

Agony! Beyond power of speech

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/79822841) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/79822841>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , Svetlana Vetrova , Hayden Pike , Rose Landry
Additional Tags:	Doctor!Ilya , Hospital , Anxious Shane Hollander , Awkward Shane Hollander , Eventual Romance , Eventual Smut , Ilya Rozanov is very professional and respects how patients should be treated btw , Attempt at Humor , Ilya is a good doctor and that's why it's gonna be a slow burn folks , Panic Attacks , Shane sometimes feels like shit but I don't describe it too much , Mention of suicide because Irina , Lots of mentions of bacterial infections somehow
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-18 Completed: 2026-03-31 Words: 38,464 Chapters: 8/8

Agony! Beyond power of speech

by [Sourdough_and_Tears \(Bread_and_Breakfast\)](#)

Summary

After needing jaw surgery following a game injury, Shane receives a flirty message on his phone. Does the very handsome dental surgeon who took care of him want to know him better? Shane has to ask him.

Reader, he was wrong about half of the story.

Chapter 1: #1

“Don’t talk, baby, it’s okay,” Yuna Hollander said, holding his hand on the hospital bed.

Shane didn’t want to say anything, if he was being honest with himself. He was rather happy not to be concussed or more injured than he was, but his jaw was wildly painful. He had never experienced such a sharp sensation in his teeth. It was fairly common for hockey players to hit their mouthguard on something – stick, board, human being – but it had never happened to Shane before. His mouthguard had guarded what it could, but the blow had not come for his teeth first. After colliding into the boards, Shane had felt a brutal pain on the side of his jaw, just next to the chin. The hit had reverberated through his bones, and *that’s* when his teeth had potentially been broken. Or not. He could not dare to open his mouth yet. In any case, it was blocked by a cast.

“They will not let you go out with shattered teeth, sweetheart,” Yuna comforted him. “I told them to send the best dental surgeon in Ottawa, you can afford it.”

“Ugh,” Shane let out, and the vibrations of his own voice triggered a jolt of pain in his mouth. He groaned.

“Don’t talk, the dentist will be here soon. You don’t have other injuries, so just focus on not moving your jaw. Your head is fine.”

Your head is fine. Shane liked the sound of that, even if he was getting more and more worried about his teeth. He didn’t mind looking a little rough – most hockey players did, and he didn’t get brand deals for his smile. He rarely showed his teeth while smiling, so...

Shane’s phone was face down on the little bedside table next to him. He grabbed it and saw that Hayden had left him a message.

Hayden P

Still alive?

Shane tried not to sigh, because he was in enough pain as it was.

Hayden P

Still alive?

Yeah... I'm going into dental surgery, apparently. Head okay, but some of my teeth might be fucked.

Shit! Hope you don't end up like Jaws in The Spy Who Loved Me 🤦

Shane had no idea what this was even about. He always watched the same ten movies, usually with his parents, and whatever this reference was supposed to be was not part of the list.

“Mr Hollander?”

Shane looked up without moving his chin at all, very careful not to make the pain any worse. An incredibly good-looking man with curly dark blonde hair walked into the hospital room, sending a tornado of unnecessary feelings in his stomach. Shane knew he was certainly not straight, and his recent breakup with Rose had only made it obvious that he preferred his secret thoughts about men over the reality of a relationship with a woman. He knew that he could not indulge in his undisclosed desires if he wanted to keep his career afloat, not *publicly* at least, but he could talk about it with Rose any time he needed to let some steam out.

Maybe, one day, he would actually cross that bridge and kiss a man. Maybe. And he definitely needed to tell Rose about the handsome dentist who was going to repair his mouth.

“Good evening, Dr Rozanov,” Yuna said before Shane could emit any sound. “Thank you for making yourself available.”

Rozanov... Shane had indeed heard a Russian accent when the doctor had pronounced his name. The doctor showed him a schematic drawing of a skull neatly tucked into a folder with other medical documents.

“We will do radiography first, panoramic X-ray of the jaw, yes? This will show if your jaw is fractured or not. It is currently locked, the nurse told me.”

Shane couldn't help but try to open his mouth, just a little. The movement was enough to make his vision go white.

“Aaaand you tried,” Dr Rozanov said, matter-of-factly. “Do not try.”

“Shane, sweetie, please don't move your jaw,” Yuna begged him, pressing her thumb into the palm of his hand. The sensation grounded him a little, and the pain receded.

Shane tried to focus on the doctor's eyes, which were... extremely attractive, like the rest of him. He felt a sting of sadness at the thought that he could never ask this man out, in a totally casual way, just to drink ginger ale or something else. There was a wall around his heart, and he could barely dare to think how hot Dr Rozanov was. *Maybe I shouldn't, actually. He's my doctor, not a Grindr match.* That would be unprofessional, for sure.

“Let's bring you to the radiologist,” the doctor said. “I will come back after.”

Shane was grateful for his jaw, in a way. In a more normal situation, he would have blurted out something unfortunate. He wished he could keep looking at the beautiful dentist – and he was worried about the surgery itself, so spending time with a hot doctor sounded more exciting. He had never ended up under the knife for anything on his head, and it was extremely scary.



After coming back from the X-rays, Shane took his phone again while he waited with his mother for the results to arrive.

Rose L

OK after an accident during the game. Will get jaw surgery, I think.

Really? I'm so sorry, Shane. Are you alright?

The dentist is very... well

I see 😊 Ask for his number!

You know I could never... Anyway, he's back soon, I should delete all this

Shane deleted all the messages one by one, hiding the screen away from his mother. He could not afford to be outed if someone hacked into his phone. Just as he deleted the last one, Dr Rozanov came back. He somehow looked even better than two hours ago.

“So, Mr Hollander.”

Shane *loved* how his name sounded in his mouth. Guilt immediately crept in, ugly, needless. Yuna didn't seem to notice his inner demons as they waited for the doctor to speak.

“You have a small jaw fracture, and two cracked teeth. There will be two surgeons taking care of you, now.”

“Not you?” Shane couldn't stop himself from asking through his gritted teeth.

“Yes, me, I will be one of the surgeons. We need neck specialist and dental specialist, it is safer.”

“Neck?” Yuna asked.

“This is for safety,” he insisted, still looking at Shane. “Your head appears to be okay, but we need to confirm that your neck has no issues during the surgery.”

Shane liked that Dr Rozanov was speaking directly to him. He usually didn't mind his mother doing all the official talking around him outside of a rink, but this felt more important than usual. He would have hated feeling like a child when it came to his health – this wasn't a brand deal for shoes.

“Okay,” Shane said, and it sounded like two vowels with no consonants.

“The surgery will take three hours, maximum. Is standard.”

Shane wondered how often people injured their mouth until they couldn't open it anymore for it to be a standard procedure, but his thoughts were cut short by Dr Rozanov smiling gently. *Damn.*



When Shane opened his eyes, he was already back to his hospital bed, and alone. His head was spinning a little, and there was a delicious warmth in his chest. After a few seconds, his brain registered that this must be the remnants of anesthesia, as well as some solid painkillers. *It's great... woah.*

Shane grabbed his phone on the bedside table without thinking. A part of his hockey-infested brain wanted to know what the final score against Ottawa had been, which he had completely forgotten to ask Hayden earlier, but his mind went blank when he saw the text on his screen.

“Hey, it's sexy Doctor Rozanov 😊 Hope you woke up well. Let me know if you want to grab a drink.”

Shane's heart inflated four times its size, at least. The information going through his brain felt like they were swimming in thick soup, but he knew that his pulse was higher than it should be. He closed his eyes and tried to decide if he was excited or terrified. *Rose. Rose will know.*

He struggled through the icons on the screen and texted Rose.

Rose L

surgery ok ay, doctor sent me text? Wants to go drink wthme

What? Did he pick your number from your file? That's not legal, surely...

But you should accept! Come on, you have a crush on him, right? Live a little, Shane.

idk yeah maybe

he said hey, it's sexy doct rz v hope you wokeup well and grab a drinkk

Ok you need to rest, Shane! You're still high from the painkillers! Delete all of this and rest well baby

Shane was, all of a sudden, acutely aware that his jaw felt weird. His head was caged in a plastic or silicone cast, he couldn't tell. It made him feel tired in a way he rarely experienced. He locked his phone and fell asleep. When he woke up again, the most beautiful face was looking at him.

“Hi, Mr Hollander. Your parents will come back tonight, okay?”

“Oh... Can I speak?” Shane carefully tried. “Ouch—”

“Is acutely painful, but not for much longer,” said Dr Rozanov. “You will stay at least two days here, yes? And only soft and liquid foods for two weeks, at least.”

Shane shrugged. He was used to protein shakes, anyway. He didn't want to say that in front of Dr Rozanov in case it made him sound silly, though. *Why do I care? Nothing is going to happen.*

“Will I be fine?” he asked, remembering what his priorities were.

“The surgery went very well, do not worry, Mr Hollander. You may look round like hamster for a while, but there are no medical issues anymore now.”

“Good. Did you... Well...”

Dr Rozanov looked at him expectantly, with the body language of someone who needed to get going as soon as possible but had to stay professional. He was a busy man, after all.

“Yes, Mr Hollander?”

“The message you sent me... Yes, I say yes.”

The monitor showed that Shane’s heart rate went from 76 to 91, which was extremely embarrassing.

“A message?” Dr Rozanov repeated, puzzled.

“Yes... You sent it to my number...”

“I did not steal your number from your file, Mr Hollander. Totally illegal. You are high from painkillers, yes?”

“I– no, I mean–”

“You must be, because you think I am unprofessional. Is better if you are high, less embarrassing for you.”

“Hey, no–”

“You should rest, and stop moving your jaw too much. Is fine.”

Shane wanted to protest, but the pain was starting to be extremely uncomfortable. He watched the doctor leave the room and felt both humiliated and angry. Why was this man gaslighting him? He grabbed his phone with the intention to send a response to the doctor's text, something like “Well? Didn't you steal my number?”.

But, after scrolling for a good minute, he could not find it. *What the fuck?* The only trace of the text in question was him writing it to Rose, with a number of typos that made him blush. He had not dreamed of receiving it, so what had happened? Only he knew his phone lockscreen code, and it was certainly not his date of birth or anything that the doctor could have guessed. Nobody could have deleted that text.

Shane’s mind was now very clear, and his jaw on fire, but he didn't want to take more painkillers. He combed through his phone with desperation, as if something could appear out of thin air. He opened his Notes app to find an old tutorial he had saved about retrieving deleted content from his phone, after losing a nice team picture the previous year, and his stomach sank.

“heeeey, it's roz 🌹 🧠 sleepy. Drink ?.”

Shane wanted to cry. The note was right there, clearly saved before he had sent it back to Rose. He had written “Dr Rozanov”’s text to himself, completely high, with a rose and even *a freaking Russian nesting doll emoji* because it started with R. He had apparently looked for a Rozanov emoji twice, as if Big Tech had ever bothered inventing one. It barely made any sense, but his brain full of painkillers had invented a nice story about it. *Oh my god, I'm a fucking imbecile.*

He had to apologise, somehow.

“Mr Hollander,” said an energetic woman, suddenly entering his room. “I am Dr Vetrova. You have not met me before surgery, but I was there to monitor your neck.”

Shane nodded mentally, remembering a certain Dr Svetlana Vetrova on the file his mother had tried to make him read hours earlier. She looked at the monitor next to his bed and shook her head.

“Do you have a history of atrial fibrillation, Mr Hollander?”

“Uh... no, is it dangerous?” he managed to ask.

“It depends on the cause. Let me take your blood pressure.”

He waited in silence as she took it with a portable device, wondering if he was in trouble.

“No, it's fine,” she concluded, releasing his arm. “Are you particularly upset about being here, Mr Hollander? High stress can provoke this.”

“Um...”

She blinked, waiting for him to say something, but his jaw felt like it was glued shut. He tried pronouncing sentences by only moving his lips, which was very annoying, but she seemed to understand.

“I think I made Dr Rozanov angry.”

“Oh, really?” She seemed amused. “Did you tell him he was incompetent?”

“No, but... well, I hallucinated that he sent me a text because of the painkillers, and I confronted him about it. He said that I better be high, otherwise it was embarrassing of me to think he was unprofessional like that.”

The pain was atrocious, but he needed to tell all of this to his second doctor, automatically motioned by forces he couldn't control anymore.

“Don't worry about it,” she said. “He's snarky, but he would never be truly angry at a patient. What was the text about?”

Shane knew he must have been blushing furiously, because his heart rate increased on the monitor. *How humiliating*. He had to tell Dr Vetrova what had happened. He *had* to.

“...asking me out?” he breathed out, and he realised with horror that his eyes were wet.

“Oh! Well, I can confirm to you that Dr Rozanov would never steal your personal information to flirt with you, if it makes you feel better. This would be highly unprofessional, and you would be in your right to sue. But you are correct in thinking that it never happened, so you can stop worrying about it.”

She paused, and when she saw no relief on Shane's face, she added:

“Oh. You wanted it to be real, didn't you?”

“Uh—”

“Don't speak more, you will get sore way longer if you move your jaw too much. Listen, Mr Hollander.”

She sat on his bed next to his legs, which startled him.

“Dr Rozanov is a great surgeon, but also a normal human being. There is a limit to how much he can hide, and if he had been outraged by your words he would have snapped at you. I know him.”

Shane felt relieved.

“I will not repeat any of this to him, this is in your hands,’ she added. “Also, I am here for a completely different reason. You might spend longer than you think in this hospital, because I came to tell you that your neck will *indeed* need monitoring for at least a week.”

Shane inhaled sharply.

“Nothing serious, but we have to do a few checks every day. With me,” she added with a pointed look. “You will only see Dr Rozanov from time to time.”

“Okay.”

“Your parents are coming, by the way,” she said, standing from the bed. “Whatever they try to pester you with, try not to move your mouth. We might free you from the cast tomorrow, if the X-ray looks good.”

Shane closed his eyes, ready to pretend to sleep to avoid his parents’ questions, but Dr Vetrova had something more to say that made him blink.

“Dr Rozanov will always look uninterested in you, because he is focused on his mission, and his mission is to save patients. But there is something I can tell you... While you will never get any attention from him in this hospital, nothing forbids you from meeting him in the future, where you will not be his patient anymore. You are allowed to have a drink with him or become his friend. He's not going to jail for walking into old patients and being polite with them.”

Shane didn't like how she seemed to say that he would absolutely never care about him romantically, but her speech let the most dangerous feeling bloom into his chest: hope.



After his parents visited him – and he pretended quite successfully to need a lot more sleep than he actually did –, Shane contacted Rose again.

Rose L

Will spend at least a week in the hospital for monitoring. Bad news though, I completely hallucinated the text from the doctor and wrote it to myself on the Notes app.

What!! Omg Shane, that's so awkward... Did you tell him?

Thankfully not too clearly, I told him he sent me a text and he said no, that he would never do that. The second doctor confirmed he wasn't like this, you know...

Gay?

No, unprofessional!! Wtf Rose

Well, we want him to be gay, bi, pan, right? At least homoromantic? Would be the bare minimum to date you, I think.

I'm never dating him, I would need to find him outside the hospital and that sounds impossible without stalking him. Which I won't do.

And don't do it either.

You completely butchered his name, and I am too lazy to investigate. Rest well, take your recovery seriously, and we'll talk about this handsome doctor again if he really saved your teeth!

Shane scoffed. Indeed, maybe his jaw was actually in a catastrophic state, and he had no business crushing on this man. He looked at the time on his phone and sighed. The whole evening had been atrociously long, and his parents had visited him in the middle of the night to be there for him after the surgery. Maybe he had been harsh with them, but he felt genuinely exhausted.



At the crack of dawn, Dr Rozanov was back. *Shit, I thought it would only be Dr Vetrova!* He was acutely aware how disheveled the bed looked.

“Mr Hollander,” said the doctor, and once again Shane couldn’t get enough of the way he pronounced the Rs. “Let’s look at your jaw, yes? No pain?”

“Lots of pain,” Shane said flatly. He had spent the rest of the night tossing and turning, but too proud to call for painkillers. Maybe that had been an absurd thing to do, considering.

“Let’s look at that.”

Dr Rozanov slowly removed the cast from under his chin, and Shane believed for a hot second that his lower jaw might just drop on the bedsheets. *Stop panicking, Hollander. For fuck’s sake.*

“Tell me if there is pain, yes?”

“Okay.”

Shane closed his eyes, the only safe way to avoid staring at the doctor’s beautiful eyes. Blue? Hazel? He couldn’t remember and was spiralling.

“No stress,” Dr Rozanov said, after the monitor betrayed his heart rate.

Shane let him touch his chin with the tips of his fingers, and every single part was painful.

“Everything hurts,” he admitted. He felt shameful, as if he was somehow guilty for telling this wonderful man that his bones had not perfectly healed in half a day.

“Is normal. I will make the nurse give you painkillers, you should feel better soon. You need to be comfortable before you eat something, you will need straw inside your mouth.”

“Can I avoid taking painkillers, though?”

He was so scared of saying something stupid while high...

“Pain does not help. I know athletes are like this, I am also like this a little, but you need painkillers. Just a little, okay? Low dose.”

Shane sighed and nodded as Dr Rozanov put the cast back under his chin. He was so delicate... thoughtful, even. *Well, professional.* This was normal. He was doing his job.

“You’re an athlete?” Shane asked, unable to stop himself.

“I work out a lot,” the doctor simply replied.

Shane dared to look at his face, which made his heart skip a beat – metaphorically, not visible on the monitor – and let his eyes wander downwards. Dr Ilya Rozanov seemed to be fit as *fuck*. Beautiful. Perfect. A Greek statue, actually. When he looked up again, the doctor seemed amused, but his smile disappeared immediately.

“Take the painkillers, and try to rest. There will be some movement exercises later with Dr Vetrova.”

“Thank you.”

“For?”

“Well, for saving my teeth?”

Dr Rozanov shrugged.

“Is my job.”

“Yeah, but... Our faces are important.”

“For ads on television?”

“For– no, for life in general! For eating!”

Shane was embarrassed by the whole conversation, but equally as surprised that the doctor seemed to know him.

“Have you seen my ads?”

“No, your mother told me when she called me for help.”

“Oh. Well, don’t watch them, it’s fine.”

Dr Rozanov raised his eyebrows, but did not comment on that.

“Call if you need anything. The nurse, I mean. Yes?”

“Fine.”

He left, and Shane wanted to disappear into the mattress.

Rose L

I feel really dumb

What happened? Did you talk to him?

I didn’t say anything suspicious, it’s just that... I feel like I constantly say something stupid when he talks to me, and he must think I’m not the brightest guy ever

Awww... You need to get some confidence, baby! It’s not your job to be at your best, you’re a patient today. Enjoy being taken care of, and you’ll think about this man after the whole ordeal. Okay?

Yeah, I guess... Thank you, Rose

Here for you, sweetie, always.

Shane smiled, which hurt him greatly. He loved his friendship with Rose. She was probably the best thing that had happened in his life in recent years, even if it had been at the cost of an awfully stressful relationship with her.



On the second day, after Hayden and JJ visited him and had to be threatened to put their phones away – no, pictures of Shane in his cast would *not* be funny to post on Instagram –, Shane didn't see Dr Rozanov at all.

“He's tasked me to remove your cast for a few hours and see how you feel,” said Dr Vetrova as she got to work.

“Is he okay?”

Shane realised a bit too late how catastrophic his question was.

“Well, he is performing surgery in another hospital on Tuesdays, nothing worse than that. Don't worry about Dr Rozanov, Mr Hollander. He works hard, that's all.”

Shane tried not to smile, but failed. He had not heard or seen anything that made him dislike this man so far. *That's dangerous. I shouldn't. People don't even know I like men. Oh my god, I'm going to out myself by accident if I take more painkillers.*

“Are you going to experience anxiety every time I come to see you?” Dr Vetrova pointed out. “I am starting to believe that it's my fault, you know.”

“Very sorry–”

“Don't apologise, I was simply joking. Are you in pain? Move your neck like this.”

Shane carefully tried to imitate what the doctor was showing to him, and did not feel anything strange.

“No, I only feel pain in my teeth and jaw. And the occasional headache.”

“That is to be expected, yes. How many painkillers have you taken today?”

“Uh... zero?”

“I can’t say that I like hearing this. Well, I will leave you without the cast for a few hours, and I will come back to you later. A nurse can bring you books from the hospital library, if you spend all your time stressing about Dr Rozanov. Okay?”

Shane blushed and looked away. How obvious was he? He was putting himself in great danger for a random crush. Had he never seen a handsome man before? Why did it feel more important? To be fair, he felt very different about it, for some reason. It was as if he had found the missing piece of a puzzle after hours of looking for it under the family couch. He felt exhilarated to be near him, and he couldn’t wait to see him again. To hear his voice.

Which happened on the same day, surprisingly. But he got scolded, which wasn’t very exhilarating.

The nurse was holding the phone near his ear.

“Mr Hollander,” said the voice of Dr Rozanov, sounding quite pissed off but polite. *“I was told that you still refuse painkillers. Even low dose. Do you not trust me? I would never make you take too many of them, you can be assured of this.”*

“I don’t know, it’s just– Can I be honest with you?”

He looked with pleading eyes at the nurse, who left the phone with him and stepped away from the room.

“I was very impolite with you after the surgery, and that was because of the painkillers. I am worried about becoming disrespectful again if I take them.”

There. The truth, plain and simple.

“I understand. You know, it is my job to make sure that patients are okay. The rest is not important. You should focus on your recovery, not my comfort. Do you understand?”

“Yeah... Sorry for being anxious about stupid stuff, I just hate being mean to people accidentally. You are not unprofessional. Like, at all.”

“Good to hear. Now, you take the pills, or I will have to come back to hospital to yell at you.”

Shane wanted him to come to the hospital *so badly*. But maybe not to get yelled at.

“And do not steal my number from the nurse’s phone.”

It took a few seconds for Shane to register that this had to be a joke, but he wasn’t fully sure.

“I wouldn’t do that!”

“Is joke.”

“Oh.”

“I saw your ad on television this morning, by the way.”

“Really?” Shane asked, failing miserably at sounding self-confident.

“You don’t smile with your teeth. Not sure why you needed surgery.”

“Very funny. Will you be here tomorrow?”

What the fuck! We’re not dating! What the fuck are you saying—

“Yes, I will be back. Have a nice rest of the day.”

“You too! I mean— See you tomorrow.”

Shane scrambled to hang up, his heart racing in his chest. He couldn’t believe how much impoliteness he was piling on top of his previous impoliteness. It was becoming a mountain of impoliteness, actually. *How fucking embarrassing*. Only one person could help him brainstorm this whole phone conversation.

Rose L

I'm such a clown, he must hate me

He seems to like banter, actually. This is a good thing, he must find it amusing. Say whatever you want to say! And take your meds.

Shane took the painkillers, and finally slept for more than three hours.



Shane woke up with the cast on his chin. *Dr Vetrova...*? He didn't know how he slept through a whole medical procedure without anesthesia, but he wasn't mad about it. Dr Svetlana Vetrova had a way to understand what he tried to hide that made him scared of interacting with her. Was she good friends with Dr Rozanov? She had said she knew him well, which could mean anything, really.

He spent the rest of the day looking at the wall in front of him, deadly bored. Every time he peeked at his phone, he remembered the ridiculous message he had written to himself, and he saw all the notifications from journalists wanting to know if he was badly injured or not. He didn't want to deal with this, it was Yuna's job.

Something he had not done yet was googling Ilya Rozanov, and he felt like this was a line he shouldn't cross. He was already going way too far by talking casually to the doctor, and finding information about him online would only result in an absolute nightmarish hospital stay. Shane closed his eyes and tried not to think about his two-day crush, to no avail. When he finally gave up on trying to sleep, he opened his eyes again and saw that Dr Vetrova had silently entered the room. He jumped in fear.

