’t still have gulags, right?

No, that was ridiculous. He was just panicking. He shifted, refocusing. Eight thirty. Four and a half hours left.

“Uh.” JJ cleared his throat, staring at his phone. “Guys. The article’s out.”

Everyone started reaching into their pockets.

“No one read it,” Shane said sharply. “It’s not- not right. Leave it alone.”

“...Shane,” JJ said, glancing over, his phone still glowing. “It says-”

“Leave it, JJ.”

“It says they spoke to two members of the team.”

Shane’s blood ran cold. “...What?” he asked quietly.

“It... the source. Says they spoke with two members of the Montreal Voyageurs on condition of anonymity.”

Shane sat very still. He inhaled deeply through his nose. "Right. If anyone here was one of those two members, you should leave now."

The team was silent, as they all glanced at each other furtively. No one stood up.

Shane was going to find out who it was. Shane was going to find them, and they would never play another game of hockey in their lives. He would fucking destroy them.

"...Okay then," he said. "No one reads it."

~~

Shane watched the arrivals board update, and the flight from Moscow switched to say it had landed. Something inside him clenched ominously. Okay then. Not long now.

"Jesus Christ, what the fuck is all this?"

Shane jumped, and turned around to see Coach standing there, glaring at the mess of hockey players that had set up camp, coffee cups and food wrappers littering the floor around them.

"Coach?" Renaud blinked, sitting up straighter.

"It's one in the fucking morning, what the fuck are you all doing here?"

"Waiting for Roz," Wilson piped up, eyes wide.

Coach paused, and then shook his head tiredly. "Well, looks like you've all been here a while."

"Hours," Taylor nodded.

"Dumb motherfuckers. None of you decided to look up what time the flight gets in?"

Shane swallowed. "Why're you here?"

Coach raised his eyebrows threateningly, and Shane ducked his head.

"Coach," he added respectfully.

"Didn't realise Rozanov already had a fucking welcoming committee," Coach said, rolling his eyes. "Thought the kid might need a ride home. Home, where every single one of *you lot* is supposed to be. We still have practice tomorrow."

Shane folded his arms and faced forward again.

The airport was pretty empty now, just the last few flights coming in and disembarking. He watched businessmen with bags under their eyes and backpackers in pyjamas walking past, making their way to the exit and sucked another lungful of oxygen into his lungs.

Coach stayed standing, shifting his weight from one leg to the other as he checked his watch. The team seemed to get more tense and the minutes dragged on, the exhaustion and boredom fading into a grim anticipation.

“I think-” Comeau started, and Shane perked up, following the man’s eyes.

He’d never been more happy that Ilya was tall, because he spotted the head of curly hair emerging from customs easily. He was looking down, hunched over and his hands shoved into his pockets as he walked quickly, in a dark suit.

Shane got up at once, striding over determinedly. “Hey, asshole,” he said, the words coming out shaky.

Ilya’s gaze shot up to look at him, his eyes widening.

Shane reached him, and promptly shoved him in the chest. “You couldn’t fucking text?”

“Phone died. No charger.” Ilya stared at him, expression apprehensive.

Shane thought his legs might be about to give out from under him. “I thought-” His voice broke.

“Is okay. I am here.”

Shane nodded, and flung himself forward the last couple of feet, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s shoulders, squeezing so hard it made his arms ache. “You’re here,” he whispered into Ilya’s hair. “Thank you, thank you for coming home.”

Ilya was stiff underneath him. “Is that...”

Shane pulled back, glancing behind him. Ilya was staring at the gaggle that was there waiting for him in confusion.

“Yes,” he said, pushing him forward. “We were worried about you, dickhead.”

Ilya frowned, and started walking over. Shane followed behind him, trying to communicate with the players with his eyes, staring daggers at them. *Be nice. Be gentle with him.*

“Jesus, man,” Drapeau said, standing up and punching Ilya in the shoulder. “True what they say, huh? You lot do have a flair for the dramatic.”

Shane opened his mouth, about to tear him a new one, but Ilya got there first, pushing Drapeau back.

“Ah, like you don’t love it,” he said smoothly. “Your life would be so boring without me, no?”

The dam broke, and then everyone started jumping up. Wilson and Taylor got there first, throwing themselves all over Ilya as he laughed, shaking their heads by their hair.

“Glad you’re back, Roz,” Boizeau said, and Stedlund slapped him on the back, everyone piling over to touch him.

Shane stood back, watching. He let Ilya have his moment with the team, he wanted him to be able to feel all the love there was for him. Ilya was smiling, still looking surprised and a little sheepish, but pleased.

“Okay, okay,” he said, knocking everyone off him. “Enough, now. I smell like plane.”

“Yes,” Coach said loudly, “and you’re all causing a scene.”

They all started backing off Ilya, and Ilya ran an overwhelmed hand through his hair.

“You’re good, Rozanov?” Coach asked briskly. “Any problems getting back?”

Ilya shook his head. “All good, Coach.”

“Alright. Let your agent know, she’s been blowing my phone up.”

“Yes, Coach.”

“Okay.” Coach swivelled his gaze to look at the rest of them. “...No morning skate tomorrow. Go back home, sleep, come in at midday. Then we need to have a team meeting.” His tone was heavy with implication, and then he spun around, walking towards the exit.

The others all nodded, sighing and starting to grab whatever stuff they came with, touching Ilya one last time as they said goodbye. Shane finally went to stand next to him.

“Need a ride?” he asked.

Ilya blinked at him. “...Yes, okay. Thank you.”

“Come on then.”

Chapter 27: January 2016 (IV)

JANUARY 2016

“Is okay. See you soon.” Ilya hung up, turning back to Alexei, whose brow was furrowed as he tried to translate Ilya’s English.

“...*You’re going, then?*”

Ilya didn’t bother apologising; he knew Alexei wouldn’t want to hear it. “*Yes. Hollander needs me back home.*”

Alexei shook his head in disgust. “*Didn’t realise you were the bitch.*”

“...*Yes. Well.*” Ilya put his phone back in his pocket. “*There’s been leak. About me. He doesn’t want me to stay in Russia.*”

“*Jesus, I fucking told you. Told you not to become an American fucking liberal, what did you expect was going to happen? Jesus Christ, Ilya.*”

“*Will you-*”

“*Yeah, I’ll deal with all of Papa’s shit. Should’ve fucking known.*” Alexei scoffed, standing up. “*Come on, then.*”

“*What?*”

Alexei stared at him flatly. “*I’ll drive you to the airport. Got your passport?*”

“...*Yes,*” Ilya said. “*Do you not want to stay?*”

“*With those old fucks? No, not really. Come on, I’m quicker than a taxi.*”

“*Okay.*”

Ilya followed Alexei to his car. He berated Ilya the whole time for being a stupid fag who couldn’t keep his dick in his pants, as Ilya searched on his phone for the next flight to Montrea. It buzzed, telling him he only had 5% battery remaining and he cursed. Luckily, the roads weren’t too busy, and Alexei liked to drive a little recklessly. They made it to the airport in decent enough time, and Alexei pulled into the drop-off zone. Ilya jumped out, grabbing onto the top of the car before Alexei could drive away, leaning through the window.

“*I don’t think I’ll be coming back,*” he said.

“*Yeah. No shit.*”

“*You can have my apartment. Sell it, or sell Papa’s house, live there.*”

“...Alright.”

“Be nice to Karina.”

Alexei rolled his eyes. *“Yeah, yeah, I’ll try.”*

“Okay.” Ilya wondered if he was supposed to say something else. *“Text if you need money.”*

“I will.”

Ilya snorted. *“I know.”*

“...Good luck, Ilya.”

“Bye.” Ilya stood back, and Alexei pulled away. Ilya watched him go, and then turned around, heading into the airport.

~~

Ilya followed Shane to his car, sort of dazed. He hadn’t expected so many people to be waiting for him when he got back. Frankly, he hadn’t been expecting anyone. It had been kind of a lot. He sat in the passenger seat, letting Shane pull out of the parking space and frown as he manoeuvred his stupid big car around the cramped parking lot.

“You have charger?” Ilya asked.

Shane glanced at him. “Oh! Yeah, sure, there should be one in the glove box.”

Ilya nodded, finding it and plugging it into the car. His phone vibrated, the lightning symbol appearing, and he waited for it to gain enough power that he could start to use it.

“How... how are you feeling?” Shane asked quietly.

Ilya shrugged. “I don’t know. Don’t really know what’s going on.”

