

Missed Understandings

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Missed Understandings

by Anonymous

Summary

Being famous means that a lot of people develop certain perceptions of you.

Ilya Rozanov generally doesn't mind this. He has, after all, spent years curating that very perception.

He minds it a lot more when people have certain misunderstandings about his husband, and sets out to rectify them in his signature chaotic way.

Or, 4 times Ilya taught the world about his husband, and one time Shane did.

Notes

I cannot believe how badly this fandom has consumed me. I love it. Do it more.

I adored the show with it's surprising depth and subtlety, and I loved all the fanworks when I came to check it all out.

I have never before had the inclination to write a fic like this (meaning social media adjacent), but wow have I been inspired to try!

Hopefully it's not too awful lol.

Chapter 1: No Volunteers Needed

It was probably impossible to be any level of celebrity in the age of social media and not have had someone sit you down to read horrifyingly embarrassing tweets on camera. Shane Hollander had done it before, and his thirst tweet interview had gone moderately viral after he stammered and blushed his way through reading that someone would *love* him to shove his hockey stick down their throat.

Ilya Rozanov had also gotten a lot of attention when he did the same style of interview, but it certainly was not for blushing. Matching the freak of twitter patrons with a grin on his face had only encouraged them, and he had developed a bit of a reputation for retweeting and replying if he found them funny enough.

So it wasn't really a surprise when Thirst Tweets won the twitter poll asking what the people wanted to see from the Centaurs next. By a landslide.

Having the pair of them read together as a married couple was either Harris's best idea or his worst. Shane thought it might be the latter, but Ilya had been over the moon and badgered him into it.

"Alright." Harris turned his attention away from the light set up and eyed them, most specifically Ilya, with a wry twist to his mouth. "I've got cue cards for both of you. You'll be reading tweets addressed to you, but people will really be watching for how you react to each other's. So just try not to say anything too... unairable, but also don't hold back too much. I'll beep out anything too crass or you can ask me to edit out tweets that make you too uncomfortable; but remember this is meant to be at least a little fun."

Shane shifted in his seat uncomfortably, cheeks already heating up as he imagined what his husband was going to be saying. Since the initial chaos of being outed had died down a little, Ilya had delighted in showing the world just how much he loved his husband, and there had been a few press interviews that had left Shane choking on air when a question had been answered with a searing innuendo and a wink. Telling the grinning Russian that he was allowed to openly say filthy things was like letting a kid be unsupervised in a candy shop.

"Yes, yes. This will be very fun." Ilya nodded, his grin even bigger as he too shifted in his seat. Unlike Shane, his inability to sit still was eagerness, and he had a large hand already stretched out to take the cards that Harris was pulling from a desk drawer. "I wish to hear how many people are sad they cannot touch my love." He shot a wicked glance to the blushing man next to him, "Or me."

"Uh-huh." Harris did not openly roll his eyes, but his tone certainly implied it as he handed them each the cards. "Remember, Shane, you can just ask me to cut if you need to."

"No, I'll be fine." Shane laughed a little weakly, "I've done this before."

"Yes." Ilya said warmly, "Was very cute."

The blush on Shane's face spread, making his freckles stand out, but he appreciated Ilya's attempt at reassurance. He waited quietly while Harris finished setting up, letting one finger drift off the arm of the folding chair he sat on to brush against his husband's wrist in thanks. Ilya turned his hand to reciprocate, squeezing Shane's hand just long enough to convey his support. It might be a bit of a game for him to make Shane blush, but he always made sure to keep the intensely private Canadian from being so mortified he was truly upset. It was more like a new way of chirping - a backbone of their relationship even now - rather than any sort of malice.

Truthfully, he did not even mind it all that much. He just found it extremely difficult to be so open himself, in part from years of hiding pretty much all of himself, and in part from simply not being as gregarious as Ilya by nature.

"Okay." Harris clapped his hands together as he came to stand behind the camera and lights, "You ready?"

Both men nodded, Shane sitting up straighter and Ilya immediately leaning over so he was nearly tipping his own flimsy wooden chair into his love.

"Three, two-" Harris counted them in, forgoing a verbal final count in favor of a pointed finger.

"Hello," Shane tried to look less like he wanted to crawl out of his own skin; although he supposed that might only increase the viewers' enjoyment if his last attempt was any indication, "I'm Shane Hollander of the Ottawa Centaurs."

"And I'm Ilya Rozanov," Ilya took up the baton eagerly, his teeth blindingly white as he grinned at the camera. "*Captain* of the Ottawa Centaurs."

"And we're here to read thirst tweets." The finished together, as instructed by Harris.

"I am very excited for this." Ilya puffed out his huge chest, "I wish to see how many of you appreciate my *Zolotse*."

Shane ducked his head to hide his immediately pleased response to Ilya's endearment, before peeking up with a sheepish shrug when he remembered that those sorts of reactions will be the point. "I'm sure we'll see some interesting ones. You love to inspire them." He finished dryly.

"Hah!" Ilya laughed boisterously, "My fans are all brilliant. Such creativity!"

"They sure are." Shane laughed a little too, the anxiety clawing at his lungs making it come out a bit strangled. "You want to go first?"

"Yes!" Of course he did. Ilya brought up his cards and wriggled in his seat like a puppy. "Oh! This is good: *I would let Ilya Rozanov to smash me into a fine paste and thank him after.*" He laughed again and shot an obnoxious wink to the camera, "Many ways to do that."

Wrinkling his nose a little, and belying the expression with a soft huff of amusement, Shane shook his head as he looked at his first tweet. "*Shane Hollander is baby girl. I want to pat his hair and dry his tears after-*" He looked up with wide eyes and then down with a small cough, "*After I ride him till he cries.*" Clearing his throat again and refusing to look at the smug grin he just knew Ilya was wearing, Shane faced the camera with a quick smile, "Well, thank you, I think?"

Ilya was practically vibrating in his seat, and tossed the first card away to read the next. "*I bet Ilya Rozanov is the kind of man to make you forget your own name and then keep going.*" He waggled his eyebrows, not at the camera, but at his husband, "True, I am. I make it difficult to remember any name except mine."

Covering his face with one hand, Shane elbowed and shoved the leering man away with the other until the chair was no longer creaking alarmingly. Once he felt like he could actually look up without combusting, he set his used card on the floor much more carefully and took a deep breath to steady himself before he started on the next.

"*I'm changing my pronouns to sweat/drop, just so I can run down Shane Hollander's neck.*" Shane chuckled a bit more genuinely and gave the camera a lopsided smile, "Well, I always try to respect anyone's identity."

"Perhaps I should change too, then?" Ilya smirked, "But I would not be sweat, I would be-"

Shane's hand shot out to cover his mouth before he could finish, and he rolled his eyes when Ilya licked his palm immediately. But, he did not call for Harris to cut. He knew Ilya had been expecting his reaction, and would not have finished the sentence anyway. They stared each other down for a moment before Shane dropped his hand and retreated fully to his seat. Ilya remained grinning at him, once again hanging so far over the arm of his chair that he was risking its structural integrity. Harris was massaging his forehead behind the cameras, but it was obvious that he had expected as much and he did not call a cut either.

"Is my turn now, yes?" Ilya's voice curled around the words as though he had forgotten they weren't alone, and he was eyeing Shane with a dark glint in his eyes.

"Yes, Ilya." Shane sighed, giving him a look that said 'behave' as loudly as possible.

He did not hold out much hope there, but it was worth a try.

Holding up his hands in mock surrender, Ilya tossed the latest used card away with a flick and settled a bit more securely into his seat. "Ooh! *I don't just want Ilya Rosanov to rearrange my guts, I want him to scrape them out and make a modern art piece.*"

"Oh, wow." Shane stared wide eyed at the card Ilya proudly held out to him, "That's... Graphic."

"Yes. Is like I said, my fans are best fans." He made a show of tucking the card into the pocket of his pants with a filthy grin. "I maybe frame this and hang it in our bedroom."

"Please don't." Shane did not need to feign a shudder. He knew Ilya wouldn't leave it up there as a permanent decoration, but there was a non-zero chance that he would walk in to sleep and find that card in a frame just to get a reaction.

"Maybe." Ilya smirked like a cat sitting in a suddenly empty bird cage. "You next? What are your fans saying?"

"Er..." Shane shuffled the cards in his hand a bit to bring the next one to the forefront. "Oh... um, this one is a picture of Katniss Everdeen saying 'I volunteer', and the tweet is *Me if Shane Hollander ever gets sick of Ilya topping all the time.*"

Mortification crawled over his skin, stronger than it had all day, and he was considering telling Harris to cut it when two things happened. First, Harris's head snapped up and a deep frown pulled his brows together. He looked like he had no idea what Shane had just said, and their eyes met in complete bafflement.

Secondly, Ilya blew a raspberry with a wildly suspicious *lack* of surprise.

It didn't take much for Shane to figure out what had happened. His menace of a husband had tampered with the cards, for reasons that Shane was probably about to find out.

"Is stupid." Ilya leaned back in his chair with a mocking expression at the camera.

"Ilya." Shane sighed and scrubbed both hands over his face, the remaining cards balanced neatly in his lap.

"What? It is stupid misunderstanding." His accent was suddenly thicker in the way it always became when he was excited or wanted to appear especially intimidating. Shane would bet it was both, because the look Ilya was giving him was a particular mix of determined and mischievous that he knew all too well. "I should clear it up."

Fully aware that his husband would just derail the rest of the interview further until he was satisfied, Shane waved a weary hand to tell him to go on.

"I am big, scary Russian, yes? Very aggressive, smash body into boards whenever I can. Love to throw boy around and good at it." Ilya grinned the same vicious grin he always wore when he spotted an opportunity to absolutely demolish some poor guy just trying to get the puck in the goal. "How would you say on Twitter? Big top energy?"

"Oh my god." Shane whispered hopelessly and looked up at the ceiling.

"Shane, he is good Canadian boy. Polite, focused on strategy and not on throwing gloves. Nice, clean player." Ilya rolled his neck with a pleased hum, "But, he is still hockey player; strong, very strong. Thighs like tree trunks and very pretty abs. We all see him take body down when he wants. Perhaps less likely to throw someone around for fun, but if you set the mood right..." He trailed off with a clear implication in the soft sound the rumbled from his chest.

