

i really hope you're gonna get out soon

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by [taywrites11](#)

Summary

Sochi Olympics, 2014.

"MASSIVE ICLOUD HACK REVEALS PRIVATE PHOTOS, MESSAGES, VIDEOS OF HUNDREDS OF OLYMPIC ATHLETES"

Ilya feels a trickle of unease down his spine. He shakes it off impatiently as he clicks on the article.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Hello!

For anyone here from Home Ice Advantage, this is unfortunately not the sequel. I am working on that—I've got it mostly planned out now and the first chapter will be up within the week. For now, enjoy this completely unrelated "one-shot" that ended up 20k words and two chapters because I have no self-control ;P

The second chapter of this fic will be up in a couple days! Just need to do a quick edit and add one more scene. I hope you enjoy :)

The First Day

Ilya is, of all places, in the locker room when he sees the news.

It had been a gruelling practice. Russia is on precarious footing in the Olympic round-robin so far with more losses than wins. They play Latvia tomorrow afternoon, and the entire team is well aware that it will be their last game of the tournament if they don't manage to pull out a win. Ilya knows that the pressure of a home Olympics is getting to all of them, himself included, but even as the captain he's not sure how to fix it. There are too many big egos in the room, too many guys focused on being the hero rather than helping the team. He projects confidence, but he's already dreading how it all ends.

He picks up his phone in the locker room after practice expecting to find the usual collection of missed calls from his father criticizing his performance in yesterday's game. They had spoken last night, of course, but Ilya knows he'll have thought of more shortcomings by now. Instead, his teammates start murmuring in surprise around him as they check their own devices, and it doesn't take long for Ilya to find the news alert that has piqued their interest.

"MASSIVE ICLOUD HACK REVEALS PRIVATE PHOTOS, MESSAGES, VIDEOS OF HUNDREDS OF OLYMPIC ATHLETES"

Ilya feels a trickle of unease down his spine. He shakes it off impatiently as he clicks on the article. It doesn't say much more than the headline, doesn't have a link or anything—of course not. A reputable news site probably wouldn't be allowed to spread hacked data. He doesn't know why his heart is beating so fast. He doesn't even have an iPhone, so there's no way this implicates him at all. The Samsung logo staring up at him from his phone is proof enough of that.

He takes a few deep breaths as he changes quickly. Based on the chatter in the room, it seems like at least some of his teammates may have had their data leaked. Great. That's just what they need distracting them before the game tomorrow. The article that Ilya had skimmed had mentioned that the leak originated from North America, so he can only hope that every team with NHL players will be dealing with this, not just Russia.

There's still a knot of discomfort in Ilya's stomach as he slips out quietly—uncharacteristic for him, but his teammates are too distracted to notice—and starts the short walk back to the Athlete's Village. He tries to examine it as he walks, to figure out what about this makes him so uncomfortable.

Even if he were involved in the leak, Ilya doesn't think he has much to hide. He definitely wouldn't want his messages with his father or brother made public, but it wouldn't be the end of the world if it happened. He could laugh it off, deflect if anyone asked him about it. He doesn't think any of his pictures would be an issue either—there may be a few nudes, but he's usually good about deleting those after he sends them, and although he doesn't necessarily want them public he's not someone easily embarrassed. There are his messages with Hollander, of course, but he's still entered in Ilya's phone as "Jane". Having his sexts public would also be embarrassing, but there's nothing in them to suggest that the person receiving them is a man.

Ilya stops dead in the middle of the road, his heart dropping into his stomach. He doesn't even know why at first, the realization slow to dawn, but he knows, suddenly and irrevocably, that he had been right to be worried.

His messages with Hollander... seen from the perspective of Ilya and "Jane", there's nothing to be worried about. It's well-known that Ilya hooks up often—it would probably be weirder for people to not find sexts in his message history. But it wouldn't be from Ilya's perspective if their conversations were part of the leak—he doesn't have an iPhone.

From Hollander's perspective...

This would out Hollander for sure. It would be immediately obvious that "Lily" is a man—just off the top of his head, Ilya can think of several times he's mentioned wanting to fuck Hollander, not to mention the few ill-advised dick pics he had sent purely for the joy it brought him to imagine Hollander's face receiving them. And if people know "Lily" is a man, it probably wouldn't be a huge jump to figure out that he's another player. And with the dates of their messages lining up with every Montreal vs. Boston game in the last few years...

Fuck. Ilya's mind is racing now, trying to remember if he's ever said anything in their texts that would reveal his identity. He knows he'd been careful, but if someone were looking for it...

He picks up his pace. He needs to call Hollander, needs to find out right now if he's jumping ahead or if he's right to be panicking. He can't for the life of him remember if Hollander even has an iPhone, but he thinks he might. Even then, he might not have been affected by the leak, but Ilya needs to know. If both of them get outed from this, Ilya is in far more danger. Hollander's country would protect him—Ilya's would send the police straight to his door. He can't do anything in public though.

He's never been so grateful that he has his own room in the Athlete's Village. He shuts and locks the door behind him, pulling out his phone and jamming Hollander's contact. While it rings, he grabs his backpack—the one without the Team Russia Olympic logo—and starts shoving things in. Passport, clothes, toiletries—just as a precaution.

Just as Ilya is starting to think that Hollander won't even pick up—and then what will he do?—the ringing stops, and a familiar if confused voice is there.

"Hello?"

"Hollander." Ilya suddenly doesn't know what to say, how to even begin to explain. So instead he just asks the most pressing question. "Do you have an iPhone? iCloud account?"

"I—what? Yeah, but... why?"

Fuck. What are the chances that Hollander miraculously escaped the hack? Probably not very high.

"There was big hack," Ilya tries to explain, wedging the phone between his ear and his shoulder as he zips his backpack. His heart is pounding again, and he's torn with indecision, mind racing through his options even as he tries to explain what's wrong to Hollander. "Data leak. Pictures, messages, everything from iCloud accounts of Olympic athletes. Mostly North American ones, I think, or ones who live there. We need to find out if they got you too."

"You don't think... you mean our texts?"

"Yes. Would be obvious that Lily is a man. Not sure if people would know it's me. I can't remember. Fuck."

"*Fuck*," Hollander agrees. Ilya can already hear the panic in his tone. "Fuck!"

"Where are you?" Ilya asks.

There's silence on the other end of the line, then Hollander's voice again, more distant. It's obvious he had pulled his phone away from his ear to search up the news himself. "Fuck, it says hundreds of athletes. There's no way I'm not in there."

"Hollander," Ilya tries to infuse more urgency into his voice. He needs help to figure out what to do next, and Hollander is his only option. "Do not panic yet. We do not know for sure, but we need to find out. Could be very dangerous for me. Where are you?"

"I—in my room."

"Is there a way for me to get there without anyone seeing?" It's only a temporary solution, but better than nothing. And maybe he can keep Hollander from panicking and get to the bottom of this faster. "I cannot stay in Russian building, not until we know for sure that it's safe."

There's a long pause on the other end of the line, Hollander no doubt processing that. Ilya doesn't know where he'll go if Hollander says no. But then: "Yeah. I'm on the ground floor,

right beside the emergency exit. I can sneak you in that way. I'm rooming with J.J., but he was going to watch the speed skating. He won't be back until tonight."

Ilya is already moving. "You are sure no one will see? If we are wrong and our texts are not leaked, or if it is not possible to know who Lily is, me going into Canada building is as good as telling everyone."

"I'm sure," Hollander says. "You would only be in the hall for maybe two seconds. I'll wait for you right by the door and make sure no one is around."

"Okay." Ilya takes one last glance around his own room, making sure he has everything important. There's a very good chance he never comes back here. "Where do I go?"

"You know where the Canada buildings are?"

Ilya can't help but snort. "Kind of hard to miss, with maple leaves everywhere. Is maybe... ten minute walk for me. Less if I hurry. I'm leaving now."

"Once you get here, I'm in the building farthest to the north. Go around to the back left corner. Door G. I'll make sure no one is there."

Ilya pulls his hood up around his face as he steps outside. "Okay," he says. "I'll see you soon. Try to find list of names while you wait, people whose data was hacked. See if you are on it."

"Okay." There's a definite tremble in Hollander's voice, but he seems to be holding the panic at bay for now.

"And Hollander," Ilya adds, unable to help himself as he skirts the edge of a courtyard, head down to avoid eye contact with any of the groups of people hanging around chatting. "Thank you." Ilya is more than aware that Hollander doesn't have to help him at all—he could lock himself in his room and panic about this by himself like he no doubt wants to do. Instead, he's risking discovery so that Ilya can have a safe place to be, so that they can figure this out together.

"I'll see you soon," is all Hollander says in response. Then he hangs up.

Rozanov barely even looks up as he slips through the outer door Shane is holding open for him and then follows the three steps to Shane's room. His hood is drawn up around his head, a nondescript black backpack on his shoulders.

Shane can't help but think that he looks *hunted*.

It's only once Shane has closed and locked the door behind them that he shrugs the hood off, and yes, this is a different Rozanov than the cocky asshole Shane hooks up with a few times a year. This version of Rozanov looks scared.

"Did you find anything?" he asks.

Shane shakes his head. "There's no list yet that I can find online. A few names have been reported by the news outlets, but not many. And not mine."

Ilya swallows visibly, then nods. "Okay then," he says. He sounds about as resigned as Shane feels—just because his name isn't showing up anywhere now doesn't mean they're in the clear.

"When you said it could be dangerous..." Shane can't help but ask. He thinks he knows what Rozanov had been referring to, but he's never really thought about it that much. It seems stupid in retrospect, considering who he's been hooking up with for the last four years, and also considering their current situation, which Shane had always known was a possibility.

Rozanov just nods. "Not for you," he clarifies, like that's what Shane is worried about. "You are Canadian, Olympic people will protect you. No one will want to start international incident. But for me... yes. Very dangerous."

"Is—" Shane feels stupid for even having to ask this. He should have searched it up while Rozanov was on his way over. "Is it illegal here? To be gay?" He knows Rozanov isn't actually gay, or at least he assumes based on all the women he's regularly pictured with, but the distinction doesn't feel important right now.

Rozanov just sighs, slumping down on Shane's bed and pulling his phone out of his pocket. He doesn't meet Shane's eyes as he answers. "Technically no," he says. "But is illegal to... I don't know the word. Spread? Promote? Yes, promote being gay. And I am celebrity here, even more than in America. So even if I do nothing, it could still be seen as..."

"Promoting," Shane finishes. He feels sick. "What would happen to you?"

Rozanov shakes his head, still looking at his phone. "I don't know," he says. His voice is thin. "I don't want to find out."

Fuck. Shane realises then how scared Rozanov must be. He's on the edge of potential disaster, and there's nothing they can do to even find out what's going on, whether he's right to be so worried. Shane realises that Rozanov is probably deciding whether or not he needs to flee the country. The thought is inconceivable. He tries to calm himself down. He can feel the edge of panic still lingering, but he needs to hold it off for now, needs to help Rozanov with this mess that Shane may have unwittingly caused. "Okay," he says, taking a deep breath. "What's the best thing for us to do right now?"

Rozanov is ten steps ahead of him. "I am reading through our texts," he says, still not looking up from the phone. "To see if there is anything that could identify me, if someone knew that "Jane" is you. You can keep searching for your name. Sooner we know if texts are public, sooner we can decide what to do."

Shane nods. A simple task—that, he can do.

The silence stretches out as they both become engrossed in their phone screens. Shane clicks through article after article about the leak, but he can't help his mind from drifting to the man at his side, the texts he's reading right now. Shane would probably be embarrassed that Rozanov is sitting beside him rereading their sexts, if the situation were any different. As it is, he can't help but feel a sinking dread at the thought of everyone reading them, making assumptions, knowing things about Shane that he hasn't even been able to come to terms with himself. This thing with Rozanov... it's been contained, locked away, safe, and that's the only way Shane has been able to handle it. He doesn't know what he'll do if suddenly everyone knows about it.

After maybe fifteen minutes, Shane can't take the silence anymore. He's refreshing the same old articles now, and nothing new is popping up. He had managed to find a link to the entire data dump before it had been deleted, but the file is too big for his phone to handle, thousands and thousands of pages. Even if he could access it, Shane guesses it would take ages to run a search. No, the best thing to do is probably to wait until someone compiles a list of the affected athletes. In the meantime, he looks over at Rozanov again.

"Anything?" he asks.

Rozanov presses his lips together. "Enough," he says.

Shane waits, but he doesn't elaborate. "What does that mean?"

Rozanov sighs, obviously annoyed, but Shane doesn't think it's directed at him. "Nothing obvious," he says. "No names, nothing like that. But plenty of little things. All together, is not impossible for someone to figure it out, especially if they also look at pictures, videos of us during games... I'm sure we have done something to give it away, if people are looking for it."

"Fuck," Shane says. He hadn't thought about there being other evidence out there, beyond their texts. He's sure that the way he's looked at Rozanov on the ice sometimes would give them away in a heartbeat.

"And..." Rozanov hesitates, like he maybe doesn't want to tell Shane this, but he forges on anyways. "Is definitely enough for people who know me to know, if they see. I texted you the address to my apartment, last time you were in Boston. Anyone who has been to my place would know it's me."

"Fuck," Shane repeats. He had completely forgotten about that.

"Yes," Rozanov agrees. "It's not a sure thing. If texts are released... it would probably take time, for people to figure it out. They might not be able to confirm, depending if my teammates or someone who knows where I live talks. Or if there is something, pictures or video we don't know about, with more proof. But I don't think it's impossible that they find out."

"What does that mean... for you?" Shane asks. "Like, with Russia. Would they... if it was just speculation, would they still..."

Rozanov finally, finally looks up at Shane, and there's that hunted look in his eyes again. "I don't know," he says. "Would probably depend. How much proof they have, how big the story is, what people are saying. No way to know these things in advance."