"Any pain?" she asked.

"You scared me! Why are you so silent?"

"Why would I be loud, Mr Hollander? Show me the neck movements again, please."

Shane obeyed. It did hurt, this time.

“Is this normal?” he asked, worried for the first time in forever about his health.

“We are only two days after a quite serious injury, Mr Hollander. I will add some neck physiotherapy to your daily checks and treatments, and it should help a lot.”

“Thank you.”

“And what about your teeth?”

“They still hurt, but a lot less.”

“See? Painkillers work, and you’re not saying anything unfortunate to anyone.”

Shane looked away, embarrassed.

“Did he tell you?”

“*You* told me that you were rude to Dr Rozanov two days ago. Should he have told me anything else?”

“N–no, nothing.”

Dr Vetrova rolled her eyes – Shane had not expected to ever see a doctor do this in front of a patient.

“He has that effect on a lot of people,” she said with a little smile.

I’m not special. I should give up, right? She didn’t say more.

Chapter 2: #2

Chapter Notes

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

On his third day at the hospital, Shane's jaw felt like it was fused shut to the rest of his skull at all times. He was drinking his protein shakes through his front teeth, embarrassed in front of his parents as some drops fell down his chin.

"It will get better, it's still very early," Yuna told him.

She sounded sorry, even though it was nobody's fault. Her mother was on a rampage about the press and what every single news outlet had published about his medical issues, but Shane was not really listening. He produced short noises from the back of his throat, careful not to move his neck before the physiotherapist would arrive, and Yuna continued speaking. His thoughts wandered to a certain doctor, even if he really didn't want them to.

"Is everybody treating you well, sweetheart?" his mother suddenly asked him, and he tried not to look like he was waking up from a dream.

"Uh-uh."

"Send me a text if there is anything wrong going on, okay? You might spend over a week here, so there is no reason to accept bad behaviour. We have enough money to move you somewhere else."

Shane blinked a few times, unable to do much more. After his parents left, he grabbed his phone.

Rose L

Nothing great to update, my jaw is locked... Even if the doctor comes, I won't be able to speak to him at all

Sorry about that! It's okay, Shane, you don't need to have conversations with him to seduce him 😊

I have a cast all around my head and my chin is twice its normal size!

Try to wink to him, you're very cute when you do that

Shane chuckled internally. He liked it when Rose complimented him, because she never lied. Maybe he needed some reassurance that he could indeed look nice to Dr Rozanov – not that this was more than a painkiller-related crush, of course. If he conveniently forgot that he had blushed seeing him *before* surgery.

“Mr Hollander,” he heard the doctor arrive, speaking with a tone that almost sounded like he was making fun of him. “I have been told that you can't move your jaw at all, today, yes?”

Shane made an awkward hand gesture, which he immediately hated. He never talked with his hands. Dr Rozanov smiled, and it was slightly different from his usual almost-smirks. He looked kind rather than intimidating, for once.

“Is okay, let's look at this.”

Dr Rozanov removed his cast and felt around his jaw with his fingers, while Shane tried not to look at his face. He looked absolutely *deadly* handsome, and Shane couldn't blame the butterflies in his stomach on meds. The doctor's fingers felt like hot coals against his skin, but it could also be because it was painful as hell.

“So,” Dr Rozanov said, taking a step back. “This is called trismus, is when your jaw is locked after surgery or trauma. It will last a week, at most, so you will be safe here. The nurses will give you warm compresses for the face, yes, and physiotherapy will continue as well. Do not worry.”

Shane suddenly felt overwhelmed. He had tried to hold it together in front of his parents, but the sensation of his mouth being impossible to open was absolutely terrifying. His breath became shallow, and he knew exactly what was happening. *Shit*. He couldn't stop it, and a whining sound came out of his nose.

“Oh,” Dr Rozanov breathed out. “This is panic attack, Mr Hollander. You will be okay.”

Shane wasn't sure it was true. He felt like he was dying, and his jaw, *his jaw...*

"Sit with your back against the wall, and hold your pillow," the doctor instructed.

"Uh...", Shane sobbed, obeying with shaky hands.

"Close your eyes and breathe while I count."

Shane knew the technique of box breathing, but it felt a lot more efficient with Dr Rozanov's voice. When he finally calmed down, he felt dizzy but much better.

"Type on your phone to tell me what you feel, yes?"

Shane grabbed his phone, opened the Notes app, and tried not to gag when he saw the note from two days ago. He opened a blank one and typed:

"Not being able to open my mouth stressed me out, all of a sudden. I am sorry."

"No need to be sorry," Dr Rozanov shook his head. "Stress is normal. I know, it happened to me."

"Did you also lock your jaw?" Shane typed furiously.

"Yes, yes, I had accident with a gym machine, two years ago. I had just arrived in this country, and it was very difficult to communicate with the staff."

"Are you from Russia?"

Shane genuinely did not know, since he hadn't googled him. Maybe Rozanov was a Bulgarian name, for all he knew.

"Yes," he replied, looking deep in thought for a few seconds. "Russia."

"Do you like living in Canada?"

“Mr Hollander, you are supposed to be the one having the panic attack, yes?” Dr Rozanov said, amused. “This is not *my* therapy, today.”

Shane became so red that he had to close his eyes so they wouldn't sting and tear up. He had crossed a line, clearly, even if the doctor was laughing it off. *What the fuck did I think I was doing? What an idiot...*

“Sorry,” he typed on his phone, showing it to Dr Rozanov while staring down at his legs under the blanket.

“No, please do not worry, it's actually... well, it's actually nice to have conversation, for once. I like Canada, it is more free than Russia.”

“*Free how?*”

“Free in every way. No Russian in your team has ever talked to you about the country? You have Kolya Andropov.”

Shane didn't know what to type. He only stared at Dr Rozanov, dumbfounded. How the fuck did he know about his Russian teammate?

“Sorry,” the doctor apologised, and his face was unreadable. “I saw news about your injury, so I clicked. I saw interview with Andropov.”

“It's—”

Shane yelled through his gritted teeth. The surprise had made him forget momentarily that he could not speak out loud, and the pain was blinding. Dr Rozanov's fingers immediately flew to his chin, where they massaged his jaw expertly. It was painful, but Shane was dazed by the contact. Being taken care of by Ilya Rozanov was exhilarating.

“You tried to open your mouth,” he sighed. “Do not do that again.”

“Uh-uh,” Shane managed to emit.

“This is private clinic, Mr Hollander. You are not paying me to hurt you, okay?”

“Uh.”

“Try to relax.”

As Dr Rozanov continued massaging his jaw, Shane lost himself in the contemplation of the doctor’s blue eyes, unable to look away. If they had not been in public, if the doctor was not his doctor, and if he was interested in him... he would have kissed him, with no hesitation. But this was in the realm of fantasy. Star hockey player Shane Hollander did not kiss men.

“I watched your game, by the way,” Dr Rozanov suddenly said. “The one of your injury.”

“Uh?”

“I wanted to see what had happened, for better care, yes?”

“Uh-uh.”

“I did not have to watch for a long time, you had an accident very fast.”

Shane frowned, bewildered. Was Dr Rozanov making fun of him? *No way.*

“You should be more careful, your team lost when you left. You skated into the boards like my little niece, and she is child.”

Shane didn't know what to respond to that. Why was his doctor remembering these kinds of details? Dr Rozanov looked up at the monitor and smiled.

“Good, your heart rate is back to normal. Being angry helps a lot during panic attack.”

Shane grabbed his phone and tried to type something, but the doctor was still holding his chin.

“Sorry if my methods are, well... a little bit special. I want results, fast results. I do not really watch hockey.”

Shane's fingers stopped trying to move on his phone screen. He was *disappointed* that the doctor didn't actually care about his hockey game, or how important he was to his team. He would have preferred getting *insulted* by a medical professional, apparently. *What the fuck is happening to me?* He needed this man to notice him, he wanted to exist somewhere in his mind, and he had taken that opportunity away from him. It made no sense, but he knew it was true.

Out of his mind, he typed "*You're an asshole*" and showed it to the doctor. Dr Rozanov's expression remained unreadable for a few seconds, then he smiled – sadly, as if the gesture hurt him.

"Yes, I'm an asshole, probably."

He stepped back without looking at Shane and turned around.

"I will come back for evening check, later. You will ask the nurse to put your cast back if it hurts, yes? Goodbye."

Shane was left alone in the room. He pressed his fingers to his eyes and sobbed, unable to stop himself. He had no idea how to feel, and if he could even define what he was currently going through.

Rose L

I fucked up so bad SO BAD I can't even believe it, I insulted him, he provoked me to stop my panic attack and I called him an asshole

What the fuck am I feeling this is NOT NORMAL Rose I think I'm going fucking crazy

He is NOBODY in my life and I am even less in his, this crush is out of control, I don't understand what I am doing Rose I am losing my fucking mind

My jaw will be closed forever and I will never be able to apologise to him I'm an absolute piece of shit

His name is Ilya Rozanov please call him please tell him I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm the asshole it's me I'm so fucking sorry please call him tell him all of this Rose I'm so sorry to ask

you this

What is the name of your hospital?

Shane replied and burst into tears. He hid his face under the bedsheets, crying until his chest hurt. The tension in his jaw was unbearable, and thinking about Dr Rozanov's fingers didn't help whatsoever. To make his day even more difficult, someone knocked at the door. He hoped to God this wouldn't be his mom.

"Mr Hollander."

Dr Vetrova. Shane didn't move. He knew he was in good hands and could show how horrible he felt. Svetlana Vetrova was without a doubt the person he feared seeing the least in Canada right now. She was honest, gentle and realistic. He could look a little vulnerable, it was acceptable to his stressed-out brain.

"I am once again asking you not to panic about what Dr Rozanov can think of you."

Shane peeked above the bedsheets and closed his eyes. He felt so tired.

"Dr Rozanov apologises again for provoking you on purpose, and you have nothing to worry about. Alright? Show me your neck movements, it's time."

Shane sat up and moved his neck as instructed, without much pain. His eyes were red, and his cheeks both pale and flushed, depending on the area. He felt absolutely miserable. Dr Vetrova sighed and took his hand, which surprised him.

"Do you want me to refer you to another dental surgeon? You need a professional who will inspect your daily X-ray results and your teeth when you can finally open your mouth. It's okay if you're not comfortable with Dr Rozanov, he will not mind. We are professionals, we understand."

Shane didn't know how to respond to that. Well, he *knew*, he wanted to say no with no hesitation. But why did he? Wouldn't it be more simple to get another doctor, one he wouldn't want to know better? He wasn't supposed to know his doctor better. God, he wanted to know *so much* about Dr Rozanov, it was scary. It was beyond having a crush. His delusional mind was telling him that they could have a connection, in some way he couldn't comprehend yet.

But he shook his head to say no.

“You want to keep Dr Rozanov, then?” she confirmed. “A good choice, he is very competent. His methods might be unconventional, but he said you responded very well.”

“I called him an asshole,” Shane typed on his phone.

“And he liked that you reacted strongly, it meant that the panic attack stopped.”

“He left immediately and seemed angry.”

“He was not angry, simply worried that you had had enough. Or that you were scared of him, after he might have sounded like he was stalking you. He was clearly not looking up information about you, so hopefully you understand that this was an act.”

“I was surprised, but not scared.”

I want to know everything about him. I want to know why he left Russia. I want to know if he is married. I want to know why I feel so vulnerable near him.

“I have to admit that I had never seen a patient getting into so many misunderstandings with Dr Rozanov,” Dr Vetrova said, amused. “He usually tones down his antics pretty fast, and nobody calls him an asshole.”

Before Shane could type anything, she added:

“He found it very funny, by the way. Do not feel bad, please. He's kind of an asshole.”

“Do you know him well?”

“Oh yes, he's a childhood friend, actually! I moved to the US, and then Canada, way before he did. And, since I can already see your head think way too much about this – no, we are not

dating.”

Shane blushed. She had caught him before he had even formed a constructive thought in his mind.

“Stop putting yourself in the worst mental states imaginable, Mr Hollander. Please focus on your teeth, okay? If talking to Dr Rozanov puts you in such despair, ignore his banter and he will stop immediately.”

Shane looked down. It was embarrassing to be read so clearly by Dr Vetrova, but he loved her immensely for it.

“He's more intimidated by you than the contrary, trust me.”

Shane looked puzzled, and Dr Vetrova continued:

“It's not easy to become a doctor in another country, where people have misconceptions about where you come from and possibly even your skills as a professional. He does not want to sound incompetent or aggressive with you, Mr Hollander, and you are a very famous patient as well. You could destroy his career with one interview.”

Shane was speechless, now also through his phone. He had never thought about that, actually – Dr Rozanov fearing his reactions, and the fact that he was more powerful than he thought he was as a patient. It made him even more uncomfortable. How could he think of having a crush on this man, in such a situation? This was unfair for both of them. He had to stop it, somehow.

He would do better. He would stop thinking about his eyes, his curls, his lips.



Hours later, after another X-ray and the physiotherapist being unable to move his jaw, Rose Landry entered the room. Shane raised his eyebrows and pointed at his phone.

“You're not panicking anymore, that's good,” she said, holding his elbows to let him type. “I jumped on the first plane I could find, baby. Are you feeling better?”

“You shouldn't have come! Where were you?”

“Of course I had to be there, you scared me! And you needed a friend, clearly. I was shooting in Toronto, so it's not a big deal at all. That movie is particularly catastrophic, they can wait for me to come back tomorrow. Most of it is my stunt double anyway, so I won't be missed. Tell me what happened.”

Shane typed everything that had unfolded after Dr Rozanov had left. Rose seemed concerned, and her thumbs traced little circles on Shane's arms. It felt amazing to be comforted, after so many days of high stress and tears.

“I don't like how weird your relationship to your doctor is, Shane, honestly. You seem to think about him more than you focus on your mouth, at his point.”

“It scares me too, but I feel something... It's very strange. Do you think I'm stupid? Delusional?”

“Oh, Shane, I would never think that. Do you want to know my opinion, though?”

Shane nodded.

“You should simply wait for the end of your hospitalisation. Send him a card, maybe a box of chocolate. Tell him that this was wild but that he was very cool and competent and that if he wants to keep contact with you, here's your number. And then, you just wait. It won't even look like you're hitting on him, which is great in case the gift leaks in the press. You will finally be in an equal situation, you know? That's what you should be doing. In the meantime, try to think about your recovery as much as possible.”

Shane closed his eyes and smiled as best as he could. Rose knew how to save him from any situation. In another world, she would have been the perfect girlfriend.

“Ank’ you,” he pronounced from the back of his throat, and Rose kissed his forehead.

“It's okay, I love brainstorming, especially potential relationships. Also, *no*, I have not googled your doctor's name and I don't know anything about him, so this is based on the vague possibility that he's not straight. You will have to figure that part out yourself, sweetheart.”

Shane sighed. Yeah, maybe Ilya Rozanov had a wife at home, maybe even in *Russia*.

“When is your next exam happening?”

“Now.”

Shane’s eyes flew open. Dr Rozanov was back, and he looked mildly surprised to see someone he had never met before in the room.

“I have results from your X-ray. Could your visitor please leave?”

Rose made a movement to leave, but Shane grabbed her wrist swiftly. She looked at him with surprise, and he shook his head. This was enough for Dr Rozanov to understand what he wanted, thankfully.

“Okay. So, your teeth and lower jaw are healing nicely, but we have no information yet about the trismus. At the end of the week, we will try to open your jaw gradually, if nothing has changed, yes?”

Shane nodded, his eyes fixated on the X-ray results, even if he was not really reading anything. He couldn't look at Dr Rozanov, still embarrassed by their previous interaction. *Hold the line. Don't react. Don't imagine things. One more week.*

“Good. Do you need the cast?”

Shane shook his head. His heart felt like someone was pinching it.

“Alright. Is everything okay?”

Shane realised that he sounded worried, and he finally looked at him. Dr Rozanov was visibly concerned. Shane had no idea how to handle this. He was not okay, there was no denying it, but he had to stay strong and unwavering. *Don't react.*

“He's tired,” Rose intervened. “He told me he was very tired, but he's okay. His jaw is still locked, his neck is fine, and that's the gist.”

“Are you his wife?”

Rose let out a nervous laugh, and Shane grimaced. It was strange to meet someone who had no idea who Rose Landry was, and that they were separated.

“No, I am his friend,” she said.

If Shane had been delusional, which was obviously not the case, he would have sworn that Dr Rozanov looked a bit less tight after hearing that piece of information.

“Good. I will come back tomorrow, then. Please call the nurse if you need anything in the meantime. Goodbye.”

He left so fast that he might as well have been running.

“*Good,*” Rose repeated. “It's good that I'm not your wife, apparently.”

“*Stop, he doesn't think that way...*”

“Maybe he does. If you weren't constantly looking at that damn piece of paper, you would have noticed how intensely he always looks at you. I'm not saying he's interested, but...”

“*He must be like this with every patient.*”

“Maybe, or maybe not. Anyway, you need to rest, I was not joking about that. I need to go back to Toronto in two hours.”

“You travelled just for a few minutes here!”

“And I don't regret it at all,” she assured him, kissing his hand. “Please update me more often, okay? I don't want you to feel abandoned.”

Shane held her hand until he fell asleep, exhausted both physically and emotionally.



The next morning, Shane woke up so early that he felt embarrassed calling a nurse for a simple craving. He got up from his bed, something he had only done to go to the bathroom every day so far, and walked into the silent corridor. He wanted to find a vending machine to buy ginger ale, which he would try to aspirate through his teeth and hope he wouldn't get cavities later. As he clicked on the buttons for a very tempting can of Canada Dry, he saw in the reflection of the machine that someone was behind him.

Dr Rozanov was here, looking brutally exhausted. His eyes were hollow, and his expression so closed off that Shane couldn't help but shiver a little.

“Mr Hollander,” he simply said, and typed the code for the drink he wanted. Coke.

Shane had left his locked phone under his pillow, since his hospital pyjamas didn't have pockets. He felt lost, unable to tell Dr Rozanov the million things he wanted to say. Did he like Coke? Wouldn't coffee help more? Had he spent the night performing surgeries? Was he going to sleep before seeing him for his next exam? Was he okay? *Was he okay?*

“You like ginger ale, yes?”

Shane nodded. The cold drink was incredibly tempting in his hand, but he didn't want to spill it on the floor by trying to shove it between his teeth while standing up.

“Is not good for teeth, you know? Sugar.”

Shane pointed at the Coke in his hand and raised his eyebrows. Dr Rozanov nodded and shrugged with a tiny smile.

“The television always shows nine dentists who say something, and one who is wrong. I am number ten.”

Shane chuckled and looked at his feet sheepishly.

“Is early, you should go back to your room. I will be here soon, anyway.”

Shane tried to mime going to sleep and pointed at him.

“No, I will not have time to sleep, but I am used to it.”

Shane was glad he didn't have his phone, or he would have typed something unhinged, such as “*You can borrow my bed, just take a nap, nobody will notice, I will hide you under the bedsheets.*” He was oddly aware of Dr Rozanov’s body near him, his broad shoulders, the way he stood tall despite the exhaustion. He was beautiful.

Shane made an apologetic gesture and walked back to his room, unable to think straight anymore. If he didn't stop himself, he would touch his arm, or something equally unacceptable.

When Dr Rozanov came to his room, Shane was halfway through the can of ginger ale, struggling to sip it without making a mess.

“You like ginger ale? It is a boring drink.”

Shane frowned. The banter about his performance on ice was barely worse than trying to insult his favourite drink.

“I drink it to avoid alcohol. It's better for an athlete.”

“It's better for everybody, actually. But I still think I drink too much Coke, it's less bad than alcohol but not that great either.”

Shane's heart fluttered at these little pieces of information about Dr Rozanov.

“Why do you like it?”

“I don't know, it reminds me of my childhood, probably. Why are you asking me about Coke?”

“I wanted to know something boring about you, maybe. So we're even.”

Dr Rozanov smiled, but he looked so tired that the smile didn't reach his eyes.

“I agree. Show me your teeth.”

Shane was taken aback, but he pushed his lips away from his teeth to show them to the doctor. Dr Rozanov leaned closer and inspected them, humming after each observation.

“I see. Your cracked teeth don't look cracked anymore, this is good. But I need to see more when the trismus goes away, yes? We will wait and see. Can I massage your jaw as well?”

Shane nodded and braced himself for the exhilarating feeling of Dr Rozanov's fingers against his skin, once again. He was attracted to him like a magnet. *Think about your accident. Think about not being healed before playoffs. Think about the saddest events of your life.* But it was impossible to fight the desire gnawing at his guts, the way he wanted to grab Dr Rozanov's face and crush their lips together, ignoring the pain, ignoring that this was probably not

acceptable in any shape or form. Shane felt dizzy from holding his breath, and he knew that he was hard – and that he was not even under the covers. This was a nightmare.

He had to put a stop to this.

“No,” he managed to say, pushing Dr Rozanov’s hands away from his face.

“Are you in pain, Mr Hollander? Oh.”

Shane knew that he had fucked up. He had brought attention to the rest of his face, which was red as a cherry. Dr Rozanov quickly looked down, up again, and took a step back.

“This was enough massage, anyway. You even said a word! Congratulations.”

“ot ‘unny.”

“Very funny, on the contrary. You will not be Mr Locked Jaw much longer, is good.”

Shane wasn't sure he liked the nickname, but he was glad that Dr Rozanov had not brought up what he had just seen through his clothes. He was, after all, a professional. Or, at least, as far as his manifest exhaustion was letting him be.

“Are you sure you need your mouth to open again? I saw on television this morning that you are not very... sociable.”

Shane typed an answer on his phone, even if he knew he should drop the subject and calm himself down. But there was a problem: it was *extremely entertaining*.

“I need my jaw back to call you an asshole out loud. Why are you watching me on TV constantly, Rozanov?”

“Ooooooh, Rozanov, that's how we're talking now. Well, *Hollander*, I watch the news in the morning, and journalists say you are boring.”

“You didn't watch anything this morning, you were here all night. Do you just like googling me? I can sign you an autograph, you know. Just ask.”

“Alright, Mr Dostoyevsky, you are writing too much. I will get your autograph when you sign the bill at the end, do not worry.”

Shane was both appalled and impressed.

“Fucked up thing to say to a patient, Rozanov.”

“Fucked up thing to say to a doctor, Hollander.”

They stared at each other in silence for what felt like an eternity, until a nurse entered the room with a breakfast tray – the same protein shake he was going to try to ingest. Dr Rozanov actually *winked* at him and said:

“Well, I will see you later, Mr Hollander.”

“Nap,” Shane managed to say before his jaw hurt.

“Yes, probably.”

His next facial expression mixed gratitude and sadness. Shane's stomach was in knots.

Chapter End Notes

LISTEN UP the rumours are true!! I am posting this at a totally normal time of the day and not at 3am!

Chapter 3: #3

Chapter Notes

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

Shane was stretching on the hospital floor. His mouth was still a mess of pain and bizarre tension at each joint, but he needed his legs and abs to do something, *anything*. Staying in bed was hurting his back, and he ached for a good workout. The best he could manage without getting scolded was core strength exercises on the ground between exams and visits.

“You cannot even rest for four days, yes?”

Shane scrambled to get up from the floor, startled by Dr Rozanov's voice, but he felt dizzy and swayed on his feet. The doctor caught him by the shoulders and helped him sit on the hospital bed. Shane tried very hard not to think about how close they had been for a second, and even worse – that he had been hard the last time they had seen each other. How fucking embarrassing.

“You will not become like yogurt if you stop working out. Please wait for the physiotherapist appointment tomorrow to ask what is safe, okay?”

“Yeah.”

