

But is it wrong if I see him this weekend?

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But is it wrong if I see him this weekend?

by [ihave_a_boringlife](#)

Summary

That thought settles into his brain dangerously. Ilya's been with everyone. Girls. Guys. Others. What's another person on the list?

If Shane wants experience...

If he wants to stop feeling behind...

Why not Ilya?

Yes, he was a complete asshole that Shane wished he could choke to death sometimes and his brother's childhood bestfriend, but it wouldn't mean anything. It's for the experience, the education of it all.

For hockey.

Obviously.

Or: Ilya Rozanov has always been Shane Hollander's older brother's best friend. He was never supposed to become Shane's first everything.

Notes

Hello to anyone reading this! I just want to state that this is my first fanfic... ever, and I'm not really sure on how to do things. Please let me know if you see any mistake in the tags or the fic itself or anything, and give me all the advice, it would be greatly appreciated. As I've written more for this fic, I think I truly found my writing style, so the first few chapters may be rougher.

Titles from: Victorious Cast - Best Friend's Brother

PLEASE ENJOY!!!

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

Chapter 1: Is this all in my head? I don't know what to do

“Shaney! I missed you!” are the first words Shane Hollander hears after another summer away at hockey camp.

Hockey camp is important for anyone serious about the sport. Shane knows that. That’s why he spends most of his summers away from home.

His parents understand his need to go. He’s dedicated and disciplined, they love that about him. Nick, however, never really understood.

As Shane’s older brother, Nick felt like it was his job to show him the world. Hockey camp, in his opinion, stunted that. Nick believed it was a waste of a summer, Shane was already at his peak, wasn’t he? What else was there to achieve?

Nick’s summers were filled with complete and utter fun. Road trips, loud music, and parties that lasted until sunrise. Living out every young man’s dream summer, all with his annoying Russian best friend, *Ilya Rozanov*.

Shane liked to blame a lot of Nick’s quirks on Rozanov. The guy was a full on manwhore. Shane was convinced he’d slept with every single woman... *and* man in town who could possibly be attracted to him.

The complete opposite of Shane. Shane hasn’t even had his first kiss. He was too focused on hockey to think about anything else, or at least, that’s what he told himself. Because hockey wasn’t just a sport to him, it was his *entire* life.

Shane wanted more experience and a stronger foundation before entering the NHL draft, so he chose to play college hockey instead of jumping straight into the league.

He had just graduated high school before leaving for camp and turned eighteen around the same time. Camp only took up part of the summer, leaving him one final month at home before college began.

He’d been accepted to multiple schools on hockey scholarships, but ultimately chose the same one Nick and Rozanov attended. It was only a twenty minute commute from home, saving him from dorm life. Nick and Rozanov shared an apartment near campus. Shane hoped he’d eventually do the same with his friends.

“I didn’t miss you, Nick,” Shane says, rolling his eyes, though he was smiling. He had missed him, a little.

“Hockey camp made you a liar, huh? Wait- bro, you look so... different. What do they feed you over there?” Nick asks, staring at him.

In truth, Shane figured his new shape would garner a few questions. He worked out more than ever before this summer, and it seems like he's hit some form of second puberty.

Although he's played hockey most of his life, Shane's stature never seemed to catch up with his ability. Now, though, he looks better than ever, especially with his newly structured diet.

"Haha," Shane replies flatly. "Nothing new. Same old, same old."

Nick narrows his eyes before laughing. "Guess I can't take you out with me anymore. You'll steal all the attention."

"We both know the attention I want isn't the same kind you do," Shane says, already unpacking.

He had come out to his family just before leaving for camp. In a way, it had felt safer to tell them right before disappearing for two months, just in case they didn't accept him.

But they did, happily and with open arms. Nick was glad he'd eventually have a brother-in-law instead of a sister-in-law.

"Well-" Nick starts, but he's quickly cut off by the door opening to a loud, obnoxious voice.

"Baby Hollander! Welcome home!" Ilya Rozanov yells as he walks into the Hollander home. He stretches out the words and smirks as his eyes land on Shane.

"Roz!" Nick shouts, giving him a bro hug. "The fuck are you doing here?"

"I remembered Shaney came home today," Ilya explains. "Had to welcome him back, of course"

His eyes land on Shane, they were slow and amused, as if they were assessing every single part of him.

"Of course," Shane mutters, rolling his eyes hard enough to risk them getting stuck.

"Did you finally hit a growth spurt?" Ilya smirks. "Careful, Hollander. Baby Hollander's about to steal your spotlight," Rozanov jokes, then winks at Shane.

"Stop being an ass, Rozanov. What do you even want?"

"Is it illegal to check on a friend? It's been so long. I even brought you a gift. Very yummy Snickers bar," Ilya dramatically sighs.

Shane freezes. A fucking Snickers bar.

Six years ago.

Shane's twelfth birthday had not been going according to plan.

He invited his entire team and friends, not expecting too much, some of them might have been on vacation or out of town. But nothing felt worse than seeing absolutely no one appear.

His parents had set up a hockey themed party in their cottage's backyard, per Shane's request. They put so much effort into it, only to be rewarded with disappointment.

Shane sat in a corner, tears welling in his eyes as he watched time tick by to no avail.

Suddenly, his brother and his brother's best friend appeared, laughing and joking around. They were two years older than Shane and still treated him like a baby.

"Yeah, no, 'cause Jess said she'd be there so we have to show up. Come on, man!" Nick exclaimed.

Ilya chuckled and nodded, "Yes, for Jess," he teased, before pausing as he looked at the decorations.

"Wait... is today your brother's birthday party?" Ilya asked, confused.

Nick yawned and nodded, "Yeah. Too bad it's on the same day as Cliff's pool party 'cause no one's showing up. Anyways, let's go get ready. You can borrow a swimsuit of mine."

Shane felt distraught. His entire team and friends had chosen Cliff's pool party over his. His day was completely ruined, and the tears began falling freely.

And then, suddenly, Ilya's eyes caught his. His mouth fell into a small gasp.

"Yeah, get those. I will be with you soon. I want those cupcakes," Ilya said to Nick, pointing at the untouched hockey themed cupcakes. Nick laughed as he headed inside.

Ilya stood there for a moment before walking toward Shane and sitting next to him in the corner. "Hello, baby Hollander. Happy birthday," he said with a small smile.

Shane sniffled. "Thank you," he replied, looking down.

"I am sorry those losers did not show up. I am sure they missed out on boring but fun hockey party," Ilya expressed.

Shane glared at him for a moment before looking down. "I just thought that at least one person would be here," he sighed.

"I am here. Should be enough," Ilya replied teasingly.

Shane shook his head, "No, you're going to that party too, with Nick. Not even my own brother wants to stay." The tears began reappearing at the thought.

Ilya frowned and looked directly at Shane, "He is also missing out. Cliff is not that cool anyways. No reason for this huge deal."

"Everyone else seems to think otherwise..."

Ilya frowned again, then suddenly his lips smiled. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a Snickers bar. "You like?" he asked.

"Yes. It's my favorite," Shane replied with a small smile.

Ilya handed him the candy bar. Shane hesitantly accepted.

"I will stay," Ilya proclaimed suddenly. "We'll tell Nick something. Or not tell him, he will survive."

Shane stared at him, "You don't have to."

"I want to," Ilya shrugged. "Pool party happens every year. Baby Hollander turns twelve only once."

Shane looked confused. Why was Ilya doing so much to make him feel better? He had always ignored Shane or made fun of him with Nick.

"No, no, I don't want you to miss out-"

"I will not be. I am still life of party. Just here instead of there. Will be fun."

Shane smiled, "Okay."

Ilya smiled back.

A moment later, Nick walked back into the backyard, looking around. "Have you seen Ilya?" he asked, glancing toward the house. "We were gonna go... study."

Shane rolled his eyes at the obvious lie.

He quickly turned toward Ilya and whispered, "Hide." Ilya chuckled under his breath and ducked behind one of the lawn chairs. Shane wiped at his face quickly, trying to look as normal as possible.

"Oh. Uh, yeah. So weird, but he ran out a few moments ago. Something about his dad needing him home or whatever. But he said you can... study without him. He won't mind. He'll text you later."

Nick frowned slightly but seemed to accept the obvious lie. "Okay. Cool. Well, I'll go get to that. Have a fun birthday!" Nick said before heading back inside.

As soon as the door shut, Ilya stepped out from behind the chair. "Wow," he grinned. "What a liar. I have already corrupted you."

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was smiling now. "Sure."

He picked up the Snickers bar and began unwrapping it. He needed something sweet right now.

*Ilya watched carefully as Shane took a bite.
"You like it, yes?" he asked.*

"Yes. I told you, it's my favorite."

"I know."

Shane looked at him, confused, "How?"

Ilya shrugged, "I notice it."

"Okay, creepy," Shane laughed, but it didn't feel creepy to him, it felt more...

"Eat up, birthday boy. We will make this best birthday ever."

And they did. Shane's twelfth birthday went from being one of the worst to one of his favorites. They played soccer in the yard alone, eating cupcakes meant for twenty people and laughing until Shane forgot to check the door for the missing guests.

After that day, Ilya went back to teasing him like usual. But something small had changed because Shane never forgot that he stayed when no one else did.

Shane stares at the candy bar in Ilya's hand.

"I'm on a performance diet. No unnecessary sugars," Shane asserts.

Ilya's smile dims just slightly, "Even if it is your favorite unnecessary sugar?"

"Even if it is," Shane quietly responds, but there's something almost regretful in his tone. He wants it, *God, he wants it*. But he can't break the regimen he's worked so hard to stick to.

Nick scoffs, "Not sure why you like those things anyway. Easily bottom two candies," he cuts in.

“Nick,” Ilya grumbled seriously, “Do not bully Shaney for his bad taste. He has special preferences.”

“How about you both leave me alone so I can unpack?” The hockey player mutters.

Nick and Ilya exchange a look.

“Sure, bro,” Nick says. “But tonight we’re taking you out. Cliff’s throwing a house party. You need to show off the new look.”

“No. Absolutely not,” Shane denies immediately.

Nick sighs dramatically, “Oh, come on. I think your friends will be there too. Rose and Hayden? Yeah. It’ll be fun. You need to let loose a little.”

At the mention of his friends, Shane hesitates for a second. They were supposed to come by later anyway. And if they showed up excited about the party too... he wouldn’t stand a chance to say no. His eyes flicked to Ilya, trying to read him, but his expression was completely unreadable, which is typical.

“I’ll think about it,” Shane finally lets out.

Nick cheers, “That’s all I’m asking! Let me know later, yeah?”

Shane nods as Nick leaves the room with another cheer. Ilya lingers and steps closer, holding the Snickers bar out again, gently shaking it in front of Shane.

“Take it. We all need treats sometimes,” he commands softly.

Shane stares at it. He shouldn’t, he knows he shouldn’t. But the memory of a twelve year old version of himself, sitting alone in a decorated backyard, flashes through his mind.

He reaches out and takes it.

“Uh... thanks,” he says, feeling strangely off-balance.

Ilya’s smirk returns, “Welcome home, Shane.”

And then he leaves.

“Shane, you have to come! Now that you’re out and proud, maybe we’ll find you a man... or two,” Rose says, sprawled across Shane’s bed.

“I agree. There has to be someone who’s into dudes. Shouldn’t be too hard, I mean, look at you,” Hayden points out. Rose nods in agreement.

It’s safe to say his best friends are definitely impressed by his newly changed form.

“I don’t want any of that, guys. I mean, I tried a relationship once, with you, and you know how that ended,” he responds, glancing at Rose.

Rose laughs and shakes her head, “Well, that’s because you’re not into girls and we were forcing it. You couldn’t even kiss me.”

Shane looks down, embarrassed at the memory.

“Jackie and I are in absolute bliss. Being in a relationship can be great, Shane,” Hayden adds.

“Absolute bliss? Shut up, man,” Shane says, laughing along with Rose.

Hayden scoffs, “What? It’s true! You won’t understand until you’re in one.”

“Well, he doesn’t even have to get into one. But maybe getting laid would loosen him up a little,” Rose exclaims.

“Why does everyone say I need to loosen up? I’m already loose!” Shane shoots back, irritation creeping into his tone. Rose and Hayden burst out laughing.

“No, you aren’t, Shane. That’s why we’re trying to get someone to make you... loose,” Rose teases, Shane goes red.

“Whatever. Fine. I’ll go if it gets you guys to stop talking. But I’m not hooking up with anyone.”

“We’ll see about that tonight,” Rose sounds smug. Sometimes he wishes she would just give up on his romantic life.

He sends a quick text to Nick letting him know he’s actually attending the party.

“Nice. Shane’s in,” Nick says, blowing cigarette smoke into the air. Ilya knows Nick’s parents are against it, but Nick has never cared, unlike Shane, who’d rather die than take a single puff.

“Mhm,” Ilya replies absently, not having much to say as his thoughts begin running wild.

He’d always known Shane was beautiful, but now he’s *hot* and it unsettles him more than he’d like to admit, the idea that other people might notice that too. He doesn’t know why he’s feeling this way. He never saw Shane as a younger brother or anything. Shane was just...

there. Being annoyingly boring whenever Ilya visited the Hollander house.

Shane was neat. He liked to keep things organized. He loved hockey, Ilya had never seen anyone that obsessed. He was a nerd, always studying when he wasn't at practice. He had two friends, both equally annoying. He never went out. He liked Snickers bars and ginger ale.

And he looked absolutely heartbreaking when he cried. Ilya remembers that part too clearly for his own good.

Over the years, he'd collected small details about Shane through his scattered appearances in his life without meaning to. The way his nose scrunched when he was annoyed, the way he got stubborn when arguing, the way he pretended not to care about something when he very obviously did.

Maybe that's what makes this different. Maybe that's what makes this hard, he doesn't want to see Shane vulnerable or heartbroken again.

"Didn't Troy Barrett come out recently? Maybe I'll introduce them. Troy's a sweetheart now that he's away from Dallas Kent," Nick suggests.

Something sharp twists in Ilya's chest, "He is dating some guy, I heard."

"Oh. Well, maybe he could still be a good friend. Isn't it good to be friends with people who've had similar experiences? That's why you're friends with that Russian girl, right?"

"Yes. It's good."

Nick is referring to Svetlana, a girl Ilya met in a class on campus. She is Russian too, and it's nice speaking in his native tongue. They had hooked up more than a few times. He enjoyed her company, but it never felt in any way romantic.

"Wait, you're bi, bro. Maybe you can help him," Nick stammers.

Ilya stares at him, "Help him how? Teach him how to fuck a guy?"

Nick chokes on his cigarette smoke, "No, no! Maybe just help him flirt or something. He's such a loser, I don't think I've ever seen him flirt."

Ilya studies his best friend for a moment. "I will talk to him," he says finally.

Nick nods, "Well, it's getting late, let's head out. You're driving."

They both stand. "Is Shane going with his friends?" Ilya asks.

Nick shrugs, "I guess."

And then he climbs into Ilya's passenger seat.

Loud music punches through the walls as Shane, Rose, and Hayden step into the house. The air is pungent with alcohol, sweat, and smoke. Bodies grind against each other in the dim light. Someone nearly spills a drink on Shane before he even makes it past the doorway. *Everything is perfect. Just perfect.*

He's already calculating how soon he can leave without it looking like a pathetic loser. Parties have never felt fun to Shane, only very unpredictable. There's too many people and way too many possibilities. They're physically *and* emotionally messy. He prefers environments he can completely control himself, like rinks, gyms, his room. Places where he can sit and think freely without loud music in the background.

A loud splash echoes through the house. He turns toward the back door, the pool glows under string lights.

"Shane, babe, I gotta go find my friend! I'll be back!" Rose shouts over the music. Hayden is already gone, probably searching for Jackie.

Shane nods, pretending he's fine. "I think I'll go outside," he offers, but Rose is gone before he finishes.

Great.

He heads toward the backyard. It's slightly less packed, but not calmer by any means. People crowd the pool while others chant around a beer pong table. Someone's cannonballing every five minutes.

Shane makes his way to the drink table, staring at the array of drinks: beer, vodka, rum, tequila. That's *it*. There's no soda, no water, and definitely no ginger ale.

He sighs.

God, he would kill for a cold ginger ale right now. The fizz, the sweetness, something simple and normal to him. Instead, it's just bottles and red cups. He grabs a cup, pretends to pour something, then sets it down untouched. Maybe he'll just hold one all night.

As he leans against the wall, scanning the yard, he wonders where Nick and Rozanov are. Maybe he can stick near them and survive the night.

"Hollzy, my man!"

Shane looks up.

J.J. strides toward him, already flushed and grinning at him. They'd met at hockey camp last year and now they're teammates at university. J.J. is loud and charismatic, the kind of guy

who thrives in places like this.

“Can’t believe I’m seeing you at a party! You finally wanna live a little, huh?” J.J. says in his Quebec accent.

Shane laughs, “I guess. One last summer before college.”

“Yes, man! You know... they say players do better after a good night out, if you know what I mean,” he winks.

Shane blinks, “Wouldn’t I just be hungover?”

J.J. laughs loudly, “Not the drinking, Hollander. What happens after. A good lay. I always play like a fucking beast after a wild night.”

Shane stares at him.

“A... lay.”

“Yes! You gotta *relax*, release all this tension. Trust me.”

Before Shane can respond, some girl tugs J.J. away toward the pool.

And suddenly Shane is alone with that idea.

A good lay.

He’s never even kissed a guy. The only relationship he’s attempted was with Rose at sixteen, and he couldn’t even bring himself to kiss her. Once he accepted he liked men, he assumed everything else would just... click. And weirdly enough, it hasn’t.

He watches couples pressed together near the fence, as hands slide along waists with confidence he’ll never even dream of having. Maybe J.J.’s right, maybe he’s too wound up and that’s what he’s missing.

But with who?

Troy Barrett just came out, but he’s dating Harris Drover. Most of the other queer guys in town are older, or taken, or both. There has to be others. Maybe Rose knows someone. *Maybe-*

“Baby Hollander! You are being very boring just standing there. Go party!”

Ilya Rozanov’s agitating, grating voice rumbles beside him.

Shane nearly jumps.

Ilya Rozanov.

Bisexual Ilya Rozanov.

Oh.

Oh.

That thought settles into his brain dangerously. Ilya's been with everyone. Girls. Guys. Others. What's another person on the list?

If Shane wants experience...

If he wants to stop feeling behind...

Why not Ilya?

Yes, he was a complete asshole that Shane wished he could choke to death sometimes and his brother's childhood bestfriend, but it wouldn't mean anything. It's for the experience, the education of it all.

For hockey.

Obviously.

"Shut up," Shane mutters. "I'm having fun."

"Of course you are, Mr. Boring," Ilya says, smirking as he leans beside him.

"So," Shane asks casually, "find your nightly prospect yet?"

Ilya raises a brow, "Why? You jealous?"

"Absolutely not."

Ilya laughs, and then something suddenly shifts. That annoying smirk becomes... less annoying.

"Nick told me you came out," he starts. "That is good. I, uh... if you ever need help with anything, advice or whatever. I am best bisexual in Canada, very qualified."

Shane's heart stutters.

He was just thinking-

"Oh. Um. Thanks," Shane says, suddenly aware of his own pulse.

Ilya studies him, "No questions?"

Shane almost says it. He almost asks, almost ruins his dignity forever.

“*Shane!*”

Rose barrels toward him, dragging Hayden and Jackie behind her.

“There you are! Have you danced yet? No, of course you haven’t. You’re Shane Hollander. Come on!”

She’s clearly drunk as she speaks. And for some reason, Hayden begins eyeing Ilya suspiciously.

“Pike,” Ilya greets. “You get any better at... anything yet?”

Hayden’s jaw tightens and mouth opens.

Shane steps between them immediately before Hayden could muster up a single word. “Let’s go dance,” he says urgently.

As he pulls away, Ilya calls after him,
“Hollander! I am here if you need me!”

Shane hears the sentence and stops for a second before moving further away.

He dances with his friends, tries to forget about it all. But even as music vibrates through him and Rose spins him around, his thoughts won’t settle.

A good lay. Ilya Rozanov. *I am here if you need me.*

Later, when he leaves earlier than everyone else, without finding that *good lay*, he’s still thinking. Could he actually ask? Would Ilya say yes?

And why does that possibility feel more terrifying than any party *ever* has?

Chapter 2: I really hope I can get him alone

Chapter Summary

Shane asks Ilya the ultimate question.

Chapter Notes

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

A week after the party, Shane's thoughts still haven't untangled from the mess they were left in. He's been to the rink three times since then, and something feels extremely off. It's not in his skating skills, but in his head.

Every drill feels like it's missing something and he could be sharper and faster on the ice. He keeps wondering how much better he could be doing if he just had sex. It sounds stupid when he thinks of it like that. Like something a middle school boy would say in a locker room while undergoing puberty.

But what if it isn't?

He's not doing bad, he's never doing bad. His coach and teammates consistently praise him. But better exists, better *always* exists.

There is no ceiling for Shane Hollander. There is no threshold where he gets to relax and say this is enough. Hockey doesn't allow that. *He'd* never allow that, because hockey has never failed him.

It's easy to think about hockey. He's loved it since before he understood what love was. Since his parents took him to his first Ottawa Centaurs game and he sat so high in the stands he could barely see the puck, but he felt it. He'd felt the puck's movements, heard the sound of blades cutting ice, seen the way the arena held its breath before a goal.

Hockey became muscle memory, his second nature. Sometimes it feels more natural than speaking. Without it, he wouldn't know who he is. Without it, he wouldn't know what he's working toward. Without it, there's just... failure.

So if something, *anything*, could improve him, even marginally, he has to consider it. Even if that something is Ilya Rozanov. And maybe that's the flaw in this whole plan.

He can't tell Nick. That part is non-negotiable. Nick would lose his mind and never look at Shane the same way again. Shane isn't sure if he possesses the level of faith that would require him to trust Ilya with a secret like this.

What if Ilya doesn't even want someone inexperienced? What if that's embarrassing? What if Shane's too stiff and awkward during it? He's the boring sibling. The one who leaves parties early and drinks ginger ale instead of beer, which is not exactly seductive.

The truth is, Shane has never really felt desire the way people describe it. No overwhelming or fully consuming feelings. He's never looked at someone and thought, I need them. And he's never been looked at like that either. At least, not that he's noticed.

This summer was the first time people commented on his body. The way his shirts fit differently now. But compliments aren't the same as wanting, and no one has ever crossed that line with him.

He's never tried to invite it, either. Meanwhile, Nick has never struggled with this part of life. Girls have been slipping into their house since they were fifteen. Shane used to lie awake and listen to hushed giggles in the hallway outside his room. Nick always thought their parents were asleep. They weren't, they knew every time. They just asked him to be safe... and quiet.

Nick never had to question whether someone would want him. He's always moved through life like the answer is automatically yes. And Ilya is the same. They're both so effortlessly wanted.

Shane and Nick feel like opposites accidentally placed in the same family. Their parents joke that one of them must've been switched at the hospital.

Shane is structured and disciplined, he is obsessed with precision. His life is a carefully curated routine of workouts, meal plans, practice schedules, hockey.

Nick lives completely impulsively. His gym sessions are for aesthetics, not any kind of sports performance. He attends parties to no end and his decisions are made at the moment. That's why Nick and Ilya work, their lives fit easily together.

Sometimes Shane wonders what it would feel like to be easy. Maybe then he wouldn't be calculating the statistical impact of sex on athletic performance. Maybe then he would've already had his first sexual experience. Maybe then he wouldn't feel like he's standing at the starting line of a race everyone else finished years before him. And somewhere in the middle of all that thinking, he realizes something extremely uncomfortable. *It has to be Ilya.*

He starts making a list in his head, because that's what he does when something overwhelms him, and Ilya checks all of the boxes. He is experienced, obviously, he's into men, he isn't a stranger who could secretly record him, blackmail him, and ruin his hockey career, and most importantly, Ilya already offered to... help.

The list is still a work in progress.

Before he can talk himself out of it, Shane grabs his keys.

Nick's at work, a shift at the coffee shop near campus. Ilya is probably home. He doesn't usually have classes this time of day from what he remembers. The drive feels shorter than

usual, or maybe longer. His thoughts loop so aggressively he barely registers traffic lights.

He rehearses sentences over and over, planning every sound down to the smallest detail. He will sound well prepared and eager to learn, yet polite and forthcoming. But every version he tries sounds absolutely ridiculous.

When he pulls into the apartment complex parking lot, his chest tightens. He sits in the car for a full minute.

“Come on, Hollander,” he whispers to himself. “This is just a very simple conversation.”

Just a conversation that could permanently alter your relationship with your brother’s best friend. He gets out anyway.

By the time he reaches their floor, his palms are sweating. He finds the door, raises his hand, and knocks. There’s a moment before he hears movement inside. He considers leaving immediately. *This is insane*. He can just download an app and find a stranger that’ll get it over with.

He turns slightly, ready to retreat when the door opens. Ilya stands there shirtless, hair damp, water still tracing down his collarbone. Only adorning a pair of athletic shorts that hang low on his hips. Shane’s brain short-circuits.

He’s seen men shirtless before. Locker rooms are not new territory, so naked bodies aren’t foreign to him. But this body, contextualized like this, feels different than any that had come before it. This is the man he’s been mentally undressing for a week. Heat immediately floods his face.

Ilya notices instantly, of course he does. A slow smirk spreads across his mouth, “Oh. Hello.”

Shane just stares. His mouth opens slightly, then closes, then opens again. He forgets how the English language works.

“Baby Hollander, are you okay? Nick is not home. If you need him, I can-”

“Did you mean it?” Shane blurts. The words tumble out too fast for his liking.

Ilya blinks, “What?”

“When you said you’re here if I need you. Did you mean it?” His voice sounds strained, almost panicked.

“I mean... yes?” Ilya’s brows knit together. “Hollander, come inside.”

The hallway suddenly feels too exposed and way too public for what he’s about to say, so Shane steps in. The door shuts behind him with a soft click that feels deafening.

Ilya gestures toward the living room and takes a seat on the couch. Shane stays standing. He

feels like if he sits, he won't be able to get the words out.

"I— okay. So J.J., he's my teammate, he told me something at the party. About how players perform better after..." Shane swallows. "After sex. And I thought that sounded fake. But he seemed convinced. And I've been thinking about it all week and I don't want to miss something that could make me better."

Ilya just stares.

"And I've never done anything like that before. So I need someone experienced. And trustworthy. And you're... you. And I know you. So it makes it less risky. But I don't know if you'd even want to do that with me, so it's fine if you say no, I can find someone else, I just thought—"

"Shane. Shane." Ilya stands abruptly. "I do not understand. Say it clearly."

Shane feels detached from his body. Like he's hovering above himself, watching this unfold. He locks eyes with Ilya. "I need you to fuck me so I can get better at hockey."

The words feel foreign in his mouth. Rozanov is going to kick him out, tell his brother, and he's going to be embarrassed for life.

But there is only silence as the sentence hangs between them. Ilya mutters words under his breath in Russian that Shane can't understand, then he steps closer, *a lot* closer.

His expression is different now. The teasing is gone, his eyes are darker, focused on him in a way that makes Shane's pulse spike. The air feels so thin yet so tight.

What the fuck did he just do.

When Ilya first locked eyes on Shane Hollander standing at his door, red faced and trembling through that sentence, he genuinely thought he had misheard him.

Had he imagined Shane in positions he wouldn't admit to under torture after seeing him this summer? Absolutely. Did he ever intend to act on it? No. He'd known Shane too long. Shane had always been sweet, painfully earnest, too sincere for something casual and reckless. Ilya had never seen him as a one night stand kind of guy, and that was all Ilya had ever really allowed himself to be.

And yet here Shane was, flushed with embarrassment and shame and determination, asking him to fuck him. Power curled low in Ilya's stomach before he could stop it.

Shane was clearly a virgin. Ilya had never heard even a whisper otherwise, and Nick worried

about his “nonexistent game” often enough. And now, Shane wanted him to be the first. Wanted Ilya to unravel him, to see him open and undone. The thought alone made him hungrier as he stepped closer.

It is hot, undeniably hot, but it is also unbearably adorable. He wants to have sex to get better at hockey. Who thinks like that? *Of course he does*, Ilya thinks. Hockey is probably Shane’s first love, maybe his only real one so far. But sex isn’t supposed to be an athletic enhancement, it’s supposed to be heat and want and losing control. If Ilya agrees to this, he’ll have to show him that.

If he agrees.

If Shane were a stranger who walked up and asked him the same thing, Ilya wouldn’t have hesitated. He would have had him against the nearest surface before the sentence finished.

But this isn’t a stranger. This is Shane Hollander. Quiet, obsessive, soft eyed Shane Hollander, his best friend’s little brother.

“I’m so sorry, I overstepped, didn’t I? I’ll just see myself out, download Grindr or something. Just forget this happened, and *please* don’t tell Nick,” Shane rushes out, already half turning toward the door.

The image comes to him instantly and he hates how irrational it makes him. Shane in some stranger’s apartment, nodding politely through something he doesn’t understand yet, letting someone impatient rush him just because he doesn’t know better. Ilya knows men like that, he had been men like that.

No. Absolutely not. If anyone is going to ruin Shane Hollander, it’s going to be someone who knows exactly how far to push, someone who could never hurt him.

“No,” Ilya says, firm. “I will do it. Should be fun,” he shrugs.

Relief floods Shane’s face so quickly it almost makes Ilya regret how much he likes seeing it. “Really? Um, it doesn’t have to be long term. I just need to learn the basics before diving into the gay pool. And it might not even help my hockey, so-”

“Shane, shut up,” Ilya cuts in, smirking. “Only you would want to have sex for hockey. So boring.”

Shane’s brows pull together immediately, indignant and flustered all at once, and Ilya loves the way he looks like that.

“Well if you’re going to fuck me, then you have to stop calling me boring.”

“Mmm, no. That is the price. You accept it.” He steps closer, close enough that their air mixes, close enough to see the way Shane’s throat moves when he swallows. He was so red, so tense, so pretty it almost feels unfair. In what universe did Ilya deserve this?

Because here he is, Shane Hollander, the only person who had ever made him feel steady when everything else collapsed around him.

Eight years ago

Ilya had lost the ability to feel.

It's as if something inside him had gone quiet, numbed beyond repair.

Nothing will ever erase the image burned into his mind. His beautiful mother lying unconscious on the floor, frantically screaming and calling her name, his father and brother shouting at him to move.

Nothing could have prepared him for that.

Moving to Canada was supposed to be a good thing. It was supposed to help her, to give her the chance to leave his father. Ilya had seen the cruel ways his father treated her and it broke his heart every time.

People keep asking how he's feeling. They tell him she's in a better place now, she's looking down on him, watching over him. But Ilya didn't want her watching, he wanted her here, with him, telling him everything will be okay.

Even Nick doesn't know how to comfort him.

Ilya met Nick at school when he first moved to Canada two years earlier. They'd been inseparable ever since, sleepovers, video games, late nights laughing too loud and getting yelled at. Ilya's mother loved Nick's family. They always invited them over for dinner, his father hated that.

Weeks pass after the incident, but Ilya still dreamt about it. The image wouldn't leave him. At first, he cried constantly, now he doesn't cry at all.

His father grew angrier by the day. Their house felt so small, yet so loud.

So, Ilya asked Nick for a sleepover and Nick agreed immediately. His father barely looked up when he leaves.

When Ilya arrived at the Hollander house earlier than planned, it's quiet and empty.

He stepped inside anyway, the door unlocked like it always is.

Suddenly, Nick's younger brother appeared in the hallway. Shane. Ilya didn't see him much. He was usually just the quiet kid in the background, easy to tease.

“Oh– hi. Are you here for Nick?” Shane asked in a small voice.

Ilya nodded, “Yes.”

“He’ll be back soon. He went with my parents to get groceries. They let me stay home alone,” Shane explained quickly. “Sorry.”

Ilya just nodded again and walked to the couch, sitting beside him.

“We are having sleepover,” he explained. Shane studied him for a moment.

“I thought so... Hey, I heard about your mom. How are you?”

There it is, even from a ten year old.

“Better,” Ilya muttered. It seems as if it was the only word he was able to speak.

Shane nodded slowly, “She was really sweet. I liked when she came over for dinner.”

“Yes. She liked it too.”

“And she loved you a lot. I could tell.”

Something twisted in Ilya’s chest, “I loved her too,” he said quietly. “But she left me. So maybe not enough.”

He didn’t know why he said that. He hadn’t said it to anyone. Shane frowned immediately.

“I don’t think that’s true,” Shane replied. “Sometimes you love someone so much, but you still have to leave. Like when my parents leave me alone to go grocery shopping.”

It’s a terrible comparison, Ilya almost smiled.

“But you’ll see them again soon,” he responded.

Shane thought about that. His thinking face was serious with his brows pinched and lips pursed.

“I think you’ll see your mom again too,” he said finally. “Maybe not soon... but someday.”

Ilya looked at him. Some days, he did hope he’d see her soon, so soon it scared him.

“Ilya,” Shane continued softly, “what do you think happens when people die?”

What a question.

“Everyone says they go to a better place,” Ilya answered after a moment. “Heaven, maybe. If they are good person, but I do not really know.”

Shane nodded, "My parents say that too. I hope your mom is in the best place ever."

Ilya hoped so too.

"But even if she isn't," Shane added carefully, "Maybe her memory stays with you. And that's still a good place."

Ilya didn't know how a ten year old just said something no adult had managed to.

"Thank you," he murmured quietly, then the front door opened.

"Ilya, sweetie! Nick told us you're staying over tonight. We're about to make dinner!" Yuna called as she carried grocery bags inside.

Nick spotted them on the couch. "Don't tell me you annoyed him to death, Shane," he teased.

"Don't talk like that to your brother," David warned from the kitchen.

"No," Ilya denied. "I almost annoyed him to death."

Nick laughed, "Come on! I got a new game!" He bolts upstairs.

Ilya stood, but before he followed, he glanced back at Shane. He gave him a small smile. Shane smiled back, so soft.

For the first time in weeks, something in Ilya felt less empty.

That same steadiness still flickers beneath all of Shane's panic. Ilya hasn't forgotten what Shane once gave him, even if he'll never acknowledged it again. Maybe this is the only way he knows how to return the favor.

"So," Ilya says slowly, studying him, "You want to fuck one time to get it over with, or do you want a full lesson plan?"

Shane flushes again at the word *fuck*, which Ilya notes with a smirk.

"Lessons maybe? I just want to be prepared. I know I sound pathetic but--"

"No, no. You are not pathetic at all," Ilya interrupts, "This is very normal. All hockey players ask their brother's best friend to teach them how to fuck. Completely standard."

"I'm already embarrassed enough. Could you stop being an asshole?" Shane glares.

Adorable.

Ilya smiles, “Okay. We will start soon. Not tonight. Your brother will be home any second.”

Shane immediately shifts into planning mode, “Send me your schedule. I know your shifts at the coffee shop overlap with Nick’s sometimes, so I’ll create something that avoids him completely. We can structure it properly, maybe outline specific topics.”

Ilya stares at him. This man was trying to syllabus sex.

“Fine,” he sighs. “Make a schedule. But no lesson plan. It must feel natural. You follow me and I’ll follow you.”

Shane nods and takes a second to calm down, “Well you’re the teacher, so I’ll trust you, Mr. Rozanov,” he says innocently.