"No," Shane agrees. "So if the texts were leaked..."

Rozanov reads Shane's mind. "Would have to decide what to do without knowing," he says. "Would be... risky. Risky to stay, in case people do find out and story gets big. Risky to run, because that confirms it, and no guarantee I get out before they catch me."

"Shit. Is—could you just go now? It might be for nothing but... wouldn't it be better to be safe than sorry?"

Rozanov immediately shakes his head. "No," he says. "Not unless I have to. Leaving during Olympics, especially when they are in Russia... no. I would be a... disgrace. I could never come back. It might even be enough for them to dig up the reason I left, even if texts did not leak. I'm sure there are cameras in Athlete's Village that show me coming here, if someone looks. And... I do not have citizenship anywhere else. If work visa ever falls through, I would have to come back here."

Shane knows his eyes are wide—Rozanov has obviously thought this through in detail. He wonders how much this weighs on his mind on a day-to-day basis, why he had ever even hooked up with Shane in the first place, if this had been what he was risking. "Wouldn't all that happen if the texts were leaked, though?" he asks.

Rozanov nods once, curt. "Yes," he says. "But if there is any chance of avoiding, I will take it."

Fair enough. Shane can't even imagine how hard of a decision this must be to make. For the first time, he notices the backpack Rozanov had brought with him. He realises that it's probably all of his most essential possessions, that Rozanov is ready to run right now if the situation demands it. Once again, Shane feels the panic threatening to overwhelm him. He doesn't know how Rozanov is even functional.

They lapse into an uncomfortable silence again. Shane goes back to the articles, refreshing the news page again. More and more names have started to pop up, but his own is frustratingly absent. Not that he wants his data to have been leaked, but at least then they would know. This waiting is killing him. Shane wonders what they do if his name just never shows up—how long would they have to wait before they could relax and accept that they were safe?

Whether fortunately or unfortunately, they don't have to find out. It's barely been five minutes when Shane refreshes a social media page and there it is, right at the top. A list of names, alphabetical. His eyes track down to H automatically, and he barely even has to look before his own name is staring up at him from the screen. A few black letters on a white background, completely and irrevocably changing the course of both of their lives. Shane's breath hitches.

"Rozanov," he says, voice thin and shaky. It's hard to breathe all of a sudden, but Shane forces the feeling down, down, down. Rozanov does not have time to deal with Shane falling apart right now.

It must be obvious by his voice what's happened. Rozanov just holds his hand out for Shane's phone, eyes narrowing as he scans the list. He hands it back listlessly, then puts his head in his hands.

Shane counts one, two, three, in his head. Then Rozanov straightens up, meets Shane's scared eyes. "I think... I think I need to go. I know it will out both of us, will make everything harder. With the league, with teammates, with... everyone. But I—"

"Go," Shane interrupts. "You—fuck the league, fuck everyone else. We'll deal with it." He can't believe Rozanov is even trying to defend his decision, given what he's risking, what he's sacrificing. They don't know each other that well, but Shane has been starting to understand Rozanov better after so many years of hooking up, and he can only hope that goes both ways. He hopes that Rozanov realises, maybe once he's not in the heat of the moment, that Shane could never, ever blame him for this.

Rozanov takes a breath, obviously steeling himself. "Okay," he says. He stands.

"Where will you go?" Shane asks, standing with him. He obviously can't go back to his apartment in Boston, even if he does make it out of the country undetected. Not with the address apparently online for anyone to see.

It's obvious Rozanov hasn't thought that far ahead. "Fuck," he says. "I—I'm not sure. I'll figure something out. Somewhere in Canada or America. Will get a hotel room, wait to see what happens."

"Go to Canada," Shane offers immediately. "My cottage. It will be safer than a hotel, private. No one has the address except me and my parents. No one will find you there."

Rozanov hesitates, like he doesn't want to accept the help, but it doesn't take long for him to relent, no doubt every second he stays here weighing on him. "Okay," he says.

Shane relaxes a fraction. He knows he'll feel better knowing where Rozanov is, that he's safe. "I'll text you the address, and the code to get in," he says. "Don't worry, I've already turned off my iCloud. Just—please, give me updates. I'm going to be worried sick."

The barest hint of Rozanov's signature smirk appears. "You care, Hollander?" he asks.

"Fuck you," Shane says, stepping forward. Before he can overthink it too much, he pulls Rozanov in for a hug. "Of course I care," he mumbles into his shirt. "Please be safe, Ilya."

Thankfully, Shane feels strong arms squeeze him back. "I will try," Rozanov says. "And I will text you. And Shane?" He pulls back so that their gazes meet. "I know this will be hard for you too. But you are brave. You will be okay." He drops a chaste kiss on Shane's lips.

Shane nods, suddenly too choked up to form words. Then he forces himself into motion—he can't help but think that every second wasted is another second closer to people finding out, to Ilya's journey becoming all the more dangerous. He heads for the door, poking his head into the hallway to make sure it's clear, then motions to Ilya to hurry.

"Go," he says one more time. "Safe travels."

"Good luck," Ilya says. "And thank you."

Then Shane is watching his back disappear through the emergency exit, wondering if they'll see each other again, and what their lives might look like if they do.

Once Ilya is gone, Shane finally lets himself fall apart.

He collapses on his bed, too exhausted suddenly to even stand up, and curls himself into a ball as his breathing speeds up. He knows he's panicking, knows he should try to keep calm to deal with the fallout that is inevitably coming from this, but he can't seem to help himself. Images run through his mind, random people, journalists, combing through his and Ilya's texts at this very moment, looking for the next headline. He wonders how long it will take—Shane isn't the most famous person at the Olympics, but he's probably up there. Hockey is huge in Canada, and Shane has been the face of men's hockey for years, which makes him one of the more prominent members of the Olympic team. Someone is probably already reading the messages, realising what they mean.

He still can't picture a world where everyone knows. He doesn't know how he's going to answer people's questions, how he's going to look anyone in the eye when everyone in his life will know that he's been lying to them for years. He tries to imagine it, and his mind draws a complete blank. He realizes that his cheeks are wet with tears.

Shane wishes, for the first time, that he was nobody. He's never wanted a life other than the one he has—he's wanted to play in the NHL since he was a kid, and the goal had always been to be one of the best. But Shane can't help but think that if he were a normal person, or even just a less successful player, he wouldn't be in this situation. Ilya wouldn't be in this situation—forced to out himself and flee the country, knowing he'll never be able to come back to the place where he was born. The guilt gnawing inside of Shane feels like it will eat him alive. How can he even freak out about any of this when it's so much worse for Ilya?

He wonders where Ilya is now. Definitely out of the Athlete's Village, on his way to the airport. Or maybe the train station—it suddenly occurs to Shane that the airport, with all its security, is probably not the best idea. Someone would be sure to notice and wonder why Russia's star athlete is trying to get a flight out of the country in the middle of the Olympics. Shane hopes that Ilya has thought of that, that he'll take the safest way, even if it takes longer. He wonders how scared he is, weighing the risks, being recognised and questioned versus getting out of the country faster. Both Russia and Canada have games tomorrow afternoon—

Shane knows without even needing to ask Ilya that he needs to be safe and away by then at the latest. If no one is looking for him before that, everyone will be then.

Shane doesn't know how long he lays there, catastrophizing. Long enough that the light streaming in through the window changes to the long shadows of late afternoon. Long enough that the tears dry on his cheeks, that his heart eventually slows down. He's still tense, restless energy coiled in his body, waiting for a blow he already knows is coming. His muscles are sore by the time it finally does.

His phone lights up with an incoming call. Then another. Then another. Teammates, from the Olympics and from home. His parents. A few unknown numbers that make him sweat. Hands trembling, he declines them all, puts his phone on Do Not Disturb for good measure. Then he searches up his own name.

In the hours that Shane has spent freaking out, the articles about the leak have multiplied exponentially. That makes sense, he thinks. It's morning now in North America, people waking up to news of the hack. It probably hadn't made as much of a splash in Russian and other European news outlets.

The other difference is that Shane's name is in every headline now.

He click on the first one he sees ("CANADA'S HOCKEY PRODIGY SHANE HOLLANDER OUTED IN MASSIVE DATA BREACH"), but he barely makes it two sentences before he has to put the phone down and put his head in his hands, feeling like he's going to be sick. They have pictures of the texts right there in the article—with words censored, but it doesn't matter. Messages that Shane had agonised over sending, pushing himself to be bold because only Ilya would see them and he had never made fun of Shane for any of it—those same messages are now embedded in a news article for everyone to see. For everyone to judge him for.

He feels the panic rising again. Before he can spiral too hard though, there's a knock on his door.

Shane freezes for a moment. Despite Ilya's earlier words telling him he had nothing to worry about, he's suddenly overcome with the fear that it's Russian officials at the door, here to kick him out or arrest him. He knows there are openly queer athletes at the Olympics, Canadian ones even, but the flash of terror is immediate and a little frightening in its intensity.

Then a familiar voice rings out. "Shane? Shane it's J.J., are you in there?"

In all of this, Shane had completely forgotten that he had a roommate. He realizes that he had instinctually relocked the deadbolt after Ilya had left, that J.J.'s key card won't work to unlock that. He obviously knows Shane is here though. Almost in a daze, Shane gets up to let him in.

"Jesus, Shane," J.J. pushes in, immediately re-locking the door, then turning to put his hands on Shane's shoulders. Shane looks down at the floor, the wall, anywhere but J.J.'s eyes. He knows it's probably obvious that he's a mess, eyes red-rimmed from crying. "Are you okay?" is all J.J. asks.

Somehow, the only thought in Shane's head right now is that J.J. isn't supposed to be here. He's supposed to be at the speed skating event for a few hours more—he had told Shane this morning that he wouldn't be back until after dinner, when he had invited Shane to join him and the other guys from the team that were going. Shane can only be thankful now that he had refused.

"Aren't you supposed to be watching speed skating?" he asks, instead of answering J.J.'s question. He thinks the answer is pretty obvious anyways.

"What? Shane, I—" J.J. pauses and takes an obvious deep breath. "I saw it as soon as it broke," he says. "The—the headlines about you, I mean, not the leak, I saw that this morning. But just luck maybe, I refreshed Twitter exactly when the first headline about you got posted, maybe half an hour ago? I came back as soon as..." he trails off. His eyes rove over Shane again—he can feel J.J. assessing, thinking. "Fuck," he says, the realization evident in his tone. "You've known since this morning, haven't you? Since the leak? That this would happen?"

Shane can't bring himself to lie, even though he knows it makes him look pathetic. Everyone already knows he's pathetic now anyways, if they've read his and Ilya's texts. He nods.

"Fuck," J.J. says again, pulling Shane into a hug. It almost makes Shane want to start crying again, but he pushes the tears down. "Shane, you should have called me."

Shane just shrugs. There's no universe where he would let any of his teammates be there while he's freaking out like that, and he thinks J.J. knows him well enough to know that.

When Shane is finally released, he sits down hard on the bed again, putting his head in his hands. He still can't bring himself to look J.J. in the eye, can't help but notice that the *what* of all of this has been left unsaid. It's not long before he feels the dip in the mattress beside him that means J.J. has taken a seat next to him, and the warm pressure of a hand on his back.

Like he can read Shane's mind, J.J. finally addresses the elephant in the room. "I didn't read the messages," he says. "Not past the first few at least, once I realised what they were." Shane nods minutely—he doubts J.J. even sees it. "And it doesn't make a difference to me if you're... gay." Shane can't help but flinch. "Or bi, or... whatever. Of course some people will be assholes about it, but I've got your back, and I think a lot of the guys on the team will too." Shane wonders if he's talking about Team Canada, or about the guys back in Montreal. God, he doesn't even want to know what's happening in the team group chat right now. He doesn't know a lot of the guys on Team Canada as well, so he can't know how they'll react, but he knows his own locker room. Has heard the jokes and slurs slung around casually. They might not say anything to his face, because Shane is their captain and the best player on the team by a mile, but they won't be okay with this.

J.J. won't either, once he knows the whole truth. It's one thing to be... whatever Shane is. He still doesn't know, other than that sex with a woman has never felt half as good as anything he's done with Rozanov. He's not sure if that makes him gay, or if maybe he just hasn't found a woman he's actually attracted to yet. It's not like he's ever really wanted to sleep with another man either. But it's one thing to be caught sexting a guy. It's another thing entirely to be hooking up with his rival, the guy he's been pitted against since their rookie seasons. The

guy all his teammates hate, and think Shane hates too. He wonders how pissed everyone will be when they see how long him and Ilya have been doing this. They had exchanged numbers for the first time at the All-Star game in their rookie seasons, and Shane's not sure but he thinks it's probably clear in their texts that it hadn't been the first time they had hooked up. He'll be lucky if any of his teammates talk to him after this, much less accept him as their captain. And the league will be pissed too—it will make them look like fools, for playing into the rivalry. Shane will be lucky to even have a team to go back to.

But none of that has happened yet. Inevitable as it may be, Shane isn't about to move things along—not with Ilya still probably in Russia, relying on his identity remaining unknown long enough to get out. Shane won't be the one to reveal their secret, so for now he just nods, chokes out something grateful-sounding to J.J., and wishes the day could be over already.

He's absolutely not going to the dining hall tonight, so after he pulls himself together enough to at least sit up and pretend he's fine, J.J. leaves to get him some food. As soon as the door clicks shut, Shane lunges for his phone. It's been blissfully silent since he turned on Do Not Disturb, but it occurs to him suddenly that Ilya may have texted.

It takes him a while to sort through all of the missed calls and messages. He goes through and mutes all his group chats without reading them, deletes the voicemails that have piled up without listening. There are dozens of people who have messaged him directly too—Shane feels a little sick when he sees a text from his mom come in even as he goes through them all.

