meet me in the dark

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by fonduebroski314 (anon_carrots)

Summary

Born as the second son of a high-ranking officer in the Russian mob, Ilya Rozanov is sent to head the Bratva's overseas branch in Canada. One day, his father calls with an assignment: shut down their rival operation in Ottawa, a money-laundering front backed by the Japanese Yakuza. He's given one name to go off of: Hollander.

Shane Hollander is a graduate student in an MD program specializing in sports medicine. There's nothing particularly interesting about him, other than the fact that his mother, Yuna Hollander, is the CEO of an arts charity—and the daughter of the chairman of the second-largest yakuza family in Japan.

Unfortunately for Shane, Ilya gets the wrong Hollander.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

▶ Content warnings

Russian written in italics

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya jabs at the little red ‘end call’ button with a grunt of annoyance. Across the room, Svetlana cuts her eyes at him, waiting for him to speak.

“*The mark is in position*,” he says, in Russian. It’s his habit to default to their mother tongue when it’s just the two of them. “*Fifteen minutes from here. I need to head out now*.”

She quirks his lips. “*Will you be able to handle yourself, or do you need me to come hold your hand through it?*”

“*Stay*.” Ilya rises from the plush armchair in his study. “*This should be over quickly*.” He reaches into his desk drawer, grabbing his Glock and sliding it into the leather holster under his left arm. His suit jacket falls over it neatly, giving no hint at the weapons concealed on his person, gun or otherwise. He had it specially tailored, as do all the men on his payroll.

Svetlana stands as well, pressing a kiss against his cheek. “*Don’t die*,” she says into his ear. “*Or else I will have to take over your operations for you, and I will be very displeased by that.*”

Ilya scoffs. “*Please. As if something this simple could be dangerous.*” He steps back, and walks out the door. With a wave of his hand, his men fall in step behind him as they walk to the garage.

In English, he says, “Call Connors. Have him clear building. Discretely. Do not scare the boy off.”

Marlow, his lieutenant, snaps off a jaunty salute. “You got it, boss,” he says, Canadian accent thickening the ‘o.’ He steps out in front of Ilya, pulling open the car door of the sleek black SUV for him. The driver knows the location already, peeling out of the concrete garage.

They set out for the coffee shop known as ‘A Whole Latte Love,’ where Ilya has received a report of the arrival of one Shane Hollander.

Ilya Rozanov is the second son of Grigori Rozanov, *avtoritet* of the Moscow *Bratva*. His father specialized in money laundering and other financial crimes, and had been very good at it indeed in his heyday. He is retired, now, and looking to have Ilya's brother Alexei, his oldest son and rightful heir of the Rozanov name, take over Grigori's operations.

As the younger son, Ilya has been given the dubious honor of managing their North American operations, based in Ottawa. For Alexei, this is a convenient assignment to keep his (more handsome, more charming, and above all, more *competent*) brother out of the way. Ilya prefers this, if he's being honest. He's never liked Moscow. Not since his mother passed.

In Canada, he can be free. As free one can be when they're born into the Russian mafia.

He's grateful that Svetlana came, too. Not for him in particular, but to chase her own dreams of building a business from her own father's legacy. Her work naturally intersects with his. Given their shared past, it's only natural that they work together, as long as it benefits the both of them.

For the most part, his family leaves him alone. As long as their Canadian and American branches pull their weight in gold, all is well.

Therefore, it's highly unusual when Ilya receives the call from his father.

"*Hello, Father,"* he says.

"*Ilya.*" As usual, his tone is cold. "*Still wasting your time in those clubs, da?"*

"*No, Father."*

"*It is a wonder that our Canadian branch has not crumbled away, with your laziness."* He continues as if he hasn't heard Ilya. "*Well, here is an assignment to prove yourself with."*

"Yes, Father."

"It's come to our attention that our friends from Ginza have established a long-term operation in Ottawa," his father says. "*I bear the shame that you have not discovered them sooner, despite your years residing there."*

"It is my mistake."

"And so you will be the one to fix it. We cannot allow them to continue unchecked. Remind them they are operating on our territory. They will owe us the standard fee, if they wish to remain."

"And if they do not cooperate?"

His father sighs, staticky over the phone. "*Do not ask stupid questions. If they do not cooperate, you will shut them down. That is the Russian way."*

Ilya hears the meaning in those words. "*Yes, Father."*

His father leaves him with a name: Hollander.

When the bell of the cafe door jingles, Shane barely looks up. He's engrossed with his chemistry textbook, highlighting line after line of material. Midterms are coming up next week. He'll need to study if he wants to make the Dean's list again. Voices murmur and the automatic coffee grinder whirs noisily as the barista serves the new customer. He tunes it all out, biting his lip as he rereads the notes he made during lecture.

He's so focused, in fact, that he doesn't notice the man walking across the shop to him, coffee cup in hand. Shane always sits in the back left booth. He spends hours there at a time with his textbook and laptop, chugging espresso shots like his life depends on it. Which it sort of does.

"Hello."

Shane jumps a meter in the air. He nearly knocks his own drink over, and smears a long line of fluorescent yellow ink down the page he had been working through. Looking up, he opens his mouth to curse.

There's a man standing before him. His hair falls in golden curls, and Shane's eyes are drawn to the distinctive mole on his left cheek. He's tall and muscular, wearing a well-tailored suit that leaves nothing to the imagination about the man's physique.

He is, unfortunately, incredibly attractive.

Shane's voice dies in this throat, and he's left with his jaw hanging slightly open.

"Can I sit?" He has a Russian accent. It registers dimly in the back of Shane's mind, but the rest of it is too busy short-circuiting.

"Uh—" Shane glances around the shop, which is completely empty save for the barista on duty, Emily. Given how tucked away the back booth is, they're out of her line of sight. " — I'd really prefer if you didn't, I'm kind of in the middle of something here."

But his protest falls on deaf ears as the man drops into the faux leather seat opposite of Shane.

“Thank you,” the man says. “You are very generous.”

Shane furrows his brow, fixing his gaze somewhere near the man’s mouth as he talks. “Who are you?”

“My name is Ilya Rozanov,” he says. When Shane doesn’t react to his name, he tilts his head. “I am simply wanting a conversation.”

“Okay, well,” Shane says, “you picked the wrong person.”

But Rozanov shakes his head. “No, no, I think you are exactly who I am looking for.” He leans forward. “Hollander. Shane Hollander, yes?”

Shane feels his heart stutter. “...How do you know that?”

“I was surprised to know that someone with a name like Hollander is connected to Yakuza,” Rozanov says. “But you are connected to them, da? With the, ah, Bijutsu Foundation?” He struggles on the Japanese word slightly, Shane watching the way his lips form the vowels.

“I’m telling you, you have the wrong person,” Shane says, beginning to gather his loose papers and shutting his laptop. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“No, I think you do, Shane Hollander,” Rozanov says with a smirk. Shane shoves everything in his backpack without looking, a far cry from his typical meticulous organization. “Relax, I only came to deliver message.”

“Sorry, I’m not interested. I have to go.”

“Moscow says hello,” Rozanov calls after him. “Please pass that along to your people.”

Shane reaches for the front door—and finds his path blocked by two burly men in black suits, similar to the one that Rozanov wears.

“It’s okay. Let him go.” The man’s voice, tinged with amusement, says behind him. The men back off.

Shane forces himself to take deep, even breaths as he walks as fast as he can. Can’t quite force the image of those finely-sculpted lips, quirked in a slanted smile, out of his head.

Shane Hollander doesn’t consider himself to be particularly interesting. He’s in his second year of an MD program specializing in sports medicine, and plays for his university’s varsity hockey team. He’s lived all his life in Ottawa, and hopes to become an athletic trainer for the NHL when he completes his degree.

His mother, on the other hand, is Yuna Hollander, nee Nishiguchi. Her father, Shane's grandfather, is the chairman of the Sumiyoshi-kai—the second-largest yakuza group in Japan. Shane met him once, when he was almost too young to remember it. He can only dredge up a vague impression of an old man's laugh. His mother grew up in Canada, and keeps that part of her family separated from David and Shane.

…aside from the fact that she's the CEO of the Bijutsu Arts Charity Foundation, generously endowed by her father's company. If the charity offers some venues for particular dealings with Japan—Shane has learned not to ask. He simply allows himself to be grateful to his mother's financial support for his studies, and strives to make an honest man of himself.

In fact, he hasn't thought about that side of his family in years. Not until Ilya Rozanov sweeps his way into Shane's quiet routine, and upends his life.

"Hello, Shane."

He grits his teeth and resolutely doesn't look up from his assignment. "What do you want, Rozanov."

"I can't say hello to my favorite coffee partner?" Rozanov's voice is teasing. He slides into the booth, at 12 P.M. on the dot, as he's been doing for several weeks. "I am wounded." He takes an obnoxiously loud sip of his coffee.

"You're going to have to give up eventually," Shane says. "My answer is the same as the last two times. I don't know what you're talking about, and I want you to leave me alone."

"Aw, you are so boring," Rozanov says. "Is not like anybody will hear us."

Unlike their first meeting, there's a quiet murmur as patrons move about the shop today. Shane has the sneaking suspicion that Rozanov had something to do with it, but he's not exactly about to ask the man. When he raises his gaze, he fixes his eyes on Rozanov's lips, as always.

"I don't know what you want from me," he says quietly.

"I already told you," Rozanov says. "Tell your people to do things properly."

"Through your people, you mean."

"*Da.* Is that easy."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"I'm not in charge of anything, unlike you," Shane snipes at Rozanov. He bites his lip immediately after, realizing he's said more than he's intended to.

Rozanov scents blood in the water. “So tell me who is in charge. I will go to them, and finally leave you alone.”

Shane’s already shaking his head. “I can’t do that. I… don’t know who it is.”

“Hm. You are lying,” Rozanov says. “Lucky for you that you are a cute liar. Otherwise, I would have my men find a way to make you talk.”

He chooses to ignore part of what Rozanov just said. “If you were really going to torture me, you would’ve done it already. Why drag this out? More trouble for the both of us.”

“Ah, Hollander, but I am having so much fun.” Rozanov clutches at his chest in exaggerated agony. “You feel the same, I know it.”

“You can tell yourself that, if it makes you feel better.”

“It does.” The Russian man stands. “Good talk, Hollander. I will see you next week.” He leaves his empty coffee cup on the table as he stands. Shane watches him go, eyes dipping briefly down his backside before he schools himself. Unlike the last few times, Rozanov doesn’t have a pack of suited henchmen waiting at the door. Instead, there’s a curly-haired woman wearing a designer coat. As the door jingles merrily with Rozanov’s exit, she catches him looking, and smiles. Says something to Rozanov, who turns around and winks at Shane through the glass windows of the shop.