The title is quick to increase Ilya’s pulse. “I am sure you will be a very good student,” he murmurs.

The front door opens. Nick’s voice fills the apartment, and Shane jumps back like he’s been electrocuted.

“Bro, what’s up! It’s good to see you!” Nick starts, smiling at Shane. “Did you need something?” he asks.

Shane was crimson, “No, just asking *Ilya* for advice. I’m leaving now.... Oh, mom and dad want you over for dinner tomorrow.”

As he reaches the door, Ilya leans in just enough to brush his mouth near Shane’s ear.

“It’s Mr. Rozanov to you,” he whispers.

Shane looks like he might burst. The door slams behind him.

Nick drops onto the couch, “What was that about?”

“You wanted me to help him, yes? Advice,” Ilya says smoothly. “Basic things. You would not understand... straight.”

Nick grins, relieved, “Dude, that’s great. He really needs someone like you.”

Ilya leans back, finally allowing himself a small, private smile.

“Yes,” he says quietly. “He really does.”

Hope you guys enjoy this one! It's not as long as I hoped it'd be but I wanted to get another chapter out.

I do have exams coming up so next update will probably take longer, so sorry!

Thank you to everyone who left kudos or comments on the last chapter, it made me so happy.

Chapter 3: Why can't I tell if he's lookin' at me?

Chapter Summary

The calm before the storm.

Chapter Notes

Just wanted to mention, Ilya and Svetlana's conversation happens entirely in Russian, italics are supposed to symbolize that in that particular section!

Also, I made it so that any Russian could be translated by hovering over the word or pressing it on mobile. Please let me know if any issues arise with this!

Hope you enjoy!

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

“So let me get this straight... or well, gay—”

“Shut up.”

“Your teammate told you that players do better after getting laid, so you went and asked *Ilya Rozanov* to get you laid? Did I hear that right?” Rose looks amused yet confused, and almost like she's about to burst out of laughter.

“Well, yeah,” Shane responds timidly.

“And he said yes?”

“Basically.”

She finally lets out her laughter, loudly, doubling over slightly like he's just told her the funniest joke she's heard all year.

Shane feels his face burn. He knew this would happen. He knew saying it out loud would make it sound insane, but in his head it had made sense. It had been a perfectly logical, structured plan.

“Does your brother know?”

“Obviously not. And neither does Hayden, so you can't say a word to him,” Shane commands sternly, his eyes focused on her face.

Rose wipes at her eyes dramatically, “Relax. I’m not trying to die. Hayden would *explode!*”

That image alone makes Shane’s stomach twist. Hayden already hates Ilya for reasons Shane doesn’t fully understand, something about him being arrogant. If Hayden found out that Shane had willingly gone to him for this... he’d never let it go. He’d talk him out of it, probably threaten Ilya, and then everything would get complicated. And Shane doesn’t want this to get any more complicated than it already is.

“He would tell me it’s a bad idea,” Shane admits, more to himself than to her.

Rose's laughter quiets down as she begins observing him. “Is it?” she questions.

Shane hesitates. The answer should be obvious. *Yes*. It’s truly reckless, it’s his brother’s best friend. It could blow up his family dinners for the next ten years. It could ruin his dynamic with Nick in ways he didn't want to think of. But when Ilya had stepped closer to him, when his voice had dropped just slightly, when he’d said *I will do it* like it was the easiest decision ever, Shane’s pulse had gone completely out of rhythm.

Shane trusts Rose more than almost anyone. They’d met freshman year of high school and clicked almost immediately. They’d even tried dating, briefly, because it seemed like the logical next step. That had ended quickly and awkwardly when Shane realized he couldn’t even imagine kissing her without wanting to pass out. Rose had been the one to laugh it off and say, “Yeah, that makes sense,” when he stumbled through the reasons for the breakup. She’d been the first person he ever came out to. She’d never made it weird or made him feel like a problem to solve. So if he was going to tell anyone about Ilya, it was always going to be her.

“I don’t think so,” his stomach flips as he says it.

Rose tilts her head, “You don’t think so, or you don’t want it to be a bad idea?”

He hates that question immediately. “I just... he makes the most sense. He’s experienced. He’s not some random guy who could fuck me over. He already knows me, so it’s less awkward and the everything’s way more controlled,” Shane stammers, falling back on logic because that’s all he knows.

“Controlled,” she repeats slowly.

Shane nods. Controlled is a good thing, if he keeps the situation controlled, he most probably won't derail his entire life.

Rose stares at him, “Okay, hockey sex theory aside. Do you even want him, like sexually or romantically?”

The question is an interesting one. Shane opens his mouth, then closes it again.

Of course Ilya is attractive, but that's not the point. Anyone with functioning eyes could see that. His arms, his curls, his face, his eyes, that infuriating smirk. While he wouldn't ever admit it out loud, Ilya's probably responsible for at least ten percent of Shane's gay awakening. But that doesn't mean anything. At all.

Attraction is an uncontrollable, biological occurrence that is completely irrelevant to anything. He didn't go there because he wants Ilya, neither sexually nor romantically. He went there because Ilya is the obvious solution. Shane made that list about it and all (it's still a work in progress).

"It's not about that," Shane insists.

Rose raises an eyebrow, "You know that that wasn't my question."

Shane exhales, "He's objectively attractive. I'm not blind. But that's not why."

It's not because sometimes Ilya looks at him like he's something worth figuring out, or because his stomach does backflips when they're standing too close, or because being called boring makes him want to prove him wrong, or because Ilya keeps handing him those goddamn Snickers bars, or because he caught a glimpse of something different in him all those years ago.

Shane just likes being challenged, it's his ego, not any form of desire.

"I don't know," he says instead, which feels better than admitting anything specific. "I think it's just for the hockey."

Rose watches him as if she can see straight through him, "If this is actually 'just for the hockey,' you're insane. But if it's also about him, that's... *different*."

Shane stares down at the table. It's not about him, it can never be about him.

"And what exactly is the plan?" she asks.

Shane thinks before sputtering his words out, "We're not doing anything yet. Not tonight. We're going to plan it, properly. I even made a schedule."

She blinks, "*Plan* it?"

"Yes."

"You're *scheduling* sex."

"It's not scheduling sex," Shane insists. "It's coordinating what times we're both available without making any...unnecessary run-ins."

Rose bursts out laughing again.

Shane groans and covers his face, “You’re not helping.”

“I’m sorry,” she says between laughs. “Only you would turn *this* into something so serious.”

He drops his hands and sighs, “I just don’t want to mess it up.”

He doesn’t want to be awkward or to disappoint Ilya. He doesn’t want Ilya looking at him like he’s inexperienced or fragile. He doesn’t want Ilya to regret agreeing to this. But he also definitely doesn’t care about what Ilya thinks.

Rose’s expression softens as she sees his struggle, “Hey.”

He looks up.

“You’re not going to mess it up. And if he makes you feel bad, you walk away. Got it?”

Shane nods.

"And then we could tell Hayden and Nick about all of this and we'll beat him up for you."

He allows himself to smile, but his mind still betrays him, replaying the way Ilya had leaned in, his voice and the way it had dipped when he spoke, the shift of the air between them. That still doesn’t mean anything. He just needs to get this over with, a couple of lessons and he’d be a sex expert. Walking away will be so easy.

Obviously.

“*Welcome home, Sveta.*” Ilya steps into her apartment like it’s his own, arms open to greet her in a welcoming hug.

He met Svetlana in a freshman psychology class when they were thrown into a group project together. The first thing they bonded over was their shared Russian heritage, the second was their mutual understanding that they both found each other to be extremely attractive. They’d slept together more times than he could count, and for a brief moment he’d even wondered if she’d fixed something in him, if maybe he just needed the right girl to make romance work, but she hadn’t.

She was gorgeous and the sex was great... but the feelings were not romantic, and neither of them pretended otherwise. Svetlana didn’t want a relationship, and Ilya had no interest in offering one. Their current dynamic worked fairly well.

What he valued more than the sex was the language. Outside his family, he never got to speak Russian. Growing up, it had been mandatory at home, even after they moved to Canada. Now he barely heard it at all, and sometimes he worried that one day he’d reach for a word and it

wouldn't be there anymore.

Over the summer, she'd gone back to Russia to visit family. Ilya hadn't been back once since they immigrated. His father had never explained why they left so abruptly, but he figures it's related to why they won't go back. At least his mother was buried here in Canada, it makes staying a lot easier.

It's not like he'd ever want to go back anyway. He knows exactly how the country would react to his sexuality, and he has no illusions about any distant relatives being more open minded. Even his family here doesn't know. If they did, it wouldn't end well at all.

Ilya didn't start sleeping with men until after he moved out and into the apartment with Nick. He never sat anyone down for a big, formal coming out, but he also never hid it. The first time he brought a guy home, Nick showed up the next day with a cheap grocery store cake in bisexual flag colors and left it on the counter without a word. That was as close to a conversation as they'd ever had about it.

His family was also just complicated. His father's dementia was getting worse and his older brother was an unreliable drug addict at best. Distance wasn't really an option, even if he wanted it to be.

"It's good to be home," Svetlana says, closing the door behind him. *"I was ready to come back."*

He arrived the day after she landed. She didn't have to send an invite for Ilya to show.

"Russia misses you, you know. I heard it in the wind," she teases as he toes off his shoes.

He snorts, *"Tell the wind I don't miss it back."*

She grins and nudges him toward the couch, *"How long has it been, Ilyusha? I think you don't even remember the wind."*

He shoots her a look, *"Canada did not miss you either. In fact, you should probably go back."*

She punches his shoulder lightly, and they both settle into the couch like they've done a hundred times. *"How have you been? How's your family?"* she asks, tone shifting just slightly.

He leans back, casually stretching his arms along the cushion. *"Same as usual,"* he replies. *"I'm betting my father forgets my face in about two weeks,"* he makes sure it lands as the joke it is.

But there's a quick sting under his ribs that he ignores. His father had never been kind, never been the ideal representation of a parent, but the idea of being erased from someone's memory is unsettling in a way he never thought he'd know.

"How was Russia?" he asks smoothly, cutting off any sympathy before it can form.

Svetlana studies him. She always does that, like she's sorting through his many hidden layers.

"The same as always," she says with a small shrug. Then her eyes narrow, *"Do not deflect. Something's bothering you."*

He exhales. Annoying. *"It's not my dad,"* he says. That much is true, he's already accepted his dementia.

"Then what?" she presses. *"You know you can't lie to me."*

That's the problem. Nick is his best friend. They grew up together and they understand each other without trying. But Nick takes things at face value, he never pries or asks many questions. Svetlana, unfortunately, does.

"It's Nick," Ilya begins, then corrects himself. *"Well. Not him. His brother Shane."*

Her expression lights up instantly, *"Shane Hollander? Our team's new recruit? He's very good."*

Of course she knew. Svetlana followed their school's hockey team like it was her job, which, considering she was studying sports management, it practically was.

"Yes. Him," Ilya rubs a hand over his jaw, *"I've known him forever. He was always just... there."*

"And?" she prompts.

He hesitates, then scoffs like it's ridiculous, *"Apparently someone told him sex would improve his hockey. So he came to me and asked me to fuck him... for hockey."*

Svetlana bursts out laughing, *"You're joking!"*

"I am not," he says flatly. *"He's never been with anyone, but he basically said he trusts me more than a stranger."*

She's still grinning as she speaks, *"Okay, that is funny. But what's the problem? You sleep with people all the time, and it's not like he's ugly."*

Ilya's jaw tightens involuntarily, *"If Nick finds out, I'm completely dead."* That's the easy part to explain.

"And?" she asks, catching that there's more to the situation.

He shrugs, *"He's inexperienced. You know virgins, they get attached. I don't want to deal with that."*

Svetlana rolls her eyes, *"You think too highly of yourself. Yes, you're good in bed, but not life"*

changing or anything. Maybe he just wants to get better at hockey. Maybe you are simply his human dildo."

He glares at her, *"Careful."*

She smirks, *"If you are worried, set boundaries. Or you know... say no."*

He shakes his head, *"I'm not letting him go find some random guy who might hurt him. He deserves better than that."* The words easily slip out.

Svetlana tilts her head, *"Ah."*

He ignores the implication, *"Nick would lose it. But he'd lose it more if something happened and I could've prevented it."*

"Okay then, do it, but tell him that no love will be involved," she starts, *"I don't even know why you're so scared of it... love."*

The word lingers between them and Ilya feels his shoulders tense before he can stop them. Love isn't the dramatic fantasy he's had to read about in high school books, love is a risk, it makes you vulnerable. Ilya's never managed to hold onto love without it fleeing away from him.

He doesn't do love, he'll never know how to. And Shane... Shane seems like he'd accept any form of it.

"I could ask you the same question, Sveta," he keeps a light, teasing tone, like none of this matters.

Svetlana narrows her eyes at him, but she lets it go. She grins, stretching lazily, *"I could distract you. Unless you're too busy thinking about your little hockey prodigy."*

He stands, smoothing his shirt, *"As tempting as that is, I have dinner with said prodigy's family."*

Her eyebrows shoot up, *"You're insane,"* she giggles.

"Probably."

"Good luck, Ilyusha."

He huffs out a breath as he heads for the door. Yeah, he's going to need all the luck he can get.

Yuna and David gracefully move around the kitchen, finishing the last dishes while the oven

timer beeps in the background. The Hollanders had started doing weekly family dinners after Nick moved out, and this week was no different. Most weeks, Shane liked them, today, he has absolutely no desire to see his brother.

“Shane, help me set the table, please,” his mom calls over her shoulder.

He grabs plates from the cabinet just as the front door swings open. “Your favorite son is home!” Nick loudly announces.

Shane doesn’t bother turning around. “I’ve been home for a while now,” he shoots back. Nick rolls his eyes as he steps inside.

Their parents never really favored either of them, but Shane had always needed more attention because of hockey. His mom helped him manage his schedule, his dad loved reliving his own college hockey days through him. Nick never had something like that, not that he ever complained.

“I brought Ilya, if that’s okay,” Nick reveals.

Shane freezes. He turns slowly and finds Ilya standing just behind Nick, hands in his jacket pockets, looking entirely too comfortable for his liking.

“Honey, of course that’s okay!” Yuna says warmly. “He’s always welcome here.”

That’s true. They knew enough about Ilya’s family situation to never question his presence. He came to dinners when he could and even had puzzle nights with his father, though Nick usually claimed he was busy or working during dinners.

So why tonight? Did he want Shane to die on the spot?

“We missed you, Ilya!” David says, pulling him into a hug. “How’ve you been?”

“Better now that I’m about to eat your food,” Ilya replies easily. “I’ve been surviving off Nick’s ramen.”

“That is *not* true,” Nick mutters.

“You should come more often. You’re family,” David tells him.

“Exactly,” Yuna adds. “*Nick*, stop starving him.”

Shane barely hears the rest. Ilya’s eyes flick toward him and remain there.

Everyone moves toward the dining table. Ilya hangs back just enough to be beside Shane. He doesn’t say anything, but he looks at him, slowly, then winks. His mouth curves into that familiar, infuriating smirk. Shane has to physically stop himself from elbowing him.

They sit. Of course, the only open seat for Shane is directly across from Ilya. *Perfect*.

“So,” Yuna begins, settling in. “Are you boys ready for next semester? Nick, you need to keep those grades up. We’re not paying tuition for you to sit around your frat house all day.”

“I do more than that, mom—”

Shane tunes it out. He’s heard this speech many times before. When he glances up, Ilya is still fucking watching him. *Is he insane? Does he want someone to notice?*

“Shane,” his dad says, pulling him from his thoughts. “How’s your first week back been? Miss hockey camp already? I never wanted to leave when I was your age.”

“Uh, it’s been good. Just getting ready for classes and practice,” Shane answers.

“That’s my boy,” David proclaims proudly.

“Oh yeah, he’s doing great,” Nick cuts in. “I even got him to go to a party.”

Yuna’s eyebrows lift, “Really? That’s good, honey. I’m glad you’re having fun. Did you drink?”

“No,” Shane replies quickly.

“You know we wouldn’t be mad if you did,” David confirms. “Just stay safe. We don’t need another... situation.”

Nick groans, “You promised you wouldn’t bring that up again.”

“I don’t remember making that promise,” Yuna mutters.

“Don’t worry, I’d never even put myself in that position,” Shane shrugs.

Nick snorts, “Yeah, because innocent little Shane would never do anything fun.”

“No arguing at the table,” David warns.

Ilya leans back in his chair, clearly entertained, “Hollander family dinners are very fun,” he says mildly.

“We’re sorry about this. I hope you’re enjoying the food,” Yuna frowns.

“Of course. Everything is perfect, as always.” He smiles at her, then looks back at Shane. Asshole.

Dinner becomes normal after whatever that was. Shane tries his best to focus very hard on his plate and only his plate.

“Oh!” Yuna exclaims suddenly. “Shane, you’ll never guess. You remember our friends’ son,

Kyle?”

“Vaguely,” Shane answers cautiously.

“Well, he just came out as gay too! Such a sweetheart. I was thinking maybe you two could meet sometime?”

Before he could reply, a fork hit the ground. The clatter is loud, causing everyone to look up.

Ilya is already bending down to retrieve it. “Sorry,” he whispers, though his jaw looks tight.

Shane stares at him. *What was that?*

“I don’t really have time for a relationship, Mom,” Shane says, trying to sound unaffected. “And just because he’s gay doesn’t mean we’re meant for each other.”

“I’m just saying. Think about it,” Yuna asserts.

Ilya doesn’t look at him again for the rest of dinner.

Afterward, Nick gets dragged into cleanup duty since Shane helped set up. Shane luckily gets to quietly slip upstairs.

He exhales the second he reaches his room. After a moment, the door clicks shut behind him. He turns and sees Ilya leaning against it.

“Why didn’t you say yes?” Ilya asks quietly.

What?

“To what?” he hesitantly questions.

“Kyle.”

Shane frowns, “I told you. I don’t have time.”

“You do not have time for him,” Ilya starts, pushing off the door, “but you have time for me?”

“That’s different.”

Ilya steps closer, “How?”

Shane’s back hits his desk.

“We’re not in a relationship. What we have is an arrangement. That’s not the same thing,” he explains.

“Good,” Ilya replies, his voice lower now. “I do not want you thinking it is.”

Something flares in Shane’s chest, “You think I’d fall in love with you just because I asked you to fuck me?”

Ilya’s lips curve, “I am difficult to resist.”

“Shut up. That’s the last thing I’d want,” Shane snaps.

“Relax,” Ilya murmurs, stepping closer. “I do not want that either, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#).”

“What does that mean?”

“Learn Russian and find out.” He tilts his head, “You are very smart. You will pick it up, fluently.”

Shane swallows, “I made the schedule. We’re both free tomorrow at four.”

“Ah,” Ilya hums. “Eager for your first lesson, *Mr. Hollander*.”

He leans in, close enough that Shane feels the heat of him. “*My perfect student*,” he whispers.

Shane’s entire body reacts before his brain can catch up.

Ilya pulls back first, “See you tomorrow.”

Then he’s gone. Shane stares at the closed door, his heart is pounding stronger than ever before.

How the hell is he supposed to survive this?

Chapter End Notes

This took me longer than I'd hoped. I got busy with classes and crying over Punch the monkey.

Anyways, thanks to everyone who's been leaving kudos and comments! It keeps me motivated.

Please give me all of your thoughts!!

Next chapter will have the heat, so stay tuned!!

Chapter 4: Should I give him a smile?

Chapter Summary

Lesson 1

Chapter Notes

I changed the rating to Explicit if that matters to anyone. I just wasn't sure and it's better to be safe than sorry. So here's a warning for explicit content.

Enjoy!

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

“What were you doing up there?” Nick asks when he sees Ilya coming down the stairs.

Ilya had just done something reckless. He'd felt something during dinner, dark and completely unreasonable, and instead of swallowing it, he followed it upstairs. He never should've said yes to Nick's invite tonight. None of the lines were supposed to blur like that.

But hearing about Kyle, hearing Shane talk about him so casually, it had stirred something unknown in his chest. It wasn't jealousy, he was just being protective again, that's it.

At least one thing was clear now, *no love*. He and Shane had agreed on that. Absolutely no love allowed.

Now he just had to worry about whether Nick saw something he shouldn't have.

“Ah. I was just using the bathroom,” Ilya deadpans, donning his shoes. He hopes Nick doesn't hear the lie.

Nick frowns, “Why not the one downstairs?”

“The upstairs one has better soap.”

Silence.

“What?”

“What? I like the upstairs soap.”

Nick squints at him, “Okay, weirdo.”

Shane appears at the top of the stairs a second too early. Nick’s gaze shifts between them. “You good?” he asks Shane.

“Yeah,” Shane answers defensively. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You two aren’t fighting or anything, right? You guys seem... tense.”

“Oh– no. No, everything’s good. I just needed to grab something from my room.”

He is unbelievably bad at lying. Ilya notices the tightness in Shane’s shoulders, the faint red creeping up his neck. He knows exactly why it’s there, he put it there. But still, he is so bad at lying. Ilya has to bite the inside of his cheek to keep himself from smirking.

Nick studies Shane a moment longer than should be necessary. Then, he shrugs, “Whatever. We’re heading out.”

“Yeah, uh, bye! See you soon–” Shane stops himself. “I mean, later.”

Nick tilts his head, “Bye...?”

But Shane is already retreating upstairs like the floor might crumble beneath his feet any moment now.

Ilya laughs quietly as he follows Nick outside. This is going to be difficult for Shane. He can’t even survive a hallway conversation without tripping over his words... maybe he’s just shaken from what happened upstairs. *Of course he is.*

Ilya had stepped so close to him, claiming space that wasn’t supposed to be his. He whispered and teased, and when Shane got angry, when his eyes flashed red and his jaw tensed, it did something to Ilya. How was he supposed to resist that?

The drive back to the apartment is quiet at first, music plays at a low volume to fill the silence.

Nick stares ahead longer than usual before speaking. “I’m sorry about dinner. You know how my parents can get. Probably why you don’t come to these that often.”

Ilya turns to look at him. “I grew up in your house, Nick. I know how they are,” he says lightly.

“Yeah, but still,” Nick shrugs. “It’s like I’m a full grown adult and they still talk to me like I’m a kid. Like I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Ilya can hear his clear frustration, though he doesn’t really understand it. He wishes he had a parent that cares like Yuna and David do.

“I think they just care,” he postulates.

Nick huffs a laugh, “Yeah. I know. And I know your dad’s worse and all that—”

“It’s not a competition.”

“I know,” Nick quickly confirms. “I’m not saying it is. I just—” He exhales. “Sometimes it feels like they care about certain things more than others.”

Ilya doesn’t fully catch the meaning there. To him, the dinner table felt loud but normal, familial.

“Maybe... they’re trying, in their own way.”

“Yeah. Well.” Nick’s jaw tightens slightly. “That’s definitely not how they treat—”

A loud honk cuts him off.

“Asshole,” Nick mutters, switching lanes.
He doesn’t finish the sentence, but he doesn’t have to, Ilya lets it go.

“Cliff’s throwing another party in a couple of days. Thursday,” Nick says, shifting the mood.

“Ah. You bringing your little brother again?” he teases.

“Fuck off,” Nick says automatically, but he’s smiling as they laugh, making things feel easy again.

Nick glances over, “Hey. About Shane.”

Ilya keeps his expression as neutral as possible.

“He seemed off tonight. I know you two talked about... whatever. The gay stuff,” He gestures vaguely. “I don’t know. He just seemed more tense than usual. Did he say anything?”

He doesn’t sound suspicious of anything, more so concerned. Nick always watches out for Shane, even when he pretends he doesn’t. But what the hell is Ilya supposed to say?

He smiles, “He is fine. It’s just a lot, being out to everyone you’ve known forever. You start wondering how people look at you now.” Which, technically, isn’t a lie.

Nick nods slowly.

“He will be alright,” Ilya continues. “He’s a baby gay. Still in his little cocoon. One day he’ll burst out, spread his giant rainbow butterfly wings, and dramatically fly in the sky. Right now he just needs to... get used to things.” Ilya should really win an award for this.

Nick snorts, “You’re ridiculous.”

“You know me.”

“So it really is just about his sexuality?”

“Yes.”

Nick exhales, “Man. I wish I could help him there. I just don’t want him feeling alone.”

Ilya looks out the window.

“Don’t worry,” he says quietly. “He has Hayden Pike.”

It's silent for a moment before they break into laughter.

Shane checks the time three times before knocking. It's 3:58 and that's too early.

He waits in the hallway outside Ilya’s apartment like an idiot, hands shoved into his jacket pockets, heart beating way too fast for something that he technically scheduled. He almost laughs at that. He really did schedule a sex session.

But truthfully, Shane doesn’t really care about the sex part, he cares about experience that comes from it. Experience should not be embarrassing, and therefore he should *definitely* not be feeling as embarrassed as ever right now.

He checks his phone once again, it's 4:00, he knocks. The sound feels loud to his ears, almost horrifying. For half a second, he considers running, claiming he got food poisoning or literally anything else.

But then the door opens... and there’s Ilya.

He looks so casual, as calm as ever, as if this isn’t one of the most monumental moments in Shane’s life, as if Shane didn’t spend the last hour staring at himself in the mirror wondering what to exactly wear to a sex lesson.

“Right on time,” Ilya states, one eyebrow lifting slightly.

Shane swallows, “I did say four.”

“Yes, you did.”

He steps aside to let Shane in. The apartment smells faintly like something clean with a hint of cigarette smoke, it feels distinctly like Ilya. The door shuts behind him with a quiet click that echoes far too loudly in Shane's head. This is it, there's no going back now. He doesn't have Rose to help him or Nick to interrupt the moment. There's only him... *and Ilya*.

Shane's palms are already sweating. He hopes Ilya can't tell.

"Do not be scared, Shaney. I go at your pace. I may be the teacher, but the lesson is designed specifically for you," Ilya insists.

That shouldn't make Shane's stomach flip the way it does. He finally takes in what Ilya's wearing, a white tank top and some loose shorts. His arms and shoulders are completely bare. Shane's brain very unhelpfully supplies the information that those clothes will not stay on for long.

"Come, bedroom," Ilya softly commands. Shane follows.

Each step feels heavy as he walks toward Ilya's room, which is cleaner than he expected. It's sleek and minimal with dark bedding and the light smell of smoke remains. It's *so very* Ilya. The door closes behind him. Shane's pulse spikes at the sound.

"Let's start with basics, yes?" Ilya offers.

Shane nods, then forces himself to speak, "Yes."

Ilya steps closer, but he's not touching him yet. He stands just close enough that Shane can feel the warmth of him.

"Sex," Ilya says casually, like he's explaining how to make a fucking sandwich, "is about pleasure. And pleasure does not begin with..." His hands gesture in the air, "Crazy." He takes a step closer, "It begins with small things."

Now Ilya's hands land on Shane's waist. They rest on his skin. The contact is light, but it feels electric. Shane's breath stutters and his mouth parts before he can stop it.

"Little touches," Ilya finishes quietly. His thumbs move slightly against Shane's sides, slow, as if he's testing how far he could go. Shane feels heat rush through him instantly. His body reacts before his brain can process anything.

"Tell me," Ilya murmurs, leaning closer. "You have kissed people before, yes?"

Shane's stomach drops as he looks down and shakes his head. The silence stretches just long enough to make him feel more exposed than before.

"Hmm," Ilya hums softly.

Fingers slide from his waist to his chin, ever so gently lifting his face. "Do not look away from me," Ilya commands quietly. His words are firm, but they don't feel harsh to Shane.

“There is nothing embarrassing here... *Others should be embarrassed for not kissing those lips.*”

Shane’s brain stops. Why would he say things like that?

“I will kiss you now,” Ilya says, still holding his chin. “Yes?”

Shane nods. Ilya’s thumb presses slightly, “*Words.*”

Shane swallows, “Yes. Kiss me.”

Ilya's lips curve into a small, pleased smile before leaning in.

He doesn’t rush it at first as their lips barely brush. Shane freezes for half a second, then he melts into it. The kiss isn’t messy or awkward as he expected it to be, instead, it makes him feel warm inside.

Ilya’s hand slides from his chin into his hair, fingers curling lightly at the back of his head, guiding him. Shane exhales into the kiss, and Ilya deepens it slowly, angling his head. When his tongue brushes against Shane’s lower lip, Shane makes a quiet sound he doesn’t mean to make. Heat floods him instantly in embarrassment. Somehow, Ilya takes that as permission.

The kiss deepens, it’s slow but overwhelming. Their warm breaths colliding, teeth grazing lightly. Shane’s entire body feels hypersensitive, like someone turned the volume up on every nerve ending. He’s seen this in movies, he’s heard about it from friends, but he didn’t know it would feel like this, like something unlocking inside him.

Ilya pulls back first, both of them breathe heavier. “I think,” Ilya murmurs, brushing his thumb across Shane’s jaw, “You lied to me, [Text with Creator's Style turned off.](#)”

Shane blinks in confusion at his words, “Was that... okay?”

Ilya smiles faintly, “For first time? Very okay.”

He tilts his head slightly, “Next time, do not leave your hands doing nothing. They are allowed to touch.”

He takes Shane’s wrist gently and places his hand in his own hair. “Here,” he says. “Try again.”

And this time, when their mouths meet, Shane grabs as his fingers curl into Ilya’s hair, tentative at first, then firmer when Ilya makes a low sound in his throat that goes straight through Shane’s spine.

That reaction causes Shane to tug again, just slightly. Ilya's hands slide down from Shane’s face to his waist, pulling him closer until there’s no space left between them. The contact is solid now, they’re standing chest to chest, heat bleeding through the fabric of their clothes.

Shane can feel everything. He feels how warm Ilya is, how steady his breathing isn’t

anymore, how the kiss is definitely not one sided. The kiss changes as quick as it began, becoming less instructional and more hungry.

Ilya's mouth moves with purpose, slower now but deeper, like he's testing how much Shane will follow. When Shane does, when he leans in instead of shrinking back, Ilya rewards him with a firmer pull at his hips. Shane exhales into his mouth.

"Good," Ilya murmurs against his lips. "That is good."

The praise makes his stomach churn. Ilya's hands move, dragging lightly up Shane's sides beneath his shirt, not under it yet, but they're enough to make him aware of where they *could* go.

Every small touch feels amplified. Shane breaks the kiss first this time, just barely, breathing harder, "Is it supposed to feel like this?"

Ilya's mouth curves, "Like what?"

"Like—" Shane swallows, "Like I can't think." Ilya leans in again, brushing his nose lightly against Shane's.

"Yes."

His fingers slip under the hem of Shane's shirt now, slow enough that Shane has time to react, to stop him if he wants to. He doesn't, instead, he nods.

Warm palms press against his bare skin. Shane's breath catches at the contact. His body responds instantly, arching just slightly into the touch before he can stop himself.

Ilya quickly notices, "Relax. Nothing happens unless you want it to."

"I want it," Shane says too fast.

Ilya smiles again. It's his usual smirk. "Hm. Then show me."

His hands trace upward, exploring Shane's torso, but he's not rushing it, he goes as slow as possible.

Shane's hands, unsure where to go, slide from Ilya's hair down to his shoulders, then lower. He grips the fabric of the tank top, hesitating. "Can I—?"

"Yes."

And that's all the permission he needs. Shane pushes the tank up slightly, fingertips brushing hot skin underneath. The contact makes his head spin. *This is actually real, it's actually happening.* He's touching Ilya Rozanov. He pulls the shirt higher and Ilya lifts his arms to help, watching him the entire time. The tank hits the floor.

Shane stares for half a second too long. Ilya huffs a quiet laugh, “Eyes up here, Shaney.” But he doesn’t sound annoyed.

Shane steps closer instead. Because suddenly, he doesn’t want distance anymore. He wants *more*, he wants to feel Ilya’s body heat. Ilya grabs his hips, his hands feel demanding, and pushes him on the bed. Shane lets out a small groan, “Asshole.”

Ilya lets out a laugh, “Good?” he asks.

“Yes.”

Ilya begins trailing kisses down his body. He starts at Shane’s throat, slow and precise, lips warm and open mouthed as they move along the column of his neck. He takes his time at his shoulders, pressing softer kisses there, then lower, across his chest, down his stomach, like he’s trying to memorize every inch of him.

“You need to learn your partner’s body,” Ilya murmurs against his skin. “You need to appreciate it.”

By the time Ilya reaches the waistband of his pants, he pauses and looks up. “Pants?” he asks for permission quietly.

Shane swallows, heart hammering, “Take them off, Rozanov.”

The sound Ilya makes is low and pleased. He undoes the button slowly, dragging the zipper down with careful fingers before easing the fabric down Shane’s legs. The pants hit the floor in a careless heap. Shane’s brain latches onto it. *Great, they’re going to wrinkle.* He should’ve folded them first.

Ilya straightens, watching him, and then steps back to tug his own shorts down. He doesn’t break eye contact. “How far do you want to go today?” he questions with a quiet voice as he leans back in, pressing another slow kiss just below Shane’s ribs.

Shane hesitates. He wants more, he wants everything... but maybe not all at once. You don’t master an entire subject in one lesson. And maybe, *selfishly*, he doesn’t want this to end too quickly. Maybe he wants to drag it out, just to perfect his technique.

He looks at Ilya through his lashes, his eyes feel heavy and a little watery. His lips are swollen and damp as he speaks, “Can I...” his voice catches, he clears his throat. “Can I suck your cock?” The words come out hungrier than he expected them to be.

Ilya stills. The look on his face shifts into something almost feral, dark eyes blown wide, jaw tightening slightly. “You’re eager,” he murmurs. “So desperate to have me in your pretty mouth.”

Shane feels heat flood his entire body.

Ilya steps back again and confidently pulls down his boxers in one quick motion. He stands

there fully exposed, his thick, hard cock standing straight up against his stomach, he's completely at ease in his own skin.

Shane's stomach flutters. He's big and somewhat intimidating, causing some doubt to creep in. *Would that even fit in his mouth?*

Ilya notices the flicker of hesitation and smirks faintly. "Relax. We'll go slow. Come here." Shane slides off the bed and steps in front of him. "On your knees."

The command sends a shiver down his spine and he obeys instantly. He sinks down, heart pounding so loud he swears Ilya can hear it.

Ilya steps closer, until the hot, solid weight of his erection rests against Shane's cheek. "Grab it," Ilya instructs. "Gentle. Not too tight." Shane wraps his hand around the hard length of him and dryly swallows.

"Good," Ilya breathes. "Start with the tip. Kisses, small licks. Be careful with your teeth, and take your time."

Shane leans in cautiously, pressing soft kisses first to the swollen head. His tongue follows, tentative, licking at the bead of precum already gathered at the slit. It tastes unfamiliar, different than he imagined, but not bad. More than anything, he feels pleasure at the way Ilya reacts.

"Fuck... yes. Just like that."

Encouraged, Shane parts his lips and takes the head of his cock into his mouth slowly, careful of his teeth like instructed. His head moves cautiously at first. Ilya's fingers slide into his hair and his hips give a minute, involuntary thrust. The sensation of that hard flesh pressing deeper makes Shane moan around him, the vibration pulling a ragged curse from Ilya.

"Easy. Let your mouth do the work. Don't go too fast."

Shane focuses on not panicking. He moves down a little further, taking more of the hard length into the wet heat of his mouth. Ilya's hand tightens slightly, "Now take more, slowly. Let your throat open for me."