Mom: Shane, we love you. Please just let us know you're okay.

He swipes it away. He can't even imagine what he's going to say to his parents. How he's going to explain why he hadn't told them. He's abruptly glad they're in Canada, that they hadn't made the trip—it probably makes him a coward, but there's a sense of relief, that he can avoid them for a while before having to have that conversation.

When he's gone through everything, Shane's heart is beating fast again, breaths coming too quickly. There's nothing from Ilya. He wonders if he would even hear anything, if Ilya were caught. If it would be on the news. Maybe not. If he were recognized, detained at the border or something, no one would know why he was running, not at first. They might not even publicise it until they knew why.

He can't help himself. He's going to go crazy, wondering if Ilya is okay.

Shane: Are you still okay? Did you make it out?

He stares at the little text bubble, like that will somehow make Ilya answer him.

Thankfully, he doesn't have to wait long. The reply comes in less than five minutes later.

Lily: I am okay for now. No international trains from Sochi, and too much security at airport. On a train to Moscow. No one has recognised me yet.

Lily: Delete that message please. Just in case.

Lily: I will text you when I am out.

Shane feels something unclench.

Shane: Okay, thank you. Be safe.

He deletes the messages immediately, as Ilya had requested, then searches up how long it takes to get to Moscow by train from here. He doesn't like the answer—almost twenty-four hours. If Ilya had left shortly after leaving Shane's room, it will be lunchtime tomorrow by the time he makes it there, and then he'll still have to find another train out of the country. Russia's game against Latvia is scheduled for two o'clock—that's the latest that people will start looking for him. It's cutting it very close, but Shane is sure Ilya knows that. It must be the best way.

He deletes his search history too, feeling paranoid. Then he searches his own name again.

Reading the articles makes him feel sick, and the comments are even worse—people dissecting his messages, speculating about his sex life, giving their opinions on whether he should still be allowed to play hockey. He forces himself to do it though, looking for any mention of "Lily", any indication that people have started to put the pieces together. Thankfully, there are none that he can find. If the speculation has already started, then it hasn't made it to the mainstream news outlets yet, which means it can't have grown too much.

When J.J. finally returns, Shane has put the phone away and is lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling. He sits up immediately when he sees that J.J. isn't alone. Instead, Team Canada's general manager is there, along with the coach and a woman in a suit Shane doesn't recognise. He feels a flash of panic, but J.J. seems to anticipate that, putting his hands face down in a placating motion.

"It's okay," he says. "You aren't in trouble Shane, they just want to check in."

It turns out the woman in the suit is a representative from the IOC, and the three of them are just there to check in with Shane, and to reassure him that his place in the Olympics is not in jeopardy because of this. The woman assures him that they're doing everything they can to determine the source of the leak and punish those responsible, and apologises that Shane's Olympic experience has been negatively affected by this. Shane almost wants to laugh—"negatively affected" feels like the understatement of the century. The GM and his coach are a little less formal, but they still assure Shane that his spot on the roster is secure, that they're committed to fostering an inclusive environment. The GM tells him that he knows Shane obviously didn't want this to get out, that he respects the way Shane keeps his head down and focuses on the game, that they're going to support him to continue doing that. Shane hears the subtext, even as they reassure him they won't make him do media tomorrow, that they'll talk to the team and make sure no one treats him any differently; don't acknowledge this, don't make it a bigger deal than it already is, and we'll help you make it go away.

Shane just nods. He knows they don't know everything yet, that this will all change tomorrow.

Eventually, they leave, and Shane gets ready for bed because there's nothing else for him to do. The fact that he has a game tomorrow had completely slipped his mind until now, and he can't imagine getting up and going to the rink like it's any other day. But it's what he's going to have to do, so he lays down and closes his eyes until eventually he feels J.J.'s concerned eyes move away.

He doesn't really sleep. His mind can't stop alternating between the comments he had read earlier, the ones he's almost guaranteed to hear spat in his face tomorrow, and Ilya, speeding through the darkness towards probably the most dangerous place he can be right now. He keeps checking his phone for a text, even though he knows that Ilya won't even get to Moscow until tomorrow, much less get out. Not until Shane is getting ready to go on the ice. Instead, he ends up scrolling back through their texts, imagining everyone he knows or will ever meet reading them too.

The Second Day

When the sun peaks over the horizon, Shane gets up, gets dressed, and pretends to have slept. He doesn't think J.J. is fooled, but it doesn't really matter. He's not hungry, so he skips the dining hall again, only picking at the food J.J. brings back. Finally, it's time to go to the rink—they have a pre-game meeting, then warmups, then their final round-robin game against Slovakia.

Shane checks himself in the mirror before they leave. He had been careful to stop himself from crying overnight, and now the traces of his panic from yesterday are almost gone. He looks like shit—the bags under his eyes deep and telling—but he thinks it's as good as he could hope for. And they had promised they wouldn't make him do media today, so he only has to worry about cameras from a distance and those on the ice, where he can hide behind his helmet and the rest of his gear.

He doesn't meet anyone's eyes as he and J.J. board the shuttle bus with the rest of the team. He doesn't want to know. He takes a seat in the first row and stuffs his headphones in his ears.

He searches his name again, almost like a compulsion. This time, the first result is from some gossip magazine: "WHO IS LILY? EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT SHANE HOLLANDER'S SECRET GAY LOVER".

Heart pounding, Shane turns his phone off. Then he turns it back on again, checks his messages with Ilya. Nothing. He's probably getting into Moscow right around now. Shane wonders how long it will take him to get a ticket, board his next train, and leave. Or if it's already too late and there will be people waiting for him when he gets off. He forces himself not to send another message.

Shane had been jealous, a little, when Ilya had been named team captain for Russia at the Olympics. Shane hadn't gotten the honour—it had gone to one of the more veteran players—

and never has he been more glad for that than right now. He has no responsibilities before the game, no obligation to make a speech or talk to anyone. He can feel the stares of his teammates as they change into their gear, can hear the barely concealed whispers about him, but they hardly register. Neither does J.J.'s steady presence at his side.

Canada's game is at one o'clock. By the time Shane steps on the ice for warm-ups, the Russian team would probably be arriving to the rink for their own game next door. Shane imagines it will probably take them a little while to realise that Ilya isn't just running late, that he's gone. Someone will be sent to check his room, probably. They'll start texting, calling him, but if Ilya is smart he'll have his phone off by then. Shit, can they track his location based on his phone? Shane hadn't thought of that, he wonders if Ilya has. All told, by the time the puck drops for Shane's game, they'll know that Ilya is gone. It won't take people long to put together the reason, not with them already speculating about Lily's identity. By the time Shane steps off the ice, it's likely that everyone will know, or at least suspect.

Shane tries not to think about it. Hockey has always been like breathing, so he puts his head down and tries to focus.

It's not his best game, not by a long shot. He has flashes of genius, of his usual self, and manages an assist on a goal early in the first. But the longer the game goes on, the more Shane can feel the cameras on him, the eyes of the world no doubt watching right now. He can practically hear the commentators speculating, the unsubtle mention of the Russian captain not showing for his own game, and could there be a connection? It makes him sloppy, unfocused. He's responsible for a truly stupid turnover in the third period, but they're up by three and J.J. blocks the shot anyways, so it doesn't end up mattering. It matters to Shane though—he knows that the spotlight is so much bigger now, the pressure to prove that he belongs here that much more intense. He replays the mistake over and over in his head, already feeling his career slip through his fingers, hearing the accusations that he's weak, that he can't handle it.

Canada wins. Shane doesn't score. He also doesn't acknowledge the whispered slur one of the opposing players snarls in his ear during the handshake line. His face remains impassive, but something lodges in his throat. It feels significant—he's had language like that hurled at him on the ice before, but this is the first time it's happening where the person saying it knows it's actually true. Shane knows it won't be the last.

As soon as he's showered and changed, Shane is pulled aside by one of the team staff. He follows, even as his teammates look after him in confusion. They haven't had a chance to check their phones yet, so they wouldn't know. But Shane knows what's coming. He wonders what on earth he's supposed to say. He discreetly checks his phone on his way to the conference room, hoping against hope for a message from Ilya saying he made it, that he's safe. But there's nothing.

His phone is off, Shane tells himself. His phone is off because he knows people are looking for him, and he's trying to stay safe.

This time, there's no IOC representative. Shane recognises all the people already sitting around the table when he enters the meeting room—the same room they had used earlier for their pre-game meeting, when Shane had hidden away at the back. They're all Team Canada

management, GM's and front office staff who mostly all work for the NHL too. All of the attention is on him now.

"Shane," Bradford, the Team Canada GM who Shane has only spoken to twice including last night, gestures for him to sit down. "There have been some... rumours published while you were on the ice." There's no congratulations for the victory, no more pretence of support. Shane had expected the switch, but it still hurts.

"What kind of rumours?" Shane keeps his voice even. He's overly conscious of his face, his posture. He hasn't heard from Ilya yet, which means he needs to not confirm anything these people think they know. It's a goal that Shane latches onto, something to keep him from spiralling into the panic that threatens to overwhelm him.

"Are you in a relationship with another player?" Bradford asks.

Shane meets his accusatory stare. "No," he says, no hesitation. It's not even a lie. He doesn't know what he would call his and Ilya's... thing, but "relationship" would not be the first word he would use.

Bradford sighs, impatient. "Look, I'm not trying to pry into your personal life, Hollander. I get that you didn't want it out there, but it is now. People think the "Lily" from your text messages is an opposing player," he says. "A very specific one. The evidence all lines up. If you are in an... intimate relationship with an opponent, that's a conflict of interest for the team, which makes it our business.

Shane says nothing. He doesn't know what he can say in response to that, and he's conscious that denying it too much will only make him sound guilty.

Bradford tries another strategy. "Did you know Ilya Rozanov missed his game against Latvia this afternoon?"

Shane had been expecting this, had prepared himself for the question. He lets his eyebrows rise, plasters on his best expression of mild surprise. "No," he says. "Why?"

"No one knows," Bradford says. His tone makes it clear that everyone knows. "He's currently considered a missing person. The Russian police just reached out to us, asking if you know where he is."

Cold runs down Shane's spine. *If they're still looking for him, that means he hasn't been caught*, he tells himself.

"How would I know?" Shane infuses as much detachment in his voice as he can. He still doesn't think it's convincing, but it doesn't really matter. Everyone in this room knows, even if they aren't saying it out loud.

Bradford sighs. "Look," he says. "You can obviously see how this is a conflict of interest. Even if the player in question is... not here, appearances matter, and right now people think that you might not be entirely committed to Canada winning this tournament. I know the only reason this is coming out now is because of a hack that you had no control over, but it doesn't

change the reality. If you aren't sleeping with our opponents and you can prove it to us, we will defend you to the last man. What I said last night still applies—we pride ourselves on being inclusive, and you won't be run out of this team for being gay. But we need to know we can trust you."

Shane is silent for a long moment, considering. Finally, once he's sure he understands what's happening here, he asks: "Or?"

There are confused faces around the table. "Or what?" Bradford asks.

Shane takes a deep breath. He needs to be careful what he says, but the anger that's been simmering under the surface since yesterday is finally bubbling up. "You want me to out someone to you," he says. "Never mind that you all think you already know the answer, you just told me that you want me to prove to you who Lily is. Whether it's another player or not, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to out somebody else. So, where does that leave us now?"

"We're not asking you to make a public statement," one of the assistant managers cuts in. "Obviously we understand the desire for privacy, especially in the wake of the leak. We just need to make sure that there isn't any conflict of interest. Surely you understand that."

"No, I don't," Shane says. He wants to ask what happens if he is in a relationship with an opposing player, what they'll do then. He hadn't missed that they had said they would support him only if he proved it wasn't true. But pointing that out would be as good as admitting it, and Ilya isn't safe yet. "Is every athlete at the Olympics required to disclose their sexuality and relationships now? There's no reason you need to know. I'm just as committed to getting Canada a gold medal as any other player, and I think that's obvious from how I've played here." He doesn't know if it's still the case, after today, but Shane had been leading the preliminary round of the tournament in goals and points as of yesterday morning.

There's silence around the table. The people gathered exchange looks, like they aren't sure what to do now that Shane is resisting them. It's true that he has a reputation for being polite, coachable, easy to work with—they probably hadn't expected any pushback. The plan had probably been to bench him if he admitted it and let him keep playing if he proved them wrong—now that they're stuck in limbo, no one seems to know what to do.

Bradford is the one to finally break the silence. "Why don't you take a day off, think about it," he says. "We don't want your Olympics ruined by this any more than you do, but you have to understand with the optics of you playing..."

"No," Shane surprises himself by the vehemence in his voice. "I don't need a day off—I just had one. And do you think I'll—what? Change my mind and throw Lily under the bus? Out someone else to save myself? There's nothing for me to think about. I'm perfectly capable of playing in the game tomorrow—if you're going to bench me over this, at least have the guts to do it."

It occurs to Shane, distantly, that he's probably ruining any chance he may have had of ever playing internationally for Canada again. He's so mad that he can't bring himself to care. Even though he had told himself to expect this, he still can't really believe that it's happening.

There's a long pause. "Fine," Bradford says tightly. "Then you're benched. But I want you to know Shane, that this is entirely within your control. You disclose any conflicts of interests, and as long as we can come to an agreement on how to mitigate those, you can be back on the ice anytime you want."

Shane nods once, curt. "Right," he says. "Is there a Team Canada plane I can take to get home, or should I book my own flight?"

There's another beat of silence, like no one really believes that he's serious. Again, Bradford is the one to speak up, though obviously he doesn't want to. "Are you really sure you want to do this Shane? There's nothing stopping you from staying, taking a few days to think it over. We don't want to lose you any more than you want to leave."