He jerks back, slumping in the booth so he’s out of view. His face burns.

Svetlana is waiting for him when he ends his call. Her gold sequined dress flutters in the night air, the party muted behind balcony doors. Ilya itches for a cigarette, but he knows she would be displeased by the smell clinging to his clothing.

“*Your father, again?”* She asks. “*That’s the third time this week.”*

Ilya shakes his head. “*You know how he is. Impatient about the job.”* He straightens his cufflinks, sliding his phone into his tuxedo pocket. “*Do not worry about it. Tonight is your night.”* He offers his arm to her.

“Damn right it is,” she says, tucking her hand into the crook of his elbow. “*Don’t embarrass me, Rozanov.”*

“I could never.”

She only laughs at that, and they step back into the dinner gala he had left only a few minutes ago. A charity something-or-other. For once, it’s a legitimate event, and he’s attending as Svetlana’s plus one. He enjoys playing his role as her arm candy, watching her run circles

around old businessmen who should have retired decades ago. As they reintegrate with the partygoers, Ilya nods at his men stationed around the corners of the room.

Ilya loses count of how many hands they shake. He subtly wipes his hand after the last one, glancing around the room for a good excuse to tow Svetlana away from her socializing.

He finds one.

Ilya locks gazes with Shane Hollander. He watches as the other man's eyes move away instinctively, before doubling back to Ilya and widening in shock. Hollander looks good tonight. He's dressed in a tux as well, per gala dress code, hair lightly gelled, hands in his stuffed pockets. It's a far cry from the dishevelled student Ilya has grown accustomed to seeing.

"*Look who it is,"* he murmurs to Svetlana, who follows his gaze. "*Let's go say hello."*

She quirks her lips knowingly at him. "*Naturally."*

Ilya strides across the room in large steps, expertly weaving through the crowd. Hollander looks like a deer caught in headlights, ready to bolt at a moment's notice but rooted in place. When he gets closer, Ilya sees the reason for it—an older woman, whose features echo Hollander's, is deep in conversation with someone. She holds Hollander's arm, and he seems incapable of escaping.

"Shane Hollander," Ilya says, savouring the taste of his name like the fine champagne being passed around the party. "I am surprised to see you here."

"...you too," Hollander says, reluctantly.

The woman finishes her conversation, turning to greet Ilya and Svetlana politely. "Oh, hello!" She reaches her hand out to shake, and Hollander makes an aborted motion as if to smack Ilya's hand away. "I'm Yuna Hollander. Director and CEO of the Bijutsu Arts Foundation."

Ah. Ilya understands now. He's had the wrong Hollander this whole time. His men must have overlooked Yuna in their research, giving him Shane's profile instead. He makes a mental note to have Svetlana teach them a lesson on underestimating women. For now, however, their mistake is Ilya's gain. Because he finds that he's having too much fun with Hollander—he can't tear his eyes away.

Svetlana introduces herself and Ilya. Yuna Hollander looks between Ilya and Shane. "Do you two know each other?"

"We've met." Hollander, the younger, doesn't elaborate.

Ilya allows his smile to broaden across his face. "*Da,* we have met a few times over the last few months. I hope to become good friends."

An indignant flush works its way across Hollander's cheeks, but Yuna beats him to his reply.

“Oh, I didn’t know you would have friends here tonight, Shane!” She pats his arm. “Why don’t I go chat with Mr. Hunter over there for a bit. You can spend time with your friends.” Hollander tries to protest, but Yuna is already walking away.

Svetlana catches the glint in Ilya’s eye. “*I will go find some more champagne,”* she says. “*Don’t have too much fun without me.”*

“You know I will,” he says, and she’s gone too. And then it’s just Ilya and Hollander.

He steps up to Hollander, just a little too far into his personal space. Hollander eyes him warily.

“So,” Ilya says, “I see how it is. You were hiding your beautiful mother from me.”

“Fuck off,” Hollander snaps. “Don’t bring her into this.”

“Ah, but I must,” he says. “She is the one I am looking for, after all. And I regret to inform you, Mister Hollander, but Moscow is growing impatient as the months pass. Now that I have found my true target, perhaps I will go speak with her—”

“No!” Hollander’s hand reaches out, and catches Ilya’s wrist. “Don’t—don’t do that.”

“And what would you have me do instead?”

“We can—what do you want from me? I’ll do whatever you want. Just leave my mom alone.”

“Aw, so sweet,” Ilya all but purrs. “Perhaps you will not be saying this, however, when you hear of what I am thinking.”

Hollander glares. “Well? Tell me.”

Ilya leans in close to his ear, and tells him exactly what he wants.

Rozanov’s residence is sleek, modern, all straight lines and ambient lighting. Normally, he would take more time to appreciate the interior design, but he sort of has bigger fish to fry at the moment.

He’s not sure how he got here. Actually, no, he knows exactly how it happened. Rozanov whispering in his ear, the hot flash of indignation that had seared through Shane’s body, his stuttered excuses to his mom, the awkward car ride in Rozanov’s sleek SUV with the Russian man’s chauffeur. And now, Rozanov standing before him, hip jutting out as he sweeps his clear blue eyes over Shane’s body.

(*“*Come home with me tonight,” Rozanov says. His lips graze the outer shell of Shane’s ear, and a shudder runs down his spine.

He jerks back on instinct. “What? No way in hell.”

“Don’t lie to yourself. I have seen you looking.”

“I—I don’t—”

“Okay. Perhaps I will ask your mother, instead.”

“Don’t you dare.”

“Come home with me tonight, and I back off of your yakuza charity.”

“For good?”

“For now.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Mm. Work with me here, Hollander. What is your Canadian saying? Ah. I scratch your back, and you scratch mine. And maybe I will scratch more than your back.”

“Fuck you.”

“Only if you ask nicely.”)

His phone pings.

Mom

Have fun, get home safe!

Possibly the last thing he needs at this moment. Shane taps back a quick message, before shutting his phone off. When he looks up, Rozanov is right in front of him.

“Shit!” Shane yelps, moving away instinctively. His back hits the wall. Rozanov reaches a hand up, cupping the side of Shane’s face. It’s surprisingly gentle. Shane lets out an unsteady breath, and looks away.

“You are shy.”

“Shut up.” Shane scowls. “So… what now?”

“Hm. Perhaps you can tell me.” Rozanov’s fingers find Shane’s bowtie, loosening it expertly before he starts on his shirt buttons. Shane presses his hands against the smooth wooden door behind him, as cool air hits his bare torso. “How do you like it, usually? You want my hands on you, on your cock? Or do you prefer to be touched up here?” He accentuates his words, sliding his large hands across Shane’s chest, one gliding over his left nipple.

Shane makes a noise at the back of his throat, one he hadn’t meant to make. “Stop teasing me.”

“But that is half the fun,” Rozanov says. He pauses as something occurs to him. “...you have been with men before, yes?”

Shane didn’t think his face could get any warmer than it already was, but somehow his body manages it. He could lie. But he hesitates too long, and understanding dawns on Rozanov’s face. So Shane gives a quick, small shake of his head.

“Hollander,” Rozanov breathes, and suddenly Shane can’t take it anymore.

He sinks to his knees in one motion, reaching up for Rozanov’s belt. Doing his best to pretend like the burning in his stomach is humiliation, not arousal. “This is what you want, isn’t it?” He says out loud. Shane looks up at Rozanov through his lashes. “Your family’s rival getting on his knees for you, sucking you off.”

Rozanov cards his fingers through Shane’s hair, pupils blown so wide his eyes are almost black. “In fact, yes, that is exactly what I want.” He helps Shane undo the rest of his belt and underwear, leaving his cock erect in the air.

He takes a deep breath. Okay, they’re really doing this.

Shane opens his mouth and licks tentatively at Rozanov’s head. Rozanov lets out a sigh above him, but Shane keeps his focus on his task. He licks at it again, gaining confidence as he slides his tongue down its length. It’s not… unpleasant, slightly salty, with a musk that he can only describe as *Rozanov*. He opens his mouth, and takes the tip fully in.

Rozanov swears in Russian.

Slowly, centimeter by centimeter, Shane takes Rozanov’s cock into his mouth. His shoulders tremble as it hits the back of his throat. He bobs his head experimentally, and Rozanov’s grip tightens in his hair.

“Fuck, Hollander,” he says, accent thickening. “Look at you. So pretty, for me.”

Shane’s mouth is full, so he pinches Rozanov’s thigh in retaliation. He bobs his head again—it’s too much, all of a sudden, and he gags reflexively. He gasps as he comes up for air, spit leaking from his mouth, and all of a sudden he feels filthy.

“Is okay,” Rozanov reassures. “Go slow.” He feeds his cock back into Shane’s open mouth. “I show you.” He moves his hips back and forth, slower than Shane’s speed, and he can only let his jaw slacken as much as possible. Shane would wonder at the show of restraint, if he

wasn't openly drooling now, feeling like nothing more than a toy as Rozanov fucks into his mouth. It's also impossibly hot.

Something bitter blooms across his tongue. Rozanov whispers in Russian, gentle nothings that help Shane settle into the rhythm. He closes his eyes, lost in the sensation.

And then Rozanov is pulling him up, off of his cock. Shane sputters, glaring at him over the sudden movement. "What?" He winces at how hoarse his voice is.

"C'mon, Hollander, you want to get fucked or not tonight?" Rozanov says, although he sounds breathless. He manhandles Shane through the door and into his bedroom. "Clothes off."

"Geez, do you treat all your hookups this way?" Shane says, shrugging out of his open jacket and shirt, before starting on his slacks. He folds everything into a stack on a chair, Rozanov's gaze heavy on his body as the other man also strips. Unlike Shane, he tosses it into a pile haphazardly onto the floor.

"*Da*. It is compliment. I am eager for the main show."

He's not sure what to do with his hands now that they're both fully naked. Luckily, Rozanov solves the problem for him by pushing him onto the bed. The mattress is soft, he notes, and the sheets are silky smooth under his palms. Rozanov flips him onto his stomach, grabbing a pillow to shove under his hips.

"Hey!" Shane protests, mostly on principle. "Asshole. You're just gonna assume—"

"Oh," Rozanov says, raising an eyebrow. "You would prefer it the other way?"

Silence.

Rozanov laughs, not unkindly. "That's what I thought. Have you ever touched yourself like this before?" He runs a hand down Shane's backside, pulling one cheek aside with his thumb. It's embarrassing, being so exposed, and unexpectedly arousing. He feels his own cock, already hard, pressing into the cushion below him.

"I…" Shane can't stand to look at him any longer, and buries his face into the sheets. "Yeah," he mumbles. "I… have a. You know."