Shane relaxes his jaw, sinking down, inch by inch. The stretch is intense, the feeling of fullness is overwhelming. He focuses on breathing through his nose, on the weight on his tongue. When the head nudges the back of his throat, he gags lightly, tears rushing to his eyes.

"God... yes, that's it," his voice makes Shane's pulse spike. He keeps going, testing how far he can manage, adjusting when his throat protests. He hears Ilya curse again, he sounds wrecked.

["Text with Creator's Style turned off"](#)... fuck, that feels too good." Shane's confidence grows with every sound he pulls from him. *He's actually doing this.*

“Now move,” Ilya commands, voice rougher. “Go back and forth.”

Shane pulls back, slick saliva stringing between his lips and Ilya’s glistening cock, then plunges down again, deeper. They find a rhythm, Shane bobbing his head, Ilya’s gentle, controlled thrusts meeting him. The wet, filthy sounds of his mouth working fill the room. Ilya’s composure is crumbling, his breaths become completely uneven.

“So good, Shane. You swallow my cock like you are made for it.”

Shane's own body aches painfully in his boxers, his cock straining against the fabric, but he ignores it. This is about learning and being good. Still... he starts to reach down instinctively to touch himself— “No.” Ilya’s tone sounds strict. “Stay focused on me. We will get to you.”

The command makes heat coil low in Shane’s stomach. He looks up, maintaining the rhythm, eyes locking with Ilya’s, which seems to do something to the blond. His hips twitch forward, pushing his dick deeper into Shane’s throat.

“Fuck... fuck,” he groans, fingers tightening harder in Shane’s hair. “Don’t stop. Just like that.”

Shane feels powerful in a way he’s never felt before. He can make Ilya Rozanov lose control, he can literally hear it happening. He tastes and feels the tension building in the way Ilya’s body tightens, the way his cock seems to swell even harder against his tongue.

“Shane,” Ilya warns, his voice sounds strained. “Get off unless you want me to come down your throat—”

But Shane doesn’t pull back. He wants this, he wants proof he did it right. Shane’s hands flies to Ilya’s hips, holding him in place. He looks up, his eyes streaming, his mouth stretched obscenely wide, and he doesn’t let go. He keeps going, hollowing his cheeks slightly, sucking harder, maintaining the same rhythm as if he was trying to memorize it for an *oral* exam. Ilya swears under his breath, letting out a string of Russian Shane doesn’t understand, but he can feel it.

“[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)” His hand grips tighter and then he breaks. The sound that leaves him is utterly wrecked. Shane feels the first hot, salty pulse hit the back of his throat, then another, and another, as Ilya’s cock throbs and twitches, spilling his cum. Shane swallows desperately, taking it all, some escaping to drip down his chin, not pulling off until the last shudder passes through Ilya’s body.

For a moment, the only sound in the room is heavy breathing. Shane pulls back slowly, still on his knees, lips swollen, hair a mess, and his chest is heaving.

“Was I good?” he asks, unable to stop himself, there’s something painfully sincere in the question.

Ilya lets out a breathless laugh, “Fuck, Shane. Yes. So good I’m starting to think you lied.”

“Didn’t,” Shane mutters, lifting off his knees. “Maybe I’m just a good student.”

Ilya grips his jaw and kisses him, as if he's claiming him, the taste of his own cum still on Shane’s tongue. “That means I’m a good teacher.”

Before Shane can argue, he’s lifted and dropped back onto the bed with a surprised laugh. “Your turn.”

When Ilya pulls his boxers down, the relief is almost overwhelming. His cock springs free, flushed and leaking, straining painfully for minutes. He doesn’t even try to act composed anymore. The way Ilya touches him now is completely different, he's so confident in each movement he makes. His hand wraps around Shane’s dick, his thumb swiping over the wet head, spreading the precum.

Ilya doesn't hesitate, he swallows him down in one smooth motion. Shane cries out, his hands flying to Ilya’s head. Ilya’s tongue swirls around the head, his throat working on the shaft, he *knows* how to do this. It was too much and too good. He tries to last, he really does, but inevitably fails. Shane’s hips thrust, his orgasm rips from him with force. He comes with a broken shout, spurting into Ilya's mouth, his vision whiting out at the edges.

Ilya milks him through it, swallowing every drop, before releasing him with a final, tender kiss to the oversensitive head.

When it’s over, he lies there stunned, chest rising and falling rapidly. Ilya presses one last kiss to his stomach before settling beside him.

“Fuck,” Shane breathes. “That was...”

“Good?” Ilya supplies. Shane nods weakly, “Mhm.”

“It’s a good start for you,” Ilya says, smirking. “Could use more practice. A+ on first lesson.”

Shane rolls his eyes but feels pride blossom in his chest.

“You think you'll be better at hockey now?” Ilya laughs dryly.

“Asshole,” Shane mutters, but he’s smiling. To be fair, Shane was wondering the exact same thing.

They lie there in comfortable silence until Ilya breaks it. “You want to shower?” he asks.

Shane wonders if he means together. He absolutely *does not* want that right now.

“Uh, yeah. You can go first.”

Ilya nods and disappears into the bathroom. The sound of running water fills the apartment

and suddenly... Shane is alone with his thoughts.

What the fuck just happened? He gave and received his first blowjob... with *Ilya Rozanov*. Nick's best friend of all people. Guilt creeps in his mind. What if this ruins everything? What if Ilya got what he wanted and now the training was done?

But beneath the anxiety, there's something stronger that grows within him. He tries to push it away. According to his schedule, they can meet again in two days. *Two days*. Would they do the same thing? Would they go further? Was he ready for further?

And then... *it hits him*. Ilya was his first kiss.

You grow up thinking your first kiss is supposed to mean something, that it's supposed to come from love, or at least like, if anything. But he harbors neither of those feelings for Rozanov.

Shane stares at the ceiling. He doesn't know what this means, he just knows he wants it again.

"Are you trying to fall asleep?" Ilya's voice cuts through Shane's spiraling thoughts.

"Oh— no..." Shane answers quickly, though he doesn't sound that convincing.

Ilya smiles faintly, "Shower's yours."

Shane nods and gathers his clothes from where they're scattered across the floor. He really should've folded them, but they're beyond saving now. He heads to the bathroom and takes one of the fastest showers of his life.

He needs to get out of here.

When he steps back into the room, fully dressed, Ilya is sitting on the edge of the bed, scrolling through his phone *so fucking casually*.

"Thursday," Shane says flatly. "Four p.m."

Ilya lowers his phone and hums, "Yes. You sent me the schedule."

Shane rolls his eyes, then hesitates. "So what's... next?" he aims to sound as casual as he could be given the situation.

Ilya looks at him for a long moment, it feels like he's reading him. "You sure you want to know?" he asks quietly.

Shane's jaw tightens, "Well I did ask."

A slow smirk curves at the corner of Ilya's mouth. He rises from the bed. "Next time," he starts, "we focus a little more on you."

“In what way?” Shane hates how quickly his mind starts racing.

Instead of answering, Ilya closes the distance between them. He steps into Shane’s space, crowding him just enough that Shane instinctively steps back, until his shoulders press against the wall.

Ilya’s hands settle low on Shane’s waist, firmly. He easily lifts him just enough that Shane’s breath catches and his legs reflexively hook around Ilya’s hips.

“There’s a lot we haven’t done,” Ilya murmurs, close enough that Shane could almost feel the words. “A lot you haven’t tried.”

Shane swallows, “Like what?”

Ilya’s hand slides lower, grabbing his ass. Shane almost squeals. “You will like it,” Ilya teases. “But you need to relax. And you need to trust me. And maybe prepare a little before.”

Oh...

Shane stiffens at that, “I don’t not trust you,” he says quickly before he can stop himself.

Ilya’s smile widens, “Good. Then be ready for me on Thursday.”

Shane’s pulse jumps. It’s definitely only an anticipation to learn. He really loves learning.

Ilya sets him back on his feet with ease and steps away, leaving the bedroom and heading toward the front door.

“Don’t overthink it,” he says as Shane opens it. “It’s only lessons, yes?”

Shane nods automatically, “Right.”

The door shuts behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, here we are...

I've never written smut before, please go easy on me.

Thanks to everyone who's left comments and kudos, I truly appreciate it!! Give me all your thoughts and feelings, I love reading them.

Chapter 5: Should I get up and leave?

Chapter Summary

Lesson 2

Chapter Notes

Explicit content warning again!

Enjoy!!

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

The rink is quieter in the summer.

There's no coaches watching, only guys who feel like showing up and spending their warm summer days at a cold rink. Shane likes that part, he likes knowing everyone out here chose to be here.

He finishes tying his skates carefully, adjusting the laces until they feel even on both ankles. He hates when one feels tighter than the other, it throws off his balance.

“You good, bro?” Hayden asks as he skates by the bench. Shane looks up at him and nods. “Always,” he says, stepping on the ice.

Not many guys showed up today. Hayden and J.J. were there as well as two other guys from the team.

The cold settles into him almost instantly, in a way, it grounds him. The first few strides feel normal, but by the time he takes a pass from J.J. and carries it down the ice, he realizes something feels... easier.

He doesn't over handle the puck and he doesn't hesitate when wondering if he should pass instead of shoot. He shifts his weight and snaps it into the net. It was a perfect shot.

J.J. lets out an impressed noise, “Hollander! What was that?”

Shane shrugs. It could have been luck... but *it wasn't*. He felt it the second the puck left his stick.

They reset. Hayden tries to check Shane against the boards, but it barely affects him. He stays on his feet, keeps control of the puck, and slips it away before Hayden can pin him. He takes another pass later and scores again, cleaner than the last one. Even during camp, when everyone was pushing at their hardest, he's never felt himself play with this kind of confidence.

"Woah, I know you're good, but this is another level," Hayden says, skating towards him.

"I've been practicing more," Shane shoots back.

Hayden laughs, "You're always practicing, though. It's different today."

Shane circles around him and takes another shot, this one ringing off the post. He feels it in his chest, that jolt of adrenaline.

J.J. skates over, leaning on his stick, "I'm telling you, this is what happens. Guy gets laid once and suddenly he's a hockey god."

Shane nearly chokes on his own breath. "Can you not?" he mutters, eyes dropping to the ice.

J.J. grins wider, "I was joking, Hollander! Wait... did you?"

Hayden's head snaps toward him, "Did he what?"

"It's none of your business," Shane says quickly, which is probably the worst possible answer he could've given.

J.J. laughs loudly, "Ah, I knew it! That's what this is. You finally *relaxed*."

That's the thing... he does feel different. Lighter, almost. Like something in his chest that's been wound tight for years finally loosened a little. He hates that J.J. was right all along.

"Wait, Shane, you got laid? When?" Hayden sounds genuinely surprised.

"No, I didn't. J.J.'s a fucking liar."

Hayden gives him a look that says he doesn't believe that for a second.

They line up again, and Shane keeps scoring. Every move he makes is precise, he doesn't hesitate or second guess. It's like his body is finally doing exactly what he tells it to.

And he can't stop wondering how a fucking blowjob could have done this much to his game. The pleasure was intense, sure, overwhelming even, but how does that translate to better control on the ice?

J.J. skids to a stop in front of him, "Nah, I'm serious. Whatever you did yesterday, do it again. I don't fucking care if it was sex or not."

Heat crawls up Shane's neck. He doesn't want to think about tomorrow, about how the pleasure he felt yesterday will most likely be recreated. And he definitely doesn't want to think about Ilya, or the way he told him to be ready.

When practice finally winds down, Shane comes up with the excuse of his life to leave before Hayden can corner him with more questions. He hasn't even told Rose the exact details yet, and explaining it to Hayden would mean lying, or worse, telling the truth and admitting who it was with. And that's not happening.

As he heads home, his mind continues to wander. Shane is still in disbelief about the reality of practice today. He did play better than before. Which is insane, because all that changed is that he let someone put their mouth on him.

He's been playing hockey his entire life. Years of training, conditioning, private camps, endless drills in empty rinks long before anyone else woke up. That's what should've made the difference, not *Ilya*.

The thought lingers longer than it should, because weirdly enough, this isn't the first time Ilya's been the one to help him with hockey.

3 years ago.

Shane was internally freaking out.

The first period had just ended, and he had not played like himself. This was his first official game with his new juniors team, and it felt like everything was slipping just out of his control.

He'd messed up two passes, fumbled a shot he normally would've scored, and held onto the puck longer than he should have. He was too in his head.

His coach tapped his shoulder and told him to take a breather. Shane nodded, pretending he wasn't rattled, and glanced toward the stands. His parents were there, of course in the front row. His dad leaned forward, elbows on his knees. His mom clapped whenever he so much as touched the puck. They looked proud... but they also looked worried.

His gaze drifted past them then stopped at Ilya Rozanov leaning back in the bleachers, arms crossed, watching Shane.

Just before the game, Nick had texted him saying he'd gotten caught up in something and couldn't make it. Shane told him it was fine. It wasn't, but he wasn't going to admit that.

What he definitely hadn't expected was Ilya showing up instead. Why would he even be here?

Shane headed for the locker room, trying to reset. He didn't understand why this was happening. Practices have been great and he'd been better and faster than ever. The team

liked him and he'd even made a friend already, Hayden Pike, who seemed normal and into hockey in a good way. Everything had been lining up and now he was playing like a little kid who didn't belong in his skates.

This was his dream, his entire future, he couldn't afford to be the one fucking it up. It felt like he was sabotaging the one thing he was actually sure about.

"You think too much."

Shane froze. He turned around to see Ilya standing just inside the locker room doorway like he'd been on the team.

"You're not supposed to be in here," Shane said flatly.

Ilya shrugged, "No. I am not. But here I am."

Shane rolled his eyes and moved to brush past him, "I don't have time for you."

Ilya stepped slightly into his path. "You think too much," he repeated boldly. "On the ice. You are scared."

Shane let out a ragged breath, "Scared of what?"

"Of being wrong. Of your own skill."

"That doesn't even make sense."

"It does," Ilya said calmly. "You see it."

Shane hated how he spoke like he was inside his brain.

"What are you even doing here?" he shot back. "Nick isn't even here."

"I am not Nick's pet, I go places without him. And I have friends on the team," Ilya replied, unimpressed.

That bothered him more than he wanted to admit. "You didn't have to come," Shane muttered.

"I know."

There was a brief, quiet pause.

"You are better when you stop thinking," Ilya continued. "I have never seen anyone more obsessed with this sport. You practice like you will die if you don't. So play like you will."

His tone was steady and flat but there was something underneath it. Something that felt more... intentional.

“I have to go,” Shane said, looking away because holding eye contact with Ilya had always felt impossible.

“Trust yourself, baby Hollander.”

Shane scoffed lightly.

When he stepped back onto the ice, in a way, the rink felt less overwhelming. The stakes were still high, but not as heavy as they were once before. He found himself simply moving on the ice, letting his body do what it knows how to do best.

And when the puck came to him late in the third period, he shot it and it hit the back of the net. That was the winning goal. They won.

Shane told himself afterward that he just needed a reset... a quick pep talk, that anyone could have said those things. It definitely didn't matter that it specifically came from Ilya Rozanov.

A ping from his phone pulled him out of the memory.

Rose

SHANE HOLLANDER

hayden just told me that you may have slept with someone??

did you actually go through with it??

why am I finding out through HAYDEN

Shane

Don't listen to Hayden

Rose

so that's a no?

Shane

...No

I did

Rose

OMG SHANE
HOW WAS IT

Shane

Confusing, but I actually think it helped
With hockey

Rose

that is NOT the part I care about
how'd he treat you?
do I need to beat someone up??

Shane

I mean he's always an asshole
But he was good to me
So that won't be necessary

Rose

aww my shaney is a virgin no more

Shane

Well technically we haven't fully had sex yet

Rose

oh???
saving that for later then
so what did you do

Shane

Um
We kissed
Or like made out
And we gave each other head

Rose

SHANEY

I've heard some great things about Ilya's mouth 😊

Shane

Oh gosh
Rumors are true then
I gotta go. Bye

Rose

NO YOU ARE NOT
GET BACK HERE

He turns off his phone and puts it away. It buzzes again almost immediately. And again. But he doesn't flip it back over.

He doesn't really want to dissect it. Not with Rose, not with anyone. Saying it out loud already made it feel bigger than he was ready for.

Tomorrow he will see Ilya again. At four p.m. He wasn't sure if the time between now and then felt too long or not long enough.

4:00 p.m. Shane Hollander was nothing if not predictable.

Ilya notices the exact second the knock comes, not because he had been waiting for it, *obviously*, but because he'd already checked the time twice in the last three minutes.

The knock comes again, Ilya pulls the door open. Shane stands there in a hoodie and that

permanently serious expression that is etched on his face. His hair is still damp at the ends, like he'd just taken a shower.

"You're early," Ilya jokes.

"It's four," Shane clearly does not find him humorous.

Ilya glances at his face then steps aside to let him in. Cliff's party was at eight, which means he has four hours until then. Four hours is entirely too much time.

Ilya silently walks to his bedroom, Shane obediently follows, which intrigues Ilya as Shane's usually one to bicker, to push back, but now he just walks quietly behind him. The door closes after them and he feels a strange tension begin to accumulate. He wasn't nervous, Russians do not get nervous. It was something far more irritating.

Ilya turns around slowly. Shane stands a few steps inside the room, hands hidden in the sleeves of his hoodie, shoulders squared as if he was bracing for something. He always carries himself like that, so defensive. Even here, with Ilya. *Because Shane thinks Ilya hates him.* The irony of that almost makes Ilya smile.

He wishes he did, it would've made things easier, because hate would explain it all. It would explain his teasing comments, their back and forth banter, it would explain the way Ilya notices every little thing about Shane, the smallest changes in his expressions, the miniscule details that define him. But whatever this was, it could never be hate.

Ilya knows what hate feels like. He's felt it burn hot and ugly in his chest before. He's seen it in his father's eyes. He's carried it longer than he ever wanted to admit. His mother used to tell him that hate rots the person holding it, that it poisons everything it touches, but he never fully believed her.

What he feels when he looks at Shane Hollander is nothing like that.

Shane likes to pretend he hates Ilya. But even Ilya can see through that performance. Shane is too earnest, too transparent in his reactions. He flares up easily, yes, but it's never cold or cruel. He's too soft for true hate.

"You look nervous," Ilya says, deliberately, because he wants to see the denial in his face.

"I'm not," Shane retorts immediately.

Such a liar.

Ilya closes the distance between them slowly, giving Shane every opportunity to move away. He didn't, if anything, he seemed to lean in without realizing it, like gravity had forced him to. Up close, Shane was almost unfairly beautiful, in a way that could not be described with words. His eyes are difficult to hold without getting lost in them, expressive in a way Ilya doesn't understand. The scatter of freckles across his cheeks draws Ilya's attention every time, like constellations he has memorized against his will. Shane has always had this quiet

sense of beauty.

When he was younger, Ilya used to wonder why Shane looked different to him than Nick did. Nick is attractive, undeniably so, especially with his confident charm, but Shane has something else, something that instantly pulls your attention. It fascinates him.

He leans in first, pressing his mouth to Shane's in a slow, deliberate kiss. He wants to feel the moment Shane stops thinking and just starts responding. It happens quicker than Ilya expects. Shane's grip tightens in his shirt, fingers curling like he needs something solid to anchor himself to. His reaction feels intoxicating.

Ilya guides him backward until the backs of his knees meet the mattress, and Shane sits without breaking the kiss. When Ilya finally pulls back, just enough to look at him, he feels a flicker of something resembling tenderness. Shane's expression is open in a way he rarely allowed, his eyes dark and unfocused, mouth flushed and slightly swollen.

"*You think too much,*" Ilya murmurs, the words slipping out before he could stop them.

Shane's breath stutters. Ilya wants to unravel him layer by layer, until every ounce of tension melted out of his body. Ilya pushes him gently onto his back and follows, taking his time, letting his hands explore slowly enough that he earns every little reaction.

Ilya reaches for the hem of Shane's hoodie and pulls it up slowly, watching the way his expression shifts as the fabric slides over his head. He discards it somewhere behind him without looking, then tugs his own shirt off in one smooth motion. His hands move back to Shane almost immediately, fingers brushing along his waist before he begins working at the button of his jeans, easing the denim down while guiding him closer at the same time.

He begins kissing down his body slowly, memorizing the way Shane reacts to his touch. The small sounds Shane tries and fails to suppress only make Ilya more aware of his power. He has the power to make Shane feel good, to make him forget himself. *Ilya is a lucky man.*

"Do you know what you do to me?" he hears himself ask, the words quiet.

Shane looks at him with those searching eyes and shakes his head. *So clueless.*

Ilya hooks his fingers into the waistband of Shane's boxers and pulls them down slowly, his gaze flicking up to catch Shane's. Once they're gone, he slides his hands along Shane's thighs, guiding his legs apart before settling himself between them. He leans back in to kiss him again, slower, letting his hands roam over his warm skin as if he has all the time in the world.

"Last time was all about your mouth, the pleasure that comes from it," he starts, "Today is a new kind of pleasure, Hollander." Ilya continues, his voice dropping.

Shane's brow furrows.

"Breathe, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)," Ilya murmurs. He starts with his hands,

tracing the defined ridges of Shane's abdomen, feeling the muscles jump under his fingertips until Shane's breathing loses its rhythm and becomes something more ragged. "See?" Ilya whispers, his lips close to Shane's ear. "Pleasure."

He finally wraps a hand around Shane's cock, which was already hard and leaking. Shane gasps, his hips lifting off the bed involuntarily. Ilya strokes him, a slow rhythm, his thumb swiping over the head on each stroke. He watches Shane's face, the way he bites his lip, flutters his eyelids, fights to keep his expression neutral and completely fails.

When Shane starts trembling, his knuckles turning white where they grip the sheets, Ilya releases him. Shane makes a choked sound of protest.

"Patience," Ilya chides. He reaches for the lube on the nightstand. The click of the cap is obscenely loud. He slicks his fingers, watching the sheen catch the light. "This will feel different. You tell me to stop if you need to."

"I won't need to," Shane grits out.

Ilya's slick fingers trail lower, past his balls, to the tight, untouched muscle behind them. Shane goes still, every muscle locking down.

"Breathe out," Ilya commands softly.

Shane exhales as Ilya presses the tip of his finger against him, circling gently, applying pressure until the tip breaches him. Shane's back arches off the bed, a silent cry caught in his throat. His eyes are wide, fixed on Ilya's face.

"Good," Ilya soothes, his voice a low rumble. He holds still, letting Shane's body adjust, feeling the pulse around his finger. "So good for me. Just take it."

He begins to move, slowly pushing in and out, opening him up. Shane's breaths come in punched out gasps now, any form of control he once possessed shatters. Sweat coats his chest. Ilya adds a second finger, and Shane cries out, a raw sound fills the room.

Ilya crooks his fingers, searches and finds the spot on the next stroke.

Shane's whole body seizes. "*Fuck!*" he shouts, his hand flying out to grip Ilya's forearm, nails digging in. "What— what is that?"

"That," Ilya says, a slow smile spreading across his face as he presses again, relentlessly, "is your prostate."

He leans down, his breath hot against Shane's inner thigh, his fingers still working him open with deep strokes. "Now, there is more to the lesson."

Ilya's mouth descends, his tongue leaving a broad, wet stripe across Shane's entrance, circling the stretched ring of muscle where his fingers were buried seconds before.

Shane's back thrusts off the bed, a broken sob tearing from his throat as the sensation and pressure continues.

Ilya's tongue is relentless, licking and probing as he pushes his fingers back in, his tongue dips in alongside them to taste Shane's body. The wet sounds are obscene, the sound of lube smeared fingers thrusting, the slurping of Ilya's mouth devouring him, Shane's own moans punching through the air.

[“Text with Creator's Style turned off](#), you taste so fucking good,” Ilya growls against his skin. He sucks at the rim before plunging his tongue inside, fucking Shane shallowly while his fingers curl harder against his spot. Shane's prostate throbs, growing hypersensitive, his cock leaks against his abs.

Shane's hands fist the sheets until his knuckles go white once again, his thighs quivering uncontrollably. His hole clenches around Ilya's fingers, three now, stretching him wide.

“Ilya, fuck, I can't— too much,” Shane babbles, his voice cracking. But his hips thrust up anyway, chasing the pleasure, grinding his ass down onto Ilya's face and hand. *Such a liar.* Sweat drips down his temples, his chest heaves with sobs and whimpers.

“You can,” Ilya rasps, pulling back just enough to speak, his chin shiny with spit and lube, lips swollen and red. His free hand grips Shane's thigh, hiking it higher, spreading him impossibly wider. “Your body knows what it needs... tight little hole sucking me in, begging for it. Look at you, dripping like a *slut*.”

Shane's face burns, the words seem to hit him like a gunshot. His face twists into shame and *lust*. His cock jerks untouched. “Don't— don't say that,” he gasps, even as his hole flutters, trying to pull Ilya's fingers deeper.

Ilya chuckles darkly, “Why not? It's true. Little hockey star, whining for my tongue. Imagine if Nick knew, his precious baby brother, spread open on his best friend's bed, begging for *me*.” He dove back in, tongue deep, swirling around with his knuckles as he fingers Shane harder and faster, the wet sound echoes louder. His fingers twist on every thrust, dragging over the prostate brutally.

Shane seems to shatter completely. “Oh god, Ilya— gonna— fuck! Your fingers— right there,” His words dissolve into a wail as Ilya leaves a kiss on his hole while scissoring his fingers wide, stretching the muscle until it gapes, pink and glistening. The pressure builds until Shane looks like he is seconds away from exploding.

“Not yet,” Ilya commands, pulling his mouth away. He straightens up on his knees, eyes dark and feral as he watches Shane writhe. His own cock strained against his boxers, but he ignores it, focusing solely on Shane's desires. “You come when I say. Hold it, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#). Earn your A.”

Shane thrashes his head, tears prick his eyes. “Can't, please, Ilya, need to come— please,” dirty pleas spill from his lips. Shane was beyond shame, Ilya reduced him to a trembling, sweaty mess chasing release.

Ilya's gaze burns with triumph, "That's it. Beg for me." He doubles his efforts, fingers pistoning now, knuckles deep on every thrust, curling against the prostate, making Shane's eyes roll back. Then he returns his mouth, his tongue flicking rapidly over Shane's stretched hole, lapping at the skin, dipping in to taste him.

Shane's back arches violently, his hole spasms wildly around Ilya's fingers, "Fuck— Ilya, yes!" Thick ropes of cum erupt from his cock, splattering his chest as his entire body convulses. His ass clamps down, forcing Ilya's fingers deep inside.

He looked *divine*. Cum staining his skin, lube dripping down his crack to the sheets, spit shining on his thighs.

Ilya doesn't stop, working him through it with gentler strokes as Shane rides his orgasm. "Good boy," Ilya murmurs, finally easing his fingers free with a wet pop, watching Shane's hole clench emptily, red and puffy, *obscene*. "Look at that... still hungry. You took it so well, Shane."

Shane collapses back, limp and twitching, cum drying sticky on his skin. His eyes were glassy. And for the first time, Ilya sees him soften completely.

Ilya wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, smirking down at his work.

"What about you?" Shane asks breathlessly, still flushed, still so soft. The fact that he's worried about Ilya at this moment, that he's thinking beyond his own pleasure, makes something twist inside him. *How adorable*.

"Ah, do not worry about me," Ilya says lightly, stretching out beside him.

Shane frowns at that. "No," he insists, shifting closer, stubborn as always.

Before Ilya can dismiss him again, Shane's hand moves with a hesitant form of confidence. He pulls down his boxers, releasing his strained cock. Ilya lets out a breath he doesn't mean to release. Shane begins to slowly stroke him before Ilya could protest, not that he ever would. He could never stop him. Watching Shane focus, watching him learn, is far more dangerous than he expected it to be. It doesn't take long before Ilya's composure fractures, and he's spilling into Shane's hand, letting out Russian curses.

"You learn fast," Ilya says, his voice steady.

"What's my score for the second lesson?" Shane asks. He's so serious in a way that makes it impossible not to laugh.

Ilya looks at him, really looks at him, and something warm spreads through his chest. "A+. Straight A student."

Shane smiles in a pleased way that feels like he just earned a reward.

Ilya checks the time on his phone. It hasn't been long. There's still time before the party, but not much time before Nick comes home.

At this point, he doesn't particularly care about Cliff's party. He has already experienced the highlight of his day.

Unless...

Unless Shane is going too. The thought makes him feel somewhat territorial. If Nick drags Shane into some corner and starts introducing him to random guys, who exactly is supposed to intervene? Ilya is, *technically*, his teacher. He should supervise his progress. That is a perfectly reasonable excuse.

"Are you coming to Cliff's party tonight?" Ilya asks before he can analyze the question too much.

"What party?"

Ah.

"Cliff I think has an unhealthy party fetish. He throws one every week. There is one today at eight."

"Oh, um, maybe? Are you?"

Instead of answering immediately, Ilya reaches for a cigarette and lights it. Shane makes a face, predictable as ever. Ilya knows he hates smoking.

"Maybe. Nick wants to go after his shift. You had fun last time?"

"Kinda. I don't drink, so it's hard when everyone else does."

"Why? For hockey?" Ilya asks.

"Yes. And I just don't like what it does to the body. I've tried it, but hockey's more important."

"Nothing is more important than hockey to you," Ilya says, watching him through a thin veil of smoke.

Shane hesitates, "My family is. But hockey's... up there. You know."

It fascinates him, the purity of that dedication. "Yes, I know. It will be nice seeing you succeed in it," Ilya says more quietly than he intends. "You will become a hockey legend. They will name moves after you."

Shane blushes immediately and looks away, "Uh, thanks. What about you?"

“What about me? I do not play stupid sports.”

“No, I mean like what do you want to succeed in?”

Ilya pauses. That question feels more invasive than anything physical they’ve done.

“My father, he wanted me to follow him and do what he did but I do not want that. I like working with kids, maybe I will become a teacher, I don’t know.”

“Aren't you majoring in business with Nick?”

“No. I switched.”

“To what?”

“You ask so many questions.”

“Sorry.”

“Do not apologize.” He studies him for a second. “Nick will be home soon. You should go get ready. For the party.”

“Who said I’m going?”

“The devil on your shoulder.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Ilya hums, putting out the cigarette. “Did you enjoy today’s lesson?” he asks lightly. “Feel good?”

Shane flushes but nods, “Yeah. I don’t think I’ve ever felt that good.”

“And tell me, Hollander,” Ilya says, voice dropping just slightly, “are you better at hockey now?”

“Oh, fuck off!” Shane throws a piece of clothing at him. His underwear.

Ilya catches them, smirking. He holds Shane's gaze for a moment before taking a deep sniff, not breaking eye contact. Shane’s entire body goes red.

“Pretty,” Ilya says softly before handing them back to Shane.

“I– I think maybe I am better. The guys noticed,” Shane admits.

“Good,” Ilya replies. “Then this is useful–”

“Yes. It is,” Shane replies with speed.

Ilya nods. "I'm going to shower. See you later, baby Hollander." He winks before cupping Shane's face and pulling him into one last bruising kiss, rough enough to leave him breathless. He enjoys teasing Shane more than anything.

Well.

Maybe not more than *anything*.

Under the spray of the shower, he leans his forehead briefly against the tile. He doesn't know if he wants Shane at that party. He doesn't know if he wants anyone else to see him the way he just did. And that thought bothers him more than anything else.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guysss. Sorry this took longer than usual!! It's midterm season, please keep me in your thoughts 😞

Anyways, hope you guys enjoyed this chapter.

Thanks to everyone who's left comments or kudos, genuinely my greatest motivation.

Heres a message to all my commenters: munch munch munch yum yum yum

Chapter 6: I don't want to, but I want to

Chapter Notes

Have fun!!

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

Shane

Are you guys going to that party tonight

Rose

yes

I literally texted you about it but you left me on delivered 😞

Shane

Sorry

Hayden

I'm also going!!

Shane stop ignoring me, I've been texting u all day

Answer my texts

Rose

wait shane are you going??

Shane

Yes

Hayden

Shane hello

Did you sleep with someone??
Shane Hollander

Shane

I'll see you guys there

Hayden

Man wtf

Ilya Rozanov has always had a way of pulling people toward him.

It isn't just his looks, though those certainly don't hurt, there's something else about him, it's almost magnetic. People orbit him without realizing it, drawn in by the confidence he's carried since Shane first knew him. He has a way of making anyone feel special.

Shane notices this immediately when he walks into Cliff's house. Ilya is standing in the kitchen, surrounded by a small crowd of people, laughing at something someone says. There are men and women pressed close to him, but one girl in particular has a hand looped around his arm as if she owns him, and Ilya lets her. Because Ilya is single, he's always going to be single.

It's difficult to ignore the fact that just a few hours ago Shane was lying in bed with him, feeling things he hadn't even known were possible. Ilya had pushed him to a level of pleasure Shane could barely process, something intense enough that he was still thinking about it now. But for Ilya, it probably meant nothing. Shane was just another person he made feel special.

Shane clenches his jaw slightly. How can he act so casual about it? Sure, they weren't close before all this started. But Ilya is Nick's best friend, he's known Shane for years. Doesn't that mean something? Or does ruining Shane mean nothing to him?

To be fair, Shane isn't even sure he cares about Ilya himself. What bothers him more is what everything represents. Lately things haven't felt as clear as they once had been.

"Shane! Bro! I didn't think you were actually coming!"

Shane looks up. Nick is weaving through the crowd toward him, grinning like he always does.

“Uh, yeah,” Shane says awkwardly. “I’m here.”

“Let me guess. Rose dragged you here?”

“Yup,” Shane lies easily. “That’s why I’m here.”

Nick laughs, clapping him on the shoulder, “You know what? I’m so glad you came. There’s someone I want you to meet.”

Shane immediately feels a sense of dread settle in his stomach.

“I think he’s with Rose right now,” Nick continues. “She’s putting in a good word for you.”

Oh no.

Before Shane can protest, Nick grabs his shoulder and steers him through the crowd toward a quieter corner of the living room. Rose is there, talking animatedly with a guy Shane has never seen before.

“Shane! You’re here!” Rose says, immediately pulling him into a hug. She smells faintly like tequila. She’s definitely had a few drinks already.

“Shane, this is Miles,” Nick says.

The guy turns toward him with a bright smile. “He’s a theater major with me,” Rose adds. “I was showing him pictures of you and he said you were cute, so obviously I had to set you guys up—” she pauses, “I meant guys, but that works too!”

“Rose,” Miles says, laughing.

Nick speaks up, “Rose mentioned it earlier and I thought it sounded like a great idea,” he claps his hands together. “Alright, have fun you two!”

Before Shane can even react, Nick and Rose disappear back into the crowd. Shane stares after them in disbelief. What the fuck is wrong with them? How could they just leave him alone with a complete stranger?

“Hey,” Miles says, leaning casually against the wall. Miles isn’t unattractive. Actually, he’s pretty good looking, and if he’s friends with Rose he’s probably nice too. But Shane’s brain is still stuck somewhere else entirely. Could he even start dating someone right now?

“Hi,” Shane says awkwardly. “I’m Shane.”

“I know,” Miles says with a chuckle. “Miles.”

He extends his hand. Shane shakes it. “Let me grab us some drinks. What can I get you?”

“A ginger ale, if they have that.”

Miles raises an eyebrow, “Ginger ale?”

“Yes.”