Shane's jaw was still locked, but he could open it enough to pronounce consonants in a decent way.

“Did you sleep?” he asked the doctor, who looked tired but less like he had just spent two days in the trenches.

“A little bit. You are my only appointment tonight, I will go home soon.”

“Where do you live?”

Oh my god, who cares? Why did I ask? Shane tried not to look spooked by his own question.

“Ottawa,” he simply said, and Shane was grateful that he didn't go into details – because he absolutely shouldn't.

“I was born here, but I live in Montréal now.”

“You have houses everywhere, yes? But you prefer Montréal for work.”

“Well, I am lucky to have an NHL salary, that's true. I thought surgeons had a good salary as well, do you not invest in real estate?”

Dr Rozanov looked at him with a blank stare.

“That sounds... very *boring*.”

“Real estate is awesome, you can choose every detail of your future building and–”

“Should have been an architect, then. I chose medicine. You chose sports.”

Shane pursed his lips, feeling the weight of where *sports* had led him today.

“Sometimes, I feel like sports have chosen me,” he muttered.

“You don't like playing hockey?”

“I *love* hockey. It's my entire life. I just can't remember a time when it was a decision from me to do this, it's like... Hockey was always in me, if it makes sense?”

Dr Rozanov pretended to look at papers in the folder he was holding, but it looked so diabolically fake that Shane had to look at his knees instead.

“So,” the doctor went on, “you have no time for anything else. Your health, your life.”

“I– I take care of my health!” Shane protested. “I could just leave this clinic today and go back to practice, but I have decided to be serious about my recovery. For once.”

“Good. You should also, maybe, well... is not my place to say.”

Shane honestly didn't know what he wanted to talk about.

“No, it's okay, go on.”

“Well... The receptionist told me that the woman who visited you was famous actress, Rose Landry, yes?”

“... Yeah?”

“She is your girlfriend, yes? I am only saying that you could also focus on... living with your girlfriend? Being happy couple.”

Shane was flabbergasted. He really thought that everybody knew who Rose was, and that they had broken up pretty publicly a few months ago.

“Rose... is my ex.”

“Your *ex*? I am very sorry. I should not have—”

“It's okay, we're close friends now. She's a great person. And you?”

Shane didn't even hate himself for that question. It was fair, actually, since Dr Rozanov had asked first.

“I don't have someone.”

“Okay,” Shane breathed out. It was very difficult not to put any emotion in the word. “You must be very busy, anyway.”

“You're also busy.”

“Yeah. Well, I'm single, so you could say it's coherent.”

Dr Rozanov looked at him in silence for a while. It felt uncomfortable, since they didn't have much more to discuss. Or, rather, they had *way too much* to discuss, but they should absolutely not indulge in whatever was going on. Shane's skin felt electric. He had to fill the silence as soon as possible.

“So, uh... Did you just come to tell me that stretching my back is bad?” he asked, trying to make it sound funny, but with a voice so shaky that it was obvious how awkward he felt.

“No, actually,” Dr Rozanov said, jolting as if he had been hit. “I wanted to show you this document with possible things that could happen.”

Shane raised his eyebrows while he looked at the simple sheet of paper telling him that he could get infections, joint pain in his jaw, and sensitivity to hot, cold and sugar. *Okay. He could have given this to the nurse, no? Why is he taking time away from his nap to show me this?*

“Thank you,” Shane said. He had no idea what else to say. “Anything I can do to avoid this?”

“No, it is bad luck, nothing you can do. Call us if there is anything unusual, that is all.”

“Okay?”

Dr Rozanov frowned. He clearly didn’t like his tone. *I might have been a little too sarcastic...*

“Is there a problem?”

“No, no, no problem at all. I’ll read that in detail after dinner, it’s fine.”

There was no way in hell Shane could tell him what he had on his mind. *Did you come to my room to ask me if I’m dating Rose? Do you have a crush on me? What’s going on? Are you jealous? Do you feel whatever I am feeling? Would you get replaced by another doctor if I kissed you, right now?*

“Okay,” Dr Rozanov said. “Well, have good dinner.”

“Yeah. Maybe I can drink my protein shake more easily now, but I still can’t chew anything.”

“Your jaw must be sore, after all this talking.”

“True.” *Massage it. Please massage it. Please, you have to massage it, or I’ll die.*

“I will let you rest. See you tomorrow, yes?”

It took a supernatural amount of strength from Shane not to ask him to stay. *Contact Rose. Don't do this, Shane. Don't fuck this up.* Dr Rozanov looked at him, standing next to the door, and Shane's stomach twisted painfully. He couldn't believe how much he wanted this man, viscerally. Then, the doctor left.

Rose L

Am I crazy for wanting to risk it all for a man I didn't know 4 days ago?

Risk it all? Tell me more, sweetie

I think he wants to talk to me for no reason. Like, not for his job. I might be delusional

Did he say anything about me, by the way? I couldn't read his face when I met him, he is very good at hiding his emotions. I'm an actress, you can trust me on that.

He asked if I didn't want to focus on my family life, or something. With you

He had no idea who you were, the receptionist snitched on you and he apparently didn't even google it afterwards. Didn't know we had broken up

Yeah I don't think you're delusional at all, Shane, that's a lot... Anything else happened?

Shane hesitated. He knew he could trust her, but it was very embarrassing to type it out.

Rose L

I got hard when he massaged my jaw.

Oh damn.

Did he notice?

Yep.

... and?

He didn't say anything and just left, after we uh... bantered a little.

Is banter a euphemism?

Oh no, we just said mean things to each other as a joke. Provocation, you could say?

Extremely bizarre, but I'm glad this isn't giving you panic attacks anymore, at least. And tonight?

He came to give me a document that the nurse could have left on my bedside table in my sleep, and nothing else. He didn't say much and left.

There was a long silence, and Shane started stressing out. Rose didn't find it normal either. He might even find the situation *more* acceptable than she did, actually. How fucked was he? He was finally starting to have a weird relationship with his doctor, it didn't feel like he was the only one behaving strangely anymore.

Rose L

I told you to hold the line until the end of your hospital stay. Don't banter with him! You apparently find it sexy when hot men are mean to you, but you really shouldn't be doing this!

You're more vulnerable than you realise, I think. You're a patient. Just enjoy having a crush in silence, don't interact with him. Do you understand?

I do.

Please tell me you won't try anything. Promise.

I won't. Trying what, anyway? I can't be with a man, you know that. And we're in public.

Can you speak?

Yeah

Rose called him half a second later.

"Hey. Shane, are you alone?"

"Yes, why? Is there anyth—"

"Listen to me. You are allowed to want to be with your doctor, and to actually be with him. I don't want to hear you say that you can't be with a man, okay?"

“But—”

“No but. I don’t give a fuck what your team thinks, it doesn’t even have to be a public relationship. Do you understand?”

“I don’t— I didn’t mean that I was *ashamed*, or anything like that,” Shane protested. “I’m just worried about the consequences for my career, alright? I would like to be with him. I would like it a little too much, actually.”

“Okay, good. Well, not good, your crush is going too far, but good. Please take care of yourself, baby, and stop making it worse every single time you talk to me.”

Shane sighed and hung up the phone. He was definitely fucked. On top of that, the way he was terrified of going too far with Dr Rozanov and getting outed was making him sound like he didn’t accept who he was. And, even worse, he didn’t know if Dr Rozanov was attracted to men. Maybe this was all in his head, and he really was incredibly vulnerable mentally.



“Anything you’d like to tell me?”

Ilya stopped dead in his tracks. Svetlana never talked to him in Russian in the break room, unless she had something quite personal to discuss. He knew exactly what this one would be about, since there was truly nothing to say about their motherland. Both of his parents were dead, and he had removed his brother from his life.

“Sveta—”

“Let’s talk about it with no bullshit, okay?”

Ilya didn’t answer. He was looking at his can of Coke with a blank stare, extremely worried. Having this conversation was the last thing he wanted to do.

“You are attracted to your patient.”

“Which one?”

“Don’t make fun of me, you know exactly which one. I saw you take on the duties of two different nurses to talk to him.”

Ilya took a sip of Coke to give himself strength, but he choked on the bubbles and started coughing.

“He is... interesting.”

“You can’t do that, Ilyusha. You know you can’t.”

Svetlana covered Ilya’s hand with her own, a gesture that didn’t raise eyebrows anymore in the break room – it was very natural between them.

“I am not– I am not doing anything about it. I stay professional.”

“So you won’t deny it, then?” Svetlana sighed. “You have a crush on him.”

“I–”

“Don’t replace his nurses, that’s all I am saying. You should not do the physiotherapist’s job either. Stop massaging his jaw, this is not your role. Understood?”

Ilya stared at the can, feeling like he was getting scolded. *Well, I am definitely getting scolded.*

“Ilyusha, look at me.”

Ilya timidly met her icy gaze.

“You can have this. You are allowed to have this. But not yet.”

Ilya sighed loudly and got up.

“I’m going to take a nap.”

“Yeah, the exhaustion is making you misbehave. See you soon, okay?”

Ilya leaned down, kissed her on the cheek, and left – even forgot his Coke behind him. He went to the adjacent room and lay down on one of the four quite uncomfortable cots, eyes closed. His brain was not letting him sleep in peace, even if he needed more than one nap today to make up for his night in the operation room.

Svetlana was right, of course. Ilya couldn’t stop thinking about this annoying hockey player and his broken jaw. He was fighting himself every second he spent next to him, and had only narrowly avoided flirting with him. He wanted to know everything about this man, this gentle yet aggressive man, a good soul in a sea of athletes in a massively violent game. He had treated horrible injuries on hockey players during his career, and he knew that you couldn’t do this job without being tough as granite. Yet, he could *feel* so much from this man. So, so much.

It was as if he had met someone who could truly understand him – but it made absolutely no sense because it had been less than a week. Ilya could not stop imagining Shane Hollander’s lips on his, his hands on his chest, and even worse things he could not dare to think about. The only time he didn’t want to smother him under his body was when he massaged his jaw, because it was his mission and he had to wire himself to do it correctly. That was why he was replacing the physiotherapist as often as possible – to feel like a doctor in Hollander’s presence, because *that* was what he was supposed to do. But he knew that Svetlana would never believe that touching Hollander actually helped him not to think too much about touching him *more*.

Ilya finally fell asleep, half-dreaming of his last fight with his brother.

He was woken up by his pager beeping and vibrating in his pocket. He yawned and sat up, reading the room number on the screen. *Shit*. It was not a good sign that Shane Hollander needed an emergency visit, because he had only been improving since his surgery.

Ilya was entirely focused. There was no room in his head for lust or romance. He was Dr Ilya Rozanov, a skilled dental surgeon trained in Russia and practicing in Canada, and his patient was in trouble. *Let’s go*.

When he entered Hollander's room, the nurse was taking blood from his arm. Hollander was sweating profusely, his breath quite rapid, and he was flushing so red his freckles were almost invisible. He was shaking hard.

"What– what the fuck–" he babbled, aimlessly trying to reach something with his hand.

Ilya grabbed his wrist so he would not accidentally hit the nurse, and asked:

"Infection?"

"Yes, Dr. It started half an hour ago. We will determine which bacteria is responsible for this, but in the meantime you might want to start an antibiotic."

"How long for the test results?"

"Half an hour, at most. This will be our priority, there's nobody else needing the test at this time."

"Hm. I'm going to stay here and monitor him. I don't want to start doxycycline yet, but I will call if he gets worse."

The nurse let him apply pressure on the inside of his elbow with a cotton ball, and he started waiting for the results. Hollander was very restless, sobbing intermittently. After replacing the cotton ball with a plaster, Ilya patted his forehead with a cold towel.

"You have an infection," Ilya told him, unsure if he could understand him. "Is like the document says. Sorry. It happens."

Hollander inhaled sharply through his mouth, and whined when his jaw pain acted up. Ilya found the cast in the drawing of the bedside table and put it back on his chin.

"Don't move your mouth, Mr Hollander."

Hollander released a long string of whines and various noises, none of them sounding particularly reassuring. He clenched his jaw and cried out even more loudly. Ilya removed the cast, seeing this wasn't a good idea.

“I will hold it for you, then.”

Ilya carefully put his hand along Hollander's jaw to keep it slightly open, but not too much. Hollander instantly relaxed under his touch, as if he was melting into the mattress. Ilya was relieved – Hollander could have cracked his teeth, or worse. He continued sweating and shaking, and both of his hands flew to Ilya's white coat.

“Uh... Don't grab me, Mr Hollander.”

“Please,” he whined, barely pronouncing the syllables. “So cold.”

“It's the fever, Mr Hollander.”

“Call me– call me Shane.”

Ilya bit his lower lip, trying not to lose his professional composure.

“I will not, Mr Hollander. Stay calm, you will receive the correct antibiotics very soon. Listen to my voice, it's going to be okay. Is okay, I promise.”

Hollander's grip on his coat slowly weakened, and he fell into an agitated slumber. Ilya continued talking to him and massaging his jaw, satisfied to see him calm while his heart rate did not worsen. When the nurse came back with a choice of three antibiotics against *Serratia marcescens*, Ilya let out a long sigh.

“You are special, Mr Hollander. Rare bacteria, resistant to almost everything? Very impressive.”

The doxycycline would have been useless. He was glad he had waited. As the nurse prepared the perfusion of ciprofloxacin, Ilya wondered how on earth he had picked up such a nasty

nosocomial pathogen. That was pure bad luck. The nurse left after installing the perfusion and giving him liquid paracetamol through his barely opened jaw, and Hollander whined even more, feeling uncomfortable. Of course, antibiotics did not provide immediate relief, so he was not going to relax and have a great rest of the night.

“You are making me do second sleepless night, Mr Hollander.”

“Sorry,” he whispered, eyes closed. “Sorry.”

“No, is okay. Do you even hear me?”

“So sssorry,” Hollander was slurring his words, but not in an alarming way. He was simply exhausted after his violent fever. “I’m sorry I... I will wait.”

“You will wait?”

“After. After hospital. You are... professional. Sorry. Very sorry I tried to... I thought too much about you.”

Ilya was confused, but in truth he perfectly understood what Hollander was saying. *He is interested in me. He wants to wait until he’s not my patient anymore.* The relief he was experiencing could probably be studied by scientists. This felt unreal. Shane Hollander, star hockey player, was interested in him? He had refused to look up any information that he wouldn’t tell him first, but he had seen him repeatedly on television and on Instagram since his injury. He had learnt everything against his will, but with guilty curiosity. Curiosity was the right word, actually. He was deadly *curious* about Shane Hollander.

“Okay,” Ilya said, trying not to be emotional. His patient needed him, and he could not think too much about how hopeful he felt. “You need to sleep, yes? Sleep.”

“Hold my hand. My jaw is fine.”

Ilya knew for a fact that it was not the case, so he kept one hand on Hollander’s jaw and wrapped his other hand’s fingers around his wrist. He could not dare to actually hold his hand, it would be totally unacceptable as a medical professional. Especially when he was not even having a panic attack.

“Sorry I called you an asshole,” Hollander slurred.

“Is okay. Don’t speak, just try to sleep.”

“Am I... going to die?”

This time, Ilya moved his hand to hold Hollander's. He looked and sounded terrified.

“No, the antibiotics are going to work. You are already sweating less, see?”

He didn't know if it was true or not, since he had a cloth on his forehead, but Hollander needed reassurance. He closed his eyes, and a tear rolled down on the pillow. *Not so sure the fever is over, clearly...*

“I can't die now,” Hollander whispered, so low it was barely audible. “I never lived how I should.”

“Uh... what?”

“I'm gay. I lied to everybody. To myself.”

Ilya was used to patients blurting out their deepest secrets. He did not work in palliative care, so most of the confessions he heard were caused by anesthesia, fever and painkillers, rather than a carnal need to finally feel free. The topic still hit him every time, though. He was bisexual himself, and even if he had never hid it from himself, he had to hide it from his family and entire birth country. He could understand why a hockey player would face homophobic discrimination.

“Is not a lie,” he murmured. “Survival, maybe.”

“It doesn't feel like surviving.”

Hollander shed more tears, sniffing.

“What has changed?” Ilya asked him, hoping he would calm down a little. It was never nice to fall asleep while crying, patients often woke up with a strong headache afterwards.

“You. I want... I want to know you. It's worth it... even if I'm scared.”

Ilya closed his eyes. He couldn't let his heart feel so carefree.

"Hey," he heard in Russian behind him.

"Sveta," he responded, not even bothering to release Hollander's hand.

"I saw the update on his file from the nurse. Is he okay?"

"*Serratia marcescens*. But it's under control."

"Gross, he hit the jackpot. Poor guy. Are you holding his hand, Ilyusha?"

Ilya nodded, still not strong enough to look at her. He knew that what he was doing was wrong. Hollander was now half-asleep, lulled by the soft Russian voices around him. Svetlana walked to the other side of the bed and inspected the monitor.

"Do we even know where the infection is? Doesn't seem to be his mouth, I see no swelling or redness."

"No, it seems to be systemic. I don't know, but hopefully we won't need to know."

"Of course. Do you think you could stop holding his hand, now, maybe?"

"Sveta... He said he was interested in me."

"That's great, and you should *definitely* not hold his hand anymore, then. Don't become your worst nightmare, Ilyusha."

Ilya released Hollander's fingers and carefully removed his hand from his jaw when he confirmed he would not clench his teeth again immediately.

"Go back to sleep, Ilyusha. I will be contacting his parents when the sun rises."

"About— about me?" he asked, startled.

"No, you idiot, not about *you*. They need to know about the infection, silly."

She hugged him tightly and shook her head.

“I am not here to destroy your future date, Ilyusha. Someone has to be reasonable in this room, that’s all. Go sleep a little. He’s okay, now.”

Ilya nodded, because she was obviously right. He had done his job, so he had no business staying with his patient. The rules were simple.



Shane woke up feeling like an absolute mess. His arm was hooked to a perfusion bag, his mouth was incredibly dry and sore, and he had clearly cried on his pillow all night. *What the fuck...* Like clockwork, his parents were here.

“You had a bacterial infection last night,” Yuna said, caressing his hair. “It’s okay now, the doctors both said you’re fine.”

“Where is Doctor Rozanov?” he croaked. “I need him.”

“*Need* him? Sweetie, you’re not in danger anymore. You don’t need to see a doctor right now, don’t worry.”

“I still—”

When his brain finally registered that he was whining to his mom about a man he wanted to kiss passionately, and that this had nothing to do with his health, Shane stopped complaining. All the strange thoughts his mind was showing to him like a silent movie were starting to make sense, and he was very scared of what they meant. He wanted to know how the last hours had gone by, and it was terrifying.

“Sorry, I understand,” he said instead, looking away.

“It’s okay, baby. Well, it looks like he’s coming over anyway, you will be happy.”

Shane stared at the door until he finally saw Dr Rozanov appear. He looked like he had slept, this time, but clearly not at home.

“Can I be alone with Dr Rozanov?” Shane asked his parents, feeling braver than on an ice rink.

“Why?” Yuna frowned.

“I don’t like... I don’t like talking about my health like that, okay? It’s nothing serious, don’t worry.”

His mother seemed to agree that Shane sometimes needed things that were not easy for her to understand, and her parents left the room. Dr Rozanov looked puzzled, and like he had a lot of things on his mind.

“I wanted to see if you were okay,” Dr Rozanov simply said.

“I am. I only have one question. Did I say anything stupid while I was feverish?”

The doctor did not react physically, which Shane didn’t like at all. If he had not said anything in particular, he would have laughed. Possibly.

“Whatever I said,” Shane continued, “was most likely fake. I do not remember any of it.”

“You can open your mouth almost normally, today,” Dr Rozanov remarked, ignoring his speech. “Is very good.”

“Don’t change the subject!”

“I am your doctor, Mr Hollander. I am only interested in your health.”

“You held my hand last night. I remember you holding my hand.”

The doctor stayed silent.

“What made you hold my hand?”

“You asked,” Dr Rozanov replied, dryly. “I obeyed.”

“Bullshit. You could have said no.”

“You thought you were dying. It was comfort, just comfort.”

Shane nodded. That’s what he was suspecting, and it made sense.

“Fine, then,” he said, feeling a little less tense. “Thank you, then. I didn’t need another panic attack on top of the infection. Is that all I’ve said?”

This time, Dr Rozanov didn’t have time to hide his facial expression. He looked emotional for a split second, then pretended again that he was professionally unfazed.

“Yes,” he muttered.

“That’s *clearly* a lie.”

Shane didn’t know why he was fighting his doctor, at this precise moment. He wanted to extract everything he could from this man, terrified that he had said something he had to regret. He needed to feel the pain of having said too much. He had to be in control, somehow. Dr Rozanov sighed, exasperated.

“This is not the way you should talk to your doctor.”

“I don’t understand why you’re lying to me about this! Was it *that* embarrassing?”

“It was so much better when you could not open your mouth, fuck!”

Shane was taken aback, then burst into laughter, as much as his jaw could allow it. He laughed so much that his chest hurt, and he was crying again. He didn’t know if the tears were only of hilarity, or if he was also panicking about what he felt for his doctor. It was too much.

“Hey, Mr Hollander. Stop.”

“I’m okay, I’m okay,” Shane groaned. “It’s fine. Please, tell me what I said, I need to know.”

Dr Rozanov sighed again, but this time it sounded less glacial. He sat on a chair next to Shane’s bed and whispered as low as possible:

“You... said you’re gay, and you regret lying.”

Shane’s heart sank. Was he really surprised, though? Ever since he had broken up with Rose, the words constantly threatened to leave his lips. He wanted to come out to everybody, constantly. He wanted to scream it from the rooftops and fight whoever would have something negative to say. But the fear was also there, ugly, icy cold against his heart. He couldn’t. But he had done it, to his doctor, in the middle of the night.

“Lying about...?”

“About being gay. And then, you fell asleep.”

Shane didn’t know if this was true, but he didn’t want to know more, after all.

“I’m sorry I told you that,” Shane apologised. “Maybe... maybe you disagree. I don’t know.”

“Disagree?”

Shane had finally done it: Dr Rozanov looked authentically horrified.

“Hollander,” he said, dropping the formalities in the blink of an eye. “I am saying this as your doctor, and your doctor only. There is not *one* part of me who is homophobic. Not one. You are safe here, you will always be safe under my care. Please do not *ever* apologise for being yourself.”

Shane was pretty sure that this was the longest thing Dr Rozanov had ever told him.

“I’m still sorry I told you a secret,” Shane insisted. “It must be embarrassing to have your patient saying stuff you didn’t ask to hear.”

“It’s okay. Is normal here, in my job. I don’t mind it.”

Shane nodded. He didn’t know what more to say, but Dr Rozanov looked like he was battling some piece of information that he didn’t want to reveal. *Or maybe I’m paranoid.*

“You said more,” Dr Rozanov finally admitted. “You said incoherent things about being interested in me.”

Holy fucking shit. Shane stayed silent, his heartbeat going embarrassingly high on the monitor. He wanted to fucking disappear.

“I’m very sorry,” he said in an almost imperceptible voice.

“Is okay. I am not bothered by it.”

“Do you mean—”

“I do not mean anything, Mr Hollander. Let’s get you healed and not think about this, yes?”

Shane had no idea if this meant that Dr Rozanov was comfortable with his feverish remarks, or if he actually reciprocated them. He was way too shocked to ask, and Rose had done her best to keep him from asking. He had to stay silent. He had to respect Dr Rozanov’s job and oath.

“Okay,” Shane breathed out, looking away.

Rose L

Bad infection, but I’m not in danger anymore. Apparently, I confessed to Dr Rozanov last night. Fucking great

Hold the line, Shane! Hold the bloody line!

I want him so bad, I feel like I don't even care anymore what people would think.