"I don't know. What?"

He forces himself to let his breath out, and the words tumble out with it. *"Ihaveadildo.*"

Rozanov laughs again, slightly disbelieving. "Of course. What color is it?"

"I'm not answering that," Shane snaps. "Get on with it, already."

"Impatient," Rozanov says, but he obligingly reaches back to the nightstand, rummaging around. He produces a bottle of lube and a pack of condoms, and begins to slick up his

fingers. Shane turns around again. Somehow, he can't bear to look. Hands find their way to his ass again, and something wet and cold traces his hole, before pushing in.

Shane tenses instinctively around the finger. It's different from when he does it himself.

"Relax," Rozanov murmurs, leaning over Shane, pressing his chest to his back. Shane takes a deep breath. As Rozanov establishes a rhythm, the friction slowly turns to pleasure, and Shane sighs quietly. "Good," Rozanov says, chest rumbling, and Shane's breath hitches.

One finger turns to two, then three, and then Shane is panting as liquid pleasure runs down his spine when Rozanov crooks his fingers *just right*. "Hurry up," he says, "I'm ready." Actually, he usually prepares himself for longer, but he thinks he'll come soon, and wouldn't that be embarrassing on their first time having sex together? And then he shakes his head, because why is he thinking about having sex with Rozanov multiple times?

"So eager," Rozanov says. But he pulls his fingers out, Shane clenching around the empty feeling. He hears rustling behind him, before Rozanov is lining himself up. "Ready?"

"Yes, fuck," Shane groans, "just get on with it."

And then Rozanov pushes his way in. Shane gasps—it's different, compared to his previous… experience. He knew it would be, but knowing and experiencing are two very different things. Rozanov, considerately, gives him a moment to adjust, although from the way he groans, Shane thinks he may be just as aroused as he is.

After a moment, Shane nods. "Okay, okay. Keep going."

Just like earlier, Rozanov starts slow, rocking into Shane at glacial speed. It hurts a bit, Rozanov's base stretching him wider than his fingers. But it's quickly overridden by pleasure.

"Fuck," Shane groans.

Rozanov lets out a breathy laugh. "Working on it."

A retort bubbles on the tip of Shane's tongue, but Rozanov picks up speed, and higher thought flies out of his mind after that. He can't say if it lasts for hours or a minute, although if he's being honest it might be the latter.

"Rozanov," he slurs, drooling into the expensive sheets below him. "Please, Rozanov—"

"Ilya."

"Ilya," Shane says, dazed. "I'm gonna come—"

Ilya reaches around Shane and wraps a hand around his cock. He pumps once, twice, and then Shane is overcome with sensation as he climaxes.

Everything whites out. His head hums through the bliss, and he slumps into the bed.

Distantly, he hears Ilya groan, and feels him tense, his hips stuttering, rhythm growing uneven. “Shane,” Ilya murmurs, and then he pushes himself deep into Shane and comes. Shane only sighs, unable to muster up the energy to do anything else.

A moment later, Ilya collapses onto the bed next to him.

“It was good, *da*?”

“Shut up, asshole,” Shane says. “What do *you* think?”

The other man chuckles, and Shane has a vague sensation of a hand running down his back. He sinks deeper into the bed. Of all the irresponsible shit he’s done that day—going to the gala, accepting Rozanov’s proposition, letting him fuck him—in that moment, Shane does the most irresponsible thing of all.

He closes his eyes and falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Me: all my friends love the gay hockey show. I’ll check it out but i’m a seasoned ao3 warrior, it probably won’t faze me
Me: *blacks out and wakes up with 12 pages of porn-with-plot* damn the gay hockey show got hands
-
All info about the bratva and yakuza come from their respective wikipedia articles. Please do not take anything about organized crime in this fic seriously!! I am just a court jester dancing in my jingly hat!!

I also don't know much about the Russian language. Please forgive me and let me know if there are any errors.
-
ummmm so also this is my first time ever writing smut. Honestly never thought i’d be the type to write smut either. genuinely reevaluating my self image rn, I hope it’s decent lmao. Actually when I was outlining this fic I had no intention of making it explicit - it was gonna be tasteful fade to black. And then the voices got me. The fucking voices…

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

▶ Content warnings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane opens his eyes sleepily, to a beam of sunlight and the sight of a naked Russian man asleep half-beneath him. He lets out a sigh, burrowing deeper into the sheets. Something small and pointy digs into the skin of his chest, but he's too comfortable to care. Then his mind catches up.

He bolts upright with a yelp.

"*Chto?"* He hears Rozanov's voice, thick with sleep. "*Chto ne tak?"*

Come is crusted across his front and thighs. His backside is mortifyingly sore. Shane stumbles into the ensuite bathroom, grabbing the first towel he sees and wetting it to wipe himself down. It feels disgusting, but he doesn't want to spend another second in Rozanov's home.

He tries not to look at himself in the giant, luxurious mirror. Can't quite help it. He looks wrecked.

"Uh," he says, when Rozanov walks in after him, naked as the day he was born. "I should—I should go. This was a mistake." The golden crucifix hung around his neck winks in the light, matching the shape of the angry red imprint lining Shane's skin from where he was asleep against the Russian.

Rozanov's hair sticks up in the back. Shane wants nothing more than to run his hands through it. The other man casts an amused look at him, which Shane ignores. He tosses the towel into the hamper he spies in the closet, and rushes to put his clothes on. It's uncomfortable, his dress shirt creased and slacks wrinkled around the knees. Should've hung up his formalwear rather than folding it.

"You sure you do not want breakfast?" Rozanov says. "I can cook."

"No," Shane says, firmly. "No, thank you. I need to leave."

"You're in a hurry. Is there someone I should be jealous of?"

"Even if there was, I would never tell you," Shane shoots back. He fumbles through his pockets.

“Looking for this?” Rozanov says, holding his phone out.

Shane snatches it, their fingers brushing. He stops, looking at Rozanov, before belatedly remembering to speak. “Um. Thanks.”

“Let me call you a car, at least.”

He balks. “With your mob guys driving?” Rozanov raises an unimpressed eyebrow. “No offense, but I’d rather not ride in one of your cars again. Not by myself, at least.”

“Please, Hollander, as if I would pay them to do something like that.” Rozanov holds his phone out, which shows the screen of a rideshare app. “Put in your address.”

“That’s somehow worse,” Shane says. “Then you’d know where I live.”

“I tracked you down at your favorite coffee shop already,” Rozanov says. “If I can find that about you, you think your address is any more protected? Quite literally public information, Hollander.”

“I’m still not typing my address into your phone.”

“Okay, then give me yours.”

“I can call the car myself.”

“No, I will call. Use my card.”

“You’re going to put your card on my phone?”

“Yes,” Rozanov says, exasperated. “Come on, give it.” He holds his hand out.

Shane sighs, tired of arguing. “Fine, whatever.” Even though he knows it’s a bad idea, he just wants to get out of here as quickly as possible. Hands over his phone, trying to ignore the way that their fingers brush. Rozanov types for a moment, before handing it back. Shane eyes it suspiciously, but as far as he can tell Rozanov has genuinely only added his card info onto Shane’s account.

“Okay, call your car. Now let’s have breakfast while we wait for it.”

Lily

hope you got home safe ;)

Shane

Who is this?

Lily

aww, you forgot me already? after i cooked you breakfast?

Shane

ROZANOV?! How did you get this number?

Lily

be careful who you give your phone to next time

Lily

you are terrible at being gangster.

Shane

That’s because, like I keep telling you, I’m NOT a gangster!

Lily

yes, yes, that is your mother

Lily

would you prefer i have taken her home last night, then?

Shane

Shut the fuck up.

Ilya stays out of Hollander's way for three whole weeks (texting doesn't count). Good behavior must be rewarded, after all. He's only known Hollander for a few months now, but at the same time it feels like years. It almost feels strange to return to his previous routine, whiling away his hours shooting the shit with Svetlana and yelling at his men and handling the occasional disturbance.

His father calls here and there, but in the last few months there's been a sharp decline in frequency. At first, Ilya chalks it up to a busy season. The work in Moscow never ends, and Alexei is a fool for choosing to stay over taking the better deal in Ottawa.

But then, one day, his father calls Polina by Irina's name. It hits Ilya like a bull, driving the air from his lungs.

"*Father,"* he says. Licks his lips. "*Father, Irina is dead. Your wife is Polina."*

There's a pause from the other end of the line. "*Of course I know that. I misspoke."*

His father never misspeaks.

They end the call. Life goes on.

It lingers in the back of Ilya's mind, however. The barest whisper of a suspicion, terrifying to even think of. It could spell the end of his life as he knows it. *It could be his ticket out.*

It's driving him crazy. Ilya calls his car and heads to Hollander's coffee shop.

While he orders his usual at the counter, he spies the tip of a shoe peeking out from the back booth. It taps in its typical agitated manner, and even though he can't see into the booth he knows precisely who its owner is. His coffee tastes slightly burnt, the sweet cream foam unable to mask its taste, and as he rounds the corner and finally sees Hollander, something in his chest settles.

Hollander looks up and scowls.

"I am glad to see you missed me," Ilya says.

"Shut up."

And it's like Ilya is home.

To his delight, it barely takes two visits before he's able to coax Hollander into another visit to Ilya's home. This time, Ilya is the one who takes Hollander's cock into his mouth, laying him flat on Ilya's bed and pinning him by the stomach with one hand. Hollander gasps and whines beautifully. He comes with a yell, and Ilya swallows him down.

He continues until Hollander pushes at his forehead, overstimulated. He pulls off obligingly, but holds Hollander's softened cock in hand and presses a kiss to it, just to hear the way Hollander's breath hitches.

He's seized by the urge to pull more pretty noises out of him. Ilya climbs up and over Hollander's prone body, and kisses him, open-mouthed and filthy. Hollander recoils at first, protesting over the taste of his own come, but Ilya presses onward, and soon Hollander is moaning into the kiss.

They break apart to breathe, and Hollander's eyes are glassy. Ilya leans down to sink his teeth into the smooth neck below him. Hollander groans. "What—" Hollander says, voice dying in his throat before he clears it to try again. "What about you?" He gestures at Ilya's groin.

With a laugh, Ilya grabs Hollander's wrist and guides it to his cock. "You are smart. I'm sure you will figure it out."

His movements are gentle, hesitant, but pick up speed as precome smooths out the friction. Ilya's not ashamed to admit that it takes just a few short strokes before he comes as well, spilling into Hollander's hand and onto his chest. He enjoys the look of it. Spent, he collapses on top of Hollander.

"Oof," Hollander grunts, "you're heavy."