Shane can't help but scoff. "Bullshit," he says. But he forces himself to take a deep breath anyways, to really consider his options here. He could take them up on their offer. By tomorrow, as long as Shane has confirmation that Ilya is safe, there would be no additional risk in disclosing the truth of their relationship—if it could even be called that. Especially if they weren't making him do it publicly. He could potentially be back in the tournament without missing a single game.

Something about the idea doesn't sit right with him though. There's the mention of "mitigation" for one—it had been slipped in there casually, but Shane had caught it. He doesn't know what they would come up with to "mitigate" the supposed conflict of interest, but the fact that there would be more hoops he would have to jump through to get back on the ice makes him not want to find out. He's can't believe the unfairness of it all—that his loyalty is somehow in question, when he's never given less than 100% to anything. He knows that if this were the same situation but he were dating an opposing player's sister, or maybe a female staff member on another team, there wouldn't be any talk of "mitigation". It's enough to get his blood boiling. He could tell them the truth tomorrow, and he still might not be allowed to play, depending on what more they demand from him.

No, he decides. He doesn't even think about it for that long. He won't cave and give in to whatever they want even if Ilya does make it to safety. If they can't trust him now, they won't ever trust him, and something about trying to prove his loyalty when he's done nothing wrong bothers him too much to consider. He's wary too—all of the Team Canada staff also work in the NHL, so anything he agrees to here sets a precedent, and not just for himself. Ilya has been outed because of all this too, and he gets a say in deciding how they'll handle this and any kind of "mitigation" they'll agree to. Shane can't decide that alone, and he's angry that they're trying to force him into this position.

"If you're benching me, I have no interest in staying here," he says to the group. He wonders if any of them feel any kind of empathy for him, if any of them disagree with what's being done here. If they do, they don't show it. "I won't change my mind, and I won't tell you anything more about my private life. So do I need to make my own way home, or can someone here get me on a flight?"

"There will be a flight," Bradford finally says, once it's obvious that Shane won't take it back. "Tomorrow, probably. I'll get someone to send you the details."

"Right," Shane says. He stands, and he feels a little dizzy all of a sudden, overwhelmed by what he had just done. But he forces himself to remain steady, just for a few more seconds as he looks around the room. He won't let these people see any of the turmoil he's feeling inside. "I think we're done here then."

He waits, just to see if anyone will say anything more. Most of them won't meet his eyes. Bradford is shaking his head at Shane, projecting disappointment. It just makes Shane angrier. When nothing is forthcoming, he turns and just... walks out.

As he walks down the hall, his pace quick and purposeful even though he doesn't really know where he's going, he pulls his phone out of his pocket.

Still nothing from Ilya.

He chokes back the tears and keeps walking.

Shane doesn't know if the team bus is still around or if it would have even waited for him, and he doesn't bother trying to find out.

It's a short walk back to the Athlete's Village anyways, and Shane does it alone, head down. He's wary the whole way of being ambushed by reporters, but no one bothers him, and it gives him the chance to think about everything that's happened today.

Somehow, he can't seem to concentrate on anything though. All he can think of is Ilya, hopefully on a train out of Russia by now. The confirmation that the police are looking for him hangs heavy over Shane's head. That's another reason he needs to get out of Russia himself—the longer he stays here, the more chance the police try to question him about Ilya's whereabouts. He knows that the Canadian Olympic Committee will protect him from any harm or trouble, but that might not extend to keeping him away from the local authorities, especially if they're pretending that they're looking for Ilya out of concern for his wellbeing. He doesn't know how anyone would buy that story, but Bradford hadn't even seemed to realise the implications. Shane figures that if they're looking for Ilya, the first thing they'll probably do is go through camera footage of the Athlete's Village starting from the last time he was seen. It won't take them long then to find out he had come to Shane's room.

His phone's silence is loud enough that Shane wants to scream. He doesn't dare text though, not again, not when the police are actively looking for Ilya. If someone were to take his phone, even if he deletes the messages after...

No. Maybe he's being paranoid, but it's better that Shane has no idea what train Ilya is on and where he's going. Not until he's safe, at least. But the waiting might just kill him.

When he makes it back to his room, J.J. is nowhere to be found. *Probably for the better*, Shane thinks. He probably won't be so supportive, now that everyone knows the full truth, or

at least as much of it as they're going to get. Speaking of, Shane hasn't actually looked yet, at what people are saying. He throws himself down on the bed and unlocks his phone.

"THE ENTIRE ANNOTATED TIMELINE OF HOLLANOV" one article reads.

"HOW SHANE HOLLANDER AND ILYA ROZANOV PULLED OFF THE STEAMIEST HIDDEN AFFAIR IN SPORTS HISTORY" another declares.

"WHERE IS ILYA ROZANOV? RUSSIAN CAPTAIN MISSING, LOVER HOLLANDER SILENT" a third one asks.

Shane scrolls and scrolls and scrolls. They don't stop, article after article, all of them with their names in the headline. As much as Ilya had said the evidence wasn't conclusive, it appears that he had been right that him running would be all the confirmation people would need. The internet has already decided what the story is, and Shane knows there's no changing it now.

This is going to be such a mess.

He wonders if Ilya has thought at all about how they'll handle this when they get home, how the league might react. Shane has no idea. It's not like they're together or anything, so he doesn't know how Ilya feels about being outed, other than the obviously shitty part about having to flee his home country like a criminal. He realises for the first time that the two of them will have to talk about it, will have to decide on a plan together. That it will probably be an emotional conversation, at least for Shane. He's not sure how he feels about that—it's not like they've really done much talking before, about anything.

For now, he does his best to push those thoughts aside. He can worry about all that once he knows that Ilya is safe. He thinks a difficult conversation is a small price to pay, if it means they make it out of this.

He checks for messages again, just in case, before he grits his teeth and starts the other difficult conversation he needs to have.

His mother picks up on the first ring, like she had just been waiting by her phone for him to call. "Shane," she says immediately, her voice choked up. He feels an acute stab of guilt for ignoring his parents for an entire day—longer, even. "Shane, we've been so worried. Are you okay?"

It's hard to find words all of a sudden. He still doesn't know how to talk about this—not to anyone, but least of all to his mom. He had thought he would have years more until he had to have this conversation, if ever.

"I'm..." Shane doesn't know what to say. Fine would be a lie, but he doesn't want to admit the truth either, that he feels like he's holding on by a thread. "I'm coming home," he settles on finally. That's the important part, the reason he has to make this call now. He doesn't want his parents to find out from the news. "Tomorrow, probably."

"What? Why? Shane did they... is this because of the leak? They can't—"

"They can," Shane interrupts. "Just... it's complicated. They didn't kick me out or anything. They just... they gave me an ultimatum. It was my choice to leave."

"Oh, baby," his mom says. She's definitely crying now. "Are you sure? I'm sure we can fight them, if you really do want to play."

"I don't," Shane says. To his complete surprise, he thinks it's the truth. He hadn't thought about it before now, but the absolute last thing he wants to do right now is keep playing in the Olympics. The cameras, the scrutiny, the weight of his teammates' stares—it's all too much. Representing Canada at the Olympics had been one of his childhood dreams, but now the idea of leaving it all behind brings a measure of relief. If it weren't for his fear for Ilya, Shane thinks he could float away on the feeling.

"I really, really don't," he tells his mom instead. "I just want to come home."

"Okay then," his mom says. "Then come home. Should we drive to Montreal, or will you come here?"

"I'm not sure," Shane says. Privately, he knows that he's going to the cottage, whether or not he hears from Ilya. He needs to see for himself whether he's okay. But he doesn't tell his mom that. It's early morning there—it's possible that she hasn't even seen the news about Lily being Ilya Rozanov yet, and that isn't a conversation Shane wants to have right now. "I don't even know where the plane is headed yet," he says instead. "They're sending me on a Team Canada flight, but I don't have details yet. If they give me a choice I'll come to Ottawa."

"Okay. Just let us know when you know."

"Okay," Shane says. He can hear the exhaustion in his own voice, the way it trembles a bit. He prays that his mom leaves it alone—he doesn't feel like he can do this right now.

"We love you Shane," she says. Thankfully, she seems to realise that Shane isn't up for a conversation right now. "Nothing will ever change that, okay? We can't wait to see you soon."

"Love you too mom," Shane chokes out. "I'll text you."

"Okay, baby. Safe travels."

Shane spends a long time after he hangs up just staring at the ceiling. So long, that he actually drifts off for a bit. He's awoken by the creak of the door as it opens and J.J. walks in.

Shane turns his head at the noise and immediately regrets it. He doesn't want to talk to J.J. right now—there's no way it ends well, and Shane is already spread thin from exhaustion and fear and anxiety. He doesn't have the bandwidth for an argument, but by the time he realises the best thing to do is probably to fake sleep it's too late. J.J.'s eyes narrow as he looks at Shane. "You're still here," he says.

Shane turns away. "Don't worry, not for long," he says. It's dark outside now—who knows where J.J. had spent the rest of his evening. Avoiding Shane, no doubt.

"Really?" J.J. demands. "That's all you have to say for yourself?"

Shane sighs. He considers for a moment, wondering if there's a chance that he could get J.J. back on his side if he just explained, but... he's so tired. "Yeah," he says instead. That is all he has to say right now.

Unfortunately, J.J. seems to be itching for a fight. "You don't think you owe me an explanation? Look, I get why you didn't tell me that you're gay. I get it. But why the fuck did you not say yesterday that your secret gay lover was fucking Rozanov?"

Something in Shane snaps. He stands, eyes narrowing, and he has to stop himself from screaming. Of all the things, *that's* why J.J. is pissed?

"Oh, I don't know," Shane says, and he can hear the sarcasm dripping from his voice, mean and unfamiliar. "Maybe because he was in the process of *fleeing the fucking country*? Maybe because the moment everyone figured it out, the fucking *police* apparently started looking for him? I don't even know if he's fucking *alive* right now, or if he's been arrested, or beaten up, or..." Shane hears his own voice crack. "So I'm sorry if telling everyone all the details wasn't my top fucking priority."

J.J. looks a little shocked, but he still doesn't back down. "I'm not saying you had to make a fucking statement," he says. "But you didn't think it was relevant to mention to me?"

"No I fucking didn't!" Shane is screaming now, and he can't bring himself to calm down. "Why the fuck would I? How could I know you wouldn't go tell someone else? Wouldn't bring the police knocking on my door asking me questions about him?"

"You think I'd go to the police?"

"No," Shane says honestly, but he can't help the bitterness in his tone. "But I wasn't going to risk you telling someone else. Could you honestly say you wouldn't have? I know you're pissed it's him."

"Of course I'm fucking pissed! It's fucking Rozanov! Everyone hates him—I thought you hated him."

Shane sighs again, all the fight draining out of him in an instant. "Yeah," he says. "I know."

Uncomfortable silence fills the space between them. Shane sits back down on his bed, and opposite him J.J. does the same. "So," J.J. eventually says. "Are you guys, like, together?"

"No," Shane says. "Not that it's any of your fucking business. We just hook up when we're in the same city. That's all."

"Was the rivalry ever real?"

Shane shrugs. "Real enough," he says. "This doesn't change that. I don't know why everyone thinks it does."

"Everyone? Was this what that meeting was about, after the game?"

"Yeah. Team Canada doesn't think I'm loyal enough anymore. I'm going home tomorrow."

Silence falls again. Shane doesn't need to ask to know that J.J. obviously agrees with management about this, at least a little bit. He ignores the stab of hurt and lays back down. At least that conversation is over now—hopefully by the time he wakes up in the morning, J.J. will be gone and then Shane won't have to think about this again until the Olympics are over.

He hears rustling from the other side of the room, the familiar sounds of J.J. getting ready for bed too. Then there's quiet. When it's been so long that Shane thinks J.J. must be asleep, he's proven wrong by the sound of a soft voice drifting across the room.

"Is it really illegal here? To be gay?"

Shane scoffs. *That's* what J.J. is hung up on? But he hadn't really known much about this until yesterday, so he can't really blame him for the question. He's done his own research, in the hours of waiting to hear from Ilya, so he's a little better informed now.

"Not exactly," Shane says. "*Being* gay is technically fine, although there's still a lot of discrimination attached to that, legally and stuff. But it's... they have a law against gay propaganda. It's illegal to *promote* being gay, especially in public places where it could be seen by children. Ilya said... because he's a celebrity, that even just news stories about him could be interpreted as promotion. He wasn't a hundred percent sure they'd come after him for just that, but he ended up being right."

"You talked to him then?" J.J. asks. "Yesterday?"

Shane figures that J.J. will probably find out anyways, if the police do dig up footage of Ilya sneaking over to Shane's room. They might even come to ask about it—Shane doesn't intend to be here if they do. "Yeah," he says. "He came here, right after the leak. Said it wasn't safe for him in the Russian building until we knew for sure whether our texts were out there. You can't tell anyone this, though, J.J., I mean it. I know you hate him, but he was so fucking scared. He doesn't deserve this."

There's a long pause. "I am pissed at you," J.J. says eventually. "So fucking pissed, actually. I can't believe this whole time you've been lying to us, pretending to hate him and sleeping with him behind our back. After every game we've played against him." Shane ignores the way his stomach churns at the words, at the coldness with which J.J. delivers them. "But I won't tell anyone he was here. Or even that you confirmed to me that it is him. Of course he doesn't deserve to be fucking arrested for this, no matter how much I hate him."

Some of the tension drains out of Shane's body. "Thank you," he says. Right now, that's all he cares about. He can deal with the rest later, after the Olympics, after Ilya is hopefully safe.

When it's clear that the conversation is over, Shane checks his phone again. He's been gripping it this whole time, so tightly the edge of the case has left marks on his hand. He knows he would have felt it if it had buzzed, that he hasn't received any new messages.