“Yeah,” Shane sighed. “We’ll figure it out, okay? Whatever we have to do.”

Ilya stared at him, feeling like someone was playing a very sick joke on him. He was pretty sure Shane should be running away right now. This was basically Shane’s worst fear, playing out right in front of him.

His phone lit up, and immediately, he was inundated with a barrage of missed calls and texts. He texted his agent, letting her know he was back in the country and that he’d call her when

it wasn't the middle of the night. He googled his name, the article coming up at the top of the page. He clicked on it, scanning the words.

It wasn't too bad - sleazy, but nothing super explicit or humiliating. They said he had been 'flaunting his male lover during practice'. Ilya wasn't sure he'd been flaunting anything, but they could say that if they liked. Really, he was most worried that Dan would be named, he was pretty sure their relationship hadn't been HR-approved. But the article didn't say anything about who his male lover was. Perhaps it wasn't exciting enough to say unless it was another celebrity. Ilya switched his phone back off.

Shane parked on the street outside Ilya's apartment building, undoing his seatbelt.

"You are coming up?" Ilya asked.

Shane's mouth fell open, eyes stricken. "...Yes? I was going to. Unless you don't want me t--"

"No, I want."

"Okay." Shane got out of the car, and Ilya followed him, going inside the building and up the stairs, unlocking his door. They both went inside, and Ilya stood in the middle of the living area uselessly.

"Um," he said.

Shane smiled, strained. "Do you want to take a shower? I can, uh, try and find you something to eat."

"Okay." Ilya did want to take a shower, and get out of his funeral suit. He left Shane and went to the bathroom, letting the water run as he stripped. He washed quickly, scrubbing himself of airport grossness and stretching out his muscles, stiff from the flight. He got out and went to his bedroom, towelling himself dry and putting on a pair of sweatpants and a vest.

He hovered at the door, building up the courage to go back out. This really wasn't how he'd wanted his reunion with Shane to go. He'd already fucked it up the first time, forgetting about him and flying to Moscow. Now he'd fucked it up again, getting himself outed.

He didn't- He wasn't ashamed of who he was attracted to, he never had been. He was a little mad that the opportunity to tell people on his own terms had been taken away from him. He didn't really want to put up with all of the bullshit that was surely going to come his way now. But he supposed there wasn't much to be done about it.

He decided to grow a pair of balls and go and face Shane. He found him over the hob, heating up a tin of soup.

"Hello."

Shane jumped, and looked over his shoulder. "Oh. Hi. I wasn't sure how hungry you were, I know plane food is awful so you probably haven't eaten much, but maybe you don't feel like eating, so I figured soup was a good compromise, but if you--"

“Hollander,” Ilya interrupted, holding up a hand. “Soup is good. Slow with all the words, please, my brain is tired. I haven’t slept in, like, twenty-four hours.”

“Right, sorry.” Shane’s forehead creased even more. “Did you want to go to bed? I don’t have to be here.”

“Not what I meant. Just... calm, yes? Is all okay.”

Shane bit his lip. “I’m supposed to be the one telling you that.”

“You have told me that. Do not worry, soup is good choice.”

Shane nodded, his shoulders relaxing a little. “Okay. You can sit down, it’ll only be a few more minutes.”

Ilya went to sit on the couch obediently, playing with a hole in the leather on the armrest. Shane came over with two bowls, handing one to Ilya and keeping one for himself. He sat down, at a too-respectful, too-far distance. Ilya dropped his spoon on the coffee table, tipping the bowl straight into his mouth and slurping.

Shane raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “That’s gross.”

“I’m hungry. Shut up.” Ilya drank more of his soup straight from the bowl, finishing it quickly and setting down. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, as Shane delicately used his spoon to eat.

“So...” Ilya started. Then he realised he didn’t know how to go on.

Shane put his bowl down too, unfinished, and turned to face Ilya properly, bringing his legs up onto the couch and tucking his socked feet under his thighs. He looked so gorgeous, making himself comfortable in Ilya’s space, pretty under the light of the lamp behind him and the streetlight shining through the window. Ilya had a stray, deranged thought of locking the door and never letting him leave, and just keeping him locked away in here, cozy and warm.

“I, uh,” Shane said. “...How was your dad’s funeral?”

“Fine. Not that sad, he was ready to go. Probably had been for a while.”

Shane nodded. “...Um, sorry you had to leave so suddenly. I know you had- unfinished business, or whatever.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, letting out a soft exhale. “Is too bad, but not your fault.”

“We’ll find a way to try and make it right. Maybe we can set up a memorial for your mom somewhere here, so you don’t need to go visit the wrong grave. I was googling, uh, how you get one the local government to let you put down one of those ‘in loving memory’ benches. We could do that, if you wanted? Or something else, it’s up to you. But I thought- something dedicated to her.”

Ilya felt the tears already threatening to form - it was too early for that. He fought to keep himself under control. "You thought about that?" he asked. "You- googled benches?"

"Well... yeah. It's up to you though, it doesn't have to be that."

"No, I like that idea."

A small, nervous smile appeared on Shane's face. "Okay. We'll do that, then."

He kept saying *we*. Like he had told Ilya to come home, like Russia wasn't his home, like here was his home. Canada. Montreal. Where Shane was. Ilya glanced out of the window, digging his index finger back in the hole in the couch.

"What... what else will we do?" Ilya asked hesitantly.

"Whatever you want. I mean, the PR people will give you some advice, if you want, and we can find you a lawyer, help you get citizenship."

"No," Ilya said, turning back to face him. "I mean, what about us?"

"I- Oh-" Shane stuttered, eyes widening.

"You said- before. But now- I know it's different now, so I-"

"No, no, shit," Shane said rapidly. "Sorry, I didn't- Fuck, I wanted to do this better. My brain is, like, all over the place right now."

"Mm, I know. Mine too."

"Ilya. I-" Shane took a deep breath, looking directly into Ilya's eyes. "I really fucked things up with us. I... I was so- so fucking scared. Of wanting you, of being gay."

"But you are..?"

"Yeah," Shane said forcefully. "I'm gay. I wish... Fuck, I wish I'd accepted it so much sooner, but. I couldn't. I- When we were-... You remember last season?"

"Yes."

"It was the *best* few months of my life," he said, face earnest, leaning forward. "I mean it. But I just, like... I split us up, in my head. The sex, and everything else. It was the only way I could... have both, I guess. And I wanted both, I wanted all of you. But I just- kept it all separated, and then when you said you liked me, and that separation started to break down, I got so fucking scared, and I freaked out and ran."

"I'm sorry," Ilya said.

"No, don't say that," Shane implored. "I'm- *I'm* sorry, okay? I'm so fucking sorry. I'm... Ilya, I'm crazy about you, I was then too. I was just a fucking coward as well."

Ilya nodded. "I don't want- like before," he said. "I don't want... hooking up, or friends with benefits, or any of that shit. I don't think I can- can do half-way again and be happy. So if that's what you want, then-"

"It's not."

Ilya's insides were tied into knots. "...No? What, ah... what are you wanting?"

"Everything," Shane said, staring at him. "Like, all of you. A fucking- relationship, or whatever. Boyfriends."

"Yes?"

"Yeah."

"...Okay," Ilya sighed. He felt light, suddenly. Like he was floating to the top of a pool, about to be able to breathe again.

"You want that too?" Shane asked pressingly.

Ilya nodded. "I have wanted that for a long time."

"I wasn't sure if-"

Ilya laughed, slightly frenzied. "Of course I want that," he said. "I am- what was expression you used? Crazy about you? That, I am crazy about you too."

Shane's lips started creeping upwards, the corners of his eyes crinkling. "Yeah? You are?"

"Da. You are-" Ilya tapped his heart. "You are in here, always. Very annoying, I can never escape you."

Shane punched out a shaky breath, and promptly clambered into Ilya's lap, swinging one leg over Ilya's thighs and cupping Ilya's cheeks with his hands. They were lovely hands, calloused from years of hockey but still so soft. Shane pressed their foreheads together, noses bumping.

"I'm so in love with you," Shane whispered feverishly. "Please don't try and escape me. I'm so pathetically in love with you."

Ilya pulled his down the last inch, kissing him at once. He needed too, needed to feel Shane's lips against his own again, so desperate it bordered on hysteresis. Shane whimpered quietly, mouth falling open and pliant, his tongue meeting Ilya's own. Ilya's eyelids slid shut, but he was pretty sure a few tears slipped past anyway.