He laughs softly, “Alright. I’ll be right back, gorgeous.”

Shane feels his face heat up. He’s not sure if it’s the compliment or the embarrassment of the situation, probably both.

He immediately pulls out his phone to scold Rose.

Shane

Rose WHAT THE FUCK

Rose

SHANE

look I know you have whatever thing you have with Ilya
but Miles is sweet just talk to him!!

Shane

Ilya and I have nothing

Rose

yeah sure
that’s why you should give Miles a chance

Shane

Rose

Rose

come on just indulge me for one night
even Nick was excited about this

if you don't like him you never have to talk to him again

Shane

Fine
But don't do this again

Rose

hopefully I won't have to 😊

“Here you go, handsome.”

Shane looks up as Miles returns, holding two drinks. One of them is already being extended toward him. Okay. He's definitely overdoing it with the nicknames.

“Thanks,” Shane says, taking the cup from him.

Miles leans against the wall again like he had earlier, completely relaxed, one shoulder pressed casually against it, he looks so natural in this environment.

“So you play hockey, right?” Miles asks. “Rose says you're incredible.”

Shane shrugs a little, lifting the drink to his lips mostly so he has something to do with his hands. “Yeah. I've played my whole life,” He pauses before asking, “You do theater?”

“Yup. Theater kid,” Miles grins, completely unashamed. “I've always wanted to be a Hollywood actor.”

Shane smiles politely, “That's cool.” It actually is cool. Shane has always admired people who know exactly what they want to do with their lives and say it openly.

“You know what would be fun?” Miles says suddenly. Shane immediately has a bad feeling about where this is going.

“What?”

“Dancing.”

Shane's eyes widen slightly. He is absolutely not a dancer. “I'm kinda tired,” Shane says quickly. “Maybe later.”

“No way,” Miles laughs, already grabbing Shane’s wrist before he can say anything else.
“Come on! Let’s have fun.”

Before Shane can protest, Miles pulls him toward the middle of the room where people are dancing. The music is loud enough that Shane can feel the bass in his chest, the floor is crowded with bodies moving in rhythm with the beat. Someone nearby shouts something that Shane can’t hear over the music. He tries to relax and just go with it. He really does try.

But then—

He glances across the room and immediately makes eye contact with Ilya. Rozanov is watching him. The girl from earlier is still hanging off his arm, her hand draped over his shoulder, but his attention isn’t on her. It’s on Shane. And Shane is suddenly very aware that Miles’s hands have settled on his waist.

“You’re really hot, you know?”

Shane turns his head back toward Miles. Miles looks completely at ease, swaying with the music and smiling. There’s something about the way he moves, like he’s not thinking about it at all. Shane kind of appreciates that about him, he wishes he could be like that sometimes.

And then he feels a familiar warmth creep into his face again. Compliments have always made him uncomfortable, especially from people he barely knows. He can never really know what to do with them. But it’s easier to focus on the compliment than to think about the eyes that feel like they’re staring straight through him from across the room.

“Relax,” Miles says with a grin, leaning a little closer so Shane can hear him over the music. His hands squeeze Shane’s waist gently as he pulls him closer, their bodies brushing together.

“Do you go to a lot of these things?” Shane asks, partly to change the subject.

“Cliff’s parties?” Miles laughs. “I guess so.”

“Oh, cool,” Shane mutters, though he doesn’t really know what else to say.

Miles grins at him, “You’re not a party person, are you?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Maybe, a little,” Miles teases.

Then he leans closer, his face near Shane’s ear as he lowers his voice, “But I like that about you.”

Shane’s eyes close briefly as he processes the words. Miles is definitely straightforward. Shane isn’t really sure what he’s supposed to feel right now. He never thought someone would actually like the fact that he doesn’t go to parties. Most people seem to think it’s

boring.

When he opens his eyes again, Miles is staring directly at him. The look in his eyes is... *intense*. Shane wants to say it's desire, but he's not completely sure if that's what it is.

For a few moments, he manages to forget about the rest of the room. The music is loud, the crowd moves around them, and Miles is easy to talk to. Then his hands slide along Shane's waist as he spins him around. Shane's back hits Miles's chest and he lets out a quick, startled gasp.

Before he can even process what's happening, Miles begins guiding him with the beat, moving them together so easily, making Shane feel somewhat unsteady. He doesn't know what else to feel. It's intense, but at the same time, not... enough. Across the room, Shane knows exactly why.

Ilya's expression is different now. In a way, it's darker, much darker than it had been earlier. He lifts his drink to his lips, taking a slow sip while still staring directly at Shane. His gaze is harsh enough that Shane can feel it from across the room. Shane can only stare back at him.

For a short, reckless moment, he lets himself wonder. Why does Ilya look so angry? Is he doing something wrong? Maybe he's disappointed in him as a student. Maybe this whole thing is embarrassing somehow. *But that doesn't really make sense*. He tries to close his eyes and focus on Miles instead, tries to push the thoughts away, but his brain refuses to cooperate with him.

When he opens his eyes again, Ilya is no longer standing where he was before. The group of people around him are still there, still talking and laughing, but Ilya himself is gone.

"Woah," Miles suddenly gasps. His hands immediately let go of Shane's waist.

Shane instinctively takes a step forward before turning around to see what happened.

"Ah, careful," a low, unmistakable voice says. Ilya is suddenly standing beside them. Miles's shirt is completely soaked with what looks like the contents of Ilya's drink, liquid spreading across the fabric. Ilya's expression is hard and almost cold.

"What the fuck was that?" Miles says angrily, glaring at him.

Ilya only smirks in response, "Was an accident. Sorry." But he doesn't sound sorry at all. If anything, he sounds smug and... *angry*.

"You should probably go," Ilya continues casually. Both Shane and Miles stare at him in confusion.

"Excuse me?" Miles says, clearly seconds away from punching him in the face, Shane wouldn't blame him.

"To change your shirt," Ilya says calmly. "It is dirty now. Cliff can give you a new one, I'm

sure.” The smirk never leaves his face.

“Yeah, whatever, asshole,” Miles mutters. “I’ll be right back, Shane.”

He heads off toward the hallway, probably looking for a bathroom. Shane watches him go for a second before turning back to Ilya. And Ilya is already staring at him. The smirk is gone now, but his expression is still intense, dark, and completely unreadable.

Shane feels irritation rising in his chest. Who did Ilya think he was, interrupting them like that? Even if Shane hadn’t been having the best time, it was still unbelievably rude. And besides, why was he even over here in the first place? He had seemed perfectly happy earlier, surrounded by that group of people who never seemed to deprive him of attention or touch.

“What the fuck, Rozanov?” Shane lets out angrily. “Why would you do that?”

For a moment, Ilya doesn’t answer, his eyes only watch Shane. Up close, the irritation on Shane’s face is even more obvious than it had been from across the room. His eyebrows are drawn together, lips pressed tightly like he’s trying not to cause some sort of scene. Ilya had been watching that expression since Shane had first arrived, watching him pretend he was enjoying himself, watching that idiot’s hands touch and grab his waist, as if he had the right to, and watching Shane let him, allowing this to happen.

It had been irritating, unreasonably irritating. Ilya lifts the empty cup in his hand slightly before setting it down on the nearest surface. “It was an accident,” he repeats, trying his best to sound unbothered.

Shane stares at him like he doesn’t believe a single word. Which... is fair because it hadn’t been an accident. Ilya had crossed the room very deliberately, the drink had tipped over Miles’s shoulder very deliberately. The surprised look on his face had been almost funny.

“You spilled an entire drink on him,” Shane says with disbelief, “I know that wasn’t a fucking accident.”

Ilya shrugs, “Mistakes are happy accidents.”

Shane lets out a disbelieving laugh. The music around them is still loud, people are still dancing like nothing was happening. But here, in the small space between them, everything feels strangely still.

“What the fuck does that even mean, Rozanov? You literally interrupted us for no reason,” Shane says.

Us. *Huh.*

“Oh yes, because you were definitely enjoying yourself, Hollander,” Ilya replies sarcastically.

“We were dancing. I was having fun,” Shane shoots back, his voice angrier now. The accusation clearly lands harshly, because his jaw tightens immediately after he says it.

“Yes, I saw,” Ilya says, rolling his eyes. Of course he had seen it all. He hadn’t been able to stop himself from watching.

Ilya knows Shane. He knows the details of his expressions, the ones anyone else would completely miss. From across the room he had seen it clearly, the stiffness in Shane’s shoulders, the smile that never quite reached his eyes, and the way he kept glancing around like he didn’t know what to do with himself. Shane had looked uncomfortable the moment he stepped into the party.

At first, it had been somewhat entertaining. Then that theater boy had appeared. Suddenly Shane wasn’t standing awkwardly by the wall like he had expected him to. Instead, someone was touching him, leaning close to whisper things in his ear, pulling him closer and closer until their bodies were practically pressed together. So unbelievably close, so *unnecessarily* close.

It had ignited something inside Ilya before he even had time to formulate his thoughts. The idea that some random man thought he had the right to touch Shane like that, like he knew him well enough to slide his hands around his waist and pull him in. He had barely known Shane for ten minutes. And for some unbeknownst reason, Shane had let him. How could Shane allow that?

“You’re unbelievable,” Shane mutters, rolling his eyes.

Ilya tilts his head slightly, watching him, “Oh? Why?”

“You walked over here, ruined his shirt, and told him to leave.”

“Yes. I was there.”

Shane exhales in frustration, “Why are you acting like this, Rozanov? You can’t just— just do this!” he says, gesturing vaguely. “And it’s not like you didn’t have company of your own. I’m allowed to dance with a hot guy.” The last words sound so defensive.

Ilya pauses and studies him carefully. Shane’s breathing is uneven now. His shoulders are tense, his posture stiff. *Interesting.*

“Do you like him?” Ilya inquires quietly.

Shane’s head snaps up, “What?”

“The theater boy,” Ilya clarifies. “Miles.”

Shane stares at him like the question is somehow offensive. “What the actual fuck is wrong

with you,” he almost yells, turning around and heading toward the front door. Ilya doesn't hesitate to follow him.

“What?” he says, trying to justify the question. “I am curious.”

“Bullshit.” The word is spat out over Shane’s shoulder. Ilya almost smiles at the anger in his voice. Shane wasn't usually one to get angry.

“You were dancing very closely,” Ilya continues as they step towards the door. “I could only assume. The reason we are doing what we are is because you want to learn sex. For hockey, but also for future men, yes?” he says evenly. “Will you use what you learned on him?”

Shane scoffs as he pushes the front door open and walks outside. The front yard is quiet compared to whatever was happening inside the house. The music becomes muffled behind the door, the night air feels cold against Ilya’s skin.

Shane turns around to face him, “Oh, were you watching me that closely, Rozanov?” Shane says, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “Who knows. You were my first experience, but you won’t be my last. Maybe I will. He seemed pretty eager for me.”

Ilya doesn’t respond, but something inside him fractures. The thought alone... Shane in someone else’s bed, looking at someone else the way he had looked up at Ilya earlier that afternoon. Someone else touching him, hearing the sounds he makes when he loses control. The images come viciously, filling his mind with a heat that spreads through his chest like something poisonous. He feels anger. *No...* something darker than anger, something possibly close to violence.

The idea that Shane would let someone else touch him like that almost makes Ilya break in half. But he says nothing.

Shane runs a hand through his hair in frustration, clearly expecting some kind of response. Instead, Ilya steps closer and closer again. Shane barely has time to react before Ilya’s hand grips his waist firmly, pulling him forward and erasing any lingering memory of Miles’s touch. He guides Shane toward the side of the house, into the shadows where the light doesn’t reach, then he pushes him hard, back against the wall. The impact knocks the breath from Shane’s lungs.

Ilya’s hands slide under Shane’s shirt before he can even protest, his palms pressing against the warm skin of his waist. The touch burns. Shane gasps, clearly about to yell something. But the words never leave his mouth, because Ilya kisses him.

The kiss is rough and sudden, filled with anger, frustration, and so much tension. The moment is so electric he almost feels a shock.

Shane freezes for half a second, then he instantly responds. He leans into it and doesn't pull away. Ilya’s hand tightens against Shane’s side.

“You are naughty today, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#),” Ilya murmurs against his

mouth, his voice sounds almost dangerous. “That is not how you should be speaking to me.”

Shane’s breathing is uneven now, his chest rising and falling quickly.

“I was making you scream hours ago,” Ilya continues quietly. “And now you want to act like a brat?”

Shane’s eyes widen slightly at the reminder.

“Tell me something,” Ilya says, his voice impossibly low. His fingers slide up to Shane’s chin, forcing him to look directly at him. “Did Mr. Actor make you feel good? Did he make you feel like you did earlier today?”

Shane doesn’t answer. His eyes look glossy now, dazed and uncertain. It hurts Ilya to look at them.

“He cannot,” Ilya says softly. “Only I can. Yes?”

Shane swallows, then he whispers, “Yes.”

That was too easy. Ilya feels a dark satisfaction bloom in his chest. He tilts Shane’s chin slightly, studying his expression. He folded so easily. He was so inexperienced, so beautiful, so lost.

“Mhm,” Ilya confirms. “You are still a student.” His thumb brushes lightly along Shane’s jaw. “So inexperienced,” he continues quietly. “You are not ready to explore yet.”

His gaze darkens, “You are mine.”

And quickly after...

“My student.”

His fingers tighten slightly against Shane’s chin, “I cannot have you embarrassing me. Do you understand?”

Shane doesn’t answer immediately, but the look on his face says more than his words can. He only looks at Ilya, as if he hasn’t processed his words yet.

“Your student,” Shane whispers finally. It’s so quiet Ilya would have almost missed it if he wasn’t standing so close to him.

“Yes.”

“And that... that gives you the right to act like this?”

“Shane,” Ilya tries, “I had to be a hero. You looked sad with him.”

“No, you can’t just decide that I was sad, I was having fun,” Shane snaps.

“It was very obvious,” Ilya replies. “Do not lie to me.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “And what about the girl that was all over you? Why are you allowed to act like that but I’m not?” he shoots back.

“That was Svetlana, she is a friend,” Ilya tries to explain. He was always touchy with Svetlana.

Shane scoffs, “Oh yeah? Tell me you haven’t fucked her.”

Ilya just looks at him. The accusation is almost insulting, the fact that Shane would assume he had slept with Svetlana even after he’d called her a friend. Although... it isn't entirely unfair. Ilya has never been one to shy away from his reputation. Still, he finds himself wishing, absurdly, that Shane might see him as something more.

He forces his voice to stay steady. “If you want to fuck actor boy so badly, then go,” he commands. His gaze hardens, “But I know you can still feel me.” Shane stops moving at the words.

“My hands. My fingers. My tongue,” Ilya continues teasingly. He can see the memory immediately flash in Shane’s expression.

“You will not go,” Ilya says, stepping close, “Because you know.” He steps a little closer, “You know that I am right. He does not do it for you.” Another step, “He is not the man you want.”

For a moment Shane just stares at him.

Then suddenly... he surges forward and kisses him. The kiss instantly turns hot, like Shane is trying to shut him up and punish him. Ilya’s brain goes blank for half a second before instinct takes over and he pulls Shane closer.

Shane breaks the kiss for a second, breath uneven. “You fucking asshole,” he scolds.

Then he kisses him again, causing Ilya to almost laugh into his mouth. “Stop lying to yourself, Shane,” he teases against his lips.

The kiss deepens again, it gets messy. Shane’s hands grip the front of Ilya’s shirt like he’s trying to pull him as close as possible, and Ilya slides a hand down to his waist, dragging him forward. Shane jumps slightly and wraps his legs around him.

Ilya internally freezes. Because Shane Hollander, the careful, anxious, constantly overthinking Shane Hollander, is currently clinging to him in the middle of a stranger’s front yard like he doesn’t care if the entire party walks outside and sees them.

Shane should hate this. He should be pushing Ilya away. Instead his fingers are tangled in

Ilya's hair and his mouth is more desperate than ever.

Shane shifts slightly against the wall. "Ilya," he lets out quietly. There's a slight hesitation in his voice. He sounds more careful than before.

Ilya raises an eyebrow, "Yes, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)?"

Shane swallows and for a moment it looks like he might change his mind, but then the words come out. "Ilya... please," he begs softly. "I want it."

Ilya's brow furrows slightly, "Want what? [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)."

Shane exhales, he's visibly flustered. "Fuck me," he blurts.

For a moment, the words hang in the silence. Then Shane immediately rushes to fix them, "I mean— like— I want you to teach me," he explains quickly. "Completely. The full lesson."

Ilya can only stare at him. Shane looks more serious than ever. He'd never expect that request to come from his mouth, at least not after everything that had occurred tonight, but here he was, looking like a determined little puppy.

There are so many reasons that explain why this would be a bad idea. But Ilya knows one of them is worse than the others.

If he says yes tonight... if he gives Shane the final lesson... that might be the end of this. Their agreement was simple. Shane learns what he needs, and then it stops. Shane will be ready for meaningless hookups and then there will be no more excuses for Ilya to see him, no more of his stupid schedules, no more watching Shane's brain go blank beneath his touch.

He doesn't want it to end.

At least, not yet... and definitely not like this.

But Ilya knows himself, he already wants to say yes, very badly. He exhales slowly through his nose, dragging a hand through his hair as he forces his brain to function again. "Shane," he starts.

He glances briefly toward the house. He can still hear the music and see the people everywhere. Nick was somewhere inside.

Then he looks back at Shane. "If I could," he says slowly, "I would fuck you right here against this wall."

Shane's eyes widen slightly.

"But it is not the right time," Ilya continues calmly. "You made a schedule. You worked very hard on it," he reminds him.

Shane groans and lets his head fall lightly against the wall. “Fuck the schedule.” He pauses, “...wait.” He looks back at Ilya, “No. Fuck me.”

The sincerity in his voice is so ridiculous Ilya can’t stop himself from laughing. Shane immediately looks offended.

“You say this now,” Ilya says, shaking his head slightly, “but I do not want you regretting it tomorrow.” He studies Shane carefully, “We are both feeling... a little crazy tonight.” That might actually be the understatement of the century. “We will follow your schedule. Next lesson is not far away,” he says firmly.

Shane’s face tightens slightly, “So you don’t want me?” he asks, almost unsure.

Ilya blinks then snorts, “You are very funny.” He pats Shane lightly on his cheek, “Do not be a brat again. Listen to me, Hollander.”

Shane still looks unconvinced, “But—”

Ilya cuts him off. His hands settle back on Shane’s waist, “Do you think I am a fool?”

Shane frowns, “What?”

“If I start teaching you the final lesson tonight. After everything that just happened, after you yelling at me, after me almost starting a fight with *Miles*,” He exhales, “It will not be a lesson.” He leans slightly closer, “I will not be able to go gentle on you. I will not take my time and lead you through every step.” He pauses. “No,” he says quietly. “I would break you.”

The stubbornness slowly fades from Shane’s expression, but something darker replaces it. He looks so frustrated.

Ilya presses his palm once more against Shane’s side before finally stepping back, “We will do it properly, like you planned.” He stops for a second before adding, “Besides. You would not survive it tonight anyway,” he gives him what he deems to be a gentle smirk.

Shane’s eyes widen. And out of seemingly nowhere, something shifts in him. “No,” Shane says quickly. “You’re right. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“Shane—”

“Nick is literally in there!” Shane explains, panic creeping into his voice. “We shouldn’t have been this— this reckless. And I left Miles alone—”

Ilya’s expression darkens, “You are still thinking about Miles?”

“And literally anyone could have seen us,” Shane continues, clearly spiraling now.

“Shane, no one saw us. We will be more careful next time.”

“No,” Shane retorts quickly. “There’s no next time. We won’t do something like this again. Only in private. As scheduled.”

Ilya stares at him.

“You were right,” Shane admits, he looks small and fragile.

“If that is what you want. Does not mean it will happen,” Ilya whispers the last part quietly, to himself.

“Yes,” Shane insists without a beat of thought. “It is.” He starts backing away from Ilya.

“I’m going inside. Wait before you follow me.”

Before he can turn completely, Ilya grabs him again and quickly kisses him. Ilya isn’t entirely sure why he does it, he just wanted to.

“Ilya–” Shane starts as he breaks off the kiss.

“Goodbye, Mr. Hollander. See you next lesson,” Ilya tries to sound casual.

He pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. Shane immediately makes a disgusted face, and Ilya smiles at it. Shane doesn’t say anything else as he turns and walks back toward the house.

Ilya stays where he is, watching him go, trying very hard not to think about the fact that, for a moment back there, he had been extremely close to ruining everything.

Shane walks back into the house reluctantly. It all felt so overwhelming. God, he wants to go home. With everything that happened with Ilya tonight, he feels like he’s losing his mind. Actually losing it. How could he have been so desperate? So stupid? He literally *begged*.

When he’s around Ilya it’s like something in his brain shuts off. His self-control and ability to think disappear. All the careful planning he puts into every interaction, every word and move, it all just evaporates. Shane presses a hand to his forehead as he pushes through the crowd. It was all meant to be about hockey, that’s it.

He wanted to get better at sex so he could get better at hockey, that was the plan. And Ilya was just the person experienced enough to help him learn. He should not have become anything more. He is and always will be just his brother’s best friend, someone who absolutely did not matter.

Yet somehow tonight Shane had ended up pinned against a wall outside a party, legs wrapped around him, asking him to– begging him to *fuck him*. He squeezes his eyes shut. They

already had a lesson today, a *full* one. How the hell did he forget that? How did he go from that to *please fuck me* in the span of a few hours? What is wrong with him?

As soon as he steps back onto the dance floor, he hears someone call his name. “Shane, hey!” Miles appears beside him, holding up his shirt. “I was able to clean it. Where’d you go?”

“Oh— uh. Nowhere important,” Shane stares at him for a second, still trying to get his brain to work. “Look, Miles, you’re really sweet—”

Miles immediately raises a hand, “Don’t worry, Shane. I can see where this is going.”

Shane blinks.

“I know Rose set us up because she wants us to date,” Miles continues easily, “but we don’t have to do that.”

Shane opens his mouth, confused.

“We can just fuck,” Miles shrugs. “I’m okay with that.”

“Oh— no,” Shane replies quickly. “No, I don’t think I can just... fuck.”

Miles stares at him, “Are you serious?” Then a look of realization appears on his face. “Does this have anything to do with Ilya Rozanov and the way he was acting with you earlier?” he asks. “I figured maybe it’s because he’s basically like your brother’s brother or whatever. So he’s protective of you but—”

“What? No!” Shane blurts out the lie. “This has nothing to do with Rozanov.”

Miles raises an eyebrow but doesn’t push it.

“I’m just not in the right mindset for a hookup or relationship or anything right now. I’m sorry,” Shane apologizes.

Miles shrugs, “I mean, you’re hot so it’s a bummer,” he says honestly. “But it’s fine,” then he grins. “I’ll get you in my bed someday,” he winks and walks away.

Shane just stands there. What the fuck just happened. He slowly backs off the dance floor and leans against the nearest wall, trying to process the last hour of his life. This night is absolutely insane.

Across the room he spots Nick dancing with some random girl, looking completely unbothered by literally anything. Good for him.

“I will need to use my headphones tonight, by the looks of it.”

Shane stops in his place at the sound of the voice.

Why.

Why.

“Didn’t I tell you to leave me alone?” Shane exclaims without even turning.

“No,” Ilya replies. “You did not.”

Shane sighs and finally looks over. Ilya is standing beside him as if nothing had happened.

“I just wanted to make sure you were okay,” he adds. “I’m sorry if I took things too far earlier.”

Shane exhales slowly, “It’s not just your fault. We both got carried away.”

Ilya hums quietly, “Yes. That is true.”

Silence lingers between them as Ilya turns to look at the door. “I saw Miles leave,” he points out. “I guess you are not practicing those skills tonight.”

“I’m not ready to,” Shane whispers.

“So I was right? Again?” Ilya teases.

“Shut up.”

He smirks. “You know,” he says after a moment, “I am... excited for the next lesson. I just want it to be good for you.”

Shane nods hesitantly, “I get it. I do too.” He looks down at the floor. “I’m not sure why I was thinking like... *that* earlier. I was acting irrational.”

“Do not put it all on yourself,” Ilya says quietly. “Tonight was just a lot. Let us forget about everything.”

Shane lets out a small laugh, “I’m not sure if I can.”

Ilya pauses, “Me neither.”

They both stare at the crowd instead of each other until Ilya’s phone buzzes and he turns to check it.

“I have to take Svetlana home,” he explains. “Please be safe.”

Right, his friend... *Svetlana*. The girl who had her arm around him all night and Shane had very stupidly accused him of sleeping with. But... would he? Would Ilya sleep with her tonight?

It's none of his business what Ilya does. He tries not to think about the strange feelings that come up in his head.

"Didn't you drink?" Shane worriedly asks.

"Well, I had a few sips of a drink," he shrugs. "The rest of it magically appeared on someone else's t-shirt."

Shane rolls his eyes, "I think I'll go home soon too. Just need to find Rose and Hayden." Then after a second, he dryly adds, "I'll try not to get touched by other men."

Ilya glances at him, his eyes stare deeply, "Good. You should text me when you get home. Just to be sure."

Shane frowns. Why was Ilya so worried about him? It's not like he's a child, he knows how to take care of himself. The concern bothers him, although it also makes him feel somewhat warm.

"Okay," Shane lets out.

They nod at each other and Ilya walks away. Shane watches him disappear into the crowd, then immediately tells himself to stop doing that.

It doesn't take long to find Rose. She's already with Hayden and Jackie.

"Shane!" Rose yells. "How'd it go with Miles?"

"He's sweet... but I just don't think I'm... ready for anything," Shane admits.

"Oh well. There's more gay fish in the rainbow sea," She shrugs. "Trust me, I've dated most of them."

Hayden and Jackie laugh immediately, Shane smiles faintly.

"Wait," Hayden says suddenly. "Did I see you talking to Ilya Rozanov a second ago? What was that about?"

Shane's brain stops at the question and Rose immediately turns to him with concern. He still hadn't told Hayden the truth.

"We were talking about Nick," Shane retorts quickly. "Don't worry about it." He changes the subject, "Hey, I'm ready to go home."

"You're good to drive?" Jackie asks.

"I only had a ginger ale."

"Alright, Shaney, I'll text you later. I think we have some things to talk about," Rose says.

Shane knows exactly what that means, he nods.

He hugs them all goodbye and heads outside. The night air is somehow colder. His car is parked down the street, and the walk there gives him just enough time for the remaining adrenaline to start wearing off. By the time he sits in the driver's seat, the exhaustion hits him all at once. He drops his head back against the headrest and stares at the ceiling of the car.

What the hell was tonight?

Everything about it feels surreal now. Like it happened to someone else in a cliché movie. Shane presses his hands over his face. This was never supposed to happen, but every time he's around Ilya, things leave his control. Shane says things he doesn't actually mean or does things he didn't plan. It's like Ilya has some kind of effect on him that Shane absolutely hates. But he had to do this, for hockey, to improve, to get comfortable with something he had always been bad at.

Shane exhales slowly and starts the car. As he pulls away from the curb, one thought keeps circling in his head. If Ilya had said yes tonight... would he have even stopped him?

No. He would have let Ilya do anything to him at that moment.

Shane grimaces and turns on the radio, trying to drown out his own thoughts. He quietly drives home. When he finally pulls into his driveway and turns off the engine, he sits there for another moment, staring at his phone.

He sighs and opens Ilya's contact.

Shane

I'm home

He stares at the message for a second before hitting send, then he tosses the phone onto the passenger seat and leans his head back again.

He's so not ready for the next lesson.

Chapter End Notes

I have 2 midterms tomorrow and yet here I am.

I've been seeing a lot of fic inaccuracy discourse on Twitter so if there is literally anything inaccurate about my writing of hockey, Russian, or literally anything please let me know!!

Was this enough jealousy? No, there can never be enough jealousy.

Thanks again to all my wonderful commenters and kudos givers, love you all!!!!

Give me all thoughts and opinions, I'm willing to beg, just not as much as Shane.

Chapter 7: 'Cause I just can't get him out of my mind

Chapter Summary

Realization

Chapter Notes

Chapter is completely in Ilya's POV, it was necessary!

Once again, italics in Ilya and Svetlana's conversation symbolize Russian dialogue.

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

"Something's wrong with you."

Svetlana is nothing if not blunt.

"Hm?" Ilya replies absently, staring at his phone again. Shane's message sits there on the screen. *I'm home*. One simple, boring message, yet he had reread it at least twenty times.

"You were quiet on the drive here," Svetlana continues from the other side of the room, *"And now you're staring at your phone like a crazy person. Did something happen to your family?"*

"No. There is nothing wrong. You notice too much," Ilya doesn't look up.

Staying with Svetlana tonight had been a mistake. After the party he had assumed Nick would be bringing someone home, and the last thing Ilya wanted was to walk in on that. So he had driven Svetlana back to her apartment and stayed instead. Normally, by this point in the night, they would already be in her bed. Instead, Ilya was lying on her couch, one arm thrown over his eyes, his phone still in his hand. And for the first time in his life, he simply... wasn't in the mood. Which was *ridiculous*.

Sleeping with Svetlana would have been an easy distraction, but every time he tried to imagine it, his mind betrayed him... because he kept seeing Shane. Shane flushed and angry, grabbing his shirt, whispering please against his mouth. Ilya exhales slowly and stares at the message again. At least the boy had listened. At least he knows Shane is safe.

Across the room, Svetlana watches him for a long moment, then she smirks.

"Oh," she exclaims. *"I know exactly what this is about."*

"No, you do not," Ilya replies immediately, still not looking at her.

"I saw you with Shane Hollander, Ilyusha." That makes him glance up. "When you left me on the dance floor to go interrupt him and his little boyfriend," she leans back against a wall.

"That wasn't his boyfriend."

Svetlana's smile widens, *"You're jealous."*

"I am not jealous," Ilya denies flatly.

She laughs, *"Ilya. You almost punched the man."*

"There was nothing to be jealous of," he grumbles.

"Oh, okay..." she sounds sarcastic. "And that's why you glared at his date like you were planning to murder him."

"He was very annoying."

"No, I understand. I also spill drinks on people I find annoying."

"He deserved it."

Svetlana folds her arms, studying him with amused patience, he knows she could see beneath the lie.

She tilts her head, *"So you didn't follow Shane outside because you were jealous."*

"No."

"You didn't spend half the night with him."

"Was your night so boring you had to watch mine?"

"And you're not currently lying on my couch staring at a text message he sent you."

Ilya's jaw tightens as Svetlana leans forward, her eyes gleaming.

"Oh my god," she breathes. "You are obsessed."

"I am not obsessed."

"You've been staring at your phone for the last ten minutes. You're obsessed."

"Sveta, go find something better to do."

She bursts out laughing, *"Ilya Rozanov,"* she says between laughs, *"Russia's greatest love machine, in love with a boring Canadian hockey player."*

"In love? I do not fall in love," he glares.

"Right, I almost forgot, you don't have a heart. Ilya... why are you so scared to admit that you can love?"

Ilya doesn't answer, because the truth was irritatingly unclear. For years everything had been the same, people wanted him and he sometimes wanted them back. No one gets hurt if you keep feelings out of the equation. But Shane had managed to ruin that balance in the span of a few weeks. Shane with his stubborn mouth and his ridiculous questions. Ilya rubs his face with his hand.

Svetlana watches him quietly for a moment.

Then she speaks up, softer now, *"Maybe you do not love him, but you like him."*

"He is Nick's brother."

"And?"

Ilya stares at the ceiling. After a moment, he mutters, *"He is... so complicated."*

Svetlana snorts, *"No. You are."*

Silence settles in the room for a few seconds. Then, Svetlana moves towards the couch.

"Well, this is depressing," she announces.

Ilya raises an eyebrow.

"You came to my apartment and instead of sleeping with me like a normal man, you are moping on my couch over a boy," she walks towards the hallway.

"Sveta," he sighs, frustrated.

"What? You are moping," she teases him with a smile then grabs a blanket from the back of a closet and tosses it to him. *"Sleep,"* she orders.

Ilya catches the blanket, *"You're leaving me alone?"*

"No," she grins. *"I am saving myself from listening to you pretend you are not in love."*

"I am not—"

"Goodnight, Ilyusha."

She disappears into her bedroom before he could finish. Ilya lays there, staring at the ceiling. He looks back down at his phone, Shane's message was still on the screen.

I'm home.

His thumb hovered over the keyboard, he could text back. Something simple, boring.

Good.

Sleep.

See you soon.

He sighs and locks the phone, setting it on the table beside the couch. Because if he starts a conversation now, he isn't sure it could end.

Saturday night puzzles with David Hollander are something Ilya looks forward to every week.

He can't remember exactly when the tradition started, only that at some point years ago David had pulled out a puzzle after dinner and asked if he wanted to help. Since then, it had somehow turned into a routine. Almost every Saturday, if they were both free, Ilya would come over and they would sit at the kitchen table for hours, quietly sorting pieces and arguing over their colors and edges.

Ilya loved it, he loved spending time with David. In many ways, David was the father Ilya had always wished he had growing up. Tonight, however, his thoughts keep drifting somewhere else.

Ilya knows Shane will be home. He also knows they're supposed to meet up tomorrow for their next lesson. And most annoyingly of all, he knows that he still has absolutely no idea what he's feeling. So for tonight, he decides on one thing: he will simply avoid Shane Hollander.

"Alright, son," David says as he walks into the kitchen carrying a stack of puzzle boxes. "Since we finished the last one last Saturday, we're starting a new one tonight," he sets the boxes down on the table with a small thump. "And I'm pretty sure it's your turn to pick."

Ilya quietly laughs as he looks over the collection they've built over the years. There are dozens now, landscapes, cities, paintings, animals. Some of them are easy, some of them take weeks. Normally he'd choose one of the harder ones. Tonight, though, he doesn't feel like thinking that much.

He flips through the boxes until he finds one with an illustration of a stargazer lily, the bright pink petals contrast against a paler background.

"That one," he chooses, handing it to David.

“Good choice,” David says with an approving nod. He claps his hands once, already moving to clear the kitchen table. “Alright. Let’s get to work.”

They flip the box over and pour the pieces out onto the table, the rattle of cardboard filling the room as the pile spreads across the surface. For a few minutes, they work in comfortable silence, flipping pieces right side up and separating the edges.

David hums quietly to himself as he sorts through the pile of puzzle pieces.

“Ilya,” he says after a moment, “Is everything alright?”

Ilya stares down at the puzzle pieces, turning one slowly between his fingers. “Yes,” he doesn’t look up. “I do not know.”

It’s hard to lie to David.

“Son, you know you can talk to me about anything,” David says gently.

“I know,” Ilya claims quietly. “But I do not know how to talk about this.”

David studies him for a moment. “Romantic troubles?”

Ilya lets out a soft, quiet laugh. “You could say that.”

“Figured. I know that look on a young man,” David says with a small smile.

Ilya hesitates before speaking again, “David, how did you feel about Yuna before you started dating?”

David’s hands stop moving. For a second he just smiles, the question bringing back fond memories.

“I felt everything,” he admits finally. Ilya looks up. David leans back slightly in his chair, thinking. “I thought about her all the time. I’d wonder what she was doing, what she was thinking,” he chuckles. “The smallest things reminded me of her. The silliest things,” he picks up a puzzle piece and stares at it. “And whenever I was around her... things just felt right.” Ilya listens carefully. “You know Yuna, she can be very strict about things. But it never annoyed me. I loved it. I loved everything about her.” He laughs softly. “Even the things that didn’t make her perfect.”