"Mmm," Ilya says lazily, nuzzling his face into the crook of the other man's neck. "You are good pillow."

They fall asleep like that. The next morning, Hollander freaks out again, and Ilya offers to call him a car again, and the whole song and dance and Hollander's blushing face amuses him to no end.

It amuses him so much that he convinces Hollander to sleep with him the next week. And the week after. And on and on, until they've been seeing each other with regularity for several months.

"Guess what today is," Ilya says, setting his coffee mug down with a clink.

Hollander glares. "Don't do that. I hate guessing, I never get it right." He's been chewing on his hoodie string, and it slurs his words slightly.

"Try."

He sighs heavily. "I dunno. Your birthday?"

"I wish. Then I would have had you wrapped in a ribbon and nothing else, as my gift."

Hollander kicks him under the table. "I would never do that."

“Really? But you are so pretty. Would look good in ribbon.”

“Just tell me what it is already.”

“I am wounded that you do not know,” Ilya says. “It is our one year anniversary today!”

The other man scrunches his brows in confusion. “One year? We’ve only been… you know… for a few months.”

“Having sex? Hooking up? Making sweet love?”

“Shh!” Hollander ducks his head, ears red. Ilya wants to nibble on them. “Not so loud!”

“Nobody will hear,” Ilya says. “And it is one year anniversary of when we met. Is big deal, no?”

“That’s not something I’m planning to celebrate, exactly,” Hollander says, frowning heavily.

Before Ilya can tell him what he has in mind, however, his phone rings. Normally, his phone is on silent when he’s spending time with Hollander, but a select few people can override it. So it’s important. The Caller ID shows ‘Marlow.’ He answers.

“What is it?*”* He snaps.

“Urgent,” Marlow’s voice says. “We caught the mole. It’s Shevchenko.”

They’ve been hunting for this leak for a long time. Information that the Germans cannot possibly know without an inside source keeps making its way to some rather inconvenient ears. Ilya can’t leave this unattended. Frustration simmers in his stomach, and he suddenly wants to hit something.

“Fine,” he says. “Bring me to him. I will deal with it.”

“Already on my way, boss.”

He ends the call. Hollander eyes him warily. “What was that about?”

“I must go,” Ilya says, sighing heavily. “I am sorry, Hollander. Truly. I will make it up to you another time.”

“I didn’t exactly plan on doing anything with you today anyway,” Hollander says. “Go do… whatever it is you do. I don’t care.” Then, quietly: “please stay safe.”

Ilya smiles at that. “Of course.”

He cocks his head in consideration, before he stands. He leans forward, bracing himself with one hand on the table. The other reaches out and gently tugs Hollander’s abused hoodie string out of his mouth; Ilya is unable to disguise how entirely fond the motion is. As usual, Hollander—Shane—avoids eye contact, but Ilya slides his hand along his chin, tilting his

face into the correct angle. Grazes the pad of his thumb lightly over Shane's lower lip. He moves slowly, but Shane doesn't pull away.

Ilya presses a soft kiss against Shane's mouth. It's quick and chaste, and Ilya thinks he deserves a medal for his restraint. Shane's freckles stand against his dark blush, and he makes a small noise.

"See you later, Hollander," Ilya murmurs.

"You should get going," Shane says. "Can't keep your driver waiting."

"I pay him too much for him to leave without me," Ilya says, amused. "I will see you next week?"

Shane grumbles, but doesn't say no. Ilya takes that as his victory.

He strides out to his waiting car, where Marlow is ready to pull the backseat door open for him. His righthand man knows better than to try to speak with Ilya, other than a short greeting. By the time they're pulling up to the warehouse, his fingers itch. The industrial doors grind open on the gravel as Ilya throws them open.

It's one of the many abandoned buildings littering the city with crumbling brick and broken glass—it makes for good business for the *Bratva*. The warehouse has no insulation to speak of; frigid wind blows in from the riverside. Their mole kneels on the ground, stripped down to his boxers with hands cuffed behind his back. He looks up as Ilya approaches.

Shevchenko is a middle-aged man of average height, slightly paunchy build, and a horrendously receding hairline. He manages the North American branch's outgoing shipments—or he did, until today. Ilya kneels before him, gripping his short hair and wrenching his head back sharply.

"*You have been very foolish, Shevchenko,"* Ilya says, in Russian. Only about a third of his men present speak the language, but right now he only needs one man to understand him. "*Did you think you would not get caught?"*

To his credit, the man doesn't bother with denials or pleas. "*Fuck you."* He spits, and the glob lands neatly across Ilya's face. "*You're nothing but a little boy playing with Papa's money and rank. Without him, you're nothing but a useless dog that fucks anything that moves—"*

Ilya pulls his black leather glove off of his hand, and backhands Shevchenko across the face. While he struggles to pull himself up from the ground, Ilya reaches out and accepts the kerchief that Marlow holds out for him. Carefully, he wipes the spit from his face.

"*You will suffer for your crimes against Moscow,"* Ilya says. "*I will take great delight in carrying that punishment out."* He crouches down, so that he can look Shevchenko in the eye. "*But I want you to know: I do not care about your words, or your arrogance for thinking you could get away with your betrayal.* He pats the man's cheek roughly. "*No*, *what I care about is that you have interrupted a very important day for me. And for that, you will pay."*

He stands again, and in one fluid motion he brings his knee up and into Shevchenko's face. The traitor's nose caves with a satisfying *crunch*. Shevchenko bites back a grunt of pain, blood bursting in a stream onto the gravel stones under him.

Shevchenko spits blood. "*Is that all?"*

"*Oh, that was the warm-up,"* Ilya says, borderline cheerful. He considers reaching for his gun and ending it, with enough time to make it back to Shane, but discards the thought. He wants to enjoy this. Ilya instead reaches an open hand behind him, and one of his other men, Dykstra, sets a pair of surgical gloves in his hand. Once he's done pulling those on, he picks out pliers from a tool box set out for his convenience, while Dykstra kneels, helping him force Shevchenko's mouth open. "*When was the last time you visited the dentist? It seems you have many teeth that need some work."*

Four molars, two incisors, and a canine later, Ilya wipes his hands. He hasn't taken all of the man's teeth—he wants him to be able to speak. Shevchenko isn't in a state to string together anything coherent, at the moment, moaning lowly around the blood and saliva pooled in his mouth. He returns the pliers to the toolbox it came from, and selects a blunt-headed hammer next.

He smiles. "*Ready for the next round?"* Ilya swings low; Shevchenko's kneecap shatters into a fine mush of skin and flesh and bone.

That's when Shevchenko really starts screaming.

It takes another two hours before Ilya feels the haze of anger finally clear from his head. By then, Shevchenko is nothing more than a bloody pulp smeared on the ground. He nods to Dykstra.

"Dispose of him, please."

Dykstra nods. "Yes, sir."

Ilya strips the dirtied surgical gloves from his hands. Marlow hands him an alcoholic wipe, and then his typical leather gloves. He glances around the warehouse. "Before I go—does anybody else have any objections about my leadership? Speak now."

Nobody speaks.

"—and then he had the audacity to *ghost* me!"

Rose's voice is tinny through the speakerphone. The video call quality is shaky, but he can still see her pout clearly. He adjusts his hold on his phone, tilting it away from the glare of the lightbulb above him.

"Right. Who would do that to *the* Rose Landry?"

"You get it." She laughs. "Okay, enough about my boy troubles. Tell me about yours."

"What makes you think I have any?"

"Don't play dumb. I can see it on your face."

"I look how I always do."

"No, there's something different. C'mon, you can tell me."

Shane pauses, thinking about what he wants to say. "...alright, yeah, there's a guy."

"I knew it!" Rose's face blurs as she crows in victory. "I wanna know all about him! Give me juicy details!"

"I…" He scrubs a hand over his eyes. "I don't even *like* him. He's rude, arrogant, always in my space, never leaves me alone when I ask him to. I don't know what the fuck he wants from me."

Rose looks delighted. "How did you meet him?"

"He—" *stalked me and threatened me* " —sat down at my table at my usual coffee place. 'A Whole Latte Love,' the one I took you to last time you were in town."

"So a meetcute," she says. "You don't appreciate what you have, Hollander."

He grimaces. It's stupid, but when she says his last name he can't help but think of Rozanov saying it in his accent. "Not a meetcute at all. I told him to find his own table, but he wouldn't leave. And then he just kept showing up." *And now we're fucking.*

"Aww, so he *likes* you. How many times did you sleep with him?"

"I didn't—" he looks at Rose's face, and realizes there's no use in lying. "...a lot."

She raises a brow. "So often you've lost count? Is he that good?"

Shane sputters. "That's private!"

"So he's *really* good." She smiles, excited. "Shane, it sounds like you really like him. Not just like a hookup. You seem happy."

"I shouldn't be."

"Why not?"

"We're not supposed to be together." *Because he's a Russian crimelord and our families are enemies, like the world's most fucked up version of Romeo and Juliet.* "We're just too different."

"Opposites attract, right? Don't let your brain rule your heart."

The problem is that, Shane thinks, it's really the other way around.

Jane

Are you free tomorrow?

Ilya

for you, always

Ilya

should i prepare the silk sheets?

Jane

You're insatiable.

Jane

No, I had something else in mind.

***Jane** is typing…*

Ilya

?

Jane

Come skating with me tomorrow morning. Open skate at the park rink.

Ilya

people will see. you are ok with that?

Jane

It's Saturday morning. Nobody else will be there at 8 am.

Ilya

you are only person who would wake up at 8 on a weekend for fun

Jane

Do you want to come or not?

Ilya

always ;)

Jane

Gross.

Jane

8 AM sharp.

Ilya

aye aye captain

Rozanov is a natural on the ice. His blades barely whisper as he sweeps from one end of the rink to the other—and of course he'd shown up with his own skates. He's smiling from ear to ear, and it strikes Shane that this is the most carefree he's ever seen Rozanov… ever.

Shane isn't one to be shown up on the ice, naturally. He's right there alongside Rozanov, circling around the rink at breakneck pace. Shane is faster, but Rozanov is showier. His blood sings with excitement, and he almost wishes they had hockey sticks and a puck to pass around.

He skates to the side, dipping a hand over the barrier and scooping up his water bottle. Sweat trickles down his neck and back, despite the cold weather. Rozanov follows close behind, and Shane can feel his eyes on him as he takes a deep drink.

"You are good," Rozanov says. "Not as good as me, of course. But very good."

"Hey!" Shane squawks, elbowing Rozanov. He dodges, laughing. "Sorry, but I seem to recall that I'm the one who plays on a hockey team, between the two of us." He passes the bottle to Rozanov, who takes a swig. Shane can't quite look away from where the other man's lips meet the straw of the bottle.