Hooooold the liiiiiine

Chapter End Notes

Longest I've ever written before people are kissing but this is the hollanov way of life apparently

Chapter 4: #4

Chapter Notes

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

Going through a bacterial infection from a relatively rare pathogen was not exactly all fun and games. Shane's body had never heard of the antibiotics he was on, and he spent his time feeling miserable, nauseous, dragging himself to the bathroom with the IV pole, plagued with a stomach pain he had not experienced since his first and last massive hangover.

Dr Vetrova and the physiotherapist didn't bother coming, aware that he had other problems than his neck. Shane didn't expect to see Dr Rozanov either, but he would not have rejected a little jaw massage – throwing up was clearly hurting his joints, and his face was on fire. He hated everything he was going through. Hayden and JJ joking in his texts were helping a little, but not much more.

Montréal Bros

Still throwing up, I don't think I'll be okay for Toronto next month, guys

[JJ] Where is our Captain?? We always play with broken ribs, you can come with fucked up teeth!!

[Hayden] Be nice, he needs to rest. We can't play if he can't even speak, he's our Captain dude

I will try my best to come back asap, but the complications are getting out of hand nowadays

[JJ] You can tell us if you've found yourself a cute nurse to fuck!

[Hayden] Shane the hospital playboy

Fuck off guys

He couldn't help but smile, though, between two bathroom trips. His team missed him... that was probably the best feeling he had experienced all day.

“Mr Hollander?”

Shane froze. God, that was embarrassing. He put his phone on the floor next to the toilet, with a heavy sigh.

“I’m in the bathroom,” Shane replied, hoping Dr Rozanov would not enter and see him sick, which felt a bit silly considering where he was. “Don’t come, please, I’m throwing up.”

“I have seen worse,” said Dr Rozanov’s voice from the other side of the door. “But I will wait here. How do you feel?”

“Like shit. I don’t even see my lunch anymore, it’s just water at this point...”

“This will stop in two days, do not worry.”

“I don’t worry, I just feel like shit, as I’ve said.”

“Okay.”

Shane didn’t want to be mean, but he was extremely cranky when he felt like his insides contained lava up to his esophagus.

“I have come to give you something for the nausea,” Dr Rozanov added.

Not fucking early enough! “Oh, thanks, leave it on the bedside table then...”

“I would like to examine you first, we don’t just give medication to patients through door.”

Shane shook his head and chuckled lightly. This man was always either blunt or sarcastic, and he hated how attractive that was. He flushed the toilet and washed his mouth and hands, then came back to his room. Dr Rozanov was holding a little box with pills, which he seemed to touch only out of absolute necessity, with the smallest portion of his fingers logistically possible. *Weird.*

“Happy?” Shane sighed, gesturing towards his face.

“You look like zombie,” Dr Rozanov remarked.

“Thanks. You also look terrible, but I’m not being an asshole about it.”

“I will keep the pills, then.”

“I'm really happy to have such a nice doctor, that's a relief.”

“They gave me degree in patient communication, I am best of the university.”

Shane loved that Dr Rozanov was apparently back to his normal state. He had been stressed out by the instances where he was almost silent, clearly not bantering anymore. The familiarity of his fake insults made his heart flutter. Shane took the medication from his hands and swallowed one pill with the end of a ginger ale can.

“Why did you want to be a doctor, by the way? Apart from insulting patients like me, of course.”

“I wanted to work in mental health, at first. But then, during university, I saw very interesting lectures about facial reconstruction and wanted to do this instead.”

Shane could hear something behind his words. Disappointment? Guilt? His eyes seemed to say that he had given up something important to him and chosen another field of medicine, but Shane couldn't ask him that sort of stuff.

“You still work in mental health, then.”

“What?”

“Facial reconstruction, teeth... That's extremely personal to people. We need someone who will support us, who will explain what's happening. It's mental health as well, a big part of it.”

Dr Rozanov nodded slowly. His stare seemed to become less tense. Something also shifted inside Shane, as he realised that he truly believed his own words. *I AM vulnerable. I feel absolutely fucking vulnerable right now. It's probably the worst week of my life.* He had never felt so little control over his own body, and giving it away to medical professionals didn't feel good whatsoever. He had been too proud to admit that Dr Vetrova and Rose were correct for warning him every day against his supposed *crush*. Shane couldn't be his normal self in this situation, and he had to wait. They were right.

“Do you experience distress, Mr Hollander?” Dr Rozanov asked, and Shane felt okay with the answer, for once.

“Yes. My life is completely chaotic, this week, and I wish I could wake up and discover it was all a nightmare. I don't feel like myself. Does it make sense?”

“It does,” the doctor nodded. “Let me know if you need anything, yes?”

Dr Rozanov's smile was very gentle, but Shane knew he had to stay on his own for a while to think about his newfound realisation. The jaw massage could wait.

Especially because he wanted to throw up again.

“Is not a very fast medication, or your stomach is slow,” Dr Rozanov sighed from the other side of the door, and Shane told him to fuck off.



The rest of the day felt as miserable as it had started, but Shane was doing yoga on the floor while thinking about his own feelings. Even if he spent a lot of time in his own head, it was rarely to ponder about his emotions. He was practical, he needed solutions to his problems, he needed things to work properly to reach his goals. Here, the goal was totally unattainable if he did not first spend a few hours understanding what he was going through.

Shane had reached conclusions that he wanted to share with Rose.

Rose L

I thought about what I felt, and I think two aspects are clear.

OK, I'm listening

So, I find him attractive, and I think he is interesting when we have conversations. I find him intriguing. This is objectively true.

What might be because I feel like shit at the hospital, though: being convinced that we are meant for each other and that we have a connection, or something.

Baby, I'm so relieved that you finally get it. I didn't want to make you sad

It's okay, Rose. I feel much better now, much more rational

That's great! Can't wait for you to leave the hospital. Let me know asap, we need to have coffee together

Or ginger ale 😊

Shane sighed with contentment, but had to run back to the toilet with his IV pole a few seconds later. *For fuck's sake.*

☹️☹️☹️

"He seems well," Svetlana said, eating a salad at the speed of light in the break room.

"Who?" Ilya replied.

"Don't try to be funny, Ilyusha."

"I know, I know. Good, the antibiotics seem to be working, then. No need to try another molecule for now."

Svetlana nodded and grabbed an apple from her bag.

"He didn't have that distant stare, the one he had all week. It's like he is finally at peace, it's very palpable. Did you say anything to him?"

"Nothing in particular, he was throwing up so I gave him ondansetron."

"Strong as hell, Ilyusha."

"I know, but the nurse had told me he looked like he was going to disappear if he lost any more weight today."

"Maybe he finally relaxed because you didn't massage his jaw."

Svetlana bit into her apple, waiting for Ilya to say something. But he didn't. He was staring at the table, trying very hard not to look embarrassed in front of his dearest friend.

"Uh-uh," Svetlana went on. "Ever thought about letting the nurses do their job, then? You were making this poor man panic by touching his mouth. Do you understand?"

"That's not possible," Ilya frowned. "He always seems to feel better when I do it. You know I am skilled in that type of muscle and joint work, Sveta."

"Physically, I'm sure it worked! Psychologically, though... Don't torture him, that's all I'm saying."

Ilya was scared of showing his heart too much to Svetlana, but he needed to know. Shane Hollander's health depended on it, and it was his utmost priority.

"What should I do, if he requests it?"

"Send the physiotherapist to his room."

Ilya nodded, and felt like he was talking a lot less than usual. Svetlana would end up noticing it, for sure.

"You've never been in this situation, Ilyusha," she said softly. "Talk to me, or you're going to explode."

"I'm fine."

"No, I know you. You can't lie to me, remember?"

"I want to smoke."

"You shouldn't."

"Fuck."

"Be honest with me. Do you have feelings for your patient?"

For the first time in his career, Ilya was *scared*. He was going to say yes, and then what? He would not be allowed to go near Shane Hollander for the remainder of his stay. The

information would leak, somehow – the receptionist? the physiotherapist? – and he would be known as the doctor who tried to take advantage of a vulnerable hockey player with a locked jaw. It was simply not possible. Career-ending bullshit. No visa anymore, back to Russia, with the reputation of having tried to seduce a man. He would be finished. Thank God they were having this conversation in Russian.

“No,” he lied. He was feeling something, alright. He was not sure what, exactly, but there was a feeling.

“I sure hope you know what you’re doing,” Svetlana warned him. “I will always defend you, but I can’t save you from public disgrace if you still decide to fuck up. Stay in your lane, Ilyusha, you simply don’t have any other choice.”

Ilya didn’t say anything, his usual behaviour this past week, and got up to prepare himself for a long string of appointments. He grabbed his laptop and files, gave Svetlana a kiss on the forehead, and left without a word.

In the corridor, he walked into Yuna Hollander.

“Oh, I was looking for you,” she said. “Do you have a minute?”

“I am... in a hurry,” he replied, worried about spending too much time with this family as a whole.

“I will be quick,” she said anyway, and Ilya understood why Hollander had never felt like life could ever be chaotic or unexpected. “I have heard from the nurse that you did not perform a jaw massage on my son today.”

“Mr Hollander said no, so I did not do it.”

Yuna Hollander looked both appalled and confused.

“You are not supposed to obey *him*, you are the professional here. His jaw hurts, and the physiotherapist’s technique was very average, to put it mildly. I hired you for your skills, please do not forget that.”

Ilya nodded sharply, ready to walk past her, but she was not done yet.

“Go back to his room as soon as possible, please. He is genuinely in pain, but too proud to ask for you.”

“I will,” Ilya answered, his stomach sinking to depths never seen before. How was he supposed to say no? His patient was suffering.

It was high time he ignored himself.



Shane felt like he was on the most unhinged cocktail of painkillers, but he knew it was not the case – his stomach and teeth were still torturing him. He was however floating, with a mix of exhaustion and plenitude. He was *mentally relaxed*. No voices telling him that he was in trouble. How great.

The long parade of doctors and nurses and physios and his parents had done nothing to attack his newfound inner peace. He was himself, finally. He had no reason to feel stressed out. Every thought dangerously veering towards a certain dental surgeon was carefully nipped in the bud.

Rose L

Yoga is amazing.

Good to know! Had a nice day? How is the infection?

Still on IV, but it's going well. I wish I could go home and watch TV, I never thought I would miss it.

Soon!

Shane smiled, his head in the clouds. She was so nice for not mentioning A Certain Person. What a great day. His phone was still on the bedside table, though. Had he even touched it?

He couldn't remember. Eh, whatever.

He was only annoyed by how fucking loud the heart monitor was. Shane moved his head to the side, and it was so incredibly heavy that it required an effort. And he was cold, or hot. Not sure anymore. His eyes narrowed when he saw the number on the monitor – 48? That was funny. Was it a problem, though? He couldn't tell.

Around his bed, people were accumulating and shouting things. His arm hurt, moved from left to right, something was stinging him again and again. So weird. He closed his eyes, the ringing in his ears never stopping until he lost consciousness.



“You couldn't have predicted this, Ilyusha.”

Ilya was smoking his second cigarette in a row in the hospital parking lot.

“I would have noticed that he was going into sepsis if I had spent time with him, instead of sending the physiotherapist. It's my fault.”

“All of us saw him before his heart rate dropped!” Svetlana said. “We are not incompetent, okay? You could *not* have known before he effectively fell into bradycardia. You can't guess that someone will almost shut down just because they are *less stressed* than usual.”

Ilya didn't reply and continued smoking, breathing out shakily. Svetlana shook his arm.

“There is absolutely *no way* you should blame yourself for this. This is not a medical error at all. He ended up not responding well to the antibiotic, we are trying another one, it's annoying but it's standard procedure.”

“I could have—”

“You could have *what*? Seen through his veins that the bacteria were not dying fast enough, with your microscope-eyes?”

Ilya knew deep down that Svetlana was right, but he needed to blame someone for all of this. And it fell on him, naturally.

“There must be some tests that we could have done.”

“We don't check bacteria levels in the blood of every patient five times a day, especially when they seem to be doing okay. It was handled immediately when it happened, he's safe, Ilyusha. Stop blaming yourself for a pathogen behaving like a little shit. They do that, this is a strain constantly resisting antibiotics, that's why we're here to help.”

Ilya looked at the sky and tried to breathe, but it was getting more and more difficult.

“I'll call his parents,” Svetlana told him softly.

“I should do it.”

“You should, but you're almost in tears and they're going to believe that he's dead. So stay here, compose yourself, and go see your patient.”

Ilya got rid of his cigarette in the special bin.

“Is he even conscious, right now?”

“Not yet, but he should be very soon. I will wait until you've talked to him to call his parents.”

Ilya blinked.

“Why? You don't condone me talking to him, so why now?”

“He came back to himself for a minute before I left his room. He didn't ask for his parents, only for... you. He wanted you to be next to him, and when I said you weren't available he passed out. I think I'll allow it, for once. Go tell him that he will be okay.”

Ilya's heart was in shambles. It didn't make sense to him how affected he was to hear this. Shane Hollander had invaded his thoughts in a way he could not comprehend.

“I will go, then.”

“Chew some gum, you stink. But I'll excuse the cigarettes, you went through something. Alright?”

Ilya obeyed her, because she was correct – you did not barge into a hospital room smelling like smoke. He took a shower, chewed so much gum under the hot water that he thought he would soon need jaw surgery as well, and walked quickly to Hollander's room.

When he entered, Hollander was awake. His eyes were veiled, but he reacted to his presence and smiled. Ilya closed the door behind him and sat on the chair next to the bed, carefully trying not to display any emotion on his face.

“Why is all of this shit happening to me?” Hollander said with a hoarse voice.

“Is bad luck,” Ilya replied.

“Like last time... Fucking bacteria, I guess?”

“Fucking bacteria, yes.”

Hollander stirred a little under the covers and sighed.

“Thank you for coming. Feels nice.”

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

Ilya needed this conversation to stop as soon as possible. Hollander looked very relaxed, and he had to find something medical to do to keep his other thoughts at bay. Hollander stopped smiling and shook his head.

“Dr Vetrova... She told me I would be... confused for a few days, something like that.”

“Sepsis can do that, yes. Mostly feeling tired, but cognitive issues sometimes.”

“Why the fuck did I injure myself? I hate this shit.”

He swears a lot more when he's tired...

“You can't change what has happened, Mr Hollander.”

“Shane. *Shane*. If you don't call me Shane, I will give you my bacteria and tell you platitudes as well. What a fucking asshole.”

“Okay, *Shane*,” said Ilya with an amused smirk. “I will leave you alone, you should rest.”

“Wait—”

Hollander raised his hand, in the slowest movement Ilya had ever witnessed from him. He could have backed off a thousand times before it landed on his cheek, but didn't. He didn't *want* to. Hollander smiled with so much sadness that Ilya's stomach twisted painfully.

“Are you trying to slap me?” Ilya tried to joke.

“I'm scared,” Hollander whispered. “I'm so scared.”

“You won't die, Holl–*Shane*. I promise.”

“It's not just that... Please, don't leave me, stay.”

Ilya's lips turned into a thin line. He was walking on eggshells, here. His entire being wanted him to stay, take Hollander's hands in his, maybe even kiss his knuckles one by one until he fell asleep, but it was impossible. Hollander was at his most vulnerable state, and cuddling with him could definitely not be considered psychology-driven care.

“I'll stay,” Ilya said, hoping Hollander would sleep very soon, after which he could run away from this room and smoke a third cigarette.

Ilya moved his head a little and Hollander's hand *mercifully* dropped on the bedsheets. Ilya couldn't breathe anymore, asphyxiated by how much he felt for the man who was looking at

him with tears in his eyes. *I'm crazy. I have lost my fucking mind.*

"Is okay, you can sleep." He hated how shaky his voice was.

"Hockey," Hollander exhaled, lips trembling. "Hockey is not accepting."

"I'm sorry about that."

"But I could make it work."

"What?"

"You. I could. There's always a plan."

Before Ilya could say anything, Svetlana opened the door.

"Ilyusha, I can't wait forever, the delay will look very suspicious to them. Can I call his parents?"

Ilya looked at Hollander and saw that he was finally asleep.

"Sveta... I can't handle his care anymore. It's too much for me. And for him."

"His parents won't agree with that. They really wanted you. Whatever he said... I can tell him that he was dreaming, or confused."

"You would lie to him? That's why I can't keep doing this. It's just unethical, Sveta."

Svetlana seemed to think about it for a minute, while Ilya waited in silence. He was terrified, *so fucking* terrified. A tear rolled down his cheek, and he wiped it away.

"Take a day off. I'll tell everybody that you looked sick. Sleep on it twice. Come back in two days with a fresh perspective."

Ilya felt like his world was collapsing around him, and he was grateful for the way his best friend carried him through the rumbles of every wall falling at his feet.



Shane knew he had not dreamed it.

He had very clear memories that weren't vague, or cloudy, or anything of the sort. He remembered his entire conversation with Dr Rozanov, until he had fallen asleep. Shane had confessed, alright. He had told him that he wanted to live with him, which was definitely unhinged.

Rose L

So... my bacterial infection was antibiotic-resistant, and I went into sepsis

What the fuck!!! Shane, are you okay? I'm so worried, are you sure you don't want to be flown to the US or something? There might be an infectious disease doctor who could help you over here.

No, I'm much better now, but tired. I'm so tired that I don't even feel bad about confessing last night.

Can I call you?

Shane knew he was going to get scolded over the phone, which is exactly what happened. Thankfully, Rose was interested in other details of the situation.

"And you're saying he's absent today?"

"Yeah. I don't know why," Shane said, before yawning. "Sorry, I'm so tired."

"I will leave you alone, but it's just— Why did you start planning for a life together, Shane? Do you want to marry a stranger? You barely know him."

"I have no idea why I said that. I can't really control what I say when I'm so vulnerable."

“That’s okay, but you need to try to control it a little, you’re going to scare this poor man so bad that he’ll go back to Russia.”

Shane pretended to laugh, but he was genuinely terrified of this possibility. What if Dr Rozanov had fled Canada because of him? Dr Vetrova assured him that he was simply at home on his day off, but the timing felt very odd.

“Use this day wisely to stop thinking about him constantly, okay?”

“I will try.”

Shane hung up and let himself sink into the mattress. He did not believe in love at first sight, and it was pretty obvious that this was not what was happening to him either. It took him a while to develop feelings of any sort, apart from disgust, so it could not be that. What did he feel, exactly? It seemed to be the carnal need to hold the doctor’s body against his, the desire to take, take, *take*, and to give everything he had in exchange. Was it okay to want someone physically so bad that he was almost humiliating himself during his hospitalisation? He didn’t know. But he wasn’t ashamed of it anymore.



Ilya could hear his father’s voice in his head as he was rotting in bed in the afternoon, with ready-made pancakes and a bottle of maple syrup on a plate. *Lazy*. He had turned the television on and immediately seen the news – hockey star Shane Hollander had suffered sepsis at a private clinic in Ottawa, according to a source. The footage showed him playing hockey, looking very serious in post-game interviews, and beaming at the camera holding the Stanley Cup. Ilya felt a lump in his throat, realising that this was not how he knew Shane Hollander at all. He was right to step away today – Shane Hollander was not himself at the hospital, he was sure of it.

Ilya had not had a full day of *nothing* in a while. He usually at least brought back some admin to wrap up at home, but Svetlana had almost kicked him out of the clinic without his handbag. It was a miracle he even had his phone with him, at this point. He was looking at it between two pancakes, hesitating to contact Svetlana.

No, I can't. She would kill me, and she would be right. God, he needed to know if Hollander felt better today. Had he really gone home to be tortured in the exact same way as at work, but with pancakes? What if someone needed dental surgery, and he was the only doctor good enough to perform it? *Fuck this, I can't stay here.*

He called Svetlana, who missed his call. This gave him the opportunity to realise that he was acting like a fool. She rang him back a few minutes later.

“What? If you're telling me that you want to come back, or trying to micromanage Hollander from home, I will—”

“Sorry, I spilled water on my phone and it called you,” Ilya interrupted her. “I will hang up.”

“Alright. You're not going to ask me how he is?”

“... no.”

“Good boy.”

He could hear the smile in her voice, and sighed as he hung up. He really loved her to bits.

Ilya turned the television back on and ended up *once again* on a news segment about Shane Hollander. Wasn't there anybody else in Canada to talk about? Ilya was angry to see that paparazzi had started swarming the surroundings of the hospital just after he had gone back home. He would most likely see them on his way back, and get asked questions. *Absolute vultures.* He understood how scared Hollander was of showing a little too much that he was not straight, if those parasites were constantly interested in snapping pictures of him wherever he went. Or however he felt.

Suddenly worried about that last idea, Ilya grabbed his phone and typed Hollander's name on Twitter – something he had promised himself not to do. This was different, though. He scrolled through pictures of the hospital from afar, and a blurry shot of a nurse he knew while she was drinking coffee in the parking lot. *Assholes.* He was relieved to find no picture of Shane Hollander on his hospital bed – the paparazzi had not reached the inside of the clinic, thankfully. Ilya leaned back on his pillow, exhausted. *Fuck.* He had imagined scrolling into

Hollander's face, with his puffy eyes, his beautiful freckles, and his pale cheeks. Looking weak, small, at the lowest of his life. The thought made him sick, and he ate more pancakes to push it down.

Then, Svetlana called him again.

"I genuinely can't say this by text in case someone translates it, but Hollander has no filter at all. Sepsis really rewired his brain temporarily, and I'm sure he will regret it soon. As his primary specialist right now, can you give me the green light to forbid all visits but the main nurse?"

"What do you mean, no filter?"

"You'll see tomorrow, but I hope it will be over. He's too famous to let him babble like this all day, especially with all those assholes trying to install microphones in our windows from outside. Do you green light a patient lockdown on Shane Hollander?"

Could he really say no to Svetlana?



"You have to admit he's hot," Shane told the nurse as he inspected his IV bag.

"Dr Rozanov is not bad, indeed..."

"No, but *really*. I've never seen a man this freaking hot. Have you seen him? Fuck."

"Don't move, I need to replace your IV needle."

"Oh no, it hurts," Shane whined, knitting his brows. "Fuck bacteria! Fuck them!"

"Indeed, fuck bacteria!"

Shane and the nurse laughed together. He felt very light, very good, as if his brain was finally leaving him alone. It was nice.

"Why is nobody else coming here? I want to see Dr Vetrova, she's very cool."

“I already told you that you are experiencing some cognitive issues after your septic episode, Mr Hollander. We don’t want you to say anything out loud that you would prefer to keep a secret.”

“Oh, yeah. Are you going to repeat that I find Dr Rozanov hot?”

“No, don’t worry about that. My daughter is not straight, did I ever tell you? I waited for her to announce it to the world to talk about it. Your secret is safe with me.”

Shane pouted.

“I could find Dr Rozanov hot without being gay, you know.”

“I know.”

“I’m gay as fuck, though.”

The nurse smiled and tapped his shoulder.

“Done! You should rest, now. The consequences of sepsis will disappear soon, and you will be very embarrassed. I am *imploring* you not to be, okay? This is my job.”

“I’m not ashamed of finding him hot!” Shane protested, which made him realise how slurred he sounded. “Oh, my voice is weird.”

“Please take a nap, and push the emergency button if needed.”

Shane sighed and closed his eyes. He wanted to post on Instagram that Ilya Rozanov was the juiciest piece of man he had ever seen in his life, but the nurse had taken his phone away from him. *Fuck*. He tried to get up, but the exhaustion was staggering. He was not going anywhere, clearly. *I want to tell EVERYONE that they’re lucky to be in Dr Rozanov’s clinic.* God, he wanted him so bad.

“How dare you stay at home when I’m ready to have a serious conversation with you, Rozanov?” he babbled out loud, before hurting his jaw. “*Fuck!*”

A few minutes before midnight, Shane woke up from an agitated nap and realised he was finally out of the chaos train. Sheepish, and very hungry, he pushed the button to call the nurse.