"I love you too," he murmured against Shane's mouth. "No escape, I promise. I am chained to you."

"Chained *together*," Shane corrected, growling.

Ilya groaned, gripping Shane's hips ever-tighter. "Yes. Chained together. Malysh, I have missed you so much."

"God, yes. Me too. Ilya."

"Let me- Shane, I need to fuck you again, please. Need you back."

Shane nodded hurriedly. "Shit, yes. Fuck me, Ilya, I need it too."

Ilya stood up, holding Shane by his thighs, Shane's legs automatically going to wrap around his waist. Ilya carried them to the bedroom, laying Shane down on the mattress and pausing at the sight.

"So pretty," he hummed, dropping kisses all over his face. "My pretty boy, all for me."

Shane keened, his hips canting upwards. "Ilya, I'm-"

"I know, I know." He patted Shane's hip. "Strip, quick now." He sat back ridding himself of his clothes as Shane did the same, and leaning over to the bedside table to grab the lube. He squeezed some out, coating his fingers, and found his place back between Shane's legs. "I'm going to open you up now," he said, pressing more open-mouthed kisses along the side of Shane's neck. "Yes?"

"God, yes, please."

Ilya slipped a finger inside him, working it in small circles. Shane immediately started pushing down, hungry for more, and Ilya grinned.

"Be patient," he chided. But he pressed a second finger in anyway.

Shane grabbed his hair, pulling Ilya up for another kiss. Ilya indulged him, how could he not? He snaked his tongue back into Shane's mouth, as he felt Shane's dick rutting up against his own.

"Shane," Ilya panted. "Shane."

"Ilya. Fuck me now, I'm ready. Please."

Ilya nodded, too desperate to wait any longer. He rolled on a condom, and positioned Shane's legs over his back, practically bending in him half, before he pressed inside.

Fuck, it was so perfect. The wet, hot feeling enveloped Ilya's cock, sucking him in further as he inched inside slowly.

"Jesus," Shane hissed, head back against the pillow.

"So good," Ilya told him. "Feel so perfect around me. You're so eager for me, I can tell. Can feel you clenching around my cock, don't want to let me back out, do you?"

Shane shook his head, face and chest flushed crimson.

“Greedy,” Ilya said, as he finally bottomed out. “Is okay, I give it all to you. Always. Going to fuck you so well, yes? I can move?”

“Mhm. Move, please, I want-”

Ilya pulled out and thrust back in, cutting Shane off. He set a relentless pace, fucking in as hard as he could, as Shane dug his nails into Ilya’s shoulders, trying to meet Ilya’s thrusts.

Ilya wasn’t going to last long. It had only been a couple of minutes, he was already about to blow. “Shane-” he said, voice trembling, as his hips kept driving in instinctually, chasing the high. “Shane, I can’t- Is too much- Fuck-”

Shane’s eyes widened. “Are you-”

Ilya groaned, speeding up and starting to lose his rhythm.

“Holy fuck. Touch me.”

Ilya could do that. He grabbed Shane’s dick, stroking it as he neared his climax. “Shane, I’m going to-”

“Come, Ilya.”

Ilya let out a cry, bursting into the condom. Shane spilled into his hand a second later, coming with a surprised moan, and then grabbing Ilya and pulling him down, holding him against his chest.

“Fuck,” Shane whispered. “That was so hot.”

“Shut up. I’m sorry.”

“No. Holy shit.” Shane kissed the top of his head. “That was perfect.”

“Give me ten minutes, we go again,” Ilya said, cheeks burning. “I’ll last longer.”

Shane laughed, his hands playing with Ilya’s hair. “...We really should get to sleep, it’s so late. Besides, we’ve got time, right?”

Ilya nodded, a flood of warm rushing through him at the idea. They had all the time in the world. He smiled, pulling out with a hiss, and then collapsing back on top of Shane. He felt Shane’s arms wrap around him, and sighed contentedly. “Yes. Sleep sounds good.”

~~

The morning light flooded the room suddenly when the curtains opened, and Ilya groaned, covering his eyes with his forearm.

“Up, come on,” Shane said. He was already out of bed, dressed, looking wide awake. The sight made Ilya irrationally upset.

Ilya pouted. “No, stay in bed with me,” he moaned. “I’ll make it so worth it for you, Hollander.”

“Tempting,” Shane grinned, giving him a quick kiss. “But Coach already cancelled morning practice, we can’t be late on top of that.”

Ilya sighed. He really didn’t want to re-enter the real world, he wanted to stay in his bubble. Here with Shane and no one else, with easy affection and no worries or bothers. That would all go as soon as they left the apartment.

“Come on,” Shane said again. “You can use the shower, I’ll make coffee.”

“...Fine.” Ilya heaved himself out of the bed, going and taking a shower. He got dressed and went back out, taking the mug Shane offered to him. They had a bit of time before they left, so Ilya figured it was time to face the music.

He called his agent, assuring her that he was okay and wouldn’t go on social media for a while. He turned off most of his notifications, deciding to deal with the other few hundred missed calls and texts later. At Shane’s beckoning, he grabbed his stuff and followed him outside, getting into Shane’s car.

“So,” Shane started, as they set off. “Have you... read the article?”

Ilya hummed.

“Okay. So you know, then, that it was-”

“I saw,” Ilya said. “Two people on the team.”

Shane’s face turned stormy. “Yes. We’ll figure out who, and deal with them.”

Ilya hummed - he doubted that, he couldn’t see how they would, and it wasn’t as if he expected whoever it was to just fess up. He reckoned it would just be something he was always left to wonder about. He could try and re-evaluate his interactions with every Voyageur, second-guess every look and comment, but it wasn’t like that would provide him with answers, only suspicion.

One of Shane’s hands left the steering wheel, going to rest on the back of Ilya’s neck. His thumb rubbed the skin in little circular motions, soothing. “Today’s probably going to be the worst day,” Shane said calmly. “Just need to get it over with, yeah?”

“Is okay,” Ilya said. “I am okay.”

“...Okay.”

They arrived at the facility, getting out of the car and hauling their stuff out of the boot. Ilya wondered what Theriault was going to say to him. He hadn't seemed that pissed last night, but it had been late, and in public. Maybe he was saving it.

"Ilya!"

Ilya's neck snapped up, as Dan jogged towards him from across the parking lot.

"Jesus," Dan said, coming to a halt in front of him. "You're back. I texted, I tried calling-"

"Sorry," Ilya said, "has been- chaotic. Have not answered everyone yet."

"Yeah, no, it's okay." Dan looked at him. "Are *you* okay?"

"Yes. Is not the end of the world, I can deal."

Dan smiled. "Yeah, I know you can, babe."

Shane slammed the trunk of the car loudly. "Sorry, but we need to get in."

"Oh. *Ohh*." Dan glanced between Shane and Ilya, his eyes lighting up. "I see. Wow."

Ilya bit back a grin. Shane huffed loudly.

"Sorry," Ilya said, bouncing on his heels, stupidly pleased. "We have team meeting. I need to go and get yelled at."

"Yeah, sure," Dan smirked. "Let's talk later."

"Yes, please."

Shane started walking off. "Ilya," he barked. "We're going to be late."

Ilya winked at Dan, and Dan laughed. "Glad it worked out."

"Da," Ilya said, beaming, "me too."

~~

"Okay," Theriault said, staring down at all of them from where the team was all sat in a meeting room. "Clearly, we need to go over a few things. Things I thought were obvious, but *apparently not*." He took a deep breath, glaring. "Firstly, do not have an open relationship with a man if you're a citizen of a homophobic country. And don't then *go back to that country*." He fixed Ilya with a sharp look. "Understood, Rozanov?"

Ilya nodded, resisting the urge to smile. “Won’t happen again, Coach.”

“Don’t be smart right now.” Theriault took a step back, surveying the room again. “Secondly,” he continued, “if a teammate does come out to you, *do not go to the press*. That goes double for international players. Does everyone hear me?”

There was a low chorus of *yes, Coach*.

Theriault shook his head. “This is bullshit, do you hear me? We’re supposed to be a team, do we look like a team right now? Sniping at each other to the fucking press! What the fuck?!”

“I want to know who it was,” Shane said, voice harsh. “Who was it? Own up, now.”

The room stayed silent, as players ducked their heads, shooting uneasy glances at each other.