"Hm. I could if I wanted to."

Shane tilts his head in consideration. “Probably. Did you skate as a kid?”

“Yes. I loved it. Wanted to be professional hockey player when I grew up.”

“Honestly, me too.”

Rozanov sets his bottle back onto the bleacher seat. “What stopped you? You are better than many of the bumbling idiots I see on TV.”

Shane shrugs. “I dunno. My family, I guess. With the… you know. Being a public figure was just too much. Not that I expected to be famous—“

Rozanov snorts. “No, you definitely would be. Overachiever Hollander. You would probably have been the first draft pick in your year.”

“Yeah, right.” He shakes his head. “That would never have happened. Mom still wanted me to follow my passions, though, and she supported me doing something similar to hockey—so sports medicine it was. She loves hockey, too. And I think she felt a little bad that our family was holding me back like that.” He kneels down to tighten his left skate, where the tongue of the shoe has shifted sideways underneath the laces. “How about you?”

“Same.” Rozanov leans back against the barrier, looking up at the cloudless sky. “I was always meant to go into the family business. Like my brother. Could not have something like skating or hockey to distract.”

He feels like it’s the most direct thing Rozanov has ever told him. Shane blinks. “Maybe we have more in common than we thought.”

Rozanov turns, leering down at Shane. “Oh? What about the fact that we both like when I put my dick in your—”

He yelps, smacking Rozanov’s face. “Shut up!” Despite it all, he finds himself laughing. It feels good. Rozanov laughs with him.

The moment passes. It’s quiet for a beat, and Shane casts about for something to fill the silence. “Do you even like doing… what you do? With your family?” He winces at his inelegant wording.

The other man shrugs. “Honestly? No.” Presses his lips together. “But I don’t have much choice. Not until now.”

“Not until now?”

Rozanov grimaces. “I do not want to say too much. Is complicated. My father, he grows old. Too old for the business. But my brother will not be a strong heir. If power passes to him…”

Shane furrows his brow. “Would you take it from him?”

“No. Opposite.” Rozanov lets out a long exhale, breath pluming into steam. “I would leave. I have no loyalty to him anyway.”

“Can you do that? Just leave? What would happen to your people here?”

Rozanov waves a hand. “You think too hard, Hollander. I said is complicated. But there are ways. My friend, Svetlana, she has a legitimate business here. Cars. I have discussed with her. And my men, most do not care where the money comes from, only that they receive their fair share. No need for *Bratva* to be involved.”

“I see. That makes sense,” Shane nods, “it’s not like you’re out here committing drive-by shootings or having gang wars. Not in *Ottawa*.” Shane chuckles to himself, and Rozanov’s face twitches. “I’ve learned from my mom that you can solve pretty much anything with enough money.”

“*Da.* Is simple matter.”

“You say I think too hard, but it sounds like you’ve planned it out.”

“Enough, Hollander. Maybe you enjoy thinking this far ahead, but this is too much for me to worry about now. Come, we have wasted enough time. Race you around the rink?”

“Oh, you’re on!”

Shane finishes the winter term. The day he receives his final class grade—a 98%—he climbs on top of Ilya’s lap and rides him into the couch. Ilya’s fingers press bruises into Shane’s hips, and he moans into an open-mouthed kiss.

He wonders at how he was able to keep his straight-A record despite the constant harassment he’s endured for over a year now.

They go skating again, too. He feels a thrill at spending time together in the public like that, but reminds himself there’s nothing illegal about it. Hanging out, that is. As long as they don’t do anything incriminating, it’s almost like he’s just meeting up with a friend. If he could be friends with someone who’s also stuck their tongue down his throat, and up his ass, and so on and so forth.

He promises himself he’ll spend more time with his parents within the weeks before the spring term begins. Somehow, he still finds himself texting Rozanov nearly every day, or every other day. And somehow, Rozanov always has the time. Even with his shady mafia shit.

Shane becomes well-acquainted with nearly every surface of Rozanov’s home. On the marbled kitchen counter, up against clear glass windows, bent over the intricate wooden desk in his study… his cheeks heat up just remembering it. As does his backside, which is just the slightest bit sore.

“Are you feeling alright, honey?” His mom asks. The dining room is filled with gentle clinks of silverware scraping against fine china. “You’re looking a little feverish.”

Shane chokes on his dad's (excellent) pot roast. "I'm fine," he says, when he's done coughing, squirming uncomfortably in his chair. "Just… thinking."

"Oh, I understand," Yuna says. "It's normal to be nervous about your final term."

"Uh-huh." Shane nods, grateful for the misunderstanding.

David passes him another bread roll. "Eat up, kiddo. Don't wanna be hungry on your last first day of school."

"You say that before every term," Shane says in exasperation.

"And I mean it every time!"

It feels good to laugh at that, like he's a little kid again and nothing mattered more than his mom and dad across the table from him at dinner. He feels a pang of nostalgia, and a whisper of guilt at his lie of omission by keeping Rozanov a secret. But it passes. It's fine. Soon enough, they finish eating, and Shane clears his throat.

"Uh, Mom, I sort of wanted to ask you a question." Shane winces at how awkward he sounds.

Yuna leans forward, concerned. "Of course, honey. What is it?"

"Well, it's about the business. The *family* business."

David stands. "How about I take your plates?" He reaches over and scoops up their dirty dishes before Shane can protest, and he trundles off to the kitchen. Shane sort of envies him.

His mom reaches out and touches Shane's arm lightly. "Is something wrong? You don't usually bring this type of thing up. I thought you were happier not knowing."

"No, I am," Shane says. "I mean, nothing's wrong." He bites his lip. "I was just. Curious. About something small."

"Okay," his mom says. He knows her, can tell she's getting suspicious; worse, he knows that *she* knows him too well. "So, what is it?"

He hesitates. "Do we… does the family… Do they have any enemies?"

She lets out a shocked laugh. "What? I mean, of course. It's not exactly a nice line of work. But you know I don't do any of that."

"Yeah, of course." He bobs his head unconvincingly. "Just… there's nobody that would, like, have a grudge against us, right? Or something…"

"Is someone bothering you?" Yuna asks, eyes wide. "We have resources to protect you, Shane. If you're feeling threatened, *please* let me know."

"No!" He yelps. "Not at all. It's fine. I'm fine. Really."

“Honey—”

“It was a dumb question, anyway. Pre-first day nerves. That’s all.”

“Okay,” she says, voice laden with skepticism. “If you say so.”

His dad returns from the kitchen, drying his hands on a dish towel. David and Yuna exchange a glance, the kind that Shane can never quite decipher. He casts about for something to say.

“Hey, did you catch the Montreal-New York game last week? I mean, what a blow-out…”

Thankfully, they let it go.

Shane is getting ready for bed, wearing just a threadbare t-shirt and boxer shorts, when someone knocks at his apartment door. He frowns; it’s late. Who could be looking for him at this hour?

Maybe it’s Rozanov. He goes to open the door.

It happens so fast, Shane doesn’t see it coming. There’s only a flash of pain, the feeling of his head snapping back from the blow—and then darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Russian:
Chto: 'What?'
Chto ne tak: 'What's wrong?'
-
Hey so I don’t know shit abt skating or hockey and for that I’m very sorry. This is why I’m writing a non-hockey AU lmao. Not that I know much about the mafia either.

Actually, my parents did try to get me into figure skating as a kid. It lasted for maybe 6 months before I failed baby’s first skating exam because I was too scared to pick up one foot and cross it over the other while moving forward on the ice. Sue me I was 6 years old.

Actually (x2), and this sounds so fake, but I also grew up very close to a town run by a Korean mafia. This is hilarious because this was like bumfuck Bible belt suburbia. They weren’t violent or anything (to me at least…) but all the Korean businesses there had to pay them a fee. TBH they’re probably the reason why Koreatown is now the best-organized ethnic enclave in the area.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

▶ Content warnings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane does his best to flex his fingers against the rough rope chafing his bare skin. His wrists are bound together behind his back. The angle is awkward, his left pinky and finger already having gone numb. Idly, he muses that it could cause permanent nerve damage. Then he barks out a laugh at himself, vision tunneling at the edges with hysteria—he might die here and he's busy worrying about his fingers.

"Quiet!" One of the men guarding him barks. He jumps, rattling the flimsy wooden chair they've sat him in. Thankfully, he's not tied to it, or else this experience might be even more miserable than it already is.

"Sorry," he mutters, blinking rapidly. His eye stings. Blood crusts on his forehead, where a welt the size of his palm is rising above his eye. He hopes he doesn't have a concussion.

There are two men guarding him. They speak rapid Russian to each other, and keep their heavy-looking automatic guns at the ready—one trained on him, one pointed to the door.

Shane shivers. His thin shirt provides no barrier to the cold, and his ass has long since gone numb. It's so embarrassing that he's going to have to die wearing nothing but boxers and pajamas.

Distantly, he muses that he's in shock. They teach you about stuff like that in a sports medicine program. He's missing his last first day of class.

There's some hushed murmuring, and then the door scrapes open behind him. Footsteps, and then the man he knows as Kuzmin comes around to Shane's field of view. He cuts a tall, thin figure, wrinkles beginning to gather around his mouth with a touch of grey at his temples.

Shane glares. "I'm telling you, I don't know anything about Rozanov."

Instead of answering, Kuzmin grabs Shane's face roughly, four fingers digging nails into one cheek while a thumb claws into the flesh of the other. He has a wild thought that Ilya would never touch him that way.

"I wonder what he sees in you," he says, turning Shane's face from side to side. His English is smooth, a tinge of a Russian accent coloring his words—but where Shane finds Rozanov's voice warm and comforting, Kuzmin's is harsh and cold.

“That’s because you’ve got the wrong guy—“

Kuzmin slaps him across the face. Colors burst behind Shane’s eyelids; of course, he’s hit him on the side with his existing head injury. Dazed, Shane lists sideways in the chair. The sound of a phone camera shuttering registers dimly in his ears, barely audible above the ringing sound he’s pretty sure only he can hear.

“That will be sufficient evidence, I think,” Kuzmin says. “Send it to Rozanov.”

Ilya wants to hurl his phone into the concrete ground. Instead, he forces himself to set it down gently, eyes boring a hole into the blank wall before him. Anger, ice-cold, runs down his back and pools in his lungs; he refuses to acknowledge the well of fear as well. It won’t do Shane any good.

“Marlow, report,” he barks instead. “Where are we with the search?”

Marlow snaps to attention. “We’ve cleared the west and southern sectors of the city, Boss. The north-eastern quadrant is proving difficult since there are so many buildings that match the photo background.”