“I’m back,” Shane said miserably.

“Out of it, finally?”

“Yep. Sorry, I think I said some pretty... embarrassing things.”

“It’s not a big deal. Do you want your phone back? I should ask for Dr Rozanov’s permission, though.”

Hearing his name was incredibly shameful. He wanted nothing to do with the doctor yet, but the concept of complaining about his wild day to Rose was very appealing to him.

“Yeah, I’d like my phone back, thanks.”

“Let me call Dr Rozanov.”

Suddenly, they heard a commotion in the corridor. The nurse looked outside and gasped. Hurried steps were coming closer, along with aggressive voices.

Chapter End Notes

THEY DIDN'T EVEN KISS

Chapter 5: #5

Chapter Notes

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

Around ten in the evening, Ilya was pretty sure he had just spent the most frustrating day of his life. He was hopping between the television, Twitter, Instagram, a bag of Doritos, and nothing was good enough to stop thinking about the exhausting mess his life was turning into.

Then, while scrolling on Twitter, he saw a post from some Canadian tabloid he had started getting on his timeline, after tapping on too many crass articles about Hollander's injury. He followed the link to the journal's website, his heart beating noticeably faster.

Breaking | Shane Hollander undergoes room isolation in Ottawa clinic – Bad news incoming?

Today, 22:08

We have received confirmation from an anonymous source that star hockey player Shane Hollander is now on patient lockdown at the private Ottawa clinic he entered last week, following a jaw injury during a game. Only one nurse is allowed to get in contact with him – not even his own parents – and no new information has emerged since early afternoon. Our in-house reporter has been able to snap a picture from the window.

Ilya scrolled and saw a picture of the fifth floor's window, with the nurse looking outside quickly while closing the curtains. Thankfully, nobody could see Hollander in there, but Ilya was horrified to confirm that a paparazzi was clearly climbing trees to steal his most vulnerable moments. *Fuck.*

Ilya didn't want to bother Svetlana (and get killed later), so he contacted the nurse taking care of Hollander.

Rudy S Ottawa

Hi, it's Rozanov. Be careful, I have noticed online that there is a paparazzi in front of the window. Keep the curtains closed at all times, okay?

Yeah, I saw that piece of shit earlier. I called the police, but they told me he was already gone when they arrived. Not sure what I can do now...

Is Hollander ok?

Still barely coherent, but he's napping now. Finally.

OK. Let me know if anything happens with the paparazzi, you'll need more hands.

Ilya knew he should be sleeping before a new day at work, even if he did not have any surgery scheduled – thank God–, but he felt restless to the bones. He couldn't stop scrolling, terrified that he would suddenly see Hollander's bruised face between two tweets about the approaching Met Gala. His day had been hell so far, and it was clearly not over.

Just before midnight, as Ilya was mercifully starting to doze off, Svetlana called him.

"Ilyusha, thank heavens you're replying... We have a massive problem. I would never call you on your day off if it wasn't serious."

"Sv–"

"Listen, I'll be quick. There are paparazzi pretending to need emergency care to get into the clinic and find Hollander. We cannot just refuse people or chain them into the waiting room all night... The police are already here, but we are overwhelmed with patients right now and we don't know fast enough who's faking it."

"You need more hands," Ilya understood. "I can come and examine new patients, I'll be there soon."

"I think it would be easier if you just locked yourself with Hollander, actually. I have three surgeries tomorrow and really need to sleep before that, and nobody else is available. Please go to his room and stay there, I can't make a nurse do this with the volume of work we have. And I won't put a stranger in there either, I don't trust the police."

"Don't worry, Sveta, I'm on my way."

Ilya drove at the maximum speed allowed – getting arrested was probably the worst thing he could do right now –, parked at the clinic, and ran to the locked staff door at the back. He didn't want to attract attention from the people waiting at reception, especially because his

own name had popped up a few times in news articles. He wasn't exactly hard to miss, with his height and, yeah, face.

As he reached the fifth floor, Ilya noticed a man walking at a pace that didn't fit a patient at all. He was clearly looking for something *and* trying to be quiet, which didn't happen. Patients who needed help generally didn't look like cartoonish thieves. Ilya walked up to the man and asked:

“Can I help you?”

The man turned around and spoke with a voice way louder than it had any right to be.

“You're Rozanov! Show me Hollander's room.”

“Uh... Absolutely not, sir. Please follow me downstairs, or I will call the police.”

“You think I give a fuck about the cops? Show me his room, I'll give you a few thousands.”

Ilya clenched his jaw. He was getting very angry, but had to remain professional.

“No bribe in this clinic, sir. Follow me.”

“I'll find him myself, I don't fucking care.”

Ilya walked in front of him to block his path, and the paparazzi kicked him in the hip, his knee hitting his bone so hard that Ilya lost his balance. *Fuck!* He didn't fall, but the blow felt like fire on his left side.

“Stop!” he yelled.

“Get out of my way!”

“No!”

Ilya was very worried about hitting the man, since it could greatly endanger his visa to end up in legal trouble. During the second he hesitated, thinking that protecting Hollander could make his worst nightmare worth it, the paparazzi kicked him again, this time in the thigh, then in the ankle. Exhausted and panicked, Ilya realised too late that he was falling.

He heard something crack before he could feel it. The paparazzi jumped on him and started hitting him on the ground. Ilya tried to defend himself, but his workout of choice was definitely *not* boxing, so he felt overpowered. Especially with what was starting to feel like a leg fracture. *Fucking hell.*

Suddenly, they were surrounded by two nurses – including Rudy – and a police officer. The weight of the paparazzi lifted off Ilya's hurt body, as he was swiftly arrested. Ilya groaned from both pain and relief. The paparazzi was spotless, while he was covered in red marks, injured, and all the cameras in the corridor had recorded that he had not even touched the man. He was safe. He was going to stay in Canada.

He was going to stay with Hollander.

As Rudy helped him sit up to examine his legs and ankles, Ilya saw that Hollander was wobbling towards him, holding his IV pole, clearly destroyed by post-sepsis fatigue. He looked pale, worried, nauseous.

“Go back to your room, Mr Hollander,” Ilya managed to say between gritted teeth. “It is not safe, other ones might take picture of you.”

“I don't care,” Hollander replied. “Are you okay? Did he break your leg?”

“I think so, probably...”

“Shit. I'm so sorry...”

Ilya looked at him and tried to smile, but it turned into a grimace. *Fuck, it hurts.*

“For the record,” Hollander said, “I don't want to be transferred to another hospital. At all. If my parents try to move me, I want to make it clear that I refuse. Find a solution with the police, I'm staying here.”

Ilya couldn't help but chuckle. Damn, this man was really something.



Half a day later, Shane decided that he had waited long enough before asking Dr Vetrova the only question that mattered to him. A completely different dental surgeon had examined him a few hours ago, so it wasn't a mystery that the situation had changed.

“Is Dr Rozanov okay? Did he break his leg?”

Dr Vetrova sighed and continued her examination of his neck.

“He’s not going to be my doctor anymore, right?” Shane insisted. “So there’s no problem. I also need to know *who* is going to be my referral doctor from now on.”

“Чёрт возьми,” she exhaled, and Shane could only guess what the curse word could be. “You are even more tenacious than your mother, Mr Hollander.”

“I know, it’s hereditary. Can you *please* let me know if he got surgery or not? He tried to protect me, it’s only fair. I owe him a lot.”

Dr Vetrova stared at him in silence, her hand still on his neck. She obviously didn’t want to tell him anything. *So professional*. Shane could not blame her – she was careful because he had been absurdly awkward about the whole situation for a full week. He still cringed at the thought that he had told her about the text in his Notes app. Absolutely unhinged behaviour.

But he still needed to know.

“Is he dead? Did he die?” Shane asked. “you’re scaring me!”

“Don’t even try to fake a panic attack. I am not like Dr Rozanov, I might slap you.”

“Really?”

“No, I would go on trial.”

Shane had totally believed her.

“My mother will ask, and she will tell me. You could tell me first, you know?”

“You’re exhausting. Let me finish the exam, at least!”

Shane waited patiently, and Dr Vetrova crossed her arms over her lab coat.

“Your neck looks much better, if you even care.”

Shane had to admit that his neck was pretty low on his list of priorities. He worried a lot more about his jaw, and the entire list of his organs seemingly attacked by a very resistant bacteria. And, of course...

“Great. So, Dr Rozanov?”

“Господи! You’re unbelievable! Okay, listen carefully. I can’t tell you more than what you have already seen, but yes – his leg was broken by the paparazzi, and his ankle got sprained pretty badly, with no fracture. He is absolutely stable, no need to worry.”

“And the kicks? I saw the paparazzi hit him with his foot, before the police officer grabbed him.”

“I don’t have much to report on that. He’s bruised, yes. Now, you have to rest, Mr Sepsis. You’re *not* healthier than he is!”

Shane sighed and hid his face under the covers, frustrated. He wanted to find Dr Rozanov and see for himself if he felt better – and, obviously, he needed to thank him. He had been so confused at midnight that he had not even realised that he owed him an absence of stolen pictures, and possibly even worse. It would have been more simple to send him a text, but Dr Vetrova would surely murder him before he could finish asking the question.

“Have a good nap!” Dr Vetrova said dryly, leaving the room.

Shane immediately tried to get up from his bed. He threw a hoodie on, leaving one sleeve off for the IV, put his phone in one of the pockets, and left his room as incognito as possible. Walking around was a struggle. He felt dizzy, weak, extremely tired, and the IV pole's little wheels always turned in random angles that made them stop moving. But he had a mission, and he couldn't just stay there. *I don't know where to start.* The clinic had eight floors. Maybe Dr Rozanov was in a special part of the hospital, where the staff could be treated more confidentially? He had no idea. He felt silly, in the middle of the corridor.

Of course, he was rapidly intercepted by Rudy, his main nurse.

“Are you going to buy ginger ale again?” he asked him with a wide smile.

“Uh... Yeah, sure?”

“No, you were not,” Rudy understood with a deep sigh. “Well, I have other patients to tend to first, but do you feel okay right now?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty good,” Shane lied, trying to look a bit more lively.

“I see. 802.”

And Rudy walked away. Shane felt blessed in ways he could not comprehend. Was this even okay, from a professional standpoint? *Well, he's not my doctor anymore, so why would I not be allowed to see him?* Suddenly, his stomach sank. What if Dr Rozanov didn't want to be seen in his hospital bed? Vulnerable? Shane had not enjoyed being seen as a patient either. It was surely worse for an actual medical professional, right? They were barely friends, and maybe Shane's attraction was one-sided.

Well. Stay calm, Shane. You can just knock at the door and ask him if he's okay with you talking to him. That was a great plan, actually. He loved when there was a great plan.

After finding room 802 without being recognised by other people in the corridors, apart from a few police officers confirming that he was a patient – *good, we don't want more paparazzi* – Shane knocked. Worry flooded his chest like boiling oil.

“Yes?” Dr Rozanov's voice asked.

“It’s, uh,” he hesitated, not wanting to yell his famous name in the corridor. “It’s me?”

“Come in.”

Shane opened the door and said, in a softer voice:

“It’s Shane Hollander.”

“I understood”, Dr Rozanov chuckled.

Shane closed the door behind him. They were alone, and Dr Rozanov was sitting against two pillows propped against the wall. He was wearing the same ugly pyjamas, and Shane could see how dreadfully *fit* he looked underneath. This man was clearly working out more than he did, if that was even possible. Shane’s mouth felt dry.

“Who told you my room number?” Dr Rozanov asked.

“I won’t snitch.”

“Fair enough. Do you feel okay?”

Shane closed his eyes for a few seconds, trying to remain calm.

“Dr Rozanov—”

“Call me Ilya, please. I am not your doctor anymore.”

“Well, uh, *Ilya*,” Shane forced himself to say without panicking, “I want to know if *you* are okay. Thank you for saving me last night.”

“Is okay. Part of my job.”

“Why were you here, by the way?”

Ilya groaned and looked away. Was he *embarrassed*? Shane took a few steps inside the room, and sat on a chair. He had walked way too much today, after a week in bed. Ilya seemed to go back to his usual role in the blink of an eye.

“This is post-sepsis fatigue. You should go back to your room, Shane.”

God, how he loved finding his name in his mouth.

“I’m okay,” Shane said. “I don’t even feel that nauseous, this is a much better antibiotic than the first one.”

“Good to hear.”

“And you? Where were you injured?”

“Leg broken, ankle sprained, wrist sprained as well,” he added, showing his bandaged hand. “I fell to the ground a little badly, maybe. I was surprised.”

Shane moved the chair closer to the bed. He was nowhere near enough to make Ilya uncomfortable, but it felt less impersonal.

“I’m sorry you got hurt. But you didn’t answer... Why did you come? I thought this was your day off, since it’s not a Tuesday. Dr Vetrova told me you had appointments in another hospital on Tuesdays, that’s why.”

“And she exaggerated, that only happens every few weeks... But I’m not surprised, she does not like when patients ask too many questions.”

“Fine. You *still* haven’t answered.”

“I really miss when you communicated with your phone, Shane.”

Shane took his phone out of his hoodie and typed:

“*Why were you here last night?*”

“блядь,” Ilya sighed. “We were overwhelmed with fake patients, and Svetlana asked me to protect you. I was supposed to stay in your room, and I found the paparazzi on my way there. Is simple, yes?”

“*You were—*”

“You can speak with your voice, I am not angry.”

“Okay. You were off-duty, and you came back anyway... just for me?”

Ilya nodded.

“Yes.”

Shane didn't know what to say. Ilya pouted, which made him look much younger than usual.

“Is it a problem?” he asked.

“No, I mean— I'm surprised that you did this for me. I don't know if you would do this for every patient, that seems impossible logistically.”

“I would not, no.”

Shane couldn't help it. He moved the chair even closer and grabbed Ilya's hand, the uninjured one of course.

“Thank you,” he breathed out, suddenly feeling very emotional and trying not to show it. “I— I don't know why you did this, but thank you.”

“I don't know either,” Ilya whispered.

Shane felt a lump in his throat. He had to find something to say, or he would run away at the pace of a snail and embarrass himself.

“I should teach you how to fight,” he said. “You went down way too fast under this asshole.”

“Oh, I can fight, but... Well, I could get deported, if the judge thinks it's my fault.”

Shane was mortified to levels he could not imagine reaching in his life.

“Oh God, I feel so stupid. I’m so sorry.”

“Is okay.”

Ilya moved his hand a little, as if he was trying to imitate a handshake. The skin on Shane’s fingers felt electric.

“This is *by far* the worst week of my life,” Shane rambled on, awkwardly trying to fill the silence. “I get injured, I can’t speak for days, I get two rounds of a shitty bacterial infection, and now my favourite doctor gets injured as well...”

“Oh, really? Svetlana got injured too?”

Shane pretended to slap his hand, and Ilya smiled. Fuck, he was beautiful.

“*You* are obviously my favourite doctor, Rozanov. My jaw feels like shit, since you decided to run away and get broken by a paparazzi.”

“Run away?” Ilya repeated, suddenly looking uncomfortable.

“You sent the physiotherapist for that specific jaw massage, I noticed that. He’s terrible, he just hurts me and I barely feel better afterwards. My mom went to complain to you, and then you took a day off.”

Shane paused.

“Wait. Was it related?”

Ilya looked away, his face back to its unreadable state. Shane usually needed help to understand what people were trying to hide, but he had thought about this precise issue for a full week and was not oblivious to its explanation.

“You think you’re making me emotional. You think you’re making me *worse*.”

“It’s... true,” Ilya exhaled. “It’s what is happening.”

“You’re lying to yourself!” Shane snapped. “I am not in pain anymore for *hours* after your jaw massages. How can it be making me worse? Be honest with me, Ilya, if you can’t be honest with yourself.”

Ilya sighed and released Shane’s hand, pulling the bedsheets higher on his chest.

“Sorry,” Shane went on. “You need rest, I’m behaving like an asshole. I’ll stop bothering you.”

He didn’t know what to add to that. *You can visit me any time you want, if you find a wheelchair. I can come to your room all day, if you’re okay with it. Please don’t shut me out. But... maybe you have been doing that from the start.*

“I’m the one always annoying you,” Shane forced himself to say, because it was true but painful. “I’m sorry if I... intruded, or something.”

“Your phone. Give.”

Shane stared at Ilya, surprised. He found his phone in his hoodie, unlocked it and gave it to the doctor.

“Why?” he asked, which he probably should have done *before* doing that.

“There,” Ilya said, giving it back after typing on it with one hand. “We will be less tired.”

Shane realised that Ilya had saved his number in his phone.

“Do you... do you want us to text each other?”

“Only if you agree. You have my number, you can make the decision.”

“I– I don’t know what to say. You’re not annoyed by me?”

“No, I’m just... very tired. And it is painful.”

“Did they give you painkillers?” Shane asked.

Ilya rolled his eyes and looked away.

“I said no.”

“Oh, so you can force me to take *my* meds, but you don’t want yours?”

“It is... complicated.”

Ilya’s tone did not invite any questions. Shane nodded slowly – if Ilya wanted to tell him, he would do it eventually.

“Please try to rest,” Shane said. “It’s your turn, now.”

“Is still *your* turn,” Ilya protested. “Sepsis is worse than a broken leg.”

“Well, it’s not a competition! I will send you a text, don’t worry. If you’re really happy to talk to me, though. Don’t feel like you should do this to be polite.”

“I don’t care about fucking polite,” Ilya scoffed.

Shane tried to fight his urge to ask repeatedly if Ilya was okay with him texting his number, and got up as slowly as possible to avoid feeling dizzy. But it failed.

“Fuck,” he whispered, feeling like someone had catapulted him into a boat.

“Sit down,” Ilya said, but Shane simply collapsed next to him, half on the bed and half on the ground. “Hey, Shane, wait–”

Ilya helped him sit on the bed with one arm, and he was surprisingly strong. *Yeah, he could have demolished that paparazzi, alright.* The last time Shane had been this close to his face, Ilya was examining his teeth. Every time it had happened, he had felt like his heart was going to stop, and this time was no different. He was trying his hardest not to look at Ilya’s lips, but losing himself in his wonderful eyes was no less dangerous.

“You should be careful,” Ilya said.

Shane wasn't sure what he meant. He should walk more carefully, sure. But Shane also knew that, if he let himself give into what he desperately wanted to do, there would be no way back. He would not be able to blame it on circumstances, on his own altered judgement, whatever people around him would think of him. He knew where he was, what he was doing, and why his lips were drawn to Ilya's mouth like his stick to the puck. He would never be able to believe whoever would say that he was lost.

And it would mean a lot, maybe way too much. It would confirm that he liked men, that he had fallen for one he was obsessed with, and that his life would be a lot more complicated than he had wanted it to be. But it was a purgatory he was ready to wait in until he felt at ease. Ilya Rozanov was worth it.

“You should not,” Ilya whispered, and Shane felt his breath against his lips.

“Why?”

Shane's mind took the wrong direction.

“Wait, is sepsis contagious?”

Ilya laughed, and the sound was music to Shane's ears – even if he was embarrassed.

“No, but you should take your time, yes?”

“Okay,” Shane conceded, happy with this answer that didn't sound like outright rejection. “I will focus on my health, Doctor. When your hand gets better, do you think you can come to my room and give me a jaw massage?”

“For free? Fuck off, Hollander. I'm not *your* doctor anymore.”

“Hey! You should want to help everybody! What about the Hippocratic Oath?”

“Call me when you're dying, maybe I will care.”

Ilya's words were sharp, but his face looked soft. He ran his thumb on the line of Shane's jaw, smiling and shaking his head.

"Don't die, Shane. I did not like when you had infections."

"Sorry about that," Shane whispered, choking on his breath.

"Is okay. Go back to your room, yes?"

Ilya stared at his cheek so intensely that Shane thought he was going to kiss it, but he did not move. Shane obeyed him, getting up even more slowly than before.

"I will buy ginger ale on my way back," he said before opening the door. "Tons of sugar."

"Maybe your neurons will work better, we all need glucose."

"Asshole."

They smiled at each other, then Shane left. His phone felt heavy in the hoodie's pocket, as if it contained feelings that were better left unsaid for now.

Chapter End Notes

I swear to god at some point

Chapter 6: #6

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, I am currently struggling with a jaw infection (it's absolutely not a joke lmao I KNOW IT'S VERY IRONIC), I'm going to countless dental appointments, but unfortunately my dentist isn't Ilya. Sucks to be me. Anyway here's the new chapter

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

Shane had looked down at his phone for so long without sending anything to Ilya Rozanov that his neck started to hurt.

“It’s good that you did some exercise today, but you should keep it minimal for now,” said Dr Vetrova. “Rudy told me that you walked in the corridors.”

“Yes, it’s exhausting but I felt great afterwards.” *No, I collapsed on my bed and blacked out.*

“Be careful, that’s all I am advising. You have not tripped or fainted so I can’t stop you, but you should not run errands a day after experiencing post-sepsis confusion. Understood?”

“Understood.”

Dr Vetrova frowned as she massaged his neck.

“Do you do the stretches I have shown you? If you have stopped, you should start again. Your neck is much stiffer, do you feel pain?”

“I don’t know, should I be worried?”

“Well, a very stiff neck with no explanation could indicate a bacterial infection, but I would be surprised by the absence of fever.”

“Oh... Well, no, there *is* a reason. I used my phone in an awful position, it’s my fault.”

Dr Vetrova glared at him, and sighed.

“Well. Do not do that, then. It’s simple.”

“Sorry about that.”

“Less apologising, more good posturing.”

They smiled at each other, and Shane was relieved to know that she wasn’t going to kill him yet. He was also grateful that she didn’t ask questions.

One second after she left, Shane finally found the strength to type the text he needed to send.

Ilya Rozanov

Hi

Shane hated how bland this sounded, but he had no idea what to tell Ilya. Everything he actually thought sounded dangerous to share.

Ilya Rozanov

Hi

You don’t have to send short messages, your jaw is not locked on your phone.

What a fucking asshole. Shane wanted him immensely, though. God, his smile. His arms. His eyes. His shoulders. *Shit.*

Ilya Rozanov

It's not locked in real life either.

I miss that. It was good for you.

Why?

Shane wasn't sure if this was supposed to be a type of flirting or not. He really wanted the answer to that question, actually.

Ilya Rozanov

It was nice to let you think about what to reply, when you had to type and show me. Less stressful for you.

Shane couldn't breathe. It was true, he often regretted what he said when he blurted out an answer, as if there was no filter between his brain and his mouth. He needed a few seconds to process information and provide the adequate reaction, but also talked too quickly. This had been a problem all his life – the most recent example had been asking Hayden “Again?” when he had announced that his wife was pregnant. How the *fuck* had Ilya noticed this within a week of talking to him? Shane didn't even explain it to himself so plainly. *He reads me. This is so weird.* But his belly felt very warm at that thought. He was reading his mind so well...

Ilya Rozanov

You're right. How did you notice?

It's my job.

No, but really?

Shane waited for an answer as calmly as possible, but he couldn't fight the warmth that was spreading through his chest. Ilya Rozanov got him. He understood.

Ilya Rozanov

I don't know. How do you say, observant?

You're very observant, yes.

I prefer talking out loud though. The days where my jaw was locked were the worst of my life. Glad it's over.

Do you feel okay, now? Call Svetlana or the physio if you feel bad.

Shane threw his free arm on his face, trying to ignore how wildly he was blushing. Even from a hospital bed, Ilya could not stop caring about his well-being. Yes, it was most likely him being professional, but Shane had barely complained about anything hurting him at present.

Ilya Rozanov

I'm really okay, don't worry.

Good.