“Own up,” Shane repeated coldly. “Come on, whoever it was. You could speak to a fucking reporter, don’t get scared now.”

Ilya shook his head. “Is fine,” he said. “I don’t need to know.”

Next to him, Shane froze. “...What? Ilya, they- they put you at risk!”

Ilya shrugged. “I am sure they did not mean for me to be in Russia when it happened.”

“That’s not the point!”

Ilya looked at all the members of the Montreal Voyageurs. They weren’t the Bears, but they were what he had. And he wanted to stay on this team now, wanted to stay with Shane. They weren’t the perfect team, but they were acceptable. He could deal with two anonymous members who hated him, he could let that go.

“Is fine,” he said again. He looked to Theriault. “Can we go and skate now? We have game tomorrow.”

Theriault stared at him for a long time, and then gave a quick, singular nod. “Alright. On the ice, everyone.”

Chapter 28: February 2016

Chapter Notes

god, so close to the end now, its pretty much all up from here :))

FEBRUARY 2016

Shane's fingers drummed repetitively on the steering wheel as he drove. His jaw was tight.

"Sweetheart," Ilya said, "you know you don't have to do this."

Shane spared him a glance, before returning his eyes to the road. "No, I want to. I'm just stressed."

"...Okay, well, it does not have to be today. There is no rush."

"We're already on the way."

Ilya shrugged. "So? Drop me off at coffee shop, I can sit on my phone for a few hours. You just have normal visit. No problem."

"No," Shane said determinedly, shaking his head. "I want to do this."

"You look like you are about to have heart attack."

"I'm fine."

Ilya took Shane's hand in his own, taking it off the steering wheel and holding it on his lap instead. "Okay," he acquiesced. "If you are sure. Only if you want to, da?"

The corner of Shane's lip curled upwards. "Da. I want to."

It had been a really good month. Well, not all good. The public had had a very loud reaction to Ilya's coming out. And the press were having the time of their lives reporting on the disaster that was the Voyageurs' locker room. There were new pieces published every day about the strife between the team, endless conspiracies about who had leaked the information. Ilya's strategy was to ignore it all. He'd let the Voyageurs' management make a statement on his behalf, not denying anything and asking for privacy, saying as little as possible.

That was until he finally started checking social media again, and realised everyone was calling him gay. Apparently, when people found out you fucked men, they assumed that was the only option. So Ilya had had to make his own statement on twitter, the only comment he had on the whole thing.

Rozanov81_official: it has come to my attention ppl are saying i am gay. i would like to reassure all women i shared a wonderful night with, this is not true. i simply also share some nights with men, thank you

Shane had yelled at him for that, Theriault too. “Inappropriate”, or whatever. But Ilya didn’t have anything else to say on the matter, he was happy to let all the chatter and bitching happen around him. He didn’t find it hard to tune out.

Especially when, in private, it had been the best month of his life. He had Shane now. Shane was *his*. They fucked and they kissed and Ilya spent most of his nights in Shane’s bed, either in Montreal or whatever hotel they were staying in. He got to see Shane in his glasses, and he knew about Shane’s skincare routine now, and Shane hogged the covers and kicked Ilya in his sleep and Ilya absolutely loved it.

But today was a big deal. Today was their day off, and they were driving to Ottawa, because Shane was insistent that he wanted to tell his parents about them. Ilya didn’t need that, he hadn’t asked for that, but the fact that Shane had offered it had been breathtaking. Because Ilya might not need that, but as soon as Shane had brought up the idea, Ilya knew he *wanted* that. He wanted to worm his way into every crevice of Shane’s life, wanted to be a part of all of it. Embarrassingly, in a way he would never admit out loud, he wanted Shane to show him off, even if it was only to his parents. Ilya was ridiculously proud to be able to call Shane his, and it made him feel weak-kneed to think Shane felt the inverse. That he wasn’t ashamed anymore.

They drove past the sign welcoming them to Ottawa, and Shane’s shoulders began to tense again.

“Hollander,” Ilya said.

“I’m okay,” Shane said resolutely. “...You, uh, remember what I told you, right?”

“Yes, I remember lecture. You have already given it three times.”

“*Don’t* bring up Preston Manning.”

“Why would I bring up Canadian politician from the 1900s? I had never even heard of him before.”

“You’ll set Dad off, he’ll rant for an hour if he even hears the name.”

“Yes, okay,” Ilya said. “Don’t worry, I will behave.”

Shane nodded. “And eat whatever Mom puts in front of you. And don’t forget to take your shoes off.”

“I am European, I do this anyway! Hollander, relax. Will all go okay, I promise.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I know.” Shane sighed. “I just want them to like you. And hopefully not, like, completely freak out.”

Ilya swallowed. He was putting on a brave face, but honestly, he hoped they liked him too. He was aware his reputation left something to be desired, particularly in the case of your child's partner. At least he didn't still play for Boston, that would probably have been the last straw for Hollander's mom.

It felt like the drive passed very quickly, and before Ilya knew it, they were pulling into the driveway of Shane's parents' house. Shane took a deep breath as he turned the car engine off.

"Last chance," Ilya said. "Do you want to back out? I would not blame you."

"No. I want them to know." Shane looked at him and smiled valiantly. "Want them to know you, yeah?"

"Okay."

"Okay. Let's do this." Shane got out of the car, and Ilya followed him, walking up the driveway, stuffing his hands in his pockets to hide the trembling of his fingers. He let Shane ring the doorbell, and heard the sounds of people moving inside the house, and then the door was opening, Yuna Hollander standing there.

"Sha- Oh." She paused, her face turning confused as she laid eyes on Ilya. "I didn't know you were bringing Rozanov."

"...Uh, yeah," Shane said, shifting uneasily. "Can we- Can we come in?"

Yuna Hollander frowned, but stepped back. "Of course."

~~

Ilya ended up sat in the living room awkwardly, as Shane and his parents discussed which teams were most likely to make the playoffs. It had been half an hour already, and no one had brought up the elephant in the room yet.

Ilya had learnt that English expression recently, on account of the fact something about him was the elephant in most rooms he walked into. He felt particularly elephant-y right now though, as Shane's mom and dad kept shooting him questioning glances without actually mentioning it. Ilya wondered if Shane had lost his nerve, and wasn't actually going to tell them. It would be disappointing, if so, but he'd understand.

"You know," Shane's mom said contemplatively, "I think Montreal has a real chance at the cup this year. You got so close last year, and now the team is that little bit older... As long as everyone holds onto their nerves, I think you can do it."

“Maybe,” Shane said. He glanced at Ilya. “Um... I actually, um, wanted to talk to you guys about something else, if that’s okay.”

“Of course, honey.” Shane’s mom leaned forward. “What is it?”

“Well, I’m... I just thought you should know... that I’m, uh-” Shane swallowed. “Gay,” he muttered, cheeks going bright red.

“Oh!” Shane’s mom exclaimed. Her eyes darted over to Ilya, flickering from curiosity to realisation in under a second. “...I see,” she said primly, sitting back again. “Are we to assume that’s why Rozanov is here?”

Shane nodded.

Ilya cleared his throat. “It is, ah, nice to meet you. Ma’am.” He looked over at Shane’s dad, who was staring at him, shocked. “Sir.”

Shane’s mom pursed her lips, pinning Ilya under her gaze. “I thought it was very terrible what happened to you,” she said slowly, her tone not giving anything away. “A very poor show of sportsmanship, especially coming from your fellow teammates.”

“Thank you. Is okay, though.”

“So, Shane,” she said, switching her piercing look to her son. “You’re the male lover?”

Shane choked on his drink, eyes bulging out of his head. “Uh, no!” he spluttered. “No, that was- not us. Um- I mean-”

“I wanted him to be,” Ilya put in. “Shane wanted to play hard to get.”

“That’s not-” Shane shook his head. “We weren’t-”

“Is this serious?” Shane’s dad asked, speaking for the first time.

Shane seemed to get himself under control. “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, that’s why- why we’re here. He’s- he’s my, uh, boyfriend.”

Ilya grinned at the words. They still felt exciting to hear.

“This must have all happened rather quickly,” Shane’s mom said, eyeing them both skeptically.

Ilya snorted. Shane reached a new level of red.

“Not really,” he muttered.

“No? But Rozanov was-”

“Ilya,” Ilya corrected. “Please.”

“...Ilya,” Shane’s mom said. “Was with someone else? Recently?”

Shane glared at his hands. “Yes,” he said, expression flat and moody. “I know. We had... a break-up. We don’t need to talk about it.”