Ilya shuts his eyes. The photo, the one he received of Shane is seared into his retinas. Shane’s face is half-turned from the viewer, a trail of rusty blood oozing from his face to his neck. It stains the color of his sleep shirt. The rest of his body fares no better, littered in cuts and bruises and dirt. But what Ilya can’t shake from the image is the angry red print on Shane’s cheek, visibly forming the shape of an open palm and five fingers.

It takes him a moment to speak. “Double our numbers in the northeastern sector. Every person we have available must be out there searching.” He takes a deep breath to quell the tremor he can hear in his own voice. “But you and your immediate team will stay. Be ready to move at a moment’s notice.”

“Got it, boss.”

Marlow runs to pass Ilya’s orders forward. Ilya himself takes another deep breath, before spinning on his heel sharply to stride toward his office. Inside, Svetlana is flipping through every file she can get her hands on, reading with a critical eye for any damning evidence.

“*It must go with Shevchenko,”* she says, without preamble. “*He could not have worked alone.”*

“*We cleaned up all loose ends after Shevchenko,”* Ilya says. “*There is nobody left to organize such an attack.”*

Svetlana taps a fingernail against one line. "*He was messaging someone in Moscow the day before you caught him. You have cleaned house here in Canada, but you have no direct jurisdiction in Russia without Alexei—"*

"*How is that going to help us?!"* Ilya snaps, voice raised. "*Shane is in danger* now!"

She only raises an unimpressed brow. "*Your father's lieutenant, Pyotr Kuzmin, had flight tickets to Ottawa booked after their conversation. He could be connected to all of this—we can check his trail leading up to today. It's more of a lead than we've had so far.* Think, *Ilyusha."*

Ilya feels himself deflate. "*…you're right. Thank you. I will send men now to check."*

His hand reaches up to his neck, finding his mother's golden crucifix. And for the first time in a decade, he prays.

They don't let Shane sleep.

Every time his eyes drift closed, or his chin dips down toward his chest, one of the men will prod him with the butt of a gun. Each time, Shane jerks up, adrenaline shooting through his veins. But the men only laugh at his reaction. And then his body will relax from sheer exhaustion, even when he really doesn't want to, and the same cycle runs its course.

He's pretty sure he's going to die here. Ilya will blame himself. Shane wants to tell him that it's not his fault.

His mom will be devastated. All these years protecting him from the family business, and he had to go and get caught up in a totally different set of drama.

His mom. The family.

Shane's thoughts, thick and syrupy with exhaustion, abruptly narrow into clarity.

He raises his head, and looks around until he catches the eye of one of his guards.

"Hey," he croaks, and has to clear his throat to try again. "Hey. Tell Kuzmin I want to talk."

The guard scoffs. "What could you tell him?"

"Tell him if he doesn't come talk with me, he's about to become a target of the Sumiyoshi-kai."

The name means something to the guard. He levels his gun at Shane's head. "How do you know that?"

Shane doesn't flinch. This isn't his first rodeo—or kidnapping, as it were. He's got Nishiguchi blood in his veins, after all.

"If Kuzmin wants to know, he better come chat."

It doesn't take long for Kuzmin to show, after that.

Shane jumps to speak first. "I'm directly related to the Sumiyoshi-Kai's chairman."

Kuzmin frowns. "Don't waste my time. Nishiguchi has only one daughter."

"Right. Yuna Hollander. That's my mom."

"Lying won't get you anywhere."

"How else would I know that name?" Shane counters. "You should know, they're very protective of family. If I'm out of contact with my mom for too long, she'll start sending people to look for me."

Kuzmin narrows his eyes. "You should want that. Why are you warning me?"

"I don't want to put my mom in danger," Shane says. "And you don't want trouble with my family. We have a shared interest here."

"Suppose I believe you. How would you contact your family? You don't think I'd allow you a phone call."

Shane's been thinking about this. Planning this. That's what happens when a man isn't allowed to sleep. "You have my phone—I'll text her. We don't call every night anyway. As long as she hears from me, she'll be satisfied." He leans forward. "You can watch me type it out."

"You will dictate, and my men will write it for you," Kuzmin counters.

"I never mess up my spelling or grammar," Shane says. "Your guys are all Russian. You think they can impersonate me reasonably?"

He holds his breath as Kuzmin visibly thinks it over. Here's where the plan could all fall apart—technically, they could use a dictionary, or a good translation app. But he's gambling on the fact that it will simply be too inconvenient. *Nobody* is as neurotic about texting as Shane is.

"Fine." Kuzmin reaches into his suit jacket, pulling out Shane's phone while nodding to one of his men. Someone slices through his ropes with a knife, the whisper of metal on his skin sending a shiver down his spine. "Rybakov will supervise. I must attend to other matters." He leaves.

Shane brings his hands to his front stiffly, attempting to massage some blood back into his wrists and fingers. Painful pins and needles flood through him.

"Here," Rybakov says, thrusting Shane's phone at him. "You have thirty seconds."

“You try typing that fast,” Shane mutters, but takes his phone. He clumsily taps in his password, and navigates to his text messages under Rybakov’s watchful eyes. He opens his thread with his mom, where she’s asked some mundane question about his preferred tie color for a show. Taps out a quick *All good, love you.* Hits send.

“Okay, done,” Rybakov says, reaching for the phone.

Shane tightens his grip. “Hang on,” he protests. “Let me text my girlfriend, too.”

“No fucking way.”

“Look at her messages,” he says, thumbing through the frantic bubbles sent by ‘Lily’ over the last few hours—texts he’s been counting on receiving. He feels a stir of guilt in using them in this way, but he thinks Rozanov would probably forgive him. “She’s really clingy. And jealous. If she doesn’t hear back she’ll call the cops. Kuzmin doesn’t want that either, right?”

Rybakov’s forehead rises in disbelief. “You are fucking Rozanov *and* girl? Filthy dog.” But he doesn’t move to take the phone back. “One message.”

“Thank you,” Shane says, trying not to betray his nerves. He taps out a short two-word text, showing Rybakov. “Okay, done.”

He reaches his arm out to pass the phone to Rybakov. As he does, he flips his wrist so that the screen faces down to the ground. He blindly taps at what he hopes is the correct button with his thumb. A split second later, he squeezes the power button, turning his phone off.

To the outside viewer, it all appears to be nothing more than a harmless force of habit.

Rybakov takes the phone back. Shane’s heart leaps into his throat as Rybakov glances across the dark screen. But rather than demanding Shane reopens his phone to review his texts, the man slides the phone into his pocket without a second glance.

Shane holds his wrists up to the man, ducking his head low in an act of meekness. “I’m done.”

“So eager,” Rybakov sneers, his accent twisting it into a perversion of one of Rozanov’s favorite phrases. He ties Shane’s hands obligingly, not noticing that Shane’s arms are now in front of his body, rather than behind like before.

At least Shane won’t worry about losing a finger this way.

Lily

where are you

Lily

where are you shane

Lily

please respond

Lily

this isn’t funny shane

Lily

talk to me

Lily

i need you to come home

Lily

i will do anything

Lily

please

Lily

i love you

Lily

just come home

Lily

don’t leave me

Lily

please

Shane

I’m fine

Shane

Started sharing location with Lily

Shane's drifting in a grey haze of delirium when it happens. The door to the warehouse slams open. The sound rattles through his bones after who knows how many hours of relative quiet. He almost can't process it at first—it's immediate chaos, Kuzmin's men yelling and opening fire with their automatic rifles.

It takes him a beat to react. Then he drops to the dirty concrete ground, tucking himself into the fetal position and bracing his bound hands behind his neck to protect his head as best as possible. Just like his mom taught him.

Eventually, Rybakov yells for his side to stop. The gunfire has kicked up too much dust to see clearly, and Shane cranes his neck up to risk a peek out.

Gunfire shatters what remains of the cracked windows around them. Whoever it is has placed attackers at strategic angles to shoot into the building, catching most of the standing men from the back and by surprise. They fall. Shane flinches away from the noise, tucking himself back into the defensive ball he was in before.

Kuzmin himself runs into the main room of the warehouse. He's armed with nothing but a handgun, pointing it at the doors. His eyes are wild, whites showing around the edges.

"Show yourself, you coward!"

And through the debris, Rozanov strides into the warehouse. Relief, sweet and pure, floods through Shane's body, and he almost weeps for it. The nightmare is almost over.

Ilya is dressed in black, long coat flaring out behind him like an avenging angel. He points a gun back at Shane's captor. Rozanov's men flank him, their own guns trained on any of Kuzmin's men who are still moving.

"Kuzmin*,"* Rozanov says. It sends a chill through Shane. He's never heard him sound this angry before. "You have taken something of mine. I have come to bring him back."

"*Kozyol,"* Kuzmin spits. "You will do no such thing. I will end you, and the Rozanov reign, for good, today."

Rozanov continues to press forward. The safety of his gun is off. Shane forces himself to half-crawl awkwardly across the ground, moving to a better position.

"Until today, you could have had the power you desired without a fight," Rozanov says. "But that was before you hurt Shane. For that, you will die."

"Enough!" Kuzmin roars. He brings his second hand up to steady his gun.

But before he can fire, Shane makes his move.

He might be injured and exhausted, but Shane won't let Ilya risk his life for him. Not without doing something about it.

Because he's not just Shane. He's a grandson of the Sumiyoshi-kai. He's Yuna Hollander's son. And above all, he's in love with Ilya Rozanov.

Shane throws his weight at Kuzmin in a half-body tackle. Kuzmin's gunshot goes wide, whizzing harmlessly into the drywall behind Shane. The sound deafens Shane's left ear, but he doesn't need to hear to be able to clasp his bound hands together to smash down over Kuzmin's head.

"Shane!" Ilya yells. "Get away from him!"

While Kuzmin lies in a daze, Shane grabs the man's wrist and bends it as far back as it will go, until his fingers pale and loosen around his gun. Shane grabs it and throws it in Ilya's direction. Ilya, who's been sprinting to close the distance between them, instinctively stops to catch it.

With Kuzmin disarmed, Shane finally lets out a breath. He turns to Ilya, a smile beginning to form on his lips— Ilya's eyes widen in alarm, raising his gun again—

A hand grabs his hair, forcing his head back. Something cool and sharp meets the delicate skin of his throat.

"Don't move," Kuzmin growls. He gives Shane's head a shake, and Shane gasps as his vision blurs. Ilya freezes obligingly.

"You will regret this," Ilya says, low and slow.

Kuzmin laughs wildly. "If you don't let me leave here alive, I'll kill your little toy. I'll slit his throat and make you watch, and when he's done drowning in his own blood I'll kill you too. Your choice, Rozanov."