Ilya watches him, fascinated by the certainty in his words.

“Man,” David says with a shake of his head, “I felt so lucky when she said yes to a date with me.” He slides the puzzle piece into place. “And I still feel that way anytime I’m with her.”

The kitchen goes quiet again. Ilya looks down at the puzzle, it’s already starting to come together. One of the lily’s petals is nearly complete now, pink pieces fitting together in the

shape of a curve. Tiny darker dots scatter across the surface of the petal. Ilya stares at them.

Freckles.

They remind him immediately of Shane. For as long as he can remember, those freckles have been the first thing anyone notices about him. Scattered across his cheeks and nose. Ilya remembers the first time he saw Shane as a child. That was the first thing he noticed then, too. Those adorable freckles.

10 years ago

It had been Ilya's first week in Canada. Everything about the school had felt loud and confusing. There were too many kids and too many words he didn't understand. And to make things worse, English still felt weird on his tongue. Ilya had mostly kept to himself. He didn't know how to be friends with these... Canadians, so he sat alone observing everyone else, instead.

One afternoon on the playground, he heard some very annoyingly loud shouting. He rolled his eyes at the interruption of peace and turned to see a group of boys standing laughing near the swings, and in the middle of them was a smaller boy. He only noticed his freckles at first.

"Why does your face look like that?" one of the boys asked. "Yeah," another one said, leaning closer to him. "Did you catch some disease?"

The smaller boy frowned at them, clearly annoyed. "They're freckles," he explained.

"Freck- what?"

"My mom says they come from the sun. Like little sun spots," the boy said matter-of-factly.

The boys burst out laughing. "That's stupid. Your face looks dirty."

The boy's cheeks turned red, but he didn't cry, he crossed his arms stubbornly. "Well my mom says they're lucky," he shot back.

"Lucky? You look like you got splashed with mud or something," one of them mocked.

There's more laughter from the group.

Ilya stood across the playground watching the interaction. He didn't understand every word said, but he understood enough to know what was happening. And he understood the look on the boy's face. He looked angry and embarrassed, as if he was trying very hard not to cry. But Ilya said nothing, all he could do was watch.

The next day, it happened again. The same group of kids had cornered the boy near the fence. "You should wash your face," one of them yelled.

"They won't come off," the boy snapped.

"Maybe it's contagious," a kid said, reaching out like he was going to poke Shane's cheek.

Ilya stared for a moment and then he moved. He walked straight towards them, his steps felt heavy on the gravel. The boys noticed him immediately. He was taller than most of them, broader too.

"What do you want?"

Ilya's English was still slow but he wasn't backing away. "Stop," he warned, glaring at them.

The boys blinked at him. "What?"

"Stop," Ilya repeated. Then he pointed at Shane, "Leave him."

The boys laughed, clearly not understanding the threat, "Or what?"

Ilya didn't answer, he grabbed the nearest boy by the front of his shirt and shoved him backward.

Ilya didn't like fighting. Not really. He had known what it looked like when anger took over, the control you lose. He promised himself he'd never let that happen to him and he knew his mother would be disappointed if she found out that he did. But the look on the boy's face, the tears that welled in his eyes but didn't fall, made his mind go devoid of rational thoughts.

The bully stumbled and fell into the dirt, which caused a series of moves in retaliation. Someone shoved Ilya and Ilya shoved them back harder. He had seen enough fights at home to know what to do.

Before he could swing again, another kid suddenly jumped into the chaos, shoving one of the bullies away from Shane. He looked older, around the same age as Ilya.

"Back off!" he snapped.

The boys quickly realized they were now too weak for the fight. One of them muttered something under his breath, causing them all to scatter.

The playground fell quiet right after. The older kid turned toward Ilya and briefly they just stared at each other.

"Thanks," the kid grinned. "My brother, Shane," He pointed at the younger one.

The smaller boy was still standing by the fence, watching them both with a frown.

Then he pointed at himself, “Nick.” Finally, he pointed at Ilya, “You?”

Ilya hesitated before answering, “Ilya.”

It is strange to think that Nick and Ilya’s friendship had started with a fight, but the memory still makes him smile. After that day, Nick had taken Ilya under his wing. It started with little gestures, helping him with English, inviting him to sit with his friends at lunch, walking home together after school, but over time it had turned into a permanent friendship that has lasted for years and hopefully many more to come.

Luckily, the bullies had never dared to go near Shane again. Ilya still doesn’t understand how anyone could have ever made fun of those freckles.

“Who are you thinking about?” David’s voice pulls him out of the memory.

Ilya blinks. The puzzle in front of them is nearly finished now. “What?”

“Whoever you were thinking about,” David says with a knowing smile. “The person my words reminded you of.”

Ilya doesn’t answer.

“You must love them.”

Ilya’s fingers go still against the puzzle piece he is holding. “I am not sure I can... love.”

David looks at him for a moment and then he laughs. “Ilya, I’ve known you since you were ten years old. You absolutely know how to love,” he says warmly.

“Maybe,” Ilya concedes. “Yes, I can love family. But not... romantically.”

David shakes his head, “Don’t convince yourself of that.”

He leans forward, glancing down at the puzzle between them. “You know, love is a lot like this thing,” he continues, tapping the edge of the puzzle. “At first it looks like a mess. There's pieces everywhere and nothing makes sense. You try to force things together and they don’t fit, so you think maybe the picture... isn’t there.”

Ilya stares at him, listening carefully.

“But if you slow down and actually look at the pieces... eventually they start connecting.” He slides a piece into place. “And suddenly you realize the picture was there the whole time. You

just needed patience to see it.”

Ilya stares at the puzzle and for a moment neither of them speak.

“David,” Ilya lets out quietly, “I do not think I ever said thank you.”

David looked up, “For what?”

“For taking me in. When everything happened. Losing my mom would have been... harder without you and Yuna,” Ilya admits.

David’s expression softens immediately, “Ilya, you never needed to thank us for that.” He reaches across the table and squeezes Ilya’s shoulder. “We loved your mother. Irina was family to us long before she passed. And you were stuck with us whether you liked it or not.”

Ilya laughed softly.

“You’ve been part of this family for a long time. Nothing about that was... charity.”

Ilya thinks as if he might cry but he just smiles at David. The puzzle sits between them now with only one piece left. Ilya wonders briefly how they had managed to have such a heavy conversation while still fitting every piece exactly where it belonged.

He picks up the final piece and places it into the empty space. It fits in perfectly, completing the flower. Both of them sit back and admire it.

“Alright, son,” David stands up. “I promised to take Yuna out tonight, and she’ll be mad if I’m not ready in ten minutes.” He claps Ilya on the shoulder. “You know we’ll always be here for you. You can stay if you want. There’s leftover dinner in the fridge,” he gestures toward the kitchen.

“Thank you,” Ilya offers with a small smile. “Do not make Yuna wait.”

David laughs as he starts toward the stairs. “Oh, and Ilya?”

“Yes?”

“Good luck with Shane.”

He disappears upstairs and Ilya’s mouth falls open. How did David know? He replays the entire conversation in his head, trying to remember if he had accidentally said Shane’s name out loud. But... he hadn’t.

He is still staring at the staircase when another voice appears, “Ilya, honey!”

Yuna walks into the kitchen, adjusting the sleeve of a beautiful dress. David clearly was taking her somewhere nice.

“Yuna! You look beautiful,” Ilya greets, standing up

She beams at him, “Aw, thank you! How did tonight’s puzzle go?”

“Fast,” he gives her a smile.

She glances toward the table, “Oh wow, you boys finished already.” Then she looks around the kitchen. “Have you seen Shane? He wasn't in his room,” she asks.

“No. Is he not home?” Ilya frowns slightly.

“He came in earlier. But you know Shane. Sometimes he just disappears when he needs quiet.”

Ilya nods, “Yes, that sounds like him.”

“Well,” Yuna smiles, smoothing down her dress, “if you see him, tell him we’ll be back later.”

“I will.”

She gives him a quick hug before heading toward the stairs. “Have a good night, Ilya!”

“You too.”

A moment later he hears David’s voice upstairs, followed by Yuna laughing at something he says.

Ilya stands in the kitchen for a minute, staring at the finished puzzle on the table. He sighs softly and pushes his chair in. Maybe a little fresh air would help clear his head.

He walks toward the back door and steps outside. The night air is cool, carrying the faint smell of grass and summer. The backyard is quiet, you could only hear the quiet hum of cars in the distance.

Ilya quickly looks around, taking in the view, until he notices a figure lying in the grass. Shane is stretched out on a blanket, lying on his back with one arm tucked behind his head while the other rested across his stomach, his eyes fixed on the sky above him.

Ilya hesitates near the porch. He had told himself he would avoid Shane tonight. He considers quietly going back inside, but instead, he finds himself walking towards him, the grass crunching under his feet. Shane must hear him, because he turns his head towards his direction until their eyes meet.

“Baby Hollander.”

“Ilya.”

Ilya moves closer before dropping down onto the grass beside him, stretching out next to the blanket. “This is very boring of you,” Ilya teases.

Shane doesn’t look away from him, rolling his eyes. “Fuck off.”

Ilya huffs out a quiet laugh, “Your parents left for dinner.”

Shane makes a small noise in acknowledgment before turning his gaze back toward the sky. “Did you have fun with my dad tonight?”

“I always have fun with your dad,” Ilya jokes, winking.

Shane immediately reaches over and lightly smacks his chest.

“Hey,” Ilya laughs. “Yes, it was fun. We finished the puzzle,” he admits.

“Already? Those usually take you guys forever,” Shane sounds surprised.

Ilya shrugs slightly, “I wanted to see the full picture tonight.”

Shane turns his head again, squinting at him. “Wow,” he smiles. “Okay, Mr. Poet.”

Ilya laughs again then gets quiet, “He is very good at helping. I needed... advice.”

“Makes sense. He’s good at that.”

They fall into a comfortable silence. Above them, the sky is scattered with stars and a bright moon that casts a light on the backyard.

“Is everything okay? You seem off,” Shane asks after a while, with genuine concern in his voice.

“Ah, yes. Do not worry your pretty little head,” Ilya lies.

“Ilya.”

“You are very stubborn.”

Shane doesn’t respond but keeps staring at him. Ilya sighs and finally looks away, fixing his eyes on the stars above them.

“I think on nights like these. I miss her the most,” he confesses quietly.

“Your mom?” Shane’s voice softens immediately.

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

Momentarily, the only sound between them is the rustling of the trees.

“I was remembering the day we first met,” Ilya continues.

Shane huffs out a quiet breath, “The day you risked your life to stand up to some stupid bullies?”

“The day I saved you from some big strong bullies.”

“I was doing fine, you know,” Shane scoffs.

“Does not matter. They were insulting something you cannot control,” he glances at Shane briefly. “Your freckles did not deserve that.”

Shane looks at him with that familiar look he gets sometimes. The look incites too many mixed feelings in Ilya that he never had the words to describe.

“After that fight... I felt bad. I thought my mom would find out and be angry. I spent the entire walk home deciding if I should lie or tell the truth.”

“And?” Shane interrupts.

“I could not lie to her. So I told her everything,” he shrugs and pauses. “She was angry that I fought, yes, but she was also proud that I stood up for someone. And she told me something,” a small smile tugs at the corner of his mouth.

“What?”

Ilya stares up at the sky again. “She said, Доброе сердце никогда не ошибается. A kind heart is never wrong.”

Shane briefly stays quiet before speaking. “I like that,” he breathes out.

Ilya swallows. “I remember nights like this with her. She always knew what to say when I felt lost. Always there when I needed her.” His voice drops slightly for the next words, “Maybe I was not there when she needed me.”

Shane sits up a little, turning toward him. “Ilya.”

Ilya keeps staring at the sky.

“You remember what I told you. Right after she passed?” Shane questions.

Ilya nods.

“Sometimes you love someone so much, but you still have to leave them.” He hesitates before continuing, “I think you helped her more than you realize. She probably wouldn’t

have survived as long as she did without you.”

Ilya says nothing.

“And I think,” Shane gently adds, “that whatever choice she made... it wasn’t because of you.”

“You do not know that,” Ilya remarks.

“No. But I know you,” he lays back down beside him again.

Ilya glances at him, Shane looks completely serious. “You’re the most loyal person I know. You would’ve done anything for her. And I think she knew that,” Shane finishes.

The two of them lay there in silence again. The stars above them feel impossibly far away. After a moment, Shane speaks again. “Hey.”

“Yes?”

“You never told me what you needed advice about tonight.”

Ilya closes his eyes and lets out a quiet breath, “Romantic troubles.”

“Oh,” Shane turns his head slowly toward him. “I think I might need advice about that too.”

Ilya turns his head and their eyes meet. Shane holds his gaze for a second before glancing away again. “We have... a lesson tomorrow,” he sounds more uncertain than he probably means to.

“Yes. We do,” Ilya acknowledges.

“A big one,” Shane shifts slightly on the blanket.

Another laugh escapes Ilya, “Yes. A very big one.”

Shane snorts and silence takes over again.

“I don’t know,” Shane muttered after a moment. “This whole thing just feels weird.”

“The lessons?”

“Yes. The lessons,” Shane reiterates.

Ilya studies him from the corner of his eye. “You were the one who asked for them.”

“I know. It... it made sense then.”

“And now?”

Shane hesitates, "It still technically makes sense."

Ilya raises an eyebrow, "Technically?"

"But now it's just... different," Shane croaks.

Ilya doesn't push further. A few minutes later Shane lets out a yawn.

Ilya glances over at him, "Tired?"

"Mhm," Shane mumbles.

"It is la-"

Another yawn interrupts him, causing Ilya to chuckle under his breath.

"Shut up."

The backyard settles into quiet again. Somewhere in the distance, a loon calls, causing Ilya to shiver. Even after all these years, Ilya still hadn't gotten used to those stupid Canadian birds.

Eventually, Ilya notices Shane has gone completely still. He turns toward him to assess, Shane's eyes are closed.

"Shane?" he tries quietly to no response. Ilya props himself up on one elbow, studying him. "Baby Hollander," a slow breath leaves him.

Carefully, Ilya pushes himself upright and brushes grass from his shirt. He stands there, looking down at Shane. His hair has fallen messily across his forehead. The faint moonlight catches the freckles scattered across his cheeks. Even asleep, he somehow manages to look so stubborn yet so... angelic.

Ilya shakes his head with amusement and smiles. He crouches down and slips one arm beneath Shane's shoulders, the other under his knees. When he lifts him, Shane stirs slightly, but he doesn't wake up. Instead he instinctively shifts closer, his head dropping against Ilya's shoulder. Ilya freezes then slowly exhales, entering the house.

He carries Shane up the stairs with careful steps. It wasn't the first time he had done this. Years ago, Shane would fall asleep on the couch during movie nights. Ilya would haul him upstairs while Nick laughed about it. Back then it had meant nothing, he was simply being helpful. Now, Shane's warmth presses against him, his breath steady against Ilya's neck, and it feels like a lot more than it used to.

Ilya nudges the bedroom door open with his foot, moonlight spilling across the floor from the window. He crosses the room and lowers Shane carefully onto the bed. Shane shifts slightly, mumbling something incoherent before settling deeper into the pillow. Ilya pulls the blanket over him and steps back.

For a long while he doesn't move, he stands there watching Shane. He looks so peaceful like this, so soft, so unaware of the insanity he had somehow managed to create in Ilya's mind.

"You must love them," David's voice echoes.

Earlier, Ilya had brushed those words aside. No matter what David had said, he hadn't believed love was something meant for him. Whatever he felt for Shane could be ignored. But standing here now, hearing Shane's delicate breaths in the quiet room... the truth settles over him with sudden clarity as he breathes in.

"Oh," he gasps.

Oh.

Ilya Rozanov is in love with Shane Hollander.

Chapter End Notes

Lowkey cried a little writing this.

Sorry to those who expected lesson 3 this chapter, I wanted more feelings involved before they got there.

Big thanks to everyone who commented on the last chapter. I love reading comments more than anything.

Give me all your thoughts and opinions!!!

Chapter 8: I know it's strange, I don't know what I'm thinking

Chapter Summary

Lesson 3

Chapter Notes

For all my og readers, I made it so that any Russian could be translated by hovering over the word or pressing it on mobile. Please let me know if any issues arise with this!

Explicit scene warning!

Enjoy!

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

9 years ago

Shane loved when Irina Rozanov babysat him.

It didn't happen often. His parents had a regular babysitter, and they didn't want to trouble Irina, no matter how many times she insisted it wasn't any trouble at all. But that night, the babysitter had canceled last minute, and his parents had reservations at a restaurant they couldn't miss.

So Irina came over, with Ilya, of course. Nick was thrilled. He and Ilya had only been friends for about a year, but somehow they were already inseparable, like they'd known each other forever.

Shane... was less thrilled about that. Not because he hated Ilya, but together, he and Nick could be a lot, and Shane preferred the quiet. So instead of playing games with them, Irina had put on a cartoon for him. At nine years old, Shane liked to think he had outgrown cartoons, but he absolutely had not.

They sat together on the couch, tucked under a blanket. Irina let him lean into her side, her arm wrapped loosely around him. Shane liked her. She was always gentle and kind, always knew exactly what to say to make things better. He usually only saw her during dinners when she and Ilya came over, but even then, her affection was obvious, especially when it came to Ilya.

Shane had noticed that a long time ago. The way she looked at him and the way Ilya always stayed close to her. He didn't know much about Ilya's father, but he knew that both of them went quiet whenever anyone mentioned him. Shane didn't understand the situation completely, still, he understood enough to know it was serious.

On the TV, the cartoon played on. It was one of those overexaggerated kids shows. On the screen, two characters were confessing their love for each other. Shane watched quietly for a while, then tilted his head up to look at Irina.

"Miss Irina?" He spoke in a small voice.

"Yes, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)?" she answered softly.

He paused, trying to find the right words to ask. "What does it mean when they say they love each other like that?"

Irina glanced down at him, surprised for a moment. Then she smiled, "Love..." she began slowly, careful in choosing her words. "It is when someone is very important to you. More than anyone. You think about them all the time. You want them to be happy, even if- if it is not about you."

Shane frowned slightly, thinking, "Like family?"

She nodded, "Yes, like family. But also... different. More, maybe. Little scary too."

"Scary?" he echoed.

"[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#). Because you care so much... you do not want to hurt them," Irina laughed.

Shane looked back at the TV, watching the characters dramatically hug. "That's weird," he muttered.

Irina smiled again, her hand smoothing over his hair, "Maybe. But also very beautiful."

Shane was quiet for a second before another thought crossed his mind, "How do you say I love you in Russian?"

Irina fondly looked at him, her gaze brightened, "In Russian you say 'Ya tebya lyublyu'."

Shane blinked up at her, "Ya-tee-baa-loo blue?"

She let out a small laugh, shaking her head, "Very hard, I know."

"Yeah, it sounds weird," Shane admitted.

Irina tilted her head, looking at him for a moment before her voice turned a little more serious than before, "One day, you will meet someone. Someone you love very much."

Shane made a face immediately, “Ew. No, I won’t.”

Irina chuckled, clearly unconvinced. “You will,” she insisted. “And when you do, you should tell them. In Russian.”

“Why would I do that?” Shane groaned, sinking further into the couch.

“Because it will be special. Just for you,” she said, tapping his nose lightly.

He shook his head stubbornly, “I’m never gonna fall in love.”

“We will see, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#),” Irina laughed, completely certain he was wrong.

Shane huffed, turning his attention back to the cartoon, pretending he didn’t care. But he repeated the words quietly under his breath anyway, trying his best to memorize them. “Ya... tebya... lyublyu.”

Shane Hollander’s alarm rings at 8 a.m. sharp. Shane does not get up.

It’s not like he’s asleep. He hasn’t been for a while now. His eyes are closed, his body is still, but his mind hasn’t shut up for the past hour. At first, he had been confused about how he even ended up in his bed. The last thing he remembers is lying outside, staring up at the sky on the grass (not just the grass, there had been a blanket under him) talking to Ilya Rozanov.

For a second, he thinks maybe he had sleepwalked. That didn’t make sense, he’s never sleepwalked in his life. Then he thought maybe his dad had found him and brought him inside. But even then, he knows that wasn’t right, because he knows what had happened. Ilya was what had happened. The memory is barely there but it’s stuck in his head. Shane had opened his eyes for a second last night, long enough to see someone leaving his room, someone with blonde curls and broad shoulders. Ilya Rozanov.

Shane presses the back of his head further into the pillow. Ilya carried him inside. Shane isn’t small, he’s put on muscle, especially after hockey camp this summer. He knows his own weight and Ilya had just lifted him as if he was as light as a feather. Which... is strangely attractive to Shane.

He exhales slowly through his nose, staring up at the ceiling. It shouldn’t matter to him, it really shouldn’t. Ilya’s done it before, years ago. But for some reason... it really does mean *something*.

He moves under the covers, trying to ignore it all. Shane doesn’t even know why he went outside in the first place. Well, *he does* but he just doesn’t like the reason. Sometimes, when things get too loud in the world around him, he goes out there and lies down, stares at the

stars until his brain finally shuts down. Last night, it didn't work. If anything, it made things worse. All he could think about was the party, about Ilya at the party. The way he had looked at him, the way Shane had begged— *no*. He is not about to cloud his mind with the memories again.

Shane squeezes his eyes shut, then forces them open again. The conversation from last night lingers in his head. Ilya talking about his mom like that, it felt wrong to hear. Not because he thought it was true, but because Ilya actually believed it. He knows Irina's death still affects him, that much has always been obvious, but the guilt... Shane doesn't think that ever should have been his to carry. Even when Shane was younger, he understood that much.

He had seen the way Irina looked at Ilya, she loved him, that had never been a question to him. And because of that, Shane knows that none of it had ever been Ilya's fault. Even then, the incident never affected his views on Ilya, which were still pretty complex.

He doesn't... dislike him. Not anymore, not really. He just finds him annoyingly frustrating. He's always saying the wrong thing at the worst possible moment, always pushing things, always there to annoy the fuck out of him. It's too much sometimes. And the worst part is that he acts like he cares. At ten, he fought bullies for him, at fourteen he stayed at Shane's party when no one else did, and now, at twenty, he's doing whatever the hell these lessons were.

And after all that happened last night, Ilya had the audacity to say he was having romantic troubles. And he discussed it with his dad, of all people. Shane huffs quietly. What does that even mean? Was he talking about Svetlana? That girl from the party? His... friend?

Shane exhales and pushes himself up. No. He needs to stop. Whatever happened at the party does not matter. Whatever happened last night does not matter. What matters is today, the day of their third official lesson.

Shane walks into the kitchen at exactly 8:25 a.m. after finishing his morning routine. His mom is already there, moving between the stove and the counter, cooking something that would usually smell appetizing but instead makes Shane's stomach churn. His dad sits at the table with a cup of coffee, reading this morning's newspaper.

"Morning," Shane mutters, heading straight for the fruit bowl.

"Good morning, honey," Yuna says without turning. "I made eggs if you want. They're cooked just the way you like."

"Thanks, mom, but I'm not really hungry for eggs," Shane replies, plucking an apple from the bowl.

"Are you sure?" Yuna presses.

Shane nods, taking a bite of the apple. He enjoys the quiet for a few minutes as Yuna finishes

at the stove and takes a seat at the table. Breakfast with his parents is part of his daily routine, a small moment of normalcy that—

“You saw Ilya last night?” David interrupts, peering over the top of his newspaper.

Shane pauses, he was just about to take another bite of his apple. “Yeah,” he murmurs instead.

David hums, “That’s good.”

“Why?” Shane frowns slightly.

“No reason, just asking,” David shrugs, putting down the newspaper.

Shane’s stomach twists with worry. *They’re just curious*, they don’t know about his thing with Ilya. They *can’t* know. If they did, they’d have to tell Nick and then that would lead to everything going wrong and ruining his relationship with his brother as well as Ilya’s relationship with him and he *cannot* have that happening. He stays still, trying to keep his hands steady instead of spiraling.

Yuna glances between them, hiding a small smile as she takes a bite from her plate, “Your father is just curious.”

“About what?” Shane worries.

“About how... you know, it all went,” she says.

“How what went?”

“The night,” David clarifies.

Shane stares at him for a long moment, blinking his eyes in confusion. “It was a normal night. Nothing interesting happened,” he finally lets out.

“Did you guys talk at all?” his dad wonders.

“I mean, yes, we did.”

“Did he... confess anything?” David probes, leaning forward slightly.

Shane blinks again, “What would he confess?”

“He seriously didn’t tell you anything interesting?” David questions, he looks defeated.

Shane hesitates before replying. What even are these questions? “No...?” he answers slowly.

Another look passes between his parents.

“...Okay, what is happening?” he asks, exasperated.

“Nothing is happening,” Yuna denies.

“You’re both being weird,” Shane grumbles.

“We’re not being weird,” David insists.

“You are,” Shane snaps. “Did Ilya tell you something I don’t know?”

David raises his hands defensively, almost laughing. “No, no,” he says.

“Then why are you acting like that?” Shane counters, rolling his eyes.

Yuna turns to look at him, “We just like Ilya. We want to know how he’s doing.”

Shane frowns, taking a moment to digest that. It still didn't make sense to him, why would they think he knows how Ilya is?

“He’s fine,” Shane says, more to himself than anyone else.

“Good,” David nods, picking up his coffee again.

“Shouldn't you be asking Nick about that?” Shane inquires.

“Well, Nick isn't here...” David points out.

“Honey, we were just worried about Ilya,” Yuna cuts in. “And we know you two have a special relationship so we thought he'd talk to you about things.”

Alarm bells immediately start ringing in Shane’s head. Special relationship? *Special relationship*? Did they know? Did Ilya tell them something?

“Special relationship?” Shane repeats, trying, and failing, to sound normal.

Yet another look passes between his parents. “You two have always had a *special* bond,” David claims, taking a sip of his coffee instead of meeting Shane’s eyes. “Since you were kids.”

Shane’s grip tightens slightly around his apple. “We don’t–” he starts, then cuts himself off, shaking his head. “There’s no *special* bond. We barely even talk.”

Yuna raises a brow at that, clearly unconvinced. “Shane–”

“We don’t,” he insists before he can stop himself.

The room goes quiet for a second as Shane exhales, forcing his shoulders to relax. “I mean... we talk sometimes, but not like that,” he amends.

David nods. Shane can tell he might not believe him, but he would not push it. “Alright,” he says, glancing back down at his newspaper.

Yuna watches Shane for a few more seconds then lets it go as well. “Well, if you do see him again, tell him to come over for another dinner soon.”

Shane nods quickly, “Yeah. Sure.” He reaches for another apple, even though he’s not really hungry, he just needs something to do with his hands.

And suddenly, Shane feels more anxious at the thought of meeting up with Ilya than before.

Shane has never been late to any of these lessons before, and he isn’t about to start now, even if everything seems to be going wrong.

He did everything on time. He showered three times, just to be as clean as possible. He spent an hour researching male penetration, making sure he knew what to expect. He left the house quietly, avoiding any other weird questions from his parents. And everything was right on schedule... *until it wasn't.*

There’s been some kind of accident on the main road leading to Ilya’s apartment. Shane can’t see it, but he can see the line of cars ahead barely moving. At some point, traffic gets forced into one lane, and everything slows down even more. He checks the time and he's already late.

His grip tightens slightly on the steering wheel. *This is bad.* They already don’t have much time before Nick gets back, and now it’s even less. If things take too long and Nick walks in—*that’s not happening.*

When he finally gets to the apartment, he moves quickly, knocking on the door more hurried than usual. Shane can feel the heat in his face, he looks more flustered than he should be.

The door opens after a moment.

“Ah,” Ilya drawls, leaning against the frame, a smirk tugging at his mouth. “Not so perfect student anymore. You are tardy.”

Shane just glares at him for a second, then pushes past him into the apartment.

Behind him, Ilya laughs. “No, seriously,” Ilya calls, shutting the door. “Is something wrong? Are you even Shane Hollander?”

“Fuck off,” Shane mutters. “There was a crash. One I wish I was in right now.”

Ilya snorts, following after him.

Shane doesn't wait for Ilya's lead this time. He heads straight to the bedroom, trying to ignore the way his nerves are already starting to build inside of him.

"Baby Hollander," Ilya starts. "Do not rush. Let us talk a little."

Shane stops in his place. Talk? Why would they talk?

He turns towards Ilya, "Talk?"

"Yes. I know you are very eager for me, but if you want me to fuck you, we should talk first. Just a little."

"Rozanov, I'm already late," Shane says, a bit harsher than he means to. "We need to finish before Nick gets here."

Ilya goes quiet for a second, the smirk fading into a frown.

"Hm," he hums under his breath. "Yes. Finish." It's quiet, almost only to himself, causing Shane to barely catch it and not really question it.

"Fine," Ilya agrees, sitting on the edge of the bed. He gestures toward him, "Strip."

Shane nods and starts pulling off his clothes, folding each piece and stacking them into a neat pile. Ilya's clothes, however, are off in seconds.

It feels different than the last two times. Before, it had been rushed and messy, this... *isn't*. Everything feels slower and more intentional, Shane doesn't know what to make of it.

"Come here," Ilya pats the bed. "Lay down [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)."

Shane still doesn't know what that fucking word means. He follows the command, lying back. Ilya stands there for a moment, just looking at him, the stare goes on a little too long for Shane's liking.

He lightly frowns. "What?" Shane questions.

"[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)," Ilya quietly exhales.

Shane hears the Russian and doesn't know what to think. Part of him likes it, the way it sounds coming from Ilya, so easy and natural. The rest of him hates not understanding. He only knows a few Russian words, and none of those are familiar.

Shane shifts slightly on the bed, the sheets feel cool against his bare skin, but he still somehow feels warm. He wants to ask what those words mean, but the question doesn't leave his throat. Shane watches as Ilya finally moves, slowly climbing onto the bed.

Ilya faintly shakes his head, as if he was clearing his thoughts. He positions himself between

Shane's legs, his hands resting lightly on his thighs, the touch sending a shiver up Shane's spine.

"Relax," Ilya says, his voice deep. "First, we start slow. Foreplay is important. It prepares your body, makes everything better. You remember from last time how my fingers felt inside you?"

Shane nods, his throat tight. He remembers every little detail.

Ilya's fingers trace up Shane's inner thighs, teasing the sensitive skin. "Good. Today, we do more. I will touch you everywhere, make you ready. Tell me if anything hurts or feels wrong. This is your lesson, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#). We go at your pace."

Shane swallows, his cock already half hard just from the anticipation and Ilya's stupid gaze, "Okay. I— I trust you."

A small smile flickers on Ilya's face. He leans down, capturing Shane's mouth in a short kiss, then moves to press his lips to Shane's collarbone, continuing to go lower. Shane gasps softly, hands fisting the sheets. Ilya's mouth moves to his nipple, tongue flicking out to circle the hardening bud before sucking it between his teeth.

"Fuck," Shane breathes, arching up.

Ilya lifts his head just enough to meet Shane's eyes. "Tell me what you feel," he commands as his hand slides down, wrapping loosely around Shane's cock, stroking it once.

Shane swallows hard. "It— it feels so good," his voice is shaky, it's almost embarrassing.

["Text with Creator's Style turned off"](#), Ilya whispers, squeezing him lightly. He resumes his path downward, kissing along Shane's ribs, his abs, while his hand pumps his cock, slow enough to make Shane almost explode. Shane's hips buck, seeking more friction, but Ilya pins him with his arm. "Stay still," he instructs.

Shane frantically nods, biting his lip as Ilya moves even lower. His breath ghosts over Shane's inner thigh before Ilya nuzzles there, tongue darting out to lick the skin. Shane whimpers, the sensation making his toes curl. "Ilya..." he gasps.

"*Beg*, Hollander. You know how to," Ilya teases, his voice masked with his own arousal. "Tell me you want my mouth."

Shane's face burns, but he doesn't hesitate, "I want your mouth on me. Please."

Ilya chuckles, "Good student." And in an instant, he takes Shane's dick into his mouth, swallowing him down halfway. Shane's back lifts off the bed, a moan ripping from his throat as Ilya sucks, slowly moving his head. Shane can already feel his arousal building at his stomach.

Ilya pulls off too soon, after a minute or two, leaving Shane a whining mess. "Not yet," he

says, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Turn over, on your stomach. Knees up."

Shane obeys, flipping onto his belly, then draws his knees under him, he's practically presenting himself. His face presses into the pillow, heart hammering as he hears Ilya grabbing lube from the nightstand. "Relax," Ilya coaches, settling behind him. His hand rubs circles on Shane's lower back, trying to calm his nerves.

The first finger circles Shane's hole for a second before pushing in slowly. Shane tenses, the intrusion burning just a little at first, but he quickly gets used to it. "Fuck," Ilya mutters, working the finger deeper and twisting it. "Good?" he asks.

"Yes," Shane manages to let out, his eyes tightly shut with pleasure. A second finger joins the first, scissoring carefully, curling to brush that spot inside that made Shane see stars last time. He cries out, pushing back harder, chasing the feelings of it.

"[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#), like that," Ilya groans. "You open so well for me, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#). So tight and perfect." He adds a third finger, stretching Shane further. The burn turns into deep pleasure as he pumps them in and out. Shane's body trembles on the bed.

Finally, Ilya withdraws, and Shane hears him grab the lube and a condom, this time. The mattress dips as Ilya positions himself, sliding the condom on his cock. "On your back now," Ilya instructs, helping Shane flip till they're face to face, eyes locking. He moves until his cock presses against Shane's entrance. "Tell me if anything feels bad," Ilya commands softly. Shane nods, breathless.

He pushes in slow, inch by inch, pausing when Shane winces. Shane gasps, fingers clawing the sheets. "Good... so good," Ilya praises, stopping when he's halfway in to let Shane adjust.

It does hurt a bit, but the fullness feels incredible. He pushes back, taking more, until Ilya's fully inside of him, balls pressed against ass. They both groan as Ilya starts moving, starting with shallow thrusts. "[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#). So perfect. How do you feel?"

"Full," Shane moans. "More please."

Ilya's cock drags over his prostate with every slide in and out, the pace intensifying. Shane's moans fill the room as Ilya's hand wraps around his cock again, giving it dangerously light strokes.

"Faster?" Ilya grunts out.

"Yes! Yes," Shane gasps. "I'm so— so close."

Ilya obliges, hips snapping harder, causing the bed to creak. He leans down, kissing Shane again messily, their tongues tangle as he pounds into him. "Come for me, Shane," Ilya orders, thrusting even faster.

The command tips Shane right over the edge, his cock pulses, cum spilling over Ilya's fist,

clenching tight around him. The clench pulls Ilya deeper, and he groans loudly. "Fuck, yes," he drawls, burying himself inside of Shane and filling the condom with hot spurts.

They collapse, both of them breathing hard into the quiet of the room. For a few seconds, Shane doesn't move. He lies there, eyes shut and heavily panting, trying to make sense of the way his body feels. It's like his skin doesn't belong to him anymore.

Ilya pulls out carefully, and Shane flinches before he can stop himself. He instantly feels empty. Then Ilya leans forward and settles on top of him, causing Shane's breath to catch. Ilya's chest is pressed against his, his weight and warmth sinking into Shane's skin in a way that brings him a form of comfort.

