

orange chicken, hockey, and other stupid fucking surprises

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by [livermoriumkid](#)

Summary

When Dennis agrees to be the temporary on-site doctor for a Pittsburgh Penguins hockey game as a favor to a classmate from medical school, he's not expecting much. He's not the first-choice to be team doctor, and he's definitely not a hockey guy. His plan is simple: hide out on the sidelines until he can go home and crawl into bed. Funny how plans change.

Or: Ilya takes a slapshot to the face and gets treated by a doctor who looks like a wet kitten.

Notes

y'all im not even gonna attempt to do a chapter count on this one. If you've read my other HR fic, you'll know it's a bad idea.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Dennis has a bad feeling as he flashes his PTMC ID at the security guard by the side entrance of the rink.

The guard gives him a cursory glance up and down, clearly wondering why some lost co-ed is trying to sneak into the benches.

“I’m Greg’s replacement for the game,” Dennis supplies, in a tone that does not remotely convey how much he doesn’t want to be here.

He’s running on about seven hours of sleep- which would be fine, if he hadn’t just come off a forty-eight-hour ER shift. He’s already been puked on twice in the past eight hours. Once by a little kid with the stomach flu, and again by the kid’s dad, who also had the stomach flu.

All Dennis wants to do is crawl onto the couch with Trinity, eat leftover Chinese food in his fuzzy socks, and binge the newest season of *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*.

But no.

He’s here instead.

At PPG Arena in downtown Pittsburgh.

Instead of holed up on his couch under a nice, cozy blanket and watching people drink their body weight in soda because they can't have coffee or alcohol he's shivering at the side entrance of an arena.

He'd go as far as to say he regrets being here.

He regrets it in the way only a man who has had one protein bar since noon and a guilt-based inability to say no can regret something.

"Just one night," his former med school lab partner had said when he'd called Dennis a few hours ago. "Our team doc's stuck out of town by bad weather. You're in emergency medicine, you can handle sports stuff."

Dennis *can* handle sports stuff.

He just doesn't *like* sports stuff.

He was never very coordinated as a kid. While his brothers played pee-wee flag football and high-school tackle football, Dennis hung out on the sidelines picking at the grass. The few times he did try and play catch with his dad, he'd end up catching the football with his face. No. Dennis doesn't like sports stuff in general.

And he *especially* doesn't like sports stuff that happens in loud buildings that smell like cold air and sweat.

But Greg Treviano had been an excellent lab partner in med school. He'd covered for Dennis so many times that Dennis had lost count.

Like when Dennis had been sleeping in his car because he couldn't afford rent, and the tow truck driver had towed away his Ford Fiesta with him still in it. He'd had to jog to class from the tow yard in the snow. Greg had distracted their absent-minded professor with long, rambling questions about his time in Vietnam.

Then there was that time in their anatomy lab, when their professor had a strict no-tardiness policy and Dennis had been running late after falling asleep in the library. Greg had popped open a second-floor window for Dennis to climb through just in time to make the roll call.

Weird how most of those stories involved Dennis sleeping.

But yes. Dennis owed Greg Treviano more than one favor. Probably several dozen at this point.

Never mind that Greg himself was now a doctor of physical therapy, which was apparently “different.” And God forbid the countless EMTs at the game counted as adequate medical staff.

When Dennis had brought that important little fact up, Greg had sighed.

“Look, I know. But it’s the rules. We’ll need to forfeit if we don’t have proper staff. Please?”

Ah hell. Dennis was a pushover.

He’d agreed, and Greg had cheered over the phone and given him driving instructions.

Not that Dennis had a car anymore. He’d sold the Fiesta so he could actually afford to finish med school, and the idea of telling Trinity where he was going was beyond humiliating. She’d tease him to no end. He liked her, he really did, but he drew the line at her making fun of him for getting roped into dumb stuff. Especially because *she* often roped him into said dumb stuff.

So, he’d taken a bus to the train station, then the train to Steel Plaza, then walked the rest of the way, shivering in a thin coat that had been rescued from the ER lost-and-found and meant for someone twice his size.

By the time security finally waves him through, Dennis already feels like a damp apology of a person.

He has no idea where he's going beyond Greg's vague directions: *walk down the hallway, turn right at the first door, then left*. He wonders where Greg even is right now. The very least the man could do was guide Dennis to wherever he's supposed to be.

He must look as confused as he feels, because a woman with slick black hair approaches him.

"You lost?" she asks. She's wearing a Pittsburgh Penguins staff jacket.

"Um, yeah. I'm the replacement doctor for tonight's game?"

She quirks an eyebrow, and Dennis feels his cheeks heat. Did he really sound that out of place?

After a moment she snaps her fingers. "Right! Dennis! Greg said you were coming. C'mon, I'll show you where to go." She checks her watch. "Cutting it a little close, aren't we?"

Dennis shrugs sheepishly. "There was some bad traffic. I just got back from the hospital."

She gives him a questioning look.

He's changed out of his scrubs already, now in ratty jeans and a worn-out black T-shirt he's had since middle school. He's already on the skinny side and the crazy hours he works aren't doing wonders for his appearance. She must think he's sick or something.

"Working. In the hospital," he corrects himself quickly. "I work in the hospital. The ER. At PTMC."

He winces at how stupid he sounds, but the woman's eyes go soft in recognition.

"You guys took the majority of the people from Pitt Fest, right?"

Oh.

Dennis will never forget Pitt Fest.

It had already been one of the worst days of his life before the mass-casualty alert came in. He still hears the screaming sometimes when he's trying to fall asleep. Still sees the blood soaking through towels too fast. The way someone would pass out mid-sentence while he tried to keep their insides where they belonged.

His forehead starts to ache and forces his expression to smooth out.

“Yeah,” he says quietly. “That was us.”

She nods. “Yinz saved my sister’s life.”

Dennis blinks.

“Oh,” he says, because his brain has temporarily stopped offering better words.

She gives him a small smile. “I’m Cindy. Follow me.”

He does, trailing after her through the winding underground of the arena.

Greg is a fucking liar.

There is no universe where Dennis would have found his way around here alone.

They pass concrete hallways, pipes overhead, doors with codes, carts rattling past. It smells like cleaning solution and old metal. The sound of the crowd above them is a constant, distant thunder.

Cindy pushes through a set of heavy double doors-

-and suddenly they're rinkside.

It's breathtaking in the most overwhelming way possible.

The space is enormous. The ice glows under the lights. The arena is packed with thousands of people, all talking over each other. Music blasts from somewhere unseen, and an announcer booms about sponsors like this is the Super Bowl of... whatever this is.

Dennis feels like an ant that wandered into a cathedral.

"Pretty cool, right?" Cindy says.

"Cold," Dennis mutters, pulling his thin coat tighter.

Cindy crouches and drags out a stuffed-looking medical bag and a folding chair from beneath a recessed bench in the wall. She snaps the chair open and sets it against the boards. There's a bright red medical cross on the back.

On the floor, three long strips of tape mark a path - two forming a straight line toward a small gate that opens onto the ice, the third connecting them into a square around the chair.

She nudges the chair into the square.

"There. Direct line of access to the ice and your special chair," she says cheerfully.

Special chair. Dennis feels like he's being put in time-out.

She points toward a smaller open hallway nearby. "EMTs are down there with a stretcher."

She digs through the bag and hands him a black walkie-talkie. "Preprogrammed. Just hold the button if you need them or other assistance. But honestly? If you just wave, they'll be watching."

Dennis stares at the ice. “How do I know when to-”

“The refs will whistle. Good chance one of the staffers will see you and kinda push you onto the ice.”

...Fantastic.

Dennis looks down at his ratty sneakers.

Yep. Still regretting this.

Was there literally no one else who could do this for a professional hockey team? He’d eat absolute shit if he stepped onto the ice like this.

As if reading his mind, Cindy produces a pair of black non-slip shoes from nowhere and hands them to him.

“They might be a little big,” she says with a wink, “but that’s better than falling in front of ten thousand people.”

He can't tell if she's kidding.

She also hands him a black staff jacket like hers, just without a logo on it.

“You help either team. They've got their own staff, but as the home team, we're in charge.”

Dennis wants to tell her he's not “home” anything.

He decides not to.

He is, frankly, a little afraid of her.

Cindy gives him a final once-over, like she's assessing a rescue kitten before releasing it into traffic. “You'll be fine. Just hang out and watch the game.”

Then she leaves him there.

Alone.

In his special chair.

Dennis pulls out his phone and checks his texts.

That lesbian bitch: dude, you left without me???

That lesbian bitch: hot date????

He rolls his eyes.

Huckleberry: no, just had something to do

Huckleberry: chinese in the fridge

That lesbian bitch: dibs on the orange chicken

Dennis straightens in his little medical time-out chair.

Huckleberry: that's MINE

That lesbian bitch: thats what u get for ditching secret lives night

Dennis stares at the screen.

Damn. He'd really wanted that orange chicken.

He locks his phone and looks out over the ice. There's already hockey players out on the ice warming up or doing whatever it is they do before games. Pittsburgh is playing Boston, and the color scheme is confusing. Both teams are black and gold. The Pittsburgh team is wearing black jerseys with golden patches, and Boston white ones with golden patches. His brain already hurts as he tries to keep track of who is who as they zoom around. There are thousands of screaming fans and professional athletes flying past at speeds that feel medically irresponsible.

Fucking Greg.

Should have just let Dennis sleep away medical school in his Ford Fiesta.

Chapter End Notes

idk if that is how they do doctor stuff at hockey games. I play roller derby and that's how we do medics at our games lol. Take it with a grain of salt.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

howdy bitch

Dennis is a little lost.

He's never actually watched a full hockey game before. He knows, conceptually, you hit the puck into the net to score, and whoever scores the most wins. That part feels manageable. But then there are all these penalties that keep getting called.

Slashing. Offsides. Icing, which sounds fake.

The goalie looks like the Michelin Tire guy. People keep using their hands even though that feels illegal in most sports. Everyone is moving so fast Dennis is fairly certain the laws of physics are being bent in real time.

It's confusing as hell.

He probably should have asked how many periods there are.

The first period is about fifteen minutes, he thinks, and it goes by without anyone scoring, which he's not sure is normal or not.. He also keeps getting the teams mixed up.

He decides it's safest not to cheer for anyone because God forbid he accidentally cheers for Boston. He may get scalped or something.

Number 81 from Boston appears to be in charge of... something. He talks the most. He gestures to everyone. He also seems to be the one getting hit the most.

Dennis almost launches out of his chair when #81 gets absolutely checked over the boards and onto the floor right in front of him.

The sound is horrific as he crashes to the ground.

Dennis's hands are already halfway up, muscle memory screaming *neck, spine, concussion-*

-but the guy just pops back up like an inflatable punching clown and hops back over and skates off like nothing happened.

He's smiling.

Smiling.

Dennis stares.

In med school, Dennis joined an intramural ultimate frisbee team once. He'd taken a flying disc to the eyebrow and cried for five full minutes behind a vending machine.

He cannot imagine what is going through Boston Guy's head when he gets body-slammed into reinforced glass and just... grins about it.

Are hockey players okay?

Dennis pulls his borrowed jacket a little tighter. He's sitting in his little taped-off square of responsibility, watching men with knives on their feet hurl themselves at each other for fun.

The third period has about a minute left and Dennis is already day dreaming about going to bed as soon as he gets home, shower be damned, when #81 gets clocked across the face by a rogue puck.

It happens very, very fast.

One second he's upright, scanning the ice. The next, the puck ricochets off a stick, lifts into the air, and-

crack.

The sound carries even over the crowd.

The puck hits him square in the face and #81 goes down hard.

The arena makes a noise Dennis has never heard before. Twenty thousand people inhaling at once.

He's moving before the whistle even finishes blowing.

Someone behind him shouts, "Doc!"

The little gate in the boards is suddenly open wide for him. A staffer's hand presses between his shoulders, urging him forward.

Dennis steps onto the ice and immediately almost eats shit.

The borrowed non-slip shoes squeak, but hold. He's never been ice skating before. He can't imagine doing it now.

Cold air hits his lungs. The ice is brighter up close, almost blinding.

#81 isn't moving much. There's blood around him. Not a ton, but enough.

Dennis fumbles with his borrowed medical bag and borrowed shoes and borrowed jacket and tries to not fall as he reaches the fallen player. He's no longer concerned with eating shit. All he sees is an injured person. Dennis drops to his knees beside him, hands already working the bag open. He puts on a pair of gloves.

"Hey," he says, voice calm in the way it only ever is when things are bad. "Don't try to sit up."

Blue eyes blink up at him, dazed but conscious.

“...You are a wet kitten,” the player mumbles.

Dennis exhales.

“Great. You’re talking. That’s my favorite thing for you to be doing right now. What’s your name?”

“Ilya,” the guy mutters.

“Okay, Ilya. Do you know what city you’re in?”

Ilya is quiet for a second. Dennis pulls a penlight from his pocket and checks his pupils.

They’re blown and huge. They are barely reacting to the light.

Dennis’s stomach drops. He suddenly really wants to know exactly how fast a hockey puck can travel. He takes off the helmet. What was this guy's name? Ilya, right?

“Boston?” Ilya guesses in his thick Russian accent.

Okay. That's bad.

Ilya's jaw is swelling rapidly. He's got a deep laceration under the chin that has bright red blood welling fast.

Dennis presses gauze firmly to the cut, stabilizing his head with his other hand.

"What year is it, Ilya?"

"Two thousand... three?"

Yep. Concussed.

God damn it.

Dennis is sure there are dozens of games where nobody gets seriously hurt. Of course the one time he's in charge, someone takes a puck to the face at Mach Jesus.

“Okay. You’re doing great,” Dennis says, voice steady, hand firm. “Stay still for me.”

He grabs the walkie-talkie, thumb pressing hard on the button.

“I need a stretcher rinkside now. Head trauma. GCS about fourteen. Unequal response. We’re transporting immediately. Please.”

Within seconds, there’s a swarm of people around him. Some are staff, Dennis recognizes the jackets but also two EMTs in full uniform, already moving with efficient calm. The protective gear they can reach its removed- gloves, shin guards, that sort of thing.

Together they fit Ilya with a C-collar, just in case, and transfer him onto the stretcher.

Dennis has a brief, irrational concern about the logistics of pushing a stretcher across ice.

It works fine.

As they wheel him toward the tunnel, the crowd starts cheering.

Dennis blinks.

Maybe because he's alive. Because he moved. Because this means it's bad, but not *the worst*.

The EMTs clearly know their way around the arena, so Dennis just follows as they push through winding concrete hallways.

"Where we going?" one of them asks.

"PTMC," Dennis says automatically. "Radio ahead that Dr. Whitaker is inbound with a head trauma. Adult male, sports injury."

Cindy appears out of nowhere.

Dennis nearly jumps out of his skin. "Holy shit."

"You don't need to stay," she says quickly. "Game's basically over for you. You can go."

“Um. Okay,” Dennis says even though he’d always planned on going. It hadn’t even occurred to him not to.

“I’ll grab his stuff. Do you need anything of his?”

“Wallet, if you can find it,” Dennis says, not breaking stride. “But we need to leave as soon as possible.”

She nods and disappears again.

Dennis briefly imagines her digging through enormous, sweaty hockey duffel bags in search of one man’s wallet and decides that’s not his problem.

They exit through the same side door Dennis came in.

An ambulance is already waiting.

The EMTs load Ilya in with smooth efficiency, movements practiced and fast. The pulse ox is quickly clipped to his finger. Dennis gets a blood pressure cuff on and it starts squeezing.

Ilya groans softly, trying to move.

Dennis is at his side immediately. “Hey. No. Stay still for me, okay?”

Blue eyes flutter, unfocused.

“Wet... kitten,” Ilya mumbles again.

Dennis huffs out a breath that might be a laugh, might be fear bleeding out sideways.

“Yeah,” he says quietly. “Still me.”

Cindy jogs up, slightly out of breath, arms full. She hands everything to one of the EMTs—wallet, keys, phone.

“Here you are. Give us a call when it’s over.”

“You got it,” Dennis says.

The ambulance doors slam shut.

One EMT moves to the front. The other stays in the back with Dennis and Ilya as the vehicle lurches into motion.

Ilya's breathing is getting labored and his eyes drift closed.

Not gasping exactly, but wrong. It's sort of shallow and irregular.

Dennis's head snaps up. "Hit the lights!" he calls toward the front.

Sirens wail to life. Inside the ambulance, the world shrinks to a box of bright white and moving shadows.

Dennis's hands are already working. He finds where they keep the oxygen and pulls out a mask. The EMT apparently has no issue with Dennis getting involved, because he watches as Dennis adjusts the oxygen mask over Ilya's face.

"Hey, Ilya. Stay with me. Open your eyes."

They flutter open, but it looks like it takes a lot of effort. Ilya is really pretty for a professional hockey player. He's got a lot of moles and curly hair that looks good even though he'd just been wearing a helmet.

"Can you squeeze my hand?"

There is a weak squeeze. It's good he's still responding. His jersey, which looks expensive, gets fully cut away. He's wearing some kind of chest plate and shoulder pads. Dennis is confused by all the straps, but the EMT makes quick work of them. Probably a good thing—they looked expensive. Now shirtless, it makes it easy for the electrodes to go on Ilya's chest. They insert an IV line.

The EMT reads vitals. "BP's climbing. Heart rate's up."

Yep. Pain and brain irritation will do that.

Dennis leans close, voice low and steady. He uses the tone he uses on terrified kids and dying adults alike.

"You took a hard hit. We're going to my hospital. They're ready for you."

Ilya blinks slowly.

“...game?” he whispers.

“You’re benched,” Dennis says. “Doctor’s orders.”

A faint huff of air that might be a laugh but then his eyes start to drift again.

“Hey. No, no. Stay with me.” Dennis taps his shoulder gently. “Look at me.”

The ambulance swerves through traffic, sirens screaming. Dennis spares a glance at his vitals. Heart rate is 120. His blood pressure is high, too

“Damn it.” Dennis mutters. He leans back over Ilya.

“Hey Ilya. Are you having pain anywhere? What hurts?”

“M’ head.”

“I know. We’re working on it. Anything else?”

“Face.”

Yeah. His chin is bleeding and his jaw is rapidly bruising.

“Yeah. I know, buddy. Is there anyone I can call for you?”

Ilya mutters something. It’s so quiet, Dennis misses it.

"What’s that?"

“Jane. On my phone.”

Huh. Jane must be a girlfriend or something.

“Sure thing.” Dennis says as the ambulance turns into the bay at PTMC. He can see through the door window that Shen is there, gowned up and sipping an iced coffee.

“I’ll call Jane.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Y'ALL my roommate and I went to an ECHL game tonight (minor league hockey) and a puck went over the boards and hit this poor girl in front of us in the head!!! She was bleeding bad, too. I hope she's okay. Also like ten sticks broke mid-play and the refs had to break up like eight fights and we had 3 players in the box at the same time TWICE at one point, including our captain. And then we lost 3-4. It was her first hockey game and I was like "it's not usually like this'. HOW do you blow a fucking 3 shot lead, bears????

But go bears anyway! We'll get them next time.

(being a solar bears fan is a curse.)

here's the newest chapter lol

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

“Hey, Whitaker,” Shen says, sipping his monstrous iced coffee as the EMTs start unloading their patient. “Thought you left.”

Dennis will never understand Shen. He’s way too relaxed to be an emergency room doctor. Honestly, he’s too relaxed to be any kind of doctor. Except maybe a dermatologist or something.

Dennis hops out of the rig, he knees aching in protest. He'd really like to be sitting down, now. But there's a patient in front of him.

“Hi. Yeah, so did I.”

Shen just shrugs, listening as the EMTs give their report as they wheel him in through the ambulance bay.

“Twenty- nine year-old male, hockey player. Took a puck directly to the face at high velocity,” the medic reports. “Confused, disoriented to time and place. Heart rate one-twenty, BP one-sixty over ninety, respirations twenty-two, sat ninety-eight on room air. Jaw swelling, active bleeding from laceration under the chin, controlled with pressure. No other obvious trauma.”

“Any LOC?” Dennis asks the EMT. “Did you ask anyone?”

Dennis had been a little occupied to ask anyone else if the man had gone fully unconscious.

“Teammates say he dropped immediately, unsure if full loss of consciousness but he was slow to respond.”

“Ouch, puck to the face.” Shen commiserates as they escort Ilya to one of the trauma rooms. “Beer league? Is *that* what you do in your spare time, Whitaker? Hockey?”

“No!” Dennis squeaks in a very manly way. He clears his throat. “Um, no. I was doing an old friend a favor by-,”

“Holy shit!” Ellis blurts.