Shane locks eyes with Ilya. Ilya, whose blue eyes are wide with adrenaline, lips peeled back to show bared teeth, gun pointed steadily at the man holding Shane. He's never looked more beautiful.

He dips his head in an almost-imperceptible nod. *I trust you.* Ilya's eyes narrow.

"Well?" Kuzmin demands.

Shane throws his head back as hard as he can. At the same time, he shoves his weight backward into the body behind him. He knows he's hit the man's nose by the crumbling sensation under his scalp.

The man's energy has been directed toward keeping Shane from running away, so he's wholly unprepared for Shane to suddenly be moving toward him. Unable to brace himself against the weight of a 200-something pound student athlete, he staggers back. They crash

into the wall together. But Shane is ready for this too, grabbing the arm that's been pinning his throat using his bound hands, and throwing himself away from Kuzmin. It forces the man's arm to open wide, leaving Kuzmin wholly exposed.

"Now!" Shane yells.

There's a sharp *crack.* Ilya fires.

Abruptly, the arm still thrown over Shane becomes dead weight—literally—and he follows Kuzmin to the ground. The force of it knocks the breath from his lungs.

"*Shane!"* Ilya screams, and then his face is looking down at him. His golden curls are hallowed by the cold fluorescent warehouse lights. "Shane, look at me."

"Ilya," Shane says, or tries to say. He finds that it's hard to breathe, all of a sudden. When words fail, he goes to lift his hands—both of them still bound together—to touch Ilya's face —it smears a trace of bright red blood onto Ilya's fair skin.

"Don't move," Ilya says, voice shaking. "It's okay, you're going to be okay. Just don't move."

Why not? Shane wants to ask. Something warm and wet is pooling around his shoulder and running down his arm. More blood. Where is it coming from?

He turns his head, and his nose bumps into the knife handle sprouting from his collarbone. Oh.

Everything is hazy. Ilya yells something above him. Shane can't quite hear it, even though they're right next to each other.

Something is starting to hurt. He's not sure where it's coming from.

He looks at Ilya. "Are you okay?"

Ilya laughs, the sound strained. "You get kidnapped and stabbed, and you are asking if *I* am okay?" He's moving Shane's limbs around, working his arms under Shane's shoulders and legs. Shane would try to help, but his body feels strange and rubbery.

"Was worried," he says, words slurring, "that you would do s'mthin' reckless…"

"For you? Anything."

More pain floods his senses as Ilya lifts him. He can't help but groan at the sensation, and Ilya murmurs helpless platitudes in his ear.

"Not your fault."

"What?" Ilya says. And then: "Take his legs. I take shoulders. Move him in the car." Shane doesn't think that was for him. His head lolls back onto Ilya's shoulder.

Pushing through the haze of pain and confusion dragging his eyelids closed, Shane finally, finally forces words he's wanted to say this whole time past his lips.

"I love you."

Through his lashes, Ilya's eyes are like a brilliant blue sky above him.

"Stay awake, Shane." His voice is tight, controlled. It's wrong on Ilya, who should only ever sound carefree.

"I love you." He's not sure if the moisture on his face is blood or tears. Everything grows fuzzy.

"*I love you,"* he hears in the distance. Maybe. Maybe not. Shane closes his eyes and allows the darkness to claim him.

The surgery takes hours. His doctors assure him that the knife missed most major arteries. However, it did go deep enough to glance off of Shane's collarbone, requiring extensive reparation. That's what's taking so long, they say. These are the best physicians money can buy in Canada, so Ilya forces himself to nod and thank them for their time instead of cursing them out for how vague their information is.

Svetlana is waiting somewhere out in the hallway of the wing. Ilya can't quite remember where, and can't bring himself to care. He's been sitting, hunched and miserable, over Shane's bedside ever since the doctors allowed him in. His dress shirt is crusted with Shane's blood. It's itchy and uncomfortable.

By some cruel twist of fate, Ilya's escaped this whole ordeal without so much as a scratch. But Shane—brave, foolish, reckless Shane—lies in the hospital bed, pale under the fluorescent lighting, half his side and face wrapped in sterile white bandages with bruises peeking out from beneath. If Ilya weren't watching for the slow rise and fall of his chest, he would look like a corpse.

Ilya gives his head a physical shake to knock the thought away. He reaches out and takes Shane's hand. It's cold, but a pulse flutters weakly beneath Ilya's touch.

"*You scared me,"* Ilya confesses. "*You scared me more than I knew I could be scared. I could not think, could not eat, could not rest knowing you needed me."*

The heart monitor beeps steadily in response.

"*If you had not survived… I do not know what I would do. That is the worst part: how close we came to this unknown."*

Ilya brushes his thumb across Shane's bruised cheekbone.

"*I love you."*

Shane leans into the touch, even with his unconscious state. His lips twitch.

"*I love you so much. I would do anything for you."*

He scans Shane's eyelids for any movement, any hint of opening. They stay firmly shut.

"Boss," Marlow calls from the door. "The Hollanders are en route."

"One moment."

Ilya leans over Shane, and presses a gentle kiss to his bruised lips. It tastes of copper and antiseptic.

"Okay." He takes his ruined suit jacket from the back of his chair. "Let's go. There is much work to be done."

When Shane wakes, his parents are sitting by his bed. Yuna's holding Shane's hand, sobbing, while David strokes her back.

"You're alive," Yuna says, through her tears, "you're okay."

"I'm okay," Shane agrees. "Hi, mom. Hi dad."

"You're very injured," she says. "You have a concussion and two fractured ribs, not to mention the penetrative trauma to your sternum muscle. I can't remember the name of it."

"Sternocleidomastoid," Shane supplies automatically. Then, carefully, he asks, "do you know… what happened? Like, who did this?"

Yuna nods. "We know the man. He's an enemy of the Nishiguchi." She reaches over and takes his hand. "Oh, honey, I'm so sorry you were caught up in all of this. If I had known, you would have had better security."

"It's not your fault," Shane says. "Just business, right?"

"Too much business," she says. "I'm leaving it behind for good. Neither of you," she reaches over and takes David's hand as well, "will ever be in danger because of me again."

Shane should protest more, but he can only muster up relief. "Did they say anything about who brought me in?"

“The hospital said they weren’t able to get a name,” Yuna says. “I had a team headed out to where the warehouse was, so we were far away when we got the call from the hospital. By the time we arrived whoever brought you in was gone.” She pauses. “We probably would’ve found you ourselves, if you hadn’t sent me that text.” She gives Shane her patented *we’ll-talk-about-this-later* glare.

Shane should be more upset, but his head swims pleasantly from whatever drugs he’s on. “Sorry.”

Yuna sniffs. “Anyway. Our people reported that the place you were held at was all cleared out. There was only a body left of the man who did this. Probably infighting, if we had to guess. It was one of those places nobody really had a claim to, not that it was good territory in the first place.”

“Oh. Okay.” Shane tries not to feel disappointed. He’s alive. That’s what’s important. Then he fully registers that his mom is speaking in the past tense. “You said where the warehouse *was*? What happened to it?”

“I had it burnt down,” Yuna says, waving a hand thoughtlessly. “I didn’t want to see it ever again.”

A surprised laugh bubbles out of his throat. “Thanks, mom.” He finds that he means it.

“Of course, honey.”

“Well, in that case, I have another question.”

“What is it?”

“Have you seen my phone?”

Shane has to get a new phone. Luckily, with technology these days, all of his old information is easy to download onto it.

There are no missed texts from Ilya.

He tries waiting a day. Then another. Then a week.

No texts.

Shane is discharged from the hospital. He starts physical therapy.

He texts Ilya. No response.

Rose comes to see him. The Bijutsu Arts Charity Foundation goes legitimate.

No texts from Ilya.

Shane completes physical therapy. His shoulder still aches on bad days, and he won't be playing hockey anytime soon. A shiny scar sits in a jagged line across his collarbone.

No texts from Ilya.

He starts school again. His university has allowed him to delay his final term due to extenuating circumstances, partially eased by a large donation by his mother.

No texts from Ilya.

Three months pass like this, day by agonizing day.

No texts from Ilya.

Jane

I need you.

Jane

I miss you.

Jane

Please talk to me.

Jane

I hope you're ok.

Jane

Why won't you talk to me?

Jane

What did I do wrong?

Jane

Please.

Jane

I love you.

Jane

I miss you.

Jane

Please.

Jane

You can’t avoid me forever. I’m coming to find you.

The car dealership is the height of luxury, all white marble and glass walls. For a split second, Shane feels out of place, as if his mom hasn’t been parading him out at her black-tie charity fundraisers since the moment he was big enough to fit into a tiny bespoke suit jacket. And then he reminds himself that he’s angry at Ilya.

The sound of heels clacking against the smooth floor draws his attention. A woman in a close-fitting dress approaches him. She looks vaguely familiar.

“Can I help you?” She asks. A slight Russian accent tinges her words. He has a flashback to the night at the gala, when he and Ilya hooked up for the first time. Ilya had been there with this woman.

“Where’s Ilya?”

“I’m sorry,” she says, “do you have an appointment?”

“I want to see Ilya. Tell him Shane’s here.”

She smiles at him. “I don’t—“ But she’s interrupted by a deep voice. A voice that Shane hasn’t heard in months.

“Shane?”

And there he is. Dressed in that damn suit he’s always wearing, hair lightly gelled back, perfectly-sculpted lips parted around Shane’s name.

“Ilya.”

Before Shane can think about moving, Ilya crosses the room in a few long strides, grabbing Shane by his right elbow. He resists the urge to lean into the other man’s warmth.

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you!” Shane hisses. “Why have you been ignoring me? I thought you might be dead!”

“Shhh!” Ilya says, eyes darting around the room. The woman—Svetlana?—has an amused tilt to her mouth. “Come with me.” He tows Shane with him, and into the door that Ilya had come through.

It leads to a spacious office, decked out in fine leather furnishings and dark wood. As soon as the door closes, Ilya whirls to face Shane.

“Why did you come here?”

Shane glares. “I told you. You wouldn’t answer me. I had to find out if you were alive at the very least, asshole.”

“That’s dangerous!” Ilya says. “You could’ve—“ But he cuts himself off. “How did you find me here?”

“It’s public information, *Rozanov.”* Shane throws Ilya’s own words back at him, from all those months ago when they first met. “I looked you up. God knows why I didn’t do it sooner. So, what, you’ve been out here becoming a *car salesman* while ignoring me?”

Ilya sets his jaw mulishly. “I wasn’t ignoring you.”

“Then what do you call it when you don’t respond to thirty-seven texts over six months and decline my calls?” Shane says. A touch of hysteria enters his voice. “You killed a guy for me, and suddenly you’re scared to talk to me?”