Throat suddenly dry, Shane swallowed thickly and allowed his eyes to drop down from the roof, finding Ilya already looking at him in a way that was entirely too reminiscent how he had stared all those years ago in a Las Vegas hotel room while Shane touched himself on the bed. A very different type of heat suddenly flooded his cheeks and he licked his lips without meaning to. Ilya's eyes followed the motion with a pleased languor, his legs spreading slightly as he dragged his blistering gaze all the way from Shane's face down his body.

That was definitely not a look meant for public consumption. Blinking hard, Shane ripped his eyes away and busied himself with the note cards. He kicked Ilya's ankle, reminding him they both still had tweets to read, and tried to hide the small smile that kept creeping its way into the corner of his mouth.

Shane did not really know how he got through the remaining handful of tweets, but he could not quite meet Harris's eyes when he said that *all* the tweets could stay in. Ilya's dark smirk as he also confirmed there were none he wanted to cut made Shane unable to look away lest he make some sort of embarrassing noise right there in front of the social media manager. When that large hand settled on his back as they left, he sucked in a small breath that drew a chuckle from his incorrigible husband.

"I'll get you back for that." He promised in as icy a voice as he could manage with all his skin prickling in hypersensitive desire to press Ilya against a wall and do it *immediately*.

"Hmm?" Ilya leaned forward until the words were a hot breath in his ear, "Is that a promise?"

Ottawa Centaurs Official @OttawaCens

Opening up our thirst tweet series with a bang:

@IlyaIlya and @SHollanderOfficial read thirst tweets!

Bear With Me @Rosanooooov

Thirst tweets from the First Husbands themselves! Holy shit, this is the best day of my life!

Puck*Me @Centauress

OMG! This is not a drill! @SHollanderOfficial read my tweet! I still volunteer, btw!

Hollanova @Hollanovtruth2481

Yep, I'm being so normal about ILYA BASICALLY BRAGGING THAT SHANE TOPS LIKE A BEAST

Mrs Rozanov @IloveIlya81

Oh my god. I think it's finally happened and I have to admit I'll never be able to compete with @SHollanderOfficial THAT LOOK Ilya gave him
I'll be crying in my room

Puck*Me @Centauress

@IloveIlya81 be for real

But also, I feel you

Chapter 2: Lessons Taught

Chapter Notes

Be warned, the POV is from a DEEPLY unlikable character. They're bigoted, arrogant, and downright rude. But, thankfully, our boys can handle that just fine.

Austin Johnston's skates hit the ice with even more anticipation than they had in his first game in the NHL. Being first draft pick by a mile had meant that the crowd had been roaring with excitement to see the six-foot-five mountain of hometown muscle in his inaugural game. His heart had been just about bursting, a hulking beast made of adrenaline and pride screaming in his chest. But even that paled in comparison to what he felt stepping on the ice four games in.

Because today he was facing off against the Ottawa Centaurs for the first time.

Their captain, Ilya Rozanov, had been a legend since before even being drafted to the NHL for Boston. First pick in his own year, a beast on the ice and off it; blood on his knuckles when he played and women all over him when he partied. Austin'd had his poster up on his wall all through his teen years. All he had wanted in life was to get a chance to compete and party with Rozanov.

That poster and all his respect for the man was now shreds in the garbage.

Turned out that all those women he was famous for fucking didn't have a hope in hell of anything more - if they had even really got what the media said they did - because the poster boy for wild hockey behaviour was bent. Austin had nearly thrown up when he saw that fucking video of his hero kissing a man, and then spent ages convincing himself it was a crazy prank. He had even laughed uneasily to himself, wondering how Rozanov had managed to convince Golden Boy and bitter enemy Shane Hollander to go along with it.

Maybe they had both just hated Scott Hunter that much?

Except they weren't fucking joking. They were fucking *married*. All that admiration had turned to ash when the truth came out, and Austin's desire to be just like Rozanov had instantly turned into a burning need to see the man brought down.

And now the crowd were going bananas because they wanted to see the new blood verses the old; Austin verses the man who had essentially *been* him once upon a time; or at least pretending to be. Austin was grinning like death all damn day because the betrayal of his former idol felt fucking personal. His coach had been more than okay putting him in for the first face-off, and he was going to use the opportunity to stomp the Russian boy-kisser into the ice and make everyone aware just who was top dog.

"What's it like?" He sneered as they set up for the puck drop, leaning aggressively into Rozanov's space to speak just quietly enough the ref could pretend not to hear. He felt like he had a decent size advantage on the Russian, but Austin did not want to admit that Rozanov had an air about him that made him feel much, much bigger and much, much more intimidating than he had expected.

Rozanov just cocked an eyebrow under his helmet. Dick.

"Knowing the soft fucking fairy infected you?" Austin pressed on. He was waiting to bring out the really big chirps later - it wasn't like he'd lack opportunities against the gayest team in the league - but he wanted to get this first dig in right from the jump.

A noise escaped the Russian, but it wasn't offense. Rozanov fucking laughed, just a brief bark, and then did not say anything else. The most famously mouthy player in the league didn't say shit, which somehow threw Austin more off balance than if he'd dropped gloves. Just a quick, dismissive amusement before he slapped the puck away so fast it was superhuman.

Austin swore as he tore off after him, legs pumping harder than they ever had. He was fast, having trained for years watching videos of this exact man skate, and he had run circles around a lot of other veterans in the last few weeks, but he could not fucking catch up. Rozanov fucking flew, a blur on the ice as he powered towards the goal like some sort of machine made for one purpose only. The defence rallied quickly, converging fast enough to block an immediate goal. Rozanov didn't seem to give a shit, and the puck sailed straight to one of the other Centaurs when his momentum was about to be cut off.

They still scored a few minutes later, and Austin damn near snapped his stick.

He got another opportunity to take a shot at Rozanov not much later. They were both practically on the boards, battling for the puck viciously, when Austin got his arm in a perfect position. For a second he completely forgot the puck, and grinned angrily as he snapped his elbow up and back. Any player worth their skates would be able to dodge the blow, but it would feel good to throw Rozanov off and get a bit of revenge for that first face-off.

But for some fucking reason, Rozanov didn't dodge. His head snapped back as the elbow connected with the point of his chin, and he stumbled way more dramatically than Austin thought was warranted for a pretty weak blow.

It might have thrown the guy off, but it also threw off Austin. Someone else snaked the puck, streaking off with it as Austin froze for a moment when Rozanov grabbed at the boards and sagged a bit. The whistle came up, and the crowd went a bit quiet as everyone tried to figure out what had happened. No one was more shocked than Austin when the ref was suddenly yelling him into the box while the other man was skating off a bit unsteadily.

As they passed each other, Rozanov's eyes met his and he finally spoke to Austin for the first time.

"Have fun." He said in his thick accent, laughing without laughing as Austin frowned in confusion. Then he was sitting down and the medics were checking him for signs of

concussion while he batted at them without any heat.

Sitting out his time, Austin tried to figure out what had happened. There was no way Rozanov had not seen his elbow coming; even kids could block that shit when they could barely skate. So how the hell had Austin not only sent him to the medics (temporarily, from the looks of it), but also managed to do it without having the notorious fighter drop gloves and deck him? Sure, he had definitely come into the game eager to draw blood, but what the fuck was that?

A prickle ran over his skin seconds before his time was up, and Austin blinked back into reality. He glanced around, trying to figure out why he suddenly felt like there was something looming over him, but there was no one nearby. The only person even paying him any attention was clear across the rink on the players' bench.

Hollander was staring from his place between his teammates, calmly readying himself to hit the ice and watching Austin with not a single hint of anything on his face. He stood up almost totally in sync with the end of Austin's penalty, gliding onto the ice with preternatural quiet. Austin had been almost as eager to humiliate the former league Golden Boy as he had Rozanov, but he had not really spared the guy much thought otherwise. Hollander was a technical player famous for being weirdly polite and never playing dirty. Even before he had gotten his hooks in Rozanov, Austin had mostly only noticed him in passing when his games against Boston were on. Guy was just a non-entity to a teenager whose favourite parts of the game all involved how hard he could hit.

So it was real fucking strange to crouch over in front of the guy and feel all the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

Hollander did not look down, his dark eyes drilling into Austin with a focus that felt less textbook and more personal. He wasn't that big a guy, especially compared to players like his *husband* or Austin. His build was more lean muscle than bulk, built for speed more than he was for the brawl; frustrating to catch but nothing to fear. Except, as the sticks hit the ice in preparation for the puck, Austin was feeling way less certain of himself than he had when he was staring at a solidly established reputation of gleeful brutality.

"How's the elbow?" Hollander had a quiet voice, always so polite in the press. It was still quiet now, but it wasn't the humble deference every hockey fan or player had heard in a million sound bites. The ice was warmer than that voice, and soft as a pillow in comparison.

A shiver ran up Austin's back, a thousand times stronger than in the box.

He was still searching for a response when the puck dropped. There wasn't even time for his stick to move before a black blur shot directly between his skates. Hollander was still staring him dead in the eyes as the crowd gasped in disbelief, and Austin straightened up to turn around like he was swimming through tar. His whole team was staring at the goal, jaws dropped at the sight of the puck sitting dead centre of the net. The goalie looked a bit like he was punch drunk, head swivelling between his net and the centre like he was trying to shake off a hit or wake up from a really weird dream.

When his brain finally caught up, Austin turned back to find the same total lack of expression on his opponent's face; as though the guy hadn't just shot a goal so impossibly fast that Austin was wondering if he had blacked out for a second.

"Must hurt, then." Hollander observed drily, as though that explained the way Austin hadn't even been able to twitch his stick, and then looked away to the ref like nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

What followed was the most humiliating experience of Austin's entire life. He had braced for the hits the Centaurs would dole out in revenge for the elbow to their captain, like any team would, but he had not really expected to do more than laugh it off. Turned out that it was real hard to laugh off hits that felt like the hammer of God while they stayed just clean enough that he would have looked like a tool if he dropped gloves over them. Even harder to swallow the sound of his team's net seeing way too much use. By the end of the second, his whole team was starting to hurt bad and the scoreboard mocked them with a huge 4-0.

Hollander had scored a hat trick already, and only seemed to do it when it made Austin look like a total idiot. He didn't bother to talk past that first time, but his dark eyes and stony face were always there when Austin looked up and his stick was always always *fucking always* there to hook the puck away like there wasn't anyone defending it. That chill had spread from the rookie's back all the way up to under his helmet, and he was increasingly desperate to get any control back. He tried to get a few of his own preferred methods in, aiming to knock down Hollander whenever they were close enough, but it was like trying to punch smoke; with just a flick of those intense eyes, Hollander would see him coming and slip away like Austin wasn't even trying.