She’s staring at the patient, gloves only half on. She must have heard 'head trauma' over the radio and booked it across the ER to get her hands dirty.

“That’s Ilya fucking Rozanov.”

“Who?” Shen asks, still sipping his coffee. Dennis shoots him a look, and he sets the coffee down.

“Jesus,” Ellis mutters, yanking her gloves on properly. “Let’s transfer. Ready? One, two, three.”

They move Ilya to the bed. He mutters something in Russian. Or at least Dennis hopes it’s Russian and not just concussion babble.

“He’s a hockey player,” Dennis adds.

“Uh, yeah,” Shen says, stethoscope in his ears now, pressing it to Ilya’s chest. “We established that. Puck. Face.”

“Thanks, guys,” Dennis tells the EMTs. “I think there are Gushers in the medic room if you want.”

“Aww, they get Gushers?” Shen complains. “We don’t get Gushers.”

“We don’t get anything.” Dennis mumbles.

”That’s not true. All three of us got student debt. Not as fun as Gushers.”

“You’re all idiots,” Ellis says, shining her penlight into Ilya’s eyes.

Dennis pinches Ilya’s toes. “Can you feel that?”

“*Da*,” Ilya mumbles.

Okay. Good. Dennis knows that one word in Russian. Well that and a bunch of swear words. Ever since leaving his tiny little town, Trinity has made it her mission to culturally educate him. He knows about a dozen different swear words in different languages now. His favorites were the ones in Tagalog

It also helps that he gets sworn at a lot in the ER.

“He’s famous,” Ellis says. “Like, Times Square billboards, makes-a-zillion-dollars famous. Literally the best player in the league.”

“Jane,” Ilya slurs.

“I’ll call her, okay? Don’t worry,” Dennis says.

He digs through the belongings bag, uses Ilya’s thumb to unlock the phone, finds “Jane” in recent contacts, and copies the number into his work phone before tucking everything back.

“CT,” Shen says, straightening. “Rule out skull fracture.”

“It hit his jaw,” Dennis points out.

“X-ray too. He’s very clearly concussed. GCS fourteen?”

“I thought so,” Dennis says. “Can we make it a priority?”

“VIP in my book,” Ellis says. “We should probably call security and let them know. Hockey fans are kinda nuts. If the press gets wind that he’s here, it’ll be a mess.”

“I’m not calling Gloria,” Shen mutters. “Not again. Not after the carrot incident.”

“What carrot-”

Ilya suddenly gags.

“Oop,” Shen says, much too casually.

They roll him onto his side, careful of the C-collar, just in time for him to vomit. Ellis kicks a trash can into place so most of it doesn’t hit the floor.

And only some of it hits Dennis’s shoes.

“Aw, man,” Dennis groans. “Again?”

Fuck his life. That’s three times he’s been puked on in less than 24 hours. That must be a new hospital record or something.

“Shit luck. Ellis agrees. “Hey Lena, can you give us a hand here? We gotta take this guy up to imaging.” she calls out to the hallway. Lena, the charge nurse, flashes her a thumbs up.

“Go change.” Shen tells Dennis and he and Ellis start to secure Ilya to be moved.

“Into *what*? It’s on my shoes.”

“Then wash them in the sink or something. I dunno.”

Greg fucking Treviano. That’s *it*. Dennis is never doing this again. He’d rather help the man move countries and throw out his back then be a team doctor for a professional hockey team any day of the week.

Dennis sighs. “I’m gonna call this ‘Jane’ He was pretty insistent.”

“Is she his emergency contact?”

“I have no idea, Ellis. He asked, I have the number, I’m done asking questions.”

He trudges across the ER in puke-damp shoes. His socks are wet and there’s puke squishing between his toes.

Fantastic.

When get gets to the staff bathroom, he double checks it’s empty before he dials Jane’s number. It rings three times before someone answers.

“Hello?”

Well. That is very clearly a man.

“Hi, I’m looking for Jane.”

Pause.

“Yes?”

“...Are you Jane?”

“That’s me. It’s a...nickname. Only Rozanov calls me that. Why are you calling?”

Okay, then.

“My name is Dr. Dennis Whitaker. I’m calling from Pittsburgh Trauma Medical Center. Mr. Rozanov was injured during a game and brought in.”

“What? Oh my god, is he okay?”

“We’re doing imaging now. He’s concussed. He asked me to call you. Can you come in?”

“Yes. I’m in Cleveland. I can be there in a few hours.”

“We’ll likely keep him overnight. I’ll tell the staff to expect... Jane.”

“*My name is Shane,*” the man says, trying very hard to sound calm. “*Inside joke.*”

“Alright, Shane. Your friend puked on my shoes.”

“*Uh...Sorry?*”

“Make him apologize later. Call this number if you have questions.”

Dennis hangs up first.

Was that bitchy?

Yes.

But he missed orange chicken, his show, and has been puked on three times. He’s earned a little bitchy. In fact, Dennis would go so far as to say he’s earned a *lot* fucking bitchy.

He checks the drive time from Cleveland. His phone says it's just over two hours.

“See you soon, Jane,” he mutters to the empty urinals.

Then he takes off his shoes and starts washing them in the break room sink.

Chapter End Notes

so technically HIPPA would keep Dennis from calling 'Jane' but take it with a grain of salt lol. he's tired.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

howdy howdy i hope yinz (new word! Thank you commenter who is a Pittsburgh local and can tell me about such things) are having a good day. I am very much not because I forgot to due a huge city budget project and I had to miss out of hanging out with my roommate and her mom at a theme park. I am very disappointed in myself.

anyway my brain is fried so im taking a break from the city budget to post this chapter. Then back into the city budget. Who spends THAT much on fucking crosswalk paint? 175\$ a can??? Not on my watch. Take your ass to the hardware store down the street. chop chop.

also I asked my nurse friend Laura to help me out with all the medical stuff this chapter and it's probably like... 80% accurate. Thanks Laura! :D

happy reading!

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

Dennis can't salvage the socks.

He tries. God, he tries. But there's no coming back from that. Concussion puke is the worst kind of puke.

He tosses them in the trash and slides his bare feet back into his still-damp sneakers. It's unpleasant to say the least.

Okay. Game plan. Maybe he can just... sneak out.

He starts mapping the route home in his head. Would the buses even be running this late? Maybe he could call Trinity and see if she'd pick him up.

Although knowing her, she's probably half a bottle of wine in by now.

They were supposed to *both* be half a bottle of wine in by now.

Damn it.

He leaves the relative safety of the bathroom and slinks back toward the nurses' station. Ilya is gone. So are Ellis and Lena.

They must be at CT.

Good. Fine. Excellent. Not his problem for five whole minutes.

Marisol, one of the night shift nurses, looks up as he approaches.

"Hey, Dr. Whitaker, before you go--"

“No!” Dennis blurts.

She blinks at him.

He immediately deflates. “Sorry. I mean- please. No more cases. I just want to go home.”

He doesn’t quite succeed at hiding how desperate he sounds.

“I just need you to sign a few forms about bringing the ambulance here instead of UPMC Mercy.”

Dennis frowns. “What do you mean?”

“UPMC Mercy is closer to the arena,” she explains gently. “And it’s a Level One trauma center. You didn’t need to bring him here just because you work here.”

Oh.

Oh, she is so very right.

It's only a few forms here, but he can already imagine the paperwork the Penguins organization is going to drown him in.

"Can it wait until tomorrow?" he asks, checking his watch. It's nearly midnight. He's back on at eight am.

"It'll be worse if you wait," she says, already handing him a tablet.

The forms are open. All he has to do is sign.

Dennis sighs and slumps into one of the chairs against the wall. He signs with the tip of his finger without reading a word. He might as well be signing away his firstborn.

Whatever. With the amount of hours that he's working, he's probably killed off all of his viable semen anyway.

He hands the tablet back to Marisol and starts calculating the cost of a late-night Uber home.

Greg is absolutely paying for it.

The radio receiver crackles sharply across the nurses' station.

"PTMC, this is Engine 41. Copy."

Dennis freezes mid-step.

Marisol's expression shifts. She picks up the radio.

"Engine 41, this is PTMC. Go ahead."

"PTMC, be advised, we are on scene at a multi-unit residential structure fire, Wood and Penn. We have approximately ten to fourteen patients. Repeat, ten to fourteen. Mixed acuity."

Dennis feels his spine straighten automatically.

Marisol's voice stays steady. "Copy ten to fourteen. Go ahead with patient breakdown."

“Affirmative. We currently have-” static crackles briefly “-three priority one patients. Severe smoke inhalation, altered mental status. One with significant facial and upper airway burns. Two priority twos with partial-thickness burns approximately twenty to thirty percent total body surface area. Remaining patients priority three - smoke exposure, minor burns, anxiety-related dyspnea.”

The voice on the other end pauses. Dennis can clearly hear someone shouting in the background.

“Requesting full trauma activation and burn team notification. We will be transporting in waves. First units departing scene in approximately three minutes. ETA five.”

Marisol doesn't hesitate. “Copy full trauma activation. Burn team notified. We'll be ready. PTMC out.”

Dennis feels his stomach drop. Airway burns are unpredictable. Smoke inhalation can cause people to crash fast. There's the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Cyanide exposure. Fluid resuscitation. Intubations.

It's going to be bad.

Marisol looks at him.

“Go home,” she says firmly.

Dennis glances toward the trauma bays. Then toward the exit.

Then back again.

Sirens are already growing louder outside.

He sighs.

And reaches for a pair of gloves.

The first stretcher bursts through the ambulance doors less than four minutes later.

Dennis doesn't even have time to change into scrubs. He's still wearing the borrowed arena jacket.

He is also still not wearing socks.

Fantastic. Love that for him.

“What do we got?” he asks, slinging his borrowed stethoscope around his neck as they wheel the patient into the first open trauma bay.

He appears to be in his mid-thirties. He’s got soot smeared across his face like war paint and he’s coughing hard enough it sounds like he’s tearing himself apart.

“Priority one!” the paramedic calls. “Pulled from second floor bedroom. Prolonged smoke exposure. Increasing hoarseness. Stridor developing.”

Stridor.

Which is like wheezing, except worse. Much worse. Especially when it’s coming from a guy who looks like he lost a fistfight with a charcoal grill.

They transfer him to the trauma bed. The man tries to sit up immediately, clawing at the oxygen mask.

“I can’t- I can’t breathe-”

“You can,” Dennis says, putting his hands on the guy;s shoulders to try and keep him still.
“You are breathing. We’re helping.”

His voice is already raspy and his lips are tinged gray.

Ellis isn’t here yet, but Shen pops out of nowhere and shines a light into the guy’s mouth.
“Soot in the airway.”

Shen makes eye contact with Dennis. “We’re intubating early.”

Right. Because with inhalation injuries, you intubate before the airway swells shut.

Once it swells?

Game over.

Dennis moves automatically to the head of the bed. Respiratory starts bagging with high-flow oxygen.

“Ketamine. Rocuronium,” Shen orders.

Marisol appears with the meds like a very competent fairy godmother and pushes them.

The patient’s struggling slows. His jaw relaxes.

Dennis picks up the laryngoscope and he goes in. It’s bad. The airway is angry red, the tissue already puffing up.

“Visual?” Shen asks.

“Edematous,” Dennis mutters. “I can’t see cords yet. Suction.”

Suction slides in, pulling out black-tinged secretions.

The swelling is worse than it should be this fast.

He adjusts and repositions.

There!

For half a second, he sees a glimpse of vocal cords. He advances the tube.

“Hold on-” Shen says.

The oxygen saturation monitor beeps.

92%

“Bag him,” Shen says.

Respiratory squeezes, but the chest doesn’t rise well.

Dennis frowns.

“Capnography?”

But there’s no color change. No waveform.

“Tube’s in the esophagus,” Shen says calmly.

Shit.

Dennis pulls it immediately. The guy’s sat drops to 88%.

“Bag harder,” Shen orders.

The patient’s neck is visibly swelling now, the airway closing like a fist.

Stridor turns into nothing.

Which is worse. Dennis would very much like the stridor back now. Please.

“Second attempt,” Shen says, stepping in.

Dennis moves aside, heart pounding. He’s never fucked up an airway like this before.

Shen goes in.

“Can’t see,” he mutters. “It’s collapsing.”

The sat drops again. This time to 82%.

His chest barely rises with the bag.

“Cric kit,” Shen says quietly, nodding at Marisol.

That’s the point where you cut the neck.

Dennis feels cold all over.

They position themselves and clean as best they can. Shen palpates landmarks like he's locating the world's most inconvenient button.

"Thyroid cartilage... cricoid membrane..." he mutters under his breath.

74%.

"Let's do it."

Shen takes the scalpel from Marisol.

The incision is quick and clean. Blood wells immediately.

Dennis hands him the trach hook.

Shen punctures the membrane. There's a horrible, wet hiss as trapped air escapes.

They slide the tube in and Respiratory connects the bag and squeezes.

Dennis stares at the man's chest.

Please. Please. Please.

The chest rises and the monitor climbs.

76... 81... 88... 94%.

Dennis hadn't realized he'd stopped breathing too. He sucks in a deep breath, feeling dizzy.

Shen steps back, sweat at his temple but expression completely neutral, like he just buttered toast instead of cut into someone's neck.

“Secure it. ABGs. Burn team upstairs. He’s ICU.”

The patient is stable, at least for now.

Dennis looks down at his gloved hands.

They’re shaking.

That had been thirty seconds from disaster. And it would have been his fucking fault.

Behind them, another stretcher is already being wheeled in.

“Second priority one!” someone calls.

Dennis closes his eyes for exactly one second.

No socks. Borrowed jacket. Fire victims stacking up. And no fucking orange chicken waiting for him at home.

Cool. Cool cool cool.

He opens his eyes.

“Alright,” he says, voice steady again. “Who’s next?”

Chapter End Notes

whump there it is :)

also my nurse friend said that there's no WAY that dennis would be permitted to work after how many hours he'd just worked and how he came in (with Ilya). There'd be too much paperwork lol.

so for 'duty hours' (she said its called something else now but I can't recall what she said they were) drs are generally capped at 80 hours per week with shifts capped at 24 consecutive hours plus up to 4 hours for transition/educational activities. Fully licensed attending physicians (like Shen) often work 40-60+ hours but residents (like Dennis) must have at least one day off in seven. The more you know!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

this chapter goes out to apple-mango juice i once had at a Cole's in Australia back in 2019. I have been chasing that high ever since and have been trying to recreate the feeling with drugs and alcohol.

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

Dennis's knees are shaking.

He doesn't get shaky like this unless one of two things has happened:

1. mind-blowing sex, or
2. that one time Trinity and Mel dragged him to hot yoga.

To be clear, hot yoga was worse. He shook. He vomited. He briefly saw God and God was disappointed in him.

He can proudly say he has never thrown up after sex. Not even during the many, many deeply regrettable encounters that come with being sixteen and gay in the middle of nowhere Nebraska. Bad sex and rural, religious repression go together like peanut butter and jelly.

They've treated most of the fire victims now.

Three of them died.

Including the man whose intubation Dennis screwed up.

He isn't afraid of death. He's not naïve about it and he certainly doesn't romanticize it.

He's just *so* fucking tired of it.

He lowers himself carefully into the chair by the nurse's station. It's the same chair where, ninety minutes ago, he'd been signing forms like he was trading away his firstborn. It feels like that happened in another lifetime.

Someone presses a juice box into his hand.

He stares at it.

There's a cartoon cat on the front wearing sunglasses like it drives a convertible.

He looks up. Marisol smiles at him.

“Told you,” she says gently. “You should’ve gone home.”

“I should’ve listened,” he groans.

It’s been ninety minutes. Not a shift. Not a day. An hour and a half of nonstop trauma and smoke and blood and alarms.

It feels like ninety years.

He punctures the juice box and takes a sip. It's apple-mango.

Honestly? It’s incredible. He should figure out where they source these from and bulk order a crate or two. Maybe he can find them at Costco or something.

“Can I go home *now*?” he asks.

“Give yourself a few minutes,” Marisol says. “Then you can drive.”

“I rode in the ambulance, remember?” Dennis says. “I’ll Uber. Or hitchhike. Or join a traveling circus. Whatever’s fastest.”

He drains the juice in one aggressive gulp and tosses it in the trash.

Then he thinks about Greg fucking Treviano, who is probably asleep, blissfully unaware that Dennis has had the worst ninety minutes of his year, and irritation flares hot in his chest.

Screw Greg.

Dennis doesn’t owe him anything. Not anymore. Not at this rate.

He pulls out his phone and opens the Uber app, ready to financially punish himself for existing, when it starts ringing.

Trinity.

He sighs and answers. “Hey.”

“Hey,” she says, slurring a little. “Quick question. Why the fuck did I just see you on ESPN?”

“The fuck?”

“ESPN, dipstick. The sports channel.”

“I know what ESPN is.”

“You were on the ice at the Penguins game! That’s what you skipped Secret Lives night for? I thought you had a date!”

“I never said I had a date,” Dennis mutters.

“Shut up. You treated Ilya fucking Rozanov. I would pay money to touch that man’s eyebrows. You held his whole face in your hands. The group chat is losing its mind. Check your messages.”

Dennis pulls the phone away and opens the group chat.

GIRLS ONLY!!!!

thatlesbianbitch: did I just see huckleberry on TV???

abbottsdomme: ????

Melifianct: it's almost midnight. mercy i ask of you

Melifianct:I have my fuzzy socks on. no texts after fuzzy sock time!!!

Abbott'sdomme: who changed my contact name to this????

thatlesbianbitch: chill samira we all know you and jack are fucking

Abbott'sdomme: !!!!

Tiktoktori: what is this about dennis on tv

thatlesbianbitch: do none of you watch hockey

Tiktoktori: no

Abbott'sdomme: no

Melifianct: becca likes football better

thatlesbianbitch: turn on espn

Tiktoktori: i don't have cable

thatlesbianbitch: youtube dot com slash something something rozanov puck

Abbott'sdomme: oh my god that is dennis

Tiktotori: is that the russian cologne ad guy?? he has like a 48 pack. jesus

Melifianct: he is very pretty

thatlesbianbitch: since when does dennis play doctor for the penguins

thatlesbianbitch: @huckleberry

Tiktotori: @huckleberry

Abbott'sdomme: @huckleberry

Melifianct: @huckleberry but no pressure though!!!! :-)

Dennis closes his eyes briefly.

He puts the phone back to his ear. "Do I look stupid?"

"Nah," Trinity says. "*You look like you always do.*"

"That's not comforting."

"Some of the comments are hilarious."

“Please don’t read them out loud. I just want to go home.”

“I’m drunk, I can’t pick you up.”

“I figured. I’m getting an uber”

“How did you even end up doing that? Doc for the Penguins?”

“Favor for a friend from med school,” Dennis says. “Debt repaid. I’m officially retired from professional sports medicine. Effective immediately.”

He glances up and freezes.

There’s a man at the counter. He’s huge. Six-two, easy two hundred pounds of athletic bulk. He’s got on dark sunglasses even though he’s indoors and a baseball cap pulled low.

It’s about subtle as a brick to the face.

“Can I help you?” Dennis asks, exhausted.

The man shifts, hands in his hoodie pockets.

“I’m-,” he starts to say.

The voice is familiar. He sounds the same in person as he did over the phone. Has it been two hours already?

“Shane,” Dennis says, pushing himself upright on still-unsteady legs.

“Shane?!” Trinity screeches in his ear. *“Shane who? Is there another hockey player?!”*

Dennis hangs up mid-squawk and shoves his phone into his pocket.

He straightens, summoning Doctor Mode 2.0.

“I’m Dr. Whitaker,” he says evenly, extending a hand. “We spoke on the phone.”

Compared to this guy, Dennis is dwarfed. He's not that out of shape, he and Mel go to the gym together as often as they can, But this man looks like he was carved out of marble and fed protein shakes by woodland nymphs. The guy shakes Dennis's hand firmly.

"Follow me," Dennis says, grabbing a tablet from the counter and leading him toward one of the family consult rooms.

The sunglasses don't come off until the door shuts behind them.

"Is there anything you can tell me?" Shane asks.

He pulls up Ilya's chart as a tiny, belated alarm bell goes off in his head.

He called Shane.

Without technically confirming-

Shit.

He scrolls quickly to emergency contacts.

Emergency Contact: Shane Hollander

Secondary Contacts: Yuna Hollander; David Hollander

Next of Kin: Shane Hollander

Dennis exhales in visible relief.

“Oh, good,” he says. “You’re his next of kin. I was about to get myself fired.”