It doesn't stop the sinking feeling he gets when he sees the blank screen. It's been over twenty-four hours now since he's heard from Ilya.

Shane tries to stay optimistic. He tells himself, as he tosses and turns all night, that Ilya is being safe. That he's being cautious. That Shane will wake up in the morning with a text letting him know that he's okay and far, far away from Russia. But he can't help but count the hours since Ilya would have arrived in Moscow, since he should have boarded another train to take him away. Shane has no idea where he would go, but he can't shake the feeling that it's been hours. Wherever he had gone, he should be there by now.

His phone stays silent, the screen dark, as eventually the night turns to morning on the third day.

Chapter 2

The First Day

Ilya keeps his head down as he hurries through the Athlete's Village, the tension only loosening a fraction once he's far away from the Canadian buildings. Then he forces his shoulders to relax, pulls out his phone and pretends to look at it as an excuse not to meet anyone's eye. He tries to appear casual even as his pace stays quick, reminding himself that no one has any reason to question him yet, that no one knows anything. He still doesn't want to be seen leaving—that will only make it easier for people to find him, once they know there's a reason to look.

There's a train station within walking distance, brand new and built just for the Games, and Ilya is on a train speeding away within twenty minutes of leaving Shane's room. It's full of other athletes—people who are done competing or just enjoying a day off, heading to watch some of the other events or see the sights. There's no one Ilya recognizes, so he finds a seat at the back and buries his head in his phone.

He needs to figure out what to do.

Team Russia is scheduled to play their final preliminary round game against Latvia tomorrow at two o'clock. If Ilya is lucky and no one puts the pieces together about his and Hollander's texts before then, that's the absolute latest that people will notice he's missing. The team is supposed to head over to the rink at noon—once they realize he isn't there, he imagines the alarm bells will go off pretty quickly. They'll send someone to check his room, ask around, and his team will realize that no one has seen him since practice ended this morning. By the time they step out on the ice, it will be headline news on every network in Russia, even if they don't know the reason for his absence—the captain abandoning his struggling team during a pivotal match. Ilya can't imagine it will take longer than that for people to put the pieces together.

All of that means he needs to be out of the country by lunchtime tomorrow.

Five minutes scrolling through train itineraries on his phone is enough for Ilya to confirm his suspicions—it's not possible. Even from the main train station in Sochi, there are no international trips. The airport is the only way to get out of Russia from here, and Ilya discounts that idea immediately. There's too much security at airports, too many people who would have to see a ticket with "Ilya Rozanov" printed on it in clear letters. There's no way he makes it onto a flight without someone questioning why one of Russia's biggest stars is leaving in the middle of the Olympics.

That leaves him with his only option being travel by train, which means he needs to get himself to a larger hub—somewhere that has international options. He feels the dread and resignation settle as he books himself a ticket to Moscow on his phone, leaving in half an hour. He'll be rushed to catch the train from the central station in Sochi, but every second now counts.

He'll arrive in Moscow in twenty-four hours' time—probably just before his team realises he's missing. Then it will be a race against the clock to catch an international train before anyone thinks to look for him in a city over 1,500 kilometers away from where he should be.

Ilya isn't sure of his odds. He doesn't really want to know.

The Second Day

Ilya's eyelids are heavy by the time the train pulls into Moscow on the second day. Every time he closes them, about to drift off, he's jolted awake by fear. A new passenger boarding the car, the hushed whisper of conversation a few rows behind him, the sudden ringing of a phone—anything is enough to set him on alert, to have him bracing himself, thinking he's about to be recognized, caught, arrested. He had barely slept a wink all night.

Instead, he had passed the time reading coverage of the hack on his phone. It hadn't helped to calm him down much.

It does mean that he is very aware of his situation as he steps off the train in Moscow. He's read every piece of news that had mentioned Hollander's name in the last twenty-four hours, so Ilya knows that as of right now, he's still safe. The speculation has started about "Lily's" identity, but no one has come to the correct conclusion yet, and there's still almost an hour until he's supposed to be at the rink for the game. An hour to make it onto his next train undetected—after that, he'll have to be far more careful.

He also knows, after hours of extensive research, that he isn't going to be able to board a train out of Russia in Moscow. He won't be safe for a while yet.

Ilya's initial thought, when he had decided to take the risk of coming to Moscow rather than trying to board a flight in Sochi, had been that he could easily catch a train to any number of European cities from there. And it's true—Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, Prague... all are options, with trains leaving this afternoon. What Ilya had forgotten had been that every single one of those routes also stops in Minsk.

He doesn't think Belarus is any better than Russia right now, when it comes to being outed as a queer person. Ilya isn't sure what border control looks like there, if he would have to show his passport even if he was just passing through, but he can't take the risk. He suspects Belarus would be all too happy to detain him and even extradite him back to Russia, and there's no way they won't be looking for him by the time he gets there.

No, Belarus is too dangerous. Which means his only option is going North instead of West. To Finland.

There's a train from Moscow to Helsinki that leaves shortly before midnight. Originally, Ilya had planned to be on it, but the faster the eventual public reveal of his identity approaches,

the more anxious he gets. He can't help but flinch when he brushes against someone as he's getting off the train, terrified that he'll catch someone's eye, that the spark of recognition will catch and be swiftly followed by a shout of confusion, heads turning to look. He finds a secluded bench to wait, out of view of any cameras he can see, and immediately knows he can't stay here all day. Not only is the station too busy, the risk of being caught too great, but his nerves can't handle it.

He's been trying to avoid thinking about what could happen to him if he is caught. It's harder, here, to push those thoughts away.

Instead, he clicks through timetables on his phone until he finds a train to St. Petersburg leaving within the hour. He can be there by early evening, and there are much more frequent trains to Helsinki from there.

He realizes once he's boarded his next train that his phone is almost dead. It's probably a matter of minutes now, not hours, until news outlets start reporting his absence from the game, so he lets it die. He doesn't know if they could track it, but he figures it's better safe than sorry. He had already told Hollander not to contact him again, and he'll be the only one who cares what happens to Ilya very soon. He can charge the phone and let Hollander know he made it once he's in Finland.

He finds a seat at the back of a car, pulls his hood over his head, and pretends to sleep.

The Third Day

Shane had known he wouldn't be able to avoid the media forever, but somehow he's still surprised when he steps out of the shuttle to the airport only to be faced with a wall of cameras.

There are Team Canada staff around him, doing their best to keep the reporters away and give Shane some space as they hurry into the building, but any relief Shane feels is quickly set aside when he realizes there are more just inside the doors. He's herded over to a semi-secluded corner of the terminal, and at first Shane naively thinks that it's so they can get rid of the media before he has to go through security, but then he catches sight of a guy in a bright red Canada jacket leading a half dozen people with cameras and microphones toward him.

He sends a panicked look to one of the women accompanying him. She had seemed nice when he spoke to her on the shuttle. "No," he says, and she turns to look at him in surprise. "I can't—I'm not talking to media. Tell them to leave."

The woman—her name is Emma? Emily? Shane can't remember—frowns in confusion. "What do you mean?" she says. "It's not a full press conference. Hockey Canada said you'd take a few questions from Canadian networks before we left."

Shane feels dread settle in his stomach. "I never agreed to that."

Emma—or is it Emily?—shrugs. "I don't think there's much we can do about it now. They've been advertising it all morning. I think they're planning to air it live. I thought Bradford said he'd sent you some talking points—here, just a second, I have a copy here somewhere." She gestures at the man leading the reporters closer to pause for a moment as she ruffles through her clipboard full of papers.

Shane's heart is pounding. Maybe Bradford had sent him talking points—Shane wouldn't know. His phone is still such a mess of notifications that he has it set so that only Ilya's messages can come through. He hasn't even opened his email since the leak. Regardless, Shane knows that's not the point. This is punishment, plain and simple. He had refused to cave and give management what they wanted, so they had decided to throw him to the wolves and see if he could manage to protect his secret on live television.

He's so... *angry*. He takes the sheet of paper provided to him—supposedly his talking points—and looks at it without seeing any of the words. He's already had his private messages splashed across the headlines of every major news network in the world, he's been outed in the most public and terrifying way possible, and somehow they still want *more* from him? He's not even sure if it's Bradford and Team Canada he's mad at, or the reporters themselves. He watches himself crumple the paper into a ball numbly, feeling like he isn't even in control of his body.

"Fine," he says, his voice clipped. He shoves the paper into his pocket—he has a pretty good idea of what they would want him to say, and what he is and isn't willing to share. He suspects they're two very different things. "Bring them over. No more than five minutes."

The staff around him exchange concerned looks, some of his anger obviously coming through in his voice. But Shane just schools his face into the media-perfect blank slate he had perfected as a teenager and squares his shoulders. If they want him to talk to the media so badly that they're forcing him into it, he'll do it—but he won't repeat their bland statements about inclusion for them. Not when they don't have the spine to back up their own words with actions.

Ilya is still missing, he reminds himself as the reporters approach and get themselves set up in front of him. *You can't say anything that could implicate him, or that he wouldn't be okay with if he makes it to safety and we have to deal with the fallout of this*. He doesn't know when his mental classification of Ilya had shifted from "running" to "missing". He tries not to think about it—not now.

The reporters must have talked while they were waiting, because once they're all set up and the cameras and microphones have been shoved in front of Shane's face, there isn't the usual clamour of voices talking over one another to try and make themselves heard. Instead, they take turns, like the questions have been predetermined. It's been over forty-eight hours now since the leak, so Shane figures that must have been plenty of time for them to coordinate.

The first man to speak is a reporter from the CBC who Shane knows a bit from the promotional interview he had done before coming to the Olympics. He remembers with a pang that the man had mentioned his husband when they had last talked, and maybe that's

why his eyes seem so kind and his question is an easy one, something Shane can do what he wants with.

"Shane," he says. "It's been a crazy few days for you, I'm sure. Can you tell us how you're doing right now?"

Shane can feel the corners of his lips quirk upwards in an almost-smile. "Uh, not great," he says, surprised enough by the question that he answers honestly by default. He tries to pull himself together to give a proper media-friendly answer. "I mean, yeah, obviously it's been hard, dealing with this so unexpectedly. For me, and I'm sure for all of the athletes affected by the hack." Shane Hollander being into men had definitely been the biggest scandal to come out of this, but not the only one. "So I guess I want to take this opportunity to ask for privacy, for me and for everyone else affected. The Olympics is a lifelong dream for so many athletes, and it's hard to focus on being at your best when there's this other stuff going on. Personally, I guess... there are things that are public knowledge now which I had previously kept private, and I kept them private for a reason. So I'm not going to talk about any of that just yet."

The reporters are all nodding gravely, but Shane wonders if any of them are even listening to his words other than to try and pick out their next headline. He feels abruptly bad for thinking like that, but his feeling is validated almost immediately when the next reporter speaks.

"Your messages that were leaked as part of the hack include many intimate exchanges with another man. Would you like to clarify how you label your sexuality?"

Shane swallows, keeping his expression carefully blank, even as he feels a flush beginning to creep up his neck. Of course they won't respect his request for privacy—they want something that will carry the news cycle forward for the next few days, now that the initial hype has died down. "No," he says simply.

There's a pause, like they're expecting him to elaborate, but Shane stays stubbornly silent. He's not giving them anything—it's not like he's about to tell them he doesn't even know the answer to that question.

Eventually, someone else pipes up. "Can you confirm the identity of 'Lily'? As I'm sure you're aware, speculation has been running wild these last few days."

Shane is weirdly grateful that the woman hadn't said Ilya's name—that Shane didn't have to try and hide the way just hearing it has been hitting him like a physical blow these last few days, with his phone still ominously silent. Even if she is blatantly disregarding his plea for privacy.

"No," he repeats. This time though, he does elaborate, because the greed of the world has been pissing him off these last few days, and here is finally an outlet for some of that anger. "And to anyone who has been speculating, to everyone who keeps asking me about it, you need to stop. I've already been outed against my will, at a moment when literally the entire world is paying attention. Is that not bad enough? Now you want me to out someone else too, to drag them into this shitshow? I won't do it." He flinches a little as soon as the swear word

is said, but doesn't take it back. "And I already said I'm not going to talk about the messages, so if that's all the questions you have..."

"Just two more, Shane," another reporter says. "Not about the messages. I wanted to know if you feel any regret about how your actions may have changed people's perception of you. As someone who had always been looked up to as a role model, do you think now you'll maybe be seen in a different light?"

Shane fights to keep his expression blank. Of course, he should have expected this, and he already resents the past tense in the man's question. Someone who *had* always been looked up to as a role model. He had known what would happen if his secret ever got out, had kept it private for this exact reason—because he already feels like he needs to be perfect, needs to be the role model that every kid looks up to, just to *exist* in the hockey world. He had known that people knowing would change things, but it still makes him so angry.

"No," is all he says. Clipped, concise, nothing to cause any more scandal than there already is. "I don't feel any regret. My phone getting hacked was out of my control, and so are other people's reactions to it. I've always just been focused on what happens on the ice, and that isn't going to change."

"Last one," the first reporter, the one with the kind eyes and the husband, speaks up again. "Aside from all of this, I'm wondering if you can speak to your decision to pull out of the Olympics. I know none of us can understand what you're going through, but considering you've been the leading goal-scorer in the tournament so far and the playoff round starts today, I'm sure it was a shock to many to hear that you were going home. Especially when you played yesterday, which was after the leak. What changed from then to now, and do you feel at all that you're letting your country down?"