Rozanov wasn't any better, but in a really strange way. He was still getting hits in, crushing bodies to the boards and generally careening around like a cannonball, but he had barely gone near Austin at all. The only times he had done, the hits had been so insulting Austin felt like a kid again. Stupid taps and shoves that were perfectly timed to trip him up with minimal effort. The rest of the team would be walking bruises from the demon Russian by the end of the night, but Austin had barely been touched by him. Not that he wanted to be touched by the guy, but *fuck* it was embarrassing. He could also see it in his team's eyes, the way they knew they were taking the hits that Rozanov was pointedly not doling out to him.

The real axe came at the very end of the game, right on the buzzer. Austin had just been gliding to a stop, a huge gaping hole of disappointment in his gut and winded by the hardest game he had ever played, when something hit his skate and the world suddenly went tumbling end over end. The ice rushed up to meet him, knocking any remaining air out of him and making his teeth clack together hard enough to feel even through his mouthguard. Pain came on the heels of that chaos, leaving Austin rolling over with a groan to blink up at the roof. A face blocked out the lights, replacing their glare with the deadly calm of Hollander.

"Sorry," He shrugged, totally unrepentant and already turning to go join his team in celebrating. "Didn't see you there."

The locker room after the game was dead silent. His team stripped down and showered like they were strangers, every last one of them feeling that awful 6-0 like a brand. Austin sat

with his head in his hands, still dripping sweat while everyone was starting to file out, trying to figure out what the fuck had just happened. It was pretty obvious that his hit to Rozanov had sparked the whole thing, but he still could not figure out *how*. The hit shouldn't have even gotten through, just a jab that was meant to knock the guy off his stride, and even when it had connected it had barely been a tap. But after Rozanov had meandered over to be checked out for a hit he was recovered from in seconds, everything had gone to shit.

And somehow, it was all down to Hollander. Austin was sure of it, dead sure right down in his bruised ego. Without a word said or direction given, Hollander had been the one to really orchestrate the brutality that followed. When they saw the match schedule, the more experienced guys on his team had groaned about facing the former Metro almost as much as they had Rozanov, but Austin had just scoffed at them.

He wasn't fucking scoffing now.

The Centaurs hadn't bothered with any brawls, but the point had been made loud and clear. They had been out for blood, and had no problem extracting it in the most humiliating ways possible. Between them, Rozanov and Hollander had turned a team that was basically a joke into a weapon.

Austin finally had to shower the shame off his skin, scrubbing until he felt raw. He was the last one to clean up, and he knew it probably wasn't long until Coach came hunting for him again. Throwing on his clothes haphazardly, he took a long moment to steady himself before leaving to endure the rest of the night stewing on his humiliation. Maybe later he would use it to fuel his hate and determination to destroy the Centaurs, but tonight he was probably just going to wallow a bit.

"Is good game, yes?" A voice scared the shit out of him when he finally left the lockers.

Rozanov was leaning against the painted bricks right next to the door, dressed warmly and wearing a smirk that made Austin want to start swinging.

But, *fuck* if he wasn't too tired to do anything about it. So he just hitched his bag higher, fighting a wince when his shoulder pulled from the single hit Hollander had landed, and glared at the older player. "What the fuck do you want?"

"Hmm." Rozanov pushed off the wall with a smug little shrug. "You know old stories? Like fairy tales. Not this Disney shit you Americans love? *Real* stories?"

"Huh?" Austin grunted, feeling a bit stupid and pretty goddamn angry about it. "The fuck are you talking about?"

"The old stories, yes? With fairies and shit." Rozanov stepped closer, his smirk absolutely lethal in a way that made Austin start trying to figure out an exit. "You think they are just, ah-" He fluttered his fingers through the air next to his head. "Little nothings. Just sparkles and pretty giggles."

"So what?" Austin squared up belligerently, wondering when the first punch would come. He was feeling battered as hell, but he also wasn't going to go down easy.

"So, you mean my Husband is nothing but sparkles and pretty giggles when you call him that." Rozanov laughed, mean and delighting in it. "But Shane? Well... he is not your American Disney bullshit. You want to call him fairy? First, you are a child who can barely skate, let alone compare to him." He narrowed his eyes, all mirth dropping from his face as he stepped so close Austin started to curl in on himself despite his best efforts. "Second, Shane is like something of the old world, even if he is born here. He is fairy from *my* childhood tales, what you call... Vily? A Fae? A killer of men in a shell too lovely for mortals to resist. He is just too nice to indulge... often. Until silly little boys maybe don't know how to control their mouths, you see?"

Austin couldn't make his mouth move as his knuckles turned white around the strap of his bag. He normally would have tried to pulverise anyone else getting so in his face and talking to him like that, but something about Rozanov made every last bit of fight fall right out of him. His heavy, painful swallow seemed to satisfy the man, and he stepped back with his grin returning.

"Remember the moral of your story, little boy." He waved carelessly and began to walk away, "Or I let my husband teach you all over again."

Joshie @hockeyboy21

Daaaaaamn, I don't think I've ever seen a more painful game of hockey.
Remind me to never piss off @SHollanderOfficial

Sun'n'Ice @Sunshine24

Who needs to throw a punch when you can just casually end their whole career? Ouch.

Mrs Rozanov @IloveIlya81

Wow, I was so shocked to see @IlyaIlya take that elbow and nearly go down.
Then I saw what @SHollanderOfficial and the rest of the team did to the rookie...
definitely took it on purpose.

Puck*Me @Centauress

Wait, isn't that the kid who talked shit about @AdmiralScottHunter?
Anyone else seeing a pattern here?

Trouble Lover @MistyMountMain

@Centauress Totally is. What a little jerk. That shot from centreline was everything he deserved.

Chapter 3: For A Good Cause

Chapter Notes

So apparently I am writing this faster than I have ever written anything before lol I had the bones of it pretty ready, but I'm managing to smash this thing out on my lunch breaks. Which, honestly, probably says a lot about the unhealthy level of fixation this fandom has inspired in me 😁

Hayden Pike did not remember that he was the spark for yet another round of Ilya Rozanov's particular brand of unhinged chaos until it was already pretty much over. Mostly because he was absolutely blitzed out of his mind when he caused it.

"I'm just saying," He was listing drunkenly against the bricks of an alley way too filthy for peace of mind, propping himself up and blissfully lost in the feeling of far too many drinks after a hard-played game. "Hot? I mean, obviously. Definitely. But sexy?" He shrugged with a vaguely negative bobble of his head, nearly sending himself tumbling when it upset his precarious balance. He very rarely drank anything close to excess, and was not exactly practiced at holding himself together when he was three sheets to the wind.

Rozanov glanced at him sideways, his eyebrows doing that bitchy arching thing that always pissed Hayden off. Despite matching every one of Hayden's drinks with two of his own, the Russian barely seemed fazed. He looked like the picture of Slavic ease, leaning against the same wall in a leather jacket and black jeans so tight that Hayden had wondered how the hell they didn't split over the bulging muscles of his thighs. The only real indication that the guy was anything but sober was the cigarette he was lifting to his lips. He never really smoked anymore, not wanting to risk the disapproval of his husband. Shane Hollander would not say anything in public about it if he saw Rozanov spark up, but the disapproval would absolutely radiate off him long after the offense was done.

But even Shane seemed to think the occasional drunk cigarette got a pass. Or maybe he was just still busy inside, trapping J.J. Boiziau into one of his endless game postmortems. The Centaurs/Metros rivalry was outstripping the historical Metros/Raiders one pretty quickly, and the rest of Hayden's team was probably on the other side of town being completely fucking disgusting about winning that night's game. Hayden preferred to come out with the Centaurs these days, because his own team's bullshit was making him contemplate talking to his wife Jackie about maybe trading to another team even if it meant uprooting their family. Listening to Shane obsess over every last goal and play, or putting up with Rozanov's obnoxious presence, was way preferable.

"He is literal underwear model!" Rozanov scoffed, bringing Hayden's admittedly fuzzy focus back to him.

He blew a dismissive raspberry. "I *know*. Didn't I just say he was hot? That's just objective truth. But there's a big difference between *attractive* and *sexy*." He made a frustrated sound in the back of his throat, trying to claw the right words out from the lake of vodka Rozanov had convinced him to drink. "It's like... Oh! So, Shane is nice to look at, like one of those sculptures, a bit. You can see him and go '*oh, there's a guy who's genetically blessed*', right?"

"Right." Rozanov looked deeply amused and proffered his cigarette to Hayden, who took it thoughtlessly and had exactly one drag before handing it back. No one else knew that Hayden occasionally did this if he got drunk enough, but Rozanov thankfully chose not use it for blackmail and kept that fact from both Jackie and Shane.

"But he's not gonna wink at some girl-" He stopped and frowned, "Or guy, and have their panties hit him in the face." His frown deepened and he added for fairness, "Except you, I guess. But everyone's got their own thing that gets them going. Outliers to every statistic and all that jazz."

"Okei." Outwardly, Rozanov looked unimpressed by the logic, meaning that Hayden completely failed to spot the speculative twinkle in the guy's eye underneath the frown.

He probably would have shut up and tried to bludgeon the last few minutes from the menace's head if he had.

"But, anyway... Where was I?" He tilted his head back and grasped at his severely derailed train of thought. "Oh! Right. Firemen. We've always had a hockey calendar. They're perfectly good, yeah? But I make one comment about those firemen calendars being for desperate middle-aged women, and next thing I know, Jackie's replaced it and I'm staring at oiled up beefcakes every time I walk into the study." He gestured emphatically at himself with both hands. "I'm literally a professional athlete! She sees enough abs every time I take off my shirt."

"Does she?" Another bitchy flick of Rozanov's eyebrows.

"Fuck you, Rozanov." Hayden said with feeling. "Dick."

He totally forgot that conversation the second they were back inside the bar, and he certainly did not remember when he woke up the next morning with his head pounding. Which meant that Hayden was pretty surprised to receive an official looking email a few weeks later inviting him to be part of a fundraising calendar for the Irina Foundation. He was even more surprised to find out that it was apparently Rozanov's idea to invite him.

"We need variety." The Russian's indifferent shrug was goddamn audible over the phone once Shane handed it over. "Some people have no taste and like bad hockey players who look like accountants. We should cater to them too."

"Fuck you, Rozanov."

"No, no, I'm serious. Is popular look with the visually impaired." There was a heavy sigh, very likely because Shane was sitting there and staring his husband down with that particular

spousal-disapproval look he might have learned from Jackie. Or Yuna. "*Fine*. You have demographic. Real one."