Shane yearned for a seamless conversation, but it was a skill he was not given in life. He wanted to know everything about Ilya Rozanov, and to ask him all these questions naturally – but he felt awkward, inadequate, the least interesting person on the planet. However, it was getting obvious that, despite giving him his number, Ilya wasn't exactly the king of texting either.

Ilya Rozanov

What are you up to?

Lying on my bed.

Yes, you should be doing that

After half an hour, the empty and slightly ridiculous texts stopped, and Shane figured that Ilya must have fallen asleep. He didn't feel so great himself, in the middle of sepsis treatment, and after witnessing someone he was starting to care way too much about getting beaten up on the ground for protecting him. The full realisation of what Ilya had done for him hit him like a truck, and Shane closed his teary eyes so the world would stop spinning. He

couldn't handle how emotional he felt. He didn't even know if he was sad, happy, or so intolerably horny for this man that he couldn't think anymore – maybe all of these at the same time.

As Shane tried to calm himself down, especially some parts of his body that didn't seem to understand that he was in a hospital, and he fell asleep.



Ilya knew that he was not fine. His job, the fight, the surgery, the first steps of recovery, talking with Shane Hollander – all of these things kept him occupied, focused, brain pumped full of adrenaline. Now that he was simply lying down on a bed throughout a whole night, unsure what to send to Shane that would not sound too weird, his mind was racing in directions he did not want to hear about at all. His mother, his father, his brother, how fragile his visa was, how he had jeopardised the complicated balance of his life by letting himself be fascinated by a *patient*. He hated himself, but not as much as he hated staying in that bed.

After a nap that had felt more like fainting from boredom, Ilya grabbed his phone again. It was the middle of the night, but he knew how little hospital patients slept in general. It took him forever to type texts with only one hand – he was serious about not straining his injured wrist. He couldn't do the contrary of the advice he gave to all his patients... Well, he smoked, though.

Hollander

Shane?

Yeah?

Tell me about your family.

He didn't know why he had asked. Perhaps he desperately wanted to be asked “and you?” and reveal how fucking distraught he felt right now, too tired and vulnerable to fight the negative feelings anymore. Shane proceeded to tell him about how his mother was a massive hockey fan who took care of his personal brand, while his father was able to keep everybody grounded. Ilya wasn't sure who Shane looked like the most, maybe both. A little boring, in a

great way, but ambitious to levels he could most likely not fathom himself. You had to be, if you wanted to be a successful athlete. Ilya could relate to that – both of them were ready to spring into action without caring about potential injuries. Ilya winced, thinking about his fractured leg. How long would it take to heal? He was not a teenager anymore, sadly.

Hollander

And you?

For a minute, Ilya had started to hope that Shane would forget to ask the question back. Talking about his mother didn't feel so comforting anymore, after hearing how great Shane's parents seemed to be.

Hollander

Complicated. My father is not so nice. My brother asks for a lot of money, he is like parasite.

That sounds rough... And your mother?

Ilya started typing, but he stopped himself. Why was he sending his trauma to his patient? Former patient, sure, but that was still too much. He stared at the screen for so long that it felt silly to try to respond, at that point. He had left half an hour pass by, inadvertently ghosting Shane. How the hell was he supposed to fix that? *I will pretend I fell asleep. I will change the subject in five hours.* This sounded like a solid plan.

Then, someone knocked at the door. Svetlana, maybe? Nurses seemed scared of coming into his room at all, for some reason, so it had to be her.

“Да?” he called.

“Um... Sorry, it's Shane...?”

Fuck. Ilya scrambled to look presentable, instead of lying awkwardly on crumpled bedsheets, with greasy hair. He could not do much about the latter, unfortunately.

“Sorry, yes, come in.”

He watched Shane wobble into the room with his IV pole, then turn the light on, and Ilya shook his head.

“You should not be here, Shane. Is very late, and you are sick.”

“I don’t care,” Shane frowned. “I wanted to apologise for my last text. I saw you trying to type several times, but you don’t have to answer. Sorry I insisted.”

Ilya stayed silent, a bit dumbfounded. Had Shane travelled through the whole hospital to apologise for a text? Instead of... sending an apology text?

“Alright,” Shane said, starting to turn around. “That’s what I wanted to say, I’ll go back–”

“No, wait. Come here.”

Ilya knew he was being unreasonable, especially a few seconds after telling him to leave. Shane timidly walked to the bed and sat on the chair next to it. He looked as confused as Ilya felt. *I can’t help you with that, sorry.*

“I did not want to talk about her,” Ilya said softly. “I thought I did, but not anymore.”

“It’s okay. We don’t know each other. I should have taken the hint when you didn’t mention her in your text.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Ilya was fighting himself so hard he could almost not breathe anymore. He wanted to be sarcastic, to change the subject, to *attack*. Sounding unguarded was way beyond his comfort zone – but Shane did not deserve to receive his pain. He had done nothing wrong.

“I’m tired,” Ilya sighed. “I am not very... logical, yes?”

“You’re logical,” Shane said. “Do you want me to stay?”

“Maybe... fifteen minutes?”

Shane smiled. “Fifteen minutes, then.”

They looked at each other without speaking, simply content to have a presence in these trying times. After a while, Ilya noticed that Shane was shifting uncomfortably on his chair.

“You are tired,” Ilya stated. “You should go back to your bed.”

“It’s just– it’s my back. It hurts. But I can take it.”

“Well.”

Don’t say it. Don’t even try to imply it. But Shane was holding his gaze with less shyness than he would have expected. The silent conversation they were having meant a lot more than if they had said anything out loud. Ilya let himself give the smallest nod, and Shane immediately sprang into action. He sat on the bed and Ilya shuffled on the side, trying not to move his broken leg too much. He put his pillow next to him and watched Shane lie down, while he sat against the wall. Shane looked up at him with relief, his muscles finally relaxing.

“Better,” he muttered with a smile.

“What should I say to Svetlana, if she sees you?” Ilya asked, amused but realistically worried. “And what if the nurses look for you?”

“Are they going to punish me?”

Ilya was taken aback, and he considered the question.

“No,” he concluded.

“Then, it’s settled.”

Shane closed his eyes and hid half of his face with his hand. Ilya understood that the light was hurting him, and he tried to get up. Shane immediately placated a strong palm against his chest, pushing him against the wall.

“Don’t even think about it,” he warned him. “I’ll turn it off.”

As Shane was slowly walking back to the light switch, Ilya could still feel his hand against his hospital pyjama top. He was thankful not to be plugged to a heart monitor, or Shane would have known that he was on fire. When Shane came back to the bed, guided by the light of Ilya's phone, he did not look as relaxed as a few seconds ago. The unexpected effort had clearly taken a toll on him.

“I didn't want to sleep, but I might,” Shane yawned.

“It's okay.”

I appreciate that you're here. Thank you for thinking of me. I can easily tell the whole team that you came here without my permission because your jaw hurt, and you are the only one potentially facing embarrassment. You are incredible, Shane Hollander. He couldn't bring himself to voice any of this.

Instead, with his uninjured hand, Ilya gently dragged a thumb across Shane’s eyebrows, in a hypnotic movement that lulled him to sleep. As he watched superstar hockey player Shane Hollander drift into unconsciousness, Ilya wondered what kind of fucking asshole could break into a hospital to take pictures of him and sell them. He didn't deserve any of that shit.



When Shane woke up next to Ilya Rozanov, who was sleeping with his muscular back against the wall, he was not exhausted, or confused, or feeling vulnerable. He was perfectly aware of the amount of fucking up he had just performed. World-class fucking up.

“Hey, wake up,” he shook Ilya's shoulder.

“Uh?” Ilya yawned, his eyes suddenly big and full of surprise. “What is happening...?”

“Have we been caught? Has anyone seen us?”

Ilya shook his head, frowning.

“No, it's only... just before five. Nurses will come in a moment. You had a short nap.”

“Shit. I need to go. I can't believe I fell asleep here... holy shit.”

“Shane, it's okay.”

“It's not!” he snapped, a little too loud. “I shouldn't be here, that was a mistake.”

“Are you unhappy that you slept next to me?”

Shane considered lying, but he was tired of swimming in misunderstandings, from the first day they had met.

“No,” he replied. “but I can't afford to be seen in bed with my doctor, with paparazzi potentially swarming the building. I also put you in trouble... I'm sorry, I'll go back to my room.”

“Paparazzi are gone,” Ilya said. “If you are scared, you can just sit on the chair, is okay.”

Shane nodded. He really didn't want to leave, anyway. The chair would be less suspicious. Shane struggled to stand up, but he felt less weak than before his nap. *Good*. His jaw didn't feel like hell, and he wasn't as exhausted as he had been recently.

“I think the antibiotics are working,” he commented, letting himself fall carefully on the chair. “And you? Your leg?”

“My leg is okay. My back... not so much.”

“Oh,” Shane realised. “That's my fault, you gave me your pillow... You should lie down now.” *Since you don't want to take painkillers at all*. Shane didn't want to insist.

Ilya shuffled until he was horizontal enough, and let out a long sigh of relief.

“Better?” Shane asked him.

“Better. You said that too. Lying down is great.”

They laughed, but Shane had to repress many thoughts about lying down with Ilya.

“Maybe I should just go,” he said. “The nurse will be looking for me– or worse, Dr Vetrova.”

“I would just tell her that it’s okay.”

“Well... You deserve some peace and quiet, you’ve done enough.”

“It’s okay. It’s my job.”

Shane didn’t like hearing that anymore. At first, these words had comforted him, but everything had changed when Ilya had fought the paparazzi. This was not the job of your dental surgeon.

“Ilya, I will ask this only once, and please respond to me before you fall asleep.”

Ilya raised his head a little from the pillow and looked at him with confusion.

“Yes...?”

“Me, talking to you... being close to you. Does that make you uncomfortable?”

“W– what do you mean?” Ilya asked, frowning.

“Are you annoyed that I’m... always there? Are you even attracted to men?”

Ilya looked so dumbfounded that Shane knew he was fumbling this to heights rarely seen in human history.

“Okay, forget I said anything. I should shut the fuck up.”

Shane got up from the chair and grabbed the IV pole.

“I like both,” Ilya suddenly said.

“Sorry?”

“Men, women. I like both.”

Shane didn't like how hopeful he was getting. This was doomed from the start, but he found himself imagining that Ilya would be... interested. Ilya licked his lips slowly, which made Shane experience a feeling that had never settled in his stomach before. *Fuck.*

“Okay,” Shane breathed out, at a loss for words.

“So, you know about me. Are you happy?”

“I– well–”

“What is it that you want, Shane?”

He could tell from Ilya's tone that he was trying to help him rather than to fight him, and that was a massive relief. He had not found it despicable of him to ask that question. *Phew.*

“What I want?” Shane repeated.

“Yes. I don't hate when you are here, if that was your question. I do not accept things that I hate.”

“Okay.”

Shane was now scared of talking. He had said too much, but clearly not enough for Ilya.

“Tell me why you always want to see me.”

“You know why. Don’t be an asshole.”

“Don’t fight me.” Ilya looked serious.

“I’m not fighting you! I just... don’t want to talk about it.”

“You started the conversation, yes?”

“I did. I guess I fucking did.”

Shane slowly walked to the door, and he could feel Ilya’s eyes digging a hole into his back from afar. He could not just *leave*. How could he leave him alone like that, after saying so much weird shit to his face? Shane was terrified of what was happening, but he was not a coward, for fuck’s sake. He had been silent long enough.

He turned around and braced himself for the truth.

“I am... very *intrigued* by you. I feel... something. I don’t know what. I can’t stop thinking about you.”

Ilya didn’t respond. Instead, he got up from the bed, and carefully walked to Shane, putting no weight on his injured leg.

“Don’t–,” Shane advised him, but there was no way a doctor would listen to his advice. Especially not Ilya Rozanov.

Ilya delicately took his jaw between the fingers of his healthy hand and slowly inspected every place he had operated himself, just like he did during Shane’s first days at the hospital. He looked focused, but also slightly... disappointed? Maybe that was wishful thinking.

“Is it painful?” Ilya asked, his eyes suddenly burning with something... intense.

“No,” Shane whispered, breathless. “Not anymore.”

He had no idea who moved first, but their mouths crashed together so fast that Shane's back hit the door. Ilya was kissing him desperately, as if this had been the only thing on his mind for years. Shane's heart was beating so fast he couldn't inhale normally, only gasping for air, panting, whimpering against Ilya's lips. They stopped to catch their breath, and Ilya's mouth trailed down his neck. Shane shuddered and closed his eyes, totally lost in the sensation of Ilya's kisses on his starving skin. He had wanted this *so much*, without daring to imagine it too realistically.

Ilya moved his healthy leg between Shane's thighs, which made him moan so loudly that he covered his mouth with his own hands, panicked. Ilya chuckled and kissed him gently on the cheek. His eyes were still on fire, but with a softer gaze now.

"Let's stop here for now, yes? This is not the best place."

"No, this is— this is not."

"I'm sorry, I didn't ask before kissing you."

"That's the *only* thing I was asking for, all this time," Shane said, feeling very embarrassed by his own honesty.

"The only thing? Really?"

Ilya had an adorable lopsided smile, and it made Shane's stomach twist with something that his body had never known yet.

"There is no rush," Ilya continued, and he kissed him quickly on the lips. "Go back to your room, Shane."

"For the record, you're an asshole for putting your leg against me like that. I'm going to look fucking stupid in the corridors, these pyjamas don't hide anything."

"I almost fell," Ilya shrugged. "I did not want to do this."

"Yeah, sure."

But, seeing how Ilya was awkwardly standing on his toes to avoid hurting his broken leg, Shane knew he was telling the truth. *I have embarrassed myself by saying that, then. Nice.*

“You could have broken my jaw a second time,” Shane said, because he didn’t like feeling too vulnerable for too long.

“You would need something *inside* your mouth for this.”

“Wh—”

“Maybe next time, if you stop calling me an asshole.”

Shane blushed.

“There will be no next time, if you keep being an asshole.”

“No, don’t lie, you like me too much.”

“Shut up.” It was true, of course.

Ilya patted his cheek gently and kissed his forehead. The butterflies in Shane’s stomach were becoming giant grasshoppers.

“Go and rest, please,” Ilya insisted. “You did not sleep long enough.”

“Yeah. Fine.” Shane stopped himself from calling him *doctor*, which would have rightfully spooked him to death.

After Shane wobbled back to his own room, way more tired than what he wanted to be – but happy that Dr Vetrova was not waiting for him next to his bed – he checked his phone.

Ilya Rozanov

Back to your room?

Shane smiled, his eyes almost closed, but fighting sleep long enough to respond to Ilya.

Ilya Rozanov

Back to your room?

Yes. 👍

Good. 😊

Shane fell asleep without sending anything provocative, completely spent.

When he woke up, Dr Vetrova was here, and she did not look very happy.

Chapter End Notes

Am I forgiven???

Chapter 7: #7

Chapter Notes

I finally finished this chapter after being tortured by the dentist myself

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

Before Dr Vetrova could say a word, Shane raised his hand to speak first.

“I don’t need to justify myself, Dr. This isn’t school.”

“Oh?” Dr Vetrova rolled her eyes. “So you *do* know that you acted irresponsibly. That’s a good start, Mr Hollander.”

“He’s not my doctor anymore, officially. I can talk to him.”

“That was not what I was going to talk about, actually.”

Shane froze. Had he said too much? *What a fucking idiot.*

“Don’t worry, I know what is going on between you two. My issue is...”

She walked closer to his bed and examined his neck.

“You should *not* be walking around day and night with ongoing sepsis and a jaw fracture, Mr Hollander. And then, sit on chairs for hours, lie in bed at the wrong position of the spine...”

“Do you follow me on the hospital cameras?” Shane asked, trying not to make it sound provocative. He was genuinely worried about this.

“It doesn’t take a genius to know where you could be, if it’s not the vending machine for your ginger ale. Stop going to Dr Rozanov’s room at night, alright?”

“He can’t walk.”

Shane hated that he was finding excuses and basically fighting a *doctor*. Realistically, Shane's job was to stay in his bed, not go on adventures to see a man he had been starstruck with for a week.

"But I'll stop," Shane added quickly, to avoid the absolute storm that Dr Vetrova was going to hurl at him within the next seconds.

"I trust that you make the right decisions, or you might still be here while Dr Rozanov is sent back home. He will be gone next week at most, but you could be staying here for *months* if your body is too weak to fight infections by itself."

"Is it possible that I could be safer at my own home, then? I would sleep a lot more."

"I am absolutely positive that you would not, Mr Hollander."

She's right, but...

"I know exactly how you athletes behave," she went on. "I am Sergei Vetrov's daughter, did you know that?"

"Sergei Vetrov? The iconic goaltender?"

"Himself. I know hockey, I know how you guys are... If I send you home, you're going to be on skates in three days, and you will forget to finish the antibiotics course."

"That's not true," Shane unhelpfully muttered.

"It totally is. And then, you'll retire before 30 with the biggest health issues you can fathom. I will not let you go home yet, but you will be free earlier than you think if you rest and do your physiotherapy correctly."

Shane waited for more scolding, but Dr Vetrova's expression softened.

"Do not let Dr Rozanov come to your room instead, okay? He will hurt himself and jeopardise his recovery."

"So... you're not angry?"

“I am angry within the limits of my role here, Mr Hollander. Your health is the only priority I will talk about.”

“But he's your best friend. Right?”

Dr Vetrova rolled her eyes.

“You're not his worst pick ever, Mr Hollander.”

Shane figured that this would probably be the best compliment he would ever get from her.



Ilya Rozanov

No regrets?

What?

Do you regret? Last night...

I would already be back in your room, if Dr Vetrova hadn't scolded me this morning. She scares me a little...

I will come to your room

No! You can't walk, don't do that

Call me?

Shane waited with a nervous smile, heartbeat deafening in his ears. Ilya would definitely call, if he wasn't currently busy with medical staff – *his colleagues*, Shane thought, shivering. *It must be such a weird situation for him...* Shane wondered if he felt awkward, being seen as a patient by the people he usually managed. Shane definitely wouldn't have wanted to be helped in the shower by Hayden or JJ... *And they have seen me naked daily! It's not the same at all for Ilya.*

Before he could torture himself further with a type of worry he had made up in his own head, Shane's phone lit up with an incoming call. A *video* one. *Shit, shit, shit!* Shane tried to look presentable, but his hair was the dirtiest it had been in his existence, and he was lying down, giving himself a face with a bizarre angle, pale skin with red patches, and a constipated expression. *Well. He saw my fractured jaw with his own eyes under the knife, I don't think he cares. But what if he does?* Shane couldn't believe how self-conscious he suddenly felt. It was ridiculous.

He picked up. Ilya's face appeared on the screen, in the exact same position. Shane smiled when he saw how cute Ilya looked with his chin tucked into his neck, and cursed himself mentally for fearing he wasn't every bit as adorable as what he was seeing. *Love yourself a little bit more, Hollander.*

"You look cute," Ilya said with a goofy smile, and Shane blushed. He loved the confirmation.

"You don't look too bad yourself. How is your leg?"

"Well, bones are not repaired in a few hours, so is still fragile."

"Painful?"

"Not really. You are mad, yes?"

Shane's eyebrows shot up.

"Mad?"

"Angry."

"What? Why would I be angry?"

Ilya's eyes seemed to unfocus. He looked slightly... sad. *What the fuck?*

"It's just..." he stammered. "You are mad that I do not take my painkillers. You talked about it, days ago."

“I wasn’t even thinking about your meds, Ilya... I am definitely not mad, okay? It’s your choice, and you’re the doctor.”

Shane was convinced that Ilya was trying to make him ask *why*, but he hated being upfront about difficult and potentially emotional subjects. He usually found a way to obtain an answer by offering his own anecdotes and waiting for the other person to take the bait and imitate him, but he could not remember a time in his life when he had avoided taking medication. How could he get this piece of information?

But he *had* to try. It felt like someone was tightening their grip around his ribcage with a giant fist, but he had to say something.

“Do you ever go back to Russia?” Shane asked – not the question that was expected of him, but something close enough. *There must be something in his past that makes him want to avoid meds, right?*

“Ah,” Ilya breathed out, looking to his left so suddenly that Shane wondered if a nurse had walked in. “Not really. And I don’t think I will go again, probably.”

Ilya’s eyes moved back to the centre of the screen, and Shane realised that he looked away when he was reminiscing.

“Is Russia that bad?” Shane asked. “Won’t you miss anyone back there? You said that your father was not great and your brother a parasite, if I remember well. But... is there anyone else?”

“No. Nobody else. Svetlana, and she is here too, this is amazing.”

Shane smiled. He genuinely loved that Ilya had such a strong woman at his side. But, once again, Ilya had avoided talking about his mother. Was there really a bait, after all? Maybe he didn’t want to say a word about her. Shane inhaled deeply.

“You can tell me about... anything, you know? If you want to. Only if you want to.”

There. He had tried. Ilya blinked a few times, and Shane believed for a horrifying second that he was going to cry on the screen. He looked like he was experiencing deep pain.

“I don’t talk about this with anyone, just Svetlana,” Ilya muttered.

“It’s okay, Ilya. Something made you avoid taking pills, and you don’t have to tell me what it is. We don’t know each other well, it clearly makes you uncomfortable, so let’s just change the subject if you don’t feel good.”

“Okay,” Ilya breathed out, and relief flooded his tortured features. “What will you do, when you leave the hospital?”

“Well. I don’t even know *when* I will leave! You’re the doctor, you should be the one giving me a timeline.”

“That was not the question.”

Shane snorted and looked away, embarrassed. Ilya definitely had a point.

“Okay. I will go to my cottage, where there is a fake ice rink and everything I need to recover in peace. It’s my favourite place in the world.”

“Not my hospital bed?”

“You’re an asshole.”

“But I’m an asshole that makes you travel through the whole building. You can’t get enough.”

Fuck, that crooked smile. Shane’s heart was beating hard, and he was starting to feel something a bit lower that he *really* did not want to think about yet.

“I’m stuck here because your best friend doesn’t want me to move anymore, and you decided to become Superman against a paparazzi so you can’t walk either.”

“Superman?” Ilya repeated with a laugh. “Superman is invincible. I was not so invincible.”

“Sorry, I actually don’t know shit about Superman, I haven’t watched these yet during flights. Lots of other movies.”

“You should definitely watch, is very good.”

“Fine, I might.”

“What else will you do?”

Shane realised that he didn't know.

“I have never been injured like this before. I guess I will be very... bored. I will rewatch old games to think about strategy. I will read books about hockey. I will practice within the limits of how I'll feel. What else am I supposed to do?”

“I don't know, have fun with your friends?”

“I thought I was supposed to rest... Do you want me to go to the club?”

“No, I was thinking of boring things that are fun for you, like doing puzzles.”

“Fuck you, puzzles are great!”

“Oh, I am sure.”

Shane loved talking to him, and he wished he could just meet him over a nice lunch and see him face to face. And kiss him again, obviously. *And more.*

“What do you like?” Shane asked him. “Are your hobbies much better?”

“Not a lot of hobbies, I am busy,” Ilya sighed. “But I like sports cars.”

“Sports cars? Really?”

“Is it, what, European stereotype, yes?”

“No, I was just finding that surprising. Do you drive fast?”

“Yes, it is big problem.”

“I thought a doctor would be more careful, that's all.”

“Nobody is perfect.”

Shane wanted to disagree, but he also refused to make it obvious how infatuated he was with Ilya Rozanov.

“My arm hurts,” Ilya suddenly said.

Shane realised that he had been switching from one arm to another for the entire call, but Ilya obviously couldn’t do it with his sprained wrist.

“Put your phone next to you,” Shane said. “We don’t have to use the camera.”

“I like it a lot, Shane. Watching you.”