“I have killed many men,” Ilya retorts. “Kuzmin is only latest one.”

“You’re missing my point.” He stands before Ilya, arms wide, feeling adrift in the tide of emotion rising in his chest. “At least have the decency to break up with me in person!” Embarrassingly, Shane’s voice cracks on the word *break.*

Ilya takes half a step toward him, face stricken. “What? No, I—you think I’m breaking up with you?”

As if his day couldn't get any worse, tears begin to pool in his eyes. Shane presses his lips together, focusing on controlling his breathing through the lump that's suddenly formed in his throat.

"You ghosted me for months with no explanation. What am I supposed to think?" He tries to draw on the cold fury that had pushed him to hunt Ilya down in the first place, but only finds a pit of sadness in his chest. "I—I'm sorry I put you in danger, okay? With the k-kidnapping," he stumbles over the word. "Or, whatever you want. Just… talk to me. Please." He swipes the back of his hand under his nose.

"Shane," Ilya says. Pauses, mouth opening and closing soundlessly for a moment. "*Pizdets*."

"I… don't know what that means." He's not ready to admit that he's been practicing Russian. For Ilya. Even after all this time.

"No, no. That wasn't meant for you." Ilya reaches out, tentatively. He touches Shane's arm—gently, so gently that it's barely a brush of his fingers. "I did not mean to hurt you. I thought it would be better like this."

A laugh bubbles out of his throat, a note of hysteria in it. "Better? Because you wouldn't have to see me again? Like I said, if you're done with me, I'd appreciate it if you could be upfront and tell me."

Ilya's already shaking his head. "I could never be done with you."

"You sure don't act like it."

"I was trying to protect you."

"Protect me. How? You were nowhere near me for all these months."

"My father died."

Shane feels as if the air has been punched from his chest. Even though it's been healed for months, the spot on his left side where his ribs were once broken aches.

He takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Ilya takes a step toward Shane. "It happened a while ago. Right after you were… hospitalized."

Now it's Shane's turn to reach a hand out to Ilya, touching his elbow. "I wish I could've been there for you."

"That is the thing," Ilya murmurs, "even with all the mess of his death, of the funeral, of the mess with his succession, of being in Moscow again—I thought only of you." The afternoon light catches his eyes in a shock of blue. "I thought only of how I longed to be back in Canada with you, drinking terrible coffee with you."

“I wanted that, too,” Shane says, voice barely more than a whisper in his confession. “Why didn’t you come back?”

“I knew I must become an honest man, first,” Ilya says. “I had to be worthy to be by your side.”

“So this whole time, you’ve been…”

“Reforming the group here,” Ilya says. “Cutting out the traitors in my organization. Building a legitimate business entity. Svetlana has been helping me.” He lets out a laugh. “You would not believe the paperwork involved. We have been doing *so much* paperwork. In a few more weeks, I will formally declare my departure from *Bratva*.”

“You’re leaving your family.”

“There is nothing left for me there.”

“So you’re… staying here?” Shane peers through his lashes. “For good?”

“For good.” Ilya says, walking toward Shane. He allows the other man to step into his space, moving until his lower back meets the wooden desk behind him. “For you.”

“I thought you were done with me,” Shane confesses, voice small. “I didn’t know what to do without you.”

“I was trying to keep you safe,” Ilya says. “Was going to wait until after I leave the brotherhood for real. It could still be dangerous.” He sighs, dropping his head onto Shane’s shoulder—his uninjured one. “But it killed me every day to stay away. Wanted to see your eyes so bad, hear your voice.”

“Me too.” Shane brings a hand up to card his fingers through Ilya’s hair. “I felt the same way. My mom left her family too, you know. The charity is a real charity now. When she told me the news, the first person I wanted to tell was you. When I finally started going back to class, I hoped every day that you would show up at the coffee shop again.”

An alarmed look crosses Ilya’s face. “You are back to class? You haven’t graduated yet, right?”

Shane shakes his head. “I’m redoing my last term. Since I never really got to start it in the first place.”

“Good. I did not want to miss it.”

“Even when you were ignoring me.”

“Even then.” Ilya chuckles into Shane’s shoulder, the sound muffled and wet. “We make for a sorry pair, don’t we?”

“We do,” Shane sighs. “I wouldn’t want it any other way.” He hesitates, and then presses a soft kiss into the skin below Ilya’s ear. “I don’t care if it’s dangerous. As long as we’re

together."

Long, blunt fingers find his shirt collar, tugging it down low enough to expose the twisted pink scar that sits between his left shoulder and neck. He shudders as Ilya traces the ridge of it.

"I could never forgive myself if something happened to you again."

"And if something had happened to you before today, without me knowing, do you think I could live with myself any better?" Shane counters. "It goes both ways."

"Yes, yes," Ilya says. He raises his head, and catches Shane's lips in a kiss. "Together, from now on."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Ilya leaves the office a little late that evening. He drives into the setting sun, arriving at his apartment to find Shane already there. He's standing at the sink, washing a dish, and Ilya comes up behind him, wrapping his arms around the other man's waist and kissing the back of his neck.

"Welcome back," Shane says. And for the first time since he was twelve years old, Ilya feels like he's come home.

"*I love you,*" he says into Shane's back.

"I love you too," Shane says, familiar with the Russian phrase. "Did you want to eat anything —"

But Ilya's already mouthing at Shane's neck, sliding his hands under his shirt. All of a sudden he's desperate to have him.

"The only thing I want to eat around here is you," he says, and Shane groans at the line, and then he groans again for other reasons.

"Bedroom," he murmurs, drying his hands on a towel.

Ilya sheds his clothes as they go. Shane, as always, makes a neat stack at the foot of the bed. Unable to wait any longer, Ilya grabs Shane's hips and pulls him onto the mattress on top of Ilya's body. Shane grinds down, both of them beginning to fill out.

"Like this?" Shane says, already sounding breathless. "You want me to ride?"

“Not yet,” Ilya says. “I want to take care of you, first.”

He props himself up on his elbow, angling his head to catch a searing kiss from the lips above him. His other hand runs down Shane’s chest, rubbing circles over Shane’s nub the way he knows Shane loves. Predictably, Shane lets out a small keen, ducking down to lick and suck at Ilya’s neck. Ilya sighs into it, enjoying the sensation.

Shane bends down to kiss at Ilya’s chest, and he puts his hand in Shane’s short hair, scratching his fingernails against his scalp. “You are always so good for me,” he says, “so sweet.”

“Only for you,” Shane says. He looks up, and Ilya shudders at the sight of his spit-slick mouth.

He uses the hand in Shane’s hair to haul him back up to Ilya, kissing those red lips. In one motion, he flips them so that his own body covers Shane’s. He reaches without looking to grab what he needs from the nightstand.

“On my front?” Shane asks, panting, but Ilya shakes his head.

“Like this. I want to see you.”

It’s better for Shane’s shoulder this way, too. Ilya ducks down to kiss the scar tissue gently, feeling the pulse of Shane’s skin. It’s warm. At the same time he pushes a slicked finger into Shane’s hole. He takes his time, making sure Shane is well-stretched—although he can’t help but tease a bit too, pressing down on the spot that makes Shane squirm and curse breathlessly.

Shane hooks a leg behind Ilya’s legs. “C’mon,” he pants, “I’m ready.”

“Patience, *lyubimyy,”* Ilya chides, but he slicks himself up obligingly. He touches his forehead to Shane’s, kneeling as he lines himself up.

Shane gasps as he pushes in. “Ilya—“

“Shane,” Ilya answers. He goes slow, closing his eyes at Shane’s tight heat. Shane continues his litany of noises, raking his fingernails down Ilya’s back. Inch by inch, he feels Shane relax around him, until his cock is fully sheathed.

“Move,” Shane says, “please, Ilya.” He gazes up at Ilya with his brown eyes, and Ilya is helpless to comply.

He rotates his hips, setting a languid rhythm. Shane sighs with each motion. Liquid pleasure spreads through Ilya as they make love. And that’s the word for it, making love, not fucking. He reaches out and cups Shane’s face in one hand while the other grips the man’s hip to keep himself steady. He’s not sure how long it lasts, maybe minutes, maybe hours, but all he knows is the smooth glide between their bodies, and the endless depth of Shane’s eyes. Shane, too, looks back at him steadily, arms hooked around Ilya’s neck as they move together.

When Shane's face begins to tighten, a line appearing between his eyebrows as he draws close to his climax, Ilya reaches down and palms Shane's cock.

"Always so good, so beautiful," he murmurs. "Come for me, Shane."

Shane's breath stutters, and his back arches. He comes between them, cock painting stripes on his belly and on Ilya's hand. Ilya groans as he feels Shane tighten around him.

"You too," Shane gasps. "Your turn, Ilya."

Ilya's gone after that. He makes a low noise in the back of his throat as he feels his body tighten, and he buries himself deep into Shane. Pleasure rocks through his body as he comes, deep and intense.

When he's spent, he's careful to fall onto Shane's good side.

"Tired already?" Shane asks, a chuckle in his throat. He reaches for a tissue to wipe himself and Ilya down.

Ilya sighs and throws an arm across Shane's chest, tucking his nose into the other man's collarbone. "Mm. Just a moment."

"C'mon, Ilya, at least get cleaned up before we sleep…"

Ilya smiles blissfully and ignores Shane, burrowing into his sheets. He drifts off like that, sweaty and drunk off of love, knowing that Shane will be there in the morning when he wakes. They'll bicker about breakfast, and Shane will leave for class, and Ilya will go to work at the dealership, and Shane will welcome him home when he returns.

He'll meet Shane's parents and they'll have dinner together as one big family, no longer separated by fake lines in the sand and artificial loyalties. Shane will finally give in and move into Ilya's house, and throw out all of Ilya's random stock photos on the walls and fill them with photos of the two of them together and fall into bed together.

And they'll sleep and rise and do it all again and Ilya will be the happiest man in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Russian translations:
Kozyol = asshole, motherfucker. Lit. goat.
Pizdets = fuck, shit
Lyubimyy = darling
(as always, if there's something wrong with any russian used in this fic, please let me know!)

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hmm, the angst was really supposed to be more prominent, but I just couldn't stand to keep Shane and Ilya away from each other too long. shane's been through enough, at least. lol. imagine being so soulmate-pilled that you transcend universes to force an innocent fanfic author to let you be together again.

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you may notice that this fic is now part of a series! While I'm done writing this main story and any real plot (for now...), I have some bunnies floating around for some one-shots. Mostly smut, if I have to be honest. Like I said all the way in chapter 1, the gay hockey show got hands...

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thank you for reading all the way through this humble fic! sincere love for all of your comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subscriptions. please do not try most of the things in this fic at home <3

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