"I have a what?" Hayden glared suspiciously at the wall, ignoring the latest gleaming man on the calendar.

"Dem-o-graph-ic." Rozanov sounded the word out exactly like he did when he was trying to teach the Pike children something in his native tongue. "You are dad, and some people love that. They think you sexy because you are super boring and have a million kids. Would mean a lot to us if you join."

That was probably the nicest thing the man had ever said to him, and Hayden wondered if Shane was holding up cue cards or something.

His eyes shifted to Jackie's damn calendar, and he grimaced in thought. "Alright, I'll do it."

"Yes!" Rozanov sounded weirdly excited, but powered on before Hayden could do more than frown slightly. "Shoot will be in Vegas after awards, mm? Make sure everyone in one place, get it done together."

Seemed a bit cumbersome to Hayden, who did not always travel to the awards, but whatever. He had actually been planning to go that year anyway.

Rozanov had managed to gather a pretty wide group of players for the shoot, which actually gave some credence to his insistence that he just wanted Hayden for the demographics. It looked like there was pretty much a player for every taste there, from teams all across the league, and Hayden finally relaxed when he realised it really was not a prank. He wasn't particularly insecure about his looks, but he had wondered about Rozanov's eagerness to get him in on it. Maybe he had done it to make Shane happy.

It was all happening at the rink, because of course it was. All promotional materials had been stripped or covered, the main lights were firmly off to make way for the portable stage lights, and there were a huge number of back stage types buzzing around. Hayden wasn't really one of the players who got asked to do a lot of shoots or ads, but he had done the usual promotional shots that any pro did. He found it interesting to watch who was like him and feeling a little out of place in the specific context of the shoot, compared to who was obviously well and truly in their comfort zone. The level of hair and makeup was definitely new to a few of the guys, and they generally sat like they were afraid of breathing once it was done. Others were chatting easily while various products were applied to make them look artfully sweaty, laughing and joking like they spent their life being fussed over by a whole team of professionals.

All of them, new to it or not, had made sure to do plenty of exercises to enhance what hockey gave them. Getting a bit of a pump was pretty much a prerequisite if you were going to be stripped down and oiled up for charity.

Once the whole circus got rolling, it was actually pretty fascinating to watch. Hayden had been the first called up, so he didn't have to hang around, but he chose to anyway. The photographer had set him up in the locker room, the lighting bouncing off his oiled up skin in

a way that made Hayden preen a bit when he realised his muscles were probably looking the most defined they ever had. A few of the other players had watched, with minor chirping and heckling as he tried to get in the flow, but they drifted in and out without much interference. It was much harder than he would have thought to relax into what the staff was telling him, and he kept having to redo shots when they told him he was looking a bit stiff.

Of all people, it was Shane who came to the rescue.

"Do that thing where you lean up on a door frame." He suggested seriously, peering over a tech's shoulder at the laptop displaying the shots so far.

"What?" Hayden looked up from where he had been trying to lounge alluringly on the bench.

"Remember Jackie said she likes when you stand in the bedroom doorway and look at her?" Shane offered him a bit of a smile, laughing under his breath in obvious remembrance of the rather passionate wine-induced rant Hayden's wife had gone on not so long ago. "Do that."

Feeling a bit dubious, Hayden only got up when the photographer nodded and started instructing for the lights to be moved. It took a few tries to get it right, feeling wildly strange to do something that he had not even realised was a *thing* until his wife was several wines deep at dinner with Shane and Rozanov. The director eventually told him to forget them all and imagine his wife. That had been the trick, apparently. He leaned comfortably in the doorway, legs crossed casually at the ankle and one arm resting loosely above his head on the frame, picturing Jackie tucked up in their bed instead of a whole gaggle of people staring avidly at him. A series of flashes that left him half blind later, and he was told he could relax.

"Looks good." Shane offered him a thumbs up with a smile, still positioned behind the tech in his hockey pants and a fully zipped hoodie.

"Thanks, mate." Hayden breathed a little sigh of relief that he was done, nodding politely to the director and photographer when they also gave him their approval.

Cliff Marlow was probably the only person more awkward than Hayden. He kept staring around with wide eyes every time he thought that the camera shutter was going to click, ruining carefully curated poses and bringing tightness to the polite smiles of the crew. In the end, his winning shot had been a total fluke.

"Hey, Marley!" Rozanov's brash call came when the guy was slumped over in the penalty box, the photographer fiddling with his cameras and turned away to let the man gather his nerves.

"What, Roz?" Marlow looked up, his dark brows drawing down over his eyes and his thumb resting at the very corner of his mouth as though he was about to swipe away the carefully not-too-obvious gloss there.

The photographer proved themselves to be worth their weight in gold right then. Even though they were facing completely the other direction and apparently ignoring everyone, they managed to get a camera aimed the right way just in time to capture the intense glower Marlow sent his former Captain over the bulging muscles of his massive shoulder.

Hayden was not even pretending he hadn't been watching the whole thing, and saw the shot blink up on the laptop screen. And, dammit, he had to admit it was a hell of a photo.

Marlow's huge frame was hunched in a way that looked like he was about to spring over the boards for a fight rather than to run away from the whole shoot, and the look on his face as he glared just off the side of the camera made him look dangerous in the kind of way that would probably make Jackie whistle. Everyone seemed to agree, and there was a lot of clapping the man on the back as he hurriedly tossed on his hoodie and escaped to the showers.

Most of the others seemed to be having fun. The goalie from New Jersey had a reach that could probably cover the entirety of Canada, and he stretched out to his full wingspan as he leaned back to rest his arms on the goal with a knowing smirk and every last ab flexed to catch the light. A rookie from LA had apparently done a bit of modelling as a teen, and he was completely comfortable trying pretty much anything they asked of him. He ended up with an action shot, skating at high speed towards the camera and then somehow managing to look sexy while snowing the crew. Everyone had laughed while they wiped off, accepting his apologies with assurances he had done perfectly.

Scott Hunter lounged over the boards in a way that oddly reminded Hayden of the famous moment he had brought Kip onto the ice. Most of his body actually ended up hidden in the final shot, but that didn't do much to detract from the smouldering, soulful way he stared right down the lens. The tensed muscles of his forearms and the inviting looseness of his outstretched hand didn't hurt any, either.

Rozanov had a total blast when it was his turn, shooting onto the ice with a whoop. He was dressed the same as the rest of them, full kit below the hips and not a stitch above, but he was the only one who had stayed shirtless the whole time everyone else was having their turn. The crazy Russian did not have so much as a single goosebump, posing and flexing his muscles with every expression under the sun. The crew seemed to find his enthusiasm infectious, even though he was the second last of the day and they were all tired as hell. They indulged his suggestions and tossed out plenty of their own, moving him around the whole rink with banter flying through the air. Shane laughed from next to Hayden when his husband smirked from his latest pose in the stands and then excitedly flew down the stairs with a shouted suggestion that he should try some stretches.

How someone could get bare-chested on the ice and not freeze his fucking nipples off was a mystery, but Rozanov somehow managed it. He probably had more options for shots than the rest of them combined, but Hayden had a sneaking suspicion he knew which one would win. Rozanov had been almost flat to the ice, every carved out muscle of his back on full display as they stretched out above the deep eyes and barely parted lips of his serious expression. He lifted his hips in the air and spread his thighs wide like he was just loosening up before the game. Except players didn't usually drop their chests to the ice in the process of limbering up, and they certainly did not stretch out one heavily muscled, gleaming arm like they were about to imitate a prowling cat.

The coup de fucking grâce was that ever present golden crucifix just barely kissing the ice, catching the flashes and lighting up like a beacon.

It should have looked stupid as fuck. If any of the rest of them had tried, it definitely would have. But even Hayden was forced to admit right down in the very base of his confirmed heterosexual soul that he suddenly understood why Shane had lost his mind enough to fuck the guy in the first place.

God, a man that irritating should not be allowed to have that much raw magnetism. It was fucking unfair, is what it was.

They called it a wrap for Rozanov after that, so the director must have agreed with Hayden's assessment of the shot. Which meant it was time for the last player.

Poor Shane peeled off his hoodie awkwardly and let the makeup team slick his revealed torso up with the oil. His face transformed from indulgent fondness for Rozanov's antics to the determined focus he brought to every task as he listened to the shots the director wanted to try. He was not awkward in front of the camera like Hayden and Marlow, but he definitely lacked the ease of Rozanov and the kid from LA. Every pose was executed exactly as requested, and as many times as needed, but Hayden could see his friend getting more and more tense as his slot stretched out.

The crew were nice about it, praising him lavishly as they moved about him, but there was a sense that they all knew it was not quite going to plan. Shane posed and moved like he was doing another editorial ad, shying into himself just on the edge of the desired sexiness of the day. Hayden felt his frustration, and wished he knew how to make it better as Shane was directed to sit in the gate with his skates on the ice. No one seemed to quite know how to break through all the carefully instilled media training that had followed Shane for years, and the photographer crouched in front of him, pointing at his camera screen and offering gentle redirections before they started shooting again.

But, someone really did know Shane well.

An unholy scraping noise shattered the air, making everyone startle and whip around all at once. Rozanov smirked at them, making his way leisurely across the ice and towing a chair that he had gotten from God only knew where. It definitely was not one from the rink, not unless the VIP sections were significantly nicer than any Hayden had ever seen. It was all in ridiculously plush fabric with brushed gold legs, and it honestly looked more like it would belong in the penthouse suite of a hotel on the Strip than in any sports stadium.

A strangled noise caught Hayden's ear, and he turned to find Shane staring at the chair like it was a bomb. Which was, in a word, fucking weird.

The chair was dumped right behind where the photographer planned to stand with a definitive clunk, and Rozanov rounded it to recline like he was readying to re-do his shots. He had finally chucked on his hoodie, but had left it open and loose over his broad chest. He spread his legs casually, staring right at Shane's frozen face with an intensity that made Hayden feel a bit embarrassed.

"I want to watch." The Russian accent curled around the words, dark and way too intimate for the setting.

But, instead of telling his husband to fuck off for being in the way, Shane swallowed hard and nodded. A tiny smirk touched the Russian's mouth before he rolled his head back to resume staring with that same intensity. The photographer looked between them quickly, then straightened up with a brilliant smile and hustled to stand on their mark. They angled their body carefully, making sure not to block the direct line of sight between Rozanov and Shane, and nodded quickly to the man stretching out in the bizarrely out of place piece of furniture.