“A break-up?”

“Was not my idea,” Ilya said firmly. He didn’t want Shane’s parents thinking he was anything but totally devoted. “I was very committed to your son. He was the one who needed to date famous movie star before deciding he was gay.”

“Not helpful,” Shane said.

Yuna tracked her eyes over Ilya, looking him up and down. Her face was still unreadable, and honestly, sort of scary. Ilya wasn’t used to moms like this. Mama had been soft and agreeable, always. Yuna Hollander was the opposite.

“Okay,” she said eventually. “So you’re dating my son?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re sure about this? It isn’t a fling?”

“I love him,” Ilya said simply. “I’m with him for as long as he will have me. Hopefully forever.”

Shane reached over, holding Ilya’s hand. “Yeah. I love him too. And he’s- he’s not going anywhere. So I’m hoping you guys can be okay with this.”

“...Stay for dinner, Ilya,” Yuna Hollander said. It wasn’t a request. “I think we need to get to know you, if you’re not going anywhere.”

Ilya smiled. “Yes, Ma’am.”

~~

“I think that went well,” Shane said, once they were back in his Montreal apartment. “They liked you.”

Ilya grinned. “Your mom makes a lot of food.”

“Yeah, I know. Sorry.”

“No, is good. She is good cook. And your dad is funny.”

It was dark, late after staying for dinner and making the drive back. They had practice tomorrow morning, they were both going to be moving slowly. But Ilya thought it was worth it. Shane's parents had been nice. They hadn't freaked out, or said he wasn't good enough. They had cooked for him, and asked him questions, and invited him back.

Shane smiled, walking over and wrapping his arms around Ilya's middle, laying his head on Ilya's shoulder. "You did so well, thank you," he murmured. "I know Mom gave you a grilling, sorry."

"Grilling?"

"Asked a lot of questions," Shane supplied. He carried on. "I know it must've been intense, she can be like that, but you were so good about it, I can tell she really liked yo-"

"I love you," Ilya said out of the blue, saying it without even thinking. But it was true; Shane was perfect for him without even realising, without even trying. The way he filled in the gaps in Ilya's English without even acknowledging it, like he was merely saying bless you after a sneeze. The way he didn't even blink, let alone laugh. The only person who Ilya would even ask, if they said something he didn't understand, because he knew Shane would never judge.

"...Hm?" Shane pulled back enough to look at him, raising his eyebrows.

Ilya kissed him. "I love you," he said again. "Thank you for taking me to tell your parents. Thank you for telling them."

"...I love you too. Thank you for coming with me."

"I bet you are tired now, yes?"

"Exhausted."

"Long day. You've been very brave."

"Shut up."

Ilya beamed. "Go and sit, we can watch highlights of Toronto game. I'm going to have a beer, do you want one? Or ginger ale?"

"I'll have a beer, I think," Shane requested. "Today was a lot."

"I'll get it. Go."

Shane nodded, kissing him once more before heading for the living room. Ilya went to the fridge, popping the caps of the beers Shane kept in there now, along with Cokes and other things that Ilya enjoyed. He went and joined Shane on the couch, raising an arm for Shane to nestle under as they both watched Toronto's goal against Detroit.

Shane rested his head on Ilya's chest, letting out a long exhale. "They liked you," he murmured.

“You think?”

“Yes. You charmed them. Mom’s probably planning our future right now. Hope you’re okay with that.”

“...I think so. As long as you are.”

Shane hummed. “We can tell her to back off if she gets too excited. But it’s how she shows she cares, so you have to let her do it a little.”

“Okay.” Ilya took a swig from his beer bottle, his other hand tracing patterns along Shane’s back. He was tired too - it had been a big day.

“Do you... do you think your parents would have liked me?” Shane asked.

Ilya snorted softly. “Papa would have hated you. But don’t worry, that is point in your favour.”

“What about your mom?”

“She...” Ilya hesitated. “She would probably not have approved,” he said. “You are a man, and an atheist, and not Russian.”

“Oh.”

“But Mama was from small, religious village in Soviet Russia,” Ilya said. “She was... product of environment. But very loving, never had bad word to say about anyone. I think if she was born in different place, or different time, then she would have loved you. I think of that version of her, when I think about us. You are nice, polite, generous boy, what’s not to love?”

Shane nuzzled against Ilya’s pec. “Yeah?” he breathed.

“Yes. And besides, you make me very happy. She would want that, any version of her. I think she would be happy that I am happy, even if she didn’t approve of why.”

“Okay. You make me very happy too.”

Ilya smiled, running his hand up Shane’s back and scratching his scalp, making Shane let out a little moan. He fell asleep ten minutes later, the TV still playing and his beer only half-drunk. Ilya let him doze until the highlights were done, and then turned the TV off and scooped Shane into his arms bridal-style.

Shane’s nose scrunched up at the jostling, blinking himself awake again.

“Shh,” Ilya hushed. “S’okay.”

“I can walk.”

“I can carry you.” Ilya loved carrying Shane around. It satisfied some stupid, caveman part of his brain that saw Shane and screamed *protect! provide! cherish!* that Ilya was helpless to ignore.

“I’m heavy,” Shane mumbled, but he made no move to extricate himself from Ilya’s hold.

“I’m strong,” Ilya replied. “Besides, is fair. You get me up in the mornings, I take you to bed in the evenings, yes?”

“...Mm, okay,” Shane said sleepily.

Ilya carried him up to bed.

Chapter 29: May 2016

MAY 2016

The night they made the playoffs, Ilya went out for two drinks with the rest of the team. Shane stayed for his usual single beer before making his exit, while Ilya stayed behind, bitching with Drapeau and Comeau about the shitfuck players on Toronto's defence.

He stayed for an extra forty minutes, watching Wilson and Taylor manage to score with girls on the dancefloor and snapping back at Drapeau and Comeau easily. They had more ammunition against him, now they knew he liked dick. They weren't afraid to chirp at him about it, probably in ways that were considered offensive. Ilya retaliated by saying that they had tiny dicks and didn't know how to use them. He didn't mind so much, if they wanted to go after him for liking cock. It was better than at first, when they had been too put off to even bring it up. He could handle chirping much better than distance. He liked that they brought it up, even if it was only ever in a bad way. Better than not being able to mention it.

Besides, they both had French names, his expectations had been low to begin with. They worked well enough for what he wanted from them, which was simply people he could talk shit with. They could still do that, so Ilya was happy.

He dipped out early, though, because as good as chatting shit felt, there were other things that felt so much better. He went back to his apartment, and tutted when he had to unlock the door.

"You're trying to keep me out," he said as he entered.

Shane was on the couch, some hockey thing playing on the TV. "I'm trying to teach you about basic safety," he said.

Ilya rolled his eyes, but didn't extend the argument. He made his way over to Shane instead, over the moon. "We have made playoffs," he said, beaming. "And have whole weekend to ourselves before next practice."

Shane looked at him, nodding. "Mhm. I wonder how we'll fill the time."

"I have idea," Ilya said impulsively. Maybe it was the two beers. Maybe it was the high of making the playoffs. Maybe it was the way Shane looked at him, that made him want to run his mouth and confess every thought that appeared in his head. "A fantasy, if you want."

"You have... a fantasy?" Shane asked.

Ilya nodded.

"...What is it?"

Ilya bit his lip, and stood up, walking back across the room to where he had dumped his bag by the doorway. He bent down and produced his jersey with a flourish, holding it up by its shoulders and displaying it. "I want you to wear this while I fuck you," he said plainly.

Shane stared at him. "Seriously?"

"Yes."

"No."

Ilya paused, thrown. He had expected to do some needling, he hadn't expected such an outright rejection. "...You already wore it, back when I first joined the team," he said. "Is not so different now. You will just have my cock in you. Makes it better, I promise."

Shane shook his head, expression cold. "No way. Sorry, absolutely not."

Ilya felt himself droop, disappointed. "...Okay," he said, more crestfallen than he realistically should have been. "Forget it. Do not worry. I will fuck you anyway, hm? Sound good?"

Shane narrowed his eyes, and then pushed himself to his feet, stalking away from Ilya and into the bedroom. It took Ilya a few seconds to catch up, and then he was following Shane's footsteps. When he got to the bedroom, Shane was not on the bed, nor was he stripping himself of his clothes. He was digging through Ilya's closet.

"What are you...?" Ilya started.