Shane doesn't say anything out loud, he doesn't trust himself to. Something about this lesson still feels different from the rest of them. It feels like something he shouldn't want... so he stays quiet.

After a moment, Ilya pushes himself up and walks off toward the bathroom without a word.

The room smells like sex and sweat. He drags a hand over his face, exhaling slowly, trying to balance himself. This was supposed to be the third lesson, the last step, technically, but that didn't mean it was the end. There is still so much room for improvement, he wasn't about to stop at *general sex*... no, he needs to move on to advanced sex.

The bathroom door opens and Shane turns his head to watch as Ilya moves around the room, grabbing something then setting things down at the nightstand. He seems and looks so calm, as if he didn't just fuck the life out of his best friend's younger brother.

The bed dips when Ilya sits beside him. Shane pushes himself up onto his elbows and Ilya begins to clean him up with a cloth. He's gentle, the action feels domestic in a way. Shane remains quiet, just letting it happen, his thoughts moving too fast to formulate any words.

Ilya finishes, tosses the cloth aside, then reaches for something he set on the table.

"Here," he says.

Shane blinks at him, his gaze shifting to the items.

Ginger ale and a Snickers bar. *Oh.*

Shane stares at them, then he lets out a small laugh, because of course, of course it's those two things. The exact two things that would calm him down after something like this. And of course Ilya had them ready, it's like he had planned it, like he knew exactly what Shane would need before Shane even did.

As he looks at Ilya standing there, holding out the ginger ale and the Snickers, an image flickers in his mind. Not the man in front of him now, the one with the infamous reputation, but... the *younger* Ilya. The version of Ilya Shane has known for years who showed up and stayed, who cared in ways others wouldn't fathom. He's seen all of it, he's seen Ilya laugh,

cry, tease, yell, be patient, be cruel, he's seen him be... *caring*, something no one else seems to notice. This is Ilya Rozanov.

Shane doesn't reach for the snacks. His eyes burn slightly, he hates that he can feel the tears.

"Congratulations," Ilya breaks the silence, setting them back on the nightstand.

Shane frowns, brows pulling together, "For what?"

Ilya glances at him, then away again, "That was it. You are finished."

"Finished... with what?" he questions slowly, blinking in confusion.

"The lessons," Ilya replies. "You graduated," he jokes, but Shane doesn't laugh.

He doesn't know what to say anymore. Was this it? Were they actually done? *Did Shane even want this to be done?* He wouldn't have rushed, would've tried harder to not be late if he'd known this was the end.

"W- what?" he stutters out.

Ilya shrugs, "You wanted to get better, yes? You are better now."

Shane pushes himself up further, ignoring the way his body protests, still feeling sore. "That's not- what are you talking about?"

Ilya finally looks at him properly. His expression is as calm as it could be. "Are you not better at hockey now?" he asks.

Shane opens his mouth, ready to fight back, then hesitates with his words. "I- yeah, I am," he admits, because it is true. "Which is why I need this," Shane adds quickly.

He doesn't know if those words are exactly true, but what he does know is that the idea of this ending, of Ilya just deciding it's over, doesn't sit right with him. It doesn't make sense, it's not part of his original plan.

And... he hadn't been thinking about hockey much as of late. At least, not like before, where everything connected back to it, where every decision was made with the sport in mind. Somewhere along the way... it stopped being *just* about it.

Ilya's gaze hardens. "No," he claims. "You do not."

Shane has the uneasy sense that he's missing something. Ilya is talking like he understands him, like he knows what Shane is thinking, what he needs. But he doesn't, he's not even close.

"What do you mean I don't?" Shane demands. "Is this some sort of joke? Because it's not funny."

“I am not joking, I mean exactly what I said. You have learned everything you need. There is no reason to continue,” Ilya deadpans.

Shane shakes his head in denial. “I’m not ready to— you can’t just end it after taking my fucking virginity! This was my idea,” he snaps.

He’s surprised by the intensity of his own anger. All this time, he’d convinced himself that there was nothing more than lessons with Ilya, but now, the thought of it ending feels unbearable. They never fully discussed how many lessons there would be, but the schedule he’d sent Ilya clearly planned for more than three. He just doesn’t feel ready. He needs more, so much more.

Ilya’s jaw tightens slightly, “Why not?”

“Because—” Shane cuts himself off in frustration. “Because we’re not done,” he finishes weakly.

“We are,” he replies, he says it so easily that it ignites something in Shane.

“We’re not. Ilya—”

Ilya interrupts him, “You have what you wanted, You are... very capable now. So we are done.”

“That’s not true,” he insists.

“Then what do you want?” Ilya tilts his head in curiosity.

Shane opens his mouth only for nothing to come out. He doesn’t know how to answer that, not in a way that makes sense out loud. Ilya watches him in the silence, then looks away like that’s all the answer he needs.

“Ah,” he mutters.

Something in Shane breaks, anger floods his body. “What, so you want me to go fuck some other guy?” he exclaims, the words are louder than he meant for them to be.

Ilya goes completely still before speaking again. “If that is what you need...” he whispers.

Shane just stares at him. That’s not the right answer, not what Shane expected to hear, not what Ilya was supposed to say.

“I don’t understand what the problem is,” Ilya continues, his tone turning colder. “You asked me to teach you. I say yes. It was a favor. We were never going to do this forever,” he exhales. “What, you expect me to lie to my best friend, *your brother*, for the rest of my life? I do not do more than this, Shane. And you are not meant for this. Find someone good, someone you can love. That is what you need.”

He takes a second to actually process what Ilya is saying. A favor, that's all this was to him. Shane never thought this was going to turn into anything more, he's not stupid, he knew what this was. But that doesn't mean he expected... *this*. Ilya deciding it's over and letting him loose the second he took his virginity.

And maybe that's just who Ilya is. Maybe there's a reason people talk about him the way they do, the reputation exists for a reason. Maybe Ilya Rozanov really is just a fucking asshole.

"...Okay," Shane slowly nods as he looks down at himself, still naked, he's so exposed and he suddenly feels so stupid.

"Okay," Shane repeats.

He pushes himself off of the bed and reaches for his folded clothes. "Fine. Got it," he lets out, not looking at Ilya as he starts pulling them on. "Congratulations, right? The lesson's over," he adds, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

Ilya doesn't stop him, he doesn't even say anything to him. It makes everything so much worse.

Shane lets out a rough breath. "Yeah, great," he croaks under his breath as he heads for the door. "Thanks for... teaching me."

He doesn't turn to look back at Ilya. The thought of seeing his face right now just makes him more furious.

For a second, he thinks about that crash on the way here and the traffic it had caused, he'd been so frustrated about being late.

God, he wishes he never made it at all.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry this took so long!! I got food poisoning and I felt so bad, but I'm better now.

The reaction to the last chapter was completely INSANE. Thank you for all the love on this story, I genuinely appreciate it more than anything. Another thank you to all the wonderful comments, they motivate me more than anything!

Do not be mad at Ilya guys, remember what Irina said about people in love...

I'm hoping for 3-4 more chapters. I don't really want to drag this out too long but I also want things to naturally develop so...

Give me all thoughts and opinions!!!! Love you all!!!!

Chapter 9: 'Cause he's such a dream

Chapter Summary

The dichotomy between family and family.

Chapter Notes

Happiness? I hardly know her.

Italics in the Ilya/Alexei/Grigori scene signify Russian!

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

The ginger ale and Snickers bar lay on the nightstand untouched.

Ilya Rozanov stares at the front door that had just been abruptly shut, as if his stare could bring Shane back any moment now.

He didn't think he'd actually be able to go through with ending the lessons. A part of him almost didn't let him, his mouth had nearly swallowed the words, but he loves Shane, and he knows Shane shouldn't love him back.

Ilya doesn't think he'll ever be good for Shane. Shane deserves the absolute best and nothing less. He deserves someone who knows what they want in life, who won't weigh him down, who will know how to love him the way he deserves to be loved. Someone who isn't Ilya.

Ilya is good at appearances. He can find someone and sleep with them without letting it mean anything, he can drink and smoke and take shit he shouldn't, can party until the sun rises, can lie and perform the role of a man who is the very picture of happiness. He's had enough practice that it doesn't even feel like lying anymore.

But he can also lie awake at three in the morning dreaming of his mother, he can stand in his own kitchen and get berated by his older brother over the phone, he can send most of his paycheck home to his sick father without a word of complaint, he can lie very still in the dark and wish that he had been born into a different life.

He looks down at the cross hanging at his collarbone, the last piece of his mother he has left. He needs to visit her soon. Maybe standing at her grave will bring him some clarity. Give him some meaning to the tragedy that has become of his life.

And what a tragedy it is, to be in love with Shane Hollander.

It's the easiest thing Ilya's ever stumbled into. Shane makes it so simple, everything about him is so inherently loveable. No one should blame Ilya for letting himself fall. It had been inevitable from almost the beginning, and the only thing that surprises him is how much it hurts to do the right thing. It had physically pained him, watching Shane's expression change. But a quick shock of hurt is more survivable than the slow, permanent damage Ilya would undoubtedly cause.

There's also the Nick of it all.

Nick knows him, he knows the worst parts of him. Which is exactly why he wouldn't want his younger brother anywhere near Ilya. And Ilya doesn't want to disappoint him or make him angry. Nick was the one who helped Ilya find his footing when he first came to Canada, his first *real* friend here, his best friend. If by some miracle Shane loved him back, Ilya would spend the rest of their relationship hiding, lying to the one person who he trusts the most. He can't do that to Nick, he won't.

As if summoned by the thought, he hears a key in the lock. Nick walks in, drops his bag by the door, and moves toward the couch. He shoves Ilya's legs out of the way and drops down beside him with a long sigh.

Ilya can't quite look at him, not when the sheets in his room still smell like his brother.

"Bad shift?" Ilya questions.

"When isn't it," Nick mutters.

Ilya huffs a short laugh as he reaches for the pack of cigarettes on the coffee table, shakes two loose, and holds one out, Nick takes it without looking. Ilya puts the other between his lips and lights both.

They smoke in silence for a moment. They've done this almost every day that they've lived together, but today Ilya feels like he's crawling out of his own skin.

"Roz," Nick tilts his head sideways and exhales a stream of smoke. "You good? You look... sad."

Ilya turns the cigarette between his fingers, "Do you think we will ever find love?"

It comes out of nowhere and he doesn't know how he even said it, but it's a true question, the truest one he has right now. Nick has had his fair share of relationships, more than Ilya by a long stretch, but nothing has ever stuck.

Nick blinks then he lets out a small laugh, "Woah. Okay. I think my brain is too tired for that question right now."

A faint smile appears on Ilya's mouth as he takes a drag, smoke filling his lungs.

Nick is quiet for a second before responding. "I think we'll find it when we're ready for it," he admits as he taps the ashtray. "And maybe we're just not ready yet."

Ilya hums, taking in the words. Nick can be insightful, sometimes, when he just talks his heart out.

"I wish I was easy," Ilya whispers.

Nick snorts, "You're the easiest man I know."

"No," Ilya shakes his head. "I mean easy as a person. Easy to love."

The smile dies on Nick's face as he turns to look at Ilya. For a second, Ilya worries what he'll see, what he might accidentally give away, but Nick doesn't seem to look hard enough. Ilya looks at the dark window, dragging on his cigarette, allowing them to sit quietly again.

"I never found it hard," Nick interrupts the silence, "To be your friend."

It's such a simple declaration but it causes Ilya to smile as he closes his eyes, letting the smoke blow out of him.

"I guess romance and me... are just not very compatible," Ilya drawls.

Nick doesn't argue or turn it into a joke. He sits there on the couch with him and smokes, his best friend.

"What brought this on anyway?" Nick asks after a moment. "Did you... meet someone?" he teases, nudging him with his elbow.

"Ah, maybe. But it's not important."

"No!" Nick sits up straighter, suddenly very awake. "Ilya, you have to tell me. Who is it? Do I know them?"

Yes. Really well.

"Hollander, let it go. It is nothing."

"Don't tell me it's..." Nick narrows his eyes dramatically. "Hayden Pike?"

"Fuck no! I would rather shoot myself," Ilya turns to glare at him.

They both laugh, so loud that it fills the apartment. A moment like this almost pushes everything else back. Ilya almost lets himself forget the door that shut an hour ago, the items still sitting on the nightstand, the look on Shane's face when he walked out. But he doesn't.

His phone rings and cuts through the laughter, Nick glances over at it curiously.

"Is it your lover?"

Ilya rolls his eyes as he picks it up. His brother's name glares across the screen, causing the laughter to drain out of him.

"It's Alexei. My father is doing worse. He wants me to go visit," his voice is flat.

The phone keeps ringing in his hand but he has no desire to answer it. The call ends on its own.

"I'm sorry, man," Nick admits quietly.

"Do not be. Unless it is somehow your fault my family is made up of assholes."

Nick shrugs, "Well, I did have a big part in making you one."

Ilya smiles as he pushes up from the couch. He grabs his keys from the table and finds his shoes by the door. This day has turned into absolute shit.

"Have fun alone," Ilya calls as he steps out.

"Always do," Nick yells back.

Ilya pulls the door shut behind him and stands there for a second, keys in hand, not quite ready to move yet. Then he exhales and walks away.

The door opens to yelling.

"You took your fucking time! I've been calling you all goddamn day, can you not pick up your phone?"

Alexei looks worse than the last time Ilya saw him. He's thinner with darker undereyes, as if hasn't slept properly in weeks. It... doesn't really bother Ilya.

"Where is he?" he asks instead of replying.

"Don't act like you give a shit about him. I had to beg you to come here."

"Alexei," his voice is flat. *"Where is he?"*

"His room. Where else?"

Ilya pushes past him. The house looks notably dead as he walks the short hallway to his

father's room and stops in the doorway.

Grigori Rozanov sits on his bed, hands folded in his lap, staring at the wall across from him.

He's also worse than Ilya remembers. That's always the first thing he notices any time he visits, how much worse he looks. It shouldn't still catch him off guard, but it does, every single time. The man who had filled every room Ilya had ever been afraid in, the man whose footsteps in the hallway used to make Ilya's stomach drop, the man whose voice could silence an entire crowd... reduced to this. Sitting quietly on a bed, hands folded like a child.

Ilya doesn't feel sorry for him. He's tried to manufacture something that resembles pity, but it never comes. What comes instead is a kind of grief that has nothing to do with love. In a way, he is grieving what was never there, the version of this man that only ever existed in what he could have been, should have been, if he had been anyone else.

He thinks his mother had loved Grigori once, or maybe she had tried to. Ilya saw it in the way she acted around him, the words she spoke to him. He used to think that was her flaw, loving someone so cruel. Now he thinks it was just her heart, which had always been bigger than the people around her deserved.

"Papa."

Grigori turns his head slowly. His eyes move uncertainly over Ilya's face. Ilya watches him search and feels the familiarity of waiting to be recognized, not knowing which version of his father is making an appearance this time.

"Ilya," he whispers.

Ilya's eyes widen at his name. He hates that after everything, the sound of his name in his father's voice can still affect him. He has no business feeling relief that the man knows who he is, he shouldn't want to be known by him at all.

"Yes," he pulls the chair from the corner of the room and sits down across from him, keeping his distance. *"How are you feeling?"*

Grigori doesn't answer as he looks at Ilya's hands, then back up at his face, then past him toward the doorway.

"Where is this?" he asks.

"Your house, Papa. In Canada."

Grigori's brows furrow. He looks around the room slowly, taking it in, it looks the same as it always had. Ilya watches him do it and thinks that maybe there is something almost merciful about him forgetting. His father spent so much of his life angry, so much of it with hatred, and now most of it is just... gone. Ilya wonders if the man is lighter now, under all of the confusion.

"Canada," Grigori repeats.

"Yes."

"*We came here*," he murmurs to himself. "*We came here and then—*" he stops, looking back at Ilya as the furrow in his brows deepens. "*How old are you now?*"

"*Twenty.*"

Grigori stares at him. "*Twenty*," he shakes his head slowly, and for a moment something flickers in his eyes. "*You were just small.*"

"*It was a long time ago, Papa.*"

His father goes quiet, gaze drifting past Ilya's shoulder. "*Are you still spending time with that boy? The Canadian one.*"

Ilya goes still, "*Which one?*"

"*The family*," Grigori's expression tightens. Ilya feels his disapproval, the particular feeling that has survived everything the disease has taken. "*I never liked them. They are... too easy on you. You should be careful with people like that.*"

Ilya doesn't answer.

There's a version of him, maybe a younger version, who would have wanted to argue, would have wanted to say that the Hollanders were the only people who ever made him feel like he had somewhere to belong, that David Hollander had taught him more about what a father could be in a single puzzle night than Grigori had managed in twenty years. But arguing with this man has always been pointless, and arguing with this version of him even more so. So he says nothing.

Grigori looks at him again, then his eyes drift back away. His expression smooths out into a blank one. After a while his eyes close and his breathing slows.

Ilya sits with him until he's sure he's asleep. He doesn't know why he stays the extra minutes. It feels like an obligation or some strange powerlessness from being in the same room as someone you spent your whole childhood afraid of and now feeling almost nothing at all.

He stands, places the chair back carefully in the corner, and leaves the room.

Alexei is waiting in the hallway, arms crossed. "*That's it?*" he questions.

"*I talked to him, I checked on him. What else do you need?*" Ilya moves toward the front door.

"*I don't know, maybe getting off your lazy ass and actually being here for once? I am with him every single fucking day, Ilya. Every day while you're out living your little life.*"

"I can't be here. I have school, I have work. The money I send is the reason he has care at all."

"It's not enough. He needs more."

"Does he need more, or do you?" he retorts angrily. "Because I know exactly where the money goes, Alexei."

"Watch your fucking mouth."

"Get clean and then tell me to watch my mouth."

"What kind of son are you, huh?" Alexei steps toward him, voice rising. "Can't take care of your own father. Can't even show your face when he's actually dying. And I've got a wife, I've got a kid, I've got a whole fucking life I'm putting on hold for this, while you do what exactly? Send a coffee shop check and feel good about yourself?"

"That check keeps the lights on in this place. Don't act like I do nothing," he barks back.

"It's not enough!" Alexei snaps. "None of it is ever enough. You think you can just throw a little money at it and that makes you a good son? You're useless. You've always been fucking useless," something meaner flickers behind his eyes. *"Just like mama was."*

Ilya moves before he thinks, his hand closes in the front of Alexei's shirt and he shoves him back against the wall, hard enough that it rattles the walls.

"Do not," he says, very quietly, *"mention her."*

Alexei doesn't flinch as he looks at Ilya with flat eyes. He's not afraid of him, he's not sorry for his words, he's... empty.

Ilya releases him and steps back, turning away and trying to slow his breathing down. His mother's words echo in his mind... [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#).

"She was your mother too," Ilya whispers. He knows the words are filled with pain. *"Whether you remember that or not."*

Alexei says nothing back.

"I'll send what I can. Get him more help," Ilya straightens up.

"It won't be enough."

"When will it ever be?"

He opens the front door and walks out without looking back. He stands there for a second, the anger still sitting in his chest with nowhere left to go.

For a brief moment, his mind wanders off to the thought of Shane. The way seeing him right now would help him more than anything else could.

He shakes his head, pulls out a cigarette, lights it up, and walks away.

Whoever told Shane Hollander that having sex would improve his hockey skills deserves to die.

Not only did it make him worse, it made his entire life more complicated in ways he had never wanted. He glares at J.J. across the locker room with the contempt of someone who has been catastrophically misled.

Today's practice had been a disaster. It's not like he was visibly bad, but Shane always knows. He can feel when his body isn't doing hockey the way it's supposed to.

This is Shane Hollander, he doesn't have off days, he has never had off days... until apparently now, because Ilya Rozanov ended their lessons and took Shane's skills with him.

It had been a few days since he'd walked out of that apartment. They were supposed to have another lesson today, Shane still knew the schedule by heart and the event was still written on his calendar.

"Hollander," J.J.'s voice cuts across the locker room. A few of the other guys look up. "What was going on out there today?"

"Off day," Shane says in a monotone voice, not looking up from his skates.

"Since when do you have off days?" Hayden says from the bench beside him.

"Everyone has off days, Hayden."

"Not you," Hayden replies with certainty. He has known Shane's skills since they were kids. "Seriously, what's going on?"

"Nothing. Drop it."

"[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)," J.J. says causing a couple of guys who speak French to laugh.

Shane shoots him a look, "[Text with Creator's Style turned off](#), Jean Jacques."

J.J. clutches his chest dramatically, "Ooh, the full name. He's serious."

"He's literally Shane 'Serious' Hollander," someone mutters, getting another laugh.

Shane ignores them all and shoves his gear into his bag. He just needs to get out of here before Hayden corners him, because Hayden has known him long enough to know something is up, and right now Shane doesn't have the energy to lie convincingly to someone who can read him.

"Hey," Hayden says quietly, just to him. "You okay?"

"Fine. I just need food, haven't eaten since this morning," Shane retorts.

"There's that coffee shop like five minutes away. The one Nick works at! They have some good ass sandwiches."

Shane's brain immediately works. Nick doesn't work right now, but neither does Ilya. He knows this because he knows Ilya's schedule. He *memorized* Ilya's schedule.

"Yeah, okay," Shane agrees. He'll try his absolute best to keep the conversation on anything but himself.

He keeps telling himself that he'll be okay on the drive over. As they find parking, Shane thinks that absolutely nothing will go wrong... until they push open the door to the coffee shop and the small bell above it rings, and Shane looks up, and sees Ilya Rozanov behind the counter.

In an instant, he freezes in his place, his brain completely shutting down. Ilya is wiping down the espresso machine with his back turned to him, hair slightly disheveled. *What the fuck.*

Before Shane could comprehend whatever the hell is happening, Ilya turns around and his eyes find Shane immediately, causing the air between them to grow with tension.

Neither of them move. Shane can feel his surroundings, the low music playing in the shop, the sounds of the machines working, the voices of people talking. Yet... he can only stand at the entrance and hold eye contact with Ilya Rozanov as he tries to remember how to be a person.

"Oh, I guess Nick's not here right now," Hayden says from beside him as he scans the counter, oblivious to everything. "That's fine, we can just order— hey, isn't that *Rozanov*?"

"Yeah," Shane says, he tries his best to sound unaffected.

Hayden glances at him, "You good, dude?"

"Fine."

Behind the counter, Ilya has seemingly already recovered. The shock on his face is replaced with that stupid expression he wears in public. He leans one hand on the counter as Hayden and Shane step up to it.

"Hollander," he says, looking at Shane. Then he turns, "Pike."

"Rozanov," Hayden mutters back in a hostile tone.

Ilya's gaze moves back to linger on Shane. "Extra shift," he answers the question Shane has internally been wondering. It's as if he'd read his mind and owed him an explanation. "What do you want?"

Shane looks at the menu. He's been to this place too many times, yet he cannot seem to remember a single fucking thing on the menu. "Just a coffee... black."

Ilya nods and turns away.

Shane exhales and moves to the end of the counter to wait, putting as much space between them as he can manage. Hayden follows, ordering something with an absurd amount of additions, making the other girl at the register type for a full minute.

Shane keeps his eyes forward, very carefully as to not watch Ilya work. He is absolutely not noticing the way he moves behind the counter, like he hasn't thought about Shane once in the last several days. To Ilya, Shane had walked out of his apartment and simply ceased to exist. Which is fine. Shane is *totally* okay with that.

A cup appears on the counter in front of him. He reaches for it at the same time Ilya's hand releases it, their fingers don't quite touch but they're close enough that Shane feels the heat of Ilya's. He pulls the cup back instantly.

"Thanks," Shane says, eyes to the counter.

"Mhm," Ilya mumbles in response.

Shane turns and finds a table near the window, as far from the counter as possible. Hayden drops into the seat across from him a moment later, his drink in hand, and looks at Shane with an expression that he cannot read to save his life.

Shane takes a sip of his coffee.

"So," Hayden starts.

"So?"

Hayden tilts his head slightly, glancing toward the counter, then back at Shane.

"How long has practice been... bad?" he asks instead of starting something.

Shane rolls his eyes, "It's one day, Hayden."

"It wasn't one day. You were off yesterday too. I didn't say anything because I thought you were tired," he pauses. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened."

"Shane."

"I said nothing happened."

Hayden goes quiet and takes a long sip of his drink, looking out the window. Shane thinks, hopes, maybe he's going to let it go, he should let it go.

But Hayden doesn't. "Whoever you slept with must've really done a number on you," he says, without turning his head away from the window.

Shane almost drops his cup.

"Because I've never seen you play like that and I've never seen you *look* like that either. Like... sad, I don't know," he finally turns back to look at him. "Couldn't be that bad, right? Whoever it was," Hayden states with a shrug. "It's not like it was someone insane. Like Ilya Rozanov or something."

The silence that follows is approximately three seconds long. Shane says nothing as he looks at his coffee because he is very aware of exactly what his face is doing and completely unable to stop it. Hayden stares at him.

"Shane," he whispers slowly.

"Hayden," Shane says quietly.

"Shane," he quietly exclaims.

"Hayden, please—"

"It was Rozanov!" Hayden says it as if he solved a crime case. His expression moves through the seven stages of grief. "It was actually Rozanov."

Shane closes his eyes, "Keep your voice down."

"I am keeping my voice down!" Hayden hisses, leaning forward. "Shane, what the hell?"

"It's... complicated."

"It's— yeah, I'd say it's complicated, he's Nick's— how did this even—" Hayden stops himself, pressing his lips together. He sits back and looks at Shane with concern. "Are you okay?"

Shane wants to cry. "I don't know," he admits.

Hayden exhales slowly and glances toward the counter again. When he looks back his expression seems more soft. "How long have you guys been...?" he asks.

"Not long. But It's over now... he ended it."

Something crosses Hayden's face. "Of course he did," he mutters to himself.

"It wasn't like that," Shane says quietly.

Hayden looks at him and nods. "Okay," he starts. "Okay. You don't have to tell me everything, Shane. But I would appreciate it if you did?"

Shane stares at the table. His eyes move across the shop, glancing over the paintings hanging on the walls. He doesn't look toward the counter... he is not going to look toward the counter.

"I don't even know where to start," Shane confesses.

"I guess just wherever your situation started," Hayden replies, shrugging.

"It started after the first party I went to after camp," Shane begins. "Cliff's."

Hayden nods slowly.

"J.J. said something. About how players perform better after—" Shane stops, face turning red. "After sex."

Hayden stares at him in disbelief, "Please tell me you didn't—"

"I went to Ilya," Shane says quickly, ripping off the bandage. "Because he offered to help. With the gay stuff. At the party, he said he was there if I needed anything, and I thought..." He exhales. "I thought it made sense."

"How does Ilya Rozanov make sense?"

"He's experienced, he's not a stranger, and he wouldn't tell anyone," Shane can hear how it sounds. "I made a list."

"You made a *list*... of course you made a list."

"It's still a work in progress..."

Hayden shuts his eyes tightly. Shane can visibly see him forcefully keeping his opinions inside his body. "Okay, so what happened?"

"We had... lessons," Shane feels incredibly embarrassed. "A few of them. And it was— it was fine. I thought maybe it could keep going and then after the last one he just... ended it. He said I had what I needed, it was only ever a favor."

"A favor?"

"Yeah."

"*He* called it a favor."

"Hayden can you stop repeating everything I say?"

"I'm processing this Shane, its fucking insane. Give me a second," Hayden picks up his drink and almost chugs it all in one gulp. "Okay. And now your hockey is... worse."

"Sure."

"Because of him."

"Apparently, maybe."

"So the whole thing completely backfired on you."

"Thank you, Hayden, I hadn't noticed," Shane says dryly.

"I'm just," Hayden shakes his head. "How bad is it? Like how are you actually feeling?"

Shane looks at him. "I don't know. I keep telling myself it was just the lessons, you know? It was always just about hockey. And then I'll be fine for like an hour and then something stupid will remind me of him and I'll—" He stops. "I don't know, it's annoying."

"Something stupid like what?"

"Like—" Shane laughs once, humorlessly. "Like a ginger ale! How is it possible for him to ruin my favorite fucking drink?"

"Shane..."

"I know..."

"Maybe it is more than just about hockey."

"I know," Shane whispers again.

"Like that's genuinely not even a little bit about hockey."

"Hayden, I know."

Hayden goes quiet. "Do you like him?" he asks. "Like actually. Do you *actually* like him?"

Shane opens his mouth and instantly closes it. *Yes*. "I don't know. I don't know what I feel. I just know it feels bad and it's messing up my game and I want it to stop."

Hayden stares at him, eyes scanning his face. "For the record though, I think he's an idiot."

"I think you've made that clear."

"Yeah, but before it was 'cause he's a dick. Now I have a much better reason," he teases, causing Shane to let out a small laugh.

He reaches across the table and squeezes Shane's arm, then lets go and gives him a small punch. "You should've told me."

"Yeah, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize." Hayden shakes his head. "Just don't do things alone, okay? That's what I'm here for."

Shane nods, he truly means it.

"Wait," Hayden's eyes narrow slightly. "Does Rose know?"

Shane says nothing as he looks down, away from Hayden's stare.

"You told Rose before you told me?"

"You hate him! I thought you'd talk me out of it," Shane explains.

"I would've tried," Hayden admits. "But I don't think you would've listened."

"Exactly."

They sit there for a little while longer, the conversation shifts onto Hayden and his perfect relationship with Jackie. Shane appreciates it, he wants to stop talking about his own situations. Soon after, as they're standing up to leave, Shane's eyes betray him for just one second.

Ilya is watching him from across the room. He looks away the moment Shane catches it, turning back to the machine like he was never looking at all.

Shane follows Hayden out the door and doesn't look back.

Shane feels tired as he walks into his home. The feeling isn't unusual, but it usually comes from an excruciating practice, not seeing your ex sex-teacher in a coffee shop.

His mom is sitting in the living room, reading a book. The lamp beside her is on, the rest of the room dim, and something about the warmth of the room makes him smile. He walks over and sits down beside her without saying anything, close enough that their arms touch. He just needs the proximity, he needs to be near her.

Yuna looks up from her book, not saying anything immediately. She looks at him for a second and he can tell she's trying to read his face.

"How was practice?" she asks, her voice light.

"Um," he stares at his hands in his lap. "Not the best."

"I could tell. Same look you get when you messed up as a kid."

"Mom," he scoffs.

She closes her book and sets it on the cushion beside her. "What's wrong? You've been off the past few days. Is it hockey? Did you get hurt?"

"No," he quickly denies. "No, absolutely not. I promise."

"Okay. So what is it?"

Shane looks away from her, words failing to come out. It's not that he doesn't want to tell her, it's that his own feelings haven't organized themselves into anything that resembles the English language yet.

"I don't want to bother you with it. I think I just needed to be near you right now."

"Shane, you could never bother me."

He knows that, he's always known that. It's a logical assumption, she's his mom. But it doesn't make it easier to believe in the moment.

"I just—" he exhales slowly. "I don't even know how I feel. I don't know how to put something into words when I don't understand it myself."

Yuna is quiet for a moment before she speaks, "Start with one word. The first one that comes to your mind. Let it lead you."

Shane closes his eyes.

"Bad," he starts. "I feel bad. I just wanted to be better. At hockey and maybe at—" he pauses, fumbling his words. "At being a man, at things that everyone else seems to know how to do," he swallows. "There's someone. He was helping me with that. We were... *something*. I've known him for a long time and I told myself it wouldn't mean anything, I wanted it to mean nothing, I planned for it to mean nothing. And then he ended it. Whatever we had, which was nothing, technically. And I just feel—" he stops again. "Bad. I feel bad and I don't even fully understand why."

There are tears sitting right at the edge of his eyes, but he doesn't let them fall. He never lets them fall when he can help it, it feels like losing something inside of him, giving himself permission to be sad.

Yuna doesn't speak when he's done, instead taking a minute to process the information. "Were you two like... boyfriends?" she asks carefully.

"Oh— no. God, no. It was a lot less than that," Shane shakes his head.

"Did you want it to be more?"

Shane opens his mouth, then closes it. He genuinely doesn't know how to answer that. "When we started I never wanted that... but now I'm— I don't know. I saw him today and I felt everything come back. All of it. He wasn't even supposed to be there, he wasn't on the schedule, I was sure of it, but I look up and he's just right there. And I couldn't— I couldn't do anything. I just stood there."

"Who is he?" Yuna asks quietly.

Shane's mouth keeps moving before his brain thinks. "Ilya," the name comes out and he immediately regrets it.

He looks at his mom as his face goes completely red. "Mom, please don't tell Nick. He doesn't know and I don't know how he'd react and Ilya would—"

Yuna reaches over and takes his face gently in her hand, turning him toward her. She's done this exact gesture since he was small, whenever she needed him to stop spiraling about something and to actually hear her.

"Shane, I won't tell him. Not if you don't want me to," She affirms, holding his gaze for a moment. "Also, your father and I kind of already suspected."

Shane blinks at her, "What?"

"We had a feeling," she says, shrugging and releasing his face.

"Since when?"

She smiles fondly, "Do you remember that birthday of yours? When none of those awful kids showed up?"

"Mom—"

"I'm just saying, you deserved better than that."

Shane shakes his head, smiling.

"Anyways, I was going to go clean up the backyard when I looked out and saw you and Ilya. And I— I stopped. Because you looked so happy, and it had been such a hard day, and there he was just... there with you," she pauses, grinning at him. "Your father came up beside me and looked out too. And he said 'seems like those two have a special bond'," she shakes her head

softly. "After that we just kept seeing it. Small little things over the years. The way you'd get around each other and how he'd *always* show up for you. Then the other night, when Ilya came over for the puzzle, we saw you two outside before we left for dinner. It just all... made sense."

Shane stares at her, "Is that why you were interrogating me over breakfast?"

"I wouldn't call it interrogating. We were just *curious*."

Shane lets out a small laugh that quickly goes away.

The room becomes quiet again as Shane leans his head back against the couch cushion and stares at the ceiling, "Mom. I don't know what to do."

"I get it," she reaffirms.

"I keep telling myself it's fine. It's not a big deal. I'm just thrown off because it's new and I'll get over it. But then I see him and I feel like I have to leave the room."

Yuna thinks for a second before speaking, "Shane. What do you feel when you think about him? Not the entire... *situation* that happened with him, just Ilya as a person."

Shane closes his eyes. It's not images that come, not memories or moments or a compilation of everything that's happened in their lives. It's just a simple, yet overly complicated feeling. It's messy and it's layered with emotions he can't even name and others he wishes he couldn't. There's warmth and frustration, so much fucking frustration, and something that hurts and something that makes him want to laugh and something that makes him want to scream and smile and *love*. He opens his eyes.

"Everything," Shane mutters quietly. "I think about everything."

Yuna doesn't say anything as she reaches over and takes his hand, covering it with both of hers the way she used to when he was small and overwhelmed.

"I think... that you already know what you're feeling. You're just scared to say it."

Shane's throat tightens. He keeps his eyes away from her, he can't bring himself to look at his own mother without wanting to breakout in tears.

"What if it doesn't matter? What if I figured out whatever I feel and it still doesn't matter because he already made up his mind?"

"That's... a possibility," Yuna starts, she's never one to sugar coat things. "But at least you know how you feel and you can do something about it or move on."

Shane closes his eyes again.

"You don't have to say it out loud," she adds softly. "Not to me. But say it to yourself at least."