Shane blinks at him. “You called me.”

“Yes, and in hindsight I probably should’ve confirmed you were legally allowed to receive information before doing that,” Dennis says. “He kept asking for- well. He said ‘Jane.’ Which I’m assuming was you.”

Shane shrugs. “I won’t tell if you won’t.”

Dennis points at him. “Excellent. Love to see it. Wait, *is* your last name Hollander?”

“Yes.”

“Fantastic. Please sit. My blood pressure just stabilized.”

They both sit down. He scrolls through the tablet, reading the notes from his chart that Ellis must have done.

“Are you his doctor?”

“One of them. I was the team doctor tonight for the Penguins. Your...” he looks up. Shane has gone very still. He looks a little freaked out.

Dating. They have to be dating.

There’s no reason why Ilya would have Shane listed as his emergency contact. His secondary contracts must be related to Shane, too. But Ilya is a professional hockey player. As far as Dennis knows, there’s no gay players in the NHL.

Well, there was that one guy. Dennis doesn’t know his name or team, but Trinity had sent him clips of the player and his boyfriend kissing on the ice. The poor man must be freaking out over their relationship getting revealed.

“Ilya,” he says instead of anything loaded. “Took a puck directly to the jaw. I evaluated him on the ice and made the call to bring him here.”

Dennis deliberately looks back down at the chart.

“CT and X-ray are clear. No fractures. Mild concussion. Needed a few stitches in his chin. His jaw’s going to be sore as hell, but nothing’s broken.”

“He doesn’t need surgery or anything?”

“Nope.” Dennis says easily. ““We’re admitting him overnight for observation. Standard concussion protocol. We’ve given him meds for pain and swelling. He’ll be groggy.”

Shane nods, slumping in his seat. He must have driven here from Cleveland without stopping. What thoughts must have been running through his head? All Dennis said was that Ilya was in the hospital and had asked for him.

“He’ll need someone to keep an eye on him for a few days,” Dennis adds. “Do you live in Ohio?”

Shane rubs a hand over his jaw. “No. I was there for a game. I live in Montreal.”

Dennis blinks. “Oh. Do you play hockey too?” he asks before he can stop himself.

Shane just looks at him.

There’s a long, awkward pause.

“Yes,” Shane says carefully. “I do.”

Dennis squints at him.

“Oh my god,” he says slowly. “You’re not just, like... recreationally jacked.”

Shane’s mouth finally tilts upward.

“I play for Montreal. Professional hockey.”

Dennis stares.

“Okay,” he says faintly. “That feels like information I should have known. Can you tell I don’t really know anything about hockey?”

“Aren’t you the team doctor for the Penguins?” Shane asks, and there’s no accusation in it. Just curiosity and a little bit of confusion.

“I was a substitute,” Dennis says immediately, dragging a hand through his hair. “Their actual team doctor got stuck out of town. I’m college buddies with the physio. This was my first shift with them and someone immediately got concussed. That feels on-brand for my life.”

He huffs out a tired laugh. “I don’t have the best luck.”

Shane nods slowly. “Sounds familiar. I tripped during a breakaway three years ago. Completely ate it. No contact, either. Just gravity. ESPN still replays it.”

Dennis points at him. “See? That’s exactly why I avoid sports knowledge. Plausible deniability.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not how that works.”

“I’m choosing to believe it is.”

There’s a beat of quiet. Shane’s gaze drops to Dennis’s sneakers, recalling their phone conversation about getting puked on.

The sneakers are, objectively, tragic. Even if Dennis had been wearing socks and they weren't damp. He feels a little embarrassed by them, especially the hole by the big toe. Everything Shane is wearing is plain, but probably expensive. Dennis has never felt self-conscious about his clothing before. Maybe it was just because he was with someone who is a professional athlete. A very good looking professional athlete.

“Sorry Ilya puked on you,” Shane says.

“Better puking than dead,” Dennis replies automatically. “Hey, that’s on a motivational poster somewhere. Got to be, right?”

That earns him a small, real smile.

Dennis checks the tablet again. Ilya’s officially admitted and has a room assigned.

He glances at the clock. It’s definitely past visiting hours.

He glances back at Shane's red-rimmed eyes and bites his lower lip.

He's already going to get lectured for staying past shift limits. Might as well commit.

"Ah, what the hell," he says. "We're technically past visiting hours, so just promise you'll be quiet and not, like, start a press conference. I'll take you up."

Shane straightens. "He's not going to have a roommate, is he?"

Dennis studies him for half a second.

Right. Two NHL players, first of all. Plus the whole secret dating thing. They are also, presumably, not interested in becoming a Reddit thread.

He checks the chart again. "It's a double room, but the other bed's empty. I can flag it to keep it that way. Maybe move him to a quieter floor in the morning."

Shane exhales. "Thank you."

“Of course.” Dennis locks the tablet and stands. “Any questions before we go?”

“No. Thank you.”

“Great,” Dennis says. “Let’s go visit a hockey player.”

Chapter End Notes

thatlesbianbitch- trinity

Tiktoktori- victoria

Abbott’sdomme: samira

Melifianct: mel

in case you needed to know lol.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

i was gonna finish this out but then cestdaveee said something in the comments and now I gotta keep it going. This was gonna be a one-shot.

I don't have anything to say in this note lol. i hope you all are having a good day. and if you're not I hope it gets better. If you're reading this at 3am instead of sleeping, go to bed ya goblin.

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

Even though he's exhausted enough to fall asleep standing up, Dennis knows these hallways by muscle memory alone. He could probably navigate this hospital blindfolded.

Possibly while concussed.

He leads Shane wordlessly through the maze of corridors, badge-swipes them through two secured doors, and finally steps into the elevator.

The ride up is painfully quiet.

The hallway lights on Ilya's floor are dimmed for night shift. It's soft and low, almost peaceful. The kind of lighting that lies and pretends hospitals aren't scary places to be a patient.

Janelle is at the nurse's station. She's wearing her purple glasses chain. That should be a good sign, right?

God, h e hopes so.

Dennis spots her immediately and almost considers turning around.

She looks up.

“Heyyyyyy, Janelle,” he says, attempting charm.

She squints at him suspiciously.

Then at Shane.

Then back at Dennis.

“Dennis,” she says slowly, in a tone that suggests she has already decided this is nonsense.

“Please?” he says immediately, deploying the full arsenal: wide eyes, softened voice and the classic faint lower-lip pout.

He knows he must look like a Victorian orphan asking for porridge.

Janelle sighs and leans back in her chair. The cheap hydraulic mechanism squeaks in protest.

“Pretty please?” Dennis adds.

She rolls her eyes and takes off her glasses, letting them hang from the beaded chain around her neck like she’s about to deliver a sermon.

Finally, after what feels like ages, she points at Shane.

“You. Stay out of the way and stay quiet. You cause a scene, you’re out.”

“Yes ma’am,” Shane says instantly straightening from his slouch.

Janelle pivots her finger toward Dennis.

Now, Janelle is approximately four foot nothing and in her mid-sixties. She's rail thin with bony wrists and ankles

She is also the most terrifying person Dennis has ever met.

If forced to choose between a charging bear and Janelle in a bad mood, Dennis would pick the fucking bear any day of the week.

“This is the last time,” she says. “You hear me? You owe me jam.”

“Thank you!” Dennis beams.

He gestures for Shane to follow him down the hallway.

“Jam?” Shane asks under his breath.

Dennis sighs dramatically. “I make my own. Grew up on a farm in the middle of nowhere Nebraska. My mom and I canned every summer. Her recipe won Best in Show at the county fair for twelve years straight.”

Shane raises an eyebrow curiously.

“I brought one jar in for Secret Santa,” Dennis continues darkly. “Now any time I need a favor, I have to barter like we live in a medieval village.”

“Huh,” Shane says. “Must be good.”

“It is good,” Dennis insists. “Lingonberry. One time I baked it into homemade kolaches. My roommate nearly bit my finger off. If you’re around tomorrow morning, I’ll bring you a jar.”

He smiles at the memory of it. It had been this past Christmas.

They weren’t going to do anything for the holidays. Trinity didn’t really celebrate. And Dennis...

Well.

Being queer in rural Nebraska wasn't illegal or anything. It just wasn't... welcome. Not even being a doctor made up for *that*.

When he'd suggested flying home for a few days that year, his mom had gently suggested he stay near the hospital. In case he was needed.

That one had stung.

His parents had sacrificed a lot to get him where he was, but it was more like they had done it to get them out of their hair. They had three other sons who had wives and kids- those were the sons they could put in the Christmas cards.

Oh, Dennis? He's in the big city. He's very busy saving lives with his job, you know. He won't be able to make it for Christmas this year.

Never mind that he hadn't made it home for Christmas since he'd left for college. But this was the first time he'd been able to request the time off. He might not get it, but he could ask. He missed them, even if they didn't miss him.

Trinity had responded by aggressively decorating their apartment with dollar-store tinsel and off-brand ornaments. They'd baked pastries and had eggnog. And Christmas Eve, which they had both miraculously gotten off, they'd fallen asleep on the couch watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

It had been one of the best Christmases Dennis had ever had.

“Well,” Shane says, pulling him back to the present, “Thank you, but I don’t eat added sugar. Performance diet.”

Dennis looks him up and down. Even in the oversized hoodie, Dennis makes out the lines of his muscles.

“Yes,” he says. “You absolutely do not.”

Shane snorts faintly and they reach Ilya’s room.

The door is cracked open a bit, but the shades over the windows are drawn. The room is dark from what he can tell.

Dennis peeks inside first. There’s one occupied bed by the window and the other is empty.

Good.

He steps in and flips on the lights, then quickly dims them to a soft glow.

They approach the bed.

Ilya is asleep. A clean line of stitches curves under his chin. His jaw is already blooming purple. There's swelling, but not as bad as Dennis had feared.

Monitors hum steadily. His vitals look normal- about as normal as Dennis would expect someone would have after getting a concussion.

Behind him, Shane inhales sharply.

Dennis glances back at the sound.

The look on Shane's face-

It's raw.

It's not *fear* exactly. Or even panic. It's hard to put a word to it, really. Dennis can tell that it's quiet and heavy.

Dennis looks away immediately and gestures toward the chair. "You can use that. I'll grab you a blanket."

Shane swallows, his Adam's apple bobbing and he nods.

Dennis slips out of the room, leaving the door slightly ajar.

The hallway is quiet and blissfully empty. He finds the blanket warmer, pulls out one of the oversized heated blankets, and heads back.

He nudges the door open softly.

Shane is leaning over the bed. One hand cups Ilya's face gently, thumb brushing along his cheek.

Dennis can't tell if Ilya is awake.

Then Shane bends down and presses a soft kiss to Ilya's forehead. His lips linger there.

It's intimate in a way that makes Dennis feel like he's walked into a chapel mid-ceremony.

Oh.

Oh.

This isn't casual or new. This isn't just a fling they're nervously hiding.

This is love.

The real, terrifying, marrow-deep kind.

Dennis suddenly becomes very aware that he is intruding on something sacred and very, *very* private.

This isn't just a bedside visit.

He backs out quietly, blanket still in his hands, and pulls the door almost closed. He gives them a few seconds- long enough to pretend he didn't see anything- then knocks gently on the frame before stepping back in.

Shane has already moved away from the bed.

His hands are shoved into his hoodie pockets like he's been caught shoplifting.

Dennis pretends not to notice.

"Here," he says, offering the warm blanket.

Shane takes it. "Thanks."

"The nurses come by every four hours for vitals," Dennis says, slipping back into professional mode. "They'll also come in if any alarms go off. Otherwise, you'll be alone."

Shane nods.

Dennis points to the call button. “That’s for nurses. Bathroom’s down the hall, first door on the right. Visiting hours technically start at nine, so just... lie low until then. If someone tells you to leave, just leave. Don’t argue.”

A faint huff. “I won’t.”

Shane looks wrung out. The adrenaline that got him here from Cleveland must have burned off, leaving only exhaustion behind. Dennis has been there before.

“Try to get some rest,” Dennis adds more gently.

Shane meets his eyes.

There’s gratitude there. And something else. Relief, maybe?

“Thank you,” he says.

Dennis offers his hand out of habit. Shane shakes it. The grip is still strong, but not as rigid as before. There’s less fear in it.

“Of course.”

Dennis slips out quietly, easing the door closed behind him.

Janelle watches him approach the nurse’s station with a stern expression.

“Don’t forget the jam,” she calls after him as he heads toward the elevator.

Dennis presses the call button.

“For you Janelle?” he says over his shoulder. “Never.”

Dennis finally gets home just past 2:30 a.m.

Everything hurts.

His knees. His shoulders. The base of his skull. Even his fingers ache when he fumbles with the lock. For a fleeting second he wonders if he's coming down with something, but no. This is just the particular full-body misery of a shift that refused to end.

He kicks his shoes off just inside the door, not even pretending to line them up on the rack.

He really needs new ones. Maybe he'll start squirreling away a few dimes a month until he has enough for a thrift-store pair.

The apartment is dark except for a single lamp in the corner of the living room.

Trinity is passed out on the couch, curled around the soft pink blanket he'd given her for her birthday. One arm is flung dramatically over her head. There are empty Chinese takeout containers on the coffee table and a half-empty bottle of wine tipped sideways but miraculously not spilled.

Dennis exhales, long and tired.

He gathers the containers first, stacking them carefully so they don't clatter, and pads to the kitchen to toss them. The quiet domesticity of it all feels almost surreal after the hospital.

He peels off his jacket next.

The Penguins jacket!

He stares at it for a second.

Right.

He has absolutely no idea how he's going to return that to the Pittsburgh Penguins without it being weird. They still have his shitty coat, too. Damn.

Future Dennis problem.

The rest of his clothes go into the hamper in a heap. He pulls out old gray sweatpants and an oversized T-shirt that's been washed so many times it feels like air and stumbles into the bathroom.

The shower is, without exaggeration, one of the top five showers of his life.

The water is scorching in the way that borders on irresponsible for his skin and water bill. Steam fills the small bathroom until the mirror disappears entirely. The water pounds against his aching shoulders, runs down his spine, loosening muscles he didn't realize were clenched. Or could clench.

He leans his forehead against the cool tile and nearly falls asleep standing up.

For a moment he debates staying there forever.

Sleeping in his own bed, though, wins out.

Eventually, he towels off, drags on his clean clothes, and shuffles back into the living room.

The blanket has slid off Trinity and pooled on the floor. He bends, scoops it up, and drapes it back over her carefully. He adjusts her pillow, tilting it just slightly so she won't wake up with a crick in her neck.

She makes a faint disgruntled noise but doesn't wake.

He grabs the wine bottle, takes a few unapologetic swigs straight from it, and screws the cap back on.

A cap. Not a cork.

They are *not* that kind of fancy household.

He opens the fridge to put it away-

-and freezes.

There's a takeout container inside with his name written across the lid in black Sharpie.

Dennis.

He blinks at it.

Slowly, he opens it.

It's orange chicken.

He stares down at it in disbelief.

“Oh, you bitch,” he whispers, awed.

She hadn't eaten it.

He leans against the counter and eats it cold straight from the container with a fork. It's sticky and sour. The sauce is thick and sugary and *perfect*.

It is exactly what he needs.

He finishes every last piece, tosses the container, washes the fork, and flicks off the kitchen light.

Back in the living room, he turns off the lamp. The apartment falls into soft darkness.

“Goodnight, Trinity,” he murmurs to her sleeping form.

She doesn't stir.

Dennis pads down the hallway, body heavy and finally, finally ready to give in.

He knows that right now Shane is probably trying to sleep in a plastic hospital chair. There will be the sounds of monitoring humming and machines breathing.

Here, the only sound is the refrigerator cycling on.

He crawls into his own bed.

Sleep takes him immediately.

"Dennis."

Please, Dad.

“Dennis.”

Please. Just look at me. Why won't you look at me—

“Dennis!”

“Gah!”

He bolts upright in bed, heart slamming against his ribs like it's trying to escape.

He's not sixteen.

He's not standing in the kitchen.

He's in his apartment.

Trinity is leaning over him like a sleep-paralysis demon. She's in her Cookie Monster pajama pants and a black, boxy tank top.

Dennis drags a hand down his face. It comes away damp.

Great. So that's new. Just when he'd thought he'd be too busy to think about his dad. Great. Future him problem.

He squints at the alarm clock.

It reads 6:00 a.m. That's a full hour before he needs to be conscious.

"Trin-" he groans, voice wrecked with sleep. "It's so early."

He flops backward dramatically. The bed squeaks in protest.

"I saved your chicken," she announces proudly.

His eyes stay closed.

“I saw. Thank you.”

A beat.

“Also,” she adds.

He can hear the smirk.

“Oh God,” he mutters into his pillow. “What now?”

“Oh nothing,” she drawls. “Just that you’re trending on Twitter.”

Chapter End Notes

the chapter has been brought to you by my own award-winning jam of which I am required to bring to any and all social events on pain of death

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

i'm calling it twitter. if elon musk can deadname his child, i can deadname his website

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

Dennis opens one eye.

“...I’m sorry?”

Because she’s kidding. She must be kidding.

Right?

Trinity straightens, crossing her arms with immense satisfaction. “Trending. On Twitter.”

It feels like he’s been dunked in an ice bath and then hurled out into traffic to fend for himself

“I don’t even have Twitter.”

“That has literally never stopped the internet before.”

He groans and drags the pillow over his face. “Why would I be trending? I didn’t kill anyone.”

“Wow,” Trinity says. “Incredible first guess. “What’s the next, your sex tape leaked?”

He peels the pillow down just enough to glare at her. “Trinity.”

She hops onto the edge of his bed, nearly launching him off the other side as she does so.

“There’s video,” she says, wiggling her eyebrows.

His stomach drops. He’s never filmed a sex tape before but what if...

“Video of what.”

“You,” she sings.

Dennis sits up again, slower this time.

“What. Video.”

“Dude, I told you I saw you on ESPN after Ilya Rozanov got hurt.”

His brain tries to catch up.

Thousands of people going quiet at once, trying to see if Ilya would be getting back up. The sound of footsteps on ice as he rushed to the unmoving man’s side. The way he’d been relieved with Ilya had opened his concussed eyes, either side of his hands around Ilya’s face.

“Oh no,” he breathes.

“Oh yes,” Trinity counters, already unlocking her phone. “It’s all over. TikTok too, but Twitter’s worse. Or better. Depending on how you feel about being called-” she squints at her screen, “-‘Pretty Twink Doctor.’”

Dennis makes a strangled noise. This can't be happening right now. He can't be trending as the Pretty Twink Doctor. He won't be able to survive this. He just won't. This is worse than the sex tape thing.

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No. ”

She turns the phone toward him.

It's footage from just after Ilya got hit, clearly taken from the stands. It's weirdly zoomed in, so much that as it tracks across the rink to film Ilya unmoving on the ice it makes Dennis's head hurt a little.

There he is, running across the ice not looking even half as unstable as he'd felt with the med bag. The camera zooms in as best it can on his face.

He watches himself in silent horror as he snaps on gloves and takes control of the situation on the ice like he actually knows what he's doing.

Which he does.

But still.

The caption reads:

“Pens team doc going making me go feral!!!!!!”

Dennis drops back onto his mattress. He'd kind of expected that he may end up the internet after he read about the girls seeing him on ESPN, but like.... In relation to Ilya. Not as his own person.

“I hate the internet.”

Trinity is cackling now, unable to contain herself.

“Dennis, there are edits.”

“Edits?” he croaks uselessly

“With music.” she giggles, barely able to breathe.

He stares at the ceiling.

“I save one professional athlete and suddenly I’m internet thirst bait?! This is ridiculous!”

“Oh, it’s not just the saving,” she says sweetly. “It’s the whole ‘sickly Victorian child’ thing. Very popular right now. Have you seen those Korean actors now? You’re chic!”

He covers his face with both hands.

“I need to move. Change my name. Or possibly fake my death.”

“You’d trend harder.”

A miserable groan leaves his lips. This was a disaster.

“Does the hospital know?” he asks weakly.

“Probably? But you’re not doing anything wrong. You just look...” She gestures vaguely.
“Competent. And kind of scary. In a hot way.”

He makes another pained noise.

She pats his knee.

“Congratulations, Dr. Twink.”

He turns his head slowly.

“If you ever call me that again, I will tell everyone about the time you cried during a dog food commercial.”

Her smile drops. “You wouldn’t.”

“I’m trending. I’m sure I can make an account and have hundreds of people-,”

“Uncle! Uncle!” Trinity says, standing quickly with her hands up in truce. “I made breakfast. Come eat. I cannot wait to have you explain this to Robby.”