Shane ignored him, and then made a small noise of satisfaction. "Here we go," he said happily, stepping back.

Holding Ilya's old Boston jersey.

Ilya stood frozen, unsure. "Is that-"

"I'm not wearing a Montreal jersey while we fuck," Shane said firmly. His face turned dark. "The Voyageurs fucking- they fucking *betrayed* you, Ilya."

"I don't care," Ilya said in a small voice.

"Well, I do," Shane said. "They betrayed you, and they made you unsafe. We're not- we're not making *them* any part of us. Of what we do. Never."

"...But?"

Shane's eyes glittered. "But," he said, his lips quirking upwards. "I'll wear the jersey of Boston's Captain. You know, I always thought he was hot."

Ilya groaned, his cock twitching in his pants. "God, please. Shane, put it on. Malysh, baby, *please*."

Shane grinned, looking far too pleased with himself, and peeled off his hoodie. He put on Ilya's old Boston jersey, which cut off midway down his thighs, and then pulled down his sweatpants and boxers. He stood in front of Ilya proudly.

God, he was a sight to behold. Ilya thought he might come in his pants from that image alone. "Turn around," he said hoarsely.

Shane spun slowly, showing off the *ROZANOV* painted across his back. One of Ilya's hands moved, entirely of its own accord, to his crotch, and he started to squeeze his dick over his trousers.

"Shane," he said, "Sweetheart. You are mine. Perfect. Mine."

"Mhm," Shane hummed, coming back around to face Ilya. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Fuck." Ilya broke, stalking forward and pushing Shane against the wall, shoving his tongue into Shane's mouth and bunching the jersey in his fists. "This is bad idea," he murmured, pulling back. "I am so very tempted to tie you up and keep you like this forever. My name on you. Only for me, da? All mine."

"Possessive meathead," Shane said fondly. "Yeah. All yours."

"Fuck. Shane. Want to fuck you, please."

Shane nodded, his hands looping around Ilya's neck. "...I have," he said, flushing, his eyes not meeting Ilya's, "my own, um, fantasy. If you want."

"Yes," Ilya said at once. "What do you want? I will do."

"...Uhm." Shane swallowed, still looking down at Ilya's chin. "Well, we've never... without a condom."

Ilya's knuckles went white. "...No," he said slowly. "You want that?"

"Um... yeah, maybe. It might be hot."

"I have never..."

Shane's eyebrows shot up. "Really? You haven't?"

"No."

"So I would... be your first?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God. Can we? Please?" Shane's arms tightened around Ilya. "I want to take one of your firsts, please."

Ilya's brain had gone entirely fuzzy. "Yes. Malysh, I want. You want? Yes? You will let me fuck you bare, let me come inside you? While you wear my name?"

"Ugh," Shane moaned, his hips jolting into Ilya. "Please, yeah. I want."

Ilya spun them around, walking Shane towards the bed and pushing him down onto the mattress. He climbed on top of him and attached their mouths together, unable to hold himself back, his hips jolting down uncontrollably. "Mine," he mumbled again, instinct taking over entirely. "Mine. Going to fill you up. Fuck. All me, only me."

Shane moaned, holding Ilya's head down on his neck, where Ilya suckled, making marks he'd have to apologize for tomorrow. "Just you," Shane said. "Ilya- come on."

Ilya grabbed the lube from the nightstand, slicking his fingers and pushing two into Shane without fanfare. Shane let out a guttural groan, tensing before accepting the intrusion, his face going slack as Ilya found his prostate.

"Oh, shit," Shane whined, flinging an arm over his face. "Fuck. *Ilya*."

"I've got you. I've got you, baby, going to fucking own you." Ilya's fingers twisted inside Shane, massaging inside him and stretching his hole. Ilya probably could have been nicer, could have teased and dragged this out and made Shane beg, but he was too desperate, too impatient. Shane was laid out in front of him, in Ilya's fucking jersey, with Ilya's C for Captain emblazoned on it, and Ilya was utterly powerless against the sight.

Finally, once Shane was ready, Ilya pushed himself inside. God, it felt so good. So much *more*. He almost couldn't take it.

"Ilya," Shane whispered, as Ilya held himself still, unable to move. "C'mon. Please."

"Just- one moment," Ilya hissed. "You feel- is so-"

"It's good? Better?"

"Fuck, Shane." Ilya's head fell forward, onto Shane's shoulder. "Perfect. Always perfect, but... this- fuck. Baby. Sweetheart. Mine."

"Fuck me, Ilya. Do it. Need- need you."

Ilya inhaled deeply. He could do this. He started moving slowly, already close to firing off. But he held himself back, and speeded up, hammering into Shane as hard as he could, hitting his prostate every time. This felt so fucking good for Ilya, this was so fucking perfect, he thought the only thing that could ruin it was if Shane didn't love it too. So he focussed his mind on making it as good as possible for him.

Ilya's cock was already inside, bare, feeling every inch of Shane, skin to skin. Ilya was already staring at his jersey - his *Boston* jersey - hanging off of Shane's frame. He didn't think his wildest wet dream could come up with something like this. So he hoisted Shane's legs up and thrust into him as hard as he could.

“Oh, fuck!” Shane gasped, his head tipping back. “Like that. Il- Like that. Ilya, oh God.”

Ilya carried on, wrapping a hand around Shane’s dick and jerking him off at the same time. “Come for me, Shane,” he hissed. “Come on my cock, be good boy.”

Shane came, spilling all over Ilya’s hand. Ilya felt a rush of delight, and immediately came as well. He stilled inside, as deep as he could, pushing in even further. He thought, in a perfect world, he would never have to leave.

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Ilya woke up the next morning, and went to find Shane sitting on the couch, staring glumly into a plate of eggs. Ilya went to sit next to him.

“Good morning.”

“Morning.”

“Why are you pouting?” Ilya asked. “We’re through to playoffs. Columbus is saddled with injured centre. New York is saddled with ancient Scott Hunter.” Ilya grinned. “I gave you best sex of your life last night, and this is best chance you’ve had of winning cup. What is there to be sad about?”

Shane looked at him and sighed heavily. “We really could win the cup this year.”

“Yes? And?”

“...I don’t know if I want to win the cup for this team.” Shane pushed his plate away, folding his arms and staring dejectedly into his lap.

“...Sweetheart,” Ilya whispered. “I’ve told you, it’s okay.”

“Right. But it’s not though.” Shane’s face crumpled. “I can’t- I can’t trust them anymore. I don’t know who it was, but two of them... two of them sold you out.”

“Is hockey,” Ilya said. “You know how hockey is.”

“Yeah. But Ilya...” Shane looked at him imploringly. “I spent hours, sitting in that airport, scared that something had happened to you. Knowing you were in danger. I was- fucking *helpless*, just stuck waiting, because someone on *our team* did that to you.”

“Shane. They did not know.” Ilya had said this so many times, over the last few months. “I am sure they did not know I would be in Russia when that article came out. They meant to embarrass, maybe. Not good, sure. But what happened, that was not the intention.”

“Who cares?” Shane shot back. “That is what happened. And what- I mean, what’s supposed to happen with us, after what they did to you?”

“What do you mean?”

Shane shrugged, his expression devastated. “I mean... I don’t know anyone outside of hockey. I don’t have, like, friends from school, or hobbies, I don’t know my neighbours. My entire life, always, has been hockey. Since I was eighteen, the Voyageurs have been, like, my whole world. And now, I can’t trust any of them.”

“Of course you can.”

“I *can’t*,” Shane said, shaking his head. “I can’t even tell Hayden about us. He’s my best friend, and I have to keep this huge secret. Because I don’t know who went to the press, so I can’t trust any of them. I mean, I’m sure it wasn’t him, in my head, but I can’t *know* that. So- So what does that mean? We never tell anyone except my parents?”

“If you want to tell Hayden, tell Hayden,” Ilya said. “Tell whoever you want.”

“And if it ends up in the papers?”

Ilya shrugged, his eyes shooting down for a second. “I would not mind,” he said lowly. “If everyone knew.”

“But-”

“I know. I don’t need everyone to know. I’m not asking to- to go public, or anything.” Ilya huffed a laugh. “But if you want to tell team- or even just some of team... maybe we accept risk it might not stay secret. And that is not end of world.”

Shane paused, and then shook his head. “No.”

“Okay.”

“I’m not being outed.”

“That’s okay.”

“I’ll tell everyone about us on my own terms.” Shane frowned. “No, sorry. Our own terms.”