You deserve to know your own heart, Shane.”

Shane lies there in the quiet of his living room with his mother's hands over his and three words sitting in the back of his throat, the ones that explains every single thing he's felt for longer than he's been willing to admit.

He doesn't say it out loud, but he knows it, more than anything else at the moment.

He's in love with Ilya Rozanov.

He's in love with Ilya Rozanov and Ilya Rozanov ended it like it was all nothing, like Shane was nothing, and called it a favor, and Shane has absolutely no idea what to do now.

"Mom," he lets out quietly.

"Mm?"

"When you were young. Did you ever love someone who didn't know you loved them?"

Yuna thinks over the question as her thumbs trace slow circles over the back of his hand. "Yes," she replies.

"What did you do?"

"I told him... but it took me a very long time and I was terrified."

Shane turns his head to look at her, "And?"

She smiles, "He's currently married to me."

Shane lets out a breath that's almost a laugh, "Not sure if that helps me."

"I know. But... who knows what could happen?"

She squeezes his hand once, then lets it go and reaches for her book again. She knows him well enough to know that he's reached his limit. He needs to sit with all this new information instead of talking about it more.

Shane stays beside her for a long time, simply existing in a world in which he's in love with Ilya Rozanov.

Chapter End Notes

Took me long enough am I right?

I had a bit of a brain freeze on this chapter, wasn't exactly sure where to go but here we are. Hope you guys liked it!

How do we feel about Shane and Ilya rn? I'm feeling pretty good ;)

Give me all your thoughts and opinions, I love and appreciate them so so so much!!!!

I have to confess that I... love you guys!!!

Chapter 10: I just don't, don't want him to know

Chapter Summary

So much happens.

Chapter Notes

Well...

Enjoy!

Explicit content warning!!

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

7 years ago

Shane liked to bike around the neighborhood whenever he needed to feel real. Something about the wind in his face just grounded him. His parents were starting to let him go alone, he was getting older, and honestly if anyone needed supervision between him and Nick, it wasn't Shane.

He didn't have a destination. He never did on rides like these, just picked a direction and went. He got lost in it the way he always did, the familiar streets blurring past him, and he almost missed the park entirely.

It was small and easy to overlook, with old equipment that had probably been there before Shane was born. He'd never had a reason to stop there before. But... he stopped now, because there was someone on the swings.

Shane slowed his bike and squinted. Those stupid blonde curls. Ilya Rozanov, sitting on a swing without swinging, feet dragging in the dirt, staring at nothing.

Shane thought about leaving. Ilya probably wanted to be alone, and he was Nick's friend anyway, not Shane's. They had a perfectly functional thing going where they mostly tolerated each other and Shane wasn't sure he wanted to mess with that.

He parked his bike and walked in anyway. Ilya heard him coming and looked up. He looked surprised for a second before his face settled back into its usual expression.

"Baby Hollander," he greeted.

"What are you doing here?" Shane asked.

"Swinging," Ilya muttered. He wasn't even swinging.

Shane looked at him for a second. His eyes were slightly red around the edges. Shane noticed and immediately decided not to say anything about it. Instead, he walked over and sat on the swing beside him.

Neither of them said anything. Shane started swinging lightly, feet grazing the dirt. Ilya stayed still. "This park isn't near your house," Shane said eventually.

"No," Ilya agreed.

"So why are you here?"

Ilya looked down at his feet, at the small dent in the dirt they had formed. "It is close to your house," he explained.

Shane frowned slightly. What a strange thing to say. He didn't really know how to respond to that.

"Are you okay?" Shane asked rather than replying.

"I am fine," Ilya instantly let out.

Shane looked at him knowingly.

"I am," Ilya repeated, it wasn't very convincing.

But Shane didn't want to push it, so he swung back and forth, the old chains creaking above him. After a while Ilya started swinging too, falling into the same rhythm as Shane.

A car passed in front of them, Shane pushed his legs a little higher, chasing the weightlessness of the swing up before gravity pulled him back down.

"You are not going to ask me anything?" Ilya murmured, keeping his eyes away from him.

"Do you want to answer anything?" Shane asked.

"No."

"Okay then."

Ilya glanced at him with a small smile, Shane glanced back, smiling as well. Ilya had this... specific look on his face that Shane simply couldn't decipher. He went back to swinging.

They stayed like that for a couple of minutes, chains creaking slightly out of sync. It was somehow exactly what Shane had needed from this bike ride.

"Shane!"

He twisted around towards the voice. Nick was jogging toward the entrance of the park, a little out of breath.

"There you are. Mom wants you home for dinner, she told you to come back at six."

Shane realized he'd completely lost track of time. "Oh. Sorry," he dragged his feet to slow down and hopped off, grabbing his bike.

He looked back at Ilya, who had stopped swinging again, feet back in the dirt, watching him with the same expression.

"You should come for dinner," Shane requested, before he really thought about it.

"Yes!" Nick exclaimed immediately from the entrance. "Come!"

Ilya blinked at them. "I do not want to intrude," he said.

"If my mom heard you say that she'd be so offended," Shane smiled.

Nick laughed, "I think she'd drag you home."

Ilya looked at Shane for a second before he stood up from the swing and brushed the dirt off his jeans. "Fine," he sounded inconvenienced.

Shane wheeled his bike toward the road, behind him he could hear Nick loudly launching into something causing Ilya to laugh and respond.

The park went quiet.

Shane's had time to think... to process. He knows what he feels now, he just doesn't know what to do with it.

The past few days have been spent holed up in his room or at the rink, because he couldn't afford to lose any more from his game. He barely spoke to anyone. He wasn't exactly avoiding people, but it was hard to form words that actually matter. It's just been hard, plainly hard, in a way he doesn't have a more sophisticated description for.

He's in love with Ilya, he knows that now. But Ilya clearly doesn't love him back. If he did, he wouldn't have ended things. He wouldn't have called it a favor and handed Shane a fucking graduation prize. Sure, there are obstacles, *really just one obstacle and his name is Nick*, but

they could have figured something out if Ilya had wanted to. He just didn't want to.

Has he always loved him? Maybe. Probably. He's always found a particular kind of comfort in Ilya that he couldn't find anywhere or in anyone else. Even in the years when he convinced himself he couldn't stand him, it was never really true. There has always been a piece of his heart that belonged, stubbornly and without his permission, to Ilya Rozanov.

He's sitting at the breakfast table, moving food around his plate without eating it, when Nick walks in. It's not unusual for him to show up for breakfast unannounced, he did still have his keys.

"Morning, mom!" he announces, dropping his gym bag by the door with a loud thud.

"Good morning, honey," Yuna warmly greets. "Help yourself to anything."

Nick grabs a plate with the enthusiasm of a starved dog and drops himself into the chair beside Shane, hitting him on the back in greeting. Shane rolls his eyes at the gesture. Nick reaches over and steals a blueberry from his plate without breaking eye contact causing Shane to move his plate in response. Nick laughs and reaches across anyway.

"How are you?" Yuna asks, settling at the table.

"Better now. Ilya and I are surviving off the food we take from the coffee shop," Nick says. "I'm tired of muffins."

"Ilya couldn't come?" David asks, with a very noticeable frown.

"He has a shift," Nick explains. "I told him to stay home because he's been acting weird lately but he insisted. You know how he is."

"Weird how?" David asks.

Nick waves his fork vaguely. "He's been sulking. Which is very unlike him. He kind of hinted at having someone romantically but he wouldn't give me anything direct. I asked him if he'd met someone and he didn't deny it, just said it wasn't important. And then he had to leave so I didn't get much out of him."

Shane's fork goes still. He can feel his mother's eyes move to his face without looking at her. His brain, unhelpfully, immediately begins running in every possible direction at once. Was this about him? Was Ilya sulking because of Shane? But that didn't make sense because Ilya was the one who ended it. Unless he ended it and then regretted it. Or unless he'd met someone else entirely and that's why he ended it, which would make everything so much worse and Shane really needs to stop thinking right now.

"Oh, I hope everything's alright," Yuna frowns.

"He'll be okay," Nick says, reaching for more food. "You know Ilya, he's very—"

"Strong."

The word comes out before Shane realizes he's said it. Everyone turns to look at him. He opens his mouth and closes it again, having absolutely nothing to follow it with.

After a beat of silence, Yuna speaks up. "Yes, Ilya's very strong."

Nick looks between them for a half second then lets it go. "He is, but whatever happened must be serious because he's been off for a while now. Like the past few weeks. It feels like he's keeping something big from me."

"I'm sure it's nothing," David mutters. "You two have always been close. He'd tell you if it were serious enough."

Nick frowns, "Yeah. That's true."

He reaches back for his food and the kitchen goes quiet. David turns a page of his newspaper, Yuna begins clearing her plates, Nick happily chews his food, and Shane sits with his thoughts.

Ilya has been *sulking*. Ilya Rozanov, who performs happiness so effortlessly that most people never think to question it, has been *sulking*. Ilya, who acted like it all meant nothing. Ilya, who told Shane to go find someone good and then apparently was so not fine that even Nick noticed, and Nick notices almost nothing when it comes to things he doesn't want to see.

Shane is not jumping to conclusions. He is absolutely jumping to conclusions and he is completely aware of it and he cannot stop.

Nick watches him with curiosity, "Shane. You okay?"

"Yeah," Shane mumbles, "I'm just tired."

Nick watches him for another second before slightly shrugging, "You coming to Cliff's thing tonight?"

"Cliff's having another party?"

"Cliff is always having another party. It's like genuinely concerning." He points his fork at Shane, "You should come. You seemed like you actually had fun last time."

Shane thinks about last time... the side of Cliff's house and Ilya's hands on his waist and his own hands in Ilya's hair and the way Ilya had kissed him when he was angry. None of that is something he can think about with Nick two feet away. "Maybe," he says.

"Say yes."

"I said maybe."

"Come on," Nick nudges him. "You've been locked in this house for days. Mom texted me about it."

Shane glares at his mother, "Mom."

"I was worried," she sounds completely unapologetic.

"I'm fine," Shane says, to the table, to the room, to himself, to the entire fucking world. He stands up to wash his plate.

When Nick finally leaves, after kissing Yuna on the cheek and stealing some more food, he lets the door fall shut behind him with a bang. The house is always quieter without him, Shane had to learn to get used to it after he moved out.

Eventually he looks up at his mom. He doesn't say anything, he doesn't think he really needs to, she already knows, she's always already known. Shane looks at her and she looks back. She nods once, smiling.

"Your father and I won't be home tonight. It's a work dinner, they usually run late."

Shane nods again.

"Have fun tonight... no matter what happens," she says.

"I will," he replies.

He means it, he thinks. Or he's going to at least try to mean it.

Cliff Marlow's party fetish is a problem for Shane Hollander.

The number of times he's been dragged to one of these since coming home from camp is genuinely astounding. Yet here he is, standing in Cliff's living room for what feels like the hundredth time this summer, it sounds, smells, and feels the exact same. Rose and Hayden are beside him, which at this point has become a routine. And Shane usually loves routines... he cannot find a single thing to love about this one tonight.

Unlike the last few times, Ilya isn't immediately visible to him. There's no crowd gravitating toward him, at least not that he can see. Shane scans the room, trying to be subtle about it and almost certainly failing. Nick is here, he can see him at the beer pong table across the room, already very much in his element, but there's no Ilya.

Maybe he's late or maybe he's not coming. Shane doesn't know which possibility is worse.

He has to talk to him tonight. He came here with that specific intention and he is not leaving without at least trying. He just needs to find him first.

"Who are you looking for?" Hayden asks from beside him. Rose turns to look at Shane as if she already knows the answer to the question.

Before Shane can come up with anything, his eyes catch movement by the front door. Ilya steps in, alone and later than everyone else, with his usual, annoying confidence. Shane feels his heart skip a beat.

So he was late.

It doesn't take long for people to find him, as usual.

"Are you going to talk to him?" Rose quietly questions.

"I'll try," Shane mutters.

"You know, after everything you told me," Rose begins. Shane knows he won't like what comes after. "Miles is still very much on the table. Just saying."

"Rose."

"She has a point," Hayden adds. "There are genuinely better options out there."

There's no better option. That's the whole problem. Shane has met a lot of people and none of them have ever felt like Ilya feels, he's irreplaceable in his life. He's one of the best people Shane has ever known despite every effort he's made to convince himself otherwise.

"Can you both just support me right now? Please. I know he has a reputation, I know how it looks. But I grew up with him. I know who he actually is underneath all of that. And Nick said he's been feeling really bad lately too, so there has to be—"

"Shane," Hayden interrupts.

"What?"

"Don't turn around."

Shane turns around immediately.

Ilya is across the room with some girl Shane has never seen before, his hand on her waist, kissing her like they're in their own little world. The air immediately goes out of Shane's chest. His mouth falls open slightly before he can stop it, then closes. He stares for one second longer than he should before he makes himself look away.

"Rose!"

Shane turns at the voice. Miles is cutting through the crowd toward them, grinning and looking genuinely happy to see them. Of course Miles is here at this exact fucking moment.

"Hey!" Rose excitedly yells. "We were literally just talking about you."

"Good things?"

"Obviously."

Miles glances at Shane, "Hey, you."

"Hey," Shane surprisingly sounds more unaffected than he actually is.

"Drinks! We need drinks. Come on, I'll find you a ginger ale, Shaney," Rose announces, grabbing Shane's arm.

"No."

Rose stops, "No?"

"I want something stronger."

Rose and Hayden look at each other, then at Shane.

"You sure?" Hayden asks slowly.

"I'm not a baby, I can drink. Let's go."

At the drinks table, Miles hands him something without any explanation on what it is, but he doesn't need it as he quickly downs the drink, the sharp taste stinging his throat. Miles raises his eyebrows at the action but says nothing, pouring him another, which goes down a lot easier. By the third drink, the room becomes slightly less clear, the music feels a little less loud, and the memory of watching Ilya kiss that girl burns a tiny bit less. He is not drunk, not yet at least.

"Dance with me," Miles appears beside him again, already moving to the music.

Shane hesitates for a small moment. Then he thinks about Ilya across the room, so unbothered, moving on from their... *situation*, and he nods. "Yeah. Okay."

The dance floor is completely packed. He lets himself move with Miles, the same way he did last time, feeling a slight sense of *deja vu*. Miles lightly keeps his hands on Shane's waist. Shane lets himself follow the music and tries very hard not to think. Which he manages not to do for at least five minutes, until Miles leans in close to say something in his ear and Shane glances up in response to the feeling of being watched, finding Ilya across the room.

Ilya is looking at him, like completely staring at him, with an expression Shane has never quite seen on his face before, but it's close to the one that he saw last time this had happened. The girl from earlier is gone. He's standing with a drink in his hand and his eyes fixed on Shane and there is something in them that makes Shane want to run away.

Shane holds his gaze. He doesn't look away, he's tired of looking away.

Something changes in Ilya's expression as Miles stays close to Shane. His jaw tightens as he takes a slow sip of his drink without breaking eye contact. Miles spins Shane around and Shane loses the eyeline. When Miles pulls him back in, so much closer than before, Shane finds Ilya again over his shoulder... still watching. Good, let him watch.

Miles says something Shane doesn't catch over the music. He laughs anyway, causing Ilya's grip to tighten on his cup.

"You're so beautiful," Miles says close to his ear.

Shane looks at him. Miles is looking back with a warm smile. Shane tries his best to smile back. Miles is a good person from what he's seen, he deserves better than being used as a point in someone else's fight. But he's going to kiss him anyway.

Or Miles kisses him... Shane isn't entirely sure who moves first, only that suddenly it's happening, Miles's warm hand on his jaw and Shane closes his eyes and tries to just enjoy it. The kiss doesn't get too far.

A hand closes around his arm and it's not Miles's hand. He knows that immediately, before he even opens his eyes, because no one else has ever grabbed him quite like that, enough to make his breath catch.

He opens his eyes. Fucking Ilya.

His expression is murderous, with a jaw tight enough to break at any moment and eyes so dark he almost can't find the blue shade he's grown to love. Ilya looks at Shane for one second and then he looks at Miles.

"Can I borrow him," Ilya asks, or well, demands.

"Uh—" Miles starts.

"Thanks," Ilya interrupts, already steering Shane away.

Ilya pulls him through the crowd without a word, hand still closed around Shane's arm. Shane goes because some part of him, the part that has been waiting all night, wants to see where this goes.

They end up outside, away from the people spilling out onto the porch, it's not the same spot as last time. Ilya lets go of his arm.

"What are you doing?" he growls.

"Dancing, Ilya. I was dancing."

"You're drunk."

"I'm not!"

"Shane—"

"Why do you care?" The words come out meaner than he intended, which is maybe the alcohol or maybe just everything that's been sitting in his chest for weeks finally coming out. "Seriously. Why do you care what I do? You ended the lessons. We're done. So why does it matter to you who I dance with?"

"When have I not cared about you?" Ilya asks angrily. "Lessons or not."

"Oh I don't know, maybe when you just decided we were finished right after you fucked me and walked away."

"I was helping you! That was always what it was. You came to me, Shane. You asked me—"

"I know what I asked you," Shane cuts in. "And then I wanted to keep going and you just—you ended it. Right after we fucked for the first time, as if it was all nothing to you!"

"It was not—"

"You fucking kissed someone tonight. I came here tonight to talk to you and I looked up and you were kissing some random girl and I just had to stand there and watch. So don't ask me what the fuck I'm doing."

Ilya's jaw tightens but he doesn't say anything.

"I'm going home," Shane turns away from him.

"You cannot walk home like this."

"Watch me."

He starts walking. He knows the streets outside of Cliff's house, but Shane has absolutely no clear idea which direction home is from here. He keeps going anyway because getting lost in a neighborhood sounds more appealing to him than fighting with Ilya at the moment.

But Ilya follows right after him. Of course he does.

"Shane, stop."

"Go back inside, Rozanov."

"You are not walking home drunk."

"I'm not drunk. And I saw you drinking too so don't act like that."

"Yes, but I am Russian and did not have my first drink thirty minutes ago. You are a lightweight. I am not letting you walk alone."

"You're not letting me," Shane echoes. "That's funny. You let me walk out of your apartment just fine."

Ilya says nothing to that. Good, that shut him up.

They walk in very tense silence for a while, still with no direction in mind. It's starting to feel cool outside, but it helps clear Shane's head with every step he takes. He still hasn't turned to look back at Ilya.

"There is a park, over there," Ilya lets out after a moment. "You can sit for a little."

Shane almost says no on principle. Then he thinks about trying to navigate home right now and nods without looking at him.

He knows where they're going before they get there. The park looks exactly the same as it always did, with the same old infamous equipment. Shane's eyes go straight to the swings. He was eleven the last time he sat on one of those. Ilya was thirteen, feet dragging in the dirt. He wonders if Ilya remembers. He wonders if that's why he suggested it.

They're entirely too large for the swings, but they sit on them anyway, because there's nowhere else to sit, even though the whole thing feels slightly ridiculous. Shane breathes as he stares straight ahead.

"I should not have kissed her," Ilya breaks the silence.

Shane looks at him.

"The girl. Tonight. I was not going to... but then I saw you and—" he stops. "It was stupid."

"Yeah," Shane mutters. "It was."

"I know."

"Why did you end the lessons?" Shane asks. "Be honest, please."

"Hollander—"

"Don't say you were helping me. I know that's what it started as. I was there, I came up with the idea," he turns to finally look at him. "Why did you end it the way you did, right after that?"

Ilya is quiet for a long moment as he stares at the ground, hands gripping the swing's chains.

"You know why," he mumbles.

"I really don't."

"Shane."

"If I mattered to you at all," Shane's voice is quiet, completely stripped of the anger, "why was it so easy to let me go?"

Ilya doesn't answer immediately, he shakes his head, still looking down.

"It was not," Ilya whispers.

"Then why—"

"Because," Ilya exhales, he turns to look at Shane, and his expression is the most vulnerable he has ever seen it. "You know why."

"Tell me, Ilya," Shane says.

"Shane."

"If it's because of Nick then we can figure something out, okay? He doesn't have to know right away, we could—"

Ilya stands up from the swing. He takes a few steps away, hands in his hair for a second, then turns back around.

"It is not just because of fucking Nick."

Shane goes quiet.

"Nick is— yes, okay, Nick is part of it. He is my best friend and I do not want to lose him. But if that was the only reason I would have found a way around it," he exhales. "It is not the only reason."

"Then why?"

Ilya stares at him. His eyes are red, almost teary, and Shane has only ever seen him look like this once before, years ago. He opens his mouth then closes it as he shakes his head like he can't get his words out. But he does.

"Because I love you! Okay? That is why. Because I love you and you should not love me back. You deserve someone who is not me— someone whose father does not have dementia, who does not send his little money home every month, who does not have a brother falling apart, who does not carry all of—" he gestures at himself. *"This. You deserve someone whole, Shane. Someone who will not weigh you down."*

"Ilya—"

"I know what I am," he continues. "I know what my family is. I know what it would mean to put that on someone else and I will not do it to you. So yes, I ended it. Because hurting you once is better than watching myself slowly ruin you."

Shane just stares at him. Ilya looks so sure, so certain that this is the right thing, that he's protecting him, that he's somehow doing Shane a favor by walking away... and he couldn't be more *wrong*. Ilya could never weigh him down. If anything, he's the only person who has ever made everything feel quieter, like Shane doesn't have to overthink everything around him, he can just exist and not feel like he's constantly falling short of something. He doesn't feel weighed down around Ilya, he feels lighter, like he can finally fucking breathe. How could Ilya not see that? *How could he think Shane wouldn't love him anyway?*

"Ilya," Shane whispers.

"Shane."

"*Ya tebya lyublyu.*"

Ilya stares at him, "What."

Shane holds his gaze. "Your mom," he says quietly.

Ilya blinks, "Baby Hollander, now is really not the time to make a your mom joke—"

"No!" Shane quickly interrupts. "No, I mean— it was your mom. Irina." He looks down at the ground, smiling. "I was like nine. She was babysitting us and we were watching cartoons and there were two characters confessing and I asked her what it meant when people said they loved each other," he pauses for a second, trying to remember the exact details. "She explained it and then I asked her how you say it in Russian."

Ilya has gone very still.

"She told me," Shane continues. "And she said— she said that one day I'd meet someone. And when I did, I should tell them in Russian. That it would be special, just for me," he looks back up at Ilya. "I told her I was never going to fall in love."

The corner of his mouth pulls into another smile.

"She laughed at me. She was absolutely certain I was wrong."

Ilya doesn't speak, he looks like he's about to cry at any moment.

"She was right," Shane mutters.

"Shane," Ilya manages to say, his voice sounds wrecked.

"I know what you carry. I've watched you carry it since we were kids. I'm not asking you to

put it down. I'm just asking you to let me stand next to you while you do."

Ilya looks at him, then lets out a small laugh through his tears.

"You are the worst student I have ever had," he says.

"You've only had one student," Shane sounds offended, but softly smiles, eyes glistening.

"Yes. The worst."

Shane is still smiling when Ilya takes his face in both hands and kisses him, and it's much more than any kiss they've had before. Shane puts his hand over Ilya's wrist and holds on to it as they smile into each other's mouths.

When they pull apart Ilya presses his forehead to Shane's and closes his eyes.

"Finally," he murmurs quietly.

Shane lets out a small breath of a laugh, "A-plus?"

Ilya smiles, "No. More."

"No way. People are gonna think I'm bribing the teacher."

"Ah. It is because you are. Very naughty, Mr. Hollander."

Shane looks at him for a second. "My parents aren't home," he starts. "It's a short walk."

"Are you not still drunk?" Ilya raises an eyebrow.

"Fuck off. I was never even that drunk."

Ilya laughs and reaches for his hand. Their fingers lace together easily, like the final pieces of a puzzle. "I will keep you safe, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)."

"Will you ever tell me what that means?"

"Maybe," Ilya smirks. "If you earn it."

Shane rolls his eyes but he's smiling as they start walking, the neighborhood quiet around them. Shane has so much to think about, so much that still needs to be said and figured out, but right now, for the first time in weeks, none of it feels urgent. He knows what he feels. Ilya knows what he feels. Everything else can wait until morning. He just wants to stay in this moment for a little while.

The Hollander house is dark when they reach it. Shane barely gets the front door open before Ilya grabs him from behind and lifts him off the ground. Shane gasps.

"Asshole!"

"Mmh," Ilya's completely unbothered. "You love it."

"I love you," the ease of the words surprise Shane.

"No," Ilya scolds. "Only in Russian."

Shane turns in his arms to look at him, "*Ya tebya lyublyu.*"

"Better."

He carries Shane to the couch and drops him, the cushions catching him with a soft thud, and kisses him before Shane can say anything else. Shane's hand finds the front of his shirt and pulls him closer and everything feels like it's exactly where it's supposed to be.

It doesn't take long for the kiss to become something more. Ilya's hand slides under the hem of Shane's shirt and Shane makes a sound against his mouth that he would usually be embarrassed about, not tonight.

"Here?" Ilya murmurs.

"No," Shane says immediately, grabbing his wrist. "Not here. This is my parents' couch."

"Ah. Yes. Very unsexy," Ilya agrees, not sounding particularly deterred as he kisses Shane's jaw anyway.

"Ilya."

"Mm."

"I'm serious. My mom sits on this couch."

Ilya pulls back, "Okay, okay. Where then?"

Shane looks at him for a second. "My room," he says.

Something about saying those words out loud feels somewhat significant to Shane. Every other time has been in Ilya's own space, Ilya's bed, Ilya's terms. This is... *different*. This is Shane's, and he's choosing it, and Ilya seems to understand that because he gets quieter, only smiling at him.

"Yeah?" Ilya affirms.

"Yeah," Shane nods.

Ilya looks at him for a moment longer, just to be sure, then he stands and holds out his hand. Shane takes it and leads him up the stairs of his own house for the first time like this, past the

family photos on the wall, some that included Ilya, past Nick's room, past the bathroom with the better soap, and into his own.

He nudges his bedroom door open. It's dark before he turns a lamp on. Ilya's been in his room before, but this was somehow more vulnerable than he would've ever expected it to be.

Ilya steps inside and looks around for a second. "Very tidy," he observes. "I expected nothing less."

"Shut up," Shane snaps but he's almost smiling.

"Is that a participation trophy?" Ilya squints at the shelf.

"It is not a participation trophy, I was eight and I scored the most goals in the league—"

"Shane."

"What?"

"I am joking," Ilya says, turning back to look at him. "I know you would never only participate in anything."

Shane looks at him standing in the middle of his bedroom, holding his hand and smiles. He could tease him back, they could bicker for ages, but right now, he just wanted to be as close as possible to Ilya.

"Come here," Shane commands, smiling.

Ilya smiles back as he steps closer until their bodies press together in the middle of the room. Shane's hands slide up Ilya's chest, fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt as he pulls him in for another kiss. The faint taste of alcohol lingers from earlier. Shane's heart hammers in his chest as Ilya's breath hitches when his tongue slips past his teeth.

Ilya's hands settle on Shane's hips, thumbs pressing into the soft skin just above his waist. Shane's hands roam up Ilya's back, bunching the fabric of his shirt and tugging it. Ilya breaks the kiss just long enough to yank his own shirt over his head, tossing it aside without a second glance. Shane's breath catches at the sight of Ilya's bare chest.

"You're beautiful," Shane whispers with too much emotion to grasp.

Ilya chuckles softly and cups Shane's face. "You too, [Text with Creator's Style turned off](#)." He kisses him again, then moves to Shane's neck, lips brushing the sensitive skin there. Shane tilts his head back, a quiet moan escaping as Ilya's teeth graze lightly.

Shane's shirt comes off next as Ilya pulls it up slowly, giving Shane time to lift his arms. Ilya's hands are immediately on his skin, palms sliding over his sides, thumbs circling his nipples until they harden under the touch. Shane shivers, pressing closer, his erection already straining against his jeans.

They stumble toward the bed with their hands flying everywhere. Shane fumbles with Ilya's pants and Ilya does the same to Shane's. The jeans are shoved down their legs and kicked away in a pile of fabric. Not too long after, their boxers follow, leaving them both completely naked and brushing against each other as they fall onto the mattress.

Ilya hovers over Shane for a moment, propped on his elbows, eyes searching his face. "You okay?" he confirms.

Shane nods, reaching up to thread his fingers through Ilya's hair. "More than okay. I want you."

The words pull a smile from Ilya. He lowers himself, their bodies aligning and Shane wraps his legs around Ilya's waist, pulling him down fully. Ilya's cock presses against Shane's thigh and Shane reaches between them, wrapping his hand around it. He strokes slowly, feeling the thick length pulse in his grip.

Ilya groans into Shane's mouth, hips bucking forward. "Shane..." He kisses down Shane's chest, tongue flicking over one nipple, then sucking it into his mouth. Shane arches, hand tightening on Ilya's cock, pumping faster. Ilya's free hand mirrors him, fingers curling around Shane's dick.

They stroke each other like that for a while... but Shane wants more, needs more. "Ilya, please," he gasps, guiding Ilya's hand away. "Inside me. Now."

Ilya pauses, eyes darkening with desire. He nods and Shane leans over to the nightstand where he keeps lube and condoms, always prepared, even if this is the first time in his own bed. Ilya slicks his fingers generously before pressing one against Shane's entrance. "You are mine, Shane," he growls.

"Yours," Shane groans as Ilya circles the tight ring of muscle, pushing in slowly. The stretch burns a little, but it's good, really, really, really good. Ilya watches his face, adding a second finger when Shane nods and moving them gently, curling to brush Shane's prostate. Shane moans loudly, hips lifting off the bed.

"There," Ilya murmurs in a low voice. "You feel so good." He leans down to kiss Shane's thigh, then higher, taking Shane's cock into his mouth. He sucks slowly, tongue swirling around the head while his fingers thrust deeper.

Shane's hands fist the sheets in pleasure. "Ilya— fuck, I'm close."

Ilya pulls off with a wet pop, grinning up at him. "Not yet." He withdraws his fingers, earning a whine from Shane, and rolls on a condom, lubing himself up. Positioning at Shane's hole, he pushes in inch by inch, pausing when Shane tenses.

"Perfect," Ilya says softly, stroking Shane's hip.

Shane exhales, trying to relax around the intrusion, the fullness feels so overwhelming and

perfect at the same time. Ilya bottoms out, stilling to let them adjust, forehead pressed to Shane's.

Then Ilya starts moving with slow thrusts that gradually build. Shane meets him, hips rolling up. The bed creaks softly under them, the only sound besides their gasps and moans. Ilya's hand wraps around Shane's cock again, stroking in time with his thrusts.

"Love you," Shane breathes, pulling Ilya down for a messy kiss.

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*," Ilya replies against his lips, pace quickening. He angles his hips, hitting Shane's prostate on every stroke now, drawing out louder cries.

Shane comes first, spilling over Ilya's fist with a shuddering groan, clenching tight around him. Ilya follows seconds later, burying deep as he pulses inside, a low growl rumbling from his chest.

They collapse together, both sweaty and spent. Ilya pulls out carefully before disposing of the condom. He gathers Shane close, arms wrapping around him. Shane nuzzles into his neck, feeling completely and utterly content.

"Stay," Shane mumbles.

"Always," Ilya promises, kissing his temple.

"Shane, why the hell did you—"

Nick Hollander stops in the doorway. The rest of his sentence dies in his throat as his eyes land on them.

"What the fuck."

Chapter End Notes

Erm so... how is everyone?

Big confession. Big reveal.

Don't worry, there will be so much talking next chapter. There is so much talking that needs to be done.

Ya tebya lyublyu to all my readers!!!! Comments are my fav thing ever, thanks to everyone who comments literally anything!

As always, give me all thoughts and opinions!!

Appreciate you all <3

Chapter 11: You'd know what I mean, If you weren't related

Chapter Summary

The aftermath

Chapter Notes

I'm back...

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

Shane Hollander was a prodigy. It was easy to see, you didn't need to watch him long to understand that. He lived and breathed hockey the way other kids lived and breathed video games, and he was so exceptional at it that it felt almost unfair to anyone else who tried. He wasn't the most sociable person, never had been, but unbeknownst to him, people gravitated toward him anyway. There wasn't much not to like. He was good looking without knowing it, talented without being insufferable about it, and he just existed in a way that made people want to exist in his presence.

He kept a small circle and preferred it that way. But people tried, constantly, to worm their way in. Girls had flirted with him all through school, some very obvious about it, some not, and he'd turned them all down with a kind of oblivious politeness that somehow made them like him more. Even some guys had tried, but Shane had been clueless to all of it. He wasn't cold or cruel to them... he just didn't seem to notice, or maybe he didn't want to. He was somewhere else, always, on the ice in his head.

As a child, Shane had been well cared for. Not popular, exactly, but it hadn't mattered. His parents had more than compensated for whatever the rest of the world withheld. They devoted themselves to him completely, to his routines, his needs, his development, his hockey career. He was their beloved son. He never had to wonder if he was loved, it was always present in every room he walked into.

Shane Hollander also had a brother.

Nick was two years older and everything Shane wasn't... *socially*. He was easy to talk to, easy to be around, he was the kind of person who could walk into any room and instantly find his crowd. Simply, he blended right in. Shane stood out without trying, and Nick disappeared without trying, and neither of them had asked for it to be that way.

Their parents loved Nick, that was never in question. But Nick never seemed to meet the expectations his parents had unknowingly set. They put him in hockey first, then other sports, then music lessons, then art, then sciences, working through the list hoping he would finally find his thing, the thing that made him match up to his younger brother. Nick never cared enough about any of it to pretend otherwise. By the time Shane's hockey career started undeniably taking shape, their parents stopped pushing Nick, and he stopped waiting to be pushed. That was that.

Shane was a good brother. He made time for Nick when he could, talked to him, showed up whenever he needed to, but he was always moving, practicing, traveling, training, and Nick had learned not to take it personally. At some point, Nick stopped trying to show up in return. They existed in the same house, shared dinner tables and movie nights, but there were times where they felt more like two only children under the same roof than brothers. So close, yet so far.

And then came Ilya.

They met Ilya, both of them did, and Ilya had a way of ingraining himself in people's lives. Nick clicked with him instantly, it seemed as if they'd known each other for years within an hour. And Shane had been more resistant, or maybe just more oblivious, or maybe it was something else that Nick did not understand. On the surface, throughout most of their childhoods, it had seemed like Nick was the one Ilya belonged to. Shane and Ilya were just in the same solar system, orbiting a common star, never colliding.

He'd believed that... for years, he'd believed that. But now, replaying it all in his head, the lingering looks, the tension filled arguments, the way Ilya always somehow knew where Shane was in a room, he could see it so clearly it made his head hurt.

He had been so fucking blind.

Because now he is standing in the doorway, Ilya and Shane are tangled together naked in a bed, and his world has completely rearranged itself. He wonders how long, if he was the last to know, or if he was the only one who never knew at all.

The room is quiet enough to hear a pin drop as Nick stares at Shane and Ilya. Ilya quickly moves to grab the blanket and pull it over them both.

Nick sees the movement and looks down. "Get dressed," he says quietly, pulling the door shut behind him.

Shane and Ilya turn to look at each other in the dark. Shane feels as if he's about to have a heart attack. He finds his clothes on the floor and pulls them on with shaking hands. Beside him, Ilya dresses quickly, and Shane wishes he could see his face properly, but the room is too dark, and he's not sure he's ready to look at him anyway.