Dennis moans. Oh god. Robby. Robby, his boss who he probably should have informed that he was working temporarily as the team doctor for the Penguins.

“Let me see.” he says unhappily. He should at least know what he’s getting into. Trinity opens up Twitter and passes her phone over.

Ilya’sWife @ Oosiepoopisez

Omg who is that??? That’s not their usual guy #penguinsdoc #prettytwinkdoctor

trashmunchies @ hagridsbeard34

He’s kinda hot? Like he looks like he just gave blood and its about to faint kinda way
#prettytwinkdoctor

MontrealsBiggestFan @metrosmetros6

What a hit on Rozanov!!! Big shoutout to the @ Penguins med team

SidneysMissingTooth @puckbunny88

Respectfully, if that doctor told me to breathe I would

EMTguy412 @steelcitymedic

Was on that call. Dude was calm, direct, and on it. Made a rough transfer smooth. 10/10 would hand off again.

GoalieMaskEnjoyer @creasecreep

Why does he look like he just stepped out of a slow burn medical drama lmao

HockeyWivesStan @icequeen77

Is that a new team doc??? The Pens really said we're adding depth this season

YinzAreWild @412chaos

I don't even watch hockey but if that man told me I had internal bleeding I'd say thank you

NurseLife89 @ivpushqueen

You can tell he's the type who triple-checks dosages and brings coffee for night shift!!!!

prettytwinkdoctor fan acct @twinktraumafan

making a compilation of his little hand gestures bc why does he point like that 😭😭

"There's a fan account? It's been less than ten hours!"

"I'm surprised it took that long. Honestly." she takes her phone back and looks down at it, scrolling a little.

Then she gets suspiciously quiet for a full thirty seconds.

Dennis narrows his eyes at her.

"...What."

She doesn't look up from her phone.

“Nothing.”

“Trinity.”

She bites her lip.

“Oh no,” he says immediately. “No, no, no- what now? What else?”

She slowly rotates the phone toward him like she’s unveiling a cursed artifact. Her face is hard to read. It’s like she’s delighted but trying to contain it. Like some kind of fucked up pinata.

“Okay. So. The internet has pivoted.”

Uh oh.

“Pivoted *where*.”

She clears her throat and passes him back the phone.

IceIsLife @puckfairy21

Not to be dramatic but the way the doc looked at Rozanov?? That's cinema. #penguinsdoc
#prettytwinkdoctor

hockeyromantics @slowburnstan

He was holding his face SO gently are we SURE that's just team doctor behavior???

PensObsessed @letsopensbaby

New ship unlocked: #DocZanov 😊

NHLWattpadQueen @penaltyboxangel

6'3 russian hockey menace x soft-spoken trauma doc who hasn't slept in 48 hrs??? inject it
into my VEINS

IlyaStanAccount @rozysrevenge

enemies to lovers speedrun any% #DocZanov

HabsCryMore @pens4cup

Imagine waking up from a concussion and THAT is the first face you see. I'd fall in love too.
#DocZanov

prettytwinkdoctor fan acct @twinktraumafan

#DocZanov The way he leaned over him??? That tension??? Gnawing at the bars of my
enclosure

“They’re *shipping* us?” Dennis blurts, horrified.

Trinity snatches her phone back before he can grab it, biting her lip to suppress a grin that absolutely refuses to stay hidden.

“Looks like it,” she says. “Congrats on your new beau.”

Dennis drags both hands over his face and presses the heels of his palms into his eyes until he sees sparks.

He has never known humiliation like this. Ever. Not even when he was stripped naked and strung up in a cornfield during homecoming his junior year of highschool.

“Up and at ’em, champ!” Trinity announces brightly, pivoting without warning. “Breakfast is waiting. I made your favorite.”

He groans into his hands, contemplating whether it’s socially acceptable to fake his own death before 7 a.m.

“Tapsilog!” she adds, triumphant.

His hands drop instantly.

“...Pork or beef?”

“Beef.”

He squints at her.

“God damn it,” he mutters, but he’s already swinging his legs out of bed.

It’ll be easier to face the world with fried eggs and beef in his stomach.

They get to the hospital twenty minutes early.

Dennis is hoping, foolishly, that he can slip into the locker room, change, and begin his shift like a normal, anonymous physician.

The universe laughs at him.

Princess spots him the second they walk through the doors.

She lets out a sharp whistle. “Hey, pretty boy!”

“Oh God,” Dennis groans, covering his face with both hands. “Please can we not? Pretty please? With a cherry on top?”

Perlah, stationed beside Princess as always, is grinning like it’s Christmas morning. “The internet loves you.”

“I know!” Dennis cries, scandalized.

“I already teased him,” Trinity says helpfully, shoving her hands into her jacket pockets.

Dennis is still wearing the borrowed black jacket-the one from the arena- because he left his own coat behind. It doesn’t even have pockets. He has nowhere to hide his hands. Or himself.

“Oh, c’mon, Dennis,” Princess says. “It’s just a little fun. No one actually believes you’re dating hockey superstar Ilya Rozanov.”

His stomach drops.

Oh man. Shane is probably freaking out right now.

“I’ll be back,” Dennis mutters and promptly flees.

He takes the familiar path upstairs two steps at a time, heart thudding.

Janelle is at the nurses’ station, packing up her things.

She looks up.

“You have my jam?” she asks, one eyebrow arching.

Dennis immediately reaches into his backpack and produces a neatly labeled jar. He makes them in large batches and seals them in a water bath so they're shelf-stable. That way he's always prepared to barter for favors.

"Thank you again," he says, handing it over.

She inspects the seal with professional seriousness, nods once in approval, and tucks it into her bag.

"Pleasure doing business with you," she says. Then she nods toward the hallway. "Your boy's been here all night. Sweet guy."

Dennis feels his ears heat.

"Yeah," he says awkwardly. "Um. You haven't-"

"Yes, I have, pretty twink doctor."

He drops his head into his hands.

Even the night shift.

He escapes before she can say anything else.

When he reaches the room, the door is ajar, just like before. He knocks anyway.

He does not need to accidentally witness another private moment. After a moment, Dennis steps inside.

Shane is awake, hunched forward in the rigid plastic chair, elbows braced on his knees. The blanket Dennis had given him last night is folded up and draped over the bed railing. He looks like he hasn't moved in hours.

"Hey," Dennis says gently, moving closer. He glances at the monitor as he does- blood pressure a touch elevated, but everything else stable. Good. "You get any rest?"

Shane shakes his head. "Not really."

"Sorry."

“Don’t be.” A pause. “Thanks for negotiating for me so I could stay.”

Dennis digs into his backpack again and pulls out another jar of jam.

He holds it out.

Shane stares at it, then lets out a small, surprised laugh. “You were serious about the jam.”

“I never joke about jam,” Dennis says gravely. “I know you don’t eat added sugar, but I figured he might like it.”

Shane’s expression softens. “Yeah. He will.”

He sets the jar carefully on the floor beside his chair.

There’s a beat of quiet.

Then Shane clears his throat.

“Um. About Twitter-,”

“Not you too,” Dennis groans.

Shane huffs a tired laugh. “Sorry. It’s kind of funny.”

“I thought you’d be, I don’t know. Mad?”

“Why would I be mad?”

Dennis shrugs.

“I don’t know,” he says casually. “Maybe you’d think I was going to steal your boyfriend.”

The word lands like a dropped glass and Shane’s smile vanishes instantly.

Oh shit.

“Oh- I mean-” Dennis stumbles. “Sorry. I didn’t mean- I just-”

Shane has gone pale. Thankfully, he’s already sitting down. But he doesn’t deny it.

Dennis’s brain scrambles.

“If it makes you feel any better,” he rushes on, “this is all doctor–patient confidentiality. And even if it wasn’t, I wouldn’t say anything. I swear. I mean. I get it. I understand.”

Shane frowns faintly.

“You mean-”

“Yeah,” Dennis says quietly. “Yes. I mean... I’m bi. I get it.”

Shane glances at Ilya, at the steady rise and fall of his chest, then back at Dennis.

Some of the tension drains from his shoulders and he swallows.

“Does your family know?”

Dennis nods automatically.

“Did they... take it well?”

Dennis shifts his weight awkwardly.

“Um. It was... fine,” he says, which is technically true in the most bureaucratic sense of the word.

Shane looks slightly ill.

“No, I mean- we still talk,” Dennis adds quickly. “We’re not estranged or anything. It’s just... weird sometimes. I’m from a small town in the middle of nowhere, Nebraska. My family’s a

little more conservative. I'm sure your folks are great."

"I- yeah," Shane says. "They are."

"So you haven't told many people?" Dennis asks gently.

Shane shakes his head. "Not really. My friend Hayden knows. My friend Rose. That's about it."

His eyes drift back to Ilya again, soft and unguarded in a way that feels almost painful to witness.

"That must be lonely," Dennis says before he can stop himself.

Because it is.

Being sixteen and queer in rural Nebraska had been lonely in a way that settled into the bones. Even now, living in a city, sharing an apartment with Trinity, having dated men and women and still feeling somehow misplaced. He's too straight for some spaces. Too gay for others.

Too much. Not enough.

He can't even count the number of times someone has told him he's confused. Women who think he's gay, men who think he's only pretending. It was lonely and put some pressure on him. Like he needs to perform.

He has been trending for less than twenty-four hours and he already feels like he can't breathe. He can't even imagine what it must be like for Shane and Ilya.

"It is." Shane agrees softly. They both get quiet again.

"I'll be in the ER for the rest of the day," Dennis says after a moment. "You can ask any of the nurses to page me if you need something. Honestly, I might appreciate the distraction. My roommate teased the hell out of me this morning and I don't think it's stopping anytime soon."

Shane frowns slightly. "You have a roommate?"

Dennis blinks. "What? Yeah. Trinity. She's a doctor here too."

"You're a doctor," Shane says, like he's just now fully processing it.

Dennis huffs a small laugh. “Yeah. But I’m also hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt from med school. And I’m a first-year resident. I don’t exactly get paid superstar money.” He shrugs. “Give and take.”

Shane stares at him. “You literally save lives and they pay you peanuts?”

“Well...” Dennis shifts sheepishly. “Right now it’s mostly ‘give.’ One day it’ll balance out. I’m happy living with her.”

Shane studies him for a second.

“Does she know? About you being bi?”

“Oh, yeah,” Dennis says easily. “She’s gay. In fact, she keeps bringing girls home and kicking me out. I usually end up loitering at the grocery store until she’s done. I’d rather stare at plums for forty-five minutes than listen through the walls.”

“I guess that’s fair,” Shane says.

They both laugh and little, and Shane looks a little lighter.

Then there's some shifting and movement from the bed. They both turn to look.

Ilya opens his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

shout to my buddy tori who gave me some of the most unhinged ideas for the twitter posts. I couldn't use about 90% of them case they were so nuts, but the thought was there <3

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

i realize that Boston org probably would have sent someone with Ilya to the hospital but.... suspend your disbelief. Today may end up being a double upload day. I got ahead of myself and wrote a BUNCH and I am way too jazzed to wait to post the chapters haha. I think I'm obsessed with this AU.

also I wrote a whole backstory for Dennis and I read it back and was like "omg im cooking' so I'm gonna publish a separate Pitt fic that's just Dennis. In case you are so inclined. It was actually a little too sad for this fic, which is saying something! I just love writing hurt guys. I should probably unpack that in the therapy. LOL.

please enjoy loves!!!!

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

Well.

Dennis hasn't even changed into his scrubs yet when Ilya starts to stir, blinking sluggishly and fumbling for his nasal cannula.

“Whoa,” Dennis says, moving quickly to his side. “It’s okay. You’re in the hospital. You’re safe.”

He studies Ilya’s pupils. They’re the same size and reactive. That's good.

“Do you remember what happened?” Dennis asks.

“Hockey,” Ilya mumbles tiredly.

Dennis exhales and leans back slightly. “Yep. Hockey. Shane’s here. Just relax.”

That gets Ilya’s attention instantly. He nearly hauls himself upright before Dennis quickly adjusts the bed to raise him instead.

“Shane is in the hospital?”

“I’m here for you,” Shane says softly. He moves to the other side of the bed and takes Ilya’s hand in his.

“But you are okay?” Ilya asks.

“Yes.” Shane offers a small smile, though his hand trembles where it cups Ilya’s. “You took a puck to the face at the Penguins game. Not exactly a great look for your last season with Boston.”

Dennis blinks. “Last season? Are you quitting hockey?”

“No, no,” Shane says quickly, at the same time Ilya mutters, “I would rather die.”

“He’s a free agent,” Shane explains. “He’s, uh, going to see about getting signed to Ottawa.”

Dennis considers that. “You live in Montreal. Is that a close drive? I actually don’t know how far those cities are from each other.”

“Two hours,” Ilya says, squinting. “My head hurts.”

“On a scale of one to ten,” Dennis says automatically, “one being no pain and ten being the worst pain of your life, how does your head feel?”

“Four.”

“Ilya,” Shane chides gently.

“Okay, okay. Five. Six at most.”

Dennis nods. "I'll see about getting you something."

Ilya studies him for a moment. Dennis glances down at his borrowed jacket and shitty sneakers.

"I'm a doctor," he says. "I swear."

"You were the doctor at the game," Ilya says slowly. Dennis can practically see the moment recognition clicks into place. "The wet kitten."

Dennis feels heat creep into his cheeks. It's better than pretty twink doctor, he supposes.

"Uh, yeah. I also get haunted Victorian child a lot."

"That too," Ilya agrees seriously.

"Rozanov," Shane says, sharper this time.

"Sorry."

“It’s fine,” Dennis assures them both.

He checks his watch. He’s technically late for his ER shift now. But Shane is still gripping Ilya’s hand like he’s afraid to let go, and Ilya looks up at him with something soft and lost that makes Dennis hurt a little.

“I’m going to get a nurse,” Dennis says. “It’ll take... three minutes.” He eyes Shane’s death grip on Ilya’s hand. “Five. I’ll take five. Set a timer.”

Shane nods gratefully, and Dennis slips out before Ilya can ask what the hell that means.

He walks very, very slowly to the nurses’ station, giving them as much time as possible. Soon morning rounds will start, and Ilya will have a handful of medical students in his room asking questions about his concussion. That kind of attention can be overwhelming.

Ilya-like Shane-is built like someone who intimidates for a living. They’re both all broad shoulders and solid muscles. But the way he looks at Shane is unbearably sweet.

Dennis presses his lips together and keeps walking, pretending his chest doesn’t ache just a little bit at the sight of it.

When he finally reaches the nurses' station, Janelle is gone, replaced by Linda- who Dennis knows from his internal medicine rotation.

"Hi, Dennis. What are you doing here?"

"Checking in on a patient," he says. "Room 413."

Linda glances down at her tablet. "Ilya Rozanov? Concussion?"

"That's the one. He just woke up."

"Oh, good. I'll go check on him."

"Take your time," Dennis says quickly. "I've got to run. Um-he has a visitor."

She frowns at the clock. "It's not visiting hours."

“Yeah, I know. But they start soon. Can you pretty please-”

“You got any jam?” Linda interrupts.

Dennis rolls his eyes but swings his backpack around, fishing out his last jar. He presses it into her hands. She gives him a thumbs up.

“Thank you,” he says. “I’ve really got to go.”

“Have fun!” she calls after him as he jogs down the hallway.

He changes into his scrubs lightning-fast, shoves his bag into his locker, and practically sprints to the pit.

He barely makes it in time to clock in at the kiosk attached to the wall. His roommate is leaning on the wall, studying a tablet.

Trinity materializes an energy drink from somewhere and tosses it at him without looking up from her charting.

“Hey, hot stuff.”

“C’mon, Trinity,” Dennis mutters, cracking the can open and taking a long swallow. It’s so sweet his teeth ache.

“Dennis!” someone calls from across the ER.

Victoria approaches, smiling brightly. She’s got a twinkle in her eye.

“No. No!” Dennis warns, pointing at her. “Please. I can’t take it.”

“You never answered the group chat! What were you doing at a Penguins game? I didn’t think you liked hockey.”

“I don’t,” Dennis says. “I was doing a favor for a friend from med school. Their usual team doctor was stuck out of town.”

“Why couldn’t your friend from med school do it?”

“I don’t know,” Dennis grumbles. “Something, something physiotherapist.”

He spots Mel walking over with Samira. Mel brightens immediately when she sees them and they cross the ER to chat.

“Hi, Dennis! Why were you at a hockey game?”

“Okay,” Dennis says, holding up a hand. “I’m only saying this one more time. I was doing a favor for someone from med school. No, I don’t like hockey. Yes, one of their players took a puck to the face. He’s upstairs.”

“Oh my God. Ilya Rozanov is here?” Trinity cuts in then she realizes that she’s basically just shouted that little fact across the ER and clears her throat. “*Here?* Boston’s greatest center since the 70’s? Maybe ever?”

Dennis frowns at her. “I didn’t know you followed hockey.”

“Recreationally,” Trinity says primly. “I like the hot ones.”

“He is very pretty,” Samira agrees with a nod.

“Don’t you have a night-shift doctor to make out with?” Dennis mutters.

Samira flushes. “Jack and I are *not* dating.”

“I didn’t say dating,” Dennis replies. “I said making out.”

Trinity arches an eyebrow. “Oh, it’s *Jack* now, is it?”

“I will sic Garcia on you,” Samira threatens gravely.

“Please do,” Trinity says easily. She smiles without her teeth and tilts her head. Of course Trinity would love that.

Samira rolls her eyes. Dennis finishes the drink in one last gulp and tosses the empty can.

“You know, Dennis,” Victoria says, sidling closer, “I’m getting pretty popular on TikTok. We should make a video.”

Dennis frowns. “I don’t really-”

“It’ll be fun!” Victoria insists. “My page is about exploring medicine and helping people. You want to help people, don’t you?”

“Laying it on a little thick there, Dr. J,” Samira says dryly.

“I just want to forget about it, okay?” Dennis says, a note of desperation creeping into his voice.

Of course that’s when Dr. Robby walks by, clearly on his way to ask why a cluster of his doctors are loitering in the hallway instead of treating patients. When he spots Dennis, he smiles. It does funny things to Dennis’s stomach.

“Oh lord,” Dennis mutters, heat flooding his face.

“Jack ratted you out,” Robby says cheerfully.

“Dr. Abbott has Twitter?”

“He said his girlfriend set it up for him.”

Dennis shoots Samira a betrayed look. She shrugs haplessly.

He turns back to Robby. “Look, I’m sorry, okay? I was filling in for the Penguins’ team doctor. I didn’t think anyone would get hurt. Or that I’d go viral.”

Robby shrugs good-naturedly. “Hey, no complaints from me. All I saw was a competent doctor helping someone in need.”

Dennis swallows. “You saw the video?”

“Sure did,” Robby says. “Just keep your head down today.”

“I won’t let it affect my work.”

“Course you won’t.” Robby claps his hands together. “All right, people. Let’s get moving. Lives to save.”

The group scatters, and Dennis takes a steadying breath before heading back into ER, hoping, futilely, that maybe today the internet will forget he exists.

It takes exactly two patients for someone to recognize him.

His first patient of the day is an elderly man who fell at his assisted living facility. Dennis is fairly certain the man doesn't even own a cellphone, so he treats him without incident—orders imaging, checks for a hip fracture, keeps everything routine and blissfully normal.

His second patient is a young woman with green streaks in her hair who managed to tear out her lip ring when it caught on the zipper of her jacket that morning.

When Dennis walks in carrying a tray of sutures, her eyes widen in recognition.

“Oh my God,” she gasps, wincing slightly around the gauze pressed to her mouth. “You’re the pretty twink doctor!”

Dennis closes his eyes briefly. “Um. Yeah.”

Her roommate—a lanky girl with freckles and a halo of curly red hair—lights up. “No way. What a small world! I literally just saw you on Instagram.”

Dennis stares down at the tray in his hands, as if the neatly arranged sutures might swallow him whole. “It’s on Instagram now?”

“It’s everywhere, man,” the roommate says cheerfully. “Can we get a picture?”

“Um.” Dennis hesitates. He doesn’t want a photo. He absolutely does not want a photo. But he also has no idea how to say no without sounding like a jerk.

“Leave him alone, Meg,” the patient says, as firmly as she can manage with gauze stuffed against her lip. “He’s working. He didn’t go to medical school for, like, eight years to be pretty twink man.” She pauses. “He’s pretty twink *doctor*.”

Dennis drags the tray closer and snaps on his gloves.

“Um. Thanks?”