“Oh,” Shane blushed hard. “I don’t look good, though.”

“You have beautiful freckles. You will always look good, because the freckles are here.”

“Stop, you’re exaggerating. You’re just trying to make me feel better because you look like a Greek statue.”

“Greek statue?”

The screen became white, and Shane knew that Ilya’s phone was now sitting next to his pillow, filming the ceiling. He also put his phone next to him, physically tired.

“Russian statue, maybe,” Ilya said. “I don’t look Greek.”

“No, not really,” Shane admitted.

“But I think my body looks like Greek statue, yes.”

“Yeah? Everywhere?”

Shane’s blood drained out of his face when he realised that his thirsting about big pectoral muscles sounded like he was talking about—

“Not everywhere,” Ilya said. “I think I have enough.”

“Holy shit, that’s not what I meant, I’m so sorry—”

“Is what you mean in your heart, probably.”

“I said no, and you’re an asshole!”

“If you say so.”

Shane laughed nervously. He didn’t like being misunderstood at all, but bantering with Ilya was simply too entertaining to be mad about it.

“Don’t worry,” Ilya said, suddenly a little more serious. “I know you were meaning other things. I appreciate the compliments, by the way.”

“Alright.”

“And I am not lying about your freckles.”

Shane blushed, and he was glad that Ilya couldn’t see him anymore.

“I still don’t believe you, but thank you anyway,” he let out.

“You’re annoying,” Ilya sighed.

“I know. Why are you even putting up with this, by the way? This must be horribly awkward for a doctor.”

There was a long silence, and Shane knew he had fucked up.

“I mean,” he went on, “it must be difficult for you to care about me, I was your patient... You know? I’m sorry I made you go through this.”

“You don’t need to apologise,” Ilya finally said. “It was also difficult for you. I did my best to hide my emotions, but maybe you noticed it. I’m also sorry about this.”

“I didn’t really notice anything, I thought you found me annoying...”

“Well, you *are* annoying, but I didn’t hate working with you.”

Shane smiled and sank into his pillow. He was glad they were having this conversation.

“I would like to apologise for something else,” Ilya suddenly said. His voice sounded strained, which worried Shane. “I didn’t tell the truth.”

“About what?”

“My father. I told you he is a bad person, but he is dead. He is not alive anymore. I don’t know why I was vague about this.”

Shane bit his lip. This was horribly sad, and he didn’t know why Ilya felt the need to correct the details about the private life he had no reason to share with him yet.

“It’s okay, you don’t have to tell me everything.”

“I did not like that you could think... that I could be friendly to my father again, yes? It is too late.”

“I’m— I’m sorry to hear that, Ilya.”

Shane genuinely didn’t know what to say. The silence lingered, and he realised that he didn’t mind listening to Ilya’s slow breaths. He could imagine himself lying next to him, hearing his soft inhales and exhales, a chaste hand on his waist, waiting for sleep to overtake them both.

“I want to try to come to your room again,” Shane said.

“No, Shane, that’s not smart at all. Do not come here, please.”

“But... You sound sad, Ilya. I want to help.”

“If you want to help me, sleep well and leave the hospital in good shape. Yes?”

Shane felt a pinch in his heart. Ilya was basically telling him that they would not see each other before the end of his hospitalisation, which might be weeks away. After *that* kiss, Shane was not sure he could handle being away from Ilya for that long. He couldn’t stop the ugliest thoughts from crossing his lips.

“You’re going to forget me.”

After a silence so long that Shane wondered if Ilya had fallen asleep, he checked the screen next to him and only saw his wallpaper – the Montréal Voyageurs logo. *What the fuck?* Ilya had hung up on him. Shane hid his face under the bedsheets, fucking embarrassed. Sounding so unbearably needy one day after kissing a man was downright *cringe*.



Ilya could deal with Svetlana trying to kill him later. He had crossed half of the hospital on his crutches, never stopped at any of his colleagues' remarks, and he arrived at Shane Hollander's room red as a beet and sweating like a waterfall. Shane looked flabbergasted.

"What the fuck?" he exclaimed, sitting up with a panicked expression. "I thought you had just stopped the call!"

"I did," Ilya panted, closing the door behind him. "Let me breathe."

He waited for a full minute until his heartbeat came back down to acceptable numbers, while Shane stared at him with so many different emotions that Ilya wasn't sure how to read them.

"I wanted to talk to you in person," Ilya finally said. "I don't like bullshit."

"Okay. I don't like bullshit either."

"So you should stop telling bullshit to yourself, Shane. I will wait for you to leave the hospital, and I will not forget you. Do you understand?"

Ilya watched Shane's eyes go from relief to guilt.

"You walked on your broken leg and sprained ankle, holding crutches with an injured wrist... because you felt bad about me being so fucking insecure?"

If Ilya listened to himself, he would entirely refuse to answer this. He was usually very composed, hovering above everything. Obviously, he was kind to patients, and open-hearted. But in private, Ilya was fairly closed-off, and it had always been a good thing in his personal life. Heartache was not something he wanted to experience at all. Having an armour around his brain was great, actually.

But this damn hockey player with his fucked-up teeth had destroyed every safety wall he had so carefully built around himself. Feeling vulnerable was his worst nightmare, but somehow it felt okay if it was for Shane Hollander. It was okay if he told him how much he meant to him, so quickly, so unexplainably. It was okay if he injured himself to protect him. It was okay if he opened his heart to him in a way that made him feel like his own sports cars ran him over.

It was worth it.

Ilya sat on Shane's bed, and immediately dragged his thumb along his cheekbone.

"Rest well, Shane. I will wait for you. I will call every day. Svetlana will not update me because it is not my job now, and we have confidentiality. You can tell me, or not, it is your choice. I will certainly leave the hospital tomorrow, or the morning after that, so I will say goodbye and see you soon. Okay?"

That was way too much at once. Shane looked confused.

"I'm sorry," Ilya chuckled. "I speak a lot."

"No, it's okay... Can you..."

Shane seemed to hesitate.

"Kiss you?" Ilya helped him.

"No. I mean... sure, but I wanted to ask for a jaw massage, actually."

Ilya almost blushed, but Russians did not do that. Or something. He smiled and expertly ran his fingers along Shane's jaw, watching him melt, so relaxed he looked asleep. There were many other places Ilya wanted to dig his fingers into, but he genuinely wanted to help.

"Was it painful, today?" he asked Shane.

"No. I just wanted to feel your hands."

Fuck. Ilya used all his strength not to let his hands wander. They were in a hospital, and anybody could barge in to take blood from Shane's arm and check if the damn bacteria was gone. Instead, he leaned down and kissed Shane's forehead.

"I hope you will not suffer again, then. Do your physio, heal from the sepsis. It's going to be okay."

"Fuck, Ilya."

Shane grabbed his face, yanked him closer, and kissed him soundly on the lips. After the initial surprise, Ilya melted into the kiss, his heart beating furiously in his chest. He wanted this. He wanted all of this so bad. But it was too early, and he would definitely be in trouble if he was found here. He sighed into the kiss and caressed Shane's cheek, earning a moan that sounded like the most beautiful symphony to his ears. Not that he particularly listened to classical music, though.

"Shane, I need to go," he whispered against his lips.

"No, stay... Can't you hide under the covers?"

"My leg cast is bigger than your whole body."

"Fuck you, I work out!"

Ilya laughed and kissed Shane's cheekbones, one after the other. He loved his freckles so much that he wished he could stay here and kiss them all for hours. The way Shane shivered under his lips was definitely appreciated as well...

“Be nice to Svetlana and Rudy, okay? And your new dental surgeon. And the physio.”

“The physio is terrible,” Shane groaned.

“You should still do your best, yes?”

Shane nodded. Then, he rubbed his thumbs on both sides of Ilya’s face and kissed him so tenderly that it made his stomach twist. He needed this man so bad, it was terrifying.

When Shane finally released him from the most delicious torture he had ever been through, he smiled at him and said:

“Go, Ilya. I will heal and find you outside. And you should take care of your leg as well, alright?”

“Deal.”

There was so much Ilya wanted to say. He wanted to stay on this bed and explain that his mother deserved better than two mentions and his refusal to say more. He wanted to talk about how scary it had been to be a closeted bisexual man in Russia. There was *so much*.

“See you soon, Shane. And don’t go back on the ice immediately like dumb hockey player.”

“You know I will.”

“Of course, because you are dumb hockey player.”

“And you’re a dumb doctor walking on a broken leg. Not that I’m complaining, though.”

They smiled at each other. Ilya was well-aware how exhausted Shane looked, pale, flushed, with dark circles under his eyes – and he knew he must not be far from that himself. *Time to be normal patients, both of us.*

One chapter left!!

Chapter 8: #8

Chapter Notes

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

Back at home, Ilya spent most of his free time texting Shane. He still had to fill paperwork for all the patients he could not see in person, to refer them to other surgeons, or give them access to reimbursed taxi trips between appointments when they could not drive. But his heart was clearly elsewhere.

Hollander

I feel less dizzy.

Yes, resting actually works well 🙌

It's so fucking annoying when this advice is correct...

I know, I have the same problem.

Oh, he hated baring his heart like this, but he felt like Shane could understand him. He had been worried to hear that he would not take his painkillers, for sure, but they were similar in more ways than one.

Hollander

Yeah, feeling weak is worse for us, you mean? Worse than pain.

Yes... I am not a professional athlete, but I understand

Is it the Russian mindset? You have to be strong, or something?

Ilya exhaled slowly. He didn't like having conversations about Russia as a whole, and especially not about how his country had impacted his education and personality. That was personal beyond just saying too much to someone he had a mighty crush on – this was stuff he didn't even want to *think* about.

Hollander

Sorry if it's too personal, btw. Ignore that if it's annoying.

No, it's okay. I just don't know

That's fine. Are you in any pain, anyway?

Only my back, because I don't move enough.

You should visit, maybe... Like, come as a visitor.

Ilya smiled and closed his eyes. How great would that be? Coming to the hospital, kissing Shane... But he couldn't do that, obviously. There was a difference between walking a little in his flat and paying for a taxi to go see his favourite hockey player. Well, the only one he cared about, at least.

Hollander

I don't think I can do that. Can you call?

Ilya didn't even have to wait more than three seconds.

"Hey," Shane said, his beautiful face appearing on the screen – zoomed in to the maximum, but Ilya didn't mind.

"Are you okay? You look tired."

"Well, I have spent almost two weeks here, it's never a good look, you know? I should definitely go to my cottage after this."

"Do you bring your boyfriends to your cottage?"

Such a cheap way to get information. Ilya felt ashamed, but it looked like Shane was taking the question literally and staying perfectly oblivious to the bad strategy at work here.

“I have never had a boyfriend,” Shane simply replied.

“So... Did you bring Rose Landry to your cottage?”

“Oh, you know about her... No, I didn’t bring her to my cottage.”

“Why?”

Ilya saw Shane’s face collapse slightly, and he felt bad. *Fuck, I should have been careful.*

“I mean—,” he started, but Shane interrupted him.

“It’s okay. It’s my favourite place ever, and I didn’t feel like we were a good match. I don’t— I don’t like women, I think. Well, she’s great, but I was not attracted to her.”

“This is not bad at all, Shane. You need to know what you like before you know yourself.”

“Well... That’s definitely true. I just wish I hadn’t spent months in the public eye, being followed by paparazzi, while I was having a shit time in private. It feels unfair how much scrutiny I got, and *still* get, without any of the good sides.”

“So you need a boyfriend, then.”

Maybe Ilya was mean for teasing him like this, but he felt the need to make it clearer. Shane had been very vocal about being scared that Ilya would forget him and move on, but he was going through the same feelings. He had to know how serious this was for Shane, and if these three days spent away from each other hadn’t particularly bothered him.

Instead of mild annoyance or embarrassment, Ilya saw Shane’s eyes water and his lips thin into a large smile.

“Really? Would *you* want that?”

“I mean, yes, probably? I want to know you, Shane Hollander. I want to spend time with you. And maybe... we will be boyfriends, yes?”

Shane blushed furiously, and Ilya hoped he wasn't red himself – but, given how hot his face felt, he was most likely losing that fight.

“G–good to know,” Shane stuttered.

“You look feverish, is it the fever?”

“Fuck off, I feel much better,” Shane said, trying to hide his face with the sleeve of his pyjama top. “I’m on the last day of IV, thank god. I will be able to go buy my ginger ale without carrying that damn pole, that’s good news.”

“Happy to hear it.”

“Yes, and– oh shit, I’m not alone anymore. See you soon.”

He hung up brutally, and Ilya smiled. This had to be Svetlana, because nobody else terrified Shane more than her.



“Sorry,” Shane said, for no reason.

“You are allowed to make phone calls,” Dr Vetrova said, rolling her eyes. “I have the results of your blood tests, since the dental surgeon is absent today. They’re good, so you are on the right track to leave the hospital in two weeks.”

She seemingly waited for him to make a disappointed face, but Shane didn’t move. He was expecting this timeline, and it was much better than a full month.

“So, just more rest,” Shane commented. “Nothing about my jaw?”

“Well, you have not been in pain for a while, you were only pretending to see Dr Rozanov more often.”

Shane didn’t think it was possible to blush more than he already did, but his skin was full of surprises.

“I’m sorry that he injured himself because of me,” Shane said. “I understand that this must worry you, I don’t take it lightly either.”

“Oh, no, you’re not doing that.”

Dr Vetrova sat on the chair next to his bed and looked at him intently.

“Ilya is a grown man. He does whatever he wants to do, and there is no reason for you to feel bad about him defending you against that paparazzi. I am joking about your *situation* with him because it amuses me, not to be passive-aggressive with you. Alright? He did what he did, and I don’t feel devastated because he broke his leg. I can’t control Ilya Rozanov, and I doubt you can either. And that’s okay.”

Shane nodded, transfixed. She had fixed in ten seconds a guilt he had been carrying for days.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“Don’t mention it. I should thank *you*, actually. I have never seen him happier than he is nowadays, and that is happening during one of the most miserable weeks of his career. You’re provoking miracles, clearly.”

“Happy... I hope so.”

“Oh, you can trust me on that. And don’t call him back immediately, your parents are waiting at reception.”

“Thanks for the heads-up,” Shane sighed.

Dr Vetrova smirked.

“You should at least *pretend* that you’re happy to see them.”

“I would rather— well. Nevermind.”

“Sure, nevermind.”

Shane shook his head as Dr Vetrova left. Now that he had almost fully accepted that he was desperately attracted to his doctor, kissed him twice, and heard that they were almost dating, he felt the need to tell the whole world. It was a strange feeling, this mighty wish that everyone knew how great he felt, how comfortable he was with his own emotions. But it wasn't a good idea for his career – or for anything else, for that matter. He was not officially dating Ilya Rozanov yet.



Two weeks passed.

Ilya called Shane everyday, between visio appointments where he took care of his patients from afar, delegating in-person examinations to his colleagues but following every case as closely as possible. He was planning on coming back to the hospital soon, with crutches, since his wrist was now fully healed. There were ways to perform surgery without standing on two legs at all times. But Shane Hollander would not be there anymore.

And he had something dear to his heart to do first.

Hollander

Are you going to your cottage soon, then? Leaving today?

No, my parents want to look after me for a few days to make sure I can go there by myself. They don't believe I can drive. And you, back to work?

It should be soon. I have a fundraiser to do in two days, it is very important to me.

Really, a fundraiser event? What for? Is it your own charity?

It is for mental health. My friend Dr Price has a charity about depression and anxiety, and I participate.

That's amazing, Ilya. Where is it?

It was now pretty obvious that Shane was going to come to his fundraiser, where he would learn exactly what Ilya had hidden from him about his mother. Something he could have googled a hundred times by now, but apparently never had, out of respect. This was not a secret, it could be found in the testimonials of the charity website. Ilya liked that Shane had only wanted to know him through what he told him. There was a lot about his past online, but Shane absolutely never seemed to know about it.



Shane could see Ilya standing with his crutches next to Ryan Price, the massive doctor who could easily pass as a retired hockey player. Possibly more hockeyish than Shane himself. All the main members of the charity were present on the stage, facing hundreds of guests – including Shane and Dr Vetrova.

“Have you looked up anything about him online?” she asked Shane, with a tone barely different from when she inspected his neck at the hospital.

“No, I think it’s... impolite. Apart from looking for pictures if you miss someone, maybe.”

“You had him every day on your screen though, so you didn’t need that. Are you feeling okay?”

Shane shrugged. *Okay* was the best word available, really. He didn’t feel healthy yet, and had to sit down every few hours because exhaustion made his head turn. He was clearly not ready for the rink.

“I am not in danger anymore, but I need to rest a lot more than usual.”

“Which is normal. You don’t like it because you’re an athlete, that’s all.”

“Pretty sure nobody likes sepsis, not just athletes.”

“Ilya is starting to rub off on you, I see.”

Shane looked down to hide his reddening cheekbones under his bangs.

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Dr Vetrova said. “You’re a good match.”

“Oh... Well, thank you, Dr.”

“Call me Sveta, or Svetlana, at least. I’m not your doctor anymore, okay?”

“Okay– Svetlana, then.”

“Do you want some advice, Shane?” she smirked. “We don’t call each other by our full first names – not when we are at least friends. Nobody from Russia calls me Svetlana, and nobody calls him Ilya.”

“Oh? So... what should I say?”

“Ilyusha.”

Shane loved how affectionate it sounded. He was not strongly into nicknames unless the person directly asked for them – Hayden had requested Hayd first, and Jean-Jacques hated when people didn’t call him JJ. Saying *Ilyusha* unprompted would be a first. Possibly terrifying. Even if it seemed more and more like they were dating, Shane felt intimidated by Ilya Rozanov. He was very kind, warm and funny in private, but there was always something sad and cold lying beneath the surface – or directly surrounding him when he was not talking to him, like his current demeanour.

Ilya’s eyes were clearly avoiding him, but Shane did not take it personally – he was also avoiding looking at everybody else. He seemed lost in his own head. Shane wondered if he should have googled him, after all. What if Ilya needed support? What if he could have helped him for two weeks, instead of asking himself why he sounded so melancholic?

Shane had not put two and two together yet. Of course, he knew there must have been something linking mental health and Ilya’s deceased mother or father, but he did not know the details.

Shane watched every person surrounding Ryan Price talk into the microphone one after the other, explaining how more mental health support could have saved one of their family members. Shane dreaded to hear what was to come, even if it was becoming very obvious.

“My mother Irina took her life when I was twelve,” Ilya said, with a voice Shane barely recognised – extremely controlled, hollow, as if every word burnt his mouth, and directly reading from a sheet of paper. “She had no support, and her medication was unadapted. She

died from pills she should not even have been prescribed. I support my friend Ryan's fundraiser events for this charity every three months. Not as a celebrity, not as a medical authority either, but as a reminder that people with depression should never leave us. My mother deserved better, and if you are currently suffering, please know that you also deserve better. We will help as much as we can. Thank you."

Shane clapped, but he wanted to jump on the stage and hug Ilya, fusing their skins together until only a surgeon could separate them. Ilya looked so small, sad, quiet, it was actually heartbreaking to watch. *I asked him twice about his mother... And he could not tell me that she... Oh god.* Shane felt bad that he had insisted, but there was no way to turn back time. At least, he had not pestered him with more questions, and he had accepted Ilya's silence without fighting it.

When a singer replaced the testimonies on stage to provide background music for the drinks and nibbles, Shane walked through the crowd but could not find where Ilya had disappeared. His phone vibrated in his pocket, and he exhaled with relief. *He's not running away from me.*

Ilya Rozanov

I am backstage

Small room called 12

Shane tried his best not to run. He passed security with no issue by pretending he needed to talk to Dr Rozanov – both guards knew NHL superstar Shane Hollander, and fame was a very useful privilege to have sometimes. He signed autographs, took selfies with them, hoping his eyes weren't red from emotion, and walked until he found a door marked 12. He knocked, and Ilya immediately opened.

"Come in," he said, his voice slightly shakier than usual.

"Ilya, I'm so fucking sorry," Shane told him as he locked the door behind them. "What you went through... I don't even know what to say."

Ilya shrugged, sniffed once, and looked away. He was standing against the wall to rely a little less on his crutches, and had large shadows under his eyes. He looked exhausted, under the

normal lighting of the room.

“Is okay,” he told Shane. “Not your fault.”

Shane closed the distance between them and tentatively touched his shoulders. Ilya’s eyes turned back to him, and he smiled sadly.

“Thank you for coming.”

“I will make a big donation. For your mother.”

Ilya suddenly dropped his crutches and embraced him, sobbing against his neck. Shane’s heart was racing. He had not expected Ilya to crumble like this, but felt very emotional that he trusted him so much. Shane held him with all the strength he could muster, making sure that Ilya wouldn’t push on his broken leg. He caressed his hair, his nape, his back, overwhelmed.

“Ilyusha,” Shane whispered. “It’s going to be okay, I promise.”

Ilya sobbed even harder, and Shane wondered if he had fucked up.

“Does my bad accent make you cry?” Shane asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Ilya laughed against his neck, music to Shane’s ears. He leaned back to look at him, tears streaming down his face but finally slowing down.

“Svetlana told you that,” Ilya guessed.

“Yes. I hope it’s not... too much.”

“It’s not. I love it.”

Shane scanned the room for any place where Ilya could sit down, and saw a small couch that could probably handle both of them. Unfortunately, Shane's thighs were often larger than he remembered them to be, and the position was very awkward. One of his legs was almost over Ilya's, but thankfully not the injured one.

"Are you going to your cottage soon?" Ilya asked, drying his tears.

"Yeah, maybe next week. Do you... Well, I don't want it to sound weird, but would you be okay... coming over? I wouldn't mind having someone there that isn't my mom or dad, sometimes I feel very tired..."

Oh no, I'm rambling. Ilya chuckled and shook his head, which made Shane's heart drop to his toes.

"This is very tempting, Shane, but I have to go back to work."

"To work? But, your leg—"

"I operate with my hands, and my brain. I can't abandon my patients."

"Because of your visa?"

"Because I'm a *doctor*, Shane. I want to help people. I feel useless, right now."

Shane frowned.

"You're not useless. You're literally helping for a fundraiser! And even if you were sleeping all day, you *still* wouldn't be useless."

"Do you feel good, not being the captain of your team right now?"

Shane pursed his lips. Ilya raised his eyebrows, showing him that he had proven his point. *True. I hate this situation as much as he does, but he's the only one between us who can actually go back to his job.* Ilya carefully took his hands in his own and looked at him.

"You will come back in great shape, yes? And we will see each other afterwards, if this is still what you want."

“If? I missed you, Ilyusha. There is no way you’re getting rid of me after I leave this room.”

Ilya smiled, then suddenly looked serious. Shane shuddered from the intensity of his gaze. In another life, he would have been scared of what he felt, looking at Ilya’s eyes like this, but he had thought about this a lot lately. None of this needed to be public, for now.

“Are you okay with this?” Shane asked. “We don’t have to tell everyone.”

Ilya kissed him, and Shane knew this would be his best response for now. Neither of them had an answer to the burning question – *what now?*

“I don’t know what will happen next,” Shane whispered against Ilya’s lips. “I need to brainstorm something.”

“Not today,” Ilya groaned, his hands releasing Shane’s and settling on his awkwardly bent leg. “You should sit on my lap, is better for your spine.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“You don’t want?”

“I– I might hurt your leg, I’m not exactly weightless.”

Ilya seemed to think about it for a few seconds, genuinely, not to make fun of him. His medical brain was hard at work calculating the physics at play.

“True,” he concluded with a sigh. “I will go home in two hours, would you like to follow me there?”

Shane couldn’t breathe. This was way more than kissing furtively, holding hands on a couch, joking around. If he went to Ilya’s place, they would most likely – *holy shit*. Did he want that? Yes, absolutely. He was scared, but a billion percent willing.