Shane blinks. He can't help the way his eyebrows draw together, the slight frown of confusion he's sure is present on his face. Shouldn't they be asking Bradford this? He does his best anyways. "Uh, well... I'm not really sure what changed. It's—it's always an honour, to be chosen to represent Canada internationally, and that's especially true of the Olympics. Obviously I feel the pressure from everyone back home to win gold, and that's what I came here to do. That's what I would do, if I could, no matter what's going on in my personal life. So no, I don't really feel like I'm letting anyone down, because it's sort of out of my hands. I wish the guys all the best though, and I'm sure they'll make Canada proud."

He thinks he's done pretty well, tactfully stepping around anything that would make headlines or give any more details about the obvious rift between him and Team Canada's management, but all of the reporters are looking at him with confusion now.

"Are you saying it wasn't your decision to withdraw?" one of them asks.

There's a sinking feeling suddenly in his chest. He had assumed that there had been some sort of statement released, for everyone to know he was leaving, but had there not been?

Before he can respond, the woman who had asked him about Lily cuts in. "Team Canada released a statement this morning," she says, answering one of Shane's questions. But then why were they all so confused?

"Sorry, I—I didn't know... I haven't seen it," Shane says. He can definitely feel himself fully blushing now. Fuck, he's going to look like an idiot on live TV. Everyone in Canada is probably going to see this.

Thankfully, the woman immediately taps her phone a few times, then hands it to Shane so he can see. It's short—two lines of white text on a red background.

Given recent events, Shane Hollander has made the difficult decision to withdraw from the Olympic Games and return to Canada for personal reasons. We wish him all the best.

The sinking feeling turns to dread as Shane realizes what he's done. They had lied—of course they had lied. They had pretended that Shane had made the decision to leave himself, that they hadn't benched him at all. Anything else would make them look terrible, like they were discriminating against him for being... whatever he is. And of course, they had expected Shane to go along with it, because publicly feuding with his country's national team would not only blow this up ten times more than it already is, it would also make a lot of people back home mad. Would make it seem like Shane is purposely rocking the boat—the one thing no one is ever supposed to do in hockey.

And Shane had gone and fucked it up because it hadn't even occurred to him that they would lie. He's been so busy worrying about Ilya, he's barely been able to think about anything else, much less read the talking points he had been sent.

He wonders, for a split second as he hands the phone back, face carefully blank and mind racing, whether he would have gone along with it. He's mad enough about the whole thing that he thinks there's a chance he wouldn't have, but he's not sure. It doesn't matter now. There's no way to salvage this with what he's already said, so he may as well just go for it.

"Is that not true?"

"Was it not your decision to withdraw?"

"Were you forced off the team?"

The reporters are talking over each other now, practically salivating at his slip. At least now they'll have their headline, Shane thinks. He wonders if Bradford is watching this live—in the sick, twisted part of Shane's brain, he hopes so.

"I would have kept playing if I could have," Shane says, holding up a hand for quiet. He thinks it's even the truth—as miserable as it would have made him, leaving of his own volition hadn't even been a possibility in his mind until Bradford issued the ultimatum. "I was told that I would be benched until I met certain conditions—conditions that no other player needs to meet. I did choose to go home, but only because what was being asked of me was unreasonable, unclear, and something I wouldn't do regardless. And if I'm not playing, I would rather be spending time with my family. That's why I'm leaving."

There are a dozen more questions being shouted at him all of a sudden, but now the Team Canada staff around him have apparently decided to be helpful and start herding the reporters

away. Shane glares at the people surrounding him, daring them to say something. No one does.

No one says anything to him at all as they make their way through security and eventually settle in at the gate to wait. Shane ponders whether he cares about what had just happened, the additional attention it's going to bring, but he finds himself feeling oddly numb. The messages, people's reaction... it all feels so far away now, sequestered away in a tiny airport and soon to be on his way to the cottage. He knows he'll have to deal with it all eventually, but not now, and so he shoves it down, down, down, into a box with all of his other feelings about the leak.

Just before they board, he checks his phone one last time. If there's anything he hasn't been able to compartmentalize these last few days, it's his worry for Ilya. He would have arrived in Moscow over twenty-four hours ago now. Shane is starting to have a hard time coming up with a reasonable explanation for why he still hasn't texted. He doesn't think Ilya's been caught by the police, because they're still advertising him as a missing person and asking anyone with information to come forward, but he's also not one hundred percent confident in that. Could they be pretending to be looking for him to avoid any international attention on whatever they're planning on doing to him? Shane doesn't think it's that far out of the realm of possibility. No matter where Ilya had chosen to go after Moscow, twenty-four hours is more than enough time for him to get there, which means that even if he had turned his phone off for safety, it should be back on by now.

With every hour that passes, Shane is less hopeful. And now he's getting on a plane, with four hours between now and his layover in Paris, when he'll be able to check his phone again.

He wants to send a text, to let Ilya know that if Shane doesn't respond to him the second he hears something, it's not because he doesn't want to. But he's also conscious of Ilya's request for Shane not to contact him until he's made it to safety. Maybe he was somehow delayed getting out of Moscow and that directive is still relevant.

Four hours, Shane thinks. He'll wait four hours—until he lands in Paris. Then he'll reach out. He can't handle doing nothing for any longer.

Ilya feels something unclench as the plane touches down in Ottawa.

The sound of people stirring, rising from their seats and retrieving their luggage, the buzz of notifications as phones are turned back on... so far on this journey, it's been anxiety inducing. Ilya knows that these are moments when he's most likely to be recognized, when people are pulled out of their own worlds and forced to observe and interact with their surroundings. He still has his hood up, but he's seen his own face staring back at him on every TV screen he's passed in the last two days. He knows it wouldn't take much for someone to notice that the subject of the most talked about disappearance in the world right now is getting off this plane in Ottawa, Ontario.

Now, though, he doesn't have to worry. It doesn't matter if anyone recognizes him—he's safe. Canada wouldn't kick him out, even if the Russian authorities asked, and his work visa is good for a few years still. He had gone through customs in Toronto, so there isn't even that hurdle to clear.

He still doesn't want to be recognized. The only thing getting him through the last few hours has been the promise of a private place where he can finally relax and get some sleep. He's barely even dozed the whole time he had been travelling, terrified that his hood would fall off in his sleep, or that someone would point him out without him knowing. The idea of Shane's cottage sounds too good to be true right now, and he isn't about to ruin it by bringing the press right to the front door. Despite Shane's assurances of privacy, Ilya is sure they would sniff him out if anyone knew he was in Ottawa. So he keeps his head down, trying to prevent his knee from jiggling with impatience, from drawing any attention to himself. He can walk straight out of this airport without interacting with a single other person, as soon as they open the damn doors and let him off this plane.

When he does finally make it into the terminal, he heads straight for the exit, stopping only briefly at the car rental counter to get himself a mode of transportation. He holds his breath as he hands over his American license, waiting for the gasp of recognition, but the woman doesn't even blink. Ilya wonders if she even read the name—it is the middle of the night here, after all. He only knows this from looking out the window of the plane—he's lost all sense of time with all the trains and planes in the last few days. Ilya just knows he's tired, and wants to get somewhere with a bed as soon as possible.

He briefly considers getting a hotel room for tonight near the airport and making the drive tomorrow. When he looks up the address Shane had given him, it's almost two hours away, and he knows he shouldn't drive in his state. But he knows he'll never be able to relax in a hotel with other people around, especially given that if anyone had recognized him without him noticing, the airport hotel is the first place people would check.

He grabs the keys to the rental car with a mumbled thank you. Two more hours, then he can sleep.

The car is a mind-numbingly boring Toyota. Not something he would ever be seen driving in Boston, the snarky side of his brain notes. As he settles in, he pulls out his phone to turn off the airplane mode function. He's expecting the flood of notifications, but he ignores them all, searching for one in particular.

He's almost surprised when he finds it. He had texted Shane as soon as he landed in Toronto, and had been a little disappointed when he hadn't even bothered to reply. It had been nice, the fantasy that at least one person in the world was worried about Ilya's well-being, but he supposes looking back that Shane had probably only said that he would worry because he could tell how terrified Ilya had been. How pathetic. It made sense that he would have other things on his mind—Ilya had seen his fair share of headlines about Shane these last few days too, including one that apparently he had pulled out of the Olympics. Obviously texting his occasional hookup wasn't high on his list of priorities, even if he had reached out again while Ilya had been in the air over the Atlantic.

But there's a response right there. And it doesn't seem like Shane had been placating him.

Jane: Ilya what the fuck

Jane: I've been so fucking worried

Jane: Toronto???? How did you even get there?

Jane: Never mind, it doesn't matter. I'm guessing you're in the air again by now anyways. I'm just so glad you're safe

Jane: Idk if you saw, but I'm on my way home too. Hopefully I'll see you soon.

Ilya's not quite sure what to say to all that, and he doesn't really want to examine the way his heart is suddenly beating faster. Instead, he pulls up his phone's GPS and punches in the address for Shane's cottage. Reconsiders for a moment, then looks up the nearest gas station.

Ten minutes later, he's emerging from the gas station with a double espresso to keep his eyes open for the drive. He turns the radio on and tries not to look at the GPS as the kilometers remaining tick slowly downwards.

After the longest two hours of his life, he pulls up in front of a veritable mansion. He has the stray thought that he and Shane really need to talk about his definition of a cottage, but the conviction disappears almost as soon as he thinks it. He's just so tired, stumbling up the steps with his shoulders hunched. He realises his hood is still up out of habit. It takes him three tries to punch in the correct code for the door.

Once he's inside, he pauses just long enough to make sure the door is locked behind him, then stumbles forward into the darkness. It's still the middle of the night, although he assumes that dawn can't be too far off, and he can't be bothered to search for light switches. Instead, he gropes through room after room until he finds one with a bed, then collapses onto it.

He really should do a few things before going to sleep. Text Shane he's arrived, for one. Get out of his hoodie, for another—he's been wearing it for three days, and it's probably disgusting. Speaking of which, he should also probably shower. But instead he just lies his head against the softness of the comforter for a moment—just to rest his eyes.

The Fourth Day

Ilya is jolted awake all at once.

His whole body is tense with remembered fear. The feeling of being on a knife's edge, seconds away from being caught, of being hunted... it's been a constant companion these last few days, and it hasn't gone away. It takes him a long moment to remember where he is, that he's safe now.

Just as he starts to relax, there's a muffled noise from somewhere else in the cottage. The fear returns, a wave of it, strong enough to take Ilya's breath away. His head is suddenly filled with images—the Russian police, somehow finding him, arresting him, stealing him back across the ocean. Some crazy reporter, breaking into the cottage, shoving a camera in his face, broadcasting his location for the whole world to know. His father, his brother, come to make good on the threats that Ilya had only glanced at on his phone, to get rid of him before he can bring any more shame to the family.

There's another noise, a whispered curse. Whoever it is trying to be quiet. Ilya has just managed to push through the fear to stand, to run maybe, when a figure appears in the doorway of the bedroom.

"Ilya," the relief is evident in Shane's voice, as is the same kind of exhaustion that Ilya feels in his bones.

Then Shane is suddenly rushing across the room, slamming into Ilya so hard he falls back onto the bed. He can't help the way he latches on, clinging to Shane like he's drowning and nothing else will save him. It's almost startling, being so close to another person after the isolating loneliness he's felt these last few days, but Ilya can't help but relish it.

Ilya realizes after a few moments that one of them is shaking. At first he thinks it's him, but then he realizes that it's Shane. He's rocking back and forth just a little even as his weight presses Ilya into the bed, murmuring something to himself. It's only after a beat of surprise that Ilya realizes Shane is crying.

The sight immediately summons tears to Ilya's own eyes, and he blinks them away impatiently. He refuses to cry over any of this, to pity himself that much. But seeing Shane so emotional stirs something inside of him, and he instinctively brings a hand up to run through Shane's hair, murmuring reassurances in Russian.

Eventually, they both calm down. Ilya stops feeling like his heart is going to beat out of his chest from feeling too much, and Shane's quiet sobs subside into shaky breaths. When Shane finally pulls back to look at Ilya properly, they're both able to manage a shaky smile.

"Do you know how fucking worried I was about you?" Shane asks, the words feeling loud. Ilya is surprised to see genuine distress, maybe even anger, in Shane's expression. "Why the fuck did you wait until you got to Toronto to text me?"

Ilya winces. He had felt a little bad, sure, but he really hadn't thought Shane would care that much. They know each well from the years of hooking up, but they aren't exactly friends.

"Sorry," he says anyways, and means it. "Phone died in Moscow. I thought I had charger in my bag, but I did not. Must have left it in my room at the Olympic Village. Could not risk stopping to buy one in Moscow or St. Petersburg, and was middle of the night when I got to Helsinki. Then airport in Helsinki did not have one that fit my phone. Bought one in Reykjavik, but then had to hurry to make my flight, so I only plugged it in on the way to Toronto."

He can see Shane's eyes widening as Ilya recounts the steps it had taken to get here. It had been a lot—three trains and three flights in the same number of days, no doubt a ridiculously roundabout route compared to the chartered flight Shane had probably been on.

"I—okay," Shane says eventually. "That's... okay, that answers my others questions too. Holy shit, Ilya."

Ilya just nods. "Was a long journey," he says.

"What time did you get here?"

Ilya looks around. Belatedly, he realizes it's definitely daylight now, the sun blocked by heavy blinds but still peeking in through the corners of the windows. "I do not know," he says. "Late. Middle of the night, maybe close to dawn. What time is it now?"

"Morning," Shane says. "Like, nine o'clock. You probably only slept a few hours."

That makes sense. Ilya can still feel the exhaustion tugging at his eyelids, and Shane seems to feel the same.

"We should sleep," Shane says. "We have... a lot to talk about probably, but I'm tired. And you look like shit. We could probably both use a nap."

Ilya nods, but now that he's a little more alert, he suddenly can't stand the thought of lying here in these clothes any longer. He realises that he hadn't even pulled back the blankets before—he had just been sleeping on top of the duvet. "Okay," he says. "But... maybe I will shower first. Very fast. Just... clothes are disgusting."