Rozanov did not speak, he just breathed deeply and watched Shane. But somehow there was a whole lot of communication in that one slow exhale, because Shane transformed in front of all their eyes.

One arm moved back, supporting his torso in a deep lean that pulled all the light in the set straight to him like he was glowing gold. The other moved slow, drifting up to rest his fingertips at the very base of his throat in a touch that was more a caress than a pose. Tension bled out of him in one way, the taut focus drifting away into the frigid air, to be replaced with a much warmer kind of tension that rolled Shane's head back and brought colour to his cheeks. His legs, which had been pulled tightly together, drifted down, one straightening almost completely with the light reflecting silver off the blade of his skate and the other staying bent but turning down until his knee was almost parallel to the ice.

Dark eyes fluttered slightly, hooded and glassy as they stared up at the man watching from the chair. It was like there was only the two of them in the whole rink, like the rest of them had simply ceased to exist in any meaningful way. Shane's chest rose in a breath that was bordering on a gasp, stuttering and finally releasing on a heated sigh.

Hayden would never admit it out of loyalty, but he had never quite been able to understand why someone as highly sexed as Rozanov was so feral for his terminally reserved friend. But the way Shane's tongue just barely touched his lip and his whole body seemed to arch into some invisible touch made things a whole lot clearer.

Hell, Hayden wasn't even in the direct line of fire and he was suddenly wondering if he was totally sure he was one-hundred percent straight.

The lights flashed in a burst, flickering and capturing the moment in digital immortality. Shane blinked and shook his head slightly, as though coming out of a daze, and drew back into himself with a sheepish blush.

It did not seem to matter, because the director and photographer were both excitedly declaring it the best shot of the day. Shane looked relieved it was over, and yanked on his hoodie with an awkward laugh and total lack of eye contact with anyone there.

"Still think he is not sexy?" Rozanov's face was turned towards Hayden, but his eyes were fixed on where his husband was gliding over to look at the shots.

"What?" Hayden frowned, wondering what the fuck the guy was talking about.

"Shane." Rozanov flicked his eyebrows expressively, as though Hayden should know what the hell he meant. "Still think he is only *objectively attractive*? Still think he cannot drop panties with a wink?"

Hayden opened his mouth to demand a better explanation as to why Rozanov sounded a bit like he was trying to sound out whether Hayden wanted to bang his best friend, but then an extremely blurry memory filtered through from wherever his brain had tossed it to protect him.

Surely not. Not even Ilya Rozanov could be that unhinged? Right?

Turning to face the smirking man properly, Hayden scowled with the full force of his parental disapproval until he had the full attention of the absolute bane of his existence. Rozanov made him wait a good long while, but eventually he tore his eyes away from Shane to meet the dad-glare.

"Did you seriously organise a whole charity calendar just because I said I didn't personally find your husband sexy?" It came out a bit strangled, because he both wanted to yell and keep his voice down so Shane wouldn't hear.

Rozanov just shrugged. "Also good idea for Foundation."

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Hayden groaned with feeling.

Ottawa Centaurs Official @OttawaCens

All this heat can't be good for the ice!

Purchases of the first Irina Foundation Calendar go live at midnight

Mrs Rozanov @IloveIlya81

Lord save me! I think I need a whole year of just @Ilyallya

I might die from dehydration though

Joshie @hockeyboy21

Absolutely no words for @SHollanderOfficial

Just... Jesus. I think I need to lie down in a dark room.

Puck*Me @Centauress

OMG! Just looking at the previews is insane!

It looks like @Ilyallya is crawling to @SHollanderOfficial

Captain Rozy @Ilyallya

@Centauress I might be ;)

The Lover Fighter @abrightday23

Ummm, so I might have lost my mind... or does anyone else suddenly understand how

@HaydentheMetro has a million kids?

Chapter 4: Talk Dirty To Me

Chapter Notes

AAAAHAHA, oh god, why can't I stop?! Seriously, I cannot focus on anything else 😂😂

Believe it or not, Cliff Marlow was actually pretty happy when he found out Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander got together.

Roz had been an amazing captain for Boston when they played together. Tough, hard, outspoken, and a complete demon on the ice. Perfect for the Raiders, and Cliff had loved the guy for it. The years they played together were the best years of his career, years he knew would never be matched. Roz had taken an okay team and turned them into an army, with him at the helm spewing battle cries that felt like riding to fucking Valhalla.

He was also an incredible friend; up for just about anything and there instantly if one of the guys needed something. It did not take long before the entire team could not imagine life without his boisterous Russian cursing and wild laughter filling the rink.

So when Roz had announced his shock trade to Ottawa of all places, Cliff had already felt like there was a huge unfillable hole in the team before he was even gone. The Raiders had taken it hard, all of them feeling that same pre-emptive absence and reacting with varying degrees of outrage. Some had begged him to be joking, others had just smashed the nearest breakable object. There was no one in the Boston locker room that wasn't gutted by the announcement. Roz was the kind of player that only came once in a generation.

Except the guy wasn't once in a generation. Ilya Rozanov had a perfectly even match in the form of Golden Boy Shane Hollander.

Different as two guys could be, sure, but so equal it was a bit scary. Roz was a tornado of speed and testosterone, blitzing across the rink and taking out anything in his path. Hollander was inevitable death on skates, quiet and polite right up until you watched all your hopes and dreams vanish in one insanely precise flick of his wrist. Even as snot-nosed rookies, the untouchable talent had been palpable in every move they made and every shot they took. Squaring up to either of them was not something that anyone looked forward to.

Except each other.

Cliff had immediately clocked the way Roz would buzz with energy anytime Montreal was on the schedule. Right from his first game with the team, it had been obvious that he was never more pumped than when he could face off against his arch rival.

Same with Hollander, even if Cliff only saw it from a distance. The kid was still pretty reserved, but there was an extra intensity to him any time Roz was nearby. He was certainly more likely to push back against Roz than he was when anyone else gave him shit, surprising Cliff a few times when he shot back something dry but absolutely hilarious when Roz was chirping.

The energy crackling between them had hit the tired Montreal/Boston rivalry and shot it full of new life like a pair of twin lightning bolts; taking it from something that had become almost formalised over the years and turning it back into a proper war over the puck. The two of them would crouch at the centreline, and every single teammate on both sides would feel that rush of energy radiating from the sheer power of it.

But really, once that puck was in play, only Roz could keep up with Hollander, and only Hollander could keep up with Roz.

This was probably why it did not exactly surprise Cliff when he found out that he also knew Hollander as The Montreal Girl. The 'girl' whose texts would have Roz blushing and almost giggling right after he delivered a speech about being out for blood. The 'girl' whose silences would turn Roz into a mess of misplaced anger and fuming, spiralling destruction. Despite all the denials, Cliff had always known that Roz was obsessed with his Montreal Girl to a probably unhealthy degree, and had sometimes sent up a silent prayer that the poor girl would be able to handle his crazy teammate if the pair of them ever stopped dancing around each other. The revelation of 'her' identity had felt less like a shock to Cliff, and more like a relief.

So, yeah, even if it meant losing the best captain he'd ever had, Cliff liked that his mate had found something with Hollander.

Because only Hollander could keep up with Roz.

Strangely, he actually worried more about Roz being able to keep pace with Hollander's relentless pace than he did the other way round. Roz lived in spikes of adrenaline that he kept going for as long as possible. Women, cars, *life*; Roz liked it all fast and never ending. He chased the high and revelled in it. But highs always pass, leaving nothing but a brutal fall. It was unsustainable to live like that twenty-four/seven, and Roz would crash after a while. A tantrum or two, a few broken sticks, and finally a bit of rest; then he would be back for the next game with a war cry on his lips and a crazy gleam in his eyes again.

Hollander was focused in a way that no one else Cliff had ever met could be. A lot of people (including Roz, the dick) called him boring. It was a pretty common chirp for players to throw his way, and he generally faced it with relative grace followed by a slapshot that could have shattered bone if he wasn't so damn accurate and nice about it. His training regime was legendary for being absolutely crazy, and the standards he held himself to were even more insane. He barely drank, barely partied, barely swore (comparative to the rest of the league, anyway). What he did do was keep going. Endlessly, relentlessly, perpetually *going*. Hollander did not spike on adrenaline, so he did not crash. Guy was a robot built for hockey and nothing else.

So how was Roz meant to keep up with that?

Cliff did think they were genuinely happy, and he was happy for them. So he tried to shelve that little nagging worry for his friend and kept his mind off it as best he could.

But, as Roz liked to joke, he wasn't always the best at the more cerebral side of life.

"Soooo..." Cliff had not really meant to interrupt Roz's passionate rant about 'stupid Canadian wolf-birds', but it was burning the tip of his tongue after a few too many drinks. They rarely had enough time to just hang out since Roz had moved, and they were at a rooftop bar having a quiet round before they intended to head out to the clubs for a proper night. It was probably now or never, and apparently Cliff had decided it was now without any input from his brain.

Roz stopped short, turning to glare jokingly at him like there was nothing more important in the world than eerie bird sounds. "What, Marley? Why are you being weird?"

"Uh, well..." He cleared his throat and fiddled with his beer. He did not actually have a clue what he was going to say. "I guess I'm just curious how things are going with Hollander... Um, Shane."

All remaining traces of levity fled Roz's face, leaving a hard blankness that made Cliff wince a bit.

"Not, like, in a bad way." He quickly defended, "Just as your buddy. Checking in, y'know?"

Christ, did he seriously just say *buddy*? Cliff would have been way happier if there was a way to communicate about complicated emotional concepts through hockey. He sucked with words, and was probably worse with emotions. There was no way to nudge-nudge-wink-wink-did-your-girl-wear-you-out-last-night with actual marriages, or at least there was no respectful way. Being disrespectful about Hollander to Roz was probably a one way ticket to a broken jaw, and Cliff had a game against the Admirals in two days.

"As buddy." Roz's tone was flat, but he did not seem like he was about to start swinging.

"Yeah." Cliff shrugged and tried for an open smile. "You've been married a while, and now you're on a team together. I just... wanted to know how that's going."

"You, Cliff Marlow, want to know how it is going with my Shane," Roz said the words slowly, leaning forward and setting his beer on the table with way too much care before turning his body to fully face Cliff, "As *buddy*."

Well, obviously Roz was not going to put up with any clumsy attempts at subtlety. The narrowing of his eyes also said that he was not going to let it go, and any deflection would probably be met with a punch. Putting down his own beer, Cliff sighed and scrubbed a hand over the back of his neck.