"Fuck," Shane breathes once he's fully dressed. "I wasn't ready for him to find out. Especially like this!"

Ilya is quiet for a moment, "Me too."

"What do we do?" Shane runs a hand through his hair. "I can't go out there."

"You can."

"Ilya—"

"You can," Ilya says again as he reaches out in the dark and finds Shane's wrist. "We can. You are brave, baby Hollander."

Shane gives him a short smile, "Not right now."

"It is still true." Ilya's thumb moves once across his skin. "And Nick— he cannot stop this. Us. I think, when the shock is over, he will understand."

"We lied to him," Shane says. "We've been lying to him. How is he going to understand that?"

Ilya doesn't answer right away, he smiles as he speaks, "There is only one way to find out."

Shane exhales. He wants to argue, but Ilya's hand is still around his wrist and it's hard to think straight while feeling his touch. "Yeah," he manages to let out. "Okay."

"No matter what happens out there, I love you," Ilya murmurs.

Shane closes his eyes, "I love you too."

They find Nick downstairs in the kitchen. He's standing at the counter with his back to them. He hasn't turned the light on. The room is lit only by the light coming through the windows.

Shane opens his mouth.

"No," Nick says, without turning around.

Shane closes it.

A long silence. Nick's shoulders are rigid with tension. Shane has never seen his brother like this. He's usually loud and unbothered, always, even when he shouldn't be.

Finally, Nick turns around. He looks at Shane first, then at Ilya, then back at Shane.

"How— how long," he asks.

"Since the summer. After Shane came home from camp," Ilya admits.

Nick lets out a short breath that's almost a laugh. "The summer," he stares at Ilya. "I told you to help him, not *do* him!"

Ilya opens his mouth, "Well—"

"Do not finish that sentence, Rozanov," Nick interrupts immediately, pointing at him.

Ilya stops talking.

"He's my brother," Nick states, gesturing at Shane.

"He's my boyfriend," Ilya retorts.

Shane's head snaps toward him, "Boyfriend?"

Ilya glances at him, "I mean, yes. If you want."

"I want," Shane instantly replies, smiling.

"No— gross— no—" Nick puts both hands up, looking between them with an expression of genuine distress. "What is even happening right now? What is happening? In my fucking parents' house."

"Technically it's Shane's house too," Ilya offers.

"Ilya," Shane scolds.

"What? It is."

"Not helping," Shane sighs.

"Right. Sorry."

Nick stares at them both. Then he turns around and faces the counter again like he needs a moment to rethink his entire life. Shane watches his shoulders rise and fall with one long breath. When he turns back around, any humor that traced his expression is gone, he looks very tired.

"How long have you both been lying to me," he mumbles.

"Nick—" Shane starts.

"I've been living with you, working with you," Nick continues, looking at Ilya now. "Talking to you every single day. And you looked me in the face and said nothing. Both of you."

"I know," Ilya says without flinching. "I was scared of losing you. That is the truth."

"Do you know how stupid I feel?" Nick's voice cracks slightly. "I've been telling you he seemed off, asking if you knew anything, and you just— you just—"

"Yes," Ilya says quietly.

"That's it? Yes?"

"What do you want me to say? That I should have told you sooner? Yes. That I handled it badly? Yes." Ilya's voice stays even but Shane can hear the pain underneath it all. "I know all of it. I am sorry."

Nick looks at him for a long moment before his gaze moves back to Shane. He looks more hurt than he had ever seen him before.

"You always get everything," Nick starts quietly, looking down. "You know that? Hockey, mom and dad, the future, all of it just fucking lines up for you. And that's fine, I'm glad, I'm not mad—" he stops. "But Ilya was mine. He was my person. And even that—"

He doesn't finish the sentence, but the fragments of it already cause Shane's eyes to tear up. He never thought about it that way... he never really thought about it at all, which is probably exactly the problem.

"Nick," he quietly murmurs.

"I'm not trying to make this about me. I know it's not. I just—" he exhales. "I need to sleep on this. I need to go."

"Nick—" Ilya takes a step forward.

"Don't," he grabs his keys from the counter and pauses at the front door with his hand on the handle. "Ilya," he calls, without turning around.

"Yes."

"You're still my fucking best friend," he turns his eyes towards Shane, "and you're still my little brother... I'm just really pissed at you guys right now."

He doesn't wait for a reply, shutting the door right behind him.

The house goes completely quiet. Shane stands in the kitchen staring at the door. Beside him, Ilya exhales slowly.

"He'll be okay," Shane states, but he's not entirely sure if he's saying it to Ilya or to himself, and he doesn't know if he completely believes it.

"I know," Ilya nods. He finds Shane's hand in the dark, fingers curling around his. "Come on. Let's go to bed."

"You're staying?"

"He has the apartment. He needs it more than I do tonight."

Shane nods and they head upstairs together.

Waking up next to Shane Hollander almost makes Ilya forget that his best friend had walked in on them last night... but it did still happen.

He'd deal with Nick, he really fucking has to. He isn't going to avoid the conversation, no matter how annoying it will be to have. But right now, on this beautiful morning with Shane tucked against his chest and still fully asleep, Ilya can't bring himself to move. He can't even bring himself to care about anything outside of this room.

Ilya lies there just watching him. It's embarrassing how long he does it, but it allows him to notice every little detail. Shane's face goes completely soft in sleep, all that careful guardedness and stress dissolving, with slow, careful breathing.

Ilya has known this face for years. So many looks, glances, desires, and yet he firmly repeated that it didn't mean anything. For so long he hid behind the idea that he was just protective of him because of Nick, because he grew up alongside him. He'd been lying to himself for years, and some part of him had always known it.

But Shane is his now, completely. They are boyfriends. He never thought he'd be able to even think about that word, it all still feels like a dream that Ilya hopes he would never wake up from. He gets to kiss him, take care of him, love him and be loved back the exact same way. Ilya would get to have this every day, hopefully, for the rest of his life.

He wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, not even, if he is being honest, for Nick not having seen what he saw last night.

Shane stirs next to him, quietly exhaling. Ilya lifts his hand slowly to run it through Shane's hair, brushing his thumb along his cheekbone. Shane's brow smoothes out and he settles again for a moment before his eyes blink open, adjusting to the light and instantly finding Ilya's face.

"Morning," he stares at him before groaning out. "Creep."

Ilya grins, "Best morning."

He leans down and kisses him and Shane makes a soft, reluctant sound against his mouth before pulling back.

"Ilya. Morning breath."

"My tongue has been in your ass."

"No kissing until teeth are brushed," Shane furiously blushes. "I'm serious," he presses a hand flat against his chest and weakly pushes Ilya away.

"I am serious also. This is nothing."

"You're disgusting," he says while smiling, and it's the most beautifully perfect smile Ilya has ever seen. He wishes he could tattoo the image onto his eyelids. Shane leans in and kisses Ilya again anyway. "Hi."

"Hi," Ilya smiles back.

They stay like that for a moment as their foreheads touch. Then Ilya, because he can't help it, says, "Almost as if your brother did not walk in on us last night."

Shane's expression morphs immediately. His eyes go wide and any trace of sleep evaporates.

"Oh my god," he sits up. "Nick. Ilya, we have to go talk to him, we have to go right now—"

"It is so early," Ilya protests, not moving. "Relax."

"Ilya."

"He had the whole night to process. Another hour will not kill him."

"He was so mad, Ilya! Who knows what he could be planning? I just fucking lost my brother! He's probably—"

"Planning our murder? Do you think he will kill you first or me?" Ilya jokes, Shane glares at him. "Shane, he will be fine."

"That is not the point!" Shane runs a hand through his hair. "Nick is your best friend. You're my— we're together now. That's a lot for him."

Ilya looks at him, Shane looks back with irresistible eyes.

"We will go. After breakfast."

"Ilya—" Shane tries before getting interrupted by a knock at the door.

Shane turns to look at the door while Ilya continues to stare at him, his mouth curving.

"Look at that. Someone in your family knows how to knock."

Shane stops himself from laughing, "Come in!"

The door opens and Yuna leans against the frame, taking in the sight of the two of them

sitting up in bed, at least fully dressed this time, with a knowing expression.

"I was hoping you'd be here," she says while looking at Ilya.

"Mom," Shane deadpans.

Yuna tilts her head. "What?" She looks between them, smirking. "So are you two...?"

"We are lovers," Ilya lets out.

"No," Shane turns to him. "Ilya, what is wrong with you? We're boyfriends."

"Same thing."

"It's really not."

"I'm so happy for you both," Yuna presses a hand to her chest. "Both of you, come down. I'm making breakfast."

"We actually have to go," Shane moves to get up. "We have to talk to Nick."

Ilya pouts, "Before breakfast?"

"Yes, before breakfast."

"Shane, Nick will not die if we have breakfast."

"That's not what I—"

"Nick? What happened with Nick?" Yuna asks.

"It is a long story," Ilya sighs. "Come on, baby Hollander. Very quick breakfast, promise, then we drive over."

Shane looks at his mom, then back at Ilya. "Fine," he murmurs.

"You go down," Ilya adds, standing and stretching. "I will shower and meet you down there."

"I'll shower with you," Shane says without thinking, then immediately looks horrified by his own mouth. The words shock Ilya completely. Shane has never been one to speak without thought. "I mean—"

"Shane! Your mother is right there!" Ilya says in fake horror.

"I—"

"I cannot believe you would say that in front of her. Yuna, you should ground him."

"Ilya, stop," Shane looks down in embarrassment.

Yuna seems to have developed a sudden intense interest in the doorframe. "Don't worry about me. I remember being young and in love," she turns away from the door. "I'll be downstairs. Don't take too long," she pulls it shut behind her.

Ilya turns back to Shane with the goofiest grin.

Shane stares at him, "We're not showering together in my parents' house."

"But Shaney, it was your idea!"

"I'm going to jump in front of a car."

"No! Not before we shower together."

"Go shower. Alone," Shane grabs a pillow and throws it at him. Ilya catches it, laughing, and dropping it back on the bed before leaning in to kiss Shane.

"You are just wasting water," he murmurs against his lips. "Very bad for the environment."

Shane's hand comes up and lands on Ilya's arm. "Asshole," he says quietly.

Ilya pulls back, still grinning, and looks at him for a second, overwhelmed with happiness that he hopes will last even after a certain conversation.

By the time Ilya gets downstairs, David is at the stove finishing up what seems to be pancakes, unbothered by the fact that his son's boyfriend spent the night, and Yuna is sitting at the table, sipping coffee from her mug.

David turns around when Ilya walks in. "Ilya," he says calmly.

"Good morning, David."

He gestures toward a chair, "Sit. Coffee?"

"Please."

David is already pouring it before Ilya even pulls out the chair. He sets the mug down in front of him and pats his shoulder.

"So," David starts, taking a seat next to Yuna. "It's official?"

Ilya smiles as he looks down at the coffee, "Yes."

David nods, smiling too. Ilya had never really worried about him, not after their last puzzle night. If anything, David had made it clear that there wasn't anything left for Ilya to prove. They'd seen too much of him for that, knew him too well for any kind of grand performance to matter to them. It didn't mean he'd stop trying, he still would, probably always, but it was nice not to have to.

"Good," David says.

"We couldn't be happier for you," Yuna adds, smiling as well.

"Thank you," Ilya manages to reply. "I am very happy too."

"We always knew, you know," Yuna continues. "David and I. We've known for a long time."

"The birthday party," David points out.

"The birthday party," Yuna agrees.

Ilya softly smiles, the confession doesn't surprise him.

They sit in silence for a moment before Yuna speaks up with a more serious tone than before, "Ilya." She sets down her mug, "We know you would never hurt him. We do know that." She glances at David, who looks right back. "But he's our son. So we're saying it anyway."

"If you do, we will be very disappointed in you," David comments.

Ilya can't help but smile. It's a terrifying sentiment, letting Yuna and David Hollander down, but he knows he never would, at least not intentionally. Hurting Shane in any capacity would mean hurting himself, and Ilya's life is too good for that at the moment.

"That is very frightening," Ilya says.

"Good," Yuna responds, taking a sip of her coffee.

David looks at Ilya again, "You have our approval. You've always had our approval. Don't make us regret it, son."

"You will not. I promise you."

Yuna holds his gaze for a moment, then nods, seemingly satisfied with his response.

Suddenly, they hear footsteps on the stairs. Shane appears in the doorway a moment later, hair damp, freshly showered. His eyes sweep the room and land on Ilya sitting at the table, perfectly at ease between his parents.

He stops, "What are you guys talking about?"

"Nothing, sweetheart," Yuna says.

Shane looks at Ilya. Ilya who looks back at him with an expression of pure innocence. Shane's eyes narrow.

"You look very pretty," Ilya tries to distract him as Shane pulls out the chair beside him.

Shane's face goes red. He sits down and says nothing back to him, only giving Ilya a stern look of disappointment.

"We have to go," he announces to the table.

"Without breakfast?" David asks, sounding disappointed. Ilya would be too if someone refused to eat those perfect pancakes.

"We have to talk to Nick."

"Sweetheart, your brother is probably still asleep," Yuna says, setting a plate in front of Shane anyway. "Eat something first."

Shane looks at the plate, then at the door, then at Ilya.

"Eat," Ilya commands.

Shane picks up his fork.

"What exactly are you planning to tell him?" David asks.

"About..." Shane starts, not looking away from his plate. "Us," he finishes his sentence, turning to look at Ilya. Ilya smiles at him.

Shane's parents exchange one of their stupid looks. "He'll be fine," Yuna says.

"You don't know that," Shane replies.

"I do, actually. He's your brother, Shane. And Ilya is his best friend. Do you know what that means?"

Shane waits for her to finish.

"It means he already loves you both. He already trusts you both. He's not going to have to wonder whether you'll be good to each other because he already knows. And when you two eventually get married, we'll all properly be family. Which we've been looking forward to."

Ilya's eyes go wide. Marriage has always sounded like a bad idea to Ilya. He watched his parents' marriage fall apart over so many years that by the end it was hard to remember if there were ever any good moments. They never divorced, even when he really wished they would have. And after his mother's death, his father married a woman Ilya had barely known. So no, marriage has never sounded like something meant for him. You inherit these things,

he's always thought. Alexei is married, but Ilya was never sure if his brother actually loved his wife, or if he just got to a certain age and didn't know what else to do.

But thinking about marrying Shane, staying with him, building something with him, waking up next to him for the rest of their lives, it doesn't sound like a bad idea, it sounds like the best fucking idea.

"Mom," Shane's fork stops moving. "We got together last night."

"I know that."

"We've been together for less than a day."

"I'm aware."

"No, baby Hollander, she is right. I will marry you," and he's serious, too.

Shane turns to stare at him, "Ilya."

"I am very certain about this."

"We're not talking about this right now."

"When would you like to talk about it? I can make time."

"Ilya—"

"I can clear my whole schedule, actually."

"Oh my god," Shane exclaims as he pushes back his chair and stands, grabbing Ilya's arm.

"We're leaving. Thank you for the lovely breakfast," he's already pulling Ilya toward the door.

"Thank you for having me," Ilya calls back, being dragged with complete willingness, grinning over his shoulder. "As always. The pancakes are excellent!"

"Goodbye!" Shane yells loudly.

"Good luck!" Yuna and David shout back in perfect unison.

The front door swings shut behind them. Shane stands on the porch, hand still loosely around Ilya's wrist.

"We definitely need it," he mutters.

Ilya looks at him, then he lifts Shane's hand, still wrapped around his wrist, and turns it over, pressing a quiet kiss to his knuckles.

"Hey," he softly says.

Shane looks back at him.

"Whatever happens with Nick... we will be okay. Yes?"

Shane holds his gaze for a moment and then he exhales, some of the tension leaving his shoulders.

"Yeah," he nods. "Okay."

They walk to the car together and Shane doesn't let go of his wrist the whole way there.

"Ilya! Stop!" Shane whisper-yells as Ilya pulls out his keys.

"What? It is my apartment too."

"Yes, but maybe we should knock first. So it's not like an ambush."

"What if he is still sleeping? Knock would wake him up."

"I think your obnoxious keys already woke him up."

"They are not obnoxious, they are personal to me."

"You have like ten things on that keychain, Ilya."

"Each one is an important memory."

"Fine, whatever, I'll knock—"

The door swings open before either of them can move. Nick stands there looking at them with a completely unreadable expression.

"Look who has clothes on," he says.

Shane opens his mouth. "Nick. Hey," he sounds exactly as nervous as Ilya knows he is. "We came to finish the conversation. Clear some things up."

"What is there to clear up?" Nick looks at them. "I said everything I needed to last night. Unless you two are keeping something else from me," he pauses. "What, are you already married?"

"Unfortunately, no," Ilya says.

Shane elbows him.

"What? It is true, unfortunately."

"Look," Shane steps forward slightly. "This wasn't supposed to happen the way it did. We're sorry for hiding it, we genuinely are. We both love you and we never wanted to put you in that position."

Nick looks at him for a moment, then shrugs and looks away. "Never thought you two would become a we," he murmurs. He steps fully outside, shutting the door behind him, then heads toward the stairs.

"Nick," Ilya follows him immediately. "Do not walk away. Let us talk."

"It is too early, Roz," Nick comments without turning around. "Talk to me after you stop fucking my brother."

"Nick!"

But he's already gone down the steps. Shane and Ilya stand in the hallway in complete silence.

Ilya exhales slowly, then he turns to Shane. "Let me talk to him alone first. We should both have separate conversations with him."

Shane looks down, jaw tight. He nods. "You're right," he looks back up. "Don't be an asshole."

"When am I ever?" Ilya tilts his head with sincerity.

Shane gives him a certain look before Ilya catches his face in both hands and presses a quick kiss to his mouth.

"Go inside," he murmurs.

Shane's expression slightly softens as he nods and opens the door, stepping inside. Ilya watches the door close behind him, stands there for a second, then turns to find Nick.

He doesn't have to look far, he knows Nick.

Sure enough, Nick is around the back of the building, leaning against the wall with a cigarette already lit, staring at nothing in particular. His face is completely neutral. Ilya walks over and stops beside him, back against the same wall, shoulder to shoulder. He doesn't immediately say anything as Nick continues to smoke

"Chicken wings," Ilya says after a moment.

Nick glances at him, "What?"

"Your favorite food. Your parents never make them because they are too messy and Shane cannot stand messy food. But you love them," Ilya keeps his eyes forward. "First night in this apartment. We did not even have proper furniture yet. We sat on the floor and ate an entire bucket of chicken wings and you said it was the best night of your life."

Nick says nothing back, but Ilya can see his face change.

"When we were both thirteen," Ilya continues. "We stole a pack of cigarettes from the corner shop. Smoked for the first time behind your school. You could not handle it at all. Thought you were going to choke to death. But you kept going because you wanted to be rebellious," he remembers with a small smile. "Your mom smelled it the second you walked through the door. She sat you down at the kitchen table and went on for an hour, then she turned to me and did the same."

Nick lets out a breathy laugh, "She was so mad."

"So mad," Ilya agrees. "She did not call my father. She never called my father for anything," his smile turns into a frown. "We did not listen to her."

"Never did. We probably should've," Nick mutters.

Ilya nods and they both go quiet for a second until Ilya speaks up again. "When my mom died, I could not breathe... but then I came to you. I climbed through your window at two in the morning because I did not want to wake your parents," he pauses. "You did not know what to say. You never know what to say when things are serious, it is not how you are. But you let me in and you moved over on your bed. Knowing you were there made it less bad."

Nick goes still beside him.

"I am not telling you things you do not know," Ilya says. "I am just reminding you that I know them too. You are my best friend, you have been my best friend since I was ten years old and did not know how to exist in this country, and that has never changed and will never change. Nothing that happens with Shane changes that. You are not losing anything."

Nick takes a long drag of his cigarette and slowly exhales it out. "You could have told me," he says quietly. "That's what I keep coming back to in my head. You could have just fucking told me."

"I know."

"I hate that you felt like you needed to lie to me, both of you."

Ilya nods, he knows he can't fully justify his reasoning, "I know. I am sorry."

Nick finishes his cigarette and drops it, pressing his shoe down on it.

"You remember that girl?" Ilya says after a minute. "The one you would not shut up about."

Nick lets out a quiet laugh, "Yeah."

"You would not stop talking about her. Every single day, I could not escape it," Ilya shakes his head. "We planned that whole thing, the big confession, you were so excited. And then it turned out she had a crush on Hayden Pike."

Nick groans, "Of all people."

"Of all people," Ilya agrees. "But then you said you would not give up on her, because you loved her. And I did not understand that. It made no sense to me, why you would keep chasing something that made you so nervous you could not speak and go red by only thinking about her," Ilya pauses and looks down. "But you told me how she made your heart beat faster. How she made you happy by existing. And I remember thinking... I know what that feels like."

Nick turns to look at him and stops moving.

"Not for a girl with terrible taste," Ilya continues quietly. "For Shane. And I buried it. For a long time I buried it very deep, because of my father, because of you, because it was easier to think that my feelings did not matter," he shakes his head. "And then this summer Shane had his very stupid plan and I could not bury it anymore."

"It was that easy to stop?" Nick asks.

"The easiest and hardest thing I have ever done," Ilya says.

Nick goes quiet, looking away toward a parking lot.

"You know," he says, "I love my family. I do. But sometimes it felt like I was invisible in it. Not on purpose, I don't think they ever meant it. Shane just needed more, hockey took everything," he shrugs. "I always figured I at least had you as my person," he glances at Ilya. "And now you're also his."

"I was always going to be his," Ilya quietly admits and turns to properly face him. "But... that does not make me any less yours. You are not being replaced. You are gaining the best brother-in-law in Canada."

Nick stares at him.

"Too soon?" Ilya asks.

"Maybe," Nick jokes. Ilya notices that he looks a lot less tense than before. "You really love him?"

"Yes."

"Like actually? You're not just in it for the... sex?"

"Yes, Hollander. Actually," Ilya stares at him. "I would rather walk into traffic than hurt him. You have my word."

Nick lets out a long breath. "Ilya Rozanov," he says slowly. "Tamed. By a Hollander" he shakes his head. "Never thought I'd see it."

"You know your brother, he is... *irresistible*."

Nick makes a sound of disgust, closing his eyes and shaking his head. "Ilya, no."

Ilya laughs and nods.

"Who's going to be my wingman now? You're useless to me."

"Absolutely not. I am in a relationship, not dead. I am still Ilya Rozanov. I will wingman you until the day I die."

Nick laughs at that. "God," he mutters. "Okay. I need a second to fully wrap my head around the image of you and Shane—"

"It is a very hot image."

"—but I'm not going to stand in the way of it. I can't," he looks at Ilya with honesty. "I love you both. I just wish you'd told me sooner before walking in on some shit I can never fucking unsee."

"That would not have happened if you had knocked."

Nick glares at him.

"From now on, knock. Very simple habit."

"I will actually kill you," Nick says, and he's laughing again.

Ilya opens his arms. Nick looks at him, then looks away, then looks back, he walks into the hug and grabs him around the shoulders. Ilya holds on for a second before pulling back.

"Hey, maybe I'll end up falling in love with Alexei," Nick says, grinning. "If a Hollander can tame a Rozanov, might as well shoot my shot."

Ilya stares at him, "That would be a very interesting, very toxic relationship."

"Who knows."

"I know. Do not."

Nick laughs again and Ilya shakes his head, but he's smiling.

"You should go talk to Shane," Ilya says, nodding toward the building. "He's probably in there stressing."

Nick snorts, "Yeah." He straightens up and looks at the door. "Yeah, okay."

He takes a step forward then pauses, "Hey, Roz."

"Yes."

"If you hurt him," Nick says in a very serious voice. "I will fuck you up."

"I know," Ilya says.

"Good," Nick looks at him for one more second, then nods.

Ilya watches him go inside and laughs.

Shane has been standing in the middle of the apartment for a while by the time he hears the door open. He's not entirely sure how long it's been, but it's enough to run through every possible version of this conversation in his head, and they all sound like absolute hell.

He'd tried sitting down at one point and writing a list of possibilities, but that lasted a couple of minutes before he started to feel insane. So now he's just... waiting. He's not sure for what exactly. Maybe a conversation with Nick... or for Ilya to tell him how bad it all went... or for Ilya to tell him he chooses Nick over him...

He's replayed last night too many times already. Nick's face, the way his voice sounded, the things he said... it all felt so wrong.

He doesn't notice he's been staring at the counter until the sound of the door pulls him out of it.

He turns quickly to see Nick standing in the apartment, alone. Nick stares at him as he inches closer.

"Hey," he says quietly as he plops on the couch. Shane stays in his spot, arms crossed.

"Sit down," Nick mutters. "You're making me anxious."

"I'm making *you* anxious," Shane questions, sitting down on the armchair and Shane doesn't know where to go from there. He wants to let Nick speak first, as he doesn't have it in him to start the conversation.

"So," Nick says.

"So," Shane replies.

"You and Ilya."

"Um... yeah."

Nick slowly nods, maybe he still needs to process things? "How long were you going to keep it from me?"

Shane looks away from him, "I don't know. It happened fast and there wasn't really a chance for me to tell you," he pauses. "I'm sorry, Nick. I know that's not a good enough reason."

"You could've told me, Shane. I'm your brother."

"I'm sorry."

"Like, out of everyone, I'm the last person who would give a shit—" he stops. "Okay, no. I get it. He's my best friend and you're my little brother and that's fucking crazy."

Shane looks up at him, avoiding eye contact at all costs.

"It was still shitty," Nick adds.

"I'm sorry," Shane says again, even quieter than before.

"Was it always him? Like, even before this summer?" Nick manages to ask.

Shane looks down again, eyes beginning to form tears. He thinks about every moment with Ilya, the ones that shaped his entire childhood. "I think so," he admits. "I just didn't know it."

He turns his head towards Nick, whose expression has changed into something Shane couldn't explain. But maybe it was less... angry.

"Last night when I walked in, I said something to you," Nick recalls.

Shane meets his eyes for the first time, "'You always get everything'."

"Yeah," Nick looks down. "I didn't mean to say that. I left before I could... explain," he shakes his head. "Fuck— I'm not trying to make this about me."

"I think you're allowed to make it a little about you," Shane says quietly. "I want to understand why you said that."

Nick goes quiet before he speaks again, "It's not like I fucking resent you or whatever. I need you to know that. Because I never have. But sometimes growing up it felt like I... didn't exist. Always in your shadow. Hockey took so much of mom and dad's attention and I know it— *you* really needed that," he pauses. "And I never had some shit like that. Something that

was like, I don't know... mine, that they could give attention to. Then I met Ilya and I brought him into the family and that felt like something I did, you know? Like that was my contribution," he glances up at him. "Now— now he's yours too. And I just— last night all my words came out so fucking wrong because I was shocked and I was angry and—"

"Nick," Shane interrupts.

"I don't want you to feel bad about any of it—"

"I do feel bad about it," Shane interrupts again. "I should have. I never thought about it that way and I should have," he looks at his brother. "You know that none of that is true, right? You have things I'll never have. People love you the second you walk into a room and you don't even have to try. I've spent my whole life not knowing how to do that. And Ilya isn't yours any less just because he's mine too. That's not how it works. You brought him into this family and he stayed because of you. Don't fucking... belittle that."

Nick looks at him and suddenly starts to laugh. Shane follows suit, because what else was he supposed to do?

"When did you get so wise?" Nick mutters between laughter.

"I've always been the smarter one."

"Don't push it, Shaney," Nick says, laughter dying down. His face becomes more serious. "I think I just needed to say all of that out loud to you. It's not like I'm traumatized by it or whatever bullshit—"

"Dude."

"But it all still mattered so."

"I'm glad you said it. I can even talk to mom and dad if you want me to. If that helps at all," Shane offers.

"No, I think I'll be fine. But I need to get over the sight of you naked with Roz, then I'll be right back to normal. If anything's traumatizing, it's that."

"Yeah well maybe if you knock you wouldn't have to see that, asshole."

Nick laughs and nods, and Shane finds himself laughing with him, things feel easy again. They fall quiet for a second. Then Nick interrupts the silence.

"Bro— wait a fucking minute."

Shane blinks, "What?"

Nick leans forward. "Which one of you am I best man for? Fuck, I didn't think of that when Ilya mentioned being my brother-in-law... this is actually so fucked up."

Shane stares at him, "Are you serious?"

"I can split it," Nick says immediately. "Like I'll stand on his side for half, then switch over. Keep it fair."

"Why is everyone talking about us getting married? I'm literally eighteen."

"Shane, this is important. We need to lock this shit in early."

"Who said I even wanted you as my best man?" Shane shoots back. "You know I have Hayden."

Nick recoils, "I swear to god, if Hayden fucking Pike takes one more thing from me—"

Shane laughs, shaking his head, then his gaze drops for a second before he looks back up. "So you're okay with everything?"

Nick takes a second before he answers, "Yeah, I think so. It's weird, I'm not gonna pretend it's not weird. And this could go so wrong, like so fucking wrong. But it's you two, and I know you both. So," he shrugs. "Yeah. I'm okay with it."

"Thank you," Shane smiles at him.

Nick makes a face, "Don't thank me. That's weird."

"Sorry."

"Yeah, stop doing that too."

"Sor—" Shane cuts himself off and Nick grins.

Shane feels the last of the tension finally start to drain out of the room.

Nick looks at him for a second, "Okay, but seriously."

"What?" Shane straightens up.

"If you fuck this up, I'm beating your ass."

Shane rolls his eyes, "Nick."

"I'm not kidding," he cuts in. "That's my best friend too. You can't fuck him up."

Shane's expression softens, "I wouldn't."

"I know," Nick says quickly. "I know you wouldn't, but I'm looking out for both of you, alright? That's my job."

"Okay," Shane nods.

"And also, I don't want to see anything. Like at all. Ever."

Shane goes red.

"I'm serious. Like you gotta let me know before you come over."

"Got it."

"Thank you," Nick pauses. "Also I want to be there when you tell mom and dad."

Shane stares at him, "They already know."

"What?" Nick's face drops.

"They figured it out. Apparently they've known for a while."

"Are you serious?" Nick looks genuinely betrayed. "Everyone knew before me?"

"Hayden knew," Shane offers.

"Hayden Pike knew before I did?" Nick's voice rises slightly. "Hayden Pike?"

"And Rose."

"What the fuck," Nick puts his face in his hands. "I am the last person on earth to find out."

"I mean... you were kind of the hardest person to tell."

"I'm your brother!"

"Exactly!"

Nick lifts his face from his hands and stares at Shane, then he smiles at him, looking somewhat relieved.

"He really loves you, you know? He didn't have to tell me, I could just tell," he admits quietly.

Shane swallows, "I know."

"Do you? Love him? Like genuinely, this isn't just some... what did Ilya call it? *Stupid plan?*"

"Yes," Shane stops him from speaking further. "I love him."

Nick looks at him and nods, "Okay." Then, his eyes flick down to the coffee table, "Is that my notebook?"

Shane freezes, "No."

"That's literally my notebook," Nick says, leaning towards it. "Why are there—" he flips it open, squinting, "—bullet points?"

Shane presses his lips together.

Nick starts reading, "'Possible outcomes of conversation with Nick' are you serious right now?"

"Give that back," Shane reaches for it.

Nick leans away, still reading. "'Best case: Nick is immediately understanding. Worst case: physical altercation,'" he looks up. "You thought I was gonna fight you?"

"I didn't know what you were going to do," Shane mutters.

Nick flips another page, "'Things to say if Nick starts yelling' oh my god."

"Okay, give it back now," Shane sounds more insistent.

Nick finally hands it over, shaking his head. "Oh my god, you two actually deserve each other," Nick says, getting up and walking toward the hallway. "Both of you are insane," He stops at the doorway of his room and looks back. "Tell Ilya to come in. And tell him he's on laundry duty for the rest of the month."

Shane smiles, "He's gonna hate that."

"Exactly," Nick smiles back.

Shane shakes his head but he's still smiling. "Nick," he says, causing Nick to pause.

"Thank you. Really."

Nick smiles at him. "You're my brother," he says, and that's all that Shane needed to hear.

Then he disappears into his room and Shane gets up to go find Ilya.

He finds Ilya leaning against the wall just outside the building. His head tilts up when Shane steps out, eyes tracking him immediately.

"Hey," Ilya greets.

Shane stops a few steps away. For a second, neither of them move.

“Hey,” Shane replies.

Ilya studies his face, “You talked to him.”

“Yeah,” Shane nods, grinning. “He’s... okay. Not like completely, but—” he shrugs a little. “He’s trying, which is the best we were going to get.”

Ilya nods, “Mhm.”

A small silence settles between them then Shane locks his eyes on him, “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Ilya says with a hint of a smile. “We did not fight. That is a win.”

“That is a win,” Shane agrees. “I was worried,” Shane admits after a second. “Not just about Nick, about everything. I thought maybe it would all fall apart once he found out. But it’s all more... real.”

Ilya slightly frowns and pushes himself off the wall, stepping closer, closing the space between them. “It is real,” he says quietly. “And it did not fall apart.”

Shane lets out a small breath, “Yeah.”

Ilya reaches for him then, slowly, giving him time to pull away if he wants to. Shane doesn’t. Their hands find each other easily, fingers fitting together like the perfect pieces of a puzzle.

“We are okay,” Ilya softly murmurs.

Shane nods, “We’re okay.”

“Boyfriends,” Ilya adds, smiling now.

Shane huffs out a short laugh, “Yeah. Boyfriends.”

Ilya lifts Shane’s hand slightly, brushing his thumb over his knuckles. Even now, with every little touch, Shane feels like he’s exploding with butterflies.

“Good,” he murmurs.

“Perfect,” Shane squeezes his hand.

They stand there for another moment, then Shane nudges him lightly, “Come on. Nick wants you back inside.”

Ilya narrows his eyes slightly, “Will he murder me?”

“No, but you're on laundry duty for the month,” Shane teased.

Ilya gasps, genuinely offended, “That is worse.”

Shane laughs. “Come on,” he commands, tugging him toward the door.

Ilya lets himself be pulled, their hands still linked, and follows him inside.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hello there...

I want to greatly apologize that this chapter took longer than usual. Like genuinely I'm so sorry. The reason isn't some exciting story or whatever, honestly, I just couldn't get myself to write. This is the second to last chapter (most likely) and the next one should be the epilogue. I just didn't want the story to end, I think. Like I was kind of delaying the inevitable. All the love and support that I've gotten has meant so much to me, truly. I just didn't want to let it go. But alas, all stories must come to an end, so I got out of my funk and wrote this. Hopefully it's good enough for you guys, it is for me :)

Also, I just got pretty sick today and my immune system lowkey sucks so I'm feeling extra awful. Worst part is that finals are coming up and I'm feeling worse than Nick did when he walked in on Hollanov.

Anyways, next (and final) chapter should come out in 1 to 4 weeks. My finals are from the 7th-14th so I'm kind of stressing hard for those. I'm really sorry about this, guys. I really wanted it to be easier.

Thank you to everyone who left comments, kudos, or silently showed support. I appreciate it more than anything.

And a special thank you to the commenter who gave me the idea for the best man debacle and everyone who was annoyed at Nick not knocking. Comments really help me!

Give me all your thoughts and feelings, and any ideas for the epilogue 🙏🙏🙏.

End Notes

Don't have a concrete update schedule but we'll see. It's usually 5-7 days between chapters.

Comments and kudos would be appreciated!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!