“Yes, but– Well, I get tired very fast. And you’re injured.”

“Then we will watch movie on television and sleep. Is not a problem.”

“I would love that.”

Shane smiled, relieved. Ilya seemed to be eager to spend some time with him, whatever that time contained.

“Do you want to go back there and get a drink?” Shane asked. “I’m sorry that I made you cry.”

He kissed his cheekbones, hoping that the skin would stop being red, but it didn’t work. Ilya shook his head and rolled his eyes, seemingly exasperated.

“I come to this room every three months and cry. It is like my second home.”

“Really? I mean, I don’t find it surprising.”

“Is it normal to be sad like this... almost twenty years later?”

“It’s not abnormal to mourn your own parent, Ilyusha. Do you want to be less sad about it?”

“I would like to be sad... differently, maybe?”

Shane kissed the tip of his nose, and Ilya smiled – but the smile didn’t reach his glassy eyes.

“You already channeled your sadness into something useful, this charity. If you want to go even further, maybe you should try to go to therapy?”

“Hm. Maybe.”

Shane knew that Ilya had surely already thought about it, so he didn’t push it. Going to therapy was not the most obvious thing in the world for people focused on their job and convinced that they could shake off bad emotions by themselves – he knew one thing or two about that, having never set foot at the therapist’s despite feeling overwhelmed a third of his waking hours.

“I’m sorry that this is still so painful for you,” Shane ended up saying before kissing his forehead. “You can talk to me whenever you want, okay? If I’m not on the ice, I will reply to you.”

“You should focus on playing,” Ilya said. “Your team is bad again, without you.”

“Was that supposed to be a provocation? It sounds like a compliment to me.”

“It is one.”

They smiled at each other in silence, which felt more comfortable than Shane would have ever imagined it. He didn’t like loud environments, but people saying absolutely nothing stressed him out after a while. It was a fragile balance that he almost never stood on at ease. Ilya held his hands, eyes closed, resting against Shane’s shoulder.

In the end, they half-napped next to each other for the two hours that Ilya wanted to spend around little canapés and champagne. It was torture to break apart, but Shane’s heart awakened at the excitement – and anxiety – that they were going to be alone together at Ilya’s flat. Alone for the first time ever, because security could unlock room 12 from outside at any moment. *Glad they haven’t.*

Every ounce of panic Shane was experiencing as they silently rode a taxi to Ilya’s flat faded away when the door closed behind them. When Ilya looked at him with tired eyes and a soft smile, it felt natural, safe, expected. It felt right.



Ilya would have loved jumping on Shane and doing exactly everything he had in mind for weeks now, but their bodies were clearly not up to the task. His back was killing him, after sitting on a couch for hours with Shane’s leg crushing half of his thigh, and Shane was wobbling on his feet from the sheer effort to stay awake. As a result, they ended up in Ilya’s bed, and not in a sexy way whatsoever. They didn’t even have time to cuddle before they both fell asleep, physically devastated by a long day of existing outside of a bed.

When Ilya woke up, Shane was still sleeping soundly. His face looked very relaxed, much more than at the hospital. Ilya had thought that Shane would be too scared to accept his invitation, until he had proposed his own cottage first. *He likes me... I think he does.* His

heart was racing. He couldn't believe his luck. He closed his eyes, holding onto the warm feeling blooming in his chest.

“What are you thinking about?”

Ilya's eyes flew open. Shane was smiling at him, and Ilya had to make a strong effort not to kiss his freckles.

“Hi,” Ilya breathed out. “Do you feel better?”

“Still tired, but it took the edge off. And your back?”

“Really bad. But... I think I want to try something, if you help me.”

Shane looked puzzled but nodded. Ilya opened a drawer in his nightstand and showed the little box to Shane, his hand trembling slightly. The object burnt his fingers, or at least it did in his mind. Ilya had given similar boxes to countless patients, but the awful feeling only appeared for himself. He grabbed the bottle of water he always kept next to his bed and took a deep breath.

“Can you...?”

Shane seemed to immediately understand what he needed.

“Okay. You have to take this ibuprofen, Ilyusha. Look at me.”

Ilya hated how scared he felt, how revulsed he was by the simple act of taking a painkiller, but he obeyed and forced himself to look at Shane. He was surprised by the duration of their eye contact, more used to seeing Shane's gaze drift to his nose or lips. Shane cupped his face delicately and kissed him. Before they could deepen the kiss, he leaned back and said:

“You will feel much better afterwards, and not in danger at all. Let's have a nice rest of the day together, okay? Just take one.”

It took a few minutes for Ilya to put the pill in his mouth, until Shane held his hand to help him stop shaking. He choked on the medication and water several times, his throat closing down from stress and repulsion. When he finally stopped coughing, he tried to settle his breathing but failed until Shane held him tightly. The disgusting taste of the broken-down pill lingered in his mouth.

“I can’t even take ibuprofen,” Ilya groaned against Shane’s shoulder, angry at himself.

“You just did, Ilyusha. You did something very brave, today.”

“Is not brave. Everyone does it.”

“Not everyone does it with your past, just like not everyone is working at a hospital thousands of kilometers away from their birth country. You are doing your best, and it’s pretty impressive. I wish I had that kind of courage.”

Ilya kissed him softly. He wasn’t sure he believed in his praise, but it was nice to hear.

“What makes *you* scared, Shane?”

“Losing,” he replied with no hesitation.

“At hockey?”

“At everything.”

Ilya wasn’t sure what it meant, but he wanted to give him space to explain. However, it didn’t look like Shane was going to elaborate. *That’s fine. We all have our secrets.*

“Anything else?”

“Well... I am scared of other stuff.”

Ilya didn’t need to ask. Shane was staring at his naked torso, blushing, and apparently unable to realise how lustful he looked. Ilya held his wrist gently and smiled.

“It does not have to be scary.”

“I’m— I’m very inexperienced, I need you to know that. And I’m in shit shape right now.”

“Shane, I saw you getting through a locked jaw, sepsis, and I can’t even move my leg properly yet. I don’t think we should have... expectations, yes?”

Shane smiled, but it didn’t reach his anxious eyes.

“We can also wait,” Ilya added, closing his eyes and pretending to fall back asleep. He heard Shane giggle.

Then, he felt Shane’s fingers trace the outline of his arm, and he couldn’t help looking at him. Shane’s face was very flushed, and his eyes dark.

“That’s not what I want, though,” he said flatly.

“Oh?”

Shane seemed to hesitate a lot. Ilya wasn’t sure what he had in mind precisely, but it surely involved what they both wanted right now. Whatever it was, he was visibly too scared to do it.

“I am lucky that you are here,” Ilya told him. “You do not have to perform. This is not the ice.”

“Aren’t you worried? Like... what if we look ridiculous?”

“I am worried, but... This is more important than ego,” he said, pointing to both of them. “And nobody is watching. I don’t find you ridiculous, so there is no problem.”

Shane lifted himself on his knees and sat on Ilya’s thighs, carefully avoiding putting his weight on his injured leg. Ilya nodded quickly to let him know that he was doing the right thing, and Shane sighed in relief. He lowered his face until they were kissing, softly at first, then a bit more desperately. Ilya loved feeling Shane’s hard muscles against his chest, and he

sneaked his hands under his shirt to caress his back. Shane whimpered and hid his face in the crook of Ilya's neck.

"This is what you were thinking about all the time at the hospital..." Ilya teased him.

"Shut up," Shane groaned.

"I refused to think about it. But my brain had other ideas."

"Oh yeah, really?" Shane asked, lifting his head to look at him. "You stayed professional, though. I guess I should thank you for that, because I needed that time to heal and think about it."

"Well, it is normal, Shane. It is already too much that we kissed during your hosp—"

"Fuck that, it's in the past."

They kissed until they were breathless, Shane's hands holding Ilya's face as if he could disappear at any moment. Ilya wasn't sure if his heart was beating inconsistently because of the back pain, or because of his feelings. He didn't know which one was the scariest either. When Shane broke the kiss and removed his shirt, Ilya couldn't help but look at the numerous bruises between his elbow and his shoulder. He had spent so much time plugged to the IV pole that the nurses had moved the needle along his arm, probably not able to find good veins anymore after the first two weeks. He could see that they had tried the back of his hand once, which he had not noticed until that moment. Ilya knew that this was the least of his worries, medically speaking, but he could not stop himself from staring.

"Blame the fucking bacteria," Shane said, forcing him to look at his face instead. "It's not a big deal."

Ilya nodded and tried to reach Shane's trousers to remove them, but the ibuprofen was clearly not working yet and he winced in pain. Shane pushed him back on the mattress and shook his head.

"I'll do it."

Ilya wanted to complain, but it would have defeated the purpose of telling Shane that being unhealthy nothing to be ashamed of. Shane undressed himself with less shyness than Ilya

would have expected, even if his body was as athletic as it could be. Ilya ended up naked as well, trying his best not to look at Shane's cock yet. Shane seemed very anxious about what to do next.

"Do you have... experience?" Shane asked, looking somewhere near Ilya's left ear, too awkward to meet his eyes.

"A little."

"With men?"

"... Also a little, yes."

Shane bit his lip, blushing. Ilya wanted nothing more than to flip him over and teach him everything he needed to know, but he would most likely end up going back to the hospital. And, this time, it would be *very* embarrassing to explain. He would have to do the next best thing, which was to take all the time in the world.

"Open the drawer."

"Do you need ibuprofen again?" Shane asked, frowning.

"No, there are... other things in the drawer."

Shane stretched his whole body to reach the side of the bed and grabbed lube and a condom. Ilya groaned when their erections brushed. *Fuck*. It was going to be awfully difficult to be patient. Shane was red as a cherry as Ilya instructed him to open himself up, with careful but shaky movements.

"You can stop any time," Ilya told him. "There are lots of other things we could do."

"No, I'm almost there."

Ilya couldn't believe how quickly Shane readied himself, and sank on his cock at the speed of light. He knew that hockey players could go through unreasonable levels of physical pain before they decided it was unacceptable, but he was still impressed. He had bottomed once and disliked it, and it clearly had taken more than two minutes for him to get there. Ilya was a

bit overwhelmed, looking at the gorgeous man sitting on him, with pink cheeks and the darkest eyes he had ever seen on anyone.

“Okay?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah,” Shane breathed out. “Your back?”

“Eh, is fine. I like the view.”

Shane smiled and tried to ride him, but the angle was off and he could barely move. Ilya helped him position himself better, caressing his chest to reassure him.

“Sorry,” Shane let out.

“No, is totally normal.”

Ilya bent his knee to anchor his thigh and accompany his movements, and he had to close his eyes from how good it felt. Shane was finally riding him properly, panting hard, clenching around him.

“Are you close?” Ilya asked, surprised that Shane could be so attuned to his body.

“No,” Shane shuddered. “Not yet.”

Ilya understood that his body was responding to both exhaustion and possibly anxiety, and he made him slow down. Shane bit his lip and moved his hips at a more reasonable pace, until Ilya’s heart rate almost went back down to normal. He couldn’t believe he had this man on his lap. Beautiful, brave, compassionate, understanding, funny. He wondered if Shane had many positive things to say about him.

Maybe this trail of thoughts wasn't ideal.

“Are you okay?”

Shane was looking at him with concern.

“Sorry, I—”

Ilya didn’t know what to say, actually. His thoughts were all mangled, starting somewhere and always ending in something purely negative. Shane stopped moving and brushed a thumb along his jawline.

“Tell me, Ilyusha. I want to know what’s wrong.”

Emboldened by the affectionate way he called him, Ilya responded honestly.

“You are amazing, Shane. But me... am I worth it?”

“I can’t believe *you* out of all people would feel unworthy of love.”

That was a lot at once. The compliment. The accidental admission that Shane had bigger feelings for him than he dared to believe. Ilya wanted to tear up. Maybe he was already crying, actually.

“Oh, hey,” Shane said quickly, wiping his tears away with both of his thumbs. “I didn’t want to make you cry!”

“No, it’s just— I feel very lucky. Hard to believe all of this.”

“Me too, I’m sorry that you feel like you don’t deserve it. I’ve been scared for a month that I looked like a weird stalker to you, so it’s wild to hear that.”

“Well, you *are* a weird stalker, Hollander.”

“Fuck you.”

“Couldn’t stop thinking about me, instead of fighting for your life.”

“I will never compliment you ever again, asshole.”

They laughed until Shane leaned down and kissed him. Ilya's hands wandered on his back and cheeks, both sets of them.

"Do you want to stop?" Shane asked, smiling against his lips.

"No, please..."

Ilya was half-hard, but he *really* needed to come. No amount of self-doubt could make him forget how much he wanted Shane Hollander. He could feel it all over his skin, the unexplainable sensation that this man was going to flip his life upside-down.

This time, Shane didn't try to set an unforgiving rhythm with his hips, and simply rode him slowly while kissing him. This was almost too much for Ilya, who had never dared to imagine it happening this way. He was willing to fantasise about Shane tolerating a few hook-ups with him, fast and brutal, until he would find someone more interesting to date and forget him forever. This sad non-fairytale seemed safe enough, realistic. Shane moving around him as if he loved him was making his head spin.

"I'm close," Shane suddenly gasped, and Ilya sneaked a hand between them to wrap his fingers around him.

This would normally be the moment he would flip him over and pound into him until he screamed, but neither his back nor his brain could allow it. He felt very vulnerable under Shane's heated gaze, and he wanted to stay there for a while. It was a good place to be, all things considered.

"Я тебя люблю," Ilya breathed out, completely unable to stop himself.

"Fuck," Shane groaned.

His hips moved erratically, and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Ilya was overwhelmed by how beautiful Shane looked, how sublime he was when he finally let go of a small portion of the control he exercised on himself. Shane moaned, much higher than his usual voice, and Ilya knew he was right there. Shane's movements still, and he spilled on Ilya's stomach with a broken cry.

Ilya followed almost immediately, his heart pounding from both the orgasm and the fear creeping up on him. He had told Shane that he loved him. How ridiculous was that? Thank god he had said that in Russian. *I should be more careful.*

Shane collapsed on top of him, bracing himself with one elbow at the last moment to avoid crushing him. Ilya held him close.

“So...,” Shane whispered. “I hope you don’t find this ridiculous, but...”

“Hm?” Ilya felt like he was going to either drown in sleep or anxiety, nothing in between.

“Я тоже тебя люблю.”

Ilya’s fingers gripped Shane’s forearms like vices. He couldn’t believe what he had just heard from Shane’s mouth.

“Say it again,” he pressed him, almost pleading.

“Я... тоже... Shit, my accent is terrible.”

“How do you know this?”

I love you too. He had said *I love you too*. Ilya couldn’t keep his mouth away from Shane’s skin, kissing him everywhere he could reach.

“Well,” Shane panted. “I spent two weeks trying to learn Russian on my phone. I wanted to surprise you, but... There’s not much more I can say, unfortunately. This is much harder than I had imagined.”

“Do you think languages are... easy?”

“I didn’t struggle to learn French, so...”

Ilya laughed.

“Two weeks is not a lot. And you did not practice.”

“Do you think you could help me, then?”

“I will help you every day, Shane. You will speak Russian fluently.”

“How long will it take, you think?”

“Two months, maybe? You are very smart.”

Shane scrunched his nose, and Ilya’s heart skipped a beat. How could he be so cute?

“I will teach you French.”

“Why do I need French?”

“Ottawa is a bilingual city, officially. It could help you speak with patients without having to call an interpreter.”

Ilya nodded. That was a great idea, actually. He had been in Canada for two years and could speak more than decent English now, so French could be an interesting choice for the future. *This is nice.* He felt amazing, surprisingly. Usually, talking about commitment immediately after having sex for the first time was a certain kind of nightmare, and a few of his hook-ups had scared him off by talking about marriage on the pillow. He was pretty sure he could marry Shane Hollander in a heartbeat.

“I’m dirty,” Shane suddenly said, looking disgusted.

Ilya kissed him in a way that made him melt even faster than Shane himself, and they carried their broken bodies to the bathroom. They took a careful shower together, and Ilya took advantage of the ibuprofen finally working on his back pain to lead a very tired Shane back to bed. Ilya slept facing the ceiling, Shane tucked against his body, his nose buried in the crook of his neck.

When Shane woke up, he couldn't find it in his heart to panic about everything he had said and done the night before. His first time with a man, his first night next to the man he had been obsessed with for a month, his confession in Russian... And yet, it felt like the logical string of events following everything they had been through together. Shane felt so comfortable next to Ilya's peaceful face...

"You are awake," Ilya suddenly said, his voice thick with sleep.

"Yes, but you shouldn't wake up yet, it's too early."

Ilya moved to roll over Shane, but didn't realise fast enough that his back was still painful. He swore in Russian, and Shane couldn't help but laugh.

"You forgot."

"Fuck, yeah, I forgot."

They kissed lazily, constantly mesmerised that they could simply... do this. Shane's arms were full of the man of his dreams.

"Are you sure you can't take a few days off to come to my cottage?"

"I am sure, sorry," Ilya replied with a pout. "I will have some days in three months, maybe."

"Three months... What if I can't take care of myself without a doctor at home?"

"You did not look so sick when you wanted my dick, Hollander."

Shane was appalled, but horribly turned on.

"You can joke about it when you're able to fuck me properly, asshole."

"Oh, I thought you were worried about not being good enough, Shane? This is very cruel. I don't know if I want to see you naked again."

“Are you sure?”

Shane straddled Ilya’s thighs and towered over him, showing off every single one of his leg and chest muscles. When he saw Ilya practically salivating at the sight, he blushed and looked away. He was not very good at bragging.

“You must be sore,” Ilya said, and it made Shane’s heart flutter. He was considerate... and correct.

“Yeah, well. Maybe I jumped the gun here.”

“Is okay. Lots of other things to do.”

Ilya wrapped his hand around both of their cocks, and Shane thought he was going to die on the spot. He admitted that he had not really thought about that in great detail – his fantasies involved imagining himself in Ilya’s arms, and suddenly feeling very good. He couldn’t stop bucking his hips forward, more and more aggravated.

“Fuck, Ilya,” he whimpered. “It’s too early for that, I’m not going to last...”

“I don’t care. I want to see.”

Shane’s mind was turning into mashed potatoes. He was feeling way too much – the almost painful drag of Ilya’s hand on his dry cock, the way his thighs collided against Ilya’s stomach after each thrust, Ilya’s other hand grabbing his ass. He was going to ascend, or disappear into the ground. There was no alternative.

To his surprise, Ilya came first, with a blissed-out face that threw him over the edge. He didn’t have much left to come after the previous night and not enough sleep in between, but the relief hit him like a truck. He closed his eyes and tried not to fall on top of Ilya, this time, worried that they would have to wobble to the bathroom again. He was too tired to go through that twice, even if he had loved taking a shower with Ilya.

“Beautiful,” Ilya murmured, looking at him with borderline adoration. It made Shane’s stomach twist with a kind of joy he had never experienced outside of an ice rink.

“You should see yourself.”

“I see myself every day, thank you.”

“And what do you think about it?”

“Very handsome.”

Shane scoffed and couldn't hide his smile.

“You're a handsome asshole.”

“Glad to know that you find me handsome.”

Shane could feel the first hint of self-deprecation, and he leaned down to kiss Ilya's lips tenderly.

“I feel crazy saying that again, but I love you.”

“I love you, please stay today,” Ilya asked, holding him in his arms. So much for the wish to avoid the shower. “I want to teach you more Russian.”

“Only that?” Shane smiled.

“More, if you stop waking up every two hours. You are only allowed to wake up when my back stops hurting.”

Shane's skin prickled with excitement.

“And... what will you do, when your back pain is gone?”

“I will make you know what you have been missing until now.”

Ilya's voice sounded... dangerous. It was almost torture to go back to sleep after wiping themselves off. Shane was embarrassed to notice that he was almost hard when Ilya fell back asleep. He had never met a carnal version of himself, and wondered if it had been unearthed

or created from scratch, added to himself without his knowledge, fueled by the man he was holding with a protective arm across his chest. *Fuck, I really love him.*



Three months later

The little vacation week predicted by Ilya finally came, and Shane was buzzing from anticipation – for two reasons. First, of course, Ilya would be coming to the cottage. The second reason was the end of an extremely frustrating period of his life.

“So, it is decided?” Ilya asked, after putting his luggage near the cottage’s door. “You will start again in two weeks?”

“Already talking about my health?” Shane smirked. “Come here.”

Ilya pushed him against the wall and kissed him urgently, making his toes curl in his sneakers. *Shit, starting well.*

“So?” Ilya insisted.

“Alright, Doctor. Yes, I will go back to practice in two weeks.”

There had been a mountain of setbacks in Shane’s journey back to the rink. He could never meet the threshold set by his medical team and coach, always tired way too fast, plagued with headaches and leg pain if he skated too fast. The past three months had been excruciating, alternating between boredom and workouts in which he was not allowed to overexert himself. The threat of his fatigue becoming chronic was there, though, and very real, so he obeyed his doctors to the letter. And it had been *extremely* annoying.

“You said you weren’t tired anymore, when I called,” Ilya kissed his forehead. “Very good.”

“For...?”

“For your career and your health. You are pervert.”

“Asshole.”

“You should learn more Russian words, maybe I would believe you.”

Shane smiled and kissed him gently.

“I don’t want you to believe me. I love you, Ilya.”

They could not stop holding each other, as if the other could disappear in an instant. Suddenly, Shane’s phone rang in his pocket, and he unlocked the screen.

Rose L

Hey, reaching out for some news! Is it still awkward with your doctor?

Shane smiled, and Ilya scoffed.

“You told your ex that you were interested in your doctor.”

“Well, she’s the one who made me realise that I was gay, so... She gives good advice, as you can see.”

“Maybe... maybe.”

Shane took a deep breath. Seeing Rose’s message, which he would answer soon, made him painfully aware that there was something he had never told Ilya.

“If I show you something... can you promise you won’t make fun of me?”

“No, I can’t promise,” Ilya said earnestly.

“Of course, I should have expected that... Well, you know, when I accused you of messaging me when I was completely high from painkillers?”

Ilya's eyes were less amused than Shane would have expected.

“I thought I was going to lose my job,” he sighed. “You scared me a lot.”

“I'm still sorry about that... Well, please look at this.”

Shane scrolled through his Notes App and showed him the precious file he had never had the heart to delete. If anything, he had taken a screenshot of it and sent it to his email address, to make sure it would never get lost, even if his phone fell into the lake.

“heeeey, it's roz 🌹 🍷 sleepy. Drink ?.”

“What is this?” Ilya asked, eyebrows raised – a rare occurrence. “*This* is what you thought was *my* message?”

“Well–”

“Is this a matryoshka doll emoji?”

“Please don't laugh, I was completely out of it–”

“I'm surprised you did not put the eggplant emoji. Is your favourite.”

“It is *not* my favourite!”

“You prefer the real thing.”

Shane let out an exasperated sigh, but it didn't come from the heart. He loved the man too much – and he wasn't wrong. Ilya kissed his neck, making him shudder.

“I am glad that you invented a conversation with me, Shane.”

“Yeah?”

The rest of their words drifted off as they kissed more and more urgently, shedding their clothes out of the way.

☹☹☹

Ilyusha ❤️

Heeeeeeey it's Roz, 🌹🔒🌹🔒🌹🔒 Sleepy. Want a drink?

FUCK. OFF.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for following this fic until the end!! This is my first long fic for this fandom. After seeing the nightmare that some authors are going through around here, I'd like to thank you all for being normal in the comments and bookmarks. I feel like I got lucky so far... I appreciate you all a lot.

BTW this is a message for my insurance: if you are reading this and still not paying back my dental surgery from two weeks ago, I will write MCD next time and force you to read it, thank you

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!