“...What do you mean?”

“I mean, I can’t trust our team. We can’t tell them and think it’ll stay private. But...” Shane looked at him, uncertainty shining in his eyes. “Did you mean that? You wouldn’t mind if everyone knew?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Ilya said dumbly.

“Do you *want* everyone to know?”

“I want what you want.”

“No. Ilya, I’m asking. What do *you* want?” Shane's gaze doubled in intensity, wide-eyed.

Ilya swallowed. “I already can’t go back to Russia,” he said. “Is easier for me, to say I want to go public. I am already out. But I think- maybe, someday. It does not have to be soon. But someday, I would like not to hide how much I love you.”

Shane's face trembled, his eyes going glassy. “...Yeah,” he said sorrowfully. “I’d like that too.”

“Someday,” Ilya said. “Not important for now. For now, we focus on winning cup.”

“...We could transfer,” Shane said, voice going quiet. “Leave Montreal.”

Ilya stiffened. He didn’t want that - no team could afford them both. They would have to split up. Ilya didn’t know if he could handle that. “...You would want to be apart?” he asked, dismayed.

“No,” Shane said. “But- but it’s an option.”

“Not to me.”

“Would you want to transfer?” Shane asked. “If you could.”

“I am on team with you. With you every day. I would not trade that for anything.”

“Yeah. But, like... just in your imagination. If I could come with you, somehow. You wouldn’t want to leave Montreal?”

Ilya shrugged. “I am not angry like you,” he said. “I am okay with team.”

“How? It’s- It’s *you* they fucked over.”

Ilya shrugged again. “I guess I... I do not care, so much, about it,” he said. “They go to press, so what? Some fans are mad, some players think I’m gross, so what? I am in Canada. I’m not in prison, I don’t have government knocking at my door. I am still free - that cannot be taken away, no matter what anonymous teammates think. So they can do what they like. I still do what I want.”

Shane reached out and gripped Ilya’s hand tightly. “I get that,” Shane said. “Freedom is... is good. I’m glad you have it, here. I don’t want to, fuck- minimize that, or whatever. Fuck, I don’t really... But I don’t want... I don’t want you settling for freedom, just because it’s good enough. I want you to have more than that.”

“And what would that be?”

“I don’t fucking know. Acceptance? Love? That shit.” Shane shook his head. “I don’t fucking know. Not whatever this is.”

“I have what I need from everyone who matters. I can ignore everyone else.”

Shane’s face screwed up, dissatisfied. “That’s not fair, though.”

“Yeah.” Ilya smiled. He liked this part of Shane - the Shane that had unbreakable principles, and saw the world in black and white, and wouldn’t just accept things the way they were. Sometimes it could be frustrating, how stubborn and invincible Shane could be, his detest for nuance. Sometimes, like now, it was admirable. And comforting. And made Ilya believe things could be more than what he settled for.

Ilya really didn’t care. He’d love it if hockey suddenly became a progressive bastion, but he didn’t expect it, and didn’t need it. Compared to Russia, it was still great. He wasn’t at risk of being beaten, or arrested, so he was okay.

But it was still distressingly beautiful to have Shane remind him that, even if that’s how things were, it’s not how they should be. Sometimes Ilya was still too willing to accept whatever he was given, even if he was working on that. He liked that Shane was an idealist, that Shane saw the world in terms of *ought* rather than *actuality*.

“We are okay,” Ilya murmured. “Team is not perfect, I know. But is not awful either, da?”

“...And you’re happy, like that?”

“Yes. Team is good enough to be a team. Outside that, I have you. I have your parents, I have Nadya, I have Dan, I have Marlow, I have Alexei - at least in every way I need him.” Ilya smiled. “Team is not my whole world. And it shouldn’t be your whole world either. You- you should talk to Rose more, other people outside of hockey. Maybe then it is not so bad.”

“I fucked things up with Rose,” Shane said.

Ilya took a deep breath, and decided to be the bigger person. “Yes,” he said. “I also hate her. You know this. But she was still there for you, when you needed her. So I’m forced to like her too. And I think you need - and deserve - friends outside of hockey. Is good for me, I think it would be good for you too.”

Shane wavered, and then smiled stiffly. “Yeah. Yeah, maybe. I- Maybe hockey isn’t everything. Rose was... was nicer to me in a few months than any of the team over eight years, I guess.”

“She would be good friend,” Ilya said. “I will always hate her, of course-”

“Asshole,” Shane grinned.

“But good friend,” Ilya repeated. “Has been good to you.”

Shane nodded slowly. “...Maybe. I still don’t think-”

“I know,” Ilya said. “The team is not what a team should be. But it’s what they are. And hockey is better than it was when we first joined, yes? Things are not great, but better. Good enough. And who knows, maybe when we are old like Scott Hunter, and Wilson and Taylor

are captains of whatever teams they are on then, they will think that now is awful, instead of good enough. They take the reins, and make a new good enough. And the new Shane Hollander has easier time than you did.”

“...That’s a nice idea,” Shane murmured, blinking away glassy eyes.

Ilya kissed his temple. “We work with what we have,” he said. “And we make it easier for the next lot, da? That is not so bad.”

“Maybe. Sounds kind of nice, when you put it like that.”

“I am a sweet-talker,” Ilya grinned. “You are lucky, if I could speak to you in my first language I would have you eating out of the palm of my hand.”

Shane smiled, a thumb wiping at the corner of his eyes. “That’s good. Nice idiom, well done.”

“What idiom?”

Shane laughed, and then turned serious again. “...Okay. For now... I agree. We focus on the cup.”

“The cup,” agreed Ilya.

“But let me talk to my mom. I want to see what she thinks.”

"Okay. But no more pouting, okay?"

"Okay."

Chapter 30: June 2016

Chapter Notes

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

JUNE 2016

They made it through to the Stanley Cup final, defeating Columbus to face San Jose from the Western Conference. The team had been solemn and tense all through the playoffs, determined to win Montreal's first cup in years, even as the media and the fans wrote off their chances, declaring too much animosity among the players to be an effective team.

They'd proven them all wrong so far, getting even further than they had last year. Ilya worked with Wilson and Taylor to make sure the second line was in top form, pushing to score a goal in their first match against San Jose. It gave them a win - only one, San Jose could still come back and win the best of seven yet, but it was better than a loss.

There was a quiet, tentative hopefulness as they all left the arena that evening, and Ilya nodded along to the music in his car as he drove home in the dark. Shane was in the passenger seat, stretching his neck, obviously tired from the amazing fucking performance he had just delivered on the ice.

"I have... a plan," Shane said suddenly, when Ilya came to a stop at a red light.. "For us."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "A sex plan?"

"No. Asshole. Like a real, serious plan."

"...Okay," Ilya said slowly, unsure. "Tell me this plan."

"Ottawa's Captain is retiring after next season. They're going to need a new centre, a new Captain."

Ilya was so thrown, it took him a second to realise the light had turned green. He started driving again. "You want to trade to Ottawa?"

"Eventually. But I think you should first." Shane stared at him. "You should play one more season for Montreal, and then move to Ottawa when Roy retires. You could be captain there. Play on the first line again."

Ilya swallowed, trying not to show his dejection at the idea. "And you would stay on the Voyageurs?"

"For one extra season. Mom doesn't think they'd take both of us at the same time. But then I'd join you."

"You are the one who is unhappy with the Voyageurs. Why should I leave first?"

Shane sighed. "Because out of the two of us, you're the one who should be a captain. And you should be playing on the first line again."

"Shane, you are good captain."

"Maybe," Shane said, grimacing. "I think you're better, though, at team stuff. Leading people."

"No, you are-"

"I know, I know," Shane interrupted. "I don't think I'm, like, bad at it, or anything. But I don't... I don't think I even *like* being a captain. All it does is stress me out, gives me shit to worry about that's not hockey. I wanted to be captain because that's- that's like, what you're supposed to want, right? If you want to be the best, you need to be captain. But I don't... I don't think I enjoy it. I think I just want to play hockey."

"...Okay," Ilya said, brows furrowing, not sure what to say. "If you... All that matters is you are happy. If you don't like being captain, you don't have to be."

"But *you* should be," Shane said. "You led Boston, you were great at it, and you loved it, don't lie."

Ilya paused, and then nodded. He had loved it.

"So you should move first," Shane said. "Go to Ottawa. Become captain, start whipping them into shape. Then, the next season, when my contract is up, I can join you."