“You’re welcome,” she replies solemnly.

He works quickly and carefully, placing a few neat stitches while explaining what he's doing, keeping his voice steady even though he feels like screaming. When he finishes, he goes over the aftercare instructions in detail- cleaning, avoiding irritation, when to come back if there's swelling or signs of infection.

The two women nod earnestly, then dissolve into quiet giggles as they leave with the paperwork.

Dennis feels Dr. Robby's gaze boring into his back the entire time.

Fantastic.

It's around ten in the morning when Dennis finally gets a chance to breathe.

He leans against the nurses' station counter, scanning the ever-growing list of incoming patients. There are a few open rooms left, but not many. Soon they'll have to start triaging into the hallway. Maybe the guy insisting his foot is broken despite the complete lack of swelling, bruising, or literally any visible sign of trauma, can camp out in a chair for a while.

Trinity slides up beside him and silently flips her phone over so he can see the screen.

There's a photo of him.

Taken from a distance. Very recently. He's wearing the exact same scrubs. Leaning over a chart, brows furrowed in concentration.

“What the hell?” Dennis snatches the phone and squints at it.

Posted thirty minutes ago. Over three thousand likes already.

Pretty twink doctor hard at workkkk @PTMC, baby! #prettytwinkdoctor

Dennis slowly lowers the phone and looks around the ER.

No one is obviously pointing a camera at him. No one is even blatantly on their phone. The idea that someone snapped that without him noticing makes his skin crawl.

“Told you,” Trinity says mildly. “The internet works fast.”

“I want the internet to leave me alone.”

“This might end up being a problem,” she muses.

“*Might?* You didn’t think it would be before?”

She shrugs. “I can let security know.”

Dennis hesitates. It’s not like they can ban phones. And it’s not like he wants to cause a scene over a stupid nickname.

He opens his mouth to respond, but a broad hand settles on his shoulder.

The gentle squeeze tells him exactly who it is.

Robby doesn’t say anything- just steers him away from the station and into the storage room. It’s empty of people but its shelves are lined with boxes of gloves and IV kits.

Dennis turns to face his boss.

“Sorry,” he blurts.

“I haven’t said anything,” Robby replies.

Dennis drops his head. “Someone just posted a picture of me from, like, thirty minutes ago. In the ER. Without me knowing.”

Robby’s expression shifts. He’s less amused now and more assessing. “That one I don’t like.”

“Yeah,” Dennis mutters. “Me neither.”

“Did the photo show any patients? Charts? Screens?”

“I don’t think so,” Dennis says quickly. “It was just me. Leaning over a chart. You can’t see anything specific.”

“Good.” Robby nods once. “Because that’s where this becomes my problem.”

Dennis huffs out a weak laugh. “Comforting.”

Robby steps closer, lowering his voice slightly. “Listen. You being internet-famous for patching up a hockey player? I don’t care. You did good work. But people taking photos inside my ER without consent is different.”

Dennis presses his lips together.

“I don’t want to cause trouble,” Dennis says quietly.

“You’re not.” Robby’s tone sharpens just a fraction. “You’re allowed to feel uncomfortable about strangers photographing you at work.”

Dennis shifts his weight. “It’s just- if we make a big deal about it, won’t that make it worse? Like, more attention?”

“Maybe,” Robby admits. “But we don’t have to make a scene. I’ll talk to security. They can keep an eye out for obvious filming. We remind triage to reinforce the no-recording policy. Calmly.”

Dennis nods slowly.

“And,” Robby continues, “if anyone asks you for photos while you’re on shift, you say no.”

Dennis blinks. “I can do that?”

Of course he can do that. He had the chance to, earlier. But it’d be so terribly awkward. He’s not sure he can handle it.

“Yes,” Robby says flatly. “You’re a physician. Not a zoo exhibit.”

A startled laugh escapes Dennis before he can stop it.

Robby’s mouth twitches. “If they push, send them to me.”

There’s a brief silence. Robby is being very, very cool about all of this.

“You’re not... mad?” Dennis asks.

“Why would I be mad?”

“For going viral. For the hospital name being tagged. For... all of it.”

Robby sighs, softer now. “Dennis. All I saw was one of my doctors keeping his head in a chaotic environment and doing exactly what he was trained to do.” He pauses. “Frankly, it made us look good. It made you look good.”

Heat creeps up Dennis’s neck again, but this time it’s not from embarrassment. “Oh.”

Robby smiles at him- slow and warm and devastatingly kind.

Dennis feels the now-familiar flip-flop in his stomach, like his internal organs are doing gymnastics. It is deeply inconvenient. And absolutely routine at this point.

Right.

Time to reel back the pining for his older, straight boss.

He clears his throat and drops his gaze to a box of nitrile gloves on the shelf, as if it has suddenly become the most fascinating object in the room.

“Anyway,” Dennis says briskly, channeling every ounce of professional composure he owns.
“I’ll, uh. Go be competent.”

“Good plan,” Robby replies, still smiling.

Stop smiling like that, Dennis thinks desperately.

Robby gives his shoulder one last squeeze and then steps back to let him pass.

Dennis escapes into the hallway before he can make a bigger fool of himself.

The ER swallows him whole again. He presses his palms briefly to the counter, centering himself.

Older.

Straight.

Boss.

He mentally repeats the words like a mantra.

Then Trinity appears at his elbow.

“You look flushed,” she says mildly.

“I am *not* flushed.”

“Mhm.”

“I just had a very normal, professional conversation with my very normal, professional supervisor.”

Trinity studies him for a beat. “If you say so.”

Dennis grabs the next chart before she can say anything else.

There’s a patient waiting.

And that, at least, is something he knows exactly how to handle.

Chapter End Notes

ah fuck it. Hucklerobby is it!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

this are very quickly spiraling out of control for me. But in a good way. I'm very pleased that you all like the huckerobby!!! I was nervous lol

also if you're from pittsburgh please tell me the street i mentioned make sense!

Robby has an office. He's the Guy in Charge(TM). He'd have an office. He just never uses it.

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

Dennis makes it through another three hours of his shift without incident.

And then the EMTs wheel in a guy who's barely able to stay on the stretcher.

He's swaying dangerously, arms loose at his sides, head lolling as if his neck can't quite be trusted to do its job. The smell hits Dennis's nose before the stretcher even clears the ambulance bay doors.

He absolutely *reeks* of liquor.

"What do you have?" Dennis asks, already walking alongside them as they guide the stretcher through the ER and to a room.

That's when he notices the uniformed officer trailing behind.

"OWI," one of the medics says. "Cops picked him up off Carson Street on the south side. Found him leaning against a light pole that he'd just crashed into. Said he was 'resting his eyes.'"

The patient lifts his head at that, blinks hard at the fluorescent lights, and slurs, "Wasn't sleepin'."

"He blew a .365," the officer adds. "I have a warrant for a blood draw."

Dennis' eyes widen before he can stop himself. All professionalism goes straight out the window.

"Holy shit. And he's still conscious?"

"He was standing," the other EMT says, almost impressed. "Wobbly. But upright."

Dennis glances at the patient again. A .365 BAC! For a lot of people, that's coma territory. Respiratory depression. Intubation. ICU.

And this guy had been upright. Insane.

“How long is this going to take?” the officer asks, already sounding impatient.

“Um. A while,” Dennis says automatically. “We won’t be able to medically clear him until we’re sure he’s stable and not heading toward respiratory compromise, so-”

The man suddenly lurches sideways.

There’s a horrible, slow-motion second where Dennis knows exactly what’s about to happen and still isn’t fast enough.

The patient leans over the edge of the stretcher and vomits. A lot.

It splashes onto the floor.

Onto Dennis’ shoes. And some of his pants. And a little bit splashes onto his top.

Dennis freezes.

He closes his eyes for one full, centering second.

Great. Just great.

“-a while,” he finishes faintly.

Behind him, someone says, “I’ll grab a towel.”

Another nurse is already pulling gloves on with sharp snaps of latex. Trinity appears at Dennis’ side like she’s been summoned. How does she always know where he is?

“Welcome back,” she murmurs.

Dennis opens his eyes, squares his shoulders, and switches back into clinician mode. The puke smell is rancid. One day. He can’t even go one day without getting upchucked on.

“Let’s get him turned on his side,” he says, voice steady again. “Airway first. Let’s get a line and labs going- CBC, CMP, lactate, ethanol level to confirm. And grab a bag-valve mask. Just in case.”

The patient groans as they reposition him.

The officer steps carefully around the mess. “I still need that blood draw.”

“You’ll get it,” Dennis says tightly. “When he’s not aspirating.”

“Sorry,” the man slurs, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Dennis wordlessly hands him a basin instead.

The guy squints up at him with watery, bloodshot eyes, trying very hard to make his vision cooperate.

“Hey,” he says slowly, like he’s just solved a complex puzzle. “You’re that twink doctor from the Penguins game.”

Trinity makes a small choking noise that is absolutely not a laugh.

“I’m sorry?” Dennis says flatly. Surely there's no way that this guy can be *this* drunk and still recall Dennis at the game.

“Penguins,” the man insists, nodding hard enough that he immediately regrets it. “You were on the Jumbotron.” He points at Dennis with dramatic accusation and nearly pokes himself in the face. “That’s you.”

The officer, who has thus far maintained a professional distance, looks between them with open curiosity.

Dennis can feel heat creeping up his neck again. Not embarrassment, exactly. More like the slow burn of a migraine forming.

“I am not a ‘twink doctor,’” Dennis says evenly, adjusting the pulse ox on the patient’s finger. “And you are severely intoxicated.”

“You were helping Rozy” the patient continues, undeterred. “Looked mad about it.”

Trinity is very carefully not looking at Dennis now. Her shoulders are shaking.

“Sir,” Dennis says, slipping fully into his clinical voice, “you currently have a blood alcohol content high enough to sedate a horse. I would not rely on your memory.”

“I got a great memory,” the man argues weakly. “You’re cute.”

“That’s enough,” Dennis says quickly.

The patient grins, then abruptly goes pale.

“Oh no,” Trinity says.

The basin is barely in place this time, but at least Dennis isn’t wearing the splash zone.

When the heaving subsides, Dennis checks his airway again, trying to keep his expression professionally blank.

“Let’s get that IV,” he says. “And start fluids. He’s going to need monitoring for a while.”

The officer clears his throat. “So... were on the kiss cam?”

Dennis doesn't look at him.

“Focus on the warrant, Officer.”

When Dennis is satisfied their patient isn't about to slip into an alcohol-induced coma and die, he makes his way to the scrub machine.

He already has the process down to a humiliating science.

Borrow gown.

Strip in the corner like a disgraced raccoon.

Feed ruined scrubs into the machine.

Wait for the mechanical whirl of judgment.

Collect fresh pair.

He pulls the stiff hospital-issued black scrubs from the dispenser. Black feels appropriate. Funereal, even.

His shoes, unfortunately, are still damp with vomit.

In the bathroom, he peels off his socks and drops them straight into the trash. Again. That makes two pairs this week.

He runs paper towels under cold water and scrubs at his shoes with diminishing hope. The stain lightens, but the smell does not.

When he lifts one foot to inspect the damage, he notices a new hole torn open across the mesh at the top.

“You have got to be kidding me,” he mutters.

He shoves his feet back in anyway. They squish unpleasantly.

His pinkie toe is clearly visible through the hole.

Fantastic.

He should have packed spare socks.

Rookie mistake.

He dumps the borrowed gown into the laundry bin on his way out and heads back toward the nurse's station, bracing himself for whatever fresh hellish disaster awaits him. Maybe someone will come in with his face tattooed on their bicep.

Instead, he finds Robby and Gloria standing close together, speaking in low, urgent tones.

Robby looks pissed. He's got a deep frown on his face.

Gloria looks composed in the way administrators do when something is actively on fire behind the scenes.

They both look up when Dennis approaches.

“There he is!” Gloria says brightly. Far too brightly for Dennis’s comfort.

Robby’s mouth tightens.

Dennis stops short. That’s not a good look.

“Um,” he says cautiously. “Am I in trouble?”

“No,” Robby answers immediately. “Nothing like that.”

Gloria folds her hands. “We just think it might be best if you take a break.”

Dennis blinks. “I mean, my lunch isn’t until one-thirty, but I can-,”

“No,” Robby says quietly. “For the rest of the day.”

Dennis feels his stomach plummet.

He looks at Gloria, feeling something sharp and wounded flickering across his face.

“Just until things calm down,” she reassures him.

“But-” He can’t even begin to process this. “You don’t want me treating patients? What if there’s an emergency?” he presses. “Or a trauma activation?”

“Then you will be paged,” Gloria says smoothly. “In the meantime, you could catch up on charting.”

“I’m caught up,” Dennis says flatly.

“Inventory, then. Or assist one of your colleagues with their charting.”

“I’m a doctor,” he says, and he hates that his voice wobbles. He hates that it sounds young.

All he did was help someone at a hockey game. This isn’t fucking fair.

Gloria’s expression softens professionally.

“PTMC is preparing a statement confirming that one of our physicians was present at the Penguins game last night and that Mr. Rozanov is doing well. But until that’s released, we need to minimize attention.”

Dennis goes very still.

“...Attention,” he repeats.

“There are reporters outside,” Robby says quietly. “And someone from legal is on the phone.”

Dennis stares at him.

“You’re benching me,” he says.

“It’s not a punishment,” Robby says quickly.

“It feels like one.”

Around them, the ER continues humming. The world keeps moving.

Dennis feels abruptly, irrationally excluded from it.

Gloria’s tone shifts, gentler now. “You did the right thing last night. Everyone agrees on that.”

“Then *why*-”

“Because right now,” Robby cuts in, jaw tight, “we have to protect you. I wish you could stay.”

Dennis looks at him.

Protect you.

From reporters. From social media. From becoming the headline instead of the physician.

His throat tightens.

“I don’t need protecting,” he says, but it comes out quieter than he intends.

Robby’s eyes flick briefly downward- to Dennis’s damp shoes, the hole exposing his pinkie toe- then back up to his face.

“You’ve already had a rough shift,” Robby says. “Go upstairs. Hide in my office if you have to or the on-call room. I’ll page you if we need you.”

Dennis swallows.

He hates this. Hates being sidelined. Hates feeling small.

But he nods.

“Fine,” he says quietly. “Call me if there’s a trauma.”

“We will,” Gloria promises.

Dennis turns and walks away before they can see how much it stings.

Somewhere, a monitor alarms.

And for the first time, Dennis isn’t the one running toward it.

He doesn’t go to the on-call room.

He ends up in an empty conference room with no windows. He shuts the door behind him, leans back against the wall, and slowly slides down until he's sitting on the carpet.

This isn't fair.

This isn't fucking fair.

He's a doctor, for God's sake. He did a simple favor- one game as team physician for the Penguins. One night. And because someone decided he "looked pretty," he went viral.

Now he's benched.

The betrayal hurts. Gloria, he could almost understand. Administration protects the institution first. But Robby-

Robby told him he was proud of him just this morning.

And now he's pulled from rotation like a liability.

The tears start before he realizes he's crying. They're hot and steady, sliding down his cheeks and dripping onto his scrubs. It's mortifying. He feels young in the worst way- small and foolish and painfully exposed.

He doesn't make a sound. He can't. He just sits there, knees pulled tight to his chest, face pressed into the fabric, shoulders shaking silently.

This isn't *fair*.

When he finally runs out of tears, he's dizzy. His head throbs. His chest feels hollowed out.

He drags himself off the floor and makes his way to one of the single-occupancy staff bathrooms. Thank God for that.

He looks awful in the mirror. His eyes are bloodshot and rimmed red. Salt tracks have dried faintly along his cheeks. His hair is a mess from pressing his face into his knees.

"Jesus," he mutters.

He splashes cold water on his face. It helps a little. Not enough.

What a miserable forty-eight hours.

He stays there until he looks less like he's just had a breakdown on hospital carpeting and more like someone who simply didn't sleep well. Then he finds a water fountain and forces himself to drink.

What now?

Should he just go home?

But what if there's a mass casualty? What if there's a trauma and they need him? He's too wired to lie down in the on-call room. He'd just stare at the ceiling and spiral.

He exhales slowly.

He can't be useful downstairs.

But he can still be useful somewhere.

He decides to go check on Ilya. He's not Ilya's doctor right now- but he can be his friend. Or at least support.

Dennis trudges toward the elevators at a pace that feels far slower than usual. He stops at a vending machine and buys a sparkling water.

The floor is quiet when he arrives. Linda is at the nurse's station, typing. She looks up as he approaches.

"What are you doing here?" she asks, frowning slightly. "Shouldn't you be in the ER?"

"They benched me," he mutters. "Too much publicity. Is Rozanov still here?"

Her expression softens immediately. "Oh, honey. I'm sorry. I didn't think it was that big a deal."

"You know?"

Linda smiles faintly. “The whole hospital knows by now.” She lowers her voice. “Yes, he’s still here. I think Dr. Patrick’s planning to discharge him soon. He’s got a hell of a headache, but he’ll be alright.”

“Thank you.”

She nods and returns to her computer.

Dennis heads down the hallway to Ilya’s room. Thankfully, the second bed is still empty.

Shane is there, exactly where Dennis expected him to be. He’s still wearing yesterday’s clothes. He looks wrung out and stretched thin with worry.

“Hey,” Dennis says quietly.

He holds out the sparkling water. Shane blinks at it in surprise.

“Thank you,” Shane says, taking it.

“It was the only drink without added sugar,” Dennis replies, rubbing the back of his neck.

He glances at Ilya’s monitor out of habit. The blood pressure looks much better than before. That’s something.

Ilya is sitting upright against a pile of pillows, jaw stitched and already blooming into dramatic shades of purple and deep blue. The swelling is impressive.

“Hello, wet kitten,” Ilya greets, voice rough but amused.

“Hi,” Dennis says, the corner of his mouth lifting despite himself. “How are you feeling?”

“Headache,” Ilya says, carefully touching near the stitches along his jaw. “But otherwise okay.”

The bruising is spectacular. Dark and vivid. It’s almost artistic.

“Do you remember any of it?” Dennis asks.

Ilya shrugs carefully. “I remember first two periods. Not third. Just the locker room. Then I wake up on ice and you are there.”

Dennis nods. A memory gap isn’t surprising. “That tracks. Good news is you’re getting discharged soon. They’ll bring paperwork in a bit. You’ll need someone to stay with you for the next twenty-four hours, in case symptoms get worse.”

Shane nods immediately. “He knows. We’ve both had concussions before.”

Yeah. That tracks too. Two professional hockey players. Of course they have.

Shane’s eyes narrow slightly as he looks Dennis over. “Are you okay?”

Damn. Dennis had hoped the bathroom intervention had done more.

He exhales and perches on the edge of the bed. “Yeah. It’s just... well, it kind of went viral. There are reporters outside. Some people are being weird about it. My boss took me off ER rotation for the day.”

“They benched you?” Shane says, incredulous. “That’s insane.”

Dennis shrugs, aiming for casual and landing somewhere closer to deflated. “The hospital’s releasing a statement. It’ll calm down.”

Shane mutters something vicious that sounds distinctly French. “I need to call Farrah.”

“That is our agent,” Ilya supplies helpfully. “Nice lady.”

Oh my God. They share an agent. That’s so- Dennis forcibly shuts down that train of thought. He doesn’t think they’d appreciate him saying that it was sweet they share an agent.

“Are you going to release a statement?” he asks instead.

“Eh. Probably something like I am recovering at home and thankful to doctors who helped me.” Ilya studies him more closely. His gaze drops to Dennis’s damp, visibly damaged shoes. “Hollander tells me I threw up on you. Sorry.”

Dennis smiles faintly. “It’s fine. Not even the first time that day. Actually, these aren’t the scrubs I came in with. Someone in the ER threw up on me earlier, too.”

Shane recoils slightly. “I could *not* do your job. I can barely handle it when someone bleeds on me.”

“That happens a lot?” Dennis asks, suddenly concerned.

“Yes,” Ilya says at the exact same time Shane nods vigorously.

“Jeez.” Dennis says.

“It is not fair they benched you,” Ilya says abruptly. “I will complain.”

“Oh, please don’t,” Dennis says quickly. “That would absolutely make it worse. It’s upsetting, but it’s not... it’s not a huge deal.”

“It sounds like huge deal.”

Dennis hesitates. “I think I’m more hurt that my boss let it happen.”

He can still see the look on Robby’s face- all gentle and apologetic but resolute.

“This boss,” Ilya says casually. “Are you fucking him?”

Dennis inhales sharply and chokes on absolutely nothing.

Shane glares at Ilya. “Jesus, man.”