"Look, man, I don't mean it in, like, a bad way." Cliff grimaced, "I really am just asking as a friend. I know why you're all pissed about people prying, but you know me. You know I'm happy for you."

Roz's eyes shuttled quickly between Cliff's for a long second, and then he tossed his head slightly and breathed out, a small hint of the tension dropping from him. "Okei, so what? Why are you asking?"

"I guess because you're on the same team now." Cliff released some of his own tension, relieved that Roz had been able to see he truly just wanted to check in on his friend. "Just... y'know, wondering how you're keeping up with him?"

"Keeping up?" A very different kind of offense made Roz's head snap back, and he scoffed something in Russian that was probably rude. "Me?!"

"Er, yeah, kind of?" Cliff laughed a little awkwardly, "I'm not saying you aren't great, Roz, you know I think you're the best player in the league."

"Oh, sure, Okei." Roz scoffed, picking up his beer and taking an angry swig.

"You are, don't be an idiot." Cliff's laugh turned a bit happier at the way Roz was pouting and refusing to look at him. "But Hollander's like a fucking robot. Guy probably does drills in his sleep. So, just wanted to make sure he's not burning you out now that you're together all the time."

"You think Shane is robot?" Roz stared hard at his bottle, frowning heavily. "That he would burn me out?"

"I mean, c'mon, everyone knows the guy doesn't do anything except hockey." Cliff nudged his friend. "I know he loves you, Roz, I'm seriously not questioning that. But, like, he's not just treating you as another part of hockey, is he? He's... giving you what *you* need, too?"

"My needs?" Roz's mouth moved as though he was chewing over the words. "Like what?"

"I dunno..." Cliff looked up as though searching for inspiration. "Affection, maybe? You're always talking about how much you love him, but I don't think I've ever heard the guy say anything that isn't about hockey or pre-approved by some PR team."

When Cliff looked down, Roz was still frowning at his drink. He did not look angry, just thoughtful, so Cliff decided to wait and see what he would say. After a moment, Roz rolled his neck and snatched up his beer for a long pull. He slammed it down once it was empty, and turned to Cliff with a smile.

"Is Okei." He reached over and shook Cliff roughly by the shoulder. "I am happy."

"Okay, cool." Cliff nodded, clapping his hand over Roz's a couple of times. "But I'm here if you ever need to talk or anything."

Whatever Roz called him in Russian was definitely rude, but Cliff saw the fond roll of his eyes and the way he leaned back carelessly. He was not the most perceptive guy, but his friend's reaction seemed pretty relaxed. A small knot of worry loosened in his chest; not completely, but enough that he allowed the subject to drop when Roz changed the subject to where they would head next.

He still thought of that conversation occasionally, and did still worry a little about whether Hollander understood that not everyone was as single-minded as he was. But then Cliff would remember the way Roz had been fighting a smile while he swore in Russian, and would decide to trust his friend. It was never brought up again between them, and Cliff assumed Roz had just dismissed the whole thing entirely until all three of them ended up in the All-Stars game a few months later.

Roz and Hollander had become expected fixtures at these games. It was almost more surprising if they weren't there on the occasions they had other commitments. Even the dicks at head office knew they could not keep the two away without massive public backlash, so their names were some of the first announced. Cliff had been to a few over the years, but none since Roz left Boston. He was pretty happy to get the call, and even happier to be on the same team as Roz again. He did kind of wish that Hollander was on their team too, mostly for Roz, but he liked going up against the guy too.

As long as he looked where he was damn well going.

For probably the first time, every single player involved was going to be mic'd up. The league had made a massive deal of it, and there would be a stream for every player that people could tune into and even jump between. Cliff had not really cared; he did the hot mic sometimes, but he was not particularly popular on it because he was fairly quiet while he played and only chirped or spoke when spoken to. He had gotten a laugh out of someone stitching together the sound of all his checks and hits into a rough approximation of an Imagine Dragons song, but he knew his would not be a frequently visited stream.

Roz and Hollander, on the other hand, would definitely see the highest traffic. Roz was both a PR nightmare and a fan favourite on the mic. Cliff was pretty sure that the crew had to draw straws every time he was selected, because whoever had to deal with hovering a finger over the button to cut the feed would be at risk of a stroke. Fans ate it up, and clips of his most brutal chirps regularly went semi-viral alongside amused speculation about what he had said to get the audio cut.

Hollander was not quite as popular, but he had a pretty good following of fellow nerds who loved that he took the whole thing seriously enough to narrate plays if he could spare the focus. The only time he gave the PR department headaches was when Roz was anywhere near him and smiling like he was about to say something.

So, always.

Cliff did not realise something was incredibly wrong until the crew had them all wired up and everyone was stretching on the ice. Roz was nearby, but he was keeping oddly quiet since the techs had finished with him. The only thing he had said at all was directly related to what plays he expected to be making and anything he wanted his team to be especially focused on. It was a bit strange, but Cliff had kind of chalked it up to nerves about facing his husband over the puck for the first time in a while.

But then Hollander skated right up to Cliff and waited in front of him with a friendly smile.

"Hey," Cliff grunted, nodding and going right back to focusing on limbering up. "Already done with your stretches?"

"Pretty much, yeah." Hollander shrugged, and then leaned close enough that both their mics would pick up what he said loud and clear. "You know, it's really easy to stretch out my hips when Ilya is so happy to help."

It took way too long for Cliff's brain to catch up with what had just been said. He was nodding easily, as though they had just exchanged general nothings, before he froze and whipped his head up to gape at where Hollander had been. The man was already gliding away towards Roz, stopping only to tap him with his stick before returning to his own team. Roz smiled happily as he watched his husband go, and then turned to look directly at Cliff. The smile went from a bit goofy to a cheeky smirk in the blink of an eye, and Cliff felt a sinking in his gut.

What the fuck was Roz up to?

More importantly, what the fuck was *Hollander* up to?

There was a game to play, though, and Cliff did not want to let down his team. So he shook off his unease and put his head down to finish his stretches, listening to nothing except the sound of his own breathing and focusing only on what he needed to do to win. When everyone headed into their places for the game to get underway, he was ready and fully invested once again.

Cliff caught Hollander against the board pretty much straight after the face off, focused entirely on hooking the puck out and away to where Roz was waiting. He had done the exact same thing to Hollander a million times before, to the point where it was nearly muscle memory and he knew exactly where best to push to get the advantage. It was familiar enough that he could do it in his sleep, and Hollander probably could too. The guy did not usually leave Cliff feeling like he was in some bizarre alternate reality, however.

"Gotta do better than that," Hollander gasped with a surprisingly vicious smirk and a shove with his hip that freed him up some breathing room, "I've got plenty of practice pushing back against alllll that Russian muscle, remember."

From anyone else, and usually from Hollander too, Cliff could have just assumed he meant that he had taken plenty of hits from Roz and knew how to deal with it. But the smirk on Hollander's face said he definitely wasn't talking about shrugging off hits in the rink, and that made Cliff's brain crash and reboot. By the time he had regained control of his body, the game had moved on and Hollander was being chased towards the goal by a grinning Roz.

It did not get any better from there.

"I'd say my stick handling is where I really shine, right Marlow?"

"Got any bets on the game with Ilya? I do."

"I'd offer some tips, but I think my *play style* is probably a bit out of your comfort zone."

Every single time Hollander was anywhere near Cliff, something would pop out of his mouth that could almost be passed off as a casual chirp. On the surface, they sounded a little like the usual type that Hollander was prone to - like a kid trying to chirp with the big boys but too worried about upsetting someone to really lean into it.

Almost.

Because there was no mistaking that the tone was *not* innocent 'Golden Boy' stuff. For some unholy reason, Hollander had picked the fully mic'd All-Star game and Cliff specifically to start making some of the most insane innuendoes ever heard on ice.

Yo-mama jokes, outright cursing, and general digs about sexual ability were so commonplace in games that Cliff barely noticed them. It was weirder if players didn't throw out something crass, hence why Hollander and the rare players like him stood out so much. You stole a puck, got called a limp-dick, and moved on with a laugh or a punch. Simple, easy and predictable.

Trust fucking Hollander of all people to be the one who figured out how to throw a seasoned pro off by making the cleanest-sounding chirps ever.

At one point, Cliff had been cursing himself for missing a perfect opportunity to stop Hollander from flicking that slapshot of his right into the net, when the man himself had skated right up behind him.

"Hmm, well, I guess I do score plenty."

Then he was gone again. Another drive-by innuendo shot directly into Cliff's ability to focus. Surely there was some sort of ban on polite Canadian boys saying things like that? It was somehow worse that the guy had not said a single thing that was openly obscene. Knowing exactly where to lay the actual blame, Cliff turned a glare to where his captain was skating into position. It said a lot that Roz had not even once screamed at Cliff to focus, not even when he kept fucking up easy shit. They were on the same team, so why the hell had the crazy bastard unleashed Hollander on him?

He did not get an answer until they were both on the bench sometime in the third. Cliff was probably one comment from Hollander away from dropping gloves just to save his sanity, even if he knew he was going to look like he had lost the fucking plot doing it.

Seriously, who comes out with a haymaker because their mate's husband came over after you had a fall and said something like "You need a pillow? Ilya thinks I have too many, but I guess I like having something to hold on to."

Cliff knew exactly what that implied, and usually would not have even given a shit besides the usual good natured groans of a guy whose friends are disgustingly in love. But he had spent an entire game dealing with Hollander wrecking his focus with laser-targeted precision and was desperately trying not to start a brawl that would have him tarred and feathered in the press. So, he fumed over it all until they were side by side on the bench, and then turned to his captain with a growl.

"What the fuck is going on with Hollander?" He had wanted to wait until they were off hot mics, but his patience was being tested severely.

"Hmm? Shane?" Roz smiled lazily, rolling his neck and looking at Cliff from the corner of his eye. "Oh, he is just enjoying letting his hair down, I think. Good for him to have a fun game."

"Sure seems like it." Cliff's jaw hurt when he clenched it and he glared at the ice, where Hollander was apparently not throwing weird innuendos at anyone else.

"Yes. Cannot always be just perfect shots and hockey." Roz started to get ready to head back onto the ice, nudging Cliff to do the same. "He is not robot, after all."

Cliff fumbled his stick. Surely not. No way. No *fucking* way.

Roz smirked at him like he had just gotten the best chirp of all time. Which, Cliff supposed with some resignation, he had.

The next time Cliff saw Hollander coming with that fucking boyish smile, he held up his hand in defeat and shook his head quickly.