"Would they even be able to afford-"

"I'd take a pay cut, if I had to. Then we could be together, away from this team."

Ilya took a deep breath, still frowning. Obviously, Shane had been thinking about this a lot. "...And you want to do this?" he asked. "Leave Montreal? Take pay cut to move to a worse team? That would make you happy?"

They reached Ilya's apartment, and Ilya parked, but didn't make a move to get out of the car.

"Yes." Shane said, wide-eyed and earnest. "I don't want to end my career here, I can't keep giving them everything. Not anymore. I just want to play on a team with you, and trust that team. Would you... would you want that?"

"I want whatever makes you happy," Ilya said simply. "You want to go to Ottawa, we go to Ottawa. I would move to fucking Texas for you, sweetheart."

"Really? You wouldn't mind moving again?"

Ilya shook his head. "I moved continents when I was eighteen. Switching neighbouring cities doesn't phase me at all."

Shane huffed a laugh, a hand reaching out to pet the back of Ilya's head. "Thank you," he whispered. "I love you."

"I love you too. With my whole heart. You want to move, I ask where. You say jump, I say how high. Is that easy?"

"You're ridiculous."

"I am in love."

Shane smiled, and jerked his head. "Come on. Let's get in."

Ilya nodded, and they got out of the car, walking up to Ilya's apartment and he let them inside. He thought he would miss some of the Montreal players, but honestly, not in any way that really mattered. If Shane wasn't happy in Montreal, then Ilya was willing to take a trade in a heartbeat. The season apart would be hard, but if that's what it took to make Shane happy, then Ilya would do that.

And he would like to be a Captain again. He had loved that role, like he had loved mentoring Wilson and Taylor in Montreal. Ottawa was a bad team, but Boston had been in a rut when he'd signed with them. Ilya thought, with enough work, he could turn them around.

But frankly, he would move to a team that was hopeless, to play on the third line and barely appear on the ice, if that was what Shane wanted. Shane was more important than hockey.

Shane was his guy.

~~

Ilya watched Shane sit at his locker, elbows on his knees, face blank as he breathed deeply. They had about another twenty minutes before they had to go on the ice. To face San Jose for the final time. And maybe, if everything went well, win the cup.

Ilya sidled over, sitting down next to him. "Calm, Hollander," he murmured. "We can do this."

"I know," Shane said weakly, staring at the floor.

"...You want to make bet?"

Shane's eyes shot up to look at him. His eyes had that familiar spark of interest, and Ilya felt a fuzzy feeling of pride, that he got exactly the reaction he had wanted, and expected. He was pretty sure Shane would always be compelled to compete with him. Ilya wasn't complaining.

“What sort of bet?” Shane asked.

Ilya hummed contemplatively. “I scored hat trick in Stanley Cup final with Bears,” he said. “Do you think you can beat that?”

“...Seriously?”

“If you can’t, you must get tattoo.” Ilya grinned, all teeth and goading edge. “My choice.”

Shane bit his lip, nodding. “If I win, I get to post something on your instagram. My choice.”

Ilya remembered, a year and half ago now, when they made a bet in the arcade and Shane had demanded the same thing. “You are eager to get your hands on my social media, Hollander,” he said. “Something planned?”

Shane winked. “Guess you’ll have to wait and see, right?”

“Da.” Ilya stood up. “Come on. Time to destroy San Jose once and for all.”

Shane took a deep breath and stood up as well, nodding. His expression turned solemn once more. Then he met Ilya’s gaze again. “Thanks,” he said quietly, looking at Ilya from under his eyelashes.

Ilya’s heart was so full it almost hurt. “Always,” he replied.

~~

Ilya battered his way back into the locker room, shoving the other players out of his way, grabbing Shane’s shoulders from behind and shaking him. “Four fucking goals! What did I fucking tell you, hm?” he boasted loudly into Shane’s ear, over the noise of all the celebrations, giddy with joy. “What did I tell you, Hollander? You are record-setter! I told you. Fuck youngest player, you are *the only*.”

Shane laughed, his face glowing as he turned around to face Ilya. “Yeah, you fucking told me.”

“Amazing game, beautiful. Wonderful. Gorgeous.” Ilya tried to think of more English words to describe Shane’s playing, as someone started spraying champagne all over the locker room.

“Fuck,” Shane said, shaking his head. “I can’t believe it. We *did it*, we won the cup!”

“The first of many.”

Then Drapeau was jumping on top of Ilya, and they got separated by the mess of raucous, cheering hockey players.

The party went on late. Even Shane stayed out for the whole thing, as they hit up a fancy club and stayed there until the early hours of the morning, drinking and yelling and celebrating. Everyone was lightheaded, the hard work of years and years finally paying off. Ilya spent hours lavishing drunken praise on Wilson and Taylor, yelling in Drapeau's face as his words got more and more slurred, indulging himself in every way. Almost every way.

Finally, at three in the morning, Ilya slipped away. Everyone was too wasted to really notice by then, and Ilya smoked a cigarette on the street outside for five minutes until he spotted Shane exiting the club too.

They walked back to the hotel together. Shane was beaming, slightly tipsy which was rare for him, and Ilya was totally inebriated.

"Baby, you were so hot today," he murmured, as they stumbled down the sidewalk. "But there is absolutely no way my dick is going to work right now."

Shane snorted, not even telling him off for speaking like this in public. It was fine anyway; the streets were empty, it was the dead of night.

"In the morning, I will ruin you," Ilya promised.

"Okay," Shane said, failing to walk in a straight line, bumping into Ilya, their shoulders touching, Ilya feeling Shane's weight for a few seconds. "You'll still come back to my room, though?"

"Of course."

They reached the hotel, and Ilya followed Shane to his room. As soon as the door was shut behind them, Ilya had his lips on Shane's. The room was spinning - probably because he was drunk, but then again, the room normally spun when Ilya kissed Shane.

They kissed sloppily as they tumbled towards the bed. Ilya didn't even have the energy to get undressed, he fell on top of the covers, still in his jeans, and dragged Shane down with him, wrapping his arms around Shane's torso and humming contentedly.

He was asleep within seconds.

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He woke up horrifically hung over, but he didn't care. He'd won his second Stanley Cup. Even better, he still had Shane in his arms, looking so stunning as he slept. Ilya began

pressing kisses to the bare skin of Shane's neck, squeezing him.

Shane's nose twitched, as he started to show signs of life. "Ilya?" he mumbled.

"Mhm." Ilya ran his hands over Shane's toned stomach, under his t-shirt. "How are you feeling?"

"Good." Shane smiled dreamily. "We won."

"Da."

Shane rolled over, looking at Ilya properly. "...And," he said. "I won the bet."

Ilya eyed him. "Da. What are you going to post?"

"You'll find out," Shane grinned, his eyes glimmering. "Phone, please."

Ilya smirked, enjoying the sight of a gloating, cocky Shane Hollander, and handed it over without complaint.

"You aren't allowed to delete it, remember," Shane said.

"Yes, I remember."

Shane opened Ilya's phone, and then, with his spare hand, grabbed Ilya's. He locked their fingers together, resting them against the white sheets of the bed, and held the phone up. Ilya heard the sound of the camera-shutter.

"...Shane," he whispered. "What are you-"

Shane's face turned serious, a slight hint of uncertainty shining through. "Do you trust me?"

"...Yes. But you don't have to." People would work it out. They'd recognise Shane's hand, the slender curve of his wrist, the scar on his pinky.

"I want to."

Ilya was frozen, feeling something stick in his throat. "Really? You're sure? You really want to?"

"Really." Shane smiled, the corners of his eyes creasing. "I spent so long denying us. I don't want to do that anymore, for anyone."

Ilya leaned forward and kissed him, hard and urgent, morning breath be damned. "Post it," he said, overwhelmed. "Please. Let everyone know. I want everyone to know."

Shane's smile widened, spreading to the edges of his cheek. He took a moment to card his hand through Ilya's hair, face going soft. Then he posted the photo, just a tap of his thumb, and switched the phone off, tossing it down the bed. Ilya had to remind himself to breathe.

"Shane," he said, stunned.

“Ilya.”

“You are so brave.”

Shane’s lips twitched, as he shook his head. “I’m in love.”

Ilya felt it so deeply - felt loved in a way he hadn't known was possible. He kissed him again.

Chapter End Notes

ahh we've finished!!! thank you so much for reading y'all, i love you all like shane and ilya love each other

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