Ilya claps Dennis on the back in what is absolutely not a helpful way for someone who just aspirated air. Even concussed, he’s strong. Dennis nearly slides off the bed with the force of it.

“I’m good,” Dennis manages, waving him off. “Just surprised me.”

“Ah,” Ilya says thoughtfully. “So you are fucking him.”

“No,” Dennis says, and winces at how miserable he sounds.

“Ah,” Ilya repeats. “But you want to. You should go for it.”

Dennis shakes his head. "I can't. One, he's my boss. Two, he's almost thirty years older than me."

Shane lets out a low whistle.

"He's like fifty," Dennis adds. "And three, he's straight."

Shane nods sympathetically.

Ilya shrugs. "So? You know for sure?"

Dennis opens his mouth to say yes-of course he knows-but then pauses.

He's never actually asked. Robby isn't exactly a walking stereotype. Neither is Dennis, for that matter.

"I- it doesn't matter," he says finally. "Even if he wasn't straight, he wouldn't be interested in me."

The words are heavier than he intends. They sound so self-deprecating and kind of pathetic.

He clears his throat quickly, trying to recover. “He’s out of my league anyway.”

Shane and Ilya exchange a look and have one of those silent conversations that takes half a second and contains entire paragraphs. It’s intimate without being showy.

Dennis feels the ache of it unexpectedly. He and Trinity can have conversations without saying a word, but it’s so intimate when it’s between people who love each other.

“So,” he says brightly, pivoting. “Ilya, you’re not supposed to use screens for a bit. No phone, no TV. You must be bored out of your mind.”

“I am very bored,” Ilya confirms gravely. “Shane will not let me do anything.”

“Because you have a brain injury,” Shane says.

“Minor brain injury,” Ilya corrects.

Dennis smiles despite himself. “Well. If you need entertainment, I can read you discharge instructions in my most soothing clinical voice.”

Ilya squints at him. “Is that voice different from the twink doctor voice?”

Shane actually laughs this time.

Dennis rolls his eyes. “First off, you’re not supposed to be on your phone. How do you know about that?”

“Shane told me.” Ilya supplies. Shane shrugs sheepishly. “He wanted to know!”

“Okay. You have a concussion. I’m ignoring you.”

But the heaviness in his chest has eased, just a little.

Chapter End Notes

robby: this is for your safety dennis. I just want to protect you. im worried about you
dennis: you don't like me :(

also a 365 is a fucking INSANE number to blow. A regular person would go into a coma. The fact that our barfing friend is even conscious is a fucking miracle

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

did y'all see the HBO Nordic account on TikTok actually posted a fucking Hucklerobby edit???? I was like 'oh this is cool who- HBO????? OFFICAL????' .

Unpaid intern, I see you.

I opened my browser history and its INSANE. My FBI agent probably has me a on watchlist somewhere. I swear it's just for fanficton search purposes.

Thanks for liking the fast updates! I'm too impatient so as soon as I get feedback from my beta I post it. We are both losers with no social lives so she usually gets back to me within a few hours of me sending the chapter.

I was worried that y'all would be like "too many!!! Take your time 🤨🤨" also I was a little worried that if people browse the Pitt tags and the HR tags every day like I do and they keep seeing me update so fast they'll think it's bad. Very irrational of me.

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

Dennis ends up staying for nearly an hour.

It's easy. Unexpectedly easy. Ilya is funny even with a concussion. Shane is a steady conversationalist, if a little awkward in a way Dennis finds oddly endearing. He's precise with his words. Literal sometimes and earnest. Dennis briefly wonders if Shane might be a little autistic, but it's not his place to speculate, let alone say anything.

They laugh when Dennis tells them about Greg cashing in a long-promised favor from medical school.

“He once distracted a professor for me,” Dennis says, grinning despite himself, “so I could climb in through a second-floor window after oversleeping. Like an actual monkey.”

Dennis learns that Ilya is from Moscow-unsurprising-and moved to Boston at eighteen to play professionally. Shane is from Ottawa. Shane’s mom, Yuna, is both of their managers.

“Momager,” Dennis says before he can stop himself.

Shane’s face lights up. “Yeah, I’ve heard that one. Mom says the Kardashians stole it from her, but I don’t think that’s true.”

They spend summers at Shane’s cottage. Ilya desperately wants a dog but admits he’s on the road too much to take care of one properly.

“That’s responsible,” Dennis says approvingly.

“I am very responsible,” Ilya insists.

Between them, he learns Ilya has had three concussions.

Shane has had six.

That surprises him. Ilya seems reckless, the kind of player who launches himself into danger. Dennis saw him get checked over the boards in person less than a day ago. It's surprising that Shane, who seems more cautious, has had more.

"It is because I am better," Ilya says smugly.

Shane punches him lightly in the arm and they go back to talking about hockey.

The hour passes quickly. Too quickly.

Dr. Patrick arrives and goes over discharge instructions. Ilya is cleared to leave with the standard warnings: rest, no screens, no skating, and no nonsense.

It's only after the paperwork is signed that Ilya looks down at himself.

"My jersey is gone," he says.

Shane grimaces. "I drove straight here from Ohio. I didn't pack anything."

"Hang on," Dennis says. "I think I can find you something."

For the first time since getting benched, he feels useful. He leaves and goes in search of Kiara. He finds her office and knocks.

"Come in!" she calls.

She's at her desk, sorting through paperwork. "Hi, Dennis. How are you doing?"

"Fine," he says automatically. "One day at a time, right?"

"Right," she agrees warmly. "What's up?"

"I was hoping I could look in the clothing closet?"

"Of course."

She stands and pulls open the closet, dragging out a few large plastic bins filled with donated clothes. The hospital washes and keeps them for patients who need something to wear home. They mostly give them to unhoused patients but they're an option for anyone without options.

Dennis rummages, estimating the sizes as best he can. He finds a pair of sweatpants, a navy long-sleeve shirt, and- after some digging- a pair of cheap flip-flops. It's chilly outside and these clothes aren't super warm, but it'll get Ilya to the car.

"Thanks, Kiara."

"No problem."

He considers grabbing socks for himself, but the thought makes his stomach twist. These are for people who truly need them. He can survive without ones for the rest of his shift.

Back in Ilya's room, he hands over the bundle.

"These should work. They're clean."

“Thank you,” Ilya says sincerely.

“So,” Dennis asks, “what’s the plan?”

Shane runs a hand through his hair. “I have a game tonight in Ohio. I drove here after our first one last night and told them I had a family emergency. If I miss the game, I’ll be in trouble.”

Ilya nods. “And Boston plays the Penguins tonight.”

“You’re not playing,” Dennis says immediately.

“I already talked to him about that,” Shane says firmly. “He’s not.”

“I can still go to the game,” Ilya argues. “Sit and watch.”

Dennis bites his lower lip. “You really should rest. Even after symptoms ease, the brain is still healing. Physical and cognitive rest matter.”

“I cannot sit alone in hotel,” Ilya says. “I will go and take it easy. Boston doctor will look after me.”

Shane sighs, glancing at him. “I wish I could stay.”

“It’s okay,” Ilya says gently. “You go. I stay. I see you in three weeks in Montreal.”

Dennis opens his mouth to object- three weeks feels ambitious to get one the ice- but stops himself.

“I know,” Shane says quietly. He looks miserable. They are totally completely, transparently in love. “I’ll call you after the game.”

He glances at Dennis. “Briefly. Promise.”

“As long as he rests,” Dennis says. “Ilya, if you get double vision, blurred vision, worsening headache, nausea- come back. Immediately.”

Ilya nods. “Okay.”

Linda comes in to pull the IV. Ilya flirts shamelessly through the entire process. Shane rolls his eyes. Dennis pretends not to smile.

They step out into the hallway so Ilya can change.

A few minutes later, they're called back in.

"Okay," Dennis says at last, stepping back. "You're officially free to go."

Shane steps forward first and offers his hand. His grip is firm. "Thank you. Seriously."

"Yes," Ilya adds. "You are very good doctor. They should not have benched you."

Dennis feels heat creep into his cheeks. "Thanks, guys. Really."

Ilya suddenly snaps his fingers. "I have idea. Shane, take out your phone."

Shane frowns but complies, pulling it from his pocket.

Before Dennis can ask what's happening, Ilya slings an arm around his shoulders. Even concussed and stitched up, he's solid and warm and entirely too strong.

"Take photo of me and pretty twink doctor."

"Oh my God," Dennis mutters. "You're not going to post that, are you?"

"Trust me, Whitaker," Ilya says solemnly. "It is good idea. I promise."

Dennis looks at Shane for backup. Shane just shrugs in a helpless, fond way that suggests he has long since given up trying to manage Ilya's impulses.

Dennis sighs. "Fine. But if this ruins my career- "

"Yes, yes." Ilya brushes him off.

Shane snaps a few pictures. Ilya grins broadly despite the bruising; Dennis is sure he looks caught somewhere between exasperated and amused.

“Okay,” Shane says. “Give me your number. I’ll send them.”

Dennis hesitates only a second before typing it in and handing the phone back.

Linda appears in the doorway pushing a wheelchair.

Ilya eyes it like it has personally insulted him. “Do I have to?”

“Hospital policy,” Linda says apologetically. “But I’m sure Dr. Whitaker wouldn’t mind wheeling you out.”

Shane heads off to bring the rental car around while Linda reviews the discharge paperwork one last time. When she’s satisfied, she nods.

Ilya lowers himself into the wheelchair with deep reluctance, like a king forced onto a peasant’s cart.

Dennis steps behind him and grips the handles.

“Comfortable?” he asks dryly.

“No,” Ilya says immediately. “I feel ninety.”

“Well, you look ninety,” Dennis replies, steering them into the hallway.

Linda laughs and peels off toward the nurses’ station.

The hallway is quiet. Afternoon light filters weakly through the distant windows. Dennis pushes slowly, mindful of bumps.

“I will send photo to Farrah,” Ilya says casually.

Dennis’s stomach drops. “Wait- what?”

“She handles press,” Ilya explains. “Better to give them something good than let them make something bad.”

Dennis pauses mid-step before continuing.

“You’re going to... what? Spin it?”

“Yes,” Ilya says simply. “Photo of doctor who helped me. Smiling. Alive. Good, yes? No drama.”

Dennis hadn’t even considered that.

“You don’t have to do that,” he says quietly.

Ilya tilts his head back to look up at him. “You helped me. This is small thing.”

Dennis swallows.

Outside, Shane is waiting at the curb, engine running. He hurries over and opens the passenger door.

“Text me if anything feels weird,” Dennis says automatically as he helps Ilya stand.

“I will.”

“Headache worse, vision changes, nausea-”

“Yes, I will come back and let you be covered in vomit again.”

Dennis rolls his eyes but smiles.

Shane hesitates before closing the door. “We mean it,” he says softly. “About you being a good doctor.”

Dennis nods, throat tight.

The rented SUV sputters away from the curb, exhaust curling into the cold afternoon air.

Dennis stands there for a long moment, hands buried in the pockets of his borrowed, too-stiff scrubs. His shoes are still faintly damp. His pinkie toe is still visible through torn mesh.

They'll be alright.

He knows it with a strange, steady certainty. Shane and Ilya are very much in love. That kind of thing can withstand a lot- different teams, different cities, hundreds of miles, brutal schedules, media pressure. They orbit each other like gravity is a law neither of them could break if they tried.

Dennis watches until the SUV disappears into traffic.

Then he pulls out his phone.

One new message.

From Robby.

I'm sorry about today, Dennis. I tried to help you out, but this is safer.

Dennis stares at it.

Safer.

He can picture Robby typing it. Brow furrowed and jaw tight. Probably in his office with the blinds half-closed, legal still on hold or at the nurse's station counter.

Dennis's thumb hovers over the keyboard.

He could respond. He could say *I understand*. He could say *Thank you for trying*. He could say *It's fine*.

Instead, he locks the screen and shoves the phone back into his pocket.

What does he know about love anyway?

He knows what it looks like in a hospital room when someone can't stop glancing at the door until their person walks in.

He knows what it sounds like when someone says *I wish you could stay* and means it with their whole chest.

He knows what it feels like to be told *we have to protect you* and still feel left behind.

Dennis exhales slowly.

Somewhere inside, a monitor alarms.

Somewhere in the ER, someone needs a line, or stitches, or reassurance. Someone is being born. Someone is dying.

The hospital keeps moving, whether he's in rotation or not.

His phone vibrates. It's not a text, but a call. The sharp trill startles him. He frowns and yanks it from his pocket.

If it's Robby, he won't answer. Or maybe he will.

He doesn't know.

He glances at the screen- and freezes.

His eyes widen and he answers immediately.

“Mom?”

Chapter End Notes

Oop!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Another day another solar bears loss :(12th in the league of 15, BTW. I hate it here.

ALSO I'm in school and we have this huge paper due and I've done my part already and it's due literally tonight at 11:59pm. Tell me why has no one answered ANY of my texts this week?? I swtg if I don't hear anything by 8pm im gonna email the professor. I am not flunking this class cause of y'all lazy bitches. I refuse.

Also I got back the feedback for my Dennis fic from my beta so once I nitpick, it'll be uploaded soon! Sometime this week.

Enjoy!

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

“Mom?”

There's a rush of background noise on the other end. The wind, maybe, and the faint clatter of dishes.

“Dennis Whitaker,” she says, her voice bright in a way that means she's either delighted or furious. Probably furious. *“Do you want to tell me why my neighbor just texted me a photo of you on national television?”*

Dennis closes his eyes.

Of course.

“Hi, Mom,” he says weakly.

“Don’t ‘hi, Mom’ me,” she snaps. “Why did I have to find this out from Carla Henley?”

Dennis sighs.

This really isn’t fair of her.

He loves his mom. He really does, but their relationship is... complicated. He calls once a month for twenty minutes. She asks about the weather in Pittsburgh. He asks about the farm. She gives updates on his brothers and nieces and nephews and asks if he's met a nice girl. They never mention his father. Then they hang up and don’t speak again until next month.

It’s not like he calls her every time something happens to him. He hadn’t even called after PittFest.

And she knows he’s bisexual.

She was the one who walked in on him making out with Tommy Johnson in the barn.

She'd cried. Dennis had burned with humiliation. And then she'd told his father.

That had been a fucking nightmare.

Dennis had come into the kitchen, lips still swollen from kissing, and his dad had refused to meet his eyes.

"You're gay," his father had said.

"I'm bisexual," Dennis had replied. "I like men and women."

His mom had nodded briskly, as if that solved everything. "Well. Then you can still have a normal life. Cara Finnegan has a crush on you. You can date her."

"I am normal, Mom," Dennis had said, his throat tight.

His dad didn't say anything else. But that look on his face... god. disappointment so heavy it felt physical. It had made Dennis want to step into traffic.

“Please. Just look at me. Why won’t you look at me?” he’d pleaded.

His father had walked out of the kitchen without a word.

He’s never really looked at Dennis since.

So Dennis turned seventeen, got early admission to the University of Nebraska, and chose theology. Maybe if he became a pastor, his father would look at him again. Maybe if he tried hard enough, his mother would acknowledge all of him.

It didn’t work.

He switched to medicine instead.

He hasn’t been home in almost eight years.

“Sorry. I’m at work,” he says now, voice stiff.

He could have taken a hospital job in Nebraska. He could be an hour from the farm. Robby would have written a glowing recommendation. He could have gone anywhere.

He didn't.

They both know why.

There's a beat of silence on the other end. Wind pushes hard against her receiver. A screen door creaks.

"You're always at work," she says.

It isn't accusing, exactly. It's worse than that. It's tired.

Dennis presses his thumb into the edge of his phone case and watches an ambulance pull in too fast.

"I'm a resident, Mom."

“I know what you are,” she replies. “Carla said you were on the ice. With hockey players.”

“I was the substitute team doctor. One of them took a puck to the face and I did my job.” he tells her, feeling drained.

The wind dies down. He hears her move inside; the clatter fades.

“Your father saw it,” she says.

Dennis goes very still.

“Oh.”

“He didn’t say much.”

Of course he didn’t.

“But he watched the whole clip,” she adds. “Twice.”

Dennis swallows. That shouldn't matter. It shouldn't feel like something sharp and bright under his ribs.

“Did he actually look at the screen?” he asks before he can stop himself.

There's a soft exhale on the other end. He can picture her at the kitchen sink, cordless phone wedged between shoulder and ear, dish towel in her hands. The same kitchen. The same table.

“Yes,” she says.

He closes his eyes.

Eight years of not going home for Christmas. Eight years of careful distance. Monthly twenty-minute calls about weather and corn yields and which niece lost her first tooth.

Never Tommy Johnson in the barn. Never the way Dennis left Nebraska like it was on fire. Never the fact that he may never go back.

“Are you going to be the team doctor for the Penguins, now?” she asks.

“No. It was a one time thing.” he emphasizes, because he’d said he was the substitute and she never *listens*.

“Okay. How are... things?”

“Fine. How’s the farm?”

‘Fine, fine.’

That’s how they do it. They skim. They deflect. They survive each other in small, manageable doses.

“Okay,” Dennis says, chest aching. “I need to go. They need me.” He lies.

“Alright. I’ll talk to you soon.”

“Okay. Bye.”

She hangs up first.

The line goes dead with a soft click, like a door closing somewhere down a long hallway.

Dennis keeps the phone pressed to his ear a second longer anyway.

The hospital doors slide open behind him. Cold air knifes through the thin cotton of his borrowed scrubs. Someone brushes past, muttering about bed shortages.

Life, relentless.

He lowers the phone slowly.

When was the last time she'd said *I love you*?

Five calls ago? Ten?

Maybe the last time he'd been home for Christmas. The year before he left for good. The year his father bowed his head over grace and didn't look up when Dennis said he had to get back to campus early.

Or maybe she'd said it after that. Maybe he just stopped hearing it.

Nausea curls low in his stomach. He feels sixteen again, standing in that kitchen, waiting for his father to look at him.

When did the woman who raised him become a stranger?

The first time she chose his father's silence over his tears? The first time he learned to edit himself for her comfort? Maybe it was the first time he realized love, in that house, was conditional.

They aren't proud of him. Not really. Not unless he shows up with a wife and a ring and a story they can tell at church.

He hasn't let himself imagine what the opposite would look like- walking through that kitchen with a man's hand in his and daring his father not to look away.

He swallows hard.

Somewhere in the city, a rented SUV is pulling onto the highway. Somewhere, Robby thinks this is safer.

Robby.

The name alone feels like pressing on a bruise.

Dennis stares down at the cracking sidewalk.

Oh god.

Was that what this stupid crush was about? *Daddy issues?*

The thought hits him with such blunt force he almost laughs. Almost. Instead it lodges somewhere under his sternum and aches.

He hates the idea of being a stereotype. Young, ambitious, slightly pathetic doctor with a thing for older authority figures.

It makes his skin crawl.

But when he tries to untangle it, really tries, he doesn't just see "older man." He sees Robby standing shoulder to shoulder with him in a trauma bay at three in the morning. Sees the quiet confidence, the way he lets Dennis take the lead but is always right there if he stumbles. The way he'd say *I'm proud of you* and mean it.

That didn't feel *paternal*.

That felt steady.

It felt safe.

Dennis presses his lips together.

Maybe that's the problem.

A small green weed pushes through a crack in the sidewalk at his feet, an unbloomed bud clinging stubbornly to its stem.

“You and me both.” Dennis mutters to the weed. His phone buzzes in his pocket. Dread washes through him. Was it his mom? Did he even want it to be? He braces himself and checks it. It’s not his mom, or Robby. It’s an unknown number.

Unknown number: hey it’s Shane

Dennis frowns down at the phone. Hadn’t they just left? How long had he been standing out here?

Unknown number: we had to stop for gas

Oh.

He saves the contact.

Shane: Here *[image1.jpg]*

Dennis taps the photo. It’s the one Shane had taken of Dennis and Ilya in the hospital room. Ilya’s got one hand slung over Dennis’s shoulders. They’re both grinning, Dennis a little more shyly than Ilya.

He really likes the picture.

Dennis: can I send this to my roommate? She's gonna be jealous

Shane: Ilya says yes but only if you screenshot her reaction

Dennis laughs under his breath, saves the photo, and sends it to Trinity.

Her response is almost immediate.

thatlesbianbitch: IS THAT

thatlesbianbitch: ILYA FUCKING ROZANOV

thatlesbianbitch: YOU FUCKER

thatlesbianbitch: !!!!

Dennis grins.

Huckleberry: it was his idea.