Shane huffs a soft laugh. "Yeah, I always feel like that after travelling too. You go ahead—there's a shower through there, I'll use the other one."

Ilya takes the fastest shower of his life, exhaustion still weighing down his limbs, but he can't deny he feels better after stepping out. He changes into a clean pair of briefs from his backpack and crawls back into the bed, under the sheets this time. They're soft and warm, and he finds himself sinking into a doze quickly. He's only prevented from falling asleep by the soft sound of footsteps approaching.

"Shane?" he mumbles. He had thought they were sleeping before talking any more.

"I'm here," Shane says. Ilya feels the dip of the mattress as Shane perches on the edge of the bed. "Just... do you mind if I join you? You're sort of in my bed, and I don't like the mattresses in the guest rooms very much."

Ilya forces his eyes open. *Shit*. He hadn't even thought, stumbling through the cottage in the darkness, that of course one of these beds belongs to Shane. He pushes himself into a sitting position, fighting his muscles' protests. "Sorry, sorry," he says. "I did not know. I can go... where is guest room?"

"No!" Shane says, a hand suddenly on Ilya's chest to prevent him from rising any further. "No, you don't have to go. This bed is comfiest anyways. We can share, if that's okay with

you. It's king-sized, there's plenty of room."

"I—okay," Ilya says. "If you are sure." They've never shared a bed before, never stayed the night despite all of their hookups, but he's too tired to analyze whether this means something right now.

Instead he just scoots over a little, making room as Shane slips under the covers beside him. He briefly considers rolling away and just going to sleep, but with Shane right there the temptation is too great. Ilya wastes no time turning him around and spooning up behind him, resting his head in the crook of Shane's neck.

"Okay?" he asks.

He gets a contented sigh in response as Shane nuzzles closer. Then sleep is pulling him down, and he drifts off to the sound of Shane's soft breathing.

Ilya wakes slowly to gentle hands carding through his hair.

Again, it takes him a few disoriented moments to remember where he is. The softness of the sheets, the faint light seeping in through the blinds, the warmth he feels down to his bones—all in sharp contrast to the fear that's been ever-present since he had first unlocked his phone to the news of the hack back in Sochi. It's quicker to come back to him this time—that's he safe, away from Russia, at Shane's cottage. And those are Shane's hands in his hair, the weight of him dipping the mattress beside Ilya.

It feels nice, so he doesn't move for a long moment. The feeling of fingers scratching his scalp is foreign—he can't even remember the last time someone had done something this tender with him. His mother probably, but those memories are so faded now that the details are lost to time.

As he comes more fully to awareness, he realises that Shane is sitting up in bed beside him, leaning against the headboard. It's still light out, and Ilya guesses it's probably afternoon by now. Shane had likely slept on the plane home, since he hadn't had to worry about being recognized the way Ilya had, so it makes sense that he had awoken first. Ilya wonders how long he's been sitting here, one hand resting lightly on Ilya's hip and the other tugging at his hair, but then immediately decides he doesn't want to know. It twists his stomach up in knots just thinking about Shane watching him while he sleeps for some reason.

He fakes waking, blinking his eyes open and peering up at Shane. He can see the faint flush making his freckles stand out even more, no doubt embarrassed to be caught cuddling, but he doesn't move either of his hands.

"Good morning," Ilya says, when it's been too long and they just staring at each other is starting to feel weird.

Shane huffs a fond laugh. "More like good afternoon," he says. "The sun will be going down here soon. You slept almost all day."

"Mmm," Ilya says. It's not like it's a surprise. If he's being honest with himself, he wouldn't have been that shocked if Shane had told him it was morning again and Ilya had been asleep all day and night. He had been so tired. He can still feel it a bit, creeping in at the edges of his consciousness, but he seems to have slept long enough to ward it off for now. "Was tired," is all he says to Shane. "Did not really sleep since leaving Sochi. Little bit in the hotel in Helsinki, and little bit on flight to Ottawa, but not much."

"Jesus," Shane says, and Ilya momentarily regrets saying anything. He doesn't want Shane to pity him—not when objectively, things could have been so much worse. But when Ilya looks there's none of that in Shane's face. "I'm just..." Shane chokes up for a moment, obviously having a hard time finding words. "I'm so glad you made it. That you're safe. You have no idea... how worried I was. Fuck, sorry, that's probably so insensitive. Obviously it must of have been so much worse for you. I can't even imagine... but God, Ilya. I was so scared I'd just... never hear from you again. I don't know what I would have done."

"I—really?" It's too vulnerable, too raw—not at all in line with the careless playboy image Ilya deliberately maintains. It probably reveals far too much. But Ilya can't hide his surprise. That someone, that Shane specifically, cares that much about him. These past few days, jumping from train to hotel to plane and hoping no one would notice him while every news outlet dissected the implications of his disappearance with morbid fascination, it had sort of felt like there was no one in the entire world who actually cared about him as a person. Whether or not he would be okay, after this. In the darker moments, Ilya had wondered why he was even running, when there was so little to run towards.

And here Shane is, saying that he cares. Ilya believes it too, looking at him now. He's staring at Ilya like he's drinking him in, like Ilya might disappear if he looks away for even a second. And his hand is still in Ilya's hair, stroking gently. It's tender in a way they've never been before—in a way Ilya has never allowed anyone to be with him.

"Of course," Shane says, and his voice breaks a little. It looks like he's holding back tears. "It's... Jesus. I know we haven't... that we're not... I mean. Of course. Of course I was worried. I didn't know if you were even alive. They were saying that they were looking for you, but I didn't know if that was the truth or if they'd already found you. And... I know you said your phone died, and obviously I don't blame you for that and the most important thing was to get to safety, but when you said you'd text me when you were out of Russia and more and more time passed and I hadn't heard from you..."

Ilya is struggling a little to understand. It's obvious that Shane is telling the truth—the pain in his voice is far too real to have been an act, and for the first time Ilya notices the bags under Shane's eyes. Evidently it's been a difficult few days for him too. But... "Why?" he can't help but ask. "What difference would it have made for you, if I was caught? Is not like... I knew the risks. I always knew it was a possibility, going back to Russia. Would not have been your fault."

Now there is something like pity in Shane's eyes. It makes Ilya squirm uncomfortably, and he suddenly hates being below Shane like this, still sprawled out on the bed. As much as it pains

him to no longer have Shane's hands on him, he forces himself to move, to disentangle himself and sit up against the headboard too.

"Ilya," Shane says. "It... it doesn't matter whose fault it would have been. Or that you knew it was a possibility. I just... you didn't deserve to be fucking arrested or—or—" his voice breaks off, and he takes a deep breath, as though to steady himself. "Of course I care what happens to you. It was... it was both of our messages in that leak, both of us who got outed. But it was... I didn't have to flee the country. I know you lost so much more than me, and it was because of what we did, together. How could I not worry about you?"

Ilya feels tears pooling in his eyes at the amount of emotion in Shane's words, and he has to look away, blinking to keep them contained. God. In all the uncertainty about whether or not he would even make it here, Ilya hadn't even thought about what would happen after. What things would be like with him and Shane. It had only ever been casual between them, although Ilya can admit he'd had a soft spot for Shane that he didn't hold for his other hookups. He had put it down to Shane being a man and therefore a rarer occurrence for Ilya, given the danger of being caught, but this... Ilya realizes abruptly that if their situations were reversed, if it had been Shane who had needed to run and Ilya hadn't heard from him for three days, he would be a mess too.

It takes him a moment to collect himself enough to respond. When he turns back to Shane, his eyes flick down, like he's embarrassed about what he had just admitted. "Okay," is all Ilya can think to say.

They fall into an uncomfortable silence. Ilya's eyes rove around the room, cataloguing details he had been too tired to notice earlier. The furniture is all warm tones, the walls and floors exposed wood, personal accents and touches everywhere. It feels cozy in a way Ilya wouldn't have expected from Shane, who is clean and neat and minimalistic in so many aspects of his life, but seeing him here so relaxed it makes a strange sort of sense. Shane's hand reaches out absently to tangle his fingers with Ilya's on top of the duvet, like he doesn't even notice he's doing it.

Ilya fights to keep his breathing even. He realizes abruptly that he doesn't know if they've ever been in each other's presence alone for this long without having sex. He's still in only his briefs, as is Shane, but strangely that's the furthest thing from Ilya's mind right now.

"Why did they kick you out of the Olympics?" Ilya asks when the silence starts to be unbearable. "I saw you played game, day after I left." He had seen the headlines in the airport in Toronto, clips from the game along with speculation, but he hadn't wanted to linger too long near the TV's with his own face appearing in every other clip.

Shane winces, like he had been dreading the question. "Oh. Well. I didn't really want to keep playing anyways, with all the cameras and the questions. They kept asking me about you, and I had no idea if you were even out of Russia yet. It was awful."

Ilya frowns. It takes him a moment to realize that what's wrong with Shane's answer is that it hadn't been an answer to his question at all. "But why did they let you play one day and kick you out the next? Or did you decide to leave on your own?" Ilya can't picture Shane

Hollander doing that, no matter how much he may have wanted to. His sense of duty is too strong.

Shane closes his eyes. "Bit of both," he says eventually. "They, uh... they were fine with me being... whatever. Gay, I guess. Well, probably not fine with it, but they weren't going to kick me out over it. I think they just wanted me to ignore it and keep scoring them goals, said they'd keep the media away. But then... when people started speculating that it was you... that changed things."

Ilya feels sick. "They kicked you out of the Olympics because of me?"

Shane levels a glare at him. "I thought we already agreed that this was neither of our faults?" he says. After a long moment, Ilya sighs and nods. "And... no, not really. I mean, sort of. They said it was a conflict of interest, that it made it look like I wasn't committed to Canada winning the tournament, even though you weren't playing. They basically told me that I was benched until I proved to them that I wasn't fucking an opponent. They never did say what would happen if it turns out that I was, and obviously I didn't want to confirm it so I didn't ask. But they mentioned 'mitigating the conflict of interest', so I took an educated guess that they probably wouldn't have let me play anyways." Ilya knows he's not imagining the bitterness in Shane's voice. It must be hard, to have his country—or at least his country's management—turn on him so quickly. Ilya had always known that he would lose his home country if his sexuality were to get out. Shane had to have at least suspected that it wouldn't go well for him either, but it couldn't be easy having it confirmed.

There's something Ilya still doesn't understand. "But... everyone already knew Lily was me, right?" he asks. "Would it have been so bad, to tell them and see what they said? For chance at Olympic medal?"

Shane shrugs, not meeting his eye now. "I hadn't heard from you," he says. "I know the Russian police wouldn't have arrested me or anything, but I was worried that if I confirmed it they might... I don't know, corner me somehow and search my phone? I deleted our messages, but I didn't know if that was enough. And... I don't know. All those Team Canada guys, they work for the NHL. I didn't want to agree to any conditions for playing, or do anything that made it seem like there was a conflict of interest to work around. I figured it would set a bad precedent, for both of us."

"Wow." Ilya can't help but be impressed at the forethought. "You really think about all that in advance?"

Shane shrugs, his eyes on the spot where their hands are still joined. "I had a pretty long night, after you left. Lots of time to think through the possibilities, the timeline, likely scenarios. I had a pretty good idea of what they would say."

Ilya is silent for a minute, processing. Shane's mention of the league has his thoughts turning to the future, to what happens in a few weeks when the Olympics are over and they're meant to return to their respective teams to finish the season. "Do you think... will be the same here? With the NHL? We will be benched?" *Is his career over?* That's the question Ilya really wants the answer to, especially because he now can't ever go back to Russia. Is his work visa in jeopardy?

"I've been thinking about that," Shane says, because of course he has. Ilya can't help the fond smile that takes over his face. "I don't think so. It's not... the league itself can't bench individual players. They could suspend us or try to nullify our contracts, but that would be pretty blatant discrimination, and there's no way they'd win if we fought it. Our coaches could technically scratch us from every game for whatever reason they want, but we'd still count towards the team cap, so it's not like they could do that indefinitely since they would need that cap space to replace us if we aren't playing. And we both have no-move clauses, so they couldn't send us down to the minors or trade us either." Something in Ilya's chest loosens.

"We'll have to see," Shane goes on. "But... I really don't think there's much they could do. It—it definitely won't be good regardless. For me, at least, I don't know what your team's like. I'll lose my C though, and I think I'll be lucky if any of my teammates even talk to me after this, but... if we want to keep playing, I don't think they could stop us. Not until our contracts are up, at least."

Ilya nods slowly. He had just signed a new contract last year—for six years. He can work with that. Five more years to get himself a passport that isn't from Russia, or to prove that he's still a good enough player to be worth signing again regardless of the rest.

"Okay," he says. "You think... you really think you will lose C?" Ilya doesn't want to doubt Shane's words, not when he had just been kicked off his Olympic team for this and obviously knows his own team much better than Ilya does, but he just can't imagine Shane without the C on his jersey.

Shane nods. "J.J. was rooming with me at the Olympics," he says. "He's probably one of the only ones I would have thought would maybe be supportive. And he was, that first night, when it was just that I... slept with a guy. But once he found out it was you... he was so pissed. If he didn't get it, none of the others will."

Ilya can't help but squeeze Shane's hand a little. He looks so dejected, even though his words are resigned. "Same," Ilya says. "For my team, I think. Some of them would maybe be fine with me being bisexual. Do not think they will be fine with it knowing about me and you." He thinks for a moment. "Do you think maybe..."

"What?" Shane asks.

"What if we... I don't know, make some kind of statement?" When Shane immediately recoils, Ilya squeezes his hand again. "I know, I don't want to either, but maybe it would help. We could tell people was just casual, meant nothing, that we are not together. That we don't meet up anymore. Last texts were from before Christmas, long enough that we can pretend we ended things."