"Point taken." He panted out with a rueful laugh, flicking his stick to point the opposing captain to the centreline where his husband was waiting.

Hollander laughed as well, gave him a friendly clap on the shoulder, and went off to finish demolishing the scoreboard.

So yeah, Cliff was pretty happy that Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander got together. Because only Hollander could keep up with Roz, and only Roz could keep up with Hollander.

Mrs Rozanov @IloveIlya81

What was going on with @IlyalIya on the mic? He was so quiet?

Did they threaten to bench him if he said anything mean?

Joshie @hockeyboy21

@IloveIlya81 He called @AdmiralScottHunter at least 17 different types of dinosaur?

But I guess I see your point.

Bear With Me @Rosanooooov

@IloveIlya81 The chirp was in the other castle. His husband spent the entire game messing with @CliffMRaider

It was weird and VERY enlightening.

Mrs Rozanov @IloveIlya81

@Rosanooooov Oh wow. Just went and watched the highlights.

Why was that somehow crazier than anything @IlyalIya has ever said?!

Captain Rozy @Ilyallya

@Ilovely81 He is very good at strategy. I should talk to him about not distracting my Wing.

Sun'n'Ice @Sunshine24

What did @CliffMRaider do!?

It definitely seemed all friendly, but holy moly I think he was a broken man by the end.

Puck*Me @Centauress

Did @Ilyallya and @SHollanderOfficial switch bodies?

What sort of fanfiction shit is this?

(I love it. Do it again)

Chapter 5: Солнышко

Chapter Notes

So did any of y'all touch grass while Ao3 was down, or did you just sob into your metaphorical pillows like I did? 😊

I think I need a long weekend to recover lol

On a more serious note, thank you so much to everyone who has taken a moment to read, kudos, or comment on my silly little socmed-adjacent fic. I've never written one before, and am a little social media adverse, so I'm extraordinarily flattered to have so many people be so lovely! 1000+ kudos is enough to make a girl blush!

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

Ilya Rozanov knows what everyone thinks of him. To the world at large, he is a terrifyingly brutal force on the ice - a big, scary Russian with a record for knocked out teeth only exceeded by how many women he had slept with. On the whole, he is totally fine with that. It is what he had wanted everyone to think when he first started wiggling out from under his father's iron thumb; an impenetrable shell around his heart that kept everyone laughing at his antics and gasping when he doled out a hit. No one wanted to mess with a guy who would happily start swinging if they looked at him wrong, but they were all still kept close enough by his rakish charm that he was not alone.

Lonely, maybe, but not alone. He considered that a hell of a lot better than the alternative of letting anyone close enough to stick a metaphorical knife in his ribs.

Except his armour had not been as perfect as he imagined.

At first, it had just been curiosity and lust, the same as any time he went out and seduced someone he should not. Shane Hollander had told him he should not be smoking, and somehow it had been the most charming fucking thing that Ilya had ever heard. He had gotten a particular vibe from his touted rival immediately, and had contemplated whether he would ever be able to get the buttoned up Canadian to do anything about it; but he had not expected to get such startlingly obvious confirmation the very first time they hit the showers together. Shane had been mortified when Ilya had caught him looking, obviously, and been so absolutely shocked at his body's betrayal that Ilya was certain he had been extremely successful in never before having to deal with getting hard while sharing rink showers.

And, well, how was Ilya supposed to resist that?

Ilya had fully intended to leave it at that. Trade blow jobs just the once, leave the hotel room, and only ever think of the way Shane Hollander looked when he came if he wanted to taunt

the guy into a fight during a game. Simplicity itself. A shared secret that Ilya knew damn well neither of them would actually expose.

It *should* have stayed at that. But Ilya just could not seem to stay away. He kept coming back, drawn by the desperate heat of Shane's touch and the oddly charming quirks like the way he folded his clothes so neatly before climbing Ilya like he was not a feared ice hockey player himself. They fought like two warriors locked in eternal battle over the frozen rink, and then they would find each other in the hidden shadows afterwards to clash together like forces of nature. It was an addiction, and a dangerous one. After every time, Ilya would sigh and tell himself no more, and then he would sigh after the next time and tell himself no more.

And then, and then, and then...

Maddeningly, Shane's unwitting charms started to do their work on Ilya. The Canadian would swear at him and scoff like he could not care less if the Russian left, but then he would cling to Ilya like he was his only tether to reality. It was too heady for a man who craved and wanted like he did. Every choked off gasp was another thread, every startling moment of unwitting affection another knot in the complicated mess between them. He tried to protect himself as best as he could, pushing Shane away or trying to reduce their contact to rivalry and meaningless sex.

He knew how to be cold, knew how to be cruel, knew how to be brutal winter that could strip skin from bone. He wielded that with ruthless precision, desperate to protect himself from the way he compulsively sought even the tiniest scrap of Shane's attention.

It had never worked.

He got the feeling Shane tried to do the same, in his oddly polite way, but neither of them was able to prevent the other from drifting through their armour like it never even existed. Finally, after too many wounds left on each other and themselves, both of them had been forced to admit defeat.

Had been forced to admit *love*.

Because Ilya did love Shane - every neurotic, hockey-obsessed inch of him. He loved the way he would stand up to Ilya without hesitation, and the way he would soften when pleased. He adored the way he was like the sun that Ilya could always turn to warm his tired heart, and the way Shane would lean in to him to do the same.

Love, deep and ridiculous and abiding, because to not love Shane would be to rip out his own heart.

A smile, soft and very unlike the cocky smirk he showed the public, touched Ilya's mouth and soul as his phone lit up with a rapid succession of notifications. Shane, diligent and serious as always, would be posting a single carefully selected photo with some sort of painstakingly curated and PR-friendly message to all his social media. The same as every year, he would be doing it before they went to their anniversary dinner, and then Ilya would tease him all the way through. Ilya liked to wait until Shane had posted his, because it would always make

Shane arch up like a wet cat when he saw the just as carefully selected but far less PR-friendly photos Ilya would post in response.

He loved that little tradition, delighting in the way Shane would scoff and insist that Ilya was a menace. Ilya would laugh, loudly and well, and insist in turn that Shane's post looked more like an announcement for the Foundation. They would bicker, always fond and secretly pleased by the other's foibles, and then they would return home to fall into their shared bed like inevitability.

Finishing with the buttons on his black shirt and checking in the mirror to make sure it was stretched tightly enough over his broad chest that Shane would spend all night staring despite himself, Ilya judged his outfit ready. Only then did he sit on the end of the bed and check his phone, already feeling gleeful. He thumbed open Instagram at first, and was immediately greeted by his own face and that of his husband.

It was not a photo, but a short video. The matching suits told him immediately that it had been taken at their wedding, but it was clearly not from the official photographer. The angle was odd, as though being filmed by a phone lying almost flat on a table, and their faces were almost obscured in darkness. The soft, golden light of the bonfire lit them from somewhere off to the side, illuminating Shane as he fiddled with his eyelashes in a sure sign that he was anxious. Ilya was resting his chin on his shoulder, right in the crook of his neck, and he was obviously aware of his very new husband's mood.

He remembered the moment, when all the people celebrating around them had felt more overwhelming than pleasing to the introverted Shane, and Ilya had come to him ready to offer whatever he could.

"Okei?" The camera had picked up Ilya's low voice with complete clarity, including the sound of the kiss he pressed to Shane's cheek.

"Yes." Shane had dropped his hand immediately, and his eyes slid closed with a soft breath that released the tension in his strong frame. He turned his face just slightly, rubbing his temple against Ilya's face in total contentment.

"Okei." Ilya kissed him again, a smile curling his mouth and a softness in his expression that he did not even know he could possess.

And that was it, a tiny, soft moment in the firelight after they exchanged vows. Ilya blinked at his phone, confused and wondering why Shane even had that on film, when he realised that it was not the only slide on the post. He swiped his thumb carefully, free hand covering the confused frown on his mouth, and moved to the next clip.

It was another very strange angle, like from a phone propped up on their coffee table. Shane was huddled in a pile of blankets, leaning forward as though he was setting up the camera, his expression absolutely miserable with watery eyes and a nose so red it looked a bit silly. One of the many summer colds that the Pike children had passed him then, leaving him feverish and coughing because he loved all the Pikes too much to not help if they needed him in the off-season. His breath was raspy as he rushed to pick up yet another boring hockey book

when footsteps approached from off camera. His eyes darted to the camera just once more, but he did not move it or stop the recording.

"Here," Ilya's voice was so gentle, so soft as his hand appeared to replace the book with a steaming bowl. "I made you kasha."

"Oh, thanks." Shane sniffled and coughed a bit when he tried to smell it through his blocked nose, making Ilya laugh both in the video and in their quiet bedroom. "What's in it today?"

"Mushrooms, lots of garlic." Ilya appeared properly, taking his place next to Shane with a can of ginger ale in his hand, ready for his ailing husband to grab without having to move at all. "Everything my *Lyubimyy* needs to get better."

"Thanks, Ilya." Shane sighed contentedly as he picked up the spoon and blew on a mouthful.

"Of course." Ilya gently patted his husband's hair, watching warmly as Shane diligently ate the buckwheat porridge. His face was open in a way that it never was unless they were alone, and Ilya found himself blushing a bit at the idea of the whole world seeing it. "*Vse dlya tebya.*"

Flustered, Ilya swallowed around the lump in his throat and swiped again.

The next shot was from a far greater distance, and moving slowly like someone was holding the camera as they walked high in the stadium at the Centaurs' almost empty rink. The only two people there were on the ice, careening wildly around as they chased each other in Irina Foundation jerseys. Shane was in the lead, head down and body leaning in perfect balance as he pumped his legs to swing around the goal. Barely an arm's length behind him, Ilya was reaching out with his head tossed back in laughter.

They often did that after the hockey camps, blowing off some of the energy and frustration of chasing a bunch of excitable kids around by chasing each other around like they were excitable kids. Or they would make a game of collecting stray pucks, sometimes with shots and sometimes balancing them on their sticks as they carefully counted who had more before they fell. It was a moment after the chaos that Ilya treasured, but he had not known that someone had caught it on film. Perhaps Harris, always looking for content, had spotted them and stopped to see if they did anything interesting.