Thatlesbianbitch: i am so jealous

Thatlesbianbitch: you don't even know

Thatlesbianbitch: is this a divine punishment for past wrongdoings

Dennis rolls his eyes and screenshots the messages. Then he sends it to Shane.

Shane: worth it

Dennis is about to write a reply when his phone buzzes with another notification. He glances down at it.

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.

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Robby: We need to talk.

Chapter End Notes

Dennis: you ever feel like you're a weed growing in the cracks of a dirty city sidewalk
Trinity: no lol

—

So Dennis and his family have strained relationship even in the show (I.e, they haven't talked in awhile, he hasn't been home etc) and he also states "they sacrificed a lot for me to be here" but it's like what is their motivation for it?? I'm honestly worried they're gonna pull a George from Greys and have him just be a smart kid in a family for not booksmart people who make fun of him for it. If that happens I'm gonna be soooooo pissed. 😡

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

i'm sorry for the cliffhanger guys. I'm the worst, I know

no TWs I can think of for this chapter. expect for maybe gay panic.

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

Oh god.

Dennis stares down at his phone and rereads the message for the third time.

Robby: We need to talk.

His stomach drops.

What did that mean?

Was he getting fired? Dragged into HR? Was he about to be professionally dismantled for developing an extremely inappropriate crush on his supervising attending?

He immediately wants to text Trinity and ask how the hell he's supposed to interpret this-but she's probably busy actually being a doctor, unlike him. And she would absolutely laugh first and offer emotional support second.

He considers texting Mel. Mel wouldn't make fun of him.

But Mel is also working.

And, if he's being honest, Dennis doesn't really have close friends. Acquaintances, sure. People he liked. Greg Treviano, for example. Dennis would absolutely text Greg to ask how the Yankees were doing.

He would not text Greg to say *hey do you think my boss knows I'm in love with him*.

Dennis exhales slowly and screenshots the message anyway.

Then, before he can talk himself out of it, he opens a new thread.

Dennis: did you hit the road yet?

The reply comes quickly.

Shane: not yet. Ilya wanted snacks

Dennis sends the screenshot.

Dennis: what do you think he means by this

The typing bubbles appear. Disappear. Reappear.

Shane: is that your boss you like?

Dennis winces. This was so awkward.

Dennis: yea

Shane: I think it just means he wants to talk to you?

Dennis stares at the message.

Well. That's profoundly unhelpful.

His phone buzzes again almost immediately.

Shane: idk let me ask Ilya one sec

Dennis groans quietly.

That could either be incredibly helpful... or catastrophic. There is absolutely a universe where Ilya decides this means Robby wants to sleep with him and encourages Dennis to ruin his entire professional life.

The phone buzzes again.

Shane: Ilya says it sounds like he wants to fuck you

Shane: sorry

Dennis presses his lips together to keep from laughing.

Dennis: that's okay just getting in my own head about it

Shane: maybe he really does just want to talk about you getting benched?

That, unfortunately, sounds much more realistic.

Dennis: I hope so

Shane: well i doubt he's gonna ask you to jump his bones in the middle of a workday. probably.

Dennis huffs out a breath.

Dennis: you're so right

Dennis: drive safe

Shane: thank you

Dennis switches back to Robby's message.

Okay. He can do this. He's an adult. A physician. A professional.

He types before he can overthink it.

Dennis: where are you? I'll come to you.

The reply is instant.

Robby: Meet me in my office.

Dennis stares at the screen.

Okay.

He can do this.

Dennis has never actually been to Robby's office before, but he knows where it is. He'd worked in the ER for nearly three months before learning Robby even *had* an office. They

were usually too busy for Robby to disappear into it, and even when things slowed down, Robby somehow never seemed to be there.

The door is closed when Dennis arrives.

There are windows, but the blinds are drawn, making it impossible to tell if anyone's inside. For a brief, hopeful second, Dennis wonders if Robby got pulled into something else and forgot.

He knocks anyway.

"Yeah- come in!" Robby calls.

Dennis opens the door.

The office looks exactly like every hospital office Dennis has ever seen: sturdy wooden desk, computer, filing cabinet, and two chairs.

It's almost aggressively impersonal.

There are no photos. No bookshelf stacked with well-worn spines. No decorations. The only attempts at personality are a dusty plastic plant in the corner and a small nameplate on the desk.

Robby sits behind it, reading glasses perched low on his nose as he studies a document. He glances up over the frames.

“Hi. Come in, sit,” he says, gesturing to the chair. “Close the door?”

Dennis shuts it and sits, rubbing his palms against his knees.

“I’m not about to get fired, am I?” he asks, aiming for humor and landing somewhere closer to anxiety.

Robby blinks, startled. “God, no.”

Relief rushes through Dennis so quickly it almost makes him dizzy.

Robby slides the paper across the desk. “Here. This is the statement PTMC is releasing about Rozanov.”

Dennis takes it and begins to read:

PTMC OFFICIAL STATEMENT- For Immediate Release

Pittsburgh Trauma Medical Center (PTMC) confirms that professional hockey player Ilya Rozanov of the Boston Raiders received medical evaluation and treatment following an on-ice injury sustained during last night's game.

Mr. Rozanov was initially assessed by a licensed PTMC physician serving as part of the Pittsburgh Penguins' game-day medical coverage team. Following standard protocols, he was transported to PTMC for further evaluation.

After consultation with PTMC emergency medicine physicians, Mr. Rozanov was treated and safely discharged with appropriate follow-up recommendations.

At this time, Mr. Rozanov is reported to be in good condition and recovering well.

PTMC is proud to support the health and safety of professional athletes, community members, and visitors alike through evidence-based emergency care and collaborative partnerships with regional organizations, including professional sports teams.

Due to patient privacy regulations and out of respect for both the patient and hospital personnel, PTMC will not provide additional details regarding treatment, staffing assignments, or individual providers involved in Mr. Rozanov's care.

We respectfully request that members of the media and public refrain from attempting to film, photograph, or otherwise interfere with hospital operations or staff while patient care activities are ongoing.

Our priority remains the delivery of safe, compassionate, and uninterrupted medical care to every patient who enters our facility.

Media inquiries may be directed to the PTMC Office of Communications.

Dennis leans back slightly, crossing one leg over the other without thinking.

“Wow,” he says. “That’s... better than I expected.”

Robby’s mouth twitches. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Dennis exhales, shoulders finally loosening. “So I’m not in trouble?”

“No.” Robby shakes his head. “And I’ve already spoken with security. They’ll be enforcing stricter rules about filming in the ER.”

“Um, this seems like it’s breaking some HIPPA laws.” He points out.

”Ilya gave us permission.”

Dennis nods, the paper crinkling in his hand, re-reading one line.

individual providers involved in Mr. Rozanov’s care.

“They didn’t name me.”

“No,” Robby says. “And they won’t.”

The relief washes through him and he lets his shoulders drop.

“That was intentional,” Robby adds gently. “You did everything right. But you’re a resident, Dennis. You don’t need national media attention attached to your name.”

Dennis nods, fingers tightening slightly on the page.

“You’re welcome to come back tomorrow morning and resume practice.”

He straightens immediately. “Can I work the night shift?”

“Absolutely not.”

The firmness in Robby’s voice makes Dennis’s stomach flip. He wonders if he talks to his partners like that.

God. He really needs to get a grip.

“You’ve been up all day,” Robby continues. “You’d push straight into a night shift without rest. That’s not safe, Dennis.”

Safe.

There’s that word again.

Safe, safe, safe.

Why is everyone suddenly so concerned about his safety?

Maybe he doesn’t want safe. Safe feels a little too much like being sidelined. Like Dennis needs to be protected instead of trusted.

Dennis looks down at the statement in his hands, then back up at Robby.

“I don’t need to be protected, you know. I can take care of myself.” and he regrets the words are soon as they leave his mouth because Robby’s eyes crinkle a little as his brow furrows.

“I mean. I’m not ungrateful or anything-,”

“I know, Dennis,” Robby says gently, cutting him off.

“That’s not the point.”

Dennis stills.

Robby leans back slightly in his chair, studying him in that quiet, attentive way he always does. The way that confuses Dennis every time. Is he looking at Dennis as a doctor? As a co-worker? Or maybe...

“I want to,” Robby says softly.

Dennis feels something flip hard in his chest.

Robby blinks, like he hears himself a moment too late. His posture straightens quickly.

“The hospital wants to,” he corrects quickly. “It’s about liability. And making sure you’re not put in a position that becomes... overwhelming.”

Right. Institutional concern. That is a totally normal explanation.

Dennis nods, but the earlier words keep echoing anyway.

I want to.

He folds the press release carefully, buying himself a second to breathe.

“I just don’t want people thinking I can’t handle it,” Dennis admits. “I worked really hard to get here. I don’t want to be the resident everyone has to shield.”

Robby’s expression softens immediately.

“No one thinks that,” he says. “You handled last night exceptionally well. You handled today well, too. Even with half the city suddenly knowing your face.”

A small, reluctant smile pulls at Dennis's mouth.

"That wasn't exactly part of residency training."

Robby lets out a quiet huff of laughter. "No. Unfortunately."

Then Robby pushes back his chair and stands. He walks around the desk, *definitely* closing the professional distance between them, and settles on the edge of it directly in front of Dennis.

Close.

Too close.

Dennis suddenly becomes very aware of where his hands are, where his knees are, how little space exists between them. He doesn't know whether to lean back or forward, so he stays exactly where he is, uncrossing his legs like that somehow makes him look less nervous.

"Protecting you isn't about doubting you," Robby says. "It's about making sure one moment doesn't derail a career you've spent years building."

Dennis swallows.

Robby leans forward slightly, bending at the waist so their eyes meet level to level. Up close, Dennis can see the faint exhaustion under Robby's eyes and the silver threaded through his beard.

"You're a very good doctor," Robby says quietly. "And good doctors burn out fast when they feel like they have to prove they can survive everything alone."

Dennis knows what he *should* do.

He should nod, say thank you and stand up. Leave the office before this crosses a line. He could go help Trinity with charting or ask Victoria a question. Find literally any reason to exit this room.

Instead-

His gaze drops.

To Robby's mouth.

He wonders, absurdly, what it would feel like to kiss him. Whether the beard would scratch or soften against his skin. Whether Robby would taste like coffee or cigarettes or something else.

When Dennis looks back up, Robby is already watching him.

There's something in his expression Dennis has never seen directed at him before. It's not supervisory. It's almost... tender.

"I have faith in you," Robby says.

Dennis swallows hard enough it echoes in his ears.

"You do?"

Robby's eyes flick briefly to Dennis's lips before returning to his gaze.

"Always have."

The air shifts between them. Dennis can't hear anything other than the ringing in his ears.

He doesn't know who moves first. Maybe they both do. Maybe the distance had already disappeared before either of them realized it.

Robby leans down at the same moment Dennis tilts forward, drawn in without thinking.

And then-

Robby's lips are on his.

Hesitant for only a heartbeat before certainty replaces restraint.

Dennis's breath catches as the world narrows to contact-the brush of Robby's beard against his skin, the steady hand sliding to the back of his neck, anchoring him there. Grounding him.

It feels like something that has been waiting for permission.

Dennis exhales against Robby's mouth, nerves sparking into something bolder. Before he can overthink it, he shifts closer, swiping his lips along Robby's teeth in a tentative invitation.

Robby makes a soft sound-half hum, half surprised approval-and the noise goes straight through Dennis like electricity.

That's all the encouragement he needs.

Dennis surges upward, momentum overtaking caution. The chair legs scrape faintly against the floor as he rises, pressing forward without entirely meaning to.

Robby yields with a startled breath, bracing one hand behind him as his hips meet the edge of the desk. For a second he's caught between standing and sitting, half leaning back as Dennis crowds into his space.

The hand at Dennis's neck tightens, fingers spreading into his hair.

The kiss deepens.

Robby kisses like he does everything else- attentively. As if he's learning Dennis in real time. There's heat there now, unmistakable, but also restraint, a careful awareness that makes

Dennis's chest ache.

Dennis grips the front of Robby's scrub top, pulling him closer. His pulse is loud in his ears, adrenaline mixing with something disbelieving softness.

This is happening.

He's kissing Robby.

Robby exhales sharply through his nose, one hand sliding from Dennis's neck to his jaw, thumb brushing along the edge of his cheek. As if confirming he's real.

Dennis leans into the touch instinctively.

The office feels suddenly too small.

Robby breaks the kiss first.

Not far. Just enough that their foreheads nearly touch, breaths mingling.

His hand stays at Dennis's neck.

"Okay," Robby murmurs, voice rougher than Dennis has ever heard it. "We should... probably slow down."

Dennis doesn't move away.

He can still feel the imprint of Robby's mouth on his lips, the warmth of his body where they're pressed together.

"Probably," Dennis agrees softly.

Neither of them moves.

Robby's hand tightens at the back of Dennis's neck before he seems to realize what he's doing.

He pulls back, but just barely. Their foreheads stay pressed together, breaths mingling, lips still close enough that Dennis can feel the warmth of every exhale.

“Okay,” Robby says, voice low and a little rough. “Okay. We-”

He swallows.

Dennis watches the moment awareness crashes back into him. Attending and resident. Office door closed. Hospital hallway just outside.

Robby straightens slightly, like he’s trying to put physical distance where his self-control clearly isn’t cooperating.

“This... we need to slow down,” he says, attempting authority. There’s no real heat in it. His thumb is still brushing absent circles at Dennis’s hairline.

Dennis notices immediately.

“You’re still touching me,” he murmurs.

Robby freezes and looks at his own hand like it betrayed him.

“...Right.”

He does not move it.

Instead, his gaze drops to Dennis’s mouth again, helplessly.

“This is exactly what I was trying to avoid,” Robby mutters. “You’re my resident.”

Dennis’s heart stutters at the way he says *my*.

“I know,” Dennis says quietly.

Robby exhales, long and shaky, eyes closing for a second as if summoning discipline from somewhere deep inside himself.

“We can’t blur lines,” he says. “You’re vulnerable right now. The press, the incident, everything-it would be unethical for me to take advantage of-”

Dennis leans forward just enough that their noses brush again.

“I kissed you too.”

Robby’s composure fractures instantly. His eyes open. They’re dark and warm and completely undone.

“That’s not helping,” he says weakly.

Dennis’s hands settle cautiously at Robby’s waist, giving him time to stop this- giving him an out. They both really need to step away.

Instead Robby’s hands slide from Dennis’s neck to his shoulders, thumbs pressing into muscle like he’s memorizing him.

“I’m supposed to be the adult here,” Robby says quietly. Almost like he’s trying to tell himself that.

“You are an adult,” Dennis replies.

That earns a quiet, breathless laugh. It sends Denis's heart soaring.

"Not acting like one."

Robby tries again- actually leans back this time, putting a few inches between them. He drags a hand down his face, regrouping.

"This can't become something that compromises you," he says firmly. "Your career matters more than... whatever this is."

Dennis nods, even though the distance already feels wrong.

"Okay."

The agreement should end it. But it doesn't.

They just stand there, staring at each other.

Robby's eyes soften first.

"Tell me to stop," he says.

Dennis opens his mouth.

He doesn't say it.

Robby exhales sharply, like a man losing an argument with himself.

"...Yeah," he murmurs. "That's what I thought."

And then he's kissing Dennis again. It's less hesitant this time, one hand cupping his jaw, the other pulling him closer until Dennis is half pinned between Robby's legs.

Robby doesn't stop kissing him.

That's the problem.

Every attempt at restraint dissolves the second Dennis leans in again, the second Robby's mouth finds his and something warm and reckless takes over. Dennis feels himself being pulled closer, guided almost unconsciously until his hips bump the desk and Robby's hand steadies him there.

It's not careless and it feels so, so fucking good. Just to feel *wanted*.

Robby kisses like a man who has spent a long time denying himself something and suddenly can't remember why he tried.

Dennis makes a soft sound into the kiss, fingers curling into the fabric of Robby's shirt, and Robby answers with a quiet hum, deep in his chest-

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

They freeze.

The pager cuts through the room like a fire alarm.

Robby jerks back first, breathless, eyes wide, one hand still cupping Dennis's jaw as if his body hasn't gotten the message yet.

BEEP. BEEP.

Reality slams back in.

"Oh- shit," Robby breathes.

Dennis blinks, dazed, lips still tingling. "Is that-"

"My pager," Robby says unnecessarily, already fumbling at his hip. He glances down, reads the screen, and the attending mask drops back into place with painful speed.

"Trauma incoming. Five minutes out."

Of course it is.

Dennis lets out a soft, disbelieving laugh, running a hand through his hair. “Yeah. That tracks.”

Robby stares at him for half a second too long.

His gaze flicks to Dennis’s mouth again.

Then he inhales sharply and steps back, physically creating space this time, like he’s forcing the moment into containment.

“We-” Robby starts, then stops. He clears his throat and tries again. “We’ll talk later.”

Dennis nods, even though *later* suddenly feels enormous and terrifying.

“Right. Later.”

Robby moves toward the door, then pauses with his hand on the handle. He doesn’t turn around immediately.

When he does, his expression is softer than Dennis has ever seen it on shift.

“Are you okay?” he asks quietly.

Dennis huffs a laugh. “You just kissed me against your desk and now you’re running a trauma. I genuinely don’t know.”

That earns the ghost of a smile.

“...Good,” Robby says. “Me neither.”

Chapter End Notes

dennis: guys wHAT does this text meaN?

Shane: (autistically) that he wants to talk to you????

Ilya: he wants to fuck you :)

the next chapter is gonna take a couple of days. I wrote it, sent it off to my beta, got it back, edited it and now i hate it. I must change it. This chapter was gonna be the last one, but now I think the next one will be. Maybe. I don't know.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

surprise! This is the last chapter. It was gonna be split into two, plus an epilogue but I was like " ehhehh nah" so here we are.

Keep an eye out in the future for another part to this universe. I haven't written it yet, but I have a VERY good idea about Trinity and Ilya. I also have a Dennis centric-fic that I am ALMOST done editing. it's called 'the hayloft'. It's very depressing. You'll love it.

Also, if I could write smut I'd be writing it. I'm sorry, ok. What do I even write? Like... "their dicks touched. the end." hello???

All the medical stuff I just pulled outta my ass after perusing a few medical journals. My nurse buddy was busy. I'm sure she's gonna read this and tell me how wrong I am. Hi Laura! :)

thank you all very much for reading this and giving this fic a chance. I know it's sorta a weird crossover, especially if you're only into heated rivalry or only into the pitt. If you haven't seen either show, I'd say go for it. It's worth a read!!

Please enjoy :)

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

Dennis slumps into Robby's office chair, pressing the back of his hand against his mouth as if he can still contain the feeling there.

Had he really just kissed Robby?

Not just kissed.

Made out. Fully, undeniably made out.

At work.

“Oh god,” he groans, dropping his face into his hands.

This was a terrible idea. Possibly the worst decision he has ever made. What the hell had possessed him to kiss Robby? Worse- how had he *kept* kissing him? At no point had his brain stepped in to stop things. He had no professional instinct. No survival instinct. Just want.

And the worst part?

It had felt incredible.

Robby's beard had been scratchy in the best possible way, warm against Dennis's skin. He can still feel the ghost of Robby's teeth against his lips and the soft exhale they'd shared when they finally pulled apart. And the way Robby had looked at him afterward-

Really looked at him.

Like Dennis mattered. Like he wasn't just another resident to supervise or protect or mentor. Like he was *wanted*.

Dennis exhales shakily.

Well.

That definitely hadn't been safe.

Robby's office door doesn't even lock. Anyone could have walked in at any moment. A nurse. Another attending. Hospital administration. Anyone.

The thought makes his stomach flip but not with dread, but with a sharp, electric thrill.

Anyone could have walked in, and Robby still kissed him.

Dennis's knees are still trembling a little.

He needs to tell someone. Immediately. This cannot stay inside his head or he's going to combust.

But who?

He doesn't exactly have a roster of confidants. Trinity's working. Mel's working. Victoria's working. Samira's working. Everyone sensible in his life is currently being responsible doctors.

Shane, maybe. Shane should be finishing the drive after dropping Ilya off at the Boston team hotel. Dennis has already been texting him this afternoon.

Would calling be too much?

Dennis licks his lips.

He can still taste Robby.

Fuck it.

It's call a professional hockey player who may or may not end up being your friend but who is definitely hiding a gay love affair with his Russian hockey rival, or spontaneously combust.

He assumes Shane is driving when he hits call, so he's surprised when the phone actually picks up.

"Dennis!"

That's Ilya, not Shane. Dennis smiles despite himself; he likes the way Ilya says his name, the emphasis lingering on the *n*.