Shane is silent, obviously parsing through the implications, the potential outcomes. Ilya thinks it would work. They would still be out, still probably be shunned by their teams and the league at large, but Shane had said it himself: that was never going to be the main problem. It would suck, but it would be made so much worse because people knew about *them*, specifically. That the supposed rivals were fucking after every game. That's where the conflict of interest argument came from, that's why they might be benched. If they removed that from the equation... maybe it would make the rest bearable.

It doesn't take long for Shane to reach a conclusion. "But then... if we said that, we would have to mean it. We wouldn't be able to see each other anymore. If we were caught... it would just make everything so much worse."

Ilya nods. "Yes," he says. He had known that when he came up with the idea, had hesitated to voice it aloud for that exact reason. But if it would help...

Shane is shaking his head though. "No," he says. "That... we shouldn't have to do that. We know there's no conflict of interest, we know we play just as hard against each other on the ice. Why should we have to end things because everyone else doesn't agree? That's... we're in this together Ilya. I don't want to never talk to you again. Then everything would be terrible and we wouldn't even have anyone to talk to about it who actually understood."

Ilya can't help the relief that slowly floods him as Shane talks. But then there's a hesitation, and Shane glances nervously over at him. "Unless... unless that's what you would rather do," he says. "I—that would be okay, if it's what you wanted. I'd understand."

Ilya is shaking his head before Shane even finishes. "No," he says. "No, of course I do not want that either. I just... is an option. Wanted to make sure that you know that."

"No," Shane says again. "No, let's not do that."

"So we just... keep going," Ilya says. "League cannot do anything, teams cannot do anything. Teammates hate us, other players probably hit us more on the ice, fans boo us, but... we keep playing."

Shane visibly swallows at Ilya's assessment, but he must have already thought things through himself and reached the same conclusion. "Yeah," he says. "I guess so. I mean... we could always waive the no-move clauses. Get ourselves traded to different teams. A lot of them would be the same probably, but... I don't know. There have to be some teams that wouldn't care as much."

"True," Ilya nods. He knows that there are some teams who march in their city's pride parades every year. Or who at least don't opt out of doing a pride night game. Even though it's not being queer that's the major problem here, Ilya has to hope that at least those teams might be a little more open-minded about... whatever it is that's going on with him and Shane.

He suddenly finds that he can't stand this... the not knowing. He's lying here holding Shane Hollander's hand, talking casually about the destruction of their lives as they knew them, and he has no idea where they go from here. Where Shane wants to go from here. Ilya thinks again of the hand that had been in his hair when he woke up. It makes him uneasy, to feel so out of control of this situation. So, like he always does, he bulldozes past the awkwardness and asks.

"And us? What happens in this fantasy world where we get traded to teams who are okay with rivals fucking each other? We keep meeting up after every game? Paparazzi staking out our house, trying to catch us? No more sexting, probably, but would you really want to keep going with everyone knowing?" Sometimes, Ilya had wondered if the forbidden aspect of their relationship had been all that had kept Shane coming back.

Shane tenses up like Ilya had known he would. "Yeah," he says eventually, so quiet that Ilya barely hears it. "I—it would be hard, obviously. So I'd get it, if it was... too much, for you. If you want to stop."

"...no," Ilya says. It was maybe too revealing, but he couldn't bring himself to play the part, here in this bed with Shane's hand somehow still in his. "Is just... a lot. A lot of bad things to deal with for a fuck every few months. I—worst has already happened for me, I do not care. But... are you sure is worth it Hollander? If we want to say we are not meeting anymore, it has to be now. Cannot be six months from now if you decide everything is too much."

"I know," Shane says quietly. "But... what if it wasn't just a fuck every few months?"

Ilya's heart stops. He can feel his entire body tense up all over, knows Shane must be able to feel it too, but he can't control it. Of all the things he had maybe expected Shane to say about this mess... this had not even been in the top one hundred. "What—what do you mean?" he hates the way his own voice trembles.

Shane is definitely bright red now, but Ilya can feel the heat in his own cheeks to match. "I mean... we haven't just been sexting, recently. I know you reread our texts, so you must have noticed. I just... I like talking to you. And if everyone knows now... I mean, it wouldn't be the end of the world if we hung out, or something?" he phrases it like a question. "We could be... friends. I don't know. It was just a thought."

"Friends who fuck?" Ilya can't help but ask.

Shane blushes even deeper. "Sure," he says. "Or... more than that. I don't know. We could figure it out. What we want, instead of what everyone else wants."

Ilya nods slowly. It sounds almost too good to be true. He likes Shane too, of course—has spent the last year or so trying to convince himself that he doesn't, pushing those feelings down so deep that he had barely even registered the truth until now. Of course he likes Shane—the way he folds his clothes before sex, the little crease between his eyebrows every time they face off against one another, the fond exasperation on his face every time Ilya makes a dirty joke. On anyone else, Ilya probably would have found Shane's quirks boring, annoying, uptight. But he's known for a while now that Shane is different. And without the thoughts of his father and Russia weighing him down, it feels almost... freeing. To think about the possibilities.

"Okay," Ilya says. He keeps his head down, hoping Shane won't notice just how happy he is at the thought. One future gone, but so many more possibilities opening up before his eyes.

"Okay?" Shane asks, like that isn't clear enough.

"Okay," Ilya agrees. He chances a glance over at Shane only to find that endearingly exasperated expression on his face. He tries to clarify without somehow spewing his feelings everywhere. "Okay we can try. Friends who fuck and maybe more. We can see how it goes."

The smile that graces Shane's face is blinding. "Okay," he agrees. And suddenly nothing else matters. Ilya knows that outside of the cottage, the world hasn't stopped. The Olympics are

still ongoing, the news cycle is probably still showing their faces on loop, speculating about their whereabouts, their relationship, their sex lives, their futures. But here, in this bed, the moment feels precious, suspended in time, just for them.

"So," Ilya says, swinging a leg over Shane and settling in his lap. "Was a lot of talking. Good start on the friends part. Think we need to work on the fucking."

Shane laughs, and Ilya falls—in more ways than one.

Chapter 3: Epilogue

Shane grips Ilya's hand a little tighter as they pause outside the Centaurs' locker room.

Logically, he knows that it's going to be fine. He had been traded to Ottawa only a few weeks after the Olympics, and his new team has been nothing but amazing. Not a single person has even asked him about the texts, about Ilya, about any of it, other than to sympathize and offer their support. Shane hasn't explicitly confirmed his relationship with Ilya to anyone, but he figures they all probably at least suspect based on the lack of a denial, and no one has treated him any differently. It's a sharp contrast to how it had been in Montreal, those awful few weeks after the Olympics. It's why he had found himself nodding, when management had pulled him into a meeting at the end of last season.

When he had first sat down in the conference room with the GM and some of Ottawa's front office and been told they wanted to ask him about Ilya Rozanov, Shane had almost panicked. Things had been going so well with his new team, and he had been starting to think that maybe things would be okay. He still heard homophobic slurs on the ice from their opponents almost every night, still got hounded by the media at every opportunity even though he had made it clear he wasn't giving any further comments, but with a supportive team around him, the rest of it almost felt bearable. So when he had first heard Ilya's name from the GM's mouth, his stomach had sunk as he pictured losing it all, having to start all over *again*.

It must have been obvious on his face, because the GM had immediately raised his hands in a placating motion. "We don't care about your personal life," he had said. "I know we talked about this when you were traded here, and that's still true. None of us care what you and Rozanov are to each other. But we do care about our players, and about your well-being. And we know you've had a year from hell. So we don't want to do anything to make that worse, or to make things harder on you than they need to be. Which is why we're here."

Shane had swallowed, then nodded. He still hadn't had any idea what the meeting had been about, but the sincerity in the words had been enough to stave off the panic.

Then had come the words that had changed Shane's life again.

"Boston has indicated that they're open to offers on Rozanov," the GM had said. "Obviously we need more depth at center, so we'd like to see if we can get him. But we don't want to make your life more difficult than it already is. So we'd just like to know if that's okay with you. We don't need a reason, we don't need to know anything about your relationship. The media would obviously have a field day with it, and we would maintain our policy that neither of you would be obligated to answer questions about your personal lives. But if you think it would be too much, whether with the media or maybe with Rozanov himself, say the word and it's off."

Shane had been so speechless it had taken him long seconds to find the words to answer. He couldn't believe that this was happening. Couldn't believe that Ilya could be here, in Ottawa,

with Shane. That his new team cared enough about him to give him this much power in a move that would be an instant win for them.

"No," he had managed to gasp out eventually. "I mean, yes. I mean... it's okay with me. Rozanov being here. That would be... yeah. Of course you should try to get him."

He had paused, waiting for the inevitable questions. Surely, they would want to know whether the two of them were together now, if they were potentially going to be on the same team. Shane's mind had already been racing on how to answer—at that point, him and Ilya had been talking on the phone more often, venting about their teams and their situation and sometimes just chatting for the sake of it, but they had yet to talk again about their relationship. About what it was they were even doing. Shane had invited Ilya to his cottage for the summer, since he couldn't go back to Russia, and Ilya had agreed to come, but Shane hadn't know what that meant. He had been a little terrified, to be honest, at the thought of having almost two whole months together.

No questions had been forthcoming. "Excellent," the GM had said. "Of course, I'm going to ask that you don't say anything to anyone yet in case it doesn't go through, but I'm pretty optimistic about our chances. Thanks, Shane."

Shane had left the room in a daze and called Ilya the second he had gotten home.

The trade had gone through, and their two months at the cottage had been spent with the knowledge that they were about to be teammates. Shane had thought through every possible scenario, Ilya patiently talking him through all of it, and he knows now that, really, there's a very small chance of this going badly. His new teammates are amazing, and if they hadn't said anything to Shane last season when he had played with them for months, he knows that logically nothing will change now. Especially given that the trade had been announced only a few days after that meeting with the front office, at the end of last season. Probably, his team has been expecting this.

It's still no less terrifying as they push open the locker room door and walk in together.

Immediately, the conversation in the room quiets, heads turning to look. Shane braces himself, squares his shoulders, and forces himself to be the brave one, just this once.

"Hey, guys," he says. "This is Ilya."

There's a single, endless second of silence. Then the room breaks out into cheers.

Ilya gets pulled away immediately, slapped on the back and introduced around. Dykstra is saying something about their powerplay, how having Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander is going to have them leading the league from day one. Tanner Dillon, the youngest guy on the team, is looking up at Ilya the same way he had looked at Shane last season, with a kind of hero-worship that makes it far too easy for the other guys to chirp him. Some of the guys Shane had started to feel closer to at the end of last season approach him as he watches his boyfriend meet his team with a fond smile.

"Knew you had terrible taste in men," Chouinard says, bringing an arm down around Shane's shoulders. "Dykstra said there was no way someone as nice as you would be with an asshole like Rozanov, but I told him he was wrong."

"He's not an asshole," Shane says with a smile. He can tell Chouinard knows that already by the way he's grinning, obviously happy for Shane. "Or, well, he is, but not all the time, and not to his own team. You'll see soon enough." Bood, one of the rookies listening nearby, lets out a laugh of disbelief.

"I'm looking forward to it," Chouinard says. "And I'll talk to the guys. Make sure they don't let slip to the media that the two of you are... that you showed up together."

"We are together," Shane confirms, and he can't help the little thrill as he says it. Other than his parents, who had showed up at the cottage in February the day after Shane and Ilya had arrived, when they still hadn't even known what they were to each other, this is the first time he's actually talking to anyone about it. "We weren't... before. It really was just casual. But... he came to my cottage this summer, and it got to be... more." He can't help the way he smiles at the memories, the quiet domesticity of those first few weeks, the sense of inevitability when Shane had realized that they were acting more and more like a couple with each passing day. The way his parents would smile at him when they were over for dinner and Ilya wasn't looking, like his feelings were splashed all over his face. The way Ilya had whispered "I love you" in Russian so many times against his neck before he found the courage to say it out loud in English.

"That's great," Chouinard says. "I'm happy for you two. And it must be amazing, to be in the same city now."

"Yeah, it is," Shane grins. He can't believe how lucky he had been, with this team. Of all the places he could have been traded. "Although we aren't going to be telling the media that, so it would be great if you could make sure the guys know not to say anything." He doesn't have any doubt that they'll keep the secret, although he also knows that it probably won't stay a secret for too much longer. They had bought a house together last week, after all.

Eventually, they make it onto the ice for the first practice of the season, and Ilya knocks his shoulder against Shane's as they skate out together. "Okay?" he asks.

Shane grins. "Yeah." He had seen the way Ilya had been watching Shane in the locker room, both of them afraid of someone saying something and making it all go wrong, but he's good. Everyone so far has been great.

"Good," Ilya says. "Now, let's show every other team how stupid they are, letting us play together. Much, much worse than being rivals, putting us on same team."

Shane grins. It's only the first practice, his and Ilya's first ever time on the ice playing together instead of against one another, but he can already feel the truth in Ilya's words. Ottawa is a young team, sure, and they were near the bottom of the standings last season, but so were Montreal and Boston a few years ago. The two of them had dragged their teams all the way to the playoffs a few times now—Shane could only imagine that it would be even easier, with the two of them working together and with something to prove.

As awful as this year has been, Shane can't bring himself to regret any of it. Not when it had all led to this moment—the scratch of his blades on the ice, the puck on the end of his stick, his boyfriend ready to receive the pass.

For the first time since he had woken up that morning in Sochi to Ilya's call—maybe even for a while before that—Shane feels completely at peace. Somehow, some way, he knows that they'll weather the storm that's sure to keep coming from all of this and get out soon.

Together.

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