Down on the centreline, Ilya had caught Shane by back of his jersey. They spun from the momentum for a second, orbiting close as they came chest to chest. A distant laugh rang out, just barely audible, and the hand on Shane's back dropped to his waist as their foreheads came together. Ilya grabbed his husband's hand, raising it up like they were in one of the period drama movies that Sveta pretended she did not love, and then began to turn and glide them across the ice. Shane's head tilted back, exasperation evident even from such a distance, but he allowed Ilya to lead them in a clumsy dance. They were not figure skaters, their balance on the ice meant for power and speed instead of precision and beauty, but Ilya loved watching the moment almost as much as he had loved doing it at the time.

"Dammit, Ilya." Shane had sighed, unheard by the camera yet so fond that Ilya's heart had ached and squeezed. "You better not let me fall."

"Never, *kotik*." Ilya had managed to make him spin out to the full extent of their joined hands, reeling his husband in with a delighted grin at the way Shane had not been able to fully conceal his own smile. "*Nikogda, poka ya zhivu*."

The clip ended with Shane resting his head on Ilya's shoulder, their dance turning slow and sweet until they were simply rocking back and forth together. Ilya stared at the screen as it restarted, had to take a shaky breath before he moved to the next one.

Yuna and David's place, the two of them bracketing Ilya on the couch while a game played in the background. David was half turned towards his wife and son-in-law, smiling indulgently while they were more focused on each other. Ilya was only seen from behind, his curls a halo of frizz in the TV light, and Yuna was curled in the corner spot that no one else dared sit in lest they risk her wrath. Both of them were gesturing at the game, and from what Ilya could tell, it was one of the times they were actually on the same side of the argument, but just having it for the sake of fun.

"That call was bullshit!" Ilya scoffed, a broad wave of his hand conveying his deep disgust. "Is embarrassing. I would fight with ref if he called that slashing, give my opponent a chance to show what it is really like."

"He's being overzealous, definitely." Yuna sighed, hunching her shoulders and rubbing at her arms like she was cold. "Not sure I would encourage you to give someone a free shot at slashing you, though."

Ilya laughed, and his long arm reached over the back of the couch. He fished around for a moment, and then grasped a blanket from the crate of them that lived there. He drew it back, shaking it out and flicking it carefully around Yuna's shoulders. His attention was on the game the whole time, even as he tucked the blanket edges around his beloved Mother-in-law.

"Perhaps I demonstrate, then." No one would need to see his face to know Ilya was grinning like a cheeky boy, his voice was all teasing and laughter. "Just to make sure he sees right."

"*Ilya*." Yuna shot him a look, the kind only mothers who love so deeply it is part of their soul can give, and then laughed. "But I guess he would really have a good example then. Textbook."

"See?" Ilya finally turned from the TV, a smile broad and relaxed on his half-revealed face, "I am a very good boy, even teaching the ref."

David joined in on their laughter, reaching over to ruffle Ilya's hair into an even crazier mess, and then the three of them looped back to the beginning.

The lump in Ilya's throat had become a stinging in his eyes. The intimacy of all these moments stunned him, making him feel both exposed and so, so cherished. He was almost scared to see what came next, but he swiped anyway.

It was a bit startling to see Shane's face so close up, before the camera was suddenly switched off selfie mode and focused on the entrance to their living room. The light was bright, flooding the room with sunshine through their huge windows and chasing away any shadows.

Banging and clattering was happening somewhere off screen, recognisable as a bag full of heavy hockey equipment being dropped. Dragging footsteps followed, and then Ilya shuffled into view with a tired groan. His hair was damp, probably from the showers at the rink, and he was wearing a hoodie open over a tight vest.

"Tough practice?" Shane asked, the camera moving until it was propped up behind his shoulder, the very edge of his arm visible as the focus stayed on Ilya.

"The worst." Ilya sighed, crossing the room and flopping tiredly onto his husband, knocking the camera into falling crazily to show the ceiling. "I need my Shane back. Your elbow will be fine by the game, yes?"

"Yep. Doc said that I can get back into it properly for tomorrow's practice."

The camera swooped again, careening upwards and flipping back to the front camera. Shane's chin and mouth were just visible, the rest of it devoted to Ilya's head on his chest. Both of them were smiling, happy and relaxed to be together. Ilya watched all the fatigue fall from his own body, melting into the air like morning frost under the midday sun. He knew that feeling, knew it so well he could feel his body moving for the next part without even needing to think about it. He shifted on the screen, one arm groping about until he caught Shane by his free wrist and plopped his husband's hand on the back of his head. Shane's face tilted down a bit, as though he was trying to see what was going on, and then he relaxed and started petting at the damp curls.

"Better?" He asked, fingers twining into the strands and drawing a pleased hum from Ilya.

"Hmm." He shifted, burrowing further into the embrace, and sighed happily. "Better."

There was only one more slide, and Ilya moved to it with a thick tongue and tears in his eyes.

It was not a video. Just a simple still frame, taken of Ilya perched on his favourite rock at the cottage. He looked half-asleep but he was laughing, gilded by the dawn reflecting off the water. Plenty of people had seen Ilya Rozanov laugh before - he was known for his wild grin and mean cackles that drove the other team crazy. But no one had seen him laugh like this.

Except one person. One single person who could bring that light to his chest and make it spill out of his mouth. A grumpy comment about not smoking, or a dry observation about some mundane topic, and Ilya would laugh without a hint of pretence. He would laugh simply because he was in love, and because that love could not be contained.

Ilya scrubbed at his mouth, feeling far too much to ever express. He wanted to hide, he wanted to run, he wanted to shove these moments into everyone's face.

He wanted to find Shane and demand to know if this was really how he saw Ilya - if he loved as fiercely as Ilya loved him. If this handful of stolen and freely-given moments were anything close to how his husband felt. Because they felt like love to Ilya, they felt like being known on a level so deep it almost scared him, but thrilled him more.

To finish his beautiful torment, Ilya turned his eyes to the caption.

@SHollanderOfficial

Five years ago today, I said 'I Do'.

We did it quietly, amongst friends and loved ones, because that is how it truly is with us:

Quiet, and with love.

There is loudness in our lives together, because we are often loud in our own ways, but there is this too.

For years we were quiet because we had to be. Hidden away and unable to say what we wanted.

Now, we can be quiet because we choose to be.

I can no longer imagine a life where we cannot be both quiet and loud. Where I do not have this man who can make me laugh and challenge me in every way.

Where I do not have this man who loves me so gently and so sweetly that I ache with it.

For years, I have loved being Hollander and Rozanov.

Now, I cherish these moments where we can just be Shane and Ilya.

Thank you, @Ilyallya, for being my sunshine and bringing your light into my world.

Я тебя люблю

The comments spilled underneath in a swell of love and support.

I just want someone to love me like Shane Hollander loves his husband.

I'm crying this is so beautiful

Happy anniversary to the most beautiful people in the world!

I'm kissing my screen just to feel a fraction of this

Oh, so this is love.

Ilya's throat was thick with emotion, and he swallowed down a lump the size of a puck. Never before had Shane allowed such an intimate look into his life, not willingly. He stiffened and shied away if he felt like there were eyes on him, eyes that might judge him. And yet, here was a whole litany of tiny moments so soul-baringly intimate that Ilya hardly knew how to process it.

"What do you think?" The voice was not the slightly tinny distortion of a phone speaker, but warm and soft and threaded with the tiniest hint of worry.

Ilya looked up from his phone to find Shane standing in the door, dressed in a suit and ready to go out. He was smiling, blushing sweetly, but watching Ilya watch *them* with a set to his jaw like he was uncertain he had done the right thing.

"Where are these from?" Ilya asked, voice choked with emotion that he could not seem to clear away.

"I, uh, have been kind of collecting them?" Shane shrugged, sheepish and avoiding eye contact. "It sort of started at our wedding. I was fiddling with my phone and didn't realise I had filmed that until later. I really liked it, and then I just kind of... kept doing it. I have a few that other people have sent me too. Just silly stuff, really. Like the dancing"

"Is this all?" Ilya looked back to his phone, unable to keep looking elsewhere.

"Ah, no." Shane laughed, short and half-swallowed and so so so endearing. "Definitely not. I've got a whole hidden folder of them on my phone. I even backed them up to a physical harddrive."

It was such a *Shane* thing to do that Ilya laughed as well. It came out as a strange sobbing noise, and he quickly choked it off with a grunt.

"Why?"

Shane stepped into the room, his hands in his pockets until he reached where Ilya was unable to stand from the bed. He withdrew one, cupping Ilya's jaw with tenderness that felt like sunshine after a long darkness, and smiled that sweet little curved smile of his.

"Because I wanted to keep these pieces of you that no one else had." He leaned down, pressing a lingering kiss to Ilya's furrowed brow, whispering the next words into his skin in a prayer and a vindication. "And then I wanted to show you off to the world. To show everyone just how lucky I am. I wanted everyone to know that I love the hard shell of you just as much as I love the soft heart you built it around."

"You are lucky?" Ilya hated himself a little for the plaintive way he asked, but so much less than he might have before Shane taught him how to love.

"I am." Shane kissed his forehead again, lingering and breathing him in.

There were no words to say in either of his languages. Nothing that could possibly encompass the entirety of what Ilya felt. All he could do was reach up with both hands to hold Shane and kiss him, pouring everything inside him into their mouths. He wanted to have the words, to return something just as beautiful, but he was stuck with the knowledge that nothing could ever be good enough no matter what language he used. So he was left with his body, which he had always been better with, and he tried to let that tell Shane just how much he loved him.

Shane understood, because of course he did.

They nearly missed their reservation, caught in that amber moment of pure love. Ilya let Shane drive once he was finally able pry himself away, laughing and pretending he was too shocked to be safe behind the wheel.

By the time they parked at the restaurant, there was a post on Ilya's Instagram too. It was just one photo, something that he had never before even thought of sharing publicly.

Dawn light spilled across a sleeping face, touching scattered freckles and dark hair like curious fingers searching for the secret to perfection. Eyelashes, straight and dark, cast a shadow like an invitation to rest under their protection. A man's hand, rough with callus and the occasional scar from a notoriously brutal contact sport, brushed a lax cheek with such tenderness that it seemed impossible.

Underneath was a caption. One word to match the one image.

@ПyaПya
Солнышко

Chapter End Notes

All Russian is Googled, so let me know if it's hilariously wrong 😊

Nikogda, poka ya zhivu – Never, for as long as I live.

Kotik – Kitten

Lyubimyy – (my) love

Vse dlya tebya – Anything for you

Солнышко ('Solnyshko' - Sunshine; diminutive, used specifically as an endearment)

[thank you to industandstarlight for the correction]

Я тебя люблю - Ya Tebya Lyublyu – I love you

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