"I fucked up," Dennis blurts.

"Did you kill someone?" Shane asks immediately. *"You're on speaker, by the way."*

"Oh. Hi. Sorry-"

"Don't be!" Ilya says cheerfully. *"Shane and I were just talking about you."*

Dennis freezes. “You were?”

“We were taking bets on when you were going to fuck your boss.”

“Ilya!” Shane coughs, clearly mortified.

“Well,” Dennis says weakly, “about that-”

“An hour!” Ilya declares triumphantly. *“I win!”*

“You didn’t kill anyone, right?” Shane asks again.

“No. Nobody’s dead. I’m still benched,” Dennis says. “And we didn’t- we didn’t fuck. We just... kissed.”

“A lot?” Ilya prompts eagerly. Too eagerly for a guy who still has a mild concussion.

“...A lot,” Dennis admits. “Maybe too much. We’re at work, for god’s sake.”

“Well, you were not working,” Ilya says at the exact same moment Shane adds, “That’s actually a good point.”

Ilya makes a smug little noise, probably muttering something self-satisfied in Russian.

Shane clears his throat. *“Do you think it’s going to become a frequent thing?”*

“Kissing at work?” Dennis asks, confused.

“No. Well- hopefully not that,” Shane says. *“I mean in general.”*

Dennis worries his lower lip between his teeth. Was it going to be a thing? Robby had said they’d talk later, but he’d also admitted he didn’t fully know how he felt yet.

“I can hear you thinking,” Ilya says. *“Even with concussion.”*

“I don’t know,” Dennis admits quietly. “He got paged before we could talk.”

He can practically picture Shane and Ilya exchanging a look- one of those silent conversations couples have that Dennis has always envied.

“Do you want it to?” Shane asks gently.

Dennis hesitates. “What do you mean?”

“Maybe it was just a heat-of-the-moment thing,” Shane says. *“But if you two decide to date, or hook up, or be-”*

“Lovers,” Ilya supplies helpfully.

“Ilya, gross,” Shane mutters. *“My point is- you’ll probably have to hide it.”*

Yeah. Dennis had already figured that part out.

“All I’m saying,” Shane continues, *“is that Ilya and I know a thing or two about hiding relationships. And it’s hard enough when we’re barely in the same city. You’ll see him every day. Do you think that’s something you can do?”*

“Or that you want to do,” Ilya adds.

Dennis winces. They’re right. He can barely function normally around Robby now, and that’s with *just* a crush. If this became real, they’d have to be completely professional at work. No lingering looks. No touching.

And if anyone found out? They might never work together again. Dennis would be pulled from Robby's staff so fast his head would spin.

Robby had already said Dennis’s career mattered more than whatever this was.

“You two manage it,” Dennis says.

Shane laughs softly. *“Barely. Though I guess we’ll get more practice once Ilya transfers to Ottawa.”*

“Not true,” Ilya argues. “We are very good at pretending on ice.”

Shane hums thoughtfully. *“He’s right. On the ice nothing changes. Ilya’s still an asshole to me.”*

“Shane still loses faceoffs.”

“I do not,” Shane protests, without real heat.

Dennis smiles faintly, imagining it. Then he tries to picture himself in a trauma bay, heart-eyes at Robby while someone is in need.

That would be impossible.

Someone could walk in to the ER with a papercut and Dennis would snap straight into doctor mode.

Work is work, and feelings would have to wait.

And they could, couldn't they?

“Did you figure it out?” Ilya asks when Dennis goes quiet.

“...Yeah,” Dennis says slowly. “I think I did.”

“Good,” Shane replies, and Dennis hears a turn signal clicking. “*Because I’m about to drop Ilya off and things are about to get sappy.*”

“*What is sappy?*” Ilya asks.

“Disgustingly sweet,” Shane explains.

“*Ah,*” Ilya says. “*Then yes. Very sappy.*”

Dennis laughs. “I don’t need to hear that. Thanks, guys.”

“*Anytime,*” Ilya says warmly. “*Bye, Dennis!*”

“Bye.”

Dennis hangs up first.

The office feels strangely quiet after the call ends.

Dennis lowers the phone slowly, staring at the dark screen like it might offer guidance. It doesn't. It just reflects his own flushed face back at him- mouth still swollen from kissing, eyes bright, and hair that he absolutely cannot bring onto the hospital floor.

He exhales and lets his head fall back against Robby's chair.

Robby's chair.

"Oh my god," he mutters again.

He swivels once, absently, the wheels creaking beneath him. The room smells faintly like coffee and whatever cologne Robby wears. It's something warm and clean that Dennis now associates entirely with being kissed stupid against a desk.

He presses his knuckles to his mouth.

You're a very good doctor.

Dennis groans quietly.

This is catastrophic.

Not because he regrets it, and that makes it worse. There isn't even a shred of regret sitting in his chest. Just adrenaline and warmth.

He meant it when he said he didn't want to be protected.

But when Robby looked at him like that - careful, proud, *soft* - Dennis felt... chosen.

And he wants that again.

He wants Robby. Not just the kiss. Not just the crush he's been nursing through rounds and charting and stolen glances at the nurses' station.

He wants the *thing after*.

Coffee after shifts. Shared exhaustion. Someone waiting for you to come home.

Dennis scrubs a hand over his face.

“Okay,” he whispers to himself. “Okay. You’re fine.”

He sits up straighter, forcing himself back into doctor mode. Trauma. Charts. Patients. Normal things. Totally professional things.

He reaches for the statement Robby gave him earlier, scanning it again, trying to focus on words instead of lips and hands and the memory of Robby’s thumb brushing just behind his ear.

Mr. Rozanov was initially assessed by a licensed PTMC physician serving as part of the Pittsburgh Penguins’ game-day medical coverage team...

God. His life has become absurd. How the hell did a simple favor turn his life upside down? He really needs to call Greg Treviano and exchange a few choice words with him.

He drops the paper onto the desk and spins the chair again, restless energy buzzing under his skin.

Dennis checks the time. The trauma team should already be working. Robby is probably fully immersed now - telling people what to do and what meds to pull and staying calm even as someone bleeds out in front of him.

Like nothing happened.

The thought twists something in Dennis's chest.

What if it *was* just a moment for Robby? Stress, adrenaline, proximity make a perfect emotional storm. Dennis has seen it before. Hell, he sees it all the time in the pit. What if later means *we shouldn't do that again?*

Dennis's stomach flips.

He hates how much that possibility matters.

He pushes himself to his feet, pacing once across the office before stopping in front of the door. He hadn't seen it when he came in, since the door opened inward. It's a slightly crooked photo frame. It seems like a weird place to put a photo, but it sort of makes sense for Robby.

He'd be able to see it every single time he was about to leave the office. It was like a reminder.

He hesitates, then straightens it.

It's a group photo from some swanky hospital fundraiser - Robby younger, smiling openly, arm slung around colleagues. One of them looks to be Dr. Abbott.

He looks relaxed. Happy, even.

Dennis smiles despite himself.

"Yeah," he murmurs, letting his fingers graze the glass protecting the photo. "I'm screwed."

Dennis stays in Robby's office for a few more minutes, long after the adrenaline has faded into restless energy. Sitting still becomes unbearable. His thoughts keep looping- Robby's mouth, Robby's hands, Robby's fingers.

He needs a distraction.

He leaves the office and heads for the employee break room.

It's empty when he walks in, the fluorescent lights humming overhead.

Dennis pulls out the lunch he packed that morning: a turkey and cheese sandwich slathered with mayo and an apple already bruised from rolling around in his bag. He eats mechanically, barely tasting any of it. When he finishes, he buys a soda from the vending machine just to give himself something else to do.

The hiss of carbonation feels disproportionately loud in the silence.

He sips slowly, dragging things out, because sitting with nothing to occupy his hands-or his brain- is driving him insane.

The break room door swings open.

Dr. Abbott walks in, reusable lunch bags slung over his shoulder. Jack looks far too awake for someone about to start a night shift.

Dennis blinks.

Had he really burned that much time already?

“Hey, Whitaker,” Jack says casually, heading straight for the fridge. He rearranges containers to make space for his bag. Lunch? Dinner? Dennis has never figured out how night-shift people conceptualize meals. The whole schedule makes him feel permanently disoriented when he works it.

“I saw you on Twitter this morning.”

“Oh god.”

Dennis has said that phrase approximately fifty times today, and none of them have been positive.

Jack snorts. “Relax. Looks like it’s already died down.”

Dennis straightens immediately. “It has?”

“Yeah,” Jack says, shutting the fridge. He walks over and claps Dennis on the shoulder with a rough, friendly palm. “Internet attention span. Everyone’s obsessed with some fat hippo now.”

“...A hippo.”

“Pretty cute one, actually. Look.”

Jack pulls out his phone and flips it around. A photo of an absurdly round baby hippo fills the screen.

Dennis can’t help it- he smiles. “Okay. Yeah. That’s adorable.”

“One cute thing to another,” he mutters under his breath, drumming his fingers on the table.

“He’s on the roof,” Jack says, pocketing his phone.

Dennis blinks. “The hippo?”

Jack raises an eyebrow. “No. Robby.”

Heat floods Dennis’s face instantly.

Had Dr. Abbott just-?

“Relax, kid,” Jack says, grinning. “Robby’s had a crush on you for ages. It was honestly painful to watch. I only realized something finally happened because he didn’t look like he was about to emotionally implode for once when I got in.”

Dennis stares at him.

Robby... had a crush on him?

For *ages*?

His brain struggles to process the information. All this time Dennis thought he’d been humiliating himself with unrequited feelings.

“News to you, huh?” Jack asks, amused.

“...Yep,” Dennis manages, voice tight.

Jack jerks his head toward the hallway. “Roof, Dennis.”

Dennis nods automatically, already standing. His pulse picks up. His nerves and excitement tangle together in his chest.

“Roof,” he repeats to himself.

Yeah.

He needs to go to the roof.

Dennis takes the stairs two at a time. The elevator would be faster, probably, but he doesn't trust himself to stand still that long.

Robby's had a crush on you for ages.

Ages.

The word keeps echoing in his head as he climbs higher, past floors he rarely visits. The hospital sounds fade the farther he goes.

His pulse is loud in his ears, matching the thud of his shoes against concrete. By the time he reaches the roof access door, he's slightly out of breath. He hesitates.

What if Jack was wrong?

What if Robby just needed air? What he just needed distance after realizing he'd crossed a professional line with a resident who clearly cannot control himself?

Dennis presses his palm against the metal bar anyway.

The door opens with a heavy clang.

Cold evening air rushes over him immediately, clean compared to the recycled hospital smell despite the smells of the city. The sky is beginning to dim into early dusk- lavender bleeding into deep blue. The wind is brisk up here, tugging at his scrubs.

And there- leaning against the waist-high barrier - is Robby.

For a moment, Dennis just watches him.

Robby's still in scrubs, his hoodie sleeves pushed up. His hair is slightly mussed like he's been running his hands through it. His reading glasses are gone, no longer hanging from his neck. A pocket, maybe?

He can do this. He walks up as close as he dared.

“Hi.”

Robby turns immediately.

Their eyes meet.

He's surprised at first, but then his face dissolves into relief so obvious it makes Dennis's chest tighten.

"Hey," Robby says softly.

Dennis shoves his hands into his pockets to stop himself from fidgeting. "Dr. Abbott told me you were up here."

Robby huffs a quiet laugh. "Of course he did."

It's different up here than before.

There's no desk between them. No fluorescent office lights. Just wind and open sky and the city below.

The wind lifts the edge of Robby's scrub top. Somewhere below, a siren wails faintly before fading into the distance.

“I didn’t mean for that to happen,” Robby says finally.

Dennis’s stomach drops.

Robby continues quickly. “Not because I didn’t want to. God knows I wanted to.” His mouth twitches. “I just... I’m your attending. You’re a resident. That matters.”

Oh.

“Okay,” Dennis says, because he doesn’t know what else to say. Something like disappointment prickles under his ribs.

Robby studies him carefully. “But I’m not sorry I kissed you.”

That knocks the air right out of Dennis’s lungs.

“You’re not?”

“No.” Robby shakes his head once. “I’ve been trying very hard not to, actually.”

“You’ve been trying not to?” he asks faintly.

Robby huffs a quiet laugh. “You’re in my department. I’m supposed to be mentoring you, not- ” He gestures vaguely between them. “Not wanting to shove you against my desk.”

Dennis’s face goes molten.

“Okay,” he says again, weakly.

Robby pushes off the ledge and steps closer. They aren’t touching yet. Just close.

Dennis swallows. “Jack said you’ve liked me for ages.”

Robby groans softly and tips his head back toward the sky. “I am never speaking to him again.”

“So it’s true?”

Robby looks back at him. There's no hesitation in his answer.

"Yes."

Dennis steps a little closer without meaning to.

"I thought it was just me," he admits. "I figured I was projecting or... having some weird authority-figure crisis."

Robby laughs under his breath. "Trust me, I questioned my own judgment plenty."

They're close enough Dennis can see the faint shadow of stubble along Robby's jaw.

"That was a lapse in judgment," he continues. "A mutual one."

"Definitely mutual," Dennis blurts.

Robby's mouth twitches.

The wind picks up, ruffling Dennis's hair. He doesn't look away, holding Robby's gaze.

"I meant what I said earlier," Robby continues. "Your career comes first. Always. I won't do anything that jeopardizes that."

Dennis nods slowly.

"I know."

"But," Robby adds, voice softer now, "I also don't want to pretend that it didn't mean something."

Dennis's chest tightens.

"I don't want safe," Dennis says before he can chicken out.

Robby's brow furrows slightly. "This isn't about safe."

"It kind of is," Dennis insists. "You keep talking about protecting me. My career. My reputation. Like I'm going to break."

Robby's expression softens. "I don't think you're fragile."

"Then what?"

Robby steps closer again. There's barely five inches between them now.

"I think you're talented," he says quietly. "And I think you're ambitious. And I think if this"- he gestures between them again-"goes badly, it will hurt you more than it hurts me."

Dennis swallows.

"And I don't want to be the reason you lose anything," Robby finishes.

The wind howls briefly between them.

Dennis considers that. Really considers it.

“You wouldn’t be,” he says finally. “If anything happens, it’s because I want it to.”

Robby searches his face. “You’re sure?”

“Yeah,” Dennis says. “I am.”

He’s never been more certain about anything in his life.

The realization settles deep in his chest. Is this what Shane and Ilya had felt about each other? Absolute certainty- even in the face of what feels like impossible odds?

Robby’s shoulders drop, tension draining out of him as if someone finally released a pressure valve.

“Okay,” he says.

This time there's no dramatic kiss. There's no reckless repeat of earlier. Instead, Dennis steps closer instead and leans forward, resting his forehead against Robby's shoulder. His face presses lightly into Robby's chest, close enough to hear the slow rhythm of his heartbeat.

Robby stills for a fraction of a second, surprised, but then his arms come around Dennis, broad forearms settling carefully at his back. One hand spreads between Dennis's shoulder blades, warm and steady. He lowers his chin to rest against Dennis's hair. It feels nice.

They stand there together as the lights come on across the city.

No more pretending nothing had changed.

"Safe," Dennis murmurs quietly against Robby's chest.

"Yeah," Robby agrees.

Two Weeks Later...

Dennis tugs at the edge of his turtleneck for what has to be the tenth time in five minutes. The fabric scratches faintly against his neck, doing an adequate but deeply suspicious job of

hiding the massive hickey Robby left there the night before.

He really should have anticipated that outcome.

Across the counter, Mel scrolls through imaging on the tablet while Dennis leans beside her, both of them fully absorbed in a case that technically isn't even theirs anymore. The patient- a sixty-five-year-old man- has already been whisked upstairs to the cath lab.

Which, of course, makes it infinitely more interesting.

They *cannot* let it go.

When Dennis had tried to pull Trinity into the discussion earlier, she'd taken one look at their intensity, rolled her eyes, and declared them *unrecoverable nerds* before walking away.

Frankly, Dennis suspects she's still annoyed he's been spending so many nights away from the apartment at his mysterious new boyfriend's place. He'd promised her tonight was sacred roommate time:. He was fully prepared to binge *Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, split a giant container of orange chicken, and drink an irresponsible amount of wine.

He's looking forward to it.

Dennis taps the counter thoughtfully. “Vitals were ninety-two over fifty, heart rate one-oh-five, satting fine on room air. AED advised shock in the field. STEMI alert makes sense.”

“I’m telling you,” Mel mutters, squinting at the EKG. “LAD occlusion.”

“Yeah, but a classic LAD usually wipes out a bigger territory- septum, anterior wall, sometimes lateral involvement.” Dennis drums his fingers. “This looks... weirdly isolated.”

Mel tilts her head. “Isolated lateral wall MIs are rare.”

“Unless a smaller LAD branch is occluded.”

Her eyes light up. “Diagonal branch? Maybe obtuse marginal?”

“Exactly.”

“Dang,” she says. “Okay, now I’m invested.”

“Of course. How could you not be?”

“Hey, Donnie,” Mel adds casually.

Dennis looks up, startled. He hadn’t even noticed the nurse approaching. Donnie stands beside them holding a medium-sized brown box.

“This came for you,” Donnie says, offering it over.

Dennis frowns as he takes it. “For *me*?”

He isn’t expecting anything. Ever. Especially not deliveries addressed to the emergency department.

“Should I be opening mysterious packages sent to the ER?” Dennis asks cautiously.

Donnie shrugs. “Mailroom already X-rayed it. If it’s a bomb, it’s a very polite one.”

Dennis flips the box over and freezes when he sees the return address.

Jane Hollander
81 Lily Lane
Montreal

A grin spreads across his face before he can stop it.

“Well,” he says, “can someone hand me scissors? Time to find out if we all die from ricin.”

Mel produces a pair from her pockets and passes them over.

Dennis slices through the tape, folds back the flaps, and blinks.

Inside, cushioned in neat layers of tissue paper, sits a pair of sleek black sneakers. There are some kind of grey mesh panels on the side. They look expensive. So expensive, in fact, that Dennis instinctively feels underdressed just looking at them.

Tucked beside them is a bundle of thick black socks.

“Whoa,” Donnie breathes, leaning in. “How the hell did you get these?”

Dennis looks up. “The shoes?”

Donnie makes grabby hands until Dennis steps aside. He lifts one shoe like it’s a museum artifact.

“Dude,” Donnie says reverently. “These are the Reebok collab with Jordan. They sold out everywhere.”

“...Is that a person?” Dennis asks.

Several nearby staff immediately turn toward them. He can literally hear Perlah click her tongue at him in disapproval.

“Oh my *god*,” Donnie continues. “Resale on these is like six hundred bucks.”

Dennis’s eyes widen.

He pulls out his phone and opens his messages.

Dennis: You sent me shoes????

The reply comes almost instantly.

Shane: It was Ilya's idea.

Dennis: These are expensive!!!!

Shane: He felt bad at puking on your shoes.. Don't even worry Rebook is a sponsor of mine they just kinda send me stuff so it was free

Shane: The socks were my idea though

Shane: got them at Simons

Dennis laughs under his breath. He knows Shane is a millionaire, but it's still nice to know he didn't drop \$600 on shoes for Dennis.

Dennis: thank you

A new message pops up immediately from Ilya. Shane must have told him Dennis texted him.

Ilya: you got the shoes

Dennis: I did. Thank you. They're really nice.

He glances up to find half the department now gathered around Donnie, passing the sneaker between them like it's a newborn baby.

Dennis: i'm popular now thx guys

Ilya: with your handsome boss???

Dennis rolls his eyes.

Dennis: I don't need shoes to be popular with him.

Ilya: 😊 get it pretty twink doctor

He slips the phone back into his pocket.

Mel peers into the box again. "There's a note at the bottom."

"Oh."

Dennis retrieves the folded card while carefully ignoring the crowd still admiring his footwear. He opens it.

Dennis,

Thanks again for everything. Please enjoy the shoes. You can machine-wash these so cleanup is easier next time you get barfed on.

—S

P.S. Ilya says these will make you look hot. Something about memory foam lifting your calves.? Report back on what your boss says.

Dennis snorts softly and folds the note again, far more carefully than necessary. He has no intention of throwing it away anytime soon.

“Who’s it from?” Mel asks.

Dennis closes the box, smiling faintly.

“Oh,” he says lightly, warmth blooming in his chest. He watches as the shoes get passed around. He picks up a pair of thick, black socks. They feel waterproof. Very vomit-resistant.

"Just from a couple of friends."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all very, very much for reading! Thank you for all your kind words of support in the comments. It genuinely inspired me.

See you next time! <3

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